

Westgate Primary School Phonics Teaching

Introduction

Westgate Primary School currently uses Letters and Sounds as the main system for teaching phonics to early readers. However, with effect from September 2022, we will be moving to the Red Rose Letters and Sounds System, which is Lancashire's adaptation to the Letters and Sounds system. The Red Rose version will have the fidelity required to ensure that children get the quality teaching they need to make a good start to their early reading development.

The Red Rose Letters and Sounds system will be started from September. However, staff will be undertaking training and development over the Summer Term 2022 so that the move to the new system is as smooth as possible for our pupils and that refinements needed to the existing system of phonics teaching are in place but with minimal disruption to current learning and progression.

Research shows that children develop reading and comprehension skills best if they learn to read through a Systematic Synthetic Phonics approach. This teaches them to recognise letters (graphemes) and their associated sounds (phonemes). Children learn to read words by blending their pure sounds/phonemes (individual sounds such as 't', 'h', 'o') and digraphs or trigraphs (combined letters to make sounds, such as 'sh', 'igh'). Alongside this, children learn how these sounds translate to their written form/ grapheme so that they can break (segment) words up into the order of phonemes they hear to be able to write/spell them.

By exploring blending the sounds together or segmenting them to their individual phonemes, children can learn to decode ever increasingly complex words over time in order to read more fluently. Home Reading books, while children are cracking the phonetic code, match the phase the children are confident in or are currently learning. This ensures children are able to practice and apply their phonetic skills as much as possible in order to read. At a later time, and as children become more fluent readers, the comprehension of what they are reading develops further so they can not only decode words, but also make sense of what they are reading. We recognise this as also being a vital part of a child's reading development.

Using the Red Rose Letters and Sounds programme we intend for our pupils to be able to:

- Recognise, say and write all phonemes within each phase
- Use their phonic knowledge to blend and segment phonetically decodable words
- Use their phonic knowledge to attempt to read and write more complex words
- Learn to read 'Tricky Words' and High Frequency Words smoothly and on sight
- Read easily, fluently and with good understanding, age and ability appropriate texts
- Develop the habit of reading widely and often, for both pleasure and information
- Write clearly, accurately and coherently, using phonic knowledge

Phonics screening check

The Phonics Screening Check is administered to children in Year 1, and is usually taken in June. It gives teachers and parents information on how pupils are progressing in phonics. It will help to identify whether your child needs additional support at this stage so that they do not fall behind in this vital early reading skill.

The test has two sections consisting of 20 words each. It assesses phonics skills and knowledge learned through Reception and Year 1. The test has real and nonsense / 'alien' (pseudo) words that consist of phonemes taught in phonic sessions.

Pupils who do not reach the threshold will be supported with further development in Year 2 and will have the opportunity to undertake the check again at the end of this year. Pupils who still do not reach the threshold by the end of Year 2 will continue to receive intervention and support in order to gain confidence in phonics and reading throughout Key Stage 2.

What does it check?

It checks that your child can:

- Recognise graphemes taught and their associated sounds.
- Sound out and blend phonemes in order to read simple words.
- Read phonically decodable one-syllable and two-syllable words, e.g. cat, sand, windmill.
- Read a selection of nonsense (pseudo) words which are referred to as nonsense or 'alien' words.

What are nonsense / 'alien' or pseudo words and why are they included?

These are words that are phonically decodable but are not actual words with an associated meaning e.g. 'blop', 'sloob' etc. Pseudo words are included in the check specifically to assess whether your child can decode a word using phonics skills rather than their memory.

The pseudo words will be shown to your child with a picture of an alien/creature and they will be asked to tell their teacher the name of the alien by reading the word. This not only makes the check a bit more fun, but provides the children with a context for the nonsense word which is independent from any existing vocabulary they may have. Crucially, it does not provide any clues, so your child just has to be able to decode it. Children generally find nonsense words amusing so they will probably enjoy reading these words. They are practised regularly during their daily phonics sessions so they become very familiar with reading these types of words before the test is taken.

How will my child be scored? Is there a pass mark?

The test is out of 40. For the last few years, the threshold mark (or pass standard) set by the government has been 32 correct answers out of 40. However, school does not find out the threshold mark until after the test has been taken.

What can I do to help my child?

First and foremost, reading to and with your child is proven to improve their life chances. Reading at any age improves mental health and wellbeing, improves memory and keeps the brain active.

Supporting your child on their reading journey is vital and makes a huge difference to a child's reading ability. Setting aside quality time to listen to and help your child read the phonetic books sent home will help with your child's reading development as they need as many opportunities as possible to apply the phonetic skills taught in school. These books are designed and matched to support your child's phonic development. A second book, is also chosen by your child to be shared for pleasure. This can be read by a parent/carer and helps to promote a child's love of reading and listening to stories.

Research also shows that where children experience a rich and enjoyable source of books from a variety of genres, they will learn more confidently not only in English but across the curriculum. They will therefore stand a better chance of achieving well in their school years and beyond.

At Westgate, we believe that 'Reading is the Key to Learning' and endeavour to develop children who are readers for life. After all, we learn to read and read to learn!