



"Inspiring minds to ignite lifelong learning"



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Phonics

Your guide to Phonics at Onchan Primary School and how to support at home.

units of sound	simple code key words	complex code + key words	graphemes or spelling alternatives which are code for the sounds
/a/	a apple		
/e/	e egg	-ea head	-ai said again
/i/	i insect	-y cymbals	
/o/	o octopus	wa watch	qua qualify
/u/	u umbrella	o son	-ou touch
/ai/	ai first aid	-ay tray	-ough no thoroughfare
	-ey prey	a table	-ae sundae
		-ea break	a-e cake
		eigh eight	-aigh straight



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What is Phonics?

Phonics is the teaching of sounds in language. We use phonics to help children identify sounds in words which can then be used to help them read and write.

For example when we say 'teach' – we can hear 3 individual sounds– t – eeee – ch . Each of these three sounds is called a phoneme.

As we know the English language has 26 letters in its alphabet, but there are 44 sounds or phonemes. We have all of the alphabet sounds like ah – b – c, but we have other sounds such as ar, ow, ch sh etc.

Quick disclaimer – phonics doesn't cover absolutely everything as our language is borrowed and evolving, with regional accents also making a difference. Essentially, the English language is complicated to learn but phonics can help!

Phonics is the teaching of sounds in language and these sounds are called phonemes.

Terminology

Phoneme - a sound

Grapheme – how a sound is written down

Digraph – 2 letters representing one sound (for example the ie in tie).

Trigraph – 3 letters representing one sound (for example the igh in night).

Split digraph – 2 letters working together but split within the word (for example the i and e in bike).



Please note split digraphs were historically referred to as "magic e" words.

Our children are taught from the beginning of their phonics journey all of the correct terminology, so they can start to understand the code of our language and how it's all put together. It sounds complicated, but when exposed to and explained from an early age our children do genuinely understand it.

Writing

When learning to write children are encouraged to sound the words out to enable them to hear the different phonemes. They are then taught the corresponding grapheme, which is where it gets tricky again! For each of our 44 phonemes there are multiple graphemes to choose from.



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For example when writing the word "mat", there are three phonemes: m, a, t.



However there are more than three graphemes to choose from. The picture shows all of the choices for m, a, and t.



Children are taught which grapheme is the normal best fit within words and spelling patterns.

At Onchan, we call every grapheme a 'code' (for example in thumb -mb is code for m) and we're aiming to CRACK THE CODE.

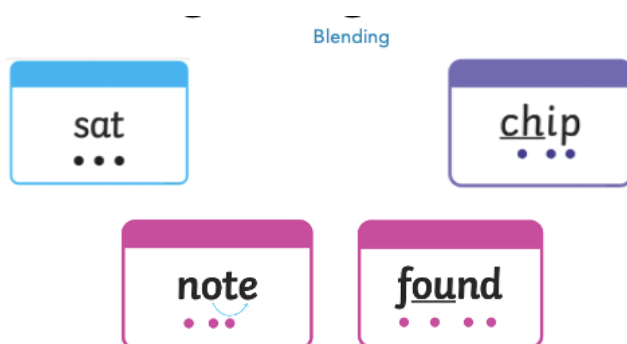
How to pronounce the different phonemes

We teach children that letters have names like we do, but also that they are code for different phonemes. In teaching phonemes we are trying to isolate the single sound as much as possible. This means there shouldn't be an "uh" at the end, for example in letters such as cuh, duh, luh. This causes problems for children when they are blending as they add in an "uh" to the middle of words, therefore making it much harder for them to read and write. The only exception to this rule is "qu" and the way to remember this is that queen's can do what they want!

Although some pronunciation is based on our individual accent, the following video shows how the majority of us will pronounce the phonemes.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UCI2mu7URBc>

Beginning to read



Once your child knows a few letters it's time to blend them together to make words. We encourage our children to 'sound out' the words by saying the individual sounds and then blending them together to make the word.

You may see dots or lines under words that help children recognise digraphs, trigraphs and split digraphs; these can be called sound buttons.



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Some children when beginning to read may find blending difficult so one of things you can do at home is use ‘sound talk’ in day to day life:

Can you z-i-p up your coat?

Shall we go to the sh-o-p?

What word am I trying to make? b-a-th

Tricky words

As much as we want our children to read phonetically decodable books and words that match the phonics level they are on, unfortunately there are words some children just need to learn. For example it would be very difficult to write any book without the word ‘the’, but if you think about the code in the – e is making an uh sound. Tricky to remember for a child who has just learned e!

Tricky Words

the	to	me	her	were
I	no	was	have	little
go	into	they	so	when
he	she	are	some	what

Tricky words cannot be sounded out easily.

These are common words that have complex codes within them. New readers may find tricky words difficult to read as they have not yet learned some of the graphemes in those words. These are sometimes known as sight words, common words or first words.

We introduce these words slowly and try to learn these by sight, so that when they come up in reading, they can be recognised and read quickly. This helps children with their overall pace and fluency.

When beginning to read, one idea is to point the tricky words out ahead, for example ‘this is a tricky word, can you remember’. Eventually your child will just read them, but when beginning to read it is good to give your child a little clue, because they have to switch from ‘sounding out’ reading to ‘whole word’ reading.

The Alphabetic Code Chart

units of sound	simple code key words	complex code + key words	graphemes or spelling alternatives which are code for the sounds		
/a/	a apple	-ea head	-ai said again		
/e/	e egg	-ey cymbals			
/i/	i insect	-y cymbals			
/o/	o octopus	wa wheel	qua quartz	ait ait	
/u/	u umbrella	o oak	-ou ouch	-ough no thoroughfare	
/ai/	ai first aid	-ay tray	a table	-ae sandwich	-e enke
		-ey prey	-ea break	-eigh eight	-aigh straight

All of the classrooms at Onchan display a code chart, from Foundation Stage to Year 6 and you will find a copy in your child’s Phonics Learning Log. The children are taught how to use these charts and refer to them throughout their school journey. The picture is just a small section of this chart.



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Initially we teach the simple code which is the yellow section that runs down the left. This is the most common grapheme or representation of the 44 sounds.

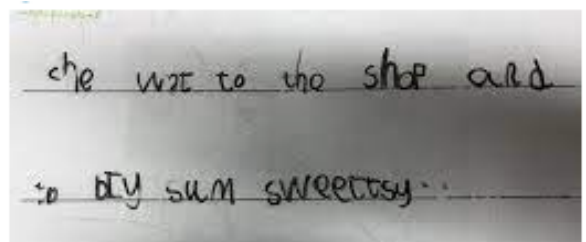
Once ready, towards the end of Foundation Stage, we start to look at the complex code which is looking at those alternate graphemes or other representations of that sound. For example a child might have learned this 'ai', but then at a later date they will learn that "ay" and "a_e" are alternative codes for that phoneme. By the end of Year 2 the children will have been exposed to the majority of the codes.

Our children will know that when looking for a grapheme they can look at their alphabetic code chart and see all the options. The most likely or common grapheme is to the left and as you move right these graphemes are in fewer words.

There does come a point in a child's learning when they will need to start remembering which code is in which word, but the code chart gives them a really good initial helping hand with this.

Early spelling

As our Foundation Stage children will only be exposed to the simple code, their writing and spelling will reflect this. So please don't worry if you feel your child's spelling isn't perfect, it's part of their journey and at this stage, we're looking to see if it's decodable. The pictures are evidence of this decodable writing.



When your child begins to write, we will encourage them to 'sound out' their words so they can hear the sounds that they need and then link those sounds to the letters that they know. For



example, if your child wants to write the word – g-oa-t – we would say "let's sound it out' together - g – oa – t. They could then use their memory to think of the letters that they need or they can refer back to their code chart to help them locate the letters they need. As

the adult, you can keep reminding them of the sounds and to also guide them to use resources to help them.



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Helping at home

Your child learning to read truly is a joint effort between home and school and we see the most success in children who are supported at home.

A couple of strategies have already been mentioned, but the biggest way you can help at home is to simply practice with your child!



It is important to not force an activity if they are not in the right mindset, as we want learning to be fun and not an activity they see as a chore.

Any reading you can do at home cannot be underestimated. Reading really is a skill that needs to be practiced over and over again. Don't worry if you do not have a lot of time, a short and snappy session is better than none! Read wherever you are and whatever you have! If the only time available is in the car or making dinner then ask your child to read to you then. If you have a recipe, instructions or signs to read, point out words or codes you know they have seen before so they can help you read them. This is all practice; it does not need to be an onerous sit down task. They might not even know they have been practicing reading!

Remember to find a time that works for you and your family. Every family is different.

Keep reading short and sweet. You could say, "hey look you're 4 so we're going to try to read 4 pages or you've now turned 5, let's try reading for 5 minutes". Timers can really work well and you could ask your child to set the timer. We want to build up the positivity of reading and if they want to read for longer that is great!

Try to make it fun, think of it as a time to sit and chat with your child. Ask questions, talk about the characters, new words, settings. You can find out a lot about your child through reading and finding out their opinions and understanding. It can also open up new doors, for example if a word comes up that your child doesn't know, maybe it's an animal or a place, show them pictures or find out new facts together.

A final way you can support is through engaging with our Phonics Learning Logs. Each week, they contain the phonemes and letters that we have learned that week in school and ideas of how you can reinforce and support that learning at home so it is embedded and retained. Information around dates for learning logs coming home will be communicated by your child's class teacher.



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Useful phrases when helping at home

Below are the types of phrase we use within school, so you can mirror this when supporting your child at home.

I can see you've sounded out that word correctly, however, in this word, the code you need is...
Let's have a look on our code chart.

What can those letters be code for?

Have another look, what codes can you see?

(pre-empting) Ooo I can see a digraph/trigraph/split digraph in that word.

In this word, the letter Y is code for /ee/ e.g. baby

Phonics in Key Stage One

Phonics is taught throughout Key Stage One (Years 1 and 2) with the codes getting progressively more challenging. Phonics Learning Logs are still sent home and while the activities change to suit the different year group the basic format stays the same.

Although the above ideas for helping at home are based on Foundation Stage reading, the general idea remains the same. Any practise completed at home is beneficial and any reading counts! Use the above ideas with your child regardless of their year group to ensure learning is embedded.