

036 Literacy

Responsibility: EHo
Date: November 2017
Next Review: November 2019

1. Introduction

Literacy can be simply defined as 'the ability to read and write'. In the educational sphere it must also incorporate speaking and listening – correspondingly this policy refers to the development of good language skills (speaking, listening, reading or writing) rather than to a narrow definition of literacy. In addition to the more formal methods of teaching reading, writing, grammar, and spelling, language skills are taught within a variety of curricular contexts by meaningful and relevant activities. Only then can we ensure that our pupils become literate and that they enjoy language and communication in all their forms.

Language is central to the learning process and learning becomes more effective for the pupil when the teacher employs appropriate language strategies which encourage in the pupil a wide variety of language use. Well-structured lessons and courses of study enhance a pupil's ability to read, write, speak, listen and comprehend –to become more adaptable language makers and language users- for language is most effective when function and occasion match and pupils are provided with 'real-life' purposes.

2. Aims

Language development must be a continuous learning process, and not be confined to any one particular key stage. It can be assessed across a broad range of activities. Certain skills can be revised continuously in order to refine pupils' language development.

Children come to school with very different language experiences, capabilities and skills. Some start with the ability to read and write, and speak more than one dialect. Others have very little knowledge and under developed language skills. It is important that teachers use a child's experiences/skills in order to develop and improve their capabilities - the school's schemes of work will reflect this.

a. To contribute towards the development of good language skills and to enable pupils to:

- understand spelling systems and use them to spell and read accurately;
- have fluent and legible handwriting;
- have an interest in 'printed words' and words on screen and their meanings;
- have a growing vocabulary that can be used to aid their comprehension and expression, e.g. when trying to understand and discuss their own and others' reading and writing;
- have growing powers of imagination, creativity and critical awareness;
- enjoy reading and writing and in so doing exhibit confidence, fluency, enjoyment and comprehension;
- Use a variety of reading cues (phonic, graphic, syntactic, contextual). This will enable pupils to monitor their own reading and correct their mistakes;
- be able to plan, draft, revise and edit their own writing;
- be able to write about a range of texts (fiction and non-fiction) exhibiting a sound knowledge and an ability to analyse and evaluate writers' methods
- know about the ways in which narratives are structured, i.e. setting, character, plot, etc;

- know about and be able to write in, a range of fiction and poetry genres.
- b. To ensure literacy learning is interactive and engaging
- c. To maintain a whole school approach to the management of literacy through target setting linked to systematic action planning, monitoring and evaluation.
- d. To ensure that individual departments audit their provision for literacy.
- e. To identify specific needs such as the need for out-of-school courses and in-school support for professional development.

3. The Library

The Library is pivotal in supporting the whole school literacy programme and is used frequently when project or research work is undertaken. Each subject based scheme of work should consider the following in order to further develop literacy and numeracy skills:

- i) include reference to the use of the Library and its resources, e.g. the English Department may refer to the use of the library in their reading schemes.
- ii) indicate appropriate resources that are available, in the Library, for each part of the course.
- iii) plan suitable routes through the course which plan for and allow for the best use of library resources.
- iv) provide the means to inform relevant persons the details of the courses being run, e.g. staff who have a responsibility for, or wish to build up, cross-curricular links.
- v) allow the whole school curriculum to be regularly reviewed by appropriate persons.

The Library itself can offer teachers and pupils a novel environment in which to work and can support activities which are not possible in the classroom. The use of the Library and its facilities will certainly help the staff to allow pupils to express their thoughts and ideas through writing, drawing, displays, photographs and audio recordings, etc.

Using the following list it would be useful for Departments to consider each statement and reflect on how their Department offers such opportunities.

Language skills are developed and enhanced in all curricular areas when:

- 1) the activities integrate the different aspects of language.
- 2) the activities have a flexible route or task order.
- 3) the activities contain tasks which develop knowledge and understanding, and others which develop problem solving skills.
- 4) the activities have a balance between pure language and the applications of language in 'real life' situations and with authentic purposes
- 5) the activities have a balance between those which are short and succinct and those which are more open-ended and which take longer to complete.
- 6) the activities try and use pupils' own prior knowledge, experiences, interests or questions as starting points or as further lines of development.
- 7) the activities have a balance between independent and group work.
- 8) the activities consist of a variety of experiences, e.g. doing, observing, talking, listening, discussing with teachers and other pupils, reflecting, drafting, reading and writing.
- 9) pupils are asking and answering questions, giving precise instructions, information, and giving and receiving clear or simple explanations before and during the activities.
- 10) pupils are encouraged to form clear intentions and purposes for their writing before they begin the activity.
- 11) pupils present ideas, experiences, and understanding in the form of displays, dramas, publications or newsletters. (These are excellent ways to encourage parental

involvement).

- 12) pupils are developing reading skills using drama/role play.
- 13) pupils are reading and writing for different audiences, e.g. parents, friends, teachers and other adults. Pupils should use the appropriate language for specific situations and different people.
- 14) pupils are using different methods to present information, e.g. written work, word processing, DTP., and pictorial work.
- 15) pupils' work involves others, e.g. teachers, friends, and peers in problem solving exercises.
- 16) pupils' work involves sharing reading exercises with other children (group work or class work) or with a teacher/adult. In the case of reading aloud in the classroom it is important that volunteers are asked for and that the occasion is looked upon as a learning exercise. In a positive atmosphere, and with a teacher that the pupils have confidence in, even the poorest readers will feel confident to volunteer. The length and exact nature of the section to be read should be matched to the known ability of the pupil. If all comments are constructive then a pupil's confidence should grow. A useful strategy is to allow pupils the opportunity to 'rehearse' or prepare the reading prior to the lesson.
- 17) pupils' work involves evaluating information from a variety of books, CD ROMs, films, etc., in order to learn how information can be organised and presented. This would then encourage pupils to produce better quality work on their own, or when working with others.
- 18) pupils' work is evaluated, reviewed and discussed with other children and the teacher. The pupils should make recommendations about how work could be improved.
- 19) pupils' work involves them in thinking about the quality of what they have read, and their own creative writing with either the teacher or the class.
- 20) pupils use the conventions of effective discussion and conversation, e.g. taking turns and talking for an appropriate length of time.
- 21) pupils' work involves keeping a folder or exercise book of their own written/language work (from planning to the finished piece of work) in order to show progression, and to build upon their own achievements and development. The progress of the pupil may then be discussed with the teacher, parents, other interested parties, and improvements noted. Pupils may also discuss their folders with other members of the class. This can involve talking about spelling, letter formation, sentence structure and the sequencing of words.
- 22) staff implement whole school policies on spelling, reading and handwriting.
(Teachers could provide a glossary of words for each topic in order to aid correct spelling and understanding of the meanings/use of words. The topic lists could be displayed on the walls of the classroom. It would be useful for all classrooms to have a good stock of dictionaries.)
- 23) pupils' work is marked or discussed by a teacher who asks questions such as 'How?', 'Why?' and 'When?', etc. to expand on the child's use of language. (Teachers should also adhere to the whole school policies on 'Spelling' and 'Marking').

Staff give clear explanations and effective questioning involves as many pupils as possible.

Staff take account of an individual pupil's attainment when asking questions. Staff also give pupils time to think before answering and explore the reasons for wrong answers.

Questions should:

- probe the pupils' understanding and identify misconceptions;
- encourage pupils to extend and expand on their ideas and reasoning;

- cause pupils to reflect on and refine their methods of working and ways of recording their work;
 - ask pupils to think of and explore different ways of approaching a problem;
 - prompt pupils to generalise or to give examples that match a general statement.
- 24) teachers ensure that there is language continuity. This can be done by reinforcing the links between curricular areas, and within and between different year groups. Staff could refer to work in other subject areas, e.g. Humanities, Maths, English, Art, Music, Languages, etc. whenever appropriate.
- 25) teachers could ensure that there is cross phase progression, possibly with the continuance of one piece of language work at the end of the School year. This would also be appropriate for pupils who have a new teacher.
- 26) teachers use a considerable amount of direct teaching and interactive oral work in whole class and group contexts.

Effective **direct teaching** involves three major elements, i.e. demonstration, explanation and questioning. [For questioning see 23) above]

Demonstration:

- staff can demonstrate how to produce plurals;
- staff can demonstrate a particular chemical reaction;
- staff can demonstrate how to mould or shape plastic;
- staff can demonstrate the steps in the solution to a problem.

Explanation:

- staff can clarify and discuss why a particular method of rhyme or structure works;
 - staff can provide and explain the solution to an equation in mathematics;
 - staff can explain the sections in the structure of a piece of discursive writing.
- 27) teachers are involved in a pro-active manner, i.e. not just when pupils are having difficulties.
- 28) teachers regularly rehearse existing knowledge and skills with pupils to keep them fresh and familiar, including practising the instant recall of grammatical facts.
- 29) teachers pay careful attention to the structured incremental development of literary vocabulary and the use of correct terminology and notation.
- 30) teachers have high expectations of the pupils, e.g. for standards of accuracy and presentation.
- 31) teachers regularly and systematically assess pupils so as to set pupil targets and to inform planning.
- 32) teachers target available support to help those pupils whose needs are greatest.
- 33) teachers set regular purposeful activities for homework.
- 34) teachers produce well-structured lessons which make good use of time and ensure that pace is maintained and minimum time is spent on class administration or control.
- 35) teachers select and design resources with due consideration of reading age, suitability of content, text size, etc.

Staff encourage pupils to follow both verbal and written instructions accurately.

4. Withdrawal and Support

Pupils who enter school with literacy levels that are less than expected will be given extra support to help them catch up with their peers.

If it is suspected that a child may have special needs with respect to reading, writing, spelling, numeracy or general comprehension then the SEN Department will be contacted and requested to take appropriate steps and to offer support. In striving to meet individual needs, teachers make substantial and increasing efforts to provide any recommended computational, technological or other facilities.

Some pupils who are experiencing serious difficulties may be best helped in a more private and personal atmosphere where their specific difficulties can be addressed. During withdrawal great emphasis is placed on the experience of reading and an extensive choice of reading material is available. It is also important that progression is in 'small steps'.

5. More able Pupils

To ensure that pupils who have been identified as more able are appropriately challenged, teachers should frequently modify the scale and/or the extent of the tasks with which they are presented. In addition, such pupils are encouraged or required to read, write and talk about their work and to engage in discussions and/or to work with similar pupils.

6. Language Provision Within a Multicultural School

Although this is not currently an issue at Holmfirth High School, it would be short sighted of us to assume that this may always be the case.

Those pupils whose mother tongue is not English have experience of developing their own home language skills within the National Curriculum. The various languages spoken in the school are given full recognition and respect by all pupils and staff. Any pupil, regardless of their ethnic origin and mother tongue, has the opportunity to become familiar with the various community languages spoken at their school.

This would not only help to promote general cultural awareness, but also improve cognitive learning. Such a school policy would also be of advantage when producing multi-lingual signs within the school, providing translations for newsletters and information booklets, etc. Pupils could help with the production of these resources, and feel that they were contributing to the whole school community.

Curriculum support is essential if pupils are to develop competent skills in English language as well as having equal opportunity to improve language skills in their own mother tongue. This means that staff are committed to providing a fully integrated language support system in the school. This system attempts to ensure that new pupils to the school who do not speak English at home, receive immediate and full language support, and gain maximum access to the Curriculum.

Experience suggests that the vast majority of pupils in the school for whom English is their 'second language', quite quickly attain a level of understanding and a degree of fluency that make normal classroom communication perfectly possible. For the relatively few pupils for whom that is not the case, teachers rightly exercise considerable patience, and seek to play their part:

- by doing what they can to familiarise themselves with some basic words and gestures from a pupil's first language and culture that are likely to prove useful in the context of the classroom;
- by repeatedly re-wording and re-phrasing any discourse in English with the pupil;
- by employing, and encouraging the pupil to employ, non-verbal modes of communication, e.g. gestures and drawings, to support any attempts at verbal discourse;
- by enlisting the aid of any appropriately bilingual pupils in the group, or that of any available adult.

7. Information Technology

Research has shown that most pupils experience increased levels of motivation and interest if

learning is supported by the use of ICT in all areas of experience. ICT offers a differentiated medium through which many traditional learning styles can be employed, e.g. open-ended/problem solving/project work, to enhance the acquisition of literacy skills. All pupils, especially those with special educational needs can develop better literacy skills by using ICT and multi-media systems

8. Additional Observations

Any literacy policy should emerge as an organic part of the School's philosophy and organisation. The policy should be the result of debate and discussion, of the analysis of needs and resources, of the assessments of strengths and weaknesses recognised in the pupils (and the staff).

Above all else, the literacy policy must command the support of the whole staff of the School because without that support the policy will be just so many words on so many sheets of paper. There is, therefore, a need to consider how it is possible to involve the whole staff –despite heavy subject responsibilities-in ensuring the success of the policy.

Spelling

Introduction

Opportunities should be taken in every curriculum area to promote a positive approach towards more accurate spelling. Every teacher must be aware of the importance of creating opportunities for pupils to improve their spelling.

This policy, designed for staff, parents and pupils, gives practical advice and information about how pupils' spelling can be improved. Good spelling is important in writing because:

- it eases communication and understanding;
- it creates a good impression and can help career prospects;
- it frees the writer to be more expressive;

There are some fundamental principles on which this policy is based:

- correct spelling is crucial in any form of written work, be it hand written or computer generated;
- spelling is a skill that can be taught and learnt;
- spelling failure can occur throughout the ability and age range;
- all pupils can improve on their spelling as long as:
 - i) they are shown how;
 - ii) they are willing to learn;
 - iii) they have confidence in their ability to improve and do not see themselves as poor spellers. The dangers of the self-fulfilling prophecy cannot be overstressed.

Every teacher must be aware of the importance of creating opportunities for pupils to improve their spelling. Pupils will obviously need to learn some spellings which are specific to particular subject areas, e.g. polygon, chemical, volcano.

If spelling is not taught well, pupils' written work may deteriorate, i.e. they may become worse at using their existing knowledge about word structure and dealing with new words.

Improving Spelling

Perhaps the most important aspect of helping to improve spelling is to try to ensure that pupils do not see themselves as poor spellers who cannot be taught how to improve. It may be that they do not have a good memory for certain things, such as the order in which letters should go. However, with commitment and hard work from the pupil, with the right kind of help, with lots of support and encouragement, and a belief that they can learn to spell better, they will become competent spellers.

Confidence and independence need to be fostered, and a balance struck between giving pupils

the confidence to attempt unknown words while at the same time equipping them with the 'tools' to correct them if necessary. Opportunities need to be given to improve pieces of work. Each pupil should be encouraged to use the section at the back of the planner to write in words they commonly spell incorrectly, and that they constantly use.

a) Marking

Marking can be one of the most significant strategies by which spelling can be improved. However, a consistent whole school approach is required which remains flexible with the needs of the individual child. Although all teachers think that spelling is important, it occurs less often as an issue in some subjects (e.g. Maths & PE). When teachers mark, they will often be looking for things like how good the ideas are, how well the thought is organised, how well a lesson has been understood, how much research has been done, how clearly the pupil has expressed ideas, etc. The spelling, by itself, may not be the most important thing about the work. However, if a teacher is marking a piece of work for spelling, it should be explained beforehand. Teachers usually do not correct all of the spelling mistakes, because many corrections may have a negative effect on a pupil's self-confidence. In many cases errors will be identified and pupils will be encouraged to use a dictionary to correct their mistakes. Errors are not corrected to criticise the pupil's work, but are done in order to help a word is not spelt the way the pupil thinks. Teachers will try to help, by showing pupils the correct way and how they can learn to spell better:

- when work is marked many spelling mistakes may be corrected. However, it depends much upon the nature of the work and the individual's ability, as to the extent of correction. e.g. spelling mistakes may only be identified on the first page of a piece of work;
- spelling mistakes should be underlined and, 'sp' put in the margin; when appropriate correction may be written by the teacher;
- if the same mistake is repeated, we only mark the error once;
- we will remind pupils of the strategy – look it up, cover it up, write it up, check again;
- the pages in the back of the planner should be used by all pupils to record the spellings from a piece of work as part of their response to marking. This may reveal a pattern of errors which could facilitate future targets for individualised learning;
- if a common error is discovered within a group, class discussion takes place. This may form the basis of a spelling test, but this is usually based on families of words, associated with a topic;
- if a well known rule of spelling is frequently broken (e.g. 'I' before 'e' except after 'c') the rule and how to apply it should be pointed out;
- an able child will have most of his/her mistakes corrected;
- those with spelling difficulties would have key words corrected;
- in the early stages, pupils with severe spelling difficulties need the time to read their pieces of work to the teacher, to notice and to question how words are spelt, and the range of words they can spell themselves, e.g. commonly used words are particularly important to them. This is the most effective way of marking at this point.

b) General Strategies for Staff and Parents

- encourage the child. Praise him/her for the words which he/she can spell correctly and any attempts they make to spell difficult words;
- try not to let the child become disheartened. It is always worth pointing out that not 'hundreds' of words a pupil mis-spells, but that they probably only mis-spell a few words time and time again, and even then, it is frequently only a matter of a letter being omitted, added or misplaced;
- try to remain optimistic yourself about improvements – no matter how slight. Remember that if you remain optimistic then the child is more likely to remain hopeful about becoming better at spelling. In such circumstances there is more likelihood that the child will put the effort that is required to learn to spell better;
- if the child is following a Spelling Programme, parents should try and supervise this and encourage their son/daughter's progress as much as possible. It is essential that there are opportunities to experience the application and relevance of recently acquired knowledge of spelling in meaningful situations – only then will the knowledge be consolidated;
- bearing in mind the above, the school should take what steps it can to ensure that

- possess their own dictionary or, at the very least, have easy access to one at home;
- pupils and parents are provided with lists of common words that are often spelt incorrectly through pages in the back of the 'Planner' – they should be added to as is necessary;
- it is good practice to make a list of useful spellings for pupils to put at the start of each section of work;
- key words for each topic can be mounted for display in the classroom;
- dictionaries should be available in each classroom. Alphabetical skills should be practised regularly, and pupils should be given different types of dictionaries to use in order to become familiar with a variety of formats;
- remember that communication and enjoyment of the language are of paramount importance;
- parents can practise spellings with their child so that he/she can confidently write important personal information, such as their address etc.
- use any opportunities that might arise naturally, to help with spelling, e.g. point out letter patterns in their names, or names of family members, e.g. "Andrew", "few", "new", "chew", etc. Or point out familiar words from, e.g. food labels, TV adverts, newspapers and magazines, street signs, etc.
- don't ask a pupil to learn a word, without showing a way to do so;
- plenty of practice for sounds and sound blends where appropriate;
- look for a word(s) hidden within the word, e.g. to get her = together; since rely = sincerely
- deliberately mispronounce the word (Wed-NES-day);
- look for the root word: be aware of beginnings and endings, e.g. ploy, employ, employment;
- invent a mnemonic, i.e. a sentence where each letter of the word forms the first letter of a word in the sentence. This should be done occasionally, or it becomes harder to remember all the mnemonics;
- try writing the word in different ways to see which looks right;
- trace the word with your finger, as you look at it. Try writing by looking at the correctly spelt word and not at what you are writing;
- visualise what the word looks like. Imagine taking a photograph of it, imagine it written on a board, a bill-board, in flashing lights, or in a newspaper;
- look at the word, with the intention of remembering it, cover it up, write it down, check to see if it's right;
- do not try and learn lots of spelling rules: there are only about six which are really useful, i.e.
 - i) Short words ending in 'l', 's', or 'f', double the last letter, e.g. tell, fuss.
 - ii) No English word has a 'q' without a 'u', e.g. question, squeeze.
 - iii) No English word ends in 'v'.
 - iv) * to make a word ending in a vowel + 'y' plural, add an 's', e.g. toy/toys.
* to make a word ending in a consonant + 'y' plural, change 'y' to 'ies', e.g. heavier, or 'iest', e.g. easiest.
 - v) Some words have a silent "e", e.g. hope, pine.
 - vi) 'i' before 'e' except after 'c', e.g. believe, receipt. This is a useful rule but is not always correct – especially in scientific terms, e.g. protein,
 - vii) nucleic acid.

Special Subject Consideration

There are opportunities within every subject area for pupils to develop their spelling abilities, and it is best if pupils learn how to spell the words they need to use, in the context in which they are most likely to use them, (e.g. 'isosceles', 'ingredient', 'evaporation', etc.). It is essential that pupils use and expand their knowledge about words in real situations. Obviously it is not useful to learn lists of unrelated words for the sole purpose of being tested, so this is not something which we feel is worthwhile.

Identifying those who might need extra help

At the beginning of each academic year, as well as information from Junior Schools, tests are given to Year 7 pupils to ascertain which individuals have particular reading and/or spelling difficulties. The precise nature of the support needed can then be ascertained. In addition to these tests referral can come at any time from a multitude of sources, e.g.

- subject teacher's request;

- pupil self request;
- parental request;
- management request;
- following information from previous school (e.g. primary school);
- following blanket testing of Year 7 pupils;
- following diagnostic tests;
- following individual interviews;
- following an SEN teacher tracking and observing individual pupils in lessons.

Early identification, assessment and provision for any child is very important for the following reasons:

- it can minimise the difficulties that can be encountered when intervention and provision occur;
- it can maximise the likely positive response of the child
- it can allow for a temporary learning difficulty to be overcome and for future learning to be unaffected;
- if the child's learning difficulty proves less transient when addressed by the School alone, then external agencies can be brought in earlier and very likely with more success.

Pupils with severe problems can be targeted for help with any available support from within the School or from outside agencies. Structured support programmes are set up following discussion with parents/guardians. The parents/guardians can then play an active and/or supporting role in their child's language development. During this time the pupils' progress is closely monitored.

It may be appropriate for pupils to use a structured spelling programme. The pupil works on this at home, with regular monitoring at school. For this to be most effective, the pupil needs to be keen to work hard to improve, there is support from someone who can help at home, and progress is evaluated regularly at school.