

Chapter 1 Who determines literacy policies in England and on what evidence? An independent survey of the views of Head Teachers, teachers and parents

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Background

Government literacy policy on learning to read in England since 2006 appears to have its origins in the Rose Report, *The Independent Review of the Teaching of Early Reading* (Rose, 2006). A critique of the report is to be found in chapter 13 of *Learning to be Literate: Insights from research for policy and practice* (Clark, 2016) with further evaluation in chapter 7 by Clark and chapter 8 by Greg Brooks in *Reading the Evidence: Synthetic phonics and literacy learning* (Clark, 2017a). Since 2006 my aim has been to present a balanced picture of the evidence concerning the government's mandatory policy in England that *the* method of teaching reading should be by synthetic phonics only, and since 2012 that the Phonics Screening Check be a statutory assessment taken by all children in state primary schools at the end of Year 1, when about six years of age. The check has 40 words (20 real and 20 pseudo words) which the child is required to read out loud to the teacher. Those who fail to achieve a mark of 32 out of 40, the pass mark, are required to re-sit the check the following year. What had initially been claimed as a light touch diagnostic check has become a high stakes test with schools expected to raise their percentage pass year on year. The results are scrutinised both by the government and by Ofsted. The increase in the percentage pass on the check is being claimed to show that more children each year are, thanks to this policy, on their way to becoming fluent readers. In a series of articles, I analysed these developments, summarising them in Part IV of *Learning to be Literate: insights from research for policy and practice* (Clark, 2014), updating this evidence in a revised edition of the book in 2016. The School Standards Minister Nick Gibb, who has been committed to this policy since 2005, recommended to the Federal Government in Australia that it should, on the basis of its success in England, adopt synthetic phonics as the method of teaching reading and introduce the Phonics Screening Check into Australia (See Appendix III).

I felt that a balanced picture of the evidence from England was not being presented in Australia. In two edited books in 2017 and 2018 I presented evidence from seventeen academics in the United Kingdom, Australia, The United States, The Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The latter two countries, with very different literacy policies, and with teachers involved in their development and implementation, ranked statistically higher than England in the recently reported findings of PIRLS 2016 (Clark, 2018).

The School Standards Minister for England Nick Gibb, immediately on publication of the PIRLS 2016 results in December 2017 made a speech at the British Library where he claimed not only that England's improvement in ranking on this assessment of ten-year-olds was the result of the phonics policy but also that children's potential had previously been stunted, not by their teachers but because of 'a dogmatic romanticism that prevented the spread of evidence-based teaching practices'. This he followed with a sweeping indictment:

- despite the evidence in favour of phonics – we faced opposition from various lobby groups: those opposed to testing, those professors of education who had built a career on teaching teachers to use the 'look and say' approach, and the teaching unions.

(Gibb, 2017)

He further stated that his case for synthetic phonics as the method for teaching reading is 'not an un-evidenced assertion' and is one 'backed up by decades of research' Unfortunately the research he still chooses to quote is that in Clackmannanshire in Scotland whose methodology has been heavily criticised by many researchers (see chapter 14 in Clark, 2016 and chapter 2 by Glazzard, 2018). The School Standards Minister continues this theme in his more recent speeches.

Those who read *Reading the Evidence: Synthetic phonics and literacy learning* (Clark, 2017a) dispassionately checking for evidence, would have found extensive research to challenge the claim that prior to recent government policy, phonics was not evident in classrooms in England and in The United States, where similar claims were made in 1990s, or indeed recently in Australia. That book contains a collection of papers by five literacy experts from the United Kingdom and Australia showing that phonics did already have a place in classroom practice. In *Reading the Evidence*, we included in the appendices, statements made by UKLA in 2014 in The United Kingdom, and a joint statement by ALEA and PETAA in Australia in 2016, both backed by extensive references (Clark, 2017a). Shortly after the publication of *Reading the Evidence*, the results of PIRLS the Progress in International Reading Study 2016, were released in December 2017. Critics claimed the results invalidated our claims in that book, as England's ranking had risen in this latest assessment of literacy of ten-year-olds when compared with the previous assessment in 2011, rising from joint 10th to joint 8th. This improved ranking, according Nick Gibb, was caused by current policy and the phonics check which these children were the first to sit. Such claims are considered in several articles in a more recent book, *Teaching Initial Literacy: Policy, evidence and ideology* with contributions from a further twelve academics (Clark, 2018). Cautions are sounded in the report on PIRLS in drawing causal connections from this single set of data. It is also pointed out that not all countries that have an emphasis on phonics rank high. Both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland rank statistically higher than England on PIRLS yet no attention has been drawn in England to what we might learn from these literacy policies which differ greatly from that in England. Readers are referred to these two edited books for evidence on the development of and effects, intended and unintended of the Phonics Screening Check on the literacy experiences of young children in England. The only place so far where children's voices are reported is on pages 92-93 of Clark 2017a with quotations from the research of Jane Carter. Her research also included interviews of teachers as to their views of the check. Further evidence from that impressive study should soon be available.

The only published evidence on the views of teachers on the Phonics Screening Check is to be found in the government funded research by the National Foundation for Educational Research. This was, however, published in 2015 and covers only the early years of the check before it became such a high stakes test as it has now become. Yet even then teachers reported it was having effects on the classroom literacy experiences of young children, some of which concerned them (see chapter 16 of Clark, 2016 and chapter 9 in Clark, 2017a). In 2017 the government launched a consultation on assessment in primary schools in England in which reference is made to the Phonics Screening Check as a statutory assessment for children at the end of Year 1. There are questions on the future of other assessments, yet no questions as to the future of the phonics check, whether it should remain, and if so as a statutory assessment. I now have evidence that omission was no accident, as may be seen from the answer I received when I raised this issue at the Westminster Forum on December 7 2017 following a presentation on the consultation (see Appendix D).

The place of phonics testing in primary schools: the government consultation on assessment in primary schools in England

Below are extracts from an article in the *Education Journal* 2017 306: 12-14 summarising the evidence I was submitting to the DfE consultation (*Primary Assessment in England: Government consultation*. Launch 30 March 2017. Standards and Testing Agency. Reference STA/17/7935/e ISBN 978-1-78644-438-7). The DfE issued this consultation document on Primary Assessment in March 2017, with the closing date for responses 22 June. I considered the justification for the phonics screening test remaining a statutory assessment in primary schools and the claim that synthetic phonics is *the* way to teach reading, as repeatedly claimed by the School Standards Minister Nick Gibb.

On page 10 of the consultation document reference is made to the phonics screening test as:

A light-touch, statutory screening check administered by teachers. The check assesses a pupil's phonics decoding ability to identify pupils needing additional support... Pupils who do not meet the required standard are required to re-sit in year 2.

Twenty questions are posed in the consultation document to which one is asked to respond. To my surprise, no questions are raised as to the future of the phonics screening test, whether it should remain, and if so, as a statutory assessment. Following the consultation, it was possible that the only other assessments remaining in Year 1 might be teacher assessments. Thus, the screening test whose reliability, validity and effect on the curriculum were not even being scrutinised was likely to remain a statutory assessment. This pass/fail test with percentage pass within each school year on year recorded, and an expectation of an increase in percentage pass each year required, is far from being a light-touch diagnostic assessment as claimed. Disturbingly, it could become an even higher stakes measurement, with percentage pass an important aspect in school accountability as measured by Ofsted and the government.

No evidence-based criticisms of the status accorded by the government to synthetic phonics as the method of teaching reading, or of the success of the screening test as having raised standards in anything other than the test itself had so far dented the School Standards Minister Nick Gibb's faith in the policy. In the Conservative Manifesto only a few pages were devoted to primary education, yet, on page 51 reference was made to two key aspects of government policy for primary education,

We will build on the success of the phonics screening test.

We will expect every 11-year-old to know their times tables off by heart.

This government that claims its policy is evidence-based offers a depressing future for young children in the 21st century in primary school in England, as in their early years they will be expected to practice pseudo words, recite their tables and learn grammatical terms! Sadly, many of the youngest children will also have been recorded by the age of six as having failed the phonics check.

The following are important points to which I drew attention:

- i) The large difference in pass rate each year between the oldest and youngest children; thus, many of the youngest children, particularly boys, are labelled failures early in their school career.
- ii) Not only are half the words in the phonics check pseudo words, but each year the first twelve words in the test had been pseudo words. Some of those confused by the pseudo words have been children who could already read, or have attempted to make these into real words. There are children, including some autistic children, who refused to attempt pseudo words, but read all the real words correctly, thus failing the check. The instructions for the check are ambiguous meaning that some teachers might stop the check without giving children who fail on pseudo words the opportunity to try the real words.

Recent developments in the phonics policy in England

The dictates from DfE and Ofsted on the place of synthetic phonics and the importance for schools of a high and increasing percentage pass on the phonics check were, I felt having a major impact on practice in schools, and institutions training teachers in England, removing the freedom of practitioners to adopt the approaches they think appropriate for their individual children. Yet the government remains committed to expenditure on further synthetic phonics initiatives, even funding a pilot study in 300 schools to consider whether the check should be repeated in Year 3 by those children who failed the phonics check in Year 2. The report of this study by NFER was not published but in a written answer Nick Gibb, School Standards Minister stated this policy would not be implemented. (*NB Following a Freedom of Information Question I did manage to obtain a copy of the report*).

Until recently there was only anecdotal evidence on the effects of these developments on young children's experiences of and attitudes towards literacy. How will this greater emphasis on phonics in the early stages, the isolated nature of much of their tuition in phonics, the new emphasis on pseudo words and the phonics check influence their understanding of the nature of literacy and attitude to reading, also their parents' ideas as to how to help their young children? We need evidence from the children, including those who passed the check, any who could read but failed the check, and those required to re-sit the following year. The assumption that the needs of those who fail to reach the arbitrary pass mark on this test may still be met by a continuing focus on synthetic phonics as the solution to their problems seems naive.

Freedom of Information Questions enabled me to estimate the large amount of money spent by government on synthetic phonics, including on commercial programmes. (This information I have recently updated and present in Appendix II). There are no records of how much has been spent by schools on commercial synthetic phonics products in attempting year on year to increase their percentage pass on the Phonics Screening Check, nor how much has been spent by institutions training primary school teachers in England in meeting Ofsted's demand for a focus on synthetic phonics. From what was originally referred to as a 'light touch' test this has become a high stakes form of data, used by Ofsted in its judgement of a school's standing. Although the results for individual schools are not published they are available on Raiseonline, accessible to Ofsted inspectors and are in danger of achieving an even higher profile.

At the Westminster Education Forum Keynote Seminar on 7 December 2017 the findings of the consultation document were reported. The answer I received to a question to the speaker confirmed my suspicion that the future of the Phonics Screening Check was not indeed scrutinised as part of the consultation. See Appendix I for my question and the reply based on the written transcript.

The lack of any evidence as to the views of teachers and parents as to the effects, intended and unintended, of the Phonics Screening Check was the reason for planning this independent survey. We felt that teachers and parents might have valuable evidence and be more concerned than their present comparative silence suggested. Our main aims are to establish whether in the view of the profession and parents what has now become a high stakes test does provide any valuable diagnostic information. In their opinion is it value for money, should it remain, and if so as a statutory measure? What is the value if any, in recording the result as pass/fail and in requiring any children who fail to retake the check the following year? It is important to consider the views of teachers and parents as to the effect the imposition of this assessment is having not only on those who fail but on children who were already reading with understanding at the time they were assessed.

The government insists that synthetic phonics be the mandatory way of teaching all children in England to read. Furthermore, those who fail the check have more of the same, with the assumption that this method will in the end achieve success for all children. At a time of cuts to school budgets it seems appropriate to put the expenditure on this policy under scrutiny. I have been able to find out how much money is being spent by DfE on the phonics check, synthetic phonics materials and training courses. There is no way to establish how much money is being spent by schools to achieve a higher percentage pass each year on the check in order to be judged successful by DfE and Ofsted. However, see Bradbury (2018) where she mentions that over 5,000 schools are using a commercial scheme recommended by DfE. In this survey we have been able to ask Head Teachers their views on such expenditure.

The impact of the Phonics Screening Check on grouping by ability

Using data from a nationwide survey of teachers (n=1,373), focus groups and in-depth interviews with teachers, Bradbury has recently investigated the impact of the Phonics Screening Check on classroom practices of grouping children by 'ability'. She found that the pressures of accountability have encouraged teachers to place children in groups according to ability, even when they had doubts about this practice and there is little evidence to suggest grouping improves attainment (Bradbury, 2018).

She found evidence of grouping children within classes, across year groups, or even across several year groups. This grouping was by ‘phase of phonics learning’ guided often by advice from private phonics schemes’. There was also evidence of borderline children becoming the focus, and increased use of intervention involving the withdrawal of children. Bradbury’s recently published article makes disturbing reading. She claims that this distinction between Phonics and Reading is a relatively new phenomenon driven by the Phonics Screening Check in Year 1 and the resits in Year 2. Bradbury claims that these groupings for Phonics are facilitated by some of the widely used commercial schemes recommended by DfE. In some case study schools, children from Year 5 were sitting with children from Year 1 to learn Phonics and children were being demarked from their peers on the basis of progress in Phonics. She pointed out that this allocation to a Phonics group marks the first point of division for young children. Thus, this check described as a light-touch assessment now functions as a high stakes assessment used by Ofsted. For many teachers Bradbury felt that grouping was motivated by the need to avoid failing to get a high percentage pass on the check. She refers to the fact that Read Write Inc, a commercial scheme, recommended by DfE and used in over 5,000 schools, was used to legitimise grouping, even when teachers disagreed. This was removing these decisions from professional judgement. This has not been a slow shift as the check has only been in existence since 2012 and there was evidence of the beginnings of this development shortly after the introduction of the check reported in the NFER Research commissioned by DfE (see chapter 16 in Clark, 2016).

Based on the initial focus groups with teachers she found that ‘Phonics was seen as a separate and distinct subject, rather than part of Reading’. She found that regular grouping for Phonics was common, not only in Year 1 but also even 58% of nursery teachers were grouping for Phonics (children age 3-4).

This article by Bradbury has been published since the completion of our survey.

A survey of the views of Head Teachers, teachers and parents of the Phonics Screening Check 2012-2017

In Appendix IV can be seen the information on this independent survey which was widely circulated nationwide in England encouraging teachers and parents to complete the survey. There were three links to the research on survey monkey, one for Head Teachers another for teachers who had assessed children on the Phonic Screening Check, the third for parents any of whose children had been assessed. Parents who had more than one child assessed on the check were asked to complete the survey for their child most recently assessed. We assured anyone who completed the survey that their results would remain anonymous. However, they could contact us at a dedicated email address should they wish to receive a copy of the report and/or wish to be contacted to contribute to any further aspect of the research. Informed consent will be required for any further aspects. Any further research will need to be submitted to our ethics committees for approval. The plan for the survey was submitted to the ethics committees at both Newman University and Leeds Beckett University and approved by both.

The survey was open for about four weeks and closed on 25 May 2018. The information was widely distributed nationally within England. Teachers and parents were encouraged to complete the survey whether or not they were in support of the government literacy policy; it was stressed that the survey was independent and that the individual results would be anonymous. In order to assess the generalisability of our results we asked respondents to indicate in which region of the country they are based. Head Teachers and teachers were asked how long they had been teaching as it was felt this might influence their views. We also asked teachers if they were also parents any of whose children had been assessed, and parents how many of them were also teachers who had assessed children on the check.

Information about the survey was widely distributed to their members by national associations such as NEU, NAPE, UKLA, TACTYC, BERA, to several parent associations, to universities who are involved in training primary teachers and to many literacy researchers with contact with teachers and

parents. The independent nature of the survey was stressed and that we hoped for information on their views from those in support of current government literacy policy as well as those with concerns. In addition to questions with multiple choice answers there were key questions where space was available for respondents to make comments. We were surprised at just how many respondents availed themselves of this opportunity. In addition to presenting the summary information based on our preliminary analysis of the data we are here reporting on a preliminary analysis of their comments to a number of key questions. We plan to undertake further, more complex analyses of the data.

Appendix I is the statement at the Westminster Forum in December 2017 which revealed that DfE had not sought the views of teachers on the check in the consultation on assessment in 2017;

Appendix II summarises expenditure by DfE on synthetic phonics, based on response to Freedom of Information Questions;

Appendix III updates the information from Australia

Appendix IV is the information on the survey circulated inviting teachers and parents to take part.

The Head Teacher results are reported in chapter 2, those of the teachers in chapters 3 and the parents in chapter 4. The questions asked can be seen in these chapters. However, in Appendices V, VI and VII all the questions and tables of results from the preliminary analyses are to be found.

References

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Chapter 2 Head Teachers' Views on the Phonics Screening Check

Sue Reid

Introduction

During the final four weeks of the Spring Term 2018, Head Teachers were invited to take part in an independent survey on Survey Monkey. The survey was widely advertised and closed on 25 May 2018. Anonymity was assured for all participants but if they wished to have a copy of the report or to take part in further research a secure email address, which could be accessed only by the researchers, was given. We wanted to determine if we had a representative sample and therefore asked the Head Teachers to indicate the region in England where their school was, how long they had been teaching and whether they were the parents of children who had been assessed on the phonics check. In all three surveys, which are part of this study many, but not all, respondents answered all questions. We are therefore aware that some of the forms were incomplete. This may have been because some people wanted to see the questions and in order to do this they would have had to open the survey. As a research team we took the decision to include all the data as we felt we might be criticised for any omissions. However, readers can see just how many of the respondents answered each question and therefore on how many responses we have based any conclusions. All the questions and answers tables are in Appendix V.

We had 230 forms returned for this survey of Head Teachers and all respondents answered questions 1 to 4. Question 1 asked *Where is your school?* Head Teachers from across the country participated with the greatest number, 56 from the South East with the fewest respondents 11 from the North East. Question 2 asked about the type of school with 198 Head Teachers of primary schools and 23 Head Teachers of Infant (KS1 only). The answers to question 3 about length of service, as would be expected for senior leaders, showed that most had over ten years' experience, with 97 having more than 20 years teaching experience. The responses to Question 4 indicated that more than half the Head Teacher respondents had administered the check, and Question 5 indicated that 87 had assessed more than 40 children. There were 189 responses to Question 6, which showed that 47 were parents of children who had taken the phonics check. The information in these six questions indicates that this sample of Head Teachers from across all regions of England are experienced practitioners many of whom have administered the check and therefore it can be assumed have an awareness of the implications of the phonics check from both a leadership and classroom practice perspective.

A summary of the results of these six questions is given below:

- Head Teachers from all regions of England responded to the survey
- Most Head Teachers had over ten years' experience in teaching
- A majority of Head Teachers had administered the phonics check and of these a majority had administered the check to over 40 pupils

The questions and tables with the answers from the Head Teachers can be found in Appendix V. As well as the multiple-choice questions, space was made available for respondents to make comments on questions, 14, 17, 20 and 22 and a selection of these comments have been included in this chapter. Many of the Head Teachers did make comments.

Results

Question 7. What was the percentage pass on the check in your school for children in Year 1 in 2012 (the first year of the check)?

189 Head Teachers answered this question

Question 8. What was the percentage pass on the check in your school for children in Year 1 in 2017?

189 Head Teachers answered this question

Questions 7 and 8 of the survey showed that the number of children who reached the required standard has risen from the implementation of the check in 2012 to 2017 with 21 Head Teachers reporting that fewer than 50% of their pupils passed the check in 2012 but only one recording this for 2017. The percentage of Head Teachers reporting that more than 80% of their children were successful in the check has also risen from 2012 with 100 of the Head Teachers reporting that 80% or more of their pupils passed the check in 2017.

Question 9. Approximately how many children in Year 1 in your school sat the check in 2017?

189 Head Teachers answered this question with 104 stating that more than 40 pupils took the check

Question 10. How many children re-sat the check in Year 2 in 2017?

189 Head Teachers answered this question: 106 answered that more than 6 children had re-sat the check in 2017

Question 11. Are parents told about the check in advance? (select all that apply)

180 Head Teachers answered this question with the majority indicating that parents are told in advance either orally or in writing.

Question 12. Are parents told whether their child passed or failed the check? (select all that apply)

180 Head Teachers answered this question and only nine said that parents were not told.

Question 13. Are parents told their child's actual mark on the check?

180 Head Teachers answered this question and 91 said they told parents their child's actual mark.

The table below shows the Head Teachers' answer to question 14 and as can be seen there was a range of results, with 129 stating somewhat or a great deal. Comments were invited to elaborate on the answers given and a selection of these is recorded in the narrative under this table.

Q 14: Has the phonics check affected the way you now teach children to read in your school?		
Answer Choices	Responses	
No	10.00%	18
Not much	18.33%	33
Somewhat	39.44%	71
A great deal	32.22%	58
	Answered	180
	Skipped	50

73 Comments

As can be seen there were 180 responses to this question and of those 73 respondents added a comment. Many of them were supportive of the need to teach phonics with one Head Teacher stating that there was *'much more rigour now with the check.'* Another Head Teacher, who was positive about the effect of the phonics check, felt she has a much better knowledge and understanding of the teaching of phonics and therefore considered it had affected a great deal the way phonics is taught in her school. It is also interesting to note that because of the phonics check, three Head Teachers have introduced Read Write Inc. into their schools and feel this is ensuring consistency in the teaching of phonics, other Heads have introduced daily phonics sessions.

However, although there were positive comments, concerns were raised and in particular Head Teachers showed a level of disquiet about the use of pseudo/non/alien words in the phonics check. 27 of them commented on the focus that is now put on the teaching of alien/pseudo/ non-words in Year 1 to the detriment of other reading strategies. One respondent observed that although phonics plays an important part in the teaching of reading; comprehension skills, picture clues and whole word reading are also important. It was not only the focus put on the teaching of non-words but also their inclusion as part of the test. Their effect on fluent readers gave concern, with one Head noting, *'Our children who were reading for meaning would try to make sense of the nonsense word on the test and therefore failed the test.'* This was echoed by other respondents who stated that because of the inclusion of alien words they were teaching children to read nonsense words *'especially in the Spring term.'* Head Teachers also reported that due to the high stakes nature of the check there was more pre-check testing and teaching to the test to ensure that children were prepared for the test Another Head cited the linking of the results of the check to teachers' performance as an issue which has resulted in pressure on staff and more testing for children. This pressure to ensure attainment for the school was also confirmed by one Head who came under pressure from the LA *'because of the impact on their results.'*

With the focus on decoding, the negative impact on comprehension skills was cited explicitly by seven Head Teachers and implicitly by many others. These respondents felt that the phonics check had affected the teaching of reading somewhat or a great deal. They considered that the focus on phonics and specifically the use of pseudo words had had an adverse impact on the time given to the teaching of comprehension skills with one Head summing it up, *'Less focus on comprehension teaching to free up time for more focused phonics teaching'*. This was backed up by another Head Teacher who stated, *'More time on phonics, less time on the breadth of the curriculum.'*

Question 15. Does the phonics check provide you with information on individual children which you did not already have?

180 Head Teachers answered this question.

Question 16. Do you think it is useful to have real and pseudo/alien words in the check?

180 Head Teachers answered this question.

When asked if the phonics check gave them any additional information about their children (Q.15) 160 Head Teachers responded that it did not and 144 respondents did not think that pseudo/alien words were useful in the check (Q. 16).

This table indicates the answers to question 17. An overwhelming majority of Head Teachers, 140 out of the 180 who responded to this question, consider that the check is not useful. Some of the comments made about this question are recorded below.

Q 17: Do you think it is useful to assess all children on the phonics check in Year 1? If no, which children would you exclude?		
Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	22.22%	40
No	77.78%	140
	Answered	180
	Skipped	50

107 Comments

This question asked Heads to comment on which children they would exclude if they answered that they considered the check was not useful. 107 Head Teachers took the time to make a comment and of those, 25 stated that they would exclude all the children in their school from the check with ten of these stating that they did not find the check useful. Thus they appeared to want the check to be discontinued. They added that because they already had internal assessments they were able to make professional judgements about the children’s phonics ability. Others expressed concern on the ‘testing’ of 6-year olds, stating that... ‘They are not ready emotionally to be sitting statutory tests however informally you are able to dress them up’.

Those who commented identified a range of children who they considered should be excluded. These included fluent readers, ‘Higher ability who can read fluently and don’t need to use phonics to sound out and blend any more’. This could include both those who have progressed beyond the need to use phonics or, as alluded to in other questions in this survey, those who learn to read in ways other than phonetically.

A further group of 41 respondents believed that those children working below the expected standard for Year1 and those children who have been assessed by the school as having special needs (SEN/D) or have a speech impediment or developmental delay should not be entered for the check. As well as this, one Head expressed concern on the emotional impact that the check will have on these children ‘... it can be very demoralizing for a child who cannot sound out words above CVC.’ This was

supported by another respondent who stated that she would exclude *'children who you know will score a demoralising score.'*

One Head Teacher summed up that in her school *'EAL, summer born, children whom our internal checks show they are not at the standard of the test.'* should be excluded from the check. This view was shared by several other Heads who also believed that newly arrived children and the youngest children in the class were not ready to be entered for this statutory assessment.

The main issues around those children, who Heads considered should be excluded, were the check to be continued, surrounded both those who were unable to access the check or would not be successful and those who are already reading fluently. Several Head Teachers would like to see the check discontinued. As one Head commented in justification of this... *'I haven't worked with a teacher yet who doesn't know their children in depth. They know who and how to support pre reading and reading skills.'* Head Teachers trust their teachers who are skilled professionals to use their expertise to support children's learning and progression.

Question 18. Do you think pass/fail should be recorded for the check?

180 Head Teachers answered this question and 127 did not think pass /fail should be recorded.

Question 19. Is it useful to re-test children in Year 2 who fail the check in Year 1?

180 Head Teachers answered this question and 115 did not feel it is useful to re-test.

The table below shows the answers to question 20. The responses showed that nearly half Head Teachers bought in commercial materials. A few of the comments made on this question are shown below.

Q 20: Do you buy commercial synthetic phonics materials or training for your school? If yes, please give details.		
Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	45.56%	82
No	54.44%	98
	Answered	180
	Skipped	50

62 Comments

62 chose to comment on the materials they use. Read Write Inc. was by far the most frequently, used with 37 respondents using it in their schools and six using Letters and Sounds and 8 using Jolly phonics. The rest of the responses were from various other phonics programmes and included some schools that had developed their own materials to supplement commercial packages and suit the needs of the children. One Head, who used Read Write Inc., commented that *'because we need to meet government targets otherwise we would not.'* Another added that they bought materials to prepare children for the check *'Scholastic testing materials are used before the test to get the children used to the format.'*

Question 21. Do you think the check should remain statutory for all children in Year 1?

180 Head Teachers answered this question and of those 152 did not think that the check should remain statutory for all children.

This table shows Head Teacher responses to question 22 with only 11 agreeing completely with current government policy.

Q 22: Literacy experiences in school and current government literacy policy. In England synthetic phonics is mandated as the only method for teaching children to read.		
Answer Choices	Responses	
Agree	6.11%	11
Agree Somewhat	31.67%	57
Disagree	62.22%	112
	Answered	180
	Skipped	50

73 Comments

Of the 180 responses to this question 73 Head Teachers made comments. Most of these comments support the use of phonics as a strategy for the teaching and learning of reading even though the data suggests that they disagree with Government policy. However, many expressed reservations as to the use of phonics as the only strategy to teach reading. As one respondent put it, *‘I have always had a strong approach to phonics as it supports both reading and writing but the emphasis on phonics now is so heavy that it can actually hinder some children’s reading.’* This was supported by another Head who added her concerns that *‘...if they find phonics difficult this could hinder their chances of becoming competent readers.’* Yet another respondent was concerned about attitudes to reading being affected *‘Although successfully implemented I have continuing doubts as to (the) impact on reading attitudes in children.’*

The overwhelming majority of comments, whilst supporting the use of phonics as a starting point for learning how to read, consider that phonics is only one element of the reading process and for children to become successful readers they need to use other strategies and most Heads commented that not all children learn this way. Even those who advocated synthetic phonics as working for the majority of children agreed that this strategy does not work for all children, *‘...phonics is just one skill that children need to read’* This view was repeated by others... *‘For the majority of pupils it is the right pedagogy but for some it will not work and therefore they need a different approach.’*

Interestingly, many Heads believe that the use of other strategies such as *‘picture cues, context cues, reading on’* should be taught to enable pupils to choose the correct strategy to solve an unknown word. One respondent going on to say, *‘Using phonics to the exclusion of other pedagogy impedes understanding and the development of inference skills.’* This observation was repeated in comments from other Heads.

One Head Teacher stated that she had only ever taught this way and didn’t know much about alternative methods. Related to this is a quote from another Head who has concerns about the standard of training that student teachers receive in the teaching of reading and the subsequent impact this has on the children they teach.

'Most importantly we need teachers to be seriously trained in how children learn to read otherwise they do not have the professional judgement and this severely restricts the impact of their teaching on children.'

A summary of the comments on this question would indicate that although schools are teaching phonics and supporting this statutory policy outlined in the National Curriculum (2013) the Head Teachers of these schools also advocate the teaching of other strategies as they consider phonics to be just one skill in the reading process. As one Head put it in answer to this question *'If that's the case how did anyone ever learn to read before this opinion?'*

Preliminary Conclusions:

The initial analysis of this data indicates that Head Teachers:

- Have concerns about the way in which the phonics check is influencing the reading curriculum in Year 1
- Regard the inclusion of pseudo/alien words in the check as unhelpful
- Consider that the check does not give them any information beyond that gleaned from their internal assessments of phonics
- Are aware that phonics is an important strategy in the teaching of reading
- Challenge the notion that phonics is the only strategy to teach reading as not all children learn to read using phonics
- Have concerns that the focus on phonics undermines comprehension
- Support the use of other strategies such as the use of picture cues to teach reading
- Believe that not all children should be entered for the phonics check

Further analysis

This interim report only gives a narrative account of the data provided. At this point we have not looked in any depth at any relationships between whether the respondents were Head Teachers in Infant or Primary schools and if this influenced their views on the phonics check. Also, we will check whether the views of those who had administered the test differed from those who had not. Similarly we will consider whether the views of those Head Teachers who are parents differ from those who are not. These variables will be considered in further analysis.

Policy Implications

Some of the policy implications which can be identified at this stage from Head Teachers' responses:

- 140 of the 180 Heads who responded to question 17 believe that the phonics check is not suitable or necessary for all children in Year 1. This would suggest that Head Teachers who feel the check should remain feel that it should be a voluntary rather than statutory assessment used by schools to further their knowledge of children's phonics ability.
- Schools have their own assessments for phonics and 160 of the 180 Head Teachers who responded to question 15 (see Appendix V) answered that the phonics check did not provide any further information about children's phonics ability. Therefore, any future check should be designed so that it tells schools more about their children's ability and does not replicate what they already know.

- This study indicates that Head Teachers consider the inclusion of pseudo/alien words in the check is impacting on the teaching of reading and has resulted in many schools teaching to the test. Therefore, the use of pseudo/alien words in any new test should be discontinued.
- The major concern of Head Teachers as shown by the comments received in this survey is the impact the phonics check and the statutory requirements in the National Curriculum are having on the teaching of other reading skills and comprehension. Although many of the Head Teachers who commented agree that phonics is an important part of the teaching of reading, a majority are uneasy about the focus on phonics and feel that present policy does not reflect how young children learn to read for meaning. This would suggest that policy should be amended to ensure that the reading curriculum is in step with current theory and practice in the teaching and learning of reading.

Chapter 3 Teachers' Views on the Phonics Screening Check

Susan Atkinson and Jonathan Glazzard

Introduction

Teachers in England were invited to take part in the independent survey on Survey Monkey. This was widely advertised for four weeks, closing on 25 May 2018. Anyone completing the survey was assured of anonymity. We did supply those who completed the surveys with a secure email address to contact the researchers if they wanted to receive a copy of the report or to be involved in any further stage of the research. To determine the representativeness of our evidence we asked all who completed the surveys to indicate the region in England where they live. We asked teachers how long they had been teaching and whether they were also parents of children who had been assessed on the phonics check.

In order to look at the questions it was necessary to open the link and start to answer some of the questions. Some of the incomplete forms may have been by those wishing to see the questions. In all three surveys many, but not all, respondents answered all the questions, and a minority answered only a few questions. We decided we might be criticised for any omissions so decided we should present all the data. However, readers can see just how many of the respondents answered each question and therefore on how many responses we have based any conclusions. The questions and tables with the answers from the teachers are in Appendix VI. It was interesting to note that for several questions 208 respondents did not give an answer and for some questions this rose to 240. However, it is reassuring to note that each question was answered by over 1000 respondents.

We had 1,348 returned forms from teachers, most of whom answered all the questions. Question 1 asked *Where is your school?* Teachers from all regions of England took part with the greatest percentage from the South East (19%), and the fewest from the North East (5.56%) and the East of England (7.20%). Question 2, 81% worked in primary schools, with 17% in infant schools. Question 3, Most teacher respondents had taught between 2 and 20 years (78%), with just over 7% in school for less than 2 years and 14% working for more than 20 years. Question 4, 27% of these teachers had administered the Phonics Check in 2012, the first year of its implementation, and this rises steadily to 75.59% in 2017. It is reasonable to assume therefore that the majority of these teachers have administered the check more than once. Question 5, 53.34% administered the check only to children in Year 1, whereas 40.13% had done so in both Years 1 and 2. Question 6, 58.08% of the teachers had assessed 60 or more children on the check. Question 7, 23.37% indicated that they had a child who had taken the Phonics Check. This information indicates that the sample of teachers taking part covers the whole of England, and that they are in the main experienced teachers who have administered the Phonics Check at least once. More than three quarters of the sample do not have a child who has taken the Phonics Check.

A summary of the teachers' responses from the questionnaire is presented below. In addition to the questions with multiple choice answers, space was given for comments to several questions: many respondents made use of this. We have included a selection of comments in this chapter.

In summary:

1. All regions in England were represented in the survey of teachers;
2. Most teachers were teaching in primary schools;

3. Nearly half the respondents had taught for between 2 and 10 years;
4. Most of the teachers had assessed children as recently as 2017 and 27% had assessed children in 2012, the first year of the check;
5. Just over half of the respondents had assessed only children in Year 1 and 40.13% had assessed children in Years 1 and 2;
6. More than half of the teachers had assessed 60 or more children;
7. Only 23.37% of the teachers were also parents of children who had been assessed on the check.

Questions 1-7 were answered by all 1348 teachers.

Results

Question 8. In your school are parents told in advance about the check and its purpose?

This question was answered by 1140 teachers, 91.14% of the teachers indicated that parents were informed about the check and its purpose.

The table below indicates the teachers' answers to Question 9 and as can be seen most of the teachers stated that they did give preparation for the check.

Q 9. What preparation do you give children for the check? (select all that apply).		
Answer Choices	Responses	
Practice with individual words	96.67%	1102
Practice with pseudo words	97.46%	1111
Assistance from commercial materials	48.16%	549
None	0.53%	6
Other (please specify)	18.86%	215
	Answered	1140
	Skipped	208

There were 215 comments for this question. Comments included:

'Practice with past papers'

'We assess children to see which phonemes they are not secure on and give them interventions to help them learn them in addition to our normal phonics teaching.'

'Intervention sessions for those deemed to require it!'

'Mock screenings regularly to monitor children's scores, intervention groups, real and nonsense word games.'

'Phonics boosting sessions after school.'

'Pre-screening with prior test materials.'

'Phonics interventions and additional support if not meeting expectations'.

Question 10. If you use commercial materials, which ones?

There were 1140 comments for this question. Initial analysis suggests that the most used materials are Twinkl, Phonics Play, Read Write Inc, and online games and activities. However, of the 1,140 teachers who responded to this, 405 indicated that they did not use commercial materials at all.

Q 11. Are parents given guidance on how to prepare their children for the check?		
Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	71.58%	816
No	24.47%	279
Don't know	3.95%	45
If yes, please elaborate.		519
	Answered	1140
	Skipped	208

As can be seen, many of the teachers indicated that they did give parents guidance on preparing their children for the check. In addition, there were 519 comments for this question. The majority of parents are given guidance on how to prepare their children for the phonics check. Initial analysis suggests that information about phonics and the check itself is most common, along with advice on how to read with their child, suggestions for web resources or games to play. Typical comments include:

'Parents are made aware of the different type of words and can practise them with their child if they wish.'

'We advise parents that the check is completed in a discrete way so suggest games they could play at home to support with phonics in l general - not just for the check.'

'We encourage parents to read actual books with their children. We want them to enjoy books and read for meaning and pleasure.'

'Real and pseudo Words sent home fortnightly to practice'

Q 12. Have you observed children affected by the check?		
Answer Choices	Responses	
No	37.02%	422
Yes a few	48.68%	555
Yes many	14.30%	163
If yes in what ways?		533
	Answered	1140
	Skipped	208

There were 533 comments for this question. It is positive that only 14.3% of teachers identified that they had observed many children being affected by the check. However, nearly 63% of teachers identified that they have observed some children being affected, which is a concern. Some comments highlighted the detrimental impacts on more-able children. Comments about the ways in which children are affected are stated below:

'Children who are competent readers are becoming anxious and tearful over pseudo words.'

'Children are stressed. Some cry. It also results in an over use of phonics when reading.'
'Reluctant to try. Want to make pseudo words real words.'

'More able readers have been upset when not being able to read a made up word as they try to make a real word.'

'A few of the more able get frustrated because this is not the way that they read and they constantly try to make real words, even when told that they are nonsense words.'

'Children whose parents try and 'prepare' them, have been nervous about 'the test' even though we never mention 'test'.'

Other comments suggested that children were not affected by the check, although these were in the minority:

'Why would they be. If it's presented in a non-confrontational way by the teacher, it is only a check-up like all the others we do regularly.'

'The children don't know they are taking it so don't worry about it.'

Q 13. What percentage of the children in Year 1 in your school passed the check in 2012 (the first year of the check)?		
Answer Choices	Responses	
Under 50%	9.39%	107
50-59%	9.82%	112
60-69%	11.58%	132
70-79%	11.75%	134
80-89%	9.91%	113
over 90%	5.18%	59
Don't know	42.37%	483
	Answered	1140
	Skipped	208

14. What percentage of the children in Year 1 in your school passed the check in 2017?		
Answer Choices	Responses	
Under 50%	1.93%	22
50-59%	3.16%	36
60-69%	8.86%	101
70-79%	20.70%	236
80-89%	36.67%	418
over 90%	21.32%	243
Don't know	7.37%	84
	Answered	1140
	Skipped	208

As can be seen, the percentage of children who passed the check was much higher in 2017 than in 2012, the first year of the check. However, 42.37% of the teachers could not remember the percentage pass in 2012.

Question 15. How many children re-sat the check in 2017?

This question was answered by 1140 teachers, some indicating that they did not know how many had re-sat the check. In most schools there were few but in several school there were 12 or more children who had to re-sit the check.

Question 16. Are parents told whether their child passed or failed the check?

This question was answered by 1140 teachers, 73.86% of whom indicated that the parents were informed in writing, and a further 14.3% of the parents were informed both orally and in writing.

Question 17. Are parents told their child's actual mark?

To this question 50.26% responded 'Yes'

Question 18. Do you think children seem worried after the results of the check are known?

'No, none worried, was the response by 46.40%, but 20% felt that some children were worried or very worried

Question 19. Do you feel the phonics check provides you with information on individual children which you did not already have?

To this question of 1108 teachers who responded 93.59% answered 'No'.

Question 20. How accurate do you regard the Phonics Screening Check to be in assessment of children's decoding skills?

This question was answered by 1108 teachers, Only 32 of the teachers regarded it as 'very accurate' and a further 384 regarded it as 'accurate'. However, 46.93% regarded it as 'not very accurate' and a further 15.52% regarded it as not accurate.

Question 21. Do you feel it is useful to include real and pseudo/alien words in the check?

As can be seen from the table (see Appendix VI) 79.69% of the teachers did not feel it was useful to include these words and only 20.31% felt it was useful. In addition, there were 298 comments for this question.

The majority response indicated that including both kinds of words is not useful. Some comments highlighted the detrimental impacts of including pseudo words for more-able children. Comments include:

'We teach children to read for meaning, therefore some children try to make a real word e.g. strom becomes storm.'

'It really confuses some children who can decode well!'

'Some children can read beyond this level, so their brain automatically tries to correct the pseudo words. The best readers sometimes struggle on the test.'

'Our more able children usually attempt to self-correct to a real word as they use their wider reading skills to make sense of what they read.'

'Better readers try to turn alien words into similar words that they know are real. To prevent this from happening, children have to be 'trained' in how the test works. This time would be better spent teaching them actual reading skills.'

'Alien words serve no purpose for reading skill. Lots of children who are competent readers and sight read really struggle with these.'

'I think that they just trip up the good readers who have to be coached into reading them as alien words and not to try and make sense of them as they would normally when they come across a word that they do not immediately recognise.'

Some comments were supportive:

'The pseudo words check the blending skill. This does not mean that I personally agree with this.'

'Yes, as it tests specific phoneme knowledge.'

'Ensures children are using phonic skills and not just sight reading'.

'Because you then know how a pupil will decode any new unknown words in a text. If you only do real words you do not know if they are using Synthetic Phonics or memorising words as a whole.'

'They provide evidence of an ability to decode.'

'Checks secure identification of diagraphs and blending.'

Question 22. Did you notice any difference in the results on the real and pseudo/alien words?

To this question 37.55% answered 'Yes'.

Question 23. Do you think it is useful to record pass/fail on the check?

To this question 74.73% of the teachers answered 'No'.

Question 24. Do you think it is useful to re-test children in Year 2 who fail the check in Year 1?

To this question 74.10% of the teachers answered 'No'.

Question 25. Has the phonics check affected the way you now teach children to read in your school?

Of the 1108 teachers who answered this question 33.12% felt it had affected the way they teach children 'A great deal' and there were varied responses to this question. However, there were 481 comments which are more revealing than the multiple choice answers. More than 60% of respondents feel the phonics check has affected how they teach. The majority feel this has negatively affected how they teach and many comments mentioned 'teaching to the test':

'Children are now drilled from Foundation to be able to read individual words on flashcards - both real and pseudo. They are given regular 'mock' tests. They are also invited into school for extra 'catch-up' sessions before the start of the school day if it is not thought they will pass.'

'Because we have to concentrate so much on 'phonics', reading for meaning, language development, vocabulary all suffer.'

'Not in a positive way. Year 1s now just do lots of pseudo words and test preparation, instead of using that time to improve their writing or other useful skills.'

'For the negative! We now teach to decode far more and less emphasis is on comprehension and fluency as the test takes up far more of our time to prepare for.'

'Huge amounts of time are spent preparing the children for the test and planning and teaching intensive interventions for the children who will not make it. The ones who will pass are just left to get on with it.'

'We teach to the test. It's depressing and goes against everything most teachers want to deliver. Reading should be for pleasure, for learning and for life. Subjecting 5-year olds to 'failure' at reading is just crazy. All any good teacher needs to know is where their children are showing gaps in knowledge or understanding of phonics. Teaching children phonics every day for a year and listening to children read gives teachers far more information than this check could ever produce.'

'Teach to test. Drill children with nonsense words when we should be teaching the skills of reading of which phonics is just one small element.'

'The school feel under pressure to reach the national average results for this and as a result puts pressure on the teachers. Phonics teaching would happen regardless but as the check is nearing more time is spent on decoding rather than further reading skills.'

But other responses were more positive:

'It is fantastic. It ensures teachers teach the Phonics part of The Big Five using Systematic Synthetic Phonics. This is essential for literacy skills for ALL pupils.'

'I actually understand the evidence and science of how children learn to read and have adjusted my teaching accordingly.'

'[We now offer] targeted lessons and intervention groups aimed at covering the phonemes and graphemes'.

'Our teaching of phonics is more directed to "plug the gaps" of the sounds individual children don't know. This makes our planning more personalised which can only be a positive thing.'

Question 26. The Phonics Screening Check is a statutory assessment of all children in Year 1 and any child who fails to achieve a pass mark of 32 out of 40 is required to re-sit the check in Year 2. What do you think the future of the Phonics Screening Check should be?

This question was answered by 1,108 teachers, 68.32% of whom thought it should be discontinued (757) and a further 20.04% (222) thought it should become voluntary administered only to some children.

Question 27. If the check remains statutory should children who fail to achieve a mark of 32 in Year 1 resit the check in Year 2?

Of the 1108 teachers who answered this question 75.81% answered 'No'. In addition, there were 334 comments.

The majority do not think children should have to re-sit the test. Responses highlighted the detrimental impact that repeating the check has on children's self-esteem and some comments stressed the need to try alternative approaches to reading with the children who did not pass the check in Year 1. Others emphasised the beneficial impacts of re-taking the check. Typical comments include:

'Children who do not pass in Y1 clearly struggle to decode and alien words are not a useful way to identify their difficulties. It causes stress on these children.'

'Some children find it very hard to learn phonetically and learn to read in different ways. This test does not allow them to succeed.'

'If they failed in Year 1, phonics probably does not work for them. They may be better off continuing to learn to read with other strategies that are more suited to them.'

'It puts so much pressure on Year 2s, it makes the children feel rubbish that they often have to attend groups with younger children and stops the children from accessing Y2 phonics required for KS1 SATs. The overlap is too much work for both children and staff.'

'If the test were to remain, it would make sense to continue the year 2 retest.'

'[Yes, it] ensure phonics continues in Y2.'

'But not to be published, maybe just keep optional in school.'

Question 28. In England synthetic phonics is mandated as the only method for teaching children to read. To what extent do you agree with this government policy?

Of 1108 who answered this question 42.24% agree somewhat and 47.47% disagree. There were 429 comments for this question.

A mixed response was demonstrated here, evenly split almost between agreeing somewhat and disagreeing with synthetic phonics as the only method for teaching reading. Most comments emphasised the need for teachers to use a broad repertoire of strategies to teach children to read.

'Synthetic phonics does not work for all. Children need to be exposed to a variety of different methods.'

'Phonics is an amazing teaching tool and enables most children to access text successfully from an early age however it does not encompass the full range of reading skills that exist ...'

'I think you should teach phonics in as many different ways as possible and not rely on just one method.'

'The phonics lessons should be fun and incorporate different styles to cater for the different learning styles of different children e.g. VAK or SEN such as emerging dyslexia.'

'Comprehension skills as important if not more so.'

'Some children are only able to learn through sight word knowledge we are doing these children a disservice by continually trying to make them learn phonics.'

'We have a nation of children who bark sounds at a page. It discourages reading for meaning and pleasure. More worryingly is now that parents have cottoned on to phonics they encourage their children to sound out EVERYTHING including non- decodable.'

Preliminary conclusions

Initial analysis of the data indicates that:

- Most teachers provided parents with guidance to help them to prepare their children for the phonics check;
- There is evidence that teachers have witnessed some children becoming stressed during the implementation of the phonics check;
- Most teachers did not feel it was useful to include the teaching of pseudo words;
- Many teachers felt the phonics check had impacted on how they approach the teaching of reading;
- Most teachers felt that the phonics check should be discontinued;
- Most teachers felt that children who fail the phonics check in Year 1 should not be required to re-sit the check in Year 2
- 47.47% of teachers disagreed with government policy which promotes the teaching of synthetic phonics as the only method of teaching children to read.

Further analysis

We have provided descriptive statistics only at this preliminary stage. We have not analysed the relationship between length of time spent teaching and teachers' views on the phonics check. Additionally, we have not analysed whether the views of teachers who are parents differ from those who are not parents. Further analysis will explore relationships between these variables.

Policy Implications

At this preliminary stage it is possible to identify some policy implications.

1. The views expressed by the teachers who responded to this questionnaire, indicate that the government should seriously consider either discontinuing the phonics check or making it voluntary. If the check is to be continued, then children who fail it in Year 1 should not, according to many of these teachers, be required to re-sit it in Year 2; this could be an optional decision which schools make.
2. Most teachers who responded to the survey do not agree with the inclusion of pseudo words within the check, stressing the effect of these on their practice in the early years including on children who can already read. Thus, it should be seriously considered whether to remove these if the check is to be continued.
3. Most teachers reported that they had witnessed some children becoming stressed during the implementation of the check. If it is to be continued, consideration might be given to it becoming a formative tool only to support teachers in planning to address individual needs.
4. The use of Phonics Screening Check data as a benchmark to measure overall school improvement appeared to be regarded as unhelpful by many. Additionally, the emphasis given to the pass rates in Ofsted inspections was not felt to be helpful. It appears that the 'high-stakes' status of the check results may place pressure on teachers which is passed down onto children, resulting in some becoming stressed.
5. Given the proportion of these teachers who disagree with government policy (47.47%) the government should consider a broad repertoire of approaches for teaching children to read. The Teachers' Standards in England currently require all trainee teachers and teachers to 'demonstrate a clear understanding of systematic synthetic phonics' (TS3). The inclusion of synthetic phonics within the Teachers' Standards makes this method of teaching reading mandatory. In the light of these results government should consider amending this so that it emphasises the role of synthetic phonics within a broad range of approaches for teaching children to read rather than as the only method of teaching reading to all children.
6. The response to this survey by teachers, to the multiple-choice questions, and the detailed comments they added to many questions, suggests that they are concerned about current literacy policy. Thus, surely it would be valuable for the government to involve teachers who have assessed children on the check and Head Teachers in discussion on the future of both the Phonics Screening Check and the current mandatory requirement that the only method of teaching reading should be by synthetic phonics. The lack so far of any attempt by government to undertake any such consultation and to seek the views of practitioners was the reason for us to undertake this independent survey (see Appendix I).

Chapter 4 The views of Parents on the Phonics Screening Check

John Bayley

Introduction

Links to an independent survey on survey monkey were widely advertised for four weeks closing on 25 May 2018. One of these links was for parents in England any of whose children had been assessed on the statutory Phonics Screening Check. Anyone completing the survey was assured of anonymity. We did supply those who completed the surveys with a secure email address at which they could contact us should they wish to receive a copy of the report or to be involved in any further stage of the research. To determine the representativeness of our evidence we did ask all who completed the surveys to indicate the region in England where they live. We asked Head Teachers and teachers how long they had been teaching and whether they were also parents of children who had been assessed on the check. Parents were asked if they were teachers involved in assessing children on the check as we thought this might influence their opinions.

In order to look at the questions it was necessary to open the link and start to answer some of the questions. In all three surveys many but not all respondents answered all the questions, and a minority answered only a few questions. We decided we might be criticised for any omissions so decided we should present all the data. However, readers can see just how many of the respondents did answer each question and therefore on how many responses we have based any conclusions ((see Appendix VII for all questions and survey monkey analysis tables).

We had 419 returned forms from parents, but as can be seen below most of our evidence is based on the answers by about 300 parents. Our sample is as follows:

1. There are parents from all regions of England.
2. Most of the children were in primary schools.
3. Only about half those who replied had seen the check.
4. Some are themselves teachers who have assessed children on the check.
5. Most forms were completed by the mother.
6. About half these parents` children had passed the check.
7. English was the mother tongue of all but a tiny minority of these children.
8. There were children who had sat the check in any of the years from 2012 to 2017.
9. Some parents had more than one child who had sat the check.

Parents with more than one child who had been assessed were asked to complete the survey for their child who had been assessed on the check most recently. They were invited to contact the researchers on the dedicated email address if the experience of their other children had been very different and they wished to discuss this with the researchers. The high number of these children who had passed the check could partly have been explained by the fact that the percentage pass has risen steeply and is high in 2017 when many of them sat the check.

We were disappointed that in spite of our effort we were able to reach very few parents whose child`s mother tongue was not English. Thus, it should be noted that these views are mainly those of mothers, many with children who passed the check and nearly all with English as their first language. The views of these parents are nonetheless valuable. We would welcome the opportunity to add evidence

of the views of more parents whose children failed the check and were required to re sit it in Year 2 and parents whose children had a limited command of English when they were assessed.

A summary of the parents' responses based on the survey monkey analysis is presented below. In addition to the questions with multiple choice answers, space was given for comments to several questions. Many respondents availed themselves of this opportunity.

Some of the more interesting responses to questions on the parents' survey are as follows:

Question 13. Were you informed in advance about the check?

Answered: 338 Skipped: 81

66 had been informed orally, 84 in writing, 128 both orally and in writing, and 60 had not been informed.

Question 14. Were you asked to prepare your child in any way for the check?

Answered: 338 Skipped: 81

137 respondents answered Yes, and 170 answered No

Question 15. In what ways were you asked to prepare your child? (select all that apply)

Answered: 157 Skipped: 262

111 respondents stated that they had been asked to practise individual words, and 128 stated that they had been asked to practise pseudo words.

Question 16. If you bought any materials to help, do you remember the name of the materials? If so please indicate.

Answered: 316 Skipped: 103

The majority of parents indicated that they had not purchased any materials to help with the test, with one parent taking the opportunity to state: *'The test is a waste of time so I did what any good parent did [sic] and just help them to read properly.'* Another parent commented: *'I didn't buy anything. At the age of 5/6 I don't believe in putting pressure on children.'* Two parents stated that they did not know that the phonics test was happening. A number of parents had used online materials, including practice tests from the government website, and some had resources provided by the school. Materials that were purchased include Read Write Inc, and Oxford Owl.

Q 17 Did any aspects of the Phonics Screening Check affect your child?		
Answer Choices	Responses	
Don't know	17.41%	55
No	53.16%	168
Yes	29.43%	93
	Answered	316
	Skipped	103

It is important to note that this is a neutrally phrased question, and whilst 168 parents stated that it had not affected their child, and 55 did not know, only two parents made positive comments about the check. However, 93 parents took the opportunity to comment on what they perceived as negative effects that the Phonics Screening Check had on their child. This should be of concern to all involved.

One concern was over anxiety/stress/worry (three frequently used words in the responses) felt by the children. One parent stated that her/his child had had sleepless nights, and another indicated that the child was worried that s/he would *'get in trouble at school if they did it wrong.'* One parent complained that *'He [the child] was stressed about it and worried he was going to fail.'*

The use of 'pseudo' or 'alien' words was another frequently cited issue, as many parents identified that they had caused confusion. One parent, for example, commented that her child was praised for reading alien words correctly to the point where she (the child) thought she was reading real words. This sense of confusion was compounded where children tried to make pseudo words into 'real' words, a factor identified by many parents. This was especially the case where parents identified their child as a 'good' reader, who, perhaps not surprisingly, was attempting to make these make sense. This might best be summed up by one parent's response: *'Found it frustrating to read alien words as she didn't know if they sound correct, as unknown...she had to look to adult for reassurance.'* It would be interesting to know the thinking behind the use of such pseudo words as a means of testing children's reading, especially as one parent said of the child: *'The alien words became part of her language.'* We know, of course, that many words in English are not spelled phonetically correctly, as was recognised by one parent, who stated: *'I feel my child now spells a lot of words phonetically which is difficult when many words in the English language do not follow this rule.'*

Failure in the Phonics Screening Check clearly had a negative effect on the self-esteem of some children. One child failed the test in Year 1, and had intervention in Year 2, and the parent identified that she (the child) *'presents with anxiety'*. Another parent had strong opinions here, stating: *'Yes, he failed so he said he was thick! Disgusting way to kill a kid's confidence off'*. One parent, whose son had speech problems, was concerned that he *'felt pressured to keep repeating words knowing he won't be able to say it, no matter how many times he tries'*. Another parent (of a child who twice failed the check) stated that *'Despite attempts to minimise stress, my child's anxieties increased and behaviour deteriorated'*.

A further case was where the child had to retake the check in Year 2, '...though she was a good non-phonetic led reader', and this resulted in her 'not expecting books to make sense because of the over practice of nonsense/alien words'. Yet another child 'Became convinced he was not a reader and no good, as he was one of the only ones who failed the test.'

Some parents of children who were fluent readers expressed concern that their children were bored, or that it was a waste of time for them to take the phonics Screening Check. A typical comment was

'Waste of lesson time repeating alien words and practising for the test'. Another was that *'...it had a negative impact [on] reading for enjoyment'*. Another parent complained that her child *'...was a fluent reader and it made her reading slow and stilted for a while because she was told to sound everything out. She did not need to'* Yet another parent said that their child was *'...utterly bored of phonics and it made her less happy to go to school.'* This might all be summarised in the response of one parent: *'[The test] took up time that would have been better spent on actual reading!'* This is supported by the comment of another parent, who stated: *'My child found it boring and there was far too much preparation for it beforehand, in my opinion (two 20 minute phonic sessions daily).'*

There were only two positive comments in response to this question, one of which suggested that the *'emphasis on phonics helped him to become a good reader,'* and the other stated that the child *'loved individual time with the teacher and reading funny words.'*

Question 20. Were you informed what mark your child received?

Answered: 314 Skipped: 105

161 parents stated that they had been informed in writing, 36 orally, and 31 both orally and in writing. 86 parents were not informed.

Question 23. How well could this child read at the time of the check?

Answered: 304 Skipped: 115

242 parents stated that their child could already read with understanding, 48 said that their child could read a few words, 13 stated that their child could recognise most letters of the alphabet.

The responses to this question raise the issue of what purpose the Phonics Screening Check serves, given that the majority of these parents indicated that their child could already read with understanding (see also the responses to Q25 (below)).

Question 25. Is he or she reading with understanding now?

Answered: 302 Skipped: 117

290 respondents answered Yes, whilst 12 answered No.

Question 29. The Phonics Screening Check is statutory for all children in Year 1 and to be re-taken by all children in Year 2 who fail to gain a mark of 32 out of 40. Do you think the check should remain statutory?

Answered: 298 Skipped: 121

40 replied Yes, for all children, 16 replied Yes, for some children, 55 said it should be voluntary, and 187 said that it should be discontinued.

Question 32. To what extent do you agree with current government literacy policy?

Answered: 295 Skipped: 124

17 parents agreed with government literacy policy, 84 agreed somewhat, 165 disagreed, and 29 did not know.

Preliminary conclusions

Initial analysis of the data indicates that:

- Seventy-five per cent of the children whose parents responded to the survey passed the check.
- The majority of these children could already read with understanding at the time they sat the check and could write recognisable words.
- While about half the parents did not feel that the phonics screening check had an effect on their child, 93 of the parents felt it did and many commented on ways that it did.
- Most parents said they were asked to prepare their child for the check by practising individual words and by practising pseudo words.
- Most parents did not buy materials to support their child with the check.
- Nearly half the parents indicated that their child knew whether or not they had passed the check.
- Some parents felt that the inclusion of pseudo words caused confusion.
- Some parents felt that the Phonics Screening Check had an adverse effect on their child's confidence and self-esteem.
- Only 13% of the parents felt the check should remain statutory for all children. The great majority of parents in the survey do not agree that all children should take the Phonics Screening Check.
- Few parents stated that they agree with government policy while nearly 30% stated that they agree somewhat. However, more than half the parents stated that they do not agree with the policy.

Further analysis

It will be possible, with further analysis, to make distinctions between categories of parents – e.g. between those whose child passed and those whose child failed the check, as well as those parents who are/are not teachers.

Policy implications

At this preliminary stage it is possible to identify some policy implications.

1. The government might consider withdrawing the phonics screening check, in response to the views of the many parents (and teachers) in the survey. See chapters 2 and 3 for the views of Head Teachers who completed the survey.

2. Some of the views expressed by parents who responded to this questionnaire agree with those of teachers and Head Teachers in that the use of pseudo words had confused their child, therefore, the government should consider discontinuing the use of these.
3. Some parents indicated that the phonics screening check had an adverse effect on their child's confidence and self-esteem; the government might consider the use of formative assessment by teachers in this area.
4. In response to some parents' concerns, the government might consider whether the check is suitable for some children with disabilities.

Limitations

As we have indicated the sample of parents who completed the survey contained only a limited number whose child failed the check. We were also disappointed that we were not able to obtain responses from more than very few parents whose first language is other than English. Were we able to obtain responses from these parents this would be a valuable addition to the survey.

Chapter 5 The views of Head Teachers, teachers and parents on the Phonics Screening Check: Preliminary findings of the survey, their implications and limitations

Margaret M. Clark and Jonathan Glazzard

Background

In this report we present the preliminary findings of our independent survey, the aim of which was to give a voice to the views of Head Teachers, teachers who have assessed children on the Phonic Screening Check between 2012 and 2017 and parents whose children have been assessed. Information about the survey was widely distributed in England together with links to the three survey forms, one for Head Teachers of schools where children had been assessed on the check, another for teachers who had assessed children, the third for parents any of whose children had been assessed. The survey closed on 25 May 2018. Those who completed the survey on Survey Monkey were assured of anonymity. They were offered the opportunity of contacting the researchers on a secure email address should they wish to make any further comments or to be involved in any future aspect of the research. Parents who had more than one child who had been assessed on the check were asked to complete the form for the child most recently assessed. It was thought, for example, that these parents might have valuable insights if the experience of their other children had been very different. Others might wish to give more detailed comments than was possible within the constraints of the online survey. We have been contacted by a number of people wishing to receive a copy of the report or interested to collaborate further. We have acknowledged these emails and indicated that we will contact them again when we have planned any further aspect of the research. Our immediate priority over the next few months is to complete more complex analyses of the data we already have.

We will compare, and contrast the views of more and less experienced teachers, parents who are also teachers and teachers who are also parents any of whose children have been assessed on the check. We will also analyse the characteristics of those who are more or less supportive of current government policy and the check. We will also compare the views of parents whose child passed the check with those whose child failed the check. We feel there is valuable evidence in the data we have already and this we present here, making clear its limitations. In chapters 2, 3 and 4 we show how many Head Teachers, teachers and parents completed the survey, how many answered each question and how many took the opportunity to comment on specific questions. We have included a preliminary analysis of these comments and some quotations and will now undertake more complex analyses. We had forms returned from Head Teachers, teachers and parents from all regions in England. All the questions and tables are to be found in Appendices V, VI and VII.

We had 230 forms returned by Head Teachers, most with over ten years' experience of teaching. The majority of them had administered the check. We had 1,348 forms returned by teachers from across all regions of England and many of the teachers had assessed 60 or more children. Of the teachers 23.37% were parents of children who had been assessed on the check. Forms were returned by 419 parents from all regions of England. Only about half of these parents had seen the check and some were teachers who had themselves administered the check. Most forms were completed by the mother and about half of these parents had children who had passed the check. Some of these parents had more than one child who had sat the check; in that case our information is for the child who sat it most recently, and of course the percentage pass on the check has risen over the years. Unfortunately, we reached few parents whose child's mother tongue is not English. Their views would add an important

further dimension; it is possible that these children may have more difficulty with the check than those on whom we are reporting here.

The views of the Head Teachers (see chapter 2 and Appendix V)

Initial analysis of the Head Teacher survey revealed that about half the Head Teachers have themselves administered the check and 47 are parents of a child who has sat the check. Nearly all informed the parents if their child had passed the check. The majority of the respondents do not support the Phonics Screening Check. To the question as to whether they felt that the check provided them with information they did not already have 160 of the 180 who answered this question did not feel the check provided them with additional information;

Only 40 regarded it as useful to assess all children on the check in Year 1 (140 did not);

144 of the Head Teachers disagreed with the inclusion of pseudo words in the check;

127 did not agree with the use of pass or fail as an outcome of the check;

115 thought it was not useful to retest in Year 2 children who failed in Year 1.

Of the Head Teachers 152 did not agree that the check should remain statutory for all children, only 28 felt it should. While nearly half the Head Teachers purchased commercial materials, many gave as their reason current government policy. Furthermore, 112 (of 180) of these Head Teachers do not agree with government policy that promotes the use of synthetic phonics as the only approach for teaching children to read (11 agreed). Many Head Teachers reported that the check had affected the way they now teach reading either somewhat or a great deal (129 out of 180).

In summary, the initial analysis of this data indicates that a number of Head Teachers:

- have concerns about the way in which the phonics check is influencing the reading curriculum in Year 1;
- regard the inclusion of pseudo/alien words in the check as unhelpful;
- consider that the check does not give them any information beyond that gleaned from their internal assessments of phonics;
- are aware that phonics is an important strategy in the teaching of reading;
- challenge the notion that phonics is the only strategy to teach reading as not all children learn to read using phonics;
- have concerns that the focus on phonics undermines comprehension;
- support the use of other strategies such as the use of picture cues to teach reading;
- believe that, should the check remain statutory, not all children should be entered for it.

Comments from Head Teachers included:

‘Our children who were reading for meaning would try to make sense of the nonsense word on the test and therefore failed the test.’

‘I haven’t worked with a teacher yet who doesn’t know their children in depth. They know who and how to support pre reading and reading skills.’

‘I have always had a strong approach to phonics as it supports both reading and writing but the emphasis on phonics now is so heavy that it can actually hinder some children’s reading.’

'Most importantly we need teachers to be seriously trained in how children learn to read otherwise they do not have the professional judgement and this severely restricts the impact of their teaching on children.'

'For the majority of pupils, it is the right pedagogy but for some it will not work and therefore they need a different approach.'

The views of the teachers (see chapter 3 and Appendix VI)

Initial analysis of the teacher survey indicates that most teachers provided parents with guidance to help them to prepare their children for the phonics check. There is evidence that teachers had witnessed children becoming stressed during the implementation of the phonics check. Most teachers did not feel it was useful to include the teaching of pseudo words in the check. There was clear evidence in the survey that the phonics check has impacted on how teachers approach the teaching of reading. Most teachers felt that the phonics check should be discontinued. Most teachers felt that children who fail the phonics check in Year 1 should not be required to re-sit the check in Year 2. A sizeable proportion (47.47%) of teachers disagreed with government policy, which promotes the teaching of synthetic phonics as the only method of teaching children to read. We have provided descriptive statistics only at this preliminary stage. We have not analysed the relationship between length of time spent teaching and teachers' views on the phonics check. Additionally, we have not analysed whether the views of teachers who are parents differ from those who are not parents. Subject analysis will explore relationships between variables.

In summary, the initial analysis of this data indicates that:

- Most teachers gave practice for the check of individual and pseudo words, only six did not, a number used commercial materials and indicated which materials they use;
- most teachers provided parents with guidance to help them to prepare their children for the phonics check (816 of 1,140);
- there is evidence that teachers have witnessed some children becoming stressed during the implementation of the phonics check (718 of 1,140);
- most teachers did not feel it was useful to include the teaching of pseudo words (883 of 1,108);
- many teachers felt the phonics check had impacted on how they approach the teaching of reading somewhat or a great deal (789 of 1,108);
- few teachers felt the check gave them information they did not already have (71 of 1,108)
- most teachers felt that the phonics check should be discontinued (757 of 1,108);
- most teachers felt that were the check to remain, children who fail the phonics check in Year 1 should not be required to re-sit the check in Year 2 (840 of 1,108);
- 47.47% of teachers disagreed with government policy which promotes the teaching of synthetic phonics as the only method of teaching children to read (526 of 1.108).

Comments from teachers included:

'Better readers try to turn alien words into similar words that they know are real. To prevent this from happening, children have to be 'trained' in how the test works. This time would be better spent teaching them actual reading skills.'

'We teach to the test. It's depressing and goes against everything most teachers want to deliver.'

Reading should be for pleasure, for learning and for life. Subjecting 5-year olds to 'failure' at reading is just crazy. All any good teacher needs to know is where their children are showing gaps in knowledge or understanding of phonics. Teaching children phonics every day for a year and listening to children read gives teachers far more information than this check could ever produce.'

'Teach to test. Drill children with nonsense words when we should be teaching the skills of reading of which phonics is just one small element.'

'The school feel under pressure to reach the national average results for this and as a result puts pressure on the teachers. Phonics teaching would happen regardless but as the check is nearing more time is spent on decoding rather than further reading skills.'

'I actually understand the evidence and science of how children learn to read and have adjusted my teaching accordingly.'

'[We now offer] targeted lessons and intervention groups aimed at covering the phonemes and graphemes'.

The views of the parents (chapter 4 and Appendix VII)

Initial analysis of the parent survey indicates that most of these parents (187) who answered this question feel that the phonics check should be discontinued. The majority of these parents (242) reported that their child could already read with understanding at the time when the check was administered. In the case of these children, the assessment data from the check would not have supported the teacher to more effectively support the progress of the children, given that their development had exceeded the skills that were being assessed on the check. It is a concern that only 17 of these parents agree with the government literacy policy, 84 agree somewhat but 165 disagree. Many of these parents have children who passed the check (238 passed and only 55 failed).

In summary, the initial analysis of this data indicates that:

- some parents felt that the inclusion of pseudo words caused confusion;
- some parents felt that the Phonics Screening Check had an adverse effect on their child's confidence and self-esteem;
- only 13% of the parents felt the check should remain statutory for all children. The great majority of parents in the survey did not agree that all children should take the Phonics Screening Check;
- few parents stated that they agree with government policy while nearly 30% stated that they agree somewhat. However, more than half the parents stated that they do not agree with the policy;

Nearly half of these parents had not seen the check and some of those who had may have been teachers who had administered the check themselves.

Comments from parents included:

'...it had a negative impact [on] reading for enjoyment'.

'it made her reading slow and stilted for a while because she was told to sound everything out. She did not need to.'

'[He] became convinced he was not a reader and no good, as he was one of the only ones who failed the test.'

'[She was] utterly bored of phonics and it made her less happy to go to school'.

'[The] emphasis on phonics helped him to become a good reader.'

'They loved individual time with the teacher and reading funny words.'

Policy implications

As can be seen from Appendix I the Department for Education has not involved Head Teachers, teachers or parents either in the development or implementation of the Phonics Screening Check. No attempt has been made to investigate the views of these stakeholders on its impact on the literacy experiences of young children in state schools in England. This survey is the first opportunity for teachers and parents to express their views.

At this preliminary stage it is possible to identify some policy implications. It is the view of those who completed this survey that the government should address the following:

1. The views expressed by the Head Teachers, teachers and parents who responded to this questionnaire, indicate that the government should seriously consider either discontinuing the phonics check or making it voluntary. If the check is to be continued, then children who fail it in Year 1 should not be required to re-sit it in Year 2; this could be an optional decision which schools make.
2. Most Head Teachers, teachers who responded to the survey do not agree with the inclusion of pseudo words within the check, stressing the effect of these on their practice in the early years including on children who can already read. Parental comments also indicated that a number parents disagreed with the inclusion of pseudo words and where their child they could already read these led to confusion and were detrimental to their child's progress. Thus, it should be seriously considered whether to remove these if the check is to be continued.
3. Most teachers reported that they had witnessed some children becoming stressed during the implementation of the check. Many parental comments also referred to stress and anxiety. If the check is to be continued, consideration should be given to it becoming a formative assessment tool only to be used support teachers in planning to address individual needs.
4. The use of Phonics Screening Check data as a benchmark to measure overall school improvement appeared to be regarded as unhelpful by many. Additionally, the emphasis given to the pass rates in Ofsted inspections was not felt to be helpful. It appears that the 'high-stakes' status of the check results may place pressure on teachers which is passed down onto children, resulting in some becoming stressed.
5. Given the proportion of teachers (47.47%), Head Teachers (62.22%) and parents (55.93%) who disagree with government policy, the government should consider a broad repertoire of approaches for teaching children to read. The Teachers' Standards in England currently require all trainee teachers and teachers to 'demonstrate a clear understanding of systematic synthetic phonics' (TS3). The inclusion of synthetic phonics within the Teachers' Standards makes this method of teaching reading mandatory. In the light of these results, government should consider amending this so that it emphasises the role of synthetic phonics within a

broad range of approaches for teaching children to read rather than as the only method of teaching reading to all children.

6. The response to this survey by Head Teachers, teachers and parents to the multiple-choice questions, and the detailed comments they added to many questions, suggests that they are concerned about current literacy policy. Thus, surely it would be valuable for the government to involve all stakeholders in discussion on the future of both the Phonics Screening Check and the current mandatory requirement that the only method of teaching reading should be by synthetic phonics. The lack so far of any attempt by government to undertake any such consultation and to seek the views of practitioners was the reason for us to undertake this independent survey (see Appendix I).

Limitations

As we have stressed these are only preliminary findings. We do have the data to undertake further, more complex analyses. It would be valuable to have a larger sample of parents whose children failed the check and to seek the views of parents whose children have only a limited command of English and or have recently arrived in this country.

The impact of the Phonics Screening Check on grouping by ability

In chapter 1 we reported on a recently completed study the results of which were published by Bradbury after we had completed our survey (Bradbury, A. 2018 'The impact of the Phonics Screening Check on grouping by ability 'necessary evil' amid the policy storm' *British Educational Journal* DOI:10.1002/berf.3449). Using data from a nationwide survey of teachers (n=1,373), focus groups and in-depth interviews with teachers, Bradbury has recently investigated the impact of the Phonics Screening Check on classroom practices of grouping children by 'ability'. She found that the pressures of accountability have encouraged teachers to place children in groups according to ability, even when they had doubts about this practice and there is little evidence to suggest grouping improves attainment (Bradbury, 2018). She found evidence of grouping children within classes, across year groups, or even across several year groups. This grouping was by 'phase of phonics learning' guided often by advice from private phonics schemes'. There was also evidence of borderline children becoming the focus, and increased use of intervention involving the withdrawal of children. Bradbury's recently published article makes disturbing reading. She claims that this distinction between Phonics and Reading is a relatively new phenomenon driven by the Phonics Screening Check in Year 1 and the resits in Year 2. Bradbury claims that these groupings for Phonics are facilitated by some of the widely used commercial schemes recommended by DfE. In some case study schools, children from Year 5 were sitting with children from Year 1 to learn Phonics and children were being demarked from their peers on the basis of progress in Phonics. She pointed out that this allocation to a Phonics group marks the first point of division for young children. Thus, this check described as a light-touch assessment now functions as a high stakes assessment used by Ofsted. For many teachers Bradbury felt that grouping was motivated by the need to avoid failing to get a high percentage pass on the check. She refers to the fact that Read Write Inc, a commercial scheme, recommended by DfE and used in over 5,000 schools, was used to legitimise grouping, even when teachers disagreed. This was removing these decisions from professional judgement. This has not been a slow shift as the check has only been in existence since 2012 and there was evidence of the beginnings of this development shortly after the introduction of the check reported in the NFER Research commissioned by DfE (see chapter 16 in Clark, 2016).

Based on the initial focus groups with teachers she found that 'Phonics was seen as a separate and distinct subject, rather than part of Reading'. She found that regular grouping for Phonics was common, not only in Year 1 but also even 58% of nursery teachers were grouping for Phonics (children age 3-4).

Postscript

Bradbury's research shows clearly one disturbing impact of current government literacy policy, in particular, the now high stakes Phonics Screening Check, on the literacy experiences of young children in the early years in infant and primary schools in England. Our survey adds the voices of Head Teachers, teachers and parents many of whom are experienced professionals, yet whose voices have until now played no part in the planning or implementation of this government policy. Surely this is evidence that should count, evidence that shows the concern of many teachers and parents on the negative impact of many aspects of this policy, particularly the Phonics Screening Check.

Appendix I The future of the Phonics Screening Check. Margaret M. Clark

At the Westminster Education Forum Keynote Seminar 7 December 2017 there was a report on the primary assessment consultation undertaken by the government in 2017, *Reforming primary assessment in England and implications for school accountability*, entitled 'Reforms to assessment at primary level'. It was given by Marc Cavey, Deputy Director, Assessment Strategy Policy and Communications, Standards and Testing Agency.

Marc Cavey gave an overview of developments at a national level in assessment policy over the last 18 months and outlined some of the key decisions and next steps flowing from the primary assessment consultation that was held during 2017. This was followed by questions. This is my question and Marc Cavey's response as reported in the written transcript which is a verbatim report of the proceedings. It is permitted to reproduce this.

Margaret M Clark: What is so sacrosanct about the phonics screening check that it's merely stated in that consultation document that it would remain statutory? There are no questions asked about it and so you probably didn't get many answers. I did submit evidence. It has been in existence since 2012. It is supposed to be diagnostic and it is now about as high stakes a test as you can imagine, because percentage pass is supposed to rise. It is on RAISE Online. It's used by Ofsted and yet you have a consultation document where you just mention that it will remain statutory.

Marc Cavey: The consultation document was developed within the parameters of Government policy and Government policy is that it's very firmly committed to phonics as a mode of teaching reading and is very firmly committed to the continuation of the phonics screening check. So I don't think it would have been helpful to set up a false debate about something which the Government wasn't going to change, and Ministers weren't going to change, and you know Minister Gibb has very strong views on phonics and the phonics screening check. As you'll know, we've had the publication of some international comparison data around reading this week, which the Government would interpret as being an endorsement or a validation of the approaches that it's taken to the teaching of reading over the past few years, its commitment to phonics as a mode of teaching and the phonics screening check. So we didn't ask a question about it and consequently we didn't have many responses on whether it should continue in the future. I know that there are differing views but the Government policy on this is what it is.

Following her attendance at an open session of The Science and Technology Committee on 20 March 2018 Wendy Scott OBE, one of the contributors to my new book, *Teaching Initial Literacy: Policies, evidence and ideology*, wrote to the chairman, Norman Lamb MP on 23 March. She stated: 'I am writing to draw your attention to widespread concerns within the early years sector as to the imposition of a single method of teaching reading which is based on spurious claims as to its effectiveness..... She cited the quotation I have noted above.

Appendix II Expenditure by the Department for Education on the Phonics Screening Check, commercial materials and training courses on synthetic phonics. Margaret M. Clark

This information is based on a series of Freedom of Information Questions. I published the first information in the *Education Journal* in 2014 and reported it in chapter 18 (pages 148-151) of the revised edition of Clark, M.M. (2016) *Learning to be Literate: Insights from research for policy and practice* Abingdon: Routledge. This has been updated by a reply to my latest question sent to DfE on 29 March, reply received on 24 May 2018. I have been unable to estimate how much has been spent by schools or universities on commercial materials as a consequence of this policy. However, it is known that approximately £23 million was spent by schools on materials and training during the match-fund initiative between 2011-13. Bradbury in 2018 reported that over 5,000 schools use Read, Write Inc provided by Ruth Miskin Training (see chapter 1 here for further details). Here is only summary information, but further detail up to 2016 is to be found in Clark 2016. In the response to my latest Freedom of Information Questions I was given the names of the companies and institutions which had received funding. However, as it was stated that the information provided is protected by Crown Copyright I have omitted this information. Much of it is readily accessible and I was provided with links to further information. Here I only give a minimum estimate of DfE expenditure on this policy. Surely it is time to require DfE to provide information on its expenditure specifically on Synthetics Phonics and this policy.

Costing the synthetics policy in England 2011-16 (see Clark 2016: 148-151 for more detail up to 2015)

1. Match-funding by DfE for commercial programmes and training courses 2011 to 2013 £23,593,109. NB The schools would have matched this funding which was for programmes from the catalogue of synthetic phonics materials issued by the government. During that period 14,263 schools claimed from this fund (233 for training only, 1,697 for training and products). Thus, the match-funding cost approximately £46 million over that period.

2. During 2012 and June 2015 for the Phonics Screening Check

Distribution to schools, printing collating guidance products and statistical first release. £1,085,750 plus £300,000 for the pilot study. There is no information on the cost to the schools of administering the check.

3. External assessor in 2013. The only payment recorded is to The University of Reading of £11,760 to review the words.

4. NFER commissioned research by DfE was published in 2015 (see chapter 16 in Clark, 2016 for a summary of the findings) £278,695.

5. 2015-2016 NFER commissioned research by DfE to consider the extension to Year 3 of the check for children who still failed it in Year 2. £64,606. NB There is only an administrative report of a pilot study and this has not been published. It was decided not to implement this policy.

6. Eight schools to be awarded £10,000 each to work with neighbouring schools, approximately a further £80,000. However, as DfE now lists approximately £190,000 on phonics partnerships in their recent reply. (see below)

Updated information supplied by DfE on 24 May 2018

On 29 March 2018 I sent four Freedom of Information Questions to DfE requesting up dated information on expenditure by DfE on the check and training courses on synthetic phonics. On 24 May I received a reply a summary of which is given below.

a) Expenditure on the phonics screening check since 2016.

The expenditure was itemised but only a summary is given below

2015 to Jan to March 2016 £26,888.59

2016-2017 £322,436.99

NB. It was stated that these costs are all those which can be directly attributed to the PSC as many elements of the Standard Testing Agency's test development and delivery resources and processes are centralised across a range of primary assessments.

b) Information on expenditure on road shows in any way connected with synthetic phonics, which organisation was funded and where. (I have omitted the detail)

2015-2016 £30,690.00

2017-2018 £76,890.00

A university 2017-2018 £43,080.54

c) Information on expenditure on synthetic phonics courses pending or currently out to tender, costs anticipated and timescale

Following a competitive procurement process for the Teaching and Leadership Innovation Fund Round 1 a contract was awarded in September 2017 to deliver a whole school literacy professional development programme to support systematic phonics teaching. The contract value is £1,056,290 and the contract expires on 31 March 2020.

d) Any other expenditure by DfE on synthetic phonics.

(I already had some information from a previous enquiry on the first two items:

Matched funding £23.7 million claimed by over 14,000 schools (see earlier)

Phonics Partnerships 2015-2018 £189,429.27)

Further £435,000 announced for further phonics partnerships and phonics roadshows up to 2020,

Phonics advisers Two contracts worth £5000 each in 2015-16 and 2016-17 and another for 2018-19.

Strategic School Improvement Fund 17 strategic School Improvement Fund Projects include phonics. These projects estimated expenditure £6.42 million.

English Hubs £26.3 million has been announced over the years 2018-2020.

Appendix III The Phonics Screening Check: The current state of play in Australia. Misty Adoniou, Associate Professor, University of Canberra, Australia

There is no doubt that the teaching of early reading has become political. A review of policy and party politics in Australia confirms this, in case there had been any doubt.

Australia is a federation of six states and two territories. Although there is a Federal government that controls a number of purse strings, each state and territory government is ostensibly responsible for its own education policies.

Currently the Federal Government is a conservative party, the Liberal Party. They are working with a mixed bag of Liberal and Labor state and territory governments.

These state and territory education ministers gather several times a year as the 'Education Council' to meet with the Federal Education Minister to nut out federal approaches to issues in education. The Federal government uses its budgetary levers to coax the states and territories into taking up federal initiatives. However, political differences mean that federal agreements are rare. Nonetheless, in 2008 they did all agree to national standardized assessments conducted in Year 3, 5, 7 and 9 – the National Assessment Program of Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). Although 10 years on there are now grumblings about the worthiness of this testing regime and the Education Council has announced a review into NAPLAN.

For the past two years one of the Federal initiatives that Federal Minister of Education, Simon Birmingham, has been trying to get his state and territory colleagues to agree upon is to roll out the English Phonics Screening Check (PSC). So far, he has been unsuccessful. However, his home state - South Australia – voted in a new conservative government in March 2018, and they have made the PSC compulsory in that state. Victoria, Australia's second largest state, is currently led by a Labor government but it goes to a state election in October and the conservative opposition has said it will also make the PSC compulsory should it win office. This automatic commitment to the Federal government's conservative policy is curious as Victoria's literacy results would indicate that it has no issues with declining literacy outcomes in the early years. It is, in fact, Australia's best performing jurisdiction in the Year 3 national assessments, with only 0.9% of students below benchmark in writing, and 1.5% below benchmark in reading.

Meanwhile South Australian politicians have been particularly influenced by the parent dyslexia association in the state, which has advocated strongly for the Phonics Screening Check, describing it as necessary for the early identification of dyslexia. This is a claim that is repeated by Minister Birmingham in his public speeches (Ireland, 2017).

It has meant that South Australia's literacy policies are essentially 'dyslexia' policies. The new conservative government's literacy policy is called 'The Literacy Guarantee' and it is described thus:

- a comprehensive program to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes for all students, with the benefit to be most profound for those students with dyslexia and other learning difficulties.

The program will include:

- literacy coaches with expertise in phonics and teaching students with dyslexia and other learning difficulties

- phonics checks for all Year One students in South Australia
- free dyslexia workshops for parents across South Australia – including regional centres not currently serviced
- Literacy Guarantee conferences providing professional development opportunities for teachers. Liberal Party (2017)

The first of those Literacy Guarantee conferences has taken place, with all Reception and Year 1 teachers being trained in the PSC, and receiving training in synthetic phonics.

The SA parent dyslexia association had also demanded the implementation of synthetic phonics programs and decodable readers as the pedagogical solution to their children’s literacy difficulties (Dyslexia SA, 2017). Their successful advocacy for their own children has effectively now changed the learning experience for all 5 and 6 year olds in South Australia.

Newly published guidance for all South Australian teachers now states,

Ensure that students are using decodable readers as their main reading material.

Decodable readers are specially constructed short texts made up of words that the students can decode and high frequency sight words that they have been taught simultaneously.

(Government of South Australia, p.7)

This framing of learning to read as a medical neurological condition is reflected in the strong role played by speech pathologists in arguing for the PSC. Minister Birmingham opened their May 2018 national conference, which was coincidentally also held in South Australia. He began by noting that this connection between health and education is one that the ‘outside’ world fails to appreciate:

Why, some may ask, is the federal Minister for Education and Training speaking at the national conference of Speech Pathology Australia? Probably fewer people in this room, but certainly many outside would think there’s a disconnect between what is often seen as an expert field in the health sector and the education portfolio. After all, as your website explains, speech pathologists are university-trained allied health professionals, with expertise in the assessment and treatment of communication and or swallowing difficulties, which does not at first glance seem to fit with the usual education issues.

He goes on to explain that the fit is indeed a natural and productive one, and thanks them for their active participation in education policy debates.

Currently in Australia the states and territory ministers are not agreed that a national rollout of England’s phonics check is a useful addition to the educational assessment landscape in Australia. Indeed, the Education Council is currently reviewing the worth of the national standardized assessments of NAPLAN, so there is little appetite for the introduction of a new national test for 6 year olds.

However, one small conservative-led state, South Australia, has implemented the PSC with all students, ostensibly it would seem, to identify dyslexic students. This was never the stated purpose of the PSC, and the developers of the check, and subsequent evaluators, acknowledge that the PSC is not nuanced enough to perform diagnoses of literacy difficulties.

All of South Australia's children and teachers are now being subjected to education policy that has been shaped by politics rather than pedagogy, and emotion rather than evidence.

One other state opposition in Victoria is promising to deliver the PSC should it win government, simply because it is a conservative education policy, not because there is evidence of a literacy decline in the state.

Reading and writing should not be framed as ideological, nor as a medical condition. The consequence of such framing is the implementation of reductive, narrow pedagogies and accompanying assessments that fail to adequately capture the complexities of learning to read. It is crucial that teachers and researchers continue to foreground evidence for policy makers, and to clearly explain that evidence to parents.

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Ireland, Judith (2017) National tests for year one students under government plan. September 17th Sydney Morning Herald <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/national-tests-for-year-one-students-under-government-plan-20170917-gyj108.html>

Liberal Party South Australia (2017) Literacy Guarantee - the best possible start for all students <https://strongplan.com.au/policy/literacy-guarantee-the-best-possible-start-for-all-students/>

Appendix IV The Phonics Screening Check 2012-2017: An independent enquiry into the views of teachers and parents.

If you are a Head Teacher of an infant or a primary school in England, a teacher who has assessed children on the Phonics Screening Check or a parent any of whose children have been assessed on the check we hope you will take part in this independent survey. It is important that we achieve a large and representative sample to ensure our evidence has credibility in informing debates at DfE on the effect of current literacy policy in England. Please take part in the survey whether or not you agree with government literacy policy.

Professor Margaret M. Clark, Visiting Professor, Newman University in collaboration with Professor Jonathan Glazzard, Leeds Beckett University.

The Phonics Screening Check is a statutory assessment administered to all children in Year 1 in state schools in England since 2012. The check consists of 40 words to be read aloud to the teacher (20 real words and 20 pseudo or alien words). Any child who fails to read at least 32 out of 40 words correctly must re-take the check at the end of Year 2.

The survey forms were accessed from one of three links, one for Head Teachers, another for teachers who had assessed children on the check and a third for parents any of whose children had been assessed on the check. Parents who had more than one child assessed on the check were asked to complete the survey for their child who had most recently been assessed,

What is the aim of the research? This is an independent research project to inform government policy, evidence-based by the views of teachers and parents. Your participation is entirely voluntary. Your answers will remain anonymous. Our aim in collecting geographical information, and years in teaching, is to enable us to assess how representative a sample we achieve. Should you wish to contribute further to the research either in writing or by an interview please contact us.

Why is this survey important? There were no questions about the future of the Phonics Screening Check in the Government consultation in 2017 on Primary assessment in England. It was merely stated that it is a statutory assessment. Thus, it appears the government is firmly committed to its continuation. We feel it is time to give teachers and parents a voice through the medium of an independent survey exploring the effect government policy is having on children's literacy experiences in school, whether the check is value for money and whether it should remain statutory.

Appendix V Head Teachers: The survey questions and answers

Q1: Where is your school?

Answered: 230 Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Greater London	14.35%	33
South East	24.35%	56
South West	8.26%	19
East Midlands	11.30%	26
West Midlands	9.13%	21
East of England	5.65%	13
Yorkshire and the Humber	10.43%	24
North East	4.78%	11
North West	11.74%	27
TOTAL		230

Q2: What type of school?

Answered: 230 Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
infant	10.00%	23
primary	86.09%	198
junior	2.17%	5
other	1.74%	4
TOTAL		230

Q3: For how many years have you taught?

Answered: 230 Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Fewer than 2	4.35%	10
2-10	18.26%	42
11-20	35.22%	81
more than 20 years	42.17%	97
TOTAL		230

Q4: Have you personally administered the check:

Answered: 230 Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	55.65%	128
No	44.35%	102
TOTAL		230

Q5: To how many children have you administered the check?

Answered: 127 Skipped: 103

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Fewer than 20	7.09%	9
20-29	16.54%	21
30-39	7.87%	10
40 or more	68.50%	87
TOTAL		127

Q6: Are you also a parent of any children who has sat the check?

Answered: 189 Skipped: 41

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	24.87%	47
No	75.13%	142
TOTAL		189

Q7: What was the percentage pass on the check in your school for children in Year 1 in 2012 (the first year of the check)?

Answered: 189 Skipped: 41

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Under 50%	11.11%	21
50-59%	14.81%	28
60-69%	23.81%	45
70-79%	14.29%	27
80-89%	16.93%	32
90% or higher	7.41%	14
not applicable	11.64%	22
TOTAL		189

Q8: What was the percentage pass on the check in your school for children in Year 1 in 2017

Answered: 189 Skipped: 41

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Under 50%	0.53%	1
50-59%	2.65%	5
60-69%	15.34%	29
70-79%	23.81%	45
80-89%	37.04%	70
90% or higher	15.87%	30
not applicable	4.76%	9
TOTAL		189

Q 9: Approximately how many children in Year 1 in your school sat the check in 2017?

Answered 189 Skipped 41

Answer Choices	Responses	
Under 20	13.23%	25
21-29	13.76%	26
30-39	17.99%	34
40 or more	55.03%	104

Q10: How many children re-sat the check in Year 2 in 2017?

Answered: 189 Skipped: 41

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
None	2.65%	5
1-5	41.27%	78
6-10	29.63%	56
more than 10	26.46%	50
TOTAL		189

Q11: Are parents told about the check in advance? (select all that apply)

Answered: 180 Skipped: 50

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes orally	50.00%	90
Yes in writing	65.00%	117
No	7.78%	14
Don't know	4.44%	8
Total Respondents: 180		

Q12: Are parents told whether their child passed or failed the check? (select all that apply)

Answered: 180 Skipped: 50

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes orally	17.22%	31
Yes in writing	86.11%	155
No	5.00%	9
Don't know	4.44%	8
Total Respondents: 180		

Q13: Are parents told their child's actual mark on the check?

Answered: 180 Skipped: 50

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	50.56%	91
No	41.11%	74
Don't know	8.33%	15
TOTAL		180

Q14: Has the phonics check affected the way you now teach children to read in your school?

Answered: 180 Skipped: 50

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
No	10.00%	18
Not much	18.33%	33
Somewhat	39.44%	71
A great deal	32.22%	58
TOTAL		180

73 comments (see chapter 2 for commentary)

Q15: Does the phonics check provide you with information on individual children which you did not already have?

Answered: 180 Skipped: 50

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	11.11%	20
No	88.89%	160
TOTAL		180

Q16: Do you think it is useful to have real and pseudo/alien words in the check?

Answered: 180 Skipped: 50

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	17.78%	32
No	80.00%	144
Don't know	2.22%	4
TOTAL		180

Q17: Do you think it is useful to assess all children on the phonics check in Year 1?

Answered: 180 Skipped: 50

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	22.22%	40
No	77.78%	140
TOTAL		180

107 comments (see chapter 2 for commentary)

Q18: Do you think pass/fail should be recorded for the check?

Answered: 180 Skipped: 50

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	29.44%	53
No	70.56%	127
TOTAL		180

Q19: Is it useful to re-test children in Year 2 who fail the check in Year 1?

Answered: 180 Skipped: 50

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	36.11%	65
No	63.89%	115
TOTAL		180

Q20: Do you buy commercial synthetic phonics materials or training for your school?

Answered: 180 Skipped: 50

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	45.56%	82
No	54.44%	98
TOTAL		180

62 comments (see chapter 2 for commentary)

Q21: Do you think the check should remain statutory for all children in Year 1?

Answered: 180 Skipped: 50

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	15.56%	28
No	84.44%	152
TOTAL		180

Q22: Literacy experiences in school and current government literacy policy.

In England synthetic phonics is mandated as the only method for teaching children to read. To what extent do you agree with this policy?

Answered: 180 Skipped: 50

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Agree	6.11%	11
Agree somewhat	31.67%	57
Disagree	62.22%	112
TOTAL		180

73 comments (see chapter 2 for commentary)

Appendix VI Teachers: The survey questions and answers

Q1: Where is your school?

Answered: 1,348 Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Greater London	10.61%	143
South East	18.99%	256
South West	9.79%	132
East Midlands	12.98%	175
West Midlands	10.09%	136
East of England	7.20%	97
Yorkshire and the Humber	10.61%	143
North East	5.56%	75
North West	14.17%	191
TOTAL		1,348

Q2: What type of school?

Answered: 1,348 Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
infant	16.99%	229
primary	81.01%	1,092
junior	0.22%	3
other	1.78%	24
TOTAL		1,348

Q3: For how many years have you taught?

Answered: 1,348 Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Fewer than 2	7.34%	99
2-10	47.63%	642
11-20	30.49%	411
more than 20 years	14.54%	196
TOTAL		1,348

Q4: In which year or years have you administered the check? (select all that apply)

Answered: 1,348 Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
2012	27.00%	364
2013	34.79%	469
2014	41.39%	558
2015	52.30%	705
2016	61.94%	835
2017	75.59%	1,019
Total Respondents: 1,348		

Q5: To which year groups did you administer the check?

Answered: 1,348 Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Year 1 only	53.34%	719
Year 2 only	6.53%	88
Both Years 1 and 2	40.13%	541
TOTAL		1,348

Q6: Approximately how many children in total have you assessed on the check?

Answered: 1,348 Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Fewer than 20	7.79%	105
20-39	25.30%	341
40- 59	10.83%	146
60 or more	56.08%	756
TOTAL		1,348

Q7: Are you also a parent of any children who have sat the Phonics Screening Check?

Answered: 1,348 Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	23.37%	315
No	76.63%	1,033
TOTAL		1,348

Q8: In your school are parents told in advance about the check and its purpose?

Answered: 1,140 Skipped: 208

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	91.14%	1,039
No	6.23%	71
Don't know	2.63%	30
TOTAL		1,140

Q9: What preparation do you give children for the check? (select all that apply).

Answered: 1,140 Skipped: 208

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Practice with individual words	96.67%	1,102
Practice with pseudo words	97.46%	1,111
Assistance from commercial materials	48.16%	549
None	0.53%	6
Other (please specify)	18.86%	215
Total Respondents: 1,140		

215 comments (see chapter 3 for commentary)

Q10 If you use commercial materials, which ones?

Answered: 1140 Skipped: 208

1140 comments (see chapter 3 for commentary)

Q11: Are parents given guidance on how to prepare their children for the check?

Answered: 1,140 Skipped: 208

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	71.58%	816
No	24.47%	279
Don't know	3.95%	45
TOTAL		1,140

519 comments (see chapter 3 for commentary)

Q12: Have you observed children affected by the check?

Answered: 1,140 Skipped: 208

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
No	37.02%	422
Yes a few	48.68%	555
Yes many	14.30%	163
TOTAL		1,140

533 comments (see chapter 3 for commentary)

Q13: What percentage of the children in Year 1 in your school passed the check in 2012 (the first year of the check)?

Answered: 1,140 Skipped: 208

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Under 50%	9.39%	107
50-59%	9.82%	112
60-69%	11.58%	132
70-79%	11.75%	134
80-89%	9.91%	113
over 90%	5.18%	59
Don't know	42.37%	483
TOTAL		1,140

Q14: What percentage of the children in Year 1 in your school passed the check in 2017?

Answered: 1,140 Skipped: 208

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Under 50%	1.93%	22
50-59%	3.16%	36
60-69%	8.86%	101
70-79%	20.70%	236
80-89%	36.67%	418
over 90%	21.32%	243
Don't know	7.37%	84
TOTAL		1,140

Q15 How many children re-sat the check in Year 2 in 2017?

Answered: 1,140 Skipped: 208

1140 Answers (See chapter 3 for commentary)

Q16: Are parents told whether their child passed or failed the check?

Answered: 1,140 Skipped: 208

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes orally	5.26%	60
Yes in writing	73.86%	842
Yes orally and in writing	14.30%	163
No	3.68%	42
Don't know	2.89%	33
TOTAL		1,140

Q17: Are parents told their child's actual mark on the check?

Answered: 1,140 Skipped: 208

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	50.26%	573
No	41.32%	471
Don't know	8.42%	96
TOTAL		1,140

Q18: Do you think children seem worried after the results of the check are known?

Answered: 1,140 Skipped: 208

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
No, none worried	46.40%	529
A few slightly worried	27.28%	311
Some worried	15.88%	181
Some very worried	4.12%	47
Don't know	6.32%	72
TOTAL		1,140

Q19: Do you feel the phonics check provides you with information on individual children which you did not already have?

Answered: 1,108 Skipped: 240

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	6.41%	71
No	93.59%	1,037
TOTAL		1,108

Q20: How accurate do you regard the Phonics Screening Check to be in its assessment of children's decoding skills?

Answered: 1,108 Skipped: 240

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Very accurate	2.89%	32
Accurate	34.66%	384
Not very accurate	46.93%	520
Not accurate	15.52%	172
TOTAL		1,108

Q21: Do you feel it is useful to include both real and pseudo/ alien words in the check

Answered: 1,108 Skipped: 240

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	20.31%	225
No	79.69%	883
TOTAL		1,108

298 comments (see Chapter 3 for commentary)

Q22: Did you notice any difference in the results on the real and pseudo/alien words?

Answered: 1,108 Skipped: 240

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	37.55%	416
No	11.91%	132
Not much	23.10%	256
Somewhat	23.10%	256
A great deal	4.33%	48
TOTAL		1,108

Q23: Do you think it is useful to record pass/fail on the check?

Answered: 1,108 Skipped: 240

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	25.27%	280
No	74.73%	828
TOTAL		1,108

Q24: Do you think it is useful to re-test children in Year 2 who fail the check in Year 1?

Answered: 1,108 Skipped: 240

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	25.90%	287
No	74.10%	821
TOTAL		1,108

Q25: Has the phonics check affected the way you now teach children to read in your school?

Answered: 1,108 Skipped: 240

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
No	14.98%	166
Not much	13.54%	150
Somewhat	38.36%	425
A great deal	33.12%	367
TOTAL		1,108

481 Comments (see chapter 3 for commentary)

Q26: The Phonics Screening Check is a statutory assessment of all children in Year 1 and any child who fails to achieve a pass mark of 32 out of 40 is required to re-sit the check in Year 2. What do you think the future of the Phonics Screening Check should be?

Answered: 1,108 Skipped: 240

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Remain statutory for all children in Year 1	11.64%	129
Become voluntary and administered only to some children	20.04%	222
Be discontinued	68.32%	757
TOTAL		1,108

Q27: If the check remains statutory should children who fail to achieve a mark of 32 in Year 1 re-sit the check in Year 2?

Answered: 1,108 Skipped: 240

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	24.19%	268
No	75.81%	840
TOTAL		1,108

334 comments (see chapter 3 for commentary)

Q28: In England synthetic phonics is mandated as the only method for teaching children to read. To what extent do you agree with this government policy?

Answered: 1,108 Skipped: 240

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Agree	10.29%	114
Agree somewhat	42.24%	468
Disagree	47.47%	526
TOTAL		1,108

429 comments (see chapter 3 for commentary)

Appendix V11 Parents: The survey questions and answers

Q1: Have you seen a copy of the Phonics Screening Check?

Answered: 419 Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	55.13%	231
No	44.87%	188
TOTAL		419

Q2: How many of your children have sat the phonics check?

Answered: 419 Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
one	70.41%	295
two	23.39%	98
three	3.82%	16
more than three.	2.39%	10
TOTAL		419

Q3: In what area was your child at school at the time of the check?

Answered: 382 Skipped: 37

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Greater London	5.50%	21
South East	24.61%	94
South West	9.69%	37
East Midlands	13.09%	50
West Midlands	14.40%	55
East of England	6.02%	23
Yorkshire and the Humber	10.21%	39
North East	3.93%	15
North West	12.57%	48
TOTAL		382

Q4: What type of school did your child attend at the time of the check?

Answered: 382 Skipped: 37

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
infant (4-7)	25.39%	97
primary (4-11)	74.61%	285
TOTAL		382

Q5: Person completing the questionnaire

Answered: 382 Skipped: 37

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Mother	94.24%	360
Father	2.62%	10
Other (please specify)	3.14%	12
TOTAL		382

Q6: Is this your first child to have sat the screening check

Answered: 382 Skipped: 37

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	70.68%	270
No	29.32%	112
TOTAL		382

Q7: Sex of child

Answered: 382 Skipped: 37

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Boy	53.14%	203
Girl	46.86%	179
TOTAL		382

Q8: Date of birth of child

Answered: 382 Skipped: 37

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
2005	2.36%	9
2006	4.19%	16
2007	4.97%	19
2008	9.69%	37
2009	15.97%	61
2010	19.90%	76
2011	28.80%	110
2012	14.14%	54
TOTAL		382

Q9: Is your child's first language English?

Answered: 382 Skipped: 37

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	98.17%	375
No	1.83%	7
TOTAL		382

Q10: Is your child fluent in English?

Answered: 7 Skipped: 412

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	71.43%	5
No	28.57%	2
TOTAL		7

Q11: How many languages does your child speak?

Answered: 380 Skipped: 39

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
one	95.00%	361
two	4.21%	16
more than two	0.79%	3
TOTAL		380

Q12: When did this child take the check?

Answered: 338 Skipped: 81

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
2012	7.10%	24
2013	4.44%	15
2014	8.88%	30
2015	15.09%	51
2016	19.23%	65
2017	45.86%	155
Total Respondents: 338		

Q13: Were you informed in advance about the check?

Answered: 338 Skipped: 81

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes orally	19.53%	66
Yes in writing	24.85%	84
Yes both orally and in writing	37.87%	128
No	17.75%	60
TOTAL		338

Q14: Were you asked to prepare your child in any way for the check?

Answered: 338 Skipped: 81

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	40.53%	137
No	50.30%	170
Can't remember	9.17%	31
TOTAL		338

Q 15: In what ways were you asked to prepare your child? (select all that apply)

Answered: 157 Skipped: 262

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
by practising individual words	70.70%	111
by practising recognising alien (pseudo) words	81.53%	128
with assistance from materials you bought	9.55%	15
Other (please specify)	14.65%	23
Total Respondents: 157		

23 comments (see chapter 4 for commentary)

Q16 If you bought any materials to help, do you remember the name of

the materials? If so please indicate.

Answered: 316 Skipped: 103

Q17: Did any aspects of the Phonics Screening Check affect your child?

Answered: 316 Skipped: 103

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Don't know	17.41%	55
No	53.16%	168
Yes	29.43%	93
TOTAL		316

95 comments (see chapter 4 for commentary)

Q18: Did your child pass the check?

Answered: 316 Skipped: 103

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	75.32%	238
No	17.41%	55
Don't know	7.28%	23
TOTAL		316

Q19: Did your child pass the check when they sat it again in Year 2?

Answered: 55 Skipped: 364

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	38.18%	21
No	18.18%	10
Has not re-taken it yet.	43.64%	24
TOTAL		55

Q20: Were you informed what mark your child received?

Answered: 314 Skipped: 105

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes in writing	51.27%	161
Yes orally	11.46%	36
Yes orally and in writing	9.87%	31
No	27.39%	86
TOTAL		314

Q21: What mark did your child receive?

Answered: 225 Skipped: 194

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
0-10	2.22%	5
11-20	2.67%	6
21-31	4.89%	11
32-39	51.11%	115
40	22.67%	51
Don't remember	16.44%	37
TOTAL		225

Q22: Is your child aware that they passed or failed the check?

Answered: 311 Skipped: 108

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	43.41%	135
No	56.59%	176
TOTAL		311

Q23: How well could this child read at the time of the check?

Answered: 304 Skipped: 115

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Could already read with understanding	79.61%	242
Could read a few words	15.13%	46
Could recognise most of the letters of the alphabet	4.28%	13
Could only recognise a few letters of the alphabet	0.66%	2
Was unable to recognise any letters	0.33%	1
TOTAL		304

Q24: How well could your child write at the time of the check?

Answered: 304 Skipped: 115

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Could write recognisable words	84.87%	258
Could write most of the letters of the alphabet	9.21%	28
Could write their own name	4.61%	14
Was able to distinguish drawing and writing	1.32%	4
Was not yet able to distinguish writing and drawing	0.00%	0
TOTAL		304

Q25: Is he or she reading with understanding now?

Answered: 302 Skipped: 117

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	96.03%	290
No	3.97%	12
TOTAL		302

Q26: Is he or she writing meaningful sentences now?

Answered: 302 Skipped: 117

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	97.68%	295
No	2.32%	7
TOTAL		302

Q27: Does your child enjoy reading?

Answered: 302 Skipped: 117

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Very much	56.95%	172
Somewhat	31.46%	95
Does not enjoy reading	11.59%	35
TOTAL		302

Q28: Does your child prefer to read on screen or from books?

Answered: 302 Skipped: 117

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
On screen	4.30%	13
Books	65.89%	199
Both on screen and from books	23.51%	71
Neither	6.29%	19
TOTAL		302

Q29: The Phonics Screening Check is statutory for all children in Year 1 and to be re-taken by all children in Year 2 who fail to gain a mark of 32 out of 40. Do you think the check should remain statutory?

Answered: 298 Skipped: 121

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes for all children	13.42%	40
Yes for some children	5.37%	16
No it should be a voluntary assessment	18.46%	55
No it should be discontinued	62.75%	187
TOTAL		298

Q30: How much do you know about the way that your child is being taught to read in school?

Answered: 295 Skipped: 124

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
In detail	51.86%	153
Some information	38.64%	114
Very little information	9.49%	28
TOTAL		295

Q31: How have you learnt about this?

Answered: 295 Skipped: 124

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
By information from the school	62.37%	184
By homework set for you to do with your child	14.58%	43
By observation in the classroom	14.58%	43
Not applicable	8.47%	25
TOTAL		295

Q32: To what extent do you agree with current government literacy policy?

Answered: 295 Skipped: 124

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Agree	5.76%	17
Agree somewhat	28.47%	84
Do not agree	55.93%	165
Don't know	9.83%	29
TOTAL		295

Q33: Are you a teacher who has administered the check to any children yourself?

Answered: 295 Skipped: 124

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	26.78%	79
No	73.22%	216
TOTAL		295

Q34: In what year or years did you administer the check?

Answered: 78 Skipped: 341

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
2012	30.77%	24
2013	32.05%	25
2014	33.33%	26
2015	41.03%	32
2016	41.03%	32
2017	48.72%	38
Total Respondents: 78		