

Rhythm for Reading is an innovative way to engage students with reading that complements phonological approaches yet focuses on rhythm instead of words.

The outcome for our students has been phenomenal. For instance, we set a target for one particular student to read simple words by the end of July, but he achieved this in the first five weeks of the programme and progressed to reading sentences.

Our school is for young people with severe learning difficulties, including autism and Down syndrome. For years we plugged away at a range of interventions in an attempt to teach them to read, including Jolly Phonics, Premier League Reading Stars and all the reading schemes traditionally used in primary

schools. The difficulty, however, was that by the time students arrived in Year 7, many had been turned off reading, convinced that it was a pointless effort and that they would never master the skill.

Principal Elaine Haver came across the Rhythm for Reading programme when she was scouring the internet for something that might help to overcome this. After learning about the work of Dr Marion Long, who developed the programme, she realised that while it had been trialled in a school for students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and ADHD, it had yet to be tried in a setting like ours where pupils have such widely varying needs, including severe learning difficulties, autism spectrum disorder and speech, language and communication difficulties.

Nevertheless, she was willing to give it a try, even if it only worked for one or two. That was 12 months ago. Today we are excited to be extending the Rhythm for Reading programme across the school.

The intervention supports and improves reading comprehension and reading fluency and helps in supporting phonological awareness. It works by honing students' sensitivity to sounds and in this way accelerates their progress in learning phonics. Fundamentally it improves their sensitivity to rhythm so that they start to connect words fluently, enabling them to read for meaning for the first time.

Mainstream schools run the 10-minute programme once a week for 10 weeks via a secure portal, which streams materials onto the interactive whiteboard. We adapted this slightly for our pupils by