

## UKLA's response to the proposed Programmes of Study for English (2012).

### Speaking and Listening

UKLA is concerned that Speaking and Listening has disappeared as an attainment target in its own right, although there is some reference to 'spoken language' in the aims and it does appear subsumed within Reading and Writing. There is also some mention of discussion about books read and heard read, which is to be welcomed. However, specific elements of talk (e.g. explaining, hypothesising, questioning, and so forth) need to be clearly named in the PoS, to enable teachers to engage in planning for *purposeful* talk. Speaking and listening is at the heart of the curriculum, and it is essential that children not only develop oral skills to enable purposeful social interaction, but also engage in appropriate dialogue and exploratory talk to support learning and thinking across the curriculum. Instead, there is an emphasis in the PoS on reciting and presentation. Although this is welcomed, it is not enough: there is only scant reference to drama, and what about storytelling, composition of oral texts, playing with language?

There is also no strong link between Speaking and Listening, Reading and Writing. These aspects of literacy are inextricably linked, and this should be more clearly articulated in the documentation.

#### *Suggestions:*

- *Speaking and Listening should be reinstated as an attainment target in its own right.*
- *Speaking and Listening should be reinstated as there is a danger that otherwise it is likely that there will be a lack of professional commitment to Speaking and Listening as a purposeful tool for social interaction, cognitive development and clarification of concepts.*
- *Aspects of talk should be named to ensure purposeful planning for meaningful talk (across the curriculum).*

### Reading

UKLA welcomes the emphasis on reading for pleasure, reading aloud, and giving children opportunities for discussion about texts, but good quality teacher training is essential to ensure all teachers have an up-to-date knowledge of children's literature and can use it well to enthuse children about reading (Cremin et al, 2009). It is important that teachers develop knowledge of a wide range of engaging children's texts: poetry, classic children's texts as well as modern texts that children enjoy today, if they are to truly encourage reading for pleasure and reflect a curriculum for the twenty-first century. The range of literature should also include popular culture, digital and multimodal texts.

UKLA welcomes the importance given to reading across both fiction and non-fiction, but are concerned that there is no mention in the PoS of the value of media, popular culture, visual literacy, multimodal texts, new technologies in supporting children's reading development and encouraging engagement with reading. There is also no specific reference to multicultural and multilingual texts, or the importance of links with the home experience and prior cultural experience. The importance of maintaining home language alongside learning English as an additional language has been long established, not just in terms of language development, but also in terms of attainment, because those children who can access their prior knowledge through

the language and culture most familiar to them can call on a rich array of schemata to support their learning (Chamot, 1998).

Reading is largely described in terms of decoding skills and the implementation of systematic synthetic phonics to support the development of these decoding skills. No other decoding strategies are mentioned. Although UKLA supports the teaching of phonics, we feel that it is important to note that this is only one of many strategies to support decoding and the teaching of reading. There is also the implication that, for early readers, access to texts should be limited to decodable texts; indeed, some schools are already removing from the classroom books that are not phonetically plausible.

UKLA is concerned that it could be disabling to teach phonics to able readers who can already read words fluently.

In the PoS decoding comes before comprehension and reading for meaning, rather than alongside it. It is crucial that the importance of critical engagement with text should be more clearly articulated throughout the documentation. It is also important that progression is more clearly defined (e.g. phonics goes straight to comprehension).

#### *Suggestions:*

- *Teacher training will need to include appropriate opportunities for trainees to develop a sound knowledge of a wide repertoire of children's literature.*
- *Teachers should receive appropriate training and support to ensure that their subject knowledge of children's literature is sound.*
- *Include digital and multimodal texts, to ensure children have access to the full repertoire of texts to prepare them for life in the 21st century.*
- *Include reference to multicultural and multilingual texts to reflect the richly diverse, multicultural populations in our classrooms.*
- *Make reference to the place of home language alongside additional language (English) learning.*
- *Change the positioning of the reference to 'English as an additional language' in the Inclusion section as it, unfortunately places EAL in the same category as special educational needs and disability.*

#### **Writing**

UKLA agrees that writing often falls behind reading in the early years, but is concerned that the emphasis on developing transcription skills over compositional skills may only make this situation worse. Many young children start with composition, and write copiously long before they are able to spell conventionally, because they have something they want to communicate for a purpose and to an audience (Hall & Robinson, 2003). The PoS for Yr1 children is under-challenging, and overly controlled as it does not give them the opportunity to compose their own text, because the emphasis is on dictation and sentence construction. It is important that writing for meaning, purpose and audience is clearly articulated in the PoS as this is what encourages effective writing. Currently this does not appear until Years 5-6 PoS ([147]). Many Yr1 children are perfectly capable

of writing stories, letters, information texts, and this can and should be the *meaningful* focus for developing spelling, grammar and punctuation skills.

Although there is some reference to role play to support writing activities in Yr2, there is not sufficient emphasis on activities to support the preparation for writing.

*Suggestions:*

- *The layout of the PoS supports the notion that transcription should come before composition. Change the layout to show the interrelatedness of composition and transcription more clearly.*
- *Revise the PoS to enable free writing in Yr1 to encourage the development of compositional skills.*
- *Give more emphasis to compositional writing, and the importance of writing for purpose and audience.*
- *Avoid the recommendation for teaching grammatical structures and terminology out of context (e.g. divorced from meaning), as this will be counterproductive.*

## **Spelling**

There are 24 pages of appendices (spellings, grammatical terms and a glossary): this reinforces the emphasis in the PoS on the technical aspects of literacy. UKLA believes that grammar and spelling are key aspects of writing, but that they should not be taught in a decontextualised manner. Research shows that the most effective teaching of grammar and spelling is undertaken using texts to show how grammar is associated with meaning (Myhill et al, 2012).

There is an over-emphasis on spelling and transcription in writing, and over-dependence on systematic synthetic phonics decoding skills to support encoding in spelling. There is a lack of reference to visual strategies, word families etc.

UKLA has concerns that learning word lists will lead to rote learning out of context, and may only stay in the children's short-term memory. Learning spellings in the context of writing for a purpose is more likely to support children learning them longer term.

*Suggestions:*

- *Spellings should be learnt in the context of children's own writing for a purpose and audience.*

## **Handwriting**

UKLA recommends that as well as "discrete, direct teaching" of handwriting (Yr1 [37]), there should also be some reference to linking the development of handwriting to the teaching of spelling, as many children benefit from the multisensory approach (Graham and Kelly, 2003).

*Suggestions:*

- *Make clearer the links between spelling (and phonics) in the teaching of handwriting.*
- *Reinforce spelling patterns learnt in the context of the children's writing in the teaching of handwriting.*

## General comments

UKLA is concerned that the draft PoS:

- are not challenging enough or expansive enough to raise standards (especially in Yr1);
- do not present an appropriate curriculum for the 21st century;
- present a highly formal view of literacy teaching;
- seem to suggest that creativity is only for subjects that are non-core subjects;
- do not present the sense of a child as an active learner;
- it appears, in places, more like a scheme of work than a PoS, because the degree of detail in the teaching of reading and the Appendices dictates what is to be taught.

UKLA is also concerned that assessment will drive the content of the PoS to a large degree (e.g. the phonics screening test in Yr1 and grammar, punctuation and spelling test in Yr6).

Feedback from UKLA members at a session held at the UKLA International Conference 2012, Leicester, highlighted the following key concerns with the proposed PoS:

- the aims of the curriculum should have more clearly informed the PoS;
- the PoS presents an inadequate curriculum, which lists “things to do”;
- Speaking and listening should be an element in its own right;
- phonics knowledge and skills are presented as the foundations of word reading, not as one of a range of strategies;
- what the knock-on effect on reading for pleasure will be from the promotion of early readers only reading phonetically plausible texts;
- It will be potentially disabling to teach phonics to fluent readers, and is likely to diminish standards;
- lack of clarity about the relationship between the PoS and the accountability framework;
- creativity seems to only be for subjects that are non-core;
- no reference to home literacy practices;
- no reference to critical literacy;
- no reference to twenty-first century technologies;
- no real sense of progression (e.g. phonics goes straight to comprehension)
- “The soul has been taken out of the subject”.

## References

Chamot, A. U. (1998) Changing Instruction for Language Minority Students to Achieve National Goals , at the Third National Research Symposium on Limited English Proficient Student Issues: Focus on Middle and High School Issues, August 1998.

Cremin, T., Mottram. M., Collins, F., Powell, S., and Safford, K. (2009) Teachers as Readers: building communities of readers, *Literacy*, 43 (1): 11-19.

Graham, J., and Kelly, A. (2003) (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) Writing Under Control. David Fulton.

Hall, A., & Robinson, A. (2003) (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) Exploring Writing and Play in the Early Years, David Fulton Publishers.

Myhill, D., Jones, S.M., Lines, H. & Watson, A. (2012) Re-thinking grammar: the impact of embedded grammar teaching on students' writing and students' metalinguistic understanding, *Research Papers in Education* 27 (2): 139-166.