



Stebbing Primary School Phonics Teaching Strategy

What is Phonics?

Phonics is a way of teaching children how to read and write and is taught in the Early Years and Key Stage 1. At Stebbing we follow the Essential Letter and Sounds (ELS) resource created by primary teachers Tara Dodson and Katie Press, based on the Phases and 4 part lesson structure of the previously followed Government Strategy 'Letters & Sounds' (DfES, 2007). ELS sets out a detailed and systematic programme for teaching phonic skills and is covered mainly in Reception and Year 1, however it is used as an intervention to support older pupils where needed.

It falls largely in line with the Communication and Language, and Literacy areas of learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Phonics aims to build children's speaking and listening skills as well as preparing them to read and write by developing their phonic knowledge and skills. Phonics supports children with hearing, identifying and using different sounds that distinguish one word from another in the English language. Knowing the sounds of the individual letters and how those sound when they are combined will allow children to decode words when they read. Understanding phonics will also help children know which letters to use when they are writing words.

In phonics lessons children are taught three main things:

Graphemes

*Graphemes are the single letters and letter combinations that represent the sounds (phonemes) we hear in words. This simply means that the children are taught all the phonemes in the English language and ways of writing them down. These graphemes are taught in a particular order. The first sounds to be taught are **s, a, t, p**. They then learn digraphs; the **'s'** grapheme and the **'h'** grapheme joining together to make the **'sh'** grapheme and sound. In Year 1 they learn that these graphemes can also make alternative sounds.*

Blending

*Children are taught to be able to blend. This is when children say the individual sounds that they can **see** in a word (when reading) and are able to merge the sounds together until they can hear what the word is. This skill is vital in learning to read. ELS teaches the 'robot arm' strategy to support children with their oral blending before they are then able to blend to read.*

Segmenting

*This is the opposite of blending. This is when children say the individual sounds that they can **hear** in a word (when spelling). Children are able to say a word and then break it up into the phonemes that make it up. This skill is vital in being able to spell words. We elongate ("stretch") the words to hear each individual sound, then use our 'robot arms',*

count the phonemes and draw 'sound buttons' to help us transfer a word from our mouths to the paper.

Phonics Phases (as highlighted in Letters & Sounds (DfES, 2007))

Phase 1

Phase 1 of Letters and Sounds is used at the start of Reception, and in interventions and 'Funky Phonics' Club. Phase 1 concentrates on developing the children's listening skills, mouth movements, and phonological awareness which all lay 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.

It is divided into 7 aspects that involve exploring sounds in songs, rhymes, **environmental sounds** not necessarily letter sounds:

- Listening to sounds
- Learning how to discriminate sounds and knowing the difference between them
- Remembering sound patterns
- Orally segmenting and synthesising sounds
- Understanding how our mouth feels when we make that sound
- Recognising rhymes orally even if suggestions are not real words

Phase 2

Phase 2 is the children's first formal teaching of graphemes in Reception and is when the ELS programme begins for them.

There are 44 sounds in total for children to learn and these are known as phonemes.

Various letters and letter combinations known as graphemes (over 200 in all, in our English language) are used to represent the sounds. In Phase 2 children concentrate on learning the first 19 most common single letter sounds. Each week children will focus on approximately 4 new letter sounds to make learning them more achievable. The order in which they are taught in Reception is inline with the Letters and Sounds scheme. The purpose of this phase is to also move children on from oral blending and segmentation to blending and segmenting with letters. By the end of the phase many children should be able to read some VC (vowel-consonant) and CVC (consonant-vowel-consonant) words and to spell them either using magnetic letters or by writing the letters on paper or on whiteboards. During the phase they will be introduced to reading two-syllable words and simple captions. They will also learn to read some 'harder to read and spell' words, by sight/memory: the, to, go, no, I, into.

Phase 3

By the time Reception children reach Phase Three, they should be able to blend and segment words using the phonemes taught in Phase Two. During this phase children will learn a further 26 phonemes which mostly consist of digraphs and trigraphs such as /ee/, /ch/, /igh/, /air/. They will also learn the letter names using an alphabet song, although they will continue to use sounds when decoding words.

More 'harder to read and spell' words are taught by sight and memory.

Phase 4

Phase Four doesn't introduce any new phonemes. The aim of this phase is to consolidate children's current phonic knowledge and to help them learn to read and spell words containing adjacent consonants, such as **trap, string and milk**, and polysyllabic words. It is important that children continue to build their confidence with reading and writing sentences. They should now be blending confidently to decode new words and continue to take that step towards automatic word recognition. When writing, children should be about to write most letters correctly. This phase usually lasts between four to six weeks and most children will complete it by the end of Reception.

Phase 5

This is begun, as an introduction, in the final half term of Reception and then repeated (for embedding) in Year One. The purpose of this phase is for children to broaden their knowledge of graphemes and phonemes. 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. Children should master these in reading first, and as their fluency develops use them correctly in their spelling. Children become quicker at recognising graphemes of more than one letter in words and at blending the phonemes they represent. When spelling words they will learn to choose the appropriate graphemes to represent phonemes and begin to build word-specific knowledge of the spellings of words.

By the end of Year 1, children should be able to:

- Say the sound for any grapheme they are shown
- Write the common graphemes for any given sound (e.g. 'e,' 'ee,' 'ie,' 'ea')
- Use their phonics knowledge to read and spell unfamiliar words of up to three syllables
- Read all of the 100 high frequency words, and be able to spell most of them
- Form letters correctly

Phase 6

This is now completed in Year 1 also (previously Year 2) following the ELS programme.

Children should know most of the common grapheme– phoneme correspondences (GPCs). They should be able to read hundreds of words, using one of three strategies;

- reading the words automatically if they are very familiar;
- decoding them quickly and silently because their sounding and blending routine is now well established;
- decoding them aloud.

During this phase, children are becoming fluent readers and increasingly accurate spellers. They are aware of much punctuation and grammar and are using pleasing expression to add understanding for the listener and hold their interest. Children find the spelling of words more difficult so this takes a little longer to grasp. The ELS programme addresses this by reviewing the learning frequently to really embed that knowledge and skill.

They will also learn, among other things:

- Focuses on spelling changes/rules that include prefixes and suffixes, doubling and dropping letters etc.
- Making a word into a plural
- Learning about the past tense
- Compound words e.g. everywhere, lunchbox.
- Reading and spelling 'harder to read and spell' words.

Although formal phonics teaching should be completed by the end of Year 1, children continue to use their knowledge as they move through the school.

Teaching Strategy

Children are taught as a whole class, within something we call a 'Mastery Approach'. This preserves and strengthens self-esteem, nurtures equal opportunity and enables all children to 'keep up' not 'catch up'. The ELS programme also encourages short (3 minute) interventions within the phonics lesson itself promoting more the ability to 'keep up'. If needed other interventions are organised in addition to the phonics lesson to accelerate the progress of pupils who are working towards the expected standard.

Using half termly assessments (on Week 5 of each ELS block) and mock phonics screening checks signify where further further is needed (be it in the ELS lesson or in an additional intervention). Formative assessments take place within the lesson, as the children orally blend, participate by the adult leading the class and the TAs who are sitting on the carpet watching the children, within the lesson, to make sure any misconceptions are addressed

and to ensure the children are being challenged. Adults also hover around the class, once children are working at their tables, to check on and support writing, grapheme recognition and reading.

Phonics Planning

At Stebbing we regularly follow the weekly planning from Phonics Play (*follow link for planning <https://www.phonicsplay.co.uk/teachers/planning>*). Their planning follows the weekly overview given in Letters and Sounds but breaks it down by providing day by day lessons. Teachers can then adapt this planning accordingly to meet the needs of the pupils in their class.

Teaching Sequence

Each ELS phonics lesson utilises a 'presentation' which follows a repetitive and familiar sequence:

1. **Review** - *this involves recapping previously taught phonemes.*
2. **Teach** - *oral blending is practised, 'harder to read and spell' words are thoughts and a new grapheme is introduced*
3. **Practise** - *this involves reading words and sentences using the new grapheme and taught 'harder to read and spell' words. Previously taught graphemes are included in the words and sentence too, to embed prior learning and grow the children's confidence, fluency and love for reading.*
4. **Apply** - *the children use their ELS Activity Books to read and write words/sentences containing the new grapheme, or they may use a whiteboard if it is a 'review day' (Fridays, and on 'Week 5' (Assessment Week) of each ELS block). In the Summer term of Year 1, once the Activity Books have been completed, Year 1 will use an exercise book to promote handwriting and provide evidence of their progression. For some children, scaffolding will be provided to help them 'apply' learning as independently as possible - this may include the use of magnetic letters, velcro sound mats, grapheme cards, jumbled sentences to rearrange.*
5. **Assess** - *Grapheme cards and words are revisited for a final time. The children have another valuable opportunity to embed the day's learning by recognising, recalling and reading these.*

Assessment of Phonics

Children are formally assessed in class half termly using the ELS assessment documents provided. Year 1 children (and any Year 2 children awaiting a resit) complete a mock phonics screening check half termly and this data is collated in a document to ensure they are making progress each time.

The data from these assessments is used to:

- Ensure all children are on track to meet the expectations of the Phonics Screening check
- Inform parents of how they can support at home
- Action further interventions
- Action any special needs provision
- Identify the most able children to ensure they are being challenged