

# Newington Green's Approach to Phonics & Early Reading

## Context

To help support and enhance our teaching of phonics in school, Newington Green chose to follow the DfE validated *Essential Letters and Sounds* (ELS) scheme, which was developed by the Knowledge Schools Trust. The programme is designed to ensure that all children learn to read well and make speedy progress. It provides a simple routine and consistent approach to phonics teaching, which helps to reduce pupils' cognitive load and maximise their chances of success. We made this decision based on extensive research and careful consideration of the needs of all our readers.

We received substantial funding from New Vision English Hub, which enabled us to invest in home reading books and school books all perfectly matched to the new phonics programme. With these we aim to ensure high quality, early reading for every child and help continue to grow a love of reading at Newington Green.

It is essential that our approach to teaching phonics and reading is accessible to all learners, regardless of background.

## Intent

At Newington Green we passionately believe that reading is the key to learning, allowing pupils to confidently access and engage with the wider school curriculum. Our aim is for all children to leave KS1 able to read well, making inferences and drawing on background knowledge to support their developing understanding of a text when they read. To do this, they need to be able to draw not only on their phonics knowledge but also on their wider reading and comprehension skills, each of which must be taught.

## Implementation

Essential Letters and Sounds (ELS) is our chosen Phonics programme. The aim of ELS is 'Getting all children to read well, quickly'. It teaches children to read by identifying the phonemes (the smallest unit of sound) and graphemes (the written version of the sound) within words and using these to read words.

## Nursery

Within our nursery, teachers & practitioners raise the children's awareness of the general sounds in the environment around them. This can be achieved through music lessons, listening to stories and by singing familiar nursery rhymes. Alliteration and poetry are also taught and explored by sharing a rich selection of texts, that are read to the children multiple times to help build awareness. Oral blending is fundamental to our teaching of phonics and is reinforced throughout our early years. It is often taught by giving children simple instructions such as 'Come and **s-i-t** on the **m-a-t**.'

From Spring 1, for children meeting the curriculum expectations for Communication and Language and Literacy they will begin learning a single letter sound each week, giving them exposure to all the Phase 2 GPCs, before they enter reception.

## The Seven Aspects Taught in Phase 1:

- Environmental sounds
- Instrumental sounds
- Body percussion
- Rhythm and rhyme
- Alliteration
- Voice sounds
- Oral blending

## Reception

Children begin learning Phase 2 at the very beginning of Reception, through discrete daily lessons. We begin by teaching the single letter sounds before moving to digraphs such as **'sh'** (two letters spelling one sound), trigraphs **'igh'** (three letters spelling one sound) and quadgraphs **'eigh'** (four letters spelling one sound). In each lesson we teach children to:

- Decode (read) by identifying each sound within a word and blending the sounds together to read fluently.
- Encode (write) by segmenting each sound to write words accurately.

Children are given the knowledge and the skills to then apply this independently across different areas of the curriculum. We also prioritise pupils' language development as we know that speaking and listening skills are crucial for fluent reading and writing.

## Year 1

Children continue daily phonics lessons in Year 1, following the ELS progression and sequence. This allows our children to practise their existing phonics knowledge whilst building their understanding of the 'code' of our language, GPCs (Grapheme Phoneme Correspondence). As a result, our children can tackle any unfamiliar words that they might discover.

Children continue to experience the joy of books and language whilst rapidly acquiring the skills they need to become fluent independent readers and writers. ELS lessons teach relevant, useful and ambitious vocabulary to support that journey.

The repetitive structure of ELS lessons supports 'overlearning' and allows children to know what is coming next, what they need to do, and how to achieve success. This makes it easier for children to learn the GPCs we are teaching and how to apply this when reading.

Children will have completed the content required to pass the Phonics Screening Check by Spring 2, week 3. More rarely used GPCs are taught in Summer Term 2, as children move on to the wider requirements of the reading, writing and spelling curriculum.

## Year 2 and Beyond

Children have the opportunity to revise and revisit phonics when entering Year 2, to enhance and aid their reading and writing. At the beginning of the term, teachers complete a Half-termly Assessment with each child in the class, allowing them to identify any gaps in children's GPC knowledge or understanding. The GPCs identified as being the least secure, are then revisited at the start of the daily phonics lessons. During Autumn Term, the Year 2 teachers will also reteach the Year 1 Summer Term content. This will help to consolidate the children's knowledge and ensure they are ready to step up to the requirements of Year 2. The familiarity of the whiteboard presentations will also help build the children's confidence and ensure they feel ready for the next steps.

In Year 2, from Spring Term, the daily ELS phonics lessons are replaced with whole class guided reading. These lessons are taught by the class teacher and focus on the different reading domains in the Year 2 curriculum.

## Additional Support and Intervention

ELS is designed on the principle that children should 'keep up' rather than 'catch up'. In the moment interventions are delivered in the second part of the lesson by the class teacher, supporting any child who has shown inconsistencies with the content that has just been taught. Where further support is required, specific and effective 1:1 interventions are used to support gaps in children's GPC knowledge or to support their oral blending.

### *Daily Intervention Reading*

In Year 1 and Year 2, children are also taught to read by a fully trained adult in small groups of up to 6 children. Within each session, the children read and explore a phonetically decodable book, matched to the GPCs they have learnt during their phonics lessons. These daily 30minute reading sessions allow the children to further apply and embed their knowledge of taught GPCs, increase their fluency and expression and practise their comprehension skills, ready for the end of Year 2 reading expectations.

These sessions are also used to support children in KS2 who are not yet fluent readers. These children will receive additional support and decoding practise using phonetically decodable low level, high interest books.

### *Reading at Home*

At Newington Green we recognise the important role parents play in their child's journey to becoming fluent and confident readers. At the start of each academic year, we deliver parent workshops to share how we teach phonics and early reading within the school. Many parents have not been taught to read using a phonics approach and so may be unfamiliar with the phonetic alphabet. We support parents with learning and modelling the correct, 'pure sounds' by sending home weekly videos in the form of QR codes. We also share parent resources, produced by ELS, on our school website to ensure there is consistency between what the children hear at home and in school.

In Reception and Year 1, each child is given a phonetically decodable book every week. This book is perfectly matched to the ELS programme and will only contain words with GPCs the child has secured. The children are encouraged to read this book with a parent 4 times across the week, allowing them to practise their decoding skills, fluency and expression. To help develop reading for pleasure, we also send home a 'book to share' for parents to read and explore with their child. This system is also applied for children in Year 2 and Year 3 that have not yet passed the Phonics Screening Check. For all other pupils, they take home a banded book, closely matched to their decoding and comprehension abilities and a free choice book from the school library.

Home reading is carefully monitored through the use of personal reading records and is followed up through parent/ carer discussions and additional 1:1 reading interventions.

### Impact

Assessment is used to accurately monitor progress and to identify any child needing additional support at the earliest opportunity. Within ELS, the Half-termly Assessments are planned into the fifth week of each half term. They are designed to allow teachers to identify any gaps in children's developing phonics knowledge and reading skills, further supporting the ongoing daily assessment for learning. The timing of the assessments means teachers can plan and organise any required interventions before the upcoming school holidays. This data is reviewed and discussed between class teachers and SLT to ensure any follow-up is actioned swiftly.

In June, all children in Year 1 complete the Phonics Screening Check Assessment; any Year 2 child who did not pass the assessment the year before, will also resit the test. Newington Green's attainment in the Phonics Screening Check is typically above the National and Local Authority average. In 2022, 91% of Year 1 children passed the Phonics Screening Check and 96% of children had passed by the end of Year 2.

In Years 1-6 we use National Test-style Standardised (NTS) assessments to assess and track children's progress and attainment across the wider reading curriculum. Finally, we use the Salford Sentence Reading Test to assess our children's reading age. All this data is used to identify gaps, trends in key pupil groups and to inform subsequent support and planning.