

# The fuh-ss over phonics

**Debbie Hepplewhite urges teachers to embrace the messages from the Rose Report and explains what adjustments schools need to make to fulfil the recommendations**

I have always argued for channels of good information for teachers so that they can make fully informed choices. While many are critical of the recommendations of the Rose Report becoming statutory, the report itself is nevertheless a welcome informative document.

Rose authoritatively unpicks a variety of significant issues relevant to current teaching practice thus, in effect, encouraging teachers to question latest trends often promoted by advisers. Rose's report refers to research, wide consultations, written submissions, observations in exemplar schools and classroom findings but, most refreshingly, the report is underpinned by common sense – something that many would see as sadly lacking throughout the reading wars and in education today.

Those teachers who are generally of the 'questioning' variety should draw strength from the advent of this report!

In any event, while the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) framework has always been promoted as merely 'guidance', some would argue that it may as well have been statutory – such was the clout with which it has been rolled out. Local authority advisers have tended to act with coercion to ensure schools use government programmes and the searchlights reading model rather than alternative commercial programmes. Commercial programmes are often referred to in derogatory terms in educational discussions, yet authors of leading programmes have admirably led the way in pointing to research and to the need for testing and comparing methods and programmes objectively.

Rose touches upon wide-ranging contentious issues including the early years direct instruction (perceived as 'formal' teaching) versus discovery learning and the much-argued starting age for phonics teaching.

He calls into question the individual learning styles issue and thinly veils his description of the practice in exemplar synthetic phonics schools compared to exemplar NLS schools.

Rose recommends that the searchlights reading model is replaced by a model which makes clear the separate roles played in reading by all-through-the-word blending for decoding words (synthesising) and comprehension of the text which is related to oral comprehension.

## The starting point

I strongly urge every teacher and teaching assistant to read for themselves the Rose Report with highlighter in hand – and read it several times. It is a long but very readable report with very important information to absorb and it will be yet another tragic twist in the story if people allow their disquiet regarding any statutory requirement associated with this



report to detract from its huge importance. Literacy standards will undoubtedly rise from the good advice of the Rose Report.

'The case for systematic phonic work is overwhelming and much strengthened by a synthetic approach' (p.20, Final Report, Jim Rose, March 2006).

