The Secondary National Strategy

An evaluation of the fifth year

Better education and care

Age group	Published	Reference no.
Secondary	December 2005	HMI 2612

Document reference number: HMI 2612

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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Executive summary

In March 2004, Ofsted reported on the third year of the Key Stage 3 Strategy. Since that time Her Majesty's Inspectors of schools (HMI) have continued to evaluate the impact of the Strategy. This report covers the academic year 2004/05. During the year, HMI visited nearly 180 secondary schools, interviewed teachers and pupils, scrutinised documentation and observed nearly 750 lessons. They also visited training events, held discussions with and shadowed the work of local authority (LA) officers and consultants.

The Secondary National Strategy, formerly known as the Key Stage 3 Strategy, continues to have a positive influence on pupils' attainment. Since its inception in 2001, the Strategy has made a significant contribution to the steady improvement in the proportion of pupils reaching Level 5 or above in English, mathematics and science tests taken by pupils at the end of Year 9. Provisional data (*National Assessments of 14 years olds in England, 2005 [provisional], DfES*) show that results rose again in 2005 with substantial gains in English and science. These results reflect inspectors' findings, although there are times when inspectors judge that pupils' achievements are better than test results might indicate.

The impact of the Strategy is greatest in the two thirds of schools where leadership and management are good. The impact is greatest where the responsibility for leading the Strategy is in the hands of a manager with the seniority and the capacity to implement change. These effective senior managers know the strengths and weaknesses of their schools and select and adapt Strategy initiatives to address identified needs. The quality of this leadership and management has improved in the last year, notably in monitoring and quality assurance.

The quality of teaching and learning are also improving as teachers continue to apply Strategy techniques. The best lessons include a wider range of teaching strategies, with more emphasis on pupils thinking for themselves. They respond well to the variety and the brisk pace. In less effective lessons, teachers often use the recommended structures and approaches in a mechanistic way and their teaching fails to meet the needs of individual pupils. In these lessons, pupils tend to become passive learners, overdependent on the teacher and ill-equipped to meet future demands.

In the schools where Strategy guidance on teaching and learning has limited impact this is sometimes because it is simply ignored or, more often, because it is followed uncritically or misunderstood. The quantity of information and guidance provided by the Strategy is now quite daunting and many schools would welcome a coherent re-statement of how the various parts fit together.

Assessment for learning has been a major element of the Strategy this year, and is good or better in a minority of schools and unsatisfactory in a quarter.

Relevant training and development are at an early stage in many of the schools visited and, so far, there has been little impact on teaching, learning or achievement. Although most schools now have a mass of data on pupils, there are often weaknesses in data analysis, particularly in relation to inclusion. Thus, schools do not always know where they should be targeting resources.

Of the 18 local authorities inspected during the year 15 provide good or highly satisfactory support for the Strategy. Schools find the support provided by Strategy consultants of greater value than attendance at external training courses. This is usually because consultants' help is better tailored to meet schools' specific needs.

There is little progress with the development of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum. Most of the teachers are aware of the importance of teaching literacy but few do so effectively. Cross-curricular numeracy is given insufficient priority in the great majority of schools. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) is satisfactory in science, modern foreign languages (MFL) and design and technology but unsatisfactory in well over half the lessons in English, mathematics and other foundation subjects.

Intervention programmes are still not implemented with sufficient rigour. Schools are not doing enough to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of those pupils who start their secondary education with low standards in English and mathematics.

Arrangements for the move from primary to secondary school are gradually improving but the transfer of data remains unsatisfactory in nearly a quarter of schools. Teachers find it difficult to build seamlessly on primary school work in ICT and the foundation subjects because they do not find out what pupils already know, either through baseline testing or from the primary schools themselves. However, there is no requirement for primary schools to pass on information about these subjects. The best provision is in schools where senior leaders give high priority to transfer arrangements. With more data, these schools are in a better position to allocate pupils to the correct teaching groups at the beginning of Year 7.

The Strategy provides useful support to improve attendance and behaviour, and to help those who teach pupils who do not quite reach Level 4 by the age of 11. However, there is little to support those who are learning English as an additional language (EAL), and provision is mixed. There is some indication that lower-achieving boys and bilingual learners are doing better as a result of the more carefully structured teaching associated with the Strategy.

Strategy guidance, particularly the audit, the various subject frameworks and the training modules, are having a positive impact. There is a slight improvement in subject leadership which is good or very good in three out of every five departments. The best subject leaders now engage their staff more

fully in developing schemes of work and in reviewing and improving teaching practices. Schemes of work are better structured and more comprehensive although it is still unusual for them to provide guidance on teaching pupils of different abilities. In about one in ten of the schools, there is still a lack of commitment to the Strategy amongst teachers, mainly those who have little knowledge of its potential.

Key findings

- Results in English have risen steadily since the introduction of the Strategy, with a substantial rise in the proportion of pupils reaching Level 5 according to provisional figures for 2005 (*National Assessments of 14 years olds in England, 2005 [Provisional] DfES)*. Pupils are doing better in their writing than in reading, which is the opposite of the position in earlier Key Stages.
- The proportions of pupils reaching levels 5 and 6 in mathematics have risen steadily since the introduction of the Strategy.
- Science results have risen steadily since the introduction of the Strategy until 2004, when they dropped; there has been a substantial improvement in 2005.
- Leadership of the Strategy is at least good in two thirds of the schools. The most effective Strategy managers are usually members of the school's senior management team and engage staff through seminars, working parties and mentoring schemes to secure improvement.
- In a small minority of the schools where the impact of the Strategy is unsatisfactory, there have been weaknesses in leadership, the allocation of resources is inadequate, subject leaders are uncertain about the Strategy and they are not held to account sufficiently for raising standards.
- Subject management of the Strategy is at least good in three out of every five departments, but less than satisfactory in one in every six, a slight improvement on previous findings.
- In well led departments there is a clear sense of purpose. The emphasis is on raising standards by improving teaching and learning, and on effective assessment and tracking of pupils.
- As a result of Strategy guidance, departmental schemes of work are now better structured and more comprehensive, although it is still unusual for them to provide guidance on teaching pupils of different abilities.
- The quality of teaching and learning continue to improve as teachers apply Strategy techniques. The best lessons include a wide range of teaching strategies, with more emphasis on pupils thinking for themselves.
- In less effective lessons, teachers often use recommended structures and approaches too mechanistically with too much emphasis on content rather than developing conceptual understanding.
- The teaching of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum is afforded low priority in the great majority of schools.
- The teaching of ICT is better in science, modern foreign languages and design and technology than it is in English, mathematics and other foundation subjects.

- The use of assessment for learning is good in only a few of the schools and unsatisfactory in a quarter, but Strategy support for this is still at an early stage.
- About a third of the schools have good arrangements for tracking pupils' progress but they are unsatisfactory in a fifth, similar to last year.
- The impact of Strategy consultants is at least satisfactory in nearly all schools. Consultant support is generally more effective than external training courses because it is more carefully targeted to meet schools' needs.
- Staff training has heightened the awareness of inclusion in a very large majority of schools but teachers often find it difficult to put policy into practice to meet individual pupils' needs.
- Provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language varies too much.
- Schools are not doing enough to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of pupils who start Year 7 with English and mathematics results that are below average.
- Since the Strategy started, planning for the move from primary to secondary education has improved and is now satisfactory in a large majority of schools. However, the transfer of data is still unsatisfactory in nearly a quarter of secondary schools. Secondary teachers find it difficult to build on primary school work in ICT and the foundation subjects because they do not have information about these subjects.
- It is increasingly difficult for schools to keep abreast of all the Strategy's developments, especially in areas where staff turnover is high.
- In about a tenth of the schools there is still a lack of commitment to the Strategy amongst teachers, mainly those who have little knowledge of its potential.

Recommendations

1. The National Strategy team, local authorities and schools should:
   - improve the teaching and learning of literacy, numeracy and ICT across the curriculum
   - work with others to improve the quality of provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language.

2. The National Strategy team should consider how it can make more manageable the wealth of Strategy material so that schools find it easier to navigate and to understand the underlying rationale.

3. Local authorities and Strategy consultants should encourage primary schools to pass information about achievement in ICT and the foundation subjects to secondary schools. Where such information is unobtainable, Strategy consultants should help schools devise arrangements to assess ICT and the foundation subjects when pupils start Year 7.

4. Schools should make sure that:
   - intervention programmes are used effectively to raise the standard of reading, writing and mathematics of the lowest attaining pupils
   - they have a clear policy on assessment for learning and that it is applied consistently
   - assessment data is used effectively to identify key areas for improvement
   - teachers' marking and feedback help pupils to understand what they need to improve.

5. Schools that have so far resisted implementing the Strategy should consider how best they can use Strategy material to improve standards.

Part one: whole school themes

School Leadership

1. Leadership of the Strategy is satisfactory in a very large majority of the schools visited and good or better in nearly two thirds. Around half of the school Strategy managers are good at discharging their roles, with most of the others being satisfactory. The impact of the Strategy is unsatisfactory in a small minority of schools, mainly those where senior leadership is in a state of flux.

2. Well-led schools are further forward in Strategy implementation because of a shared understanding of the rationale of the National Strategy and its agenda for change. In these schools there is a rigorous approach to evaluation in order to identify strengths and weaknesses at all levels and to determine priorities. Effective improvement plans contain clear timings and measurable success criteria and schools are flexible enough to change them in response to review.

3. The most effective Strategy managers are usually senior managers who hold a clear mandate for change and have the authority to bring it about. They select areas of the Strategy according to the strengths and weaknesses of their schools and involve academic and pastoral middle managers in a two-pronged attack on underachievement. Getting the linkage correct between departmental improvement plans and whole-school initiatives is crucial; planning is most effective where individual departments have the flexibility to adopt and adapt whole-school approaches while retaining consistency across the school.

4. The impact of the Strategy depends crucially on how it is introduced to teachers. The best examples involve active engagement of staff through seminars, meetings and working parties. Good and very good Strategy managers liaise with the local authority to decide when to use school staff to lead on aspects of improvement and when to deploy consultants. They act as regulators of Strategy initiatives and thereby prevent the volume of material from swamping their colleagues.

5. Strategy managers are least effective where the responsibility frequently changes hands or where they have too many responsibilities, leaving them insufficient time to manage the Strategy properly. Ineffective managers place too much emphasis on disseminating information without checking how it is used. Furthermore, they do not require departmental action plans to be based on audits of provision.

6. Less effective school improvement plans continue to show the weaknesses identified in previous reports: they make insufficient reference to outcomes for pupils; success criteria are not measurable; responsibilities for implementing the plan are unclear; there is

inconsistency with departmental improvement plans; and costs and times are not clearly stated. The impact of the Strategy is reduced by vague, incomplete or overloaded school improvement plans that do not give a clear enough lead, resulting in inconsistent practices across the school.

7. School improvement is also hindered where there are middle managers in key departments or across the school who are resistant to change or who know too little about the Strategy. In schools where self-evaluation is not well established the selection of initiatives can be ill-informed with little account taken of the capacity of particular departments to respond.

8. About half of the schools have good or very good arrangements for monitoring and quality assurance at Key Stage 3. Arrangements are unsatisfactory in a very small minority of schools in the sample. This is a substantial improvement compared with earlier reports. Effective practice is characterised by clear policies, leading to an understanding by all concerned of how to monitor and evaluate the quality of provision and the impact of initiatives. In these circumstances self-evaluation is an established part of school life. Some schools have included this as an area for development and staff training. Secure quality assurance is underpinned by middle managers who are held accountable for their areas of responsibility.

9. Schools are better at monitoring and evaluating the core subjects than the foundation subjects. This is because they have more data which they feel is increasingly reliable, and subject leaders are better attuned to the importance of such work.

10. Features of effective systems for supporting departments and teachers include:
    - strong overall management of the Strategy
    - good line management structures enabling senior managers to work with departments to audit their provision and plan training for teachers and subject leaders, and
    - the dissemination of good practice through mentoring schemes and working groups.

11. Management systems are ineffective where:
    - subject leaders have insufficient time to develop their improvement role
    - the school's professional development budget does not acknowledge Strategy priorities
    - individual subject leaders are not held accountable for the provision in their areas.

12. Schools not providing satisfactory education (those newly placed in the special measures or serious weaknesses and those remaining in these categories for extended periods), have not generally been successful in

embedding the Strategy. Engagement with the Strategy is often too superficial to affect the quality of education provided. The reasons include:

- overall weak leadership and management
- a lack of continuity in implementing initiatives due to high staff turnover
- a general lack of faith in initiatives as a result of previous failures
- the potential for confusion between action plans, school improvement plans and plans for implementing the Strategy.

13. Increasingly, senior managers across the full sample of schools find that they and their staff are unable to keep abreast of all the developments promoted by the Strategy. This is especially true in schools where staff turnover is high and in schools where engagement with the Strategy is limited.

Subject leadership

14. Subject leadership and management of the Strategy are good or very good in three out of every five departments, but unsatisfactory or poor in one in six. This is a slight improvement on previous findings.

15. The most successful subject leaders have a clear vision for improvement, which is informed by a rigorous analysis of pupils' progress and standards. They recognise the potential of the Strategy to promote further improvement, and can exemplify the gains already made. On the basis of this analysis, planning is based on a pragmatic approach to Strategy guidance. Approaches and materials are prioritised and modified to suit the requirements of the department.

16. Good subject leaders delegate effectively, promote constructive debate and reflection, and ensure that meetings concentrate on raising standards. In the best departments, this results in a consensus about the department's aims, a good range of teaching and learning strategies and effective assessment and tracking of pupils. In schools where senior leaders demonstrate clarity of purpose and provide support and challenge, subject leadership is particularly effective.

17. In the best practice, there is monitoring of written work, lesson observations, interim assessments, examination results and progress against specific objectives from previous plans to identify strengths and areas for development. Evaluation and planning are collaborative, audits are detailed and results are used to set priorities, ensuring that planning covers key objectives and prevents duplication of work. Actions are well matched to purpose, explicitly linked to Strategy support, have clear success criteria and concentrate on pupils' learning rather than the coverage of teaching topics.

18. The scope for improvement identified in many of the schools exceeds the time available for teachers to work together to make the necessary changes. Schools find it difficult to make enough time for collective improvement activities such as professional development meetings, dissemination of training, collaborative planning and peer observation.

19. In departments where the Strategy is having little impact, monitoring and evaluation tend to be too vague. There is often a lack of clarity and commitment from senior leadership who fail to provide subject leaders with adequate support or challenge. In these circumstances, there are marked inconsistencies in the quality of leadership, and few subject leaders have a clear sense of their accountability for standards in their subjects. Typically, they fail to track the progress of the pupils or analyse results from end of Key Stage tests.

20. This sometimes leads to complacency and erroneous notions about pupils' progress, and fails to identify weaknesses in the teaching. A characteristic of such departments is the inconsistent approach to teaching, learning and assessment and the lack of consensus about how the Strategy might benefit pupils. This inconsistency is manifested in the erratic approach taken by teachers within the same department, the lack of implementation of key elements which might be particularly beneficial, or alternatively to wholesale implementation of the Strategy with little regard for pupils' needs. This lack of coherence is often accompanied by muddled planning with ill-defined actions that do not reflect pupils' needs. A failure to achieve the intended improvements is often overlooked because success is equated with the completion of planned actions, rather than with their impact on pupils' learning.

Assessment for learning

21. The Strategy has committed considerable resources to improving assessment for learning and a majority of schools in the sample made it a priority for 2004/05. In many of the schools visited, relevant training had only just started and therefore development is at an early stage. Though the picture is improving with time, so far there is little impact on teaching, learning or on achievement because few schools have established consistent, rigorous practices.

22. The use of assessment for learning is good or better in a minority of schools and unsatisfactory in a quarter. About a third of the schools have good arrangements for tracking pupils' progress but they are unsatisfactory in a fifth, similar to last year.

23. Where assessment for learning is most effective, schools and subject departments have clear policies that are implemented consistently. Assessment is emphasised in lesson plans and pupils are involved in assessing their own progress and that of their peers using

straightforward criteria. The most skilled teachers are able to adapt their plans mid-lesson in response to assessment information. However, teachers can only do so when they are clear about the lesson objectives and know the common misconceptions faced by pupils. Assessment for learning is particularly effective when teachers monitor pupils as they work, making them aware of how well they are doing and what they need to improve. This enables pupils to concentrate on improving areas of weakness and to consolidate knowledge and understanding where they are insecure.

24. Schools are increasingly data-rich but in the majority there are weaknesses in data analysis, particularly in relation to the progress of different groups of pupils including those from different minority ethnic heritages. Pupils' progress is tracked best in schools where assessment is regular and where results are moderated for consistency. The information is then used in a variety of ways, as in this example:

    One head of humanities has developed a Key Stage 3 progress record, which can be passed from teacher to teacher; this is important in a school where staff turnover has been high. Each pupil's progress is monitored and there is a record of preferred learning styles. These have been identified through self- and peer-assessment using prompts provided by the teacher. A mixture of self- and peer-assessment is used to identify precise targets for improvement from a bank of suggestions also provided by the teacher. The record card ensures there is continuity in the approach adopted by each teacher and also provides an important starting point for reporting to parents.

25. In the best cases, assessment information is collated and analysed to provide information on the quality of learning and to track and compare the progress of different groups of pupils. At an individual level, data is used to revise pupils' targets and identify gaps in knowledge and understanding. Underachieving pupils are identified and appropriate action is taken. Information from data analysis is also used to revise schemes of work and lesson plans to address weaknesses.

    In one school, the design and technology department introduced a test to assess pupils' capability, skills and knowledge at the beginning of Year 7. The assessment information was used by teachers when planning lessons and to set pupils' targets for the year. In lessons, teachers identified where pupils were encountering problems and adjusted their teaching accordingly. Project-specific assessment sheets were used with pupils to help them identify what they needed to do to achieve the next level. Pupils assessed their own work during the project, sometimes revising work several times to achieve higher levels. The assessments were moderated across the department and used to further refine teaching programmes.

26. Where the use of assessment to promote learning is unsatisfactory, it is often because of deficiencies in leadership and management. Some of the schools visited had not recognised it was a priority, despite unsatisfactory practice. In others implementation was delayed because training was not properly organised. Too often, implementation was inconsistent because there was no effective whole-school policy and teachers were left to respond as they saw fit.

27. In some departments, subject leaders tolerate inconsistent or ineffective practice. Inadequate moderation often means that common assessments are inconsistent and marking is not matched to criteria. In their marking, some teachers give little or no advice to pupils on what they need to do to improve. In some schools, reliable assessment data is not used to improve achievement.

    In one science department, assessment had little impact on improving achievement, despite a school-wide focus and training on feedback to pupils. This training had not been followed up in the department and the unsatisfactory practices went unchallenged. Books were marked regularly but not purposefully. As a result, teachers did not have a sense of pupils' strengths and weaknesses and this impaired their ability to develop pupils' understanding. Teachers did not give pupils enough guidance on how to improve and did not even check that they had corrected their work. Lack of assessment data meant there was limited analysis of pupils' progress, and little feedback to improve teaching programmes.

Training and support

28. The impact of training and consultant support was satisfactory or better in the very large majority of schools and, for the most part, across all strands. Effective training is provided through local authority consultants and by schools' selective use of Strategy resources, making full use of their own expertise. The impact is even greater when consultants follow up with individual departments. However, training has limited impact where schools allow insufficient time for teachers to cascade information and embed practice.

29. Consultants working in schools proved to be more effective than external training courses and their work was judged to be good in the majority of schools. They make the most impact where their expertise is used to provide practical support and where this is matched to the school's audit of needs. Consultants often help develop schemes of work, teach model lessons and provide bespoke training programmes. Teachers attest to the difference the support makes to their work, for example, one reported, 'I'm focusing much more on learning rather than teaching now'.

One consultant visited a school each week to offer help, including coaching for the head of mathematics department. He was also aware of the strengths and weaknesses of individual teachers in the department. The school had a contract that specified the support programme which included help with an audit and the scheme of work, demonstration lessons, observation of teaching, and critical analysis of test results. Furthermore, there was a formal review of the programme at the end of the year. The consultant's demonstrations of booster lessons were watched by staff who found it most helpful. The consultant has encouraged experimentation with different approaches to teaching and has helped teachers with their self-evaluation.
However, some consultant support has limited effect because of the high turnover of either consultants or teachers.

30. For the most part, the work of consultants is highly regarded, but there are variations in their impact between the strands. It is more likely to be very good in the core subjects and where there are specific programmes, such as design and technology, rather than in other foundation subjects. This is a reflection of the subject expertise of the consultant as well as the extent to which departments have received support. The amount of consultant support received by foundation subjects varies and has declined in some schools as consultants increasingly take on responsibilities for whole school themes such as assessment for learning.

31. Strategy resources are generally well-regarded by schools. Where there are concerns, it is with the quantity and thus the manageability of materials rather that their quality.

Local authority support

32. Of the 18 local authorities inspected during the year 15 provide good or highly satisfactory support for the Key Stage 3 Strategy. Support is guided by education development plans and targeted to particular schools following an audit of needs supported by good use of data. Key Stage 3 teams usually work well with others involved in school improvement.

33. A feature of improved provision is that, rather than imposing their own decisions, local authorities are working more closely with schools to decide the best use of consultants to meet their needs. As a result, there is now greater flexibility in their deployment and better arrangements for sharing good practice. Schools are well supported to make effective use of group and pupil-level data.

34. In the three local authorities where provision is only satisfactory, the most common areas for improvement are monitoring and evaluation,

arrangements for sharing good practice, documentation of consultants' visits and the adaptation of support to meet schools' needs. In some authorities, data is not used well enough to target support or to track the achievement of individuals or groups of pupils.

Literacy across the curriculum

35. In the majority of the schools visited this year, the development of literacy as a subject taught by all teachers has lost momentum. As a result of training since the Strategy was introduced, most teachers are literacy-aware but few have translated awareness into improved classroom practice. In nearly all the schools, the very good literacy targets that are set in English are not reinforced in other curriculum areas, particularly in teachers' marking.

36. Provision varies markedly within and between schools. In the majority, speaking and reading are less well developed across the curriculum than writing, particularly non-fiction writing. There is a growing realisation in schools of the need to revitalise work on literacy, but a relaunch often has to wait for the appointment of new personnel committed to cross-curricular literacy. The best practice is associated with an imaginative but pragmatic approach. In one school, for example, the head teacher has instituted 'Teaching Tuesday', in which a selected teacher makes a five minute presentation to staff about good literacy teaching in their area. In another school, the head teacher initiated a system where teachers' lesson plans identify opportunities where literacy development can take place.

37. Only a minority of schools respond consistently and successfully to the teaching of literacy. The key to success is the designation of a whole-school coordinator with the time and the authority to promote literacy across the curriculum. Other important factors are a discussion forum for literacy and the involvement of a local authority consultant.

38. In most of the schools, the monitoring of cross-curricular literacy development is particularly weak. Reviews by senior leaders typically examine teaching and learning but not standards of literacy. Where there is a focus on literacy it is often within a subject rather than across the whole school.

Numeracy across the curriculum

39. Progress with numeracy across the curriculum has stalled since the launch three years ago. Few schools give it a high priority and in most practice is unsatisfactory. Often a policy has been drawn up and occasionally some work has been undertaken with individual departments. This might, for example, include a joint project or the

sharing of approaches to teaching specific numerical or statistical ideas, but beyond this, there has been little impact.

40. Leadership of numeracy across the curriculum is frequently weak and few schools have effective plans for developing numeracy skills or for using and applying mathematics in other subjects. Teachers of other subjects find it difficult to judge the difficulty of mathematical applications and sometimes make inappropriate demands of the pupils, both too high and too low. They may also use different language and terminology from that used in the mathematics department, so causing confusion amongst the pupils.

41. Most science, ICT and design and technology departments recognise the importance of numeracy skills. Even so there are sometimes serious numerical and graphical errors in pupils' work. In science and ICT, pupils need to understand how to produce and interpret graphs and charts and how to use formulae to model aspects of the real world, such as speed, time and distance. However, it is rare to find departments collaborating on when and how these mathematical skills are taught. Where leadership of numeracy is unsatisfactory this problem often goes unrecognised.

42. In other departments, opportunities are frequently missed; for example, in history lessons, teachers do not always recognise the value of numeracy in interpreting evidence. Occasionally, tutorial sessions include a numeracy element, or there is a specially designated numeracy week. It is rare to find any consideration of other subjects' contribution to mathematics or links to using and applying mathematics as required by the National Curriculum. The following examples describe numeracy provision in two schools with comparatively well-developed provision.

    In one school '*eight departments followed up their numeracy training with an audit of mathematics and by writing departmental numeracy policies. Each has mathematical dictionaries, class sets of calculators, compasses, and protractors and a booklet highlighting standard procedures to ensure consistency across the curriculum.'*

    In another school '*the mathematics department advises teachers how best to teach topics like percentages or conversion graphs and sets weekly numeracy puzzles for use in form time. However, the school has yet to consider the potential contribution that other subjects could make in developing numeracy or to using and applying mathematics.*'

ICT across the curriculum

43. The use of ICT is satisfactory or better in most of the science, modern foreign languages and design and technology departments visited, although some science departments still lack adequate data-logging

equipment. ICT use is unsatisfactory in well over half the English, mathematics and other foundation subjects.

44. The Strategy's initiative *Embedding ICT in Subjects* has had limited impact. Given the title of this initiative, it is unfortunate that the Strategy missed the opportunity to embed the use of ICT into its guidance for each subject. For example, the mathematics resource *Geometric Proof and Reasoning* did not assume the use of a dynamic geometry system. The use of ICT is often considered as an afterthought in many schools.

45. It is uncommon to find ICT used well to enhance and support learning across the curriculum. Most often, it is used for applications such as word-processing, internet access and for presentations. Using the internet for research is most productive when teachers give clear guidelines, but all too often pupils engage in unstructured research which is of little value.

46. Although most of the school leaders recognise the potential of ICT to enhance teaching and support learning, many ignore or condone variations between and within departments. One reason is that some schools fail to provide the training and development time needed to get the best value from expensive equipment. Another is that teachers are simply allowed to opt out of using ICT. In many schools access to computer suites remains difficult because more ICT lessons are being timetabled.

47. In the few cases where ICT is led and managed as a whole school priority the impact of ICT is greater. For example, ICT has a high profile in one school where the Strategy manager has taken a lead in developing ICT through subjects. Schemes of work in all subjects include key references to using ICT and pupils have good access to computers. Training and support are provided by the ICT coordinator each week. Another school used Specialist School funds to give £500 to each department to spend on ICT, subject to their identifying the intended impact on teaching and learning.

48. Many of the schools have a few teachers who are passionate and skilled in the enterprising use of ICT to enhance and enrich teaching and learning. Lesson observation and pupil interviews confirm that good use of ICT can increase the motivation and engagement of pupils. In the best schools, the Strategy has encouraged ICT staff to liaise with others, for example to discuss the teaching of control technology with design and technology teachers, and there is often agreement with departments such as science and geography to use ICT to analyse data.

Inclusion

49. The Strategy now offers considerable support to meet the needs of pupils whose achievement is affected by poor behaviour or attendance and for those who do not quite reach Level 4 by the age of 11. However, the Strategy offers limited support to help teachers meet the needs of pupils for whom English is an additional language and for those who start their secondary education well below Level 4. There is some evidence that lower-achieving boys and bilingual learners are doing better as a result of the more carefully structured teaching associated with the Strategy and there is now a pilot project to support 20 schools in challenging circumstances that have significant numbers of pupils working at Level 3 or below.

50. More generally, whole school training has heightened the awareness of inclusion in a very large majority of schools. Even so, teachers often find it difficult to put policy into practice to meet the needs of specific students. In one school, for example,
    - *students at an early stage of learning English were given a difficult linguistic task where they had to distinguish between definitions and conventions in mathematics*
    - *pupils who joined the school mid-year were placed in sets where there was space rather than in those which suited their abilities*
    - *two 'accelerated' Year 9 students were developing poor mathematical habits as they worked without adequate support through AS material*
    - *rough and tumble behaviour in corridors went unchallenged, making them unsafe for pupils with restricted mobility.*

51. For inclusion to be effective, schools need to plan in greater detail in order to translate general awareness into effective classroom practice. For example, in one mathematics lesson, lower attaining pupils were struggling because the work was too demanding, but the lesson was based on the Strategy's sample medium-term plans, which are pitched at the level expected of average pupils of this age. With more detailed planning the teacher could have adapted the material to suit the lower attaining pupils' needs. Too often, individual education plans are not considered when teachers prepare their lesson plans.

Intervention

52. Since the Strategy started, there has been a gradual improvement in the quality and quantity of information passed between schools when pupils transfer from Year 6 to Year 7. Thus it is now easier for secondary schools to identify and prepare for pupils who require additional support before they start Year 7. However, imaginative approaches to such intervention are lacking in the overwhelming majority of the schools.

53. There is some evidence which shows an improvement in the motivation of pupils involved in intervention programmes because they feel they are receiving special help. However, the evaluation of intervention programmes is weak in the majority of schools and only a few track the performance of pupils on these programmes and can demonstrate that improvements in standards are the result of intervention programmes.

54. The most successful schools offer a range of intervention activities well-matched to individual pupils' learning needs, including lower and higher attaining pupils. There is a regular cycle of assessment, implementation and review of the pupils' progress, including regular book and homework checks. In one school a head of department invited parents to attend extra evening classes alongside their child. As well as improved subject levels amongst pupils, each parent learned how to help with their child's learning. In another school, pupils were involved in setting and monitoring personal targets that were recorded on the back of their planners.

55. The use of teaching assistants to support intervention programmes has improved, with more regular discussion between them and class teachers about their respective roles and responsibilities in lessons. Schools are also deploying teaching assistants more effectively, often allocating assistants to curriculum areas where they have or can develop particular expertise.

56. The schools inspected in 2004/05 used a variety of methods and materials to support pupils who were well below Level 3 at age 11. These included literacy progress units (LPUs), Springboard, booster classes, bridging units, commercial materials such as Successmaker, and the use of adapted materials and those developed by schools.

57. In the overwhelming majority of schools, pupils are taken out of their ordinary lessons for literacy intervention programmes. Out of context, however, pupils find it hard to understand what they are taught. Thus, when they return to ordinary lessons they struggle to apply what they have covered. There are isolated exceptions, for example in one school, the intervention activities included:
    - *a well-planned and well-established Year 6 summer school*
    - *literacy progress unit materials integrated into ordinary lessons for lower attaining sets*
    - *a paired reading programme led by Year 10 pupils*
    - *resources aimed at particular groups of pupils which included a reading diary for pupils at Level 3*
    - *the introduction of the Reading Challenge for a small number of pupils after school*

- *targeted starter activities*
- *silent reading sessions in form time.*

58. There are fewer examples of intervention for lower attaining Year 7 pupils in mathematics and science. Schools usually claim that setting arrangements are sufficient to cater for pupils in these subjects. Intervention is often left to individual teachers who decide for themselves what intervention and extra support should be provided. In the main, when pupils are taught in sets, there is little further attempt to meet the individual needs of pupils in those sets catering for low attainers. In the most successful schools visited for this survey, special needs teams provided well targeted support, as in this example:

The inclusion unit gave excellent help to the science department by providing additional resources and the routine support of a teaching assistant for some lessons. Strategy materials were extensively modified, as were those provided by the unit, so as to meet the needs of some pupils with challenging behaviour. As a result of this support, the department was able to maintain an inclusive approach to their science teaching with no need for pupils to be removed from lessons for extra help.

English as an additional language

59. Training and support by local authorities and other external agencies were good or better in three of the seven schools which HMI visited to inspect provision for teaching EAL, but they were unsatisfactory or poor in the remaining four. In four of the schools, staff had attended EAL Strategy training, sometimes as contributors. However, whole-school EAL training for all staff was not common practice.

60. In the well led schools, EAL specialists have a central and integrated role in developing whole-school literacy and in establishing common approaches to teaching and learning. They plan and teach alongside subject teachers and ensure that Strategy approaches to teaching and learning provide EAL pupils with the best opportunities to develop subject knowledge and language skills.

61. In these schools, EAL pupils particularly benefit from the use of specific learning objectives linked to short term tasks with precise purposes. They also respond to well planned lessons in which modelling, scaffolding and opportunities for shared learning enable them to participate fully. Careful grouping of pupils in mainstream settings enables EAL pupils to participate in speaking and listening activities with competent speakers. In these schools, the pupils are placed in classes according to their ability rather than on the basis of their competence in

English, and are provided with effective support whatever their stage of language acquisition.

62. In the less effective schools, information about pupils is often patchy and inconsistent, and assessment and entry data are analysed inadequately. Thus teachers find it hard to pinpoint the most suitable provision for individuals and groups of learners. Too often, undue emphasis is given to practising existing language skills. Practices vary between and sometimes within schools depending on resources and demands. There are times when the focus is almost exclusively on new arrivals; pupils are withdrawn for intensive language lessons before they are launched into ordinary classes where they receive little help or support. Where EAL pupils are taught separately from others, they have few opportunities to acquire or practise English in relevant and recognisable contexts.

Transition

63. Since the Strategy started, planning for academic continuity has improved, particularly in science. Although it is satisfactory in a large majority of the schools it remains unsatisfactory in nearly a quarter schools. Where the transition of pupils from one school to another is very good it is usually because senior leaders give it high priority and establish open and trusting relationships with partner schools.

64. Where transition is best, secondary schools use teacher exchanges and locally planned bridging units and also build on the pupils' primary school reading records. In science, for example, several schools work with their primary partners and plan the Year 6 and 7 curricula together. This is a good example of the Strategy switching its support to build capacity for further improvement. By contrast, in previous years schools often used ready-made bridging units as a substitute for cross-phase liaison.

65. Good transition relies on the prompt, accurate and complete transfer of data from primary schools. One third of the schools visited receive timely support from their local authority with the transfer and analysis of data. Thus, they are able to allocate pupils to the correct teaching sets, target additional support and teachers are better able to plan their lessons to meet pupils' needs. Over half the schools supplement this information with data from cognitive ability tests, to provide a starting point from which to monitor and evaluate pupils' progress in English, mathematics and science.

66. By contrast, secondary schools rarely receive information on pupils' attainment in ICT and the foundation subjects. Although there is no statutory obligation to supply such information, the Strategy could do more to encourage primary schools to provide better information.

67. About a quarter of the schools have developed their own strategies to provide meaningful baseline data. In one school, for example, Year 6 induction days are used to assess pupils' ICT skills. At another, teachers test skills such as designing, drawing, subject knowledge, spatial awareness and manual dexterity using multiple choice and open-ended questions so that those with poor literacy skills are not disadvantaged. Individual targets are subsequently based on these test results.

68. Nearly a quarter of schools lack adequate transfer data to inform planning, even in the core subjects. This is more so in schools that admit pupils from a large number of primary schools. In some urban areas, as many as a third of pupils attend secondary schools outside their home borough and data transfer is often slow or incomplete.

69. In the very small minority of schools where transition is inadequate, it is usually because the management has not made it a high enough priority. Some authorities do not gather or analyse data in time for schools to use them purposefully. The inconsistent or limited use of data and inadequate liaison with partner schools could be overcome with better management. Although teachers from about three quarters of the secondary schools now visit their partner primary schools, there is often no systematic evaluation of what they have observed nor any attempt to adjust provision once pupils start at secondary school.

Part two: subjects

English

70. During 2004/05 inspectors visited 32 schools to look at English at Key Stage 3. Of these, 17 were schools where test results had recently improved substantially (the improving schools) and 15 were to schools where results were low (the low attaining schools).

71. The impact of the Strategy on attainment is at least good in ten of the improving schools. Subject leadership is usually good, schemes of work have been improved and the Strategy's recommended approaches to teaching and learning are adopted consistently. In these schools, staffing is stable and there is a good mix of experience. Teachers work together well and build on existing good practice. They have high expectations of pupils and challenge them to understand and apply what they learn.

72. In nearly half of the low attaining schools the Strategy's impact on attainment is unsatisfactory. Weak or uncommitted leadership often means the Strategy is implemented slowly or is still in its early stages. Staff turnover is frequently high and consequently there is often a high proportion of inexperienced or unqualified teachers. Approaches to teaching and assessment are rarely consistent. Low levels of literacy are not addressed firmly enough and intervention programmes for Year 7 pupils have little effect.

73. Ten of the lower performing schools and 13 of the improving schools have good schemes of work. The better schemes focus strongly on what pupils should learn rather than what they should do. Learning objectives are clearly stated and often give priority to issues identified through assessment. Planning for improvement is effective in 11 of the improving schools and in eight of the low attaining schools. However, too many plans lack specific detail on how improvements will be made and are not linked to specific targets for improving attainment.

74. The main difference between the improving and lower attaining schools is in the quality of teaching. The Strategy has had a good impact on teaching and learning in most of the improving schools but only on a small minority of the lower attaining schools. In the better lessons, planning is precise and objectives are specific and clear. Teachers structure lessons to support learning and give pupils time to work in pairs, groups or individually to apply and consolidate what they have learnt. Teachers use a variety of approaches and phrase their questions to encourage pupils to explain and justify their views. However, even in the better lessons, plenary sessions remain a weakness.

75. In less effective lessons, teachers often use the recommended structure in a mechanical way without understanding how it should encourage learning. Their planning is not matched to pupils' needs. Rather than identifying what pupils should learn, lesson objectives are frequently expressed as activities or tasks. Too little time is provided for pupils to actively engage in learning and, therefore, progress is too slow.

76. The value of Strategy approaches is clear when comparing the following two lessons from the same school.

Pupils in a high attaining Year 9 lesson started by sequencing the elements of a short story they had previously read, to understand how writers structure narrative. The teacher linked this work to the criteria for Level 6, prompting good recall of writers' techniques identified in earlier lessons, and then annotated the ending of a short story using a projector. Pupils identified key words and phrases, explaining their importance and how they indicate the structure of the narrative. The emphasis was on note-making to explain the writers' choices. All pupils were very clear how they should proceed. For example, two pairs of high attaining pupils worked on transparencies, ready to feed back to the class during the plenary. The resulting learning was successful and pupils understood how to analyse and interpret the text.

In another lesson with a middle set Year 8 class, the objective was to learn how to annotate a text. As in the first lesson, the teacher modelled the process that pupils would need to use. However, some of the technical terms that the teacher used were too complex and pupils did not understand them. Furthermore, the teacher did not make clear that it was only single words or short phrases that need to be identified. The modelling was teacher-led, instructions were unclear and pupils' understanding was limited. They worked enthusiastically and ended up with heavily highlighted text but very few, if any, notes. When asked to explain why they had selected particular text they struggled to give any explanation for their choices, so the lesson objective was not met.

Mathematics

77. National test results in mathematics continue to improve but this is as much due to better test technique as it is to a rise in standards of mathematical understanding. Most schools have an enhanced focus in Year 9 on test questions and revision sessions, a feature that was especially apparent in visits to schools with rapidly improving results, where familiarity with the style of questioning in tests was considered important. Booster classes have also helped to increase pupils' confidence and their test scores. However, it is notable that recent Key Stage 3 improvements are not being sustained at GCSE.

78. Half the mathematics departments visited are making good use of the Strategy to improve teaching, learning and attainment and to develop the capacity for further improvement. Another third are making worthwhile changes but without fully grasping the underlying rationale. In a minority of schools the focus is on better test preparation rather than long term measures to improve mathematical understanding.

79. Schemes of work were inadequate in a third of the schools in this year's sample, twice as many as previously. Since the Strategy issued its sample medium term plan for mathematics in 2001 departments have had four years to adapt and enhance the plan, or to establish a satisfactory scheme of work by other means. The integration of new Strategy resources into schemes of work has been slow because it takes time to understand, select and adapt the materials.

80. The best subject leaders use departmental meetings to disseminate good practice and for discussion of curricular issues, such as how to apply various elements of the Strategy. They have adapted their schemes of work and most include, for example, regular assessment opportunities and also identify suitable resources. The following offers a good example of how this can be approached.

    The scheme of work was developed collaboratively. It refers to various resources and suggests suitable teaching approaches, including how to develop process skills. Teachers meet regularly to discuss what went well in lessons and how they could improve the pupils' learning, so they are continually improving their understanding of effective pedagogy. They are always trying to challenge pupils to think rather than spoon-feeding them.

81. Although most departments set pupils by ability, few have separate schemes of work for different sets. The Strategy offers limited guidance on teaching the most able. It advises teachers to select topics from the following year's Framework, but able pupils also need to develop fluency with standard material and to cover topics in greater depth. Few schemes of work indicate how pupils should be taught to devise their own strategies for solving problems or to use and apply mathematics in real contexts.

82. The Strategy has had a positive impact on teaching and learning and the majority of teaching is good as the Framework has led to greater consistency between classes. Most mathematics lessons are now well structured and clearly planned, usually with reference to learning objectives. Despite these gains, too often pupils are not taught how to think mathematically.

83. Many lessons follow a common 'safe' pattern. They begin with a starter to revise a key idea, after which the teacher demonstrates a method for

the day's topic and gives pupils time to practise the technique through exercises before recapping. Such teaching can engender a calm atmosphere in which pupils concentrate, behave well and learn how to apply standard methods. However, lessons can be much more effective if the questioning, explanation and exercises promote mathematical thinking, as shown by these examples.

Two lessons on bearings were quite different. The first teacher provided a detailed demonstration of how to measure bearings, modelling methods that would help pupils avoid difficulties, provided they followed the instructions correctly. The other teacher gave pupils an early opportunity to draw and measure so they discovered some of the pitfalls for themselves and shared them in discussion. The teacher also explained the relevance by making links with geography and navigation.

Both lessons led to effective learning, but pupils made faster progress and had better attitudes and behaviour in the second class because they were more actively engaged and allowed to think for themselves.

84. In unsatisfactory lessons, teachers often demonstrate what to do without making links to previous knowledge and sometimes make incorrect assumptions about what pupils understand. Frequent demonstrations leave pupils little time to consolidate their learning through independent work. They are sometimes given answers to questions before they have even attempted them. Thus they become passive learners, overdependent on the teacher and ill-equipped for future demands. Even in some of the better lessons the teachers tend to dominate discussions, asking mainly closed questions which are answered by the same few volunteers.

Science

85. The impact of the Strategy in science is satisfactory in a very large majority of schools and good in small minority. Since some disappointing results in the 2004 tests there has been a stronger focus in schools on raising standards. Improvements in lesson structure and planning with clear objectives have enhanced pupils' depth of understanding.

86. Variable use is made of Strategy booster materials. In some schools they are the major focus of revision programmes in Year 9. In others, revision programmes are left to individual teachers. The biggest improvements occurred in schools that recognised from analysing their 2004 test results the importance of literacy skills in understanding scientific terminology. In one school, a combination of literacy skill development and a focus on examination techniques enabled pupils to handle complex scientific concepts in test situations. This allowed the

pupils to achieve results commensurate with their abilities and boys' results were well above the national average.

87. In the small minority of schools where pupils make poor progress or where standards have dropped, departments tend to focus on delivering content with insufficient emphasis on teaching strategies that help pupils understand science. These schools often mistrust Key Stage 2 results yet make little effort to provide alternative assessments as a baseline against which to measure progress. Poor progress is also related to high staff turnover which affects the continuity of learning.

88. A major and continuing improvement has centred on curriculum planning. A very large majority of schools now have schemes of work that are at least satisfactory, and most make some attempt to meet the needs of a wide range of pupils. They provide a very strong basis for lesson plans with good guidance and support for inexperienced teachers.

89. In the best examples, schemes are based on the National Curriculum, QCA exemplar materials and the science Framework. They include modified programmes for the least able that focus on understanding key concepts rather than content. The best schemes focus on skills development, particularly in experimental and investigative science. The Strategy is particularly helpful where the yearly teaching objectives or the 'five key ideas' are used to guide planning and to ensure that the work is appropriate to pupils' age and abilities.

In one school a particularly innovative scheme was written in narrative form rather than as a series of individual lesson plans. As a result of good co-operative working across the department, the schemes were very comprehensive and clearly identified the objectives for each aspect of the work. This was supported by very good guidance about teaching and learning in relation to specific targets as well as very good advice to teachers on opportunities for assessment for learning.

90. Planning is less successful where a published scheme is used uncritically and where the role of investigative science is not made explicit. Additionally, while individual teachers often put a lot of effort into developing innovative approaches this can result in inconsistencies in presentation and quality of teaching.

91. The impact of Strategy initiatives on teaching and learning is good or better in the majority of the schools. The Strategy has a clear emphasis on improving teachers' understanding of how to promote scientific thinking. This is a slow but potentially self-sustaining approach, and is well understood by effective subject leaders. In their departments, the Strategy is used to develop teaching styles that enhance learning, for example, capturing and sharing ideas on interactive whiteboards to promote thinking.

92. Teachers are becoming more skilled at dealing with pupils' misconceptions and more readily amend their plans mid-lesson when necessary. There are better approaches to experimental and investigative science and clearer learning intentions for practical work. The following example demonstrates the impact of the Strategy on the work of one department.

    Teachers had created a 'can do' culture and pupils rose to the challenge. Pupils developed understanding through discussion and extensive writing opportunities. Assessment was part of every activity, giving teachers a good knowledge of pupils' understanding and progress. Individuals who were confused were readily identified and given extra help to consolidate their understanding. The improved teaching sustained pupils' interest and they engaged well with the lesson content – even potentially disruptive pupils worked well.

93. The best science lessons have a purposeful structure, with energising starters and constructive plenary sessions to reflect on learning. There is a clear learning route even where the topic spans more than one session. Pupils learn well in response to probing questions that are used to check their knowledge and understanding. Card games, peer discussions and small group work are used alongside well-planned experimental activities. Role play adds a new learning dimension to some lessons. Good use is made of guided reading and writing frameworks to develop skills or to lead pupils through the processes associated with experimental science.

94. Such changes are beginning to improve pupils' practical and their ability to interpret data and apply scientific knowledge in new contexts. Their engagement improves as science is made more pertinent and interesting.

95. However, there remain wide variations in the quality of teaching even within individual departments. While lesson structure has undoubtedly improved, too often teaching lacks imagination and the emphasis is on the factual content of the lesson rather than how pupils might learn and understand key concepts. Weak lessons have unclear objectives and teachers do not address the needs of all pupils. Questioning is often inadequate, with closed questions requiring only brief responses, or more open questions where pupils are not given enough thinking time. In addition, too much experimental work is rooted in outdated practice. Pupils carry out mundane practical tasks without understanding the reason for them.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

96. The impact of the Strategy on attainment in ICT is good in nearly half the schools visited in 2004/05 and satisfactory in a very large majority. Where Strategy materials and guidance are used by schools there is nearly always improvement in pupils' ICT capability, but more so in the presentation of their work than in analysis, modelling and control.

97. ICT teachers have seen the content of their subject and expectations of pupils change considerably. Those who have attended training understand better how to assess pupils' work against National Curriculum levels although only rarely are the criteria fully communicated to pupils. Untrained teachers find it difficult to assess pupils' work well enough to help them to improve.

98. Effective ICT coordinators have a clear vision for improving ICT in their school and use Strategy guidance intelligently, adapting it to meet their needs. The audit, when completed thoroughly, continues to be an effective tool in identifying priorities for development. All too often, however, weak subject leaders fail to complete the audit and do not involve the whole department in reflecting on current practice.

99. Strategy guidance has led to a significant improvement in schemes of work. Most are satisfactory and a minority are good. Only one in ten is now unsatisfactory, compared to one in three last year. Strategy units have led to a better balanced curriculum and a richer and broader experience for pupils. The best schemes of work describe how topics will be taught and assessed, indicate appropriate teaching approaches and materials, provide guidance on teaching pupils working at different levels, and show teachers how to develop pupils' understanding of complex ideas, such as modelling. However, it is still rare for departments to have consistent policies on teaching strategies; for example, to enter formulae in spreadsheets, some favour keying in cell references while others encourage a point and click method.

100. Most of the schools with inadequate schemes of work have not used the Strategy guidance. They pay little or no attention to ICT capability and teachers employ a task-oriented, skills-based approach which presents applications and tools out of context and gives little chance for pupils to make decisions or evaluate their work. Additionally, where schemes of work are weak some units are covered in great detail while others, often more difficult ones, are given scant attention.

101. The impact of the Strategy on teaching and learning is good or better in nearly half of the schools visited. Pupils respond well to the quicker pace and more engaging materials suggested by the Strategy. Well taught pupils are moving beyond competence in specific technical skills; they make choices about the most appropriate software for a task, have a

sense of the intended audience, judge whether their work is fit for purpose, are reflective and make improvements. This approach to work is far more demanding than merely expecting pupils to follow instructions.

102. Teachers are now better at specifying what they intend to achieve in lessons and what pupils will learn. In the most effective lessons, they help pupils understand the process of learning. They use well-framed questions to encourage pupils to think and to explain their difficulties. They often repeat pupils' answers for the rest of the class to think about. Pupils are expected to direct their own learning and ask when unsure. As teachers become more confident, they are able to concentrate on what the pupils are thinking and doing, rather than on their own delivery.

    In a good, well-planned lesson, the teacher reminded the class about what they had learned previously and explained the purpose of what they were about to do. The class was involved in a lively question and answer session which provided essential vocabulary (field length, data types, primary key) and reminded them what skills they needed. Pupils needing support were identified in lesson notes, and the teacher ensured they had individual help. Pupils were given time to evaluate their work which they saved in an electronic portfolio. Pupils talked confidently about the level they were working at.

103. Where such approaches are neglected, learning is slow. When teachers regularly give answers too soon, or summarise the expected learning without checking whether it has occurred, pupils become passive and always expect to be told what to do. If they cannot see the point of a lesson pupils are easily distracted, for example surfing aimlessly on the internet, playing games or repeatedly changing aspects of presentation.

104. If all pupils are to develop ICT capability, it is necessary to improve teachers' understanding of the subject's conceptual demands. For example, few teachers have a secure grasp of absolute, relative and mixed references in spreadsheet formulae, a Year 8 topic. This can lead to ineffective lessons in which pupils simply follow instructions without understanding what they are doing.

Foundation subjects

105. Pupils' attainment in foundation subjects is rising steadily, as shown by the increased proportion of pupils achieving Level 5 and above at the end of Year 9. The Strategy is contributing to this improvement, although its impact is patchy as yet. In particular, there remains too much inconsistency in the quality of teaching and learning within and between departments in the same school.

106. There has been a marked improvement in the quality of curriculum planning. Most of the schools visited in 2004/05 have started to review their schemes of work and are incorporating features promoted by the Strategy, including learning objectives and ideas for starters, main activities and final plenaries. The best map out progression in knowledge, skills and understanding and highlight opportunities for assessment.

107. Despite improvements to schemes of work, standards in foundation subjects are hindered in some schools by weaknesses in curriculum planning and in the quality and accuracy of assessment. Although most schemes of work refer to cross-curricular themes, especially literacy, these are often not realised in practice. The focus is often narrow and planning lacks coherence. Writing is emphasised with little attention paid to developing pupils' speaking, listening and reading skills.

108. The Strategy has led to a renewed focus on effective teaching and learning so both are at least satisfactory in the very large majority of schools and good in the majority. Teaching remains unsatisfactory in one lesson in ten. There is a higher proportion of good teaching and learning in Years 7 and 8 than in Year 9. In the few schools where there is more unsatisfactory teaching, teachers have taken insufficient account of pupils' prior knowledge and attainment.

109. Over the last year there has been a particular improvement in the use of a range of strategies in the classroom. Where teaching is good teachers plan their lessons to cater for a range of preferred learning styles. The range of teaching strategies goes beyond the familiar and sometimes formulaic use of the three-part lesson and encompasses good use of questioning skills, the clear modelling of expectations and the development of pupils' thinking skills.

110. Pupils are increasingly engaged in their learning especially where teachers use a variety of approaches and where pupils really understand what they need to do to improve. Increasingly, pupils are developing skills both as independent and collaborative learners.

An advanced skills teacher brought together several Strategy approaches to teaching an outstanding Year 7 history lesson on why William won the Battle of Hastings. The lesson was well-planned to accommodate visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learning styles, and specified how the needs of gifted pupils and those with special education needs would be met. Learning objectives were shared with pupils; these combined subject knowledge, skills and understanding. Pupils' learning was well-structured with varied activities, including card-sorting, paired and individual work. The teacher's skilful questions elicited good extended answers. Literacy skills were well-integrated, such as the teaching of subject-specific spellings and guidance on how

to structure a particular type of essay; this included some modelling and the discussion of an essay written by a pupil. The lesson ended with a 'traffic lights' self-assessment, to which pupils responded thoughtfully. Throughout the lesson the teacher made effective use of the interactive whiteboard as an aid to teaching and to add variety, focus pupils' attention, demonstrate expectations and check understanding.

111. The large majority of schools where teaching and learning are good have a created a working group to harness teachers' enthusiasm to improve pedagogy. These groups sometimes benefit from consultant support but are increasingly self-supporting. At best, they are open to all teachers to share good practice, while at the same time ensuring all departments are represented to promote consistency.

112. Despite such improvements, some teaching remains dull and does not engage pupils or develop their skills as learners. This is sometimes a consequence of a lack of contact with the Strategy consultants and training, or alternatively, a failure to involve all foundation subjects systematically across the school.

Modern Foreign Languages (MFL)

113. Where teachers are making use of specific Strategy approaches or using the Framework, pupils are making good progress in all four skills. They speak and write at greater length at an earlier stage, make use of a wider range of tenses and use more complex structures. They use a range of strategies to support their reading and, when the teachers' use of the target language is consistent, their listening skills are well developed. Pupils have a better understanding of grammar, and can apply it well. Pupils are more involved in their learning and more are developing good research skills. Pupils are developing greater independence through effective use of glossaries and dictionaries. Where teaching is very effective, there is no difference in the progress of boys and girls in lessons or in the rate of progress of different ability groups.

114. Departmental planning is satisfactory but remains too variable and is unsatisfactory in a minority of schools. In the most effective and well-led departments audits have been used effectively to identify areas for development. Curriculum plans focus on skills as well as on topics and have appropriate links to the Framework objectives. Where subject leadership is less effective there is less consistency across the department. In a small minority of schools teachers have been resistant to the use of the Strategy.

115. The impact of the Strategy on teaching and learning is good in the majority of schools visited in 2004/05. Pupils respond well to the clear

lesson objectives, to the increased focus on the structure of the language, and to the opportunities provided for them to reflect on what they have covered in a lesson and on the progress they have made. They are generally well motivated, participate well and the vast majority are well behaved. The impact is less strong where there is inconsistency in implementation across teaching groups.

116. Lesson objectives are now more precise and teachers are making increasing use of general approaches taken from the Strategy, such as the use of starters, and ideas from the MFL Framework to extend the range and effectiveness of classroom activities. Teaching is particularly effective when teachers plan for, and develop, pupils' grammatical knowledge of the modern language, when activities promote creativity and when expectations of pupils' spoken and written outcomes are high. It is enhanced by effective use of ICT, such as the use of an interactive whiteboard to explain and model grammatical constructions. Judicious use of ICT supports language learning well, but its use is rarely consistent across a department.

117. There are weaknesses in teaching where the Strategy or Framework have been imperfectly understood or inconsistently applied. In a small minority of schools there is no clear rationale for the use of English.

Design and technology (D&T)

118. The impact on achievement in D&T is good in half the schools visited in 2004/05. In most of the others the impact is satisfactory but in a few it is limited, mainly because of weaknesses in teaching. Improvements in achievement result from better teaching of design and more comprehensive coverage of the programmes of study. These improvements are most noticeable in the design and evaluation stages. In particular, pupils are better at thinking, analysing, sharing and developing ideas, and writing design specifications.

119. The impact of the Strategy on departmental planning is good in three-quarters of the schools and occasionally very good. In the remainder the impact is satisfactory, but with weaknesses in aspects such as the planning for continuity and progression. Nearly all the schools have found Strategy materials useful for auditing provision and identifying priorities, usually with consultant support, as in this example.

Following the audit in one school teachers revised their schemes of work to ensure key objectives were covered more thoroughly and they reduced their teaching of other aspects which they realised were taught repeatedly.

120. Schemes of work in this three-quarters of schools reflect the D&T Framework and provide good subject guidance to teachers. However,

guidance on teaching literacy and numeracy is often insufficiently detailed as is that on challenging more able pupils. Lesson plans usually follow the format suggested by the Strategy with a clear statement of objectives but they still tend to focus on teaching intentions rather than learning outcomes.

121. The impact of the Strategy on teaching is broadly satisfactory, with good features in about a third of the schools. Strategy training has helped teachers to improve the provision they make for lower attaining pupils. Where the Framework has been understood and adapted well, teachers now cover a broader range of objectives in their lessons, often using short term tasks to maintain a brisk pace; they plan thoroughly, manage effectively and try new approaches, including different styles of questioning; they intervene judiciously to dispel misconceptions and question pupils' responses. Teachers in these schools are better at developing autonomy, creativity, reflection and team work. As a result, pupils have a deeper understanding about how to design. For example, in one lesson, pupils of all abilities successfully learned how different designs would appeal to various client groups, while in another lesson pupils recognised they could evaluate a product using a number of criteria which they needed to weigh one against another.

122. Similarly, the overall impact on pupils' learning is also satisfactory with good features in about a quarter of the schools. The use of quick starter activities at the beginning of lessons has been particularly effective in engaging and re-engaging pupils. They enjoy the brisk pace and feel they are making good progress because they cover the ground much more quickly.

123. In a few schools, the Strategy has been disregarded or misunderstood, sometimes as a consequence of high staff turnover or lack of consultant support. In these circumstances, teachers rely too much on didactic exposition and rarely help pupils see the connections between different areas of D&T. Many of these teachers regard designing as a linear rather than an iterative process. In practical sessions they often leave pupils to continue designing and making very much on their own. Lesson objectives remain unclear, the pace is slow, work is undemanding and low standards are accepted too readily.

124. Although schools are making better use of data to track pupils' progress in D&T, the use of assessment remains under-developed in the great majority of schools, being satisfactory or unsatisfactory in equal proportions. However, there are examples of good practice:

Assessment was very good in one school because teachers were good at recognising where pupils were encountering problems and adjusted their teaching accordingly. Assessment sheets for each project

identified expectations and targets were shared with pupils so they knew what they needed to do to improve.

125. In about half the schools involvement in the Strategy has reinvigorated teachers and established a strong capacity to sustain improvement. The capacity for improvement is rarely unsatisfactory.

Notes

1. The Key Stage 3 Strategy started with a pilot in the academic year 2000/01 and has grown each year, as shown in table 1 below.

Table 1

Year	Pilot / launch	Available to all schools
April 2000 – August 2001	English Mathematics	
2001/02	Science Foundation subjects ICT	English Mathematics
2002/03	Modern foreign languages	Science Foundation subjects ICT
2003/04	Design and technology Behaviour and attendance Assessment for learning	Modern foreign languages

In April 2005, after five years of operation, the Key Stage 3 Strategy became the ***Secondary National Strategy for School Improvement.*** The aim of the Strategy is to raise standards at both Key Stages 3 and 4 by improving the quality of teaching and school management. The goal is to ensure that the most effective teachers and schools:

- understand the purpose of education
- evaluate and reflect on their practice
- have the capacity for self-improvement.

2. In March 2004, Ofsted reported on the third year of the Key Stage 3 Strategy. Since that time HMI have continued to evaluate the impact of the Strategy. This report covers the academic year 2004/2005. During the year HMI visited nearly 180 secondary schools, interviewed teachers and pupils, scrutinised documentation and observed nearly 750 lessons. They also visited training events, held discussions with and shadowed the work of LEA officers and consultants.

3. On most visits, HMI inspected the impact of the Strategy on raising standards and improving the quality of provision in one of the strands

listed in table 1 above. On seven visits, inspectors focused on the impact on pupils who use English as an additional language.

4. Inspectors' judgements about pupils' achievements are based on the observation of pupils in lessons, the scrutiny of samples of work and on test results.

Annex: performance data

Key Stage 3 national test results 2001 to 2005

Table 2 shows the percentage of pupils achieving Level 5 or above and Level 6 or above in the core subjects. Data for 2005 is provisional and is taken from *National Assessments of 14 years olds in England, 2005 (provisional)*, DfES.

Table 2

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	Change from 2004 to 2005
English Level 5+	65	67	69	71	74	3
English Level 6+	32	33	35	34	35	1
Mathematics Level 5+	66	67	71	73	74	1
Mathematics Level 6+	43	45	49	52	53	1
Science Level 5+	66	67	68	66	70	4
Science Level 6+	34	33	40	34	37	3

The proportion of pupils reaching Level 5 and above in English has risen steadily since the introduction of the Strategy, with a substantial rise in 2005. Girls did better than boys in 2005, with 80% reaching Level 5 and above compared with 67% of boys. Overall there has been a steady rise in the proportion of pupils reaching Level 6 in English. Results are significantly higher for writing than for reading, the opposite of the position in earlier Key Stages.

The proportions of pupils reaching Levels 5 and 6 in mathematics have risen steadily since the introduction of the Strategy. Girls did slightly better in mathematics than boys with 74% of girls reaching Level 5 or above compared with 73% of boys.

The proportion of pupils reaching Level 5 and above in science has risen steadily since the introduction of the Strategy, until 2004 when results fell. There has, however, been a substantial improvement in 2005. Again, girls did slightly better than boys in science with 70% of girls reaching Level 5 or above compared with 69% of boys. There was a steady rise in the proportion of pupils reaching level 6 until 2004 when results dropped substantially. They have, however improved again in 2005.

In ICT 69% of pupils (74% of girls and 65% of boys) reached Level 5 or above when assessed by teachers, and 25% (27% of girls and 22% of boys reached Level 6.