



Why learn phonics and why is it so tricky?

You could think of written English as a sort of code. Through the teaching of phonics in a clear and systematic way, we can help children to crack the code. The alphabet consists of only 26 letters and spoken English uses about 42 sounds (phonemes). Therefore, to represent all these phonemes, we have to use one letter or a group of letters (graphemes). At school we follow a fun and interactive phonics programme called 'Letters and Sounds'. Children will progress through the six phases that the programme is divided into.

The phases

Here is an overview of what is included in each phase.

Phase One - The aim of this phase is to foster children's speaking and listening skills. Children will be helped to tune into sounds, to listen to and remember sounds, to talk about them and to make them. They will also experience and develop awareness of rhythm and rhyme in speech.



Phase Two and Three - In these phases children learn:

- How to represent 42 sounds (phonemes) by a letter or sequence of letters. These are introduced in a certain sequence of sets, the first set being s, a, t and p.
- How to blend phonemes together for reading and how to segment words into phonemes for spelling.
- To name the letters of the alphabet.
- How to read and spell some high frequency 'tricky' words containing graphemes not yet learnt e.g. to, no.



Phase Four - The purpose of this stage is to consolidate knowledge of graphemes by reading and writing words containing adjacent consonants and polysyllabic words.

Phase Five - Children learn alternative ways of representing sounds and practise blending for reading and segmenting for spelling.



Phase Six - During this phase children learn more complicated and irregular spelling patterns and spelling rules, to become more fluent readers and increasingly accurate spellers.



A Guide to our Phonics Programme

Terminology

Phonics – This term refers to a method of teaching English that is based around hearing and identifying letter sounds and matching them to letters or letter patterns.

Phonemes - Words are made up from small units of sound called phonemes. Children need to be helped to listen carefully and identify the phonemes that make up each word. This helps children to learn to read words and to spell words.

Graphemes - A grapheme is a symbol of a phoneme. One letter or a group of letters can represent a phoneme. For example the word fish has three phonemes (separate sounds) and each of these phonemes is represented by a grapheme f-i-sh.

Grapheme-Phoneme-Correspondence (GPC) – Graphemes are converted to phonemes when we are reading. We convert phonemes to graphemes when we are spelling. Children need to learn which graphemes correspond to which phonemes and visa versa.

Digraphs, Trigraphs and Four-Letter Graphemes - A digraph is a two-letter grapheme, where two letters represent a phoneme such as 'ea' in seat. A trigraph is a three-letter grapheme, where three letters represent a phoneme such as 'igh' in night. An example of a four-letter grapheme is 'eigh' in eight.

Split Digraphs - This is where a letter comes between the two letters in a digraph, as in rode where d separates the digraph oe and in time, where the m separates the digraph ie. It used to be said that words such as these had a 'magic e' at the end, but we no longer refer to this.

Blending – This skill consists of building words, pushing phonemes together so that words can be read.

Segmenting – This skill consists of breaking words down, chopping them into the phonemes they are made up from, vital for spelling.

Syllable – This is a basic unit of speech which contains a vowel. Examples of two syllable words are sun/set, farm/yard and care/ful. Three syllable words include fair/y/tale, el/e/phat and po/ta/to.

Polysyllabic Words – Words with more than one syllable.

Tricky Words – These are words that children need to learn by sight that don't fit into usual spelling patterns.



High Frequency Words – These are common words that are repeated in much written material.

Abbreviations

vc = vowel + consonant e.g. in

cvc = consonant + vowel + consonant e.g. cat

ccvc – consonant + consonant + vowel + consonant e.g. frog

cvcc – consonant + vowel + consonant + consonant e.g. belt

Helping your child

A guide to how to pronounce phonemes, 'say the sounds', is available on the website 'oxfordowl.co.uk'. More information relating to the teaching of phonics is also available on this site, as are some great ebooks.

As a parent/carer you can do a great deal to support your child's learning. Below are some games you might like to play with your child...**make them fun.**

- Action Time – Sheets will be given to your child showing a letter or group of letters (graphemes) that represents a sound (phoneme). Help your child to remember the grapheme by learning the action that goes with the phoneme.
- Magnetic Letter Game – Your child will have a set of magnetic letters to make words with. Lists of words will be given to your child that you to help them to make using the letters.
- Speak Like a Robot – Speak to your child like a robot, segment the sounds (phonemes) in a word and see if your child can put the sounds together (blend them) to say the words e.g. you say 'm' – 'a' – 't', your child says 'mat'. You can reverse the game, so that you say a word and your child then speaks like the robot e.g. you say 'chop' and your child says 'ch' – 'o' – 'p'.
- Regularly sing an alphabet song with your child.
- Try the website <http://www.phonicsplay.co.uk/> for some useful games.