

# Letters and Sounds in the Early Years



Phonics guide for parents and carers

## Introduction

When the children enter Reception they take part in high-quality phonics sessions every day. These are fun sessions involving lots of games which encourage active participation. Through these the children develop their speaking and listening skills which underpin their reading and writing development. There are lots of opportunities for the children to use their reading and writing skills in their independent play both indoors and outdoors.

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

Phonics is about children knowing how letters link to sounds, for example c as in 'cat', ll as in 'fell', and ee as in 'sheep.

We use a systematic phonics programme called Letters and Sounds, as well as the phonics programme Jolly Phonics. Letters and Sounds is divided into 6 phases, where each phase builds on the skills and knowledge of prior learning.

## Phase 1

This phase is fundamental for future learning. This is heavily taught through games in nurseries and pre-schools. The children do activities that develop their listening skills. Teachers teach a wide range of nursery rhymes and songs. They read a range of 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. They play games with rhyming words and support the children to begin to notice phrases where the words start with the same sound e.g. sizzling sausages.

## Phase 2

In this phase children will continue practising what they have learnt from Phase 1. 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 (digraph), for example, /ll/ as in b-e-ll. They will use the Jolly Phonics actions and songs to support this.

We show the children how to *sound-talk* c-a-t= cat. The separate sounds (phonemes) are spoken aloud, in order 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 round – cat= c-a-t. The whole word is spoken aloud and then broken up into its sounds (phonemes) in order. This is called *segmenting* and is a vital skill for spelling.

Now the children will be seeing letters and words, as well as hearing them. To do the above activities we often pretend to be like robots and move our arms for each of the sounds (phonemes) we say. They will be shown how to make whole words by for example pushing magnetic or wooden letters together to form little words, reading little words on the interactive whiteboard and breaking up words into individual sound, which help with their spelling. These might be simple words made up of two phonemes for example, am, at, it or three phonemes for example, cat, rug, tick, bell.

### Phase 3:

The purpose of this phase is to teach more graphemes/ phonemes correspondences (GPCs), most of which are digraphs (2 letters making 1 sound), for example, 'oa' as in boat, but there are also some trigraphs (3 letters making 1 sound), for example, 'igh' as in light. They will also practise blending and segmenting a wider set of CVC words, for example, fizz, chip, sheep, light. They learn all letter names and begin to form them correctly. They also read and write words in phrases and sentences.

### Phase 4

Children continue to practise previously learnt 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

### Activities to do at home:

- Use magnetic letters on a radiator or clingy letters in the bath. Make little words together, for example, it, up, am, top, dig, run, met, pick. As you select the letters, say them aloud: 'a-m- am', 'm-e-t- met'. Now do it the other way round: read the word, break the word up and move the letters away, saying 'met-m-e-t'.
- Look for letters and sounds in the environment. Hunt for letters on the way home from school. Can they recognise letters on number plates?
- When playing with for example the cars or trains, make stations/car parks with tricky words on. They have to read the word before they can leave the station!

- Have passwords up around the house this could be letters on the door or words they could read.
- Play 'I spy', using letter names as well as sounds.
- Play 'pairs', turning over two words at a time trying to find a matching pair. This is especially helpful with the tricky/ high frequency words.
- As you look through the cupboards, they can write a shopping list for you.
- Tricky/high frequency word spotting as they look at magazines, comics and books.
- Going on a for example bug hunt in the garden with a clipboard and they can write down what they have found (they write the phonemes they can hear **not** copying your writing)
- Finding a cosy space and sharing a book, can they spot any words they know? Use a magnifying glass, they will be even more motivated!
- Having regular reading time in a quiet, comfortable place (for example this could be lying on their stomachs or snuggled under a duvet)
- Mood Sounds: Say a letter sound and ask the children to repeat it. Ask the children to say the sound as if they were angry, happy, frightened etc.
- Gobbler/Muncher Game: Use a cereal box to make a person. E.g. Gordon the gobbler. Have a large hole for the mouth. Collect a variety of objects beginning with 2 different sounds. Ask your child to select an object from your tray that begins with a certain sound. Children feed the object to the gobbler with replies with an mmmm sound if they are correct.
- Hoop game: Get 2 hoops, trays or plates and place a letter card on each of them e.g. s and a. Have a variety of objects beginning with these 2 sounds. Ask your child to select an object and say the name of it. Repeat it several times and then ask your child to place it on the correct letter tray.

- **Croaker:** Introduce a puppet to your child. Explain that it is finding it hard to say some words. Ask your child to select an object out of a bag. The puppet pronounces it incorrectly – maybe missing off the initial or end sound. The children help the puppet say the word correctly emphasising the part of the word that was missing. E.g. The puppet says ‘encil’ the child can say the word correctly ‘pencil’ and then the adult can emphasise the ‘p’ sound that was missing.
- **Rogue Sound Game:** Show a variety of objects to your child. All of the objects to have the same initial sound except for one item. Children to identify which is the rogue item. E.g. sun, sausages, cup, scissors.
- **Bingo:** Bingo boards can easily be made to suit the ability of your child. You can use them in a variety of different ways to help your child learn the letters of the alphabet. Make a board containing 6 letters of the alphabet. Then make a set of 6 letter cards that match the board. You can make 2 boards to play a matching game with your child or one of you could be the bingo caller and say the letter on the cards and the other person finds the letter on their board and puts a counter or toy on it. You can just match the letters or you could have some objects to match to the letter boards. Your child can then pick an object and place it on the correct letter to show what sound the object begins with.
- When choosing objects around the house to use for sound games ensure that they begin with the single sound that you are working on. For example: Tiger, train, pencil, present, goat, grass.

#### **Ideas for learning keywords**

- Little and often is best, and most importantly, try and make it fun. Depending on your child, focus on a few words at a time.
- Make a set of word cards. Old cereal boxes are ideal for this. (You can buy sets of keywords, even magnetic ones if you prefer) Introduce new words a few at a time. Talk about the words- what’s at the beginning/ end... long or short word...double letters...tall letters...little word within longer words e.g. an/and, it in little etc. Encourage your child to sound them out, if

appropriate, or simply tell them what the word says. Display them somewhere that your child can access. Find a regular time, maybe after tea, and ask your child to point to/ find a specific word. Swap the words as your child learns them.

- If you make a double set of words, you can play matching pairs. Again, cereal boxes are great for this. Make sure you put a colour spot on the back of one set. Your child can then choose a card with and without a spot, reading the word as they turn over the card. Alternatively, use 2 different colours of card.
- Put out a set of magnetic letters, which correspond to the words you are learning, either on the fridge or baking trays work well. Challenge your child to make each word in turn and come and show you.
- Playdough and letter cutters- again, challenge your child to make a specific word. Alternatively, use biscuit mix and eat the words you make!
- Sponge letter shapes and paint
- Foam letters at bath time.
- Spot the words you are helping your child to learn in their bedtime story books, reading books, comics, labels and signs around us...“Oh look, there’s the word ‘the’. Can you find it on another page?”
- Make up captions and phrases for your child to read and write, for example, a silver star, clear the pond, crunch crisps.
- Create a treasure hunt by writing some simple sentences and leaving them around the house for your child to find and read. When they get to the end, they find the treasure 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
- Use some of the websites with games on such as Dinosaur Eggs and Buried Treasure

Don't forget to revisit the words your child has learned and keep adding to the pile. Do a quick read of "all the words you know". This is a great confidence booster too.

### **Future Phonics:**

For children who are working above the age expected level, they will begin Phase 5 at the end of Reception. Otherwise Phase 5 and 6 are introduced through Years 1 and 2 with regular phonics sessions. There will be a similar session for parents in Year 1 to explain how phonics works in Key Stage 1.

### **Websites:**

The following websites have games that the children can play as well as information that will help you know more about phonics.

More information:

[www.nationalliteracytrust.org.uk](http://www.nationalliteracytrust.org.uk)

Phonics Play Website:

[www.phonicsplay.co.uk](http://www.phonicsplay.co.uk)

Phonics Games:

[www.ictgames.co.uk](http://www.ictgames.co.uk)

Jolly Phonics Website -

<http://www.jollylearning.co.uk/>

Pronouncing the Phonemes -

<http://www.getreadingright.com/Pronouncephonemes>.

