

Evaluation of the Primary and Secondary National Strategies 2005–07

The Primary and Secondary National Strategies have been in place for over six years. They are intended to help improve teaching and learning and to raise achievement. This report reviews progress since 2005 and evaluates the quality of transition from primary to secondary schools, with a particular focus on the continuity of learning. It evaluates the support which local authorities provide for schools to implement the National Strategies. The survey found that the impact of the National Strategies was good in around half of the schools inspected. However, in around 1 in 10 of the schools its effectiveness was seriously limited by weak leadership. There was too little continuity of learning for pupils as they moved to secondary school. Local authorities provided generally good support to schools.

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Executive summary

Ofsted has evaluated the National Strategies since they were established over six years ago and has published several reports, the most recent in 2005.¹ This is the first report to bring together findings from the Primary and Secondary Strategies.² It evaluates the effectiveness of the transition processes from primary to secondary school in the light of serious concerns raised in Ofsted's previous report on transition.³ It also evaluates how well local authorities help schools to implement the National Strategies.

The findings are based on the inspection of 85 primary and 88 secondary schools between autumn 2005 and spring 2007. Details of how the schools were selected are given in the notes section on page 20. The majority of the inspections focused on English and mathematics. However, visits to a quarter of the secondary schools related to National Curriculum foundation subjects. In 10 local authorities, inspectors reviewed the quality of support provided to schools and the effectiveness of transition between the primary and secondary phases. Transition was inspected in visits to 15 secondary and 32 primary schools in these local authorities. Care should be taken in drawing direct comparisons with the 2005 reports, as the sample for 2007 does not represent all schools nationally.

The overall aims of the National Strategies include:

- raising standards and achievement, particularly in English and/or mathematics
- transforming teaching and learning
- improving assessment and its uses to raise standards
- improving leadership and management, especially in developing capacity for further improvement.

The impact of the National Strategies on raising achievement was good in around half of the schools inspected. It was most evident where there was strong leadership which ensured consistent approaches. In around one in 10 schools, the impact was seriously limited by weak leadership, inaccurate self-evaluation and senior managers' low expectations of teachers.

¹ The Primary National Strategy was developed from the separate National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies which were established in the autumn terms of 1998 and 1999.

² *Primary National Strategy: an evaluation of its impact in schools 2004/05* (HMI 2396), Ofsted, 2005, is available at www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/2396. *The Secondary National Strategy: an evaluation of the fifth year* (HMI 2612), Ofsted, 2005, is available at www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/2612.

³ *Changing schools: the effectiveness of transfer at age 11* (HMI 550), Ofsted, 2002, is available at www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/550.

Teaching and learning were good in just over half the schools visited. Teachers who applied the approaches of the National Strategies' effectively usually had a very good understanding of how the methods helped pupils to learn. The quality of lessons in English was noticeably stronger than in mathematics in primary and secondary schools. Assessment continues to be the weakest aspect of teaching.

There were effective systems for the care of all pupils as they moved from primary to secondary school, and procedures to support the transfer of vulnerable pupils were good. However, as in 2002, there was too little continuity in teaching, learning and assessment. Curriculum planning in the secondary phase did not take account of performance data and information provided by the primary schools. Infrequent contact between teachers in primary and secondary schools limited their understanding of each other's approaches.

Local authorities provided generally good support to schools. Even so, most authorities and schools had difficulty in evaluating the effectiveness of specific initiatives and demonstrating their impact on outcomes for pupils. Although most of the authorities had reduced the number of schools failing to reach national 'floor targets', they found it hard to sustain this improvement in a few schools or prevent unexpected decline in others.⁴ Teachers valued the support provided by local authority staff and spoke positively about the quality of training they received. The three after-school training sessions seen during the survey were less effective than the part- or whole-day events and provided too little opportunity for participants to learn from each other.

A considerable amount of work still needs to be done by the National Strategies to ensure that their programmes are effective in those schools targeted for support. The main areas in need of improvement remain those highlighted in earlier reports: leadership; assessment; teachers' understanding of the principles underlying the National Strategies; and transition arrangements between primary and secondary schools.

Key findings

The surveys of the Primary and Secondary National Strategies were conducted separately for most of the period covered by this report but reached common findings.

⁴ The Department for Children, Schools and Families sets 'floor targets' for schools to improve standards. For 2006, they specified 65% of pupils aged 11 achieving Level 4 or above in national tests; 60% of pupils aged 14 achieving Level 5 or above; 30% of pupils aged 16 achieving at least 5 A*–C grades. Local authorities are expected to reduce the number of schools performing below the national floor targets.

- Schools and local authorities have made satisfactory progress in following up the recommendations Ofsted made in 2005. However, the same major areas still require improvement.
- The impact of the National Strategies on provision and pupils' achievement was good or better in around half of the 173 schools visited and inadequate in 13. The Strategies were most effective when strong direction from senior leaders ensured consistent approaches. Superficial self-evaluation limited effectiveness.
- The quality of teaching and learning was good in just over half the schools visited and generally better in English than in mathematics. Teaching was least effective when teachers did not understand how the Strategies' recommended lesson structures could be used to help pupils learn. Assessing pupils in lessons to ensure that learning was pitched at the right level for them was the weakest aspect of teaching.
- Induction of new pupils and the transfer of pastoral information from primary schools were good in 11 of the 15 secondary schools where this aspect was a focus of the visit. Transition procedures for the most vulnerable pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, were good in most of the schools visited.
- Continuity in teaching, learning and assessment when pupils move from primary to secondary school continues to be weak. Too few teachers understood clearly the main approaches to learning in the other phase and there was little regular cross-phase contact between teachers of English and mathematics.
- Analysis of pupils' Key Stage 2 results and other information was not used enough to inform the curriculum and planning in secondary schools to improve pupils' progress.
- Local authorities' support for schools was good in seven of the 10 authorities visited. Most of the authorities had increased the number of schools exceeding the floor targets, but they found it hard to sustain improvements in a few schools or prevent unexpected decline in others. It was difficult for authorities to determine the extent to which particular initiatives had contributed to improvement.

Recommendations

To improve the transition of pupils between phases, the Department for Children, Schools and Families should:

- promote the importance of continuity and progression between key stages, especially between primary and secondary schools.

In order to ensure that the Primary and Secondary National Strategies have greater impact on the outcomes for pupils, the National Strategies and local authorities should:

- support school leaders and managers in identifying key priorities for development and ensuring improved consistency in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment
- improve teachers' understanding about how the National Strategies can improve pupils' learning
- improve the evaluation of the National Strategies' impact in schools and local authorities
- support schools in improving continuity in the curriculum, teaching, assessment and pupils' learning between primary and secondary schools.

To raise pupils' achievement further, schools should:

- improve the quality of assessment for learning
- improve the evaluation of initiatives to assess their impact on pupils' learning and progress
- ensure effective continuity in learning when pupils move from primary to secondary school.

The impact of the Primary and Secondary National Strategies

Overview

1. The impact of the National Strategies on pupils' achievement was good or better in around half of the 173 schools visited, inadequate in 13 and outstanding in only seven. The impact was greater in primary schools than in secondary schools. Where the impact was clearest, schools could demonstrate that concerted action to implement approaches recommended by the National Strategies had contributed consistently to improving standards and achievement. Important features of successful impact on pupils' achievement included: improved teachers' planning through informed use of assessment information and clear learning objectives; carefully structured lessons with a strong focus on learning outcomes; and engagement of pupils through activities which required them to think and apply skills. Achieving consistency proved more difficult in secondary schools than in primary schools and explains why there was a difference in the degree of impact.
2. The successful primary schools had frequently selected from the National Strategy initiatives and taken them on for the whole school, thus ensuring consistency from the beginning. The weak areas remained those identified in previous reports. Pupils generally made the slowest progress in Years 3 and 4. Despite the National Strategy programmes to improve assessment and literacy, school leaders did not always identify this dip in performance, especially where there was no rigorous system for tracking pupils' progress. Generally, pupils' progress remained weaker in writing than reading. In some cases, teachers' ongoing limited knowledge about how to teach and assess progress in writing

was not sufficiently addressed by National Strategy consultants working in schools.

3. The impact was good or better in just under half of the secondary schools, compared to two thirds of those visited for the 2005 report. Although the sample of schools was smaller in 2006, the main reason for the lack of impact was that school leaders did not accord the National Strategy the high profile they had given to it previously. The first flush of innovation had not been taken forward into consistent practice. Measuring the impact of National Strategy initiatives, identifying priorities, and creating a sense of accountability were all tasks which were not built in sufficiently or systematically enough to embed and develop the Strategy. Heads of departments and other leaders did not share their knowledge and skills concerning the National Strategy programmes effectively and were unable to take the lead. Some moved on before the policies and procedures were established. As a result, too few staff were able to demonstrate the school's agreed practices. These weaknesses and the consequent lack of a consistent approach to teaching and learning, adversely affected pupils' progress. In a small number of lower attaining secondary schools, high staff turnover and frequent changes in subject leadership led to weak provision, especially in mathematics.

Leadership and management

4. Leadership and management of the National Strategies and subjects were good or better in just under two thirds of the schools visited. They were good or better in just over half of the secondary schools and two thirds of the primary schools.
5. In primary and secondary schools, the impact of the National Strategies on improving teaching, learning and achievement was greatest when the headteachers provided strong leadership, clear vision and high expectations. Effective evaluation of strengths and weaknesses ensured that the Strategies were focused accurately to bring about key improvements. Senior leaders carefully integrated the National Strategies into whole-school planning and built on existing strengths. Subject leaders worked effectively within an agreed framework. They had clearly designated roles and responsibilities which held them accountable for the quality of provision and outcomes for pupils. Teachers and teaching assistants benefited from appropriate training and well focused advice from consultants. However, even where leadership was effective, schools could rarely demonstrate conclusively the impact of National Strategies' on outcomes for pupils.
6. Leadership and management were inadequate in nine of the 88 secondary and three of the 85 primary schools visited and therefore reduced the impact of the Strategies. In these schools, superficial or erratic evaluation of strengths and weaknesses led to initiatives being introduced without a clear understanding of what they were intended to improve. Poor tracking of pupils' progress meant

that gaps in their skills or understanding were not identified. Senior leaders' expectations were unclear and there was insufficient guidance to ensure consistent approaches to teaching. Subject leaders had too little support and were rarely held accountable for the quality of provision and outcomes. In a minority of the secondary schools visited, these weaknesses were compounded by high turnover of staff, including subject leaders, in English and mathematics.

7. Specific National Strategy programmes such as the Intensifying Support Programme and the Primary Leadership Programme generally had a positive impact in the primary schools visited.^{5,6} The strong focus within the Intensifying Support Programme on using assessment to improve achievement had improved the tracking of pupils' progress, but the outcomes were not used regularly enough to adapt the curriculum or to match work to pupils' needs in lessons. The Primary Leadership Programme enabled the wider leadership team in a school to discuss and analyse areas for development with guidance from an experienced headteacher. The resulting planning and evaluation had broadened the range of leadership skills and expertise in the schools involved. However, the Primary Leadership Programme was not universally successful, especially with higher achieving schools and where there had been staff changes involving senior leaders during the programme. In these cases, the support and intervention were not targeted sufficiently at the particular needs of schools and senior leaders. As a consequence, the impact on achievement was limited. These schools were not closely monitored by the local authorities and headteachers were not held accountable for implementing the necessary changes.

Teaching and learning

8. A major focus of the National Strategies has been to improve the quality of teaching. Although it is difficult to disengage the impact of the National Strategies from the many other influences on the quality of teaching, the majority of schools visited during this survey credited the National Strategies for recent improvements. The most impressive teaching was seen in schools where the initiatives were implemented consistently, with strong direction from senior leaders and materials were adopted or adapted extensively.

⁵ The Primary National Strategy's Intensifying Support Programme is a school improvement programme which began in some primary schools in 2003/04. It is designed to raise standards and improve teaching and learning, through regular assessment and setting of targets in English and mathematics, and a plan for raising attainment.

⁶ The Primary Leadership Programme is a school improvement programme provided through the Primary National Strategy with the National College for School Leadership. This has been a rolling programme, and has reached most primary schools since 2003/04. It focuses on developing collaborative leadership through guidance from experienced and effective consultant headteachers.

9. Teaching and learning were good in just over half the schools visited. In these schools, the impact of the National Strategies was reflected in planning that was firmly based on very good identification of the gaps in pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills. Teachers used their subject knowledge effectively to match work closely to pupils' needs and to formulate precise learning objectives. In primary schools, work was pitched at different levels for different groups of pupils; this was far less common in secondary schools.
10. In the effective lessons, teachers focused on key skills and questioned pupils incisively to ensure that they had to think, review their ideas, apply and explain them. Pupils were expected to work productively in pairs or groups, discussing their learning, trying out new skills and exploring concepts. At key points in the lessons, teachers returned to the objectives and encouraged pupils to review their understanding before moving on. In the best instances, pupils evaluated their own work or that of their peers, using clear criteria and linking them to their individual targets. By the end of a lesson, the teacher and pupils had a good understanding of what had been learnt and which objectives needed further consolidation.
11. Teaching was inadequate in one in 13 of the lessons observed in the survey sample (slightly fewer in primary schools than in secondary). In these lessons, teachers adopted the National Strategies' approaches without understanding fully how they could be used to improve pupils' learning, or they lacked the subject knowledge or classroom management skills needed to apply the approaches successfully. The weaknesses are longstanding; they are found in other types of school inspections and have been reported previously. Weaknesses persist despite the National Strategy's targeted attempts to improve these areas of teachers' skills in their programmes of training or support. Enduring weaknesses included:
 - limited assessment of pupils' knowledge in order to shape lesson plans
 - imprecise objectives, describing tasks rather than what pupils should learn
 - inadequate knowledge, particularly about how to help pupils acquire essential mathematical concepts and skills or improve their writing
 - overlong introductions to lessons, a failure to vary the time allowed for tasks to suit pupils' different needs, limited time for collaborative and independent work, and too few opportunities for pupils to make choices in their learning
 - failure to teach explicit subject-related vocabulary
 - low expectations of pupils' work and behaviour
 - whole-class questioning rather than questions directed specifically to individual pupils
 - missed opportunities to assess pupils' understanding during the lesson so that some pupils moved to new work before they had consolidated their learning while others marked time
 - rushed conclusions to lessons which focused on what pupils had done rather than what they had learnt.

12. The quality of teaching and learning was weaker in mathematics than in English in primary and secondary schools.

In a Year 3 lesson, the teacher introduced a method of finding a fraction of a number which required pupils to apportion counters into columns on a card divided into sections. The idea was that they should choose a card where the number of sections corresponded to the denominator. This was too difficult for many. As a result, the attention of the more able children wandered and they were unable to recall what to do when they started working independently. To calculate one third of 21, they put 21 counters into groups of three (effectively making one seventh of 21). When the teacher asked for their answer, they found they had the right answer, seven. The teacher failed to ask them to explain and a vital teaching point about the relationship between 3, 7 and 21 was lost. The pupils did not understand that they had arrived at the right answer by inaccurate use of the method because no one had asked them to explain or helped them guide their thinking.

In a secondary school lesson based on pie charts, pupils were asked to mark a clock face to indicate angles and fractions. They were told to draw hands showing 3, 6, 9 and 12 o'clock and to express the angles as degrees and as fractions. The link with pie charts was obvious to the teacher and the inspector but was not made clear to the pupils. The choice of times meant that pupils had to use only quarters and halves, the fractions that they were most comfortable with. They completed the task but did not make the connection with expressing fractions or percentages in a pie chart. The teacher did not expect them to think independently and restricted them to following instructions. Even though the pupils were told the learning objectives, the sequence of activities was not explained sufficiently and they were unclear about how the activity related to what they should learn.

13. The National Strategy intentions were not sufficiently focused on improving aspects of pupils' learning rather than improving the quality of teaching skills. As a consequence, inspectors frequently observed learning objectives which described the lesson's activity rather than expressed the purpose underpinning the tasks. The case study below, demonstrates the use of learning objectives to clarify what skills and understanding the pupils were expected to acquire.

In an outstanding Year 9 mathematics lesson, the learning objectives were strongly focused on process, relating to 'Using and applying mathematics'. Pupils would learn:

- the value of working systematically to solve problems
- to refine their understanding of the methods they develop

- to refine their verbal and written explanations of their methods
- the value of reducing a problem to a simpler case.

The problem was to explore how to establish the number of ways to rearrange the letters in the name LUCY. Variations were held in reserve (what about SIMON or EMMA or JON or GEMMA) to guide pupils to the generalised problem of counting permutations of letters where some letters repeat.

During the main part of the lesson, the teacher:

- listened to pupils' explanations
- encouraged pupils to explain how they were thinking systematically
- encouraged further development of emerging ideas that seem promising
- intervened with additional problems when appropriate.

Mini-plenaries were used effectively to:

- get pupils to share their ideas with the class
- draw out key ideas that emerged
- encourage further thought about variations on the original problem.

Crucially, pupils understood the importance of making systematic lists and therefore understood in a concrete sense the nature of the solution. In summary, they were thinking independently, working systematically and learning the value of reducing a problem to a simpler case. They developed a good understanding of the emerging method and learnt how to refine their explanations. This developmental approach meant that pupils would be well prepared for future work on permutations and combinations, probability and proof.

Assessment

14. Six previous evaluation reports on the impact of the National Strategies identified assessment as the weakest element of teaching and learning. As a consequence, assessment has remained a key focus for the National Strategy approaches since any learning objective is meaningless unless properly linked to the appropriate developmental stage of individuals or groups of pupils. Assessment remains the weakest element of teaching and learning.⁷ It was

⁷ Assessment for learning has been a key element in the National Strategies since 2004. It focuses on helping pupils to learn more effectively and improving their achievement. It is now a central element

satisfactory in half the schools visited and inadequate in one in 10. It was better in primary than in secondary schools, partly as a result of the Intensifying Support Programme and the Primary Leadership Programme. In these schools, leaders and teachers were held accountable for raising standards by improving assessment skills, planning carefully targeted activities and addressing the needs of pupils who did not achieve as well as they should. Teachers were expected to use National Curriculum levels accurately to assess pupils and provide them with regular feedback about their progress, as well as to set clear and specific targets in lessons.

15. Even in the higher achieving schools, teachers did not know enough about pupils' needs, and some higher or lower attaining pupils were not always given work that was matched accurately to their abilities. In a few of the lessons in primary schools, teachers used objectives for the pupils' year group, even though the pupils did not have a secure grasp of the knowledge, skills and understanding taught in earlier years.

In a primary school, the focus on improving pupils' writing led to an over-emphasis on the purpose of the writing and less on its organisation. Pupils understood what they were being taught about the purpose of the text and its key features, at a level appropriate to their age. However, their writing was hampered by their very weak grasp of skills that they should have learnt earlier. Clear, logical and coherent sentence construction needed to precede work on paragraphing but they were expected to use paragraphs despite the fact that many were not able to write correct and ordered sentences. This was a result of age-appropriate objectives being used without consistent weaknesses in pupils' sentence construction being tackled first.

16. Despite the approaches to assessment recommended by the National Strategies, where assessment was weak, teachers did not routinely check pupils' understanding against the learning objectives as the lesson progressed. As a result, they did not adjust the focus of the work and the level of challenge. In these lessons, pupils were rarely expected to assess their own or each other's work. Even when teachers drew the whole class together, whether at the end of a lesson or at other points, they often told pupils what they had learnt rather than assessing them and requiring them to explain or apply their understanding.
17. Effective assessment was based on clear and consistent policies which encouraged teachers to review pupils' learning regularly against precise objectives. With appropriate guidance, pupils assessed their own work and that

of personalised learning. Assessment for learning was the focus of Ofsted's evaluation of the National Strategies in summer and autumn 2007.

of their peers accurately and worked purposefully to achieve their individual targets. They understood what they needed to do to improve.

In a Year 7 mathematics lesson exploring polyhedrons and tetrahedrons, pupils were encouraged to investigate the properties of angles. The teacher had used recent assessments to plan the lesson carefully. Priority was given to a thorough recap of earlier learning, giving pupils time to evaluate what they knew before the objectives were clarified. As the lesson developed, the teacher used effective techniques to get the best from pupils. Questions focused on understanding, such as 'why is your shape a polyhedron?' Pupils were warned when they would be expected to answer and given 30 seconds to think before answering. As a result, pupils were confident. They did not fear giving a 'wrong' answer. The teacher encouraged them to see that wrong answers could help their understanding and to reflect further through responses such as 'can you explain why you think that?' In this way, pupils evaluated their understanding. The teacher also avoided saying that answers were correct, preferring to seek explanations first. Pupils worked confidently, both independently and with each other. They enjoyed the activities and demonstrated that they could think mathematically.

18. Where assessment was effective, teachers' marking was related clearly to the learning objectives and their comments helped pupils to make the work better. However, comments were more specific in English than in mathematics, where they generally dealt with presentation and effort rather than whether the lesson content had been understood or not.
19. Most schools collected and reviewed assessment data but analysis, despite National Strategy guidance, did not necessarily lead to amended lesson plans which focused on teaching what pupils did not know or could not do.

Intervention strategies

20. Intervention to support lower attaining or underachieving pupils varied in quality.⁸ At best, schools introduced intervention programmes after a thorough analysis of assessment data which identified individuals' specific weaknesses. Pupils were then carefully selected for intensive short-term programmes, taught by fully trained and experienced teachers or teaching assistants, and progress was monitored closely.

⁸ Intervention programmes have been a key component of the National Strategies from the start. Intervention is seen in three stages or 'waves': for all pupils, as part of high quality lessons; for identified pupils through focused work in small groups; for individuals, through specific programmes.

In a secondary school, pupils needing extra support were identified early in Year 7 on the basis of the test results at the end of Key Stage 2 and standardised tests of reading and spelling. Pupils were withdrawn from a different non-core subject each week, so that they could work on the literacy progress units.⁹ Depending on their specific needs, they might also be invited to participate in the Reading Challenge, a lunchtime reading club or a group focusing on the social use of language.¹⁰ In Year 8, the programme continued with the addition of the Writing Challenge and a communication skills group.¹¹ In Year 9 there were one-to-one and small group withdrawal sessions to 'boost' students before the national tests. A very small group continued with the programme into Year 10. All sessions were taught by the coordinator or a teacher for whom this was the only role. The programme was very well led. The teaching was very good and monitoring was thorough. The coordinator's evaluation showed that, from a starting point of Level 3, over two thirds of pupils made one level's progress by the end of Year 7 and achieved Level 5 in their English tests in Year 9.

21. Less effective intervention stemmed from a number of weaknesses in implementation and teaching. Too often, schools introduced intervention programmes without an accurate knowledge of pupils' weaknesses or used them as an alternative to good class teaching. Teaching assistants who had insufficient training and experience found it difficult to adjust the lessons in the programme to match pupils' understanding and therefore tended to stick with the original plan, even when it was not suitable. Too often, secondary schools placed pupils on generic programmes rather than on programmes focused on their specific weaknesses. Intervention programmes were insufficiently linked to work in English lessons and to developing literacy skills in other areas of the curriculum. When intervention was ineffective the tracking of pupils' progress and the evaluation of outcomes were also usually weak.

Progress in relation to the recommendations made in the 2005 reports

22. Satisfactory progress has been made against the recommendations of Ofsted's reports, published in 2005, on the Primary and Secondary National Strategies. Assessment had been a major area for recommendations in previous reports.

⁹ Literacy progress units, designed for small group work, are part of the intervention programme in the Secondary National Strategy. The units are intended for Year 7 pupils who achieved Level 3 at the end of Key Stage 2 and cover aspects of reading, writing, spelling and information retrieval. They are intended to help them to achieve Level 4 by the end of Year 7 and Level 5 by the end of Year 9.

¹⁰ The Reading Challenge is an intervention programme designed to support Year 7 pupils whose reading ages are two years below the chronological age.

¹¹ The Writing Challenge is an intervention programme for Year 7 pupils who are working below their expected level.

The situation has improved, from a low starting point, but there is still more to be done in ensuring that the information gained from assessment is used effectively in teachers' planning and leads to improved achievement. Pupils' progress is tracked regularly. Schools analyse assessment data more effectively to identify underachievement and to provide additional support for pupils. Pupils are familiar with targets for their achievement and understand better what they need to do to improve their work. Collaborative working has improved, especially in some primary school networks. However, the areas for improvement reported in 2005 still remain the essential elements for development.

23. Strong school leadership remains crucial to implementing initiatives successfully. The Primary Leadership Programme and Intensifying Support Programme have been successful in many of the primary schools visited. However, in too many schools, especially secondary schools, leadership of National Strategy initiatives was weak. Senior leaders frequently monitored action plans and outcomes for pupils but failed to evaluate the impact of specific initiatives on improving achievement. Collaborative working, such as through the Primary Strategy Learning Networks, has been successful when targets have been very precise.¹² In the secondary phase, however, the move towards negotiating programmes of support for individual schools has worked against effective local networks, as the agreed priorities differ. In several schools, consultants were unable to build networks and encourage teachers from different schools to share practice and evaluations.
24. Too many teachers fail to understand the National Strategies and their application to learning as reported in the 2005 Ofsted report. This weakness has still not been successfully addressed by the National Strategies. Teachers still use the approaches to structure the lesson without linking them closely enough to the content and process of pupils' learning. In those schools inspected, teachers' limited subject knowledge and weak assessment practice undermine the impact of the Strategies on pupils' achievement. This situation is worsened, especially in a small minority of secondary schools, by high turnover of staff and subject leaders in English and mathematics.

Transition from primary to secondary school

25. Despite weaknesses having been identified in previous reports, the transition between Key Stages 2 and 3 has not sustained sufficient focus in the National Strategy priorities. Rather than sharpen pupils' progress between the two key

¹² Primary Strategy Learning Networks (PSLN) were established in 2004 as a funded programme to foster professional links between primary schools. Their focus was on learning and the improvement of teaching practice. Each network agreed a statement of intent. Around half of all primary schools were involved in a PSLN by 2005/06.

stages by ensuring the transfer of accurate pupil tracking and curriculum continuity, the focus has been on summer schools, bridging units, and teacher visits which have not been consistently effective and have lapsed in many schools. Ofsted's report on transition in 2002 found that more needed to be done to improve the continuity of teaching, learning and assessment as pupils transferred from primary to secondary school.¹³ Little has changed.

26. Secondary schools made good use of personal and social information in order to ensure that the pupils' pastoral needs were met. However, although data on pupils' attainment and progress are transferred from primary to secondary school, they are not used to inform lesson planning. As a consequence, pupils felt that they were not sufficiently challenged or in a few cases, were revisiting work already covered in Year 6.
27. In each of the 15 secondary schools visited for this element of the survey, the majority of Year 7 pupils came from between three and nine primary schools. However, the remainder of the pupils came from between 15 and 38 other schools. There was no link between the quality of transition arrangements and the number of partner primary schools. Generally, schools had good working links with those which sent them the majority of their pupils but less effective links with the wider group of schools. Secondary schools very rarely agreed protocols on transition with others in their area. This complicated matters for primary schools, some of which had to cope with sending pupils to induction days on different dates and using different transfer documentation.
28. All of the secondary schools in the sample used the Key Stage 2 test results effectively to allocate pupils to tutor and teaching groups. Increasingly, this resulted in Year 7 classes based on ability. However, assessment data was not analysed in sufficient depth to ensure that the level of challenge for groups of Year 7 pupils was targeted accurately. Furthermore, schools failed to ensure effective continuity or progression in individual subjects from Year 6 to Year 7. While inspectors found insufficient continuity within the core subjects, the situation was even worse in the wider curriculum where assessment records were rarely passed on. As a consequence, knowledge and skills were repeated in too many subjects across the curriculum and Year 7 teachers too readily assumed the pupils brought with them a superficial understanding of individual subject areas.
29. In the best examples, primary schools passed on teacher assessments early in the preceding summer term to identify those pupils needing additional support when they transferred. The secondary schools used some form of standardised or diagnostic test, either during the summer term induction day or early in the

¹³ *Changing Schools: the effectiveness of transfer at age 11* (HMI 550), Ofsted, 2002; available at www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/550.

autumn term. Analysis of this data was used to refine groupings and, in some cases, to set targets for pupils. However, the detailed records of pupils' progress in primary school and any intervention programmes in which they had been involved were rarely passed on. Only the two middle schools visited used primary school data to inform their curriculum and lesson planning.

30. Bridging units were used in seven of the schools and, even then, only for a few lessons.¹⁴ Most of the other schools had abandoned them because they could not ensure that all or most pupils had a common experience of the work. The units worked most effectively when they were developed and agreed by staff from both phases and supported in the primary schools by staff from the secondary school. In the best example, the units focused on key areas of weakness in pupils' skills, as in the following example from a middle school where pupils entered in Year 6.

Each year the literacy and numeracy coordinators from each primary school met together with an English and mathematics specialist from the middle school to moderate agreed pieces of work. The primary staff analysed the Year 5 optional tests to find areas of weakness and strength and discussed this information with the middle school. The advanced skills teacher for literacy analysed the Year 6 test papers and shared the findings with Year 7 staff. This information was used to inform curriculum planning. A literacy moderation booklet and a calculations policy had been agreed by the family of schools. Outreach work for numeracy in the primary schools and the numeracy bridging project enhanced the information available about pupils.

31. Only three of the 15 schools visited for this aspect of the survey held regular subject-focused liaison meetings, usually for the core subjects. In five of the schools, the headteachers and senior staff met regularly to coordinate arrangements for transition. In the other schools, meetings were occasional and often conducted by the teacher in the secondary school who was responsible for transfer. One of the local authorities had well established primary school networks but secondary schools were not involved in these at any stage.
32. Secondary teachers often taught lessons in primary schools. Increasingly, the subjects taught were linked to the secondary school's specialist status. These arrangements ranged from regular weekly commitments through short, focused

¹⁴ In 2002, the Qualification and Curriculum Authority produced a number of units of work to support transition between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3, based on teaching objectives from the Key Stage 3 Strategy. Secondary schools were encouraged to adopt them in partnership with primary schools. Funding was initially provided through the National Strategies to encourage their use and to help in buying resources. Some schools have devised their own units of work and others are available commercially.

programmes to 'taster' lessons. Usually, these opportunities were available only to the primary schools which transferred the majority of their pupils to the secondary school. Primary and secondary schools rarely agreed a specific strategy to ensure continuity in teaching, learning and assessment. There were very few examples of Year 6 and Year 7 teachers being given the opportunity to observe each other. As a result, teachers in one phase knew little about the current approaches to teaching and learning in the other.

33. Of the 15 secondary schools, 11 had good arrangements for the induction of pupils and the transfer of personal and social information from primary schools. All arranged for staff to visit the primary schools, mainly in the term preceding transfer, but these visits focused on organisational and welfare issues rather than learning and assessment. As a consequence, excellent opportunities to ensure academic progress were missed.
34. In almost all the schools, provision to support the transfer of vulnerable pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was good. These pupils received additional visits in the primary schools and they often spent extra time in the secondary school before transfer. In a few schools, learning mentors were used to ease the transfer and teaching assistants were allocated to all Year 7 classes for the early weeks of term until pupils had settled. They appreciated having a mentor or 'buddy' from another year group.
35. Only a few of the schools set targets for pupils from the start of Year 7 so that academic progress could be monitored. As a result, most contact with parents in the autumn term focused on how pupils were settling in rather than on how well they were learning.
36. National Strategies have not always joined up their own materials and approaches between primary and secondary phases. This omission reinforces the impression that academic progress at the point of transition does not have a high priority.

The impact of local authority support for schools in implementing the National Strategies

37. The impact of the National Strategies was good in seven of the 10 local authorities visited. Almost all of them ensured that support provided through the National Strategies was well integrated into their wider systems for school improvement. Procedures for identifying schools' needs were well established and understood by all partners. School staff generally held National Strategies personnel in high regard and valued their support. The majority of schools which received targeted support improved, although the authorities' data indicated that this was generally at a similar rate to other schools and that trends over time were not always consistent.
38. The impact of support on pupils' achievement and personal development was good in seven of the 10 authorities. However, it was difficult for authorities to

determine the extent to which particular initiatives had contributed to improvement. Schools and authorities could identify general trends of improvement but found it much harder to attribute aspects of this improvement to particular activities. Where such evidence did exist, it was more likely to be in the primary phase.

39. The local authorities were generally successful in reducing the number of schools with results below the floor targets for performance in national tests and examinations. However, while they had success with most of the schools on which they had focused, standards in a small number of other schools declined unexpectedly: they slipped below the floor targets or did not maintain their earlier trend of improvement.
40. Examples of effective local authority support leading to improved standards in targeted schools included writing in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. Three local authorities identified the Intensifying Support Programme and the Primary Leadership Programme as important factors in improving achievement in Key Stages 1 and 2. However, authorities found it much harder to track the impact of support on pupils' personal development. Teachers considered National Strategy programmes to develop social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) to be effective and they were well received by many of them.¹⁵ However, substantive evidence of any impact was not available. Teachers reported that SEAL improved attitudes to learning and helped them identify more opportunities for the effective engagement of pupils during lessons. However, none of the schools inspected had developed methods to evaluate impact, for example by comparing attendance figures before and after the programme.
41. The quality of support for improving teaching and learning was good in eight of the 10 local authorities. National Strategy consultants knew their schools well and understood the challenges they faced. They were particularly effective where the relationship with the school was consistent and had been built up over time. Consultants' work with teachers in schools, seen during the survey, was mainly good; some was outstanding. However, in a small number of instances, consultants' subject knowledge was inadequate and the training they provided lacked sufficient focus.

¹⁵ The National Strategy's SEAL programme began in primary schools in 2005 and was intended to promote good attendance and engagement. It was followed in 2006 by a pilot, in a small number of authorities, of the social and behavioural skills (SEBS) programme for secondary schools. Its focus was to improve punctuality and attendance and to link attendance with behaviour and achievement. Ofsted reported on the pilot in 2007: *Developing social, emotional and behavioural skills in secondary schools* (070048), Ofsted, 2007.

42. The National Strategy after-school training sessions for teachers seen during the survey often had limited impact because teachers were too tired to absorb the quantity and detail of material which was covered in a short time. Part or whole-day training sessions were more effective and allowed participants to explore issues in more depth, with greater opportunity to learn from each other as well as from the course leader.
43. The quality of support for improving leadership and management was good in seven of the 10 local authorities. Support was well aligned to the authority's categorisation of schools and generally well targeted. Schools appreciated programmes negotiated according to their particular needs, particularly where this led to coherent support across the authority's services. A particularly effective aspect was the National Strategy guidance provided for analysing performance data, which helped schools' self-evaluation.
44. Seven of the 10 local authorities made good use of the National Strategies' initiatives and resources. This was particularly the case with the Intensifying Support Programme, the Primary Leadership Programme and the courses for developing middle leaders in secondary schools.¹⁶ The programmes were most effective in supporting schools with new or inexperienced leadership teams but less so where teams were weak. Even so, authorities found it difficult to quantify the impact of these initiatives. Network meetings for senior and subject leaders were used effectively to keep schools up to date with the latest priorities in the National Strategies.
45. In at least three of the local authorities the effectiveness of support was adversely affected by high turnover of subject leaders and teachers, particularly in some secondary schools. In its extreme form, this led to a consultant providing support to a newly qualified teacher who, as the only qualified teacher left in the mathematics department, was acting as the subject leader. In another school, the consultant provided basic subject knowledge to a group of non-specialist teachers who were taking mathematics lessons.
46. Generally, the work of National Strategy consultants was monitored effectively by local authorities, although direct observation of their work in schools was rare. Focused discussions with schools and the results of questionnaires were used in conjunction with the detailed records kept by the consultants. However, the evaluation of the impact of specific support was weak in a majority of schools and local authorities. Even where there were systems for gathering evidence to be evaluated, the criteria for success in action plans and contracts

¹⁶ The Secondary National Strategy developed courses for aspiring subject leaders. Materials were also produced to support self-evaluation and planning for progression. Subject leader development folders were supplied in English and mathematics. These were supported by the establishment of local networks for subject leaders.

with schools were too often not measurable and so made it difficult to analyse impact.

Notes

Ofsted last reported on the impact of the National Strategies in December 2005 and on primary to secondary transition in 2002. This report considers progress in relation to the main findings of those earlier reports.

Between autumn 2005 and spring 2007, Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) visited 85 primary schools, 88 secondary schools and 10 local authorities. They interviewed headteachers and key staff, reviewed documentation, talked to pupils, observed lessons and observed training and work in schools undertaken by local authority staff.

In autumn 2005 and spring 2006, there were separate HMI teams for each of the National Strategies. The primary schools visited during this period comprised a sample with equal proportions of schools with Key Stage 2 results above, in line with and below the national average. Inspections focused on the impact of the Primary National Strategy on achievement and provision in either English or mathematics. Of the secondary schools visited, two thirds had been graded as good or better in their most recent inspection and results in Key Stage 3 tests were above average overall. The main focus here was on the core subjects but, in a quarter of the schools, inspectors also examined work in foundation subjects. In summer 2006, HMI visited 16 secondary schools with below average Key Stage 3 results, some of which were engaged in either the Low Attainers Pilot or the Secondary Intensifying Support Programme, designed to help raise achievement.^{17,18}

In May 2006, the two surveys combined, with a particular focus on transition from primary to secondary school. In the summer term, visits were made to 33 primary schools selected for their proximity to 15 specific secondary schools. The following term, visits were made to each of the secondary schools, two of which were middle schools to which pupils transferred at the beginning of Year 6. These visits included interviews with secondary pupils, some of whom had also been interviewed while they were in primary school. All these visits focused on the impact of the National Strategies in either English or mathematics.

In spring 2007, HMI visited the 10 local authorities whose schools had been inspected during the previous two terms. The focus of these visits was to evaluate the authorities' support for transition to secondary school and the impact of the support provided for schools to implement the National Strategies.

¹⁷ The Low Attainers Pilot has involved a small number of schools since 2005 in enhancing the progress of pupils working below national expectations in Year 7. It uses radical curriculum design to investigate ways of using the Strategy's approaches effectively in challenging contexts.

¹⁸ A small pilot in 60 secondary schools began in 2005, using some of the approaches from the primary Intensifying Support Programme to raise attainment in schools where a significant number of pupils joined Year 7 with low attainment.

Further information

Publications

Changing schools: effectiveness of transfer at age 11 (HMI 550), Ofsted, 2002.

www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/550

Primary National Strategy: an evaluation of its impact in primary schools 2004/05 (HMI 2396), Ofsted, 2005.

www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/2396

The Secondary National Strategy: an evaluation of the fifth year (HMI 2612), Ofsted, 2005.

www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/2612

Developing social, emotional and behavioural skills in secondary schools (070048), Ofsted, 2007.

www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070048

Websites

For policy overview

Department for Children, Families and Schools: www.dcf.gov.uk

For the Primary National Strategy

www.standards.dcf.gov.uk/primary

For the Secondary National Strategy

www.standards.dcf.gov.uk/keystage3

For relevant publications and research

www.publications.teachernet.gov.uk

For information on floor targets and local authority performance:

www.dcf.gov.uk/inyourarea/help/shtml

www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/page.asp?id=650

For detail of curriculum review and bridging units

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority: www.qca.org.uk

For other evaluations of the National Strategies

National Foundation for Educational Research: www.nfer.ac.uk

Annex

List of schools visited during the survey

Primary schools

Alfred Salter Primary School	Southwark
Archbishop Cranmer C of E Primary School	Leeds
Aspull Church Primary School	Wigan
Aston Clinton School	Buckinghamshire
Barrow Hall Community Primary School	Warrington
Bembridge Church of England Primary School	Isle of Wight
Blackfell Primary School	Sunderland
Botwell House Catholic Primary School	Hillingdon
Brookburn Community School	Manchester
Brookhurst Primary School	Wirral
Castle View Primary School	Halton
Cherry Tree Primary School	Bolton
Childs Ercall C of E Primary School	Shropshire
Combe Down C of E Primary School	Bath and NE Somerset
Conway Primary School	Birmingham
Cople Lower School	Bedfordshire
Dorridge Junior School	Solihull
East Ward Community Primary School	Bury
Eccleston Lane Ends Primary School	St Helens
Enfield (New Waltham) Primary School	North East Lincolnshire
Fernhurst Junior School	Portsmouth
George Washington Primary School	Sunderland

Goldington Green Lower School	Bedfordshire
Grafton Primary School	Shropshire
Grayshott C of E Primary	Hampshire
Great Coates Primary School	North East Lincolnshire
Greenmount Primary School	Bury
Harwood Meadows Primary School	Bolton
Heald Place Primary School	Manchester
High Wycombe C of E Combined School	Buckinghamshire
Holy Family Catholic Primary	Birmingham
Houghton-on-the-Hill C of E Primary School	Leicestershire
Hovingham Primary School	Leeds
Humberston Cloverfields Primary School	North East Lincolnshire
John Burns Primary School	Wandsworth
Lady Katherine Leveson Church of England School	Solihull
Langmoor Primary School	Leicestershire
Legh Vale Primary School and Childcare Centre	St Helens
Livingstone Lower School	Bedfordshire
Mason Moor Primary School	Southampton
Mendell Primary School	Wirral
Merton Bank Primary School	St Helens
Millbrook Combined School	Buckinghamshire
Montgomery Primary School	Birmingham
New Waltham Primary School	North East Lincolnshire
Newtown C of E Primary School	Shropshire
Oldfield Park Junior School	Bath and NE Somerset

Paddox Primary School	Rugby
Park Hill Primary School	Birmingham
Park View Primary School	Bury
Pembury School	Kent
Pensby Park Primary School	Wirral
Pinkwell Primary School	Hillingdon
Portswood Primary School	Southampton
Rabbsfarm Primary School	Hillingdon
Rotherhithe Primary School	Southwark
Runcorn All Saints C of E Primary School	Halton
Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School, Hindley Green	Wigan
Shalfleet Church of England Primary School	Isle of Wight
Shottermill Junior School	Surrey
Simms Cross Primary School	Halton
Solent Junior School	Portsmouth
Somerville Primary (NC) School	Birmingham
St Andrew's C of E Primary School	Warrington
St Catherine Catholic Primary School	Hillingdon
St Francis RC Primary School	Southwark
St John's Catholic Junior School	Wirral
St John's C of E Primary School	Birmingham
St Joseph's RC Primary School	Wandsworth
St Jude's C of E Primary School	Portsmouth
St Margaret Clitherow Catholic Primary School	Kent
St Mary's Catholic Primary and Nursery School	Norfolk
St Oswald's C of E Primary School	Rugby

St Patrick's Catholic Primary School	Southampton
St Patrick's C of E Junior and Infant School	Solihull
St Stephen's (Tonbridge) Primary School	Kent
Stanton Road Primary School	Wirral
Stoke Holy Cross Primary School	Norfolk
Talbot Primary School	Leeds
The Oaks Primary School	Bolton
Twelve Apostles Catholic Primary School	Wigan
Twiss Green Community Primary School	Warrington
Usworth Grange Primary School	Sunderland
Whitefriars C of E Primary School	Norfolk
Wix Primary School	Wandsworth
Wroxall Primary School	Isle of Wight

Secondary schools

Abington High School	Leicestershire
Aldridge School - A Science College	Walsall
Allerton Grange School	Leeds
Arden School	Solihull
Ashlawn School	Rugby
Beechen Cliff School	Bath and NE Somerset
Belmont School and Community Arts College	Durham
Bishops Park College	Essex
Bispham High School - an Arts College	Blackpool

Blackfyne Community School (now Consett Community Sports College)	Durham
Bridgemary Community Sports College	Hampshire
Brigshaw High School and Language College	Leeds
Brooke Weston CTC	(Northamptonshire)
Caister High School	Norfolk
Cheshire Oaks High School	Cheshire
Clayton Hall Business and Language College	Staffordshire
Cleeve School	Gloucestershire
Clough Hall Technology School	Staffordshire
Colbayns High School	Essex
Colne Valley High School	Kirklees
Costessy High School	Norfolk
Dame Alice Owen's School	Hertfordshire
Dame Elizabeth Cadbury Technology College	Birmingham
Dawlish Community College	Devon
De Aston School	Lincolnshire
Ellis Guildford School and Sports College	City of Nottingham
Francis Bacon School	Hertfordshire
Frome Community College	Somerset
Gartree High School	Leicestershire
Golden Hillock School and Specialist Sports College	Birmingham
Guru Nanak Sikh VA secondary School	Hillingdon
Guthlaxton College	Leicestershire
Haling Manor High School	Croydon
Hartismere High School	Suffolk

Hazel Grove High School	Stockport
Helena Romanes School and Sixth Form Centre	Essex
Hornsey School for Girls	Haringey
James Brindley High School	Stoke on Trent
John Cabot CTC	(South Gloucestershire)
John Mason School	Oxfordshire
Kenilworth School and Sports College	Warwickshire
King Alfred's Community and Sports College	Oxfordshire
King Edward VI Humanities College	Lincolnshire
King Edward VI School	Warwickshire
King James I Community Arts College	Durham
Kings International College for Business and the Arts	Surrey
Kings Norton High School	Birmingham
Kingsmead Community School	Somerset
Littleover Community School	City of Derby
Mellow Lane School	Hillingdon
Newent Community School	Gloucestershire
North Axholme School	North Lincolnshire
Northampton School for Girls	Northamptonshire
Oxclose Community School	Sunderland
Parkside School	Bradford
Pedmore Technology College and Community School	Dudley
Quilley School of Engineering	Hampshire
Rosebery School	Surrey
Selsdon High School	Croydon

South Wolds Community School	Nottinghamshire
Southend High School for Girls	Southend
St Alban's Catholic High School	Suffolk
St Anne's Catholic School	Southampton
St John Plessington Catholic College	Wirral
St John's RCVA Technology School and Sixth Form Centre	Durham
St Robert of Newminster RC School	Sunderland
St Thomas More Catholic School	Gateshead
St Thomas More Catholic School, Willenhall	Walsall
Stanborough School	Hertfordshire
The Garendon High School	Leicestershire
The Green School	Hounslow
The High Arcal School	Dudley
The John Roan School	Greenwich
The Meadows Community School	Derbyshire
The Orleton Park School	Telford and Wrekin
The Ravensbourne School	Kent
Thomas Mills High School	Suffolk
Tollbar Business and Enterprise College	North East Lincolnshire
Top Valley School	City of Nottingham
Townley High School	Lancashire
Usworth School	Sunderland
Uxbridge High School	Hillingdon
Valentines High School	Redbridge
Venerable Bede C of E (Aided) Secondary School	Sunderland
Woodcote High School	Croydon

Woodlands Community School

Derbyshire

Woodlands School

Essex

Wribbenhall Middle School

Worcestershire

List of local authorities visited during the survey

These local authorities were visited in spring 2007 to evaluate the support they provided for the National Strategies.

Bath and North East Somerset

Birmingham

Hillingdon

Leicestershire

North East Lincolnshire

Oxfordshire

Solihull

Surrey

Warwickshire

Wirral