

SEN Teacher in three Secondary Schools: SRS with her first pupils...

I began teaching SRS straight after the training course (April 2013) and am thoroughly impressed by it. I work in three secondary schools and have had to adapt it to the situation I am in e.g. in one school I am only there one day a week so it is impossible to keep to the exact programme. In each school I am very stretched and have slightly different roles but have managed to find three different ways of using SRS.

In one school I am sticking to your plan - one-to-one tuition in the recommended timings. **The results have been tear-jerkingly good.** I am working with a girl who at the age of 14yrs 11 mths had a reading age of 10 yrs 1 mth. She has no learning difficulties that I can make out, just hadn't got the basics and had been drifting ever since. In 7 weeks her reading age had gone up by 17 months. She is absolutely delighted, has continued to make very good progress and is becoming fascinated by language, listening out for things and wanting to talk about words and grammar, getting annoyed that these things were never taught to her in the past. Another child was 13 yrs 1 mth old and had a reading age of 8yrs 9mths (lots of gaps in his education and his answers in the reading test were so random I'm not really sure that it's an accurate score). In 9 weeks his reading age had gone up by 11 months. He had got into the habit of guessing, not just the next word but the next sentence, and it's been quite a task to get him to trust that he can read what I put in front of him and I won't ask him to read things that he hasn't been taught. He continues to make good progress.

In another school I am teaching two pupils together because of timetable constraints. It is not as obvious an impact because I can't individualise it to the same extent but it is still proving to be useful because it is such a comprehensive method - they will both get everything they need, just might take longer.

In a third school I have done some individual SRS work with S3 pupils with very impressive results - one of the boys' reading age went up by 20 months in just 3 months of tuition, one hour a week. It all just made so much sense to him it seemed to click everything into place very quickly indeed. With another, he has such poor sound processing skills that any attempt at reading and spelling was exceptionally difficult. He had learnt some spellings by heart but he could not connect them to the sounds, they were just random shapes that he wrote down to please teachers that seemed to make little sense to him. (His primary teacher had just told him not to bother joining in class spelling tests because there was no point - he just couldn't do it and it was destroying his confidence) It took ages to start from the beginning with the 'Sound Snips' but we stuck with it and it is now starting to make a difference - his spellings actually have some connection to the sounds and he can even copy from the board more accurately. (I don't think that people always realise how hard it is for someone to hold an abstract shape on the board in their head and copy it onto a page. When the shape becomes more meaningful it is easier to memorise.)

In the same school I am teaching SRS as group spelling lessons to 7 pupils together because it was impossible to see them all individually and they all need the help. The English teacher there is also doing similar lessons for an S1 class with the same gap in their knowledge of the alphabet code. (I did the SRS diagnostic test with the whole year-group

and there were huge gaps across them all.) I prepare the SRS sheets for the class and she delivers the lesson. It is early days with this but I can give you an update in the future.

I have to say that SRS is the most comprehensive reading/spelling programme I have come across and I know that several people have been impressed by this. There are some people who still believe that children should be taught the basic 42 spellings (e.g. Jolly Phonics) and that they will then make all the rest of the connections in the spelling code on their own but if they don't come from the kind of household where reading is part of their normal lives then this is unrealistic.

We wouldn't give piano lessons teaching all the white notes and then say all the black notes are just tricky and you're on your own from here! That's how I feel about some of the pupils that I have been working with - they've been given some information but then they've been expected to sort the rest out alone.

Senior Management teams have been extremely supportive of my work. However, I am still fighting my corner with some secondary teachers who are not used to any kind of phonics intervention after pupils reach 11/12 years old and with others who are very reluctant to release pupils from lessons because they don't want them to get behind in their subjects. Teachers are under such pressure to make sure that pupils succeed in their subjects that they sometimes forget that the pupil would get much more out of it if he/she could read independently and not feel excluded by having to have help the whole time. However, I know that success breeds trust and SRS is certainly successful. I will let you know how it goes in the coming months.

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