



## **Phonics at St. Mary's**

At St. Mary's we teach systematic synthetic phonics using the Read, Write Inc. programme.

Children are organised into different, colour-banded, groups according to their phonics and reading ability. A Read Write Inc. text is read in school weekly and these are sent home to be shared at the end of the week. Children are also able to choose a book from our class libraries to take home. Children read regularly in school and we are very fortunate to have a number of volunteers which come into school to read with the children.

We provide all children with a reading record for parents to comment in and sign and a book to take home. We believe that reading is extremely important and encourage parents and carers to share books and read with their children every day. We use the Reading Karate programme to reward regular home reading. Children earn points for reading at home and then they have enough points are awarded different colour badges.

### **Simple advice on helping your child with phonics**

Phonics are special sounds, the sounds which make up 'talk'. Children progress naturally from talking to writing, and from listening to reading. We need to encourage this process.

### **Phonemes**

When we speak, we make sounds. These sounds form words and phrases. These sounds are 'phonemes'. Take the sound 'shhh'. (Make it by putting your finger on your lips as if you were telling someone to be quiet). This is a phoneme because it forms part of the words 'shark', 'flash', 'nation', 'ambition' and many others. But the sound you make when clapping your hands is not a phoneme as a handclap sound is not part of any words. There are generally agreed to be 44 different phonemes or sounds that make up spoken English. This will vary from area to area as different accents use different sounds.

### **Letters**

Letters are graphemes - ways of writing down the sounds that come out of our mouth. We use the term 'grapheme' rather than letter because many sounds are written using more than one letter. E.g. the 'shhhh' sound is often written using the letters s and h as in 'shark' or it is written using the letters 'ti' as in 'nation'. The grapheme

representing this sound here is 'ti'. One sound can be written in different ways and often using two (or more) letters.

## **Learning Phonics**

Children need to learn three things:

1. The words that we SAY can be broken up into single sounds (phonemes). 'c' 'a' 't' is cat.
2. Written script is a code – we learn how to write each sound we hear in a word (grapheme). When we read, one of the things we do is to 'decode' the words.
3. Any one sound (phoneme) can be written in more than one way (grapheme).

## **How can I help my young child?**

- Encourage your child to listen for the first sound in a word, e.g. the /sh/ sound in 'ship' or 'shark' or the /d/ sound at the start of 'dog'.
- Help children to spot words starting with the same sound as their name. Amy can spot 'apron' and 'April' but not 'apple'! They may also recognise 'their' letter, but get them to listen out for the sound too.
- Rhyming games help children listen out for middle and end sounds in words by asking them to spot and create rhymes. Best, guest, west, VEST... can be part of a game where you take turns to say a rhyming word. The words do not have to be 'real' – ants, lants, fants, PANTS... cause great giggles!

## **Sounding out to read and write**

Help your child to sound out and blend simple words. Words like 'this', 'that', 'thing' and 'then' are best read by sounding each phoneme: /th/ - /a/ - /t/. This really helps children to read small common words like 'in', 'an', 'on', 'at', 'it', 'is', 'up', 'us', 'we', etc.

## **Fluency**

Reading fluently is an important reading skill. Once children are more confident in their phonics knowledge, we encourage them to sound out words in their heads as much as possible. This is referred to as 'Fred in the head' because of the Read Write Inc. frog character called Fred. Children are also encouraged to develop their sight recognition of common words.

## **Tricky words**

There are some words that use less regular spellings and cannot be sounded out easily. They are often common words such as 'was', 'one', 'once' etc. In Read Write Inc. these words are referred to as 'red words' and children are expected to memorise these words so that they can recognise them within a text.

The most important thing is to try and make reading fun and interesting for your child, practise a little and often.

Please ask your child's teacher if you are unsure about helping your child with reading at home.