



A longitudinal study of literacy development using Sounds-Write

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These are the key findings from the original study we conducted to evaluate the efficacy of Sounds-Write when we first developed the program.

Method

A spelling test* was used to determine overall literacy progress. Data collection took place between 2003 and 2009.

Teachers were provided with all materials and conducted the spelling tests between May and June in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2.** They returned individual score sheets to the researchers, who verified the scores for every paper.

Why a spelling test and not a reading test?

- Sounds-Write teaches reading and writing together because the code is reversible.
- Students cannot spell accurately words they cannot read.
- Spelling requires retrieval memory. It is harder than reading, which only needs recognition memory - so students' reading age should be similar to or higher than their spelling age.
- Spelling tests are quicker to administer whole-class and generate a written record for every student.

Sample

1,607 children from 76 classrooms in 24 schools (5 Church of England, 6 Catholic, 11 non-denominational) across three English regions.

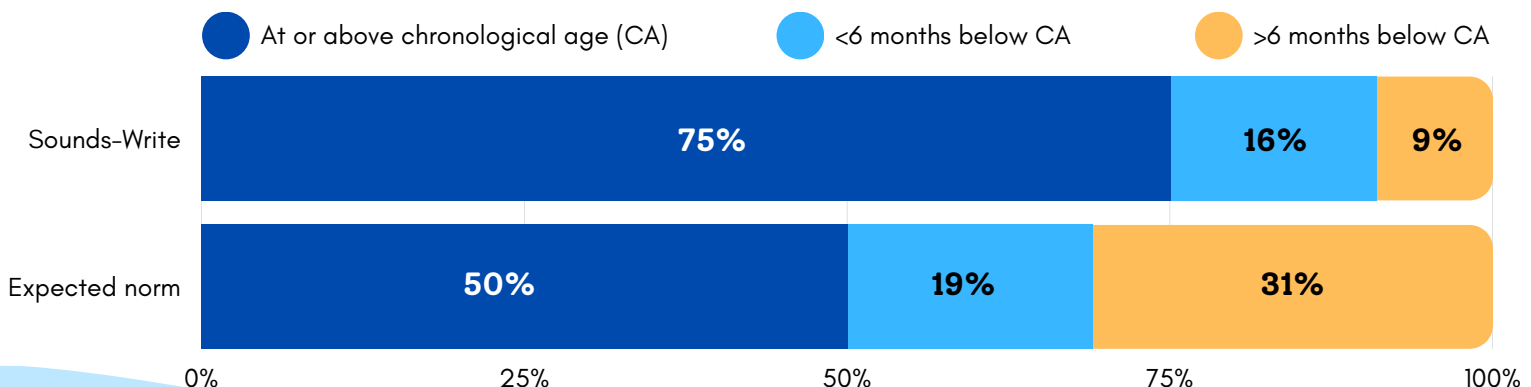
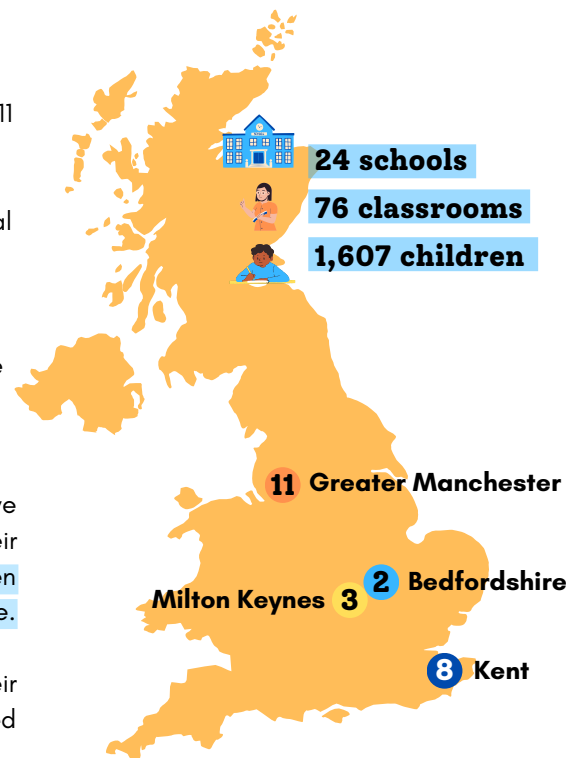
2,012 children were tested in Reception but 405 had to be excluded from the final results due to one of the following reasons:

- moved to another school before reaching the end of Year 2
- were away ill or on holiday during one of the test days in Year 1 or Year 2
- their Year 1 or Year 2 class was taught by a teacher not trained in Sounds-Write

Overall results

By the end of Year 2, 75% of children had a spelling age (SA) that was at or above their chronological age (CA), and 16% of children had a spelling age below their chronological age by fewer than six months. This meant that 91% of the children moved to Key Stage 2 with basic literacy skills at an age-appropriate level or above.

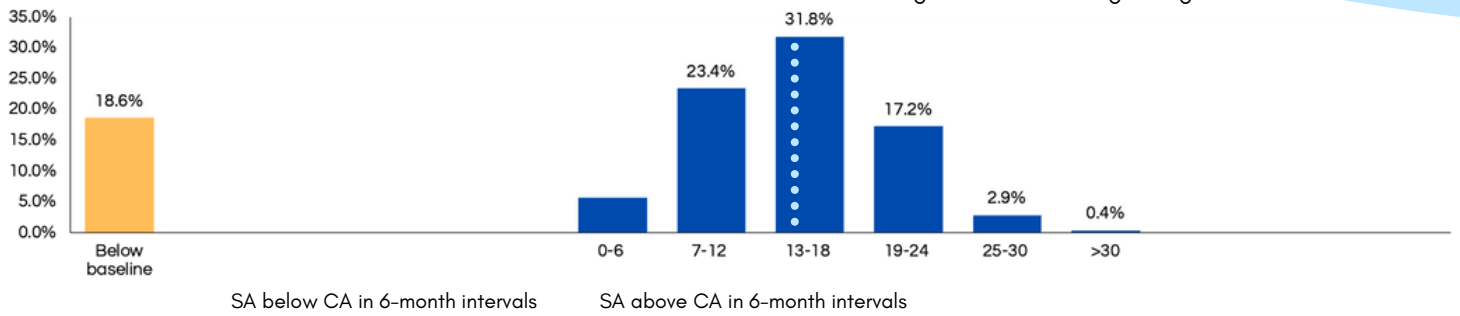
The percentage of children whose spelling age was more than 6 months below their chronological age was 9% in Sounds-Write classrooms, compared to the expected 31% in a normal distribution.



*Young, D. (1998) *Parallel Spelling Tests*, 2nd edition, Hodder & Stoughton

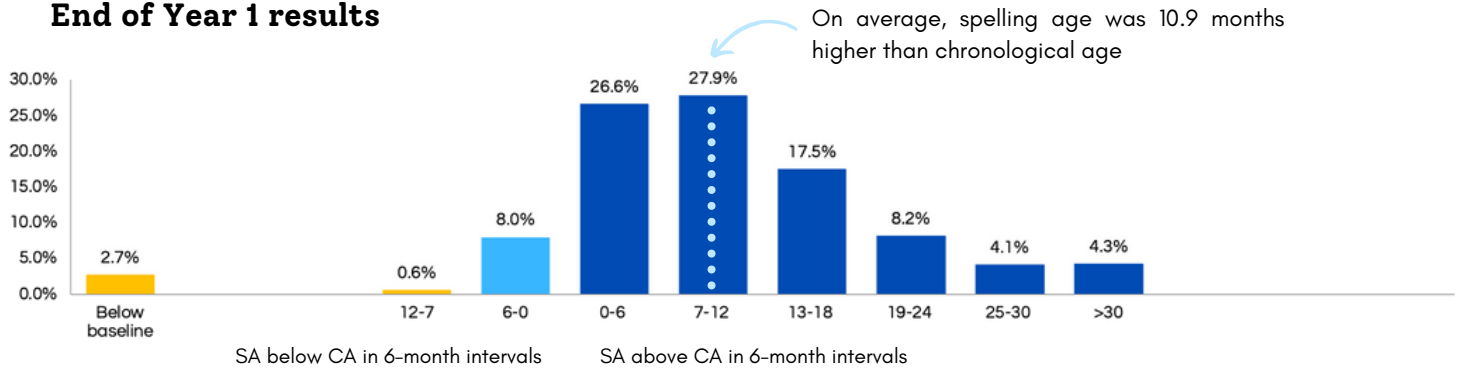
**Children in English schools start Reception the September after their fourth birthday.

End of Reception results



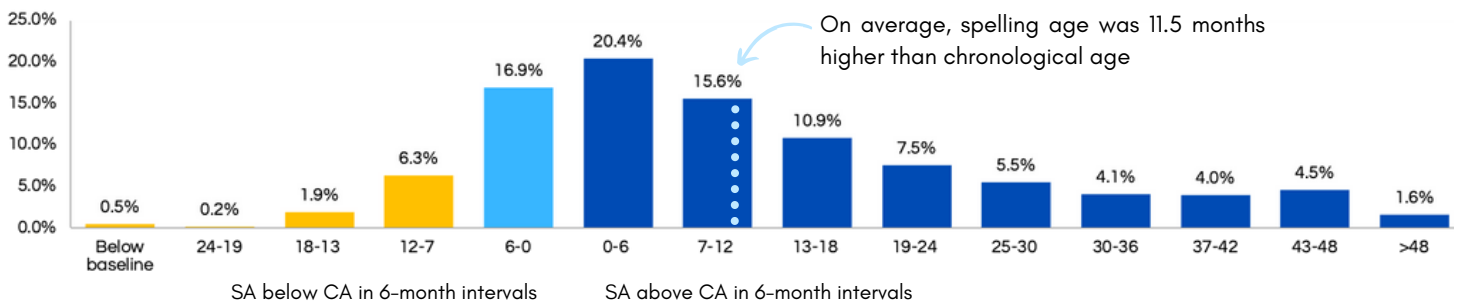
By the end of Reception, children's chronological ages range from 4y 10m to 5y 10m. The basal spelling age (lowest possible score) on the spelling test used is 5y 11m. 81.4% of children tested at the end of Reception scored on the spelling test. Their average spelling age was 6y 6.5m, 14.8 months above their average chronological age of 5y 3.8m.

End of Year 1 results



The 97.3% of children who scored on the spelling test at the end of Year 1 had an average spelling age of 7y 2.3m, 10.9 months above their average chronological age of 6y 3.4m.

End of Year 2 results



The 99.5% of children who scored on the spelling test at the end of Year 2 had an average spelling age of 8y 2.7m, 11.5 months above their average chronological age of 7y 4.3m.

Best practice

The average spelling age of the children in each of the 76 classrooms was above the norm, as was the average spelling age for boys and girls taken separately in each classroom. However, results varied across the 24 schools, with average spelling ages ranging from only a few months above expectation to over 2.5 years above expectations.

The best results were found in schools that:

- used Sounds-Write for 30 minutes every day
- followed the Sounds-Write method and sequence with fidelity
- had a Literacy lead charged with maintaining the integrity of the programme during implementation