

Phonics

In order to read successfully, children need two skills; phonics and language comprehension. They need to be able to decode by blending the sounds in words to read them and they need to be able to understand what the word means and the context within which it appears.

At Warden House Primary School we use a systematic phonics programme called "Letters and Sounds". In Reception this is used alongside a programme called "Jolly Phonics" which assigns actions to letter sounds. Letters and Sounds is divided into six phases, with each phase building on the skills and knowledge of previous learning. The sessions are fun and interactive with lots of games to keep the children motivated and engaged. Children are constantly encouraged to apply their phonics learning to their reading and writing in a variety of contexts throughout the day.

What is phonics?

There has been a huge shift in the past few years in how we teach reading in UK schools. This is having a big impact and helping many children learn to read and spell. Phonics is recommended as the first strategy that children should be taught in helping them learn to read. It runs alongside other teaching methods such as Guided Reading and Shared Reading to help children develop all the other vital reading skills and hopefully give them a real love of reading.

Words are made up from small units of sound called phonemes. Phonics teaches children to be able to listen carefully and identify the phonemes that make up each word. This helps children to learn to read words and to spell words

In phonics lessons children are taught three main things:

GPCs

They are taught GPCs. This stands for grapheme phoneme correspondences. This simply means that they are taught all the phonemes in the English language and ways of writing them down. These sounds are taught in a particular order. The first sounds to be taught are **s, a, t, p**.

Blending

Children are taught to be able to blend. This is when children say the sounds that make up a word and are able to merge the sounds together until they can hear what the word is. This skill is vital in learning to read.

Segmenting

Children are also taught to segment. This is the opposite of blending. 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.

So why bother learning phonics?

Since the English language is so tricky, it is important children learn to read clearly and systematically. A written language is basically a kind of a code. Teaching phonics is just teaching children to crack that code. Children learn the simple bits first and then progress to get the hang of the trickier bits.

Phonics codebreaker

Phoneme - a sound as it is said.

Grapheme - a sound that is written.

Digraph - two letters that work together to make the same sound.

Trigraph - Three letters that work together to make the same sound.

Split digraph - Two letters that work together to make the same sound, separated by another letter.

What makes phonics tricky?

In some languages learning phonics is easy because each phoneme has just one grapheme to represent it. The English language is a bit more complicated than this.

Let's start at the beginning...

Each one of the 26 letters in the alphabet has its own 'sound'. This is very different to how a letter is 'said' in the alphabet.

For example: 'a' in **a**rrow 'b' in **b**at

Of course phonics is not that simple! There are more than 26 sounds in English language, in fact there are 44 sounds in total. To make things even trickier, there are around 120 graphemes or ways of writing down those 44 sounds. Obviously we only have 26 letters in the alphabet so some graphemes are made up from more than one letter. Two letter sounds are called digraphs and three letter sounds are called trigraphs.

ch th oo ay (these are all digraphs - graphemes with two letters)

ear, ure (trigraphs – graphemes with 3 letters)

Another slightly sticky problem is that some graphemes can represent more than one sound. For example **ch** makes very different sounds in these three words: **ch**ip, **sch**ool, **ch**ef.

How is phonics taught?

Some people worry that phonics is taught to children when they are too young. However, those people might be surprised if they stepped into a phonics lesson. Phonics sessions are entirely made up from games, songs and actions and these sessions only last for 15-20 minutes per day.

These are some really useful websites to find information and resources.

<https://www.phonicsplay.co.uk>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UCI2mu7URBc>

5 tips to help your child fall in love with reading

1. Choose books that your child is genuinely interested in.

This may sound obvious, but asking a child to read about robots if they love trains isn't going to have the same impact!

2. Pick a quiet and appropriate time to read

Creating a relaxed environment can really help to ease the pressure some children face when asked to practice their reading.

3. Talk about the story

It is important to make reading more than just about 'practicing reading'. Remember that books are stories!

Talk about what is happening in the story 'what do you think this book is going to be about?' 'What do you think will happen next?' are great questions to engage your child in the storybook.

4. Identify tricky words first before you start reading

Once you start to read regularly you will learn the words that they will find tricky depending on their level. Reading the trickier words together before you start reading will give your child confidence when they see that word during the story.

5. Give them time to decipher the words

Giving your child time to decipher the words and not rushing them will increase their confidence. It is important for children to learn the process of how to read words. That is how phonics works. Ask them to take their time, sound it out and blend it back together.

Be patient here! It is not uncommon for children to correctly read a word and then 30 seconds later be unable to read it. Go through the process from the beginning, sound it out, blend it together and in time they will recognise high frequency words.

Don't forget to give them positive praise for their effort!



Prompts to help my child read at home



Look at the front cover. What could the book be about?

Do any of the words rhyme?
Do they end in the same sound?

We know this word starts with H what in the picture starts with H?

Can you retell the story?

Who are the characters?

How does the character feel and why? How would you feel?

Can you spot any sounds you have learnt at school?
Can you do the sound action?

What is the first, middle and last sound? Can you say those sounds together c-a-t

What do you think will happen next?
How will it end?

Can you spot any sounds in your name?

What is happening in the picture?
Have you done this before?



What do you think is happening in this picture?

Examples of some phonetic and comprehension questions to ask

How many times can you see the word run on this page?

How do you know they are having fun?
What on their faces shows this?

Can you spot any sounds in your name?
F for Finley

Do any of the words rhyme? What sound do they end in?

Let's break the word down f-u-n...
now say the sounds together



Who is wearing the biggest hat?

Do you remember when we went to the beach?

How many hats can you see?
What does hat start with again?

What colour is the Dad's top?

What do you think will happen next? Why?

Is this the new sound you have learnt in class?
Can you show me the action?