

Key Questions and Prompts

The Overarching Question

In what ways and how effectively is the capacity of teachers, administrators, and parents developing to ensure that all children reach an acceptable standard of literacy by third grade?

Key Questions

Practice of Teaching

- 1a. Does the school/classroom environment help teachers teach effectively?
- 1b. Do teachers recognize and respond to the needs of all their students?
- 1c. Do teachers employ a range of strategies and classroom organization with the whole class and smaller groups and reflect on how well their approaches have worked?
- 1d. Do teachers ensure they are providing a learning experience that is consistent with other classes in their grade?
- 1e. Has the school community addressed the recommendations on “the practice of teaching” identified in the previous review?

Student Learning

- 2a. Do students understand what they are doing, what they are expected to learn from it, where their strengths and weaknesses lie, and how they may improve?
- 2b. Can students draw on their own experience and knowledge to help them tackle new problems and stimulate their speech and writing?
- 2c. Do children enjoy their learning and respond to the opportunities they are given?
- 2d. Do students achieve the standards expected in reading, writing, and speaking and listening?
- 2e. Has the school community addressed the recommendations on “student learning” identified in the previous review?

The Learning Community

- 3a. Is the school committed to Cornerstone principles and definition of literacy and to working together as learners?
- 3b. How do the principal, teachers, and all those who work in the school organize to translate the principles into practice and work toward agreed-upon and understood goals?

–Cornerstone Mission

To ensure that all children reach an acceptable standard of literacy by third grade.

To read, to write, to think critically, to reason, to analyze and evaluate information, to communicate effectively in a variety of forms, and to inquire systematically into any important matter.

- 3c. Do those with Cornerstone roles help teachers and others become more proficient in their work with students?
- 3d. Does the school involve the parents and wider community?
- 3e. Has the school community addressed the recommendations on “the learning community” identified in the previous review?

Key Questions with Prompts for Lesson Observations, Interviews, and Other Evidence Gathering

Practice of Teaching

1a. Does the school/classroom environment help teachers teach effectively?

- Examples in the whole school learning environment – halls, library, etc. – to illustrate commitment to literacy and promotion of reading and writing activities;
- Accessibility of library facilities to small people, including heights of displays and suitability of texts;
- How classroom learning environment promotes literacy activities;
- How the reading area is presented and organized; how it is used, who uses it;
- Types of texts available to students;
- Prompts for student writing;
- Intellectual environment; emotional environment;
- Professional environment – how it helps the teacher do the job;
- If separate areas are set aside for large (for crafting), small group (invitational), and individual literacy work;
- Whether there are displays of children’s work and records of children’s thinking;
- Book collections by the same author, illustrated by the same artist, or on a special theme;
- Whether there are appropriate bilingual texts;
- How explicitly the teacher makes use of this variety of texts;
- Whether the class hears a range of texts read out loud;
- How extensive the classroom library is; how the collection is displayed.

1b. Do teachers recognize and respond to the needs of all their students?

- How teachers know the current learning needs of each student;
- Group-reading activities with or without the teacher or other adult;
- How teachers ensure their teaching has an impact on students of all abilities;
- How specific help is organized for students who need it;
- How students choose a book to read; how, given a free choice, they choose books appropriately, how choices are made for them; how the teacher ensures that the book chosen matches the student’s reading.

1c. Do teachers employ a range of strategies and classroom organization with the whole class and smaller groups and reflect on how well their approaches have worked?

- How the elements of literacy have been broken down into a set of skills that are taught progressively;
- Evidence that teacher is consciously trying to improve practice in providing crafting (whole group) lessons and is reflective about that practice;
- The degree to which teacher meets with whole class to think aloud and model explicitly as children learn a new strategy or skill;
- Teaching styles that are seen to promote literacy;
- How teachers communicate their expectations;
- A spirit of rigor is evident; children are urged to share more, probe more deeply;
- How well reading and writing with small groups extend skills and provides high-quality interactions;
- How appropriate are independent activities of children working without direct adult intervention?

1d. Do teachers ensure they are providing a learning experience that is consistent with other classes in their grade?

- Does grade level planning ensure consistent coverage of taught literacy skills?
- Is there a fruitful interchange of ideas and resources between grade teams?
- Are teachers in the grade working to a common level of expectation?

1e. Has the school community addressed the recommendations on “the practice of teaching” identified in the previous review?

- Refer to the previous review and cross reference with the sections above.

Student Learning

2a. Do students understand what they are doing, what they are expected to learn from it, where their strengths and weaknesses lie, and how they may improve?

- Whether quiet reading time is a really productive and useful time; what is being read;
- Student awareness of the wider aims of reading and writing, and a wide range of uses for reading and writing;
- Students enabled to articulate their ideas; invited to talk/confer about their reading and writing;
- Students can talk about their learning;
- Opportunities for students to write in a range of ways for different purposes (to communicate, inform, record, instruct, entertain, plan, as an aid to memory, to persuade, to organize, etc.).

2b. Can students draw on their own experience and knowledge to help them tackle new problems and stimulate their speech and writing?

- Whether children solve learning problems independently or are unnecessarily reliant on their teacher;

- The extent to which students are invited to make reference to text-to-self connections;
- Whether children take their own experience as a starting point for some of their writing, and enhance it imaginatively;
- The part played by speaking and listening in reading and writing;
- Causal links between oracy difficulties and literacy difficulties recognized and addressed;
- Evidence that students are focused on and gradually assuming responsibility for use of deep structure strategies and surface structure skills;
- Consistency of relationship between reading and writing;
- Quality of texts presented to students and availability within classrooms.

2c. Do children enjoy their learning and respond to the opportunities they are given?

- Evidence that students love reading and treasure books;
- What reading goes on through the day (This may not necessarily be from a 'reading book' but may be in connection with some other curriculum area);
- Opportunities taken to promote children's pride in their literacy;
- Whether students have opportunities to share their reading or writing with readers of different ages;
- Whether their behavior demonstrates commitment to learning; how well they participate in groups; how well they work independently of adults;
- Criteria employed by the school when choosing books.

2d. Do students achieve the standards expected in reading, writing, and speaking and listening?

- How well the standards achieved in each grade match those defined by the Cornerstone Framework. (Note: Cornerstone standards are generally more rigorous than state requirements.)

2e. Has the school community addressed the recommendations on "student learning" identified in the previous review?

- Refer to the previous review and cross reference with the sections above.

Learning Community

3a. Is the school committed to Cornerstone principles and definition of literacy and to working together as learners?

- How well the purposes of literacy activities are defined and whether these purposes are consistent across the school;
- The learning philosophy that underpins the teaching of literacy;
- How this is communicated to students, parents, and others who work in the school community;
- The extent to which this philosophy is inherent in the practice observed throughout the school.

- 3b. How do the principal, teachers, and all those who work in the school organize to translate the principles into practice and work toward agreed-upon and understood goals?**
- How the leadership of the school promotes a culture of literacy;
 - The level of faculty expertise and how it is disseminated;
 - How responsibility for coordinating the teaching of literacy is defined and how effectively it is carried out;
 - Evidence that the school is a learning community; how the faculty shares ideas about literacy teaching;
 - Opportunities that exist for teachers to observe the good practice of colleagues in the school and elsewhere;
 - Areas for improvement in the teaching of literacy which the faculty has identified and expressed as goals emanating from the asset map and how they are approaching the task of improvement.
- 3c. Do those with Cornerstone roles help teachers and others become more proficient in their work with students?**
- Training that has been offered to support literacy teaching to faculty and others in the school community;
 - Changes in professional practice that can be attributed to training received;
 - Improvements in student learning and literacy that can be attributed to improved professional practice;
 - Criteria by which these student improvements are measured and understood by the faculty and the degree to which they have knowledge of how to sustain them;
 - The extent to which teachers without their own classes and teaching assistants are benefiting from Cornerstone training;
 - How the role of the coaches is sustained and supported;
 - How closely and effectively the coaches work together;
 - Input from the critical friend and district strategy manager.
- 3d. Does the school involve the parents and wider community?**
- Examples of parental involvement;
 - Extent to which the parent body understands the objectives of Cornerstone, and how this has been achieved;
 - How the school has overcome obstacles to increased parental involvement;
 - Extent to which the school's wider community has been able to contribute to the development of Cornerstone, and examples of this.
- 3e. Has the school community addressed the recommendations on "the learning community" identified in the previous review?**
- Refer to the previous review and cross reference with the sections above.