

Partners in Literacy: An Overview

“Literacy is not just a matter for the Director of Children’s Services, it’s a matter for the whole council. It’s critical to social mobility, regeneration, social cohesion and democracy. Partners in Literacy can help make this vision a reality.”

Terry Piggott, Executive Director, Children and Young People’s Services (2004-2009), Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council



Partners in Literacy

Literacy has the power to transform lives. Partners in Literacy is piloting the difference that a dedicated local authority strategic coordinator could make to supporting literacy in the home to benefit both children and their parents. It is an initiative funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families and delivered by the National Literacy Trust.

Why focus on families?

Research has produced compelling evidence that:

- parents are a child's first educator – the family and home environment have a strong impact on children's literacy development.
- children's literacy skills develop long before they start school. A focus on the early years is therefore crucial.

Why a coordinated approach?

We believe that the more coordinated local services are, the greater their effect.

Partners in Literacy has developed over many years of working with government, local authorities, and other interested organisations on how best to raise standards of literacy. The role of parents as a child's first educator is acknowledged in both the Children's Plan and Every Parent Matters, and the need for a more coordinated approach to supporting children underpins the Every Child Matters agenda. However, evidence suggests that despite much excellent practice on the ground, productive partnership work is often patchy and short-term. Where local authorities

have a strategic commitment to raising literacy standards, partnerships across agencies and across communities flourish. The Trust believes that through these partnerships the audiences who can benefit most from improving their literacy skills can be reached. Schools, family learning, libraries and education provide excellent services and are able to engage and support the majority of people. However, to make sure local support for literacy is not 'hard-to-reach' local authorities need to lead the way in engaging all partners who serve local families and communities.

Why now?

During the 2008 National Year of Reading every local authority in England committed to focusing on literacy and the importance of a coordinated, multi-agency approach. Partners in Literacy builds on this momentum, supporting each of the targeted pilot authorities in:

- mapping current provision
- strengthening partnership work across the authority
- linking with a wide range of voluntary organisations, community groups and businesses at local level

in order to:

- improve existing services to strengthen delivery of both universal and targeted provision
- engage and support a wider range of parents and their children, particularly the most disadvantaged families
- embed support for literacy in the home with local planning, ensuring sustainability
- contribute to the delivery of local and national targets and policies
- release efficiencies



Timetable

Partners in Literacy is a two year pilot project. Starting in 2008 with a review of research and evidence, the pilot began in 2009 in four authorities and was extended to a further five in 2010. By 2011, the National Literacy Trust believes it will have proved the impact of a multi-agency approach to literacy and will be able to support local authorities nationally to develop the model. Authorities engaged as pilots are: Coventry, Derbyshire, Gateshead, Kent, Knowsley, Lambeth, Sheffield, Suffolk, Wiltshire.

How Partners in Literacy can help local authorities reach their national targets

Research* has proved the impact of literacy on outcomes including:

- aspirations and social mobility
- civic and cultural participation.
- educational attainment
- health and wellbeing
- skills and employment

Partners in Literacy will help local authorities to improve outcomes for the most disadvantaged families. It is in a powerful position to support the delivery of both local and national government targets.

The diagram on the next page shows how Partners in Literacy can contribute to these targets.

* See Literacy Changes Lives: An Advocacy Resource at www.literacytrust.org.uk/research



Improving outcomes for families through local coordination

Partners in Literacy

Outcomes achievable through Partners in Literacy

Increased literacy of parents and children

Greater emphasis on the enjoyment of learning

Public Service Agreement target sets

Sustainable growth and prosperity (PSA 1-7)

Relevant Public Service Agreements

- PSA 1** Raise the productivity of the UK economy
- PSA 2** Improve skills of the population
- PSA 7** Improve the economic performance of all the regions, and close the gap between regions

- PSA 8** Maximise employment
- PSA 9** Halve child poverty, c
- PSA 10** Raise the educational
- PSA 11** Narrow the gap in ed
- PSA 12** Improve the health o
- PSA 14** Increase the number
- PSA 15** Address disadvantag on their gender, race

Negotiated National Indicators achievable via Partners in Literacy (Statutory targets shown in bold)

- PSA 2** NI 161 Learners achieving a level 1 qualification in literacy
- NI 163 Proportion of population aged 19-64 for males and 19-59 for females qualified to at least level 2
- PSA 7** NI 151 Overall employment rate
- PSA 16** NI 148 Care leavers in employment, education or training
- DIUS DSO** NI 174 Skills gaps in the current workforce reported by employers

- PSA 8** NI 151 Overall empl
- NI 152 Working age
- PSA 9** NI 116 Proportion o
- PSA 10** NI 72 **Achieveme**
- NI 73 **Achieveme**
- NI 74 **Achieveme**
- NI 79 Achievemen
- NI 80 Achievemen
- PSA 11** NI 92 **Narrowing**
- NI 93 **Progression**
- NI 95 **Progression**
- NI 97 **Progression**
- NI 102 Achievemen
- NI 106 Young peopl
- PSA 12** NI 50 Emotional h
- PSA 14** NI 110 Young peopl
- NI 117 Number of 1
- or training (N
- PSA 15** NI 140 Fair treatme
- NI 3 Civic particip

The diagram demonstrates:

- the key outcomes achievable through the Partners in Literacy approach
- how they link to key national Public Service Agreement targets (middle section)
- how these outcomes contribute to a range of local targets from the National Indicator Set (bottom section).

NB: An editable version of this diagram is available on the Partners in Literacy website. This enables authorities to tailor it to fit with particular local practices and targets.

Diagram showing how the PiL strategy can contribute to national policy and local targets

Increased family cohesion and communication

Higher frequency of home literacy practices

Better links between the school and home literacy practices

Fairness and opportunity for all (PSA 8 – 17)

Stronger communities and better quality of life (PSA 18-26)

Equal opportunity for all
 on the way to eradicating it completely
 Full attainment of all children and young people
 Educational achievement of all children
 Health and wellbeing of children and young people
 Support of children on the path to success
 Elimination of prejudice and discrimination that individuals experience based on race, ethnicity, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief

PSA 21 Build more cohesive, empowered and active communities

Employment rate
 Support people on out of work benefits

PSA 15 NI 4 % of people who believe they can influence decisions in their local area

Number of children in poverty

DSO DCMS NI 9 Use of public libraries

Percentage of 78 points across the EYFS
 Percentage at level 4 or above in English
 Percentage at level 5 in English

PSA 21 NI 1 % of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area

Percentage of a level 2 qualification by aged 19
 Percentage of a level 3 qualification by aged 19

Closing the gap in the early years

CO DSO NI 6 Participation in regular volunteering
 NI 7 Environment for a thriving third sector

Percentage up by 2 levels in English between KS1 and 2

Percentage up by 2 levels in English between KS2 and 3

Percentage up by 2 levels in English between KS2 and 4

Percentage of gap between children on free school meals and their peers

PSA 12 NI 50 Emotional health of children

Percentage of children from low income households progressing to higher education

Emotional health of children

Percentage of young people's participation in positive activities

Percentage of 16 to 18-year-olds who are not in education, employment or training (NEET)

Percentage of children supported by local services

Percentage of children participating in the local area

In the last three decades, research has produced compelling evidence justifying a focus on the family in order to improve outcomes, stressing the need for an emphasis on the early years.

These key findings underpin Partners in Literacy:

- **Families and parents are critical.** Parental involvement in their child's literacy practices is a more powerful force for educational attainment than other family background variables, such as social class, family size and level of parental education.
- **The home is crucial.** Parents have the greatest influence on the achievement of young people through supporting their learning in the home rather than supporting activities in school. It is their support for learning within the home environment that makes the maximum difference to achievement.
- **Early intervention is vital.** The earlier parents become involved in their children's literacy practices, the more profound the results and the longer-lasting the effects. Early intervention is crucial because learning begins within the family long before children start school.
- **Parent involvement in home learning activities is essential.** Many background variables affect the impact of the family and home environment but parental attitudes and behaviour, especially parents' involvement in home learning activities, can be crucial in overcoming the influences of other factors.

Low literacy rates are associated with the most disadvantaged families and communities. No national strategy or local approach can succeed in improving literacy standards by focusing just

on formal educational settings where children spend only a small proportion of their time. On the contrary, we need to embrace the family as a whole and include parents as partners in their children's education from the very beginning of their children's lives. Partners in Literacy will help to raise parents' awareness of the difference they can make and help set up systems that offer constant encouragement and support.

For a fuller version of this rationale, with references, see www.partnersinliteracy.org.uk.



*“I used to nag nag nag
but now I know how
to help my children.”*

A case study changes lives in Rochdale

Terry Piggott, Executive Director of Children and Young People's Services (2004-2009) at Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council, explains how Rochdale's coordinated approach to literacy has, and continues, to raise standards.

We're a little bit unusual among local authorities because we've got a whole-borough literacy strategy. It's working because the results here have started to improve rapidly. Although Rochdale is the twenty-fifth most deprived borough in the country, since 2003 Rochdale's results at key stage 2 have consistently been among the most improved in the country. Our most improved primary schools are engaged in family learning.

The historic link between poverty, low aspirations and poor basic skills may not have been completely broken, but it has certainly been loosened. Obviously, literacy is not the only thing that is helping children achieve these results but it is a vital part.

The special elements that have helped make our approach successful are, first, that I championed it so there was a drive from Director level. The fact that I give this some priority means we found funding for a coordinator.

Another central element is our Literacy Entitlement Group (bringing together people from a range of sectors to drive the initiative forward). People want to attend because the meetings are interactive and fun, with a chance to network.

Apart from the usual 'literacy suspects', we've got Job Centre Plus, the Primary Care Trust and Voluntary Sector groups. Despite their different interests they can all see the importance of literacy to improving the lives of the people they support.

For me, literacy is a taproot of so much else. Obviously, the council wants its citizens to be prosperous, have jobs and fully participate in democratic debate. So literacy is not just a matter for the Director of Children's Services: it's a matter for the whole council. It's critical to regeneration and social mobility. It's all very well to build new buildings and create new industrial estates, but the skills needed for the future really do rely on people having higher skills. You cannot progress to higher skills until you've got that basic bedrock of literacy. Every council, whether it's prosperous or otherwise, should recognise that.

To not have a literacy policy, to not have a coordinated approach to the fundamental building block of all those things, means you really are missing a trick. Literacy transforms lives.

"To not have a literacy policy, to not have a coordinated approach means you really are missing a trick."

“We know from research that children who go on to do well at school are those whose parents communicate and read with them from an early age. We also know that by working across our services and with partner agencies we can support more families. Through Partners in Literacy we can bring these two elements together, engaging partners across the whole of Suffolk to better support families and improve outcomes for children.”

Cllr Graham Newman, Cabinet Member with portfolio for Children and Young People’s Service, Suffolk County Council

“Partners in Literacy is a really important project for Lambeth. We see literacy as a foundation, not just for education, but for employment, skills, cohesive communities and confident and articulate children. This project will help us reach all the families who most need help with reading and writing. It’s also a great vehicle for us to drive multi-agency working. We’re aiming to make every Lambeth home a reading home and Partners in Literacy is helping us to make that a reality.”

John Readman, Divisional Director, Community Learning, Lambeth Council

“We have much that we can be proud of in terms of our support for families , by working together we can ensure that all families receive the support they need. Reading, writing, speaking and listening are skills which underpin so much – personal confidence, educational attainment, access to work, our local economy- that’s why we’re making literacy a priority via Partners in Literacy.”

Paul Carter, Leader of Kent County Council

“In Coventry, we are forging partnerships across health and children’s services to improve outcomes for children and families. Partners in Literacy is a vehicle to advance this further, putting language acquisition and communication right at the heart of work across these two key agencies, strategically and on the front-line. Only by working across agencies can we improve outcomes for the children and families that most need support.”

Andy Walmsley, Assistant Director, Children, Learning and Young People, Coventry City Council

“I am delighted to be the Partners in Literacy Champion for Gateshead and to be associated with this excellent and worthwhile project. I fully endorse its aims to support the development of a multi agency partnership and to raise literacy levels, by supporting those families for whom improved literacy can have the greatest impact. This is vital if we are to continue to raise literacy levels in our schools and in our communities resulting in people’s improved skills and employability as well as confidence and aspirations.”

Cllr Catherine Donovan, Cabinet Member with portfolio for Children and Young People, Gateshead Council



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