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CHANGE FOR THE BETTER

An exploration into the implementation of a Department For Education (England) validated **synthetic systematic phonics programme in ten schools in Wales.**

'Never done anything that has had an impact on this scale. The ripples are far reaching.'

- Headteacher, School H

The enquiry aims to:

- determine the impact on standards in phonics of using a DFE validated synthetic systematic phonics programme in school in Wales
- to identify any factors that increase/inhibit the impact of the selected programme on standards. (Enablers and Barriers)



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Forward

One of the many delights of being partially retired is that one has the opportunity to explore professional issues that have been of interest for some time.

As I approach the end of my career, I have come to the realisation that like many teachers in Wales, I have never been taught how to teach phonics properly. The extent of my phonics training has been being handed the teacher handbook of whatever the school scheme happened to be and expected to get on with it. As many teachers do, I did the best I could with what I had been given.

Anecdotally, I hear that the standard of phonics in England is significantly higher than they are in Wales. These anecdotes come from friends who teach close to the English border in both South and North Wales. Those on the English side of that border complain that pupils transferring from schools in Wales have poor phonic knowledge and need significant intervention. Meanwhile the views of schools on the Welsh side of the border are characterised by a quote from the headteacher of one of the schools participating in this enquiry:

"When pupils transfer from England, they can all read and write, despite backgrounds such as ALN and ACES."

She felt that the baseline assessment conducted at the school she led simply 'confirmed what we suspected, in black and white' i.e. that her pupils were 'at least a year behind' the English expectation.

Further, simply looking at some of the DFE validated systematic synthetic phonic schemes indicates that expectations in phonics seem significantly higher in England than in Wales.

I wanted to understand why there seemed to be such a difference and wondered if a DFE validated systematic synthetic phonics programme could impact on phonic standards in schools in Wales.

This paper outlines how I went about exploring this issue and what I learned during a journey that lasted over 12 months. It is not intended to be a rigorous academic paper. It is merely an honest reflection on the journey that I shared with ten willing schools and an accommodating Director of Education of a DFE approved synthetic phonics programme called Monster Phonics.

Little did I realise at the start just how much I would enjoy working with the ten participating schools nor just how much my strongly held views on pedagogy would be challenged.

I very much hope that schools in Wales will find this of interest when considering how they teach phonics.

Context

At the start of this enquiry in July 2023, the inspection handbooks for the inspectoral agencies Estyn (Wales) and Ofsted (England) differed significantly with regard to their specific reference to reading.

In the Estyn document What We Inspect (2024 – 2030): Maintained Schools and Pupil Referral Units, the specific reference to teaching and learning in reading remains limited to:

- develop pupils' skills systematically and progressively during lessons and over time so that they:

o acquire the necessary skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing, numeracy as well as the digital skills to support their work and progress'
The Ofsted inspection handbook has many more specific references to reading and phonics including:

'When evaluating early reading against the 'quality of education' judgement, inspectors will consider whether:

- the school is determined that every pupil will learn to read, regardless of their background, needs or abilities. All pupils, including the weakest readers, make sufficient progress to meet or exceed age-related expectations

- stories, poems, rhymes and non-fiction are chosen for reading to develop pupils' vocabulary, language comprehension and love of reading. Pupils are familiar with and enjoy listening to a wide range of stories, poems, rhymes and non-fiction

- the school's phonics programme matches or exceeds the expectations of the national curriculum and the EYFS early learning goals. The school has clear expectations of pupils' phonics progress term by term, particularly from Reception to Year 2

- the sequence of reading books shows a cumulative progression in phonics knowledge that is matched closely to the school's phonics programme. Teachers give pupils sufficient practice in reading and re-reading books that match the grapheme–phoneme correspondences they know, both at school and at home

- reading, including the teaching of systematic synthetic phonics, is taught from the beginning of Reception

- the ongoing assessment of pupils' phonics progress is sufficiently frequent and detailed to identify any pupil who is falling behind the programme's pace. If they do fall behind, targeted support is given immediately

- the school has developed sufficient expertise in the teaching of phonics and reading'

England has phonic screening and a reading framework. The DFE has validated around 45 systematic synthetic phonic programmes. **There is no such comparative structure in Wales.**

In a written statement in November 2023, Jeremy Miles MS, Minister for Education and Welsh Language at that time, acknowledged that the data obtained from the personalised assessment taken by all learners in Y2 to Y9, indicated a fall in standards when comparing 2018/19 to 2022/23:

'The report shows clearly the negative impact of the pandemic on attainment in reading and numeracy.....'

The same written statement referred to The Welsh Government's Reading and Oracy Toolkit that was published in March 2023. Within that toolkit, there is specific mention of phonics. It defines systematic phonics as:

'Systematic phonics is the way in which the majority of learners will learn to understand the way in which letters or groups of letters (graphemes) represent the sounds (phonemes) that make up words that are already known to them in spoken form.

Learners develop the ability to decode the way that letters represent sounds to make words and improve to the point that word recognition becomes automatic and doesn't require conscious effort. This provides them with one of a number of skills needed to make sense of what they read.'

The toolkit also outlines the role of phonics in Curriculum For Wales, stating that it:

- 'encourages schools and settings to develop systematic and consistent approaches to the teaching of phonics building on prior work to develop early communication skills, recognising that phonological and phonemic awareness are important cognitive skills in learning to read

- recognises that the teaching of systematic phonics should be alongside the development of vocabulary knowledge, comprehension and fluency as essential and interrelated components

- enables schools and settings to design their own curriculum and assessment arrangements, and make informed decisions to meet the needs of individual learners for them to become successful readers'

In addition the toolkit outlies how phonics feature within the relevant area of learning and experience:

'The Languages, Literacy and Communication Area of Learning and Experience sets out that specific consideration should be given by schools on the provision of systematic development of phonological awareness and phoneme awareness. It explains that all schools should put in place a clear procedure for and place emphasis on learners' phonological and phoneme awareness.'

And how phonics is included within the descriptions of learning:

'The descriptions of learning in the Curriculum for Wales framework start at Progression Step 1 with an expectation that all learners will learn to segment and blend words, develop knowledge of grapheme-phoneme correspondence, and recognise and read high frequency words.'

Within his written statement, The Minister made clear his intent to include specific guidance for the teaching of phonics:

'...I will publish an updated toolkit later this term, to ensure clarity on the systematic and consistent teaching of phonics.'

This statement highlights the fact that there is a lack of clarity within Wales in regard to how to best teach phonics.

More recently, the confusion with regards to how teaching should be taught in Wales has been exposed by ITV Wales reporter Rhys Williams. His article of 16th October 2024, **Wales reading crisis: Welsh government makes another U-turn on teaching methods** contains the following:

'Last month, an ITV News investigation revealed that a method which has been discredited for decades is being widely used in schools across Wales.
In this approach, commonly referred to as "cueing", young children are told to use "cues" like pictures or the context of a sentence if they are stuck on an unfamiliar word.

This technique is based on a flawed theory of how we learn to read and was discredited by scientists decades ago.

On Wednesday, the Welsh Conservatives forced a debate in the Senedd based on the ITV News' investigation.

In their initial response to our report, the Welsh government said that it did not advocate any one specific method to teach reading.

The following week, the Welsh government admitted that guidance for schools needed to be clarified. A spokeswoman also told ITV News that "cueing" should not be used to tackle unfamiliar words.

This week however, in an interview with ITV News, the Cabinet Secretary for Education Lynne Neagle performed another U-turn, with the official government response now having changed three times in three weeks.

Ms Neagle said that cueing could be used to teach reading, with phonics as the "building blocks."

Whilst the importance of phonics is being recognised, there remains no additional guidance on how phonics should be taught.

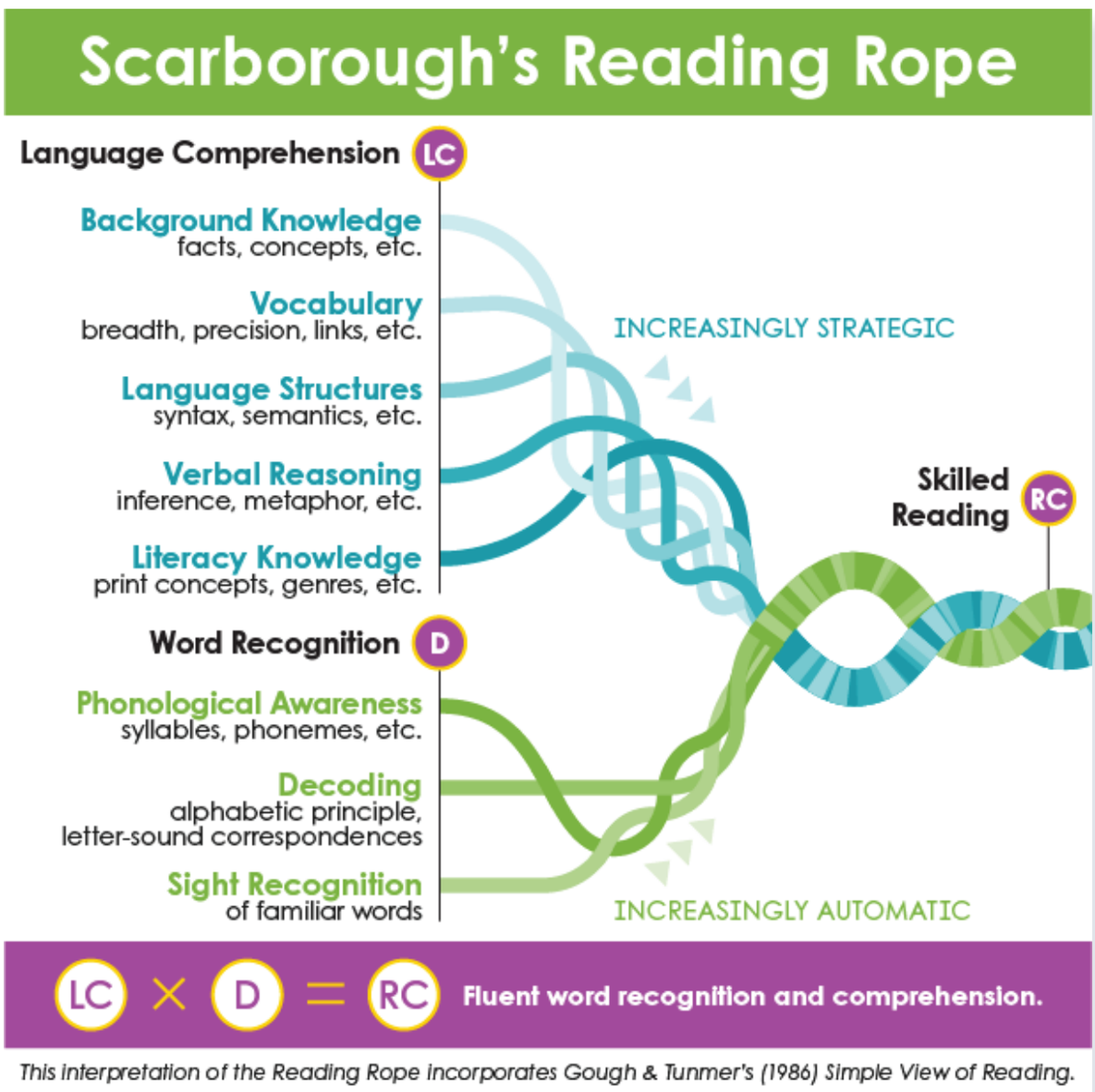
The way schools are held to account for their standards in phonics varies more than just in the way they are inspected. Wales is moving away from a high stakes accountability system:

'The Welsh Government remains clear that the purpose of personalised assessments is to support progression in learning, and that the assessment outcomes are not to be used for accountability purposes at any levels.' (Written statement. November 2023, Jeremy Miles MS)

This is in marked contrast to the accountability system in England where phonic screening data is used to compare the standard in phonics in different schools.

There are other significant differences in education between England and Wales. Schools in Wales tend to prefer adaptive teaching methods that promote the matching of tasks to pupil ability in order to meet the needs of individual learners through a range of differentiation strategies. To the Welsh, the English system can seem as a top-down model that expects all children to learn the same and force them through a one size fits all system, regardless of significant factors such as additional learning needs, adverse childhood experiences and personal learning styles and preferences. To the English, the Welsh system can seem to lack rigour and to rely too heavily on 'catch up' programmes when the attainment of some learners fall below that of others, as opposed to ensuring that the gap in attainment doesn't occur in the first place.

It is recognised that there is significantly more involved in the teaching and learning of reading than simply phonics. The diagram below illustrates this well:



This interpretation of the Reading Rope incorporates Gough & Tunmer's (1986) Simple View of Reading.

Phonological awareness, a skill set that includes identifying and manipulating units of oral language – parts such as words, syllables, onsets, and rhymes, is seen as one of the strands needed to develop fluent readers.

Selection of DFE Validated Scheme

This enquiry does not compare the different DFE validated phonics schemes. The author selected Monster Phonics for the following reasons:

- DFE validated.
- comprehensive range of resources
- rigour
- training provided
- engaging
- has a baseline assessment and an integrated assessment structure
- colour coding matched to phoneme/grapheme/monster
- addresses workload issues as planning and resources are provided

It is recognised that a number of other systematic synthetic phonic programmes have some of the above features. Monster Phonics with its monster characterisation and colour coding was considered to be particularly engaging and a facilitator of creative pedagogy. It had the potential to ensure that phonics could be fun and consist far more than worksheets: dressing as the monster characters, going on monster hunts, building monster houses and singing the monster songs for example.

Teacher workload is a significant barrier to new initiatives. Wales is currently in the midst of significant educational reform. A key aspect of this reform is the realisation of The Curriculum For Wales (CfW). Schools have been charged with developing a curriculum enabling their learners to develop towards the four purposes of the curriculum:

- ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives
- enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work
- ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world
- healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society

These are considered to be the starting point and aspiration for every child and young person in Wales. The curriculum needs to be relevant to their learners and ensure that all statements of what matters are included. Principles of progression need to be followed and descriptions of learning considered to ensure progression and facilitate assessment. There has been a move away from what was considered to be a high accountability system to one that focusses on the journey of individual learners. This change has brought increased workloads and at times a lack of clarity. In addition, Wales has also implemented a national additional learning needs transformation process.

It was therefore felt important that the synthetic phonics scheme selected had the potential to fit within CfW and the wider educational reform and that it provided planning and resources for teachers.

Concerns have been raised about the level of school spending per pupil, differences across local authorities and whether funding levels are sufficient to meet the needs of pupils in different parts of the country. This led to the commissioning of the 'Review of School Spending in Wales Building in evidence, fairness, transparency and clear expectations.' It was published in October 2020 and highlighted the complexities of school funding in Wales recording the fall in funding per pupil in Wales.

The NAHT Cymru funding study, 'A Failure to Invest: The state of Welsh school funding in 2021', (November 2021) outlined the pressures on school budgets and provided examples of the ways in which school leaders had cut expenditure in an attempt to balance their budgets. These include:

- reducing staff through not replacing vacancies
- reducing investment in equipment for schools
- delaying repairs or refurbishment; reducing maintenance budgets
- reducing investment in teacher training

More recently, school budgets have faced pressures from increasing inflation and energy prices and there has been a significant increase in schools setting deficit budgets.

NAHT's report - Falling Short: The Deepening School Funding Crisis in Wales (2024) - found that:

- more than a quarter (28%) are reducing the number of hours of teachers
- nearly six in ten (59%) are leaving posts empty
- 55% are reducing teaching assistant hours.

Compared with 2021, when NAHT asked school leaders similar questions, they are now around twice as likely to have to be taking these measures. Only three per cent said they didn't need to make savings, compared to a fifth three years ago.

The survey shows a range of issues are fuelling a "funding crisis", all of which the NAHT say have worsened over the last three years – from support for pupils with additional learning needs (cited by 88% of school leaders), to inflation and increased salaries (55%), supply cover 52%) and changes to local funding formulae (25%).

Since financial pressures were considered to be a significant barrier to schools engaging with the study, the selected synthetic phonics scheme needed to be accessible in terms of price. Through negotiation, Monster Phonics agreed to provide a 50% reduction in subscription and up to £1000 matched funding toward resources for all participating schools.

The Schools

To engage the schools in the study, a number of strategies were used:

- The posting of a blog on LinkedIn and X (Twitter)
- The use of social media, including X and Facebook
- Information session at a school
- A webinar

In this way, the participating schools were self-selecting and the extent of interest meant that it was not possible to select a range of schools to represent all types.

The following table provides information on the participating schools.

Table 1: School type and local authority

SCHOOL	TYPE	LOCAL AUTHORITY
A	Catholic Primary	Cardiff
B	Catholic Primary	RCT
Ca	Community Primary within a federation	Cardiff
Cb	Community Primary within a federation	Cardiff
F	Welsh Medium Primary	RCT
G	Community Infant School	Caerphilly
H	Primary School	Wrexham
I	Community Primary	RCT
J	Community Primary	Powys
K	Church in Wales Primary	Powys

An indication of the size of each school is given below as it shows the number of pupils in each year group participating in this enquiry.

Baseline Data

The relevant Monster Phonics baseline assessment was used for each year group i.e. reception baseline for reception, Y1 baseline for year one pupils and Y2 baseline assessment for Year 2 pupils.

This enabled a comparison to be made between the phonic standards in each school with the expected standard in England.

The baseline assessment was repeated in late June/early July to demonstrate the impact of the scheme on attainment in phonics in each year group in each school.

By October, baseline data was secured for the following number of pupils:

Table 2: Number of pupils in each year group, in each school for which a baseline result was obtained.

SCHOOL	RECEPTION TOTAL: 223	YEAR ONE TOTAL: 245	YEAR TWO TOTAL: 226
A	18	20	22
B	26	34	30
Ca	32	35	35
Cb	13	16	19
G	18	25	20
H	39	29	23
I	8	42	31
J	40	15	13
K	40	29	33
TOTALS	223	245	226

SCHOOL	YEAR THREE	YEAR FOUR	YEAR FIVE	YEAR SIX
F	28	21	28	22

The following table shows the baseline results for those pupils for whom a baseline result was also obtained again in June/July. Variation from the number of pupils in the table above that participated in the initial baseline assessment is due to migration or absence.

Table 3: Numbers of pupils in each year group, in each school, for which a baseline result was obtained at the beginning and repeated at the end of the academic year 23/24. Total score possible for the sounds and words aspect of the baseline assessment and the average (mean) result for each year group in both the sound and word aspect of the assessment. The mean expressed as a percentage of the total score possible.

School A

RECEPTION: 16 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	50	0.19	0%
	WORDS	47	0.00	0%
YEAR 1: 19 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	52	4.37	8%
	WORDS	52	5.63	11%
YEAR 2: 13 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	20	1.85	9%
	WORDS	20	6.46	32%

School B

RECEPTION: 26 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	50	13.23	26%
	WORDS	47	1.04	2%
YEAR 1: 33 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	52	9.85	19%
	WORDS	52	8.73	17%
YEAR 2: 13 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	20	3.63	18%
	WORDS	20	12.00	60%

School Ca

RECEPTION: 26 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	50	14.06	28%
	WORDS	47	2.94	6%
YEAR 1: 33 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	52	6.22	12%
	WORDS	52	4.25	8%
YEAR 2: 13 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	20	5.69	28%
	WORDS	20	5.49	27%

School Cb

RECEPTION: 16 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	50	6.64	13%
	WORDS	47	0.45	1%

YEAR 1: 19 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	52	4.07	8%
	WORDS	52	4.79	9%

YEAR 2: 13 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	20	5.13	26%
	WORDS	20	4.31	22%

School G

RECEPTION: 26 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	50	2.88	6%
	WORDS	47	0.00	0%

YEAR 1: 33 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	52	6.57	13%
	WORDS	52	1.30	3%

YEAR 2: 13 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	20	0.95	5%
	WORDS	20	6.5	33%

School H

RECEPTION: 26 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	50	10.59	21%
	WORDS	47	0.00	0%

YEAR 1: 33 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	52	6.86	13%
	WORDS	52	5.72	11%

YEAR 2: 13 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	20	2.23	11%
	WORDS	20	4.73	24%

School I

RECEPTION: 16 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	50	18.32	37%
	WORDS	47	6.43	14%

YEAR 1: 19 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	52	12.32	24%
	WORDS	52	12.83	25%

YEAR 2: 13 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	20	1.32	7%
	WORDS	20	7.16	36%

School J

RECEPTION: 26 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	50	0.00	0%
	WORDS	47	0.00	0%

YEAR 1: 33 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	52	5.00	10%
	WORDS	52	4.20	8%

YEAR 2: 13 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	20	1.32	7%
	WORDS	20	7.16	36%

School K

RECEPTION: 26 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	50	4.59	9%
	WORDS	47	2.69	6%

YEAR 1: 33 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	52	5.00	10%
	WORDS	52	4.20	8%

YEAR 2: 13 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	20	0.61	3%
	WORDS	20	5.83	29%

School F

YEAR 3: 27 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	51	20.19	40%
	WORDS	47	24.00	51%

YEAR 4: 21 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	51	28.05	55%
	WORDS	47	33.81	72%

YEAR 5: 27 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	51	33.59	66%
	WORDS	47	42.41	90%

YEAR 6: 21 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	51	31.95	63%
	WORDS	47	45.48	97%

The baseline data for reception pupils gives an indication of each school's intake. Schools A, K G and J had the lowest baseline, whilst school I had the highest. The baseline data for year one and year two show just how low the standards in phonics were in all schools. Overall, year one pupils read 12% for the sounds correctly and 10% of the words correctly. Year two pupils read 15% of the sounds correctly and 33% of the words correctly.

The information in Table 14 was collected during the summer visit to each school and shows the schools' reaction to the baseline assessment results. The low standards in phonics caused the schools issues as to where the pupils should start on the scheme. This was explored in depth during the summer visits. The way each school addressed this challenge is shown in Table 15.

Network

To tease out emerging issues as well as enablers and blockers, network meetings were held every month/six weeks. These were designed to:

- provide information on both the research and the synthetic phonics scheme
- build professional trust so that participants can be honest about standards in phonics at their schools
- facilitate the sharing of what has gone well and what has not gone well
- share resources and ideas
- provide an insight into which areas to explore in the questionnaire and school visits

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was completed in March 2024 by all participating schools using Typeform. The questionnaire is shown in appendix A - It was designed to explore each school's:

- engagement of staff
- engagement of pupils
- engagement of parents
- impact on pupils
- engagement with training
- what had gone well/Enablers
- what had not gone well/Blockers

Outcomes From Questionnaire

Of the ten participating schools, one is a federation of two schools. That federation completed one questionnaire rather than two so there were nine responses to the questionnaire.

Each aspect of the questionnaire responses is considered further in this section:

Staff Engagement

Table 4: Number of teachers and support staff who used Monster Phonics in Early Years to Y2 and in Y3 to Y6 in each school.

	EARLY YEARS TO Y2		Y3-Y6	
SCHOOL	TEACHERS	SUPPORT	TEACHERS	SUPPORT
A	4	4	4	2
B	6	6	1	1
Ca and Cb	10	8	0	2
F	1	0	6	5
G	3	3	0	0
H	4	5	0	0
I	5	5	0	0
J	3	3	3	4
K	7	7	1	1
TOTAL	43	41	15	15

Across the schools there were 43 teachers and 41 support staff using Monster Phonics in Early Years through to Year Two.

In addition there were 15 teachers and 15 support staff using Monster Phonics in Y3-Y6. Note that 6 of the teachers and 5 of the support staff were in the Welsh Medium school where English phonics are taught from KS2.

Of the 8 English medium schools, 5 have used Monster Phonics in KS2, though this was not initially intended to be part of the enquiry.

Initial staff reaction to using Monster Phonics

Table 5: Staff reaction to introducing new phonics scheme in each school.

ENGAGEMENT	SCHOOLS
All very reluctant	H
<25% of staff resistant to change	A, K and J
<25% happy as we are	C
<25% Is it suitable for our children?	C
>75% eager/keen	F, G and I
51-75% of staff keen to try something new	B

This indicates that most schools had at least some staff initially reluctant to try a DFE validated systematic synthetic phonics scheme.

School H and School C appear to have been the most resistant to change initially. However school H commented:

'We were all very reluctant to start (Sept 23) with Monster Phonics as we hadn't long started NAMED SCHEME and liked it and we didn't feel we had had enough time to embed it and see it move through the years. But I am glad to say now (March 24) love it and we are all so glad we did.'

Pupil Response To Monster Phonics

Table 6: Schools' description of pupil response to Monster Phonics.

SCHOOL	RESPONSE
A	The pupils love Monster Phonics, particularly the monsters! Following the planning and not using other resources from elsewhere has a positive impact on pupil learning. The daily repetition for younger pupils has been of great benefit seeing positive results. Older pupils who have always struggled with reading and spelling have also made good progress.
B	There has been a huge impact within our school. We have seen an impact and improvement in pupils' reading ages and their ability to blend and recognise sounds. Most of all we have been blown away by the confidence and engagement the pupils have shown towards their learning.
C a/b	Pupils are very enthusiastic about the scheme. They love the monsters. We have noticed that nearly all children are more engaged in phonics sessions. They have become familiar with the monsters very quickly and enjoy talking about them.
F	Enthusiastic and enjoying, especially the songs. Filling gaps in phonological knowledge. Improving spelling.
G	The pupils have loved the scheme. They are very enthusiastic and engaged. Sound knowledge has increased in all classes. Levels in reading have improved with many children moving up over 10 levels since September.
H	The pupils have responded so well to Monster Phonics. They love it. I teach Reception and my children love all aspects of it. They love the monsters and the colour coded sounds have made a huge impact on their reading. My children have a real passion for phonics this year. When sharing books with their friends or looking at signs, they are always identifying the sounds that have been introduced.

SCHOOL	RESPONSE
I	Engagement and confidence have improved. Pupils eager to read and love the monsters.
J	Amazing. The children are fully engaged. They love the characters and they are recognising and reading colour coded graphemes etc with so much more ease and fluency.
K	Real buzz about phonics. Songs have had a big impact; they are heard throughout the day and parents say they hear them at home too. Very excited to do the sessions. They enjoy the sessions and notice if it doesn't happen! Assessment tracking is showing many pupils are improving with their phonic knowledge, more analysis to be done. Daily feedback from staff shows many pupils are blending and doing this earlier. Looking forward to seeing the baseline data repeated evidence and how this progresses over the coming years. Most pupils are now more confident to ,have a go' when reading and spelling.

It is striking that all schools describe significant, positive pupil reaction to Monster Phonics.

The most commonly occurring responses are listed below.

Table 7: Initial impact of phonics scheme on pupils and the schools and number of schools describing that impact.

ENGAGEMENT	SCHOOLS	NUMBERS
Improved Engagement with phonics	B, C, G, H, J and K	6
Enthusiastic/Love the Monsters/ Scheme	A, C, F, G, H, I, J and K	8
Positive Impact on standards/ progress	A, B, F, G, H, J and K	7
Confidence	B, I and K	3

At this point (March 24) all but one of the schools reported that pupils were loving the monsters/scheme and showing increased enthusiasm.

Seven of the nine schools reported a positive impact on standards/progress.

It was decided to include a question on impact/progress in the school visits planned for June/July to explore if the impact has been sustained.

Parental Engagement

Table 8: Parental response to new phonics scheme and description of any relevant parental event at each school.

SCHOOL	SCHOOLS	EVENT	TYPE
A	During parents' evening and parental workshops, they were keen to learn about the schemes and the relevance of monsters to phonics. Very positive response from all parents we spoke to.	YES	We showed the parents how we teach phonics and the purpose of each monster-giving them examples of the stories attached to each one. Discussed colour coding and how we assess and teach the children. Used the monster 'teddies' during their workshop.
B	We have had many questions regarding the scheme and so many parents interested and wanting to know more information. From this we held two parent sessions and over 40 parents attended (this is great for our school). Some parents attended the free webinar by Monster Phonics and we have also had parents purchase some resources for home. Because of the parental engagement with this scheme, we have created home learning guides for parents and phonics packs for home. Overall a positive response from our parents.	YES	We have held two parental workshops where both the school governors and school improvement partner attended. We used the Monster Phonics resources such as books, characters, posters and flashcards during the showcase. We also used some of the Monster Phonics videos and literature that we were given by Monster Phonics.
C	Parental engagement is a challenge for us. We told parents about Monster Phonics on Parent's Evening and followed this up with an information session for parents.	YES	We held a Parents Introduction to Monster Phonics session in both schools. Parental engagement is a challenge for us although things are definitely improving. We find that parents are often unwilling to come to academic sessions so we tried really hard to emphasise that they would be fun, informal sessions. Eight parents attended at one of our schools and a few more at the other. We felt that that was quite a positive response for us. Those that attended said they had enjoyed the sessions. Next time I would include an opportunity for parents to work with their children.
F	No launch day yet - summer term. More structure to spelling test.	NO	Intend to hold a MP Reading Cafe where teachers will model lessons, song activity and activities. Information and link will be shared on our website.
G	Parents have been very interested, wanted to know more. Keen to support at home.	YES	Parents saw first-hand a phonics lesson and carried out activities with their child in all year groups. Books, characters, magnetic letters, stickers, handwriting, reading books and worksheets were all used. PowerPoints and videos used. Reading presentation to start the session used information from teacher manuals and share point presentations.
H	We have made a PowerPoint for parents. Having chats with parents they are amazed at their phonic progress and they say the children are always talking about the monsters at home. We keep the books for school use only but once a week I send home an audio book of me reading the book that matches the sound we have covered in class that week. I have had positive feedback about this. Some parents say the children just like to listen to me reading it. Others say their children pause it and read it themselves and some said that they like to pick out the words linked to the sound and read those words.	NO	We have made a PowerPoint for parents and during a show and share session where children share their work with the parents, we left reading books out for them to look at. We are always sharing phonics work with our parents via seesaw.

SCHOOL	SCHOOLS	EVENT	TYPE
I	Parents have enquired about it and show interest in the monsters.	NO	
J	They have embraced it as well. They also find the books that Reception and Year 1 are taking home are very enjoyable for the children and have noticed a significant improvement in the fluency of their reading.	NO	
K	During parent/carer evenings it was mentioned by most parents and discussed as a positive. The parents knew the characters and it was clear the children were talking about their Monster Phonics work at home. Parents who attended our parent/carer information were impressed with the scheme.	YES	Parent/carer presentation during parent/carer evening with opportunity to see the resources also. Discussions with teachers also. Planning to repeat as an online session too.

Table 9: Type of parental engagement and the number of schools reporting that engagement.

PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT	SCHOOLS
Parental Interest/Mentioned by parents	A, B, G, I and K
Want to support at home	B and G
Parents buying resources for home	B
Recognise impact on child's phonics	H
Recognise impact on reading	J

Five schools had held an event for parents. One of the remaining schools did share a PowerPoint with parents and gave access to the reading books.
Some schools had a great deal of parental interest whilst others struggled to engage parents.

Training

Table 10: Type of Monster Phonics training received by each school and its impact.

SCHOOL	MP ONLINE	RESPONSE/ IMPACT	MP IN PERSON	RESPONSE/ IMPACT
A	YES	Very good training. All queries have been answered whenever needed. Clear explanations and directions where to find resources and assessment material	NO	

B	YES	Positive impact.	YES	Positive impact. Staff felt it was relevant and enjoyed having the videos to refer back to. Simple guides in the training so all staff felt clear in how to implement and move the scheme forward in their classes. As a school we found the session on assessment of great value.
C	YES	Staff found the initial training session helpful. We trained all our teachers even if they wouldn't be teaching it as we felt that the strategies and the way sounds were grouped could be implemented higher up the school. We found the online training videos useful and we have used these to upskill some of our TAs. They are also useful to refer to from time to time. The training enabled us to confidently begin teaching MP. Some face-to-face training would also be useful.	NO	
F	YES	Staff enjoyed the online training as it gives them the necessary information to carry out the teaching.	YES	Working as a team, sharing good practice and asking questions.
G	YES	Webinars are effective as not too long. Online training for nursery. Informative but then time is needed to explore. Online training is great as it can fit into evening staff meetings.	YES	Initial training was a lot to take in. We then needed to take time to look at the website. The amount the trainer needed to share was a lot and he recognised this. Training has had a good impact as there is consistency across the school.
H	YES	It was effective training and helped us in our delivery of Monster Phonics.	NO	
I	YES	Staff enjoyed the online training as it gives them the necessary information to carry out the teaching.	NO	

SCHOOL	MP ONLINE	RESPONSE/ IMPACT	MP IN PERSON	RESPONSE/ IMPACT
J	YES	Great all staff thought it was very good. It gave the staff the scaffolding to go forward and not be afraid to try something new.	YES	Brilliant. They could understand the significance of the colour coded idea. Having a face to face ensured that staff that were not fully on board before the training could ask relevant questions and have their concerns erased
K	YES	Level 1 and Level 2 training re-capped phonic knowledge and it has helped develop whole school consistency regarding phonics.	YES	We are taking face to face to mean the support training provided by Kathryn over Teams. This has been more personal and has meant we could ask questions which have been answered there and then. It has provided reassurance for staff. Introduced guided reading sessions from the training. Have more of an idea of where Monster Phonics could go e.g. multisensory approaches and outdoor provision. However it is in the ‚doing' of the scheme that staff feel they have learnt most.

All schools had used Monster Phonics online training.

All schools found the training to be useful.

Five schools had accessed Monster Phonics face to face training, as well as online training. All five schools found it useful.

It was decided to explore the impact of training further during the summer visit to each school.

Enablers and Blockers

The following table shows the things that schools reported had gone well with the initial introduction of Monster Phonics (enablers) and those things that had not gone well or were barriers to it going well (blockers).

Table 11: Aspects that each school reported had gone well with the introduction of Monster phonics and those aspects that were a struggle/prevented it from going well.

SCHOOL	ENABLERS	BLOCKERS
A	Having the initial online training and being able to go back to look at the online training and use this with some support staff who were unable to attend inset.	Getting to grips with the assessment schedule as some staff started a little later than others.
B	Support from Monster Phonics and Mike. Sharing of good practice within the school.	Year 3 staff and pupils found the resources and videos a little young. Time: we feel we need to give more time and dedication to the scheme. Some difficulty with PS3 staff implementing the scheme within their classroom as they were reluctant to doing this in Y3 due to time restrictions and staffing
C	It has enabled us to try something different with children who find phonics difficult. It means that we have a consistent approach to phonics across the federation.	Initially a small number of staff had reservations about introducing something new. However all staff now recognise the impact the scheme has had. Some staff have had IT problems with some of the activities but that could be a problem at our end. We did not really like ch, sh, th and ng all being taught in the same week in reception so we spent longer on these sounds. We have a Year 1/2 class and a Year 2/3 class so we needed to think of a way to make MP work for us as we couldn't teach it to the whole class. We overcame this by streaming the children into three groups. Class teachers need to be aware of the sounds all the children are learning. This is working well for us.
F	Teamwork. Detailed plans. Multimedia resources and assessments. Monitoring.	Very few not sticking to the detailed planning. This has not impacted on effectiveness but on timing on units.
G	Children's response and enthusiasm. Staff dedicated to delivering the scheme and being effective.	Hard to deliver when there are so many gaps in children's learning especially in year 2.
H	The thing I find that has gone well is the children's love of it. They have really developed a love of reading and phonics. They enjoy the videos in the lessons and love the books like Hansel and Gretel that we share as a class. All children are enthusiastic to read parts of it out in class. The sounds are also coming into the children's writing.	A lot of the focused activities I find are a bit formal for reception so I tend to make my own up. Having time for interventions is also struggle. This is down to time.
I	Well planned easily accessible lessons. Engaging and interesting resources to engage pupils. Good progression throughout the foundation learning.	The intervention sessions planned in the lessons to fill the gaps in the pupils' learning
J	Everything. The purchase of the reading books. Just the platform it is on. Great ease of using the resources and planning. The assessment tools. Just love everything about it and what it offers.	None

SCHOOL	ENABLERS	BLOCKERS
K	* Having the children split by stage not age - having support staff in order to create these groups. * Consistency, happening every day in all classes and with the same language/ approach being used. * Seeing the children's enjoyment in the Monster characters and how this helps them relate to the sounds. *Children are amazing at reading the graphemes when coloured rather than in black print. * Parents who are already engaged in their children's lives have been enthusiastic - having the support of Monster Phonics to share information with parents/carers has helped. *Word of mouth with other schools becoming interested in the scheme. *Staff buy-in to the scheme, real enthusiasm, Friends of school helped here with providing the resources to support us.	* Cost is a big barrier; it has limited what we can use with the children and the range of texts we can provide physically. * We have found the pace difficult, particularly in the Reception phase, they have to do an initial sound every day which is very quick. * Songs and videos go very quickly * We have found same day interventions very difficult to incorporate as we are spending a fair bit of time on the lessons themselves already and have less time for other areas of the curriculum * High Frequency words are still difficult for the children and they don't always pick up on this in the sessions. * Guided reading, again fitting it in, this is still an area for us to develop.

Enablers

Table 12: Aspects that had gone well with the introduction of Monster Phonics and the schools that reported that aspect.

ENABLER	SCHOOLS
Engagement	G, H, I and K
Planning	F, I and J
Consistency	C and K
Assessment/Tracking (Monitoring)	F and J
Training	A
Sharing Good practice	B
Mike/Ian	B
Multimedia Resources	F
Progression	I

Four of the nine responses highlighted improved pupil engagement.

Whilst all schools identified things that had gone well and had enabled the implementation of the scheme, there was little agreement between the schools as to what the enablers were. It was decided to explore enablers further during the summer visits to the schools.

Blockers

Table 13: Aspects that had not gone well/preventing things from going well with the introduction of Monster Phonics and the schools that reported that aspect.

BLOCKER	SCHOOLS
Intervention	K and I
Time/Fitting it in	K and B
Assessment	A
Difficulty when there are so many gaps in children's knowledge	G
Pace	K
Cost	K
Staff not sticking to planning	F
Too formal for Reception	H
Overcoming Issues e.g. split classes	C
Staff reluctance	B

Whilst all but one school (J) recognised barriers to the successful implementation of the scheme, there was very little agreement as to what the barriers were. It was decided to explore further barriers to the successful implementation of the scheme during the summer visit to each school.

School Visits- Summer 2024

A visit to each school was made in late June/early July.

These were designed to explore specific areas in more depth. The areas were identified through the network meetings and questionnaire outcomes.

The visits consisted of interviews that aimed to explore:

- the schools' perception of the standards in phonics in relation to England
- impact including on standards and any other progress from September to July
- the use of the assessment integrated within Monster Phonics
- fidelity To Scheme

1. monitoring to ensure consistent implementation of the scheme
2. use of the materials provided by scheme/ use of supplementary resources
3. assessment of pupil progress/use of assessment outcomes
4. staff training and professional development in relation to the scheme

- intervention/differentiation
- enablers and blockers

The structure of the interviews is shown in appendix B

The outcomes from each aspect of the visits are considered in this section. Table 14 shows the schools' response to the results of their initial baseline assessment.

Table 14: Each school's response to the initial baseline assessment results at the start of the autumn term.

SCHOOL A
Deputy Head said that standards were one year below the level expected in England. So Y1 pupils performed badly on the Y1 baseline but better on the Reception, so they started their scheme halfway through the reception programme. The Y2 baseline data was low apart from the high ability pupils. The Y1 baseline data 'wasn't great' and showed big gaps in pupils' phonic knowledge so they started on the Y1 programme. The deputy explained that the school had a trend of low baseline on admission to reception. This year only 6 pupils recognised their name with 3 of these being able to read their name. All pupils scored 0 in the Monster Phonic reception baseline assessment. The school provided a half term of pre phonic learning such as oral blending before starting the scheme. The deputy head recognised an inconsistency in the teaching of phonics at the school and understood the need for change. The Y2 teacher explained that she could see immediately that the expectations in England were 'very different. So much higher.' She explained that she was keen to use something new to address the priorities identified.

SCHOOL B
Deputy Head stated that 'our standards were way below'. They were a year or more behind the expected standards of the scheme. This 'surprised us to a point. We had dipped into the XX scheme and all classes were at the right age group.... so quite surprised.'

SCHOOL Ca
Expected standards were higher than school had expected. Higher than 'what we did' within NAMED SCHEME. Previously there had been low pupil engagement. Now pupils 'enjoy doing it'. In baseline only the MAT pupils in Y2 scored. Y1 could read words but not nonsense words.

SCHOOL Cb
The SLT lead for progression steps one and two and LLC lead explained that the school was 'disappointed' with the baseline results. This is because the school had previously taught phonics and so expected to do well. There was an acknowledgement that expectations were lower than those in England. Pupils were able to read words but found 'sounds in isolation' difficult. She explained that she had not seen any value in 'nonsense words' but does now 'having seen the impact on children'.

SCHOOL F

The headteacher said that she knew that standards of phonics at this Welsh medium school were low. Having tried 'bits and bobs' the school was looking for a new phonic scheme.
The baseline results confirmed what she had believed i.e. the pupils could read English words but had poor phonological awareness.

SCHOOL G

The headteacher reported feeling 'dread' when the year groups could not access the baseline assessment of the relevant age group.
She outlined the context at the school and as a new head noted that when as an experienced foundation phase practitioner, she shared story sacks with the pupils at this school, they were not engaged. She could see that reading was not a priority.
In addition she noted that the existing approach to phonics was blended with no record keeping. She described it as 'not great' so she 'knew data would be poor but not as poor as it was.'

SCHOOL H

The headteacher said that in many ways the results of the initial baseline was not a surprise. Living close to the border with England, the school has had a number of pupils transfer from English schools. The head said, "When pupils transfer from England, they can all read and write, despite backgrounds such as ALN and ACES."
She felt that the baseline assessment simply 'confirmed what we suspected, in black and white' i.e. that her pupils were 'at least a year behind' the English expectation.
The Head felt that the school had 'faffed about for too long' and needed to commit to the systematic synthetic programme and to stop 'worrying about what they were not doing' as a consequence. She focussed on the mantra 'Can't read/Can't Achieve'.
She recognised that year after year pupils transferring from 'Y2 to Y3 needed catch up/boost every year and that such support was still 'going on in Y5.' She asked why and felt that the school needed to 'invest earlier' in reading.
The reception teacher reported that she had been afforded a 'fresh start' and so 'started at week one (of the SSP) and went from there'. She frequently found that previously nursery pupils had lost their phonic knowledge over the summer break.

SCHOOL I

The acting deputy and literacy lead described the expectations of the scheme as 'way higher than we usually do'.
In completing the baseline, it was noted that whilst pupils were often able to read words, they were not able to read graphemes. 'Reading words was ok but not sounds'.
They considered the pace expected as the real difference.

SCHOOL J

The headteacher described a 'huge gap' between her pupils' level in phonics and what was expected in England. She described most of the Y2 pupils to be working at the English reception level.
She recognised both the expectations and the pace of the SSP programme to be very challenging.
The Y1 teacher described the difference as 'Wow! A real eye opener. There was a huge difference. My Y1 pupils had to start at reception level'.
The Y2 teacher repeated what the headteacher had said i.e. most pupils 'came out low' working at reception level. There were a few pupils a little higher'.

SCHOOL K

Deputy headteacher said she was 'shocked. Knew phonics wasn't good but didn't know how far behind expectations in England we were.'
She said it made the school reflect on what they had been doing and if the children would ever reach the same standards.'
The Y2 teachers described it as 'a massive shock. Only a minority could access the baseline assessment. Graphemes were simply not known.'
Other teachers described the baseline assessment results as 'shocking' and another commented, 'Not good. Very few pupils scored What were we doing?'

Even though all ten schools had taught phonics before implementing Monster Phonics, without exception they all found that standards in phonics were significantly below that expected by the English scheme.

This presented difficulties with regards where to start the pupils on the new scheme. The following table shows the approaches used.

Table 15: Starting point determined by each school for each year group.

SCHOOL A
Reception pupils started at the beginning of the scheme for Reception. Y1 pupils started halfway through the scheme for Reception. Y2 pupils started at the beginning of the scheme for Y1
SCHOOL B
The nursery started with the nursery scheme. Reception had a 'quick fire' on the nursery scheme and then started the reception scheme. Y1 started on the reception scheme. Y2 have 10 pupils on the reception scheme and 20 on the Y1 scheme. Y3 have 6 pupils on the Y1 scheme and the rest on the Y2 scheme.
SCHOOL Ca
Reception pupils follow reception work. Y1 and Y2 are taught in 3 groups. Group 1 Have worked from the beginning of the reception work. Group 2 have worked from the start of the Y1 work. Group 3 have worked from Y1, term 3.
SCHOOL Cb
Reception – all started together at the beginning of the reception work and have stayed together with the exception of two pupils with ALN. The TA provides intervention. The two classes made up of Y1 /Y2 and Y2/3 are taught in four groups. Group 1 have been taught from the beginning of the reception work. Group 2 have been taught from Reception, term Y3 work. Group 3 have been taught from Y1, term 2. Group 4 have been taught Superhero Spellings. This group consists of all Y3 pupils.

SCHOOL F
Given this baseline, all classes started with the reception material that the school renamed stage one. What varied in each class was the pace with Y6 'skipping past' sounds already known.
SCHOOL G
Reception pupils started the reception scheme. Y1 worked on the reception scheme until Easter. Y2 worked on the Y1 scheme until Easter.
SCHOOL H
Reception pupils started the reception scheme. Y1 worked on the scheme for Y1. Y2 worked on the scheme for Y2.
SCHOOL I
Mixed age classes throughout. Pupils taught in groups that best fit their ability. Some Y2 pupils working at Reception level of the scheme.
SCHOOL J
The headteacher described a 'huge gap' between her pupils' level in phonics and what was expected in England. She described most of the Y2 pupils to be working at the English reception level. The Y1 teacher described the difference as 'Wow! A real eye opener. There was a huge difference. My Y1 pupils had to start at reception level'. The Y2 teacher repeated what the headteacher had said i.e. most pupils 'came out low' working at reception level. There were a few pupils a little higher'. Pupils are taught in groups of best fit. Given that there are mixed age classes, it's felt that this ensures that no pupils struggling.
SCHOOL K
The deputy explained that the pupils are not working in classes. Screening was used to allocate pupils to 5 main groups across Foundation Phase. Approach is stage not age. When asked the deputy said that this had not caused any issues with parents or pupils. Teachers confirmed the above. One added 'Such a wide range of ability and need, had to group them. They work at the level that is right for them.' Another explained, 'Stage, where pupils are, not their age. Good for wellbeing. Older pupils love helping younger ones'.

Determining where to start on the Monster Phonics scheme was a significant issue for most schools. All schools started their reception children at the start of the scheme for reception. However the complexities were around mixed aged classes and the significant gaps in the phonological knowledge of the pupils in Y1 and Y2.

A feature of the DFE validated scheme is that children in a particular year group are taught the same thing and any that struggle are provided with intervention.

A number of schools during the visits noted that they were interested to see how the scheme worked for the current reception pupils when they moved into Y1.

Progress/Impact from introduction of the scheme (September 23 to June/July 24).

The following table shows the comments made by those interviewed about the impact of the SSP programme alongside the impact on baseline data. It was considered best to present in this way so as to give a more rounded picture of impact in terms of context such, as number of pupils and their starting points, as well as highlighting progress that cannot be shown by data alone.

Many of the schools found the baseline too challenging for pupils in Year 1 and 2. This is evidenced in their scores in September which was on the baseline for their year group. Gaps in phonic knowledge meant that they could not score well.

As outlined previously, (Table 15) schools had to start the scheme at different points, where the children were, and not at chronological points. There were no guarantees of success in June/July against the baseline as many pupils were not working at this level through the year.

The school's comments and the assessment integrated within Monster Phonics are a more accurate reflection of the extent of the progress made. As the scheme was new to the schools, they started the integrated assessment at different times and so direct comparisons are not possible. The use of the integrated assessment at each school was explored during the summer visits as part of fidelity to the scheme.

Table 16: Impact of Monster Phonics at each school, including that reported by the schools and the baseline assessment results.



SCHOOL A
• consistency in approach to the teaching of phonics • common terminology/language used • teaching of phonics is now systematic • now far more pupils can blend • increased engagement – 'engagement superb' • significant improvement in reading data, though different cohorts • a significant impact on standards can be seen in reception • the number now reading at the 'expected level' in her Y2 class is double that than in the previous year • increase in confidence and a buzz in learning • pupils are now 'wanting to write/are not phased at all' • pupils apply their learning independently such as in their missions • they are all 'writing texts across the board. Previously pupils wanted you to write for them' • 'pupils love the whole learning, are excited and find it fun'

RECEPTION: 16 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	50	0.19	0%
	WORDS	47	0.00	0%
JUN-23	SOUND	50	38.00	76%
	WORDS	47	23.06	49%
IMPROVEMENT	SOUND	50	37.81	76%
	WORDS	47	23.06	49%

YEAR 1: 19 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	52	4.37	8%
	WORDS	52	5.63	11%
JUN-23	SOUND	52	29.67	57%
	WORDS	52	24.11	46%
IMPROVEMENT	SOUND	52	25.30	49%
	WORDS	52	18.47	35%

YEAR 2: 13 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	20	1.85	9%
	WORDS	20	6.46	32%
JUN-23	SOUND	20	10.38	52%
	WORDS	20	16.46	82%
IMPROVEMENT	SOUND	20	8.54	43%
	WORDS	20	10.00	50%

SCHOOL B
• baseline assessment showing significant impact • significantly the pupils following the reception scheme have increased their Y1 baseline results despite not having covered that work • engagement of staff and pupils. 'All bought in and worked really hard.' • huge impact on our reading assessment (GL) • impact on learning environments • its transferring into the children's writing...they independently recognise the sounds needed. • developed children's vocabulary both in their oracy and written work.

RECEPTION: 26 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	50	13.23	26%
	WORDS	47	1.04	2%
JUN-23	SOUND	50	33.35	67%
	WORDS	47	20.69	44%
IMPROVEMENT	SOUND	50	20.12	41%
	WORDS	47	19.65	42%

YEAR 1: 33 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	52	9.85	19%
	WORDS	52	8.73	17%
JUN-23	SOUND	52	30.39	58%
	WORDS	52	34.09	66%
IMPROVEMENT	SOUND	52	20.55	39%
	WORDS	52	25.36	49%

YEAR 2: 33 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	20	3.63	18%
	WORDS	20	12.00	60%
JUN-23	SOUND	20	5.79	29%
	WORDS	20	16.17	81%
IMPROVEMENT	SOUND	20	2.17	11%
	WORDS	20	4.17	21%

SCHOOL Ca
• everything is higher (standards) • more 'grammar type of things' are taught than before • have more knowledge • use technical language e.g. trigraph • tenses/suffixes/contractions/plural- now taught. Understood and constantly reinforced • pupils see where grapheme fits in words • the Monsters really help • pupils more confident with reading. 'Will have a go' • it's impacted on independent writing. Pupils choose which grapheme to use from the poster • pushed level of my phonic lessons

RECEPTION: 34 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	50	14.06	28%
	WORDS	47	2.94	6%
JUN-23	SOUND	50	37.94	76%
	WORDS	47	26.09	56%
IMPROVEMENT	SOUND	50	23.88	48%
	WORDS	47	23.15	50%

YEAR 1: 34 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	52	6.22	12%
	WORDS	52	4.25	8%
JUN-23	SOUND	52	28.17	54%
	WORDS	52	21.64	42%
IMPROVEMENT	SOUND	52	21.95	42%
	WORDS	52	17.39	34%

YEAR 2: 35 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	20	5.69	28%
	WORDS	20	5.49	27%
JUN-23	SOUND	20	8.91	45%
	WORDS	20	10.66	53%
IMPROVEMENT	SOUND	20	3.23	17%
	WORDS	20	5.17	26%

SCHOOL Cb
• interest in sounds is so much greater with children telling the teacher that 'we've done this sound' when coming across it • enthusiasm and engagement greatly increased. 'Before they weren't interested in phonics. Now they love it • they are in the Monsters' world with them'. • more able year one pupils are now desperate to write, to have a go • pupils are now applying their learning in phonics. 'Before they had phonics but didn't use it in reading/ writing' • they just want to learn phonics more than ever before. • they use they use the resources to find the grapheme for the phoneme. • keyword knowledge is so much better.

RECEPTION: 11 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	50	6.64	13%
	WORDS	47	0.45	1%
JUN-23	SOUND	50	44.09	88%
	WORDS	47	45.64	97%
IMPROVEMENT	SOUND	50	37.45	75%
	WORDS	47	45.19	96%

YEAR 1: 14 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	52	4.07	8%
	WORDS	52	4.79	9%
JUN-23	SOUND	52	20.57	40%
	WORDS	52	19.43	37%
IMPROVEMENT	SOUND	52	16.50	32%
	WORDS	52	14.71	28%

YEAR 2: 16 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	20	5.13	26%
	WORDS	20	4.31	22%
JUN-23	SOUND	20	15.00	75%
	WORDS	20	12.38	62%
IMPROVEMENT	SOUND	20	9.88	49%
	WORDS	20	8.13	40%

SCHOOL F
• pupils are excited for learning • they love the monsters • enjoyment of children • children know what they are learning. All classes were able to tell me what they had learned- vowels/consonants • scheme has helped in spelling, reading and pronunciation • there is a 'purity in sound' • pupils are 'not afraid to have a go'

YEAR 3: 27 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	51	20.19	40%
	WORDS	47	24.00	51%
JUN-23	SOUND	51	45.48	89%
	WORDS	47	39.96	85%
IMPROVEMENT	SOUND	51	25.30	49%
	WORDS	47	15.96	34%

YEAR 4: 21 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	51	28.05	55%
	WORDS	47	33.81	72%
JUN-23	SOUND	51	47.81	94%
	WORDS	47	41.24	88%
IMPROVEMENT	SOUND	51	19.76	39%
	WORDS	47	7.43	16%

YEAR 5: 27 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	51	33.59	66%
	WORDS	47	42.41	90%
JUN-23	SOUND	51	48.56	95%
	WORDS	47	46.19	98%
IMPROVEMENT	SOUND	51	14.96	29%
	WORDS	47	3.78	8%

YEAR 6: 21 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	51	31.95	63%
	WORDS	47	45.48	97%
JUN-23	SOUND	51	49.95	98%
	WORDS	47	46.90	100%
IMPROVEMENT	SOUND	51	18.00	35%
	WORDS	47	1.43	3%

SCHOOL G
• engagement – now love phonics and reading books. They talk about the monsters: They are part of the classroom and are now linked to many things • staff are confident and engaged in teaching phonics • training meant that all staff started from the same starting point. • phonic sessions are never missed • data is tracked • there has been a 'huge impact' on reading levels (PM Benchmarking) There is a 'massive difference' from last year • this school has a focus on applying the phonics and have tracked the impact on reading closely • a 'huge difference' in the children's book with regards to how the children write. The Y2 pupils in particular have improved language. They attempt the language because they feel they can do it

RECEPTION: 25 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	50	2.88	6%
	WORDS	47	0.00	0%
JUN-23	SOUND	50	42.72	85%
	WORDS	47	34.36	73%
IMPROVEMENT	SOUND	50	39.84	79%
	WORDS	47	34.36	73%

YEAR 1: 23 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	52	6.57	13%
	WORDS	52	1.30	3%
JUN-23	SOUND	52	32.91	63%
	WORDS	52	26.22	50%
IMPROVEMENT	SOUND	52	26.35	50%
	WORDS	52	24.91	47%

YEAR 2: 20 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	20	0.95	5%
	WORDS	20	6.55	33%
JUN-23	SOUND	20	15.75	79%
	WORDS	20	15.25	76%
IMPROVEMENT	SOUND	20	14.80	74%
	WORDS	20	8.70	43%

SCHOOL H
• Y2 loads better despite Covid • less pupils needing targeted universal provision • not many pupils needing Boost/Catch Up • blitz not needed • 'A joy- children enjoy reading. Love it! • there is a buzz amongst staff, parents and children. • they share a common language. • in Y2 the pupils' independence has greatly increased. They are accessing materials and enjoying it. • 'perhaps the biggest impact in the school is on pupils' engagement and love of reading'. • pupils writing independently • increased confidence in reading • initially using colour coding and then successfully reading when colours dropped from the text • pupils know their sounds • pupils love the SSP. They complain if a phonics session is late • they love the books and PowerPoints and when the video is played, they shout 'Again. Again!' • all pupils want to read the sentences in the sessions • parents and pupils love the audio books sent home • pupils love writing. It's not a chore • improved attitudes to work, including writing • improved resilience • improved motivation • pupils want to read. They choose to read more often

RECEPTION: 17 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	50	10.59	21%
	WORDS	47	0.00	0%
JUN-23	SOUND	50	46.94	94%
	WORDS	47	35.82	76%
IMPROVEMENT	SOUND	50	36.35	73%
	WORDS	47	35.82	76%

YEAR 1: 29 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	52	6.86	13%
	WORDS	52	5.72	11%
JUN-23	SOUND	52	24.72	48%
	WORDS	52	23.97	46%
IMPROVEMENT	SOUND	52	17.86	35%
	WORDS	52	18.24	35%

YEAR 2: 22 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	20	2.23	11%
	WORDS	20	4.73	24%
JUN-23	SOUND	20	8.86	44%
	WORDS	20	14.09	70%
IMPROVEMENT	SOUND	20	6.64	33%
	WORDS	20	9.36	47%

SCHOOL I
• blending, applied to general reading. This impact was noticed 'within weeks' • pupils responded well to the structure, Y1/Y2 pupils in particular • the built-in progression and the daily sessions helped avoid gaps • most children in the school have made progress • Y2 pupils have picked up learning that had previously been missed • increased engagement

RECEPTION: 37 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	50	18.32	37%
	WORDS	47	6.43	14%
JUN-23	SOUND	50	40.81	82%
	WORDS	47	25.03	53%
IMPROVEMENT	SOUND	50	22.49	45%
	WORDS	47	18.59	39%

YEAR 1: 41 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	52	12.32	24%
	WORDS	52	12.83	25%
JUN-23	SOUND	52	37.00	71%
	WORDS	52	32.71	63%
IMPROVEMENT	SOUND	52	24.68	47%
	WORDS	52	19.88	38%

YEAR 2: 31 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	20	1.32	7%
	WORDS	20	7.16	36%
JUN-23	SOUND	20	5.67	28%
	WORDS	20	12.80	64%
IMPROVEMENT	SOUND	20	4.16	21%
	WORDS	20	5.64	28%

SCHOOL J
• increase in pupils' 'independence in witing with then using phonically plausible spellings'. She felt that they had • 'greater confidence to have a go' • colours have been impactful in reading books • increased willingness to write. 'They've become what we have always wanted- independent learners' • pupils are remembering previous words in dictation'

RECEPTION: 8 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	50	0.00	0%
	WORDS	47	0.00	0%
JUN-23	SOUND	50	37.88	76%
	WORDS	47	30.00	64%
IMPROVEMENT	SOUND	50	37.88	76%
	WORDS	47	30.00	64%

YEAR 1: 15 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	52	5.00	10%
	WORDS	52	4.20	8%
JUN-23	SOUND	52	24.40	47%
	WORDS	52	25.53	49%
IMPROVEMENT	SOUND	52	19.40	37%
	WORDS	52	21.33	41%

YEAR 2: 13 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	20	5.08	25%
	WORDS	20	7.69	38%
JUN-23	SOUND	20	12.31	62%
	WORDS	20	16.54	83%
IMPROVEMENT	SOUND	20	7.23	37%
	WORDS	20	8.85	45%

SCHOOL K
• significant progress and noted that in reception pupils at a low level when entering (not mark making/ poor oracy) were now beginning to blend • noted that across all classes there had been 'great impact' on pupils' perseverance and their confidence to 'have a go' • 'see that children are getting closer to where they would be in England.' She noted that the impact 'comes through in independent writing'. In addition she commented on a love of books and a pleasure in reading. 'Impact already but more excited about the future' • impact on spelling test (single word spelling test) • huge impact on class including attitude to independent writing with pupils recognising graphemes and having the confidence to have a go (Y2) • confidence will have a go at all activities • more independent in writing • within the specialist centre a number of ALN pupils have made 'huge progress. Some needs of other pupils have resulted in little progress • 'they al love it' • In reception low ability pupils are 'struggling'. 'wow moments', an increased confidence, pupils saying 'I can read!' • felt that 'it's been impactful with EAL pupils in particular'

RECEPTION: 29 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	50	4.59	9%
	WORDS	47	2.69	6%
JUN-23	SOUND	50	34.45	368%
	WORDS	47	16.90	36%
IMPROVEMENT	SOUND	50	29.86	59%
	WORDS	47	14.21	30%

YEAR 1: 27 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	52	0.89	2%
	WORDS	52	0.52	1%
JUN-23	SOUND	52	17.22	33%
	WORDS	52	15.33	29%
IMPROVEMENT	SOUND	52	16.33	31%
	WORDS	52	14.81	28%

YEAR 2: 18 PUPILS		TOTAL	AVERAGE	%
SEP-23	SOUND	20	0.61	3%
	WORDS	20	5.83	29%
JUN-23	SOUND	20	7.83	39%
	WORDS	20	14.78	74%
IMPROVEMENT	SOUND	20	7.22	36%
	WORDS	20	8.94	45%

Each school is different. Each teacher is different. Each child is different. In short, the context of each school and learner is different. For this reason, empty meaningless comparisons are avoided here.

What is clear however is that despite having previously taught phonics using different schemes, Monster Phonics had a significant impact on raising standards in phonics in all participating schools. This will be discussed further in the Author Reflections.

Fidelity To The Scheme

The term 'fidelity to the scheme' describes how closely to the way recommended by the scheme itself, a school implements that scheme. For instance do staff use other resources, adapt materials or decide not to use key aspects such as the integrated assessment?

The table below is intended to provide an indication of the extent to which each school implemented Monster Phonics in the way that it was designed to be used.

Table 17: Indicators of each school's fidelity to the scheme including the use of resources, the use of the integrated assessment, the training provided and the monitoring of implementation.

SCH.	PLANNING & RESOURCES	INTEGRATED ASSESSMENT	TRAINING	MONITORING
A	Used Fully	Used but some staff find difficulty to perform assessments and continue teaching the phonics	Only training related to the scheme provided. Online training accessed	Learning walks 'pop ins' Book looks Governor focussed visits Sharing of practice Staff discussions Assessment data in TEAMS. Resources evident
B	Used Fully	Used but some staff find difficulty to perform assessments and continue teaching the phonics	Only training related to the scheme provided. Online training accessed	Learning walks 'pop ins' Book looks Governor focussed visits Sharing of practice Staff discussions Assessment data in TEAMS. Resources evident
Ca	Planning, videos and PowerPoints used fully. No worksheets. Developed own activities for across provision.	Not used in first term. Fully used from Spring term.	Only training related to the scheme provided. All staff completed two modules. Staff access online training/guides.	All staff were given a three-week trial after initial training 'Give it a go!' Staff watch each other teach Celebrate Listen to learners Digital portfolios Tracking sheets 'See it in each other's classrooms, share ideas but also competitive!'

SCH.	PLANNING & RESOURCES	INTEGRATED ASSESSMENT	TRAINING	MONITORING
Cb	Planning followed closely. Videos and songs used. Sometimes change the activity, putting them into the provision.	The integrated assessment is used. Tend to have an assessment week. Teaching continues and the TA 'pulls out for assessment and intervention'	All training from Monster Phonics. Teachers had the general online training. TAs had separate online training. Staff also had general training. Staff completed training modules.	Small staff so see when it happens' LLC lead 'nips in' to sessions. Monitors tracking on Google drive Recent Estyn report comments positively.
F	The scheme is followed closely and the materials used 'whole class'. What can vary is the pace.	The school recognises that it was late starting with the integrated assessment. Now find it useful to see that gaps have been filled.	All staff had initial training with Monster Phonics. This was tailored for the school and its Welsh medium context. The literacy lead has delivered model lessons.	Book looks Classroom visits Talking to pupils Sharing and use of data
G	Particularly well resourced with all elements of the scheme. 'Everybody has everything'. Limited use of worksheets. Y2 teacher does change order of what is taught.	Found to be onerous. The school does assessment and track it (not Y2) but the assessment is not done as often as suggested by the scheme. It is used by teachers 'in the weeks and terms best for them'.	Initial in person training provided for all staff by Monster Phonics. Staff also access webinars.	Head drops into lessons. Not recorded Staff meetings for reviews and updates Staff have watched each other teach Small school helps so know what is going on Formal lesson observation showed provision in phonics Trust Visible throughout everything/provision Books Listening to learners- in headteacher's write up Assessment/record sheets Discussed with deputy in SLT days.
H	The compliance with the scheme is 'pretty tight' and staff were not 'veering off'. Class teacher said that she has 'followed it to the letter'	Followed the integrated assessment 'as it gives 'amazing data- who fell behind/ intervention given/ progress made.'	Full day bespoke training from Monster Phonics and have accessed drop ins and videos.	Learning walks and a phonics day to which governors were invited. Officer from the local consortium had visited and written a report noting the positive impact. Foundation phase team work closely together and often discuss the implementation of the SSP. 'We are constantly in and out of each other's classrooms. We talk about it, see it, share our assessments and in addition our books are monitored'.

SCH.	PLANNING & RESOURCES	INTEGRATED ASSESSMENT	TRAINING	MONITORING
I	Most staff use all aspects. All staff use the planning. No other scheme is being used. The whole class structure is always as planned. It's the way follow up activities are used that varies. They are part of a reading carousel that follows the Monster Phonic input. This can be a focussed task with an LSA.	The school recognises this as a significant developmental need. It has been trialled by the literacy lead who found it very difficult to fit in as it needed the testing of individual pupils. The school feels that assessment weeks are needed as this allows the re-teaching of aspects not fully grasped by pupils.	The school had initial training and later training on assessment and intervention. The acting headteacher has also led twilight training.	Listening to learners Staff interviews Good team, all on board, very open with each other Discussion on training needs Monitored by local consortium Time in the classrooms Phonic sessions taking place each day, every day between 9 and 9:30am.
J	The headteacher felt that It was being used to 'fill the gaps is knowledge of older pupils. She felt that with younger pupils it was being used at the correct pace with phonemes/graphemes being taught in the correct order. Teachers confirmed that only Monster Phonics resources used.	Reception and Y2 teachers use the integrated assessment when it should be completed. It is used in Y1 but is not completed as often as the scheme suggests.	Initial training was provided by Monster Phonics and staff accessed videos.	Sametime every day Headteacher in class twice a week Small school so hear and see it every day Staff talk to each other about it- chat daily and can see progress Pupils tell the head and deputy what they are doing
K	The deputy described the adherence to the planning and materials as being initially 'rigid'. However staff now feel more confident to move away from work sheets to outdoor learning and continuous provision. The SSP was being used 'tightly. Day by day, week by week.	The deputy and most staff were clear that the integrated assessment is being completed in line with the scheme. Some teachers recognised that whilst the assessment tool took time, it was useful in determining gaps and showing where intervention was needed. Other teachers noted that whilst they completed the assessment, there wasn't always the time or staff to provide the intervention that the assessment indicated was needed. One teacher does the assessment during an assessment week and felt that she was 'doing them because we have to.'	The deputy explained that all FP staff have been trained. This included online training and training bespoke to the school. The bespoke training answered the questions that the school had. Staff have accessed a further two modules.	Focused learning walks In and out of classes Planning meetings Staff discussions Can see impact All do it at the same time Classroom visits/sharing of success Data on one drive

Planning and resources

Overwhelmingly, schools in the main followed the planning provided and used the resources, the PowerPoints, songs and monster back stories. This helped significantly with workload. Teachers often commented -It's all there for you. (See Enablers)

However, there were aspects that schools felt the need to adapt.

Some schools wanted to move away from the worksheets and use more creative pedagogy.

Some wanted to ensure that activities to teach/reinforce phonics were within the provision.

Integrated Assessment

During the visits, a number of schools were able to provide detailed tracking sheets provided by the SSP that indicated the progress made by each pupil. Where this was most effective, the assessment was frequent (as detailed within the SPP) and led to action. For example, if a child had failed to grasp something, intervention was provided. School H for instance followed the integrated assessment as it gives 'amazing data- who fell behind/intervention given/progress made.'

However, the frequency and time-consuming nature of individual pupil assessment was a challenge to a number of the schools, as the table above illustrates. Nearly all schools could see the benefit of it but many struggled to find the time or the additional staff required to perform the assessment and any intervention required.

Training

Table 18: Impact of training reported by schools.

SCHOOL	IMPACT
A	Felt that the training is 'excellent for those not familiar with technical language'. as clarity was provided Regarding impact she notes that all are following the scheme as there is clarity regarding what to do. In addition she feels that TAs are more confident. They have phonics as one of their performance management objectives. This has found the TAs to be 'happy and confident delivering sessions and tracking pupils' progress. She noted that any TAs that had missed the training were less confident. The Y2 teacher reported that the initial training had created excitement and that staff know how to access training videos when required.
B	Deputy feels that the progressive scheme and training brings clarity to what needs to be taught and ensures focussed provision for phonics. Training has developed a consistency of approach. This was described as 'probably the biggest thing'.
Ca	Rather than the training itself, it was felt that 'doing it daily has had the impact'. Knowledge and understanding then shared between staff.
Cb	Found videos 'really useful'.
F	The training answered questions and helped with consistency. It helped staff feel less overwhelmed.

SCHOOL	IMPACT
G	The head feels that training has impacted on confidence and consistency. This has been recognised by the staff themselves in the questionnaires that they completed for the headteacher. In addition she feels that it has provided 'knowledge that they didn't have' and provided terminology that staff use with the pupils.
H	The headteacher feels that the training has brought clarity as to why phonics needs to be taught every day, even when that means that other things have to be dropped. The school has trained its TAs as well and the head feels that this has brought consistency with everyone knowing what they are doing and why. The reception class teacher referred to the Monster Phonics interactive day session, the online training and the videos. She felt that they 'made it clear what we needed to do and answered the questions' they had.
I	It was felt that the training had: • enabled staff to feel comfortable and confident with the scheme • established consistency in teaching • had built understanding The school recognised that very few staff had ever had any training in the teaching of phonics.
J	The headteacher felt that no staff struggled as they were used to another phonics programme. The Y2 teacher felt that the training allowed staff to start teaching and all come together, supporting each other.
K	The deputy described the impact as: • questions answered • strategies picked up/hear it around the school • consistency • staff learned from it • purposeful Teachers confirmed much of this: • purposeful • ensures no misconceptions • clarifies why we are doing it • explains it • puts it into practice • good to look at for support • videos provide good examples Staff commented that training videos often showed small groups – 'it would be good to see it with a whole class, with behaviour difficulties.

All training was related to Monster Phonics.

The training provided was felt by many to provide clarity with regards how phonics was to be taught, leading to greater consistency within the schools. A number of those interviewed recognised that they had never had training on how to teach phonics.

Intervention v Differentiation

During network meetings, discussion was often around how the scheme fitted the pupils rather than the pupils fitting the scheme.

For many of the schools, the concept of all pupils in a class learning the same thing, in the same way at the same time, during a whole class phonics lesson, was challenging.

The implication of the scheme is that all pupils in a particular year group cover the same thing and that those pupils that have difficulty are provided with intervention to ensure that they attain what is required.

In nearly all of the participating schools, the pedagogy was more about 'stage not age' and moving each child forward from where they were. It was about the journey of each learner. This usually means a variety of differentiation and most commonly teaching phonics in ability groups.

Many of the feedback during the visits shown in the table below show how the different schools faced this issue.

The comment from the headteacher of school H challenged the prevailing view:
The headteacher describes the move from differentiation to intervention as 'the biggest pedagogical shift'. She feels that the change has proved itself in that pupils have done better.

She feels that there is no need to do the six-way shift (organisation into six groups) and all the 'faff' associated with that.

In her opinion the removal of year-on-year expectations have made it 'very ambiguous' as to where are these pupils should be at the end of Rec/Y1/Y2 etc. The SPP provided the clarity.

Table 19: Schools' comments regarding differentiation and intervention

SCHOOL A
The deputy head teacher commented on the non-alignment with what is considered to be good early years practice in Wales. The practice at the school is to use each child's baseline to determine groups, as opposed to whole class teaching. She tends to teach in focus groups that match pupils' needs, teaching 'little and often'. Whilst all have access to the main input, the follow up activities are not the same for all children as it can be simply too advanced for some children. She went on to acknowledge that some children needed smaller steps. However she felt exposure to the same initial phonic input was important: 'They have exposure to the same phonic input. They get it at their level so some may know Angry Red and the sound but not be able to recognise the letter b.' She commented on the potential over reliance on worksheets. She explained that she uses intervention with individuals and groups when the more able learners are having guided group reading. In addition TAs work with individual children, going to them wherever their learning is taking place and using flash cards for instance so that they are reminded. The Y2 teacher explained that intervention had been tried and although it had helped some it became necessary for the 8 ALN pupils to use the reception scheme as they simply could not access the Y1 programme (remember Y1 programme being used with Y2 pupils this year). This is achieved with the deployment of a TA. So there is a reception input and a Y1 input.

SCHOOL B
'We tried all children doing the same thing. Less able children were not retaining and were making little progress. They just get lost and disengage.' So now differentiated in that class teacher and TAs do separate inputs. The school provides quality follow up activities as part of provision. 'It fits with our ethos, our vision and provision. It fits with our way.'
SCHOOL Ca
This 'streaming' means that the school uses differentiation for Y1 and 2. However as reception pupils all started at the beginning of the scheme, they are taught the same thing and the hope is that the gap between standards in England will close and the school can move to intervention. Though it was acknowledged that some reception pupils are 'not keeping up'.
SCHOOL Cb
The school has opted for differentiation from Y1 to Y3 in that children are taught in ability groups. The LLC lead commented 'I can see how much easier it would be if all pupils did the same. Can put it into the provision etc and can make it harder/more complex for certain groups. It is hoped that the reception children will stay together but can see already difficulties in that it's possible to see 'some are not keeping up'. She commented, 'expectation is important so we are challenging ourselves'.
SCHOOL F
Given its context (Welsh Medium), the school has used the same stage one (Reception) material throughout Y3 to Y6 pupils. The differentiation comes through the speed/pace at which the work is covered. The school does provide intervention for individuals where they continue to get the sounds introduced wrong.
SCHOOL G
Head initially liked the fact that the scheme used whole class teaching as financial pressures meant that additional staff were not available to work with groups. Approach is different in the different classes. The whole class teaching was followed for 'as long as we could' (one term) but there was 'always a group not keeping up'. Often this was because of poor attendance or other issues. Some intervention is given but not using the Monster Phonics material. The school develops its own intervention that is provided outside of the phonics session. Y1 have six pupils taught separately in that the HLTA provides a different input. Intervention in this class is often going back and repeating where required Head is happy with this as 'no class is the same'. Head explained school's approach. The session is provided and when the children break into activities these activities focus on the application of the phonics as opposed to simply learning the phonics themselves. It is felt that enhanced provision is not required as the focussed tasks (differentiated) are effective enough, removing the need to 'flood the whole classroom'. Phonics are integrated into activities in a different way e.g. colour coding of graphemes when reading/writing cookery instructions.
SCHOOL H
The headteacher describes the move from differentiation to intervention as 'the biggest pedagogical shift'. She feels that the change has proved itself in that pupils have done better. She feels that there is no need to do the six-way shift and all the 'faff' associated with that. In her opinion the removal of year-on-year expectations have made it 'very ambiguous' as to expected level for the end of Rec/Y1/Y2 etc. The SPP provided the clarity. The headteacher feels that a conversation has been opened up across the school regarding meeting pupils' needs – class/group rotation/taking pupils out. She describes a move away from teaching groups to whole class teaching and a resulting bigger impact. She refers to professional enquiries completed by staff as a driver for this. She feels that staffing cuts, will mean that things have to be done differently, providing another reason for moving to more whole class teaching. She sees the TAs still in place having specific roles re intervention. The reception class teacher recognises that she differentiates with regards to reading books. She ensures that all sounds are reviewed each day with all pupils and that pupils falling behind are given intervention.

SCHOOL I
This is an issue that the school continues to explore. Emphasised that the fast pace has been a challenge, particularly for reception pupils. Recognised that pace is needed and that it's important to expose pupils to it all, ensuring modelling. Challenge is to ensure that its taught appropriately for ALN pupils but issues with those not catching up. LSA support is given to pupils that need it- more like intervention Split classes pose another issue. An interesting observation is the improved performance on the baseline assessment for Y1 and Y2 pupils, even though they have not followed the scheme for that year group. Felt that a move to guided group reading from individual books would release staff to provide more intervention.
SCHOOL J
The headteacher describes the school approach as 'differentiation rather than intervention'. She feels that there is simply not enough staff to provide the intervention because of funding. Pupils are taught in groups of best fit. Given that there are mixed age classes, it's felt that this ensures that no pupils struggling. The issue re staffing was reiterated by the Y1 teacher. She felt that if all pupils were doing the same work, some would not keep up and retain it- demoralising for ALN pupils. National tests and teacher assessment used to group pupils in y3 to Y6. Differentiation in that the input is for the group. No whole class input. The Y2 teacher explained that she taught three differentiated groups. She does use intervention for pupils that have missed work.
SCHOOL K
The deputy explained that the pupils are not working in classes. Screening was used to allocate pupils to 5 main groups across Foundation Phase. Approach is stage not age. When asked the deputy said that this had not caused any issues with parents or pupils. Teachers confirmed the above. One added 'such a wide range of ability and need, had to group them. They work at the level that is right for them.' Another explained, 'stage, where pupils are, not their age. Good for wellbeing. Older pupils love helping younger ones'.

There appear to be a number of entwined factors at play here:

- pedagogy
- the curriculum for Wales discouraging year group expectations
- financial constraints resulting in less staff to teach different ability groups or to provide intervention.

These are considered further in the Author Reflections section.

Enablers and Blockers

Responses to the questionnaire conducted in March 2023 highlighted a number of enablers and blockers but as tables 12 and 13 indicated, there was little consensus between the schools as to what the main enablers and blockers were.

During the visits to schools, staff were asked again to identify what had gone well and what factors had inhibited the implementation.

Table 19: Enablers and blockers identified by each school.

SCHOOL A	• planning and resources- great for teacher workload. 'It's all there' • provides progression and consistency • systematic approach to teaching phonics • especially good for staff not familiar with how to teach phonics • engagement and excitement • pupils know and are engaged by the monsters • they colour codes and monsters make it accessible to all learners • multi-sensory approach • workload- 'it's all provided. Can't go wrong' • 'Great for supply staff' • brings excitement • consistency • impact on low baseline	• clash with early years practice/pedagogy/ethos • need to avoid reliance on worksheets • issue around how initial sounds are introduced. Made own resource to help them find them • cost • assessment tracks sound recognition and reading but not spelling • staffing capacity in relation to intervention • spelling not tracked. • more writing opportunities needed for Y2 • move away from colour code to black text can be problematic
SCHOOL B	• structure – what to teach/when • resources are at hand • E books for guided and shared reading • support from Monster Phonics. They respond immediately • you can follow structure but adapt for your school • high quality of resources • guidance • assessment is built in • everything is in one place	• time – fitting in with curriculum • staffing – need for groups/intervention • cost of resources • pedagogy- need to adapt
SCHOOL Ca	• progress • pupil engagement • interactive • books – Good stories/fun/build up sounds • many aspects to the programme • fun • eye catching • characters relatable/fun • each character has a story. • modern singing- rap	• staffing levels and ability (School losing 6 members of staff) • higher expectations • lack of confidence • time to do intervention • time to do integrated assessment • clarity of Tricky Witch's singing • cost
SCHOOL Cb	• structure • great for less experienced staff • it's all there for you • it makes us do it every day • engagement • characters (Monsters) and their back stories • pupils pick up the sounds around them • we are all in it together, all day	• mixed age classes • initial staff reservation. Like what we see now. (Now converts) • EAL pupils. Particularly struggle with trigraphs • cost (but not us because of pilot) • parental engagement
SCHOOL F	• PowerPoints • resources all there. • visual- colour coding • catchy and fun • children's enthusiasm- 'They love it'. • children know that they are learning • multisensory • lovely to see this practice in KS2	• Pace • Individual teacher's attitude • Danger of teacher just opening PowerPoint with no preparation • Resources/cost • Time and staffing for integrated assessment and intervention • Need for phonics to be given priority/ other things have to go.

SCHOOL G	• workload- all materials provided. 'It's all there' • variety- not the same thing every time • quality PowerPoints • back story to monsters- not just flash cards • hooks in staff and pupils • training provided • access to resources and training • staff attitude- journey together • colourful/colour coding • exciting- every lever • screen and then books • guided group reading books • Monster Phonics as a company so responsive. Prepared to listen to people on the ground	• Assessment- time to do it • Intervention- lack of staff • Parental engagement- some interest but finding it difficult to understand. Not even supporting with eBooks
SCHOOL H	• all materials are provided, reducing workload • really engaging- our pupils love it • pupils latch on to the characters/monsters • provision of a common language • provides smooth transition from nursery to Y2 and beyond • accessibility of training • back up support provided by Monster Phonics • colour coded graphemes • characters/monsters • provision of videos and all materials that are 'all there for you' making it easier for teachers • reduces workload- just log on and video/ PowerPoint and book is there ready	• cost • mindset- group v whole class and the priority required for phonics • 'Scary' initially to go back to the beginning in order to plug gaps • lack of strategy in Wales to improve children's reading • excuse making • activities can be too formal for reception/early years practice • mindset
SCHOOL I	• structure • consistency • training • progression • improved engagement • monsters and the colour coded graphemes • hook into learning • children love it • high quality resources • support from Monster Phonics. 'They listen to us and evolve.' • reduced workload as it's all there	• split classes • intervention/differentiation • pace • cost • time to fit it all in. Has to be a priority. Pressure to do so much in curriculum • Estyn expectations i.e. little whole class input • class size and number of enabling adults • need experienced foundation phase practitioners to make it for Welsh schools
SCHOOL J	• materials and planning available saves time • colour coding and monsters • matched funding and reduced costs • planning, assessment, resources • engaging characters • reception pupils move quickly onto books • impact of colours- makes a huge difference in reading books • consistency • assessment help inform parents as to why books selected • pupils love the Monster 'cuddles'	• finance/cost • determining staring place • staffing/number of adults to facilitate ability grouping/intervention • ability variation within class • mixed age classes • resources for Wales- continuous/enhanced provision • some dodgy songs that could be made more memorable • intervention/staffing needed • finance • time- fitting it in, making it a priority • not all activities need to be done • staff confidence

SCHOOL K	• pace • impact • lesson plans, reducing workload • PowerPoints -easy to use • clarity for supply teachers • consistence in routines • pupils pick it up • children complain if no Monster Phonics session • consistency of language/understanding • training – essential • colour coding/characters/animation • eBooks and link to parents • commitment/believe in it • staff buy in and buzz • guided readers	• pace- initially when compared with previous scheme • interventions- time/takeover timetable • takes more than 20 mins daily • cost for all elements • cognitive overload for ALN/Reception pupils • lack of parental buy in • clash with early years practice- need activities such as water painting etc

With regard to enablers:

The responses indicate that there are features of the specific scheme selected that facilitated its implementation. Nine schools commented on the monsters and the way they engaged pupils. Further, six schools found the colour coding feature of the scheme impactful.

Nine schools found that the positive impact of workload of having the planning and resources easily accessible and in one place an enabling factor.

Four schools found that the consistency brought to the teaching of phonics within the school to be a significant enabler.

With regards to blockers.

Eight schools found that cost of the scheme/ school lack of finances was or would have been a significant barrier to implementing the scheme if not part of this research.

Eight schools found that staffing levels, particularly around the provision of intervention when needed to be a significant challenge.

Six schools identified the time needed to implement the scheme fully to be problematic. Some described the need to prioritise the teaching of phonics meant that decisions needed to be made regarding what not to do in order to create more time for the teaching of phonics.

Six schools were challenged by the apparent clash between the scheme and the established early years practice in Welsh schools.

Author Reflections

It is not possible to claim with any certainty that any particular variable was the cause of any specific progress/lack of progress. For instance, it would be meaningless to claim that certain schools saw greater progress because of the training they had or where they started the learners on the scheme or how they provide intervention. There are simply too many variables at play to make such claims.

For this reason, this piece of work is presented more as a series of case studies with schools sharing what went well and what was problematic with the implementation of a systematic synthetic phonics programme in Welsh schools.

What is clear is that all ten participating schools, despite having taught phonics previously, found the move to Monster Phonics to have been beneficial. Significant impact on pupils' engagement, learning and progress was reported. Standards in phonics improved.

This enquiry was never intended to compare Monster Phonics with other DFE validated systematic synthetic phonic programmes. It seems reasonable to suggest that training all staff to teach phonics and providing detailed planning, quality resources and integrated assessment, so that the teaching of phonics is systematic and consistent throughout the school, would result in higher standards regardless of which scheme delivered this. There were however some key features of Monster Phonics that seem to have made it particularly impactful, notably learners' engagement with the monster characters and the colour coding of graphemes.

Although only highlighted by a few schools when asked for blockers to implementing the scheme, there is little doubt that knowing where to start pupils on the scheme, was initially a challenge for schools. This issue was caused by the apparent difference between the standards in phonics in the participating schools and those required by the systematic synthetic phonics programme. Hopefully, the various approaches tried by the participating schools (Table 15) will be of use to other schools in Wales looking to implement a DFE validated synthetic phonics scheme.

It will be of interest to see what emerges as the Reception pupils that followed the scheme throughout Reception now work on the year one scheme. A key issue to explore is if there are fewer gaps in phonological knowledge, facilitating whole class input, and less need for intervention or differentiation.

The financial challenges faced by schools outlined in the context, did impact on the study. Schools reported that costs and staffing levels were seen as significant factors in implementing the scheme. The discount and matched funding provided to participating schools helped to some extent to overcome that barrier but cost would be a significant factor for consideration for any school looking to implement a systematic synthetic phonics programme.

There is a paradox with regard to staffing levels. In its basic form, the programme promotes whole class teaching with those pupils needing extra support being given intervention. Fewer support staff within classrooms may lead to the need to teach more whole class lessons. However extra staffing is required for the intervention. A number of participating schools had been forced to make cuts to staffing and others need to make further cuts.

Significant pedagogical issues were raised. Firstly, the approached outlined above of whole class input for early years and foundation phase pupils was seen problematic by some schools. Further, the use of worksheets as opposed to more experiential learning in a range of relevant authentic contexts promoted by many in Wales, was an issue for some staff. In a number of cases the schools moved away from worksheets to focused and enhanced tasks within the provision. Though not a focus of this study, good and poor practice in this area was observed during the summer visits to the schools. It was best in school B where the tasks were engaging, meaningful and reinforced learning. It was poorest in two schools where a lack of adult support resulted in pupils using resources inappropriately in a way that confused previous learning.

The other pedagogy that was challenged was stage not age. The scheme states what is expected for learners in each year group. Schools found this a challenge, especially as their pupils were simply not able to access the work for the relevant year group. Intervention may be appropriate for individual pupils that are struggling but is clearly not appropriate when the majority of the class is unable to access the work. Most schools used some form of differentiation in ensuring that the work was suitable for their learners. It will be particularly interesting to see if the reception pupils that began the scheme at the beginning will, as they move through the school, be able to be taught more as a whole class with intervention provided to those that need it. Participating schools have been advised to conduct phonic screening as in England so that the longer-term impact of this project can be determined.

In relation to fidelity to the scheme, the participating schools showed high fidelity in terms of:

- using only Monster Phonics resources
- teaching the 'sounds' in the recommended order. Pace was a challenge to many.
- only Monster Phonics training was provided
- systems were in place to ensure compliance with the scheme

However, there was less fidelity to the scheme in that

- not all schools used the integrated assessments and tracker from the beginning
- schools differentiated the work to match the ability of the learners
- schools made learning more engaging e.g. replacing worksheets with activities within the provision

The issue here is that of determining when adaptation is reasonable and even advisable, resulting in greater positive impact, and when the changes result in the dilution of the programme and its impact on standards. Related here are teachers' mindset and expectations regarding pace and standards. Further, can staff make such decisions correctly if they lack appropriate training and experience of what can be achieved?

Whatever the pedagogical differences, there can be little doubt that standards in phonics in England are higher than they are in Wales. Further, children do not always learn in a linear way. One teacher who was struggling with stage not age verses year group expectations referred to one learner that had huge difficulty in recognising 'b' but could list a number of phonemes associated with the monster Angry Red.

Some schools recognised a need for staff to change their mindset, particularly with regard to pace and expectation. The difference between the pace and expectations of the scheme to that in schools where reception pupils are introduced to a sound a week is stark
.
There is one further aspect to the discussion here. The realisation of Curriculum For Wales has in many instances removed national expectations. Some of the participating schools welcomed expectations for year groups. These expectations, together with an evidenced informed method for the teaching of phonics, brought clarity and a consistency in approach. As evidenced within the context section, there remains in Wales a lack of clarity with regards to phonics and the teaching of reading general. Schools are being left to find what is right for their pupils, regardless of the successful impact of evidenced informed strategies used just over the border in England. Despite the lack of clarity and falling standards, phonics nor reading feature in the 'What needs to improve' section of Estyn's primary sector summary. (Annual Report 2022-23).

Finally, whilst it was felt important to highlight and explore the issues faced by schools in the implementation of the systematic synthetic phonics programme in order that this enquiry can be of use to other schools, it is important not to get distracted. It is recognised that the low phonic standards in the participating schools caused a significant issue with using the relevant age group baseline assessments as a measure of progress. Nevertheless, all participating schools reported a significant improvement in phonic standards. The following quotes, one from each school, provide a good summary.



School Summary Statements

'It's brought consistency. Pupils love the monsters and relate them to the sounds. The quality of the resources is fantastic. The planning and assessment is all there. It really does raise standards.'
School A

'It's been great. Everyone is on board. Really, really pleased with the results. Teachers are enthusiastic. Pupils love it.'
School B

'The best thing we have done for years without a doubt. Huge impact for us.' School Ca
'It's given our children the opportunity to succeed by setting high expectations for all.'
School Cb

'Pupils are now enthusiastic about phonics that could have been boring. They love it! They are excited about letters, sounds and reading. It's coming through in their writing'.
School F

'The fun and level of engagement has increased by; well I can't tell you by how much! It has impacted on pupils' confidence, reading and standards. They now have a love of reading. It's also bonded us as a team.' School G

'Never done anything that has had an impact on this scale. The ripples are far reaching.'
School H

'It's been beneficial to all staff. It has inspired children and developed their love of reading. The segmenting and blending have helped hugely.'
School I

'First time ever I have felt that I have made such a difference. It's been successful, we've been successful and the children have been successful. Best thing since sliced bread. Biggest difference I've seen in assessment outcomes in 20 years.'
School J

'Delighted with the impact that Monster Phonics has had on our pupils' confidence and perseverance. Their independent writing is greatly improved.'
School K

If one person with limited resources can conduct this type of enquiry, imagine what could be achieved by national research and a review of existing research with regards to the teaching of phonics. With academic rigour, it could disprove commonly held misconceptions and challenge the use of already discredited pedagogy.

It could establish the most impactful strategies and resources. It could remove the lottery currently faced by learners in Wales. It could replace confusion with clarity and lead to improved standards in phonics in Wales. Surely the four purposes are more likely to be realised if the children of Wales can read!

Appendix A: Questionnaire

1 – Name of School:

2 – Email Address:

3 – The number of TEACHERS teaching Monster Phonics:
Early Years to Y2.

4 – The number of LSAs / TAs teaching Monster Phonics:
Early Years to Y2.

5 – The number of TEACHERS teaching Monster Phonics:
Y3 - Y6.

6 – The number of LSAs / TAs teaching Monster Phonics:
Y3 - Y6.

7 – Initial Response to the Introduction of Monster Phonics.
Please indicate the reaction and the percentage of staff showing that reaction by writing A<25%, B 26-50%, C: 51-75% or D: >76%

8 – In general, how have the pupils responded to Monster Phonics?
Any impact up to now?

9 – In general, how have the parents/guardians responded to Monster Phonics?

10 – Have you held any type of Parent/Guardian Information/Launch event regarding Monster Phonics?

A = Yes
B = No

11 – If Yes, Please tell us about the event
E.g. Type of event/ Extent Of Engagement/ Use of any Monster Phonics material.

12 – Has your school received online training from Monster Phonics?

A = Yes
B = No

13 – Please outline the percentage of staff having the training.

A = < 25%
B = 26-50%
C = 51-75%
D = 76%
E = None

14 – What is your response to the training received to date and the indications of its impact?

15 – Has your school received face to face training from Monster Phonics?

A = Yes
B = No

16 – Please outline the percentage of staff having the training This question is required.*

A = < 25%
B = 26-50%
C = 51-75%
D = 76%
E = None

17 – What is your response to the training received to date and the indications of its impact?

18 – Has your school provided any training itself to staff regarding the teaching of Monster Phonics?

A = Yes
B = No

19 – Please outline the percentage of staff having the training This question is required.*

A = < 25%
B = 26-50%
C = 51-75%
D = 76%
E = None

20 – What is your response to the training received to date and the indications of its impact?

21 – What has gone particularly well? What has facilitated this?

22 – What has been a struggle/not gone well? What has caused this?

Appendix B: Structure of interviews during summer visits to participating schools.

Thank you for completing the baseline assessment back in September 23. What did the results tell you about your standards in phonics?

Given what the baselines results showed you, has there been any progress or impact on standards in phonics since September 23?

The scheme recommends whole class teaching with intervention provision for pupils if they start to fall behind. Would you describe your approach as intervention or differentiation?

I would now like to explore now how closely you have followed the scheme. There are no prizes for following it religiously! I am just interested in how the scheme has been used within your school.

Firstly, tell be about the planning and resources used in the teaching of phonics.

Have you used the integrated assessment within the scheme?

What training has been provided with regards to the teaching of phonics?

How do you know that staff are following the scheme?

I am hoping that our enquiry will help any other schools in Wales thinking of implementing a systematic synthetic phonics programme. What things have aided the implementation and what things have made it difficult?

How would you summarise the impact of implementing Monster Phonics?

MIKE GLAVIN
CATALYST
CHANGE FOR THE BETTER

To discuss this enquiry please

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