



# Letters and Sounds

## Phonics information for parents and carers with children in Reception and Key Stage 1 classes

When children enter the Reception class they take part in high-quality phonics sessions every day. These are fun sessions involving lots of speaking, listening and games, where the emphasis is on children's active participation. They learn to use their phonic knowledge for reading and writing activities and in their independent play.

The aim of this leaflet is to give you a clear picture of how we approach the teaching of phonics and word recognition and how, as a parent or carer, you can support and encourage your child at home.

### Not all children will learn at the same rate

Your child should be supported *whatever* their rate of learning. There is a very close link between *difficulty with phonics* and *hearing* so, if your child is making progress more slowly than might be expected, it would be worth having their hearing checked.

From a very early stage, children develop awareness of different sounds in spoken language. They develop understanding that spoken words are made up of different sounds (*phonemes*) and they learn to match these phonemes to letters (*graphemes*). Phonics is about children knowing how letters link to sounds (*graphemes* to *phonemes*), for example, *c* as in 'cat', *ll* as in 'fell', *ee* as in 'sheep'.

Children use this phonic knowledge when they are reading and writing. This approach has been shown to provide a quick and efficient way for most young children to learn to read words on the page, fluently and accurately. We want children to develop this skill so that it becomes automatic. This also greatly helps them with their spelling.

We use a systematic phonics programme called *Letters and Sounds*.

*Letters and Sounds* is divided into six phases, with each phase building on the skills and knowledge of previous learning. There are no big leaps in learning. Children have time to practise and rapidly expand their ability to read and spell words. They are also taught to read and spell 'tricky words', which are words with spellings that are unusual or that children have not yet been taught.

### Phase 1

This paves the way for systematic learning of phonics and usually starts in nursery or playgroup.

Teachers plan activities that will help children to listen attentively to sounds around them, such as the sounds of their toys and to sounds in spoken language. Teachers teach a wide range of nursery rhymes and songs. They read good books to and with the children. This helps to increase the number of words they know - their *vocabulary* - and helps them talk confidently about books.

#### Ways you can support your children at home

Play '**What do we have in here?**' Put some toys or objects in a bag and pull one out at a time. Emphasise the first sound of the name of the toy or object by repeating it, for example, 'c c c c - car', 'b b b b - box', 'ch ch ch ch - chip'.

Say: 'A tall tin of tomatoes!' 'Tommy, the ticklish teddy!' 'A lovely little lemon!' This is called alliteration. Use names, for example, 'Gary gets the giggles', 'Milo makes music', 'Nathan's nose'.

Teach them '*Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers*'.

## Learning how to 'sound-talk'

The teacher shows children how to do this - **c-a-t** = **cat**. The separate sounds (*phonemes*) are spoken aloud, in order, all through the word, and are then merged together into the whole word. The merging together is called *blending* and is a vital skill for reading.

Children will also learn to do this the other way around - **cat** = **c-a-t**. The whole word is spoken aloud and then broken up into its sounds (*phonemes*) in order, all through the word. This is called *segmenting* and is a vital skill for spelling.

This is all oral (*spoken*). Your child will not be expected to match the letter to the sound at this stage. The emphasis is on helping children to hear the separate sounds in words and to create spoken sounds.

### Ways you can support your children at home

#### Sound-talking

Find real objects around your home that have three phonemes (*sounds*) and practise 'sound talk'. First, just let them listen, then see if they will join in, for example, saying:

'I spy a p-e-g - peg.'

'I spy a c-u-p - cup.'

'Where's your other s-o-ck - sock?'

'Simon says - put your hands on your h-ea-d.'

'Simon says - touch your ch-i-n.'

'Simon says - pick up your b-a-g.'

## Phase 2

In this phase children will continue practising what they have learned from phase 1, including 'sound-talk'. They will also be taught the phonemes (*sounds*) for a number of letters (*graphemes*), which phoneme is represented by which grapheme and that a phoneme can be represented by **more than one letter**, for example, /ll/ as in **b-e-ll**. They may be using pictures or hand movements to help them remember these.

### VC and CVC words

C and V are abbreviations for 'consonant' and 'vowel'. VC words are words consisting of a vowel then a consonant (e.g. *am, at, it*) and CVC words are words consisting of a consonant then a vowel then a consonant (e.g. *cat, rug, sun*). Words such as *tick* and *bell* also count as CVC words - although they have four letters, they have only three sounds. For example, in the word *bell*, **b** = consonant, **e** = vowel, **ll** = consonant.

Now the children will be *seeing* letters and words, as well as hearing them. They will be shown how to make whole words by pushing magnetic or wooden letters together to form little words, reading little words on the interactive whiteboard and breaking up words into individual sounds, which will help their spelling. These will be simple words made up of two phonemes, for example, *am, at, it*, or three phonemes, for example, *cat, rug, sun, tick, bell*.

### Tricky words

They will also learn several tricky words: **the, to, I, go, no**.

Children will still be practising oral blending and segmenting skills daily. They need plenty of practice at doing this.

### Saying the sounds

Your child will be taught how to pronounce the sounds (*phonemes*) correctly to make blending easier.

Sounds should be sustained where possible (e.g. *sss, fff, mmm*) and, where this is not possible, 'uh' sounds after consonants should be reduced as far as possible (e.g. try to avoid saying 'buh', 'cuh'). Teachers help children to look at different letters and say the right sounds for them.

Contact your child's school for more information about this important aspect of phonics.

### **Ways you can support your children at home**

#### **Magnetic letters**

Buy magnetic letters for your fridge, or for use with a tin tray. Find out which letters have been taught - have fun finding these with your child and place them on the magnetic surface.

#### **Making little words together**

Make little words together, for example, *it, up, am, and, top, dig, run, met, pick*. As you select the letters, say them aloud: 'a-m - am', 'm-e-t - met'.

#### **Breaking words up**

Now do it the other way around: read the word, break the word up and move the letters away, saying: 'met - m-e-t'.

**Both these activities help children to see that reading and spelling are reversible processes.**

#### **Don't forget the writing box!**

Spelling is harder than reading words - praise, don't criticise. Little whiteboards and pens, and magic boards, are a good way for children to try out spellings and practise their handwriting.

Your child might be trying to use letters from their name to write; this shows that they know that writing needs real alphabet letters.

Make or buy an alphabet poster.

### **Getting ready for writing**

Teachers will model how to form letters (*graphemes*) correctly, so that children can eventually acquire a fluent and legible handwriting style. These skills develop over a long period of time. A child's ability to form a letter correctly is a separate skill from phonics. Holding a pen or pencil needs considerable co-ordination and practice in making small movements with hands and fingers.

In the early phonic phases children can use letter cards or magnetic letters to demonstrate their knowledge of phonics.

### **Writing in lower-case letters**

We shall be teaching lower-case letters, as well as capital letters. As most writing will be in lower-case letters it is useful if you can use these at home. A good start is for your child to write their name correctly, starting with a capital letter followed by lower-case letters.

Your child's teacher can advise on the handwriting style that is taught and how you can help at home.

### **Ways you can support your children at home**

#### **Using their whole body**

For handwriting children need to be well co-ordinated through their whole body, not just their hands and fingers. Games that help co-ordination include throwing balls at a target, under-arm and over-arm, and bouncing balls - also skipping on the spot, throwing a Frisbee, picking up pebbles from the beach and throwing them into the sea. Have fun!

#### **Hand and finger play**

Action rhymes such as '*Incy wincy spider*', '*One potato, two potato*' and '*Tommy Thumb*' are great fun and get their hands and fingers moving. Playing with salt dough or clay really helps strengthen little fingers, as does cookery and using simple toolkits.

#### **Hand-eye co-ordination**

Pouring water into jugs and cups of different sizes, sweeping up with a dustpan and brush, cutting, sticking, tracing, threading beads, completing puzzles, peeling off stickers and sticking them in the right place - these all help hand-eye co-ordination.

#### **Pencil hold**

The 'pincer' movement needs to be practised. This is important as it enables children to hold a pencil properly as they write. Provide them with kitchen tongs and see if they can pick up small objects. Move on to challenging

them to pick up smaller things, for example, little cubes, sugar lumps, dried peas, lentils, first with chopsticks, then with tweezers.

Ask children to peg objects to a washing line.

Provide plenty of different types of pen and pencil; hold their hand to practise the correct grip.

## Phase 3

The purpose of this phase is to:

- teach more graphemes, most of which are made of two letters, for example, 'oa' as in **boat**
- practise blending and segmenting a wider set of CVC words, for example, **fizz, chip, sheep, light**
- learn all letter names and begin to form them correctly
- read more tricky words and begin to spell some of them
- read and write words in phrases and sentences.

## CVC words containing graphemes made of two or more letters

Here are some examples of words your children will be reading: **tail, week, right, soap, food, park, burn, cord, town, soil**

Their confidence from the daily experience of practising and applying their phonic knowledge to reading and writing is really paying off!

## Tricky words

The number of tricky words is growing. These are so important for reading and spelling: **he, she, we, me, be, was, my, you, her, they, all.**

### Ways you can support your children at home

- Sing an alphabet song together.
- Play 'I spy', using letter names as well as sounds.
- Continue to play with magnetic letters, using some of the two grapheme (*letter*) combinations:  
*r-ai-n = rain* blending for reading *rain = r-ai-n* - segmenting for spelling  
*b-oa-t = boat* blending for reading *boat = b-oa-t* - segmenting for spelling  
*h-ur-t = hurt* blending for reading *hurt = h-ur-t* - segmenting for spelling
- Praise your child for trying out words.
- Ask teachers for a list of the tricky words.
- Set a timer. Call out one word at a time and get your child to spell it on a magic board or a small whiteboard, against the timer - remember, they can use magnetic letters.
- Play 'Pairs', turning over two words at a time trying to find a matching pair. This is especially helpful with the tricky words: **the the, to to, no no, go go, I I**
- Don't worry if they get some wrong! These are hard to remember - they need plenty of practice.

## Phase 4

Children continue to practise previously learned graphemes and phonemes and learn how to read and write:

**CVCC** words: **tent, damp, toast, chimp**

For example, in the word 'toast', **t = consonant, oa = vowel, s = consonant, t = consonant.**

and **CCVC** words: **swim, plum, sport, cream, spoon**

For example, in the word 'cream', **c = consonant, r = consonant, ea = vowel, m = consonant.**

They will be learning more tricky words and continuing to read and write sentences together.

## Tricky words

said, so, do, have, like, some, come, were, there, little, one, when, out, what

### Ways you can support your children at home

- Practise reading and spelling some *CVCC* and *CCVC* words but continue to play around with *CVC* words. Children like reading and spelling words that they have previously worked with, as this makes them feel successful.
- Make up captions and phrases for your child to read and write, for example, *a silver star, clear the pond, crunch crisps*. Write some simple sentences and leave them around the house for your child to find and read. After they have found and read three, give them a treat!
- Look out for words in the environment, such as on food packaging, which your child will find easy to read, for example, *lunch, fresh milk, drink, fish and chips, jam*.
- Work on reading words together, for example, a street name such as *Park Road*, captions on buses and lorries, street signs such as *bus stop*.

## Phonics teaching will continue into Key Stage 1 (Year 1 and Year 2)

As your child enters Key Stage 1 (Year 1) they will continue to take part in daily sessions on phonics.

They will learn that most sounds (*phonemes*) can be spelled in more than one way. For example, the **f** sound can be written as **f** as in *fan* or **ff** as in *puff* or **ph** as in *photo*.

This develops their knowledge of spelling choices. They will continue with this spelling work into Year 2 and beyond.

They will learn that most letters and combinations of letters (*graphemes*) can represent more than one sound. For example, the grapheme **ea** can be read as /ee/ as in *leaf* or /e/ as in *bread*.

This supports their reading development.

Good phonics knowledge and skills help your child to read words fluently and spell words, but they need to understand what they are reading and understand the processes and purposes for writing too. Your help is vital here.

### Ways you can support your children at home: reading together

**Teach lots of nursery rhymes** - each one tells a different story.

**Enjoy and share books together** - buy or borrow books that will fire their imagination and interest. Read and reread those they love best.

**Make time to read with your child throughout their time in school** - **PLEASE** continue reading to your child, even when they are reading independently. This is very important - your child needs to practise their reading skills every day, and needs the support of an interested adult. Grandparents, older brothers or sisters can help, too.

**Let them see you reading** - grown-ups can share their magazines about their favourite sport or hobby.

**Read with your child** - ask your child to attempt unknown words, using their phonic skills and knowledge. Make sure they **blend** all through the word.

**Talk about the meaning of the book, too** - take time to talk about what is happening in the book, or things that they found really interesting in an information book. Discuss the characters and important events. Ask them their views. Provide toys, puppets and dressing-up clothes that will help them to act out stories.

Explain the meaning of words (*vocabulary*) that your child can read but may not understand, for example, *flapped, roared*.

**Listen to story tapes.**

**Teach your child some action rhymes** - 'Heads, shoulders, knees and toes', 'Here we go round the mulberry bush', 'We all clap hands together'. Use tapes and CD-ROMs of nursery rhymes to sing along to.

**Read simple rhyming books together** - leave out a rhyming word now and then, and see if your child can work out the missing word. If not, you say it.

**Borrow or buy** the best books you can to share with your child. Libraries and bookshops can advise you of the most popular books.

**Add sound effects** when reading a story and encourage your child to join in.

**A quiet area with some cushions and toys** is a comfortable place where you and your child can go to look at a book together.

**Ways you can support your children at home: writing together**

**Magic writing boards** are great fun for children, both little and larger versions. It won't be long before they will be trying to write their names!

**Write with your child** - 'think aloud' so they can hear the decisions you are making as you write. Make sure the writing is for a purpose, for example, a birthday message, a shopping list, an address.

**Talk about the words they see in everyday life** - food packaging, signs in the supermarkets, captions on buses and lorries, messages on birthday cards and invitations.

**Write a shopping list together.**

**Send an email** to a family member or a friend - your child says the message, you write it!

**Provide your child with a shoe box full of things to write with** - writing tools of various sizes and thicknesses: gel pens, crayons, glitter pens, rainbow pencils, old birthday cards, coloured paper, sticky tape to make little books. Rolls of wallpaper can be attached to a table or wall to provide a large canvas for their writing and drawing.

**Praise them for their play writing** - those early squiggles and marks show that your child is beginning to understand writing.

**Ways you can support your children at home: what to do if your child is reluctant to read or write at home**

Relax!

### **Reading**

- Make sure your child sees you reading.
- Read **to** your child. Show you like the book. Bring stories to life by using loud/soft/scary voices - let yourself go!
- Spread books around your house for your child to dip into.
- Let your child choose what **they** would like to read - books, comics, catalogues.
- Read favourite books over and over again. Enjoy!

### **Writing**

- Make sure your child sees you writing.
- Compose an email together, inviting a friend over to tea.
- Continue to make words together, using magnetic letters.
- Leave a message on the fridge door and encourage them to write a reply to you.
- Make up a story together about one of their toys. You write for them, repeating the sentences as you write. When the story is complete they can draw pictures to go with it.
- Buy stickers of a favourite film or TV programme and make a book about it.