

News release

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Estyn highlights best practice in developing reading and writing skills in 7 to 14 year olds

Estyn, the education and training inspectorate for Wales has today published recommendations and guidance for schools and their partners on how to improve pupils' reading and writing skills.

“Success in reading and writing is critical to pupils' employment prospects and to the future of Wales as a learning country. While many schools have been successful in improving the standard of pupils' Welsh and English, the challenge is to spread best practice more widely and consistently so that the learning and teaching of reading and writing skills in all schools across Wales are as good as they can be”, says Dr Bill Maxwell, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales.

Standards in Welsh as a first language and English in primary and secondary schools in Wales have improved since 2000. However, around a third of schools, particularly secondary schools, do not do enough to develop pupils' communication skills across all subjects of the curriculum, which inhibits the standards pupils achieve.

Inspectors have found that pupils write best when asked to write for real purposes and audiences which are relevant to their interests, such as articles for magazines, pamphlets or posters on topical issues, oral presentations and stories, poems and drama scripts which are shared with others.

The quality of leadership and management has improved over recent years in many primary and secondary schools and this has generated improvements in literacy. In the most effective

lessons, staff make links between speaking and listening, reading and writing so that pupils understand how these different aspects of using language are related to each other. When staff develop these skills through interesting and challenging topics, pupils are motivated more strongly to become independent readers and willing communicators.

The majority of support programmes in primary and secondary schools do have some impact in helping pupils to improve their reading and spelling. However, despite this support, less able pupils, particularly boys, often make slow progress in their learning because of their poor literacy skills. Many less able pupils in primary and secondary schools would benefit from more help with writing, particularly as they get older and writing tasks become more complex. Only a minority of schools provide more able and talented pupils with reading and writing tasks that are sufficiently progressive and challenging.

Over the past ten years, the gap between boys' and girls' performance has increased, with the widest gap in writing. Estyn's report looks at the effect boys' and girls' different learning styles has on their reading and writing skills, and makes recommendations for how this issue can be addressed.

Some of the different methods that inspectors see schools using to tackle poor reading and writing skills include improving library provision, encouraging pupils to read widely for pleasure, studying more poetry, and marking their own and each other's spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Estyn also calls for schools and local authorities to make better use of assessment information to ensure that work is stimulating and matched to pupils' needs, and that it takes into account the skills pupils learn in each group and stage. As pupils progress from primary to secondary school they find it difficult to succeed in the wider curriculum if they do not have good reading and writing skills. In best practice, primary and secondary school staff share information about pupils' prior achievements and learning needs in reading and writing, so that there is the right level of support and challenge in their learning.

Estyn is planning a conference in September 2008 with invited representatives from schools, local education authorities and officials from the Welsh Assembly Government, to discuss how Wales can improve standards in reading and in literacy.

Notes to Editors:

- Estyn, the office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales, provides a high quality inspection and advice service.
- Estyn's report, 'Best practice in the reading and writing of pupils aged 7 to 14 years', has been commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government.
- The report provides an overview of standards and the quality of provision in Welsh and English as core National Curriculum subjects in primary and secondary schools in key stages 2 and 3. It evaluates practice in key areas of learning and teaching Welsh and English.
- Full copies of inspection reports are available on Estyn's website at www.estyn.gov.uk

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