



West Dunbartonshire Council
Educational Services

Literacy Strategy

April 2013

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Rationale

The overarching vision of Literacy Action Plan (2010) published by the Scottish Government is to raise standards of literacy for all from early years to adulthood with a particular focus on those with the lowest levels of literacy.

The priorities across learning outlined in the Action Plan are

- Breaking the link between poor literacy levels and deprivation.
- Improving the skills of the few who have difficulties with basic literacy, particularly those who are vulnerable.
- Ensuring children and young people progress successfully from basic to advanced literacy skills.
- Raising advanced literacy for all.

In Education Curriculum for Excellence is the vehicle for delivering this vision.

Curriculum for Excellence defines Literacy as follows:-

Language and literacy are of personal, social and economic importance. Our ability to use language lies at the centre of the development and expression of our emotions, our thinking, our learning and our sense of personal identity....Children and young people encounter, enjoy and learn from the diversity of language used in their homes, their communities, by the media and by their peers... Literacy is fundamental to all areas of learning, as it unlocks access to the wider curriculum. Being literate increases opportunities for the individual in all aspects of life and lays the foundations for lifelong learning and work.

In Curriculum for Excellence, the literacy experiences and outcomes promote the development of skills in using language, particularly those that are used regularly by everyone in their everyday lives. This includes the ability to apply knowledge about language and reflects the need for people to be able to communicate effectively both face-to-face and in writing through an increasing range of media.

They recognise the importance of listening and talking and of effective collaborative working in the development of thinking and in learning. In particular, the experiences and outcomes address the important skills of critical literacy.

Children and young people not only need to be able to read for information: they also need to be able to work out what trust they should place on the information and to identify when and how text is used to persuade or influence them.

These principles along with the lessons from literacy research have guided the formulation of West Dunbartonshire Council's literacy strategy.

Research suggests that to ensure that our children and young people gain the literacy skills they need for learning, life and work, there should continue to be a focus from early years and beyond to address the negative effects of socio-economic disadvantage on learning. This should include:-

- Sustained efforts by nurseries to ensure children are provided with direct and skilled support to develop their early language and literacy skills (especially phonemic awareness). This particularly applies to looked-after children
- Systematic support for parents in assisting their children's early learning in the pre- birth to three age group.
- The systematic teaching of phonics within a broad based literacy curriculum as the approach to getting the great majority of children decoding successfully.
- The consistent application of baseline assessments to ensure early identification and intervention with struggling readers.
- Snowling *et al* (2003) have emphasised the importance of early identification in pre-readers of a very young age of the precursors of dyslexic-type symptoms in order to facilitate the development of compensatory reading strategies.

In addition, all intervention programmes should incorporate fundamental skills that are important for **reading comprehension** from the early stages Snowling and Hayiou-Thomas (2006). There needs to be a focus on Higher order Reading Skills:

- Teaching Fluency.
- Teaching Vocabulary.
- Teaching Comprehension Strategies: multiple strategies together rather than discrete.

Background

In West Dunbartonshire Council schools, attainment in literacy has been a major development priority. In the past approaches to learning and teaching have been enhanced and supported by targeted resources and this has led to a steady improvement in literacy attainment.

The conclusion from West Dunbartonshire literacy initiative was that in *areas of socio-economic disadvantagethe establishment of long-term literacy initiatives with multiple components, with intensive individual programmes for failing readers, with detailed assessment and evaluation measures and with high levels of training, monitoring and staff support* is required to ensure improved literacy levels. (MacKay, T. 2007, Achieving the Vision; The Final Research Report of the West Dunbartonshire Literacy Initiative).

The development of Curriculum for Excellence in all West Dunbartonshire educational establishments is providing all children and young people with the opportunity to apply their literacy skills across all areas and stages of their learning.

One of the Educational Service Department's strategic objectives is to raise attainment and achievement and to ensure that this becomes a reality and not just an aspiration, all learners need to achieve confidence and competence in literacy.

Developing literacy skills in West Dunbartonshire

"Literacy is about more than reading and writing – it is about how we communicate in society. It is about social practices and relationships, about knowledge, language and culture. Indeed, literacy itself takes many forms: on paper, on the computer screen, on TV, on posters and signs. Those who use literacy take it for granted – but those who cannot use it are excluded from much of the communication in today's world. Indeed, it is the excluded who can best appreciate the notion of 'literacy as freedom'." (*UNESCO, Statement for the United Nations Literacy Decade*)

Literacy skills are not acquired incidentally nor emerge spontaneously. The foundations of reading, listening, talking and writing are fostered in children through a variety of opportunities to learn through play and to engage with language and print in interaction with a sensitive adult, attuned to the child's needs. Furthermore, the later development of these skills depends on a systematic and structured approach to the **teaching** of reading, writing and spelling appropriately tailored to the developmental level of the child. Evidence suggests that this is particularly important for children from literacy impoverished environments.

Explicit teaching of higher order skills in thinking and active learning beginning at the early level provides a solid foundation for the acquisition of skills for learning, work and life. This will also form a basis for raising advanced literacy skills for all.

Secondary schools will build on the work begun in early years and in primary and provide a range of contexts, opportunities and learning experiences to ensure the development of reading, writing, listening and talking. Pupils will be given chances to develop cross-curricular skills in understanding, analysing and evaluating and to reflect on and measure their own progress through the outcomes and experiences during S1-S3. They will develop these further in the Senior Phase along with improving thinking skills, research and presentation skills and strategies for reading.

Aims

The key aims of the authority's literacy strategy are to:

- Ensure all practitioners understand literacy's fundamental importance in equipping children and young people for learning life and work and what literacy means in the context of the policy frameworks: the Early Years Framework, Pre-birth to Three, Curriculum for Excellence all underpinned by *Getting it Right for Every Child*.
- Raise attainment in literacy among learners by providing an effective framework for the delivery of high quality learning and teaching.
- Promote a seamless, coherent approach to teaching and learning 3-18 and particularly across transitions.
- Ensure all practitioners understand their role and responsibility for literacy across learning and the importance of reflection and self-evaluation in order to plan improvement.
- Promote effective approaches to reporting assessment and moderation
- Ensure all learners are equipped with the ability to use reading talking and listening in their everyday lives.
- Ensure all learners are able to apply knowledge about language and communicate effectively in writing using a variety of media.
- Ensure that the approaches adopted meet the requirements of West Dunbartonshire's Education department's key priority of raising attainment and align with the vision of the Literacy Action Plan (2010).

The task for West Dunbartonshire

There are a number of strands of development which are being addressed across all sectors:

1. Early development of literacy skills.
2. Identification of and intervention with struggling readers.
3. Development of higher order and meta-cognitive skills.
4. Raising attainment.
5. Building on good practice by developing a coherent approach to literacy through transitions from pre-school to primary and primary to secondary.

The following sections outline the expectations we have in West Dunbartonshire Council for how establishments approach literacy in order to realise the vision to raise the standard of literacy for all, from early years to adulthood.

Vision and Leadership in Literacy

Every educational establishment in West Dunbartonshire should have the following elements in place to ensure that the aspirations of the Literacy Action Plan (2010) are realised:

- A literacy policy which is aligned to the school's vision and values and details expectations in achievement and learning across the curriculum.
- Appropriate systems in place to track progress and achievement and to intervene early where children and young people are struggling to attain age appropriate literacy skills.
- A clear understanding that all staff have responsibility for literacy across learning.
- A training plan for staff that is underpinned by a needs analysis and ensures that all staff have the knowledge and understanding of literacy development particularly the teaching of reading, the development of higher order skills and the identification and assessment of struggling readers.
- Clear roles established for staff in all educational establishments regarding responsibility for taking forward improvements in literacy teaching and learning.

Culture and Ethos

Reading should be engaging and all establishments should have a range of approaches that allow young people to experience enjoyment and a wide range of choice in reading: ensuring that it is not just books but a range of media including digital media that is exploited.

Establishments should adopt a positive approach with emphasis on building self-esteem in learners.

Children and young people have a vital role to play in working with professionals to improve the quality of their learning experiences. The importance of listening to children cannot be underestimated. Through this professionals will develop a greater understanding of how children and young people learn and how to progress their interests and develop their skills.

All establishments should ensure that children and young people have the opportunity to express an opinion and to have that opinion taken into account when decisions are being made on any matter that affects them: they should be actively involved in their literacy learning.

Literacy attainment should have a high profile in all establishments and all staff should feel confident in their ability to develop the skills of individual learners.

Parents should be effectively supported to provide a literacy rich home environment.

Learning and Teaching

Competence and confidence in literacy, including competence in talking, listening, reading and writing are essential elements to the teaching of literacy and should be reflected in all establishments' improvement plans

All establishments are expected to make use of a variety of resources to support literacy development including: *Learning to Listen, Hearsay, Write to the Top and Reading Routes*.

Specific programmes to develop concepts of print, phonological awareness, vocabulary, alphabetic awareness and learners' understanding of onset and rime should be evident in all establishments at the early level.

Early literacy skill development should be underpinned in all primary schools by synthetics phonics approach (Jolly Phonics) with the pace of teaching moderated to the needs of learners.

Improvements in literacy depend on learners achieving sound comprehension of text and establishments should support this with the use of Bloom's Taxonomy across all curricular areas to ensure that staff use higher order level questions.

Children and young people should have the opportunity to take on responsibility for and be actively involved in their own literacy learning particularly with regard to the development of active thinking skills.

The teaching of higher order reading skills require to be made explicit by developing approaches to enhance critical literacy skills; understanding, clarifying, analysing, evaluating and summarising a range of texts.

Meta-cognitive skills which allow children and young people to monitor their learning and comprehension should be built in to literacy teaching from the earliest stages.

It is important that in secondary schools all teachers appreciate that developing literacy skills is a shared responsibility and that collegiality within and across curricular areas will support pupils and improve attainment.

Monitoring Progress and Achievement and Self Evaluation

GL Assessment are commissioned by West Dunbartonshire to conduct formal testing of literacy attainment as measured by the New Group Reading Test (National Foundation for Educational Research). The performance of children and young people is measured against national standards each year at P3, P5, P7, and S2. This allows the authority and individual schools to target support for improvement.

Establishments must have in place both formative and summative assessments to track progress in literacy, to provide an analysis of trends which can then be compared with the results on the authority commissioned New Group Reading Test to inform improvements.

Establishments should create a consistent approach to moderation and sharing the standard within establishments, across clusters and across the authority.

A key feature of practice in moderation and quality assurance is that it promotes capacity building of assessment expertise, professional learning and development and quality improvement which is integral to quality assurance processes. The 'Sharing the Standard' blog for West Dunbartonshire hosts quality assured resources produced by our schools and pre-school centres which assists all teachers and staff in sharing and identifying appropriate standards. This should be used by all establishments as appropriate.

The Collaborative Screening procedures should be used in P3 to consider the progress of all learners with literacy and appropriate strategies for addressing concerns planned at this stage and shared with parents.

Children and young people identified as struggling with literacy should be managed within the staged intervention process and plans made to address their needs; paired reading should always be considered for children and young people falling behind in developing reading fluency as this has an evidence base supporting its effectiveness further strategies are outlined in *Supporting Literacy; A guide for Pupils with Additional Support Needs* (WDC 2009)

Children and young people with very significant additional support needs require specialist support to access literacy and here the emphasis should be on total communication and skills for life where teaching social sign vocabulary is crucial.

Sharing of information across the transitions from pre-five to primary;

- Pre-five establishments should use the literacy baseline assessment as a formative tool to provide a profile of early literacy for children entering school. Primary schools should complete this during P1 and re-test at the end of P1.
- The education authority will collate a sample of the baseline assessment results each year to track trends in early literacy attainment and plan support for improvements wherever necessary.

It is crucial that all relevant information is shared between primary and secondary in a consistent and timeous way. Collegiality is vital to ensure shared understanding of standards and methodology.

- Primary and secondary staff should share formative and summative assessment criteria for reading and writing, with implementation moderated through cross-marking sessions.
- Shared formative and summative peer / self-assessment grids should be used in P7 and S1.
- Generic skills based essay plans and formative assessment grids for use in all curricular areas should be developed for young people.
- Common approaches to learning and teaching should be developed between primary 7 class teachers and secondary staff: shared correction codes, VCOP (Vocabulary, Connectives, Openers and Punctuation) pyramids, colour coded VCOP posters, critical essay writing.
- Secondary English staff should visit P7 classes and/or team teach alongside primary colleagues.
- There should be consideration of visits to secondary by Primary 7 pupils to complete literacy themed units of work as part of a transition project.

Partnerships and Parents

Educational establishments should make the most of opportunities to work in partnership with parents/carers, other services and agencies to improve literacy.

Establishments should ensure that parents/carers are well informed about the literacy development using a variety of ways of disseminating information.

Schools and early years establishments should encourage parents and young people to use the Library Service and be aware of how the Library Service can support literacy development by seeking ways of working collaboratively whenever appropriate.

While it is the responsibility of all staff to support all learners, network support resource staff provide specialist advice and support to schools on the management and development of programmes to support children and young people experiencing difficulties in learning; they are able to help with planning both at an individual and whole establishment level.

All educational establishments have a link educational psychologist who is able to support school staff with the identification, gathering and analysing of assessment information for pupils who are struggling with literacy including those who may be dyslexic (see WDC Dyslexic Guidelines).

Educational Psychologists can provide information on evidence based approaches to the teaching and learning of literacy skills.

Speech and language therapy offer training to staff in schools and early years centres on communication, typical talk, comprehension, phonology and how to support children and young people with speech and language delay and disorder.

Speech and language therapists provide additional support and training in the areas of language and communication to the communication link person in early years establishments who then in turn provide support to colleagues to enrich language.

Reflective Questions (See Appendix 1 for additional questions)

How effective are all establishments in making sure that our children and young people have all the necessary literacy skills to equip them succeed in life and to fully participate in society .

With regard to literacy consider the following key questions:

How well do children learn and achieve?

How well does the school support children to develop and learn?

How well does the school improve the quality of its work?

Appendix 1 Additional Reflective Questions

- In what ways do we track improvements in literacy across learning?
- To what extent do we use a range of resources to develop talking, listening, reading and writing?
- To what extent are staff skilled in developing approaches to explicitly teaching higher order literacy skills and how can this be improved?
- How do we build on creative ideas to make literacy fun?
- How confident do learners feel about talking about their literacy learning and the strategies they employ to develop understanding of text?
- How confident do learners feel about influencing the choice of text and the approach to literacy development?
- How effectively do we make use of active learning to improve literacy across learning?
- How well have we informed parents about their children's literacy learning and provided them with opportunities to communicate their views?
- How do we provide means for parents to support literacy learning at home?
- How well do we use assessment information from a range of sources to inform improvements in literacy learning?
- How confident are we in the early recognition of and provision of support to children and young people who are struggling with literacy skills?
- To what extent do we use benchmarking data to evaluate literacy outcomes?
- To what extent do we ensure that learners experience a coherence of approach to literacy across transitions?
- To what extent do we make the most of opportunities provided by other partners and people to enhance literacy?

Appendix 2 Literacy Action Plan

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

Literacy Action Plan					
Actions	Lead Staff	Timescale	Resources	Expected Impact/Outcome	Monitoring/ Evaluation
1. Develop Reciprocal Reading Guide for class teachers	Literacy Working Group	Ongoing Sept 2013	Staff time Printing Literacy Grant	Staff are more confident in their teaching of comprehension skills.	Focus Group
2. Develop training programme and materials on higher order skill development	As above	Ongoing Sept 2013	As above	Improved literacy outcomes for young people	Sample assessment of young people's reading Reading self concept scale
3. Pilot training programme	As above	March 2014	As above	Young people improve in confidence in understanding a range of text	Comprehension Assessments
4. Share reciprocal reading approaches across 3 Local Authorities	As above	March 2014	As above		

Literacy Action Plan					
Actions	Lead Staff	Timescale	Resources	Expected Impact/Outcome	Monitoring/ Evaluation
5. Carry out small scale research project on the impact of reciprocal reading	Psychological Service	March 2014	Staff Time Scottish Government Literacy Grant	Improved literacy levels	As above
6. Devise a consistent approach to teaching and learning of higher order literacy skills across the curriculum in secondary schools.	Literacy Working Group and Principal Teachers English	2013-14	Staff time	Improved consistency in teaching and learning across transition from primary to secondary and across the curriculum	G.L. Assessment Focus Group
7. Refresh training on developing early literacy skills for early years and primary school staff	QIO Early Years	2013 –14	Staff time	Improved confidence in staff Improved early literacy skills	Literacy Baseline Assessment Results Training evaluations
8. Develop resource bank on Glow to share good practice.	Literacy Working Group.	2013-14	Staff time	Increase consistency of practice	Observation Focus groups