

Teaching the higher levels of phonics: practical ideas from practitioners



The challenges

Even when children make good progress in phonics in Reception, this is not always sustained into Year 1.

It is usually at this stage that children encounter the challenge of alternative ways of writing the same sound (rain, rein, reign) or of reading words that have two possible pronunciations (wind, minute, read). They are also likely to encounter more challenging vowel digraphs and trigraphs.

The following slides might be used collaboratively, for example in a staff meeting, or they might be used independently by class teachers. They provide prompts for discussion and a collection of ten tried and tested ideas for use in the classroom.

Questions to consider

- **How do you sustain the pace and progress children have made in phonics prior to Year 1?**
- **How do you plan the teaching of phonics at the higher levels? For example, do you teach the alternative graphemes all together or spread over a period of time?**
- **How do you support children to choose which grapheme to use when writing when there are plausible alternatives?**

Idea 1: When introducing a new grapheme for a known phoneme, think about ...

- **Preparing beforehand a bank of words to have at your finger tips that reflect the rule you are focusing on. Choose words that the children already understand, for example, see and sea.**



Idea 2: When introducing a new grapheme for a known phoneme, think about ...

- **Using appropriate children's names or familiar words to illustrate the grapheme. Alternatively, you could introduce a toy or a puppet whose name exemplifies the grapheme you are teaching.**



Idea 3: When teaching the split digraph, think about...

- **Giving children opportunities to physically 'split' the digraph, for example, by cutting the grapheme in two to 'wrap around' the final phoneme. Another approach is to ask two children to hold hands to represent the grapheme - the pair is split by another child who represents the phoneme between them.**



Idea 4: When teaching the split digraph, think about...

- **Using correct terminology from the time you first introduce digraphs and trigraphs. The 'split' is then a natural progression.**



Idea 5: When using investigations and word sorts, think about...

- **Collecting and sorting words with particular graphemes, for example, ai/ay/a-e. Encourage children to generalise about the position of a phoneme within a word. For example, the ay grapheme is most likely to occur at the end of a word.**



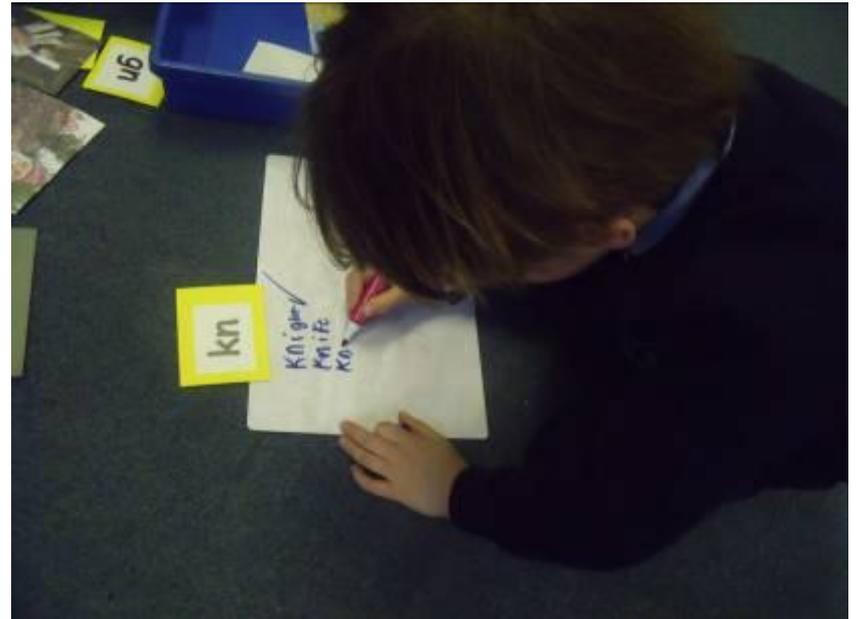
Idea 6: When using investigations and word sorts, think about...

- **Making up your own phoneme spotter stories or tongue twisters so that the children can investigate specific phoneme choices.**



Idea 7: When using investigations and word sorts, think about...

- **Sorting objects, photographs or pictures with the same phoneme but different digraphs, for example, phone, soap, in order to check whether children know the correct choice.**



Idea 9: Provide opportunities for pupils to practise and apply their phonic skills during literacy lessons

For example, by:

- Reading 'model' texts that help reinforce patterns or rules.
- Demonstrating how to apply spelling strategies while writing.
- Teaching proofreading skills by using a child's piece of writing to identify a particular spelling error related to a recent teaching focus, for example, word endings.



Idea 10: Provide opportunities for pupils to practise and apply their phonic skills through the wider curriculum

For example, by:

- Drawing attention to phonic choices in subject vocabulary such as *grate*, *bake*, *slice*, *dice*.
- Holding a word race to compile words with a specific trigraph, for example, igh.
- Collecting themed lists of words with a particular digraph, for example, gale, wave, whale, shipmate.
- Asking children to find words at home that represent particular graphemes, for example, spoon, bedroom.



How can school leaders support the teaching of the higher levels of phonics?

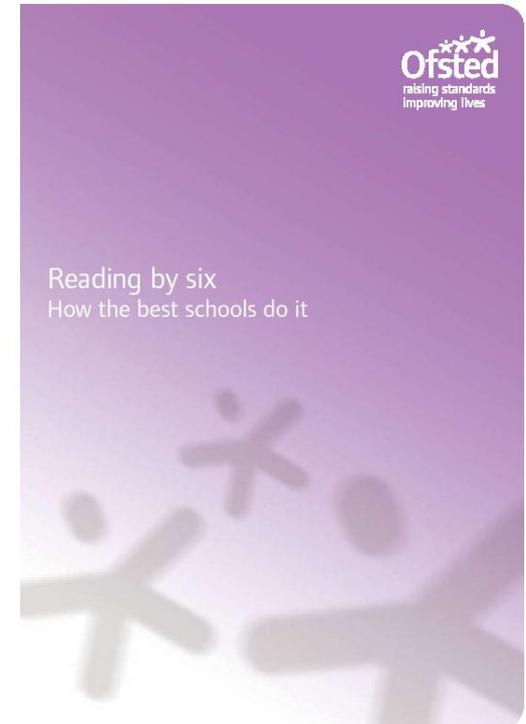
- By championing phonics personally and emphasising the importance of seeing children's learning through to the higher levels; expecting this to happen and monitoring to make sure it does
- By enabling all teaching staff to share the same phonics training and development work to ensure consistency of both understanding and practice
- By sometimes rotating staff between Reception and Year 1 so that, over time, each one has direct experience of teaching all stages of phonics
- By ensuring the school follows a clear phonics progression from Reception into Year 1 and that children's progress in phonics is specifically assessed and tracked through to Year 1
- By providing good quality and appropriate resources for the teaching of the higher levels of phonics in Year 1
- By ensuring a rich reading environment in the school so that children can apply their skills in real contexts

Follow-up reading

Reading by six: how the best schools do it

Ofsted - November 2010

The best primary schools in England teach virtually every child to read, regardless of the social and economic circumstances of their neighbourhoods, the ethnicity of their pupils, the language spoken at home and most special educational needs or disabilities. A sample of 12 of these schools finds that their success is based on a determination that every child will learn to read, together with a very rigorous and sequential approach to developing speaking and listening and teaching reading, writing and spelling through systematic phonics. This approach is applied with a high degree of consistency and sustained.



Feedback

- **Did you find this useful?**
- **What did you like?**
- **What didn't you like?**
- **Any feedback on these ideas would be much appreciated. Please email your feedback to martin.bull@education.gsi.gov.uk**