

PRESS RELEASE 30 SEPTEMBER 2005 from THRASS UK

## DAVID CAMERON'S EDUCATION POLICY IS FLOORED BY BRITISH PHONICS EXPERT

Here is a copy of the open letter, 30 September 2005, to David Cameron, Conservative MP for Witney, from Alan Davies, Chartered Educational Psychologist, Chester, concerning the MP's statement, "On literacy, we need concrete action to enforce the use of synthetic phonics".

### MR DAVID CAMERON: ARTIFICIAL OR NATURAL SYNTHESIS?

As a UK Conservative leadership contender, and possible future Prime Minister, you stated on 29 September, that "On literacy, we need concrete action to enforce the use of synthetic phonics".

However, as is clear from the reply to my letter dated 22 July 2005, neither you or Nick Gibb, Conservative MP for Bognor Regis, fully understand what synthetic phonics actually is – as Nick Gibb put it, "As you know, I take a keen interest in this, and would welcome the opportunity to meet you to discuss the distinction between artificial and natural synthesis" (letter dated 3 August 2005, House of Commons).

Therefore, how can you insist on 'concrete action to enforce synthetic phonics', when you don't actually know what it is? What concrete action can be used to enforce the use of synthetic phonics, if you don't know what it is?

I reproduce below, as a reminder, the last paragraph of my letter to you, published on the internet in late July, by most of the world's largest search engines (e.g. Google News, MSN News, Yahoo! News, Alta Vista News, Excite News, Webcrawler News):

"On behalf of the thousands of schools that use THRASS worldwide (Australian school teachers attended over 400 days of training last year), I would be grateful if you would let me know if Gyles Brandreth was wasting his time, in sending my synthetic phonics programme to Kenneth Clarke all those years ago, because the Conservative Party now favours the artificial synthesis approach to synthetic phonics? Or do you favour both approaches?"

It is now public knowledge that THRASS (Teaching Handwriting Reading And Spelling Skills), is one of the phonics programmes to be investigated by the British Government in the Rose Review, recently instigated by Ruth Kelly, Minister of Education. Following my meeting with Jim Rose at the DfES in London, on Friday, 23 September, I have submitted the names of five primary schools, including some where phonics is taught 'throughout the whole Foundation Stage', for OFSTED inspectors to visit. I have stated that it is ESSENTIAL that a visit is made to Windsor Clive Infant School, Grand Avenue, Ely, Cardiff, Wales. Vicky Meadows, the headteacher, and her staff, have a school in a very challenging area and since they changed from Jolly Phonics (one of the programmes that you are promoting), the school has gone from strength to strength.

Indeed, only a few weeks ago, Dr Jean Place, Principal Tutor, Foundation Division, University of Witwatersrand, flew from South Africa to watch a day of demonstrations at the school. It is her view that the standard of English phonics

teaching, throughout the school, is of the very highest standard. Jane Davidson AM, Minister for Education, Welsh Assembly, has also visited the school and been equally impressed by what she has seen, especially with regards to the teaching of essential speaking and listening skills in the nursery and special needs unit.

ITV News (Meridian Tonight) have a news feature, filmed 21 September, soon to be broadcast, that focuses on another of the schools that I have recommended, Andrews Endowed Primary School, Alton, Hampshire, along with an interview with Dr Roger Norgate, Consultant Educational Psychologist, Hampshire LEA, who confirmed that evidence, taken from eight schools in Hampshire, showed that the children's average reading scores more than doubled during the 8 months of the study and some children's reading ages improved by over 3 years (a ratio gain of over 4, that is, over four months progress per month).

BBC West Midlands 95.6FM will be broadcasting an interview that I did with BBC presenter Saul Abner. The broadcast will be on Sunday, 2 October, between 7- 8pm. This will be via DAB digital radio, and streamed online via <http://www.bbc.co.uk/england/radiowm/> - the interview includes discussion about the Botswana Government's announcement to implement THRASS in 20 rural schools in Serowe, the work I have been doing with schools and universities in South Africa and the new THRASS PHONEME MACHINE on the PHONICS 4 PARENTS website [www.phonics4parents.co.uk](http://www.phonics4parents.co.uk)

Mr Cameron, people may not agree with everything that Tony Blair does as Prime Minister but as a possible future Prime Minister of this country, I think you would be well advised to: visit Wales (and not just Clackmannanshire, Scotland), watch the ITV News and listen to BBC radio, before you make any further pronouncements on the teaching of synthetic phonics.

I believe that the THRASS programme, especially the new THRASS PHONEME MACHINE software, is tantamount to a revolution in the teaching of English phonics – a revolution that was prophesied by Gyles Brandreth, former Conservative MP for Chester, when he sent my 1992 version of THRASS to the then Minister of Education, Kenneth Clarke.

Copies:

Andrew Miller, Labour MP for Ellesmere Port & Neston

Barry Sheerman, Labour MP for Huddersfield, Chairman Education Select Committee

Ruth Kelly, Labour MP for Bolton West, Secretary of State for Education

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