

British Schools now free to choose Commercial Phonics Programmes, such as THRASS, using new Government Website

The British Government is withdrawing the two main phonics programmes implemented over the last decade so schools are now free to choose commercial programmes if they wish. It is due to publish a new resource but has advised schools that they should not delay selecting and using an effective phonics programme. Last year, the Government published criteria to help schools select a high quality programme and the THRASS phonics programme scored full marks against all these criteria. THRASS UK is now one of the first publishers to submit self-assessment details of its programme for publication on the Government's new dedicated phonics website.

The THRASS (Teaching Handwriting Reading And Spelling Skills) phonics programme, has been pioneered by British phonics expert and educational psychologist, Alan Davies, who has twice been invited by OFSTED to present papers on phonics at its invitation seminars, so it perhaps not surprising that THRASS scores so highly.

The THRASS programme meets the Government's core criteria in the following ways:

- a. THRASS is a '10-skills' programme for the systematic teaching of synthetic and analytic phonics.
- b. THRASS 15 Minutes a Day x 2 is a 4-year scheme of work for teaching and assessing the 10 skills, which enables children to start learning phonic knowledge and skills systematically by the age of 5.
- c. The programme focuses on the 44 phonemes of spoken English, the 120 keygraphemes of written English (the most frequent graphs, digraphs and trigraphs) and the reading and spelling of the 500 high frequency words - taught in discrete daily sessions using the scheme of work.
- d. All skills are assessed by criterion-referenced tests with observable standards of achievement, recorded on a Profilecard.
- e. Simultaneous visual, auditory and kinaesthetic activities (VAK skills) are encouraged throughout so the programme is multisensory.
- f. In Keyword Synthesis, learners are assessed on their ability to blend, read and spell. The free THRASS Phoneme Machine software has a SYNTHESIZE THE WORD button for blending the phonemes, from left to right, 'all through the word' for reading, in 500 high frequency words.
- g. Most of the THRASS resources show the phoneme/grapheme relationship, through having all words clearly separated into their graphemes - to demonstrate how words can be segmented into their constituent phonemes for spelling.
- h. Learners are taught the many different 'jobs' that letters do in the high frequency words, so they are competent and confident with the alphabetic principle, even if a word is not completely phonically regular.
- i. Learners read and spell 500 high frequency words. The spelling is taught using the THRASS 'Say Name Cover Write Check' procedure and the use of Spelling Logs. This ensures that learners practise words that do not conform completely to grapheme/phoneme correspondence rules.

j. In the early stages of THRASS, especially Picture Location and Keyword Location, teachers, assistants and parents work together to develop essential speaking and listening skills by acting-out, matching, naming, describing, categorizing and discussing 120 key pictures and the associated keywords with their children. The creation of phrases, sentences and stories is also very much encouraged to develop imagination, competence and confidence. Learners are also encouraged to turn over the pages of a book, with the help of an older child or adult, to 'pretend-read' a favourite story.

In addition to meeting the core criteria, the THRASS programme has good 'Fidelity to the Model' (consistency in the teaching of the programme), which is achieved through high quality accredited training. Thousands of Professional Development Course evaluations, amassed from hundreds of courses over the last decade, can be viewed on the THRASS website.

But the THRASS phonics programme also offers much more than is required by the published criteria. It provides an extensive picture-based training website for schools and parents with easy access to a wide range of resources and support materials and extensive evidence of the widespread success of THRASS. Teachers, parents, educational psychologists and speech and language therapists in thousands of schools in the UK, Europe and Africa use THRASS and the website includes a number of demonstration lessons and shows THRASS being used very successfully in a wide range of schools, including new schools like Oxley Park Primary School, Milton Keynes (assessed as outstanding in its recent OFSTED inspection) and also challenging inner city schools like Windsor Clive Infants School, Cardiff, both of which are Centres of Excellence for teaching THRASS.

And the THRASS programme also provides the Phoneme Machine, a groundbreaking computer programme that is free to download and uses moving human lips and the International Phonetic Alphabet to teach children, and indeed learners of all ages and abilities, to read and spell in an entertaining and fun way. The Phoneme Machine has recently received software accreditation from SMART for use on its interactive whiteboards in the countries that THRASS UK is licensed to serve and, in addition, it is to be showcased at Microsoft's African Schools Technology Innovation Centre.

A 'snapshot' assessment of what the THRASS phonics programme offers and how it meets the criteria overall, together with further detailed information about how the programme meets each of the criteria is on the British Government's dedicated phonics website www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/phonics. It is also on THRASS UK's main website at www.thrass.co.uk/dfes.htm, and there is a downloadable PowerPoint for schools and universities.

The THRASS extensive picture-based training website is at www.thrass.co.uk

For a summary of the main features and benefit of THRASS, visit www.thrass.co.uk/keyfacts.htm

The phonics papers presented by Alan Davies at OFSTED invitation seminars in 1999 and 2003 can be downloaded from www.thrass.co.uk/downloadsdocs6.htm and www.thrass.co.uk/table.htm

Demonstration lessons can be viewed as videostreams or downloaded as wmv or Ipod files from www.thrass.co.uk/tvc.htm

For information about the Phoneme Machine and to register for a free download of the software, visit www.phonememachine.com

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