



**Literacy in Primary and Secondary Schools
in the Cayman Islands:**

**A Review of the Findings from School Inspection Reports
1997-2001**

A Report commissioned by the Cayman Islands Schools' Inspectorate

This report was researched and prepared for the Cayman Islands Schools' Inspectorate
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Foreword

From the inspection evidence arising from this review of literacy in primary and secondary schools in the Cayman Islands, it is evident that schools hardly need to be convinced about the central importance of literacy, or of the priority that they must give to teaching literacy. However, at the same time, the inspection findings clearly indicate that there are unacceptably wide variations in standards of literacy in our schools.

The co-existence of these two seemingly contradictory conditions - unacceptably wide variations in standards of literacy and a strong professional acknowledgement of the importance of literacy - are by no means unique to the Cayman Islands. Here, as elsewhere, a crucial point for consideration is the impact on standards of the approaches taken to teaching and assessing crucial aspects of literacy. In recent years, it seems that most English-speaking countries have judged it prudent to keep levels of literacy under review in pursuit of higher standards. Whether the means of doing so are through various combinations of statistically reliable and valid national tests, teacher assessments, or through inspection findings, it is widely agreed that the key to raising standards is the quality of teaching received by the pupils. The review indicates that, while good provision and effective teaching and learning, associated with sound or better standards of literacy, exist to some extent in all schools, there is considerable room for improvement.

It is also important to acknowledge that reviews of literacy challenge not just the professional climate and culture of teaching in the schools, but also the adequacy of national policies and provision for supporting schools in pursuit of high standards of literacy, including the quality of initial and in-service training and factors such as the levels and suitability of books and other resources for teaching literacy. School Inspectorates, too, find that reviews of literacy which draw upon their reports often prompt consideration of how well inspection methods and frameworks secure evidence to provide a reliable picture of strengths and shortcomings in the teaching and learning of literacy. In short, such reviews often provide a timely reminder not only of the importance of literacy but also of the distinct, but overlapping, responsibilities and accountabilities of all those associated with upholding standards of literacy within, and in support of, schools.

As elsewhere, policy makers and support services for schools in the Cayman Islands will need to work closely with teachers and school communities to bring about the considerable improvements in standards of literacy which the review of inspection reports suggests are necessary and within reach.

.....
Mary E. Rodrigues
Chief Inspector of Schools

INTRODUCTION

Background

1. The Cayman Islands Schools' Inspectorate was established in 1996 as an outcome of the Cayman Islands National Strategic Plan for Education. The Inspectorate is an independent office within the Ministry of Education. Among its purposes is the responsibility to develop and implement a school inspection programme that will sustain and improve the standards of learning and the quality education for the Cayman Islands; provide accurate assessments of the progress of schools in meeting the standards of quality established by the Ministry, and to make regular reports to the Minister of Education, the Chief Education Officer, and the people of the Cayman Islands.
2. By the end of March 2001, the Inspectorate had carried out 14 full inspections of schools. These inspections covered: nine primary; four secondary, and one all-age school, including three private schools as well as Government schools.

Specification for the Report

3. The Inspectorate believes that the 14 inspection reports provide a sound evidence base on which to review school provision and pupil outcomes in relation to standards of literacy. This report, commissioned by the Inspectorate, reviews the 14 inspection reports and comments, as required by the specification, upon the following features related to literacy:
 - the standards of pupils' achievements and quality of learning;
 - the quality of teaching and support for literacy across the curriculum;
 - contributory factors, including the adequacy and fitness for purpose of resources for teaching literacy;
 - any marked variations in provision (inputs) and achievements (outcomes) between phases or schools.
4. The amount and quality of quantitative, i.e. statistical, data currently available on standards of pupil achievement in the Cayman Islands are limited. In keeping with the specification, this report therefore focuses upon professional judgements contained within the published inspection reports rather than upon numerical data.
5. The report comments separately but consecutively on primary and secondary phases within each section. As far as possible, comments are matched to the criteria set out in the Schools' Inspectorate: *Handbook for the Self-Assessment and Inspection of Schools*, drawing attention to key areas for development which will help schools to improve. Comments on variations in provision and achievements between phases and schools are woven into each section of the report.

PART I: INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

International Comparisons and Concerns

6. Obviously, the drive to raise achievement and secure high standards of literacy is not confined to the Cayman Islands. Irrespective of whether countries have defined a national curriculum, literacy is invariably seen not only as part of the core curriculum but so important as to command high priority across the whole curriculum. In recent years, most English speaking countries have reviewed their policies for, and often devoted considerably more resources to, raising standards of literacy.
7. Despite this intensified focus on literacy, the question of whether standards of literacy are rising, falling or staying the same continues to be an issue of considerable debate in many countries, including the USA and the UK. This is because few, if any, English-speaking countries, seem able to produce reliable data on what is happening to standards of literacy over time. Informed debate is therefore often hampered by lack of reliable data designed to track standards. Nevertheless, there is widespread agreement that irrespective of what is happening to standards, the demands of society are not static. They are increasing. The argument runs that it is not sufficient simply to sustain standards of literacy. Standards must rise to keep pace with the demands of developing and leading edge economies:

‘Current difficulties in reading largely originate from rising demands for literacy, not from declining absolute levels of literacy. In a technological society, the demands for literacy are ever increasing, creating more grievous consequences for those who fall short.’ (Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children (1998). The American National Academy of Sciences).

8. It follows that whatever else schools do, making sure pupils are literate remains central to their purpose. Two concerns are often voiced in this context.
9. The first concern is about how well schools are responding to rising expectations for literacy. The comment by the British Prime Minister: ‘Education is our best economic policy,’ rings true for most, if not all countries. Future employment opportunities, for example, will depend upon high facility with literacy as the availability of unskilled work is much reduced, and that which remains is likely to require an increasingly literate work force. Arguably, this is even more important for small countries, such as the Cayman Islands, where a significant proportion of young people may need to seek work in fiercely competitive employment markets abroad.
10. Secondly, there is a concern associated with the modern curriculum, especially in primary schools. It is claimed that the primary school curriculum has broadened to include not only new content in subjects, such as science but also new subjects, such as information & communications technology. In many cases, classroom practice has also changed to include more investigatory learning and practical work, and less didactic teaching. In the USA and the UK, primary schools face something of a dilemma over how to achieve a broad and balanced curriculum which gives priority to literacy. On the one hand, schools are criticised for spending too much time teaching the ‘basics’ of reading and writing at the expense, for example, of arts subjects and physical education. On the other hand, they are criticised for giving less structured time to teaching key aspects of literacy than they should if pupils are to achieve acceptable standards.
11. Whatever response is evoked by these concerns, securing high quality teaching and learning of literacy in primary schools is of first importance. Research strongly bears out what common sense suggests: that the overwhelming number of pupils who achieve high standards of literacy in the primary phase makes the greatest

educational progress thereafter. The reverse is also true: pupils who have not mastered the basic skills of reading and writing by the end of their primary education find it increasingly difficult to 'catch up' and are at risk of serious under-achievement.

Research into the Teaching of Literacy

12. Not surprisingly, these widespread concerns about the importance of literacy and the priority that schools must give to literacy have fuelled much research into the most effective ways to teach those elements that are generally regarded as the main constituents of literacy, notably, reading and writing.
13. A detailed review of this research does not fall within the terms of reference of this report. However, where it is likely to be helpful, brief reference is made, within the report, to research which is relevant to the findings of inspection and the framing of inspection judgements. Research that has helped to shape highly successful national literacy initiatives is also taken into account. Foremost among these initiatives, is the National Literacy Strategy in England which draws extensively on sound educational research and good school practice to guide schools, train teachers and provide teaching and learning resources designed to raise standards in line with demanding but achievable national targets.

Literacy: what is it?

14. When they consider literacy, what most people have in mind is fluency in reading and writing:

'We are defining literacy as the ability to read and write accurately and effectively in order to accomplish socially important tasks.' (Effective Teachers of Literacy. A report of a research project commissioned by the Teacher Training Agency (England). Jane Medwell et al 1998).

15. It is generally accepted, moreover, that the degree of fluency required constitutes an irreducible minimum, or essential threshold, of 'functional literacy'. Put simply, to be less than functionally literate is to be illiterate. Thus while very few pupils, who have completed statutory schooling, may be unable to read and write at all, many may struggle to cope with the demands of reading and writing associated with their jobs and daily lives, let alone have sufficient command of print to allow them to read and write for interest and pleasure.
16. Research points to four, key, inter-dependent strands which schools must address if pupils are to achieve high standards of literacy, notably: speaking, listening, reading and writing. Clearly, the quality of pupils' learning relies heavily upon the effectiveness of the teaching they receive on each of these strands. The Cayman Islands' *Handbook for the Self-Assessment and Inspection of Schools*, acknowledges this position and requires inspectors to seek robust evidence of pupils' progress and attainment on these four strands for evaluating the teaching of English and for judging the effectiveness of literacy teaching across the whole curriculum. Although the need for attention to these four strands may seem all too obvious, as shown below, Cayman Islands' schools, as many schools elsewhere, often overlook the importance of one or more of them.
17. For the purposes of this report, optimum progress and attainment in literacy may be defined as what pupils are expected **to know, do and understand** at agreed stages of the Cayman Islands' National Curriculum for language arts and by the end of statutory education. Many pupils may exceed those expectations and achieve literacy targets before the appointed times. For schools, however, these

expectations should mark a threshold of achievement in literacy which is an entitlement for all pupils.

Information & Communications Technology (ICT)

18. In recent times definitions of literacy have widened so that it is now common, for example, to hear reference to 'computer literacy'. Schools increasingly include ICT as part of the repertoire of basic knowledge, skills and understanding which define what it means to be literate and to function successfully in a literate society. As noted later in this report, the Cayman Islands have responded well to this aspect of literacy.

Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing: Four Fundamental Strands of Literacy

19. It is generally accepted that children follow a well-trodden path to literacy in which listening and speaking skills develop ahead of, yet link closely with, those of reading and writing. In other words, the four strands of listening, speaking, reading and writing form a broad developmental sequence, with powerful overlaps between each strand, which schools need to take into account when planning their approach to literacy. Comments on inspection findings covering these four strands are set out below following the *Handbook for the Self-Assessment and Inspection of Schools*.

PART II: INSPECTION FINDINGS

A. Main findings

20. The main findings of the review are as follows:

- Nearly all the inspection reports acknowledge the hard work, commitment and application of the teachers. Good provision, and effective teaching and learning, associated with sound or better standards of literacy exist to some extent in all the schools covered by this review. However, these attributes vary far too widely within and across the schools. The single most important finding from the 14 inspection reports is that this unacceptably wide variation is pulling down standards of literacy in both the primary and the secondary sectors of education.

In primary schools, attention to developing listening and speaking weakens considerably after Year 1. In the secondary sector, standards of achievement and the quality of learning in listening and speaking vary considerably within and between schools. Consequently, standards of achievement and the quality of learning in listening and speaking do not, in general, meet expectations;

In the primary sector, standards of achievement and the quality of learning in reading are variable. All the schools give priority to teaching pupils to read accurately but they often give insufficient attention to widening and enriching pupils' reading as their abilities to decode print develop;

Considerable improvements in the quality of learning are needed in over half the primary schools if reading standards are to rise. There is a carry-over of these weak reading standards into the secondary sector such that many pupils do not recover lost ground and continue to under-achieve in reading;

In primary schools, the standard of pupils' achievement and the quality of their learning in writing suffers from an over-emphasis on copying rather than composing writing;

There are examples of good standards in writing in each secondary school. Under-achievement is often associated with a weak match of work to pupils' different but developing abilities. When compared, neither setting by ability, nor mixed-ability classes show clear advantages;

Policies on marking are not always clear, nor applied consistently in the classroom to ensure that pupils receive accurate feedback on what they need to do to improve their written work;

Most schools benefit from favourable teacher-pupil ratios and good levels of resourcing for the teaching of literacy, including computer literacy which is boosted by the expertise of specialist and peripatetic staff;

- Generally good provision for SEN in relation to literacy exists in most schools. Stronger co-ordination between the work in specialist units and that of ordinary classes is needed because the potential of specialist SEN staff for supporting class teachers is under-exploited.

Discussion and recommendations

21. Shortcomings and unevenness in the quality of teaching are almost certainly the most serious obstacles which schools must overcome, urgently, if standards of literacy are to rise. Much of this teaching must move closer to the best and focus more urgently upon securing progression in the work pertaining to literacy within and across schools, to reverse the considerable under-achievement in literacy of many pupils.
22. The teaching of reading needs to recognise that the purpose of reading is comprehension; pupils must be able to understand what they read rather than simply parrot words. Similarly with writing, they must be able to construct text to make their meaning plain to the intended audience. To achieve these degrees of fluency pupils need to master the skills of reading and writing to the extent that they can apply them automatically, and thus concentrate on meaning unhampered by constant uncertainties, for example, about basic grammar and spelling.
23. Pupils need more opportunities to increase their stock of words and write for a wide range of readers and purposes. This is not to say that attention to learning structural aspects of writing, including: grammar, syntax, spelling and handwriting, should be reduced so much as re-focused upon the pupils' own writing. The place and purpose of worksheets, and prescribed exercises, need to be kept under review to make sure they support, rather than restrict, pupils' developing abilities to write fluently and independently.
24. The substantial amount of teaching of the basic skills of literacy in most schools tends to under-estimate the importance of developing speaking and listening. The indications are that too much time is spent on a narrow range of reading and writing, de-contextualised exercises and copying prescribed notes which encourage pupils to be passive learners and 'over-dependent on the teacher for directions and solutions.' The teaching of the skills of literacy encompassing: speaking, listening, reading and writing, needs to be balanced by more teaching which encourages pupils to apply those skills to more challenging literacy assignments across the curriculum.
25. To help teachers break free from re-cycling these short-comings, there is an obvious need in most schools for a stronger, school-wide, literacy policy, better planning to establish a more balanced approach to teaching literacy, and clear guidance, supported by substantial in-service training, on how to put those policies and plans into action in the classroom. There is a core of good practice in the schools which might contribute valuably to the professional development of teachers through in-service training focused upon raising standards of pupils' achievement in literacy.
26. In summary, the teaching of literacy is more problematic than single subject teaching because achieving the looked-for high standards in literacy requires a school-wide response. Literacy is not confined to the subject of English or 'language arts': if standards are to rise, all teachers must see themselves as teachers of literacy. Where persistent, significant shortcomings in teaching exist in any subject, they will almost certainly impact negatively on the potential of the subject to support literacy.
27. To strengthen the provision and raise standards of literacy in Cayman Islands' schools, there is a need for:
 - strong national and school-wide literacy policies and better planning to establish a more balanced approach to teaching literacy;
 - clear guidance, supported by substantial in-service training, on how to put those policies and plans into action in the classroom.

C. Detailed Commentary on Inspection Findings

Standards of Achievement and Quality of Learning

Listening and Speaking

The primary reports, in general, present a favourable picture of the pupils' response to provision for developing listening and speaking skills in kindergarten, reception and Year 1 classes. Typical comments include:

- 'The teaching of speaking and listening skills is most effective in the infant classes ...'
- 'A high priority is given to language development. Standards in listening and speaking, phonics and early reading are sound.' (Under-fives)
- 'The pupils achieve skills and understanding in language arts appropriate to their age.' (Reception and Year 1).

27. However, these favourable findings are reversed as pupils move into the middle and later primary years. A clear and very important finding from the ten primary sector reports is that attention to developing listening and speaking weakens after Year 1. Consequently, standards of achievement and the quality of learning in listening and speaking do not, in general, meet expectations.

28. The pervasiveness of this shortcoming is best illustrated by the following extracts from each of the ten schools with primary-aged pupils, inspected so far:

- 'Older pupils' ability to relate information drawn from listening to text, and apply it to their own personal experience is not well developed.'
- 'Only limited progress is made in developing oral and aural skills.'
- 'Pupils' speaking and listening skills are under-developed.'
- 'A key issue (arising from the self-assessment report) is the need to promote better listening skills throughout the school.'
- '...the pupils are not often required to listen for a defined purpose, or given sufficient opportunities to respond to what they are told.'
- 'Pupils are given few opportunities to develop their listening and speaking skills.'
- 'Pupils..... are not encouraged to develop their speaking and listening skills.'
- 'Few lessons are planned with sufficient opportunities for pupils to express their views and to develop their speaking skills. Opportunities for good oral work are limited and speaking skills are below the level expected.'
- '..... much of the oral work is not sufficiently demanding. Few examples were seen of students being asked to rephrase or expand answers, to suggest and evaluate alternatives, defend a point of view or speculate.'
- '..... spoken language is largely confined to pupils' questions.'

29. In the five secondary sector reports, standards of achievement and the quality of learning in speaking and listening vary considerably within and between schools. There is considerable need for greater attention to the development and, especially, the wider application of speaking and listening skills.

30. Only one secondary report judged achievement and quality of learning in speaking and listening to be good with no major shortcomings:

'The students listen attentively to one another and their teacher. They ask questions confidently ... learning to research and record information for themselves to make presentations and develop their debating skills.'

31. One secondary school presented a mixed picture:

- 'Progress in speaking and listening is enhanced by frequent opportunities in lessons for the students to make presentations to the whole class. Through these they learn

to adapt their speech to more formal situations, and to provide a supportive but critical audience for one another. The students are not often asked to rephrase or extend comments that are initially brief and undeveloped, or reminded of the need to speak clearly and audibly. This hinders progress.'

32. Three out of the five secondary schools drew unfavourable comments:
 - 'Oral work is under-emphasised.'
 - '...in many lessons seen, little time was devoted to discussing ... in order to deduce, infer, to reason and evaluate.'
 - 'Not all pupils listen attentively and courteously to the views of other students. Students are rarely called upon to give a well-considered opinion.'
33. If standards of literacy are to rise, the importance of addressing the shortcomings in these aspects of the work, in both the primary and the secondary sectors, must not be under-estimated. Research and inspection clearly demonstrate that 'oral and aural' skills i.e. speaking and listening, are important in their own right and fundamental to the development of reading and writing.
34. In the primary sector, for example, the acquisition of phonic awareness on which reading and writing depend, requires a clear understanding, on the part of teachers, of how to teach speaking and listening skills. In order to understand the alphabetic principles of the English language and operate the letter-sound system, young pupils must be able to listen attentively.
35. Having a good model of spoken English from which to identify and reproduce words, and the component sounds of words, together with ample opportunities to sound out whole words and their component sounds accurately, are crucial for developing the abilities to decode and encode text. Pupils' progress in writing is similarly advanced through the ability to articulate well-formed sentences, drawing upon an increasing stock of words as their vocabulary is enriched through discussion and a wide range of reading.
36. In the secondary sector, the achievement of higher order listening and speaking skills also calls for greater attention to these areas. Pupils, in general, would benefit from more opportunities for discussion and debate to develop their abilities, for example, to analyse; deduce; infer; evaluate, and distinguish facts and evidence from opinion.

Reading

37. In the primary sector, standards of achievement and the quality of learning in reading are variable. All the schools give priority to teaching pupils to read accurately but they often give insufficient attention to widening and enriching pupils' reading as their abilities to process print develop. The picture which emerges ranges from high achievement, in a very few cases, to significant under-achievement in others. Considerable improvements in the quality of learning are needed in over half the primary schools if reading standards are to rise.
38. It should be noted that this variation is not necessarily associated with the levels of staffing and resourcing of the schools. In other words, some schools seem to make much better use of existing resources for literacy, such as library provision, than others. This indicates that it is often factors within the control of schools, most notably the quality of teaching and learning, which need to improve if standards are to rise.

39. The following comments from inspection reports typify primary school settings where reading standards and the quality of learning vary unacceptably:
- ‘The standards achieved in language arts range from sound to work with shortcomings. Across the various subjects, the quality of the pupils’ reading, writing, speaking and listening skills vary. In all years, the pupils read their assigned reading texts accurately and fluently, but only a few read widely or on their own initiative.’
 - ‘The majority of pupils read at levels expected for their age, and a small proportion reads above them. Nevertheless, there is a substantial proportion of pupils whose reading standards are below expectations. Few pupils read widely from choice or for their own interests.’
 - ‘The standard of achievement in language arts varies.... Many read accurately, But they do not read extensively.’
 - ‘The overall standard of reading is below expectations. Most pupils do not read widely and few have read whole books outside of the reading scheme.’
 - ‘The standards achieved in language arts range from sound to poor, and in the vast majority of lessons there are shortcomings. While a few pupils demonstrate a love of literature, many do not read an adequate variety and number of books.’
40. In contrast, a minority of reports point to schools where standards are higher and more consistent:
- ‘Children have a positive attitude to books (in the Reception Class). Standards are strongest in reading where some pupils achieve above expectations for their age by the time they leave school. Older pupils read fluently and with expression when they read out loud in class. They are enthusiastic readers of fiction and non-fiction...’
 - ‘The overall standard of reading is sound. The best readers achieve a high standard. They read fluently, accurately and with suitable expression.’
41. A disappointing finding from the primary reports is the low incidence of sustained high standards of achievement and of the quality of learning in reading. In most cases the top end of the range of achievement is reported as ‘sound’. More often than not the inspectors link depressed standards in reading with a restricted range of literature and a narrow focus on a prescribed reading scheme for pupils who are capable of reading more extensive and challenging material.
42. In the secondary sector there is a carry over of the narrow response to reading reported in the primary sector, leading not only to lack of attention to more advanced reading skills but also, in some cases, to a serious lack of general progress in literacy among the lower ability groups of pupils following transfer from primary schools. Under-achievement in reading is associated in all the secondary reports with under-expectation i.e. work that is too easy and lacking in challenge for many pupils. For example:
- ‘.. many students enter the school with weak reading, spelling and grammar skills, and this problem persists throughout the school.’
- ‘Too few students who arrive with poor initial achievements make sufficient progress to reach a secure level of literacy by Year 9.’
- ‘Their reading is generally accurate and fluent. The best students read with a good pace, expression and emphasis and by grades 11 – 12 with a deepening understanding of and involvement in challenging texts such as ‘Paradise Lost’. However, in general, students do not read widely for pleasure or for information outside of the texts prescribed in class or for assignments.’
 - ‘Teachers encourage pupils to read aloud but give insufficient guidance on how to do this effectively....While many pupils read accurately, few read with adequate use of intonation, expression and emphasis.’
 - ‘While the majority read with accuracy, few students read widely and on their own initiative or borrow books on a regular basis from the library.’

- 'The students read with understanding, but the range of their choices for independent reading is limited.'
 - 'Across the various subjects, reading aloud is often accurate and fluent, especially in the upper bands. It is seldom expressive, though some good work was seen in this area in drama. Students have a sound basic comprehension of what they read, but at all levels they need more help with advanced reading skills, such as making and defending judgements about the texts they read.'
43. The picture which emerges is one in which the skills of reading are given priority in most primary schools such that the great majority of pupils learn to decode and encode print. Schools, in general, genuinely believe that they give due attention to what they perceive to be 'basic literacy skills', and this is reflected in their self-evaluations. The inspection reports show, however, that while the basic skills of reading, such as phonic skills, are given attention, they are too often taught in isolation, for example, within the confines of workbooks and de-contextualised exercises. Many pupils are not sufficiently challenged to apply these skills to wider reading and independent writing, and so do not achieve, by the end of their primary education, the fluency in reading they need to succeed in the secondary phase of education. For these pupils, the provision in secondary schools does not always take sufficient account of their prior learning and they continue to under-achieve.

Writing

46. Obviously, a rich range of reading provides pupils with powerful models for their own writing. As might be expected, therefore, in primary schools, the standards of pupils' achievement, and the quality of learning, in writing mirror those in reading. Inspection judgements on writing in two primary schools are largely favourable; in two schools they are evenly spread between favourable and unfavourable, and in six schools they are largely unfavourable.

Typically favourable comments from inspection reports include:

'The standard of writing is sound throughout the school. Pupils produce neat, well-presented work and by Year 6 spelling and punctuation are good. They are able to construct sentences and use paragraphing at a standard appropriate to their age and ability.'

44. The central tendency in primary schools is encapsulated in the following comments from different inspection reports:

- 'The standard of writing, within the limited range required is sound ...Pupils in the junior classes have a good understanding of basic grammar and are able to produce a range of simple written work. A few were able to write creatively, but most lack a good grasp of paragraphing and are unable to write fluently.'
- 'Occasionally pupils are given extended writing assignments, but more frequently they are restricted to copying sentences written by the teacher or completing worksheets.'

45. Typically unfavourable comments are:

'In general, pupils' written work is small in volume and weak in quality.' 'Much written work is copied.'

- 'The range of pupils' written work is limited both in range and quality ...they spend a large amount of their time copying work from the board.'
- 'The teaching of grammar takes priority on the timetable and as a result other areas of language such as creative writing, poetry and comprehension are not given sufficient emphasis. In one junior class over an eleven-week period, more than twenty lessons were taught as compared to six creative writing lessons.... Generally, pupils are expected to do little more than fill in blanks or underline words or phrases.'

- ‘Across the range of subjects, most of the written work is limited in form and style and pupils rarely write reports or compositions.’
 - ‘Very little writing beyond copying notes takes place in most subjects.’
46. The standards of primary pupils’ achievement and the quality of their learning in writing therefore call for improvement. There is an over- emphasis on copying rather than composing writing. Pupils need more opportunities to draft and create text for a wide range of readers and purposes. This is not to say that attention to learning structural aspects of writing, including: grammar, syntax, spelling and handwriting should be reduced so much as re-focused upon the pupils’ own writing. The place and purpose of worksheets, and prescribed exercises, need to be kept under review to make sure they support, rather than restrict, pupils’ developing abilities to write fluently and independently. The teaching of writing needs to take greater account of the potential of rich reading as a source of models of writing for primary pupils.
47. The secondary school inspections report slightly better standards of achievement and a slightly better quality of learning in writing than those of primary schools. Two secondary schools drew largely favourable judgements, and three presented an even spread of favourable and unfavourable judgements. No secondary school attracted largely unfavourable judgements.
48. Typically favourable comments on writing from the secondary inspection reports include:
 ‘Most students write fluently and with reasonable standards of accuracy.’
- ‘The students write for a variety of purposes and readers. Most write accurately and organise their work appropriately.’
 - ‘Some students produce very good work. They speak and write fluently, organising and presenting their ideas clearly and effectively.’
49. There is evidence to show that secondary school pupils would benefit from a greater degree of attention to varying their writing styles to match the variety of tasks undertaken. In some cases they tend towards an unvarying, informal style of writing irrespective of genre. This suggests, as in primary schools, that the teaching under-exploits the study of good models of writing that pupils should encounter in their reading. For example:
- ‘The progress made by some older pupils is limited by their continued use of an informal style and colloquial vocabulary, which is not always appropriate for the different kinds of writing they are asked to produce.’
 - ‘Weaknesses in the students’ writing suggest that the department now needs to help students vary their writing to a greater extent, to meet the demands of the different genres, tasks and readerships that are involved, especially where a formal or concise writing style is required.’
50. Under-achievement in reading and writing in secondary schools is often associated with a weak match of work to pupils’ different but developing abilities. The inspection reports show that neither of the two most frequently applied forms of organisation i.e. placing pupils into ability sets for the teaching of English, and teaching pupils in mixed ability classes, guarantees high quality work that is sufficiently differentiated to match the range of pupils’ abilities.
51. Setting, for example, is not always associated with improved standards of writing for all ability groups, nor do parallel sets always receive equally demanding teaching and produce parallel standards:
 ‘Even in the higher sets students work well below their capability, frustrated by the severe limitations set upon them by undemanding worksheets and the generally slow rate of progress.’

- ‘.. sometimes sets which contain pupils of a similar ability and age, are subject to different demands and produce quite different standards of work.’
- ‘The students write fluently...In the upper sets, students spell and punctuate their written work accurately but elsewhere spelling errors increase, often quite sharply.’

52. Mixed-ability classes also display limitations in the match of work to pupils’ abilities and the teaching sometimes fails to exploit the advantages of small classes:

‘Despite the small classes, the most common teaching method is whole-class teaching, with little differentiation in the information or support given to pupils..... the pupils’ role is limited to listening and following instructions.’

‘...in most cases, despite classes that are mixed in age as well as ability, all students are taught the same topics, at the same time, and are asked to complete the same tasks. This approach limits their progress.’

53. The secondary school reports show that, while there are examples in each school of high standards in writing, irrespective of whether the pupils are taught in ability sets or mixed ability classes, schools need to exercise greater vigilance to ensure that appropriately challenging work with a clear progression is the norm for pupils of all levels of ability.

54. In most secondary schools, the marking of pupils’ written work should be of considerable help in monitoring progress. However, marking sometimes varies unduly in quality and effectiveness. Even where school policies on marking are clear and well-founded, they are not always carried through to the classroom in all subjects, though, in some cases, the quality of marking in the English department sets a good standard for other subject departments:

- ‘ The school has a clear marking policy but this is not followed consistently by the staff. Some teachers provide pupils with encouraging feedback and helpful comments while elsewhere the marking is superficial.’
- ‘ The marking rarely indicates how the work might be improved. This is a serious shortcoming. Often the students have no idea how the mark or percentage they achieved has been allocated, or which features of their work are given the most weight.’
- ‘ Teachers’ marking (in the English department) is regular and positive ...it also points clearly to ways in which students can improve their work... in the lower sets teachers place considerable emphasis on marking assignments while working alongside individual students. In the lessons where this was observed, students responded positively to this one-to-one feedback.’

55. The benefits of adhering to a consistent policy, across all subjects, for marking pupils’ written work are under-valued. Policies on marking written work and, particularly, the consistent application of them so that pupils are assured about what they do well and receive accurate feedback on what they need to do to improve their writing, need to be strengthened.

The Quality of Teaching and Support for Literacy across the Curriculum

56. Not surprisingly, the quality of teaching emerges as the ‘input’ factor within the control of the school that is most closely associated with standards of pupils’ achievement and the quality of their learning in literacy. In short, teachers’ knowledge, skills and understanding of what to teach, and how to teach it, most strongly influence pupils’ knowledge, skills and understanding of literacy. This accords with extensive reviews of research, for example:

‘ ... much of the research we have reviewed encompasses ... populations of students with varying degrees of risk. Good instruction seems to transcend characterisations of

children's vulnerability for failure; the same good early literacy environment and patterns of effective instruction are required for children who might fail for different reasons.' (op.cit. para.7).

57. The most important inspection finding in this respect is that the quality of teaching of literacy in language arts, and in other subjects, varies too widely in both the primary and the secondary sectors. For standards to rise, much of this teaching must move closer to the best and focus more urgently upon securing progression in the work pertaining to literacy within and across schools.
58. Undue variation in the quality of teaching literacy across all subjects is apparent even in the most successful primary schools:
 - 'The quality of teaching is sound or better in eight out of every ten lessons. In almost one half of all lessons, teaching is good or better. In two out of every ten lessons the teaching has shortcomings, some of which are major.'
59. Two secondary school inspection reports also typify unacceptable variations in the quality of the teaching sometimes exacerbated by monotonous whole-class methods:

'Though there are lessons in which students concentrate hard There are many where the demands are too light. Either the pace is leisurely, or the work is far too easy.'

 - 'The teaching is based on clear, but often undemanding learning objectives. Lesson pace tends to be slow and pupils are not always clear about the teachers' expectations. Whole-class teaching is the main method of instruction and exposition by the teacher is usually followed by consolidation exercises. There are, therefore, few opportunities for pupils to think for themselves.'
60. Nearly all the inspection reports, however, acknowledge the hard work and application of the teachers, with comments such as:
 - 'All of the teachers are hard working and conscientious.'
 - 'The teachers are very caring, committed and hard working.'
61. In primary schools a cross-curricular approach to teaching literacy is too often left to chance and calls for a greater degree of planning. One inspection report typified the cross-curricular response prevailing in most primary schools:
 - 'The school is aware of the need to promote literacy and numeracy across the curriculum and sound contributions are made in a number of subjects. However, the provision is often not planned, and this limits the effectiveness of the work.'
62. One secondary school English department adopted an imaginative approach to strengthening literacy through a module on Caymanian heritage. Two secondary schools demonstrated very effective support for literacy in Religious Education and Bible Studies:

'Each year group completes a module on Caymanian heritage, using books written or produced locally, along with materials developed by the department in collaboration with the National Archive. The material is of a high quality and has the potential to contribute to the students' language development in many areas.'

 - 'Cross-curricular links between English and Bible Studies are well developed. The subject makes an important contribution to literacy through oral reading, discussion, different types of writing and the study of Christian literature.'
 - 'The (RE) lessons make a valuable contribution to developing the students' oral and note-taking skills.'
63. Drama, too, is a subject where some secondary school departments support literacy effectively:

- 'It (drama) makes a direct contribution to the students' language and personal development...'
 - 'They communicate effectively with one another (in drama) and work well in a range of groupings. In lessons, in discussion and in their journal writing there is evidence of growth and understanding of dramatic form.'
64. Inspection evidence suggests that it would be timely for schools to review the quality of teaching within more robust school-wide policies and planning strategies for raising standards of literacy. In so doing, schools should build upon the best approaches to teaching language knowledge and skills. There is, for example, a valuable contribution to be made by whole-class, expository teaching but this needs to be balanced by more imaginative opportunities for pupils to apply what they have learned to achieve greater confidence and fluency in speaking, listening, reading and writing across the curriculum.

Contributory Factors: the Adequacy and Fitness for Purpose of Resources for Teaching Literacy.

65. **The level of staffing** in the schools was overwhelmingly favourable. In the schools inspected, the ratio of pupils to teachers (PTR) ranged from 7:1 to 20:1 in the primary sector, and from 7:1 to 13:1 in the secondary sector. The average size of teaching groups (classes) ranged from 9 to 26, in primary schools, and from 9 to 20 in secondary schools. While these rounded figures show considerable variation within and, to a lesser extent, between sectors, inspection judgements generally paint a very favourable picture of the levels of staffing in schools in both the primary and the secondary sectors.
66. **The qualifications of teachers** are also judged to be at least adequate for teaching the prescribed curriculum in all the schools. However, as evidence presented earlier in this report shows, there is a considerable need to improve the quality and co-ordination of teaching if standards of pupils' achievement in literacy are to rise.
67. It would be worthwhile to review the programme of in-service training available to schools to make sure that up-to-date training in the teaching of literacy is available and receives sufficient attention in the continuous professional development of teachers. In so doing, the existing strengths of the schools should not be overlooked. There is a core of good practice which could inform in-service training and contribute valuably to professional development.
68. **School accommodation** was rarely seen as an obstacle to the teaching and learning of literacy. Only a minority of inspection reports mention serious shortcomings in this respect. For example:
 'Oral activities in one class make teaching and learning difficult in the other (because of a thin partition). In the library, there are severe space constraints for working and displays of work. Lighting is poor in many areas of the school.'
 'The library functions as a multi-purpose area and a main thoroughfare; one corner is used as a staffroom. When the library is used for lessons, pupils and teachers work in very difficult conditions with frequent interruptions and distracting noise.'
69. These unfavourable findings are in sharp contrast to mainly better than adequate accommodation in most schools. For example:
 'The (primary) school benefits from well-planned purpose built accommodation. The library occupies a spacious and attractive room at the centre of the school.'
 'English is taught in specialist rooms which are spacious and bright.' (secondary school).
 'The library occupies a spacious and attractive room at the centre of the (secondary) school.'

70. **Overall levels of resources for teaching literacy**, including text and reference books are also at least adequate in nearly all of the schools. Typically, in the case of primary schools:
- 'The school is well-resourced. There is a good supply of books and materials to support learning.'
 - 'All classes have sufficient text and workbooks to support the scheme of work.'
 - 'The school library is stocked with a satisfactory amount of fiction and non-fiction books. In addition, the school has access to the adjacent public library.'
71. And typically in secondary schools:
- 'The library is well-organised and the bookstock is up-to-date.'
 - 'The school is very well-resourced for its work.'
 - 'Resources are adequate. Balance and breadth in students' work are well-provided for.'
72. However, these generally favourable findings about accommodation and levels of resources are not always matched by the effectiveness of the use made of them. In other words, some schools under-used good resources. Issues for action in primary schools sometimes call for 'making better use of equipment and resources available in the school.'
73. Similarly in secondary schools good resources were not always sufficiently exploited. A serious shortcoming in respect of literacy was often the under-use of good library facilities. In secondary schools, for example:
- 'The teaching commitment of the temporary librarian means that the library is not always open and its use as a resource base to aid learning across the curriculum is limited.'
 - 'The library is attractive and well-suited to the needs of the school. It is centrally located and pupils have ready access... Presently, it is not being used effectively either for personal study, to encourage students to read widely or as a source of information and pleasure.'
74. For most primary and secondary schools, there is cause to strengthen the links between central and classroom collections of books, and other resources for literacy, to provide pupils with a wider range of increasingly challenging reading, and opportunities to develop reference and research skills.
75. **Information and Communications Technology (ICT)**, though at various stages of development, is reported upon very favourably in several primary schools, and in four out of the five, secondary schools. At best, very good and sometimes excellent provision is noted which, almost certainly, is at least comparable with good quality of provision found in schools in the UK and USA. For example, in the primary sector:
- 'The school has excellent computing facilities. There is a purpose-built, air-conditioned room, equipped to a high standard with modern computers, and each classroom has at least one additional computer... In addition the school offers an extra-curricular computing programme, twice weekly, for interested junior and senior pupils.'
 - 'The recently completed computer suite is an excellent facility that includes a very generous number of good quality computers and a good range of compatible software.'
76. Primary schools which have established computer suites and have either peripatetic, or school-based, specialist teachers almost always achieve good quality work which strengthens aspects of literacy, for example, through equipping pupils with word processing and drafting skills. A lack of teaching expertise is the greatest obstacle to

progress in some schools but primary teachers, in general, are keen to develop ICT skills and sometimes benefit from on-site training by peripatetic ICT specialists.

77. In each secondary school, the broadly good provision for ICT is matched by good quality teaching:

‘The quality of teaching is at least sound and in some aspects very good..’

‘In the computer lessons seen, the quality of teaching was good.’

‘All ICT teachers have a good to excellent understanding and knowledge of their subject.’

‘The quality of the teaching in information & communications technology is consistently sound.’

78. The good levels of provision, together with the commendable, and developing, expertise of teachers of ICT, mean that most schools are well placed to secure high standards of pupil achievement in ‘computer literacy’. In continuing to manage and sustain this good provision, schools should endeavour to use ICT more intensively to support the teaching and learning of reading and writing. There is ample good practice, overall, to help those schools which, for whatever reason, have made slower progress than others in these respects.

Pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN)

79. Helping pupils to overcome difficulties with speaking, listening, reading and writing forms a major part of the provision for pupils with special educational needs in primary and secondary schools. All but two of the primary, and all of the secondary, inspection reports comment favourably upon specialist provision and, to a lesser extent, upon school-wide responses to pupils who have special educational needs related to aspects of literacy.

80. Serious difficulties with language are usually readily apparent, and most schools identify and assess pupils’ special educational needs in literacy at an early stage. For example:

‘Early assessment procedures quickly identify pupils requiring additional support... Staff from the Island’s Special Needs Support Unit assist with the identification procedures and parents are consulted as appropriate.’ (Primary)

‘ There is a comprehensive and effective system in place for identifying pupils with special educational needs. The special needs co-ordinator works closely with the primary schools to identify pupils requiring additional help prior to their entering the high school.’ (Secondary)

81. The arrangements for SEN pupils, who present difficulties with literacy, commonly rely upon an approach in which pupils are taught in specialist provision, i.e. withdrawn from their regular class, for part of the time. It follows that the success of these arrangements depends upon the thorough monitoring of pupils’ progress, joint planning and close co-operation between class teachers and SEN specialists. Inspection findings indicate that where there are shortcomings, these are usually associated with discontinuities and weak co-ordination between the work in specialist units and the work in regular classes. Typically:

‘The teaching and pupils’ quality of learning are consistently good in lessons where SEN pupils are withdrawn and receive specialist help. All pupils in the programmes show positive attitudes, are interested in the activities and respond well to the very good, mutually respectful relationships that have been established. Class teachers are kept informed of the progress the pupils are making and agree the targets set for the pupils. However, except in the Reception class, teachers do not take sufficient account of the learning needs of the pupils on the SEN programme in regular lessons. As a consequence, pupils often lose interest, become inattentive and even disruptive.’ (Primary)

'At present, a number of staff contribute to SEN provision. They operate, however, without the guidance of an overall policy and clearly defined responsibilities and there is, therefore, a lack of co-ordination. The potential of these qualified staff to help subject teachers to adapt classroom materials, differentiate work appropriately and advise on teaching strategies remains untapped.' (Secondary)

82. Inspection suggests that the generally good provision for SEN in relation to literacy, in most schools, would benefit from stronger co-ordination between the work in specialist units and that of regular classes. The potential of specialist SEN staff for supporting class teachers is under-exploited and should be used to greater advantage.

