

# From training to teaching early language and literacy: further information about the survey

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This survey set out to evaluate how well new teachers are trained to teach language and literacy, including phonics, in primary schools. It sought to identify the common elements of effective training and induction as well as the most common factors that prevent new teachers from gaining the necessary knowledge, understanding and skills for teaching language and literacy well.

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Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

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## The context

1. The government has a very strong commitment to improving the language and literacy skills of pupils in primary schools so they are better equipped to move on to the next stage in their education. There is a strong focus on improving the teaching of reading and more specifically promoting systematic synthetic phonics in schools. A reading skills development check for six-year-olds was piloted in June 2011 and implemented in June 2012. The aim of this check is to identify pupils who need extra help including through more phonics-based instruction.
2. The Teachers' Standards effective from September 2012 state in the third standard that teachers must 'demonstrate an understanding of and take responsibility for promoting high standards of literacy, articulacy and the correct use of standard English, whatever the teacher's specialist subject' and 'if teaching early reading, demonstrate a clear understanding of systematic synthetic phonics'.<sup>1</sup> The Training and Development Agency has published guidance and support materials for systematic synthetic phonics in initial teacher education.<sup>2</sup>
3. Since 2001 many Ofsted surveys have reported on the importance of high-quality assessment and teaching in helping pupils develop good language and literacy skills. The reports have emphasised the importance of training staff well, including how to implement systematic synthetic phonics programmes with fidelity to help ensure success in reading and writing. In the past two years, Ofsted surveys with a focus on the teaching of language and literacy have included *Reading by six: how the best schools do it* (2010), *Removing Barriers to literacy* (2011) and, most recently, *Moving English forward* (2012).<sup>3</sup>
4. The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (Ofsted, 2011) reported 'that primary trainees do not always have sufficient well-timed opportunities to teach early reading using a systematic phonics approach'. It found that 'those [initial teacher education] providers who received poor response rates to the question on the quality of phonics and early language training in the Training and Development Agency's newly qualified teacher survey had made good progress in improving the quality of their provision. Most trainees possess a good theoretical grounding in phonics. However, sometimes there is too long a period between theoretical input and opportunities for trainees to put their

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<sup>1</sup> Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2011) effective from 1 September 2012; [www.education.gov.uk](http://www.education.gov.uk).

<sup>2</sup> Since April 2012 known as the Teaching Agency and responsible for initial teacher training (ITT) in England.

<sup>3</sup> *Reading by six: how the best schools do it* (100197), Ofsted, 2010; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/100197](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/100197).

*Removing barriers to literacy* (090237), Ofsted, 2011; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/090237](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/090237).

*Moving English forward* (110118), Ofsted, 2012; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/110118](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/110118).

knowledge and skills into practice.’<sup>4</sup> In the most recent Training and Development Agency’s newly qualified teacher survey 58% of the newly qualified teachers who responded said that their training had prepared them well to teach reading including phonics and comprehension, a rise from 51% in 2010.

5. This survey sought to identify the common strengths of the journey through initial training and induction that effectively prepare new teachers to teach language and literacy skills well, including phonics. By tracking trainee teachers from their final teaching placement in schools through to their first teaching position, inspectors were able to evaluate the effectiveness of initial training and induction by taking account of the quality of teaching and the progress made by pupils taught by the teachers involved.

## **Methodology and fieldwork findings**

6. For the purpose of this survey, inspectors followed 50 primary school trainee teachers from their final school placement during initial training through to the first two terms in their induction year as newly qualified teachers. The longitudinal approach was applied to capture a variety of individual training journeys, while identifying common factors and issues across training institutions, school placements and the induction year that affect the quality of new teachers’ practice in teaching language and literacy.
7. The 50 trainees were chosen from 10 initial teacher education providers selected for the survey to reflect a range of quality as identified by the Training and Development Agency’s newly qualified teacher survey in 2010. Five trainees were chosen from each of the 10 providers. All the trainees selected were expected to reach qualified teacher status by the end of their training programme. The majority of trainees were following a PGCE, two were following a BA (Ed) QTS programme and 14 were following the Graduate Teacher Programme.
8. During the summer term 2011, as well as holding discussions with the trainees and staff of the initial teacher education provision, inspectors visited 49 schools hosting the final school training placements for the 50 trainee teachers.
9. Of the 50 trainees, 44 were tracked through to the spring term 2012 in their roles as newly qualified teachers. Nearly all received two visits from inspectors during their induction year, one in the autumn term 2011 and one in the spring term 2012. Three of the participants were not visited during the autumn term 2011 as they were teaching in schools which had a whole-school inspection.

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<sup>4</sup> Responses from the annual newly qualified teacher survey carried out by the Training and Development Agency in 2010.

Fifteen of the newly qualified teachers were teaching in the same school as their final placement.

10. During each of the school visits the trainees or newly qualified teachers were observed teaching a literacy- or language-based session and a discrete phonics or guided reading session. Inspectors met with the headteachers of the schools; the trainees or new teachers; their school-based mentors; and the school literacy coordinator or person responsible for communication, language and literacy in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Inspectors also looked at trainees' coursework, and language and literacy planning and evaluation, as well as feedback given to them by tutors from the initial teacher education providers and the school staff. They looked at pupils' work, and the tracking of pupil progress and planning across the curriculum.
11. As part of the final meetings with the 44 newly qualified teachers, inspectors carried out detailed work scrutiny from books or learning journeys for higher-attaining, middle-attaining and lower-attaining pupils, and, if relevant, a pupil who had been identified as having special educational needs and a pupil at the early stage of learning English as an additional language.
12. In total inspectors observed:
  - one hundred and thirty-six literacy- or language-based sessions
  - one hundred and thirty-six discrete phonics sessions, guided reading sessions or similar short specific sessions for enhancing language and literacy skills.

## **Specific elements of initial training and induction**

### **A well-defined curriculum within initial teacher education**

13. The best provision found during this survey, which has also been identified within inspections of initial teacher education providers, ensured that trainees understood the key skills needed by pupils at different ages. Providers made sure that trainees knew how to teach language and literacy skills including systematic synthetic phonics and the importance of reinforcing key skills across the curriculum.
14. Every provider included some input on the teaching of language and literacy including phonics. There were clear indications from nine out of the 10 providers that practice had changed in the light of the Rose Review, with an increased emphasis on phonics in particular.<sup>5,6</sup> No provider had ignored the

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<sup>5</sup> One provider had a change in personnel and as a result the new subject lead did not know about changes that had happened earlier.

<sup>6</sup> J Rose, *Independent review of the teaching of early reading: final report*, DfES, 2006; [www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DFES-0201-2006](http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DFES-0201-2006).

need to ensure that trainees were versed in how to teach phonics. Trainees and newly qualified teachers in this survey who had access to expertise from a Leading Partner in Literacy School or a Teaching School had gained considerable benefit from observing excellent practice and working with 'expert' colleagues. Access to these schools was not available for all of the trainees or newly qualified teachers.

### **Precise audit of the trainees' skills**

15. Nearly one third of the 50 trainees had strong skills audits in relation to language and literacy during their initial training which supported their progress well. However, for 18 of the trainees the skills audits did not identify the specific skills required to teach these areas and so were not helpful or used for planning future training.
16. Weaker audits were characterised by a lack of support from the provider, leaving the mentor and trainee unclear about the detail required or how to assess subject-specific skills. There was limited or no follow-up, so the audits did not inform the training and experiences being offered, and few links were made between the initial audit and ongoing experience. They also lacked clarity about the differences between the subject knowledge specific to language and literacy, and more generic knowledge about teaching.

### **Early and ongoing experience of effective assessment**

17. Trainees had a much better understanding of assessment and its use where their programme enabled them to develop a series of lessons during their school placements. In all types of initial teacher education programme there were trainees who were developing a good understanding of assessment and how to use this to inform planning. The quality of their learning in this area was heavily dependent on the effectiveness of practice in the schools where they were placed. In the best examples, providers introduced the principles of a range of assessment strategies and gave trainees a basic understanding of expectations of attainment and the pace of pupils' progress for different age groups. Placement schools then supported trainees to use assessment strategies regularly in their practice. Feedback to the trainees included precise comment about assessment used during lessons, as well as ongoing assessment from observations of pupils' work, marking and summative assessment using levels and common criteria.
18. Where the use of assessment, specifically for language and literacy, had been introduced early during training and revisited throughout the programme, new teachers were more effective at planning to meet the needs of different pupils. Where planning was good or better, newly qualified teachers were planning for different individuals and groups, in some cases for up to five different groups. There was clarity about the role of other adults based on previous evaluation, and resources were well matched to the levels and interests of pupils in

different groups. These newly qualified teachers took into account starting points and challenge for higher-attaining pupils as well as those who were working at lower levels. In the Early Years Foundation Stage there was clear planning to ensure that the content of language- and literacy-based activities was also reinforced in other activities, providing continuous learning opportunities. Often new teachers who were planning most effectively were planning as part of a team.

19. Where there had been insufficient emphasis on assessment in initial training new teachers found it harder to use ongoing assessment to inform their planning. Too often they focused on what pupils would be doing during the lesson rather than what different pupils needed to learn. They were therefore less likely to provide suitable learning activities that would challenge all the pupils in their class. They often lacked the confidence to adapt lessons as they progressed, in order to more accurately meet the learning needs of different pupils. These trainees also had to work harder at becoming accurate at assessing specific levels and identifying the precise next steps to help pupils move forward with their learning.

### **Providers know the quality of language and literacy provision in their partner schools**

20. The initial teacher education providers judged the quality of schools used for placements by looking at Ofsted reports. This provided useful information initially but very few had any knowledge of the school's most current progress and attainment data for language and literacy. For those that had ongoing links with schools there was often awareness of the quality of teaching and the type of phonics programme being used, but this was not always sufficiently robust to ensure that they knew about trainees' experiences precisely enough to make the necessary adjustments to their centre-based input. Adjusting training opportunities was easier for providers with strong links with Leading Literacy Schools.

### **Good-quality mentoring at every stage**

21. In three providers there was good training for school-based mentors in partnership schools to ensure that they understood what they should be looking for within language and literacy lessons specifically, as well as in other subjects. In two providers, the course for mentors included research and further studies, and participants could work towards a master's degree in education. This was popular with those involved and motivated teachers to undertake the training. The training from other providers was more generic and focused on the administration of the programme rather than the quality of lesson observation and feedback. In these programmes there was rarely anything specific about subject content or how to ensure that subject-specific targets were set for teaching language or literacy including phonics. Even those providers offering good-quality training could not insist that mentors attend. Fourteen of the 50

mentors interviewed during the first stage of this survey had not attended any training. For seven mentors this was due to other school commitments.

22. Just under half of the induction tutors were very skilled at supporting new teachers.<sup>7</sup> These induction tutors gave regular and high-quality feedback which was communicated clearly and concisely. These stronger induction tutors provided informal and formal feedback, picking up aspects from pupils' learning that were specific to the teaching of language and literacy including phonics. Observations of the new teachers' lessons were timed to occur just before scheduled meetings with the induction tutors so that the new teacher could first offer their reflection on and evaluation of the lesson and then feedback could be discussed in depth. Feedback was developmental and referred back to in subsequent observations, ensuring a cycle of progress and development.
23. Not all the schools surveyed had ensured that mentors and induction tutors were well trained or had the necessary coaching skills to support training and new teachers. Training for mentors and induction tutors rarely included specific training in aspects of language and literacy; for example in evaluating the teaching of reading. There were a few schools where this was not addressed in other ways, for example by ensuring the involvement of the literacy coordinator or senior leadership staff, and consequently the feedback being given to new teachers was not good enough to help them move forward with their practice.

### **Well-coordinated involvement of the literacy coordinator**

24. Inspectors found mixed practice regarding the level of involvement of school literacy coordinators in trainee placements and induction. In the best practice, schools involved the mentor and the literacy coordinator. Their roles were clearly planned and coordinated so that the trainee or new teacher received a seamless package of support for, and monitoring and evaluation of, their teaching and assessment of language and literacy.
25. When there was less clarity about lines of support and accountability, trainees and new teachers did not receive sufficient subject-specific input and at worse were given confusing advice that did not prioritise the most important points for development. In nine cases support and challenge were being offered by the same person within the school. Although this was sometimes successful, it did not provide the trainee or new teacher with options for informal discussion about their issues and concerns.
26. At all stages of their training, trainees and new teachers benefited most when there was regular monitoring of language and literacy through a review of assessment and planning, lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work. In the best examples, monitoring was followed up by a discussion, based on

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<sup>7</sup> Induction tutors for newly qualified teachers were often referred to as mentors by schools.

precise developmental feedback in writing, focusing on the progress made by pupils in the class. This included how well the teacher challenged pupils at different levels of ability as well as supporting them to move on to the next step. It also included a clear expectation that the teacher was responsible for the quality of the work of any support staff in the class and ensured that they knew how to monitor the quality of this work and provide feedback to the staff involved.

## **Observations, monitoring and feedback**

27. During initial training the quality of feedback following observations was variable both within and across providers. Some schools gave better subject-specific feedback than centre-based tutors, but this was not consistently the case. There was far more emphasis on generic classroom management and teaching skills. In half of the schools involved, developmental feedback was strong and gave detailed feedback on generic teaching skills as well as subject-specific skills. In the best practice, observations and feedback were carried out by the literacy or communication, language and literacy coordinator as well as the school-based mentor. However, even in the best practice there was little emphasis on giving feedback about the teaching and learning of language and literacy across subjects. In half of the trainees' experiences there was little evidence of tracking observations over time to assess a trainee's progress in the teaching of language and literacy, although there was better tracking of generic teaching skills.
28. During induction the best programmes had explicitly planned for formal observations of language and literacy lessons, including separate sessions for phonics. For these new teachers a clear priority was given to evaluating teaching and learning of this core subject, recognising that the pupils' skills underpin access to other learning. These new teachers were also regularly involved in pupil progress meetings. The mentors and the literacy coordinators had regularly referred back to agreed development points when checking progress made by the new teacher.

## **Access to best practice**

29. The best induction ensured that new teachers were able to build upon their previous training and benefit from development opportunities within their own school as well as with other schools. While headteachers recognised that it was essential that new teachers used the programmes and strategies of their own school consistently, these outward-looking programmes added value to their ongoing development. New teachers made better progress in developing their ability to reflect on their own practice when the induction programme included observation and discussion about best practice found within and outside their own school.

## **Opportunities to teach all aspects of language and literacy**

30. Where initial training had ensured that trainees had a good range of opportunities to teach all aspects of language and literacy, the trainees were better prepared for teaching successfully in their induction year. The expectation that the full language and literacy curriculum would be covered by a teacher with whole-class responsibility was less of a challenge where new teachers had already had that experience during their training. Where there was ability grouping for teaching literacy in their induction school, new teachers made slower progress in building upon their initial knowledge and expertise to be able to teach pupils of all levels of ability. Where this disadvantage was recognised, schools made sure that communication between staff about the skills and knowledge being gained by pupils was shared effectively. However, too often the schools did not realise that working in this way put the new teacher at a disadvantage in developing their knowledge of how to meet a range of pupils' needs. In these situations the new teachers were less skilled and confident in supporting pupils to apply and practise their language and literacy skills across the curriculum.

## **Providing for pupils who have special educational needs**

31. Only two training providers had explicitly embedded addressing the needs of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs within their training for early language and literacy including phonics. A further two had fewer explicit references to this area of expertise, but some aspects were covered. In six providers, weaknesses in this area of training were evident from discussion about course content with the providers, trainees and school-based staff, as well as from the trainees' planning files.
32. Too many of the new teachers in the survey were insufficiently equipped to accurately assess the language and literacy needs of all pupils. They were not always able to identify the particular barriers to learning being faced by different pupils in their class. Frequently the lowest-attaining pupils or those with special educational needs were being given additional support by teaching assistants. New teachers rarely understood their role in ensuring the quality of interactions and teaching by these staff. They were unskilled at monitoring the quality of work by support staff or providing them with developmental feedback.

## **Promoting speaking and listening**

33. The best new teachers at all key stages were able to create interesting experiences and activities that engaged pupils in speaking and listening. They knew how and why they encouraged pupils to talk about their experiences and feelings, to make choices, explain their thinking, re-tell stories and listen discriminately. The links between these and reading and writing activities were clearly planned and pupils were enthusiastic about being involved.

34. These teachers frequently adapted their interactions in subtle and flexible ways so that children at different levels of attainment moved on in using language to communicate and think. They introduced varied vocabulary, more challenging materials and higher-level questioning to develop pupils' thinking skills. The best new teachers surveyed who were teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage ensured that children were immersed in language, heard lots of stories, heard, sang and recited rhymes, took part in role play, and used puppets and a wide range of other resources to encourage talking and listening to each other. They were clear about the purpose of all these activities. They did not underestimate the interest that young children have in unusual words and continually added to their vocabulary.
35. Lesson plans were well constructed by the best new teachers. Based on a sound knowledge of previous assessment, they made sure that there was a good ratio of speaking and listening to reading and writing. These new teachers had a clear process for helping pupils analyse their own language for different audiences and through careful questioning ensured that they could explain their understanding. They had a good knowledge of the range of resources available to promote speaking and listening. Technology was used well to enhance opportunities, for example using talking postcards and flip video cameras so that pupils could record and review their talking for different audiences.
36. Weaker practice occurred when there had been insufficient focus on developing speaking and listening skills during training, so that trainees and new teachers did not attach enough importance to these skills being specifically assessed and taught. Often, new teachers perceived speaking and listening as skills implicitly interwoven through everything, rather than needing to be explicitly planned for and taught. In these situations, opportunities were missed for pupils to develop thinking skills using language. New teachers' questions tended to be directed towards gaining a simple correct answer rather than encouraging pupils to describe or explain something more complex in a coherent way. Sometimes an over-emphasis on adult-led, regimented turn-taking in small group work prevented fluent discussion and dialogue to help solve problems.

### **Providing for pupils at an early stage of learning English as an additional language**

37. All trainees had some input during their initial training in relation to teaching language and literacy to pupils who were at an early stage of learning English. For most this was at an acceptable level. Trainee teachers who had a better understanding of meeting the needs of such pupils had usually been placed in schools with high proportions of these pupils during training.
38. For some new teachers, increasing their knowledge about teaching pupils at an early stage of learning English had been a priority during induction. The majority of schools with pupils at an early stage of learning English recognised that newly qualified teachers would need additional support and training in this aspect of their practice, and this was provided. However, there were a few

schools where staff were less experienced in this aspect of teaching. In these instances, the new teachers were struggling to meet the needs of these pupils effectively and insufficient help was available to them.

39. Other new teachers had less experience in their training and required a great deal more support from their induction schools when working with pupils who were at an early stage of learning English as an additional language.
40. The following factors were found to be most important in ensuring that trainees and new teachers have the best possible chance of developing the necessary knowledge and expertise for teaching language and literacy well.
  - Initial teacher education programmes need to ensure that every trainee has a good understanding of how children develop language and literacy skills and a good understanding of the early developmental experiences that children need to ensure later success.
  - There must be ongoing rigorous evaluation of the knowledge and skills of trainees and new teachers specifically with regard to the teaching of language and literacy; training opportunities must be adapted accordingly.
  - Trainees and new teachers must receive clear, robust and objective feedback on their performance, specifically about the teaching of language and literacy.
  - Trainees and new teachers must be provided with many early opportunities to work alongside skilled colleagues in assessing, planning and evaluating pupils' learning, in order to ensure that from the outset, planning and teaching meet the different needs of all pupils.

## Definitions of terms used throughout the report

### Systematic synthetic phonics

This refers to teaching word recognition whereby phonemes (sounds) associated with particular graphemes (letters) are pronounced in isolation and blended together (synthesised) in order to decode words.<sup>8,9</sup> Synthetic phonics for writing reverses the sequence: children are taught to say the word they wish to write, segment it into its phonemes, say them in turn and then write a grapheme for each phoneme to produce the written word. In synthetic phonics programmes children are systematically taught grapheme–phoneme correspondence. The teaching of systematic synthetic phonics (the relationship between letters and their

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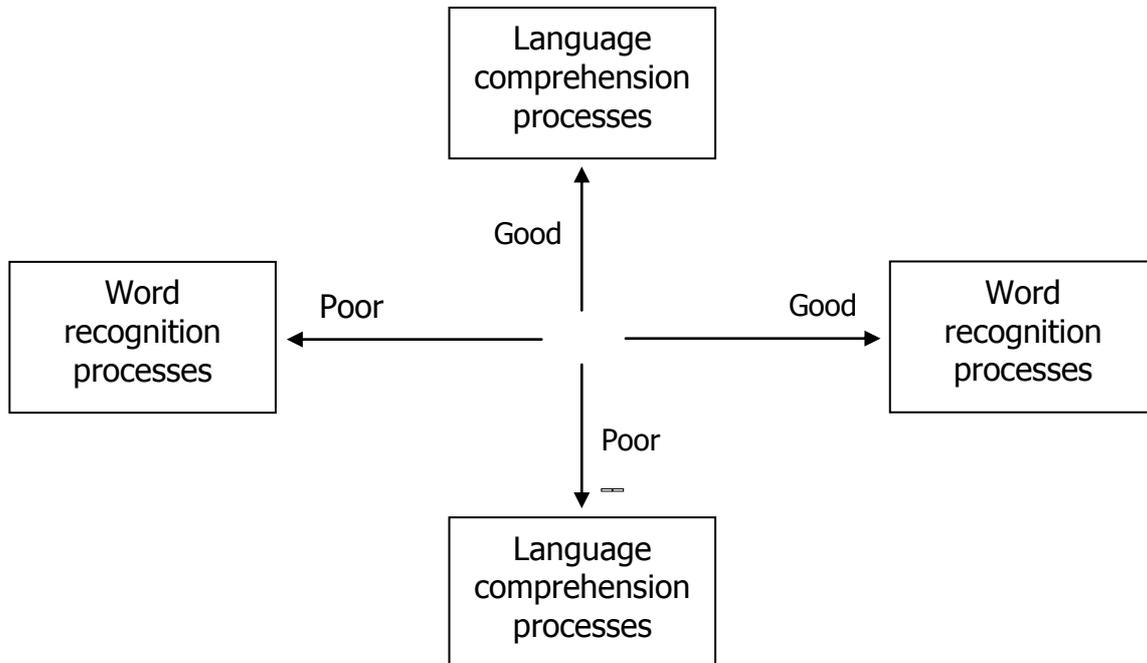
<sup>8</sup> A phoneme is the smallest unit of sound in a word that can change its meaning. For example, in /bed/ and /led/ the difference between the phonemes /b/ and /l/ signals the difference in meaning between the words 'bed' and 'led'.

<sup>9</sup> A grapheme is a symbol of a phoneme – that is, a letter or group of letters representing a sound.

corresponding sounds) supports pupils across all age phases to develop skills to decode (read) and encode (write).

## The 'simple view of reading'

**Figure 1: The 'simple view of reading'**



As shown in Figure 1, the 'simple view of reading' proposes that skilled reading entails the development of a set of processes by which the words on the page are recognised and understood (that is, word recognition processes), and the development of increasingly sophisticated language comprehension processes, by which texts as well as spoken language are understood and interpreted. Learning to read therefore involves setting up processes by which the words on the page can be recognised and understood, and continuing to develop the processes that underlie both spoken and written language comprehension. Both sets of processes are necessary for reading, but neither is sufficient on its own. Children who cannot adequately recognise the words on the page are by that fact alone prevented from fully understanding the text. However, recognising and understanding the words on the page is no guarantee that the text will be understood.

Different kinds of teaching are needed to develop word recognition skills from those that foster the comprehension of written and spoken language. It follows that when practitioners and teachers undertake reading activities, including shared, guided and discrete teaching of reading, they need to think carefully about which component of reading they intend to focus on. The knowledge, skills and understanding that constitute high-quality phonics work should be taught as the prime approach in learning to decode (read) and encode (write/spell) print.

The 'simple view of reading' replaces the Searchlights model in the Primary Literacy Strategy. The knowledge and skills within the four Searchlights strategies are subsumed within the two dimensions of word recognition and language comprehension in the 'simple view of reading'. For beginner readers, priority should be given to securing word recognition knowledge and skills. This means that high-quality phonic work, as defined in the Rose Report, should be the prime approach used when teaching beginners to read and spell.

### **Segmenting and blending**

Segmenting and blending are reversible key phonic skills. Segmenting consists of breaking words down into their constituent phonemes to spell. Blending consists of building words from their constituent phonemes to read. Both skills are important.

## Further information

For the main report *From training to teaching early language and literacy* see [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120031](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120031).

*Excellence in English* (100229), Ofsted, 2011; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/100229](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/100229).

*Learning: creative approaches that raise standards* (080266), Ofsted, 2010; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/080266](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/080266).

Raising standards in literacy (speech by HMCI), March 2012; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/raising-standards-literacy-speech](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/raising-standards-literacy-speech).

*Reading by six: how the best schools do it* (100197), Ofsted, 2010; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/100197](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/100197).

*Removing barriers to literacy* (090237), Ofsted, 2011; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/090237](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/090237).

*Responding to the Rose Review: schools' approaches to the systematic teaching of phonics* (080038), Ofsted, 2008; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/080038](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/080038).

*Teacher trainees and phonics: an evaluation of the response of providers of initial teacher training to the recommendations of the Rose Review* (070257), Ofsted, 2008; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/070257](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/070257).

*The impact of the Early Years Foundation Stage* (100231), Ofsted, 2011; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/100231](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/100231).

*Moving English forward* (110118), Ofsted, 2012; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/110118](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/110118).