Simple View of Schools' Phonics Provision

Phonics Programme X Practice = Phonics Provision

The school's core SSP programme is 'Letters and Sounds' but this does not include any actual resources. Teachers use familiar resources from the main commercial SSP programmes to provide:

-some phonics display material on classroom walls (frieze, tricky words)

-the 'revisit and review' part of the lesson (flash cards, IWB) often using the mnemonic system of a commercial SSP programme

-introduction of the new or focus letter/s-sound correspondence

Pupil-practice commonly consists of children sitting on the carpet with mini whiteboards doing sound-to-print spelling activities for very short periods of time. This may be the whole class or groups. Little or no paper-based work, no evidence of work for class or individuals.

At least some teachers promote multi-cueing guessing strategies.

Phonics lessons are invariably '20 minutes' at best - as this has become the standard time associated with L & S phonics provision.

'Letters and Sounds' (DfES 2007)

Teachers use 'Letters and Sounds' but have 'adapted it' for 'their' children. They have bought, made and acquired various teaching and learning resources to provide a 'variety of fun games and activities' to deliver phonics lessons in ways considered to be 'child-friendly'.

Games often stuck at code and word level - not substantial texts. Phonics content has little or no progression in type and challenge of activities provided from Reception to Year One.

Slower-to-learn children may be very disadvantaged from too many varied and time-consuming games which are 'extraneous' (Sir Jim Rose warned us about 'extraneous' activities). There are likely to be a lot of Year Two 'strugglers' as the phonics games are not fit-for-purpose.

Teachers think some children are not 'developmentally ready' - this becomes self-fulfilling. They think phonics does not 'suit' all children - intervention may be Reading Recovery with its multi-cueing reading strategies (or less-expensive equivalent) - or computer games such as Nessy. Little or no paper-based practice or record of activities.

Teachers are perplexed about poor or inconsistent Year One Phonics Check results - but children do not get enough blending practice.

Teachers disagree with the Year One Phonics Check and don't understand why their 'better readers' do not score better in the check.

SSP = Systematic Synthetic Phonics

The school invests in a content-rich, fit-for-purpose SSP programme delivered largely according to the author's guidance. SSP authors recommend far longer than '20 minutes' time allocation for phonics lessons.

Headteacher and all staff fully trained and equally committed - teachers work in full partnership with parents and carers.

Phonics coordinator has non-contact time to support all staff with CPD.

Rigorous application of the Teaching and Learning Cycle' using cumulative code, words, sentences, texts and reading books - ample time allowed.

Any special needs intervention uses same SSP phonics programme and guidance and extra 'little and often' practice is guaranteed. Extension activities are provided for quicker learners as required.

*No multi-cueing guessing strategies are taught or encouraged. Children provided with cumulative, decodable home reading books.

Teachers' professional knowledge and mindset along with high-quality SSP provision, in a language and literature-rich environment, ensure that all children learn to read and write.

Fullyresourced Core SSP Programme

The school initially invests in a content-rich SSP programme and training but the headteacher may be 'too busy' to attend the main training event for the programme.

Poor adherence to the programme - possibly because the headteacher lacks determination and commitment and no-one leads the way, or the phonics coordinator has insufficient non-contact time to lead or support.

This results in inconsistency of phonics routines and lack of continuity from person to person and/or from one year to the next, for example:

- -teachers 'adapt' the programme for their children but this usually means they choose not to follow the author's guidance
- -teachers stick with what they are used to change takes effort
- -over time, the programme becomes unappreciated and diluted
- new staff may introduce conflicting phonics practices
- new headteacher and/or some staff not on board with the programme -visiting inspector or advisor instructs school to do things differently: e.g. multiple grouping but this may not be the programme's design

At least some teachers promote multi-cueing guessing strategies or the school generally believes in multi-cueing strategies.

NOTE: Research and practice show us that multi-cueing reading strategies ('guessing' words from word-shape, pictures, initial letters and context) cause long-term bad reading habits which can be very damaging.