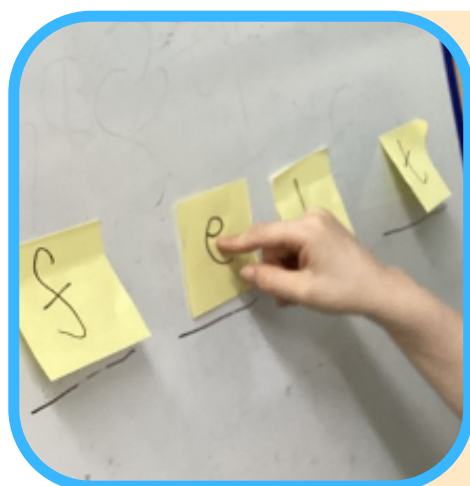


'It has improved teachers' pedagogy beyond their phonics lessons'

Torfield Special School, UK, October 2023



Jasmine Seymour is Learning Leader for Phonics and Reading at Torfield School, which began implementing Sounds-Write in March 2022. Torfield caters for pupils with Special Educational Needs including autism, speech and language difficulties, moderate to severe learning difficulties, and social, emotional and mental health difficulties. All pupils at Torfield School have an Educational Health Care Plan, and some face learning challenges such as behaviour for learning, attention, focus and retention.



- School: **Torfield Special School**
- Location: **Hastings, East Sussex, UK**
- Pupils on roll: **97**
- Age range: **4-11**
- Free school meals: **48.5%**
- English as an additional language: **7%**

Why did you choose Sounds-Write?

Before choosing Sounds-Write as our validated phonics programme, we spent time researching the programmes we thought would work best in our setting and speaking to professionals. We viewed different phonics programmes in action at several schools. Having heard such positive comments about Sounds-Write, we then spent some time at an academy that has successfully been using Sounds-Write for many years. We discussed the programme with the English Lead, observed whole-class lessons and saw how it could look in small groups for pupils with Special Educational Needs.

Initially, we chose to train members of the Senior Leadership Team, the English lead (also the Year 6 teacher) the Year 3/4 teacher and the Early Years teacher, so that we were targeting a mixture of ages across the school. We trialled this in classes as soon as teachers were trained. After just one term of trialling, we could see the benefits of Sounds-Write not only to pupils' willingness to engage in phonics, but also to their progress and confidence in reading and writing.

'The recent introduction of a structured phonics scheme has been a resounding success.' (Ofsted, 2023)

What impact has Sounds-Write had on pupil progress?

When trialling Sounds-Write, we found that in the classes implementing the programme all pupils were making better than expected progress in their reading. On the basis of this evidence, we rolled it out across the whole school.

Before the implementation of Sounds-Write, we found that pupils' spelling skills were not developing in line with our expectations. With Sounds-Write in place, we have found that pupils progress in reading and writing together, and that they are applying the skills developed in Sounds-Write sessions to improve the quality of their spelling in other subjects.

With our new selection of Sounds-Write books, the pupils are now reading books that are exactly matched to the sounds that they know. This has allowed our children to read with more fluency, accuracy and confidence, both in school and at home. Sounds-Write has raised standards in reading and writing in our school.

How do you teach Sounds-Write to students with Special Educational Needs?

In some classes and for some pupils, we adapt Sounds-Write to meet the needs of all our learners. This may include shortening the length of phonics sessions to maintain focus and concentration, small group work or 1:1 sessions. Here is how we do it.

Autism: Children love the repetitive nature of Sounds-Write and feel reassured by the scripts and routines of the lessons. Sounds-Write happens at the same time every day to ensure consistency.

Speech and Language difficulties: Pupils may work in smaller groups away from the classroom to reduce noise levels. Lessons will be supported with visuals and Makaton. As with all our Sounds-Write sessions, we never deviate from the scripts, so pupils know what instructions are coming next and understand the structure of lessons.

Pre-/non-verbal and profound hearing loss: Our pupils do lots of work on the pre-phonics skills, which include tuning into different sounds, experiencing rhyme and rhythm, and distinguishing between different vocal sounds. In addition to this, we believe that exposure to Sounds-Write is vital for their phonological development and means that children join in the lessons. Lessons such as 'Seek the Sound' and 'Sound Swap' work really well, as they are able to find sounds and build words with appropriate adult modelling. Teachers display sounds very clearly on mini-whiteboards for pupils to match the sounds and they are encouraged to use Makaton to sign the sounds they hear in words. The repetition in lessons means that pupils are continually working on associating sounds to spellings.

Severe learning difficulties: Our pupils work 1:1 with the class teacher in a quiet environment and generally focus on just one lesson per phonics session to keep the learning really focused, for example, working on 'Word Building' for five minutes. Whilst this is happening, sensory activities are often set up in the classroom for pupils to continue to be exposed to the sounds in different formats. As an example, the 'Symbol Search' lesson may be adapted to finding symbols in sand.

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

Think carefully about how you are going to roll out the training process for your staff. The training is thorough, the quality of CPD and the CPD opportunities for staff are exceptional and have improved teachers' pedagogy beyond their phonics lessons. We are really passionate about Sounds-Write. It has made a huge difference to our pupils and their reading and writing skills.