

'Sounds-Write is a very different approach to phonics'

Olive Hill Primary Academy, UK, April 2022



Matthew Priest, Deputy Headteacher at Olive Hill, talked to us about how Sounds-Write has been received by teachers, students and parents at this inclusive two-form-entry primary in the Stour Vale Academy Trust.



- 📍 School: **Olive Hill Primary Academy**
- 📍 Location: **Halesowen, West Midlands, UK**
- 📍 Pupils on roll: **458**
- 📍 Age range: **3 - 11**
- 📍 Free school meals: **26.9%**
- 📍 English as additional language: **30.8%**
- 📍 Pupils with SEN support: **16.4%**

Why did you choose Sounds-Write?

We were attracted by Sounds-Write because of its strong evidence base. We wanted a programme for our children which was proven to work in a range of settings over time. We approached a number of schools that had used Sounds-Write and they all pointed to the positive impact the programme had in their school. In opting for Sounds-Write, we have selected a programme that can be used throughout the whole school; it suits both young children who are beginning to learn how to read and older children who need to catch up quickly. The learning is delivered in small, manageable steps with lots of opportunity for knowledge and skills to be embedded through repetition and practice. It supports our mixed-ability, whole-class approach to teaching, whilst also being well-suited to small-group interventions and one-to-one learning when needed.

How did you find the training and support provided by Sounds-Write?

One of the best things about Sounds-Write is the emphasis on staff being well trained and properly equipped to teach phonics well. I came away from the training wondering why such comprehensive phonics training is not part of every teacher training programme. It transformed the way teachers viewed phonics and has given clear strategies for teaching the key skills for early reading and writing: segmenting, blending and phoneme manipulation. Each member of staff has spoken positively about the training in supporting their development.

'The programme provides a comprehensive and clear way to teach sounds, reducing teacher workload and lightening the cognitive load for children.'
(Teacher)

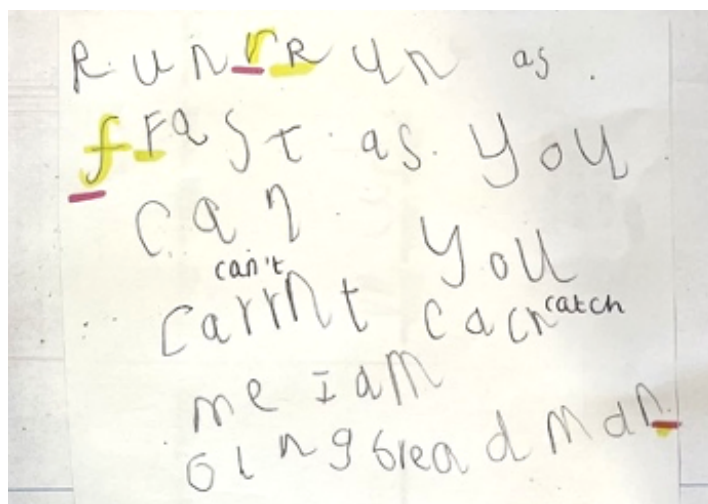
What has been the reaction from the children and parents to the adoption of Sounds-Write?

Sounds-Write is a very different approach to phonics. We used to teach with songs, rhymes, games... but we now understand that, although enjoyable, many of these were distractions or additional things to remember (adding to the cognitive load) on top of what we actually wanted the children to learn. During Sounds-Write lessons, we have found the children are engaged and enjoy taking part. Parents have been really pleased with the progress their children have made. A parent who has seen her older children come through the school was able to compare to previous approaches and was impressed.

What impact has Sounds-Write had on pupil progress?

We are still at an early stage of implementing Sounds-Write, but we can already see the immediate impact the programme has had on our children. For example, nine of a group of twelve Year 2 children who hadn't passed the Phonics Screening Check in Year 1 passed it after just one term's intervention using Sounds-Write. Children in Reception are more secure in their understanding of the basic alphabetic code and are more confident with blending and segmenting than previous cohorts. Children in Key Stage 2 are now better supported with strategies for spelling multi-syllable words.

'The phonics scheme is new. It is helping more pupils learn their sounds more quickly.'
(Ofsted, 2022)



Writing from memory, Reception (March 2022)

What would you say to other schools about the Sounds-Write programme?

The visible impact of Sounds-Write is clear just months into implementation. We are pleased with the strong foundations Sounds-Write is supporting us to lay in Early Years and we are excited by the prospect of continuing to embed the practice throughout the whole school. We would welcome any questions or conversations about Sounds-Write from anyone considering the programme.

