



Phonics at Long Crendon

What is Phonics?

Research shows that explicit systematic phonics teaching is the most effective way to help children learn how to read.

Phonics are the sounds made by individual letters or letter groups (for example, the letter “c” makes a *k* sound), and teaching children how to merge separate sounds together to make it one word (for example, blending the sounds *k*, *a*, *t* makes CAT). This type of phonics teaching is often referred to as “synthetic phonics”.

In order to teach phonics correctly it is important to use a system that is explicit; directly teaching children the specific associations between letters and sounds, rather than expecting them to gain this knowledge indirectly.

English has a complicated spelling system. It is important to teach letter sounds in a systematic way, beginning with simple letter sound rules and then moving onto more complex associations.

The term “phonics” has been used quite loosely by several reading programs, with some straying from these fundamental principles. For example, asking children to guess unfamiliar words using cues, such as the meaning of a word gleaned from sentence context. Other programs ask children to look at words (for example, *pig*, *page*, *pen* all starting with the same sound) and learn letter-sound rules by analysing or making comparisons between those words (analogy or analytical phonics). These programs are not as effective as those focusing on letter-sound knowledge taught in an explicit and systematic fashion.

Why are Phonics important?

Phonics instruction teaches children how to decode letters into their respective sounds, a skill that is essential for them to read unfamiliar words by themselves. Most words are in fact unfamiliar to early readers in print, even if they have spoken knowledge of the word. Having letter-sound knowledge will allow children to make the link between the unfamiliar print words and their spoken knowledge.

The process of letter-sound decoding is a learning mechanism. For example, have a go at reading the following... ‘*Wingardium Leviosa.*’

When you first read the words, you probably used your letter-sound knowledge, which involved these important processing stages:

- It helped you produce the correct sound of an unfamiliar print word. If you're a Harry Potter fan, the pronunciation also probably lit up connections to the meaning of the word.
- It drew your attention to the details and the combination of the letters of the word.

These two steps then function as a learning mechanism, allowing you to recognise the previously unfamiliar word quicker the next time around (have another go at reading the above!) This transition from slowly sounding out a word, to rapidly recognising it, is what we call "learning to read by sight". Every reader must make this transition to read fluently. It is true that there are many English words, such as *yacht* and *isle* that do not follow typical letter-sound rules. Even then, research has shown that children can still learn these words successfully by decoding some parts of the word (*y ... t* for *yacht*), with help from spoken vocabulary knowledge to facilitate the learning.

Phonics is important not only because this knowledge allows children to read on their own, but it is also a learning mechanism that builds up a good print word dictionary that can be quickly accessed.

Does teaching phonics improve reading?

Reading effectively is not just about phonics or having a good knowledge of single words. Functional reading requires several other skills such as good vocabulary, the ability to extract inferences, and synthesise and hold information in memory across several sentences. But if your single word reading is not efficient, comprehension is going to be dramatically affected.

If we use building a house as an analogy, understanding text is the complete home; single word reading ability is the structural frame of the house, and phonics is the foundation of that frame. Effective phonics instruction is important because letter-sound knowledge is the foundation needed to build up reading and writing abilities.

Organisation

Phonics teaching happens daily in Foundation and Year 1, focusing on progressive phases taught using our chosen phonic scheme.

In Year 1 all children sit a phonics screening check - a statutory assessment required by legislation. If the screen indicates that phonic skills are not secure, children will be offered extra support and intervention programmes in Year Two to provide them with sufficient knowledge and understanding to re-visit the 'Phonics Screening Check' and obtain the required level. This support will be carried over into Year 3 and across Key Stage Two with a phonics and/or spelling intervention programme.

Planning for phonics is done separately from literacy but with the understanding that good phonics teaching should link to the literacy needs of the children within literacy lessons and across the curriculum.

Phonics lesson will generally include the following sections:

- Revise – Overlearn the previous graphemes and words
- Teach – Introduce a new grapheme / phoneme words
- Practise – Develop GPCs (grapheme phoneme correspondences) /read and spell new words
- Apply – Use the new graphemes / words in games and activities to secure knowledge
- Assess – Monitor progress within each phase to inform planning.

During Year 2, most children will have learnt the phonic skills necessary to support further reading and writing and will be consolidating their phonic knowledge. They will then move on to following the Rising stars spelling programme which is a lively, flexible scheme aligned to the National Curriculum. The focus here for reading, and in KS2, moves increasingly from word recognition to comprehension with a focus on whole class reading during text-based literacy lessons. Support will be carried over into Year 3 and across Key Stage Two with a phonics and/or spelling intervention programme if necessary.

Which Phonics Scheme do we use?

At Long Crendon School we are using the DfE validated Bug Club Phonics, which is a systematic synthetic phonics programme that features the following:

- Daily lessons from the start of Reception
- Teaching of the main grapheme-phoneme correspondences of English in a clearly defined, incremental sequence
- Supports children reading and spelling from very early on
- Includes blending for reading and segmenting for spelling activities
- Provides opportunities for children to practise and apply known phoneme-grapheme correspondences for spelling through dictation of sounds, words and sentences
- Features language sessions that teach 'tricky' common exception words
- Provides resources that support the teaching of lower-case and capital letters correctly, with clear start and finish points
- Includes direct teaching sessions, with extensive teacher-child interaction and involves a multi-sensory approach

- Has reading texts that closely match what has been taught up to that point.

If you are interested in supporting your child at home and would like to know more about Bug Club Phonics, please click on the link below for a parent's guide to Bug Club Phonics.

<https://youtu.be/OdCRWLLNXPo>