Reading Age data in Y1 & Y2 for pupils taught using Sounds~Write (from the 2007 report)

Although we have previously explained why we did not choose to use reading tests to measure the progress of pupils being taught by Sounds~Write, we always knew that there would be those who needed to see such data. We are therefore particularly grateful to all those Y1 and Y2 teachers who have taken the trouble to also test their pupils on the Burt (Word recognition) Reading Test for us. All of their results are shown in the two tables below.

Table 1: Y1 Pupils, Burt Word Recognition Test Reading Ages

Gender	No: of pupils tested	Number not reaching test baseline of 5.03 years	Pupils who did score on the test			
			Number	Average Age (CA) in years and months	Average Reading Age (RA)	Months ahead in reading (RA – CA)
Girls	**692**	**5** (0·7%)	**687** (99·3%)	**6 years 3·6 months**	**7 years 0·4 months**	**8·8 months**
Boys	**683**	**18** (2·6%)	**665** (97·4%)	**6 years 3·4 months**	**6 years 10·9 months**	**7·5 months**
Total	**1375**	**23** (1·7%)	**1352** (98·3%)	**6 years 3·5 months**	**6 years 11·7 months**	**8·2 months**

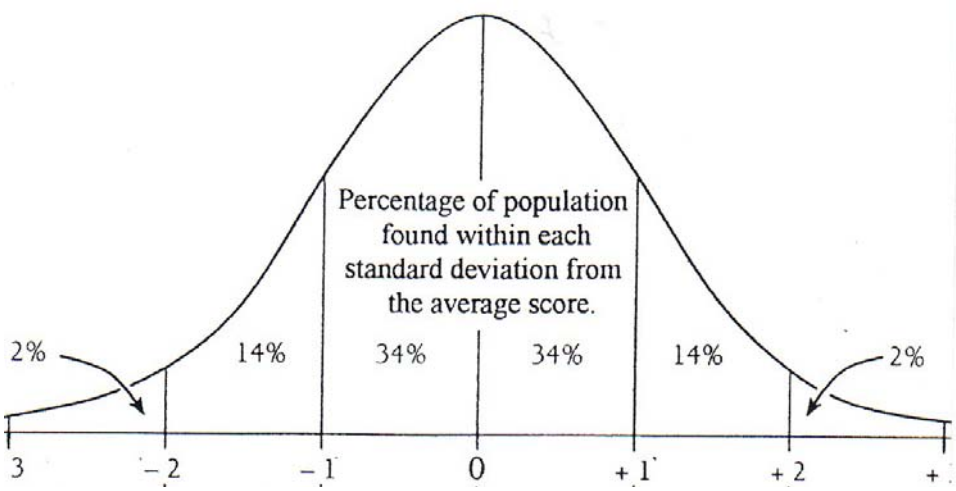
Table 2: Y2 Pupils, Burt Word Recognition Test Reading Ages

Gender	No: of pupils tested	Number not reaching test baseline of 5.03 years	Pupils who did score on the test			
			Number	Average Age (CA) in years and months	Average Reading Age (RA)	Months ahead in reading (RA – CA)
Girls	**295**	**0** (0·0%)	**295** (100·0%)	**7 years 3·8 months**	**8 years 1·3 months**	**9·5 months**
Boys	**304**	**1** (0·3%)	**303** (99·7%)	**7 years 2·7 months**	**7 years 11·3 months**	**8·7 months**
Total	**599**	**1** (0·2%)	**598** (99·8%)	**7 years 3·2 months**	**8 years 0·8 months**	**9·1 months**

When we started collecting data we said that we thought that the effect of the Sounds~Write programme on the expected Bell curve would be to push it to the right (*i.e. increase average attainment levels*) and skew it so that the left-hand slope became steeper and the right-side tail became elongated (*i.e. that many more pupils would come to understand the phonic principles underlying the English alphabet code and make much more progress than traditionally expected*). We were very pleased to see that this was indeed the case.

We have included a picture of the theoretical Bell curve below so that readers can compare it with the bar charts shown on page 3 for the Y1 and Y2 reading data. The curve would be obtained by joining up the centres of the tops of each bar in the charts, but obviously to get a really good curve you would need more data and to draw many more bars of much smaller groupings than the six-monthly intervals that we have presented.

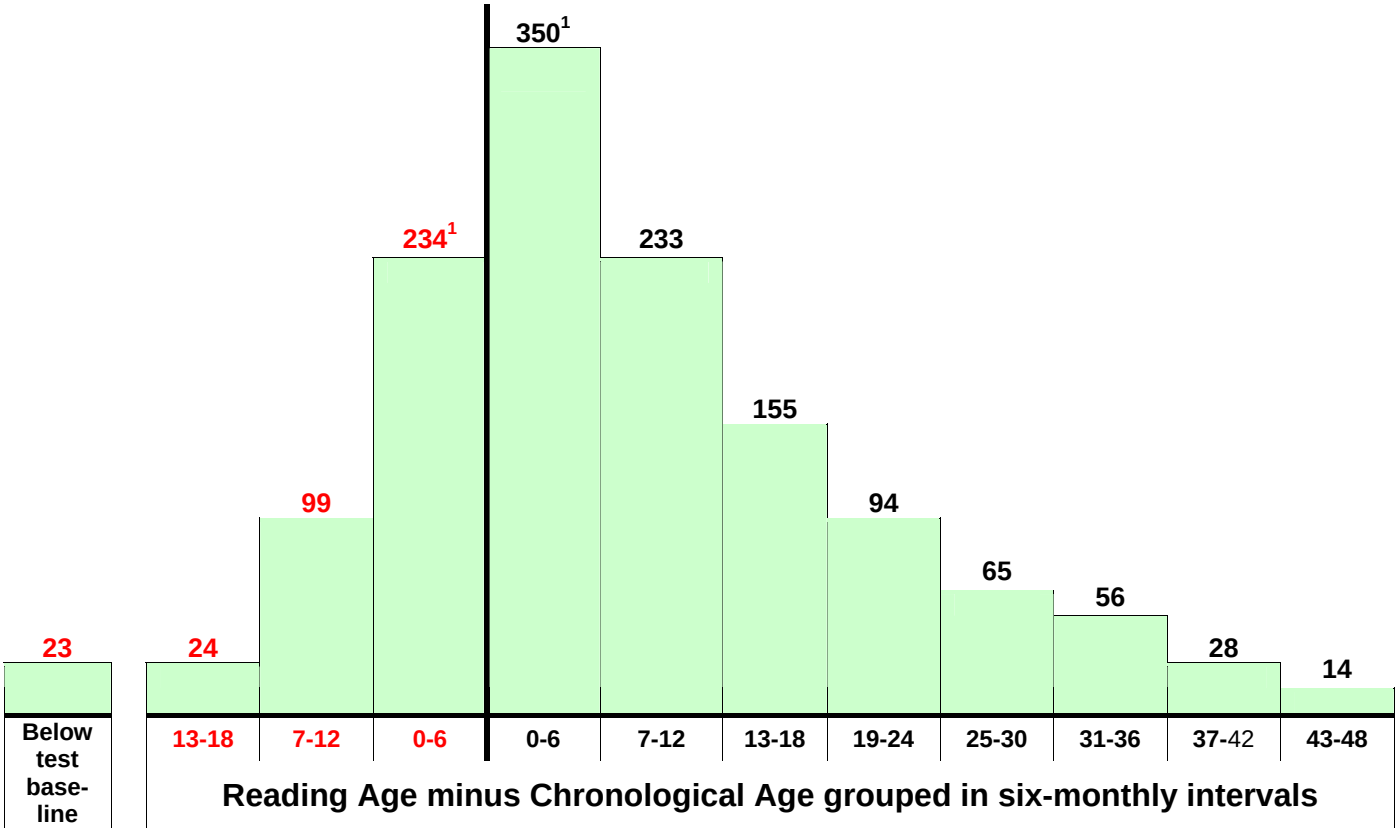
Figure 1: The Normal Distribution Curve (Bell curve)



We have previously commented that the results of traditional reading tests that have been made to conform to the Bell curve can only do so artificially, because those tests are measuring two variables that are only minimally correlated: (i) sight-memory for high frequency words, and; (ii) accurate phonic decoding skills. We therefore predicted that pupils taught by Sounds~Write would demonstrate results on traditional reading tests that would differ from the Bell curve because they would be consistently dissuaded from sight-memorising any words at all. The Y1 and Y2 bar charts of reading test results are both shown overleaf so that readers can compare their distributions. It is quite obvious that the Y1 distribution conforms to the sort of right-skewed distribution we predicted, while the Y2 results appear to be moving towards a rectangular distribution that bears very little, if any, resemblance to the normal distribution Bell curve that should result from the test used.

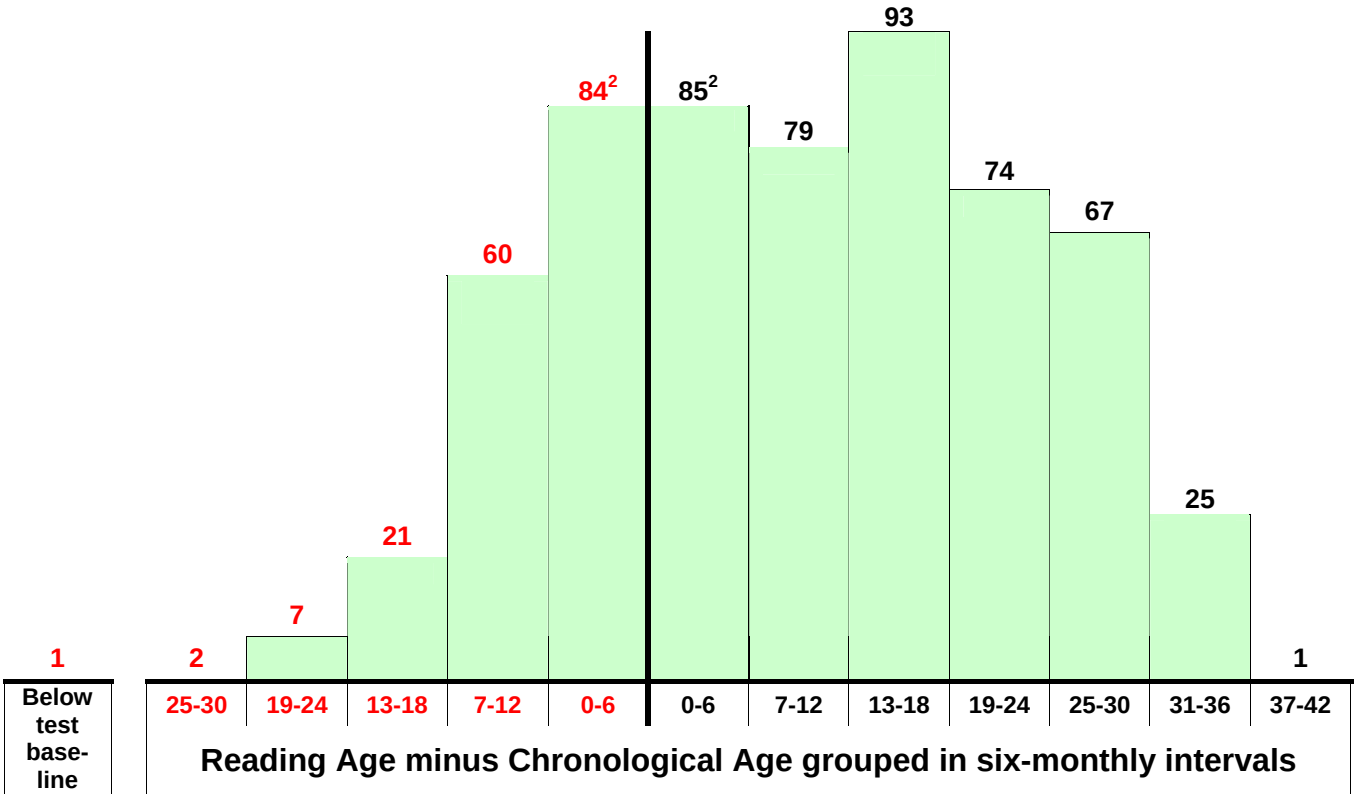
We would be rather surprised if our pupils' progress in literacy was not normally distributed. We think that it is. Unfortunately, currently available reading tests have been artificially standardised in a statistical manner that makes them inappropriate and inaccurate for use with pupils who have been taught by genuine phonic principles.

Bar chart of Year 1 pupils placed in six-monthly intervals of Reading Age above/below Chronological age.



[1] 48 pupils had reading ages that equalled their chronological ages. 24 were allocated to each of these columns.

Bar Chart of Year 2 pupils placed in six-monthly intervals of Reading Age above/below Chronological Age.



[2] 4 pupils had reading ages that equalled their chronological ages. 2 were allocated to each of these columns.