



## Targeting support: choosing and implementing interventions for children with significant literacy difficulties

Management guidance

**Headteachers,  
SENCOs and Literacy  
Coordinators in  
primary schools**

Status: Recommended

Date of issue: 05/03

Ref: DfES 0201/2003

**Is the provision that you make for children with literacy difficulties working well?**

**Do children receiving help make, on average, at least twice the rate of progress that the majority of children make over the same period of time so that the gap between them and their peers is narrowing?**

If the answer is 'no' then you may want to review your provision.

This management guidance will help you to undertake such a review. It is about choosing and implementing effective interventions for children who have difficulty in learning how to read, write and spell.




It aims to support schools in:

- taking an informed and independent view of the many possible literacy interventions which are available;
- evaluating the outcomes of their current SEN provision and the value for money it provides;
- making decisions about how best to target available funding in future;
- enhancing the life chances of some of their most vulnerable children.



## Three 'waves'

Effective literacy provision can be described in terms of three 'waves' of intervention.

-  **Wave 1** The effective inclusion of all children in a daily and high quality literacy hour
-  **Wave 2** Additional small-group intervention for children who can be expected to catch up with their peers as a result of the intervention
-  **Wave 3** Specific targeted approaches for children identified as requiring SEN support (on *School Action*, *School Action Plus* or with a Statement of special educational needs)

If a child experiences significant literacy difficulties, this could be because:

- they may not have had consistent high quality teaching at Wave 1. For example, insufficient attention may have been paid to phonics in the early stages of literacy acquisition;
- they have missed an opportunity to take part in a Wave 2 intervention, such as *Early Literacy Support* in Year 1, or else their needs have been correctly identified as too great to enable them to succeed within a Wave 2 intervention;
- they have not yet had access to Wave 3 intervention, or a particular Wave 3 intervention, where used, has not proved effective in accelerating their rate of progress.

Where a school is finding that very large numbers of children are experiencing significant literacy difficulties, it will first need to review its provision at Waves 1 and 2. Otherwise, it may find itself investing an unnecessarily high level of resource into individualised support at Wave 3, when a lower level of resource and an earlier, preventive approach would work better.

Where effective Wave 1 and 2 provision is in place, it reduces the overall requirement for Wave 3 support and helps clarify exactly which children will require more focused Wave 3 intervention.

## Why is effective Wave 3 provision important?

In 2002, 7% of children left Key Stage 2 below level 3 in English. One in ten boys left Key Stage 2 below level 3 in reading.



This level of difficulty makes for inability to access the full curriculum, frustration and disaffection. The effect on children's own learning and behaviour, and on that of other learners, can be substantial.

A small proportion of children who leave Key Stage 2 with literacy levels below level 3 will have severe difficulties in cognition and learning. For these children, attainment at pre-level 1 (the 'P' scales), level 1 or level 2 may be appropriate and represent significant achievement. It would not be appropriate to expect or aim for higher levels.

The majority of children who fail to attain at least level 3 in Key Stage 2 will not, however, have learning difficulties of this type. They will be children with literacy difficulties that can, with appropriate and timely intervention, be overcome.

## What can schools do to improve the outcomes for these children?

There are significant differences between schools with similar intakes in the percentages of children leaving Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 with very low attainment in literacy. Some schools manage to make sure that every child (except those with the severe difficulties in cognition and learning described above) is able to achieve minimum levels of literacy. They do this by investing in skilled, high quality Wave 3 intervention to complement effective provision at Waves 1 and 2. They choose their Wave 3 interventions carefully, on the basis of evidence on what works, and match the intervention to the particular needs of individuals. In addition, they implement intervention at an early stage rather than waiting until the child has experienced persistent failure. They monitor the impact of the intervention and the progress of individual children very closely and adjust the support provided in the light of their evaluation.

## What works for children with literacy difficulties?

To answer this question, the National Literacy Strategy commissioned an independent research study<sup>1</sup> to provide an overview of the evidence on the impact of different

<sup>1</sup> *What works for children with literacy difficulties?* (DfES research report 380), available from DfES publications (tel: 0845 60 222 60) or can be downloaded from the website [www.dfes.gov.uk/research](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research)

types of Wave 3 intervention. The research covered reading (both accuracy and comprehension), spelling and writing – although very few evaluations have been carried out on programmes to help children develop the ‘compositional’ aspects of writing as distinct from the ‘transcriptional’ (handwriting and spelling).

Forty schemes and programmes were investigated in all. Some of these proved not to have data from which a measure of impact could be calculated. The main impact measure was ratio gain: the amount of progress which children made, in months of reading or spelling age, divided by the number of months over which those gains were made. A ratio gain of 1 represents the normal rate

of progress of all children over time – one month of reading or spelling age per month of chronological age. Children with literacy difficulties usually progress at a slower rate than this without intervention; if they are to catch up with their peers, however, ratio gains of more than 1 will be needed.

The research showed that ratio gains of at least 2 (sufficient to double the normal rate of progress) were achievable. Eighteen of the forty types of intervention investigated were able to provide evidence of this kind of impact. Of these successful interventions, those that are readily available to schools are listed, in alphabetical order, in the table below.

<b>Literacy interventions at Wave 3</b>				
<b>Intervention</b>	<b>Age group</b>	<b>Delivered by</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>For more information</b>
Acceleread, Accelewrite	Years 3–6	Computer and supervising teaching assistant (TA)	TA works with individual child for 20 minutes a day for four weeks using talking word processor to type sentences following phonic patterns	email: talksystem@aol.com
Better Reading Partnerships	Years 1–6	Trained volunteer adult or teaching assistant	The adult reads 1–1 with the child three times a week for approximately 25 minutes, over a 10-week period. The aim is that the child will develop independent reading strategies. The intervention also emphasises parental involvement. It is particularly successful with children who have less severe difficulties	www.rowa.co.uk email: info@rowa.co.uk Ref: SBT/BRP
The Catch Up Project	Years 2–6	Teacher or teaching assistant	10–15-minute individual session, once or twice a week, involving reading a text and a linked writing or spelling activity (plus an optional 15 minute group session) over a period of 1–3 terms	www.thecatchupproject.org email: catchup.eaz@virgin.net
Cued Spelling	All ages	Parent, volunteer or another pupil	Paired work in spelling based on choosing cues to remember a word – 3 x 15 minutes a week for approximately six weeks	www.Dundee.ac.uk/ psychology/TRWresources
Family Literacy	Reception Year 1 Year 2 Year 4	Trained tutors	Children and their parents work in groups for 8 hours a week over a 12-week period. The aim is to raise standards of literacy among adults with difficulties, boosting their ability to help their children and reducing the inter-generational transmission of literacy problems. Particularly successful with families where parents themselves have literacy difficulties	Contact your LEA lifelong learning, adult learning or community education team for information on the availability of family literacy programmes in your area

*Continued overleaf...*

Intervention	Age group	Delivered by	Description	For more information
Interactive Assessment and Teaching (IAT)	Years 2 and 3	Teacher	An individually adaptive programme with the emphasis on phonic skills in the broad reading context. Includes both writing and reading. Children are taught for 10 weeks in a group	email: rea.reason@man.ac.uk or a.fawcett@sheffield.ac.uk
Multi-sensory Teaching System for Reading (MTSR)	Years 2–5	Teacher or teaching assistant	A scripted, multisensory package for teaching word-level reading, used with groups of children for 20 minutes a day, four days a week, over a period of approximately 12–20 weeks	<a href="http://www.mmu.ac.uk/ioe/projects/mtsr/mtsr1.html">www.mmu.ac.uk/ioe/projects/mtsr/mtsr1.html</a>
Paired Reading	Years 1–6	Parent, volunteer or another pupil	A simple technique used to practice reading aloud, first supported and then alone. Varying durations – approximately 9 weeks	<a href="http://www.Dundee.ac.uk/psychology/TRWresources">www.Dundee.ac.uk/psychology/TRWresources</a>
Paired Writing	Reception – Year 6	Other pupils	Pairs of children work together to tutor one another on writing, over a period of 6–8 weeks	<a href="http://www.Dundee.ac.uk/psychology/TRWresources">www.Dundee.ac.uk/psychology/TRWresources</a>
Phono-Graphix™	Key Stages 1–4	Teacher plus teaching assistant or parent	The teacher works with the child 1–1 for 1 hour per week, supplemented by 3 x 20-minute sessions with TA or parent, over a period of 12–26 weeks. Phonics-based plus practice in reading texts of own choice	<a href="http://www.readamerica.net">www.readamerica.net</a>
Reading Intervention/ Sound Linkage (formerly Cumbria Reading with Phonology Project)	Years 1–6	Teacher	The teacher works with a group of children, twice a week, for 35 minutes each time, over a period of 12–25 weeks, on a highly structured approach to reading and writing coupled with systematic activities to develop children's phonological awareness	<a href="http://www.york.ac.uk/res/crl/html/index.html">www.york.ac.uk/res/crl/html/index.html</a>
Reading Recovery	Years 1 and 2	Teacher	The teacher works 1–1 with the child for 30 minutes a day over a period of, on average, 20 weeks. Teaching is based on detailed and ongoing diagnostic assessment and aims to ensure that the child develops independent strategies for reading and writing, and can operate at age-appropriate levels. Particularly successful with children in Year 1 who have the greatest difficulties (non-readers at the start of the intervention), children eligible for free school meals and children learning English as an additional language who experience literacy difficulties.	email: Readrec@ioe.ac.uk

Intervention	Age group	Delivered by	Description	For more information
Reciprocal Teaching	Key Stages 2–4	Teacher	The teacher works with a group for at least twenty 40-minute teaching sessions over a period of about 16 weeks, modelling text comprehension strategies; pupils are gradually encouraged to take on the role of the teacher. Particularly successful with children who have comprehension difficulties	email: christa.rippon@haringey.gov.uk or liz.bassant@haringey.gov.uk
RITA	Years 2–3	Computer and supervising adult	A computerised version of IAT. The child works with the software over a period of approximately 17 weeks	email: r.nicholson@sheffield.ac.uk
THRASS	Years 2–6	Teacher	A structured, multisensory word-level programme covering handwriting, reading and spelling; the teacher works with individuals or a group for 30 minutes a day over periods of 13–22 weeks	www.thrass.co.uk

## Key messages from the research

A key message from the research report is that if the identified children in a school are not, on average, achieving **at least twice the normal rate of progress** through the school's existing Wave 3 literacy provision, it may be appropriate to re-evaluate what is being offered.

A second key message concerns the length of interventions. The report concludes that **long interventions do not necessarily produce proportionally greater benefits**: some of the most effective schemes were those which operated intensively over a short, focused period of up to 20 weeks.

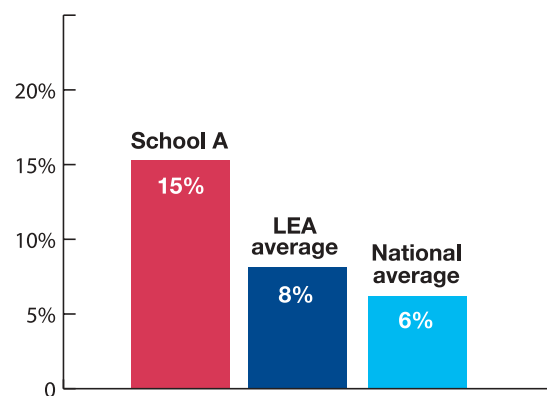
## School self-evaluation and Wave 3 provision

### Quantitative self-evaluation

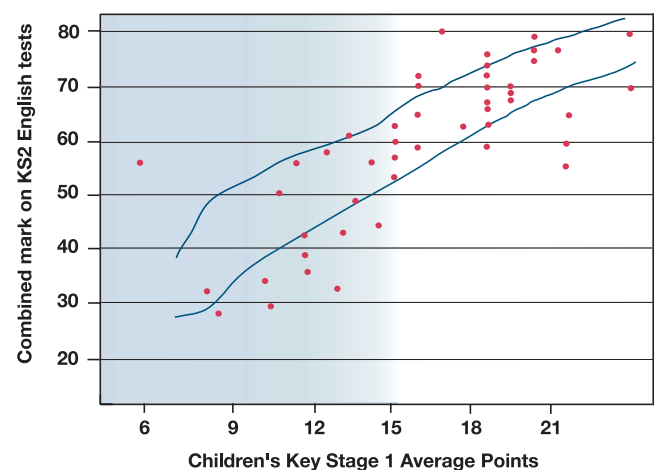
Three useful self-evaluation questions to ask in school:

- How does our children's progress from the beginning to the end of a period of Wave 3 intervention (for example, in reading or spelling age) compare with the 'at least double the normal rate of progress' rule of thumb?
- How does our average percentage of children achieving below level 3 in English, reading and writing at the end of Key Stage 2 (or below level 1 at the end of Key Stage 1) compare with the national average and the average for similar schools?
- How does the progress that we achieve for children with low prior attainment compare with that achieved nationally?

Percentage of children (3-year average) attaining below level 3 in English at the end of Key Stage 2



Progress made in English during Key Stage 2 in School B



### Key

- Children in School B
- National upper and lower quartile line
- Children with below average prior attainment

## Qualitative self-evaluation

Schools can compare their own Wave 3 provision with a set of quality guidelines derived from research and best practice. These are shown in the box below.

Wave 3 Quality Guidelines: school self-evaluation	
<p><b>Key area 1:</b>  <b>establishing priorities,            analysing results and            reviewing progress</b></p>	<p><b>Effective Wave 3 provision will:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• be based on a clear expectation, and tracking, of progress;</li> <li>• be based on a diagnostic assessment of individual children's skills, strengths and learning styles, covering all aspects of literacy and, where appropriate, oracy;</li> <li>• incorporate regular review and measurement of progress as an intrinsic part of the programme;</li> </ul>
<p><b>Key area 2:</b>  <b>continuing to improve            the quality of teaching and            learning</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• be delivered or overseen by a teacher with the skills and expertise necessary to continually adapt and tailor teaching to the child's starting points, strengths and areas of difficulty;</li> <li>• build in opportunities to generalise, apply and review new learning;</li> <li>• include elements of word, sentence and text level work and, where appropriate, oral language skills – the balance depending on the assessed individual needs of the child;</li> <li>• ensure close connections between the intervention and the work of the class as a whole;</li> </ul>
<p><b>Key area 3:</b>  <b>management and            deployment of resources            to meet the needs of            all pupils</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• be embedded within a coherent whole-school approach to the three 'waves' of support;</li> <li>• be based on early intervention rather than intervention later on when a child's difficulties are entrenched;</li> <li>• ensure that a range of age-appropriate interventions are available for children who may need more than one Wave 3 intervention during their primary years;</li> <li>• use an approach for which there is documented evidence of success (based on quantified evidence of progress from existing national or local evaluation), or an approach which is embedded in local action research;</li> <li>• use an approach intensively for a focused period, within an identified time scale;</li> <li>• incorporate an explicitly defined exit strategy;</li> <li>• ensure that over time the entitlement of all children to a broad and balanced curriculum will be maintained;</li> </ul>
<p><b>Key area 4:</b>  <b>professional development            into practice –            Creating the climate</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ensure that the child plays an active part in agreeing what needs to be learned, reviewing what has been learned and monitoring his or her own progress;</li> <li>• develop the child's capacity to be an independent learner;</li> <li>• ensure good communication and a sense of partnership between all those involved in the child's learning, especially with parents and carers;</li> </ul>
<p>Identifying CPD needs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• use an approach for which there is an infrastructure of support – appropriate training for the teachers and, where applicable, for the teaching assistants implementing it;</li> <li>• ensure all staff have an appropriate understanding of the whole-school approach to Wave 3 provision and their role within it.</li> </ul>

## Funding Wave 3 provision

Funding for Wave 3 provision for children at *School Action* comes from the school's delegated budget for special educational needs. LEAs are required to make clear to schools each year what this sum is, and work with schools to monitor the impact of their spending.

In some cases, where a high proportion of a school's intake experience or are likely to experience literacy difficulties, additional funding may be available from local regeneration budgets or other targeted funds aimed at tackling social disadvantage.



### Implementing Wave 3 provision: Case study A

School A is a medium-sized primary school serving an urban estate with high levels of social deprivation. 60% of children are eligible for free school meals. Three years ago, the school used a three-year average to compare the percentage of children leaving Key Stage 2 with significant literacy difficulties (below level 3 in English) with that in similar schools within the LEA. Even after taking into account essential contextual information on pupil mobility, the percentage of children learning English as an additional language and the percentage of children with high-funded SEN, the school found that their numbers of very low-attaining children were unacceptably high.

The headteacher and deputy headteacher (also the SENCO) took immediate steps to review the provision made for children with literacy difficulties. They decided to train a member of staff as a Reading Recovery teacher. The initial one-year training was funded by the LEA but the school now funds her to take part in the Reading Recovery programme of regular top-up training sessions to maintain and refine skills. The teacher works with four children (the lowest-attaining children in Year 1) at any one time, for half an hour a day, one-to-one, over a period of between 15 and 20 weeks, at a total cost per child of approximately £1250. The Reading Recovery teacher is also involved in a wide range of other literacy work across the school: developing colleagues' skills and confidence in using guided reading, helping them locate suitable texts using the Book Bands system, providing training to teaching assistants, assessing children and monitoring their progress, and supporting staff involved in NLS Wave 2 intervention programmes.

Recently, a local Children's Fund programme has enabled the school to fund and train a second Reading Recovery teacher, so that larger numbers of children can receive direct support. Family Literacy programmes are also being implemented in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1.

In Key Stage 2 the school audited need and mapped a range of Wave 3 support, from intensive one-to-one word level work (Phono-Graphix™) through to adaptations of *Additional Literacy Support* and *Further Literacy*

*Support* for groups of children needing a prime focus on text level skills within programmes implemented at a slower pace than that used at Wave 2.

Three years later, the impact of the new provision on whole-school outcomes is clear. The percentage of children leaving Key Stage 2 with very low attainment in English has reduced from 36% to 11%. In Key Stage 1 the percentage of children attaining below level 2 has reduced by two-thirds in both reading and in writing. Over half of the children receiving Reading Recovery have attained level 2C at the end of Key Stage 1; 94% have achieved level 1+ in reading, and 82% in writing. School staff are also noticing differences in children's behaviour, with improved attitudes to learning in all classes and fewer children causing severe disruption than was the case in the past.

### Implementing Wave 3 provision: Case study B

School B is a junior school with 180 children on roll, of which 7% are eligible for free school meals. The school's analysis of its value-added data showed that children with average prior attainment did better at the end of Key Stage 2 than similar children nationally; children entering Year 3 with very low or very high prior attainment, however, did worse. Alongside work to stretch its more able pupils, the school sought advice from the LEA in order to undertake a detailed assessment of all Year 3 and 4 children who were experiencing difficulties in literacy. The school was then able to implement a School Action programme of one-to-one work on phonological awareness and phonic skills to match the needs they had identified through assessment. In addition, the SENCO ran a paired reading project, involving parents in scaffolding children's reading of challenging texts which they had chosen for themselves. Assessment before and after the Wave 3 intervention showed that the 18 children who took part during the first three years of the project made, on average, ten months' progress in reading age over the three months of intervention. They also maintained these gains when followed up over time.



## Checklist for school management of Wave 3 intervention

*Tick the most appropriate response for each statement*

	Yes	No	Partly
We have identified members of the leadership group within the school who are jointly responsible for our strategy for Wave 3 literacy intervention – for example, the headteacher, SENCO and literacy coordinator.			
We have identified the individual who leads on our Wave 3 work on a day-to-day basis (implementation, monitoring and evaluation) – for example, the SENCO.			
We track individual children's progress carefully against LEA and national comparators, and identify at the earliest opportunity all those whose progress gives cause for concern.			
We target Wave 3 intervention on the basis of our pupil tracking data.			
We are familiar with the evidence base for different Wave 3 interventions.			
We are able to offer a range of Wave 3 interventions, matched to children's needs and delivered by skilled, trained staff.			
We routinely evaluate the impact of our own Wave 3 interventions, to make sure that they are, on average, at least doubling the normal rate of progress.			

Points for action

A copy of this leaflet is available to every primary school.  
Further copies can be downloaded from the National Literacy Strategy website:

[www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/literacy](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/literacy)

Ref: DfES 0201/2003

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