

YEAR ONE PHONICS SCREENING CHECK – ADVICE FOR MEMBERS **SEPTEMBER 2011**

Background

The Government is planning to roll out a new, statutory, screening check for all pupils in Year one in June 2012, following the pilot which took place in 300 schools in June 2011.

The Government claims that the Year one Phonics Screening Check is designed to:

- confirm whether individual pupils have grasped the basics of phonic decoding by the end of Year 1; and
- identify those pupils who need extra help, so that the school can provide support.

The NUT has argued that there is no evidence that learning phonics first and fast has a positive impact on children's long term reading ability or enjoyment of reading. Phonics alone will not produce fluent readers. In order to become fluent and accurate readers children must learn to use all of the cueing systems together. (This is the way in which teachers effectively teach children to read).

Emphasising phonics as the key aspect of learning to read sends a message to schools and parents that other aspects may be less important. There is a danger that Year one teachers will face pressures to increase their teaching of discrete systematic synthetic phonics in order to ensure that the 'Check' scores reflect well in the RaiseOnline data which will be used in OFSTED monitoring.

The Government's stated aim is to raise the reading standards of primary school pupils. The NUT argues that the Phonics Screening Check will not do this. It will give teachers no additional data on pupil ability beyond that which is provided by their own assessment.

The NUT advises members to continue with their usual planning and teaching in Year one. Any pressure applied to teachers to prepare pupils for the Check or 'teach to the test' should be resisted and reported to the NUT school representative and the NUT regional office.

What is the nature of the Check?

The Screening Check will be a mixture of real words and pseudo-words. The pseudo-words will be accompanied by a picture cue of an imaginary creature.

The check will test individual pupils on whether they have learned decoding to an appropriate standard and identify pupils who need additional support from

their school The Government will issue guidance to schools on the process of administering the Check in due course.

Who will need to take the Check?

The check will be statutory so all Year 1 pupils will be tested.

How long will it take to administer the Check?

Results of the pilot which took place in June 2011 showed that the Check took between four and nine minutes to complete for each child.

Who will administer the Check?

It will be administered by Year 1 teachers or the literacy co-ordinator.

The NUT recommends that your school should use supply teacher cover for Year one classes during the period in which the Check and any related administration is undertaken by the class teacher. It would be extremely difficult to administer the Check and supervise the class at the same time.

How will the Check impact on children with EAL and SEN?

Almost a third of the schools in the pilot reported that the Check had been a negative experience for pupils with EAL, SEN and speech or language difficulties. Fewer than half of the teachers involved with the pilot were confident of the accuracy of the Check's assessment for this group of pupils.

The NUT recommends that teachers administering the Check use their professional judgement when determining when to move a child on to the next word in the Check or to stop the Check.

Will the phonic Check results be a part of the league tables?

The Government says that it is not planning to make the results publically available in this form.

Individual pupils' results will be made available to parents, so that parents are kept informed about their child's progress in developing word reading skills.

Will the phonic screening check results be used by Ofsted?

Yes. School-level results will be recorded on RaiseOnline, and made available to Ofsted to use in inspections.

There is deep concern about the way in which the data from the screening checks will be used to judge schools and, potentially, individual teachers. The

NUT will continue to argue that the Check should only be used as a diagnostic tool by schools and teachers.

Will I have to change my approach to teaching reading?

Teaching methods are a matter for the school and teachers to determine. The NUT has received reports that in some schools teachers have been told that they should no longer use 'real' books with Year 1 pupils. There is no basis for this, as the Government has said the Check should take place within a 'language rich environment'.

ACTION

If you experience any additional workload arising from the Year one Phonics Screening Check such as:

- **additional preparation for the test or administration relating to the test, if you are a Year one teacher; or**
- **being asked to cover a year one class which is taking the Check, during your PPA time, or any other free time, if you are a teacher in another year group;**

you should contact your NUT school representative or if there is no NUT representative in your school, the regional office.