Reading is one of the most important things we can teach our children. As they develop we want them to be able to; read the news, read about other people’s thoughts and opinions, read letters and e-mails, understand forms and official documents, keep in touch with friends and family on social media.

At Sherbourne we mainly use structured phonics to support the development of reading. We use a programme called **Phonics for Pupils with SEN by Ann Sullivan.**

**What is Phonics?**

Phonics is the name given to the way reading and spelling are taught in school. Phonics is understanding how we say the words written on a page and how letters in written words represent the speech sounds we say.

For example, say the word ‘cat’ aloud. You will not think about the sound you are making. When you listen carefully you can hear /c/ /a/ /t/. When we write the sounds, we write ‘cat’.

The technical word for speech sounds is ‘phoneme’ at Sherbourne we call them **sounds**.

The technical word for letters that represent the sounds is ‘grapheme’ at Sherbourne we call them **sound-spellings.**

When we speak English, we use 44 different sounds in different combinations. Children gradually learn these sounds and their matching sound-spellings. Working through all the sounds and combinations can take some time.

**The Alphabetic Code**

It would be great if we only had to learn single sounds but the code is not that easy. Some sound spellings have more than one letter.

Look at these words; **sh**op **th**in si**ng**

The sounds /sh/ /th/ and /ng/ are represented by sounds made up of 2 letters.

Now look at these words: L**igh**t w**eigh**t

The sounds /e/ and /ai/ are represented by sound spellings of 3 and 4 letters.

Some sounds are represented by lots of different sound-spellings. Look at these words they all have an /oa/ sound. n**o**  c**oa**t sn**ow** t**oe** th**ough** c**o**d**e**

Some sound-spellings represent more than one sound. These words both have the sound-spelling ‘ow’ but they make different sounds br**ow**n sl**ow**

This is why learning to read can be very difficult for some children.

**Blending**

When children have learned some of the code they need to be able to use it. They learn to push the sounds together to make a word. This is called **blending.**

There are 2 ways blending is taught.

1. The children work through the sounds left to right saying the sound. Then they push them together to say the whole word e.g. /s/ /i/ /t/ ‘sit’
2. The children work through the sound e.g. /s/>/i/>/t/ ‘sit’

It is important when we are supporting children to say the sounds we do not accidentally add an ‘u’ to the end of a sound e.g. ‘bed’ sounded ‘bu -e -d’.

**Reading longer words.**

When children are confident we start to introduce longer words. These are trickier because they contain lots of sounds and sometimes need an extra breath to say them.

For example, Say the word ‘fun’ – this takes one beat/breath. Now say ‘funny’ – this takes 2 beats and now say funniest – this takes 3 beats. Chunking the sounds is natural to us. These chunks are called syllables.

Look at this word **finish.** The child starts by blending the sounds /f/ /i/ /n/ and then hears a chunk/syllable. They remember this chunk and blend the rest of the word /i/ /s/ /h/. They then remember the 2 chunks and blend them together fin>ish to make ‘finish’. Having to remember chunks/syllables can make reading longer word tricky.

**Moving On**

With their growing knowledge and confidence children can sound out words and read them. This is the first step to becoming an accurate and fluent reader.

As adults we don’t sound out every word we read we know them straight away. This is called reading ‘on sight’. Our brains learn the relationship between the sequence of sounds and the words. Over time with practise we automatically read the words.

**Common Words**

Some words are very common in texts. Some of these words have unusual sound-spellings that often come later in the phonics programme. e.g. **th**e l**i**k**e** w**ere** **wh**i**ch.**

Some programmes say these words cannot be decoded but this is not true. If we look carefully we can see the relationship between the sounds and their sound-spellings.

Look at the word; said. It has 3 sounds /s/ /e/ /d/. The ‘s’ and ‘d’ are not a problem for beginner readers but the /e/ sound is represented by the sound-spelling ‘**ai’** which is rare. In this case we would ask the child to tell us the sounds they know and then we would say the sound for the sound-spelling that is new. They will come across this sound at a later time in the programme.

**Reading with Understanding**

Phonics is very much about decoding but reading is much more than this. The skills of reading include following a story, understanding the facts/information, getting the message, understanding vocabulary, understanding language structure and comprehension. When reading with a child their understanding should always be checked through questions and discussions.

**Choosing books to read**

There is a wonderful selection of books for children to read and enjoy. When we want the children to read at school it is important that the book are decodable for them. i.e. contains sounds/sounds-spelling they are mostly familiar with. At Sherbourne the majority of our decodable books come from the Collin’s Big Cat reading Scheme. The very first books the children read have no words to encourage the child to share a book developing their listening skills and understanding of how books work.

Children really benefit from us reading out loud to them and in this instance a wide range of books above the child’s phonic knowledge/decoding skills can be shared. As well as reading in Phonics and English lesson children will read across many different curriculum areas.

**Helping your Child with Reading**

1. Listen to your child read the books they bring home.
2. Encourage your child to point at the sound-spellings or point for them.
3. Sounding out each word can be tiring so short bursts of reading time are better.
4. Encourage your child to say all the sounds blending as they go – show them how if they get stuck. (if your child is non-verbal model the sounding and blending for them)
5. Be patient allow time for them to work it out before stepping in to help.
6. If they get stuck work out where they are going wrong and give them the information they need. E.g. I think you have forgotten the sound that matches this sound-spelling.
7. Help your chi9ld when they are reading a common word with a sound-spelling that is rare or new to them.
8. If you think your child is sounding out a word they know ‘on sight’ encourage them to say the word instead of sounding out. Some times children just need permission to do this.
9. Read and re-read the books- practise helps develop confidence and fluency.
10. Talk about the story before and after reading – ask some questions.

**Spelling**

Spelling uses the same code used to learn to read but we just go the opposite way around. When we want to spell a word, we think about the sounds in that word and one by one we match a sound-spelling to each sound in order to write the word. Splitting the word into its sounds before spelling is called **segmenting.** Segmenting words to spell takes lots of practise.

Think of the word ‘bug’. We identify 3 sounds /b/ /u/ /g/ and we write 3 sound-spellings bug.

Think of the word ‘fish’. We identify 3 sounds /f/ /i/ /sh/ and we write the 3 sound-spellings fi**sh.**

Think of the word learns. We identify 4 sounds /l/ /er/ /n/ /z/ and we write l**ear**ns.

As well as spelling/writing in phonics and English lessons they will spell and write in many different curriculum areas. Fir multi-syllabic words the children will need to chunk the sounds before working out the sound-spellings for each sound. E.g. ‘perfect’ – ‘per’ - /p/ /er/ - per and fect - /f/ /e/ /c/ /t/ - fect

**Helping you child with Spelling**

1. When your child isn’t sure how to spell a word encourage them to segment and identify the sounds then writing/choosing a sound-spelling to match.
2. Draw lines on the paper to match the number of sound-spellings e.g. if they are trying to spell ‘dream’ draw \_ \_ \_\_ \_ . This will support them to recognise the /ee/ sound.
3. If your child really is stuck write 2 options for them to choose from.

**Additional Strategies**

For students with specific needs, alternative or additional strategies may be used to support their development of reading e.g. Students with Autism may need visual support, students who are non-verbal may need to use other ways to communicate (E-Tran/Eye-Gaze) their understanding of the sounds/words/books they see. Children with visual impairment will use their auditory skills to hear the sounds and then use braille skills to read. Children with hearing impairment will use visual cues alongside signing. Children with complex needs may focus on identifying different sounds in their environment. Please speak to your child’s teacher about the specific strategies used. If you have any further questions about reading please get in touch.