

## **How will the implementation of phonetically decodable home readers aligned with children's daily phonics sessions impact the progress children make in reading by end of the Reception year?**

Southwold Primary School, EYFS Phase

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to explore if using home readers, which were phonetically decodable and linked to the daily phonics, would impact on children's progress in early reading. Over a period of 12 weeks children took home two reading books, one aligned to their daily phonics teaching and a pleasure reader which was age banded. The progress in reading of six children was measured (two children levelled as on track at baseline in September and four children levelled as working below the expected level). The progress of the children was compared with a comparable group of children from the previous academic year.

*'A systematic approach, which is generally understood as 'synthetic' phonics, offers the vast majority of young children the best and most direct route to becoming skilled readers and writers.'* Jim Rose, Independent review of the teaching of early reading (2006)

The findings of the study indicate that when children take home a phonetically decodable reading book aligned with their in-school phonics lessons they make better progress during early stages of reading.

### **Introduction**

Southwold is a two-form entry primary school in the London borough of Hackney, providing education for children aged from three to eleven. The proportions of children from minority ethnic groups and those who speak English as an additional language are much higher than the national average. The proportion of children eligible for pupil premium is also higher than average. Most children start school with skills typically well below that expected for their age.

Although the percentage of children leaving the school at the expected standard in Year 6 has been significantly higher than national average for many years, the percentage of children achieving the Good Level of Development (GLD) at the end of Reception year, and outcomes from the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check have been broadly in line with the National figure for some time. Ofsted states that schools should ensure that *'At all stages, reading attainment is assessed and gaps are addressed quickly and effectively for all pupils. Reading books connect closely to the phonics knowledge pupils are taught when they are learning to read,'* (Page 51). The school's published data, combined with an Ofsted focus on children reading books linked to their synthetic phonics lessons, resulted in the school reviewing its home reading provision in Reception and Year 1.

Prior to the study, children would take home a reading book banded by difficulty known as reading levels or book bands, these varied greatly in their design and format. Some texts would use phonics, some sight words, and some a mixture of reading strategies. This was confounded by the fact that the books came from a variety of schemes and so would be very different in their layout and format. The phonics books chosen for the study came from two reading schemes so children would quickly become familiar with the style and layout of the text.

Another aspect, which made home-reading variable, was the fact that the reading books that children took home did not link to the daily phonics lessons which children accessed in class. Phonics lessons are daily, last half an hour and teach specific sounds. Not having home reading books linked to the daily phonics teaching was a missed opportunity to reinforce daily phonics teaching and learning. Linda Farrell (2019) makes the point that texts, which are not phonetically decodable, encourage children to guess based on context or the pictures, ultimately looking away from the words or text. She goes on to point out that no good reader looks away from the words when reading.

## **Research Process**

The early years phase leader led the study with six children from across the Reception year group. Two of the children selected were assessed as being 'on track' and four children were assessed as 'working below the expected level' at

baseline in September. Quantitative data was collected as the start of the academic year through baseline assessments using the 'Development Matters' - a set of age specific assessment criteria linked to the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile.

Staff received both early reading and phonics training at the start of the year and were briefed on the new system of sending home two home readers, one book banded book and one linked to the phonics that the children had been learning in class that week. Weekly phonics meetings were held on a Friday morning, which provided the opportunity for dialogue between the teachers and other adults delivering phonics teaching and also those changing home-reading books. It also allowed for the opportunity for the phase leader to evaluate the study as it developed, making any necessary changes if or when needed.

To ensure that parents understood the system, information workshops were delivered. So that parents knew which text was the phonics reading book, a 'P' was used in home reading diaries to differentiate the text from the book banded reading book. Parents were also informed of their child's reading level by letter (see Appendix 2). The home-school reading diary could also be as home – school communication tool as parents could comment on the progress of their child's reading (see Appendix 3) in it. In order to monitor the frequency of reading and to ensure that the phonics reader was read regularly, the 'Reading Diary Chart' was introduced (see Appendix 4). This was introduced to both children and parents, and displayed by the classroom door so that parents could see it at drop off and collection. Children were also rewarded for reading by class teachers providing stickers.

The phase leader monitored the implementation and use of phonics readers through weekly book bag and home reading diary checks. Checking reading diaries supported the phase leader to take feedback from parents regarding the new system for home-reading. Weekly feedback during phase meetings provided an opportunity for dialogue between the school staff involved in undertaking the project. This provided regular feedback on how well the new home-reading system was going and allowed the phase leaders to make any necessary changes e.g. ordering more

books of a certain phonics phase to ensure that children were not capped or would become bored with the selection of phonics readers available.

Following the baseline assessment in September, the six children involved in the project were assessed again at the end of the Autumn term in December and again at the end of the Spring term in April. Children were assessed using the development matters assessment criteria for 'Reading' within the 'Communication, Language and Literacy' strand of the Early Years' Curriculum. As well as collecting assessment data, at the end of the research parents views were collected about the introduction of phonetically decodable home readers.

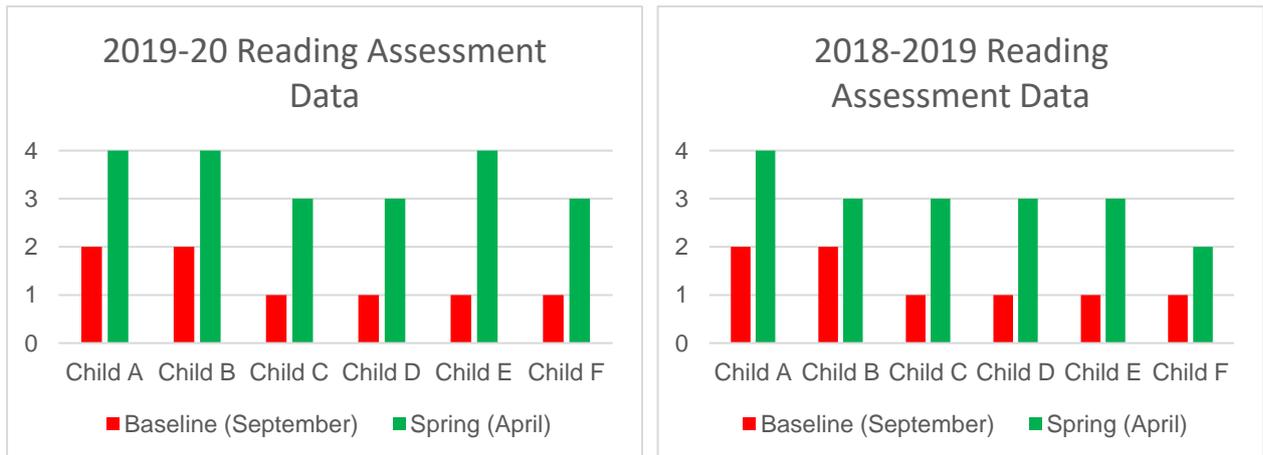
## **Findings**

From the study, it was possible to gather quantitative data in the form of the children's progress in reading, and qualitative in the form of the feedback comments from parents. Lankshear and Knobel (2004) make the point that it is almost impossible to adopt a research approach which is solely quantitative or qualitative as both will almost always have elements of the other.

It is expected that children move two development matter bands between the baseline assessment in September and Spring assessment in April. If children are on track to meet the end of year expectations they should be '40-60 Developing' at the Spring assessment. More than two bands progress would be considered more than expected progress.

The assessment data gathered at the end of the research project (fig 1.) showed that all children had made at least expected progress (two bands), with one child making more than expected progress (three bands). When looking at a similar group of children from the previous academic year, four children had made the expected progress (two bands), two children had made less than expected progress (one band), with no children making more than expected progress.

**Fig. 1**



Key:

- 1: 30-50 Secure
- 2: 40-60 Emerging
- 3: 40-60 Developing
- 4: 40-60 Secure

As well as the reading assessment data collected, parents were also surveyed for their views (fig 2). Parents were asked the following: Do you think the addition of phonics books has helped your child to develop their reading skills?

**Fig 2.**

<b>Child A</b>	<i>"The books can be a bit repetitive, but I have seen a real improvement in my child's reading since September."</i>
<b>Child B</b>	<i>"The phonics books have been really good. I have noticed that my child is applying the sounds that she is learning into the books elsewhere, such as the home learning packs. I recommend that you continue to use them next year as my child really enjoys reading them".</i>
<b>Child C</b>	<i>"My child really enjoys reading their phonics book to me; it's nice that they have a book that they can read without help.</i>
<b>Child D</b>	<i>"The books are not enjoyable, but have definitely helped with learning the sounds".</i>
<b>Child E</b>	<i>"I think it is good to see how my child uses phonics when reading because I was taught to read in different way".</i>
<b>Child F</b>	<i>"Yes and No. The stories are quite short and I cannot really help my child to use sounds because I was taught to read differently. But seeing her reading improved I do believe these books work".</i>

Although some of the parents thought that the quality of the phonics reader text could be improved, all made positive comments regarding their children's reading and three said that they have seen an improvement in their child's reading skills.

### **Impact and Conclusion**

The findings from this research study suggest that using phonetically decodable home readers at the early stages of learning to read support children in making better progress. From the children's assessment data it can be seen that all children made expected or better than expected progress, an improvement when compared with a similar group of children from the previous academic year. Reducing the attainment gap in reading at the end of Reception year should in theory lead to improved outcomes in the Year 1 Phonics Check. Tracking the children through to Year 1 would therefore be an interesting focus for the leaders involved in the action research project.

The findings of the action research project are based on pupil assessment data and the views of the parents reading the phonetically decodable books with their children. Common feedback from parents was that the books were repetitive and sometimes boring. It would be interesting to gauge the opinions of the children, to see if they shared similar opinions on the texts. The views of children would have added an additional dimension to the research and made conclusions even more robust.

The phonics books chosen came from two reading schemes so that children would quickly become familiar with the style and layout. However, the early visible impact of this action research meant that school leaders sought to source greater variety of phonetically decodable reading books before the project came to an end. It is hoped that this will prevent children from becoming bored and losing interest in their reading.

## References

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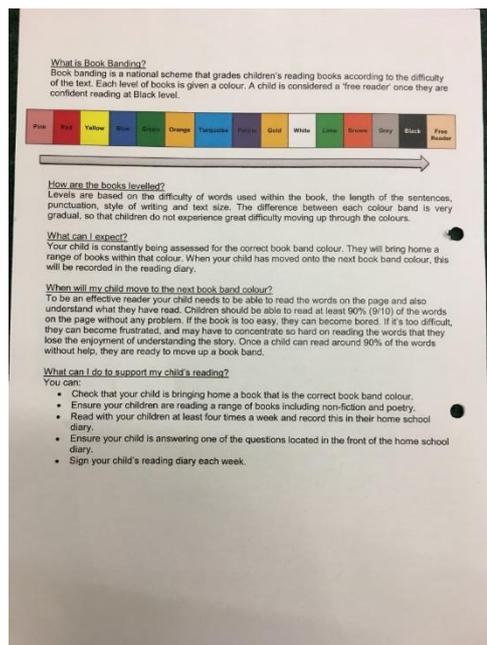
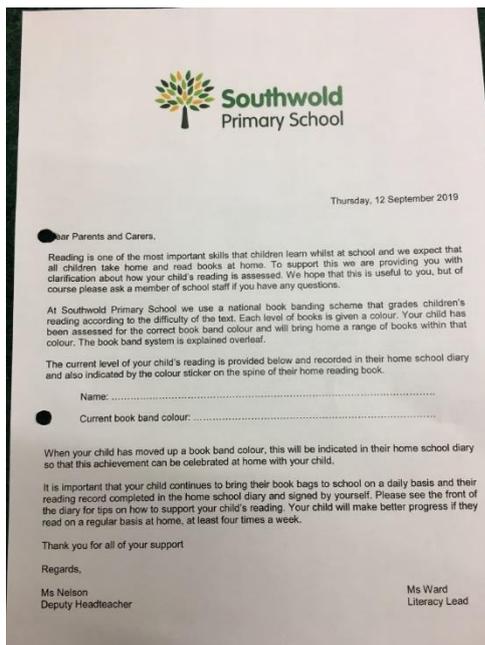
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## Appendix 1 – Phonetically decodable books



## Appendix 2 – Explaining book banding to parents





Appendix 3 – Home reading diary explained

diary explained

 **Southwold Primary School**

EYFS/ KS1  
Home – School Learning Diaries

It is an expectation that every child at our school has the opportunity to read at home for at least 15 minutes every evening and to record relevant comments in home reading diaries

Top tips for filling in the reading diary

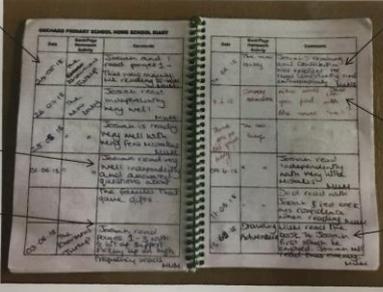
Date when you have read with your child

Have discussions about the text e.g. characters, storyline or what might happen next, use the questions at the front

Allow your child to have a go at reading new words and sounding out

"What is the first sound?"

"Sound out the letters and blend together"



Work in partnership with the school and feedback on the reading experiences you have had with your child every evening

Answer a question (found at the front of the reading diary) about the text

Read for enjoyment and always encourage and support!

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Appendix 4 – Reading chart

## WELL DONE FOR READING AND GETTING YOUR READING DIARY SIGNED!

	24 Feb	2 March	9 March	16 March	23 March	30 March
Child A	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Child B	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Child C	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Child D	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Child E	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Child F	✓	✓	✓	✓		

