

What is the most popular validated phonics scheme?

Earlier this year, a Teacher Tapper got in touch to suggest we find out the most frequently used validated phonics schemes.

For those of you not up to speed with the often-contested world of phonics, let's take a quick history lesson before we get on to answering the Tappster's question...

What is a validated phonics scheme?

First off, the rules: it is a statutory requirement to teach phonics at KS1 and administer the phonics screening check to pupils in KS1.

It is not statutory to use any particular scheme to teach phonics. However, since 2021 the DfE have 'validated' 48 systematic synthetic phonics (SSP) teaching programmes. The DfE emphasises that they (and Ofsted) do not have "a preferred programme or approach" but it is "important is that schools take an approach that is rigorous, systematic and used with fidelity."

To help schools make the decision whether a scheme meets these criteria, DfE validation shows that a programme has been:

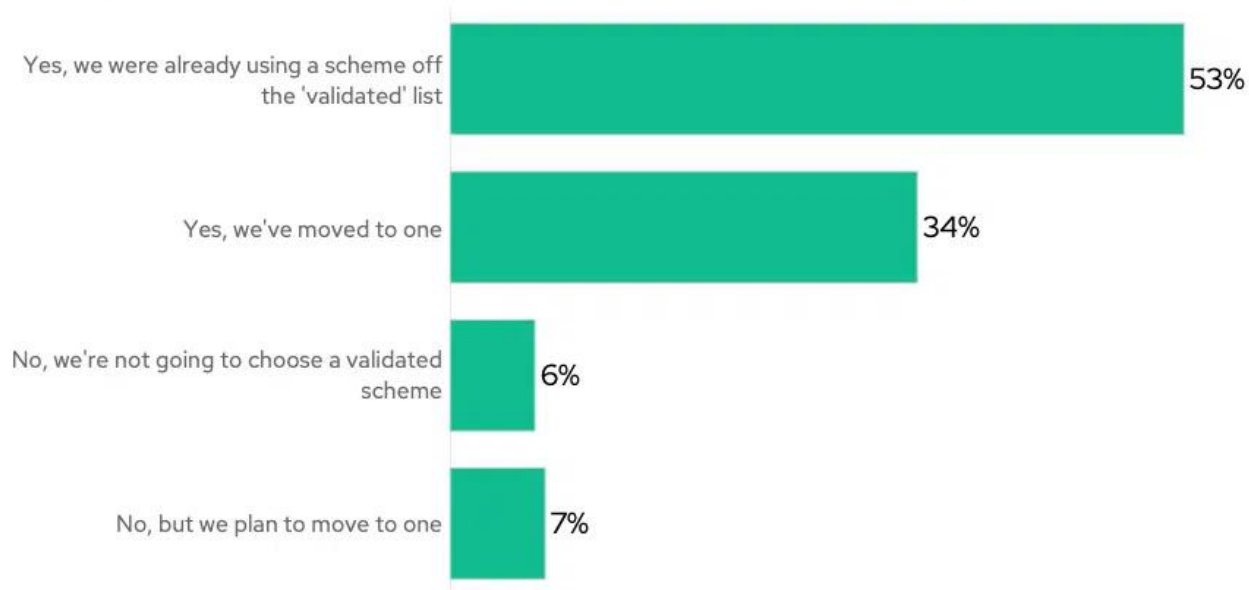
- self-assessed by its publisher; and
- judged by a small panel with relevant expertise,

and that both groups consider the programme to meet all the DfE criteria of effectiveness (see the full details on [this DfE site](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/validated-synthetic-phonics-teaching-programmes))

How many schools use a validated scheme?

Whilst schools don't have to use a validated scheme, it does take a pretty brave (and time-rich) school to go it alone in the world of phonics. By 2022, 9 out of 10 primary schools were using a validated scheme.

Does your school use a phonics scheme that's validated by the DfE?



Question answered by 1,814 teachers on 22/06/2022 (results weighted to reflect national teacher and school demographics)

Which schemes are most popular?

There are lots of validated schemes available for teachers to use! Certainly too many to fit into a normal Teacher Tapp question with a list of responses! Therefore, we asked primary teachers an open question about which scheme they use. For our analysis, we focussed on EYFS/KS1 teachers, as a lot of KS2 teachers said they didn't know or didn't respond. This gave a total sample of 707 teachers.

Comparing responses against DfE's validated list shows that provision is significantly skewed toward a small number of schemes. 80% of teachers use one of six schemes, and 60% use one of just two schemes. The top two (by some way) are Read Write Inc and Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised. Between them, these two schemes are used by more than half of schools.

Also making the top six are:

- Sounds-Write
- Essential Letters and Sounds
- Twinkl Phonics
- Bug Club Phonics.

To check the accuracy of the open question, we included the top six schemes in our monthly Brand Tracker. The data matched, and it was great to see lots of teachers saying they'd recommend these schemes to others too.

A final thought on the 'market'

For teachers, accurately learning and using an SSP scheme can be a substantial undertaking.

You'd be forgiven for not wanting to change once you get the hang of a particular programme! So, it's possible that as time goes on, we could see a consolidation of the schemes on offer with those that are not as popular eventually withdrawing their programme. Whether this is right or not is for others to decide, but here at teacher Tapp we'll make sure we keep an eye on how things change over time.