



An Evaluation of Sounds-Write by the Department for Education

What follows is a report, unedited and unabridged, written by a Phonics and Early Reading Consultant for the DfE, after a drop-in visit to two days of one of our training courses, on 28th and 30th January 2013.

We believe that this gives a good indication of just how well Sounds-Write meets the DfE's requirements for a quality phonics programme.

For more information on Sounds-Write:

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How the training conforms to the DfE CORE and TRAINING criteria	
Criteria	Evaluator's comments
The training promotes high quality systematic synthetic phonic work as the prime approach to decoding print i.e. a phonics 'first and fast' approach.	<p>The training strongly and consistently promoted systematic synthetic phonics as the prime approach to decoding print.</p> <p>This position was well explained and justified and the disadvantages of alternative strategies such as whole-word learning were discussed.</p> <p>Those participating were also provided with written study materials that explained in detail why a phonics first approach is so important and beneficial.</p>
The training promotes the expectation that children start learning phonic knowledge and skills using a systematic, synthetic programme by the age of five, with the expectation that they will be fluent readers having secured word recognition skills by the end of Key Stage 1.	<p>These expectations were strongly and clearly promoted. Participants were also usefully helped to see how the 'Sounds-Write' approach and materials could support children who had fallen behind with their reading and writing.</p>
The materials and approach promoted are designed for teaching discrete, daily sessions, progressing from simple to more complex phonic knowledge and skills and covering the major grapheme/phoneme correspondences.	<p>The materials in the Sound-Write programme are clearly designed for regular periods of discrete teaching. Effective delivery of these sessions was exemplified and explored in conscientious detail. Thorough, very supportive materials also accompanied the training.</p> <p>In the Sounds-Write approach, the way in which sounds are initially introduced and the order in which this is done are somewhat different from other programmes. However the approaches taken are fully explained and justified and it is made clear that they have been selected after very careful deliberation and trialling. The programme is very detailed and rigorous and the overall content and intended outcomes are consistent with high quality systematic synthetic programmes and meet the DfE criteria.</p> <p>The 'Sounds-Write' approach and materials also have particular strengths in showing participants how to teach through children's errors and how to address the multi-syllabic words which form such a large part of reading and writing as children's skills develop.</p>
The training demonstrates how children's progress is assessed.	<p>Very helpful diagnostic assessments were introduced and explored in detail, together with appropriate measures and records.</p>

<p>A multi-sensory approach is promoted so that children learn variously from simultaneous visual, auditory and kinaesthetic activities which are designed to secure essential phonic knowledge and skills.</p>	<p>'Sounds-Write' is a 'no frills' system of teaching phonics based on a strongly didactic approach. However visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learning is an integral part of the programme throughout.</p>
<p>Training demonstrates that phonemes should be blended, in order, from left to right, 'all through the word' for reading.</p>	<p>This is an absolutely integral and essential element of every stage of the Sounds-Write approach. Blending was strongly and properly linked to the accurate enunciation of phonemes and participants were given demonstrations of this with follow-up practice.</p>
<p>Training demonstrates how words can be segmented into their constituent phonemes for spelling and that this is the reverse of blending phonemes to read words.</p>	<p>Segmenting, including the reversibility of the blending and segmenting, and its centrality to phonics learning and application was emphasised throughout.</p> <p>This was a particularly prominent feature of the training as the provider believes that aspects of phonics relating to segmenting and writing can too easily be neglected.</p>
<p>Training demonstrates how children should apply phonic knowledge and skills as their first approach to reading even if a word is not completely regular.</p>	<p>It was fully demonstrated and explained how high-frequency words are cumulatively introduced through the programme, generally in the context of the recommended 'dictation' exercises. Learning is always through asking children to respond to the parts of the word they already know, and helping them with any 'tricky' sounds, so that they can still blend through the word. The learning of whole words as 'sight words' is discouraged.</p>
<p>Training promotes that children are taught high frequency words that do not conform completely to grapheme/phoneme correspondence rules.</p>	
<p>Training promotes fidelity to the teaching framework for the duration of the programme, to ensure that these irregular words are fully learnt.</p>	
<p>Training promotes that as pupils move through the early stages of acquiring phonics, they are invited to practise by reading texts which are entirely decodable for them, so that they experience success and learn to rely on phonemic strategies.</p>	<p>The 'Sounds-Write' materials contain in-built decodable text at all appropriate stages. Additional materials evaluated as fully meeting the DfE criteria were also displayed and promoted.</p> <p>The problems and dangers of putting children into independent reading situations where they have no alternative but to learn words by sight were exemplified and discussed.</p>

<p>Training relates directly and wholly to the use of materials which meet the phonics 'Core Criteria'</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Training is generic; applicable to any of the programmes that meet the phonics core criteria.</p>	<p>Yes.</p>
<p>Trainers have relevant experience of teaching children to read.</p>	<p>Yes.</p>
<p>Training takes account of the trainees' existing knowledge and experience.</p>	<p>This is a full training programme and properly does not assume prior knowledge, although appropriate deference was always paid to the trainees' professional status and experience.</p>
<p>Training secures teachers' knowledge and understanding of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - all the basic phonemes of commonly used English words (normally accepted as around 44 in number) - all the main grapheme representations of each of these phonemes as used in written English - how phonemes should be blended, in order, from left to right, 'all through the word' for reading - how words can be segmented into their constituent phonemes for spelling and that this is the reverse of blending phonemes to read words. 	<p>The training was very secure in promoting appropriate knowledge and understanding of the phoneme/grapheme correspondences and the fact that sometimes the same spelling can represent different sounds, whilst the same sound can have different spellings.</p> <p>Similarly the reversible processes of segmenting and blending were well explained.</p> <p>A most pleasing amount of time was allowed for participants to practice and apply the relevant skills and their inevitable misconceptions were always noticed and sympathetically rectified.</p> <p>An excellent manual, for use both during the training, and subsequently by the participants and their schools, provides excellent support and is shortly to be revised to improve this even further.</p>

<p>Teachers are equipped effectively to use the materials promoted to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - achieve each and all of the outcomes implied in the Annex A Criteria - use, adapt or supplement the materials to support children who begin to fall behind the expected learning schedule - Deliver them in an effective and engaging way 	<p>There is every reason to think that those who complete the 'Sounds-Write' training, and subsequently put it into practice, will be in a strong position effectively to deliver teaching that will achieve the outcomes of the DfE core criteria.</p> <p>The training is also particularly strong in preparing teachers to support children who fall behind the expected schedule.</p>
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General comments:

This is outstandingly thorough training. Those participating are given a full grounding in all aspects of phonic knowledge, including the alphabetic code and the processes of blending and segmenting. To this is added a detailed and conscientious introduction to the rigorous and systematic 'Sounds-Write' programme, covering both theoretical background and effective implementation. All this is backed up by an invaluable handbook and is presented with all the skill and expertise that comes from extensive, effective experience of both teaching and training.

The training visited fully met all of the agreed criteria.

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