

Letters and Sounds

A guide for parents and carers



The next steps to reading and writing.

Where you see the  symbol you will find some suggested activities that will support your child in their learning.

Introduction

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 in their independent play.

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 or carer, you can support and encourage your child at home.

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

Children use their 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 6 phases, with each building on the skills and knowledge of previous learning.

Useful websites and leaflets for more information

www.nationalliteracytrust.org.uk/familyreading/parents

Includes information about how to make reading and writing fun for you and all your family. It promotes their campaign to make 'every home a reading home'. It also offers many links to further websites.

www.oxfordowl.co.uk

Includes top tips for supporting your child's reading, games and activities and e-books to read together.

www.phonicsplay.co.uk

Lots of brilliant phonics games for children to play on the computer.

Phase 1

This paves the way for systematic learning of phonics and usually starts in nursery or playgroup. See the leaflet 'Letters and Sounds: the first steps to reading and writing' for lots of ideas for how to support the development of Phase 1 skills at home.

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 sounds (phonemes) for a number of letters (graphemes), which sound is represented by which letter and that a sound can be represented by **more than one letter**, for example, /ll/ as in **b-e-ll**.

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 2 sounds e.g *am, at, it* or 3 sounds e.g *cat, rug, sun, tick, bell*.

Tricky words

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

Saying the sounds

Your child will be taught how to pronounce the sounds correctly to make blending easier.

Sounds should be sustained where possible (e.g sss,fff,mmm) and, where this is not possible, 'uh' sounds should be reduced (e.g avoid saying 'buh', 'cuh').

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



Ways to 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, top. 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.

Useful leaflets and websites

for more information.

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.



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

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!
- Leave books around the 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.

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.



Ways to 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 are great fun and get their hands and fingers moving. Playing with 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. It enables children to hold a pencil properly. Use tongs, pegs and tweezers

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 to 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 to support your children at home:

Reading together

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.

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.

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



Ways to 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 letter combinations:
r-ai-n - rain, b-oa-t - boat, h-ur-t - hurt.
- 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 2 words at a time, trying to find a matching pair. This is especially helpful with the tricky words.
- 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**

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

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 to 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, 'crunch crisps', 'clear the pond', 'a silver star'. Write some simple sentences and leave them around the house for your child to find and read. After they have found 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, 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.