



English teaching can improve in Hong Kong, writes **Phila Siu**

Phonics can be phun

The author of a set of books about English phonics and an adviser to the British government on literacy has called on Hong Kong schools to change the way they teach English.

Ruth Miskin said that every English learner, whether the language was their first or second language, should start by learning phonics.

Miskin is the author of Read Write Inc (RWI), an English learning programme published by the Oxford University Press. She is also a member of Britain's National Curriculum Review Advisory Committee.

In Hong Kong, phonics is not a part of the mainstream curriculum, although some schools do provide extra weekly phonics lessons. In the city, pupils are usually taught to memorise English words through matching the pictures to some words in the articles.

"Tell them to change that as soon as possible," Miskin said.

She said that mastering phonics gives children the foundation to further sharpen their English. If they understand how to break down the sounds in an English word, they will have no problem pronouncing every English word, she said; in doing this, the children's reading will develop very fast.

Miskin said that there were too many existing English words for children to gain a good command of the language simply through matching a word with a picture. To encourage the teaching and learning of phonics, the British government is providing subsidies to schools to spend on training and resources. It also plans to introduce phonics tests to all six-year-olds.

About 4,000 schools in Britain have adopted Miskin's programme for learning English, as have 49 schools in Hong Kong.

Practising the lessons they've learned will help students learn English skills faster, Miskin says



RUTH MISKIN GIVES A PHONICS LESSON; (TOP) RWI PROGRAMME WINNERS. **PHOTOS: PHILA SIU**

Miskin urged greater interaction between students; practising what they had learnt would speed up the learning process.

"Children should always be partnered. Everyone should take turns being the teacher," she said.

Last month, *Young Post* followed seven winners of the Oxford University Press' RWI Ambassador Programme on a trip to Oxford, in England. The pupils, aged five and six, have learnt English by using Miskin's material in Hong Kong, and were selected from more than 200 entries through interviews.

They took a lesson from Miskin and talked to students from Oxford University.

Bonnie Chan Lai-yuk, mother of Chivers Lee Tin-chi, 6, said her son had a much better grasp of English after learning phonics. She has seen improvement in his spelling and pronunciation.

She said she was amazed when her son had written down the names of 100 different dinosaurs.

"I cannot believe he knows the names of 100 dinosaurs," she said, giving credit to the phonics studies for her son's mastery.

Lee Mun-hung, the father of Davis Lee Pok-man, 6, said his son's pronunciation had greatly improved since learning phonics. He said his son was no longer afraid to speak to foreigners.