

Supplementary Notes 1

Building a strong interface between the junior and senior secondary curricula: Focusing on the development of literacy skills

*[Supplementary notes to Chapter 1.4 **Interface with the Junior Secondary Curriculum and Post-Secondary Pathways** in the English Language Curriculum and Assessment Guide (Secondary 4-6) (CDC & HKEAA, 2007), pp.3-4]*

In designing and implementing an effective school-based secondary English language curriculum, due consideration has to be given to the learning experiences and achievements of the learners in the previous key stages of learning, with a view to developing and reinforcing learners' English knowledge and skills progressively through opportunities for consolidation and application at the secondary level. Particular emphasis has to be put on the development of literacy skills at the junior secondary level.

In developing primary learners' reading skills, strategies are adopted by schools in the design of their school-based English language curriculum and the use of resources on top of textbooks. Since 2005, primary schools have introduced Reading Workshops, which take up a maximum of 40% of the English lesson time, into their school-based English language curriculum to strengthen learners' development of reading skills. In Reading Workshops, real books covering a wide range of literary and information texts over a variety of themes and topics are used to facilitate the development of reading skills in context. The reading texts also stimulate learners in generating ideas and applying the necessary vocabulary and structures in follow-up writing activities. Primary learners' literacy skills are strengthened so that they can meet the challenge of English language learning at the secondary level.

In this respect, further development of literacy skills at the secondary level is necessary. Through exposure to a variety of text-types and texts of different levels of complexity and on a wider range of topics, learners' knowledge base and learning experiences are broadened and enriched. To maximise the benefits gained from reading, teachers can design writing activities which not only require learners to borrow or integrate ideas from the reading input, but also allow them to use the vocabulary, communicative functions and text features they have learnt.

Secondary teachers have to recognise that all learners have accumulated a certain range of reading experiences and developed some basic reading skills and strategies by the time they start Secondary 1. To better articulate learners' current performance in reading and writing and understand how they could be guided to progress further, teachers may make reference to Figures 1 and 2, which present an overview of the growth of learners on a developmental continuum as they become effective readers and writers. The figures give a general description

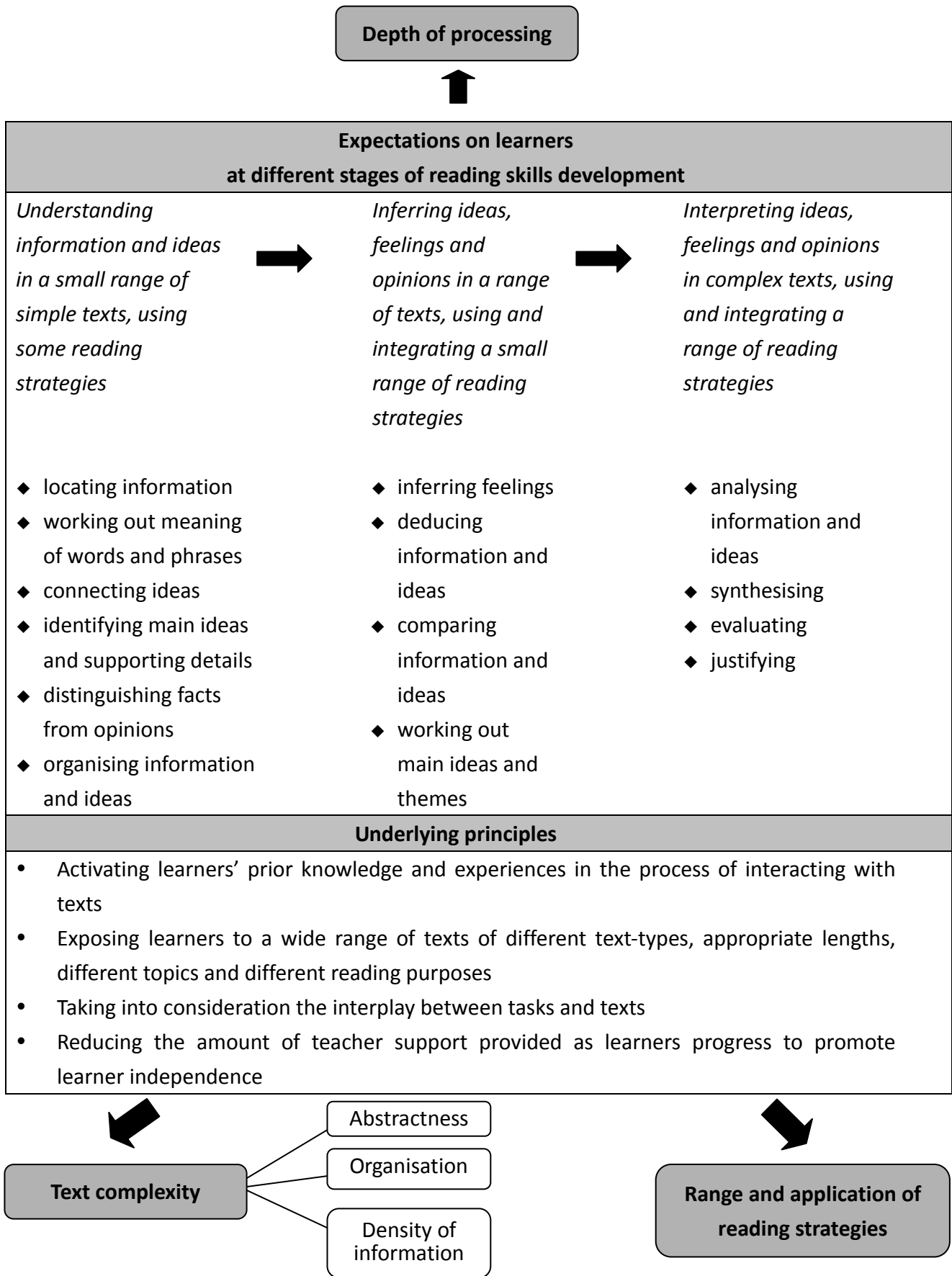
of what the learning outcomes are in reading and writing, i.e. what learners are able to do in demonstrating the progressive development of literacy skills from the primary to secondary levels. They also describe in more detail how the learning outcomes are to be interpreted, as well as include underlying principles about developing learners' reading and writing skills respectively that are applicable across different stages of learning. By making reference to the progression as described in the two figures, together with assessment data gathered from various learning and assessment tasks, teachers can make informed decisions in relation to the following:

- Where to start with their learners
- Whether a text is easy or difficult for their learners
- Whether their learners are making the expected progress
- What to teach, what materials to select and what types of learning tasks to design
- How to help learners to become more effective readers and writers
- What their learners need in order to make progress

Depth of processing

- Planning and providing opportunities for learners to progressively draw on skills that facilitate text processing which requires different levels of cognitive demand, e.g.
 - locating information by identifying key words
 - using a variety of decoding strategies to work out the meaning of unfamiliar words (such as knowledge of letter-sound relationships, knowledge of prefixes and suffixes)
 - following the development of ideas and connecting ideas by using semantic and syntactic clues (such as use of cohesive devices, change of tenses, use of conditional structures)
 - recognising and understanding how texts are organised by using knowledge of text structure and rhetorical patterns (such as cause and effect, comparing and contrasting)
 - inferring ideas, feelings and opinions by using semantic clues (such as use of words with positive or negative connotations, use of subjunctive mood and rhetorical questions)
 - interpreting ideas and opinions presented within and across texts
 - synthesising ideas and opinions presented within and across texts

Figure 1: Progression in the development of Reading Skills



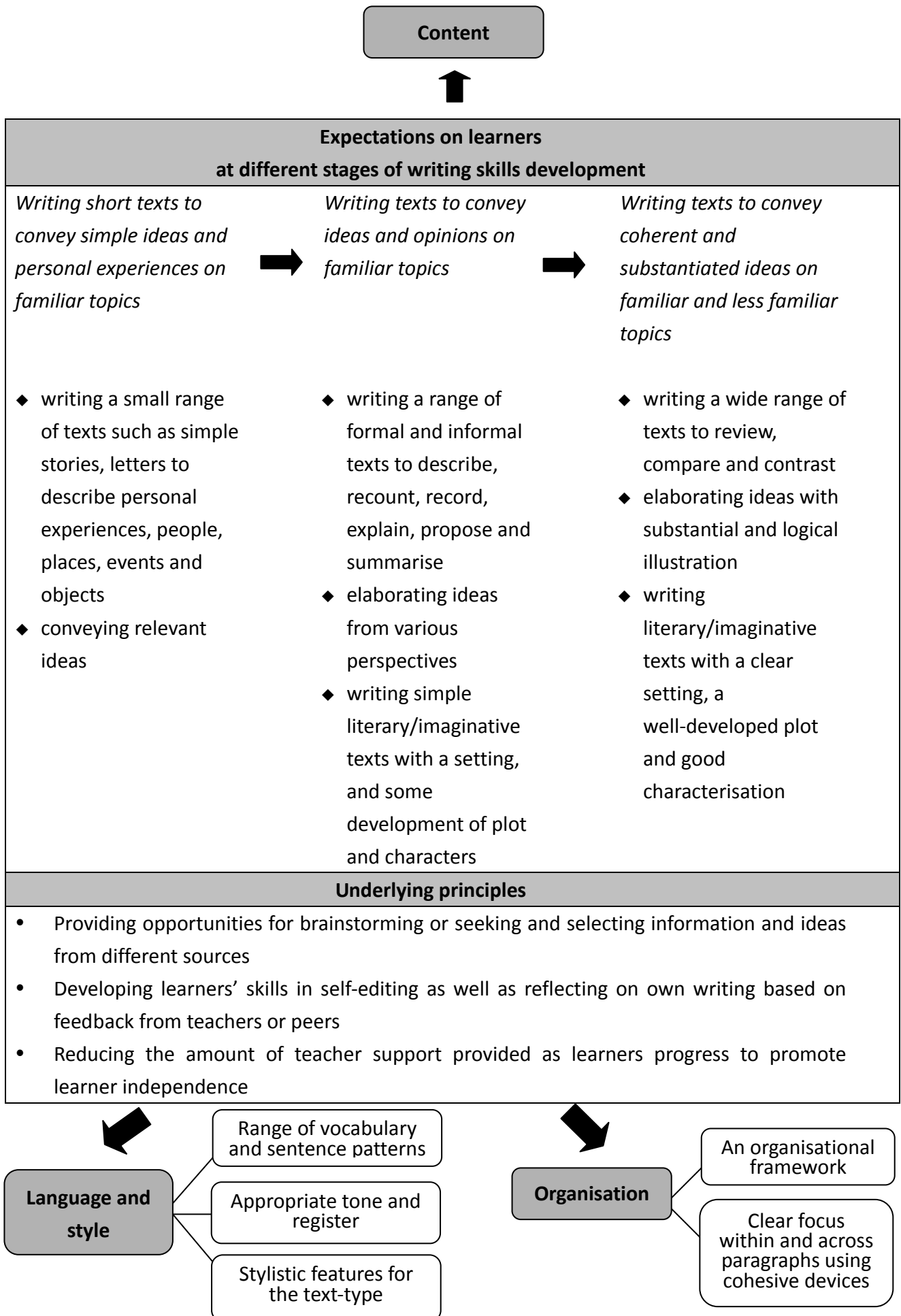
Text complexity

- Using a variety of both print and electronic texts to enhance learners' general knowledge and consolidate their skills and strategies in processing simple/complex texts with due consideration given to, e.g.
 - topics/themes (ranging from familiar topics such as teen problems to less familiar topics such as homeschooling and organ trade)
 - text-types (such as literary and imaginative texts, newspaper articles, online posts on discussion forums, charts, signs, illustrations, comic strips, advertisements)
 - abstractness (such as stating information and ideas explicitly or implicitly through the use of figurative expressions)
 - density of information (such as embedded clauses, nominalisation)
 - stylistic elements (such as a range of language patterns to express different degrees of formality as well as tone and register)
 - text structure (such as paragraphing, headings and subheadings, sequencing of ideas)

Range and application of reading strategies

- Teaching reading skills and strategies explicitly and in a progressive manner to help learners attack words, make meaning of the content, develop higher order thinking skills and extend learning of the content, e.g.
 - modelling what proficient readers do in the process of reading
 - using effective questioning before, while and after reading
- Using texts composed of a range of vocabulary items to sensitise learners to word formation, collocations, academic words and semantically related words
- Supporting the integrated use of language skills and extending learners' learning experience and knowledge by providing opportunities for them to respond to texts purposefully and critically, e.g.
 - examining the topic/theme of the texts from various perspectives
 - expressing like/dislike about characters in stories
 - inferring writer's point of view
 - making connection with the world or other texts they have read
 - justifying interpretations
- Fostering learners' abilities to monitor their reading for accuracy and to adjust their reading, e.g.
 - using what they know about words and sentence structures
 - looking for clues to confirm their predictions and inferences
 - varying the speed of reading, rereading and attending to the most important information when they encounter obstacles

Figure 2: Progression in the development of Writing Skills



Content

- Providing opportunities for learners to write texts of different lengths, about a range of topics (from the familiar to the less familiar) and for a range of purposes (including recounting, describing, recording, explaining, proposing, summarising, reviewing, comparing and contrasting)
- Taking learners through steps towards analysing questions (such as identifying the purpose, writer's role, target audience, topic, and stylistic features for the text-type)
- Making explicit how subject matters and purposes influence the choice of language and style and text organisation

Language and Style

- Fostering learners' abilities to present ideas with appropriate stylistic features through, e.g.
 - emphasising the use of grammar in context to achieve the intended writing purposes
 - enriching learners' word choice and contextualising their vocabulary knowledge by assigning writing tasks associated with a wide range of themes, providing authentic practices in lexical expansion and teaching vocabulary building strategies explicitly
- Raising learners' awareness of tone, style and register to achieve the intended writing purposes (such as the degree of formality, reader-writer relationship)

Organisation

- Introducing the use of different kinds of graphic organisers for organising information (e.g. a Fishbone mapping which is useful for discussing questions which have a cause and effect)
- Developing learners' abilities in arranging ideas and establishing links through the whole text by modelling the use of writing frames which feature the structure of a particular text-type
- Fostering learners' abilities to use appropriate cohesive devices to enhance cohesion and coherence in the text

Planning a literacy programme

When planning for a holistic school-based literacy programme, teachers should be aware of the importance of vertical curriculum coherence. They should take into consideration the knowledge and skills acquired by learners at previous key stages and conduct learning activities to support learners to achieve the intended learning outcomes progressively. The same principles apply to the development of listening and speaking skills. During the process of language skills development, teachers should also enhance learners' high order thinking skills, which, among others, include critical thinking and creativity, through designing less guided learning tasks in varied contexts. Taken together, these classroom practices enable learners to develop their receptive and productive skills further and apply them for general and academic purposes and ultimately independent, life-long learning.