

Dr Jennifer Buckingham OAM quoted in 'Reading experts' concern at WA Catholic schools mandating discredited Running Records assessments' (online), and 'Year 1 on Read Alert' published in The West Australian on 2 December 2023. See below:

YEAR 1 ON READ ALERT

Catholic schools use outdated tests

EXCLUSIVE BETHANY HIATT

Reading experts are warning that a directive forcing WA Catholic primary schools to assess young readers with an outdated test and discredited strategies could lead to future learning difficulties.

Catholic Education WA (CEWA) is mandating the use of "Running Records", a type of test discarded by many education sectors because it is derived from ineffective teaching methods and considered unreliable.

This year its use was listed as highly recommended but from next year it will be compulsory for about 130 Catholic schools to use Running Records to assess every Year 1 student's oral reading skills as well as some Year 2s.

Taking a Running Record involves a teacher listening to a child read aloud and ticking off words as they go, highlighting the ones they got wrong and the reason for the mistake.

The child is then assigned a reading level based on their accuracy score.

Jennifer Buckingham, strategy director at MultiLit — which sells schools literacy programs — said experts around Australia were concerned that CEWA's decision to mandate Running Records was "out of step" with trends in other States and Territories, as well as WA public schools.

"It's the only system I know of that mandates Running Records as a system-wide approach," she said.

Running Records stems from a 50-year-old reading strategy known as "multi-cueing" or "three-cueing", where children are taught to deduce unknown words based on

clues in the text, or "cues". Multi-cueing encourages beginning readers to guess at a word they don't recognise based on what they think would make sense in the sentence, clues from nearby pictures or the word's first letter.

Research has found multi-cueing reflects the habits of poor readers and is an ineffective strategy compared with teaching children to "decode" words by connecting sounds with letters using phonics.

Phonics advocate Dr Buckingham said using Running Records could potentially affect pupils' learning because it stemmed from a "disproven" reading model.

And mandating it for assessment sent a strong signal that teachers should also teach children three-cueing methods — even though research had found them to be ineffective.

"We know that what gets assessed generally gets taught," she said. "If schools are having to report data from Running Records centrally, and being evaluated or judged based on the results of those Running Records, then they're going to adjust their instruction to reflect those assessments and try to improve results."

La Trobe University Science of Language and Reading Lab co-director Pamela Snow said Running Records had not been shown to be reliable or valid assessments.

"If you're using a Running Record to try to identify children who need extra support . . . you're going to miss a lot of potentially vulnerable learners," she said.

CEWA batted away the concerns.

"Overall, CEWA students perform well in literacy and numeracy, as evidenced by NAPLAN outcomes," a spokesman said.