

# Phonics and Reading

There have been many changes over the past few years in how we teach reading in 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.

## **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 learn to read words and 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, i, n.

### **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 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.

### **What makes phonics tricky?**

The English language has around 44 phonemes (or sounds) but there are around 120 graphemes or ways of writing down those 44 phonemes (e.g. ai, ay, ae, igh and ey all make the long vowel sound for **a**) Obviously we only have 26 letters in the alphabet so some graphemes are made up from more than one letter.

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

There are other graphemes that are trigraphs (made up of 3 letters **igh**) and even a few made from 4 letters. (**eigh**)

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 is phonics taught?**

At Balliol we follow the program of Letters and Sounds. The children are taught in a systematic, yet fun and 'hands on' way. In the daily phonics lesson the 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. They are then taught to apply the new phonemes in their reading and spelling.

There are assessment systems in place to keep track of how all children are doing in phonics.

At the end of Year 1 all children are assessed using the national phonics screening assessment. The purpose of this assessment is to monitor their attainment in line with national standards and identify any additional support requirements. These results are reported to parents.

There are some children that grasp phonics less quickly than others, they are given intervention (specific support with their phonics) to help them catch up as soon as possible.

## **Reading.**

At Balliol Primary School all children access a variety of reading books at an appropriate level for their learning. We use a variety of books of different genres. Our aim is to develop a love of reading and wide reading range for all of the children.

Your child's reading book will have been selected from a colour Book Band. This means that whatever book your child has chosen, it will be at an appropriate level for them. Your child should then be able to practice some of the phonic strategies to sound out new words. At this stage it is vital that the child uses the sound of the letters rather than the name. (**c-a-t** blends together to make cat, but **see ay tee** does not!)

When the children have grasped phonics and are developing confidence they will move onto Accelerated Reader a scheme that we use to further develop reading and comprehension skills. Children will choose a book which is suitable for their reading age and when they have read this will complete an online test to check their understanding.

As the children progress through the school the books become suitably challenging but also engaging to secure the love of reading that we aim for for all.

## **How you can help 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. 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. This is a powerful message to send to your child.
- Read something with your child - It doesn't need to be a book. The secret is to find something that your child is desperate to read - comics, magazines, football programmes, newspapers, internet pages, texts, e-mails, catalogues etc. However, never underestimate that power of a book that a child really, really wants to read, even if it is too hard for them. If they are very keen to read a particular tricky book then go for it and just help them out when they need it.
- Talk about what they are reading - Talk before you start. Talk whilst you are reading. Talk after you have finished.
- 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.

If you would like more information or ideas to help your child please don't hesitate to contact us.

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