

Simple criteria for evaluating and selecting a synthetic phonics reading AND spelling programme

Does the programme:

1. Recognise the importance of NOT teaching children an initial 'sight' vocabulary where words are learnt as whole units?
2. Teach the children in a simple way, from the beginning, how the English alphabetic code works for reading and writing, namely: that words are made up of sounds (phonemes) and that letters (graphemes) are used to represent the sounds?
3. Teach that the core skill of reading (word identification) lies in blending the sounds all-through-the-word eg. /k-a-t/ is cat, /sh-ee-p/ is sheep and that the core skill of spelling lies in identifying the sounds (phonemes) all-through-the-spoken word and choosing the correct letter or letter-combinations (graphemes) e.g. cat is made up of the sounds /k-a-t/, sheep is /sh-ee-p/?
4. Focus initially on the sounds associated with the letters and letter combinations and NOT the letter names?
5. Work at the level of the individual sound/phoneme (that is the smallest single identifiable sound in speech) and NOT larger chunks of words?
6. Introduce the letter/s-sound correspondences at a fast pace (3-6 per week) and use them for reading and spelling words straight away?
7. Systematically teach children to learn the frequently used words that have an unusual spelling by blending, identifying the awkward part and learning the correct pronunciation?
8. Thoroughly cover the basic code, which is generally the most common spelling for each sound, AND then systematically introduce the advanced code; which is the remaining common spelling alternatives for each sound?
9. Ensure that children are not expected to read, by themselves, words, sentences and books that do not match their phonic knowledge?
10. Ensure that children are not expected to write words, sentences and stories independently, before being taught how the writing system works: that is, before gaining the phonic knowledge and skills to represent the sounds in words?