

# St. Gregory's Catholic Primary School - Phonics Subject Knowledge

(Taken from Phonics Play)

**Phoneme** - The smallest unit of sound. There are approximately 44 phonemes in English (it depends on different accents). Phonemes can be put together to make words.

**Grapheme** - A way of writing down a phoneme. Graphemes can be made up from 1 letter e.g. p, 2 letters e.g. sh, 3 letters e.g. tch or 4 letters e.g. ough.

**GPC** - This is short for Grapheme Phoneme Correspondence. Knowing a GPC means being able to match a phoneme to a grapheme and vice versa.

**Digraph** - A grapheme containing two letters that makes just one sound (phoneme).

**Trigraph** - A grapheme containing three letters that makes just one sound (phoneme).

**Oral Blending** - This involves hearing phonemes and being able to merge them together to make a word. Children need to develop this skill before they will be able to blend written words.

**Blending** - This involves looking at a written word, looking at each grapheme and using knowledge of GPCs to work out which phoneme each grapheme represents and then merging these phonemes together to make a word. This is the basis of reading.

**Oral Segmenting** - This is the act hearing a whole word and then splitting it up into the phonemes that make it. Children need to develop this skill before they will be able to segment words to spell them.

**Segmenting** - This involves hearing a word, splitting it up into the phonemes that make it, using knowledge of GPCs to work out which graphemes represent those phonemes and then writing those graphemes down in the right order. This is the basis of spelling.

## **Phase 1**

Phase 1 is absolutely vital. It is the one phase that shouldn't come to an end. These skills should continue to be developed throughout KS1 and KS2. Phase 1 develops children's abilities to listen to, make, explore and talk about sounds. This phase is split into 7 aspects that are explored and developed through games.

## **Phase 2**

GPCs need to be introduced in systematic way.

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 s ss

It is very important that you pronounce these phonemes clearly and correctly. If you don't, children may find it very difficult to blend them together.

When introducing GPCs, ensure you introduce them with the sounds, pictures, actions and lots of practise for forming the letter. You can form the letter with a finger in the air, on the palm of the hand, on the back of another child, on a rough surface like the floor. All these experiences will need to come before trying to write the letter on a whiteboard or piece of paper.

## **Phase 3**

Phase 3 continues in the same way as Phase 2 and introduces more new GPCs. By the end of Phase 3 the children will know one way of writing down each of the 44 phonemes.

Set 6 - j v w x

Set 7 - y z zz qu

Consonant digraphs - ch sh th ng

Vowel digraphs (and trigraphs) ai ee igh oa oo ar or ur ow oi ear air ure er

Make sure that you are very confident about what the term CVC means. It refers to words with a consonant phoneme, a vowel phoneme and then a consonant phoneme - it is not referring to letters. Therefore hot, bed, boat and ship are all CVC words but cow and toy are not.

#### **Phase 4**

The main challenge in this phase is to help children to blend and segment words with adjacent consonants e.g. truck, help. These adjacent consonant phonemes can both be heard when you say the word which makes them different from a digraph where there are two letters that make just one sound. Be careful, lots of people get these confused, including some published materials.

Children with speech and language difficulties can find Phase 4 very tricky. If children struggle to hear all the sounds in a word encourage them to think about the movements that their mouths are making. Looking in mirrors can help with this.

#### **Phase 5**

These first 4 weeks introduce some new GPCs in the same way as in previous phases. Five of these GPCs are known as split digraphs. They are a\_e, e\_e, i\_e, o\_e, u\_e. These used to be taught as magic e but now it is recommended that children learn to recognise these in the same way as other graphemes but simply explaining that in these particular graphemes the two letters work as a team but they aren't directly next to each other.

The next 3 weeks introduce the idea that some graphemes can be pronounced in more than one way. E.g. the ch grapheme can be pronounced in each of these ways check, chef and school. This is a vital lesson for children to learn and they need to learn to apply it in their reading. Make sure you model trying to read a word by sounding out the most obvious phonemes then blending it together. If it doesn't make sense model looking at each grapheme and seeing whether there are alternative pronunciations. Try sounding out the word with the alternative pronunciation and blending it together. Does it make sense now? This can be quite a jump for some children to make as they have to realise that English isn't quite as straightforward as it once seemed. However, it can also be quite empowering to know that just because a word doesn't make sense first time, it doesn't mean that they can't go back and figure it out for themselves.

The next 22 weeks of Phase 5 is all about learning that some phonemes have more than one spelling (in fact some of the really awkward ones have loads of different spellings). In the past, some people have thrown in the towel with phonics at this point and decided that there is no point in teaching it as there is no rhyme and reason to how these phonemes are spelled. The fact is that there is much more rhyme and reason to which spelling we use for these phonemes than most people are aware of. Certainly, we can teach children how to make the best guesses when spelling these phonemes. They aren't always infallible but it leaves children with far fewer 'tricky' spellings that they have to just learn in other ways. It is important that children try to discover these rules by themselves by playing investigative type games and looking for patterns.

#### **Phase 6**

Phase 6 reinforces much of the learning from Phase 5, helps children to develop greater automaticity in reading, and begins to explore spelling rules and conventions e.g. adding -ing and -ed.

How does phonics fit into the big picture of teaching reading?

Phonics is simply the code that turns written language into spoken language and vice versa. It is the vital initial step in teaching children to read but it is far from the whole picture. Phonics will only work in an environment where Speaking and Listening Skills are promoted and developed. Children should also be regularly exposed to a wide range of quality texts. They should be regularly read aloud to. Regular, well planned Guided Reading sessions are essential and reading skills should also be explicitly taught in Shared Reading sessions within literacy lessons.

Once children reach Phase 6, we work on helping them to move away from blending and segmenting and develop automaticity in their reading. We can then devote even more of our attentions to developing all the other areas of reading that need to teach.