



Vocabulary and Reading in Secondary Schools (VaRiSS)

3 October 2017

Dear XX (*Head teacher name*),

We are researchers at the Institute of Education, University of Reading and I am writing to invite your school to participate in a study about oral vocabulary and reading development in adolescence.

What is the study?

This project is a longitudinal study that will track the development of oral vocabulary and reading in approximately 200 pupils from Year 7 to Year 9. We know from our previous work with secondary schools that there is great concern about language and literacy levels in secondary school, a time when learning increasingly depends on independent study. However, there is currently very little research in this area that involves pupils at secondary level, so the findings from this study will contribute considerably to the research knowledgebase, as well as having implications for teaching practice.

Why is our school being asked to participate?

We are contacting your school because we are keen to work with schools that are near to the University of Reading. We plan to work with approximately three schools that between them educate a group of pupils that are broadly representative of the South East of England.

Does the school have to take part?

It is entirely up to you whether or not you give permission for the school to participate.

What will happen if the school does decide to take part?

We will visit your school over the course of three years to assess oral vocabulary and reading development in your current (2013/2014) Year 7 cohort. Pupils will be seen individually during each year for approximately two sessions, lasting 45 minutes each. These sessions will take place during the normal school day. During the sessions, pupils will complete well-established standardised tests of nonverbal reasoning, reading and vocabulary. A small subgroup of pupils will be asked to participate in 2-3 sessions per year for the first and second years of the project. During this time they will be taught the meanings of unfamiliar words, as well as their spelling patterns.

What are the risks and benefits of taking part?

The information you give will remain confidential and will only be seen by the research team. Neither you, the children, nor the school will be identifiable in any published report resulting from the study. In previous studies, schools have found it interesting to take part. It is anticipated that the findings from this study will have implications for professionals working in the field of education by informing theories of reading and oral vocabulary development. In addition, it is hoped that insights that are gained will guide quality first teaching and intervention approaches for promoting oral vocabulary and reading development in secondary school. If you agree to take part in the study, an electronic report summarising the findings can be sent to you at your request.

What will happen to the data?

Any data collected will be held in strict confidence and no real names will be used in this study or in any subsequent publications. The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you, the children, or the school to the study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Participants will be assigned a number and will be referred to by that number in all records. Research records will be stored securely in a locked filing cabinet and on a password-protected computer and only the research team will have access to the records. The data will be destroyed securely once the findings of the study are written up, after five years. The results of the study may be presented at national and international conferences, and in written reports and articles.

What happens if I change my mind?

Should you wish to withdraw your consent for participation, you are free to do so at any point by contacting us using the details given at the end of this letter. If you change your mind after data collection has ended, we will discard the school's data.

Who has reviewed the study?

This project has been reviewed following the procedures of the University Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct. The University has the appropriate insurances in place. Full details are available on request. Furthermore, all researchers with access to the pupils' data have enhanced Criminal Records Bureau clearance.

What happens if something goes wrong?

In the unlikely case of concern or complaint, you can contact Jessie Ricketts at the University of Reading by telephone on +44 (0)118 378 2796 or by email at j.ricketts@reading.ac.uk.

Where can I get more information?

If you would like further information, please do not hesitate to contact either Nicky Dawson or the principal investigator Dr Jessie Ricketts using the addresses given below.

What should I do next?

We really hope that you are interested in taking part in our research. If you are willing to give consent for your school to take part in this project please complete the enclosed consent form and return it to us as soon as you can.

Thank you for your time and we look forward to hearing from you.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

Dr Jessie Ricketts and Nicky Dawson

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The purposes of the project have been explained to me in the Information Sheet, and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to the arrangements described in the information sheet in relation to the nature of the current study.

I understand that the pupils' participation is entirely voluntary and that they have the right to withdraw from the project at any time, without giving reason and without repercussions.

Please tick as appropriate:

I consent to the involvement of my school in the study outlined in the information letter:

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Name of Head Teacher:

Name of School:

Signed:

Date: