

# What is Phonics

## What is Phonics (Letters and Sounds)

### What is phonics?

Phonics is a way of teaching children to read quickly and skilfully. They are taught how to:

- recognise the sounds that each individual letter makes;
- identify the sounds that different combinations of letters make - such as 'sh' or 'oo';
- blend these sounds together from left to right to make a word.
- segmenting words to help learn to spell

Children can then use this knowledge to 'de-code' new words that they hear or see. This is the first important step in learning to read.

### **Phonics is taught through a programme of learning called Letters and Sounds**

'Letters and Sounds' is a phonics resource published by the Department for Education and Skills in 2007. It aims to build children's speaking and listening skills in their own right as well as to prepare children for learning to read by developing their phonic knowledge and skills. It sets out a detailed and systematic programme for teaching phonic skills for children starting by the age of five, with the aim of them becoming fluent readers by age seven.

In order to teach all our pupils to become fluent, confident readers, who have a love of reading, we ensure that we teach a daily, discrete, systematic phonic programme - 'Letters and Sounds' supported by 'Jolly Phonics' in Reception.

Children are targeted at their current level of attainment, and are encouraged to apply this learning in their reading and writing.

Pupils continue to receive daily phonics teaching until they are confident with using and applying the skills taught within phase six of 'Letters and Sounds.'

Discrete phonics teaching continues into Key Stage 2, and for as long as necessary, for pupils who require extra support and learning time to focus on securing their phonics knowledge.

Any pupil who has not reached the expected phonics level by the end of Year 1, as assessed by the national screening check, receives additional phonics intervention within Year 2, so that they can catch up with their peers.

Pupils at St Augustine's Catholic School benefit from staff who have a high level of phonics knowledge, the consistent use of language throughout the school and the high emphasis that phonics receives in all reading and writing activities.

## Language used in phonics programme

### A phoneme

Is the smallest unit of sound that we use in the English language. A phoneme can be made up of one letter as in the alphabet sounds - s, a, t, p, i, n etc, or two letters (a digraph) as in sh, ch, th, ay, ar, or three letters (trigraphs) as in air, ear, ure. Phonemes cannot be broken down into separate sounds.

### A grapheme

Is the way we spell a phoneme. A phoneme may have only one grapheme for example 'b'. Or may have several different spellings -for example or can be spelt 'or' in torn, 'aw' in claw, 'au' in naughty or ore in more. The children will initially be introduced to one common grapheme for each phoneme, but as they progress through the school they will be taught the less common spelling alternatives and encouraged to try and choose the correct grapheme for a particular word they are trying to spell.

### Consonant blends

Are made up of two or three phonemes blended together quite quickly as we learn to read. Examples are sc, sm, bl, pr, str

### Short Vowel Sounds

Are the vowels saying their sound as 'a' in c a t.

### Long Vowel Sounds

Are the vowels saying their name as 'ay' in day, 'oa' in boat or 'igh' in night.

### How do we teach Phonics at our school? (<http://www.letters-and-sounds.com>)

### During Reception we use activities from Phase 1 of Letters and Sounds.

Phase One of Letters and Sounds concentrates on developing children's speaking and listening skills and lays the foundations for the phonic work which starts in Phase 2. The emphasis during Phase 1 is to get children attuned to the sounds around them and ready to begin developing oral blending and segmenting skills.

Phase 1 is divided into seven aspects. Each aspect contains three strands: Tuning in to sounds (auditory discrimination), Listening and remembering sounds (auditory memory and sequencing) and Talking about sounds (developing vocabulary and language comprehension).

### Phase 2 begins in Reception

In Phase 2, letters and their sounds are introduced one at a time. A set of letters is taught each week, in the following sequence:

**Set 1:** s, a, t, p

**Set 2:** i, n, m, d

**Set 3:** g, o, c, k

**Set 4:** ck, e, u, r

**Set 5:** h, b, f, ff, l, ll, ss

As soon as each set of letters is introduced, children will be encouraged to use their knowledge of the letter sounds to blend and sound out words. For example, they will learn to blend the

sounds s-a-t to make the word **sat**. They will also start learning to segment words. For example, they might be asked to find the letter sounds that make the word **tap** from a small selection of magnetic letters.

### **Phase 3**

By the time they reach Phase 3, children will already be able to blend and segment words containing the 19 letters taught in Phase 2.

Over the twelve weeks which Phase 3 is expected to last, twenty-five new graphemes are introduced (one at a time).

**Set 6:** j, v, w, x

**Set 7:** y, z, zz, qu

**Consonant digraphs:** ch, sh, th, ng

**Vowel digraphs:** ai, ee, igh, oa, oo, ar, or, ur, ow, oi, ear, air, ure, er

### **Phase 4**

When children start Phase Four of the Letters and Sounds phonics programme, they will know a grapheme for each of the 42 phonemes. They will be able to blend phonemes to read CVC (consonant-vowel-consonant) words and segment in order to spell them.

Children will also have begun reading straightforward two-syllable words and simple captions, as well as reading and spelling some tricky words.

In Phase 4, no new graphemes are introduced. The main aim of this phase is to consolidate the children's knowledge and to help them learn to read and spell words which have adjacent consonants, such as trap, string and milk.

### **Phase 5**

Children entering Phase Five will already be able to read and spell words with adjacent consonants, such as trap, string and flask. They will also be able to read and spell some polysyllabic words.

In Phase Five, children will learn more graphemes and phonemes. For example, they already know ai as in rain, but now they will be introduced to ay as in day and a-e as in make.

Alternative pronunciations for graphemes will also be introduced, e.g. ea in tea, head and break.

### **Phase 6**

At the start of Phase Six of Letters and Sounds, children will have already learnt the most frequently occurring grapheme-phoneme correspondences (GPCs) in the English language. They will be able to read many familiar words automatically. When they come across unfamiliar words they will in many cases be able to decode them quickly and quietly using their well-developed

sounding and blending skills. With more complex unfamiliar words they will often be able to decode them by sounding them out.

At this stage children should be able to spell words phonemically although not always correctly. In Phase Six the main aim is for children to become more fluent readers and more accurate spellers.

### **Helping your child with phonics**

Phonics works best when children are given plenty of encouragement and learn to enjoy reading and books. Parents play a very important part in helping with this.

#### **Some simple steps to help your child learn to read through phonics:**

- Ask your child's class teacher about the school's approach to phonics and how you can reinforce this at home. For example, the teacher will send home the letters and sounds the class has covered in lessons each week.
- You can then highlight these sounds when you read with your child. Teaching how sounds match with letters is likely to start with individual letters such as 's', 'a' and 't' and then will move on to two-letter sounds such as 'ee', 'ch' and 'ck'.
- With all books, encourage your child to 'sound out' unfamiliar words and then blend the sounds together from left to right rather than looking at the pictures to guess. Once your child has read an unfamiliar word you can talk about what it means and help him or her to follow the story.
- Your child's teacher will also be able to suggest books with the right level of phonics for your child. These books are often called 'decodable readers' because the book is written with words made up of the letters your child has learnt. Your child will be able to work out new words from their letters and sounds, rather than just guessing.
- Try to make time to read with your child every day. Grandparents and older brothers or sisters can help too. Encourage your child to blend the sounds all the way through a word.
- Word games like 'I-spy' can also be an enjoyable way of teaching children about sounds and letters. You can also encourage your child to read words from your shopping list or road signs to practise phonics.
- All children have a 'book bag' and take a book home to read at least on a weekly basis. Please listen to your children read and discuss what they have read. This can be done in any language.