

"We don't need more research or more headline-grabbing initiatives which can't be sustained. Good leadership is the key to good literacy in schools. Above all, this means being passionate about high standards of literacy for every single pupil, and creating a no-excuses culture both for pupils and for staff. I am confident we can get to grips with this issue. I am determined that Ofsted will focus more sharply on literacy in our inspections, and I am proposing ten specific steps to raise national standards in literacy."

Sir Michael Wilshaw, HMCI

*Note: This document sets out the key findings and recommendations in the Ofsted report, as set out in the report. The key findings have been numbered (they are bullet points in the original). Numbers in brackets refer to the pages in the report where the key findings and recommendations are found. The full document runs to 67 pages.*

This report sets out to answer the question: how can attainment in English be raised in order to move English forward in schools? It is recommended to all who teach the subject, those who lead the subject, and headteachers of primary and secondary schools. The findings are based principally on evidence from inspections of English between April 2008 and March 2011 in 268 maintained schools in England. Part A highlights the main strengths and weaknesses in English and presents the evidence from the survey inspection visits. Part B draws on this inspection evidence to analyse 10 areas of weakness and recommend appropriate action to improve practice in each area. (Cover page).

### Key findings (page 5)

1. Attainment in English has risen in secondary schools since 2008, but there has been only limited improvement overall in attainment in English in primary schools.
2. A large majority of schools in the sample were judged to be good or outstanding in English. Around 30% were no better than satisfactory. Provision was broadly the same across primary and secondary schools, although there was more outstanding practice in secondary schools.
3. An increasing number of children were assessed as being secure in communication, language and literacy in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).<sup>1</sup> However, a minority of children did not achieve these levels and where this was the case, schools were not always systematic enough in developing their early communication skills.
4. The quality of teaching was good or outstanding in seven in 10 of the lessons seen. In these lessons, teaching plans were clear about the key learning for pupils, teaching was flexible and responded to pupils' needs as the lesson developed, and tasks were meaningful, giving pupils real audiences and contexts where possible.
5. The quality of pupils' learning was hampered in weaker lessons by a number of 'myths' about what makes a good lesson. The factors that most commonly limited learning included: an excessive pace; an overloading of activities; inflexible planning; and limited time for pupils to work independently. Learning was also constrained in schools where teachers concentrated too much or too early on a narrow range of test or examination skills.
6. The curriculum for English was judged to be good or outstanding in the large majority of schools inspected. The most successful schools were those that had identified the particular needs of their pupils and then designed a distinctive curriculum to meet those needs.<sup>2</sup>
7. However, few of the secondary schools visited had taken the opportunity, following the ending of the Year 9 statutory tests, to refresh their Key Stage 3 schemes of work. The best schools provided students with tasks that had practical outcomes beyond the classroom, thus reinforcing the importance and relevance of the subject, but this was not common enough across the survey schools.
8. Although the survey uncovered areas of good practice, the quality of transition between Key Stages 2 and 3 in English was too often no better than satisfactory. The lack of regular communication and exchange of ideas between primary and secondary schools created problems for continuity in teaching and assessment. There was similar evidence about whole-school literacy. This report includes some examples of good practice but the majority of schools visited did not have systematic procedures in place to develop good literacy practice across all departments.

9. The survey found that too few schools gave enough thought to ways of encouraging the love of reading, and a sizeable minority of pupils failed to reach national expectations in reading. The teaching of writing was variable in quality, with too little attention given to spelling and handwriting.
10. Leadership and management were judged to be good or outstanding in most schools surveyed. More secondary than primary schools had outstanding leadership and management. The report links this with the lack of subject specialists in primary schools and suggests that this is one of the reasons for slower improvement in English in primary schools.

### Recommendations (page 7)

#### The Department for Education should:

1. publish research on the teaching of writing, drawing on national and international publications, to include the effective teaching of spelling and handwriting, and how boys can be helped to become successful writers.
2. provide support in order to increase the number of specialist English teachers in primary schools and to improve the subject knowledge of existing English coordinators in primary schools.

#### All schools should:

3. develop policies to promote reading for enjoyment throughout the school.
4. ensure that preparation for national tests and examinations is appropriate, does not begin too early, and does not limit the range of the curriculum or pupils' opportunities for creativity in English.
5. improve transition and continuity in curriculum and assessment in English between Key Stages 2 and 3.
6. simplify lesson plans in English to concentrate on the key learning objectives and encourage teachers to be more flexible in responding to pupils' progress as lessons develop.

#### Nursery and primary schools should also:

7. develop a structured programme for improving children's communication skills in the Early Years Foundation Stage
8. secure pupils' early reading skills by the end of Key Stage 1.

#### Secondary schools should also:

9. ensure that the English curriculum at Key Stage 3 has a clear and distinct purpose that is explained to students and builds in, where possible, tasks, audiences and purposes that engage students with the world beyond the classroom.
10. strengthen whole-school literacy work across all departments to ensure that students extend and consolidate their literacy skills in all appropriate contexts.

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