



A Guide to Phonics

As we already know, it is so important for parents and teachers to work together to give your child the best start. Reading together at home is one of the most effective and important ways in which you can help your child. Children should be encouraged to enjoy sharing books and read independently, as well as reading with an adult. This not only supports children's progression in reading but leads to them seeing reading as a source of pleasure and interest.

Starting from the Early Years, children will be taught Phonics, these are vital skills taught to support each child on their individual journey of learning how to read and spell. To support your child in becoming an effective and confident reader we hope to work with you to develop their knowledge of phonics (letter sounds) to enable them to decode different words they may come across. Through this document we hope to give you an overview of phonics teaching with your child, and some ideas for how you can support your child at home.

What is Phonics?

The alphabet contains only 26 letters. Spoken English uses about 44 sounds (phonemes). These phonemes are represented by letters (graphemes). In other words, a sound can be represented by a letter (e.g. 'e' or 'p') or a group of letters (e.g. 'sh' or 'air').

A letter consists of a sound, a shape and it has a capital form and a lower-case form. The letter sound is the first thing that children need to recognise. An important factor to remember is - only use capital names when the children know the letter sounds.

At Beacon Primary Academy, we follow the Twinkl Phonics Programme. The six-level teaching programme focuses on high quality phonics work. The intention is to equip children with the phonic knowledge and skills they need to become fluent readers. You will have access to a parent information sheet that includes the visual aids, songs, letter formation and actions that the children have been learning in school, as well as focus words to practise at home. In Year 1 the children sit a phonics test which consists of 40 decodable words. They are split into 2 groups – real words and nonsense words. This test takes place in June and since 2012 when the test began, the pass mark has been 32 marks. However, this could change at any time.

Phonics Terminology

Oral Blending

Your child hears a series of sounds and they are able to blend those sounds together to make the whole word, for example you say 'c-a-t' and they blend to make 'cat'.

Phoneme

The smallest unit of sound in a word. So the word 'sun' has 3, 'chair' has 2, 'sport' has 4. There are approximately 44 in the English language to learn.

Grapheme

The written form of the phoneme. It's what we write on the paper or see on resources. The number of graphemes corresponds to the number of phonemes. A grapheme can be made up of different numbers of letters for example 'ai' is 2 and 'ear' is 3.

Digraph

Two letters together that make one sound, for example 'ck', 'ee' and 'ar'

You have consonant digraph like 'sh' and 'ch' or vowel digraphs like 'ai', 'oo' and 'ow'

Trigraph

Three letters together that make one sound, for example 'igh', 'ear' and 'ure' learnt in Phase 3.

Split digraph

This is when a digraph like 'ie' has been split and a consonant has been placed in the middle. It still makes the 'ie' phoneme. There are five to learn: a-e, i-e, e-e, o-e and u-e.

Syllable

A unit of a word that has one vowel sound. The word 'rain' has one, 'raining' has 2, 'umbrella' has 3.

Polysyllabic

A word that contains more than one syllable. Examples are 'children', 'softest', 'melting'.

Compound Word

A compound word is formed when two or more smaller words are joined together to create a new word. Examples are 'bedroom', 'playground', 'sandpit' and 'sunflower'.

Pure Sounds

Using the pure form of a sound helps children to accurately hear and say the sounds correctly when they are reading and writing. An example of a pure sound would be saying, 'mmmmm' rather than 'muh' for the letter m, or saying 'sssss' rather than 'suh' for the letter s.

The Levels

Level 1

The aim of Level 1 aims to develop children's listening and speaking skills as preparation for learning to read and spell with phonics. Children explore and experiment with sounds and become familiar with rhyme, rhythm and alliteration. Parents can play a vital role in helping their children develop these skills by encouraging them to listen carefully and talk extensively about what they hear, see and do. This level is really important and continues throughout their whole education.

Level 2

Level 2 introduces grapheme/phoneme (letter/sound) correspondence. Children learn that words are constructed from phonemes and that phonemes are represented by graphemes. They begin with a small selection of common consonants and vowels (s, a, t, p, i, n) and begin to put them together to read and spell CVC words (consonant, vowel, consonant). For example – cat (c-a-t) dog (d-o-g) pin (p-i-n).

By the end of Level 2, children should be able to:

- give the phoneme when shown any Level 2 grapheme;
- find any Level two grapheme, from a display, when given the phoneme;
- orally blend and segment CVC words;
- blend and segment in order to read and spell (using magnetic letters) VC words, such as if, am, on, up and nonsense words, such as ip, ug and ock;
- read the five tricky words - the, to, l, no, go.

Level 3

Level 3 teaches children one grapheme for each of the 44 phonemes in order to read and spell simple regular words. Children link sounds to letters, naming and sounding the letters of the alphabet. They hear and say sounds in order they occur in the word and read simple words by blending the phonemes from left to right. They recognise common digraphs (1 sound 2 letters e.g. th) and read some high frequency words. For example – shell (sh-e-ll) boat (b-oa-t) train (t-r-ai-n).

By the end of Level 3, children should be able to:

- give the phoneme when shown all or most Level 2 and Level 3 graphemes.
- find all or most Level 2 and Level 3 graphemes, from a display, when given the phoneme.

- blend and read CVC words (single-syllable words consisting of Level two and Level three graphemes).
- segment and make a phonetically plausible attempt at spelling CVC words (single-syllable words consisting of Level 2 and Level 3 graphemes).
- read the tricky words - he, she, we, me, be, was, my, you, her, they, all, are.
- spell the tricky words - the, to, I, no, go.
- write each letter correctly when following a model.

Level 4

Level 4 teaches children to read and spell words containing adjacent consonants. Children will be able to blend and segment these words and apply this skill when reading and spelling. They move from CVC words (pot, sheep) to CVCC words (pots) and CCVC words (spot) and then CCVCC words (spots). They will also explore polysyllabic words (shampoo, helper).

By the end of Level 4, children should be able to:

- give the phoneme when shown any Level 2 and Level 3 grapheme.
- find any Level 2 and Level 3 grapheme, from a display, when given the phoneme.
- be able to blend and read words containing adjacent consonants.
- be able to segment and spell words containing adjacent consonants.
- be able to read the tricky words - some, one, said, come, do, so, were, when, have, there, out, like, little, what.
- be able to spell the tricky words - he, she, we, me, be, was, my, you, her, they, all, are.
- write each letter, usually correctly.

Level 2 – 4 are covered in Reception.

Level 5

Level 5 teaches children to use alternative ways of pronouncing the graphemes and spelling the phonemes already taught. For example, they will learn that the phoneme 'ai' can be spelt 'ai', 'ay' 'ey' and a_e'. They will also learn that 'c' can be pronounced 'c' in coat or 'c' in city.

By the end of Level 5, children should be able to:

- give the phoneme when shown any grapheme that has been taught.
- for any given phoneme, write the common graphemes.
- apply phonics knowledge and skills as the prime approach to reading and spelling unfamiliar words that are not completely decodable.
- read and spell phonically decodable two-syllable and three-syllable words.
- read automatically all the words in the list of 100 high-frequency words.
- accurately spell most of the words in the list of 100 high-frequency words.
- form each letter correctly.

- Use alternative ways of pronouncing and representing the long vowel phonemes.

Level 5 will be covered in Year 1.

Level 6

Level 6 teaches children to develop their skills and automaticity in reading and spelling, creating ever increasing capacity to attend to reading for meaning. They apply phonics knowledge to recognise and spell an increasing number of complex words.

By the end of Level 6, children should be able to:

- read accurately most words of two or more syllables.
- read most words containing common suffixes.
- read most common exception words.
- read most words accurately, in age appropriate books, without overt sounding and blending, and sufficiently fluently to allow them to focus on their understanding rather than on decoding individual words.
- sound out most unfamiliar words accurately, without undue hesitation.
- segment spoken words into phonemes and represent these by graphemes, spelling many of these words correctly and making phonically-plausible attempts at others.
- spell most common exception words correctly.

Level 6 will be covered in Year 2.

Blending for Reading

To learn to read and spell children must be able to smoothly blend sounds together. Blending sounds fluidly helps to improve fluency when reading. Blending is more difficult to do with longer words so learning how to blend accurately at an early age is imperative. Showing your child how to blend is important. Model how to 'sound talk' sounds and blend them smoothly together without stopping at each individual sound. Remember some sounds (digraphs) are represented by two letters, such as ee or oi. Children should sound out the digraph not the individual letters (e.g. oi not o-i). Some words may also have trigraphs, three letters to represent one sound (.e.g. h-ear or p-air.).

Try these words: Plant p-l-a-n-t Sheep sh- ee-p Explain e-x-p-l-i-n

Segmenting for Spelling

Segmenting is a skill used in spelling. In order to spell the word it is necessary to segment the word into its constituent sounds. E.g. ran r-a-n. Start by having your child listen for the first sound in a word (games like i-spy are ideal). Next try listening for the end sounds and then the middle sounds (middle sounds are hardest to hear). Begin with simple three letters words (e.g. tap or hot) and build it up. Take care with digraphs, the word fish, for example, has four letters but only three sounds f-i-sh. Rhyming games and poems also help tune the ears to the sounds in words. Encourage children to think about the word, say it several times and then write it.

Tricky Words (Common Exception Words)

Tricky words are words that cannot be 'sounded-out' but need to be learnt. They don't fit into usual spelling patterns.

Games to play at home

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 tray.

Sound Hunt - Encourage children to hunt around the house or garden for objects beginning with a certain sound. This can also be done with words hidden around the house.

Rogue Sound Game - Show a variety of objects to your child. All of the objects have the same initial sound except one. Ask them to identify the rogue item.

Bingo - Bingo boards can be easily made and differentiated. Put letters, digraphs, words etc. in 6 spaces and make 6 cards that match. Can your child match them? Can they be the 'bingo caller' and say what is on the card first?

Letters/graphemes in the mud - Encourage children to write letters/graphemes in different ways. Write them with a stick in the mud, with their finger in sand, a straw in paint. This is not only great for their sound/ letter correspondence but also for handwriting.

Treasure/Trash - Make some word cards with real and non-sense words using a variety of graphemes. Decode the word together, blend and decide if it is a real 'treasure' word or a 'trash' non-sense word (which can go in the bin).

Splat the sound – lay all the sounds out on the floor, say a sound to your child, your child then must locate the sound and splat it with their hand.

Speed read – Set a 2-minute timer, how many words can your child read correctly in that time. Add the challenge of giving them 1 minute if it becomes easy.

Sort the words – Use the sound cards to make headings, child then has the words to read and put under the correct sound heading.

If you have any other information regarding phonics, please do not hesitate to contact us.

