

Sound Discovery

Introduction

Sound Discovery is a synthetic phonics programme which is delivered through the Snappy Lesson method of teaching. There is substantial evidence for the benefits of synthetic phonics and it is the approach advocated by the government. This report highlights the impact of Sound Discovery and outlines the evidence on which this is based.

The impact

The evidence showed that Sound Discovery was effective:

- when used with the whole class as part of quality first teaching (wave one) accompanied by catch-up interventions for groups of children at risk of falling behind (wave two); and
- as a group intervention for those working well below age – related expectations (wave three).

The evidence for wave one and two came from assessments of over 700 children across two schools. Wave three evidence came from 250 children across 54 schools.

Whole class quality first teaching with catch up interventions for those at risk – Wave one and two

Sound Discovery has been successfully used for teaching whole Reception classes¹, with children making advancements in their reading and spelling ages and the programme helping to close achievement gaps. A teacher of a Y4 class also reported the:

“major, major improvement” in her children’s reading and spelling after using the programme for a month².

Children who used the programme throughout their primary years achieved high levels in their English SATs³. Particularly noteworthy was the impact on boys’ writing at KS1 and 2, and the reduction in those not reaching the expected level at Y6.

Advancements in reading and spelling ages – children over a year ahead

Over successive years Reception children with low base line assessments for language and social skills were on average 15 months ahead of their chronological age for both reading and spelling after participating in the programme. One teacher noted how her class entered Reception in September with no knowledge of sounds and highlighted the:

*“huge increase in the number of children being able to read and write by Christmas 2010.”*⁴

Gaps closed

Sound Discovery was effective in closing the gap for a wide range of groups of children. Boys and girls achieved equally well in reading and spelling, as did those with summer birthdays. Travellers

¹ St Michael’s CE Primary, St Paul’s Primary School

² BG Primary School

³ St Michael’s CE Primary School

⁴ St Paul’s Catholic Primary School

and children with free school meals obtained scores above their chronological age in reading whilst children with English as an additional language reached the expected level for their age in reading and spelling.

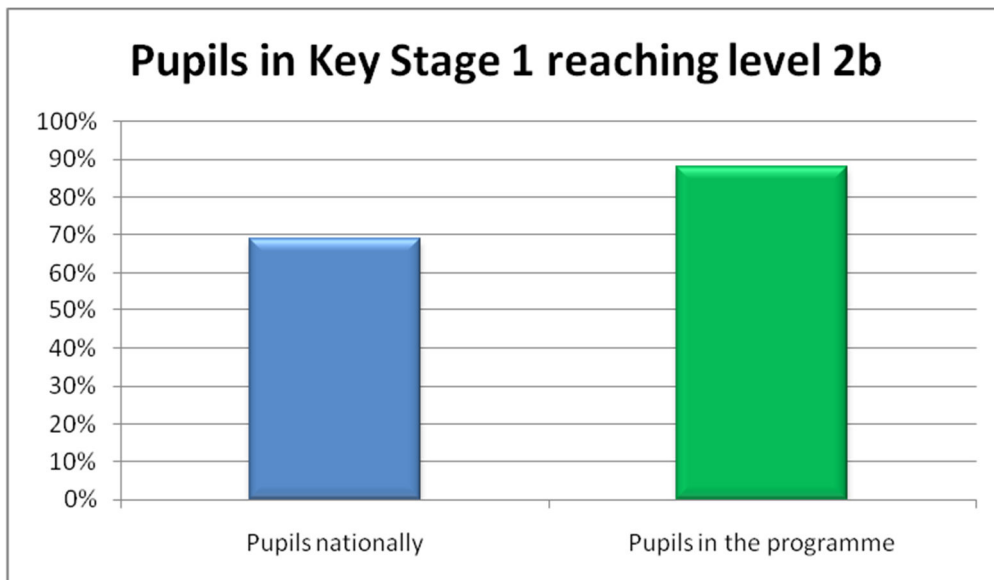
One boy with a summer birthday had significant behaviour difficulties. He refused to do any reading and would put his head on the table. After his involvement in the programme his reading was at the level expected for his age and his spelling was above average. He enjoyed practising his sounds at home.

Children caught up

Reception children who did not have a measurable reading or spelling age in standardized tests⁵ in January were given extra Sound Discovery interventions and by the summer term were between 5 and 12 months above their chronological age.

Reading and writing SATs levels well above the national average

Children who had participated in the programme throughout the primary years achieved above the national average in KS1 and KS2 assessments⁶. All of the pupils in the school received whole class Sound Discovery teaching in KS1 and 2, with extra interventions given to identified groups of children. At KS1 88% reached 2b in reading compared with 69% nationally⁷. In 2003 89.4% achieved level 4 or above in KS2 English compared with 74% nationally. The following year's KS2 results were even higher with 94% achieving a level 4 and 65% achieving Level 5 compared with 27% nationally. These results were obtained despite the children entering school with low baseline scores⁸ and the KS2 results compare very favourably with the results for pupils in similar schools.

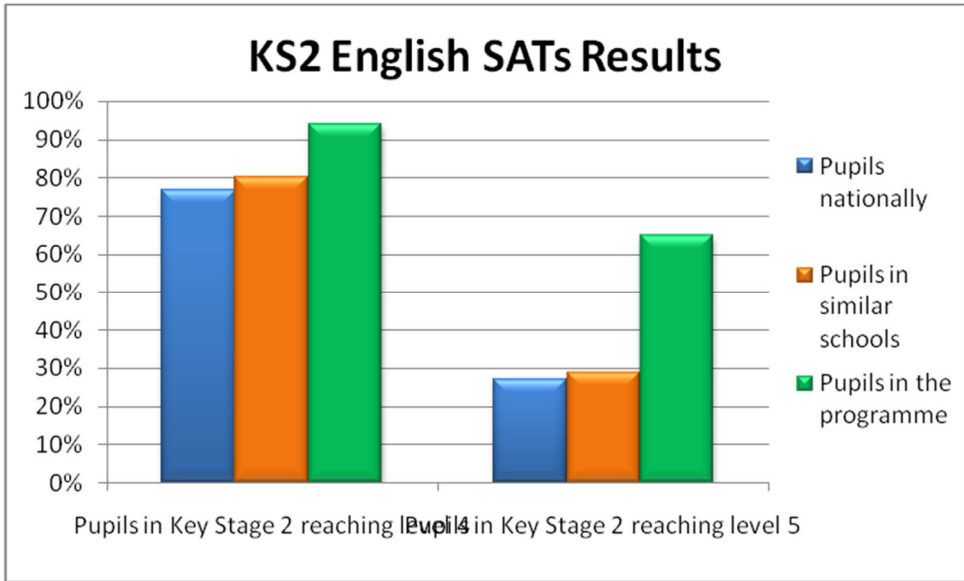


⁵ Schonell B and Burt Individual Word Reading Test

⁶ St Michael's C E Primary School

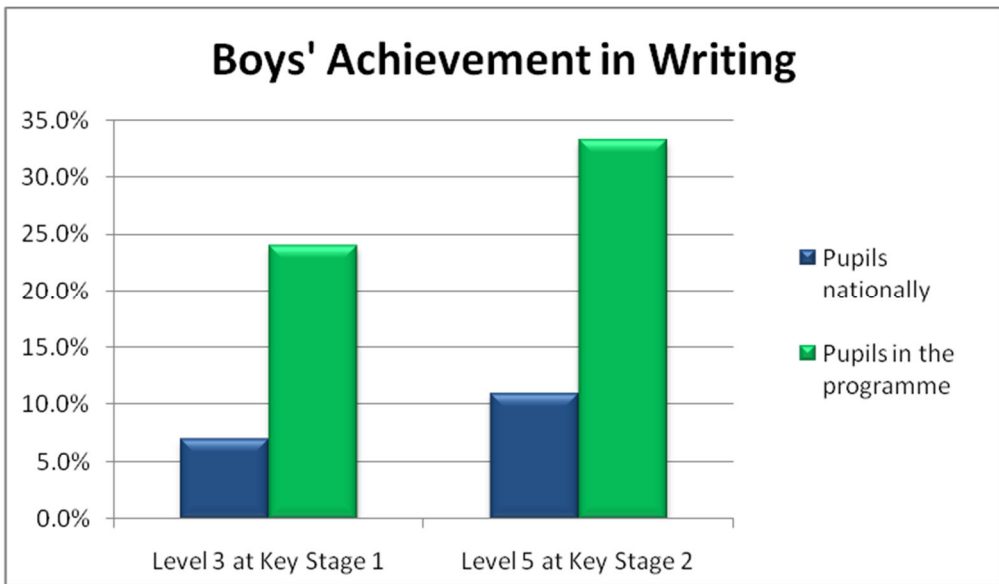
⁷ KS1 data from similar schools was not available.

⁸ "Assessments of children when they enter the reception class show that their attainment in reading and writing, and their social skills, are slightly below what might be expected for their age." St Michael's Ofsted Inspection Report, 2000, p1 (Accessed at <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspection-reports/find-inspection-report/provider/ELS/109228>)



Boys achieved high levels in writing

Particularly noticeable in the results was the performance of boys who achieved well above the national average in writing. At KS1 24% gained a level 3 compared with 7% nationally and at KS2 33.3% gained a level 5 compared with 11% nationally.



Reduction in those below the expected level

Interestingly, the use of Sound Discovery as whole school programme was not only linked to a very high percentage of Level 5s, but also to a reduction in those performing below the expected level. So only 6% achieved a level 3 compared with 15% nationally and no children achieved level 2 or below compared with 7% nationally.

One child had a statement due to his complex and severe learning difficulties. During Reception he participated in the whole class Sound Discovery sessions and also some catch –up interventions. As he moved through KS1 and KS2 he continued to receive whole-class Sound Discovery teaching and group interventions. His reading developed so that he could enjoy the sports page of the family newspaper. By Y6 he achieved a 3B for English and by Y9 no longer required a statement.

Group Intervention for those well-below age –related expectations (wave 3)

When used as a wave three intervention, Sound Discovery led to highly accelerated rates of progress in reading and spelling, with some evidence of this transferring into improved performance in the classroom. Teachers particularly noted improvements in children’s confidence. The programme has been effective with pupils with a wide range of needs and ages. Pupils and teachers highlighted the motivating nature of the programme. Schools not only noted the positive impact on their pupils’ learning but also found it easy to use.

Accelerated rates of progress in reading and spelling

Children who were experiencing particular difficulties with reading and spelling made on average 3 times the expected progress in reading after participating in Sound Discovery interventions (lasting between 10 and 16 weeks). This is well above the recommended rate of progress for an effective intervention.⁹ Pupils also made better than expected progress in spelling¹⁰.

Wave 3 – Reading and Spelling Gains

Date	Local Authority	Reading ¹¹ Accuracy Average Ratio Gain	Spelling Average Ratio Gain
2003	Norfolk CC	3.8	2.7
2004	BANES LA	3.3	1.1
2005	Norfolk CC	1.8 – 5.3	1.4 – 3.2
2008	Wiltshire CC	3.7	1.9
2009	Wiltshire CC	2.9	1.9
2010	Wiltshire CC	3.1	1.4

⁹ DfES, 2003

¹⁰ The results for KS3 children were also positive. One group of low achieving Y7s made 6-9 times the expected rate of progress for reading and spelling. A group of KS3 pupils who took part in the programme all agreed that they would recommend it to other schools.

¹¹ The ratio gain was calculated as the advancement in reading/spelling age over the period of participation in the programme divided by the duration of that period of time (i.e. the amount of time spent on the programme)

Pupils noticed the progress they made, as one child said:

“I can try to think what sound is in the word and I can write it. Before Sound Discovery it was really tricky for me.”¹²

Some teachers noted reading, spelling and writing skills beginning to be transferred into the classroom with teachers in one local authority¹³ highlighting the role that Sound Discovery played in raising writing levels. When asked about whether the skills were transferred into other areas of the curriculum one teacher noted:

“[The children showed] more independence with reading and writing.”¹⁴

Improved pupil confidence was a particular benefit noted by teachers. As one parent commented:

“I thought it was one of the most positive things she’d done. There was a marked improvement confidence wise and ability during the time. Now she’s enjoying reading – and flying.”¹⁵

Effective with a range of ages and needs

Sound Discovery has been effectively used with pupils from Reception right through to Year 8. These children had a wide range of needs including:

- dyslexia;
- moderate learning difficulties;
- autism;
- attention and concentration difficulties;
- speech and language difficulties;
- emotional and behavioural difficulties; and
- English as an additional language.

Motivating and fun

Teachers and pupils highlighted the motivating and enjoyable nature of Sound Discovery. For example, one child commented:

“It has helped me with my sounds and spelling and it’s fun!”¹⁶

- The headteacher at this child’s school particularly noted the way in which reluctant readers and writers moved from saying:

“no’ or ‘I can’t’ ...to ‘I can’ and ‘Can we do some more during playtime?’”

¹² Pupil from Priestly Primary, Wiltshire.

¹³ Bath and North East Somerset

¹⁴ North Elham Primary School

¹⁵ Parent, Bath and North East Somerset

¹⁶ Child P, Y5, North Elham

Easy to use

Schools found Sound Discovery easy to use. Teachers highlighted the clear, manageable lesson structure and the simplicity of the resources. Learning support and teaching assistants also found the materials straightforward to use. One learning support assistant commented that:

“[the manual was] simple and clear”¹⁷

and another noted that:

“once everything was photocopied and prepared it took only minutes to get the actual lesson prepared”¹⁸.

In one local authority,¹⁹ teachers particularly felt that the programme contributed to developing their confidence in meeting the needs of children who experienced difficulties with reading and spelling.

The evidence base

Over 8 successive years Reception children in a large primary school were taught from October to July using the programme (wave 1). Those at risk of falling behind were given Sound Discovery as a catch-up intervention (wave 2). The reading and spelling ages of in total 700 children were assessed in the summer term (see table below). The reading and spelling ages of 30 Reception pupils from another school were also assessed following their use of the programme.

A table to show the average number of months above their chronological age of Reception pupils after participation in Sound Discovery:

Reception	Pupil nos.	Reading	Spelling
Summer 1997	66	6m	6m
Summer 1998	90	12m	17m
Summer 1999	85	17m	18m
Summer 2000	86	16m	18m
Summer 2001	84	16m	18m
Summer 2002	89	15m	16m
Summer 2003	88	15m	15m

¹⁷ North Elham Primary School

¹⁸ Bath and North East Somerset

¹⁹ Bath and North East Somerset

Summer 2004	86	15m	15m
-------------	----	-----	-----

Sound Discovery was used for whole class teaching and as a catch up intervention for the pupils from the large primary school as they moved through the school. Evidence was collected of their KS1 and KS2 SATs results.

Sound Discovery was used as a wave 3 intervention in 54 schools in 3 local authorities. The reading and spelling ages of the 250 children were measured before and after the use of Sound Discovery. Teacher and pupil questionnaires were completed by some of those involved in the wave 3 interventions.

Summary of Results of Local Authority Wave 3 Intervention Studies using Sound Discovery, 2003-2010:

Date	Reference	Year Group(s)	Numbers	Schools	Taught by	Reading ²⁰ Accuracy Ratio Gain	Spelling Ratio Gain	Time
2003	Norfolk CC	YR – Y6	17	1	Teachers/Teaching Assistants/Group	3.8	2.7	10 wks
2004	BANES LA	Y3	18	4	Teachers/Teaching Assistants/Group	3.3	1.1	20 wks
2005	Norfolk CC	Y2 – Y8	47	13	Teachers/Teaching Assistants/Group	1.8 – 5.3	1.4 – 3.2	12 wks
2008	Wiltshire CC	Y2 – Y3	46	15	Teachers/Teaching Assistants/Group	3.7	1.9	3-4 months
2009	Wiltshire CC	Y2 – Y3	52	11	Teachers/Teaching Assistants/Group	2.9	1.9	9-12 wks
2010	Wiltshire CC	Y2 – Y3	70	12	Teachers/Teaching Assistants/Group	3.1	1.4	9-12 wks

²⁰ The ratio gain was calculated as the advancement in reading/spelling age over the period of participation in the programme divided by the duration of that period of time (i.e. the amount of time spent on the programme).