

## A Guide to Phonics

Children in Reception and Key Stage 1 follow the synthetic phonics approach, using the 'Letters and Sounds' programme. It's an approach to teaching phonics in which individual letters or letter sounds are blended to form groups of letters or sounds, and those groups are then blended to form complete words.

The daily phonics sessions are intended to be fun and lively, involving lots of speaking, listening and games. The focus is on children's active participation. They learn to use their phonic knowledge for reading and writing activities and in their independent play.

Letters and Sounds is divided into six phases, with each phase building gradually upon previous learning. Children have time to practise and expand their ability to read and spell words. They are also taught to read and spell 'tricky words' – words with spellings that are unusual or that children have not yet been taught. These include the words 'to', 'was', 'said' and 'the' – you can't really break the sounds down for such words so it's better to just learn them.

There are six phases of letters and sounds taught up to Year 2. Many children will cover Phase 1 in pre-school settings, phases 2, 3 and 4 are taught in Reception and consolidated in Year 1. Children are then taught phase 5 in Year 1 and phase 6 in Year 2.

### **What do all the technical words mean?**

#### **What is a phoneme?**

It is the smallest unit of sound and a piece of terminology that children like to use and should be taught. At first it will equate with a letter sound but later on will include the digraphs. For example 'rain' has three phonemes, / r / ai / n.

#### **What is a grapheme?**

A grapheme is a letter or a number of letters that represent a sound (phoneme) in a word. Another way to explain it is to say that a grapheme is a letter or letters that spell a sound in a word. E.g. /ee/, /ea/, /ey/ all make the same phoneme but are spelt differently.

#### **What is a digraph?**

This is when two or more letters come together to make a phoneme. /oa/ makes the sound in boat.

### **What is blending?**

Blending is the process that is involved in bringing the sounds together to make a word or a syllable and is how /c/ /a/ /t/ becomes cat.

To learn to read well children must be able to fluently blend sounds together. Blending sounds smoothly helps to improve fluency when reading. Blending is more difficult to do with longer words so learning how to blend with accuracy from an early age is crucial. Showing your child how to blend is important. Model how to put sounds smoothly together without stopping at each individual sound.

### **What is segmenting?**

Segmenting is a skill used in spelling. In order to spell the word cat, it is necessary to segment the word into its individual sounds; c-a-t.

Children often understand segmenting as 'chopping' a word. Before writing a word young children need time to think about it, say the word several times, 'chop' the word and then write it. Once children have written the same word several times they won't need to use these steps as frequently.

Children will enjoy spelling if it feels like fun and if they feel good about themselves as spellers. We need, therefore, to be playful and positive in our approach – noticing and praising what children can do as well as helping them to correct their mistakes.

### **What are tricky words?**

Tricky words are words that cannot be 'sounded-out' but simply need to be learnt. They don't fit into the typical spelling patterns. Examples of these words are attached to each phase. In order to read simple sentences, it is necessary for children to know some words that have unusual or untaught spellings. It should be noted that, when teaching these words, it is important to always start with sounds already known in the word, then focus on the 'tricky' part.

### **What are high frequency words?**

High frequency (common) are words that occur frequently in much of the written material young children read and that they need regularly when they write.

### **What are CVC words?**

CVC stands for consonant- vowel- consonant (cat, dog, hat). In phase 4 we talk about CCVC words such as clip, stop.

## Phonic Phases in more detail

### Phase 1

Phase 1 of Letters and Sounds concentrates on developing children's speaking and listening skills and is the basis for the phonic work which starts in Phase 2. The emphasis during Phase 1 is to get children attuned to the sounds around them and ready to begin developing oral blending and segmenting skills.

### Phase 2

In Phase 2, letters and their sounds are introduced one at a time. A set of letters is taught each week, in the following sequence:

Set 1 : s,a,t,p

Set 2: i,n,m,d

Set 3: g,o,c,k

Set 4: ck,e,u,r

Set 5: h, b, f, ff, l, ll, ss

The children will begin to learn to blend and segment to begin reading and spelling. This will begin with simple words.

Tricky words introduced in Phase 2

the	to	ll
go	into	no

### Phase 3

By the time they reach Phase 3, children will already be able to blend and segment words containing the 19 letters taught in Phase 2.

Over the twelve weeks which Phase 3 is expected to last, twenty-five new graphemes are introduced (one at a time).

Set 6 : j,v,w,x

Set 7: y,z,zz,qu

Consonant digraphs: ch, sh, th, ng

Vowel digraphs: ai, ee, igh, oa, oo, ar, or, ur, ow, oi, ear, air, ure, er

Tricky words introduced in Phase 3:

we	me	be	was	no	go
my	you	they	her	all	are

## Phase 4

By Phase 4 children will be able to represent each of 42 phonemes with a grapheme. They will blend phonemes to read CCVC and CVCC words and segment these words for spelling. They will also be able to read two syllable words that are simple. They will be able to read all the tricky words learnt so far and will be able to spell some of them.

This phase consolidates all the children have learnt in the previous phases.

Tricky words introduced in Phase 4:

said	so	she	he	have	like
some	come	were	there	little	one
they	all	are	do	when	out
what	my	her			

By this point children would be expected to be reading CVC words at speed along with the tricky words from the previous phases. It is important that children are taught that blending is only necessary when a word is unfamiliar.

## Phase 5

Children will be taught new graphemes and alternative pronunciations for these graphemes and graphemes they already know. They will begin to learn to choose the appropriate grapheme when spelling. The children will be automatically decoding a large number of words for reading by this point.

Tricky words introduced in Phase 5:

oh	their	people	Mr	Mrs	looked
called	asked				
water	where	who	again	thought	through
work	mouse	many	laughed	because	different
any	eyes	friends	once	please	

New graphemes for reading

ay (day)	oy (boy)	wh (when)	a-e (make)
ou (out)	ir (girl)	ph (photo)	e-e (these)
ie (tie)	ue (blue)	ew (new)	i-e (like)
ea (eat)	aw (saw)	oe (toe)	o-e (home)
		au (Paul)	u-e (rule)

During this phase children will begin reading words fluently and no longer be blending and segmenting familiar words.

The real focus throughout the phase is to not only learn the new graphemes for reading but also to learn to read words with alternative pronunciations. Children also will need to learn alternative spellings for each phoneme.

### **Phase 6**

In phase 6 children will be reading longer and less familiar texts independently and fluently. It is crucial that at this point children are now reading to learn and reading for fun.

Children should be able to read the 300 high frequency words. At this point it is important that comprehension strategies are developed so that children clarify meaning, ask and answer questions about the texts they are reading, make mental images during reading and summarise what they have read.

In spelling children are introduced to the adding of suffixes and how to spell longer words. Throughout the phase children are encouraged to develop strategies for learning spellings.