



Sytchampton Endowed Primary School Phonics Programme

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What is Synthetic Phonics?

Synthetic phonics is a method of teaching reading and writing in which words are broken up into their smallest units of sound or 'phonemes'. Children learn to associate a written letter or group of letters, known as 'graphemes', with each phoneme. Sounds are then built up or 'blended' together into words for reading or, conversely, whole words are broken down or 'segmented' into their constituent sounds for writing. The benefits of this approach are:

- children learn in an order which is well thought-out and allows them to progress through stages as they are ready;
- teachers have a structure for planning and clear stages for assessing children, in order to ensure progression and coverage;
- children can attempt new words working from sound alone;
- reading and writing become practices that are developed hand-in-hand.

Synthetic phonics has been the required method of teaching early reading and writing skills since the 2006 Rose Report, which examined the advantages of phonics through long term data. The benefits of a phonetic approach has been well evidenced and, as a result, the UK government produced its own non-statutory synthetic phonics guidance document, Letters and Sounds. In March 2021, the DfE decided it should not continue with its involvement in this work. While many practitioners are moving away from using this document to directly inform their teaching, it still has had a huge impact on how we teach phonics today. Our teaching sequence complements the progression laid out in Letters and Sounds.



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A Cohesive Whole School Approach

Synthetic phonics builds continuously on prior learning. It is therefore vital that the same programme is used across the whole school to ensure maximum impact. By following one scheme as a whole school, we are able to establish a progressive, consistent phonics curriculum where children progress and succeed.

As part of this cohesive approach, it is also vital that all staff, children and parents use the same terminology and language when talking about phonics. Reading books follow the same teaching progression as our phonics scheme so that children immediately apply their new knowledge in context.



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Phonics Terminology

Phonics has a large technical vocabulary. Our teachers will use this technical vocabulary with the children in phonics lessons.

Phoneme smallest unit of sound in a word	Grapheme symbol of a phoneme, this could be one letter or a group of letters (i, ie, igh, i_e)	Grapheme-Phoneme Correspondences (GPCs) the relationship between sounds and the letter or letters that represent that sound
Blending building up of words from individual phonemes for reading	Segmenting breaking down words into individual phonemes for writing	Tricky (Common Exception) Words words that are not decodable at the child's current phonic level of understanding
Digraph two letters that work together to make one sound (ee)	Trigraph three letters that work together to make one sound (igh)	Mnemonic an illustration that is designed to support children's recognition of GPCs

Alternative Phrases used to support pupils' understanding of these concepts include:

- Digraph – Two letters, one sound
- Trigraph – Three letters, one sound
- Common Exception Words – Tricky Words



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How are letters and sounds (GPCs) taught?

In phonics, children are introduced to letters and the corresponding sounds they make. Children learn to link a grapheme to a phoneme and this link is referred to as a grapheme-phoneme correspondence (GPC).

There are 44 phonemes in the English language. These include the 26 letters of the alphabet plus consonant sounds such as /sh/ and /ng/ and long vowel sounds such as /ee/ and /igh/.

Each phoneme is introduced systematically and at a fast pace. When learning the first 44 phonemes, children should be introduced to around four new sounds per week, revisiting and practicing taught phonemes daily to ensure secure understanding and rapid recall.

Our phonics scheme provides a variety of support scaffolds to aid children's learning of the first 44 GPCs, including ditties, mnemonics (pictures that create a visual link to the GPC), actions, letter formation rhymes and songs. Making many links through visual, auditory and kinaesthetic stimuli helps children to access and secure this learning.

To assist our pupils in identifying new phonemes and recognising digraphs and trigraphs, staff may use colour coding. They may also use sound buttons ('sausages and beans') which are dots and dashes to help pupils to distinguish single letter phonemes and digraphs/trigraphs.



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Using Pure Sounds

When introducing children to the first 44 GPCs, it is important to use 'pure sounds'. 'Pure sounds' refers to the way of sounding phonemes without adding an extra 'uh', known as a schwa, at the end of each letter. Using pure sounds helps children to blend sounds for reading and segment words for writing, as no extra sounds are accidentally inserted into words. For example:

- /s/ is pronounced as 'sss' instead of 'suh'
- /t/ is pronounced as a very short bouncy sound instead of 'tuh'

It is also important to pronounce GPCs as their letter sounds, not names, e.g. 'a, b, c' rather than 'ay, bee, see'



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Regional Accents

Phonics is an approach that enables children to access as many words as possible through their knowledge of sounds. However, some sounds vary according to children's accents. Regional variations need to be recognised and factored into phonics planning and lesson delivery. For example, the GPC 'u' in 'bus' and 'put' sounds the same in a north-of England accent but are different sounds in a south-of-England accent. No regional variation is preferred and all phonics schemes can be used to teach children with any accent, including international accents. Acknowledgment and slight adjustments in delivery will just be needed at times to cater for individual differences.

Adjusted Sounds

Adjusted sounds appear where slight auditory adjustments are made in order to increase children's access to words that are almost decodable. Some very common words feature sounds/phonemes that are not taught until a later phonic level, but that without access to will limit children's ability to read otherwise age-appropriate texts. Examples of these within Level 2 are 'is', 'of', 'has' and 'dogs', which feature sounds that do not appear until Level 3 ('v', 'z'). These words are considered decodable at Level 2 as most children working within this level can make the auditory leap from /is/ to /iz/, /dogs/ to /dogz/ and from /of/ to /ov/, in order to read and pronounce the words. Note that /f/ is articulated in the same way as /v/, and /s/ as /z/, apart from the fact that /f/ and /s/ is unvoiced and /v/ and /z/ is voiced.

* Another example of this, would be the 'i' at the end of 'taxi'. In many accents, the 'i' here can be heard as an /ee/. Children working at Level 3 would be able to adjust the sound /i/ to /ee/, in order to make the word decodable. Adjusted sounds also appear in cases where the pronunciation of a particular grapheme is very rare, e.g. 'ai' saying /e/, so has not been discretely taught, but can be identified within the context of a whole word. For example, a child reading 'mountain' for the first time might pronounce the 'ai' as a long sound, but then recognise they have heard the word and pronounce it naturally.

** Our Phonics Scheme chooses to follow this approach (as it appears in Letters and Sounds and the Early Reading Framework) to ensure that children are able to decode as many words as possible from as early as possible and also to recognise that regional accents create variety, and therefore the need to 'tweak' or 'adjust' sounds as a matter of course.

* Department of Education and Skills (2007) Letters and Sounds, Crown Copyright

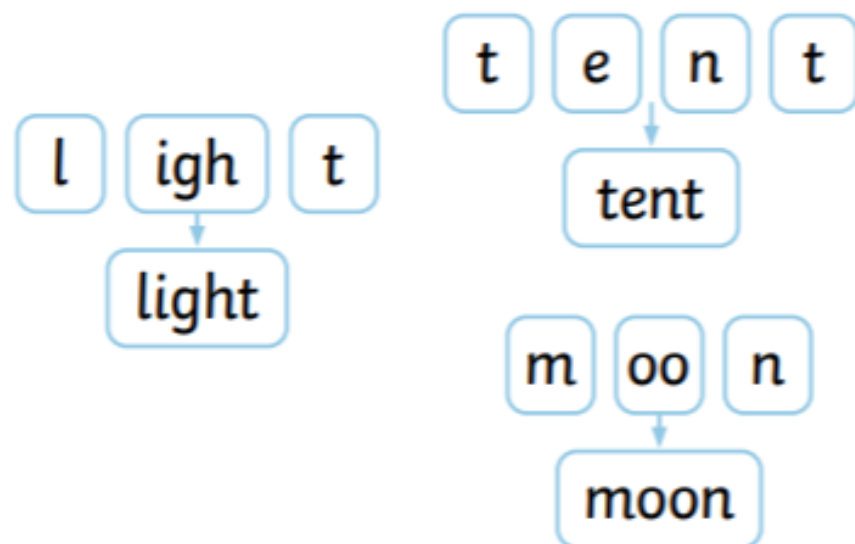
**Department for Education (2021) The Reading Framework - Teaching the Foundations of Literacy, Crown Copyright



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What is blending?

Blending is the key skill in the development of word reading. Blending is the process of saying each individual phoneme that appears in a written word and then running the phonemes together to hear and say the word. For the process of blending to be as smooth and effective as possible, pure sounds must be used. Secure, rapid recall of individual letter sounds, digraphs and trigraphs is crucial to enable children to blend words effectively





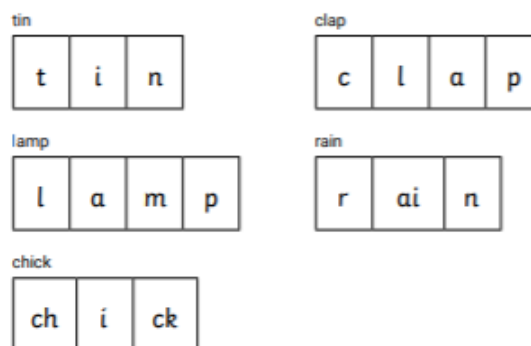
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What is segmenting?

Segmenting is the key skill in the development of word writing. Segmenting is the process of breaking down a word into the individual phonemes in order to correctly spell the word. Children listen to, and identify, the phonemes in a word and then choose the correct grapheme or graphemes to represent them. Encourage children to hold up their fingers as they hear each phoneme and to take particular care when choosing the GPCs to represent long vowel digraphs and trigraphs or adjacent consonants.

Adjacent consonants, such as 'br', 'st' or 'cl', can be segmented into their separate letter sounds as both sounds can be heard individually. Note that the word 'lamp' has 4 phonemes as each sound can be heard individually within the word.

However, the words 'rain' and 'chick', while having 4 and 5 letters respectively, each have only 3 phonemes as the digraphs 'ch', 'ck' and 'ai' make a single sound within the word.

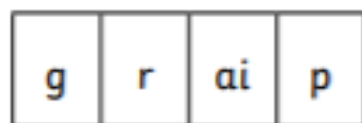




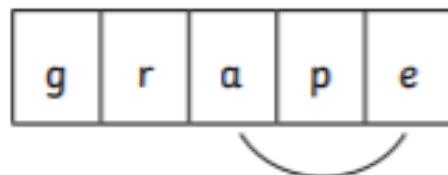
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Children will choose graphemes from the phonetic level at which they are working when segmenting words for spelling. Especially in the early stages of learning, this will sometimes lead to 'phonetically plausible' attempts at spelling words. These independent attempts, while technically incorrect, should be encouraged and celebrated as spelling accuracy will improve and refine as further GPCs are learnt.

For example, if a child is working at Level 4 and attempting to spell the word 'grape', an acceptable phonetic attempt at segmenting it would look like this:



The spelling is naturally corrected at Level 5 when children are introduced to split digraph 'a_e'.





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Tricky/Common Exception Words

There are parts of some very common words in the English language that are not phonetically decodable. Some examples of these are 'to', 'the' and 'said'. Due to the frequency and usefulness of these common words, it is necessary to introduce them as 'tricky' or 'common exception' words at the earliest stages. At Sytchampton, we call them 'tricky words.'

By introducing these words as a unique group that do not follow the usual phonics rules, it allows children to access a greater range of sentences for both reading and writing and to begin to build a bank of sight vocabulary. Common exception words are introduced first as reading sight vocabulary and then are reintroduced later as spelling words.

Children need to recognise these common exception words as sight vocabulary. It is, therefore, important to make sure all children practise them daily in order to learn them by sight and attain rapid recall.

Common Exception words are assessed on a termly basis (Reading and Writing) to identify gaps and areas for intervention.

All Taught Common Exception Words for Reading

Level 2	to, the, no, go, I
Level 3	he, she, we, me, be, was, my, you, they, here, all, are
Level 4	said, so, have, like, come, some, were, there, little, one, do, when, out, what
Level 5 Weeks 1-10	could, should, would, want, oh, their, Mr, Mrs, love, your, people, looked, called, asked, water, where, who, why, thought, through
Level 5 Weeks 11-20	work, house, many, laughed, because, different, any, eye, friend, also, once, please, live, coming, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, brother, more, before
Level 5 Weeks 21-30	January, February, April, July, scissors, castle, beautiful, treasure, door, floor, bought, favourite, autumn, gone, know, colour, other, does, talk, two



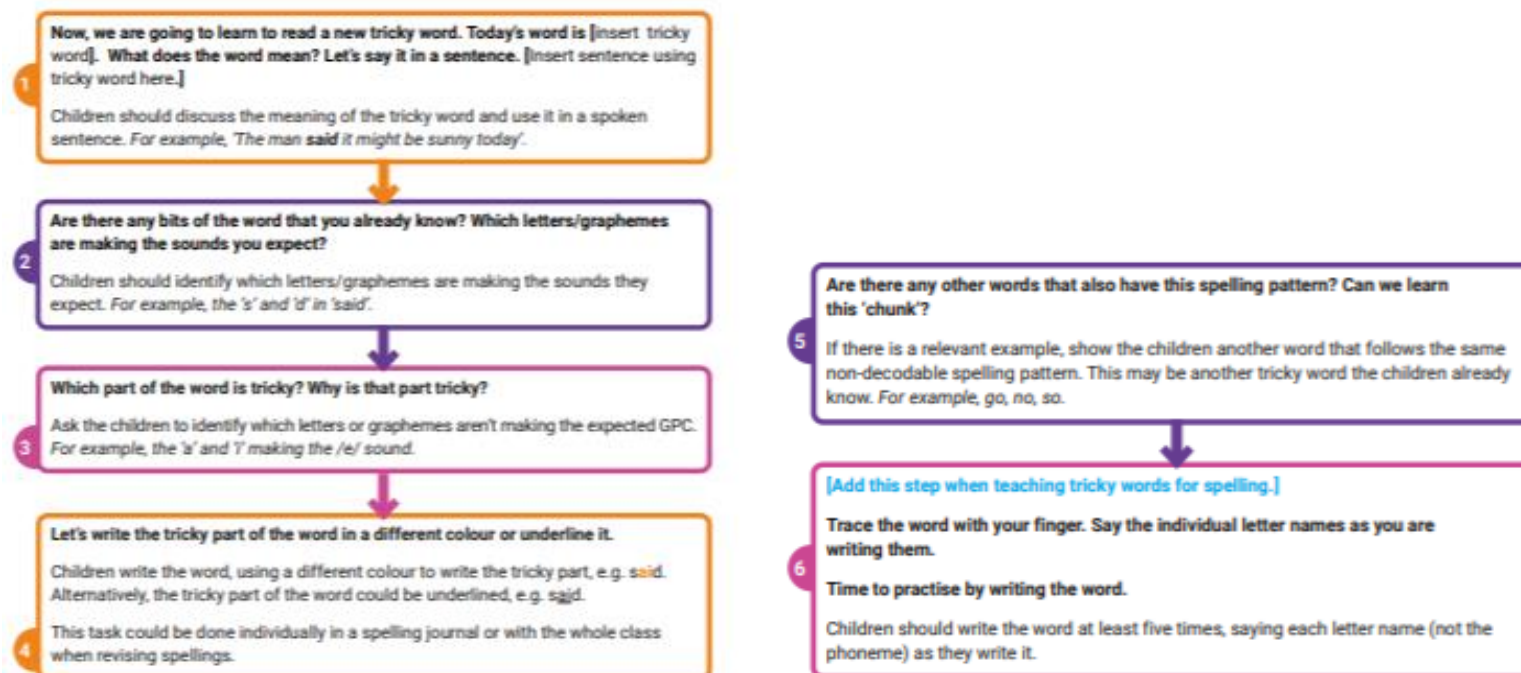
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Teaching Common Exception (Tricky) Words

The Active Repetition Method

When introducing and teaching new tricky (common exception) words for reading and spelling we use the suggested language and steps laid out on these pages. This approach supports children to identify the decodable and non-decodable parts of a word and helps them to make links between non-decodable spelling patterns; it assists them to recognise tricky words by sight and attain rapid recall. When learning tricky words for spelling, Step 6 supports children to memorise the spelling of each word.



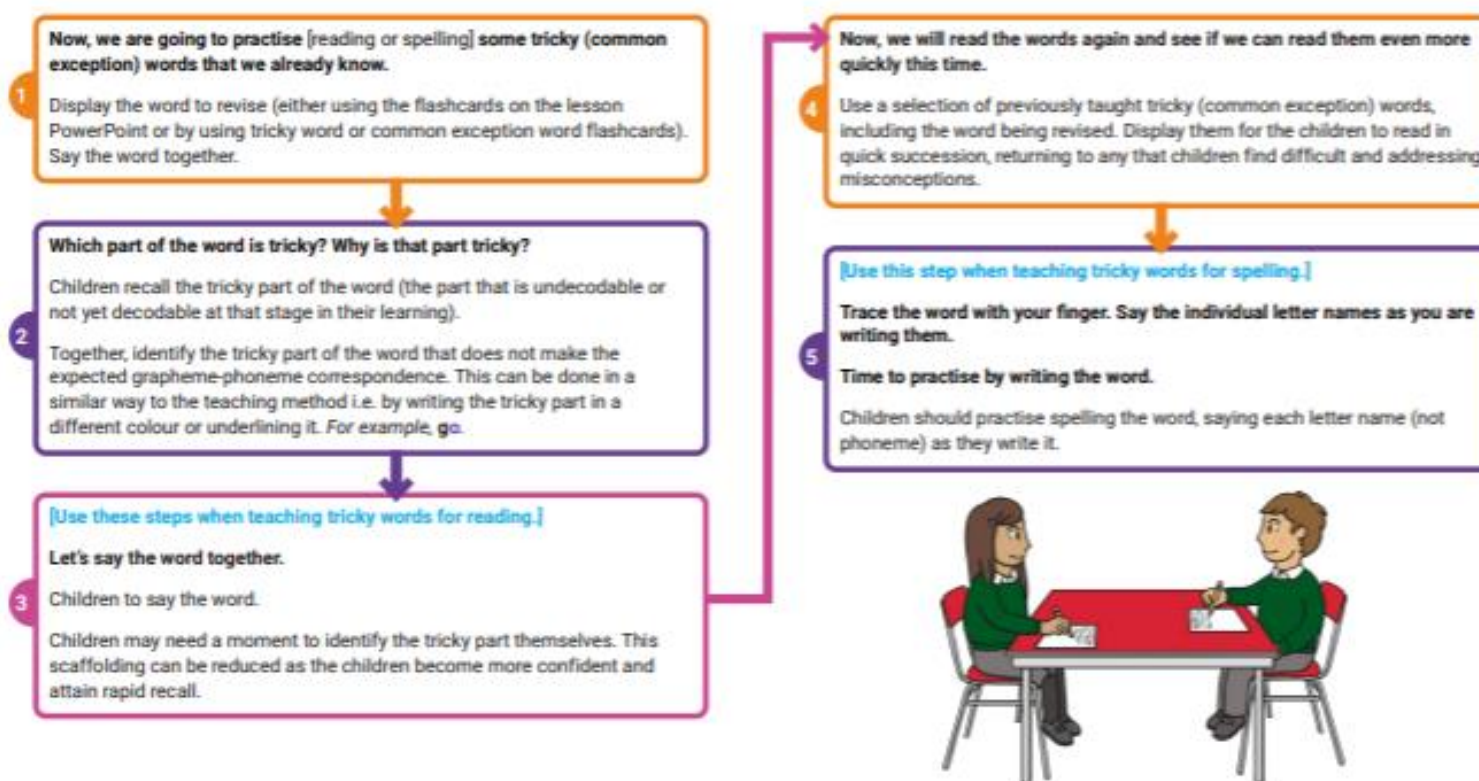


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Revising Previously Taught Tricky (Common Exception) Words

During the Revisit and Review section of the lesson, we recommend following a similar strategy to identify the tricky and non-decodable parts of the words. This scaffolding can be reduced as the children attain rapid recall for both reading and spelling.





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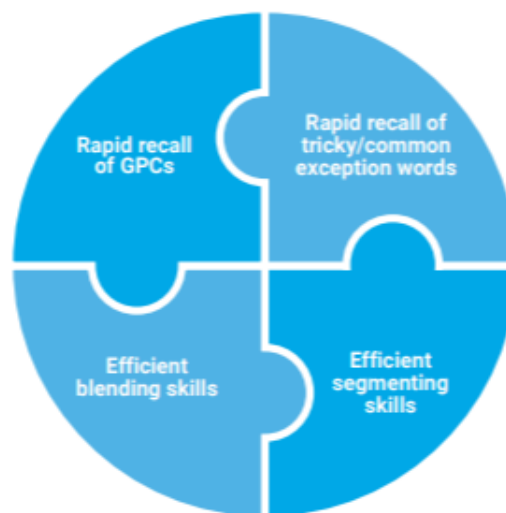
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The Four Cornerstones of Phonics

There are four key elements that children need to master in order to read and write fluently:

- Rapid recall of GPCs
- Rapid recall of tricky/common exception words
- Efficient blending skills
- Efficient segmenting skills

The four skills represent the cornerstones of phonics and must be practised every day to ensure children make the expected progress.





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How We Teach Phonics

Creating the Right Environment

In order to create an environment which supports pupils' learning and independence, we ensure the following:

- We carefully consider how and where pupils are seated during phonics sessions, so that we can target particular pupils and ensure their engagement
- On The Wall/Washing lines – Previously taught and new GPCs are updated each lesson, Common Exception Words are displayed and sound families posters may be displayed and referred to
- On The Tables – Common Exception Word mats and Phoneme Frames may be used to support independent learning
- Other Useful Resources that may be available – Flashcards, Assessment Materials



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Structure of a Phonics Lesson

Younger children enjoy consistency of approach in their phonics lessons and to know what is coming next. Therefore, similar activities should be used. This helps to build their confidence with phonics learning.

Older children may enjoy more variety in approach and a wider range of activities. This helps them to see phonics as part of the wider curriculum and understand that the skills taught in phonics lessons can be applied in all aspects of learning. However, for all children, it is important that the structure and routine of your phonics lessons covers the four cornerstones of phonics every day

The structure of every phonics lesson follows this five-part pattern to ensure that the four cornerstones of phonics are covered:





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Ditties, Actions and Songs

We have developed our own range of songs, actions and mnemonics (we call them ditties) for the phonemes that pupils encounter. This is intended to support pupils with linking the phoneme and grapheme and to give as much visual information to the children as possible and aid children's recall.

During each teaching sequence, children will learn the correct grapheme formation through a letter formation rhyme, which is linked to the mnemonic.

Assessing Phonics

Formative assessments (assessing as we go along) ensure learners have a broad understanding of a range of sounds and phonic concepts. These assessments not only tell us what children can do or what they know, they also outline those sounds and concepts some learners may need to revisit or practise further.

In Reception, teachers assess pupils' recognition of phonemes learnt on a weekly basis (Fred Cards). Year 1 and year 2, children are formally assessed on their knowledge of GPCs and common exception words to establish a child's phonic stage (level or phase) on a termly basis. Blending and segmenting assessments are also used to ensure that children have the skills securely for reading and spelling.

Supporting the Lowest 20% Achievers

Regular assessment is vital to ensure the early identification of children who may need to be provided with extra support, either through interventions or during the daily classroom teaching. Once identified, these children will take part in daily, highly structured interventions, which will normally include recapping or relearning missing GPCs and tricky/common exception words, and practising blending and segmenting skills.

As soon as we identify any child who is struggling to succeed in phonics, these steps are used to provide the best possible support:

- Build a clear picture – Using Phonics Assessment Packs, assess the specific area(s) of their phonics learning that children are struggling with, e.g. learning and retaining GPCs, hearing and identifying sounds, blending, segmenting.



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- Consider reasons for slower progress – Use observation and assessment and consider if the child may have any SEND issues that are providing a barrier to their learning. Should we have any concerns, we will refer the child to our SENDCo
- Liaise with other adults – All adults in the classroom should be made aware of all children in the setting who require further support by class teachers. These adults will be made aware in discussions about children's progress and information shared so that all adults are fully informed and ready to support
- Involve parents and carers by sharing our concerns and letting them know ways in which they can support their child at home.
- Make reasonable adjustments during daily phonics teaching – These adjustments can include: providing children with clear weekly targets that are small and measurable, so they are clear about what they will be learning; making sure that children are able to see the teacher clearly during the lesson; positioning children near supporting adults in the classroom for one-to-one and group support; providing additional, appropriate visual aids, such as magnetic letters, or visual prompts, such as Letter Fans/Cards and sound mats; ensuring that our class phonics display is clearly visible to the children during their phonics teaching.
- Make time for additional input – We will provide children with an opportunity to revisit specific phonics skills taught in lessons at another point during the day, as part of a small group or one-to-one. These sessions will be targeted to meet the specific needs of the children and keep them in line with their weekly targets. We will also take the opportunity for 'quick wins' and practise phonics skills as often as possible throughout the day, e.g. read a sound before lining up, do sound hunts or use a 2-minute flashcard challenge.

Extending and Challenging Fast Learners

Regular assessment is also vital to ensuring the early identification of children who may need us to challenge them further, either through extension activities or during daily classroom teaching. These are some of the steps we may take to provide appropriate extension and challenge for faster learners.

Build a clear picture – Children may well be ready to be challenged in some areas of their phonics learning but it is best to first ensure that they have no gaps in their understanding of other areas. It can be easy for these gaps to 'slip through the net'. Using Assessment Packs, we will regularly assess to ensure that any gaps in children's skills or knowledge and understanding are identified. This prevents possible difficulties later on with various phonics skills, such as GPC understanding, segmenting, letter formation or pencil grip.

Liaise with other adults – We will ensure that all other adults in our setting are informed of ways in which these children should be challenged and extended, as well as possible gaps in knowledge to be aware of. We will involve these adults in discussions about the children's progress. Parents and carers may be given extension activities to take home



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Challenge and extend within our daily phonics teaching – We may challenge children to apply their new phonics skills to word, sentence and text-level activities. We may also further encourage independence and innovation in their phonics learning through:

- providing opportunities for faster learners to practise skills free from supervision;
 - asking children to add to and improve dictated sentences;
 - encouraging them to compose and write their own sentences;
 - modelling and encouraging use of letter names when spelling.
- Provide opportunities to enrich learning beyond daily phonics teaching – These opportunities could include: making use of classroom displays and visual resources to expose children to additional GPCs, such as Phonics Display Bunting or sounds mats; when children are reading or writing across the curriculum, talking to them about unusual and alternative spellings or tricky words; encouraging children to make links between new information and their existing knowledge to promote discussion to deepen understanding; providing children with additional reading books that contain some words that may not yet be decodable to provide opportunities for a greater depth of understanding.



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Interventions In Phonics

If, through assessment and observation, we identify that a child is working below age-related expectations and would benefit from a phonics intervention programme, we utilise scripted KS1 Intervention Packs and KS2 Codebreaker interventions which are specifically tailored to the needs of each key stage and designed to move children onto the next stage in their learning. The scripted packs are designed to be used by teachers and support staff alike. For both KS1 and KS2, there are intervention packs for Levels 2, 3, 4 and 5 so that pupils are being supported at the appropriate phonics level, in an age-appropriate way.

Each weekly pack contains 5 scripted session plans and supporting resources that cover reading and writing words containing GPCs, as well as reading and spelling common exception (tricky) words. Using a multisensory and dyslexia-friendly step-by-step process, pupils learn to spell common exception (tricky) words in an effective and meaningful way. The session plans are scripted to ensure consistency and high-quality teaching. They follow a consistent five-part lesson structure for those children who thrive on predictability and routine and follow the same order as our whole school Phonics Scheme.

KS2 Intervention

For those children who are working below age-related expectation, phonics learning shouldn't end in KS1. If, through assessment and observation, we identify that a child needs further phonics intervention, Codebreakers is a comprehensive and scripted intervention programme, specifically designed for KS2 pupils to close the gap and develop essential reading and writing skills.



Early Reading and Text Rich Environments

In order to build a solid foundation for phonics, early reading must be considered an essential part of the early years classroom. Within early reading, children are introduced to a range of books: both stories and non-fiction. Introducing and exploring new texts and sharing familiar stories with children will enable them to develop a love of reading and sharing books. Children are encouraged to explore books freely both independently and with adults. As well as providing meaningful opportunities for sharing stories, a text-rich environment is also key. A successful text-rich environment may include:

- labels which also include a picture of the item(s) or have been created by the children themselves
- displays showing words and pictures;
- displays of children's own mark making and writing;
- a reading loft
- a mark-making area;
- a role-play area including labels, books, text, and writing resources, e.g. shopping lists;
- environmental print resources that include familiar logos, signs, packaging that children will recognise.

Such an environment will not only enable children to become aware of the importance of text for reading and writing but will also provide a model that they will then reflect in their independent play.



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Decodable Texts/Home Reading

In order to apply their decoding and comprehension reading skills, it is important that children have plenty of opportunities to read texts that are fully decodable at the phonics level they are working. Children should be reading take-home books at 90% fluency and should not be reading texts that are too easy or beyond their phonics level or understanding. Decodable texts should only contain the sounds and tricky (common exception) words that the children know, to allow them to read with fluency and confidence while applying their developing skills effectively.

Matching Our Phonics Scheme to Our Reading Scheme

The books that children read as part of our reading scheme are fully decodable. We endeavour to ensure there is alignment between our phonics scheme and reading books so that children can apply their phonics learning to guided or home reading, using only the sounds and words that they have been taught.

Home reading that reinforces the skills that children are learning in school is important not only for sustained progress, but also builds both the child and parent's sense of achievement and helps develop a positive association with reading and books. There are many other benefits to reading at home, including increasing vocabulary, imagination and comprehension, as well as developing empathy, promoting discussion and learning about the world around us.