



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Literacy and numeracy: Your questions answered



Literacy and numeracy: Your questions answered

Audience

All practitioners and other education professionals and support staff working in Foundation Phase, primary, secondary and special schools; tutors in initial teacher education; governors and other interested stakeholders in Wales.

Overview

This document provides answers to key questions on the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF) and National Reading and Numeracy Tests (NRNT) to support schools.

Action required

None – for information only.

Further information

Enquiries about this document should be directed to:

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Additional copies

This document can be accessed from the Welsh Government's website at gov.wales/learning

Related documents

Documents to support the implementation of the LNF can be found at learning.gov.wales/resources/browse-all/nlnf/?lang=en including *National Literacy and Numeracy Framework: To support schools in introducing the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework* (Welsh Government, 2013); *Curriculum planning guidance* (Welsh Government, 2013); *Assessment for learning and the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework* (Welsh Government, 2014).

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Why has this document been produced?

This document has been written to clarify our vision at a time of transition. Well-developed literacy and numeracy skills are key to enabling learners to play an active, confident role in society, well equipped to meet the demands and expectations of life in the twenty-first century.

'We have already given priority to literacy and numeracy. The National Literacy and Numeracy Programmes were introduced in 2012 followed by the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF) in 2013. Many schools have made steady progress in implementing the LNF; however more needs to be done to ensure that literacy and numeracy skills are embedded in a meaningful way in all schools. We will therefore continue to focus on literacy and numeracy as an essential pre-requisite for our new curriculum.'

***A curriculum for Wales – a curriculum for life* (Welsh Government, 2015, p.16)**

The *National Literacy and Numeracy Programme – a strategic action plan* (Welsh Government, 2016) sets out our vision for literacy and numeracy as we move towards a new curriculum. In the new curriculum learners' competence in literacy and numeracy will continue to be a priority, as a cross-curriculum responsibility for all teachers. There will also be an emphasis on how assessment for learning in literacy and numeracy is central to supporting our learners to independently apply their literacy and numeracy skills across a range of contexts.

Who will find this document useful?

This document will be useful if you are a:

teacher or support teacher working with learners on a whole class, small group or individual basis

- It will clarify statutory expectations and influence the teaching and learning experiences that you provide for your learners.
- It may raise questions about your current practice or provision that can lead to useful discussions with colleagues.
- It will answer common questions or 'myths' about the LNF and National Reading and Numeracy Tests (NRNT).

school leader, a member of a leadership team or a teacher with a curriculum or phase responsibility

- It will explore the myths that may adversely affect provision.
- It will assist you in reviewing or updating your documentation or reinforcing your expectations to your staff so that there is a consistent approach.

- It will provide material for discussion at staff meetings or on INSET days, helping you evaluate how well your provision meets the best practice suggestions that are included in the document.
- It provides useful information for subject leaders, teams or heads of departments when leading staff on best practice and how this is reflected at an individual teacher or classroom level.

governor

- It will provide you with information about what effective use of the LNF and administration of the NRNT look like.
- It can inform detailed conversations with the headteacher, leadership team or teachers about how well the school has implemented the LNF and how effective this has been.
- It can inform your conversations with the headteacher, leadership team or teachers about how the school approaches the NRNT and how consistent this is across the school.

1. Curriculum planning and the LNF

If I am not a literacy or numeracy specialist, do I need to teach these skills?

I am not a member of the English, Welsh or mathematics department/team. Should literacy or numeracy skills feature in my lessons?

Must I teach the LNF in every subject or in every lesson?

All teachers should see themselves as teachers of literacy and numeracy in a way that supports the subject or theme they are teaching. However, there is no requirement for there to be a literacy or numeracy skill in every subject or lesson, if this is not appropriate.

- The LNF is designed as a cross-curricular planning tool for the appropriate literacy and numeracy skill development within subjects, topics and themes.
- Subjects, topics and themes outside of English, Welsh and mathematics lessons provide invaluable opportunities for the application of literacy and numeracy skills in interesting and varied contexts.

Securing effective practice

In your school, consider:

- › identifying worthwhile opportunities for the development and application of literacy and numeracy skills in line with year-on-year expectations in the LNF
- › identifying or planning for opportunities where literacy and numeracy skills naturally occur within a lesson or subject
- › ensuring that opportunities are maximised, but not contrived
- › maximising opportunities to teach and apply literacy and numeracy skills, which is a key principle of the LNF. Literacy and numeracy skills may be explicitly taught first in English, Welsh and mathematics lessons before being applied across the broader curriculum or in other subjects and themes.

Estyn say

'Inspectors do not have literacy and numeracy boxes to tick whenever they observe lessons during inspections. Teachers should take advantage of opportunities that occur naturally in the curriculum to reinforce learning in literacy and numeracy. However, this should not mean that literacy and numeracy become mantras for repetition in every lesson in the school day no matter what the topic.'

Inspection Clarified (Estyn, 2015, Q6)

'Schools are not expected to create opportunities for pupils to show their skills in ICT, numeracy, literacy or Welsh in every single lesson.'

Inspection Clarified (Estyn, 2015, Q22)

Whilst schools have been supported in the implementation of the LNF, how a school chooses to undertake this is a decision for each individual setting.

- › A suite of materials is available on Learning Wales to support schools with their ongoing implementation of the LNF. This includes: curriculum planning guidance; training materials; assessment guidance; exemplification materials; and classroom tasks.
- › Since September 2015 ongoing support for the LNF has been delivered via regional consortia.

Securing effective practice

In your school, consider:

- › reviewing teaching and learning to ensure the LNF is being implemented in line with the school's vision and expectations. How consistent is this?
- › revising your school's vision or expectations to reflect the reality of what is meaningful for all subjects or themes and that skills are only taught where this is not forced or contrived
- › sampling learners' books to see if there are further opportunities to develop skills
- › developing a cluster approach that establishes a core philosophy for planning for and using the LNF.

Estyn say

'There isn't an 'Estyn approved' lesson structure or pattern. For example, teachers don't need to set out the learning objective formally at the beginning of a lesson and finish with a plenary for inspectors to judge the lesson as good. The key focus is on the effectiveness of the lesson in terms of standards and learning, not the method or format.'

Inspection Clarified (Estyn, 2015, Q5)

'In the two-thirds of schools where the curriculum is good, teachers recognise the importance of ensuring that pupils have strong literacy and numeracy skills and use the Literacy and Numeracy Framework to ensure that pupils build on their previous learning as they move through the school. They have incorporated the framework into their curriculum planning, but have not allowed it to dictate unduly what or how they teach. In successful schools, the framework is not an afterthought or a 'box to complete', but is integral to the learning activities across the curriculum.'

The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales 2014–2015 (Estyn, 2016, page 24)

My lessons are now mainly about teaching literacy and numeracy skills. Was the LNF intended to narrow the curriculum?

Schools are expected to provide a broad and balanced curriculum that is enhanced by the development of literacy and numeracy skills.

- The LNF should not replace curriculum provision, but should be used to support and enhance learners' knowledge of key concepts, subjects and themes.
- Schools that have implemented the LNF most fully have developed a broad and balanced curriculum, that supports and develops literacy and numeracy skills in engaging and meaningful contexts.
- The *Successful Futures* report (Welsh Government, 2015) recommends that literacy and numeracy, along with digital competence, form cross-curricular responsibilities in the new curriculum. Our current provision for literacy and numeracy, as set out in the *National Literacy and Numeracy Programme – a strategic action plan* (Welsh Government, 2016) provides a good foundation on which the new curriculum can be built.

Securing effective practice

In your school, consider:

- reviewing the breadth and balance of your curriculum, including beginning to consider the four purposes of the *Successful Futures* report
- conducting a 'Listening to Learners' session to establish their views on current provision – how engaging and creative it is from their perspective
- visiting or finding out more about schools who have developed a creative approach to the curriculum or have 'home-grown' engaging themes or cross-curricular units of work
- responding to national events such as the Olympics or Roald Dahl centenary and building these into your curriculum provision
- looking closely at learners with low attendance or which school day has the lowest attendance. Plan for creative days to motivate learners to attend school.

Estyn say

'Employment opportunities in Wales now require much higher skill levels than in the past. A curriculum fit for the twenty-first century needs to build learners' intellectual strengths, their curiosity and creativity, and their adaptability and resilience. A challenging, ambitious curriculum helps learners to develop high-level thinking skills – their verbal, numerical and critical reasoning. These are the skills needed for most examinations and, in particular, for the new GCSEs in Welsh, English and mathematics, as well as for PISA. So there should be no tension between learning experiences that engage and excite young people and ones that ensure high standards of literacy and numeracy, of reasoning and creative ability, and of examination success.'

The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales 2014–2015 (Estyn, 2016, page 7)

'Many schools have reduced the time spent on non-core subjects and areas of learning. This is often after introducing heavy-handed approaches to literacy and numeracy development, aimed at boosting their performance data and the outcomes of annual tests. Recent changes to qualifications and performance measures have led many secondary schools to reduce the number of option choices for pupils in key stage 4. This narrowing of the curriculum has not necessarily resulted in better outcomes.'

The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales 2014–2015 (Estyn, 2016, page 30)

'There are shortcomings in just under a third of schools, where planning does not ensure that pupils develop their literacy and numeracy skills across a broad range of subjects and the focus for developing these skills is too narrow.'

The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales 2014–2015 (Estyn, 2016, page 42)

2. The Foundation Phase and the LNF

Does the LNF fit with the Foundation Phase's experiential and play-based approach to learning?

The introduction of the LNF does not mean a return to whole-class teaching of literacy and numeracy in the Foundation Phase. In order to support the development of children's language, literacy and communication skills and mathematical development, practitioners must ensure a balance of child-led and adult-led active learning and play-based experiences. These must be within the child's area of experience and be within a real-life context in line with their age and stage of development.

- We are committed to ensuring that all children have the best possible learning and development opportunities through the Foundation Phase. The LNF and its cross-curricular approach promote and support the principles and pedagogy of the Foundation Phase.
- We recognise that not all children progress in the same way and this is particularly true of children's development in the early years which can follow different trajectories. The structure of the LNF allows teachers to ensure that they are incorporating the appropriate skills into their delivery of the curriculum. This must take into account the stage of development of the learner, e.g. using the statements of the year above and the year below to support differentiation.
- There is good evidence to show that where the Foundation Phase curriculum is being delivered well it is raising the attainment of all children, with improvements in overall school attendance, literacy, numeracy and learner well-being. This does not involve formal approaches to the teaching of literacy and numeracy. Many of the fundamental approaches used in the delivery of the Foundation Phase, particularly learning through experience, will extend across the breadth of the new curriculum. It is important therefore that we continue to improve the way we deliver the Foundation Phase so that we can build the implementation of the new curriculum on a solid basis of good practice.

Securing effective practice

In your setting/school:

- › focus on the use of stories, songs and rhymes before introducing letters, sounds and numbers
- › ensure practitioners have clear guidance and training to enable them to start their planning from the skills identified within the LNF and develop rich tasks which enable children to learn and consolidate those skills across all Areas of Learning. Practitioners should then observe children within the areas of provision to evaluate the impact and plan for the next steps for learning
- › avoid introducing formal methods of teaching literacy and numeracy before children have developed sufficient spoken language. Focus instead on supporting children's talk; and providing many opportunities for engagement in talk with others and with adults
- › provide children with the opportunity to make choices in their learning, to help them develop as independent learners and engage in literacy and numeracy skills
- › avoid following schemes of work rigidly as this limits the potential of the learners to follow their interests and can result in a curriculum which becomes constrained and overly prescriptive. Where discreet teaching is used, this should be in small groups for short bursts of time
- › plan the learning environment, indoors and outdoors, to provide interesting opportunities for children to practise their language, literacy and numeracy skills at an appropriate level for them
- › do not 'teach to' the National Reading and Numeracy Tests as this would normally lead to overly prescriptive approaches.

Estyn say

'In around two-thirds of schools, standards of numeracy are good or better. In these schools... In the Foundation Phase, pupils use their data handling and measuring skills as part of their everyday learning. Many weigh ingredients in a 'mud kitchen' and create and interpret simple tally charts showing findings from a bug hunt. In schools where standards of numeracy are adequate, there is an over-reliance on formal teaching and on worksheets that limit pupils' opportunity to apply their numeracy skills across the curriculum.'

The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales 2015–2016 (Estyn, 2017, page 43)

'There are too many schools where learning in the Foundation Phase becomes too structured and formal too soon. This reduces pupils' ability to develop as independent learners. In these schools, pupils do not have enough chances to choose what and how they learn, particularly towards the end of the Foundation Phase.'

The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales 2015–2016 (Estyn, 2017, page 46)

'In about a quarter of schools where leadership is judged as adequate, there is a lack of urgency about improving pupils' standards and wellbeing. Progress since the previous inspection is limited, and leaders fail to recognise and address weaknesses. For example, these schools often do not deliver the expected Foundation Phase practice, particularly in Years 1 and 2. Leaders have not identified this as a weakness because monitoring procedures do not have a broad enough focus or because leaders have a weak understanding of the Foundation Phase.'

The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales 2015–2016 (Estyn, 2017, page 48)

3. Responsibility for the LNF

**I am a head of English/Welsh/mathematics.
Am I the person with responsibility for
the implementation of the literacy or
numeracy components of the LNF?**

Responsibility for implementing the LNF is that of the whole school.

- Responsibility for implementing the LNF does not fall solely to the head of mathematics, English or Welsh or even their departments.
- The role of the literacy or numeracy lead within a school is a key role for both coordinating how the LNF is used across classes as well as monitoring how effectively the LNF is being implemented.
- A whole-school approach for the teaching of literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum is essential so that there is a consistent, shared approach.

Securing effective practice

In your school, consider:

- who is the most appropriate person to undertake this role regardless of the phase or subject that they teach?
- many schools choose to assign responsibility to a literacy, numeracy or skills coordinator/s. This person does not necessarily need to be a member of the English, Welsh or mathematics department or the subject leader in a primary school.

Estyn say

'Not all schools understand how best to plan for pupils' progress in literacy and numeracy. Most list opportunities for pupils to use their literacy and numeracy skills in schemes of work, but they also need to provide genuine contexts for pupils to apply these skills across the curriculum, link them to the literacy and numeracy framework, and order the opportunities into a structured, whole-school sequence. The best schools already do this, but many do not.'

The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales 2014–2015 (Estyn, 2016, page 6)

4. Data, assessment and the LNF

Do the Welsh Government or regional consortia collect data based on assessment for learning using the LNF?

Assessment for learning data for the LNF is not collected nationally.

- Assessment using the LNF is formative in nature. Neither the Welsh Government nor the regional consortia collect or use any assessment for learning data that is based on the LNF.

Securing effective practice

In your school, consider:

- running a series of staff development events on the content of the LNF statements to ensure that there is a common understanding of them, e.g. the technical language or terminology. This is key as it is likely that there will need to be opportunities to discuss or consider the detail of what each statement means to an individual and how this is agreed upon by all members of staff
- reflecting on how you assess learner progress and the development of literacy and numeracy skills over a period of time. Is there a good balance of formative opportunities? Is assessment against the LNF statements carried out across a range of contexts, subjects or themes?
- do self and peer assessments include opportunities for learners to assess their progress against the skills or statements in the LNF alongside the assessment of the teacher?

Estyn say

‘Purposeful assessment helps teachers to plan effectively for the next steps in pupils’ learning and, as a result, it helps to raise standards.’

The Annual Report of Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales 2014–2015 (Estyn, 2016, page 24)

As a teacher am I expected to come to best-fit judgements about the LNF at the end of the year for each of my learners? Should I assess which year group a learner is working at and include this in the report to parents/carers?

Teachers are not expected to make a best-fit judgement on a learner's attainment against the year-on-year expectations of the LNF.

- Assessment using the LNF is formative in nature, not summative.

Securing effective practice

In your school, consider:

- at your setting do all teachers ensure that their provision provides opportunities for the development and application of literacy and numeracy skills across a range of contexts?
- as part of routine classroom practice teachers should assess how well their learners are responding to this in terms of the acquisition of their literacy and numeracy skills
- is your annual report to parents/carers on the LNF narrative in format and does it include next steps in the learners' literacy and numeracy journey?
- does your provision include a wide range of opportunities for challenging learners as well as the planning of rich tasks within which a learner can demonstrate the LNF skills they can use independently?

Estyn say

'Concerns around assessment and accountability also prevent many schools from being innovative. Less confident leaders may promote a culture where teachers assess pupils' work regularly, but with little impact on standards. They gather a considerable amount of information about pupils' progress and attainment, but do not use it to inform the teaching or to plan for the next steps in pupils' learning.'

The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales 2014–2015 (Estyn, 2016, page 30)

5. Tracking and the LNF

Should I track learner performance using the LNF? Do we need to create or purchase an electronic tool to do so?

There is no requirement to track progress across the curriculum and schools should not feel obligated to purchase software or electronic tools to enable them to do so.

- It is statutory for schools to use the LNF as a curriculum planning tool. It is also statutory for schools to assess formatively using the LNF and to produce an annual narrative report to parents/carers on the LNF in English, Welsh and mathematics and Language, Literacy and Communication Skills and Mathematical Development Areas of Learning.
- Schools may find a tracking tool is useful for tracking individual learner progress as well as the progress of different groups such as boys/girls, e-FSM/non e-FSM. However, Estyn look at how well data is used and whether it is used to support provision for learner progress.

Securing effective practice

In your school, consider:

- discussing with all staff, including teaching assistants, how assessment information feeds into planning and provision
- establishing core strategies across a cluster for assessment across the cluster, in particular the assessment of oracy and reading skills.

Estyn say

'Many schools use a wide range of data to analyse pupil performance and to track their progress. More schools are using data effectively to track the progress of specific groups of pupils, but this remains underdeveloped in a few schools. Where the analysis of performance data is most effective, it raises questions and informs judgements on how well the school is doing, as well as adding to a range of first-hand evidence on pupil standards and the quality of provision.'

The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales 2014–2015 (Estyn, 2016, page 44)

6. National testing as formative assessment

Are national test results used to measure my school's performance?

The results of the tests are not included in the set of performance measures for the categorisation of primary schools or secondary schools.

- The National Reading and Numeracy Tests provide formative assessment of reading and numeracy at a learner level, against the LNF. This enables schools to ensure that strengths and areas for improvement are identified so that teachers can help all learners make progress in the development of their reading and numeracy skills.
- Under the Welsh Government's National School Categorisation System, schools are asked how they act on the information about learners' skills provided by the National Reading and Numeracy Tests. This may include provision for individual learners or whole classes. Consideration should also be given in the school's management and development plan to how test information is used alongside teacher assessment.
- Over time, the tests will be replaced by online adaptive tests. In these new, personalised assessments, questions will be adjusted to match and challenge the skill levels of each learner. Emphasis will be on providing learners, teachers and parents/carers with a range of formative information in order to help learners make progress. The information from the assessments will not be used for accountability purposes at local authority, regional or national level.

Securing effective practice

In your school, consider:

- how effectively you use the test information to plan provision for all learners
- tests and teacher assessment provide different information – a test outcome reflects the skills demonstrated through written responses on a given occasion, whereas teacher assessments are built up from a large evidence base over time. How effectively do you analyse whether there is a correlation between teacher assessment and test data? What happens with this information?
- signposting to the National Reading and Numeracy Tests information for parents/carers section on Learning Wales on your website and in your communications to parents and carers so that they know what to expect.

Estyn say

‘Purposeful assessment helps teachers to plan effectively for the next steps in pupils’ learning and, as a result, it helps to raise standards.’

The Annual Report of Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales 2014–2015 (Estyn, 2016, page 24)

7. The national tests and school inspection

Will Estyn judge our test results as part of our inspection?

Estyn says that results from the national tests should be used for diagnostic purposes.

- › Estyn does not make judgements on a school's performance based on test results.
- › Estyn looks for evidence of how a school is making use of the diagnostic information that the tests provide.
- › Estyn expects a school to have information on how well learners are doing in terms of their reading and numeracy. This will include a range of evidence such as teacher assessment and learners' written work, and the information from the national tests should be considered in this context.

Securing effective practice

In your school, consider:

- › how do you use the data from the national tests?
- › is the data used to identify strengths as well as areas for development and actions at phase, class and individual learner level?
- › how do groups compare with others, e.g. boys/girls, e-FSM/non e-FSM, learners that have received a targeted intervention compared to those that did not?
- › do all teachers use the information diagnostically and develop their provision to target areas of weakness?

Estyn say

'Many schools use a wide range of data to analyse pupil performance and to track their progress. More schools are using data effectively to track the progress of specific groups of pupils, but this remains underdeveloped in a few schools. Where the analysis of performance data is most effective, it raises questions and informs judgements on how well the school is doing, as well as adding to a range of first-hand evidence on pupil standards and the quality of provision.'

The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales 2014–2015 (Estyn, 2016, page 44)