

Overview of Phonics teaching at St. Stephen's

At St Stephen's phonics is taught through the systematic acquisition of sounds using the synthetic phonics programme, Ruth Miskin's, 'Read, Write, Inc.' Phonics is the method of teaching children to read by linking sounds (phonemes) and their symbols (graphemes).

All children have explicit phonics lessons throughout their first three years at school, starting from Nursery in order to ensure they have enough time to become secure with their decoding skills. Phonics teaching is accompanied by Read, Write, Inc Storybooks which the children read during their phonics lessons and 'Read, Write, Inc Book Bag Books which are sent home to further consolidate the sounds learnt in school and increase pupils' success with reading. Gradually, pupils are exposed to a variety of texts which build their comprehension skills and their vocabulary throughout the curriculum. As a result of this, children become confident readers early on and shift from 'learning to read' to 'reading to learn.'

Nursery

Children begin learning initial phonological skills in our Nursery class using the guidance from development matters. The emphasis is on building up the skills needed for phonics using a playful approach. The children work through the following topics: listening and tuning into sounds, rhyme, alliteration, oral segmenting and blending.

Listening and tuning into sounds helps children to develop their listening skills. Children listen to sounds in the environment, move on to matching sounds, then practise listening to each other. Children start exploring rhyme by learning how to make rhymes with their own names and listening to lots of rhyming stories and songs. A core set of rhyming books are read together as a class. When learning about alliteration children develop their skills of tuning into the sounds in words. This is taught through songs, rhymes and games. The letters for each sound are also introduced and children are exposed to print in a variety of different contexts and activities.

Finally children move on to developing their oral segmenting and blending skills. Children begin to learn skills in hearing individual sounds in words and putting them together to hear a word. They also work on breaking words down into their component sounds. This is taught through a variety of games, activities and opportunities for children to explore phonological skills through their free play.

In the summer term, the children that are ready will begin the 'Read, write, Inc' Nursery programme. Children are taught to say the sounds of letters with the help of mnemonics, to blend the sounds into words and explore these concepts through play and playful learning.

Reception

Phonics in Reception is taught using the 'Read, Write, Inc.' programme. Phonics is taught four times each week.

When children start in Reception in September they begin daily whole class phonics lessons covering Set 1 Sounds in the following order.

Set 1 Sounds – m, a, s, d, t, i, n, p, g, o, c, k, u, b, f, e, l, h, sh, r, j, v, y, w, th (blow), th (tickly), z, ch, qu, x, ng, nk

Children learn to recognise these letters (or digraphs) and link them to sounds. Learning is initially focused on oral blending of sounds to hear words, before moving on to reading simple CVC words. Children initially work on hearing the first sound in words before developing their skills in hearing all the sounds in simple CVC words, in order to be able to write these. Spelling simple CVC words is practised daily as part of the phonics sessions. Handwriting and correct letter formation is also taught during these lessons using the RWI mnemonics. Red Words which cannot be sounded out are taught weekly and set as homework.

At this stage support staff are deployed to work alongside the class teacher in delivering these whole class sessions in order to support children who may find participating or focusing during the session difficult.

When all Set 1 sounds have been taught the children are assessed and grouped across both Reception classes. Children who are not confident in recognising the Set 1 sounds revise these. Those who have not yet mastered oral blending or are less confident in reading simple CVC words focus on these areas. Children who are confident with all that they have been taught so far move onto learning the Set 2 sounds in the following order.

Set 2 Sounds – ay, ee, igh, ow, oo, oo, ar, or, air, ir, ou, oy

In Reception children begin reading RWI Story books as part of the daily phonics sessions. Learning is initially focused on developing skills in reading simple sentences and decoding words. They then begin to learn the fundamental skills in answering comprehension questions, focusing on finding evidence in the text to support their answer.

The children are assessed every 6-8 weeks and then regrouped.

Year 1

Children are assessed on entry to Year 1 and put into groups. Six members of staff take phonics groups in order to keep group sizes to a minimum and ensure progress is made by all children. Phonics is taught four times each week and children are streamed across both Year 1 classes.

Children continue working through the RWI programme and revise the sounds that they need to practise. When children are confident with both Set 1 and Set 2 sounds they begin Set 3. The Set 3 sounds contain the alternative spellings for the Set 2 sounds, as well as some less frequently used sounds. They are taught in the following order.

Set 3 Sounds – ea, oi, a-e, i-e, o-e, u-e, aw, are, ur, er, ow, ai, oa, ew, ire, ear, ure

As part of each phonics session the children develop their skills in recognising sounds and reading words, with an increased emphasis on spelling and grammar rules. Children practise reading 'alien' nonsense words in preparation for the Phonics Screening Check. In phonics lessons the children read the RWI Storybooks which correspond to the sounds they are learning. They continue to develop their fluency in reading, as well as comprehension skills for both retrieval and inference questions.

Those children identified as falling behind in Year 1 receive additional reading support and do not progress onto the next set of sounds until they are confident in identifying the current set of sounds they are working on. At this early stage any concerns will be shared with the school's SENCo.

The 'Phonics Screening Check' is taken individually by all children in Year 1 in June. In this screening, teachers are able to check that children can sound out and blend graphemes in order to read phonically decodable one-syllable and two-syllable words and a selection of pseudo words. In addition to ongoing Read Write Inc. assessments, teachers use past screening check materials throughout Year 1 so children are familiar with the format of the screening check. Additional materials are sent home for children identified as benefiting from extra practise.

Those children who do not reach the threshold score in the Year 1 phonics screening check in June participate in booster phonics groups before the summer holidays. If they have not been flagged up already, then class teachers will share any concerns with the school's SENCo.

Year 2

Children are assessed on entry to Year 2 and those who did not pass the Phonics Screening Check in Year 1, along with those who the class teachers identify as benefiting from additional input, participate in phonics sessions throughout the year. These sessions focus on re-teaching those sounds the children are less confident with, fluency in reading and comprehension skills.

Those children who do not pass the retake of the Phonics Screening Check when they are in Year 2 participate again in additional phonics booster groups before the summer holidays and throughout Year 3. They are also referred to the school's SENCo if they haven't been before.

Once children reach Year 2 they continue to build upon their phonological knowledge by progressing onto developing spelling and grammar skills which are taught through direct teaching. Concepts are taught in daily starter sessions and children apply these skills in their written work. Year Two children continue to use the RWI Storybooks and other texts to develop their comprehension skills.

Ongoing assessment

Methodical assessment across EYFS and KS1 using Read, Write Inc. resources is carried out in order to pinpoint where children need support. This takes place every 6-8 weeks.

Children who are falling behind are placed in smaller groups in order to provide them with more tailored and focused teaching. Usually teaching staff lead these smaller groups in order to target these children and ensure that the gap decreases.

Children who can identify all of the sounds that they have been taught and read both real words and 'alien' nonsense words containing those sounds will move onto the next set of sounds, Storybooks and Book Bag Books.