Junction Farm Primary School

Phonics Validation Criteria

July 2022

Document Control

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What is this document?

Department for Education

In April 2021, the Department of Education published 16 revised core criteria for effective systematic synthetic phonics teaching*. The purpose of this document is to demonstrate how the *Sounds4Life* scheme meets each of these criteria for Saltburn Primary School to ensure that children in our school receive synthetic phonic instruction of the highest quality.

*https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/phonics-teaching-materials-core-criteria-and-self-assessment/validation-of-systematic-synthetic-phonics-programmes-supporting-documentation

1. Constitute a complete SSP programme providing fidelity to its teaching framework for the duration of the programme.

Note 1

Phonics is best understood as a body of knowledge and skills about how the alphabetic system works, and how to apply it in reading and spelling, rather than one of a range of optional 'methods' or 'strategies' for teaching children how to read. A programme should promote the use of phonics as the route to reading unknown words, before any subsequent comprehension strategies are applied. It should not encourage children to guess unknown words from clues such as pictures or context, rather than first applying phonic knowledge and skills. It should not include lists of high frequency words or any other words for children to learn as whole shapes 'by sight'. The focus should be on phonemes, and not on 'consonant clusters' (/s/+/p/+/l/ not /spl/) or 'onset and rime' (/c/+/a/+/t/ not c-at, m-at, b-at).

- Sounds4Life constitutes a scheme for the teaching systematic, synthetic phonics across Phases 2-5, covering the full range of 44 phonemes.
- All TAs and Teachers across the school are trained in the consistent, high-quality delivery of the programme with an expectation of fidelity to its principles and practices (see policy).
- The scheme is implemented throughout the school for children in all year groups (beyond Phonics Screening Check) who require continued phonic instruction.
- The scheme provides to all teachers and TAs:
  - Overview (programme of study)
  - Lesson plans
  - Teaching Resources (PowerPoints)
  - Standardised display resources – double up as flashcards
  - Policy
  - Glossary of terms
  - High quality CPD
- Additional provision (e.g. interventions and boosters) are provided following the scheme and its practices, adapted in terms of pace of coverage.

2. Present systematic, synthetic phonic work as the prime approach to decoding print.

- In a Sounds4Life school, the scheme provides a clear approach for teaching children how to read at a mechanical level. The approach is consistent and comprehensive and other systems are not used.
- Sounds4Life does not use or refer to the teaching of reading through sight words, high frequency words, consonant clustering or 'onset and rime'.
- Mechanical focus of reading centres exclusively on phonemes, segmenting and blending via the application of the alphabetic principle.
- Pictures are not used for clues within reading lessons beyond the initial identification of the new sound being taught.

3. Enable children to start learning phonic knowledge and skills early in reception, and provide a structured route for most children to meet or exceed the expected standard in the Year One Phonics Screening Check and all national curriculum expectations for word reading through decoding by the end of KS1.

- Sounds4Life scheme provides a structured route through phases (2-5) and sounds as per the Letters and Sounds programme. Some amendments have been made to this programme as outlined in the overview documents. For example, while 2 sounds are generally taught per week in Sounds4Life, this drops to 1 sound when complex graphemes (e.g. trigraphs) are taught.
- Reception children begin by reviewing Phase 1 to check foundational skills (esp. aspect 7: oral segmenting & blending).
- GPC learning begins early in Reception's Autumn term.
- Programme clearly provides a structured route through Phases 2-5 across Reception and Year 1.
- Phase 5: Part 1 completed ahead of the Phonics Screening Check
- Phase 5: Part 2 completed in part - up to 'ea' for /e/ - ahead of the Phonics Screening Check
- Phase 5: Part 2 completed after the Phonics Screening Check
- '*Word Reading'* objectives from the National Curriculum covered through the programme with the exception of those elements taught through grammar instruction (e.g. contractions and suffixes).
- Sounds4Life transitions into the Year 2 Spelling programme in the final year of KS1.

4. Be designed for daily teaching sessions and teach the main grapheme-phoneme correspondences of English (the alphabetic principle) in a clearly defined, incremental sequence.

- Weekly lessons are consistently mapped (exceptions for complex graphemes):

- Monday	Reading – decoding GPC 1	- Wednesday	Reading – decoding GPC 2
- Tuesday	Writing – encoding GPC 1	- Thursday	Writing – encoding GPC 2
		- Friday	Tricky words

- Individual lessons are clearly defined in a predictable manner:
  - Review → Teach → Practise → Apply
  - 25 minutes per lesson

- Lessons are fully planned and resourced.
- GPCs taught incrementally, mapped in programme overview document:

Phase 2: s→a→t→p→i→n→m→d→g→o→c→k→ck→e→u→r→h→b→f→ff→l→ll→ss
Phase 3: j→v→w→x→y→z→zz→qu *etc.*

5. Begin by introducing a defined group of grapheme-phoneme correspondences that enable children to read and spell many words early on.

- Monographs *s, a, t, p, i, n* taught initially in the overview programme to facilitate over 60 possible words for decoding. This maximises word reading from the earliest possible point.

6. Progress from simple to more complex phonic knowledge and skills, cumulatively covering all the major grapheme-phoneme correspondences in English.

- Beyond s, a, t, p, i, n, GPCs are introduced incrementally to rapidly expand the range of decodable CVC/CCVC/CVCC words for children as they progress through Phase 2.
- Programme sequentially introduces digraphs, trigraphs, adjacent consonants, split digraphs thereafter.
- Phase 4: Uses adjacent consonants and brings together prior learning from Phases 2-3 to decode polysyllabic and compound words.
- Phase 5: Part 1 - alternate graphemes for known phonemes.
- Phase 5: Part 2 - alternate phonemes for known graphemes.
- Children progress from referring to letter sounds to letter names when spelling verbally as part of encoding

- All digraphs/trigraphs are taught consistently using letter names when spelling the grapheme verbally
  Correct: 'i' + 'g' + 'h' = /igh/
  Incorrect: /i/ + /g/ + /h/ = /igh/

7. Teach children to read printed words by identifying and blending (synthesising) individual phonemes, from left to right all through the word.

- Children encouraged to use fingers to read words from left-to-right (modelled by adults).
- Children adopting 'chunking' strategy when blending the phonemes to decode longer words.
- Sound buttons and bars used routinely (consistent terminology adopted across school) to represent monographs, digraphs, trigraphs and split digraphs to aid in decoding.

8. Teach children to apply the skill of segmenting spoken words into their constituent phonemes for spelling and that this is the reverse of blending phonemes to read words.

- Adults (through CPD) and children (through lessons) are explicitly taught the reversal relationship between decoding for reading and encoding for spelling.
- 'Robot talk' used to segment words into constituent phonemes for purpose of successful encoding.
- All weekly teaching sequences cover both the reading (decoding) and spelling (encoding) of the focus GPCs.

9. Provide opportunity for children to practise and apply known phoneme-grapheme correspondences for spelling through dictation of sounds, words and sentences.

- Each week includes two writing sessions to provide opportunity for children to encode the two GPCs that week
- Dictation a feature of all writing sessions:
  - Phase 2 Dictation of simple words for children to encode featuring focus GPC
  - Phase 3 Dictation of simple sentences for children to encode (after teacher modelling) featuring focus GPC
    - Teacher modelling transcription features such as finger spaces, writing on line, capital letters, full stops etc.
  - Phase 4 Dictation of simple sentences for children to encode independently featuring focus GPC
- Application opportunities for focus GPC built into areas within Reception continuous provision
- Spelling programme in Year 1 aligned with Sounds4Life wherever possible – decodable spellings are always taught *after* the GPC is secured in phonics learning.
- GPC applied within writing lessons in English and across the curriculum (Year 1 and beyond).

10. Ensure that children are taught to decode and spell common exception words (sometimes called 'tricky' words), appropriate to their level of progress in the programme.

Note 2
Common exception (or 'tricky') words are those that include grapheme-phoneme correspondences (GPCs) that are an exception to those children have been taught., They include correspondences that are unusual and those that will be taught later in the programme (such as 'said' and 'me'). Programmes should teach children to read and then spell the most common exception words, noting the part of a word that makes it an exception word. These words should be introduced gradually.

- Tricky words reviewed at the beginning of each phonics sessions as part of a predictable lesson structure (Review → Teach → Practise → Apply)
- Each week includes a session on the teaching of 'Tricky Words' (mapped across the programme)
- All decodable texts used for in-school and at-home reading begins with a review of featured GPCs and tricky words
- Year 1 spelling programme (running alongside Sounds4Life phonics) features all Year 1 CEWs taught three times over across the year.
- Tricky words taught as words that contain 'tricky parts', while other parts may be decodable
  Phase 2 'the' Two sounds – both tricky parts based on teaching so far
  Phase 3 'the' Two sounds – 'th' digraph is decodable – 'e' remains a tricky part

11. Provide resources that support the teaching of lowercase and capital letters correctly, with clear start and finish points. The programme should move children on by teaching them to write words made up of learned GPCs followed by simple sentences composed from such words as well as any common exception words ('tricky words').

Note 3
At first, children should not be taught to join letters or to start every letter 'on the line' with a 'lead-in', because these practices cause unnecessary difficulty for beginners. Children may be taught to join the letters in digraphs, but this is optional. (All resources designed for children to read should be in print).

- Every letter of the alphabet is taught with a rhyme and a visual representations (mnemonic) to support formation. These are consistent across the school

Example: 's' is represented with an image of a snake
"Start at the snake's tongue. Watch out! Slide all the way round to his tail."

- Phonics displays are standardised and only contain the GPCs taught in the programme so far.
- Displays and teaching resources feature GPCs in print not pre cursive.
- Handwriting programme (LetterJoin) in Reception has been realigned to match the teaching of GPCs in phonics
- Exposure to capital letter formations begins in Reception – explicit capital forming is taught in Year 1
- Children apply GPC encoding knowledge in simple words (Phase 2) and simple sentences (Phases 3 onwards) in writing sessions (also including tricky words).
- Tricky words become part of vocabulary lists on writing mats within English lessons.

12. Be built around direct teaching sessions, with extensive teacher-child interaction and involve a multi-sensory approach. The programme should include guidance on how direct teaching sessions can be adapted for online delivery (live or recorded).

Note 4
Direct teaching sessions should involve a routine so that teachers and children get to know what is coming next and minimum time is spent explaining new activities. Teaching and learning activities should be interesting and engaging but firmly focused on intensifying the learning associated with the phonic goal. Where computer-based resources are included, these should support or supplement direct teaching by the teacher, but not replace it.

Note 5
At each step, children should have sufficient time to practise reading and writing with the grapheme-phoneme correspondences they have been taught, cumulatively. For this purpose, the programme should provide:
a) words and texts for reading practice
b) teaching activities for writing practice (letter formation and spelling)
Resources provided as part of the programme such as:
- *flash cards* - *Word cards*
- *friezes* - *Grapheme wall posters*

should match the GPCs and progressions in the programme.

- Direct, daily teaching sessions of 25 minutes from Reception to Year 1 (continuing beyond Year 1 where gaps identified)
- Predictable routine to the week and to individual lessons:

- Monday	Reading – decoding GPC 1	- Wednesday	Reading – decoding GPC 2
- Tuesday	Writing – encoding GPC 1	- Thursday	Writing – encoding GPC 2
		- Friday	Tricky words
Lessons:	Review → Teach → Practise → Apply		

- Multisensory approach in lessons: flash cards, learning walls, moveable magnetic letters, songs, games etc.
- Scheme feature a limited number of proven games that are both engaging with evidence of strong impact (e.g. full circle). These are outlined in planning documents and on lesson resource PowerPoint slides.
- Computer resources supplement learning (e.g. consistent 'alphabetic song' used at the start of every lesson).
- Full resourcing of scheme allows for instruction to be delivered by teachers/TAs live online (e.g. Teams, Zoom, Google Classroom) or uploaded as recordings on an online platform (e.g. Seesaw, Showbe, YouTube etc.)
- PDF versions of all books available for online learning.

13. Provide resources to enable teachers to deliver the programme effectively including sufficient decodable reading materials to ensure that, as children move through the early states of acquiring phonic knowledge and skills, they can practise by reading texts closely matched to their level of phonic attainment, that do not require them to use alternative strategies to read unknown words.

Note 6
The texts and books children are asked to read independently should be fully decodable for them at every stage of the programme. This means they must be composed almost entirely of words made up of grapheme-phoneme correspondences that a child has learned up to that point. The only exceptions should be a small number of common exception words (see note 2) that the child has learned as part of the programme up to that point. In the early stages, even these should be kept to a minimum. Practising with such decodable texts will help to make sure children experience success and learn to rely on phonic strategies.

Note 7
If a complete programme relies on guidance on the teaching of phonics from one publisher and decodable books from another, the programme publisher must demonstrate:
a) where matching decodable books can be sourced
b) how these decodable books match the phonic progression of the programme
Additionally, the programme publisher must state how they communicate this information to schools. To ensure ongoing validity and currency, programmes should regularly update the recommended sources of decodable books that match their programme (including publisher details) and share this with schools.

- Teachers provided with full resources to teach synthetic phonics effectively without adding to workload:
  - Overview programme - Policy - CPD
  - Planning - PowerPoint Resources - Display Materials (grapheme cards)
  - Sound mats - Decodable texts at every phase and sound
- Use of Junior Learning scheme of decodable texts to mirror sequential learning in school
- Use of Bug Club decodable texts for home-loan reading
- Children are matched to in-school and home-loan texts (phase and sound) based on prior learning and secure knowledge (i.e. texts which are decodable based on what the child has learnt up until that point). This is determined using assessments, trackers and teacher AfL knowledge
- Daily guided reading sessions support phonics sessions in Reception and Year 1.
  - Only decodable texts are used from the Junior Learning scheme.
  - Sessions allow children to progress in reading of a text: decoding → fluency → comprehension → prosody

14. Include guidance & resources to ensure children practise and apply core phonics they have been taught

Note 8

A phonics programme should not include teaching and learning activities that are:

- *over elaborate - difficult to manage - take children too long to complete*
- *will likely make children focus on something other than reading or writing*

For example, it should not include finding letters in sand, because children are likely to focus more on playing with sand than on learning about letters. Teaching and learning activities like this may be valuable for other areas of learning including developing language but are not suitable for core phonics provision. A publisher should consider testing and trialling teaching and learning activities to ensure they are effective for all children, particularly those children with additional learning needs.

- All learning follows predictable structure each day: Review → Teacher → Practice → Apply
- Learning is the paramount consideration of any activity. No tasks/resources are included if the task/resource distracts from the learning of content.
- Limited number of high-quality phonics games so that children learn the game quickly and will focus on the phonic content of the game thereafter (e.g. 'Full Circle').

15. Enable children's progress to be assessed and highlight the ways in which the programme meets the needs of those who are at risk of falling behind, including the lowest attaining 20% of children.

Note 9

Full guidance should include clear expectations for children's progress. If the programme is high quality, systematic and synthetic it will, by design, map incremental progression in phonic knowledge and skills. It should therefore enable teachers to conduct frequent and ongoing assessment to track and record children's progress and to identify those children at, below or above expected levels, so that appropriate support can be provided.

Children who are at risk of falling behind need extra practice to consolidate and master the content of the programme. Programmes should provide guidance on how to support these children so that they keep up with their peers. Options for support could include 1 to 1 tutoring. They should not suggest or provide a different SSP programme for these children.

Note 10

High-quality training is an essential element of an SSP programme and is key to ensuring it is effectively implemented with fidelity and consistency within settings. A comprehensive programme of training must ensure continuous professional development of all those leading or delivering phonics teaching, assessing children's progress and supporting children who are at risk of falling behind the expected pace of the programme.

Programmes should demonstrate how they will ensure those delivering the training are appropriately qualified and that they have the capability, capacity and resources to provide on-going support to those teaching phonics in different settings. Programmes should also demonstrate a responsive approach to changing circumstances and an ability to adapt delivery methods when required.

- In-house phase-specific phonic assessments conducted half-termly assessing all taught GPCs.
- Ongoing trackers map phonic learning at a granular level, identifying the gaps of individual children
- Booster sessions timetabled, informed by tracker, assessment and teacher AfL knowledge to plug individual gaps
- Interventions hosted for children with a significant number of gaps.
- Boosters and interventions hosted with fidelity to the practices and sequence of learning within Sounds4Life scheme, but may be taught at a reduced rate with a focus on over learning.
- Daily reading for bottom 20% of children using decodable texts matched based on assessments and trackers.

16. Provide full guidance for teachers to support the effective delivery of the programme and appropriate, programme-specific training either directly, through appointed agents or remotely; with assurances that there is sufficient capacity to do so and that those delivering this training will have appropriately high levels of expertise and relevant experience.

- High quality CPD delivered to all teachers and TAs by the programme's creator.
- CPD delivered to all staff to ensure that terminology and practices are consistent across school for any child that continues to require phonic instruction, regardless of age / to remind older children of phonic strategies when encountering unfamiliar words.
- Phonics leads in position at all schools using Sounds4Life. These provide the first contact for staff with questions.
- Scheme creator remains on contract and is available for additional training / questions within the trust.
- Parent workshops hosted to explain and demonstrate the scheme to other stakeholders.
- Calendar of quality assurance checks to ensure effective teaching and learning practices.