



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

PUBLICATION

Developing pupils' English reading skills from 10 to 14 years of age

What we plan to do in response to Estyn's report on how well pupils' reading skills are developing.

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Report details

The advice was commissioned by the Curriculum, Assessment and School Improvement Division to report on how well schools are developing pupils' English reading skills across the curriculum from Year 6 through to Year 9. It considers how well pupils' reading skills are developing, their attitudes to reading and the extent to which schools are developing a reading culture.

Separate advice will be provided in 2023 to 2024 on how Welsh and bi-lingual schools are developing pupils' Welsh and English reading skills across the curriculum.

Summary of main findings

The key findings of the report are:

Standards of pupils' reading and attitudes to reading

The pandemic had a negative impact on many pupils' reading skills. Since face-to-face teaching has resumed, standards are beginning to improve. This is particularly the case in schools where specific skills deficits have been identified and provision put in place to address these.

Overall, in upper primary and lower secondary phases, many pupils can highlight and annotate a suitably challenging text in a basic way. In Year 6, the majority of pupils use advanced reading skills confidently, such as summarising and evaluating suitably challenging texts. In Years 7 to 9, a minority of pupils continue to develop advanced reading skills effectively. The majority of pupils in Years 7 to 9 do not develop their reading skills well enough.

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In the few primary schools and the minority of secondary schools where the provision for and standards of reading skills are too weak, a minority of pupils are unable to read stage-appropriate texts fluently. These pupils may have gaps in their phonological knowledge as well as not having an effective range of strategies to support their reading of challenging words and texts. As a result, they make limited progress in their learning.

Provision for developing pupils' reading skills

Estyn reports that the development of pupils' reading skills, as an integral part of their literacy skills, almost always features as a priority within school improvement plans. However, in many secondary schools in the sample, planning is often vague, generic and over-reliant on summative data from tests rather than on first-hand evidence of pupils' progress from lessons and books.

Where provision is strongest schools have identified evidence-based reading strategies and leaders have provided staff with effective professional learning so that they understand the purpose of each strategy, when it should be used and how it can be applied in different context.

Nearly all primary schools and many secondary schools promote the importance of developing pupils' reading skills across the curriculum to staff and pupils. Many primary schools provide regular meaningful opportunities for pupils to develop their reading across the curriculum. In a minority of secondary schools, the concept of adapting reading for specific areas of learning is beginning to be established.

Where provision is strong, there is a co-ordinated balance of approaches, giving pupils regular opportunities to develop their reading skills with their class, in groups and independently across the curriculum. Introducing more challenging texts is successful when teachers model the strategies pupils need to access these texts and provide appropriate support. There is also a balance of activities

so that pupils have regular opportunities to hear teachers read aloud, read aloud themselves and develop their independent reading skills.

Planning for the progressive development of pupils' skills, particularly their reading skills, from Year 6 to Year 7, is underdeveloped in nearly all schools across Wales. This is also the case in many all-age schools because there isn't enough communication and collaborative planning between the Year 6 and Year 7 teachers.

The school improvement services do not collaborate well enough to ensure that the highest quality professional learning is available across Wales.

Developing a reading culture

A minority of primary schools and a few secondary schools are beginning to move beyond the development of pupils' reading skills in lessons to create a 'reading culture' across the school.

One of the most important factors in creating a reading culture is that senior leaders clearly support reading and ensure that it has a high profile among staff and pupils.

A school library that is welcoming, accessible, well-stocked, supervised regularly and used well by many classes contributes helpfully to developing a reading culture within a school.

Recommendations

School leaders should:

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Recommendation 1

Provide staff with high-quality professional learning about evidence-based strategies to develop pupils' reading skills across the curriculum.

Recommendation 2

Monitor and evaluate robustly the impact of reading strategies and interventions.

Recommendation 3

Plan within their cluster for the progressive development of pupils' reading skills from Year 6 to Year 7, including making appropriate use of feedback and progress reports from personalised assessments.

Teachers and classroom-based support staff should:

Recommendation 4

Plan meaningful and engaging opportunities for pupils to develop their reading skills progressively.

Recommendation 5

Use high-quality, suitably challenging texts to develop pupils' reading skills alongside teaching the strategies pupils need to access and engage with these texts.

School improvement partners should:

Recommendation 6

Work together closely to ensure greater consistency and synergy in professional learning opportunities around reading for school leaders, teachers and teaching assistants.

Welsh Government Response

The Welsh Government welcomes these recommendations as they support our expectations for all learners, no matter what their background, to have the reading skills they need to fulfil their potential and for schools to provide high quality teaching and leadership.

Local authorities have a statutory responsibility for school standards. Regional consortia and partnerships in Wales have a significant role to play in improving educational outcomes for all our learners. The Welsh Government provides substantial annual funding to regional consortia and partnerships to deliver our aspirations and priorities for schools and education in line with **Our National Mission: high standards and aspirations for all**. The funding enables the delivery a range of support to schools including support to co-construct, plan and deliver a curriculum which promotes a broad range of knowledge, skills and experiences, and enables ambitious professional learning for all practitioners in a school dedicated to being a learning organisation. The Minister for Education and the Welsh Language has written to local authorities and regional partners drawing attention to the report and actively encouraging them to plan for improving standards of reading, and literacy in general, supporting disadvantaged learners and promoting attainment for all.

We will continue to work with regional consortia and partnerships to support

schools make appropriate use of assessment methods to support individual learner progression in reading skills. This includes information from the statutory online personalised assessments which are available for use throughout the school year to provide direct feedback on skills and progress at an individual and class level, which in turn helps inform next steps in teaching, learning and progression planning.

The report outlines good practice in schools already delivering positive actions and we welcome the case studies embedded within the report. We will integrate the report into the [whole school approach to oracy and reading toolkit](#) to ensure all educational settings are able to learn and benefits from these experiences.

The Welsh Government should:

Recommendation 7

Continue to promote and develop the whole-school approach to oracy and reading toolkit.

Welsh Government Response

The Welsh Government accepts this recommendation. The [whole school approach to oracy and reading toolkit](#) which was published on 23 March, provides a package of information and resources to support schools and settings develop and embed their own whole school approach to achieving high standards of oracy and reading. It is designed to help all settings identify opportunities to raise standards of oracy and reading, find guidance and resources to support the development of a whole school approach, learn from the experiences of others, and signpost to sources of information to support learners and their families.

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Speaking, listening and reading skills are fundamental to just about every aspect of our lives, from home to school and to the world of work. Not only are they at the core of being able to access learning, they also enable the development of relationships with parents, peers and wider communities, and can open doors to talking about difficult subjects, beneficial to our mental health and wellbeing. The toolkit recognises that schools and settings are best placed to make decisions about the needs of their specific learners and to develop and embed their own whole-school approach for these skills. It recognises the benefits of the whole school community working together in a coordinated, consistent, and sustained way to have a positive impact upon oracy and reading skills.

Through its literacy programmes the Welsh Government ensures that children, and their families, have access to good quality reading resources promoting reading for pleasure from as young as 6-months old. Recently with additional funding the programmes have been supplemented so that every learner in Wales has been gifted a book of their own to keep and every school in Wales will receive a box of 50 books to supplement their library.

We will continue to work with partners and wider stakeholder to develop and enhance the toolkit. National Network conversations hosted in July 2022,

highlighted examples of work taking place in schools across Wales that is having a positive impact upon oracy and reading skills. We are commissioning a range of case studies to showcase this work and when available they will be incorporated into the toolkit.

We are also piloting a reading mentoring model to test whether it will have a positive impact upon learners' attitudes, enjoyment, and motivation to read. One of the levers for improving reading skills (and literacy in general) is to generate a love of reading and a culture of reading. Research shows a positive correlation between pupils who read more and enjoy reading and those who attain well. Conversely, weaker readers are more likely to disengage from education and attain less well. The pilot will target learners in Years 5 and 6 to aid transition to

secondary school.

Options for expanding the scale of mentoring will be considered during the course of the pilot. This will include developing the model in the context of the Welsh language in order to incorporate reading in Welsh fully into any upscaling and future phases.

Publication details

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

This document may not be fully accessible.

For more information refer to our [accessibility statement](#).

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