

Children's Screen Use

The British Psychological Society has recently released the report 'Changing behaviour: Children, adolescents and screen use', providing recommendations to help children and families gain the most from the digital world.

Children's screen use is increasing with '5- to 15-year-olds using digital media for around 15 hours a day and 99% of 6- to 36-month-olds using digital media

daily'. Digital literacy is important for children growing up however there have been many suggestions that screen use poses a threat to children's health including disruptive cognitive and social development, obesity, sleep disruptions and wellbeing. Whilst the American Association of Pediatrics have guidelines for parents that outline the benefits and risks for parents, there is a lack of something similar in the UK.

Screen-use and digital media can refer to a large number of mediums capable of many different functions and innovations are increasing rapidly. It is difficult for policy and academic research to keep up and there are currently a larger number of studies that look at the detrimental effects of screen-use than benefits.

The report reviews research in 7 areas: Cognitive changes; supporting young children's learning from digital media; the displacement hypothesis; screen use and sleep; effects of screen time on mental health; online risk and harm; and positive uses of digital media. They warn that stories about the risks of screen-use are often sensationalised and the evidence base is undermined by methodological flaws and being out of date.

The evidence suggests that there are gains to be had from digital media however certain guidelines are sensible to implement such as minimising use before bed and encouraging participation in a wide range of on and off screen activities. There is recognition that parents may be less familiar or skilled as children with new technologies and may require support. They make several suggestions for further research necessary to evaluate the impact of digital media on young people.

Full report and recommendations (pdf) here: <https://goo.gl/i4AK2B>



Call for Evidence: Children in need of help and protection

Children in Need are a legally defined group of children, assessed as needing help and protection as a result of risks to their development or health. This group includes children subject to Child in Need Plans, Child Protection plans, Looked After Children, young carers; and disabled children.

The DfE want to understand what it is that makes the difference to the educational outcomes of Children in Need in practice, how some Children in Need can achieve better educational outcomes than others, and what works in enabling Children in Need to achieve their potential.

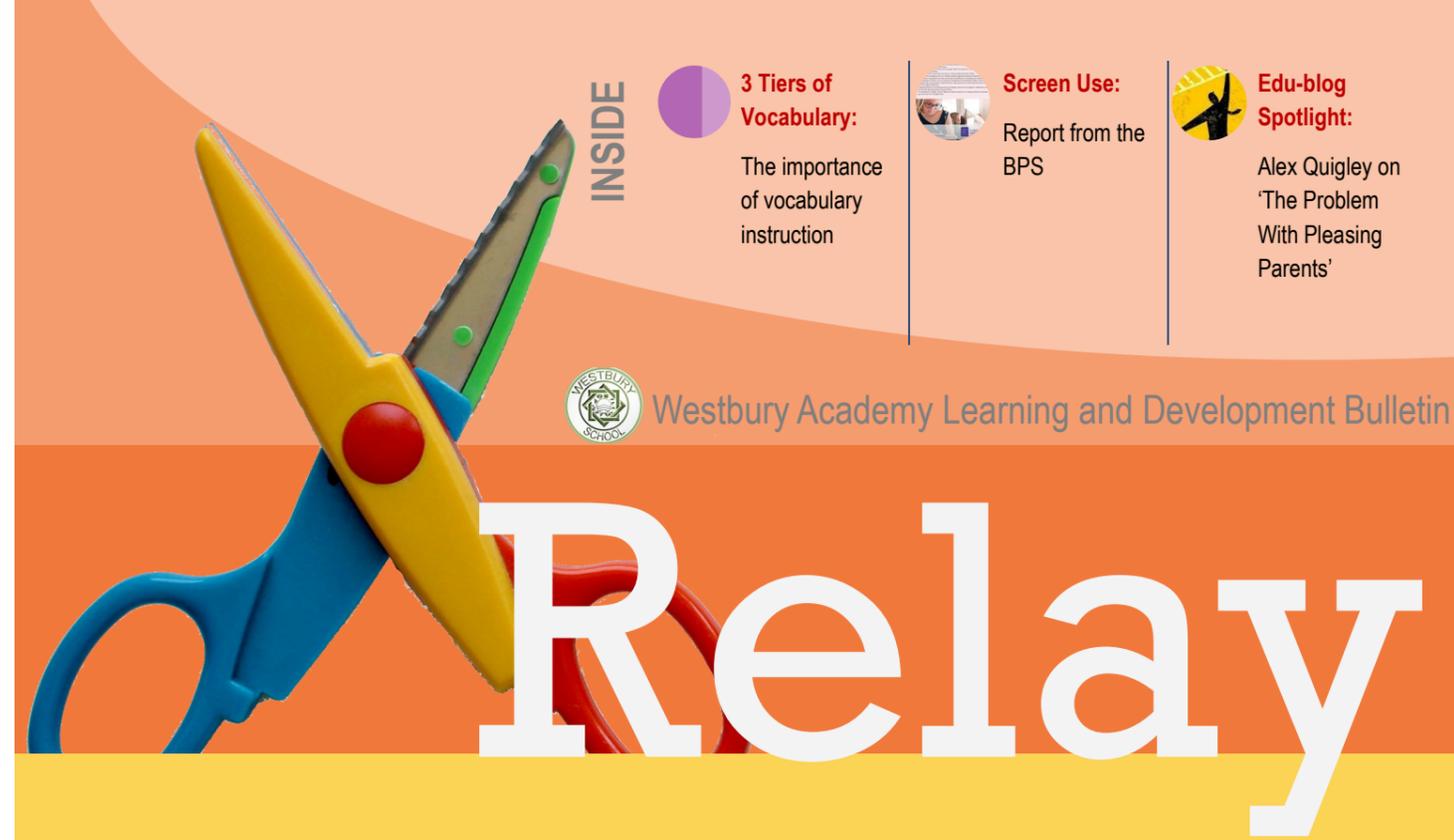
They want to develop a stronger evidence base looking at different stages in a child's life and recognise a child may work with a variety of professionals who offer support to a child and to their family, to improve a child's circumstances at each stage.

They are specifically interested in:

- how support is delivered or commissioned to help children
- how this support is measured and evaluated
- how this support influences educational outcomes

Survey: <https://goo.gl/JqEbWz>

Edited by Beth Greville-Giddings



Homework: Heaven or Hell?

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Homework can be a controversial topic. Whether that's as a pupil cramming it in on a Sunday night, as a parent trying to find out if it even exists or as a teacher fitting in yet another thing to plan and mark; it's probably safe to say it is not universally loved. So is it worth setting and how can it be effective?

The EEF reports separately on homework in primary and secondary settings. There is limited evidence of benefit at primary where homework *may* be of benefit if it is short focussed tasks which builds directly on what is being taught in school, and schools should encourage parental engagement. There is stronger evidence that homework is helpful at secondary level and evidence shows that quality of homework is more important than the quantity. Pupils should be clear as to the purpose of the homework and receive specific and timely feedback. Tasks should be varied and linked with what is being learned in class, and should not be used as a punishment.

Vatterott (2010) states that 'the best kind [of homework] deepens student understanding and builds essential skills' and identifies five fundamental hallmarks of good homework. Teachers should use homework to provide feedback on student understanding, homework should have a clear academic purpose such as practice, applying skills or checking for understanding. Tasks should be efficient and show evidence of learning and best use of time. Vatterott gives the example of tasks involving cutting and sticking which may give the impression of working for a long time but reveal little about student knowledge. Teachers should promote ownership of the work by considering pupil choice and interest and pupils should be able to complete tasks without help. Finally, she states that homework should be appealing to students.

The evidence suggests that teachers should consider their setting when giving homework which should deepen understanding and provide feedback.

The Five Hallmarks of Good Homework (Vatterott, 2010)

Purpose

Efficiency

Ownership

Competence

Aesthetic Appeal

3 Tiers of Vocabulary

Written text contains words that are deliberately chosen to convey a specific meaning. Many words are rarely included in the spoken-word and pupils are generally exposed to these words through reading. For pupils who do not experience a rich vocabulary from a young age, the vocabulary gap widens.

In order to understand a text you need to understand around 95% of its vocabulary. There is a positive correlation between academic ability and socio-economic status and disadvantaged children are shown to have a restricted vocabulary; children starting secondary school can have word-knowledge ranging from 6000 to 12000 words. An example of the Matthew Effect, broader word-knowledge will help increase overall word-knowledge. If schools don't explicitly address the gap in knowledge, the word-rich will get richer and the word-poor will get poorer.

Advice on teaching vocabulary often cites Beck et al's (2002) three-tier hierarchy of words:

Tier 1: Words that are simple, familiar and occur in general use - book, chair, yellow.

Tier 2: Words unlikely to be spoken that appear in challenging fiction, academic texts or newsprint - superficial, radiant, anticipate.

Tier 3: Technical, subject-specific vocabulary that is taught when needed - inflation, photosynthesis.

In order to help pupils access higher level texts, including those used in many exam courses and into adulthood, vocabulary instruction should be focused on words that do not occur in spoken language, tier 2 words. Whilst it is important to encourage pupils to read more challenging texts, for many pupils the vocabulary gap will already be too wide and the words that pupils will need to understand in written work need to be explicitly taught.

Explicit Teaching

Explicit teaching of vocabulary is recommended to take place as frequently as every day, focusing on a limited number of words. Lemov et al (2016) set out a four-step process for explicit instruction: word selection, accurate and student-friendly definition, parameters of use, and active practice. Teachers should teach words in context and provide multiple exposures to words. Avoid getting pupils to guess what words mean by providing the definition as soon as possible, allowing more time for problem solving. They warn to 'Beware the Synonym Model' - introducing pairs of words as

having the same definition, as it is important to highlight both the similarities and differences between words.

Implicit Teaching

Vocabulary teaching should be reinforced across the curriculum. Teachers shouldn't shy away from challenging texts and find opportunities to drop in definitions, pronunciation and spelling of words.

Whilst ensuring a focus on vocabulary requires preparation, it is important to prepare students through continued practice.

Pitfalls to avoid when writing student friendly definitions:

Oversimplification: Make sure to capture the full meaning of a word.

Inaccuracy: Words may be suitable as a substitute in one context but inappropriate in another.

Size: Ensure definitions don't have so many parts they become inaccessible.

Inaccessibility: Make sure definitions use words that pupils already know.

Wrong tense or part of speech: Don't use definitions that are in a different tense or part of speech.

(Reading Reconsidered; Lemov et al, 2016)

Edu-Blog Spotlight

Alex Quigley is an English teacher and the Director of Huntington Research School in York. He is also a Research School Developer for the EEF and author of edubooks. He blogs at www.theconfidentteacher.com and he tweets as [@huntingenglish](https://twitter.com/huntingenglish)

As a parent himself, Alex understands the conflict between what parents want, what we think they want, and what is actually beneficial to the learning of our pupils. In a recent post, Alex poses four problems facing schools 'that are in part driven by a subtly damaging desire to please parents'.



First on his list is marking. Workload is a significant factor in the recruitment and retention problem and marking is part of that. For parents it can be a visible proxy that the teacher is closely supporting their child, but there is little evidence on the effectiveness of marking and Ofsted have no preferred frequency or method, so why do we do so much?

Secondly is homework. Many parents find the idea of not having any homework worrying but again, the evidence on homework shows mixed benefit. Do schools stick to 'habitual homework policies because we simply fear a backlash from parents'?

The third factor Alex explores is the pressure on student grouping. There is no evidence that setting benefits most children and student groupings can prove a competition. It is hard to be flexible with groupings when parents are likely to oppose their child moving 'down' a set.

Finally on the list is reports. With an increase in monthly targets, half-termly updates, termly data reports, and more, has reporting gone too far? Parents need to know what's happening but it is easy for the curriculum to become 'steered by reporting' - and of course there is workload to consider.

Alex knows that most parents are not experts in teaching and learning, and all these things seem like they help pupil learning but perhaps we should reconsider. 'Pleasing parents needn't be a problem. It should be at the heart of our solutions'.

Full post and comments here: <https://goo.gl/KZEAVH>

You've been asked for some information or a pupil report for a meeting, but what do all those letters mean?

Decoding the Diary Sheet

NPQ

National Professional Qualifications are available for current and aspiring school leaders and include:

- NPQML - National Professional Qualification for Middle Leadership
- NPQSL - National Professional Qualification for Senior Leadership
- NPQH - National Professional Qualification for Headship
- NPQEL - National Professional Qualification for Executive Leadership

There are six content areas common to each NPQ, which set out what a leader should know or be able to do and the knowledge and skills within them increase in sophistication, depth and breadth progressively through each NPQ level.

Participants are assessed through a series of defined assessment tasks following a framework set by the Department for Education.