

Notes to accompany presentation slides for:

## Ofsted's subject professional development materials: English

A non-mandatory training resource for teachers of English in primary schools

**These accompanying notes are designed to be used in conjunction with the presentation slides. Each note is numbered to reflect the slide it refers to.**

### **1. Title slide: A training resource for teachers of English in primary schools**

### **2. About this training resource**

The materials cover five themes identified in the *Moving English forward* report. Feedback from schools that trialled the materials suggests that each theme could be used to provide the basis for an hour's discussion within a staff meeting. Schools can choose to work through the materials unit by unit; this would provide material for a sequence of five meetings about English. Alternatively, schools may decide to select the themes that are of particular interest to them. These supplementary materials are aimed to support the subject leader or headteacher by offering ideas and suggestions that can be used to plan the discussions.

### **3. Title slide: Some questions on English: How well do you know the performance data?**

### **4. Questions**

### **5. Answers**

The important thing here is not how many answers teachers get right. The key is to compare the national data with your own school's performance and identify areas that might need to be improved. If, for example, your reading/writing gap tends to be wider than average, what should you do about it? Similarly, if the performance of boys or pupils entitled to free school meals is weaker than average, you should

consider discussing the issue and trying to identify why this is the case. You should consider the performance of your minority ethnic pupils; how does this compare with the national picture for different minority ethnic groups? If you do not have any of this data readily to hand, perhaps that should be the first item on any improvement plan!

## **6. Title slide: What is the impact of teaching on pupils' learning in English in your school?**

Although schools are free to choose the units that are of most relevance to them, it is recommended that all schools consider this unit on teaching and learning. *Moving English forward* has some important things to say about learning and progress in lessons in English.

## **7. What is effective teaching in English?**

Inspectors (and sometimes pupils) often complain that all lessons tend to follow the same structure. Yet, if you want to encourage a love of reading, introduce pupils to a play by Shakespeare, or stimulate effective story writing, there seems no obvious reason why the lessons should be planned in an identical way or follow the same plan. You might want to talk together about the best ways of encouraging a love of reading, or developing pupils' written work. What different approaches are mentioned by colleagues? This should lead to the important statement on the next slide; Ofsted does not prescribe how teachers should teach. Instead, the emphasis is on the impact of teaching on pupils' learning.

## **8. What is effective teaching in English?**

You should move on to consider how the school evaluates the quality of teaching in English. In subject inspections, primary schools often find it difficult to distinguish between the quality of teaching overall and the quality of teaching in English. Yet, we would not expect all primary teachers to be equally effective at teaching, for example, English, mathematics, music and geography. Given that there is likely to be a considerable amount of time spent monitoring activities in English (for example, lesson observation or work scrutiny), it seems reasonable to suggest that schools should be better at picking up strengths and weaknesses in teaching at the subject level. Look at the school or subject action plans; are they specific enough about how to improve teaching in English? If not, what more could the school do to identify strengths and weaknesses of individual teachers in English?

## **9. The 'myths' of good teaching in English**

The weaknesses identified in this section of the report include: excessive pace; too many activities; over-detailed lesson plans; limited time for independent learning; and constant review of progress. Do teachers feel that any of these issues constrain their own teaching or the progress made by pupils?

Look at what the report says about flexibility. Would teachers feel confident enough to alter their plans in a lesson that was being observed or would they feel obliged to stick with them? Encourage teachers to discuss particular lessons where they have altered their plans because it became clear that pupils were either struggling to understand or where it was evident that their understanding was greater than the teacher had expected.

## **10. How effective are your learning objectives?**

When discussing learning objectives, you could also refer to paragraphs 23–24 from the previous triennial report, *English at the crossroads* (080247, June 2009). This lists some weaknesses in learning objectives and illustrates the issue through a Key Stage 2 lesson example. Remember that your learning objectives should be:

- realistic and achievable in one lesson
- capable of being evaluated
- appropriate for all pupils
- applied to skills, knowledge and understanding in English. For example, 'write a story' or 'prepare a talk' merely define the activity rather than the learning while 'show an understanding of some different ways to begin a story' or 'use Standard English and formal language in giving a talk' are more specific and capable of being reviewed together by the teacher and pupils.

## **11. A school policy statement on effective teaching and learning in English**

It is not essential that a written statement is produced at this stage; a detailed discussion of good teaching in English would be fine. However, a short statement or set of bullet points in the subject leader's file or English policy can be helpful, especially when observing lessons and in trying to develop a consistent approach across the school.

## **12. Title slide: Teaching writing, including spelling and handwriting**

### **13. Standards of writing**

The emphasis here is on performance data about writing. You might want to start by sharing assessments from the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) in your school. What does this suggest about children's skills in writing on entry to the school and the progress they make in the EYFS? Discuss the approach to writing in the EYFS; does it appear to be successful?

Secondly, look at progress data on writing as pupils move through the school. How does it compare with the reading data? Do any groups under-perform? How well do boys do? Next, discuss what interventions are in place to support pupils who are struggling with writing. Is there the same emphasis on writing as there is on reading? What are the most effective interventions?

## **14. How confident are you about the teaching of writing?**

The very best teachers 'model' writing effectively. This is often best done with the pupils themselves, giving the teacher the opportunity to discuss the language choices made and to illuminate the process of writing. However, many teachers lack this kind of confidence or present a previously written text. Teachers are also often happier modelling persuasive writing, for example, than poetry or narrative writing. Yet, all teachers write well enough to be able to guide and help primary age pupils.

## **15. Spelling, handwriting and grammar**

Issues to discuss:

- Does the school have a written policy on pupils' handwriting styles and how to teach them? Are all members of staff confident in their teaching of handwriting? Are standards of handwriting high enough? What support is available for pupils with poor handwriting?
- You might want to discuss the link between a cursive writing style and good spelling.
- Does marking ever identify weaknesses in handwriting or presentation? What would teachers regard as acceptable in both areas?
- Is there an agreed whole-school policy and approach on spelling? Does this build on the phonics teaching in the EYFS and Key Stage 1? Are older pupils knowledgeable about spelling rules and patterns?
- What is school practice in correcting spellings in pupils' work and how are pupils expected to follow up mistakes? Would teachers regard it as acceptable never to correct spelling mistakes in pupils' work; inspection evidence suggests that this happens in large numbers of schools.

## **16. Writing for real, writing that matters**

It is not always possible, of course, to generate real audiences and purposes for writing. However, even simulated audiences and purposes will be of benefit if they clarify the task and expectations for pupils. Your older pupils may already do a good deal of writing outside school for real audiences, perhaps through social networking sites. It is useful to find this out, as well as finding out which of your pupils (and there are always some in a school) write for themselves at home, whether it be stories, poems, or a diary. Some schools have experimented successfully with

different forms of writing journals where pupils write for themselves and have more choice over the subject.

Does the school invite people who write into the classroom? This might include professional novelists, for example, but what about all the other people doing more conventional jobs who need to use writing all the time in their work? This can help pupils to understand the importance of writing outside school.

The report suggests that many pupils do too little extended writing and rarely redraft or edit their work. Discuss current practice in school. What works and how can the best practice be extended?

## **17. How effective is the teaching of writing in your school?**

Castle View Primary School developed its own approach to writing, following no one formula but borrowing from different places to meet their pupils' needs. The school also worked hard to ensure a consistency in teaching writing across the school. Discuss the strategies employed. Compare this with your own practice.

You should also look at the example, linked in the Castle View case study, of one girl's writing in the lesson. Talk about her work. Notice particularly how she behaves like a real writer, constantly reviewing, changing and improving her work. Notice also how she is helped by the teachers' activities and guidance. The impact of teaching is very evident here.

Discuss together if there is anything for you to learn from the case study. Make a note of possible changes and use then to identify some actions on writing for the subject improvement plan.

## **18. *Title slide:* Promoting wider reading and reading for pleasure**

### **19. Reading for pleasure**

Issues to discuss:

- How do you know (other than anecdotally) how much your pupils read
  - inside school, and
  - outside school?
- Do some groups of pupils read more than others and enjoy reading more? Which are they?
- Do you do anything to help disinterested readers regain their enthusiasm? What?
- Does it matter in the long run if pupils like reading or do so independently outside school?

- In discussing reading, have teachers concentrated on reading fiction? What about online reading and the reading of magazines and newspapers?

## 20. Why reading for pleasure is important

Make a list of all the strategies currently in use in your school. This would be a useful section in an English policy statement. It might include the following:

- Hearing a teacher or other adult read stories or novels aloud to a class
- Opportunities to read poetry (such as 'poem of the week')
- Choosing a book other than in a reading scheme
- Reading other texts such as comics or newspapers or non-fiction texts
- Pupils reading to themselves for extended periods
- Talking about books, including hearing the teacher talk about books, sharing recommendations
- Having 'book talk' with others – such as librarians, writers, visitors
- Visits from writers and others
- Book week and related activities
- Reading competitions

## 21. Teachers as readers

Pupils are far more likely to become keen readers if their teachers are enthusiastic and read regularly. Discuss:

- What book are you currently reading for pleasure?
- Who are your favourite authors and/or poets?
- What can you remember about the reading curriculum when you were at school?
- What books and poems, if any, do you think that every child should encounter in the primary school? Why?
- What book, if any, are you reading to your class this term? If this is not happening, should it?
- Does the subject leader know what texts are being studied in each class? If not, why not? Does the choice of texts build on the work of the previous teacher?
- Is 'story time' at the end of the day a good idea or not?
- What other sources of information about children's books are teachers aware of?
- How do you involve parents and carers in practical support for reading at home?

## 22. Developing reading stamina

You might use this slide to talk about extended reading of non-fiction texts. Is it enough that we encourage pupils to read lengthy novels? What kind of extended non-fiction might be suitable for your pupils – and are different skills involved in reading an extended non-fiction text than reading a novel?

## 23. The range of texts available

Discuss resources for reading in your school. You might want to include these questions:

- Is there a wide enough range of genres available to all pupils (such as adventure, comedy, mystery, or historical)?
- What other reading material is available to pupils?
- Is there a balance between fiction and non-fiction?
- Does the reading material support learning in other subjects and topics that the pupils are studying?
- Are there enough texts to motivate boys?
- Are electronic books available in your school? How might they be used to stimulate interest in reading?
- How effective is your school library?

This is the final slide on the reading section. It should be possible now to summarise the various discussions and identify some required actions. Perhaps you can ask each teacher to note down some specific ideas and use this to draw up a plan of action for developing wider reading and an enthusiasm for reading?

## 24. *Title slide:* How many of your children have weak language and communication skills on entry to the school?

## 25. Communication skills and the Early Years Foundation Stage

Are your youngest children in the Early Years Foundation Stage good communicators (in speaking and listening)? Do they speak confidently and draw on a wide vocabulary? The national EYFS profile assessments suggest that this should be the case as 86% of children nationally were judged to be secure in using language for communication and thinking in 2011. This is higher than for the three other areas of CLL.

Yet, research from the Communication Trust suggests that children's ability to communicate orally has declined in recent years. Primary headteachers have commented that some children enter primary school without even knowing their own name. What is the view of your staff? Has oral fluency declined and, if so, why?

Ask your EYFS coordinator to talk about children's communication skills in your EYFS. What are children's strengths and weaknesses in oral communication?

What particular strategies do staff employ in the EYFS to develop oral communication skills? What are children's skills when they move to Year 1 and how does this affect reading and writing? Ask the Year 1 teachers to comment. How do they build on the first start in the EYFS?

## **26. Communication skills; 'learning happening accidentally'**

Use the discussion to list all the activities that are planned to develop pupils' oral communication skills. Consider the issue of progression. What happens from year to year? Do teachers know about pupils' speaking and listening experiences in the previous class?

Do assessments take place in this area? Are targets ever set for speaking and listening? Are units of work ever constructed around objectives in speaking and listening?

## **27. 'Bathing children in language all the time'**

This slide asks you to read two case studies of good practice and use them to discuss your own provision in the EYFS.

## **28. Developing speaking and listening skills beyond the EYFS**

You might discuss whether you think it is appropriate for a primary school to teach these aspects of speech (they are all in the existing National Curriculum.): accent and dialect, Standard English, slang, different types and registers of speech event.

Ask teachers:

- Speaking and listening are often employed to support writing (such as 'talk for writing') but how often do you teach aspects of speaking and listening explicitly?
- Do you consciously model spoken language for your pupils? Are you a good model of spoken English? How should teachers speak to pupils – in Standard English? Does it matter if you employ a regional accent or dialect? (And do all teachers understand these two terms?)
- Do you ever use spoken language as a resource in the classroom, for example through television, audio tapes or transcripts?
- Do you think you should ever intervene in classroom talk? If so when? Should you ever 'correct' what pupils say? If not, how are pupils to extend their spoken repertoire? Do you ever compliment a pupil on how they have said something?

Once again, use this final slide to draw together some recommendations for action.



## **29. Title slide: Effective leadership and management of English**

## **30. Subject knowledge in English in primary schools**

*Moving English forward* raises questions about the subject knowledge of coordinators in primary schools. There has been substantial training for subject leaders in recent years but the report suggests that this has focused on aspects of classroom practice rather than subject pedagogy. Clearly, primary teachers have to cover the full range of subjects and, as a result, very few will have specialist qualifications in English. The government has stated that: 'We need more specialist mathematics teachers in primary schools and will encourage and support schools in developing this specialism.' The current report argues that this policy should be extended to include English.

Compile a list of subject-knowledge topics for possible future continuing professional development in English

## **31. English; a subject audit**

In addition to the issues on the slide, perhaps it might be useful to consider the idea of a reading champion or advocate in schools. How might it work and is there someone in your school who would like to take on this role?

## **32. Improving the leadership and management of English**

You might start by asking all staff to write a few lines about English; their definition of what is important about the subject for your pupils. Try to avoid simply repeating the National Curriculum definition and, more trickily, try to avoid clichés! Then introduce the two examples in paragraphs 83–84 of the report. Use the discussion to draft a statement about the nature of English in your school to go into the English policy.

## **33. Improving teaching in English**

This slide focuses on the need to monitor and evaluate teaching in English effectively and to use this to improve the consistency across the school. Subject action plans in English are often rather vague about how to improve classroom teaching and tend to rely on changes to assessment alone. The outcome of this discussion should be clear and specific actions to enhance teaching in English within each classroom, for a whole-school or subject action plan.

## **34. Title slide: Summary and conclusion**

## **35. Conclusion; next steps to improve English**

The pack should have provided several opportunities to draw up or add to a subject action plan. If not, this is your last chance!