Leicester City Council Scrutiny Review

Literacy Teaching at Key Stage 1 (with a focus on reading)

A Review Report of the Children and Young People Services Scrutiny Commission

Date: 10th October 2017

Leicester
City Council

Contents

Appendices:

Literacy Task Group
Children and Young People Services Scrutiny Commission

Task Group Members: Councillor Dr Lynn Moore (Chair)
Councillor Teresa Aldred
Gerry Hirst – Co-opted member
Young People's Council representatives

Chair's Foreword

In August 2016, the Children Young People and Schools Scrutiny Commission was presented with the Annual Education Performance Report 2014/15

The report compared the results of SATs tests in reading, writing, English and Maths. for Leicester children in city schools with the national picture.   The commission was concerned to see that the percentage of pupils in Leicester achieving a Level 2b+ in reading, writing and maths was significantly below the national average and the gap had widened. Attainment in the year 1 Phonics screen had improved by 3% but was still 5% below the national average with significant variation between schools.

It is generally recognised that children need to acquire literacy skills in order to participate fully in their education; and, as a counterbalance to poverty, to achieve to full potential in adult life.

In the light of the city results, the commission decided that it would be worthwhile for a task group to carry out some investigation into the pattern of these results by visiting schools, observing practice and talking to teachers. But rather than concentrate on negative results, they wanted to detect and scrutinise successful practice - and because most children are expected to lay a firm foundation for these skills during KS1, it was decided to narrow the focus of the task group to this phase of primary education.   This had the advantage of simplifying what would otherwise have been a very large, time consuming and probably unmanageable task to something which could be conducted in the time available during the municipal year.

The Chair is grateful to those head teachers and their staff who welcomed the task group members into their schools, allowed them to observe literacy teaching in action and gave generously of their time to discuss the aims, objectives and overall philosophy which underpinned their approach to the teaching of literacy.

She is also grateful for the opportunity given by staff of the Whatever It Takes initiative to meet with the task group to discuss their work. Finally, as always, thanks are due to task group members and to the officers, both from scrutiny and from school improvement, who participated in this project.

Councillor Lynn Moore

Chair of Children and Young People Services Scrutiny Commission.

1.   Introduction

1.1   The Children and Young People's Scrutiny Commission set up a task group to conduct a review into 'Literacy Teaching at Key Stage One (age 7) in Leicester primary schools' with the primary focus on reading. At the outset, the task group recognised that key issues arise not only when a child reaches key stage one, but much earlier in their development from Early Years to Foundation Stage.

1.2   The commission spent some time attempting a definition of literacy in order to inform its observations. It was agreed that to be literate, children should not only be able to decode text accurately and fluently, but be able to access and demonstrate an understanding of meaning, enjoy the act of reading and engage in reading a wide variety of good quality children's literature.   In terms of writing, less time was spent defining what literate writing was, but it was agreed that it involved accurate spelling and a fluent and legible handwriting style.   In the event, the accounts of teachers helped to refine this definition.

1.3   The commission also queried whether passing a Statutory Assessment Test (SAT) was a reliable index of a good standard of literacy.   It was acknowledged that children could be coached to pass SATs but not be truly literate as defined above.

2.   Recommendations

The Assistant Mayor for Children's Services and the Executive are asked to consider the following recommendations:

2.1   Task group investigations indicate that schools who achieve success for children at Key Stage One (KS1) in developing literacy skills in accordance with their age follow a precise curriculum for teaching phonic skills as advocated by Knowledge Transfer Centre (KTC) and monitor individual progress continuously, introducing intervention as needed. All schools should be encouraged to consider adopting this curriculum, backed by guided reading and extensive, good quality reading resources.

2.2   These schools are led by strong, committed heads who support an informed whole school approach. Recruitment and selection of head teachers is the first step to tackling poor reading standards in our Key Stage One and Key Stage Two children. Governors should be offered information on what works in teaching young children to read, so that they can draw on this knowledge when interviewing and appointing heads.

2.3   Schools should consider introducing measurement of reading age on an annual basis as a more reliable measure of progress than a Whatever It Takes (WiT) survey or a SAT result.

2.4   The City Council should support the principles represented by the Knowledge Transfer Centre (KTC) and if appropriate, encourage schools to consider undergoing the training it offers.

2.5   The City Council should consider maintaining its investment in the library services so that they can continue to support schools in providing resources at Key Stage One (KS1).

2.6   Similarly, it is vital that schools in those areas where children can experience various forms of deprivation can maintain their nurseries in providing early and effective grounding in literacy skills and enjoyment of books, together with work with parents. In those areas which maintain private nurseries, there should be some kind of intervention by the City Council to support, and if necessary encourage, these nurseries to employ skilled staff and offer the same quality of early years' experience.

2.7   Schools expressed appreciation of interest and support shown by local councillors. It would be politic for councillors to visit and show interest in their local schools, particularly if their pupils come from disadvantaged or impoverished backgrounds.

Leicester City Council and the Leicester Education Strategic Partnership are asked to consider the following recommendation:

2.8   There seems to be some confusion about the respective roles and responsibilities of the local authority and the Leicester Education Strategic Partnership. This needs to be clarified with schools.

The Schools Forum are asked to consider the following recommendation:

2.9   Schools Forum may wish to revisit the principles on which WiT was founded and seek some transparency in and external monitoring of, its bid procedures.

3.   Background

3.1   **National context**

3.2   How Key Stage 1 Outcomes are measured

3.3   Children are assessed against the national curriculum when they complete key stage 1. This is usually in the summer of the school year in which they are 7 years old. In 2016, primary assessment changed in line with a new curriculum brought into England's schools by the Department for Education (DfE) in September 2014. As a result of these national changes to the curriculum and assessment frameworks, with the exception of the phonics screening check results, 2016 outcomes are not comparable with earlier years.

3.4   Teacher assessment (TA) is the main focus for end of KS1 assessment. It is carried out as part of teaching and learning. Teacher assessment provides a rounded judgement that is based on knowledge of how the pupil has performed over time and in a variety of contexts. Teachers must base their TA judgement on a broad range of evidence which takes into account;
* written, practical and oral classwork
* results of the statutory KS1 tests
* homework

3.5   In 2016 the statutory tests (SATS) were new and included a reading test, a mathematics test and an optional grammar, punctuation and spelling test. The tests are set externally but marked internally. Test scores are not reported separately nationally, and often not reported separately at all, even to parents. In 2016, teacher assessments were reported using the standards set out in "the interim teacher assessment frameworks" (appendix B). The frameworks contain 3 standards:
* working towards the expected standard
* working at the expected standard
* working at greater depth within the expected standard

3.6   At the end of key stage1 external moderation of a school's teacher assessments is statutory. It is undertaken by the local authority and the Standards and Teaching Agency (STA). It gives confidence that schools' TA judgements are accurate and consistent with national standards. In 2016 the local authority moderated 25% of Leicester schools and Leicester City LA was moderated by STA.

3.7   Phonics Screening Check

3.8   In addition to the end of key stage assessment schools are required to administer the phonics screening check. This is designed to confirm whether pupils have learnt phonic decoding to an appropriate standard and identify pupils who need extra help to improve. All pupils who have reached the end of

year 1 must take the check. Pupils in year 2 must also take the check if they didn't meet the required standard in year 1, or haven't taken it before.

3.9   The scheme for marking the tests sets out an expected standard for attainment with performance scored in terms of teacher assessment and written answers to set papers.   For example, at the end of KS1, pupils should be able to read accurately most words of two or more syllables; and in age–appropriate books, read words accurately and fluently without overt sounding and blending together the letters or letter groups in printed words. If children are working at greater depth, they should be able to make inferences on the basis of what is said and done in a book they are reading independently. (*See Appendix B for a full description of these standards*.)

3.10   In the 2016 KS1 tests, children were given a booklet which gave information about the children's author, Tony Ross, together with the full text of one of his short stories. In an accompanying answer booklet, the child is asked a series of closed questions. Expected answers vary from finding and copying a word, completing a table to indicate if a series of statements are true or false, selecting a correct phrase from multiple choices, ordering sentences to reflect the sequence in which they appear in the story - to writing a sentence in answer to a question. Points are allocated for each correct answer. In a second paper, there is less reliance on the child's short term memory, in that each page has a section of a story with questions conforming to the above categories printed on the same page.

3.11   To answer questions, the child must read and understand the meaning of words in the story. These include multisyllable words and words which use digraphs so are not phonically regular. Correct answers rely on these decoding skills as well as a knowledge of vocabulary. The child should be able to paraphrase (i.e. understand that "fisherman" is a kind of job), make inferences from the content of the passage and be able to reproduce the sequence in the story by ordering sample sentences.   So correct answers also rely on reasoning skills. Children from families where English is the first language, and who have had a rich preschool experience of language, including looking at and listening to story books will be advantaged over children who lack this experience, **unless the school has provided relevant experiences to overcome any deficit.**

3.12   In October 2013, the Department for Education announced changes to the performance measures that would be used following changes to the national curriculum. 2016 Key Stage One results cannot be compared to previous years, as this is the first year that these new measures come into place fully

across all key stages. Due to the changes in curriculum and assessment systems, the outcomes cannot be directly comparable with previous years.

3.13 **Local context**

3.14 The Annual Education Performance Report for 2014/15 for Leicester Primary Schools at Key Stage 1 showed:
- The size of the cohort significantly increased in 2014/15 and the increase was considerably larger than in the cohort nationally.
- The percentage of good and outstanding primary schools in Leicester was below the regional and national average but improving
- There was considerable variation in the performance of different schools

3.15 Attainment
- Attainment on entry was low
- Overall Key Stage One (KS1) performance in Leicester was low against statistical and regional neighbours and gaps were widening
- The percentage of pupils in Leicester that achieved a Level 2b+ in reading, writing and maths was significantly below the national average with the gap widening from previous years
- Attainment in the year 1 Phonics screen improved by 3% but was still 5% below the national average

3.16 Progress
- The percentage of pupils making expected progress from EYFS to KS1 was good and improving
- The percentage of pupils making expected progress in reading went up from 90% to 99% and those that exceeded expected progress went up from 46% to 62%

3.17 Performance of Groups
- Girls outperformed boys at Level 2B in reading, writing and maths
- Disadvantaged pupils achieved better in reading, writing and maths than their peers do nationally
- Pupils with EAL performed significantly worse than national in reading, writing and maths
- White British and Indian pupils were significantly below national averages in reading, writing and maths

3.18 Targets
The task group heard that the aim of the School Improvement Service was for the percentage of children achieving;
- the expected standard in phonics to match national performance
- age related expectations or above in reading, writing and maths to at least match national performance in attainment and progress

3.20 Key Priorities
For 2015/16 the key actions for Key Stage One were to;
- further roll out the Knowledge Transfer Centre work

- continue to target Whatever It Takes (WiT) Strategy work to tackle the variation in performance between schools and within schools

3.22 The Annual Education Performance Report for 2015/16 for Leicester Primary Schools at Key Stage 1
During the time this report was being compiled data for 2015/16 became available and showed;
- The percentage of good and outstanding schools increased by a further 12% in 2016 closing the gap to 2 percentage points on regional and 5 percentage points on national averages
- Leicester improved its national ranking for reading, writing and mathematics at Key Stage 1 but remained below the national average for all three subjects
- Attainment in the year 1 phonics screen improved to 4% below the national average
- The percentage of pupils making expected or better progress from EYFS to the end of KS1 improved further. In 2015/16 it was significantly above the national average for the expected level (ranked 6 out of 152) and the higher level (ranked 4 out of 152).
- White British pupils' attainment and progress at Key Stage 1 was significantly below other groups nationally

4 Report

4.1 During this review, the visits to schools highlighted some excellent work being done by both schools and Leicester City Council to raise standards in literacy. The task group members place on record their appreciation to staff who are dedicated to raising standards in literacy.

4.2 The task group evidence gathering included the 'Annual Education Performance Report 2015' and an overview presentation from Leicester City Councils Lead Raising Achievement Advisor (*presentation at Appendix D*).

4.3 Headlines data:

- The percentage of pupils making expected progress from EYFS to KS1 has increased in all areas from 2014.
- In reading the percentage of all pupils making expected progress went up from 90% to 99% and those that exceeded expected progress went up from 46% to 62%
- In writing the percentage of all pupils making expected progress went up from 88% to 100% and those that exceeded expected progress went up from 34% to 61%
- In maths the percentage of all pupils making expected progress went up from 75% to 100% and those that exceeded expected progress went up from 43% to 69%
- Girls outperform boys at Level 2B in reading, writing and maths but both are significantly below national averages

- Disadvantaged pupils achieve better in Leicester in reading, writing and maths than their peers do nationally.
- Pupils with EAL perform significantly worse than national in reading, writing and maths.
- White British and Indian pupils are significantly below national averages in reading, writing and maths.
- Overall Key Stage One (KS1) performance in Leicester is also low against statistical and regional neighbours and gaps are widening.

4.4　There is considerable variation in the performance of different schools and there is also considerable variation within schools between the outcomes in reading, writing and maths.

4.5　The task group heard that the aim of the School Improvement Service is for the percentage of children achieving the expected standard in phonics to match national performance, for the percentage of pupils reaching age related expectations or above in reading, writing and maths to at least match national performance; and for all Leicester children to make good or better progress through the key stage.

4.6　Investigation

4.7　Selection of sample

4.8　The task group visited five city primary schools with KS1 departments as well as a special school for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. All had recorded superior SATs results at KS1. Most of the pupils at the special school, although older, had entered the school with few or no literacy skills.

4.9　To avoid any inference that results reflected the quality of home experience, schools were selected with intakes which, on paper, would indicate depressed results. Demographics were as follows:

School 1　90% children from Somali families, together with Indian, Bangladeshi and Italian children, none with English as their first language.

School 2　50% Arabic, 30% Bengali, and 20% of children from Indian families, none with English as their first language.

School 3　60% of children from Asian families, speaking either Gujarati or Bengali, 40% Somali children speaking Swedish or Dutch (as Somali refugees had moved first to Sweden or The Netherlands) and some Eastern European children from Slovakia.

School 4　Predominantly children from Indian families with no English and an impoverished language environment

School 5 Mainly white British children from socially deprived families with many single parents. 18% of children from Eastern Europe with no English.

Special school Mainly white British children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

4.10   On paper, therefore, it might be expected that (based on pre-school experience and/or family support) these children would achieve low SATs scores – but the reverse was true, an indication that what the schools were doing in teaching literacy skills to KS1 children was making the difference.

4.11   School visits

4.12   Members of the task group typically visited a school for a morning session. Each school devised a programme which included observations of classroom practice and child behaviours, discussions with key members of staff, and demonstrations of resources. The following questions guided conversations between task group members and staff:

1) How do you teach reading at Key Stage 1, in this school? e.g. methods, approaches, what works well and what does not

2) What steps could Leicester City Council take to improve literacy and reading standards in schools in Leicester?

3) Are you involved in the 'Whatever It Takes' initiative in Leicester?

4) If so, what are the impacts of this initiative? for example funding, improvements, resources.

5) Are you aware of other models of teaching literacy (in particular reading) at Key Stage One? e.g. best practice in other schools

4.13   The chair participated in each visit. An officer from School Improvement attended four out of the six visits. Two other members of the task group attended two visits each.

4.14   Notes were taken by task group members. Together with other materials provided by the schools, these notes were collated. It was then possible to compare the methods used by each school, draw out commonalities and so reach some conclusions that these were the key elements in how the schools were teaching the children which helped them to make impressive, measureable progress.

4.15 Finally, in the light of these results, some current published literature was searched to see if results from well-designed research studies confirmed what we had observed.

4.16 At the suggestion of officers, members of the task group met with staff from the Whatever It Takes initiative who gave information on the history of the project, how it was conducted and how it was financed.

4.17 Results

4.18 Entry skills

4.19 All schools talked about those entry skills of their pupils which were part of the foundation for developing literacy skill i.e. fluent speaking of English, knowledge of vocabulary, experience of using story books in the home and hearing stories and rhymes. This was important information about the baseline from which schools added value.

4.20 Two schools were attended by children of university students so had experienced relative affluence and stimulation at home; but the majority of children in this study were experiencing a low to very poor standard of living. In four schools 9-40 children entered school from abroad during the year, many of in economic migrant families. In one school, 80% of children came from poor white British families. In addition one school reported a high level incidence of autistic spectrum disorder. In another, children entered with very poor independence skills, not weaned or toilet trained.

4.21 Although mostly well-nurtured by their families, children entering school in four of the six schools had no experience of speaking colloquial English at home, had poor spoken language with very little knowledge of vocabulary. In two schools, teachers told us that the children had not been read to, and didn't know rhymes. Some children had attended private nurseries run by their own communities, which were not open to inspection. It was the impression of teachers that these nurseries employed unskilled staff on low pay and did not provide the same breadth of rich experience as the school nurseries.

4.22 All primary schools had their own attached nurseries, so before entering reception classes many children had enjoyed some good quality nursery education with schools reporting that they began work on literacy skills at this stage: immersing children in spoken English (four schools), using key words such as "toilet", providing lists of high-frequency words in the classrooms, and working on listening skills: using rhymes, reading stories, alerting children to the first sound in words, then helping them to detect the sequence of sounds in words (segmenting). Children were shown the letters which represented many of the sounds in spoken English and had practice in blending them into

short, phonically-regular words and writing them. Two nurseries placed a particular focus on boys attaining these skills.

4.23   As children came into reception, the five primary schools worked hard to engage parents, organising workshops and drop-ins to model how to share books with children, hear them read from books sent home and providing tips and suggestions on the school website. For parents with a low grasp of English, teachers modelled language and gave definitions of words to achieve understanding. One school encouraged parents to come into the classroom for a short session before school where teachers worked alongside parents to model methods, and answer their questions. This was very well attended, with children keen for their parents to come along. There was a group email address for parents to use, to provide evidence of work with their children which was then displayed on a "*wall of work*".

4.24   General school characteristics

4.25   The heads of all five primaries were experienced and had spent many years (from 10 to 25) working in the same school. Two heads were executive principals working with two schools. One was a key figure in Whatever It Takes, organising and participating in outreach training with other schools.

4.26   From our observations, all the primary schools used the following groupings: whole class teaching, children kept in class but working in pairs or streamed small groups. Some, but not all schools, withdrew children to work individually or within a small group with an adult, either a teacher or a teaching assistant (TA), if they needed to catch up. In some schools, children had one to three sessions in a group of six per week; in another, 4 to 5 children had 1:1 support in class. One school streamed children according to literacy attainment into class groupings. All deployed other adults beside the class teacher in the classroom: TAs and volunteers who were selected for their good English or attendance on training courses. In the special school, a TA supported pupils if they needed support for reading in class. So all the children in these schools had access as needed to individual support from a skilled adult.

4.27   Training

4.28   All schools trained their teachers and TAs through a variety of means and placed heavy emphasis on the importance of peer support as a means of disseminating good practice. For example, in one school, teachers regularly filmed themselves teaching a lesson then shared this with a colleague for feedback. Teachers went into other schools in their development group to observe and to do moderation and support.   TAs could attend a course to equip them to carry out guided reading.

4.29   When interviewed, the head teachers described their commitment to professional development via particular approaches:

"Don't bombard staff with training, embed it, adapt what we've got"

"Get everyone on board"

"Training is not enough, it must be part of active delivery".

4.30   Curriculum

4.31   One common feature was a clarity about the literacy curriculum with objectives linked to government guidance. Each school linked objectives to descriptions of a hierarchy of targets. These were then migrated to teacher plans, record sheets, and/or individual learning books so that everyone working with a child could see progress, enable early identification of slowing or stopping; and mediate accordingly. The use of computer programs such as Target Tracker and word processing supported this process. Staff carried out checks day to day/weekly and reviewed progress via staff discussions at half-termly intervals.

4.32   The initial focus of teaching was a knowledge of the phonic code which governs English spelling, practice in decoding words by reading each letter as the sound it represents in order to blend the word; and segmenting words into sounds in order to write them. This observed a logical sequence:

- teaching single sound/letter correspondences
- blending and segmenting short, phonically regular words
- blending and segmenting words which used digraphs, teaching the various combinations of letters by which a sound can be written – and pairing the digraph with the actual sound, rather than individual constituent letters.

4.33   Lists of particular high frequency words (words which make up a large proportion of text but which are not easily blended because of phonic irregularity) were provided in class, with lists changing to introduce new words as the year progressed.

4.34   Methods used to teach these elements included the following:

- images accompanying letters and words as a cue to how to sound them
- a verbal cue to help the child decode: "Read the letter, say the sound"
- a multi-sensory routine – "the robot" – in which children were taught to use certain gestures when reading letters in order to blend a word
- if a child was uncertain of a correct response, the teacher would model it immediately
- if children in a group didn't answer when asked to give a correct response, the teacher would select them deliberately to answer and correct them immediately if they answered wrongly

- some schools used precision teaching to help children consolidate learning of particular elements: they would read aloud a "probe", a sheet listing five or so elements repeated at random. The number of elements read correctly as well as mistakes was marked on a chart. The probe was repeated daily until the graph levelled out as the child read all elements correctly and fluently with no mistakes over several days

4.35   Alongside the above, there was a strong emphasis on talking: to introduce topics, to define the meaning and origin of words and for adults to read stories to the class for enjoyment. Participation in events such as World Book Day, the summer Reading Challenge and author visits reinforced the concept of books and reading as a source of pleasure.

4.36   To extend learning beyond decoding, children participated in guided reading: an adult and a child sharing a text from a particular book, selected as appropriate for the child's reading level. The adult would talk about the book and use target words which would appear in the text, then intersperse reading with asking the child various questions, pointing to pictures and encouraging prediction to help him/her understand what he/she was reading and build vocabulary and skills of comprehension such as inference. If a child could not read a word, even after trying to blend it, several schools recognised that memory of what had just been read gave important cues to the next word(s) and would give the correct word so as not to interrupt the flow of reading. Some adults realised that it was better to point above rather than below a word if helping the child to match voice to word, so as not to mask the words which the child would be reading next. One school recommended an interactive computer program, Star Reading, which gives a child opportunity to practise and improve his/her comprehension by providing tasks at an appropriate level, selecting words to complete a sentence so demonstrating understanding.

4.37   Children read daily either to a "buddy" in class or an adult. In the special school with older children, the TA and child would share a book by reading a line each to build confidence. Writing practice was generally included in every session with instruction at an early stage as to the direction in which to form letters and write words.

4.38   As a means of helping children engage with language, lessons were also given in grammar and punctuation, with practical activities to reinforce the function of particular parts of speech.

4.39   Every school had strategies to encourage fluent reading and reading from a breadth of materials, such as paired reading, projects, daily buddy reading out of class with an older skilled peer, inter-class competitions with prizes and

"class claps" at weekly assemblies for the most number of hours/books read. There was a seamless transition of these practices into KS2.

4.40 Engagement with parents was crucial to this, not only with children taking books home to read daily, but with parents providing information on progress, coming into school to observe sessions and working with their child with expert advice on hand. One school held a popular reading café in school for parents, not just to advise them on how to support their children, but creating a relaxed atmosphere in which parents could have support to develop their own literacy. Schools can provide parents with laminated tip cards and DVDs showing how children learn literacy skills and what parents can do to support them.

4.41 The strategies used and the success that accompanies them bears out the results of research, particularly a well-designed and validated longitudinal study over three years with primary-aged children, which established beyond doubt that a phonological intervention, taught alongside common sight words and a small number of core phonic skills on a whole class basis and with the use of good children's literature ("real books") leads to a dramatic reduction in the percentage of children who were failing to learn to read, as well as improving the attainments and motivation to read of all pupils (Solity and Shapiro 2008)[1].

4.42 Resources

4.43 All the school visited used a variety of resources as part of teaching literacy. These ranged from lists of high frequency words taped to tables in the classroom for children to copy correctly as they wrote; flash cards of letters and target words used by the teacher when talking to the class group; magnetic letters; key rings of particular word cards which a child needed to practise; and displayed lists of words, colour coded to indicate their grammatical function. In one school, apart from book bags, each child received a new plastic folder with a pencil case and equipment to last the year. Children used individual whiteboards and markers for writing. In one school they could photograph their written work for display on a large board. Display boards with attractively presented and captioned contents were everywhere.

4.44 It was particularly impressive that all schools were deploying ITC equipment to great effect. We observed many lessons in which teachers used prepared lessons projecting them from laptops onto interactive white boards.

4.45 The main resource was the provision of a wide variety of books at all levels of difficulty, fiction (including classics as well as popular current publications)

---

[1] Solity, J. and Shapiro, L.R. (2008) *Developing the practice of educational psychologists through theory and research* Jo of Ed and Ch Psych 25(3) p123-149

and non-fiction covering a range of topics. All classrooms had their own library which was frequently refreshed by the library service to reflect current topics and interests. Schools also bought their own books. All schools had a well organised, attractive library with children participating in replacing returned books. To ensure that children could develop their reading skills on texts of an appropriate level of difficulty, there was a "Reading Recovery" resource in each school with books from various reading schemes graded for difficulty and with each level stored together. This organisation of material was used to record and check progress: for example, in one school, TAs checked competence at a particular level by using a sample book for accurate reading and understanding before moving the child to the next level. Schools also mentioned particular published schemes which they favoured: Ruth Miskin, Fresh Start, Jelly and Bean, Jolly Phonics, Read Write Inc, (and for older failing readers: Rapid Reads, Talisman, Barrington Stoke, Shadows). Big Books were used in reading high quality children's stories in whole class carpet sessions. All schools stressed the importance of their local libraries and praised the events organised for children and parents.

4.46   *Overall philosophy*

4.47   In talking to heads and staff, we gave an opportunity for them to talk about the particular philosophy which underpinned the teaching of literacy in their school. Certain central issues emerged from these conversations: the importance of strong, committed and vigorous leadership by Head and senior staff; the need to monitor progress towards definite targets constantly, with all staff on board keeping their fingers "on the pulse"; the teaching of literacy was not just aiming to get children through SATs but to provide an enriching environment in which children could learn to enjoy reading. Individual heads stressed particular issues: the importance of recognising uncertainty in new teachers and nurturing a growth in skill and confidence through training, peer support and dialogue; encouraging class teachers to own the progress of their children by reporting results to senior staff to highlight problems or good progress; making sure that everyone spoke correct English; avoiding withdrawal and keeping all children within the class group; an insistence that any failure was a failure in teaching, not within the child or the family.

4.48   *Support from the local authority*

Schools were asked what the local authority could do to lend support to their efforts. All stressed the importance of keeping libraries open. Two schools commended the support they received from governors and one appreciated the support and interest shown by their MP and local councillors. The same school wanted the local authority to promote good teaching of phonics,

tracking of progress, and a within-school culture of total immersion in language and literacy. Another school asked the LA to recognise which schools had strengths and to encourage them to release staff to train other schools, rather than employing consultants.   They commended the triad arrangement whereby staff could observe what colleagues in other schools were achieving. One school pleaded not to withdraw funds from preschool education. There was praise for the sponsored development of a toolkit to help with the learning of English. And some (but not all) schools praised the availability of funds from the Whatever It Takes (WiT) project for investment in training and purchase of resources.

From these comments, it is clear that some schools and their staff are confusing the respective roles, responsibilities and resources available to be deployed by the local authority and the Leicester Education Strategic Partnership (LESP).

4.49   **Whatever It Takes (WiT) Project**

4.50   The WIT initiative started in 2009 to take advantage of an underspend in the Dedicated Schools Grant. WIT came from the drive to tackle literacy in schools direct from a Secondary Educational Improvement Partnership and the NUT (National Union of Teachers). Its objective was to increase the overall standard of literacy attainment in city schools: *"Whatever it takes to get every child in Leicester reading"*. Funding was used to offer support and training to teachers in those schools which needed extra help: in acquiring and practising effective skills for teaching literacy skills and encouraging reading, as well as buying books, conducting projects and funding events. When government funds were cut, the decision was made by schools via Schools Forum to keep going.   Promotional materials currently describe the WiT initiative as:-'..*a well-established, cross-phase reading initiative with a group of over 100 schools, comprising targeted school projects, high profile inspirational events and centrally located staff training'.*

4.51   From 2013, DfE regulations deemed that certain activities by Schools Forum had to be directly agreed by schools through an annual consultation.   WIT comes under this heading and so every year since then schools have voted to continue to pool funds to use for WIT.

At present, nearly all WIT funds come from the pooling of funds by maintained schools, with some academies choosing to buy into the central offer of CPD. Independent schools and academies are exempt, but academies can buy into WIT. Each school's contribution is determined by numbers on roll.

4.52   The total "pot" is currently £1.33m. £250k is spent annually on core activities, essentially training for staff in specific approaches in the teaching of reading/spelling, data analysis, and Reading Champions conferences attended by children. Approximately 80% of total funds goes back to schools who have put in successful bids to support in-school literacy initiatives, such as funding to support training, purchase of reading resources, and/or particular reading projects with targeted pupils. The quality of bids is assessed by a panel. If unsuccessful, schools can receive support from members of the Strategy Board and the Local Authority Improvement Team to improve their bids. The use of WIT money is also monitored to ensure that schools are using funds effectively. Schools can apply for a Core Grant for projects which are over and above the key reading work that they already do within their own general reading policy, and can also choose to submit a proposal to enhance this work further (should funds remain after Core Grants have been awarded).

4.53   For example in 2015/16 funding was awarded to 68 primary schools for 110 projects for a total of £804,003 (an average £11,823 per school):

- Core Grant – 68 schools received funding for a total of £724,869 (average £10,660 per project)

- Additional Grant – 42 schools received funding for a total of £79,134 (average £1,884 per project)

4.54   All Leicester City maintained Primary and Secondary schools (not including Special Schools) de-delegate to WiT. Until March 2017, the city council made a relatively small contribution from the General Fund to be used for out of school activities. This is currently continuing at £39k. City council General Funds have also been used to support work commissioned through Leicester libraries including summer reading schemes, library-based storytelling activities and a number of other high profile reading activities (as part of WiT) organised through libraries.

4.55   WiT has a Strategy Board which includes head teachers, current practitioners, Local Authority officers, representatives from libraries and children's centres, and representation from the NUT.

The actual management of WiT projects is delivered by the School Development Support Agency (SDSA), a not-for-profit organisation with a small core team of staff based in offices at Alliance House in Bishop Street. WiT is one of several major curriculum initiatives where groups of schools pool significant funds to tackle major priorities.

SDSA calls upon a pool of expert associates in offering consultancy to schools In developing school improvement. Its activities include support for networking on regional basis, training in leadership, events and conferences and project management. Although it states that it is not a direct competitor to LAs, has Leicester head teachers and an academy principal at Director level, is often commissioned to support the work of LAs, and aims to complement existing services and policies where possible; it is a private company, and as such competes with local authority services in its offer to schools and charges for its activities and materials.

4.56 WiT also has a Project Board which looks more closely into the impact of central projects. Members of the Strategy Board and the Project Board and additional current school practitioners as necessary form the Grant Application Review Panel. The panel's funding judgements are made based upon schools' reading data over time, the results of the pupils' attitudes to reading, plus an evaluation of the impact of their previous work. Schools are required to supply an evaluation of each project under WIT, outlining the impact and outcomes for children. Schools will not receive funding for the next academic year until the previous year's evaluation have been submitted.

4.57 The current management costs of WiT projects to SDSA are £102,115 per annum. In return, SDSA undertakes all aspects of project delivery and organises events such as Author Week and Reading Champions, and produces resources to sell: DVDs for parents and carers on how to support children in learning to read, book marks and packs for the Reading Champions Scheme: worksheets, activities and certificates. All maintained city schools can have up to 2 free places on commissioned CPD, or children can attend events such as Author Week at no charge. Some example of CPD pertinent to teaching at KS1 are Better Reading and Writing Partners, which will enable TAs to choose an appropriate book for a child, observe strengths and weaknesses and help a struggling pupil make progress. The Read Write training for teachers and experienced TAs gives a full account of the curriculum for teaching phonics and helping children to understand what they read.

4.58 A core activity of WIT is the Knowledge Transfer Centre (KTC). This uses a Quality First Teaching (QFT) approach to reading in which teachers can have access to direct training as well as opportunities to visit other schools to observe good models of teaching and receive monitoring and encouragement. A Universal school (recent adopter or vulnerable) is partnered with a Core school (early adopter and experienced KTC school) which can provide peer support. The scheme receives some funding from the Leicester Education Schools Partnership (LESP). There are currently 46 schools in Leicester who are KTC schools. These are schools that have adopted the KTC approach as their main method of teaching reading.

4.59   KTC training has been developed and is led by consultant Ann Smallberger (project managed by SDSA). There is no cost to schools to become a KTC school, as all training and development is provided free of charge.

4.60   Leicester City Council supports and encourages schools to adopt the KTC approach. The KTC has a team of advocates and trainers.

4.61   Although the task group did not take direct evidence from the SDSA, they were informed that the management arm of the WiT project is the SDSA, and the staff that manage the WiT project are employed directly by the SDSA.

4.62   WiT Evaluation and Feedback

4.63   The WiT initiative is evaluated each year.   The latest evaluation 2015/16 document was received as evidence (Appendix C).

4.64   The task group was provided with an analysis of the effectiveness of WIT approaches (Appendix B); but this account acknowledged difficulties in carrying out a precise evaluation: changes in statutory assessments at the end of KS1 and 2, making historic comparisons impossible, as well as evaluating the effect of long-running projects on literacy attainment. Nevertheless, the report attributes significant improvement, ("albeit from a very low base" p5)*, both in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile for children at age 5; and in outcomes at the end of Year 2. Leicester has kept pace with the overall national improvement and after a widening of the gap in 2014 and 2015 the gap has now narrowed with a gap of 4.2 percentage points at the end of Y1 in phonics attainment; and 3.4 at the end of Y2 in 2016. Repeated surveys with children over attitudes to reading, (carried out this year with over 11,000 primary pupils), show relative stability over six years, with the majority reporting very positive attitudes.

4.65   In our conversations with schools, opinions about WIT were mixed. Three schools were enthusiastic participants in KTC, one proactive in organising outreach training, claiming high success in that the vast majority of children were reading successfully by KS2 and that there was a snowballing effect as schools saw the success of the KTC approach and joined the network of training schools. Another school was in its second year of the KTC training course, and was using funds to employ a TA to work with individual children. A third school relied on WIT funds to buy books for guided reading and for prizes. However, three schools admitted to not participating in the KTC or WIT (apart from acquiring funds to buy books) although one was training other schools and moderating progress. Two were critical: one preferred to use their own monies and felt that WIT didn't monitor the use of bid money properly. Similarly, the other cautioned against "throwing" money at schools which didn't use it effectively. It was content about the principle of giving money to WIT to support failing schools, but felt that acquiring resources or

experiencing training from external experts was not enough: delivery of interventions could only be effective if it was embedded in the school culture with effective leadership, monitoring and clarity about priorities. Consequently, it used its own funds and conducted its own in-house peer support and training. Paradoxically, the head teacher most enthusiastic about KTC voiced some similar caveats, acknowledging that there could be resistance within the triad development groups towards training, as newly qualified teachers could feel judged when their practice was evaluated as part of KTC.

4.66 The task group recognises the paradox represented by WiT and the SDSA. Originally, consultancy and school support for improvement was the total remit of the local authority, free at the point of delivery. With changes in governance and financing, the decision by Schools Forum to espouse the WiT initiative with collections of funds from schools and distribution according to need could be seen as "a voluntary collaborative initiative from schools", "from each according to their means, to each according to their needs". Now that service is being administered by a private organisation, which markets its resources and generates demand on an open market. There is nothing irregular in commissioning a company to project manage WiT in this way, but it does raise issues about the exact nature of the relationship between WiT and SDSA which, if not already clear to commissioning schools, might need some clarification for them.

4.67   *Future Challenges / Risks identified*

1. With increasing academisation across the city, schools will be putting themselves outside the Schools Forum DSG de-delegation scheme. It would seem quite unlikely to assume that the leadership of the emerging multi-academy trusts would want to submit part of their MAT top-slice to this process.

2. With the national funding formula changes to education, the impact on schools will most likely result in limited resources when choosing to buy in a service such as WiT.

3. A number of schools do not engage in the WiT project. Non-take up reasons range from not interested; not knowing about it; being overwhelmed by it; being overstretched; no issues with attainment levels; to not needing help.

4.   With the city council receiving less government funding each year, it will become increasingly difficult to provide the same level of funding in the future to WiT.

5.   Significant budget reductions would have an impact on the staffing levels of WiT, but as an "arm's length" organisation this responsibility would rest with the SDSA.

5   Conclusions

5.1   All the schools studied used a whole school approach to the teaching of literacy skills, led successfully by a committed, supportive and experienced head teacher.

5.2   All followed a clear curriculum in teaching children phonological skills, based on theory as to how children learn best, and tied to precise objectives, so that children's progress could be monitored and recorded constantly and intervention given if this slowed or stopped. ITC was used to facilitate this process.

5.3   Schools gave individual or small group help as needed either as part of whole class teaching, or by withdrawal.

5.4   All staff were trained in effective approaches and methods, either by participation in the KTC; or developing their own in-house training. This included all adults in contact with children: teachers, TAs and volunteers, the success of approaches used echoes research findings.

5.5   All schools offered guided reading to develop children's comprehension of what they read.

5.6   All schools maintained well stocked and well organised reading resources and class- and whole school-libraries, supported by the library service, with immersive opportunities throughout the school day to listen to, read and engage with text.

5.7   There was a prevailing philosophy that, no matter the early experience, background or genetic inheritance, it was the task and responsibility of the school to teach all children to read and any failure was a failure of pedagogy, not of the child or parent(s).

5.8   Schools placed heavy emphasis on the importance of early experiences; the primary schools visited introduced children to enjoyable listening, reading and recording activities in their own nurseries.

5.9   They were committed to working with parents as partners and offered many opportunities to make parents welcome in school, and to support them in working with their children at home.

5.10   The WiT initiative provides a range of admirable resources for schools to use in encouraging a love of reading. The KTC offers an excellent model for training with data confirming the effectiveness of its approach, while acknowledging that precise analysis of progress is problematic and that working with a failing school is not straightforward and can generate resistance.

5.11   Some criticism of the bid process points up the ambiguity of the relationship between schools and WiT. Schools are providing the funds for WiT to operate but are subject to decisions by a panel as to whether they get funds back. Furthermore, some schools are making a contribution but may not be receiving (even if by choice) a return on what is in effect an investment.

5.12   Schools expressed appreciation of interest and support shown by local councillors. It would be politic for councillors to visit and show interest in their local schools, particularly if their children come from disadvantaged or impoverished backgrounds.

6   Financial, Legal and Other Implications

6.1   Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. If the national school funding formula is implemented then it is expected that 2018/19 will be the last year that funding can be de-delegated by schools for WiT. From 2019/20 schools would need to buy services directly from such schemes or otherwise agree amongst themselves to pool funds. The City Council's contribution to WiT has reduced to £40k from 2017/18.

Martin Judson, Head of Finance

6.2   Legal Implications

There are no direct legal implications in the report, as the findings are based on information and views formed by the review task group.

Kamal Adatia, Head of Legal Services

6.3   Equality Implications

Leicester is a diverse city and there are a number of languages other than English spoken by various communities in the city, those whose mother tongue is not English and who may not be able to speak or understand English, may face barriers in terms of literacy.

Young people's behaviours and attitudes to reading can be influenced by their age, gender, socioeconomic backgrounds and ethnicity. The LA and Leicester Primary Schools are addressing the need to improve attainment levels at key stage one to support literacy, and to motivate and encourage children from across different backgrounds to enjoy reading, through various initiatives and teaching methods.

Surinder Singh, Equalities Officer

7   Summary of Appendices

Appendix A – Executive response template
Appendix B – Standards set for SATs
Appendix C – 'Whatever it Takes' Project – 2015/16 Full Evaluation
Appendix D – Overview of service – presentation slides

8 Contacts

Councillor Dr Lynn Moore
Chair of Task Group
Councillor.Lynn.Moore@leicester.gov.uk
Tel: 0116 454 6342

Anita Patel
Scrutiny Policy Officer
Anita.Patel@Leicester.gov.uk
Tel: 0116 454 6342

Appendix A

Executive Response to Scrutiny

The executive will respond to the next scrutiny meeting after a review report has been presented with the table below updated as part of that response.

Introduction

…

Scrutiny Recommendation	Executive Decision	Progress/Action	Timescales