

ORCHARD PRIMARY SCHOOL

How to help your child with phonics



The aim of this booklet is to give you a clear picture of how we approach the teaching of phonics and word recognition and how, as a parent or carer, you can support and encourage your child at home.

What is phonics?

Phonics is the knowledge of phonemes and graphemes and how these are used to read and spell words. (Phonemes are the sounds that are made by a single letter or group of letters. A grapheme is the written equivalent of a phoneme).

Teaching children to blend the sounds of letters together helps them decode unfamiliar or unknown regular words by sounding them out. For example, when a child is taught the sounds for the letters s, a, t, p, i and n, they can start to build up the words: "tap", "taps", "tin", "pats" and "sit".

What scheme do we use to teach phonics at Orchard?

Children in Reception and Key Stage 1 follow the synthetic phonics approach, using the Jolly Phonics Scheme, in which individual letters or letter sounds are blended to form groups of letters or sounds, and those groups are then blended to form complete words. We supplement our scheme where necessary with other resources such as 'Phonics Play'.

How does Jolly Phonics work?

Using a synthetic phonics approach, Jolly Phonics teaches children the five key skills for reading and writing.

1. **Learning the letter sounds** - Children are taught the 42 main letter sounds. This includes alphabet sounds as well as digraphs such as sh, th, ai and ue.
2. **Learning letter formation** - Using different multi-sensory methods, children learn how to form and write the letters.
3. **Blending** - Children are taught how to blend the sounds together to read and write new words.
4. **Identifying the sounds in words (Segmenting)** - Listening for the sounds in words gives children the best start for improving spelling.
5. **Tricky Words** – Tricky words have irregular spellings and children learn these separately.

1. Learning the Sounds

In Jolly Phonics the 42 main sounds of English are taught, not just the alphabet. The sounds are in seven groups. Some sounds are written with two letters, such as ee and or. These are called digraphs. Both oo and th can make two different sounds, as in book and moon, that and three. To distinguish between these two sounds, the digraph is represented in two forms. This is shown below:

1. s, a, t, i, p, n
2. c k, e, h, r, m, d
3. g, o, u, l, f, b
4. ai, j, oa, ie, ee, or
5. z, w, ng, v, oo, oo
6. y, x, ch, sh, th, th
7. qu, ou, oi, ue, er, ar

Each sound is taught with an action, which helps children remember the letter(s) that represent it.

Children should learn each letter by its sound, not its name. For example, the letter a should be called a (as in ant) not ai (as in aim). Similarly, the letter n should be n (as in net), not en. This will help in blending. The names of each letter will be taught later.

The letters have not been introduced in alphabetical order. The first group (s, a, t, i, p, n) has been chosen because they make more simple three-letter words than any other six letters. The letters b and d are introduced in different groups to avoid confusion.

Sounds that have more than one way of being written are initially taught in one form only. For example, the sound ai (rain) is taught first, and then alternatives a-e (gate) and ay (day) follow later.

2. Learning Letter Formation

It is very important that a child holds their pencil in the correct way. The grip is the same for both left and right handed children.



The pencil should be held in the 'tripod' grip between the thumb and first two fingers. If a child's hold starts incorrectly, it is very difficult to correct later on.

A child needs to form each letter the correct way. The letter c is introduced in the early stages as this forms the basic shape of some other letters, such as d.

Particular problems to look for are:

the o (the pencil stroke must be anticlockwise, not clockwise), d (the pencil starts in the middle, not the top), there must be an initial down-stroke on letters such as m and n.

3. Blending

Blending is the process of saying the individual sounds in a word and then running them together to make the word. For example, sounding out d-o-g and making dog.

It is a technique every child will need to learn, and it improves with practice. To start with, you should sound out the word and see if a child can hear it, giving the answer if necessary. Some children take longer than others to hear this. The sounds must be said quickly to hear the word. Try little and often with words like b-u-s, t-o-p, c-a-t and h-e-n. It is easier if the first sound is said slightly louder.

Remember that some sounds (digraphs) are represented by two letters, such as sh. Children should sound out the digraph (sh), not the individual letters (s-h). With practice they will be able to blend the digraph as one sound in a word. So, a word like rain should be sounded out r-ai-n, and feet as f-ee-t. This is difficult to begin with and takes practice. Similarly, some sounds have three letters (trigraph) like 'l-igh-t' and 'h-ear'.

4. Identifying sounds in words

The easiest way to know how to spell a word is to listen for the sounds in that word. This is also called segmenting and is the reverse of blending.

Start by having your child listen for the first sound in a word. Games like I-Spy are ideal for this. Next try listening for the end sounds, as the middle sound of a word is the hardest to hear.

Begin with simple three-letter words such as cat or hot. A good idea is to say a word and tap out the sounds. Three taps means three sounds. Say each sound as you tap. Take care with digraphs. The word fish, for example, has four letters but only three sounds, f-i-sh.

Rhyming games, poems and the Jolly Songs also help tune the ears to the sounds in words. Other games to play are:

a) Add a sound: what do I get if I add a p to the beginning of ink? Answer: pink. Other examples are m-ice, b-us, etc.

b) Take away a sound: what do I get if I take away p from pink? Answer: ink. Other examples as above, and f-lap, s-lip, c-rib, d-rag, p-ant, m-end, s-top, b-end, s-t-rip, etc.

5. Spelling the Tricky Words

Pupils are also taught to read and spell 'tricky words' – words with spellings that are unusual or that children have not yet been taught.

Tricky words are words that cannot be decoded using phonics but are frequently used in the books the children are reading. These include the words 'to', 'was', 'said' and 'the' – you can't really break the sounds down for such words so it's better to just 'recognise' them.

There are different ways to learn words with irregular or tricky spellings:

1) Look, Cover, Write and Check. Look at the word to see which bit is tricky. Ask the child to try writing the word in the air saying the letters. Cover the word over and see if the child can write it correctly. Check to make sure.

2) Say it as it sounds. Say the word so each sound is heard. For example, the word was is said as 'wass', to rhyme with mass, the word Monday is said as 'M-on-day'.

3) Mnemonics. The initial letter of each word in a saying gives the correct spelling of a word. For example, laugh - Laugh At Ugly Goat's Hair.

How do we teach phonics at Orchard?

Discrete 20-minute phonics lessons take place daily across Reception and Key Stage 1.

Phonics sessions are structured in the same way each day, building consistent and familiar routines. In this way children know what to expect, are aware of expectations and are not distracted in their progress towards the learning intent.

We follow the structure of 'Review, Teach, Practise, Apply and Assess' to ensure that children are consolidating phonic knowledge and skills over time and that they are able to apply them in context.

With fun actions to teach the 42 letter sounds, as well as games, stories and songs, our multi-sensory phonics sessions allow pupils to revise their knowledge, learn new sounds and use and apply their reading and writing skills in a highly engaging way.

Within these sessions, children are also introduced to 'tricky words' and aim to read and write the high-frequency words for the phonics phase they are working in.

How you can help at home

To revise Phase 1

This paves the way for systematic learning of phonics and usually starts in nursery or playgroup. Teachers plan activities that will help children to listen attentively to sounds around them, such as the sounds of their toys and to sounds in spoken language. Teachers teach a wide range of nursery rhymes and songs. They read good books to and with the children. This helps to increase the number of words they know – their vocabulary – and helps them talk confidently about books.

Play '**What do we have in here?**' Put some toys or objects in a bag and pull one out at a time. Emphasise the first sound of the name of the toy or object by repeating it, for example, 'c c c c – car', 'b b b b – box', 'ch ch ch ch – chip'.

Say: 'A tall tin of tomatoes!' 'Tommy, the ticklish teddy!' 'A lovely little lemon!' This is called alliteration. Use names, for example, 'Gurpreet gets the giggles', 'Milo makes music', 'Naheema's nose'.

Teach them '**Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers**'.

Go on a **sound hunt** to collect objects beginning with a specific sound e.g. t t t t – teddy.

Sing songs and nursery rhymes in English or the language you know best. Rhythm and rhyme is a key part of phonic awareness.

Learning how to 'sound-talk' at Phase 1

The teacher shows children how to do this – **c-a-t = cat**. The separate sounds (phonemes) are spoken aloud, in order, all through the word, and are then merged together into the whole word. The merging together is called blending and is a vital skill for reading.

Children will also learn to do this the other way around – **cat = c-a-t**. The whole word is spoken aloud and then broken up into its sounds (phonemes) in order, all through the word. This is called segmenting and is a vital skill for spelling. This is all oral (spoken).

Your child will not be expected to match the letter to the sound at this stage. The emphasis is on helping children to hear the separate sounds in words and to create spoken sounds.

Sound-talking

Find real objects around your home that have three phonemes (sounds) and practise 'sound talk'. First, just let them listen, then see if they will join in, for example, saying:

'I spy a p-e-g – peg.'

'I spy a c-u-p – cup.'

'Where's your other s-o-ck – sock?'

'Simon says – put your hands on your h-e-a-d.'

'Simon says – touch your ch-i-n.'

'Simon says – pick up your b-a-g.'

Phase 2

In this phase children will continue practising what they have learned from phase 1, including 'soundtalk'.

They will also be taught the phonemes (sounds) for a number of letters (graphemes), which phoneme is represented by which grapheme and that a phoneme can be represented by **more than one letter**, for example, /ll/ as in **b-e-ll**.

They may be using pictures or hand movements to help them remember these.

VC and CVC words

C and V are abbreviations for 'consonant' and 'vowel'. VC words are words consisting of a vowel then a consonant (e.g. am, at, it) and CVC words are words consisting of a consonant then a vowel then a consonant (e.g. cat, rug, sun). Words such as tick and bell also count as CVC words – although they have four letters, they have only three sounds. For example, in the word bell, **b** = consonant, **e** = vowel, **ll** = consonant.

Now the children will be seeing letters and words, as well as hearing them. They will be shown how to make whole words by pushing magnetic or wooden letters together to form little words, reading little words on the interactive whiteboard and breaking up words into individual sounds, which will help their spelling.

These will be simple words made up of two phonemes, for example, am, at, it, or three phonemes, for example, cat, rug, sun, tick, bell.

Tricky words

They will also learn several tricky words: **the, to, I, go, no**. Children will still be practising oral blending and segmenting skills daily. They need plenty of practice at doing this.

Saying the sounds

Your child will be taught how to pronounce the sounds (phonemes) correctly to make blending easier.

Sounds should be sustained where possible (e.g. sss, fff, mmm) and, where this is not possible, 'uh' sounds after consonants should be reduced as far as possible (e.g. try to avoid saying 'buh', 'cuh').

Ways to help at home with Phase 2

Magnetic letters

Buy magnetic letters for your fridge, or for use with a tin tray. Find out which letters have been taught – have fun finding these with your child and place them on the magnetic surface.

Making little words together

Make little words together, for example, it, up, am, and, top, dig, run, met, pick. As you select the letters, say them aloud: 'a-m – am', 'm-e-t – met'.

Breaking words up

Now do it the other way around: read the word, break the word up and move the letters away, saying: 'met – m-e-t'.

Both these activities help children to see that reading and spelling are reversible processes.

Don't forget the writing box!

Spelling is harder than reading words – praise, don't criticise. Little whiteboards and pens, and magic boards, are a good way for children to try out spellings and practise their handwriting.

Your child might be trying to use letters from their name to write; this shows that they know that writing needs real alphabet letters.

Make or buy an alphabet poster.

Getting ready for writing - ways you can support at home

Using their whole body

For handwriting children need to be well co-ordinated and have good core strength - it's not just their hands and fingers. Activities that help core strength include climbing, balancing and swinging at the park, pushing things in a wheelbarrow, and carrying heavy objects like tyres, watering cans and bricks. Try sitting on a stool to eat rather than on the sofa! Have fun!

Hand and finger play

Action rhymes such as 'Incy Wincy Spider', 'One potato, two potato' and 'Tommy Thumb' are great fun and get their hands and fingers moving. Playing with playdough or clay or squeezing sponges and flannels in the bath really helps strengthen little fingers, as does cooking – stirring, kneading, mixing - and helping with DIY – nuts and bolts, hammering and using a screwdriver.

Hand–eye co-ordination

Pouring water into jugs and cups of different sizes, sweeping up with a dustpan and brush, cutting, sticking, tracing, threading beads, completing puzzles, Lego, peeling off stickers and sticking them in the right place – these all help hand–eye co-ordination.

Pencil hold

The ‘pincer’ movement needs to be practised. This is important as it enables children to hold a pencil properly as they write. Provide them with kitchen tongs and see if they can pick up small objects.

Move on to challenging them to pick up smaller things, for example, little cubes, popping corn, dried peas, lentils, first with their thumb and forefinger, then with tweezers. Raisins and Cheerios are good too and the children can eat them!

Ask children to peg objects to a washing line.

Provide plenty of different types of pen, pencils and paintbrushes; hold their hand to practise the correct grip.

Did you know?

There is a very close link between difficulty with phonics and hearing so, if your child is making progress more slowly than might be expected, it would be worth having their hearing checked.

Phase 3

The purpose of this phase is to:

- teach more graphemes, most of which are made of two letters, for example, ‘**oa**’ as in **boat**
- practise blending and segmenting a wider set of CVC words, for example, **fizz, chip, sheep, light**
- learn all letter names and form them correctly
- learn to recognise and write the capital letters
- read more tricky words and begin to spell some of them
- read and write words in phrases and sentences.

CVC words containing graphemes made of two or more letters

Here are some examples of words your children will be reading: **tail, week, right, soap, food, park, burn, cord, town, soil**

Their confidence from the daily experience of practising and applying their phonic knowledge to reading and writing will be really paying off!

Tricky words

The number of tricky words is growing. These are so important for reading and spelling: **he, she, we, me, be, was, my, you, her, they, all.**

Ways to support at home

- Play ‘**I spy**’, using letter names as well as sounds.
- Sing an alphabet song together.
- Continue to play with magnetic letters, using some of the two grapheme (letter) combinations:
- **r-ai-n = rain** blending for reading
rain = r-ai-n – segmenting for spelling
- **b-oa-t = boat** blending for reading
boat = b-oa-t – segmenting for spelling
- **h-ur-t = hurt** blending for reading
hurt = h-ur-t – segmenting for spelling
- Praise your child for trying out words.
- Ask teachers for a list of the tricky words.
- Set a timer. Call out one word at a time and get your child to spell it on a magic board or a small whiteboard.
- Play ‘**Pairs**’, turning over two words at a time trying to find a matching pair. This is especially
- helpful with the tricky words: **the the, to to, no no, go go, I I**
- Don’t worry if they get some wrong! These are hard to remember – they need plenty of practice.

Phase 4

Children continue to practise previously learned graphemes and phonemes and learn how to read and write:

CVCC words: tent, damp, toast, chimp

For example, in the word 'toast', **t = consonant, oa = vowel, s = consonant, t = consonant**

and **CCVC words: swim, plum, sport, cream, spoon**

For example, in the word 'cream', **c = consonant, r = consonant, ea = vowel, m = consonant.**

They will be learning more tricky words and continuing to read and write sentences together.

Tricky words: said, so, do, have, like, some, come, were, there, little, one, when, out, what

Ways to support at home

Practise reading and spelling some CVCC and CCVC words but continue to play around with CVC words.

Children like reading and spelling words that they have previously worked with, as this makes them feel successful.

- Make up captions and phrases for your child to read and write, for example, a silver star, clear the pond, crunch crisps. Write some simple sentences and leave them around the house for your child to find and read. After they have found and read three, give them a treat!
- Look out for words in the environment, such as on food packaging, which your child will find easy to read, for example, lunch, fresh milk, drink, fish and chips, jam.
- Work on reading words together, for example, a street name such as Park Road, captions on buses and lorries, street signs such as bus stop.