Follow-up Study from Reception to Year 1 (2010-2012) and Summary Report of an earlier Longitudinal Study (1997-2004)

The Effects of a Systematic, Synthetic Phonics Programme on Reading and Spelling

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Summary

The background of the government initiatives into the teaching of early reading with 'high quality phonic work' is set out in independent reviews of early reading conducted by the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2005 (1) and by Jim Rose, 2006 (2). In 2011, the Department of Education published a list of publishers and products which meet the Department's revised core criteria (3). In 2012 the match-funding arrangements were set out in 'The Importance of Phonics Catalogue – Issue 2' (4).

In 2011 (5), the author reported on the reading and spelling results from a whole class of Reception children starting from school entry with a government approved synthetic phonics programme. Following the present government's initiatives to promote the teaching of synthetic phonics with beginning readers, the author asked whether the government initiative was a brilliant opportunity to drive up reading standards or would it "switch off" children from a love of reading?

This small piece of research built on the author's previous large scale longitudinal study from 1997-2004 (6) using first time and catch-up synthetic phonics teaching. Both studies found that all the Reception children learned to read and spell successfully, including potentially vulnerable groups like boys and children with summer birthdays, free school meals, English as an additional language, travellers, significant behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and those in catch-up interventions. At the end of the Reception year, the outcome was that Reception children read with confidence and enthusiasm, and that the children in the catch-up groups "caught up" and closed the gap in their achievements.

In the 1997-2004 research which followed children through to KS2 English SATs there were no severe literacy difficulties (Level 3B was the lowest level for English).

In the present paper the author reports on the follow-up study to Year 1 (2011-2012). The Year 1 children had made a very strong start with the development of their reading and spelling skills, including vulnerable groups like boys and children with summer birthdays, free school meals, English as an additional language, significant behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and those in catch-up interventions. At the end of Year 1 the children had built on their flying start with reading and spelling in Reception. They read with confidence and enthusiasm, and all the children in the catch-up groups were at least average in their achievements.

The implication of these results is hugely significant. It could be said that dyslexia can be eliminated with rigorous, first-time synthetic phonics teaching and sufficient catch-up synthetic phonics for children who struggle with literacy and for children with SEN. Synthetic phonics teaching, careful monitoring of progress and extra teaching with synthetic phonics for slow-to-start children was found to be effective for all children in the studies. The schools did not need to resort to different sorts of teaching, they did not need to turn to specialist dyslexia trained teachers or expensive Reading Recovery teaching.

Use of a systematic synthetic phonics programme was shown to give children a flying start with their reading and spelling, it was effective for catch-up, it reduced special educational needs across the schools and it enabled higher numbers of children to transfer to Secondary school equipped to access the curriculum. Children were reading more fluently which encouraged a love of books.

Research Study in Reception and Year 1 in 2010-2012

A Catholic Primary School designated for travellers of Irish origin, used the systematic, synthetic phonics programme *Sound Discovery*® to teach literacy to their whole Reception class, from September 2010 and

into Year 1. A key feature of this programme is the *Snappy Lesson*® which teaches all the phonic skills needed for literacy in a fast paced, interactive way, so that even boys with the shortest attention spans and children with concentration difficulties can be kept on task. Also, the constant review of prior learning within the *Snappy Lesson*® supports the learning of children with weak memories.

The school has quite a high level of social and special educational need. There were 30 pupils in the Reception cohort, 18 boys and 12 girls. In Year 1, 26 children were re-assessed, who had all been assessed initially in Reception, 15 boys and 11 girls. Three children had left, including the travelling element, and one child was absent. The absentee was a high achieving boy in Reception who would have been expected to have high or very high scores in 2012. There were the usual vulnerable groups often believed to experience barriers to learning: boys, free school meals (FSM), summer birthdays, English as an additional language (EAL) and significant BESD (behavioural, social and emotional difficulties). In Reception, the school identified a slow-to-learn group who received catch-up teaching delivered as an intervention in a small group with their class teacher or class Teaching Assistant using *Sound Discovery®.* This was little and often teaching, to reinforce learning. Another catch-up group was identified for extra teaching in Year 1.

In September 2010, the Reception teacher assessed all the children on school entry. None of them knew any letter/sound correspondences and none could demonstrate any reading or spelling.

By Christmas 2010, the Reception teacher was reporting, “a huge increase in the number of children being able to read and write”. By July 2011, for reading, only 7% remained at alphabet CVC level, the remaining 93% were reading above this level at alphabet CVCCVC, CVCC, CCVC, CCVCC, consonant digraph or vowel digraph levels. By July 2011, for spelling, only 10% remained at alphabet CVC level; the remaining 90% were spelling above this level at alphabet CVCCVC, CVCC, CCVC, CCVCC, consonant digraph or vowel digraph levels. The children were also given decodable storybooks and texts from an early stage which contained only the sounds they had been taught, and a controlled number of high frequency “tricky” words.

The composition of the catch-up groups was interesting. There were a variety of reasons why the children might be relatively behind, but no clear predictors. In the Reception group, there were three boys and 2 girls. Two of the boys had summer birthdays. One of these was also a traveller on free school meals and the other had significant behaviour difficulties with non-compliance. Both girls and the third boy were not in any other vulnerable group but probably had some learning difficulties. In the Year 1 catch-up group of eight children, three of the children had been in the Reception catch-up group, three were EAL and three had summer birthdays, with some overlap. There were 5 boys and 3 girls. One of the boys had a summer birthday and two other boys were EAL. Two of the girls were EAL and in addition one of these had a summer birthday. The two remaining children, two boys and one girl, were not in any vulnerable group but probably had some learning difficulties, two having received catch-up in Reception.

Results in 2011

In July 2011 all 30 Reception children were assessed at the end of their first year at school on the British Ability Scales II Word Reading and Spelling achievement scales. The results for the whole class and for individual groups were discussed in the previous paper (5) but are summarised again below in Table 1.

The whole class, the summer birthday children, the boys and the traveller achieved ‘above average’ reading and spelling. The girls and the FSM children achieved ‘above average’ reading and ‘average’ spelling. The child with behaviour difficulties with non-compliance achieved ‘average’ reading and ‘above average’ spelling. The EAL and catch-up groups achieved ‘average’ reading and spelling.

Table 1: Reception Results 2011, for whole class and individual groups of children, using BAS II Word Reading and Spelling

Group	Av CA	Reading: Average Standard Score	Reading: Average Percentile	Average Reading Age	Reading: months above CA	Spelling: Average Standard Score	Spelling: Average Percentile	Average Spelling Age	Spelling: months above CA
Whole Class (N=30)	5:05	116.6 AAv	82.1 AAv	6:07	14	113.3 AAv	76.6 AAv	6:05	12
Summer Birthdays (N=10)	5:01	121.0 AAv	87.5 AAv	6:07	18	117.2 AAv	83.0 AAv	6:05	16
Boys (N=18)	5:05	118.1 AAv	83.5 AAv	6:08	15	115.6 AAv	79.1 AAv	6:06	13
Travellers (N=1)	5:02	116.0 AAv	86.0 AAv	6:01	11	110.0 AAv	75.0 AAv	5:10	8
Girls (N=12)	5:04	114.3 AAv	79.8 AAv	6:05	13	109.8 A	72.8 A	6:02	10
FSM (N=3)	5:07	113.0 AAv	80.7 AAv	6:05	10	109.3 Av	73.3 Av	6:02	7
Behaviour Difficulties (N=1)	5:03	109 Av	73 Av	5:10	7	113 AAv	81 AAv	6:04	13
EAL (N=4)	5:04	109.5 Av	72.0 Av	6:01	9	103.3 Av	58.3 Av	5:08	4
Catch-Up (N=5)	5:04	108.2 Av	68.2 Av	5:11	7	107.6 Av	68.4 Av	6:00	8

Key:
CA: chronological age; Chronological age, reading age and spelling age are in years and months
Av: Average
Standard Score of the BAS II Achievement Scales has a mean of 100 and standard deviation of 15
Percentile: 50th percentile is average; a Percentile of 99.8 means that 99.8% of children of that age would score the same or below
FSM: free school meals; EAL: English as an additional language
Av: average scores: Standard Scores in 90-109 range; Percentiles in the 25-74 range.
AAv: above average scores: Standard Scores in 110-119 range; Percentiles in the 75-90 range

Results in 2012

At the end of the second year of school, the whole class, the summer birthday children, the boys and the boy with behaviour difficulties achieved 'very high', 'high' or 'above average' reading and spelling. The girls, FSM children, EAL children and catch-up group achieved 'above average' reading and spelling, as shown in Table 2, below:

Table 2: Year 1 Results 2012, for whole class and individual groups of children, using BAS II Word Reading and Spelling

Group	Av CA	Reading: Average Standard Score	Reading: Average Percentile	Average Reading Age	Reading: months above CA	Spelling: Average Standard Score	Spelling: Average Percentile	Average Spelling Age	Spelling: months above CA
Whole Class (N=26)	6:04	123.6 High	90.0 AAv	8:02	22	122.0 High	88.0 AAv	8:01	21
Summer Birthdays (N=9)	6:00	128.9 High	95.3 High	8.00	24	124.6 High	91.2 High	7:09	21
Boys (N=15)	6:05	127.1 High	92.8 High	8.06	25	127.1 High	92.7 High	8:07	26
Girls (N=11)	6:04	118.9 AAv	86.3 AAv	7:08	16	115.0 AAv	81.6 AAv	7.05	13
FSM (N=1)	6:10	113.0 AAv	81.0 AAv	7:10	12	119.0 AAv	90.0 AAv	8:03	17
Behaviour Difficulties (N=1)	6:02	134.0 VHigh	99.0 VHigh	8:03	25	132 VHigh	98 VHigh	8:03	25
EAL (N=3)	6:05	118.3 AAv	88.0 AAv	7:07	14	114.0 AAv	80.3 AAv	7:06	13
Catch-Up (N=8)	6:04	118.8 AAv	86.5 AAv	7:07	15	114.8 AAv	79.6 AAv	7:05	11

Key:
CA: chronological age; Chronological age, reading age and spelling age are in years and months
Av: Average
Standard Score of the BAS II Achievement Scales has a mean of 100 and standard deviation of 15
Percentile: 50th percentile is average; a Percentile of 99.8 means that 99.8% of children of that age would score the same or below
FSM: free school meals; EAL: English as an additional language
AAv: above average scores: Standard Scores in 110-119 range; Percentiles in the 75-90 range
Av: average scores: Standard Scores in 90-109 range; Percentiles in the 25-74 range.
High: high scores: Standard Scores in 120-129 range; Percentiles in the 91-97 range
VHigh: very high scores: Standard Scores in 130 and above range; Percentiles in the 98-99 range

A summary of boys' and girls' achievements is summarised below in Table 3.

Table 3: Achievements in Reading and Spelling above chronological age in Reception and Year 1, for whole class, boys and girls.

Group	Whole class numbers	Whole Class Reading Above CA	Whole Class Spelling Above CA	Boys' Reading Above CA	Girls' Reading Above CA	Boys' Spelling Above CA	Girls' Spelling Above CA
Reception 2011	30	14 months	12 months	15 months	13 months	13 months	10 months
Year 1 2012	26	22 months	21 months	25 months	16 months	26 months	13 months

Key: Reading and Spelling are reported as months above chronological age on tests of word reading and spelling

The most successful children in the Year 1 class were in the 'very high' range. The highest child in the year 1 class for reading and spelling was a boy aged 6 years 5 months. He was completely fluent at reading and spelling at 11 years 3 months for reading and 11 years 9 months for spelling. He achieved the highest achievable Standard Score of 145 and Percentile of 99.9, for both reading and spelling. One other boy achieved the highest achievable Standard Score of 145 and Percentile of 99.9 for reading and 'very high' scores of 137 and 99 for spelling.

The lowest child in the Year 1 class was a boy in the catch-up group, aged 6 years 9 months. His reading and spelling were both in the 'average' range. For reading: his Standard Score was 104, Percentile was 61 and reading age was 7 years 1 month. For spelling: his Standard Score was 107, Percentile was 68 and spelling age was 7 years 4 months. He had also been the lowest child in the 2010 cohort, but with continued phonics teaching and catch-up he has continued to close the gap. In the 11 months since his last assessment, he has made 18 months improvement with reading and 12 months improvement in spelling.

There was one boy in the Year 1 class with significant behaviour difficulties, including non-compliance. He has remained in the catch-up group for that reason. He has a summer birthday and was aged 6 years 2 months at the time of assessment. His confidence and fluency with reading and spelling have improved hugely since last year. In the 11 months since his last assessment he has made 29 months improvement with reading and 23 months improvement with spelling. On the last assessment he was reluctant to read but this time he needed no persuasion to read with confidence.

The distribution of reading and spelling achievements in the whole class, and in the boys' and girls' groups is summarised below in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4: Percentage Distribution of Reading and Spelling Achievements, for whole class, boys and girls: very high, high, above average, average

Group	Pupil Numbers	Reading				Spelling			
		very high	high	above average	average	very high	high	above average	average
whole class	26	31%	27%	34%	8%	27%	27%	23%	23%
boys	15	40%	40%	13%	7%	47%	33%	7%	13%
girls	11	18%	9%	64%	9%	0%	18%	46%	36%

Key:

Very high:	Standard Score range 130 and above,	Percentile range 98-99
High:	Standard Score range 120-129,	Percentile range 91-97
Above average:	Standard Score range 110-119,	Percentile range 75-90
Average:	Standard Score range 90-109,	Percentile range 25-74

Table 5: Percentage Distribution of Reading and Spelling Achievements, for whole class, boys and girls: above average and above, average

Group	Pupil Numbers	Reading		Spelling	
		above average and above	average	above average and above	average
whole class	26	92%	8%	77%	23%
boys	15	93%	7%	87%	13%
girls	11	91%	9%	64%	36%

The following observations can be made about the achievements in reading and spelling at the end of the second year at school:

- No achievements were below the 'average' range.
- High percentage of the whole class could read at least at an 'above average' level (92%)
- 40% of boys read at the 'very high' level
- 80% of boys read at 'high' levels and above (40%+40%)
- 47% of boys could spell at a 'very high' level
- 80% of boys could spell at 'high' levels and above (47%+33%)
- no girls had 'very high' spelling
- 18% of girls could spell at 'high' levels
- More than half of the girls could spell at 'above average' levels and above (46%+18%)

Several of the children had attention difficulties but they were all able to focus on their reading and spelling and they were confident. All of them were able to use phonemic strategies for reading (sounding out and blending) and for spelling (saying the sounds as they were writing down the letters), but the majority of the children were doing this sub-vocally by Year 1.

The boys, the summer birthday group and the boy with severe behaviour difficulties were impressive. The boys were the highest achievers with an average reading age of 25 months above chronological age and an average spelling age of 26 months above chronological age.

Relatively, the EAL group (14 months above for reading and 13 months above for spelling) and the catch-up group (15 months above for reading and 11 months above for spelling) groups were the lowest achieving but all the individual children were reading and spelling at least in the in the 'average' range for their age, they were confident and were using phonemic strategies for reading and spelling.

This study shows that all children can learn to read and spell if they are taught explicitly and systematically with high quality synthetic phonics teaching. If they have a strong start with their reading and spelling in Reception, they can build on that success in their second year of school (Year 1). Teaching appears to be more powerful than the usual barriers to learning. All these children started school with no prior code knowledge or ability to read or spell simple words, but this did not predict a risk of literacy problems. As part of their synthetic phonics programme they were taught phonemic-awareness and letter-sound knowledge from the beginning. Those children identified as slow-to-learn were identified very quickly and they showed that they were responsive to their catch-up teaching in small groups using little and often teaching with the teaching materials already in use in their classroom.

Recommendations to school at the end of the second year of school

Some schools believe that the work of teaching explicit phonics is completed by the end of Y1. However, there is much to be gained by continuing to teach and reinforce phonics throughout Key Stages 1 and 2 and by continuing to apply phonemic strategies throughout the whole curriculum during the school day. The present study with the Year 1 class (2012) identified some weaknesses and gaps in alphabetic code knowledge and some issues, e.g. girls' spelling, which need continued work. The following recommendations were made to the school:

- Check basic code knowledge and advanced code knowledge for all children moving to Year 2
- Ensure that there is phonics catch-up in place with identified children as often as possible
- Whole class and targeted practice, preferably daily, with the alphabetic code, particularly basic code digraphs and the advanced code (e.g. 'long' vowel digraphs)
- Reinforce letter formation, particularly start points of letters. Errors such as reversals are most often orthographic errors
- Continue applying phonics throughout the whole curriculum and throughout the school day. Simple phonics walls charts of the basic and advanced codes can hugely support both staff and children with this. More unusual graphemes can also be identified and their virtual position located on the advanced code chart
- Incidental phonics teaching can continue with words that crop up in the course of the school day
- Continue beyond phonics to polysyllabic words, ensuring children can break down longer words into smaller chunks, are aware of prefixes, root words, suffixes and syllables. Phonics is then used within smaller chunks for reading and spelling.
- Continue to tackle 'tricky' words and high frequency words phonemically, identifying any 'tricky' grapheme-phoneme correspondence(s). Do not learn these by sight as whole words.
- Remind children to continue using their phonics and not to guess at words when reading

- Remind children to vocalise words clearly when spelling and identify all the sounds in the word or chunk of a word
- Continue with decodable storybooks and texts to reinforce specific weak areas and extend skills
- Continue with structured handwriting and writing practice, making a plan of key paragraphs and using a 'talk for writing'/modelled writing approach which includes verbal rehearsal of sentences, adult moderation, accurate writing of sentences, one at a time, and reading back to check what was written.
- Set negotiated written expectations for those children who are struggling most with pieces of written work. Aim for accuracy rather than quantity with clear paragraphs, coherent English sentences, accurate punctuation and spelling.

Research Studies in Reception from 1997 to 2004 (6)

Sound Discovery® was used whole school in a large Primary School for eight years, where children were very low for language and social skills on school entry. Nearly 700 children were assessed at the end of their Reception years. Averaged over the eight years, the Reception children were about 15 months ahead of chronological age for both reading and spelling at the end of the Reception year, children in catch-up intervention groups caught up and again there was no gender gap, summer birthday gap, social class effect and no EAL effect. In 1997, the children only started the programme at the beginning of the summer term but subsequent cohorts started synthetic phonics from the beginning of the school year. Averaged over the seven years during which children started synthetic phonics from the beginning, the Reception children were 15.1 months ahead for reading and 18.1 months ahead for spelling.

The results for whole class groups, with no child disapplied, are summarised below in Table 6. Note the extra gain of 5 months in average reading age between 1998 and 1999 when the first set of decodable reading books was introduced, other teaching variables remaining the same. Decodable reading books closed the gap between reading and spelling and in subsequent years both reading and spelling were very similar.

Table 6: Reception Results 1997-2004, for whole class groups using Burt Individual Word Reading Test and Schonell Test for spelling

Reception	Pupil Numbers	Reading above chronological age in months	Spelling above chronological age in months
Summer 1997	**66**	**6**	**6**
Summer 1998	**90**	**12**	**17**
Summer 1999	**85**	**17**	**18**
Summer 2000	**86**	**16**	**18**
Summer 2001	**84**	**16**	**18**
Summer 2002	**89**	**15**	**16**
Summer 2003	**88**	**15**	**15**
Summer 2004	**86**	**15**	**15**

Longitudinal Research to Key Stage 1 SATs and Key Stage 2 SATs (6)

The children who started with the systematic, synthetic phonics programme *Sound Discovery*® in Reception were followed up to the end of Key Stage 1 and to the end of their primary education. The results are summarised below in Tables 7, 8 and 9. No child was disapplied from the tests or results.

2003: For Key Stage 1, Level 2+ results of 95% for reading and writing were significantly high compared with national standards. 40% Level 3 reading was significantly high and note that both boys and girls were reading equally as well. 24% Level 3 boys' writing was significantly high, and note the comparison with 8% boys' writing for the Local Authority. These results are summarised in Table 7. Figures in bold with an asterisk are statistically significant.

Table 7: English SATs results Key Stage 1, 2003 for large primary school (study school)

Key Stage 1							
Reading	Level 2+	**95%****			Local Authority		
	Level 2B+	88%					
	Level 3	**40%****	**Girls** **40%****	**Boys** **39%****			
Writing	Level 2+	95%**					
	Level 2B+	88%					
	Level 3	31%	Girls 35%	Boys **24%****		Girls 20%	Boys 8%

2003: For Key Stage 2, a third of the boys achieved Level 5 writing which was very significantly high nationally, and note the comparison with 9.5% boys' writing for the Local Authority. These results are summarised in Table 8.

Table 8: English SATs results Key Stage 2, 2003 for large primary school (study school)

Key Stage 2						
English	Level 4+	89.4%	Girls 90.9%	Boys 87.9%	Local Authority	
	Level 5 Writing	27.3%	Girls 21.2%	Boys **33.3%****	Girls 19.4%	Boys 9.5%

2004: For Key Stage 2, Level 4+ (94%) and Level 5 (65%) results for English were statistically above national averages. It was perhaps even more exciting that there was no score below Level 3B and no severe difficulties with literacy, which was also significant statistically. All the children were able to transfer to their Secondary schools equipped to access the curriculum. These results are summarised in Table 9. There was no dyslexia, as defined by the British Psychological Society (7), whose working definition focuses on severe and persistent difficulties with literacy learning at the 'word level' and states that " *dyslexia is evident when accurate and fluent word reading and/or spelling develops very incompletely or with great difficulty. This focuses on literacy learning at the 'word level' and implies that the problem is severe and persistent despite appropriate learning opportunities."*.

Table 9: English SATs results Key Stage 2, 2004 for large primary school (study school)

	Level 4+	Level 5	Level 3	Below Level 3B	Level 2 and below
Study School	**94%****	**65%****	6%	**0%****	0%
Local Authority	82%	29%			
Similar Schools	80%	28%			
England	77%	26%	15%		7%

Conclusions

These studies with Reception and Year 1 children demonstrate that teaching with a government approved systematic, synthetic phonics programme can be a brilliant opportunity to drive up reading standards. There is no evidence to indicate that such phonics teaching is a "straightjacket" or that it will "switch off" children from a love of reading books. Nor is there any evidence that such teaching damages children's development.

On the contrary, children taught in this way pick up reading quickly. They become enthusiastic and confident in their reading and are more able and willing to engage in the world of reading around them. Teaching in this way also appears to be more powerful than potential barriers to learning experienced by vulnerable groups such as boys, children with summer birthdays, children entitled to free school meals, travellers and children with English as an additional language. Children who are slow-to-start, for a variety of possible reasons, can be identified early and are responsive to catch-up intervention in small groups, also using synthetic phonics teaching. These early strugglers were shown to close the gap with both reading and spelling.

Longitudinal studies showed that children do not lose their early advantage. This study (2012) reports on a whole class of children after their first and second years at school. In Reception the children made a strong start with reading and spelling (14 months ahead for reading and 12 months ahead for spelling) and built on this in Year 1 (22 months ahead for reading and 21 months ahead for spelling.). Boys were more successful than girls and reading was marginally stronger than spelling. The other Grant studies (6) reported that children who start with synthetic phonics go on to achieve above national expectations for reading and writing throughout their primary schooling, equipping them for a more successful Secondary transfer. Boys' writing was found to be particularly successful.

Phonics teaching is not an end in itself. Phonics is the key that unlocks the literacy engine so that children are more able to access a wide range of texts thus contributing to their educational achievement.

Some critics of synthetic phonics point to the complexity of written English saying that children have to go further than being able to sound out words phonemically. But good synthetic phonics programmes, such as those approved by the government, take the complexity of the English written code seriously. They systematically, cumulatively and explicitly teach both the advanced as well as the basic alphabetic code.

Likewise some critics of synthetic phonics point out that phonic recognition, although important, is only a part of learning to read English. But again good synthetic phonics programmes include strands that develop vocabulary and reading comprehension and they will provide structured decodable texts and structured writing practice.

Other critics point to the importance in the early years of outdoor and indoor play which is active, stimulating and exploratory. Children need to enjoy running, skipping, climbing, singing, dancing and messy play with sand, mud and sticks. They need opportunities to play socially with other children. Some critics have said that it is more important to read stories to children and enjoy stories with them than to teach them to read. The author agrees wholeheartedly that all these activities are important for young children's development but she believes that they can be taught phonics as well, in a simple and enjoyable way. In the studies reported here, all these activities were recognised as being vitally important and could be incorporated into the children's lives and daily curriculum but alongside that, they were given a flying start with their literacy.

Children's expressive language and understanding of language are crucially important. Schools will be developing speaking and listening skills in the classroom and putting interventions in place, following the advice of speech and language therapists as necessary. Children with delayed or disordered articulation are often helped when they start phonics and begin working with sounds and representing them by visual symbols.

Some critics believe that formal teaching of literacy should be postponed to a later age. In the studies reported here all the children benefited from synthetic phonics in their early years of school, including children in potentially vulnerable groups and those with learning difficulties.

Another government initiative, the Year 1 phonics screening check (8), should assist in the process of raising standards. It will focus schools' efforts on teaching children to read early in their schooling when they are most receptive. The phonics screening check will assist in the identification of children who are struggling, so that they can receive extra help to catch up. As Nick Gibb said, this will enable every child "to go on to enjoy a lifetime's love of reading rather than a lifelong struggle."

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