Letters and Sounds

A Guide for Parents

November 2015
Introduction

Letters and Sounds is an essential yet fun and interactive way to support children in learning how to read and write.

The alphabet contains only 26 letters. Spoken English uses about 44 sounds (phonemes). These phonemes are represented by letters (graphemes). A sound can be represented by a letter (e.g. ‘s’ or ‘h’) or a group of letters (e.g. ‘th’ or ‘ear’).
Once children begin learning sounds, they are used quickly to read and spell words. This booklet provides an overview of the teaching of letters and sounds at Sacred Heart, to help you support your child.
There are six phases of letters and sounds taught throughout Nursery to Year 2.

Technical Vocabulary

What is a phoneme?

It is the smallest unit of sound and a piece of terminology that children and adults may use. At first it will equate with a letter sound but later on will include the digraphs. For example ‘rain’ has three phonemes, /r / ai / n.

What is a grapheme?

A grapheme is a letter or a number of letters that represent a sound (phoneme) in a word. Another way to explain it is to say that a grapheme is a letter or letters that spell a sound in a word. E.g. /ee/, / ea/, /ey/ all make the same phoneme but are spelt differently.

What is a digraph?

This is when two or more letters come together to make a phoneme. /oa/ makes the sound in boat.

What is blending?

Blending is the process that is involved in bringing the sounds together to make a word or a syllable and is how /c/ /a/ /t / becomes cat.
To learn to read well children must be able to smoothly blend sounds together. Blending sounds fluidly helps to improve fluency when reading. Blending is more difficult to do with longer words so learning how to blend accurately from an early age is imperative.
Showing your child how to blend is important. Model how to ‘push’ sounds smoothly together without stopping at each individual sound.

What is segmenting?

Segmenting is a skill used in spelling. In order to spell the word cat, it is necessary to segment the word into its constituent sounds; c-a-t. Children often understand segmenting as ‘chopping’ a word. Before writing a word young children need time to think about it, say the word several times, ‘chop’ the word and then write it. Once children have written the same word several times they won’t need to use these four steps as frequently. Children will enjoy spelling if it feels like fun and if they feel good about themselves as spellers. We need, therefore, to be playful and positive in our approach – noticing and praising what children can do as well as helping them to correct their mistakes.

What are tricky words?

Tricky words are words that cannot be ‘sounded-out’ but need to be learned by heart. They don’t fit into usual spelling patterns. Examples of these words are attached under each phase. In order to read simple sentences, it is necessary for children to know some words that have unusual or untaught spellings. It should be noted that, when teaching these words, it is important to always start with sounds already known in the word, then focus on the ‘tricky’ part.

What are high frequency words?

High frequency (common) words recur frequently in much of the written material young children read and that they need when they write.

What are CVC words?

CVC stands for consonant- vowel- consonant, words such as map and cat are CVC. In phase 4 we talk about CCVC words such as clip, stop.

What are pseudo words?

Pseudo words (also known as nonsense words or alien words) are words that are phonetically decodable but are not actual words e.g. brip, snorb. The children are tested on decoding these words in the National Phonics Screening Check in Year 1.
Letters and Sounds Phases

Phase 1

Phase 1 of Letters and Sounds concentrates on developing children's speaking and listening skills and lays the foundations for the phonic work, which starts in Phase 2. The emphasis during Phase 1 is to get children attuned to the sounds around them and ready to begin developing oral blending and segmenting skills.

Phase 2

In Phase 2, letters and their sounds are introduced one at a time. They are often taught in sets, e.g.
Set 1: s, a, t, p
Set 2: i, n, m, d
Set 3: g, o, c, k
Set 4: ck, e, u, r
Set 5: h, b, f, ff, l, ll, ss

The children will begin to learn to blend and segment to begin reading and spelling. This will begin with simple words.

Tricky words introduced in Phase 2:
the, to, I, no, go, into

Phase 3

By the time they reach Phase 3, children will already be able to blend and segment words containing the 19 letters taught in Phase 2. In Phase 3 twenty-five new graphemes are introduced (one at a time).

Set 6: j, v, w, x
Set 7: y, z, zz, qu
Consonant digraphs: ch, sh, th, ng
Vowel digraphs: ai, ee, igh, oa, oo, ar, or, ur, ow, oi, ear, air, ure, er

Tricky words introduced in Phase 3:
me, be, was, no, go
my, you, they, her, all, are
Phase 4

By Phase 4 children will be able to represent each of 42 phonemes with a grapheme. They will blend phonemes to read CCVC and CVCC words and segment these words for spelling. They will also be able to read two syllable words that are simple. They will be able to read all the tricky words learnt so far and will be able to spell some of them. This phase consolidates all the children have learnt in the previous phases.

Tricky words introduced into Phase 4:

said  so  she  he  have  like
some  come  were  there  little  one
they  all  are  do  when  out
what  my  her

By this point children would be expected to be reading CVC words at speed along with the tricky words from the previous phases. It is important that children are taught that blending is only used when a word is unfamiliar.

Phase 5

Children will be taught new graphemes and alternative pronunciations for these graphemes and graphemes they already know. They will begin to learn to choose the appropriate grapheme when spelling.

ay -day  oy - boy  wh - when  a-e- make
ou -out  ir -girl  ph - photo  e-e- these
ie- tie  ue- blue  ew - new  i-e- like
eea- eat  aw -saw  oe - toe  o-e- home
au-Paul  u-e- rule

The children will be automatically decoding a large number of words for reading by this point.

Tricky words introduced in Phase 5:

oh  their  people  Mr  where
Mrs  looked  called  asked  who
would  should  could  work  again
thought  your  through  different  mouse
many  laughed  because  once  any
eyes  friends  eight
please  two  four  please
During this phase children will begin reading words fluently and no longer be blending and segmenting familiar words.
The real focus throughout the phase is to not only learn the new graphemes for reading but also to learn to read words with alternative pronunciations. Children also will need to learn alternative spellings for each phoneme.

**Phase 6**

In Phase 6 children will be reading longer and less familiar texts independently and fluently. It is crucial that at this point children are now reading to learn and reading for pleasure. Children should be able to read the 300 high frequency words. At this point it is important that comprehension strategies are developed so that children clarify meaning, ask and answer questions about the texts they are reading, construct mental images during reading and summarise what they have read.

In spelling children are introduced to the adding of suffixes and how to spell longer words. Throughout the phase children are encouraged to develop strategies for learning spellings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Syllables</td>
<td>To learn a word by listening to how many syllables there are so it can be broken into smaller bits. (e.g. September)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base Words</td>
<td>To learn a word by finding its base word. (e.g. jumping - base word jump +ing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analogy</td>
<td>To learn a word use a word that is already learnt. (e.g. could, would, should)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mnemonics</td>
<td>To learn a word by making up a sentence to help remember them. (e.g. could, should, would – OU Lucky Duck; people - People Eat Orange Peel Like Elephants)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homophones</td>
<td>Homophones are words that sound the same but have different spellings/meanings. For example sail/sale, see/sea.</td>
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</tbody>
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What can I do 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.
- Ensure that your child knows the tricky words by sight and does not try to segment these (you could have these on the fridge too for your child to easily recognise).

If you have a computer or tablet at home then below is a list of websites that have fun interactive games for children to play. There is also a large amount of apps available to support letters and sounds.

Useful website letters and sounds games:

http://www.letters-and-sounds.com

http://www.phonicsplay.co.uk/

http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/wordsandpictures/


http://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/welcome/home/reading-owl/fun-ideas

http://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/ks1/literacy/phonics/play/popup.shtml

We hope that you have found this booklet useful.