**Contents**

Preface ii

Editors and Contributors iii

Acknowledgements iv

1. Who determines literacy policies in England and on what evidence? An independent survey of the views of Head Teachers, teachers and parents *Margaret M. Clark*  1
2. Head Teachers’ views on the Phonics Screening Check *Sue Reid* 7
3. Teachers’ views on the Phonics Screening Check

 *Susan Atkinson and Jonathan Glazzard*  15

1. The views of parents on the Phonics Screening Check *John Bayley* 25
2. 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*  31

Appendix I The future of the Phonics Screening Check *Margaret M. Clark* 38

Appendix II Expenditure by the Department for Education on the Phonics Screening Check, commercial materials and training courses on synthetic phonics *Margaret M. Clark* 39

Appendix III The Phonics Screening Check: The current state of play in Australia

*Misty Adoniou* 41

Appendix IV The Phonics Screening Check 2012-2017: An independent enquiry into the views of teachers and parents 44

Appendix V Head Teachers: The survey questions and answers 45

Appendix VI Teachers: The survey questions and answers 54

Appendix VII Parents: The survey questions and answers 64

The survey report can be downloaded from

<https://www.newman.ac.uk/knowledge-base/the-phonics-screening-check-2012-2017>

**Preface**

Since 2006 I have published a series of articles on literacy, the teaching of early literacy in particular. I have put under the searchlight the evidence base for current literacy policy in England and justification for its claimed success in raising literacy levels. These publications were brought together in my book *Learning to be Literate: Insights from research for policy and practice* (Clark, 2014 Part IV). This was updated in a revised edition in 2016.

Following information that the Federal Government in Australia was considering following England’s lead and making synthetic phonics the required method of teaching reading and importing the Phonics Screening Check from England I published two edited books, one in 2017, the other in 2018, with relevant evidence from seventeen literacy researchers. *Reading the Evidence: Synthetic phonics and literacy learning* (Clark, 2017) and *Teaching Initial Literacy: Policy, evidence and ideology* (Clark, 2018) have contributions for UK, USA, Australia, The Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. It should be clear that these academics, and indeed many others, are not as has been claimed, opposed to phonics, all accepting that it has a place in the teaching of reading. What they challenge is that there is evidence that the *only* method of teaching reading to all children should be by synthetic phonics. They also present evidence challenging many of the claims for the Phonics Screening Check, a statutory assessment for all children in England around six years of age since 2012.

The government in England has neither involved the teaching profession in the development or implementation of what is now a high stakes statutory assessment and mandatory way of teaching reading in all state schools (see Appendix I). Schools are judged by DfE and Ofsted by the percentage pass on the check with a requirement to increase the percentage pass each year. Universities involved in teacher education are required to present this method as the method of teaching reading and there seems no opportunity for academics to challenge this policy in their teaching, in dialogue with DfE, or even with other academics. Furthermore, the funds allocated by DfE since 2012 for literacy courses and materials, which have been substantial, are with synthetic phonics at their heart (See Appendix II).

There is little evidence that the views of teachers or parents as to the effects of the check, intended and unintended, on the literacy experiences of young children in England have been sought by the government since the early research funded shortly after it was introduced (see chapter 16 in Clark, 2016). Their silence and that of many academics may be assumed to indicate that they are in support of the policy, or are unconcerned.

The aim of this independent survey, preliminary results of which we present here, is to explore the views of teachers who have been involved in administering the check and parents whose children have been assessed. The response to this survey has shown that their relative silence until now should not be taken as evidence that they are uninterested or unconcerned. Not only did busy professionals and parents complete the survey but many took time to add comments. The survey is anonymous but we have been contacted by a number of those who completed the survey who have expressed interest to be involved in further research or to provide further information. Here we present our preliminary analyses which we feel have valuable messages for policymakers. We acknowledge their limitations and are now undertaking further, more complex analyses, which will be published. We appreciate that though there were advantages in an anonymous survey there are dangers also, as we have no way of testing whether any of the returns are spurious. We appreciate that to view the questions it was necessary to open the links and some of the incomplete forms may be from people who merely wanted to see the content of the survey. However, we decided we should retain all forms submitted rather than face criticism for making what might be seen as an arbitrary decision to delete some. It is clear from the tables how many of each sample replied to each question and how many skipped questions (see Appendices V, VI and VII). In our more complex analysis we will be able to relate responses to the characteristics of those who answered. Care was taken to frame the questions so that they were not leading questions and advice was sought from a number of literacy researchers. We stressed in the notice about the survey that this was an independent survey and that we encouraged those in support of current government policy to complete the survey as well as those with concerns.

This survey is not a funded research project and has not received grants. Associations we approached were merely asked to publicise the notice and encourage members to complete the survey. In addition, we advertised it as widely as possible and do appear to have reached teachers and parents from all regions in England.

Margaret M Clark June 2018

**Editors and Contributors**

Margaret M Clark OBE is a Visiting Professor at Newman University and Emeritus Professor at the University of Birmingham. She was awarded a DLitt for her first published books on literacy, a community study of children with reading difficulties and a research into young fluent readers. The Scottish Council for Research in Education awarded her a Fellowship for her distinguished contribution to educational research. She was personally commissioned by the Secretary of State for Education to evaluate research of relevance to the education of children under five. Her book *Learning to be Literate: Insights from research for policy and practice* won the UKLA Academic Book Award in 2015 and an updated revised edition was published by Routledge in 2016. Her two most recent books in 2017 and 2018 on the teaching of early literacy have contributions from UK, USA, Australia, The Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. In 2017 she was elected to the Reading Hall of Fame.

Jonathan Glazzard is Professor of Teacher Education in the Carnegie School of Education at Leeds Beckett University. His research areas include inclusive education, special educational needs and or disability in schools and early reading development in children. He has published papers on specific areas including autism, dyslexia and speech and language and communication needs. He has also authored several books to support trainee teachers. Jonathan is interested in research which improves educational outcomes for marginalised learners and in giving voice to children and young people who have experienced discrimination in schools.

Susan Atkinson is a Senior Lecturer in the Carnegie School of Education at Leeds Beckett University. She is a chartered psychologist, with research interests in inclusion, cognitive development, working memory development, working memory and reading, and factors affecting attainment in primary school.

John Bayley is a former primary school Head Teacher and is now a Senior Lecturer in the School of Educational Studies at Newman University.

Sue Reid is a Senior Lecturer in Initial Teacher Education at Newman University with a specialism in English. She has experience as a teacher throughout the key stages, also in early years. She has worked as a National Strategies literacy consultant and trained many teachers in the implementation of systematic synthetic phonics before taking up her current role as a teacher educator.

**Acknowledgements**

We are grateful to all those who have given advice on the framing of the questions, to those who circulated the information about the survey and not least to those who took the time to complete the survey.

We are particularly indebted to Bob Ridge-Stearn Head of ELearning at Newman University who transformed our draft questionnaire into survey monkey format which made not only for ease of completion but also provides a preliminary analysis. We are also grateful to Newman University for allowing us to distribute this preliminary report through the Newman website in a way that makes it widely available quickly and in a form able to be downloaded. Our thanks to Hannah Jackson and the Marketing Department at Newman University for their assistance in preparing this version for the website and to colleagues who have proof read the report.

Our thanks to Professor Misty Adoniou of the University of Canberra for contributing Appendix III in which she outlines the current position in Australia with regard to the Phonics Screening Check.