



Phonics at Levens CE School

How do we teach phonics at Levens?

At Levens, we have developed our own carefully sequenced phonics curriculum rather than following a DfE validated scheme. It is firmly rooted in the principles of **systematic synthetic phonics (SSP)** and reflects the evidence-informed principles outlined in the Department for Education's **Reading Framework**. The framework highlights the importance of systematic phonics teaching, a clear progression of knowledge and skills, regular practise and appropriate support for pupils who need additional teaching. New phonemes and graphemes are introduced systematically, with regular opportunities for children to practise, apply and revisit previously taught knowledge and skills. This ensures that children build the secure phonic knowledge and blending skills they need to become confident, independent readers and accurate spellers. Our approach is **systematic, cumulative and carefully sequenced**. Children are taught phoneme-grapheme correspondences through a planned progression, with opportunities to practise blending and segmenting and to apply their developing knowledge when reading and spelling. Previously taught content is regularly revisited and consolidated so that new learning builds securely on what has gone before.

What was the rationale behind our decision?

Developing our own progression gives our teachers the flexibility to respond to the needs of individual cohorts and pupils. It has enabled us to design a progression which is specifically tailored to the needs of our pupils, our school context and the wider reading curriculum whilst maintaining a clear and consistent whole-school, evidence-informed approach. As a result, we are able to adjust the pace of teaching, revisit areas where children need further consolidation and provide appropriate additional support without being constrained by the sequence or structure of a programme which requires fidelity to be demonstrated at all times. Teachers and staff have a shared understanding of the progression and the expectations at each stage, ensuring that phonics teaching remains consistent across the school.

Whilst we recognise that validated phonics schemes provide valuable structure and resources for schools, there is no requirement for a school to follow one particular commercial scheme:

‘There is no statutory requirement for schools to choose one of the SSP programmes on the validated list. Ofsted does not have a preferred programme or approach. What’s important is that schools take an approach that is rigorous, systematic and used with fidelity (any resources used should exactly match the Grapheme Phoneme Correspondence (GPC) progression of their chosen SSP approach), and that achieves strong results for all pupils, including the most disadvantaged.’

Our priority is to ensure that our provision meets the key principles of effective systematic synthetic phonics teaching and enables all pupils to become successful readers.

How do we ensure phonics is taught effectively?

Despite not following a validated scheme, our approach to teaching phonics is informed by current evidence and guidance on effective systematic synthetic phonics teaching and regularly reviewed by school leaders. We use appropriate resources which support consistent teaching and ensure that staff have a shared understanding of progression, pronunciation, blending, segmenting and assessment of pupils' progress, including instances where pupils may require further support.

Our phonics teaching is closely linked to our wider reading curriculum. We carefully select books and reading materials that enable children to practise the phonemes and graphemes they have been taught, while also exposing them to rich vocabulary and a broad and engaging range of texts. Children's reading books are precisely matched to their phonics ability, meaning they are not exposed to new books which they are expected to read, without first being taught the phoneme-grapheme correspondences required to do this successfully.

Our phonics progression is regularly reviewed and evaluated by school leaders and staff. Pupil attainment, assessment information and classroom practice are used to evaluate its effectiveness and make adaptations where necessary. Ultimately, the measure of our phonics provision is not whether we follow a particular scheme, but whether our pupils develop **secure phonics knowledge, accurate decoding and blending skills, increasing reading fluency and the confidence to apply their knowledge independently**. Our phonics curriculum is therefore designed to ensure that every pupil receives the teaching, practice, consolidation and additional support they need to become a confident and successful reader and accurate speller.

Assessment and responsiveness

Assessment is an integral part of our phonics teaching. Teachers use Phonics Tracker to monitor progress and identify pupils who have not yet secured particular phoneme-grapheme correspondences or who require further practice with blending and segmenting. This information informs subsequent teaching, intervention and opportunities for consolidation.

EYFS Profile data and the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check, enable leaders to evaluate pupils' developing skills and the effectiveness of our teaching approach. We use these statutory assessment outcomes, alongside our own ongoing assessment to evaluate the effectiveness of our provision and identify where further teaching is required, or whether a different approach may need to be taken.

Consistency and professional development

Having our own progression does not mean that phonics is delivered differently between early years and key stage one. On the contrary, we have established a consistent approach to the teaching of phonics. Staff work from the agreed progression document and use shared terminology, routines and approaches to pronunciation, blending, segmenting and assessment. Staff receive appropriate guidance and professional development so that they understand both the rationale behind our progression and how to implement it effectively. Leaders monitor phonics teaching, pupil progress and assessment information regularly and use this to identify strengths and areas for development. Our approach is continually being reviewed and refined over time in response to evidence from pupils, assessment outcomes, staff feedback and developments in national guidance.

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