

Phonics Policy

The ability to read accurately, fluently and with good understanding is a vital skill and central to future life success. At St. John's we are committed to ensuring that all children are equipped with this ability and develop the love of reading widely and often, both for pleasure and acquiring information. We strive to teach our children to read effectively and quickly by placing the teaching of systematic, daily phonics at the heart of our practice. By following the Letters and Sounds phonics programme we endeavour to teach the children to:

- recognise the sound that each individual letter, then combinations of letters, make (the Grapheme Phoneme Correspondence or GPC)
- blend these sounds from left to right to make a word
- use this phonic knowledge as the route to de-code new words they see and hear
- read common exception (or "tricky words") which are introduced at regular intervals
- read words containing taught GPCs and -s, -es, -ing, -ed, -er and -est endings
- read words of more than one syllable that contain taught GPCs
- understand that the apostrophe represents omitted letters and read words with contractions with this in mind
- progress from overtly sounding out then blending words, to sight reading fluently and with expression

Children build this phonic knowledge from the EYFS onwards, and are given the opportunity to read and then re-read books which closely match, and are consistent with, their developing phonic knowledge in order to build their confidence and fluency in word reading from the earliest opportunity, as appropriate for each individual.

All staff closely monitor and regularly assess the children's progress in reading and identify those children requiring additional support, therefore intervening at an early age. Children making the slowest progress, and/or falling behind age related expectations, receive frequent small group or 1:1 intervention in order to narrow the attainment gap.

As a school we are committed to facilitating the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) of our staff in order to enhance their phonic knowledge, skills and understanding with the aim of improving the quality of teaching and learning and raising standards. Thus providing the best learning environment possible for our children.

At St John's we recognise and value the vital role that parents/carers play in helping their child to learn to read and invite them into school from the earliest opportunity, and at regular intervals, to observe phonics teaching, attend meetings relating to phonics, and speak directly to staff about their child's progress, in order to ensure that parents/carers are fully supported and armed with the information and skills needed to support their child's reading at home. A Phonics Guide for parents is available on the school's website.

Our phonics sessions take place daily from Nursery through to Year 2. They are intensive, fast paced and cumulative, therefore late arrival to school and/or poor attendance severely disrupts the progress of any pupils who are late or absent, for however short a time. As a school we take all steps possible to remove any barriers to attendance and to both support these children and take action with their parents/carers where necessary.

Letters and Sounds - Letters and Sounds is taught in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 and is divided into six phases:

Phase 1 – Nursery / Reception

Phase 2 – Reception

Phase 3 – Reception

Phase 4 – Reception / Year 1

Phase 5 – Year 1

Phase 6 – Year 1 / Year 2

Nursery

Phase 1 is divided into seven aspects which each focus on the initial skills needed for reading and writing – e.g. listening to and discriminating between different sounds – both environmental and instrumental, developing an understanding of rhythm, rhyme and alliteration, and then moving on to the ability to orally blend and segment words when appropriate. These activities involve singing lots of nursery rhymes and songs, using musical instruments and playing listening games using a variety of multi-sensory resources including ICT.

Due to the importance we place on the teaching of phonics at St. John's we begin to develop our children's phonic skills from the earliest available opportunity, with children within our 2 Year Old provision being introduced to elements of Phase 1 phonics. The children take part in daily song time, listen to stories, use a variety of musical instruments and, where appropriate, work in small groups to enhance the children's speaking and listening skills. Parents are invited to attend group Rhyme Time sessions at regular intervals throughout the year to begin to encourage parental support as early as possible.

Within the Nursery Phase 1 activities are carried out daily both with the whole class and in small groups. These activities are carried out both by the class teacher and experienced Early Years practitioners, ensuring that all staff are aware of the abilities and progress of the individual children and are therefore able to intervene and offer additional support where necessary. The children are regularly informally assessed, and the results are recorded termly on a phonics tracking sheet.

If appropriate, targeted children also receive Early Talk Boost intervention sessions aimed at boosting their language skills in order to narrow the gap between themselves and their peers. The sessions take place three times per week for 20 minutes per session.

The Nursery staff work very closely with parents/carers and send home weekly diary letters to inform them of the activities that the children have carried out during the week and offer activity suggestions, games or websites that parents/carers could use at home to reinforce and consolidate this learning. There are also a number of Nursery Rhyme sacks which are sent home for parents to use with their child to further support and develop their early phonic skills.

The Nursery children take part in a Nursery Rhyme Challenge, where parents are encouraged to help their child to learn up to 8 Nursery Rhymes, after which the children receive a certificate at a celebration assembly which the parents are invited to attend.

There is a weekly Foundation Unit library where the children are encouraged to choose a book to share with their family at home to further encourage their interest in books and love of listening to stories and the Nursery children also visit Crown Street Library in the town centre during the year.

During the summer term, targeted children and their families are invited to take part in the National Literacy Trust's "Everyone Ready for School" programme which aims to engage parents/carers in their child's learning, helping them to understand and implement simple communication, language and literacy activities in the home. The sessions are carried out by our Reception staff so this enables children and their families to begin building relationships with them at the earliest opportunity.

Prior to their child starting in Reception all parents/carers are invited to attend a transition meeting. This provides the opportunity for the Reception teacher to discuss the importance of home support and how vital it is that both school and home work together in order to fully support their child's learning.

Reception

On entry to Reception the children's phonic knowledge and abilities are assessed and any aspects of Phase 1 are consolidated or taught, as necessary, depending on the needs of the children.

At the end of their first week the children begin to receive wordless picture books to take home and share with parents/carers. An accompanying information sheet explaining the importance of these wordless books is enclosed, which gives parents/carers tips and advice on how to "read" them with their child.

In week 3 (the children's first full week) the children begin Phase 2 phonics, along-side any Phase 1 activities deemed necessary. Here the children are introduced to the sounds (or phonemes) that the individual letters make. The letter sounds are taught at a rate of 3 sounds per week - following the order set out in Letters and Sounds so that the most commonly used sounds are introduced first, enabling the children to be introduced to simple words immediately. Previous sounds are recapped and consolidated. The children take home their sound book at the end of each week to practise recognising and writing the sounds taught that week and re-cap previous sounds. New sounds are added each week.

Within the first few weeks of Phase 2 parents/carers are invited to attend phonics drop-in sessions to see phonics being taught. They are made aware of the importance of pronouncing the letter sounds correctly, shown how blending (and then segmenting) is taught, given activity ideas, shown useful apps and websites and given a copy of the school's Phonics Guide for parents. Any parents/carers who are unable to attend the drop-in sessions also receive a copy of the phonics guide, and the websites and apps suggested during the sessions are included in the weekly diary letter sent home in their child's home/school Working Together book.

As soon as the children begin to develop the ability to blend sounds to read simple words they progress to taking home CVC word cards e.g. sat, nip, pat, pin etc. to allow the children to practise their blending at home. Once confident with these sets of cards the children then move on to books with simple sentences. Along with their first book they take home an alphabet strip showing both the lower and upper case letters so that any unfamiliar capital letters can be identified by matching them to their lower case sound.

The children are also introduced to "Tricky Words" – words that cannot be sounded out then blended but must be sight read. These are introduced gradually, at intervals, and are introduced in the order they appear in the Phase Two reading books.

Home reading books are organised by phonic phase so that the books the children receive are closely matched to the letter sounds and tricky words they know. This enables the children to experience reading success from the outset and helps to build their confidence and enjoyment when reading. It is expected that the children read at home for a short time every night. Books are changed on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, allowing the children to re-read the book they have been given the following night or during the weekend in order to further build their confidence and fluency. All Reception children read 1:1 with an adult at school at least once per week. Home reading is closely monitored and any children not reading regularly at home are quickly identified and read 1:1 with an adult daily at school. The class teacher then speaks to the parent(s)/carer(s) concerned to reinforce and remind them of the importance of regular home reading. During the Reception year the children take part in a "Reading Challenge" where regular home reading is

rewarded with a certificate and “Star Reader” badge, which the children receive at a celebration assembly attended by parents/carers.

The children are informally assessed on a daily basis with the children moving ability groups when necessary in order to receive the most appropriate phonic activities and support. More formal assessment is carried out at regular intervals with the results recorded half-terminally on a phonics tracker. If children are secure with their current phase they will move on to the next phase of their phonic development, as appropriate. Children making the slowest progress, or not yet secure, are identified and receive daily small group work with either the class teacher or highly experienced teaching assistant. Targeted children also receive Talk Boost intervention sessions aimed at narrowing the gap between children with language delay and their peers. The children are taught in small groups three times per week for 10 weeks, with each session lasting approximately 30 minutes. Parents are kept fully informed about their child’s progress and are given any help, support and strategies to use at home if needed.

In Phase 3 the children build on the skills learned in Phase 2 and are introduced to new letter sounds and sounds made up of two letters e.g. sh, ch, ar (digraphs), or three letters e.g. igh, air, ure (trigraphs). They are also introduced to further “tricky words”.

During Phase 4 the children continue to practise segmenting and blending sounds using their letters and sounds knowledge, and practise decoding and reading words containing clusters of letters that can be found at either the beginning or end of words e.g. br, cl, cr, nt, str. Further new tricky words are introduced.

Children in Reception progress from reading Phase 2 reading books, to Phase 3 books, then books containing Phase 4 clusters. By the end of Reception the highest attaining children are introduced to some Phase 5 sounds and tricky words as appropriate, to enable them to continue to make rapid progress in reading and begin to read the next stage of home reading books and aid their transition into Year 1.

There is a weekly Reception library where the children are encouraged to choose a book to share with their family at home to further encourage their interest in books and love of listening to stories. The children also enjoy taking part in Rhyme Time and story sessions with members of the Darlington Library events team who visit school during the Reception year.

Year 1

At the start of the Autumn term parents/carers are invited into the classroom to a “Meet the Teacher” event where the Year 1 teacher explains how phonics is taught in Year 1 and how the Phonics Screening Check will operate later in the year. All staff are fully aware of the expectations of the Phonics Screening Check and access the training video and support materials.

In Year 1 the children continue to receive daily phonic sessions. They recap and reinforce known phonemes and new phonemes are introduced, as appropriate, for those children who are ready to begin working on Phase 5. The children practise reading words containing the new phoneme taught, and then listen to words containing that phoneme which they then segment and write on individual whiteboards. These phonic skills are embedded during reading sessions and also during writing sessions within English lessons. Within Phase 5 the children also learn additional tricky and decodable words.

Daily home reading continues to be an expectation in Year 1 and reading books are sent home along with sets of High Frequency Word flashcards known as “fast words”. These words are sent home in groups of around 10 words at a time ranging from phase 2 to 5 and Year 1 Common exception words, as appropriate to the individual child. The children read their fast words daily at school and receive the next set of words when appropriate.

The Year 1 children receive a group guided reading session for 20 minutes each day, reading a text which challenges their phonetic decoding and sight word reading skills. They apply the reading strategies taught in the whole class sessions to their text.

Reading intervention sessions also take place daily for those children whose reading skills are below age related expectations. The reading intervention session includes a recap of selected phonemes and sight words. Following this the children read a Code X intervention reading book.

In addition to the Phonic Screening Check the children are assessed at the end of each half-term, with their results recorded on the phonics tracker.

Year 2

In Phase 6, the focus is on learning spelling rules for word endings (suffixes). The children learn how words change when certain letters are added – e.g. -s, -es, -ly. In Year 2 Phase 6 phonics is linked to daily guided reading, spelling, and handwriting sessions. With the children receiving a weekly spelling test.

At the start of the Autumn term parents/carers are invited into the classroom to a “Meet the Teacher” event where the Year 2 teacher provides parents/carers with a copy of Year 2 Common Exception words to learn to read and spell at home. Any parents/carers unable to attend the event are given the sheet the following day. The Year 2 teacher also meets with the parents/carers of targeted children to explain their child’s individual needs and offer activities they could do at home to boost their child’s phonic skills. The parents/carers of any children who are required to retake the Phonics Screening Check are reminded that this will take place the following June. These children have their phonic knowledge monitored closely and are re-tested at regular intervals throughout the year.

The Year 2 children who did not pass the Year 1 Phonic Screening Check have three phonic sessions each week working on targeted phonemes. Targeted children are further supported by a daily reading intervention session using the Code X intervention scheme, which pre-teaches phonemes and High Frequency Words before the children read the selected text.

Children work in target groups for guided reading sessions four times per week. Opportunities are provided for children to read 1:1, in small groups or in a whole class setting where they read texts appropriate to their phonic ability.

Children choose their own home reading books on a daily basis from within their appropriate reading stage. A weekly check of home reading is kept and any children not reading regularly at home are identified and provided with opportunities to read with an adult at school. Parent helpers also listen to children read 1:1 on a weekly basis.

Year 3

Children who did not pass the Year 2 retake phonic screening check receive a daily 1:1 reading intervention using the Code X scheme. Phonic games are played, high frequency word cards are read, and there is a combination of reading and spelling words containing targeted phonemes.