

# STRATEGY OR STRAIT-JACKET?

Teachers' views on the English and mathematics strands of the Key Stage 3 National Strategy

FINAL REPORT

Study commissioned by the  
Association of Teachers and Lecturers

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The Association of Teachers and Lecturers exists to promote the cause of education in the UK and elsewhere, to protect and improve the status of teachers, lecturers and non-teaching professionals directly involved in the delivery of education, and to further the legitimate professional interests of all members.

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## ▲ Dedication

This report is dedicated to the memory of Terry Furlong (1942-2002), a major and inspiring figure in English teaching for more than 30 years.

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## ▲ Acknowledgements

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Finally, our most heartfelt thanks must go to all the teachers, together with some advisers and consultants, who have provided us with continual feedback and responded cheerfully to our many requests for assistance on top of their heavy teaching loads. Without them, we would have nothing to say; we only hope that we have been successful in conveying aspects of both the unity and the diversity of their voices so that they may play a key part in the national debate.

**Margaret Brown**  
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**November 2002**

## ▲ Foreword

The Labour Government in its first term of office felt it had made an excellent start in its mission to raise standards by launching the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies in primary schools in 1998/9 and 1999/2000 respectively. Evaluation studies showed that these Strategies were implemented much as intended in virtually all schools, and were well received by most teachers and parents (with teachers especially welcoming the Numeracy Strategy). However, the additional work that had to be undertaken by teachers to deliver the implementation in a rushed timetable was found to be considerable, and these initiatives undoubtedly contributed towards triggering the current concern over workload. It is only now that the 2002 targets for performance in the Key Stage 2 tests have been missed in both subjects, and the results of more critical independent research studies are surfacing, that some deeper questions are being asked. These questions concern whether the claims made about the expected effects of the Strategies, on the basis of which they were sold to teachers and the public, were justified.

It was not surprising that, in view of the apparent initial success of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies in primary schools, it was decided to extend the policy to secondary schools under much the same management. The first stage in this Key Stage 3 Strategy incorporated the mathematics and English strands, following on from the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies and with very similar features. However, it was clear that secondary schools, with their specialist teachers, acute staffing problems and more critical stance would provide a very different milieu for centrally-directed change. Secondary teachers were also concurrently involved in changes to GCSE and AS/A2 courses and examinations, so it was far from clear that they would see Key Stage 3 reform as a major priority.

When the pilot scheme for the mathematics and English strands was announced it seemed important that there would be some independent evaluation in addition to that of the HMI. We were therefore very pleased to be approached by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers to carry out this study so that we could record the voices of the teachers who have had to grapple with implementing the strands alongside their other work. In particular we felt we had complementary strengths; the Association of Teachers and Lecturers provided access to teacher expertise and a wide knowledge of current educational policies and their effects in schools, whereas we had particular expertise in the teaching and learning of mathematics and English at secondary level, and of evaluating the National Numeracy and Literacy Strategies at primary level.

We fully expected there to be some opportunity for evaluation of the national pilot, to which we could contribute, before the nature of the mathematics and English strands was determined for national implementation. This was not to be however, since as soon as the

pilot training courses were completed it was decided to go ahead the following year. Nevertheless, we have welcomed the opportunity to feed into discussions between the Government and the teacher unions, and to meet with personnel involved in the Key Stage 3 Strategy to report our results as part of a frank exchange of information and evidence.

We have undertaken this enquiry in what we hope is an open and constructive fashion and, as well as reporting on the situation in schools, have also been keen to indicate implications for future reforms based on the evidence. Although the samples in this study are not large, we feel that the research contributes the voices of teachers to the process of educational change, something that has sometimes been sadly lacking in the past.

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The Key Stage 3 National Strategy forms a major part of the Government's policy on education. The initiative aims to work across the Key Stage 3 curriculum with the stated objective of wanting to 'transform standards in the early years of secondary school'. The policy has five focal areas, or 'strands' – English, mathematics, science, information and communications technology (ICT), and teaching and learning in the Foundation subjects (TLF) (basically, the other subjects in the statutory curriculum within this Key Stage).

A pilot of the English and mathematics strands began in September 2000 in 17 local education authorities (LEAs) across England. This was followed a year later by the national launch of both these strands. The nationwide rollout of the science strand began in the summer term of 2002 and the remaining two strands were launched in September 2002.

This study, commissioned by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, and representing primarily (though not exclusively) the views of its members, has focused on two years of implementation in pilot schools of the English and mathematics strands.

The key features of the Key Stage 3 Strategy that are common to both English and mathematics are briefly described below.

- 1 **The provision of a 'Framework for teaching'**  
These large documents present the curriculum in the form of numerous specific learning objectives within 'Yearly teaching programmes' that specify the content that is appropriate for Years 7, 8 and 9. The Framework also provides a range of advice on pedagogy – more pace and structure in lessons is called for, and interactive teaching directed at the whole class is advocated.
- 1 **Catch-up/Progress units for students below Level 4 on entry to Year 7**  
This was a key feature of the Strategy pilot at the time of its launch. Catch-up aims to get as many students who have achieved Level 3 in their Key Stage 2 tests to Level 4 by the end of Year 7. Springboard 7 was provided as a resource file in mathematics to help teachers to achieve this aim and Progress units were provided to English teachers. 'Progress tests' – basically a repeat sitting of Key Stage 2 tests in Year 7, conducted at the same time as these were held in primary schools, were provided to secondary schools in order to assess the level attained by these students.
- 1 **Literacy/numeracy across the curriculum**  
Schools were asked to provide school-wide INSET to their staff in order to develop a more coherent delivery of literacy and numeracy skills, and to encourage other subject teachers to be aware of strategies that they could use to achieve this.

**1 Training/professional development**

An extensive training programme was developed to disseminate information to teachers about the kinds of changes envisaged within the Strategy. Key Stage 3 consultants were recruited within local education authorities to run these training programmes. Supporting materials, including exemplar video clips of teaching, were provided centrally by the Key Stage 3 Strategy team within the Department for Education and Skills.

**The Research brief**

Our research outline was to monitor and evaluate the unfolding implementation of the pilot of the English and mathematics strands, focusing particularly on the impact of this on teachers and pedagogic practice, and teachers’ perceptions of its impact on students and their learning. The study has followed the implementation over two years (2000 – 2002). Findings on the progress of the Strategy through the first year of implementation were published in an Interim Report (Furlong, Venkatakrishnan and Brown, 2001). This Final Report focuses on how the implementation of the mathematics and English strands has proceeded in the second year. Evaluation is based primarily on completed questionnaires and telephone interviews with members of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers who were teaching in schools in the pilot authorities. These were conducted at various points through the year, a feature that facilitated an understanding of how the forms of implementation of the Strategy were being modified gradually in response to teachers’ assessments of efficacy in classrooms.

The data collection schedule over the second year of the pilot was structured as shown in the table opposite.

	MATHEMATICS	ENGLISH
Autumn term	Questionnaires to members: 35 responses.	Questionnaires to members: 20 responses.
Spring term	Telephone/e-mail interviews: 10 conducted.	Telephone/e-mail interviews: 10 conducted.
Summer term	Questionnaires to members: 21 responses. Telephone/e-mail interviews: 3 conducted.  Three pilot LEA interviews: 1 group interview with teachers from five schools and an interview with a consultant  1 individual interviews with six teachers from two schools and interviews with consultants  1 individual interviews with two teachers from two different schools.	Questionnaires to members: 10 responses. Telephone/e-mail interviews: 10 conducted.  Focus group: four teachers from four pilot LEAs participated.
Number of LEAs covered	Responses gained from 15 of the 17 LEAs participating in pilot.	Responses gained from 14 of the 17 LEAs participating in the pilot.

This study aimed to provide a critical overview to both teachers and policy makers on the ways in which the teaching and learning of English and mathematics are changing through the implementation of the Key Stage 3 Strategy. The short time interval between the start of the pilot projects and the national launch of these two strands left little room for evaluations of the pilot to feed constructively into schools involved in the national rollout. Nevertheless, this report provides a picture of implementation that points to specific aspects of the Strategy: those that teachers within the pilot have viewed as being beneficial, and also those that they have identified as being problematic. Teachers’ comments on features within their departments, schools and education authorities that have either facilitated or hindered their attempts to develop teaching and learning are also included within the analysis.

The three key elements of the English strand of the Key Stage 3 Strategy are:

- 1 the Framework for teaching English in Years 7, 8 and 9
- 1 a Catch-up programme of progress units for pupils below Level 4
- 1 the development of literacy across the whole curriculum.

It is worth summarising these again before detailing the findings of the research.

The Framework is a list of learning objectives for literacy and English. It covers reading, writing, and speaking and listening and the objectives are further sub-divided into those operating at the word level, the sentence level and the level of the whole text. These objectives are not directly tied to national curriculum levels, although progression from Levels 4 to 6 is built in to the objectives. Although the national curriculum for English (Curriculum 2000) contains similar objectives at the whole text level, it does not specify in detail what should be taught at the word and sentence levels. The Framework therefore aims to help teachers by giving advice on planning, either for a whole year, a few weeks or an individual lesson. It suggests four-part lessons with a starter activity, an introductory phase, a development phase and a plenary session in order to increase the pace of the lesson and involve most pupils. The folder of training materials covers such topics as whole class learning and teaching, planning, writing, speaking and listening, spelling, and differentiation and support. It also suggests particular teaching strategies, materials and resources.

The 'Catch-up' or 'progress' units are a range of strategies designed to raise the attainment of pupils who enter secondary schools at Level 3 or below in English. To assess their progress, these pupils are then asked to sit 'Progress tests', designed and marked externally, to ascertain whether they have now reached Level 4 (which is the level thought necessary to benefit adequately from the secondary school curriculum). In addition to this, schools are encouraged to arrange 'booster classes' for Year 9 pupils to help those at Level 4 reach Level 5 in the national tests.

Literacy across the curriculum aims to involve teachers of all school subjects in appropriate ways in the development of pupils' literacy skills by building a coherent approach to the matter across the whole school. Schools were provided with key objectives in reading, writing, speaking and listening, and spelling and vocabulary, for every pupil in Years 7, 8 and 9. They were encouraged to develop a coherent strategy to achieve these objectives by developing appropriate management structures, policies and training programmes. As a result, many more materials have been produced for promoting literacy across the curriculum. Most of the teachers in the study were interested in the possibilities they presented.

## ▲ Summary of interim results, first year

Many of the teachers in the sample welcomed the way in which learning objectives have helped them to focus on helping their pupils develop a wider range of language skills and greater confidence in using them. However, many were concerned about the number and complexity of these objectives which they felt were likely to take up so much of the available lesson time that it would be impossible to give enough time to important activities such as extended writing or reading and reflecting on whole literary texts such as a full-length novel, a play or even a long poem. There was interest in adopting and experimenting with particular teaching strategies such as guided writing and modelling writing with pupils, but the four-part lesson structure with a starter activity, an introductory phase, a development phase and a plenary presented problems of timing. Teachers reported that the suggested strategies had often been difficult to adapt for use in a class of pupils with widely differing needs who work at different speeds.

Most teachers reported spending very large amounts of time reviewing and rebuilding schemes of work. They had to adjust assessment and monitoring systems and develop new formats and materials to fit in with the Framework. Time had to be found for teachers to go to training meetings, to set up meetings to communicate what they had learnt to other teachers, and for them to meet together to devise new units of work and lesson activities. All this had to be done quickly and put huge pressure on staff. Some schools were able to provide free periods so that teachers could more easily meet together to do all this in school time, but most teachers found that the other pressures of the new AS/A2 syllabuses and Key Stage 3 and GCSE examination classes meant that the work had to be done outside school time. Problems of staffing obviously contributed significantly to these pressures.

The picture which emerged of the training was very mixed. Some teachers felt that their LEA-based consultant had been helpful and supportive, but many others expressed dissatisfaction with the initial training they had been given, feeling that it had been authoritarian and patronising in tone, making any sort of discussion or open exploration of the issues impossible. Many said they would have appreciated model schemes of work, such as those produced by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), much earlier in the pilot. They had almost all made some use of the 'progress materials' designed to help lower attaining pupils in Year 7 and about half of them had made quite a lot of use of them. They felt that the pupils enjoyed them but were unsure about whether they had really contributed to any measurable progress.

Almost all the teachers in the sample were critical of the Optional tests. They disliked the style of them, feeling that they were neither valid nor reliable, and they resented the time it

took to mark them and the inadequacy of the advice given. Many people also commented on the sharp differences in style and content between them and the tests used at Key Stage 2 or Key Stage 3.

Different teaching styles had to be employed when preparing pupils for the tests and the transition from one year to another was made additionally complicated.

Overall, teachers in the sample had all found something to interest them in the Framework and welcomed the concept of a literacy strategy that was cross-curricular. Although many of them had been daunted at first by its prescriptive nature and the way the training was delivered, they were looking forward to adapting the ideas which they had found useful to their own situations.

### ▲ Summary of results, second year

Many of the concerns expressed by teachers and noted in the Interim Report were again emphasised in the questionnaires to which teachers responded in the second year of using the Framework. However, there was a distinct sense that it no longer seemed threatening – that familiarity with the ideas behind it was making them feel more comfortable. They were able to enjoy the fruits of all the hard work that had been essential in the pilot year and to see that the Framework could be used in a positive way without forcing them to abandon the teaching methods they believed in, and which they found useful with their particular pupils. Almost all of them were now implementing the Strategy in Year 8 as well as Year 7, but only two of them had extended it to Year 9.

The main findings follow.

- 1 The Framework's emphasis on structure was generally thought to be useful and effective. Although the four-part lesson was not considered appropriate for every lesson, teachers had adapted it in their own ways and intended to go on using the format.
- 1 Teachers were divided as to whether the Framework's emphasis on the need to get more 'pace' into the lessons was helpful or not. Many felt that it disadvantaged both the most able and the least able pupils.
- 1 Few teachers felt that their lessons had become more interactive since implementing the Framework – indeed, some felt that they had become less so.
- 1 There is considerable doubt among teachers as to whether the knowledge that pupils gain from focusing on the objectives is then embedded in their writing and reading.

- 1 Teachers welcomed the emphasis on language but felt the Framework's order of word level, sentence level and then text level proposed a misguided approach to the learning of reading and writing.
- 1 In the second year of implementing the Framework, teachers felt more relaxed about keeping only what they found useful in it.
- 1 Implementation of the Framework requires a significant increase in resources and therefore in funding.
- 1 The teachers were unanimous in their view that the Framework's emphasis on language was undervaluing the literature entitlement in the national curriculum. There is widespread regret that covering all the objectives in the time available would exclude the reading of whole novels and teachers would prefer to sacrifice some of the objectives rather than lose this.
- 1 Teachers would have liked more emphasis on speaking and listening in the Framework.
- 1 Although teachers felt that their use of the Framework had extended pupils' awareness of language, they were not convinced that standards in reading and writing had actually improved overall.
- 1 More work needs to be done to provide clearer methods of differentiating more precisely between various levels of ability.
- 1 The progress units have been limited in their effectiveness and need further development.
- 1 The emphasis on literacy skills across the whole secondary curriculum and the materials provided has been strongly welcomed and, in the second year of implementation, are proving effective.
- 1 The assessment tools which accompanied the Framework were deemed inadequate. In particular, the optional tests were greeted with derision – they were seen as being irrelevant to the learning and achievement of pupils.
- 1 The training provided varied from one LEA to another, but had been generally useful.
- 1 The difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff in schools was reported to be a major obstacle to implementing the Framework successfully.
- 1 The workload of teachers using the framework in years 7, 8 and 9 was considered to have been excessive in the first year but more manageable in the second year of implementation.



## The findings

Information about the way teachers of English now regard the Strategy has been collected from their responses to the questionnaires, and from interviews conducted in person and on the telephone. It is clear that, in the second year of implementing the Strategy with Year 7 and extending it to Year 8 (and sometimes to Year 9), teachers find the Framework less intimidating. The large number of objectives seem less like hurdles on a race course, and more like useful props and signposts. Many of the teachers have commented that the teaching methods are much the same as those they have always used, just differently arranged, and familiarity with that arrangement has made them bold enough to take up the ideas which suit them, leaving those which do not. Nevertheless, the Strategy has shaken up the way in which the curriculum is perceived and presented. In some schools in the sample this change looks as if it will be short lived, but in others the impact has been sufficient to radically alter the balance of skills taught, the perceived progress of the pupils' learning and the assessment which follows it.

We shall start by presenting some of the ways teachers felt the Framework had made an impact on their teaching.

### Impact on teaching and learning

#### *The four-part lesson structure*

Half the teachers in the sample said they regularly used the four-part lesson structure, beginning with the starter activities and finishing with the plenary. The other half were equally divided between using it often and using it occasionally. Only two of them felt that this format had invariably led to more clearly structured lessons, the others felt that it was only appropriate or useful with certain sorts of topic. In the telephone interviews, several teachers said that they had become more aware of the need to structure but that the four-part lesson was very 'bitty'. Following is a typical response:

'The four-part lesson is not a favourite – it feels like a strait-jacket and I am confident that all 'thinking' English teachers will eventually have the courage to loosen the ties as appropriate'.

'Starter' activities also seemed to present problems:

'The original enthusiasm for all singing, all dancing starter activities – mainly word level stuff – has waned. The sheer practicality of producing, storing, sharing, collecting lots of cards, white boards, pens, sponges, bits of paper etc has ground us down. However, the idea of a good, quick, focused and active opening has stayed with us. Now that we are giving Year 8 the NLS [National Literacy Strategy] treatment we are feeling much braver about planning starter activities which fit more sensibly into the lesson and don't necessarily require an hour's preparation'.

Many people commented on the difficulty of fitting starter activities into ten minutes and preventing them from taking over the whole lesson, although one teacher commented that:

'Most lessons begin with some sort of 'starter' activity – good lessons always have done. We use specific NLS [National Literacy Strategy] approved starter activities in about 50 per cent of our lessons in the relevant year groups'.

Another said:

'We teach sentence level stuff in starter sessions, building on grammar skills taught at other times in the week. I use Hodder Starter OHTs. Quick, easy to plan and effective'.

These activities were only felt to be useful if they could be clearly tied into the subject of the rest of the lesson and there was some doubt about whether the skills which could be taught in these starter sessions really became embedded in the pupils' minds so that they transferred them to their writing. Some teachers also said that the plenary often turned out to be rather limp and that the concept of dividing a lesson into parts needed rethinking altogether if it was not to be disruptive. One teacher, who felt it was her duty to keep closely to the prescribed structure, explained a typical dilemma:

'I can't go on reading *Treasure Island* with Year 7 for more than 20 minutes because if I don't stop and do something else, I'm not fulfilling my obligation'.

One or two people felt that the group work was difficult to manage and that more individual or pair work was needed:

'The independent part of the lesson has proved a stumbling point. Ours is a pleasant school with generally well-behaved children. However, the notion of being able to work in a concentrated fashion with one group during this phase of the lesson has been met with responses ranging from disbelief to derision. We have seen it work in primary classes and some of us are prepared to try it, but the dynamics and relationships are different at secondary level'.

However, the emphasis on structure in the Framework was generally appreciated and, in the second year of implementation, most teachers seemed to be responding to it confidently. One teacher said:

'The Strategy has helped us to consider a wider variety of approaches and shapes to lessons'.

However:

'We would always abandon a plan to a lesson if something really worthwhile but unplanned was happening'.

### *The pace of lessons*

Half the teachers in the sample felt that the emphasis on pace in the Framework had made a significant difference to their lessons and the other half felt that it had made some difference. Many of them felt that the pace of their lessons had improved and that they were more aware of pupils' attention span, but that it was important to have some slower lessons as well as the 'pacy' ones in order to suit the material and ability range of pupils. However, there were some negative responses:

'The emphasis on pace is unhelpful. Weaker pupils are often hustled along too fast; more able pupils who might wish to explore an idea are required to move on'.

'What is meant by 'pace' to those who are responsible for the Strategy may not be the same as what is understood as 'pace' by good, practising teachers'.

### *Interactive lessons*

When asked whether the Framework had led to their using more interactive teaching styles, half the teachers in the sample said that it had made only a little bit of difference, two of them said it had made no difference at all and only one said that it had made a significant difference. It has sometimes been claimed that the teaching style introduced by the Framework has led to more pupils taking an active part in the lessons, but when asked if their lessons were now more interactive teachers seemed surprised – even perhaps taken aback – at the idea that their lessons had not been interactive before:

'We have always assumed that interaction is a central part of good English lessons'.

Only one teacher said that the structure of the Framework made pupils more active participants:

'There is more opportunity to give a response. Even a quiet little girl has to answer a question'.

Some people, however, felt that there had been a reverse effect:

'My teaching is rather didactic now. I feel as though every activity has to be justified and has to have a demonstrable outcome'.

'If anything, Strategy lessons are teacher dominated'.

However, one teacher described the Framework as 'brilliant' because it had made her more reflective as a teacher as well as making her pupils more active participants in the classroom activities, and another said that it had given the pupils more opportunity to respond and helped them to be proud of their own learning.

### *Impact on pupils' learning*

All the departments represented in the sample had adopted some form of three or four-part lesson structure when piloting the Strategy. Many of them had found advantages in having to change their teaching style to fit in with the Framework, but most of them also expressed strong reservations about its long-term effect. They agreed that the Framework helped children to write more efficiently and achieve a better variety of skills, but that pressure of time meant that there were fewer opportunities to write imaginatively. They felt that much of the writing was more or less a matter of filling in the blanks on a writing frame and that spontaneity was lacking. Extended writing was difficult to retain. Similarly, since there was not enough time to do any extended reading, responses to literature were in danger of becoming more mechanical, less reflective. Far from having improved their thinking skills, pupils had fewer chances to reflect:

'There's not enough thinking in English now. That's one of the things that have gone out with the lack of a text. It's all the sort of English which reaches an end. It's not open ended. It's almost as if you taught English in a foreign country, as though you are teaching linguistic skills only.'

Serious doubts were expressed about the extent to which the skills taught in short portions of the lesson then became embedded in the development of the pupils' skills:

'When you're actually trying to teach them something like participles it's very difficult to do it in ten minutes and you don't get the time to revise, revisit it or embed it. That's the big weakness of the Framework. It doesn't do embedding. It does visiting, ticking it off and, if you can be seen to have done those things, it is assumed that children will become more literate'.

However, there were signs that, in the second year of using the Framework, teachers were being encouraged by their co-ordinators and LEA consultants to be flexible in their approach. They now feel more comfortable in taking up the ideas which work for them and not worrying about the rest:

'You take from it what is good and the methodology, if properly used and not hysterically clung to, is good. Yes, our lessons have got 'pacier'. There's probably more variety, but as soon as you say you can't spend as much time as you like doing on a particular book you are cutting away what is fundamental to English teaching'.

In the next section we examine the way teachers in the sample perceive the change in

emphasis which the Framework has brought to English teaching and the impact it has had.

### **The curriculum in practice**

#### *The objectives*

Nine out of ten of the teachers who responded to the final questionnaire said that the teaching in their department had been very much affected, or affected to a significant extent, by the need to plan lessons to the Framework's objectives. Several of them said that they had been alarmed by the number of objectives at first because the list seemed so prescriptive, but that it had been easier to get used to them than they had expected and they were now enjoying adapting to the objectives in their own way. However, one person did say that if the Framework were to be used exactly as it should be, focusing on the objectives could be restricting.

On the whole they welcomed the emphasis on word level and sentence level, with the opportunities it gave for pupils to focus on and enjoy words, but they felt that even though the number of objectives had been slimmed down, there were still too many of them. If they were all to be covered, the time pressure was overwhelming. Some teachers, who had been used to teaching in schools where knowledge about language was not given such a high profile, felt that the Framework gave them useful guidance as to what they should focus on. Others questioned whether the objectives were the right ones for the Key Stage 3 age group. However, four-fifths of the schools in the pilot said that they based their lessons in Year 7 on specific objectives from the Framework and half of them said that their lessons were now much more precisely focused as a result of the setting out of these objectives.

#### *Schemes of work*

There was great variation in the extent to which schools had adapted their schemes of work to fit in with the Framework. In some LEAs they were written centrally and delivered to the schools. Sometimes one person would write them for a whole department and sometimes a team of about eight or nine teachers would get together and work them out for the rest of the team. Only one teacher said that her department had given up writing or revising schemes of work and now used the website's ready-made resources.

Almost all the schools in the sample said they had completely rewritten their schemes of work for Year 7 and changed their order. Only two of them said they had only needed to alter them slightly to connect them to the objectives. While some schools said they didn't alter very much, others said they were constantly rewriting them. The greatest change was to fit in the word level activities and to include much more non-fiction writing, such as travel writing, writing to persuade or advise, and media-based activities. The majority of teachers whom we interviewed felt that this was a useful expansion of the range in Years 7 and 8 and that perhaps in the past their planning of the year's work had not been

sufficiently rigorous to take in a full variety of skills. Others welcomed the fact that pupils were now being asked to explore different genres, but said that this did not necessarily lead to their expanding and developing their writing skills as such. There was also considerable anxiety about the perceived need to cover the range without rushing each topic in such a way that it seemed scarcely worthwhile. One teacher was particularly worried about this:

*'We do eight modules in a Year 7, but no class readers. We do non-fiction, poetry, myths and legends, media, history of the language, short stories, Chaucer and Shakespeare. Four weeks on each module. Each lesson is truncated by the plenary so there's less time on what you're doing. It makes it very bitty. It's quite a big change. The Framework has transfigured everything'.*

Others, however, felt more comfortable with the time constraints and felt that the need to extend their range had been stimulating.

Most people said that, having rewritten their Year 7 schemes of work for the pilot, they had not had to make any significant changes to them in the second year of using the Framework. They also said that their approach to rewriting schemes for Year 8 had been more confident. They had felt free to adapt the materials according to what they found most useful in the Framework rather than being bound by its exact specifications. Schools which had started to implement the Strategy in Year 9 were worried by the need to combine schemes which related to the Framework as well as to the modified Key Stage 3 tests. Many of their remarks suggested that they found a considerable clash between these two demands:

*'Year 9 is going to be about getting your head round new tests and Year 8 will go on the back burner again, because you haven't got time to develop schemes of work for them until you have a chance to consolidate things. You would assume that the tests wouldn't be changed until the whole country had got the first set of students through three years of the Strategy, but they're being changed just when the pilot schools have got the first year through. It makes it extraordinarily difficult. It's difficult enough for the people who've been teaching to the Framework for two years, but the people who've only been doing it for one year (in Year 7 only) are going to be teaching Year 9 in a way they haven't been taught before to get them through a test they've never seen before. It's lunacy'.*

Few people recognised any connection between the teaching strategy in the Framework and the Optional tests. Teaching to the Framework is one thing, teaching to the test is another. They can't both be done at once. Because of the huge pressure put on schools to get results in the national tests which would show up well in the league tables, teachers may be inclined to put the need to prepare their pupils for the test questions before the needs of the Framework. They feel that the problem has been exacerbated by the

notification from QCA that the tests will take a new form from 2003 onwards.

### **Balance**

Much of the debate about the usefulness of the Framework rests on the question of what the subject 'English' is for. Is it simply about using language effectively in a variety of contexts or should it be about the development of the imagination and the enjoyment of literature? Many teachers felt that although in the past the emphasis may have been too much on personal fulfilment and creativity at the expense of language skills, the pendulum was now swinging (or being pushed) too far the other way. This was a point to which many of the teachers in the sample referred. One of them quoted a comment from a teacher trainer who visited a pilot school:

*'I think it's all really impressive; the literacy is really buzzing. The thing that worries me is where's the English? I can see the literacy but where's English gone?'*

For this teacher, something was missing:

*'I think the sheer fun of it, the private reading, the ability of a member of staff to say 'I've come across this poem, it's the first time I've seen it; I want to share it with you'.'*

Although half the teachers in the sample felt that the Framework was leading to more efficient writing, three-quarters of them felt that their pupils were writing less imaginatively. Some said that their pupils were bored and that English was no longer a lesson to which they looked forward. Most people felt that they could do much less literature now and that their pupils were cut off from the 'wealth of literature'. Although one school had worked out a scheme of work which retained literary text at its core and they had not had to change the books they used, others felt that private reading had been squeezed out, that an interest in Shakespeare was being stifled and that they had to use short stories a lot because there was no time for whole novels. Several teachers remarked that imaginative writing had been weakened by the new emphasis on using literary text for analysis rather than for stimulating the imagination. Many welcomed the inclusion of more non-fiction but regretted that the concept of the class reader had gone. Novels are now used to achieve objectives and the reading is always for a purpose rather than for its own sake. This is said to be often particularly good for boys – and particularly for bright boys who love annotating texts – but it leaves little opportunity to read whole texts since the objectives in the Framework have to be achieved by selecting extracts.

In contrast to this, some teachers were very positive about the effect the Framework had had on their teaching. It had reminded them of a wider range of teaching methods and the use of technology to support those methods. They implied that they now felt their former practice had been too leisurely, perhaps too self indulgent in that it had focused on literature and not enough on language as such. They welcomed the restoration of a

balance between the different parts of the English syllabus:

*'We put more emphasis on language. This needs to happen if kids are to improve further up the school'.*

Although not everyone felt the balance had needed to be greatly altered:

*'We have managed to retain our focus on literature by using the Framework as a filter for text-based reading'.*

*'It has allowed us the opportunity to deal more specifically with language issues and activities but there has been very little change in balance'.*

### **Progression**

There were mixed responses to the question of whether the Framework had provided a clearer sense of progression in Years 7 and 8. Some felt that the built-in progression provided a clear pathway towards greater language skills along which the class as a whole could be seen to proceed and that it was a help in target setting. It made the pupils more aware of writing techniques and they gained a sense of their own progress. Others felt that this was too simplistic a view. It was all very well to go through a list of objectives, ticking them off as one did so and introducing the vocabulary of grammatical terms, but pupils did not often connect this hastily gathered knowledge with what they actually wrote themselves, so there was no real progression in the long term. For less able pupils particularly, the study of word and sentence level as discrete elements which led up to text level rather than following on from it was a bar to meaningful progress. It meant that their understanding of the point of what they were learning was so slight that it never became embedded in their consciousness and there was seldom time to return to a lesson on a particular point, embedding it by repetition, before rushing on to the next objective.

### **Differentiation**

The teachers in the sample were from schools with different types of intake and different ways of grouping their pupils. One was a selective boys' school, another a selective girls' school. The others were comprehensives, mostly organised in mixed-ability classes, but sometimes using some form of banding, sub-grouping or withdrawal classes to support either the very talented or the less able pupils.

Sometimes the materials used were differentiated but only to a limited extent. Among those who taught mixed-ability classes there was some concern about the difficulty of giving the able children sufficient opportunity to go into a subject in depth. It was feared that they got bored and frustrated by the need to move swiftly from one part of the lesson to another. On the other hand, the pace of the lesson, which is a fundamental principle of the Strategy, was thought to be bewildering for the slower learners. They were often presented with too

many activities giving them half understood information which there was no time to embed or return to with sufficient frequency. One person remarked that although the Framework had, in some ways, raised the standard of the children at the top and in the middle of the ability range, it had definitely hampered those at the lower end. On the whole, teachers felt that at first they had seen the Framework as a move away from differentiation, but now, in their second year of teaching it in Year 7 and their carrying it on into Years 8 and 9, they were looking at ways of developing more differentiated materials within their schemes of work.

### ***Progress units***

Nearly all of the schools in the survey had made some use of the progress materials, designed for use with pupils in Year 7 who had not yet achieved Level 4. Several teachers said that they had had to pick their way through them and that they had not used the phonic unit because it did not seem appropriate to pupils of that age. They said that what was intended to take only 20 minutes, in practice took 60 minutes, and they were doubtful about the effect the tasks had in raising standards of literacy. In many schools they were used with small groups of pupils and delivered by the literary coordinators. One teacher expressed surprise that it should ever have been suggested that this type of teaching could be undertaken by a learning support assistant. They might not have the experience needed to 'push' the disadvantaged children who make up a high proportion of those who need to catch up:

*'You need an understanding of what is the essence of what you're trying to put over. You need your professional expertise to get the best out of twenty minutes'.*

The general consensus was that the units were only really useful with very small groups and there were problems in finding a time for pupils to do them. After the initial enthusiasm at having something specially laid on for them, many pupils resented having to stay behind after school, which was the most common arrangement. The alternative was to withdraw them from their mainstream lessons. This meant that they would be missing out on what the rest of the class did and would be perpetually struggling to catch up with that.

### ***Literacy across the curriculum***

When teachers were asked whether they thought the Strategy had helped to improve literacy across all school subjects, the answer was very positive. English teachers felt that people teaching other subjects were starting to realise how important it is to have a coherent policy across the whole school to raise standards of reading and writing. One said:

*'There's a sense that we are all working towards the same end in our methodology – in our thinking about what we're doing, in the way we conduct lessons, pace lessons, in the way we assess, in a general sort of way'.*

They referred to the fact that children could find 'key words' everywhere, including on their mouse mats and that writing frames had been introduced in almost all subjects to help them with extended writing. They felt that the materials for cross-curricular literacy were well thought out and that attitudes had changed. There were still some teachers of other subjects who felt that it was not their job to correct things, like punctuation and spelling. They were often so taken up with delivering the content of their subject that it was difficult to get them to think of the language in which it was expressed. However, the Strategy had certainly made a big difference in encouraging teachers to aim for higher standards of reading, writing, speaking, listening, spelling and vocabulary in all subjects. Teachers in the study felt that now, in its second year, the Strategy was about very much more than just basic literacy and numeracy, that it was about everything that goes on. One said that the teaching in every year – not just Year 7 – had been 'energised'.

### ***Resources***

Almost all the teachers said that they had needed a huge increase in resources in order to reorganise their schemes of work. Without the extra money (which all pilot schools had received) they did not know how they could have done it. They also stressed that funding would need to be continued in order to proceed with the work. They now had equipment such as white boards for the pupils, OHPs and screens and flipboards. This was very important:

*'Money made a huge difference, because we could equip every classroom with the means to deliver what we were supposed to deliver. We could all have white boards. It became quick and fun. It has enabled teachers to adapt their methodology quite quickly'.*

They also needed tape recorders and audiotapes, video recorders and videotapes as well as computers, printers and constant access to photocopiers. Materials for the starter activities in particular had taken a lot of money and time. Schools had had to buy resources such as laminated card, filing cabinets and storage boxes. In order to present lessons with more emphasis on language, they had had to buy dictionaries and books on language. They also needed a greater variety of non-fiction texts and different types of literary texts which fitted more appropriately into the new schemes.

### ***Assessment and testing***

All the schools in the sample had well-developed systems in place for monitoring and assessing pupils' progress. Most of them felt that, with Key Stage 2 results in front of them and with Key Stage 3 tests looming in Year 9, pupils should have the first two years of the secondary education as free from timed tests as possible. It was the norm for each child's portfolio of work to be assessed at regular intervals and in many cases this was backed up

by a short test at the end of the year. The requirement that, in the first year of the pilot, pupils must do 'optional' tests in both reading and in writing in Years 7 and 8 was not, therefore, greatly welcomed. The progress unit tests on the other hand could be used by teachers in the pilot schools in any way they wanted. Several schools used parts of them in an informal way so that they gained some extra knowledge of their pupils' progress without adding to their sense of failure.

### **Progress tests**

Progress tests, which are taken by pupils who have entered secondary school with a Level 3 in English, are intended to ascertain whether they have reached Level 4 before the end of Year 7. The idea is that they should work through the progress units and then sit the Progress tests. In the first year of the pilot, the Progress tests were exactly the same as the Key Stage 2 tests for that year. In the second year, schools in the pilot authorities had the choice as to whether or not to administer the tests. Of the 205 schools in the pilot authorities, only 56 administered the 'old' (i.e. Key Stage 2 test) Progress tests, while 57 opted to pilot the 'new' Progress tests.

Although some teachers felt that the tests provided a useful goal for pupils, more than half felt that they were unsuited to the sort of children who would be taking them. Two teachers remarked that, although useful, the tests were too complex for children at Level 3 and one said they were so inappropriate that they were a joke. One said that in a class of 22 children the tests suggested that, after using the progress units, two pupils had made progress, two had got worse and the other 18 had made no discernible progress. Another said that they were of little use:

*'They demonstrate very little and tend to stress what pupils can't do rather than can do. Pupils get very little satisfaction out of them'.*

Some people said that the Progress tests, which are externally marked, could only be useful in the future if the marking of them could provide more reliable diagnostic assessment and be accompanied by more detailed feedback to schools.

### **Optional tests**

Overall, just over half of all the respondents reported that they had used the Optional tests in Years 7 and 8 but very few of them felt that they were useful or suitable for their pupils. They were variously described as 'arid', 'a waste of time', 'ridiculous', 'inappropriate', 'not the sort of way to test English' and 'too sophisticated'. Only one person said they found them helpful and more straightforward than, for instance, the Year 9 tests, and another described them as 'only one step away from multiple choice'. As tests they were said to be 'ludicrously narrow and limiting' and 'too long'. Several teachers expressed bewilderment about what was being measured:

*'We've run the Optional tests twice and either those tests are not testing the Framework or it doesn't work because the pupils don't do any better than they ever did. What the tests are testing isn't what English teachers test'.*

The remark made by one teacher expresses the attitude taken by at least a third of the sample:

*'The Optionals were dire, and once we could opt out we did – even though we were bribed with the offer of free LEA marking analysis'.*

However, there were some favourable comments about the tasks on the writing paper and also about some of the reading material, which was thought to be interesting and likely to interest boys as well as girls. It was the questions used to test understanding which were criticised:

*'The reading material is interesting and well presented but the questions that are asked about it don't seem to me to allow the response that you would try to get out of children in a classroom. They cut it up in such strange ways. They ask questions about things like the use of the passive voice in a particular sentence. Some of the questions demand a level of understanding out of the range of children of this age'.*

It is not unusual for new examinations or tests to cause an outcry. When it is a case of national examinations, the teachers soon find themselves (sometimes reluctantly) adapting their schemes of work and teaching to the test, in order to get the best results for their pupils. What is confusing about this situation is that the tests are optional. Although some teachers have expressed concerns that the test results may, in future, be used for performance management purposes, for the moment at least nothing depends on them. There is no reason to adapt the teaching to the narrow demands of the test and therefore the gulf between what is taught and what the test requires the pupils to know is likely to remain wide. Test and Framework are likely to undermine each other. If, however, the tests were suddenly to be declared compulsory they would very seriously distort the way in which teachers use the Framework.

The attitude of many teachers was summed up in one response to the questionnaire:

*'We consider our own tests to be reasonably effective but still look to improve them. Optional or Progress tests have some use – it saves time not having to devise our own – but aren't fully appropriate to pupils and there are serious concerns about the marking'.*

Many teachers expressed concerns about the instructions for marking. The mark schemes were said to be 'huge and intimidating', 'horrendous', 'too complex' – but also too

simplistic because:

*'They say 'Here are the answers to this question about the text'. Nothing else will do. The whole thing about English is that there are so many interpretations that will fit'.*

On the whole the views of most teachers were summed up by the following comment:

*'We need to put an end to the Optional tests – they are horrible. English is not a mechanistic subject – it has been made objective. There has to be room for subjective response leading to real thought'.*

The actual marking of each script took up an intolerable amount of staff time, which meant that there was no time to break down the results and learn from them, so they became pointless as a way of backing up the Framework. One school decided that it was impracticable for the teachers to mark the scripts themselves and bought in outside markers, while others used LEA staff. It was clear that most teachers discounted these tests as being unworkable. The tests would have to be revised and more time and training given to teachers if they are to accept the tests and mark them themselves in future.

## Training

Most of the English departments in our survey consisted of between six and 12 experienced teachers, although this was not always stable and some schools had staffing problems (see page 22). There were various arrangements for training. Some required day release from school and were done at a centralised meeting organised by the LEA, and others were undertaken by literacy consultants visiting the schools individually.

### *External training*

Most of the teachers interviewed felt that they had had reasonable support from their LEA advisers during the first year, although two of them reported that at first they had had literary consultants who had been too dogmatic and had laid down the law about how to use the Framework without allowing teachers to question it. They felt this had been a bad introduction with a lot of valuable time wasted on irrelevant activities and they had felt de-skilled and patronised. One teacher wrote:

*'Access is quite regular, but irritatingly condescending',*

while another wrote:

*'Still too much unnecessary stating of the obvious and taking people out of the classroom'.*

One school seemed to have been offered very little training and another said that they had not had enough staff to enable them to release anyone to go out for the day on a training course. However, others said that one teacher from their department had gone out to a

training day and had then been able to come back to school and 'cascade' the information she had gathered to other members of the department. This had worked satisfactorily. There was a general consensus that training during the second year, although limited, had been more worthwhile because teachers were familiar enough with the Framework to make more use of it. Some people said they would like more training.

A common complaint was that the training had been unfortunately timed – that many teachers had had no training in advance of the time when they had to be actually implementing the Framework. Others had been surprised that there was no proper evaluation of the pilot before all schools were required to be doing it and therefore there had been no opportunity to reflect on difficulties and to learn from mistakes. Now that they were implementing the Framework for a second year and extending it into Years 8 and 9, about half of them felt there was a need for more training. When asked to comment on access to further training, a few said they had had none, or that they had had sufficient. The only real conclusion that can be drawn from these remarks is that although the provision of training varied very considerably from one LEA to another, it is important that teachers should have access to it.

### *Internal training*

In contrast, at least half the teachers in the sample said they had, at some time, received excellent support from their LEA literacy consultant who had made regular visits to the school and worked with teachers on an individual basis. Sometimes the consultant would do a demonstration lesson or take a class over for a week or so, other times they would lead the work on adapting schemes of work and mapping them to the objectives. This teamwork was felt to be the best sort of training. However, several teachers had been discouraged and demotivated by consultants who had stuck too rigidly to the letter rather than the spirit of the Framework.

When teachers were asked if they had had designated planning time in the first year of implementing the Framework, they gave answers which varied from 'none' to 'one period a week'. In the second year, when it was still needed, most said that they had not had extra time allocated in the timetable and that most of the work had to be done after school hours, although new teachers were given opportunities to go out on extra training courses. One teacher commented on the fact that young teachers had responded much more positively to the training than people who had been teaching for a long time. They tended to like the idea of the Framework which made them feel secure, and they liked being told exactly what to do. However, one teacher felt there were dangers in this:

*'As a teacher trainer I am very worried that the work I used to do with trainees on planning lessons has been made largely redundant since they find themselves increasingly in faculty areas where lesson plans are 'off the shelf'. We have to avoid the danger of training a generation of teachers who simply 'stand and deliver'. New teachers must be given the skills and understanding to plan their own*

effective lessons’.

After implementing the Strategy for a second year, many teachers in the survey said that it was foolish to think that once people are trained, the job is done. They still felt they needed more training and that now would be a good time to have it because they now knew where the difficulties lie. They felt the need for more skill in planning so that they could introduce a more coherent structure into the way in which children built up different skills in response to the objectives. It was all very well to cover the objectives, but these objectives could become too self contained so that it was difficult for pupils to transfer what they had learnt from one genre to another and teachers needed more guidance in dealing with this. One teacher cited differentiation as the thing in which she needed more training and another said that more guidance was needed as to how to make the plenary more meaningful.

It was clear from these conversations that, as the Framework becomes more established, more training will be needed to sustain its principles and prevent it becoming just a list of things that ought to be covered. Training opportunities, however, depend on adequate staffing.

## Staffing and management

### Staffing

Almost all the schools in the survey had had staffing problems of one sort or another. Experienced staff had left either to retire or because of promotion and those who had come in to replace them had not stayed for more than a year. Head of department posts particularly have become very difficult to fill. Several schools mentioned situations in which a post of head of a faculty or department had been advertised, sometimes more than once, and received no suitable applications in response. It was generally agreed that the increase in paperwork, form filling and data collection had fallen very heavily on heads of department and that the job had now become both exhausting and unrewarding. Teachers no longer wanted that sort of job, preferring either to devote themselves entirely to classroom teaching or to find one of the numerous consultancy or advisory jobs now available. Respondents in the study felt this to be a very worrying situation.

The problem was exacerbated in several of the schools by the fact that many gaps in the teaching staff had been filled by temporary staff who understandably had less commitment to the development of the schools’ schemes of work than those teachers who expected to be there for some time. This was even worse if the gaps had to be filled by agency staff (‘cover teachers’) who often changed from week to week. One teacher’s cri de coeur was:

‘Staffing crises have left us bereft of hope of development – I believe many of our children have gone backwards because of the staffing problems’.

This sentiment was echoed in at least half of the interviews with teachers.

### Workload

When asked if the workload resulting from the implementation of the Strategy was as great in the second year as it had been in the first year of the pilot, responses were mixed. Some people felt that there was more reading and more paperwork now that they were extending their use of the Framework to Years 8 and 9. For instance:

‘The workload has increased due to the need to rewrite schemes of work, but not much more than last year. There is also increased stress and insecurity caused by the feeling that established successful teaching practices may have to be altered to suit the Strategy’s requirements’.

Others said that the planning was much less onerous than last year, that although they had had to prepare new materials and worksheets the familiarity of what they were trying to change had made the process less time consuming and less worrying. Overall, however, teachers felt there was still too much to do.

Many of the teachers commented on the fact that at a time when they were having to rethink their Key Stage 3 teaching they were also coping with new AS and A2 syllabuses and preparing for new GCSE syllabuses. They had also been recently informed that there would be a change in the Key Stage 3 tests. Bewilderment was expressed at what seemed to be bad management on the part of the Government:

‘Is there one committee in one room that organises and thinks about new courses for Key Stage 4, another in another room which does the same for post-sixteen and then another for Key Stage 3? Do they not talk to each other? Why do we have to do new AS and A2 courses at the top of the school at the same time as we are piloting the literacy strategy at the bottom? They must start thinking about it from the point of view of the teachers and also the pupils who say ‘It’s always new when we get there.’’

### Support from senior management

About three-quarters of the teachers in the sample responded very positively when asked how much support they felt they had had from senior management, both in the pilot year, and in the second year. One said that as their headteacher was ‘anti-Strategy’ and they had had a good Ofsted report, they were free to select only what seemed to them good from the Framework and continue their own practice as much as possible. Several of them felt that in the second year of implementing the Strategy the senior management team had become much more interested in the promotion of literacy across the whole range of school subjects. They had been more prepared to provide money to develop whole school policies and to support the training of learning support assistants to work with special needs teachers.

### *Learning support assistants*

All the teachers involved in the research were appreciative of the work done by learning support assistants, both in helping to prepare materials, and in supporting pupils during lessons. Only a very small minority of the schools had ever required them to supervise lessons by themselves or to take small groups of pupils withdrawn from mainstream classes. It was felt to be unreasonable to suggest they took small groups of under-achieving groups of pupils through the progress units as had been suggested, since this required particular expertise in adapting and timing the units. Several schools had put considerable resources into finding high-quality assistants, and training and organising their work. Some had also put additional funding into paying them an adequate salary, but there was a sense of uncertainty about how to build up a stable team of learning support assistants, as schools often found that those who had been carefully trained in the first year of the pilot then went elsewhere in the following year when their support was most needed.

## Conclusions

New ideas are always welcome. The ideas in the Framework have not come out of nowhere, nor are they particularly new, but they are not firmly based on research evidence. They are based on the sort of teaching that has been going on in good classrooms for many years. What is new is that principles, not firmly based on research evidence, have been set out in a structured and detailed plan to be implemented in every school in England. Some teachers say this was long overdue, that there was too much vagueness about English as a subject and not enough emphasis on knowledge about language. They see it as a bold move that will not only bring new life to teachers who feel they are failing, but will provide a basis for more focused discussion about how teaching should be done. Nobody expected the upheaval involved to be instantly popular with all teachers, and many people are amazed that it has been as well received as it has. There are some who say they are confident that in the end it will raise standards, transform teaching and learning and produce a curriculum relevant to young people's lives. They say things like:

*'Our work on the Framework has made us think. Despite lots of reservations, we are definitely planning and, in some cases, teaching, more effectively. Interestingly, we have found ourselves dipping into both methodology and materials from our Year 7 work to adapt for use further up the school. Modelled writing has established itself as one of those things that makes total sense once you do it and you can't understand why you never did it before'.*

That is quite generous praise. Nevertheless, the majority of teachers involved in the study had serious criticisms both about the principles behind the Framework, the way it has been put into practice, and the damaging effect it was having on learning.

The most serious and frequent comment was that studying the technicalities of a language is pointless unless you look first at the context in which it appears. Text level should come first, followed by sentence level and word level but never preceded by them. Teachers welcome the emphasis on language, on non-fiction and on different writing styles for different purposes, but they have serious doubts about whether the Framework and its prescribed approach allows the flexibility to deal with the complex language issues which arise in order to allow pupils full understanding of them. They are also severely critical of the way that extended reading and writing is being squeezed out in order to make time for the coverage of small objectives. They see the change in balance between literature and language as a definite step backwards.

Only a very few teachers felt that standards had improved because of the Framework and many expressed bewilderment about the conflicting methods of assessment. The need for a more coherent system of monitoring and assessing pupils as they progressed through both primary and secondary school emerged strongly from the survey. Transition from one Key Stage to another is not helped by the fact that the mode of assessment is so different at each stage. More needs to be made of teacher assessment (with perhaps a system of testing a carefully worked out sample of pupils each year) in order to ascertain the national standard. There is very little confidence in the tests already devised. When reflecting on the way the Strategy had been launched, a high proportion of teachers felt that it had been done too hurriedly and with insufficient preparation and training. It was felt to be unfortunate that it should have been piloted just at a time when staffing in secondary schools was going through a serious crisis and the workload on the permanent workforce was dramatically increasing. Extra money had helped, but it was frequently stressed that this extra funding would have to continue in order to pay for the extra resources and learning support assistants that would be needed to keep the Strategy going when staffing levels are uncertain.

It has been said by some teachers that the Strategy is as much about a changing workforce as about good teaching. With problems of teacher supply, and with the increasing casualisation of the teaching workforce, some people feel that many schools are going to have to rely increasingly on temporary staff, and therefore it is important to have a detailed and precise literacy strategy which everyone follows. It gives teachers who are new to a school an immediate idea of what their pupils have already covered and what they should do next. It also reduces considerably the workload of heads of department or literacy co-ordinators, because the new teacher then needs very little induction training.

Administratively this uniformity might seem to have much to recommend it. It would certainly be a way for central government to control what is taught in the schools, but it would only work if those who go into teaching were different sorts of people. At the

moment the great majority of people who decide to go into English teaching do so because they like their subject and want to pursue it, they have interests and values which they want to share with young people and they enjoy the creative process of thinking up lessons, trying them out, discussing them, and rethinking them. This process may produce problems as well as successes, but at least it is alive, and always 'on the move'. If opportunities to explore this process are reduced, the essential nature of teaching is changed and the sort of people who are willing to spend time doing it change too. When creativity is lost, English as a subject will lose its point.

If pleasure and excitement in teaching are reduced, then learning is also affected. In the first year of the implementation of the Framework, many teachers worried about how to cover the objectives without losing the interest of pupils. By the second year, their increased confidence helped them to realise how they could use it in their own ways. However, some doubts remain:

*'As the whole Strategy rolls out, I have growing concerns that we are in danger of presenting kids with five identical lesson formats a day. This can't be good. There has to be room for creativity and spontaneity. There is a danger of teachers being de-skilled if we play it by the book. I hope we will continue to have the courage of our convictions and take from the Strategy those things which we can see enhance pupils' learning. Equally, I think we should not be afraid to reject those things in the Strategy which we try and find wanting'.*

It is a reassuring statement, placing the emphasis firmly on what needs to be rejected. Teachers will continue to oppose the notion that one strategy can suit all situations, but they will find something good in any strategy, and work with that. As they always do.



## Summary of interim results, first year

The majority of schools within the first year sample restricted implementation of the Strategy to Year 7. Incorporation of the Strategy involved a range of aspects. In terms of teaching, most departments introduced more mental and oral starter activities, and more questioning of students in lessons. An increased incidence of asking students to justify their answers was also reported. Almost all departments purchased practical resources such as pupil white boards and overhead projectors that aided the move to more interactive teaching styles.

In curricular terms, about half the departments in the sample re-wrote their Year 7 scheme of work to align with the sample plans given in the Framework. This task in itself was time-consuming, but it was exacerbated through the year with difficulties in aligning textbook resources to the Framework's programme – the specificity of individual learning objectives and the revisiting of topics built into the Framework's plans did not marry up straightforwardly to the ordering of topics in many published schemes. The majority of teachers felt that the Framework's curriculum placed a greater emphasis on number work and mental skills than the national curriculum had done. The fast pace of work needed to cover the Year 7 programme was also commented on – many felt that it was leading to a superficial coverage of concepts, with extended investigational tasks falling by the wayside.

Teachers who had access to external training tended in the main to be positive about its usefulness, but the range of access across departments was highly variable. Some teachers mentioned that there was a lack of supply cover for them to attend training sessions. Lack of time to disseminate information and then to discuss and plan jointly in schools was commonly cited, and appeared to be contributing to a patchy implementation of the Strategy within mathematics departments.

The 'Catch-up' programme received mixed responses in the first year. Some teachers were positive about the focus the Strategy gave to lower attainers, and the responses that they were getting in classrooms using more interactive teaching styles. Others though were sceptical about Springboard's repeating of key concepts within previous yearly teaching programmes as a means of achieving catch-up. The poor results on the Progress tests within the pilot last year added to negative perceptions of this model of remediation.

Staffing problems were a significant barrier to implementing the Strategy in some schools. Some heads of department commented that finding personnel to actually stand in front of mathematics classes was hard enough, and negated their efforts to even begin to get to

grips with improving teaching and learning. Additionally, there were indications within the relatively small sample of more experienced teachers leaving permanent teaching posts – usually because of what they perceived as the burgeoning workload and incessant pressures involved in the job.

## Summary of results, second year

The second year of implementation of the Key Stage 3 Strategy pilot is characterised by a picture of diversity. This research suggests that the Strategy is being incorporated in a range of different ways into schools, with changes directed at different year groups within Key Stage 3. This contrasts with the first year of the pilot, where a much greater degree of common ground was apparent in terms of the actions instigated by mathematics departments and individual teachers, and where curricular organisation changes were restricted largely to Year 7.

Approximately two-thirds of respondents stated that their departments had rolled implementation of the Strategy through into Year 8 in the second year. A significant proportion of the remainder had simultaneously pushed the Strategy into Year 9 also. A small number of departments had decided to concentrate their efforts on Year 7, and refine the mechanisms that were put in place last year before moving forward more formally into Year 8. Incorporation of the Strategy into successive year groups involved a similar range of measures to those undertaken at the start of the pilot. In the vast majority of departments, the content of schemes of work was checked and modified where necessary. In about half of the respondents, this had involved re-writing schemes of work to align with the ordering of the sample plans for Year 8 (and in some cases Year 9) given in the Framework. Problems remained with finding appropriate textbook resources that could be sensibly matched to specific objectives. Some teachers stated that, in response to this, their departments were now modifying their units of work into longer, more holistic blocks that facilitated the teaching of concepts and alleviated the pressurised timescales that they had worked to in the previous year.

Almost all respondents indicated that there was a greater emphasis on number within the Framework's curriculum, and many pointed to the preponderance of number activities within the mental/oral starter. The majority of respondents indicated that lessons had become more tightly paced and more structured. Approximately half of the teachers within the sample felt that this stress on pace was leading to superficial learning, and over half stated that they no longer had the time to work on more extended investigative problems.

The changes in teaching styles that were cited in the Interim Report appear largely to have been sustained. The vast majority of teachers stated that they used mental/oral starters

regularly, and many departments said that further work was being done on the plenary this year. Teachers and consultants reported a more flexible advocacy of the three-part lesson (mental/oral starter, main activity, plenary) this year, with moves to ensure that all three aspects figure, but perhaps within the teaching of a unit of work, rather than insisting on their use within every lesson. In connection with this, the majority of teachers stated that they had become more proficient at using a variety of teaching styles in their lessons. There were indications too, of more widespread take-up within departments of different teaching styles and activities than was the case in the first year.

Most mathematics teachers have now had access to some Strategy training, although the amount of training or consultant support available to pilot schools in the second year appeared to vary widely between different education authorities. Training, where available, has also been offered in more flexible and responsive ways, with a significant number of departments stating a preference for in-school support tailored to their own priorities, rather than external training.

Springboard was used differently, in most instances, in the second year. In the first year of the pilot many schools used it as a stand-alone scheme with their lower attainers. This however, caused problems when trying to move students between sets. Additionally, several teachers expressed the view that the scheme itself sometimes missed important concepts, and that the photocopying costs involved were prohibitive. The majority of schools this year have reverted to using their own differentiated schemes with these students, with Springboard used as a dip-in resource.

Patterns of test use within pilot schools this year also showed a high degree of variation. Information from the QCA suggests that only half of the schools within the pilot administered the Progress tests (either the old or pilot new versions) this year. Within the sample, use of the Optional tests was somewhat more widespread, but some teachers stated that their departments had reverted to using either internal end of year tests or previous years' Key Stage 3 test papers. These, they felt, had the advantage of being both aligned with standards at Key Stage 3 and tiered, and hence were more appropriate for use across the student body.

The issue of staffing continues to hamper the implementation of the Strategy in a significant minority of schools which faced acute problems in recruiting permanent, and in some cases even temporary, staff. Additionally, there were indications this year that the workload of heads of department is increasing. As well as dealing with recruitment and retention issues and the implementation of initiatives, some department heads stated that in the second year they were faced with demands to start delivering improved test results at Key Stage 3. Growing frustration in this crucial role was evident. This was in spite of the fact that the majority of teachers and heads of department expressed broad support for the

Strategy itself.

Implementing the Strategy has clearly involved a broad range of measures. Specific aspects of the changes that have been made in different schools are now presented in more detail.

## The findings

A diverse range of forms of implementation of the Strategy was noted in the summary (see previous section). Mathematics departments within the pilot appear to have been much more willing in the second year to make modifications to the curricula and teaching practices that they took on board during the first year. Alongside this, consultancy support appears to have been less prescriptive this year in terms of what schools were asked to do. The focus of the research, as in the first year, has been on teachers' perceptions of the ways in which the Strategy is impacting upon their work, through its stress on transforming pedagogy and curriculum and its associated assessment tools. Teachers' views on the ways in which implementation of the Strategy is affecting students' learning of mathematics forms an important part of this section.

We begin by detailing the changes that teachers reported in their pedagogical practices over the second year, broken down into the aspects within this area that were most commonly referred to.

### Teaching

#### *Mental/oral starters*

The evidence this year points to a more widespread awareness and integration of the mental/oral starter activity into the repertoire of Key Stage 3 teachers within the pilot, with indications that this kind of starter activity is also being transferred across into teaching at Key Stage 4. In some departments, these activities have been firmly established into the routine of all mathematics lessons; in others, teachers reported that their departments were using starter activities within some of their lessons, with an encouragement to try and build in this kind of work at least once into each week or each unit of work. The teaching within these starter activities tended, in the majority of cases, to involve more questioning and interaction than was usual within the other sections of the three-part lesson. However, in a few instances teachers (and consultants) did comment that some teachers were reverting to a very traditional format in their use of starter activities – for example a ten-question mental test – but that lack of time for peer observation and follow-up made this reversion difficult to tackle.

#### *Interactive teaching*

The Framework calls for the predominant use of 'interactive whole class teaching'. The

majority of respondents said that teaching was more interactive than previously, but a significant proportion of these reported that this change in teaching style was restricted to the starter activity, with teaching in the main part of the lesson remaining relatively unchanged. More interactive teaching appeared to be associated in particular with a greater use of questioning within classrooms and where this pattern of working had been established, teachers' responses to this change were largely positive:

*'I love the activities... I'm using a lot more challenges with pupils up at the board. A group dynamic has developed'.*

Many teachers commented that moving to this style of working took time to establish with classes, and that as a prerequisite for persuading teachers to change, time was needed for peer observation, training, and discussion. Supporting resources such as individual white boards and overhead projectors also contributed to the success of this teaching style. There were also indications that the more orderly and motivated classroom culture within higher sets in some setted departments made interactive teaching easier to establish, and it was therefore more prevalent with these sets than with lower sets. Teachers suggested too that the Framework's wide-ranging emphases sometimes created conflicts for their practice. A frequent comment was that the stress on delivering a more challenging and tightly paced curriculum actually hindered the move to a more participative teaching style:

*'To cover the content a lot of colleagues are tending to use a didactic approach – pressure of time... There's a strong sense of 'pace' within lessons because clearly there's a lot of work to cover. There isn't a lot of spare time for a lot of whole class discussion'.*

Some teachers commented that interactive teaching had been in place in their departments prior to the start of the Strategy, but that the purchase of supporting resources and numeracy games had given it more focus.

The majority of teachers commented on a shift to using a greater variety of teaching styles within lessons – a shift that was viewed very positively:

*'I think it's been brilliant for our teaching. I think we're all more confident in different sorts of styles, teaching styles'.*

#### *Three-part lessons*

The plenary remains problematic to implement. Whilst some teachers echoed a consultant's view that this element was too often being 'left to chance', there were also comments suggesting that the need to cover the curriculum in lessons resulted in a shortage of time. The plenary was particularly difficult to implement in schools where lessons were less than an hour long, with this time cut further if students arrived late from other classes. As one teacher stated:

*'It is not currently realistic to have an 'all singing and dancing' three-part lesson for*

every Key Stage 3 maths lesson’.

The evidence suggests that there is less prescription of the regular use of the three-part lesson this year – a point made by teachers and consultants – than there was in the first year of the pilot. The consultants participating in the research, and some teachers, described alternative strategies that they were moving to in order to facilitate the accommodation of the three distinct elements. Among these were ‘key’ lessons within each unit of work focusing on the main objectives within that topic (in which teachers were encouraged to work interactively) and interactive starters and plenaries to begin and end each unit. This more flexible advice, focusing on the practicalities of the classroom and the curriculum was summed up by one head of department thus:

‘I often say to the people working at Key Stage 3: so long as they have a starter and a plenary in a week – three lessons – then that’s fine, because sometimes you can’t get all of it in. I want them to know that sometimes it’s better to spend longer on an active introduction of a topic and a plenary at the end than it is just to set five little questions’.

### **Structure and pace**

In the majority of responses, teachers reported that their lessons were more structured and focused than previously. This had been achieved through a variety of mechanisms – a stricter focus on the objectives being aimed at (coming directly from the Framework in some schools, but more commonly mediated via the department’s scheme of work), the need to cover more content within the timeframes dictated in the Framework’s sample medium-term plans, and the need to incorporate the three-part lesson. All of these aspects were described as figuring within what teachers felt were more ‘pacy’ lessons than was the case previously – a feature reported in the majority of the responses received through the year. The ways in which the Framework’s curriculum contributes to the issue of pacing is discussed within the *Curriculum sequencing and progression* section opposite.

### **Teachers’ responses to changes in pedagogy**

Teachers who were very positive about the Strategy and the way it was being developed within their schools often commented on similar combinations of aspects that had undergone change. In terms of teaching, the shifts that they were particularly enthusiastic about were:

- 1 a collaborative planning and development focus across the department that has been fostered by time devolved for joint Strategy training
- 1 the collaborative production of lesson plans and/or unit of work plans
- 1 more focused planning of tasks and activities used in lessons, with a greater stress on progression of learning

- 1 more interactive and ‘fun’ lessons in terms of teaching and learning
- 1 a shift away from working from textbook scheme-based work – several resources used to dip into as and when appropriate (often with significant investment put into the purchase of interactive resources).

Negative responses to teaching within the implementation of the Strategy tended to be critical of particular aspects – the stress on pace noted above, the lack of time for adequate planning and the continuing problems in finding and matching text book resources to objectives.

### **Summary**

Our findings in the first year indicated that changes in teaching tended to be restricted to personnel who had either received external training or were involved in translating the Strategy into departmental policy. The progress of the Key Stage 3 Strategy pilot into the second year points to a more widespread take-up within departments of practices relating to the initiative. These include the mental/oral starter activities and more interactive teaching. However, a much greater difference between schools was noted in the way and the extent to which implementation of different Strategy recommendations occurred.

### **Curriculum sequencing and progression**

This section considers the second major thrust of change within the Key Stage 3 Strategy – the curriculum and its structuring in the form of yearly teaching programmes within the Framework.

### **Schemes of work**

Approximately half the departments within the sample have re-written their schemes of work for the year groups within which the Strategy is being implemented. They did this to align with the content and ordering of the curriculum units within the sample medium-term plans in the Framework. Most of the remaining departments have checked their own schemes against the Framework’s yearly teaching programmes (or in some instances, against the key objectives for each year), and added in missing content. An important point to note here is that, within the sample, the task of re-writing schemes of work has largely been undertaken by one, or at most, two teachers within mathematics departments (usually the head of department and/or the second in charge). Other teachers have tended to work with the department’s schemes of work (through which the Framework’s curriculum, to differing extents, is mediated) rather than working with the Framework itself. The degree of familiarity that teachers have with the Framework therefore, remains variable:

‘I still don’t feel I have enough time to look at the Framework properly. I feel I’m

dipping in and out and haven't really had the chance or the time to grasp the whole, I think'.

Departments that went down the route of re-writing schemes in line with the medium-term plans appear to have added significantly to their workloads, not just in terms of the initial re-writing, but additionally on an ongoing basis as the content and order of these new schemes tended not to align straightforwardly with either existing, or in some cases, newly-purchased textbook resources. This factor is considered in the section *Resources* on page 37. Overall therefore, the vast majority of departments within this sample have taken steps towards covering the curriculum as presented within the Framework, in most instances working from the yearly teaching programme for the year group under consideration.

### **Progression**

The yearly teaching programme format, together with training, has clearly helped some teachers to get a much better sense of the progression of mathematical topics – one teacher who was very positive about the impact of the Strategy described the effect of this awareness on her use of activities in the classroom:

'There is more of a forward plan of where that one (the activity) is moving to'.

This suggested an improved knowledge of how to select activities in order to extend the learning of students.

### **Coverage issues**

An increase in the volume of work to be covered within the new schemes was reported by many teachers. In conjunction with this, they stated that they often had difficulty working within the Framework's suggested timeframes for each unit of work. This often resulted in a rushed pace of working, leaving teachers unable in many cases to spend time exploring concepts to greater depth:

'People do often feel that they run out of time not only to cover all the work, but also within the lessons as well. A lot of people have said to me 'I felt like I was really getting it done and then it had to stop'. So sometimes I think they are just scratching the surface when they want to get that little bit deeper'.

In the second year of the study, some departments were beginning to address this issue of a continual sense of lack of time and a rush to cover objectives by integrating their units into more holistic blocks and covering fewer units over the year. Others expressed their intention to modify their schemes in this fashion for the following year. This facilitated, or would facilitate, (they felt) a more satisfactory pace of working that enabled teachers to focus on developing students' understanding of concepts.

Interestingly, while the consultants involved in the study generally supported the more

integrated teaching of topics, they disagreed with the view that the curriculum was overloaded. They argued that the issue of lack of time was due partially to the fact that whilst the Framework had introduced more challenging, higher-level content into the Key Stage 3 curriculum, teachers within this Key Stage were unwilling to leave behind work at lower levels that students coming through now to Year 7 were already confident with – essentially that teachers were adding to the upper end of the curriculum without losing any content at the lower end. However, there was a lack of consensus on this issue demonstrated by the fact that several teachers commented on the lack of depth of students' understanding: 'Very often, students have insecure concepts'.

Teachers widely accepted that students' facility with mental arithmetic and recall of number facts had improved, and that this did allow for some time-saving in their classroom activities. The majority felt though that improvements were restricted to this area of mathematics, with a small number citing improvements in algebraic skills also. Thus, the ability to start teaching at a higher level with Year 7 was not widely regarded as feasible.

### **Expectations**

Many teachers acknowledged that the Framework's curriculum did embody higher expectations than their previous curricular formulations. Some teachers commented that they had been able to set higher expectations of what pupils at Key Stage 3 were capable of achieving:

'There are more things coming in earlier than have been expected. It forces Year 7 to do a lot more work than there's ever probably been done before'.

As earlier quotes indicate however, many did question whether it would be possible to get deeper conceptual understanding of higher level work if the stress on 'pacy' lessons continued. Where teachers were positive about being able to move onto higher levels, their comments indicated that this began with professional judgements about the levels of understanding of their classes. The Framework's setting out of the curriculum in the form of yearly teaching programmes contributed to helping teachers to extend their students' learning by enhancing (with support from Strategy training in some cases) their awareness of curricular progression. One teacher described this change with reference to one group of students that was able to move onto higher-level work than previous groups had done:

'I know the person teaching top set has definitely felt like she's pushing top set a lot further, because she had never considered, you know, top set Year 7 should be moving onto these things'.

### **Balance and breadth**

The sense of an increased stress on number within the Framework's curriculum was almost universally noted, though once again, responses to this change were mixed. Some felt that

this higher profile was necessary to improving both numerical skills and mathematical proficiency generally:

*'We do find that this constant practice of number work is necessary and beneficial'.*

Others argued that equally significant aspects of the mathematics curriculum were being sidelined through the emphasis on number – the profile and teaching of shape and space, and the proficiency of students in this area on entry to Year 7 were raised as particular concerns.

Teachers reported that within the starter activity in particular, number tasks tended to predominate unless active steps were taken to incorporate a range of topics. These were seen as lending themselves most straightforwardly to the brief format needed at the start of lessons, and were most accessible to students:

*'A quick number work activity is a good way to settle a class'.*

The issue of starters being biased towards number work was viewed by some departments as sliding into over-representation. In some cases, this had been addressed by having starters that generally linked into the main activity; others stated that they were working towards incorporating a wider range of mathematical areas, but were finding that current published resources tended to focus more on number work than other topics.

### *Conceptual versus procedural approaches*

Conflicting views were received on the approaches to learning mathematics presented within the Framework. Some teachers argued that the interactive, questioning-led teaching format, when used with the kinds of problems suggested within the supplement of examples, was actually encouraging the development of students' reasoning and problem-solving skills:

*'They have to be more analytical with how they assess, how they've attempted questions – thinking a lot more about how they've got answers rather than just doing things'.*

Others though, felt that the curriculum was driven by a much more procedural view of mathematical learning in which understanding was being relegated in the quest for efficiency:

*'There has been an increased emphasis on skills at the cost of deeper conceptual understanding'.*

The majority of teachers stated that the use of more extended investigational tasks had virtually disappeared from their schemes due to lack of time, although some teachers felt that the reduction in the use of longer investigations was balanced by the increase in the integration of reasoning within shorter problem solving tasks. On this issue there was some

evidence that, while the implementation to date had seen teachers struggling to come to terms with unfamiliar and densely packed schemes of work that had made the insertion of investigations difficult, some departments were aiming to redress the balance in the coming year.

### **Teacher support**

A significant minority of teachers within the sample felt that one of the advantages of the careful re-working and greater detail within their modified schemes of work was the support that it gave to new teachers within their departments. (A small number of teachers commented that the opposite had occurred – that the detail within their previous schemes had been lost in the need to align with the Framework.) Within the first group though, many felt that the clarity of objectives and the format of the plans helped new teachers to ensure continuity when they came in, and significantly reduced the time they would have taken previously to familiarise themselves with schemes and resources. Whilst some teachers, both this year and last year, voiced reservations about going down the route of writing detailed lesson plans, one head of department who had worked with five different supply teachers in the last year, stressed that she viewed her very detailed scheme of work as a 'baseline document' – one that would 'allow for a satisfactory basis for teaching'. She emphasised that this level of detail did not imply prescription, and that she was happy for more confident and experienced teachers to depart from the structure, but that the structure was needed in a climate of difficulty with recruitment – an area considered later on in this report.

### **Resources**

This section considers the issues surrounding the availability and use of resources within the implementation of the Strategy.

The majority of departments indicated that in the first year of the pilot, they had invested in resources to use within the starter activity – white boards, overhead projectors and number games were frequently mentioned. A significant minority had also invested in new text book schemes for particular year groups. In the second year, some departments in the sample had acquired interactive 'Smart' boards for use with whole classes. Some teachers reported though that decreased levels of funding in the second year for resources had meant that further text books could not be purchased. In some cases, there was no further money to replace the 'consumable' resources that had played an important part in interactive teaching within the first year, such as pens for white boards and photocopying costs for worksheet materials.

Matching text books to Framework-aligned schemes of work continued to be problematic in the second year for mathematics departments, with high degrees of resentment apparent in teachers' statements on the time spent in finding appropriate resources to

match objectives. One respondent described this recurring process through the year in the following terms:

'Oh, it's dreadful, yes. You do 5.2 and 5.3 and then you jump to – you don't do 5.1 just yet. But you see, the textbook has been set out logically in their view and they kind of skim over things that they've introduced earlier, but if you haven't done it in the Framework....'

The impracticality within schools of dipping into Year 8 text books in Year 7 schemes of work was also commented on – spare sets of these books simply did not exist. Some departments, in response to these problems in the first year, had moved away from work based on text books entirely. This appeared to require both confident teaching and a strong collaborative ethos, with time set aside for joint planning and the sharing and discussion of ideas. In other instances, departments had decided to revert to the ordering of topics in their previous schemes of work – an order that tended to align more straightforwardly with their existing resources.

Classroom support assistants were mentioned by a small number of respondents. In the majority of instances, they were being deployed to support the learning of lower attainers.

The following sections detail findings on the differentiation of work within mathematics departments implementing the Key Stage 3 Strategy pilot, and the kinds of provision made for Catch-up programmes.

### Differentiation

The evidence suggests that few changes had been made to the way work was differentiated within classrooms. Most teachers reported that they continued to use support and extension work as they had done prior to the Strategy's introduction. A small number of setted departments had moved to providing work for higher sets in Year 7, built around the Year 8 objectives for example, while the work for lower sets was planned around the objectives in the Year 6 (and sometimes Year 5) teaching programmes. Some teachers commented that this was not a straightforward process. One teacher, in a high-achieving school in which the scheme of work had been cross-checked with the Framework but had not changed significantly, argued that moving her top sets to working from the Year 8 programme was likely to throw their topic sequence out of synchronisation, and that this in turn would make it harder for them to move students between sets – a feature that they were anxious to retain.

On the issue of student grouping more generally, only a small minority of departments within the sample used mixed-ability grouping at Key Stage 3. Almost all of these departments had moved at least some of their year groups to setted classes in response to the Strategy. Differing reasons were given for this. In some, the need to incorporate Catch-up programmes was cited in both the first and second year of implementation. In others,

the need to stretch the more able, or difficulties in incorporating differentiated mental/oral starters within tightly-paced lessons were offered as reasons for moving to setting.

### Catch-up

This section considers the changes in the ways that the Catch-up programme was delivered.

Problems relating to the use of Springboard 7, followed by the highly negative experience for teachers and students of taking the Progress tests last year, have led, in the majority of instances, to changes in the way that 'Catch-up' programmes were organised within mathematics departments. Most teachers stated that their departments had reverted to using their own differentiated schemes of work with lower sets, with Springboard being dipped into as one of a range of available resources. The 'stand-alone' use of Springboard last year with lower attainers created a scheme which was not aligned to the programme followed by other students, a factor that had made moving between sets more difficult. One teacher who had been positive about her constructive use of Springboard in the first year, but who reverted to the departmental scheme in the second year remarked with some sadness that for lower attainers:

'Catch-up is not just closing the door, but locking them out within mathematics'.

Criticism of the Catch-up programme was not restricted to its lack of alignment with the schemes of work followed by other students, however. Many teachers disagreed with the central premise of Springboard, which simply repeats the teaching of key concepts from earlier yearly teaching programmes as a means of catching up:

'I think it is naive to believe children who are behind need more teaching of the same concepts. Children with SEN [special educational needs] need a totally different approach and content – not more of the same'.

Several teachers were also critical of the short-term view taken by policy makers in the devising of the 'Catch-up' programme, with Progress tests taken by students just two terms into secondary schooling. Many pointed out that the net result of this experience last year was that the vast majority of these students finished Year 7 with test results in hand unimproved from their levels at the end of Year 6, feeling that they had failed to make progress – that an initiative intended to encourage and motivate them was actually having the opposite effect. In relating these students to the whole student body, teachers perceived that the overall attainment gap was actually widening with the implementation of the Strategy – an issue taken up within the section *Standards* on page 43. Some teachers pressed for a longer-term focus for Catch-up – a three-year programme was suggested. Additionally, some teachers contrasted their departments' records of achieving with these students over more extended periods with the experiences of the Progress tests in the previous year:

'We've always done really well, especially at our lower levels, over the five years that

they're in the school – adding value, making a significant difference to how they can achieve in maths. And I think that by doing the Progress test just after a year – I think it's a negative thing, they just feel 'I'm not achieving'. Whereas over a longer period of time they actually see that they are getting somewhere'.

Teachers' perceptions of the effect of using these tests with their students last year has clearly impacted on patterns of use of the tests this year. The next section explores this issue.

### Tests/assessment

Responses to the use of the Progress tests last year were very negative for a range of reasons:

- 1 the low proportion of students moving up to Level 4 (approximately 10 per cent of the entry in pilot authorities) was disheartening for both students and teachers
- 1 the tests themselves were felt to be too difficult for the population of students they were aimed at
- 1 the tests were written around Key Stage 2, rather than Key Stage 3 programmes of study.

A common sentiment expressed by teachers in retrospect was that the title given to these tests was something of a misnomer, as one respondent pointed out: 'The Progress tests show no progress!'

These problems appear to have contributed to a very diverse pattern of test use across the pilot schools within the sample this year. Some departments (about a quarter of all schools within the pilot according to the QCA) were taking part in trialling the new Progress tests. A small number of respondents indicated that both the Progress and Optional tests would be used again. Others had decided to dispense entirely with the Progress tests and were aiming to use only the Optional papers in Years 7 and 8. A small group had opted out of both papers and were reverting to their prior practice of using either an internal end of year test or previous years' Key Stage 3 test papers. These had the advantage, according to respondents, of being tiered, and hence were more appropriate for use across the attainment range within student cohorts. Some teachers also felt that these tests provided more reliable results than the Optional tests, and were better indicators of Key Stage 3 test performance. At this stage, only limited information is available about the results of the tests taken this year.

The summary of test use would appear to suggest that teachers were generally more

satisfied with the use of the Optional tests than with the Progress tests. In relative terms, this would be true, but a significant minority of teachers stated that a key factor within their continued use of the Optional papers was that they were provided free of charge for two years to pilot schools, and that they would probably go back to using their previous tests next year. Concerns continued to be expressed about the suitability of the Optional tests, covering only national curriculum Levels 4-6, in particular for higher-attaining students in Year 8. Some departments stated that they were producing supplementary tests for use with these students. A small number of teachers expressed dissatisfaction with these tests on the grounds that the narrower range tended to result in a greater 'bunching' of results – that they were less able to discriminate between students on the basis of these results.

The Strategy's focus on target-setting appeared to have fed into a shift in the ways in which students' results were reported. Some teachers stated that their departments were moving to reporting students' attainment across Key Stage 3 in three bands for each Level – for example 5a, 5b and 5c, following the model now widely used in primary schools. In some areas this move was supported by education authority-wide monitoring of progress.

In the first year, the Interim Report of this study revealed a reduction in the frequency of use of internal tests, as many departments focused on integrating new schemes of work for which the tests used previously were no longer appropriate. Some of these departments have now put half-termly tests in place, while others stated that they were still in the process of working towards this.

Additional funds were provided this year to schools to provide 'booster classes' in Year 9 prior to the Key Stage 3 tests. The models of provision used within pilot schools are outlined in the following sections.

### Booster classes

A wide variety of models of provision for Year 9 students was evident even within this study's relatively small sample. A sizeable minority did use the additional funding to target support for pupils who were considered to be on the 'borderline' between Levels 4 and 5, and concentrated their teaching on key concepts within this range. Other departments spread the funding between support for Levels 4/5 and 5/6 students. Some schools used the money for additional staffing that allowed them to withdraw their lowest attainers (those below Level 4 in most of these instances) from mathematics classes over the spring term for extra help, whilst others focused on the 'Exceptional Performance' end of the attainment range. Support was offered in some departments within mathematics lessons, either on a withdrawal or in-class basis. In a small number of schools, students were withdrawn from their normal timetable for two weeks and received intensive support in English, maths and science. Teachers tended to prefer the former model of provision rather

than this latter model, arguing that it heavily restricted the curriculum for these students, many of whom were already difficult to motivate in class.

The very modest improvements in the 2002 Key Stage 3 test results (only a one per cent increase in both mathematics and English) indicates that, to date, the Year 9 booster classes do not seem to have had a significant effect on students' performance.

Due to the range of provision on offer through the booster funding and the relatively small number of teachers involved directly in teaching the Level 4/5 range students, few comments were received about the usefulness of the booster materials produced to help teachers. However, in the instances where they were used, teacher responses were generally very positive about them.

### Impact on students

The majority of respondents suggest that students are positive about the more interactive style of lessons, and are particularly responsive to the mental/oral starter activity. Teachers suggested that students' familiarity with the three-part lesson model, having experienced it within the National Numeracy Strategy in their primary schooling, did make this style of working easier to establish than it perhaps would have been previously. One teacher who was very positive about the impact of implementing the Strategy stated that it was encouraging a much more active sense of participation for students, that '...more and more of them are getting involved' – a sentiment echoed by many other teachers. Several also commented on students' increasing willingness to explain their thinking and to ask, as well as answer questions. A small number of teachers though did feel that the novelty of this style of teaching was beginning to wear off through Year 8, and that students' attitudes to learning mathematics by the end of Year 8 were largely unchanged in relation to the cohorts that went through prior to the introduction of the Strategy:

'To be perfectly honest by the time pupils are halfway through Year 8, I'm not sure there is much difference from the traditional model'.

Others however, strongly disagreed with this sentiment and stated that they perceived a more lasting commitment (one teacher described 'a more professional attitude') to learning mathematics amongst their students, that stemmed at least in part from livelier lessons that incorporated more interesting and challenging work:

'It has actually changed the way – with a lot of very challenging girls – a lot of those are turning up for maths clubs every time'.

Perhaps predictably within a climate of frequent testing, teachers commented that pupils were more aware of their levels of learning. This was viewed positively in some cases as motivating students to progress. However, some teachers were critical about the cumulative impact of continual testing on students, and felt that the introduction of what

they perceived as further externally produced, high-stakes tests via the Strategy, through the use of the Progress and Optional tests, was compounding their problems in motivating pupils to study later on in their schooling. One teacher expressed his growing concerns about motivating Year 11 students thus:

'They're blasé about the whole thing. This system of big exams at the end of Year 6, Year 7, Year 8, Year 9 and Year 11 – they've had it. You just don't get worked up about it'.

Some teachers commented that they tended to avoid a big build up to exams in Year 7 and 8, partly as a means of addressing this concern.

### Standards

This section considers teachers' views on the impact that the strategy has had on standards of mathematical learning.

Improvements in the mental arithmetic skills of students coming into secondary schools were widely reported. Teachers also commented on improvements in students' use of appropriate mathematical vocabulary in their oral work. Some teachers raised concerns however that this was accompanied by weaknesses in other areas of mathematics – understanding of concepts within the area of shape and space being mentioned most frequently. A more wide-ranging issue, alluded to earlier, was the perception that students' understanding of concepts in many areas appeared to be quite superficial, and further, that many lacked confidence in applying knowledge:

'It's a very algorithmic approach that they've got. It's not rooted in understanding'.

In some cases, teachers felt that the Framework's curriculum at Key Stage 3 was driving them, in turn, to move to a more procedure-driven coverage rather than encouraging in-depth understanding. Again, this view was strongly disputed by other teachers, however.

A small number of teachers felt that students' formal written skills were somewhat weaker than previously, perhaps due to the increased use of oral work in mathematics. One teacher indicated that the lack of written work provided a partial explanation for the popularity of the mental starter activity among some of his students, but once again raised the fact that care was needed to avoid increasing problems beyond the realms of Key Stage 3:

'Pupils generally seem to enjoy mental/oral work – particularly boys who don't have to write! Some concern about this as pupils get older and go into KS4 [Key Stage 4] – GCSEs are largely written-based exams and many pupils still have difficulty presenting their solutions in a written form'.

Another teacher, also commenting also on weaker written skills, added that perhaps this

needed to be one of the foci within mathematics at Key Stage 3.

In spite of the improvements in mental arithmetic skills, many teachers remained sceptical about the extent to which students' Key Stage 2 test results reflected their actual levels of learning. Several comments expressing concern that the degree of coaching in Year 6 made these scores unreliable as indicators of attainment were received:

'We found that some of the children must be getting pushed really hard for their Key Stage 2 SATs. When they come to us they aren't necessarily – they've achieved reasonably well, but I think some of their learning is actually quite superficial'.

Several schools continued to use an internal test (or other tests/combination of tests) to place students in sets in response to this perception, in spite of the fact that they acknowledged improvements in students' facility in number.

A final, key aspect of concern within the discussion on standards is the growing unease expressed by several teachers within this sample that, contrary to one of the central aims of the Strategy, the attainment range in schools actually appears to be widening rather than narrowing. One teacher commented that in spite of a general increase in the attainment of the intake at her school, she perceived an increasing divide between the higher and lower attainers:

'Some of the special needs pupils are just lost. The bottom end's really dropped. There is now a massive difference between them. The top and middle sets are just flying'.

This teacher commented that in her school there were lower actual levels of attainment for the weakest students on entry this year as well as a wider attainment range. A number of teachers (and one of the consultants) felt that above average students were making the biggest gains within the emphasis on whole-class teaching in the Strategy. One teacher commented that she was:

'...not convinced that the middle and less able pupils are any better prepared – many still lack confidence in class sessions'.

These comments lend weight to the opinion voiced by many teachers that to address concerns about underachievement in mathematics, a more radical and wide-ranging solution than Catch-up is required. More interactive teaching, which focuses on improving the thinking skills of weaker students rather than simply re-covering the work within earlier yearly teaching programmes is needed. As one teacher put it:

'The Strategy fails to recognise that the problem with these students is one of

cognition, not content. Low attainers are losing out'.

## Training

This section considers the role of training in the second year of the pilot.

On this issue too, a very mixed picture of practice was reported. In some areas teachers reported that there had been very little additional training beyond the first year – a shift of focus to non-pilot schools and/or schools designated as 'Phase 1' within their education authorities was sometimes given as the reason for this absence or near-absence. In other authorities though, training and consultancy support remained as an important facet of the Key Stage 3 Strategy. There were indications that in some of these areas, there was a shift towards consultants working in schools with whole departments. This was generally in response to both departments' preferences, and because of difficulties in getting release time for external training. External training remained on offer though within the majority of the authorities in which teachers in this sample were working.

The 'cascade' problem noted in the first year relating to the dissemination of information has clearly been ameliorated in contexts where in-school support has occurred, but remained as an issue in schools where access to training this year has largely been restricted to the head of department and perhaps one other teacher. Teachers continued to comment on the lack of time within schools for anything approaching an effective dissemination. One teacher spoke very positively about the effects of being allowed to go out as a department to the three-day Strategy training at the end of the first year, and contrasted this with what had happened when one or two people were granted access and then asked to feedback to the others:

'I think the fact that it was as a department definitely helped because we all heard the same thing at the same time, and just trying to cascade things in school and being given the time to do so is just virtually impossible sometimes'.

Joint access to training, either external or with the consultant in school, was talked about in particularly positive terms and was often acknowledged as the boost needed to kick start a much more fruitful style of collaborative working within departments. This paid dividends on an ongoing basis in reducing workload by fostering the joint production of unit of work/lesson plans and the sharing of resources. The teacher quoted in the previous paragraph commented that 'It saves us all doing the work four times over'.

The role of training in persuading teachers to try out new ideas in the classroom was pointed out in the Interim Report of this study. Teachers in the second year mentioned the

role of ongoing access to training in sustaining these changes – changes that otherwise were prone to being dropped within the intensive nature of the school day:

*'It would be nice to go quite regularly because you think 'Oh yes, I'll do that' and you get quite enthusiastic, and then because of everything else that's going on you slip back. So the stimulus that the training sessions give is quite good'.*

Central training sessions over this year have covered a range of aspects, with evidence that some of these aspects have followed up requests from departments of areas in which they needed support. Among these were booster classes, primary-secondary transition and data handling. Teachers' responses to the quality of training were generally positive. A small number did express frustration at the limited remit and knowledge of their consultants however, and the fact that in some instances they were unable to offer any information, guidance or support on issues that fell outside the immediate confines of Key Stage 3 – on changes at GCSE, AS and A2 levels for example.

## Workload

The first year of implementation of the Strategy was associated with significant increases in workload for teachers. This section details the effects on workload of moving into the second year.

There was little evidence of workload levels diminishing in the second year of the pilot. The majority of responses stated that workload arising from the Strategy remained unchanged or had increased over this year. Several reasons were given for this – teaching different sets in Year 7 to those taught last year and simultaneously rolling the Strategy into Year 8 was one; getting used to new textbooks was another. The concurrent pressures relating to the introduction of statistics coursework at Key Stage 4 were also mentioned. The continued inflow of multiple initiatives into schools was also a concern, and in many instances cut into the time available for focusing on the teaching and learning of mathematics:

*'I find the Numeracy Strategy excellent but would like more time to prepare lessons. This would be more beneficial than performance management and other initiatives. I am fed up with being unable to do the work I really enjoy because of endless demands from elsewhere'.*

Many teachers talked also about the increasing workload falling on heads of department in the second year, with the job of re-writing of schemes of work often done by them in isolation. At the same time, pressure to begin delivering improvements in test results at Key Stage 3 is starting to filter through. One teacher in a stable and experienced department commented that:

*'The pressure on the head of department is increasing – to the point where our very good head of department is thinking of giving up the post of responsibility'.*

## Recruitment and retention

Once again, the issue of inadequate staffing was causing acute concern in a sizeable minority of the schools within the sample. High levels of staff turnover were also mentioned more generally, with one head of department stating that one of the consequences of participation in the pilot had been the loss of almost all of the staff within his team. Strategy training input had helped many of them to move onto promoted positions in other schools faced with implementing the Strategy in the following year. A significant number of teachers felt that the Government was simply ignoring the problems of lack of staffing, and the way this impacted upon the workloads of teachers and their ability to deliver year-on-year improvements. A particularly worrying aspect of this is evidence of an increasing burden falling on the shoulders of heads of departments in the second year, many of whom spoke of the high levels of stress within the job and a desire to leave their posts. One head of department moving to an internal promotion in September described these combined pressures:

*'The Strategy will not succeed unless you've got the personnel and at the moment, it's difficult to attract those personnel. What's going to happen is that people like me will get burnt out. I would not have stayed doing the head of maths job next year. I'm just completely and utterly exhausted, and that's three years of struggling with staffing and implementing things – which I believe in, I haven't got a problem with that. It's just managing the whole shop – it's too much'.*

The Strategy is clearly just one aspect of a much wider recruitment and retention issue. As an important facet of government policy on education, there appears to be an urgent need to adopt a more proactive role in addressing this issue rather than ignoring it. One maths teacher, who was also a senior teacher and very positive about the Strategy, spoke of how her school's implementation of the Strategy had actually alleviated staffing problems there. The local consultant had provided ongoing support, and the department had been able to negotiate a significant amount of release time to focus on joint planning, a feature that had allowed them to build up a bank of lesson plans aligned to Framework objectives that were now available for use by anyone joining their team. Furthermore, the collaborative and productive ethos that had been generated through the Strategy focus had persuaded one of the supply teachers working in their department to take on a permanent post. The Strategy, the respondent felt, had '...brought people together and kept people on'.

Within this context, the role of the Strategy in responding to the problems within mathematics at Key Stage 3 in a more integrated way is apparent, and through this model,

- ▲ several of the features that teachers within the sample raised as problematic – the lack of time and staffing issues – are starting to be addressed.

### Summary of teachers' responses to the implementation of the Strategy

The findings of this research indicate a diverse, but widespread take-up of elements of the Strategy. In the majority of departments, the curriculum on offer to students at Key Stage 3 has been modified with reference to the Framework. Attempts are being made in the second year to address the areas that were seen as problematic in the first year of implementation – amongst these, what teachers described as the 'bitty' nature of more literal translations of the Framework's medium-term plans into schemes of work, and the loss of investigational work. This indicates too, that teachers are more willing this year to diverge from the Framework's prescriptions if they feel that this is in the interest of students' learning. The training and consultancy support on offer this year also reflects this more flexible and responsive approach – an acknowledgement perhaps of the importance of meeting the differing needs and priorities of schools. Teachers still perceive though that the inspection agenda is less tolerant of divergence from the 'script' – schools expecting an Ofsted inspection expressed reservations about investigating alternatives, and in one instance the head of department in a school involved in a mathematics programme that shares much in common with the Framework stated:

'I feel very exposed despite a HMI visit being positive about what we are doing. My reputation/job is on the line'.

Teachers and consultants also pointed out that their greater familiarity with translating the Framework's curriculum into schemes of work had allowed, in the second year, for a productive shift in focus to teaching. Pedagogy too this year appeared to have undergone some significant changes. Mental starters have been widely established as an important part of the learning experience of students. Questioning also occurs with greater frequency. Teachers who had established these changes within their lessons (or used them anyway prior to the implementation of the Strategy), were positive about the impact on the culture within classrooms and the learning of students.

The focus given to 'Catch-up' at the outset of the pilot appears to have diminished this year, due in large part to the negative experiences of using Springboard and the Progress tests in the first year. As such, the opportunity that was afforded within the scope of a national Strategy to make a significant difference to the mathematics learning of lower attainers appears for the moment to have been lost.

The most positive aspects of the Strategy – summarising from the views of teachers within this sample – appear to fall within two key areas. Firstly, it has begun to enhance the quality and broaden the styles of teaching within mathematics classrooms. Secondly, where teachers have been given the time and opportunity to grasp the content of the yearly teaching programmes, they have been able to use these as a resource that raises

expectations of what students can do and enhances their awareness of progression. This awareness is starting to be used to plan lessons that aim specifically to extend the learning of the students.

The teachers within the sample who were most critical of the Strategy tended to be particularly critical of what they perceived as its short-sighted approach, or even absence of attention, to learning. One teacher commented:

'They have gone for a simplistic model of teaching and learning. And if the Strategy had been aimed at enabling teachers to come to grips with what I would call an accelerated learning model, a more sophisticated learning model, and if it had equipped them with the skills and the understanding of that model, then it would have had a greater effect on quality of teaching, the quality of learning and incidentally, attainment. What they've done is, they've gone for attainment, hoping the others will follow'.

The teachers within this sample who were most positive about the Strategy appeared very strongly however to have placed this sense of accelerating individual learning at the heart of their practice. For them, the Framework – supported by training – provided an easily accessible and clearly laid out curriculum and guidance on progression through this curriculum. They found that they could use this to informally assess the learning of their students and then use to organise their future teaching:

'I like the Strategy – it gives a framework and examples to work with. It gives me a good idea of the progression students can make. I have dipped into it and found it useful to develop my understanding, and how to develop and extend at the students' level'.

Many teachers indicated that lack of time and access to training had prevented their gaining anything more than a superficial knowledge of the contents of the Framework. Teachers who have been able to get to grips with this content have found much that is useful, particularly pertaining to extending students' learning. Wider access to this information – and to a more central focus on learning and formative assessment – would appear to be a key area into which the Strategy now needs to move.



## Conclusions

The evidence of this research suggests that implementing the mathematics strand of the Key Stage 3 Strategy has effected changes in teaching and learning. The common elements of these changes on the pedagogical side were an increased stress on mental arithmetical skills and a greater incidence of questioning and interactive teaching in classrooms. Additionally, most departments had made some attempt to integrate the Framework's curriculum in the relevant Yearly Teaching Programmes into the schemes of work for the years in which the Strategy was being implemented.

Beyond these broad areas of convergence, the incorporation of the Strategy took very different forms in different departments. There was a much greater emphasis on teaching to the Framework's objectives in some departments than in others; some had already developed a bank of lesson plans aligned to the Framework that were available for use in lessons, while others worked with broad plans at the unit of work level. Interactive teaching was restricted to starter activities in some schools; in others, more participative styles were used throughout the lesson. Some teachers also commented that their departments had moved away from a textbook-based scheme as their familiarity with the Framework increased, while others stated that problems with the Framework's units had led them to revert to more textbook-based schemes.

Teachers' perceptions of a widening gap in attainment between the highest and lowest attainers both on entry to Year 7 and through Key Sage 3 are particularly worrying. Where alternatives for remediation were suggested, these tended to call for programmes that developed the more generic thinking and reasoning skills of these students, rather than delivering a tightly paced and narrowly focused scheme based on achieving Level 4 that inevitably in many cases tended to become more procedurally driven. The early assessment of these students through the use of the Progress tests was generally viewed as counter-productive to maintaining progress.

As teachers' comments in the previous section indicated, broader access to the ways in which the Framework's curriculum can be used to generate better progression for individual students appears to have the potential to be very useful. Within the pilot though, this powerful tool has so far been given limited exposure.

The simultaneous presence in schools of multiple initiatives continues to dissipate the time and energy that teachers have to give to any particular issue. Respondents' comments indicate that some streamlining of the number of policies that continue to flow into secondary schools would be likely to significantly improve the chances of an effective and meaningful translation of policy into practice.

Finally, the Interim Report of this research flagged up the critical situation of staffing in some of the departments within the sample. It should again be recognised that in many schools, progress is constrained by the need to support a shifting population of teachers. Within the relatively small sample of schools involved in this study, there were departments in which some teachers were new to teaching, some were new to teaching mathematics, and some were new to teaching mathematics in this country. There is a real danger that the resulting load on heads of department and other senior teachers of simultaneous changes at Key Stages 3, 4 and AS and A2 levels, together with pressures from targets and inspections, may harm retention and in the longer term the standards of teaching and learning that many of the initiatives coming into school are seeking to enhance.



## REFERENCES


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The Association of Teachers and Lecturers' groundbreaking study of the Key Stage 3 National Strategy sheds new light on the impact of the Government's drive to raise standards in secondary schools.

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