

Criteria for assuring high-quality phonic work

General article

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The revised core criteria provide schools with clearly defined key features of an effective, systematic, synthetic phonics programme.

We asked publishers to submit revised self-assessment forms in light of the amended core criteria.

Publishers of products can submit self-assessments to be reviewed by independent evaluators. These publishers should contact the phonics mailbox to request a self assessment form. They will then need to return the self-assessment form together with two copies of their product. A list of publishers and their self assessments will be added to the phonics pages shortly.

Published programmes for phonic work should meet each of the following criteria. Further explanatory notes are offered below.

The programme should:

- present high quality systematic, synthetic phonic work as the prime approach to decoding print, i.e. a phonics 'first and fast' approach (see note 1)
- enable children to start learning phonic knowledge and skills using a systematic, synthetic programme by the age of five, with the expectation that they will be fluent readers having secured word recognition skills by the end of key stage one (see note 2)
- be designed for the teaching of discrete, daily sessions progressing from simple to more complex phonic knowledge and skills and covering the major grapheme/phoneme correspondences (see note 3)
- enable children's progress to be assessed (see note 4)
- use a multi-sensory approach so that children learn variously from simultaneous visual, auditory and kinaesthetic activities which are designed to secure essential phonic knowledge and skills (see note 5)
- demonstrate that phonemes should be blended, in order, from left to right, 'all through the word' for reading
- demonstrate how words can be segmented into their constituent phonemes for spelling and that this is the reverse of blending phonemes to read words
- ensure children apply phonic knowledge and skills as their first approach to reading and spelling even if a word is not completely phonically regular
- ensure that children are taught high frequency words that do not conform completely to grapheme/phoneme correspondence rules
- provide fidelity to the teaching framework for the duration of the programme, to ensure that these irregular words are fully learnt (see note 6)
- ensure that as pupils move through the early stages of acquiring phonics, they are invited to practise by reading texts which are entirely decodable for them, so that they experience success and learn to rely on phonemic strategies (see note 7).

Explanatory notes

1. Phonic work is best understood as a body of knowledge and skills about how the alphabet works, rather than one of a range of optional 'methods' or 'strategies' for teaching children how to read. For example, phonic programmes should not encourage children to guess words from non-phonetic clues such as pictures before applying phonic knowledge and skills. High quality systematic, synthetic phonic work will make sure that children learn:

- grapheme/phoneme (letter/sound) correspondences (the alphabetic principle) in a clearly defined, incremental sequence;
- to apply the highly important skill of blending (synthesising) phonemes, in order, all through a word to read it;
- to apply the skills of segmenting words into their constituent phonemes to spell; and that
- blending and segmenting are reversible processes.

2. Teachers will make principled, professional judgements about when to start on a systematic, synthetic programme of phonic work but it is reasonable to expect that the great majority of children will be capable of, and benefit from doing so by the age of five. It is equally important for the programme to be designed so that children become fluent readers having secured word recognition skills by the end of key stage one.

Associated resources

Self-assessment form

Revised self-assessment form for publishers.

Word, 95 Kb

[Help with document formats](#)

You may also be interested in

[Choosing an effective phonics teaching programme](#)

[Publishers and their products](#)

[Response to the Year 1 phonics screening check](#)

[Phonics screening check framework](#)

[Teaching the higher levels of phonics](#)

[Phonics: Frequently asked questions](#)

3. The programme should introduce a defined initial group of consonants and vowels, enabling children, early on, to read and spell many simple CVC words.
4. 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: track children's progress; assess for further learning and identify incipient difficulties, so that appropriate support can be provided.
5. Multi-sensory activities should be interesting and engaging but firmly focused on intensifying the learning associated with its phonic goal. They should avoid taking children down a circuitous route only tenuously linked to the goal. This means avoiding over-elaborate activities that are difficult to manage and take too long to complete, thus distracting the children from concentrating on the learning goal.
6. The programme should not neglect engaging and helpful approaches to the more challenging levels where children have to distinguish between phonically irregular graphemes and phonemes.
7. It is important that texts are of the appropriate level for children to apply and practise the phonic knowledge and skills that they have learnt. Children should not be expected to use strategies such as whole-word recognition and/or cues from context, grammar, or pictures.

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