The importance of phonics

The government has produced a set of criteria for high quality phonic work, presenting the key features of an effective, systematic, synthetic phonics programme.

This envisages phonics as ‘the prime approach to decoding print, i.e. phonics ‘first and fast’ approach’

The phonics screening check is now statutory and a central strand of policy implementation.

¹Phonics teaching materials: core criteria and the self-assessment process (DfE, October 2010)
The phonics screening check

A short, light-touch assessment to make sure that all pupils have learned phonic decoding to an expected standard at the end of Year 1

The check comprises a list of 40 words and non-words which the child reads one-to-one with a teacher

It aims to identify the children who need extra help so that they are given support by their school to improve their decoding skills

All Year 1 pupils in maintained schools, academies and free schools must complete the check
The national evaluation of the phonics screening check

NFER commissioned to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the check

Aim 1: To explore whether issues raised in the pilot evaluation have been addressed

Aim 2: To identify and track the impact of the check on teaching and learning
Evaluation design

**Large-scale surveys**
- Literacy coordinators (2012: n=844; 2013: n=583; 2014: n=573)
- Year 1 teachers (2012: n=940; 2013: n=625; 2014: n=652)

**In-depth school case studies**
- 14 schools (2012); 19 schools (2013); 19 schools (2014)
- Senior school leaders, literacy coordinators, Reception, Year 1 and 2 teachers, parents and carers

**NPD and VfM analyses**
- To quantify the impact of the check on the standard of reading and to assess its value for money.
Evaluation of the Phonics Screening Check: First Interim Report
Research report
May 2013

Phonics screening check evaluation
Research report
May 2014

Phonics screening Check Evaluation:
Final report
Research report
June 2015

Matthew Walker, Shelley Bartlett, Helen Betts, Marian Sainsbury & Palak Mehta
National Foundation for Educational Research


2013
Administration of the check

2014
Impact of the check

2015

Public

Evidence for Excellence in Education

• independent • insights • breadth • connections • outcomes
Phonics screening check: findings

Views on phonics and the check

- Teachers were positive about phonics
- Teachers’ views on the check were more mixed
- Many schools use other decoding strategies

“You have structure, sequence and endless resources to support you ... It seems logical and sensible to give every child a way of attacking reading ... It gives children access to reading and they realise there’s a code they can follow and be successful”.

Literacy coordinator
Phonics screening check: findings

Views on phonics and the check

- Teachers were positive about phonics
- Teachers’ views on the check were more mixed
- Many schools use other decoding strategies

“The results mean nothing because by the time they do it it’s too late. No teacher needs to do that test to know which children in their class are struggling in phonics. You know by Christmas in Reception which children are not picking things up – it’s pointless really”.

Literacy coordinator
### Phonics screening check: findings

**Views on phonics and the check**

- Teachers were positive about phonics
- Teachers’ views on the check were more mixed
- Many schools also use other decoding strategies

### Many schools believe that a phonics approach to teaching reading should be used alongside other methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method Description</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phonics is taught discretely alongside other cueing strategies</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systematic synthetic phonics is taught ‘first and fast’</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonics is always integrated as one of a range of cueing strategies</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NFER survey of literacy coordinators, 2014. Due to percentages being rounded to the nearest integer, they may not sum to 100. N=573
Phonics screening check: findings

Lessons learned from the national roll out

• Less time spent on training and preparation
• Largest cost was supply cover
• Year 1 teacher most frequently administered the check to Year 2 pupils
• Most schools provide information to parents prior to administration of the check

Impacts on teaching and learning

* Evidence of changes to teaching practice
* Introduction of pseudo words
* Increased grouping by ability
* More frequent assessment
* Increased pace of teaching
Impacts on pupil attainment

• Phonics attainment, as measured by the check, has improved between 2012 and 2015
• No identifiable pattern of poorer performance for those children who are already fluent readers.
• Most children who achieve L2 at the end of Year 2 have met the expected standard on the check
• Typology analysis
• Overall, analyses of pupils’ literacy scores in the national datasets over four years were inconclusive.

Source: DfE (2015) SFR: Phonics screening check and national curriculum assessments at key stage 1 in England, 2015c
Phonics screening check: findings

Impacts on pupil attainment

- Phonics attainment, as measured by the check, has improved between 2012 and 2015.
- No identifiable pattern of poorer performance for those children who are already fluent readers.
- Most children who achieve L2 at the end of Year 2 have met the expected standard on the check.
- Typology analysis.
- Overall, analyses of pupils' literacy scores in the national datasets over four years were inconclusive.

Source: NFER analysis of National Pupil Database data. N=568,883
Phonics screening check: findings

Impacts on pupil attainment

- Phonics attainment, as measured by the check, has improved between 2012 and 2015
- No identifiable pattern of poorer performance for those children who are already fluent readers.
- Most children who achieve L2 at the end of Year 2 have met the expected standard on the check
- Typology analysis
- Overall, analyses of pupils’ literacy scores in the national datasets over four years were inconclusive.

Among those who achieved the expected standard of level 2 or above at KS1 in 2014 (87 per cent of pupils):

- 79 per cent reached the expected standard as a Year 1 pupil in the 2013 PSC
- 18 per cent reached the expected standard as a Year 2 pupil in the 2014 PSC
- three per cent did not reach the expected standard in 2014
- less than one per cent had missing phonics check data in 2014.
Phonics screening check: findings

Impacts on pupil attainment

- Phonics attainment, as measured by the check, has improved between 2012 and 2015.
- No identifiable pattern of poorer performance for those children who are already fluent readers.
- Most children who achieve L2 at the end of Year 2 have met the expected standard on the check.

Typology analysis
- Overall, analyses of pupils’ literacy scores in the national datasets over four years were inconclusive.

Phonics screening check: findings

Impacts on pupil attainment

- Phonics attainment, as measured by the check, has improved between 2012 and 2015
- No identifiable pattern of poorer performance for those children who are already fluent readers.
- Most children who achieve L2 at the end of Year 2 have met the expected standard on the check
- Typology analysis
- Overall, analyses of pupils’ literacy scores in the national datasets over four years were inconclusive.

The introduction of the check does appear to have affected phonics teaching and classroom practice.

There is little evidence to suggest that many schools are teaching systematic synthetic phonics ‘first and fast’ in its purest form, to the exclusion of other word reading strategies.

Many teachers believe that a phonics approach to teaching reading should be used alongside other methods.