

PE2037/G: Improve literacy attainment through research-informed reading instruction

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills written submission, 2 August 2024

Thank you for letter dated 4 July 2024 providing me with a update in relation to Petition PE2037: Improve literacy attainment through research-informed reading instruction. I note that the petition has now been closed and wish to thank Ms Glennie, the Committee and you for all your work in considering this important issue.

As I have stated in earlier correspondence on this matter, I agree that systematic phonics should be a key part of a school's overall approach to teaching young children how to read and that is why earlier this year Education Scotland published updated guidance on early reading, providing clarity on the key role of systematic phonics as part of an overall approach. Education Scotland has also produced a suite of research-informed professional learning resources (PLRs) aimed at supporting teachers to consolidate and broaden their professional knowledge in early reading.

You have drawn my attention to the Petitioner's view in relation to the need for more detail on the content of what is being taught to pre-service teachers in relation to systematic synthetic phonics. As I indicated in my letter dated 22 November 2023, the Scottish Council of Deans of Education (SCDE) has highlighted how student teachers are taught about systematic synthetic phonics within a broader understanding of the development and teaching of reading. The Council has stated that student teachers are taught key concepts and terminology, different approaches to phonics and reading instruction, debates in the research literature about synthetic phonics and the principles underpinning systematic synthetic phonics. However, my officials will share the Committee's letter, this response letter and the Petitioner's submissions of [12 December 2023](#) and [12 June 2024](#) and they will engage with SCDE counterparts to seek further information on the detailed provision within each institution.

The National Response to Improving Literacy (NRIL), which is co-chaired by Scottish Government officials, Education Scotland and the Association of Directors of Education (ADES) and includes the SCDE, will continue to oversee a range of activity to support literacy. The NRIL activity will include a focus on evidence-based professional learning, including Initial Teacher Education, as well as the review and update to the curriculum. As you may be aware, Literacy and English is a priority area for our new Curriculum Improvement Cycle which commenced this year.

I hope this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Jenny Gilruth MSP