

**EDUCATION GUIDANCE**

**GUIDANCE on: The Early Acquisition of Literacy in Primary 1**

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**Rationale**

First published in August 2018 and updated in February 2019, this document provides guidance for P1 teachers in Argyll and Bute on the early acquisition of literacy in Primary 1. Linked to current developments in Argyll and Bute, these guidelines support the authority’s *Our Children, Their Future* document, *Literacy in the Early Years* and *The Learning and Development Framework 0-5 years*. They also support the draft document, *Guidance on the early acquisition of numeracy in primary 1*. In addition, they are also closely aligned to the emerging literacy resources developed in Highland and adapted by a growing number of Argyll and Bute schools as part of the Northern Alliance RIC. Many supporting resources and advice can therefore be found at <https://highlandliteracy.com/emerging-literacy/>.

**The educational context:**

The first two priorities of the *National Improvement Framework* are as follows:

* Improvement in attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy
* Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children

In 2017 Argyll and Bute council published its education strategy, *Our Children, Their Future,* which outlined its six key objectives as follows:

* Raise educational attainment and achievement for all
* Use performance information to secure improvement for children and young people
* Ensure children have the best start in life and are ready to succeed
* Equip young people to secure and sustain positive destinations and achieve success in life
* Ensure high quality partnership working and community enagagement
* Strengthen leadership at all levels

“PISA surveys show that increasing reading engagement could mitigate 30 per cent of the attainment gap. Reading also has long-term effects on vocabulary and achievement in other curricular areas.”

*Closing the attainment gap in Scottish education, (Edward Sosu & Sue Ellis, 2014)*

“Literacy is fundamental to all areas of learning as it unlocks access to the wider curriculum. Being literate increases opportunities for the individual in all aspects of life, lays the foundations for lifelong work, and contributes strongly to the development of all four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence”

*Curriculum for Excellence, (The Scottish Government, 2010)*

**The way forward**

It is clear that a consistent approach to early literacy acquisition is needed across the authority. However, as a very diverse authority, ranging from urban to isolated rural environments and with a range of children from SIMD1 to SIMD10, with primary school roles ranging from around 25 to over 400 and where we currently have 25 primary schools with a roll of under 20 pupils, it is clear that a ‘one size fits all’ approach would be counterproductive.

“Children, like all people, learn concepts and practices, including phonological and phonemic knowledge, not as simple linear content; rather, learning occurs unevenly and flexibly and by having many varied opportunities for interaction, for practice, for application and reflection on its purposes and processes. We should not be dogmatic about the fine details of curriculum content any more than we should be dogmatic about the details of teaching methods.”

*Kathy Hall: How children learn to read and How Phonics Helps (from Ellis) p, 14*

 Instead, we need to ensure that a common set of shared principles underlie all elements of effective classroom practice within early level.

**Principles at the heart of this guidance**

* The teaching of literacy should be appropriate to developmental stage: **no child should be left behind, but equally, no child should be held back.**
* The concept of readiness for literacy cannot be reduced to a tick box formula, but is reliant on **effective professional judgement.**
* Teachers should provide experiences, interactions and environment which best suit the individual child
* There are key foundation stages to literacy that a child must be given the opportunity to achieve
* These foundations should be ongoing throughout the early phase, rather than being seen as one step that can then be overtaken
* No approach to literacy will be successful unless a school embeds a sustainable, literacy rich environment and a culture of literacy within and across the whole school.
* The principles of active in learning, enjoyment and pace should underpin all approaches.
* **Parental engagement is key to success**: parents should be aware of the approach the school is taking and how they can best support their child.

**Overview**

There are key developmental stages which a child must experience before he or she is ready to acquire the more formal skills of literacy. As a result of changes to our society and our relationship with technology, we must be aware that not all children have been given the opportunity to develop these skills and we must be wary of pushing them into the formal acquisition of literacy before they are ready.

Elements such as increased screen based lifestyles, the decline of outdoor play and a focus on the commercial aspects of childhood can mean that the following areas may not have had the opportunity to fully develop:

* Self-regulation
* Empathy and social skills
* All aspects of language including listening and talking

Thus it is vital that we offer our young people the opportunity to develop the foundations they need to become successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.

There are **7 key elements** to this guidance:

1. Foundations of literacy
2. Learning to read
3. Reading in context
4. Writing in context
5. Introducing writing
6. Creating literacy rich environments
7. Parental partnership

**Structure**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Transition | Data drawn from ELC Literacy tracker Professional observation of developmental readiness |
| August – December | Ongoing foundations of literacy workPhonics for readingBlendingLetter formationPhonics for writing (at an appropriate point) |
| Jan onwards | Ongoing foundations of literacy workPhonics for writing (latest start point)Revision of phonics for reading where appropriate |

**Transition**

Upon arrival in P1, every child should have individual record sheets from their time at ELC, which detail their attainment in reading, writing, listening & talking. This attainment is linked to the Northern Alliance early progression framework and pupils will be working at one of the following levels:

* I am aware
* I understand
* I use with understanding
* I am attaining the Benchmarks

Each P1 class should have a progression overview sheet which will continue to be filled in during P1. This sheet shows at a glance the progression of the whole class from 3 years old to the end of P1.

It is important to remember our underlying principles at this stage:

*The concept of readiness for literacy cannot be reduced to a tick box formula, but is reliant on effective professional judgement.*

Professional judgement based on observation, discussion with the child and awareness of home environment must be at the heart of any decisions made about each child’s level of development.

The P1 teacher should continue to have professional discussions about the pupils’ level of attainment and areas for next steps throughout P1. These should take place three times over the course of the year; four times if there are concerns. These are to be recorded on the individual record sheets and transferred to the progression overview.



**Foundations of literacy**

The importance of the foundations of literacy is at the heart of this document. *Throughout the year*, alongside the teaching of phonics for reading and writing, every teacher should embed opportunities for pupils to further develop the following foundations of literacy:

* Listening
* Talking
* Engaging with music, movement and memory
* Engaging with stories
* Concepts of print
* Awareness of sounds
* Physical readiness for writing

The development of these skills should not be seen as a one-off block which can then be moved on from. Some children will enter P1 with a firm grasp of these skills. This does not mean that reinforcement of these aspects can be missed out or ignored. At this stage it is difficult to isolate literacy skills from aspects of development such as self-regulation, resilience, creativity, problem solving skills and so on and therefore it is valuable for every child to have these foundation skills at the heart of their learning.

**Secure acquisition of literacy is not a linear process and children should continue to engage with the foundations of literacy throughout their P1 year, even alongside more formal teaching. They are the foundations of all learning and should be at the heart of all activities**

A brief overview of the importance of each aspect is included below. Teachers should ensure that they are confident in embedding each of these within the day to day activities of the classroom and curriculum. These are not elements that should be solely confined to a designated ‘literacy’ time – rather they should permeate the whole of the curriculum, embedding literacy across learning.

**Listening**

At the most basic level, children need to be able to single out specific foreground sounds against background noise. Subsequently, the ability to listen in a sustained manner is at the heart of later ability to access the curriculum at all levels. A key factor in successful literacy learning is auditory memory. This, and many other aspects of discriminative listening, is naturally developed through musical activities, especially memorising songs and rhymes.

**Talking**

Talking is an important precursor to writing. While writing is a mechanical skill, the desire to write comes from early verbal construction of stories. Talking does not need to have an artificial context; rather it should be encouraged through embedding opportunities for context related play into the day to day life of the classroom. The best way to encourage talk is to listen to and build on naturally occurring conversations.

**Engaging with music, movement and memory**

Music provides children with an early means of communication; it develops auditory memory, encourages awareness of rhyme and rhythm and helps develop physical coordination – all of which are key elements in literacy acquisition. Therefore music and song should be at the heart of every classroom, no matter what the level of teacher expertise.

**Engaging with stories**

For some children the majority of their exposure to stories will have been visual, through screens or devices. However, programmes and films do not have an explicit narrative so some children may not have developed a sense of a story’s structure. This can lead to problems with reading because children find it difficult to make sense of the overall shape of what they’re reading and they can find it difficult to structure writing themselves. There should be many opportunities to engage with stories throughout the day.

**Concepts of print**

It is important that children have had the chance to discover that writing is different from pictures, that it is divided into letters, words and sentences and that in English it goes from left to right and top to bottom. They also need to know that writing has a purpose. Having a classroom filled with different kinds of print, which is regularly referred to, will help to reinforce its value.

 **Awareness of sounds**

Children need to be able to hear the different sounds within a word, often referred to as phonological awareness. All of the stages above feed into this. For many children phonological awareness is both a cause and a consequence of letter knowledge so children should not be held back if they cannot identify every sound within a word. However, there is some evidence to suggest that if a child is struggling to read, an increased focus on phonological awareness may be beneficial. Phonemic awareness, in the form of playing with rhyme and alliteration is also fundamental to the development of literacy skills.

Important note: The Northern Alliance approach to emerging literacy contains the following resources to support planning for awareness of sounds:

* phonological awareness developmental continuum
* phonological awareness screening tool
* phonological awareness tracker
* resources linked to stages on the developmental continuum

It is strongly suggested that the phonological awareness screening tool is used with all pupils at the start of the year and that this is administered by the classroom teacher. Professional judgement should be sued to inform whether a follow up screen is required. The tracker should then be used as a working document to support planning for activities to develop these skills.

**Physical readiness for writing**

The stages above feed into the cognitive readiness for writing. However, many children – especially boys – do not yet have the fine motor skills required for writing when they enter P1. Too early an insistence on physically writing can have a demotivating effect on children and lead to a long term resistance to writing. Letter formation can be taught early, without the formal insistence on writing things down which should happen when a child has had the chance to develop appropriately. If a child is demonstrating readiness for writing then freely chosen, context-led opportunities to write should be created and encouraged through teacher direction.

The Northern Alliance approach to emerging literacy contains a pre handwriting screening tool and tracker. It is suggested that the tracker be filled in during August and used to plan activities appropriate to need. The screening tool can be used to evidence the impact of any support that has been given in specific areas, rather than being used as an assessment tool in its entirety.

*Important note: It should not be assumed that pupils begin their formal handwriting alongside their learning of sounds.*

**Links with the Northern Alliance emerging literacy approach**.

As part of the Northern Alliance, Argyll and Bute is engaging with the emerging literacy approach. This is an approach which focuses on, but is not confined to, the approach to learning in Primary 1. An increasing number of schools are going through training offered by the Northern Alliance literacy lead and taking part in network reflection sessions.

The approach centres on the importance of having a developmental approach to literacy which reinforces our idea of foundation skills. The wording used is different but the skills are the same. A rough equivalency is provided below:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *A&B Foundation Skills* | *Comparable to Northern Alliance* |
| Listening | Phonological Awareness / oral language |
| Talking | Oral Language |
| Engaging with music, movement and memory | Phonological awareness |
| Engaging with stories | Concepts of print |
| Concepts of print | Concepts of print |
| Awareness of sounds | Phonological Awareness |
| Physical readiness for writing | Pre-Handwriting |

Northern Alliance resources are available to support learning and teaching approaches as follows:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| AREA | DEVELOPMENTAL CONTINUUM | TRACKING TOOL | RESOURCES TO SUPPORT LEARNING & TEACHING |
| Concepts of Print |  |  |  |
| Oral Language: expressive language |  |  |  |
| Oral language: understanding language |  |  |  |
| Phonological Awareness |  |  |  |
| Pre-Handwriting |  |  |  |

All of the resources involved in this approach are freely available through ABLE2: <https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/glowblogs/able/> and at <https://highlandliteracy.com/emerging-literacy/>.

**Learning to read**

Learning to read is about more than phonics and children need to understand this to avoid becoming stuck in a ‘fixed mindset,’ whereby success or failure in this one element determines how they view themselves as readers and, ultimately, as learners. The National Reading Panel identifies phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension as the 5 pillars of reading. Moreover, as outlined above, the same approach does not work for all children so teachers must be flexible according to the needs of individuals. However, the following could be taken as broad general guidance on the teaching of phonics.

“It must always be remembered that phonics is the step up to word recognition. Automatic reading of all words – decodable and tricky – is the ultimate goal.”

*Letters and Sounds: Principles and Practices of High Quality Phonics (Primary National Strategy 2007)*

The initial 2 terms of P1 should be spent focussing on phonics for reading, using a balanced approach which may emphasise the key elements of synthetic phonics but also includes the opportunity for elements of analytic phonics and sight word recognition as well as embracing real books (see guidance on reading in context, below) Approaches which develop the foundations of literacy alongside phonics teaching - e.g. songs, rhymes, tongue-twisters, multisensory activities - should be central as they allow all children, no matter what their developmental level, to make progress and engage in the learning.

At the heart of any approach to phonics should be an understanding of the individual phonological awareness skills of pupils. The Northern Alliance emerging literacy phonological awareness continuum should be used, alongside the phonological awareness screening tool and tracker, to determine when the majority of pupils are likely to be able to access a phonics scheme.

Research on effective ways of teaching reading is ongoing and any approach should take into account the latest findings on long term pupil impact. However, our current recommendations are as follows:

**A systematic approach to sounds**

 Systematic approaches include, but are not limited to:

* Jolly Phonics
* ReadWriteInc
* Storytime Phonics
* Letters and Sounds

It is important that there is a systematic, evidence based plan in place within each school for which sounds will be taught and how this will be developed into P2, P3 and beyond. It is also important that teachers of all stages know the progression of sounds and the way in which they’ve been taught, to support later conversations about spelling and its phonological basis.

**Brisk pace**

It is recommended that 3 to 4 sounds are taught per week. Because handwriting is not taught specifically at this stage there will be plenty of opportunity for consolidation with small groups according to developmental stage. In addition the post-Christmas block of writing will enable further revision for those who need it, while further reinforcement should be built in through the remainder of P1 and on through primary school. It should be remembered however that teachers should keep in mind the developmental needs of their classes and should not feel obligated to follow the pace of an external scheme when it is clearly not working for the individual pupils they have in front of them.

No more than 10 to a **maximum** of 20 minutes should be spent on whole class teaching of phonics. For maximum impact, go for several short periods during the day.

“Short, pacy and frequent phonic inputs have more impact than longer, drawn-out sessions.” *(Ofsted 2005)*

**Grouping vs whole class teaching**

It is important that practitioners plan for the needs of their class. In some cases whole class teaching will be entirely appropriate, as long as there are plenty of opportunities for consolidation and practice according to need and regrouping happens regularly to enable small group and one-to-one teaching as required.

If a child comes into school able to read, careful attention should be paid to the level of their skill and activities adapted for them as required. There is no necessity for a child with sound phonic knowledge to sit through a whole class session and suitable engaging activities should be created for them, perhaps linking in to what’s happening in class in a more developed form. Colouring in or worksheets which reinforce what they already know are not suitable alternatives.

Equally, teachers should use professional judgement to be aware of pupils who are struggling with the acquisition of sounds at this stage. Approaches rooted in songs, rhymes and multisensory activities will help these children to engage with foundations of literacy reinforcement even if they are unable to progress at a fast pace.

Where a pupil is struggling with the acquisition of sounds, teachers should refer to the emerging literacy phonological awareness continuum and use the associated resources to build up their skills.

It is important to note that whole class teaching does not mean that children are sitting passively, being instructed. The sharing of phonics for reading should engage children, using as many of the foundations of literacy elements as possible.

**Blending from the start**

It is vital that children are given the opportunity to manipulate the sounds from the moment they start to recognise their corresponding graphemes. Blending should be undertaken in as engaging and active a manner as possible using resources such as magnetic letters, washing lines of letters, shaving foam, trays with lentils, glitter, gloop, letters in the air and so on.

Note: If a child does not have sufficiently developed awareness of sounds, it may not be appropriate for them to blend until their phonological awareness skills are further developed.

**Spelling**

“Reading and spelling are reversible processes and should be taught in tandem so that this reversibility is obvious.”

*Early Reading Instruction: What science really tells us about how to teach reading (Diane McGuiness 2004)*

Children should be encouraged to work from phoneme to grapheme as well as from grapheme to phoneme. Again, this can be done without the need for formal writing at this stage (see note on blending above). It is important that this approach is modelled through the whole school, using the same language relating to sounds, to support later spelling development.

**Constant revision**

Plenty of opportunities should be given for reinforcement of graphemes already taught. This can be worked into the day to day activities of the classroom in any context.

**Foundations of literacy**

Opportunities to continue developing the foundations of literacy should be integrated into daily activities for all children, no matter what their level of proficiency with reading. Approaches to teaching phonics which engage with these foundations (e.g. using songs, rhymes, dances, stories etc) are extremely valuable.

**Sight Words**

“We must ...consider that, no matter how systematic the programme, there are many words in the English language that are just not decodable.” *(Phonics, the wider picture, Sue Ellis 2006)*

A sight word approach used in isolation should not form the basis of any approach to learning to read although it may be used very effectively to supplement other teaching. Too great a reliance on sight words can lead to ‘whole word guessing – decoding the first letter phonemically then guessing at the rest based on length and shape. It is important therefore that sight words have ‘value’ in the sense that they are the most commonly used words in our language and not words which are meaningless to pupils within their context. Two examples of 100 common words can be found in Appendix 3.

When teaching sight words, it is important that they are incorporated into the natural flow of daily routine in an active, immersive way, rather than being delivered through one approach in isolation (e.g. flashcards)

**Children who struggle**

As described above, if it becomes clear that a child is struggling with the concept and acquisition of reading, it is important that opportunities for them to engage with activities to develop their phonological and phonemic awareness are created throughout the day. Such children should also be paired with children at a wide range of developmental stages, to avoid creating an identity of failure around phonics.

If formal handwriting is delayed until later in the term / year, this will provide pupils with another chance to engage with sounds.

While the emerging literacy resources developed by the Northern Alliance are designed to be used universally, the phonological awareness developmental continuum and supporting resources can, in particular, be used to target children struggling with their reading (see page 9).

**Tracking and Monitoring**

At the heart of successful sound acquisition is the need to respond to the individual needs of the class. Ongoing, rigorous tracking and monitoring is therefore essential. On at least three occasions during the year, the Northern Alliance literacy progressions should be used to support discussion with support workers / line managers about the level at which a child is working. Strengths and development needs should be recorded onto the individual record sheets. Individual information should then be transferred to the overview sheet using highlighters, so it is easy to see at a glance the pattern of development in a class.

**Point to note about writing:**

While the specific skills of handwriting are not likely to be taught immediately, correct letter formation should be included at this point and children given opportunities to create letters in the air, in sand, shaving foam and so on. In some cases it may be suitable to introduce more formal, written letter formation earlier in the session according to the developmental level of the children. This could be done with some pupils or all. Whether you introduce written letter formation earlier or not, there should be ample opportunities to write around the classroom so that children who are ready to write can do so. However, just hoping that children will engage with writing is not sufficient. Practitioners must guide and support children in the opportunities to write which are available to them within their environment.

**Reading in context (real books)**

“The man [sic] who does not read has no advantage over the man who cannot read.” *Mark Twain*

“Studies suggest that reading engagement begins to fall around Primary 4/5, declining most strongly in struggling readers.” *Improving adolescent literacy: effective classroom and intervention practices: a practice guide (Kamil et al, 2008).*

“Where a reading culture has been successfully developed across the school, there are consistently high expectations about the frequency and quality of reading.” *3-18 Literacy and English Review (Education Scotland 2015)*

 “There are many little ways to enlarge your child’s world. Love of books is the best of all.” *Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis*

Books should not be seen as something reserved for ‘literacy’ periods during the day. They should be at the heart of all experiences within the classroom. Engaging with real texts is a highly effective way to engage children with their learning and is vital for children who have not had access to many books in their home environment.

“highly effective teachers teach a range of reading cues (grapho-phonic, picture, syntactic and semantic), coaching children to use them in the context of reading actual texts rather than simply modelling, explaining or practicing them as decontextualized skills.”

*Assessment, teacher education & the emergence of professional expertise (Ellis & Smith 2017)*

Alongside the skills needed for decoding text, children need to develop their vocabulary and comprehension as well as develop their fluency. It is vital therefore that the teacher shares books with children, teaching them how to read and the strategies they can use to develop their understanding.

“Decoding is a means to an end, not an end in itself; once we know what a word ‘says,’ we need to be able to talk about what it means to us – how the story relates to our own feelings and experiences or how the text entertains, instructs, persuades or informs us.”

*Play & Planning: A Sound Pathway to Pleasurable and Purposeful Reading, Margaret Perkins & Prue Goodwin, from Ellis p.58*

It is important to read with the children during the day – as many times as possible. The key element should always be pleasure, but you should also explicitly explain strategies you use to understand words, look at context clues and so on, modelling good reading practice. This can be done within the context of any other learning that is taking place in the classroom as you look at non-fiction as well as stories. It is important that children are given the opportunity to experience both fiction and non-fiction books to reinforce their awareness of the different purposes of texts as this will develop reading comprehension.

However, the teacher should be wary of too prescriptive an approach, whereby the pupils never get to experience a book for its own sake because of the questions that accompany it. Reading a story because of the joy of the story is a perfectly acceptable approach and will often be the first approach to any book.

It is good practice to repeatedly return to ‘favourites’ until children can read along – they can then take the lead in reading the book to their peers. You could also have a book of the week so that children build up a ‘bank’ of well-known stories.

**Sending books home**

While individual schools have their own approach to sending books home, it is important that this should not be seen as a test and reading for enjoyment should be emphasised rather than progression through a series of stages. This is particularly important when access to books in the home environment may be limited.

It is important that teachers think about the language they use when talking about sending books home with parents. Asking parents to read the book with their child may not be appropriate – emphasising the idea of ‘sharing’ is recommended.

If and when books are sent home, parents should be clear about the purpose of this and the role they are being asked to play. It is strongly recommended that a workshop is offered to parents, explaining the school’s approach and the importance of their involvement. It is essential that reading does not become a competition whereby the focus is on the level achieved rather than on the skills children are developing.

**Writing in context**

**What is writing?**

Writing should be seen “not as a ‘one-off’ activity, but as an opportunity to develop, alter and improve ideas.” *(Foundations of Writing: Learning to Write, Bill & Maureen Michael 1987)*

Writing involves both secretarial and composing skills. The secretarial skills are about the appearance of writing (handwriting) while the composing skills are about the substance of writing. During this process, children have to think, select, organise and order what they wish to write. It is not necessary for them to be able to write their letters and compose words correctly before they practise these skills.

Writing is about communication and an early form of writing is mark making and drawing. Value should therefore be given to drawing, as the first written form that children create. In some cases, drawing may be no more than making lines yet it is important that children are given opportunities to read what their ‘writing’ means so they begin to see themselves as writers. Further information on this can be found in Foundations of Writing by Bill & Maureen Michael. There are references to this within the Teachers’ Toolkit.

However, sitting behind any approach to writing within any context should be an awareness of the skills which children need in order to hold a pencil. As well as foundation skills advice, resources from Highland Literacy should be used to provide developmentally appropriate experiences that develop children’s gross and fine motor movements, their scissor skills and their mark making ability.

**The importance of talk**

“It is impossible to write any text without being familiar with the language rhythms and patterns that it involves.” (*Pie Corbett & Julia Strong: Talk for writing across the curriculum)*

Talk should be seen as the starting point of writing – in general if a child can’t talk it, they can’t write it. Through talk they can practise the patterns and rhythms of writing. Through telling stories they develop their sense of structure and development of detail. The Highland resources on sequence and narrative can be used to support children’s concepts of structure and language.

**Modelling**

It is important that teachers model different types of writing, explaining the purpose of what they’re doing and how they decide what to include. This does not have to be a formal precursor to the children producing a similar piece of writing but can be part of the natural flow of the day’s activities. However, modelling a type of writing and spending time on developing children’s understanding of it is an important part of the writing process.

**Real contexts**

In order to become effective writers, children need to be both physically ready to write and emotionally engaged in the act of writing. It is vital that they see themselves as writers, rather than see writing as something which they do because they are told to do so. Therefore, it is important that children are given real contexts in which to practice their writing, including contexts which reflect the concerns of their local communities. This has a huge impact on motivation.

“When writing opportunities were moved to the places where boys chose to play and were included in the boys’ play, they became keen and motivated writers.” *Supporting boys’ writing in the early years: becoming a writer in leaps & bounds (Julie Cigman, 2014)*

It is about creating opportunities where children want to write, rather than imposing artificially created contexts upon them. Equally, writing should be seen as something which occurs within all aspects of the curriculum, rather than being something that solely happens in a designated ‘literacy’ time and space.

Therefore, the environment both inside and outside should be considered and opportunities to write built into opportunities for exploratory play. However, rather than sitting back and hoping that these will have an impact, the teacher should take a key role in maximising these opportunities by guiding pupils towards the possibilities of writing available to them.

Thought should also be given to IDL activities and the ways in which these may provide opportunities for writing.

Approaches such as Storyline Scotland, where the context is co-created by pupils and teacher, have evidence that they have had a positive impact on children’s continued motivation to write.

“We write best about what we know and what matters*.” Talk for writing across the curriculum (Pie Corbett & Julia Strong 2011)*

**Tools for Writing**

“Practice isn’t the thing you do once you’re good. It’s the thing you do that makes you good.” *(Malcolm Gladwell)*

While the context for writing is important, once children are physically ready to write there should be explicit instruction in early level tools for writing, namely capital letters and full stops.

More able pupils should also be introduced to question marks and exclamation marks.

These should be reinforced throughout the year and in all contexts, according to the needs of the child.

**Introducing Writing**

While accurate letter formation should be taught alongside sounds for reading, it is important that pupils who are not developmentally ready should not have formal handwriting instruction until later in the session. While January is the latest start point for this, it is likely that practitioners will begin letter formation sometime around October. Some pupils may be ready to write earlier in the session, in which case this can be encouraged by having well-equipped writing areas in class and many informal opportunities for writing in various contexts. However, many pupils, boys in particular, do not yet have the mechanical skills required for successful handwriting as they enter school. The splitting of phonics into two stages therefore allows for the following:

* Pupils are given the opportunity to develop mechanical ability through early foundations of literacy work
* Pupils will be able to engage with the mechanics of writing at a time which is developmentally suitable for them
* The inclusion of lots of writing opportunities that can be accessed prior to the writing block means that children who are ready will develop their writing in real contexts
* The revisiting of sounds allows for revision for those who need it

At no stage should a pupil be held back from writing if they have the mechanical skills to engage successfully with it. Opportunities need to be created for children to write within their own contexts but it is important that teachers do not just assume they will take these. Children can be guided through discussion and modelling to take the opportunities that are there. However, a continued refusal to write at this stage should not lead to situations where children feel forced to write.

Equally, it is vital that all stages of early writing are valued, not just writing which is grammatically ‘correct,’ so opportunities to write within the environment are not limited to children who are able to form their letters correctly. This includes strings of symbols and recognisable letters with no punctuation as well as drawing. Children should have opportunities to explore mark making using a variety of media such as pens of different thicknesses, glitter pens, felt tips, wax crayons and so on.

In order to support a decision about the best time to start formal handwriting, the Northern Alliance emerging literacy pre-handwriting developmental continuum can be used.

In considering readiness, the practitioners should consider the following elements:

* shape formation
* shape manipulation
* directionality
* fluidity of movement
* fine motor skills
* pressure control
* pencil grip

Further information and support for these can be found at <https://highlandliteracy.com/emerging-literacy-pencil-control-skills/>

In teaching formal writing the following key principles should be observed:

**A systematic order**

It is suggested that the order of teaching handwriting follows the shape of the letters and can be divided into four groups as follows:

The L group: l,t,i,u,y,j

The C group: c,a,d,g,o,qu,s

The R group: r,p,n,m,h,k,b

Other letters: e,f,v,w,x,z

When introducing these letters the practitioner should consider asking the children to describe what they are doing rather than telling them. This helps to embed the language of directionality and means that the children are more actively engaged in the process.

**Supporting Resources**

Handwriting jotters should have guide lines so that children develop an understanding of ascenders and descenders. Classrooms should have a display showing the starting points of letters and refer to this regularly.

**Pace**

It is recommended that one group per fortnight is taught. It is important that pace is appropriate for the children’s developmental stage and, as such, teaching of handwriting could begin earlier if every child has the necessary development of motor skills.

**Practice vs repetition**

Handwriting should become automatic and without the need for thought, leaving the child’s mind free to think about the communication itself. Children should then have plenty of opportunity to practise writing at speed correctly and automatically. In some cases, e.g. with tricky words, it might be useful to practise writing words so that their formation becomes fluent.

However, rather than mindless repetition of letters, it is important that any approach should involve mindful practice. Practice involves thinking and making changes, whereas repetition can lead to mistakes that can become embedded and difficult to correct.

Therefore, pupils should be encouraged to both describe and reflect on the letters they have written. Working with a partner, a child might write a letter while describing what they are doing to their partner. Once the letter has been written they can be encouraged to ask themselves questions such as, ‘Does this look right?’ ‘Did I use the correct strokes?’ ‘What should I do next time?’

**Left Handed children**

Approximately 12% of children are left-handed. However, many children may experiment with both hands for a while. If you have children who are clearly left-handed in your class you should provide a separate handwriting lesson for them, modelling all aspects of handwriting with the left hand. It can also help them to have a block to raise their work above their hand, to use a writing grip and to be seated with space on their left-hand side. Delaying handwriting until October will give children the opportunity to see which hand they naturally prefer.

**A note on overwriting and underwriting**

The aim of writing instruction is to create confident, independent writers. Writing sentences out for children and asking them to copy underneath means that children are just copying rather than developing their understanding of individual strokes. Asking children to write over words which you have written for them limits their fluidity of movement. In both cases, these strategies can lead to high levels of anxiety as the child is not developing any independence as a writer. If reading and spelling have been taught as reversible processes from the beginning (as outlined under learning to read, above), once children are able to form letters they should be confident in their ability to work out the spellings of a word without copying from an adult.

**Creating a literacy rich environment**

Children’s capacity to see possibilities in their environment is huge. The classroom environment is therefore fundamental to the early acquisition of literacy. Where the classroom environment provides opportunities for pupils to explore literacy in a variety of contexts, pupils interact independently with their environment. This can also free up time for teachers to spend with pupils who need more focus on the foundations of literacy.

 “A literate identity cannot be forced or imposed by teachers but requires open, social spaces where learners can define themselves as readers/writers in relation to their peers and to texts.” *Literacy and Gender: Researching texts, Contexts & Readers (Moss 2011)*

Fundamental to success in literacy is the teacher’s awareness that literacy is about more than the tools for reading and writing, listening and talking. In order to be successful in literacy a child must see reading, writing, listening and talking as valuable to their sense of personal and social identity. The classroom environment creates a culture of literacy which the child – particularly the child with limited access to literacy experiences at home - will internalise and it is therefore vital that teachers put thought into how they organise resources to maximise impact on literacy learning.

“The key is to make sure that children feel ownership of the space and that how you have arranged the resources and the content of your display are for the children and not you.” *Effective transition into year one (Alistair Bryce-Clegg 2017)*

The Argyll and Bute *ELC Literacy tracker* can be used as a tool for self-evaluation in relation to the classroom environment. The early years outdoor environment self-evaluation tool can also be used for outside spaces.

The following recommendations should be taken into account:

* Children always have access to writing materials
* Opportunities are provided to practise writing within the context of what has been taught or experienced e.g. a Wanted poster for Nessie after a Scotland topic, a shopping list near the play shop
* Books are organised and attractive
* Books have been selected to appeal **to the children** and what they want to read, taking into account their cultural and community backgrounds
* There is a safe, comfortable space for children to access books
* Books should also be in all areas of the classroom, not just the designated reading area
* There are a range of contexts for children to develop talking and listening skills through role play, through playing with small world characters, through puppet shows etc
* There are numerous examples of writing around the room, both writing for a purpose – signs, notices, days of the week etc and writing that demonstrates creativity and enjoyment
* Children are involved in the creation of the writing around the room
* A sense of belonging to the classroom literacy community is created by involving children in decisions around literacy
* New vocabulary is displayed, e.g. through a ‘word of the week’
* Key sight words are displayed around the room so that they can be incorporated into the daily routines and conversations of the classroom
* Every opportunity is taken within IDL contexts to develop literacy skills e.g. building range of vocabulary
* Opportunities are provided for parents to share their literacy skills with their child e.g. through writing the diary of what a class soft toy did, through sharing book bags, through playing literacy based games
* Opportunities are created for children to interact independently with their environment, free to interpret objects and activities as they like.

The **key principles** here are:

* Value is placed on all aspects of literacy
* Praise is given for creativity and innovative thinking as well as for accuracy
* Teacher models good practice in all aspects of literacy
* Real, meaningful contexts are given

Creating literacy communities goes beyond individual classrooms: it is something that should permeate the whole school and link with home.

**Parental partnership**

Parents and carers should be involved in all stages of the early acquisition of literacy. A common misunderstanding of the first year of school is that children should be sitting down throughout the day and that they should be pushed to read and write as quickly as possible. While pace is at the heart of successful phonics teaching, our guidance emphasises that time should also be given to the development of the early foundations of literacy and this needs to be shared with parents.

**Parental workshop**

A parental workshop should be held early in the school session to share the approaches you will take towards literacy.

The following aspects should be emphasised:

* Recognition of what parents already do
* The importance of fostering oral language
* The importance of active play in every aspect of well-being and intellectual development
* The importance of pleasure and fun

There are a range of Argyll & Bute resources available to support staff with this workshop including:

* Talking with your child booklet
* Sharing books with your child handout
* Learning to write booklet
* PowerPoint presentation with script that can be adapted for individual contexts

**Learning at home**

Schools should think carefully about the nature of literacy homework if it is given and ensure that it has value beyond colouring in or visually matching words / letters. If homework is given there should be a range of literacy activities for parents to undertake with their child. Expectations in relation to learning at home should be shared clearly with parents so that homework is not just seen as the completion of worksheets.

**Other parental support**

Parents should be encouraged to access the Argyll and Bute Literacy website, ABLE 2, where there are many resources to support them in helping their child at home: <https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/glowblogs/able/>

**Learning in the Outdoors**

“Well-constructed and well-planned outdoor learning helps develop the skills of enquiry, critical thinking and reflection necessary for our children and young people to meet the social, economic and environmental challenges of life in the 21st century. Outdoor learning connects children and young people with the natural world, with our built heritage and our culture and society, and encourages lifelong involvement and activity in Scotland’s outdoors.”

*“Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning,” Learning and Teaching Scotland 2010*

All elements of literacy can be and should be experienced through the outdoors as often as possible. It is important that P1 teachers and schools are aware of the opportunities they give to pupils in this area.

Appendix 5 contains the Early Years Literacy Rich Environment tool for learning in the outdoors. This should be used a source of ideas for ways in which to incorporate learning in the outdoors within the early acquisition of literacy.

**Using ICT**

Our children are increasingly growing up in a world dominated by ICT and screens. It is important to strike the balance between ensuring that they have the skills to succeed in the modern world and making sure that they are not disadvantaged in their development of the foundations of literacy by an over-reliance on technology.

The activities which develop the skills at the heart of the foundations for literacy, such as listening to real stories and developing fine motor control, are not just about learning the basics of reading and writing. **They are also about developing self-regulation, empathy and social skills, self-confidence and resilience, problem-solving skills, creativity and a love of learning.** It is important therefore thatwe do not replace real books and real writing with digital versions or create an environment where children work individually at screens with no opportunities to talk and listen with others.

There are many useful ICT resources to support the development of literacy. When these are used however, the teacher should be confident that these are only one element within a much broader picture.

**Additional support needs**

By ensuring that the foundations of literacy are securely embedded within pedagogy and that children are able to develop at their own pace, many areas that need to be developed will progress over the course of P1. However, it is important to be aware of children who continue to experience difficulties at these early stages, even after repeated opportunities to develop have been given. In these cases, it is important that early interventions are followed.

Below is a list of things to look out for. It is important to note that professional judgement plays a large part in the identification of early literacy difficulties and that not every child who is unable to concentrate will be diagnosed as ADD, for example.

* Children who struggle to differentiate foreground from background noise may have a hearing problem.
* Children who are unable to concentrate may have Attention Deficit Disorder. However, it is important that they are actively being given opportunities to develop their listening skills before seeking help for this.
* Children who struggle with short term auditory memory may have a specific learning difficulty.
* Children with language delay who don’t develop within the opportunities for talk within the classroom should be referred to speech and language therapy.\*\*
* Children who seem to be consistently confused about vocabulary may have an underlying language disorder.
* Children who struggle to use language within social situations may fall somewhere on the autistic spectrum.
* Children who, despite immersive exposure to a language-rich environment, do not begin to enjoy and play with rhyme, may be at risk of dyslexia.\*\*
* Children who seem to take a long time to develop fine motor control may need the support of an educational psychologist.\*\*

\*\* The resources in support of the Northern Alliance’s emerging literacy approach have been developed alongside speech and language, occupational therapy and educational psychology. They include a developmental continuum with links to activities to support children at each stage. It may be helpful to use these resources to support children in the first instance. All resources can be found at ABLE 2: <https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/glowblogs/able/>

Argyll and Bute follow a **staged intervention approach** as follows:

* Stage 1: initial teacher concern with work differentiated to support that concern
* Stage 2: support from school working with single /multi agencies and GIRFEC plan
* Stage 3: other agencies become involved to actively work towards short and long term targets

Useful resources for practitioners include:

The Dyslexia Toolkit <https://www.dyslexiascotland.org.uk/addressing-dyslexia-toolkit>

CALL Scotland <http://www.callscotland.org.uk/home/>

SNAP: for children excelling in literacy and numeracy, including those with dyslexia <http://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/education/ablepupils/resources/>

**Assessment and Moderation**

All stages of the moderation cycle should be planned for and discussed across stage / school / cluster.

At the end of primary 1, pupils should sit the Scottish National Standardised Assessment (SNSA). This forms one part of the range of evidence which should contribute to the teacher’s evaluation of pupil progress against the Benchmarks for reading, writing and listening & talking and should not be taken as any more important than other forms of evidence.

It is every teacher’s responsibility to ensure that each pupil has a sufficient range of evidence to support an evaluation of their progress against the Benchmarks at the end of primary 1. Teachers should also ensure that they familiarise themselves with the standard within the Benchmarks so that pupils do not have too heavy a burden of formal assessment.

The teacher may wish to measure progress in phonological awareness and early sound acquisition. If so, we recommend the Northern Alliance emerging literacy phonological awareness screening tool which is also available in Gaelic. This is designed to be administered to all P1 pupils on entry and can be recorded using the tracking sheet. Along with the phonological awareness continuum, this can then be used to support planning for the development of these skills. These resources can be found in the toolkit and at ABLE2.

The following points should be borne in mind:

* Observation will play a key part in informing teacher professional judgement about progress.
* It is important to ensure that evidence of learning acquired through pupil led contexts is captured and stored where appropriate.
* Evidence of learning may also come from a context outside the classroom or school.

Some exemplification of early level holistic assessments is included in the accompanying teachers’ toolkit.

Examples of ongoing tracking materials that can be used are also included within the toolkit.

**For further information:**

***The Argyll and Bute Literacy Experience (ABLE2) website contains a wide range of materials to support staff, parents and learners in their journeys towards literacy:***

[***https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/glowblogs/able/***](https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/glowblogs/able/)

***Highland Literacy’s emerging Literacy resources are invaluable and it is highly recommended that practitioners use these alongside this guidance. They can be found within the toolkit at ABLE 2 or altogether at:*** [***https://highlandliteracy.com/emerging-literacy/***](https://highlandliteracy.com/emerging-literacy/)