



22 JAN, 2024

## Hopping mad over outdated teaching

West Australian, Perth





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## Scour classroom, parents told

**BETHANY HIATT**

Beware Skippy Frog or Eagle Eye in your child's classroom.

Parents are being warned their school may not be using the most effective methods to teach reading if they see those characters being promoted.

Education program provider MultiLit has released a checklist ahead of the new school year to help parents find out if their school is up to date on latest reading instruction methods.

The Eagle Eye reading strategy encourages kids to guess at words from pictures on the page while Skippy Frog, pictured below, encourages them to skip a word they do not know — both telltale signs a school is not using best practice.

Other outdated methods not backed by evidence include giving kids long lists of “sight words” to memorise or teaching letter sounds too slowly, such as

introducing one letter a week.

Sending home “predictable” reading books containing words the child has not yet been taught in class and using inaccurate assessment tools such as Running Records are also key indicators.

Signs that a school is using evidence-based methods include phonics lessons that systematically teach children the relationships between letters and sounds and how to blend them to form words.

Use of “decodable” books containing words that children can sound out using newly-acquired phonics skills and evidence-based screening tools are also hallmarks

of good teaching.

MultiLit

senior research fellow Jennifer Buckingham said navigating the start of school could be challenging for parents, who may not know how to identify high-quality, effective reading instruction.

She said too many schools were still using outdated strategies that were inferior to teaching phonics explicitly and systematically, leaving many children struggling.

“Not all literacy teaching strategies are created equal,” she said. “Relying on predictable readers and promoting characters such as Skippy Frog or Eagle Eye might seem fun and harmless but all it does is instil unhelpful reading habits.

“As students progress



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through school, and are required to read books without pictures and containing increasingly complex words, they often struggle unless they have honed their decoding skills.”

Dr Buckingham said this year’s NAPLAN results — which revealed 35 per cent of WA’s Year 3 students were not proficient in reading — were a wake-up call highlighting the need for evidence-based practice across all schools. She urged parents to ask questions of their child’s school about how and why they used particular approaches and programs.

As revealed by The West Australian, Catholic Education WA has been criticised for mandating the use of Running Records for all its schools this year.

CEWA has previously said it backed a “multi-dimensional” approach to early literacy learning — including phonics — and Running Records was just one of a suite of assessment tools.

