

All-Party Parliamentary Group for Education

**Report of the
Inquiry into
Overcoming the
Barriers to
Literacy**

July 2011

Contents

Declaration of resourcing	1
The context	2
Summary of recommendations	4
Theme 1: Creating a reading culture	6
Theme 2: Ensuring choice and diversity of education resources	7
Theme 3: Literacy is not just a primary school issue	8
Theme 4: Encouraging parental support and expectations	9
Theme 5: Government and the supplies industry working together	10
Theme 6: The curriculum and assessment learning journey	11
Theme 7: Protecting library provision	12
Theme 8: Increased status for continuing professional development	13
Theme 9: Phonics as one of many literacy strategies	14
Theme 10: Improving literacy needs a joined-up approach	15
Conclusion	16
Appendix I: Evidence received	17

Declaration of resourcing

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

The APPG for Education would like to thank all those who took part for giving their time and expertise so generously, and Baroness Perry of Southwark and Lord Knight of Weymouth for kindly chairing the roundtable discussions.

This material may be reproduced free of charge in any format or medium without specific permission, providing that it is not reproduced for profit, material or financial gain. It must be reproduced accurately and not used in a misleading context. If republishing the material or issuing it to others, its source and date of publication must be acknowledged.

The context

This Inquiry by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Education began in October 2010 when Dr Rona Tutt from the National Literacy Association, Tricia Adams from the School Library Association and Ruth Miskin presented to the APPG.

They pointed out that the literacy debate has often been side-tracked – looking at the potential linguistic vandalism of text messaging – rather than focusing on the real problems. For example, a poverty of trained librarians, a lack of engagement by parents and senior teachers, and poor policy coordination preventing special educational needs being identified.

The Government acknowledges the high number of children who struggle to read, citing one in five 11-year-olds as being below the expected standard, with that figure rising in deprived areas to one in three 11-year-olds.

The Government also – as is well known – favours systematic synthetic phonics, and has set out its literacy policy along the following lines:

- Spending more time in initial teacher training on core teaching skills, especially reading and mathematics, and ensuring that teachers themselves reach a high standard of literacy and numeracy;
- Ensuring that all children have the chance to follow an enriching curriculum by getting them reading early, supporting phonics and introducing a reading check at age six;
- Providing funding for high-quality training and classroom teaching resources to support phonics;
- Enhancing Ofsted's expertise in assessing the teaching of reading, with judgements reflecting appropriate expectations and recognising phonics teaching; and
- Publishing information on schools' methods and results in teaching reading, and publishing details of interventions which especially support achievement among disadvantaged children, including intensive support in reading, writing and mathematics.

As a cross-party group and an independent voice, drawing in interests and expertise from across Parliament, the APPG for Education has an important role to play in helping to shape the development and implementation of literacy policy.

1 in 4 children in London leaves primary school at 11 unable to read or write properly.

1 in 5 leaves secondary school without being able to read or write with confidence.

One million (one in six) working adults in the capital cannot read with confidence.

Nationally five percent of adults in England have literacy skills either at or below the level of a seven year old.

16 percent is the estimated proportion of 16-65-year-olds with the reading age of an 11 year old.

40 percent of 11-year-olds from inner-city primary schools have a reading age of between six and nine when they start secondary school.

40 percent of London firms say their employees have poor literacy skills – and report that it has a negative impact on their business.

*Evening Standard headlines,
31 May 2011*

For its Inquiry, the APPG agreed to pursue five broad themes, which developed into the following questions:

- 1. The literacy landscape and social mobility**
 - How do children and young people perceive literacy?
 - What do society and business expect of young people; have expectations changed over time?
 - Does society give children and young people mixed messages about literacy?

- 2. Government policy**
 - What will the impact of the Government's phonics policy be?
 - Looking at the Government's literacy policy:
 - How much will it affect current teaching practice?
 - What are the problems within it – what anomalies exist, and what is missing?
 - What are the positive aspects, what do you expect to be successful?
 - What policy approaches haven't worked in the past, and why?
 - What literacy policy or policy changes would best support social mobility?
 - To what extent do Government departments besides DfE – such as BIS and DH – affect literacy rates?

- 3. Challenges and barriers**
 - What other factors affect literacy, and how would you characterise their impact, for example:
 - Advances in technology
 - Unidentified special educational needs
 - Transitions between school stages
 - Home life, and home support for reading and learning

- 4. Successful approaches**
 - What successes have your organisations seen?
 - Why do you think they were successful?

- 5. Recommendations**
 - What are the key areas to improve? What steps would you take to improve and maintain literacy rates?
 - What should be avoided? What lessons can we learn from past approaches?

In order to develop our recommendations, evidence was gathered in a variety of ways from April to June 2011:

- An online questionnaire was completed by 584 teachers, providing both data and open responses
- A discussion session was held involving 16 education organisations and associations with an interest in literacy
- A discussion session was held involving 16 companies in the education supplies industry with an interest in literacy
- A range of written submissions were received from individuals and associations

Further details of these are available from www.educationappg.org.uk

Summary of recommendations

- 1. Literacy is an essential life skill which begins when pupils start reading for pleasure. The Department for Education needs to acknowledge that literacy is more than a mechanical skill.** Literacy is the key skill enabling active participation in all areas of life. Schools need to develop a culture of reading. It should be acknowledged that there is no one way to teach reading and so a single focus on systematic synthetic phonics is a false one. The phonics test at age six is likely to de-motivate children rather than ensure that they become eager and fluent readers.
- 2. Teachers must be able to choose their own resources for literacy to suit individual literacy needs.** There should be no government prescription of resources, and funding should be given directly to professionals to deal with their school's literacy issues, for example, targeted support for a wide range of programmes that have been proven to work such as Reading Recovery.
- 3. Literacy is not just a primary school issue. There needs to be a focus by the Department for Education on post-primary school literacy issues.** Head teachers should be responsible for the literacy levels of their students. Schools should be developing cross-departmental strategies to improve literacy, rather than working in departmental silos. Ofsted needs to be looking more closely at this and it should be built into their new remit. More prominence needs to be given to the transition between primary and secondary school to avoid what David Wray calls 'the retreat from print' that occurs at that time.
- 4. There should be a focus on parental support and early intervention by funding wider programmes to ensure that parents read with their children and have access to books.** This means that initiatives such as Sure Start Centres and Bookstart should be guaranteed funding over a period of time. Other valuable programmes such as Summer Schools for children and their parents should be re-established to break down barriers between home and school and to allow catch-up programmes to take place.
- 5. The Government should recognise the part that the resources industry plays in the creation of materials that help schools and teachers to meet their goals.** The industry is firmly focused on education outcomes and it is essential that the industry is a part of policy change from early stages. This will ensure that appropriate, high quality resources and approaches can be developed in a cost-effective and timely way for the benefit of all.
- 6. There should be a major review of assessment and the curriculum across the whole system.** We have to decide what the 21st century requires us to teach and what we are trying to assess. Both have been looked at in a fragmented way but should be considered more as a 'learning journey'. This would help with transition problems and make the whole system more consistent and coherent.

Schools were asked what percentages of pupils in their school have very good literacy skills. Only 22% of primary and 16% of secondary schools gave a positive response.

In addition to those with very weak literacy skills, a further quarter of primary and a third of secondary school pupils are considered to have weak literacy skills.

Overall, teachers from secondary schools are more likely to identify that pupils have weak or very weak literacy skills.

57% of pupils in secondary schools are classed as having weak or very weak literacy skills.

In comparison, only 39% of pupils in primary schools are considered to have weak or very weak literacy skills.

APPG for Education's literacy survey, May 2011

7. **The right of citizens to visit a library and have access to a range of free reading material must be made overt and funding made available.** Evidence shows that libraries both in schools and in the community have a positive effect on reading, yet many are disappearing because of financial constraints.
8. **In a world of constant policy change it is vital that teachers have access to good quality professional development (CPD).** The lack of CPD challenges the professional status of teachers and does not provide the best value for our education system. Other countries insist that their teaching professionals re-certify at regular intervals, a condition of this being that they take part in up-to-date professional development courses and events such as BETT and The Education Show.
9. **Ministers need to make clearer statements about the value of all aspects of literacy and communication, not just phonics.** There needs to be recognition in the community and in schools that writing, speaking and listening are all vital in communicating. As well as this, there needs to be an acknowledgement of the growing value of digital literacy.
10. **It is important that the Department for Education works more closely with other government departments.** DfE needs to better integrate the impact of community, health, justice and financial issues into its literacy policy.

Theme 1: Creating a reading culture

When we teach children to read we are teaching not only the skill but also the human attitudes and assumptions about utility and personal reward that are characteristic of a reader.

Teaching methods should bring pleasure and reward to children, including to those who are just beginning to make sense of the letters on the page. The teachers who responded to the Inquiry felt that unless children have developed as readers in the fullest sense and are personally motivated to read, they will not progress beyond level 3 or 4 by the age of 11, and their reading capacity could even regress.

There is no single panacea which guarantees that all children will become readers. Although the Government has so far exclusively focused on systematic synthetic phonics, it is likely that the majority of primary schools will continue to embed phonics within a more balanced approach. Following one programme rigidly will make reading unexciting to children. As the Ofsted report *Excellence in English* (2011) argues, encouraging such enthusiasm is likely to require a mixed model. Children need to be enthused to read and if they are, this will become a springboard for their achievements throughout the curriculum.

One of the most serious challenges to continuity in the teaching of reading is the transition between key stage 2 and key stage 3. This transition, coming at a time when many children are emerging as self-motivated readers, is generally handled very badly because of curriculum and assessment constraints. Insufficient attention is given in Years 7 and 8 to the needs of children as readers, particularly those who are becoming literate but who remain in need of one-to-one tuition or small group teaching.

The active encouragement of reading for pleasure should be a core part of every child's curriculum entitlement because extensive reading and exposure to a wide range of texts make a huge contribution to students' educational achievement. This is why libraries are so important to the development of a reading culture – both those in schools and those in the community.

Many of the teaching associations involved in the Inquiry believe that schools should have a whole-school approach to the teaching of reading in order to foster a reading culture. Reading should be part of a school's integrated approach to the teaching of literacy, and as such should be developed along with children's writing, speaking and listening skills.

This whole-school approach should also encourage teachers and parents to work together, with a shared understanding that reading should be for meaning and enjoyment as well as an essential skill. Adult role models are especially important for those children where reading is seen as neither pleasurable nor the norm. For example, reading volunteers from business who work with individual children whose homes may not have many books; projects involving fathers reading to their sons; and projects with a link to sporting activities such as football, have all had positive effects. The Bookstart programme is also seen as vital, providing books to families from birth so changing the culture of reading.

“The current ways in which literacy is assessed leads teachers and children away from reading and writing for sheer enjoyment.

The biggest difference between those who can read and write and those who find it a challenge is that those who can have been shown how much fun it can be by parents and other significant adults.

Schools need to continue conveying that message – reading for pleasure, information and writing for interesting purposes.

By Year 6 writing is all about getting the right SATs level, even in the most creative of schools.”

Teacher response – APPG for Education's literacy survey, May 2011

Theme 2: Ensuring choice and diversity of education resources

Since the late 1980s schools have had responsibility for dealing with their own budgets. This has enabled them to choose the materials and adopt the methods that were relevant to their own learners in their own context. In response, this has encouraged a diversity of product ranges and approaches where ‘no one size fits all’. The educational supplies industry is firmly focused on education outcomes and helping schools to deliver their targets in curriculum, training and assessment areas.

All parties in this Inquiry expressed concern about the suggestion of more prescription of resources and approaches from the centre. The Government’s White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching*, talks about giving schools more autonomy and respecting teachers as professionals in what and how they teach. However, there is also talk of prescribed reading lists at key stage 2 in order to encourage children to read ‘the right books’, alongside a firm focus on systematic synthetic phonics as being the sole solution for all children’s reading problems.

Moreover, phonics materials are being assessed externally and ‘approved’ at Departmental level and linked to a matched-funding stream. Additionally, the matched funding stream is only available to those approved products purchased through one supplier appointed to prepare the catalogue of resources. The message appears to be that if educational professionals want to take advantage of matched funding, they have to buy from only a small range of products and only from one source. The financial incentive will be very strong and will be hard to ignore for many cash-strapped schools.

Although it is to be applauded that schools are being provided with incentives to teach phonics, such funding should be provided direct to schools in order that they can purchase the phonics (and literacy) materials and training appropriate for them.

The teacher survey conducted for this Inquiry shows that schools felt phonics should be taught as one of many strategies and that schools are still finding their budgets for literacy insufficient. The responses confirm that teachers are happy with the types of literacy resources being used, but there is a significant need for more provision and access for pupils.

Many schools have found one-to-one methods such as Reading Recovery (Every Child a Reader) very effective in teaching children to read. There was a funding stream for this but schools now must pay for this themselves if they wish to continue. They felt that the choice to be able to adopt approaches for a consistent period of time was being removed from them with a change of focus to systematic synthetic phonics only. This can only be to the detriment of the learners and so presents another barrier to improving literacy.

“Intensive programmes such as Reading Recovery really do work and not just in the short term. The impacts are felt months and years down the line.

Research by KPMG shows the financial saving of Reading Recovery.

The initial one-to-one support means that pupils are brought into line with their age-related expectations. They can then go back into class and access the rest of the curriculum.

The programme teaches the pupils strategies to use in both reading and writing. These can be applied back in the classroom.

Evaluation of the programme shows that very few of these children then need further support.

How many other programmes can truly say that?”

Teacher response – APPG for Education’s literacy survey, May 2011

Theme 3: Literacy is not just a primary school issue

Since the National Literacy Strategy of 1998 there has been a focus on literacy within primary schools. The Strategy and its Framework arguably defined literacy and how it should be approached for a generation of children and their teachers. Key stage 2 SATs results in reading and writing increased by almost 20% over 12 years, but the complementary secondary strategy did not achieve a similar result. In the secondary phase, the focus has been on teaching English as a subject rather than a skill, while school organisation and the pressures of the examination system also undermine literacy development.

In the APPG's survey, secondary school teachers identified 57% of their pupils as having weak or very weak literacy skills, compared to the significantly lower 39% of pupils identified by primary school teachers. Nevertheless, across secondary schools, only 6% indicated that there should be a change in the extent to which literacy is incorporated into lessons. Instead, secondary school teachers were more likely to prefer the option of one-to-one support for struggling pupils.

This suggests that it is more difficult for secondary schools to tackle literacy as a distinct issue. Staff are not used to teaching basic skills. The 'subject' at this stage is English, which does not incorporate the skills-based approach of literacy. What's more, the subject-based examination system is the driver for the secondary school curriculum. Curriculum pressures often mean that the day is divided into 40-minute units to teach individual subjects; the result is that teachers cannot focus long enough on problem areas to deal with them.

Head teachers are perhaps not accountable enough for literacy levels in secondary schools. Amongst Inquiry respondents, there was a strong feeling that a consistent whole-school approach was missing and many subject teachers were reluctant to admit that literacy is within their remit. Despite training and INSET, literacy is still seen as the responsibility of the English Department rather than a whole-school issue, particularly in terms of assessment. Non-English subject teachers do not assess literacy, creating the danger that students view it as a skill which only matters in English lessons.

The transition between key stages 2 and 3 also challenges the continuity of teaching reading. Respondents felt that this transition, coming at a time when many children are emerging as self-motivated readers, was often handled very badly, with insufficient attention in Years 7 and 8 to the needs of children as readers.

The impact is clear. The Prince's Trust found that over 10 percent of 16 to 24-year-olds in the UK have no qualifications. Compared to other OECD countries, the UK has one of the highest proportions of 15 to 19-year-olds outside education and one of the greatest wage penalties for leaving education without secondary qualifications. The National Literacy Trust has shown that in the UK, 60 percent of prisoners have basic literacy difficulties, a far higher proportion than the 16 percent of the general population with such difficulties.

Literacy policy needs to be designed and funded with the long term in mind. Clear investment and sound teaching strategies are critical. The alternative will guarantee the knock-on effects of poor literacy at a huge social and economic cost to the nation.

"The drive to get level 4 SATs has meant that KS2 teaching seems to concentrate on getting the students the highest possible reading level in their SATs exam.

This means that quite weak students can end up with 3a or 4c SATs results - which do not reflect their lack of ability. They come to secondary schools with a label that indicates that they can read and write - but they can't!

Then all the pressure is on secondary teachers to jump them through various convoluted loops to gain a GCSE - and there is no time to STOP to teach them to read and write.

They have three hours English per week at secondary school and must read pre-1914 texts, analyse and compare multi-modal texts, etc.

There just isn't the time to teach them to read and write. They fall further and further behind; their behaviour becomes unmanageable and they drag their peers down with them."

Teacher response – APPG for Education's literacy survey, May 2011

Theme 4: Encouraging parental support and expectations

The impact of the home learning environment on literacy development cannot be overstated. Throughout childhood only 16 percent of time is spent in school and the rest is spent with families and within communities. It was a clear message from all constituents of the Inquiry that there should be a stronger focus on parental support and early intervention to encourage parents to act as reading role models and ensure access to books. Early language skills and vocabulary, and talking to and with a child are also important.

According to the National Literacy Trust, in both primary and secondary schools, 'research shows that parental involvement in their children's learning positively affects the child's performance at school ... leading to higher academic achievement, greater cognitive competence, greater problem-solving skills, greater school enjoyment, better school attendance and fewer behavioural problems at school'.

Parental involvement in their child's reading has been found to be the most important determinant of language and emergent literacy. Early reading experiences prepare children for the benefits of formal literacy later in school and give them a head start in their learning.

Participants in the Inquiry praised the work of Sure Start Centres where parents and their children could come to improve parenting skills, address social issues and receive informal literacy help. The aims of these Sure Start programmes are to (1) increase the numbers of parents/carers reading with their children; (2) increase library membership amongst 0-4 year-olds and their parents/carers; (3) ensure that 100% of children have access to good quality play and learning; and (4) reduce the number of children who need specialist speech and language support by the time they start school.

Evaluations of Bookstart programmes in 2009 indicated that parents were strongly supportive of reading with babies and toddlers and generally read frequently with their children. Longitudinal evidence suggested marked improvement in book sharing frequency after receiving the packs for 'less active' reading families (those that reported having relatively few children's books in the home and read with their child less than once a day). Three months after receiving a Bookstart pack these 'less active' reading families reported significantly increased reading frequency, stronger parental interest in reading with their child and higher levels of library membership. Early intervention initiatives such as Sure Start Centres and Bookstart should be guaranteed funding over a period of time.

Other valuable programmes such as Summer Schools for children and their parents should be re-established to break down barriers between home and school and to allow catch-up programmes to take place. Projects to encourage fathers reading to their children was cited as an opportunity to develop the reading habit in boys, as was the involvement of community-based projects such as those in football clubs. Finally, technology cannot be ignored: there are homes without books but with computers. It is possible to introduce adults and children to literacy through ICT, and the market is responding with, for example, Kindle in the USA having recently developed an agreement to lend ebooks.

What factors make it more difficult to increase literacy rates?

"... Children's lack of vocabulary and reading, playing activities when starting school. Poor parenting skills ... children arriving at school with language delays of up to three years.

From my experience children enter KS1 with poor behaviour skills, they lack support from the home in terms of wanting to learn.

Their home literacy experiences consist of limited knowledge of nursery rhymes, traditional stories and other story types ... poor letter sound recognition. Some children don't even know colours!"

Teacher response – APPG for Education's literacy survey, May 2011

Theme 5: Government and the supplies industry working together

The industry ensures that the resources available to teachers and learners match current government guidance, correspond with curriculum and assessment requirements, and meet their teaching and learning needs. Greater communication and collaboration between industry and policymakers would benefit the whole education system, clearly recognising the impact that good resources can have when in the hands of a good teacher.

Such cooperation would ensure more timely resources, which would be in tune with Departmental thinking. This would be more cost-effective for developers and schools alike. In practical terms, this means giving publishers and suppliers access to curriculum and guidance well in advance of publication. At the moment though, this does not happen, suggesting that the way resources are developed and produced is not integrated into policymaking.

Assessment and the interpretation of data was also an area of concern for literacy development. Selecting the best intervention depends on a sound understanding of assessment results and what they demonstrate about a pupil's reading capacity. Such assessment resources are developed on behalf of commercial companies by experts, and the companies themselves provide much of the continuing professional development in this area. In this sense, they are a vital partner of the DfE in working with teachers to improve literacy, indicating that greater involvement would be beneficial.

For those children with special educational needs, specialist literacy resources are essential. Although the UK is widely acknowledged to be leading the field in this area, many teachers expressed concern that funding and resources were not freely available to help such children raise their standards of literacy. A partnership between educators, the industry and the DfE, which endeavours to create the best materials and to develop teacher expertise, would assist in meeting the needs of the recent recommendations in the Green Paper, *Support and aspiration: A new approach to special educational needs and disability*.

Throughout the Inquiry, the School Library Association and several literacy associations highlighted the importance of books and reading materials of all kinds, including new technological developments. The variety of these materials, and how to make the most of them, needs to be communicated more effectively to educators. To achieve this, the industry could be a key partner of the DfE with more use of large events such as BETT, which attracts 30,000 visitors, and The Education Show, with 12,500 visitors.

Working together in this way would encourage educators to become better informed and more cost-effective purchasers of literacy resources and enable the DfE to translate their policies into action in a wider range of schools and by teachers.

“Every year we give one million books to schools through our Book Fairs and Book Clubs – this is through the commission schools earn on hosting either (or both) of those services.

Since Book Fairs started 21 years ago, we have given over 21 million books to schools in the UK.

These books give attention to the needs and particular challenges of boys' reading and their engagement with books – we are committed to providing good quality age-appropriate professionally-chosen books specifically with their needs and interests in mind.

Our nonfiction publishing such as Maths Readers, Investigate, allows reading for information, for pleasure and can engage boys' reading too.”

Scholastic Ltd – written evidence supplied to the inquiry, May 2011

Theme 6: The curriculum and assessment learning journey

The National Curriculum has driven what goes on in schools since it was specified in 1988. The National Strategies and their Framework for Literacy also had a major impact on literacy teaching. Within it, the *Letters and Sounds* programme gave those who had not been trained previously in phonics a useful structure. However, the National Strategies has had an important effect on teacher confidence. While SATs results improved with the introduction of the Literacy Hour and the Framework, these programmes also acted as a straitjacket even though they were not statutory.

Many teachers have known nothing but the Literacy Framework, which did not encourage creative approaches. Survey respondents often felt the crowded nature of the curriculum was responsible for lack of literacy improvement. Reading is not taught for pleasure but is rather broken down into small units to be covered during lessons. In all, it was felt by many that the problem with all these schemes is that they become ‘the norm’ when teachers should be building on them and adapting them for their own purposes.

The new National Curriculum is likely to advocate traditional approaches to texts, alongside its concentration on synthetic phonics and the Year 1 phonics screener. There were concerns amongst respondents that these new policies would simply replicate the unnecessary and counterproductive pressures of the Literacy Framework.

Literacy needs to be built into the whole curriculum. Speaking, listening and comprehension skills – as well as decoding through such means as phonics – are vital to literacy. However, there is less and less space in the curriculum to tackle these. Contributors to the Inquiry felt that the curriculum has been looked at in a fragmented way, mostly dealt with by reference to discrete subjects. It would be more useful to consider it as a ‘learning journey’, which would help with problems such as transition between school stages, as well as making the education system more coherent and consistent. Developing 21st skills remains an important task, and we should look at how young people read using new devices and technologies and whether these have a place in enthusing young people about reading.

The assessment and accountability system is also seen as a problem, distorting pedagogical practice and creating a barrier to the improvement of literacy standards. Until we are clear about what we are trying to assess in schools and how that data will be used, then the situation will not improve.

SATs are seen as unsuitable for the age range they are assessing, as old-fashioned and unhelpful. Most respondents felt that teacher assessment would be a better indicator of achievement, and would make more use of teacher professionalism. Many teachers described the bureaucracy and tick-box culture that exists, not allowing them to treat children as individuals. Early Years practitioners were concerned that pressure to achieve higher levels too early pushes the youngest children into reading and writing before they are ready. Too many teachers are concentrating on ‘teaching to the test’ rather than developing a love of reading because the pressure is on schools to achieve high results for the league tables. This causes more problems for secondary schools that have to work with children who have achieved a standard on paper which does not reflect their true ability.

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

“A less overloaded literacy framework! Greater emphasis on enjoyment of high quality texts put at the heart of literacy learning, more opportunities for teachers to share their practice within and between schools.”

Teacher response – APPG for Education’s literacy survey, May 2011

Theme 7: Protecting library provision

The report by the National Literacy Trust (NLT), *Literacy: State of the Nation* (2010), reveals the negative impact of low literacy rates on social responsibility, workplace and educational achievement. Literacy is the key life skill – enabling active participation in all areas of life.

There was a fear amongst respondents that schools might follow one scheme rigidly rather than adapting and employing more than one approach. Learning styles and creative teachers instil a love of reading, and wider reading has been shown to impact on motivation, wellbeing and attainment in a positive manner. An important part of this is library provision.

It was felt by all groups in this Inquiry that the lack of a coherent support for school libraries and their proven impact early in children's education is a huge anomaly. Although it is clear that libraries are not the single answer to improving literacy, they are an important resource for supporting a school's literacy teaching and learning.

The concern is that students without school libraries will not have access to a wide range of learning and reading resources to support their learning. A good library and, crucially, a good librarian, can be a real benefit to a school and attainment.

For example, the *School Library Commission Report* (2010), which surveyed 17,000 students, found that there was a very strong relationship between reading attainment and school library use. Young people who read below the expected level for their age were almost twice more likely to say that they are not a school library user. Conversely, those who read at or above the expected level were nearly three times more likely to say that they are school library users.

Many contributors to the Inquiry felt that the concept of 'literacy' made reading dull for children. Seeing literacy as a functional process disadvantages those without social capital. There is a need to make reading more creative in order to develop a purposeful love of reading. Family reading and social mobility are important strategies. Libraries are a place to make reading 'cool', a place where reading is for pleasure.

Many children have no books at home and such a culture will not encourage reading. Libraries are essential to provide free and open access to a wide variety of reading materials. Economic constraints are forcing some of these to close and for schools to limit their library facilities and this can only be a barrier to successful literacy for learners of all ages.

The Publishers Association reports that purchases of school library books have declined by 40% since 2002. The Secretary of State has said that children should be reading up to 50 books a year and that successful schools give a high profile to reading for pleasure, but current policy seems to operate against this.

“There is lack of funding for libraries in school (ours doesn't exist) with little opportunity to read real books and/or meet real authors when we have to put all our money into a reading scheme.

Where's the enjoyment or motivation to learn to read?”

Teacher response – APPG for Education's literacy survey, May 2011

Theme 8: Increased status for continuing professional development

A recurrent theme of the Inquiry was the need for more and better continuing professional development (CPD) for educators in order to maintain and enhance their effectiveness. At the moment, CPD is often unsatisfying and occurs haphazardly, undermining its potential positive impact on teachers' professional status.

There are a number of barriers to successful CPD. INSET days are at times used inefficiently and ineffectively. Other CPD has to take place after school, so putting more pressure on already overloaded teachers. The alternative is for CPD to happen externally which involves further expense in replacing teachers in classrooms.

Yet in a world where policy changes frequently, it is vital that teachers have access to good quality professional development. Initial training cannot provide all the knowledge and skills that an individual will need for their entire career. The lack of CPD challenges professional status and does not provide the best value for our education system.

A greater emphasis on all-round literacy during initial teacher training, and through enhanced CPD, will become even more important if school policy requires all teachers to be responsible for pupil literacy.

Properly funded in-service training throughout a teacher's professional life would better enable them to make sound judgements and more appropriate interventions. Ensuring that teachers are well trained to identify and overcome a range of barriers to learning should increase early identification and raise literacy standards.

There is also a concern that many teachers have only taught using the National Strategies Framework, and are therefore likely to need more support to manage the transition away from the Framework. Local authorities used to have this support role in schools, but there is some anxiety that this is in decline.

In many careers, engagement in CPD is a requirement to maintain membership of one or more professional institutions, but this does not happen in teaching to such an extent. Indeed, respondents mentioned that other countries insist that their teaching professionals re-certify at regular intervals, a condition of this being that they take part in up-to-date professional development courses.

In the USA for example, teachers are expected to attend conferences and exhibitions in order to participate in professional development and learn about the latest resources and approaches. In the UK we have some of the biggest of such events, for example BETT in London (focusing on ICT, running over four days in January, with a complete CPD programme) and The Education Show in Birmingham (which takes place every March and covers a wide range of education issues). Attending such events and courses would increase the status and value of CPD for the profession, but such a programme would have to be fully funded.

“Teachers are not trusted as a profession by government.

Rather than supporting a teacher-based, bottom-up, school-team-policy approach to the particular literacy needs of each school's children, supported by training for identified professional development needs, we have a non-teacher led, top-down, prescriptive, ever-changing, complicated list of expectations based on the idea that literacy 'standards' are something quantitative that can keep improving indefinitely and must be assessed externally and statistically.

We are worn out trying to keep all these ridiculous plates spinning instead of feeling energised and inspired!”

Teacher response – APPG for Education's literacy survey, May 2011

Theme 9: Phonics as one of many literacy strategies

The Department for Education is currently focusing heavily on systematic synthetic phonics. There will be a phonics reading test at age six; Ofsted will be looking closely at this aspect of teaching reading, and there is even ring-fenced funding for the purchase of selected phonics resources for key stage 1.

However, teachers felt there was a need for time to consolidate approaches rather than to start a different methodology, and that they should be able to use their professional judgement as to which approach was most suitable for their learners. There was great concern that ‘phonics’ and ‘reading’ are being used interchangeably by policy makers, when they are not the same thing at all: reading isolated words is not reading for meaning.

Most participants believed that it is a media myth that teachers do not already use phonics to teach reading. Rather, they see phonics as one part of ‘the mix’. There is a fear that the ‘one size fits all’ approach is flattening out aspiration and achievement, thereby failing low achievers and switching off the brightest.

Synthetic phonics has been taught through the *Letters and Sounds* programme, and this gave those who had no confidence in phonics teaching a useful structure. The evidence points towards the problem with such programmes: they become the norm when teachers should be building on them and adapting them for their own purposes.

It is important that the teaching methods we employ bring pleasure and reward to children, including those who are just beginning to make sense of the letters and shapes on the page. Reaching level 3 or 4 by the age of 11 will not lead to further progress, and could even result in regression, unless the children are growing as readers in the fullest sense and are personally motivated to read.

It is likely that a majority of primary schools will continue to embed the teaching of synthetic phonics within a more balanced approach. Respondents were clear that there is no one panacea which guarantees all children will become readers. We need to accept that children do not ‘learn in a straight line’. There are different ways to learn and different learning preferences; this is why a focus on only synthetic phonics is not appropriate.

The focus of the Department for Children, Schools and Families was on funded one-to-one interventions. Intensive programmes such as Every Child A Reader (Reading Recovery) have been shown to work over the short and long term, and research by KPMG shows the financial savings of using Reading Recovery. The programme teaches pupils strategies to use in both reading and writing. The initial one-to-one support means that pupils are brought into line with their age-related expectations so that they can then go back into class and access the rest of the curriculum. Evidence shows that very few of these children need further support.

There also should be recognition in the community and in schools that writing, speaking and listening are all vital in communicating, as well as an acknowledgement of the growing value of digital literacy. ICT and advances in technology are seen as an important opportunity to encourage and develop reading. ICT especially motivates boys and resources such as e-readers could enthuse some reluctant readers.

“The teaching of reading has taken on an almost wholly phonic approach in many settings.

Because the English language is not wholly phonic in character, phonic-only programmes limit children’s exposure to excellent quality language and limit the strategies the children employ in their fledgling reading attempts.

There is too much emphasis on synthetic phonics as the major component of early literacy teaching. Children need to develop a range of strategies, including phonics, in order to successfully read continuous texts.

Significant numbers of children have had rigorous phonics teaching and are still struggling to read and write.

Schools need to be encouraged to teach a range of strategies to enable all pupils to have access to techniques which support their learning styles and abilities.”

Teacher response – APPG for Education’s literacy survey, May 2011

Theme 10: Improving literacy needs a joined-up approach

Literacy is a huge issue for the nation, our society and our economy, not just for schools. It is vital that the Department for Education works more closely with other government departments to tackle the complex problems that literacy policy faces. The DfE needs to better integrate the impact of community, health, justice and financial issues into its literacy policy. Many individuals have needs that do not necessarily fall within the Department's remit, but which nevertheless present barriers to literacy improvement.

The National Literacy Trust report, *Literacy Changes Lives* (2008), showed that families with high literacy levels are far more likely to live in working households, with only two percent of families with good literacy living in workless households. Higher literacy levels are associated with lower drinking and smoking, as well as higher levels of good mental health. Improved literacy will reduce the pressure on the health service and public funds and contribute to a healthier nation.

Literacy (and numeracy) skills clearly play an important part in terms of employability and wages. Adult basic skills, specifically literacy, should also be a priority for government. Research shows that up to one in six adults cannot read at the expected level for an 11-year-old. As the *Leech Review* (2006) argued, unless this number is reduced, the UK faces a severe skills shortage in the future.

Participants to the Inquiry were united in their belief that support received from outside agencies, especially speech and language therapy, particularly in relation to levels of provision for school-age children nationwide, were essential but they also voiced concerns about the reduction in such services because of financial constraints.

Respondents were of the opinion that early intervention is essential and that recommendations or statutory guidance should be provided to health authorities to prompt earlier intervention. For example, some studies have suggested that 20 percent of children have visual problems that affect learning. With 11 million children in Britain, this represents 170,000 children in each year group across the UK who are underachieving because of a correctable problem. Yet fewer than 10 percent of children get their eyes tested. There is no funding for this work within either the health or education budgets. No national screening of children's vision is carried out within schools in England and Scotland (although Wales is considering a scheme at the present time).

According to National Literacy Trust research, 70 percent of pupils permanently excluded from school have difficulties in basic literacy skills, and 25 percent of young offenders are said to have reading skills below those of the average seven-year-old.

Research focusing on looked after children carried out by the DfE in March 2010 found that 44,400 children had been looked after continuously for 12 months at 31 March 2010. This is an increase of 3 per cent from 42,900 in 2009. Of these, only 36 percent achieved the expected level in both English and mathematics in key stage 2 tests (compared to 74 percent nationally) and 12 per cent gained 5 or more GCSEs or the equivalent including English and mathematics at grades A* to C (compared to 53 percent nationally).

"In 2006 KPMG released a paper entitled 'The long term costs of literacy difficulties'. This research estimated the annual cost of poor literacy as £1.73bn; made up of costs in terms of crime, health, special needs support, behavioural issues, and unemployment. KPMG states that this estimate is conservative, and there are a number of intangible benefits of literacy that are not included in the survey.

The KPMG findings complement research previously published that highlights the UK's output per worker relative to other nations. According to the Centre for Economic Performance (2005), the UK has a lower output per hour (between 10 and 25%) than France, Germany and the US, which can be explained at least partly by poorer levels of basic skills and a lack of capital investment."

National Literacy Trust,
Literacy Changes Lives, 2008

Conclusion

This Inquiry has developed a series of themes and the challenge is how best to respond to them. Phonics has been at the centre of many discussions, along with the fact that the DfE is advocating synthetic phonics as the method that works to teach reading. This raises the immediate questions: How far does society and the Government trust teacher professionalism? Is the teaching of reading at the beck and call of the latest fad? Most participants in this Inquiry believe that reading is for pleasure – it is not just about phonics – and there is no single way to learn how to read; instead approaches should reflect individual learning styles.

However, choice of teaching approaches needs clear understanding. There is obviously a need for continuing professional development (CPD) and for revisions to initial teacher training. With the decline of local authority help for schools, the education supplies industry has a big role to play in the support of teachers in mediating materials and methods.

There needs to be greater discussion of what it is important to teach and to learn in the 21st century. Is it subject based? Is it about reading and writing? At the moment there are a range of unfair and unproductive pressures such as league tables, examinations and what is seen as a restrictive curriculum – all of which are barriers to improving literacy. Previous governments were viewed as being guilty of ‘initiative overload’. The present government is offering autonomy to schools, and it is clear that schools do need to be ‘left alone’ and given time to embed and consolidate their teaching practices.

Discussion with teachers and school leaders will tend to focus on funding and resources, but research has shown that high levels of expenditure are not necessarily associated with high performance. There is a need, however, to be consistent on funding for programmes, training and resources so that schools can plan over the long term and are not at the whim of financial crises. Teachers also need the freedom to choose their own resources to suit their particular needs and not be told what to buy and where to buy from. Libraries must be central to literacy development, and must be appropriately resourced. When choosing resources, the professionalism of teachers must be accepted. In other countries teachers have a much higher status as professionals, but this is linked to higher entry qualifications, higher pay and a much stricter accountability agenda.

Literacy is a national issue, central to our economy and society. In his address to the Policy Exchange (June 2011), the Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, ‘deplored the human cost of substandard education’, and warned of the ‘serious threat to our international competitiveness’. He recognised the need for reform to keep pace with huge change: globalisation, technological innovation, and the unprecedented mobility of capital, labour and information.

Literacy and the ability to access the curriculum obviously have a significant role to play in this. The Secretary of State cited the fact that in Singapore, four out of five pupils achieve an equivalent of a C both in English and Maths, compared to about half of British pupils at GCSE. We need to be much more ‘joined-up’ in our own approach.

“... in Finland ... key elements of national culture allow teaching approaches of a quite unpromising kind to result in high standards – there is a societal commitment to high levels of attainment, a long history of standards of literacy and involvement in reading, and an expectation of high levels of parental involvement in learning ...

Finnish society is one which, from 1686, legally enforced literacy through demanding it as a requirement for marriage ... schools in Finland have traditionally been small, well-integrated into the communities from which the pupils come, and with little ethnic diversity ... Family learning and early literacy are essential elements of Finnish society. Aided by a language which is much simpler than English, literacy becomes an early platform for learning...”

Could Do Better, University of Cambridge, November 2010

Appendix I: Evidence received

Further details of evidence received is available from <http://www.educationappg.org.uk/>

The teacher survey

Sampling and population				
	Responding sample	NERP members contacted	Percentage response	Total population
Schools				
Primary	426	1400	30.4	17,020
Secondary	158	460	34.3	3,336
Total	584	1,860	31.4	20,356

Individuals and organisations providing written submissions

GL Assessment

Keith Holland and Associates

Audrey Major

National Association for Primary Education

National Literacy Association

National Literacy Trust

The National Union of Teachers

The Prince's Trust

Scholastic Ltd

The School Library Association

Individuals and organisations providing oral evidence

Session chaired by Baroness Perry of Southwark:

Geoff Savage, Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP)

Brian Lightman, Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL)

Nansi Ellis, Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL)

Dr Kate Saunders, British Dyslexia Association (BDA)

Ray Barker, British Educational Suppliers Association (BESA)

Kathryn James, NAHT

John Coe, National Association for Primary Education (NAPE)

Darren Northcott, NASUWT

Simon Gibbons, National Association for the Teaching of English (NATE)

Sue Southwood, National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)

Rona Tutt, National Literacy Association (NLA)

George Dugdale, National Literacy Trust (NLT)

Hazel Danson, NUT

Nicola Swann, Publishers Association

Graham Taylor, Publishers Association

Tricia Adams, School Library Association (SLA)

Caroline Edwards, Shannon Trust

Session chaired by Lord Knight of Weymouth:

Nick Parry, Accipio Learning

Peter Cope, Bli Education

Ray Barker, British Educational Suppliers Association (BESA)

Dominic Savage, British Educational Suppliers Association (BESA)

Ann Crick, Crick Software

Maria Brosnan, Day One Productions

Kate Gambles, HarperCollins

Donna Burton Wilcock, Immersive Education

Claire Varlet-Baker, Nelson Thornes

Kersti Worsley, Oxford University Press

Lindsay Nadin, Pearson

James Bell, Renaissance Learning

Gill Budgell, Rising Stars

Alison Sutton-Davezac, RM

Chris Ratcliffe, Scholastic Ltd

Rachel Jones, Steljes

Sunita Gordon, *The Guardian*

Christina Voizey, Widgit Software