

IMPROVING LITERACY IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

RAG Self-Assessment

Preamble

This school RAG Self-Assessment tool accompanies the Education Endowment Foundation's 'Improving Literacy in Secondary Schools Guidance Report', which sets out seven recommendations for teachers and school leaders to support students to improve their literacy across the curriculum. It describes what 'ineffective', 'improving' and 'effective' practice could look like in relation to the guidance.

This tool can be used as part of an initial audit process to establish current practice (i.e. a point of departure), as well as monitor progress towards the development of more effective practice (i.e. a direction of travel). It can be used by literacy coordinators and any school leader who is seeking to improve literacy in their school. Subject leaders may seek to use the self-assessment tool to establish current practice in their department or faculty.

We strongly recommend that these tools are used in conjunction with other self-audit tools and approaches, and as such it is not deemed as a definitive document to determine what best practice should look like. For example, schools may evaluate existing practice with a self-evaluation that includes teacher questionnaires, learning walks, student outcome data, curriculum artefacts etc. These different sources of data can be triangulated to create a richer picture of classroom practice and how literacy approaches are enacted. This tool should not be used to set any teacher performance development targets or to make performance management judgements.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Prioritise 'disciplinary literacy' across the curriculum

Ineffective



Teaching staff have **limited** knowledge about disciplinary literacy. There is little awareness of the general and subject specific literacy skills that would benefit students in accessing the curriculum.

Teachers and teaching assistants have not had appropriate training relating to disciplinary literacy. Department/faculty training time is limited and generic CPD is not contextualised with subject specific CPD.

Departmental/faculty plans, policies and practices do not reference disciplinary literacy, nor is there a consistent understanding that general literacy can require subject specific adaptations. Some barriers to accessing the curriculum relating to reading writing and the curriculum are known, but there are few systematic approaches to addressing such issues.

Individual teachers evaluate the quality and complexity of existing reading materials in some areas of the curriculum. Teachers are not fully aware of what makes a text complex and this can lead to some students struggling with reading materials.

Intermediate



Teaching staff have **good** knowledge about disciplinary literacy. They have had some support with training and time in departments to contextualise disciplinary literacy in their subject and classroom. They have done some sharing of the unique language, ways of knowing, doing and communicating in their respective subject disciplines with colleagues and in their classroom practice with their students.

All teachers have had some training relating to disciplinary literacy, but it is not necessarily embedded into the school's CPD programme consistently. Some teaching staff may need updated training on disciplinary literacy, but there are not systematic processes to support this and there can be limited time for departmental/faculty CPD.

Departmental/faculty plans, policies and practices reference developing disciplinary literacy, but it is unclear how these are aligned with curriculum development. Some barriers to accessing the curriculum related to reading, writing and communication are responded to, but this is not systematically and some teachers lack confidence in tackling the issue.

There are planned approaches in departments/faculties to evaluate the quality and complexity of existing reading materials, but this isn't applied systematically, nor aligned with a curriculum progression model.

Exemplary



Teaching staff have **excellent** knowledge about disciplinary literacy. They have been supported with training and time in departments to contextualise disciplinary literacy in their subject and classroom. They consistently share the unique language, ways of knowing, doing and communicating in their respective subject disciplines with their colleagues and in their classroom practice with their students.

All teachers and teaching assistants are appropriately trained on disciplinary literacy, including a range of general and subject specific literacy skills; this is kept up-to-date with iterative CPD, with new staff being appropriately trained. Departments/faculties are supported with expert input on general literacy skills, alongside appropriate time for department/faculty CPD.

Departmental/faculty plans, policies and practices with regard to developing disciplinary literacy is coherently aligned with curriculum development. Barriers to accessing the curriculum relating to reading, writing and communication are recognised and systematically responded to by teachers and leaders.

There are systematic approaches in departments/faculties for evaluating the quality and complexity of existing reading materials, developing a clear model of progression in curriculum development that is updated consistently.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Provide targeted vocabulary instruction in every subject

Ineffective



Some teachers recognise the specialised vocabulary of their subject discipline. As such, there is **little** awareness of vocabulary development in curriculum design and lesson planning, with apt subject links not typically acted upon.

Vocabulary instruction is **sometimes** integrated into daily classroom instruction, with explicit instruction being developed, whilst opportunities for incidental promotion of vocabulary development are sometimes exploited.

Vocabulary is **rarely** organised into meaningful patterns within and across subjects. Teachers are unaware of useful models to cohere patterns of vocabulary e.g. Beck et al.'s 'tiers of vocabulary model'. As such, teacher and pupil vocabulary is weak.

Students are **rarely** provided with opportunities to hear, see and use new words with rich oral and written language environments. Students rarely exhibit the independent use of word learning strategies e.g. noticing morphological patterns.

Intermediate



Most teachers recognise the specialised vocabulary of their subject discipline. **Some** awareness of vocabulary development is evident in all curriculum design and lesson planning, with some apt subject links considered though not typically acted upon.

Vocabulary instruction is **often** integrated into daily classroom instruction, with explicit instruction being developed, whilst opportunities for incidental promotion of vocabulary development are sometimes exploited.

Vocabulary is **sometimes** organised into meaningful patterns within **and** across subjects. For example, Beck et al.'s 'tiers of vocabulary model' is understood and it is unclear where responsibility lies for such instruction. As such, teacher and pupil vocabulary development is variable.

Students are **sometimes** provided with opportunities to hear, see and use new words, within rich oral and written language environments. Students often exhibit the independent use of word learning strategies e.g. noticing morphological patterns.

Exemplary



All teachers recognise the specialised vocabulary of their subject discipline. A **sensitive** awareness of vocabulary development is evident in all curriculum design and lesson planning, with apt subject links considered and developed upon.

Vocabulary instruction is systematically integrated into daily classroom instruction, with explicit instruction being well developed, whilst opportunities for incidental promotion of vocabulary development are consistently exploited.

Vocabulary is **routinely** organised into meaningful patterns within **and** across subjects. For example, Beck et al.'s 'tiers of vocabulary model' is understood and it is clear where responsibility lies for instruction.

Students are **routinely** provided with ample opportunities to hear, see and use new words, within rich oral and written language environments. Students consistently exhibit the independent use of word learning strategies e.g. noticing morphological patterns.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Develop students' ability to read complex academic texts

Ineffective



Teaching staff have **limited** knowledge of the common barriers to academic reading e.g. dysfluency; limited vocabulary; gaps in background knowledge etc. As such, they are rarely responsive to students' progress or provide additional support, therefore students often struggle to access to challenging texts.

Teachers and TAs share little common understanding of key tenets reading instruction. They possess an **insecure** knowledge of reading comprehension and so there is little evidence of a developed progression evident in curriculum development and lesson planning in departments/faculties.

Teachers **rarely** instruct pupils to use reading strategies so that students do not become strategic when they read challenging academic texts. Students exhibit little confidence in planning, monitoring and using a range of reading strategies independently, meaning that they are dependent upon their teacher and can lack confidence and motivation when reading.

Reading strategies are **rarely** adapted and applied to specific subject disciplines and practice is not consistent or coordinated within departments/faculties.

Intermediate



Teaching staff have **good** knowledge of the common barriers to academic reading e.g. dysfluency; limited vocabulary; gaps in background knowledge etc. They are sometimes responsive to students' progress and they provide additional support to students when needed to ensure access to challenging texts, but practice is variable.

Teachers and TAs share some common understanding of key tenets reading instruction. They possess a **good** knowledge of reading comprehension and so there is evidence of a developed progression evident in curriculum development and lesson planning in some departments/faculties.

Teachers **often** instruct pupils to use reading strategies so that students become increasingly strategic when they read challenging academic texts. Students exhibit some confidence in planning, monitoring and using a range of reading strategies independently, though this is not consistent across all subjects.

Reading strategies are **sometimes** adapted and applied to specific subject disciplines, but this practice is not consistent or coordinated. For example, corroborating sources is promoted in History, whereas re-reading is used consistently in mathematics.

Exemplary



Teaching staff have **excellent** knowledge of the common barriers to academic reading e.g. dysfluency; limited vocabulary; gaps in background knowledge etc. They are consistently responsive to students' progress and they provide additional support to students when needed to ensure access to challenging texts.

Teachers and TAs share a common language about reading instruction. They possess a **sophisticated** knowledge of reading comprehension and so there is a clearly developed progression evident in curriculum development and lesson planning.

Teachers **consistently** and confidently instruct pupils to use a range of reading strategies so that students become increasingly strategic when they read challenging academic texts. Students typically exhibit confidence in planning, monitoring and using a range of reading strategies independently.

Reading strategies are regularly and carefully adapted and applied to specific subject disciplines. For example, corroborating sources is promoted in history, whereas re-reading is used consistently in mathematics.

RECOMMENDATIONS 4 & 5

Break down complex writing tasks / Combine writing instruction with reading in every subject

Ineffective



Teaching staff have **limited** knowledge of the complexity of writing. They do not support students' writing by breaking down of writing tasks with consistency, and as such, many students do not develop competence and confidence in completing extended writing tasks.

Teachers and TAs too **rarely** develop students' skill and motivation as writers across a range of subject disciplines.

Teachers have an **insecure** understanding of how reading and writing are overlapping, complementary skills. As such, they are rarely combine them well in subject specific tasks e.g. annotating model texts or using writing checklists.

Teachers and TAs have a **limited** knowledge of the role spelling, punctuation and grammar for meaning plays in writing in their subjects. As such, aspects such as spelling are rarely taught actively and strategies like sentence-combined are not deployed enough

Intermediate



Teaching staff have **good** knowledge of the complexity of writing. They typically support students' writing by breaking down of writing tasks, such as providing apt word level, sentence level and whole text level instruction in subject specific writing.

Teachers and TAs **sometimes** develop students' skill and motivation as writers across a range of subject disciplines. For example, there is targeted support for students who do not write fluently.

Teachers have some **good** understanding of how reading and writing are overlapping, complementary skills. As such, they are often combine them well in subject specific tasks e.g. annotating model texts or using writing checklists, but this is not systematic within and across departments/faculties.

Teachers and TAs have a **good** knowledge of the role spelling, punctuation and grammar for meaning plays in writing in their subjects. As such, aspects such as spelling are often taught actively and strategies like sentence-combined are deployed with skill. These approaches are not however consistent within and across all departments/faculties.

Exemplary



Teaching staff have **excellent** knowledge of the complexity of writing. This results in a skilful breaking down of writing tasks, such as providing apt word level, sentence level and whole text level instruction in subject specific writing.

Teachers and TAs **consistently** develop students' skill and motivation as writers across a range of subject disciplines. For example, there is targeted support for students who do not write fluently.

Teachers have a **sophisticated** understanding of how reading and writing are overlapping, complementary skills. As such, they are combined skilfully in subject specific tasks e.g. annotating model texts or using writing checklists, in a highly systematic fashion.

Teachers and TAs have an **excellent** knowledge of spelling, punctuation and grammar for reading plays in writing in their subjects. As such, aspects such as spelling are taught actively and strategies like sentence-combined are deployed with skill.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Provide opportunities for structured talk

Ineffective



Teachers and TAs have **limited** knowledge of what constitutes high-quality, accountable talk. As such, apt strategies for discussion and debate are rarely selected by teachers and departments/faculties are not systematic in develop students' subject-specific talk and reasoning.

Teachers and TAs are not appropriately trained to develop accountable talk. Departments/faculties are not supported with expert input on general and subject specific skills relating to high quality talk. As such, practice is inconsistent across departments/faculties.

Modelling talk and the use of vocabulary is not well understood and is **rarely** promoted via explicit teaching. There is little evidence of the developed progression of student reasoning through talk in departments/faculties.

Teachers and TAs have **limited** understanding of how students benefit from metacognitive talk and self-talk. For example, teachers scaffolding of self-talk is inconsistent and not widely understood by staff.

Intermediate



Teachers and TAs have a **good** knowledge of what constitutes high-quality, accountable talk. As such, apt strategies for discussion and debate etc. are selected by some teachers and in some departments/faculties.

All teachers and TAs are appropriately trained to develop accountable talk, but it is not consistently embedded into practice and in curriculum development and lesson planning. Departments/faculties are supported with expert input on general and subject specific skills relating to high quality talk, with whole school routines developed, although practice remains inconsistent.

Modelling talk and the use of vocabulary is **sometimes** promoted via explicit teaching. There is some evidence of the developed progression of student reasoning through talk in departments/faculties.

Teachers and TAs understand how students benefit from metacognitive talk and self-talk with **some confidence** and a degree of consistency across departments/faculties. For example, teachers typically scaffold and promote self-explanation.

Exemplary



Teachers and TAs have an **excellent** knowledge of what constitutes high-quality, accountable talk. As such, apt strategies for discussion and debate etc. are selected appropriately and precise feedback is given to students.

Teachers and TAs are appropriately trained to develop accountable talk. Departments/faculties are supported with expert input on general and subject specific skills relating to high quality talk, with apt whole school routines developed.

Modelling talk and the use of vocabulary is **consistently** promoted via explicit teaching. A clearly developed progression of student reasoning through talk is evident in curriculum development and lesson planning across most departments/faculties.

Teachers and TAs understand how students benefit from metacognitive talk and self-talk with **thorough confidence**. For example, teachers consistently scaffold and promote self-explanation.

RECOMMENDATION 7

Provide high quality literacy interventions for struggling students

Ineffective



Identification of struggling students is often slow and action taken to support them is limited.

Diagnostic tools (such as the Simple View of Reading or standardised reading tests) are **rarely** used to identify the best next step for teaching.

TAs deliver mainly unstructured literacy interventions, for which there is little reliable evidence for effectiveness. TAs may deliver commercial intervention programmes, but in an unstructured way (e.g. not as prescribed by the developer).

Intervention sessions are not well structured, poorly timetabled and irregular. Consequently, students routinely miss significant portions of classroom teaching.

Teachers have little or **no awareness** of the structure and coverage of literacy intervention programmes. As a result, they cannot link the focus of the interventions to whole class teaching. It is left largely to students to make the links between what is covered in interventions and their learning in general classroom teaching.

Intermediate



When a student is identified as struggling with their literacy they are given extra support, but this may not be well matched to their specific needs.

Diagnostic tools (such as the Simple View of Reading or standardised reading tests) are **sometimes** used to identify the best next step for teaching.

TAs deliver some well-chosen literacy interventions that have the potential to effectively supplement classroom learning, although this is not always occurring (e.g. use of assessments to monitor and inform next stages of development is inconsistent).

Although interventions are structured, they are not always delivered as intended. Timetabling of sessions is reasonable although sessions are sometimes missed.

Teachers have **limited awareness** of the structure and coverage of literacy intervention programmes. Students receive some assistance in applying their learning from interventions to the wider curriculum, although again this is inconsistent.

Exemplary



When a student is identified as struggling the first thing a teacher does is to try to identify the specific reason(s) why they are struggling.

Diagnostic tools (such as the Simple View of Reading or standardised reading tests) are **routinely** used to identify the best next step for teaching.

TAs deliver one or two evidence-based and structured literacy interventions, chosen to deliberately complement and extend class-based teaching and learning.

Intervention sessions are regular and sustained, with clear objectives and expectations. Sessions are well-placed, well-resourced and carefully timetabled to minimise time spent away from general class teaching.

Teachers have **good awareness** of the structure and coverage of literacy intervention programmes. Teachers and TAs both help students make connections between the learning in interventions and the wider curriculum.