

A Parents' Guide to Phonics



Reception

What do we mean by Phonics?

Starting in Early Years, children are taught phonics; the journey of learning to read, write and spell. These vital skills are the beginning of a lifelong literacy journey. Phonics, which may also be referred to as 'Letters and Sounds', is the process of children learning to read.

The process of learning to read and write begins from an early age, where children can learn and practise many skills. This can be done in a range of ways and settings, including home. Exposing children to conversation and books is essential.

Spoken Language

Listening and talking to your child is essential. As part of everyday activities, talk to your child, explaining what you are doing. Speaking and listening are the building blocks for reading and writing. The more language your child is exposed to, the more they will understand and use for themselves.

Letters and Sounds

The systematic phonics programme called 'Letters and Sounds' is divided into six phases. During the programme, new skills are taught, continually building on previous learning.

Phase 1

This is the beginning of the systematic learning of phonics and takes place predominately in Nursery or Pre-School. It falls primarily within the Communication, Language and Literacy area of learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum.

During this phase, children should be exposed to a language-rich environment. Activities are mainly adult led and build up to teaching children the important basic elements such as oral segmenting and blending.

Aspects 1-6 focus on identifying and creating sounds, rhyme and alliteration.

Aspect 7: Oral Blending and Segmenting

This stage is vital before children are exposed to grapheme to phoneme correspondence (learning which letter represents each sound). It is all done orally and is to encourage children to hear the separate sounds within words.

Oral Blending

At first, the adult will show the children how this is done. The separate sounds (phonemes) are clearly spoken aloud, in order, fairly quickly and are then merged together into the whole word. For example:

m-a-n man

The merging together of the sounds is called blending. Initially, children may not be able to merge the sounds together independently and will need frequent practise which is highly beneficial.

Oral Segmenting

This is the opposite to oral blending. Here, children hear the whole word before it is then broken into separate sounds (phonemes). For example:

dog d-o-g

This skill is called segmenting and is vital in order for children be able to spell. Initially, children might only be able to hear the initial sound and will need frequent practise.

Phase 2

This phase builds upon the oral blending and segmenting of the previous phase. Children must continue to practise what they have learnt. They will also then be taught the grapheme-phoneme representations (letters) for 19 letters. Additionally, they will be taught that phonemes (sounds) can be represented by more than one letter. For example: **fin, huff**

The suggested order for teaching the sounds, is as follows, with one set being taught each week:

Set 1	Set 2	Set 3	Set 4	Set 5
s a t p	i n m d	g o c k	ck e u r	h b f,ff l,ll ss

The process of learning a sound, includes:

- Saying a number of words with the same initial sound, exaggerating it. E.g. ssssnake, ssssssun
- Showing the children the grapheme (letter) that represents the sound.
- Flashing a card with the grapheme on one side and a picture on the other. When the children see the grapheme side, they are to say the sound. When they see the picture sound, they are to say the word corresponding to the picture.

VC and CVC Words

During this phase, children will be taught to read different words using the sounds and letters they have been exposed to.

V = vowel

C = consonant

VC words are those that consist of a vowel and then a consonant (am, on, it). CVC words are those that consist of a consonant then a vowel and then a consonant (cat, dog, pen). Some words such as bell are also CVC words because they only have three sounds. **b-e-ll**

Useful Tip

Pure sounds should be used when children are saying sounds. This means, where possible, the 'uh' sounds after consonants should not be said. E.g. the sound 'f' should be pronounced **fff** rather than **fuh**.

The children will use magnetic letters to make and spell words, read words on the whiteboard and on flash cards as well as beginning to write words.

Tricky Words

During this phase, the children will also be exposed to tricky words; words that cannot be sounded out. **the, to, I, go, no**

Where we are at.

We spent the first few weeks of the year revisiting Phase 1. We went on a sound walk around the school grounds so that we could practise our listening skills, distinguishing and describing individual sounds. We then spent some time focussing on rhyming words, creating rhyming strings and sharing lots of stories involving rhyming, encouraging the children to join in. We then looked at initial sounds, ensuring the children could hear the initial sounds in words. We also introduced oral blending, sounding out words when talking to the children—can you pass me the p-e-n? How many b-l-o-ck-s do you have? Can you see the d-o-g?

We introduced Phase 2 about three weeks before half-term, continuing aspects of Phase 1 alongside. Up to now we have looked at the graphemes

s a t p i n m d g

Each session begins with picture clues to the new phoneme. Each word's initial sound is exaggerated so the children can hear the new sound.

E.g. ggggggoat, gggggglass, ggggggorilla

We learn the 'Jolly Phonics' action to go with the sound. This is a great way to help us remember each sound.

We then look at the grapheme—the letter—that represents the sound. We practise writing the grapheme in the air using our 'magic finger'.

Finally we attempt to read some simple vc and cvc words by putting together graphemes that we have already learned.

We will be working on our Phase 2 sounds until Christmas.

What can I do to help at home?

- Ask your child what sound they have learned today. Can they teach you the action to go with it? Can they think of any words that start with that sound?
- Use magnetic letters to create simple cvc words. Can the children blend the sounds together to read the word?
- Practise writing each grapheme. Encourage them to sound out and spell simple cvc words.