

**All-Party Parliamentary Group for Education**

**Summary of  
Evidence from  
the Inquiry into  
Overcoming the  
Barriers to  
Literacy**

**July 2011**

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### Declaration on resourcing

The Inquiry was funded by the British Educational Suppliers Association (BESA) as part of its provision of the APPG for Education’s secretariat. Ray Barker, Director of BESA, wrote the report and provided advice and organisational support. On behalf of BESA, Ferelith Gaze of Ranelagh International provided the organisational support and inquiry design and documentation, and edited the report; Rachel Womack and Sue Murray of Mango Marketing provided public relations support; and Richard Connor of C3 Education advised, managed and reported on the surveys.

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## Headline summary of the questionnaire to teachers

An online questionnaire was used to collect quantitative evidence from a broad range of schools across English local authorities. Online questionnaires were issued to 1,860 named literacy leaders from the National Education Research Panel, of which 584 responded. Literacy leaders include head teachers, deputy head teacher, heads of English and literacy co-ordinators.

### Level of literacy skills

When responding schools were asked what percentages of pupils in their school have very good literacy skills, only 22% of primary and 16% of secondary schools gave a positive response. In addition to those with very weak literacy skills, a further quarter of primary and a third of secondary school pupils are considered to have weak literacy skills.

Overall, teachers from secondary schools are more likely to identify that pupils have weak or very weak literacy skills. 57% of pupils in secondary schools are classed as having weak or very weak literacy skills. In comparison, only 39% of pupils in primary schools are considered to have weak or very weak literacy skills.

### Changes in literacy provision

In primary schools there is some level of interest in the majority of opportunities; however, one-to-one support for struggling pupils is the choice of over a third of teachers. Teachers would also like to change the way literacy is taught, supported and assessed.

Around 12% of primary school teachers also suggest that there needs to be change in the extent to which literacy development is incorporated into lessons. Across secondary schools only 6% indicate that there needs to be a change in the extent to which literacy development is incorporated into lessons. Rather than change the way literacy is taught and supported, secondary school teachers are more likely to prefer the option to have one-to-one support for struggling pupils.

### Literacy resource provision – primary schools

Primary teachers are significantly more likely to conclude that budgets for resources are completely insufficient, than identify an insufficiency in training and continuous professional development or interaction with and support from other staff. The finding is interesting as in a previous question primary school teachers were least likely to identify resources as an opportunity they would most like to change. The outcome from these questions may be that teachers are happy with the types of literacy resources being used, but there is a significant need for more provision and access for pupils.

### Literacy resource provision – secondary schools

Secondary school teachers provide a similar view on literacy resourcing as primary schools. However, there are some differences. Secondary school teachers are significantly less likely to feel that there is the right amount of time allocated to literacy co-ordination. While more than a third of primary school literacy leaders consider the time allocated to literacy co-ordination to be about right, only 16% of English teachers in secondary schools feel the same. Thirty percent consider it to be completely insufficient.

As with primary schools, training and CPD is a concern in over half of schools. Of greater concern is the level of resource budgets. Few secondary schools consider budgets to be about right. Overall, 90% of secondary schools indicate that the level of budget for resourcing of literacy skills is either not enough or is completely insufficient. The results indicate that about a third of schools have great concerns over the sufficiency of time and resources to meet the needs of improving literacy skills.

### Importance of literacy budgets

It is clear that secondary schools would like to see greater budget for resources, as opposed to a requirement for more training and CPD courses. Around a quarter of secondary school literacy leaders would like to see more time allocated to literacy co-ordination.

The requirement for primary school literacy leaders is more likely to be focused on training and CPD, rather than time allocated to literacy co-ordination. Even so, as with secondary school responses, there is a requirement for a greater budget for resources.

Those schools choosing budgets for resources identified a wide-range of potential purchases from the general renewal of resources, to new interactive media and specialised programmes for reading recovery. The general consensus is the need for more resources that cover a broader spectrum of ability to ensure that all abilities are catered for.

#### **Literacy funding – primary schools**

When primary school literacy leaders were asked to identify if funding for literacy learning resources would be adequate in 2011/12, there was a general consensus that provision will be inadequate. This type of finding is usual when teachers are asked about funding. It is the relative differences that can identify where there are more likely to be particular concerns over funding. In the case of primary schools it is in funding for special needs resources.

#### **Literacy funding – secondary schools**

In secondary schools the findings indicate that it is in key stage 3 that there is most likely to be an inadequacy of literacy resources – rather than in special needs, as identified by primary schools.

Overall, secondary schools are more likely than primary schools to identify that funding for learning resources is adequate. However, it remains the case that the majority of secondary schools consider funding to be inadequate, with over a fifth indicating that funding is entirely inadequate in most areas of literacy teaching.

#### **Funding impact – primary schools**

Teachers are most likely to identify a significant impact on library resources if there is a contraction in spending. However, once those indicating some impact are included, nearly all teachers think that there will be an impact on teacher resource spending from any contraction.

It is interesting to note that the views on printed classroom materials and digital content are broadly similar. These results indicate that teachers have integrated digital content into the teaching and learning process and value the resource as much as printed classroom materials.

#### **Funding impact – secondary schools**

In comparison to primary schools, secondary schools are more likely to be concerned about the impact on digital content resources from any re-assignment or cut in funding during 2011/12. Over a quarter indicate a significant impact on digital content spending from anticipated spending re-assignments or cuts in 2011/12. While a fifth of teachers also indicate a significant impact in spending on printed classroom materials, relatively few schools indicate some impact.

Secondary schools are also much less likely than primary schools to identify a significant impact on library resource spending. The results suggest that while digital content use for literacy purposes is well-embedded into the curriculum there are clear concerns that spending re-assignments or cuts in 2011/12 will impact on the ability to provide digital content for literacy.

## Headline summary of teacher 'open response' views:

### 1) What factors make it more difficult to increase literacy rates?

- **Low expectations:** both children's and parental expectations are seen as low and this leads to poor motivation as well as inadequate language development on entry into school.

*'... They think it is fine to say their sons do not read. They prefer football - but they would never say the same of maths ... We still have difficulty in engaging parents in the education of their children despite time, effort and strategies to underpin this.'*

*'Children's lack of vocabulary and reading, playing activities when starting school ... poor parenting skills... Children arriving at school with language delays of up to three years ... From my experience children enter KS1 with poor behaviour skills, they lack support from the home in terms of wanting to learn. Their home literacy experiences consist of limited knowledge of nursery rhymes, traditional stories and other story types. Poor letter sound recognition. Some children don't even know colours! So when you're faced with a class of 30 to support in writing for example, it's so difficult because you can only work with a group at a time and the remaining 25 are waiting! There needs to be more classroom support for this age group. Children given the most supportive early years and KS1 have the foundations to become secure with literacy skills. There needs to be compulsory smaller class sizes... or more adults per ratio of young children for literacy learning. It takes roughly 10 minutes per child to listen to them read and discuss reading book. You add that up and x30 in a class and you realise that hours are gone that you should be teaching in and when you are scaffolding a child with their reading.'*

- **Not enough targeted support:** Reading recovery, for specialist teachers and one-to-one support.

*'Insufficient staffing levels to give children the intense support some need in the early years... insufficient teaching time for one to one support for reading and insufficient funds to pay for enough suitable reading material.'*

- **Lack of funding:** to provide training and reading texts.

*'Not enough reading of whole texts in primary school. NLS promoted dry study of extracts hence loss of reading habits.'*

- **Curriculum and assessment issues**

*'We have an overloaded curriculum, where we focus more on paperwork and ticking boxes, than looking at our children as individuals. We admire the teacher who has a highlighted piece of paper telling us what his/her children have achieved.'*

*'Pressure to achieve high levels early on - children in Early Years are often pushed into reading and writing before they are ready due to targets that need to be met... Pupils are taught to the test in KS2 which results in warped levels of achievement. Consequently, secondary schools have to work with pupils who have only reached the supposed standard on paper. Primary schools should be able to focus on improving literacy skills not just doing well in SATS.'*

- **The unfair nature of resourcing**

*'There is an inappropriate distribution of additional resources amongst schools. Those in deprived areas receive a great amount of support and money in addition to their budget; however schools which are not deemed to be in such areas will still have many children from those areas and yet they are often judged against schools with a more affluent cohort.'*

- **The failure to treat teachers as professionals**

*'Teachers are not trusted as a profession by government. Rather than supporting a teacher-based, bottom-up, school team policy approach to the particular literacy needs of each school's children, supported by training for identified professional development needs, we have a non-teacher-led, top-down, prescriptive, ever-changing, complicated list of expectations based on the idea that literacy 'standards' are something quantitative that can keep improving indefinitely and must be assessed externally and statistically. We are worn out trying to keep all these ridiculous plates spinning instead of feeling energised and inspired!'*

- **Inadequate support for specific needs**

*'Children who need specific individual tailored teaching of reading, responding to what they know and what they need to know not having a specialist reading teacher who can also involve parents more directly and who can also provide support to other staff..., it is difficult to support children with special needs when the support services budgets have been cut. We NEED speech therapists, early years support teams, educational psychologists, behaviour workers etc to be able to do our job properly in all areas, and cutting them means that the children with special needs get a raw deal in all areas of the curriculum.'*

- **The need for libraries**

*'Lack of funding for libraries in school (ours doesn't exist) with little opportunity to read real books/meet real authors when we have to put all our money into a reading scheme. Where's the enjoyment or motivation to learn to read?'*

- **An inappropriate focus on phonics**

*'The teaching of reading has taken on an almost wholly phonic approach in many settings. Because the English language is not wholly phonic in character, phonic-only programmes limit children's exposure to excellent quality language and limit the strategies the children employ in their fledgling reading attempts... too much emphasis on synthetic phonics as the major component of early literacy teaching. Children need to develop a range of strategies, including phonics, in order to successfully read continuous texts. Significant numbers of children have had rigorous phonics teaching and are still struggling to read and write. Schools need to be encouraged to teach a range of strategies to enable all pupils to have access to techniques which support their learning styles and abilities.'*

- **The need for better teacher training**

*'Too few teachers and trained teaching assistants. Lack of training for teachers once they are qualified... Lack of effective teacher training in teaching reading.'*

- **Too much change**

*'Constant changes from the government. I have just heard today that the Standards site is to shut down ... Constant changes in the curriculum. The EYFS curriculum in school with no consequent change in the key stage 1 curriculum. Standards have dropped in key stage 1.'*

- **At secondary level the need for whole-school approaches**

*'Lack of a consistent whole-school approach and the reluctance of many subject teachers to admit that literacy is their remit are a real problem.'*

## 2) What has made the most difference to your school's literacy standards?

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Reading Recovery:</b> <i>'Reading Recovery, a wave 3 intervention programme for a limited number of year 1 pupils who were working at below-age expected levels.'</i></li> <li>• <b>Staff training:</b> <i>'All staff have been trained how to assess the children's reading using running records and the school's reading material has been levelled according to the Reading Recovery levels.'</i></li> <li>• <b>Phonics:</b> <i>'Letters and Sounds ... structured synthetic phonics for all children... has had a good impact on raising the standard of quality first teaching and pupil attainment.'</i></li> <li>• <b>New ways of assessment:</b> <i>'Close assessment and tracking procedures... Children understanding what they need to do to make progress through self assessment using 'I Can' statements... using teacher assessment rather than tests.'</i></li> <li>• <b>Quality of teaching:</b> <i>'Quality of teaching, level of staff CPD. Very good leadership team.'</i></li> <li>• <b>A clear literacy strategy:</b> <i>'Having a clear literacy strategy has been very important. This has been driven by a senior member of staff. As a reading recovery teacher for the past two years I have been privileged to work with the lowest 10% of children at KS1 and worked to raise their literacy levels in line with age-related expectations. Many of the skills I use in the sessions are being adopted by teachers and TAs and are having positive impacts on the pupils. There is also a culture of reading for pleasure in the school.'</i></li> <li>• <b>ICT:</b> <i>'Using IWBs and digital media.'</i></li> <li>• <b>Using outside assistance:</b> <i>'SIP focus on reading and writing, specifically trained support staff to deliver packages to individual children, parent literacy workshops and involvement... Support from LA consultants has been invaluable. They have supported the school with introducing new concepts and given teachers confidence and new ideas.'</i></li> <li>• <b>Focus on writing:</b> <i>'The introduction of 'Big Writing'. This has had a big impact on standards in writing and we have seen a steady increase in KS 1 and KS2 pupil attainment, especially at the higher levels. Boys have responded well to the strategies put in place and we see improvements in boys' writing results.'</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Current assessment system:</b> <i>'The drive to get level 4 SATs has meant that KS2 teaching seems to concentrate on getting the students the highest possible reading level in their SATs exam. This means that quite weak students can end up with 3a or 4c SATs results - which do not reflect their lack of ability. They come to secondary schools with a label that indicates that they can read and write - but they can't! Then all the pressure is on secondary teachers to jump them through various convoluted loops to gain a GCSE - and there is no time to STOP to teach them to read and write. They have three hours English per week at secondary school and must read pre-1914 texts, analyse and compare multi-modal texts etc. There just isn't the time to teach them to read and write. They fall further and further behind; their behaviour becomes unmanageable and they drag their peers down with them.'</i></li> <li>• <b>Children's attitudes:</b> <i>'The behaviour of children (lack of listening skills) and poor home environments bring about poor literacy skills. Children of these experiences have very limited knowledge to draw from as they don't experience travel or places of interest. For me personally I have had success but that's down to me being enthused about my teaching, making the learning fun using stories, etc. as a starting point and not using commercialised plans. I try to make all my literacy cross curricular, meaningful to the children, good feedback in marking so they know how to improve. I walk past too many classes where children are working in silence doing dull work. I see a purposeful talking classroom as a learning classroom.'</i></li> </ul>

### 3) **Headline summary of teacher ‘open response’ views on literacy and assessment**

- **Focus on one-to-one interventions:** *‘Intensive programmes such as Reading Recovery really do work and not just in the short term. The impacts are felt months and years down the lines. Research by KPMG shows the financial saving of Reading Recovery. The initial one-to-one support means that pupils are brought into line with their age-related expectations. They can then go back into class and access the rest of the curriculum. The programme teaches the pupils strategies to use in both reading and writing. These can be applied back in the classroom. Evaluation of the programme shows that very few of these children then need further support. How many other programmes can truly say that?’*
- **SATs:** *‘The way year 6 pupils are assessed at the end of key stage 2 is unsuitable for their age range, old fashioned and unhelpful. It needs to change more than any other aspect of primary education. If a child is more able and working at a level 5 in literacy, they should not have to prove this by doing it on a given day within a limited time allocation. Some children do not cope well with exam style test conditions and it can cause unnecessary stress to them. Why are we expected to cause stress to 11 year olds?’*
- **Teacher assessment would be a better indicator of achievement.** *‘The SATs assessment procedure currently in use is both inaccurate and inappropriate. The interpretation of the level descriptors following the tests in May is so wide that it is possible for children who are below average to achieve a level 4. Whilst this is much more acceptable for the reputation of our school it is of no value to the child or the secondary school. Any test that is used will inevitably narrow the curriculum to a ‘teach to the test’ mentality and misses both the wealth of literature and activities that could be used and also does not take into account the rates at which different children progress. I agree completely with accountability but the present system seems to have become more of a political exercise rather than part of educating children.’*
- **Teacher confidence:** *‘For some literacy teaching models have not changed since the strategy was first developed. The lack of confidence in teachers is massive due to be told that they are ‘unsatisfactory’ if they have not taught in a manner that ticks all the boxes on a pre written checklist. Teaching good literacy skills is far more about teaching a passion for texts and communication. Teachers feel constrained by their tick boxes and cannot explore with the pupils.’*
- **Enjoyment:** *‘The current ways in which literacy is assessed leads teachers and children away from reading and writing for sheer enjoyment. The biggest difference between those who can read and write and those who find it a challenge is that those who can have been shown how much fun it can be by parents and other significant adults. Schools need to continue conveying that message - reading for pleasure, information and writing for interesting purposes. By Year 6 writing is all about getting the right SATs level, even in the most creative of schools.’*
- **Whole-school issues:** *‘Despite training and INSET, literacy is still seen as the responsibility of the English Department rather than a whole school issue - particularly in terms of assessment. Non-English subject teachers do not assess literacy. The result of this is that students view it as a skill which only matters in English. This reinforces bad habits in their reading, writing and verbal communication.’*



#### 4) What would help your school to raise the standard of literacy achieved by each pupil?

- **Adequate funding:** *'Money to buy reading books... ensuring literacy resources are kept up to date.'*
- **Classroom support:** *'More adult support for one-to-one activities... Additional support staff to assist in the running of intervention groups and to assist in helping & encouraging struggling pupils in the lesson.'*
- **Focus on training:** *'More specialist training for staff... more training given to every class teacher.'*
- **Parental support:** *'Some responsibility put on parents to help their children to read and write... greater parental awareness of the impact that they can have in supporting their child with learning to read. Then real commitment to regular support at home.'*
- **EAL support:** *'Acknowledgement that EAL children have greater difficulties in achieving National standards. BUT their achievements should be celebrated and a different route to Literacy might be more appropriate. Teachers given a greater freedom to teach what they think the children need e.g. more talk programmes. Smaller classes so children have a better teacher /pupil ratio.'*
- **A less prescriptive literacy curriculum:** *'A less overloaded literacy framework! Greater emphasis on enjoyment of high quality texts put at the heart of literacy learning, more opportunities for teachers to share their practice within and between schools.'*
- **Focus on speaking and listening:** *'Staff (both teachers and TAs) who understand how to speak with children. Children cannot write until they can speak and many of our children do not have adequate spoken language (not just EAL). They need constant opportunities to practise spoken language and staff that are able to facilitate this.'*
- **One-to-one literacy programmes:** *'Continuation of 1 to 1 tuition and Reading Recovery programme.'*
- **Early intervention:** *'Continued support for Sure Start Movement programmes and information for parents on the importance of physical activity.'*
- **Change in assessment:** *'A move away from narrowly focused testing that tries to reduce literacy to a quantitative skill that can be totted up like a Maths test.'*
- **Smaller class sizes:** *'Smaller classes - 30 5-6 yr olds in one class is too much.'*
- **Teachers teaching:** *'In poorer areas too much time has to be spent each day on the PHSE social issues. We have to be social workers, surrogate mums and dads, crowd control experts! Then last of all comes the teaching... The staff working in unison, with a high profile literacy co-ordinator spearheading change, specialised (one-to-one, small group) support for all pupils with special needs and a SENCO whose focus is purely on those pupils with special needs.'*
- **ICT:** *'Resources such as Kindles would enthuse some reluctant readers.'*

## Headline summary of written submissions

### GL Assessment

The fact that literacy (though intrinsic to an ability to access the curriculum) is not an overt secondary education subject means it is not formally monitored or taught.

A further barrier to literacy concerns teacher training. Selection of the best intervention is dependent upon a sound understanding of assessment results and what they demonstrate about a pupil's reading capacity.

GL Assessment advises the following recommendations:

- School policy should emphasise that all teachers are responsible for pupil literacy
- School management should record robust data on their pupil's literacy rates
- Improve teaching training of assessments so that teachers have the best information.

It is vital that assessments and interventions are tailored to the specific needs of pupils. If the assessment is correctly administered, analysed and its results properly understood, this will enable teachers to select the right intervention. Since all teachers are responsible for SEN and literacy, they need to be able to identify potential literacy difficulties. Ensuring teachers are well trained to identify and overcome a range of barriers to learning should increase early identification and raise literacy standards.

### Keith Holland and Associates

Any comprehensive investigation of the causes of literacy difficulty must take account of the physical factors that impede the acquisition of skills for learning, and the key skill in this regard is vision.

Children cannot read efficiently, write easily, and spell accurately if their visual system is unstable. Problems with how the eyes team up, focus and scan around the page are probably the commonest causes of under-achievement today, and yet there is no structured screening or investigation available in the UK.

Some studies have suggested that 20% of children have visual problems that affect learning. With 11 million children in Britain, this represents **170,000** children in each year group across the UK who is underachieving because of a correctable problem. And yet less than 10% of children get their eyes tested – and those that do will not normally have the right skills assessed during an NHS sight test – most will be examined purely for eye health issues and distance vision, and the subtle vision problems affecting reading and learning will go unchecked.

The key skills for reading efficiently include maintaining accurate focus, using the two eyes together effortlessly at a close working distance and tracking or scanning text sequentially over time. Problems with any of these **will** affect efficiency, and lead to symptoms.

Judicious use of glasses to reduce visual stress has been shown to be timely and effective in developing literacy skills.

There has been much publicity in the use of coloured filters. There is a long heritage of using training activities and exercises to build visual skills, and enhance vision-based thinking skills.

The role of visual factors in learning and education is currently not considered in the training syllabus for UK optometrists. There is no funding for this work within either the health or education budgets. No national screening of children's vision is carried out within schools in England and Scotland (Wales is considering a scheme at the present time).

### Audrey Major

The implementation of fully funded in-service training so that all teachers are enabled to make sound judgements about the barriers to learning.

Ensuring all teaching assistants have basic training in how children learn, including learning to read.

Less emphasis on offering prescriptive “fix-it” solutions to the “problem” of literacy, and greater emphasis upon recognising the significance and impact of teachers supporting the differentiation of the curriculum.

The recognition that early years teachers in particular require time to assess children’s needs, and plan and implement differentiation.

A Review of support received from outside agencies, especially speech and language therapy, particularly in relation to levels of provision for school age children nationwide, with recommendations or statutory guidance to health authorities

A Review of the current provision of Early Year SEN advisory teaching posts nationwide with statutory guidance to local authorities

A consideration given to establishing a new, more equitable, distribution of government funding between secondary and primary schools to allow greater funding at the foundational stages of learning.

Encouraging public recognition of the complexity of the process of learning to read for many children, and the complexity of teaching in this context

A realistic view to be taken by policy makers, of the changing make up of the school population.

Despite decades of debate and many shelves full of academic research there is still no agreed single approach which is effective in teaching all children to read, and to imply that one exists is disingenuous

The ergonomics of the classroom environment should receive the same attention as the work place.

More attention should be given to visual perceptual difficulties, including the use of appropriate colour contrast and font in technology as well as printed text.

### **National Association for Primary Education**

When we teach children to read we are teaching not only the skill but also the human attitudes and assumptions about utility and personal reward which are characteristic of a reader. For this reason it is important that the teaching methods we employ bring pleasure and reward to children including those who are just beginning to make sense of the hieroglyphics on the page.

Reaching level three or four by the age of 11 will not lead to further progress but even to regression unless the children are growing as readers in the fullest sense and are personally motivated to read.

The link between policy and practice is at best tenuous, policy influences rather than directs. It is likely that a majority of primary schools will continue to embed the teaching of synthetic phonics within a more balanced approach. Our training and experience make us aware that there is no one panacea which guarantees that all children will become readers.

The most serious challenge to continuity in the teaching of reading is within the transition between key stages two and three. This transition, coming at a time when many children are emerging as self motivated readers, is in general handled very badly.

Insufficient attention is given in years seven and eight to the needs of children as readers, particularly those who have made a beginning to literacy but who remain in need of one to one or small group teaching as they move towards induction into the adult culture of reading.

### **National Literacy Association**

NLA advocates and campaigns for:

- a less prescriptive, more creative approach to reading and other aspects of literacy which recognises that children learn in different ways and progress at different rates. However, every child needs to experience the fun, pleasure and enjoyment of becoming literate.

- more emphasis on the importance of developing the skills of listening and speaking – a curriculum that includes storytelling, reading aloud, drama and role play.
- children's diversity to be reflected and celebrated in books. We want to see imaginative and inspirational learning materials that give a positive view of different cultures, religions, gender, abilities and disabilities.
- giving teachers and children more scope for developing and exploring creative approaches to reading, writing and other literacy skills.
- greater access to books and other reading materials for children from backgrounds where reading skills are poor or not always seen as a priority.
- training and support for teachers, carers, other professionals and parents on the imaginative and appropriate use of ICT, including ebooks and other new technologies.
- a further expansion of support for disadvantaged parents of preschool children to enable them to help their children.

### **National Literacy Trust**

The impact of the home learning environment on literacy acquisition cannot be overstated. In fact throughout childhood only 16% of time is spent in school and the rest is spent with families and within communities.

The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education Project found that while the social class and levels of education of parents were related to child outcomes, the early year's home learning environment was more important than family socio-economic status and income effects.

In the UK 60% of prisoners are said to have difficulties with their basic literacy, far higher than the 16% of the general population.

As the government strives to ensure that synthetic phonics and the mechanics of reading are taught consistently and effectively across all schools, there is also a need to assess the comprehension and motivational factors which follow this.

The changing policy landscape at both a national and local level provides a framework in which businesses, community groups and others can work to promote literacy and the impact it can have.

### **The National Union of Teachers**

In the Union's experience, there are general conditions which can be created in schools which are the basis of effective practice for the teaching of reading:

- schools should have a whole school approach to the teaching of reading;
- reading should be part of a school's integrated approach to the teaching of literacy, and as such should be developed along with children's writing, speaking and listening skills;
- a school's approach to teaching reading should ideally involve teachers and parents working together, with a shared understanding that reading should be for meaning and enjoyment as well as an essential skill; and
- schools need to have whole-school diagnostic methods of assessing children's progress in reading, which can both inform the practice of subsequent teachers and communicate to parents the continuing needs and achievements of their children.

Currently one of the most pervasive myths about the way children are taught to read is that synthetic phonics are rarely, if ever used. The Government's proposals for a Year 1 Phonics Screening Check appear to be predicated on this basis and may have been conceived as a means of enforcing compliance with the Government's policy on this issue.

The NUT believes that the active encouragement of reading for pleasure should be a core part of every child's English curriculum entitlement, whatever their background or attainment, as extensive reading and exposure to a wide range of texts make a huge contribution to students' educational achievement.

Much greater attention should also be given to the development of children's spoken language and the potential of drama and role play to aid language development in the primary phase.

### **The Prince's Trust**

Over 10 percent of 16-24 year olds in the UK have no qualifications.<sup>1</sup> Compared to other OECD countries, the UK has one of the highest proportions of 15-19 year olds outside education and one of the greatest wage penalties for leaving education without secondary qualifications.<sup>2</sup> These young people are more likely to be from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Our research estimates the cost of educational underachievement for the current generation of young people aged 17-24 at £22 billion<sup>3</sup>.

We work in partnership with schools and outside mainstream education provision, such as Pupil Referral Units and Young Offending Institutions, to run our Prince's Trust xl clubs.

Most Prince's Trust xl clubs provide a personal development programme aimed at young people aged 13-19 at risk of underachievement or exclusion from school.

Together, young people work towards The Prince's Trust Qualifications accredited by Ofqual, which gives young people an award, certificate or diploma sized qualification in five activity areas including citizenship and entrepreneurship. Last year (2010/11) we ran 1,084 clubs, supporting 11,552 young people. 98% of whom were educational underachievers (at risk of not reaching Level 2 – 5 GCSEs A\*-C).

Advisers' views on what works:

- One to one or small group work
- Being associated with something positive
- Teacher's targets
- Taking into account young people's environments
- Consistency across primary and secondary schools
- The influence of factors such as technology and transitions between school stages

### **Scholastic Ltd**

Everything we do is designed to help children in the classroom learn. We ensure resources match current guidance and link to the curriculum. The things we would need is greater communication and collaboration – in practical terms, this means access to curriculum and guidance well in advance of publication.

In terms of what we do already, every year we give one million books to schools through our Book Fairs and Book Clubs – this is through the commission schools earn on hosting either (or both) of those services. Since Book Fairs started 21 years ago, we have given over 21 million books to schools in the UK. These books give attention to the needs and particular challenges of boys reading and their engagement with books – we are committed to providing good quality age appropriate professionally chosen books specifically with their needs and interests in mind.

### **The School Library Association**

The recent report from the National Literacy Trust (2010) *Literacy: State of the Nation*<sup>4</sup> shows a rather grim picture of recent literacy rates and the negative impact on social responsibility, workplace and educational achievement of lower literacy rates. Literacy is the key life skill – enabling active participation in all areas of life.

Literacy rates have risen but are currently perceived to be at a plateau, though in international comparisons we are perceived to have dropped in the ratings (PIRLS (2006)<sup>5</sup> and PISA 2010)<sup>6</sup>. It

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<sup>1</sup> The Prince's Trust, (2010). The Cost of Exclusion

<sup>2</sup> OECD, (2010). Education at a Glance. Indicator A1: To what level have adults studied? Accessed at: [http://www.oecd.org/document/52/0,3746,en\\_2649\\_39263238\\_45897844\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html#d](http://www.oecd.org/document/52/0,3746,en_2649_39263238_45897844_1_1_1_1,00.html#d)

<sup>3</sup> The Prince's Trust (2010) The Cost of Exclusion

<sup>4</sup> National Literacy Trust (2010) *Literacy: State of the Nation*. A Picture of Literacy in the UK today. Available at [http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0000/3816/FINAL\\_Literacy\\_State\\_of\\_the\\_Nation\\_-\\_30\\_March\\_2010.pdf](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0000/3816/FINAL_Literacy_State_of_the_Nation_-_30_March_2010.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (2006) available at [http://timssandpirls.bc.edu/pirls2006/intl\\_rpt.html](http://timssandpirls.bc.edu/pirls2006/intl_rpt.html)

seems that children are more able with the mechanics of reading but have lost the enjoyment of wider reading – which is so important for motivation, health etc.

The lack of a coherent support for school libraries and their proven impact early in children's education seems a huge anomaly – they are not the total answer but a well run and active library can fully support all the literacy teaching and learning within a school.

Good practice can be seen in many school libraries, SLA makes it a major plank of its mission to enable sharing this good practice to the benefit of all students in schools by supporting the development and sustainability of good school libraries.

Our concern is that students in schools without school libraries will not have access to a wide range of learning and reading resources to support their learning. A good library and, crucially, a librarian can be a huge benefit to a school as evidenced by recent research nationally, and this is supported by other international research too<sup>7</sup>.

There is a very strong relationship between reading attainment and school library use, with young people who read below the expected level for their age being almost twice more likely to say that they are not a school library user. Conversely, those who read at or above the expected level were nearly three times more likely to say that they are school library users.

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<sup>6</sup> OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (2010) available at [http://www.pisa.oecd.org/pages/0,2987,en\\_32252351\\_32235731\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.pisa.oecd.org/pages/0,2987,en_32252351_32235731_1_1_1_1_1_1_1,00.html)

<sup>7</sup> Ofsted (2006) – Good School Libraries: Making a Difference to Learning. HMI2624  
School Libraries Work (2008) – Research Foundation Paper. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Scholastic Library Publishing.

## Headline summary: the views of education organisations

A meeting was held on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2011 at the RSA with sixteen education organisations. The roundtable discussion was chaired by Baroness Perry of Southwark.

### The literacy landscape and social mobility

- There is a big issue to get 'reading for pleasure' back on to the curriculum. This is not understood by children or parents. The introduction of the reading test at six based on synthetic phonics was seen to be about decoding and not reading.
- The Ofsted report 'Excellence in English' looked towards a mixed model. Children need to be enthused to read and this becomes their springboard to achievement.
- The availability of reading books in schools and home was seen as a challenge. This paucity of reading materials was often linked to low expectations of certain socio-economic groups.
- There should be more focus in schools – both primary and secondary - on reading aloud for pleasure.
- Adult literacy issues need to be tackled as well as parental expectation and their ability to be able to read with their children will have an impact on literacy.
- There is a danger with 'cuts' in education. The impact will be upon book stock in school and we are seeing the decline in library services. The sale of school library books has gone down by 40% since 2002 and this is a concern.
- The Secretary of State has said in the press that children should be reading up to 50 books a year and that successful schools give a high profile to reading for pleasure, but policy seems to go against this.
- It was agreed that literacy skills have never been so important and that a focus should be placed more on communication. Speaking and listening skills are vital but there is less and less space now in the curriculum to tackle this. Phonics work is important but so is comprehension. Literacy has to be built into the whole curriculum.

### Government policy

- The curriculum has been looked at in a fragmented way and should be considered more as a learning journey. This would help with problems such as transition and make our system more consistent and coherent.
- Reading is a skill that needs to be taught but enjoyment of reading also needs to be there. There is a danger that reading could become a school exercise and not change the children as people.
- The assessment system is a big problem and drives everything in schools. Until accountability is addressed in terms of tests and league tables and we are clear about what we are trying to assess then the situation will not improve.
- It is a media myth that teachers do not use phonics to teach reading. They see this as one part of the mix as 'one size does not fit all'.
- The reading test at six stands in danger of 'skewing teaching'. It is not clear about what will happen to those children that 'fail'. 'Phonics' and 'reading' are being used interchangeably by policy makers and they are not the same thing at all. Reading isolated words is not reading for meaning.
- Accountability should be a focus, but in important areas such as secondary school literacy. Head teachers are perhaps not accountable enough for literacy levels in secondary schools.
- The use of 'government approved' lists for reading and phonics materials was not seen as acceptable and was counter to policy views giving more autonomy to schools and treating teachers as professionals.
- A higher level of skills will be required in teacher training, especially in areas such as dyslexia. We need to look more closely at the skills of the workforce. There was a concern that many teachers have only taught using the National Strategies framework. They may need more support to manage the transition of new policy.
- The focus on phonics in reading seems to have lessened interest in writing. Writing scores are lower than reading for SATs tests. A wider literacy debate needs to be had.
- If costs in education are an issue then policy needs to look to the longer term. Research has shown that 70% of young offenders/prisoners have a reading age of less than 11. The knock-on effects of poor literacy are a huge cost to the nation, so investment strategies should be clear.

### **Challenges and barriers**

- ICT and advances in technology are a massive opportunity to encourage and develop reading, for example through devices. ICT tends to be more motivational – especially with boys.
- This technology still needs the ability to be able to read so it is not substituting skills; rather literacy enables the use of more effective technology.
- Both traditional literacy and 'media literacy' are essential for employability.
- Changing parental attitude and support for the home is still a challenge.
- The Tickell review on Early Years offers some interesting perspectives on links to the home environment and how to involve parents in their children's learning.

### **Successful approaches and recommendations**

- Summer school funding was a successful model for 'catching up' but also with involving young people in different approaches to literacy outside school.
- There needs to be a focus on key areas such as transition between key stage 2 and key stage 3 as there is a fall-off of children's attainment here. The culture of reading from primary needs to be considered in what happens at secondary and must continue to grow.
- The involvement of industry in helping young people to read has had some success, e.g. Reading Partners schemes where people from local businesses come into school to read with children every week.
- One-to-one tuition has had an impact but as funding declines this will have to stop.
- The Dyslexia-friendly School Scheme has had some success as it looks across policy areas, from the classroom to parents.
- Reading Recovery programmes have been very successful (Every Child A Reader) but they tend to be expensive.
- Continue with projects such as Bookstart. This gets books into homes and encourages a variety of reading strategies for example reading with fathers.
- Good practice needs to be identified and disseminated more widely, but this is difficult as many government agencies have now gone.



## Headline summary: the views of the education supply industry

A meeting was held on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2011 at Portcullis House, Westminster, with 16 companies from the education supply industry. The roundtable discussion was chaired by Dominic Savage, Director General of BESA, and Lord Knight of Weymouth.

### The literacy landscape and social mobility

- It was felt that children and young people experience 'literacy' as a value-laden term – it would be better to talk about 'communication'. There is a notion of literacy as utilitarian. Focusing on functionality gets in the way of joy and phonics is reinforcing that.
- The love of reading has to come before process. Children want to be read to because they want to be able to get to the story. At the moment there's an approach of, 'let's go and do literacy'.
- The new phonics test at six will measure success in phonics rather than success in reading. The phonics test also implies to parents that if the score is okay then the child can read and so they can step back. What about reading for meaning?
- 'Literacy' is seen as dull – we need to make it creative to develop a purposeful love of reading. 'Literacy' is a label that we need to move away from.
- Reading isn't seen as being 'cool'. You can have a creative lesson where there's great interest, for example on an interactive whiteboard, but children may not realise that's encouraging their literacy.
- English teachers at secondary schools say, 'We're English teachers not reading teachers' and don't know how to respond when their pupils can't read. The system needs to change.
- There have been so many u-turns, 'fads and fashions' and this creates a cycle of frustration and failures from the beginning.
- Businesses want literate and creative employees, who can respond quickly, because they'll then add value and profit. Different jobs will require a different balance of oracy, analytical and written skills. But there are 'norms and acceptabilities' that we have to adhere to.
- The 'one size fits all approach' is flattening out aspiration and achievement, which is failing low achievers and switching off the brightest. There's also a cultural bias in reading lists, with what's acceptable at what age.
- There is also the issue of teacher training. It's a distraction to discuss phonics as the key to successful literacy; it's about the quality of teaching and learning.

### Government policy

- The ring-fencing of funding for phonics materials will affect all areas, but the impact will mean 'we lose more from the top than we gain from the bottom'. Literacy must be taught in every lesson.
- Teachers need the ability to be able to choose the materials that will deal with their own particular problems, not from a prescribed list.
- From an industry point of view the ring-fenced funding will mean that over £80 million can be spent on phonics and this will skew the entire resources market at key stage 1 and early primary.
- The phonics test at six won't diagnose. It will give 'false positives' because children can identify words and non-words creating the impression that they can read, and it won't catch those who can't read.
- Any testing needs to be relevant. It is sad that teachers teach to the test because that's how they're judged. Children are being taught to get good test scores because that's how a school will be judged.
- Good teachers will use the test appropriately but many will not be able to as they have been teaching with only National Strategies frameworks throughout their career. More teacher training on new approaches will be necessary.

### Challenges and barriers

- That there is a focus on reading is a success. We need to move away from just phonics – children should be taught to read for pleasure. This is where there is a great danger in prescribed reading lists.
- Family reading and social mobility are key here. Seeing literacy as a functional process disadvantages those without social capital. We need to inspire a love of reading. Physical

involvement of parents is also important to encourage, boys and their fathers in order to break the cycle.

- Early language skills and vocabulary, and talking to and with a child is important. Bookstart for example would have helped to break the cycle.
- Technology cannot be ignored. There are homes without books but with computers. You can introduce them to literacy through computers. Kindle in the USA have recently come to an agreement about lending ebooks.
- The most powerful forms of personalised devices such as smartphones are not used in schools because of behaviour, management or internet safety rules. This is a waste of a resource but also of motivation.
- Studies have found that found reading comprehension in Years 5 and 6 was good, but then it began to drop significantly. This may be a problem with secondary school transfer and the complete change of curriculum and approach at secondary. This is a move away from a reading culture. Literacy is a secondary school issue as well but many English teachers don't accept it. We need a reading curriculum.
- We need to accept that children don't 'learn in a straight line'. There are different ways and different learning preferences; this is why a focus on only synthetic phonics is not appropriate.
- Teacher training and teacher skills are an issue. Some of the matched funding could also go to increased teacher and teaching assistant training. In teacher training, we should share good practice, have primary and secondary schools working together, respecting each other's professionalism.
- Letters and Sounds gave those who hadn't done phonics in teacher training a useful structure. The problem with all of these schemes, they become the norm when teachers should be building on them and adapting them for their own purposes.
- The resources industry is focused on creating and supplying materials that help children learn in the classroom. To do this better for the benefit of all, the industry should be involved more closely in policy change so they can develop resources and approaches in line with policy and teacher and pupil need. In this way, resources would be available when needed, help policy-makers deliver programmes more effectively and reach their targets, and ensure a more cost-effective and timely delivery of literacy outcomes.

### **Successful approaches and recommendations**

- We need joined up work with BIS for home reading skills, MoJ for offenders, DWP for benefits claimants, CLG for looked after children, DH for educational psychologists and speech therapy.
- In the US you have to re-certify as a teacher every three years and therefore CPD is very important. The previous government suggested this. It would improve attitudes towards professionalism and ensure a commitment to CPD as in other professions. Education conferences are often inspiring, but hardly any teachers go. In America, re-certification is valued and attendance at CPD events gives promotion points.
- Investment in technology is important. The power of smartphones is latent, but the system (curriculum, assessment pressure) needs to change to enable these to be used.
- Funding needs to be given directly to schools to deal with their own issues. Ring-fencing rarely works.
- Keep the emphasis on reading, but not the prescription through phonics. Teachers are professionals, but they need more support; for example as professional purchasers and valuing CPD.
- It is more appropriate to take a holistic view of literacy. This means that the whole curriculum and the whole child are taken into account.
- Try new approaches to deal with problem areas. Virtual schools could become home schools for those vulnerable children whose literacy is generally poor, so that records stay with the looked-after child.