

A Joint Report by the Education and Training Inspectorate and the Department of Education and Skills Inspectorate on Promoting and Improving Literacy in Post-Primary Schools

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Glossary of abbreviations and terminology used in commentary extracts and report

AfL	Assessment for Learning
CAT	Cognitive Ability Tests
DE	Department of Education
DES	Department of Education and Skills
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
ETI	Education and Training Inspectorate
GCE	General Certificate of Education – see appendix 9.2
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education – see appendix 9.2
HODs	Heads of Department
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
JCSP	The Junior Certificate School Programme is a national intervention for potential early school leavers
KS	Key Stage – see appendix 9.2
LOPs	Levels of Progression
New Group Reading Test	A standardised assessment of reading literacy
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PDST	Professional Development Service for Teachers
PIE	Progress in English – A standardised assessment of a pupil's reading and writing ability.
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
QWC	Quality of Written Communication – assessed in public examinations in the North
SSE	School Self-Evaluation
Together Towards Improvement	ETI document to aid school self-evaluation
TY	Transition Year – a one-year programme taken after Junior Cycle and before Leaving Certificate programme which acts as a bridge between the two.

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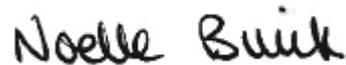
Foreword

This report builds upon important collaborative work involving the Education and Training Inspectorate and the Department of Education And Skills Inspectorate over many years.

Recent work on literacy has been of major importance to both jurisdictions on the island, arising from the realisation that a good quality of teaching and learning in literacy is essential for the learner's success in all areas of learning. This report follows on similar work undertaken in primary schools in the recent past, but moves the focus to literacy and the adolescent learner.

The fact that each author of this report had the opportunity, as part of the North-South Inspector Exchange programme, to work alongside their counterpart in the other jurisdiction strengthens the basis for this work.

We welcome this publication and commend it to all with an interest in education but especially to those whose work relates to the promotion of high standards of literacy. In doing so, we wish to extend our gratitude to the inspectors, from both Inspectorates, who compiled this report, namely: Elizabeth Armour (ETI) and Kevin O'Donovan (DES Inspectorate).



Harold Hislop, Chief Inspector DES

Noelle Buick, Chief Inspector ETI

1. Introduction

Under the North/South Ministerial Council, the Literacy and Numeracy Working Group, commissioned the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) and the Department of Education and Skills (DES) Inspectorate to research and report jointly on the key features of successful teaching and learning in literacy and numeracy at primary level.¹ Following the success of this joint venture, the Working Group commissioned two further reports to identify best practice at post-primary level. This report is the first² of these and focuses explicitly on how best to promote and improve literacy across the curriculum.

Whereas in the past, the role of developing the literacy skills of students was seen as the sole preserve of the English department, increasingly the importance of our young people being able to use and apply these skills in various contexts has been recognised and highlighted. Both departments, Department of Education (DE) and the DES, have developed and launched new strategies (*Count, Read: Succeed*, DE, 2011; and *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life*, DES, 2011) in which this broader perspective has been emphasised.

In recent years, each Inspectorate has published separately reports on English at post-primary level, but the aim of this report is to extend the focus beyond the English classroom and take a broader perspective on how best to develop the literacy skills of our young people. To this end, the report will identify good practice in literacy across the curriculum. Furthermore, to engage the reader – namely, school and subject leaders and teachers in post-primary schools – and to provide exemplars of good practice the report includes extracts from commentaries written by the ten participating schools.

The findings of the report are informed predominantly by joint visits to four schools – two in the North and two in the South (see appendix 1). The visits included lesson observations and meetings with relevant personnel, including the subject leaders/heads of department (HoDs) of other subjects. The lessons visited included subjects which the schools identified as having a significant impact on their students' literacy development. Each school was also invited to write a commentary on its literacy provision, how it is managed and the effect it has had.

In addition to the four schools visited, three other schools in each jurisdiction were also invited to write a commentary.

2. Why is literacy important?

A recent European Union report spoke of a 'literacy crisis that affects every country in Europe' and highlighted its central importance in the life-chances available to young people:

If smart growth is about knowledge and innovation, investment in literacy skills is a prerequisite for achieving such growth... Our world is dominated by the written word, both online and in print. This means we can only contribute and participate actively if we can read and write sufficiently well. But, each year, hundreds of thousands of children start their secondary school two years behind in reading; some leave even further behind their peers...

¹ <http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/surveys-evaluations/surveys-evaluations-primary/surveys-evaluations-primary-2010/a-joint-report-by-eti-and-des-on-how-best-to-promote-and-improve-literacy-and-numeracy-in-our-schools-dec-2010.pdf>

² The second report being the companion report focusing on numeracy.

Literacy is about people's ability to function in society as private individuals, active citizens, employees or parents... Literacy is about people's self-esteem, their interaction with others, their health and employability. Ultimately, literacy is about whether a society is fit for the future.

EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy, 2012

Clarity regarding what is meant by the term 'literacy' is also necessary here. Current research regarding the nature of literacy is encapsulated by the following definitions from both jurisdictions:

Literacy is the ability to read and use written information and to write appropriately and legibly, taking account of different purposes, contexts, conventions and audiences. It involves the development of: an integrated approach to the acquisition of talking, listening, reading and writing skills across the curriculum; knowledge that allows a speaker, writer and reader to use language appropriate to different social situations; formal and informal language across all areas of social interaction.

Count Read: Succeed – a strategy to improve outcomes in literacy and numeracy

Traditionally we have thought about **literacy** as the skills of reading and writing; but today our understanding of literacy encompasses much more than that. Literacy includes the capacity to read, understand and critically appreciate various forms of communication including spoken language, printed text, broadcast media, and digital media ... when we refer to "literacy" we mean this broader understanding of the skill, including speaking and listening, as well as communication using not only the traditional writing and print but also digital media.

*Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life:
The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People*

These definitions are further supported by the view of literacy outlined in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) which assesses adolescent students' reading performance across a range of countries. The report for PISA 2012 noted:

PISA defines reading literacy as understanding, using, reflecting on and engaging with written texts, in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential and to participate in society (OECD, 2009) ... PISA's conception of reading literacy encompasses the range of situations in which people read, the different ways written texts are presented through different media, and the variety of ways that readers approach and use texts, from the functional and finite, such as finding a particular piece of practical information, to the deep and far-reaching, such as understanding others ways of doing, thinking and being.

PISA 2012 Results: What Students Know and Can Do

Thus literacy involves not only reading and writing, but also talking and listening, as well as the capacity to use and appreciate language critically across all areas of social interaction, including the digital realm. It is important to note that, encompassed by these definitions, is the idea that literacy is relevant to all learners.

3. What challenges are associated with developing adolescent literacy?

In recent years the importance of maintaining an emphasis on literacy development beyond the primary school has come to the fore. Current thinking regarding the particular literacy challenges faced by adolescents is of particular relevance in the context of this report. A significant challenge in this area is the belief which suggests that all literacy learning is completed in the years of primary education. However ongoing support for the continued development of adolescents' literacy skills throughout the years of post-primary education is vital across all subjects for a range of reasons.

Growing up, and in adult life, **learners** are faced with literacy demands and tasks of increasing complexity: texts are longer and vary across subject areas; sentence length and complexity increase; conceptual challenges increase; graphic presentations occur with greater frequency and can make texts more, rather than less complicated. Therefore the learners must acquire new vocabulary in and across subjects; they must become more adept in the appropriate use of varied comprehension strategies; they must be familiar with the use of language to support thinking skills across a range of disciplines; and they must draw upon more extensive background knowledge. This will enable the learners to access learning in all subject areas and in their adult lives. The challenge faced by the adolescent learner is summed up in the following excerpt from the position statement on adolescent literacy of the International Reading Association:

As texts become increasingly complex, multimodal, and necessary for discipline-specific learning, middle and high school students must adapt by using more advanced, specific strategies for deeper understanding and composing.

Public: International Reading Association, 2012

It is also worth noting that, in research over recent years a particular focus has been placed on a number of key elements that ensure effective support for the development of adolescent literacy across subject areas in mainstream classrooms. In particular, these include:

- explicit teaching of vocabulary;
- explicit teaching of comprehension strategies;
- opportunities for extended discussion of texts;
- increasing student motivation for and engagement with literacy activities; and
- making available intensive individualized interventions for struggling readers that can be provided by qualified specialists.

National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, 2008

A further challenge is the manner in which the “literacy practices in adolescents’ lives ... often are disconnected from the academic literacy demands students are required to meet in school” (*International Reading Association, 2012*). While many school activities may be based ‘almost exclusively on print,’ the out-of-school literacy practices of adolescents are ‘increasingly digital: a significant challenge facing teachers and schools’ (*Final report of the EU High Level Group of experts on literacy, 2012*). The motivation of all adolescents could be ‘further encouraged by in-school reading materials that resonate with out-of-school preferences,’ (*Final report of the EU High Level Group of experts on literacy, 2012*).

4. What is good literacy pedagogy for adolescents?

In both jurisdictions recent inspection reports, as well as visits made as part of this project, highlighted the need for high expectations on the part of teachers with regard to the learners’ achievement in literacy. For *teachers* of all subjects this means asking the question, ‘How can I best meet the literacy needs of the adolescent learners in front of me?’ It means thinking about the kinds of literacy experiences provided for young people. These experiences will sometimes be provided through collaborative working with other departments; but the greatest impact for the learners will come from all practitioners, in all learning environments, ensuring that, through innovative and creative pedagogy, all the learners will be able to enjoy and develop their language skills. They will be encouraged to experiment and take risks with language, allowing them to explore, discover and develop their understanding and use of language. The quality of teaching and learning in literacy across the curriculum is therefore fundamental to adolescents’ success in the post-primary school. Teaching and learning must be planned and designed to move all the learners from where they are to where they need to be. To this end, it is important that good practice is identified and shared in order to help promote continuing improvement.

Teachers in all subjects must be conscious of their responsibility to act as role models in the use of language. Approaches predicated on this view of teachers’ responsibilities were evident in the schools that participated in this project. In all areas of the curriculum teachers should create opportunities to develop the learners’ vocabulary and interest in language as an essential support for learning. The explicit teaching of comprehension skills should be employed, where appropriate, across the curriculum.

Teaching and learning in the development of literacy skills is of a high quality when:

- good questioning is used to promote learning and understanding for all;
- the learners feel confident to reflect and take time to respond, question and seek help;
- promotion of talking and listening, leading to high-level thinking skills is a regular feature of lessons;
- teachers enthuse the learners to develop an awareness and understanding of vocabulary and the potential and power of language with regard to their learning;
- the learners are given the opportunity to talk about their learning and refine their skills in talking and listening, reading and writing;
- the appropriate use of a wide variety of comprehension strategies is explicitly taught;

- a positive disposition towards listening, speaking, reading and writing is promoted;
- the learners are given the opportunity to work in effectively organised pairs and groups as a means of developing their literacy skills, their understanding and knowledge;
- teachers facilitate the learners in developing their oral, reading and writing skills through a scaffolded approach, moving at an appropriate pace from fully supported work, to semi-independent and finally to independent work; and
- ICT is used effectively to support the learners' literacy development and engagement with language.

The development of the learners' oral language is fundamental to their literacy development within and across subjects. It is important that the language of the learners' everyday lives is acknowledged and respected. However, the learners should also have an understanding of the types of oral language that should be used across other contexts and when addressing different audiences. In particular, teachers should plan explicitly for the learning they expect to take place as a result of talking and listening. The language of the subject disciplines should be modelled and promoted by classroom teachers, with the classroom presenting plentiful opportunities for the learners to use this language themselves in discussions with their peers and their teachers. This is essential as such approaches will in turn inform and support the learners' reading, writing and thinking skills.

Glanmire Community College, Glanmire, County Cork – Promoting talking and listening

Following on from our initial focus on reading, it was decided to focus on the skills of speaking and listening. After an informative staff workshop on the principles of group-work, facilitated by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), members of staff were encouraged to: provide repeated exposure to and use of new vocabulary; model good speaking and listening, demonstrating high expectations; provide opportunities for structured group work; engage in appropriate use of 'wait time'; provide opportunities for open, extended discussion; use clear lines of questioning including lower and higher order questions to stimulate students' responses; explain concepts clearly and model effective use of language; provide students with helpful feedback which supports the development of speaking and listening; provide opportunities for peer and self-evaluation of listening and speaking tasks; and create opportunities for oral assessment at the end of chapters, topics and tasks.

St Mary's College, Derry – Developing thinking skills

Recent whole-school staff training has also focused on the importance of effective questioning in the classroom and developing a shared understanding among staff about how effective questioning promotes higher order thinking skills. A standard feature of in-service training is the dissemination of good practice and three teachers recently, for example, shared their experience of effective questioning with the staff body. The teachers involved represented different departments in the school, including English. Departments followed up this session by then reviewing their current approach to questioning and identifying questioning techniques to promote higher order thinking skills in their subject area.

In the post-primary school, the learners will encounter an ever-widening range of new and complex vocabulary. Supporting the learners in acquiring, understanding, retaining and using new vocabulary is of relevance in all subject areas through oral, reading and writing activities. Alongside subject-specific words that are connected to a specific subject discipline, schools also need to attend to those less familiar words that may be outside of the learner's immediate experiences. Teaching word parts such as suffixes, prefixes and roots; using context clues; encouraging dictionary use; fostering word consciousness; and encouraging wide reading are all approaches that can support the further development of the adolescent learners' vocabulary (*National Center for Reading First, 2008*).

St Joseph's Boys' High School, Newry, County Down – Extending the learners' vocabulary

We have introduced VOCP – vocabulary/openings/connectives and punctuation in ALL English rooms and within the reading room. As a school there is a focus on basics – spelling, punctuation, vocabulary and reading. Oral language and the development of knowledge are highly encouraged in each class. We have a whole-school strategy for spelling and presentation of pupils' work including training for staff on the best way to teach spelling. We have created a vocabulary booklet which is integrated into the English department's spelling scheme. This is coupled with a universal wall display of spelling strategies tailored to subject needs. This is now being generated for all departments. There is an 'open-door' policy within the English department for literacy advice to staff across the whole-school.

Donahies Community School, Dublin – All teachers are teachers of literacy

In our school we have created an environment where all teachers are teachers of literacy and not just individual subjects. The teachers in our school try to raise the literacy levels of their pupils regardless of what subject they are doing. We have focussed a lot on creating a print-rich environment where our classrooms will have display materials. Each classroom also has a red keyword notice board where key words that are subject related are displayed. In our school we believe vocabulary enrichment can help us improve literacy levels. To this end all teachers regularly pre-teach vocabulary at the start of lessons. We have developed vocabulary booklets to help us to do this. The students build up a database of new words to use in this manner. We have also tried to develop digital literacy in the school with a laptop initiative. Identified classes work on programmes on the laptops such as Lexia, Comic Life and Inspiration. In our school we view spelling as very important to helping students improve their literacy levels. We have a spelling bee in December of every year with first year students. Class teachers prepare individual classes for the spelling bee.

As with many areas of adolescent learning, motivation is a key factor in supporting literacy development. With this in mind, opportunities to converse and co-operate with peers in literacy-related activities; providing a range of options when choosing texts; building students' confidence in their own reading ability; and linking with the types of literacy activities, including digital literacy, that the learners engage with in the world outside of school, are all worth considering as a means of advancing learning.

Banbridge Academy, County Down – Promoting a positive view of literacy

A range of initiatives is organised to promote a positive view of literacy activities. These include writing competitions, spelling bees and a readathon. These are linked internally with the school's house system, or externally with relevant organisations. A number of assessment instruments are used to provide baseline and benchmark data, including standardised tests, formative assessment marks, and internal examination results. We seek to address underachievement in literacy through tailored support for those students in need of additional help – 'Helping Hands' is a scheme which creates a mentoring role for senior students in this area, while 'Reading Partnership' utilises the time and experience of our classroom assistants.

St Angela's College, Cork – Student-led literacy

There are 25 students in this Transition Year module, including three visiting students who speak English as an additional language. The students renamed the class 'Reading Revolution' and set about devising their aims for the year. There are many roles within the group. Each student has been assigned their own role with the understanding that they may be needed to perform other functions as events arise. Examples include class secretaries, project managers, literacy noticeboard monitors, bloggers, red wall monitors, photographers and public relations managers.

The students have planned a number of projects aimed at raising awareness about literacy in the school and make reading a fun habit. They began their awareness campaign by running a Bookmark competition for first years with first prize as a €15 voucher. As we approach Halloween they have organised a Short Story Competition among first and second years with the Halloween theme. Similar events are planned for the different high points of the year, Christmas, Valentines, and Easter. Literacy Notice boards (Red Walls) have been established on each of the school's four floors and have a consistent red border to tie into the Reading Revolution's red colour scheme. Each notice board focuses on a different theme. For example one notice board is all about a particular author (September was Seamus Heaney). Another includes a "word of the week" with an emphasis on digital literacy.

5. How can literacy be led, co-ordinated and promoted in post-primary schools?

The organisation of post-primary schools presents particular challenges in ensuring a cross-curricular approach to literacy. For example, post-primary schools may be separated into different subject 'silos', all of which make particular, often differing, demands regarding the learners' literacy skills. While generic literacy strategies are important across the curriculum, the particular literacy demands of different subjects should also be considered in applying them.

High quality teaching must therefore be supported by effective whole-school policies and frameworks, and clearly targeted at all the learners' needs and prior learning. This view is underlined by this comment from one of the schools that participated in this project:

Dean Maguirc College, Carrickmore, County Tyrone – Promoting literacy across the school

We feel that high standards of literacy are now no longer the domain merely of the English department, rather this is demanded across the entire school especially now that the Quality of Written Communication will be rewarded in almost all GCSE subjects. After a staff training session led by the literacy co-ordinator, middle leaders decided that a drive throughout the school for all teachers would be: demanding higher quality spelling, punctuation and grammar from all pupils, regardless of the subject. Therefore our effective practise during Key Stage 3 (KS3), which commences at the very beginning of year 8, leads to continued motivation and endeavour at Key Stage 4 (KS4); moreover our endeavour to ensure all pupils have the same English teacher from year 8 to 12 allows us to build very productive and effective working relationships.

Schools now accept the fact that teachers of all subjects can no longer be bystanders when it comes to promoting literacy. To bring about improvement, however, committed leadership at all levels must support and enable the development of good practice. Pedagogy that promotes literacy is a combination of many components and characteristics. It is about being clear about 'what the learner can already do' and 'what they need to do to develop and/or improve'. It will help to ensure that whole-school planning for teaching and learning promotes and develops literacy skills in an exciting, innovative manner, using literary, non-literary and digital texts that will engage, enthuse and inspire the learners. Literacy must feature strongly in the whole-school-development plan for teaching, learning and assessment. It is important that teachers are given opportunities to develop their own expertise in promoting literacy through participation in continuing professional development.

Leadership and whole-school planning and co-ordination in relation to literacy are of a high quality when:

- there is a strong and sustained commitment on the part of senior leaders which is reflected in the planning, monitoring and evaluation of actions and impact;
- there is leadership for literacy at all levels of the school community;
- a core-committee is established from a broad range of subjects to co-ordinate and support literacy development within the school;
- appropriate time is provided for in-service training;
- opportunities are created to allow for good practice to be shared;
- whole-school literacy focuses not only on initiatives external to the classroom, but maintains a strong emphasis on what is happening in classrooms; and
- literacy forms a consistent strand in the school development plan and actions are implemented through an effective and sustained school self-evaluation process.

St Mary's College, Derry - Literacy as a whole-school priority

Literacy development is a whole-school priority in St Mary's school development plan. In this way, all teachers, regardless of the subject they teach, help pupils improve their literacy skills by creating opportunities to promote reading, writing, talking and listening as well as personal, interpersonal and team-working skills, important for life and the world of work. We firmly believe that it's literacy that unlocks access to the wider curriculum and helps pupils become lifelong learners.

There are a number of key people involved in driving the literacy focus throughout the school. Two members of staff have recently taken up senior leadership posts which focus on raising standards in both literacy and numeracy. Both senior leaders work closely with the Heads of English, the literacy coordinator and the head of learning support. All heads of department annually identify and address literacy in their development plans, schemes of work and individual education plans for pupils on the learning support register, therefore aligning departmental priorities with whole-school priorities. In this way there is a direct link and shared vision between the Principal, senior leadership team, HODs and classroom teachers. In addition to this, a raising standards strategy team meet and direct the literacy agenda, ensuring and monitoring how the school wide focus on literacy impacts on pupils' learning experience in every lesson. These internal structures help ensure that St Mary's pupils experience a classroom and school environment which is rich in language and which seeks to build pupils' confidence and competence in all aspects of literacy.

Greenhills College, Dublin – The literacy team

Over the last number of years raising the standard of literacy has become a priority in Greenhills College. We have a whole-school approach to literacy including the English department, core team, members of the learning support department and all other subject departments. A literacy team was set up in the school with a number of set targets focussed on improving reading scores, widening students' vocabulary and participation in a number of our initiatives. At the beginning of each year we hold a book fair where students choose a book they are going to read. In November we hold our Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) week. Following this all students have a book in the bag which they can read during any free time or for five minutes at the end of any class subject if the teacher says so. Teachers have been asked to try this once a week in their subject. Students can exchange their books during their library class or at lunch time/library time each day. Students are then challenged to see how many books they can read between DEAR and February mid-term. First year students and their parents are surveyed on their attitudes to reading. The students are again surveyed at the end of the year to see if there is a change of attitude. When students have completed a book they write a short review on leaf shaped paper and this is put up on the Reading Tree.

Christian Brothers College, Cork – Sharing and developing a vision for literacy

Literacy has always been a part of the Christian Brothers College (CBC) education experience. Management has used staff meetings and internal professional development to share and develop a vision for literacy as a fundamental in all subjects – a view that more effective learning can result from a greater awareness of the role literacy plays in every teacher's classroom. The Literacy Committee reports to management and makes presentations at staff meetings. Above all, our goal is to encourage the sharing of experience and good practice between teachers. A range of initiatives throughout the school has begun which strongly support CBC's commitment to developing all aspects of students' literacy skills.

Christian Brothers College, Cork – Leadership and the provision of internal continuous professional development

As a result of developments in Transition Year teachers recognised the potential that existed in assessment for learning (AfL) for empowering students to engage with the process of learning and assessment in a more meaningful way. Again influenced by the encouragement we received at whole-school level through the provision of continuing professional development (CPD) on new methodologies, we used our subject meeting process to explore ways in which we could incorporate AfL methods into our existing practices in the classroom. Teachers were encouraged to share ideas and to put AfL rubrics that they had devised and used into the subject folder on the staff server. A dedicated AfL sub-folder was created to emphasise the importance of the process, something we felt was preferable to saving AfL files to specific folders such as Poetry or Personal Writing.

As a result of the increased use of AfL and portfolio work in English, teachers were invited by management to speak about our experiences with the full staff at CPD afternoons with a view to encouraging other subject departments to consider further incorporating these methods into their own planning and practice.

Dean Maguirc College, County Tyrone – Initiatives to support literacy development

When pupils are identified as having literacy problems, we aim to intervene as quickly as possible thus we invite pupils to participate in our long standing literacy interventions: The lunchtime Spelling club, The Paired Reading programme and the Reading Partnership programme. Pupils are tested pre and post intervention and their parents are informed of any improvement.

Banbridge Academy, County Down – Internal self-evaluation

Highly effective use of self-evaluation by senior leadership, careful planning and informed preparation all contribute to the pupils' literacy development. We try to encourage pupils to write in a mature, sophisticated and reflective manner through particular emphasis on tone, techniques and style. In Key Stages 3 and 4 there is a very strong infusion of language and literature. We focus on developing a sophisticated, technical vocabulary which is demonstrated through the pupils' written work and also through their ability to express appreciation of the writer's craft.

Holy Trinity College, Cookstown, County Tyrone – Commitment of senior leadership

Improving standards of literacy is a challenge for all schools but one which Holy Trinity College embraces every day. The senior leadership team (SLT), teachers and support staff work closely to tackle underachievement in these areas. The SLT recognise the centrality of developing literacy and numeracy and they are at the heart of the school development plan and feature as a whole-school objective in performance review and staff development. Additional teaching time, smaller groups and a setting arrangement are practical and effective means of enabling progression in these all important areas. The SLT adopt a proactive approach to raising standards of literacy and numeracy and this is an integral part of strategic planning. They ensure that effective use is made of baseline data such as 'Progress in English' scores as well as information from CATs in Years 8 and 11 so that all staff are aware of each child's potential. Personalised targets based on data are set for each pupil and these targets are kept under regular review by SLT, HODs, subject teachers and form teachers, all of whom have access to pupils' results. In other words, everyone is held accountable, the evidence or trajectory of progress is available for all to see and everyone therefore takes responsibility and ownership for each pupil's performance within their subject.

Regular classroom visits are conducted by the Principal to ensure that classroom delivery is at its very best. To have teachers discussing pedagogy, effective questioning, and the principles of a good lesson during departmental meetings, can only encourage professional dialogue and a professional community to ensure that learning is at the heart of every lesson.

6. What constitutes effective planning for literacy?

It was evident from the schools visited during this project that good planning for the development of the learners' literacy skills is essential when trying to bring about improvement. There is nothing random about developing and promoting literacy within English and within other areas of the curriculum. Consequently, planning is vital for the effective support of the learners' literacy development.

Planning for literacy development is of a high quality when it:

- is built upon what has gone before;
- gives appropriate cognisance to the work that has been undertaken in primary schools;
- is based upon evidence of students' learning and uses this evidence as a base for the next steps in teaching and learning;
- establishes clearly what and how the pupil will learn, understand or do;

- places appropriate emphasis on listening and talking, reading and writing; and
- provides the learners with the opportunity to acquire and develop wider experiences for thinking, learning and interacting in personal, social and work contexts throughout life.

The need to have effective transition arrangements between primary and post-primary schools is of great importance in ensuring the smooth progression of learning for adolescents. The most recent Chief Inspector's Reports in both jurisdictions have highlighted this point, with the Chief Inspector in Northern Ireland 2010-12 noting:

A key challenge ... is to improve transitional arrangements between organisations in order to overcome the regression that can occur at these points. It is therefore imperative that all organisations are able to correlate each learner's achievements with their potential and that, where necessary, interventions are applied swiftly and appropriately to combat both low achievement and underachievement

This finding is reflected in research conducted by the *Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI)* in 2007 that found that entry to lower secondary school in the South leads to gradual decline in academic motivation, self-perception, and school-related behaviours over the early adolescent years with the percentage of students describing schoolwork as interesting, for example, falling to just above 50% by the end of second year and a similar number having negative attitudes to homework by the time they reach third year. As exemplified by participating schools, limiting the negative impact of transition from primary to post-primary is essential in facilitating higher achievement and preventing students from developing negative attitudes to school.

Dean Maguirc College, County Tyrone – Linking with feeder primary schools

In late June students who will be joining our school in September have their Induction Day. This day includes a fun element and enables pupils to meet their new classmates but we also use this day to carry out literacy testing through standardised tests and a piece of personal writing. Traditionally we carried out this testing in September but decided that the long summer holidays did not allow pupils to do themselves justice. We ensure that our pupils settle into English quickly and confidently with our transitional unit 'Myself' taught in September. This unit features artwork, talking and listening exercises and paired/group work as the pupils learn to write autobiographically and the skills of self-assessment and redrafting are re-introduced.

Further test results become available for teachers to analyse and interpret in October time. During staff development the literacy co-ordinator and special educational needs co-ordinator discuss this analysed data with all staff. All units of work are fully differentiated for each class although the schemes of work are the same. We are very proud of the challenging and motivational units we teach which inspire pupil performance and result in almost 100% of pupil commitment and enjoyment of their teaching and learning experiences.

St Joseph's College, Newry, County Down – Building on what has gone before

Robust baseline testing evidenced a range of difficulties in the Year 8 cohort identifying between 58% and 89% of new intake pupils scoring below the average mean score of 100. This year, the English department introduced an online standardised test 'Progress in English' to provide more information to help identify pupils' particular areas of difficulty. Diagnostic profiles on each pupil have been prepared and provided across the whole-school to HODs. This information, in addition to assisting the English teachers, also assisted the special educational needs co-ordinator in the identification of any new special needs concerns and whole-school strategies for literacy support. Central to these strategies was the sharing of all data with all teaching staff and the up-skilling of classroom assistants, so that they were able to address the literacy needs of the pupils they support.

Glanmire Community College, Glanmire, County Cork – Linking previous and future learning

As an initial starting point to explicitly address literacy in the school, the literacy committee decided to examine the reading habits of first year students. A number of focus group interviews were held with existing first year students to determine if the focus on reading habits was a worthwhile endeavour. Following conversations with these groups, it was apparent that most students did not read on a regular basis and many claimed that they did not enjoy reading. Consequently, it was decided by the literacy committee to focus our attention on incoming first years, with a specific emphasis on improving both the frequency of reading and attitudes towards reading amongst this cohort. A baseline survey was conducted to determine the reading habits and attitudes to reading of all incoming first year students. The results of the survey found that a sizable minority (30%) stated that they never or rarely read, whilst less than half (47%) of students rated themselves as competent readers.

Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) Project

To support the achievement of our initial objectives, we decided to introduce a Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) project on a weekly basis. Further investigation found that this initiative operated successfully in a number of similar schools and was well liked and successful amongst this age cohort. Management fully supported this initiative.

At the beginning of May the initial survey was repeated with all first year students. The results showed that more students now read more regularly, with a 17% increase in the number of students who stated that they now read occasionally. However, what perhaps could be considered the most important finding in the survey, was the increase in the number of students who consider that their ability to read and subsequent confidence had improved since the project began; 11% more students now felt they were competent readers at the end of the project than chose this category initially.

Holy Trinity College, Cookstown, County Tyrone – Provides the learners with the opportunity to acquire and develop wider experiences for thinking, learning and interacting

Developing learners' thinking skills and personal capabilities is central to teaching. Teachers regard themselves as facilitators and employ a range of active learning and teaching strategies as well as the regular use of ICT. There is an increased emphasis on careers education, information, advice and guidance and the linking of English schemes of work to real life. Learners are increasingly involved in the setting of personal targets and are in discussions with their class teachers about their progress. Increased use of self and peer evaluations allow pupils to become more independent and to assume greater responsibility for their learning.

St Angela's College, Cork – Placing appropriate emphasis on listening and talking

The idea for a 'SALAD' (Speaking and Listening Active Discussion) day arose from some reading undertaken by the school's literacy team and the literacy link teacher. To begin the day, two English classes were brought together and we enacted group work based around Sylvia Plath (for which the students had prepared through homework the night before) for the lesson.

Students had a list of questions (which varied from group to group) that had been compiled by the students themselves as part of their homework earlier in the week. The questions all related to Plath - the poet they had just finished studying. After a period of discussion, the observer of the group then had to present a one minute summation of their group's discussion to the two classes. The observer had to present for one minute without hesitation or repetition while highlighting what they thought were the most interesting points of the group's discussion and any disagreements the group had. Other staff members in subjects besides English employed a variety of methodologies including role plays, hot seating, walking debates, student presentations, oral language practise (modern foreign languages), group work, and partner work.

7. How can assessment support the development of literacy?

Assessment is an essential part of classroom practice helping to promote and demonstrate improvement for the learner and the teacher. Informal and formal assessments constitute integral parts of all teaching and learning. They guide the teacher in future planning while helping the learner to become more responsible and motivated towards his/her learning. With this in mind, it is important that the learner is aware of his/her progress during and at the end of each topic. Formative and summative assessment should play an important role in the development of the learners' literacy skills. Assessment that supports the development of the learners' literacy skills is of a high quality when:

- learning intentions not only focus on the subject but explicitly identify the literacy skills to be developed;
- opportunities are provided to share and mediate the relevant literacy learning intentions with the learners;
- marking and assessment give the learners the opportunity and expertise to improve;
- appropriate questioning allows the teacher to assess and promote the learning and understanding of the learners;
- the learners acquire the skills and dispositions to peer-assess and self-assess their own work and that of others sensitively and usefully;
- it leads to further improvement when the literacy requirements are made explicit;
- AfL strategies are a consistent element in classroom practice; and
- appropriate use is made of screening and diagnostic testing.

Banbridge Academy, County Down – AfL

Aspects of AfL, such as, effective and skilful questioning are crucial for us in eliciting confident, articulate and informed pupil responses. Formative assessment which is clear and focused, and where success criteria are openly discussed and agreed by teacher and pupils, is vital in producing high level responses. A focus on pedagogy is also crucial as we use a variety of teaching approaches, from teacher directed to active learning. It is this balance that facilitates high levels of enthusiasm and engagement, with pupils aware that their responses are valued and that we have high expectations for them.

Formal and informal assessment, incorporating teacher observation of the learner, are integral parts of the teaching and learning process. However, information gathered in this way can be underpinned with effective and judicious use of data. Schools are generally adept at gathering data; the analysis of this data and subsequent actions taken are, however, the key drivers in ensuring that the learner improves and progresses. The use of data to inform future planning for teaching and learning is essential in order to ensure progression and coherence in the learners' experiences.

St Mary's College, Derry – Using data effectively

A range of assessment instruments, including standardised and diagnostic tests are used to identify underachieving pupils. English teachers are involved in the review and interpretation of this data and findings are discussed at department meetings where interventions are planned. This information is also shared with school management and year heads, encouraging a collective approach to tackling underachievement. As well as using the above data, we have also started to make more strategic use of internal data from assessments to monitor and track pupil progress.

Marking for improvement

As a school, we realise the importance of a standardised marking approach to facilitate the meaningful review and monitoring of pupil progress. Therefore, to support the introduction of this initiative, all learning tasks and their outcomes will be monitored by the school's quality assurance team which consists of both members of senior leadership team and teaching staff. In an attempt to ensure consistency in standards, including literacy standards, subject teachers will be asked to submit two marked samples of each learning at home assessment completed by his/her classes to HoDs. HoDs, where necessary, will make recommendations about the learning at home assessment. As part of this whole-school approach to raising standards, departments will then be randomly selected and asked to submit three marked learning at home assessments (top, middle and bottom) from each year group (Yr8 –Yr10) to members of the quality assurance team. The quality assurance team will consider the samples and provide feedback on issues such as the suitability of the task, evidence of marking for improvement and success criteria. The findings of the quality assurance team will then be reported to the HoDs and the senior leadership team. HoDs will review the learning at home assessments in light of their own findings and those of the quality assurance team. All subject teachers have been involved in the design of these learning at home assessments which have pupil-friendly assessment criteria and promote pupil self-evaluation.

Greenhills College, Dublin – Using data effectively

New students sit an entrance exam during the spring before they enter Greenhills College. The test used for reading and comprehension is the New Group Reading Test. The results of the assessment are analysed and any students that score a standard score below 90 are followed up on. We seek to improve the reading scores of students through a variety of actions and supports in junior cycle. For example, students with difficulties in literacy development receive additional tuition to address this area. Some students follow Catch up Literacy and teachers utilise the JCSP statements with their students in class. These provide clear learning outcomes which support the learning of all students. In addition, paired reading, library lessons, author's visits and a strong focus on the development of vocabulary by subject teachers all support students' reading and writing skills. Assessments are subsequently undertaken in April of first year and April of second year. Reading scores are again analysed to track students' improvement and learning needs.

Christian Brothers College, Cork – Self-regulated learning

Because the focus in Transition Year in the college is on encouraging students to develop an independent learning approach and openness to new ideas, our subject department members felt that we should look at our own classroom assessment practices as a means of furthering these goals. With this in mind we devoted time at our subject meetings to discussing strategies we successfully employed in our own individual class groups. As a result it was agreed that we would introduce portfolio work on a pilot basis. It was agreed that this strategy had the potential to empower the learner to engage in a process of self-regulated learning, while at the same time allowing for teacher oversight and evidence-based planning for the future.

A document was produced, outlining the brief for the students and setting out the assessment of their work. In this case the portfolio would constitute 20% of their summer examination. There was also provision made for a review process at the end of the pilot year. From this review, it was agreed that the experience of portfolios was overwhelmingly positive but that opportunities existed for introducing an element of AfL into the process of assessment. In the second year of the portfolio approach, AfL was used, resulting for students in a greater level of task awareness, awareness of assessment criteria and a stronger overall sense of partnership in the learning process.

The success of portfolio work and AfL in Transition Year had a positive knock-on effect on the department's approach to assessment in other year groups also. Following a subject inspection of English by the DES in the college in December 2012, it was suggested that we should consider introducing portfolios at first year level too. The subject department agreed that this would be an interesting and potentially rewarding development and through scheduled meetings made preparations for introducing this for the 2013/14 academic year. As with the Transition Year process, the use of portfolios will be reviewed at the end of the current academic year.

Glanmire Community College, Cork – Assessment informs the next stage of planning for teaching and learning

Collaborative learning, with a particular emphasis on group work (including pair-work), was chosen as the principle methodology to be used in class to enhance speaking and listening skills. These dialogic approaches have been shown to be highly effective in supporting learning and oral literacy. In keeping with the school's planning process, members of staff will create opportunities to gather baseline data by conducting initial assessments as part of the school's October assessment process. Teachers have been provided with sample speaking and presentation rubrics which may be amended according to the task being evaluated. The findings and recommendations based on teachers' experiences will be discussed at the next staff meeting. This feedback will then provide the springboard and direction for the next phase of implementation.

8. The way forward

In the future, a greater emphasis should be placed on building on and advancing the literacy skills that the learners have been taught in the primary school as they move into their adolescent years. Teachers, school leaders and the entire school community should consider the development and promotion of literacy as integral to planning, teaching, learning and assessment across the curriculum and in the wider school experience of the adolescent learners. This statement applies not only to the learners experiencing difficulties in literacy development, but to all adolescents in the post-primary school system. Comprehending, manipulating, responding to and enjoying a wide array of texts, in all their multiple forms, is central to the learners' ability to critically engage with their society, democracy and the world of work. The development of the learners' skills in literacy is of vital importance for their life chances after their formal schooling has ended.

Participating schools

The following schools were visited and provided a commentary.

Glanmire Community College, Glanmire, County Cork – co-educational Community College with approx 900 pupils

St Angela's College, Patrick's Hill, Cork – Voluntary Secondary School girls' school with approx 530 pupils

Greenhills College, Limekiln Avenue, Greenhills, Dublin 12 – co-educational Community College with approx 490 pupils

Donahies Community School, Streamville Road, Dublin 13 – co-educational Community School with approx 520 pupils

Christian Brothers College, Sidney Hill, Wellington Road, Cork – Fee-paying Secondary boys' school with approx 840 pupils

Holy Trinity College, Cookstown County Tyrone – Roman Catholic Maintained non-selective co-educational school with approx 950 pupils

Dean Maguirc College, Carrickmore, Co Tyrone - Roman Catholic Maintained non-selective co-educational school with approx 500 pupils

St Mary's College, Derry - Roman Catholic Maintained non-selective girls school with approx 880 pupils

Banbridge Academy, Co Down – Controlled co-educational grammar school (selective) school with approx 1300 pupils

St Joseph's Boys' High School, Newry, Co Down - Roman Catholic Maintained non-selective boys school with approx 618 pupils

School systems

Typical Age range	South of Ireland	North of Ireland
10-11	Primary – Fifth Class	Primary – year 7 Communication (LoPs 1 to 5)
11-12	Primary – Sixth Class	Year 8 – Key Stage 3
12-13	Junior Cycle 1 st year	Year 9 – Key Stage 3
13-14	Junior Cycle 2 nd year	Year 10 – Key Stage 3 Communication (LoPs 1 to 7)
14-15	Junior Cycle 3 rd year Junior Certificate at Foundation, Ordinary or Higher levels. Foundation Level only occurs for Gaelge, English and Mathematics	Year 11 – Key Stage 4
15-16	Transition Year (Not compulsory)	Year 12 – Key Stage 4 GCSE at Foundation or Higher tiers
16-17	Senior Cycle 5 th year	Year 13 – Sixth Form GCE (AS Level)
17-18	Senior Cycle 6 th year Leaving Certificate at Foundation, Ordinary or Higher levels. Foundation level only occurs in Gaelge and Mathematics	Year 14 – Sixth Form GCE (A Level)

Relevant publications

Adolescent Literacy: A Position Statement of the International Reading Association, International Reading Association, 2012

A Joint Report by the Education and Training Inspectorate and the Department of Education and Skills inspectorate on How Best to Promote and Improve Literacy and Numeracy in our Schools, ETI & DES, 2010

<http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/surveys-evaluations/surveys-evaluations-primary/surveys-evaluations-primary-2010/a-joint-report-by-eti-and-des-on-how-best-to-promote-and-improve-literacy-and-numeracy-in-our-schools-dec-2010.pdf>

Better English, ETI, 2011

<http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/surveys-evaluations/surveys-evaluations-post-primary/surveys-evaluations-post-primary-2011/better-english.htm>

Chief Inspector's Report 2010-2012, DES 2012

<https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/Evaluation-Reports-Guidelines/Chief-Inspector%E2%80%99s-Report-2010-2012-Main-Report.pdf>

Chief Inspector's Report 2010-2012, ETI, 2012

<http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/support-material/support-material-general-documents-non-phase-related/the-chief-inspectors-report/ci-report-2012.pdf>

Count, Read: Succeed – a strategy to improve outcomes in literacy and numeracy

http://www.deni.gov.uk/count_read_succeed_a_strategy_to_improve_outcomes_in_literacy_and_numeracy.pdf

Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), 2007

Effective Vocabulary Instruction, A Reading First Quality Brief, National Center for Reading First, 2008

Every School a Good School – a policy for school improvement

http://www.deni.gov.uk/esags_policy_for_school_improvement_-_final_version_05-05-2009.pdf

Final Report of the EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy, 2012

ec.europa.eu/education/policy/school/doc/literacy-report_en.pdf.

Gearing Up for the Exam: The Experience of Junior Certificate Students, Liffey Press, 2007

Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, 2008.

Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life, DES, 2011

http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/lit_num_strategy_full.pdf

Looking at English, DES, 2007

http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/Evaluation-Reports-Guidelines/insp_looking_at_english_pdf.pdf

Moving Up. The Experiences of First-Year Students in Post-Primary Education, Liffey Press, 2004

Pathways through the Junior Cycle: the Experience of Second Year Students, Liffey Press, 2006

PISA 2012 Results: What Students Know and Can Do

School Self-Evaluation Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools, DES, 2012

Survey of Best Practice in English and mathematics in Post-primary Schools, ETI, 2013
Include

<http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/surveys-evaluations/surveys-evaluations-post-primary/surveys-evaluations-post-primary-2013/best-practice-in-english-and-mathematics-in-post-primary-schools.pdf>

Together Towards Improvement (Post-primary), ETI, 2009

<http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/together-towards-improvement/together-towards-improvement-post-primary.pdf>