

Excellence in English

What we can learn from 12 outstanding schools

One of the most pressing issues in English facing a large number of schools today is how to improve from being good to outstanding. The aim of this report is to improve practice in English across all schools and particularly to help them become outstanding. The report provides 12 case studies of schools which are successful in helping their pupils to make outstanding progress in English.

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Introduction: from good to outstanding

The last triennial report on English from Ofsted identified some of the ways in which satisfactory schools could improve their provision for English.¹ However, subject inspections indicate that most schools visited are judged to be good overall in English. The *English at the crossroads* report made the point that there are too few effective systems to identify and share good practice. Since the publication of that report, teachers have frequently asked inspectors to explain what makes a school outstanding in English. One answer to this question has been provided through the publication of subject-specific descriptors for use on subject inspections.² This report attempts to provide further guidance for schools.

There are, of course, many routes to excellence. No two schools are the same and there is no simple formula that will make a school outstanding in English. The key characteristics of outstanding schools in general have already been identified in earlier reports from Ofsted.³ Many of the characteristics of outstanding schools apply equally well to excellence in a subject such as English. It is not the intention of this report to repeat ideas already published in earlier reports. At a subject level, it is the detail that matters; for example, what makes the English curriculum in one school more effective than another and why a particular lesson is successful in improving pupils' writing. The teaching of phonics in primary schools has been addressed in Ofsted's recent publication *Reading by six*, so while high-quality phonics work is an important part of outstanding provision, and a characteristic of all the primary schools featured here, the main focus of this report is on other issues in the teaching of English.⁴

The central section of this report is a series of 12 case studies, equally divided between primary and secondary schools, including one special school for secondary-age students. All the schools were identified because they operate in challenging circumstances. Ten of the schools contain substantially above average numbers of pupils who are eligible for free school meals and, in all cases, pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding are below average on entry to the school. Several of the schools contained substantial numbers of pupils from minority ethnic groups and pupils who were learning English as an additional language. In others, the issue was how to improve the achievement of White British pupils who were eligible for free school meals.

¹ *English at the crossroads: an evaluation of English in primary and secondary schools 2005/08* (080247), Ofsted, 2009; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080247.

² See, for example, *Generic grade descriptors and supplementary subject-specific guidance for inspectors on making judgements during subject survey visits to schools* (20100015), Ofsted, 2010; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/20100015.

³ *Twelve outstanding secondary schools – excelling against the odds* (080240), Ofsted, 2009; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080240; and *Twenty outstanding primary schools – excelling against the odds* (090170), Ofsted, 2009; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090170.

⁴ *Reading by six: how the best schools do it* (100197), Ofsted, 2010; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100197.

Yet all these schools are successful in helping their pupils to make outstanding progress in English. From below average starting points, all enable their pupils to reach at least average standards; in several schools attainment is well above average in English. Pupils' progress in English in these schools is consistently high, generally placing the schools among the top achieving schools nationally in terms of pupils' progress.

Ten of the schools in the survey were identified during a previous subject inspection visit in English. In seven of these schools, the initial inspection judged the overall effectiveness of English to be outstanding. In three cases, the overall effectiveness in English was judged to be good but the inspector concluded that the school had very good capacity for further improvement and should be included in this survey. The follow-up visits to these schools judged that they were now likely to be providing outstanding effectiveness in English. Of the remaining two schools, one was identified through very positive feedback from its whole-school inspection and a second was chosen following feedback from a different survey. All schools were re-visited at least once for this survey between April and December 2010; 10 received two visits.

These 12 schools had many excellent features in their teaching, curriculum, leadership and management, and in the positive impact of these on pupils' achievement in English. To avoid repetition, each case study in this report focuses on one innovative aspect of provision in each school. While this runs the risk of oversimplifying the reasons for their success, it does enable the report to describe in some detail particular approaches to English in these outstanding schools.

It is hoped that this approach through case studies will enable schools that are not yet outstanding to select the case studies of most relevance to them and identify the issues that particularly interest them. The central theme of each case study is as follows:

- creating writers: a workshop approach to writing in a primary school
- steps to excellence: turning average readers into keen ones (primary)
- differentiating the curriculum so that all succeed (secondary)
- the impact of effective subject leadership on teaching (secondary)
- success with pupils learning English as an additional language (primary)
- exploiting opportunities for literacy in the Early Years Foundation Stage and beyond (primary)
- trusting teachers, trusting pupils (secondary)
- teachers and other staff working together to create an innovative curriculum (primary)
- a challenging curriculum for all in a special school
- success with boys in English (secondary)
- encouraging pupils to read and talk well (primary)

- helping pupils to become independent learners (secondary).

Of course, it is rarely possible for schools to become successful by merely imitating what works well elsewhere. As this report confirms, schools that are outstanding in English always have a strong and individual approach to the subject. Schools that wish to become outstanding need to review their own strengths and weaknesses in English before deciding what they have to learn from the case studies in this report. It is the expectation of all good schools that they can become outstanding. It is hoped that this report will help them answer the question: 'What can we do to achieve excellence in English?'

Summary of findings

1. 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. What links all the schools in this survey is that they provide innovative or creative curricula for English that are explicitly and successfully designed around the particular needs of their pupils.
2. Each school developed its own distinct and original vision for English. Subject leaders were keen to develop their own schemes of work and promoted a vigorous debate about the identity of English and its importance for pupils within the school in order to achieve this. This debate, supported by highly effective subject leadership, ensured that a coherent, shared vision for English provided a clear sense of direction to subject work.
3. Excellent teamwork, collaboration and sharing of best practice generated a consistency of approach, especially in the crucial area of the quality of teaching. The English teams represented in this survey observed each other's lessons, sometimes taught together, and concentrated in meetings on discussing key issues of methodology rather than administration. As a result, staff learnt from each other. This was especially evident in aspects which included the provision of a high-quality classroom environment that stimulated pupils and supported their learning, as well as teaching that engaged all the senses.
4. These outstanding schools had a clear understanding of the varied needs of their different groups of pupils in English and ensured that lessons, and the schemes of work, were planned explicitly to meet this range of needs. The schools ensured that all pupils had access to the same experiences in English but that the curriculum and lessons were differentiated effectively to help all pupils to make the greatest possible progress.
5. Teachers in these schools listened very carefully to what pupils said about English, what they enjoyed doing and how they learnt best. Teachers involved the pupils in constructing the English curriculum. The schools also gave teachers freedom and flexibility in devising programmes that would engage their pupils. All schools stressed the importance of motivating pupils and

ensuring that they enjoyed English lessons. However, this was not because the schools provided a low-level curriculum based simply on what pupils wanted to do. In all these schools, inspectors noted that pupils were motivated by challenging work and rigorous expectations.

6. Schools in this survey ensured that pupils' experience in English extended beyond the classroom. They did this first through the provision of rich extra-curricular experiences outside school, such as reading groups, theatre trips and working with creative practitioners. They also ensured that classroom activities, wherever possible, involved real tasks, purposes, audiences and issues related to the local or wider community. In this way, the curriculum matched pupils' needs and interests.
7. Outstanding English teams continually seek to get better. This was particularly evident in the ways that the survey schools had responded to the areas for improvement suggested in the initial subject inspection. However, it was also built into their own approaches to review and evaluation, and was supported by a constant drive for improvement. Staff sought out feedback and reacted positively to suggestions and criticism. Follow-up visits confirmed that the schools had listened to inspectors' comments and improved provision further as a result.
8. Where provision was outstanding in English, boys did as well as girls. This is in contrast to the national picture. The case studies give some insight into the schools' success with boys and one of them takes this as its central theme. This report offers no simple solutions to a complex issue. However, it is no accident that these schools all offered a lively and engaging curriculum, supported by active approaches in the classroom with substantial emphasis on discussion and well-managed group work, which led to clear and productive outcomes in English.
9. Good-quality oral work engages pupils, including boys and pupils who might otherwise take little interest, and yields benefits in all areas of English. Talk happens in all English lessons but it is not always well-structured or taught explicitly. The survey schools planned carefully for pupils' speaking and listening, making good use of drama and group activities. This had a significant impact on pupils' enjoyment of English and more effective provision for speaking and listening improved pupils' work in reading and writing. Group work was often particularly well planned and effective.
10. The curriculum in each of these schools gave a high profile to reading for pleasure. International comparisons indicate that although most pupils in English schools are competent in their reading at secondary school age, their interest and commitment decline substantially.⁵ Schools that take the business

⁵ See, for example, the results of the PISA international survey; www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/pisa-2009-results-what-students-know-and-can-do_9789264091450-en.

of reading for pleasure seriously, where teachers read, talk with enthusiasm and recommend books, and where provision for reading is planned carefully, are more likely to succeed with their pupils' reading. This success was seen in the survey schools, both in good test results and an enthusiasm for reading beyond the classroom.

The case studies

Each of the case studies that follow is illustrated by data that compares the school to the national averages from the 2010 validated RAISEonline report.⁶ Contextual Value Added (CVA) data indicate how pupils compare with others nationally. Values that are 'sig+' show pupils making significantly more progress than other similar pupils nationally. Similarly, values that are 'sig-' show pupils making significantly less progress than other pupils nationally. Values showing 'no significance' are in line with the national average. The deprivation indicator is based on the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) and measures the proportion of children under the age of 16 in an area living in low income households. The indicator, ranges from 0.00 (least deprived) to 1.00 (most deprived).

Castle View Primary School, Halton

Creating writers: a workshop approach to writing

School data	School	National (primary)
Number on roll	155	241
% Free school meal eligibility	51.5	18.5
% Pupils from minority ethnic groups	12.8	25.7
% Pupils with English as additional language	8.3	16.1
Deprivation indicator	0.49	0.24
% Eligible pupils attaining Level 4+ in English	100	80

CVA three-year average	School	Significance
English	103.1	Sig. +
English (boys)	103.3	Sig. +
English (girls)	102.3	Sig. +

⁶ RAISEonline provides interactive analysis of schools' and pupils' performance data. www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/About-us/FAQs/RAISEonline2.

11. Castle View Primary School is a smaller than average primary school with a majority of pupils from White British backgrounds. Although many children have weak literacy skills on entry, standards are above average in English at the end of Key Stage 2. Every single pupil has made at least the expected two levels of progress between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 over the past three years. Boys have made even better progress than girls.
12. Among its many achievements, the school is remarkably successful with writing. This can be seen first of all in the unusually positive attitudes that pupils have towards writing. All claim to enjoy writing. Indeed, a large number of the older pupils write for themselves at home. One pupil shared her home-writing books. These comprised two beautifully illustrated exercise books (clearly influenced by her earlier study of *The Jolly Postman*, with lots of inserts and cleverly hidden notes) containing a vast range of work; chiefly stories but also poems, lists of words, lists of favourite reading, and other texts such as the design of a passport. Also, an example of an English lesson plan, expertly imitating her teacher's approach even down to learning objectives, warm-up games, an outline plan and marking criteria!
13. The school manages to persuade all pupils that they are writers and to behave like writers. One teacher said that 'we believe that all the pupils can be good writers' and pupils are certainly confident in their own writing ability. They talk about the way that teachers 'give you just enough help with writing but not too much, leaving you free to think of your own ideas'. One simple but effective strategy is the school's use of high-quality hardback writing books. These have high status in the school. They are not provided for younger pupils and, as a result, become something that these children eagerly anticipate as they get older. The books have the appearance of a professional writer's rough book. They contain all the pupil's writing in English, including first ideas, plans and final pieces. Pupils are encouraged to look through their book for ideas or to reflect on the progress that they have made.
14. All teachers also employ the notion of a writer's 'toolkit', which is designed by each teacher to support a particular writing task and is shared with pupils. This lists aspects of writing that pupils might try to incorporate in that task. One teacher said: 'We say to pupils that this is how writers work. This is one of their tricks. And then they're really keen to have a go.' Another interesting feature is the use in all classrooms of a 'working wall'. This includes guidance from the teacher, word lists, examples of first sentences, drafts of openers and so on. The wall gets added to as new guidance is posted on top of old but previous work and hints can soon be recovered. Pupils say that they find this really helpful and it is constantly referred to during lessons.
15. Another aspect of the approach to writing is that teachers work hard to make the writing purposeful. This is especially evident in the Early Years Foundation Stage where pupils write menus for the café role-play area, design signs for the tea party, compose letters after visits and frequently write spontaneously to other teachers. Older pupils build on this by writing: programmes for the school

play; letters to the Enterprise team after a visit; posters about the danger of fireworks, which are displayed in the local community in November; and letters to pen pals in another school.

16. However, more than anything, at the heart of the school's success with writing is its approach to teaching through writing workshops. The subject leader has produced detailed guidance for staff on teaching writing and this includes how to conduct a writing workshop. Broadly, the strategy involves a great deal of writing and modelling by the teacher, with planning integrated at all stages. It is a step-by-step approach with pupils and teachers working together on constructing a piece of writing. In each lesson, the pupils work through a series of exercises before moving to a longer piece which is sharply focused on specific criteria. The pupils' work, with its crossings-out and additions, shows how well these pupils operate as real writers, constantly looking to rewrite and improve.
17. The workshop approach to writing in the school has also developed teachers' own confidence as writers. As a result, they tend to write their own texts for lessons rather than searching the internet for examples that might not suit their particular purposes. Among a batch of examples provided by one teacher were the following:

'Because it was such a pleasant warm day, Jane and her parents had decided to take their brand-new, leather-furnished, automatically controlled, convertible Lamborghini out for a spin in the countryside.'

'I think that the people of Thornton should not rely on Jack and Jill to fetch the crucial pail of water every day. Firstly, it is important to consider the fact that they are extremely young and therefore barely developed physically to carry such heavy pails.'

'Early in the morning, the warming sun creeps like a timid child slowly over the horizon while bringing with it a warming glow casting long shadows.'

18. One lesson observed showed how the writing workshop operated. The lesson was part of a unit of work on suspense writing. The learning objectives involved using a range of suspense techniques and different sentence openers to vary their writing. The teacher provided a 'suspense writing toolkit' which formed part of the 'working wall'. This included questions, short sentences, prompts about noises and shadows, and instructions to 'introduce cold/dark, bring in the unexpected'. The warm-up activities were to complete sentences such as 'Hardly daring to breathe, Andy...' One pupil responded, '...crawled under the table'. The teacher immediately asked: 'How did he crawl?' Other exercises on sentence starters followed: 'Without warning...', 'Shaking with fear...'
19. The teacher then read an extract from *Danny, the champion of the world*. The pupils' task was to continue it. A clear structure was provided by the teacher:

the opening to be one of the warm-up sentences written earlier; followed by a paragraph using multi-sensory description; then a final paragraph introducing an unexpected element. Twenty minutes were provided for the writing. The teacher constantly intervened and questioned: 'How did he step into the forest?'; 'What kind of twigs brushed against his skin?' There was a strong emphasis on sharing ideas, learning from each other, the pupils becoming real writers.

20. The lesson shared many of the features of a creative writing session for adults. The pupils were serious and fully engaged in the task. What was most impressive was their readiness to experiment and change; this is not common practice in schools. These pupils were confident to alter words, cross out and revise as they wrote. Later, the pupils reviewed their writing against some of the toolkit prompts: use of shadows, questions, strong verbs, suspense techniques. The high quality of writing produced by pupils in the lesson confirmed the positive impact of the workshop approach and the confidence that pupils showed in different aspects of the writing process. The extent to which they were able to plan, reflect, change and edit as they wrote was especially impressive.
21. One final aspect of the school's approach to writing is worth describing. Inspectors frequently comment on the relative lack of extended writing in schools. Common practice in many primary schools is for pupils to spend two or three weeks working towards an extended piece of writing. In the meantime, they analyse short exemplar texts, perhaps producing their own brief pieces of writing. For example, when working on persuasive writing, pupils might spend considerable time talking about, identifying and then writing examples of rhetorical questions, using certain connectives and composing different types of sentence. At this school, the policy is for pupils to produce concentrated and extensive texts in all lessons. Accordingly, a unit on persuasive writing featured topics over a three-week period that included: 'should primary children eat more healthy food?'; 'do we need a new bridge in Runcorn?'; 'should the school have a tuck shop at lunchtimes?'; 'should under-21s be allowed to buy alcohol?'; 'should primary children have homework?'; 'should pupils choose who to sit with in class?'; 'should Everton and Liverpool share a football ground?'; and 'should Hermia, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, be able to choose whom to marry?' All pupils produced extended writing in response to each of these tasks. It is no wonder that they move on to secondary school feeling confident about themselves as writers.

Clifton Green Primary School, York

Steps to excellence: 'turning average readers into keen ones'

School data	School	National (primary)
Number on roll	360	241
% Free school meal eligibility	35.7	18.5
% Pupils from minority ethnic groups	17.5	25.7
% Pupils with English as additional language	15.5	16.1
Deprivation indicator	0.36	0.24
% Eligible pupils attaining Level 4+ in English	82	80

CVA three-year average	School	Significance
English	101.8	Sig. +
English (boys)	102.0	Sig. +
English (girls)	101.6	Sig. +

22. Three years ago standards in reading and writing at Clifton Green Primary School were broadly average. Since then, provision has improved rapidly and recent results at the end of Key Stage 2 have been either above average or average. Pupils' progress has been very high over the past three years and boys have made even more progress than girls. The headteacher describes the school's steps towards excellence as:

- a curriculum driven by what children need, including a particular focus on speaking and listening, and reading
- a menu of different activities to give English purpose and enjoyment, including visits by authors, 'star writer of the week', World Book Day, spelling championships, performance poetry and competitions
- everyone knows what everybody does and discussions about children's progress take place constantly
- monitoring and evaluation are thorough and take many different forms
- the success of the school has been achieved through a very effective, collaborative relationship with the parents and governors.

23. The headteacher has assembled a strong team of leaders with a range of expertise in English. These subject leaders have helped to inspire enthusiasm among their colleagues for children's literature, early reading, drama and the use of information and communication technology in English. A librarian and the literacy governor are also involved in planning. Regular English updates to staff provide guidance on aspects of the English curriculum.

24. Key to pupils' good progress and enjoyment is the substantial reading programme. The headteacher describes this as a menu from which teachers select according to their pupils' needs. The school invests significantly in books and adult time to support reading. The programme includes:
- phonics 'taught fast and first' each day in the Reception class, Key Stage 1, and selectively in Key Stage 2
 - a balance of shared, guided and independent reading
 - a low ratio of pupils to adults, including trained volunteers, to maximise opportunities to listen to pupils read and talk about their reading
 - home reading and additional support for those who make slower progress
 - book borrowing from the library for Early Years Foundation Stage children upwards
 - shared class reading of whole novels chosen to capture pupils' interest
 - reading of different kinds of text, including digital texts
 - reading events such as a 'magic and make-believe' day of storytelling, class authors, book and film clubs, and book weeks with parental involvement
 - reading targets for pupils.
25. The school feels that investment in the enjoyment of reading turns average readers into keen ones. Guided reading involves a higher than typical ratio of adults to pupils, resulting in more discussion time for each pupil. The class teacher, or teaching assistant, checks the home-school reading journals and assistants, or volunteers, listen to pupils read if it appears not to have happened at home. All classes read two or three substantial works of fiction a year; teachers select the books that they want to teach, drawing on library-borrowing statistics and what different groups of pupils say they like. Boys and girls speak with similar enthusiasm about novels by C.S. Lewis, Roald Dahl and Michael Morpurgo. These class novels provide the exemplars and contexts for learning language skills.
26. All pupils borrow books from the school library, which has over 14,000 books. The well-furnished, carpeted room displays books temptingly under a three-dimensional frieze of story characters made by a local artist. A similarly inviting room equipped with book bags, reading resources and small tables is used for group work. These investments enact the school's policy to provide 'access to quality books in school and at home, to encourage a love of books for enjoyment'. The book stock is very well maintained by the school's team of teaching assistants, all of whom know the library well. The library is managed by the English leader assisted by a teaching assistant librarian. It is used for teaching library skills, reading clubs and class borrowing sessions. Older pupils talk to younger pupils about books and read with them. Pupil librarians

described the library as 'a quiet place that people like to use'. Members of the book club have produced a guide to the library for other pupils.

27. As a result of this strategy, independent reading is popular with both boys and girls. A discussion with a group of pupils from Years 5 and 6 revealed equal enthusiasm for reading in general and class novels in particular. Boys were just as ready to name favourite fiction authors and titles as girls, something not typically found, and to read at home. The school's library records reflect pupils' varied tastes, which are all well catered for. Boys borrow more Willard Price adventures and *Where's Wally* picture books than girls, but both genders also choose traditional stories. The school has also found that in the holidays more than a third of its pupils consistently borrow books from the city's libraries, which is a higher figure than usual. The school has recently started an advanced reading group for Year 5 pupils, which is led by an undergraduate volunteer and aims to move them towards Level 5. The pupils read demanding texts, dramatise them, make collages of characters and talk about themes. Some of this group of boys and girls were no better than average readers at Key Stage 1, and it is clear that the school's encouragement of reading has made a significant difference to their enjoyment and achievement in English.

Crown Woods School, Greenwich

Differentiating the curriculum so that all succeed

School data	School	National (secondary)
Number on roll	1,455	984
% Free school meal eligibility	30	15.4
% Pupils from minority ethnic groups	41.2	21.7
% Pupils with English as additional language	27.3	11.7
Deprivation indicator	0.35	0.22
% all pupils attaining A* to C at GCSE English	61.5	68.1

CVA three-year average	School	Significance
English	1,001.8	Sig. +
English (boys)	1,002.0	Sig. +
English (girls)	1,001.6	Sig. +

28. Crown Woods is a larger than average secondary school with far more boys than girls. Standards are well below average on entry, with very few higher attaining students. The headteacher of Crown Woods School believes that the particular task facing the school is to challenge and support students across the full ability range so that very able students will no longer be directed towards grammar school places in the neighbouring borough and previously hard-to-

engage students will respond productively to high expectations and robust teaching. The English faculty has led in developing a curriculum and range of teaching styles that support highly effective differentiation across a considerable spread of ability and approach. Although lessons observed revealed striking differences in approach across the range of ability sets, the policy for a whole-year group was given coherence by having a common focus. The pace and idiom of each lesson were well pitched to engage and challenge particular students. In each class, there was clear progression and students had a sense of achievement.

29. During one visit, the inspector observed different classes all engaged in identifying and practising skills in persuasive speaking and writing. In the two higher-ability sets, election leaflets were distributed among students working in small groups. Students identified techniques used in the leaflet they were given and then the groups were reformed so that experts in each group were able to talk about similarities and differences and evaluate their relative impact. Finally, the students, working individually, tried their hand at the first section of an election leaflet, taking into account their understanding of points made earlier in the lesson when discussing a speech by Winston Churchill.
30. The middle-ability set applied skills, identified earlier in the unit, to the business of persuading the headteacher to introduce improvements to the school, such as a shorter working week. The boys in particular clearly relished the challenge; their command of techniques, including rhetorical questions, ascending sets of three, repetition of key phrases and well-judged humour was impressive and persuasive. As one student explained, 'If you want to get on, you've got to do this kind of thing.'
31. The class with less able students worked together, looking first at a Gary Lineker webpage, then at a news item about his impending divorce. Working in pairs, they highlighted a range of techniques used, including graphics as well as language, and identified the target audience and the intended effect. There was vigorous, informal discussion about the rights and wrongs of the case. Prompted by the teacher, students progressed from casual and ill-considered comment to thoughtful argument well supported by relevant information. The momentum that this created carried students into the final phase of the lesson when they were required to work independently and distil their point of view into a short paragraph.
32. On another occasion, several GCSE classes were seen working towards a view of Steinbeck's *Of mice and men* as a tragedy. They approached the central question from different starting points. The most able students began with theory. Through pair work and whole-class discussion, they developed a working definition of tragedy which they then tested against a plot summary of Othello and, finally, against plot and characterisation in Steinbeck's novel. Less able pupils worked the other way round, beginning with discussion of a teacher-selected passage that showed key characters in conflict. Skilfully guided rather than directed by the teacher, students were able to draw out strands

which they wove into a definition of tragedy that made sense to them and gave them a more complex view of the novel.

33. Students in the middle-ability class also worked from the novel outwards but made their own decisions about which characters to focus on and which parts of the novel best illustrated their point of view. They were presented with two concepts: loneliness and dreams. Prompted by pictures representing key characters from the novel, students worked in small groups to build a case for a character of their choice as the novel's loneliest. Students then explored links between the themes of loneliness and dreams with their chosen character. Finally, students considered how definitions in Northrop Frye's *The five stages of tragedy* might be applied to *Of mice and men*. The sense of a worthwhile journey successfully completed was shared across these different classes. What these examples illustrate is the department's thoughtful and well-planned approach to ensuring that common themes and experiences for all students are taught in ways that engage the interests of all students and enable them all to make appropriately high levels of progress.
34. Another key feature in the department's success is that students, as well as all staff, contribute directly to planning schemes of work in English. Topics and approaches are proposed and evaluated through discussion in lessons and through consultation with students representing the range of ability and aspiration. The curriculum has also been constructed so that there are clear, shared priorities that directly address local and community needs, such as:
- to explore themes relevant to students' experience, for example, looking at how media target and manipulate children
 - to reflect the school's growing diversity and tackle south-east London issues such as refugees, racism, and street culture.

The Duston School, Northamptonshire

Getting started: how effective subject leadership improved the quality of teaching across all classes

School data	School	National (secondary)
Number on roll	1,173	984
% Free school meal eligibility	17.1	15.4
% Pupils from minority ethnic groups	20.6	21.7
% Pupils with English as additional language	13	11.7
Deprivation indicator	0.19	0.22
% all pupils attaining A* to C at GCSE English	60.2	68.1

CVA three-year average	School	Significance
English	1,002.2	Sig. +
English (boys)	1,002.1	Sig. +
English (girls)	1,002.1	Sig. +

35. Free school meals and social deprivation data are broadly average at The Duston School. However, the school spent a period of seven years in an Ofsted category and was given a notice to improve as recently as 2007. When it was last inspected in 2010, it was judged to be a good school and improving rapidly.
36. The school was in special measures when a new subject leader was appointed a few years ago. Achievement was low with standards below 30% A* to C in GCSE English. Staff say that there was no real sense of identity within the department or process of sharing across the team. As a result, teachers tended to work in isolation. Encouraged by senior leaders and managers, and whole-school systems to improve teaching and raise standards, the subject leader quickly identified three elements that needed urgent attention. These were:
- the lack of any common systems or structures in English teaching
 - the absence of any effective teamwork or collaboration, especially in relation to teaching and learning
 - low morale and patchy subject knowledge across the team.
37. The leader rapidly put in place three key elements:
- a clear vision for the subject
 - a common entitlement for all students, strongly based on getting them to enjoy English
 - a range of simple and effective schemes of work, backed by resources, and a common approach to assessment.
38. The rapid development of these three elements, combined with the subject leader's infectious passion for the subject, brought about immediate improvement. Over three years, GCSE A* to C results improved from 27% to 35%, then 48% and 60%. The subject leader's view is that the real key to this improvement was an unwavering focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning. While the vision and systems were essential in shaping the change, the significant shift in the quality of what happened in classrooms made the real difference.
39. The subject leader described her view of English as 'getting out the plasticine and paint'. This is not to be taken literally but encapsulates the need to make English an active and discursive experience for students, one which engages their interest and gives them a voice. Teachers were given the scope and confidence to do this while making learning interesting. Teachers who were in

the department at the time describe how 'English came alive again'. They recognised the immediate sense of clarity of direction and gained the confidence to try approaches to see if they were successful. They confirmed how the professional culture in the department changed and how this moved teaching forward.

40. One feature of this change was the total avoidance of any management or administrative items in the subject meetings. The whole focus of meetings was on aspects of teaching and discussion of how to improve students' achievement. Teachers gained in confidence as the subject leaders could be relied on to provide suggestions or solutions which helped to improve practice. The value of the climate of dialogue and readiness to implement new ideas and approaches which this simple change to working practice brought cannot be overestimated.
41. Perhaps equally important was the 'open classroom' strategy which the subject leader used to share effective methods in teaching and learning. She describes herself as 'the lead learner' and sees constant improvement in pedagogy and practice as the natural way to improve outcomes. In a department where teachers had rarely shared their skills previously, the subject leader regularly invited teachers to observe her using particular approaches or focusing on specific groups. This was not a one-way process as others were also encouraged to share, and as the team became more successful it took on this role across the school. All the time, these activities were underpinned by the subject leader's drive to make English a popular and successful subject, which students enjoyed rather than endured.
42. Changes made by the department included the use of early entry with a 'fast track' group in Years 9 and 10, and regroupings and interventions that aided borderline grade C students and lower-attaining students. However, it is unlikely that these changes alone would have more than doubled results in four years. To put this in context, the progress made by students is now in the top 10% of schools nationally. Developments at the whole-school level have clearly been significant. This includes a relentless drive by senior leaders and managers to raise standards. Recent initiatives include training for all subject leaders, support from external consultants, and a systematic approach to self-evaluation across all departments.
43. In English, the subject leader's approach rests on a very clear vision and passion for the subject. It also relies on unswerving commitment to do the best for students and an ability to inspire trust and to engage others. Interestingly, the subject leader says of the early stages of the change, 'If you ask for people's opinions, you have to listen.' This is exactly how teachers felt. The strong sense of teamwork meant that all teachers were encouraged to share ideas. The principle was that all teachers should work across all year groups in the school, where possible, including within the significantly expanded range of sixth form courses. This helped to improve dialogue, increase teachers' skills, and encourage the sharing of ideas and expertise.

44. The subject leader also identifies the ability to be 'selective and effective' in deciding which approaches to adopt and what has been successful. Regular monitoring of provision and direct evaluation of outcomes supported the momentum of improvement. The subject leader speaks of 'making it count' when referring to the effort and approaches which the team deployed.
45. When the subject leader took up a whole-school role in developing teaching and learning last year and other teachers moved on with promotion, the department entered a different phase. Results were now among the highest in the school. The level of progress made by students was high. The new subject leader faced a different challenge to her predecessor; how to sustain success and develop the subject further? Interestingly, her response confirms some of the key strategies involved in the first stage of improvement, namely:
- keeping the subject relevant and interesting for students
 - making the most of systems and structures, such as assessment data and feedback to students, to maximise success
 - using the curriculum to build students' skills and familiarise them with the approaches they will need to be successful.
46. The success of the approach rests on sustaining and developing the quality of teaching. The English team is now looking closely at how to improve teachers' use of assessment data and the impact and appropriateness of the Key Stage 3 curriculum in the light of new GCSE specifications. Above all, the strong focus on monitoring teaching and providing coaching and development opportunities aims to maintain recent improvements in teaching and learning.

George Eliot Primary School, Westminster

Success with pupils learning English as an additional language

School data	School	National (primary)
Number on roll	230	241
% Free school meal eligibility	53	18.5
% Pupils from minority ethnic groups	95.7	25.7
% Pupils with English as additional language	88.7	6.1
Deprivation indicator	0.48	0.24
% Eligible pupils attaining Level 4+ in English	93	80

CVA three-year average	School	Significance
English	101.5	Sig.+
English (boys)	101.3	Sig.+
English (girls)	101.6	Sig. +

47. Most pupils in George Eliot Junior School come from minority ethnic groups and English is not the first language for 89% of its pupils. The largest groups are of Asian or Black African heritage. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is very high. Attainment was above average in 2010. The headteacher of George Eliot School and her deputy emphasise the need for firm structure and consistency within the school since, for many of the pupils, life outside the school lacks stability. The school's curriculum is distinctive and effective. It has been constructed around a very good understanding of the needs and interests of the pupils in the school. Curriculum decisions in this school are driven by a determination to: promote an international perspective; foster thinking and enquiry skills; appreciate and exploit the role of emotions in learning; and develop an understanding of how children learn, through research, professional training and shared good practice.
48. Because so many of the pupils struggle with English, the school has adapted an approach which focuses on using pictures and images to stimulate work in English, including especially well-chosen multimodal texts.⁷ Pupils enjoy the opportunities to explore theme, plot, point of view, characterisation and genre through images as well as words. For those still grappling with the basics of English language, entry to a book through its pictures is a real bonus. As one pupil remarked: 'Some people who don't have much English can look at a picture and get more information.' Importantly, pupils understand that the value of the pictures lies in the range and the complexity of what they communicate and that this has to be read and understood as much as any conventional language-based text. As a couple of Year 6 pupils explained: 'The author wants you to infer through the pictures. To predict and to think...The author wants you to "write it" in your imagination.'
49. Among the books that engage and challenge pupils most successfully are such contemporary texts as *The arrival* by Shaun Tan, *The snowman* by Raymond Briggs, *Rose Blanche* by Roberto Innocenti and *The tunnel* by Anthony Browne. Teachers use a range of approaches to develop pupils' response to these texts. A Year 5 class, for example, approached *The snowman* through music. Using

⁷ 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 webpage, in which elements such as sound effects, oral language, written language, music and still or moving images are combined.

individual whiteboards, pupils suggested and evaluated descriptive words and phrases for the various moods created by the music. The teacher's open questions encouraged them to reflect on the links between sounds, images and language, to draw inferences and make predictions. Good use was made of the classroom's 'writing wall', to which pupils had earlier contributed descriptive vocabulary.

50. Some pupils were slow to volunteer ideas at this stage. They could, however, be seen actively contributing to discussion a little later when working in small groups to interpret characters' developing relationships and the author's intentions in the illustrations. When pupils then shared their thinking with the whole class, role play and hot-seating clearly helped them to be specific and to dig deep into motivation, mood and point of view. It was noticeable that far more pupils were able to contribute productively to the final discussion than had been the case at the beginning of the lesson. Their involvement and learning had been developed through approaches that included visual, musical and linguistic strategies.
51. In discussion, pupils were emphatic that the thinking and analysis prompted by this approach to reading had a positive impact on their writing: 'It makes you more imaginative.' They drew on the ideas and strategies that they had identified through their analysis of visual texts. Their extended writing was often imaginative, vividly descriptive and carefully plotted. This was demonstrated in work sparked by exploration of the opening sequences in *The arrival*. Boys as well as girls enjoyed building up suspense and an atmosphere of menace, trying out for themselves Shaun Tan's device of half-seen, suggestive glimpses of 'things' that create unease. Those whose grasp of English made extended writing difficult were able to develop and organise their ideas as a captioned poster or storyboard.
52. The explicit development of pupils' speaking and listening skills is also key to achievement in a school where English is an additional language for most pupils. Teaching in English is characterised by a distinct and well-developed approach to group work. The school has replaced the more common primary school policy of guided reading with a group reading programme which it has adapted to suit the needs of its pupils. The principle behind this approach is that sharing observations and interpretations enhances what any pupil can do individually: 'You have more fun. You look closely and see things you didn't notice before.' Pupils describe this approach as 'giving and receiving'. Central to the programme is that children think of their own questions to discuss with their peers. This develops reading comprehension alongside independence and thinking skills.
53. One lesson observed showed how teachers managed this approach to group work on a class novel. The different activities were as follows. One group was led by a pupil selected by the other pupils. This was a productive exercise in enlightened decision-making: 'We're not judging people. We choose a leader to be happy. We give a turn to everybody.' As pupils took turns to read aloud, the

leader's role was to encourage others and to clarify, predict and question. Pupils shared ideas and knowledge, noting things down in their logbooks. As 'teacher', the group's leader took on considerable responsibility. If anyone else seemed stuck, it was his or her role to suggest an answer.

54. In the second group, pupils individually drafted questions based on the chapters being read that week and set them out in their week's log. They had prompts to help them home in on important aspects; however, they also had some freedom to pursue their own lines of enquiry. The third group worked with the teacher, reading aloud and then, after discussion, answering teacher-generated questions in their logs. In the fourth group, pupils paired up to tackle the questions drafted by their partner on day two. They discussed and evaluated each other's contribution, drawing conclusions about what seemed important and what was simply of passing interest. Pupils in the fifth group worked individually, reviewing their week's log, using a clearly structured framework to check that they knew the meaning and appropriate use of new vocabulary.
55. Pupils responded very positively to the clarity of this structure, to the sense of progress it conveyed, and the opportunities they had to show initiative. As one explained: 'Because we're doing it ourselves, we're in control. We get the responsibility.' This approach, which makes significant demands on the pupils' oral abilities, complements the use of visual texts in the school to provide an original and distinct curriculum that has enabled all pupils in the school, including those learning English as an additional language, to achieve very highly in English.

Jump Primary School, Barnsley

Providing opportunities for literacy in the nursery and beyond

School data	School	National (primary)
Number on roll	264	241
% Free school meal eligibility	20.2	18.5
% Pupils from minority ethnic groups	3.3	25.7
% Pupils with English as additional language	0.6	16.1
Deprivation indicator	0.28	0.24
% Eligible pupils attaining Level 4+ in English	97 ⁸	80

⁸ The 2009 figure.

CVA three-year average	School	National	Significance
English	101.1	100	Sig. +
English (boys)	101.3	100	Sig. +
English (girls)	100.7	100	No significance

56. Nearly all the pupils at Jump Primary School come from White British backgrounds. The headteacher has led the school for over 30 years and there are other long serving staff as well as more recently qualified teachers. The school has a very strong tradition of making a difference to pupils' confidence and learning. The school has a very strong ethos which has been established over time and is focused on giving children the best possible start in literacy and developing in them a strong aspiration to learn.
57. The school places huge emphasis on developing and promoting language skills in the nursery and building on these skills through the subsequent key stages. The learning environment for young children is planned explicitly to encourage pupils to enjoy learning and to develop literacy skills in a range of real contexts. The two subject leaders bring Early Years and upper Key Stage 2 experience to the role. They complement each other in personality and skills, and work together exceptionally well. This contributes powerfully to the development of consistent approaches from the nursery and throughout the school.
58. As a result, the quality of teaching in English is consistently high. Some of its key features are:
- a strong, language-rich classroom environment where pupils are challenged to learn and apply new vocabulary
 - the integration of writing and speaking across all areas of the curriculum
 - very effective use of open-ended questions to promote dialogue and give pupils the confidence to contribute orally.
59. This approach to developing pupils' skills in English begins in the Early Years Foundation Stage where literacy and oral work are built strongly into all activities to provide a language-rich environment for pupils. This was noted in two lessons observed during the inspection.
60. 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.

61. There was a similar picture in the Reception classroom where every space had an activity, some related to the current topic and some providing generic opportunities for learning. In the centre of the room there was a writing station and a reading area. One girl conducted a reading session here with an adult volunteer as the 'pupil'. This mirrored a class reading session with the pupil using a pointer to trace words while the volunteer read aloud. All children were positively engaged and there was very little migration from activity to activity. Children took every chance to write. One girl recorded sandwich choices on a pad. Others labelled their models or drawings. The teacher and assistant constantly modelled letter formation, engaged constantly in talk with children, and took each opportunity to reinforce children's awareness of letters and sounds. In the creative play area, the assistant asked questions of boys who were experimenting with getting water to flow: 'How will this be better?; What else could we do?; What happens if we press that?' The staff took every opportunity for language development. A boy using the interactive whiteboard for letter games accidentally loaded the BBC weather site. The teacher noticed and pointed out the similarity with the class weather board. She helped the children to get a local weather map and interpret the symbols. They then went on to explore other days and places.
62. The integration of writing within play activities is very strong and was illustrated by records of the work of one five-year-old boy. He was playing with cars and constructing a 'stunt track'. One of the adults asked him if he could make a sign to support the work. He eagerly fetched paper and some highlighter pens and began to write without prompting. He checked what he wrote, using some upper case letters, and produced a poster:

<p>Stunt Power You can Do cool stuff by E...</p>

63. He placed the sign by the side of the track and continued playing. When he next launched a car into the zone, the adult asked: 'Are you keeping score?' The boy replied, 'Yes, I have one point.' He reached for a second piece of paper and recorded this. At the end of the game, he had recorded the number of points scored and wrote, 'EJJ wins.' On another occasion, the boy was using the smart board to draw a person and then write his name. The teacher asked if he would like to use the keyboard. The boy said yes and began typing, checking

his writing after every letter. He used the delete function to self-correct. He turned to his friend and typed his name and then wrote about him: 'He looks funny and silly but I love him.' He initially used double t at the end of 'but', then realised the mistake and corrected it. These examples illustrate very clearly how careful and well-directed teaching enabled a five-year-old boy to enjoy writing, understand the purpose of it within play activities, and start to become confident about his ability to express ideas through writing.

64. This focus on integrating the teaching of literacy and oral work within all activities, giving pupils real contexts and reasons for their writing and speaking, is maintained in other classes as pupils move through the school. The Year 5 class had been engaged in an extended drama activity to design a space mission and then build parts of the spaceship before making a presentation to the rest of the class. Year 4 pupils spoke enthusiastically of writing a set of instructions after they had made a photograph frame. The Year 6 class recounted a visitation from the school ghost while they were in assembly. 'It trashed the room and wrote on displays!' Nevertheless, the 'experience' helped them to empathise with characters in the novel they were reading; *The ghost of Thomas Kempe*.
65. As a result of these approaches, the school succeeds in engaging pupils and giving them the confidence to succeed in English. Play activities in the Early Years Foundation Stage centre around the development of literacy. Practical activities that lead to purposeful speaking and listening are used consistently to develop pupils' understanding of language and to model the forms which will aid their writing. Literacy activities are linked to meaningful tasks in other subjects for the older pupils. Speaking and writing activities have a clear purpose and function. This is a common theme from classroom to classroom and because the quality of teaching is consistently high, pupils make outstanding progress.

Moor End Technology College, Huddersfield

Trusting teachers, trusting students

School data	School	National (secondary)
Number on roll	779	984
% Free school meal eligibility	32.5	15.4
% Pupils from minority ethnic groups	77.6	21.7
% Pupils with English as additional language	64.6	11.7
Deprivation indicator	0.42	0.22
% all pupils attaining A* to C at GCSE English	51.5	68.1

CVA three-year average	School	Significance
English	1,004.1	Sig. +
English (boys)	1,004.2	Sig. +
English (girls)	1,003.8	Sig. +

66. Three quarters of the students at Moor End Technology College come from minority ethnic groups, mostly Pakistani, and two thirds of students speak English as an additional language. Standards on entry are well below average. GCSE results in English have improved substantially although there was a dip in 2010. Forty-seven per cent of students gained a grade C or above in 2005 and the figure rose to 63% in 2009. However, the progress of students in English is even more impressive, placing the school in the top 1% nationally in both 2008 and 2009.

67. The school is characterised by strong and visionary leadership at all levels. Talking about the headteacher, one teacher speaks of her 'fine, detailed knowledge of the curriculum' and very high expectations. 'She knows what she wants and she gives you the freedom to make decisions. She puts a lot of trust in people.' In discussion, the headteacher stressed the importance of independent learning for students and risk-taking by teachers. This approach is maintained within the department where teachers report that:

'We never feel nervous to try something...we have the confidence that what we're doing is right. We always feel free to experiment as we're freed and trusted to do what's right for pupils.'

Teachers feel that they are encouraged to be creative and to take risks in lessons.

68. This approach accompanies an emphasis on distributed leadership in English. All teachers are expected to lead on aspects of the department's work. Teachers work well together and feel valued. Teamwork has been developed through a number of approaches including:

- a carousel for GCSE course work where all teachers offer an area of specialism
- informal 'teacher swaps' where teachers exchange classes for a lesson
- team teaching such as the use of the lecture theatre for large groups
- departmental mentoring where a teacher other than the class teacher works with identified pupils
- opportunities for new and young teachers to be fully involved from the start, for example, acting as 'coaches' where they have areas of expertise.

69. The curriculum is also constructed so that it appeals to all students, with clear, distinct outcomes and links to the world beyond school. Some of the Key Stage 3 units of work are innovative and highly distinctive. For example, younger students especially enjoy the 'Mr Men' unit of work. While this might seem on the surface to make limited demands on the ability of secondary-age students, the work involves a great deal of grammatical and linguistic analysis. The unit begins with an exploration of the notion of stereotypes. Students then review and extend their knowledge of grammar focusing on the use of adjectives, onomatopoeia and alliteration. This leads into an analysis of Mr Men characters, analysing the author's use of these techniques before students create their own new character.
70. Students also study the various plot lines in existing Mr Men stories, for example the way that a negative character is made good by the actions of a second character or the focus on the typical events of one day. They plan and write their own story and then self- and peer-assess the completed tales. At this point, the focus turns on to how to give constructive criticism and how to improve speaking and listening skills.
71. The unit ends with the opportunity for students to read their story to children in a local primary school. Boys especially enjoy the purpose and direction of this unit, which involves a clear outcome and audience for their work. There are many opportunities for students to work in groups and discuss or role-play issues. The wit and humour in the Mr Men books also engages them and the grammatical and linguistic analysis is firmly rooted in the need to study and then imitate a familiar text.
72. Not surprisingly, all students appeared to like English. Students said: 'I always look forward to English even on a bad day' and 'English lessons are as fun as a bouncy castle.' This is at least partly because the department not only listens to the students' views but directly addresses their needs and interests through what is taught. Some of this could be seen in one Year 7 lesson observed. The lesson began with the students watching a video message from one of the senior teachers. Students were invited to contribute to redesigning the school library to make it more eco-friendly. This was a highly effective start to the lesson and the students were very keen to help. It was explained that the task for students in the following week would be to 'pitch' their design ideas to the rest of the class using persuasive language and presentations involving information and communication technology. Students were put into pairs and asked to come up with one idea for 'greening' the library. They were later placed into one of four research groups to consider different environmental issues. Students acted as experts and moved to different groups to present the ideas from their first group. The lesson ended with some discussion of the linguistic features of emails as students were to compose email replies to the senior teacher outlining some of their initial ideas. A number of features made this lesson successful, especially in engaging boys:

- the effective use of modern technology

- a task that had a clear audience and purpose, which showed students how the use of language can help to get things done
- an emphasis on well-planned oral work with clear and specific roles for students.

Padiham St Leonard's Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School, Lancashire

Planning together to create an innovative curriculum

School data	School	National (primary)
Number on roll	205	241
% Free school meal eligibility	30.9	18.5
% Pupils from minority ethnic groups	1.3	25.7
% Pupils with English as additional language	0	16.1
Deprivation indicator	0.29	0.24
% Eligible pupils attaining Level 4+ in English	92	80

CVA three-year average	School	Significance
English	101.8	Sig. +
English (boys)	101.6	Sig. +
English (girls)	101.9	Sig. +

73. Padiham St Leonard's is an average-sized primary school in Lancashire. The vast majority of pupils come from White British backgrounds. Standards are below average on entry to Year 1 but above average at the end of Key Stage 2. The school's exciting curriculum inspires pupils to make outstanding progress in English. Intriguing scenarios, visits and role play stimulate pupils to communicate powerfully. They speak and write for compelling purposes which they help to define. As a result, by the end of Key Stage 2 they use spoken and written language effectively and see how reading and writing skills are relevant to their lives. Standards by the end of Key Stage 2 are at least average and this represents outstanding progress from pupils' starting points.
74. What is significant about this approach is the very strong emphasis on staff working collaboratively to construct the English curriculum. All staff work together to choose the whole-school themes and activities, utilising their own talents and interests and involving a wide range of visitors. The team of subject leaders helps to ensure that medium-term plans build skills progressively. These plans are flexible and, at the class level, pupils play a key part in choosing what and how they will learn. A creative, thematic approach to planning makes good

use of pupils' interests to inspire and stimulate learning. The activities provide rich opportunities for high-quality learning which are fun and activity-based.

75. Each term the whole team of teachers, classroom assistants, trainees and apprentices/volunteers have a meeting to discuss how to develop the whole-school themes. They plan the 'launch events' aimed to capture pupils' interest, such as meeting a local news journalist or visiting a newspaper production line. Class teams across the school develop detailed age-specific plans with help from the three English team leaders who ensure good provision for progress in the different areas of English.
76. Staff described these planning sessions as exciting and empowering and their strong involvement was evident in classrooms, where it was sometimes hard to tell which one was the teacher and which the classroom assistant, such was the quality of their interactions with pupils. Interviews with pupils, lesson observations and examples of writing indicate that the rich mixture of topics, and flexible planning, motivate pupils very well and give them a clear sense of purpose. Planning, delivery and evaluation in each class are done by teamwork. As a result, pupils are well known as individuals and their progress is well-supported and monitored. Tasks and activities are matched carefully to pupils' needs and strengths and have a clearly defined purpose. Lively, responsive teaching successfully involves pupils in working out what counts as good writing or speaking and how they can achieve it. They are guided well to reflect thoughtfully on what they have learnt and should try next. The video camera is used regularly to involve classes in evaluating and editing their writing.
77. A day spent in the school illustrated how teamwork gave the school extra capacity to 'keep pupils playing with language' right through the age range. Year 1 pupils had read a report in the local newspaper about cutting down local trees. At morning playtime, small groups of pupils were clustered round their classroom assistants discussing how to word their protest banners. In the Year 6 class, pupils applied their debating skills in a courtroom scenario which showed the impact of the school's policy of maintaining role play across all classes in order to support writing. Pupils role-played a courtroom scene in deciding whether to ban fox hunting. They had been researching facts and drafting short arguments, which they presented to the court. The lesson showed pupils attempting formal language, for example, avoiding abbreviations and slang as they stated their views. The teacher moved into role, consulting with the jury before the verdict was announced. Near the end of the lesson, pupils put on different types of 'thinking hat' to review the issues raised. They then planned the next steps: 'We could write letters to people. In maths, we could do voting.' Pupils were keeping journalists' notebooks to record what they thought, knew and wanted to find out. When the lesson ended, they were still talking about what they had been doing and what to do next.
78. The adults led group work with good understanding of the longer-term plan as well as the immediate learning needs of pupils. One volunteer, for example, skilfully steered pupils using a simple video camera to capture their ideas. In

Year 4, remarkably engaging teaching, supported by a volunteer and a teaching assistant, produced strong progress in writing. Stimulating, active approaches, with careful differentiation, provided high levels of challenge and led to very good progress in speaking, listening and writing by boys as well as girls.

Round Oak School and Support Service, Warwickshire

A curriculum for all: ensuring that all students in a special school have access to high-quality, classic texts

School data	School	National (special)
Number on roll	145	984
% Free school meal eligibility	23.3	15.4
% Pupils from minority ethnic groups	9	21.7
% Pupils with English as additional language	2.1	11.7
% Pupils with special educational needs	100	2
% Pupils with special educational needs (incl. Statement)	100	21.7
Deprivation indicator	0.17	0.22

79. Round Oak Special School is a purpose-built special school that caters for students of secondary age with a wide range of special educational needs and/or disabilities. These include: students with statements of special educational needs for autistic spectrum disorders; profound and multiple learning difficulties; visual and/or hearing impairments; attention deficit and hyperactive disorders; moderate and severe learning difficulties; and multi-sensory impairment. It was judged to be outstanding in its most recent whole-school inspection.
80. Students work at all levels from the P scales to GCSE and the curriculum and teaching are planned explicitly to meet these widely different needs.⁹ The school's written policy for English contains a detailed list of aims including a broad curriculum and the development of communication skills, functional language and literacy skills, emotional literacy, and cultural and critical understanding. These expectations reflect the wide range of students' needs, including those with restricted communication skills; they also promote all those skills expected in the National Curriculum for secondary age students. The subject leader for English states that:

⁹ The P scales are assessment criteria that have been developed to help assess pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities who are working below Level 1 of the National Curriculum.

'We have high expectations of all our learners and believe that every student is entitled to the range of learning and experiences that the National Curriculum offers. Whether the students are working at P1 or GCSE level, they will all study the range of literature in the Key Stage 3 and 4 National Curriculum, including Shakespeare plays and pre-20th century classic fiction and poetry. It is our job to ensure that the curriculum is appropriate and engaging for the students. We feel that it is vital that our students are given the same range of cultural and learning experiences that their mainstream peers access, but differentiated in a way that makes it meaningful and beneficial to them. We also insist upon giving our students age-appropriate topics and resources, which is vital for their self-esteem.'

81. The curriculum is planned in great detail to ensure that it meets the very diverse range of needs and capabilities in the school. At Key Stage 3, units of work are arranged in a three-year cycle to accommodate some mixed-age classes for students who work at the lower P levels. Other classes are formed by age groups. This pattern ensures that all students cover the same range of experiences over the three years in Key Stage 3. The long-term plans ensure a balance of literature, non-fiction and creative units in each year. The full range of texts is represented, from Shakespeare plays to pre-20th century novels, short stories and poetry. Media and drama activities are also included. At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, the school offers a wide range of accredited courses to match students' needs. As a result, all students gain qualifications at the end of Year 11 and in the sixth form.
82. The subject leader has created very detailed schemes of work for each half-term unit. They have been built up over time and are under constant review. Teachers annotate them, add extra resources or approaches, and comment on sections that did not work as well as expected. Each unit has differentiated objectives ranging from the P levels up to National Curriculum Level 5. These objectives shape the daily lesson plans for teachers. Increasingly, there are additional detailed plans to cater for students who need multi-sensory approaches and responses.
83. Differentiation is a very strong and sophisticated element in the quality of curriculum and lesson planning across the school. The schemes are carefully tailored to the needs of students through:
 - the use of specific objectives to guide general planning and individual lessons, usually at three levels
 - the interpretation of schemes to ensure access for all students, using a range of media and multi-sensory approaches
 - the provision of resources to match the differing objectives and capabilities of students, for example text at three levels; original, abridged, and in 'communicate in print' format

- a range of tasks at different levels to match the objectives, often with differing outcomes
 - focused support from teachers and teaching assistants
 - regular assessment in lessons to identify learning and shape progress
 - flexible responses to students during lessons, adjusting approaches, support or materials as the lesson progresses.
84. Effective differentiation means that all students are helped to engage with the full range of themes and genres. Texts that might be considered beyond the reading capacity of many of the students are made accessible to them. Interactive whiteboards, DVDs, information and communication technology, drama and role-play activities are used to involve students and make learning enjoyable.
85. Two Key Stage 3 lessons demonstrate this. A Year 7 class, working at higher P levels and lower National Curriculum levels, was following a scheme of work based on the horror story genre. They were using an abridged version of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as the core text. In the part of the lesson observed, students were focusing on descriptive language and trying out how to use language to improve their own stories. When the class split into groups for more independent work, there were four activities. One small group, who could read the abridged text with some additional support, concentrated on identifying the dialogue used and discussing how it improved the story. Another group, with support from a teaching assistant, read the story and looked for adjectives. A third group, again led by an assistant, had a bag of 'body parts' which they felt 'blind' and tried to describe before taking them out to develop their description further. A fourth group worked with the teacher as scribe on building a narrative using a model of a castle and a range of figures.
86. By the end of the lesson, each of the four groups had a slightly different understanding of the use of descriptive language to contribute to the plenary. The teacher then reintroduced a passage of description from the original text which was displayed on the wall and encouraged students to compare it with a still photograph from a film version of the novel before also showing a trailer of a more modern horror film. The students quickly picked up differences between the description in the text and the depiction on film.
87. In another lesson, a very small group of students with multiple disabilities followed the same scheme of work. This had been adapted for a multi-sensory approach. The students had limited communication skills and required opportunities to access learning through a range of different stimuli. Each student had an assistant. The lesson took the form of the teacher telling the story of *Dracula* using a simplified version of the novel. Each section of a few sentences was accompanied by a different stimulus. For example, students were gently sprayed with water and blown with a fan to recreate the rain and wind of the story. Cymbals represented the clock striking. A letter was presented in an envelope and opened. Masks, cloaks and plastic bats helped to

create the characters and atmosphere. At each stage, the teacher and assistants engaged the attention of, and sought response from each student in turn, with their choice-making often recorded by a digital camera to be annotated later. The lights were dimmed and windows shaded. The electronic whiteboard showed a gothic castle as the backdrop. Students responded in varying degrees to the different stimuli but all were engaged throughout the lesson and especially at the climax, when one of the pupils screamed.

88. The richness of the taught curriculum at Round Oak is complemented by an ambitious set of enrichment experiences for students. They had visited Stratford upon Avon to get a sense of the history and tradition behind their study of Shakespeare. They recounted watching laundry and sewing and then helping to prepare food in the kitchen. They also remembered the museum and theatre. Other students had visited the Globe Theatre, toured backstage, met staff and watched a performance of *Macbeth* which they remembered vividly. The school enters the Shakespeare Festival each year. Some students currently work one morning a week with the Royal Shakespeare Company. Students have also visited a local radio station and radio staff have visited the school. At least one theatre group visits every year; there is a thriving drama club and activities such as a 'girls only' reading group using age-appropriate magazines and fiction.

St Paul's Academy, Greenwich

'Love is like an old trainer': success with boys in English

School data	School	National (secondary)
Number on roll	790	984
% Free school meal eligibility	22.1	15.4
% Pupils from minority ethnic groups	68.7	21.7
% Pupils with English as additional language	37.3	11.7
Deprivation indicator	0.4	0.22
% all pupils attaining A* to C at GCSE English	83	68.1

CVA three-year average	School	Significance
English	1,003.5	Sig. +
English (boys)	1,003.5	Sig. +
English (girls)	1,003.2	Sig. +

89. St Paul's Catholic School in Greenwich was established in a Victorian school board building in 1968. By the early 1990s, shortage of space had become acute. The need to expand, together with a decision to replace a community school in Abbey Wood, led to the establishment of St Paul's Academy in 2005.

The later move in 2010, to purpose built premises on the site of the school that closed, included an agreement with the local authority that one third of places each year would be allocated to the local community.

90. Boys perform better than expected at St Paul's. Students explain this by speaking first of teachers' dedication, their desire to help all students and the vast range of out-of-school activities and support available. As one student said of his teachers, 'They are always there for you.' They say that teachers make them feel comfortable in class so that they are encouraged to join in and to give their opinions. Lessons have the right balance of 'fun' with serious work and challenge. Teachers stress that relationships are the key. They say: 'We don't shout. We like children. We treat them like adults and value their work.' Students say: 'We are not afraid to get it wrong. All teachers expect the best of you and push you. They don't patronise you but treat everyone as an individual. Lessons are never boring and teachers always get you involved.'
91. The department feels that strong relationships are at the heart of their success and that this enables boys, for example, to speak openly about their feelings. This was seen in one very successful lesson observed with a middle-ability Year 11 class working on love poems. This lesson was judged to be outstanding because the (male) teacher:
- engaged students with a starter activity the moment they entered the classroom
 - used physical objects (chosen from a bag) to intrigue and provide a starting point for writing
 - modelled the whole process unselfconsciously himself (first through his own metaphor based on 'My love is like an old trainer...' and later his own full sonnet)
 - used visual images to pre-figure the poem and arouse discussion
 - selected students in advance to provide a careful reading of Shakespeare's *My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun*.
92. Although the department is very successful with boys, this is not because it targets specifically male interests. As the head of department said, 'We ignore that they are boys.' What she meant by this was that they do not provide a curriculum heavily dependent on football and war. However, it is the nature of the curriculum more than anything else that has had the most impact on attainment in the school. In discussion, boys listed a number of common features of English lessons that appealed to them, including:
- lessons that build on what students like and do outside school
 - breadth and variety of approach in lessons
 - lots of opportunities to use modern technology in English
 - emphasis on drama in English

- good opportunities to work in groups, discuss and develop oral abilities (especially important where more than a third of students speak English as an additional language)
 - extra-curricular activities that are seen as integral to English and involve all teachers
 - teachers' enthusiasm for reading and their ability to recommend good books to students
 - lessons 'that refuse to be dull' and make students take part.
93. The breadth and variety of approach are seen in the department's scheme of work for Key Stage 3. Inspectors find that most departments organise their Key Stage 3 programme around half-termly units of work. This may be pragmatic but often appears to have no deeper rationale. Do all units of work in English need to last for 6–8 weeks? Does this not encourage a lack of pace and the disengagement of some students? Might not some units need longer? The scheme of work at St Paul's is more varied and has greater flexibility than is commonly found. The summer term in Year 8, for example, gives students opportunities to study a class novel; work for two weeks on a film analysis; read a selection of 20th century short stories; carry out a week's reading assessment; and take part in an enrichment week where English teachers (and others) offer something entirely different, usually with a cross-curricular emphasis. This programme builds in pace and variety, leads clearly towards a known assessment task, and stresses the value of English skills in a broader context. An additional effective feature of the department's work is that students are given an overview of the whole year's programme and thus know how elements are related and where the course is leading.
94. The department is particularly strong in making use of a wide range of good quality up-to-date texts to engage boys. Because the department's expectation is that all teachers will read widely themselves, including texts for teenagers, the programme draws on this knowledge to provide a good selection of contemporary novels for students that link directly to their interests and preoccupations. As a result, boys are keen to tell you how much they enjoy reading.
95. The department is also keen that English lessons should look beyond the school and demonstrate to students the importance of English in other contexts. One unit in Year 8, for example, focuses on students creating their own non-fiction leaflets and brochures. A common task across many schools perhaps. However, here the emphasis is on producing leaflets about Greenwich that might be read by others, for example tourists visiting the area. Consequently, students consider their local area, look at what is currently available, follow a Greenwich trail, conduct their own research and take their own photos. The final leaflet is designed to be publicly available at the local library. A second unit focuses on poetry from around the world. The department was concerned to ensure that these poems came to life for students. Consequently, the work was linked to

the school's charitable efforts, focused on performance poetry, and led to some students 'busking' their poems in different areas around the school.

96. A criticism in the recent Crossroads report¹⁰ was that too few schools teach speaking and listening explicitly. Talk inevitably happens in classes but it is rarely planned and developed explicitly. This is not the case at St Paul's. Group work is not only a feature of most lessons, and much enjoyed by boys, it is planned and taught explicitly. In one lesson observed, for example, students applied their knowledge of TV programmes such as the *Jeremy Kyle show* to J B Priestley's *An inspector calls*. Characters from the play appeared in turn to be grilled by the presenter. Their work combined good understanding of the play alongside very good knowledge of the TV programme. 'Mr Birling' revealed all his characteristic pugnacity, arguing with the presenter: 'I don't appreciate you insulting my daughter...remember that life is hard', before storming out of the 'studio' exclaiming that 'I've got better things to do with my time.' The class booed and hissed, as appropriate.
97. In another class, students were considering different features of a film text such as genre, audience and narrative. Groups were organised with roles allocated to students such as 'scribe' and 'expert'. At a given point, the experts moved around to present their ideas to a new group, their thoughts meticulously noted down by other students. In a third lesson, with a bottom set in Year 9, students were asked to debate the pros and cons of an issue related to the text they were studying. Roles were allocated in each small group, for example, 'speaker', 'summariser' and 'chair', and issues were formally debated. Students were fully engaged, listened carefully to each other and attempted to make use of the rhetorical devices that had been previously discussed.
98. What makes these lessons particularly effective is that the group work is planned carefully and structured so that all students have a role and know what is expected of them. It does not become an opportunity for some students to sit quietly knowing that others will do all the talking. The emphasis on discussion motivates boys. They contribute seriously in lessons. They understand that speaking and listening in English are work. The approach is built up systematically as students move through the school and is given added status in the students' eyes through the school's involvement in 'Debate Mate'¹¹.
99. Debate Mate is an initiative that involves local universities providing students to teach and model debating skills through a weekly debating club in school. Supported by mentors from the university, students engage in speaking and listening games but also practise debating skills. Topics include things such as: 'should voting be compulsory?'; and 'should the monarchy be abolished?' In addition to debates within school, there are competitions across London and

¹⁰ *English at the crossroads* (080247), Ofsted, 2009; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080247.

¹¹ www.debatemate.com.

opportunities to work with competition winners from other cities. Boys are very keen on Debate Mate. They see it as being particularly helpful in relation to future careers, 'It'll look good on my CV...I want to be a lawyer and it will be very helpful.' Students agree that the sessions are fun, that they have given them confidence and that they also help to develop their listening skills. They enjoy the occasional political discussions and talks and many of the boys like the competitive nature of the events. These skills are then complemented by oral work, drama and debates in mainstream English lessons. All this goes some way to explaining why boys do so well in English.

St Thomas of Canterbury Primary School, Salford

Encouraging pupils to read and talk well

School data	School	National (primary)
Number on roll	237	241
% Free school meal eligibility	41.4	18.5
% Pupils from minority ethnic groups	69.5	25.7
% Pupils with English as additional language	46.9	16.1
Deprivation indicator	0.61	0.24
% Eligible pupils attaining Level 4+ in English	82	80

CVA three-year average	School	Significance
English	103.3	Sig. +
English (boys)	103.5	Sig. +
English (girls)	102.6	Sig. +

100. Around two thirds of the pupils in St Thomas of Canterbury Primary School are from minority ethnic backgrounds, the largest groups being Black African and those from Eastern Europe. The number of pupils learning English as an additional language is three times the national average. The school was placed in special measures in 2006. When last inspected, in January 2010, the school was judged to be outstanding.
101. The school has been especially successful in improving reading attainment. Standards at the end of Key Stage 1 show a year-on-year increase in reading with the average point score moving from 12.1 (well below average) to 16.9 (broadly average) over that period. Ninety-seven per cent of pupils achieved the national expectation at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2010 (unvalidated). School documents state its commitment to becoming a 'reading school' and to ensure that all pupils become skilled readers, or at least 'decoders', by the end of Year 2. The English policy identifies very clearly the expectations of all staff

in relation to reading, emphasising 'the high value placed on the importance of reading both in school and at home'.

The reading curriculum for pupils includes:

- twenty minutes of daily phonics in Reception and Key Stage 1
- a balance of shared, guided, and regular independent reading
- teachers sharing class novels on a regular basis and setting reading targets for all pupils
- hearing reading on a regular basis
- an emphasis on home/school reading and the importance of a positive reading environment in school
- wider reading experiences such as book week, a regular author focus in each class, and celebrations of the reader of the week.

102. Home reading is monitored rigorously on a daily basis; letters are sent to parents when this is not taking place. Parents are invited to the school to discuss reading with the headteacher and class teacher where they are unable to support reading at home. The school has committed considerable resources to modernising the library, improving book stock, and providing a classroom assistant to manage and support it.

103. Effective phonic teaching is a key component in pupils' reading success. Staffing is enhanced for this session so that two teachers and up to four classroom assistants are available to work with ability groups across Years 1 and 2. All have been well trained and the programme is carefully coordinated by one of the school's two English subject leaders. Pupils are selected for groups on the basis of prior attainment rather than just by age and group size.

104. Inspectors sometimes observe phonic sessions which are slow, undifferentiated and teacher-dominated. Sessions in this school are pacy, high profile and fun. Children rarely sit still for more than a few minutes as these lessons are highly interactive and make use of different approaches and resources. The strategies used to engage pupils during one typical set of phonic sessions observed included:

- pupils forming letters and words in the sandpit
- relay teams putting selected sounds in the correct place on the other side of the room
- pupils fishing sounds out of a tray in order to blend and segment them
- competitions between boys and girls to identify the correct sound in words
- drama games/mimes where the pupils have to identify correct sounds.

105. The area is a buzz of activity and pupils are wholly motivated; they show high levels of interest and a good knowledge of sounds and technical vocabulary.

Lessons are fun but given high status by the school. Planning is scrupulous and all staff change groups from time to time in order to work across the ability range. Assessment is rigorous and teachers have a very clear view of where pupils are struggling with certain sounds and need additional support. Pupils join phonics sessions in the Early Years Foundation Stage for additional support when they are struggling to progress.

106. However, as noted above, the school is very clear that its systematic approach to phonics teaching exists alongside other strategies that focus on developing pupils' love of reading and their understanding of texts. The renovated school library is key to this approach. All classes, including the youngest children, visit on a weekly basis to change books and the school has significantly improved the range of texts available. The library is open at lunchtimes and after school; the after-school session is especially popular with some parents who choose books with their children before taking them home. Pupils act as librarians. Pupils are further engaged by the 'Dazzle Books' initiative. This consists of small collections for each class of the most up-to-date and high-profile books for children that are chosen by the pupils and available to be borrowed from the class teacher. As a result, they acquire high status with pupils who are keen to read them. All teachers share high-quality children's books with their classes, which also helps to engender a love of reading. On the day of the visit, 12 employees from a local bank were listening to children read.
107. Given that one third of the pupils are learning English as an additional language, the school also places considerable emphasis on developing pupils' speaking and listening skills. As with Jump Primary School, this approach begins in the nursery. The priority is to provide a curriculum that is 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 to encourage good quality talk. Unlike many schools visited, 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.
108. 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 clip board 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. Teachers provide a number of different play areas for these younger pupils in order to ensure that all pupils are able to become involved; for example, a home corner, toy shop and cave. The approach is 'to bathe children in language all the time'.

109. The positive impact of this role-play work is being extended into other areas of the school. All classes have created role-play areas. At the time of the inspection, the Year 3 class had recreated Roald Dahl's writing hut while the Year 6 classroom featured an Anderson shelter as part of the history topic. These are used in different ways. For example, during one visit the Year 3 teacher and a group of pupils were pirates in their boat corner discussing how to scrub the decks and bury treasure. The role play here was intended to support the pupils' later instructional writing. In Year 5, a group of pupils dressed as doctors visited the 'laboratory' area to examine a skeleton in order to determine the cause of death; work that linked to their science topic. The Year 6 class had extended the work with their Second World War shelters into a drama about evacuation that was filmed and then used as a later teaching resource to support journalistic writing.
110. The impact of these, and other oral activities, on the confidence and fluency of the school's pupils has already been considerable. Many schools have developed talk as an aid to writing. What differentiates this approach is that the use of role play also focuses on developing pupils' confidence and skills in using a wide range of speaking and listening.

Stretford High School, Trafford

'Challenging ourselves to hit the highest levels': helping students to work independently

School data	School	National (secondary)
Number on roll	728	984
% Free school meal eligibility	31.6	15.4
% Pupils from minority ethnic groups	81.1	21.7
% Pupils with English as additional language	54.3	11.7
Deprivation indicator	0.42	0.22
% all pupils attaining A* to C at GCSE English	58.1	68.1

CVA three-year average	School	Significance
English	1,003.3	Sig. +
English (boys)	1,004.1	Sig. +
English (girls)	1,002.0	Sig. +

111. Stretford High School is a smaller than average secondary modern school with more boys than girls. Eighty per cent of students come from minority ethnic groups; the largest groups are Asian Indian and Asian Pakistani. Nearly half the

students speak English as an additional language. Boys make even better progress than girls and the attainment gap is closing. The department's approach is highly individual and distinctive. The head of department feels that their journey to excellence begins with 'getting it right in the classroom; if the students don't find it rewarding, we change it'. The timetable has been adapted to allow students time to work in depth. Having experimented initially with one weekly four-hour session, English has now opted for two, two-hour lessons a week. Students say longer lessons 'help us bond with each other and get more out of our teachers'. Teachers say that they need time for 'experiences which enable students to feel emotions' and for talk. Both are seen as essential to engaging students and inspiring confidence in the light of obstacles such as weak literacy and lack of self-esteem.

112. The key features of the curriculum include linking interesting reading to practical activities and emphasising independence, teamwork, speaking and listening skills. These are illustrated in a Year 7 project-based course which reflects students' interests and the local community. As one student recalled, 'You learn to stand up and speak, and that there'll be no laughing at you.' Classes may be based on 'stage not age' groupings; in other words, students are selected for groups on the basis of their ability to make progress rather than their age. Promoting students' independence remains a high priority and is reflected in teachers' own professional research and discussions. In one recent workshop, for example, teachers considered ways to get students to answer their own questions. Teachers, too, are encouraged to show initiative, take risks and evaluate together. One new recruit was exhilarated by the freedom she was given to 'just get them reading'.
113. As part of this emphasis on independent learning, teachers have high expectations of speaking and listening and provide students with very good opportunities to learn how to work in groups, in ways which foster independence. This could be seen in one lesson observed in Year 8, about analysing language features in poems, where very well-managed group work led to excellent collaboration by pupils of different abilities and good progress in writing analytically. The recently qualified teacher was trialling a particular approach to structured group work within the department. The principles of this approach were that:
- the activity could not be successful unless all pupils cooperated
 - there were clear procedures to check that each participant individually contributed a fair share to a group effort
 - all pupils received the same chances and incentives to be involved in the class
 - all students were actively engaged at the same time during the class.
114. At every stage, students played a leading role in learning, because of the teacher's excellent planning. For example, the students interrogated the objectives: 'What's "to identify"?'; 'How do you annotate?' The starter involved

everyone in a tongue-loosening round robin quiz, which rapidly re-established their knowledge of language features with no need for any input by the teacher. Pre-planned, mixed groups then read and annotated a poem. Each group member had a distinct role to 'think about', 'label' or 'report orally' for the group. This allowed for differentiation and gave all a clear responsibility which prompted clear direction to the talk. A sense of urgency was maintained through a well-paced sequence of progressively challenging, interestingly different steps. There were distinct periods for talk, for silent reading of each other's work, for writing, and finally for reflecting on what they had discovered and could do next. Crucially, the teacher did not take a central position, mediating the talk, but remaining peripheral, observing and interacting with students and maintaining the pace.

115. Students engaged with the task swiftly and well, using their prior learning independently to analyse language features and collaborating well to make sense of the poems. Each took part as far as possible in the group discussion; in reading another group's poem and annotations silently and independently; and in evaluating and being evaluated by peers. Each student wrote a solo analysis of a further short poem and reflected in writing on their learning, enabling the teacher to assess how close the class was to hitting the highest levels. This added up to a lot of talk and writing for different purposes by all students in the time available.
116. A second example featured a 'stage not age' Year 10/11 group aiming for A grades. The teacher addressed the use of symbolism in *Lord of the Flies* guiding discussion through skilful questioning and modelling. This was the second half of a two-hour lesson. The plan built on the students' growing involvement with the novel and was well designed to move them towards a clear aim within two hours. Good resources included one student's A* essay and enlarged extracts from the novel, partly annotated by the teacher as a model for their own note-making. Images from the film adaptation drove home the symbolism of a 'pig on a stick'. The teacher's whiteboard displayed earlier work, which was a mind map capturing the class exploration of 'What makes a good leader?' Concepts explored explicitly in the early part of the lesson were referred to during the reading of today's chapter.
117. The most significant factors included students' eager involvement in exploratory talk and how they found their own ways to articulate their responses in writing. The teacher's dramatic reading of an extract from the novel skilfully opened up conversation about the writer's craft, like a Book Club. Students contributed confidently, commenting on the use of poetic language and making connections with other characters and events. Students were absorbed in the pig killing episode and bursting to express their responses: 'It's shocking...sadistic.' The teacher pointed out the sexual nature of imagery, opening up a channel of thought about language and effect which several students sustained maturely. Students' responses were expertly handled and evaluated with feedback. The teacher modelled the independence and sense of exploration she wanted to encourage: 'If you see this like me...I see an image of...' and they responded in

kind. She illuminated the hallucinatory passage by reference to popular culture: 'Have you seen the film of *Alice in Wonderland*? It's surreal, too.' She then gave them scope to develop their individual interpretations: 'It [the killed pig] symbolises...It's his punishment...It's like going to hell...There's something evil in everyone.'

118. There was lots of lively verbal exchange between most students. They were congratulated on sustaining their ideas and encouraged to follow their independent trains of thought. Quieter students were targeted sensitively but firmly. The teacher told them she wanted them to say something in discussion next time. There was then a clear transition to a 15 minute writing time. Students were prompted to write independently about their personal response, and the higher challenge, to 'conceptualise', was explained. Students were guided about how to tackle the writing process and to use the notes, key words and prompts gathered on the board during the lesson. They were allowed to listen privately to music through headphones and could choose their own form for their writing, whether in notes, mind-map or extended writing. A range of forms was used. Most students started readily and sustained their concentration very well.
119. This lesson showed high expectations and strong progress because of well-structured teaching which helped the students respond strongly to text and equipped them to explore their own reactions in a mature and independent way. The teacher modelled very well how to work out meaning through talk. This very effectively supported and extended understanding and added extra challenge. There were good opportunities for writing in depth, with guidance that encouraged students to make independent choices. The lesson featured a judicious balance of freedom and support.

Characteristics of outstanding provision in English

An original and distinct curriculum designed to meet pupils' needs

120. The quality of the curriculum was the strongest determining factor of outstanding provision in English in the survey schools. While this might seem obvious, it is the case that aspects of teaching have been given more attention in recent years than the content of the curriculum. There has rightly been huge emphasis on improving the quality of teaching across schools. Less time has been spent discussing the English curriculum. There are obvious reasons for this. The National Curriculum identifies a statutory provision in English and the National Strategies have provided substantial support for schools through published schemes of work. However, this survey confirmed that the most effective schools successfully identify what is needed to engage their own pupils and then construct a distinctive and original curriculum that meets their needs. This is particularly important at a time when teachers can download readymade schemes of work and lesson plans from the internet.

121. Each school in the survey works hard to keep the curriculum fresh and to re-invigorate it to meet the changing needs of pupils. They all stress the need to engage and motivate pupils. This does not mean that the curriculum in these schools is 'dumbed-down' to keep pupils interested. The key feature of the schools in this report is that they strive successfully to engage all their pupils and do so without losing rigour and challenge. Equally importantly, the schools are highly successful at developing the knowledge, skills and understanding in English that pupils need. This can be clearly seen, for example, at Round Oak Special School where a central principle of the English curriculum is that all students should experience classic texts from the literary tradition, even though many of the pupils have severe special needs. Consider, also, how George Eliot Junior School places the emphasis on visual literacy and independent learning as a way of meeting the needs of pupils learning English as an additional language. A further example was provided at St Paul's Academy where staff had come to understand the significant role that speaking and listening might play in 'giving students a voice', thereby developing their confidence and raising their aspirations.

A strong shared vision for English

122. Both the distinctiveness and originality of the English curriculum provided in the survey 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. Debate about the subject, and its value to pupils, informs staff understanding and provides support and consistency. This was seen, for example, at Castle View 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 and is always open to further change. The school has at different times made use of published schemes and approaches but has now designed its own programme to meet the very particular needs of its own pupils. Staff constantly borrow ideas from other schools and experts in the field but have used these ideas to create 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.'

123. English and mathematics are viewed as 'the backbone' of the pupils' success in learning and, as a result, Castle View Primary School probably devotes more time to English than many others while managing to retain a broad and creative curriculum.

124. At secondary level, a similar very strong sense of subject identity was noted at Moor End Technology College 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.'

This statement guides the work of teachers. For example, the notion of creativity in English has been taken seriously with the result that individual lessons, schemes of work and departmental ways of working try to integrate problem-solving methods and plan imaginative outcomes for students' work in English.

125. This strong sense of subject identity is vital when constructing teams. All of the schools in this survey operate in challenging contexts and some find it difficult to appoint suitable well-qualified staff. The existence of a carefully considered and clear vision for English has the advantage of attracting teachers who are inspired by the vision and wish to contribute to its further development.

Effective approaches to differentiation

126. Differentiation is perhaps the most difficult task facing teachers: how to ensure that individual lessons and schemes of work meet the very different needs and interests of all pupils, with continuous assessment in the classroom leading to adjustments in teaching so that all pupils make progress. The most common practice noted in English inspections, particularly in secondary schools, is for teachers to identify at the planning stage the progress to be made by different ability groups of pupils, for example, the progress to be made by the most and least able pupils. However, inspectors often comment that this is simply differentiation by outcome, with the teacher doing nothing different for these groups and simply relying on pupils to make the expected progress in terms of their prior attainment. It does not ensure that teachers plan explicitly for the different levels of ability within the class, for example through choice of tasks or the use of additional support.
127. Two of the case studies in this report show how the most effective schools have approached this complex issue in lessons and within schemes of work. The principles behind the approach of both schools are that all pupils should experience the same curriculum but that the methods and approaches used should enable different groups of pupils to make the most progress of which they are capable.
128. Round Oak Special School receives students with very different levels of potential. The case study shows how the more able pupils are taught through opportunities to read and discuss simplified versions of key texts, and then to write responses that challenge their abilities; while other pupils with more severe communication difficulties explore the text through visual, auditory and

sensory means. As a special school where all pupils have statements of special educational need, an enhanced level of staffing is required to cater for very specific individual need. However, a similar process is described in Crown Woods School where classes are set by ability. The content and skills taught are consistent across all groups but effective steps are taken to ensure that strategies employed match students' prior attainment and learning needs. This includes different resources and lessons that are adapted to challenge students at an appropriate level of ability. Schools interested in the notion of differentiation might well consider the list of strategies in use at Round Oak Special School as an interesting starting point for discussion.

Showing the relevance of English to pupils' lives outside the classroom

129. *English at the crossroads* argued that some curricula for English do not appear to engage with the experiences and knowledge that pupils have outside the classroom, especially in the area of technological development. The gap between pupils' experiences of reading and writing in school and beyond school can be substantial and this widens some pupils' sense that English does not matter to them and has no practical impact on their lives; after all, 'I'm never going to write poems outside school.'
130. The survey schools take English out of the classroom and beyond the school. First, the importance of a strong enrichment programme cannot be overestimated. It was a significant feature of all the schools visited in this survey. One good example was St Paul's Academy. The English and communications 'learning zone' (the faculty) provides a huge range of enrichment activities for students. This is summarised in a document helpfully presented to pupils as '14 reasons NOT to go straight home from school'. The English-related activities include: Debate Mate (Monday); Shelf Life, a number of reading groups including some targeted separately at the boys and girls (Tuesday); Sparks! The work of the school's magazine editorial team (Wednesday); Slam Poetry (Thursday); and GCSE English booster sessions (Friday). This provision is, not surprisingly, massively appreciated by students. This work also supports very effectively the departmental commitment to provide cultural experiences outside lessons. For example, students talked positively of visits to the Globe Theatre to see *Much ado about nothing* and the visit of the poet John Agard to celebrate the opening of the new school library.
131. A second feature of English work that looks beyond the classroom, involves the opportunities taken by schools to make work in the subject meaningful by engaging with local and community issues and using contexts and audiences outside school. The list of topics for persuasive writing quoted earlier in the Castle View Primary School case study, shows how pupils are as likely to be discussing the need for a local bridge as questions that arise from their study of a Shakespeare play. Students in that school also work with a local actor, learning about the world of theatre and performance and later producing their own plays for parents. On a similar level, St Thomas of Canterbury Primary

School ensures that the role-play activities for its youngest pupils, develop their understanding of the world beyond school and demonstrate through play how literacy skills are fundamental to ordinary human encounters. Students at St Paul's Academy took their poems out of the classroom in order to 'busk' them around school and visited local amenities to write guides for tourists. The curriculum at Crown Woods School is specifically constructed around themes and texts that link directly to students' experiences and preoccupations beyond school.

Ensuring consistent quality in the teaching of English

132. The *English at the crossroads* report identified a lack of consistency in the quality of teaching across many of the schools in the earlier survey. A clear vision for English is the first step in building consistency. However, team planning, collaborative working and the sharing of good practice were the most common aspects of excellence across all schools featured in this report. The approach at Padiham St Leonard's Primary School is based on joint planning and discussion of the curriculum by all members of staff. The case study on Jump Primary School also stresses the importance of shared approaches, especially in creating a language-rich environment that ensures consistently high standards of teaching.
133. Those leading the Crown Woods School English team attribute its success to systematic and close collaboration among teachers. Working in pairs, teachers plan together and visit each other's lessons. Opportunities for collaboration are created across the department and also for shared reflection on the progress, or barriers to progress, of individual students. At Castle View Primary School, the headteacher regards staff development as central to the school's success and it is the first item in the school development plan. Teachers work unusually closely together and learn from each other. As a result, there is a remarkable consistency of practice across the school. A key element is the school's policy on coaching. Once a week, time is made available for teachers to carry out peer coaching. Typically, one other teacher, a classroom assistant and a pupil observe the same lesson and then talk about it with the teacher afterwards. The process is supported by helpful prompts and record sheets. This has enabled all teachers to learn from each other about the importance of a stimulating classroom environment that supports learning and the need for teaching that engages all the senses. In discussion, one of the teachers spoke of the programme as follows:

'It's really helpful because you learn a lot from what other teachers do and there are always ideas you can adapt. It helps your confidence and reassures you that everyone's working in the same way. It leads to a very strong emphasis on learning. We all strive to do better. And because it involves everyone and is conducted in a friendly and supportive way, we all find it really helpful.'

134. At St Thomas of Canterbury Primary School, the headteacher spoke of:

‘...relentless focus on the quality of teaching and learning and how to raise standards further. All action plans and meetings are tightly focused on this agenda, resulting in meetings and discussions being characterised by high-quality teacher talk. Dialogue is focused on pedagogic practice. Peripheral issues are sidelines.’

135. The effective use of meetings to focus on aspects of pedagogy rather than administration characterised several of the schools visited and was described in the case study on The Duston School.

136. At St Paul’s Academy, there is an equally strong ethos of sharing and working together within English. For example, every teacher is expected to carry out a peer observation on a termly basis. They can identify teachers within the department or beyond, in order to learn from their good practice. Teachers also stress the importance of sharing ideas. This is supported by the department’s use of the shared folders on the school’s intranet. All units of work, lesson plans and teaching ideas are placed there. This means that there is a bank of, for example, starter activities that can be selected by teachers for their own lessons. The departmental action plan includes ‘developing new approaches to learning and teaching’ as one of its key priorities. This emphasises the importance of continuing to move learning and teaching forward within an already very strong department.

Listening to what pupils say about English

137. The close involvement of pupils in decisions about English, and very good procedures for getting pupils’ feedback on their learning, were key features of the success of a number of schools in the survey. Staff at Moor End Technology College work especially hard to involve students in decisions and to get their feedback on lessons. For example, students are regularly asked to provide a ‘snapshot’ view of lessons on a post-it note, and these are collected and displayed in all classrooms. In addition, students are able to express their views through the use of suggestion boxes in all English rooms. From time to time, the department will ask for students’ responses to particular schemes of work and make adjustments where it seems appropriate. More formally, some students are appointed as ‘learning leaders’. These learning leaders have to stand for election, write their own manifesto and make speeches in support of their application. They are then expected to canvass the views of their peers. They observe lessons and provide feedback to the teachers. When new English staff are to be appointed, these students are fully involved and their opinion is considered seriously. On occasion, they will be asked to attend departmental meetings and contribute, for example, to a discussion about proposed changes to the Year 9 curriculum. As a result, students feel that they have a clear voice that is listened to by their English teachers and influences their teaching.

138. At Castle View Primary School pupils are involved in the coaching process, with selected older pupils observing lessons and offering feedback alongside teachers and classroom assistants. In preparation for this, they are provided with a prompt list of questions such as 'What did the children learn?'; 'What did you most enjoy about the lesson?'; 'Would you change anything about the lesson?' In one observed lesson, the pupil said that the teacher was 'happy and smiling and always helping the children'. She liked the way the teacher 'helped them by coming over and helping them and giving them ideas'. At St Thomas of Canterbury Primary School, because the school is trying to establish a curriculum that engages all its pupils, topics are chosen that will appeal to them. Pupils are told about the topic before the work starts and have opportunities to influence study: 'What would you like to find out?' Teachers report that children go home full of excitement and talk about the topic with parents, sometimes doing work or research beforehand. Teachers explain to pupils why the topic is important and why it deserves study. The appeal of this curriculum, supported by strengths in teaching, goes some way to explain the excellent progress made by pupils.

Outstanding English teams never stand still

139. The previous Ofsted reports on what makes an outstanding school identified the importance of a constant search for improvement and better practice. This was also evident in this subject survey. An interesting example of this continuous search for even higher achievement was the response of schools to the initial subject inspection. Although most of the schools had been judged to be outstanding, the subject inspector often suggested an area for further improvement or consideration. The search for even greater effectiveness in the survey schools was often exemplary.

140. At Moor End Technology College, the department is continually seeking to extend and improve its provision and is extremely self-critical where things do not go well. The initial subject inspection in 2008 suggested weaknesses in promoting students' wider independent reading. The department's response was characteristically thoughtful. A member of the team was appointed to drive through developments. She started by eliciting students' views through questionnaires and discovered that interest in reading dipped alarmingly as students got older, even between Year 7 and Year 8. The department judged that it was using some texts that were outdated and failing to stimulate students. It bought new books that focused particularly on good-quality contemporary fiction that would motivate all students, including texts such as *About a boy* and a recent Carnegie Prize winner, *The graveyard book*.

141. A fortnightly independent reading lesson was established and library stock was improved. This session gives students the chance to read quietly but also to talk about books and share ideas and recommendations. Teachers monitor closely what students are reading and talk with individual students where help is required. Numerous other actions have been taken to raise the profile of reading, including a popular 'Extreme Reading' event over the summer.

Students complete reading logs and take part in reading competitions and events including sponsored reading for charity. World Book Day and other such events are taken very seriously by the department and all teachers celebrate the occasion by dressing up as a fictional character.

142. A certificate of achievement is presented for hard work in completing the reading log. A book club was established to help motivate Year 8 students and there is a full programme of support for poor readers across Key Stage 3. Finally, the department is committed to working more closely with parents to support students' reading. This full programme ensures that many boys, who might otherwise stop reading, continue to do so with enjoyment and with the recognition that this is a high-status activity that is taken very seriously by English staff.
143. At St Paul's Academy, the department decided that it needed to improve the performance of more able students. It produced a thoughtful and distinctive action plan entitled 'Reach for the stars; moving from A to A* in English.' The plan comprises a series of actions to be undertaken by able students and extra sessions to be provided by the department. The activities include:
- being provided with a reading list
 - visiting the Evolving English free exhibition at the British Library
 - attending a booster session about 'sophisticated writing'
 - making a link with Year 12 English provision
 - students teaching an unseen poem to the rest of the class.
144. Students are also expected to provide three pieces of evidence to show how they have aimed for an A* grade such as: 'reading another work by an author, suggesting and planning their own speaking and listening lesson, or volunteering to contribute to a lesson.' What is especially impressive about this response is the department's emphasis on students doing things for themselves, making their own decisions and learning independently.

Where provision is outstanding, boys do as well as girls in English

145. Despite a great deal of emphasis on boys' underachievement in English, the attainment gap with girls has hardly changed in recent years.¹² The extraordinary thing about the schools in this survey is that boys invariably achieved at least as well as girls; in several of the schools, they made even better progress. All this was achieved without any evidence of a negative impact on girls' performance or enjoyment of English.

¹² Seventy-three per cent of girls achieved grade C or better in the 2010 English GCSE examinations. Fifty-eight per cent of boys reached this standard.

146. An earlier case study described how St Paul's Academy had achieved great success with its boys. St Thomas of Canterbury Primary has also been successful with its boys. One pupil described to an inspector what teachers need to do to motivate boys. He talked about the need for boys to:

'Use your hands and different parts of the body and not just sit at the desk...have something active at the start of the lesson to get you involved...make sure that the teacher gets everybody involved, that no one's left out...learn about new things and topics...and be given some choice over the work.'

147. Some of this was evident from a Year 2 lesson observed in St Thomas of Canterbury Primary School. This was a cross-curricular topic on dinosaurs. The teacher had earlier 'planted' a dinosaur egg in the classroom. The pupils were convinced that it had arrived through the roof. This captured their interest straightaway. The class visited the Manchester Museum and acted as palaeontologists. They carried out research and produced an information sheet about a chosen dinosaur. The pupils had become very protective of the egg and made a nest and prehistoric forest for it to live in. The teacher then wanted to move on to a fiction unit and story-telling based on a lost-and-found plot.
148. Early in the lesson observed, the classroom assistant entered to announce that the dinosaur egg was missing. Genuine consternation: 'What shall we do? Has it hatched out? When did we last see it?' Pupils were sent to investigate the disappearance. The class talked about it and agreed that the police should be contacted. How should we describe it; size, texture, colour and so on? One pupil was chosen and used the teacher's mobile phone to call the policewoman (actually a friend of the teacher). The policewoman arrived, interviewed the pupils but then got called away. She asked the pupils to complete a crime sheet and said that she would return later to collect it. The teacher arranged the pupils into small groups, all with a team leader dressed in a police helmet and fluorescent jacket, to investigate and prepare the report.
149. The lesson clearly had a huge impact on the pupils and generated a massive amount of well-controlled energy. What was particularly impressive about the lesson was the effective use of literacy skills in 'real-life' contexts. This was not the conventional approach to finding 'wow words' to use for writing exercises. It was important for the pupils to get things right so that the policewoman could be accurately briefed over the telephone. So it mattered what time the egg went missing, what it looked like, and what evidence about its disappearance could be supplied. The later writing had a similarly important purpose and clear audience; to provide a description of the crime that would be clear enough to be used by the policewoman in the written report. It was clear to see how the lesson managed to engage all pupils, including boys, through active approaches, the use of drama, real-life contexts, and a clear purpose for the writing tasks involved.

Good-quality oral work, including well-planned group work, engages reluctant pupils and yields benefits in all areas of English work

150. This was a key theme that ran through several of the earlier case studies, including the case study of St Thomas of Canterbury Primary School, with its focus on role play and developing pupils' speaking and listening skills. The importance of a rich and well-planned curriculum for talk in the Early Years Foundation Stage was highlighted in the case studies of Jump Primary School and St Thomas's Primary School. The use of structured group work and debates enhances the quality of teaching at St Paul's Academy. Carefully planned group work that enables pupils to take a lead in learning was also described in the case study of George Eliot Junior School.
151. The *English at the crossroads* report identified some of the issues with speaking and listening in English lessons. Because a lot of talk occurs naturally in English classrooms, too little attention is often given to planning a progressive curriculum in speaking and listening for pupils that develops skills systematically from year to year. The importance of planned group work, where all pupils are given clear roles so that none becomes a passenger, has already been stressed in this report. Good-quality use of drama was also a feature of several of the most effective schools included in this survey.
152. Like many others, Castle View Primary School recognises that its pupils enter school lacking confidence in speaking. The headteacher has a firm belief in the important contribution to be made by subject specialists and regularly employs artists and musicians to work with children. The initial approach with drama was through the idea of 'a play in a day' where an actor worked with a group of pupils to produce a play to be performed at the end of the day. This approach has been extended. The school now employs a local actor to work with pupils for around 20 days a year. She spends several days working with all of the Key Stage 2 classes, sourcing Shakespeare texts or familiar stories such as Robin Hood. She also works with some of the younger children and often writes short plays specifically for them. She plays drama games and develops other skills such as improvisation, mime and movement. At the end of the year, the school puts on a formal production for parents making use of her work throughout the year and giving key roles to the older pupils.
153. The school believes that this drama work makes a significant difference to its pupils' self-confidence and oral abilities. Pupils do a great deal of collaborative work but are also expected to learn their lines and perform before a wider audience. Other theatre skills, such as lighting and costume-making, are also employed to support the production and generate high-quality outcomes. The drama work is also fully integrated within other English work in the school. For example, teachers introduce pupils to the texts before they are to work with the actor. As a result, they have already discussed aspects of characterisation and context before the drama session.

154. Teachers are clear that the drama work makes a significant contribution to high standards of writing. They say that pupils show a well-developed sense of character or atmosphere, because they explore them first through drama and then apply this knowledge to their writing. What is significant about the approach is that the actor works in a sustained and continual way with the school, rather than offering an occasional workshop. This enables her to form a good relationship with pupils. More importantly, it enables her to provide high-quality training for staff. As a result, many of the teachers are now themselves effective teachers of drama, using the strategies within their own classrooms.

The curriculum gives a high profile to reading for pleasure in English

155. Reading was the subject of the case study of St Thomas of Canterbury Primary School. Provision there, and in other schools, was directed equally at building pupils' basic reading ability alongside broader provision that encouraged reading for pleasure. The desire to engage and stimulate reading at George Eliot Junior School lay behind the use of visual texts. The new programme for encouraging wider, independent reading at Moor End Technology College has also been described. The case study at Castle View Primary School centred on pupils' skills as writers. In fact, their performance was even stronger in reading because most pupils generally achieve the higher Level 5 at the end of Key Stage 2. This reflects the impact of a popular library, lots of reading by teachers, and the provision of good-quality up-to-date texts to stimulate pupils. Pupils are also keen to read to pick up ideas and hints for their own writing.
156. A similar approach was noted at Crown Woods School, based on the department's programme of 'Reading for pleasure'. This provides a wide variety of class sets that groups read alongside their units of study. Each unit has a complete text, most often a novel, at its centre, complemented by stimulus texts that range from poetry, through non-fiction to graphic novels and moving image texts. In Year 9, for example, students work together on character development, plot and style in *The outsiders*. They explore connections between the novel's setting and aspects of street life in south-east London, drawing on news reports, interviews and pictures to extend and illustrate their thinking. Non-fiction units such as 'The Olympics' focus on fostering independent enquiry and collaborative working, with students determining how the unit is developed. This approach successfully engages boys as well as girls, develops students' experience of a wide range of texts, and works well across the wide range of ability, fostering a strong interest in literature and reading.
157. At Round Oak Special School, the subject leader identified that girls were making slower progress than boys in reading despite the fact that their overall attainment was higher. She decided to make reading special for girls by providing a 'girls only' reading club on Friday afternoons using girls' magazines and periodicals. The club took off and as teacher and girls shared enjoyment of reading, opportunities arose to introduce a range of fiction and information texts. Girls' reading progress picked up after this intervention.

Further information

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

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