

Phonics and Beyond

Phonics screening check for six-year olds.

The aim of the phonics screening check is to ensure that children in Year 1 have mastered the basic skills of early reading and to identify those who seem to be struggling.

Those basic skills are:

- recognising individual letters and groups of letters
- knowing which letter(s) are representing which sounds
- blending individual sounds together to read words.

It is not meant to assess all aspects of reading. Obviously, instant recognition of words rather than conscious blending of each letter is the goal – as this underpins fluent reading. But it is important to check that children have a strategy for working out words that they have not come across.

But, how do we get to this point and what do we do afterwards?

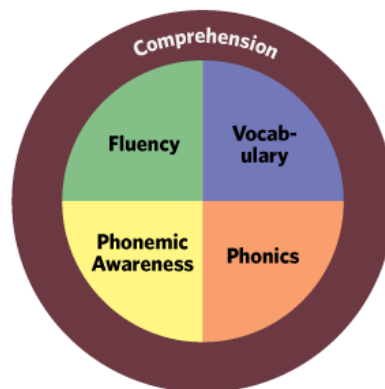
‘Reading by six’ (2010) said “The best schools can succeed regardless of socio-economic circumstances of the communities that they serve. If a school has a clear and consistent approach to phonics and reading the great majority (of children) will learn to read.”

At Glynwood Primary School, we use Read, Write Inc (RWInc) a synthetic phonic and spelling scheme throughout the school – from Early Years to Year six.

Essential components of reading.

For children to become confident readers that can apply a range of strategies to quickly decode and comprehend words that they have not yet come across, they need to first master a range of essential components.

- Phonemic awareness
- Phonics
- Fluency
- Vocabulary
- Comprehension.



Phonemic Awareness.

Phonemic awareness is the understanding that spoken language words can be broken into individual phonemes—the smallest unit of spoken language.

Phonemic awareness is not the same as phonics—phonemic awareness focuses on the individual sounds in spoken language. As children begin to transition to phonics, they learn the relationship between a phoneme (sound) and grapheme (the letter(s) that represent the sound) in written language.

Children in nursery, reception and some year 1 children will begin to develop and demonstrate an understanding of a sound and its relationship to a letter. Children are taught this through teaching of set 1 sounds – we teach short vowel sounds; children need to know letter sounds –not names – to read words.

Phonics.

Phonics is "a system of teaching reading that builds on the alphabetic principle, a system of which a central component is the teaching of correspondences between letters or groups of letters and their pronunciations" (Adams, 1990, p. 50). Reading or decoding is the process of converting printed words to spoken words. Children use phonics skills, beginning with simple grapheme letters/sounds, to pronounce words and then attach meaning to them.

From Set 1 sounds, children begin to learn Set 2 long vowel sounds (or special friends – two letters together that make one sound). Once children know these Set 2 sounds, they know one way of reading and writing every sound – these are known as complex speed sounds. As children's ability and confidence develop they are taught Set 3 sounds – these are alternative graphemes of Set 1 and Set 2 sounds that children already know. For example:

Set 1 sound	a
Set 2 sound	ay
Set 3 sound	ai
	a-e

As well as learning Set 1, 2 and 3 Speed sounds children begin to apply other decoding skills, such as the ability to decode multi-syllable words. Children also learn to apply decoding skills to irregular words that are almost decodable – these are 'Red Words'. These may contain grapheme sounds that may not have been taught by the time they are needed to read more challenging books. They are difficult to decode so are taught as sight read words, many form part of the Key Stage One common exception word list which children are expected to be able to read and spell by the end of Key Stage One.

Fluency

Fluency is the ability to read 'like you speak.'

Reading fluency is made up of three key elements: 'accurate reading of a whole text, reading at a conversational rate and reading with appropriate expression.'

Non-fluent readers suffer in at least one of these aspects of reading: they make many mistakes, they read slowly, or they don't read with appropriate expression and phrasing. For children to develop into strong readers – fluency is key. The school's RWInc scheme places high expectations on the development of fluency and suggests the repeated reading of a text is key in a child's reading development. That is why the RWInc scheme recommends that children read 'three with me (in school) and four at home.' This way children have plenty of opportunity to build their accuracy, speed and expression of a text, whilst also offering a chance to show off their developing reading fluency.

Children thrive on repetition and reading an appropriate levelled reading book with them is key to building reading confidence and ultimately comprehension of unknown challenging texts. Children's reading books should allow children to show off 'just how good a reader they are,' they should never struggle to read fluently or with expression – if this happens, then your child is not ready for that level book and may have to take a step back before moving forward. Try to avoid making comments to children like, 'this book is too easy for you / it's not enough challenge.' Instead, tell them you love them reading and the expression they use for different characters is amazing. Discuss with them characters in the book and link it to other books/characters that they may have already read or watched.

We want to make sure children enjoy reading so they will want to read for the rest of their lives – the more they read and re read a familiar text, the fast progress they will make!

Vocabulary

'Vocabulary knowledge is knowledge.' (Stahl, 2005)

Knowledge of a word not only implies a definition, but also implies how that word fits into the world. We continually develop vocabulary throughout our lives: 'vocabulary isn't a lesson, it's life.' Words are powerful and open up endless possibilities, and of course, that's what we want for all of our children. Unfortunately, some children grow up 'word deprived', quite simply, a lack of words that the children can draw upon in written and oral communication. On the other hand, children with a large and expressive repertoire of words can be classed as 'word-wealthy' (Alex Quigley, Closing the Vocabulary Gap). Statistically, a child needs to develop around 50,000 words if they are to be successful in education and beyond. This is a huge undertaking when you consider an 'average' child learns 2,000 to 3,000 words per year in education. When we consider the varied range of learners every school has within it – we can quickly see how,

quite quickly, a large number of pupils are likely to be word-deprived – literally starved of words, consumed by a lexical famine.

How do we close the gap for children who have limited or inadequate vocabularies?

Whilst, there is no right or wrong answer, one thing that is clear is that reading is considered to be central to developing and supporting children's vocabulary development. In school, children will be intentionally exposed to a broad and challenge range of vocabulary learning through their class text – activities such as:

- Teaching specific words to support understanding of texts containing those words.
- Teaching word-learning strategies that students can use independently.
- Promoting the development of word consciousness and using word play activities to motivate and engage children in learning new words.

As well as teaching intentional vocabulary through a specific text, most children, especially those in their early schooling journey acquire their vocabulary incidentally through indirect exposure to words at home and at school. By listening and talking to others, by listening to books read aloud to them, and by reading widely on their own.

At all ages the amount of reading is important to long-term vocabulary development as extensive reading provides children with repeated or multiple exposures to words and is seen as a key factor by which children see vocabulary in a rich day to day context.

Comprehension: The goal of reading.

Comprehension, or extracting meaning from what you read, is the ultimate goal of reading. Experienced readers take this for granted - as adults we do not appreciate how hard comprehension is for young children or the skills required to comprehend a text. The process of comprehension is both interactive and strategic. Rather than children passively reading a text, mature readers must analyse it, internalise it and make it their own. In order for children to learn comprehension strategies, children need modelling, repeated practice and feedback – both positive and negative.

The key comprehension strategies are described below:

Prior knowledge

When children are exposed to a new text they tap into what they already know and access knowledge that will help them to understand the text they are about to read. It is their previous exposure to repeated stories and vocabulary that provides a framework for any new information they read.

Predicting

When children make predictions about the text they are about to read, it builds upon expectations based on their prior knowledge and learning. As they read children begin to mentally revise their prediction as they gain more information.

Summarising – What is the main idea?

Being able to identify the main idea or summarise requires that children are able to recognise what is the key / important message of a text is and then put it in their own words. Part of this process is trying to understand the author's purpose in writing the text.

Questioning

Asking and answering questions about text is another strategy that helps children focus on the meaning of text. Teachers and parents can help by modelling both the process of asking good questions and strategies for finding the answers in the text.

Making inference

In order for children to make inferences about something that is not explicitly stated in the text (literal), children begin this process through their fluency of reading to summarise a text without losing the main idea, they must learn to draw on their prior knowledge of story and text, know and identify key vocabulary and recognise clues in the text itself.

Only when children have appropriately secured phoneme awareness, phonics, fluency and vocabulary can they move on to begin to really comprehending a text as an independent reader.