



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

PUBLICATION

English language and literacy in settings and primary schools: government response

Our response to Estyn's report and recommendations on English Language and Literacy in settings and primary schools.

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Report details

Estyn was asked to identify how effectively English-medium settings and schools in Wales support and teach English language and literacy to learners aged three to eleven.

Summary of main findings

The key findings of the report are:

Learning and attitudes to learning

In settings most children make strong progress from their starting points and develop their language and literacy skills effectively. In most settings and primary schools, learners have positive attitudes to developing language and literacy skills. Younger learners enjoy playing with language through songs, rhymes and games, and most participate enthusiastically in their activities. Nursery-aged learners enjoy listening to stories and many choose books from

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the reading corner or an outdoor book tent to share with friends. In the very few settings and schools where standards are excellent, most nursery children show genuine pleasure in books and stories, recounting and discussing main events and characters with confidence and maturity.

Despite improvements in aspects of speaking, reading and writing, standards of language and literacy in primary schools are broadly similar to those reported five years ago. The standard of learners' writing in many primary schools remains the weakest of the four language skills and learners' enjoyment in reading declines during their time in primary school. This is more prevalent among boys and learners from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In general, most learners with special educational needs make sound or better progress in their language development from their starting points.

Provision

In many settings and schools well-developed planning processes combined with use of resources ensure language concepts and skills build incrementally to support the successful development of learners' English language and literacy. Many have classrooms and communal areas that are language and literacy-rich learning environments, which immerse pupils in the spoken and written word. In the best examples, staff plan carefully so that developments in one skill, for example speaking, can support and complement the development in another, such as writing. They enable learners to develop the full range of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills progressively, in meaningful and interesting contexts across the curriculum.

In most schools and settings, sound partnership working helps many learners to make good progress in their language and literacy skills. Relationships with parents and carers are usually positive and most settings and schools work well with external agencies to access support or guidance to enhance vulnerable and disadvantaged learners' language skills.

Most schools make good use of a few well-known published literacy resources to support their planning for language learning, particularly for developing

learners' early reading skills and writing. In addition, settings and schools draw on helpful planning resources produced by literacy teams in local authorities or regional consortia, for example to support the development of learners' spelling and reading comprehension.

Leadership

Where standards of language and literacy are high for all learners, leaders establish a clear vision and strategic approach to developing learners' language and literacy. While leaders are sensitive and mindful of learners' circumstances and situations, they do not use them to lower their expectations of what learners can achieve.

Most schools have appropriate leadership structures in place to support the co-ordination and development of their provision for language and literacy, for example through a curriculum team, led by a senior leader. In the most effective schools, leaders develop a strong collaborative culture where all staff have access to, and benefit from, the school's collective knowledge. Leaders ensure that staff provide exceptional teaching and learning that meet individual learners' needs. As a result, these schools address inequalities in learners' language and literacy effectively, and challenge and nurture the development of more able learners successfully.

Recommendation 1

Non-maintained settings, nursery and primary schools should ensure that poverty and disadvantage are not barriers to learners developing secure language and literacy skills.

Recommendation 2

Non-maintained settings, nursery and primary schools should develop a culture of reading that encourages and enthuses all learners, including boys and those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to read for pleasure and provide opportunities

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to listen to adults reading aloud.

Recommendation 3

Non-maintained settings, nursery and primary schools should develop explicitly learners' vocabulary knowledge so that it supports the development of their speaking, reading and writing skills.

Recommendation 4

Primary schools should develop a clear strategy to support the effective teaching of reading, including addressing learners' decoding skills, vocabulary development and advanced reading skills.

Recommendation 5

Primary schools should provide appropriately challenging and relevant opportunities to support the progressive development of learners' listening and speaking skills, particularly in key stage 2.

Recommendation 6

Primary schools should support the development of learners' writing skills through the explicit teaching of sentence construction, punctuation and spelling, relevant opportunities to write and precise feedback to guide further improvement.

Welsh Government Response to recommendations 1 to 6

These recommendations are for non-maintained settings, nursery and primary schools and we accept their content. We welcome these recommendations as they mirror our own expectations for all learners to develop high level literacy skills during their time at school, regardless of background.

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The Curriculum for Wales guidance framework, published in January 2020, is at the heart of our national mission to raise standards for all, tackle the attainment gap and ensure an education system that is a source of national pride and enjoys public confidence. We will support all schools and settings through recovery from the experiences of the last year and towards curriculum reform and realisation.

Literacy is a cross curricular skill that requires all schools and settings to include it within their curricula and ensure learners have the opportunity to develop and apply their listening, reading, speaking and writing skills in the context of wider learning. More specifically, the Languages, Literacy and Communication Area of Learning and Experience addresses the fundamental aspect of human communication and supports learning across the whole curriculum to enable learners to gain knowledge and skills in Welsh, English, international languages and literature. Important considerations within this area is recognising that at the earliest stages, learning to read is dependent upon the spoken language that learners have and that developing good listening and speaking skills is therefore vital to success in learning to read. Further it recognises that learners should gain early reading skills within a rich language environment, where activities are meaningful, imaginative and varied. These activities should foster learners' interest in reading for enjoyment, for imaginative purposes and for learning.

The Languages, Literacy and Communication Area of Learning and Experience sets an expectation that learners will progress their (listening, reading, speaking and writing) skills, knowledge and experience with increasing complexity and sophistication. It recognises that being able to decode words alone is not enough and that readers need to be able to make sense of what they read. Teaching should enable learners to gain a range of skills and to apply different strategies in order to become fluent readers, with schools creating a positive reading culture which immerses learners in literature and ignites enthusiasm. Literature should be selected so that it is sufficiently rich to engage learners intellectually and emotionally. This should provide learners with a secure basis for developing and extending their language and literacy skills.

We are working with stakeholders from both the maintained and non-maintained sectors to co-construct additional guidance for practitioners working with learners in the period of learning leading to progression step 1. This Enabling

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Pathways guidance focuses on the key principles that are essential for holistic and meaningful learning to ensure schools and settings are able to plan, design and implement an appropriate curriculum which will support progression across all areas of learning and experience.

We are also working with stakeholders from the non-maintained sector to co-construct a quality assured curriculum and assessment framework for the funded non-maintained sector to adopt, if they wish to do so. The framework will include the key principles embedded within the Enabling Pathways guidance but will build on those principles to ensure practitioners in the non-maintained sector are able to deliver a child-centred, developmentally appropriate curriculum for our youngest learners which supports them to develop the foundational skills which will be key to their progression across the learning continuum.

Both the Enabling Pathways and the curriculum and assessment framework for the non-maintained sector will be published for consultation in May.

Recommendation 7

Local authorities and regional consortia should provide high-quality professional learning that meets the individual needs of settings and schools, to ensure that all learners, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, improve their language and literacy skills.

Welsh Government Response to recommendation 7

The Education Directorate regularly engages with local authorities and regional consortia and we will draw their attention to this recommendation. The Curriculum Implementation Plan published in January 2021 sets out clear roles and responsibilities for regional consortia and other partner organisations. This includes provision of a professional learning programme and bespoke support for schools and settings. These will be developed in line with the vision of the four purposes of the curriculum ensuring every learner benefits from a broad and balanced education with high expectations for all, regardless of background.

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Recommendation 8

The Welsh Government should evaluate settings and schools' use of targeted funding, such as the early years pupil development grant and the pupil development grant, to improve eligible learners' language and literacy skills.

Welsh Government Response to recommendation 8

- Countering the effects of disadvantage and deprivation on children and young people is central to our flagship Pupil Development Grant (PDG). The PDG delivers additional funding to schools, early years and other settings to enable disadvantaged learners to achieve their best educational outcomes. The majority of the grant is delivered directly to schools and settings, except the Looked After Children PDG which is managed regionally by the consortia.
- Year on year, we have extended the PDG. It now supports even more of our disadvantaged learners, including looked after children, those in the early years, those in pupil referral units and EOTAS provision. We are continuing to invest record levels of investment through the PDG, over £100m in 2021-22 to improve outcomes for our most vulnerable learners.
- Breaking the cycle of poverty and disadvantage remains a clear commitment of this Welsh Government. Since its introduction in 2012, we have made available more than £585 million through the PDG which has supported the equivalent of over 530,000 children and young people to achieve their best educational outcomes. We recognise that the earlier you support a child, the better their outcomes will be.

In the grant terms and conditions we ask regional education consortia to report specifically on ensuring schools refresh their activity in relation to literacy and numeracy to comply with the National Literacy & Numeracy Framework, and in particular to raise the literacy and numeracy skills of learners from deprived backgrounds, with the goal that no eFSM learner leaves Key Stage 2 or Key Stage 3 with poor literacy skills.

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It is the role of the regional education consortia strategic advisers to ensure that the use of targeted funding is evidence based with evaluation being a key part of this process. This work informs the annual business plans that are submit to the Welsh Government by regional education consortia on how they intend to utilise the PDG funding.

Publication details

The report will be published on or after 4 March 2021, and may be accessed on the Estyn website.

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