This document was archived in March 2017 as it no longer reflects current policy.

Notes to accompany presentation slides for:

Ofsted's subject professional development materials: English

A non-mandatory training resource for teachers of English in secondary schools

These accompanying notes are designed to be used in conjunction with the presentation slides. Each note is numbered to reflect the slide it refers to.

1. *Title slide;* **A training resource for teachers of English in secondary schools**

2. **About this training resource**

The materials cover five themes identified in the *Moving English forward* report. Feedback from schools that trialled the materials suggests that each theme could be used to provide the basis for an hour's discussion within a department meeting. Departments can choose to work through the materials unit by unit; this would provide material for a sequence of five meetings about English. Alternatively, they might decide to select the themes that are of particular interest to them. These supplementary materials are aimed to support the head of department by offering ideas and suggestions that can be used to plan the discussions.

3. *Title slide***: Some questions on English: How well do you know the performance data?**

4. **Questions**

5. **Answers**

The important thing here is not how many answers you got right. The key is to compare the national data with your own and identify areas that might need to be improved. If, for example, your gender gap is in line with, or worse than, the

national average, what do you propose to do about it? Similarly, if the performance of boys or students entitled to free school meals is weaker than average, you should consider discussing the issue and producing an action plan. You will also want to consider the performance of your minority ethnic students; how does this compare with the national picture? If you do not have any of this data to hand, perhaps that should be the first thing you need to do!

The reading/writing data for Key Stage 2 is interesting. On our surveys, we find that many secondary departments do not have this data. Where the gap is wider than average on entry to the school, we would expect departments to target writing as a priority in their plans for Year 7.

The sixth form data merely confirms that most students achieve one of the higher grades. Expectations need to be set high and you will no doubt use ALPs or other indicators to evaluate the progress that your students make on their sixth form courses.

6. *Title slide*: What is the impact of teaching on students' learning in English in your school?

Although departments are free to choose the units that are of most relevance to them, it is recommended that all consider this unit on teaching and learning. *Moving English forward* has some important things to say about learning and progress in lessons in English.

7. What is effective teaching in English?

Hold on to the definitions of outstanding teaching. They will be needed later. You should begin here to talk about the ways in which teaching and learning in English are evaluated and whether this contributes to actions in the subject development plan.

8. The 'myths' of good teaching in English

The weaknesses identified in this section of the report include: excessive pace; too many activities; over-detailed lesson plans; limited time for independent learning; and constant review of progress. Do teachers feel that any of these issues constrain their own teaching or the progress made by students?

Look at what the report says about flexibility. Would teachers feel confident enough to alter their plans in a lesson that was being observed or would they feel obliged to stick with the plans? Encourage teachers to discuss particular lessons where they have altered their plans because it became clear that students were either struggling to understand or where it was evident that their understanding was greater than the teacher had expected.

Read the section, 'What contributes to effective learning in English lessons' and note the five elements listed in paragraph 27 as characterising lessons in English where students did well. Discuss the issues that particularly interest staff.

9. What is effective teaching in English?

Remind teachers about their definitions of outstanding teacher. This slide makes the point that the most important consideration is the progress made by students rather than the nature of the teaching approaches chosen.

Inspectors (and sometimes students!) often complain that all lessons tend to follow the same structure. Yet, if you want to encourage a love of reading or introduce students to a play by Shakespeare or stimulate effective story writing, there seems no obvious reason why the lessons should be planned in the identical way or follow the same structure. You might want to talk together about the best ways of encouraging a love of reading, or developing students' written work. What different approaches work well?

What general principles would staff wish to see highlighted in a departmental policy on teaching?

10. How effective are your learning objectives?

When discussing learning objectives, you could also refer to paragraphs 23-24 from the previous triennial report, *English at the crossroads* (080247, June 2009). This lists some weaknesses in learning objectives and illustrates the issue through a Key Stage 2 lesson example. Remember that your learning objectives should be:

- realistic and achievable in one lesson
- capable of being evaluated
- appropriate for all students
- applied to skills, knowledge and understanding in English. For example, 'write a story' or 'prepare a talk' merely define the activity rather than the learning while 'show an understanding of some different ways to begin a story' or 'use Standard English and formal language in giving a talk' are more specific and capable of being reviewed together by the teacher and students.

11. A school policy statement on effective teaching and learning in English

If you have a statement in your handbook (or a whole-school policy) on teaching, please share it here and discuss as a team. Is there anything you would want to change in the light of your discussions about teaching?

Each member of the department should now spend a few minutes jotting down the most important things they have learnt from this section on teaching. Exchange ideas as a group and use the discussion to revise (or write) simple guidance about teaching and learning in English in your school.

Review the departmental activities that help you to monitor and evaluate teaching and learning. Is there anything more to do?

Look at the subject action plan. We would recommend that there should always be a section on teaching and learning. Do you have clear ideas about how to further improve teaching across the department?

12.   *Title slide*: How effective is the teaching of writing, including spelling and handwriting, in your school?

13.   Standards of writing in your school

The *Excellence in English* report includes case studies of schools where boys did well. Look at the St Paul's Academy example. Is there anything you could learn from this? Accepting one of the recommendations from the *Moving English forward* report, the Department for Education (DfE) has commissioned international research on the effective teaching of writing. You might want to check the DfE website to see if this has been published. If so, it might inform your discussion on this unit.

14.   How might the teaching of writing be improved?

This is an opportunity to discuss boys and writing. Many boys remain difficult to motivate in writing. They lack confidence and feel inhibited by perceived weaknesses in handwriting and presentation. Ask teachers to discuss individual students and what works with them. The St Paul's case study is relevant here. How can information and communication technology be used to motivate and enthuse boys with writing?

15.   Writing for real, writing that matters

It is not always possible, of course, to generate real audiences and purposes for writing. However, even simulated audiences and purposes will be of benefit if they clarify the task and expectations for students. Your students may already do a good deal of writing outside school for real audiences, perhaps through social networking sites. It is useful to find this out, as well as finding out which of your students (and there are always some in a school) write for themselves at home, whether it be stories, poems, or a diary. Some schools have experimented successfully with different forms of writing journal where students write for themselves and have more choice over the subjects.

Does the school invite people who write into the classroom? This might include professional novelists, for example, but what about all the other people doing more conventional jobs who need to use writing all the time in their work? This can help

students to understand the importance of writing outside school. The report suggests that students rarely redraft or edit their work. Discuss current practice in school. What works and how can the best practice be extended? Try to build on what professional writers and other adults do.

16. Spelling and handwriting

Reminder: you will need to ask staff to bring some examples of students' work with them. Discuss: is there a departmental policy on spelling? What guidance, if any, is available to teachers? Is any extra help provided for poor spellers and handwriters? If the answer to the questions above is 'no', what do you propose to do? Discuss how spelling should be taught explicitly across different years.

17. The role of marking in improving spelling and handwriting

As the final slide in this unit, the department should now take stock. Changes may need to be made in a variety of areas: marking; policy statements; writing for real audiences; handwriting intervention. Once again, the most sensible thing is to identify the most important actions and integrate them into a subject development plan.

18. *Title slide*: How do schools promote reading widely and reading for pleasure?

19. Reading widely and for pleasure

Do your students enjoy reading? How do you know?

Issues to discuss:

- How do you know (other than anecdotally) how much your students read
  - inside school, and
  - outside school?
- Do some groups of students read more than others and enjoy reading more? Which are they?
- Do you do anything to help disinterested readers regain their enthusiasm? What?
- How much 'book talk' is there in your class?
- In discussing reading, have teachers concentrated on reading fiction? What about online reading and the reading of magazines and newspapers?
- What are the links with the school librarian? Do you build on her/his knowledge of books and authors? If so, how? Links between the English department and the school library are sometimes under-developed. How strong are your links? Do you work closely enough with the librarian? Has

s/he been invited to join this discussion on reading! What more could you do?

20.   The whole school climate for reading

The school referred to is Don Valley in Doncaster. It has won the Reading Connects 'School of the Year' award. The new Ofsted evaluation schedule for whole-school inspections places an increased emphasis on reading and literacy. Consequently, this unit should extend discussion into the broader whole-school context. What does the school currently do? How could it be improved? You might use this unit to draft some proposals to submit to the senior leadership. You might also invite a member of the senior leadership team to join this discussion.

If English departments are serious about encouraging wider reading and a love of reading, it needs to be allocated lesson time. What variety of activities might you include in a (broadly-defined) 'reading lesson'?

Some English departments or schools have retained 'silent reading' approaches in lessons; others have not. Discuss what they contribute and what might be their limitations. This slide does not set out to criticise 'silent reading' but to suggest that it is but one possible approach. On the other hand, if your school sets aside no time for individual reading or the discussion of books and authors, what does this say about how you value reading?

21.   Boys and reading

Issues for discussion:

- Do boys in your school read less than girls? How do you know?
- Have you ever held a discussion with boys about their reading habits and the impact of departmental practice? What did they tell you?
- Does it matter if boys read less fiction than girls?
- What different things might students learn from reading fiction and non-fiction? What might they miss out on if they concentrate on one type to the exclusion of the other?
- What might be the contribution of reading on the internet or electronic books? Can this be drawn into English lessons?

22.   Teaching the class novel

Review the range of class texts read in each year across Key Stage 3. Is it sufficient? Are you happy with the number, quality and range of novels read and studied together? Has any thought been given to progression from year to year? How might you manage this?

Do you know what texts are likely to be read in your feeder primary schools? If not, why not?! Bear in mind that texts like *Skellig* and *Holes* are popular with primary teachers.

Discuss how you teach the class novel. What approaches work best?

How do you use the study of a class novel to encourage students to read other texts? For instance, do students ever read anything other than *Of Mice and Men* by Steinbeck?

Collect practical ideas about teaching a classic novel by, for example, Dickens. What works? How do you cope with the sheer length of it? Do you think that students should encounter a novel by Dickens or Austen, for example, or is it not a priority for you?

Do all class novels need to be read and studied all the way through? Does every page need to be read together? If so, what implications does this have for reading long novels? Can anything be learnt from your approaches to Shakespeare with younger classes? Use the ideas here to draft a departmental set of guidelines on teaching the class novel.

23.   *Title slide*: How effective is the Key Stage 3 curriculum?

24.   Is your Key Stage 3 curriculum effective?

What evidence do you have about the attitudes and response of your students to the Key Stage 3 programme? Do different groups respond in the same way – for example boys and girls, or low- and high-ability students? Have you talked to them about it?

Should Key Stage 3 be regarded primarily as preparation for GCSE? If not, what principles, if any, underpin your Key Stage 3 curriculum? What would you regard as key experiences for your students at Key Stage 3?

How, if at all, do you present or describe the Key Stage 3 programme to students? Do they understand it as well as the GCSE course?

Does the Key Stage 3 programme have the same coherence as Key Stage 4? Review it in relation to: key assessment 'moments'; feedback to students on progress; outcomes from individual units; students' understanding of the purpose of units, and so on?

25.   Balancing personal and analytical responses to reading

In some schools, the first task for students in Year 7 is to draft a PEE paragraph. Is this appropriate? What happens in your department? Look at these first pieces of work. How is the subject of English presented to students?

How should students engage with texts in Key Stage 3? What opportunities do they have for open discussion or to think for themselves about a text before teachers intervene? How can students be encouraged to develop an informed personal response to texts? We know that most students value the creative opportunities in

English. What part does this play in your own curriculum at Key Stage 3? You might discuss, as an example, how often students are asked to write their own poems (as well as studying other people's poems).

The report does not criticise PEE as an approach – rather its inappropriate use at too early a stage. Discuss as a department when and how often you might expect to set PEE-type tasks at Key Stage 3. Are there certain types of writing for which PEE is not an appropriate response?

26.   Progression and continuity at Key Stage 3

You will need to have your curriculum 'map' available for KS3 to discuss with colleagues. Review the choice of units from year to year. Is there clear progression and continuity? Does it matter, for example, if there is no poetry or Shakespeare unit in one of the years?

Now look at progression in a particular area. For example, review the poetry curriculum in Years 7 to 9. Does it seem coherent? Are skills developed systematically from year to year? Does it include any poems that you would want all students to encounter? If you move from narrative poems in Year 7, for example, to war or animal poetry in Year 8, is there a clear rationale for this?

How often do you review the overall programme for each year of Key Stage 3 or the individual units in the scheme of work? Are the texts used up to date and engaging? Do you ever get students' response to the units?

Does the Key Stage 3 programme offer a strong foundation for students' later needs in English and literacy? Are there opportunities to secure the so-called basic skills of literacy for most students?

27.   The overall balance of provision at Key Stage 3

Use the discussion to focus on each aspect listed in the slide. They tend to be the most commonly under-represented aspects of National Curriculum English. Is each fully taught across Years 7 to 9 in your department?

Speaking and listening are sometimes not planned for explicitly enough. Do you have a clear programme for developing students' oracy skills as well as their understanding of issues such as Standard English, dialect and accent?

Identify how you develop students' speaking and listening progressively across Key Stage 3. Do you have a clear and explicit programme?

28.   *Title slide*: How can you best promote literacy across the curriculum?

29. Literacy across the curriculum

You might wish to invite the school's literacy coordinator, if you have one, to this discussion or, alternatively, a member of the senior leadership team.

The report does not suggest that English departments will necessarily lead literacy work in schools. That is a decision for each school to take. However, it is clear that the knowledge within the department about literacy is an important foundation on which to build.

You should first consider if literacy is an issue in your school. This will reflect attainment in English for all students but also for particular groups. Do boys have more significant weaknesses in literacy? What about students who are entitled to free school meals, or those for whom English is an additional language? You should also consider feedback from other teachers about the extent to which students are able to access their curriculum.

30. Whole-school action to promote literacy across the curriculum

You will need to visit the good practice site and print off the two examples. This is best done in advance of the meeting, giving teachers the chance to read both and make a few notes. You could focus on either case study or both. They have distinct and separate reading and writing emphases:

- Don Valley (a reading focus) www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120126

- Aston Manor (a writing focus) www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/136882

The discussion should centre on whole-school strategies – such as a school literacy coordinator, a working party, formal links with the librarian, whole-school approaches to marking, training for departments, a school policy, focused literacy support for individual departments, targeted intervention in literacy, or particular arrangements in Year 7.

31. Teaching literacy within lessons across the curriculum

Discussion around this slide would be informed by inputs from other departments. Training materials have been provided on literacy for inspectors and these are available on our website here: www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/110125. They are worth checking out. They include a checklist for inspectors to consider when observing any lesson. This is as follows:

- Are key terms and vocabulary clear and explored with students to ensure that they recognise and understand them? Are they related to similar words or the root from which they are derived?

- Do teachers identify any particular features of key terms and help them with strategies for remembering how to spell them or why they might be capitalised (such as 'Parliament' in history or citizenship)?

- Do teachers remind students of important core skills: for example how to skim a text to extract the main elements of its content quickly or to scan a text for information about a key word or topic?

- Do teachers make expectations clear before students begin a task? – (for example on the conventions of layout in a formal letter or on the main features of writing persuasively)

- Do teachers reinforce the importance of accuracy in spoken or written language? (for example, emphasising the need for correct sentence punctuation in one sentence answers or correcting 'we was…' in students' speech)

- Do teachers identify when it is important to use Standard English and when other registers may be used? (for example, in a formal examination answer and when recreating dialogue as part of narrative writing)

- Do teachers help students with key elements of literacy as they support them in lessons? Do they point out spelling, grammar or punctuation issues as they look at work around the class?

- Does teachers' marking support key literacy points? For example, are key subject terms always checked for correct spelling? Is sentence punctuation always corrected?

The other point to consider here is that literacy should support and not replace learning in subjects other than English. A geography lesson, for example, will only be effective if students learn about geography. A lesson simply spent testing students' ability to spell some key geographical terms is of limited value – especially if the students do not understand the terms!

32. Moving literacy forward

Ideally, this discussion will be informed by feedback from other departments (or the school literacy coordinator). Particularly good use could be made of a literacy audit that asks other departments to identify where they would most need help and what particular literacy/oracy skills are most important in their subjects.

Possible (practical) ideas might include: marking, spelling, subject vocabulary, strategies for reading, support for writing, how to use (and move beyond) writing frames, encouraging better oral work from students, and teachers' questions.

The role of the English department is crucial. What do you think it should be? Are there any dangers in the initiative being seen as 'English' if led by the department? How might the department take on an advisory and consultancy role? The outcome for this unit should now become a plan of action for improving literacy in the school.

33. *Title slide*: Summary and conclusion

34. Conclusion; next steps to improve English

The pack should have provided several opportunities to draw up or add to a subject action plan. If not, this is your last chance!