Letters and Sounds: An example progression, 2021

Including guidance for publishers and systematic synthetic phonics programme developers

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1 Introduction
1.1 Context

1.1.1   This example progression is based on the practice of particular highly effective schools in the English Hubs programme, and is one example that could be used to inform the development of a new, complete Systematic Synthetic Phonics (SSP) programme. **It is important to note that this progression does not, in itself, aim to provide a complete programme for the effective teaching of systematic synthetic phonics.**

1.1.2   The Department for Education will be creating a new list of validated SSP programmes, which will be available on gov.uk. SSP programmes on this list will be full SSP programmes that meet current guidance on best practice for teaching phonics in schools. Schools currently using *Letters and Sounds* as the basis for their phonics teaching who need or want to improve their practice will then be strongly encouraged to use a full SSP programme from the resulting validated list as a means of improving standards in reading.

1.1.3   This progression and accompanying guidance is available as an example to anyone wishing to build a full SSP programme based on *Letters and Sounds* and bring it to be tested at validation. The guidance in this document refers only to this example progression, and not to the progression in the 2007 Letters and Sounds handbook.

1.1.4   Anyone wishing to submit a full SSP programme for validation will be able to do so. Applications can be submitted from this point and an expert panel will review applications in June 2021, November 2021 and March 2022.

1.1.5   It is not mandatory that this progression is used. There is no one 'right' order of progression for teaching SSP, and it is for individual SSP programme providers to make final decisions about how to adapt the 2007 *Letters and Sounds* progression as part of a full SSP programme.

2 The *Letters and Sounds* Phases
2.1 Phases 2 to 5

2.1.1   This progression should be considered to cover phonics teaching from the start of Reception through to the end of Year One. **It now starts with Phase 2 and ends with Phase 5.**

2.1.2   Despite the slight anomaly of now starting with Phase 2, the numbering of the original Phases has not been changed.

2.1.3   In order to maintain as much consistency as possible with the original *Letters and Sounds*, the content of Phases 2 to 5 has largely been retained. The progression of learning within these Phases has however been updated, particularly for Phase 5. (See Section 3)

2.2 The former Phase 1

2.2.1 In order to ensure the necessary pace and progress, Phase 2 should be started at the beginning of Reception. This is consistent with other validated phonics programmes.

2.2.2 As Reception is the starting point for this revised programme, Phase 1 has been omitted. Those aspects of the former Phase 1 that are directly relevant to children's phonics progress in Reception, particularly oral blending, should be incorporated into Phase 2 teaching.

2.2.3 'Phonemic awareness' – children's ability to distinguish the separate sounds or phonemes that make up words – is a crucial skill underlying phonics and reading. However, phonemic awareness does not need to be acquired fully before phonics learning can start. In fact, the process of learning the phonemes in the early stages of a phonics programme strongly supports the development of phonemic awareness. In this respect, children do not need to wait until they are 'ready' before they start learning phonics. Rather, starting to learn and practise phonics is the best way to develop young children's awareness of phonemes and their ability to distinguish them.

2.2.4 Age-appropriate pre-phonic learning remains essential at the Nursery stage, and much of the former Phase 1 material may be useful for teaching these younger children.

2.2.5 It may be helpful for some children to continue Nursery activities into Reception. If this is the case, these activities should be pursued in addition to *Letters and Sounds* teaching, not as part of it, or indeed in place of it.

2.3 The former Phase 6

2.3.1 The former Phase 6 is concerned with what is best considered **spelling development** rather than **phonics**. However, it does not constitute a full and adequate spelling programme. It has therefore been omitted from this update and *Letters and Sounds* now finishes with Phase 5.

2.4 The updated Phases

2.4.1 This gives the simplified structure:

RECEPTION Term One	PHASE 2
RECEPTION Term Two	PHASE 3
RECEPTION Term Three	PHASE 4
YEAR ONE	PHASE 5

3 The progression of grapheme-phoneme correspondences

3.1 The progression

3.1.1 The progression of grapheme-phoneme correspondences (GPCs) learned in Phases 2, 3 and 4 remains largely unchanged. One important phoneme, /nk/, that was not included in the original has now been added. More specific coverage of some double consonants has also been added. One phoneme from the original, /ure/, has been omitted as its occurrence amongst commonly encountered words is rare.

3.1.2 The intended pace of learning through the Reception year has been adjusted so that the progression falls more conveniently into half-term units, at the same time ensuring all the necessary coverage to enable children to reach expected standards at the appropriate times.

3.1.3 Although a range of alternative GPCs were introduced in Phase 5 of the original *Letters and Sounds*, the intended order for teaching these was unclear. For the sake of clarity and consistency, a structured sequence for teaching this material has been developed, based on the frequency of occurrence of the GPCs involved, as well as on the experience of effective practice.

3.1.4 Whilst this updated progression requires a good pace of learning to be maintained, time is also built in for review and revision. Experience in effective schools shows very clearly that this is the best route to ensuring success for all. They demonstrate that, as long as appropriate support is provided when needed, this pace of progress is perfectly achievable with almost all children, regardless of background.

3.1.5   This progression provides an indicative framework of the pace suggested so that children starting at the beginning of Reception master basic phonics by the end of Y1, meeting or exceeding the expected national standard in the Phonics Screening Check at the appropriate point.

3.1.6   If these outcomes are to be achieved, however, it is essential that teachers ensure that there is sufficient practice and application for children to embed this learning at every successive stage, in line with the programme being followed.

3.1.7   It is also vital that children are assessed through regular observation and day-to-day interaction in order to gauge their level of understanding. Those whose understanding remains insecure at any point should promptly be given the additional support and practice they need.

3.1.8 The full progression:

Reception

Autumn Term 1st Half: Phase 2 Graphemes
s a t p i n m d g o c k ck e u r h b f l • CVC words

Autumn Term 2nd Half: Phase 2 Graphemes
ff ll ss j v w x y z zz qu ch sh th ng nk • CVC words • words with s /s/ added at the end (hats sits) • words ending s /z/ (his) and with s /z/ added at the end (bags)

Spring Term 1st Half: Phase 3 Graphemes
ai ee igh oa oo **oo** ar or ur ow oi ear air er • words with double letters • longer words

Spring Term 2nd Half: Phase 3 Graphemes
Review Phase 3 • longer words, including those with double letters • words with s /z/ in the middle • words with es /z/ at the end

Summer Term 1st Half: Phase 4
Short vowels with adjacent consonants • CVCC CCVC CCVCC CCCVC CCCVCC • multi-syllabic words and compound words • words ending in suffixes: -ing, -ed /t/, -ed /i-d/ /e-d/, -est

Summer Term 2nd Half: Phase 4 Graphemes
Phase 3 long vowel graphemes with adjacent consonants • CVCC CCVC CCCVC CCV • words ending in suffixes: -ing, -ed /t/, -ed /i-d/ /e-d/ /d/, -est, -er • compound words

Year 1

Autumn Term 1st Half: Review Phases 3 & 4, Begin Phase 5
Review Phases 3 & 4
Phase 5
/ai/ ay play
/ow/ ou cloud
/oi/ oy boy
/ee/ ea each

Autumn 2nd Half: Phase 5 Graphemes
/ur/ ir bird
/igh/ ie pie
/oo/ /yoo/ ue blue rescue
/yoo/ u unicorn
/oa/ o go
/igh/ i tiger
/ai/ a paper
/ee/ e he
/ai/ a-e shake
/igh/ i-e time
/oa/ o-e home
/oo/ /yoo/ u-e rude cute
/ee/ e-e these
/oo/ /yoo/ ew chew new
/ee/ ie shield
/or/ aw claw

Spring Term 1st Half: Phase 5 Graphemes
/ee/ y funny
/e/ ea head
/w/ wh wheel
/oa/ oe ou toe shoulder
/igh/ y fly
/oa/ ow snow
/j/ g giant
/f/ ph phone
/l/ le apple
/l/ al metal
/s/ c ice
/v/ ve give
/u/ o-e o ou some mother young
/z/ se cheese
/s/ se ce mouse fence
/ee/ ey donkey
/oo/ ui ou fruit soup

Spring Term 2nd Half: Phase 5 Graphemes
/ur/ or world
/oo/ u oul push* could
/air/ are share
/or/ au aur oor al author dinosaur floor walk
/ch/ tch ture match adventure
/ar/ al a half father*
/or/ a water
schwa in longer words: different
/o/ a want
/air/ ear ere bear there
/ur/ ear learn
/r/ wr wrist
/s/ st sc whistle science
/c/ ch school
/sh/ ch chef
/z/ ze freeze
schwa at the end of words: actor

*This may not be pronounced in this way in some regional speech, in which case the words should be read according to the regional pronunciation

Summer Term 1st Half: Review and Revise All Learning – No New GPCs

Summer Term 2nd Half: Phase 5 Graphemes
/ai/ eigh aigh ey ea eight straight grey break
/n/ kn gn knee gnaw
/m/ mb thumb
/ear/ ere eer here deer
/zh/ su si treasure vision
/j/ dge ge bridge large
/i/ y crystal
/sh/ ti ssi si ci potion mission mansion delicious
/or/ augh our oar ore daughter pour oar more

3.2 Notes on the progression

3.2.1 This progression assumes six week half terms. Adjustments will need to be made for any variation on this.

3.2.2 Where new GPCs are initially being introduced, the intended pace is around four new sounds per week, allowing one day per week and one week per half term for extended revisit and review.

3.2.3 Some minor adjustments have been made to phases in which GPCs are taught. This has been done so that the expected pace can be achieved over each half term and the necessary coverage fitted in systematically.

3.2.4 The order of GPCs given is the recommended order of teaching.

3.2.5. The unstressed vowel sound called the schwa (e.g. /uh/ at the end of 'teacher') is not included as a GPC as it can replace different vowel sounds at different times. The recommendation is that children are taught to read the 'underlying' vowel to start with. This helps considerably with subsequent spelling. Translation into the normal speech sound is then usually easy, if not automatic. For example, the child reads 'teacher' as /t/ + /ee/ + /ch/ + /er/ (at the same time internalising the correct spelling), subsequently adjusting the final vowel to the schwa in speech.

3.2.6 Because of the reversible principle of the alphabetic code, pupil's need to be taught phoneme to grapheme correspondence as well as grapheme to phoneme correspondence. Initial learning of GPCs should be linked to the correct formation of the graphemes and writing practised through dictation of sounds, words, and sentences, as part of phonics, so that pupils embed this knowledge. However, handwriting as such is probably best taught and practised separately.

3.2.7 Initial learning of GPCs should be linked to the correct formation of the graphemes and writing practised through dictation of sounds, words, and sentences, as part of phonics, so that pupils embed this knowledge.

3.2.8 Except in the very early stages of Reception Term 1, the teaching of individual GPCs must always be immediately followed by practice in blending the cumulative sounds learned into words of appropriate length and format. Vocalised sounding and blending should move swiftly into silent reading of the whole words. The knowledge and skill acquired must be applied in practice by reading fully decodable books.

3.2.9 At all stages of the progression, the words used for blending and segmenting must be formed exclusively from GPCs taught up to that point. Normally such words will include recently-learned sounds, integrated with more familiar GPCs.

3.2.10 With the exception of double letters, adjacent consonants have been delayed until Phase 4. This has always been a distinctive feature of *Letters and Sounds.* Although this limits the words that can be practised in the early Phases, it has the advantage of keeping the earliest learning as simple as possible. It also means that towards the end of Reception previously learned GPCs can valuably be revisited and revised in Phase 4. At the same time, introducing some new words and extending learning through both adjacent consonants and longer words.

4. The progression of 'common exception words'

4.1 The progression

4.1.1 'Common Exception words' (sometimes referred to as 'tricky words') are frequently used words that, although decodable in themselves, cannot be decoded by children using the grapheme-phoneme correspondences they have been taught up to that point. Many of these words cease to be tricky in the later stages of SSP, as more alternative GPCs are learned.

4.1.2 Whilst including common exception words facilitates the formation of simple, decodable sentences, learning them adds to young learners' cognitive load and also disrupts the systematic approach of SSP. Common exception words should be kept to a minimum in the early stages.

4.1.3 The original 'tricky words' from *Letters and Sounds* have been largely retained, with some additions. For example 'sure' and 'pure' have been added as 'tricky words' now that the phoneme /ure/ has been omitted from the GPC teaching.

4.1.4 Those common exception words (CEWs) included in the National Curriculum, but not in the original version of *Letters and Sounds,* have now been incorporated.

4.1.5 The pace of learning of the common exception words has been adapted based on the experience of effective practice.

4.1.6 The full progression:

Reception

Autumn Term 1ˢᵗ Half: New Common Exception Words
is I the

Autumn Term 2ⁿᵈ Half: New Common Exception Words
put pull full as and his her has no go to into she push he of we me be

* The common exception words: *put, pull, full* and *push* may not be tricky in some regional pronunciations and in which case should not be treated as such.

Spring Term 1ˢᵗ Half: New Common Exception Words
was you they my by all are sure pure

Spring Term 2ⁿᵈ Half: No New Common Exception Words

Review all taught so far

Summer Term 1st Half: New Common Exception Words
said so have like some come love do were here little says there when what one out today

Summer Term 2nd Half: No New Common Exception Words
Review all taught so far

Year 1

Autumn Term 1st Half: Review Common Exception Words Phases 2-4
Phases 2-4 is I the e put pull full as and his her has no go to into she push he of we me be was you they all are my by sure pure said have like so do some come love were there little one when out what says here today

* The common exception words: *put, pull, full* and *push* may not be tricky in some regional pronunciations and in which case should not be treated as such.

Autumn Term 2nd Half: New Common Exception Words
their people oh your Mr Mrs Ms ask could would should our house mouse water want

*The common exception word: *ask* may not be tricky in some regional pronunciations and in which case should not be treated as such.

Spring Term 1st Half: New Common Exception Words
any many again who whole where two school call different thought through friend work

Spring Term 2nd Half: New Common Exception Words
once laugh because eye

Summer Term 1st Half: Phonic Screening Check Review no new GPCs or common exception words.

Summer Term 2nd Half: New Common Exception Words
busy beautiful pretty hour move improve parent shoe

4.1.7 In order to ensure full coverage, all the common exception words in this progression should be taught within the half-term block specified. Ideally, this will be in the sequence given. However, the order of teaching common exception words can be treated more flexibly than the order of GPCs, if this helps achieve a match to recently purchased decodable books. In this case, particular care should be taken if books from different schemes are being used. The important principle is that children must always be taught how to decode the 'tricky word' phonically before they are asked to read it independently.

4.1.8 A small number of proper nouns (for example: children's names, names of characters in books, places where the children live, names associated with seasonal or religious celebrations) could be added as common exception words if they are particularly pertinent to frequent use and are not decodable at that point. However, these should be kept to an absolute minimum, particularly in the early stages. The practice should always be that children are taught how to decode any common exception words phonically before they are asked to read them independently.

4.1.9 Children will inevitably encounter other words containing GPCs not yet learned, in books or the reading environment. A small number of these could, at the teacher's discretion, also be taught as common exception words if they are likely to be pertinent to the children's frequent, immediate use. The same constraints however apply.