

ANGUS COUNCIL
EDUCATION COMMITTEE

25 APRIL 2000

"STANDARDS AND QUALITY IN SCOTTISH SECONDARY SCHOOLS 1994-97 : ENGLISH" –
A REPORT BY HM INSPECTORS OF SCHOOLS

REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this report is to seek the Education Committee's approval of proposals to take forward in Angus schools the recommendations made by HM Inspectors in the English "Standards and Quality" Report.

1 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Education Committee:

- (i) notes the terms of this report
- (ii) notes and approves the detailed proposals for action outlined in the attached report of an Angus Working Group which comprised teachers of English, teachers of Modern Languages and school librarians.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 "Standards and Quality in Scottish Secondary Schools 1994-97: English" was published by HM Inspectors in March 1999.
- 2.2 The report, while recognising that much good work occurs in English departments across Scotland, makes clear that there is "much room for improvement in key aspects of this major area of the curriculum". Detailed recommendations for improvement are outlined in the report and are considered in detail in Section 2 of the Angus Working Group's report (see Appendix).
- 2.3 Perhaps the major recommendation made by HM Inspectors is the **need to improve the quality and quantity of writing undertaken by pupils in S1/S2**. The urgency with which the Inspectorate views the importance of improving this aspect of learning and teaching is reflected in the publication in December 1999 of a further report "Improving Writing 5-14". The Angus Working Group has taken account of this report in its deliberations and detailed proposals in respect of Writing are outlined in Section 5.3 of its report (see Appendix). These proposals include further development of the recently produced Angus resource pack "The Write Process" – this is a programme of study designed to improve the development of 5-14 Writing skills.
- 2.4 The proposals for action in response to the deficiencies identified by HM Inspectors have also taken account of a plan of action provided in the report of national seminars published jointly by HMI and the University of Strathclyde in March 2000. These seminars were set up to address the key recommendations made by HMI to improve the Standards and Quality of Learning and Teaching in English.
- 2.5 In taking forward the Council's own action proposals, Head Teachers and Secondary Teachers of English will be encouraged to take into account:
- the emerging national strategy to support learning and teaching in English
 - the existing range of sound advice and guidance in relation to 5-14 and Standard Grade English as well as major national staff development materials currently in preparation
 - the experience to date in implementing Higher Still English
 - the need to promote "continuous writing" skills across the curriculum in S1/S2
 - the action plan approved by the Education Committee in October 1999 (Article 4 of the minute of that meeting refers) in response to the Modern Languages Standards and Quality report by HM Inspectors
 - the common ground and common concerns that exist between English teachers and teachers of Modern Languages
 - the pilot project in one Angus cluster to promote an effective means of English and Modern Language teachers co-operating in the teaching of "knowledge about language"
 - the support which school libraries and school librarians can provide in promoting literacy skills

3 CONCLUSION

The Education Committee is asked to approve the attached proposals of the English Working Group and to note that these are likely to make a significant contribution to ensuring that Angus Secondary Schools respond positively and purposefully to the recommendations for improvement in the teaching and learning of English made by HM Inspectors.

4 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

5 CONSULTATION

In accordance with the Standing Orders of the Council, this report has been the subject of consultation with the Chief Executive, the Director of Law and Administration and the Director of Finance.

JIM ANDERSON
Director of Education

NOTE: No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report.

Appendix

Response to *Standards and Quality in Secondary Schools 1994-1997: English* (HMI, 1999)

1 Background

1.1 *Standards and Quality in Secondary Schools 1994-1997: English* was published by HMI in 1999, and summarises findings from a range of inspection evidence gathered between 1994 & 1997. It is important to emphasise that the report is largely positive and comments favourably on many aspects of English teaching throughout Scotland. However, it identifies important development needs and there is an expectation that these will be addressed by schools and their authorities in the context of a national action plan contributed to by key players such as the SQA and SCCC.

1.2 An Angus Council working group was set up in December 1999 to:

- Consider the issues raised and the recommendations made by the HMI report: *Standards And Quality In Secondary Schools, 1994-1997: English*.
- Recommend appropriate steps to be taken by the Authority, Secondary Schools and teachers in taking forward the recommendations.

1.3 The group had representation from among secondary teachers of English, secondary teachers of Modern Languages and secondary school librarians.

2 Recommendations of the Report

2.1 The report does not conveniently summarise its many recommendations. Instead it uses the PIs identified in *How good is our school?* to structure its analysis of good practice and development needs. The main development needs identified include:

2.1.1 *Listening and Talking*: These are often neither directly taught nor planned for and frequently suffer from poorly structured tasks, insubstantial topics and lack of purpose.

2.1.2 *Reading*: There is very little encouragement of reading for enjoyment or independent reading, and limited demand for extended reading of *any* kind. Children are encouraged to give superficial responses to texts and there is inadequate teaching of specific skills. (e.g. note-making)

2.1.3 *Writing*: There is a need for many more opportunities to write at length, for different *kinds* of writing and tasks in *contexts* which interest and stimulate the children. Standard Grade and Higher suffer from minimalist teaching towards the assessment.

2.1.4 *S1 and S2 courses*: Attention needs to be given to continuity and progression from P7 to S1, and to planned progression in the two-year common course, meeting the needs of individual children (in particular *able* children) and maintaining interest and challenge throughout the first two years of secondary school.

2.1.5 *Departmental management*: Although ethos, resources and leadership were said to be good or very good in most departments, there is a need to improve self-evaluation, development planning and staff

development and review, and to focus these on key aspects of *learning and teaching*.

- 2.1.6 *Awareness of Language*: Limited attention is paid to making children aware of language as a system which can be manipulated into meaning and from which meanings may be made, despite copious guidance over the years. This manifests itself most obviously in less than adequate use of linguistic conventions in writing and also in limited appreciation of the writers' craft.

3 The National Strategy

- 3.1 HMI have developed a national strategy linked closely to *Improving Writing 5-14*. They will also be inviting education authorities, teacher education institutions, SCCC and other possible providers to create materials and plan and implement programmes of action/staff development over sessions 1999 to 2002.

- 3.2 Four new staff development packages will be provided to all schools, education authorities and TEIs as part of the *Staff Development for Effective Teaching* programme (SDET) and these will be available for the start of session 2000/2001.

They will include:

- *Effective Teaching of Reading, 5-14,*
- *Effective Teaching of Writing, 5-14,*
- *Effective Teaching of Reading, S Grade and Higher Still*
- *Effective Teaching of Writing, S Grade and Higher Still*

- 3.3 The Universities of Glasgow and Strathclyde have been commissioned to write material to support teachers in developing their own awareness of language and confidence in teaching children about how its forms and structures contribute to meaning. These packages are intended to enable teachers of both English and Modern Languages to reinforce one another's work. The emphasis will be on language use in Listening, Talking, Reading and Writing integrated within the range of activities undertaken in well-planned 5-14 programmes in primary and secondary schools, in Standard Grade and in the Higher Still programme.

- 3.4 As well as materials on reading, writing and awareness of language, other providers of curriculum development are invited to consider what is needed to address other key issues. These include the teaching of listening and talking, planning for increasing challenge and progression over S1 to S2 and S3 to S4 and effective exploitation of the Higher Still framework to ensure appropriate challenge and progress for students in S5 and S6.

4 The Context for Action

- 4.1 Angus Council Education Department, in furthering its general commitment to raising standards and quality requires, in this case, to take into account

- 4.1.1 The large quantity of good local and national advice on teaching English already extant through 5-14, Standard Grade and Higher English developments.¹

¹ A selected list of good quality resources and advice is attached to this report.

- 4.1.2 The action plan of the cross-sectoral Modern Languages Working Group already approved by the Education Committee. (Report No 996/99)
- 4.1.3 The introduction of Higher Still (four schools in 1999 to 2000 and the other four schools in 2000 to 2001) English departments report that the internal assessment régime and "Critical Listening" offer significant challenges.
- 4.1.4 The need to explore coherent and progressive strategies for teaching talking and listening.
- 4.1.5 The need to carefully examine the causes of underachievement among boys.
- 4.1.6 The current national strategy and the materials being produced as part of it.
- 4.1.7 Common ground and common concerns that exist between teachers of English and teachers of Modern Languages.
- 4.1.8 Cross-curricular opportunities to develop reading and writing skills in ways which the children can perceive as consistent. In primary schools this is likely to mean exploiting opportunities to use and teach listening, talking, reading and writing through such subject areas as Environmental Studies or Religious and Moral Education. In secondary schools opportunities should be sought through a range of subjects including, for example, Social Subjects, Science and PSE.
- 4.1.9 The relationship (and differences) between knowledge about language in modern foreign languages, and awareness of language in the native language
- 4.1.10 The importance of school libraries, librarians and information systems to aspects of English such as reading and writing for information and reading for enjoyment.

5 Proposed Action to be taken by Angus Council Education Department

5.1 Listening and Talking

5.1.1 Offer further staff development using existing materials such as *Talking About Poetry* (Standard Grade Support Materials, SCCC 1990) and *Talking about the Novel* (5-14 Support Materials, Tayside Regional Council, 1995) to support good practice.

5.1.2 Identify good practice in Listening, particularly at Higher Grade, and prepare materials for sharing. This may include critical examination of some materials for Media Studies, in view of the requirements of the *Critical Listening* component of Higher Still English. There is likely to be merit in contacting practitioners outside Angus for additional ways of supporting listening and improving its credibility.

5.2 Reading

- 5.2.1 Await the development of HMI packages on the *Effective Teaching of Reading* and offer support to departments in implementing them.
- 5.2.2 Seek out and disseminate good practice in establishing a "culture of reading" in English departments and other departments and recognise the considerable contribution which can be made by school libraries, and which continues to be made by events such as the *Angus Book Award*.
- 5.2.3 Encourage increased involvement of libraries in cross curricular departmental liaison and of librarians in the management structure of schools in the form of appropriate contributions to management and departmental meetings
- 5.2.4 Gather good practice from Angus Schools on the *consultancy* role of librarians and seek to maximise their contribution to learning and teaching, especially as regards:
- expertise in ICT
 - interaction with children and the development of study and information retrieval skills
 - consultation with departments and other groups in the school on selecting fiction for the school library
 - promoting reading among boys
 - promoting *Reading for Enjoyment*
 - promoting *Reading for Information*
 - advice on sourcing and organising information
- 5.2.5 Exploit existing materials in developing checklists and posters to support the development of investigative skills and note making.²

5.3 Writing

- 5.3.1 The main concerns raised in *Improving Writing 5-14* do not differ substantially from the 1984 report, *Written Work in Scottish Secondary Schools*, which was complementary to *Writing Matters Across The Curriculum*, SCRE, 1983. All of these draw attention to the following concerns regarding the teaching of writing in both primary and secondary schools.
- In both primary and secondary schools children are given too few opportunities to learn about extended writing across the curriculum.
 - The lack of a "writing culture".
 - Too much time is spent on repetitive grammar exercises, which have no appreciable effect on the children's writing, at the expense of actual composition.
 - There are inconsistent understandings among teachers of the process of writing including drafting and re-drafting.
- 5.3.2 There is a clear need to engage children in discussing the elements of successful writing which include *awareness of purpose and audience, research, content, ordering, development, drafting and redrafting*. The re-drafting process suffers from carelessly produced first drafts and teachers, tutors and parents who give *excessive* support. Teachers will benefit from re-consideration of re-drafting.

² See attached *Watch Your Language*, poster and teaching notes originally published in *Awareness of Language in Standard Grade English*, SCDS, 1988.

5.3.3 There is merit in re-visiting earlier support materials in this regard. *Watch Your Language*, which was produced in 1988 as advice relating to Standard Grade English and *Knowledge About Language*³: derived from the 5-14 Guidelines are simple yet profound sources of advice which may well be a useful agenda for discussion between English and Modern Languages teachers. It will also be instructive to re-visit the comprehensive *Assessment Criteria* and *Skill Sheets*⁴, which were provided by the 5-14 Language Standing Group in the days of Tayside Regional Council. (Copies attached.)

5.3.4 In English some pupils ironically produce better quality work under exam conditions than for a folio with consequent implications for managing the writing process. Donald Graves in *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work* (1983)⁵ advocates the use of "conferencing," which entails regular discussion with the children about writing as it progresses. Other advice by practitioners such as Sue Ellis and Gill Friel⁶, and Colin Peacock⁷ should be purchased and it may be worthwhile to engage these authors to provide in-service support for teachers. It is clear that good practice exists and should be capitalised upon.

5.3.5 In assessing writing, teachers:

- often process *huge* quantities of children's writing with little focus
- do not pay enough attention to making *positive* comments
- offer comments which are largely ignored or quickly forgotten by children!
- often try to indicate *each and every error* in the children's work, which especially demotivates and demoralises those children whose writing most needs improvement.

Moreover:

- children tend to be more interested in the *mark* or *grade* than in the teachers well-intentioned written advice
- they compete against each other. "What did you get?" is more important than "How can I write better?"

5.3.6 Early feedback from *The Write Process* suggests that the quality of imaginative writing has already improved appreciably in those primary schools, which have adopted the pack.

5.3.7 There is evidence of good practice in writing at Standard Grade where stimulating and relevant contexts are used; for example the exploitation of work experience to write letters of application and CVs, or the use of contexts which are of personal interest to the student whether imaginative or informative/persuasive.

5.3.8 In the light of these, it is recommended that the Short Life Working Group already convened to consider *Standards And Quality In Secondary Schools 1994-1997: English* should become a steering group with a specific remit for supporting the teaching of writing 5-14.

³ The requirements of 5-14 regarding *Knowledge about Language* are appended.

⁴ *Assessment Criteria* and *Skill Sheets* are appended.

⁵ *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work*, Heinemann, 1983 is advocated in the HMI report in section 4, pages 17 to 19. There is a number of copies in ERS, Bruce House.

⁶ *Learning to Write, Writing to Learn*, Sue Ellis and Gill Friel, SCCC, 1988. (Note also Scholastic Writing Workshops by the same authors.)

⁷ Colin Peacock, *Teaching Writing*, Croom Helm, 1986

The group should be augmented by the addition of individuals with expertise in primary teaching and early intervention.

5.3.9 The function of this augmented steering group will be to oversee the following action plan as it progresses over the next two years:

- Address the improvement of writing across the curriculum by raising awareness of the issues with senior managers and 5-14 co-ordinators.
- Await the development of HMI packages on the *Effective Teaching of Writing* and offer support to departments in implementing them.
- Promote writing and a “writing culture” as a means of learning and of improving learning skills and encourage teachers to spend less time on repetitive grammar exercises which have no appreciable effect on the quality of the children’s writing
- Promote more consistent understandings among teachers of the re-drafting process including *awareness of purpose and audience, research, content, ordering, development, drafting and redrafting*.
- Critically evaluate local and national support materials already in circulation with a view to reinforcing their use in schools.
- Consider critically the *Assessment Criteria and Programmes of Study* (“Skill Sheets”) which were provided by the 5-14 Language Standing Group in the days of Tayside Regional Council with a view to recommending their use.
- Seek out good practice and disseminate it.
- Support teachers in developing assessment practices which are focused, formative, positive, encouraging and give effective feedback helping to identify next steps and establish individual learning targets.
- Critically examine commercial resources, such as the *Scholastic Writing Workshop* with a view to establishing a list of recommendations and in-service support. Consider extending *The Write Process* to cover *Informative* and *Personal* writing at all levels from A – F and offer joint primary/secondary staff development activities.

5.4 S1 and S2 Courses

5.4.1 Initiate discussion of all relevant matters in the English and Modern Languages Curriculum Advisory Groups. Other CAGs may become involved from time to time as appropriate.

5.4.2 Evaluate S1 & S2 programmes of study and support their re-design where necessary, with particular regard to meeting individual needs, ensuring progressive challenge and acknowledging prior learning.⁸

5.4.3 Re-examine the value of the *5-14 Skill Sheets* and *Criteria for Assessment* (Tayside, 1995 & 1996) in promoting continuity, progression and good assessment practice between P7 and S1.

⁸ This process will be informed by the report on S1 -2 provision currently in preparation by Dr Brian Boyd of Strathclyde University and Professor Mary Simpson of Northern College.

5.5 Departmental Management

- 5.5.1 Encourage Principal Teachers of English to use the audit mechanism derived from the present report, initially in the Curriculum Advisory Group and later in their departments.⁹ It is likely to be appropriate at a later stage to involve Senior Management, especially the 5-14 co-ordinator and other groups of departments.
- 5.5.2 Conduct an Evaluation of existing departmental management to identify and develop structures to support coherent, consistent and progressive learning experiences for all children, especially in S1 and 2.
- 5.5.3 Support senior managers working with Principal Teachers to improve departmental management by:
- Promoting consensus on policies and practice relating to coverage of the curriculum, demands made on pupils' output and deadlines for their work.
 - Supporting an ethos of continuous improvement including rigorous monitoring and evaluation of learning and teaching.
 - Helping to develop rigorous self-evaluation and supporting departments in addressing the priorities identified.
 - Extending the good practice of moderating assessment at Standard Grade and Higher into S1 and S2 and with primary colleagues.

5.6 Awareness of Language

- 5.6.1 Re-examine the *5-14 Skill Sheets* and *Criteria for Assessment* (Tayside, 1995 and 1996) and their use in promoting continuity, progression and good assessment practice.
- 5.6.2 Fulfil the recommendation of the Modern Languages Working Group to establish a pilot in one secondary school (Brechin High School) with formal links between the English and the Modern Languages Departments. This should be strongly supported by the senior management team and the authority and should involve:
- One teacher (not necessarily promoted) from each department sharing information about the work of their departments and current development work, especially as regards Awareness of Language.
 - Occasional joint departmental meetings.
 - beginning to establish agreed approaches to language awareness and seeking consensus on linguistic terminology
 - exploiting the common ground which undoubtedly exists relating to language acquisition and awareness of language
 - extending the good practice of establishing a common editing code for written work, already in place in most clusters, to promote consistent expectations and practices across the secondary curriculum

⁹ A Copy of the audit is attached.
USER

- reporting to the two CAGs and considering the feasibility of occasional joint CAG meetings
- Revisiting *Watch Your Language (Standard Grade English Support Materials, 1988)* to benefit both departments. An adapted summary edition prepared for modern language use could be modified for use in other departments to improve writing across the curriculum.
- Promoting consistent cross-curricular approaches to writing and language in general by drafting a poster derived from *Watch Your Language* for display in classrooms and in the library.

6 Possible Resource Commitments

In pursuing the action plan set out above there will be merit in considering resource options which may include:

- seconding a staff tutor to provide direct support to clusters, schools and departments.
- agreement about dedicated supply cover to release teachers to work on in-school developments not least of which will be the joint pilot referred to in 5.6.2
- the establishment of Local Support Groups to develop and/or adapt key resources including:
 - Listening Resources
 - Reading Resources
 - Material to support Investigative Learning and Note-making
 - Extension of *The Write Process*
 - Skill Sheets (Programmes of Study) and Assessment Criteria
- the involvement of EDS Personnel and/or external consultants to evaluate Departmental Management