

Submitted to StokeonTrentLive, Oct 1. (Stokessentinel.co.uk)

Paul Whiteman is correct. The phonics check is a waste of time. A drop in scores, even a tiny drop, will result in more time devoted to intensive phonics instruction. Research consistently shows that intensive phonics teaching only improves scores on tests such as the phonics check, tests in which children pronounce words presented on lists. But intensive phonics teaching does not improve scores on tests in which children have to understand what they read. In contrast, children who develop a pleasure reading habit do well on both kinds of tests.

Please read the research. Start here –

Krashen, S. 2009. Does intensive reading instruction contribute to reading comprehension?

Knowledge Quest 37 (4): 72-74. [<http://tinyurl.com/y24t24bt>]; McQuillan, J. 2019. Reading tests that don't measure reading. The Backseat Linguist, Sept 29, 2019.

[<http://backseatlinguist.com/blog/reading-tests-that-dont-measure-reading-corrected/>]

Original article

Shock fall in pupils passing phonics test (but should they really be asked to read nonsense words?)

Kathie McInnes

○ 1 OCT 2019

The proportion of Potteries pupils mastering phonics by the time they turn six has dropped to its lowest level for four years.

Figures show 78 per cent of Year 1 children in Stoke-on-Trent met the national standard in the 'phonics check' in 2019. This marked a two per cent decline on 2018's results.

In Staffordshire schools, 84 per cent of pupils passed the test – down one per cent on the previous year. While in Cheshire East, results stayed steady at 84 per cent.

Government ministers have championed phonics as the key to teaching children to read. Youngsters learn how to build up letters to form words and sentences

But the national check has attracted controversy, not least because half of the 40 words that pupils are tested on are made up. All the 'pseudo-words' they have to read - such as 'spraw' and 'meck' - are accompanied by pictures of imaginary creatures.

All children who miss out on reaching the national standard in Year 1 are re-assessed in Year 2.

This summer, 89 per cent of Stoke-on-Trent pupils, 92 per cent of Staffordshire children and 93 per cent of Cheshire East pupils had passed phonics by the end of key stage one.

Nationally, it is the first time results have fallen in phonics since the tests were introduced, with 82 per cent meeting the required standard in 2019.

But Paul Whiteman, general secretary of the NAHT heads' union, described the phonics test as a 'poor use of staff time' and said it 'should not be compulsory for children'.