



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

**Response to the Estyn thematic report on
Active & experiential learning: effective Foundation Phase
practice in delivering Literacy & Numeracy
in Year1 & Year2**

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.
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Report title:

Active & experiential learning: Effective Foundation Phase practice in delivering literacy & numeracy in Year1 & Year2

(December 2017)

Report Details

The Estyn report *Active and experiential learning: Effective Foundation Phase practice in literacy and numeracy in Year 1 and Year 2* was published in December 2017 in response to a request for advice from the Welsh Government's annual remit letter to Estyn for 2016/2017.

The report evaluated the standards on literacy and numeracy, pupil voice and independence, provision for literacy and numeracy, teaching assessment and leadership.

Main findings

The key findings of the report are that:

Standards in literacy and numeracy

In a majority of schools reviewed, standards of literacy and numeracy are high when pupils are given the opportunity to develop effective speaking and listening skills. Teachers provided exciting contexts for learning and this stimulated a rich response in children's spoken language. In these schools, teachers also recognised the importance of 'talking to learn'. Most pupils also demonstrated an increased understanding of language, had active imaginations, and were able to use language to explore their own experiences and imaginary worlds.

In around a quarter of schools reviewed, pupils did not apply their writing skills across areas of learning well enough. Teachers relied heavily on formal teaching and the use of worksheets or writing frames, to scaffold pupils' writing was more prevalent. Pupils were not provided with stimulating opportunities for writing during continuous and enhanced provision, limiting pupils' ability to write at length imaginatively and independently. When activities were adult-directed, children were not given enough opportunities to explore language by talking to adults and other pupils about topics that interest them as a result they did not develop an extended vocabulary or become confident in speaking to others.

Most pupils achieve well in mathematics when lots of interesting opportunities to use their skills through enhanced activities, both indoors and outdoors were provided. In around a quarter of schools, pupils were able to transfer their mathematical skills to independent activities well. When looking at a range of information, many pupils apply their numeracy skills successfully to record their findings and transfer them to a simple bar chart. However, in general, a majority of pupils do not interpret and extract information from data handling activities well enough.

Pupil voice and independence

The review found a considerable variation in the choices children had, often from school to school and from class to class. Schools with higher levels of pupil voice took account of the interests of their pupils and their views which formed part of the schools' vision for improvement. These schools used the feedback they received from pupils to plan their curriculum and developed learning experiences. In schools or classes where the delivery of the Foundation Phase was overly adult directed and too formal, pupils' levels of perseverance, and a willingness to take calculated risks in their learning, reduced. As a result these pupils were less confident in applying their literacy and numeracy skills independently across areas of learning. The inspection found more adult-directed learning than child-initiated learning in Year 2.

Provision for literacy and numeracy

The review found that classrooms in nursery and reception were generally set up well to promote pupils' learning through experiential and active learning. However, the learning environment for Year 1 and Year 2 was not well organised, and most often had a formal layout where children sat at their desk for a large proportion of the day. The delivery of literacy and numeracy was often too structured and adult-directed and pupils were not engaged sufficiently in active and experiential learning. Teachers did not understand what good quality continuous, enhanced and focused provision looked like.

In a few schools, teachers integrated the teaching of phonics, reading and specific writing skills in innovative ways during continuous and enhanced provision. Pupils were able to practise and embed their learning, with a good balance between experiential learning and formal aspects of teaching. However, by Year 2 these skills are often taught in isolation. As a result, pupils' literacy skills became too narrow and teachers did not always encourage these pupils to write at length, independently, across areas of learning.

Estyn's recommendations

The recommendations are aimed at schools, local authorities, consortia and the Welsh Government. The recommendations target the embedding of Foundation Phase pedagogical practices in Year 1 and 2 in the current and new curriculum. It also highlights the need more training and professional learning opportunities for senior leaders and teachers to identify and share effective Foundation Phase practice.

Recommendations

Schools should:

R1 Provide professional learning opportunities for all Foundation Phase staff to make sure that they have the skills, understanding and confidence to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills.

R2 Ensure that Foundation Phase learning in Year 1 and Year 2 classes is suitably balanced between experiential learning and formal teaching.

R3 Plan regular opportunities for all pupils in the Foundation Phase to apply their literacy and numeracy skills in enhanced and continuous provision areas, both indoors and outdoors.

R4 Involve pupils in Year 1 and Year 2 in decisions about what and how they learn.

Local authorities and regional consortia should:

R5 Provide training for headteachers to help them to identify, develop and share effective Foundation Phase practice.

R6 Make sure that challenge advisers identify, develop and share effective Foundation Phase practice and apply this knowledge when supporting schools.

R7 Provide training for schools to help them to identify, develop and share effective practice in teaching and assessing literacy and numeracy skills in the Foundation Phase, across the areas of learning.

The Welsh Government should:

R8 Make sure that schools understand the pedagogy of active and experiential learning when developing a new curriculum for Wales.

Welsh Government response:

We accept the recommendations and welcome this report as an important source of evidence to support us in ensuring that schools are able to deliver effectively the Foundation Phase to all pupils in Year 1 and Year 2. It is also encouraging to see that the recommendations reaffirm the actions contained within the Foundation Phase Action Plan, published by the Welsh Government in November 2016.

The Foundation Phase Action Plan sets out a national approach to continuously improve the way in which our Foundation Phase curriculum for 3-7 year olds is implemented and delivered in our schools and nurseries. It aims to improve the consistency of delivery of the Foundation Phase against its pedagogical principles.

The value of experiential learning is well documented in Successful Futures. Professor Donaldson makes clear that the new curriculum should include 'all of the learning experiences and assessment activities planned in pursuit of agreed purposes of education'. The importance of both learning and experience is central, as demonstrated by the organisation of the new curriculum development around the six Areas of Learning and Experiences (AoLEs).

The Welsh Government will discuss the findings of the Estyn review with local authorities and consortia and work with them to ensure actions are developed and, where appropriate, existing actions are reinforced to address the recommendations to strengthen Foundation Phase pedagogical practice in Year 1 and Year 2.

To support Foundation Phase practitioners, the Welsh Government is working to establish a Foundation Phase Excellence Network across Wales. The aim of the network is to strengthen the links between schools, settings, local authorities and regional education consortia to higher education institutions to develop an increased focus on research based professional development for Foundation Phase practitioners at all levels. The network will aim to support education leadership in Foundation Phase, as part of the national approach to leadership development. It will achieve this by working with regional consortia, pioneer schools, the Education Workforce Council and other Foundation Phase stakeholders to drive forward work on a national training programme for leadership in the Foundation Phase. The development of the Foundation Phase Excellence Network Zone on Hwb will provide a platform for all Foundation Phase practitioners to share effective practice as part of a wider national approach to professional learning.

That platform will provide an opportunity to more widely share the examples from lessons and case studies in the report in helping schools to overcome the perceived barriers to applying sound Foundation Phase practice, and in sharing the online video produced by Estyn and schools to exemplify good practice.

Successful Futures is clear that the new curriculum should not be too prescriptive, but should allow for a degree of autonomy with regard to the delivery of the new curriculum in schools. This will enable teachers to maximise the opportunities their community affords in terms of experiences and to most importantly meet the needs of their particular learners.

Publication Details

The report was published on 14 December 2017 and can be found on Estyn's website: <https://www.estyn.gov.wales>