

## What Is Essential Letters and Sounds?

Essential Letters and Sounds (ELS) is our chosen Phonics programme. The aim of ELS is 'Getting all children to read well, quickly'. It teaches children to read by identifying the phonemes (the smallest unit of sound) and graphemes (the written version of the sound) within words and using these to read words.

Children begin learning Phonics at the very beginning of Reception and it is explicitly taught every day during a dedicated slot on the timetable. Children are given the knowledge and the skills to then apply this independently.

Throughout the day, children will use their growing Phonics knowledge to support them in other areas of the curriculum and will have many opportunities to practise their reading. This includes reading 1:1 with a member of staff, with a partner during paired reading and as a class.

Children continue daily Phonics lessons in Year 1 and further through the school to ensure all children become confident, fluent readers.

We follow the ELS progression and sequence. This allows our children to practise their existing phonic knowledge whilst building their understanding of the 'code' of our language GPCs (Grapheme Phoneme Correspondence). As a result, our children can tackle any unfamiliar words that they might discover.

Children experience the joy of books and language whilst rapidly acquiring the skills they need to become fluent independent readers and writers. ELS teaches relevant, useful and ambitious vocabulary to support each child's journey to becoming fluent and independent readers.

We begin by teaching the single letter sounds before moving to digraphs 'sh' (two letters spelling one sound), trigraphs 'igh' (three letters spelling one sound) and quadgraph 'eigh' (four letters spelling one sound).

### **We teach children to:**

- Decode (read) by identifying each sound within a word and blending them together to read fluently
- Encode (write) by segmenting each sound to write words accurately.

The structure of ELS lessons allows children to know what is coming next, what they need to do, and how to achieve success. This makes it easier for children to learn the GPCs we are teaching (the alphabetic code) and how to apply this when reading.

ELS is designed on the principle that children should 'keep up' rather than 'catch up'. Since interventions are delivered within the lesson by the teacher, any child who is struggling with the new knowledge can be immediately targeted with appropriate support. Where further support is required, 1:1 interventions are used where needed. These interventions are short, specific and effective.

### Supporting Reading at Home:

- Children will only read books that are entirely decodable, this means that they *should* be able to read these books as they already know the code contained within the book.
- We only use pure sounds when decoding words (no 'uh' after the sound)
- We want children to practise reading their book 4 times across the week working on these skills:
  - Decode – sounding out and blending to read the word.
  - Fluency – reading words with less obvious decoding.
  - Expression – using intonation and expression to bring the text to life!

We must use pure sounds when we are pronouncing the sounds and supporting children in reading words. If we mispronounce these sounds, we will make reading harder for our children. Please watch the videos below for how to accurately pronounce these sounds.

At the beginning of each academic year, we will hold an information session for parents and carers to find out more about what we do for Phonics, Reading and English at our schools. Please do join us.

More support for parents and carers can be found here:

<https://home.oxfordowl.co.uk/reading/reading-schemes-oxford-levels/essential-letters-and-sounds/>

### **Decodable Books**

It is vital that whilst children are learning to read, they read books that match their phonic knowledge. The Oxford University Press decodable readers support Essential Letters and Sounds. These books have been carefully matched to every aspect of the programme and to the sounds that your child is learning in school.

These books are intended to be used during the Review lesson each week and as home readers. They are also recommended for use in other reading sessions to give children plenty of opportunities to develop their phonic knowledge and reading fluency. Children keep the books for one week and need to aim to re-read them at least four times in this period. Re-reading ensures that children develop their reading skills and fluency. This, in turn, supports their learning in school; as children become more fluent at reading, they are able to focus on their new learning.

The children's reading book will be match to the phase of phonics that they are currently learning. When your child knows all of their phonetic sounds up to and including Phase 5, they will move onto the book banded scheme from 'Orange' onwards.