



Department  
for Education

# **Reading: the next steps**

**Supporting higher standards in schools**

**March 2015**

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## Foreword by Nick Gibb MP, Minister of State for School Reform



Almost six years ago, I had an experience at a primary school in London which has stuck with me ever since. I observed a one-to-one reading lesson with an 11-year-old girl. Her teacher was showing her flashcards of simple words. She was barely literate, despite seven years of primary school. The girl managed to read the word “even”. I asked the teacher if the child could read the word with the first “e” covered up. She could not. It became clear that this girl was struggling to read because she did not know the sounds of the alphabet or how to blend them. She had been drilled to recognise the word “even”, but not taught how to read.

I do not know where that young person is today. The statistics on child literacy, however, tell a depressing story. Of those children who failed to achieve a level 4 in English at the end of primary school in 2009, only one in 10 went on to achieve five good GCSEs, including English and Maths<sup>1</sup>. The sad likelihood is that the girl I met six years ago is now denied the opportunities and possibilities open to those who benefitted from more effective teaching of reading.

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<sup>1</sup> Underlying data from 2014 unamended Key Stage 2 to 4 subject transition matrices

It is for this reason that the government has consistently prioritised raising standards in reading. Schools have no more fundamental responsibility than teaching children to read, and the government has taken decisive action to provide the necessary support.

We recognised the weight of research which demonstrates that the most effective way to teach a child to read is a robust programme of systematic synthetic phonics. This is especially the case for younger pupils, and for those struggling with reading. To support schools to adopt this approach, we published core criteria for effective phonics programmes and provided funding for phonics training and resources from 2011 to 2013.

In 2012, we introduced a phonics screening check for pupils at the end of year 1. The simple check asks pupils to read 40 words, of which 20 are pseudo-words. This allows teachers to identify those pupils with a genuine grasp of decoding, and those in need of further support. Since 2012, the proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard has increased from 58% to 74% in 2014. That is the equivalent of 102,000 more 6-year-old children on track to reading more effectively, as a direct result of the focus on phonics and the hard work of teachers. Our new phonics partnership grant programme will build on this success.

As children begin to master decoding, it is vital that they also begin to read with speed and fluency. These are essential skills for becoming a confident, mature reader, and are best developed by instilling in children a love of literature.

The announcements set out in this document will do just that. We will fund a new programme to help primary schools set up book clubs for key stage 2 pupils. We would like all children to be active members of a public library, so we are asking all schools to arrange library membership for their Year 3 pupils. And we will fund resources to help primary teachers encourage their pupils to read and learn poetry, as well as continuing to support the existing poetry recitation competition, 'Poetry by Heart'.

We have made substantial and rapid progress since 2010, but we cannot stand still. The Government's plan for education is raising education standards for all, and narrowing the achievement gap between disadvantaged students and their peers. At the heart of this is a very simple insight: the importance of reading.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Nick Gibb". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Nick Gibb MP**  
**Minister of State for School Reform**

## Executive summary

Pupils who can read are overwhelmingly more likely to succeed at school, achieve good qualifications, and subsequently enjoy a fulfilling and rewarding career. In addition to its substantial practical benefits, reading is one of life's profound joys.

International benchmarks demonstrate that standards of literacy in England are behind those of many of our international competitors. In response, the government's plan for education has recognised the vital importance of reading, and has consistently prioritised raising standards of literacy in schools.

Since 2010, our focus has been upon improving reading overall, and narrowing the attainment gap between disadvantaged students and their peers. A new national curriculum, with a focus on phonic knowledge and on encouraging reading for pleasure, is raising standards. The gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers is closing. Despite these improvements, too many students still leave primary school unable to read at a standard that will ensure they are well placed to succeed at secondary school.

There is a substantial body of evidence which demonstrates that systematic synthetic phonics is the most effective method for teaching all children to read. Progress has been made since the introduction of the phonics screening check in 2012 and the funding for phonics training and resources provided by the government. To build on this, we have announced a phonics partnership grant programme that will enable excellent schools to work with others to improve the quality of phonics teaching.

As pupils master decoding, it is vital that they are supported to develop speed and fluency, so that they become confident, mature readers. The best way to do this is to instil a passion for reading. Evidence shows that as the amount a child reads increases, their reading attainment improves, which in turn encourages them to read more. Reading widely also increases their vocabulary.

Book clubs are an excellent way of encouraging pupils to read broadly and frequently, and of improving both reading and spoken language skills. **The government is announcing today [5 March 2015] funding for a new programme to help primary schools set up book clubs for key stage 2 pupils.**

Libraries also have an important role to play in children's reading habits. **The government would like all children to be active members of a public library, and we are asking all schools to arrange library membership for all their Year 3 pupils.**

As children move into secondary school pupils will develop an appreciation of literature and start to read critically. They will be introduced to a wide range of genres, historical periods, forms and authors. More rigorous GCSEs will ensure they study the best of English literature.

The government is also committed to encouraging the promotion of poetry in schools. **We will continue to support the poetry recitation competition 'Poetry by Heart' in the coming year and we will fund resources to help primary teachers encourage their pupils to read and learn poetry.**

## Why reading matters

1. Nothing is more important in education than ensuring that every child can read well. Pupils who can read are overwhelmingly more likely to succeed at school, achieve good qualifications, and subsequently enjoy a fulfilling and rewarding career. Those who cannot will find themselves at constant disadvantage.
2. This gap – between those with a firm grasp of literacy and those without – is established early in a child’s education and widens over time<sup>2</sup>. In 2014, only one in three pupils who had just reached the current expected standard in English when in key stage 2 achieved five good GCSEs, including English and mathematics. By contrast, almost three in four of those with a high level 4 in English achieved this GCSE standard<sup>3</sup>. Girls still outperform boys in reading at all key stages, although the gap in attainment at level 4 or above at key stage two is narrowing: between 2011 and 2014 it fell from eight to four percentage points<sup>4</sup>.
3. Poor literacy can hold people back throughout their adult lives. Adults with good literacy skills (the equivalent of a good English Language GCSE or better) are much more likely to be in work than those with lower levels of literacy: 83% compared to 55%. Data from the recent OECD Survey of Adult Skills show that unemployed adults are twice as likely to have weak literacy skills as those in full-time employment. Better literacy skills are also associated with higher earnings. The same survey found a 14% rise in wages associated with an increase of one standard deviation in literacy proficiency in England<sup>5</sup>.
4. Literacy skills are not just important for people’s employment and economic prospects; they also have a strong impact on wider social outcomes. For example, adults in England with low literacy levels have twice the odds of reporting low levels of trust as their peers with high literacy, and three times the odds of reporting poor health<sup>6</sup>.
5. In addition to its substantial practical benefits, reading is one of life’s profound joys. Every child should have the opportunity to experience the pleasure and enrichment which comes from reading a great novel, biography or play. The canon of English literature – from Christopher Marlowe to Ian McEwan – belongs to every English speaker, whatever their background and no matter where they live. Full participation in this intellectual and cultural heritage depends upon universal, high standards of literacy.

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<sup>2</sup> Underlying data from 2014 unamended Key Stage 2 to 4 subject transition matrices

<sup>3</sup> 33% of pupils who had achieved level 4c; 54% of pupils who had achieved level 4b and 73% of pupils who had achieved level 4a at key stage 2 in English went on to achieve 5 A\*-C GCSEs, including English and mathematics, in 2014. Source: underlying data from 2014 unamended Key Stage 2 to 4 subject transition matrices.

<sup>4</sup> SFR50/2014

<sup>5</sup> OECD (2013) *OECD Skills Outlook 2013: First Results From the Survey of Adult Skill*.

<sup>6</sup> OECD (2013) *OECD Skills Outlook 2013: First Results From the Survey of Adult Skills*.

6. Evidence shows, however, that too many students are currently failing to reach this goal. International benchmarks demonstrate that standards of literacy in England are behind those of many of our international competitors. At secondary level, 17 countries or jurisdictions significantly outperformed England in the 2012 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). The 2012 PISA results also showed that 17% of our 15-year-olds did not achieve a minimum level of proficiency in literacy. This compares to only 3% in top-performing Shanghai. The gap between our highest and lowest performers is significantly above average: over two-thirds of OECD countries had a smaller difference between the highest and lowest reading scores than England<sup>7</sup>.

7. This poor performance is the legacy of a decade of stagnation. In the ten years to 2012, our absolute and relative position in the assessments did not improve, despite substantial increases on spending on education over the same period<sup>8</sup>. The 2012 OECD International Survey of Adult Skills reported that the UK is the only OECD country where young adults did not have better literacy skills than those nearing retirement age<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> OECD (2013) *PISA 2012 United Kingdom Country-specific Overview*

<sup>8</sup> OECD (2014) *Education at a Glance 2014: OECD Indicators*

<sup>9</sup> OECD (2013) *PISA 2012 United Kingdom Country-specific Overview*



## Progress so far

8. The government's plan for education has recognised the vital importance of reading, and has consistently prioritised raising standards of literacy in schools.

9. Since 2010, our focus has been upon improving reading overall, and narrowing the attainment gap between disadvantaged students and their peers. Funded early education is securing high quality early years provision that helps support young children's language development. The new national curriculum, introduced in September 2014, includes a strong emphasis upon phonic knowledge, teaching young pupils to decode the words on the page. A catch-up premium of £500 per pupil is helping schools to support pupils who have not achieved a level 4 or above in reading when they move up to secondary school.

10. For disadvantaged pupils, who are more likely to be behind in their reading<sup>10</sup>, the government will, by 2016, have made available £8.8 billion of additional resources through the Pupil Premium. From April this year, this will be extended into the early years, providing £50 million in additional funding to support the workforce to meet the needs of disadvantaged three and four-year-olds.

11. The evidence is clear that children learn to read best when they are taught using a robust programme of systematic synthetic phonics. To help schools choose a high quality phonics programme, we publish core criteria that define the key features of an effective programme. To boost the quality of phonics teaching, we have provided match-funding for systematic synthetic phonics products and training. This enabled schools with key stage 1 pupils to embed and refine their teaching of phonics, and supported catch-up work for key stage 2 pupils. Over 14,000 schools have benefited from £23.7 million in match funding.

12. To help schools measure progress, we introduced a statutory phonics screening check in 2012 for pupils at the end of Year 1, following a pilot in 2011. The simple check asks each pupil to read 40 words, and their teacher measures how many they decode successfully. This helps schools to identify pupils who need extra help, and enables them to benchmark their pupils' performance against national standards.

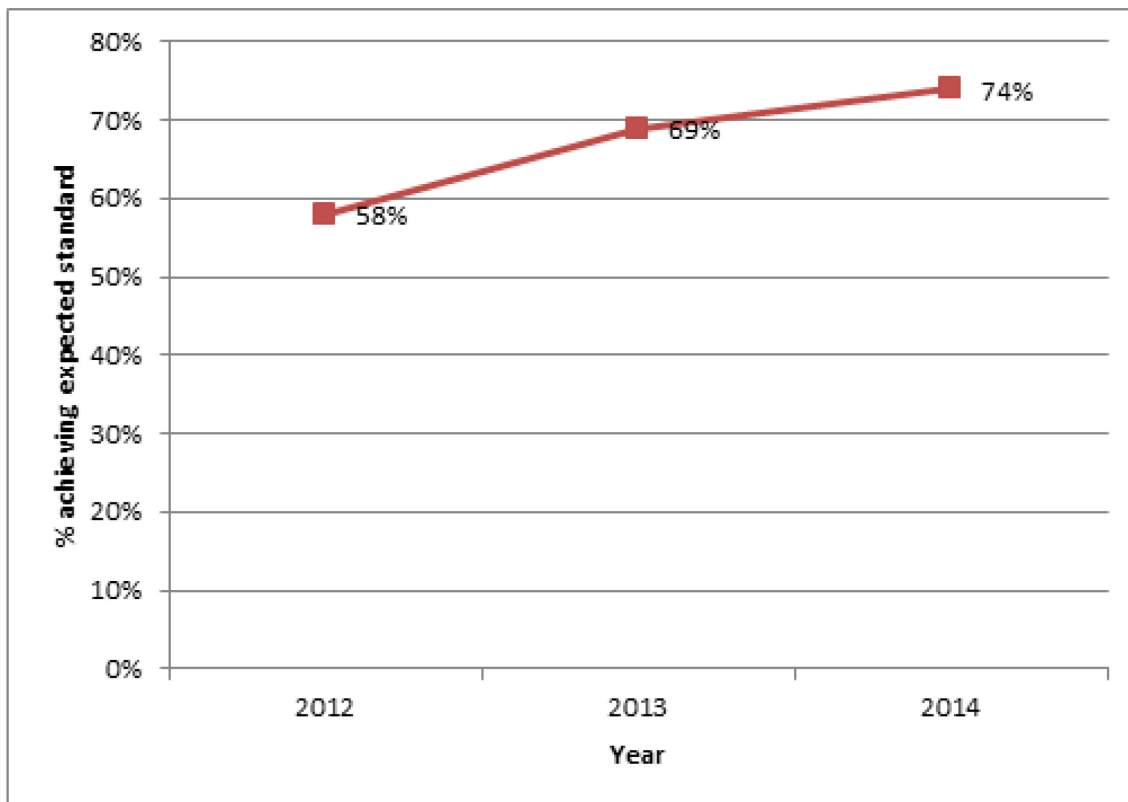
13. Our approach has already led to improved standards. Since the phonics screening check was introduced nationwide, the proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard of phonic decoding in year 1 has increased by 16 percentage points. In 2012, 58% of

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<sup>10</sup> Nearly two in ten disadvantaged pupils (18%) did not achieve the expected standard in reading at key stage 2 in 2014, compared with nearly one in ten non-disadvantaged pupils (8%). SFR50/2014

pupils nationally reached the expected standard, rising to 74% in 2014<sup>11</sup>. This rise is equivalent to 102,000 more 6-year-old children reading more effectively, based on the 2014 cohort<sup>12</sup>, and is shown in the chart below.

**Percentage of pupils achieving the expected standard in phonics between 2012 and 2014**



14. Achieving this standard is a strong indicator of a pupil's later performance in key stage 1 assessments: 99% of pupils who did so in 2013 went on to achieve level 2 or above in reading at the end of key stage 1<sup>13</sup>. By the end of year 2, in 2014, 88% of pupils nationally had achieved the expected standard (this includes the proportion who reached the standard in 2013 while in year 1). This was an increase of 3 percentage points from 85% in 2013<sup>14</sup>.

15. At key stage 1, the percentage of pupils achieving level 2 or above in reading has increased by 5 percentage points since 2011, rising from 85% to 90% in 2014. The rise in recent years follows a period of stagnation: between 2005 and 2011 there was little change in attainment at level 2 or above in reading. At level 3 or above attainment in reading fell slightly between 2005 and 2008, remained stable between 2008 and 2011

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<sup>11</sup> SFR 34/2014

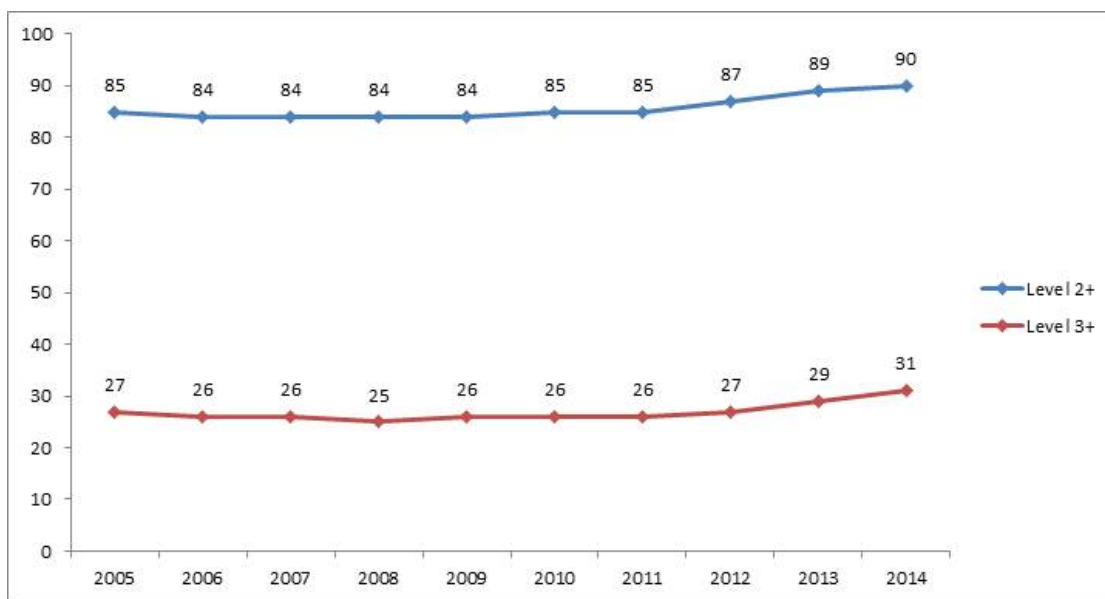
<sup>12</sup> SFR 34/2014 and Department for Education underlying data

<sup>13</sup> SFR34/2014

<sup>14</sup> SFR 34/2014

and has increased by 5 percentage points since, from 26% to 31%<sup>15</sup>. This is shown in the chart below.

**Attainment at key stage 1 reading between 2005 and 2014**



16. At key stage 2, the percentage of pupils achieving level 4 or above in reading has increased by 6 percentage points since 2010, from 83% to 89% in 2014. This was a three percentage point increase from 2013. The proportion of pupils achieving this standard fluctuated between 2005 and 2009 before decreasing in 2010<sup>16</sup>. Half of pupils now achieve level 5 or above (up 6 percentage points from 2013)<sup>17</sup>.

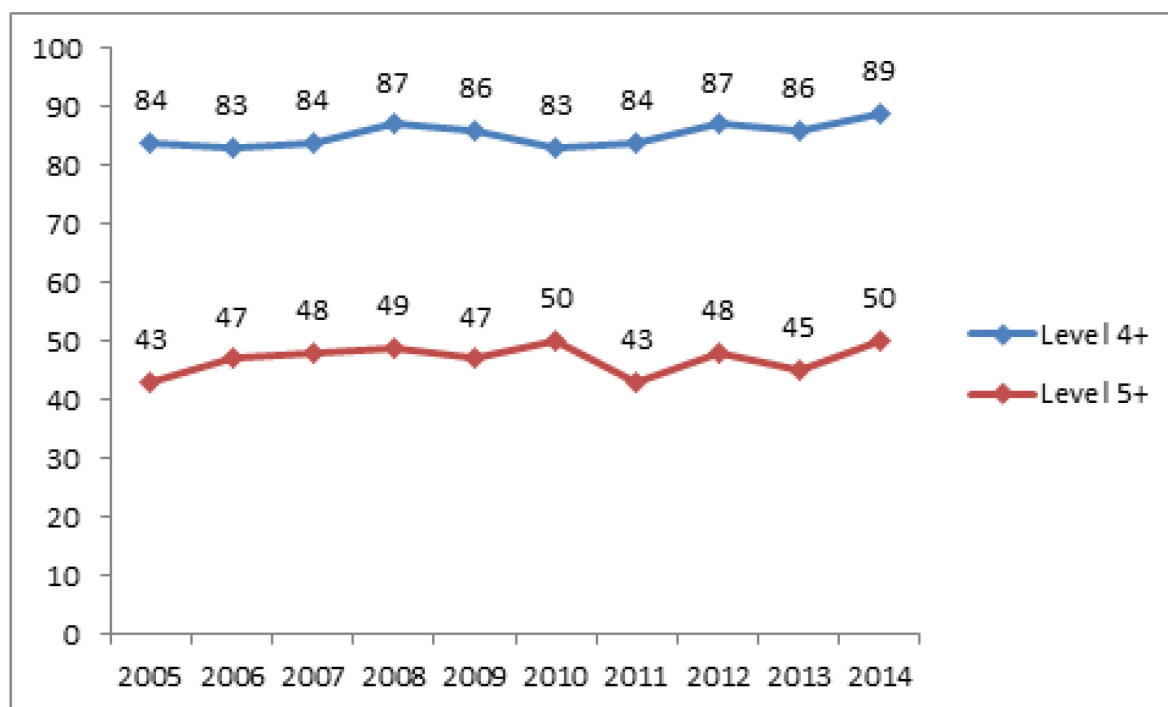
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<sup>15</sup> Figures in this paragraph have been sourced from: 2005 - SFR 04/2006; 2006-2009 – Summary sheet: SFR33/2010v2; and 2010-2014 – Table 10 SFR34/2014.

<sup>16</sup> In 2010 around 26% of the 15,518 maintained schools that were expected to administer the key stage 2 tests did not do so. The schools that did administer the test in 2010 are broadly representative of all schools at national level.

<sup>17</sup> Source of all figures in this paragraph is Table 1 SFR50/2014

Attainment at key stage 2 reading between 1997 and 2014



17. There is also evidence that the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers is closing. Taking the achievement of level 4 as a benchmark, at key stage 2, the gap between pupils who attract the pupil premium and their peers has narrowed between 2011 and 2014 from 15 to 10 percentage points. Equally important, attainment in reading has increased for disadvantaged pupils from 73% in 2011 to 82% in 2014, an increase of 9 percentage points.

18. At key stage 4, the percentage of pupils achieving grades A\*-C in GCSE English has increased by 2.6 percentage points since 2010, from 70% to 72% in 2014<sup>18</sup>. Prior to 2010 there was also a steady increase in the proportion achieving these grades up from 62% in 2006<sup>19</sup>.

19. The gap in those achieving at least grade C in English GCSE between pupils who attract the pupil premium and their peers has narrowed between 2011 and 2014 from 27 to 23 percentage points<sup>20</sup>. Equally important, attainment has increased for disadvantaged pupils from 49% in 2011 to 54% in 2014, an increase of five percentage points<sup>21,22</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> SFR02/2015

<sup>19</sup> SFR01/2007

<sup>20</sup> DfE analysis of National Pupil Database

<sup>21</sup> DfE analysis of National Pupil Database

<sup>22</sup> In 2014 there were changes made to the methodology as an outcome of the Wolf Review resulting in changes to which qualifications are counted in the secondary performance tables. The figure here for 2014 was calculated using the 2013 methodology, however caution must still be taken when comparing 2014 data with previous years.

## A plan of action

20. Improvements in standards of reading since 2010 have been rapid and significant. The government is clear, however, that further work is necessary to secure universal high standards of literacy.

21. Expectations for primary schools have historically been set too low. One in five children still leave primary school unable to read at a standard<sup>23</sup> that will ensure they are well placed to succeed at secondary school. Meanwhile, 5% of pupils aged 11 cannot read better than would be expected for a 7 year-old<sup>24</sup>. Only one in five pupils who had failed to achieve a good level 4 at key stage 2 English went on to achieve five A\* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics<sup>25</sup> in 2014. Whilst 88% of pupils are now achieving the expected standard in the phonics screening check by the end of Year 2, 12% of the cohort in 2014 – equivalent to 70,800 pupils – did not<sup>26</sup>.

22. This document sets out the government's plan to ensure that all pupils are able to read well, and the evidence underpinning our approach. The first priority is to ensure that pupils learn to decode written words into the sounds and words they denote. We must then ensure that the different processes of decoding and comprehension are consolidated and developed. By instilling in pupils a love of reading and books, we can ensure that they read widely and often, choose increasingly challenging books and come to appreciate our great literary heritage.

## The importance of phonics

23. There is a substantial body of evidence which demonstrates that systematic synthetic phonics is the most effective method for teaching all children to read. Phonics teaches children how to recognise the sounds that each individual letter makes, identify the sounds that different combinations of letters make, and blend these sounds together to make a word. Children can then use this knowledge to decode new words that they see. This is the first important step in learning to read.

24. When phonics is taught in a structured way - starting with the easiest sounds, progressing through to the most complex - it is the most effective way of teaching young children to read. It is particularly helpful for five to seven-year-olds, and those struggling

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<sup>23</sup> Level 4b at key stage 2 SFR50/2014

<sup>24</sup> Level 2 or below at key stage 2. Source: Table 1 SFR50/2014

<sup>25</sup> 20% of pupils who achieved level 4c or below; 33% of pupils who achieved level 4c; 54% of pupils who achieved level 4b and 73% of pupils who achieved level 4a at key stage 2 English went on to achieve 5 A\* - C GCSEs including English and maths in 2014. Source: underlying data from 2014 unamended Key stage 2 to 4 subject transition matrices.

<sup>26</sup> SFR 34/2014 and Department for Education underlying data

with reading. Almost all children, including those from deprived backgrounds, who have good teaching of phonics will learn the skills they need to tackle new words and read full texts. They also tend to read more accurately than those taught using other methods, such as “look and say”. This includes children who find learning to read difficult, for example those who have dyslexia<sup>27</sup>.

25. The US National Reading Panel, which reported in 2000, was the most comprehensive and detailed survey of different methods for teaching reading ever produced. The panel concluded that systematic synthetic phonics teaching leads to significant benefits for pupils in pre-school until the end of primary school, and that systematic synthetic phonics had a positive and significant effect on disabled readers’ reading skills<sup>28</sup>.

26. An analysis conducted by the Universities of York and Sheffield in 2006 by Torgerson, Hall and Brooks concluded that systematic phonics teaching within a literacy-rich curriculum has a statistically significant positive effect on reading accuracy for normally developing children and for children at risk of reading failure<sup>29</sup>.

27. In 2005, a report into the efficacy of alternative methods for teaching reading was produced by the Australian National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy. It concluded: “The evidence is clear, whether from research, good practice observed in schools, advice from submissions to the Inquiry, consultations [...] that direct systematic instruction in phonics during the early years of schooling is an essential foundation for teaching children to read. [...] Moreover, where there is unsystematic or no phonics instruction,

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<sup>27</sup> For example: Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) (2015). Phonics Toolkit: <http://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/toolkit/phonics/>; Galuschka, K., Ise, E., Krick, K. and Schilte-Körne, G. (2014). Effectiveness of Treatment Approaches for Children and Adolescents with Reading Disabilities: A Meta-Analysis of Randomized Controlled Trials. *PLoS ONE* 9(2): pp1-12; Johnston, R.S. and Watson, J.E. (2005). *The Effects of Synthetic Phonics Teaching on Reading and Spelling Attainment: A seven year longitudinal study*; McArthur, G., Eve P.M., Jones, K., Banales, E., Kohnen, S. (2012). *Phonics training for English-speaking poor readers*. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev* 12: CD009115; National Reading Panel (2000a). *Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching children to read – an evidence based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction. Reports of the subgroups*; National Reading Panel (2000b). *Teaching children to read: an evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature of reading and its implications for reading instruction. Summary report*. Rose, J. (2006). *Independent Review of the Teaching of Early Reading*; Rose, J. (2009). *Identifying and Teaching Children and Young People with Dyslexia and Literacy Difficulties*; Singleton, C (2009). *Interventions for Dyslexia. A review of published evidence on the impact of specialist dyslexia teaching. Executive summary*.

<sup>28</sup> National Reading Panel (2000a). *Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching children to read – an evidence based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction. Reports of the subgroups*; National Reading Panel (2000b). *Teaching children to read: an evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature of reading and its implications for reading instruction. Summary report*.

<sup>29</sup> Torgerson, C., Hall, J. and Brooks, G. (2006). *A Systematic Review of the Research Literature on the Use of Phonics in the Teaching of Reading and Spelling*: DfES RR711.

children's literacy progress is significantly impeded, inhibiting their initial and subsequent growth in reading accuracy, fluency, writing, spelling and comprehension"<sup>30</sup>.

28. These analyses are supported by the Clackmannanshire Study, conducted by Johnston and Watson. The seven year longitudinal study concluded that systematic synthetic phonics instruction enabled children to read and spell better than those taught by alternative approaches. At the end of primary school, children had word reading which was three years and six months ahead of their chronological age, and their spelling was one year and eight months ahead<sup>31</sup>.

29. A further study, the West Dunbartonshire Literacy Initiative, was led by Professor Tommy MacKay. West Dunbartonshire is the second most deprived area in Scotland and the 10-year research project saw the authority become the first to state it had eradicated illiteracy among school-leavers. The report concluded: "Among the individual components of the intervention, the synthetic phonics study has highlighted the benefits of a strong and structured phonics emphasis. The study indicated the superiority of the synthetic over the analytic or traditional approach, and the clearest policy recommendation would be for schools to adopt this approach." Overall, the analysis identified the benefits of "the use of synthetic versus traditional phonics, in changing attitudes to reading, in making declarations of future reading achievement and in the use of intensive individual support"<sup>32</sup>.

30. This evidence informed the government's decision to introduce the phonics screening check at the end of year 1 from 2012, following a pilot in 2011. In 2012, 58% of pupils nationally reached the expected standard, rising to 74% in 2014. This rise is equivalent to 102,000 more children on track to become successful readers, as a result of the hard work of teachers and the government's determined focus on robust systematic synthetic phonics<sup>33</sup>.

31. HM Chief Inspector of Schools, Sir Michael Wilshaw, noted the success of the phonics screening check in his 2013/14 Annual Report. He found that it has "increased the attention being given to the essential early skills that pupils need for reading and writing"<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST, 2005). *Teaching Reading: report and recommendations. National inquiry into the teaching of literacy.*

<sup>31</sup> Johnston, R.S. and Watson, J.E. (2005). *The Effects of Synthetic Phonics Teaching on Reading and Spelling Attainment: A seven year longitudinal study.*

<sup>32</sup> MacKay, T. (2007). *Achieving the Vision: The Final Research Report of the West Dunbartonshire Literacy Initiative.*

<sup>33</sup> SFR 34/2014 and Department for Education underlying data

<sup>34</sup> Ofsted (2014). *The report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2013/14: Schools.*

32. While there has been good progress since 2012 in the proportion of children meeting the expected standard in the phonics screening check at the end of year 1 there is still great variation at local authority and at individual school level. We want all children of all abilities and backgrounds to master phonic decoding by the end of year 1. There are already 611 primary schools, some in the most deprived parts of the country, where at least 95% of children reached the expected standard in 2014, putting them on track to become fluent readers.

**33. To build on the funding for phonics training and resources it has already provided for schools, the government has announced a phonics partnership grant programme.**

34. Our phonics partnership grants will enable schools that achieve excellence in teaching early reading through systematic synthetic phonics to work with other schools to improve the quality of phonics teaching. Starting in September 2015, 12-15 groups of schools, reflecting a range of school circumstances, will work in partnership to develop models for raising the quality of phonics teaching. Each group will be led by a high-performing school with a track record of leading improvement activity and will include schools seeking to make rapid improvements to their phonics teaching. The support provided may include both strategic support for schools in embedding phonics across the curriculum, and practical support for improving the quality of phonics teaching. We want these models to have the potential to be adopted by other groups of schools in future years.

35. We are also concerned that in 2014 12% of children had not met the expected standard of phonic decoding by the end of year 2. We want to make sure these pupils get the support they need to catch up rapidly so that they are not further held back, and are considering what more can be done in this area.



## Case study – Ark Schools

Ark schools dedicate a significant amount of time to literacy teaching. Across Ark primary schools, the Read Write Inc systematic synthetic phonics programme is used to teach four to seven-year-old children who are learning to read and write. The programme is also used for pupils ages seven and eight who need to catch up with reading and writing.

Through synthetic phonics, children learn the combinations of letters which make all the different sounds in the English language. They learn to blend these sounds to make words and how to decode words.

Ark believes that all of their pupils will, through quality first teaching, regular assessments and targeted interventions, achieve mastery of the phonic sounds and will be proficient in decoding words. Ark schools and trustees have agreed to an aspirational target of 100% of our pupils being proficient early readers, which the phonics screening check assesses at the end of year 1.

In 2014, 88% of the pupils in Ark primary schools who took the phonics screening check in year 1 passed. At two Ark schools 100% of pupils passed the check: Ark Globe in Elephant and Castle and Ark Conway in Acton.

Highlighting how the synthetic systematic phonics method works for all children, speaking at the time of the results, Venessa Willms, Director of Primary at Ark, said: “These figures show that you can get excellent results from pupils whatever their background.”

## Developing mature readers

36. Basic phonic knowledge – decoding letters on a page into the sounds and words they denote – underpins the process of learning to read. As pupils begin to master this ability, it is vital that they are supported to develop speed and fluency so that they become confident, mature readers.

37. The best way to promote this development is by instilling in children a passion for reading. Children who love reading will read more and, over time, choose literature which is more demanding and suitably stretching. It creates a virtuous circle: as the amount a child reads increases, their reading attainment improves, which in turn encourages them to read more. All reading makes a difference, but evidence suggests that reading for pleasure makes the most<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> Clark, C and De Zoysa, S. (2011). *Mapping the interrelationships of reading enjoyment, attitudes, behaviour and attainment: An exploratory investigation*. National Literacy Trust.

38. When young children read a high volume of literature, they have the opportunity to practise their phonic decoding skills, so that the process eventually becomes automatic. Daniel Willingham, a leading cognitive psychologist, has written that it is “virtually impossible to become proficient in a mental task without extended practice”<sup>36</sup>. As the basic process of decoding becomes automatic, young readers’ cognitive capacity (space in the working memory) is freed, which in turn makes the higher-order process of comprehension easier.

39. Information collected from 9-10 year olds as part of the latest Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), shows that those who report reading for enjoyment every day or almost every day achieve a significantly higher score on the assessment test compared to those who only read for enjoyment once or twice per week (a difference of 21 on the PIRLS performance scale, between 573 and 552<sup>37</sup> points). Our analysis of the scale of this difference suggests that if all pupils in England read for enjoyment every day or almost every day, the boost to key stage 2 performance would be the equivalent of a rise of eight percentage points in the proportion achieving a level 4b (from its current level of 67% to 75%)<sup>38</sup>.

40. The 2009 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey focused on the reading skills and habits of 15-year-olds. Between those young people who said they never read for enjoyment and those who read for up to 30 minutes per day, it found a difference in reading performance equivalent to just over a year’s schooling<sup>39</sup>.

41. Reading for pleasure is not only important because it improves performance in reading tests; it has a much wider significance for children’s education. Research shows that it brings benefits that help pupils achieve more across the whole curriculum. These include a broad vocabulary, text comprehension, grammar and general knowledge<sup>40</sup>. Reading for pleasure has also been found to be linked to greater progress in spelling and mathematics skills. Recent longitudinal research found the impact of reading for pleasure on progress in vocabulary, arithmetic and spelling between the ages of 10 and 16 to be four times greater than the impact of having a parent with degree<sup>41</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> Willingham, Daniel T. (2010) *Why Don't Students Like School?: A Cognitive Scientist Answers Questions About How the Mind Works and What It Means for the Classroom*.

<sup>37</sup> Mullis, I.V.S., Martin, M.O., Foy, P., & Drucker, K.T. (2012). *PIRLS 2011 international results in reading*.

<sup>38</sup> Department for Education analysis 2015

<sup>39</sup> OECD (2010), *PISA 2009 Results: Learning to Learn: Student Engagement, Strategies and Practices (Volume III)*

<sup>40</sup> Clark, C and Rumbold, K. (2006). *Reading for Pleasure: a research overview*. The National Literacy Trust.

<sup>41</sup> Sullivan, A. and Brown, M. (2013) *Social inequalities in cognitive scores at age 16: the role of reading*, CLS working Paper 2013/10

42. How often children read is likely to be linked with the number of books they read. Research by the National Literacy Trust has found an association between the number of books read per month and reading proficiency for 8-16 year olds<sup>42</sup>. This shows that more children exceeded the expected level of reading for their age as the number of books they read a month increased. Children who read even two or more books per month were less likely to be struggling readers. Those who read five books a month were almost twice as likely to be reading at a level beyond their age, compared with those who do not read any books at all.

43. As well as improving academic attainment, international evidence also suggests reading fiction for pleasure has social consequences. It has been shown to be associated with empathy and increased social support<sup>43</sup>. One Canadian study found teenagers used reading for pleasure to help them make sense of the world, mature relationships and cultural identity<sup>44</sup>.

44. Fluency also relies upon a sufficient vocabulary. When reading, children come across new ideas and words they have not encountered before. By meeting words in context – and meeting the same word in different contexts – they learn how to work out the meanings of unknown words and of words with more than one meaning. When children are at the initial stage of mastering decoding, it is vital that they practise their decoding through the use of reading books which are consistent with their phonic knowledge. A child who has yet to study the digraph ‘ph’ should not be asked to read a book about an ‘elephant’ – they are likely to find this confusing and frustrating. Schools should, however, find separate opportunities to build children’s vocabulary and enjoyment of literature by reading to them throughout their time in school.

45. A wide vocabulary is an important tool for understanding new subject matter, and as pupils’ understanding of a subject grows, so does their ability to work out new words they may come across.

46. The US academic ED Hirsch identifies this effect as a central cause of the attainment gap between disadvantaged students and their peers. In 2013, he wrote “Advantaged students who arrive in the classroom with background knowledge and vocabulary will understand what a textbook or teacher is saying and will therefore learn

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<sup>42</sup> Clark, C. (2014) *Children and Young People’s Reading in 2013*, National Literacy Trust.

<sup>43</sup> Mar, R. et al (2009) “Exploring the link between reading fiction and empathy: Ruling out individual differences and examining outcomes”, *Communications*, 34 (4) pp 407-428.

<sup>44</sup> Howard, V. (2011) “The importance of pleasure reading in the lives of young teens: Self-identification, self-construction and self-awareness”, *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 43(1) pp 46-55

more; disadvantaged students who lack such prior knowledge will fail to understand and thus fall even further behind, relative to their fellow students”<sup>45</sup>.

47. Reading the right quantity of suitably stretching literature within the context of a rigorous, knowledge-based curriculum is key to addressing this imbalance. The new national curriculum gives pupils an introduction to the core knowledge they need to be educated citizens. It introduces pupils to the best that has been thought and said; and helps engender an appreciation of human intellectual achievement. It is designed so that children acquire a strong base of knowledge across all subjects as they progress through their education, and build on what they know.

48. Reading, and discussing what you have read, are cornerstones of education, and the national curriculum aims to encourage all pupils into the habit of reading widely and often. The government expects teachers to do everything they can to foster a love of reading. All children should be encouraged to choose and read books independently as they move through primary school and beyond, so they discover writing that interests them, makes them think or makes them laugh – and are inspired to read more.

49. Book clubs are an excellent way of encouraging pupils to read widely and frequently, inside as well as outside school, and of improving both reading and spoken language skills. **The government is announcing today [5 March 2015] funding for a new programme to help primary schools set up book clubs for key stage 2 pupils.** The book clubs will give children the chance to discuss in a non-classroom setting the books they have read and to develop their love of literature through discovering new authors and new stories. The programme will offer information and advice to any school interested in running a book club, and will work directly with schools where reading attainment is currently low to help them set up a club.

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<sup>45</sup> Hirsh, E. D. Jr (2013) ‘A Wealth of Words’. *City Journal Winter 2013* [http://www.city-journal.org/2013/23\\_1\\_vocabulary.html](http://www.city-journal.org/2013/23_1_vocabulary.html)

## Case study – Charles Dickens Primary School

At Charles Dickens Primary School in Southwark, reading is taught through the Letters and Sounds phonics programme, supported by 1:1 reading, small guided group teaching and whole class teaching.

Once pupils have mastered the basics, they are encouraged to read more widely. Each month the school picks a book theme and selects a mixture of classics and modern books for pupils to read and discuss, with the opportunity to write reviews for the school blog. High profile whole school events like the ‘Mad Hatter’s Reading Party’ also help to encourage reading.

The school’s book group encourages pupils to persevere with more stretching books, such as Tom’s Midnight Garden. Despite sometimes finding this challenging, pupils conclude that it is worth persevering with such books as they leave a longer lasting impression than ‘easier’ reads.

The school has also invested in restocking each class’s reading corner. Teachers and pupils all enjoyed suggesting books, and the books are rotated between the different classes in each year group to enable variety on a tight budget.

The school’s results reflect the strong emphasis on reading. In 2014, 77% of children achieved level 5 in reading, significantly above the national average. According to the school, 53% of children made more than expected progress from key stage 1 and key stage 2 and 85% of year 1 children passed the phonics check.

50. Libraries also have an important role to play in children’s reading habits. Research has found that young people who did not use their public library were more than three times more likely only to read when in class, and almost three times as likely to rate themselves as not very good readers compared to library users. Young people who used their public library were nearly twice as likely to be reading outside the classroom every day<sup>46</sup>. **The government would like all children to be active members of a public library, and we are asking all schools to arrange library membership for all their year 3 pupils.** Our new book club programme will increase the number of primary schools working in partnership with their local library to promote library use; for instance by arranging class visits to the library.

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<sup>46</sup> Clark, C. and Hawkins, L. (2011) *Public Libraries and Literacy: Young people’s reading habits and attitudes to public libraries, and an exploration of the relationship between public library use and school attainment*. National Literacy Trust

### **Case study – High View School in Efford**

At High View School in Efford, there is a focus on regular reading to help children develop their vocabulary and comprehension skills, which support attainment right across the curriculum.

Reading is embedded throughout the curriculum, with books chosen to support topics being studied in history, geography and science. Classes have regular DEAR time (Drop Everything And Read), including opportunities for older pupils to support younger pupils to read.

The school runs a Reading Champions programme, rewarding pupils who read 25, 50, 100 or more books over the year.

Recognising that some pupils did not have access to books at home, the school has enrolled all of the pupils in the local library, as well as investing in access to online reading materials. In the school holidays, pupils join the community library's Summer Reading Challenge, and in 2013 were the Plymouth champions.

The school has achieved its best ever results in key stage 1 phonics, with a pass rate of 78% in 2014, 4 percentage points above the national average and a rise of 11 percentage points since last year. In key stage 2, 98% of children achieved or surpassed level 4 in reading, nine percentage points higher than the national average.

51. As children move into secondary school their reading in and outside the classroom should be increasingly wide, varied and stretching. The national curriculum programme of study for key stage 3 introduces pupils to increasingly stretching material, giving them a broad grounding that will stand them in good stead for their GCSE studies. All pupils study works of English literature, both pre-1914 and contemporary, including prose, poetry and drama.

52. Pupils will develop an appreciation of literature and start to read critically by reading, and also having read to them, whole books, short stories, poems and plays across a spread of genres, historical period, forms and authors. Giving pupils an essential grounding in demanding literary works will enable and encourage them to discover new, even more challenging, literature for themselves.

### Case study – Dixons Trinity Academy

At Dixons Trinity Academy, over 50% of students come from the five most deprived wards in Bradford. Mastering literacy is key to the school's aims to raise aspirations, encourage young people to have a growth mindset, and to progress to higher education through its key drivers of Mastery, Autonomy and Purpose.

The school runs four 30-minute DEAR (Drop Everything And Read) sessions each week, and students carry their DEAR book with them at all times. Students read in silence or in groups, discuss their reading or write book reviews. Teachers model reading aloud and in silence, facilitate class discussion and check reading logs.

Students are encouraged to read stretching books. The school runs a book club for gifted and talented pupils to introduce pupils to great works of literature. Teachers discuss and read extracts from their own DEAR books (all of which are displayed outside teachers' classrooms) to inspire students to try more difficult texts, and the library is well stocked with challenging books. English schemes of work have an accompanying reading list with more challenging reading material. This is shared with students and copies of the texts are available in the library.

According to the school, rates of progress at the school are high: over 90% of students make or exceed nationally expected levels of progress by the end of year 9. On average, students from year 8 make over 17 months' progress in reading in a 9 month period, and year 9 make 31 months' progress in a 21 month period.

53. As part of more rigorous GCSEs, all pupils taking the new GCSE in English Literature will be examined on four substantial works, which they will be expected to have read in full. This includes a Shakespeare play, a post-1914 British play or novel, a 19th century novel and a collection of 15 poems. The examination also includes unseen texts, which will reward pupils who have read widely and are able to compare and contrast a range of writing.

54. The government is also committed to encouraging the promotion of poetry in schools. Since 2012, we have supported the national poetry recitation competition for 14-18 year olds run by The Poetry Archive. This annual competition encourages both pupils and teachers to experience our world-class literary heritage by increasing pupils' exposure to poetry through recitation and helping to develop inspiring poetry teaching in schools. **We will continue to support the poetry recitation competition in the coming year and, to encourage a love of poetry from an early age, we will fund resources to help primary teachers encourage their pupils to read and learn poetry.**

## **Case study – Redden Court School**

In 2008, Redden Court School in Essex was given a Notice to Improve by Ofsted, partly due to low standards in English. A new English department head was employed to lead a focus on improving standards. The school's clear, ambitious vision for English has led to impressive results for the English faculty.

The school emphasises the importance of reading, and students are encouraged to read regularly during designated reading time as well as during whole-school events like Everybody Reads Day.

The school promotes varied and stretching reading amongst its pupils. English Ambassadors compile a reading list every half term, linked to texts read in key stage 3. The school book club meets weekly, and pupils blog about the books they are reading as well as posting video reviews. The school runs a Bingo Challenge, encouraging students to stretch themselves by reading 30 novels, including several classics.

The school librarians ensure there is a range of accessible and challenging books and advise readers across the ability range.

The school has made significant improvement in English attainment. In 2014, 92% of students made expected progress in English. Last year, Ofsted rated the school's English Faculty as outstanding, concluding that 'the progress made by all groups in this non-selective academy is impressive'.



## A shared responsibility

55. Promoting a love of reading is not something that the government can, or should, act on alone. Parents, schools, libraries and others all have a vital role to play in fostering a love of reading amongst children.

56. The government welcomes and supports the many initiatives that exist to encourage children to read widely and develop a love of books: World Book Day, the Summer Reading Challenge and Premier League Reading Stars to name but a few.

57. The Read On. Get On. campaign – led by organisations including Save the Children and the National Literacy Trust – has set the goal of getting all children reading well by age 11 in the next 10 years. The campaign is encouraging parents to read with their children for as little as 10 minutes a day, to start early to get children into the habit of reading. The government strongly welcomes the campaign's commitment to inspiring families to read more at home, giving parents the confidence to encourage children to build this daily reading habit up to reading a book a week by the end of primary school. This is both ambitious and exciting, and could make a real difference to how well children do at school.



Department  
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