



EduFocus Number 3

Reading by age 6? See how 12 British Schools made it happen!

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED) has released a comprehensive report which examines the practices of 12 nursery and primary schools which have had above average success in enabling their year 2 students to read at the appropriate level.

The information was collected as part of the inspection process in the UK and involved classroom observation and interviews with head teachers. The report noted that these successful schools shared a number of characteristics. These shared features include:

- quality of leadership;
- principles of the reading curriculum;
- quality and consistency of teaching; and
- assessment of students' progress.

Principles of the Reading Curriculum

Focus 1: Oral Language Development

The report notes that children entering school are increasingly unprepared for learning and have poor listening and speaking skills.

To combat these problems, these successful schools organised activities to develop listening skills. First activities involved general sounds. For example, children were asked to identify object based on sounds from a concealed source. Then, the focus became letter sounds, which included activities such as using musical sounds as a guide to the sounds of the spoken language.

At the nursery level, schools maintained "highly structured days from the beginning" and procured big books for reading stories, which could be easily seen by everyone in the class so that they learn "how books and stories worked."

Opportunities were also created for improving students' vocabulary by "bringing the world to the children as well as taking the children out into the world" (OSTED, 2010, p. 27).

Focus 2: Enhancing Phonic Knowledge & Skill

The teachers and teaching assistants "knew exactly what they were doing and why" (OSTED, 2010, p. 28). The strategies employed by these educators ensured that all children participated actively, and enjoyed the process of learning while being productive.

Leadership

- Determined that children will learn to read
- Expressed school's vision and goals for reading
- Invested heavily in training & continued development of teachers and teaching assistants in relation to teaching phonics
- Ensured consistently high quality through team-work
- Released subject leaders from their classes to monitor the implementation of the phonics programme
- Ensured programme's reliability
- Implemented systematic phonics teaching
- Mentored new teachers

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After fast paced, 20 - minute phonic sessions, students were usually divided into groups to participate in literacy focused activities that reinforced the sounds recently learnt. For example, some students were asked to use clay to make the letter 'h.' This report demonstrates, using observed examples, how the physical skills required for writing can be included in 'early phonics work.' OFSTED notes that "multisensory approaches to phonics can – and should – support children in recalling the shape of the letter and, if physical movement is involved, the direction in which to form a letter" (p. 30).

Focus 3: Broadening & Extending the Range of Reading

One fundamental principle that OFSTED endorses is one school's practice that "all children should read and write daily." Equally important is one school's practice of "speaking in sentences so that children understand what they are by the time they write them" (OFSTED, 2010, p. 30).

Focus 4: Reading & Writing across the Curriculum

Many of the schools in this report integrated the practices used in teaching reading in other subject sessions, which acted as reinforcement towards attaining mastery of literacy. It is noted that "the wider curriculum provided a stimulus for language development, reading and writing" (OFSTED, 2010, P. 31).

Quality and Consistent Teaching

Staff Development and feedback from internal monitoring have played a vital role in the maintenance of quality, and consistent teaching. The 12 schools identified in this report took full advantage of their human resource by ensuring that both teaching assistants and teachers benefited from training. OFSTED noted that a common practice among several schools included hosting "demonstration lessons for others," which focused on teaching phonics using specific materials (OFSTED, P. 35).

Precision in teaching is further enhanced through "precise enunciation of phonemes," the use of "teaching devices, conventions and multi – sensory strategies" to encourage active participation and learning (OFSTED, P. 35).

Assessment of Children's Progress

As a result of teachers' understanding of what students "should have learnt at the end of each phonics session," they were able to monitor their academic progress. Therefore, instruction was guided by regular assessments, which enabled teachers to match strategies and interventions to students' progress and noted difficulties.

Assessment, which takes many forms, was conducted by both classroom teachers and subject leaders for literacy. The results were shared with the students, and in some schools, lead to the creation of specific targets.

Another use for assessment included organizing teaching grouping according to students' level of attainment, which proved beneficial.

Summary

- Emphasize phonics as part of the literacy programme
- Promote a multi – sensory approach to teaching phonics
- Train everyone directly involved in the teaching process
- Understand what students should learn at the end of each session
- Use regular assessment to inform teaching and interventions
- Incorporate reading across the curriculum

More information on the strategies employed by these 12 schools can be read in the report entitled "Reading by six: How the best schools do it." It is available at:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research/Browse-all-by/Documents-by-type/Thematic-reports/Reading-by-six-how-the-best-schools-do-it>