How we teach Phonics at Tudor

TUDOR PRIMARY SCHOOL
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Authored by: Jessica Adams

At Tudor, we believe that phonics is the foundation of successful reading and writing. We are committed to providing all children with a systematic and consistent approach to the teaching of synthetic phonics, enabling them to become confident readers and writers who can access age-appropriate texts with fluency, enjoyment and understanding. Through the use of the government-accredited scheme, Essential Letters and Sounds, we ensure that pupils develop a secure understanding of the relationship between spoken and written sounds and are equipped with the lifelong skills needed for effective communication.

We recognise the importance of consistency in teaching and learning and ensure that all phonics lessons across EYFS and KS1 follow a clear and familiar structure of revise, teach, practise and apply. Teachers use a range of agreed strategies and resources, including sound buttons, sound strings, robot arms and structured spelling sequences, to support children in decoding, segmenting and applying phonics knowledge confidently. Through the consistent use of modelling approaches such as "my turn, your turn", we ensure that children are taught explicitly and supported effectively as they develop independence in applying phonics skills.

At Tudor, we are dedicated to ensuring that all children succeed. We understand that children learn at different rates and therefore provide targeted and timely interventions to support pupils who require additional practice or bespoke provision. Ongoing assessment, including regular phonics checks and diagnostic assessments, enables staff to identify gaps in learning early and adapt support accordingly across EYFS, KS1 and KS2. We are committed to inclusive practice and adapt our phonics provision to meet the needs of all learners, including breaking learning into smaller steps, reducing the pace of new learning and providing additional opportunities for repetition and reinforcement where appropriate.

What this looks like in class

At Tudor, we follow the Essential Letters and Sounds programme, with carefully considered adaptations such as the use of sound buttons and sound strings to further support our learners.

The scheme is implemented through explicit and consistent daily teaching across EYFS and KS1, alongside targeted interventions throughout the school for children who require additional phonics support. Phonics sessions take place daily and typically last between 20 and 30 minutes.

During "teach" weeks, children are introduced to four new sounds each week, with the fifth session dedicated to reviewing, consolidating and applying their learning. At the end of each session where a new sound has been taught, children complete activities in an application book to practise using the focus sound in both reading and writing tasks.

On the fifth day of the week, children work collaboratively with their reading partner to read a phonically decodable book that is carefully matched to their individual stage of development and learning needs.

During review weeks, children are not introduced to any new sounds. Instead, sessions focus on revisiting, consolidating and applying previously taught phonics knowledge in both reading and writing activities. During these sessions, children practise decoding real and pseudo words using strategies such as sound buttons, while also applying the spelling sequence to write single words and simple sentences accurately and confidently.

At the end of each session, teachers use their professional judgement and knowledge of individual pupils to identify children who require additional in-class support. These children take part in small-group intervention sessions led by the class teacher, where they are provided with further opportunities to practise and apply newly taught sounds and key phonics skills, including oral blending, decoding for reading and segmenting for writing.

Consistency of approach

At Tudor, we are committed to maintaining a consistent approach to the teaching of phonics. All staff use the same terminology, teaching strategies and resources both within phonics sessions and across the wider curriculum when children are applying their phonics knowledge. This consistent approach creates a familiar and predictable learning environment, enabling children to focus confidently on developing and applying new skills.

Within our phonics sessions and interventions, we follow a "show, copy repeat" approach to learning. Children are given the opportunity to hear and say each sound, first in isolation, and then within words and sentences. We know that children learn best when learning is clearly modelled so we use a "me then you" approach and ensure the children are taught and not tested. The key features of our phonics sessions can be seen below

Key teaching features	
Me, then you	The teacher says something, and then the children repeat it exactly.
Provide opportunities	Practice and repetition are key. There is no 'down time' in the lesson – a consistent fast pace is maintained. Children have many opportunities to: • Hear the sound or word • Say the sound or word • See the sound or word • Read the word • Write the word • Use new vocabulary.
Provide modelling	Every single aspect of the lesson is modelled for children. As the teacher, your main purpose is not to test the children but to teach them. The Apply activity must always be modelled to the children, even when they are familiar with the structure.
Active teaching and learning	ELS lessons are active – children are engaged at all times, whether joining in with a 'drum roll' to introduce the new sound, using 'robot arms' or 'tracking the teacher' as you move around the room.

Throughout EYFS and KS1 children are taught skills to help them apply their phonic knowledge such as using their robot arms to orally blend words, applying their sound buttons and strings to decode words and using a spelling sequence to spell words. Teachers and teaching assistants across all key stages then use these skills when teaching beyond phonics lessons.

Robot Arms

Robot arms are used when segmenting spoken words into oral sounds. For example the word cat is broken down into c – a – t. Children are encouraged to move their arms like a robot for each sound they can hear, then clap their hands together to when they blend the back together.

Sound Buttons and Strings

We use sound buttons to visually show sounds when children are reading. A single button on its own represents one sound whilst a string identifies a digraph or trigraph (two or three letter sounds).

For example:

C a t



Sh o p

To represent split digraphs we use a longer string which refer to as a 'smile'. For example

S p i k e



Spelling sequence

Our spelling sequence supports the children to stretch a word into sounds before writing it down. We start off by warming up our word (saying it into our our hands), stretching it (pulling are hand apart then blending it back together), segmenting into robot arms, then counting how many sounds we can hear. We use this sequence alongside sound mats to support children when writing.

Key teaching features	
Spelling sequence	Encourage children to follow the sequence: • Say the word • Stretch the word • Segment the word • Blend the word • Count the sounds within the word • Say the whole word This sequence can be used for any word where the children have been taught the GPCs within the word.

Progression

Children are taught phonics throughout EYFS and Year 1. ELS phonics sessions are used at the beginning of Year 2 before the children moving onto our spelling curriculum. We have created a curriculum progression document with guidance from the Essentials Letters and Sounds handbook, which highlights what children are taught and when. This includes sounds and harder to read and spell words.

Tudor Primary School

Phonics Progression

FS, Year 1 and Year 2

Taken from Essential Letters and Sounds- ORT and Spelling Shed

Foundation Stage Progression plan

Reception Autumn 1: Phase 2

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
/s/ <s> /a/<a> /t/<t> /p/<p>	/i/<i> /n/<n> /m/<m> /d/<d>	/g/<g> /o/<o> /c/<c> <k>	/k/<ck> /e/<e> /u/<u> /r/<r>	/s/<ss> Assess and review week R:1	/h/<h> /b/<b> /f/<f> <ff> /l/<l> <ll>
	I, the, no	put, of, is	to, go, into	pull	as, his

Reception Autumn 2: Phase 3

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
/j/ <j> /v/<v> /w/<w> /ks/<x>	/y/<y> /z/<z> <zz> /kw/<qu> /ch/<ch>	/sh/<sh> /th/<th> (voiced and unvoiced) /ng/<ng> /nk/<nk>	/ai/<ai> /ee/<ee> /igh/<igh> /oa/<oa>	-es (where there is no change to the root word) Assess and review week R:2	Review week R:3
he, she, buses	we, me, be	put, of, is	was, her		my, you

Decodable Readers

Children participate in reading sessions with a reading partner on the fifth day of their phonics teaching cycle. They are given books that match their current phonics knowledge, enabling them to apply their skills and develop reading

fluency and confidence. Reading partner activities also take place daily during review sessions.

Books are sent home to match each child's current phonics knowledge, ensuring that texts are accessible and support independent reading practice.

Parents are encouraged to read with their child at least four times a week. We encourage parents to share any difficulties they experience so that the school can offer appropriate support and help ensure that all children have regular opportunities to read at home.



Oracy in Phonics

Our phonics scheme exposes children to a wide range of vocabulary. Tricky words and unfamiliar vocabulary are modelled in context using a 'me then you' approach, with children repeating sentences before generating their own using specific focus words. Adults explicitly discuss the meaning of unfamiliar words and model how to use them in sentences, supporting children's vocabulary development and understanding.

To ensure consistency across the school, all teachers and Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) use shared terminology when delivering phonics lessons and interventions. The following list outlines the key vocabulary used across all key stages to support a consistent approach to phonics teaching and learning

Vocabulary	Definition
Grapheme	A letter or a group of letters representing one phoneme: for example, , , , ('though')
Phoneme	The smallest single identifiable sound: for example, the letters 'sh' represent just one phoneme (/sh/) but 'sp' represents two (/s/ and /p/).
Diagraph	Two letters making one sound: for example, , , , .
Trigraph	Three letters making one sound: for example,
Split Diagraph	Two vowels that make one sound but are split by one or more consonants: for example, as in 'make' or as in 'inside'. There are six split digraphs in the English language: , , , , , (as in 'type').
Button	A small spot used to identify a single sound in a word. Always placed directly under.
String	A small line used to identify a two/three sounds in a word. Always placed directly under.
Smile	An arched string used to identify split digraphs in words
Harder to Read and Spell Word	Words that children will find harder to read and spell as they will not have been taught the relevant GPCs
"Me then you"	To ensure that children can apply their understanding independently, we must always give them the information required. First, we show how to do/say something. Then they copy us, before repeating this by themselves. We repeat these steps, reducing our modelling as children's fluency and independence increases.
Robot Arms	When sound-talking a word (orally segmenting it into the phonemes within the word), Reading Teachers and children use robot arms to physically make the link between the separating of the sounds. This assists children in hearing the separate sounds within the word and ensures that they do not form 'consonant clusters' or 'onset and rime', which are not part of the ELS programme. The word is said in 'robot talk' and then blending hands are used to blend the word.
Segment	To split up a word into its individual phonemes in order to spell it: for example, the word 'cat' has three phonemes /c/ /a/ /t/. Children are asked to count the individual sounds in the word to help them to spell it.
Blending	Blend (vb) To draw individual sounds together to pronounce a word: for example, s-n-a-p, blended together, reads 'snap'

How do we know this is working?

The teaching of phonics at Tudor is a significant strength. All staff, including Learning Support Assistants (LSAs), are well trained and confident in delivering high-quality phonics teaching. A consistent approach across the school ensures that children experience clear expectations and familiar strategies, supporting confidence, security and progression in their learning. Shared resources, including flashcards, wall friezes and sound mats, reinforce learning and help children apply their phonics knowledge independently.

By the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), children have developed at least a secure understanding of Phase 2 phonics, with the majority demonstrating age-appropriate knowledge of sounds up to Phase 5. Children increasingly apply their phonics knowledge to blend sounds when decoding words for reading and segment words for writing, providing a secure foundation for early literacy.

The early identification of gaps in phonics knowledge is a key strength. Staff use the Phonics Tracker to monitor individual progress, identify specific areas of need and inform targeted interventions. Where the phonics approach is not sufficiently meeting a child's needs, staff work closely with the Inclusion Coordinator (INCO) to identify and implement appropriate adaptations and alternative provision. This ensures that children receive timely, tailored support to develop their early literacy skills. Information is shared effectively during transitions between year groups and key stages, supporting continuity of provision and enabling children to build on prior learning.

Across EYFS and Key Stage 1, children demonstrate increasing independence in applying their phonics knowledge to reading and writing. Many independently select and use resources, such as sound buttons, the spelling sequence and sound mats, to support their learning beyond discrete phonics sessions. This reflects their growing ability to transfer taught strategies into wider literacy activities.

Since the introduction of Essential Letters and Sounds (ELS), the school's phonics outcomes have improved year on year. **We now have a three-year average that is consistently around 85%.** This reflects the positive impact of a consistent approach to phonics teaching, supported by assessment, early intervention and targeted provision. Children develop increasing confidence and fluency in reading, establishing important foundations for future learning. This supports the development of reading comprehension in Key Stage 2, where teaching can increasingly focus on children's understanding and interpretation of texts.