St Meryl School's Approach to Teaching Phonics

At St Meryl we believe that good quality synthetic phonics teaching is essential in developing children's reading and spelling skills. It is taught by teachers who understand what good quality phonics teaching looks like and know how to effectively support any children who may be struggling in their understanding of phonics. We start teaching phonics from Nursery with the aim and expectation that they will be confident and fluent readers by the end of Key Stage One.

What is phonics?

Phonics is a method of teaching children to read and write by linking sounds (phonemes) to the letters (graphemes) that represent them. Through phonics, children learn how to blend sounds together to read words and segment words into sounds for spelling.

What do we use to teach phonics?

We use a phonics scheme called 'Twinkl Phonics' – a DfE validated scheme - to teach phonics. Twinkl Phonics is a comprehensive and engaging program designed to teach phonics in a systematic way, helping children develop the key skills they need to become confident and fluent readers.

The Twinkl Phonics scheme is structured into six progressive phases, ensuring that children build on their knowledge and skills as they move through the program. Here is an overview of each phase:

- **Phase 1:** Focuses on listening skills, sound discrimination, and oral blending and segmenting. This phase lays the foundation for later phonics learning.
- **Phase 2:** Introduces 19 letters and their sounds, teaching children to blend these sounds to read simple words (e.g., "cat") and segment them to spell.
- **Phase 3:** Completes the teaching of the alphabet and introduces digraphs (two letters making one sound, e.g., "sh," "ch").
- **Phase 4:** Consolidates children's learning by focusing on blending and segmenting longer words with adjacent consonants (e.g., "stamp").
- **Phase 5:** Introduces alternative spellings for known sounds and teaches children to identify the best spelling choices for different words.

- **Phase 6:** Focuses on spelling rules, suffixes, and prefixes to support fluency in reading and writing.

What does a phonics teaching session look like in Early Years?

honics teaching in Early Years focuses primarily on **Phase 1** and introduces elements of **Phase 2** as children progress. Here is how it is delivered:

Phase 1: Laying the Foundations

In Phase 1, children develop their listening and speaking skills, which are crucial for phonics learning. This phase is divided into seven aspects, all designed to improve sound discrimination and awareness:

1. **Environmental Sounds:** Exploring and identifying everyday sounds around them (e.g., birds, traffic).
2. **Instrumental Sounds:** Listening to and creating sounds using musical instruments.
3. **Body Percussion:** Using claps, stomps, and taps to make rhythmic patterns.
4. **Rhythm and Rhyme:** Recognizing rhymes and creating rhythmic patterns in songs and poems.
5. **Alliteration:** Focusing on initial sounds in words (e.g., "Sam's socks").
6. **Voice Sounds:** Exploring the range of sounds they can make with their voices.
7. **Oral Blending and Segmenting:** Developing the skills to blend sounds into words and segment words into sounds (e.g., c-a-t = cat).

Phase 2: Introducing Letters and Sounds

When children are ready, we introduce Phase 2. This phase focuses on teaching:

- **19 key letters and their sounds** (e.g., s, a, t, p, i, n).
- **Blending sounds to read simple words** (e.g., "sat," "pin").
- **Segmenting words into sounds for spelling.**

Children practice these skills through:

- **Interactive games:** Fun activities that encourage sound recognition and blending.
- **Storytime sessions:** Opportunities to spot letters and sounds in books.
- **Practical experiences:** Hands-on learning with magnetic letters, sand trays, and other resources.

What does a phonics teaching session look like in Key Stage One?

In Key Stage 1 the phonics sessions follow the same format as those in Early Years:

1. Revisit and Revise

2.Teach

3. Practise

4. Apply

5. Assess

What does a phonics teaching session look like in Key Stage 1?

In Key Stage 1, children typically progress through **Phases 3 to 6** of the Twinkl Phonics scheme, depending on their individual needs and abilities.

Phase 3: Mastering Basic Sounds

- Completes the teaching of single letters and introduces digraphs (e.g., "sh," "ch," "th") and trigraphs (e.g., "igh," "air").
- Focuses on blending sounds to read words and segmenting words into sounds for spelling.
- Children practice reading and writing simple sentences using their new sounds.

Phase 4: Consolidating Knowledge

- Children learn to read and write longer words with adjacent consonants (e.g., "frog," "stamp").
- Focuses on fluency, ensuring children can quickly blend and segment sounds without hesitation.

- Includes activities to improve reading comprehension and sentence structure.

Phase 5: Broadening Skills

- Introduces alternative spellings for known sounds (e.g., "ai" in "rain" and "ay" in "day").
- Teaches children to read and spell more complex words.
- Helps children develop strategies to identify the correct spelling for a given word in context.
- Introduces more challenging reading books to build confidence and fluency.

Phase 6: Spelling and Fluency

- Focuses on spelling rules and patterns (e.g., adding suffixes such as "-ing," "-ed," "-est").
- Encourages children to develop automaticity in reading, enabling them to focus on comprehension.
- Teaches children strategies for proofreading and editing their work.

How is phonics taught in Key Stage 2?

For most children, the focus in Key Stage 2 shifts from learning phonics to developing more advanced reading and writing skills. However, phonics support is provided for children who have not yet secured the skills taught in earlier phase.

Revisiting and Consolidating Previous Phases

- Revisiting Phase 5 to reinforce alternative spellings for sounds and the ability to decode more complex words.
- Ensuring children are confident in blending and segmenting skills to read unfamiliar words fluently.

Focus on Phase 6 Skills

- **Spelling Rules and Patterns:** Teaching common spelling rules, such as doubling consonants before adding suffixes (e.g., "running") and dropping the final "e" (e.g., "hope" to "hoping").
- **Prefixes and Suffixes:** Introducing word-building strategies using prefixes (e.g., "un-," "dis-") and suffixes (e.g., "-ful," "-less").
- **Homophones:** Teaching the meaning and correct usage of homophones (e.g., "there," "their," "they're").
- **Proofreading:** Encouraging children to check their spelling and punctuation in their written work.

Fluency and Comprehension

- Developing automaticity in reading so that children can focus on understanding the meaning of texts.
- Providing opportunities for children to read aloud with expression and confidence.
- Teaching comprehension strategies to help children engage with and interpret texts more effectively.

How do we assess knowledge and understanding in phonics and track progress?

Ongoing Formative Assessment

Teachers continuously assess children's phonics skills during daily lessons. This includes:

- **Observation:** Monitoring how children engage with phonics activities, including oral blending, segmenting, and recognition of sounds.
- **Questioning:** Asking children to identify sounds, blend words, or spell simple words as part of classroom discussions.
- **Practical Activities:** Using games, flashcards, and writing exercises to assess children's understanding in a fun and engaging way.
- **Reading Practice:** Listening to children read decodable books matched to their phonics phase to check fluency and accuracy.

Phonics Screening Check

In Year 1, children take part in the statutory **Phonics Screening Check**, which assesses their ability to decode words using phonics skills. This includes:

- A mixture of 40 real and pseudo (nonsense) words.
- One-to-one assessments with the teacher.

Children who do not meet the expected standard in Year 1 receive additional support and retake the screening check in Year 2.

How Are Assessment Results Used?

- **To Inform Planning:** Teachers use assessment data to tailor lessons and provide targeted support for individuals or groups.
- **To Identify Gaps:** Highlighting areas where children need additional practice or intervention.
- **To Support Intervention:** Ensuring children who require extra help receive focused interventions to close learning gaps.
- **To Celebrate Success:** Recognizing and celebrating children's achievements to build their confidence and motivation.

How Do We Communicate Progress to Parents?

- **Regular Updates:** We provide feedback during parent-teacher consultations and in written reports.
- **Phonics Screening Results:** Parents receive information about their child's performance in the Phonics Screening Check, along with advice on how to support phonics learning at home.
- **Home-School Communication:** We share resources and strategies to help parents reinforce phonics skills at home.

What do we do if a child isn't making enough progress in phonics?

If children are not making enough progress in phonics we will support children in some or all of the following ways:

1. Providing additional phonics sessions as part of a small group or one-to-one.

2. Consulting with parents to provide follow-up and support resources to be used at home. 3. Being flexible with groupings so that those children needing more support receive it.

How is phonics linked to the books children learn to read at St Meryl?

At St Meryl we have checked and organised our early reading books to ensure there is fidelity to our phonics programme. This way parents can be assured that the reading books brought home will be consolidating and reinforcing the phonics that is being taught in school. We have started the process of extending this to the whole collection of reading books so that they are organised into phase groups matching those in Twinkl Phonics. In the Nursery class children are taught phase 1 phonics of Twinkl Phonics. However, if there are any children in the Nursery class that we assess to be ready to start phase 2 phonics we start this with them and send home de-codable keyring words linked to phase 2.

After the October half-term children in the Nursery class take home a lilac reading book and we encourage our parents to use these to develop and model pre-reading skills and consolidate all of the learning that takes place within Phase 1. In the Reception Class, the children start to learn Phase 2 of Letters and Sounds and they receive keyring words matched to this phase. Those already working within Phase 2 on entry to the Reception Class will continue with this and then progress to new keyring words.

Guided reading sessions start after the October half-term in the Reception Class.