



MERRYLANDS
PRIMARY SCHOOL AND NURSERY

A GUIDE TO PHONICS

Review Date: Annual review

Phonics at Merrylands – Parent’s Guide

Introduction

Phonics at Merrylands is taught using a bespoke programme which we have tailored to meet the needs of the children who attend our school. It is structured using the Letters and Sounds teaching progression and uses much of the terminology children and parents will be familiar with from our previous phonics teaching, e.g. tricky words, high frequency words, digraphs etc.

Beginning in Nursery until the end of Year 2, Phonics is taught in daily discrete sessions. These will generally be whole class and delivered by the class teacher. At times, children may also receive “keep-up” sessions to ensure that they do not fall behind their cohort – these will be in addition to whole class sessions, will likely be small group or one-to-one and will be delivered by support staff.

Nursery

Phase 1

Nursery phonics lays the foundations children need to be able to move onto reading and writing in Reception. It focuses mainly on listening and discriminating sounds, moving onto oral blending and segmenting in the term before children start Reception.

On the whole, children will not be taught to recognise graphemes (the written letters) in Nursery but will gain all the skills which will enable them to be ready for this aspect in Reception.

Nursery phonics sessions are daily but are less formal and more “playful”.

Progression

Aspect 1: General sound discrimination –environmental sounds

Aspect 2: General sound discrimination –instrumental sounds

Aspect 3: General sound discrimination – body percussion

Aspect 4: Rhythm and rhyme

Aspect 5: Alliteration

Aspect 6: Voice sounds

Aspect 7: Oral blending and segmenting

All aspects will be experienced by all children to lay the best, most secure foundations. Aspects 1-6 can be delivered in any order. The children will experience them all in many ways – with frequent re-visiting.

Reception – Year 2

Beginning in Reception, Phonics will be taught in a daily 20/25 minute session and will be made up of four parts.

- Revise & Rehearse
- Learn
- Apply (Reading & Writing)
- Challenge (mix of reading & writing across the week)

Sessions are fast-paced, rigorous, challenging and no longer than 20/25 minutes. All suggestions for progression will be carefully considered in line with the cohort's needs and stage of development, using staff's professional judgement. Teaching letter sounds and what they look like written down (Phoneme and Grapheme Correspondences or GPCs) is only a small element to the teaching of phonics at Merrylands. A huge emphasis is placed on the application of known GPCs to reading and writing.

Phases 2-5

Phase 2 - Reception
As soon as the children can recognise the first set of GPCs they will begin to rehearse and apply their oral blending and segmenting skills to reading and writing. Children will have lots of modelling of letter formation and how to blend words using "pure sounds". Children will be taught to "ask the question" as soon as c,k,ck are introduced in order to begin using accurate spelling choices.
Progression
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/l, ss

Phase 3 - Reception
This phase covers the last few alphabet sounds and then teaches digraphs (2 letters, one sound). It consolidates blending and segmenting – still focussed on CVC words. Children will be actively encouraged to "ask the question" as the amount of spelling choices increase.
Progression
Set 1: j v w x
Set 2: y z/zz qu
Set 3: ch (chair) sh (shark) th (thumb) th (feather)
Set 4: ng (king) ai (snail) ee (tree) igh (light)
Set 5: oa (boat) oo (moon) oo (book) ar (car)
Set 6: or (fork) ur (fur) ow (cow) oi (coin)
Set 7: ear (ear) air (hair) ure (cure) er (teacher)

Phase 4 - Reception

Revises all GPCs learned so far whilst learning new skills and applying them to reading and writing in a more challenging way.=

Progression

- Reading and writing CVCC and CCVC words (e.g. just, lamp, rest, pram, drum)
- Reading and writing words containing digraphs (e.g. brown, snail, ladder, charm)
- Reading compound words (e.g. football, handstand, chopstick, lightbulb)
- Reading polysyllabic words (more than one syllable) e.g. faster, parking, hospital
- Reading CCVCC (e.g. ground, stings, twist)
- Writing words on a line, remembering when to use a descender and an ascender.
- Writing short sentences using a mixture of CVCC, CCVC, compound, words with more than one syllable and sight words. e.g. The fast chap ran under the carpark.
- Address common misconceptions: children regularly hear these adjacent consonants incorrectly...
jrum instead of drum
jrop instead of drop
sboon instead of spoon
sbot instead of spot
chree instead of tree
chrap instead of trap
sdop instead of stop
sdick instead of stick

Phase 5a – Reception (reviewed in Year One)

Alternative spellings of previously learned GPCs. Children must actively “ask the question” in this phase to embed the knowledge of the various GPCs and to develop an understanding of spelling rules and patterns.

Progression

Set 1: ay (play) ou (house) ie (tie) ea (beach)

Set 2: oy (toy) ir (shirt) ue (glue) aw (saw)

Set 3: wh (wheel) ph (dolphin) ew (screw) oe (toe)

Set 4: au (sauce) ey (key)

Set 5: a-e (cake) e-e (athlete) i-e (kite) o-e (note) u-e * (cube)

*extra intro u as in unicorn

Phase 5b – Year One (reviewed in Year Two)

Alternative pronunciations of previously learned GPCs

Progression

Set 1: i (tiger) o (open) c (city) g (giant)

Set 2: u (unicorn) ow (snow) ie (chief) ea (bread)

Set 3: er (fern) e (me) a (baby) a (swan)

Set 4: y (fly) y (gym) y (pony)

Set 5: ch (school) ch (chef) ey (grey)

Phase 5c - Year One (reviewed in Year Two)

Less common alternative spellings of previously learned GPCs

Progression

Set 1: t (picture) tch (catch) wr (wrap)

Set 2: ere (here) ear (learn) or (worm)

Set 3: dge (fudge) st (listen) ere (there)

Set 4: ear (pear) are (bare) oul (could)

Set 5: u (push) mb (lamb) se (please)

Set 6: a (father) al (half) kn (knit)

Set 7: gn (gnat) o (some) al (all)

Set 8: our (four) augh (caught)

Year 2

In the Autumn Term of Year 2, children will review and consolidate all previous phonics teaching and from then on, their daily sessions will be phonics based spelling lessons covering:

- Likely positions of GPCs
- Contractions
- Suffixes
- Homophones
- Patterns

Year 3 (and beyond)

Our programme is structured to enable children to become confident readers and writers by the end of Year 2. Any children who still need a little “boost” in Years 3 and above will receive small group/one-to-one sessions alongside whole class spelling lessons.

Phonics Screening

This is a statutory assessment which is carried out in June of Year 1. It measures how well children can apply taught GPCs to reading a mix of words – both real and fake “alien words”. It is carried out one to one with an adult known to the child. Parents will be informed of their child’s results.

Glossary of terms

As parents, it's important to make sure that you understand the key terms in phonics so that you can carry on the good work your child has done at school, at home!

Blend: this is when you say the individual sounds that make up a word and then merge or blend them together to say the word as used when reading. When orally blending children are taught to use their "blending" fingers to indicate how many sounds are being put together to form a word.

Consonant: most letters of the alphabet are consonants, except for the vowels: a,e,i,o,u.

CVC Words: this is an abbreviation used for consonant-vowel-consonant words. It describes the order of sounds. Some examples of CVC words are: cat, pen, top, chat (because ch makes one sound).

Other similar abbreviations include:

- **VC** (Vowel Consonant) words e.g. on, is, it.
- **CCVC** (Consonant, Consonant, Vowel, Consonant) words e.g. trap and black.
- **CVCC** (Consonant, Vowel, Consonant, Consonant) words e.g. milk and fast.

Digraph: this describes two letters which together make one sound e.g. ee, oa, ea, ch, ay.

There are different types of digraph:

- **Vowel digraph:** a digraph in which at least one of the letters is a vowel: boat or day.
- **Consonant digraph:** two consonants which can go together: shop or thin.
- **Split digraph** (used to be called magic e): two letters, which work as a pair to make one sound, but are separated within the word e.g. a-e, e-e, i-e, o-e, u-e. For example cake or pine.

Grapheme: it's a written letter or a group of letters which represent one single sound (phoneme) e.g. a, l, sh, air, ck.

Letters and Sounds: this the name of a Government document detailing the teaching of phonics.

Phoneme: it's a single sound that can be made by one or more letters - e.g. s, k, z, oo, ph, igh.

Pure Sound: it's the skill of pronouncing each letter sound clearly and distinctly without adding additional sounds to the end e.g. 'f' not 'fuh.'

Segment: it's the opposite of blending as it means splitting a word up into individual sounds when spelling and writing. The children will often refer to this as "chopping up" a word and will do a chopping action with their hands.

Tricky Words: they're the words that are difficult to sound out e.g. said, the, because they don't follow phonics rules.

Trigraph: this is when three letters go together to make one sound e.g. ear, air, igh, dge, tch.

Asking the question: this is a strategy for applying the correct spelling choices when there are alternatives (see full explanation below).

Spelling Strategy... "Asking the Question"

This strategy has been developed by 'The Phonics Queen' (an English Consultant) and is applicable to any method of teaching phonics.

From the point at which children are taught that phonemes can be represented by multiple graphemes (eg c,k, ck) children should be taught to "ask the question".

So, from early in Phase 2, when children are asked to point to 'c' on their sound mat, for example – they will have 3 choices, so they should initially be modelled how to ask the question... and then encouraged to ask it themselves...

"Is it 'c' as in cat, 'k' as in kitten or 'ck' as in duck?"

The adult then responds with "It is 'c' as in cat" and they can point to the correct grapheme.

Now, as they progress to writing words, for example "kit". We should not be asking the children to "have a go" or "which one looks right" (How are they supposed to know?) Instead encourage them to ask the question...

"For the word *kit*, is it 'c' as in cat, 'k' as in kitten' or 'ck' as in duck?"

The adult would then tell them "Good question, it is 'k' as in kitten." The children can then write/spell the word correctly.

Did you tell them how to spell it? No!

Did you give them the answer to their question? Yes!

Would you have told them the correct choice if they had just said "which c it it?" No!!

When asking the question, the children MUST display that they know what the possible options are and ask the question in full. This embeds and secures the different spelling choices (graphemes) they know and allow us to see how much they remember.

Next step...

Once children have been introduced to the 3 ways a 'c' can be represented (there are more of course, but the children haven't been introduced to them yet), we can begin to teach them simple rules about likely position of graphemes eg that 'ck' will never appear at the start of a word, but that all three can be in the middle and end of words.

This means that next time we ask them to write a word like "cab", we can remind them of this and ask them to slim down their question...

Child: "For the word *cab*, is it 'c' as in cat, 'k' as in kitten or 'ck' as in duck?"

Adult: "Think about where the 'c' phoneme is in the word *cab*."

Child: "At the start"

Adult: "Yes, do we have 'ck' as in duck at the beginning of a word?"

Child: "No"

Adult: "Right, so think about that and ask me the question again."

Child: "For the word *cab*, is it 'c' as in *cat*, 'k' as in *kitten*"

Adult: "Fantastic! It is 'c' as in *cat*."

From this example you can see how the child has rehearsed their knowledge of different graphemes for making the phoneme 'c' and they have had a conversation about spelling rules, and they have successfully and correctly spelt the word 'cab' without any guessing/does it look right?

Phase 5

In Phase 5 children will learn many different spelling choices for different phonemes, and this is where this strategy really comes into its own!

Example:

Autumn Term Year 1, children should be secure in Phase 5a from Reception and so if asked to write the sentence '*Fred put on his trainers*', you would expect children to ask, "In *trainers*, is it 'ai' as in *snail*, 'ay' as in *play*, or 'a-e' as in *cake*?"

The adult would respond "Good question, it is 'ai' as in *snail*"

If the children do not ask the question automatically, then you should prompt eg "Do you want to ask me the question for the word *trainers*?"

Example:

Autumn Term Year 2, children have covered the whole of Phase 5 and Yr1 spelling rules. So, when asked to write the sentence '*On the moon people are weightless*', you would expect children to ask...

"In *weightless* is it 'ai' as in *snail*, 'ay' as in *play*, 'a-e' as in *cake*, 'eigh' as in *eight*, 'a' as in *baby*, or 'ey' as in *grey*?"

Adult: "Think about the position of the 'ai' phoneme in the word and narrow down your choices... is it common for 'ay' or 'ey' to be in this position in a word?"

Child: "Is it 'a' as in *baby*, 'ai' as in *snail*, or 'eigh' as in *eight*?"

Adult: "It is 'eigh' as in *eight*"

Note: It is important that children are also exposed to words where the 'usual' does not apply eg 'mayhem'. They need to see that whilst we can make an educated attempt at a word, the English language is such, that there are many exceptions to the 'usual'.

By Year 2, children will still need to 'ask the question' for words they do not know how to spell but they will have a strategy for this; they will have the confidence and knowledge to start making an educated/knowledgeable attempt and know how to narrow down the question to the most likely options.

In summary:

- Children must ask the question in full – do not encourage them to shorten the question to "which 'ai' is it?" If they do this, then ask them to "ask the question properly" or "what are your choices for that phoneme?"
- Do not let children "guess" – if the question does not come automatically, then prompt "Do you need to ask me the question for the word..."