



# Getting forensic with phonics. *What you need to know*

**Rationale:** *There are a lot of questions being asked around what it means to have fidelity to one phonics programme and whether or not you can use more than one resource. This document unpicks some common themes around the concept of 'fidelity' and sets out what you need to have in place and what you don't*

**Key Purpose:** *To support leaders and teachers to plan and teach children phonics effectively and in line with recent guidelines*

What you need...	What you don't need...
<p><b>Fidelity to one consistent synthetic phonic programme</b>, i.e. one spine (or order) of the letters and letter-groups that will be taught</p> <p>Consistent approaches to teaching, for example, when tricky words are introduced, etc.</p> <p>Consistent terminology. For example, do you call them sound buttons, dots and dashes.</p>	<p>A scheme. This goes further than a programme in that it gives specific lesson plans, medium term plans, etc and is pretty much 'lift up and go'. It is entirely possible for effective, well-prepared and trained teachers to plan directly from a <i>programme</i>. The key here is in the CPD on how to use it, and internal leadership to evaluate efficiency and maximise impact.</p>
<p>If your school chooses to use a scheme, i.e. to support your chosen programme, then everyone needs to use the same scheme. It would be a good idea to set this out in your English Policy, and to ensure new staff induction is clear on programme and / or scheme of choice.</p>	<p>The same scheme as every other school. The emphasis here is on the impact on outcomes, so it will all come down to how something is used anyway. Your provision must be underpinned by Systematic Synthetic Phonics</p>
<p>A set order in which graphemes are introduced, so that none are missed out. Ensure absentees are caught up quickly so gaps don't form due to holes in knowledge.</p>	<p>Many offshoot 'streams' for catching children up if they have missed specific coverage. Look to do this in the very short term if at all possible (for example, next day intervention)</p>
<p>Specific assessment criteria at each stage, so that everyone's idea of 'secure' is the same. There should be very clear criteria plus guidance on the range of contexts, degree of independence needed</p> <p>Teachers need to know why certain children are being taught certain things at any one point in time, so AfL, differentiation etc is 'owned' by teachers including any TA-led interventions.</p>	<p>Lots of tick-sheets showing which children know which grapheme – only useful for children you're not sure about or are concerned about.</p>
<p>If using actions, songs and rhymes when introducing the sounds, stick to one set, e.g. not having one person using something else 'because the children like these' or 'I've always done this'.</p>	<p>There is nothing saying you have to use actions, songs, rhymes etc as mnemonics but evidence shows that a multi-sensory approach for early phonics can be more inclusive. Again, as long as any chosen resources to aid teaching (such as puppets, phoneme frames, kit boxes of games etc) maintain fidelity to your chosen programme, and do not give conflicting messages, then these may be sourced from differing places. It will fall under the school leaders' roles to ensure consistency in this.</p>
<p>Book stock organised so that it aligns with your school's chosen phonics programme and matches that progression in graphemes and tricky words. Reading books at the very earliest stages need to contain words that children can use their phonics knowledge on and where they are not forced to 'guess from the pictures' etc. This is so that they understand that (for unknown words), the route to decoding comes from blending the sounds, and the children become systematic and fluent at doing this.</p>	<p>Books devoid of plot or interest. There are some very engaging decodable books available nowadays. However, before replacing, initially you should audit your current book-stock as there is usually a majority that can be used but maybe in a different order/year group/term etc. Diving into your stock and checking alignment is the only way you'll know... and then you'll be equipped to match texts to readers very closely, make recommendations and tailor selection to interests as well as decoding attainment-stage etc.</p>

Subject leaders who are the experts in your school on the teaching of reading, especially early reading, and are highly effective in their leadership and change-management with confidence to challenge, support and evidence impact.

Everyone to be an expert. Nonetheless, Subject Leaders, or subject leadership teams in larger schools, have a role to play in ensuring that class teachers, teaching assistants, and any others helping children with reading are fully up-to-speed with the current approaches to teaching early reading, so there is definitely a certain kind of expertise in teaching reading needed by all primary and early years practitioners.

### Further points to consider:

All staff teaching phonics should have recent, thorough, high quality training on the principles and practices of systematic synthetic phonics (SSP) in the context of your school's chosen phonics programme. This includes knowing what is 'age-appropriate' for their year-group not only at the end-of-year stage but also incrementally throughout that year. This is so that the very earliest signs of "*falling behind the programme's pace*" (Ofsted inspection handbook, p88, section 293) can be picked up, acted upon, gaps closed and monitored.

A deep understanding of the progression **and sequencing** in your chosen phonics programme is essential.

Use pupil progress meetings as a forum for discussing and evaluating precisely how and when class teachers are supporting at-risk readers to catch up, and (together with other professionals) how the lowest attaining 20% are being supported to make accelerated progress towards end of key stage expectations.

Evidence shows that Systematic Synthetic Phonics (SSP) is effective for all children, apart from a tiny percentage who may be neuro diverse.

*"Broadly speaking, it will only be those with severe cognitive difficulties that cannot be taught the phonic code."* (Bradley Simmons, HMI)

Therefore, Ofsted will look into how "*reading, including the teaching of systematic, synthetic phonics, is taught from the beginning of Reception*" (Ofsted EIF, p87).

Prevention, through high quality first teaching (including differentiation) is always the first port of call. If some children are struggling more than others, you want to find out why and do something about it.

Listening to pupils read to check accessible and match their phonic knowledge?

Adaptable groupings i.e. will change frequently (at least half termly)

Assessment recommendations e.g. formal assessments half termly and used to change groupings. Recommend phonic checks??? Use to fill gaps.

Home learning – clarity between reading for enjoyment and reading at home linked to phonic knowledge

### Questions for Senior Leaders:

- Can all teachers and leaders, including head teachers, articulate the school's approach to systematic phonics teaching, with precision and clarity?
- Do all teachers demonstrate understanding, precision and clarity in terms of why something is being taught at a particular point and what the intended learning is?
- Can teachers articulate exactly why a child is given a certain independent reading activity during guided / group reading? Why that and why then?
- Is there precision and clarity in terms of the actual *delivery* of phonics and guided reading?
- Is articulation precise and clear, from all practitioners?
- Can staff answer questions about the reading curriculum sequence and planning such as "Why that? Why then?" meaning why is that planned into the curriculum and why at that point/year/key stage etc.
- In terms of phonics, can staff articulate why children are at a particular phase etc?
- Can staff articulate the 'so what'?