

Guidance for practitioners and teachers on progression and pace in the teaching of phonics

Please note:

This document makes reference to the setting up of an independent panel to quality assure commercial phonics programmes. The DfES has since decided to adopt a slightly different approach. Quality assurance of programmes will be based on self-assessment. A set of core criteria that define the essential characteristics of teaching programmes that embed the principles of high quality phonic work will be published during March 2007. Early years settings and schools should use these criteria to identify an appropriate and effective programme of support that meet their requirements.

The DfES will also be providing publishers of commercial phonics programmes with a self-assessment template which they can complete to assess their own programme against the set criteria. Completed self-assessments will be displayed on the Department's website so that settings and schools can view them before making a decision.

Further information is available at: www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/phonics

This paper is intended to offer support to practitioners as they reflect on their teaching of phonics in the light of the recommendations of the *Independent review of the teaching of early reading* (the Rose Report).

An important feature of high-quality phonic work is that it should be 'systematic', which means teaching all the major grapheme–phoneme correspondences in a clearly defined sequence. The aim will be to secure essential phonic knowledge and skills so that children progress quickly to independent reading and writing. Learning should be at a brisk pace but sensitive to children's developing abilities.

Phonic work should be an ambitious, enjoyable and time-limited part of the reading journey. Children progress from 'learning to read' to 'reading to learn' as they secure the alphabetic code, become confident in decoding and recognising words, and begin to read for purpose and pleasure.

Strand 5 of the Framework (word recognition) ends at Year 2 because by that time children should be well on the way to becoming fluent readers capable of decoding the words on the page automatically. Obviously, there will be some who progress at a faster rate and some who progress more slowly than others in any given setting or class. Practitioners and teachers should monitor children's progress carefully in order to adapt their teaching to achieve optimum progress for each child.

An effective, high-quality phonic programme for supporting progression and pace should meet the criteria in Annex A. All the criteria are important but it is essential that the

programme to be followed is multisensory, builds on earlier speaking and listening activities, is set within a coherent broader curriculum and teaches beginner readers:

- grapheme–phoneme correspondences (the alphabetic code) in a clearly defined sequence
- to apply the highly important skill of blending (synthesising) phonemes in order, all through a word to read it
- to apply the skill of segmenting words into their constituent phonemes to spell
- that blending and segmenting are reversible processes.

Choosing a phonics programme

Settings and schools should consider how their current practices measure against the criteria. Commercial and non-commercial materials (such as Primary National Strategy materials) are available and offer guidance on the sequence, progression and pace of phonic teaching. Settings and schools can also use their own programmes. Whatever programme is chosen, it is important to implement it with fidelity: in other words, it should be applied consistently and regularly and avoid introducing too many elements from other programmes, which can slow the pace and disrupt progression.

To assist settings and schools with choosing a phonics programme, the DfES plans to set up an independent quality assurance system to assess commercial phonics programmes. This system will evaluate these programmes, based on the criteria set out above. We will publish a list of programmes that meet the criteria on the DfES website during the spring term 2007. The Department and the Primary National Strategy will also use independent experts to develop a new phonics programme that meets these same criteria to replace *Playing with sounds: a supplement to progression in phonics*, which will also be available during spring term. This will make it easier for settings and schools to implement high-quality phonics teaching, either by choosing a commercial programme, by using the new Primary National Strategy phonics programme, or by using programmes that they have developed themselves, which meet these criteria.

Outline of progression

An outline of progression is offered as a guide in Annex B. It shows an example of how most children should be able to progress over several months. Practitioners and teachers should use it in conjunction with strand 5 of the Framework to support children achieving the learning outcomes that are reflected in the objectives.

Annex A: Criteria that define an effective phonics programme

Choosing a programme to support the teaching of phonics

The sequence, progression and pace of phonics teaching can be supported by using commercially produced or Primary National Strategy teaching materials. Settings and schools can use other programmes, such as those they have developed themselves, or which have been developed for use within their local area. The *Independent review of the teaching of early reading* (the Rose Report) recognised that there are a number of:

...differing approaches to teaching reading in general, and phonic work in particular... The common elements in each programme – those that really make a difference to how well beginners are taught to learn to read and write – are few in number.

Independent review of the teaching of early reading, paragraph 54, page 20

What is important is that the programme adopted by the school or setting reflects the key features of high-quality phonic work and that it is adhered to 'with fidelity', applied consistently and used regularly, avoiding drawing in too many elements from different programmes.

Programmes to support the teaching of phonics vary in both pace and timescale, though they are all careful to introduce phonemes, graphemes and the processes of segmenting and blending. Schools and settings will need to consider whether their current approach to the teaching of phonics, and the material they use to support their approach, form a programme that will:

- be fully compatible with a broad and rich curriculum
- be systematic, with a clearly defined and structured progression for learning all the major grapheme–phoneme correspondences: digraphs, trigraphs, adjacent consonants and alternative graphemes for the same sound
- be delivered in discrete daily sessions at a brisk pace that is well matched to children's developing abilities
- be underpinned by a synthetic approach to blending phonemes in order all through a word to read it, and segmenting words into their constituent phonemes to spell them
- make clear that blending and segmenting are reversible processes
- be multisensory, encompassing various visual, auditory and kinaesthetic activities that actively engage children (for example, manipulating magnetic or other solid letters to build words, activities involving physical movement to copy letter shapes)
- make clear the importance of speaking and listening as the foundation for embarking on a systematic phonics programme and for acquiring the skills of reading and writing
- offer clear guidance on how to assess progress and use this to inform the next steps of learning
- offer guidance about adapting the programme for children with special educational needs or who have missed earlier elements.

Annex B: Outline of progression

Phase 1

Main purpose:

Through speaking and listening activities, children will develop their language structures and increase their vocabulary. In developing their phonological awareness, children will improve their ability to distinguish between sounds and to speak clearly and audibly with confidence and control. They become familiar with rhyme, rhythm and alliteration.

Outcome:

Children explore and experiment with sounds and words. They listen attentively. They show a growing awareness and appreciation of rhyme, rhythm and alliteration. They speak clearly and audibly with confidence and control. They distinguish between different sounds in words and begin to develop awareness of the differences between phonemes.

Typical duration:

This phase reflects the developmental stages for Communication, Language and Literacy in the Early Years Foundation Stage. It paves the way for a programme of systematic phonic work to begin. This starts when the grapheme–phoneme (letter–sound) correspondences are introduced at Phase 2.

Phonic knowledge and skills acquired

Teaching will focus on speaking and listening, in order to prepare the ground for effective phonics teaching. Children will become increasingly discriminating in identifying and distinguishing between different sounds and phonemes and in articulating them. They will become increasingly aware of the relationship between sounds, letters and words. They will be introduced to a broader range of rhymes and songs with rhythmic patterns.

As children are introduced to a phonic programme, they will continue to build their confidence in distinguishing between phonemes.

Activities that support learning in this phase

Activities suitable for this phase include storytelling and singing songs, with children joining in by repeating patterns of words and refrains. Practitioners provide opportunities for children to listen to rhymes and take part in alliterative games, to respond to music and use language creatively in role-play, drama and dance. Attention is drawn to the sounds in names and words in the environment, for example children's names, or items in a shopping bag.

Activities should aim to increase children's ability to discriminate between sounds, recognise the initial phonemes at the beginning of words and increase their awareness of sounds, letters and words.

Phase 2

Main purpose:

To introduce grapheme–phoneme (letter–sound) correspondences.

Outcome:

Children know that words are constructed from phonemes and that phonemes are represented by graphemes. They have knowledge of a small selection of common consonants and vowels. They blend them together in reading simple CVC words and segment them to support spelling.

Typical duration:

Up to 6 weeks

Phonic knowledge and skills acquired

Teaching will focus on grapheme–phoneme correspondences for a small selection of common consonants and vowels, (such as 's', 'a', 't', 'p', 'i', 'n', which is a widely used, but only one, example of selections that can be used). Children will be shown how to blend these together to read simple CVC words and also how to segment them for spelling those words.

Children confidently recognise the graphemes taught and make connections with the phonemes they represent. They use their knowledge of the phonemes to blend simple CVC words, moving from left to right, (e.g. 'pat' and 'tap'). They recognise an increasing number of grapheme–phoneme correspondences and practice blending and segmenting phonemes in reading and spelling. They apply this knowledge when reading and writing new and unfamiliar words.

Activities that support learning in this phase

Activities are provided for children to apply their developing knowledge of grapheme–phoneme correspondences to blend simple CVC words. A range of approaches can be used. For example, practitioners should exploit opportunities to extend and apply phonic knowledge, for example both by encouraging children to link letter shapes with phonemes all through the word in texts that include the letter–sound correspondences already taught and through the use of games. Children are encouraged to write simple CVC words as captions and messages within their role-play.

Phase 3

Main purpose:

To teach children one grapheme for each of the 44 phonemes in order to read and spell simple regular words.

Outcome:

Children link sounds to letters, naming and sounding the letters of the alphabet. They recognise letter shapes and say a sound for each. They hear and say sounds in the order in which they occur in the word, and read simple words by sounding out and blending the phonemes all through the word from left to right. They recognise common digraphs and read some high frequency words.

Typical duration:

Up to 12 weeks

Phonic knowledge and skills acquired

Teaching will focus on all 44 phonemes with their most common graphemes, including digraphs and double letters. Children will learn to recognise that the process of segmenting words into their constituent phonemes is the reverse process to blending and enables them to spell the word. As the 44 phonemes and their grapheme correspondences are being learned, children will read and spell an increasing number of words. For example, when the letter sounds 'a', 't' and 'p' have been learned, if the letter sound 's' is taught next, the children will read and spell words such as 'taps' and 'pats'. They will show an increasing interest in using their new knowledge to attempt to read and write words.

Activities that support learning in this phase

Children are taught and introduced to the phonemes in multisensory ways. Games and activities that encourage children to match sounds to graphemes are introduced for children to explore together. Children are supported in applying their knowledge of grapheme–phoneme correspondences through reading simple texts. They are also encouraged to read and write simple CVC words, for example in writing labels in their role-play and through guided writing activities. Practitioners and teachers will encourage children to apply this knowledge in text-reading and through providing a rich literacy environment.

Phase 4

Main purpose:

To teach children to read and spell words containing adjacent consonants.

Outcome:

Children are able to blend and segment adjacent consonants in words and to apply this skill when reading unfamiliar texts and in spelling.

Typical duration:

4 to 6 weeks

Phonic knowledge and skills acquired

Teaching should focus on the skills of blending and segmenting words containing adjacent consonants; they should not be taught in word families, such as 'spot, spit, spin' as the children will treat 'sp' as one unit, and for some children this will be a barrier to learning.

Having acquired the ability to blend, children will be able to read and spell an increasing number of new words, moving beyond simple CVC words (e.g. 'pot') to CVCC words (e.g. 'pots') and CCVC words (e.g. 'spot') and CCVCC words (e.g. 'spots') and, in due course, to CCCVC words (e.g. 'split').

Activities that support learning in this phase

Activities include blending and segmenting phonemes in longer words and applying their newly learned skills in reading and writing and in freely chosen activities. Typical activities could include paired writing using small whiteboards, selecting magnetic letters to build more complex words (e.g. from 'a' to 'an' to 'and' to 'sand' to 'stand'). To reinforce the discrete phonics teaching in this and subsequent phases, practitioners and teachers should also plan opportunities in shared and guided reading and writing for children to apply their increasing phonic knowledge and skills.

Phase 5

Main purpose:

Teaching children to recognise and use alternative ways of pronouncing the graphemes and spelling the phonemes already taught.

Outcome:

Children will use alternative ways of pronouncing the graphemes and spelling the phonemes corresponding to long vowel phonemes. Children will identify the constituent parts of two-syllable and three-syllable words and be able to read and spell phonically decodable two-syllable and three-syllable words. They will recognise an increasing number of high frequency words automatically. Phonic knowledge and skills will be applied as the prime approach in reading and spelling when the words are unfamiliar and not completely decodable.

Typical duration:

Securing reading and spelling will extend through Year 1.

Phonic knowledge and skills acquired

Teaching will focus on long vowel phonemes and the different grapheme correspondences (such as /oe/ 'o-e', 'o', 'oa', 'ow'). Graphemes that can be pronounced in different ways will be explored (e.g. 'c' in 'coat' and 'city'). The reverse process of segmenting words into their constituent phonemes applies in the case of spelling.

Having acquired these skills, children will read and spell a range of simple and complex words, applying their knowledge of graphemes to make phonically plausible attempts at some complex words.

Activities to support learning in this phase

Activities include blending and segmenting long vowel phonemes, recognising and accurately using them in longer and more complex words, and applying their newly learned skills in reading and writing activities. Children are supported in tackling words of more than one syllable and attempt their own writing of words as they construct their own captions and simple sentences. Some tricky words are taught, and both shared and guided reading and writing reinforce the use of learned phonic knowledge to read and write unfamiliar words.

Phase 6

Main purpose:

Teaching children to develop their skill and automaticity in reading and spelling, creating ever-increasing capacity to attend to reading for meaning.

Outcome:

Children apply their phonic skills and knowledge to recognise and spell an increasing number of complex words. They read an increasing number of high and medium frequency words independently and automatically.

Typical duration:

For the majority of children this phase will begin in and continue through Year 2 so that by the end of this year they should be well on the way to becoming fluent readers. This means that in Year 3 the emphasis will change from teaching word recognition to developing children's language comprehension.

Phonic knowledge and skills acquired

Teaching will focus on less common grapheme–phoneme correspondences (e.g. the 's' in vision as pronounced /zh/). Children are supported in continually developing and applying their phonic knowledge and skills in discrete phonics teaching as well as in shared, guided and independent reading, both within the dedicated literacy teaching time and across the curriculum.

Children widen their knowledge of word families and recognise phonic irregularities. They develop an increasing understanding of different spelling patterns.

Activities that support learning in this phase

Children are introduced to a range of activities to support their independence in reading texts, both on paper and on screen. Guided reading and writing activities provide a broad range of opportunities for children to apply and use their developing confidence in reading and spelling unfamiliar words. Through peer marking and talking partners, children are encouraged to share their phonic knowledge to reinforce learning. High and medium frequency words are taught and discussed, with opportunities for children to use them in their own reading and writing.