



Changing life stories

Secondary School Literacy Research and Policy Guide

National
Literacy Trust
2022



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Introduction

“Teachers should develop pupils’ spoken language, reading, writing and vocabulary as integral aspects of the teaching of every subject. English is both a subject in its own right and the medium for teaching; for pupils, understanding the language provides access to the whole curriculum. Fluency in the English language is an essential foundation for success in all subjects.”¹

This year we have revised and updated our Secondary Research and Policy Guide to better support and reflect the work of our Literacy for Learning school improvement programme. We have aligned each section with our secondary teacher continuing professional development (CPD) courses. The two chapters on writing from the previous edition have been merged and we have separated the chapters on reading for pleasure and reading for learning. We have included a completely new section about building vocabulary within the curriculum as we acknowledge that this is an essential focus for secondary schools.

As well as providing a summary of key research and policy in the area, including our own National Literacy Trust research, there is also a list of essential actions for literacy leaders and teachers at the end of each section. The references at the end of the booklet point to other important books and academic papers worth exploring.

Our website, CPD courses and resources for secondary schools all highlight disciplinary literacy across the whole school, training and supporting subject teachers in how to develop talk, listening, reading and writing in their own subject areas. We also run courses specifically for literacy leaders and coordinators, examining policy development, implementation planning, intervention management and coaching for whole-school literacy.

All our training models practical strategies and activities for teaching and learning literacy across secondary schools and is underpinned by research evidence. This policy guide points to the research evidence that has informed our thinking and course development over the last few years.

We hope that this will be a useful guide for our secondary membership, especially those who are leading and developing whole-school literacy and training others.

Catharine Driver and Fiona Oakley, secondary school advisers

Nisha Tank, programme manager, Literacy for Learning

¹ The national curriculum in England: Key Stages 3 and 4 framework (December 2014), DfE, p. 10.

Section 1: Leading disciplinary literacy

International benchmarks demonstrate that standards in literacy in England are falling behind those of many of our international competitors. As a result, the government continues to prioritise raising standards of reading. The Education Endowment Foundation guidance, “Improving Secondary Literacy” (2019), has highlighted the importance of subject disciplinary literacy: what we call literacy **within** the curriculum. Literacy leaders need to plan to support all subject leaders to make this happen in their areas.

Key policy and research

Teacher standards 2011

All teachers should:

*“demonstrate an understanding of and take responsibility for promoting high standards of literacy, articulacy and the correct use of standard English, **whatever the teacher’s specialist subject.**”*

School inspection handbook (2019), Ofsted

The handbook states that inspectors will explore:

“how carefully leaders have thought about what end points the curriculum is building towards, what pupils will be able to know and do at those end points, and how leaders have planned the curriculum accordingly. This includes considering how the intended curriculum will address social disadvantage by addressing gaps in pupils’ knowledge and skills”.

and

“how the curriculum has been designed and taught so that pupils read at an age-appropriate level”.

Initial teacher education inspection handbook (2022), Ofsted

This handbook states that inspectors must evaluate the extent to which trainees receive support to:

“develop the literacy (reading, writing and communication) and mathematical skills of their children/pupils/learners and understand the causes of low achievement among some groups of children/pupils/learners.”

Teachers and literacy: Their perceptions, understanding, confidence and awareness (2015), National Literacy Trust

2,326 teachers from 112 schools in the UK participated in the National Literacy Trust’s practitioner survey in 2015. This report presents information on how they feel about teaching literacy, whom they believe is responsible for literacy in the school setting and their perceptions of what influences pupils’ literacy attainment and of their pupils’ literacy. It also focuses on teachers’ confidence teaching literacy, their own reading habits and the teaching resources that they like to draw on. Finally, it outlines information on teachers’ perceptions of school provisions and reading for enjoyment in schools. An updated teacher survey is expected in 2022.

Improving literacy in secondary schools: a shared responsibility (2013), Ofsted

This report summarises what works best to improve literacy across the curriculum and tackle weaknesses in pupils’ literacy. Besides speaking and listening, reading and writing, literacy is seen as a set of broader skills through which pupils are ready “to engage with challenging concepts, to make constructive connections between subjects, and to learn from the thinking and experience of others” in cross-curricular links between subjects. (p.5)

Improving Literacy in Secondary Schools (2019), Education Endowment Foundation

This guidance encourages ownership of literacy teaching beyond English teachers and literacy coordinators. The emphasis on disciplinary literacy makes it clear that every teacher communicates their subject through academic language, and that reading, writing, speaking and listening are at the heart of knowing and doing every subject in secondary school.

The report highlights evidence-based strategies to help secondary schools improve literacy in all subject areas. It provides seven recommendations related to reading, writing, talk, vocabulary and interventions.

Metacognition and Self-regulated Learning (2018), Education Endowment Foundation

This guidance introduces a framework and evidence for teachers of all subjects. It is aimed at senior leaders and teachers responsible for staff development. It may also be useful for class teachers interested in how research can improve their teaching. It can be used in conjunction with the literacy guidance (see above).

Putting evidence to work – a school’s guide to implementation Education Endowment Foundation

This guidance, with supporting resources, describes and demystifies the professional practice of implementation to document the steps that effective schools take to manage change well. It supports school literacy leaders to plan, prioritise, manage and embed new whole-school policies and practices.

Read all about it GL Assessment

GL Assessment conducted an analysis of the reading ability and GCSE results of 370,000 secondary school students in order to look at the strong link between reading ability and general academic performance and understand how this affects subjects such as maths and science. The report also includes:

- Various perspectives from the Key Stage 3 Literacy Project in Blackpool on how to implement change across a locality
- Practical ideas on how to embed reading across a school
- Suggestions for what to do when students lack basic vocabulary;
- Thoughts on how assessment can be used to identify reading problems and pinpoint areas for intervention
- Top tips from practitioners for improving literacy throughout a school.

Shanahan on Literacy

Timothy Shanahan is Professor Emeritus at the University of Illinois at Chicago and hosts one of the most comprehensive sites about literacy. There are research reports, presentations, FAQs and resources for teachers. His paper "[What is disciplinary literacy?](#)" has influenced the direction of our training for subject teachers.

Leading whole school literacy essentials

- Literacy leaders should have an in-depth knowledge of literacy pedagogy. Their role is to ensure that all staff can explicitly develop pupils' talk, reading and writing in order to build their confidence, and sustain progress and attainment in every subject.
- Literacy leaders should use this research and policy guide to read about what works, review practice and set priorities for improving literacy throughout the school.
- Disciplinary literacy should be promoted, with all members of staff understanding its importance. This can be achieved by giving responsibility to subject leaders for developing "literacy for learning" in their own curriculum areas.
- Schools should use assessment frameworks that establish students' baselines in talk, reading and writing and set targets using regional and national data rather than cohort data.
- Literacy skills development should be embedded in teaching, learning and curriculum plans. In developing classroom practice, leaders should make effective use of specialists such as the literacy coordinator and lead practitioners to support subject teams. Teachers can all learn from effective practice in other areas of the curriculum.
- Literacy leaders should manage and resource a literacy intervention programme for target pupils working below age-related expectations. This will require regular monitoring to ensure effective use of additional funding.
- Schools also need to maintain good communication with parents, carers and community to support and develop strong reading and writing habits there.
- Students themselves should be consulted on what works and what helps and be actively involved in whole-school literacy initiatives.
- The library and the librarian should be central to the whole-school literacy policy as well as being a rich resource for subject teachers.

Section 2: Reading for pleasure and wider reading

Since the Covid pandemic school closures, schools have focused on providing extra time and support to pupils across age and ability ranges to make rapid progress in reading. Ofsted now evaluate and report on reading provision in most secondary inspections. A welcome new development has been the expansion of form-time reading, often led by subject teachers. This is engaging pupils, supporting reading fluency and developing staff expertise in reading aloud. Several of the documents in this section will support this practice still further.

Key policy and research

Research evidence on reading for pleasure (May 2012), DfE

A key part of the government's commitment to improving literacy for all pupils is promoting the importance of reading for pleasure. In 2012, the DfE stated that they "want teachers... to support children to enjoy reading and enable them to read a wide range of good-quality literature."

The national curriculum in England: Key stages 3 and 4 framework document

(December 2014), DfE

Teachers should develop pupils' reading... in all subjects to support their acquisition of knowledge... and encourage them to read for pleasure. Schools should do everything to promote wider reading. They should provide library facilities and set ambitious expectations for reading at home. (p.10)

They should ensure all pupils... develop the habit of reading widely and often, for both pleasure and information. (p. 13)

Ofsted: Amanda Spielman's speech to the Festival of Education (2022)

[T]here's one particular aspect of curriculum that I'd like to talk about today. Reading with fluency is the gateway to almost all learning. Without reading, there is little science, no history, no geography. So, we should champion reading as a vital life skill; reading to learn; reading for advancement; reading to expand horizons; reading for pleasure. When reading is discussed in educational circles, it can quickly become a valuable, but somewhat limited conversation about the earliest stages of learning to read. Alongside this there should be wider thinking about how to embed reading throughout a child's time in education.

The Reading framework: teaching the foundations of literacy (July 2021), DfE

This guidance focuses on the early stages of teaching reading and the contribution of talk, stories and systematic synthetic phonics (SSP).

Whilst it is most applicable to teachers in primary schools, it is also relevant to those secondary schools where a significant number of pupils are behind age-related expectations for reading at the transition.

Children and young people's reading in 2020 before and during the COVID-19 lockdown (2020), National Literacy Trust

This report outlines findings from our Annual Literacy Survey 2020, in addition to findings from our survey of children and young people's reading during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Children read and enjoyed reading more during lockdown. They turned to adventure, comedy, fantasy and real-life stories and found joy in discovering books they'd never read before. Almost 50% of children said that they had read new books during lockdown. Reading also provided a refuge, supported children's mental wellbeing and enabled them to dream about the future.

Lockdown increased the literacy engagement gap between boys and girls, but audiobooks appear to have offered a way into literacy for boys, with 51.1% of boys saying that listening to audiobooks increased their interest in reading.

However, the conditions of lockdown meant that some children and young people reported that a lack of access to books (with schools and libraries closed), a lack of quiet space at home and a lack of school/peer support had negatively affected their ability to read and their motivation to read for enjoyment.

The role of audiobooks to engage reluctant readers and underrepresented children and young people (2021), National Literacy Trust

This research explores the various benefits of audiobooks for children and young people. It builds on work begun in March 2020 and focuses on findings from our 2021 Annual Literacy Survey.

Two key themes emerge: the power of audio to engage reluctant readers, and the role of audiobooks in promoting and furthering diversity in publishing. The survey notes that 25% of children and young people are listening to audiobooks and over 40% of children and young people say that they enjoy listening to audio.

Audiobooks and engagement with reading

- 1 in 5 (21.7%) children and young people say that listening to an audiobook or podcast has got them interested in reading books.
- 2 in 5 (43.1%) children and young people agree that listening to audiobooks helps them understand a subject.
- 2 in 5 (40.3%) children and young people agree that when they listen to stories rather than watching videos they use their imagination more.
- Boys who do not enjoy reading are more likely to say they enjoy listening to audio (46.6%) than girls who do not enjoy reading (37.8%) or those who prefer to describe their own gender (33.0%).

Audiobooks and diversity

- There is a link between listening enjoyment and an interest in diversity, with more children and young people who enjoy listening saying that they like to read or hear about characters or people who are different from them, compared with their peers who do not enjoy listening (65.1% vs 51.7%).
- When asked whether it was important for story and information books to include characters or people from different backgrounds, 7 in 10 (70.6%) children and young people who enjoyed listening agreed, compared with 6 in 10 (62.2%) who did not enjoy listening.

Children, young people and digital reading: National Literacy Trust research report (2019), Clark, C. and Teravainen, A.

Based on data from our Annual Literacy Survey of children and young people aged 9 to 18, this report explores how children and young people today use technology to read and how this is linked to their reading enjoyment, reading behaviours and reading attitudes.

Findings include:

- While print remains the dominant reading format for most children and young people, there was a small rise in the number of children and young people who read fiction, non-fiction and comics digitally in 2019 compared with 2017/18.
- Young people who are the most engaged with reading are more likely to read both on paper and on screen than their peers who have low engagement with reading.
- Those with low reading engagement are more likely than those with high reading engagement to consume reading materials on screen.

Multilingual young people's reading (2021), National Literacy Trust

This report promotes pupils' diverse linguistic backgrounds and reading skills by focusing on multilingual learners' reading enjoyment, behaviours and linguistic identity.

The report shows that:

- Multilingual young people are more engaged with reading than their monolingual peers.
- For 40% of children and young people, reading in languages other than English also unlocks their reading enjoyment.
- Over 70% of pupils said that their other language is an important part of their identity. However, 40% said that they would like their multilingual skills to be more recognised in their school.
- More multilingual than monolingual young people said that reading about characters that are like them makes them feel more confident about themselves (40.9% vs 32.3%).

What kids are reading (2022), Topping, K., Renaissance Learning

This year's findings, drawing on the data from Accelerated Reader and quizzes, were similar to those of previous years. Older pupils in secondary school were still reading the same difficulty of books as upper primary pupils. Pupils in primary schools consistently showed a much higher quizzing success than pupils in secondary schools (67% to 73% on APC). In the first year of secondary school, APC fell sharply despite secondary pupils reading books that were as easy as those the primary school pupils were reading.

Non-fiction book reading in secondary schools was less dominated by football books, with more science and nature featuring, and this is to be welcomed. The authors recommend that pupils (especially boys) be taught to read non-fiction books more carefully. Secondary non-fiction books were not read or understood as carefully as fiction books, so schools should make it clear (especially to boys) that if they think they are reading non-fiction books carefully, they are probably wrong.

Reading for pleasure and progress in vocabulary and mathematics

(2015), Sullivan, A. and Brown, M.

This longitudinal study shows that childhood reading is linked to substantial cognitive progress between the ages of 10 and 16. Reading is most strongly linked to progress in vocabulary, with a weaker but still substantial link to progress in mathematics. Strikingly, reading for pleasure is more strongly linked than parental education with cognitive progress in adolescence.

Understanding the impact and characteristics of school libraries and reading spaces (2019), National Literacy Trust

The review found that there was evidence of an association between school library use and reading attainment, although there was no clear-cut evidence that library use 'caused' increased reading attainment. Similarly, there was some evidence of an association between school library use and mental wellbeing.

Analysis of a subset of children and young people for whom standardised reading scores were also available suggested that overall, children and young people who used the school library had better levels of reading enjoyment, reading for pleasure, reading confidence, writing for pleasure, writing confidence and reading attainment than those who did not. They also tended to read and write a greater variety of material relative to non-library users.

School libraries: A literature review on current provision and evidence of impact

(2017), Clark, C. and Teravainen, A., National Literacy Trust

This literature review provides a comprehensive contemporary picture of school libraries in the UK. It focuses on what is known about the extent of current school library provision. This is followed by a review of the known impact of school libraries on pupils' skills, motivation and enjoyment, and then concludes with an outline of the elements that make a good school library. The research has found that children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and young people aged 14 to 16 are less likely to use their school library than their more advantaged and younger peers.

How to Teach: Reading for Pleasure (2016), Kenny Pieper, Independent Thinking Press

Kenny Pieper has gathered a range of tried-and-tested strategies to get kids reading and enjoying it. Discover strategies which will get kids talking about books, get them thinking about books, get them reading books, encourage independent reading, develop literacy skills and establish a classroom culture where reading is expected and celebrated.

Growing up a Reader Research Project (2020), Edinburgh University

Growing up a Reader is an interdisciplinary research project (Education, Psychology and English Literature) in collaboration with the Scottish Book Trust, with support from Edinburgh's Museum of Childhood. The project aims to understand what it means to be a young reader in the twenty-first century. The website includes research papers and resources for schools.

Research Rich Pedagogies, Open University

This website communicates research and evidence into creative and innovative pedagogies. It examines evidence from learners and teachers to distil key research messages and propose new approaches.

The projects explore diverse areas including reading, student- and child-led research, storytelling, drama, science, geography and promoting inclusion. They research across different age groups from the early years to older children and young people, and work with teachers and learners from across the UK and Europe.

Lit in Colour, Penguin Random House

Through Lit in Colour, Penguin aim to support schools in the UK to make the teaching and learning of English literature more inclusive. This includes commissioning research to better understand barriers and possible solutions, as well as providing practical support including book donations, free teaching resources and more.

My year reading a book from every country in the world, Ann Morgan

Ann Morgan considered herself well-read -- until she discovered the “massive blind spot” on her bookshelf. Amid a multitude of English and American authors, there were very few books from beyond the English-speaking world. So, she set herself an ambitious goal: to read one book from every country in the world over the course of a year. View her TED talk about this reading journey.

Reading for pleasure and wider reading essentials

- Develop and share your whole-school literacy policy with all staff. All departments should work together on whole-school reading initiatives.
- Receive a personalised school data report by registering your school with the National Literacy Trust’s Annual Literacy Survey to find out about your pupils’ behaviours, practices and attitudes to reading.
- Devote curriculum time to wider reading. Consider the balance of fiction and non-fiction texts and the use of whole texts within the curriculum. Consider using form time for the reading, sharing, recommending and discussion of books.
- Develop teachers’ knowledge of age-appropriate books. All teachers can excite pupils about wider subject reading. Encourage staff to use the school librarian or websites to search for trends in young people’s reading habits.
- Devote time and money into developing a welcoming and well-stocked library with a qualified librarian to promote and encourage wider reading for staff and students alike.
- Include audiobooks and digital books in the offer for pupils, especially for more reluctant readers and intervention groups.
- Remember that many children with EAL will also be reading in their home languages. Use your school language data to help prioritise the ordering of bilingual and other language books for the school library from companies such as [Mantralingua](#).

Section 3: Reading for learning

An integral part of developing pupils' reading in secondary school is reading for learning and information retrieval. This includes the growing area of digital literacy. Outstanding teachers will have a repertoire of teaching approaches that scaffold reading in subject lessons so that students can comprehend what they read more fully and access knowledge in all curriculum areas.

Key policy and research

The national curriculum in England: Key stages 3 and 4 framework document

(December 2014), DfE

"Pupils should be taught to read fluently" and to "understand extended prose (both fiction and non-fiction)" (p. 10). "In addition, it is vital for pupils' comprehension that they understand the meanings of words they meet in their reading across all subjects" (p. 11).

Ofsted grade descriptors for a 'good' quality of education (Inspection Handbook, 2021)

- Reading is prioritised to allow pupils to access the full curriculum offer.
- A rigorous and sequential approach to the reading curriculum develops pupils' fluency, confidence and enjoyment in reading. At all stages, reading attainment is assessed and gaps are addressed quickly and effectively for all pupils. Reading books connect closely to the phonics knowledge pupils are taught when they are learning to read.
- The sharp focus on ensuring that younger children and those at the early stages of reading gain phonics knowledge and language comprehension necessary to read, and the skills to communicate, gives them the foundations for future learning.
- Teachers ensure that their own speaking, listening, writing and reading of English support pupils in developing their language and vocabulary well.
- Pupils read widely and often, with fluency and comprehension appropriate to their age.

Education inspection framework: overview of research (January 2019), Ofsted

In addition to explicit vocabulary instruction, there is clear evidence that teachers can support comprehension by modelling how expert readers read actively, including by monitoring their understanding, asking questions, making predictions and summarising (e.g., Oakhill et al., 2014; Davis, 2010; National Reading Panel, 2000; Stuart and Stainthorpe, 2015).

Moving English forward (2013), Ofsted

"Too few schools currently develop reading skills effectively across the curriculum. In subjects other than English... teachers are less aware of approaches that might help pupils read effectively and make sense of what they are reading". (pp. 30–31)

English 3 to 19: a better plan (2016), United Kingdom Literacy Association and Owen Education

This group of six documents forms a statement setting out an alternative to current statutory requirements for the teaching and assessment of English 3 to 19. It represents the views of the National Association of Advisers in English, the National Association for the Teaching of English and the United Kingdom Literacy Association. The section on reading 7 to 16 states, "Effective reading is needed for success in all subjects and ought to be encouraged, taught and reinforced across the curriculum."

Read all about it: Why reading is key to GCSE success (2019), GL Assessment

This report demonstrates how assessment and careful analysis of data can be used to identify reading problems and plan intervention throughout a school. It includes perspectives from the Key Stage 3 Literacy Project in Blackpool on how to implement change across a locality as well as practical ideas and tips from practitioners on how to embed reading and vocabulary across a school.

Teachers' use of technology to support literacy in 2018

(2019), Picton, I., National Literacy Trust

Based on a survey of 219 UK teachers, this report indicates that the majority of teachers believe that technology can have a positive impact on children's literacy learning. However, varying levels of access to hardware, software and Wi-Fi and a lack of training present barriers to the effective use of technology in the classroom.

The report finds that most teachers consider the ability to engage and enable pupils to be the principal benefit of using technology in the classroom. Teachers feel technology can have a particularly positive impact on reluctant readers and writers and help pupils overcome barriers to learning. Yet under half of teachers say their pupils have access to iPads or laptops, and almost a quarter of teachers say they have received no training to use technology to support literacy. See: literacytrust.org.uk/training-and-workshops/online-training-using-digital-resources-support-literacy-key-stage-3/

Commission on Fake News and the Teaching of Critical Literacy Skills in Schools

(2018), National Literacy Trust

This final report, compiled by the National Literacy Trust for the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) found that only 2% of children and young people in the UK have the critical literacy skills they need to tell if a news story is real or fake. It also found that almost two-thirds of teachers believe fake news is harming children's wellbeing by increasing levels of anxiety, damaging their self-esteem and skewing their world view. Almost half of older children get their news from websites and social media, yet only a quarter of these children actually trust online sources of news. The report also found that half of teachers feel that the national curriculum does not equip children with the literacy skills they need to identify fake news.

EEF toolkit: reading comprehension strategies

On average, reading comprehension approaches improve learning by an additional five months over the course of a school year. Comparative findings indicate that these approaches appear to be particularly effective for older readers who are not making expected progress and are more effective than phonics for secondary pupils, in terms of both short-term and long-term impact.

Learning to Write/Reading to Learn: Genre, Knowledge and Pedagogy in the Sydney School (2012), David Rose and J.R. Martin, Equinox Publishing

In using the classroom interaction cycle, the Reading to Learn programme shows teachers how they can enable all learners to read high-quality, age-appropriate texts with full comprehension and critical understanding, using knowledge of genre and questioning to guide pupils.

English Learners, Academic Literacy, and Thinking: Learning in the Challenge Zone (2009), Pauline Gibbons, Heinemann

An essential book for all teachers, this situates reading in the subject classroom and links it directly to the abstract thought processes of different subject areas. The book is also full of practical activities that scaffold the teaching of reading and writing across the curriculum. It is a must-read for those teaching and supporting advanced EAL pupils.

Multimodal literacy: reading and viewing activities (2020), National Literacy Trust

Many secondary curriculum subjects are multimodal, which means that students need to be able to make meaning from a combination of modes, including sound, gestures, speech, images and text. Digital components of lessons may include video and audio as well as written text. Graphs, tables and maps also provide information that needs interpretation and the ability to interpret it may depend on prior cultural knowledge or experience. Our resources examine the pedagogy of a multimodal approach, providing practical strategies for embedding in English, history and design technology (DT) lessons.

Reading for learning essentials

- Teachers should carefully select texts and activities for pupils according to their reading capabilities and ensure that these provide a sufficient challenge. They should contextualise tasks through establishing the purpose for reading.
- Teachers should develop students' metacognitive awareness of reading skills, thus enabling them to tackle longer and more challenging material within the curriculum.
- Staff should introduce texts in different ways – for example, reading aloud, oral reading by students, audio recordings or reciprocal reading.
- Reading, writing and speaking should be seen as mutually enhancing processes. Talking about texts before, during and after reading helps to consolidate ideas and thinking whilst serving as a rehearsal for writing.
- Teachers should receive high-quality professional development to support their explicit teaching of reading skills such as skimming, scanning and reading for detail (including on screens) in subject lessons; research strategies such as using the index and glossary, identifying key points and making notes should also be commonly seen.

Section 4: Building vocabulary within the curriculum

Vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension are interdependent: children will develop their vocabulary knowledge through their reading, by inferring new word meanings from context, and they will then be able to use their new-found vocabulary to support their comprehension.

Key policy and research

Education inspection framework: overview of research (2019), Ofsted

“Schooling is central to increasing pupils’ vocabulary, as up to 90% of vocabulary is encountered in reading and not in everyday speech. Vocabulary is particularly important to text comprehension, as children’s books tend to deploy far less common vocabulary than is found in day-to-day speech (Snow et al., 1998; Stanovich, 1993). However, fiction often does not give access to the more academic vocabulary used for high-level GCSE, A level and beyond. ... evidence suggests that, while in primary school pupils tend to read books appropriate for their age, this is often not the case in secondary school. Boys in particular tend to read material appropriate for those below their chronological age.” (Topping, 2018). (p. 28)

The national curriculum in England: Key stages 3 and 4 framework document

(December 2014), DfE

“Pupils’ acquisition and command of vocabulary are key to their learning and progress across the whole curriculum. Teachers should therefore develop vocabulary actively, building systematically on pupils’ current knowledge. They should increase pupils’ store of words in general; simultaneously, they should also make links between known and new vocabulary and discuss the shades of meaning in similar words” (p. 11).

School inspection update (January 2019), Ofsted

Vocabulary is important because it embodies and communicates concepts...the considerable majority of vocabulary is only really encountered when reading and is not used in everyday speech... If we want to give all children opportunity, a good place to start is through reading to them frequently, introducing new vocabulary and meaning within contexts that stimulate their thinking. Subsequently, it is important to teach them a range of curriculum subjects that will provide a wide vocabulary and a rich understanding of the meaning of the words encountered. (p. 7)

Why Closing the Word Gap Matters: Oxford Language Report

(April 2018), Oxford University Press

Oxford University Press (OUP) monitors children’s language through the Oxford Children’s Corpus – the biggest active database of children’s reading and writing in English. For this report, they also conducted research with more than 1,000 teachers. The report explores four key questions with contributions from leading experts:

- What proportion of children are affected by the word gap in UK primary and secondary schools?
- What are the root causes of the word gap?

- How does the word gap impact on pupils’ academic achievement, as well as their wider life chances?
- What successful strategies have schools put in place to close the word gap?

A pivotal section, **“Vocabulary development and reading comprehension: a reciprocal relationship”** by Professors Kate Cain and Jane V. Oakhill, explains how good vocabulary knowledge is related to growth in reading comprehension over time.

Cain and Oakhill also answer the question, **What are the implications for helping children develop and use their vocabulary for reading comprehension?**

- Children need reading texts that have an appropriate level of vocabulary so that they are not overwhelmed by a plethora of unknown words, but they also need to be challenged to learn (or refine) the meaning of words in the text.
- Children should be encouraged to try to work out the meaning of unknown words in a text by using the context to develop and test hypotheses about a word’s meaning. A rich discussion about different children’s hypotheses and justifications for these word meanings could ensue.
- Children also need to learn that a word might have different meanings – sometimes subtle, sometimes not. They can be encouraged to identify any words that they find surprising in a text, and to consider whether that might be because they thought the word meant something different, or whether their representation of its meaning needs to be refined in some way.

Bridging the word gap at transition (2020), Oxford University Press

During a three-year programme of research, OUP have gained a better understanding of the impact and trends of the word gap and its ongoing impact on young people. This research focuses on transition from primary into secondary and asks two important questions:

- What role does vocabulary play in pupils making a successful transition between primary and secondary school?
- How can schools support pupils’ vocabulary development during this transition?

As they progress from primary into secondary, Y7 pupils are exposed to a huge amount of new language, partly as a result of the increase in “academic vocabulary”.

How schools are closing the word gap: Oxford language report (2021/22), Oxford University Press

Practical case studies from both primary and secondary schools.

Vocabulary building (2019), National Literacy Trust

Our most recent vocabulary guidance resources are here, highlighting key research reports and the academic word list (see further information below).

Academic Word List (2000), Coxhead, A.

The Academic Word List (AWL) was developed by [Averil Coxhead](#) at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. The list contains 570 word families, selected from corpora of academic texts in various disciplines. It was intended to be used by teachers preparing learners for tertiary-level study or by

students working alone to learn the words most needed to study in higher education. The list does not include words that are in the most frequently used 2,000 words of English. There is now a [New Academic Word List](#) developed by Charlie Browne and colleagues. Their website has a mass of useful tools and resources for those teaching older students and students with EAL.

[Exam command words: a case study from William Perkin School](#) (2018), National Literacy Trust

Understanding different command words is essential to answering an exam question effectively. William Perkin School participated in our Disciplinary Literacy at GCSE workshop, which emphasised the importance of teaching tier 2, cross-curricular vocabulary and command words. Following the training, teacher Joanna Paterson and her colleagues developed a framework and guidebook for students and teachers to better understand command words in different subjects. They also developed an 'Exam Command Word Booklet' as a revision tool for Year 11 students. This clarifies exactly what the command words are asking students to do in each different subject.

[Bringing Words to Life](#)

(2013), Isabel L. Beck, Margaret G. McKeown and Linda Kucan, Guilford Press

This book explains word frequency and introduces the idea of tiers 1, 2 and 3 words. It provides helpful criteria for selecting which tier 2 words to teach. The book is also full of excellent teaching strategies. Our colleagues and partners at Birmingham Education Partnership have published a short PDF summary of each chapter in this valuable book.

[Closing the Vocabulary Gap](#) (2018), Alex Quigley, Routledge

In *Closing the Vocabulary Gap*, Alex Quigley explores the increased demands of an academic curriculum and how closing the vocabulary gap between our “word-poor” and “word-rich” students could prove the vital difference between school failure and success. The book is well evidenced and full of practical ideas and strategies for secondary literacy leaders and teachers.

Building vocabulary essentials

- Schools should have a whole-school focus on tier 2 (generic, academic) as well as tier 3 (subject-specialist) words.
- Schools should have a good understanding of the vocabulary size and development needs of their students, especially where there is a high proportion of EAL or disadvantaged pupils.
- Literacy leaders should draw on a range of staff to support vocabulary development. MFL and EAL teachers should be experts in this area, but it should perhaps also include music or maths teachers, who understand how to use cognate words from other languages.
- Direct vocabulary instruction should be part of normal pedagogical practice, and include paying attention to morphology, pronunciation, spelling and usage of unfamiliar vocabulary.
- Teachers should be familiar with multiple methods for teaching vocabulary, including online commercial resources such as Bedrock, Lexonik, Quizlet, Babbel and Duolingo.
- Students should read texts across the curriculum that have an appropriate level of vocabulary so that they are not overwhelmed by unknown words, but they should also be challenged to

learn (or refine) the meanings of words in the text.

- Students should be encouraged to work out the meaning of unknown words in a text by using the context to develop and test hypotheses about a word's meaning.
- Students should be confident users of online and text-based dictionaries, glossaries and word lists to support their vocabulary development.
- Consider using audiobooks and podcasts to increase vocabulary. See, for example, Gene Wolfson, “Using Audiobooks to Meet the Needs of Adolescent Readers”, *American Secondary Education* 36, no. 2 (2008): 105–14.

Section 5: Writing in subject disciplines and wider writing

Writing in the subject disciplines in a range of genres requires paying attention to content, text organisation and sentence structure, as well as spelling and punctuation. The new GCSE specifications have increased the requirements for extended writing in almost every subject, so all teachers will benefit from training to teach writing explicitly.

English teachers will also need to develop students' wider writing, linking it to their everyday lives and encouraging and developing their creative responses. At the end of Key Stage 2, writing outcomes are weaker than reading, and evidence from surveys shows this continues into secondary school. Embracing technology and social media as well as creative teaching strategies can invigorate writing both within and outside school.

Key policy and research

The national curriculum in England: Key stages 3 and 4 framework document

(December 2014), DfE

Teachers should develop pupils' ... writing and vocabulary as integral aspects of the teaching of every subject. English is both a subject in its own right and the medium for teaching. (p. 10)

Pupils should develop the stamina and skills to write at length, with accurate spelling and punctuation. They should be taught the correct use of grammar. The writing they do should include narratives, explanations, descriptions, comparisons, summaries and evaluations: such writing supports them in rehearsing, understanding and consolidating what they have heard or read. (p. 10)

Pupils should ... consolidate and build on their knowledge of grammar and vocabulary through... extending and applying the grammatical knowledge set out in the Key Stage 1 and 2 programmes of study. (p. 16)

Improving Literacy in Secondary Schools (2019), Education Endowment Foundation

This report summarises key research from the UK and the USA and identifies two key areas for schools to focus on within a subject-disciplinary context.

Breaking down complex writing tasks. Writing is challenging and students in every subject will benefit from explicit instruction in how to improve. Teachers can break writing down into planning, monitoring and evaluation, and support students by modelling each step. Teachers can use a variety of approaches, including collaborative and paired writing, to motivate students to write.

Combining reading activities and writing instruction is likely to improve students' skills in both, compared to a less balanced approach. Reading helps students gain knowledge which leads to better writing, whilst writing can deepen students' understanding of ideas. Students should be taught to recognise features, aims and conventions of good writing within each subject. Teaching spelling, grammar and punctuation explicitly can improve students' writing, particularly when focused on meaning.

The guidance suggests that "Contextualised grammar instruction is well-suited to instruction across different subjects. For example, to support students to write with precision about competing arguments in History, teachers might find it helpful to explicitly explain to students the role of modal verbs like 'could, would, should' and 'might', or the way in which adverbs can be used to create more fine-grained distinctions between judgements."

Regulations for the Assessment of the Quality of Written Communication [QWC]

(2015), Ofqual

GCSE/GCE specifications are governed by the following statement: "All subjects will make similar requirements for appropriate grammar, spelling, punctuation and legibility. All subjects will have some requirement for extended writing to allow this aspect of QWC to be assessed."

Moving English forward (2012), Ofsted

There are too few opportunities for pupils to complete extended writing, and there is too little time in lessons to complete writing tasks; too little emphasis on creative and imaginative tasks; too little emphasis on the teaching of editing and redrafting; too little choice for pupils in the topics for writing; and too few real audiences and purposes for writing. (p. 26)

Most pupils are regular users of modern digital technology. Teachers need to use these contexts in their lessons if learning in English is not to seem out of step with pupils' experiences. It will also enable them to make appropriate style and language choices when using different ... communication forms. (p. 53)

Children and young people's writing during the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020

(2020), National Literacy Trust

Our most recent National Literacy Trust writing report outlines findings from our tenth Annual Literacy Survey relating to children and young people's writing in 2020, in addition to findings from our survey of children and young people's writing during the COVID-19 lockdown.

There has been an increase in the number of children and young people enjoying writing since the previous year, and evidence suggests that this continued into the lockdown period. The percentage of pupils writing outside class has also increased to 21.5%. During the lockdown, pupils seem to have written more stories, letters and diaries, and to have found they had more time to think and become inspired. Creative writing in particular has helped to improve wellbeing during this time.

Children and young people's writing in 2021 and their reflections on writing during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020

(2021), Best, E., Clark, C. and Picton, I., National Literacy Trust

Listening to children's experiences of writing during the first lockdown in spring 2020, it became clear that for many it had been a time of increased creativity, with children writing everything from songs and stories to scripts, and some even beginning their own novels. Another prominent theme in our research last summer was that having more time to write freely had increased children's enjoyment of writing.

This report builds on those findings by highlighting how children and young people felt about writing in early 2021, a period that coincided with the third national lockdown in the UK. We also share children and young people's perceptions of their writing during the first lockdown and subsequent return to school (for many) in autumn 2020.

Children and young people's writing in 2022 (2022), Clark, C., Lant, F. and Riad, L., National Literacy Trust

This report is based on 70,403 responses to our Annual Literacy Survey from children and young people aged 5 to 18 in schools in England, Scotland and Wales in early 2022. This period coincided with the lifting of all lockdown restrictions in England and most other UK nations. Findings show that enjoyment of writing and writing frequency recovered only a little after 2021's all-time low.

Our research into children and young people's experiences of writing in the first COVID lockdown in [spring 2020](#) found that it was a time of greater creativity and that having more time to write freely increased children's enjoyment of writing. However, by [early 2021](#), just 34.5% of children and young people said that they enjoyed writing, the lowest level since we first asked this question in 2010.

Key findings in 2022 include:

- **2 in 5** (40.3%) children and young people aged 5 to 18 said that they enjoy writing in their free time.
- **1 in 5** (20.5%) children and young people told us that they wrote something daily in their free time, an increase from 2021 when we recorded the lowest daily writing rate since 2010 (15.2%).
- **1 in 2** children and young people said that they write to be creative (49.9%), while **2 in 5** write to express their ideas and imagination (45.3%) or their thoughts and feelings (41.4%).
- Levels of writing enjoyment increased between 2021 and 2022 for most children and young people regardless of background, with the exception of secondary school-aged children.
- Writing continues to support children and young people's mental wellbeing, with **1 in 3** (32.8%) of children and young people saying that writing helps them relax.

The report also notes important barriers and enablers for children and young people's writing. For example, opportunities for writing for creativity, mindfulness, social connection and social change may be especially helpful in supporting writing engagement.

Teachers as Writers Project (2017)

The TAW project (a partnership between UKLA, the Open University, University of Exeter, the Arvon Foundation and the Arts Council England) suggests that teachers' engagement with professional writers is a valuable way to enhance student achievement in writing. With strengthened writer identities, teachers made pedagogic changes that impacted students' reported motivation, confidence, sense of ownership and skills as writers.

Grammar for Writing? An investigation into the effect of Contextualised Grammar Teaching on Student Writing

(2012), Jones, Susan M., Myhill, Debra, and Bailey, Trevor C.

This study, which positions grammar as a meaning-making resource for writing development, set out to investigate the impact of contextualised grammar instruction on students' writing performance. The results indicate that the intervention benefitted able writers more than weaker writers: "Grammar can be taught in ways which go beyond simply knowing terms and categories, towards encouraging pupils to love playing with grammar and language. If teachers take this approach, the

evidence suggests pupils' writing will improve ... It's not just about teaching pupils to use grammar accurately ... You can have a really accurate but dull piece of writing. This is about using the language creatively: being able to manipulate grammar for effect and giving children power over the use of language."

Writing next: effective strategies to improve writing of adolescents in middle and high schools, a report to Carnegie Corporation of New York (2007)

"Writing next" identified 11 teaching practices and strategies that have been shown, through rigorous studies, to have significant and positive effects on the quality of students' writing. These include: teaching students strategies for planning, revising and editing their compositions; collaborative writing; sentence-combining instruction; planning activities to help students organise ideas; a process-writing approach that stresses writing for authentic audiences; opportunities to read, analyse and emulate models of good writing; and writing for content learning, which uses writing as a tool for learning curriculum material.

The Writing Revolution (2017), Judith C. Hochman and Natalie Wexler, Jossey-Bass

This practical book introduces a method of instruction to improve expository writing which is based on six principles:

- Students need explicit instruction in writing.
- Sentences are the building blocks of writing.
- Writing instruction should be embedded in the content of the curriculum.
- The curriculum drives the rigour of the writing.
- Grammar is best taught in this context.
- Planning and revising are the most important phases of the writing process.

Our National Literacy Trust website includes some resources about specific types of writing, most notably a toolkit to develop ideas for [diary writing](#) and a range of video clips and challenges about non-fiction feature writing and [journalistic writing – My Words, My World](#).

Changing how writing is taught (2019), Graham, S.

This paper reviews the research into the teaching of writing in schools. Its premise is that if students are to be successful in school, at work and in their personal lives, they must learn to write. This requires that they receive adequate practice and instruction in writing, as this complex skill does not develop naturally. The article argues that many students do not acquire the writing skills needed for success in society today because they do not receive the writing instruction they need or deserve. It identifies factors that inhibit good writing instruction, including instructional time; teachers' preparation and beliefs about writing; national, state, district and school policies; and historical, social, cultural and political influences. It then examines how to address these factors and change classroom writing practices for the better.

Writing for Pleasure: Theory, Research and Practice (2021), Ferguson, F. and Young, R., Routledge

This book is essential reading for anyone who is concerned about the current status and nature of writing teaching in schools. The *Writing for Pleasure* pedagogy presented here is a radical new conception of what it means to teach young writers effectively today.

The book explores what writing for pleasure means, and how it can be realised as a pedagogy whose aim is to develop children, young people and their teachers as lifelong writers. The approach is grounded in global research into the most effective ways of teaching writing, including a description of the authors' own research project, and into what exceptional teachers of writing do that makes the difference.

The authors describe ways of building writing communities who write with purpose, power and pleasure, and they underline the importance of promoting a sense of self-efficacy, agency, self-regulation, volition, motivation and writer-identity. They define and discuss 14 research-informed principles which constitute a *Writing for Pleasure* pedagogy and show how they are applied by teachers in classroom practice.

Closing the Writing Gap (2022), Quigley, A., Routledge

The new book by popular author Alex Quigley contains sections on the history of writing, the teaching of rhetoric and grammar essentials, and acknowledges the importance of developing subject-disciplinary writing. See also his blog, [The Confident Teacher](#), for further reflections on and resources for developing literacy across secondary schools.

Writing essentials

- Develop and share a whole-school policy for teaching writing which exploits the fact that reading and writing are reciprocal and speaking and writing are generative in nature.
- Share the whole-school policy with all staff – all departments should work together on writing initiatives as well as reading initiatives.
- Receive a personalised school data report by registering your school with the National Literacy Trust's [Annual Literacy Survey](#) to find out about your pupils' attitudes to and enjoyment of writing.
- Use memorable experiences for writing engagement. See National Literacy Trust projects like [Everybody Writes](#) for ideas for how to use museums and other heritage venues to inspire young people.
- Give pupils the opportunity to write for a range of media platforms: social media, websites and multimodal writing. This gives them the motivational power of the anticipated audience response as well as the skills for writing in a technological age.
- Ensure all staff have seen samples of Year 6 writing at the expected level in a range of text types so that they have high expectations of pupils at the start of Key Stage 3.
- Develop teachers' pedagogical subject knowledge, reminding all that writing is a tool for recording thought and developing content knowledge.
- Encourage subject areas to use curriculum time for extended writing through a process for teaching writing, including modelling, planning, editing and redrafting to produce writing of 'quality'.

- Help teachers choose and use good model texts and provide guidance about the language and organisation conventions that illustrate what proficient writing looks like in their subject.
- Explicitly teach grammar in context using a consistent approach to correcting errors. The 2014 national curriculum [KS3 English grammar glossary and spelling and vocabulary appendices](#) outline what is to be taught.

Section 6: Talk for learning (oracy)

High-quality classroom talk is essential to pupils' thinking and learning. It is also linked to improvements in reading and writing, and overall attainment. Teachers need to develop and embed a repertoire of teacher-to-pupil and pupil-to-pupil talk and questioning, and structure tasks to develop depth of thought in learning.

Key policy and research

The national curriculum in England: Key stages 3 and 4 framework document

(December 2014), DfE

"Pupils should be taught to speak clearly and convey ideas confidently using Standard English. They should learn to justify ideas with reasons; ask questions to check understanding; develop vocabulary and build knowledge; negotiate; evaluate and build on the ideas of others; and select the appropriate register for effective communication. They should be taught to give well-structured descriptions and explanations and develop their understanding through speculating, hypothesising and exploring ideas. This will enable them to clarify their thinking as well as organise their ideas for writing" (p. 10).

Speak for Change inquiry and report (2021), All-Party Parliamentary Group

The inquiry has heard compelling and wide-ranging evidence as to why oracy is vital for children and young people's educational progress and life prospects, and about the detrimental impact for those who miss out.

The report finds that the development of spoken language skills requires purposeful and intentional teaching and learning throughout children's schooling, yet there is a concerning variation in the time and attention afforded to oracy across schools, meaning that for many children, the opportunity to develop these skills is left to chance.

The Oracy APPG believes that there is an indisputable case for oracy as an integral aspect of education and that all children and young people should benefit from high-quality oracy education as a consistent and comprehensive entitlement of their education in school. To achieve this, we are calling for a shift in educational culture and values, policy and practice to:

1. Raise the status and priority of oracy in education
2. Set out shared expectations for oracy across schools
3. Equip and empower teachers and schools to develop their students' oracy skills, providing them with the tools and resources they need to do this.

Speaking Frankly, English-Speaking Union and Voice 21

This publication is a collection of essays by teachers, academics and educational thinkers on the importance of oracy in education. The voices here come from diverse backgrounds and present a range of perspectives on how vital it is for schools to pay attention to the explicit development of speaking and listening skills in their students. Contributors include Beccy Earnshaw of Voice 21, former headteacher Geoff Barton and Professor Neil Mercer.

Oral language interventions (2016), Education Endowment Foundation

Overall, studies of oral language interventions consistently show positive benefits for learning, including oral language skills and reading comprehension. On average, pupils who participate in oral language interventions make approximately five months' additional progress over the course of a year.

All pupils appear to benefit from oral language interventions, but some studies show slightly greater effects for younger children and pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds (up to six months' benefit). Likewise, some types of oral language intervention appear, on average, to be more effective than others.

Oracy Cambridge

Oracy Cambridge is based at Hughes Hall, University of Cambridge. Its aim is to promote oracy in schools and in wider society. Its work includes writing papers for governmental and other organisations, providing training and consultancy for schools, and organising conferences. A recent publication, which is a research-based review of key principles, is [Oracy across the Welsh Curriculum](#) by Neil Mercer and James Mannion.

Oracy: The State of Speaking in Our Schools (2017), Millard & Menzies, Voice 21

This report was commissioned to explore the key themes emerging from the work of Voice 21 on the role of oracy in education; schools' motivations for developing oracy; the barriers they perceive; and the benefits and opportunities for teachers and students. It draws together the available evidence and, crucially, the views and perspectives of teachers and school leaders. The research clearly establishes the case for oracy and its unique importance for students. The polling data highlights a widespread belief in the value of oracy and the obstacles felt by schools and teachers in embracing it. The interviews and case studies illustrate the breadth and depth of what is meant by oracy and how different schools have approached it.

The Oracy Benchmarks, Voice 21

This invaluable booklet contains Teacher Oracy Benchmarks which define excellent classroom practice for oracy and provide a framework through which to identify, guide and empower teachers who are developing and refining their oracy practice.

The School Oracy Benchmarks articulate the strategic decisions to be made by school leaders to ensure every child in their school receives a high-quality oracy education. They include the steps needed to create the conditions to enable every teacher to meet the Teacher Oracy Benchmarks. The booklet also includes case studies and a self-evaluation section.

Improving oracy and classroom talk in English schools: achievements and challenges (2012), Alexander, R.

"talk is essential to children's thinking and learning, and to their productive engagement in classroom life... We now have additional evidence... that high quality classroom talk raises standards in the core subjects as typically measured in national and international tests" (p. 2).

Children, young people and audiobooks before and during lockdown

(2020), Best, E., Clark, C. and Picton, I., National Literacy Trust

This report outlines findings from our tenth Annual Literacy Survey relating to children and young people's engagement with audiobooks in 2020, in addition to findings from our survey of children and young people's engagement with audiobooks during the COVID-19 lockdown. Key findings include:

- During lockdown, nearly 1 in 4 (23.4%) children and young people said that they have listened to audiobooks more than before lockdown
- 1 in 2 (52.9%) children and young people say that listening to audiobooks has increased their interest in reading, and 2 in 5 (42.6%) say that it has made them more interested in writing
- 1 in 3 (31.8%) children and young people said that listening to audiobooks made them feel better during lockdown

Learning to listen: the power of audio in the classroom (2019), National Literacy Trust

A National Literacy Trust blog full of ideas for supporting and directing listening in schools. Includes links to podcasts.

The Collaborative Learning Project

The Collaborative Learning Project is a teacher network set up over 50 years ago to develop and disseminate talk for learning activities for schools. One of their key aims is to develop exploratory talk in classrooms. The website contains a treasure trove of resources for all subjects and ages.

Classroom Talk: Evidence-based Teaching for Enquiring Teachers

(2020), Rupert Knight, Critical Publishing

This book summarises key principles behind talk in school and examines research evidence relating to a variety of forms of classroom talk including classroom environments, teacher-to-pupil talk and peer-to-peer talk, and the links between classroom talk and technology, metacognition and critical thinking.

Transform Teaching and Learning through Talk

(2019), Amy Gaunt and Alice Stott, Rowman and Littlefield

A practical and inspiring book from two teachers who worked at Voice 21 school in London, delivering an oracy curriculum to a wide range of ages and a very diverse student body.

Talk for learning essentials

- Work with colleagues across the school to develop a whole school speaking and learning policy, including ground rules for class discussion and group work.
- Establish a positive classroom environment where pupils have opportunities to share their own views and ideas through the use of talk partners, drama and planned collaborative tasks.
- Enable all pupils to contribute to group and class discussions by assigning roles and directing pupils to assume responsibility for the content or direction of the discussion.
- Use the [Oracy Skills Framework produced for School 21/Voice 21](#), which offers a comprehensive oracy curriculum and assessment framework with linguistic, physical, cognitive,

social and emotional strands: <https://voice21.org/oracy/>

- Provide training about dialogic teaching, using examples from Alexander's [Towards Dialogic Teaching: Rethinking Classroom Talk](#), and support staff to plan a range of opportunities for structured talk, formal debates and oral presentations.
- Introduce different types of talk for learning strategies in lessons, such as dialogic, reciprocal, exploratory, and Socratic talk in group work (see National Literacy Trust resource [Oracy and Talk for Learning](#))
- Create challenging discussions by using open-ended, higher-order questions to draw out extended answers, encouraging learners to explore, explain and justify their views.
- Explore and develop the pedagogy of classroom language, encouraging and scaffolding pupils to think, reflect, shape their own ideas and develop and answer their own questions.
- Use teacher modelling and speaking frames to develop pupils' language, grounded within the talk for writing sequence.

Section 7: Managing literacy interventions

Secondary schools must identify and support pupils who are struggling to read and write by diagnosing specific needs and implementing appropriate interventions. These are likely to tackle difficulties with decoding and reading fluency and may include consolidating understanding of synthetic phonics. Diagnosing writing difficulties, including handwriting and spelling, is also recommended. Specific support for pupils with English as an additional language at different proficiency levels may also be required.

Key policy and research

[School inspection handbook](#) (2019), Ofsted

The grading criteria states that:

- Reading should be prioritised to allow pupils to access the full curriculum offer.
- A rigorous and sequential approach to the reading curriculum develops pupils' fluency, confidence and enjoyment in reading. At all stages, reading attainment should be assessed and gaps addressed quickly and effectively for all pupils. Reading books should connect closely to the phonics knowledge pupils are taught when they are learning to read.

[Improving Literacy in Secondary Schools](#) (2019), Education Endowment Foundation

Schools should plan to support students with the weakest levels of literacy, particularly in Year 7. In order to match interventions to need, schools will need to carry out diagnostic assessments of students, in part through the interpretation of standardised tests. Developing a model of tiered support, which increases in intensity in line with need, is a promising approach to planning intervention. [The EEF Promising Projects](#) are a good starting point for comparing effective literacy programmes.

[What works for children and young people with literacy difficulties? The effectiveness of intervention schemes](#) (2016), Brooks, G.

The fifth edition looks at what intervention schemes have been used in the UK in an attempt to boost the reading, spelling or overall writing attainment of lower-achieving pupils between the ages of 5 and 18. Have they been quantitatively evaluated? What are the schemes like and how effective are they?

[Brooks's What works for literacy difficulties? The effectiveness of intervention schemes](#) (6th edition, 2020), Lavan, G. and Talcott, J. B. (eds), Wolverhampton: The School Psychology Service Ltd.

This edition of "What works" updates all earlier editions and provides clear and analytic information on intervention schemes available in order to inform practice and choices of approach.

[Supporting secondary pupils who are behind with reading](#) (April 2022), Jones, G., Ofsted

This blog by Gill Jones explains how Ofsted will evaluate support in secondary schools for weaker readers. Inspectors will look at how schools ensure that all students progress to reading age-appropriate texts fluently so they can access the curriculum. The blog highlights the need for accurate diagnostic assessment and interventions that meet weaker readers' specific needs. Ms Jones also clarifies how Ofsted inspectors will carry out the process of inspecting reading across a school, including listening to pupils read and interviewing subject staff about how they embed reading in all areas.

[Pupil Premium Guide](#) (2018), Education Endowment Foundation

This report recommends schools take a tiered approach to Pupil Premium spending. Teaching should be the top priority, including professional development, training and support for early career teachers, and recruitment and retention.

[Oral language interventions](#) (2016), Education Endowment Foundation

Overall, studies of oral language interventions consistently show positive benefits for learning, including for oral language skills and reading comprehension. On average, pupils who participate in oral language interventions make approximately five months' worth of additional progress over the course of a year.

[Using self-regulation to improve writing](#) (May 2014), Education Endowment Foundation

This project aimed to use memorable experiences and an approach called Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) to help struggling writers in Years 6 and 7. SRSD provides a clear structure to help pupils plan, monitor and evaluate their writing. It encourages pupils to take ownership of their work and can be used to teach most genres of writing, including narrative writing.

- The approach had a strong positive effect on the writing outcomes of low-attaining pupils transitioning from primary to secondary school among a sample of pupils in state schools in the West Yorkshire area.
- The approach had beneficial effects for both FSM and non-FSM pupils.

These findings, in combination with evidence from the United States, suggest that the SRSD approach has substantial promise as a literacy catch-up strategy. In 2019/20 the National Literacy Trust ran a KS3 pilot of this approach across several secondary subject areas, which also produced a very positive evaluation.

[Understanding the language and literacy needs of EAL learners](#) (2021), National Literacy Trust

Our webpage provides advice, resources and links for assessing EAL learners, auditing provision and understanding their reading development.

[Scaffolding Language, Scaffolding Learning: Teaching Second Language Learners in the Mainstream Classroom](#) (Second Edition, 2014), Pauline Gibbons, Heinemann

This is an essential text for the theory and practice of teaching and supporting EAL students. It is also full of practical activities that can scaffold the teaching of reading and writing.

EAL programme, Bell Foundation

The Bell Foundation provide a comprehensive EAL assessment framework covering all four skills. Their website also hosts the EAL Nexus teaching resources, which include teacher lesson plans and guidance and advice about strategies and approaches which work for EAL learners of different proficiency levels in mainstream lessons. There is also a [video webinar](#) providing advice about how to support EAL learners remotely when schools are locked down.

Skills Academy, National Literacy Trust

Skills Academy improves Year 7 and 8 students' reading, rewarding their progress in a fun and engaging way. It is a 10-week intervention programme that teaches five core reading comprehension skills using topical content and online challenges.

When completed successfully, the challenges will unlock exclusive video tutorials from professional freestyle footballers, beatboxers and break-dancers. Students are motivated to learn from texts that interest them, with rewards that inspire them.

Game Changers, National Literacy Trust

Game Changers is a 20-session reading programme specifically designed for excluded students. The programme uses relatable texts, highly scaffolded resources and (optional) football activities to motivate and equip young people to read. Sample resources are available here: literacytrust.org.uk/resources/game-changers-sample-resources.

Reading: taking a rigorous approach to baselining and intervention

Nigel Ward, the Chief Executive of the Northern Schools Trust, explains why schools need to assess both decoding and comprehension, and why a robust intervention programme is just as important as a robust assessment programme.

The 'Professional Hunch' considering the whole child, GL Assessment

This PDF presents an accessible set of screening questions to support staff to consider the possible causes of reading difficulties.

Making best use of teaching assistants (2018), Education Endowment Foundation

The EEF guidance looks at the evidence base for using teaching assistants effectively and recommends that schools use structured interventions with reliable evidence of effectiveness. There are presently only a handful of programmes in the UK for which there is a secure evidence base, so if schools are using programmes that are 'unproven', they should try to replicate some common elements of effective interventions:

- Sessions should be brief (20–50 minutes), occur regularly (3–5 times per week) and be maintained over a sustained period (8–20 weeks). Careful timetabling should be in place to enable this consistent delivery.
- TAs should receive extensive training from experienced trainers and/or teachers (5–30 hours per intervention).
- The intervention should have structured supporting resources and lesson plans, with clear objectives.

- TAs should closely follow the plan and structure of the intervention.
- Assessments should be used to identify appropriate pupils, guide areas for focus and track pupil progress. Effective interventions should ensure the right support is being provided to the right child.
- Connections should be made between the out-of-class learning in the intervention and classroom teaching.

Literacy intervention essentials

- Develop a consistent policy and approach to assessing and teaching reading as well as organising reading and writing interventions across the school.
- Literacy leaders or coordinators should work closely with the SENDCo, head of English, EAL specialist staff and other subject teachers to ensure that interventions are well-matched to pupils' needs.
- All teaching staff need to understand the processes by which pupils learn to read and be aware of the difference between decoding and comprehension difficulties. An active reading pedagogy should also be modelled and practised in subject lessons across the school.
- Several staff members will have in-depth subject knowledge in the principles, theory and practice of systematic synthetic phonics (SSP) through ongoing training. The [CLPE Reading and Writing Scales](#) describe the journey that children make to become literate. They help teachers understand what progression looks like in reading and writing.
- A tiered approach with a mixture of small-group interventions led by skilled and well-trained staff as well as computer-based schemes to support students who are behind age-related expectations in reading, writing or spelling is most effective.
- Schools should also have a consistent, whole-school policy for and approach to teaching and feedback for spelling, punctuation, grammar and vocabulary (SPAG).
- Additional, specialist provision for EAL learners in line with their proficiency level may be needed. More advanced EAL learners will benefit from support for literacy within the curriculum for several years after their induction period has ended.
- Monitor the impact and effectiveness of all literacy interventions, ensuring faithful implementation. Many schemes and programmes promise much more than they deliver.

Additional references and further reading

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About the National Literacy Trust

Our charity is dedicated to improving the reading, writing, speaking and listening skills of those who need it most, giving them the best possible chance of success in school, work and life. We run Literacy Hubs and campaigns in communities where low levels of literacy and social mobility are seriously impacting people's lives. We support schools and early years settings to deliver outstanding literacy provision, and we campaign to make literacy a priority for politicians, businesses and parents. Our research and analysis make us the leading authority on literacy and drive our interventions.






Literacy is a vital element of action against poverty and our work changes life stories.



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