Moving English forward

Action to raise standards in English

This report sets out to answer the question: how can attainment in English be raised in order to move English forward in schools? It is recommended to all who teach the subject, those who lead the subject, and headteachers of primary and secondary schools. The findings are based principally on evidence from inspections of English between April 2008 and March 2011 in 268 maintained schools in England. Part A highlights the main strengths and weaknesses in English and presents the evidence from the survey inspection visits. Part B draws on this inspection evidence to analyse 10 areas of weakness and recommend appropriate action to improve practice in each area.

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Executive summary

There can be no more important subject than English in the school curriculum. English is a pre-eminent world language, it is at the heart of our culture and it is the language medium in which most of our pupils think and communicate. Literacy skills are also crucial to pupils' learning in other subjects across the curriculum.

Recent reports from Ofsted on English have focused on good practice. The previous triennial report included a section that identified the features of outstanding provision in English and, since then, Ofsted has published a series of case studies of schools that achieved excellence in English.[1] This survey also found much effective practice in English in the schools visited. However, standards are not yet high enough for all pupils and there has been too little improvement in primary schools. Consequently, this report sets out to answer the question: how can attainment in English be raised in order to move English forward?

The report is based on evidence from inspections of English between April 2008 and March 2011 in 133 primary schools, 128 secondary schools and four special schools in England, supplemented by three additional good practice visits. It also draws on evidence from six college inspections, other reports published by Ofsted, discussions with teachers and others, and national test and examination results. It reviews developments in the subject in the three years since Ofsted's previous English report.[2]

Around 70% of schools inspected in this survey were judged to be good or outstanding in English. This reflects the high profile the subject enjoys in schools, the emphasis placed on raising standards in English and the impact of substantial recent training and support. However, these positive findings also reflect in part the choice of schools for the survey since the sample did not include schools that were in special measures or had been given a notice to improve. Although the quality of provision was broadly similar for primary and secondary schools, there was not enough outstanding teaching in primary schools.

Since 2008, attainment in English has risen in secondary schools. There has also been improvement in the proportion of children who are secure in all aspects of communication, language and literacy at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. This has not yet carried through into Key Stage 1 where too many pupils failed to secure the basic reading and writing skills expected at that stage. Standards in English at the end of Key Stage 2 have also not risen since the last report. While four-fifths of pupils at Key Stage 2 reached national expectations over the last three years, one in five primary pupils did not achieve the expected standard in English. Far more pupils failed to achieve this standard in writing and the report links this with weaknesses in the teaching of writing and gaps in the subject knowledge of some English coordinators in primary schools.

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[1] *Excellence in English* (100229), Ofsted, 2011; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/100229.
[2] *English at the crossroads* (080247), Ofsted, 2009; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/080247.

Although GCSE results have improved, nearly 30% of students who are entered for GCSE English do not achieve grades A* to C. Across all phases, girls continue to outperform boys in English. Those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals continue to achieve less highly in English than those pupils who are not eligible. In addition, the government's White Paper, *The importance of teaching,* makes it clear that floor standards in English need to rise still further and surveys suggest that standards have slipped in comparison with our international competitors.[3]

This report is in two parts. Part A highlights the main strengths and weaknesses in English and presents the evidence from the survey inspection visits. Part B takes forward the findings from Part A to analyse 10 areas of weakness and identify the actions that would help to improve practice in these areas and contribute to higher standards of English in schools.

Key findings

■ Attainment in English has risen in secondary schools since 2008, but there has been only limited improvement overall in attainment in English in primary schools.

■ A large majority of schools in the sample were judged to be good or outstanding in English. Around 30% were no better than satisfactory. Provision was broadly the same across primary and secondary schools, although there was more outstanding practice in secondary schools.

■ An increasing number of children were assessed as being secure in communication, language and literacy in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).[4] However, a minority of children did not achieve these levels and where this was the case, schools were not always systematic enough in developing their early communication skills.

■ The quality of teaching was good or outstanding in seven in 10 of the lessons seen. In these lessons, teaching plans were clear about the key learning for pupils, teaching was flexible and responded to pupils' needs as the lesson developed, and tasks were meaningful, giving pupils real audiences and contexts where possible.

■ The quality of pupils' learning was hampered in weaker lessons by a number of 'myths' about what makes a good lesson. The factors that most commonly limited learning included: an excessive pace; an overloading of activities; inflexible planning; and limited time for pupils to work independently. Learning was also

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[3] *The importance of teaching: schools White Paper*, Department for Education, 2010; www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/schoolswhitepaper/b0068570/the-importance-of-teaching.

[4] Pupils achieving six or more points at EYFS for each of the communication, language and literacy scales 2008–11.

constrained in schools where teachers concentrated too much or too early on a narrow range of test or examination skills.

■ The curriculum for English was judged to be good or outstanding in the large majority of schools inspected. The most successful schools were those that had identified the particular needs of their pupils and then designed a distinctive curriculum to meet those needs.[5]

■ However, few of the secondary schools visited had taken the opportunity, following the ending of the Year 9 statutory tests, to refresh their Key Stage 3 schemes of work. The best schools provided students with tasks that had practical outcomes beyond the classroom, thus reinforcing the importance and relevance of the subject, but this was not common enough across the survey schools.

■ Although the survey uncovered areas of good practice, the quality of transition between Key Stages 2 and 3 in English was too often no better than satisfactory. The lack of regular communication and exchange of ideas between primary and secondary schools created problems for continuity in teaching and assessment. There was similar evidence about whole-school literacy. This report includes some examples of good practice but the majority of schools visited did not have systematic procedures in place to develop good literacy practice across all departments.

■ The survey found that too few schools gave enough thought to ways of encouraging the love of reading, and a sizeable minority of pupils failed to reach national expectations in reading. The teaching of writing was variable in quality, with too little attention given to spelling and handwriting.

■ Leadership and management were judged to be good or outstanding in most schools surveyed. More secondary than primary schools had outstanding leadership and management. The report links this with the lack of subject specialists in primary schools and suggests that this is one of the reasons for slower improvement in English in primary schools.

Recommendations

Part B of this report identifies 10 actions to raise standards of English in schools. Some of the issues identified, such as encouraging pupils to read widely and improving provision for literacy across all departments in secondary schools, have been noted as areas for concern in earlier Ofsted subject reports. In general, schools have done too little in recent years to address these weaknesses. This report recommends a range of practical measures that schools and the government should take. Ofsted believes that these actions would have the effect of helping to raise standards and to 'move English forward' in schools.

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[5] *Excellence in English* (100229), Ofsted, 2011; http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/100229.

The Department for Education should:

- publish research on the teaching of writing, drawing on national and international publications, to include the effective teaching of spelling and handwriting, and how boys can be helped to become successful writers

- provide support in order to increase the number of specialist English teachers in primary schools and to improve the subject knowledge of existing English coordinators in primary schools.

All schools should:

- develop policies to promote reading for enjoyment throughout the school

- ensure that preparation for national tests and examinations is appropriate, does not begin too early, and does not limit the range of the curriculum or pupils' opportunities for creativity in English

- improve transition and continuity in curriculum and assessment in English between Key Stages 2 and 3

- simplify lesson plans in English to concentrate on the key learning objectives and encourage teachers to be more flexible in responding to pupils' progress as lessons develop.

Nursery and primary schools should also:

- develop a structured programme for improving children's communication skills in the Early Years Foundation Stage

- secure pupils' early reading skills by the end of Key Stage 1.

Secondary schools should also:

- ensure that the English curriculum at Key Stage 3 has a clear and distinct purpose that is explained to students and builds in, where possible, tasks, audiences and purposes that engage students with the world beyond the classroom

- strengthen whole-school literacy work across all departments to ensure that students extend and consolidate their literacy skills in all appropriate contexts.

Part A

## Standards and achievement in English

1. In 2011, teachers' assessments within the Early Years Foundation Stage showed that 62% of children were secure in all aspects of communication, language and literacy; this represents a nine percentage point improvement since the Early Years Foundation Stage was introduced in 2008. There were improvements in all four areas of English over the period 2008–11.

Nevertheless, around four in 10 children were not considered secure in the full range of their English skills when they entered Year 1 of primary school in 2010. Eighty-six per cent of children were judged to be secure in using language for communication and thinking. Seventy-six per cent achieved this level in the two aspects of reading but only 67% did so in writing. The score for writing remains substantially the weakest of all the assessment areas in the Foundation Stage Profile. Girls achieved more highly than boys in all four areas but the gap was widest in writing, where 77% of girls achieved a secure level of performance, but only 58% of boys.

Figure 1: Percentages of children achieving six or more points in the EYFS profile for each of the communication, language and literacy scales in 2011, by gender
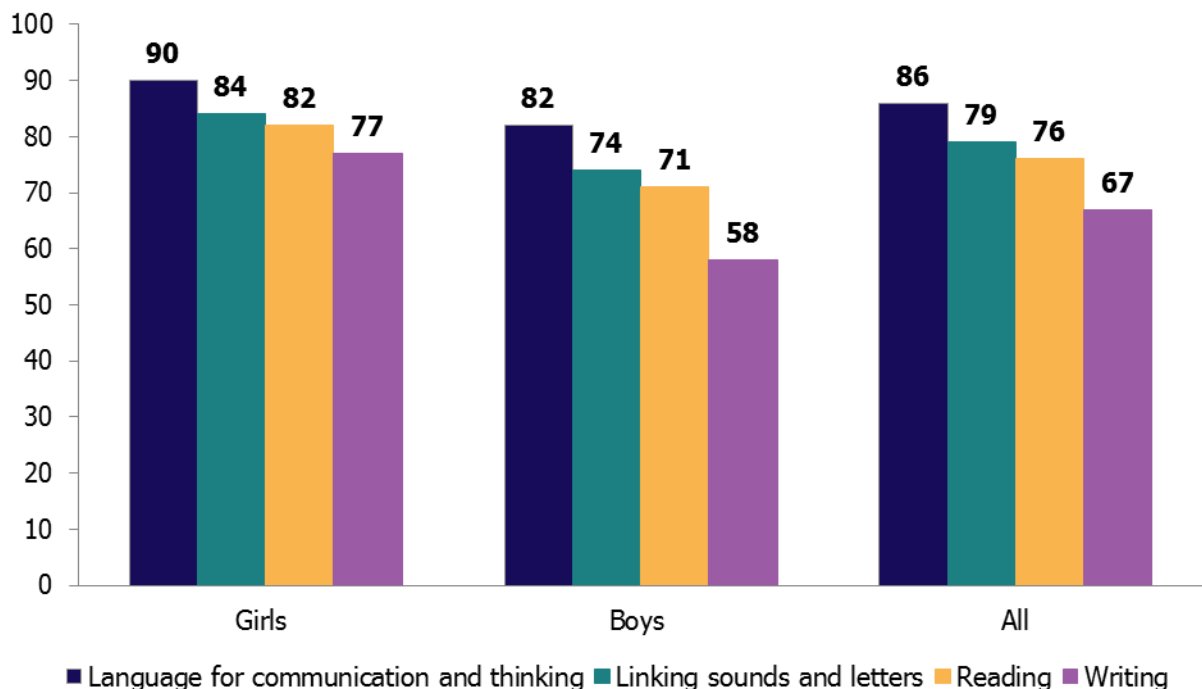
Source: DfE Early Years Foundation Stage Profile Results in England, 2010/2011

2. Teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 1 show that standards have not improved in reading and writing over the three years of the report, with 85% of pupils reaching the standard expected for their age in reading and 81% in writing in 2011. This means that a sizeable minority of pupils have not acquired the necessary basic skills in literacy when they move into Key Stage 2. Girls perform better than boys and the gap is greater in writing.

3. Attainment in English at the end of Key Stage 2 remains flat. The proportion of pupils achieving Level 4 or above, the standard expected for their age, has changed very little over recent years. It was 79% in 2005 and had risen to 82% by 2011. There has been an upward trend in writing with a four percentage point improvement over the past year. There was a nine percentage point gap between girls' and boys' performance at Level 4+ in English overall. However,

the gap remains wider in writing (13 percentage points) than reading (eight percentage points). Only 69% of boys achieved national expectations in writing. There was a decline in 2011 in the proportion of pupils achieving the higher Level 5, mainly as a result of much weaker performance in reading, which fell by seven percentage points.[6]

Figure 2: Percentages of pupils achieving Level 4+ in English in Key Stage 2 tests between 2009 and 2011, by gender
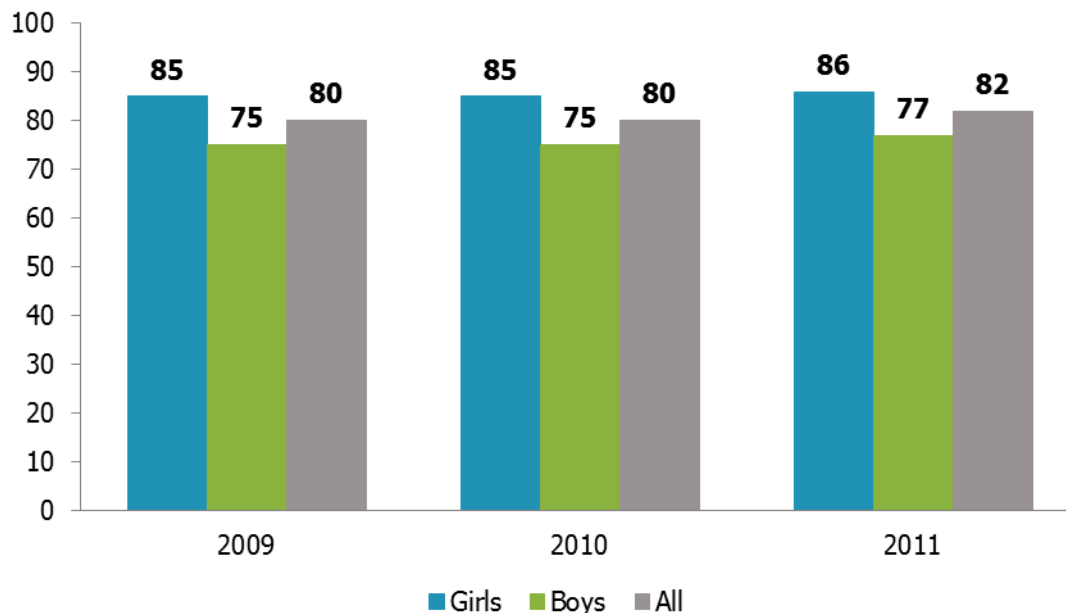
Figures for 2011 are based on revised data. Figures for all other years are based on final data. Figures include those independent schools that chose to take part in Key Stage 2 assessments.

Source: DfE National Curriculum Assessments at Key Stage 2 in England 2010/2011 (revised)

4.   Standards in GCSE English continued to improve over the three years of the report and 72% of students achieved a grade A* to C in 2011 compared with 65% in 2008. The gap between the performances of girls and boys remained broadly the same as in previous years at 13 percentage points. There was a similar improvement in GCSE English literature results with 79% of students achieving A* to C grades. The proportion of students who achieved the top grades A*/A in English has also improved since 2008, to 19%. The number of students entered for English literature fell slightly in 2011, reflecting schools' emphasis on students' achieving the all important grade C+ in English.

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[6] *Interim Results for Key Stages 2 and 3 National Curriculum Assessments in England, 2010/11*, SFR18/2011, Department for Education, 2011; www.education.gov.uk/researchandstatistics/statistics/statistics-by-topic/performance/ks2and3/a00196847/interimresults.

Figure 3: Percentage of students achieving grades A* to C at GCSE English between 2008 and 2011
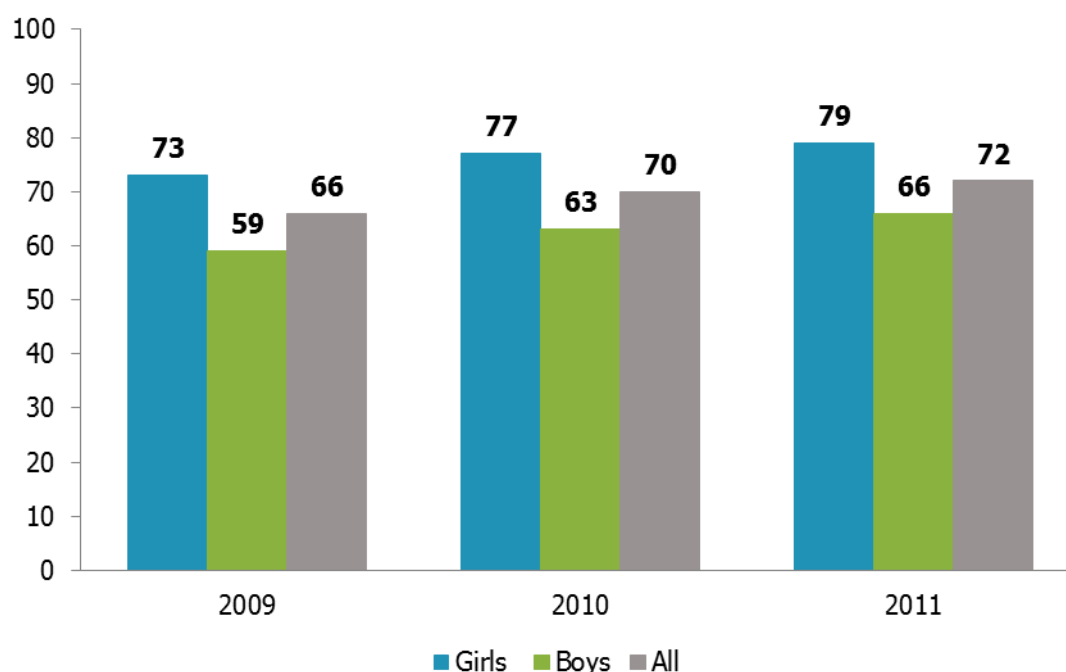
Source: DfE GCSE and Equivalent Results in England, 2010/11 (Provisional)

5. Standards at A level remained broadly similar in 2011 to previous years, with around half of students achieving grades A* to B and just under four-fifths achieving grades A* to C. English literature remains the most popular course at A level, chosen by around half the students who take an English course. However, 27% of students took English language in 2011 with the remainder following a combined course. Students were more likely to achieve grades A* to C in English literature than in English language.

6. Little progress has been made in closing the gap between the performance of pupils who live in the most disadvantaged areas of the country and those who live in the most affluent areas. Pupils known to be eligible for free school meals performed considerably less well than those who were not eligible. The gap at GCSE was 18 percentage points in 2011. Sixty-seven per cent of pupils on free school meals achieved the expected standards against 85% of pupils who were not eligible.

7. In summary, there is a variation in trends of attainment in English across the different key stages. There has been an improvement in the past two years in the proportion of children working securely within the different areas of communication, language and literacy at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Standards in English at the end of Key Stage 4 have also risen over this period. However, the picture at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 has changed little since the last triennial report. Around four-fifths of pupils achieve national expectations but little improvement has been seen for the fifth of pupils not

reaching the required level for their age. This remains a concern, particularly at Key Stage 2, and will be looked at in further detail in Part B of the report.

8.   This mixed picture reflects government concern, expressed in the White Paper, that standards of literacy are not keeping up with our international competitors: 'The truth is, at the moment we are standing still while others race past'; 'In the most recent OECD PISA survey in 2006 we fell from … 7th to 17th in literacy.'[7] This survey confirms that some persistent issues remain, including:

■ the gap between girls' and boys' achievement, especially in writing

■ evidence of lower standards overall in writing

■ poorer performance in English by pupils eligible for free school meals.

9.   The most recent Ofsted report on English sought to describe outstanding practice in the subject.[8] Evidence from subject inspections confirms that provision in English is good or outstanding in the large majority of schools inspected.[9] Nevertheless, standards need to rise by the end of both primary and secondary schooling if all pupils are to be fully prepared for the literacy challenges that face them in work or further education.

10. This report is the third by Ofsted on English since triennial subject reports were introduced in 2005. The first of the reports, *English 2000–05: a review of inspection evidence* [10] identified a number of issues that this survey confirms remain relevant, including: a lack of attention to speaking and listening; inconsistent development of literacy across the curriculum; the need to make pupils more independent of their teachers; and the decline in reading for enjoyment. The lack of improvement in these areas overall at least partly reflects the extent to which schools have focused on test and examination results and getting as many pupils as possible to achieve national benchmarks. In some cases, this has limited the development of the broader range of English skills and knowledge that pupils need.

11. In the light of government and media concerns about standards of English and literacy in schools, this report seeks to answer the question: what key actions would lead to higher standards in English? It does this in Part B through identifying 10 areas of weakness. The report then recommends a number of

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[7] *The importance of teaching: schools White Paper*, Department for Education, 2010; www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/schoolswhitepaper/b0068570/the-importance-of-teaching.

[8] *Excellence in English* (100229), Ofsted, 2011; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/100229.

[9] Note earlier comment about the sample of schools available for subject inspections. It excludes schools in an Ofsted category. In addition, an increasing number of schools previously judged to be satisfactory in their whole-school inspection are now reinspected and thus not included in the subject programme.

[10] *English 2000–05: a review of inspection evidence* (2351), Ofsted, 2005; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/2351.

specific actions that would improve practice, raise standards, and 'move English forward' in schools.

Quality of teaching and learning

Overall

12. Observation by inspectors of 1,480 lessons taught during the survey reveals a degree of consistency between the quality of teaching of English in primary and secondary schools. Overall, around 70% of lessons were judged to be at least good in both phases, including 15% that were considered outstanding. Around 30% of lessons observed were no better than satisfactory. These figures are very similar to those noted in the previous triennial English report. The overall judgements about the quality of teaching in the survey schools (a judgement that includes discussion with pupils, reviews of written work and marking, and overall outcomes for pupils, in addition to evidence from observing lessons) show that twice as many secondary schools as primary schools were judged to have outstanding teaching in English. The figure for primary schools was only 9%. This may in part help to explain why standards have not risen fast enough in primary schools in recent years and it raises questions about the leadership and management of English in primary schools that will be explored in more detail later in this report.

13. Inspectors observed comparatively few lessons that were judged to be inadequate in the schools visited. This positive picture in part reflects the nature of the sample and the fact that inspectors see many teachers at their best. Teachers of English have also benefited from considerable training in classroom methodology over this period. As a result, most teachers in the survey were at least competent in managing learning and engaging pupils.

14. Nevertheless, as stated above, just under a third of lessons observed in this survey were no better than satisfactory and inspectors commented on missed opportunities to extend pupils' learning. Consequently, the next part of the report focuses on how English lessons might be improved in order to make learning more effective.

Some common myths about good teaching

15. The missed opportunities noted in many of the satisfactory lessons, and some good lessons, related in part to teachers' assumptions – frequently mistaken – about what inspectors 'want' to see in a lesson or what constitutes effective teaching. Over recent years, some myths seem to have developed about what makes a good or outstanding lesson in English. This can be illustrated through the following lesson with Year 9 students.

> The lesson involved a Year 9 class working on techniques of persuasive writing. The lesson was planned in detail. The first phase involved an explanation of the learning objectives and a starter activity where

students worked in groups to complete a card-sort activity. In the next phase of the lesson, students used a grid to identify persuasive devices on mini whiteboards. The teacher then took them quickly through the criteria for assessment at Levels 5–7 and gave students examples of extracts from two essays on capital punishment. Students were asked to choose the more effective piece, linking it to the assessment criteria. They were then asked to produce at least one paragraph of writing on the topic of capital punishment. In the final part of the lesson, students were asked to peer-mark two other students' work, then to look at and review their own work and check the comments. One further activity was introduced before students were asked to say what they had learnt in the lesson. The lesson closed with a final activity where students revised persuasive techniques on the board.

16. There were many positive elements in this lesson. Students were fully engaged and certainly learnt more about persuasive techniques. However, a number of things struck the inspector. First, the person who worked hardest in this lesson was the teacher! The lesson involved seven or eight activities completed at speed. It was as though the teacher felt that the more she did, the better the lesson would be. In the course of the lesson, the teacher managed a number of potentially interesting tasks effectively. However, the sheer quantity of activities limited students' learning since they had insufficient time to complete tasks or consolidate their understanding. Attempting to understand the assessment criteria for three different Levels in five minutes was unrealistic, as was the time allowed to analyse the two extracts of writing. Only 10 minutes were provided for the students' writing. As a result, few were able to complete the task.

17. The teacher in this lesson concentrated on the pace of activities rather than the pace of learning. The centre of this lesson should have been the opportunity for students to show what they had learnt about persuasive techniques by producing a piece of their own writing. The desire to complete all elements of the planned lesson meant that the writing task could not be completed and the fast movement from one activity to another limited students' development of new learning or their consolidation of existing learning. This pattern is noted regularly by inspectors.

18. Inspectors believe that the effectiveness of learning in this and many similar lessons was limited by some common misconceptions about what constitutes good teaching and learning. These include the following.

- **Pace**. There seems to be a belief that the faster the lesson, the better the learning. While pace is important – a slow lesson is likely to lose pupils' concentration – teachers too often concentrate on the pace of their planned activities rather than the pace of learning. For example, a teacher told an inspector that they had been advised that a starter activity should never last longer than 10 minutes. While this may be a sensible starting point for

discussion, the inspector's view was that a starter activity, like any other activity, needs to last only as long as is needed to ensure effective learning.

■ **The number of activities**. As implied above, some teachers appear to believe that the more activities they can cram into the lesson, the more effective it will be. This is often counterproductive, as activities are changed so often that pupils do not complete tasks and learning is not consolidated or extended.

■ **Over-detailed and bureaucratic lesson plans**. Teachers are encouraged to plan individual lessons in considerable detail. Inspectors sometimes note that excessive detail within these plans causes teachers to lose sight of the central focus on pupils' learning. This is explored in further detail in Part B.

■ **An inflexible approach to planning lessons**. School policies sometimes insist that all lesson plans should always follow the same structure, no matter what is being taught. In addition, evidence from the survey suggests that teachers often feel that they should not alter their plans during the lesson. The notion of a three- or four-part structure to lessons with certain key elements, such as a lively starter activity and an opportunity to review learning at the end, is helpful to teachers. However, teachers need to have the confidence to depart from their plans if early indications are, for example, that the pupils know more or less than the teacher had anticipated. The key consideration should be the development of pupils' learning rather than sticking rigidly to a plan.

■ **Limited time for students to work independently**. A constant criticism from inspectors was that pupils rarely had extended periods to read, write or discuss issues in class. Indeed, inspectors observed lessons where pupils were asked to self- or peer-assess work before they had been able to complete more than a sentence or two. No doubt, teachers feel that they need to be actively engaged when they are being observed. However, this shows a degree of misunderstanding as inspectors' priority is above all to evaluate the quality of pupils' learning in lessons.

■ **Constant review of learning**. As noted above, in lessons observed, significant periods of time were spent by teachers on getting pupils to articulate their learning, even where this limited their time to complete activities and thereby interrupted their learning! Pupils need time to complete something before they can valuably discuss and evaluate it. To invite self- or peer-evaluation before pupils have had time to engage fully with learning is counter-productive although the principle of self- or peer-assessment remains important.

19. These points should not be seen as a plea for teachers to skimp on planning, teach slow-paced lessons, or leave pupils unsupported for long periods. However, given the positive impact of recent guidance and training on lesson methodology, there are good opportunities now for teachers to be more flexible in their approach to teaching and planning lessons. This should include a

greater readiness to respond to the unexpected in lessons and to change the direction of lessons as they develop. Teachers should also be encouraged to be creative and adventurous in their teaching, and to vary approaches depending on the nature of the learning planned for the lesson. Above all, this is a plea for teachers to focus on the key actions that affect pupils' learning and progress within lessons.

An inappropriate emphasis on tests and examinations

20. In addition to misconceived assumptions about what constitutes an effective lesson, inspectors continued to note inappropriate attention at too early a stage to the skills needed for external tests and examinations. This was especially the case in many of the lessons observed at Key Stage 3.

21. The following Year 9 lesson was judged by the inspector to be a well-structured and well-planned lesson. However, issues arose about the progress made by students.

> The main objective of the lesson was to compose an effective argument using the point/evidence/explanation (PEE) model, often used in schools, in response to a poem by Seamus Heaney. Students were presented with the poem, with the title removed, and asked to select an appropriate title from 10 alternatives provided by the teacher. Students were then expected to develop an argument supporting their choice of title. At the end of the lesson, they were asked to say what they had learnt during the lesson and recorded that they now felt much clearer about using the PEE technique.
>
> Although the inspector noted strengths in the lesson, he remarked that the poem itself appeared to be incidental. Most students had chosen a title that suggested a literal interpretation of the poem at best. None had chosen the original title (and the teacher didn't reveal it at the end of the lesson). Discussion had not touched on the themes of the poem and how this informed the choice of title. In addition, no student volunteered in the discussion about learning that they understood the poem better or that they had enjoyed it. There was no exploration of ideas, language, technique or impact within the poem. In a way, the text could have been a railway timetable with the title removed. This led the inspector to question how much learning about English actually went on in the lesson.

22. Another lesson observed also included an inappropriate use of the PEE approach with a Year 7 class. This was their first lesson on a play script of *Frankenstein* and included many good features, including effective use by the teacher of film clips and visual images to engage students. However, the first task for students after they had read a mere three pages of the play was to produce a PEE paragraph on the features of Gothic horror observed in the opening of the play – of which there were, in truth, very few examples this early in the script. In a third lesson, a new class novel was introduced by the

teacher to a Year 8 group. After reading a few pages, which failed to engage many students in the class, they were asked to write a PEE paragraph on the author's presentation of characters in relation to the historical context of the novel. There had been no opportunity for students to provide a personal response to the opening of the novel; to discuss its impact; whether it worked; what they liked/disliked; what might happen next; or what reaction they had to characters or events.

23. What appears to characterise lessons like these is an emphasis on the GCSE skills of analysis at the expense of personal response even in the early stages of Key Stage 3. Inspectors noted little attempt in these lessons to encourage an exchange of views about ideas in the text or to explore students' reaction to what they had read. Strategies that seek to engage students with the text were neglected in favour of approaches that were directly aimed at developing those skills needed for the type of analytical, literary-critical essay required in the GCSE examination. Inspectors believe that teachers often try to teach these skills before students have had the opportunity to become confident, independent and mature readers. Inevitably, this leads to learning that is heavily reliant on the authoritative, teacher view.

24. These examples concentrate on one specific type of lesson frequently noted in observations across Key Stage 3. However, there are other areas where an inappropriate emphasis on specific test skills limits the English curriculum. The Ofsted report on poetry commented: 'At GCSE level, the amount of poetry to be studied often had a negative impact on teachers' approaches and pupils' responses…The lack of focus on poetry in the end-of-key-stage national tests limited the range of the curriculum in Years 6 and 9 in the schools visited.'[11] A third example is provided later in this report, in the curriculum section, where there was a lack of explicit teaching of spelling and handwriting because relatively few marks are awarded for spelling and handwriting in national tests and examinations.

What contributes to effective learning in English lessons?

25. Since the previous triennial report, Ofsted has published subject descriptors for use by inspectors in subject inspections.[12] These are beginning to be well used in schools to explore and review practice. The descriptors emphasise the impact of teaching on learning and outcomes for pupils.

26. The English criteria for outstanding teaching and learning are as follows:

     'Teachers make imaginative use of a wide range of resources, including moving image texts, in order to address pupils' needs in reading, writing,

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[11] *Poetry in schools* (070034), Ofsted, 2007; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/070034.
[12] *Generic grade descriptors and supplementary subject-specific guidance for inspectors on making judgements during subject survey visits to schools*, Ofsted, 2010; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/20100015.

speaking and listening. They make English highly relevant to the needs of their pupils and the world beyond school. Teachers demonstrate high standards in their own use of language and they model the processes of reading and writing powerfully to help pupils make real progress in their own work. They have a detailed knowledge of texts and use this well to extend pupils' independent reading. Pupils are fully engaged through active and innovative classroom approaches including well-planned drama activities, group and class discussions.

Teachers have a very good understanding of the English language, including differences between talk and writing, and address these issues directly in lessons. The technical features of language are very well taught. Teachers use ICT imaginatively to enhance pupils' learning in the different areas of English. They take every opportunity to encourage pupils to work independently and homework tasks significantly enhance pupils' learning. Systematic approaches to marking, target setting and feedback challenge all pupils to improve work in reading, speaking and listening, as well as writing.'[13]

27. Teachers need to remember that it is unlikely that all these features will be found in a single lesson. This misunderstanding may be the cause of some of the 'over-teaching' noted above. Some examples of outstanding teaching can be found in the recent *Excellence in English* report.[14] The previous triennial report also gives examples of outstanding lessons across Key Stages 1 to 4. Using evidence from the most recent subject inspections, inspectors identified the following elements as having a consistently positive impact on pupils' learning in English within individual lessons.

- Lesson plans were clear and realistic about the key learning for pupils within the limited time available in individual lessons.

- Teaching was flexible and responded to pupils' needs as the lesson developed.

- Tasks were meaningful, giving pupils real audiences and contexts where possible.

- Pupils were given adequate time to think, plan, discuss, write, and test out ideas.

- In the lesson teachers took action, where necessary, to support and challenge groups of pupils with different abilities.

[13] *Generic grade descriptors and supplementary subject-specific guidance for inspectors on making judgements during subject survey visits to schools*, Ofsted, 2010; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/20100015.
[14] *Excellence in English* (100229), Ofsted, 2011; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/100229.

Teaching and learning in advanced level classes

28. The current English survey included a focus over the period 2010–11 on teaching in AS- and A-level lessons in schools. In the same period, English at AS and A level was inspected in six colleges, as part of the programme of further education college inspections. Evidence from inspections across both settings suggests that students enjoyed their classes and participated well. In the best classes, students engaged in challenging discussion, demonstrating a good breadth of literary awareness. Teachers of successful lessons made good use of questions to draw out extended answers, encouraging learners to explain and justify their views. However, in weaker lessons, the work was insufficiently demanding, and too few students developed good independent learning skills.

29. The strengths in teaching observed included:

   ■ excellent or good subject knowledge enabling teachers to provide thoughtful insight into a range of texts

   ■ use of a good variety of activities to interest and engage students, especially in encouraging discussion and using small group work

   ■ good support for students to become independent learners, and to develop research and study skills

   ■ opportunities for students to shape learning, using their own ideas, questions and research

   ■ effective planning that met the needs of students with varying abilities

   ■ good use of assessment criteria and constructive feedback to help students identify areas of weakness.

30. Most teachers marked students' work in detail and students generally knew what to do to improve further. Enrichment activities were well planned and often included an interesting range of visiting speakers from the wider social and educational communities to help students broaden their views of literature and language. In one college, students benefited from a visit to Jane Austen's house where, after taking part in dancing, they gained a better understanding of the symbolism of dance in her novels.

31. In weaker lessons, the management of whole class and group discussion was not always effective. Teachers did not always ensure that all students contributed to group and class discussion. In a considerable minority of lessons, teachers did not adequately prompt or direct students to assume responsibility for the content or direction of discussion. Some learners, usually the more able, contributed a lot while less confident students were too little involved. Some teachers talked too much and tended to answer their own questions, or recast the answers given by students.

Teaching phonics in primary schools

32. A recent Ofsted report looked in detail at the teaching of early reading in 12 successful schools.[15] It concluded that their success was based on a 'determination that every child will learn to read, together with a very rigorous and sequential approach to developing speaking and listening, and teaching reading, writing and spelling through systematic phonics'. There is no need for this report to go over ground already covered in the earlier report. However, in the period from April 2010 to March 2011, where possible during their routine English survey visits, inspectors observed taught phonics sessions within the primary schools visited in order to capture strengths and weaknesses in the teaching. The visits confirmed that virtually all schools were following the government's recommendations about the importance of the systematic teaching of phonics and that most were making explicit use of synthetic phonic programmes.

33. At this stage, strengths of teaching far outweighed weaknesses. In the most effective lessons, inspectors noted:

    ■ good subject knowledge of both teachers and classroom assistants

    ■ the creative use of well-designed resources and activities that helped to generate pupils' enthusiasm and enjoyment

    ■ effective modelling by teachers of phonics and the correct pronunciation of sounds

    ■ good links being made with spelling and handwriting

    ■ effective use of phonics to support pupils who were in the early stages of acquiring English as an additional language

    ■ good use of ongoing assessment to ensure well-targeted teaching

    ■ good maintenance of pace of learning in lessons

    ■ differentiation used effectively to ensure that activities and teaching were matched to pupils' specific learning needs.

34. In the small minority of lessons where the teaching of phonics was no better than satisfactory, the following weaknesses were observed:

    ■ inadequate training of teachers or classroom assistants, leading, for example, to poor pronunciation of sounds

    ■ a mismatch of work to the needs/abilities of pupils, especially at each end of the ability spectrum

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[15] *Reading by six: how the best schools do it* (100197), Ofsted, 2010; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/100197.

- poor classroom management with, for example, pupils distracted because of other activities going on in the classroom
- inability to recognise where individual pupils were struggling
- slow pace, which led to lack of concentration by pupils.

Quality of the curriculum

An effective English curriculum

35. The English curriculum was judged to be good or outstanding in 78% of the primary schools and 71% of the secondary schools visited. Around one in five schools across both phases was judged to have an outstanding curriculum in English. These figures are a slight improvement on the data from the previous triennial report.

36. The *Excellence in English* report makes the point: 'The quality of the curriculum was the strongest indicator of outstanding provision in English in the schools selected. Teaching that is held in check by an inappropriate or dull curriculum will not inspire pupils or generate high standards.'[16]

37. The report found that the most successful schools were those that had identified the particular needs of their pupils and then designed a distinctive curriculum to meet those needs. Some schools visited chose the easier path of downloading schemes of work and lesson plans from the internet, without considering the particular characteristics of their own learners. The report includes case studies of 12 schools that were judged to be outstanding, identifying what was distinctive about the curriculum in each case that enabled pupils to achieve highly. For example, one secondary special school continued to place classic texts at the centre of the English curriculum despite the fact that many of its students had considerable difficulties with basic communication. A junior school developed an innovative curriculum with emphasis on structured group work and multimodal texts in order to engage its pupils, most of whom spoke English as an additional language.[17] A primary school in the north worked hard to promote reading through a well-balanced mixture of activities, and made use of role play throughout the school in order to enhance pupils' spoken language and use talk as a way of supporting writing.

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[16] *Excellence in English* (100229), Ofsted, 2011; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/100229.

[17] A multimodal text is one that combines two or more semiotic systems. Examples of multimodal texts are: a picture book, in which the textual and visual elements are arranged on individual pages that contribute to an overall set of bound pages; or a web page, in which elements such as sound effects, oral language, written language, music and still or moving images are combined.

38. In addition to these 12 case studies of outstanding practice, the subject descriptors for English provide guidance for schools on those features that tend to distinguish an outstanding curriculum:

> 'The curriculum is distinctive, innovative and planned very well to meet pupils' needs in reading, writing, speaking and listening. Imaginative approaches, experience of a wide range of challenging texts and clear focus on basic literacy skills ensure a rich curriculum that enables pupils to make very good progress across the different areas of English. The curriculum is continuously reviewed and improved in the light of national developments. Key aspects such as poetry, drama and media work are fully integrated into the curriculum and help to provide a rich and varied programme for pupils. Schemes of work build clearly towards productive outcomes for pupils involving real audiences and purposes; this helps pupils to appreciate the importance of English to their lives outside school. Independent learning and wide reading are very well-promoted.
>
> The curriculum builds systematically on technological developments in communications and pupils have regular opportunities to use ICT, including analysing and producing media texts. Pupils' learning is very well enhanced by enrichment activities such as theatre and cinema visits, drama workshops, reading groups and opportunities for writers to work with pupils in school.'

39. The current survey found that several of the weaknesses identified in previous English reports remained a cause for concern. That confirms a lack of improvement in key areas of English. Accordingly, the rest of this section concentrates on those areas of the curriculum that need to be improved if standards are to rise further.

Refreshing the English curriculum at Key Stage 3

40. *English at the crossroads* suggested:

> 'Despite some promising developments at Key Stage 3, students generally responded better to the pace and challenge of the Key Stage 4 curriculum, with its explicit framework, clear assessment criteria and detailed feedback on their performance. Many older students complained that the Key Stage 3 curriculum had not been sufficiently challenging or stimulating and that work in Year 7 often repeated what they had learned in primary school…To many students, the Key Stage 3 programme seemed a random sequence of activities.'[18]

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[18] *English at the crossroads* (080246), Ofsted, 2009; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/080247.

41. The current survey reinforced this view although there were some examples of purposeful and effective programmes at Key Stage 3, especially where work involved audiences and purposes outside the classroom. One example is described in more detail in Part B; what especially motivated students in this school was work that seemed real to them in terms of purposes and audiences.

42. Students were also motivated by lessons that made use of modern technology. Inspectors noted that the technology used by students outside school is often far more sophisticated than that used in English lessons. It certainly remained the case that modern technology was too little used in English in many schools. The effective use of modern technology, including media technology, is highly motivating for students, as observed in the following school.

> The use of ICT and media technology is a key strength in teaching and learning. In every class there were impressive examples of how this had supported students' understanding of, and enthusiasm for, English. Particularly effective examples included:
>
> ■ an online newspaper written by students
> ■ animations written, directed and produced by students
> ■ radio plays written, directed and acted by students, including one based on *Macbeth*
> ■ homework emailed to teachers
> ■ video conferencing involving local authors and students in other local schools.

43. In general, inspectors remained concerned about the quality of provision at Key Stage 3 in too many schools visited. In the past, the Year 9 national tests at least provided a sense of direction for work in Year 9. The ending of the tests has not led to a re-thinking or re-fashioning of the Key Stage 3 curriculum in many schools. Instead, too many schools have used the freedom available to offer a watered-down set of GCSE units. Inspectors noted the use of traditional GCSE texts with younger students. For example, *Of Mice and Men* was often introduced in Year 9 and then taken up again during the GCSE course. Similarly, teachers introduced students to some of the poems they would need to study in Years 10 to 11. This report earlier referred critically to the overuse of the PEE approach across Key Stage 3. While it is clear that teachers need to use these earlier years to help students develop the range of skills required for GCSE, a narrow emphasis on some of the assessment criteria reduced the breadth of students' experience in English, limiting the number and quality of texts to be studied, and students' opportunities to respond in creative and individual ways.

44. However, a number of schools in the survey had devised imaginative approaches at Key Stage 3, as in this example.

> The department has introduced a 'Home & Away' programme in Year 9. Students have a 'home' English teacher who works with them throughout

the year and ensures steady attention to language skills and National Curriculum requirements. Every half term, a number of options are offered, each run by an English specialist, from which students may choose. Students then work on their option for the other half of the English time, which is known as 'Away' time. Examples of 'Away' topics include 'Short stories; reading and writing', 'Gothic in film and literature', 'Reading and writing thrillers'. Teachers and students are very enthusiastic about this programme and there is evidence that it increases motivation for both staff and students and encourages more independent learning.

45. In a second school, the department decided to focus on aspects of 'emotional literacy' in its English programme for younger students. Lesson objectives sought to develop students' understanding of complex issues, as well as their independence, as in the following examples.

A year 9 lesson had objectives related to 'working considerately' as a group and providing positive and constructive feedback on each other's work. The teacher highlighted these points and gave examples of effective feedback just before the class watched a group of students presenting their own television documentary. He modelled the process by taking notes during the presentation. Spontaneous applause followed the group presentation, and students gave positive comments and some sensitively expressed criticism.

Another Year 9 lesson explored the relationship between Pip's adoptive parents in *Great Expectations*. The teacher's plan included family relationships and resolution of family issues. Students chose to explore these ideas by role-playing marriage guidance sessions and hot-seating different characters. In the work and plenary which followed, students displayed unusual seriousness and trust in each other as they explored complex issues including family abuse. In this way, the study of texts was constantly related to contemporary life and students' own experiences.

46. Another school, described in more detail later in this section, decided to focus on the development of independent learning skills across Key Stage 3 and this guided their choice of units, their ways of working with students, and even the enrichment activities provided.

47. Each of these schools, in very different ways, was attempting to identify a clear character and purpose for its English work in Key Stage 3. At the same time, it was doing this in ways that were comprehensible to students and gave real reasons and purposes for their work in English. Too many schools in the survey offered no rationale to students for Key Stage 3 work, referring instead constantly to the GCSE examinations to be taken at some point in the distant future. This led to a narrow concentration on the skills tested at GCSE, experience of a limited range of texts, and too few opportunities for creative work in English. Year 7 students were not all motivated by appeals to the needs of an examination to be taken in five years' time. English departments need to

articulate a clearer rationale and purpose for students for work in Key Stage 3, preferably one that identifies the importance of English to students' lives both inside and beyond school.

Transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3

48. When the National Curriculum was first introduced, a significant amount of work took place to ensure that pupils would 'hit the ground running' in English when they arrived at the secondary school. The view of teachers during the current survey was that much of this work no longer takes place. An example from one secondary school follows.

> Until recently there were very good links with some of the major feeder primary schools. The Head of English admitted that many previous actions had now ceased. These included: meetings with primary subject leaders; a transition book which was brought with them by the Year 7 pupils; and visits by teachers to the other phase. Interestingly, the school sought out its Key Stage 2 reading and writing results during the inspection and was surprised to discover particularly poor performance in writing. This was not evidence that had previously been collected systematically by the school.

49. Teachers in Year 7 were too often unaware of what students had previously studied or achieved in their primary school English lessons, and time was therefore wasted repeating work or failing to challenge students at an appropriate level. Where teachers did not understand the curriculum in the previous phase of education, opportunities were missed to extend or consolidate learning. The school mentioned above, for example, realised once the performance data were analysed more carefully that extra attention needed to be given to improving the teaching of writing across the school. Where transition was poor, teachers repeated lessons, proceeded too slowly or studied texts that students had already read. Although most pupils in the survey stated that they enjoyed English, one of their more regular criticisms was about the repetitive nature of some work, especially across Key Stages 2 and 3.

50. Effective curriculum transition is highly challenging especially where secondary schools receive students from 30 or 40 feeder schools, but its importance is clear. Subject inspections in 2010–11 looked closely at transition and the evidence suggested that it was no better than satisfactory in around half the schools visited. Several of the schools reported a decline in transition arrangements in recent years in relation to activities such as:

- the use of transition units of work
- visits by teachers to schools in the other phase
- meetings of subject leaders to discuss curricular, teaching or assessment issues
- use of earlier assessments in English to set targets or amend the curriculum

- agreement over texts to be used in each phase.

51. As noted above, lack of knowledge about separate reading and writing levels at the end of Key Stage 2 frequently meant that secondary departments were not able to target their Year 7 curriculum effectively enough at areas of significant weakness.

52. Unsurprisingly, transition arrangements were more effective where primary schools sent their pupils mainly to one secondary school, or where cluster arrangements were longstanding and/or supported by the local authority. A number of the schools had sustained good links or were developing stronger ones in imaginative ways. This was especially effective where there was a practical activity at its centre, such as moderating assessments, agreeing good practice on common problems, or carrying out joint observations. Some of the effective individual activities noted during the survey included:

- writing produced by Year 6 pupils on their introductory visit to the secondary school that was later built into English lessons in Year 7

- a reading passport or record that moved with the pupil between primary and secondary school, giving the Year 7 teacher good, early information about each pupil's reading habits

- Year 7 students making a film about the receiving school for Year 6 pupils

- the English department asking students to bring their best piece of Year 6 work to school in September

- a transition unit involving joint work by teachers across phases including teaching by secondary staff in the primary school or vice versa

- a summer school focused on literacy and aimed at Year 6 pupils.

Teaching writing, including spelling and handwriting

53. The present government has made the improvement of reading standards a national priority. As the earlier achievement section makes clear, national tests for 11-year-olds suggest that there are similar problems with standards in writing, particularly of boys. The GCSE examinations do not separate marks for reading and writing in the same way as the Key Stage 2 tests, so there is no clear-cut evidence to show how much standards of writing improve as students move through the secondary school. Inspection evidence suggests that too many students do not write well enough by the age of 16 and that schools need to focus on this more directly. Some weaknesses in the writing curriculum have been noted earlier in this report or in other reports on English published in recent years by Ofsted. They include:

- too few opportunities for pupils to complete extended writing

- too little time in lessons to complete writing tasks

- too little emphasis on creative and imaginative tasks

- too little emphasis on the teaching of editing and redrafting
- too little choice for pupils in the topics for writing
- too few real audiences and purposes for writing.

54. *English at the crossroads* contained a section on writing and this included a list of effective elements in the teaching of writing.[19] The current survey introduced an additional element: a close look at the teaching of spelling and handwriting in primary and secondary schools. The close link between handwriting and spelling has been well established. In particular, it is clear that pupils with a fluent cursive script are more likely to become good spellers.

55. The focus on spelling and handwriting was greater in the primary than in the secondary schools visited. Most primary schools in the survey had policies for teaching spelling and handwriting but this was far less common in the secondary schools. However, inspectors observed relatively little formal teaching of spelling in either phase and interviews with pupils confirmed that spelling was rarely taught explicitly, especially beyond Key Stage 2. Although inspectors came across examples of effective, individual marking of spelling, there was little consistency within schools, with no general agreement on which spelling mistakes to correct and how. Further, marking did not make it clear how pupils were expected to respond to any spelling mistakes. As a result, teachers' comments on spelling too rarely led to action by pupils.

56. Pupils with particular special needs related to spelling, and less regularly handwriting, often received good, targeted support. However, this support did not stretch to include that broader group of pupils who lacked confidence in their spelling or handwriting. All teachers agreed that spelling and handwriting were important but most felt that they could not afford to spend much time teaching spelling and handwriting since they were allocated relatively few marks in national tests and examinations.

57. Some good practice was identified, first in a primary school.

> The school has recently rewritten its handwriting policy. This does not rely on any one commercial scheme but identifies clearly the type of script to be used in all classes. There is a detailed progression chart for teachers giving examples of handwriting patterns, families of letters and so on. Guidance is also provided on how pupils should develop pencil grips, and how to teach single letters and joins. The frequency of handwriting sessions is laid down in policy. For example, there is expected to be one weekly teacher-taught session for all Key Stage 2 classes. Sessions are to be linked to the spellings taught that week. A long-term plan for spelling identifies what is to be taught each year. Teachers are advised on the different strategies to be used such as analogy, mnemonics, word banks,

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[19] *English at the crossroads* (080246), Ofsted, 2009, pp 48–51; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/080247.

displays and interactive games. Pupils all have a spelling book and are encouraged to 'have a go' before seeking advice. Pupils are taught how to proofread and to correct their own errors. Spelling is tested on a weekly basis and differentiated for groups of pupils. Teachers are expected to identify mistakes in spelling in pupils' work and pupils copy the words out a number of times, using the 'look, cover, write, check' approach.

58. Good practice in a secondary school was recorded as follows.

The department has a detailed spelling policy describing teaching approaches and linking key words with each unit of work. Spelling is consciously reinforced when students are reading and sharing texts. For example, key words or unfamiliar words in texts are put up on the board and students discuss their meaning, their derivation, and the logic shaping their spelling. Clear guidelines have been provided for teachers, setting out expectations for the marking of written work. Teachers are expected to identify patterns in misspelling, either by individuals or by groups, as the basis for targeted interventions. Students are taught strategies for the specific reinforcement of correct spelling through tests, dictionary work and the direct linking of spelling and handwriting. A guidance booklet explains how parents can support spelling at home. The school deals with spelling problems as early as it can through grouping targeted Year 7 students for an additional programme of five to six weeks' intensive additional support. This involves a multi-sensory approach to spelling that has proved successful, with most students making at least twice the standard rate of progress. Some students are withdrawn for additional work on handwriting, for example where students have previously worked in Arabic or Mandarin script, although the school accepts that more needs to be done in teaching and supporting handwriting.

59. Overall, the survey confirmed that few schools, particularly secondary schools, had a clear policy on teaching spelling and handwriting. There was little explicit teaching of either in most secondary schools. Marking at best prioritised the identification of broad targets but rarely noted individual errors in spelling and grammar. The result was that many students received no further help with poor handwriting or spelling.

60. The *Excellence in English* report includes a case study of a primary school where exceptional provision meant that most pupils became very confident and effective writers. Inspectors visited many schools where writing was well taught. However, the variability of practice across schools in the survey and evidence of too much poor writing, including by older students, confirms inspectors' views that a significant initiative is now needed to improve the teaching of writing and to raise standards nationally. The report will return to this idea in Part B.

Developing independent learning

61. The previous triennial report commented:

> 'Although acknowledging the importance of developing pupils' independent learning, too few schools in the survey were planning systematically for it or building it into their schemes of work. As they got older, pupils were given fewer rather than more opportunities to work independently or to exercise choice. Preparation for GCSE examinations exacerbated this by focusing on what teachers and students described as "spoon-feeding". Consequently, sixth-form students often spoke about their difficulties adjusting to A-level study, where they were expected to read independently, carry out extended research, develop their own detailed initial response to texts, and think for themselves.'[20]

62. This was broadly confirmed in the current survey, although more schools were using homework effectively to develop research skills within the framework of extended projects. Schools were sometimes using more able pupils effectively to lead activities, advise others or make presentations to the rest of the class. However, the survey did not identify many primary schools or secondary English departments with an explicit policy on independent learning. One secondary school was an exception. It decided to focus on the development of students' self-confidence and their independent learning skills, and placed this at the heart of its new Key Stage 3 curriculum.

> The department is developing some innovative units of work at Key Stage 3 that are explicitly designed to make students work independently, use initiative, collaborate together, make decisions and review what they have learnt. Planned units in Year 7 include: organising a lunchtime or after-school club; improving the English department; and planning and teaching a unit of work for Year 6 pupils. The unit on 'improving the English department', for example, aims to give students the opportunity to consider the best way to use an allocated amount of money in order to improve the department. As part of this work, students are expected to research and audit the resources currently available and to conduct a survey to discover how teachers and students would like to see the department improved. The unit includes meetings of students in order to narrow the range of options, research possible cross-curricular initiatives, and prepare proposals for the chosen projects to include costings and technical advice. Groups of students will present their ideas to the rest of the class. This will lead to a whole-class decision about the best proposals which will then be presented formally by students to the rest of Year 7 and to the school's senior leadership team and English department. This

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[20] *English at the crossroads* (080246), Ofsted, 2009, pp 48–51; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/080247.

63. This approach, especially the explicit emphasis on students' developing independent learning skills was unusual across survey schools. While all schools agreed that independent learning was important, this was rarely reflected in schemes of work or in the way that teachers managed learning. The inspector observed an interesting lesson in the school described above. The content, writing a letter to a third party, was similar to many other lessons observed; what was different was the way that, in this school, the teacher withdrew from the learning and handed responsibility to the students for deciding how they were going to do this.

64. Inevitably, there were disagreements and time was wasted but the students came to realise that they would have to compromise, agree and accept different roles, listen to others, and work effectively together. The teacher supported and guided this work of course, but many of the key decisions were taken by the students. The outcome was a high-quality and effective letter. The students learnt a good deal about the language and tone of writing formal letters but almost as much about working independently and collaboratively to solve problems and reach an acceptable outcome.

Reading for pleasure

65. There has been considerable recent concern about an apparent decline in reading for pleasure. Evidence includes previous Ofsted reports, international surveys and the *Evening Standard* reading campaign. Ofsted's evidence from English surveys can be summarised as follows. In too many schools there is no coherent policy on reading overall; schools put in place numerous programmes to support reading, especially for weak readers, but do not have an overall conception of what makes a good reader. In recent years the view has developed, especially in secondary schools, that there is not enough curriculum time to focus on wider reading or reading for pleasure. Inspectors also noted the loss of once popular and effective strategies such as reading stories to younger children, listening to children read, and the sharing of complete novels with junior age pupils.

66. A recent development in reading has been the emphasis on 'guided reading' in schools.[21] This is a potentially useful strategy. However, inspection evidence suggests that it should complement rather than replace the different approaches mentioned earlier. Many primary schools in particular appear to believe that guided reading in itself will improve standards, although few have

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[21] Guided reading is a method of teaching reading to children. It generally involves a teacher and a group of around four to six pupils. The session is focused on a set of objectives to be taught through the 20 to 30-minute session. While guided reading takes place with one group of children, the remaining children are engaged in independent or group literacy tasks. The idea is that the teacher is not interrupted by the other children in the class while focusing on one group.

clear approaches to evaluating the impact of the sessions. The important question for schools is not whether they make use of a guided reading approach but how effective it is.

67. The National Curriculum rightly led to a considerable widening in the range of texts that was read and studied, including a much-enhanced emphasis on non-fiction. Inspectors believe that questions now need to be asked about the balance of time spent on different types of text in English. The most common activity in the English lessons observed was teaching the features of a persuasive text. The question arises: is studying holiday brochures or writing letters of complaint as central to English as reading novels and poems? Given that teachers are more likely to use non-fiction texts in other subjects of the curriculum, should English teachers devote equal amounts of time to non-fiction as to literary texts?

68. Criticism has been expressed in the past about the emphasis on extracts rather than complete texts in lessons. Inspection evidence suggests that this imbalance is being addressed in many schools. However, it remains the case that many secondary schools include only one unit of work in each year of Key Stage 3 that focuses on the class reading of a novel. This approach does introduce students to a good-quality text that they might not otherwise read. However, if badly taught, the 'class reader' can be a dull and slow business, discouraging the more able readers who might have finished the book themselves at home in a couple of days. Schools need to consider more imaginative approaches to teaching novels and to introducing pupils to a wider range of imaginative texts across Key Stage 3. Does every page have to be read as a class? Is there a better way of studying the class reader, especially prior to GCSE, which enables classes to encounter a range of novels in the course of the year, rather than just one? Teachers also need to be confident that their study of a class novel is encouraging pupils to read other books outside school.

69. Other issues raised in subject visits include the limited and often unimaginative variety of books read in class, and the focus, described earlier, on teaching a narrow range of literary/critical responses to texts. Students themselves frequently commented to inspectors that they would like more opportunities to respond in a creative way to the books they read. Inspectors have observed lessons at Key Stage 3 where, for example, a Shakespeare sonnet has been taught without the poem once being read aloud to the students.

70. Two further points need to be made. First, evidence from the survey suggests that too few schools currently develop reading skills effectively across the curriculum. Inspectors rarely see the direct teaching of skills such as skimming, scanning and reading for detail (including on the internet); using the index and glossary; identifying key points and making notes; summarising; or using more than one source. There is also a lack of extended reading in subjects other than English, where use is commonly made of extracts and where teachers are less aware of approaches that might help pupils to read effectively and make sense

of what they are reading. A case study of good practice in developing reading across the school is included later in this report.

71. Second, research confirms that many primary teachers – understandably, since most are not subject specialists – have a very limited understanding of the world of literature, including good-quality contemporary literature.[22] For example, over half the teachers involved in the research could name only one, two or no poets at all. This relates to the issue of subject knowledge discussed in more detail elsewhere in this report.

Literacy across the curriculum

72. As noted above, schools need a coherent policy on developing literacy in all subjects if standards of reading and writing are to be improved. Even with effective teaching in English lessons, progress will be limited if this good practice is not consolidated in the 26 out of 30 lessons each week in a secondary school that are typically lessons other than English or the 70% or so of lessons in primary schools that do not focus on English. This debate is, of course, long established and formed a central point of the Bullock report on English published in 1975.[23] Previous efforts to raise literacy as a whole-school initiative have tended at best to have a short-term impact. The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Education recently reported that 'schools should be developing cross-departmental strategies to develop literacy' and recommended that Ofsted should look 'more closely at this'.[24] In response, Ofsted has produced training materials for all inspectors and will be evaluating the extent to which schools can demonstrate a whole-school commitment to improving pupils' literacy during whole-school inspections.

73. Two interesting examples of effective secondary practice were noted during this survey.

> In the first school, the literacy coordinator (in a school where 90% of students speak English as an additional language) has launched a 'Language Focus' component in the programme for tutorial work. The intention is to provide staff with the skills and understanding of language issues needed for the programme, which will then be followed up in the teaching of their own subjects. The first unit was based around oral language used in telephone calls. The teacher responsible identified that their students had difficulty adopting a range of transactional tones and

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[22] See for example: *Teachers as readers: building communities of readers*, United Kingdom Literacy Association, 2007–08;
www.ukla.org/research/research_projects_in_progress/ukla_research_on_teachers_as_readers.
[23] *A language for life*: report of the committee of enquiry appointed by the Secretary of State for Education and Science under the chairmanship of Sir Alan Bullock FBA, Department of Education and Science, 1975.
[24] *Report on the inquiry into overcoming the barriers to* literacy by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Education, 2011; www.educationappg.org.uk/inquiry.

registers and switching between informal and formal language. A range of materials was produced to support analysis of the language used in different conversations, leading to modelling by teachers and students practising different language for different contexts. Students then applied these newly learnt language approaches in role plays or real telephone calls.

In the other school, the whole-school literacy coordinator, a historian, was appointed in September 2008. She has developed a programme to support tutorial work. This provides tutors with a scheme of work and a 'Literacy Toolkit' to aid them. The Key Stage 3 programme in all subjects focuses on spelling. Students have a booklet which contains key spelling rules, tips to improve spelling, and strategies to help them recall difficult words. The booklet also contains lists of key subject terms which students are asked to work through. There is also space for recording their own set of words to act as a mini dictionary. The literacy coordinator carries out regular observations of these sessions and also reviews students' books. The whole of Year 7 are given tests to evaluate their progress in reading and spelling, leading to the identification of each student's misspellings so that these can be addressed in a systematic way by all staff.

74. This report has already emphasised the importance of encouraging reading for pleasure and wide reading by students. The comprehensive school below won a national award for promoting reading.

The school library is at the centre of many of the initiatives to promote reading. The librarian is encouraged by senior leaders to promote a wide range of initiatives, often working in partnership with other local schools. She also works increasingly closely with students to promote reading. The weekly reading group has been particularly successful and draws in many keen and able readers. However, the promotion of reading extends far beyond the school library and includes all of the major departments. Senior leaders and managers are fully committed to improving reading and have led a number of developments themselves, including teaching an additional weekly reading lesson with all Year 7 students.

Early assessment identifies a large number of students who need extra help with their reading. Two particular initiatives have been introduced to help them make rapid progress. First the weakest readers receive additional support through a phonic-based reading programme taught by the Learning Support department. Second, the school has developed an approach based around small groups of guided readers. This session is in addition to timetabled English lessons. The groups meet weekly to work on a particular text, reading aloud, talking about the book and following the session up with homework activities. The sessions are popular with students, who strongly believe that they gain greatly in confidence as readers working in these small groups.

> The English department fully supports these initiatives and promotes the importance of reading for enjoyment within its taught curriculum. Early lessons in Year 7 involve students working in the library and learning to use all the resources. Activities on texts are devised to ensure enjoyment of reading, with lots of emphasis on speaking and listening, and practical tasks such as making and using puppets as part of the *Romeo and Juliet* work. The department has also developed its own approach to guided reading in Year 8, involving students in choosing the texts. Another interesting approach has been for all homework in English in the first term of Year 7 to involve independent reading by students at home in order to get the reading habit integrated early.

75. This level of coherent, whole-school planning for literacy was unusual in the schools visited. Too often, good practice in English was not supported by initiatives in other areas of the curriculum, thus limiting the development and consolidation of the key skills of literacy. This issue will be explored in more detail in Part B.

Leadership and management

Strengths of subject leadership and management

76. Leadership and management were judged to be good or outstanding in most schools surveyed. There were few differences between the figures for primary and secondary schools. In both phases, around 20% of schools were judged to have leadership and management that were no better than satisfactory. There was, however, a small difference between the proportion of primary and secondary schools considered to have outstanding leadership and management. The figure was 25% in secondary schools against 20% in primary schools.

77. *English at the crossroads* identified a number of key strengths of leadership and management in highly effective schools, including:

- headteachers who understood the subject's importance, placed it at the centre of their drive for improvement and maintained a close interest in the development of the curriculum

- effective subject leadership providing a clear sense of direction and purpose

- good use of a range of measures to evaluate performance.

78. The present survey confirmed these conclusions. Across all the schools inspected, where leadership and management were highly effective, the following additional factors appeared to be crucial:

- a clearly communicated and ambitious vision, securely based on accurate evaluation of the subject's strengths and areas for development

- constructive use of performance data and well-developed assessment strategies as the foundation for good planning and realistic but aspirational target-setting

- confident delegation and a collegiate approach leading to effective professional development and innovative curriculum planning.

79. These qualities can be exemplified in two case studies of schools that were inspected during the survey and judged to have outstanding leadership and management in English. The first school was an average-sized primary school in south-east London. Over half of the pupils come from minority ethnic groups and around one third have English as an additional language. Attainment has risen over recent years and is now above average. Standards are especially high in speaking and listening. The school had previously identified concerns with the teaching of writing and, as a result of effective recent action, the gap between reading and writing standards has narrowed. The features of outstanding provision in leadership and management were described by the inspector as follows.

> Senior leaders and managers have overseen an improvement in attainment in English as well as the development of an innovative and effective curriculum. This is directly the result of very effective subject leadership. The headteacher is an English specialist and previously worked as a consultant within the borough. She works very closely with the enthusiastic and knowledgeable subject leader. As a result, the school has a strong vision and sense of direction for English. The headteacher's view is that the curriculum needs to be lively, practical and challenging if it is to engage their pupils. English is viewed as a creative, interactive subject and teachers are encouraged to make regular use of drama, information and communication technology, and media texts to motivate pupils. The subject action plan identifies well-chosen areas for development, all related to outcomes for pupils. Self-evaluation is secure. The school monitors pupils' performance effectively and has detailed evidence about the achievement of the different groups. Evidence from monitoring is used well to provide feedback to teachers on areas for improvement. This feedback is honest and challenging, and is focused directly on improving the quality of pupils' learning. The subject leader has been very well deployed over the past year on a range of tasks including providing training for colleagues, moderating standards, supporting individual teachers and developing the school library.

80. The second school is a large secondary in an area of significant social and economic deprivation in the north-east of England. Attainment in English at the end of Key Stage 4 has risen rapidly. The inspector commented that the school had acted very effectively 'to raise achievement from the doldrums'. At the time of the inspection, students were making good progress and the proportion of top grades at GCSE had increased. The gap between boys' and girls' attainment

is wide when they enter the school, but was steadily reducing. Leadership and management were described as follows.

> Subject leaders are dynamic and passionately committed to improving outcomes for all students. Their clear understanding of the subject and well-informed views on how to teach it have given English a strong sense of direction. Very rigorous monitoring by senior and subject leaders evaluates a wide range of information, including the progress and attitudes of different groups of students. The clear action plan pinpoints areas needing to improve, and is being implemented rapidly and thoroughly. Responsibilities are shared well. Staff are encouraged to show initiative and are held to account for their students' progress. Their work and contribution to whole-school improvement is well regarded. The refreshed curriculum reflects the contributions of a talented team. English teachers meet regularly to review progress and share good practice. Some have worked in pairs to develop new approaches. More recently qualified teachers are well supported. As a result, there is growing understanding of agreed approaches and priorities across the team. Good management has ensured consistency in key respects, such as teachers' planning and marking.

81. Previous English reports have identified marked improvements over recent years in aspects of subject management such as monitoring, evaluation, planning and review. The quality of subject leadership has not always been as strong, although it was clearly a positive feature of the two case study schools described above. Because some subject leaders, in both primary and secondary schools visited, lacked the subject knowledge or confidence to articulate a clear vision and direction for the subject, changes were sometimes implemented uncritically and without sufficient reference to the particular needs of their own pupils. Ofsted's subject descriptors for outstanding leadership and management attempt to balance the key characteristics that describe visionary leaders who also manage the subject very well:

> 'Subject leaders inspire pupils and colleagues through a passionate commitment to the subject, strongly held views about the nature of English and very good subject knowledge. They are very well informed about developments in the subject nationally and use this to improve the curriculum and teaching. Innovation and creativity are encouraged. All staff work very well together because there is a strong shared purpose and commitment to the same goals. Provision for pupils is reviewed collaboratively and good practice is shared routinely and effectively. Subject responsibilities are well delegated and all members of the team, including newly qualified teachers, have very good opportunities to contribute to developments. Subject leaders make thoughtful and thorough use of a wide range of evidence, including the response of pupils, to review the impact of work across reading, writing, speaking and listening. As a result, self-evaluation is rigorous and effective, leading to well-targeted support for all staff. Subject plans identify very clearly how

teaching is to be further improved. The very good quality of its work means that the English department has a very high profile in the life of the school and is at the cutting edge of initiatives locally or nationally.'

82. The *Excellence in English* report provided further examples of schools where highly effective leadership had led to improved attainment and progress. The report particularly stressed the importance of subject leaders developing a strong shared vision for the subject with their team.

83. Both the distinctiveness and the originality of the English curriculum provided in these outstanding schools are firmly based on a very clear and individual understanding of the nature of the subject and its importance to pupils in each school. Strong and well-articulated principles underpin the different visions for English displayed across the various schools. This sense of subject identity encourages a consistency of approach across the subject team and provides direction to subject developments. This was seen, for example, at a primary school where the headteacher and subject leader were both extremely knowledgeable about English and passionate about the subject. Their vision of English has developed collaboratively over recent years, is always open to further change and leads to their own distinctive learning ethos in the school.

> 'In this school, education is about learners experiencing the joy of discovery, solving problems, being creative in writing, art, music, developing their self-confidence as learners and maturing socially and emotionally… Learners do better when they are excited and engaged; when there is joy in what they are doing, they learn to love learning.'

84. At secondary level, a similar very strong sense of subject identity was noted in one school where department meetings over a period of time had led to a simple but strong statement about English: 'Every student: has the right to learn in English; should enjoy learning in English; should make progress; should have the opportunity to be creative.'

Areas for development in subject leadership and management

85. As stated above, weaknesses found during the subject survey were more likely to be related to the quality of leadership than management. Inspectors in the current survey identified three common areas of weakness in less effective schools:

■ the lack of a clear defining vision for English

■ unevenness in the quality of teaching

■ weaknesses in subject planning, including a lack of clarity about how to improve teaching.

86. Reference has been made above to the importance of schools developing their own curriculum for English based on strong subject knowledge and an accurate identification of their own pupils' needs. In the less effective schools visited,

there was no clear vision for English. In primary schools, this was sometimes the result of subject leadership being subsumed within whole-school planning and management. This was particularly likely to be the case where schools had moved away from the appointment of subject leaders to key stage coordinators with responsibility for a number of subjects. In these cases, it was often difficult for schools to provide subject coherence across the different key stages or to identify and develop clearly enough the training needed to enhance teaching in English.

87. A lack of consistency in the quality of teaching across a primary school or a secondary department was often considered to be the prime cause of a failure to raise standards in English across schools. When the evaluation schedule for whole-school inspections was revised in 2009, a new and important judgement was introduced, namely the responsibility of leaders and managers for improving teaching and learning. This includes 'how well leaders and managers at all levels drive and secure improvement, ensuring high-quality teaching and learning'. Schools have taken this seriously. In the best schools in the survey, senior and middle leaders worked closely together to evaluate the full range of evidence about English, making use of extensive lesson observation, discussion with pupils and staff, regular work sampling, reviews of planning and feedback from pupils.

88. Where provision was weaker, inspectors judged that headteachers or the senior leadership team sometimes took too much responsibility for evaluating effectiveness in English, sidelining the subject leader, especially in activities such as lesson observation or work sampling. A non-specialist senior leader was more likely to look for generic factors in teaching and learning and less likely to identify the particular development of subject knowledge, skills and understanding in, for example, the texts studied in English lessons. If, during a lesson observation, the observer has limited knowledge of, for example, *A midsummer night's dream*, it clearly becomes more difficult to evaluate the teacher's understanding of the play or the quality of the pupils' response to what they are reading. In the most effective schools, monitoring and evaluation became a shared, joint endeavour, with the senior leaders' insights into strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning across the school complemented by the English expertise of subject leaders.

89. The most effective schools in the survey had secure and detailed subject self-evaluation, used performance data to identify weaknesses between particular groups of pupils, and used this evidence to plan practical and well-targeted action that was likely to lead to improved outcomes for pupils. However, subject action plans remained an area of weakness in too many survey schools. There were two particular areas of concern. First, some action plans made unwarranted assumptions about the impact of actions. For example, one secondary action plan identified changes to a scheme of work as being sufficient in themselves to raise standards, rather than seeking to evaluate the impact such changes might have on pupils' attitudes and achievement. In several primary schools, as noted earlier, it was deemed sufficient to introduce

a programme of guided reading without putting in place measures to evaluate whether the change had led to higher standards in reading or greater enjoyment of reading. This highlights a weakness in the quality of evaluation and a lack of specificity about the success criteria in too many subject action plans.

90. Second, action plans were considerably weaker in identifying how teaching and learning might be improved, despite the important change noted earlier to the Ofsted evaluation schedule. There was again a tendency for schools to assume that a change in policy or approach would automatically bring about desired improvements in teaching and learning. The most common example noted by inspectors concerned the introduction of new programmes for assessment. There can be no assumption that the introduction of any programme will necessarily lead to better teaching or assessment; it might be implemented inconsistently across the subject team; it might be effective in some areas, such as recording progress, but not in others, such as enabling more effective target-setting for individual pupils.

91. What subject action plans too often lacked was effective use of the evidence available, such as lesson observations, work sampling and other monitoring measures, to identify clearly how individual teachers might be able to improve their teaching and its impact on learning in the classroom. Given the wide range of evidence available to senior and subject leaders in schools, there is no reason why they should not be much clearer and more detailed about the ways in which individual teachers of English can improve learning for pupils in lessons. This is of course likely to depend to a large extent on the subject knowledge of English coordinators – an issue to which this report returns in Part B.

Part B: Moving English forward

92. As this report noted in Part A, subject inspection evidence for English is generally positive. The overall effectiveness of English in primary and secondary schools surveyed was judged to be good or outstanding in around 70% of schools inspected. Twenty-two per cent of secondary schools and 16 per cent of primary schools were judged to be outstanding.

93. However, standards are still not high enough. In particular, the lack of improvement in attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 remains an area for concern. In addition, the government White Paper included the intention to deliver higher standards: 'We will define a new minimum, or "floor" standard, which we will expect all schools to meet. This standard will be higher than in the past, because we think it is right that minimum expectations should continue to rise.' Furthermore, although results have risen at the end of Key Stage 4, there is still considerable concern generally about standards of literacy.

94. A recent Ofsted report on literacy focused on the barriers that prevent many people, including adults, from acquiring the necessary skills.

'Successive reports by Ofsted, including the Annual Reports of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, have shown that there are particular groups of children and young people whose educational attainment falls well below that of the rest of the population. Research for the Skills for Life survey, conducted in 2003 for the then Department for Education and Skills, showed that 17.8 million adults (56% of the adult working population) in England had literacy skills below GCSE grade C (the equivalent of Level 2). Of these, 5.2 million (one in six of the adult population) lacked functional literacy; that is, the level needed to get by in life at work. This shows the negative impact of failing to gain literacy skills at school.'[25]

95. It went on to make the point that 'even in some of the relatively successful providers visited, inspectors came across pupils who were failing to gain adequate skills in literacy'.

96. The government has placed increasing emphasis on international comparisons which appear to show that England has fallen down the league table when it comes to performance in literacy. The White Paper argues:

'What really matters is how we're doing compared with our international competitors. That is what will define our economic growth and our country's future. The truth is, at the moment we are standing still while others race past. In the most recent OECD PISA survey in 2006 we fell from… 7th to 17th in literacy.'[26]

97. The White Paper also refers to concerns about the standards achieved by students when they move from schools to employment.

'Given these problems, it is perhaps unsurprising that employers and universities consistently express concerns about the skills and knowledge of school leavers, while international studies show that other countries are improving their school systems faster… We are clear that our school system is performing below its potential.'[27]

98. There is a particular emphasis on reading and literacy in the White Paper.

'Despite the efforts of dedicated teachers, one in five 11-year-olds still leaves primary school struggling to read and write at the standard expected of them. This figure is much higher for deprived pupils – more than one in three.'[28]

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[25] *Removing barriers to literacy* (090237), Ofsted, 2011; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/090237.
[26] *The importance of teaching: schools White Paper*, Department for Education, 2010, Foreword; www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/schoolswhitepaper/b0068570/the-importance-of-teaching.
[27] *The importance of teaching: schools White Paper*, Department for Education, 2010, p18.
[28] *The importance of teaching: schools White Paper*, Department for Education, 2010, p43.

99. All this means that there is increasing pressure on schools to raise standards in English and literacy. This report, the third triennial report on English, identifies some of the common areas of weakness noted in schools and provides practical recommendations on how standards can be improved across both primary and secondary phases. It does this in Part B through 10 specific areas for action that, if put into practice, would in Ofsted's view help to raise attainment in English in schools.

Action to raise standards in English

The problem: the teaching of writing needs to be more effective and to include a stronger emphasis on spelling and handwriting

100. The curriculum section in Part A includes comments on writing. It notes that:

- assessments of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage confirm that writing is the weakest of the four aspects of communication, language and literacy

- despite improvements at the end of Key Stage 2, pupils in general do much better in reading than writing

- boys are less successful than girls at writing, across all key stages.

101. Part A also argues that the lack of clear-cut evidence in secondary schools about respective performance in reading and writing is one of the reasons why there has been less discussion nationally about writing than reading. Evidence from the now-discontinued Key Stage 3 national tests encouraged teachers to believe that standards of reading were lower than those of writing.

102. Previous Ofsted subject reports have made the point that the assessment of reading in the Year 9 tests was based in part on students' understanding and response to a play by Shakespeare and that this was likely to have influenced, and possibly distorted, the performance of students in the reading assessment. The substantial difference between the national assessments at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 has made it difficult to evaluate progress in reading and writing. However, weaker scores for the reading element of the Key Stage 3 tests meant that schools spent more time working on students' understanding of the Shakespeare play and less time consolidating their writing skills. There was no evidence from subject inspections that the gap between reading and writing at the end of Key Stage 2 narrowed in the early years of secondary school. Inspectors' views are that many students, especially boys, still struggle with aspects of writing in their Key Stage 4 course.

103. Part A lists some common weaknesses found in inspections in the teaching of writing. Part A also refers to a lack of direct teaching of spelling and handwriting in survey schools and the way in which this constrained the learning of many pupils who would have benefited from it. *English at the crossroads* noted some improvements in the teaching of writing, referring

especially to the direct modelling of writing by teachers and the increased tendency of teachers to draw on their own writing when instructing pupils. The *Excellence in English* report provides a case study of outstanding practice in teaching writing in a primary school. However, the teaching of writing varies too much in quality at present.

104. The Department for Education has recently published guidance on reading, including reading for pleasure.[29] This includes a summary of research on reading from the United Kingdom and internationally, recommendations on what works in schools, a list of practical ideas to promote reading, and some case studies. It would now be appropriate for the Department for Education to do something similar with writing. The department (then known as the DCSF) did publish material to stimulate a debate about writing in 2008.[30] Similar research evidence should now be produced on teaching writing, based on a summary of national and international research and case studies of effective practice, to inform teachers and help reduce the current variability in the quality of teaching writing.

The problem: there are too few English coordinators in primary schools who are subject specialists

105. This report confirms that in many respects provision for English was similar in primary and secondary schools in the survey. However, in two important and related areas, secondary schools were more effective. There was more outstanding teaching in secondary schools, and leadership and management were more likely to be judged as outstanding in secondary than in primary schools.

106. This at least partly reflects the fact that many subject leaders in primary schools are not English specialists. Although exact figures are not available, it is likely that few English coordinators in primary schools have studied the subject at degree level; most will not have studied the subject beyond advanced level and some may not even have this level of qualification. This is unsurprising given the need for primary teachers to take responsibility for all subjects of the curriculum.

107. As noted earlier, research, supported by inspection evidence, has shown that many primary teachers have limited knowledge of writers and poets, including writers from the literary heritage. This makes it difficult for many of them to identify suitably challenging texts to study with older children and to suggest books that might be appropriate for individual children to read outside school. This lack of specialist subject knowledge is also likely to limit the effectiveness

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[29] *Encouraging reading for pleasure,* Department for Education, 2011; www.education.gov.uk/b00192950/encouraging-reading-for-pleasure.
[30] *Getting going: generating, shaping and developing ideas in writing*, DCSF, 2008; www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationdetail/page1/DCSF-00283-2008.

of some primary teachers, especially when teaching older pupils, in areas such as understanding the differences between standard and non-standard English, teaching grammar, and modelling the writing of texts such as poetry for their pupils.

108. The recent Ofsted report on literacy highlighted the importance of subject knowledge:

> 'The most effective providers visited had at least one senior member of staff with an excellent knowledge of literacy and its pedagogy. They understood the stages of language development and how and when to provide additional support.'[31]

109. The government recognises the importance of subject specialist knowledge in the White Paper where it talks about providing support to increase the number of specialist teachers in science and mathematics and to improve the skills of existing teachers. It goes on to say: 'We need more specialist mathematics teachers in primary schools and will encourage and support schools in developing this specialism.'[32]

110. This statement applies equally well to English. If the government wishes to give a push to English standards in primary schools, where results have been flat for a number of years, it should provide the same support and training for English.

111. While it is the case that English subject leaders have received considerable training from the National Strategies in recent years, this has largely focused on aspects of classroom methodology rather than on subject knowledge. Accordingly, many subject leaders have developed a good understanding of issues such as planning lessons, managing guided group work and using ongoing assessment to review progress. This does not mean, however, that they are equally effective at choosing suitable poems to study with a class, or showing an understanding of a writer's technique, or explaining the finer points of English grammar. This report argues that there is a need for the government to do the same with English as with mathematics: to provide support in order to increase the number of specialist English teachers in primary schools, and to 'improve the skills of existing teachers'. This could be done through some form of specialist subject knowledge training or encouraging subject leaders of English in primary schools to pursue part-time higher qualifications.

The problem: too few pupils read widely enough for pleasure

112. Ofsted reports have been consistent in arguing for greater emphasis on reading for pleasure within the taught curriculum in both primary and secondary

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[31] *Removing barriers to literacy* (090237), Ofsted, 2011, p45; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/090237.
[32] *The importance of teaching: schools White Paper*, Department for Education, 2010, Foreword; www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/schoolswhitepaper/b0068570/the-importance-of-teaching.

schools.[33] This has now become a focus of government policy. The Education Secretary has been reported as saying:

> 'Children as young as 11 should be expected to read 50 books a year as part of a national drive to improve literacy standards... The vast majority of teenagers read one or two books as part of their GCSEs and [Mr Gove] said all schools should "raise the bar" by requiring pupils to read a large number of books at the end of primary school and throughout secondary education.'[34]

113. The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Education has also reported:

> 'Teaching methods should bring pleasure and reward to children, including to those who are just beginning to make sense of the letters on the page. The teachers who responded to the Inquiry felt that unless children have developed as readers in the fullest sense and are personally motivated to read, they will not progress beyond Level 3 or 4 by the age of 11, and their reading capacity could even regress… The active encouragement of reading for pleasure should be a core part of every child's curriculum entitlement because extensive reading and exposure to a wide range of texts make a huge contribution to students' educational achievement.'[35]

114. Given that Ofsted made similar recommendations in its 2005 report, it is clear that schools have been slow to take appropriate action. One reason is that national tests and examinations do not in general assess pupils' wider reading skills. Other reasons are identified in Part A, including an increasing emphasis on non-literary texts at the expense of literary texts. These texts are more likely either to be extracts or very short texts such as a newspaper article, and do not help with the development of stamina in reading. Part A also refers to the tendency for secondary schools to include the study of one novel in detail during each year of Key Stage 3 rather than providing more regular opportunities to read and discuss a wider range of narrative texts. In addition, too few schools set time aside in lessons for the reading, sharing, recommending and discussion of texts other than set texts.

115. Inspection evidence suggests that it is now time to take more practical steps to improve provision for reading in schools. A successful approach employed in some schools has been to appoint a reading advocate or coordinator. This is normally an English specialist, since they are expected to advise on reading within the English curriculum. This would involve keeping their own reading up to date, including knowledge of what has been published for children, and

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[33] *English 2000–05: a review of inspection evidence* (2351), Ofsted, 2005; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/2351.
[34] *Daily Telegraph*, 22 March 2011.
[35] *Report on the inquiry into overcoming the barriers to* literacy by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Education, 2011; www.educationappg.org.uk/inquiry.

advising on texts to be used in English lessons. However, it should also encompass a broader brief involving reading across the school. As such, it might involve working with the school librarian, and advising teachers in other subject areas how they might encourage reading for pleasure across the curriculum, as well as leading on whole-school reading initiatives and evaluating the impact of school measures. In relation to very small schools, especially primary schools, it should be possible for a reading coordinator to work across a network of linked primary schools or across a secondary/primary pyramid of schools.

The problem: national tests and examinations have too much impact on the range and content of the English curriculum

116. The challenges facing schools are well understood. At present, schools are being encouraged to take greater control over what is taught while continuing to be held accountable for pupils' standards of achievement. Part A of this report gives three examples of the negative impact of tests and examinations on provision for English:

   ■ an inappropriate emphasis on practising the GCSE skills too early in Key Stage 3

   ■ a lack of emphasis on spelling and grammar

   ■ weaknesses in the teaching of poetry, including an emphasis on analytic approaches at the expense of creative ones.

117. As one of the core subjects in the National Curriculum, English has an understandably high profile. Standards of literacy across the school curriculum are seen as being rooted foremost in what is taught and learnt in English lessons. School leaders and managers are acutely aware of the importance of English results in national assessments and examinations. Primary schools know that they will be judged by their success in meeting the government's floor standards for English by the end of Key Stage 2. Secondary schools have clearly in view the impact on their national standing of the proportion of students each year who gain five or more GCSEs at grade C or above, including English and mathematics. The government's introduction in 2010 of the English Baccalaureate as a benchmark for effective secondary education has strengthened schools' focus on the skills needed to achieve this.

118. Findings from English inspection reports and from other surveys show that it is entirely possible for schools both to be innovative and to perform strongly in national tests and examinations.[36] One of the primary schools visited, for example, showed what can happen when there is a consistent and effective

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[36] *Curriculum innovation* (070097), Ofsted, 2008; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/070097; and *Learning: creative approaches that raise standards* (080266), Ofsted, 2010; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/080266.

approach to planning and assessment in English. Classes explored cross-curricular topics, knowing from the start that their work would be presented for assessment, as a performance, newspaper or web page. The scope for enquiry, experiment, invention and independence was considerable. Systematic recording and analysis of individuals' development of English skills ensured that barriers to progress were quickly identified and action taken. Pupils in this school made good progress in English and attainment was above average.

119. The challenge is perhaps even greater for secondary schools in being innovative yet effective in examinations. All the schools featured in *Excellence in English* achieved both these objectives. It requires confidence to be innovative in a school where raising attainment is a priority. An anxious senior leadership team is likely to adopt a prescriptive approach to curriculum planning, which in turn makes subject leaders and teachers nervous about taking risks and being inventive. The danger then is that pupils see no further than their level descriptors, with the move from one level to the next towards a GCSE grade being all that English has to offer them. On the other hand, inspectors have found examples of excellent practice. This example comes from a secondary school in an area of considerable deprivation; its pupils enter Year 7 with very low prior attainment and make far better than average progress.

> Regular events such as 'Flexible Fridays' ring-fence time for extended projects organised across departments. For example, a Renaissance project had Year 9 pupils writing in the first person as a protégé of Leonard da Vinci, with a Renaissance murder built into the narrative. To encourage reading and discussion, as well as to develop useful life/social skills, a fortnightly 'library coffee morning' is organised by the librarian for Year 10 pupils. Pupils are put into mixed-ability groups and given an assortment of journals and newspapers to trawl through. They select an item that interests them – any item – and put together a brief presentation about its content for the plenary session. Pupils have to learn how to cope socially as well as being effective at speaking, listening, reading and presentation. It is a hugely popular event. Pupils see it as a treat; they do not identify it as preparation for their GCSE examination. For some, it dismantles the preconceptions and inhibitions that would otherwise keep them out of the library.

The problem: curriculum transition in English from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 is underdeveloped in too many schools

120. The All-Parliamentary Group on Education reported recently:

> One of the most serious challenges to continuity in the teaching of reading is the transition between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3. This transition, coming at a time when many children are emerging as self-motivated readers, is generally handled very badly because of curriculum and assessment constraints. Insufficient attention is given in Years 7 and 8 to the needs of children as readers, particularly those who are becoming

literate but who remain in need of one-to-one tuition or small-group teaching.[37]

121. Although these comments are directed specifically at reading, they apply equally well to other areas of English. Part A contains an analysis of transition issues and there is no need to repeat it here. With a few exceptions, schools agreed that initiatives across the primary–secondary divide had reduced in recent years. Part A identified some schools where effective transition in English was taking place and listed some of the actions taken. Two additional examples are provided below of schools that were successfully tackling some of these transition and continuity issues.

> Links with primary schools are improving which has led to English teachers from secondary and primary schools observing each other's lessons to exchange good practice. Joint training was planned with a focus on phonics and talk for writing. Every Year 7 student visits a Year 6 pupil in a primary school to support them ahead of their move. The Head of English spends three evenings reading and talking about stories with parents of pupils in the main feeder primary school.
>
> English primary subject leaders get together with the secondary staff to consider key issues such as how to engage boys, how to moderate writing and share good practice, and how to make assessment consistent across the schools. There is a clear understanding that the schools face similar problems, particularly in improving boys' writing, and the meetings provide a forum for agreeing what should be done. This has involved producing a booklet to support all schools in the cluster when assessing pupils' writing. There has also been some observation of good practice in other schools, as well as joint training provided by schools within the cluster. Transition to the secondary school also involves primary pupils in visiting a nearby abbey for sample lessons in media and drama.

122. The benefits of effective transition in English across Key Stages 2 and 3 are clear. Foremost, teachers in both phases have a better understanding of pupils' previous or subsequent experience of English. This enables secondary teachers, for example, to pitch work at the right level and build on what students have previously learnt. It enables primary teachers to understand the particular demands of the Key Stage 3 curriculum and ensure that pupils are practising the necessary skills and facing appropriately challenging work. It enables teachers in both phases to plan together to meet the particular needs of their pupils. It also enables teachers to learn from each other. For secondary teachers to learn, for example, about how primary teachers manage differentiation in mixed-ability classes, or how they plan for guided group work. Primary teachers can learn from the subject expertise of the secondary

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[37] *Report on the inquiry into overcoming the barriers to* literacy by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Education, 2011; www.educationappg.org.uk/inquiry.

department and, for example, how to help pupils write good-quality original poetry. Good practice can be shared and schools can identify coherent approaches to common problems such as how to get the best out of their boys in writing.

123. In addition, the most effective use can be made of assessment information. Reference was made earlier to the surprising number of secondary schools that do not request or receive separate levels for pupils' achievement in reading and writing and how this delays effective action in areas of weakness. The more effective sharing of assessment information would enable secondary teachers to begin work with Year 7 students with a better understanding of their strengths and weaknesses in writing. They would be familiar with pupils' progress against their literacy targets set in Year 6 and have a better insight into the reading histories of students, so that they could more easily plan programmes that would engage and stretch the abilities of all students.

The problem: lesson plans are often insufficiently flexible and lack clarity about what pupils are expected to learn

124. Inspectors frequently noted that while teaching observed in lessons had many positive features, the impact on pupils' learning was sometimes less substantial. One factor that was frequently noted was that the excessive detail within individual lesson plans sometimes caused teachers to lose sight of this key consideration.

125. It is not unusual for inspectors to be presented with a three- or four-page lesson plan. A typical example might ask teachers to identify: learning aims and outcomes; resources; references to the National Curriculum and National Strategy objectives; links to a programme of learning skills; assessment opportunities; differentiation strategies, and so on. Lesson plans frequently expect teachers to refer to particular whole-school topics such as numeracy, information and communication technology or citizenship. Furthermore, the plan will include a detailed breakdown of the lesson, sometimes in five- or 10-minute chunks. It is not uncommon to find a lesson plan that includes (in addition to the features listed above) up to 500 words describing the lesson activities. This level of detail is counter-productive and does not necessarily lead to teaching that is clearly enough focused on specific learning outcomes for pupils. Previous English reports have commented that learning objectives were frequently over-ambitious for single lessons. Lesson plans should be simplified to encourage teachers to consider the central question: what is the key learning for pupils in this lesson and how can I bring it about?

126. Teaching in English would be improved through an emphasis on plans that are less detailed but more focused on learning outcomes for pupils within individual lessons. Learning would also benefit from planning that was flexible and open to change. As Part A confirms, the best teaching is always sensitive to pupils' needs and the developing context in the classroom. In other words, the most effective teachers identify problems and misunderstandings while they are

teaching and address them in such a way that pupils learn well. They do not press on with a planned lesson that is not likely to have a positive impact on pupils' learning.

The problem: many children have weak levels of language and communication on entry to school

127. Previous subject inspections have identified a lack of emphasis on explicit, planned teaching of speaking and listening. This remains the case. Speaking is more commonly seen in schools as a way of supporting writing. Practice in this area has been resistant to change for many years. One reason is that teachers understandably prioritise pupils' work in reading and writing because they feature more prominently in national tests and examinations. What this report wishes to emphasise is the importance of developing pupils' speaking and listening in the early years that children are in school. Research by the Communication Trust suggests that children's ability to communicate on entry to school has declined in recent years.[38] Their report quotes primary headteachers reporting that some children enter school without even knowing their own names.

128. Earlier comments in this report identify the poor communication skills of some children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. This needs to be a priority for improvement. Speech comes before both reading and writing. The earlier that all children develop confidence in their speech, along with an extensive vocabulary, the more likely it is that they will be able to improve their overall competence in reading and writing. A recent report from Ofsted on the impact of the Early Years Foundation Stage identified some weaknesses in providers' planning for aspects of children's spoken language.

> 'Occasionally, speaking and listening were weak, because the provider was relying on learning happening incidentally. In one nursery, for example, there was an expectation that staff were speaking with, and listening to, the children all the time but the quality was not consistent. One childminder visited did not engage the children very much in conversation. Another did not plan activities to build on children's speaking and listening skills and she was unclear as to what language for thinking was.'[39]

129. The report goes on to explain why some staff missed opportunities to model, question and develop children's speaking and listening.

> 'Inspectors found a relative weakness in children's language for thinking compared with their language for communication in 13 of the schools and childcare providers visited, including some of the good and outstanding

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[38] The Communication Trust, 2010; www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk.
[39] *The impact of the Early Years Foundation Stage* (100231), Ofsted, 2011; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/100231.

ones. Sometimes this was because adults did not model it themselves or missed incidental opportunities. In the main, it was because practitioners did not encourage children to explain or expand their thinking, or quite simply did not give them time to think. Too often adults would immediately follow up one question with another, or would answer their own question.'

130. This complements evidence from subject inspections. Objectives for speaking and listening were far less likely to be identified as priorities for learning than objectives that related to reading or writing. Teachers and other staff in the Early Years Foundation Stage planned explicit small-group activities in reading and writing and devoted time to them. Speaking and listening, on the other hand, tended to happen incidentally and in support of other learning but were rarely the central focus of teaching. The most effective teachers worked explicitly to get children talking and, in particular, saw the development of their vocabulary as a central priority. Given that role-play areas were so prominent in Early Years Foundation Stage classrooms, inspectors often expressed surprise to see how little time some staff spent there talking to children. In the best provision, there was regular staff presence in these role-play areas, talking to children, asking questions, modelling new vocabulary and helping to improve children's confidence in expressing their ideas orally.

131. The *Excellence in English* report includes two interesting primary case studies where the explicit teaching of speaking and listening was highly effective.[40] In one primary school, provision for the youngest children was directly planned to ensure time for good-quality discussions with children.

> The school places huge emphasis on developing and promoting language skills in the nursery and building on these skills through the subsequent key stages. In the Nursery class, there was constant dialogue as children engaged in chosen activities at the start of the day. Both the teacher and the teaching assistant interacted with children as individuals and in small groups, using questions to encourage talk. The classroom assistant modelled transactional language, explaining clearly how to set up a program on the computer. She matched verbal instructions to the movement of the mouse and activity on the screen. When the program failed, she moved the children to another activity and they carried on this form of talk with a boy explaining to a girl how to fill various beakers with water and commenting on changes in colour. Two boys were talking with the teacher. One started telling a story about finding a skeleton. The teacher modelled questions which were imitated by his friend: 'Was it big?' Was the head at the top?' The whole classroom had a persistent buzz as adults and children talked as they learnt.

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[40] *Excellence in English* (10229), Ofsted, 2011; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/10229.

132. A second school, where one third of the pupils were learning English as an additional language, exhibited a similar emphasis on pupils' speaking and listening skills. This approach also began in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The priority was to provide a curriculum rich in spoken language.

> There are generally four adults in the Nursery and Reception classes. Their priority is to get children talking and to model effective talk themselves. What is particularly effective is the school's use of role play. This is identified as a priority and planned accordingly. Children are not left to 'get on with it' themselves. The teacher joins the role-play area and uses talk constantly to question, explain, motivate and model. On the day of the visit, both boys and girls enjoyed visiting the 'Baby Clinic' and maintained their interest for a considerable period, supported by the teacher. Literacy was built into their play as pupils took it in turns to act as receptionist, writing notes in a file while the doctor frequently consulted his/her clipboard to write things down or check the daily programme. At all stages, the teacher was directly involved, often in role, asking questions and using language, including technical language, for pupils to imitate. Plans ensure that there is always a member of staff working with pupils in one of the role-play areas…The approach is 'to bathe children in language all the time'.

133. English reports in the past have called for more emphasis on the explicit teaching of speaking and listening. In the context of this particular report, with its focus on those factors that will do most to raise standards of attainment in English, the importance of developing children's speaking and listening in the Early Years Foundation Stage is crucial. The foundations for later achievement in all aspects of English should be secured, wherever possible, in a richer curriculum for speaking and listening for the very youngest children in school. A structured programme for improving children's vocabulary and their confidence in speaking in the Early Years Foundation Stage would have a significant impact on the language deficit of many children as they enter the primary school.

The problem: the Key Stage 3 English curriculum lacks a clear enough sense of purpose or rationale for students

134. Students in secondary schools frequently commented favourably on the clarity and sense of purpose in their Key Stage 4 work in English and compared this with what often seemed to them a random and unrelated series of activities in Key Stage 3. They saw Key Stage 4 as a coherent programme of work, with specific outcomes and a clear progression. Key Stage 3 is necessarily different since it does not lead towards an important external examination. Nevertheless, too many departments missed the opportunity to create an innovative scheme of work at Key Stage 3 with the same features of clarity, progression, meaning and purpose.

135. *English at the crossroads* challenged secondary schools to reflect on and clarify the nature of the English curriculum they provided.

'In some of the schools visited, [the English curriculum] is innovative, using developments in modern technology effectively. In others, it has changed little since the National Curriculum was introduced in 1989. There is an increasing acceptance that 'one size does not fit all' and that the curriculum should be adapted to meet the particular needs of pupils in a school, as well as reaching out to those pupils who are not currently engaged by the subject. Teachers need to decide what English should look like as a subject in the 21st century and how they can improve the motivation and achievement of pupils who traditionally do less well in the subject. To engage them more successfully, schools need to provide a more dynamic and productive curriculum in English that reflects the changing nature of society and pupils' literacy needs.'

136. That report has been effective in generating a debate about the nature of the subject. The *English/Media/Drama* magazine, published by the National Association for the Teaching of English, recently devoted an edition to a series of articles debating the role and identity of English in the 21st century.[41] Elsewhere, there is an initiative called 'Looking for the heart of English' which aims to stimulate a national discussion to 'explore what are the central principles which should drive English teaching in the 21st century'.[42] This debate had not yet had a significant impact on the schools visited as part of this survey. Indeed, as Part A states, too many of the schools visited had failed to refresh or redesign their Key Stage 3 curriculum following the end of the statutory Year 9 tests. Instead, what too many had done was simply to increase the proportion of time spent practising selected GCSE skills and thereby limiting the range and creativity of the English curriculum. If standards are to rise at the end of the GCSE course, many schools will need to improve the creativity, breadth, relevance and engagement of the Key Stage 3 programme that they offer to students.

The problem: too many pupils, especially older students, do not see English as a subject that affects their daily lives

137. It is perhaps hard for dedicated, specialist English teachers to understand that some pupils may not see the relevance of the subject to their lives or the world outside school. Ofsted has previously reported: 'The most effective providers visited reflected on and adapted their curriculum, including any intervention programmes, to meet changing needs. They taught literacy in contexts that were relevant and meaningful to their learners.'[43]

138. English teachers from Key Stage 2 onwards need to ensure that English is taught in contexts that are 'relevant and meaningful to their learners'. One

[41] *English/Media/Drama*, June 2011 edition, National Association for the Teaching of English, 2011; www.nate.org.uk/index.php?page=9&id=37.
[42] Looking for the heart of English; www.heartofenglish.com.
[43] *Removing barriers to literacy* (090237), Ofsted, 2011; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/090237.

secondary school in the survey went out of its way to emphasise real tasks and audiences in its English programme. English was very popular in the school. One boy commented, 'Because it's real, it brings out the best in me.' Teachers consistently attempted to provide students with a genuine purpose for their work.

One simple example was work in Year 7 on a letter to the headteacher about school uniform. This was followed by a visit by the headteacher to discuss the issues with the class. The pupils commented that this had given a real sense of meaning and value to work in English. This does not mean that work always had this kind of very practical focus or that the department did not fully explore the creative elements in the subject. Indeed, poetry was very popular in this school partly because it was often explored through presentations to audiences, group work, and competitions. When Shakespeare plays were studied, the work stressed the dramatic and presentational elements and these were showcased through collaborative work and film making. All aspects of the English course were seen by students to have a definite outcome, with a clear reason for the work and a real audience.

139. In a second school visited, Year 9 students had been invited to provide feedback to the local college on a video presentation designed to encourage school leavers to choose one of their courses. In both these cases, students could see that their work in English was likely to lead to action, both within and beyond the school. Other case studies of this sort of good practice can be found in the *Excellence in English* report.

140. This type of approach to English often goes hand-in-hand with the effective development of pupils' independent learning skills, an additional weakness identified earlier in this report. This is because pupils are more likely to be working together, deciding on individual roles, preparing presentations, interviewing others, carrying out research and so on. One school visited linked independent working very effectively with a strong sense of purpose and audience in their enrichment activities.

A group of more able students was producing a school radio programme. The students had decided to create a soap opera, using a range of characters to explore issues of interest to a teenage audience. It was to be presented as part of the daily broadcasts for students. The inspector observed a writers' meeting, where students (supported by the teacher) worked on a script for one of the programmes. An earlier version of the script had been presented to members of the school's pastoral team who had suggested changes. As a result, members of the writing team worked closely together to introduce some new elements to the script. The meeting was a remarkably successful and realistic one, taking on all the elements of the kind of writers' meeting that you might get as part of a real TV or radio soap opera. One of the students described it as 'creative writing mixed with reality'. There was a very open discussion, with

students making suggestions and editing as they worked. The inspector noted that the normal roles of teacher and learner appeared to have merged. The teacher offered very sensitive leadership, prompting students all the time but rarely offering her own direct opinion: 'What do you think?'; 'How are you going to do that?' The later development of this project, once scripts had been written, would be for other students in the school to take on roles as producer, director and actors. A start had already been made, with a theme tune having been composed by another student in the school.

141. Pupils who make limited headway in English frequently speak of the subject as though it is a largely passive experience, school-based and academic. They very often contrast it with subjects like design technology, art or physical education which are seen as being practical and with clear outcomes. And yet, of course, nothing could be more practical or useful than the effective use of literacy skills. Pupils need to see the practical elements – the importance of getting that letter of application grammatically correct – as well as understanding how other work in English, such as poetry, contributes to their personal and emotional development and the development of important literacy skills.

142. Teachers need to ensure that English in classrooms integrates tasks and purposes related to the 'real world' beyond school, and includes real audiences, contexts and purposes. The study of modern technology is also important. As this report has already stressed, most pupils are regular users of, and effective managers of, modern digital technology. Teachers need to use these contexts in their lessons if learning in English is not to seem out of step with pupils' experiences, but also to enable them to make appropriate style and language choices when using different media and communication forms.

The problem: too few schools have effective programmes for developing literacy skills across the curriculum

143. As stated earlier, the White Paper emphasises the importance of improving literacy skills. Ofsted's new whole-school inspection schedule includes a greater emphasis on cross-curricular literacy, and training will be provided to ensure that all inspectors are able to evaluate provision for literacy, including in secondary schools.

144. Part A gives some examples of schools which had introduced effective initiatives for dealing with literacy in a whole-school context. The recent literacy report also stated:

'In the secondary schools where teachers in all subject departments had received training in teaching literacy and where staff had included an objective for literacy in all the lessons, senior managers noted an improvement in outcomes across all subjects, as well as in English. The

high-performing colleges visited adopted similar strategies to improve outcomes.'[44]

145. However, evidence from the subject survey suggests that such schools are in a minority. More needs to be done in both primary and secondary schools to raise literacy levels. The issue is more straightforward in primary schools since, except in the very largest schools, teachers tend to be responsible for the full range of subjects in one class. Accordingly, effective practice in planning and drafting writing in English, for example, should be capable of being extended when the same teacher sets an extended piece of writing in history or geography. Similarly, the reading skills taught within an English session at Key Stage 2 should be reinforced when the same pupils are reading a science or religious education text. Inspection suggests that this is not always the case and that some teachers fail to apply good literacy approaches outside English lessons. Nevertheless, the situation is far simpler than in a secondary school, where the majority of lessons are taught by teachers with no special training or understanding of literacy issues.

146. The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Education also expressed concerns about secondary literacy.

'In the APPGE's survey, secondary school teachers identified 57% of their pupils as having weak or very weak literacy skills, compared to the significantly lower 39% of pupils identified by primary school teachers. Nevertheless, across secondary schools, only 6% indicated that there should be a change in the extent to which literacy is incorporated into lessons. Instead, secondary school teachers were more likely to prefer the option of one-to-one support for struggling pupils. This suggests that it is more difficult for secondary schools to tackle literacy as a distinct issue.'[45]

147. This suggests that many secondary teachers do not even accept that they have a responsibility for improving literacy within their own subject. Given the expectation in the revised Teaching Standards that all teachers will promote literacy and the use of Standard English, it seems clear that more effective training is now needed in many schools. There are two essential reasons why all teachers should have a better understanding of the role that literacy plays in their subject. First, it would enable them to build on and consolidate the direct teaching of literacy that takes place in English lessons. Second, such training would enable them to understand how improved reading, writing, speaking and listening skills would help students to make more progress in their own subject. This might include, for example: reading history texts with more understanding; being able to write more clearly in evaluating the outcomes of an investigation

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[44] *Removing barriers to literacy* (090237) Ofsted, 2011; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/090237.
[45] *Report on the inquiry into overcoming the barriers to* literacy by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Education, 2011; www.educationappg.org.uk/inquiry.

in science; or using spoken language effectively to explain tactics or safety issues in physical education.

148. The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Education goes on to make the point that:

> 'Headteachers are perhaps not accountable enough for literacy levels in secondary schools. Amongst Inquiry respondents, there was a strong feeling that a consistent whole-school approach was missing and many subject teachers were reluctant to admit that literacy is within their remit. Despite training and INSET, literacy is still seen as the responsibility of the English department rather than a whole-school issue, particularly in terms of assessment. Non-English subject teachers do not assess literacy, creating the danger that students view it as a skill which only matters in English lessons.'[46]

149. The new inspection schedule should have the effect of increasing the profile of literacy across schools and encouraging headteachers and other senior leaders and managers to take a more active role in training and evaluating practice, as envisaged above.

150. The Ofsted good practice website includes a case study of one secondary school where senior leaders and managers did indeed take the lead in reading and literacy issues across the curriculum.[47]

> The school is currently focused on improving standards of reading. The library is at the centre of many of the initiatives. Many schools have highly motivated and influential librarians. What makes this school different is the strong commitment to improving the literacy of its senior staff and the integration of activities that draw together the English department, the work of the librarian, and other areas of the curriculum. The current emphasis on improving reading brings together initiatives on working closely with parents, identifying problems early on, and using a range of small-group interventions to provide extra help. Senior leaders ensure that literacy is allocated a central role in the school improvement plan. The school's view is that all teachers and departments should be involved in the programme. An early example of this was the decision to raise the profile of reading by displaying pictures of members of staff and students on large, glossy posters around the school reading some surprising choices of book.

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[46] *Report on the inquiry into overcoming the barriers to literacy,* All-Party Parliamentary Group on Education, 2011; www.educationappg.org.uk/inquiry.
[47] *Good practice resource – Promoting reading in a secondary school*, Ofsted, 2011; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/good-practice-resource-%E2%80%93-promoting-reading-secondary-school.

The librarian works closely with students through initiatives such as the popular reading group scheme. However, the promotion of reading extends far beyond the school library. The school promotes a wide range of cross-curricular reading events involving different departments. Links with the performing arts and history are especially strong and drama teachers, for example, ensure that students read texts in their lessons. A joint parent/child reading group was launched, attended by a local author who spoke of the importance of parents encouraging their children to read. Family Review days are held in the library, giving parents the opportunity to talk about books with the librarian and students. Lists of recommended reads are sent home and the school has also produced a leaflet on reading for parents, with tips and hints on supporting your child's reading.

Senior leaders and managers are fully committed to improving reading and have introduced a number of developments themselves. One recent initiative involved an additional weekly lesson on the timetable for all Year 7 students, taught by members of the leadership team and focused on reading a class novel. These initiatives on reading run alongside a well-established whole-school approach to literacy and an influential literacy action plan. The literacy coordinator leads a cross-curricular group of teachers to reinforce good practice in all subjects across the curriculum. The school also tries to help build the next generation of readers by working closely with feeder primary schools. The librarian visits all the main primary feeder schools and one of the activities that the pupils complete is to write a postcard about their favourite books and authors. This is then available, together with all the books mentioned, on display in the library when pupils arrive in Year 7.

Notes

This report is based on evidence from inspections of English in 133 primary schools, 128 secondary schools and four special schools across England between April 2008 and March 2011, as well as on national test and examination data. Over 1,400 lessons, or parts of lessons, were observed. The report also draws on three visits to schools selected specifically on the basis of high achievement or good practice known from previous inspection. To allow for fairer comparison, the judgements made on the quality of provision in these three schools have not been incorporated into the overall judgements. Evidence from the inspection of AS- and A-level English in six colleges in the academic year 2010–11 is also included.

Further sources of evidence include other reports published by Ofsted. The evidence for the report was also informed by discussions with those involved in English education, including teachers and pupils, subject leaders and senior staff in schools, academics, policymakers and others within the wider subject community.

Further information

Publications by Ofsted

Curriculum innovation in schools (070097), Ofsted, 2008;
www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/070097.

English 2000–05: a review of inspection evidence (2351), Ofsted, 2005;
www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/2351.

English at the crossroads: an evaluation of English in primary and secondary schools 2005/08 (080207), Ofsted, 2009; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/080247.

Excellence in English (HMI 100229), Ofsted, 2011;
www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/100229.

Learning: creative approaches that raise standards (080266) Ofsted, 2010;
www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/080266.

Poetry in schools (070034), Ofsted, 2007; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/070034.

*Reading by six: how the best schools do it (*100197), Ofsted, 2010;
www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/100197.

Removing barriers to literacy (HMI 090237), Ofsted, 2011;
www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/090237.

The impact of the Early Years Foundation Stage (HMI 100231), Ofsted, 2011;
www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/100231.

Other publications

Getting going: generating, shaping and developing ideas in writing, Department for children, schools and families, 2008;
www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/English/Page1/DCSF-00283-2008.

Report of the inquiry into overcoming the barriers to literacy, All-Party Parliamentary Group for Education, 2011; www.educationappg.org.uk/inquiry.

The importance of teaching: schools White Paper, Department for Education, 2010;
www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/schoolswhitepaper/b0068570/the-importance-of-teaching.

The Skills for Life survey: a national needs and impact survey of literacy, numeracy and ICT skills (RR 490), Department for Education and Skills, 2003;
www.education.gov.uk/publications/RSG/BasicSkills/Page3/RB490.

Annex A: Schools visited

Primary schools	Local authority
Abercrombie Primary School	Derbyshire
Acle St Edmund Voluntary Controlled Primary School	Norfolk
Alwoodley Primary School	Leeds
Arnett Hills Junior Mixed and Infant School	Hertfordshire
Ash Grange Primary School	Surrey
Barkston and Syston CofE Primary School	Lincolnshire
Beanfield Primary School	Northamptonshire
Birley Spa Community Primary School	Sheffield
Bishop Carpenter Church of England Aided Primary School	Oxfordshire
Bramley Vale Primary School	Derbyshire
Bridgemere CofE Primary School	Cheshire East
Brierley Primary School	Cheshire East
Bunwell Primary School	Norfolk
Burgh by Sands School	Cumbria
Burton-on-the-Wolds Primary School	Leicestershire
Campsbourne Junior School	Haringey
Carden Primary School	Brighton and Hove
Castlefields Primary School	Shropshire
Charles Kingsley's Church of England Primary School	Hampshire
Christ Church and St Peter's Church of England Primary School	Leicestershire
Clavering Primary School	Hartlepool
Clifton Green Primary School	York
Cullingworth Village Primary School	Bradford
Drove Primary School	Swindon
Eastoft Church of England Primary School	North Lincolnshire
English Martyrs' Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School	York

Enmore Church of England Primary School	Somerset
Euxton Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School	Lancashire
Fairway Primary School	Stockport
Farndon Primary School	Cheshire West and Chester
Featherstone Wood Primary School	Hertfordshire
Gallions Mount Primary School	Greenwich
Gatley Primary School	Stockport
George Eliot Junior Primary School	Westminster
Grappenhall St Wilfrid's CofE Primary School	Warrington
Greasley Beauvale Primary School	Nottinghamshire
Great Bradfords Junior School	Essex
Greengates Community Primary School*	Knowsley
Grendon Church of England Primary School	Northamptonshire
Grindleford Primary School	Derbyshire
Halam CofE Primary School	Nottinghamshire
Harehills Primary School	Leeds
Harwood Hill Junior Mixed Infant and Nursery School	Hertfordshire
Hatchell Wood Primary School, Doncaster	Doncaster
Headlands Church of England Voluntary Controlled Junior, Infant and Nursery Primary School	Kirklees
Heaton St Barnabas' CofE Aided Primary School	Bradford
Heighington Church of England Primary School	Darlington
Hempnall Primary School	Norfolk
Holy Ghost Catholic Primary School	Wandsworth
Holy Trinity Church of England (Aided) School	Buckinghamshire
Isleworth Town Primary School	Hounslow
Julian's School	Lambeth
Jump Primary School	Barnsley
Juniper Hill School	Buckinghamshire
Kidbrooke Park Primary School	Greenwich

Kingfisher Primary School	Doncaster
Kingswood Primary School	Surrey
Knowle Park Primary School	Bristol, City of
Lancasterian Primary School	Haringey
Larmenier & Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School	Hammersmith and Fulham
Lilly Hall Junior School	Rotherham
Ling Bob Junior, Infant and Nursery School	Calderdale
Longford Primary School	Staffordshire
Longmeadow Primary School	Hertfordshire
Longwood Primary School	Staffordshire
Malvern Wells CofE Primary School	Worcestershire
Marham Junior School	Norfolk
Marlcliffe Community Primary School	Sheffield
Mobberley CofE Primary School	Cheshire East
Montgomery Junior School, Colchester	Essex
Newland St John CofE Primary School	Kingston upon Hull, City of
Occold Primary School	Suffolk
Offwell Church of England Primary School	Devon
Osmotherley Primary School	North Yorkshire
Our Lady Immaculate Catholic Primary School	Liverpool
Pipworth Community Primary School	Sheffield
Portobello Primary School	Gateshead
Pound Hill Junior School, Crawley	West Sussex
Queensway School	Oxfordshire
Ranmnoth Junior School	Cambridgeshire
Reevy Hill Primary School	Bradford
Rotherfield Primary School	East Sussex
Rusper Primary School	West Sussex
Seagrave Village Primary School, Loughborough	Leicestershire
Shaftesbury Primary School	Newham

Shawley Community Primary School	Surrey
Shotley Community Primary School	Suffolk
Skipsea Primary School	East Riding of Yorkshire
Southgate Primary	West Sussex
Spellbrook Primary School	Hertfordshire
St Andrew's CofE Primary School	Derbyshire
St Andrew's CofE VA Primary School, Lopham	Norfolk
St Annes on Sea St Thomas' Church of England Primary School	Lancashire
St Bede's RC Voluntary Aided Primary School, South Shields	South Tyneside
St Bernadette's Catholic Primary School	Wigan
St Cuthbert's RC Voluntary Aided Primary School	Stockton-on-Tees
St John's Primary School	Surrey
St Joseph's Catholic Primary School	Hampshire
St Joseph's Catholic Primary School	Hertfordshire
St Luke's CofE Primary School	Manchester
St Martin's Garden Primary School	Bath & North East Somerset
St Mary Magdalene CofE Voluntary Controlled Primary School	Sandwell
St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Chorley	Lancashire
St Mary's CofE Primary School	Brent
St Mary's RC Primary School	Brent
St Oswald's Catholic Primary School, Longton	Lancashire
St Peter's Catholic Primary School	Wirral
St Stephen's CofE Primary School	Hammersmith & Fulham
Stretton Handley Church of England Primary School	Derbyshire
Summer Lane Primary School	Barnsley
Tattingstone Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School	Suffolk
Tenbury CofE Primary School	Worcestershire
Thatcham Park CofE Primary	West Berkshire
The Richard Heathcote Community Primary School	Staffordshire

The Willows Primary School	Manchester
Thorndown Community Junior Primary School	Cambridgeshire
Thornhill Primary School	Cumbria
Thurstaston Dawpool CofE Primary School	Wirral
Uplands Junior School	Leicester
Upperby Primary School	Cumbria
Victoria Avenue Community Primary School	Manchester
Wadworth Primary School	Doncaster
Westbury-on-Severn Church of England Primary School	Gloucestershire
Westwoodside CofE Primary School	North Lincolnshire
Whiteways Junior Primary School	Sheffield
Wigton Moor Primary School	Leeds
Windhill Primary and Nursery School	Hertfordshire
Winmarleigh Church of England Primary School	Lancashire
Witnesham Primary School	Suffolk
Woodmancote School	Gloucestershire
Woodstone Community Primary School	Leicestershire
Woodvale Primary School	Northamptonshire
Wootton St Peter's Church of England Primary School	Oxfordshire

Secondary schools	**Local authority**
Alder Community High School	Tameside
All Saints RC School	York
Anglo European School*	Essex
Beaumont School	Hertfordshire
Bishop Ramsey CofE Voluntary Aided Secondary School*	Hillingdon
Blacon High School, A Specialist Sports College	Cheshire West and Chester
Blythe Bridge High School	Staffordshire
Bourne Grammar School	Lincolnshire
Brentford School for Girls	Hounslow

Brinsworth Comprehensive School*	Rotherham
Brookfield Community School and Language College, Southampton	Hampshire
Broughton Business and Enterprise College	Lancashire
Cardinal Allen Catholic High School, Fleetwood	Lancashire
Cardinal Langley Roman Catholic High School	Rochdale
Carmel RC College*	Darlington
Carshalton Boys Sports College*	Sutton
Chelmer Valley High School*	Essex
Chenderit School	Northamptonshire
City of Ely Community College	Cambridgeshire
Corfe Hills School*	Poole
Cowley Language College	St Helens
Cranford Community College*	Hounslow
Dene Magna School*	Gloucestershire
Easingwold School	North Yorkshire
Failsworth High School	Oldham
Farnborough School Technology College	Nottingham
Fort Hill Community School	Hampshire
Friern Barnet School	Barnet
Fulford School	York
Fyndoune Community College	Durham
Garstang High School: A Community Technology College*	Lancashire
Glenburn Sports College	Lancashire
Golden Hillock School: A Specialist College for Sports and the Arts	Birmingham
Guiseley School	Leeds
Guthlaxton College Wigston	Leicestershire
Harper Green School	Bolton
Haven High Technology College	Lincolnshire
Haverstock School	Camden

Heathside School	Surrey
Helston Community College	Cornwall
Heritage Community High School: A Mathematics and Computing Specialist College	Derbyshire
Highgate Wood Secondary School	Haringey
Hind Leys Community College	Leicestershire
Hobart High School	Norfolk
Hodgson School*	Lancashire
Holgate School and Sports College	Barnsley
Howard of Effingham School*	Surrey
Hurstmere Foundation School for Boys	Bexley
Ilkley Grammar School*	Bradford
Joseph Rowntree School	York
Kaskenmoor School*	Oldham
King Ethelbert School*	Kent
Kingstone High School*	Herefordshire
Kirk Hallam Community Technology and Sports College*	Derbyshire
Lady Margaret School	Hammersmith and Fulham
Langley School, Specialist College for the Performing Arts, Languages and Training*	Solihull
Leyland St Mary's Catholic Technology College	Lancashire
Maghull High School*	Sefton
Malet Lambert School Language College	Kingston upon Hull, City of
Merrill College	Derby
Methwold High School*	Norfolk
Millthorpe School	York
Miltoncross School	Portsmouth
Moor End Technology College*	Kirklees
Mortimer Community College	South Tyneside
Myton School*	Warwickshire
Newman Catholic School	Cumbria

Noadswood School*	Hampshire
Notre Dame RC School	Plymouth
Oakwood Park Grammar School*	Kent
Ossett School*	Wakefield
Our Lady and St John Catholic College	Blackburn with Darwen
Park High School*	Harrow
Penistone Grammar School	Barnsley
Perins School: A Community Sports College*	Hampshire
Poole Grammar School*	Poole
Primrose High School	Leeds
Redbridge Community School	Southampton
Rhyddings Business and Enterprise School	Lancashire
Ringmer Community College*	East Sussex
Rodillian School	Leeds
Rokeby School	Newham
Ryton Comprehensive School*	Gateshead
Sacred Heart Catholic College	Sefton
Saint Paul's Catholic School	Leicester
Sandhurst School	Bracknell Forest
Sawston Village College	Cambridgeshire
Sidmouth College*	Devon
Sir John Leman High School*	Suffolk
Slough and Eton CofE Business and Enterprise College*	Slough
Smithdon High School	Norfolk
Spalding High School	Lincolnshire
St Edward's CofE Comprehensive School, Language College and Sixth Form Centre*	Havering
St Gabriel's RC High School*	Bury
St George of England Specialist Engineering College	Sefton
St Mary's Catholic Comprehensive School	Newcastle upon Tyne

St Michael's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Comprehensive School	Stockton-on-Tees
St Paul's Academy	Greenwich
St Peter's Church of England Aided School	Devon
St Thomas More Catholic School and Technology College	Warwickshire
Tenbury High School	Worcestershire
The Armthorpe School	Doncaster
The Chase School, Malvern*	Worcestershire
The Duston School	Northamptonshire
The Ellen Wilkinson School for Girls	Ealing
The Elton High School Specialist Arts College	Bury
The English Martyrs School and Sixth Form College	Hartlepool
The Grange School	Dorset
The Hayfield School*	Doncaster
The Manor School*	Nottinghamshire
The Marlborough Church of England School	Oxfordshire
The Thomas Lord Audley School	Essex
The Woodlands School*	Coventry
Thomas More Catholic School	Croydon
Thornhill School Business & Enterprise College	Sunderland
Waddesdon Church Of England School*	Buckinghamshire
Wellfield Business & Enterprise College	Lancashire
Wheldon School and Sports College*	Nottinghamshire
Wildern School*	Hampshire
Wolgarston High School	Staffordshire
Woodbridge High School	Redbridge
Woodcote High School	Croydon
Woodrush Community High School*	Worcestershire
Woolwich Polytechnic School for Boys	Greenwich
Worle Community School	North Somerset

Wreake Valley Community College   Leicestershire

Special schools   **Local authority**

Hope School   Wigan

Mount Tamar School   Plymouth

Round Oak School and Support Service   Warwickshire

The Children's Hospital School   Leicester

Academies   **Local authority**

Ivybridge Community College   Devon

St Paul's Academy   Greenwich

Walsall Academy   Walsall

Good Practice   **Local authority**

Don Valley School and Performing Arts College*   Doncaster

The Peele Community College   Lincolnshire

The Nether Edge Primary School   Sheffield

* The provider has closed, merged or converted to an academy since the time of the visit.