Teaching Children to Read

Eighth Report of Session 2004–05

Report, together with formal minutes, oral and written evidence

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The Education and Skills Committee

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Footnotes

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Summary

The ability to read is the key to educational achievement. Without a basic foundation in literacy, children cannot gain access to a rich and diverse curriculum. Poor literacy limits opportunities not only at school, but throughout life, both economically and in terms of a wider enjoyment and appreciation of the written word. This inquiry was motivated by the Committee’s firm belief that all children should get the best teaching possible in this crucial area.

This inquiry has focused specifically on the methods used in schools to teach children to read. We fully acknowledge that the acquisition of reading is an extremely complex subject, which is influenced by factors outside a school’s control, such as socio-economic background, neurological development, the language of instruction and the experiences and stimuli a child encounters at a very early age, as well as many others. These factors deserve a thorough treatment which has not been possible in the limited time available to us. However, we do consider that teaching methods have a significant impact on a child’s chances of becoming a fluent reader.

The Government tells us that primary school children have never been more proficient readers. It claims this achievement as the outcome of its National Literacy Strategy (now Primary National Strategy), introduced in 1997. Others question the true extent of this success, claiming that the proportion of children experiencing significant difficulties with reading is larger that these figures suggest. As data generated through Key Stage tests can be skewed by associated factors, such as teachers ‘teaching to the test’, we recommend that the DfES commission an independent evaluation of trends in reading standards among primary school children which would make clear the scale and nature of the problem faced, and provide a basis for further policy work.

Even if Government figures are taken at face value, at age 11 around 20% of children still do not achieve the success in reading (and writing) expected of their age. This figure is unacceptably high. Furthermore, there is a wide variation in the results achieved by schools with apparently similar intakes. This differential achievement suggests that problems do exist, either in the implementation of the Government’s strategies or inherently in the methodology it promotes.

During this inquiry, we took evidence from witnesses who argued that phonics programmes should have more prominence in the early teaching of reading (these programmes concentrate on establishing an early understanding of sound-letter correspondence). We took evidence from others who questioned the utility of this approach, preferring to focus on the development of vocabulary and the enrichment of linguistic experience, as well as from those who support the current Government advice in the form of the Primary National Strategy.

It is unlikely that any one method or set of changes would lead to a complete elimination of underachievement in reading; however it seems that at present around 20% of eleven-year-olds are not reading at an age-appropriate level. We recommend a review of the NLS to determine whether its current prescriptions and recommendations are the best available
methodology for the teaching of reading in primary schools. Further large-scale, comparative research on the best ways of teaching children to read, comparing synthetic phonics ‘fast and first’ with other methods (for example analytical phonics and the searchlights model promoted in the NLS) is necessary to determine which methods of teaching are most effective for which children. It may be that some methods of teaching (such as phonics) are more effective for children in danger of being left behind. This research should be commissioned by the DfES. As far as possible, this study should use control groups to take account of factors which may have a bearing on reading outcomes, for example, teacher knowledge and ability, socio-economic background and gender.

Corresponding research into other factors affecting reading acquisition, such as the development of cognitive skills and the age at which reading is first taught formally, is also necessary. But research cannot be of use unless teachers are fully informed of its findings and consequences for classroom practice. Improvements to teacher training are necessary to ensure that all teachers of reading are familiar with the psychological and developmental processes involved in reading acquisition. In addition, we note that the pre-school sector is generally characterised by a low skilled and low paid workforce. Upskilling in this area would result in important benefits to children’s development and reading readiness.

Other factors implicated in underachievement are the early development of literacy, oral and communication skills, as well as a love of literature and reading, and parental involvement in teaching children to read. The stimuli a child experiences before the time he or she enters primary school and begins to be taught to read formally are vital to success in reading. Early childhood development of communication skills and experiences of literacy in its widest sense have a significant effect on a child’s preparedness to learn to read. Opportunities can be enhanced through pre-school programmes, but the engagement of parents to provide educational development in the home is key. Recent initiatives aimed at fostering this engagement have been shown to significantly improve outcomes. In this context the Government’s ‘Every Child Matters’ reform of children’s services has a central role.
1 Introduction

1. The ability to read is the key to educational achievement. Without a basic foundation in literacy, children cannot gain access to a rich and diverse curriculum. Poor literacy limits opportunities not only at school, but throughout life, both economically and in terms of a wider enjoyment and appreciation of the written word. This inquiry was motivated by the Committee’s firm belief that all children should get the best teaching possible in this crucial area.

2. The Government tells us that primary school children have never been more proficient readers. It claims this achievement as the outcome of its National Literacy Strategy (now Primary National Strategy), introduced in 1997. Others question the true extent of this success. Moreover, even if Government figures are taken at face value, at age 11, around 20% of children still do not achieve the success in reading (and writing) expected of their age. This figure is unacceptably high. Furthermore, there is a wide variation in the results achieved by schools with apparently similar intakes.1 This differential achievement suggests that problems do exist, either in the implementation of the Government’s strategies or inherently in the methodology it promotes.

3. The main issue for this inquiry was to examine current practice in schools. We engaged with the ongoing debate concerning the best method of teaching reading. We took evidence from witnesses who argued that ‘phonics’ programmes should have more prominence in the early teaching of reading (these programmes concentrate on establishing an early understanding of sound-letter correspondence). We took evidence from others who questioned the utility of this approach, preferring to focus on the development of vocabulary and the enrichment of linguistic experience, as well as from those who support the current Government advice in the form of the Primary National Strategy. Many of those who contacted us during this inquiry argued passionately for or against these different methods. Our aim was to determine objectively which method worked best, based on the available evidence, or, if the evidence was insufficient, to recommend steps that should be taken in order to reach a conclusion.

4. This inquiry has focused specifically on the methods used in schools to teach children to read. We fully acknowledge that the acquisition of reading is an extremely complex subject, which is influenced by factors outside a school’s control, such as socio-economic background, neurological development, the language of instruction and the experiences and stimuli a child encounters at a very early age, as well as many others. These factors deserve a thorough treatment which has not been possible in the limited time available to us. However, we do consider that teaching methods have a significant impact on a child’s chances of becoming a fluent reader. Some of the other factors involved in early childhood development are discussed in our recent report on the reform of children’s services, Every Child Matters and in previous reports on Pupil Achievement and Early Years.2

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1 Reading for Purpose and Pleasure: an evaluation of the teaching of reading in primary schools, Ofsted, HMI 2393, 14 December 2004.

5. Before setting out our conclusions and recommendations, it is necessary to clarify the central terms concerned in any discussion of ‘teaching children to read’. ‘Reading’ is a term that is often used as if were self-evident. But a number of different processes can be understood to make up ‘reading’. These include:

- decoding: the ability to translate letters on a page into known sounds that correspond to a word;
- comprehension: once a word has been sounded out, understanding the meaning of that word;
- narrative: Knowing that a story has innate progression and coherence: a beginning, middle and end;
- familiarity with books and other printed material: a culture of wanting to read and enjoying it.

Most would agree that being a reader involves all these elements. But when discussing the teaching of reading it is sometimes useful to distinguish between them.

6. In addition, ‘literacy rates’ are often referred to without a precise definition of what constitutes ‘illiteracy’. Sometimes, reading ability is measured against a specific benchmark, such as the Government’s Level 2 skills standard (equivalent to the reading ability expected of an 11 year old), which measures adult literacy. Elsewhere, illiteracy is simply a synonym for any reading ability below that expected of a child’s age (as measured by Key Stage tests). In these cases, it is possible for a child to have a significant mastery of reading and to be able to cope with quite sustained texts whilst still being described as ‘illiterate’. In this report, we have attempted to be as precise as possible when dealing with measurements of literacy and to state on each occasion which measure is being used.

7. We announced our inquiry into methods of teaching children to read in November 2004. In the course of this inquiry, we took oral evidence from Dr Morag Stuart, Reader in Psychology, Institute of Education, University of London; Mrs Debbie Hepplewhite, Reading Reform Foundation; Mr Stephen Twigg, MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Schools; Mr Andrew McCully, Director of School Standards Group, Department for Education and Skills; Dr Kevan Collins, National Director, Primary National Strategy; Ms Sue Lloyd, Co-author, Jolly Phonics; Professor Rhona Johnston, Professor of Psychology, University of Hull; Ms Ruth Miskin, ReadWrite Inc.; Mr Neil McClelland OBE, Director and Ms Julia Strong, Deputy Director, National Literacy Trust; and Ms Jo White and Ms Melian Mansfield, Early Childhood Forum. We received 55 written submissions. We would like to thank our Specialist Adviser, Professor Kathy Sylva, for her valuable assistance.
2 Context

8. Since 1997, the teaching of reading in publicly funded English schools has been guided by the National Literacy Strategy (NLS), now part of the Primary National Strategy. The NLS is non-statutory guidance, a ‘Framework for Teaching’ which sets out objectives for children from Reception to Year 6, with the aim of enabling pupils to become fully literate. It gives guidance on the ways in which teaching should take place and acts as a day-to-day reference document for classroom teachers.

9. The NLS began in 1997, when concerns about literacy standards in primary schools (expressed, amongst others, by Ofsted in its report *The Teaching of Reading in 45 Inner London Primary Schools*3) led the incoming Labour Government to introduce a strategy specifically aimed at improving the teaching of essential literacy skills, including reading. It was rolled out to all schools in England in 1998, with the aim “to raise standards of literacy throughout the primary age range, to support teachers to deliver the primary programmes of study for reading and writing as set out in the National Curriculum, and to make a significant contribution to the development of speaking and listening”.4 The NLS established a ‘Framework for Teaching’ including the Literacy Hour, specific training for teachers in the delivery of the programme and associated achievement targets, plus support from LEA literacy consultants. Originally, the scope of the NLS extended from the Foundation Stage (age 3–5) to Key Stage 3 (age 11–14), but in 2003 the National Literacy Strategy was combined with the National Numeracy Strategy to become the Primary National Strategy, a change intended “to create a more coherent delivery structure and organisational model, and to interact with schools more effectively on whole-school teaching and learning issues”.5

10. The NLS has apparently led to a significant rise in reading standards. In 1997, 67% of 11 year olds achieved the expected level for their age in reading, and 63% in English, in National Curriculum Tests. The graph below shows the improvement in reading attainment between 1997 and 2004, as measured by the proportion of children achieving the expected level for their age in Key Stage tests. In 2004, 83% of 11 year olds were reading at the level expected of their age.

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3 *The Teaching of Reading in 45 Inner London Primary Schools*, Ofsted, HMR 27/96/DS, 1 October 1996.
4 Ev 33, para 3.
5 Ev 34, para 6
11. This picture of general improvement in the reading ability of primary school age children is supported by an independent evaluation of the NLS conducted by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto. In 2003, OISE published its final report, *Watching and Learning 3*, finding that “The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies are ambitious large-scale reform initiatives that have been generally well implemented and well supported by schools. Although the 2002 targets were not reached, there have been indications of improved teaching practice and pupil learning, as well as a substantial narrowing of the gap between the most and least successful schools and LEAs”. It did find some weaknesses: “there is considerable disparity across teachers in subject knowledge, pedagogical skill and the understanding of NLS and NNS […] Although the Strategies have made a good beginning in a relatively short period of time, the intended changes in teaching and learning have not yet been fully realised”.

12. The improvement in Key Stage test results has been welcomed by many, but others contest the extent of any advance. For example, Professor Peter Tymms, Director of the Curriculum, Evaluation and Management (CEM) Centre at Durham University, has recently challenged the validity of Key Stage 2 tests as an accurate measure of performance. Professor Tymms, who operates alternative assessments for schools and education authorities, said that Key Stage results were misleading because teachers have learnt to ‘teach to the test’. He presented evidence to show that, whilst standards may have risen between 1995 and 2000, the improvements were smaller than the Key Stage 2 scores may imply. His comments were supported by the Statistics Commission, which concluded that the “introduction of a new ‘high stakes’ test, such as the KS tests, can be expected to lead to an initial rise in test scores, even if it does nothing to raise standards […] The Commission believes that it has been established that (a) the improvement in KS2 test scores between 1995 and 2000 substantially overstates the improvement in standards in

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English primary schools over that period, but (b) there was nevertheless some rise in standards”.

13. Evidence from recent international studies has suggested that English children have a high reading ability on average. The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) was a comparative study of the reading achievement of ten year olds undertaken in 2001. Over 140,000 pupils in 35 countries participated in it, including 3,156 English children in Year 5. England ranked third in terms of reading achievement, with only Sweden and the Netherlands higher. However, the study also indicated that, although children in England have greater reading skills, they are less likely to enjoy reading than children from other countries and, importantly, that England has one of the largest variations between its most and least able pupils.

14. It is necessary to treat individual comparative studies with care, as it is difficult to be sure that they are comparing like with like. Nevertheless the PIRLS results do seem to corroborate the results of national tests which suggest that although there has been some improvement, a proportion of children (around 20%) do not achieve the level of reading expected of them at age 11. This situation has been called the ‘long tail of under achievement’. It would seem that at present around one fifth of English children have not fully benefited from any general improvement in reading standards.

15. The Government has agreed that more progress needs to be made in raising children’s reading ability. The NLS has been altered and adapted over the course of its existence (these changes will be discussed in more detail later in this report) and this looks likely to continue in future. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) has recently announced a review of the English Curriculum, under the banner ‘English 21’. It intends to consider the balance of teaching between “the place of creativity and imagination and how to provide an inspiring curriculum and how much emphasis there should be on the ‘nuts and bolts’ of language”. This review will encompass the teaching of English and reading at primary school level. In addition, the Government has recently announced significant changes to the testing regime at Key Stage 1. New assessment arrangements for 7 year olds will combine National Curriculum tests with continuous teacher assessment. Together, these changes constitute an acknowledgement that there is still room for improvement in the teaching of reading at primary school.

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9 See, for example, A Reading Revolution: How we can teach every child to read, Preliminary Report of the Literacy Task Force, chaired by Professor Michael Barber, 27th February 1997.

10 Q 181

11 http://www.qca.org.uk/2586_12512.html

12 DfES Press Notice 2004/0156
3 Teaching Methods

16. The focus of this inquiry was on the methods used to teach children to read in the classroom. We therefore took evidence on the approach recommended by the National Literacy Strategy as well as on the alternative programmes currently being used by teachers in schools. The status of the NLS as guidance means that schools and teachers are free to use whatever method they prefer to teach reading, although some of our evidence pointed to pressure from LEAs and others to adopt the NLS approach and to use the approved teaching materials published alongside the strategy.\textsuperscript{13}

17. The NLS has been strongly criticised by some, who claim that it is not equally successful with all children, and others who even see its approach as educationally damaging. In this section of our report we examine the teaching methodology set out in the NLS and the critiques put forward by two main groups: those supporting a greater use of phonics and those preferring a broader experience of text and language. We then consider what the available research evidence can tell us about these different approaches.

The National Literacy Strategy

18. The National Literacy Strategy promotes the teaching of reading in its broadest sense from the beginning of a child’s education. This includes decoding, comprehension, grammatical understanding and a more general experience of different books and texts. In the NLS scheme, none of these aspects is given priority at any particular time in a child’s acquisition of reading. For example, when a child learning to read encounters a word he or she does not know, the child is encouraged to ‘work out’ the word either by inferring from narrative context or syntax, by sounding out the word or by recognising the shape of the word from a previous encounter. This approach has been termed the ‘searchlights’ model and is graphically represented in the diagram below.

![Diagram of the searchlights model]

19. The searchlights model assumes that reading can best be taught using by using a range of strategies simultaneously. The rationale for this approach is that children will learn to read most effectively by exploiting a diverse range of strategies, but it also claims to be more effective for those children who respond better to one particular approach than to
others: “The ‘searchlights’ metaphor attempts to describe a methodology for teaching reading which optimises the range of ‘cues’ or inputs for the pupil, enabling them to cross refer between them. The more ‘searchlights’ that are switched on, the less critical it is if one of them fails”\(^{14}\).

20. In oral evidence, Dr Kevan Collins, National Director of the Primary National Strategy expanded on the rationale behind the NLS approach. He emphasised not only the ‘searchlights’ model, but also the fact that the NLS established a regular curriculum time devoted exclusively to reading:

“What the child does is they bring the four aspects of the searchlights to bear. They bring their knowledge of phonics to get the first consonant. The dominant consonant is the first thing and they get to bits of the word. They use other information, the context, maybe the picture, the evolving story. They use their syntactic knowledge, the kind of grammar and pattern of English, and they use their graphic knowledge. They bring those things to bear to try and solve that word. There are some words at the beginning of reading which you cannot read and then you have got this great other asset which is an adult to help you. What we encourage children to do is to be active learners and to try new things. I have a problem with texts that are completely bound by what children already know. It is quite helpful to have some words in a text which require you to be active and begin to problem solve because I think that is what a lot of reading is about.”\(^{15}\)

“The principal problem [before the NLS] was that there was no place where literacy (and I think reading is the priority in the early years) where reading and writing was taught. There was no moment in the day when this was our focus. It was lost in an integrated curriculum and literacy teaching. I think we would agree on this requires some very focused and structured teaching in the early years.”\(^{16}\)

21. The NLS has been subject to revision since its inception. Stephen Twigg MP, the then Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the DfES and now Minister for School Standards, told us that the Department has “sought at every stage of the strategy to keep on top of the research to ensure that we are engaging with academic evidence both from people in this country and from people in other parts of the world, and that is a continuous process”.\(^{17}\) Dr Collins agreed with this claim, saying:

“As well as that historical body of research, which we draw on deeply, we also in an on going way continually reflect on learning as it occurs, and a key area of that has been the developing research around phonics, which has been a piece of literacy learning, a core element, which we have continually updated and developed and, as we move through our support for schools, we keep drawing on it and evolving and developing our resources, our materials and support based on the research. So it

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\(^{14}\) Ev 35

\(^{15}\) Q 248

\(^{16}\) Q 249

\(^{17}\) Q 150
draws on a historical base and continues to respond to evolving research that is happening every day.”

22. The phonic ‘searchlight’ has perhaps been subject to the most revision in the lifetime of the NLS. Written evidence submitted by the DfES states:

“Every year Ofsted has reviewed the implementation and practices of the National Literacy Strategy, and now the Primary National Strategy. The programme has therefore had an unmatched regular flow of evidence to inform its continuing development. The DfES has also been proactive in seeking out fresh evidence to inform the way we support the teaching of reading. Last year, in response to a 2002 Ofsted report which identified some weaknesses in the teaching of phonics, the department convened a phonics seminar which drew on a range of expertise, including the Reading Reform Foundation, and was independently chaired by Professor Greg Brooks.

The findings of the seminar were that a major redirection of the phonics element of the NLS was neither necessary nor appropriate. The papers from the seminar, including Professor Greg Brooks’ concluding report, can be found on the Primary National Strategy section of the DfES Standards Site. We have also separately published all the background research underpinning the teaching of English at Key Stage 3 in ‘Roots and Research’, which is a research review compiled by Colin Harrison of Nottingham University.

As a result of the seminar described above, the supplement to Progression in Phonics, Playing with Sounds, was produced for primary schools in Spring 2004, to make it a more detailed and fully resourced programme.”

23. In addition, Kevan Collins, Director of the National Primary Strategy, emphasised to us that “the priority for information when you are young is developing the phonics knowledge”. Despite these alterations, the NLS approach has been severely criticised, notably by those who support a much greater and more exclusive focus on phonics in the early teaching of reading.

Phonics

24. In recent years the use of ‘phonics’ has increased in popularity as a method of teaching reading. Put simply, phonics programmes emphasise the importance of establishing a secure correspondence between written letters and the sounds of language in the learner’s mind. Phonics programmes often begin by teaching the single letters of the alphabet as sounds (for example, ‘kicking k’ rather than the letter name ‘kay’), later moving on to more complex digraphs and, finally, the irregular spellings of the English language, which do

18 Q 151
19 Ev 36–37, paragraphs 27-29
20 Q 196
21 A digraph or bigraph is a pair of letters used to write one sound. This is often, but not necessarily, a sound (or more precisely a phoneme—see footnote 23) which cannot be expressed using a single letter in the alphabet used for writing, e.g. ch, th, sh.
not follow phonics rules. As with other teaching methods, there are a number of variations in the way in which phonics can be taught. The two main variants are ‘analytic’ and ‘synthetic’ phonics. Analytic phonics does not necessarily break down words into their smallest units or phonemes. The ‘onset-rime’ method, for example, divides words into openings (onset) and endings (rime). So ‘street’ is broken down into ‘str-eet’. In contrast, synthetic phonics involves segmenting words into the smallest unit of sound, then teaching children to blend these sounds together to form words. So the word ‘street’ is broken down into five components: ‘s-t-r-ee-t’. This is sometimes referred to as ‘all-through-the-word’ teaching. Our inquiry stimulated a particularly strong response from supporters of synthetic phonics, who argued that this approach leads to much greater improvements in reading standards than the searchlights model put forward by the NLS.

25. The evidence we received in favour of synthetic phonics is based on the belief that an early ability to ‘decode’ words is the key to later success in reading. Phonics programmes give children the ability to ‘sound out’ words on a page, even if they do not always understand the meaning of all those words. Supporters of phonics argue that comprehension can be built up subsequently upon this foundation:

“You are not taught contradictory messages and you are not given, in the first instance, words which are awkward, words with complicated phonics, even if they are regular, irregular words, you are given the words that work. By the time you start to be introduced to more difficult words but useful words for reading text, you already understand the principles of the alphabetic code and how to decode words […] within half a term, or a term, you can have a whole cohort of children able to do the most fundamental skill, which is sound out and blend for reading and segment the spoken word for spelling. Now that is very powerful and compared with the mixture that is here [in the NLS], where some phonics will be taught, the results are pretty dramatic.

You can measure how well children can decode words; you can measure how well children can comprehend. What you cannot do is understand their full measure of comprehension if they cannot decode well. They might not do well in a comprehension test, but actually their oral comprehension would be better, they are just not sufficiently competent at reading the words on the page.” (Debbie Hepplewhite, Reading Reform Foundation)

If a child can decode a text effortlessly, it means then that all their resources, all their energies go into working out what the book is all about. If you have to work very hard at reading every single word that you come across, asking yourself ‘Shall I use a picture cue? Shall I use a context cue? Shall I use a picture cue with a letter cue? Shall I read on a little bit and try to work out what the word is in the middle?’, the child cannot make that decision whilst they are reading. The children who are at the

22 An exception is made for very common words which would not normally be taught immediately, such as ‘the’, so that the child is able to access whole texts from an early stage.
23 A phoneme is the smallest contrastive unit in the sound system of a language.
24 Qq 16 and 91
lower end find that almost impossible to do, so then they get the image of themselves as not being very good readers.” (Ruth Miskin, ReadWrite Inc)\textsuperscript{25}

26. An important feature of the phonics approach, which diverges from the methods recommended by the NLS, is that children are only taught to read through texts fully within their current phonological ability. So, although children might encounter words they do not understand, they are not given texts they cannot decode and are therefore not expected to infer words from context or syntax. Many supporters of phonics deplore what they see as 'guessing' strategies and view them as actively damaging.

27. Some submissions further suggest that a phonics approach is particularly effective for children who are at risk of becoming poor readers. This group includes boys, children with English as an additional language and those from socio-economically deprived backgrounds. In her written evidence, Sue Lloyd, co-author of the 'Jolly Phonics' teaching programme, states: “The NLS initiatives were supposed to correct the imbalance between the results of boys and girls, as well as prevent the serious reading failure of the bottom 25%. Fairly soon it was obvious that this initiative was not working for these particular groups […] synthetic phonics is the most effective way to teach reading […] it is possible to have all children, apart from the 2% with clinical disorders, reading and writing fluently before they enter Year 3”.\textsuperscript{26}

28. Many of those who submitted evidence to our inquiry argued that the introduction of phonics 'first and fast' would raise reading rates significantly from their current level. In response to this critique, supporters of the NLS approach gave two responses. Firstly, the DfES argued that phonics is and always has been an important component of the NLS. It pointed to Progression in Phonics and Playing with Sounds, the two phonics programmes it provides to teachers.\textsuperscript{27} It also noted that teachers are able to choose from a number of proprietary phonics programmes now available (including Jolly Phonics) to supplement the NLS.\textsuperscript{28} Secondly, Dr Kevan Collins put forward the argument that phonics should not be taught alone, and claimed that it was inappropriate only to teach decoding ability, even at a very early age of reading instruction:

“For us at the Early Years the phonics is the dominant learning but what we are saying is you do not live there; you are there for a while as you put the learning together and then you are moving up, but we run with the grain of what children do as active learners, and they need all this learning.”\textsuperscript{29}

Asked whether phonics programmes produce better readers, Dr Collins responded:

“No, I would not say that. I would say they work best in being able to demonstrate that children have learned the phonic knowledge. They do not demonstrate that children are learning the other knowledge around the development of context,
syntax and the other parts of reading which, in my view, are also important. They do not demonstrate that knowledge at all.”

29. Dr Collins also took issue with the idea of limiting children’s experience of texts to those within their existing phonological knowledge:

“Controlling the reading environment of a child is a tricky business because there might be the odd book that you have control over but the truth is that children are active readers right across the curriculum and throughout their lives, and what you have to do is give them strategies that allow them to be engaged and positive about that approach and not think, ‘I can only read when I read these little books and everything else I cannot read’.”

30. We have received conflicting evidence from supporters of phonics regarding the possibility of amending the status of phonics within the NLS. Dr Morag Stuart, Reader in Psychology at the Institute of Education, University of London and an advocate of the phonics methodology, told the Committee that the NLS “is broadly correct to the extent that it recognises that reading should be taught and that there is a role for some kind of phonics teaching in how reading should be taught”, but warned that “it has missed an opportunity to get a generation of teachers who understood about reading. I should like to see different models of reading adopted in the National Literacy Strategy guidance to teachers which were in accordance with research evidence and knowledge about reading”.

31. In contrast, other witnesses described the NLS approach as fundamentally flawed and called for it to be withdrawn entirely. Debbie Hepplewhite of the Reading Reform Foundation said that the apparent success of the NLS should not disguise its essential methodological problems:

“The National Literacy Strategy brought a huge impetus to the teaching of reading: massive influx of reading material in the form of big books and sets of reading books. A bit of a rod for teachers, saying ‘You need to teach literacy. You have to make it very high profile in your schools. You have to plan it very thoroughly. There is such a thing as word level, sentence level, text level and you must account for all these areas’. The difference it made was that the middle to above-average children have absolutely flown on that extra impetus. In my opinion, what it did not do was still train the teachers how to teach reading in the most effective way and this is where the sort of, say, bottom third are still failed, because there is still a lot of grey area about how to do it […] I do not think it [the NLS] is broadly correct. I think its programmes are contradictory.”

32. A further complication arises from a difference of opinions concerning the type of phonics that the NLS currently recommends. The DfES claims:
“The approach advocated through the National Strategies is a synthetic phonics approach, as it relies on direct teaching and the recognition and blending of letters to form words. It does not rule out the possibility that children will supplement their knowledge and understanding of a text through inference, and hence could be described as drawing on some elements of an analytical approach. However, it is clear that synthetic phonics is the principal method of instruction.”

33. In contrast, other witnesses have suggested that the NLS programmes do not constitute a rigorous form of synthetic phonics. Psychologists Professor Rhona Johnston and Dr Joyce Watson suggest it is more akin to analytic phonics, an approach they view as much less effective:

“In analytic phonics, whole words are presented and pronounced by the teacher, and the children’s attention is only subsequently drawn to the information given by letter sound correspondences. The National Literacy Strategy’s Progression in Phonics uses an analytic phonics approach, supplemented by a substantial phonemic awareness training programme. The sounding and blending element for pronouncing unfamiliar words is only introduced after children have learnt to read words by sight. Typically in the areas of England in which we have carried out studies of the National Literacy Strategy, it would not be until the third term of the first year at school that the most advanced children would be made aware of the importance of letter sound correspondences in all positions of words, which enables sounding and blending to be taught. An analytic phonics scheme such as this is usually not completed until the end of the third year at school. In synthetic phonics programmes sounding and blending is taught at the start of the year, before books are introduced, and the basic programme can be completed in a period of 2 to 4 months.

The new supplement to Progression in Phonics that was issued last May, Playing with Sounds, still emphasises rhyme and phonemic awareness training as a precursor to learning to read and spell. Early on it also emphasises sound-to-letter training for spelling, rather than letter-to-sound training for reading. In fact 16 letters are taught before children are shown how to blend letter sounds for reading.”

34. In accordance with the available evidence, the DfES now seems to have accepted that phonics is an essential methodology in teaching children to read. The present debate revolves around the status of phonics within early teaching of reading and the type of phonics programme that should be used.

Reading for Pleasure

35. Our inquiry also took evidence from other critics of the NLS who advocated alternative teaching methods. We found particular concern from some who considered that the NLS Framework for Teaching is too rigid in structure and leads to a dull and mechanical experience for pupils. These submissions suggested that there is a danger that such uninspiring lessons will demotivate pupils, so that although they may be proficient in
reading and writing the English language, they have little enthusiasm to learn and any benefits that this proficiency may have afforded them are lost.

36. Written evidence submitted by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) suggests that NLS guidance is self-defeating:

“Within the National Literacy Strategy, the focus on reading and writing, and the consequent marginalisation of speaking and listening has had perverse consequences in terms of exciting children’s interest in language and literature. Even more importantly, children need to talk and to experience a rich diet of spoken language, in order to think and learn. Reading, writing and number may be the acknowledged curriculum ‘basics’, but talk is ‘arguably the true foundation of learning’. ATL believes that foundation stage guidance (and that for key stage 1) needs to be strengthened to ensure that practitioners are less constrained by the (perceived or real) prescription of the literacy strategy. Guidance needs to focus on the role of play, of real engagement with stories, of real-life experiences of reading, rather than the small building blocks of literacy. The requirement for the full literacy hour to be in place by the end of reception should be removed.

Teachers were ‘unanimous in their view that the Framework’s emphasis on language was undervaluing the literature entitlement in the national curriculum. There is widespread regret that covering all the objectives in the time available would exclude the reading of whole novels and teachers would prefer to sacrifice some of the objectives rather than lose this.”

37. The Early Childhood Foundation supported this view in their evidence, suggesting that the formal teaching of reading, whether by the NLS, phonics or by some other means, could profitably be delayed until a later stage in a child’s cognitive development:

“Phonics teaching is not appropriate for children in pre-school or reception classes. It depends on the accurate pronunciation of letter names (which is open to confusing variation e.g. haitch for H) and their initial sounds. If the practitioner demonstrates the sounds singly, as for example in h-o-p, and creates a gap between the initial and subsequent sounds it is very difficult for the child to ‘hear’ the complete word. Presented with material which is out of context or uninteresting, children may well repeat sounds or words by rote, but not assimilate these into their knowledge base.

Recent papers published in Scandinavian countries stress the child-centred approach to learning. In many nursery and ‘first’ schools in Denmark, Sweden and Finland the children are not subjected to restricting formal lessons but are provided with ‘systematic support for their growth, development and learning’. (Finnish Family Policy document). In Sweden, ‘Educational activities are based on the children’s individual capabilities and are linked to what the child has already experienced and learned. Children are encouraged to engage in their own activities and discover things for themselves. The importance of play for a child’s development and learning is emphasised both in preschool education and in school age childcare, and is included in the national curriculum for compulsory schools.’ (Sweden SE Childcare

37 Ev 119, paragraphs 6, 7 and 11.
in Sweden). In the Council of Europe, the Committee of Ministers’ Recommendation to member states on child day-care, concerning the care and education of children from birth to eight years [Rec. (2002) 8], stresses play and talking as very important elements in children’s learning. All the countries mentioned above start formal schooling later than in the UK and have literacy outcomes far higher than ours, so maybe the approach speaks for itself.  

38. In defence of the NLS strategy, the DfES stated that “there are appropriate structured programmes in place for children below school age, which develop their communication and literacy skills within the context of play-based learning. We engage parents and the wider community fully in supporting children to learn to read and to enjoy reading”.  

39. Current evidence on the best age to begin the formal teaching of reading does not point to a clear answer. It is difficult to account for variables such as the language of instruction and the developmental level of the individual child concerned. Whatever method is used in the early stages of teaching children to read, we are convinced that inspiring an enduring enjoyment of reading should be a key objective. This can be endangered both by an overly formal approach in the early years and by a failure to teach decoding.

Other Teaching Methods

40. We are aware that many different approaches to the teaching of reading exist, apart from those mentioned specifically above. ‘Whole word’ methods were particularly prominent in the 1970s and 1980s. This approach rests on the hypothesis that many children start to read by learning words, for example, their name, as a whole word, without breaking it down into sounds. Teaching proceeds by familiarising children with the shape of each word as they learn it (this method is also known as ‘look and say’). The ‘whole
language’ approach shifts the emphasis not only away from individual sounds, but also from individual words. Children are thought to learn most effectively when immersed in language and literacy through the books read with or by adults, word games and rhymes. There are also those who contend that reading cannot be taught and that it is naturally acquired whatever techniques of intervention teachers employ. Although these views were discussed by witnesses, we have not received any evidence specifically promoting these approaches over and above others in the course of this inquiry and they appear to have been largely overtaken by more recent developments in teaching methodology.

Compromise?

41. The evidence we took during our inquiry reveals a number of competing methodologies concerning the teaching of reading. Those involved in establishing and implementing the NLS themselves accept that its ‘searchlights’ model represents a pragmatic compromise between these divisions. This is unsurprising, given the context in which it arose, which Ruth Miskin described to the Committee:

“When the NLS was first started I was on one of the advisory bodies right at the beginning with John Stannard. John Stannard was in an almost impossible position when the NLS was being written, because he had all of those pressure groups saying ‘We want this’ ‘We want this’ and then I would come in and others would say ‘No, but we want this’. What we actually got was a plethora of eclectic messages to teachers, so they had not just one sort of phonics, but they had three sorts of phonics […] You then had the whole word lobby, which was ‘Let’s all learn 250 words very quickly’ as well. So three sorts of phonics and the word level work; then the real books lobby and that is just the beginning. Then you have other lobbies to look at how you organise it, whether you should put children in groups so they could actually apply the knowledge they have at their level, or whether you should mix them all up together. Even when you have decided on a method which actually works, you then have to look at the most effective way to implement it.”

42. The question before this Committee was to consider whether the NLS ‘compromise’ represents a synthesis of best practice drawn from a range of approaches, or a confusing mix of methods that is holding back further improvements in standards of reading. We sought to answer this question by examining the results of research studies conducted in schools, which compared different methods of teaching reading and their consequences for pupils’ achievement.

Research evidence

43. Evidence submitted by supporters of phonics as a teaching methodology appears to demonstrate that schools which adopt pure phonics programmes achieve significant improvements in results. In oral evidence, Sue Lloyd cited the achievements of a West Country school using her programme:

“94% are achieving level four at the Key Stage 2 SATS [i.e. the expected level for their age], compared with 77% in England, and this is a large primary school with a low
entry assessment. This is a poor social area, a very large school. Look at the level five: 65% achieved level five in this school [i.e. above the level expected for their age] and only 26% in the rest of England. Boys? 33.3% of boys achieved level five in writing compared with 11% in the rest of the schools and it goes on like this as well [...] the boys can do just as well as the girls. No significant difference between children with summer birthdays and no children with English as an additional language on the SEN register.”

This study also showed that the school achieved just 6% reaching only level three or below, compared to 15% nationally and 0% reaching level two or below, compared to 7% nationally.

44. In some cases where phonics was used ‘first and fast’, almost 100% of pupils achieved Key Stage test results of the level expected of their age or better and some schools also showed a reduction in the percentage of children identified as having special educational needs. This includes a number of schools serving communities with a high level of deprivation, such as the Kobi Nazrul School in Tower Hamlets, where Ruth Miskin was headteacher. This school achieved results in the top 5% in England, despite taking a significant proportion of children with English as an additional language.

45. When we asked Dr Kevan Collins, Director of the Primary National Strategy, whether he could produce similar results from schools following the NLS programme, he responded:

“In looking at primary schools’ results in the Key Stage 1 tests, it is important to bear in mind that published figures take account of all pupils in year 2: including those with special educational needs; those only recently arrived in the country, and who may have little or no English on arrival; and those who are unable to take the tests. Nonetheless, in 1,962 primary schools every pupil achieved at least level 2 for their Key Stage 1 reading in 2004. In another 1,622 primaries, between 95% and 100% of children did so. In these schools, that will typically mean a single child not reaching the expected level. So, in over 20% of all primary schools in England, all or almost all KS1 pupils are reading at at least level 2 by age 7. And these are schools which will be using the support provided by the National Primary Strategy – properly adapted and supplemented for local needs and practices – including the Strategy’s central, but not exclusive, role for synthetic phonics.”

46. We discussed the best way of comparing the NLS with other programmes, such as phonics, with Dr Morag Stuart, Reader in Psychology at the Institute of Education, University of London. She told us that her research indicated positive benefits for children who received a dedicated synthetic phonics programme, but warned that individual studies had significant limitations. She advised us that a larger comparative study was necessary to confirm her preliminary findings:

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42 Q 282
43 Ev 75
44 Q 111
45 Ev 60
“Structured phonics teaching: proof that it works. There is the proof from the [United States] national reading panel’s survey of the literature which suggests that structured phonics teaching works better than no phonics teaching or less structured phonics teaching.\(^{46}\) It is very difficult in the real world to do the kind of research that you would like to be done. It is terribly difficult to match children so that they are comparable on all possible things. We did try to do that in the study that I conducted. We had 50 children taught for a term using Jolly Phonics which is a very nice programme for five-year-olds and it is fun. We had 50-odd children who were not taught [with that programme]. We pre-tested them on a range of measures of language and phonological skills and letter-sound knowledge and various things that we did not expect to change as a result of the teaching and other things that we did expect to change as a result of the differential teaching. We managed to match our groups on almost everything and where we were unable to match groups, we took account of that in the statistical analysis we did. So it is not impossible to do that sort of research, but it is difficult. What our research showed was that the Jolly Phonics teaching was definitely much, much more successful in making children fluent readers of words than the non-phonics teaching. However, that is not the sort of comparison that you are asking for, which is comparing the phonics as taught in the NLS with different phonics teaching programmes. I do not know of any research that has done that.”\(^{47}\)

Dr Stuart later added: “We have some inkling of what works: we do not know the fine details of how best to do things. We have not had proper comparative studies looking carefully at the best way to do things and the best way to do things for different sorts of children, because children differ.”\(^{48}\)

47. We accept Dr Stuart’s conclusion that there has not so far been any decisive research evidence determining the value of dedicated synthetic phonics programmes directly compared to the mixture of phonics and other strategies in the NLS. This is not necessarily an argument for the preservation of the NLS: many witnesses argued that the ‘searchlights’ model itself is not backed up by robust research evidence. Dr Stuart commented, “The model of reading which is presented to teachers [in the NLS] which is this black hole of four things [i.e. four ‘searchlights’] operating and disappearing into a text is completely and utterly misleading and bears no relation to any research on reading that I know of.”\(^{49}\)

48. In response to this critique, Dr Collins told us of the research background to the NLS:

“There are two kinds that we draw on. We draw on a body of historical research, and as the literacy strategy and the numeracy strategy were drawn together they were well founded on the core research. I would say that in terms of the literacy strategy, we were very fortunate it was a seminal piece of research done in the late 90s in the United States through Marilyn Jaeger Adams which basically did a full review of all

\(^{46}\) The National Reading Panel (NRP), *Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction*, April 2000. The Panel reviewed existing research papers on reading instruction.

\(^{47}\) Q 61

\(^{48}\) Q 96

\(^{49}\) Q 62
literacy research and informed our work as well as the key research in England drawing on the work in Australia, New Zealand and this country. As well as that historical body of research, which we draw on deeply, we also in an ongoing way continually reflect on learning as it occurs, and a key area of that has been the developing research around phonics, which has been a piece of literacy learning, a core element, which we have continually updated and developed and, as we move through our support for schools, we keep drawing on it and evolving and developing our resources, our materials and support based on the research. So it draws on a historical base and continues to respond to evolving research that is happening every day.\(^5\)

We do not consider that this answer provides conclusive evidence of the National Literacy Strategy’s basis in sound research.

49. The Committee was extremely interested to see the recent publication of a seven year longitudinal study, *The Effects of Synthetic Phonics Teaching on Reading and Spelling Attainment*.\(^5\)! This study, carried out in Clackmannanshire, Scotland by Professor Rhona Johnston and Dr Joyce Watson, looked at 300 children in the first year of the Scottish primary school system. It compared three different teaching methods: synthetic phonics; analytic phonics; and an analytic phonics method that included systematic phonemic awareness teaching. At the end of the programme, those children who had been taught by synthetic phonics were found to be 7 months ahead of the other two groups in reading. The other two groups were then given the synthetic phonics programme as well and the progress of all the children was followed for 7 years. At the end of this period, all the children were tested and found to be achieving significantly higher levels in word reading and spelling that would be expected of their chronological age. Unusually, boys were found to be outperforming girls.

50. The Clackmannanshire study is of interest as it appears to show long-lasting benefits from early synthetic phonics training. However, it does raise a number of additional issues. The study showed that although reading comprehension was still significantly above chronological age at the end of the seventh year at school (3.5 months ahead), the advantage was smaller than it had been at the end of the second year at school (7 months ahead).\(^5\) It would be useful to return to these children again in future to see whether the gains in word recognition and spelling continue to persist. The children involved in the study displayed a higher than average level of socio-economic disadvantage, but the study was not able to control for this, to determine which programme was most effective for those with the greatest level of disadvantage. As all children eventually took the synthetic phonics programme, there was no direct comparison of a dedicated phonics programmes with a programme like the NLS ‘searchlights’ model, which mixes phonics with other approaches. Nevertheless, the Clackmannanshire study is an important addition to the research picture, which increasingly points to synthetic phonics as a vital part of early reading education.

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50 Q 151

51 Rhona Johnston and Joyce Watson, *The Effects of Synthetic Phonics Teaching on Reading and Spelling Attainment: A seven year longitudinal study*, published by the Scottish Executive, 11 February 2005.

52 Paragraph 4.8
51. We took evidence from one of the authors of the Clackmannanshire study, Professor Rhona Johnston. We asked Professor Johnston whether she thought research should be undertaken comparing a group of children who were being taught by the National Literacy Strategy programme with a similar group, matched very closely, who were being taught by synthetic phonics. She replied:

“Yes, I think that absolutely needs to be done to establish what the facts are. I should stress that my research has been paid for entirely by the Scottish Government. It actually voted £18 million in 1997 to look at early intervention and that money was given to the regions. We were invited by Clackmannanshire to do the study, but that money was only given out if they did pre-tests and post-tests of an experimental and a control group using standardised tests. This is what I think should happen in England.”

52. In view of the evidence from the Clackmannanshire study, as well as evidence from other schools where synthetic phonics programmes have been introduced, we recommend that the Government should undertake an immediate review of the National Literacy Strategy. This should determine whether the current prescriptions and recommendations are the best available methodology for the teaching of reading in primary schools. We therefore strongly urge the DfES to commission a large-scale comparative study, comparing the National Literacy Strategy with ‘phonics fast and first’ approaches. This study should establish:

- The relative effectiveness of approaches to teaching reading, such as synthetic phonics, analytic phonics and the methods recommended in the National Literacy Strategy;
- The effect of mixing phonics instruction with other methods of teaching, compared to ‘phonics fast, first and only’;
- How long any gains afforded by a particular programme are sustained;
- The effect of teaching texts which go beyond a child’s existing knowledge of phonics compared to that of limiting instructional texts to those within a child’s current decoding abilities;
- The effectiveness of different approaches with particular groups of children, including boys/girls, those with special educational needs and those with a high level of socio-economic disadvantage.

The Study should:

- Measure and compare attainment by means of standardised testing and not Key Stage test results;
- Measure attainment in all the components of literacy (word recognition, reading comprehension, narrative awareness, etc.).
• Use control groups to take account of factors which may have a bearing on reading outcomes, for example: teacher knowledge and ability; socio-economic background; gender.
4 Barriers to Reading Acquisition

53. It is unlikely that any one method or set of changes in teaching methodology would lead to a complete elimination of underachievement in reading; however, at present 20% of eleven-year-olds are not reading at an age-appropriate level. This is unacceptably high and there is clearly much scope for improvement. In this final section of our report we review the main factors that prevent children from learning to read and make recommendations for action.

54. Before examining these separate factors in detail, we note that the figure of 20%, denoting those children unable to read at an age-appropriate level at age 11, is derived from the Government’s Key Stage 2 tests, a performance measure that has been challenged by those who consider that results are necessarily inflated by teachers ‘teaching to the test’. We recommend that the DfES commission an independent evaluation of trends in reading standards among primary school children which would make clear the scale and nature of the problem faced, and provide a basis for further policy work.

Instructional Models

55. As discussed in the previous section of this report, we consider it possible that current instructional methods, such as the NLS ‘searchlights’ model, may not fully exploit the potential of teaching interventions to raise literacy standards. Current evidence on this point is not conclusive. This is why we have recommended that the DfES conduct an immediate review of the NLS and commission a large-scale comparative survey to overcome the current gaps in the research. Aside from instructional methods, however, there are a number of factors which may contribute to underachievement, including teacher understanding of the psychological processes involved in the acquisition of reading skills; early-literacy experience and the development of oracy and other verbal skills in childhood; parental involvement in teaching children to read; and a number of specific learning difficulties and disabilities which may affect reading.

Teachers

56. We have received evidence to suggest that at present, teacher training is not adequate to ensure that all those who deliver the National Literacy Strategy have a full appreciation of what is involved in the reading process and the acquisition of reading by young children. We have heard criticism that the current 5 to 11 age span is too wide and leads to a lack of knowledge about specific age groups, leaving some teachers without adequate subject knowledge and unable to tailor teaching materials to specific children or groups of children.

57. The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) evaluation of the National Literacy Strategy found that a potential barrier to significant and lasting improvement in literacy was some teachers’ lack of understanding of how children actually learn to read. The report further stated that many teachers are not yet convinced that the NLS is the
correct way to achieve improvement. It suggests that further training may be necessary if teachers are to deliver improvements:

“The Strategies have done an impressive job of providing teaching resources and good quality training to a large number of teachers—thousands of them across the country. Given the sheer scope of the challenge, however, many of these teachers have not yet had the kind of extended learning experiences they would need to develop a thorough understanding of the Strategies or of the best ways to teach literacy to their pupils: ‘Training teachers to implement instructional methods when they don’t truly understand the underlying rationale is futile. Without understanding, teachers do not have the knowledge to adapt an instructional strategy to address various student need. Without understanding, teachers become cogs in a machine with neither the responsibility nor the rewards of being in control. Without understanding, teachers can become inflexible and dogmatic, unable to integrate new research-supported practices into existing approaches’ (Willows (2002, p1)).”

58. This view was supported by Dr Morag Stuart, who told the Committee that teachers need a deeper knowledge of child development and the psychology of reading:

“As a psychologist, what I believe is that teachers in training ought to be taught the psychology of reading and the psychology of reading development, so that they understand what reading is and how children learn to do it. At the moment, that is absent from teacher-training courses. Teachers in initial training are taught now to deliver the National Literacy Strategy. When they say to their tutors ‘What do we do if the children do not learn?’ they are told ‘If you do this, the children will learn’. I should like to see proper training, a different kind of training, not a training which teaches teachers to be technicians, to deliver a programme which somebody else has thought up, but teachers who understand what it is that they are trying to teach and understand how children learn what they are trying to teach so that they can adapt their teaching to suit their children?”

59. The status of the National Literacy Strategy as guidance means that it is particularly important that teachers should have a mastery of the subject. Dr Kevan Collins told us of his hope that the NLS would be adapted in schools to suit individual circumstances:

“The exciting moment we are in now is where people have great ownership of the strategy and are beginning to adapt and evolve it to make it work for themselves. The phonics example you raise is a good one because our view is that schools must have a structured phonics programme. The structured phonics programme they choose is up to them; there are a number to choose them from. There is a national programme there on the shelf and freely available, but some schools go down other
We agree that achievement is likely to rise when schools choose or adapt teaching materials in accordance with the needs of their pupils. We find it unlikely that teachers would be able to do this effectively if they do not have a full understanding of the processes involved in learning to read.

60. **In order to be really effective, teachers of reading must have an understanding of the psychological and developmental aspects of the reading process and how children learn to read.** We recommend that the DfES work with the Teacher Training Agency to review initial teacher training (ITT) courses, ensuring that teachers are fully aware of different approaches to the teaching of reading, and what the research evidence says about the effectiveness of these different methods. We further recommend that institutions offering ITT should include modules about the literacy needs of children at different stages of the process of learning to read within the current 5 to 11 age span and that programmes of continuing professional development should be made available to teachers already in service.

**Early Literacy Skills and Parental Involvement**

61. Although well-qualified teachers and sound instructional methods are central to a child’s success in reading, the effect of early childhood experiences should not be underestimated. Indeed, as we have discovered in our parallel inquiry, *Every Child Matters*, a child’s experiences before they start school have a significant effect on their educational success.

62. Jo White, of the Early Childhood Forum, told us that the process of learning to read in its broadest sense begins from birth:

“What worries me slightly about what we have just heard is that it implies that children come into school with no reading knowledge at all and suddenly they are taught by people who are called teachers. In fact, as soon as a baby looks at a symbol on a cot and points at it, they are actually learning to read. We live in an environment where print is all around us and children will be asking you at the breakfast table ‘What does that say on the cereal packet?’ and will be saying ‘How do I write my name?’ and children of two and three will be well versed in literacy. We do not suddenly teach them: we help them to learn.”

Supplementary written evidence from the Early Childhood Forum states:

“reading is a skill which relies on the presence of other skills, for example, acquisition of speech and language, hearing and listening skills, recognition of shape, difference, pattern and sequence etc. Its development is therefore woven into the activities which form part of a young child’s day and should not be separated out from the...”

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58 Q 158
59 Q 306
learning which takes place through the play, work and discussion in an early years setting.”

63. We asked Ms White what kinds of pre-school experiences were the most effective in facilitating reading acquisition. She replied:

“It is very difficult. People talk about research with young children, but it is extremely difficult because young children’s learning is messy by its very nature. It is very hard to pin it down. The best longitudinal research we have at the moment is the EPPE project with Kathy Sylva, who is looking at children in different settings and what outcomes they have. It is very clear that nursery schools and integrated centres, where that contextual learning is given high priority, are the best outcomes for children. The difficulty is that we need to go on and see how they are reading at 12 and 14. My gut feeling, and that is not good enough of course if you are trying to find money and power, is that the children who have that type of experience are those who love to learn. They love to find out, they love to take a bit of a risk and they love to experiment. For me that is essential if you are learning anything and learning to read comes within that.”

64. The EPPE (Effective Provision of Pre-School Education) research to which Ms White refers is a 1997-2003 DfES study into early years settings. This study researched the impact of different pre-school environments on children’s later educational achievement as well as their likelihood of displaying anti-social behaviour, tracking 3,000 three-and four-year-olds. Its recent report found that the impact of pre-school was significant, “over and above” that of the family, and the earlier it began the more effective it was found to be. But, EPPE noted: “full-time attendance led to no better gains for children than part-time provision.” The EPPE report also noted children in a pre-school environment where carers had a higher level of skills displayed improved intellectual/cognitive and social/behavioural development compared to those with a less well-qualified workforce.

65. The EPPE report notes the positive benefit to a child’s development that can be made by a well qualified pre-school workforce. Yet, as we found in our previous report on Early Years, despite the importance of training, the childcare sector is characterised by low skills, few qualifications and low pay. We reiterate our recommendations in that report, that there should be continued Government investment in training at all levels in the Early Years sector and that every setting outside a home which offers early education should have a trained teacher on its staff.

66. Written evidence submitted by the NUT outlines some of the early experiences that can make a difference to a child’s readiness to learn to read:

“The NUT is aware that not all children come to school with the same set of principles […] and that children’s attitudes to and familiarity with books and
therefore the extent to which they are prepared for reading vary considerably depending on a number of factors inside and outside the home. Some of these factors are:

- social and cultural attitudes to what reading is for, and its value;
- socio-economic status, which affects access to books and dictates how much time is available for reading and being read to;
- access to pre-school provision, which enhances children’s language development through a rich variety of activities involving talking and listening, including reading stories, singing songs, so familiarising them with the value of written text;
- access to public libraries and parental knowledge of what materials are available within them; and
- parental attitudes from their own success/failure at reading.

These factors will inevitably affect children’s progress in literacy once they enter the primary school.”

67. The NUT’s evidence notes not only the importance of access to pre-school provision, but also that of parental attitudes and engagement. The Committee is convinced of the enormous difference parental engagement and involvement makes in a child’s early progress in reading. During our inquiry, Neil McClelland, Director of the National Literacy Trust told us of his organisation’s support for initiatives targeting the home:

“The National Literacy Trust has tended to argue that if we are really going to deal with this issue of literacy under-achievement, and it is a long-term problem, what we need is not just the National Literacy Strategy but a national strategy for literacy. Which is cradle to grave, inter-generational, which includes family literacy, which looks at the whole issue of early language from birth, which incorporates good practices of the sort, for example, from the PEEP project which has been operating in Oxford, which is built from Bookstart onwards and is about early language and communication skills, supporting parents, which ties into Every Child Matters and looks holistically at all of those influences of parents and communities on children’s early language and acquisition and enjoyment of books. That is a necessary component as are the necessary components which we heard about earlier.”

68. The PEEP programme to which Mr McClelland refers is the Peers Early Education Partnership which began in 1995 and aims “to contribute towards a significant improvement in educational attainment by whole communities of children, from their birth, by working with parents and carers.” PEEP works by encouraging parents and carers to take an active interest in their child’s early development, providing resources in order to foster the sharing of books, games, etc. The programme was evaluated in 2001 in the study The Effects of the Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP) on Children’s
Developmental Progress by Dr Maria Evangelou and Professor Kathy Sylva. This study found clear evidence of the positive difference parents can make to a child’s learning between the ages of three and five if they get involved in their education. The authors tracked three and four year olds participating in PEEP between 1998 and 2001 and concluded that children from families engaged with PEEP benefitted in learning and self-esteem. These children made greater progress than others in vocabulary, language comprehension, understanding about books and print and number concepts.

Further evidence of the difference parents can make to a child’s learning is supplied by the EPPE study, quoted above. The EPPE research concluded that the quality of the learning environment of the home is an important factor in promoting intellectual and social development in all children. The level of parental participation, where parents are actively engaged in activities with children, was found to outweigh any effects of the social class of the parents or their own educational experience: "what parents do is more important than who they are."

The stimuli a child experiences before the time he or she enters primary school and begins to be taught to read formally are vital to success in reading. Early childhood development of communication skills and experiences of literacy in its widest sense have a significant effect on a child’s preparedness to learn to read. Opportunities can be enhanced through pre-school programmes and the engagement of parents to provide educational development in the home. Recent initiatives aimed at fostering this engagement have been shown to significantly improve outcomes. In this context the Government’s Every Child Matters reform of children’s services has a central role.

Learning Difficulties and Disabilities

Children with certain learning difficulties and disabilities require particular forms of support in learning to read. Targeted support may also be necessary for children coming to school with English as an additional language. It is estimated that around 11% of pupils in maintained primary schools in England have a first language other than English. During this inquiry, we have not taken evidence specifically on these complex issues, which are deserving of separate inquiries. However, we do take this opportunity to express our view that a proportion of the present underachievement in reading is due to the requirements of children with special educational needs not being met.

The National Literacy Strategy comprises a number of specific programmes for children having difficulties with reading, as set out in written evidence submitted by the DfES:

“For primary schools we promote a number of intervention programmes for children reading at below age related expectations to help them catch up. These

69 Every Child Matters, HC 40 (forthcoming).
include Early Literacy Support (ELS) for pupils in Year 1, Additional Literacy (ALS) Support in Year 3, and Further Literacy Support (FLS) for Pupils in Year 5, all of which provide for structured support from a teaching assistant in addition to the daily literacy hour. These intervention programmes are designed to reinforce a suggested model of intervention at different levels of need, based on three ‘waves’:

- **Wave 1**: The effective inclusion of all children in a high quality primary experience incorporating the literacy hour and daily mathematics lesson.

- **Wave 2**: Small group intervention for children who can be expected to catch up with their peers as a result of the intervention (ELS, ALS, FLS).

- **Wave 3**: Specific targeted approaches for children identified as requiring SEN intervention.

Schools use a number of programmes for intervention at Wave 3. The department directly funds the Institute of Education for its work with the Reading Recovery National Network, but there are many other programmes available. The National Strategies are committed to ensuring that schools are provided with the evidence on which of the many existing interventions have been evaluated and can show evidence of impact. Much of this research is summarised in the National Literacy Strategy publication *Targeting support: choosing and implementing interventions for children with significant literacy difficulties*. At Key Stage 3 we have also produced a step by step guide to teaching phonics in special schools.

At Key Stage 3 we promote the continued teaching of phonics in spelling for all children in year 7 as well as focused work for children who have fallen behind. The range of intervention and support materials provided by the KS3 National Strategy for reading includes teaching units on phonics; information retrieval and reading between the lines. A set of teaching units on reading for pupils in year 7 who are working below national expectations; a training scheme and resources for reading mentor partnerships and a set of teaching units for year 9 pupils working below national expectations. Through the effective use of these materials, and dedicated support from consultants we hope to achieve greater gains in Key Stage 3 reading performance in future years.”

73. We have received mixed evidence on whether these targeted interventions are theoretically sound; further, it has been suggested that there are problems in implementation. Written evidence from the NUT particularly notes the importance of appropriate staffing:

“It is not easy to provide effective training for children who find it difficult to learn to read. If they found it easy, they would not have a problem. The example of Reading Recovery (RR) training provides a useful comparison. RR teachers have to undergo a year of advanced training that includes both theory and practice. RR is not the only effective programme, but its efficiency and reputation are closely linked to the programme’s training programme for teachers and the concomitant enhancement of their professional status. The Bullock report recommended that ‘remedial work is
not for the inexperienced or indifferent teacher, but for the teacher who combines a high level of teaching skill with an understanding of the children’s emotional and developmental needs.\textsuperscript{72} The NUT believes that one way of improving the quality of reading support in schools is by arranging for peripatetic teachers to spend some periods of time attached to mainstream and special schools, where their experience and knowledge could be shared by other teachers. Such a development could also offer new career opportunities for primary teachers in the current context of falling rolls.\textsuperscript{73}

74. Written evidence from the Reading Recovery Network at the Institute of Education supports the view that staffing issues, as well as funding, have resulted in a “crisis of access” to Reading Recovery programmes:

“To many children fail to reach adequate levels of literacy: Whatever the impact of recent developments in the teaching of literacy, there has been little improvement at the lower end of the achievement spectrum. The education system in England is still failing to meet the needs of a significant proportion of children who leave school with inadequate literacy for the demands of the modern world […] The implementation of Reading Recovery is under serious threat in England. In the past three years, schools in England have reported increasing difficulty in their ability to fund the programme for their least able children and six longstanding LEAs have ceased their implementation, with three more currently at risk. Lack of funding has been the principle reason given for closures.”\textsuperscript{74}

75. If the Government wishes to make a real difference to the literacy rates among primary school children, it must ensure that suitable programmes are available to all those children who require intensive support, and that they are delivered by highly qualified professionals.

76. Reading Recovery is just one programme available as an intensive support for children having difficulty with reading. We have received evidence about other programmes of this kind, including those that concentrate on additional oral phonological awareness training. For example, written evidence submitted by Professor Margaret J. Snowling and Professor Charles Hulme of the University of York, with Dr Simon Gibbs, Senior Educational Psychologist at North Yorkshire County Council, suggested that those children in need of intensive support might benefit from a more phonics-based approach:

“We conclude, that for typically developing children, a highly structured reading programme with embedded phonics is sufficient to achieve high standards in reading. There is little additional benefit to be gained from oral phonological awareness training for normally developing children. However, this is not the case for children at risk of literacy failure. Hatcher, Hulme and Snowling (2004) went on to examine the progress of children in the intervention cohort who had entered school at risk of reading failure. These children gained poor scores on tests of vocabulary, letter knowledge and rhyme skills, and formed the bottom third of the

\textsuperscript{72} A Language for Life: a report under the chairmanship of Sir Alan Bullock, HMSO, 1975.
\textsuperscript{73} Ev 120
\textsuperscript{74} Ev 126 and 127, paragraphs 1 and 9
cohort. The progress of those at-risk was monitored from t1 to t4 and compared with that of the upper two-thirds of the cohort who served as a comparison group. Among at-risk children, those who received the reading programme alone witnessed a widening gap between their reading skills and those of their peers. Although they were progressing, they were falling further and further behind in reading in relation to the average-to-good readers. Supplementing the programme with phonological awareness training stemmed the relative decline in these children’s skills. Moreover, those who received phoneme level training fared best. The mixed onset-rime and phoneme level training was also effective while training in onset-rime was less effective in helping these children learn to read. We conclude that phonological awareness training at the level of the phoneme is critical for children at risk of reading difficulties in KS1.77

77. Some evidence suggests that intensive oral phonological awareness training programmes may be of particular benefit to children at risk of reading difficulties. We recommend that the DfES commission further research in this area, to determine the effectiveness of the intensive support programmes comprised within the National Literacy Strategy, compared to other ‘catch up’ programmes.
5 Conclusion

78. There is some evidence to suggest that children’s attainment in reading has improved since the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy (now Primary National Strategy) in 1997. International comparative evidence and that generated by national key stage tests seems to show that the proportion of children who attain an expected standard of reading by age 11 has increased. However, there is still a very wide spread of ability and a large proportion of children—around 20%—leave primary school without the reading (and writing) skills expected of their age. Although this does not necessarily mean that they are illiterate, it can nevertheless endanger their progress in secondary school and damages their prospects for further learning and employment. Some have challenged the Government’s figures and claim that the proportion of children experiencing significant difficulties with reading is even greater. As data generated through Key Stage tests can be skewed by associated factors, such as teachers ‘teaching to the test’, we recommend that the DfES commission an independent evaluation of trends in reading standards among primary school children which would make clear the scale and nature of the problem faced, and provide a basis for further policy work.

79. It is unlikely that any one method or set of changes would lead to a complete elimination of underachievement in reading; however it seems that at present around 20% of eleven-year-olds are not reading at an age-appropriate level. We recommend a review of the NLS to determine whether its current prescriptions and recommendations are the best available methodology for the teaching of reading in primary schools. Further large-scale, comparative research on the best ways of teaching children to read, comparing synthetic phonics ‘fast and first’ with other methods (for example analytical phonics and the searchlights model promoted in the NLS) is also necessary to determine which methods of teaching are most effective for which children. It may be that some methods of teaching (such as phonics) are more effective for children in danger of being left behind. This research should be commissioned by the DfES.

80. Corresponding research into other factors affecting reading acquisition, such as the development of cognitive skills and the age at which reading is first taught formally, is also necessary. Yet this cannot be of use unless teachers are fully informed of its findings and consequences for classroom practice. Improvements to teacher training are necessary to ensure that all teachers of reading are familiar with the psychological and developmental processes involved in reading acquisition. In addition, we note that the pre-school sector is generally characterised by a low skilled and low paid workforce. Upskilling in this area could result in important benefits to children’s development and reading readiness.

81. Other factors implicated in underachievement are the early development of literacy, oracy and communication skills, as well as a love of literature and reading, and parental involvement in teaching children to read. The stimuli a child experiences before the time he or she enters primary school and begins to be taught to read formally are vital to success in reading. Early childhood development of communication skills and experiences of literacy in its widest sense have a significant effect on a child’s preparedness to learn to read. Opportunities can be enhanced through pre-school programmes, but the engagement of parents to provide educational development in the home is key. Recent initiatives aimed at fostering this engagement have been shown to significantly improve
outcomes. In this context the Government’s *Every Child Matters* reform of children’s services has a central role.
Conclusions and recommendations

Teaching methods

Phonics

1. In accordance with the available evidence, the DfES now seems to have accepted that phonics is an essential methodology in teaching children to read. The present debate revolves around the status of phonics within early teaching of reading and the type of phonics programme that should be used. (Paragraph 34)

Reading for pleasure

2. Whatever method is used in the early stages of teaching children to read, we are convinced that inspiring an enduring enjoyment of reading should be a key objective. This can be endangered both by an overly formal approach in the early years and by a failure to teach decoding. (Paragraph 39)

Research evidence

3. In view of the evidence from the Clackmannanshire study, as well as evidence from other schools where synthetic phonics programmes have been introduced, we recommend that the Government should undertake an immediate review of the National Literacy Strategy. This should determine whether the current prescriptions and recommendations are the best available methodology for the teaching of reading in primary schools. We therefore strongly urge the DfES to commission a large-scale comparative study, comparing the National Literacy Strategy with ‘phonics fast and first’ approaches. This study should establish:

- the relative effectiveness of approaches to teaching reading, such as synthetic phonics, analytic phonics and the methods recommended in the National Literacy Strategy;
- the effect of mixing phonics instruction with other methods of teaching, compared to ‘phonics fast, first and only’;
- how long any gains afforded by a particular programme are sustained;
- the effect of teaching texts which go beyond a child’s existing knowledge of phonics compared to that of limiting instructional texts to those within a child’s current decoding abilities;
- the effectiveness of different approaches with particular groups of children, including boys/girls, those with special educational needs and those with a high level of socio-economic disadvantage.
The Study should:

- Measure and compare attainment by means of standardised testing and not Key Stage test results;
- Measure attainment in all the components of literacy (word recognition, reading comprehension, narrative awareness, etc.); (Paragraph .)
- Use control groups to take account of factors which may have a bearing on reading outcomes, for example: teacher knowledge and ability; socio-economic background; gender. (Paragraph 52)

**Barriers to reading acquisition**

4. The figure of 20%, denoting those children unable to read at an age-appropriate level at age 11, is derived from the Government’s Key Stage 2 tests, a performance measure that has been challenged by those who consider that results are necessarily inflated by teachers ‘teaching to the test’. We recommend that the DfES commission an independent evaluation of trends in reading standards among primary school children which would make clear the scale and nature of the problem faced, and provide a basis for further policy work. (Paragraph 54)

**Teachers**

5. In order to be really effective, teachers of reading must have an understanding of the psychological and developmental aspects of the reading process and how children learn to read. We recommend that the DfES work with the Teacher Training Agency to review initial teacher training (ITT) courses, ensuring that teachers are fully aware of different approaches to the teaching of reading, and what the research evidence says about the effectiveness of these different methods. We further recommend that institutions offering ITT should include modules about the literacy needs of children at different stages of the process of learning to read within the current 5 to 11 age span and that programmes of continuing professional development should be made available to teachers already in service. (Paragraph 60)

**Early literacy skills and parental involvement**

6. There should be continued Government investment in training at all levels in the Early Years sector (Paragraph 65)

7. Every setting outside a home which offers early education should have a trained teacher on its staff (Paragraph 65)

8. The stimuli a child experiences before the time he or she enters primary school and begins to be taught to read formally are vital to success in reading. Early childhood development of communication skills and experiences of literacy in its widest sense have a significant effect on a child’s preparedness to learn to read. Opportunities can be enhanced through pre-school programmes and the engagement of parents to provide educational development in the home. Recent initiatives aimed at fostering this engagement have been shown to significantly improve outcomes. In this context
the Government’s Every Child Matters reform of children’s services has a central role. (Paragraph 70)

**Learning difficulties and disabilities**

9. If the Government wishes to make a real difference to the literacy rates among primary school children, it must ensure that suitable programmes are available to all those children who require intensive support, and that they are delivered by highly qualified professionals. (Paragraph 75)

10. Some evidence suggests that intensive oral phonological awareness training programmes may be of particular benefit to children at risk of reading difficulties. We recommend that the DfES commission further research in this area, to determine the effectiveness of the intensive support programmes comprised within the National Literacy Strategy, compared to other ‘catch up’ programmes. (Paragraph 77)
Monday 21 March 2005

Members present:
Mr Barry Sheerman, in the Chair
Jeff Ennis
Mr Nick Gibb
Paul Holmes
Mr Kerry Pollard
Jonathan Shaw
Mr Andrew Turner

The Committee deliberated.

Draft Report (Teaching Children to Read), proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the Chairman’s draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 81 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Eighth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chairman do make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That the provisions of Standing Order No. 134 (Select committees (reports)) be applied to the Report.

Several papers were ordered to be appended to the Minutes of Evidence.

Ordered, That the Appendices to the Minutes of Evidence taken before the Committee be reported to the House.

Several Memoranda were ordered to be reported to the House.

The Committee further deliberated.

[Adjourned until Wednesday 23 March at 9.15 am]
Witnesses

Monday 15 November 2004

Dr Morag Stuart, Reader in Psychology, School of Psychology and Human Development, Institute of Education, University of London and Mrs Debbie Hepplewhite, Reading Reform Foundation.

Wednesday 8 December 2004

Mr Stephen Twigg MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools, Mr Andrew McCully, Director of School Standards Group and Dr Kevan Collins, National Director, Primary National Strategy, Department for Education and Skills.

Monday 7 February 2005

Ms Sue Lloyd, Co-author, Jolly Phonics, Professor Rhona Johnston, Professor of Psychology, University of Hull and Ms Ruth Miskin, ReadWrite Inc.

Mr Neil McClelland OBE, Director, and Ms Julia Strong, Deputy Director, National Literacy Trust and Ms Jo White and Ms Melian Mansfield, Early Childhood Forum
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List of unprinted written evidence

Additional papers have been received from the following and have been reported to the House but to save printing costs they have not been printed and copies have been placed in the House of Commons library where they may be inspected by members. Other copies are in the Record Office, House of Lords and are available to the public for inspection. Requests for inspection should be addressed to the Record Office, House of Lords, London SW1. (Tel 020 7219 3074) hours of inspection are from 9:30am to 5:00pm on Mondays to Fridays.

Sue Palmer
VAS Research Pty Ltd
Dr Valerie Yule
Jim Curran
R J Houghton
Michael Lea
The Simplified Spelling Society
Chris Nugent
Montague Diagnostics Limited
Mona McNee
Royal National Institute of the Blind
Marlynne Grant
Davis’ Dyslexia Association UK
Susan Godsland
Early Childhood Forum
Alan Quinn
Alan Davies, Chartered Educational Psychologist, Associate Fellow British Psychological Society, THRASS UK,
Carol Jones
Masha Bell
Alice Coleman
Tom Burkard, The Promethean Trust
Maggie Ford, Lewisham LEA Specialist Teachers Team
Royal National Institute of the Blind
James Houldsworth
Bob Boucher
Professor Tricia David, Emeritus Professor of Education, Canterbury Christ Church University College
Jaz Ampaw-Farr, Jolly Conferencing
Mr Utting
Jennifer Chew
James Houldsworth
Ruth Miskin
# Reports from the Education and Skills Committee, Session 2004–05

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Oral evidence

Taken before the Education and Skills Committee

on Monday 15 November 2004

Members present:

Mr Barry Sheerman, in the Chair
Valerie Davey          Mr Kerry Pollard
Mr Nick Gibb           Jonathan Shaw
Helen Jones            Mr Andrew Turner

In the absence of the Chairman, Valerie Davey was called to the Chair

Memorandum submitted by Debbie Hepplewhite, Reading Reform Foundation

REMIT: TO EXAMINE DEPARTMENTAL POLICY AND GUIDANCE ON THE TEACHING OF READING TO CHILDREN IN SCHOOLS, FOCUSING ON FOUNDATION-LEVEL THROUGH KS 3. TO CONSIDER WHETHER ANY CHANGES ARE NECESSARY TO IMPROVE CURRENT GUIDANCE/POLICY

1. Whether policy/guidance has a sound base in research evidence (looking at relative weight given to synthetic/analytic phonics, whole word/language, onset/rhyme etc)

The Reading Reform Foundation suggests that departmental policy and guidance on the teaching of reading to children in schools is not based upon research evidence. The NLS reading instruction programmes do not appear to have been objectively tested with experimental and control groups and pre- and post-testing using standardised tests. The RRF has asked for results from any objective testing of NLS programmes and none has been forthcoming.

The debate about the most effective teaching of reading has arguably been won (synthetic phonics). The RRF newsletters contain numerous articles describing in detail the effect of synthetic phonics teaching and the effect of other types of teaching in comparison.

Claims were made in 2003 on behalf of the DfES that the NLS is “a synthetic phonics programme” but this is not the case. Synthetic phonics puts almost all the emphasis on teaching children to work printed words out by applying letter-sound knowledge. The NLS, by contrast, puts considerable emphasis on teaching children to use strategies other than letter-sound knowledge for word-identification (e.g. sight-word learning, picture and initial letter cues and context use).

2. Putting policy into practice—how effectively is guidance being translated into practice? What variation exists in practice?

The NLS guidance for reading instruction is contradictory. Various programmes in different guises have been rolled out since the original NLS framework in 1998. This dilutes the effectiveness with which guidance can be translated into practice and also means that variations in practice are often the result of teachers following different parts of the guidance. The RRF has pointed to these contradictions through correspondence and the RRF newsletters and website but the criticism has never been addressed by the DfES.

There is great variation in practice in the teaching of reading. Postings on the online TES Early Years Staffroom Forum illustrate this well. Practitioners continue to be confused by the increasing amount of contradictory phonics advice through manuals and teacher-training of governamental and commercial programmes, historic myths about the teaching of reading, inadequate training through the Teacher Training establishments, personal preferences and biases and pressures from advisers, a changing climate in early years education, and through a general lack of accurate up-to-date information and knowledge of research.
3. Which children benefit from current approaches? Are all equally well-served by current policy guidance on reading?

All children are not equally well-served by current policy as described in articles in the RRF newsletters. Ofsted bases its reports on the National Literacy Strategy rather than “national literacy” and these reports fail to explain transparently that some schools follow a distinctly different approach from the NLS guidance for beginning reading. The RRF has made it very clear that the NLS reading instruction programmes are not equivalent to synthetic phonics programmes (for example, the programme used in the Clackmannanshire research) and other research-based programmes (such as Solity’s Early Reading Research) and that some of the NLS guidance can be damaging to individuals and groups of children. The RRF also believes that some children who do well when taught by government guidance could have achieved higher standards more easily with evidence-based programmes.

4. Introduction of early literacy strategies—teaching children to read from a very early age

The RRF is not a group to promote ever-earlier teaching of reading. We do, however, point out that surprisingly young children are perfectly able to learn to read especially when taught through an evidence-based approach (for example, at three years old!). We believe it is more important to use the most effective and inclusive approach once children start being taught to read, rather than the current NLS mix of methods which does not suit all children and certainly does not generally suit young children. The gender gap, for example, has been closed and reversed in synthetic phonics longitudinal studies and this appears to be regardless of the starting age. Boys, summer-born children and children from disadvantaged backgrounds have fared as well as other children from an early start to reading. This is not to say that they would have not fared just as well, or better, with a later start to reading instruction. The crucial thing is to teach reading in a research-based way from the start whether this start is at the age of three or at the age of six.

5. The success or otherwise of current policies compared to those being pursued in other countries—paying due attention to differences dictated by different languages

If children were first introduced to a “transparent alphabet” in this country through a synthetic phonics approach, this would be equivalent to the beginning reading instruction in some European countries with less complex writing systems. Children provided with solid synthetic phonics foundations become proficient decoders and do not suffer early confusion and contradictory messages about how the code for reading and writing works. There is research which shows that children who are good decoders are good decoders no matter how words are spelled therefore the complexity of the English language should not be an issue (p 90, Diane McGuinness, Early Reading Instruction: What Science Really Tells Us about How to Teach Reading, 2004).

6. The relative value of pre-literacy experience—by comparison to those countries with a later age start to education

Worries are high in some quarters that in this country early education has become increasingly more formal and academically driven. The trend has been for schools to provide reception classrooms based more on an infant class model than a nursery model (and in any event, the infant class model, arguably, has been based on a junior class model with the demands of an extensive National Curriculum and end of key stage 1 testing). This situation has been addressed by recent moves to a more play-based ethos in both reception settings and in Year 1. Comparisons of settings, ethos and staffing have been made with some countries overseas (for children under seven) and some people have linked the suggestion that too early a start to the direct teaching of reading relates to an overly formal teaching style in this country compared to our European neighbours. It looks as if the latest NLS phonics supplement “Playing with Sounds” has been influenced by this debate as it emphasises play-based activities, refers to “incidental” teaching and urges practitioners to avoid “drill”. No results have been provided to support the use of “Playing with Sounds”. It introduces phonics (letter/s-sound correspondences) more slowly than genuine synthetic phonics programmes do, but nevertheless places heavy emphasis on early spelling and writing activities at a time when children have an incomplete grasp of letter/s-sound correspondences. It attempts to tie in with previous official guidance (eg the “Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage” with its first, last, medial letter emphasis instead of all-through-the-word phonics from the outset). It does not in any obvious way contradict previous official guidance and training including the misguided promotion of guessing words through the multi-cueing NLS “searchlight reading strategies” and the previous promotion of look and say and repetitive texts of “Book Bands”. This leads the RRF to believe that the resulting concoction will be a continuation of a mixed methods approach. There is still much emphasis on language play, rhyming and playing-at-being-literate in the pre-literacy stage, but practitioners are not informed that research shows that such activities are not directly or necessarily related to learning how to read.
The RRF maintains that practitioners are not sufficiently informed of how children are most effectively taught—and how their progress can be damaged—so that practitioners and parents are simply not in a position to make informed choices in their settings.

NB: The RRF newsletters, downloadable from the RRF website, explicitly address all the issues outlined in the Education and Skills Select Committee’s terms of reference and provide detailed critiques of various NLS reading instruction programmes.

9 November 2004

Memorandum submitted by Dr Morag Stuart, Reader in Psychology, School of Psychology and Human Development, Institute of Education

1. WHETHER POLICY/GUIDANCE HAS A SOUND BASE IN RESEARCH EVIDENCE

1.1 As no references to research studies are given in any of the published documentation for the NLS, this question is more difficult to answer than it need be: we simply are not told what research evidence was used in developing, for example, the detailed term-by-term teaching plans set out in the Framework for Teaching, and therefore cannot examine the soundness of the evidence used. There is a post hoc review of the kinds of evidence that might seem to underlie the NLS Framework for Teaching (Beard, undated), but this does not cover much in the way of evidence about reading and its development.

1.2 It is the basis for the Framework for Teaching that I wish to consider here. Three major influences on the Framework for Teaching are immediately apparent: the historical context in which the NLS was introduced, Reading Recovery, and psychological research into the role of phonological awareness in reading.

Historical context

1.3 When the NLS was first mooted, the major source of influence on teacher training with regard to the teaching of reading over the previous 20 to 30 years was the “psycholinguistic guessing game” or “whole language” approach (Goodman, 1976, 1986; Smith, 1971, 78, 82, 88, 94, 2004). This approach views skilled reading as “sampling” the printed text to confirm “predictions” built up from “context”. It views reading as a process that develops as naturally as walking and talking. Therefore, children do not need to be taught to read; reading will develop naturally as long as children are in a print-rich environment where adults share books with them. The first director of the NLS was concerned that the new approach to reading teaching embodied in the NLS needed to take along with it teachers who had been trained in a very different philosophy and pedagogy. There has never been any valid and reliable scientific evidence to support the Goodman/Smith view of skilled reading and reading development. However, this view remains to this day influential among many teachers, a cause for concern in the light of the OISE report’s identification of motivation to continue with the teaching approach advocated in the NLS as challenge to its future success (see below).

Reading Recovery

1.4 During the 1970s and 80s, Reading Recovery was very much associated with the Goodman/Smith view of reading and reading teaching. The value of Reading Recovery lies in its emphasis on early identification and intervention for six year-old struggling readers. It has also recently adapted its pedagogy to include phonological awareness and phonics teaching. Many of the first Literacy Consultants appointed in LEAs to provide in-service training and consultancy in implementation of the NLS were Reading Recovery trained teachers: thus, reading recovery has influenced the NLS both indirectly (through association with the Goodman/Smith school of thought) and directly (through Literacy Consultants).
1.5 These two influences are apparent in the Searchlights “model” of reading (illustrated in Figure 1 below), which is the only model of reading that the NLS presents to teachers.

![Figure 1: The searchlights model](image)

This “model” of reading has no basis in research evidence. Its acceptance into the NLS as a means of teaching teachers to understand reading is therefore at first sight surprising.

**Psychological Research**

1.6 Adoption by the NLS of a model with no foundation in research evidence is especially surprising as, from over 30 years of psychological research into skilled reading and reading development, we now have tried and tested models of the processes involved in printed word recognition as well as models of the factors that influence comprehension of written texts. Printed word recognition processes and text comprehension processes are clearly confounded in the Searchlights “model”, where readers are assumed to get to the meaning of a text by a combination of sounding out or recognising the words that comprise the text, and using contextual information and their knowledge of grammatical structure to predict upcoming words.

1.7 However, when we consider the historical context within which the NLS was first introduced, adoption of the Searchlights “model” is less surprising, because this “model” represents an uneasy attempt to produce a compromise between the different approaches to the teaching of reading that follow from two diametrically opposed conceptions of the processes involved in skilled reading and reading development: the Goodman/Smith approach (and its initial acceptance by proponents of Reading Recovery), and the approach that results from psychological research, which is outlined briefly below.

1.8 The approach taken by psychologists views skilled reading as consisting of two essential dimensions: printed word recognition, and text comprehension (eg Gough and Hillinger, 1980; Hoover and Gough, 1990). This is illustrated in Figure 2 on page Ev 5.
1.9 According to this view, reading development therefore requires that children develop (which includes being taught) procedures for recognising printed words, and procedures for understanding the texts that their word recognition skills allow them to decipher. Teachers need to understand the procedures required for success in each dimension. Psychological research has provided valuable insights into the nature and development of procedures necessary for this success in each dimension.

1.10 Although printed word recognition processes and text comprehension processes are clearly confounded in the Searchlights “model” and in the Goodman/Smith approach, from which it in part derives, they are not confounded in the Psychological approach, nor are they confounded in children’s minds. Different factors predict successful development of printed word recognition processes from those that predict successful development of the ability to understand printed texts. Moreover, there are children who cannot understand the texts they read, despite appropriate printed word recognition skills (suggesting a specific problem with reading comprehension and/or language comprehension generally). There are also children who, despite relatively poor word recognition skills, can make remarkably good sense of texts (suggesting a specific problem with word recognition processes, combined with a strength in language comprehension). That is, a double dissociation has been observed between the two dimensions, suggesting that they are indeed separable aspects of reading.

1.11 Given the huge amount of psychological research into reading and its development over the past 30 years, it is also disappointing that only one psychological theoretical perspective is easily discernable in the original word level work at Key Stage 1 in the NLS Framework for Teaching: that concerned with the role of phonological awareness in facilitating successful reading development proposed by Bryant and Goswami (eg Goswami and Bryant, 1990). Many aspects of this particular account have been hotly contested and refuted by subsequent research. This has been reflected in some of the changes made to early KS1 word level work in later versions of the NLS (eg Progress in Phonics), where the emphasis on rhyme and onset-rime units is much reduced.

1.12 The questions that the Select Committee is interested in under this heading (ie the relative weight given under the NLS to synthetic/analytic phonics, to whole word/language and to onset-rime, etc) all relate to this essential conflict between different conceptions of reading that is inherent in the Searchlights “model”. I will be happy to answer any detailed questions in these areas.
2. PUTTING POLICY INTO PRACTICE

2.1 In this section, I have relied on the Final Report of the External Evaluation of England’s National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies (OISE report, Earl et al, 2003). Whilst this report recognises that, for both strategies, “the gains to date have been impressive”, it also suggests “there is still considerable ground to be covered if significant and lasting improvement is the goal”.

2.2 Two of the barriers to significant and lasting improvement identified in the OISE report are (1) teachers’ limited understanding of reading and (2) the fact that many teachers are not yet convinced that the NLS is worthwhile in terms of improving pupil learning. They support the goal of the NLS, but not necessarily the means of getting there.

Teachers’ understanding of reading

2.3 To date, both Initial and In-Service Training has concentrated on training teachers to deliver the NLS. It has not presented any research-supported model of the processes involved in skilled reading, or of the ways in which children are thought to develop these processes. The OISE report quotes Willows (2002, p 1) to emphasise the dangers of this approach to teacher-training:

Training teachers to implement instructional methods when they don’t truly understand the underlying rationale is futile. Without understanding, teachers do not have the knowledge to adapt an instructional strategy to address various student needs . . . Without understanding, teachers can become inflexible and dogmatic, unable to integrate new research-supported practices into existing approaches.

Yet data collected by the OISE team indicate that most teachers believe they do have the necessary skills and knowledge to teach children to read. That is, teachers do not know that their understanding is limited.

2.4 However, limitations on teacher understanding were perceived by the majority of Consultants, who felt that “teachers still needed detailed classroom guidance, deeper subject knowledge and greater pedagogical expertise” (OISE report, p 93), and by Headteachers, who made comments like: “there’s another layer missing and that’s the understanding of how children learn”; “(teachers) are very good at bashing out the curriculum, but they need to work on looking at where the children are at, listening to their needs. They still have a lot to learn about how children learn” (OISE report, p 94).

2.5 This is a dangerous state of affairs, as “If teacher learning does not become a routine feature of ongoing practice, the principles behind the Strategies may be diluted or distorted by well-intentioned people who are unaware of the gaps in their understanding” (OISE report, p 134).

2.6 The persistence of large numbers of teachers unconvinced that implementing the NLS has led or will in the future lead to improvements in pupil learning carries with it the danger that focus on improving literacy will erode. In my opinion, those aspects of the NLS Framework for Teaching that are still somewhat controversial (eg the emphasis on word level work and phonics) are likely to be most threatened.

2.7 In my opinion, this threat relates directly to the lack of teacher knowledge about reading and to the failure of the NLS to educate teachers about reading.

3. WHICH CHILDREN BENEFIT FROM CURRENT APPROACHES? ARE ALL EQUALLY WELL-SERVED BY CURRENT POLICY GUIDANCE ON READING?

3.1 The initial “good teaching” supplied under the NLS clearly doesn’t “work” for everybody—if it did there would be no need for Additional Literacy Support (ALS), Early Literacy Support (ELS) and Further Literacy Support (FLS), or for Wave 3 individual attention for approximately 5% of children. Once this Three Wave version of implementation of the NLS has been in place throughout their school career for children at the end of Key Stage 2, if there are then still schools that do not meet the criterion of 65% of pupils achieving Level 4 at the end of KS2, we might need to consider whether this fuller version of the NLS works for all children.

3.2 Matters that would then need to be considered include teacher training, the appropriateness of the targets set for 11-year-olds, and the appropriateness of the KS2 assessment procedures.

I would be happy to answer questions relating to the above matters.

1 Commissioned by the Standards and Effectiveness Unit at the DfES, and implemented by a team from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE).
4. **Introduction of Early Literacy Strategies—Teaching Children to Read from a Very Early Age and The Relative Value of Pre-Literacy Experience—by Comparison to those Countries with Later Age Start to Education**

4.1 In the UK, we already start teaching children to read at least a year earlier than is the norm in most other countries. Now that most children appear to enter the Reception class at the start of the school year during which they will reach their 5th birthday, some children in Year R are only just four years old. This is not too young for children to be learning about reading, but in my opinion it is too young for all children to be formally taught to read and expected to be successful.

4.2 This is not to say that activities known to facilitate successful reading development should not be included in the Year R curriculum, or indeed into the Foundation Stage curriculum that covers three to five year olds. These activities should be fun. They should be presented as play. They should include language development activities as well as more traditional pre-reading activities. Some children (eg those for whom English is not the language spoken at home, those from socially deprived backgrounds) particularly need language development activities.

4.3 I am happy to answer questions about the kinds of activities that can be particularly beneficial to pre-school children.

5. **The Success or Otherwise of Current Policies Compared to those being Pursued in Other Countries—Paying due Attention to Differences Dictated by Different Languages**

5.1 In this section, I am relying on the recent report from the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS, Mullis et al, 2003), which compared reading achievements of 4th grade (9- to 10-year-old) children in 35 countries in 2001. The English cohort in this study was therefore the cohort against whom the success of the NLS was to be judged in 2002. I am indebted to Dr Rhona Stainthorp for the detailed analyses of relevant PIRLS data cited below.

5.2 One of the major impulses for the introduction of the NLS was a desire to reduce the perceived tail of underachievement in reading, that is, to increase the number of 11-year-old children who reached the standard of reading deemed appropriate for an 11 year old.

5.3 Dr Stainthorp’s detailed analysis of the PIRLS data suggests that this desired outcome has not been achieved. Figure 3 (following page) shows the extent to which children at different levels of reading ability in six economically advanced European countries differ from the standard deviation from the average computed from data for all 35 countries. Children in these European countries do relatively well at all levels of reading ability when compared to the global averages: the standard deviations are all in a positive direction. However, the direction of slope is different for English children. In England, we do much better by our good readers and much worse by our poor readers. To some extent, this can be explained by the fact that English orthography is the most opaque alphabetic orthography of all, and therefore might present relatively more difficulty particularly for the least able children. However, French is also a relatively opaque alphabetic orthography, yet the French do relatively better by their least able children.

![Figure 3](image-url)
5.4 Thus, data in Figure 3 to some extent might result from language differences. In Figure 4, only data from three economically advanced English speaking countries are presented.

Figure 4

5.5 Here we see similar descending profiles for England and New Zealand, with English children doing relatively better at all ability levels than New Zealand children—somewhat ironic, given the New Zealand origins of Reading Recovery (Clay, 1972), where this programme has been in use for 30 years. However, Canada does well by children at all ability levels—maybe there is something to be learned from teaching methods used in Canada.

6. Final Thoughts

6.1 If I have been highly critical here of certain aspects of the National Literacy Strategy, this is because I am worried by the possibility, raised also in the OISE report, that what I see as the beneficial effects of the NLS on the teaching of reading are likely to be lost unless the serious concerns raised in my criticisms are addressed.

6.2 These worries are exacerbated by recent decisions to hand over responsibility for assessing reading at the end of Key Stage 1 to schools and teachers. I do not consider that the SATs administered at the end of Key Stage 1 provide reliable and valid estimates of children’s reading ability, but I do believe that some form of standardised assessment of reading is essential during Key Stage 1.

6.3 I also think there are better ways of assessing reading at the end of Key Stage 2 than the KS2 SATs provide.

6.4 I would welcome discussion of the policy implications of the issues I have raised.

6.5 I am attaching as an appendix a copy of part of my previous critique of the NLS, presented to the Phonics Seminar, March 2003. The section reproduced in this appendix raises questions about the teaching of reading comprehension in the NLS.

REFERENCES


APPENDIX

PREVIOUS CRITIQUE OF READING COMPREHENSION TEACHING IN THE NLS FRAMEWORK FOR TEACHING

Reading Comprehension in the NLS

I shall now turn to “reading comprehension” as set out in the NLS Framework for Teaching, and attempt to relate this to research evidence about the processes that are involved in reading (language) comprehension.

As I said earlier, we do not have two separate language comprehension systems, one for spoken and one for written language, but a single system that we have to learn to access from both oral and written input. The early and continuing emphasis in the NLS on identifying differences between “book language” and oral language appears to assume that oral language development is pretty well complete, and that all children have developed oral language to an age-appropriate level. Learning the nuances of difference between oral and written presentation is then all that is needed to facilitate comprehension of written text. But these are questionable assumptions. It is clearly not the case that oral language development is anywhere near complete during the early primary years. It is also certain not the case for many children that oral language development is at an age-appropriate level (Stuart, Dockrell and King, in press; Locke, Ginsborg and Peers, 2002). Therefore there should be much more emphasis, especially but not exclusively in Key Stage 1, on language development per se. Many children cannot produce a coherent oral narrative: do we know whether such children can comprehend oral narrative? Yet we expect them to comprehend written narrative.

Reading comprehension or literary criticism?

At Key Stage 2, much of the NLS Fiction text level work that is labelled “Reading Comprehension” might better be labelled “Literary Criticism”. For example:

- Year 4 term 2, children should be taught “to understand how the use of . . . descriptive language can eg create moods, arouse expectations, build tension . . .”
- Year 4 term 3, children should be taught “to describe how a poet does or does not use rhyme . . .”
- Year 5 Term 1, children should be taught “to analyse and compare poetic style”.
- Year 6 Term 2, children should be taught “to analyse the success of texts and writers in evoking particular responses in the reader . . .”

These are ways in which children can demonstrate comprehension and meta-level understanding of use of language and of its formal properties; they are not ways to teach comprehension.

Failure to Take Proper Account of Research Evidence

More seriously, the NLS fails to make explicit use of research evidence accumulated over the past 30 years that has demonstrated some of the causes of failure to comprehend in children who have age appropriate word recognition skills (ie whose failure to comprehend cannot be due to word level failures which might be prevented by good early phonics teaching). Among the causes of comprehension failure so far identified are:
Poor knowledge of story structure

In the NLS work on comprehending fiction, there is lots of work on narrative (story) structure. However, to understand why this work is there and to teach it well, teachers need to understand the concept of story grammar. I think this work would also benefit from being removed from the “literary criticism” context in which it is embedded: children do not need to work on story openings and endings so that they can recognise or write good ones themselves, but so that they acquire the concept of the beginning and its scene setting function, and the end and its resolving function. This is immediately apparent from discussion of story grammar, in which a scene is set (the where and when), characters introduced and developed (the who), goals identified (the what), motives and intentions identified (the why), actions towards the goal are described (the how), problems encountered and how they are overcome are presented, and a resolution reached (the outcome). This work — on the when, where, who, what, why, and how — is scattered throughout both Key Stages but nowhere is it presented as a whole to the teacher with its purpose and importance clarified.

There is also explicit reference to chronology in narrative and to ways in which the passage of time can be represented. This is presumably to be explored across a range of the different genres explicitly identified (Sci-Fi, adventure, myths and legends, texts from different cultures, etc). Children are also to be taught the formal structures likely to be encountered in play scripts (stage directions, ways of indicating dialogue) and poetry (rhyme patterns, language use, etc). There is again no explanation of how knowledge of these kinds of structure affects comprehension — if indeed it does.

Poor domain (background) knowledge and/or failure to link this to incoming information

There is implicit acknowledgement of the importance of activating prior knowledge and linking this to incoming new knowledge, in the requirement in Key Stage 1 that children should relate story settings and incidents to their own experience. But domain knowledge is likely to be or to become more important in reading non-fiction. Successful teaching techniques for improving domain knowledge include showing films or videos to introduce new topics. Successful techniques for encouraging children to activate and use their prior knowledge within a domain include pre-reading discussion of the topic to be studied, so that children are made aware of what they already know in that area. This can be followed by discussion of what questions remain unanswered, so that children select texts and read with a question or questions in mind. These issues are explicitly mentioned with regard to non-fiction only in Year 2 Term 3, Year 4 Term 2. They should permeate the whole curriculum.

Problems with inference making

There is no reference at all in the NLS Framework for Teaching to the importance of inference in comprehension. This is alarming, given that research has shown that less skilled comprehenders have particular problems with making necessary inferences (Oakhill, 1984; Oakhill and Yuill, 1986; Oakhill, Yuill and Parkin, 1986). Moreover, it has also been shown that less skilled comprehenders’ ability to make inferences can be improved by training that helps children to activate their prior knowledge and shows them how to draw on this to answer inferential questions (Hansen & Pearson, 1983; Yuill and Oakhill, 1988). Some kinds of inferences do depend on bringing prior knowledge to bear on the text. Jane Oakhill gives the following simple example:

“Jane was invited to Billy’s birthday party. She wondered if he would like a kite. She shook her moneybox. It made no sound!”

In order to make sense of this simple sequence, children must go beyond the literal text and fill in the gaps from their own prior knowledge. If you don’t know that it is usual to buy a present for the birthday boy, you won’t understand why Jane is wondering whether Billy would like a kite, you won’t infer that she is planning to buy him a present and that this present should be selected to please him. If you don’t know that kites have to be bought and paid for, you won’t understand why Jane is shaking her moneybox. If you don’t know that money in a moneybox rattles when it is shaken, you won’t understand the implications of the lack of sound from Jane’s moneybox. If you were asked questions probing these gaps in the literal text, you would answer them either incorrectly or not at all.
It is important that teachers understand that inference from real world experience can be essential to understanding even the simplest shortest narrative text. Yet, the NLS Framework for Teaching makes no explicit mention of the development of inference skills.

Problems with establishing causal and cohesive links

Garnham, Oakhill & Johnson-Laird (1982) showed that less-skilled comprehenders with adequate word recognition abilities have difficulty in taking advantage of the cohesive links in texts that are created by use of anaphoric devices such as pronouns. For example, in the phrase “It was ready”, it is impossible to know what it is that was ready. The pronoun “it” in this phrase can only be interpreted with reference to information in another part of the text. In this case, “it” has to be linked back to the sentence that preceded it, “Bill checked the cake in the oven”. “It” then clearly refers to “the cake in the oven”. Our knowledge of gender and syntax allow us to know that “it” doesn’t refer back to “Bill”—Bill is male and therefore would be referred to by the pronoun “he”. Less skilled comprehenders’ difficulty in interpreting cohesive devices such as anaphora means that they cannot establish even local links among the sentences in a text. This is not something that can be addressed solely by sentence level work, yet it is not mentioned at all in the NLS text level work.

Problems in integrating information in text

Less skilled comprehenders also have problems in integrating ideas presented in different parts of a text. This has been shown by Oakhill and her colleagues by asking children to detect anomalies in texts. The question asked is, “Does this story make sense?”. The stories to be read are short passages that present inconsistent information in different parts of the text (eg moles cannot see very well; moles have very good eyesight). The less skilled comprehenders were much worse at recognising inconsistencies, suggesting that they do not automatically integrate incoming information (nor do they monitor their own comprehension). Again, there is nothing in the NLS framework that overtly addresses this issue.

Problems with working memory

The identification of working memory problems in some less skilled comprehenders is important in itself, since this is also likely to interfere with the ability to link ideas from different parts of the text (Yuill, Oakhill and Parkin, 1989), which is essential to obtaining an overview of the text, and therefore to main idea identification. But it is also important as an example of the kinds of cognitive processing difficulties that can exist within the minds of some children, and which prevent them from achieving an age-appropriate understanding of texts. Children who score poorly on tasks designed to assess verbal intelligence are also likely to have limits set on their ability to understand texts: if your listening comprehension is poor, then so will be your written comprehension. No account seems to have been taken of this unpalatable fact in setting attainment targets, or in designing a curriculum that is governed entirely by chronological age.

How could reading comprehension be better presented and taught?

At this point we might be wise to look westward, to the report produced by the National Reading Panel (NRP) in the US in 2000. This gives a brief overview of the path taken by research into reading comprehension since the late 1970s, as well as classifying and evaluating research studies. In the early days, studies investigated the effects of training children in the use of single strategies that were deemed likely to improve comprehension. Then combinations of strategies were trained. Finally, the implications for teacher training and teaching began to be examined.

To these ends, pupils (mostly from grades 3 through 6) have been trained to monitor their own comprehension, to make graphic aids to improve comprehension and memory, to make mental images, to acquire and use background (prior) knowledge, to generate and answer questions, to summarise, and to develop their knowledge of story structure. These activities have sometimes been conducted in shared learning situations in small groups, and have also sometimes been conducted across the curriculum. Effectiveness of training has usually been demonstrated on immediate post-tests designed to evaluate just what has been taught. There are fewer studies that have also been able to show improvements on standardised tests of reading comprehension. Most of the strategies trained are processes already shown to be lacking in less skilled comprehenders.

Implications for teacher education

Despite the availability of this plethora of research, a recent observational study of 10 classrooms (Pressley, Wharton-McDonald, Mistretta and Echeverria, 1996) found that teachers, whilst consistently identifying comprehension as one of their primary goals, were not directly teaching comprehension strategies to their pupils. Instead, they occasionally mentioned strategies, and presented pupils with test questions tapping understandings that would have developed from strategy use. This is likely to be due to the real difficulties encountered in teaching teachers to be successful in improving their pupils’
comprehension. Duffy (1993) suggests that major changes in teacher education are required to help teachers become good strategy teachers, and emphasises the importance of taking account of the complexity involved in this kind of teaching, and the need for teachers to make creative adaptations to deal with that complexity. If we accept his views, then simply setting out what pupils “should be taught” is extremely unlikely to lead to major improvements in children’s reading comprehension.

Effective teaching methods

Despite the difficulties inherent in equipping teachers to become successful in inculcating comprehension strategies, Pressley and Wharton-McDonald (1997) identify three methodologies for effective comprehension teaching: reciprocal teaching, direct explanation, and transactional strategies instruction. These are discussed in turn below.

Reciprocal teaching

Pupils are taught to use four comprehension strategies: predicting, questioning, seeking clarification, and summarising. Instruction takes place in small groups, with each pupil taking a turn to be the teacher. As teacher, they predict likely content from titles and related knowledge, pose questions about the reading and model summarisation. When there is confusion about ideas expressed in the text, they either predict upcoming content or seek clarification. The class teacher scaffolds these activities by giving prompts.

Direct explanation

Teachers begin by explaining strategies to students and modelling these for them. Pupils then have to practice in using the strategies in reading that is monitored by the teacher. The teacher provides additional explanation and modelling as needed.

Transactional strategies instruction

This approach stems from the work of Pressley and colleagues in identifying successful implementations of comprehension teaching. The following characteristics of successful programs comprise the basis for transactional strategies instruction.

Several strategies are taught, including prediction based on the activation of prior knowledge; question generation; clarification seeking; mental imagery, and summarisation. Teaching is long term over several months. Strategies are directly explained and modelled. Teachers then coach as students practise. Students model strategy use for each other. Appropriate application of relevant strategies is taught. Teachers continued to model strategy use throughout the school day and across the curriculum.

The Way Forward

It can be seen from the above that comprehension teaching in the US is more clearly based in research evidence both about the nature of comprehension difficulties and about effective intervention than is perhaps the case in the UK. It would seem that, to further improve reading standards in the UK, several things are needed. We need to collect the necessary data that will allow us to identify the real sources of the recent stall in progress: that is, data on standards of context-free printed word recognition, and data on performance on standardised tests of reading comprehension. We need to provide teachers with a model of reading that does not confound word recognition processes with those involved in comprehension. We need to ensure that all teachers are properly trained to teach phonics quickly and effectively in Key Stage 1. We need to provide teachers with research-based training in reading comprehension, so that they understand the likely causes of failure and know which kinds of strategies it is appropriate to teach to improve different aspects of children’s comprehension. We need teachers who are both professional and expert in their understanding and their teaching. Only this can release the necessary creativity needed for teachers to be adaptable and well-informed in their teaching of reading.

Appendix references


Witnesses: Dr Morag Stuart, Reader in Psychology, School of Psychology and Human Development, Institute of Education, University of London and Mrs Debbie Hepplewhite, Reading Reform Foundation, examined.

Q1 Valerie Davey: May I welcome Dr Stuart and Debbie Hepplewhite to this, our first session? We have given ourselves the title of Teaching Children to Read which, as you both well know, has been the subject of debate for ever, it would seem, for those of us who have been involved in teaching at any time. It is something we want to look at specifically, following the Government’s new approach, given the literacy hour, given all the work they have done. Why are we having a debate now? That is the first question and it would be an opportunity that I should like to give both of you to say a few words, before we start the general questioning, as to why you think there is a debate now. Looking at the achievements or not, as you may see it, of the Government’s approach, what are the standards that you would expect young people to reach at the end of their Key Stage 2. I do not know who would like to go first, but we will give you each five or 10 minutes, depending on what you would like to say to the Committee. Would that be helpful?

Mrs Hepplewhite: Good afternoon everybody. Thank you for holding this inquiry; I think it is much appreciated. I should like to say from the outset, that I am absolutely not an academic and I come to the Committee today very much a working teacher. This means that I have a really good understanding of the kind of training that teachers have had, perhaps at teacher training college and certainly since the National Literacy Strategy and whether that has equipped them to understand about the teaching of reading, also writing, spelling and handwriting. So I come originally from the National Literacy Strategy training, which has differed from national numeracy strategy training in that if teachers raise questions during National Literacy Strategy training, these questions are not addressed and teachers are actually made to feel uncomfortable. There has been a much more open approach to the numeracy strategy, so there is literally a different climate in those two subject areas. I maintain that teachers do not have a common understanding of how to teach reading, or how best to teach reading and they do not understand that this is one subject area where it is not just about what you do, do with children, but there is an area of what you should not do with children, which can be very damaging to children. I hope that perhaps we can address these things this afternoon.

Dr Stuart: Good afternoon. I am an academic now. I was also a Key Stage 1 teacher for a large number of years, so I also have experience of teaching children to read and write. I became an academic by accident, because when I studied psychology I studied under Professor Max Coltheart who was doing really fascinating work about reading and I became interested. When he suggested I did my PhD, I knew at once what I wanted to do because I had taught children to read for about 16 years and I had absolutely no idea how they learned. When I train teachers now, this is still a common experience. When I tell that anecdote to teachers, they immediately smile and nod and they know too, that although they teach children to read, they do not know how children learn. It is quite mysterious because you just breathe on some children and they learn to read. Other children you teach and teach and teach and they do not learn to read. I wanted to know why and when I started my PhD I did a longitudinal study starting with children in their last term in the nursery and I followed those children up, having predicted how they would fare in learning to read, until they were 11. At the age
of 11, my predictions held good and the gap between the children that I predicted would find it easy and the children I predicted would not have grown so that there was about a four-year difference in reading age by the time they were 11. I have been doing research into early reading development now for the past 20 years more of less. One of the reasons we are having the debate still is to do with Ofsted’s continuing disquiet about the teaching of phonics in schools. In all the reports I have read, this is one issue which Ofsted raises. Ofsted’s disquiet is also raised in a report of 1996–98 about what teachers in initial teacher training were being taught about reading and goodness knows why else. There is a paradox in that recent international comparisons such as the PIRLS study show English children doing very well comparatively by the age of 11, but we do need to look at whom they have been compared with. The international comparisons include children from countries where most of the teachers are not trained or are certainly not trained as much as teachers here are trained, where the countries are poor and therefore there are poor school libraries and poor text books in schools. We are thus not really comparing like with like. When we compare like with like, we see some rather dispiriting things about English schoolchildren which show that although our best children do extremely well, there is a larger range between our best children and our worst children at the age of 11, than in almost any other country. We are clearly not doing as well as we should by the children at the bottom, the children who are always there in classes, whom you taught and taught and taught. So we still do not know how to do it.

Q2 Valerie Davey: You indicated that in the research you have done, you had predicted. Could you tell us very briefly what the factors were?
Dr Stuart: Yes. When the children were in the nursery, I tested their phonological awareness. Whether it has made as much difference as it could, or whether we could make more difference is really what we are here to discuss today. There is absolutely no doubt that the National Literacy Strategy has a major effect on the teaching of reading. Prior to the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy in many schools reading was not systematically taught at all.

Q3 Jonathan Shaw: Give us the Beano version.
Dr Stuart: If I say to you “What rhymes with cat?” what would you say?

Q4 Jonathan Shaw: I would say hat.
Dr Stuart: You would say “hat”. Well lots of four-year-olds would say dog, because they deal with words in terms of their meanings and not their sounds.

Q5 Mr Pollard: I said dog.
Dr Stuart: Might you have reading problems? I looked at their ability to recognise whether words rhymed or not and to tell me words that did rhyme with each other, asked them to tell me what words began with in terms of their sounds. Already in the early 1980s those were known predictors of the successful reading development. Children who, when they went into school, understood that words were composed of sounds had a head start in learning to read and that is largely because alphabetical orthographies, alphabetic writing systems, map onto speech sounds. If you know about speech sounds, you are prepared for the fact that letters will map on to them.

Valerie Davey: Thank you very much. I could go on, but I have promised my colleagues that I will not abuse the chair this afternoon. Nick, it is over to you.

Q6 Mr Gibb: Thank you very much. I got into this subject because when I first became the MP for Bognor and Littlehampton, I was discussing with the heads of my three different comprehensives why the results were as they were for those schools. They said “We have a problem with the intake”. One particular school said. “60% of my intake had a reading age below the chronological age and 30% had a reading age two years below the chronological age”. Why do you think this might be in an area like mine? Do you think there are areas of deprivation but it is not totally deprived and there are prosperous areas. Why do you think there would be these problems?
Dr Stuart: What year were these children entering secondary school?

Q7 Mr Gibb: They were going in to Year 7, so they were eleven-year-olds.
Dr Stuart: In which year?

Dr Stuart: So they had been through school prior to the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy.

Q9 Mr Gibb: Yes.
Dr Stuart: Well, I am not surprised then, because the National Literacy Strategy has made a difference, there is absolutely no doubt about that. Whether it has made as much difference as it could, or whether we could make more difference is really what we are here to discuss today. There is absolutely no doubt that the National Literacy Strategy has a major effect on the teaching of reading. Prior to the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy in many schools reading was not systematically taught at all.

Q10 Mr Gibb: So, what has the NLS brought in? I am a great supporter of the NLS.
Dr Stuart: The NLS has produced a framework for teaching which tells teachers that reading has to be taught and the prevailing ideology before the introduction of the NLS was that reading did not have to be taught, that reading was a natural human activity just like walking and talking. We do not teach children to walk, we do not need to teach children to read. In fact some authors in the early 1970s were absolutely against the idea that you should try to teach children to read and saw teaching children to read as counter-productive in terms of their learning.
Q11 Mr Gibb: Are you not exaggerating? If I were to ask primary teachers in my constituency if that was what they were doing prior to 1997, I do not think they would say that, would they? “We don’t teach children to read here.”

Dr Stuart: No, I do not think they would.

Q12 Mr Gibb: So in real terms, what does what you are saying mean?

Mrs Hepplewhite: May I speak from the point of view of the teacher? The National Literacy Strategy brought a huge impetus to the teaching of reading: massive influx of reading material in the form of big books and sets of reading books. A bit of a rod for teachers, saying “You need to teach literacy.” You have to make it very high profile in your schools. You have to plan it very thoroughly. There is such a thing as word level, sentence level, text level and you must account for all these areas”. The difference it made was that the middle to above-average children have absolutely flown on that extra impetus. In my opinion, what it did not do was still train the teachers how to teach reading in the most effective way and this is where the sort of, say, bottom third are still failed, because there is still a lot of grey area about how to do it. The very fact that you were making it so high profile and it was a case of Ofsted was looking for this and we must do this and we must account for it, was enough to have got the teaching profession into gear with the whole area of teaching of reading and a lot of teachers were learning as well, myself included. I know more about the genre now than I ever did as an adult before and I am still learning and these are all the pluses for the National Literacy Strategy. Unfortunately, in terms of the specific teaching of reading, the advice was not as it should have been, it was not scientifically tested, it was not compared to other leading programmes at the time. Because therefore the advice was not the best, admittedly, the actual government teaching material was not the best, but teachers were actually expected to use those materials, is why we have got this difference now between the bottom struggling children and children with English as an additional language, children from poor backgrounds, compared with the rest of the children. We have to be very careful that we do not therefore conclude, if we look at the improvement in this area, that it must therefore be the children’s problem, it must be innate to the children, it must just be the backgrounds because there are programmes out there where children, despite those difficulties, are making some extraordinary strides. Their level of comprehension may well be limited by their oral comprehension and the limit of their vocabulary, but in terms of the decoding of the words on the page, with certain programmes they really are now at an advantage and hopefully will be able to read more within their schools. That in itself will improve their vocabulary and their confidence and have a really good knock-on effect.

Q13 Mr Gibb: There have been huge improvements under the NLS, going from 56% reaching Level 4 to 75%; in fact last year it was 77%. But you are both critical in your written submissions of the NLS. We are kind of skirts around what the debate is. What is the debate that is going on? Why are you still critical of the NLS, given the gains that have been made?

Dr Stuart: I am critical because I am actually worried, at the time when the NLS and the NNS have been subsumed into the primary strategy and there is talk about devolving responsibility to local authorities rather than central authorities, that we have not won the hearts and minds of teachers about how reading ought to be taught. That is partly because, as I said in my paper, the National Literacy Strategy represents this uneasy compromise between two completely opposing philosophies about the teaching of reading: on the one hand, the idea that reading is a natural human activity and, given time and exposure to books, all children will learn to do it and the idea that actually, from psychological research, we know an awful lot about how children learn to read and we know an awful lot about reading and we know about the cognitive processes that children need to develop and we know about ways of teaching them that will facilitate the development of those processes.

Q14 Mr Gibb: Can you, for the benefit of the Committee, just summarise how reading should be taught? We are talking about phonics, are we not?

Dr Stuart: Yes, we are talking about phonics basically. Children need to understand the alphabetic principle and children need to know three things. They need to know the correspondences between letters and their sounds and that goes beyond the single 26 letters of the alphabet to all the vowel digraphs and consonant digraphs, two vowels together; “ai” is a graph “ch” is a digraph. They need to be able to blend sounds that they recover from translating letters into sounds in order to form words for reading and they need to be able to segment spoken words into their sounds in order to translate them into letters for spelling. So once they have mastered the alphabetic principle, they become self-teaching because they can work out new words that they encounter in texts for themselves and the words that they encounter in texts are likely to be words that are already in their spoken vocabulary. They can therefore form sight vocabulary representations for those words.

Q15 Mr Turner: What does “sight vocabulary” mean?

Mrs Hepplewhite: May I speak from the point of view of the teacher? The National Literacy Strategy brought a huge impetus to the teaching of reading: massive influx of reading material in the form of big books and sets of reading books. A bit of a rod for teachers, saying “You need to teach literacy.” You have to make it very high profile in your schools. You have to plan it very thoroughly. There is such a thing as word level, sentence level, text level and you must account for all these areas”. The difference it made was that the middle to above-average children have absolutely flown on that extra impetus. In my opinion, what it did not do was still train the teachers how to teach reading in the most effective way and this is where the sort of, say, bottom third are still failed, because there is still a lot of grey area about how to do it. The very fact that you were making it so high profile and it was a case of Ofsted was looking for this and we must do this and we must account for it, was enough to have got the teaching profession into gear with the whole area of teaching of reading and a lot of teachers were learning as well, myself included. I know more about the genre now than I ever did as an adult before and I am still learning and these are all the pluses for the National Literacy Strategy. Unfortunately, in terms of the specific teaching of reading, the advice was not as it should have been, it was not scientifically tested, it was not compared to other leading programmes at the time. Because therefore the advice was not the best, admittedly, the actual government teaching material was not the best, but teachers were actually expected to use those materials, is why we have got this difference now between the bottom struggling children and children with English as an additional language, children from poor backgrounds, compared with the rest of the children. We have to be very careful that we do not therefore conclude, if we look at the improvement in this area, that it must therefore be the children’s problem, it must be innate to the children, it must just be the backgrounds because there are programmes out there where children, despite those difficulties, are making some extraordinary strides. Their level of comprehension may well be limited by their oral comprehension and the limit of their vocabulary, but in terms of the decoding of the words on the page, with certain programmes they really are now at an advantage and hopefully will be able to read more within their schools. That in itself will improve their vocabulary and their confidence and have a really good knock-on effect.

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Q15 Mr Turner: What does “sight vocabulary” mean?

Dr Stuart: The evidence about skilled reading is that we have two procedures for recognising words, which happen every time we look at a word in print. You would be amazed at what your brain is doing every time you see a word in print. Your brain is automatically translating it from letters to sounds and automatically looking it up in your internal dictionary of the spellings of all the words that you know. Okay? The self-teaching device is that if you know letter-sounds and you can work
out unfamiliar words, once you have worked them out, you can pop them into sight vocabulary and they are available for subsequent instant recognition. Skilled readers largely rely on this instant recognition because they have this stored vocabulary.

Q16 Valerie Davey: Can we ask Debbie to answer the same question? Would you agree with that as the best way of teaching or would you like to add something?

Mrs Hepplewhite: Do not be cross with me. One thing, certainly from the point of the Reading Reform Foundation, is that we are absolutely not a philosophy; we are not promoting any philosophy. The beauty of the Reading Reform Foundation is that the stereotype of the sort of phonics proponents as being very sort of right-wing elderly ladies or whatever has gone. The Reading Reform Foundation is supported by an enormous variety of people, actually from across the world, who have the same debate in other English-speaking countries. The teaching of reading is a very emotional thing and we have tried to be very unemotional about it, although we are passionate about children failing, so emotion is definitely there. Basically we do everything by evidence and the Reading Reform Foundation’s governing principles are that we promote evidence-based teaching of reading. At the moment, that evidence is pointing very clearly to something called synthetic phonics. It could be standing on your head and turning round three times and we would promote that. I should like to make it very, very clear from the outset that we are talking about a very scientific, objective approach to the teaching of reading, as opposed to a belief system. This is not a belief system. What is missing from the National Literacy Strategy is that same objective approach to what is being promoted. In the past, I have corresponded quite a lot with people quite high up in Ofsted and one letter to me was very much saying “Debbie, you need to be patient, things cannot be changed over night. We have politics and diplomacy to consider”. Well, in my opinion, children’s welfare has nothing to do with adult politics and diplomacy and it has everything to do with what works the best in the classrooms. If you would bear with me, I should like you all to imagine that you are four years old and I should like to take you through two different scenarios. Let me take you through one scenario. You are four years old and you go into an environment where you are surrounded by lots of passionate caring people, people who love literature and who are very keen to steep you in lots of stories and want you to play in the role play corner, reading and writing, wanting you to have all these experiences to enrich your life. Of course that is really important. One of the things that they do is actually show you cards with whole words on; this is the principle of sight vocabulary. They say to you “That word says” whatever it says, they might show you a picture with it. So your first experience might be looking at words which are just black squiggles on the page at the age that you are at and you might have an elephant up there and that word says elephant and you are taught that says elephant. In actual fact, a lot of the words you will be exposed to are the kind of words which you will need for the reading of real text. So it will be “the” and “said” and “was” and “they” and “their”, the kinds of words that make text into sentences and not just odd words. So your first experience will be looking at books with Mum and enjoying the story, if you are lucky. Then you will be shown black squiggles on a page, perhaps with a supporting picture to tell you what that word is, then it will be books which are based very much on look and say “Here is a picture. Here is a word”. Then you go through the book and you pretend to read it and the chances are that you are saying the correct words, but not because of the words themselves, which are very hard to take on board, but actually because of the pictures above. I am quite sure that if you swapped the pictures around, the children would get all the words wrong. You are also teaching the child not to look at the word by the alphabetic principle where you learn the letter-sound correspondences and you learn to track the word all through the word from left to right. You have some experience of that and then you may well get some letter-sound information and it is highly likely that at home you were taught your ABC and you were told exactly that. You were told a lot of names, not necessarily letter sounds and you are getting contradictory information yet again, because when you are reading, you may think automatically in terms of the letter name and not a sound. This is another criticism of the NLS, because you are doubling your learning and confusing the information. Then you may well get a little bit of phonics creeping in, depending on how old you are, or whether you hit a more formal setting. By now you have had lots of different ways of being taught how to read. Now the adult logic is that one of these methods will work and if something fails, something else will succeed and you are only little and you are loving the books and you are looking through and you are building up that information. Now, I want to park that child’s experience for a moment, if I may, and I want to bring in another child going into a different setting. In that setting, you still have lots of books surrounding you so you have a literacy-rich environment and you hear stories and talk about books and see how books work and you still have a role-play corner. But when the adults talk to you and teach you, they find a way of explaining that when we speak, we have a way of writing a code and we are going to teach you that code and how to use it to be able to read and write. A lot of time and attention is given to just that, to getting a response to automatically, so that you are taught at letter level and single unit sound level and you get a lot of that. You do not get a little bit of it mixed up with everything else. That teacher or that grown-up is doing that all the time and building that information up quite rapidly and in the best synthetic phonics programmes, you might get six
letter-sound correspondences a week including vowels and consonants. When you get those, you are taught two extremely important skills. You are taught the skill of sounding out and blending all through the word to be able to decode the word and you are taught the skill of listening to a simple word said very slowly. When it is said very slowly, the sounds pop out. So if you say “zzzzzziiiiiiiiiiiip” you can hear those distinctive sounds and you are trained to hear those distinctive sounds and then you can spell and if you are taught your handwriting as well, you have been taught everything. Now that has been shown to be unbelievably effective, no matter what the background of the child. Those elements of teaching are not yet in the National Literacy Strategy programmes. You are not taught contradictory messages and you are not given in the first instance, words which are awkward, words with complicated phonics, even if they are regular, irregular words, you are given the words that work. By the time you start to be introduced to more difficult words but useful words for reading text, you already understand the principles of the alphabetic code and how to decode words. Some pupils of four and five, and even three, are able to sound out and blend and hear a word within the first couple of weeks of being given that method and that is pretty impressive. Within a few more weeks, more and more children can do that, which means that within half a term, or a term, you can have a whole cohort of children able to do the most fundamental skill, which is sound out and blend for reading and segment the spoken word for spelling. Now that is very powerful and compared with the mixture that is here, where some phonics will be taught, the results are pretty dramatic. What we have to do is show that, because researchers like Morag Stuart, people in the Reading Reform Foundation know that, as do growing numbers of people around the country, but it would appear that the National Literacy Strategy team are avoiding the public act of comparing these programmes and passing that information to the teachers. Until the teachers get this information, they are not in a position to make the informed choices that they need to make to help their children.

The Chairman took the Chair at 4pm
Chairman: That is very helpful.

Q17 Mr Gibb: Yes, that is very helpful. I just want to bring in Morag now as well. On this long tail of underachievement which is talked about in PIRLS study and bringing in the points both you and Debbie have made about the phonics method of teaching, which Debbie has just said applies to all children, is there not an argument that some children have a different way of thinking? Indeed is it not the case that the type of children you have mentioned before, who, when you ask them to find a word which rhymes with cat, will say dog, some children with different kinds of minds, minds like that perhaps, do need a different method of teaching and we do therefore need a variety of methods of teaching reading and not just an over-emphasis on phonics?

Dr Stuart: No, I do not think that is what the research evidence suggests at all. What the research evidence suggests is that the best way to make a child, who at four thinks that dog rhymes with cat, into a reader is to play games with them, so that they understand that cat rhymes with mat and hat and so that they do become aware of sounds in words. There are obviously individual differences in the speed with which different children learn and in the success rate at which children get to targets anyway. I remember saying to Ofsted at the very beginning of the National Literacy Strategy that I thought it was extremely unlikely that 80% of children would reach the level 4 target because the level 4 target is set on children’s understanding of what they read and understanding of what you read is limited by your verbal ability and verbal ability varies among children. I think it is very reasonable to expect that every child should be able to recognise the words on the page and phonics teaches you to do that. However, when we are looking at understanding what you read, there are other factors which set limits on your ability. I have lost your question.

Q18 Mr Gibb: The long tail of underachievement. Who are those children and would they benefit from a different method from phonics? Where is there that long tail?

Dr Stuart: The evidence suggests that phonics teaching actually benefits children from low socio-economic status homes, children with English as an additional language, more than it benefits children from middle-class homes.

Q19 Mr Gibb: Are you not saying that you are simply teaching decoding? So this is all about decoding, it is not about comprehension. Do we not need comprehension? Why is decoding so important?

Dr Stuart: Because you cannot comprehend, if you cannot decode. If you are presented with a page of text and you cannot recognise any of the words and you do not know what any of the words mean or say, you cannot understand the text. So as children grow up, they learn language, they learn the language that they are surrounded by, they learn their mother tongue and they can speak and they can understand. When they learn to read, they need to get into that language comprehension system from the printed word, rather than from the spoken word. At the early stages of reading development decoding is essential.

Q20 Mr Gibb: If I were to go to any primary school in my constituency, they would say “But we do phonics. We use the NLS and we use phonics”. What are you complaining about?

Dr Stuart: The fact that there are ways and ways of using phonics. That comes back to my worry about the hearts and minds of teachers. Teachers who have been trained in the whole language
philosophy, the idea that, as Debbie says, if you present the right environment, the children will learn to read, reject phonics teaching. In fact in one study which I carried out in London schools, where we taught phonics for 12 weeks to one group of children and we taught another way of introducing early reading to another group of children, at the end of the first year when we went and reported back to the schools on how the children were doing, I nearly lost one school because the phonics-taught children were doing better than the non-phonics-taught children and this head teacher said to me that she was ideologically opposed to taking part in a study which showed that phonics teaching worked. That is the depth of opposition that was around when the NLS came in.

Q21 Mr Gibb: Why would teachers have this view? It does seem rather perverse, unless there is something more to it.

Dr Stuart: Because there is a very charismatic figure in the world of reading education called Frank Smith, who in 1971 produced a book called *Psycholinguistic Analysis of Reading and Learning* and that book has been reproduced several times a decade and the latest edition of it came out in 2004. Frank Smith is attractive to teachers because he tells them that phonics is bad, and teachers find phonics teaching quite boring, that teaching words on flash cards is bad, and teachers find that quite boring. If you do it day after day, year after year after year it might well be boring, but it is not boring for children and it teaches them. I went to a conference where he spoke once, because I wanted to understand his mystic pulling powers and he is amazing. It is like attending a Billy Graham revivalist meeting going to a Frank Smith conference. He talks about teachers as the “keepers of the imagination”. He flatters teachers about their important role in society, which most of us do not do, most of us criticise teachers quite a lot of the time. So he is extremely attractive to teachers and he has also made it a political and ideological thing. As Debbie says, there is a perception that phonics is a right-wing affair.

Q22 Mr Gibb: Is it?

Dr Stuart: No, of course it is not.

Mrs Hepplewhite: May I just say though, that an awful lot of teachers are really so keen to have information about what works best. Lots of newly trained teachers certainly have not had training in their teacher-training establishments, though I am sure some do. I think there are individuals in teacher training in universities who are up to date with research and keen to get this out to students, but mostly they are not. I think they are desperate for proper information and they are not involved in the ideological thing and, in any event, what we have to inform those teachers about is that to do this simple-step fast-pace phonics is not exclusive of doing all the wonderful literacy things, all that comprehension stuff. It is like an exchange. A lot of people think you need to teach reading by the context, by the comprehension, giving you the words, rather than being able to decode the words and bringing you a greater ability to comprehend the text. In actual fact, some children can get by whichever way and we have said that already. It is a fact that the better reader, and anybody can be a better reader in terms of decoding, is gained through the synthetic phonics approach, but that is simply not known by ordinary teachers out there. Most teachers are good people and if they fully understood that the methods they were or were not using in Key Stage 1 or even in a remedial capacity in Key Stage 2 and even in secondary schools, if they fully understood what to do for the best, I am sure their consciences would not let them do otherwise than the best for the children.

Q23 Mr Gibb: Just how long would it take to teach a child to read using phonics?

Dr Stuart: We do not know basically; we do not know how long the ideal time is and that is one of the questions which was identified as requiring further research in the National Reading Panel’s report to Congress in the United States. However, most children can get off the ground after one term.

Mrs Hepplewhite: I was going to say one term.

Chairman: May I apologise for arriving at the session late? This was pre-planned. It was the inauguration of the chancellor of my university in Huddersfield, so it was something I had to be at and the only way I could do that and be here was to be 15 minutes late. My apologies to both of you. I have actually met Mrs Hepplewhite before and talked to her, so I am catching up on where we are in the questioning.

Q24 Mr Pollard: A couple of things I should like to pursue. How does Mr Smith debunk what you are offering? Debbie said it is unbelievably effective. If it is so unbelievably effective, how does he stop people believing the unbelievable?

Dr Stuart: I do not want to overemphasise Frank Smith, because I hope he is history, but I fear he is not. He does it by saying that there are so many phonic rules that there is too much for children to learn and he does it by saying that English is such an irregular language that even if you knew all the phonic rules under the sun, there would still be words that you could not read.

Q25 Mr Pollard: Is that all?

Dr Stuart: No, that is not all, but that is the basis of it.

Q26 Mr Pollard: How do we convince anybody and those who make the decisions? Is more research needed? Do we need a guru or a champion?

Dr Stuart: No, I am very much against gurus and champions.

Q27 Jonathan Shaw: A phonics czar.

Dr Stuart: No, no; we do not need a phonics czar. As a psychologist, what I believe is that teachers in training ought to be taught the psychology of reading and the psychology of reading development, so that they understand what reading
is and how children learn to do it. At the moment, that is absent from teacher-training courses. Teachers in initial training are taught now to teach reading, but the Reading Reform Foundation has not had the results and the teachers themselves have not. So when you attend training and you are told that the research says, you are not told which research, when you write and ask for that research, you are not told what research, therefore, you have a whole teaching profession taking the programmes up in good faith and I do not think that that good faith has been justified whatsoever.

Q28 Mr Pollard: The Chairman does not allow me to say that I have seven children, so I am not going to tell you that. We used to use flash cards and that seemed to work quite well. All our children were reading before they went to school. I take the point that Debbie made about “was” and “is” and all those sorts of things.

Q29 Mr Pollard: How do parents then get involved in this? Debbie said earlier on that teachers often do not have a clue about how this. I am paraphrasing what you said but the essence of what you said is that many teachers do not have a clue about how this works. How do parents then link into this? What about things like Cheebies, which I watch with my grandchildren? All these things are teaching children the essence of the alphabet, are they not? This is a “C” this is a kicking “K”, all that business. How does it all knit together?

Mrs Hepplewhite: Sometimes parents are the sensible ones. When teachers are spouting off to parents with their “teacherly” advice on how they need to teach their child at home, for example, one of the main things that teachers are told about how children learn to read is by looking at the pictures and guessing, the parent will say “Well, you know, that is only guessing and I like to cover the pictures up and make the child look at the word”. This is how I was alerted to the flaws in the NLS right from my first training day, when I was being told that this was a valid strategy and I said “Hang on, my weakest children are the ones that look at the pictures. They are looking at the picture and not the word and when they guess, it is the wrong word. That is a ridiculous way”. How can it be that in 2004 the Government of the country is still training its teachers to train its children to read by looking at the picture and guessing, guessing from the context and looking at the first letter, checking whether that is right and makes sense? Now that is strategy straight out of the Early Literacy Support programme, which is not entirely in keeping with the Progression in Phonics programme. The Reading Reform Foundation has scrutinised the actual programmes in unbelievable detail to flag up parts which are flawed according to research or international comparison of reading across several European countries, showed that although English school children start being taught to read at least a year before children in any other country, they do not get to comparable levels of printed word recognition until about Year 6. It is much harder to learn to read in English. That does not mean to say that we should not try to use phonics because many words are phonically regular and many words that are phonically irregular have some
regular correspondences. So “was” starts with “We” and has /W/ at the beginning and we can go on from there.

Q31 Chairman: May I take you back to the reason that we have asked you to give evidence and that is that we are the Select Committee for Education and Skills and we represent people and we are interested to represent parents who would be looking at the kind of discussion that we have been having this afternoon and would probably be totally confused that there is so much passion on all the sides of this argument. What we would normally do as a select committee is say “Here is the establishment” which I think you are linking to the present National Literacy Strategy “and you are really the radicals who are challenging the establishment”. In a sense what we would normally do and I guess parents would want us to do is say “We have many fine departments of research in this country in education, the London Institute, Cardiff and many others. What is the body”? You pointed at one particular writer, Mr Frank Smith. You are an academic. What is the body of assessment of what is going on at the moment? What quality? Lots of people are out there researching. Can you point out to the Committee where you would look, where you would guide us? I know you gave us a reading list, but give us some balance from just that one book.

Dr Stuart: I am not sure that I understand your question.

Q32 Chairman: Let us put it very bluntly then. You are an academic. What is the best research on this that you can guide us to, the very best, for evaluating what is going on in the National Literacy Strategy and evaluating phonics? What is the best?

Dr Stuart: For evaluating, I think you could look at the reports of the National Reading Panel in the United States, which actually demonstrates a very different approach to the one that we have taken here. In the United States, they convened a panel of academics to look at the evidence about the teaching of reading and how reading was learned and should best be taught and that panel trawled through the research literature and found 100,000 research reports that had been published over the past 25 or so years and assessed the evidence. This is a detailed document which provides evidence on lots and lots of aspects of the teaching of reading. With regard to the teaching of phonics, they showed clearly that in every case, where comparisons had been made, children who had been taught phonics in a systematic way—

Q33 Chairman: Learning English?

Dr Stuart: Learning English. Children learning to read in English who had been taught in a programme that used systematic phonics did better than children who had been taught in programmes that did not use systematic phonics.

Q34 Chairman: Would you be confident that that particular compilation of research includes most of the research that we know of?

Dr Stuart: Absolutely.

Q35 Chairman: What about from our own country? What research would you rate here?

Dr Stuart: Mine.

Q36 Chairman: Research is always evaluated by your peers. Dr Stuart: Absolutely. Mine gets published in peer review journals, so it must have something going for it. Important teams are doing research in the University of York and the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge.

Q37 Chairman: None of those is a five-star department.

Dr Stuart: York is for psychology.

Q38 Chairman: I was thinking of education.

Dr Stuart: The research on reading goes on in psychology departments and they are all five-star departments.

Q39 Chairman: So we should listen to psychologists more than educational researchers.

Dr Stuart: Yes, you do have to. This is all psychological research.

Q40 Chairman: How would you describe your group in terms of the balance of the argument? Is it 80:20? Are you winning the argument? Is it 50:50? In the intellectual struggle between academics do you see yourself as a small minority trying to dent the overwhelming majority which is resisting?

Dr Stuart: Psychologists are all singing from the same song sheet. Psychologists are all saying that children need to understand the alphabetic principle and they need to be taught phonics.

Q41 Chairman: So, any psychologist we got here would say that phonics is the way.

Dr Stuart: Any psychologist; I think so. I should be surprised if there were psychologists who did not say that.

Q42 Chairman: I am sorry to bear down on this, but we represent people; we are not specialists. We need to know what the evidence is. Mrs Hepplewhite, how long has your group been going?

Mrs Hepplewhite: Since 1989.

Q43 Chairman: How big is it? How influential are you?

Mrs Hepplewhite: We have contacts across the English-speaking world and we have people ranging from parents to psychologists to educationalists, to classroom teachers, the whole range of people, supporting that. It is actually, in a sense, officially quite a small group of people, but it is quite a significant committee because it is the way that people have come together to support one another. They may well have different research or
different phonics programmes, but they wanted to show that it is not about being the best, this is the best research. These people have reached a consensus, one about synthetic phonics—

Q44 Chairman: What I am trying to draw out from you is that from the evidence that I have read you still seem to be regarded in terms of—this is not a criticism—being slightly on the edge of the normal accepted ways of teaching English. I am not saying anything about who is right and who is wrong, but you are always the persecuted minority against the establishment.

Mrs Hepplewhite: It is trying to break through to the establishment to do things properly. It is very much about the testing and the comparisons and the transparency. There is a worrying lack of transparency, I hear from a lot of ordinary people about what the climate is in their local education authority and we have talked about hearts and minds. I want just to stick to technical information. I have just heard from someone who has now been made to do a programme by their authority which is Ruth Miskin’s new programme, but these people have not had explained to them that it is different from the National Literacy Strategy, because it is politically incorrect to be critical of the Government.

Q45 Chairman: Let us come back to that in a moment with some of the other questions. The last thing I want to ask you, just to be clear, if phonics is the absolute wonderful way to teach English and every teacher, every head, every parent out there wants the best way, the most effective way to introduce children to the English language, why has this copper-bottomed gold-plated wonderful method not been welcomed everywhere? Why has everyone not embraced it and changed their way of teaching?

Mrs Hepplewhite: I should like to throw that right back at you who are in the heart of London. I should like to know why there has been this lack of transparency and this lack of engagement. It is almost verging on the edge of “Is it egos? Is it people feeling embarrassed because they have not promoted things properly or tested things properly?”

Q46 Chairman: That becomes a kind of conspiracy theory does it not?

Mrs Hepplewhite: It is not so much a conspiracy. We have talked about charismatic people and gurus. I do not know the set-up in the Department for Education and Skills or in the National Literacy Strategy team, but when people do things, they might do things with good will and good heart and then if it receives criticism, you have to be a very big person to know how to handle that and how to go about addressing that criticism. The reason that the Reading Reform Foundation perhaps seems so cutting edge or very critical is the inability to reach people and penetrate and get a proper debate going.

Q47 Chairman: You were recently with the Department for Education at a very high level seminar I remember you telling me.

Mrs Hepplewhite: Yes, and I was highly critical of that seminar because it was nothing like I imagined where you—

Q48 Chairman: But you got into the higher echelons.

Mrs Hepplewhite: Yes I have and it took an awful lot of letters to get there.

Q49 Chairman: But you got there and you felt rejected?

Mrs Hepplewhite: Yes. In there, believe it or not—I do talk a lot, we know that—I had loads of opportunities to speak because nobody spoke up. Each researcher got a very short period of time in which to present their research. The conclusions did not correspond with that research or open it up to further discussion. I mentioned one programme in particular, the Early Literacy Support programme, which is absolutely not similar to what the research is showing us children should have and that we needed to say “Is this something which needs discussing? Can we look at the details of what it is promoting for real teachers, for real children in real classrooms?” The message that the videos and training gave was the exact opposite to the way that teachers need to teach reading. It was not even of the flavour of Progression in Phonics which was the prior phonics programme. That is so extraordinary, if I may say so.

Q50 Chairman: Mrs Hepplewhite, you are saying you have gone into the higher reaches of the Department for Education and Skills across the road here and all these people had their say.

Mrs Hepplewhite: Yes.

Q51 Chairman: But . . .?

Mrs Hepplewhite: No response. Is it not very clever? Is it not very clever that the way you introduce children to the English language, why has Department for Education and Skills across the road here and all these people had their say. Mrs Hepplewhite: Yes.

Q52 Helen Jones: May I say that having seen fashions in teaching come and go over the years, some of us here would like to concentrate on the research evidence rather than on the conspiracy theory. Mrs Hepplewhite, you said in your journal that the National Literacy Strategy and its programmes directly lead to underachievement in literacy for a substantial number of children. Can you tell the Committee the research on which that is based?
Mrs Hepplewhite: The actual research is mentioned in the newsletters themselves. There are studies, for example, of how children respond. I shall just backtrack. There are different ways that people can learn to read. So even as we sit in this room now, when I look at a page of print I may see that print in a different way from someone else in this room. If I have been brought up or taught to have that reflex of going left to right through the word and seeing it phonically, I will see it one way. There may well be people in this room who have a different reading reflex and have to recognise those words as wholes. That type of reader may well be less accurate in their reading, have a lower saturation point than people who can read phonically.

Q53 Helen Jones: Before you go any further, give us the research that backs up that statement.

Mrs Hepplewhite: There is research in there.

Q54 Helen Jones: How do you know that people are less accurate? Let us take a personal example. My son learned to read without anyone teaching him; we were very lucky, he was one of the people whom Dr Stuart recognises. Tell me what the research evidence is to show that people who learn to read like that are less accurate readers than people who learn to read phonically. That is what you just said.

Dr Stuart: May I come in there? I think there is a little confusion here. The fact that your son learned to read without anybody apparently teaching him does not mean to say that he is not a phonetic reader. There is lots of evidence that some children hardly need to be taught phonics.

Q55 Helen Jones: Fair enough, but the statement that Mrs Hepplewhite gave us, and this is what I am trying to tease out, is that people who learn to read phonically are more accurate readers than people who do not learn to read phonically. Now please tell us what the research evidence for that is.

Mrs Hepplewhite: What I am saying is that some people who are taught to read by a more whole-word approach and not taught with systematic phonics are put on the track of becoming failed readers, not being able to read in the first place. Now there is research in there, Charles Richardson’s research, which shows how people can see words differently: either they are trying to look at a whole-word recognition or they are tracking through the word. As long as their reading reflex is the whole-word reflex, they are more likely to have struggles if they fall in that bottom third.

Q56 Helen Jones: Now hang on, because that is not what you said in the first place. You did not talk about the bottom third. You said that people who did not learn to read phonically were less accurate generally. Now, can we be clear on what we are talking about here? Are you saying that the research shows, and if so which research, that children who have more difficulty learning to read will read less accurately that way? Or are you saying that it is a general thing that people who are not taught phonically will be less accurate readers?

Dr Stuart: I did explain earlier that research into skilled reading suggests that every skilled reader using two kinds of processes. We simply do not know the extent to which teaching contributes to whether you are a Chinese or a Phoenician reader; this is an old distinction. Phoenician readers read mostly alphabetically and Chinese readers read mostly ideographically. There are individual differences in that and we do not know to what extent teaching contributes to those individual differences. What is certainly known is that unless you, either by being taught or by your own natural instinct, learn to cope with the alphabetic system and to be able to decode words alphabetically, you are extremely unlikely to become a fluent reader of words. Although there are case studies in the literature of people who have turned up in psychology departments, for example, studying for psychology degrees and who get quite good psychology degrees, who turn out to be completely unable to read aloud any simple three-letter non-words like BUP, because they have no idea about the sound system of language and their spelling is appalling, so that is where it shows up. There is another interesting case study in the literature of an 85-year-old lady who was in the control group for a study of some stroke patients. It turned out that she could not read any non-words at all either, but she had problems with reading throughout her life. She probably had problems with spelling. So you can learn to read in exceptional circumstances without any understanding of the alphabetic system, but this is unusual.

Q57 Helen Jones: Can we go back to the National Literacy Strategy then? The statement which you made, Mrs Hepplewhite, was not simply that it is not successful for a number of children, but that it actually leads to underachievement in a substantial group of children. Now there is a difference between those two statements. Perhaps you could clarify for us what you mean. Do you mean that it actually leads to underachievement or do you mean that it simply is not successful with a certain group of children?

Mrs Hepplewhite: It leads to underachievement and even if it is only a third of those children, at the bottom third, that is leading to underachievement.

Q58 Helen Jones: No; no. Leading to underachievement is a different thing from not being successful. You said it directly led to underachievement. What I am trying to tease out from you is how it does that and where your research evidence is that shows that it is responsible for that.

Mrs Hepplewhite: The research evidence is very much linked to the concept of dyslexia. I am not an expert on dyslexia, but what I should like to suggest is that in this country there is a debate about what it is exactly and how it arrives. I should just like to throw in some seeds of thought. For
example, in a recent book, Professor Diane McGuinness pointed out that you do not get the instance of dyslexia in countries with a more transparent alphabet. Whereas in this country, even the Dyslexia Association tends to try to explain dyslexia as something which is innate to the person, in actual fact it is related to the English language and how it is taught. For example, if you have different methods of teaching within schools, some schools may have a very high special needs with regards to literacy, a very high failure rate of the children, maybe up to a third of the children are identified as having special needs in literacy which some people may call dyslexia or may say some of those children are dyslexic. In other schools, where a different method is used, you just do not get that incident. It always comes back to statistics whereby you are demonstrating that the way that children are taught leads to a manifestation of difficulties with reading and that difficulty is usually at the word level. Brain scans are done of dyslexic people where you can actually track how the brain is working in what we might describe as a dyslexic way. Those people are given very intensive phonics remedial programmes which actually changes their brain scans; it changes the way in which they are looking at words, this concept of a reading reflex. What I am suggesting is that we need to teach children so that all children have the best reading reflex which will set them up to be more accurate decoders. It may or may not help their comprehension in that comprehension is not something you can guarantee, it is to do with your oral comprehension, but you are giving them the best possible chance. I am suggesting that the National Literacy Strategy, with its promotion of guessing from pictures, from context, from initial letter clues leads to people manifesting this dyslexic symptom where they do not see words in a phonics way all through the word and they have had that created; it is not something they have been born with. They may have been born with less ability to learn than the next child, but it is exacerbated or caused by the way that they were taught to read. If you can take children from the same intakes, like Ruth Miskin’s school in Tower Hamlets, where she put her intensive phonic programme in for all children because she knew it was something they would do with children with literacy difficulties, and she can get children, as she did in her school, up to extraordinary levels of literacy and they had English as an additional language, and you have sister schools with special needs at 30 and 40% and it is about a teaching method, that in itself is evidence of a method causing a problem.

Q59 Helen Jones: It is not quite, is it? Let us try to tease out this evidence. First of all, you would have to have a study of groups which were absolutely comparable when they first came into the school; would you not? You have now gone on to make a different suggestion, which is that it is actually leading to the symptoms of dyslexia. Do either you or Dr Stuart know of any studies which have been done which might shed light on that, where you are taking comparable groups of children, they do have to be comparable to start with, teaching them in entirely different ways? I think, Dr Stuart, you referred to some work you have done on this before and looked at the results. Dr Stuart: May I disentangle this from dyslexia? Can we forget about dyslexia?

Helen Jones: Yes, please do, since we cannot all agree a definition of dyslexia.

Q60 Chairman: What do people like the National Dyslexia Association think of your phonics methods?

Dr Stuart: Dyslexic children are almost invariably given structured phonics teaching, because it is the best way to teach dyslexic children to read.

Q61 Chairman: It is highly rated by them.

Dr Stuart: Structured phonics teaching is proof that it works. There is the proof from the national reading panel’s survey of the literature which suggests that structured phonics teaching works better than no phonics teaching or less structured phonics teaching. It is very difficult in the real world to do the kind of research that you would like to be done. It is terribly difficult to match children so that they are comparable on all possible things. We did try to do that in the study that I conducted. We had 50 children taught for a term using Jolly Phonics which is a very nice programme for five-year-olds and it is fun. We had 50-odd children who were not taught. We pre-tested them on a range of measures of language and phonological skills and letter-sound knowledge and various things that we did not expect to change as a result of the teaching and other things that we did expect to change as a result of the differential teaching. We managed to match our groups on almost everything and where we were unable to match groups, we took account of that in the statistical analysis we did. So it is not impossible to do that sort of research, but it is difficult. What our research showed was that the Jolly Phonics teaching was definitely much, much more successful in making children fluent readers of words than the non-phonics teaching. However, that is not the sort of comparison that you are asking for, which is comparing the phonics as taught in the NLS with different phonics teaching programmes. I do not know of any research that has done that.

Q62 Helen Jones: We have heard a lot about the National Literacy Strategy and the debate about phonics within it. Has that debate meant that other issues are overlooked? You mentioned the difficulty of actually designing research. You said that one thing you can never design into the system is the effect of a very good charismatic teacher and the problem is that you cannot measure that. Are there other aspects of the National Literacy Strategy that either of you either thinks work extremely well or that do not work well but have been overlooked in the debate we have had about phonics?
Dr Stuart: Where I am a single issue politician is on the model of reading which is presented to teachers in the National Literacy Strategy. The model of reading which is presented to teachers which is this black hole of four things operating and disappearing into a text is completely and utterly misleading and bears no relation to any research on reading that I know of. This is tragic because it has missed an opportunity to get a generation of teachers who understood about reading. I should like to see different models of reading adopted in the National Literacy Strategy guidance to teachers which were in accordance with research evidence and knowledge about reading.

Mrs Hepplewhite: So Solity says in his paper for the DIIES phonics seminar that his research was the only piece of research that was really compared with the national literacy project and the National Literacy Strategy. According to his research the results from using his early reading research programme were much higher than the National Literacy Strategy. So there are statistics where there is a direct comparison. I also believe that with the Clackmannanshire research, which is synthetic phonics in Scotland, where the Scottish Education Minister has now recommended to schools that they may well like to use that synthetic phonics approach so impressed were the Scots with the results of the research, which was in a very poor intake area and I believe the statistic was 50% school meals, with Solity’s research with, yes, some individual schools like Kobi Nazrul when Ruth Miskin was head and like St Michael’s at Stoke Gifford, with the effect of programmes which are very similar to synthetic phonics, like Phonographix where it has been used in a remedial capacity and there are schools and studies around the country where people will show that improvement ratios were substantial. I have just heard about one in Norfolk with Sounds Discovery which is related to St Michaels, it is Dr Marilyn Grant’s programme, which created a 3.8 ratio, meaning that for every month that the children were put on that programme, they gained 3.8 months in terms of their reading age, there are other types of phonics, I believe there are some in Manchester, there is sufficient current research going on around this country and in Scotland and there are sufficient numbers of schools with sufficiently impressive results that this should now be an open debate whereby the Department for Education and Skills is prepared to organise comparative programmes. I believe in any event that the Department for Education and Skills should have ensured that their programmes were tested with comparative studies even if they were difficult to achieve. Other people have managed to achieve it. I am suggesting that the debate has got to the point where phonics is not in question: phonics teaching is good for children. So then we have to look at which are the best phonics programmes, because we cannot continue to fail any of our children and we want all of our children to get the best possible start.

Chairman: We would all agree on that.

Q65 Jonathan Shaw: Are the names of the schools that are operating these phonics techniques available?
Mrs Hepplewhite: Yes and they are the kind of schools where they want to promote the effectiveness of what they have done.

Q66 Jonathan Shaw: Would we be able to get hold of that information?
Mrs Hepplewhite: Yes, you will.1

Q67 Jonathan Shaw: Then we will be able to make comparisons of their plans with the schools that are not doing this.
Mrs Hepplewhite: Yes and that is what we have been trying to push for.

Q68 Jonathan Shaw: Perhaps we might be able to have a look at that in terms of evidence. I should like to ask Dr Stuart about teacher training. Do you have any interface with the Teacher Training Agency?
Dr Stuart: No, I do not have an interface.

Q69 Jonathan Shaw: Are you cast out?
Dr Stuart: I do not think that they know about me at all.

Q70 Jonathan Shaw: Why is that then?
Dr Stuart: I have no idea.

Q71 Chairman: Does the Teacher Training Agency not know about you?
Dr Stuart: Nobody from the Teacher Training Agency has ever approached me to talk about teaching.

Q72 Jonathan Shaw: Do you ever go into teacher training colleges?
Dr Stuart: I work in one.

Q73 Jonathan Shaw: Then you must do.
Dr Stuart: I work at the Institute of Education and I go in there every day. However, I work in the School of Psychology and Human Development and I teach on Master’s courses for already

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1 Note: http://www.rsf.org.uk
qualified teachers and the continuing professional development programme. I moved to the Institute of Education because I recognised that I now knew an awful lot about reading and my knowledge was useful to teachers. However, I have never been invited to give so much as a single lecture on the initial teacher training course which runs in my own institution. That is the extent of my failure to make a difference.

Q74 Jonathan Shaw: What is the name of your vice chancellor? Go on, that was a rhetorical question.
Dr Stuart: Things are changing because the course leader has changed and I am going to be allowed to teach next year.

Q75 Jonathan Shaw: Are you?
Dr Stuart: Yes.

Q76 Jonathan Shaw: The design of the NLS. Would you say it was broadly correct?
Dr Stuart: It is broadly correct to the extent that it recognises that reading should be taught and that there is a role for some kind of phonics teaching in how reading should be taught.

Q77 Jonathan Shaw: So does it follow that it is broadly correct, but it is what happens, it is what is implemented?
Dr Stuart: Yes I think so.

Q78 Jonathan Shaw: Do you approve of that?
Mrs Hepplewhite: I do not think it is broadly correct. I think programmes are contradictory. I do not think it has been good training and what worries me also is that at the moment we still need teachers in Key Stage 2 to be trained in how to improve children who are struggling or failing with their reading. It is more likely that teachers in Key Stage 1 have had training in Progression in Phonics or Early Literacy Support and they are now rolling out training in the latest supplement which is called Playing with Sounds. I have just done a review on that programme with another lady and should like to find out whether any testing was done on that programme.

Q79 Mr Turner: One hundred years of compulsory education and we have just discovered that reading needs to be taught. Was it really Frank Smith who put about the idea that reading did not need to be taught? He sounds pretty demagogic from your description of him, Dr Stuart, but presumably there is something behind what he says, some academic research, some influence that led to that conclusion.
Dr Stuart: He did some experiments in the 1960s where he distorted texts in various ways and made it difficult to read. He showed that people could read it despite the distortions. He used that as evidence that people do not need to pay very much attention to the actual print in order to get the meaning of the message. However, the fact that people can do something does not mean that that is the way that they do do something. Research since then has shown that people, when they are reading, do pay attention to every letter in the print, not just to the words but to every letter in every word in print.

Q80 Mr Turner: Judging by the amount of research that has been done to come up with this report, for example, was there any equivalent level of research which led Mr Smith to believe that he was right?
Dr Stuart: No.

Q81 Mr Turner: So we changed the whole way in which reading was taught in this country on a whim.
Dr Stuart: Yes.

Mrs Hepplewhite: It was actually many years before that when, I forget the person, someone thought we could learn words as wholes through teaching deaf children. So we are talking about many-centuries-old debate. Historically the teaching of reading has changed on these whims of charismatic people bringing in different ideas. You have had whole word teaching, you have had something called whole language which is bring in lots of enrichment and read lots of books and they will pick it up, you have had phonics and different types of phonics, a mix of methods. I would suggest that the National Literacy Strategy is still very much a mix of methods although at the DfES phonics seminar Professor Brooks was trying to conclude that it was synthetic phonics using Sue Lloyd, who is co-author of Jolly Phonics, saying it is synthetic phonics in her sense, when she wrote a paper for the seminar saying how it was not synthetic phonics! So there are some extraordinary stories to be told throughout the history of teaching of reading and a lot of those methods are absolutely not science based. What we are trying to do now in 2004 is totally change the climate in which we work and inform teachers properly and allow them to make informed choices, but also to ensure that if government is going to play a large role in education, they bring in those scientific principles.
Q85 Mr Turner: You never know.

Mrs Hepplewhite: It is my understanding that there were some improvements, but they were not dramatic improvements and it was not compared with anything else; that is my understanding.

Q86 Mr Turner: What is this ideology? I find it extremely hard to understand. One of you said that every head and teacher wants the best way, but it appears that not every head and teacher does want the best way.

Dr Stuart: It depends on what they are being told is the best way.

Q87 Mr Turner: So they do want the best way, but they are not prepared to accept that what you say is the best way is the best way.

Mrs Hepplewhite: They do not know; they have not been told. There is no information out there.

The Committee suspended from 5.05pm to 5.15pm for a division in the House

Q88 Chairman: A couple of other people will be wanting to get your train of thought. Let me just come in and keep the thing ticking over with something I picked up from your language. This whole area of the teaching of English is very ideological, is it not? Over the years—Andrew makes it 100 years and certainly 100 years of public education... People have been teaching English for hundreds of years in schools. It is one of the most ideologically charged areas, is it not? Why do you think that is?

Dr Stuart: It has to do with the fact that however you teach reading some children will always find it much more difficult than others. Debbie would disagree with me here, because Debbie thinks that an ideal synthetic phonics programme will take everybody along with it and maybe that is the case. My experience as a teacher was that the longer I taught the less well I thought I was doing it. The more you teach, the more you realise how much you cannot do it well. That is badly expressed, but you understand what I mean. The same thing happens with the teaching of reading. It is very difficult to learn to read. The miracle is that we do it. When you start to look at what is involved in reading, it is quite an astonishing feat. Reading and writing are the high point of human achievement actually. We should not be surprised that children sometimes find it difficult to do. I am a psychologist and psychology is a relatively young science. It is really only in the last 30 years that psychological research into reading has actually taken off. We now understand much more about what reading is and how it develops than we used to. We are in a very good position now to have a scientifically informed curriculum for the teachers.

Q89 Chairman: Are you saying that here is the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), all those 4,500 civil servants who are desperate? I should have thought that Charles Clarke would be so delighted to embrace a new methodology which could get the literacy figures steaming up the curve.

Dr Stuart: You would, would you not?

Q90 Chairman: Would you not think that?

Dr Stuart: I would, yes.

Q91 Chairman: The other caution is something Mrs Hepplewhite said. You are discontent with the National Literacy Strategy, because it has lots of ways; it is a mixed bag, is it not? It is not pure enough for you. If you were in charge, would there not be a bit of you which said that there had been so much ideological turmoil about the best way to teach reading that to be safe you would have a variety of methods to reach a variety of children?

Mrs Hepplewhite: That is the logic which has persisted for a number of years and it is a logic which is persisting still. However, we have to get away from logic, from ideology, from philosophy, from preference. There is so much measuring which has been done. You can measure how well children can decode words; you can measure how well children can comprehend. What you cannot do is understand their full measure of comprehension if they cannot decode well. They might not do well in a comprehension test, but actually their oral comprehension would be better, they are just not sufficiently competent at reading the words on the page. We can certainly measure thoroughly how well and efficiently they can decode at word level. If I were in charge of the National Literacy Strategy, I should have a completely different approach towards the teachers of this country and I should engage them in professional development, which we are supposed to do, by informing them about what is out there, what children are capable of doing and at the moment what type of teaching has reached these results. I should keep refining it. I should bring teachers along by treating them like intelligent human beings, giving them information and engaging them educationally. What has happened is that they have been told that they will teach this, it is implied that it is research based, but I would argue that it is not, or it is possibly not and then they are afraid of Ofsted and they very much feel that this is what Ofsted wants to see in their schools. I suggest that many schools are not teaching in the way that their instinct or their prior training tells them they should be teaching. They are teaching in a way which they think will be seen to succeed by Ofsted.

Q92 Chairman: Thousands of teachers out there in the country value themselves as professional people, professional teachers. Would they not be rather offended by some of your remarks in the sense that they believe they are professionals, they know about teaching children to read, some of them have been doing it for many years and many of them pride themselves on their successes. Is it not a bit arrogant for you to say that they do not know what they are doing, you are going to introduce a way of transforming their teaching ability?
Mrs Hepplewhite: No. What has already happened is the thing which has been arrogant, because lots of teachers have had their National Literacy Strategy training, asked questions during that training, only to be made to feel embarrassed and the questions have not been answered or addressed. That is what is arrogant. Some of those teachers have been teaching for many years and have had great success.

Q93 Chairman: What I am trying to get at is who the villains of the piece are. One of your villains is this man Frank Smith, who wrote this book and has imbued teachers and teacher training in a certain way. Let us put him to one side. There is another villain, which is the National Literacy Strategy.

Mrs Hepplewhite: No, the National Literacy Strategy is not a villain. There is a lack of testing and then openly letting teachers know about those results and enjoying the teaching profession coming together through online forums, for example. It is going on in a casual way in The Times Educational Supplement online forum. Teachers are sharing their practice and ideas and wanting to know. We need that kind of facility where people can genuinely relate to people across the country and share information. I am suggesting that needs to be properly organised.

Q94 Mr Turner: Somebody had said: does not every head and teacher want the best way. Dr Stuart had agreed with that. On the other hand you had also said that you nearly lost a school because the head was ideologically opposed to hearing what was the best way. What is this ideology?

Dr Stuart: I should like to think that it was history and I think that the National Literacy Strategy has gone some way to making it history. However, people are subject to ideology when they do not know and when they do not understand and that is why the OISE report, which is the Ontario Institute which evaluated the National Literacy Strategy, also says that teachers do not have enough subject knowledge about reading. Teachers simply do not know what reading is or how children develop it. They are not exposed to this in their initial teacher training courses and the National Literacy Strategy training does not expose them to it either, because it is a technical training in how to deliver the National Literacy Strategy. When teachers ask questions during training sessions, they are not answered because the literacy consultants who are delivering the training do not know.

Q95 Mr Turner: Right. They do not know, because the research has not been done or was not done.

Dr Stuart: They do not know what because the research was not done?

Q96 Mr Turner: They do not know what works because the research has not been done.

Dr Stuart: We have some inkling of what works: we do not know the fine details of how best to do things. We have not had proper comparative studies looking carefully at the best way to do things and the best way to do things for different sorts of children, because children differ.

Q97 Mr Turner: Why has this been left to psychologists? Why are education departments, or whatever you call an education lecturer, not doing the research? Is it not fundamental to being an educationist that you work out how to educate?

Dr Stuart: It is two sides of the coin. Psychologists look at learning, educationists look at teaching. Both are needed and that is why psychology is needed in education, because psychologists have done research into learning.

Q98 Chairman: Are you telling this Committee that in the way in which we train our teachers they do not have lectures from psychologists to talk to them about how students learn as well as how to teach?

Dr Stuart: I find it terribly difficult to understand what is taught in teacher training courses. In fact recently I have applied to several teacher training colleges so that I would be sent information about the course and information about the course in the brochures you receive is scant. Teacher training courses do claim to teach about child development and learning, but I do not know what is taught in those courses or how it is taught. I should really like to know.

Mrs Hepplewhite: On behalf of the Reading Reform Foundation I have actually tried to ask that question via some of the online forums that we use. A lot of students respond that no, they do not feel that they have been taught the details of teaching reading. They have not been introduced to the idea that there are pockets of research round the country and that there is a debate. It tends to be a mix of methods. When you go into a school you are going to do the National Literacy Strategy. The assumption across the country is that teachers going into schools will teach the National Literacy Strategy and there are the manuals and that is what you will do. There is no engagement on an intellectual level or on a scientific level.

Q99 Mr Turner: Whose job is it? I am a teacher by trade, but it is so long since I taught, let alone went to college, that I cannot really remember anything I was taught at college. In some professions it is clearly the responsibility of the individual to know the essentials not only of how they deliver, but what they are delivering, yet it appears that this is not the case in the teaching profession. They need to have their subject knowledge, and some sort of method, but it does not seem to matter what the method is, so long as they transmit a fair amount. I may be being very unfair, but whereas there are leaders of a profession, like the medical royal colleges in medicine, I am not sure who the leaders are in the education profession.

Mrs Hepplewhite: I should like to know who the leaders are and what their credentials are. One of our criticisms is that we do not see who the authors are of the programmes. We need to know.
Q100 Chairman: Authors of which programmes?
Mrs Hepplewhite: The National Literacy Strategy programmes. In the Reading Reform Foundation we have Sue Lloyd whose Jolly Phonics programme has really revolutionised teaching with young children. When teachers have taught for many years and they say that they have taken on this programme and they wished they had known about it 20 years ago and it has revolutionised their teaching, which is happening over the whole country, this is an extremely important programme which is designed on the basis of research and has been researched itself. We have Sue Lloyd, we have Ruth Miskin, who has had extraordinary results and we have had other researchers on the Reading Reform Foundation. What we want to know is: who are the people who have written the National Literacy Strategy programmes, based on what research, tested in which schools, to what effect? The Reading Reform Foundation is a very small group which has tried extraordinarily hard to raise awareness and raise attention to these matters, which is why we are here now. I am just a teacher and I have done the newsletter from my lounge. Really to have reached this is raising important questions and it should be incumbent upon people whose profession it is to train teachers and to bring programmes into schools which work. The responsibility is theirs to show that these are the better programmes, not really for us to say they have not done it properly. Such is our concern about this lack of debate that, for example, Ofsted, when it reports on schools reports as though all schools follow the National Literacy Strategy advice and they are covert about reporting on schools which do not. For this school, St Michael’s, which I have mentioned, their last Ofsted report said that they do a very good structured reading programme. That programme is Jolly Phonics and Sound Discovery and is different from the National Literacy Strategy approach. What I am trying to raise your awareness about is a singular lack of open, honest examination.

Chairman: We have some very good hints for the next batch of interviews we are going to be doing. Valerie Davey: I should like to be pragmatic. We have a situation now where reading levels are certainly improving. Let us be thankful for that and say yes, the National Literacy Strategy did focus on early language before we learnt to read and, as you are saying we need to start almost from scratch. I do not think Dr Stuart was saying that, but the move forward has to be from where we are, with some recognition that more children leave at Key Stage 2 learning than they did a few years ago. In that pragmatic area, what would you say we ought to be doing now to add onto something, or are you saying that we actually have to go root and branch and start again? I am beginning to hear from one of you that we can be pragmatic and from the other that we have to be root and branch and really go for it. Is that true, or am I misinterpreting?

Q101 Chairman: Dr Stuart, are you the pragmatist or the ideologue?
Dr Stuart: I am definitely a pragmatist. I am a pragmatist and I should like to see what I have been talking about all the time: I should like to see proper training, a different kind of training, not a training which teaches teachers to be technicians, to deliver a programme which somebody else has thought up, but teachers who understand what it is that they are trying to teach and understand how children learn what they are trying to teach so that they can adapt their teaching to suit their children?

Q102 Valerie Davey: Are you saying that is not possible within the National Literacy Strategy or that it is?
Dr Stuart: It would be.

Q103 Valerie Davey: It could be done within the National Literacy Strategy.
Dr Stuart: Yes, it could be done within that.

Q104 Valerie Davey: Are you saying that is possible, Debbie, or not?
Mrs Hepplewhite: I am saying that of course I am a pragmatist and I should like us not to be telling teachers which programmes to use. I think we have to give them some professionalism back. However, I should like them to be informed with simple leaflets or newsletters which will reach them all as to what the situation is in different pockets of the country and basically we need standardised reading tests even in Key Stage 1 which are simple snapshots of the effectiveness of those programmes, to be able to compare, but not to compare in a threatening light, in a league table type of approach, but in a professional will to do the best for the children. At the moment if schools are doing better than other schools, even schools in diverse circumstances, Ofsted flags this up. Teachers need to know therefore what other schools are doing which is working so much better. Baroness Ashton asked for a list of schools which we should like her to investigate. We gave her a list and we never heard from her again, so we do not know whether she investigated them. We are just trying to promote this good practice where the same schools, same teachers, same intakes, have changed their approach and had a very much better result in the teaching of reading.

Q105 Valerie Davey: Again being pragmatic, we learn to speak before we learn to read and, as you quite rightly highlight, it is a hugely complex and amazing thing that any of us learn to read, particularly you gave this Phoenician/Chinese example and the fact that people learn to read Chinese, Mandarin script and all the rest of it, is just mind-boggling. So there are not only different ways of teaching but different ways of learning and different scripts to learn and a huge complexity presumably for the psychologist to analyse in due course. However, we learn to speak and what I have always been concerned about is that we get that enrichment of language before we learn to read. I am
Q106 Valerie Davey: Is there any psychological research to show that you actually have to be proficient in your mother tongue before you can learn a second language. I know that there are bilingual children but in the circumstances you are describing, is it not important that a child is competent in their first language before they start a second?

Dr Stuart: Presumably they are. We have not yet managed to find anybody to translate our tests into Sylheti so that we can assess their knowledge of Sylheti. So the assumption has to be that they are competent as any normally developing five-year-old would be in their mother tongue. The recent evidence on bilingualism and children learning more than one language suggests that it is not detrimental to learn more than one language; it is enriching and it is particularly enriching in terms of developing your phonological awareness, your understanding of sound systems, because you have two different systems to keep apart.

Q107 Mr Pollard: I have an open mind to all of this and I have been listening very carefully when you say “unbelievably effective” and all that. Then you start using words like “instinct”, “teachers’ instinct”. If you want to convince people of the zeal you have for this system and you believe it is unbelievably effective, you cannot use words like instinct.

Mrs Hepplewhite: It was one mere slip.

Q108 Mr Pollard: My colleague and friend tried to tease out the evidence. Without evidence you are not going to overturn the system which has been in there for a long time and the vast majority seems to be able to support that. Allied to that, there has been an improvement in literacy over the last two or three years which is unavoidably and unbelievably there. I am trying to get at what the block is. If it is as unbelievably effective as you say—and I take your word for all that—I do not doubt that for a second—who is blocking it? Why can we not get it through? What is the trouble?

Mrs Hepplewhite: May I just say that when I commented about teachers’ instincts, in a way that was a bit of a personal slant because there is a fine line between the kind of training and prescription we are talking about and the psychology dictating to a general level of growth before all this very complicated analysis you gave us earlier comes into play?

Dr Stuart: There are certain things which are pre-reading skills, but they are more likely to be in the domain of phonology, the sound systems of language, than in vision. Most children have adequate control of their visual apparatus to learn to read at the time when they are normally taught in England. I should definitely like to see programmes which enrich children’s language. I am coming from doing an awful lot of work in Tower Hamlets where 90% of the primary school population are English-as-an-additional-language learners. I was horrified when I did my first reading study there and we measured their knowledge of spoken vocabulary in English to find that they were coming into school as five-year-olds with the levels of vocabulary that English monolingual two- and three-year-olds would normally have achieved and they were five and they had been in nursery classes for up to two years. Because the population of the nurseries was entirely Sylheti speaking. Sylheti was the language in the nursery as well as the language in the home and the only English input they got was from adults in the nursery classes. We have been doing some work there now in nurseries, trying to help teachers to boost the children’s knowledge of English. It is not just EAL children who need that sort of boost; it is children from lower socio-economic circumstances as well. There is plenty of evidence that indigenous monolingual English children come into school quite a lot in some circumstances with inadequate English.

Q109 Mr Pollard: Your argument seems to be that the DfES must show you why their system is working. The shoe is on the other foot.

Mrs Hepplewhite: If they cannot show teachers why their system is working and I do not just mean from things like the results in the country—

Q110 Chairman: Are you not disagreeing on what I think is a better point you have, that this is a government committed to evidence-based policy? What you have been consistently saying in this hearing is that the Government’s policy in this regard is not based on evidence. Is that not what it is?

Mrs Hepplewhite: Not that I am aware of. Ordinary teachers are not getting any evidence and the Reading Reform Foundation on asking for it has not been given any evidence. That is not to say that they have not done various tests, but I do not believe that any piloting has been done with control and comparison groups.

Q111 Chairman: So you are challenging.

Mrs Hepplewhite: I am challenging the basis on which they are telling the nation to use certain programmes. Going back, I think teachers and other people just do not know what is possible. Until they see evidence with their own eyes and statistics—so we are talking about all children in Year 2 getting level 2 or above . . . Anyone who has managed to have a look at the Reading Reform Foundation newsletters will see that we do try to include statistics and details wherever possible. I
am now in a difficult position, because we are having a general conversation, but I can show, through the very nature of the newsletter, that we talk statistics. Talking about developing a vocabulary, I am really not someone who wants to get sidetracked into the battle of when and how young? All I can tell you is that surprisingly young children, with evidence-based teaching fare remarkably well in statistical terms, how many letter-sound correspondences they can learn, whether they know the skills of sounding out and blending for reading and segmenting spoken words for spelling. All of that can be measured. There is also research to show that when you develop what we call their phonemic awareness, it is very much aided by seeing the letters. You are teaching them a sound. For example, you can learn how to spell through the very nature of the newsletter, that we 12 weeks, it is not going to damage any child to do 12 weeks of succeeding at something that they can do.

**Dr Stuart:** They will not be held back because they learn it all immensely quickly. If you can do it all in 12 weeks, it is not going to damage any child to do 12 weeks of succeeding at something that they can do.

**Q114 Mr Gibb:** Earlier on you talked about Professor Smith. You were saying that his argument for not using it would be that there were too many phonic rules to learn, that English is too irregular a language to learn using this method. How do you address those two arguments?

**Dr Stuart:** For the majority of children who make a good start in learning to read, you do not need to teach them every phonic correspondence because we have research evidence that by the age of seven children who are reading at an age-appropriate level are inferring unknown correspondences from their reading experience. We knew that these children had not been taught any vowel digraphs, like “ai” or “ea”; they had been taught single letter-sounds for the alphabet and when we showed them words, non-words, made-up words which they could not read in any other way than by sounding them out because they had never seen them before, containing vowel digraphs, they could read them and they read them better the more frequently they had been exposed to that digraph in their reading. We have a database of children’s reading vocabulary, so we can count how many times they have seen “ai” and “ea”. Children who made a good start do not need to be taught everything. The problem with this long tail of underachievement and the fact that we now have wave 1 and wave 2 and wave 3 and we are constantly giving children at various points in time 12- or 15-week bursts of catch-up programmes is that probably there is a need for research into what works best with children who find it more difficult. The likelihood is that those children need continuing support throughout school and not quick bursts of this, that or the other to catch up.

**Q115 Mr Gibb:** May I just ask you about the US? Did they not have a whole language teaching of this country? In notice from the figures that last year 63% of children were reaching level 4 in writing, which means 37% are not. Is that linked to the lack of phonic?

**Dr Stuart:** No. I think the reason for that is that I have no idea how the targets for writing, how the level 4 descriptors of what a child should be able to do in writing by the age of 11, were reached. Research into writing development is in its infancy. We know very little about writing development and we know much less about it than we do about reading development. I think the Government simply has the targets from there.

**Q116 Mr Gibb:** Do they still have it in the States? And Australia and New Zealand. Does the Government to agree to do a national inquiry into the teaching of reading in Australia for precisely the same reason.

**Mrs Hepplewhite:** Psychologists in Australia have just got the Government to agree to do a national inquiry into the teaching of reading in Australia for precisely the same reason.

**Q117 Mr Gibb:** Debbie, could you just tell us a bit about the Clackmannanshire research, the St Andrew’s University research you talked about earlier? Can you just briefly summarise this?
Mrs Hepplewhite: Yes. We have just got some more results hot off the press where children in Year 5 have now taken on another spurt where they are now three years ahead of their chronological age in reading.

Q118 Mr Gibb: How many schools are we talking about or classes?
Mrs Hepplewhite: Thirteen. May I refer back to a question which Morag was asked?

Q119 Chairman: You may.
Mrs Hepplewhite: Do children who are naturally gifted at learning to read and write need this phonics approach? It is always very inadvisable to me in a debate this size to talk about your own children or your own teaching, so I try very hard to take that out because it clouds your judgment. If you say “My children . . .” it is not a very sensible way forward. So I have never used my teaching results, because they will use the argument “charismatic teacher” and it is not for me to prove anything about my teaching, it is to look at everybody else’s teaching and everybody else’s children. What I will say is that I have four children with a range of different literacy abilities: one who taught herself to read at three and a half. I would still have given that child full knowledge about the English language because phonics is about knowledge of how the alphabetic code works and it is a wonderful thing. Children who are not taught that thoroughly have been short-changed in our education system.

Q120 Mr Gibb: Tell me about the Clackmannanshire study. What does it show in these 13 schools?
Mrs Hepplewhite: They were taught through systematic, fast-paced phonics, where children were not taught a sight vocabulary first, they were taught a type of phonics which we call all-through-the-word phonics. Where you learn a sound you do not just focus on it in an initial position, you actually teach it in a medial position and in a final position in a word and you are taught to sound out and blend all through the word without this emphasis on first sounds and hearing it and identifying it and then last and then middle.

Q121 Mr Gibb: So it is phonics.
Mrs Hepplewhite: This is where it is different from the NLS phonics. NLS phonics still teaches a sight vocabulary, still teaches children letter names along with sounds. Synthetic phonics may do that through an alphabet route, so you are actually teaching them singing the alphabet song, so they are exposed to names, but not as an automatic response to seeing a letter shape.

Q122 Mr Gibb: What were the results of these tests? That is what I am trying to get at.
Mrs Hepplewhite: I cannot tell you the exact statistics off hand, but it is now a longitudinal study and the reading age, spelling age of most children is way above their chronological age and certainly the statistics have sufficiently impressed the Scottish minister that he is now recommending it.

Q123 Chairman: Who is evaluating this research?
Mrs Hepplewhite: I do not know.

Q124 Chairman: But it is being evaluated, is it?
Mrs Hepplewhite: Yes, it is being done properly and professionally.

Q125 Mr Gibb: It is St Andrew’s.
Mrs Hepplewhite: That is it; it is St Andrew’s.

Q126 Mr Gibb: Do you know anything about this particular study, Dr Stuart?
Dr Stuart: I have not read the recent reports.

Q127 Mr Gibb: Do you have any statistics from the earlier results which came out which you can relay to the Committee? Perhaps we ought to have the full results of this sent in writing.
Mrs Hepplewhite: Yes and it is on the web. Chairman: Could you give our staff the details of that?

Q128 Mr Gibb: We should be very happy if one of you could send that in to us. Secondly, for the St Michael’s school. Did you say that was in Lincolnshire?
Mrs Hepplewhite: It is in Stoke Gifford.

Q129 Mr Gibb: Bristol?
Mrs Hepplewhite: Yes; Bristol.
Mr Gibb: Do you know that school?
Valerie Davey: It is South Gloucestershire.

Q130 Mr Gibb: Could somebody send those results to us, if you have them?
Mrs Hepplewhite: They are in one of the newsletters I have sent to you.3

Q131 Chairman: That is almost the end of the questions. We have 20% of underachievement; a lot of countries which do not speak English also have a very similar problem. We found it in France, we found it in Norway; 20% functional illiteracy in Norway. Are the comparisons you are making all fair? Why Norway? Are they not into phonics? I thought they were. 20% functional illiteracy. We told them that we just could not buy it.
Mrs Hepplewhite: The comparisons I personally am making are mainly within schools and studies within our country. There is a vast history of reading and debates are going on in other English-speaking countries, but we have enough things going on in our country to arouse more interest than has been aroused.

Q132 Chairman: Dr Stuart threw this whole American experience at me in terms of international experience and one of you mentioned 2 Note: http://www.scotland.gov.uk
3 Note: See www.rrf.org.uk
the Finnish use of phonics being very successful. Now you are retreating and saying you do not worry about international comparisons.

Mrs Hepplewhite: No, what I meant was that the way forward is to look at our country. My understanding is that the debate in America is far huger than it is in this country. They called it the reading wars and it is something that more ordinary teachers are more aware of. I am not sure that ordinary teachers in our country are even aware that there is a debate.

Chairman: You have been on television today, so a lot of people may well have heard about it. You will also know that a teachers’ TV commences in the New Year. I am sure this sort of debate will be widely broadcast at that time; so you have great opportunities. May I thank you for your contribution today? We have pushed you sometimes to try to get the answers. I hope you did not find that too uncomfortable. We have enjoyed listening to your answers. Thank you.
Wednesday 8 December 2004

Members present:
Mr Barry Sheerman, in the Chair
Valerie Davey Helen Jones
Jeff Ennis Mr Kerry Pollard
Mr Nick Gibb Jonathan Shaw
Paul Holmes Mr Andrew Turner

Memorandum submitted by the Department for Education and Skills

Summary

1. The evidence in the following pages sets out the measures that the DfES has put in place to support schools in the effective teaching of reading, centred largely, though not exclusively, on the work of the National Strategies. The essential elements of our approach are to ensure that:
   — there is a clear focus on and commitment to raising standards in reading and literacy at every level in the system, both through bespoke lessons and across the curriculum;
   — teachers and leaders in all schools have easy access to the best, evidenced based, methodologies for teaching reading and are trained to use them effectively;
   — there is a clear and early emphasis on phonics instruction, reinforced by complementary reading strategies such as context, grammatical knowledge and word recognition;
   — teaching is tailored effectively to the needs of individual children, with bespoke interventions for those performing both below and significantly above age-related expectations;
   — there are appropriate structured programmes in place for children below school age, which develop their communication and literacy skills within the context of play-based learning;
   — we engage parents and the wider community fully in supporting children to learn to read and to enjoy reading; and
   — we build capacity within schools and Local Authorities to improve continuously, and intervene decisively in the instance of failure.

Background and Context

2. In 1996 Ofsted published its report *The Teaching of Reading in 45 Inner London Primary Schools* which crystallised concerns about standards in literacy. The report highlighted the lack of focus on reading, the poor quality of teaching and the small number of schools using a balanced approach to reading which included the systematic teaching of phonics. In 1997 only 67% of 11 year olds achieved the expected level for their age in reading, and 63% in English, in National Curriculum Tests.

3. The National Literacy Strategy was introduced to all schools in England in September 1998 to respond directly to these concerns. From the outset the remit of the National Literacy Strategy has been very clear. Its purpose was, and is, to raise standards of literacy throughout the primary age range, to support teachers to deliver the primary programmes of study for reading and writing as set out in the National Curriculum, and to make a significant contribution to the development of speaking and listening.

4. Drawing on international research and best practice, the National Literacy Strategy set out a Framework for Teaching which schools delivered through the Literacy Hour. This was reinforced by subject specific training for teachers, intervention in schools that were failing their pupils, and the setting of clear targets at school, local and national levels. The National Year of Reading, and the continuing Reading Campaign which accompanied the National Literacy Strategy, had a significant impact on raising the profile of reading not just with schools but also with families and the wider community.

5. This clear focus on raising standards in literacy and English extends beyond the primary years to both Foundation Stage and Key Stage 3 (KS3). The Foundation Stage, first introduced in 2000, provides a structured framework for a play-based approach to learning for three to five year olds, which includes an emphasis on early literacy, language and communication. The Key Stage 3 National Strategy, which has been introduced progressively since 2001, is committed to raising standards in English, and literacy across the curriculum for all 11 to 14-year-olds. Between 1998 and 2001, prior to the introduction of the Key Stage 3 National Strategy, English results at age 14 were static and lacked year-on-year progression.
6. In 2003 the National Literacy Strategy was combined with the National Numeracy Strategy to become the Primary National Strategy. This allowed us to create a more coherent delivery structure and organisational model, and to interact with schools more effectively on whole-school teaching and learning issues. Throughout this evolution the core aims and principles of the strategy have remained consistent, and the teaching methods and materials which lie at the heart of the strategy continue to be refreshed and informed by the latest research and inspection evidence.

**National Trends in Reading Performance**

**Attainment Tests**

7. Since the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy in 1998 standards in reading at both Key Stage 1 and 2 have increased significantly. Between 1998 and 2004 the percentage of pupils achieving the expected level for their age in National Curriculum tests in reading went up from 80% to 85% at Key Stage 1 (approximately 30,000 more children), and from 67% to 83% at Key Stage 2 (approximately 96,000 more children). The percentage of 14 year olds achieving the expected level for their age in English at KS3 increased from 65% to 71% over the same period. Reading results at Key Stage 3 have only been separately available for the last two years, so it is not possible to construct a comparative time series. This year 65% of the cohort achieved the expected level for their age in reading. This improvement is also reflected in international comparisons (see para 61).

8. The graphs below illustrate how results have risen in both reading and English at all three key stages between 1997 and 2004:

![Graph showing reading and English attainment trends](image)

**Quality of Teaching**

9. Ofsted reports provide further evidence on the quality of the teaching of reading. In 2002 Ofsted reported on the impact of the first four years of the National Literacy Strategy. It found that:

“The National Literacy Strategy has had a significant impact on the standards attained in English and the quality of teaching over the last four years”.

10. It also found that since the start of the strategy the proportion of lessons where the teaching of shared reading was good or better increased from just over 50% to nearly 70%. Over the same period the quality of the teaching of guided reading improved from a position where Ofsted described it as “often poor” to a situation in which it was taught well in 60% of lessons, with weaknesses remaining in just 10%.

**Teaching Reading Through the National Strategies—Methodology and Evidence Base**

11. The rationale of the National Strategies is to promote literacy—not just reading and certainly not just decoding—at every stage of reading development from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 3. Through the provision of nationally kite marked materials, face to face training and direct support to both teachers and teaching assistants, the National Strategies help schools to develop the positive learning environments in which the effective teaching of literacy can take place. At every level from the pupil to the teacher, the school and the Local Authority, the National Strategies aim to ensure that tailored challenge and support is available to enable those falling behind to catch up as well as to stretch the most able.
12. The National Literacy Strategy Framework for Teaching provides a structure for teaching reading focused on word, sentence and text level objectives. These are mirrored in the application of the literacy hour in schools as a system of connected methodologies for teaching the reading and writing of texts. This approach to reading, advocated throughout the Foundation Stage and primary years, provides a solid platform for the later emphasis on research, literature and study skills taught at Key Stage 3.

The Searchlights Model

13. The National Strategies advocate a model of teaching reading which has come to be known by the “Searchlights” metaphor. The Searchlights model places a very clear emphasis on the teaching of phonics, which is reinforced by pupils' knowledge of context, grammar and graphic or word recognition:

![Searchlights Model Diagram]

14. The model characterises reading as the ability to coordinate and orchestrate a variety of strategies for:
    — Fast automatic phonic decoding.
    — The recognition of word and word parts.
    — Predictions from knowledge of syntax to make sense of strings of words.
    — Predictions from context to aid comprehension.

15. The two related aspects of the reading process, decoding and comprehension, are therefore represented in the model and complement each other.

16. A strong emphasis is placed on the teaching of phonics, but the National Strategies do not advocate the teaching and application of phonics in isolation from other reading strategies. Pupils are encouraged to use a variety of strategies to reinforce their phonological understanding, to look for analogies between the known and unfamiliar, to predict and make sense of what they are reading and writing, and to develop the practice of self-monitoring and self-correction.

17. The “Searchlights” metaphor attempts to describe a methodology for teaching reading which optimises the range of “cues” or inputs for the pupil, enabling them to cross refer between them. The more “searchlights” that are switched on, the less critical it is if one of them fails.

18. This approach to teaching reading enjoys a broad base of support among education professionals, including Ofsted and the professional associations. It is not, however, without its detractors. A minority advocates a “phonics only” approach to teaching reading. Their argument proceeds from the assumption that reading is a hierarchical process that moves seamlessly from the learning of atomic parts into integrated and complex skills.

19. The exclusive teaching of phonics precludes the teaching of hypothesising, problem solving, predicting or inferring, which form an integral part of the Searchlights model. The National Strategies, by contrast, characterise reading as a more sophisticated skill in which a range of strategies linked to decoding and comprehension interact and mutually support each other in the process of getting to the meaning of a text.

The Teaching of Phonics

20. Within this overall context, the National Strategies have always been clear about the importance of effective teaching and learning of phonics. This includes continuing to teach phonics in KS3 in the context of spelling and with pupils who are still behind with their reading. The principles which underpin the national strategies approach to phonics are:
Children should be taught as quickly as possible to identify, segment and blend phonemes in speech and writing.

This should be taught directly, not left to inference or invention.

Phonemic knowledge and skills should be taught and practised to a level where decoding and spelling become habitual and operate at the level of “tacit knowledge”.

Phonics should be taught as a separate set of skills and knowledge within the broader structure of the literacy hour. It should not be taught through texts or text reading, but should be applied to the reading and writing of texts in the following ways:

- Through the application of phonic strategies to texts in shared and guided reading;
- By using texts for reading which exemplify particular phonemic structures; and
- Through phonic word building in the context of shared writing.

Progression in Phonics is the principal resource provided for teachers by the National Strategies to support the teaching of phonics. It was published following extensive consultation and a thorough review of research evidence and successful practices. It was distributed to all schools and accompanied by a day’s funded training for 20,000 teachers in Reception and Year 1.

The Progression in Phonics programme, which was updated this year, consists of a book of teaching materials, a training pack for literacy consultants to use with teachers and a training CD-ROM for teachers to use independently. The book outlines the basic principles of the phonemic system and then describes a detailed programme for teaching phonics in seven steps. This programme builds on the guidance for teaching phonics set out in the original National Literacy Strategy Framework for Teaching, but accelerates the recommended pace at which phonics are taught.

Synthetic versus analytic phonics

The distinction between synthetic and analytic phonics is a frequently publicised aspect to the debate about the different methods for teaching phonics. Simply defined synthetic phonics refers to a method of direct instruction in which children learn to combine letters to read words. Analytic phonics, by contrast, is an indirect teaching method in which children are expected to infer information about letters and how they combine to form words.

The approach advocated through the National Strategies is a synthetic phonics approach, as it relies on direct teaching and the recognition and blending of letters to form words. It does not rule out the possibility that children will supplement their knowledge and understanding of a text through inference, and hence could be described as drawing on some elements of an analytical approach. However, it is clear that synthetic phonics is the principal method of instruction.

The evidence base

From their inception the National Strategies have been firmly rooted in the evidence base, drawing on international research findings over a 30 year period. The Strategies have also learnt from the results of inspections and known best practice. M J Adams’ comprehensive investigation into the effectiveness of reading instruction programmes, Beginning to Read, published in 1990, strongly influenced the Strategies later design. Her research found that:

“Neither understanding nor meaning can proceed hierarchically, from the bottom up. Phonological awareness, letter recognition facility, familiarity with spelling patterns, spelling-sound relations and individual words must be developed in concert with real reading and real writing, and with deliberate reflection on the forms, functions and meanings of texts.”

This is representative of a broad body of research which, while seeing a critical role for the teaching of phonics, contradicts the suggestion that phonics should be taught and learnt in isolation. In 1997 US Congress commissioned the establishment of a National Reading Panel to assess the status of research based knowledge, including the effectiveness of various approaches to teaching children to read. The Panel’s report, Teaching Children to Read, published in 2000 found that phonemic awareness and instruction, guided oral reading, vocabulary instruction and text comprehension instruction all have a positive effect on the learning of reading and comprehension skills. The report states:

“Teachers must understand that systematic phonics instruction is only one component—albeit a necessary component—of a total reading program; systematic phonics instruction should be integrated with other reading instruction in phonemic awareness, fluency and comprehension strategies to create a complete reading program . . . while phonics skills are necessary in order to learn to read, they are not sufficient in their own right.”

Every year Ofsted has reviewed the implementation and practices of the National Literacy Strategy, and now the Primary National Strategy. The programme has therefore had an unmatched regular flow of evidence to inform its continuing development. The DfES has also been proactive in seeking out fresh evidence to inform the way we support the teaching of reading. Last year, in response to a 2002 Ofsted report
which identified some weaknesses in the teaching of phonics, the department convened a Phonics seminar which drew on a range of expertise, including the Reading Reform Foundation, and was independently chaired by Professor Greg Brooks.

28. The findings of the seminar were that a major redirection of the phonics element of the NLS was neither necessary nor appropriate. The papers from the seminar, including Professor Greg Brooks’ concluding report, can be found on the Primary National Strategy section of the DFES Standards Site. We have also separately published all the background research underpinning the teaching of English at Key Stage 3 in “Roots and Research”, which is a research review compiled by Colin Harrison of Nottingham University.

29. As a result of the seminar described above, the supplement to Progression in phonics, Playing with Sounds, was produced for primary schools in Spring 2004, to make it a more detailed and fully resourced programme.

PUTTING POLICY INTO PRACTICE

30. The National Strategies provide an effective way of putting policy into practice. The real strength of the National Strategies delivery model lies in the combination of high quality lesson planning, CPD and intervention materials, with direct support and challenge provided to schools and local authorities by credible and experienced practitioners.

31. Through the strategies we employ a cadre of Regional Directors who work directly with Local Authority school improvement teams. The Regional Directors bring specific phase and subject experience to their interaction with Local Authorities, as well as providing support on whole school improvement issues, alignment and capacity building.

32. At a local level we have developed a rich mix of support for schools. National Strategies consultants, employed by Local Authorities and trained by Regional Directors, form the backbone of this. They work directly with teachers in schools to provide training, challenge and support on subject pedagogy and whole school improvement issues. We have also trained and developed a number of leading teachers at both primary and Key Stage 3 who are embedded in schools, but are able to spend a proportion of their time on outreach activities to support colleagues in other schools. Furthermore at primary level 10% of the best teachers have become Primary Strategy Consultant Leaders and through the leadership programme provide support to headteachers in underperforming schools.

33. Through this mixed economy of support the National Strategies have a reach well beyond individual subjects. Through the expertise offered by consultants, leading teachers and consultant leaders we are able to support schools across the range of whole school improvement issues, such as leadership, assessment for learning or behaviour. It has been just these issues which Ofsted have repeatedly highlighted as critical to making further improvement in the teaching of literacy and numeracy. The National Strategies provide a delivery mechanism, unparalleled in other areas of education, to address unacceptable variations in performance and to build capacity for further improvement.

34. Ofsted reports have been consistently positive about the quality of support that consultants offer schools. In their 2002 report on the first four years of the National Literacy Strategy Ofsted commented:

“The NLS consultants have played a significant role in training teachers and supporting schools. Their impact over the last four years has been very positive, both in terms of face-to-face training, as well as their contribution to a range of materials to support teaching, published nationally as well as in their own LEAs.”

35. The rising trend in national attainment from the foundation stage up to Key Stage 3 suggests that this combination of direct support, training and high quality materials and guidance is paying dividends. However, we realise that achieving further improvement is critical and that there is no room for complacency. Raw attainment scores, value added data and Ofsted reports all point to the fact that there is still too much variation in the teaching of literacy and standards attained between schools whose pupils and contexts are broadly similar. Bringing these schools up to the level of the best is a key priority for the National Strategies.

36. We have an ambitious programme of work underway to address this. In primary schools our priorities for 2005–6 are to:

— Support the more effective leadership of the teaching of reading by Headteachers and subject leaders.

— A further emphasis on guided reading and importance of tracking progress by individual children.

— Support schools and early years settings to engage parents in children’s reading, building on the recently produced materials “Parents, partners in children’s learning.”

— Support more effective teaching of reading at the point of transition from KS1 to KS2.

37. At KS3, consolidating pupils’ basic literacy skills in the early years of secondary education will continue to be a major priority. The KS3 National Strategy will develop new materials on the teaching of
Supporting reading beyond the classroom

38. Beyond the direct work of the National Strategies with schools and Local Authorities, we are also support the wider promotion of reading, in particular reading for pleasure, with children and families.

39. For example, the Department funds the National Literacy Trust to run the National Reading Campaign. Key elements of the National Reading Campaign include the Reading Connects initiative which supports teachers and staff, such as school librarians, to develop reading-rich environments and raise the profile of reading for pleasure, and the Reading Champions scheme which finds and celebrates positive role models for reading, and demonstrates the impact of motivational and peer support in domestic, educational and community settings.

40. We have also been active in harnessing wider community resources to support reading. Through the Playing for Success initiative we have established out of school hours study support centres at football clubs and other sports' grounds. The centres use the environment and medium of football, rugby and other sports as motivational tools, and focus on raising literacy, numeracy and ICT standards amongst Key Stage 2 and 3 pupils who are struggling and often demotivated. National evaluation shows that the reading comprehension of KS3 pupils who took part in the scheme improved by eight months.

41. We also engage directly with parents to enable them to support their child’s reading. For example, we have produced two leaflets for parents on reading in the “Help Your Child to Learn series” which offer ideas and suggestions from parents for improving a child’s reading. In addition the Department works with parents whose own low levels of literacy might inhibit the support they can offer their children. For example, the Family Literacy Language and Numeracy programme, which will involve some 100,000 families in 2004–05, seeks to develop literacy, language and numeracy skills of parents and children. Reading plays a key role in this. Family Literacy programmes will encourage parents and children to share books together to read and to talk about what they have read.

Equity and Inclusion

42. The notion that teaching and learning is most effective when it is tailored to the needs of the individual child is deeply rooted in the National Strategies. We have focused on assessment for learning and effective use of data, giving teachers the tools to personalise learning effectively, and to involve pupils more in understanding their personal progression. This helps to foster a clear link between lesson planning and student learning.

43. We have put in place a range of initiatives and programmes in every Key Stage to support schools in teaching reading to pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and those at risk of falling behind, and pupils with English as an additional language (EAL).

44. The National Strategies also challenge the most fluent readers to improve their skills. The Primary National Strategy allows for the fact that some children will be reading well before the start of the Foundation Stage and provides for their skills to be progressively developed.

45. At Primary level we have supported schools with the development of materials specifically designed to help teachers to identify better the learning characteristics of gifted and talented children and to adapt the literacy hour and daily mathematics lesson to meet their needs. Similarly at Key Stage 3 we have disseminated a series of modular units that schools can use within a planned professional development programme, which look at whole school issues around identifying and teaching more able pupils, as well as subject specific provision.

Catch up programmes and SEN intervention

46. For primary schools we promote a number of intervention programmes for children reading at below age related expectations to help them catch up. These include Early Literacy Support (ELS) for pupils in Year 1, Additional Literacy Support (ALS) in Year 3, and Further Literacy Support (FLS) for Pupils in Year 5, all of which provide for structured support from a teaching assistant in addition to the daily literacy hour. These intervention programmes are designed to reinforce a suggested model of intervention at different levels of need, based on three “waves”:

— Wave 1: The effective inclusion of all children in a high quality primary experience incorporating the literacy hour and daily mathematics lesson.
— Wave 2: Small group intervention for children who can be expected to catch up with their peers as a result of the intervention (ELS, ALS, FLS).
— Wave 3: Specific targeted approaches for children identified as requiring SEN intervention.
47. Schools use a number of programmes for intervention at Wave 3. The department directly funds the Institute of Education for its work with the Reading Recovery National Network, but there are many other programmes available. The National Strategies are committed to ensuring that schools are provided with the evidence on which the many existing interventions have been evaluated and can show evidence of impact. Much of this research is summarised in the National Literacy Strategy publication Targeting support: choosing and implementing interventions for children with significant literacy difficulties. At Key Stage 3 we have also produced a step by step guide to teaching phonics in special schools.

48. At Key Stage 3 we promote the continued teaching of phonics in spelling for all children in year 7 as well as focused work for children who have fallen behind. The range of intervention and support materials provided by the KS3 National Strategy for reading includes teaching units on phonics; information retrieval and reading between the lines. A set of teaching units on reading for pupils in year 7 who are working below national expectations; a training scheme and resources for reading mentor partnerships and a set of teaching units for year 9 pupils working below national expectations. Through the effective use of these materials, and dedicated support from consultants we hope to achieve greater gains in Key Stage 3 reading performance in future years.

English as an Additional Language

49. Traditionally pupils who have English as an additional language (EAL) have made slower progress at reading and English overall. We are committed to reversing this trend. Effective teaching and learning to meet the needs of minority ethnic pupils and those whose first language is not English is based on equality and inclusion and valuing the background and heritage of every child. In terms of bilingual children effective strategies have proven the value of recognising a child’s first language as a strength on which to build.

50. Recognising pupils’ abilities in their first language allows for English language, grammar and vocabulary to develop from pupils’ knowledge and understanding of these concepts in their first language. DfES’ recently published research report Making a Difference: Teaching and Learning Strategies in Successful Multi Ethnic Schools supports this approach. This report, along with established good practice, demonstrates that schools that have been successful in raising the attainment of minority ethnic pupils also value the first language of bilingual pupils in extending learning across the curriculum and in making effective links with parents and the wider community.

51. This year we are running EAL specific training in over 200 pilot schools in 21 pilot LEAs as part of the Primary National Strategy. Through this pilot, schools will put into practice a whole year’s worth of intensive EAL development, linked to EAL specific approaches to the four aspects of literacy: reading, writing, speaking and listening. For children with EAL a focus on comprehension as well as decoding, and on developing oracy in the context of guided reading sessions is critical.

Boys’ reading

52. Boys have responded particularly well to the teaching and learning approaches advocated by the National Strategies. These include structured, varied and interactive lessons; clear teaching objectives; demonstration and modelling of reading strategies by the teacher and guided reading in groups where feedback at the point of learning is given as pupils undertake reading tasks for themselves. At Key Stage 3, this has led to narrowing of the gender gap in English by five percentage points over the period 2000 to 2004. At Key Stage 2 schools have made big improvements in boys writing, where the percentage of boys achieving a level four increased by four percentage points this year. However, we recognise that we still need to do more to translate these gains into reading.

Introduction of Early Literacy Strategies

53. Evidence suggests that investment in the early years pays real dividends in terms of outcomes for children generally, including teaching children to read. The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) longitudinal research, which tracked the progress of more than 3,000 children between the ages of three and seven, shows that good quality pre-school has a positive effect on children’s cognitive attainment on entry to reception and recent findings show that these effects continue up to the end of KS1 (age seven years).

54. Some of the key quality and practice factors that contribute to child outcomes in the range of early years settings tell us the the quality of pre-school centres is directly related to better intellectual / cognitive development in children. These suggest that an earlier start is related to better intellectual development and improved independence and concentration. NFER research also states that attending some form of pre-school is associated with higher early literacy attainment at ages five and six.
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55. This is borne out by other international research which shows that structured teaching of reading, including phonics instruction, at a young age has a positive effect. The US National Reading Panel report, *Teaching Children to Read*, referred to above found that:

“Although conventional wisdom has suggested that kindergarten students might not be ready for phonics instruction, this assumption was not supported by the data. The effects of systematic early phonics instruction were significant and substantial in kindergarten and the 1st grade, indicating that systematic phonics programs should be implemented at those age and grade levels.”

56. Building on these and other research findings we have invested in support for children’s learning from a very early age. We know that early language and communication development are vital pre-cursors to literacy and therefore much of our early years work, through Sure Start, is around supporting this and the sharing of books from a young age. We are fully funding the Bookstart programme which encourages parents to read with their children from birth. A bag containing two baby books, a booklet explaining how and why to share books with young children, a booklist and an invitation to join the local library is given to parents by their Health Visitor at the eight month health check. From 2005 we are funding an extension to the Bookstart programme through which we will aim to reach all children at 18 to 24 months, and at three years old. Alongside this the Birth to Three Matters framework encourages practitioners to explore reading in variety of ways such as sharing stories, songs, rhymes and games, and learning about words and meaning.

57. The Foundation Stage provides a structure within which children and practitioners can develop children’s communication and language skills through adult planned and child initiated learning, so that by the end of the Foundation Stage they can use their phonic knowledge to write and read a range of common words. In 2004 the Primary National Strategy was extended to include expert support for the Foundation Stage, and published “Progression in Phonics: Playing with Sounds” to guide practitioners in foundation stage settings in the delivery of appropriate, fast and early teaching of phonics and phonological awareness.

58. We are also developing the Communicating matters project, the aim of which is to produce high quality training materials for practitioners so that they can develop children’s speech and language as fully as possible during the Foundation Stage. We aim to disseminate the training materials from September 2005.

INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS

Learning from international best practice

59. As set out in paragraph 25 and following, the original design and subsequent development of the National Strategies’ approach to teaching reading has been informed by the best available international evidence. This includes M J Adams’ seminal study *Beginning to Read*, commissioned by US Congress in 1990, as well as the US National Reading Panel Report, *Teaching Children to Read*, 2000.

60. The full research base is set out in some detail in Roger Beard’s *National Literacy Strategy: Review of Research and Other Related Evidence*. There he draws attention not just to the formal international research which informed the design of the National Literacy Strategy, but also to a number of small and large scale intervention projects underway in countries across the world whose practice was highly influential. These include the kinds of general practices found in New Zealand’s schools (as cited Ofsted in 1993); intervention programmes to tackle disadvantage among pupils and schools in Melbourne and Sydney in Australia (for example the Early Literacy Research project led by Carmel Crevola and Peter Hill); and a number of projects implemented across the USA.

Comparative International Performance

61. International comparisons of performance in reading indicate that England is now among the best in the world. The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) conducted in March 2001 found that England’s 10 year olds were the third most able readers out of the 35 countries included in the study and performed significantly better than all other English speaking countries that took part. This shows a marked contrast to a international study using different methods reported in 1996, in which England performed at the international average.

Early Years Education

62. Comparing different international approaches to early years education, and the teaching of literacy in particular, has stimulated wide ranging debate. As set out above there is a wide body of research conducted both in the UK and abroad which points to the educational value of early literacy teaching. Roger Beard’s research summary is again informative on this point. He makes reference to the Commission of Reading of the USA National Academy of Education which found that a country receives highest returns on its investment in education from the early years of schooling when children are first learning to read and write.
63. The EPPE research, cited at paragraph 53 above, clearly points to the advantages of access to high quality early education in terms of children’s social and cognitive outcomes. It also shows how this is particularly important for children from disadvantaged communities. Although it is true that in many countries school starting age is one or two years later than in England, and children do as well later on, this is a simplistic interpretation of what happens. In Finland and other countries there is strong family and society support for literacy, and books and reading are part of children’s day to day lives well before they are formally admitted to school. Research evidence (Desforges etc) tells us how significant such parental support is for children’s achievements which is why engaging parents to support their children’s learning is at the heart of government policy.

64. Underlying the concerns of critics is often an erroneous assumption that we are bringing young children into school early and exposing them to inappropriately formal approaches to learning to read. The Foundation Stage, which includes the reception year, was introduced to address just such concerns and ensures that learning is based on well planned play in ways which meet the particular needs of three, four and five year old children. We have invested heavily in training to ensure that practitioners understand these appropriate approaches.

CONCLUSION

65. Since the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy in 1998 there has been significant improvement in attainment in reading and English at every key stage. This is the single most persuasive piece of evidence for the underlying strength of the National Strategies model. The key is now to build on this momentum to achieve further improvements in coming years. Supporting and challenging more schools to achieve at the level of the best is a clear priority, and will require a focus on precision, both in teaching and targeting the needs of individual children. We are confident that the National Strategies provide the right combination of deep and credible educational expertise with a strong and far reaching delivery structure to support schools to improve still further.

30 November 2004

Witnesses: Mr Stephen Twigg MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Schools, Mr Andrew McCully, Director of School Standards Group, and Dr Kevan Collins, National Director, Primary National Strategy, Department for Education and Skills, examined.

Q133 Chairman: Can I welcome Stephen Twigg, the Minister, and his two members of the Department, Kevan Collins and Andrew McCully, to our deliberations. We have slightly changed the order, about which I have informed Stephen Twigg, and we are going to one or two of the members who really wanted to ask questions about the recent publication of the OECD PISA study. Of course, we do not figure in the tables. Minister, why do we not?

Mr Twigg: Because we did not meet the technical requirements, which is obviously hugely disappointing.

Q134 Chairman: But the United States had less of a critical mass than we did in terms of figures, and they lobbed apparently to be included and were included?

Mr Twigg: My understanding is that we simply did not fulfil those technical requirements. We clearly benefit from having the opportunity to be compared with other countries. The OECD has made it clear that the amount of information that has been provided from schools in this country is simply insufficient for us to merit proper inclusion within the comparisons.

Q135 Chairman: So were the comments in the Telegraph extrapolating figures fair comment?

Mr Twigg: We do not accept that is fair comment because we do not believe there is sufficient information available for those sorts of comparisons to be made in the way the Telegraph has done.

Q136 Mr Turner: Do you accept that there are both PISA and TIMSS rankings? Would you like to tell us what you think are the differences between those two, and which is the more appropriate?

Mr Twigg: I am not sufficiently sighted of the different bases of the two to give a fair answer to that, to be honest. I think it would be much better if I take some advice and come back to the Committee on that.

Mr Turner: Thank you.

Q137 Mr Gibb: Did any officials in the DfES talk to officials in the ONS about this, or try to persuade the ONS, or put pressure on the ONS not to submit these figures?

Mr Twigg: There were certainly discussions between the Department and the ONS. I am not aware of any efforts to persuade them in one direction or another.

Q138 Mr Gibb: Could you submit a list of discussions or meetings by DfES officials with the ONS?

Mr Twigg: I think the sensible thing for me to do is take that back and discuss it with David Miliband, who does lead on these matters, and respond to the Committee. 1

Q139 Mr Gibb: Why do you think there is such a low participation rate by English schools compared with most of the European countries that participate?

1 Note: See 59
Mr Twigg: I do not understand it; it does not fit with some of our previous experience of other studies, for example, studies in primary that we may well have the opportunity to talk about later on, and certainly I would want us to learn some lessons from what has happened this time so when PISA has its 2006 piece of work we are in there and we need to see what role positively and proactively the Department can play in ensuring that schools are participating next time.

Mr Twigg: I am not aware of there being any suggestion or culpability on the part of statisticians working in the Department.

Mr Twigg: I do not know the answer in terms of the United States. I know the OECD has made it very clear that there is insufficient information from the United Kingdom to make the sorts of comparisons the Telegraph is making.

Mr Twigg: I would have to ask the OECD that, and they have made it very clear to us that there is insufficient information available from the United Kingdom. I am not sighted of the detail of the United States’ evidence to know whether there is some mechanism they have used to remove the sort of bias the OECD tells us is there within the figures for the United Kingdom.

Mr Twigg: I am not aware of there being any bias the OECD tells us is there within the figures for the United Kingdom. I am not sighted of the detail of the United States’ evidence to know whether there is some mechanism they have used to remove the sort of bias the OECD tells us is there within the figures for the United Kingdom.

Q146 Paul Holmes: But America is in the official table with less information than the British, so surely America’s cannot be valid?

Mr Twigg: I can absolutely give that reassurance; evidence as we take forward our strategies. Of course, we have to do that.

Q147 Paul Holmes: According to the Telegraph’s interpretation of that quite large statistical sample of information, it showed Britain dropping in terms of literacy, yet all the Government’s literacy tests and standards each year show us improving. How would you reconcile the two if we were dropping nationally, and yet internally all our tests are showing us improving?

Mr Twigg: Clearly we will have to look at what is being said and what the evidence is. We do not believe there is sufficient evidence to make a robust comparison in PISA between ourselves and other countries; that is what OECD has told us. But if there is evidence that points in a particular direction of course it is important that we will consider that evidence as we take forward our strategies. Of course, we have to do that.

Q148 Chairman: Minister, is anyone in the ONS statistical part of our government going to be reprimanded or sacked? Is there going to be an inquiry why we did not meet these specifications?

Mr Twigg: I am not aware of there being any suggestion or culpability on the part of statisticians working in the Department.

Q149 Chairman: Minister, we would like to now move on to the main business that you are anticipating. Do you want to open up, or go straight to the questions?

Mr Twigg: I am happy to go straight to questions.

Q150 Chairman: Right. We are particularly interested in how we teach children to read. Increasingly as we start to discuss this and take evidence I am reminded in a sense, if we are going to do this on an evidence basis, that it is important to know what the Department is doing in terms of assessing what are the best ways to teach children to read and how far there are people within the Department or commissioned in university departments or elsewhere looking at this, because it does also go with another problem that we are not looking specifically at of how we teach children about mathematics and how we get into maths and science as well. So the right way of approaching
those subjects at the earliest age is very important to get the research right. What are we doing in the Department in terms of understanding what really works?

**Mr Twigg:** It is absolutely critical that all of this is based on evidence and if we look at the history of the National Literacy Strategy, it goes back to the Ofsted report in 1996 looking at 45 inner London primary schools, and then a robust look at the available research and literature at that time, which formed the foundation for the development of the National Literacy Strategy. Once the strategy was in place, we have then sought at every stage of the strategy to keep on top of the research to ensure that we are engaging with academic evidence both from people in this country and from people in other parts of the world, and that is a continuous process. Dr Kevan Collins who heads up the Primary National Strategy is very much leading on that as an educationalist engaging within the Department but also, perhaps more importantly, engaging with people out there in both practice but also in the field of academic research both in this country and elsewhere in the world.

**Q151 Chairman:** So can Dr Collins tell us what research we have carried out and what we are continuing to carry out?

**Dr Collins:** There are two kinds that we draw on. We draw on a body of historical research, and as the literacy strategy and the numeracy strategy were drawn together they were well-founded on the core research. I would say that in terms of the literacy strategy, we were very fortunate it was a seminal piece of research done in the late 90s in the United States through Marilyn Jaeger Adams which basically did a full review of all literacy research and informed our work as well as the key research in England drawing on the work in Australia, New Zealand and this country. As well as that historical body of research, which we draw on deeply, we also in an on-going way continually reflect on learning as it occurs, and a key area of that has been the developing research around phonics, which has been a piece of literacy learning, a core element, which we have continually updated and developed and, as we move through our support for schools, we keep drawing on it and evolving and developing our resources, our materials and support based on the research. So it draws on a historical base and continues to respond to evolving research that is happening every day.

**Q152 Chairman:** But is there something coming out of this research that suggests we are approaching the Early Years in terms of teaching people both reading and mathematics and getting them into the subjects in the very early times, and that we have been doing something wrong historically? Have we had a worse approach that some of our neighbours in Europe?

**Dr Collins:** The evidence does not point that way. The evidence of progress in our young children in their reading and mathematics is it is good and we are moving in the right direction, with almost 100,000 more children leaving our primary schools now than in 1997 achieving the level that we expect and hope for them.

**Q153 Chairman:** But if we compare ourselves with some of the countries in South East Asia, for example, I was at the award ceremony of AQA on Monday and the best student in the country is someone originally from Asia, but a scientist mathematician. Is it not true that some parts of the world are better than us at teaching literacy and some are better at teaching maths? What are we doing wrong that they are doing right?

**Dr Collins:** I do not think we are doing anything wrong. I think we have things to learn, and if you take a good example of mathematics which would be Korea, the structure of a mathematics lesson in Korea is something we have used quite strongly in forming the daily mathematics lesson, but I do not think the issue is identifying one small aspect of learning and saying “How can we be the best in the world in that”; we are trying to be good and excellent at everything but also attend to a broader and holistic aim in terms of the child’s fully rounded learning, and when you look at the learning in the round we stand tall and should be proud of what we are achieving, because in the round we are doing well. In reading we emerge, as you know, in the recent PIRLS study of 10 year olds—not PISA 15 year olds—primary school, third in the world, highest in the English speaking country. In mathematics we are the fastest improving country in the world, but we have to look in the round rather than at one country that focuses very heavily on one aspect of learning but not so well in other areas.

**Q154 Mr Gibb:** Minister, you went to Cuckoo Hall School I understand recently?

**Mr Twigg:** Yes.

**Q155 Mr Gibb:** They have some phenomenal results as a result of adopting a new programme. My understanding is it went from 58% achieving level 2 ‘B’ and above to 85% achieving level 2 ‘B’ and above in one year. What were your perceptions of that visit?

**Mr Twigg:** I was very impressed with the school, which is the London borough of Enfield, not in my constituency, and my sense is it is a school with very effective leadership. Patricia Sowter is a very able head teacher and she has made a difference, and she has put a focus on literacy and within the literacy programme a focus on phonics that has had a very positive effect in that school.

**Q156 Mr Gibb:** What did she think of the programme she was using?

**Mr Twigg:** She is an enthusiast for it.

**Q157 Mr Gibb:** Very good. Can I ask: Dr Collins what you think the NLS has achieved—and I am a great fan of the NLS so this is a soft ball question!

**Dr Collins:** I think there are three things from my experience as a teacher and a head teacher and working in primary schools over 20 odd years or so
in this country. We have given literacy a place. Rather than have it scattered across the day, in primary school teaching it has a dedicated time to be taught and it is focused. We have seen expectations in teachers’ planning and teaching improve and has led to improved standards in children. We have seen standards improve right across the piece; there has been no glass ceiling. One of the great success stories is that a third of our children are leaving our primary schools achieving level five, way above what we expect. We have seen significant improvements, as I said almost 100,000 more children achieving level 4, and we have seen standards improving at Key Stage 1, so we have seen expectations rise and teaching change, and I think the other thing which have seen is a new kind of energy and vigour and enjoyment from children in literacy itself, and we see that in the way in which they engage in the tasks.3

Q158 Mr Gibb: You must have spoken to a lot of teachers and been to a lot of schools. Do you think there is anything you have learned from it that you would do differently now, perhaps?
Dr Collins: Yes. The exciting moment we are in now is where people have great ownership of the strategy and are beginning to adapt and evolve it to make it work for themselves. The phonics example you raise is a good one because our view is that schools must have a structured phonics programme. The structured phonics programme they choose is up to them; there are a number to choose from. There is a national programme there on the shelf and freely available, but some schools go down other routes and I think I would have liked to have had earlier slightly more adaptability for schools to take ownership in the way they wanted to.

Q159 Mr Gibb: What percentage children end up going on the wave two NLS programme or the wave three intensive support programme?
Dr Collins: The proportion that go on and the proportion that should go on are slightly different. In terms of wave three, and they are the children who I would describe, if you want, by the end of primary school below level three, which is now a great concern of course, we are talking about 8 or 9% of children at those sorts of levels. In terms of wave two, which is where we give children a second chance to learn who seem to be slipping off the pace, we see fantastic success. We have those programmes in literacy in years one, three and five and the most recent one is the year five FLS programme, and in that programme the independent study from Leeds University and our own analysis results show that a significant majority of those children made up the gap and went on to achieve level 4. So in wave two we generally talk about maybe 15, 20% of children possibly needing some kind of wave two provision which is comparable to the general range of international studies when you are looking at children who might need a second chance, and the wave three for us is unfortunately holding and a pretty hard nut to crack round about the 8 and 9%, and we are focusing on driving that down.

Mr Gibb: That is what I would like to focus on too because that is the figure stopping us going from 85–100%. Is there anything that you have learned where you could improve wave one, the basic standard programme that would mean we would not have to have 15 or 20% going on to wave two, which is a remedial catch-up programme, or 8 or 9% going on to wave three which is a very serious catch-up programme four years down the line. How can we improve wave one to prevent this proportion of children needing catch-up and remedial work?
Chairman: What percentage come through?

Q160 Mr Gibb: 8 or 9%. This is the hard core of the problem—why we are not going from 85 up to 100%.
If we can tackle this we can solve a lot of Britain’s problems. What could we do to wave one to get that figure down? Do you feel there is anything we can do?
Dr Collins: We define that as, if you like, quality first teaching and the imperative is to ensure that every child gets the best possible start. For me the priorities are early intervention, so we are working very closely with our colleagues in the Foundation stage and Early Years, so our recent phonics publication called Playing with Sounds is driving the phonics teaching into the Early Years, done on a games-based approach where it is fast and fun but that is really important. Also, working very assertively with parents in a sense in terms of giving them more support on how they can support their children’s reading and we work with Sure Start, but it is all about the early intervention and working with the children and catching them as early as possible.

Q161 Chairman: Andrew, are you the lead person in the National Schools Standard Team?
Mr McCully: Indeed. Kevan leads the team which is outside the Department in terms of structure, so I bring Kevan’s experience into the Department and combine that with a range of other approaches to the school improvement, and it is the school improvement angle where I wanted to supplement Kevan’s points. Mr Gibb, you asked the question what would he have done differently or more quickly, and I think the other key aspect of our developments over the last year or so is to bring the National Literacy Strategy together with the National Numeracy Strategy into a much more integrated approach to improving standards in primary schools, and one of the key areas for development and further progress, because we are very clear we need to make further progress, is looking at the effective leadership of the overall curriculum and standards within schools and increasing focus on interventions and those schools where standards could and should be better. I highlight two areas which are crucial to the management of the waves that you have just been talking about. First of all, our leadership programme in primary schools, where we now have

3 Note: See Ev 60
around about 10% of the most effective primary leaders in the country working with those schools who are underperforming or who have room to improve their literacy and numeracy standards. We are also developing this year a more intensive programme of support, where the real focus is on the basics—the basic systems and the basic structures for the improvement of literacy and numeracy in those schools—and I think with those two very significant whole school developments we add to the very structured teaching and learning strategies which Kevan has just been talking about.

Q162 Mr Gibb: To what extent is phonics embedded in the text used by children in the first few years in primary school?

*Dr Collins:* Phonics, of course, is embedded in all texts but what we do not do in terms of the reading books that children enjoy is control them by phonics knowledge. Where you might be going, and correct me if I am wrong, is that there are reading approaches which focus on the phonics knowledge in terms of the text the children read and you just provide text that sometimes may not even make sense as long as you are giving the right phonics practice to the children. That is not our approach. The approach we have is we teach phonics explicitly and directly away from text. We teach phonics knowledge, and phonics skills of blending, segmenting and recognition, but then we encourage children to apply that phonics knowledge to real text. That text is appropriately age-related.

Q163 Mr Gibb: But even though some of the words or longer words in those texts will be beyond their phonics knowledge?

*Dr Collins:* Yes.

Q164 Mr Gibb: So how are they meant to get those words?

*Dr Collins:* They have to develop two sets of skills, phonics skills which allow you to decode words where there is a phonics regularity, but the problem in English because of its orthography is some of the high frequency words, let us take “the”, are quite complex phonics bits of work, so we have to teach two things—phonics knowledge firstly, but, secondly, word recognition, and there are some words we just teach as sight words.

Q165 Mr Gibb: But it goes beyond “the”. There are a huge number of words that go beyond their phonics knowledge. In your judgment, you think that is not damaging the children’s learning ability in reading?

*Dr Collins:* Absolutely not because to read well in English at all levels you need two things—you need absolute phonics knowledge, that is your first and foremost certainty, but you also need the ability to problem solve words that are not regular and that certainly do not conform to the phonics range.

Q166 Mr Gibb: Lastly, it was very good to see you at the seminar, and hopefully in January we can thrash this out a bit more, but what do you think of Morag Stuart’s paper on this? She is quite critical of this double-edged approach, the four-pronged—

*Dr Collins:* The Searchlights model.

Q167 Mr Gibb: Yes. What do you think of her paper which analysed the DfES paper in quite a lot of detail?

*Dr Collins:* I am a great fan of Morag and I think she has done tremendous work. The point is, though, that teachers do work hard to identify texts that are within the reach of children’s kind of phonics knowledge. There is an attempt to do that, but what I am saying is it is impossible, or certainly not our approach, to try and completely eliminate all words that are not within the phonics range.

*Mr Twigg:* Briefly, we had a seminar last year at which Kevan was present and Morag as well in which we reviewed all of this, and there is clearly a range of views and, indeed, we can be criticised in the direction that Nick has set out but also from the other direction as well, and the sense—not from me but that expert seminar—was that we basically got it about right in terms of the balance.

*Chairman:* A very senior educationalist, when he heard that we were looking at this area, said “That area is a swamp with sharks in it”!

Q168 Helen Jones: Dr Collins, you mentioned the need for work in the Early Years and when we visited Finland we found that children in Finnish schools learn to read in a few months, and there are two reasons for that. One is that Finnish is a phonetic language, but also they get much more preparation in pre school to make them ready to read. Are you satisfied with the quality of preparation that we have in the Early Years in terms of getting children ready to read, and are you concerned that in some areas we may be trying to teach children to read text far too early rather than getting them reading ready? Have you any evidence for that?

*Dr Collins:* If I could add one more piece to the Finnish jigsaw, I have had the privilege of visiting schools in Finland as well, and the other dimension is the enormous support in the home and socially for language, and especially for literacy.

Q169 Helen Jones: Absolutely.

*Dr Collins:* The focus in Early Years has been one of the amazing stories of the last 10 years in this country. The strength of the Foundation stage curriculum, the work in our Reception, our Nursery, and our Early Years settings is really beginning to come through. What we now have is a much more consistent approach. We are focusing in my team on quality, ensuring that the provision now is consistently higher, and what I mean by that is that children are engaged in rich oral language experiences in Early Years.

Q170 Helen Jones: Nursery rhymes.

*Dr Collins:* Yes, which are really important for syntactic knowledge—
Q171 Helen Jones: I am trying to get us back to real English!  
Dr Collins:—but the other dimension of that is it has to be meaningful as well. I was in Everton children’s centre last week where they are engaged in environmental learning and although it is environmental learning one of the core outcomes is oral language for those children, and we see that as key in preparing children for literacy. Absolutely essential learning. I could not agree with you more.

Q172 Helen Jones: We have received some evidence that, where we have this problem of underachievement, it is due to the fact that children have poor language and listening skills to start with. Now, given the fact that we have difficulty in recruiting staff in the Early Years and those staff are often very poorly paid, do you have any evidence that it would help improve our reading skills if we paid more attention to the qualifications and pay of staff in Early Years settings before children even start formal school?

Mr Twigg: That is part of what we need to do, as we take forward the whole area of children’s services and Early Years. That is an element of what needs to be done anyway in terms of the status and recruitment and retention of those staff, so we are providing a genuinely quality early start for children in those settings. There is work being undertaken, obviously led by Margaret Hodge, on that.

Mr McCully: You asked about the evidence. The document that was published on the Government’s child care strategy quoted the most recent evidence from the EPPE work which confirmed that the crucial element about improving standards was the quality of the early learning experience, not necessarily the quantity but the quality, and that points certainly to your points about qualifications and the standards.

Q173 Helen Jones: We have seen some very good nursery provision but also some that makes us cringe—children tracing out letters of the alphabet before they are even properly equipped to hold their pencils properly. We all agree we have to get rid of that. But the other question I want to ask you, if I may, is you referred earlier to this question about phonics and texts, and English is a terribly difficult language, but can we clarify what we are trying to achieve here in reading, because it is not simply about teaching people the mechanics of reading—those who were trained quite some time ago, and which is essential; it is also about getting them to make them confident in both the teaching of reading and improving children’s enjoyment of literature, and what else do you think we need to do that we are not doing now?

Mr Twigg: Yes. I went to Finland as well—I think everyone goes to Finland to look at this—but to Kevan’s third point about the home I would add in a sense a fourth but related point about libraries. I went to visit public libraries in Finland and saw not just the commitment and investment there but the fact that they are so clearly widely used by people from all backgrounds, so I think that is an element that we need to build into the equation as well. They would have a love of reading as well as that technical ability to read, so there is a broader cultural aspect. I think in the PIRLS study, from memory not only did the 10 year olds come out the third most able readers in the world, but also they came out as the most able to read full books. They were the most enthused by books, so it was not simply they had that technical ability: they also had the love of reading which I agree is critically important.

Mr McCully: Just to complete the picture, it has always been absolutely central to the approach that, alongside the National Literacy Strategy and the resources that Kevan leads on in schools, is the continuing campaign and encouragement for the enjoyment of reading. The National Reading Campaign which reached its height in 1999–20004 was part of the introduction and development of the National Literacy Strategy. We continue that with a range of partners such as the National Literacy Trust which do fantastic work in terms of encouraging children and adults to read, and that remains absolutely central to our approach.

Q174 Helen Jones: On staff training, we are asking primary teachers to do an awful lot. We are asking them to be experts on the mechanics of teaching really, but also asking them to know a lot about literature, if we want children to enjoy poetry, novels and so on, and certainly I found when I was teaching English in secondary school that was a real difficulty. I used to say, “If I get another child who has only learnt to write haikus I shall scream!” What are we doing to improve the training of teachers, including those who were trained quite some time ago, and make them confident in both the teaching of reading and improving children’s enjoyment of literature, and what else do you think we need to do that we are not doing now?

Mr Twigg: I think the most recent piece of work that Ofsted did looking at initial teacher training demonstrated that partly through the National Literacy Strategy and the work we have done with the teacher training agency and the various institutes of teacher education has improved the general, quality of teacher education with respect to English

but clearly that is only at the initial stage, and what we then need to do is ensure that is built upon through the further stages of teaching with continuing professional development. As you will know, last year we published *Excellence and Enjoyment*, the programme for primary, that is very much about building upon the literacy and the numeracy strategies, but also looking at the broader curriculum in primary schools, and that itself was a product of a series of professional engagements, conferences with head teachers, engagement with teacher associations, talking with subject associations—and we will come later on to the outdoor learning issue—organisations like the Geographical Association and the Royal Geographical Society to really get that professional engagement so the support is there for work across the curriculum. So I think what we need to do is to be looking all the time at how we can engage professionally with teachers to improve their professional schools in English as a subject but also in literacy skills that can be enhanced through most, if not all, of the other subjects in the primary curriculum.

Q175 Chairman: But, Minister, early on in response to Helen’s question you said that the important thing was quality, quality of teaching and instruction. When we did our Early Years inquiry on our visits what we noticed in Finland was that quality, yet we still have people in Early Years, who are paid a minimum wage, they themselves are not as articulate, many of them, as we would wish in terms of children learning from them, and here we have just had research presented to this Committee only last week that 75% of Sure Start is not really making much difference. What on earth are you doing in the Department not to learn from that and switch to the programmes that do add value? What are you doing to improve the quality of things like Sure Start, because that is where it matters, is it not?

Mr Twigg: It is where it matters, and I think it is fair to say that the primary strategy, initially with the literacy and then the numeracy strategies is where we started off as a government so we are much further down the line with respect to the work we are doing in primary than we are with Sure Start and Early Years, which came a little bit later on. One of the things that Kevan and his colleagues have been doing is looking at how we can ensure we learn lessons across the phases, some of which will be the Early Years and Sure Start approach, the Children’s Services approach, learning lessons from some of the success in the primary strategy as well as, as you rightly say, learning lessons from success within Sure Start itself, and that I know is an absolute priority for Margaret Hodge who leads on these matters to ensure that we do get that right. A lot of money has gone into Sure Start and will go into Children’s Services. Of course we want that to be money that is properly spent.

Q176 Chairman: But are we already switching that money from the programmes that do not add much value to children’s educational experience pre school to those programmes that do? Some of us know Dr Kathy Silva very well and her research shows the Government is doing excellently in terms of nursery provision; it makes a real difference and adds enormous value, but she does say you can teach parenting if you do it consistently and not in some nice, warm cuddly environment. You have to know what you want to achieve in a Sure Start situation. Why is government not doing more about this quickly?

Mr Twigg: We do need to do more about it, and it is a priority. I do not think it is as simple as saying you switch resources because it is often saying that there is somewhere that has very good practice, somewhere else that has poor and lots of places in between, and it is about how you can most effectively share that best practice so it applies in the other places. I do not think you do not make those places better by taking the resources away from them but by giving them the support and challenge they need to succeed.

Q177 Valerie Davey: The consistent element for a child throughout these different phases are the parents, and I think Kevan mentioned earlier on the element in the jigsaw is the parental background. I think the Government, in handing out books and sorting out, is doing work but what more could we do to encourage the quality and the professionalism at the schools and the Sure Start centres, but not to underestimate and defranchise the role of the parents who then feel a bit on the edge of all of this? How do we ensure they are that element of giving the love of books, the reading and all that goes with that?

Dr Collins: There is a tendency for schools to lay out for parents the sets of things they should do: “If you do these things, your child will learn to read”, and we are trying to shift that slightly and say, “The language needs to change as well as the practice”. We are trying to involve, inform and engage parents which all require different kinds of approaches. For example, when a school comes to a particular approach for teaching reading, it is not really appropriate and I do not think it works if a school just tells parents, “That is what we are doing” without bringing them into the debate, into the discussion, because the debates are rich and interesting around the balance between the whole book and the phonics, and parents need to be engaged in that as well as, at the end, being part of the solution. So we have been providing lots of information for schools on the ways you can do that, and the information is not art—it is just disseminating the effective practice. What we have is some extremely wonderful practice where schools are working very closely with parents and very engaged in an involved way. What we have, though, is not the right mechanisms yet to get that consistently spread across the system, so we are trying to find better ways of spreading that knowledge and that learning across the system. I would say that the solution to engaging parents will not come from the top; it has to be school-led and school-owned and community-owned, and so it is.
Mr Twigg: Absolutely.

Q181 Chairman: Are your programmes geared up to helping those, whatever percentage it may be, 5% or 9%?

Mr Twigg: Whatever the percentage it is important that we do everything we can. Are we doing as much as we should? No, we need to do more. Are we doing more than we used to? Yes, we are. I have been to two very similar primary schools this week, both of them in very difficult circumstances, one of which was having great difficulty engaging the sorts of parents you are talking about; another had cracked the nut and was doing it; and what that says to me is to reinforce what Kevan said—that we can provide some leadership and a framework and resources, but in the end the solutions are in the schools and the shift in our approach in Excellence and Enjoyment and the primary national strategy to schools leading schools, networks of schools and communities which can be dismissed as a kind of soft approach I do not think is a soft approach at all, because if we get that good practice from the school I was in yesterday into the school I was in the day before, then everyone will benefit from that.

Q182 Mr Turner: Val was told by one of our witnesses that in a particular nursery in Tower Hamlets, Sylheti was the language of the nursery as well as the home, and the only English input that pupils had was from the adults in the nursery classes. I understand that it is the policy that learning opportunities should be planned to help children develop their English at the Foundation stage?

Dr Collins: Of course.

Q183 Mr Turner: How successful are nurseries at doing that?

Mr Twigg: Obviously on this particular instance I am not sighted of that and I would have to look at that evidence. I think that the practice does vary greatly from nursery to nursery and that is reflected in evidence that has been published in recent weeks and which has come before the Committee. What I think is absolutely critical is that we are taking the best practice that undoubtedly exists in a proportion of nurseries and other pre school settings, and seeking to ensure that that is universal best practice, and of course that must be in English. There can be no question about that.

Q184 Mr Turner: But you would accept that you do not know, because this is what Margaret Hodge told me in an answer, “Information on a proportion of children not able to be taught in English in the Reception year is not collected”?

Mr Twigg: Not able to be taught in English because the school is not in a position to have the instruction, or—

Q185 Mr Turner: The question was “What proportion of pupils in each local education authority are not able to be taught in English in year R”? Information is not collected, according to Margaret.
Mr Twigg: Far be it from me to contradict Margaret Hodge—

Q186 Mr Turner: How can you do the job if the information is not collected?
Mr Twigg: I would think via the Foundation stage profile that is information we are now collecting, but I would have to clarify that. The Foundation stage profile has been criticised for the amount of information we ask for; and the benefit of it is we are collecting that sort of information via the profile.

Q187 Mr Turner: But given how difficult it is, your targets for Sure Start nationally only include in one year, that is SR 2003, a target in relation to the proportion of children having normal levels of communication, language and literacy at the end of the Foundation stage. Why have you only thought it necessary to have that target for Sure Start in one of your three years of the programme, that is PSA3?
Mr McCully: Sure Start has grown now from what we all conceived of for Sure Start, and I think that target relates to the standards at the end of the Foundation stage, so it is not purely a narrow target.

Q188 Mr Turner: You say it is not purely a “narrow target”. It applies to those Sure Start settings which have entered the programme in 2003.
Mr McCully: Indeed. Sorry, yes.

Q189 Mr Turner: But not 2002 or 2004. Why not?
Mr Twigg: I do not think any of us are in a position to answer that, and we need to respond to the Committee.
Chairman: We will move on. We will get a written reply to that.

Q190 Mr Turner: In your evidence at paragraph 27, you talk about how Ofsted inspect and find very something we would claim. It is basically gathered, as you see in the review of research which Rogers successful the teaching of National Literacy Strategy. Do they report on the type of teaching of phonics that is undertaken?
Dr Collins: Yes.

Q191 Mr Turner: What is their evidence?
Dr Collins: We have the full reports—we have the HMCI report, and the report on literacy, but also reports from Ofsted on phonics—and the evidence is clear that the schools that do well are schools that provide a structured phonics programme. They have not gone further than to say that really. We have not started having the bidding war between this programme and that programme because it gets into all sorts of commercial fun and games, but what we do know is that a structured phonics programme is what is required to ensure that you have the very best basis for a good literacy model.

Q192 Mr Turner: But would it not be helpful if you knew which structured phonics programme?
Dr Collins: We do not know which is the best in that sense because they are very context bound. Your example of Sylheti speaking children in Tower Hamlets is quite interesting because equally I would argue that there are certain phonics programmes that work well for those children, whereas if I was teaching children, as I have in Tower Hamlets but also in West Yorkshire in, say, Ilkeley, I would use a different phonics programme, so the programme is fairly context bound and that is important. You cannot say “This is the best programme”. It is given the training of the teachers, the context you work in, and then you choose the best programme. What we have done for schools is do a review, if you like, or a synopsis of the different programmes and say “Here are the strengths and weaknesses; here are the kind of programmes there are”, and that was laid out in the evidence in the seminar, “you choose the one that is right for you”.

Q193 Mr Turner: So teachers are able to engage in not only the process but also how the programme works psychologically?
Dr Collins: Yes.

Q194 Mr Turner: You are confident of that?
Dr Collins: When I say I am confident it depends on the teacher and on the school, but if I go and see Jolly Phonics in Clackmannanshire and in Kent I often see different programmes at work—around the same basis and around the same fundamentals but the interpretation and the application has a slight variation based on the context which for me is right.

Q195 Mr Turner: Who designed the Searchlight model, and who is the author of the National Literacy Strategy?
Dr Collins: A group of us. The key architect, if you were naming people, would be John Stannard, who was the first director. I was part of the initial group as well but the author and ownership is not something we would claim. It is basically gathered, as you see in the review of research which Roger Beard conducted on our website is from Best Practice and from a collection of work by teachers and educationalists over the last 30 years in literacy teaching.

Q196 Mr Turner: And who designed the Searchlight model?
Dr Collins: Who first drew it out? That was something which three or four of us sat down at one point and did but it is drawn from the work of Rummelhart, it is drawn from the work of Marie Clay, it is drawn from the work of Priestley and the comprehension theorists—it is a visual representation of a view that good readers attend to an array of information, and the priority of information when you are young is developing the phonics knowledge. But equally children are active learners and they will, and should, use other knowledge that is available, and in the theory of redundancy, which is key to us, as they develop one of their searchlights like phonics in the first couple of years, that searchlight begins to dim in explicit ways and they begin to pick up other searchlights like context when they are trying to inferential comprehension which is critical in the later years.
Q197 Chairman: Would I be one, Dr Collins, in saying that the evidence we have received is that there is a kind of ideological purism that we have heard that phonics is the only way. You understand the code of language, you must be taught as a child to break that code, and once you have done that the whole world opens, but nothing should sully that: It is the one faith, the true faith, the only faith. The other is a more pragmatic view that you are articulating that a child should be given phonics but a range of other entries into learning to read, and that is the more pragmatic one, and the two really are not compatible if you are a purist.

Mr McCully: I think there is an even further end of the spectrum. The pragmatic view is more or less in the middle and from some of our earlier experiences before the National Strategy we found there will be some teachers who would even go further beyond a pragmatic approach to one which is at the opposite end of the spectrum.

Q198 Chairman: What is the opposite end of the spectrum?

Mr Twigg: Anti phonics.

Q199 Chairman: No phonics at all?

Mr Twigg: Yes. It should all be books—read the books and—the third way!

Q200 Chairman: So you are in the middle. You are the pragmatic centre.

Mr Twigg: Evidence-based.

Dr Collins: For us at the Early Years the phonics is the dominant learning but what we are saying is you do not live there; you are there for a while as you put the learning together and then you are moving up, but we run with the grain of what children do as active learners, and they need all this learning.

Chairman: I think we have a good sense of that.

Mr Gibb: How long should it take for a child to be able to decode any word, or the majority of words—not necessarily the standard word but just to decode.

Q201 Helen Jones: And does that include “supercalifragilisticexpialidocious”?

Dr Collins: The phonic knowledge that we lay out in seven steps in the Progression of Phonics for Children which we provide should be in place by the beginning or middle of year two, and then should go subterranean for us and we attend to other knowledge. But the explicit teaching of it is over by year two.

Q202 Mr Gibb: But the euphonics people say they can get every child decoding within 12 weeks.

Dr Collins: We get every child decoding—

Q203 Mr Gibb: That is what I asked.

Dr Collins: They will be decoding by the end of reception.

Q204 Mr Gibb: So under the NLS every child can decode after one year in reception?

Dr Collins: The basic decoding, the CVC, is part of reception teaching.

Q205 Mr Gibb: So are you saying that under the NLS we are getting 99% of children decoding by the end of the year R?

Dr Collins: I cannot give you an exact figure on it, no.

Mr Gibb: Can you send in an exact figure, please?

Chairman: He cannot accept something that he cannot give. Dr Collins, if you cannot give that figure, you must say so.

Q206 Mr Gibb: Can you give it at all?

Dr Collins: We do not know that.

Q207 Mr Gibb: Finally, is it the case that the spectrum. The pragmatic view is more or less in the middle and from some of our earlier experiences before the National Strategy we found there will be some teachers who would even go further beyond a pragmatic approach to one which is at the opposite end of the spectrum. The other is a more pragmatic view that you are articulating that a child should be given phonics but a range of other entries into learning to read, and that is the more pragmatic one, and the two really are not compatible if you are a purist.

Mr McCully: I think there is an even further end of the spectrum. The pragmatic view is more or less in the middle and from some of our earlier experiences before the National Strategy we found there will be some teachers who would even go further beyond a pragmatic approach to one which is at the opposite end of the spectrum.

Q208 Jeff Ennis: Minister, why have we changed the format with the Key Stage 1 tests?

Mr Twigg: Because I wanted to listen to real concerns that were being raised by those working in schools, particularly by teachers and headteachers in Key Stage 1 in infant and primary schools, and I believe we have a system in place. People are leaving. I thought everyone was here for this item. They are all going outdoors, yes, that is right!

Chairman: To be fair, they are the out-of-school lobby. Jeffrey, sorry about that.

Q209 Jeff Ennis: That is alright. It is the effect I have! Sorry, Stephen, have you finished?

Mr Twigg: I got the primary part of the job two years ago and one of the first things we did was to have a whole series of conferences with primary headteachers. During a period of nine months we met about 7,000 primary headteachers and their input was critical to Excellence and Enjoyment. One aspect of Excellence and Enjoyment was to say that we can assess children at seven in a slightly different way and still achieve the positive benefits of having that assessment, and I think that is the system we now have in place.

Q210 Jeff Ennis: So we have listened to the teachers and we have listened to the parents and the children. What benefits do those stakeholders have in changing the test to this mode, shall we say?
Mr Twigg: I think the new system is one that is more flexible. It is worth reminding ourselves that Key Stage 1 assessment under the old system was very different to Key Stage 2 assessment, and I think a lot of the public debate and media coverage suggested that somehow seven-year-olds were sitting the same sort of tests as 11-year-olds when they were not. Under the old system we did separately report test results and the task outcomes and what was said to us was that for seven-year-olds that was not the best way of assessing how well they are doing and that we can put trust in teachers’ own professional judgment of how well seven-year-olds are doing. We have conducted a pilot, as you will know, in around a quarter of schools and LEAs in the last academic year. That pilot was evaluated by Leeds University, and it was a very positive evaluation, and I was persuaded by the outcome of that that this is a new system that we can operate in all of our Key Stage 1 schools from this year.

Q211 Jeff Ennis: There has been concern about teaching to the tests at Key Stage 2 which seems to be more and more prevalent and which, it is argued, has led both false indications of achievement and a narrowing of the curriculum being taught. Would not the model now being used for Key Stage 1 take away the pressure for teaching to the tests, and help to keep a broad curriculum for children in year six?

Mr Twigg: I certainly feel very strongly that we do not want schools to teach for the tests. I sometimes hear what you have described, Jeff, and it concerns me greatly because I do not think that is the purpose of having testing. I am very encouraged by the numbers of schools that do not do that, often including schools in challenging circumstances that still produce very good test results. What was pretty striking in Key Stage 1 under the old system is that there was not a great difference between test results and teacher assessment so that was very positive. I think the concern about moving to that system for Key Stage 2 is that Key Stage 2 is such a critical stage, particularly with respect to the benchmarking that we do look at the progress that has been made school-by-school, and we are able to use the detail and consistency of the data at age 11 for lots of different important purposes, for example identifying the issue of writing, and in particular boys’ writing. It is also a very useful tool for some of the work that we are doing to raise ethnic minority achievement because we now have through a combination of the PLASC data with test data highly detailed information about how different ethnic minorities do, not just authority-by-authority but school-by-school, and it is useful to have the test for that purpose as well. Eleven is different to seven is my short answer.

Q212 Jeff Ennis: Given that Key Stage 2 tests, as you have just indicated, are so important from a benchmarking point of view, should there not be a more diagnostic element to the testing at Key Stage 1?

Mr Twigg: I think we want that element to be there. We certainly do not believe that tests are the only way in which the diagnostic approach can be taken by the teacher. The test is in a sense a snapshot. The diagnostic work by a teacher is day in day out through the assessment that the teacher is making.

Q213 Jeff Ennis: Okay. At the start of today’s evidence we looked at international comparisons through PISA. If we look at international comparisons in terms of the amount of testing, then I think we have got the “yellow jersey” in world terms because our kids are tested to death. We have taken evidence from other countries who have said, “Why do you test your children so many times? What is the point of it? It is the law of diminishing returns,” et cetera. Are we not reaching the point now because schools are improving year-on-year where we are trying to make sure that every school is a good school—and it is going to take a long time to get there but we are certainly on the path down that particular road—where we ought to be thoroughly re-evaluating the amount of testing that goes on in this country?

Mr Twigg: Firstly to make the obvious point that we have done that in Key Stage 1 with the changes that have been made there. I have looked at some of the evidence from other countries as well and it is interesting that some countries are having the debate about whether they need to have more testing, including more national testing. In the earlier discussion we talked about Finland. I went to Finland largely because at these conferences that I have described so many of the heads were saying, “If they do not need this testing in Finland why do we need it here?” and of course in Finland they have loads of testing. What they do not have is the standardised approach that we take.

Q214 Jeff Ennis: It is more diagnostic.

Mr Twigg: It is more diagnostic but there is a lot of testing. Sometimes the argument is whether testing itself is part of the problem. It was interesting to go from Finland to Denmark where they are having something of a national crisis about their standards and where they looking at bringing in standardised testing because they have a sense they do not know how well different schools are doing. So in some places debate is moving in the direction that we have taken as a country. I think we always need to keep an eye on the evidence. We need to look at what is happening, listen to people’s concerns, which is what we did at Key Stage 1. You can never totally close the door on change but I do think some of the summative benefits of testing for wider purposes of school improvement and school standards mean that it makes sense still to have the tests as we have them at 11 and 14.

Mr McCully: Perhaps I could add to that on the importance of tests for teachers in Key Stage 1. We have made significant changes this year but the tests remain within the process because it is absolutely crucial for informing the teachers’ judgment, and that is what the teachers were saying as from the
pilot and in the evaluation, that the role of the tests in Key Stage 1 was still absolutely essential to what they wanted in terms of their classroom experience.

Q215 Chairman: Minister, you have said several times in this session that you get out and about a lot of which we all approve. We ourselves visit a lot of schools. When you go you must see the same things we do. You must hear people saying, “We are over-tested. We are over-examined and we cannot teach because the curriculum is so restrictive and there is not the flexibility to actually use our skills to teach.” Is that not what you are hearing?

Mr Twigg: Sometimes. I mentioned we have had this big programme of conferences with heads. We had a conference last week with a group of heads who have successfully combined excellence, including some schools in very challenging circumstances, with that broader curriculum. I think the Ofsted report that was published last year demonstrates that that combination is possible. So, yes, I do still sometimes hear that. Part of the challenge that we have got is for schools to have the confidence that they can go beyond what are often perceived constraints on what they can do with respect to the national curriculum. A major part of the purpose of Excellence and Enjoyment is to encourage and foster that confidence in the system, and I think it is growing. I genuinely think that it is a growing confidence about embracing that broader and richer curriculum without in any way damaging standards in literacy and literacy.

Q216 Chairman: We have seen a very different approach in terms of inspection. We are moving to a lighter touch inspection. We are learning that inspection has to change over time. Is not this change in Key Stage 1 really you saying that you can have a great deal of testing and examining full time but after a while it ceases to have its usefulness, the utility diminishes? Are you not really listening to what this Committee has been saying for some time and you have moved to what you are doing in Key Stage 1 but really you are playing your cards close to your chest? You have recognised it, have you not, that you are moving away from such a stringent testing regime?

Mr Twigg: I think what I would say—and clearly there is the evidence that we have just discussed with respect to Key Stage 1 but also with respect to some of the other changes in the school profile—is that we are recognising that you cannot simply have an accountability system based on raw test results, which I know is something this Committee has been telling us for some time, and the school profile which is a reflection of the work that is going on with respect to value added is a very important reflection of that as well. I still feel you need to have robust data with respect to how well children are doing at different key stages, for example to be able to have value added. If we did not have the test outcomes then we could not look at what the value added is between Key Stage 2 and 3 and between Key Stage 3 and 4, so I think we still want testing to be there as an important weapon in our armoury with respect to both accountability and diagnosis. I do accept that we are putting that in a broader context than we used to.

Q217 Valerie Davey: Can I say that certainly Excellence and Enjoyment sends out the right message and everywhere I have been that report of which we all approve. We ourselves visit a lot of schools. When you go you must see the same things above any other in primary schools has been welcomed. We have still got testing at Key Stage 2. How satisfied are you with the progress which young people are making at Key Stage 2?

Mr Twigg: I was very pleased this year that we saw a significant improvement in the English results at Key Stage 2 and a further modest improvement in the Mathematics results. It is not as good as we want it to be. The 85% figure, which is our national target, is not some figure that we plucked out of the air; it is based on an assessment of what schools can achieve. I was at Stockwell Primary School last week in Lambeth which is a school where getting on for half the pupils are on free school meals and the majority speak English as an additional language. In that school they achieved the national targets. If they can do it I believe that we can do it nationally. CLEARLY there are some children with particular forms of special educational needs who are not going to achieve a level 4 so 100% is not attainable but I do believe that 85% is. So, yes, I am pleased that it is upward again, it is good progress, in some schools it is remarkable progress, but there are still too many schools that are under-performing and that is why we are not achieving the 85% yet.

Dr Collins: Not only do we have that aspiration in 2004 for the first time we asked schools to set their own targets (not national targets) for what they thought they would achieve in 2005 and beyond, and schools’ own targets take us further as well. Schools are saying that there is further to go. Can I say something about the testing at Key Stage 1. Stephen has talked about the need for benchmarked robust data for us to compare schools. The other critical thing for a year two teacher or for a year six teacher is that they have some good evidence themselves which benchmarks their children against other children. Previous to the tests of course we went to the days when teachers had to manage some great big portfolio of work not knowing where their children stood at year two with any other child at year two, whereas this gives you a good, robust bit of information which allows you to compare your own children. It is downgrading the status of the test but lifting up the status of teacher assessment. It is the balance between the two that is important, not one or the other.

Q218 Valerie Davey: The 85% you said you I believe in very passionately. Are we evidence-based for our 85%?

Mr Twigg: Yes, the 85% was based on looking at attainment by free school meal band. If all of the schools in their respective free school meal bands could achieve at the level of the upper quartile you would get to 85%.

Dr Collins: Not the averaged outcome but the average rate of progress with their children.
Q219 Valerie Davey: So is the 85% now for 2006 a realistic target or is that something that is going to slip again?

Mr Twigg: It is ambitious. We have gone this year from 75 to 78%. We would hope to make further progress again next year. It would be great to hit 85 in both subjects. My sense on this is that what is important is that we build on the progress. Much as I very much want us to achieve the 85% for 2006, the bigger test for me is that we continue to see the progress towards that over these next two years.

Q220 Valerie Davey: I very much appreciate that you have allowed schools to set their own benchmark because I think that is encouraging and it is recognising their professionalism. Does it allow you perhaps to recognise that not every year is going to be steady progress? I had the top national school for primary schools in my constituency a couple of years ago. They could tell me quite readily that this was a particularly good year, 97 youngsters got four in the English, Maths and Science. “Next year it will not be the same, Valerie. We have got some youngsters there who are really struggling and we cannot expect them to do that.” That is realism, is it not?

Mr Twigg: It is absolutely vital that we have that recognition. Clearly one year group will vary compared to the previous and the next year group. What is fascinating about the change we have made on target setting—and it is probably the sort of change a few years ago we might have been a bit nervous about making—is that the targets that the schools themselves are setting based exactly on the knowledge they have got that you have described is coming out of something very robust that sees further improvement in the coming year. What that says to me is that the shift towards a greater trust in the professional judgment of teachers is reflected in that and in the Key Stage 1 change and it is something that is not in any way taking challenge out of the system with respect to literacy and numeracy standards.

Q221 Valerie Davey: The real challenge we have all got is to ensure that boys do as well, particularly in English at Key Stage 2. What are the teachers telling you that you ought to be doing about boys in primary school?

Dr Collins: We have just recently completed a piece of research with the United Kingdom Literacy Association looking at successful strategies to raise boys’ achievement. We have seen a good improvement this year of 4% in boys’ attainment, which is above the national average, so we are pleased we have seen a closing of the gap. The priorities relate to some of the fundamental things we talked about earlier on. The early work that keeps boys enthused and engaged in the kind of texts that you use. Making sure that it is not just a narrative-based literature and there is a lot of non-fiction. Helping boys to make a link between their reading and their writing, which again is important in the phonics debate because reading is not only about phonics, it is about reading for writing. Also linking the literacy much more closely to other curriculum areas so boys can see purpose in what they are doing and how it will help them in other curriculum areas. They are the kind of approaches that we are providing. We have just been developing, as I say, with the UKLA good resources and materials for schools which are building on a bank that is already there. We are seeing now progress in boys’ writing, particularly in the last couple of years, which is great.

Mr McCully: That is achievement in boys’ writing. We have got further to go in terms of boys’ reading. Certainly the improvements that Kevan is talking about are specifically in writing.

Q222 Valerie Davey: Does that not go right back to the earlier question which we had from Helen about whether every year where to my knowledge (which is limited as a parent and former teacher) young boys take longer to co ordinate eye and hand to pick up a pen and write. I had two daughters and a son and I thought my son was just going to be a demolition expert. Nothing he did was constructive. It all had to go bash. Are we putting the pen or pencil into a boy’s hand too early? Are we just not looking at that very early development. I am not talking about all boys. I am talking in general terms. It is that very early bit where boys fail at an early age and therefore are not given that encouragement to progress.

Dr Collins: The evidence, of course, does not quite on target setting—and it is probably the sort of change a few years ago we might have been a bit square up with that because we seem many boys doing very well at the early stages. I think rather than categorical statements about boys and girls it is about the curriculum being responsive to individual children and what we are encouraging through the foundation stage curriculum is much more play-based learning so that children are engaged in a rich play environment, and that takes us to that other discussion we had earlier about the quality of provision in early years, but it is absolutely appropriate that boys by the time they leave reception are able to have fine motor control, be able to write key words and begin that process. You are right, however, it has got to be appropriate for the child and it has got to be a transition into Key Stage 1. That relates to the Key Stage 1 test issue as well because at the beginning of year one, term one we were seeing many teachers preoccupied by the fact that just six terms away was the Key Stage 1 test. Now what they are preoccupied, quite rightly, is teacher assessment and the test so they can begin to have a smoother transition into the early formal learning at year one, which is another key outcome and reason for changing the testing programme and the reporting programme at the end of Key Stage 1.

Q223 Chairman: Are we in danger of being rather sexist about this? I do not remember so much of an obsession with under-performance of girls when boys were scoring higher than girls. Quite honestly, my own personal opinion is that I think women are brighter than men. I have three daughters and a son. I see that among middle managers now women earn more on average than men and thank goodness for
that. We should celebrate this, should we not, that the brightest kids are coming through and they happen to be women? Sorry, that is not a question. Can I ask you about London briefly. How is London doing in all this in terms of achievements and testing? What is the picture in London?

Mr Twigg: It is very positive. As you will recall from previous evidence, we are approaching London at three levels: a set of London-wide challenges; a set of schools that we call the Keys to Success; and five London boroughs that we are focusing particularly on for secondary improvement. On the latest GCSE results the number of Greater London GCSE five A* to Cs is marginally above the national average for the first time ever. Inner London is still behind but Inner London’s rate of progress over the last three years has been significantly better than in the rest of the country and most of the five key boroughs are improving significantly year-on-year. So there is some really good progress. Most of the schools that we have described as Keys to Success have again improved significantly more than average, admittedly from a low base but have done that. Some have not and we are putting in extra support for those who have not. We have also given a particular priority to London within the academies programme as part of the London Challenge.

Mr McCully: We have not talked at all about Key Stage 3 specifically so far in the evidence but just on the London point this certainly relates back to earlier discussions about reading. The improvements at Key Stage 3 results in London certainly outstripped most other areas of the country this year, particularly around English results where in some of the boroughs with the poorest performing schools such as Southwark, such as Lambeth, such as Hackney, such as Islington, the improvements in English—reading and writing—at Key Stage 3 were very, very significant this year.

Q224 Chairman: Why are you not communicating this better to the media then, Minister?

Mr Twigg: We do our very best to communicate this and one of the things that I am doing right now, further to your earlier point about my visits to schools, is a programme of visits to each London local education authority. It is my second programme and part of the reason for this is to communicate at a local as well as a national and regional level about some of the improvements that are happening.

Q225 Chairman: Can you explain to the Committee, Minister, why is it then (because I am not a London Member of Parliament) that in the regions, which I know much better, I see my local media celebrating achievement and they will always pick up a good story about educational achievement and so on whereas in London when you look at the Evening Standard and the Metro they seem to hate the capital city that they work for? They despise it. Every story you see about education is about failure and trouble and misery. What is it about your London media that is so poisonous?

Mr Twigg: I should tread carefully! In my experience of the last two and a half years we have had more luck with some of the media outlets than others and certainly some of the television coverage, where we can get it, for the work that we have been doing through the London Challenge has been very, very positive, and I would certainly praise the television channels in London and their regional programmes for the balanced approach that they have taken that has enabled us to get the message across about success. I would also praise some of the local or sub-regional newspapers that have taken a balanced approach and therefore some of the positive things that have happened have come across through those newspapers.

Q226 Chairman: Am I wrong in believing that the Metro and Standard seem to pedal this negative image of London, especially in education?

Mr Twigg: We have been very keen to ensure a balanced approach from all of the different outlets in London.

Q227 Chairman: What have you done with Tim Brighouse?

Mr Twigg: Tim Brighouse remains our chief adviser. When I was originally appointed he was Commissioner for London Schools.

Q228 Chairman: He is safe, is he?

Mr Twigg: He is very safe. For reasons of his own health he had to reduce his hours and that is straightforwardly the reason.

Q229 Chairman: We did not know that.

Mr Twigg: When his doctor advised him to cut back on his hours, I wanted him to stay, he is absolutely central to the London Challenge, and he wanted to stay, so we agreed a slightly different role for him and we agreed that that reason would be something that we would tell people if people asked. It is for reasons of his health.

Q230 Chairman: We are very sad indeed to hear about that because we hold him in high esteem. He is very keen on collegiates and schools working together. I would have thought he would be very worried about the Queen’s Speech Education Bill in the sense that one meeting of governors can make any school a foundation school which means it opens its premises and opens its buildings. Would that not go right against this whole notion of collegiates and co-operation among schools because you are going to have little independent schools which have got no reason to co-operate?

Mr Twigg: I will not speculate about what Tim would say but certainly my own view is that there is no contradiction between having that greater autonomy for schools and having a culture in which schools co-operate and collaborate successfully with each other. In fact, London in some respects is already leading the way in this regard. One of the most innovative academy projects in London involves the bringing together of one of the most successful schools, Haberdashers’ Aske’s in
Lewisham, with one of the least successful schools in Lewisham to create a single school, and I think that demonstrates that there is in many parts of London (although not everywhere) a culture that is willing to see the collaboration and collegiality that Tim rightly promotes and which is certainly the culture of the London Challenge.

Q231 Paul Holmes: As part of your ministerial responsibilities you are responsible for the school curriculum. I can recall, in about 1998, a Government adviser coming in on a teacher training day to talk to the secondary school I worked at about the new national literacy strategy. I asked, “How are you going to do all this when the schools have got to implement the national curriculum as well?” and he said, “That is simple. We are going to suspend parts of the national curriculum and allow them not to do the whole curriculum because we have got to make room in the timetable.” Since then in the last few years the Government have introduced citizenship. We are saying that teachers should be doing all this outdoor education. We are saying that PE and sport should be two hours rather one hour a week. We are saying that schools should be covering everything—drugs, alcohol, parenting, financial management. How do we fit everything into the school curriculum? Do we expect far too much of schools?

Mr McCully: I should add that your example of

Mr Twigg: Kevan often tells people and I am taking his lines from him, we could ask the teachers to teach faster. That is a joke! Clearly there is a lot that we are expecting of schools and it is not practical in the school day for everything to be done. Part of the message of Excellence and Enjoyment, and in a sense part of the message of Tomlinson as well is about choices being made, is about schools taking some more control over how the curriculum is applied within their own school. We are very comfortable with saying there is a set of the basics that we expect schools to be doing but beyond that we expect schools to make choices. Even in primary schools it is for schools to make a choice perhaps between a focus on music or a focus on foreign languages. It is not going to be practical for every school to do all of these things in the same way. I accept that of course that is a very different approach to what the Government Minister would have said sitting here earlier this year, school day for everything to be done. Part of the message of Tomlinson as well is about just being raised about the time and focus of that curriculum will be central to the review.

Q233 Mr Pollard: Could I go back to the added value, Minister. A primary school in my constituency, Camp School, has 50% Bengali children at it. It has been well led with different headteachers over the last 10 or 12 years and as soon as added value comes into the scheme of things local parents have got much more confidence and now the school, for the first time ever, has a waiting list. That is a very different approach to what the Government Minister would have said sitting here 15 years ago or five years ago but that reflects the way that things have moved on.

Q232 Paul Holmes: Are you now saying that you are going to extend that flexibility to all schools because in the last two or three years it has always been if you were a specialist school, if were an academy, if you were a certain type of school we would give you the flexibility to ignore the national curriculum, to vary it as you like, but other schools will have to toe the line and do as they are told. Are you now saying that all schools can have flexibility or is it still just selected groups?

Mr Twigg: I do not think it should just be selected groups. We do want this to be a broad principle. The only thing that would prevent me saying all schools is clearly there is a set of schools that is facing particularly strong challenges. For example, in the area we have been looking at just now, some primary schools are still very badly under-performing with respect to the core priorities of literacy and numeracy, and I think we have to maintain mechanisms that ensure that those schools are giving the full priority to literacy and numeracy that is needed to make the process. I think we have moved from the position of saying those are freedoms for a small number of schools to earn to saying those are freedoms that typically schools should have, unless there are exceptional reasons.

Dr Collins: It is a very difficult business, as you know, to craft that kind of curriculum. It takes quite a lot knowledge and confidence. That is why, as Andrew said earlier, we are investing so much in the leadership of schools. We currently train 1 in 10 primary heads who work with us as consultant leaders who then go on to work with other schools. The focus is on raising standards and yet at the same time we need to be raising standards in the context of a broad and enriched curriculum, and you very quickly get to the discussion how do you craft the curriculum so that it relates and feeds the personality of my school, the character of my school, and meets the needs of my children? That is exactly where you get to. I think that is best done with colleagues who are in the business rather than coming down from the top saying this is how you do it.

Mr McCully: I should add that your example of academies was referring to the secondary curriculum of course, and the curriculum was reviewed at Key Stage 4 just a few years ago. In the five-year strategy that the Government published earlier this year, there was a commitment to review the Key Stage 1 curriculum and some of those issues that you have just been raising about the time and focus of that curriculum will be central to the review.

Q234 Mr Pollard: Could I widen it again. We talked earlier about reading and literacy and all of that. You mentioned yourself about Finland having a culture of reading. We do not in this country have a culture of reading. We are open to TV games,
Valerie Davey: I must add a Bristol dimension. We are doing Read a Million Words which again is another programme with wider uptake. I am sure, elsewhere. Again, it is companies which are willing to donate books particularly into school and to have that involvement with the school. We had a good launch at Bristol Zoo which was a good icon.

Q237 Chairman: Is it money? One of the things certainly with my children that stimulated their interest in poetry was having a poet visit the school and work with children. Is there money in school budgets to have real writers and real poets coming into schools? Poets are notoriously poorly financed and their income is low so this would be a very good way of increasing the love the literature, would it?

Mr McCully: Again, just to commend another important initiative that we promote called Writing Together which is precisely for that objective. It gives opportunities for schools to have a small amount of money so that they can work with a writer and very often a poet in the classroom and then more importantly look at the effects of that experience on their on-going curriculum in school. That is led by Andrew Motion working with us. I was at an event last night where we were looking at the next development, again led by Andrew Motion, for that initiative, so, again, for those schools who have not heard about it yet we would dearly love them to engage with us.

Q238 Chairman: Minister, we are coming to the end of this session, but I must ask you, before Nick puts a last point on reading, what are you up to with David Miliband in terms of academies? The word is that the Department is going round bullying people on academies, that you are saying, “Okay, we did promise to rebuild or to renovate every school in the country”, but that seems to have slipped, and now you have got officials going round saying, “We are not going to look very kindly on your building programme because you have not put in for an academy.” Is that true?

Mr Twigg: No, I do not think that is true at all. We have certainly said that we want the Building Schools for the Future programme to be a programme of investment but also an opportunity to look at the educational challenges community-by-community. Certainly I lead on academies in London and we have been able to work very well with authorities in London with respect to the role that academies will play. Those academies will be focused in some of the areas of greatest need, so boroughs like Hackney and Southwark will have very, very significant numbers of academies. We are working very well indeed with the authorities and others in both those cases to achieve that.

Q239 Chairman: So you are not as a Department putting any frighteners or leaning on LEAs or schools or anyone out there to have an academy?

Mr Twigg: There are occasions when we certainly do want LEAs and schools to have academies.
Q240 Chairman: You know what I mean, Minister. It is the difference between friendly persuasion and saying, “You are not going to get this unless you do that.” in terms of academies?

Mr Twigg: I have found that friendly persuasion is the most effective way of persuading people.

Q241 Chairman: But your budget has slipped. All that hype that you and David Miliband gave about how many schools are going to be renovated by 2015.

Mr Twigg: It is a massive programme.

Q242 Chairman: But you are only talking about three schools in each LEA now.

Mr Twigg: It depends which stage of Building Schools for the Future each local authority is at. Clearly there are issues about those authorities that are going to be in the latter part of the programme and how many schools can be renovated or rebuilt in those authorities. Part of what we wanted to do was to ensure that there is sufficient money in the capital programme to meet the needs of schools and authorities that are further down the queue for Building Schools for the Future. They may be authorities that will not have the majority dealt with by 2015 because we always said that this was a programme that would take longer than 10 years.

Chairman: It is all very well in London, is it not Minister, but take Jeff Ennis’s constituency where he was having a struggle getting £50,000 for a specialist school—

Jeff Ennis: £7,000, never mind £50,000.

Q243 Chairman: £50,000 is a lot of money. It is alright if you are in Canary Wharf and you have all those banks like UBS and HSBC, but what about the parts of the country where £2 million is difficult to find? What are you going to do about Jeff Ennis’s patch if they want an academy? They can only go to the evangelical wing of the Anglican movement. Is that their only opportunity?

Mr Twigg: Not at all and we are making a very proactive effort to encourage sponsors to go to all parts of the country. It is certainly true on academies that there will sometimes be a preference for London or perhaps some of the other big cities and we are addressing that in a very systematic way. On specialist schools of course we have the fund that is designed to assist those schools that are unable to raise the £50,000.

Q244 Chairman: Tesco’s boast that £1 in £7 spent in this country goes into Tesco’s through their checkout. What are you doing to encourage these big supermarkets and banks that suck so much money out of our communities to put something back?

Mr Twigg: We have, as you are probably aware, a business unit based in the Department that plays a very proactive role in trying to get Tesco’s and other businesses engaged with different educational programmes. Clearly some companies do a lot of this work and others do not do so much. We want to put every bit of encouragement their way for them to do so.

Q245 Chairman: Could you not start naming and shaming some of these companies, the ones that do and the ones that do not? This is a very important point.

Mr Twigg: It is a very important point.

Q246 Chairman: Some of these people suck so much out of our communities, they destroy small businesses and at the same time nothing seems to come back. £2 million would seem a pittance to put back into a community.

Mr Twigg: And of course we do have those who are making that contribution. I am not sure we would want to go down the road of naming and shaming but we can certainly be very positive about those that are making the contribution. I would hope that that could be one tool that we can use to persuade those that are not that they should do so as well.

Q247 Mr Gibb: We had reached a very interesting point in our discussions with Dr Collins about the key differences between the NLS and what the various phonics groups are arguing for. This is about the texts used and you said that the NLS used texts that go beyond the phonics knowledge of the children. Can I just probe you on that a bit and say are we just talking about irregular but commonly used words or are we talking about words that could be decoded, they are decodable words, but the words go beyond the particular stage of phonics knowledge of the children? Are we talking about the latter?

Dr Collins: We are talking about both, so we are talking about texts that often have irregular words, some you know by sight vocab, some you do not yet because you have not been taught them, and some phonics words where you can apply the knowledge you have. For example, you may have the CVC knowledge but you do not have the double vowel in the middle of the word and you are not quite able to sort that word out. Our approach would be to say encourage the children to use all the strategies they have and through the text you often learn more, but the phonics teaching, which is fast and ambitious which is going alongside, will very quickly get you to the point where you are able to decode all of those words.

Q248 Mr Gibb: None of the phonics people argue that you should not be teaching words like “the” or “then” because those are the irregular words you need to make a sentence sound proper, but they would challenge you on these words that you could decode once you have learnt the graphemes and the phonemes. What I want to ask you is if you have not got that phonics knowledge to decode a word how does the child read it?

Dr Collins: What the child does is they bring the four aspects of the searchlights to bear. They bring their knowledge of phonics to get the first consonant. The dominant consonant is the first thing and they get to the other bits of the word. They use other information—the context, maybe the picture, the evolving story. They use their syntactic knowledge, the kind of grammar and pattern of English, and they use their graphic knowledge. They bring those things to bear to try
and solve that word. There are some words at the beginning of reading which you cannot read and then you have got this great other asset which is an adult to help you. What we encourage children to do is to be active learners and to try new things. I have a problem with texts that are completely bound by what children already know. It is quite helpful to have some words in a text which require you to be active and begin to problem solve because I think that is what a lot of reading is about.

Q249 Mr Gibb: I do not think that is necessarily a better method of reading. I disagree. I have seen seven-year-old children guessing words and just pretending to read and they would flounder without a picture. Why did we need an NLS in the first place in 1996–97? What was going on in our schools in the 10 years before that? Why has it become so necessary?

Dr Collins: The principal problem was that there was no place where literacy—and I think reading is the priority in the early years—where reading and writing was taught. There was no moment in the day when this was our focus. It was lost in an integrated curriculum and literacy teaching—I think we would agree on this—requires some very focused and structured teaching in the early years. I would say on your earlier point I would be appalled if I saw a seven-year-old who was just guessing words.

Q250 Mr Gibb: I see it often.

Dr Collins: What I would want to see seven-year-olds using the knowledge that they have but also attempting at problem-solving unknown words. I regard that as slightly different to guessing.

Q251 Mr Gibb: I have seen children who have heard the story before and who memorise it. I remember seeing a girl reading and she said, “Winnie the Pooh ...” The word “Winnie” was not there at all. She was just making it up.

Dr Collins: And the text is inappropriately matched.

Q252 Mr Gibb: The story was right.

Dr Collins: Equally of course, you see children who decode accurately but have no understanding of the comprehension in terms of what they are reading. That is why the balance is so important.

Q253 Mr Gibb: Presumably you cannot comprehend until you can decode?

Dr Collins: Absolutely.

Q254 Mr Gibb: So the key thing is to get the decoding right first?

Dr Collins: And that is why our first structured approach to teaching reading must bring in phonics.

Q255 Mr Gibb: You are bringing in these texts too soon, are you not, because you are forcing children to do things that damage the way they should be learning to read because they are guessing too early. They are getting words that are too hard for their phonics knowledge and therefore they are learning to read in two different ways. One is context and guessing and pictures and the other is build up the word from the phonics.

Dr Collins: Controlling the reading environment of a child is a tricky business because there might be the odd book that you have control over but the truth is that children are active readers right across the curriculum and throughout their lives, and what you have to do is give them strategies that allow them to be engaged and positive about that approach and not think, “I can only when I read these little books and everything else I cannot read.”

Q256 Mr Gibb: You talk about Playing with Sounds. Can you tell me in what way that is more impressive than the NLS Progression in Phonics programme?

Dr Collins: It takes the teaching earlier. It takes it much more into reception and even into nursery. It engages in a much more play-based context and it accelerates the phonics learning. One of the things we have learnt (and it is one of the things you asked earlier we could have done differently) is that you can accelerate the phonics teaching if it is done in a fun and ambitious way that is play-based. So it takes it very much into the early years context and accelerates the learning through games and through play, which has been very, very successful.

Q257 Mr Gibb: Playing with Sounds does not use the shape of the letter, does it, it just teaches the sound? Dr Collins: It starts with phonics knowledge which is the phonemic, the hearing of the sounds. It moves on to recognition which does include the shape later on. Then it moves into the segmenting for spelling and the blending for reading. So it takes you through all the steps but absolutely starts with the sounds, you are right, which is where all phonics starts.

Q258 Chairman: Let’s get the history of this in time. One small question still remains in my mind. In terms of the history of this development there used to be a great controversy about ITA, the Initial Teaching Alphabet. Where does that play in the scheme of things these days? I remember much criticism of Glens Kinnock’s role in ITA at one stage. Is this all dead and buried or is it still part of the pragmatic approach?

Dr Collins: You can dig it out of the long grass. It is pretty much there. The trouble with ITA and other similar approaches is you have to learn two things because you are learning a particular code, the ITA code, and that you have to then learn the English phonics code. What we agree absolutely on is let’s teach them English phonics, let’s teach phonics early because they can learn it, and you can then move on to the comprehension and the other deeper aspects of literacy.

Q259 Chairman: It was a fashion that is now out of date?

Dr Collins: Yes.

Chairman: Val, the last word to you.
Q260 Valerie Davey: Chairman, I think what we have seen this morning is that this debate is very time consuming, and one of the things that happened when we brought in the national literacy structures and syllabus was we said to teachers, “Stop the debate let’s get on and do something.” I think that was really important. You are showing us this morning the depth of the background to it. Can I just ask you finally to link what you have just said about the strategy of teaching of young people with the earlier comments you made about boys’ learning because I think that is where context is so important. My son was bored stiff with Janet and John. He did not want to learn to read. He would go to the library and he would pick out something about the solar system or whatever completely beyond his reading ability but that is the book he wanted to hold and to look at and to begin to take a few words out of. Is it not especially for boys that context is so important? Dr Collins: Absolutely and this is why Playing with Sounds is important because it is play-based. It is particularly important for boys because not only was phonics not taught consistently previously I do not think, it also was not taught well. It was a letter a week colouring everything that begins with P and actually that does not teach you a great deal about phonics. Exploring our sound letter system happened when we brought in the national literacy structures and syllabus was we said to teachers, “Stop the debate let’s get on and do something.” I think that was really important. You are showing us this morning the depth of the background to it. Can I just ask you finally to link what you have just said about the strategy of teaching of young people with the earlier comments you made about boys’ learning because I think that is where context is so important. My son was bored stiff with Janet and John. He did not want to learn to read. He would go to the library and he would pick out something about the solar system or whatever completely beyond his reading ability but that is the book he wanted to hold and to look at and to begin to take a few words out of. Is it not especially for boys that context is so important?

Mr McCully: I should say that it is really engaging and if the Committee would like to see copies of this I think you would find it fun as well. We would be delighted to give the Committee copies if you would be interested.

Chairman: We would like that. Any of you who did not have the opportunity to be at the IPPR seminar in Oxford on Friday and Saturday of last week which had some of the leading experts in terms of this whole range of areas, I really do recommend the papers that Kathy Silva and others were presenting. Can I thank you. We have had a lot of Jolly Phonics but I hope you have found jolly politics as well! Thank you for answering questions right across the range. Thank you, Minister, and thank you to your officials.

Supplementary memorandum submitted by Stephen Twigg MP, Minister of State for School Standards

Q138

On 8 December when I gave evidence to the Committee on the teaching of reading, I promised to write to you with a fuller response to some of the Committee’s questions. These focused in particular on the OECD’s PISA study and on the Department’s Sure Start programme.

On the issue of the PISA study I was asked to respond on the degree of contact between the DfES and the Office of National Statistics (ONS), and in particular whether the Department put pressure on the ONS not to submit the figures for England’s performance in PISA 2003. I am now in a position to reinforce the answer that I gave at the hearing.

As the Department’s contractor for PISA 2000 and 2003, the ONS has had an ongoing and close relationship with DfES over a number of years. This has included regular project management meetings and updates on PISA as appropriate to the stage of the survey. During the fieldwork period there was regular communication between officials at ONS and DfES.

However, responsibility for running the PISA 2003 study in England lay with the ONS. This means that all data collected in schools were sent directly to the PISA Consortium. None of the data collected in schools passed through the Department and there was no question of DfES officials trying to persuade, or put pressure on, ONS not to submit these data.

Q142

I was also asked to respond to the question of whether anyone in the ONS is to be reprimanded or sacked, or whether there is going to be an inquiry into why we did not meet these specifications. My understanding, following discussion with colleagues in the department is that PISA is a voluntary survey and relies on the co-operation of both schools and pupils. Unlike, in some countries, where Education Ministries can instruct schools to take part or can exert such pressure that it is tantamount to an instruction, the Department cannot force schools in England to participate. Administering the PISA tests and questionnaires is not an insignificant undertaking by schools, and the PISA fieldwork takes place at an important time in the school calendar. The Department can therefore understand that it is not always a straightforward decision for schools to participate in PISA, and that it is their right to refuse if they wish to. We are satisfied that officials from ONS and the Department did all they could to engage with schools once the problem with non-participation had been identified.
Q189

I was also asked to respond to the Committee on the question of the scope of the Sure Start PSA targets. The SR2002 PSA3 target, which covered 2003–06, did specifically refer to Sure Start Local programmes that were operational at the beginning of the period. At the time that the target was agreed Sure Start was a specific initiative aimed particularly at areas of disadvantage.

Since then Sure Start has expanded and its agenda now covers England as a whole. In recognition of this, SR2004 PSAI extends the coverage of this target to the whole of England and also seeks a reduction in inequalities in performance between the 20% most disadvantaged areas and the rest of the country.

We will use the 2004 Foundation Stage Profile results, due early in 2005, to assess progress in Sure Start Local Programme (SSLP) areas and to inform future strategy. We will also continue, until 2006, to monitor progress in language development of two year olds and expect to see improvement when the latest results from the Sure Start Language Measure are confirmed in January.

I thought you might also find it helpful if I were to clarify the position on the effectiveness of Sure Start local programmes, following on from the Committee’s reference to research showing “that 75% of Sure Start is not really making much difference”. This is a misinterpretation of the National Evaluation of Sure Start published interim findings which showed that 24% of SSLPs were being more effective than would have been expected. That is not to say that the remaining programmes were ineffective. This research showed that SSLP areas were more than twice as likely to be among the especially well-functioning areas as the “control” areas.

Finally, the Committee also asked about the proportion of children not able to be taught in English in the reception year. As Margaret Hodge’s answer to Andrew Turner’s PQ made clear, many children in Foundation Stage settings will have a home language other than English. Practitioners plan to meet the needs of all children, including those from diverse linguistic backgrounds. The statutory Foundation Stage curriculum states that learning opportunities should be planned to help children develop their English by, for example, providing a range of opportunities for children to engage in speaking and listening activities in English with peers and adults. Although we do not collect statistics centrally on the numbers of children who are not able to be taught in English, we would expect all primary schools to deliver teaching in English, with appropriate home language support offered to those children who need it.

I hope the Committee finds this further information helpful as you take forward your enquiry.

12 January 2005

Memorandum submitted by Dr Kevan Collins, National Director, Primary National Strategy, Department for Education & Skills

In looking at primary schools’ results in the Key Stage 1 tests, it is important to bear in mind that published figures take account of all pupils in year 2: including those with special educational needs; those only recently arrived in the country, and who may have little or no English on arrival; and those who are unable to take the tests.

Nonetheless, in 1,962 primary schools every pupil achieved at least level 2 for their Key Stage 1 reading in 2004. In another 1,622 primaries, between 95% and 100% of children did so. In these schools, that will typically mean a single child not reaching the expected level.

So, in over 20% of all primary schools in England, all or almost all KS1 pupils are reading at at least level 2 by age seven. And these are schools which will be using the support provided by the National Primary Strategy—properly adapted and supplemented for local needs and practices—including the Strategy’s central, but not exclusive, role for synthetic phonics.

4 March 2005
Monday 7 February 2005

Members present:
Mr Barry Sheerman, in the Chair
Mr David Chaytor
Mr John Greenway
Valerie Davey
Paul Holmes
John Ennis
Helen Jones
Mr Nick Gibb

Memorandum submitted by Professor Rhona S Johnston, University of Hull and Dr Joyce Watson, University of St Andrews

Studies of Literacy Skills in Children in England and Scotland, Comparing the Effectiveness of Synthetic Versus Analytic Phonics Teaching

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

— In our studies we have found that children in England perform significantly better when taught by the synthetic phonics method than by the National Literacy Strategy’s Progression in Phonics approach (which is an analytic phonics approach).

— In our seven year longitudinal study in Scotland, carried out in 13 classes, we have found the same advantage for the synthetic phonics method compared with the analytic phonics method.

— The best results were found when the synthetic phonics programme started at the beginning of the first year at school. This led to better spelling at the end of the second year at school for boys and girls, and better word reading for girls.

— The synthetic phonics method led to boys reading words better than girls by the end of the third year at school. They were still ahead at the end of the seventh year at school:

  The boys read words 3.9 years ahead of chronological age and were 2.0 years ahead in spelling.
  The girls were 3.1 years and 1.4 years ahead in word reading and spelling respectively.

— At the end of the seventh year at school, only 5.6% of children were more than two years behind chronological age in word reading, 10.1% were behind in spelling, and 14.9% were behind in reading comprehension.

— Children from disadvantaged homes read and spelt less well than children from advantaged homes with the analytic phonics approach, but performed as well as these children with the synthetic phonics approach.

— Writing skills did not differ between children from advantaged and disadvantaged homes with the synthetic phonics approach, and both groups performed better than would be expected on the basis of verbal ability.

WHAT IS ANALYTIC PHONICS?

In analytic phonics, the predominant method in the UK, letter sounds are taught after reading has already begun, children initially learning to read some words by sight, often in the context of meaningful text. In order to teach the letter sounds whole words sharing a common initial letter sound are presented to children, eg “milk”, “man”, “mother”. Attention is drawn to the /m/ sound heard at the beginning of the words. When all of the letter sounds have been taught in this way, attention is then drawn to letters at the ends of words, then in the middle, in consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words. Therefore children learn about letter sounds in the context of whole words. At this stage, which is generally at the end of the first year at school, children may also be taught to sound and blend CVC words, eg /c/ /a/ /t/ -> cat, but this is not a feature of all analytic phonics schemes. The method advocated in Progression in Phonics, in the National Literacy Strategy, resembles this approach, but also advocates that children learn early on to hear and manipulate sounds in spoken words without the help of letters. This is called phonemic awareness training.

WHAT IS SYNTHETIC PHONICS?

This is a very accelerated form of phonics that does not begin by establishing an initial sight vocabulary. With this approach, before children are introduced to books, they are taught letter sounds. After the first few of these have been taught they are shown how these sounds can be blended together to build up words. For example, when taught the letter sounds /t/ /p/ /a/ and /s/ the children can build up the words “tap”, “pat”, “pats”, “taps”, “a tap” etc. The children are not told the pronunciation of the new word by the teacher; the
children sound each letter in turn and then synthesise the sounds together in order to generate the pronunciation of the word. Thus the children construct the pronunciation for themselves. Most of the letter sound correspondences, including the consonant and vowel digraphs, can be taught in the space of a few months at the start of their first year at school. This means that the children can read many of the unfamiliar words they meet in text for themselves, without the assistance of the teacher. In our synthetic phonics programme, on which we present evidence below, children did not carry out a phonemic awareness programme separated either from the learning of letter sounds, or from reading and spelling activities.

**Analytic and Synthetic Phonics Contrast**

In analytic phonics, whole words are presented and pronounced by the teacher, and the children’s attention is only subsequently drawn to the information given by letter sound correspondences. The National Literacy Strategy’s Progression in Phonics uses an analytic phonics approach, supplemented by substantial phonemic awareness training programme. The sounding and blending element for pronouncing unfamiliar words is only introduced after children have learnt to read words by sight. Typically in the areas of England in which we have carried out studies of the National Literacy Strategy, it would not be until the third term of the first year at school that the most advanced children would be made aware of the importance of letter sound correspondences in all positions of words, which enables sounding and blending to be taught. An analytic phonics scheme such as this is usually not completed until the end of the third year at school. In synthetic phonics programmes sounding and blending is taught at the start of the year, before books are introduced, and the basic programme can be completed in a period of two to four months.

The new supplement to Progression in Phonics that was issued last May, Playing with Sounds, still emphasises rhyme and phonemic awareness training as a precursor to learning to read and spell. Early on it also emphasises sound-to-letter training for spelling, rather than letter-to-sound training for reading. In fact 16 letters are taught before children are shown how to blend letter sounds for reading. In the study of early synthetic phonics teaching in Scotland described below, sounding and blending for reading was taught after three letter sounds had been learnt in the first few weeks at school. However, a further two groups in Scotland started the synthetic phonics programme after Easter, and in the English school it was introduced at the start of the second term at school. As will be seen, a later start had implications for how well the children did, particularly in spelling.

1. **Study of the performance of Reception children on the Synthetic Phonics programme versus the National Literacy Strategy in a school in England**

![Figure 1](image)

Comparison of Synthetic Phonics versus the National Literacy Strategy in two classes in one school in England

The synthetic-phonics-taught children starting the programme in January, at the start of their second term at school. The programme lasted for around 30 minutes a day for 16 weeks, and was taught to the whole class. It can be seen that this class was six months younger than the other class (mean age 4.7 years compared with 5.2 years), but even so when tested in July had somewhat better word reading and spelling skills than the children taught by the National Literacy Strategy. Their reading was seven months above chronological age, and spelling was four months ahead. However, the children taught by the National Literacy Strategy in the same school were nearly three months behind their age in reading, and nearly one month behind in spelling. When the difference in age between the two classes was taken into account, the synthetic phonics taught children were statistically ahead of the National Literacy Strategy taught children in word reading and spelling.
2. **Study of children in primary schools in Clackmannanshire**

This study has just been completed, and covers a sample of around 300 children from the first to the seventh year of primary schooling. Children at the start of their first year in school were taught either by an analytic phonics method, by an analytic phonics programme supplemented by phonemic awareness training, or by the synthetic phonics method. All of the programmes were carried out for 20 minutes a day for 16 weeks, taught to the whole class. This sample was of somewhat below average verbal ability (mean score 92, when the average is 100), and there was a skew towards the children coming from homes of low socio-economic status.

(a) Comparison of children in March of the first year at school in three teaching programmes.

![Figure 2](image)

Comparison of children in March of the first year at school, comparing the three teaching programmes

The analytic phonics plus phonemic awareness programme, which the National Literacy Strategy’s Progression in Phonics programme most closely resembles, did not lead to better word reading and spelling than the analytic-phonics-only programme. The synthetic phonics programme was the most effective, the children reading words around seven months ahead of the children in the other two groups, and spelling around eight to nine months ahead. This was statistically significant for both reading and spelling.

After Easter, the children who had initially learnt by an analytic phonics approach then carried out the synthetic phonics programme.

(b) Comparison of the children at the end of the second year at school, when all groups had been taught the synthetic phonics programme.

![Figure 3](image)

Word reading, spelling and reading comprehension ages at the end of the second year at school
It can be seen that word reading and spelling are nearly a year above chronological age, and that reading comprehension is around six months above chronological age. However, the question arises as to whether there is an advantage in learning by a synthetic phonics approach right at the start of primary schooling.

Figure 4

Comparison of girls’ reading and spelling at the end of the second year at school, after all groups had carried out synthetic phonics programme

We found that the children who had learnt by the early synthetic phonics programme were significantly better spellers at the end of the second year at school than those who had started after Easter. At this stage, the boys performed equally well in word reading, regardless of which method they had started with. However, the girls (see Figure 4 above) read words significantly less well if they had started with an analytic phonics only programme.

(c) Comparison of sample at end of seventh year at school, by sex.

Figure 5

Comparison of synthetic phonics taught boys and girls at the end of the seventh year at school

At the end of the third year at school, we found that the boys were reading words significantly better than the girls. This was found for all subsequent years. At the end of the seventh year at school, see Figure 5 above, the synthetic phonics taught boys were reading words 3.9 years ahead of chronological age, and spelling 2.0 years ahead. The girls were reading 3.1 years ahead of chronological age, and spelling 1.4 years ahead of chronological age. The boys were statistically ahead of the girls in word reading and spelling. Both the boys’ and the girls’ reading comprehension was 3.5 months above chronological age. At this point we tested
vocabulary knowledge as this is a good predictor of educational achievement. Average performance is 100, so as the sample had a mean score of 92, these children were somewhat below average in vocabulary knowledge. As comprehension ability is closely associated with verbal ability, to be performing better than chronological age in reading comprehension with this level of vocabulary knowledge is very creditable.

(d) Underachievers.

(Figure 6)

Comparison of children more than 2 years behind for their age in word reading, spelling, and reading comprehension, in the second to the seventh year at school

It can be seen that the percentage of low achievers is small, especially considering that this is a fairly low ability sample that comes predominantly from a poor socio-economic background. Even at the end of the seventh year at primary school (which translates to the first year of secondary school in England age-wise) only 5.6% of the children were more than two years behind chronological age in word reading, 10.1% were behind in spelling, and 14.9% were behind in reading comprehension.

3. Disadvantaged children

(a) Comparison of reading and spelling by social background at end of second year at school

As stated above, many of the children in the study came from rather poor socio-economic backgrounds. Most came from very to moderately deprived homes, with less than half coming from moderately advantaged areas. We examined whether the synthetic phonics approach just gave a boost in literacy skills to children from advantaged backgrounds, or whether those from disadvantaged backgrounds also showed improved literacy skills.

(Figure 7)

Comparison of children from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds at the end of the second year at school, contrasting analytic versus synthetic phonics teaching
It can be seen in this comparison of 196 children that with analytic phonics teaching children from disadvantaged backgrounds showed word reading and spelling skills at much lower levels than the more advantaged children. With synthetic phonics teaching, this deficit no longer existed. The disadvantaged children were actually somewhat ahead of the advantaged children, but this may have been due to the fact that they had had the synthetic phonics programme right at the start of the school year, whereas the advantaged children had started the programme after Easter of the first year at school.

(b) Writing skills at the end of the sixth year at school.

![Figure 8](image)

Advanced writing skills were not trained in the synthetic phonics programme, but we decided to examine whether the early boost in word reading and spelling skills had implications for later writing skills. On the basis of the level of vocabulary knowledge found for this sample, these scores could be expected to be around 92. In an examination of the children’s ability to write text, it was found that they performed over 5 points above what would be expected from their levels of vocabulary knowledge. With mean writing scores of 97 and 98 respectively, the disadvantaged and moderately advantaged groups were performing close to the average of 100. Furthermore, the scores for the children from the poorest homes were only 1 point behind the more advantaged, which was not statistically significant.

Conclusions

— It can be seen that the synthetic phonics programme led to very advanced word reading and spelling skills, even for children of somewhat below average verbal ability who came from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. In fact, there was evidence for six year olds that the programme had eradicated the deficit in literacy skills normally found for children from poorer homes.

— There was also evidence that the earlier the synthetic phonics programme started the better this was for spelling ability, and that for girls this led to better word reading skills.

Does policy/guidance have a sound base in research evidence?

The Progression in Phonics and Playing with Sounds programmes have a significant rhyme and phonemic awareness training element, often without reference to letters and printed words. Our research has shown this teaching to be unnecessary. We believe it is claimed that these programmes are synthetic phonics ones, and therefore incorporate current research evidence on effective phonics programmes. We argue, however, that these are not synthetic phonics programmes because of the late start in teaching children to sound and blend.

If they are synthetic phonics programmes, then children learning by the National Literacy Strategy should do as well as children in the synthetic phonics programme used in our studies. We have found this not to be the case with Progression in Phonics.

The newly introduced Playing with Sounds programme brings in sounding and blending earlier than Progression in Phonics. It would be interesting to know if this programme was tested in schools using standardised tests of reading and spelling before and after the programme started, and whether comparisons...
were made with performance in schools not carrying out the programme. Our research suggests that although Playing with Sounds makes a move towards a synthetic phonics approach, it is unlikely to be as effective for children as an early start synthetic phonics programme, implemented soon after entering school.

**INTRODUCTION OF EARLY LITERACY STRATEGIES/RELATIVE VALUE OF PRE-LITERACY EXPERIENCE**

We have so far successfully introduced the synthetic phonics programme to children of average age 4.7 years, and have had no difficulty in enabling such children to make an excellent start in learning to read and spell. This programme is very interactive, with a lot of pupil involvement, but it does not contain the play element found in the National Literacy Strategy, nor does it seek to develop phonemic awareness skills prior to learning to read.

*February 2005*

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**Memorandum submitted by Sue Lloyd, retired teacher and co-author**  
**Jolly Phonics**

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

In the late 1970s I taught Reception children at Woods Loke PS, Lowestoft, Suffolk. During this period the school used the initial teaching alphabet (ita). The method of teaching reading was then altered from a “look and say” method to a synthetic phonics approach. The Head of Infants implemented this change in order to help the children who were failing with our old approach. Immediately this change in method proved to be far more successful. Also, the improvement was clearly reflected on the county standardised 6+ Young’s Reading Test, the average quotient rising from 102.6 to 108.4.

A few years later we took part in a research project by Dr Douglas Pidgeon. His philosophy was that the children should be able to hear all the sounds in words before being taught to read or write. When we incorporated this training into our usual teaching, we realised that some children were poor at hearing the sounds in words, and that it was possible to teach them this skill. Once again we had an improvement in our standardised reading test scores, the average quotient rising to 110+. To take an average quotient up eight points is highly significant. The most encouraging aspect was that this training particularly helped the bottom group of children.

Naturally we were delighted to see this improvement in our children, and expected our Local Education Authority (LEA) to be equally pleased. Much to our amazement, our advisor would not even come in and see this improvement. She disapproved of ita and phonics. This was quite an eye opener. From these experiences I realised that method of teaching made all the difference between success and failure, and that the advisors were not looking for the best ways of teaching children. Over the next two decades, after changing from ita to traditional orthography, I was able to confirm that the improvement had been caused by changing to synthetic phonics, and was not linked to the ita. I also spent time looking at scientific research, and trying to understand why teachers were being wrongly advised. My quest to find the answers led me to deduce the reasons for the reading problems which I have itemised below. In 1990 I met Christopher Jolly, who really was interested in my findings, and this was the start of Jolly Phonics.

*The reasons why we have problems with the teaching of reading*

- The education system itself causes the problems.
- New ideas tend to come from academic, charismatic gurus, who have no relevant classroom experience.
- Ideas are then presented at the top and, in a similar fashion to pyramid selling, permeate, via the Teacher Training Authorities (TTA) and LEA advisory services, to the schools and teachers in the classrooms.
- Promotion depends on being willing to embrace the latest ideas. This encourages headteachers, or aspiring headteachers, to fall in with these ideas.
- The gurus, lecturers and advisors who are involved in promoting the ideas have not been held accountable to anyone. They virtually never provide evidence that the ideas they are passing on have been tested in the classroom, with evidence-based research to back them up.
- State Education is a powerful monopoly, which, if not checked, can become extremely inefficient. This has certainly happened in England, particularly with the introduction of wrong methods for teaching reading. Many teachers have tried to resist what they knew were misguided ideas, but the system was too strong.
**Why the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) has largely been a failure**

— Choosing the wrong method of phonics instruction was, in my view, the main cause of the NLS failure, particularly for boys and the bottom group of children. Instead of choosing the much more effective synthetic phonics approach, the NLS authors elected to use a mixture of methods, which were more akin to analytic phonics.

— The writers of the NLS should not have published and promoted materials that they knew were not nearly effective enough. The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) tested the National Literacy Project and reported that the children’s reading scores were still significantly below the national average. With these dismal results the whole project should have been scrapped. Instead, a few changes were made, and the faulty NLS teaching programme was forced into schools. We know that it was not supposed to be mandatory, but in reality teachers saw it as mandatory. Once again the power of this monopoly was too great.

— The revised NLS should have been tested in the classrooms, using evidence-based scientific research, and only then passed on to the teachers if the results were higher than any other reading programmes.

— The NLS initiatives were supposed to correct the imbalance between the results of boys and girls, as well as prevent the serious reading failure of the bottom 25%. Fairly soon it was obvious that this initiative was not working for these particular groups. Unfortunately there could be no serious discussions about this failure. Everyone at the top closed ranks. Teachers like myself who were in schools that used synthetic phonics and were achieving the goals that the NLS was supposed to reach, were brushed aside.

— Debate in education has never really been encouraged. Teachers were, and still are, expected to listen to the lecturers/advisors, and to follow their advice. BUT the advice we have been given has nearly always been faulty! This is why I think, as stated earlier, “the education system itself causes the problems”, and, in my view, is in great need of reform.

**Solutions**

— Follow the Scottish example and provide everyone with the evidence-based research that clearly shows that synthetic phonics is the most effective way to teach reading. (Note that the NLS is not a true synthetic phonics programme. ERR, Fast Phonics First, Step-by-Step, rml and Jolly Phonics are synthetic phonics programmes.)

— Commission more scientific evidence-based research, with all the necessary controls, into aspects of teaching reading that have not been sufficiently examined eg How necessary are decodable texts? Schools should be informed of the results.

— Transfer LEA advisors back into the classroom, and give the extra money directly to schools. Students undergoing teacher-training should be informed of the evidence-based research into the teaching of reading and writing, taught about the opaque alphabetic code of English, and given lessons in how to teach synthetic phonics.

— Scrap the 7+ SATs. Instead, use simple group standardised reading and spelling tests at the end of each year. This would enable a teacher to know how effective her teaching had been that year, and would let parents know how their children were progressing.

It is possible to have all children, apart from the 2% with clinical disorders, reading and writing fluently before they enter Year 3. We must look to science, and effective schools, to give us the answers, not fads and fashions.

*January 2005*

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**Memorandum submitted by Ruth Miskin**

**FOR CHILDREN AGED 5–8**

**READING**

The children:

— learn 44 sounds and the corresponding letters/letter groups using simple picture prompts
— learn to read words using sound blending
— read lively stories featuring words they have learned to sound out
— show that they comprehend the stories by answering “Find It” and “Prove It” discussion questions
**WRITING**

The children:
- learn to write the letters/letter groups which represent the 44 sounds
- learn to write words by saying the sounds and graphemes
- write simple sentences
- compose stories based on picture strips
- compose a range of texts using discussion prompts

**TALKING**

Children are assessed so they work with children at the same level. This allows them to take a full part in all lessons.

They work in pairs so that they:
- answer every question
- practise every activity with their partner
- take turns in talking to each other

**IMPLEMENTATION**

- The systematic and lively programme is organised by an in-school manager.
- All staff (teachers and assistants) are trained together by one of our trainers who has taught and managed the programme (no cascade training is used).
- The children read and write for an hour each day, grouped according to their reading level. (Two, 20 minute sessions for Reception children.)
- Children work with a partner to practise what they have been taught. This means that all children participate during the whole lesson; there is no “down time”.
- Children with learning difficulties are supported individually every day from the very start of the programme.

**EXTRACTS FROM OFSTED**

*Comments on Read Write Inc by Ruth Miskin Literacy*

Child’s Hill School, Barnet
- Pupils in Years 1 and 2 are achieving well because of the systematic teaching of phonics.
- Teaching in Years 1 and 2 is very good—The phonics programme is very well managed.

Standards in Years 1 and 2 are rising quickly. In October 2003, the school introduced a phonic-based literacy programme to tackle low standards in literacy at this stage. There is a clear evidence of improvement in both reading and writing. Pupils work in groups organised according to attainment and some pupils in Years 3 and 4 are also included in this intensive programme. Work is matched very accurately to pupils’ needs, and they respond very well to the brisk pace and variety of activities within each session. Achievement is good. Most pupils are proud of their learning. They apply their phonics skills to read new and unfamiliar words and make logical attempts when they are spelling. Comprehension and handwriting skills are developing well alongside the phonic skills. Teaching in Years 1 and 2 is very good. Learning support assistants make a strong contribution to the success of this programme. All staff are well prepared and are committed to the programme. They manage groups very well, using praise and encouragement to keep pupils focused.

Kobi Nazrul Primary School, Tower Hamlets

Pupils of higher attainment are well challenged and the setting in literacy helps teachers to focus work at the correct level according to prior attainment and use of English language. The school is continuing to develop its provision for gifted and talented pupils and their needs are currently met appropriately. Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress in relation to their ability and sometime achieve average standards by the time they leave school. Their standards in reading are particularly good. This in itself is very good as pupils frequently enter the school with low attainment in communication, language, literacy and mathematics. These results also show how the support provided by grouping pupils of similar ability provides a good basis for their learning thereby enabling them to make very good progress.
From the information provided by the school and through observation and discussion with pupils, it is clear that there is no significant difference in the achievement of pupils from various minority ethnic groups. Because of the excellent focus on inclusion, all pupils have access to a stimulating curriculum which meets their needs and helps them to achieve very well.

Provision in English is very good

Main strengths and weaknesses:
— Standards in English are above average by the time pupils leave the school because the quality of teaching is generally very good and as a result pupils achieve very well.
— The curriculum, including planning for the development of pupils’ literacy skills across other subjects and wider English curriculum, is very well developed and impacts strongly on pupils’ achievement.
— Teachers have very high expectations which ensures that pupils behave well in lessons and demonstrate very positive attitudes to their learning.
— Teachers know their pupils very well and as a result planning is comprehensive and teaching meets the needs of all pupils well.
— Leadership and management of English are very good and support the innovative approach to developing pupils’ skills in oracy and literacy.

St Luke’s Primary School, Tower Hamlets

Main strengths and weaknesses:
— A good formal teaching plan for developing communication skills.
— The focus on improving speaking, listening, reading and writing.
— The use of small group sessions.

The impact of a commercial literacy programme and the organisation of lessons have been significant in raising standards. The lessons learnt are being transferred to mathematics. Science standards have improved because the co-ordinator has a firm grasp on the priorities and has closely monitored its implementation. There are now plans to improve other subjects.

The formal teaching of literacy skills is conducted well in both Nursery and Reception classes. Children enjoy particularly good development in their literacy groups where all children make good progress towards learning to read and learning how different blends of letters form sounds. Those who have found difficulty gain in confidence and make very good progress.

Old Ford Primary School, Tower Hamlets

A successful intervention programme that compliments the national literacy strategy has been in operation this year. Very good training for teaching and support staff has provided them with high levels of competence in teaching lower-attaining pupils through this scheme. Again, the teaching of this is finely targeted to pupils’ individual competencies, so pupils of different ages sometimes study together.

Herrick Primary School, Leicester

In Reception classes the newly introduced literacy programme is having a significant impact and children are learning their letter sounds very competently.

Provision for English is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses.
— Standards are improving because all pupils are achieving well.
— The curriculum for younger pupils, including the introduction of a detailed literacy programme is very good. This is resulting in rising standards, especially in reading; and
— The consistently good quality of teaching takes very good account of the needs of pupils with English as an additional language and this ensures that pupils throughout the school learn well. Pupils listen attentively when they expect that the lesson will be interesting.

The dedicated use of the literacy programme for teaching reading and writing is having a very positive effect in Years 1 and 2. Pupils have high levels of confidence and enthusiasm when reading and writing and their accuracy is developing well.
— The use of a commercial literacy scheme is helping to raise standards in reading particularly for lower attaining pupils;
— The effective management provided by the co-ordinator and the focus on raising standards; and
— The very good support and teamwork provided by learning support assistants.

Pheasey Park Farm Primary School, Walsall
— The teaching of the basic skills of reading and writing is effective;
— Assessment is thorough and used to plan the next steps in learning; and
— Very effective use is made of the teaching assistants to support learning.

The teachers have high expectations that the children will participate fully in the good literacy activities provided. This means that all children make good progress overall in gaining communication, language and literacy skills, and they achieve well.

The teachers develop and build the children’s early reading skills through the sharing of books and stories and the systematic teaching of phonics skills (the sounds of the letters and syllables of words). By the end of the reception year, most are able to retell the stories they have read and some of the children read fluently.

The teaching of writing is very good because the children are encouraged to use their developing knowledge of letter sounds and shapes to help them begin to write unfamiliar words for themselves. Throughout the Foundation Stage the children are provided with a good range of opportunities to write for different purposes and this promotes good levels of achievement.

Manor Hall Middle School, Southwick
The school has made a great effort to improve pupils reading skills. Consequently, by Year 6 and in Year 7, standards in reading are average. Overall, this represents good achievement. In particular, the reading standards of pupils of lower attainment have increased significantly through the school’s successful implementation of the Ruth Miskin Literacy Programme. There are abundant opportunities for pupils to engage in individual, paired, group and silent work.

Chisenhale, Tower Hamlets
One very good initiative that is raising standards is the structured phonics programme which is helping some pupils in Years 4 to 6 catch up with some of their basic skills. This has only just begun but pupils are already beginning to achieve well. Adults taking the groups are very well trained and work very effectively with pupils who are keen and very responsive and clearly enjoy the sessions. They relate well to adults and there is a dynamic atmosphere within the sessions which stimulates and excites the children in their learning. The confidence and self-esteem are growing steadily because they can see their own success. This encourages them to work even harder.

Folville Juniors Leicester
The school has worked hard during the last few years to raise pupil’s attainment, particularly in oracy in writing.

The school has successfully introduced a new commercial literacy project particularly to target those pupils identified as not making enough progress because of poor skills of word building. The intensive programme is highly structured and is delivered at a rigorous pace for pupils who are regularly withdrawn from literacy lessons. Inspection evidence indicates that during these lessons pupils work very hard, are well motivated and find learning a rewarding experience, which effectively raise their self-esteem. As a result the less confident including those with SEN or English as an additional language make good progress and achieve well.

Standards on English have improved in 2004 over those gained in 2003; one factor in this improvement is the school’s recent emphasis on the subject [English] and the acquisition of a commercial scheme.

Greenwich Pilot Study
Evaluation of Pilot Study
by Professor Kathryn Riley

SUMMARY
Children following the RML programme who started at the beginning of the school year with either average or below average levels in literacy skills achieved significantly higher scores on a reading accuracy assessment at the end of the school year than children following the National Literacy Strategy.

University of Leicester
Interim Report
Dr Morag Hunter—Carsch
Very broadly, and in summary, it can be stated at this point that in addition to the extensive initial testing of selected pupils from nine schools and interim testing of two schools, qualitative data gathered from teacher’s meetings, school visits and interviews with staff from the initial seven experimental schools (six primary and one secondary) suggest that the RML programme is having a strongly positive impact on all concerned.

The analysis of the qualitative data for the current project suggest that the RML programme has not only excellent face validity but it also appears to promote and sustain positive attitudes on the part of those involved in teaching the RML programme. It appears that the investment in training and shared awareness of the “whole-school” approach desired by the programme originator is proving to be important and beneficial in bringing about increased attentiveness and interest in literacy learning on the part of pupils.

Additionally, learning support staff and some parents of the experimental group have spontaneously commented on their observations of the positive impact of RML.

Hackney EAZ report

The best outcomes of RML for teachers and learners, include the following:

— It has led to a very sound grasp of phonics theory by teachers and support staff.
— Finger spelling has had a marked effect on raising pupils’ phonemic awareness.
— It has led to improved behaviour—as well as reducing potential disaffection, RML has raised the emphasis on behaviour which is much improved due to the expectation of listening.

Skinners is the one secondary school in the project, initiated independently of the EAZ but recently the recipient of retrospective funding. All year 7/8/9 students falling below a reading age threshold are withdrawn from timetable for the first period of each day, and work on RML 2. The head and teachers are very committed to the programme, which they say has been more successful than any other they have tried, and have largely overcome the reluctance of colleagues who lose teaching time with these students in their own subjects where they fall in period 1. The students spoken to are generally very positive, and recognise the difference it has made to them . . .

Other subject teachers in the school report that the RML pupils display greater confidence and motivation, and that they complete more homework. These pupils have started to work as reading mentors with year 3 children in a neighbouring primary school:

— It has been characterised by a transfer of skills into other areas of curriculum.
— The training for staff is excellent
— It has led to improved staff working practices and more consistent approaches.
— It has raised the esteem of primary helpers—they have moved beyond behaviour management into a really professional role.
— Managing helpers has been good professional development for teachers.
— Children are much more focussed on learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>L 2+</th>
<th>L 2B+</th>
<th>L 3+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MF 2b+</td>
<td>gains 26%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BR 2b+</td>
<td>gains 30%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
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<td>62</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
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<td>2004</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CI 2b+</td>
<td>gains 20%</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>2003</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>68</td>
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<tr>
<td>HI 2b+</td>
<td>gains 7%</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>75</td>
<td>72</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>79</td>
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<tr>
<td>MR 2b+</td>
<td>gains 19%</td>
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<td>2003</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>70</td>
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<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>L 2+</td>
<td>L 2B+</td>
<td>L 3+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>R</td>
<td>W</td>
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<tr>
<td>HZ* rml from Sept 02 2b+ 31%</td>
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<td>2002</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>73</td>
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<td>HR* rml from Sept 02 2b+ 6%</td>
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<td>83</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>76</td>
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<tr>
<td>IA* rml from Sept 02 2b+ rise 16%</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>76</td>
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**WALSALL**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>ES 2b+ gains 28%</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2c</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>17%</td>
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**Panda**

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<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>L2+</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2b</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L3</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
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**RD 2b+ gains 22%**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L2+</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2b+</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L3</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>37%</td>
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**NW 2b+ gains 30%**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L2+</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2b+</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L3</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>13%</td>
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</table>

**READING**

**GR 2b+ gains 22%**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L2+</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2b+</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L3</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>15%</td>
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</table>

**BC 2b+ gains 16%**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L2+</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2b+</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L3</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>41%</td>
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**READING**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L2+</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2b+</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L3</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
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</table>
**OLD TRAFFORD**

OT 2b+ gains 16%

**READING**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L2+</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>81%</td>
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<tr>
<td>L2b+</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L3</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>20%</td>
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</table>

**READ WRITE INC BY RUTH MISKIN READING RESULTS**

**Enfield**

CH 2b+ gains 27%

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Stage 1</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2+</td>
<td>2B+</td>
<td>2+</td>
<td>2B+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English–Reading</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>82%</td>
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</table>

**Tower Hamlets**

C B 2b+ gains 28%

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Stage 1</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2+</td>
<td>2B+</td>
<td>2+</td>
<td>2B+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English–Reading</td>
<td>78.1</td>
<td>56.3</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C G 2b+ gains 21%

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Stage 1</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2+</td>
<td>2B+</td>
<td>2+</td>
<td>2B+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English–Reading</td>
<td>78.1</td>
<td>56.3</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
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</table>

KN 2b gains 7% (already at 93%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Stage 1</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2+</td>
<td>2B+</td>
<td>2+</td>
<td>2B+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English–Reading</td>
<td>93.1</td>
<td>93.1</td>
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SL 2b+ gains 41%

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<th>2002</th>
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</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2+</td>
<td>2B+</td>
<td>2+</td>
<td>2B+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English–Reading</td>
<td>67.9</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>96</td>
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WD 2b gains 23%

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2+</td>
<td>2B+</td>
<td>2+</td>
<td>2B+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English–Reading</td>
<td>82.6</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>76</td>
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</table>
### Bow Boys Tower Hamlets

**PILOT STUDY OF FIRST DRAFT RML 2**
(Further developed into Read Write Inc 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Reading age</th>
<th>Months gained</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>September 2002</td>
<td>September 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>− 6 yrs</td>
<td>7:10 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>− 6</td>
<td>8:03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:01</td>
<td>9:09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:04</td>
<td>8:06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>− 6</td>
<td>7:11</td>
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<td>7:07</td>
<td>8:11</td>
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<td>8:00</td>
<td>9:11</td>
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<tr>
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<td>− 6</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Year 8</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8:04</td>
<td>10:01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We used the Suffolk reading test. These are comprehension ages, not decoding. All of the students could decode perfectly by the end of the programme.

The students who had a reading age of nine years and above were recommended for the programme mainly because of extreme spelling difficulties. It was thought they would benefit and they did!

*7 February 2005*

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**Memorandum submitted by Sue Lloyd**

**WEST COUNTRY SYNTHETIC PHONICS SCHOOL—**
**LARGE PRIMARY WITH LOW ENTRY ASSESSMENT**

— 94% achieved Level 4 (KS2 Sats) in synthetic phonics school compared to 77% in England (maintained only)

— 65% achieved Level 5 (KS2 Sats) in synthetic phonics school compared to 26% in England (maintained only)

— No children below Level 3B (KS2 Sats) (including a child whose intellectual ability was below the 1st percentile) compared to 7% Level 2 and below in England (maintained only)

— 33.3% boys achieved Level 5 writing compared to 11% nationally (2003 KS2 Sats)

— 21.2% girls achieved Level 5 writing compared to 20% nationally (2003 KS2 Sats)

— no significant difference in literacy skills between boys and girls;

— no significant difference between children with summer birthdays and others;

— no children with English as an Additional Language on the SEN register; and

— no significant difference in literacy skills between children eligible for free school meals and others.

KS1 to KS2 National Curriculum Points Progress for Reading and Writing is 13.7. This school’s figure is considered to be highly significant.
Examining the progress of individual pupils, it was noticed that a large number of pupils, particularly in the middle or bottom third of ability performed significantly above expectations in English. These pupils received Sound Discovery interventions during Key Stage 2. Also in mainstream classes there was a synthetic phonics rich environment.

### Graphs submitted by Suffolk Reading Test—Woods Loke Primary School 2003

![Graph](image1)

### Suffolk Reading Test—Islington Secondary Schools 1995

![Graph](image2)

7 February 2005
Q261 Chairman: Good afternoon, may I welcome Ruth Miskin, Professor Rhona Johnston and Sue Lloyd to this formal Select Committee meeting. We have had the pleasure of meeting you informally recently at a seminar and we should like to get some of the views you expressed there on public record. It is very good of you to give us another considerable amount of your time. Thank you very much indeed. As you can tell from the Chairman’s voice, he will be less talkative than he was in the seminar. Could we get started? Is there one of you who would like to come up with your point of view in terms of your views on the use of synthetic phonics in teaching children to read or do you want to go straight to questions?

Ms Lloyd: It is important to try to explain what synthetic phonics is. Back in the late 1970s our school changed to synthetic phonics. We used to use the Look-and-Say, we had our words on flash cards and it worked reasonably well. However, there was always a big group of children who did not do well. It was our head of department who looked at this and said they did not know their letter sounds when they should have done. She suggested that we actually start teaching the letter sounds and teach them how to blend words using those letter sounds. Immediately we had a huge increase in the results. Then we had another incident where we were asked to take part in a research project where the children were to be taught to hear the sounds in words. After about three or four weeks we found we could easily get the children to hear that hat is “/h//a//t/” bat is “/b//a//t/” and let is “/l/e/t/” and so on. When we put this in we had another big rise and we reduced the children who used to be below average and we got them into the higher area. That made me realise that the method can work because we still had the same teachers and the same children from the same areas, yet we had this huge rise from an average of 102 quotient to 110+ on county standardised reading tests. We thought it was very interesting that by changing the method we could get such a huge increase, so I went to the local authority and blend it and work out what it is. When you come across an unfamiliar word, sound and blending it and work out what it is. This is how it came out and my colleague Sara Wernham joined me on this and we have found that when teachers follow this programme they get very much higher results. If they try to mix and match with the National Literacy Strategy, where they are being recommended to read books that they cannot actually decode or work the words out for themselves, then you water down the effectiveness. That is why I think it is very important that everybody knows how effective this synthetic phonics is.

Q262 Chairman: So, Sue Lloyd, it would be fair to say you are both a practitioner of synthetic phonics and also you have a commercial interest in running a business that sells that particular way of learning to read.

Ms Lloyd: That is right, yes. We found it worked in the classroom and then Christopher Jolly said write it. That is how it came out and my colleague Sara Wernham joined me on this and we have found that when teachers follow this programme they get very much higher results. If they try to mix and match with the National Literacy Strategy, where they are being recommended to read books that they cannot actually decode or work the words out for themselves, then you water down the effectiveness. That is why I think it is very important that everybody knows how effective this synthetic phonics is.

Ms Lloyd: That is right, yes. We found it worked in the classroom and then Christopher Jolly said write it. That is how it came out and my colleague Sara Wernham joined me on this and we have found that when teachers follow this programme they get very much higher results. If they try to mix and match with the National Literacy Strategy, where they are being recommended to read books that they cannot actually decode or work the words out for themselves, then you water down the effectiveness. That is why I think it is very important that everybody knows how effective this synthetic phonics is.

Q263 Chairman: Professor Johnston, you are an academic and you have researched this area. Are your conclusions with Sue Lloyd, that it is phonics, synthetic phonics and nothing but phonics? Is this the true Holy Grail in learning to read?

Prof Johnston: Yes, in the early stages. It suits the children’s developmental level and their understanding of what they are doing in the reading task. We do not give children conflicting cues. We do not say “Guess from text what it is”. They are told “When you come across an unfamiliar word, sound and blend it and work out what it is”.

Q264 Chairman: We will come back to the research work you have done on this a little later. Ruth Miskin, what is your view on the importance of teaching in this way?

Ms Miskin: Having used many other methods of teaching reading in my long teaching career, it was when I first came to Tower Hamlets that I really realised the huge impact it could have. We taught children to learn basic letter sounds really, really quickly, so that they could read them effortlessly and then they could read some words effortlessly and the impact that that can have, the empowering effect on children who may have been considered in the past not to be able to read, or hard to teach to read, was massive. If we just think about it in terms of teaching the children some sounds, they are going to read them very quickly and going to go “b-t-n-at-a-s-s-d-m” really quickly like that, because we have taught them, using simple little ways, little cues to help them remember what they are which is very important.
Both Sue and I use cuing systems, so it is really easy for them to learn sounds. Then of course, again, if they know these we up the speed, so they go “m-a-s-t” then of course they can read this.

Q265 Chairman: Hang on. You are going to destroy Gurney’s reporter’s ability to report this, if you are not careful.

Ms Miskin: Okay, Chairman, I beg your pardon. They can read the word “s-a-d” because they can read these very quickly. If we multiply the number of words that the children can read and then we give them a little story, a pleasant little story, where there are all the words they can work out for themselves, they are given a book they can read, you see children going “I can read this. I can read all of it”. The fact that they can actually work those words out is based on this: if a child can decode a text effortlessly, it means then that all their resources, all their energies go into working out what the book is all about. If you have to work very hard at reading every single word that you come across, asking yourself “Shall I use a picture cue? Shall I use a context cue? Shall I use a picture cue with a letter cue? Shall I read on a little bit and try to work out what the word is in the middle?”, the child cannot make that decision whilst they are reading. The children who are at the lower end find that almost impossible to do, so then they get the image of themselves as not being very good readers. But if you give children all the time things they can do, things that are manageable, success breeds success, the rich get richer and, as Keith Stanovich says, who is one of the major researchers in the States, children are reading more advanced children’s literature by the age of seven. I am showing Harry Potter here; many of our children can read this. Now, I just picked up this Harry Potter book and what Keith Stanovich is saying is that these books contain vocabulary that they would not come across if they could not read this book. In other words, the rarity of language that children find in books is not in our everyday speech. Therefore the importance of getting children to be able to decode easily and comfortably words like leather bound book, eagle feather, fourteenth century, shriek, occasion, medieval, muggles, parchment, downtrodden, Aunt Petunia will get them to believe that they can read this book. They cannot use picture cues for Aunt Petunia.

Chairman: Well that sets us off to a good start. I am going to ask you not to flash a card at me again because Gurney’s reporters are going to be very upset. Let us get onto the questioning then. Helen, you are going to start off the questioning.

Q266 Helen Jones: That was very interesting, but I think you said that you preferred the approach of synthetic phonics from your experience rather than the National Literacy Strategy. Yet a number of assessments of the NLS have shown that it actually improves children’s reading and leads to a rising trend in the number of children reaching the required standard by 11. What in your view is the reason for that, because your evidence seemed to indicate that children ought not to be muddled by different cues, if I may use that word? So why is the National Literacy Strategy successful then?

Ms Lloyd: Because if you have no phonics, that is the absolute worst thing. If you have some phonics, you are going to get an improvement and this is what has happened. If you could just have a look here, this is the type of graph you had of the reading results before the National Literacy Strategy and this was the result in Islington. All the schools in Islington were tested and they should have had the normal natural bell-shaped curve with 100 in the middle being the average. If you look here, we have 17.9% at the very bottom end and it is not even the very bottom mark, it is below that bottom quotient. This means that these children really have absolutely no idea how to read at all. This is why the government felt it was important to bring in phonics, because this is what had gone out of the teaching. It had become the fashion not to do phonics and to look down on people who actually did blendings. It then took them into the average, so the NLS had more or less taken us into the middle. However, what had not been understood was that there was a new phonics type of programme, synthetic phonics and when it was done properly, where you built up from small to large, you got the much higher results; the whole average had gone towards the other end, and the highest was 115 instead of the average of 100. (This is to my mind the first one.) Islington was caused exactly by the whole language philosophy which was all right for children who could read, it had some very good ideas once they could read, but it was absolutely disastrous for the children who could not read. They have to have letter knowledge to be able to get the blending that Ruth and Rhona talk about; they have to master this blending to become good readers and this is the effect. There is another school here—

Q267 Helen Jones: May I just ask you something before you go on to that, please? I think it is important we are measuring like with like here. Are the two graphs you showed us relating to the same group of children taught by different methods? The Committee is interested in what works, but to measure the relative success of different methods you need to be measuring them over a similar cohort of children, do you not?

Ms Lloyd: There are the same reading tests, the Suffolk reading test, which is very well respected.

Q268 Helen Jones: Yes, but that is not what I am asking you. I am asking you about similar cohorts of children. Are they measured against similar cohorts of children?
Q269 Helen Jones: To work out the relative success of these methods, and perhaps other witnesses would like to comment on that for the members, we would need a very rigorous piece of research, would we not, which measured the progress of relatively similar cohorts of children using different methods of teaching reading? Are any of you aware of that being done anywhere? Can you enlighten the Committee with any evidence that might help us on this?

Prof Johnston: Yes. This is a study that we did in Clackmannanshire. This was a study of 13 classes and we attempted to match schools on levels of deprivation, but actually it is a rather deprived region and in the end we ended up with our synthetic phonics trained group in the areas of most deprivation. It is very well known that children from areas of deprivation do much less well in reading, so we actually set ourselves a very difficult task in trying to boost those children above the other two groups.

There were three programmes. One of them was synthetic phonics, one of them was an analytic phonics programme that followed the typical regime used in Scotland, and the third one was an analytic phonics programme which had a very rigorous phonemic awareness training programme and that more closely resembles the National Literacy Strategy’s Progression in Phonics programme. So we gave children in these groups that we compared programmes which lasted 20 minutes a day for 16 weeks. We pre-tested to find out what skills they had to start with and we had no imbalances there. We then post-tested after 16 weeks. What we found was that the children that had had the synthetic phonics programme were reading seven months ahead of the other groups of children and spelling between eight and nine months ahead of the other two groups; indeed, they were reading and spelling around seven years above their chronological age. So we had a big facilitation there.

Q270 Helen Jones: What age group was that?

Prof Johnston: These children were five-year-olds, so this is Primary 1 in Scotland, which is equivalent to reception in England.

Q271 Helen Jones: Thank you, that is helpful. May I then put to you, and perhaps any of the panel might like to comment on this, a question arising from that? If you were talking about using synthetic phonics, at what age do you think it would best be introduced?

Prof Johnston: There is no doubt that it must be the first thing that you do.

Q272 Helen Jones: When?

Prof Johnston: Our programme was administered four weeks after starting school. After the 16-week programme, the region were very keen for children in the other two groups to be taught the method and they were taught it and they learned it by the end of the first year at school. We then looked at performance at the end of the second year at school to see whether it mattered whether you had been early in the programme or later. What we found was that the girls who had done synthetic phonics early in their first year at school were better readers at the end of their second year at school and in fact for both boys and girls, if they had done synthetic phonics early in the first year at school, they were better spellers. So there were long-term consequences of when they started.

Q273 Helen Jones: What about nursery children?

Ms Lloyd: Nursery children were tested in Canada with a research programme. A nursery teacher saw that they were having a good time in the equivalent to reception in Canada and she thought she would have a go and do the teaching. It did not count as research to start off with, but they did then set it up so it was a proper research programme with the controls. They found that the children at four were just as easily able to learn to read as the children at five.

Q274 Helen Jones: How do we account then for synthetic phonics, one of them was an analytic phonics programme that followed the typical regime used in Scotland, where children do no formal reading until they start school, they start school much later than our children, but they catch us up in reading and often pass many of our children very quickly and that is based on no formal teaching in nursery or kindergarten, but a lot of pre-reading teaching in colours, sounds, language, designs and so on?

Ms Miskin: You just have to decide when. You cannot say “Yes, all children must learn to read at four” or “All children must learn to read at five”. When you decide to teach a child to read, you have to get it right first time, because you must not let a child fail when they are four or five or six, or whenever it is. For example, we have so many children going through the system now who by the time they are seven or eight might have been on five different systems, five different catch-up programmes and that is key. I was head teacher in Tower Hamlets and I had the most delightful reception and nursery teacher. I do not want you to have an image of phonics as just being deadly dull, with children at desks filling in horrible little work sheets. I am talking about it being a dinosaur and going “d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-dinosaur” and they are all making these big actions the air going round going “d-d-d-d-d”, but they are hearing the sound and then making a great big letter in the air and going “d” and then they are going “a-a-a-a” and then “m-m-mountain”. It is not formal phonic teaching. Then we have a little puppet called Fred. It is not just what you do, it is how you do it and if you can make children have a little game and say “Fred talk time” and you are all sitting round, the little children in front of you, and you say “Right, who am I going to ch-oose” and they are going “choose, choose, choose me, choose me”. They have heard the word “choose”, they put choose together and they are starting to blend. Or it could be “I want you all now to put your hand on your n-o-s-e” and they are going “n-o-s-e, n-o-s-e, nose”. That is just blending. Then of course if they know a few letters, suddenly these little tots are learning them, but if you find a child who is
obviously really hardly speaking English, you cannot say “Right, come on, letter sounds”; that would just be insensitive. You would see them hanging around the group watching and suddenly goes “m-m-m” and joining in.

Q275 Helen Jones: What you are telling us really is that the important things are enjoyment and early success.

Ms Miskin: Totally; totally. You have to be really sure that with what you are doing, you will get success because if there is any shadow of a doubt that you will not, you are just saying “Hello child, I am going to help you fail in your reception year”.

Q276 Helen Jones: May I just move on? We are talking about phonics with children in the very early years of education and I think two things arise from that which you could perhaps help us with. First of all, English is not a phonetic language, so that as children move on, they do need to pick up other clues about how to get the meaning of words. Do you have anything to tell us about how you can move children on, if you start them off with phonics, to picking up the other clues about meaning and words? Advanced readers do that. I think Sue Lloyd was a bit scathing about prediction used in the National Literacy Strategy, but in fact when all of us read, we do use prediction, that is how we read.

Ms Lloyd: There is prediction for the meaning, but what we are saying is very poor is just trying to predict what the word is for word identification, to try to work out what that word actually says. Really the children have to learn how to work it out from the letters and English is a more complicated code, which is why in Finland it is much easier because it is a transparent alphabet. Many researchers feel that because English is more complicated it actually does need to be taught earlier. There is a code and if you actually build up gradually, bit by bit, in the same way that Ruth is saying and with Rhona’s ideas as well, the children can take this on board. Where they go wrong is where they are expected to memorise whole words and not process the letters, where they are expected to try and just guess at these words because they go into the habit of guessing and they do not know which strategy to choose. If they are trained and taught just always to work it out from the letters . . .

Q277 Helen Jones: But you cannot just always work it out from the letters later on, can you?

Ms Lloyd: You can 90-odd% of the time.

Q278 Helen Jones: You cannot.

Ms Lloyd: Yes, you can when you know about your sounds like /ai/, /ei/, /ie/, /oa/, /oe/, /oo/ etc.

Q279 Helen Jones: What about know, “k-n-o-w”?

Ms Miskin: Would it be possible just to explain? Sometime the idea of phonics is the “c-a-t” and it is a transparent code that people are thinking about. In our language we have 44-odd sounds, the “i-a-um-st-eek-it” in sounds; so 44 sounds. Now those sounds, say you were learning Spanish, are represented by one grapheme, one representation. If you are learning Spanish, for every speech sound you have one neat little way to write it, give or take the odd one. In England it is a nightmare, is it not? We do not just have one representation, we have a few. Take the example of the one that you have just given me which is “kn”, the sound is “kn”, in the word neck it is with the grapheme “n”, when it is in the word know, it is with the grapheme “kn”. In the very early stages when I am teaching children to read, I actually keep it with the reception children as though they are learning Spanish. I keep them at a very simple code and Sue does. For example, when they are with the sound “a”, it is represented with an “a y” and “e” is represented with a double “ee”.

Q280 Helen Jones: So that is not pure phonics then, is it?

Ms Miskin: No. Well it is by the time you get to Harry Potter. You have the simple transparent code for phonics, but the “kn” is still phonics, it just means it is the more complex code. I am holding up a grid and in each box is one sound and each sound is represented by one symbol, we call that a grapheme. So in the “fe” box I have an “f”, in the “ul” box I have an “l”, in the “um” box I have an “m”, but as we move through the programme, there are more complex codes and the children are whizzing through these now because they think “Oh, I can read, I can read”. They are not hindered because we are actually bringing a larger code in to them, but gradually. We hold their hand to keep them safe. For example, here in the “s” box now, we have an “f” and we have double “fl” and we have “ph”. Let me give you another example. In the “e” box we have “ee” as in “been”, we have “y” as in “shiny”, we have “ea” as in “tea”. It is a gradual opening up of the system, until really you think “My goodness, very soon, by the end of Year 1, they can pick up anything”. May I just say, however, that at the same time there are two things? We are building up the blocks very gradually from the bottom to make the child feel very secure, but, equally, we are immersing them in a wide range of literature so the children are hearing rhymes, they are listening to stories. It is almost the difference between, when you
have a child at home, hearing your child read the book and at night time reading them a story and getting them heavily involved in it. So soon you want to inspire them to read “the visitors came to stay”, but you are saying “You are here now, but soon you will be here” and that is what we get.

Q281 Helen Jones: Just to finish off and be clear, what you are saying is that you are using phonics but you are also trying to inculcate in children that enjoyment of literature which is vital if they are going to continue to read in later life.

Ms Miskin: Exactly, you have put it in a nutshell. They actually have to see the whole point of reading. Keith Stanovich in the States has issued some amazing research. He shows that children who are in the top 5% of readers by the time they are eight, and what he is looking at is home reading here, who have been immersed in literature and love reading, read in one day what the bottom lot do in a year. He calls it the Matthew effect: unto those that have shall be given and they shall have abundance. Unto those that have not it shall be taken away, even what they have.

Q282 Mr Greenway: Just a brief question. How important is it, if you are going to teach a child to read through this synthetic phonics method, that they have not been exposed to some other form of teaching at playgroups or nursery?

Ms Lloyd: For three quarters of the children, it may not make such a difference, but it will for a quarter, if they have been asked to go to whole words. If you look at another script you will realise how difficult it is to try to memorise words just by looking at them. Our letters are so familiar to us, but the children they are just squiggles. If we ask them to try to memorise all these books, which they do in the NLS, they are encouraged to do this, then that is where they start to fall and then it is very much more difficult to pick up the pieces. It is better to get the system right at the beginning. We should look at the mistakes that we have made over history, because we allowed a whole language philosophy to come into our teaching with no testing whatsoever and we now realise what a dreadful thing it was to have taken the phonics out. The whole language is good when the children can read, but it is not when they cannot. Then, when we came to the NLS, we did start to learn what to do because initially they did test the NLS and here we have Marian Sainsbury’s results; the NFER tested it. Although the children improved through the National Literacy Strategy, there was improvement, they did not even get to an average quotient of 100, yet people in synthetic phonics schools like ours had much higher results than this. That is what I am trying to explain, that the NLS was better than no phonics, but their type of phonics is still the cart before the horse, it is trying to get the children to enjoy the books and read them for themselves before they are ready, instead of just enjoying good literature by reading to them and talking about stories. When they have the synthetic phonics, then you can take them through much more easily and you can reduce all the problems that you have created with the wrong method. Look at this synthetic phonics school: no significant difference in literacy skills between the boys and girls. It is the same at our school and Ruth’s: the boys can do just as well as the girls. No significant difference between children with summer birthdays and no children with English as an additional language on the SEN register. 94% are achieving level four at the Key Stage 2 SATS, compared with 77% in England and this is a large primary school with a low entry assessment. This is a poor social area, a very large school. Look at the level five: 65% achieved level five in this school and only 26% in the rest of England. Boys? 33.3% of boys achieved level five in writing compared with 11% in the rest of the schools and it goes on like this as well. At Key Stage 2, their improvement ratio is 13.7. If you get a 12, you are supposed to be A/A*.

Q283 Chairman: We will take that information as evidence.

Ms Lloyd: Yes, please take that as evidence.

Q284 Mr Greenway: The reason for my question is that having come new to this subject in many ways, reading the briefs for this, your argument for phonics is so convincing, or appears to be, that I just worry that with more and more children read through this synthetic phonics method, that they have been exposed to some other form of phonics, but their type of phonics is still the cart before the horse, it is trying to get the children to enjoy the books and read them for themselves before they are ready, instead of just enjoying good literature by reading to them and talking about stories. When they have the synthetic phonics, then you can take them through much more easily and you can reduce all the problems that you have tried to explain, that the NLS was better than no phonics, but their type of phonics is still the cart before the horse, it is trying to get the children to enjoy the books and read them for themselves before they are ready, instead of just enjoying good literature by reading to them and talking about stories. When they have the synthetic phonics, then you can take them through much more easily and you can reduce all the problems that you have tried to explain, that the NLS was better than no phonics, but their type of phonics is still the cart before the horse, it is trying to get the children to enjoy the books and read them for themselves before they are ready, instead of just enjoying good literature by reading to them and talking about stories. When they have the synthetic phonics, then you can take them through much more easily and you can reduce all the problems that you have
**Ms Miskin:** I just want to come in on this. When you get these children coming into nursery or into reception class, I say to a parent that whatever they have done, I would not denigrate, because if they have got children to love books, we can put that right. For example, I worked in a totally Bengali school and all the parents were teaching their letter names, which is not terribly helpful but I would always thank them for it and say that would be so useful soon, if not now. I do not think parents can harm; good teaching can get over it.

**Mr Greenway:** That answers my question.

Q285 **Mr Chaytor:** What puzzles me, given that children have been taught to read for hundreds of years, is why it is only now that there are these fierce arguments about different methods. Has this not been an issue in previous generations or were methods so unsophisticated that it was not a matter of debate? Why has it only developed now and why do we not have a bigger body, a more substantial body of research which compares different methods of teaching of reading to enable us to come to a conclusion?

**Prof Johnston:** Education is not very evidence-based in the way it functions and there tend to be very charismatic figures who announce that this is a fantastic way of learning to read and are really very influential. You have heard in previous sessions about Frank Smith and also about Goodman. Because these people have not done research to show the effectiveness of their methods, but people have been bowled over by their enthusiasm, they have just been rolled out in schools and nobody has actually looked at just what effect it is having. There has in fact been a huge amount of research about phonics teaching. Marilyn Adams’ book was published in 1990 showing clearly that a systematic phonics regime was much, much better than a non-systematic one or a scheme which did not have any phonics in it at all. The research has actually been there a long time, but the research was not telling people what they wanted to see and it was ignored really by educationalists.

Q286 **Mr Chaytor:** What happens in other countries, particularly countries where children tend to score more highly at reading than they do in the United Kingdom; Scandinavia and Holland presumably? Do they use phonics?

**Prof Johnston:** Yes, Holland uses a synthetic phonics scheme, Austria does, Germany does and Spain. Even in these countries the whole language is—

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1 Initial teaching methods: In Sweden we usually say that a “mix” of methods are used and every teacher can select relatively free among alternative books or set of books and related material from some 5 to 10 publishers. However, there is a clear bias for synthetic phonics, well grounded in traditions and among parents. Probably the early schooling system was influenced from Germany and our language and spelling system can also be related to German influence. Now and then there have been outbursts of attempts to focus more or faster on the reading of whole texts but in general the synthetic principle has always been underlying and an active part of kind of common “folk” wisdom as well as a general didactic principle at the teacher colleges.
given a book. What reading material do you give to a child who cannot read those letters? What you do is this. I have found some here. You give them a little book that we can guess together, we can learn off by heart. They are learning a little book off by heart because of the predictive nature of the text. They can guess from the first page what all the other pages are going to be “My home is a shell. My home is a hole. My home is a web. My home is a stone”, when actually they cannot even read “b”. That is their phonics for a week and the only reading they will do at their level for a week. Even my programme will not work under that circumstance.

Q288 Mr Gibb: When Kevan Collins was here last week he said that a lot of schools did well in teaching reading using the NLS scheme. He actually cited Tower Hamlets, which is an authority where you have been working.

Ms Miskin: Yes.

Q289 Mr Gibb: Is he right? Can schools achieve the kind of level that Sue Lloyd was talking about, the 94%, the 100% that you achieved in Kobi Nazrul, using the NLS?

Ms Miskin: Since Kevan made that comment I have been doing some research into what Tower Hamlets’ schools actually do, because I left Tower Hamlets three years ago. I wrote to the ex English adviser and we checked up, actually only earlier today, to find out what they all do. When I was a head teacher I wrote something called *Best Practice Phonics* published by Heineman. Every school in Tower Hamlets adopted a synthetic reading approach and it was either *Best Practice Phonics* or Sue Lloyd’s. I talked with a head teacher this morning who agreed with me that ten years ago in Tower Hamlets reading was vaguely acquired. It is only in the last ten years that they have really started teaching reading properly and even though they do not necessarily apply their knowledge into the reading they are getting a basic structure. I asked her whether they did the NLS PIPS and she said “No”. I asked whether they did the NLS ELS, one of the other catch-up programmes, and she said “A bit”, but that they actually fitted it in with the *Best Practice Phonics*. I asked whether they did the new playing and sounds in the NLS and she said “No”. They have not done all of these things which have actually been brought out, so Kevan was wrong.

Q290 Mr Gibb: What is the key difference between the texts which the NLS uses and the texts that the Jolly Phonics and the RML schemes use?

Ms Lloyd: We try very hard to give the children books that they can actually work out, so that when they have learned 40-odd letter sounds, they can read reasonably good stories with that number of sounds. Then gradually, as they learn more, they go on to the next level of text. I think we have to understand as well that if we do not actually start being responsible and test all these programmes and test what is going on we shall never understand what is best for our children. We need to learn to go through the scientists that are linked to the true science, the experimental psychologists . . . I will just give you this example of how we can go—

Q291 Chairman: Are you saying that of all the departments of education which do so much research, no one has properly evaluated the value of phonics against other methods of teaching children to read?

Ms Lloyd: Yes.

Q292 Chairman: That has never happened.

Ms Lloyd: If you are going to put a programme out into the whole of the country, and bear in mind that education is a huge monopoly so if anybody sneezes at the top the whole of the education world catches the cold, I would imagine that you would normally create a programme and thoroughly test it and make sure it was the very best before giving it out to everybody. Just let me show you how easily you can get fooled by people using the word “research”. It does not mean the same as when Rhona uses the word “research”. If you take a programme like Reading Recovery, Reading Recovery was meant to help the children who were failing with whole language. It was created by people who liked whole language and it is a programme which was put out as though it was really an excellent programme, very expensive one-to-one teaching. Many of the international scientists have got together in America and they have tested it properly with real scientific tests and their conclusion is that Reading Recovery is not successful with its targeted student population, the lowest performing students. Their reason is that when Reading Recovery did the testing, they did things that would not be acceptable to the real scientists. They withdrew 25–40% of children who were failing. If the children are failing with the programme, they take them out of it, so they do not count in their figures. They then make tests which are called “in-house testing” and therefore they have made up the test which is going to test the teaching. Of course you can then make it show what you want it to show. This article that I am holding is written by the scientists and it is signed by 31 eminent scientists, nearly all of whom have doctorates, and they are really saying “Look, this is the real science: do not be fooled by other people’s science. Put these programmes, which are so vital for the education of the country” because if you do not get the reading right, you have ruined the education for so many children “through the rigorous testing”. If the NLS had had the rigorous testing, and in fact it did in the beginning but nobody knew about that, it was kept very quiet, only a few people seemed to know about the NFER testing and it did not get the best results, then we could say our programme gets these results and Ruth’s gets those results, Rhona’s gets the following results and we would have something concrete and fair with which to make comparisons and choose the best for the children.

Q293 Mr Gibb: The criticism of phonics is that it is a bit dull to teach and it is a bit dull for the kids, and kids do have a lot of influences. They see words
around, they look at magazines, they will be influenced and they will see all kinds of words which are way beyond their phonics knowledge at a certain age, even under Ruth’s scheme or your scheme, Sue. How do you address that criticism?

**Ms Lloyd:** We think that they are taking in these words, but in reality they are often just learning the associated symbols. If you take the McDonald’s sign, people say “Oh, they can read McDonald’s”, but when you take the sign and the trimmings away and ask them to read it, they cannot actually read it; they are reading the sign. Imagine that the script used is not our usual one. Do we go into a Chinese restaurant and say “Oh, that looks fascinating writing, I must learn what that word is.”? We do not, do we, and nor do children? It is only if their parents show them how it works that they start to take something on board.

**Ms Miskin:** I have to say that I had Bengali signs all over my school, because that is what we always did in Tower Hamlets even though we taught them to read English, and I did not learn one Bengali word while I was there. If somebody had swapped the words “school keeper” and “head teacher” I would not have known. What happens though, is that as soon as they have some phonics, they will be going “dav-dav-dav-david. Oh, David”. They will start to put things together and the joy of seeing a child look at a new word and going “at-at-attention. Oh, attention” and they will get it. It is early knowledge, but for more able children; they are into words very quickly and they start to teach themselves. As a nation, we have to hold children’s hands all the way through and keep them safe until they go “I can read”.

**Ms Lloyd:** I think, Ruth, you would say as well, that phonics is different nowadays in that it is much more fun. The parents enjoy the programmes, the children enjoy them and the teachers enjoy them because they know exactly where they are going. As soon as you can see a child is not learning to remember the letter symbols that is your first sign that you are going to have troubles, because they do not have a good memory, even for symbols, so whole words will be even worse. Then, if they do not have a good ear for hearing the sounds in words, that is your second warning. When you have programmes that are systematic, you can immediately see where the children need help and the type of children, and get in and prevent a lot of their problems.

**Q294 Mr Gibb:** Final question. I accept the point that you do get children decoding very rapidly, but so what? They do not understand the word, do they? All they can do is decode it. Is there not an issue that you need to make sure the kids understand words, not just decode them? How do you address that criticism?

**Ms Miskin:** I would say first of all that there is worldwide research to show that, unless you have embedded phonics, you do not have anything left for comprehension anyway. So if you are reading so pathetically slowly that you cannot . . . I used to say to teachers in my training, “You know when you hear a child read and they are reading very slowly and you get to the end of page, have you ever been in a position where you have not got a clue what that was about?” and they go “Oh, yes”. I said “Well, what do you do?” and they said “Quickly scan it and ask a question”. I said “Can the child answer the question?” and they said “Well no, of course not, because they read it slowly”. The point is that when we are reading *Big Blob and Baby Blob*, we will go through the words first of all, practising decoding them so that when they come to read it, they have a good chance. The first time they read it, they will read it in quite a pedestrian sort of manner without the feeling that *Baby Blob* needs. You know, “Big Blob-is-at-the-shops-with-Baby-Blob” and it is going to sound deadly. Next time they are going to start talking about it and it is more like “Big Blob is at the shops with Baby Blob” and then you are getting the intonation coming in as the comprehension, as the speed of decoding increases. You do not read a book once, you read it once to decode, twice to understand, three for fluency and they go home and say “Mum, I can read”. May I just make one point? If you are teaching in a very deprived area, who is going to hear the child read at home? If they take a book home that they havenot known. What happens though, is that as they go home and say “Oh, I can read”.

**Ms Miskin:** Everybody was involved in this development and they got some of the most senior people in the world to write the NLS, but the trouble was that they all disagreed at that moment. There was not the research. It was what Sue and Rhona were saying: they did not want to hear that particular set of research, because at that time Reading Recovery, the whole word approach was incredibly embedded. What is scary is that the more into the inner city you go, the more they are in that psyche still; I should like to say not in Tower Hamlets so much. When you go to schools out, say, where I work in Walsall or in Bradford where you have older members of staff who have
actually seen all the systems going through; it is easy, so easy to put the programme in. They go “Oh, thank goodness, at least somebody is talking sense”. However, when you are in some of the inner city schools, you can have war because there are huge principles. It is “We work out the words by looking at the pictures. We work out the words by guessing what the context is. We work out the words by using first picture cues” so you have an awful lot. They are much younger teachers; we do not have the balance in the inner cities. What is happening now is that publishers are actually writing books like this one to fit the objectives that the NLS has. This book is not to read, this book is to use inference. This book is not to read, this book is to learn one-to-one correspondence. Each of these books has a different objective and it is like, “Is a book not to read? Is a book not just to read and understand”? I say to teachers “Look, you have one purpose, which is to get the children reading and writing”. If you have 101 objectives, like to use picture cues, to use context cues, to use this cue and to use that, they lose the plot. It is like “It is much simpler than you are being told”. All the students at college—remember I train nearly every day of my life and there are lots of young students coming in—say “We’ve been taught on a multiple cuing system” meaning picture cue, context cue, grammar, grammatical cue and so on “This is what we’ve been taught. What shall we do?” I go “Do it my way”.

**Ms Lloyd:** It was once said that in education we are like the doctors were 100 years ago and that was when the drugs were made and they suited some people very well, but made others ill and a few died. So they brought in some really effective testing and they do their best to make sure there is no damage done. Just look at the history of what has happened in education, particularly with the teaching of reading and maths. People have been able to have these great influences based on beliefs, but there has not been the backup of the testing. Until we actually get this sorted out and make sure that if we do have to have a layer of consultants and advisers above us in the profession, then they must say things which have actually been proven and which work. They must not keep on telling us things that do not work; in fact we would do better without that layer of advice, and if we were just told what the researchers, like Rhona, are finding out. We are learning more and more about what—

**Q296 Jeff Ennis:** Can we take it then that other forms of teaching of reading, like Look-and-Say, for example, are dead and the only thing that we need to be teaching now is synthetic phonics in the classroom?

**Ms Lloyd:** Yes; from the beginning.

**Ms Miskin:** With the proviso of a small selection of words that do not fit into the system at the beginning.

**Ms Lloyd:** Essentially, when you get to reading books, you should have taught the “t-h” says “/th/” and then it will be “/th/e/” and it is then not such a big leap to learn that “the” is the. Then they have to memorise it. If you look at the books that Ruth has been talking about from the National Literacy Strategy, the book bands, only 20% of those words are decodeable. The children are then being asked to read words for which they have not been given the skills. If you look at the “Playing with sounds”, look at the actual number of sounds which are not even introduced until the end of Year 1, they have had two years in school and they still have not met the following sounds “/ai/, /ee/, /ie/, /oa/, /ue/ /er/, /oi/, /ou/, /ar/, and /oo/ as in book and /oo/ as in moon. You are expecting the children to read words without the skills to be able to do it. This is where the damage is done.

**Q297 Jeff Ennis:** I am concerned if synthetic phonics is the holy mantra, as it were, making reading fun. I know a lot of these phonic schemes are fun to teach and to learn as well from the child’s perspective, but when we are dealing with Reading Recovery schemes and what have you, and this goes back to something else that Ruth said about involving parents, when I was teaching Reading Recovery in the 1970s and 1980s, we had a paired reading scheme for parents, bringing parents in to read to children, to get them used to reading a full sentence out, where the parent or the teacher led the child into that sort of rhythm of reading or whatever you want to call it. Is that a totally useless exercise now we are just to have synthetic phonics or is there a place for that sort of thing?

**Ms Miskin:** You want parents involved as much as you possibly can. I have spent a lot of time as a head teacher saying “Please come to the meeting and we will tell you about what to do at home”. Which parents always come? It is the parents who are really interested from the beginning. At one headship when I was down in Devon, I used to go knocking on doors saying “Please, please come in and I will show you how to help”. In the end, when I got to Tower Hamlets, we started teaching the parents how to read so they could help them, but they only came once a week and my kids were getting hour after hour. I said “Look, I am really sorry, but the children have over taken you now, so they will be reading to you. All you have to do is say ‘Very good. Well done’”. You have to break the cycle because there are loads of parents out there who do find reading difficult. Let us get the kids reading now, this time round, so they can then read to their own kids when they have them.

**Q298 Paul Holmes:** Sue, you have been very scathing about people who do not look at the evidence before they make educational policy, although perhaps, you are saying, if they looked at your bit of evidence and imposed it on everybody else, that would be okay, but if they are looking at other pieces of evidence that you do not agree with, that is wrong.

**Ms Lloyd:** No, it is what the right science is, the correct science. There were four, two large and two small, pieces of research into our programme, admittedly accidental. What it does show is that you get higher results. This information is not passed on into our training establishments or schools. What Rhona’s research is showing is that in Scotland,
Q299 Paul Holmes: You keep quoting the example of one particular school where the results, using synthetic phonics, are much better than the national averages achieved across the country. Quite a few eminent politicians also have trouble with understanding averages, but surely the whole point of averages is that some of them are above average and some are below. Are you seriously suggesting that there are no schools anywhere in the country, which are not using synthetic phonics, which could not produce sets of results which are way above national averages?

Ms Lloyd: If you were in a very leafy, professional area, you would be able to, because a lot of the parents actually help their children with phonics as well. If you have, as well, children who are coming in who have a good memory and a good ear for sounds, then whatever method you actually use with those, they will crack the code themselves. They see the “/sh/” at the beginning of shed and the “/sh/” at the end of fish and they are going “Aha, that is how it works”, but it is not so obvious to all the children.

Q300 Paul Holmes: So there are schools in other parts of the country, perhaps particularly in the leafy suburbs, which are using the National Literacy Strategy, various mixes of strategies, which are doing much better than average, just the same as the school you are talking about with synthetic phonics.

Ms Lloyd: I do not think we know. We heard that Kevan Collins claims that these schools in Tower Hamlets were getting high results from the National Literacy Strategy, but they are also using our programme. We do not know. What we feel is that our programmes are being spoilt because teachers feel they have to follow the National Literacy Strategy and introduce these reading books very much earlier and leave the long vowels until very much later. What I am saying is that really, if we are going to have this kind of power from the government, or the DfES, then it must be thoroughly tested and the head teachers should know what the results are before being expected to follow them.

Q301 Paul Holmes: Just one last question for Ruth. It is partly on leafy suburbs versus inner cities. All the examples you have given, Ruth, are from the school in Tower Hamlets where you were the head teacher. The thing that strikes me about synthetic phonics as you talk about it, is that it does seem to be fairly Stalinist in a sense, it is total control. The role for parents with kids aged four to five is nil really. You said about parents that you would not upset them by saying “You shouldn’t have done that” because you can overcome the harm they have done. Surely in most parts of the country there are lots of parents who will try to teach their children to read. I did with mine; I can remember being taught to read by my brother from a Beano annual when I was four years old. You seem to be saying “We want total control through synthetic phonics”.

Ms Miskin: No, I said the total opposite. I said, if you are in a position where the children have parents who cannot read, you have to be able to make sure they can do it for themselves. I also said that I welcome parents who are doing whatever they want at home, because anything parents can do can only help, even if they are just taught their letter names. I encourage parents; I was the one knocking on doors to try to persuade parents to come in. The key thing here is that I want to put the programme in my teachers’ hands so that they feel safe. I put some of the results here of the other schools who are using the programme. Yes, I am organised, I was organised and I did like to make sure that all the children felt safe, the teachers felt safe. I will not work very tightly, very homogeneously to keep them safe. I do not think keeping a child safe is Stalinist.

Q302 Paul Holmes: The whole point is that you kept emphasising that in the very early stages with children they should only be reading books which contain words that they can read, ones written by yourself or by Sue, for example.

Ms Miskin: I said two things there. I said one, that the books we want them to work out for themselves will be the ones with the controlled vocabulary. In days gone by, when we had Oxford Reading Tree, and lots of schools still use it, you would not give a child an Oxford Reading Tree book if they did not know the words off by heart before they started it. It is all the same sort of system, except this is a phonics system, we work on building blocks. What we are also giving the children is a wealth of literature that they are learning off by heart with us. If they pick up “Each peach plum plum I spy Tom Thumb”, they are running their finger along it pretending to be a reader as well. We do not want just to give the child a little book that they cannot read, there are no words in it, when it is a boring book anyway, “My home is a shell. My home is a hole. My home is a web”: we are not talking quality literature here.

Q303 Paul Holmes: So how would you stop parents who are trying to teach their children to read at home from using the wrong books?

Ms Miskin: I would not stop a parent doing anything. What I found was that when the parents I know are listening to their child read, the first words the parent says when a child cannot read it, are the same words across the country “Sound it out”.

Ms Lloyd: The whole point is that it is not hard to make sure that the children feel safe, the teachers feel safe. If you have a parent who is very anxious and feels they have to follow the National Literacy Strategy, and introduce these reading books very much earlier, and leave the long vowels until very much later. Then it is very easy to know whether or not the child is learning. If the child cannot read, you have to be able to make sure that they will crack the code themselves. They see the “/sh/” at the beginning of shed and the “/sh/” at the end of fish and they are going “Aha, that is how it works”, but it is not so obvious to all the children.
Q304 Paul Holmes: You have been very critical of National Literacy Strategy books which include lots of words that children cannot understand. Surely, you would also be very critical of parents using the same sort of book.

Ms Miskin: I had better defend the National Literacy Strategy here because they do not have their own books at all. It is the publishers that follow their advice. Whatever a parent does at home that is to do with books and literature you just say “Go for it”. I would not want to stop a parent doing anything, but what parents do say to me is “Will you show me what you do at school, so that when we do help we are talking with the same voice” and then I show them.

Q305 Chairman: I am sorry we have to draw this to a conclusion. Can I judge from this that you would like to see, perhaps Rhona Johnston would like to answer this, a piece of research which took a group of children who were being taught by the National Literacy Strategy programme and a similar group, matched very closely, who were being taught by synthetic phonics, so we can actually see a proper judgment between how far one group progressed in learning against the other?

Prof Johnston: Yes, I think that absolutely needs to be done to establish what the facts are. I should stress that my research has been paid for entirely by the Scottish government. It actually voted £18 million in 1997 to look at early intervention and that money was given to the regions. We were invited by Clackmannanshire to do the study, but that money was only given out if they did pre-tests and post-tests of an experimental and a control group using standardised tests. This is what I think should happen in England.

Chairman: Thank you very much, all three of you, for your evidence. I am going to ask the new team to step forward. Thank you.

Memorandum submitted by the National Literacy Trust

National Literacy Trust

1. The National Literacy Trust is pleased to submit evidence to the Education and Skills Select Committee’s inquiry into Teaching Children to Read. The National Literacy Trust, founded in 1993, is an independent charity dedicated to building a nation in which everyone enjoys the skills, self-esteem and pleasure that literacy can bring. Our website is visited by over 6,000 unique visitors a day and provides a “one-stop shop” for all those seeking information on literacy.

The Response

2. The National Literacy Trust welcomes the Select Committee’s examination of departmental policy and guidance on the teaching of reading to children in schools. We have broadly supported the literacy strategies developed by the DfES for primary and key stage 3 children, and are delighted that the systematic introduction of phonics is now embedded in virtually all primary school teaching. The issue now is the nature and timing of the introduction of phonics, rather than the teaching of phonics per se.

3. We believe that both synthetic and analytic approaches to teaching phonics have merit. However, we also believe that more research needs to be conducted to identify which approach is best suited for which learner. We therefore welcome the Committee’s suggested review of the research evidence regarding the relative weight given to teaching strategies within the curriculum. Overall, the National Literacy Trust feels that this is a highly emotive area that is best guided by a sound research basis.

4. The literacy strategies have recommended a balanced approach, which the Trust would generally endorse. We believe that to create the most enthusiastic readers it is critical that we take into account the different learning styles of individuals. Research has also repeatedly shown that boys’ lack of engagement with literacy is one of the major causes of their underachievement. We therefore believe that potential gender differences in physical and cognitive development need to be recognised and addressed in future literacy teaching.

Beyond Phonological Skills

5. The National Literacy Trust recommends that in order to ensure a comprehensive assessment of the most effective reading strategies, the Committee also needs to consider the following three inter-connected areas in its investigation: reading for pleasure, speaking and listening, and literacy practices in the home and community.
6. The amount children read for pleasure is a major contributor to their reading achievement. Reading for pleasure allows children to experience other worlds and roles in their imagination. As well as contributing to their reading abilities, this involvement also aids their personal and social development. The OECD Reading for Change study (2002) of 15-year-olds showed that reading enjoyment is more important for children’s educational success than their families’ socio-economic status. Yet, the PIRLS (2001, see Twist et al, 2003) study of 10-year-olds indicated that although children in England have greater reading skills, they are less likely to enjoy reading than children from other countries. Indeed, one unintended consequence of the primary strategy has been the disappearance in some schools of those times and areas that primary teachers traditionally used to nurture a love of reading.

7. Two further factors appear to be important in teaching children to read, namely reading motivation and reading engagement. Reading motivation is a multi-dimensional construct that encompasses various forms of motivation, learning styles, self-efficacy (i.e. the belief in one’s capabilities) and social norms (e.g. cultural traditions and social customs). It has become increasingly apparent that the acquisition of reading skills demands a large amount of effort and motivation (Wang & Guthrie, 2004). Research also indicates that high reading motivation and positive attitudes towards reading are associated with higher reading achievement and frequent reading (e.g. Baker & Wigfield, 1999). Despite the centrality of motivational issues to learning to read, these have rarely been the focus of reading strategies.

8. Phonological skills are of fundamental importance when learning to read. However, other facets of language, such as listening comprehension and vocabulary, are also crucial for reading comprehension (Nation & Snowling, 2004). Recent research has shown the importance of pre-school speaking and listening skills in supporting early literacy (e.g. Catts & Kamhi, 1999). Similarly, oral skills in the pre-school years have been related to later reading and writing skills (Griffin et al, 2004). It is therefore crucial that we encourage a rich language environment in the home and early school years as a foundation of word reading skills (Snow, 2001).

9. Recognising that the key to helping young children become confident communicators lies in encouraging parents and carers to talk to them more. The National Literacy Trust has launched Talk To Your Baby, a campaign that promotes the message to parents and carers that communicating with their children matters.

References to Work Cited in This Response


FURTHER INFORMATION

The National Literacy Trust would be pleased to provide further evidence at the Committee’s request, particularly with respect to the role of the home, children’s early language development and reading for pleasure (the Appendix below details our work).

APPENDIX

The National Literacy Trust is dedicated to building a literate nation, and the Trust’s work focuses on:

— providing a support network: our web-based literacy support network pulls together the best ideas and information to help everyone share good practice;

— putting ideas into practice: our practical initiatives—Reading Is Fundamental, UK, the National Reading Campaign, Talk To Your Baby, Reading The Game, Reading Connects and the Vital Link—develop ways of working in partnership to turn promising ideas into effective action;

— promoting a systems approach: our emphasis on all the factors that affect literacy achievement encourages those interventions that will be most effective in the long term.

December 2004

Memorandum submitted by the Early Childhood Forum

The Early Childhood Forum is a coalition of professional associations, voluntary organisations and interest groups united in their concern to develop the care and education of young children from birth to eight. ECF is unique. It is the only body that brings together nearly 50 member organisations, covering the full spectrum of early years providers.

The Forum has discussed the Committee’s current enquiry and the range of evidence being presented to it and would like to make the following comments. We would also appreciate the opportunity to make an oral presentation to the Committee if this is felt appropriate.

1. Initially we would like to emphasise the fact that reading is a skill which relies on the presence of other skills for example, acquisition of speech and language, hearing and listening skills, recognition of shape, difference, pattern and sequence etc. Its development is therefore woven into the activities which form part of a young child’s day and should not be separated out from the learning which takes place through the play, work and discussion in an early years setting.

2. Children learn skills when there is a reason to do so. Many acquire initial reading skills because they realise the benefits which follow, for example they learn the letters that represent their name and thus know where to hang their coat, put their mug etc. For most children it can be acquired effortlessly through this linkage with other aspects of their life. This is particularly effective when it is reflected in both home and early years setting/school and so the involvement of parents in this type of activity is crucial as is support to ensure that they understand the effectiveness of such strategies in their children’s learning.

3. Phonics teaching is not appropriate for children in pre-school or reception classes. It depends on the accurate pronunciation of letter names (which is open to confusing variation eg hatch for H) and their initial sounds. If the practitioner demonstrates the sounds singly, as for example in hop, and creates a gap between the initial and subsequent sounds it is very difficult for the child to “hear” the complete word. Presented with material which is out of context or uninteresting, children may well repeat sounds or words by rote, but not assimilate these into their knowledge base.
Case example from an ECF member:

I recently witnessed a literacy presentation with young reception children. The practitioner drew three adjacent boxes on the whiteboard and reminded the children of previously learned words from “The gingerbread man”. Letters were referred to as “phonemes” (correct but unlikely to be in common practice at home). The words selected for the lesson were hop, run, and man. One phoneme from the word hop was placed in each box. The words man and ran were presented in the same way. The class sounded out the words together, different children had turns in saying the sounds and words and seemed to know them.

The story was then re-read and re-told by the children—this section was enjoyed by the children. To conclude the session, the phonemes were again presented in their little boxes. The children did not remember the words despite much prompting by the practitioner. They made guesses which included words not taught in the lesson. Only one child remembered them quickly and accurately.

This session seemed, therefore, to be a waste of the children’s time and inappropriate for the age and development of the class. Such presentations and uninteresting repetition do not engage the child’s interest and may well inhibit future learning. Phonics have their place in teaching reading but not for pre-reception or reception classes.

4. International comparisons: Recent papers published in Scandinavian countries stress the child-centred approach to learning. In many nursery and “first” schools in Denmark, Sweden and Finland the children are not subjected to restricting formal lessons but are provided with “systematic support for their growth, development and learning”. (Finnish Family Policy document) In Sweden, “Educational activities are based on the children’s individual capabilities and are linked to what the child has already experienced and learned. Children are encouraged to engage in their own activities and discover things for themselves. The importance of play for a child’s development and learning is emphasised both in preschool education and in school age childcare, and is included in the national curriculum for compulsory schools.” (Sweden SE childcare in Sweden)

In the Council of Europe, the Committee of Ministers’ Recommendation to member states on child daycare, concerning the care and education of children from birth to eight years [Rec. (2002) 8], stresses play and talking as very important elements in children’s learning. All the countries mentioned above start formal schooling later than in the UK and have literacy outcomes far higher than ours, so maybe the approach speaks for itself.

5. Ofsted recently reported on “Reading for Purpose and Pleasure: an evaluation of the teaching of reading in primary schools”. The main findings draw attention to important points regarding the teaching of reading: although stating that the teaching of phonics was good in the schools with high standards, Ofsted states that

“the schools which were effective in raising reading standards and tackling underachievement taught a broad range of strategies early on, including the use of words recognised on sight, context and grammar”.

Most importantly, they state:

“Although some schools were successfully raising reading attainment and were teaching pupils the skills they needed to read with accuracy and understanding, few were successfully engaging the interest of those who, though competent readers, did not read for pleasure. Schools seldom built on pupils’ own reading interests and the range of reading material they read outside school.”

What is the point of creating children who are efficient decoders through phonic awareness if they do not read for pleasure as part of lifelong learning?

6. It is important to emphasise that it is not the children who are failing in literacy, but our methods which are failing the children. The apparent success of the literacy hour for older children does not mean that it can be translated to a younger age group and we are concerned at the downward pressure to start “schemes” in nursery classes rather than understanding and utilising the concepts of early literacy. Literacy activities should be given in short informal, interesting sessions; one hour is too long for young primary school children. Trainee teachers, or qualified teachers working with an unfamiliar age range, must have a basic understanding of the needs of young children. Practitioners need to know the various methods of teaching reading, their application and their use.

7. The Early Childhood Forum includes a large number of organisations for children with disabilities and we maintain an active debate on inclusion. In this respect we are particularly concerned to ensure that the needs of these children are understood and supported within mainstream settings and feel that this is of particular relevance in the teaching of reading. The methods which we have outlined above allow for the individualised support of children with learning difficulties alongside their peers which, particularly for young children, is vital in engaging them with learning.
8. Lastly, but very importantly, we would like to re-emphasise the importance of parents in the process of reading acquisition. Parents need to be informed about helping children at home through a variety of learning experiences using every day examples of reading and this can then mirror and reinforce the work being done in the early years setting or school. For instance, if children find it difficult to relate to the printed word it is sometimes because they do not see their parents or other adults reading or writing much at home. Children learn by example. If the examples are absent, artificial or boring, children may not make the effort.

As mentioned above, we would value the opportunity to expand on some of these areas by providing the Committee with oral evidence:

Members of the Early Childhood Forum
4children
Association of Advisors for Under Eights and Their Families (AAUEF)
Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP)
Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL)
Campaign for Advancement of State Education (CASE)
Children in Scotland (CiS)
Children in Wales (CiW)
Council for Awards in Children’s Care and Education (CACHE)
Council for Disabled Children (CDC)
Community Practitioners and Health Visitors Association (CPHVA)
Daycare Trust (DCT)
Early Childhood Studies Degrees Network
Early Education
Early Years Equality (EYE)
Forum for Maintained Nursery Schools
High/Scope UK
Local Authority Early Years Coordinators Network (LAEYCN)
Mencap
Montessori Education UK
National Association of Education Inspectors, Advisors & Consultants (NAEIAC)
National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT)
National Association for Primary Education (NAPE)
National Association of Nurseries in Colleges & Universities (NANCU)
National Children’s Bureau (NCB)
National Campaign for Nursery Education (NCNE)
National Childminding Association (NCMA)
National Council for Parent Teacher Associations (NCPTA)
National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA)
National Deaf Children’s Society (NDCS)
National Network Of Children’s Information Services (NACIS)
National Portage Association (NPA)
National Union Teachers (NUT)
Northern Ireland Preschool Playgroups Assoc (NIPPA)
Preschool Learning Alliance (PLA)
Prof Assoc of Nursery Nurses (PANN)
Race Equality Unit (REU)
Refugee Council
Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB)
Save the Children (SCF)
Scope
Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship (SWSF)
Training, Advancement & Co-operation in Teaching Young Children (TACTYC)
What About the Children (WATCH)
World Org for Early Childhood Education (OMEP)
ECF response
January 2005

Witnesses: Mr Neil McClelland OBE, Director and Ms Julia Strong, Deputy Director, National Literacy Trust and Ms Jo White and Ms Melian Mansfield, Early Childhood Forum, examined.

Q306 Chairman: Thank you very much Jo White, Melian Mansfield, Neil McClelland and Julia Strong for joining us. We want to get as much as we can out of this session, but we know we have a vote coming up, so it may be a little shorter than we anticipated. Basically, you have listened to the evidence given by those who would be seen as proponents for the phonics approach to learning to read. Would one of you like to start off by telling us how convinced you are about the argument for the phonics approach by what you heard?

Ms White: I think phonics is an important part of learning to read. What worries me slightly about what we have just heard is that it implies that children come into school with no reading knowledge at all and suddenly they are taught by people who are called teachers. In fact, as soon as a baby looks at a symbol on a cot and points at it, they are actually learning to read. We live in an environment where print is all around us and children will be asking you at the breakfast table “What does that say on the cereal packet?” and will be saying “How do I write my name?” and children of two and three will be well versed in literacy. We do not suddenly teach them: we help them to learn.

For me, one of the problems with the National Literacy Strategy was that it lost its way because it was much more about making better teachers and therefore having better outcomes for children as learners. One of the issues about teaching today is that the PGCE, which turns out teachers in less than eight months from being a graduate in whatever else they might have studied, is not going to have the depth of knowledge of child development and the understanding about how children learn, which is fundamental to literacy and mathematics and science and those other things. So phonics plays a part. Children play with sounds joyously all the time. They make up nonsense words, they tell jokes, they have funny names for people, nicknames, they are playing with phonics all the time and we need to support them in that and learning about alphabets and learning about their names and the letter of the week. If your name happens to begin with Y, it is very tedious. So you need phonics that actually makes sense and is relevant and is interesting and is fascinating and children really want to do it. Phonics is important and I would never say that phonics was not important, but this rather rote learning terrifies me.

Mr McClelland: I think from the National Literacy Trust perspective, and we are not an organisation which is a particularly expert organisation on phonics or other approaches, we would be supportive of phonics at the heart of things, but would regard it as a necessary but not a sufficient component of the challenge to get all children at the end of Key Stage 1 and all children as they transfer to secondary school, fluent, active, highly motivated readers. From our point of view, the danger of too much preoccupation in this way is that it reduces a very complex issue down to a single component factor. We would take the view that yes, we do need phonics and certainly we understood, and I understood that the National Literacy Strategy was based on synthetic phonics as I read Kevan Collins’s evidence to you the other day. We very strongly believe, however, that the quality of early pre-school provision, a lot of early language support, a lot of support in and around the school about reading for pleasure. I would be interested in further research which compares the various models of synthetic phonics that there are and the others that were not represented before us today with some of the approaches of the strategy, but also to make sure that is longitudinal evidence which looks at the subsequent attitudes that children have to reading when they are 11, 12 and 14.

Q307 Chairman: So the only thing which joins you with the phonics group we have just heard from is that neither of you likes the National Literacy Strategy.

Mr McClelland: No, I did not want to say that, and if I did, then I have misrepresented our view. We broadly support the National Literacy Strategy.

Ms White: My expertise is very young children and I have deep misgivings about the National Literacy Strategy in the foundation stage. I know much less about it further on up the school than that, but I have deep misgivings for it in the foundation stage.

Mr McClelland: The real issue is that because the National Literacy Strategy has been introduced from Key Stage 1, it has actually been pushed back into the foundation stage and it is very clearly stated in the foundation stage that children need to be doing a whole range of other things to develop their concentration; they need to play. I do not know whether in the course of this investigation you are looking at any issues about brain research, how the first seven years are a very sensitive period of brain development and children need to do a whole range of other kinds of activities pre reading, all the things that Jo was talking about, before they formally learn to read. I cannot remember who mentioned it, but someone referred to Finland and other countries. In fact, there is practically no other country where children are taught formally to read before they are
Chairman: Julia, are we trying to teach children to read too early?

Ms Strong: It is a very interesting point. If you look around at all the international studies, a lot of people would say that we are. I do not think anybody actually knows, which could be the central problem, why it is a blood-on-the-carpet sort of issue. I do think it is worth looking at other countries and seeing what they are doing. The trouble is that the other countries, big and small, are not trying to teach the children English and teach them to read English, and English is a more complicated language to read. The only problem with the National Literacy Strategy is that it did not start at the foundation stage and build up, which would perhaps be the more logical way to do it. On the other hand, I think that I would not want to be down here as bad-mouthing the National Literacy Strategy, because I think they have done a vast amount that has been very good: in a nut shell, the fact that they have focused on teaching children to read and teaching children to write, rather than providing simplistic opportunities to read and write. I would want to stress that, but it is a shame that they did not actually start from the bottom up, and to stress the importance of oracy. Speaking and listening are the foundation of reading and writing. The trouble is— you must have found it yourself as you sat here— some of us are very good at speaking, but we are not very good at listening.

Chairman: Yes, we have found that a great deal.

Q310 Jeff Ennis: My question has been partially answered in that I just wondered where we needed to go with the NLS in actually making it more of a success than at the present time. It has been quite successful, but how could we make it even more successful in turning out good readers?

Ms White: Part of it is about teacher training actually. I think that teachers are not sufficiently well trained and that is why something like the NLS, which does have some very interesting and good bits to it, is taken as a whole and delivered as a whole to every child, regardless of what their individual learning styles might be. The other thing is that in terms of the foundation stage it needs to be radically re-thought and that will have implications for Key Stage 1 as well. We need to be encouraging children. Sure Start has been wonderful in the Bookstart programmes in that you are never too young to be reading and actually getting parents involved in reading with their children way before the school system ever gets hold of them. So there is a huge amount of work to do that says literacy does not suddenly start with the National Literacy Strategy at school. It is a much more holistic view of literacy and play and learning.

Mr McClelland: Whilst we support the use of phonics and synthetic phonics and certainly, in comparison with what things were like in the past, we have moved forward massively and radically well, it is that wider context of that work which we believe is critically important. We obviously agree with the Early Childhood Forum on the issue of early language and books and reading in the home from the earliest age; we have initiatives of our own that build that. As far as the specific question about the strategy is concerned, we certainly believe that more emphasis can be put on encouraging children to read fuller texts, to read more for pleasure, to have more opportunities for extended writing. I actually think the strategy has come to terms with that. We are involved with an initiative funded by the DfES about creating whole-school reading communities, which perhaps my colleague could briefly mention. We believe that surrounds and supports the strategy and is a necessary additional component in this complex picture of getting children, particularly children from many disadvantaged communities and homes, to be fluent, motivated, enjoying readers.

Ms Strong: One of the problems with the strategy was that inadvertently some people took what was being said to mean that they should not be reading stories to children so much as they were, and some of the reading corners disappeared in the primary schools. Nobody said that that should happen, but it is just one of the things which have tended to happen. We have set up something called Reading Connects and the idea of Reading Connects is to try to get schools to think about how they can involve the whole school in creating school communities that read and involve all the parents. We are very pleased that the DfES has now funded that and recognises the importance of children being motivated to read, because there is any amount of research which shows that it is motivation which is at the heart of turning somebody into a life-long reader, and that is what we are trying to do. Just to give you an example, when you walk into a school we feel that everything about the school ought to tell the visitor that this is a reading school, that reading is valued: the walls, absolutely all the messages that the school gives, every single lesson, tells you that reading is seen as something that is there; and that teachers are encouraged to read aloud to the children. Let us say that I am teaching science, and science does have some great stories, I might read...
just a little bit to bite the imagination so that children hear good English, well read. All sorts of initiatives. Buddy reading would be another one, where you try to get some of the older children to encourage the younger children, because, as we know, in the end we tend to read what other people, our peers, have recommended to us. You get those sorts of schemes into schools where the children are talking about reading and encouraging each other to read.

Q311 Chairman: How long has your organisation been doing this sort of work?

Ms Strong: We started doing this about two years ago and it has now been adopted by the DfES in the last six months.

Q312 Valerie Davey: First of all may I put on record that I am President of the National Campaign for Nursery Education, which is one of the groups involved in the Forum and that is possibly where my main interest comes from in this richness of experience. Surely we ought to be investing in that richness of early experience before we get to the reading.

Ms Mansfield: Definitely.

Ms White: That is story and narrative really. You are never going to be a reader unless you understand something about story and the way narrative works. Storying is something that human beings are just destined to do throughout the ages and that oral tradition and that storying and that narrative . . . I have brought a few things that we support children with in making their own books about their own stories, scribbling for children. One of the other things that the previous people did not mention was the connection between writing and reading, that actually you do have to understand something about how writing works if you are going to understand about reading. This is about children understanding a narrative, a middle, a beginning and an end. Very young children will tell you fascinating and fantastic stories and it is that that makes people gradually turn into readers. I would say that mostly the children are already readers. Take Reading Recovery, for example. In Finland, if I were to say that a child of seven was having Reading Recovery, they would say “Recovering from what?” There is a sort of strange notion about reading and you know that for me early intervention is the key. We have many adults who can technically read, but very few who ever read for pleasure. That disposition to read and that joy of reading is actually an essential tenet if we are going to have reading. That develops with parents, in homes and in nurseries from very early stages.

Q313 Valerie Davey: Yet the Early Childhood Forum has said very specifically that in those early years, they would not introduce phonics.

Ms White: Yes. I did not write the response and I have spoken to Melian today and said that in fact I do not agree with that. I think what the Early Childhood Forum were meaning was phonics in the way the National Literacy Strategy would like us to do it, but rhyme, playing with sound, knowing about alphabet letters, recognising texts in the environment, all those things for me are crucial. The problem is that phonics has a rather bad name now. We think of it as these rather formal “b-a-t” things, which sends shivers down the spines of most of us, but actually phonics is playing with sounds and playing with sounds is an essential ingredient for learning how to read.

Ms Mansfield: But also, having a good vocabulary and having had experiences of imaginative play and other forms of trying things out is absolutely fundamentally important. The whole issue is about brain development, and there are real issues about teacher training where there is no explanation of child development, brain development, that children learn differently. It can be explored by children playing, doing drama, playing imaginative games; making up their own stories is really important. All of this needs to go on for a longer rather than a shorter length of time. We need to look at Wales, for example, which has extended the foundation stage up to six and seven and to other countries where similar type of education is on offer, where these rich and broad experiences are taking place, enabling children to improve and develop their vocabulary and so on before the actual formal reading; lots of games and activities using letters but that is fundamentally the view of the Early Childhood Forum. We need to develop the foundation stage further. The other thing is for teachers to be creative with the NLS. Some teachers are very creative and others are not. I did a small piece of research with somebody else on the NLS which showed that some children were just completely bored, made bored or had become bored with the whole idea of reading and writing because of the way they were being presented. Quite a number of authors are not happy with the way in which their books are being used. They want their books to be enjoyed as literature and not used in a truncated form and split up and so on. There is a whole range of issues, but the most compelling for the Early Childhood Forum is about extending the rich experiences and breadth of different kinds of use of language, through drama, through play and so on, before formal teaching of reading starts.

Q314 Chairman: Is that not what the NLS tells us? Is that not what they believe in too? It is exactly that.

Ms Mansfield: Is that what they say?

Q315 Chairman: The National Literacy Strategy people from the Department for Education and Skills would totally say the same things as you have just said.

Ms Mansfield: But it is not happening in the schools.

Q316 Chairman: Rich diversity, the number of ways the children learn to read.

Ms Mansfield: It is not happening in schools.

Q317 Chairman: You do not think it is happening.

Ms Mansfield: Not enough opportunities are being given even at nursery level for children to have a broad and wide experience. It varies, obviously.
Q318 Valerie Davey: Could we come back to children learning differently? My limited experience perhaps says that some children will need the phonics approach. They find it very difficult. They cannot, as it were, bring together the word on the book with what they are saying and they need that very careful move, which other children have somehow—we do not understand how—grasped and they are ahead. To go back to that at five—and I do mean “go back” for some of them—is boring. Do we not have this range of different children with different approaches and is it not our professional job to match them? Is that not it?

Ms White: Yes, that is right.

Ms Mansfield: I think that is absolutely right. If I come back to the National Literacy Strategy in the foundation stage, yes, the National Literacy Strategy did not say literacy had to be taught in reception. The reality is that the SATS and pressures from head teachers on children going into Year 1 and then into Year 2 means that for most head teachers the literacy strategy is being implemented from very early on. I had a very interesting experience. We have quite a lot of special needs children and there was a lot of sitting. In September this child was on a transition and there was a lot of sitting and I mentioned that there seemed to be a lot of sitting and she said “It’s all right because it is active sitting”. There is a lot of misunderstanding that children do not have to be sitting in order to learn literature. Schools are really not responding.

The amount of money which went into pushing out the literacy strategy was huge. For the foundation stage, the foundation stage has I mean “go back” for some of them—is boring. Do we not have this range of different children with different approaches and is it not our professional job to match them? Is that not it?

Mr McClelland: I agree with your comments. We need a variety of approaches because all children learn slightly differently. We need to be responsive to that, which goes back to my first point, that we cannot simplify this issue. It is deeply complex. The National Literacy Trust has tended to argue that if research shows that what goes on in the home is so critical of it. All I am saying is that we can strengthen what we are doing in terms of literacy for this country if we surround it with a strategy which looks more effectively at pre-school provision and looks more effectively at inter-generational and family literacy. That said, I think the National Literacy Strategy or the strategies for literacy in the last three years have got stronger and stronger. They have linked more effectively into the foundation stage, the foundation stage has developed Communicating Matters. We now have Birth to Three Matters, which links into Sure Start. We have a better understanding of the relationships with parents and how they can be supported through the strategy. We have far better linkages between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3. A lot of extremely good things are happening which can tie in well with the Skills for Life adult basic skills strategy in terms of family learning. We do need to make sure that they are properly co-ordinated or a lot of resource will be wasted. Once again, those most vulnerable in our society will fall through the net.

Ms Strong: It is worth standing back and considering what has happened to literacy. They started measuring standards of literacy in this country round about the Second World War, when the men joined up. Standards of literacy stayed the same for about 50 years and there were all sorts of different teaching methods across those 50 years. There were a few ups and downs, but basically it stayed the same. With the coming of the National Literacy Strategy there has actually been progress and it is a very important thing to note that we should not knock progress in terms of helping our children to become more literate. I suppose the problem is that if we are beginning to reach the plateau of what we can achieve with what we are now doing, we do have to worry about the 20% we are not managing to reach through these methods.

These things are focusing on the family and all the research shows that what goes on in the home is so central to how well you get on in school, this idea of being either a fish in water or a fish out of water when you reach school.

Q320 Chairman: It is very interesting that you mention this 20%. We have been to several other countries with very different and contrasting cultures and most of them, when they are honest about their figures say they have a 20% problem as well. It is almost a cross-cultural problem with the bottom 20% in a number of the societies we visited, whatever methods they use.

Ms Strong: The research seems to say that we are the worst, that we have a long tail of under-achievement and have managed to keep it for longer than others. It is not something one wants to be winning at.

Q321 Mr Greenway: Much of what we still have to ask you have touched on in a way. Do you think there is a stronger causal relationship between pre-literacy experience and reading ability, than there is between specific methods of reading instruction and reading ability?
Ms White: May I just challenge the notion of pre-literacy? I am not entirely sure what we mean by that. Children from very young ages are struggling to make sense of their world and part of that world contains literacy. For me a child is literate as it is starting to talk and all those other things. Pre-literacy is a slight misnomer.

Q322 Mr Greenway: Do we mean pre being taught formally to read?
Ms White: Possibly pre-school, pre-formal schooling; that is a different concept. Personally I do not sit very comfortably with the idea that suddenly children become literate when they get to school and they are pre-literate before that. It is a much longer continuum. They can be pre-formal teaching, or they can be pre-nursery. It is a bit like being pre-communicative. Babies are communicative as they are born and I would say that children are making sense of their world and that world is a literate one from a very, very early age.

Ms Mansfield: Gathering knowledge and understanding and that is why they need a range of experiences. The whole issue about the way the brain develops is really important. Very young children are not able to understand abstractions like letters and words if they are not connected to something which is real for them. That is why it is so important that there is a context in which children learn to read. Anybody who has had children, has children, watches children, observes young children, will know they will be making sense of everything which is around them and every symbol. They replicate those symbols when they are doing drawings and paintings. It may not be exactly as we see them initially, but it develops over time. The time which should be given to that whole period should be longer, so that children have more chances to develop that understanding and to play and use all the experiences they have had and to express them in a variety of different ways, through music, through play, through drama.

Chairman: That comes very clearly from the millennium child programmes which Lord Winston has been carrying through. I do not know whether you agree, but I have been fascinated by that aspect of them. Indeed you might like to join the pressure group I have formed to try to get those made available on video and DVD so people can actually follow them through in terms of their own interest in child development.

Q323 Mr Greenway: I am just wondering now whether there is any evidence that you could point to which supports Melian’s contention that there needs to be greater development of the context, I cannot think of a better phrase than pre-literacy experience, but the context in which a child is taught to read. You are all nodding, so you all obviously agree with this.
Ms White: It is very difficult. People talk about research with young children, but it is extremely difficult because young children’s learning is messy by its very nature. It is very hard to pin it down. The best longitudinal research we have at the moment is the EPI project with Cathie Silver, who is looking at children in different settings and what outcomes they have. It is very clear that nursery schools and integrated centres, where that contextual learning is given high priority, are the best outcomes for children. The difficulty is that we need to go on and see how they are reading at 12 and 14. My gut feeling, and that is not good enough of course if you are trying to find money and power, is that the children who have that type of experience are those who love to learn. They love to find out, they love to take a bit of a risk and they love to experiment. For me that is essential if you are learning anything and learning to read comes within that. You talked about prediction. One of the other ways of predicting what a word might be is to understand how a story might be formed and what word it might be, because there is no way you are going to be able to decode every single word. Knowing something about stories gives you that ability to predict through context.

Q324 Mr Gibb: Which words will you not be able to decode?
Ms White: The spellings, the fact that English is not a phonetic language makes it very difficult.

Q325 Mr Gibb: Just give me an example of a word you cannot decode.
Ms White: “Know”.

Q326 Mr Gibb: We did discuss that before.
Ms White: Yes and I am not sure that learning all of those words, which I think is what we were told—

Q327 Mr Gibb: No, it is not what we were told. We were told that “ne” is a phoneme like “n”.
Ms White: I have a background in phonetics and would question whether you can—

Q328 Mr Gibb: Phonics or phonetics.
Ms White: Phonetics.

Q329 Mr Gibb: That is different, is it not?
Ms White: Yes; it is sounds but it is looking at how the language is made up.

Q330 Mr Gibb: That was the disastrous reading scheme of the 1970s, was it not?
Ms White: Phonetics?

Q331 Mr Gibb: Yes.
Ms White: I am a speech and language therapist and I did phonetics as part of that training. I am sorry, I have lost the plot now.

Q332 Mr Greenway: Does the National Literacy Trust have a view on the answer that Jo has given or are you in agreement?
Mr McClelland: In terms of the research issues, we have a very strong view that there is research evidence that children who have appropriate and extended pre-school experiences, and who developed oral language skills when they were in reception stage and through foundation, achieve
more highly at school. One piece of research by the Carnegie Institute in the United States suggested that children who have developed early language experiences and come into kindergarten, in the case of the United States, with those language skills are in effect more likely to read six times more effectively than children who do not have those skills. That is backed up by quite a substantial piece of research from Harvard by Catherine Snow. We believe that the whole issue of children’s oral cognizance is absolutely essential to this issue. I would say that this is being reflected in the National Literacy Strategy doing more work around fun, around phonics and oral work in the foundation stage.

**Q333 Mr Greenway:** Coming back to Jo White, I think you said earlier on—and I paraphrase—that there is too much pressure to start formal teaching of reading or learning at too early an age, that the SATS were the cause of this. What should be done about this?

**Ms White:** SATS are a pressure and I would say that there are children at two and three who are well able to read wonderfully. So starting too early is about individual children. We know, for example, in terms of speech and language therapy, that boys’ development of language is very different to girls’ and, sitting in clinics, it will be primarily boys who are referred for speech and language therapy intervention. We know that boys’ language takes a little longer. For me it is about looking at individual children and responding to them, allowing the children who want to do phonics at two and a half and who are fascinated by it then and the children who are taking a little bit longer. The problem with SATS is that all children by the age of seven, regardless of their learning style or the experiences they have brought to school, which will be very, very different, all start from a very, very different place and at seven they all have to take the same assessment. That puts huge pressure on schools because increasingly parents come when they are getting children into primary schools and they are saying they have looked at the SATS results. SATS results really matter. They are terribly, terribly important for schools. That pressure does not allow some children the time and the different approach to learning and teaching that they may need.

**Q334 Chairman:** So you would welcome the modification in the SATS at seven.

**Ms White:** I would celebrate hugely.

**Q335 Mr Greenway:** We are all agreed on that.

**Ms Mansfield:** In Wales in fact there are no longer SATS at seven.

**Q336 Chairman:** The government have already announced for England that they are being phased out, have they not? It is going to be teacher assessment in future.

**Ms Mansfield:** Yes.

**Q337 Mr Greenway:** We need to talk about parental involvement. Where is the drive for this coming from? Is the department providing sufficient support and encouragement for parents to become involved in children’s learning?

**Ms Mansfield:** It is, but there also needs to be—again back into teacher training—some work in the initial stages of teacher training to support teachers to work well with parents and encourage and involve them. It is absolutely critical that parents are involved all the way through children’s schooling, but not all schools are very good at doing that. Parents can be very easily put off if they do not feel they are doing the right thing. They need to be encouraged and supported, because everything they do with the children matters. It is important that parents and teachers and staff in schools work together for children rather than separately. A piece of research was done in the early 1980s which showed a group of children in junior schools taught reading in the normal way and another group taught with an extra teacher; in a third group a research worker was going into every home, and many of the families did not speak English, encouraging parents to listen to their children read or to read to them. When the children for whom that was the case, where the families had been fully involved throughout the year, were re-tested at the end of the year they had improved vastly more.

**Mr McClelland:** Melian might remember that I actually had responsibility for the project when she and I worked in Haringey. That became known as the Haringey Reading Project which did pick that up. It has to be said that there have been some concerns about the methodology of that project, but there are lots of triangulations with other pieces of research which would support that piece of work.

**Q338 Chairman:** I do not mean to be rude here, but it is almost common sense, is it not, that anyone who knows about early youth would have predicted that might have made a difference?

**Mr McClelland:** Yes, but common sense does not always translate into good educational practice, then or subsequently. We could work on common sense more effectively in this country. I certainly agree with Melian about the common sense of strong partnership relationships between schools and parents having to be central to the drive. Some of those relationships are very dominated by the school culture. In answer to your question about the DfES, I would say that four or five years ago I would have been not as enthusiastic as I would be now about the department’s commitment to parental involvement. They tended to have a view, if I may say so, that the curriculum was all and quality of teaching was all. Clearly it is absolutely central importance, but it was not sufficient, going back to my view. In recent years, they have put a lot of investment into parental involvement in children’s education work, commissioned some research and produced a lot of materials. They strongly see that relationship, which we have all known about for 30 or 40 years, but that
common sense did not always get translated into practice. Just in that context, through the National Reading Campaign, which Julia leads, I hope we have recently managed to persuade all the key organisations which could have an interest in children’s reading and literacy to sign up for a campaign which will not be a quick-fix campaign, to encourage in positive ways the role of the home in our society and that includes professional organisations, Ofsted, QCA, the department, as well as those which have an interest from the library sector, the arts sector and the parenting sector. The department are very enthusiastic about that.

Q339 Mr Greenway: From that point of view, do you then tend to agree with the clarification which Ruth Miskin gave in answer to my colleague Nick Gibb, that it is important that the parents, if they are going to be involved, understand what method of teaching to read is being deployed within a school? Mr McClelland: I believe it is absolutely critical. The way in which that is communicated is also absolutely critical, so that parents fully understand that, rather than just having been told it. Clearly there needs to be a dialogue with parents, or as many parents as you can involve in doing that. I certainly agree with her comments on that and also her comments that almost anything you can get a parent to do at home is probably going to be constructive.

Q340 Chairman: Are they not different though? On the one hand you said the first part was that it was essential if it was being taught through synthetic phonics that the teacher should know that the child was being taught through synthetic phonics. On the other hand, what I thought Ruth Miskin was saying was that any activity, sitting a child on your lap very, very early on with the earliest kind of book you could possibly have, was also good. Which is good? Both? Mr McClelland: I am sorry, I did agree with that. I thought the question was: is it important that schools communicate effectively with parents about their reading approach?

Q341 Mr Greenway: Yes, it was. The answer Ruth gave to me was that anything you can get the parent to do is helpful. What we have really done is try to take the argument a bit further. If you are really going to encourage parental involvement as opposed to a view on parents, whatever it is they may do with their child, which would not necessarily have been encouraged by the school, if the school is going to encourage them, the parents need to know what kind of learning to read system is in use in the school, otherwise they have no idea. Ms Mansfield: How parents can help their children to enjoy reading is more the point, so that they can spend time with their children listening, or even reading to them up to an older age, because that is what is important, not necessarily entirely knowing exactly what method the school was using, because that can reduce the enjoyment of reading into something very mechanical and that is the concern about a lot of the debate which has gone on, that it is mechanical. Children may be able to decode and read mechanically, but enjoying, understanding and wanting to read more is another whole aspect and that is why we are talking particularly in the Early Childhood Forum, of the importance of the early experiences which encourage that. Part of that is about enjoying stories both at home and in any early years setting. It is important that that interest and motivation is developed in early years, because if it is not there then, it will not come later. Ms Strong: It is very important that schools do not make the parents feel daunted. Obviously if you are not a very good reader yourself and you think the school has rather a complicated reading scheme, you could completely alienate them. The important thing is that the parents are informed about what is going on in school, but that they are encouraged to engage with their children in any way they can. There is even evidence that it is still very helpful if parents who cannot read sit with the child and have the child read to them. That has been shown to be very useful.

Q342 Paul Holmes: I asked a question earlier about my concern that if you said synthetic phonics was the answer, the Holy Grail, everything else was wrong, you would introduce this, would that not cause a lot of problems in that parents are going to be trying to teach the kids to read at home, they are going to read books with them? Surely, if in school they are using a very rigid system, you just learn these sounds, then you just read books specially written to contain only those sounds, how can you reconcile all the stuff the child and the parents are doing outside school with that very rigid prescriptive system in school? Ms Strong: I think I agree with you. Ms Mansfield: I agree. A rigid system is not helping because it ties everybody into one way of learning and everybody learns differently and at a different pace as well. It has already been mentioned that some children are ready to read much earlier than others and we must go along with that and not try to force those children who are not yet ready to read early. They will learn. There is a belief in other countries that children will learn to read anyway by the time they are six or seven, but the majority of them learn much more quickly if they have the other experiences first: if they experience success quickly and enjoy it, that is what we want for the children.

Q343 Mr Gibb: Do you think that the children who can decode mechanically are more or less motivated to read? Ms Mansfield: Less.

Q344 Mr Gibb: Than those children who cannot decode mechanically. Ms Mansfield: Than those children who cannot?

Q345 Mr Gibb: Do you think that those who can decode mechanically are more or less motivated to read than those who cannot decode mechanically?
Ms Mansfield: I think they are less motivated.

Q346 Mr Gibb: Really. So how do you think the children who cannot decode mechanically can read?
Ms Mansfield: Children learn through a whole variety of methods. Some may need to be helped to use some particular method, but I believe that children want to read and if they are given encouragement they will learn to read.

Q347 Mr Gibb: Do you have evidence for this? Was testing done, a scientific study which proves you are right and that the phonics people are wrong?
Ms Mansfield: No.

Q348 Mr Gibb: It is just an assertion.
Ms White: It is a strange question in a way because, as we have already said, phonics is absolutely key and we want children to be able to decode; it is very important that they should be able to decode. We are not marginalising phonics. What was interesting about your question was that it might very well depend on the motivation of the child and the personality of the child. A child who cannot decode may be reading very, very happily, using the pictures, telling the story, having a wonderful time being a reader.

Q349 Mr Gibb: But without the pictures, he could not read the story presumably if you just gave him text with no pictures.
Ms White: We are looking at picture books.

Q350 Mr Gibb: Without the pictures this child could not read.
Ms White: I would not give a young child a book without pictures at all. The child who is reading mechanically, decoding very well, might not be in the least interested in reading, but it could be the other way round.

Q351 Mr Gibb: Have any of you read the Clackmannanshire study? Have you read it?
Ms White: No, I have not.

Mr Gibb: So those two have not read it, which surprises me and you two have read it, which I am pleased about. What did you think about that study?
Chairman: You are not here to comment on what you are pleased about, Nick.

Q352 Mr Gibb: You seem to have very strong views on phonics but you have not read one of the key studies about it, which surprises me, given your position. Leaving that aside, I want to focus my questions on Neil and Julia. What was your view of the study and what do you think it shows us about how you teach reading?
Ms Strong: It is quite some time since I read it. I felt that it was impressive, that clearly the teachers who had been involved had found it very useful. I suppose my feeling on that one, as with many of the others which I have read on phonics, is that different people get equally enthusiastic about different methods and I suppose I would agree—this will keep my job—with what Neil said earlier on, that there is a range. I get a little bit nervous of the not wanting to hear the other side of the argument. Certainly that method, enthusiastically taught, can have significantly good results. I have no doubt about that. Equally, I can think of other ones which you can show the same about.

Mr McClelland: I basically agree with Julia. Whilst we do not claim to be experts on phonics in the National Literacy Trust, in answer to your question, yes, I do think the capacity to decode can be motivating and it is necessary for motivating children to read. However, I do not think it is enough. It needs to be surrounded by other things. One of the concerns is that there are potentially so many other models which utilise synthetic phonics. Just a couple of weeks ago I went to see Success for All in action, which utilises synthetic phonics. I saw that in action in a Tower Hamlets school and I have to say, after spending a morning in that school, I was deeply impressed by what they were doing. I do not think I am in a position, and I do not think research is there, to say that particular approach is any better or worse yet, in terms of any longitudinal evaluation, than the Clackmannanshire approach, both use synthetic phonics.

Q353 Mr Gibb: A final question about the issues you raised of children starting school later and being emotionally developed. Do you agree with the Swiss system where they do not start formal learning until they are emotionally ready, but that can vary from child to child? You would have some children starting formal school at four, some at five, some at six. Do you agree with that approach?
Ms White: It rather depends what formal school looks like. In this country we have schooling the term after the child is five and that can be a very rich and rewarding experience for some children. For some children formal schooling can be too formal and restricting. When we talk about formal schooling, we have to make sure we all have a model about what formal schooling is. If you are talking about sitting down and that being the only model of learning that is formal, then yes, the later you start formal learning the better.

Q354 Mr Gibb: Do you accept that it can vary from child to child? Some children can start early, some need to start later.
Ms White: It can vary. If you come to my centre, and you are more than welcome to visit, you will find children ranging from 18 months to five years, all of whom, and that is the joy of the work I do, have very, very different levels and stages and interests and abilities.

Q355 Mr Gibb: So you think the way we do it in Britain in a very strict chronological way, with children going to school at a certain age and moving up the next year, is wrong and we should have children moving up according to their emotional development and how well they are doing in the class; that would then determine whether they moved.
Ms White: It can be very difficult. Yes, in terms of logistics of course that makes life very difficult, but in terms of the outcomes for children, I suspect that a model like that would be very beneficial.

Q356 Paul Holmes: You said at the start that there was 50 years' worth of analysis of literacy levels and it has mostly stayed the same. Whether it was the good old days of the grammars and secondary moderns or the bad old days of the 1960s and 1970s it has stayed much the same, but that there has been quite an improvement with the National Literacy Strategy.

Ms Strong: Yes.

Ms Mansfield: I am sure she would do it.

Ms White: I do think it has helped teachers who have sometimes been very poorly equipped just to do a very short training. That is to the benefit of the National Literacy Strategy. I worry very much particularly about the literary able children in some reception classes in Year 1 who are frankly quite bored by what is going on. I have spoken to parents whose children have gone in with great excitement and have looked into the National Literacy Strategy need to be very careful with young children that we argue it out. Certain the Canadian researchers who about literacy and that is very easily dampened. We need to be very careful with young children that we do not dampen that joy and that passion for reading, because it is about life-long learning and reading is a crucial, essential skill.

Chairman: May I thank you for what for me and the rest of my colleagues has been an excellent session? Would you remain in contact and would Jo and Nick make up afterwards? Would you remain in contact with the Committee and we should like to be able to phone you up or e-mail you for some more observations as we write up our report. Thank you again.

Q358 Paul Holmes: Is that not saying the teachers felt happier that they had nice clear directions, but the Durham test was about whether the kids were actually reading better according to standardised tests.

Note: The average reading ability of nine year olds has remained much the same since 1948. Between 1987 and 1991 there was a small decline in reading standards. But by 1995, standards had returned to the 1987 level. The report compares the performance in reading of 2,000 nine-year-olds in England and Wales with pupils of the same age in 27 other countries. England and Wales came 21st, towards the bottom of a middle group of countries. They were well behind the top group, which included the United States, Finland, Sweden, Italy and France, but were only just below Germany, Canada and Hungary.
Written evidence

Memorandum submitted by Margaret J Snowling, Professor of Psychology, University of York and Director of the Centre for Reading and Language

Margaret Snowling has 25 years research experience in the field of reading and reading difficulties/dyslexia.

Charles Hulme, Professor of Psychology, University of York and Co-Director of the Centre for Child Development and Well-Being. Has 25 years research experience in the field of reading and memory and has been involved in reading intervention research for 15 years.

Dr Simon Gibbs, Senior Educational Psychologist, North Yorkshire County Council, Academic and Professional Tutor (Educational Psychology) at the University of Newcastle, School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences and Honorary Research Fellow at the University of York. Has been particularly involved in researching the development of children’s reading for the last 15 years as well as maintaining overall interest in the broad area of child development and how educational systems may facilitate (or hinder) that.

Summary of the Evidence and Recommendations

We have evidence that carefully structured approaches that link and promote the development of phonological awareness, word reading and spelling can support significant improvements in children’s literacy. We can show that these approaches (deliverable by qualified teachers and/or teaching assistants) can help very many children who would otherwise, and for a range or reasons, experience significant difficulties in learning to read and write. However, we would caution against very early (pre-school) implementation of strict literacy training favouring instead work at that stage of children’s lives that promotes the development of language and communication through oral interaction and attention.

We cannot provide direct evidence but feel confident in asserting (on the basis of considerable case-work) that there is a pressing need to find more effective strategies for engaging (motivating) and helping children in KS3 (and KS4) acquire basic skills in phonological awareness and literacy.

We also believe that evidence-based practice will be developed and disseminated most effectively through sustained and close working relationships between universities and LEAs. Our experience is that there may be benefits from such joint working that accrue to both organisations (in terms of the development of knowledge and skills) but the benefits are most definitely evident for those (teachers, teaching assistants and children) in schools.

Whether policy/guidance has a sound base in research evidence, looking at relative weight given to synthetic/analytic phonics, whole word/language, onset/rhyme etc.

1. Our published research has a direct bearing on the value of phonological awareness training and phonics to the teaching of reading in the foundation years and KS1, and in regard to the optimal unit of phonological awareness (phoneme or onset/rhyme) to train. Hatcher, Hulme and Snowling (2004) report the results of a study that pre-dated the NLS in which they trained reception and Year 1 teachers in 20 mainstream schools to deliver a phonic teaching programme on a whole class basis. In 15 out of the 20 schools, the reading programme was supplemented by training in oral phonological awareness. The children received the teaching programme in their class, daily, for five terms (terms 2–6 after school entry). The reading and language skills of the children were assessed shortly after school entry (t1), following the first two terms of teaching (t2), after five terms of teaching (t3) and a year after this form of teaching ceased, at the end of year 2 (t4). The literacy standards of the cohort of children who had received this teaching were compared with those of the year ahead at a comparable time point (at the end of KS1).

Overall, the “intervention” cohort was ahead of the control cohort in reading and spelling (check) but not significantly so. The gain was in the order of three months of reading age.

2. A key issue was whether oral phonological awareness training (analytic phonics) would bring added benefits over and above a highly structured phonic teaching regime (with embedded phonic blending). To assess this question, five schools had been trained to focus on phoneme level training, five schools on onset-rime-level training and five schools to deliver a mixed onset-rime and phoneme programme. Within the intervention cohort as a whole, there was no significant advantage of training in phonological awareness over and above the embedded phonic work in the structured reading programme.

We conclude, that for typically developing children, a highly structured reading programme with embedded phonics is sufficient to achieve high standards in reading. There is little additional benefit to be gained from oral phonological awareness training for normally developing children. However, this is not the case for children at risk of literacy failure.

3. Hatcher, Hulme and Snowling (2004) went on to examine the progress of children in the intervention cohort who had entered school at risk of reading failure. These children gained poor scores on tests of vocabulary, letter knowledge and rhyme skills, and formed the bottom third of the cohort. The progress of those at-risk was monitored from t1 to t4 and compared with that of the upper two-thirds of the cohort who served as a comparison group. Among at-risk children, those who received the reading programme alone
witnessed a widening gap between their reading skills and those of their peers. Although they were progressing, they were falling further and further behind in reading in relation to the average-to-good readers. Supplementing the programme with phonological awareness training stemmed the relative decline in these children’s skills. Moreover, those who received phoneme level training fared best. The mixed onset-rime and phoneme level training was also effective while training in onset-rime was less effective in helping these children learn to read.

We conclude that phonological awareness training at the level of the phoneme is critical for children at risk of reading difficulties in KS1.

4. In spite of good progress in the mainstream classroom, the children at-risk of reading failure did not reach the normally expected level of performance by at the end of KS2 (t4). We conclude that a more individualised form of teaching is required to cater for their needs (see below).

Putting policy into practice—how effectively is guidance being translated into practice? What variation exists in practice?

5. We have no direct evidence on how effectively guidance on the teaching of reading within the strict terms of the National Literacy Strategy is being translated into practice. However, work carried out with teaching assistants working with children in schools in North Yorkshire indicates that, with structured training and follow-up supervision (in the form of live group tutorials), teaching assistants can adhere closely to the main elements of the programme and can also develop the skills and confidence to respond contingently to the needs and achievements of individual children.

6. During the course of our research in North Yorkshire we also assessed the reading ability of a sample of 303 children in Year 1 using the BASII word reading test, a standardised test of word reading ability. The mean standardised score (and standard deviation) for the group was 107.36 (14.81). The mean score is significantly higher (+7.36 points) than the mean of 100 for the published test, although the standard deviation of 14.81 is equivalent to the test standard deviation of 15. This may indicate local variations in achievement or it may indicate that some measures of reading are not as stable over time as may have been assumed. Our purpose in drawing this to the attention of the Committee is simply to underline the need for caution in the interpretation of data from standardised tests at a national level.

Which children benefit from current approaches? Are all equally well-served by current policy guidance on reading?

7. In a study in North Yorkshire, we have evaluated the Early Literacy Support Programme (ELS; DfES, 2001), comparing it with a version of the reading intervention programme described above (RI) (Hatcher et al, submitted). Both programmes were delivered to groups of six children by trained teaching assistants, daily, for 12 weeks in the Spring term of Year 1. The children in the RI intervention received intervention that alternated daily between group work on reading and phonological awareness and one-to-one teaching of reading. The sample comprised 128 six-year-old children, from 16 primary schools. The children were nominated as in need of special help by their class teachers before being allocated to one of the two programmes. In keeping with the rationale of the ELS, these children were behind in reading but not severely disabled. It was found that both groups of children made equivalent and significant gains in letter knowledge, phoneme awareness, reading and spelling skills that were maintained at follow-up three months later. The gain of 6.06 standard score points in reading is significant and brought the children to the average expected level. This progress amounts to a gain of 0.30 SS points per hour of teaching which is substantial. It is equivalent to that found by Hatcher et al. (1994) using trained teachers with reading-delayed children and compares well to the range of .13 to .23 standard score points per hour of teaching reported by Torgesen et al., (2001) for successful interventions.

We conclude that the ELS provides an effective Wave 2 intervention for children whose reading is slightly below the average for their age.

8. The ability of teaching assistants to implement the RI programme on an individual basis to children with reading delay, led us to develop this programme as a Wave 3 intervention for children with very low levels of literacy in Year 1 (DfES, 2003). Following screening of 635 Year 1 children in 16 schools, 118 were identified as having very limited reading skills. These children were allocated in a Randomised Control Trial (RCT) to a 20-week intervention (the trained group) in groups of three, with group and individual work alternating between days, or to the same intervention for the second 10-week period of intervention (the waiting control group). The children were assessed prior to the intervention at the end of their fourth term in school (t1), after 10 weeks of intervention (t2) and after a further 10 weeks of intervention at the end of Year 1 (t3).

The trained group made better progress in reading and in phonological awareness than the waiting control group during the two terms of teaching. However, both groups made substantial gains, averaging 7.8 standardised score points on the British Ability Scales Word reading test.

We conclude that reading intervention that combines training in phoneme awareness and individualised reading using graded books is an effective Wave 3 intervention. However, it is important to note, that even this kind of intervention leaves some children well below the expected level for their age. Thus, 32% of the children in the trained group and 47% of the control group had a standard score for reading of below 80 (which is in the impaired range). Thus, this form of intervention is not a solution for children with severe
reading difficulties. This underlines the conclusion from all our previous work, as well as comparable work in the USA, that for children with severe problems in learning to read, intensive individualised teaching is necessary to achieve adequate reading skills. Such children can be identified in the first two years of school, and an urgent policy issue is to develop a programme that will provide adequate help for these children. Such a policy could have very significant cost/benefit implications for educational attainments and the avoidance of social exclusion, and mental health problems, later in life for these children.

Introduction of early literacy strategies—teaching children to read from a very early age.

9. Learning to read depends upon children having good oral language skills. The development of phonological skills (and thence, in our view the development of reading) is related to the development of language (Gibbs, 2004a). Bringing forward the age at which children are taught to read will not, in our view, help children with poor language. Such children do not have in place the “precursors” of phonological awareness (Gibbs, 2004b). Pre-school and foundation-level programmes of language intervention (focusing on vocabulary, listening and speaking skills) are likely to be needed. We are currently evaluating one such intervention for children on school entry (funded by Nuffield Foundation). Countries that teach children to read later typically emphasise language activities in pre-school.

The success or otherwise of current policies compared to those being pursued in other countries—paying due attention to differences dictated by different languages.

10. Great caution is required in making cross-national comparisons because of differences in language structure and teaching practices. In recent data, we found that differences in reading skills between children learning to read in English (post-NLS) and children learning to read in Dutch emerged at a later (KS2) rather than an earlier age. We interpreted these differences as consequences of learning to read in an opaque orthography (English) in which children inevitably receive inconsistent feedback from their reading attempts (Patel, Snowling & de Jong, in press). Teaching practices are unlikely to change such inherent cross-language differences.

APPENDIX

REFERENCES

For further details of relevance to this evidence http://www.york.ac.uk/res/crl/.


Memorandum submitted by Valerie Legg, Chartered Educational Psychologist

1. Introduction to Person Submitting Evidence

I am a Principal Educational Psychologist with 27 years experience of teaching children to read and 16 years experience in dealing with reading failure. I completed a Doctoral degree in 2004 researching the early identification of those children likely to fail to learn to read and what can be done to intervene to mitigate this.

2. Which children benefit from current approaches? Are all equally well-served by current policy guidance on reading?

The National Curriculum has been with us since the early 1990s, with the National Literacy Strategy, following a few years later. Early indicators of the success of the pointed out the continued failure to learn to read at age equivalence or the same level as their peers of 20% of those children receiving this Strategy. This led to sequential developments in Extra Literacy Support (ELS), Additional Literacy Support (ALS), and now Wave 3. Each of these subsequent developments of the NLS is based on an analytic/synthetic phonics approach to the teaching of components of reading and each purported to raise literacy levels for the 20% of children who fail to learn to read with the NLS—but there has been no change to the failure rate so far.

3. Does policy/guidance have a sound base in research evidence, looking at relative weight given to synthetic/analytic phonics, whole word/language, onset/rhyme etc?

The answer to this is: To a large extent—“Yes”; but there are major precursors to literacy in all children—their levels of language development. In particular, the development of a young child’s vocabulary has the most significant effect on their developing phonology. My own research, and that of many others, (references available on request), indicates that where language development is insufficient, literacy is negatively effected.

4. This is of serious consequence since:

(a) The Foundation Stage of learning gives too little weight to language development per se;

(b) Baseline Assessment practices within the Foundation Stage summate indicators of language development in such a way as to disallow identification of children who need further support to develop language to a sufficient level before embarking on even informal literacy tuition;

(c) The Department of Health (driven by central policy) have removed the routine screening of the development of two-year old children by health visitors. This means that those young children whose language is not developing sufficiently to enable them to become literate later are not now generally noticed until reading fails—characteristically at 7 [instead of identifying and supporting from 3 or 4];

(d) The markers of inadequate language development to enable literacy development later are subtle and missed by most working with young children; and

(e) All staffs working with young children need much more training to be able to develop children’s language at this stage.

5. Introduction of early literacy strategies—teaching children to read from a very early age

Whilst referrals to Speech and Language Therapists may have diminished as a result of the removal of the routine screening of the development two-year olds, referrals for literacy difficulties to local authority specialist support teachers and educational psychologists have increased three fold—and Wave 3. This must surely indicate that current policy and practises are inadequate, let alone indicating that reading should be formally taught to even younger children?

6. Recommendations for action

I welcome this Commons Select Committee into reading and urge you to weigh seriously evidence of the value of pre-literacy experiences, that is:

— consider a later start to education to enable children’s further language development before formal education—[there is little evidence to suggest language development is speeded by entry to school and most children have fully developed language by age 6y 6m]. Or;

— massively change the emphasis of literacy teaching to a language-based approach and train all Early Years and Foundation Stage staffs accordingly and to a high level.

December 2004
Memorandum submitted by Sarah Seymour

1. I have been a mainstream reception teacher, a Senco and until recently, an Advisory Support teacher for the Norfolk LEA, giving advice and support to schools when children have special educational needs, in particular those with suspected dyslexia. Part of my remit was to assess children for dyslexic tendencies and then formulate a remedial literacy programme. I repeatedly found that poor phonological awareness and inadequate phonics knowledge were core problems and that a period of intensive, focussed teaching using synthetic phonics could significantly address their difficulties where other interventions (eg ELS, ALS) had failed.

2. I used Sound Discovery, a programme written by Dr Marlynne Grant, when I was teaching on a 1:1 basis. I had had significant success using Jolly Phonics when I was a reception teacher, and wanted to use the same progression but with non age specific materials, as the children I was helping ranged from 8–13 years old.

3. When I was asked by a Year 2 teacher in one school if I knew of a phonics programme that could help eight children who were non readers, we decided to undertake an informal trial using Sound Discovery.

4. The success of this prompted me to raise with Cognition and Learning team (part of the Norfolk Psychology Service) the possibility of a more formal trial at North Elmham Primary school. This was undertaken in the Spring of 2004. The purpose of this was to assess the feasibility of using Sound Discovery as a Wave 3 intervention in a small rural primary school. (a copy is attached).

5. The conclusion of the trial was that Sound Discovery was shown to be economical to introduce and use, with “user friendly” materials and methodology as well as motivating for staff and children. It showed that the minimum requirement of doubling the normal rate of progress (as recommended by the DfES) was achievable for the majority of the children using this programme.

6. In turn the measurably positive outcome of this trial has stimulated interest in surrounding schools and at the requests of their head teachers, I have to date, introduced the programme into four other primary schools and one secondary school. Training has been organised for two other schools and I have been asked to lead a twilight presentation explaining the principles behind Sound Discovery to a cluster of head teachers in the February.

7. I suggest that the degree of interest I am encountering reflects dissatisfaction with the many of the materials provided by the NLS. This is coupled with convincing and quantifiable evidence, both national and local, that there is an effective and economically viable alternative.

8. I also believe that the ready response that I find when I talk to teachers about the theory behind using synthetic phonics to develop necessary underpinning skills is because they are recognising something they already know as experienced practitioners: that it is best to “catch children before they fall” and that a thorough grounding in phonics can go along way towards achieving this.

9. My driving concern is to help children avoid the avoidable, debilitating failure that I have encountered in my work and that I have helped remediate by using methods that would be best taught as a primary, initial strategy.

The strong demand for information about Jolly Phonics and Sound Discovery has been such that I no longer work for the LEA, but am now self-employed, helping schools to introduce these programmes.

THE SOUND DISCOVERY TRIAL AT NORTH ELMHAM PRIMARY SCHOOL NORFOLK

SPRING 2004

BACKGROUND

In November 2003 it was agreed by the Cognition and Learning Team that a small trial should be conducted into the effectiveness and feasibility of using Sound Discovery as a Wave 3 intervention in small rural schools. North Elmham Primary was chosen because the head teacher, Robin Turner, was already aware of Sound Discovery as a possible literacy intervention and was consequently interested in participating.

What makes a successful Wave 3 intervention?

The DfES recommends that the “main impact measure (of an intervention) should be ratio gain: the amount of progress which children make, in months of reading or spelling age, divided by the number of months over which those gains were made. A ratio gain of one represents the normal rate of progress of all children over time—one month of reading or spelling age per month of chronological age” (DfES: 2003). The report continues “if identified children in a school are not, on average, achieving at least twice the normal rate of progress through the school’s existing Wave 3 literacy provision, it may be appropriate to re-evaluate what is being offered.”
However, it is clear that the overall feasibility of an intervention within different settings must also be taken into consideration. For example, the cost of training staff and buying resources may preclude an intervention in a small school, regardless of its proven effectiveness. These were issues that we were interested in addressing apart from the measure of ratio gain.

**What is Sound Discovery?**

Sound Discovery is a synthetic phonics programme developed by Dr Marlynne Grant, an Educational Psychologist in South Gloucester. It is suitable for “First Wave”, “Slow to start” and dyslexic pupils of all ages.

It was influenced by the literacy and language programmes of Dr Jonathan Solity ((ERR), Sue Lloyd (Jolly Phonics), Mona Mc Nee (Step by Step), Ruth Miskin (rml), and Diane McGuiness (Phono-graphix) as well as academic research from major universities such as St Andrew’s (Johnson and Watson, 1997 and 1998), Dundee (Seymour and Duncan, 1997) Hull (Muter, Snowing and Taylor, 1997), Institute of Education, London (Stuart 1999) and Warwick (Solity et al 1999).

**What are the principles behind Sound Discovery?**

Sound Discovery is underpinned by the following principles:

- **Whole class/group teaching**—to develop attention, social skills and interaction
- **Reinforcement and repetition are built in**—interleaved learning
- **Recall**—students are encouraged to make active attempts at recall rather than just recognition
- **Oral work**—to develop phonological skills
- **Interactive and lively teaching**—to engage children and keep them focussed
- **Multi-sensory methods**
- **Frequent rehearsal**—little and often
- **Fluency and mastery** in learning is essential
- **Direct instruction** (modelling )—I do, we do, you do.

**Sound Discovery teaches**

- initially by fusing the Jolly Phonics programme (Jolly Phonics 1992) with the Sound Discovery methodology
- that the alphabet is a logical code
- synthetic phonics as an initial, primary strategy
- using a systematic and progressive structure
- using the “Snappy lesson”—which integrates both reading and writing skills
- using the following progression in each lesson: phoneme < word < sentence level
- a modelled approach to writing: I do, we do, you do.

Sound Discovery was piloted, then trialled and evaluated in a large mainstream primary in South Gloucester with low entry assessments (approx 630 pupils) before it was published in 2000 (Sound Discovery, 2000). It can be used as Wave 1, 2 or 3 interventions.

The first cohort of pupils to have started with the programme when it was being piloted (as Wave 1) in Reception took their KS2 SATs in Summer 2003. 33.3% of the boys got Level 5 in writing, compared to 9.5% for the LEA and 11% nationally.

**Why trial Sound Discovery in Norfolk?**

- evidence based research elsewhere has shown it to be effective
- it has been shown to be very motivating—particularly to boys
- the materials and methodology are non age specific
- it is very adaptable within its own framework
- the materials are reasonably priced and accessible
- LSAs can deliver it after relatively brief training
- it uses group teaching as a preferred model
- it is being considered by other LEAs as their main Wave 3 intervention.
The main aims of the trial were to evaluate

— What impact can Sound Discovery have on: reading skills; spelling age; phonics skills; motivation?
— Which pupils will benefit most from Sound Discovery?
— How cost/time effective is it in terms of school resources?
— How manageable were the materials and methodology for those delivering it?
— If the training/support given to the school were adequate?

Length of trial and number of sessions

The 10 week trial (with a one week break for half term) took place during the Spring term. Each pupil had five 20 minute sessions a week in small groups of 3-5 children, taught by an LSA.

The groups

The children were taught in five groups, arranged according to attainment rather than year group. This made it possible to include a Yr 5 child with SLD whose attainment is significantly behind her peers, by placing her with Yr3/2s (Child O).

The children were screened using the Sound Discovery placement test provided in the manual, which places children on a “step” of the programme. The children were then grouped according to the step they were on (Appendix 1).

The role of the Norfolk Psychological Service was

— to discuss the principles behind Sound Discovery with teachers/staff
— to outline the project requirements
— to train the relevant school staff to use programme
— to discuss the selection of pupils and time tabling
— to provide further support and advice after initial training
— to administer pre and post testing and collect data
— to analyse data and discuss results with school.

The role of the school was

— to identify pupils in discussion with AST
— to allocate staff and time to work with groups
— assist in pre and post testing questionnaires
— to inform parents if their children were part of the project
— to liaise with NPS and help monitor the project.

Assessing and measuring progress

The following pre and post data was to be collected for the trial
Salford Reading Test (revised 2000)
Young’s Parallel Spelling test
The Basic Literacy Assessment
Sound Discovery Placement test
Questionnaires for pupils, teachers and LSA’s to gauge their response to the programme.

Assessment and age range

As Sound Discovery can be used with any age group, and target different levels and types of literacy skills, it was decided to use it from Reception to Year 6 at North Elmham.

There was a wide range of attainment in the sample: for example between children developing pre-reading skills to those whose reading was age appropriate but who needed a boost with spelling. The sample also included children with identified SpeLD, ADHD and SLD.

As there were no standardised tests available that could measure all the skills across the age range, it was decided to use the same battery of tests as those used in other trials eg the Phonics Based Reading trial, even though they were applied to a much narrower age range in those instances.
It was agreed that for consistency we would use all tests with all the children, although with such a
difference in age/attainment, significant numbers inevitably scored either below the baseline or above the
celling of the tests, either before or after the trial.

The diversity of the data made it hard to give meaningful overall average or ratio gains for all the tests.
In order to give an idea of the effectiveness of the programs in average ratio terms we have omitted from
the calculation children who were below the baseline age or above the ceiling of the tests in attainment. The
Reception children were below the baseline age for the Young’s spelling test. In some instances the children
hit the ceiling of the test in post testing and scored 100%—this is indicated on the data.

OUTCOMES OF THE TRIAL

READING SKILLS

Using the Salford Sentence Reading Test as a measure (for those whose age and attainment made it
appropriate) the average ratio gain was 3.8 over a period of 11 weeks. (Appendix 1).

Some children made substantial gains (eg Child F—a ratio gain of 10.4, 26 months) while others made
gains which were not as dramatic, but reflected significant progress given the nature and degree of their
difficulties (eg Child O).

The data from the Basic Literacy Assessment gives useful insight into individual as well as collective
progress. It suggests the programme was providing basic pre reading skill for some, but also filling in gaps
for other children. So while the Yr R/1 children were focusing on learning single sound/symbol
correspondence and their ability to blend and segment (see Appendices 3, 4, 5, 6) others benefited from
practising these skills as catch up, bringing their skills up to 100% on the assessment. This is also noticeable
in the reading and spelling of high frequency words (see Appendices 7 and 8).

SPELLING

Using Young Parallel Spelling Test as a measure for those within the age range, an average ratio gain of
2.7 was made over 11 weeks. Although individual gains were less dramatic (with the exception of Child Q
who made a ratio gain of 6.4), most children made gain around the 2 mark. There was also evidence of
significant progress on the Basic Literacy Assessment 10—spelling of HF words.

MOTIVATION

The level of motivation has been one of the most encouraging aspects of the trial. This has been reported
by the LSAs, the teachers and the head teacher as being an important factor amongst both the children and
staff. (Appendix 9 and 10) As the head teacher comments in his summary “the staff were highly motivated
by its (Sound Discovery) simplicity and the enjoyment expressed by the children who took part. Quite simply
they were sold on the idea. Their belief in its success was transmitted to the children, whose enthusiasm then
drove the scheme forward.” (Appendix 12).

The children’s comments are very positive (see Appendix 11) not only saying that they like it but giving
examples, suggesting they have reflected on their own progress eg “it definitely helps in class with my
spelling—I could spell ‘brilliant’ by sounding it out” Other comments indicate an increase in general
confidence eg “I like it because it makes me feel good. When I go back to class I feel I can do it all. I feel
proud”.

While there was some quite dramatic progress shown by some children (eg Children F, N, L and Q) there
was progress shown by all children in some areas, most of them in all, according to their starting point on
the trial and other underlying factors. It suggests that it was effective as a Wave 2 intervention for some and
as a Wave 3 for others.

HOW COST/TIME EFFECTIVE WAS IT IN TERMS OF SCHOOL RESOURCES?

It is estimated by the school that £320 was spent on additional resources—this included the Sound
Discovery manuals, four sets of magnetic letters and boards, and Sound Discovery “Phonics First”
reading books.

One and half days were put aside for training the four LSAs, which included the visit to observe a lesson
being taught.

The ongoing costs are minimal as the all materials are photocopiable. The school has chosen to laminate
these for durability and to further reduce future preparation time.
HOW MANAGEABLE WERE THE MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY FOR THOSE DELIVERING IT?

The LSAs reported that the materials and methodology are straightforward to use and rated it better than other interventions they have used. They found the manual simple and clear, useful as a base. Some felt the preparation of materials was more onerous than others. The time taken is partly because the materials were being laminated for future use and longevity. The idea of arranging them into folders according to individual “steps” was a good one and should limit the amount of preparation time in future. The majority felt they were clear about the principles behind Sound Discovery and all found it easy to use.

WAS THE TRAINING/SUPPORT GIVEN TO THE SCHOOL ADEQUATE?

While this question was answered positively on the questionnaire, there were additional suggestions. One was that the visit to observe and discuss a Sound Discovery session at another school should happen before the days training. This opportunity was considered by most to have been useful.

Another was that the training should be split in two, perhaps with the visit in between, to allow “absorption time”.

The follow up training visit, intended as an opportunity to air concerns, ask questions and clarify issues was regarded as useful.

The Sound Discovery training videos were not generally liked.

ADDITIONAL ISSUES RAISED BY STAFF

The importance of having a permanent teaching space for SD was raised. The size of group was raised (that five were too many).

The usefulness of peer/staff observation was mooted as a method of monitoring the delivery of the Snappy lesson.

The importance of record keeping as a way of informing future planning of lessons.

There was a suggestion that a link up with parents of those on Sound Discovery could be fruitful.

CONCLUSION

The main aims of the trial were to evaluate the impact that Sound Discovery has on reading, writing and motivation, and also the feasibility of its implementation within a small rural school.

The “rule of thumb” advocated by the DfES, of a ratio gain of “at least double the normal rate of progress” (DfES 2003) was satisfied at North Elmham. This is especially significant given the brevity of the trial. It is the expectation of the Head teacher and the staff that the gains will continue to rise exponentially.

The general impression given by staff and children is that the experience of using Sound Discovery has been a particularly motivating one. (See Appendices 9, 10, 11, 12).

A measure of the success of the trial at the school was their decision to continue with Sound Discovery, regardless of any statistical outcomes, which have merely confirmed what they had observed. Old Buckenham Primary, where it had been trialled for two terms on a smaller, more ad hoc scale, have been similarly convinced by their own experience and have now introduced it, after appropriate training, on a whole school basis.

It is certainly seen by North Elmham School as a cost effective intervention “cheap and easy to introduce, economical in terms of time, all combined in a multi sensory, easy to use hands on package”.

The trial has demonstrated that Sound Discovery is economical to introduce and use, with “user friendly” materials and methodology as well as motivating for staff and children. It has shown that the minimum requirement of doubling the normal rate of progress is achievable for most children using this programme.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The positive impact that the introduction of Sound Discovery has had on the children’s progress at North Elmham School indicates that it merits consideration as a recommended Wave 3 literacy intervention in Norfolk pending further consideration by the strategy group.

The trial has confirmed its potential for meeting the needs for children struggling with literacy. In particular, it is:

— effective;
— economical;
— motivating;
— user friendly;
— non age specific, the methodology and materials spanning the key stages; and
— possible to incorporate within the NLS.

In view of these significant qualities it seems reasonable to propose an initiative that introduces it more widely, perhaps by initially targeting schools that demonstrate the greatest level of need. Although it can be used with all ages, it would be in line with the philosophy of early intervention if these were primary schools.

Interested schools would be invited to attend a short introductory session, outlining the programme and the level and nature of commitment necessary for successful implementation. This would include an identified member of the leadership group responsible for organising and monitoring the programme.

The next step would be staff training: this would comprise: a short twilight for teachers; two half days and an arranged observation trip (to see best practice). Following the introductory training, monitoring should be undertaken by the designated teacher in school with support from the area Advisory Support Teacher. Access to a further session or regular “user group” sessions would be worthy of consideration and a follow up session for LSAs.

It is intended that by planning and introducing the programme appropriately the LSAs would have the requisite skills and knowledge to deliver sessions that ensure the success the programme is designed to achieve.

REFERENCES


Grant M (in press). Raising Literacy attainment of all pupils in a mainstream primary setting with a particular reference to boy’s writing a six years longitudinal study. Educational Psychology Service. South Gloucester Council.

APPENDIX 1

PROGRESS WITH READING SALFORD SENTENCE READING TEST (REVISED)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child</th>
<th>DOB</th>
<th>CA</th>
<th>NCYG</th>
<th>RA 9.1.04</th>
<th>RA 30.3.04</th>
<th>Ratio Gain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>30.6.99</td>
<td>4 years 6 months</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>No score</td>
<td>No score</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.</td>
<td>7.2.99</td>
<td>4 years 11 months</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>No score</td>
<td>No score</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.</td>
<td>4.4.98</td>
<td>5 years 8 months</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>No score</td>
<td>No score</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.</td>
<td>1.4.98</td>
<td>5 years 9 months</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>No score</td>
<td>No score</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.</td>
<td>3.3.97</td>
<td>6 years 10 months</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4 years 3 months</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.</td>
<td>9.12.96</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4 years 10 months</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G.</td>
<td>10.8.96</td>
<td>7 years 4 months</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4 years 10 months</td>
<td>5 years 6 months</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H.</td>
<td>4.6.96</td>
<td>7 years 7 months</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5 years 7 months</td>
<td>7 years 1 month</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>27.4.96</td>
<td>7 years 8 months</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7 years 6 months</td>
<td>7 years 10 months</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J.</td>
<td>25.3.96</td>
<td>7 years 9 months</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5 years 2 months</td>
<td>5 years 8 months</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K.</td>
<td>10.12.95</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4 years 6 months</td>
<td>*4 years 5 months</td>
<td>-0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.</td>
<td>1.8.95</td>
<td>8 years 5 months</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5 years 7 months</td>
<td>6 years 7 months</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.</td>
<td>30.8.94</td>
<td>9 years 4 months</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7 years 9 months</td>
<td>8 years 4 months</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N.</td>
<td>13.3.94</td>
<td>9 years 9 months</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>8 years 1 month</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O.</td>
<td>26.4.94</td>
<td>9 years 8 months</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4 years 6 months</td>
<td>4 years 9 month</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.</td>
<td>6.7.94</td>
<td>9 years 8 months</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>**10 years 2 months +</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q.</td>
<td>1.12.92</td>
<td>11.1 months</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>**10 years 2 months +</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CA = chronological age  
RA = reading age  
RG = ratio gain  
*Unwell on day of test ** these children scored at the ceiling of the test ie above 10 years 2 months  
Average Ratio Gain = 3.8 (42/11 (The number between floor and ceiling of the test) = 3.8)
### APPENDIX 2

**PROGRESS WITH SPELLING YOUNG’S PARALLEL SPELLING TEST**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child</th>
<th>DOB</th>
<th>CA</th>
<th>NCYG</th>
<th>SA 9.1.04</th>
<th>SA 30.3.04</th>
<th>Ratio Gain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>30.6.99</td>
<td>4 years 6 months</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>&lt; 5 years 9 months</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>7.2.99</td>
<td>4 years 11 months</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>&lt; 5 years 9 months</td>
<td>No score</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>1.4.98</td>
<td>5 years 9 months</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt; 5 years 9 months</td>
<td>6 years 4 months</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>14.4.98</td>
<td>5 years 8 months</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5 years 11 months</td>
<td>6 years 6 months</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>3.3.97</td>
<td>6 years 10 months</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6 years 6 months</td>
<td>6 years 11 months</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>9.12.96</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6 years 11 months</td>
<td>7 years 4 months</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>10.8.96</td>
<td>7 years 4 months</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>7 years 4 months</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>4.6.96</td>
<td>7 years 7 months</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6 years 11 months</td>
<td>7 years 4 months</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>27.4.96</td>
<td>7 years 8 months</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7 years 5 months</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>25.3.96</td>
<td>7 years 9 months</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7 years 1 months</td>
<td>7 years 8 months</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>10.12.95</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6 years 4 months</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>1.8.95</td>
<td>8 years 5 months</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>7 years 5 months</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>30.8.94</td>
<td>9 years 4 months</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7 years 6 months</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>2.4</td>
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<td>N</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>7 years 6 months</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>26.4.94</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>6.7.94</td>
<td>9 years 8 months</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8 years 1 month</td>
<td>8 years 8 months</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q</td>
<td>1.12.92</td>
<td>11.1 months</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8 years 8 months</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>37.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CA = chronological age  
SA = spelling age  
RG = ratio gain

Average Ratio Gain = 2.7 (37.2/14)

### APPENDIX 3

**BASIC LITERACY ASSESSMENT TESTS 1a AND b**  
**ALPHABET—SOUND/SYMBOL: SYMBOL/SOUND**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child</th>
<th>NCYG</th>
<th>Test date: 9.1.04/52</th>
<th>Test date: 1.4.04/52</th>
<th>% known before</th>
<th>% known after</th>
<th>% gain</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>A</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>35</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>34</td>
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<td>52</td>
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<td>C</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>52</td>
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<td>D</td>
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<td>43</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>96</td>
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<td>E</td>
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<td>47</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*F</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*G</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*H</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
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<td>*I</td>
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<td>*J</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>100</td>
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<td>NA</td>
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<tr>
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<td>52</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*L</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*M</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*N</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
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<td>O</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*P</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* These children scored at the ceiling of the test.
# APPENDIX 4

**BASIC LITERACY ASSESSMENT TESTS 2 AND 3**

**CONSONANT DIGRAPHS AND BLENDS**

<table>
<thead>
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* These children scored at the ceiling of the test.

# APPENDIX 5

**BASIC LITERACY ASSESSMENT TESTS 4a AND b**

**SEGMENTING AND BLENDING SKILLS**

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* These children scored at the ceiling of the test at pre-testing.

** These children achieved scores at the ceiling of the test at post testing.
APPENDIX 6

BASIC LITERACY ASSESSMENT TESTS 5, 6, 7
ABILITY TO DECODE CVC, CCVC, CCVCC WORDS

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<th>% known after</th>
<th>% gain</th>
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* These children scored at the ceiling of the test at pre-testing.
** These children achieved scores at the ceiling of the test at post testing.

APPENDIX 7

BASIC LITERACY ASSESSMENT TEST 9
SIGHT VOCABULARY: READING

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* These children scored at the ceiling of the test.
** These children achieved scores at the ceiling of the test at post testing.
APPENDIX 8

BASIC LITERACY ASSESSMENT TEST 10
HIGH FREQUENCY WORDS: SPELLING

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* These children achieved at the ceiling of the test at post testing.

APPENDIX 9

SOUND DISCOVERY QUESTIONNAIRE: LEARNING SUPPORT ASSISTANTS

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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very useful—opportunity to clarify and ask questions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ok—could air any problems or queries</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q. How useful was the visit to see a lesson modelled?</td>
<td>Average: 3.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Came away feeling much more confident</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not useful</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Really useful</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very helpful and discussion afterwards with the LSA at OBCP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q. Is the manual clear and comprehensible?</td>
<td>Average: 4.25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a base it is useful</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple and clear</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorted the sessions into folders for future use</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q. Are the materials straightforward to use?</td>
<td>Average: 4.25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q. Do they take long to prepare?</td>
<td>Average: 4.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No—initially yes but they are simple</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Training

Better than others programs—less preparation
About 35 mins per step—to copy laminate and cut up—lasts 2 weeks
20 mins per week

Methodology

Q. Are you clear about the principles behind SD?

Yes
Yes, fine
We benefited from the teacher and LSA sessions.
No

Q. Is it a straight forward method to use?

Strands are clear
Brilliant
Yes
Fine

Q. How does it compare to other interventions you have used?

Better—ALS is tedious
Better—less preparation
Length of session better excellent—much better
Never fan of ALS—PAT—enjoyed using this with younger children—older ones needed something more challenging eg SD

Q. Does it motivate the children?

Yes, competitive—speed element
Yes—greater confidence to have a go
Yes.

Q. Do you like using it?

I enjoy using it—it gets the children more involved, both verbally and mentally, than other interventions I have used. its much more fun and interactive
Yes—it gives a chance for praise
I like the enjoyment of pupils and you can see the progress
Yes—the children are happy and enjoy it—size of group helps

Q. Is there evidence that the children transfer their leaning into the class room?

A bit early to say—but you can see progress within the sessions
Confidence of pupils
Yes, with literacy—try first with spelling—greater independence
Can’t comment really as they are in a different class

Any other comments:

Vertical grouping can be problematic—in terms of class timing.
Need for observation by staff to consolidate skills I found 5 in a group too large.
A permanent teaching space for SD is vital.
Issues around SAT’s period.
SD reading books not very inspiring.
Easy to maintain and pick up for delivery.
Link up with parents of SD group.
Even though my group levelled—I found difficulties very different—in future will be done by LSA’s/teachers.
Levelling—some inaccuracies.
Less confident with accelerating progress pf children with pervasive difficulties.
Would be better to have same room each day.
Feel record keeping important—week by week—planning session by session then develop from this.
APPENDIX 10

SOUND DISCOVERY QUESTIONNAIRE : TEACHERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q. Do you think Sound Discovery has made an impact on the children’s reading/spelling?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More enthusiasm for reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>More focussed</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Helped Christian and Christopher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too soon to say</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pride in progressing through the numbered books</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q. Have you noticed any transfer of skills into other area of the curriculum?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>More independence with reading and writing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Seem more generally motivated</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Q. Do you think SD is motivating?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Children terribly keen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brett and Heather definitely benefited</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tom less interested</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is enthusiasm to go to SD groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q. Are you clear about the principles behind SD?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes definitely</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As much as I need to know</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q. Do you think it is an effective use of LSA time?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provided targeted at right children</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q. In comparison with other programmes would you feel SD is a robust Wave 3 intervention?</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APPENDIX 11

PUPIL’S COMMENTS ON SOUND DISCOVERY

CHILD Q Y6

“A lot of fun. I feel a lot better. I think it helped me a lot; it’s helped me with my spellings. When I write spellings in class, it’s a bit easier”.

CHILD O Y5

“It learnt me new things and that, I liked it. I liked writing the best in our green books. It helped me writing and that, really good. I liked to be in the group. It’s helped me in class . . . ‘cos if you didn’t know how to spell the words, now I can sound the words out with my phoneme fingers”.

CHILD N YR 5

“I know how to spell everything and read everything—though some bits are a quite hard and some bits are easy. Phoneme fingers is hard with some words but it is helping. I think I am getting better slowly. I like it because it makes me feel good. When I go back to class I feel I can do it all. I feel proud”.

CHILD M YR 5

“Its good and I like it. My friends are there to help me. I don’t know if it has helped me but I like doing it”.

CHILD P YR 5

“It has helped me with my sounds and spelling and it’s fun! I would like to go on doing it next term. It definitely helps in class with my spelling. I sound out in my head and use my fingers. I think I am getting better. I could spell ‘brilliant’ by sounding it out”.

CHILD L Yr 4
“It’s alright. It may have helped me. I liked making words up on the board—I don’t know if it has helped me in class”.

CHILD J Yr 3
“I liked it—it’s fun. I liked making words on the board and the game passing the sentence—you have to read them out”.

CHILD H Yr 3
“It’s fun. We make different words and I like spelling them as well. My favourite bit is handwriting. I am getting better at reading and handwriting”.

CHILD K Yr 3
“It’s good doing it. It’s helping me learn about words. My favourite bit is when we play the swap game”.

CHILD K Yr 3
“I don’t like it. I get bored—I find it easy sometimes when I am up to it. I think it has helped a little bit”.

CHILD I Yr 3
“I think it’s very good ’cos you get to learn lots of stuff about words, sounds and handwriting. I like playing games”.

CHILD E Yr 2
“It’s really good because you get to do really good stuff. It helps me when I write a story in class because if there’s a word I don’t know I can sound it out”.

CHILD F Yr 2
“I like it because it really gets me going. It gets me learning more about spellings and how to make words—that two sounds say something together. I work hard”.

CHILD C Yr 1
“I like it especially the games and making words on the board”.

CHILD D Yr 1
“You have to listen and do writing on the board. Its fun and I like it—it helps me spell words”.

CHILD A Yr R
He liked the magnetic letters.

APPENDIX 12
HEAD TEACHER’S SUMMARY

BACKGROUND
Over the last two years, analysis of internal assessments and analysis of performance data highlighted a small number of children who fall behind with literacy skills despite very good delivery of the national literacy and support strategies. This led to the search for a more effective intervention strategy.

Sound Discovery had a variety of attractions; cheap and easy to introduce, claims of good rates of progress, economical in terms of time, all combined in a multi-sensory, easy to use, hands-on package.
IMPLEMENTATION

After a day’s training the support staff found the scheme easy to introduce. They were highly motivated by its simplicity and the enjoyment expressed by the children. Quite simply, they were sold on the idea. Their belief in its success was transmitted to the children, whose enthusiasm then drove the scheme forward.

BENEFITS

Long before the final retesting, the decision had been made to continue with Sound Discovery. Regardless of statistics, the conversion of the reluctant reader/writer who always said; “No” or “I can’t” into children who say; “I can” or “Can we do some more during playtime?” was evidence enough that it had a very beneficial effect.

There were social benefits too. The skills involved in sharing, or playing games in a constructive daily setting, met other needs.

Finally, the data from retesting validated what we knew was happening. It illustrated the substantial gains that we were looking for.

SUMMARY

It works. When you read the children’s own comments, hear their opinions round the lunch table, observe their enthusiasm and enhanced self-esteem then you know Sound Discovery works without even looking at statistical gains.

It is the cycle of pleasure: success...self-esteem...motivation...which I find most encouraging.

APPENDIX 13

PLACEMENT GROUPS FOR SOUND DISCOVERY—SPRING TERM 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Step 2.2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Y6</td>
<td>Child Q</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y5</td>
<td>Child P</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Step 1.5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Y5</td>
<td>Child M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y5</td>
<td>Child N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y4</td>
<td>Child L</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group 3</th>
<th>Step 1.3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Y3</td>
<td>Child I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y3</td>
<td>Child J</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y3</td>
<td>Child H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y2</td>
<td>Child F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group 4</th>
<th>Step 1.1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Y5</td>
<td>Child O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y3</td>
<td>Child G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y3</td>
<td>Child K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y2</td>
<td>Child E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y1</td>
<td>Child D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group 5</th>
<th>Step 1.1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Y1</td>
<td>Child C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yr</td>
<td>Child A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yr</td>
<td>Child B</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Memorandum submitted by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers

SUMMARY

The national literacy strategy promotes the idea that there is one “best” practice for teaching reading. In the primary years, rigid interpretation of the literacy hour has led to an emphasis on the mechanics of reading with little opportunity for children to engage with and to enjoy books. At key stage 3, an emphasis on interpreting texts means that there is too little opportunity for young people to read whole novels. Children and young people no longer see themselves as readers. ATL believes that guidance, for teachers and for Ofsted inspectors, must be re-written to encourage teachers to use their professional judgement to establish the best ways of ensuring that all children learn to read.
1. The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) is a trade union and professional association representing over 160,000 members, the majority of whom are practising teachers. It also has a growing number of members who are directly involved in education, but who are not teachers.

2. We welcome the opportunity to comment on current guidance and policy regarding teaching children to read. We believe that the National Literacy Strategy gives cause for concern from the foundation stage onwards.

3. ATL’s research into the reception year (Inside the Foundation Stage: recreating the reception year, Adams et al 2004) provides detailed evidence of the problems caused by over-prescriptive literacy strategies for young children. The researchers found that much literacy work emphasised the “smallest building blocks of numeracy and literacy: initial letter sounds, key words . . .” Many of the activities were of a “low level of cognitive demand (in that children were being asked to do little more than recall, label and repeat.)” (Adams et al 2004: paragraph 8.18).

4. Our researchers found little evidence that children were regularly given opportunities to engage with texts as readers. These findings echo those of Browne (1998) “who found . . . that provision for literacy learning was almost entirely focused on isolated skill development, and that worksheets and flashcards were to be found in abundance.” (Adams et al 2004: paragraph 8.19).

5. The research shows that “Developmentally appropriate early literacy activities were few and far between . . . Stories and narrative, play and representation were far less common in our sample classrooms than the teaching of isolated, disembedded literacy and numeracy skills.” (Adams et al 2004: paragraph 8.19).

6. Within the National Literacy Strategy, the focus on reading and writing, and the consequent marginalisation of speaking and listening has had perverse consequences in terms of exciting children’s interest in language and literature. Even more importantly, children need to talk and to experience a rich diet of spoken language, in order to think and learn. Reading, writing and number may be the acknowledged curriculum “basics”, but talk is “arguably the true foundation of learning” (Alexander 2004: 5).

7. ATL believes that foundation stage guidance (and that for key stage 1) needs to be strengthened to ensure that practitioners are less constrained by the (perceived or real) prescription of the literacy strategy. Guidance needs to focus on the role of play, of real engagement with stories, of real-life experiences of reading, rather than the small building blocks of literacy. The requirement for the full literacy hour to be in place by the end of reception should be removed.

8. Many teachers feel pressured because of their perception (and sometimes the reality) that Ofsted inspectors will wish to see literacy hours taking place in early years (including reception) classes. Guidance and training for inspectors must be strengthened.

9. Many reception teachers feel pressured because of the need to “prepare” children for literacy hours in year 1. ATL believes that if the literacy strategy is used in school, the literacy hour itself should not be introduced until year 1, and that it should then be introduced gradually through the key stage. Teachers must be supported to use their professional judgement to establish the best ways of ensuring that children view themselves as readers, rather than as people who have failed at reading.

10. At Key Stage 3, ATL’s research into the literacy and numeracy strategies found that “Teachers welcomed the emphasis on language but felt the Framework’s order of word level, sentence level and then text level proposed a misguided approach to the learning of reading and writing” (Barnes et al 2003:7).

11. Teachers were “unanimous in their view that the Framework’s emphasis on language was undervaluing the literature entitlement in the national curriculum. There is widespread regret that covering all the objectives in the time available would exclude the reading of whole novels and teachers would prefer to sacrifice some of the objectives rather than lose this”. (Barnes et al 2003: 7).

12. ATL believes that, in a pluralistic society we must constantly be looking for effective practices, rather than for a single “best” practice. As Bullock said, “There is no one method, medium, approach, device or philosophy that holds the key to the process of learning to read” (DES 1975).

REFERENCES:
DES (1975) A Language for Life London: HMSO.
December 2004
Memorandum submitted by the National Union of Teachers

SUMMARY

1. The NUT believes that, in addition to looking at departmental policy and guidance, an inquiry into the teaching of reading in schools should make reference to:
   — the impact of high teacher turnover and vacancies on learning to read;
   — the difficulty in some areas of recruiting specialist teachers of EAL and SEN to support particular groups of children;
   — the influence of pupil mobility on reading attainment;
   — the provision of adequate school-based and/or peripatetic support for pupils with reading difficulties;
   — the effect of changes in the level of education expenditure on the number and quality of books in schools;
   — the influence of large class sizes on the teaching of reading and, in particular, the time available for teachers to support individuals or small groups;
   — the significance of parental reading abilities and habits, home book provision and home-school reading schemes; and
   — the importance of libraries and librarians within schools, as well as links between schools and public libraries.

2. The NUT would suggest that the Committee adopt the following principles to inform and underpin any conclusions and recommendations it might make on the teaching of reading:
   — Children must experience pleasure and interest from reading, and so choose to read themselves.
   — Children must gain confidence in learning to read by reading fluently rather than haltingly.
   — Children should want to be able to make choices about what they read and believe they can read more.
   — Children should know how to use books to find out and retrieve essential information.
   — Children should be able to develop research and cross-reference skills through using books.

3. These principles form the basis of the NUT’s responses to the specific questions posed by the Committee.

4. Effective teaching approaches which would specifically address boys’ achievements also offer a sound teaching model appropriate for all learners. A recent research project undertaken by the Primary National Strategy and the United Kingdom Literacy Association on this issue found a link between improved levels of attainment in reading and speaking and listening, as well as the target area of writing.

5. The integrated approach to the teaching of literacy piloted in the research indicated that levels of both competence and confidence increased when boys had a clearer understanding of how literacy served their communication needs. The supporting stimuli used in the project, for example, had a positive effect on style and language choices made by boys in their writing.

6. Children’s preparedness for reading varies considerably, dependent on a number of factors inside and outside the home. Some of these factors are:
   — social and cultural attitudes to what reading is for, and its value;
   — socio-economic status, which affects access to books and dictates how much time is available for reading and being read to;
   — access to pre-school provision, which enhances children’s language development through a rich variety of activities involving talking and listening, including reading stories, singing songs, so familiarising them with the value of written text;
   — access to public libraries and parental knowledge of what materials are available within them; and
   — parental attitudes from their own success/failure at reading.

1. Whether policy/guidance has a sound base in research evidence, looking at relative weight given to synthetic/analytic phonics, whole word/language, onset/rhyme, etc

7. The NUT is surprised that the synthetic/analytic phonics debate has been included as a major focus of the Committee’s inquiry, as opinion in the UK amongst teachers is that both approaches are needed.

8. The NUT has always supported the professional autonomy of teachers. The Bullock Report, published in 1975, was the most comprehensive enquiry into all aspects of English teaching undertaken to date. It concluded “there is no one method, medium, approach, device or philosophy that holds the key to the process of learning to read”. The NUT commends this analysis to the Committee.

9. A recent QCA publication has highlighted the need for a variety of approaches to teaching of reading to reflect the variety of kinds of texts children need to be able to read. Given the use of such presentational devices, it is self-evident that a single approach to the teaching of reading will not in itself be sufficient to equip children to make meaning of all of the texts they might encounter, both within and outside school.

10. Arguably the most significant piece of research that was used to inform the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) “Framework for Teaching” was the evaluation of the National Literacy Project (NLP). The NLP was introduced in 1996 as a model of teaching and professional development intended to raise standards in literacy, drawing on other similar international programmes that had a proven track record. The independent evaluation of the NLP, however, appeared several months after the implementation of the NLS framework in September 1998.

11. Similarly, the publication by Government of the evidence base for the NLS took place a year after its implementation, limiting any meaningful critical discussion of its merits. The focus of the Committee’s enquiry is, therefore, welcome, if long overdue.

12. One of the greatest strengths of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) is that, through the professional development activities provided to support its implementation, teachers’ professional expertise in the teaching of reading has been enhanced considerably.

13. A key positive feature of the NLS has been the evaluation carried out by a team at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISEUT). An evaluation is no substitute for continuing research, however. The NLS should continue to incorporate future research, in collaboration with schools and higher education institutions, to ensure growth.

14. One of the main findings of the OISEUT final evaluation of the Strategies was that the NLS is not yet fully embedded in schools.

15. The NUT would recommend strongly, therefore, that the NLS should continue to be evaluated independently so that barriers to the sustained and consistent implementation of the NLS can continue to be identified and tackled. Measurement of the NLS’s success in terms of pupil performance in the National Curriculum Key Stage 2 tests is not an adequate means by which to judge its efficacy.

16. In addition, an important finding in the OISEUT’s final evaluation was the need for further professional development opportunities to be made available for teachers in order for them to attain “deeper” understanding of the principles which underpin the NLS.

17. The NUT would recommend that consideration is given urgently to the further provision of professional development associated with the NLS, both to encourage this “deeper” understanding but also because, due to patterns of teacher recruitment and retention, there is a need to invest continuously in teachers’ professional development.

2. Putting policy into practice—how effectively is guidance being translated into practice? What variation exists in practice?

18. There is a need in future to review National Curriculum requirements and explore areas for greater flexibility within the curriculum framework in order to meet the needs of all learners. This is also a key area for development highlighted in the NUT’s Education Statement “Bringing Down the Barriers”. It proposes also that schools would benefit from greater support in selecting and using effectively texts from different cultural traditions, which is an area of particular significance when considering how to reflect Britain’s multicultural tradition.

19. The NLS guidance is fragile and not yet bedded down, in part due to its introduction over a very short time period. The framework document was published at the beginning of 1998 and schools were required to start using it by September of that year. Teachers were required to implement these changes too quickly. They were provided with training packs and scripted talks which illustrated how to deliver the Strategy, supplemented by training provided by LEAs which was similarly formulated at national level. The theoretical underpinning and rationale for the NLS was not included, nor were there materials which would encourage teachers to research the provenance of what they were required to do.

20. What is needed now is to develop teachers’ schools and LEAs’ capacities to adapt and refine their practice to meet the needs of their own pupils, whilst continuing to adhere to the principles of the NLS.

21. There is a strong case for ensuring flexibility rather than prescriptiveness of approach in the National Key Stage 3 Strategy. In order for the concept of literacy—including reading—across the curriculum to become embedded and effective, it is necessary to ensure that staff from different subject disciplines are able to identify time for joint working and planning, including liaison with specialist teachers of SEN and English as an additional language where appropriate. This is the case whether or not schools choose to adopt the Key Stage 3 Strategy in whole or in part.

22. Greater consideration needs to be given to primary and secondary school links in order to ensure that secondary schools are able to build on the work of primary schools effectively, and to help enable pupils to make appropriate progress as they begin their secondary school education.

3. Which children benefit from current approaches? Are all equally well-served by current policy guidance on reading?

23. The ALS programme was designed to be used with children who were potentially able to achieve Level 4 in their Key Stage 2 National Curriculum tests. It is not too cynical to suggest that the driver for this intervention strategy was more concerned with the political need to meet national targets for Key Stage 2 test performance than in meeting the needs of children at risk of not developing functional literacy.

24. More consideration needs to be given to timetabling issues. Currently, many young people receive additional support outside the “mainstream” timetable, but the Strategy’s intervention programmes do not always marry easily with school timetables, with the consequence that some pupils enrolled in the programmes can miss out on learning opportunities elsewhere in the curriculum.

25. Every area of the curriculum could and should contribute to developing literacy, including reading skills. Awareness is needed of the potential artificiality of teaching “literacy” in isolation and devoid of context.

26. In order to address reading difficulties, the teacher should have additional time and resources in order to adapt teaching methods to suit the individual child’s needs and difficulties. They must be highly skilled in understanding the child’s emotional and developmental needs and relate intensive support for reading to the rest of a child’s learning. In addition, the child’s parents or carer should be made aware of the nature of their difficulties and encouraged to support their child’s learning.

4. Introduction of early literacy strategies—teaching children to read from a very early age

27. The NUT believes that, in order to facilitate the appropriate learning conditions for reading acquisition and learning in the early years the curriculum should:

— place emphasis on personal, social and emotional development, recognising the importance of self-confidence, self-esteem and thinking and working in groups;
— provide opportunities for intellectual and emotional development through structured learning experiences which start from what the child already knows, understands and can do;
— provide opportunities for children to make responsible choices from among a wide range of activities and to develop independence;
— recognise the importance of play in children’s learning, and in their capacity to imagine, explore and experiment;
— be planned on the basis of observing, assessing and recording individual children’s thoughts, feelings, learning, development and achievements;
— provide continuity with what has gone before, especially at home, as well as future requirements; and
— provide equal access for every child and challenge discrimination and stereotyping.

28. A print rich environment in early years settings, where children are exposed to opportunities for role play and free practice opportunities supported by appropriate adult intervention, provides the most effective environment for beginning reading and developing an appreciation of books and other uses of print.

29. The teaching of reading in the early years is a combination of the whole language and phonics approaches. Exposure to print in “realistic” situations, role play opportunities, both inside the classroom and out in the playground in which children are encouraged to use print media and appropriate adult intervention to support and move forward children’s progress, are the best ways of teaching reading in the early years.

30. The advice contained within the Foundation Stage Curriculum Guidance, that the literacy hour should not be implemented in full until the end of the summer term of the reception year, should be reiterated to LEAs, schools and teachers.
31. As the Prime Minister himself said at the Annual Conference of the Daycare Trust in November 2004 in answer to an NUT question about qualified staffing in the early years sector, “we have set aside significant funding for workforce qualifications”. The NUT looks forward to discussing with the Government the most effective ways of using this “significant funding” in the most appropriate ways.

32. The NUT commends the following recommendations on the teaching of reading in the early years to the Committee:

- teaching reading in the early years should be based on a combination of a whole language and phonics approach;
- children’s development of sound recognition should be a key element of developing literacy skills in the early years;
- immersion in print within the setting, including opportunities to use print in role play both within and outside the nursery with appropriate adult intervention, is the most suitable way of beginning reading in the early years;
- advice should be reiterated to LEAs, schools and teachers that the literacy hour should not be implemented fully in reception classes until the very end of the summer term;
- teachers should have access to opportunities for ongoing continuing professional development in teaching reading, particularly for children with reading difficulties or special educational needs;
- increased funding is required for pre-school support and intervention programmes such as the Books for Babies scheme, which expose children to books at an earlier age and are vital to redressing the balance of inequalities many children face on entry to early years settings; and
- testing should be removed completely from the end of Key Stage 1, on the basis of evidence from other countries that children actually do better in the long term if they do not start formal education until ages six or seven. Children’s love of literature and reading readiness could then be nurtured through an extended foundation phase, as in Wales.

5. The success or otherwise of current policies compared to those being pursued in other countries—paying due attention to differences dictated by different languages

33. According to PISA and PIRLS, there should be optimism about the future literacy of the adult workforce, but there needs to be an awareness that there are those for whom the system is not working. If everyone is to be able to enjoy the pleasures, skills and confidence that literacy can bring, the lesson from PISA is that there must be ways found to motivate students to read for pleasure. The mechanics of reading are taught well, but there needs to be an investigation into ways which make reading accessible and fun.

6. The relative value of pre-literacy experience—by comparison to those countries with later age start to education

34. The debate about the later starting age in some countries compared to England is a false debate. It is not about children not learning up until a certain age, but about the way in which they learn, in particular, in an informal rather than formal way.

35. Early years education in England should focus on developing children’s positive attitude towards reading, as a “too formal, too soon” approach will turn literacy into segmented chunks of knowledge to be learned in order to pass National Curriculum Tests and the joy of books and reading will be lost to many children.

CONCLUSION

36. The NUT believes that there are general conditions which can be created in schools which are the basis of effective practice for the teaching of reading:

- schools should have a whole school approach to the teaching of reading;
- reading should be part of a school’s integrated approach to the teaching of literacy, and as such should be developed along with children’s writing, speaking and listening skills;
- a school’s approach to teaching reading should ideally involve teachers and parents working together, with a shared understanding that reading should be for meaning and enjoyment as well as an essential skill; and
- schools need to have whole-school diagnostic methods of assessing children’s progress in reading, which can both inform the practice of subsequent teachers and communicate to parents the continuing needs and achievements of their children.

37. The NUT believes that such conditions form the basis of the successful teaching and learning of reading. The methods or combination of methods will be chosen by an individual teacher in consultation with her or his colleagues in order to match the circumstances and meet the needs of the group of children.
38. It must be recognised, however, that the above conditions cannot be separated from the need for manageable class sizes; adequate numbers of trained, motivated teachers with expertise both to encourage and develop children’s reading and to intervene and support children experiencing difficulty; and lastly, adequate amounts of relevant attractive and high quality books and materials.

39. The NUT wishes to reiterate its belief that one of the central aims of education should be to ensure that every child attains full reading literacy at the earliest possible age. This will not be possible without adequate funding, educational resources and staffing arrangements. The NUT would urge the Committee to make recommendations to the DfES concerning the immediate implementation of these proposals.

8 February 2005

Memorandum submitted by Jennifer Chew

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

From 1978 until my retirement in 2000, I taught English at a Surrey sixth form college and was also responsible for Specific Learning Difficulties. I tested the spelling of all new students from 1984 to 1999 (more than 6,000 students in total) and found most students under-performing, despite the fact that they entered the college with GCSE results well above the national average. There were signs that the problems had started in primary schools, and to gain information about teaching methods used there I began to read as much research as possible and to attend courses and conferences. I closely followed, sometimes contributing to, national developments concerning the teaching of literacy, and had several pamphlets and articles published. In 2000, I was awarded the OBE for services to literacy. Since my retirement, I have been Literacy Governor at St Jude’s CE School in Enfield Green, Surrey, which caters for children aged 7 to 11+. I spend several hours a week in the school working voluntarily with children of all abilities, the best of them reading at adult levels and the weakest being virtual non-readers. This has made me realise that too many children are still emerging from Key Stage 1 with very poor reading skills, apparently because teaching methods are still not good enough. I have recently become editor of the UK Reading Reform Foundation Newsletter: the RRF aims to make information about literacy research and practice easily accessible to all interested parties (see www.rrf.org.uk).

COMMENTS ON THE “SUGGESTED FACT”

Whether policy/guidance has a sound base in research evidence, looking at relative weight given to synthetic/analytic phonics, whole word/language, onset/rhyme etc

Policy/guidance does not yet have a sound enough base in research evidence. In particular, insufficient attention has been paid to the Johnston and Watson research in Scotland, which has provided strong evidence that English-speaking children learn to read and spell better with synthetic phonics than with the more analytic type of phonics found in the National Literacy Strategy (NLS). “Synthetic” phonics teaches beginners letter-sound correspondences, starting with the simplest, and immediately teaches them to use this knowledge as their first strategy for reading all words: they produce a sound for each letter (and, in due course, digraph etc.) and synthesise (blend) the sounds. “Analytic” phonics allows and even encourages beginners to identify words by non-phonic strategies as a first step (eg whole-word recognition or the whole-language type of reliance on picture- and context-cues) and only then to “loop back”, in the words of the NLS paper for the March 2003 DfES phonics seminar, to analyse the words to see how the letter-sound correspondences work. NLS guidance thus continues to lie towards the analytic end of the spectrum, diluting phonics with non-research-based whole-word and whole-language elements at the crucial beginner-level. If some teachers encourage children to use phonics strategies only “as a last resort”, as noted in the NLS paper mentioned above, this is arguably because they see NLS guidance as implying that this is exactly what they should be doing; as stated in the Ofsted report The National Literacy Strategy: the first four years, 1998–2002, “the ‘searchlights’ model of reading gives insufficient emphasis in the early stages to the teaching of phonics”. The onset-rime approach never had a sound basis in research. It assumed that beginners would start with whole words learnt as “sight words” rather than with single letters and their sounds, but its leading UK proponent (Prof Usha Goswami) subsequently conceded that “it may well be easier to begin teaching children about letters . . . and then to proceed to instruction about larger units such as rimes” (Journal of Experimental Child Psychology 82, 2002).

Putting policy into practice—how effectively is guidance being translated into practice? What variation exists in practice?

Much of the guidance is probably being translated quite faithfully into practice, but this is part of the problem, because, as suggested above, some of the guidance is itself poor. In my voluntary work at a Key Stage 2 school, I can see that many children have been taught, in the Key Stage 1 schools they have previously attended, to identify words by using picture-cues and context-cues exactly as suggested by certain
NLS materials: the Early Literacy Support video, for example, shows a teacher encouraging children to work words out from the pictures (see critique on pages 12–15 of Newsletter 47 at [www.rrf.org.uk](http://www.rrf.org.uk)). Poor guidance leads to poor teaching practices which leave too many children not understanding that the first step in reading is to translate letters into sounds and blend the sounds together.

*Introduction of early literacy strategies—teaching children to read from a very early age*

UK research has shown that synthetic phonics can enable children to make a very good start on reading even before the age of five, can produce excellent short- and long-term results with both boys and girls, and can greatly reduce under-achievement: see Johnston and Watson’s study presented at the March 2003 DfES phonics seminar, and also the Grant study published in Newsletter 52 at [www.rrf.org.uk](http://www.rrf.org.uk). This is because children are allowed to walk before being expected to run: they learn to produce sounds in response to letters and to read simple words by sounding out and blending. The NLS, however, expects them to run before they can walk, working words out from context and grammar and learning irregular words as “sight words” before being given time to master the alphabetic principle in a straightforward way.

*The success or otherwise of current policies compared to those being pursued in other countries—paying due attention to differences dictated by different languages*

With a genuine synthetic phonics approach, “differences dictated by different languages” are largely irrelevant in the earliest stages, in the sense that English-speaking children can be started off on reading words which are as simple as any which German, Italian or Spanish beginners would be required to read. This allows them to apply letter-sound knowledge just as well as children learning to read in other languages—see, for example, the article by Dr Karin Landerl in *European Journal of Psychology of Education* XV, 2000. Children learning to read in English certainly need eventually to master complexities which other children do not encounter, but this is not a reason for confronting them with the complexities from the outset. They should first be given time to master the basic principles of the alphabetic code. Landerl makes the point that phonics teaching may be even more important in English than in other languages because children are less likely to work out the complex letter-sound correspondence system for themselves. The evidence suggests that the best results are produced when beginners are taught to rely fully on phonics decoding, not on memorising sight-words or working words out from pictures and context as sanctioned by the NLS.

*The relative value of pre-literacy experience—by comparison to those countries with later age start to education*

“Pre-literacy experience” is genuine pre-literacy experience in other countries: oral language skills and an interest in reading are fostered (eg through stories read aloud by adults), but the children themselves are not expected to read any words at all, least of all by using cues from pictures, context or grammar. When reading instruction starts, it is purely phonics-based, and children are not confused by being expected to use non-phonics as well as phonics strategies. The methods used to teach beginners are more important than the age at which instruction starts. Teaching can start before children turn five, but it needs to be simple and research-based.

*Points to ponder*

Are there any studies which have shown NLS methods producing better short- and long-term results than the Johnston and Watson study in Clackmannanshire or the Grant study at St Michael’s School, Stoke Gifford, both of which have followed children to the end of their primary education? If so, where are these studies? If not, how can the NLS continue to be officially regarded as the best option for raising reading standards?

Memorandum submitted by Christopher Jolly, Managing Director, Jolly Learning Ltd

**Synthetic Phonics**

I am the publisher of a programme called Jolly Phonics which is now used in 54% of UK Primary Schools (Source: IPSOS-RSL) to teach reading.

The programme is a synthetic phonics programme, meaning that it introduces the letter sounds of English early on, typically in the first term at school. Children use these letter sounds as their main way to read new words by sounding out and blending.

The programme is for whole class use, not remedial. It is also used as widely overseas as in the UK.
Results from the use of the programme indicate that children can have an average reading age, at the end of their first year, which is 12 months ahead of their actual age. They have achieved two years gain in the one year, with boys doing as well as girls. In addition the number of children needing remedial help falls from over a fifth of children to less than one in 20.

Despite its widespread adoption, the effectiveness with which schools use Jolly Phonics varies widely. On the one hand many teachers achieve excellent results. They have a high level of commitment and understanding, and they may have had significant mentoring. However such teachers are in a minority. Most teachers use the programme in a less committed way, without the early emphasis on sounding out and blending, and so do not achieve the same results.

This lack of commitment and understanding is rarely because the teacher rejects this method of teaching. Instead it is because, in teacher training and subsequent mentoring, they have not been shown and encouraged to use this kind of teaching.

**AGE OF FIRST LEARNING TO READ**

There has been advice from a number of authorities encouraging a later start to the teaching of reading, typically that it should start in Year 1, so for children age five, instead of Reception, when children are four. The main basis for this recommendation is that children in many other European countries, such as Finland and Sweden start later and that they soon pick it up to no disadvantage.

My concern is that this advice is simply a device for avoiding structured teaching to young children, and in particular phonics. As an example, in the training advice for the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage, published by the DfEE for use in Reception, is the dismissal of “reciting the alphabet by heart” as “rote learning” and as a “lower level of learning”. Such negative comments about phonics, in a document advocating a later start to formal teaching, suggests that the two are linked.

The advice on delaying the formal teaching of reading is based on flawed evidence for two reasons.

Firstly, the advice is over-selective because it draws on evidence from only a few smaller countries in Europe, none of them with English as a first language. In the US and Canada the teaching of reading typically starts in Kindergarten with five year old children but with no observable gain in literacy standards. In Scotland, by contrast, the teaching of reading starts in the first year at school, P1, when children are four. Scotland has long claimed to have higher early literacy standards than England. In private nursery schools in England children start learning to read before Reception and achievements in such schools are much higher.

Secondly, the advice is incomplete because it does not look at other factors. Most languages do not have the complexity of English, for instance, and so may be easier to learn. Of the other languages in Europe, only French has a spelling as irregular as English, and in France the teaching of reading also starts at age four.

**POLICY GUIDANCE BY THE SELECT COMMITTEE**

The Select Committee should consider whether strong advice by government is the best route to raising literacy standards. The record of government has not been encouraging.

Policy making in the teaching of reading is, inevitably, a compromise between rival points of view. The National Literacy Strategy was seen by its developers as taking the teaching of reading as far as it could towards phonics while still retaining consensus among the different advocates.

On the other hand parents see the issues in much simpler terms. They want their child to succeed in learning to read early on. They rightly see it as the key to the child’s future education.

At issue is who the teacher is acting for. Is it for the wider society (represented by government) or is it for the parents? Inevitably it is for both, but is the balance right? At the moment, I would suggest, the role of government, and of central advice, is too strong. The Select Committee should consider ways in which schools could be more responsive to parents as such responsiveness is likely to be one of the most effective measures in raising standards.

November 2004

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**Addressing unacceptable levels of underachievement in literacy**

1. *Too many children fail to reach adequate levels of literacy*

Whatever the impact of recent developments in the teaching of literacy, there has been little improvement at the lower end of the achievement spectrum. The education system in England is still failing to meet the needs of a significant proportion of children who leave school with inadequate literacy for the demands of the modern world.
2. **Long term costs of literacy difficulties**

   Failure to provide an effective and early solution to literacy problems has high and escalating costs—financially, socially and emotionally. Some costs are overt, such as SEN budgets and claims for compensation. Some costs are hidden such as year-on-year learning support, or the impact upon behaviour, motivation and social integration. Some costs occur much later, for example through the connection between poor literacy and crime.

3. **Difficulty of remediation**

   Whilst many literacy interventions exist, few are effective for the least able children and few are sufficiently powerful to fully overcome these children’s problems in reading and writing. The NLS suggest that, to be effective, an intervention must enable the children who are failing to make at least twice the normal rate of progress in order to catch up.

4. **Importance of early intervention**

   Literacy failure is not an absence of learning. Struggling readers acquire ways of “surviving” in the classroom, including copying others, guessing, distracting and disrupting behaviours. The longer these unhelpful strategies go unchecked, the harder they are to remedy. Very early in the child’s school experience, negative feelings of confusion, frustration, inadequacy and humiliation can become barriers to learning. The link between poor literacy skills and deviant anti-social behaviour are proven, eg one in three people in prison have very poor literacy skills.

5. **Reading Recovery**

   Reading Recovery is an effective early literacy intervention, with proven results in the most challenging settings. It is specifically designed for the lowest attaining children, who have made least progress in their class in their first year at school. Through focussed, intensive, daily teaching it solves literacy problems, lifting four out of five struggling readers to age appropriate levels of reading and writing. It does so within 15 to 20 weeks, after which the children continue to learn at the normal rate of progress of their peers, without further need of special support. The programme has been shown to be especially effective for children from disadvantaged backgrounds and for boys. Reading Recovery teachers have an exceptional level of knowledge, understanding and skill, acquired through an intensive professional development course. They become early literacy experts, able to influence and support literacy teaching and learning in their school.

6. **Evidence for the effectiveness of Reading Recovery**

   Reading Recovery has operated successfully in England since 1990. Every child’s progress is monitored at school, LEA and national levels. There is substantial research evidence to support its claims and it has been the subject of several independent evaluations nationally and internationally. Four out of five of the lowest attaining children are successfully returned to age appropriate levels of literacy and the proportion of children failing to reach age-appropriate levels in End of Key Stage Assessments are reduced by 60%.

7. **Support for Reading Recovery**

   The programme has widespread support, from parents who have seen their child’s attitude to school transformed; from teachers who feel empowered by the satisfaction of making a real difference; by schools which have seen the wider impact of raised expectations of what is possible for disadvantaged children. Many Ofsted reports for schools and LEAs have identified the implementation of Reading Recovery as a strength. The National Literacy Strategy recommends Reading Recovery as an effective Wave 3 intervention; successive Ministers of Education of both parties have expressed their appreciation for Reading Recovery and the DfES have, for a number of years, provided some financial support for national coordination of the programme at the Institute of Education.

8. **The financial status of Reading Recovery**

   Reading Recovery is a not-for-profit educational programme, based within schools, and coordinated at the Institute of Education, University of London. The most significant cost is the release of a teacher to work with individual children, usually about 0.5 of a teacher’s time.

9. **Crisis of access to Reading Recovery**

   The implementation of Reading Recovery is under serious threat in England. In the past three years, schools in England have reported increasing difficulty in their ability to fund the programme for their least able children and six longstanding LEAs have ceased their implementation, with three more currently at risk. Lack of funding has been the principle reason given for closures.
APPENDIX 1

Too Many Children Fail to Reach Adequate Levels of Literacy:

1. International studies such as PIRLS (2001) and PISA (2003) study have consistently highlighted the long tail of underachievement in literacy in the UK.

2. The proportion of children leaving primary school with “no useful literacy”, i.e. attaining below National Curriculum level 3, has remained at 7%.

3. A recent Ofsted report (December 2004) highlighted the widening gap in literacy between the lowest achieving children and their peers.

APPENDIX 2

Long Term Costs of Literacy Difficulties

2. (a) Wider Benefits of Learning Reports


— A 10% rise in the average pay of those on low pay in an area reduces the overall area property crime by between 0.7 and 1.0 percentage points, estimated benefit between £1.3 and £1.8 billion in an average year. (Executive summary page iii)

— A 1% increase in the proportion of the working age population with “O”-level or equivalent qualifications, would give a predicted benefit (on property crime) between £10 million and £320 million. (Executive summary page iv)

— “Effects of increases below O-level are trivial but it is estimated that a 5% increase in the population with O-level or equivalent qualifications will produce a reduction in crime with a benefit of up to £1.6 billion per year” Page 24 (which is why interventions which only boost children’s literacy a little are not powerful enough to get children on track for achieving the equivalent of “O”-level—RR comment).

— Education can have an affect on crime in a number of ways, through changes in behaviour or preferences and resulting changes in opportunity, particularly through income. One interesting study he reports is on patience and/or risk aversion, and its link to crime, and another on “Delinquency and the direct effects on the pleasure gained from crime”, both of which are affected by education. (Pages 7–9).

— Home Office report cited finding that 12–16 year old boys who did not like school were three times more likely to offend than those who liked school. (Page 28).

2. (b) The Long Term Costs of Literacy Difficulties: Basic Skills Agency reports


In 1958 the National Child Development Study in England identified 17,000 children born in one week in that year. These children have been monitored and reported on throughout their lives (A series of television programmes compared their lives, experiences and views of the world at the ages of seven, 14 and 21). In 1995, as this cohort reached the age of 37, a representative sample of 2,144 was identified. Those who had received further education (at university or college level) were excluded and a detailed survey made of the remaining 1,700. Their literacy and numeracy was assessed and the participants grouped as either good, average, low or very low basic literacy or numeracy. The study paints a grim picture of life for those with poor literacy skills.

As expected they were more likely to be in low paid jobs, unemployed, or dependent upon state benefits than those with good literacy, or that they were less likely to have had promotion, or work related training, but the degree of difference is surprising.
Table 1

PROPORTION OF THE COHORT WITH NO QUALIFICATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very low literacy</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low literacy</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average literacy</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good literacy</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

PROPORTION OF MEN LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYED/SICK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very Low literacy</th>
<th>Low literacy</th>
<th>Average literacy</th>
<th>Good literacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3

PROPORTION OF COHORT ON LOW WAGES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men (&lt; £200)</th>
<th>Women (&lt; £150)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very low and low literacy</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average literacy</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good literacy</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

They were also more likely to be in poor housing, and to have poor health. Men with very low literacy skills, and women with low literacy were twice as likely to have been classified as depressed, than those with good literacy, but women with very poor skills were five times more likely. Given the picture the report paints of their lives since leaving school, one of insecurity, dependency, and poverty, the most stalwart of us would probably be depressed! These are the women bringing up the Reading Recovery children of tomorrow.

Figure 1

PROPORTION OF COHORT RECORDED AS “DEPRESSED” ON THE MALAISE INVENTORY
The study also probed the attitudes of the cohort, and once again the difference that very low literacy makes, even compared with low literacy, is startling. Only half of the men in the very low literacy group felt satisfied with their lives, compared with almost eight out of 10 men with good literacy.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VIEWS AND OUTLOOK (MEN)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied with life so far</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never get what want from life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No control over events in life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have to be careful who to trust</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So just lifting a child out of the very low literacy group, into the low literacy group, could make a profound difference to the quality of their future life. This is still the outcome for the one in five children who do not achieve the goals of Reading Recovery.

In 2002 a further report by the Basic Skills Agency, “Basic Skills and Crime” investigated the association between poor literacy skills and crime. They found that as many as one in two prisoners have difficulties reading, and that the link appears to be worsening. Even after controlling for social disadvantage, poverty, disruptive family environment, poor education experiences and early signs of emotional and behaviour problems they found a correlation between poor literacy scores and the number of times 30 year old men had been stopped and questioned or arrested.

In 1999 a Home Office report found that 12–16 year old boys who did not like school were three times more likely to offend than those who liked school. Can you think of anything more likely to make teenage boys dislike school, than being unable to read and write?

APPENDIX 3

DIFFICULTIES OF REMEDIATION

1. In research commissioned by the DIIES, (2002, What Works for children with literacy difficulties?) Brooks evaluated literacy interventions. Among his conclusions he stated that “Normal schooling (‘no treatment’) does not enable slow readers to catch up” and “Work on phonological skills should be embedded in a broad approach.” In Key Stage 1 only one other intervention specifically reports data for the lowest attaining children; other interventions subsume the lowest group in a wider attaining population and only report gains for these norms. None other than Reading Recovery present evidence of follow up monitoring and impact upon National Assessments up to and including Key Stage 2.

2. The SCAA report (above) showed Reading Recovery to be expensive but effective: “The experimental (RR) group made mean gains of 16 months in word reading over the 8.5 months of the intervention (with an effect size of 0.75), and these gains were sustained. By contrast, the no-treatment controls made only an eight-month gain. A very important finding of the study was that the alternative treatment groups, which had been given a sustained program to develop phonological awareness, made only modest progress: Their mean reading gain was 10 months over the 8.5 months of the intervention (with an effect size close to zero). The clear implication from (this) study is that, although phonological awareness may be a good predictor of future success in reading, interventions for poor readers that focus on phonological awareness alone will have very limited success.” Harrison, C, (2000) Reading Research in the United Kingdom, in Handbook of Reading Research Vol III, Kamil, Mosenthal, Pearson and Barr (Eds), Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

APPENDIX 4

THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY INTERVENTION:

4a. The recently published Ofsted report on literacy highlighted the problem of children who, even when they had acquired functional literacy, did not enjoy reading, and therefore did not choose to read. There is considerable evidence of the lasting emotional legacy of early failure, which can only be prevented by early, fast and effective intervention.

4b. Article accepted for publication, March 2005, Literacy Today Magazine.
**When Reading is No Pleasure**

Over the picture of a famous footballer, the caption declared “Reading is Fun” but Steven’s contemptuous look suggested that he thought it was anything but. Steven had struggled with reading since he first started school, and to him reading was as much fun as a daily trip to the dentist. Success and failure are powerful teachers.

Teaching children to be real readers is crucial; to value reading as an activity, to find pleasure in books of all kinds. But how can you love something that you cannot do? How can you lose yourself in a book if reading is a struggle? How can reading become a favourite activity if your experience of it is of embarrassment, humiliation or tedium? If learning to read is fraught with confusion and failure, the child is unlikely to become a real reader. If he or she does not learn to read easily, early and effectively, then even the most inspirational role models cannot make reading fun. Even those who learn to read eventually are unlikely to enjoy reading; it remains a mechanical tool, necessary to survive in a print based world, rather than a meeting of minds with an author.

I recently interviewed children who, a year previously, had completed a Reading Recovery programme. Now aged eight, they talked about how much they enjoyed reading, how they loved to read at home—one child was reading Treasure Island with his Mum and loving it. But none of them commented on what it felt like to be a struggling reader. This puzzled me because these children had had reading problems. At the age of six they had been the poorest readers in their year group, unable to read the simplest text and heading for serious problems in their future education.

Then the penny dropped. Unlike Steven, these children had never considered themselves reading failures because their literacy problems had been solved before they realised they had a problem. Not just alleviated, but solved. Reading Recovery had stepped in early, before their difficulties could become entrenched, and the teaching had been precise and intensive, so that they learned quickly enough to catch up with their more able classmates. Within a few weeks, all four children had begun to read independently and within a few months they had reached appropriate levels of literacy for their age. The result was not just that they could read, but that they enjoyed reading.

What makes this possible? In Reading Recovery, teaching begins with what the child can do, however little, giving him a sense of growing control over the reading process. The teacher carefully selects tasks at the cutting edge of the child’s learning, so that although he makes rapid progress, it always feels easy. The daily half-hour lesson is centred on reading several little books and writing short stories. The aim is that the child never finds anything hard—challenging yes, but there is the subtle difference we all recognise between being challenged, when we feel confident that we can achieve, and being overwhelmed when we fear we can’t. Children in Reading Recovery learn how to treat the new and unknown as puzzles to be solved, not problems to be feared. From the beginning the child is successful and becomes confident, not because he is told that he is doing well, but because he learns how to unpick the problems in reading and writing, and comes to trust his own judgement. He learns to read fluently from the start and to think about what he is reading.

For children who do not learn to read easily, our challenge is to overcome their problems as quickly and completely as possible and Reading Recovery has shown that this can be achieved for almost every child. So what are the chances that our least able children will receive the Reading Recovery programme they need? In Northern Ireland the chances are good; the implementation there is supported by the Government, whose stated aim is to make it available in every Primary School. Elsewhere in the UK it’s a mixed picture. In England 2,225 Reading Recovery teachers have been trained, but only 350 are currently able to implement it. In primary schools beset with problems, first with teacher recruitment then with funding, our most vulnerable children have lost out. Reading Recovery suffers from the mistaken belief that it is an expensive luxury because it costs more than most teaching. Building roofs costs more than building walls; intensive care costs more than general nursing, but is that a reason to suppose we can do without them? Intensive intervention costs more because it deals with a complex problem, children at exceptional risk of failure. The long-term costs of literacy failure are huge and well documented, and “cheap” alternatives are not cheap if they don’t solve the problem. Reading Recovery costs around £1,500 per child—for the love of reading it’s a small price to pay.

The Reading Recovery National Network website is www.readingrecovery.org.uk.

**APPENDIX 5**

**Reading Recovery**

The lowest attaining children present very diverse and complex problems. Simplistic responses to underachievement, including “one size fits all” approaches, are unlikely to be effective with more than a very small proportion of children. Reading Recovery enables exceptionally skilled teachers to work with the complexity of the literacy learning task and with children’s individual experience, confusions and learning styles. More detailed information about the Reading Recovery programme can be found on the Reading Recovery website at www.readingrecovery.org.uk.
APPENDIX 6

EVIDENCE FOR THE EFFECTIVENESS OF READING RECOVERY

6a. Annual National Monitoring. Approximately 3,500 children in the UK complete the programme each year, and every child’s progress is monitored at school, LEA and National levels, before, during and after the programme, including their subsequent performance in National assessments at seven and eleven.

1. Which children receive Reading Recovery?

YEAR GROUP

Children are normally identified and selected for Reading Recovery between the ages of five years nine months and six years three months, after a full year of formal tuition at school. Local conditions, eg admission policies or national assessments, may influence the targeting of resources towards the first or second year (after reception) and account is taken of date of birth to ensure that summer born children are not excluded.

GENDER

Children are selected for Reading Recovery based on literacy levels. Nationally, a higher proportion is selected of boys than girls for Reading Recovery. This suggests that factors which affect boys’ literacy, causing them to be more likely to get into difficulties, emerge early and continue to exist in spite of improvements in literacy teaching in schools.

FIRST LANGUAGE

Approximately 5% of the entire primary school population speaks English as an additional language. Among Reading Recovery children this statistic varies considerably from place to place and the extent of their control of English language is also very variable.

FREE SCHOOL MEALS

Although a crude measure, entitlement to free school meals offers an indicator of economic deprivation. Research has shown persistent links between economic deprivation and literacy difficulties. In the general population, approximately 18% of children are entitled to free school meals.

Table 1 below shows the make-up of the Reading Recovery cohort in 2003–04. The majority of children identified for Reading Recovery are in Y1 (P2 in Northern Ireland), and most complete their programme within the year, although some may be taken into the programme later in the year, completing in the following year. In common with many studies, boys continue to outnumber girls among the lowest attaining children identified for Reading Recovery by around two to one. Four out of ten of children in Reading Recovery were from economically disadvantaged homes.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>All children number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year Group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y1/P2</td>
<td>3,218</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y2/P3</td>
<td>1,661</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y3/P4</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme Started</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This year</td>
<td>3,935</td>
<td>79.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last year</td>
<td>827</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not recorded</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>3,037</td>
<td>61.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>1,933</td>
<td>38.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not recorded</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What were the programme outcomes for Reading Recovery children?

There were five possible outcomes for children who received Reading Recovery.

1. Accelerated Progress (Discontinued): These children have made sufficient progress in literacy learning, within the time available, to catch up with the average band for their class, and have been judged to be likely to continue learning at the same rate as their peers, without the need for further special support.

2. Progress (Referred): The children have made progress, but have not reached the average band in literacy and will continue to need additional support.

3. Ongoing: These children started the programme late in the school year, and have not yet completed it, but will do so in the new school year.

4. Left: These children left the school part way through their programme.

5. Incomplete: These children were part way through their series of lessons when the programme had to be suspended, eg, because of withdrawal of funding.

Table 2

PROGRAMME OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN RECEIVING READING RECOVERY: BY PROGRAMME COMPLETION, THE UNITED KINGDOM, 2003–04

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>All Programmes</th>
<th>Completed Programmes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accelerated progress (discontinued)</td>
<td>3,020</td>
<td>60.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progress (referred)</td>
<td>606</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>898</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incomplete</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not known</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: “All Programmes” includes every child entering Reading Recovery in 2003–04. “Completed Programmes” are only those children whose programmes were actually completed during 2003–04.


What were the literacy levels of children in the Reading Recovery programme?

Children selected for Reading Recovery are the lowest achieving in their class on six measures of early literacy which together comprise the Observation Survey (Clay, 2002). These measures are Book Level (captured by running record of text reading), Letter Identification, Concepts about Print, Word Reading Test, Writing Vocabulary and Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words. In addition, the British Abilities Scale Word Reading assessment is administered to provide an external standardised assessment. The programme is discontinued when children are judged to have an efficient reading and writing process in place and to be operating within the average band for their class and age. Children who do not achieve the accelerated progress required for the programme to be discontinued are referred back to the school for longer-term support.
**AVERAGE SCORES AT ENTRY AND EXIT**

**Table 3**

| TABLE 3 SCORES ON OBSERVATION SURVEY TASKS OF CHILDREN WITH COMPLETED READING RECOVERY PROGRAMMES: AT ENTRY TO AND EXIT FROM THE PROGRAMME, THE UNITED KINGDOM, 2003–04 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Assessment Point | Total Assessment Point | Total Pupils | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | Mean | SD |
| Entry | At discontinuing (accelerated progress) | 3,606 | 1.8 | 2.5 | 40.3 | 12.9 | 12.7 | 3.9 | 7.3 | 5.6 | 11.8 | 10.3 | 17.1 | 10.2 |
| | At referral (progress) | 3,006 | 17 | 2.6 | 52.2 | 6.3 | 20.2 | 3 | 20.4 | 3.6 | 49.7 | 16.7 | 34.3 | 4.5 |
| | At referral (progress) | 597 | 8.7 | 3.8 | 47.2 | 9.5 | 16.3 | 4 | 14 | 5.7 | 27.6 | 15.1 | 26.9 | 8.7 |

*Note:* “HRSIW” is the Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words task.


Children in the UK came into Reading Recovery at very low levels of literacy, and two thirds are still unable to read even the simplest texts, after at least one full year at school and, in England, daily experience of the Literacy Hour. One in three can read nothing more than their own name, if that.

For out of five children are lifted to a level of text reading featuring elaborated episodes and events, extended descriptions, more use of literary language, full pages of print and more unusual and challenging vocabulary.

One in four children, who do not achieve accelerated learning, nevertheless do make considerable progress and can no longer be described as non-readers, reaching text levels featuring multiple lines of text, with 20-40 words per page, variation of sentence structure and story lines which include episodes following a time sequence and some literary conventions along with familiar oral language structures.

**WHAT WERE THE RESULTS OF NATIONAL ASSESSMENTS FOR READING RECOVERY CHILDREN?**

Children in England sit national assessments (SATS) in reading and writing at the end of their second year of formal schooling (Y2). The national target is level 2. Children identified for Reading Recovery are the lowest achieving in their class, and would be predicted to reach levels W or 1 without the intervention. Nevertheless, 70% of all children who received Reading Recovery reached SATs level 2 or above in reading and more than 60% in writing. This figure includes children who did not make accelerated progress and children who were still only part way through their Reading Recovery programme when taking SATs. Among children who achieved accelerated learning, more than 80% achieved Level 2 or above in reading and more than 70% in writing.

**Table 4**

| KEY STAGE 1 SATS LEVELS OF READING RECOVERY CHILDREN: BY PROGRAMME OUTCOME, THE UNITED KINGDOM, 2003–04 |
|---|---|---|
| Programme Outcome/ SATs Level | Key Stage 1 Reading number | Key Stage 1 Writing number |
| Accelerated progress (discontinued) | W | 1 | 0.1 |
| | 1 | 147 | 17.3 |
| | 2c | 257 | 30.2 |
| | 2b | 324 | 38.1 |
| | 2a | 110 | 12.9 |
| | 3 | 11 | 1.3 |
| | 1 | 147 | 17.3 |
| | 2 | 257 | 30.2 |
| | 3 | 324 | 38.1 |
| | W | 110 | 12.9 |
| | 2c | 11 | 1.3 |
| | 2b | 257 | 30.2 |
| | 2a | 324 | 38.1 |
| | 3 | 110 | 12.9 |
Programme Outcome/ SAT’s Level | Key Stage 1 Reading number | % | Key Stage 1 Writing number | %
--- | --- | --- | --- | ---
**All completed programmes** |  |  |  |  
W | 26 | 2.4 | 50 | 4.7  
1 | 298 | 27.9 | 363 | 34.1  
2c | 290 | 27.2 | 381 | 35.7  
2b | 332 | 31.1 | 213 | 20  
2a | 110 | 10.3 | 53 | 5  
3 | 11 | 1 | 6 | 0.6

Note: “All completed programmes” includes those children who made progress (referred) and made accelerated progress (discontinued).


**End of KS2:** In 2003 a survey was made of children who had received Reading Recovery five years previously, in 1997–98. In a sample of more than 600 children, including those who did not achieve accelerated learning, half of the children reached Level 4 and above in National Curriculum end of Key Stage tests, and only 20% failed to reach level 3. That is 20% of the lowest attaining one-fifth of the age cohort, or 4% of the whole age cohort, suggesting that Reading Recovery could almost halve the number of children leaving Key Stage 2 with no useful literacy, and significantly increase the number of the lowest attaining children progressing to Level 4 and above.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All children</th>
<th>Children who achieved accelerated learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| No level available | 131 | 20 | 60 | 14  
Level 2 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 0  
3 | 185 | 28 | 116 | 27  
4 | 266 | 41 | 207 | 47  
5 | 65 | 10 | 53 | 12  
Total | 651 | 100% | 437 |

National curriculum tests in reading for Reading Recovery children at end of KS2

Children who had achieved accelerated learning in Reading Recovery at age six were even more successful at age 11, with 59% reaching Level 4 and above, and only 14% failing to reach Level 3.

It should be borne in mind that these children received Reading Recovery in 1997 and 1998. Since then the Reading Recovery implementation has shown year on year improvements in the number of children achieving accelerated learning, and the levels of text reading reached by those children. It may be expected that these year on year improvements will lead to higher proportions of ex-Reading Recovery children reaching Level 4 and above in End of KS2 National Curriculum tests in the future, and even fewer failing to reach Level 3. The implementation in England has always been targeted to areas of particular difficulty, in some LEAs it is almost exclusively targeted to failing schools, so that the sample of children is inevitably skewed to the most challenging.
Even in the most challenging circumstances, five years after their Reading Recovery programme half of the children who received the intervention reached Level 4 and above in National Curriculum tests at end of KS2, and only one in five failed to reach level 3. Given that these were initially the lowest attaining children, who had made very little progress in learning to read in their first year in school, and were the children most likely to fail to reach national standards, this represents a considerable long-term advantage for children who received the Reading Recovery programme.

APPLENIX 7

SUPPORT FOR READING RECOVERY

7a. Ofsted Reports

Below are extracts from a small sample of Ofsted reports mentioning Reading Recovery

Thomas Fairchild Community School, Hackney

Para 15. The Reading Recovery and Numeracy Recovery programmes are taught very well and contribute significantly to pupils’ achievement.

Para 23. The school analyses how well individuals are achieving and is particularly successful in early intervention to support language and numeracy development in Years 1 and 2. Reading Recovery, Numeracy Recovery and work to support pupils with English as an additional language are important elements in the school’s provision.

Para 34. Investment in Reading Recovery, Numeracy Recovery and support for pupils with English as an additional language is leading to higher achievement . . . In Years 1 and 2 the school has put into place very effective early intervention strategies to enable pupils to catch up and make good progress.

Main Strengths and Weaknesses

— Early intervention strategies are very successful in raising reading standards.

Para 63. The Reading Recovery system, which operates in Y1, is very successful in giving a boost to those who are struggling at this early stage. The teaching in these sessions is of a very high standard, enabling pupils to make very rapid progress.

Para 66. The subject leaders have done very well in establishing and implementing strategies, like Reading Recovery and Talking Partners, which are having a beneficial effect on pupil achievement.

St John of Jerusalem CE Primary School, Hackney

— Pupils with special educational needs make good progress. Good teaching in withdrawal settings using the Reading Recovery programme assists the pupils to make good progress in reading.

— Work on the Reading Recovery programme is very effective . . .

— The quality of provision in withdrawal sessions for help with Reading Recovery is particularly good.

— The school has used the Reading Recovery programme, and the Additional Literacy Support to help identified pupils to benefit from additional focused literacy activities. They have been effective in helping these pupils to make good progress.

Birley Spa Primary School, Sheffield

Page 8–9: Pupils with special educational needs in the main school are supported well and make very good progress overall. The school also employs a range of highly effective intervention strategies, such as Reading Recovery and Additional Literacy Support, which contribute significantly to raising children’s achievement.

Page 10, para 4: One of the key strengths of the school is the very good progress which it enables pupils to make. Many progress from well below average attainment on entry to nursery to above or well above average attainment as they leave the school. This is achieved in part by the significant strength and consistency of the teaching, and the very high expectations of the staff, but also by a range of well managed and effective intervention strategies, such as Reading Recovery and Additional Literacy Support, together with the work of the learning Mentor. These do much to boost pupil’s achievements and ensure, for example, that there is a steady turnover of pupils on the register of special educational needs as temporary difficulties are resolved.

Page 16, para 25: Teaching for pupils with special educational needs is very good. Consequently pupils achieve very well and make very good progress overall against their individual targets. . . . Many structures are in place to support pupils’ needs, for example Reading Recovery.
Page 32, para 87: Trends show that standards for older pupils have improved greatly since the previous inspection. Detailed analysis of the results show that pupils who have been on the Reading Recovery programme made particularly good progress and ultimately achieved high standards.

Broadmere Community Primary School, Woking, Surrey

Page 8: What the school does well
— “Reading Recovery” is a strength, and is effectively underpinning the progress being made at the lower end of the school.

Page 37, para 88: A Reading Recovery programme is supporting pupils very well and helping them to gain a head start in overcoming difficulties. In two weeks, for example, one pupil has moved from dependency on the teacher to confidence in reading simple sentences, and has also acquired a voice in expressing opinions and evaluating her own contributions.

7b. See attached article written by a Bristol Headteacher, Jennifer Holt, of Victoria Park Community Infant School, for the LEA journal.

7c. See letter to TES written by Jean Gross, Senior Director (Achievement and Inclusion) Primary National Strategy.

APPENDIX 8
THE FINANCIAL STATUS OF READING RECOVERY

Reading Recovery is a not-for-profit educational programme, based within schools. The name Reading Recovery is trademarked for quality assurance purposes, and the trade mark is held by the Institute of Education, University of London, which accredits training courses for the programme. National Co-ordination for the programme is housed within the Institute, and is funded by subscription from LEAs and a small grant from DfES. At school level, the most significant cost is the release of a teacher to work with individual children, usually about 0.5 of a teacher’s time. This is generally achieved through school budgets with support from the LEA, through Standards funds, EAZ, EiC etc.

It is estimated to cost schools around £1,500 per child, mainly in teacher time, to implement Reading Recovery. This is less than the cost of a fairly basic self-catering package holiday in Spain, for two adults and two children. It’s about the cost of a home computer that will be obsolete within four years or a wedding dress at the cheaper end of the spectrum, worn for one day. It would pay for just six weeks at a top private school or for twenty cigarettes a day for just one year. Are all of those things really worth so much more than the difference between being literate and illiterate?

In the QCA’s evaluation of Reading Recovery of 1998 researchers found that the “cost of Reading Recovery was substantially more in the short term, but then so was the progress”. They observed that the costs associated with Reading Recovery in an LEA were “probably an essential aspect of any well run special needs section”. They pointed out that it was a mistake to assume that the kind of children who were eligible for Reading Recovery were otherwise inexpensive to educate. These children, in the bottom 20% of readers, usually need some form of specialised help in the absence of Reading Recovery. And when they costed the normal, in-school literacy support given to poor readers, they found that, within two years, the amount spent had crept up to half the cost of a Reading Recovery programme “for negligible progress”. And these costs would probably be incurred again the next year, and the next, for the rest of the child’s school career.

The children for whom Reading Recovery is designed are costly to educate. The question is, do we spend the money early, on a programme which we know has a good chance of being effective, or a little at a time over several years with, as research has shown, little return for the outlay? The choice is not whether or not to spend the money, but whether to spend it now on something that works, or later picking up the pieces.

Reading Recovery costs more because it is designed to address an expensive problem. In hospitals it costs more to provide intensive care than general nursing, but is that a reason for not providing intensive care? It costs more to lay sound foundations for a building in a sandy district than in a rocky district, but would you want to live in a house with inadequate foundations, just because you lived in a sandy place? It costs more to lay the foundations of literacy for children with complex barriers to their learning than for those who learn easily, but is that an acceptable reason for allowing them to fail?

APPENDIX 9
CRISIS OF ACCESS TO READING RECOVERY

In the past three years, schools in England have reported a increasing difficulty in their ability to fund the programme for their least able children. In one LEA thirty out of 59 schools which had ceased Reading Recovery cited funding as the reason. Since 2002 Reading Recovery has closed in six longstanding LEAs, with three more currently at risk. Lack of funding has been the principle reason given for closures. This
occurs when LEAs can no longer contribute to the cost in schools, leaving them to fund teaching entirely from already hard pressed budgets; also when personnel are promoted or retire, and the school or LEA cannot find the cost of training a replacement.


9.b See Case studies of the implementation of Reading Recovery in fur LEAs and their schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEA</th>
<th>Began RR</th>
<th>Finished RR</th>
<th>No: schools in LEA</th>
<th>Total no: RR teachers trained</th>
<th>No: RR teachers now in RR</th>
<th>Funding</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>SRB finished 2002</td>
<td>Teachers now supported by Wirral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halton</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>SRB finished</td>
<td>Teachers supported by Cheshire and now by Wirral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southwark</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(last teachers reported 2002)</td>
<td>Tutor may return to role, but no new RR teachers trained since 1997; centre dismantled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stockton on Tees</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tutor has not been able to work in RR since completing training in 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westminster</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Once supported teachers in Croydon and Brighton. Teachers supported by Greenwich, now by Hammersmith</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Memorandum submitted by Barking and Dagenham Local Education Authority

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Barking and Dagenham Local Education Authority (LEA) has, over the last decade or so, given a strong lead over the teaching of reading. The LEA’s Inspection and Advisory Service believes that teachers have traditionally been poorly trained in the methods required and so have had a poor understanding of reading development. For these reasons, the LEA has undertaken a systematic programme in which:

— very many primary teachers have received detailed, year-group-specific training on suitable pedagogy for the teaching of English; and
— the curriculum for English, including reading, has been described and elaborated in significantly more detail than in either the National Curriculum or the National Literacy Strategy.

Barking and Dagenham is an Authority suffering considerable disadvantage, and with adult literacy levels amongst the lowest in the country. As a result of our work, primary school standards have risen from a very low base to around the national average. In 1996 only 36% of pupils at age 11 reached the expected standard. By 2001 80% of pupils reached this level, with 35% of pupils achieving the higher level (level 5).

The LEA is keen to get almost all of its pupils to the expected levels but, as in much of the rest of the country, results have reached a plateau. Despite an extensive programme of staff training for both teachers and teaching assistants, there remain at least a fifth of pupils who do not do as well as they should. We see this group as a last great challenge. It is well known that pupils who fall behind by age 7 generally fail to meet the expected standards at age 11. Those who fall behind by age 11 seldom gain decent qualifications in public examinations.

It is important to explain why some pupils do not do as well as they should. In order to do this, the LEA conducted an in-depth review of the teaching of reading in the summer of 2004. The main findings of the review are shown below. However, it is first necessary to explain the LEA’s advice to teachers on the teaching of reading.

THE BARKING AND DAGENHAM PROGRAMME FOR READING

The reading curriculum is seen as an integral part of the English/literacy curriculum.

The Authority starts from a position that children need to become acquainted with quality texts in order that they internalise the language and syntax of books. Many children in this deprived community fail to enter the nursery at age three with any substantial background of reading. It is therefore the job of the teacher to develop understanding of books at the broadest level. Our early teaching therefore relies on children being read to in order to develop their skills as participative listeners.
The formal teaching of reading is later approached systematically. Of central importance is the use of high quality children’s literature, which includes both fiction and non-fiction texts. There is no evidence that the reading primers drawn from various reading schemes develop children’s reading effectively and the Authority is keen to limit their use. The advantages they bring (phonetic regularity or controlled text) are far outweighed by their artificiality and lack of appeal.

The Barking and Dagenham Primary English Project sets out a number of teaching strategies, which are intended to be used in schools across the Authority. The following paragraphs describe the intended approach, which has been promoted over the last eight years in the LEA’s training programme.

**Teaching Strategies**

**Word level work**

Alongside strategies which familiarise children with the language of books, a number of approaches are used to build up children’s knowledge of words.

The LEA has produced a highly structured programme for the teaching of phonics. During the nursery and reception years children are taught to hear rhymes in words and to develop an ear for the sounds they hear. They are taught to recognise similar sounds at the beginnings and ends of words. Once this is established, children are taught to recognise the most common letter sounds and to associate them with their symbols. During the reception year, children learn the name of each letter and its most common sound. Early work on blends is also tackled in a highly systematic way. Magnetic letters are used to help children to begin to spell words before they have the fine motor skills to write.

Knowledge of phonic rules is an essential tool in the art of reading. The most powerful element concerns the use of the initial sounds (the first letter or group of letters) in a word. These act as a strong check on what the word says, particularly when considered in conjunction with other cues, such as syntax and meaning.

As a result of the LEA programme, there is systematic teaching of the most common letter-sound relationships in all the LEA’s schools. However, English is far from being a phonically regular language. Wider reading strategies must therefore also be taught systematically.

**Whole class shared reading**

During reception and key stage 1, after being read to, children begin to recite text together. The class is positioned so all can see and follow the print in a large book or on a projected image. The text is often tracked with a pointer by the teacher. Although many children at this stage will not be able to decode individual words efficiently, they benefit by learning predictable text by heart. This enables them later to draw on their knowledge of the way the specific language of books works. Recitation of text is not the same as reading independently. It is seen as a step in building children’s confidence as they then begin to tackle the components of the text at the level of the single word.

As this work progresses children are taught to recognise particular words at sight, and to make practical use of their phonic knowledge. Alongside these technical skills, they are taught to make use of a range of other cues to decode words they have not encountered before. These include context and syntax (without, at this stage, using these words!). These cues enable children to check whether their prediction of what an unknown word might say is reasonable (for instance, how does the word read need to be pronounced in a particular context?). A concentration on making sense of the text rather than simply decoding it blindly is essential if children are to learn to read properly.

**Guided Group Reading**

Children are selected to join a particular group, based on the needs teachers have assessed. These are not ability groups—or are not intended to be so. Children are selected on the basis of their current skills and current weaknesses and group composition changes as individuals progress.

The techniques used in guided group reading are similar to those used in shared whole class reading. However, children also read individually, either silently to themselves or out loud. Teachers pick up on individual errors and developmental needs. The guided group reading session is valuable in enabling teachers to monitor the progress of individuals.

**Strategies for Practice**

Although direct teaching of reading is an essential component of the programme, it is not enough. Children are encouraged to read regularly and at length as soon as they begin to develop independence. However, many families do not support this activity and the schools have to use methods to make up for the shortfall. The strategies used for practice are as follows.
Partnered Reading

In order to develop reading confidence, children work in mixed attainment pairs. They take it in turns to read aloud to their partner from a collection of quality children’s books, which are carefully selected for each year group. Some of these books will already be known to the children. Pupils are trained on how to listen to the other reader and how to support them. The higher attainers practice at their own level but develop the skills of articulating the story for a listener. The evidence is that the higher attainers make fast progress through these activities. The lower attainers benefit by being coached by their partner. This has a dual benefit. The lower attainer makes progress by being supported. The higher attainer makes progress by teaching. In some schools, this works in mixed-age pairings, with similar benefits.

Individual Practice

Children are encouraged to take home the books that follow up the guided and shared reading sessions. This helps them practice what they have been taught. Children are also encouraged to browse and to choose books from the school libraries and to tackle books which interest them. In some cases, this means that they will not be able to decode all of the content. However, there is benefit in engaging with text which is currently somewhat beyond them in order to raise their aspirations. For the youngest children, these activities pose considerable challenge until they have developed the confidence to read alone.

Various other strategies have been tried in different schools to ensure children do read to experienced readers on a regular basis. Amongst the most successful have been:
- organised groups of adults (so called reading volunteers), who give up their lunch hour to visit a school to hear reading;
- the use of older or younger peers, who pair up with less experienced readers out of lesson times; and
- using teaching assistants where they are available.

Reading Aloud Programme

To develop children’s enthusiasm for literature and their acquaintance with the different genres, teachers are encouraged to read aloud without any intense instructional focus. Unfortunately, this activity has been put under pressure by the breadth and complexity of the full National Curriculum. This is a matter of regret.

A Review of Reading

As mentioned above, the LEA has shown very significant progress over the last eight or so years. However, between a fifth and a quarter of pupils need to do better in order to succeed with later studies. It was therefore decided to look critically at the approaches being used to teach reading. The review sought to:
- investigate the degree to which teachers adhered to the models of teaching and assessment recommended by the LEA in key stage 1 and early key stage 2;
- identify models of teaching which enabled almost all pupils to reach expected standards by the ends of the two primary school key stages; and
- identify elements of the provision which appeared to be inefficient or unsuccessful.

The Main Findings of the Review

- As is true nationally, at least one fifth of pupils in Barking and Dagenham fall below nationally expected levels at age 11. Those pupils who reach the levels expected (at least level 2B) at age 7 generally continue to make at least sound progress. However, a few more children fall behind by age 11. The gap between higher and lower attainers grows as children move through key stage 2.
- In the lessons in which pupils made the best progress, teachers had good subject knowledge; they taught and reinforced key points systematically. They identified, and incorporated into their teaching, what children needed to do to move on. In guided reading sessions the texts used were well matched to the pupils’ achievement and succeeded in maintaining their interest. The teacher explicitly taught groups of pupils, with a clear purpose and objective in mind. Teaching assistants typically supported the rest of the class generally as they carried out tasks independently. In these successful classes, a full range of reading strategies (as described above) was taught. Pupils were given strong encouragement to use them.
- In a number of schools, a restricted range of teaching strategies was used. Some teachers had chosen to drop particular approaches such as paired reading. Others had failed to attend training and so did not understand what was expected or why it was important. In odd cases, highly inefficient methods were being used. Here teachers spent large expanses of time hearing pupils read individually. Typically, the schools which used a restricted range of strategies had lower results than those which used the full range.
In weaker lessons, teaching was well organised, prepared and structured, but was too mechanical: teachers delivered lessons rather than taking opportunities to focus on and reinforce the things they assessed their children needed to learn. In these lessons, there was an emphasis on completing activities rather than on getting children to learn and apply the range of reading strategies. Too many teachers still had too little understanding of the reading process and the way children learn to read. This prevented them from assessing difficulties in individuals or the class as a whole, and subsequently doing something about it.

The teaching and support provided to the lowest attainers was often provided by teaching assistants. In many of the examples observed, this work reinforced children’s difficulties and misunderstandings; it did little to overcome them. The support was sometimes offered away from the direct supervision of the teacher and so was not monitored. In general, the shortcomings of the support were not widely appreciated by teachers or headteachers.

Because they were often removed from lessons for different work, low attaining pupils had less experience of texts of quality which were used by their peers. Instead, the work they covered focused on a restricted range of reading strategies and contributed little to their development as readers. There was a narrow and often inappropriate focus on phonics, to the exclusion of wider strategies. When confronted with error or difficulty most teaching assistants asked children to sound it out. Teaching assistants and some teachers demonstrated the process inappropriately. For example, Let’s sound it out—ah/luh/suh/ohh/ makes . . . also. Of course, this is nonsense because also is not a phonically regular word and, in any case, putting additional vowel sounds into the equation makes this approach entirely unhelpful. It is unacceptable that the neediest pupils should receive so much teaching from unqualified staff. Unfortunately, the use of teaching assistants to teach the neediest pupils has been promoted nationally; schools cannot be blamed for the decisions they have made.

Evidence gathered through listening to children read suggested that many average pupils, and the majority of the lower attaining pupils were not reading for meaning. They sometimes used phonic approaches inappropriately or uncritically. A pupil in Y4 interpreted “I am not doing that”, he murmured.

as

“I am not doing that”, he murdered.

. . . and continued to read on as if nothing were amiss.

Such pupils did not read critically for meaning and remained satisfied with simple, inaccurate, mechanical decoding. Children like this see the task of reading as saying the words on the page, rather than making sense of them.

In some key stage 2 schools time for reading practice had been squeezed and as a result there was insufficient consolidation of the direct teaching. This was attributed to the requirements of the national tests for writing and the demands of the full National Curriculum.

There was little systematic monitoring of reading in most of the schools. Some data were collected but they were rarely analysed to identify and target groups of underachieving pupils.

In most schools reading had not been the focus of systematic staff training during the last two years. Writing had had a much higher profile owing to changes in national test requirements.

Resources for reading were extensive and of good quality. In most cases they were well organised and teachers were able to choose books matched to the attainment level of their pupils. Some books used for partnered reading were getting worn out through extensive use and so needed to be replaced.

Senior leadership teams identified increasing turnover of pupils and lack of parental support for reading as areas for concern.

**ISSUES FOR THE FUTURE**

The LEA’s approach to reading has led to great gains in pupils’ achievement. Unfortunately, partly because of staff turnover and lack of funds to release teachers for training, some of the recommended approaches have not been maintained. The following actions are therefore necessary.

**The LEA should:**

— continue to work with schools and teachers to develop: teachers’ knowledge of the reading process;
— do more to develop teachers’ understanding of manageable systems of day-to-day assessment;
— articulate and promote teaching approaches that meet the needs of lower attaining pupils; and
— provide advice, training and support on the effective use of additional adults and how their impact can be monitored.
Headteachers in schools should:

— develop systems to monitor the progress of lower attaining groups of pupils. Do this in order to ascertain whether these pupils are being taught to use all the reading strategies. This should avoid a large group of low attaining pupils being created by omission;
— review the number of additional adults in the classrooms and the impact they have on the achievement of the pupils with whom they work; and
— monitor the amount of reading practice time available. Ensure there are regular opportunities for reading of different kinds each week.

Teachers should:

— develop their knowledge about the teaching of reading;
— use assessment to monitor carefully the progress of pupils. Use this information to inform teaching. Show how in their planning the way teaching has been adjusted to meet pupils’ assessed needs;
— take responsibility for the teaching of lower and lowest achieving pupils, rather than giving responsibility to additional adults;
— organise the programme to use the whole range of organisational strategies to teach reading each week. The range should include shared, guided, paired and independent reading, as well as both pupils and the teacher reading aloud; and
— teach children to read more discriminately, focusing on meaning.

Memorandum submitted by the Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB)

1. Who We Are

1.1 We are the leading charity working for the two million people in the UK with sight problems. Our mission is to challenge blindness and the disabling effects of sight loss by providing information and practical services to help people get on with their own lives, as well as campaigning with and on behalf of blind and partially sighted people. RNIB also challenges the underlying causes of blindness by working towards its prevention, cure and alleviation.

1.2 RNIB welcomes the opportunity to submit written evidence to the Select Committee’s inquiry on teaching children to read.

2. Why are We Submitting Evidence to the Committee?

2.1 87% of children’s fiction books published each year do not become available in accessible formats like large print, audio tape and braille, essential for the reading development of blind and partially sighted children. This is undoubtedly having an impact on teachers’ ability to get the reading resources they need for their pupils who have sight problems.

2.2 Visual impairment is a low incidence disability, with approximately 23,000 children between 0 and 16 years of age in the UK affected. In addition around 4% of the population is severely dyslexic. A further 6% have mild to moderate dyslexia. Synthetic speech output or audio tape is often one of the only ways in which children with dyslexia can access literature.

3. How Many Books are Available in Accessible Formats for Children with Sight Problems and Other Reading Disabilities?

3.1 In August this year the Library and Information Research Unit (LISU) of Loughborough University was commissioned by RNIB, on behalf of the Right to Read Alliance,7 to conduct research into the availability of books in accessible formats.

4. The Research

4.1 An estimate of the availability of alternative formats for all books published over a five year period was made, based on a random sample from the British National Bibliography (BNB) for the years 1999–2003 inclusive. Over the five years examined, a total of 2,069 titles were selected for the sample. Of these, just 92 were found to be available in one or more accessible formats—4.4%.

4.2 Access to reading for children: Junior Fiction.

Over the five years examined a total of 406 titles were selected for the junior fiction sample. Of these 53 were found to be available in one or more accessible formats—13.1%.

4.3 Availability varied by year of inclusion in BNB, from 7.9% in 1999 to 19.5% in 2002, as shown by the table below. (Summary of junior fiction material available in accessible formats, by year).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sample/no</th>
<th>Available, any format</th>
<th>Available, any format/%</th>
<th>Not available</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.4 Availability of junior fiction material in accessible formats, by year and format. The table below shows that availability of different formats has not improved over the last five years and has in many cases has decreased.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Format</th>
<th>1999 %</th>
<th>2000 %</th>
<th>2001 %</th>
<th>2002 %</th>
<th>2003 %</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Braille 1</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>1.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Braille 2</td>
<td>4.76</td>
<td>8.62</td>
<td>8.45</td>
<td>9.76</td>
<td>6.03</td>
<td>7.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moon</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Braille with print</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard cassette</td>
<td>4.76</td>
<td>5.17</td>
<td>9.20</td>
<td>12.20</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>6.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio: 4 track</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking books</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>2.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio CD</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>1.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAISY</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>2.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic text</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large print</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>6.90</td>
<td>8.54</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>5.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giant print</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>2.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. What is the Impact of this Shortage on Children Learning to Read?

5.1 Kathleen Gaster, Learning Resources Manager at Linden Lodge School, describes the importance of having a wide range of books in different formats to help children learn to read and continue developing their reading skills.\(^8\)

5.2 “At Linden Lodge School, I support pupils with a wide range of reading needs, ranging from Harry Potter to the earliest mode of communication—Objects of Reference. In this range are a group of children who are struggling with reading, usually at Key Stage 3. This is the stage where it’s easy to lose them as readers and we have made special efforts to provide this group with as wide a range of appropriate and lively books as possible. I also feel it is very important that shared reading is encouraged between pupils and at home, so our titles are produced in 24 and 32 point print and braille. In order to make reading pleasurable, the books have to be accessible in this way, so that children can read anywhere from class to bed!

5.3 “Large print readers especially, have a daunting task at school, coping with worksheets and textbooks in a variety of ways, so reading for pleasure and improving their literacy can seem like one more chore.

\(^8\) The standard error of this estimate is 0.5%, giving a 95% confidence interval of between 11.1% and 13.2%.

\(^9\) Linden Lodge accepts pupils with a visual impairment, some of whom have additional disabilities which affect their access to learning. The Primary and Secondary Departments cater for children aged four to 17 years, with the opportunity for some pupils to remain until they are 19.

\(^10\) Curriculum Close Up—Issue 14, “Reading for Pleasure".
5.4 “Reading materials also need to be age appropriate, so we have looked at all the series of books that are being published to address the needs of reluctant teenage readers and those pupils who are still acquiring literacy. We have also started to produce more titles in Grade 1 as well as Grade 2 Braille, for pupils coming in at transition and who might be starting Braille late.”

6. **Reading and The Schools Access Initiative**

6.1 The DfES state that there is funding available for the provision of accessible information through the Schools Access Initiative, which can be used for the production of materials to enable access to the curriculum for children with reading disabilities. However, in a written answer of 26 May 2004 (Column 1689W) the Minister for Children (Margaret Hodge) stated that:

> “It is for local education authorities to determine how they will allocate the funding made available to them in the light of local needs and circumstances detailed in their Accessibility Strategy and make that information available to the schools they are responsible for.”

6.2 Furthermore, the government have also acknowledged that there is currently no way of telling what proportion of the funding goes on accessible formats and what proportion on improving buildings’ accessibility.

6.3 Also on 26 May 2004 (Column 1688W) the Minister for Children, when replying to a written question tabled by Mark Hoban MP, asking “how much of the School Access Fund was spent on improving (a) physical access to school buildings and (b) access to the curriculum in the most recent year for which figures are available”, replied saying

> “This information is not collected centrally”.

6.4 It is therefore not clear how much money is being spent on access to literature for children with sight problems and other reading disabilities via the Schools Access Initiative, but the reports from teachers, support workers and the voluntary sector, of significant shortages, suggests that whatever the amount it is inadequate to meet the needs of children.

6.5 Despite the obligations laid on schools and local education authorities by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act, 2001 (SENDA), children are not getting the materials they need or want in the format they require. Textbooks can cost several thousand pounds to adapt into accessible formats and specialist teachers spend many hours adapting textbooks for students in individual schools.

6.6 To give some idea of the demand for accessible format books and materials that cannot be met, RNIB carried out an informal survey of teachers, asking them which Key Stage 3 and 4 textbooks they would like the charity to produce during the 2004–05 academic year. 17 subject areas were requested and 129 different texts by 22 different publishers. RNIB only has the capacity to produce 10 publications in accessible formats.

6.7 In addition, to demonstrate the budget shortfall that teachers may have to deal with, we were approached by a teacher with a request to transcribe two music scores into braille. To cover costs a £800 charge had to be made for the work, but the teacher had a total annual budget for four students of only £500.

7. **Braille Readers**

7.1 Braille is a tactile code based on a cell of six dots arranged as two columns of three, like the six on a die. There are two levels of Braille. Grade I Braille involves representing each printed character with a braille character, making it relatively simple to learn but very slow to use. Grade 2 Braille involves “contractions”, whereby a cell or combination of cells is used to represent a single word or a number of letters which commonly occur together, in order to speed up the reading and writing process. Wherever possible, Grade 2 is taught to all pupils for whom Braille is to be the main medium of communication. There are additional Braille codes for music, mathematics and foreign languages.

7.2 A recent RNIB report\(^\text{11}\) suggests that there are around 850 children using Braille in schools in England, Scotland and Wales and that 83% of braillists under 12 now attend mainstream or resourced mainstream schools. Children who use Braille are therefore very few in number but even then they do not form a homogenous group. There are differences between children that relate to the nature and time of onset of their visual impairment—some children will have been totally blind from birth, while others may have lost their sight adventitiously. There are also differences in their experiences with Braille: many will have learned literacy through Braille but some will have begun to learn to read through print and then transferred to braille as their sight deteriorated. Moreover, many of these children have needs in addition to their blindness. Of 85 Braille users in mainstream schools studied by RNIB, 35 had a range of additional needs, most commonly physical disabilities or learning difficulties.

\(^{11}\) Keil, S and Clunies-Ross, L, Report of Research Study into Teaching Braille to Children in Schools, November 2002, RNIB.
7.3 While acquiring literacy through Braille involves many processes and skills in common with learning through print, there are also major differences such as the need to develop fine tactile perception and for children to gain a wide range of concrete experiences to compensate for their lack of incidental visual learning. Because of the nature of the code, the order in which Braille signs are taught to a young reader are likely to differ from the order in which print letters and words are introduced to sighted children.

7.4 RNIB’s report raised serious concerns about falling standards in the teaching of literacy through Braille and noted that there are many unanswered questions on how to best approach Braille teaching for children in mainstream schools. In the past, children who used Braille developed their literacy skills almost exclusively in schools for the blind alongside other blind children. They were taught within a curriculum developed largely within the school by a specialist teacher who could draw upon a tradition of practical knowledge and skills that had evolved within the institution.

7.5 Children who use Braille today are likely to receive their education in a mainstream class where there are no other children with a visual impairment, and where they may be supported by a range of adults. The most important factor in the promotion of most children’s literacy attainment is generally recognised to be the class teacher, whose own knowledge of literacy, understanding of how children learn and teaching skills are crucial. However in the case of children who use Braille, it is unlikely that the class teacher will have any relevant experience or skill to offer. Most of the specialist knowledge, understanding and skill involved in developing literacy through this medium is likely to reside in other professionals, such as a teaching assistant or visiting teacher of the visually impaired. The standard of specialist training that these professionals receive, and the relationship between them and the class teacher, is therefore central to achieving a successful outcome. RNIB’s research indicates that approaches to teaching Braille to children vary considerably across the country and that there is no consensus on what constitutes best practice.

7.6 Changes in the learning context are also important. While the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) has provided benefits for many children with visual impairment it has also created significant challenges for practitioners working in mainstream schools with children who use Braille, including the following:

— It is often hard for children who use Braille to keep up with the speed of information processing required in the fast paced lessons.

— Some of the commonly used teaching techniques in the NLS (such as the use of large books for whole class sessions) have a strong visual element.

— Some aspects of the prescribed whole class sessions (eg letter formation in the development of handwriting) are not relevant for them and techniques for word attack (such as the analysis of words according to their phonic structure) are complicated by the fact that many words in Braille appear in a contracted form.

7.8 The availability of reading material in alternative formats is an essential aspect of Braille literacy. The provision of children’s reading materials in Braille is pitifully small by comparison with the wealth of material available for sighted children, a fact emphasised in RNIB’s current “Right to Read” campaign. Research undertaken for the campaign found that fewer than 9% of titles in junior fiction were available in Braille. Blind children therefore enjoy only a limited opportunity to embed their literacy skills through wider reading which advances their enjoyment, knowledge and understanding.

8. WHAT WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE

8.1 In order for teachers to have the reading materials needed to engage children with sight problems and motivate them to begin reading and develop their abilities, it is essential that separate funding is made available from the Schools Access Initiative for production and purchase of accessible format books and materials.

8.2 At the moment there is no dedicated funding under the Schools Access Initiative allocated to the production or purchase of accessible format books, so in many cases funding goes to improving physical access to buildings and not to making the curriculum accessible. We believe that the reading development of blind and partially sighted children should be supported with dedicated funding to ensure that a wide variety of reading materials in different formats is secured in both special and mainstream establishments.

8.3 Were this done we would then want to see a review of whether funding is adequate for the educational needs of disabled children in terms of reading and access to the curriculum.

8.4 We would also like to see assurances from Ministers that the RevealWeb database will have secure funding to enable it to continue its work and develop the range of materials it lists. RevealWeb (www.revealweb.org.uk) is an online database, supported and managed by RNIB and the National Library for the Blind. It lists:

— A range of resources that are available in Braille, moon, audio and digital talking books, large print and other formats by searching the catalogue of resources.

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— Contact details of organisations that hold titles in accessible formats and the terms under which they will supply them.
— A register of suppliers who produce, loan or sell accessible materials.

8.5 Teachers find Revealweb a valuable resource as it lets them identify existing accessible format copies of books or other materials they need. They can then apply to borrow copies from the body that holds them and save time and resources through not having to duplicate work that has already been undertaken.

December 2004

Memorandum submitted by the Reading Recovery National Network

As professionals who, for the last 14 years in the UK, have been concerned with teaching children who are having the greatest difficulties learning to read, we have been concerned at the misrepresentation of Reading Recovery conveyed in the evidence of some of those invited to present their views to your Committee.

While American research on Reading Recovery was the subject of a critical report there in 2003, it was based on misunderstandings about the operation of the programme which were repeated in Sue Lloyd’s evidence to your Committee, and which have since been firmly rebutted. Of more relevance to your Committee is the fact that Reading Recovery in England was the subject of a very thorough evaluation directed by Professor Kathy Sylva and Dr Jane Hurry on behalf of SCAA and QCA, published in 1995 and 1998. Their study focused on a group of children who received Reading Recovery in 1992–93 when they were six years old, spread across 22 schools, and who were followed up when they were 10 years old, just before transfer to secondary school. They concluded that Reading Recovery made a significant difference to children who had the very lowest initial scores in reading, and also to those who were the most socially disadvantaged, defined in terms of eligibility for free school meals, compared to a phonological awareness programme. They did not compare Reading Recovery to Jolly Phonics or other synthetic phonics programmes, which were not widely available then, but this research has the merit of being an extremely well-controlled study which used a sophisticated design to compare the two programmes with children in control groups in the same schools and in schools where no special programmes were taking place. Its findings deserve the attention of your committee, because, unlike other approaches which have been presented to you, Reading Recovery is not a programme designed for class use; it is designed specifically for those children who have failed to learn to read by the time they are six and offers them an effective early intervention with lasting impact on both the reading and writing skills.

Our annual monitoring of Reading Recovery, which has been operating mainly in areas of high social need in the UK since 1991, shows that 40% of all children who received the programme at age six, and who would not have been expected to reach the target of level 4 in national SATs tests at 11, actually reached this level, and a further 10% reached level 5, while 30% reached level 3. These figures include all children who received the programme and whose SATs results four or five years later could be traced, and is therefore not subject to the criticisms of selective data-presentation levelled by Sue Lloyd. We are the only early intervention programme, targeted at the very poorest readers, which can provide such evidence of long-term effectiveness in the UK. We would welcome an opportunity to meet the Select Committee to discuss our submission and the contribution that Reading Recovery can make to the progress of the very lowest achieving 10% of children.

24 February 2005