



PAPER B

Purpose: For Decision

Committee report

Committee	POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES
Date	6 SEPTEMBER 2018
Title	DELIVERING EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE – IMPROVING OUTCOMES IN PRIMARY PHONICS
Report of	DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Phonics is a method for teaching reading and writing of the English language by developing learners' phonemic awareness—the ability to hear, identify, and manipulate phonemes—in order to teach the correspondence between these sounds and the spelling patterns (graphemes) that represent them.
2. The goal of phonics is to enable emerging readers to decode new written words by sounding them out, or, in phonics terms, blending the sound-spelling patterns.
3. The Isle of Wight Council has a commitment to improve standards of attainment for all children which is set out in the document “Delivering Educational Excellence” published in June 2017. This report forms part of our strategy to keep members informed about the implementation of the strategy document and its impact.
4. Analysis of the standards reached by pupils in the first year of Key Stage 1 (Year 1) in 2017 identified that the proportion who had met the demand of the National Year 1 phonics check had stalled after initial improvement in previous years. It had not previously been identified as a relative priority due to the improving trend of outcomes.
5. The achievement of the Year 1 Phonics check by more pupils has a correlation with future achievement of Age Related Expectations (ARE) at the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 despite its relatively narrow focus.
6. This paper explains how the local authority school improvement service responded to the issue between November 2017 and June 2018 and the

positive impact of the intervention. It also identifies further steps to sustain the improvement in future years.

BACKGROUND

7. Between 2012 and 2015 the proportion of pupils on the Isle of Wight (IOW) succeeding in the Y1 national phonics check improved by 14% to match the national performance figure of 77%. In the next two years, the national average improved by 4% whilst the IOW declined by 1% opening up a five percentage point gap.
8. The IOW council received a letter from the Education Minister, (12th December 2017) which both recognised the significant improvement since 2012 but also identified the IOW in the lowest attaining 10% of local authorities in England on this measure. A meeting was requested and resulted in a discussion between the Island's MP and the Education Minister, supported by an officer of the Local Authority on 17th January 2018.
9. The Department for Education has offered a two-year professional development (PD) and leadership programme to 72 schools in England. The scheme was fully-funded through the DfE's Teaching and Leadership Innovation Fund (TLIF) programme and focuses on the teaching of phonics and early reading. It provided two days of whole-school phonics training using a published scheme, two days of literacy leadership training for the Headteacher and Reading Leader, 16 in-school Development Days with a consultant and supply cover for the Reading Leader on 19 days. All of this was funded by TLIF - normal cost £14,700. Only one school on the IOW was funded to be involved in this scheme.
10. A programme for the 18 other IOW schools where phonics check achievement was a priority was constructed by the Hampshire Inspection and Advisory Service (HIAS) English team to respond urgently to the challenge. There was no charge to schools for participation beyond meeting the modest supply costs involved to release key staff. This programme was based upon the principles of effective teaching and leadership of phonics acquired from similar challenges addressed in Hampshire schools previously.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

11. 20 schools were originally identified due to low achievement (below 78%) or significant drops in data from previous years. The prior attainment of pupils in the 2017 cohort was analysed and could not establish a reasonable link that would explain why the results had not improved. It seemed likely that the cause was a lack of security in teaching and leadership of phonics. This was confirmed during two days of auditing visits to project schools in November 2017. The project drew upon this intelligence to ensure a clear focus.
12. Professional development had been previously available to IOW schools through courses and in school support. Courses had focussed on subject knowledge rather than the review and development of whole school systems,

a reasonable presumption given the relative improvement in outcomes since 2012.

13. The aims of the project were threefold: Increase the percentage of pupils who meet the requirements in the End of Year One Reading Check to be in line with National average (81%) and more in line with statistical neighbours; develop synthetic phonics (blending sounds) as part of the early reading skills of pupils; and, equip project teachers with the skill-set to sustain improvement.
14. The programme was constructed using a modest number of consultant days (ten) to be shared amongst the 20 project schools over a three month period. It comprised identified schools attending 3 half day professional development sessions. The first helped schools to review their whole school systems. The second focused on modelling high quality teaching and learning of phonics. The final session ensured that schools understood how to accurately assess pupils' phonic knowledge and ensure clear and rapid progress. Further support was given through advice or focused visits to key schools to ensure that teaching programmes in place were robust (2 days). Additionally, support was given where appropriate to teach alongside teachers and model effective practice, (4 days). Time was also allocated to evaluating impact and creating a case study report to share best practice in the future (1day).
15. Feedback from the bespoke visits to schools identified that there were misconceptions and weaknesses in teachers' practices and that pupils were often too passive in the activities. More active learning strategies for pupils and planning support would be the key in developing teaching to improve phonic outcomes.
16. The provisional outcomes from the 2018 Year 1 Phonics check are now available and show some promising signs of the impact of the project on pupils' achievements in the first year. All schools have made a percentage gain from 2017 data. These vary from a modest 2.9% increase to a percentage increase of 25.3%. The average increase is 11% (across 17 schools which completed the project). Two schools elected not to participate after the initial session.
17. The impact of the improvement in these project schools can be seen in the overall improvement in the provisional outcome for the whole IOW which now stands at 81.8%, an improvement of nearly 5 percentage points on 2017.
18. Whilst we are rightly pleased with the improvement overall, there remains work to be done and some of this has started already. Phase 2 of the project involves working with schools to build further capacity through bespoke visits to each and to ensure that teachers new into Year 1 are supported in the autumn term of 2018. There is also a focus on the practice in Year 2 where pupils who did not meet the expectations have a further opportunity to take the phonics check. The continuation project has two further half day professional development sessions – one was early in the summer term to support teachers in using assessment to enable a final push in Year 1 and looking at the place of phonics in reading and writing outside of the phonics

session as well. A further session in September is for Learning Support Assistants to develop their skills to teach phonics effectively.

19. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the project is being undertaken but early indications through feedback from participants identifies the following features:
20. Participants' positive reactions to the professional development programme, "I have found the course inspiring and liberating".
21. Participant learning, "It has raised the profile and importance of phonics and brought about consistency in resources and the teaching of phonics".
22. Changing practices in teaching and leadership, "The presentation of phonics within each class – and across the school – has changed significantly" and "I have handed over more ownership to the children during the whole class input. It is less teacher-led and the pupils are more active and doing/practising".
23. Effective professional development sessions, "The sharing of 'good practice' was really successful – teachers were really supportive of one another and they shared some great further ideas."

FINANCIAL / BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

24. There are no additional financial considerations resulting from the recommendations in this report.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

25. The "Duty to promote high standards in primary and secondary education," originates from the 1996 Education Act. This provision was amended in the 2006 Education and Inspections Act to include, "...and the fulfilment of potential." The 2006 Act spells out the responsibility of the Local Authority to promote high standards; ensure fair access and promote the fulfilment of every child's educational potential. This duty applies to children of compulsory school age and those of any age (up to 20) who are registered as pupils at maintained schools.
26. It is the 2006 Act which also introduces the inspection of LA statutory functions by Ofsted. "The Framework for Inspection of Local Authority Arrangements for Supporting School Improvement," based upon sections 135 and 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, was published in May 2013. The LA duty to write an action plan following an unsatisfactory Ofsted inspection had already been introduced in the 2005 Education Act.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

27. Improved educational outcomes benefit all groups but have the most marked impact upon the life chances of the most vulnerable. Outcomes will be assessed specifically for children with special educational needs, those from minority ethnic backgrounds, those living in relative poverty and children in the care of the local authority.

SECTION 17 CRIME AND DISORDER ACT 1998

28. The attainment of better educational outcomes has a direct impact upon future economic wellbeing and, therefore, upon potential involvement in criminal activity.
29. Success at school promotes self-esteem, attendance and good behaviour leading to greater community cohesion, adult independence and active citizenship.

RISK MANAGEMENT

30. A clear understanding of examination results and priorities for improving them is necessary in order to improve school performance of the Isle of Wight and mitigate against poor educational outcomes for children and young people.

EVALUATION

31. The impact of this project will be evaluated by the Local Authority. It is envisaged that this evaluation will be subject to a further report brought to the Policy and Scrutiny Committee for Children's Services after the 2019 outcomes have been published.

RECOMMENDATION

32. Members are asked to note the contents of this report.

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