

Scrutiny Review of Key Stage 1 Educational Attainment

Report by the Review Board

Councillor Michael Ensor (Chair)

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Councillor Claire Dowling

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Children's Services Scrutiny Committee – 27 June 2016

The report of the Scrutiny Review of Key Stage 1 educational attainment

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Recommendations

1	<p>In recognition of the introduction of Assessment Without Levels (AWL) and its wide-ranging changes to how tests are assessed, the Children's Services Department should, as far as is practicable, promote awareness of AWL as widely as possible to relevant stakeholders including parents, school staff, governors, and elected members.</p>
2	<p>The Review Board recognises the positive impact in phonics attainment as a result of the Phonics Lead Development Programme, and we endorse the Children's Services Department's proposal to explore replicating the model for literacy and numeracy – recognising that the methods of implementation may vary slightly given the different methods of learning employed in those subjects.</p>
3	<p>The Review Board recommends that schools identify a 'phonics champion' to help sustain the improvements made by the phonics lead. In order to achieve this goal, the Children's Services Department should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">A) have an identified phonics champion for every local authority maintained school (who may not be from that school) in place by the December 2016; andB) have invited academies to take part in the phonics programme and asked them to identify a phonics champion.

Objectives and scope of the review

1. At its meeting on 21 September 2015, the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee appointed a Review Board to conduct a review of educational attainment at Key Stage 1. The Committee decided a review of this key stage was timely, as it would build on the findings of the *Scrutiny review of Early Years Foundation Stage attainment in East Sussex* conducted in 2014.

2. Whilst the Committee initially proposed a review of educational attainment across the whole of Key Stage 1, it quickly became apparent that this was impractical due to the recent introduction of a new National Curriculum and the introduction of a new assessment framework that replaced national curriculum levels with a process of Assessment Without Levels (AWL). The Board decided a comprehensive review of Key Stage 1 attainment was not therefore feasible for the time being as:

- the removal of key stage levels and changes to the curriculum content would make it very difficult to compare year on year improvements in educational attainment for pupils at the end of Key Stage 1 between 2014/15 and 2015/16;
- the new National Curriculum and AWL were crosscutting issues that affected all key stages, and so were beyond the Board's remit.

3. Educational attainment at Key Stage 1 is also measured by a Phonics Screening Check taken by all pupils in Year 1. The Review Board agreed to focus on this aspect of educational attainment at Key Stage 1 as:

- only Key Stage 1 pupils sit the Phonics Screening Checks;
- it is possible to compare educational attainment for Screening Checks year on year;
- phonics is an effective way of teaching children to read and the Phonics Screening Check is a mandatory test, so there is value in considering how the teaching of the Screening Check could be improved;
- SLES has a training programme for the teaching of phonics in East Sussex that needs to become sustainable in light of both ongoing savings and the likely future removal of the local authority's responsibility as an external moderator of teacher assessment judgements.

4. Furthermore, the Review Board agreed it was impractical to consider Phonics Screening Checks without understanding the fundamental changes the introduction of the new National Curriculum and AWL have had on Key Stage 1. The report therefore includes a discussion of these wider changes to help contextualise the decision to focus the review on phonics.

5. The Scrutiny Review Board comprised five members of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee: Councillors Michael Ensor, Angharad Davies, Claire Dowling, Johanna Howell and Alan Shuttleworth. Councillor Ensor was elected as the Chair of the Review Board.

6. The Review Board agreed that it was conducting a 'table-top' review, so it is intended that only the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee considers the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the Review Board at this stage. It is, however, for the Committee itself to decide whether the report is subsequently forwarded on to Cabinet and Full Council.

Background: Educational attainment at Key Stage 1

7. Educational attainment for pupils studying Key Stage 1 of the National Curriculum is measured by two statutory national assessments: a Phonics Screening Check in Year 1, to demonstrate a pupil's understanding of how words are formed; and Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) in Year 2, to demonstrate their understanding of the curriculum.

8. The SATs results help to inform a teachers' assessment of their pupils at the end of Key Stage 1, together with in-school assessments carried out throughout the year. Although it was a statutory requirement for teachers to assess pupils using levels at the end of each key stage, schools also adopted them for the end of year assessments provided to all other year groups.

9. In 2014, the Government introduced a new National Curriculum. In September 2015, the Government introduced a new interim assessment framework for teachers to assess pupils on the new curriculum. The framework is based on the assessment method called 'Assessment Without Levels (AWL)'.

10. Under the new assessment framework, teachers will need to assess whether their pupils are working at one of three 'expected standards' by the end of Key Stage 1. The Year 2 pupils who took SATs during May 2016 were the first to be tested on the new curriculum and the first to be assessed using the AWL method.

11. In 2012, the Government introduced a mandatory Phonics Screening Check for all children in Year 1. Results for Phonics Screening Checks in East Sussex were 7% below the national average for the 2012/13 academic year, so East Sussex County Council's Standards and Learning Effectiveness Service (SLES) launched a training programme to improve the standard of phonics teaching. As of 2015, East Sussex was 1% below the national average.

12. Ongoing local authority savings targets mean that any training programme offered by SLES must be sustainable. In order to achieve sustainability, SLES is training teachers to be 'Phonics Leads' for their Education Improvement Partnership (EIP), and has set up a new 'Phonics Hub' at Pashley Infant School to carry out future training and recruitment of Phonics Leads. With these changes in place, it is hoped that the demand for phonics training will decline – as standards improve – and the need for SLES to provide the training will also diminish as it is increasingly carried out by the teachers themselves.

Findings and conclusions

The introduction of Assessment Without Levels (AWL)

13. The National Curriculum (introduced in 1988) is divided into four key stages. Key Stage 1 covers the school years 1 & 2, which comprise pupils aged 5 to 7.

14. Pupils at Key Stage 1 receive an end of year report in Year 1 and Year 2 from the school that informs parents how their child is performing; this used to be expressed as a national curriculum level between 1 and 3 (with each level containing the sub-levels a, b, and c). The report is derived from an 'assessment judgement' made by their teacher that is based on, primarily, in-school assessments that they carry out during the year, and for pupils in Year 2 it is also informed by their SATs results.

15. The Government undertook a review of the National Curriculum in 2011. The review resulted in the introduction of a new National Curriculum in the 2014/15 academic year for all maintained schools. The new curriculum was designed to combine the best international practices with the best practices from schools in England. As part of the new curriculum, a new assessment framework for teachers was introduced wherein national curriculum levels were abolished and replaced with Assessment Without Levels (AWL) on the advice of the Commission on Assessment Without Levels.

16. The Commission's rationale for the removal of levels was that they were designed for statutory national assessments at the end of the key stage but were over-used by schools for in-school assessments as a method of monitoring whether pupils were on track to achieve an expected level at the end of the key stage. The Commission argued that this distorted the purpose of in-school assessment and had a profoundly negative impact on teaching. Levels were frequently used as a threshold for pupils; they were deemed to have shown sufficient knowledge to reach a particular level or sub-level, but this would not account for the fact that they may still have had gaps in their knowledge and understanding.

17. The new assessment framework, published by the Standards and Testing Agency (STA) in September 2015, is an 'interim' assessment framework in recognition of the fact that pupils taking SATs in 2016 will not have studied the new National Curriculum for the entirety of their school education. The STA is expected to introduce a permanent new assessment framework in future years.

18. The interim assessment framework contains the three expected standards that pupils should be achieving by the end of Key Stage 1 based on the principles of AWL:

- working towards the expected standard;
- working at the expected standard; and
- working at greater depth within the expected standard.

19. The framework also contains the knowledge that pupils need to be able to demonstrate by the end of Key Stage 1 to achieve each of the three standards.

20. The teacher assessment exemplification material – the detailed guidance containing annotated examples of pupils' work that falls within each of the three standards – was published later in the school year in February 2016.

AWL's effect on SATs

21. In Year 2, pupils sit several statutory national assessments called Standard Assessment Tests (SATs). The results of the SATs help to inform the teacher's own assessment judgement of their pupil.

22. Key Stage 1 pupils take SATs for English reading and mathematics. A new test, SPaG (spelling, punctuation and grammar), due to be introduced this year, had to be withdrawn due to the accidental publication of the test on the Department for Education (DfE) website.

23. For the first time this year, pupils from maintained schools taking SATs in Year 2 (and Year 6 for Key Stage 2) will be assessed using the interim assessment framework. This means that their SATs score will be converted into a 'scaled score' that will correspond to one of the three standards (set out in paragraph 18).

24. The introduction of the new curriculum and the interim assessment framework has not changed how Key Stage 1 SATs are conducted. The objective of Key Stage 1 SATs remains to challenge pupils' knowledge, ability, and understanding rather than test their ability to complete a task within a set time. Consequently, Key Stage 1 SATs will continue to take place in a relaxed classroom environment with no strict time limits and will continue to be marked internally by teachers who know the pupils. However, the scaled scores and the new curriculum content make comparisons of educational attainment in SATs between 2014/15 and 2015/16 impractical.

AWL's effect on in-school assessments

25. Schools monitor pupils' progress throughout the school year using in-school assessments. The expected outcomes – what a pupil should have learned by the end of the year – and learning targets – what they should be able to demonstrate at key points during the year – for in-school assessments are set out in an assessment policy that the school has developed, or adopted from elsewhere.

26. Teachers carry out in-school assessments using evidence such as a pupil's schoolwork, pupil progress meetings, and speaking to pupils in the classroom. Teachers will then log this evidence against the learning targets using tracking software, enabling them to monitor a pupil's progress and develop next steps for the pupil's learning.

27. Prior to the introduction of the new assessment framework, in-school assessments used national curriculum levels, or sub-levels, to express a pupil's performance, for example, a pupil could be assessed to be working at key stage level 1b at the end of Year 1. This was seen as problematic because:

- levels related to expected standards for statutory national assessments carried out at the end of the key stage, so were not helpful in assessing in-year progress or informing what the next steps should be in a pupil's learning;
- pupils would not need to show a significant depth of knowledge, only enough to reach the threshold for a particular level. This meant that gaps could form in their knowledge that would not be identified and addressed.

28. The interim assessment framework contains three expected standards for pupils at the end of Key Stage 1. Whereas before schools would use lower national curriculum levels as expected standards for earlier year groups, schools will now only have expected standards for the end of the key stage, and will need to create or adopt other expected standards and learning targets for pupils throughout the rest of the key stage.

29. Local authorities have a statutory role as an external moderator that visits schools to ensure that teacher assessments judgements are accurate and in line with national standards. This provides a certain amount of consistency for in-school assessments across maintained schools. However – following the publication of the White Paper: Educational Excellence Everywhere – it is anticipated that in the future the Government will redefine local authorities' statutory responsibilities and remove this duty.

30. In anticipation of this change, East Sussex County Council's Standards and Learning Effectiveness Services (SLES) is now facilitating the development of moderation within Education Improvement Partnerships (EIPs) in order to develop sustainable school-to-school

support for moderation at a local level. This involves asking each EIP to identify 'lead practitioners' who SLES trains to be able to lead the development of moderation across their EIP. Teachers are currently meeting with these practitioners to discuss what the expected standard should be for a pupil in each year group.

31. The introduction of the interim assessment framework, and the anticipated loss of SLES's moderation role, means that schools will need to have an assessment policy that includes:

- expected standards for pupils at the end of reception, Year 1 and Year 2 and learning targets that pupils should achieve at certain points during the year;
- an indication of much time is put aside for regular, peer-led moderation to ensure that pupils' work is being assessed across the school in a consistent way against the expected standards (in anticipation that the local authority will not provide this service in the future);
- a robust system to track how all pupils are progressing against learning targets and towards end of year expected standards (schools are free to purchase whatever tracking software they wish – SLES recommends SIMS); and
- ways to identify any gaps in their pupils' knowledge and adapt learning to suit their needs.

Conclusions of the Review Board

32. A new assessment framework, curriculum content, and scaled scores mean that it will not be possible to compare this year's SATs results with previous years' to determine whether educational attainment at Key Stage 1 has improved in East Sussex. However, we understand that the scaled scores will make it easier in future years because they are adjusted for changes in the difficulty in tests from year to year.

33. The Review Board recognises that AWL is now the required way of assessing the progress of pupils. However, the Board also recognises the concerns of SLES that without the opportunity to moderate schools' assessment of their pupils' performance, individual schools may have varying expectations for what constitutes meeting the three national expected standards. This could mean that schools risk setting their own standards too high or too low.

34. It is clear that the introduction of AWL has dramatically changed the language of education, at least at Key Stages 1 and 2. As with all major changes to education, it will take time for this language to bed in. SLES should use its role to inform stakeholders – such as parents, school staff, governors and elected members – of these fundamental changes. This should help stakeholders understand the new educational attainment landscape and make informed judgements about whether or not a school is performing well under the new system.

RECOMMENDATION 1

In recognition of the introduction of Assessment Without Levels (AWL) and its wide-ranging changes to how tests are assessed, the Children's Services Department should, as far as is practicable, promote awareness of AWL as widely as possible to relevant stakeholders including parents, school staff, governors, and elected members.

Phonics screening checks

35. In 2012, the Government introduced mandatory Phonics Screening Checks for all Year 1 pupils in maintained schools.

36. According to the DfE, phonics is the most effective way of teaching children to read, and is particularly helpful for children aged 5 to 7 (Key Stage 1), because:

- children who receive good teaching of phonics learn skills that then enable them to read any kind of text fluently and confidently, and to read for enjoyment; and
- children who have been taught phonics tend to read more accurately than those taught using other methods; this includes children who find learning to read difficult.

37. The Phonics Screening Check involves pupils reading from a screen 20 real words and 20 pseudo words – which are phonetically plausible but not real words. The test is carried out as a one-to-one discussion with the teacher in the classroom.

38. The test has two outcomes: the pupil is either meeting the nationally set expected standard, or they are not meeting the expected standard.

39. The benchmark expected standard is usually set at around 32/40 correct answers; new benchmarks are released each year after the screening period has ended. If a pupil does not meet the expected standard, they have to retake the test in Year 2.

40. Certain pupils with barriers to learning – such as pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL) (although they tend to pick up the language quickly), and pupils with learning difficulties – might not be expected to meet the requirements of the Screening Check in Year 1, but any other pupil without barriers to learning ought to be able to.

41. Therefore, schools should be able to improve their phonics screening results by developing:

- teaching methods that help to ensure that all pupils without barriers to learning are able to meet the expected standard in Year 1; and
- a programme of ongoing support and development for pupils who do not meet the expected standard in Year 1 to help them meet the expected standard in Year 2.

42. As with other subjects at Key Stage 1, there is a teacher within each school who is identified as the 'phonics subject leader' and is given responsibility for securing high standards for the subject by supporting, guiding and motivating teachers of the subject. Often they are the English subject leader as well due to the overlap in the two subjects.

43. It is recommended good practice that schools offer phonics training sessions for parents, and schools are required to have their phonics scheme on the website.

44. Unlike SATs, Phonics Screening Checks were not affected by the content of the new National Curriculum or interim assessment framework, so educational attainment can still be compared year on year.

'Leading on Phonics' training programme

45. Phonics outcomes in East Sussex were initially lower than the national average; in 2012, 51% of pupils achieved the expected standard in East Sussex compared to 58% nationally. In response, SLES developed a teacher training programme called 'Leading on Phonics' to improve screen outcomes. The programme was aimed at phonics subject leaders to train them to a standard where they would be able to offer leadership on Phonics Screening Checks to the rest of the teachers.

Figure 1: Year 1 phonics: percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in East Sussex

	2013	2014	2015	3-year trend	2015 National Average	E Sussex % below NA
All pupils	63%	69%	76%	+ 13%	77%	-1%
Disadvantaged	49%	57%	63%	+ 14%	66%	-3%
Special Educational Needs (SEN)	33%	35%	36%	+ 3%	39%	-3%
English as an Additional Language (EAL)	61%	66%	69%	+ 8%	76%	-7%
Girls	67%	74%	80%	+ 13%	81%	-1%
Boys	59%	65%	72%	+ 13%	73%	-1%
Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT)			32%		33%	-1%

46. In November 2013, SLES offered the training fully funded to the 40 lowest achieving schools. Following the training these schools saw a 14% increase in the number of children passing the Screening Check in 2014 compared to the year before; this compared to a national rate of improvement of 5%.

47. Following the success of the first training course, SLES ran the training again in 2014 – this time as a traded course, i.e., one that schools had to fund themselves. 22 schools attended, of which only 32% were at or above the national average in 2014. Following the course, 82% of these schools were at or above the 2015 national average.

48. Overall, the course appeared to have improved phonics screening results in East Sussex between 2013 and 2015. There was a 14% increase in the number of pupils reaching the expected standard – which was double the national increase of 7% – and East Sussex is now only 1% below the national standard.

49. Despite its success, SLES concluded that the programme was not sustainable in its current form as it relied solely on direct funding and intervention from the local authority.

Phonics Lead Development Programme

50. In response to concerns about sustainability, for the 2014/15 academic year SLES developed the Phonics Lead Development Programme.

51. The Phonics Lead Development Programme aimed to eventually achieve financial sustainability by:

- recruiting and training teachers who were already proficient at teaching phonics who could then train other teachers within their EIP; and
- tasking Phonics Leads with working with all Reception and Year 1 teachers – and some Year 2 teachers – within an identified school in order to improve its institutional knowledge of phonics, rather than deliver individual professional development sessions for teachers.

52. This was expected to achieve sustainability because:

- the cost of using teachers to deliver training is low, as SLES only needs to provide funding to cover 2.5 days of supply teacher time per teacher, per year. The school themselves may offer discretionary pay increases; and
- the demand for the Phonics Leads will decline as the quality of phonics teaching improves overall – as a result of their work – and becomes embedded practice within each school.

53. In November 2014, SLES advertised for and recruited eight Phonics Leads for the 2014/15 academic year. As a group, schools supported by the Phonics Leads saw a 9% increase in pupils achieving the expected standard for phonics during 2014/15, compared with a 6% increase for schools in the group who did not receive support.

54. Feedback from headteachers also suggests that the Phonics Leads Development Programme has been a success. In particular, they recognised the value in having the people who provide training for phonics also teach phonics because it allowed other teachers to view good phonics teaching in action.

55. During the 2015/16 academic year, SLES recruited an additional tranche of Phonics Leads, and upskilled the Phonics Leads to provide consultant-style support to underperforming schools in their EIPs. Interim data for 2015/16 suggests that schools are on course to reach or exceed the target of 85% of pupils meeting the expected standard for Phonics Screening Checks.

Plans for 2016/17

56. SLES has funded the Phonics Lead Development Programme to date by a direct grant, but SLES is aiming for EIPs to fund it themselves – through both school-based funding, and the Action Plan Funding Grant that they receive from SLES – beginning in 2016/17.

57. SLES' lead officer for phonics training left East Sussex County Council during the 2015/16 school year to take up a position at Pashley Infant School. In consultation with SLES, the school agreed to be designated as a 'Phonics Hub' for the 2016/17 academic year onwards.

58. The Phonics Hub will provide the services that SLES offered in 2015/16, i.e., training Phonics Leads and recruiting an additional tranche of Leads. SLES will fund all of the Hub's costs during the 2016/17 academic year but will look for EIPs to provide some funding in future years. SLES expects that this approach will allow for the gradual reduction in the funding of phonics training in line with wider savings targets.

59. SLES proposes to replicate the Phonics Lead Development Programme for maths and literacy in 2016/17.

Conclusions of the Review Board

60. The Review Board recognises that phonics is, alongside other teaching practices, an effective method for helping young children learn to read. The Review Board welcomes the additional rate of improvement in the results for Phonics Screening Checks that the phonics teacher training programmes have delivered. It is also clear that the Phonics Leads Development Programme has the potential to deliver improvements at the same time as achieving financial sustainability. The Review Board is encouraged by SLES's proposal to replicate the Phonics Leads model for maths and literacy.

61. Whilst it is important to have a phonics lead to provide training across each EIP and have a teacher identified as a phonics subject leader within each school, the Review Board considers it important to go one step further and develop a 'phonics champion' who can actively promote the subject more widely. For example, to the school's leadership, governors, and to parents.

62. We would expect that phonics champions would be able to:

- ensure that new information on phonics is disseminated to members of staff by liaising with the phonics subject leader; and
- promote and develop phonics activities to stakeholders other than members of staff. These activities may include working with the phonics subject leader to deliver phonics training sessions for parents to enable them to support their child at home; and ensuring information about the school's phonics scheme is on the website.

63. The Review Board considers it likely that the 'phonics champion' role will be taken up by the phonics subject leader in many cases, but we also envisage that a keen governor could provide support for the role.

64. As many phonics subject leaders are also English subject leaders, we recognise that in small schools, there will be limited capacity for that same teacher to take on the 'phonics champion' role as well – especially where the school is already performing well in phonics and has to prioritise other areas of teaching. Therefore, we recognise that it may be that the same person provides the 'phonics champion' role for more than one school within an EIP.

65. Whilst academies no longer come under the sphere of influence of local authorities, they nevertheless ought to be encouraged by SLES to adopt phonics champions as an example of best practice.

RECOMMENDATION 2

The Review Board recognises the positive impact in phonics attainment as a result of the Phonics Lead Development Programme, and we endorse the Children's Services Department's proposal to explore replicating the model for literacy and numeracy – recognising that the methods of implementation may vary slightly given the different methods of learning employed in those subjects.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

The Review Board recommends that schools identify a 'phonics champion' to help sustain the improvements made by the phonics lead. In order to achieve this goal, the Children's Services Department should:

- C) have an identified phonics champion for every local authority maintained school (who may not be from that school) in place by the December 2016; and**
- D) have invited academies to take part in the phonics programme and asked them to identify a phonics champion.**

Appendix: Terms of reference, membership and evidence

Scope and terms of reference

This scrutiny review was established by the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee on 21 September 2015 to consider and make recommendations on educational attainment at Key Stage 1.

Board Membership and project support

Review Board Members:

Cllrs Michael Ensor (Chair), Angharad Davies, Claire Dowling, Johanna Howell (the District representative) and Alan Shuttleworth

The Project Managers were Stuart McKeown and Harvey Winder

Support to the Board was provided by the following officers:

Joanne McLauchlan, Interim Head of Education Improvement

Claire Roberts, Senior Manager: Improvement and Intervention

Review Board meeting dates

8 December 2015, 4 May 2016

Witnesses providing evidence

The following officers appeared as witnesses at the review board meeting:

Joanne McLauchlan, Interim Head of Education Improvement

Richard Sutton-Smith – Head of Education Improvement

Claire Roberts, Senior Manager: Improvement and Intervention

The Board is grateful to both officers for attending the meeting on 4 May 2016.

Evidence papers

Item	Date
Overview of phonics – East Sussex County Council	4 May 2016
Overview of Assessment Without Levels (AWL) – East Sussex County Council	4 May 2016
Scaled Score Guidance – Standards and Testing Agency	3 July 2015
Learning to read through phonics, information for parents – Department for Education	2013
Achieving Potential; Closing the Gap (Draft version) – East Sussex County Council	7 April 2016
Phonics and Key Stage 1 data for East Sussex – East Sussex County Council	4 May 2016
Pupil Premium Good Practice recognised in East Sussex – East Sussex County Council	4 May 2016

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