



# Phonics Progression at Great Kimble School

## Bug Club Phonics

### What is Phonics?

Phonics is one method of teaching children how to read and write. Phonics is all about sounds. There are 44 sounds in the English language, which we put together to form words. Some are represented by one letter, like 't', and some by two or more, like 'ck' in duck and 'air' in chair. Children are taught the sounds first, then how to match them to letters, and finally how to use the letter sounds for reading and spelling. Synthetic phonics refers to 'synthesising', or blending, the sounds to read words. It is based on the idea that children should sound out unknown words and not rely on their context.



### What is Systematic Synthetic Phonics?

In systematic synthetic phonics the graphemes and corresponding phonemes are taught just before the introduction of words that contain these letters. To read these words, children are taught to pronounce the individual phonemes (sounds) associated with the graphemes (letters) they see, and then to blend them together (synthesise) to form the word. (In this programme, we use slashes / / to denote phonemes and inverted commas ' ' to denote graphemes.) The process is as follows:

- Children see a word, e.g. cat; it is not pronounced for them.
- They break it down into its individual letters (graphemes) and pronounce the corresponding sounds (phonemes) for each letter in turn: /c/ /a/ /t/
- Then they blend the separate phonemes together to form the word.

This process is known as **blending**.

Systematic synthetic phonics teaches letter sounds very rapidly, explicitly showing children how to build up words with letters from the start, and always includes blending with printed words.

Systematic synthetic phonics does not normally teach spelling, but Bug Club Phonics does teach spelling by reversing the reading process described above, i.e.

- Children hear a word, e.g. 'cat' and say it.
- They say the first phoneme: /c/.
- They write the corresponding grapheme: 'c'.
- They say the word again and say the next phoneme: /a/.
- They write the corresponding grapheme: 'a', and so on.

This process is known as **segmenting**, and is followed by the children reading the word they have produced by sounding and blending.

In our approach, both blending for reading and segmenting for spelling are fully scaffolded. We model for the children how to sound and blend words for reading, but in each lesson, children must attempt to sound and blend words for themselves to find out how they are pronounced. We also model for the children how to segment for spelling and continue to scaffold the children through the process with each word they spell. This ensures that they identify each phoneme and choose the appropriate grapheme in turn, until the word is spelt.

Systematic synthetic phonics differs from analytic phonics in that in analytic phonics children are shown word families. For example, they may be introduced to the letter sound 'c', and then be shown a list of words all starting with the same letter sound, e.g. 'cat, cake, cut, cup'. Sounding and blending starts when all the letters of the alphabet have been taught in the beginning, middle and final positions of words, whereas in systematic synthetic phonics this process starts after the first few letter sounds have been taught.

## How is Phonics taught?

In Reception and Key Stage 1, Bug Club Phonics teaches a new grapheme and related phoneme in every Phoneme Session. This fast pace, backed up by daily revision of past teaching, has proved the most effective and successful method of phonic training. This means that the basic 40+ phonemes (Units 1–12), and then the alternative spellings of these phonemes (Units 13–30), are acquired quickly, and early reading skills develop rapidly. Decodable readers are introduced after just 10 days' teaching at the end of Unit 2. This enables children to apply the taught strategies and enjoy contextualised reading early on.

## Introduction to Graphemes and Phonemes

In Bug Club Phonics children are taught graphemes and phonemes at the same time. The research study showed that children progressed quickly if they learnt about phonemes in the context of letters and print right from the start of the phonics teaching.

## Blending and segmenting

In Bug Club Phonics blending for reading and segmenting for spelling are given equal prominence, though blending is always taught first in a session. The practice of oral blending and segmentation is recommended in Phase 2. These activities are done on a regular basis throughout the school day; for example, when there are a few minutes before the bell goes. Activities include:

- suggesting words for children to practise sound-talk: e.g. tap, hat, mop
- using pictures from the online asset bank for sound-talk sentences, e.g.
  - Point to the m-a-p.
  - Can you h-o-p on one l-e-g?

## Introduction of letter names

The names of letters can be taught first, via the Alphabet song and magnetic letters. Since the programme was first launched, children have not had any difficulties learning both letter names and sounds early on. One of the benefits of this is that any child who misses a session will know the names of the letters they have missed. In many cases the letter names give a good guide to the letter sounds.

## Multi-sensory learning

Bug Club Phonics is delivered through a mixture of teacher modelling and rehearsal with the whole class and small focus groups. These are tailored to meet the needs of individual children to consolidate their learning. Bringing a multi-sensory element to the teaching of phonics is widely recognised to be hugely beneficial to its effectiveness. Magnetic letters and boards are used to consolidate children's blending and segmenting abilities. Mini-magnetic boards are used after the whole-class teaching sessions to apply and assess children's understanding. The interactive whiteboard also acts as an electronic magnetic letter board for teacher demonstration. In Reception and Key Stage 1 the children are quickly supported to write using pencils and paper as well as whiteboards (supported by the Reading Framework July 2021). The children record their phonic journeys in individual phonic books.

## Less common grapheme–phoneme correspondences

Based on experience of the hundreds of children who have been through the programme over the last 20 or so years, Bug Club Phonics takes the view that children are best served by learning the basic 40+ grapheme–phoneme correspondences in the first year at school. The less frequent pronunciations, particularly for vowels, are taught when the children are secure in the basic principles, normally in the second year of school. Very minor variations in pronunciation are not taught separately, and this has been found to pose no relevant difficulties for the children.

## High frequency (common) words and irregular words

High frequency decodable common words are included for reading and spelling throughout Bug Club Phonics. Many of these words have spellings that have irregular pronunciations; these words are always deemed 'tricky', e.g. 'one'. However, some of the words have regular pronunciations and become fully decodable later on as the phonics teaching progresses; for example, 'like' becomes completely decodable when split digraphs are taught. Children are encouraged to use their phonic knowledge to help them decode these words as far as possible.

## Language Sessions

Language Sessions occur at the end of each unit. These sessions combine the teaching of irregular words with using words in the context of captions and sentences. The acquisition of skills for reading single words is only part of the reading process. To read with fluency and comprehension, children need to apply and develop the skills taught during the systematic synthetic phonics teaching element of the programme. The Language Sessions serve to consolidate the teaching of reading and spelling in the Phoneme Sessions, and promote early comprehension skills.

Comprehension is not an end product. It is a process which occurs during active interaction between the reader and the text. In the Bug Club Phonics Language Sessions, a progressive programme of text-related directed activities has been assembled to enable children to progress from single-word reading to reading intelligently to grasp meaning from the text. While there are no new grapheme–phoneme correspondences in Phase 4, it is important that children learn to read and spell words containing adjacent consonants and read more decodable words and words that are not fully decodable (irregular words). For this reason, there are three (rather than one) Language Sessions in Unit 12 (Phase 4).

## Introduction of graded readers

Bug Club Phonics is supported by decodable readers which match the order of phoneme introduction. When the children have completed the first two units of Bug Club Phonics, they will have acquired a sufficient number of grapheme–phoneme for reading is nurtured, their comprehension skills are being developed, and their speaking and listening skills are extended. The children have access to both printed and e-reader decodable books through Bug Club Online. Colour band readers are also introduced alongside the decodable readers when children become more confident at recognising irregular words and begin to develop more comprehension skills.

## Speaking and listening skills

Our strategy of teacher-modelling and rehearsal for teaching reading and spelling provides opportunities for pupils to be both spectators and participants. As spectators, they listen to words and structures; as participants, they try them out. While sharing pupil magnetic boards, working in pairs or small groups, pupils respond to each other, learning to adjust the language to suit the situation and the response of partners. Using graded readers, we can encourage pupils to express opinions and explore, develop and sustain ideas through talk and discussion.

## How is Phonics progression tracked?

Children are assessed on their ability to use taught strategies to read unknown words. This is done in a variety of ways, daily assessment against the learning objectives where individual gaps or needs for reinforcements are highlighted, Individually when they are reading their reading books and by half termly and end of unit checks. Such a regular, rigorous system of formative and summative assessment reduces the opportunities for children to fall behind. Knowing which children need additional help at the soonest opportunity is critical to avoiding them falling behind. It greatly enhances their chances of being able to catch up.