

## Sound Discovery® - Return to School Guidance

How can Sound Discovery® help to close the gap after school closures?

Sound Discovery® is the only systematic synthetic phonics (SSP) programme that has conducted extensive research on its teaching method, <https://www.syntheticphonics.net/pdf/2014-Report.pdf>. The research findings showed that Sound Discovery® could prevent the literacy failure that is so common for children with dyslexia and who could currently be presenting as the slowest progress readers. Sound Discovery® is probably the most comprehensive of the SSP programmes endorsed by the Department of Education, <https://www.syntheticphonics.net/product.php?id=83>.

In September, schools can expect to have an increased number of children with catch up needs, since they will have missed out on a lot of learning over the last 6 months. Learning to read is key but the spelling aspect could apply to many more primary children. The children who have fallen behind will include the slowest progress readers but also those who were on-track before COVID-19, and who have not traditionally been in intervention groups. All these children need to catch up, make a speedy start in September and regain confidence rapidly. Sound Discovery® is just what is needed as it provides the following:

1. simple tools to assess children's phonic knowledge, skills, reading and spelling;
2. simple-to-follow prepared lesson plans which fill in the gaps;
3. decodable reading books and structured writing activities aligned with the Sound Discovery® teaching steps to consolidate learning and build up confidence.

### Assessment

The first task for teachers when schools open in September is assessment. Hence, they need assessment tools which are quick and easy to use. Sound Discovery® provides these in the Manual and through the Placement Tests. Some children, especially those in Years 1 and 2, may have weak phonic knowledge and skills and still be struggling with reading and spelling. Sound Discovery® assessments pinpoint where their difficulties with early literacy lie and show where to place children on the programme. The assessments can also be used for ongoing monitoring.

### Teaching

There are seven Sound Discovery® books of prepared lessons, with accompanying resource materials providing the words and sentences needed to teach the lessons, <https://www.syntheticphonics.net/product.php?id=75>. These books cover all the steps of the programme: the alphabet, digraphs, alternative spellings and polysyllabic words. Every lesson covers both reading and spelling/writing at sound, word and sentence levels. It is an advantage of the Sound Discovery® programme that it supports spelling as well as reading. Its assessments include spelling and every lesson includes spelling of words and sentences. Later column sort lessons at Step 3 help children to make correct spelling choices. Whilst children might think they are focussing on spelling and writing at this stage of the programme they will also be revising and extending their ability to decode individual words and sentences. Videos on the website of teaching vowel digraphs and alternative spellings might be useful in this context: <https://www.syntheticphonics.net/uploads/HomeSnappyLesson.mp4>; <https://www.syntheticphonics.net/uploads/SchoolColumnSortLesson.mp4>.

Some key pedagogical principles help children to learn and to catch up fast. Note also the video on the website of Jackie Day on the effectiveness of the Sound Discovery® methodology, <https://www.syntheticphonics.net/uploads/Interview.mp4> :

- The teaching is interactive and lively.

- Lessons involve direct instruction (modelling): I do, we do together, you do.
- Sessions have a fast pace to engage children’s attention and manage behaviour.
- Strategies are multisensory, integrating what you see (letters) with what you hear (sounds) and with what you do (kinaesthetic).
- There is little-and-often practice with materials at exactly the right level.
- Prepared lesson plans provide consistency, making it easy for all staff to deliver high quality teaching.
- Reinforcement and repetition is built into the lessons.
- Lesson plans are simple-to-teach and cover the key skills in small steps.

## Organisation

The practicalities of implementing this approach require teachers to timetable extra phonics teaching – whatever it takes for children to catch up which has to be the key objective in September. Daily sessions are preferable and at first they should take priority in the timetable. This structured, highly supported approach, with success built in, will also contribute to positive mental health - building up children’s wellbeing and confidence.

Small group teaching is usually more effective than one-to-one teaching, as groups provide a positive dynamic for learning. The groups should be as homogenous as possible i.e. reading/spelling at more-or-less the same step of the programme. Successful catch up is unlikely if there are less than three lessons per week.

Pupils with *severe* literacy difficulties may need extra *individual* sessions daily together with additional daily opportunities to practise and apply their phonics skills to reading and writing activities, especially if they have got left behind. Many parents found it hard to get children writing during lockdown. Sentence dictation in each Sound Discovery® Snappy Lesson will help with getting children back on track with this.

Don’t forget to include ‘strugglers’ in whole class phonics which should be taking place at the pace recommended in the English Hubs Sound Discovery® documents. Aim for ‘no child left behind’ and never give up! The quicker that children can catch up with their reading and writing the quicker they can access the wider curriculum and ‘read to learn’.

Children in Reception should be starting phonics lessons as soon as possible. This will engender a positive sense of achievement right from the beginning.

## Extra Practice – Consolidate Learning and Regain Confidence

Children need extra practice with applying their phonics to reading and writing. Extra practice will consolidate learning and help children regain confidence. They will benefit from the extensive range of decodable texts and structured writing activities in the Sound Discovery® Additional Materials Pack, also the Precision Monitoring materials to build up reading fluency, together with the materials to support comprehension, <https://www.syntheticphonics.net/product.php?id=73>.

The Modelled Approach to Writing described in the Manual extends writing skills to compositional writing.

We are also fortunate to have the 56 Rapid Phonics decodable books, published by Pearson Education, that are aligned with the teaching steps of the Sound Discovery® programme. These books contain a mixture of fiction and non-fiction stories that children particularly enjoy reading. They are available in paper form and in an e-learning format that children can also access from home.

The new Sound Discovery® e-learning training programme will train new staff in an easily accessible way and can provide a refresher for staff previously trained, <https://www.syntheticphonics.net/uploads/e-learning%20training%20programme.pdf>. The programme is very easy to follow and the video clips give clear examples. It is a modular programme available in four different packages to suit a range of training needs. The Modules are PowerPoint presentations with embedded audio and video. The nine Modules with accompanying activities and webinar would provide a two-day English Hubs training. For more information contact [training@syntheticphonics.net](mailto:training@syntheticphonics.net) or telephone: 0117 962 2670.

All the links in this guidance document can also be accessed directly via the website: [www.syntheticphonics.net](http://www.syntheticphonics.net)

To view exemplar lesson plans and their accompanying resource materials (the words and sentences required to teach these lessons), see our *Guide for Parents*, on the website, <https://www.syntheticphonics.net/uploads/Guide%20for%20Parents.pdf>

Dr Marlynne Grant, August 2020.