# A new early universal screener?

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# Acknowledgements

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# Session outline: Universal screening

Context

Key points of the proposal framework

Summary of objectives and next steps

Feedback so far

Comments and Q&A

# Context

o Wide-spread pupil underachievement

o Recognition that early identification of needs and provision of early intervention are crucial

o Inequity of provision and application of support where and when it is needed - roots both financial and philosophical.

o *Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child*. DfE Policy Paper, 2022

o *SEND review: right support, right place, right time*. DfE & DHSC, 2022

o *Spend to save on SEND*. SASC response to SEND green paper, 2022. https://www.sasc.org.uk/SASCDocuments/

# 'Opportunity for all'
# 'Right support, right place, right time'

Emphasis:

- teacher-led and learning-environment focused educational initiatives

- early and accurate identification of children's learning needs

- prompt access to targeted support for any child who needs it, regardless of diagnosis

Remit:

- improving outcomes and mainstream provision for all children

- timely and equitable access to support including early identification and intervention of special needs

*Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child*. DfE Policy Paper, 2022
*SEND* review: *right support, right place, right time*. DfE & DHSC, 2022

# Why now?
# The political landscape and mood

"Early Identification of any Special Educational Needs and Support is critical to improving the outcomes for children and young people with SEND"
– Nick Gibb (Minister of State for Schools)

"Early Identification is Key"
– Claire Coutinho (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Education)

"It is so very important that at the heart of the SEND review is early identification and early support"
– Will Quince (former Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education)

"We need to prioritise earlier intervention and quicker support"
– Matthew Western (Shadow Minister for Higher Education)

# SASC Recommendations

- Key checkpoints built into the Years 1-6 curriculum
- Frequent light-touch assessment
- Criteria for onward referral to more specialist services for children according to need

KS1 Phonics Screening Check

- extend to include other elements, to evaluate reading readiness.
- adapt for use as an early indicator for children who require additional intervention
- enhanced resource provision for developing children's oral vocabulary and communication skills

# Universal screening in KS1

## OBJECTIVES

Early identification and benchmarking of underlying mechanisms that give rise to variability in children's educational progress, across the curriculum

Needs to be useful but also needs to be used. Light touch and free to use.

Research informed but applied by professionals with standardised procedures for administration and interpretation but with additional training needs minimised.

## REMIT

Maximise existing knowledge from teachers, parents and pupils about individual strengths and weaknesses.

Focus on KS1, adapting and extending for purpose existing measures (e.g, the phonics check)

Extend focus to also address curricular domains other than reading (for e.g., mathematics)

All student approach: useful pre-diagnostic information for all children but also able to identify children at need of further in-depth diagnostic assessment.

# The policy framework

Teacher-led, light-touch screening for early indicators of difficulties in learning achievement
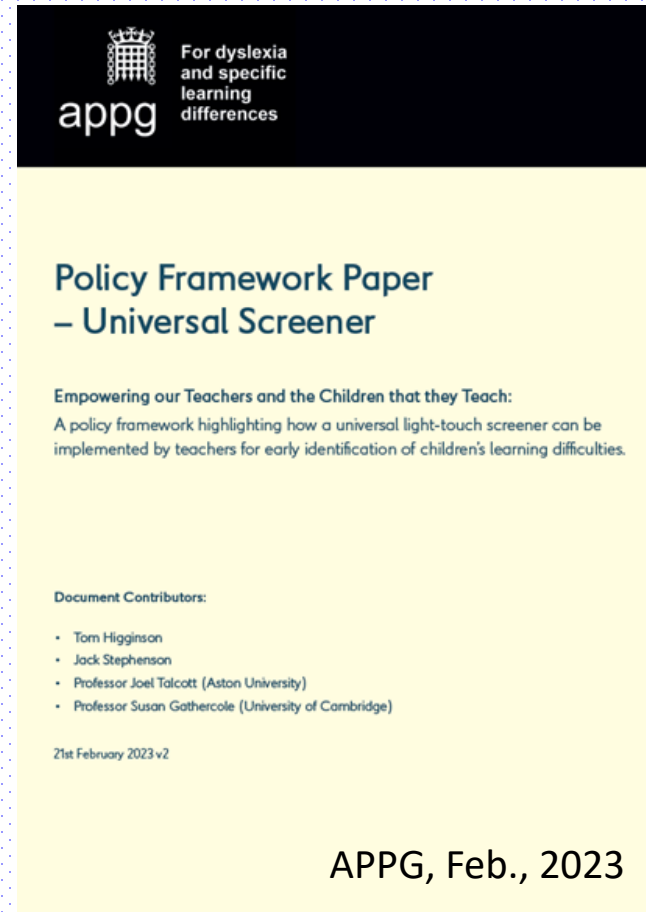
Broadens current focus to 4 core cognitive domains which promote and constrain children's learning

- Phonics (to decoding)*, vocabulary, working memory, sustained attention
- Learning extending beyond literacy, across the curriculum

Assessment of relative strengths and weaknesses

Pipelines to specific interventions and more detailed assessment services

Equity of provision: universal, classroom-based, holistic view of children's development



**For dyslexia and specific learning differences**

**appg**

**Policy Framework Paper – Universal Screener**

Empowering our Teachers and the Children that they Teach:
A policy framework highlighting how a universal light-touch screener can be implemented by teachers for early identification of children's learning difficulties.

**Document Contributors:**

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- Jack Stephenson
- Professor Joel Talcott (Aston University)
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21st February 2023 v2

APPG, Feb., 2023

# What might the screener look like?

- Administered by teacher

- Short questionnaire relating to known classroom behaviour + simple direct assessments of the child including phonics (<30 mins)

- Bespoke assessment package combining key elements of established, reliable, evidence-based assessments in short forms

- Will require standardisation and validation on UK national sample at KS1
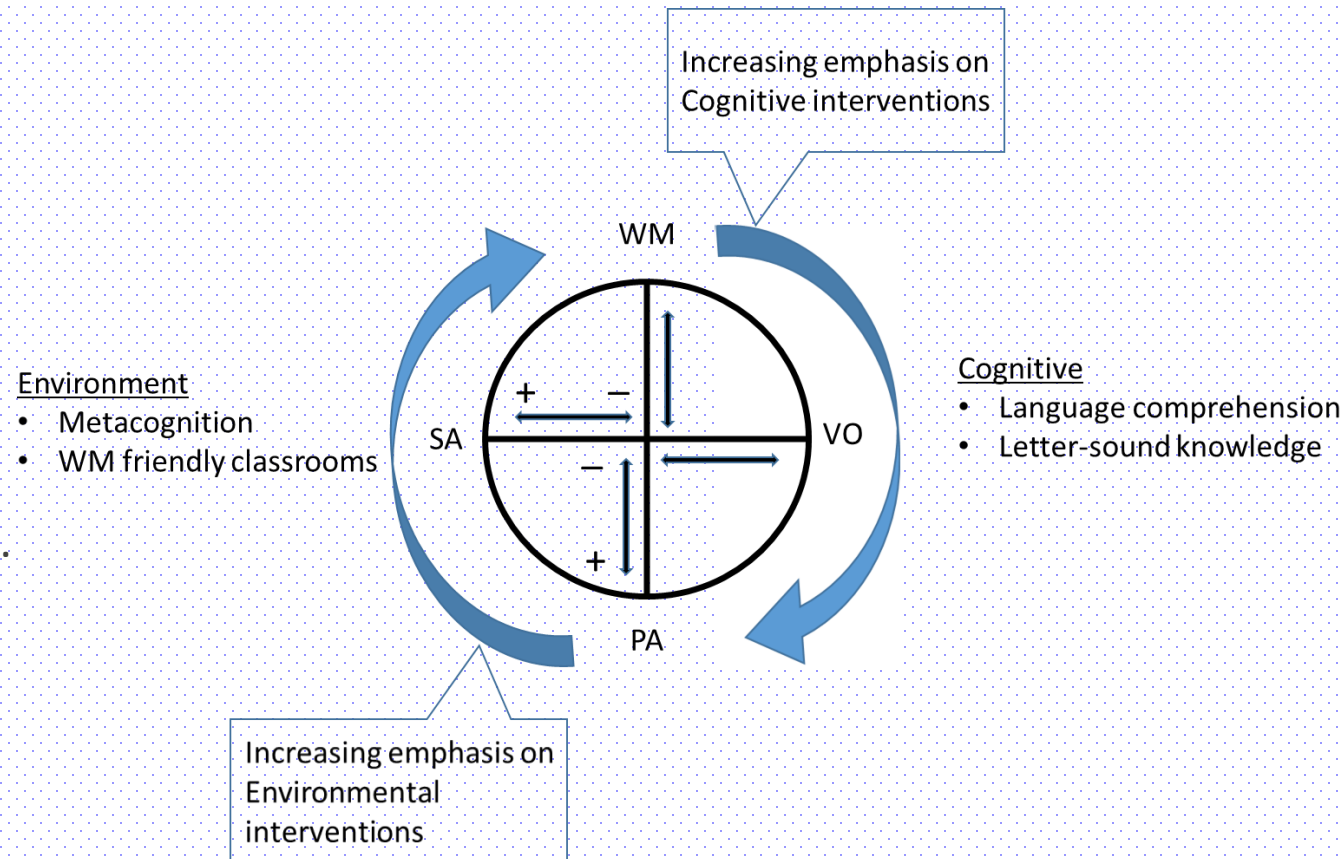
# Elements of the screener*

Initial focus on key skill domains which are foundational and underpin children's access to and consolidation of curriculum learning.

- Phonics/decoding (PA)

- Vocabulary (VO)

- Working memory (WM)

- Sustained attention (SA)

Which (other) measures to include…number sense, listening comprehension?

Pragmatic constraints on time, resources,, training, etc.

- Administered and interpreted by teachers

- Additional training and financial resourcing minimised

- Evidence-based links to interventions

Increasing emphasis on Cognitive interventions

Environment
- Metacognition
- WM friendly classrooms

Cognitive
- Language comprehension
- Letter-sound knowledge

WM

SA        VO

+    −

−

+

PA

Increasing emphasis on Environmental interventions

# Summary of design considerations

**PLAUDIT**

**P**redictive

**L**ight-touch

**A**dditive

**U**niversal

**D**imensional

**I**nform Interventions

**T**eacher led

Measures should be :

o Reliable and valid, evidence informed

o Light touch (not comprehensive assessment)

o Broad based (extended to curricular domains other than reading, e.g., maths)

o Developed with and administered by teachers (training requirements for administration and interpretation minimised)

o Non-proprietary and with limited restrictions for use.

# How could screening benefit children's learning?
## An example from Working Memory

Working memory refers to the ability we have to hold and use information for brief periods of time –

o sometimes for just seconds, and

o longer if we keep focussed on it and it's not too much to remember.

We use it all the time as a sort of mental notepad, for example:

o to remember instructions about how to get somewhere while we are doing something else

o to calculate how much our shopping will cost before we get to the checkout.

School-based learning relies very heavily on working memory

Many pupils frequently experience overloaded working memory in structured classroom activities.

This contributes to a high risk of underachievement across the curriculum at all ages.

Signs of working memory overload are children:

• needing to be reminded what to do next

• not listening to what's being said

• forgetting what they are doing or have done

• being easily distracted

• starting to follow instructions but not completing them

# Assessing working memory: An example

Teachers typically find it easy to use their knowledge of the child to judge how frequently the child behaves in ways indicating overloaded working memory.

This assessment by questionnaire-based measures should take no longer than about 5 minutes per child and could readily be adapted for use in a light-touch, freely available universal screener.



Gathercole, SE & Waterman, AH (2020). Working Memory Classroom Screener.

# Working memory interventions

Working memory capacity unfortunately cannot be directly boosted by training. But once a teacher knows that a child is showing signs of low working memory capacity, they can provide forms of support to minimise the working memory overload. They can also share their understanding with families.

There is increasing awareness by educational practitioners of working memory issues is the classroom and recognition of the need to prevent working memory failures.

A recent example from Scotland is the development of material to support the implementation of working friendly classrooms (https://highlandliteracy.com/supporting-working-memory/)

Working memory overload can be addressed by changes in practice that applies from the level of the whole classroom, group and individual child, by understanding:

o what conditions exert high working memory loads and how to minimise them

o what working memory overload looks like

o the characteristics of a working memory friendly classroom

o how to improve learning with working memory

# Evidence-based, whole classroom approaches



Perry, T., Lea, R., Jørgensen, C. R., Cordingley, P., Shapiro, K., & Youdell, D. (2021). Cognitive Science in the Classroom. London: Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)

# Screening framework: summary points

The Universal screening proposed:

- begins to address inequalities of access to support
- identifies strengths and weaknesses in key curriculum areas beyond literacy
- would provide value to teachers and augment empowerment to support their pupils
- distinct in rationale from the case for specialist assessment and diagnosis for children with the most marked difficulties.
- can inform multiple levels of support, including regular classroom activities and referral for SEND assessment

# Initial feedback from Teachers

**Response from schools in Wiltshire to**

**proposals for a**

**Universal Screener at Key Stage One**

Alison Szalay

Specialist Advisory Teacher

Wiltshire Council Specialist SEN Service

**Wiltshire Council**

(APPG, May 2023)

# 'Do you feel that screening in these areas at Key Stage One would be helpful?'

90% thought it could be helpful,

o To replace the Y1 Phonics Screening Check

o To enable standardisation of screening

o To help inform next steps, support, intervention and challenge

o To support transitions

**But…**

o Teachers already know their pupils

o Would all pupils need to be screened?

(Szalay, APPG, May 2023)

# 'Do schools already do any screening in Key Stage One above and beyond the Phonics Screening Check?'

All schools indicated that they use additional screening, including:

o Standardised assessments

o Speech and language screeners

o Dyslexia screeners

**But…**

o Less use of screeners to look at working memory and attention

(Szalay, APPG, May 2023)

# 'What sort of hurdles could a Universal Screener face?'

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o Time and money

o Expectations of what to do with screening results

o Pressure of external services

# 'Do you think a Universal Screener could be potentially useful to help ensure that all children get the support they need?'

Yes – to help:

○ Identify earlier

○ Identify wider needs

○ Inform support and intervention

**But…**

○ Concerns about resources to deliver intervention

○ And concerns about how the data could be used

(Szalay, APPG, May 2023)

# Key references

SEND review: right support, right place, right time. Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care, March 2022 (updated March 2023)

Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child. DfE Policy Paper, 2022

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Evaluation of the phonics screening check. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/307229/Evaluation_of_the_phonics_screening_check_second_interim_report_FINAL.pdf

Cracks in our foundations: Addressing the longstanding attainment gap in England's primary schools -The Centre for Social Justice (2023). https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/library/cracks-in-our-foundations

Breadmore, H.L., Vardy, E.J., Cunningham, A.J., Kwok, R.K.W., & Carroll, J.M. (2019). Literacy Development: Evidence Review. London: Education Endowment Foundation.

# Thank you!
# Questions and comments?

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