



Key features of effective phonics practice

Seven features of effective phonics practice

Through the English Hubs Programme, seven key features have been identified as characterising phonics teaching in highly successful schools, no matter which validated programme is being used. These are:

- direct teaching in frequent, short bursts
- consistency of approach
- secure, systematic progression in phonics learning
- maintaining pace of learning
- providing repeated practice
- application of phonics using matched decodable books
- early identification of children at risk of falling behind, linked to the provision of effective keep-up support.

The important question for schools is whether their implementation delivers on all these key features of effective practice. This document shows how these essential criteria apply to *Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised*.

Direct teaching in frequent, short bursts

Phonics is a specific, defined body of knowledge. Children learn this most effectively if we use direct teaching.

Phonics is also powerful knowledge. It opens up the potential of reading and so much other learning, too. Children are at an advantage if they are taught phonics efficiently and as early as possible in their learning journey.

Considering the young age of the children, regular short bursts of direct teaching are most effective, although these do not necessarily need to be of a particular duration.

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In the programme, all lessons involve direct teaching and the accompanying 'How to' videos model this.

The daily lessons follow the weekly content grids. Each lesson generally takes 15–30 minutes, depending on the age and stage of the children being taught.

Consistency of approach

This covers two aspects:

- consistency of delivery from all teachers and teaching assistants
- consistency in the learning approaches experienced by children.

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To support the necessary consistency, it is recommended that:

- all teachers watch the 'How to' videos
- all teachers refer to the 'Prompt cards', in preparation for teaching
- each school appoints a dedicated Reading Leader, who is responsible for coaching teachers, monitoring provision, gathering data and ensuring that all teachers are trained
- senior management monitors phonics teaching, with a focus on consistency.

Secure, systematic progression in phonics learning

It is essential for progression in phonics learning to cover:

- all the phonemes of English words
- correct pronunciation of the phonemes
- all commonly occurring grapheme-phoneme correspondences (GPCs)
- the correct formation of all graphemes
- blending for reading
- segmenting for writing
- the sequenced learning of appropriate tricky words.

The programme must establish a clear sequence that enables children to begin to read and write simple words, phrases and sentences as early as possible. It must then, systematically and cumulatively, work towards children being able to decode any unknown words in age-appropriate texts by the time they complete the programme.

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The programme provides a full progression through all commonly occurring GPCs, working from simple to more complex, and taking into account the frequency of their occurrence in the most commonly encountered words.

At each appropriate stage, the lesson templates guide teachers through the learning of GPCs, the formation of graphemes, blending for reading, segmenting for writing, and reading and writing simple sentences.

The weekly content grids map the introduction, practice and application of each GPC, alongside the controlled learning of tricky words. Providing the content grids are followed carefully, they ensure the secure, systematic progression required.

Maintaining pace of learning

Children need to learn to read as quickly as reasonably possible, so they can move from learning to read to reading to learn, giving them access to the treasure house of reading. Their progress must include reaching national standards by the required times, for example in the Phonics screening check. This means they should successfully cover the full phonic progression over the timespan of the school's programme so the pace of learning needs to reflect this.

However, this needs to be balanced by our understanding (backed by recent research) that children do not cope well if they have to learn too many new things at the same time. Pace of learning is therefore also about spacing out new learning to avoid overload, and to allow time for repetition and consolidation, so that learning becomes fully embedded in long-term memory.

Optimum pacing is a balance between these two considerations.

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In *Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised*, the weekly content grids map each element of new learning to each day, week and term for the duration of the programme. The pace allows for full coverage of all aspects of the progression, in a cumulative way, without adding too many elements of new learning at any one time. It also allows for significant periods of practice, consolidation and revision.

For full effectiveness, it is therefore important that neither teaching nor learning are allowed to drift too far behind the pace set. Equally, it will be unhelpful for the set pace to be exceeded, as this is likely to result in overload for many children. Any temptation to leave out periods of consolidation and revision should also be resisted.

Providing repeated practice

The ultimate goal of teaching phonics is that children read fluently, recognising most words instantly and using phonics to decode any unknown words.

This means that phonics knowledge needs to be embedded in long-term memory so that its application becomes automatic.

Repeated, spaced practice is by far the most effective way of transferring knowledge from short- to long-term memory. Effective phonics teaching offers repeated practice at the point of learning and returns to practise the same elements again at intervals over an extended period.

Practice makes permanent.

The consistent experience of effective schools using the major programmes is that children do not find repeated practice tedious as long as they are engaged with the learning process.

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The programme builds repeated practice into all lessons, as modelled in the 'How to' videos. The lessons then return several times to further practise and consolidate learning.

It is important that teachers do not shy away from repeated practice or curtail it for fear of becoming tedious. This does not happen if children are fully engaged in the learning.

Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised promotes children's engagement in learning through:

- teacher energy and enthusiasm
- extensive interaction between teachers and children in lessons
- generous praise and encouragement
- building on and celebrating success.

Application of phonics using matched decodable books

All major phonics programmes use fully decodable reading books for children to practise and apply phonic knowledge. It is an expectation of the Department for Education and Ofsted, and a requirement of the National Curriculum. More importantly though, it gives children the vital opportunity to practise the phonic skills they are learning without the distraction of words they have not yet learned to decode.

To be effective, it is essential that decodable books:

- are exactly matched to the phonics progression of the programme used
- present only words made up of GPCs learned to that point
- include tricky words only as they are introduced in the programme
- are used exclusively when children are practising reading and not mixed in with books that are not fully decodable at the child's level.

Of course, teachers should read and share a wide range of non-decodable quality children's books with their class.

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The programme includes application with decodable books as an essential stage of the teaching sequence.

Collins Big Cat for Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised have devised fully decodable books matched to our programme progression.

Detailed guidance on selecting and organising suitable decodable books from your existing stock is also provided in the 'Reading' section of the website.

The 'Reading' section of the website also provides lesson templates and 'How to' videos to support reading practice sessions using decodable books. We also have guidance and support about home reading, including the use of both decodable books and other books for sharing.

Early identification of children at risk of falling behind, linked to the provision of effective keep-up support

In effective schools, high expectations drive the pace of learning and success built for all children by identifying those having difficulty very early on. These children are then provided with sufficient additional support to help them keep up.

This involves:

- simple but effective continuous assessment, both informal and more formal
- regular progress reviews for all children
- methods of informal support understood by all teachers and teaching assistants, and implemented as soon as necessary
- systems for formal support clearly established and implemented as soon as necessary
- plans and materials for effective support readily to hand and taught well.

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The 'Keep-up' and 'Assessment' sections of the programme provide:

- teacher guides with full support for one-to-one keep-up sessions for children in Reception, Year 1 and beyond
- 'How to' videos to support one-to-one and group teaching
- templates and weekly grids for daily additional blending practice lessons
- six termly assessments for each year group
- assessment guides that help teachers identify next steps for teaching, advice on how to fill any gaps in learning, and include links to appropriate keep-up materials for children who need urgent additional support.

Auditing and monitoring

For schools implementing – or intending to implement – the programme, these seven key features of effective practice provide:

- a valuable potential focus for professional development
- an excellent basis for senior managers to audit provision or monitor ongoing delivery.