

Research finds the under-reporting of children with significant reading difficulties

June 29 2011

New research at the University of York has found that nearly 50 per cent of secondary school pupils with reading difficulties are not on the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Register.

Dr. Sue Stothard, from the University's Centre for Reading and Language, will today unveil the findings of a study into reading comprehension at the Westminster Education Forum Keynote Seminar: "The review of the Primary National Curriculum and proposals to reform the Early Years Foundation Stage".

She will discuss the variance in reading ability across the school system and will argue that the findings show that there are problems with the current process of identifying pupils with reading difficulties in primary and secondary schools in England.

Funded by GL Assessment, the research was based on a study of 857 11- to 16- year-old pupils at state-maintained secondary schools in England. The study found that some students in every [secondary school](#) year group were identified with a reading age of 6 or 7 years and a substantial proportion of pupils who experience reading difficulties were not identified on the school's SEN Register.

The other key findings are:

- Fewer than 53.5 per cent of 12 and 16 year olds with significant reading problems are known to their schools, as indicated by the SEN

Register;

- Only 46 per cent of all secondary students with decoding difficulties and 44% of secondary students with reading comprehension difficulties are on the SEN Register;
- At age 12, nearly twice as many boys have difficulties than girls (of the children with weak decoding skills, 63.3 per cent are boys and 36.7 per cent are girls). At age 16, 57.7 per cent of the poor decoders are boys and 42.3 per cent are girls;
- There appears to be a strong relationship between reading difficulties and [social deprivation](#). A third of pupils with the highest level of social deprivation (postcode ranks 1 or 2) exhibited a reading difficulty, compared with only 5 per cent of pupils with the lowest level of social deprivation (postcode ranks 9 and 10).

Dr. Stothard said: “For me, the most striking finding is the under-reporting of children with significant reading difficulties. If half of children with reading difficulties are not on the SEN Register by Year 7, this suggests to me that it’s unlikely that their reading problems will be attended to during their secondary schooling. With such a huge wealth of research and practical support to help these children, I would like to see changes made to the system to significantly reduce the number of children leaving school with inadequate reading skills and I hope this will be considered as part of the review of the primary National Curriculum.”

Professor Maggie Snowling, of the Centre for Reading and Language, said: “The data we collected are striking in showing that in each year group, there are substantial numbers of children with significant reading difficulties, many reading below the 7-year level. This finding underlines the fact that it is critical to identify children at risk of reading difficulties early, certainly well before secondary school, and for appropriate interventions to be put in place. The association between reading difficulties and social deprivation is particularly worrying because many parents of such pupils may themselves have experienced literacy

difficulties at school and they are likely to be the least vocal about their children’s special needs.”

Andrew Thraves, Publishing and Strategy Director, GL Assessment, says: “The introduction of the Year 1 phonics screener demonstrates the Government’s awareness of the importance of identifying reading difficulties at the very beginning of a child’s school career. However, it is clear that we are currently dealing with some significant reading difficulties at secondary level, which may require a more regular regime of assessment. In some cases, there are GCSE-age pupils with primary school reading ages who appear to be receiving no additional support.”

“We believe the first step to preventing struggling pupils going unnoticed is to incorporate informal and formal assessment of reading – which is standard practice in primary schools – into secondary school teaching. This is particularly important as a minor, and perhaps unnoticeable, problem at primary school can develop into a more serious problem in secondary school given the significant leap in demands in the curriculum.”

A team led by Professor Snowling, Professor Charles Hulme and Dr. Stothard at the Centre for Reading and Language at the University of York conducted the research as part of the development and standardisation of the York Assessment of Reading for Comprehension: Passage Reading Secondary (YARC Secondary), published by GL Assessment.

YARC Secondary contains a series of prose passages – both fiction and non-fiction – that enables the assessment of a student’s reading comprehension and fluency in a systematic way across the secondary school years. It is suitable for use by specialist teachers, heads of English, SENCOs and educational psychologists.

Provided by University of York

Citation: Research finds the under-reporting of children with significant reading difficulties (2011, June 29) retrieved 26 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-06-under-reporting-children-significant-difficulties.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.