

Phonics a guide for parents

What is phonics?

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.

So, what exactly is phonics?

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

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.

Segmenting

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.

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. English only has around 44 phonemes but there are around 120 graphemes or ways of writing down those 44 phonemes. Obviously, we only have 26 letters in the alphabet so some graphemes are made up from more than one letter. Another slightly sticky problem is that some graphemes can represent more than one phoneme. For example **ch** makes very different sounds in these three words: **chip, school, chef**.

How we teach phonics Phonics sessions are entirely made up from games, songs and actions and these sessions only last for 15-20 minutes per day.

What we do to teach reading

Teach phonics as the first main method for children to learn to read words, this begins at age 5.

Before the age of 5 children should be involved in pre-reading activities to prepare them for phonics work.

Phonics is taught in a systematic way across the school.

Phonics is set within a rich language curriculum that develops speaking and listening, reading and writing skills.

Phonics teaching is multisensory. This means children will learn using all their senses e.g. by singing, dancing, acting, using magnetic letters, making shapes in the air, looking at pictures, playing games, using computers, making sounds, making choices and as many other ways as possible. This is vital because all children learn differently. At Priestley School we use the letters and sounds government programme as the basis of our phonics teaching. We use Jolly phonics for the songs and the actions and we use www.phonicsplay.co.uk for the interactive games and content.

How a lesson looks;

Children in Reception, Y1 and Y2 have a 15-20 minute phonics session every day. This session is fast, fun and multisensory (see above). Each session follows a clear sequence:

Introduction - The teacher will explain to the children what they will be learning today and get them enthusiastic and motivated for the session.

Revisit and review - The children will play a quickfire game to practise something they have learned before and help build their confidence.

Teach - The children will be taught a new phoneme/grapheme or a new skill - this will be taught in a fun multisensory way and may well involve: songs, actions, pictures, puppets, writing giant letters in the air.

Practise - The children play fast, fun games to practise the new thing they have just learned. Many of the games on this site will be used in this section of the session.

Apply - The children will have a quick go at reading or writing sentences that involve the new thing they have just learned.

Each of these sections lasts a few minutes at most.

Outside of the phonics session children are given lots of opportunities to apply the new skills that they have learned in all the lessons that they do. The more opportunities they are given the sooner they will become confident with these skills. Each day the children are given time to practise forming the new grapheme in their sound book.

Is this the only way that children are taught to read?

Absolutely not! Phonics is the first step in helping children to crack the code of reading and writing. However children also need to learn strategies to tackle words that can't be decoded easily and also to be able to understand and engage with what they read.

Reading skills are also developed through;

Reading Aloud to children.

Guided Reading sessions involve a group of children reading the same book with a teacher.

Literacy Lessons are another key opportunity for teaching reading.

Shared Reading in which a teacher will plan to model a specific reading skill with a group of children.

Helping My Child

Unofficial homework - sharing what they have learned today

Encourage your child to tell you what they have done at school today. The earlier you can get into this habit the better. Children in Nursery, Reception and Year 1 will have been learning songs and actions that they can show you and you can join in with. If your child absolutely won't tell you, have a chat to the teacher and see if there are actions or songs that they can share with you. Otherwise, try learning some songs and nursery rhymes at home together. If you find out from the school which letters your child has learned so far, you could print out picture cards from www.phonicsplay.co.uk. See if your child can match up the pictures to the words and then use them to play matching games such as snap, pairs etc.

Your child may also like to play the games on this website at home too.

Reading with your child

One of the greatest gifts that you can give to your child is a love of reading. Research has shown that one of the biggest indicators of success in a child's life is whether or not they have books in the home. As a parent, try to focus on making reading fun and enjoyable rather than getting bogged down in trying to teach nitty gritty skills. There are many, many different things that you can do. Here are just a few:

Let your child see you reading - This can be a newspaper, magazine, anything you like.

Read something with your child - It doesn't need to be a book. Talk about what they are reading - Talk before you start. Talk whilst you are reading. Talk after you have finished. You can still talk about what your child is reading even if they don't want to actually read with you anymore.

Praise your child - Studies show that children who are given specific support with their reading make much greater progress if they are given lots of praise than if they are given the support alone. Try to praise your child's accuracy, understanding and attitude.

More information

If you wish to know more about how your child's reading is progressing and how you could help, here are some questions that you could ask your child's class teacher to find out a bit more information. Do bear in mind that they may not have all this information at their fingertips. You may need to give them a chance to get back to you.

What phonic phase is my child working at?

What book band are they reading at?

What would you suggest that I do to help my child at home?

Concerned about your child's progress?

The initial step should be to come and talk to your child's class teacher. They won't feel like you are bothering them. Teachers are generally very pleased to have parents who are interested and keen to help out at home. Ask them the questions above but also ask them:

Are you concerned about my child's progress with phonics and reading?

Is my child receiving any additional support with their phonics and or reading?

In addition, ensure that you are using as many of the ideas as possible above and are reading every single day with your child, in one way or another.