



Letters and Sounds
An Information Pack for Parents

Introduction

As you know, the ability to read and write is a vital skill for all children. Children practice many of the skills they need for reading and writing from a very early age. They do this through a wide range of activities and experiences, at home and in school. They explore and learn through singing and saying rhymes, making and listening to music, talking with others, sharing books with adults and other children, dressing up, experimenting with writing and using puppets and toys to retell and make up stories.

For children to make a good start in reading and writing, they need to have an adult listen to them and talk to them. Speaking and listening are the starting blocks for reading and writing.

How can you help your child?

Everyday activities such as preparing meals, tidying up, putting shopping away and getting ready to go out gives you the chance to talk to your child, explaining what you are doing. Through these activities, children hear the way language is put together into sentences.

Books are a wonderful source of new words for children – words you would not use in everyday conversations often come up in books. Read aloud and share books as often as you can. They will enjoy it and it will be useful to them when they come across these new words in their own reading.

The aim of this booklet is to give you a clear picture of how we approach the teaching of phonics and word recognition and how, as a parent or carer, you can support and encourage your children at home.



What is phonics?

Sounds in spoken language – the beginnings of phonics

At St Agnes C of E school all Key Stage One children take part in high quality, daily phonics sessions based on Letters and Sounds Materials. These are fun sessions involving lots of speaking, listening and games where the emphasis is on children's participation. They learn to use their phonic knowledge for reading, writing and independent play.

From a very early stage, children develop an awareness of different sounds in spoken language. They develop an understanding that spoken words are made up of different sounds (phonemes) and they learn to match these phonemes to letters (graphemes). Phonics is about children knowing how letters link to sounds (graphemes to phonemes), e.g. **c** as in 'cat', **ll** as in 'fell', **ee** as in 'sheep'.

Children use this phonics knowledge when they are reading and writing. This system has been shown to be a quicker and more efficient way for children to learn to read the words on a page fluently and accurately. This also helps them greatly with their spelling.

Letters and Sounds at St Agnes

Letters and Sounds is divided into six phases with each phase following closely from the last. Children have time and practice to improve their ability to read and spell words. They are also taught to read and spell 'tricky words' – words with unusual spellings or which children have not yet been taught.

Phase 1

Phase 1 usually begins in the Nursery but can continue to support children with specific needs throughout the EYFS. Teachers plan activities that will help children to listen to sounds around them. Teachers teach a wide range of nursery rhymes and songs. They read good books to and with the children. This helps to increase the number of words they know – their vocabulary – and helps them to talk confidently about books.

Supporting your child with Phase 1

Sound talking

The teacher shows the children how to do this – c-a-t = cat. The separate sounds (phonemes) are spoken aloud, in order and are then merged together into the whole word. The merging together is called blending – it is a vital skill for reading.

Children will also learn to do this the other way round – cat = c-a-t. The whole word is spoken aloud, and then broken up into its sounds (phonemes) in order. This is called segmenting – it is a vital skill for spelling.

This phase is all oral (spoken). Your child will not be expected to match the letter to the sound at this stage. The emphasis is on helping children to hear the separate sounds in words and to create spoken sounds.

Phase 2

In this phase children will practice what they have learned in phase 1, including ‘sound talking’. They will also be taught the phonemes (sounds) for a number of letters (graphemes), which phoneme is represented by which grapheme and that a phoneme can be represented by more than one letter, e.g. ll as in b-e-ll. They may be using pictures or actions to remember these.

VC and CVC words

C and V are ‘consonant’ and ‘vowel’. VC words are words such as am, at and it (words made up of a vowel and then a consonant). CVC words are words such as cat, rug and sun (consonant, vowel, consonant). Words such as bell and tick also count as CVC words – although they have four letters, they only have three sounds. For example, in the word bell –

b = consonant e = vowel ll = consonant

Now the children will be seeing letters and words, as well as hearing them. They will be shown how to make whole words by pushing magnetic or wooden letters together to form little words, reading little words on the interactive whiteboard, and breaking words up into individual sounds which will help with their spelling. These will be simple words made up of two phonemes, e.g. *am, at, it*, or three phonemes, e.g. *cat, rug, sun, tick, bell*.

Tricky words

The children will also learn several tricky words: the, to, I, go, no.

Children will still be practising blending and segmenting skills every day. They need plenty of practice at doing this.

Saying the sounds

Your child will be taught how to pronounce the sounds (phonemes) correctly to make blending easier. The teachers will practice these skills with the children so they can be sustained.

School will help to support parents and carers who are unsure of how these phonemes should sound. Pop in and ask to see your class teacher and we are available to help, we will be more than happy to support both you and your child.

Ways you can support your children at home

Magnetic letters – these can be used on your fridge. Encourage your child to find the letters they have been learning. Have fun making simple words.

Practice making little words – make little words together, e.g. it, up, am, and, top, dig, run, met, pick.

As you find the letters, say them out loud: a-m = am, m-e-t = met.

Break words up – now do it the other way round. Read the word, break the word up and move the letters away, saying met – m-e-t.

Spelling is harder than reading words. Little whiteboards and pens and magic boards are a fun way for children to try out spellings and practice their handwriting.

Your child might be trying to write using letters from their name – this shows that they know that writing needs real alphabet letters.

Make or buy an alphabet poster.

Getting ready for writing

Teachers will model how to form letters (graphemes) correctly so the children can begin to form a handwriting style. These skills develop over a long period of time and are separate skills to phonics. Holding a pen or pencil needs lots of co-ordination and practice in making small movements with hands and fingers.

Writing in lower case letters

We will be teaching lower case letters, as well as capital letters. As most writing will be in lower case letters it is really useful if you can use these at home. A good start is for your child to write his/her name correctly starting with a capital letter followed by lower case letters.

The school handwriting guidelines and policy is available from your child's class teacher.

Phase 3

The purpose of this phase is to:

Learn to Do Well

- Teach more graphemes, most of which are made up of two letters, e.g. 'oa' as in boat
- Practice blending and segmenting a wider set of CVC words, e.g. fizz, chip, sheep
- Learn all letter names and begin to form them correctly
- Read more tricky words and begin to spell some of them
- Read and write words in phrases and sentences

CVC words

Here are some examples of words they will be reading. Their confidence from the daily practice and reading and writing will really be paying off!

Tail, week, right, soap, food, park, burn, cord, town, soil

Tricky words

The number of tricky words is getting larger. These are so important for reading and spelling: he, she, we, me, be, was, my, you, her, they, all.

Ways you can support your children at home

Magnetic letters – these can be used on your fridge. Encourage your child to find the letters they have been learning. Have fun making CVC and tricky words.

Phase 4

In this phase the children will continue to practice the graphemes (letters) and phonemes (sounds) they have already learned. They will also learn how to read and write CVCC words – tent, damp, toast, chimp.

E.g. in the word 'toast', t = consonant, oa = vowel, s = consonant, t = consonant

They will also learn to read and spell CCVC words – swim, plum, sport, cream, spoon.

E.g. in the word 'cream', c = consonant, r = consonant, ea = vowel, m = consonant.

They will be learning more tricky words and continuing to read and write sentences together.

Tricky words

Said, so, do, have, like, some, come, were, there, little, one, when, out, what

Ways you can support your children at home

Practise reading and spelling some CVCC and CCVC words – but continue to play around with CVC words. Children like reading and spelling words that they have previously worked with, as this makes them feel successful.

Make up captions and phrases for your child to read and write – e.g. ‘a silver star’, ‘clear the pond’, ‘crunch crisps’. Write some simple sentences and leave them around the house for your child to find and read – when they find and read three, give them a treat!

Look out for words in the environment on food packaging that your child will find easy to read, e.g. lunch, fresh milk, drink, fish and chips, jam.

Work on reading words together, e.g. a street name like Park Road, captions on buses and lorries, street signs, e.g. bus stop.

Phases 5 and 6

As your child moves onto phases 5 and 6 they will learn that most sounds can be spelled in more than one way. For example the f sound can be written as f as in fan, ff as in huff or ph as in photo.

This develops their knowledge of spelling choices. They will continue with this spelling work into Year 2 and beyond.

They will learn that most letters and combinations of letters (graphemes) can represent more than one sound. For example, the grapheme ea can be read as /ee/ as in leaf or /e/ as in bread.

This supports their reading development.

Good phonics knowledge and skills help your child to read words fluently and spell words, but they need to understand what they are reading and understand the processes and purposes for writing too. **Your help is vital here.**

Ways you can support your children at home

Enjoy and share books together – buy or borrow books that will fire their imagination and interest. Read and re-read those they love best.

Make time to read with your child throughout their time in school – PLEASE continue reading to your child even when they are reading independently. This is very important

– your child needs to practise their reading skills every day, and needs the support of an interested adult. A grandparent, older brother or sister can help.

Magic writing boards are great fun for children – both little and larger versions.

Write with your child – ‘think aloud’ so they can hear the decisions you are making as you write. Make sure the writing is for a purpose, e.g. messages on birthday cards, a shopping list, an address.

Talk about the words they see in everyday life: food packaging, signs in the supermarkets, captions on buses and lorries, messages on birthday cards and invitations.

Write a shopping list together.

Send an email to a family member or friend

Set up a shoe box full of things to write with – gel pens, crayons, glitter pens, rainbow pencils, old birthday cards, coloured paper, sticky tape to make little books. Rolls of wallpaper can be attached to a table or wall to make a large area for their writing or drawing.

Praise them for their play writing – those early squiggles and marks show that your child is beginning to understand writing.

What to do if your child is reluctant to read or write at home: Ways you can support them.

Reading:

- Make sure your child sees you reading
- Read to your child. Show you like the book. Bring stories to life by using loud/soft/scary voices
- Spread books around your house for your child to dip into.
- Let your child choose what they would like to read – books, comics, catalogues.
- Read favourite books over and over again.

Writing:

- Make sure your child sees you writing.
- Compose an email together inviting a friend over to tea.
- Continue to make words together using magnetic letters.
- Leave a message on the fridge door – encourage them to write a reply to you.
- Make up a story together about one of their toys. You write for them, repeating the sentences as you write. When complete they can draw pictures to go with it.

Useful websites and leaflets for more information

www.phonicsplay.co.uk

This is a website we use frequently in school. There is a special parents section on the homepage that has information on phonics and lots of interactive games you can play with your child.

www.parentscentre.gov.uk/foragegroup/3to5years/readandwritetogether

This link to the Parents Centre website gives some really good ideas about how you can enjoy sharing books with your child and tells you a bit more about phonics

www.parentscentre.gov.uk/foragegroup/5to7years/alittlereadinggoesalongway

This link gives ideas about how to help your child as they are learning to read.

www.read-count.org/index.asp

A website for you and your child to explore together – it will give you some ideas about reading with your child and has online games for young children to play with you and on their own. It also has ideas for games to play away from the computer.

www.talktoyourbaby.org.uk

This website provides lots of information for parents and carers of babies and young children, and suggestions of activities, features, DVDs, books and events that are both useful and fun. You can have their free newsletter emailed to you directly.

www.familyreading.org.uk/parents

The Family Reading Campaign website provides lots of information to support you and your family. The Family Reading Campaign works to encourage reading in the home. There are also many links to other websites.

