



Dear Reception Families

Thank you to those of you who came to our Phonics Workshop last night; we hope you enjoyed it! Here is some information regarding our daily phonics teaching. We hope you find the information useful, but if there is anything we haven't answered, please come and see us.

Learning Letter Sounds with Jolly Phonics:

We use **Jolly Phonics** to teach the letter sounds systematically and fast! Young children learn particularly quickly when there is an activity involved. By doing an action with each letter sound the children are using body movements, ears, eyes and speech to help them remember. This multi-sensory approach is a very effective way of learning, as well as being fun for the children.

All words are made up of sounds. There are **43 phonemes** (sounds) in English but only 26 letters that are used to represent these phonemes. This means that sometimes two letters are put together to create a new phoneme, e.g. sh, ch, th. These are called **digraphs**. **Digraphs** are different to the **blends** you may have learnt at school. A **digraph** has just one phoneme (e.g. 'sh' in 'ship') whereas a **blend** has two **phonemes** (e.g. 'st' in 'stop'). We do not teach **blends** as children with a secure knowledge of their letter sounds will blend the '**s**' and '**t**' automatically, so there is no need to teach '**st**' as a separate unit.

Introducing the Letter Sounds:

The idea behind '**Jolly Phonics**' is that all the letters are introduced at a rapid rate. The children's enthusiasm for learning is high and this provides a meaningful start for them.

It is recommended that the letters are introduced at a rate of one new sound per day. Although this may seem a lot, the children are generally able to cope with it and look forward to their new letter sound. The letter sounds are introduced at this rate so that they can be covered in approximately nine weeks. The result should be that the children become more competent readers much sooner, and can begin to use the letters in their writing.

In the very first phonics lesson that the children have, the letter 's' is introduced. This is done by telling a story that accompanies that sound. The sound and the action are incorporated into the story. In this case the children weave their arms like a snake, making 's' shapes, saying 'sssss'.

At the beginning of the Reception year, the children practise forming these letters in multi-sensory ways (in paint, chalk, sand, shaving foam) and then move on to handwriting practice in books. Reinforcement of these letters is vital. Flash cards of the letters that have been taught are used every day.

Letter Groups:

The letters are divided into seven groups of six. They have been carefully selected to help the learning. The first six letters can be used to make many simple cvc (consonant – vowel- consonant words, e.g. sat, pat, pin). The letters that get easily confused are not too close together, such as 'b' and 'd'. The letter 'c' is introduced early on as it forms the template for the formation of many other letters, e.g. a, d, o, q, g. These can be referred to as the caterpillar letters, as they all start in the same place and with the same movement ('c').

The 'Jolly Phonic' sets of sounds are as follows:

- **s, a, t, i, p, n**
- **c, k, e, h, r, m, d**
- **g, o, u, l, f, b**
- **ai, j, oa, ie, ee**
- **z, w, ng, v, short oo, long oo**
- **y, x, ch, sh, voiced th, unvoiced th**
- **qu, ou, oi, ue, er, ar**

We are currently part way through the second set and have started to blend simple words using these sounds! Use the Jolly Phonics action sheet to see which sounds your child has picked up and which ones may need more practice.

Using Phonics in Early Reading:

Our aim is for children to become confident and independent readers who read for meaning. However, before they can do this, they have to be able to work out what the words say. The recognition of the letters/graphemes, the correct articulation of each related phoneme or sound in turn, from left to right within the word, and the ability to then say the whole word, is called **blending**. In the beginning the children are not able to do this and need to be taught. With the ability to blend, children are able to read regular words, but blending needs lots of practice. We start at school once the first six sounds have been learnt, with short words such as 'p-i-n' and 's-a-t'. The children say the sounds correctly and listen for the word. Some children find blending easy, while others find it quite difficult. Here are three possible reasons for them having difficulty:

1. They are not articulating the sounds (or phonemes) correctly. They will find it hard to hear the word if the sounds are over pronounced.
2. They do not know their letter sounds well enough. As soon as they see a letter, they should know it automatically. If they have to pause for some time and think, then they will lose track of the word. To put this right, it is necessary to revise the sounds regularly, use the actions and play letter games.
3. The way the sounds are emphasised. The emphasis should be on the first letter, e.g. d-o-g. If the children put the emphasis on the last letter sound, they may try to start the word with that sound and fail to hear the word. The first sound needs to be said slightly louder than the rest to help the child remember the starting sound.

As you will appreciate there are a lot of skills that need to be embedded before a child actually begins the process of reading simple texts. One of the most valuable tools in helping a child to read is sharing and reading stories together, including retelling stories verbally and creating imaginative stories.

After half term your child will be bringing home simple texts to read with you. They will be taking texts from the selection outside Alex Class. Each child will be given a 'reading behaviour' sheet in their reading wallet that will give you tips on how to support your child. Please ensure the wallets and sheets remain in your child's book bag. We will endeavour to change the books regularly within the school day but if you ever want to browse the selection of home readers or ask the teacher's advice about reading books, you would be most welcome at the end of the day.

Happy Reading!
The Reception Team

