

Letters and Sounds:

Principles and Practice of High Quality Phonics

Notes of Guidance for Practitioners and Teachers



Primary
National Strategy

department for
education and skills

Creating Opportunity
Releasing Potential
Achieving Excellence



Foreword

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Being able to read is the most important skill children will learn during their early schooling and has far-reaching implications for lifelong confidence and well-being.

The independent review of early reading conducted by Jim Rose confirmed that 'high quality phonic work' should be the prime means for teaching children how to read and spell words. The review also highlighted the importance of developing from the earliest stages children's speaking and listening skills, ensuring that beginner readers are ready to get off to a good start in phonic work by the age of five. Such work should be set within a broad and rich language curriculum.

All these considerations are reflected in the renewed Primary Framework which is currently being implemented, and in the Early Years Foundation Stage which takes effect in September 2008. We are now publishing the Primary National Strategy's new phonics resource *Letters and Sounds: Principles and Practice of High Quality Phonics*, replacing *Progression in Phonics* and *Playing with Sounds* which are being withdrawn. *Letters and Sounds* is a high quality phonics resource which encapsulates the reading review recommendations, meets our published core criteria which define a high quality phonics programme, and takes account of the best practice seen in our most successful early years settings and schools.

Both the Primary Framework and the Early Years Foundation Stage mark significant steps in our drive to raise standards and personalise learning so that all our children achieve their full potential. *Letters and Sounds*, with its alignment to both documents, gives early years practitioners and teachers a powerful phonics teaching tool to ensure that young children are well-placed to read and spell words with fluency and confidence by the time they reach the end of Key Stage 1. This is an entitlement we all want to achieve for every child.

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Letters and Sounds: Principles and Practice of High Quality Phonics

Letters and Sounds: Principles and Practice of High Quality Phonics comprises:

- *Notes of guidance for practitioners and teachers;*
- a Six-phase Teaching Programme;
- a DVD illustrating effective practice for the phases;
- a poster showing the principles of high quality phonic work.

These notes of guidance are designed to help practitioners and teachers use Letters and Sounds in conjunction with the Six-phase Teaching Programme. The notes are in two parts:

Part 1: Introduction;

Part 2: Principles of high quality phonic work underlying the six phases.

Part 1: Introduction

What is the Letters and Sounds programme?

Letters and Sounds is designed to help practitioners and teachers teach children how the alphabet works for reading and spelling by:

- fostering children's speaking and listening skills as valuable in their own right and as preparatory to learning phonic knowledge and skills;
- teaching high quality phonic work at the point they judge children should begin the programme. For most children, this will be by the age of five with the intention of equipping them with the phonic knowledge and skills they need to become fluent readers by the age of seven.

Practitioners and teachers will find it helpful to familiarise themselves with the 'simple view of reading'¹ (see page 9). The 'simple view' shows that, to become proficient readers and writers, children must develop both word recognition and language comprehension. The Letters and Sounds programme focuses on securing word recognition skills as these are essential for children to decode (read) and encode (spell) words accurately with ease, and so concentrate on comprehending and composing text.

¹ *Independent Review of the teaching of early reading*, Final Report, Jim Rose 2006.

Phonics is a means to an end. Systematic, high quality phonics teaching is essential, but more is needed for children to achieve the goal of reading, which is comprehension. Letters and Sounds is designed as a time-limited programme of phonic work aimed at securing fluent word recognition skills for reading by the end of Key Stage 1, although the teaching and learning of spelling, which children generally find harder than reading, will continue. Practitioners and teachers must bear in mind that throughout the programme children need to understand the purpose of learning phonics and have lots of opportunities to apply their developing skills in interesting and engaging reading and writing activities.

In choosing a phonic programme, be it Letters and Sounds, another published programme or their own programme, settings and schools are encouraged to apply the criteria for high quality phonic work (see page 8 of these Notes).

Progress from learning to read to reading to learn

Letters and Sounds is fully compatible with the wider, language-rich early years curriculum. It will help practitioners and teachers adapt their teaching to the range of children's developing abilities that is common in most settings and primary classes. The aim is to make sure that all children make progress at a pace that befits their enlarging capabilities.

For ease of planning, the Letters and Sounds programme is structured in six phases that broadly follow the Primary National Strategy's *Progression and Pace* (Ref: 03855-2006BKT-EN) published in September 2006. However, in Letters and Sounds the boundaries between the phases are deliberately porous so that no children are held back, or unduly pressured to move on before they are equipped to do so. It follows that practitioners and teachers will need to make principled decisions based on reliable assessments of children's learning to inform planning for progression within and across the phases.

Letters and Sounds enables children to see the relationship between reading and spelling from an early stage, such that the teaching of one reinforces understanding of the other. Decoding (reading) and encoding (spelling) are treated as reversible processes.

However, children generally secure accurate word reading before they secure comparable accuracy in spelling. It follows that the teaching and learning of spelling will need to continue beyond Phase Six.

The Independent Review of the teaching of early reading, the Early Years Foundation Stage and the Primary National Strategy

Letters and Sounds is founded on the principles of the *Independent Review of the teaching of early reading*. It aligns with and builds on the renewed Primary Framework and the Early Years Foundation Stage which reflect these principles². It replaces the National Literacy Strategy's *Progression in Phonics: Materials for Whole-class Teaching* (Ref: 0126/2001), and the Primary National Strategy's *Playing with Sounds: A Supplement to Progression in Phonics* (Ref: 0280-2004). It retains valued elements from those documents that practitioners and teachers have told us they would find helpful if brought together in one publication.

In 2006, the Review recommended systematic, 'high quality phonic work' as the prime means for teaching beginner readers to learn to read. The Review also emphasised the importance of fostering speaking and listening skills from birth onwards in the home environment, in early years settings and in schools, making full use of the great variety of rich opportunities for developing children's language that all these provide.

The Review also affirms that children's acquisition of speaking and listening skills, and phonic knowledge and skills, are greatly enhanced by a 'multi-sensory' approach. Examples of multi-sensory activities are given in the phases and in the DVD accompanying the Six-phase Teaching Programme. Early years practitioners will be fully familiar with this type of activity and the value it adds to other areas of learning and development in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

All of these considerations are embedded in the Primary Framework, in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Letters and Sounds.

Progression and pace

The importance of flexibility

Although the six-phase structure provides a useful map from which to plan children's progress, *the boundaries between the phases should not be regarded as fixed*. Guided by reliable assessments of children's developing knowledge and skills, practitioners and teachers will need to judge the rate at which their children are able to progress through the phases and adapt the pace accordingly. As with much else in the early years, some children will be capable of, and benefit from, learning at a faster pace than their peers whereas others may need more time and support to secure their learning.

² References: *Independent Review of the teaching of early reading*, Final Report, Jim Rose, 2006 (referred to throughout these Notes as 'the Review'); *The Primary Framework for Literacy and Mathematics* (DfES 02011-2006BOC-EN); *The Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework* (Ref: 00014-2007BKT-EN)

The following are examples of where this applies:

- the pace at which the 26 letters of the alphabet are taught;
- the introduction of digraphs;
- the introduction of adjacent consonants – practitioners and teachers may find that some children can benefit from learning about adjacent consonants earlier than is suggested in the phase structure.

In each case, and as a general principle, the pace at which it is suggested that children progress through the phases should be taken as a guide rather than applied rigidly. The programme is incremental so that successful prior learning will very largely determine the pace of children's progress.

Using the six-phase structure flexibly is particularly important in the case of the boundary between Phases One and Two. For example, it may not be necessary to complete all seven aspects of Phase One before starting systematic phonic work in Phase Two. Practitioners and teachers should use their professional judgement to decide at what point children are ready to move on, as well as recognising that elements of Phase One can be valuable to run alongside and complement the work in Phase Two.

Obviously, practitioners and teachers will not want children to be held back who are clearly ready to begin Phase Two, or, equally, begin such work if they judge children need further preparatory work to ensure that they can succeed from the start.

The programme is rooted in widely accepted best practice for the Early Years Foundation Stage in which a high priority is placed on the development of children's speaking and listening skills as important in their own right, as well as for preparing the way for the teaching and learning of reading and writing. It is essential for practitioners and teachers to make principled, professional judgements about children's different and developing abilities to decide when they should start systematic phonic work and the pace at which they progress through the programme.

Making a good start – Phase One

The importance of getting children off to a good start cannot be overstated so practitioners and teachers are urged to take particular account of the following points related to Phases One and Two.

Phase One recognises the central importance of developing speaking and listening skills as a priority in their own right and for paving the way to making a good start on reading and writing. Put simply, the more words children know and understand before they start on a systematic programme of phonic work the better equipped they are to succeed.

Phase One therefore relies on providing a broad and rich language experience for children which is the hallmark of good early years practice. In this phase and thereafter children should be enjoyably engaged in worthwhile learning activities that encourage them to talk a lot, to increase their stock of words and to improve their command of dialogue.

The activities in Phase One that exemplify this approach are set out in seven aspects as described in the guidance notes at the beginning of that phase.

Key features of a rich curriculum which are essential to Phase One and beyond are the range and depth of language experienced by the children. Good teaching will exploit, for example, the power of story, rhyme, drama and song to fire children's imagination and interest, thus encouraging them to use language copiously. It will also make sure that they benefit from hearing and using language from non-fictional as well as fictional sources. Interesting investigations and information, for example from scientific and historical sources, often appeal strongly to young children, capturing the interest of boys as well as girls and helping to prepare the way for them to move easily and successfully into reading and writing. When taught well children will take pride in their success but, as practitioners and teachers know well, they also benefit strongly from consistent praise for effort and achievement with the aim of making their learning as rewarding as possible.

Additional support

High quality phonic teaching can substantially reduce the number of children at risk of falling below age-related expectations for reading. Moreover, the focus on 'quality first' teaching should help to reduce the need for supplementary programmes. However, some children may experience transitory or longer-term conditions such as hearing, visual or speech impairments. Even a mild, fluctuating hearing loss can hinder normal communication development, slow children's progress and lead to feelings of failure and social isolation. Obviously, as with concerns about any aspect of children's physical condition, risks to their communication and language development must be shared with parents or carers so that the situation can be fully investigated and professional help sought. Where hearing loss, for example, has been ruled out and practitioners and parents or carers continue to have concerns about a child's development, advice should be sought from the local speech and language therapy service.

Children learning English as an additional language

The emphasis given to speaking and listening in the programme and especially in Phase One will help practitioners to strengthen provision for children learning English as an additional language. Listening to lengthy stretches of language where both the speaker and the topic are unfamiliar makes great demands on children for whom English is a new language. A familiar speaker using imaginative resources to stimulate talk about a topic which the children already know something about will provide a more helpful context for these children. Equally, the programme offers many opportunities for planned adult-led and child-initiated small-group and partner work to encourage these children to communicate in English as early as possible.

Systematic high quality phonics – Phase Two

Phase Two marks the beginning of systematic, high quality phonic work. (See Appendix 1, on page 18, for relevant working terminology.) This is best taught in short, discrete daily sessions, with ample opportunities for children to use and apply their phonic knowledge and skills throughout the day. Right from the start, however, every child will need to experience success moving incrementally from the simple to the more complex aspects of phonic work. Phase Two therefore starts with a tried and tested approach to learning a selection of letters ('s', 'a', 't', 'p', 'i', 'n') and emphasises multi-sensory activity. Letters and Sounds is designed to help practitioners and teachers track children's progress and should enable them to make reliable assessments for learning within and across the phases.

As noted, each phase in the six-phase structure dovetails with the next. The teaching programme for reading is time-limited and should end with the completion of Phase Six when the great majority of children will have mastered decoding print. Thereafter, by reading extensively, they will continue to hone their phonic skills and increase the pace of their reading. Acquiring proficiency in spelling for most children is unlikely to keep pace with acquiring proficiency in reading. Spelling will, therefore, require further development beyond Phase Six.

Each of the six phases suggests activities for teaching phonic knowledge and skills incrementally. These activities are illustrative examples. They do not constitute a total set of daily lesson plans. For example, in teaching letter recognition in Phase Two, the letter 's' is taken to illustrate how to teach a discrete phoneme and its corresponding grapheme. Practitioners and teachers can apply this model to teaching the other letters of the alphabet in the order given in the programme, starting with 's', 'a', 't', 'p', 'i', 'n'.

Manipulating letters: multi-sensory learning

The processes of segmenting and blending for reading and spelling need to be made enjoyable and easy for children to understand and apply. Well-timed multi-sensory activities serve this purpose and intensify learning. One easily available resource that has proved very effective in this respect is a set of solid, magnetic letters that can be manipulated on small whiteboards by children, as individuals or in pairs. These have the advantages, for example, of enabling children to:

- recognise letters by touch, sight and sounding out simultaneously;
- easily manipulate letters to form and re-form the same sets of letters into different words;
- compose words by manipulating letters even though children may not yet be able to write them, for example with a pencil;
- share the activity and talk about it with a partner;
- build up knowledge of grapheme–phoneme correspondences systematically.

These resources also provide practitioners and teachers with an easy means to monitor children's progress.

Principles of high quality phonic work and choosing a phonics programme

In March 2007, the Department for Education and Skills published a list of criteria which define 'high quality phonic work'. The criteria are based on those identified by the Review and developed through a consultation process. The Department also published guidance for settings and schools on how to apply the criteria to help them choose a commercial programme. The Department additionally published a self-assessment template for publishers to assess and publish the extent to which their schemes meet these criteria in order to inform schools' choices. The criteria for high quality phonic work, guidance for settings and schools about how to apply them, and publishers' self-assessments can be found at www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/phonics.

The Letters and Sounds programme, particularly Phases Two to Six, has been developed in accordance with the criteria. Settings and schools can use Letters and Sounds to support their phonics teaching, choose a commercial programme that they judge matches the criteria, or use programmes developed by themselves or by others in their local area that also match the criteria.

Different programmes – similar principles

The principles underlying Letters and Sounds are common to other phonic programmes. However, other programmes may cover the same phonic content in different ways as well as offering a wide range of teaching materials to support the programme, such as extra teaching resources, and materials for use by children and parents or carers. Settings and schools will wish to decide which programme to use, bearing in mind that the most important consideration is whether the programme meets the criteria for high quality phonic work.

Fidelity to the programme

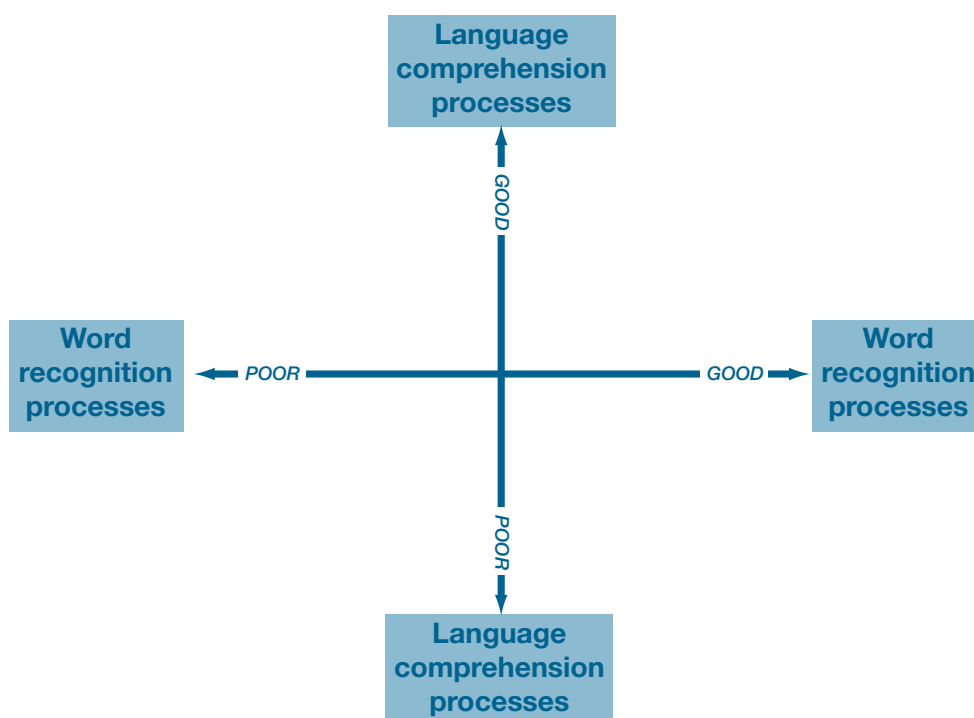
Whichever programme they choose, settings and schools should bear in mind the importance of following the sequence of the phonic content in the programme consistently from start to finish. This approach is most likely to secure optimum progress in children's acquisition of phonic knowledge and skills, whereas mixing parts of different sequences from more than one programme can slow their progress.

Adhering to the sequence of phonic content of the programme does not, however, prevent settings and schools from supplementing their chosen programme by using additional resources, such as flashcards and mnemonics, which they make themselves or purchase from commercial sources.

Part 2: Principles of high quality phonic work underlying the six phases

The ‘simple view of reading’

Letters and Sounds is based on the ‘simple view of reading’ outlined in the Review, which identifies two dimensions of reading – ‘word recognition’ and ‘language comprehension’.



Source: *Independent Review of the teaching of early reading*, Final Report, Jim Rose, 2006, figure 2, page 77.

See also the Primary National Strategy core position paper on the ‘simple view of reading’ (Ref: 03855-2006BKT-EN).

All but a very few children understand a great deal of spoken language long before they start learning to read. In order to comprehend text, however, children must first learn to recognise, that is to say, decode, the words on the page. Once they can do this, they can use the same processes to make sense of written text as they use to understand spoken language. The ‘simple view’ shows that word recognition (decoding) and language comprehension are both necessary for proficient reading. However, the balance between the two changes as children acquire decoding skills, and progress from learning to read to reading to learn for information and pleasure.

Phonics is concerned with the word recognition dimension of the ‘simple view of reading’. The purpose of high quality phonic teaching is for children to secure the crucial skills of word decoding that lead to fluent and automatic reading, thus freeing them to concentrate on the meaning of the text.

Principles of high quality phonic work

Following Phase One with its emphasis on speaking and listening, Phases Two to Six of Letters and Sounds are designed as a robust programme of high quality phonic work to be taught systematically. It is recommended that this is done for a discrete period of time – around 20 minutes – on a daily basis, as the prime approach to teaching children how to read and spell words. Good practice also shows that children benefit from encouragement to apply their developing phonic skills as opportunities arise across the curriculum throughout the day.

Phonic work should be regarded as an essential body of knowledge, skills and understanding that has to be learned largely through direct instruction, rather than as one of several methods of choice.

Beginner readers should be taught:

- grapheme–phoneme correspondences in a clearly defined, incremental sequence (see Appendix 1, page 19 where grapheme–phoneme correspondences are explained);
- to apply the highly important skill of blending (synthesising) phonemes in the order in which they occur, all through the word to read it;
- to apply the skills of segmenting words into their constituent phonemes to spell;
- that blending and segmenting are reversible processes.

The teaching of high quality phonic work: overview of the phases

(See Appendix 3 for a table summarising the phases.)

Phase One supports the development of speaking and listening as crucially important in its own right and for paving the way for high quality phonic work. **For ease of reference more detailed notes are included at the start of Phase One in the Six-phase Teaching Programme.**

Phase Two marks the start of systematic phonic work. It begins the introduction of grapheme–phoneme correspondences (GPCs). Decoding for reading and encoding for spelling are taught as reversible processes. As soon as the first few correspondences have been learned, children are taught to blend and segment with them. Blending means merging individual phonemes together into whole words; segmenting is the reverse

process of splitting up whole spoken words into individual phonemes. Earlier, in Phase One, blending and segmenting activities have been purely oral, involving no letters, for example, an adult pronounces the sounds to be blended rather than expecting the children to pronounce them in response to letters. In Phase Two, however, the children learn to pronounce the sounds themselves in response to letters, before blending them, and thus start reading simple VC and CVC words (see ‘Working Terms’, page 20). The reverse process is that they segment whole spoken words into phonemes and select letters to represent those phonemes, either writing the letters, if they have the necessary physical coordination, or using solid (e.g. magnetic) letters to encode words.

Phase Three completes the teaching of the alphabet, and children move on to sounds represented by more than one letter, learning one representation for each of at least 42 of the 44 phonemes generally recognised as those of British Received Pronunciation (RP), as shown in the table below. Just one spelling is given for each because this is all that is required in Phase Three, but in the case of some vowel spellings represented by combinations of letters, spellings other than those given would have been equally good first choices (e.g. ‘ay’ instead of ‘ai’ and ‘ie’ instead of ‘igh’).

Consonant phonemes, with sample words		Vowel phonemes, with sample words	
1. /b/ – bat	13. /s/ – sun	1. /a/ – ant	13. /oi/ – coin
2. /k/ – cat	14. /t/ – tap	2. /e/ – egg	14. /ar/ – farm
3. /d/ – dog	15. /v/ – van	3. /i/ – in	15. /or/ – for
4. /f/ – fan	16. /w/ – wig	4. /o/ – on	16. /ur/ – hurt
5. /g/ – go	17. /y/ – yes	5. /u/ – up	17. /air/ – fair
6. /h/ – hen	18. /z/ – zip	6. /ai/ – rain	18. /ear/ – dear
7. /j/ – jet	19. /sh/ – shop	7. /ee/ – feet	19. /ure/ ⁴ – sure
8. /l/ – leg	20. /ch/ – chip	8. /igh/ – night	20. /ə/ – corner (the ‘schwa’ – an unstressed vowel sound which is close to /u/)
9. /m/ – map	21. /th/ – thin	9. /oa/ – boat	
10. /n/ – net	22. /th/ – then	10. /oo/ – boot	
11. /p/ – pen	23. /ng/ – ring	11. /oo/ – look	
12. /r/ – rat	24. /zh/ ³ – vision	12. /ow/ – cow	

A fuller picture of grapheme–phoneme correspondences is given in Appendix 2, page 21.

In **Phase Four** children learn to read and spell words containing adjacent consonants. Many children may be capable of taking this step much earlier, in which case they should not be held back from doing so. No new grapheme–phoneme correspondences are taught in this phase.

³ The grapheme ‘zh’ does not occur in English words, but /zh/ is a logical way of representing this isolated phoneme on paper: there is no other simple and obvious way, and the phoneme is the ‘buzzing’ (voiced) version of the ‘whispery’ (unvoiced) sound /sh/, just as /z/ is the voiced version of /s/. Because this sound does not occur in simple CVC words, however, it can be omitted in Phase Three.

⁴ This phoneme does not occur in all accents. It occurs only if people pronounce words such as *sure* and *poor* with an /ooer/ vowel sound, not if they pronounce them as *shaw* and *paw*. It, too, can be omitted in Phase Three, and perhaps even permanently.

Phase Five would not be needed if there were a perfect one-to-one mapping between graphemes and phonemes – the above table would be all that was necessary. English is unlike most other languages, however, as many of the mappings are one-to-several in both directions: that is to say, most phonemes can be spelled in more than one way, and most graphemes can represent more than one phoneme. Appendix 2, page 21 gives a reasonably full, though not exhaustive, overview of the alternatives. Teachers should treat this as a resource to be used as needed rather than as a list of items to be worked through slavishly with all children.

In **Phase Six**, reading for the great majority of children should become automatic. However, proficiency with spelling usually lags behind proficiency with reading. This is because spelling requires recalling and composing the word from memory without seeing it. Reading and spelling become less easily reversible as children start working with words containing sounds (particularly vowel sounds) which can be spelled in more than one way. Phase Six is a good time to focus more sharply on word-specific spellings and broad guidelines for making choices between spelling alternatives.

Implications of high quality phonic work for reading done by children outside the discrete phonics session

Extensive practice at sounding and blending (decoding) will soon enable many children to start reading words automatically: this applies both to words they have often decoded and to high frequency words (e.g. *the, to, said*) that contain unusual grapheme–phoneme correspondences. In due course, too, they will start recognising familiar ‘chunks’ in unfamiliar words and will be able to process these words chunk by chunk rather than phoneme by phoneme⁵.

In the early stages, however, children will encounter many words that are visually unfamiliar, and in reading these words their attention should be focused on decoding rather than on the use of unreliable strategies such as looking at the illustrations, rereading the sentence, saying the first sound and guessing what might fit. Although these strategies might result in intelligent guesses, none of them is sufficiently reliable and they can hinder the acquisition and application of phonic knowledge and skills, prolonging the word recognition process and lessening children’s overall understanding. Children who routinely adopt alternative cues for reading unknown words, instead of learning to decode them, find themselves stranded when texts become more demanding and meanings less predictable. The best route for children to become fluent and independent readers lies in securing phonics as the prime approach to decoding unfamiliar words.

⁵ If children can recognise ‘igh’ and ‘ough’ as single units, as we want them to start doing from Phase Three onwards, there is no reason why they should not start recognising other chunks of three, four and more letters as single units once they have decoded them often enough.

Self-teaching in reading

Some children will start to self-teach quite early on, particularly for reading purposes – once they have understood how decoding works, they will work out more of the alphabetic code for themselves and will be able to read text going beyond the grapheme–phoneme correspondences they have been explicitly taught. Even these children, however, will benefit from hearing more complex texts read aloud by an adult. This fosters comprehension and an enjoyment of books – so much the better if they can see and follow the text as it is read.

Independent writing and ‘invented’ spelling

From an early stage, some children may start spontaneously producing spellings such as *frend* for *friend* and *hoam* for *home*, or even *chrain* for *train* or *nyoo* for *new*. Teachers should recognise worthy attempts made by children to spell words but should also correct them selectively and sensitively. If this is not done, invented spellings may become ingrained.

Teaching the programme: some frequently asked questions

What is systematic phonics teaching?

High quality systematic phonic work teaches children the correspondences between graphemes in written language and phonemes in spoken language, and how to use these correspondences to read and spell words. Phonics is systematic when all the major grapheme-phoneme correspondences are taught in a clearly defined sequence. Research shows that systematic phonics teaching yields superior performance in reading compared to all types of unsystematic or no phonics teaching.

What needs to be taught in each session once systematic phonic work begins?

Phonics comprises the knowledge of the alphabetic code and the skills of blending for reading and segmentation for spelling. Some sessions include learning a new grapheme; every session includes practice of grapheme recognition or recall. In the early stages all sessions include oral blending and segmentation. As soon as five or six graphemes are taught, sessions also include blending for reading and segmentation for spelling. In the later stages, reading and spelling are included in each session though the relative weighting of them may vary at different times.

Why are oral blending and segmentation important?

Oral blending and segmentation, which are the reverse of each other, help children to blend and segment for reading and spelling when they learn letters. Children enjoy games where they use their blending and segmenting skills to help a toy which can say and understand words only phoneme by phoneme. In these activities the term ‘sound-talk’ is used to describe the process of saying the phonemes in words.

Does it really matter how phonemes are pronounced?

Some children pick up the skill of blending very quickly even if the phonemes are not clearly pronounced. However, many teachers have found that for other children pronouncing the phonemes in, for example, *cat* as 'cuh-a-tuh' can make learning to blend difficult. It is therefore sensible to articulate each phoneme as clearly as possible.

What does 'learning a letter' comprise?

It comprises:

- distinguishing the shape of the letter from other letter shapes;
- recognising and articulating a sound (phoneme) associated with the letter shape;
- recalling the shape of the letter (or selecting it from a display) when given its sound;
- writing the shape of the letter with the correct movement, orientation and relationship to other letters;
- naming the letter;
- being able to recall and recognise the shape of a letter from its name.

How quickly can letters be taught?

Even by the age of five, children's personal experience of letters varies enormously. It ranges from a general awareness of letter shapes on labels, through recognising letters that occur in their names, to simple reading and writing. Some children may have made the important breakthrough – the realisation that the sounds they hear in words are represented with considerable consistency in the letters in written words. Whatever their experience, given good teaching, starting to learn all the letters for reading and writing is an exciting time.

Letters and Sounds is an incremental programme, progressing from the simple to the more complex aspects of phonics at a pace that befits children's rates of learning. Sets of letters are recommended, starting in Phase Two with 's', 'a', 't', 'p', 'i', 'n', for teaching in daily sessions of about 20 minutes, with the letters used as quickly as possible in reading and spelling words. To make the maximum use of any phonics programme it is best to teach the letters in the order the programme suggests.

What are mnemonics and are they necessary?

Some lowercase letters are easily confused. They consist of combinations of straight lines and curves and some are inversions of others (e.g. 'b', 'p', 'd', 'q'). Mnemonics (memory aids) have proved very useful in helping young children remember letters. The best mnemonics are multi-sensory; they conjure up the shape and the sound of the letter. The letter 's' is an excellent example:

- It begins the word *snake*;
- It looks like a snake;

- It represents a snake-like sound;
- The hand, when writing it, makes a writhing, snake-like movement.

There are, however, some caveats to using mnemonics. Children love alphabetic mnemonics: the characters, the actions, the sounds. Teachers need to take care, however, that reinforcing learning of the alphabet through mnemonics and popular multi-sensory activities (e.g. drawing, painting and making models, becoming involved in stories) are understood by the children, not as an end but as the means for learning their letter shapes, sounds and functions in words, i.e. are focused on their phonic purpose.

When should children learn to form letters as part of the phonics programme?

In Phase One, children have been immersed in the 'straight down', 'back up again', 'over the hill' and anticlockwise movements that they eventually need when writing letters, using sand, paint, ribbons on sticks, etc. In addition, they will have had lots of fine motor experience with thumb and forefinger as well as using a pencil. So when most children start learning to recognise letters they will be able to attempt to write the letters. Learning handwriting – how letters join – involves a more demanding set of skills but if teaching is appropriate and the handwriting programme introduces some early joins these are helpful for learning the union of the two letters in a grapheme (e.g. 'ai', 'ch', 'th').

When should letter names be introduced?

The Early Learning Goals expect letter names to be known by the end of the Foundation Stage. In phonics, letter names are needed when children start to learn two-letter and three-letter graphemes (Phase Three) to provide the vocabulary to refer to the letters making up the grapheme. It is misleading to refer to the graphemes 'ai' and 'th' as /a/-/i/ and /t/-/h/.

Letter names can be successfully taught through an alphabet song. These are commercially available but the alphabet can fit many well-known tunes with a bit of tweaking to the rhythm. It is important that a tune is chosen that avoids bunching letters together so they cannot be clearly articulated.

When and how should high-frequency words be taught?

High-frequency words have often been regarded in the past as needing to be taught as 'sight words' – words which need to be recognised as visual wholes without much attention to the grapheme–phoneme correspondences in them, even when those correspondences are straightforward. Research has shown, however, that even when words are recognised apparently at sight, this recognition is most efficient when it is underpinned by grapheme–phoneme knowledge.

What counts as ‘decodable’ depends on the grapheme–phoneme correspondences that have been taught up to any given point. Letters and Sounds recognises this and aligns the introduction of high-frequency words as far as possible with this teaching. As shown in Appendix 1 of the Six-phase Teaching Programme, a quarter of the 100 words occurring most frequently in children’s books are decodable at Phase Two⁶. Once children know letters and can blend VC and CVC words, by repeatedly sounding and blending words such as *in*, *on*, *it* and *and*, they begin to be able to read them without overt sounding and blending, thus starting to experience what it feels like to read some words automatically. About half of the 100 words are decodable by the end of Phase Four and the majority by the end of Phase Five.

Even the core of high frequency words which are not transparently decodable using known grapheme–phoneme correspondences usually contain at least one GPC that is familiar. Rather than approach these words as though they were unique entities, it is advisable to start from what is known and register the ‘tricky bit’ in the word. Even the word *yacht*, often considered one of the most irregular of English words, has two of the three phonemes represented with regular graphemes.

How can I ensure that children learn to apply their phonics to reading and writing?

The relevance of phonics to reading and spelling is implicit in these materials. As soon as children know a handful of letters they are shown how to read and spell words containing those letters. In Phase Two, once the children have learned set 3 letters it is possible to make up short captions to read with the children, such as ‘a cat on a sack’. Further, in the course of Phase Three, many words become available for labels and notices in the role-play area, captions and even short instructions and other sentences. It is important to demonstrate reading and writing in context every day to make sure that children apply their phonic knowledge when reading and writing in their role-play and other chosen activities. By the end of Phase Three, children should be able to write phonemic approximations of any words they wish to use.

When and how should I assess children’s progress?

Children’s progress should be tracked through a reliable assessment process that identifies learning difficulties at an early stage. Children’s letter knowledge and ability to segment and blend need to be assessed individually, as their progress may not be sufficiently well ascertained in the group activities. The teaching materials for each phase therefore include assessment statements, and the words and captions provided in the appendices also serve as assessment checks at the end of the phase. Appendix 4 to the Six-phase Teaching Programme provides assessment tasks on:

- grapheme–phoneme correspondences;
- oral blending;
- oral segmentation;
- non-word reading.

⁶ The list of 100 words is from: Masterson, J., Stuart M., Dixon, M. and Lovejoy, S. (2003) Children’s Printed Word Database: Economic and Social Research Council funded project, R00023406.

Every session in Phases Two to Five of the Letters and Sounds programme includes grapheme recognition or recall practice, and blending and segmentation practice. During these practice activities, there is also the opportunity for assessment. For instance, in grapheme recognition, a child can point to the letters for other children to identify while the adults can observe and assess the children. For reading and writing, different children can be called upon each day to read a word individually and when they are writing words either with magnetic letters or on whiteboards, assessment is straightforward.

How do local accents affect the teaching of phonics?

Many people from the north of England do not have the phoneme /u/ (as in southern pronunciations of *up*, *cup*, *butter*) in their accents; they have the same vowel sound in *put* and *but*, and for them both words rhyme with *foot*. This is just one example of how accents affect grapheme–phoneme correspondence. While practitioners will need to be sensitive to these and other such occurrences most find that these differences can be dealt with on a common sense basis.

Appendix 1

Working terminology

Phonics has a large technical vocabulary. This can appear to be more of an obstacle than a help if practitioners and teachers think they must know most of it in order to start teaching phonics. Thankfully this is not the case. Explained here is a small number of working terms to help teach Letters and Sounds.

Phonics

Phonics consists of knowledge of the skills of segmenting and blending, knowledge of the alphabetic code and an understanding of the principles underpinning the way the code is used in reading and spelling.

Phonemes

A phoneme is the smallest unit of sound in a word that can change its meaning (e.g. in /bed/ and /led/ the difference between the phonemes /b/ and /l/ signals the difference in meaning between the words *bed*, *led*).

It is generally accepted that most varieties of spoken English use about 44 phonemes.

In alphabetic writing systems (such as English) phonemes are represented by graphemes.

Graphemes

A grapheme is a symbol of a phoneme, that is, a letter or group of letters representing a sound.

There is always the same number of graphemes in a word as phonemes.

The alphabet contains only 26 letters but we use it to make all the graphemes that represent the phonemes of English.

Terminology

phoneme

a sound in a word



grapheme

a letter or sequence of letters that represents a phoneme

1	2	3
c	a	t
b	ir	d
f	i	sh
kn	igh	t

These words each have three phonemes (separate sounds). Each of these phonemes is represented by a grapheme. A grapheme may consist of one, two, three or four letters.

Grapheme–phoneme correspondences (GPCs) and phoneme–grapheme correspondences

We convert graphemes to phonemes when we are reading aloud (decoding written words). We convert phonemes to graphemes when we are spelling (encoding words for writing). To do this, children need to learn which graphemes correspond to which phonemes and vice versa. In order to read an unfamiliar word, a child must recognise ('sound out') each grapheme, not each letter (e.g. sounding out ship as /sh/-/i/-/p/ not /s/- /h/ - /i/ - /p/), and then merge (blend) the phonemes together to make a word.

Segmenting and blending

Segmenting and blending are reversible key phonic skills. Segmenting consists of breaking words down into their constituent phonemes to spell. Blending consists of building words from their constituent phonemes to read. Both skills are important. The skill of blending (synthesising) phonemes, in order, all through the word to read it, tends to receive too little attention in the teaching of phonics; it is very important to make sure that children secure blending skills.

Digraphs and trigraphs (and four-letter graphemes)

A digraph is a two-letter grapheme where two letters represent one sound such as 'ea' in *seat* and 'sh' in *ship*. A trigraph is a three-letter grapheme where three letters represent one phoneme (e.g. 'eau' in *bureau*, and 'igh' in *night*). And by definition a four-letter grapheme uses four letters to represent one phoneme (e.g. 'eigh' representing the /ai/ phoneme in *eight* and in *weight*).

A split digraph has a letter that splits, i.e. comes between, the two letters in the digraph, as in *make* and *take*, where 'k' separates the digraph 'ae' which in both words represents the phoneme /ai/. There are six split digraphs in English spelling: 'a-e', 'e-e', 'i-e', 'o-e', 'u-e', 'y-e', as in *make*, *scene*, *like*, *bone*, *cube*, *type*.

A very few words have more than one letter in the middle of a split digraph (e.g. *ache*, *blithe*, *cologne*, *scythe*).

Abbreviations

VC, CVC, and CCVC are the respective abbreviations for vowel-consonant, consonant-vowel-consonant, consonant-consonant-vowel-consonant, and are used to describe the order of graphemes in words (e.g. *am* (VC), *Sam* (CVC), *slam* (CCVC), or *each* (VC), *beach* (CVC), *bleach* (CCVC)).

Appendix 2

Tables 1 to 4

The representation of phonemes

Phonemes are represented by symbols (in most cases familiar graphemes) between slash-marks (e.g. /b/). A simple table showing the 44 phonemes generally recognised as those of British Received Pronunciation (RP) and one spelling for each has already been given on page 11. The correspondences given there are broadly suitable for use in Phases Two to Four and can be used equally in the grapheme-to-phoneme direction needed for reading and in the phoneme-to-grapheme direction needed for spelling. Tables 1 to 4 in this appendix present a fuller picture of grapheme–phoneme information as it may be needed in and beyond Phase Five, although some of these correspondences have already featured in the ‘high-frequency words’ taught in earlier phases (printed in italics in the tables).

The reason for the inclusion of /**th**/ as well as /th/, and /**oo**/ as well as /oo/, is that the familiar graphemes ‘th’ and ‘oo’ can each represent two phonemes: ‘th’ can represent both a ‘whispery’ (‘unvoiced’) sound as in *thin*, shown here as /th/, and a ‘buzzing’ (‘voiced’) sound as in *then*, shown here as /**th**/; ‘oo’ can represent both the vowel sound in *book*, shown here as /oo/, and the vowel sound in *boot*, shown here as /**oo**/. These distinctions in sound need to be included for the sake of covering all 44 phonemes, but as far as teaching beginners to read is concerned, the distinctions are trivial. The phonemes /th/ and /**th**/ are close enough to each other in sound, as are /oo/ and /**oo**/, that if children say the wrong one in their first attempt at reading a word, switching to the right one is easy, particularly as their familiarity with the spoken forms of words provides guidance. The /th/ and /**th**/ phonemes cause no problems at all in spelling, as ‘th’ is the only possible spelling for both. The spelling of the /oo/ and /**oo**/ sounds is not quite so straightforward – each can be spelt in more than one way, as the tables show.

The organisation of tables 1 to 4

Grapheme–phoneme correspondence information is presented in the phoneme-to-grapheme direction first (tables 1 and 2). This is not the direction needed for reading, but it follows on from the table on page 11 and the smaller number of basic units makes tables 1 and 2 visually simpler than tables 3 and 4. The first choice of grapheme for most of the 44 phonemes is obvious – where alternatives are equally simple and common (for example ‘ai’ or ‘ay’), teachers should make their own choice or be guided by the programme they are using. There is no simple spelling for the /zh/ sound (as in *vision*), but it can be left until children are ready for the more complex words in which it occurs.

Tables 3 and 4 repeat substantially the same information, but in the grapheme-to-phoneme direction needed for reading. The term ‘phoneme’ is still used for convenience in the main headings, despite the fact that the sounds represented by the relevant

graphemes in some of the sample words consist of more than one phoneme in some or all accents.

Many common words contain grapheme–phoneme correspondences which occur in few if any other words. The correspondences are therefore ‘common’ in one sense but ‘uncommon’ in another. The word *of* illustrates the point: *of* is a simple word beginners will encounter frequently, but it is the only such word in which the letter ‘f’ stands for the /v/ sound. In reading, beginners need to remember to pronounce *of* as /ov/ (not as *off*, which has a different sound and meaning from *of*) every time they encounter it, which will be frequently, while also remembering to pronounce ‘f’ as /f/ in all the many other words in which it occurs. In spelling, they need to remember that *of* is the only word in which they must write the letter ‘f’ for the /v/ sound.

While the unusual GPC in the word *of* is easy to identify, identifying the unusual GPC in other words may not be so straightforward. For example, some people would regard the ‘b’ in *lamb*, the ‘n’ in *autumn* and the ‘t’ in *listen* as ‘silent’, and others would regard them as forming part of the digraphs ‘mb’, ‘mn’ and ‘st’. Either way, the correspondences are unusual – for example, ‘st’ far more often represents two separate phonemes (as in *stop*, *start*, *stand*, *step*, *must*, *blister*) than a single phoneme (as in *listen*, *Christmas*, *fasten*). In these tables, it has been decided to treat ‘mb’, ‘mn’ and ‘st’ as graphemes in the words in question, though no criticism is implied of programmes which prefer the ‘silent letter’ option, as this is linguistically acceptable.⁷

The tables are not exhaustive. What is presented here should nevertheless enable teachers to fit further grapheme–phoneme correspondences into the overall picture as they arise.

Note: Grapheme–phoneme correspondences are included in the following tables only if children are likely to encounter them in the first two or three years of school.

⁷ See for example: McArthur, T. (ed.) (1992) *The Oxford Companion to the English Language*, (p. 935). Oxford: Oxford University Press; Morris, J. (1990) *The Morris-Montessori Word List*, (pp. 104–107). London: The London Montessori Centre Ltd.

Table 1: Phonemes to graphemes (consonants)

Phoneme	Correspondences found in many different words		High-frequency words containing rare or unique correspondences (graphemes are underlined)
	Grapheme(s)	Sample words	
/b/	b, bb	bat, rabbit	
/k/	c, k, ck	cat, kit, duck	<i>school, mosquito</i>
/d/	d, dd, -ed	dog, muddy, pulled	
/f/	f, ff, ph	fan, puff, photo	<i>rough</i>
/g/	g, gg	go, bigger	
/h/	h	hen	<i>who</i>
/j/	j, g, dg	jet, giant, badge	
/l/	l, ll	leg, bell	
/m/	m, mm	map, hammer	<i>lamb, autumn</i>
/n/	n, nn	net, funny	<i>gnat, knock</i>
/p/	p, pp	pen, happy	
/r/	r, rr	rat, carrot	<i>write, rhyme</i>
/s/	s, ss, c	sun, miss, cell	<i>scent, listen</i>
/t/	t, tt, -ed	tap, butter, jumped	<i>Thomas, doubt</i>
/v/	v	van	<i>of</i>
/w/	w	wig	<i>penguin, one</i>
/y/	y	yes	<i>onion</i>
/z/	z, zz s, se, ze	zip, buzz, is, please, breeze	<i>scissors, xylophone</i>
/sh/	sh, s, ss, t (before -ion and -ial)	shop, sure, mission, mention, partial	<i>special, chef, ocean</i>
/ch/	ch, tch	chip, catch	
/th/	th	thin	
/th/	th	then	<i>breathe</i>
/ng/	ng, n (before k)	ring, pink	<i>tongue</i>
/zh/	s (before -ion and -ure)	vision, measure	<i>usual, beige</i>

In the last column words printed in italic are from the list of 100 words occurring most frequently in children's books.

Table 2: Phonemes to graphemes (vowels)

	Correspondences found in many different words		High-frequency words containing rare or unique correspondences (graphemes are underlined)
Phoneme	Grapheme(s)	Sample words	
/a/	a	ant	
/e/	e, ea	egg, head	<i>said, says, friend, leopard, any</i>
/i/	i, y	in, gym	women, busy, build, pretty, engine
/o/	o, a	on, was	
/u ¹ /	u, o, o-e	up, son, come	young, does, blood
/ai/	ai, ay, a-e	rain, day, make	<i>they, veil, weigh, straight</i>
/ee/	ee, ea, e, ie	feet, sea, he, chief	<i>these², people</i>
/igh/	igh, ie, y, i-e, i	night, tie, my, like, find	height, eye, l, goodbye, type
/oa/	oa, ow, o, oe, o-e	boat, grow, toe, go, home	<i>oh, though, folk</i>
/oo/	oo, ew, ue, u-e	boot, grew, blue, rule	<i>to, soup, through, two, lose</i>
/oo/	oo, u	look, put	<i>could</i>
/ar/	ar, a	farm, father	<i>calm, are, aunt, heart</i>
/or/	or, aw, au, ore, al	for, saw, Paul, more, talk	<i>caught, thought, four, door, broad</i>
/ur/	ur, er, ir, or (after 'w')	hurt, her, girl, work	<i>learn, journey, were</i>
/ow/	ow, ou	cow, out	<i>drought</i>
/oi/	oi, oy	coin, boy	
/air/	air, are, ear	fair, care, bear	<i>there</i>
/ear/	ear, eer, ere	dear, deer, here	<i>pier</i>
/ure/ ³			<i>sure, poor, tour</i>
/ə/	many different graphemes	corner, pillar, motor, famous, favour, murmur, about, cotton, mountain, possible, happen, centre, thorough, picture, cupboard... and others	

In the last column words printed in italic are from the list of 100 words occurring most frequently in children's books.

¹ See 'Frequently asked questions: How do local accents affect the teaching of phonics?' on page 17.

² The 'e-e' spelling is rare in words of one syllable but is quite common in longer words, (e.g. *grapheme, phoneme, complete, recede, concrete, centipede*).

³ The pronunciation of the vowel sound in *sure, poor* and *tour* as a diphthong (a short /oo/ sound followed by a schwa) occurs in relatively few words and does not occur in everyone's speech.

Table 3: Graphemes to phonemes (consonants)

Grapheme	Correspondences found in many different words		Correspondences found in some high-frequency words but not in many/any other words
	Phoneme(s)	Sample words	
b, bb	/b/	bat, rabbit	lamb, debt
c	/k/, /s/	cat, cell	special
cc	/k/, /ks/	account, success	
ch	/ch/	chip	school, chef
ck	/k/	duck	
d, dd	/d/	dog, muddy	
dg	/j/	badge	
f, ff	/f/	fan, puff	<i>of</i>
g	/g/, /j/	go, gem	
gg	/g/, /j/	bigger, suggest	
gh	/g/, /-/	ghost, high	rough
gn	/n/	gnat, sign	
gu	/g/		guard
h	/h/	hen	honest
j	/j/	jet	
k	/k/	kit	
kn	/n/	knot	
l	/l/	leg	half
ll	/l/	bell	
le	/l/ or /əl/	paddle	
m, mm	/m/	map, hammer	
mb	/m/		lamb
mn	/m/		autumn
n	/n/, /ng/	net, pink	
nn	/n/	funny	
ng	/ng/, /ng+g/, /n+j/	ring, finger, danger	
p, pp	/p/	pen, happy	
ph	/f/	photo	
qu	/kw/	quiz	mosquito
r, rr	/r/	rat, carrot	
rh	/r/		rhyme
s	/s/, /z/	sun, is	sure, measure

ss	/s/, /sh/	miss, mission	
sc	/s/	scent	
se	/s/, /z/	mouse, please	
sh	/sh/	shop	
t, tt	/t/	tap, butter	listen
tch	/ch/	catch	
th	/th/, / th /	thin, then	Thomas
v	/v/	van	
w	/w/	wig	answer
wh	/w/ or /hw/	when	who
wr	/r/	write	
x	/ks/ /gz/	box, exam	xylophone
y	/y/, /i/ (/ee/), /igh/	yes, gym, very, fly	
ye, y-e			goodbye, type
z, zz	/z/	zip, buzz	

In the last column words printed in *italic* are from the list of 100 words occurring most frequently in children's books.

Table 4: Graphemes to phonemes (vowels)

	Correspondences found in many different words		Correspondences found in some high-frequency words but not in many/any other words
Grapheme	Phoneme(s)	Sample words	
a	/a/, /o/, /ar/	ant, was, father	water, any
a-e	/ai/	make	
ai	/ai/	rain	<i>said</i>
air	/air/	hair	
al, all	/al/, /orl/, /or/	Val, shall, always, all, talk	half
ar	/ar/	farm	war
are	/air/	care	<i>are</i>
au	/or/	Paul	aunt
augh			caught, laugh
aw	/or/	saw	
ay	/ai/	say	says
e	/e/, /ee/	egg, he	
ea	/ee/, /e/	bead, head	great
ear	/ear/	hear	learn, heart

ed	/d/, /t/, /əd/	turned, jumped, landed	
ee	/ee/	bee	
e-e	/ee/	these	
eer	/ear/	deer	
ei	/ee/	receive	veil, leisure
eigh	/ai/	eight	height
er	/ur/	her	
ere	/ear/	here	<i>were, there</i>
eu	/yoo/	Euston	
ew	/yoo/, /oo/	few, flew	sew
ey	/i/ (/ee/)	donkey	<i>they</i>
i	/i/, /igh/	in, mind	
ie	/igh/, /ee/, /i/	tie, chief, babies	friend
i-e	/igh/, /i/, /ee/	like, engine, machine	
igh	/igh/	night	
ir	/ur/	girl	
o	/o/, /oa/, /u/	on, go, won	<i>do, wolf</i>
oa	/oa/	boat	broad
oe	/oa/	toe	shoe
o-e	/oa/, /u/	home, come	
oi	/oi/	coin	
oo	/oo/, /oo/	boot, look	blood
or	/or/, /ur/	for	work
ou	/ow/, /oo/	out, you	<i>could, young, shoulder</i>
our	/owə/, /or/	our, your	journey, tour (see table 2, footnote 3)
ow	/ow/, /oa/	cow, slow	
oy	/oi/	boy	
u	/u/, /oo/	up, put	
ue	/oo/, /yoo/	clue, cue	
u-e	/oo/, /yoo/	rude, cute	
ui			build, fruit
ur	/ur/	fur	
uy			buy

In the last column words printed in italic are from the list of 100 words occurring most frequently in children's books.

To avoid lengthening this table considerably, graphemes for the schwa are not included, but see table 2.

Appendix 3

Overview of phonic knowledge and skills to be covered in Phases One to Six

Phase One	Phases Two to Six	Phase Two up to 6 weeks	Phase Three up to 12 weeks	Phase Four 4 to 6 weeks	Phase Five throughout Year 1	Phase Six throughout Year 2 ⁴
Phase One paves the way for the systematic teaching of phonic work to begin in Phase Two In this phase activities are included to develop oral blending and segmenting of the sounds of spoken words. These activities are very largely adult-led. However, they must be embedded within a language-rich educational programme that takes full account of children's freely chosen activities and ability to learn through play. Phase One activities are designed to underpin and run alongside activities in other phases.	Knowledge of GPCs ¹ . Skills of blending and segmenting with letters.	19 letters of the alphabet and one sound for each. Starting with a small set of GPCs and then increasing the number: Blend separate sounds together into whole words (for reading) Segment whole words into separate sounds (for spelling) (e.g. <i>in</i> , <i>up</i> , <i>cat</i> , <i>sit</i> , <i>run</i> , <i>and</i> , <i>hops</i> , <i>bell</i> ?) Optional: Simple words of two syllables using taught GPCs (e.g. <i>sunset</i> , <i>laptop</i> , <i>picnic</i> , <i>robin</i> , <i>camel</i>). Blending to read simple captions	7 more letters of the alphabet. Graphemes to cover most of the phonemes not covered by single letters. Blend and segment sounds represented by single letters and graphemes of more than one letter, including longer words (e.g. <i>chip</i> , <i>moon</i> , <i>night</i> , <i>thunder</i> – choice of words will depend on which GPCs have been taught). Blend to read simple captions, sentences and questions.	No new grapheme-phoneme correspondences. Blend and segment words with adjacent consonants (e.g. <i>went</i> , <i>frog</i> , <i>stand</i> , <i>jumps</i> , <i>shrink</i>).	More graphemes for the 40+ phonemes taught in Phases Two and Three; more ways of pronouncing graphemes introduced in Phases Two and Three. Blend and segment sounds represented by all GPCs taught so far. Try alternative pronunciations for graphemes if the first attempt sounds wrong (e.g. cow read as /coe/ sounds wrong; break read as /breek/ or /breck/ sounds wrong).	Word-specific spellings – i.e. when phonemes can be spelt in more than one way, children learn which words take which spellings (e.g. <i>see/sea</i> , <i>bed/head/said</i> , <i>cloud/clown</i>) Increasingly fluent sounding and blending of words encountered in reading for the first time. Spelling of words with prefixes and suffixes, doubling and dropping letters where necessary (e.g. <i>hop/hopping</i> , <i>hope/hoping</i> , <i>hopeful</i> , <i>carry/carried</i> , <i>happy/happiness</i>). Increasingly accurate spelling of words containing unusual GPCs (e.g. <i>laugh</i> , <i>once</i> , <i>two</i> , <i>answer</i> , <i>could</i> , <i>there</i>). As needed.
	High-frequency words containing GPCs not yet taught.	<i>the</i> , <i>to</i> , <i>no</i> , <i>go</i> , <i>l</i> . ³	<i>he</i> , <i>she</i> , <i>we</i> , <i>me</i> , <i>be</i> , <i>was</i> , <i>my</i> , <i>you</i> , <i>her</i> , <i>they</i> , <i>all</i> , <i>are</i> . ³ Emphasise parts of words containing known correspondences	<i>said</i> , <i>so</i> , <i>have</i> , <i>like</i> , <i>some</i> , <i>come</i> , <i>were</i> , <i>there</i> , <i>little</i> , <i>one</i> , <i>do</i> , <i>when</i> , <i>out</i> , <i>what</i> . ³ Again, emphasise parts of words containing known correspondences.	<i>oh</i> , <i>their</i> , <i>people</i> , <i>Mr</i> , <i>Mrs</i> , <i>looked</i> , <i>called</i> , <i>asked</i> , <i>water</i> , <i>where</i> , <i>who</i> , <i>again</i> , <i>though</i> , <i>through</i> , <i>work</i> , <i>mouse</i> , <i>many</i> , <i>laughed</i> , <i>because</i> , <i>different</i> , <i>any</i> , <i>eyes</i> , <i>friends</i> , <i>once</i> , <i>please</i> . ³	

¹ GPCs: Grapheme-phoneme correspondences

² See word banks for more examples (all phases)

³ See Appendix 1 in the *Letters and Sounds Six-phase Teaching Programme*

⁴ Note that the teaching of spelling cannot be completed in Year 2 – it needs to continue rigorously throughout primary school, and beyond if necessary.

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Ref: 00282-2007BKT-EN

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