

ELS

Essential
Letters and
Sounds

developed by Knowledge Schools Trust

Getting all children to
read well, quickly.



Parent
Workshop
2026-27

What are we going to cover?

- What is Phonics?
- What is Essential Letters and Sounds?
- How we teach phonics
- Getting children ready to read
- Supporting your child with reading at home
- Pronouncing pure sounds
- Using the letter formations and spelling sequence to support writing at home



What is Phonics?

A method of teaching beginners to read and pronounce words by learning to associate letters or letter groups with the sounds they represent.

There are 44 main sounds in the English Language. Each sound is represented by a grapheme (the written representation of a sound).



What is Phonics?

Phoneme: the smallest single identifiable sound in a word.
For example, in the word 'cat' there are three phonemes
c/a/t.

Grapheme: the written representation of a sound.

Digraph: two letters making one sound. For example, /sh/ in
the word 'shop'.

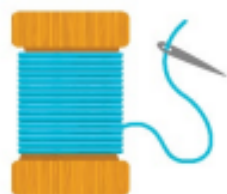
Trigraph: three letters making one sound. For example,
/igh/ in the word 'night'.

Split digraph: two vowel letters split but are split by one or
more consonants. For example, /a-e/ in the word 'cake'.

What is ELS?

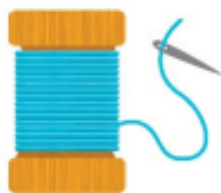
Essential Letters and Sounds (ELS) is our chosen phonics programme. It teaches children to read by identify the phonemes (smallest unit of sound) and graphemes (written version of the sound) within words and using these to read words.

Children experience the joy of books and language whilst rapidly acquiring the skills they need to become fluent independent readers and writers.



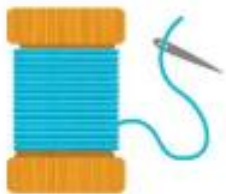
How do we teach phonics?

- We use a simple, consistent approach to teaching phonics.
- Your child will experience the same classroom routines within each lesson which reduces cognitive load and maximises the chances of success.
- All children are supported within the lesson to use their new phonic knowledge independently.
- In every single ELS lesson, your child will make the direct application to reading.



How do we teach phonics?

- Daily Phonics sessions- these start from the beginning of Reception
- Phonics throughout the day to review new sounds & graphemes taught
- Lots of opportunities for oral blending- c/oa/t
- Main focus is on word recognition. However, new vocabulary is also given and explained in every lesson.
- Opportunities for writing- new grapheme, words and sentences.



ELS Progression

Phase 1*	Phase 2	Phase 3**
<i>Nursery/Pre-School</i> Seven aspects: • Environmental sounds • Instrumental sounds • Body percussion • Rhythm and rhyme • Alliteration • Voice sounds • Oral blending	<i>Reception Autumn 1</i> • Oral blending • Sounding out and blending with 23 new grapheme-phoneme correspondences (GPCs) • 12 new harder to read and spell (HRS) words	<i>Reception Autumn 2, Spring 1 and Spring 2</i> • Oral blending • Sounding out and blending with 29 new GPCs • 32 new HRS words • Revision of Phase 2



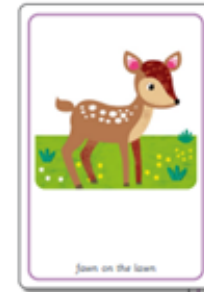
ELS Progression

Phase 4**	Phase 5 including alternatives and lesser-known GPCs	Beyond Phase 5
<i>Reception Summer 1</i> • Oral blending • No new GPCs • No new HRS words • Word structures – cvcc, ccvc, ccvcc, cccvc, cccvcc • Suffixes • Revision of Phase 2 and Phase 3	<i>Reception Summer 2</i> • Introduction to Phase 5 for reading • 20 new GPCs • 16 new HRS words <i>Year 1 Autumn 1 and 2</i> • Revision of previously taught Phase 5 GPCs • 2 new GPCs • 9 new HRS words <i>Year 1 Spring 1 and 2</i> • Alternative spellings for previously taught sounds • 49 new GPCs • 4 new HRS words • Oral blending • Revision of Phase 2, Phase 3 and Phase 4	<i>Year 1 Summer, Year 2 and Key Stage 2</i> • With ELS, phonics teaching does not stop at the end of Year 1, but continues as children move through the school, with links being made between their GPC knowledge and spelling • Revision of all previously taught GPCs for reading and spelling • Wider reading, spelling and writing curriculum



Can you read this?

It iz tiem too gow
hoam sed v kator pilla.
But iy doat wont 2 gow
howm sed th butt or
flie. Iy wot to staiy
heyr.



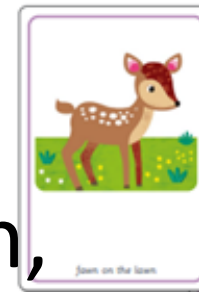
Phase One: Aspects

1. Environmental Sounds
2. Instrumental Sounds
3. Body Percussion
4. Rhythm and Rhyme
5. Alliteration
6. Voice Sounds
7. Oral Blending and segmenting



Enunciation

- Stretchy sounds - e.g. ssssss, mmmmm, llllll, nnnnnn, shhhhhh, rrrrrr, zzzzzzz, vvvvvv
- Bouncy sounds - e.g. /c/ /t/ /p/ /b/ /d/ /g/
- Unvoiced - /c/, /t/, /h/ and /p/
- Pure sounds - c not “cuh”



Phase Two

- To introduce 23 grapheme-phoneme (letter sound) correspondences.
- Continue oral blending and introduce blending to read.

Grapheme	Picture	Rhyme
s		snake – snake around the snake
a		ant – around head, down to body
t		teacher – down body and over shoulders
p		parrot – down body, around his face
i		inventor – down her body, spot her idea

Grapheme	Picture	Rhyme
n		nest – down the bird and over her nest
m		mole – mole mound, mound
d		duck – over his back and around the tail up his back and down to his feet
g		goat – start at his ear, around the ear and down the back
o		ostrich – around the ostrich's body

Grapheme	Picture	Rhyme
c		camel – ear the camel's
k		kid – down body, up to down the leg
ck		a camel and the kid
e		elephant – ear the elephant's the trunk
u		umbrella – under the umbrella and down to the tip

Grapheme	Picture	Rhyme
r		runner – down her body, up over the arm
ss		two snakes – sunbathing snakes
h		heron – from his head to his feet, up and over his back
b		bike – pedal the
f		fox – down an

Grapheme	Picture	Rhyme
ff		two foxes – two foxes facing forwards
l		ladder – down the long ladder
ll		two ladders – ladders in a line

Tricky Words (Harder to Read Words)

- Words that are not phonically decodable.
e.g. no, the, I.
- Some are 'tricky' to start with but will become decodable once we have learned the harder phonemes.
e.g. out, there.
- Use blending fingers to read and repeat each sentence once blended.



Phoneme Frames

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One grapheme in
each box.



cat
stay
singing
launch



cat



stay



singing



launch



Phase 3

- To teach children the GPCs for each of the 29 phonemes in order to read and spell simple regular words.
- 32 tricky (harder to read) words
- Harder and longer sentences

Grapheme	Picture	Rhyme
j		jet jet as
v		vip vip no
w		wo wo la
x		xx xx th
y		yacht - under the hull and down to the anchor

Grapheme	Picture	Rhyme
z		zips - zip and zing
zz		zip zip
qu		quilt quilt the
ch		che che ch
sh		she she sh

Grapheme	Picture	Rhyme
th		tip tip
ng		girl girl the
nk		ch ch nk
ai		she she ai
ee		bee on my knee

Grapheme	Picture	Rhyme
igh		light up the night
oa		3
oo		1
ar		4
ur		1

Grapheme	Picture	Rhyme
oo		scoop with a spoon
or		orde
ow		pro
oi		coke
ear		claw

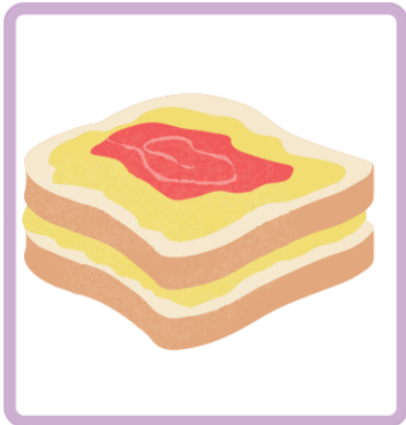
Grapheme	Picture	Rhyme
air		a pair in the fair
ure		sure it's the cure
er		a blower w laser
ow		go a low in the row

- Read each sentence three times:
 - 1) to decode
 - 2) to build fluency
 - 3) to add expression

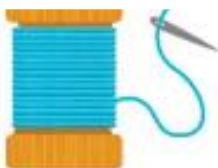
ApplyQuit activity

Read the sentence. Click on the icon to reveal the picture.

He had jam on
toast.



< Back3 of 3



Phase 4

- No new graphemes are introduced. The main aim of this phase is to consolidate the children's knowledge and to help them learn to read and spell longer words.
- Word structures – cvcc (milk), ccvc (trap), ccvcc, cccvc, cccvcc
- Suffixes (ed, er, est)



Phase 5

- To teach children to recognise and use alternative ways of pronouncing the graphemes and spelling the phoneme already taught
e.g. 'igh' as in night, tie, time.
 'ai' as in rain, play, make, break.
- Lesser known GPCs



ay		play a	ir		a quirky shirt
ou		a pros	ue		true, the sky's blue
ie		pie on	aw		fawn on the lawn
ea		each 3	wh		whip with a whisk
oy		the bo cries 1	ph		photo on a phone

y		a lovely baby
al		walk along the wall
Alternative pronunciations:		
a		apricot on your apron
ey		they chose grey paint
ea		a great break!

eigh		my neighbour has a sleigh
a		follow after my father
e		she waved to me
i		tiger in the wild
y		fly in the sky

ew		the crew flew
oe		tip-toe past the doe
au		pause the launch
ey		use money to buy honey
a-e		cake by the lake

o		let's both toast
a		swallows and swans
u		a bush full of berries
u		a unicorn in uniform!
ch		the school orchestra

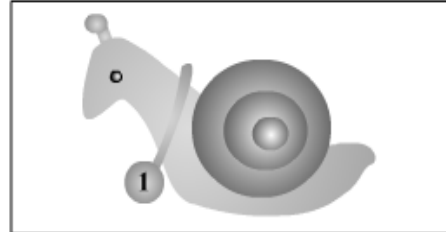
c		cycle in the city
ch		the chef has a machine
ea		heather in the meadow
ie		a good friend
or		the worthy artwork
ear		search for a pearl

Phoneme Spotter

The great snail race

Yesterday's great race was bravely won by Crazy Dave.

The start of the race was delayed by rain. The crowd became frustrated but just eighty minutes later the grey clouds rolled away. Crazy Dave (aged eight) has been training hard since he was a tiny baby snail.



He left all the other snails trailing behind him. We asked Lazy Daisy (who came eighth) if she had anything to say. She stated, "Dave is my mate and I think he is great but I hate it when he beats me."

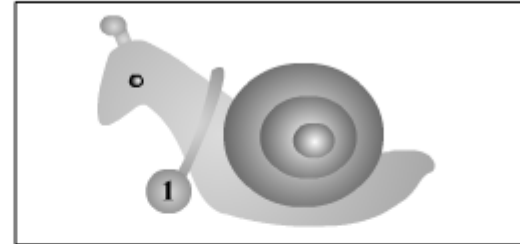


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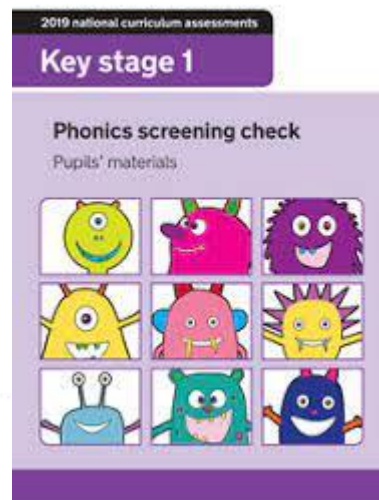
ay
ea
a_e
a
ai
eigh
ey

Word Sort

Menu

Phonics Screen

- Summer term of Year 1
- tests decoding of words and non-words
- does not test understanding
- standardised across UK



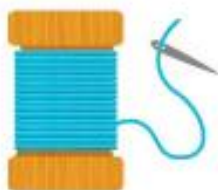
Beyond year 1

- With ELS, phonics teaching does not stop at the end of year 1. Links are always made between spelling patterns and GPC knowledge.
- Revision of all phases is continued.
- Wider reading, spelling and writing curriculum.
- Continues into KS2



Supporting your child with reading at home

- Only 1 in 3 children are read a bedtime story night
- Reading a bedtime story every night to your child improves their outcomes
- If your child views themselves as a 'good reader' when they leave Primary School they are more likely to earn a higher salary in their 40s.



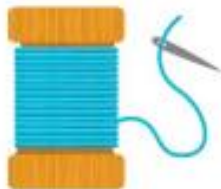
Supporting your child with reading at home

- Children are only reading from books that are entirely decodable
- We only use pure sounds when decoding words (no 'uh' after the sound)
- We want them to practise reading their book 4 times across the week working on these skills:

decode

fluency

expression



Supporting your child with reading at home

We want children to create a strong orthographic map. This means that they learn sounds spelt by the letters or groups of letters in each word.

To read fluently, or well, we need a strong orthographic map.

To consistently recognise that the <ea> in bread spells /e/ we need to read it at least 4 times. This means we need to read the word many times to build fluency for reading.



Pronouncing pure sounds

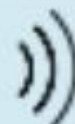
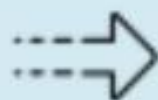
We must use pure sounds when we are pronouncing the sounds and supporting children in reading words.

If we mispronounce these sounds we will make reading harder for our children.

There are videos for this on our school website where you can hear the correct pronunciation of the sounds.



Supporting your child with writing at home



You can use the spelling sequence with your children at home to support them with their writing.

Let's try this with the word: rain

We also practise saying our sentences before we write them to make sure we write the sentence we have planned and to ensure it makes sense!



Questions

