

29 November 2024

Dear

ATISN 22067

Information requested

Thank you for your request which we received on 1 November 2024. You asked for all the emails received about 'synthetic phonics' between 25 September 2024 and 8 October 2024 by:

- Lynne Neagle, The Cabinet Secretary for Education
- Sioned Evans, Director General, Education, Culture and the Welsh Language
- Lloyd Hopkin, Deputy Director of Curriculum & Assessment
- Yvonne Roberts-Ablett, Head of Curriculum Strategy

Our response

We apologise that we are not able to release all the information to you by the deadline of 29 November 2024. We are still currently working through information that may be within the scope of your request.

Please find enclosed a first tranche of information captured by your request. This comprises the relevant parts of emails received by the named persons relating to "synthetic phonics".

Within this tranche, we have decided that some information should be withheld under the s40(2) 'Personal data' exemption provided by the Freedom of Information Act. Our full deliberations on the application of the exemption are set out in Annex A.

We hope to provide a final response on the remaining information we hold by 30 December 2024.

A copy of the information we have been able to release is enclosed in Annex B.

Next steps

If you are dissatisfied with the Welsh Government's handling of your request, you can ask for an internal review within 40 working days of the date of this response. Requests for an internal review should be addressed to the Welsh Government's Freedom of Information Officer at:

Information Rights Unit,
Welsh Government,
Cathays Park,
Cardiff,
CF10 3NQ

or Email: Freedom.of.information@gov.wales

Please remember to quote the ATISN reference number above.

You also have the right to complain to the Information Commissioner. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office,
Wycliffe House,
Water Lane,
Wilmslow,
Cheshire,
SK9 5AF.

However, please note that the Commissioner will not normally investigate a complaint until it has been through our own internal review process.

Yours sincerely

Annex A

Freedom of Information Act 2000: Section 40(2)

Section 40(2) together with the conditions in section 40(3)(a)(i) or 40(3)(b) provides an absolute exemption if disclosure of the personal data would breach any of the data protection principles.

'Personal data' is defined in sections 3(2) and (3) of the Data Protection Act 1998 ('the DPA 2018') and means any information relating to an identified or identifiable living individual. An identifiable living individual is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier or to one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of the individual.

We have concluded that, in this instance, the information requested contains third party personal data.

Under Section 40(2) of the FOIA, personal data is exempt from release if disclosure would breach one of the data protection principles set out in Article 5 of the GDPR. We consider the principle being most relevant in this instance as being the first. This states that personal data must be:

"processed lawfully, fairly and in a transparent manner in relation to the data subject"

The lawful basis that is most relevant in relation to a request for information under the FOIA is Article 6(1)(f). This states:

"processing is necessary for the purposes of the legitimate interests pursued by the controller or by a third party except where such interests are overridden by the interests or fundamental rights and freedoms of the data subject which require protection of personal data, in particular where the data subject is a child".

In considering the application of Article 6(1)(f) in the context of a request for information under FOIA it is necessary to consider the following three-part test:-

- The Legitimate interest test: Whether a legitimate interest is being pursued in the request for information;
- The Necessity test: Whether disclosure of the information/confirmation or denial that it is held is necessary to meet the legitimate interest in question;
- The Balancing test: Whether the above interests override the interests, fundamental rights and freedoms of the data subject.

Our consideration of these tests is set out below:

1. Legitimate interests

Accountability and transparency are the legitimate interests in releasing named officials' data.

2. Is disclosure necessary?

Disclosure is not necessary as this does not change the information which has been provided.

3. The balance between legitimate interests and the data subject's interests or fundamental rights and freedoms

On balance, there is no reason to release the names of officials that have not been captured in this request. This information would not change any information provided within the request.

As release of the information would not be legitimate under Article 6(1)(f), and as no other condition of Article 6 is deemed to apply, release of the information would not be lawful within the meaning of the first data protection principle. It has therefore been withheld under section 40 of the Freedom of Information Act.. Section 40 is an absolute exemption and not subject to the public interest test

Annex B
Captured Information

Received by	Sent by	Date	Captured information	Description of Email	Email Subject Heading
- CSE Mailbox - Named Individual from Curriculum and Assessment Division - Lloyd Hopkin - Sioned Evans - Curriculum and Assessment Official CSE Special Adviser - Press Office Official - Press Office Official - Press Office Official - Curriculum and Assessment Official	Press office official	2 October 2024 at 7:07	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Press Official quoting a journalist] I want to ask you specifically about the following comments made by the Cabinet Secretary for Education today: “We have a clear expectation that all schools will use synthetic phonics to teach reading. I’ve also said we are looking at what more we can do to re-emphasize that expectation.” • [Press Official quoting a journalist] In a later answer she said: “Again we are absolutely clear, synthetic phonics is what we expect as the building blocks of reading in Wales.” 	Email requesting clearance of specific lines in response to request received by ITV news.	<i>For approval - ITN blog reading clarification following Senedd questions</i>

<p>- Curriculum and Assessment Official - Curriculum and Assessment Official - Press Office Official - Business Wales Official - Education Comms Official</p>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Press Official quoting a journalist] I cannot find a single reference of the Welsh government ever making an expectation that “all schools will use synthetic phonics to teach reading”. In every response I have been given on this story, in July as well as September, synthetic phonics were not mentioned • [Press Official quoting a journalist] When responding to questions, the Cabinet Secretary also affirmed this - that we expect synthetic phonics to be taught and that is the case, i.e. learning how to convert letters into sounds and then blending those to understand words. 		
<p>- Lloyd Hopkin - Named Individual from</p>	<p>CSE Special Adviser</p>	<p>2 October</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The journalist reporting on this is accusing the Cab Sec 	<p>Email chain following the publication of</p>	<p>ITV reading story</p>

<p>Curriculum and Assessment Division - Curriculum and Assessment Official - CSE Mailbox - Press Office Official</p>		<p>2024 at 10:38</p>	<p>of misspeaking in the Senedd by referring to synthetic phonics being an expectation in the curriculum. He seems to be drawing a technical distinction between synthetic phonics and other types of phonics – I don't know how significant the distinction is. Is it the case that we have only ever referred to phonics and never synthetic phonics?</p>	<p>ITV News' reading story. Discussing how to handle the story and respond.</p>	
<p>- Lloyd Hopkin - Named Individual from Curriculum and Assessment Division - Curriculum and Assessment Official - CSE Special Adviser - CSE Mailbox - Press Office Official</p>	<p>Press Office Official</p>	<p>2 October 2024 at 10:43</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> [Press Official quoting a journalist] If you can point me to any single time before today, that the Welsh government has said that all schools should use <i>synthetic</i> phonics, then I will happily make that clear. Not systematic, but synthetic. 	<p>Email chain following the publication of ITV News' reading story. Discussing how to handle the story and respond.</p>	<p>ITV reading story</p>

<p>- Named Individual from Curriculum and Assessment Division - Curriculum and Assessment Official - CSE Mailbox - CSE Special Adviser - Press Office Official</p>	<p>- Lloyd Hopkin</p>	<p>3 October 2024 at 7:22 and 10:35</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We haven't explicitly used the term synthetic phonics, but the synthetic phonics approach is specifically described in the curriculum expectations. The "systematic teaching of phonics" is also referring to this same approach. • The descriptions of learning for Languages, Literacy and Communication state that learners should develop their knowledge and use of grapheme-phonemes. The hover over definition for "grapheme phonemes" defines this as the link between letters and words and that phonemes are "the smallest units of speech", breaking words/sounds down to their smallest units and then synthesising 	<p>Email chain following the publication of ITV News' reading story. Discussing how to handle the story and respond.</p>	<p>ITV reading story</p>
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			<p>them together, that is, synthetic phonics.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The systematic teaching of phonics refers to the method of teaching reading that introduces graphemes to phonemes one at a time – which again, is effectively the same as synthetic phonics• This is consistent with synthetic phonics because it's talking about using the written letters and using those to understand what sound they represent. That is quite different to picture cues, i.e. using pictures to determine what words mean which as we say, are not mentioned. In its broadest sense, a 'cue' is anything that provides an indication of meaning, including as we say, the letters/graphemes		
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			<p>themselves. In any case, the LNF is non-statutory so it would be incorrect to say we'd mandated it in any case and the CSE has committed to reviewing this and has been clear that she expects synthetic phonics to be made more explicit in this.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hopefully the above illustrates that and the CSE has been clear that the emphasis on (synthetic) phonics will be made more explicit. There's a caveat to this which is learners who are deaf. For some learners who are deaf, phonics will not be wholly appropriate or sufficient.• Welsh Government expects learners to learn to learn decode words using synthetic phonics. Having learned to decode words, they may use		
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			<p>a range of strategies to develop understanding of the meaning of words and sentences. The two are entirely different things. We need to draw the distinction between learning to decode graphemes and words by use of phonics (including synthetic phonics) and then wider fluency. As we say, the curriculum expects phonics (including synthetic phonics), using the graphic cues of the words themselves to be taught as the means of decoding graphemes and words. Other cues, particularly picture cues are not an appropriate substitute for phonics in learning to decode. However, having learned to decode, learners may need to rely on other cues to infer meaning</p>		
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			<p>or context of why that word is being used. The two are different skills/approaches. What the evidence is clear on is: phonics/synthetic phonics is critical in decoding words.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• However, the most understood definition of synthetic phonics is learning how to convert letters into sounds and then blending those to understand words – which is totally uncontroversial• The CSE used the term synthetic phonics in response to Tom Giffard yesterday (not in the initial response) which the journalist has jumped on as an apparent contradiction• While the descriptions of learning don't explicitly use the term synthetic phonics, they do say that learners need to		
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			<p>develop their understanding of grapheme-phonemes which are defined as the link between letters and words and that phonemes are the smallest units of speech. This is by definition the most generally understood definition of synthetic phonics: learning how the smallest units of speech correspond to letters and then putting them together to form words.</p>		
<p>- Lloyd Hopkin - Curriculum and Assessment Official - CSE Special Adviser - Named Individual from Curriculum and Assessment Division - CSE Mailbox</p>	<p>- Press Office Official</p>	<p>3 October 2024 at 11:13</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Press Office Official quoting a journalist] If you can point me to any single time before today, that the Welsh government has said that all schools should use <i>synthetic</i> phonics, then I will happily make that clear. Not systematic, but synthetic. • We haven't explicitly used the term synthetic phonics, but 	<p>Email chain following the publication of ITV News' reading story. Discussing how to handle the story and respond. This email is seeking clearance on lines to send back to the journalist.</p>	<p>ITV reading story</p>

<p>- Press Office Official - Education Comms Official</p>			<p>the synthetic phonics approach is specifically described in the curriculum expectations. The “systematic teaching of phonics” is also referring to this same approach.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The descriptions of learning for Languages, Literacy and Communication state that learners should develop their knowledge and use of grapheme-phonemes. The definition for “grapheme phonemes” defines this as the link between letters and words and that phonemes are “the smallest units of speech”, breaking words/sounds down to their smallest units and then synthesising them together, that is, synthetic phonics.• The systematic teaching of phonics		
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			<p>refers to the method of teaching reading that introduces graphemes to phonemes one at a time – which again, is effectively the same as synthetic phonics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• This is consistent with synthetic phonics because it's talking about using the written letters and using those to understand what sound they represent.• The LNF is currently non-statutory and the Cabinet Secretary for Education has committed to reviewing it and placing it on a statutory footing. She has been clear that she expects synthetic phonics to be made more explicit in this.• To be absolutely clear, no. It is not our view that young children should be encouraged to use picture cues for		
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			<p>the purposes of learning to decode words. Hopefully the above illustrates that and the Cabinet Secretary has been clear that the emphasis on (synthetic) phonics will be made more explicit.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Welsh Government expects learners to learn to decode words using synthetic phonics. Having learned to decode words, they may use a range of strategies to develop understanding of the meaning of words and sentences. The two are entirely different things.• We need to draw the distinction between learning to decode graphemes and words by use of phonics (including synthetic phonics) and then wider fluency. As we		
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			<p>say, the curriculum expects phonics (including synthetic phonics), using the graphic cues of the words themselves to be taught as the means of decoding graphemes and words.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What the evidence is clear on is: phonics/synthetic phonics is critical in decoding words. 		
<p>- Named Individual from Curriculum and Assessment Division - Curriculum and Assessment Official - Curriculum and Assessment Official - Curriculum and Assessment Official</p>	<p>- Lloyd Hopkin</p>	<p>3 October 2024 at 8:32</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While the descriptions of learning don't explicitly use the term synthetic phonics, they do say that learners need to develop their knowledge and use of grapheme-phonemes which are defined as the link between letters and words and that phonemes are "the smallest units of speech", i.e. not larger sounds. This refers to the definition of synthetic phonics: 	<p>Email chain following the publication of ITV News' story. Discussing how to handle the story and respond. This email is seeking confirmation that the information provide is correct.</p>	<p>ITV reading story</p>

			<p>learning how the smallest units of speech correspond to letters and then putting them together to form words. It would be impossible to develop knowledge and use of grapheme-phonemes without use of synthetic phonics, they're the same thing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• That's consistent with synthetic phonics because it's talking about using the written letters and using those to understand what sound they represent.• In any case, the LNF is non-statutory so it would be incorrect to say we'd mandated it in any case and the CSE has committed to reviewing this and has been clear that she expects synthetic phonics to be made more explicit in this.		
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			<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hopefully the above illustrates that and the CSE has been clear that the emphasis on (synthetic) phonics will be made more explicit• We need to draw the distinction between learning to decode graphemes and words by use of phonics (including synthetic phonics) and then wider fluency. As we say, the curriculum expects phonics (including synthetic phonics), using the graphic cues of the words themselves to be taught as the means of decoding graphemes and words.• The two are different skills/approaches. What the evidence is clear on is: phonics/synthetic phonics is critical in decoding words.		
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lloyd Hopkin - CSE Special Adviser - CSE Mailbox - Education Official - Press Office Mailbox - Press Office Official - Special Adviser - Sioned Evans - Press Office Official - Press Office Official - Education Comms Official - (previous Director of Education) - Business Wales Official - Education Comms Official - Press Office Official - Special Adviser 	<p>Press Office Official</p>	<p>3 October 2024 at 13:23</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As mentioned on team, Nation have now asked if the CSE misspoke as “As I understand it - using synthetic phonics to teach children to read is not on the curriculum in Wales” • [Press Official quoting a journalist] “We have a clear expectation that all schools will use synthetic phonics to teach reading. I’ve also said we are looking at what more we can do to re-emphasize that expectation..”She later said: “Again we are absolutely clear, synthetic phonics is what we expect as the building blocks of reading in Wales.” • Did she mis-speak? As I understand it - using synthetic phonics to teach children to read is not on the curriculum in Wales. 	<p>Seeking clearance in response to a question received by another journalist.</p>	<p>Request for comment RE comments about reading</p>
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			<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We haven't explicitly used the term synthetic phonics, but the synthetic phonics approach is specifically described in the curriculum expectations.• The systematic teaching of phonics refers to the method of teaching reading that introduces graphemes to phonemes one at a time – which again, is effectively the same as synthetic phonics• The Literacy and Numeracy Framework is currently non-statutory and the Cabinet Secretary for Education has committed to reviewing it and placing it on a statutory footing. She has been clear that she expects synthetic phonics to be made more explicit in this.		
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			<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This is consistent with synthetic phonics because it's talking about using the written letters and using those to understand what sound they represent. This is different to picture cues, i.e. using pictures to determine what words mean.• The definition for "grapheme phonemes" defines this as the link between letters and words and that phonemes are "the smallest units of speech", breaking words/sounds down to their smallest units and then synthesising them together, that is, synthetic phonics.• The systematic teaching of phonics refers to the method of teaching reading that introduces graphemes to phonemes one at a		
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			time – which is effectively the same as synthetic phonics		
- CSE Mailbox - Special Advisor	Private Secretary	3 October 2024 at 16:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [All information below is the content of the letter] In response, you said that you had “a clear expectation that all schools will use synthetic phonics to teach reading” and went on to say that “we are absolutely clear, synthetic phonics is what we expect as the building blocks of reading in Wales.” • The problem is, this is simply not true. The Welsh Government has never said all schools should use synthetic phonics to teach children to read. 	Email regarding letter sent from Tom Giffard MS. Only capture of Synthetic Phonics is in the letter. Letter can be found here	QUERY - Education Questions 02/10/24
- Special Adviser - Lloyd Hopkin - Education Comms Official - Press Office Official	- Curriculum and Assessment Official	3 October 2024 at 18:22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Content from draft Written Statement] Phonics, including synthetic phonics, are already included in the statutory expectations in the Language Literacy 	Conversation between officials on the draft versions of the written statement. There is no mention of	For Clearance: Written Statement - Support for Literacy - for issue Fri 4 October

<p>- Curriculum and Assessment Official - CSE Mailbox</p>			<p>and Communication Area of the Curriculum for Wales, but that needs to be more explicit</p>	<p>synthetic phonics in any of the emails, only in the draft version.</p> <p>Published version of the Written Statement can be found here</p>	
<p>- Special Adviser - Education Comms Official - Press Office Official - Press Office Official Press Office Official - CSE Mailbox - Curriculum and Assessment Official</p>	<p>- Lloyd Hopkin</p>	<p>03 October 2024 at 22:09</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> [Content from draft Written Statement] The statutory guidance expects learners to develop their knowledge and use of grapheme-phoneme correspondence: recognising how letters correspond to the smallest units of sounds. The curriculum also refers to a systematic approach to phonics: which means that these grapheme-phonemes should be learned one at a time. This corresponds to what is generally 	<p>Email from Lloyd Hopkin to officials and CSE about sharing the draft written statement with Estyn.</p>	<p>In confidence - draft of written statement to issue tomorrow</p>

			meant by synthetic phonics.		
- Special Adviser - CSE - Lloyd Hopkin - Curriculum and Assessment Official - Education Official - Education Comms Official - Press Office Official - Curriculum and Assessment Official	Private Office Official	7 October 2024 at 13:51	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> [Content from draft Written Statement] The curriculum also refers to a systematic approach to phonics – which means that these grapheme-phonemes should be learned one at a time. This corresponds to what is generally meant by synthetic phonics. 	A chain of emails between Officials and CSE regarding the reply to Tom Giffard MS' letter. Synthetic phonics only captured in the response attachment. Published version of the Written Statement can be found here	Reply to Tom Giffard MS - Reading LN/10230/24
- CSE Mailbox - Lloyd Hopkin - Special Adviser	- Curriculum and Assessment Official - Lloyd Hopkin	4 October 2024 at 14:51 and 14:33	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> [All below content is taken from the CfW Guidance] A systematic approach to phonics is one where phoneme-graphemes are learned sequentially or one at a time. Again, this corresponds to what 	Lloyd Hopkin and Curriculum and Assessment Official both shared the same information at different stages with all mentioned. This information	Urgent Reading

			<p>is generally meant by synthetic phonics.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be clear this is referring directly to phonics and corresponds to what is generally meant by synthetic phonics (breaking down to phonemes and then synthesising them). • To note: “graphic cues” here refers to the visual aspects of words i.e. the letters and graphemes themselves. This is consistent with synthetic phonics because it is talking about using the written letters and using those to understand what sound they represent. 	relates to the CfW Guidance.	
<p>- CSE Mailbox - Special Adviser - Press Office Official - Press Office Official</p>	Private Secretary	4 October 2024 at 19:01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Briefing content] Our approach is entirely in line with evidence on synthetic phonics and this is specifically described in the statutory guidance for the curriculum which 	Information around synthetic phonics has been captured in this brief as it was a hot issue at the time.	CSE INTERVIEW BID: Politics Wales

- Press Office Official			<p>all schools must consider.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A synthetic phonics approach is one where learners break words down into their smallest units and then synthesise these to decode words. That is precisely what the statutory guidance expects: learners developing the link between written letters and phonemes – the smallest units of speech. • Whilst we haven't explicitly used the term synthetic phonics in our guidance, the synthetic phonics approach is described in the curriculum expectations. 		
- CSE Mailbox	- Special Adviser	4 October at 14:17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whilst we haven't explicitly used the term synthetic phonics in our guidance, the synthetic phonics approach is described in the curriculum expectations. 	An email from the special adviser to the CSE providing an updated press line	Updated press line yesterday

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The definition for “grapheme phonemes” defines this as the link between letters and words and that phonemes are “the smallest units of speech”, breaking words/sounds down to their smallest units and then synthesising them together, that is, synthetic phonics. • The systematic teaching of phonics refers to the method of teaching reading that introduces graphemes to phonemes one at a time – which is effectively the same as synthetic phonics. • the guidance does not specifically say the words ‘synthetic phonics’ anywhere but what’s described in the guidance is synthetic phonics. 		
- CSE Mailbox	Private Secretary	4 October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [All content taken from the Curriculum for 	Private Secretary sent	Urgent Reading

<p>- Special Adviser</p>		<p>2024 at 15:31</p>	<p>Wales Guidance] A systematic approach to phonics is one where phoneme-graphemes are learned sequentially or one at a time. Again, this corresponds to what is generally meant by synthetic phonics.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To be clear this is referring directly to phonics and corresponds to what is generally meant by synthetic phonics (breaking down to phonemes and then synthesising them).• To note: “graphic cues” here refers to the visual aspects of words i.e. the letters and graphemes themselves. This is consistent with synthetic phonics because it is talking about using the written letters and using those to	<p>the CfW phonics guidance to the CSE and Special Adviser. No mention of synthetic phonics in the email.</p>	
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			understand what sound they represent.		
<p>- CSE Mailbox</p> <p>- Previous Direct of Education</p> <p>- Education Official</p> <p>- Education Official</p> <p>- Education Official</p> <p>- Education Official</p> <p>- Special Adviser</p> <p>- Education Official</p> <p>- Lloyd Hopkin</p> <p>- Education Official</p> <p>- Education Official</p> <p>- Curriculum and Assessment Official</p> <p>- Education Official</p> <p>- Education Official</p> <p>- Education Official</p>	Education Official	7 October 2024 at 16:43	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Briefing content] Phonics is central to this. I expect all schools to include phonics, including synthetic phonics in their approach to teaching and learning at the appropriate stage. • The approach set out in the Curriculum for Wales – that learners should break words down into their smallest units and synthesise these to decode words – is in line with the evidence on synthetic phonics. • The approach set out in the Curriculum for Wales – that learners should break words down into their smallest units and synthesise these to decode words – is in line with the evidence on synthetic phonics. 	Synthetic phonics captured in the brief of this debate on school funding. Information around synthetic phonics has been captured in this brief as it was a hot issue at the time.	NDM8686 Debate Motion Briefing and Speech

- Education Official - Education Official - Education Official					
- Press Office Official - Lloyd Hopkin			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> [Hot Topic content] The Cabinet Secretary's comments are consistent with the description of phonics in our curriculum guidance: learners recognising how letters correspond to the smallest units of sounds. This is consistent with what is generally meant by synthetic phonics. However, I'm clear that our guidance and support will be made clearer and more explicit. 	Briefing for the CSE for FMQ. No mention of synthetic phonics in the body of the email, only in the attachment.	FMQ lines - reading
- Lloyd Hopkin - Curriculum and Assessment Official - Special Adviser	- Press Office Officials	4 October 2024 at 10:57	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A synthetic phonics approach is generally understood as one where learners learn the smallest units of sound (graphemes-phonemes) and then 	A conversation between officials about communications work around Phonics.	For the Record - Phonics

<p>- Press Office Official - Educations Comms Official</p>			<p>synthesise these to decode words.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• This is what the Cabinet Secretary was referring to when she said that we expect synthetic phonics to be the building blocks of reading in Wales.• This is consistent with synthetic phonics because it's talking about using the written letters and using those to understand what sound they represent. This is different to picture cues, i.e. using pictures to determine what words mean.• [Quoting the Claim] Claim: The Welsh government has never said that all schools should use synthetic phonics to teach children to read.• The synthetic phonics approach is specifically described in the curriculum		
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			<p>expectations [link below]. The “systematic teaching of phonics” is also referring to this same approach.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The definition for “grapheme phonemes” defines this as the link between letters and words and that phonemes are “the smallest units of speech”, breaking words/sounds down to their smallest units and then synthesising them together, that is, synthetic phonics.• The systematic teaching of phonics refers to the method of teaching reading that introduces graphemes to phonemes one at a time – which again, is effectively the same as synthetic phonics.• This is consistent with what is generally		
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			understood by synthetic phonics.		
- Lloyd Hopkin - Curriculum and Assessment Official - Special Adviser - Press Office Official	- Press Office Official	3 October 2024 at 15:47	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Literacy is a top priority within the Curriculum for Wales. The Cabinet Secretary for Education has been absolutely clear that we expect all schools to include phonics, including synthetic phonics in teaching children to read. This reflects the evidence and it's already reflected in our expectations to schools. Our approach is entirely in line with evidence on synthetic phonics and this is specifically described in the statutory guidance for the curriculum which all schools must consider. A synthetic phonics approach is one where learners break words down into their 	Email exchange regarding briefing for CSE on phonics and reading. The lines include reference to 'synthetic phonics'	CG Briefing Input: Phonics/Reading lines

			<p>smallest units and then synthesise these to decode words. That is precisely what the statutory guidance expects: learners developing the link between written letters and phonemes – the smallest units of speech.</p>		
<p>- Lloyd Hopkin - Curriculum and Assessment Official</p>	<p>Press Office Official</p>	<p>4 October 2024 at 16:14</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Briefing content] Our approach is entirely in line with evidence on synthetic phonics and this is specifically described in the statutory guidance for the curriculum which all schools must consider. • A synthetic phonics approach is one where learners break words down into their smallest units and then synthesise these to decode words. That is precisely what the statutory guidance expects: learners developing the link between written 	<p>Email exchange regarding briefing for the CSE on phonics. No mention of synthetic phonics in the email, only in the attachment. Information around synthetic phonics has been captured in this brief as it was a hot issue at the time.</p>	<p>Politics Wales briefing</p>

			<p>letters and phonemes – the smallest units of speech.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whilst we haven't explicitly used the term synthetic phonics in our guidance, the synthetic phonics approach is described in the curriculum expectations. 		
<p>- Lloyd Hopkin - Curriculum and Assessment Official - Special Adviser - Press Office Official - Education Comms Official - Press Office Official - Press Office Official</p>	<p>- Press Office Official</p>	<p>3 October 2024 at 18:29</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having learned to decode words, learners may then use a range of strategies to develop understanding of the meaning of words and sentences – which is where the reference to pictures comes in. But that does not detract from the fact that learners should decode words using synthetic phonics first. • In terms of the quote/correspondence referred to – while the descriptions of learning describe a synthetic phonics approach (i.e. 	<p>Press office communicating with officials on response to questions posed by ITV News. The extracts provided refer to synthetic phonics.</p>	<p>Cabinet Secretary's comments in the Senedd</p>

			<p>grapheme-phoneme correspondence), we're keen to emphasise that there is an element of practitioner flexibility here.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• if learners don't have phonological awareness first, then it would be inappropriate to teach phonics until they do; b) we don't endorse pedagogical approaches about how to teach synthetic phonics; c) other additional pedagogical approaches may be appropriate to complement synthetic phonics depending on the needs of the learner and d) there are some learners where synthetic phonics would not be as appropriate, for example: where there are specific developmental needs		
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			<p>or for some deaf learners.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• So again, this is referring to the individual grapheme-phonemes that comprise words – i.e. a synthetic phonics approach.• Whilst we haven't explicitly used the term synthetic phonics in our guidance, the synthetic phonics approach is described in the curriculum expectations.• The descriptions of learning for Languages, Literacy and Communication state that learners should develop their knowledge and use of grapheme-phonemes. The definition for "grapheme phonemes" defines this as the link between letters and words and that phonemes are "the smallest units of		
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			<p>speech”, breaking words/sounds down to their smallest units and then synthesising them together, that is, synthetic phonics.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The systematic teaching of phonics refers to the method of teaching reading that introduces graphemes to phonemes one at a time – which is effectively the same as synthetic phonics. 		
<p>- Lloyd Hopkin - Curriculum and Assessment Official</p>	<p>Curriculum and Assessment Official</p>	<p>4 October 2024 at 10:24</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Content from Written Statement] Phonics, including synthetic phonics, are already included in the statutory expectations in the Language Literacy and Communication Area of the Curriculum for Wales, but that needs to be more explicit 	<p>Email from Curriculum and Assessment Official to official asking the official to arrange translation of the Written Statement. There is no mention of synthetic phonics in the email, only in the attachment.</p>	<p>translation of written statement</p>

<p>- Named Individual from Curriculum and Assessment Division</p>	<p>- Lloyd Hopkin</p>	<p>7 October 2024 at 9:52</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How children learn to read - The role of phonics/ synthetic phonics/ systematic phonics • Decoding: synthetic phonics - however, overlapping terms. • Whether synthetic phonics on its own is sufficient for teaching decoding • Both the grapheme-phonemes correspondence and a systematic approach corresponds to what is generally meant by synthetic phonics: learning the smallest units of letters to sounds and then synthesising these to decode words. 	<p>Email from Lloyd Hopkin to individual from the division outlining his thoughts for the Tech Briefing.</p>	<p>Tech briefing</p>
<p>- Curriculum and Assessment Official - Lloyd Hopkin - Curriculum and</p>	<p>Curriculum and Assessment Official</p>	<p>2 October 2024</p>	<p>[Quoting the transcript] CSE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have a clear expectation that all schools will use synthetic phonics to teach reading. We are looking at what more we can do to re- 	<p>Curriculum and Assessment Official emailed Lloyd Hopkin and Curriculum and Assessment Official to highlight that</p>	<p>OQs today- ITV article</p>

Assessment Official			<p>emphasise that expectation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We're seeing more children with speech and language problems, especially since the pandemic, so there might be children coming to schools who do not have sufficient knowledge of speech to be able to break down words in the way that synthetic phonics requires. Teachers will have other tools in their toolbox to support the learners who they know best. But we're absolutely clear—synthetic phonics is what we expect as the building blocks of reading in Wales. 	reading had been bought up during OQ's and provided a shortened extract.	
- Lloyd Hopkin	Curriculum and Assessment Official	3 October 2024 at 17:42	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> [Content from the letter] Our next Education Minister urgently needs to ensure that our children are taught to 	Official brought the letter to the attention of Lloyd Hopkin for him to see the correspondence	(No subject)

			<p>read through the use of high quality and well-resourced Systematic Synthetic Phonics provision that leaves nothing to chance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unfortunately, the ideology of many in educational leadership in Wales, this includes Estyn, is acting as a barrier to children being taught using synthetic systematic phonics: they believe that children will develop and learn to read in their own time when they are ready• Why haven't we accepted the overwhelming research in support of Systematic Synthetic Phonics as our main approach for teaching early reading within our primary schools?• Mandate the teaching of Systematic Synthetic Phonics and	<p>received from an external stakeholder group earlier in 2024. There is no mention of synthetic phonics in the email, only in the attachment. The extracts from this letter relating to synthetic phonics are included.</p>	
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			<p>ensure all statements in the Curriculum for Wales documentation align with this approach.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have criteria for what is required in effective Systematic Synthetic Phonics programmes and a validated list of programmes that schools can use. 		
<p>- Curriculum and Assessment Official - Lloyd Hopkin - Curriculum and Assessment Official</p>	<p>Curriculum and Assessment Official</p>	<p>7 October 2024</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>[Content from the incoming letter]</i> The (external stakeholder group) was encouraged by your comments in the Senedd on Thursday, October 3, stating that there is now a clear expectation that all schools in Wales teach systematic synthetic phonics (SSP), the most effective way to teach reading according to reliable evidence. • Moreover, if the expectation is that all schools in Wales use a synthetic phonics 	<p>Email from official notifying Curriculum and Assessment Official and Lloyd Hopkin of incoming correspondence from the (external stakeholder group)</p>	<p>Reading Instruction - synthetic phonics</p>

			<p>approach, the curriculum changes needed are not just limited to the use of cueing strategies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Therefore, we would very much welcome a meeting with you to discuss the aspects of reading that need addressing, so that early instruction aligns more closely with systematic synthetic phonics within Curriculum for Wales. 		
<p>- Lloyd Hopkin - Curriculum and Assessment Official</p>	<p>Curriculum and Assessment Official</p>		<p>I think there are a few things for us to think about as we start to consider a response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making sure we don't confirm the conclusion that external stakeholder has drawn that WG policy has changed to endorse SSP exclusively, without confusing our position – I think our most recent lines used for press etc. are here – we need to clarify 	<p>Response to Lloyd Hopkin and Curriculum and Assessment Officials providing a steer on response to incoming letter from the (external stakeholder group)</p>	<p>Reading Instruction - synthetic phonics</p>

			<p>relevant guidance and we will.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whether / how we want to involve External Stakeholder (or the (external stakeholder group) more generally) in the process of work moving forward (e.g. expert group or some other forum?) – that will colour the response. • The point he makes on phonics being used to decode, while cues can help with comprehension and meaning, is exactly aligned with our position – which is helpful to know. 		
<p>- Curriculum and Assessment Official - Named Individual from Curriculum</p>	<p>Curriculum and Assessment Official</p>	<p>8 October 2024 at 10:35</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Quoting from note of Headteacher Roundtable discussion] He also suggested that having a coherent approach to teaching synthetic 	<p>A request by an official asking if colleagues knew of a headteacher that had attended the</p>	<p>Redacted personal information</p>

and Assessment Division			phonics and a phonics screener might help improve reading outcomes.	headteacher roundtable and had subsequently requested a meeting with the CSE. The extract is from a note of the headteacher roundtable.	
- Lloyd Hopkin - Curriculum and Assessment Official - Curriculum and Assessment Official - Named Individual from Curriculum and Assessment Division	External Stakeholder	4 October at 16:06	[All below information are extracts from attachment] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Role of Synthetic Phonics in Early Reading Instruction: A Critical Analysis • Synthetic phonics is a method of teaching reading that focuses on explicitly and systematically teaching children the individual sounds of letters (phonemes) and how to blend those sounds together to decode words. It plays a significant role in early reading instruction, as it provides children with the foundational skills 	Email from an external stakeholder to Lloyd Hopkin sharing an overview of the different methods of early reading instruction, including synthetic phonics, summarising the findings of different research papers. Extracts are captured from attachments and	phonics papers

			<p>necessary to become proficient readers. This paper aims to critically analyse the evidence supporting the use of synthetic phonics in early reading instruction and explore its implications for educational policy and practice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The analysis will primarily draw upon three key documents but not exclusively:• 1. Johnston & Watson (2005): This longitudinal study investigated the effects of synthetic phonics on reading and spelling attainment in primary school children, providing evidence frequently cited in support of synthetic phonics programs.• 2. Wyse & Styles (2007): This paper offers a critical evaluation of the Rose	<p>not the body of the email.</p>	
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			<p>Report, a government inquiry into the teaching of early reading in England that heavily emphasized synthetic phonics. It challenges the report's interpretation of research evidence and its policy recommendations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 3. Glazzard & Stones (2020): This paper critiques the current policy focus on synthetic phonics in England, arguing that it lacks sufficient evidence and may be limiting teachers' ability to effectively support all children's reading development.• By examining these contrasting perspectives, this paper seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the role of synthetic phonics in reading instruction and offer		
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			<p>informed recommendations for policy and practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Synthetic phonics is a specific type of systematic phonics. It focuses on teaching children individual letter sounds in isolation and then blending those sounds together to form words (Johnston & Watson, 2005). This is in contrast to analytic phonics, which involves analyzing whole words to identify letter-sound relationships. Synthetic phonics programs often use a multi-sensory approach, incorporating visual, auditory, and kinesthetic elements to help children learn letter sounds.• Arguments for Synthetic Phonics		
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			<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Johnston & Watson (2005) study, also known as the Clackmannanshire study, was a 7-year longitudinal study examining the effectiveness of synthetic phonics in teaching reading and spelling. Key findings supporting synthetic phonics include:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children taught using synthetic phonics showed significant improvements in reading and spelling skills, which were maintained throughout their primary schooling• The synthetic phonics approach was found to be more effective than the analytic phonics approach, even when the latter was supplemented with phonemic awareness training• Boys in the synthetic phonics group		
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			<p>outperformed girls in several literacy skills, challenging the typical pattern of girls' dominance in literacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The study demonstrated the potential of synthetic phonics to support underachieving students• Additionally, the study did not show significant improvement in reading comprehension skills, which has led to ongoing debate about the overall effectiveness of synthetic phonics in improving all aspects of reading ability this paper will explore these limitations further.• The report strongly advocated for the use of synthetic phonics as the primary method for teaching reading, asserting that "the		
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			<p>case for systematic phonic work is overwhelming and much strengthened by a synthetic approach" (Rose, 2006, p. 20).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Rose Report significantly influenced educational policy and practice in England, leading to changes in the National Curriculum, teacher training programs, and instructional practices, with a greater emphasis on synthetic phonics instruction.• While the Rose Report and the Clackmannanshire study are often cited as key advocates for synthetic phonics, other studies and reports have also supported this approach• The study also lacked a control group that received no phonics intervention, limiting		
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			<p>the ability to determine the absolute efficacy of synthetic phonics.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• with different tests employed at various stages and an overall lack of significant improvement attributed to synthetic phonics.• for its narrow focus on synthetic phonics and its failure to consider a wider range of research findings,• Glazzard and Stones (2020) echo these concerns, arguing that the English policy's strong emphasis on synthetic phonics lacks sufficient research evidence and may hinder teachers' ability to effectively support all children's reading development• English language's irregular orthography can make it challenging to teach		
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			<p>solely using synthetic phonics, as grapheme-phoneme correspondences are not always consistent.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Glazzard and Stones (2020) further emphasise that while synthetic phonics may enable most children to master word recognition, it does not work for all children. For those who struggle with this approach, alternative methods may be necessary to support their reading development. The authors conclude that a broader range of instructional methods is needed to promote reading development in all children and that a balanced approach incorporating elements of both phonics instruction and whole language principles may be more effective than		
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			<p>relying solely on synthetic phonics.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Glazzard and Stones (2020) offer a critical analysis of the current English policy on reading instruction, which exhibits a strong emphasis on synthetic phonics. They argue this exclusive focus may be detrimental to children's overall literacy development. While acknowledging the importance of phonics instruction, they contend that prioritising synthetic phonics to the exclusion of other approaches can limit teachers' ability to cater to the diverse needs of learners.• The authors highlight that the English language's irregular orthography presents challenges for a solely synthetic phonics approach.		
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			<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This suggests a more effective phonics approach might involve teaching a range of grain sizes, rather than focusing solely on individual phonemes as emphasized in synthetic phonics.• Glazzard and Stones (2020) further emphasize that while synthetic phonics may be successful for many children in mastering word recognition, it does not work for all.• They suggest a balanced approach incorporating elements of both phonics instruction and whole language principles, such as immersing children in rich literary experiences and fostering a love of reading, may be more effective than relying solely on synthetic		
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			<p>phonics (Glazzard & Stones, 2020).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• While synthetic phonics has been a focal point in reading instruction debates, it's crucial to acknowledge the value of alternative approaches and the multifaceted nature of reading development. Analytic phonics, in contrast to synthetic phonics, encourages learners to analyze letter-sound relationships within whole words, fostering an understanding of patterns and word families.• Firstly, comparative effectiveness studies are needed to rigorously assess the relative merits of synthetic phonics, analytic phonics, and whole-language approaches (Glazzard & Stones, 2020).		
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			<ul style="list-style-type: none">• While synthetic phonics can be an effective tool for developing foundational literacy skills, relying on it as the sole approach to reading instruction may be detrimental to students' overall literacy development (Glazzard & Stones, 2020).		
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