

# 11 St George's Church of England Primary School, London, England

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## 1. Context

I work as a teacher for St George's Church of England Primary School, a one-form state primary school in Battersea, London, where I have taught in Key Stage<sup>\*2</sup> 1 (KS1) and used Sounds-Write since 2017. I am the KS1 leader and the phonics lead at the school.

With a total of 222 students in 2020/2021, St George's Primary School had 51.8% of students whose first language is not English (versus an average of 20.9% across English mainstream primary schools), 47.7% of students eligible for free school meals\* (versus 23.5% across English mainstream primary schools), and 20.7% of children on the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) register – 10.8% of whom had an Education, Health and Care Plan\* (EHCP) (versus 12.6% of students with SEND support across mainstream primary schools and 2% with EHCPs)<sup>3</sup>. St George's Primary School was rated as Good by OFSTED\* (2019) and the report deemed that

“adults ensure that pupils secure their phonics knowledge early on. For example, the highly effective teaching of phonics is enabling pupils in Year 1 to identify the six spelling choices for the sound ‘o’.

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2. An explanation for terms followed by an asterisk can be found in the glossary: <https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2022.55.1367>

3. <https://www.compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk/school/101044/st-george-s-cofe-primary-school/2021/absence-and-pupil-population>

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Pupils use this information to support the very strong spelling seen in their literacy work<sup>4</sup>.

## 2. Implementation

When I joined the Year 1 team in 2017, Sounds-Write was already well-established within the school from Reception to Year 6. I was trained in Sounds-Write straight away and was lucky enough to be mentored through my teaching by a Sounds-Write trainer and experienced teacher of early reading who had been working at the school for nearly 30 years.

Our Sounds-Write journey began in 2011. Spelling across the school was poor and it was clear that the phonics programme we were using was not working for us. In September 2011, all of the teaching staff and teaching assistants were trained in Sounds-Write and the programme was implemented throughout the school.

When new teachers arrive at St George's, they are enrolled onto the Sounds-Write face-to-face 4-day training course straightaway and are mentored by a more experienced member of staff, through team teaching and support with planning, until they are fully confident in teaching Sounds-Write. The way in which we mentor new members of staff includes observing the teachers regularly and giving them in-the-moment feedback. We also hold gallery lessons in different year groups for new members of staff to come and see, and we team teach with them for the first month or so when they start. Team teaching in phonics means that we plan and deliver the lesson together.

Sounds-Write also offers Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and support for the teachers and we often have one of the Sounds-Write trainers come into school and offer support and training. Since implementing the Sounds-Write programme, the school has seen dramatic improvements in reading, writing, and spelling outcomes for the children and in teachers' subject knowledge. We have

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4. <https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50055580>

seen our Phonics Screening Check\* results rise to between 96%-100% each year and the spelling in KS2 has greatly improved – this has been shown through our data from Young’s *Parallel Spelling Tests*\*.

At St George’s we teach Sounds-Write from the end of nursery through to Year 6. We teach the children as a whole class and provide interventions, where necessary, for those children who require extra support. In Year 1, where the children begin to learn the Extended Code, we have a specialist teacher who is able to take a small group of children that require more support and teach them the same content as the rest of the class but at a pace which suits them. The specialist teacher will take the children at the same time as the rest of the class are having their phonics lesson. This group of children does not always stay the same throughout the year – if a child becomes more confident during the lessons and we can see the progress in their written work, then we will put them back into class. Similarly, a child who has begun to need additional support in the whole class lesson will be moved to the small group that requires more support.

In this particular case study, I have taken Young’s *Parallel Spelling Tests* data for one class and followed their spelling progress throughout their time at our primary school. The data includes their spelling data from Year 1 to Year 6 – omitting Year 5 data due to COVID-19 school closures. I have 20 students to comment on as I have excluded data for children who either left the school before Year 6 or who arrived later than Year 1.

Each child in this cohort has been taught phonics using the Sounds-Write programme from Reception through to Year 6. In Years 1 and 2, they were taught in two groups – one larger group was taught in the main classroom and a smaller group of seven or eight children were taught the same content by a specialist teacher at a pace more suitable for them. The smaller group was made up of children who had either SEND or English as an additional language. Children 4, 6, 8, 9, and 18 all have English as an additional language and were given extra one-to-one interventions whilst they were in KS1. In KS2, the same children were monitored closely during phonics lessons and taken for interventions as a small group when they were in Year 3 and 4.

### 3. Evaluation

Using the Sounds-Write programme in our school has completely transformed the teaching and learning of phonics, and enabled our children to be successful readers and writers. We can see this across the school through our good level of development data, Phonics Screening Check results and Young’s *Parallel Spelling Tests* data. Every class from Year 1 to Year 6 takes a test from Young’s *Parallel Spelling Tests* in September and again in June. **Table 1** shows Young’s *Parallel Spelling Tests* data for the June spelling test taken by the same class from Year 1 to Year 6, and the progress made each year.

Table 1. Young’s *Parallel Spelling Tests* data for the same cohort of children from Year 1 to Year 6

Child	Year 1 2016			Year 2 2017			Year 3 2018			Year 4 2019			Year 6 2021		
	Age	Spelling Age	Progress since Sept.	Age	Spelling Age	Progress since Sept.	Age	Spelling Age	Progress since Sept.	Age	Spelling Age	Progress since Sept.	Age	Spelling Age	Progress since Sept.
1	6.8	9.7	2.6	7.8	10.5	0.8	8.8	11.9	1.4	9.8	12.3	0.4	11.8	>15.0	+
2	6.6	9.9	3.3	7.6	11	1.1+	8.6	12.5	1.5	9.6	13.7	1.2	11.6	>15.0	+
3	6.4	7.7	1.8+	7.4	8.2	0.5	8.4	8.8	0.6	9.5	10.0	1.2	11.5	12.4	+1.4
4	6.3	6.7	0.6	7.3	7.5	0.8	8.3	7.7	0.2	9.3	7.9	0.2	11.3	9.0	+0.1
5	6.9	9.0	1.9	7.9	9.3	0.3	8.9	12.5	3.2	9.9	12.7	0.2	11.10	>15.0	+>1.1
6	6.0	7.7	1.0	7.0	7.8	0.1	8.0	8.6	0.8	9.0	9.0	0.4	11.0	9.8	0.5
7	6.6	8.1	1.6	7.6	9.7	1.6	8.6	11.9	2.2	9.6	13.7	1.8	11.7	>15.0	+
8	6.3	7.4	0.8	7.3	7.7	0.3	8.3	8.1	0.4	9.3	10.7	2.6	11.3	8.6	+0.4
9	5.10	7.7	1.6	6.10	8.5	0.8	7.10	9.1	0.6	8.10	10.0	0.9	10.10	10.8	+1.0
10	6.3	8.5	2.0	7.3	9.5	1.0	8.3	11.1	1.6	9.3	13.2	2.1	11.3	>15.0	+
11	6.1	7.8	1.3	7.1	8.5	0.7	8.1	10.2	1.7	9.1	10.4	0.2	11.2	11.4	0
12	5.11	7.5	0.9	6.11	9.7	2.2	7.11	11.1	1.4	8.11	13.2	2.1	10.11	>15.0	+>2.1
13	6.3	7.8	1.1	7.3	9.9	2.1	8.3	10.2	0.3	9.3	11.4	1.2	11.3	13.5	0
14	6.1	8.0	1.1	7.1	9.0	1.0	8.1	10	1.0	9.1	10.3	0.3	11.1	14.4	+2.0
15	6.7	9.7	2.7	7.7	10.5	0.8	8.6	11.4	0.9	9.7	13.7	2.3	11.7	>15.0	+
16	6.4	8.5	1.1	7.5	9.3	0.8	8.4	11.1	1.8	9.4	12.0	0.9	11.5	14.4	+1.2
17	6.7	7.7	1.1	7.7	8.6	0.9	8.7	10	1.4	9.7	10.7	0.7	11.7	11.6	+0.2
18	6.2	7.5	0.9	7.2	8.2	0.7	8.2	9.4	1.2	9.2	9.8	0.5	11.2	10.8	+1.0
19	6.1	8.2	1.3	7.2	9.9	1.7	8.1	12.5	2.6	9.2	13.7	1.2	11.2	15.0	1.8
20	6.9	8.5	1.9	7.9	8.6	0.1	8.9	10.8	2.2	9.9	12.0	1.2	11.9	13.5	+1.9

**Table 1** shows the progress in spelling for 20 children over five years at our school. All of the children have made good progress, with many children making significant progress during that time. Looking at the results for each year, you can see that every child's spelling age increased consistently from the September spelling test to the June spelling test. In Year 1, all of the children had a spelling age which was higher than their chronological age and they all made huge progress during this year – this was the year when they learned most of the Extended Code. This continued into Year 2 – with 85% of children making between 0.5 and 2.2 years' progress from Year 1 to Year 2. As a result of this, all of the children passed the Phonics Screening Check in Year 1 and were fluent readers by the end of KS1.

In KS2, all children continued to make progress during each academic year with at least 90% starting the year with a higher spelling age than their chronological age. Even though some children may have only made what seems like a small amount of progress for the academic year, it is important to also look at their spelling age in comparison to their chronological age – for example, Child 1 made 0.34 years progress in Year 4 but their spelling age was 12.3, in comparison to their chronological age of 9.8.

The children who had interventions in KS1 and KS2 (Child 4, 6, 8, 9, and 18) seem to show little progress between Year 4 and Year 6. This is due to the effects of lockdowns and remote learning. Those children were targeted for online tutoring by their class teachers, however, lack of internet, computers, a quiet learning space at home, and engagement with online learning all stood as barriers to the children's progress. Once provided with a device which had internet access, engagement with home learning was still a struggle. The majority of students, however, still made huge progress despite the difficulties of home learning.

From as early as Year 1, when we begin to teach the Extended Code, we see an increase in confidence in the children's independent writing from using the Sounds-Write programme. Children from a young age are able to segment the word that they want to write into the correct sounds and use the sound-spelling

correspondences that they know to write the word. They are also confident enough to ask which spelling of a certain sound is the one that is used in the word they are trying to write. Our use of phonics displays in every classroom enables children to become more independent in their writing, with children and teachers referring to them whenever they are writing. In KS2, the children use the strategies they have learned in the polysyllabic lessons to write words independently.

Despite the struggles that the children have faced over the past two years, by the end of Year 6, 69% of children had a spelling age that was higher than their chronological age. In comparison to national data, 36% of students met the higher standard for grammar, punctuation, and spelling in the 2018/19 Year 6 national tests. These results have enabled the children to leave primary school and move onto secondary school as confident readers, writers, and spellers. The teachers can all feel confident that they have each made a positive impact on all of the children’s reading and spelling over their primary school career and the results are a testament to the school’s high expectations for teaching and learning.

Table 2. Phonics Screening Check – % passing

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
National results	74%	77%	81%	81%	82%	82%
St George’s results	100%	100%	100%	100%	97%	93%

The results from the Phonics Screening Check, as shown in [Table 2](#), are a real testament to the Sounds-Write programme. The majority of our children pass the screening check with a score of 40/40 and enter Year 2 as fluent readers. In 2018 and 2019, we had a small number of children who had SEND and although they made excellent progress during Year 1, they were unable to pass the Phonics Screening Check. Despite this, our results were still considerably higher than the national average for both years.

[Table 3](#) shows that the percentage of children at St George’s achieving a good level of development for literacy (comprehension, reading, and writing) at the end of Reception has increased from 2016 to present, and our results are consistently

higher than the national average. This is due to the comprehensive programme that Sounds-Write provides for teaching the Initial Code in the Early Years.

Table 3. Good level of development at the end of Reception

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019
National results	69.3%	70.7%	71.5%	71.8%
St George's results	71%	83%	80%	80%

#### 4. Recommendations

Our experience at St George's has shown the importance of training all staff in Sounds-Write, including teaching assistants, in order to ensure consistency and fidelity to the programme throughout the school. In ensuring that all staff are fully trained, it also means that there is more capacity in school to deliver interventions to those children who require additional support. We often use our most experienced teaching assistants to deliver any extra interventions – especially for children who are new to the country or who have English as an additional language. These interventions are delivered in the afternoons in KS1 and in KS2 we either bring the children into school slightly earlier or hold a session after school. The class teacher is responsible for planning all of the sessions, even if they are not always delivering them. They will then liaise with the adult who is delivering the session to monitor the children's progress. The content of the sessions will be based on what the teacher knows the child needs more support with from what they have seen in the phonics lessons. Weekly spelling tests and half-term grammar, punctuation, and spelling tests are used to track the children's progress, as well as their independent writing.

Having a member of staff lead and support phonics in school has been essential to the success of the Sounds-Write programme, especially with KS2 where phonics is not traditionally a focus and teachers do not feel as confident in their teaching of it. We have found that good quality CPD resources provided by Sounds-Write have helped tremendously in developing teacher subject knowledge and confidence in teaching the polysyllabic word lessons in particular.

In order to maximise the impact of Sounds-Write in the children's writing, each classroom has a phonics display which is updated with each new sound that the children learn. This acts as a fantastic reference point for the children during their Sounds-Write lessons. If it is an unfamiliar word, they will often ask which spelling of a certain sound is in a word that they are writing and the teacher will use the display to point to the correct one. When a child is faced with spelling an unfamiliar word, especially in KS2, their knowledge of breaking words into syllables from the polysyllabic lessons provides the children with strategies to attempt to write words that they would usually shy away from. Each child has a whiteboard at their table and we encourage them to try and write an unfamiliar word there first before they write it in their books.

At St George's we have also found that using the Sounds-Write reading books in conjunction with the programme has had a huge impact on our children's reading levels. Each child in Reception and KS1 reads with an adult every day and they take a book home every night. The expectation from us is that they read with an adult at home for 15 minutes every night and we will change the book the next day. We have found that the combination of Sounds-Write lessons and guided reading sessions every day, where a Sounds-Write trained adult is using all of the language and error corrections from the programme, has enabled the children to make incredible progress throughout the early years and KS1.

We also hold family learning sessions every half term to teach the parents the strategies we use at school to teach their children. There is always a phonics, a reading, and a writing family learning over the year. During these sessions we encourage the parents to complete the free Sounds-Write Course for parents and carers and we share a link with them which shows them how to pronounce the pure sounds precisely.

At St George's, to further refine our practice, we are continuing to train our staff by booking them onto the new Sounds-Write CPD sessions, such as the Year 3 to 6 course, the masterclasses, and the planning webinars.



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