



# Implementing the 'Letters and Sounds Programme' in the primary school

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## Aims of the project

Engagement with research to raise attainment in Literacy across the school using a programme based on the recommendations of the Rose Review into the teaching of early Literacy.

Core objectives in achieving this aim were:

- to pilot the Primary National Strategy's – Communication, Language and Literacy Development (CLLD) Programme – in Reception;
- to trial aspects of the programme in Years 1 and 2; and
- to develop appropriate CPD for colleagues in order to cascade the letters and sounds programme across the school.

## Dimensions of the study

The project was undertaken at Netherton Moss Primary School, in Sefton, Liverpool with 184 children. The school has a 40 place Nursery. It is set in an area of social deprivation with free school meals of 40%; most children enter the school way below national expectations, particularly from a Literacy point of view. Achievements in Literacy are a key issue for the school and we permanently seek ways to raise standards across all three aspects of Literacy. The programme reported on in this summary involved all children up to and including Year 2, their teachers and support staff.

## Summary of main outcomes

There were outcomes in relation to improvements in:

- attainment in Personal, Social and Emotional Development particularly by improving levels of confidence;
- children's confidence when writing;
- standards in the Foundation Stage;
- attitude and motivation of SEN children throughout the school; and
- inclusion.

## Background and context

Sefton LEA were invited, along with 31 authorities to take part in the Communication, Language and Literacy Programme to

develop young children's speaking and listening, reading and writing, with a particular focus on the teaching and application of word recognition skills. This was based on the recommendations of the Rose Review which was commissioned to support the DCSF Children's Plan.

Our SLT took the decision to include Letters and Sounds on the School Improvement Plan. Following this the Foundation Stage practitioner and English Curriculum leader attended the launch of the Letters and Sounds programme and led whole staff INSET about it in September 2007.

The school had previously built strong links with Sefton's Literacy Team and as a result the school was chosen for a visit from the DCSF as an example of good practice in the implementation of the Renewed Literacy Framework and Letters and Sounds. The LEA then provided funding for the experimentation of Letters and Sounds in Key Stage 2 and the English Curriculum leader supported Key Stage 2 staff with planning.

Prior to the introduction of Letters and Sounds, Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 teachers had used a mixture of Playing with Sounds, Jolly Phonics, Smart Phonics, Words and Pictures, Year 2/3 Spelling Programme and Progression in Phonics. The Key Stage 1 Curriculum leader had spent time amalgamating these to develop a phonics programme relevant to the school.

## Teaching processes and strategies

The teaching and learning strategies were aimed at improving staff knowledge and skills in Letters and Sounds. This section describes the key processes.

## Timetabling and organisation

- There has been flexibility between year groups to accommodate the needs of individual pupils
- Timetabling Letters and Sounds – time was spent planning 5 x 20 minutes sessions weekly in Reception, 4 x weekly in Key Stage 1 and 3-4 x weekly in Key Stage 2
- Daily Phonic Sessions were introduced in Reception which last for 20 minutes and incorporate time for revisiting and reviewing past learning, teaching new phonemes, segmenting and blending skills, and time for children to practise and apply the new knowledge

## The Letters and Sounds Programme at Netherton Moss

The main features of the programme were:

- All staff timetabled a daily 20 minute phonics session
- We assessed all children using the assessment materials from the programme (appendix 3)
- Children were then grouped in appropriate phases, often in mixed year groups, even across Key Stages, for phonics sessions

- Teaching assistants were utilised to teach and make resources
- Teachers planned for both themselves and for teaching assistants
- Plans were saved in a central place as 'weeks' and include resources with those weeks so staff can access each other's plans
- Teaching a week as a block – introducing 3 or 4 new GPCs and high-frequency words, following the letters and sounds order
- In Key Stages 1 and 2 phase targets were set at the beginning of each week and are assessed at the end of each week
- In the Foundation Stage children were assessed weekly for phase 3 and as appropriate for phases 1 and 2

### The daily lesson

The daily lesson was split into four five minute parts and lasted approximately 20 minutes. Some examples of the various activities we used are as follows:

**Revisit and review** – in this session, children revisit and review previous learning. Activities we have found the most successful are 'Noisy Letters' where the children are given a GPC, or a word or sentence containing that GPC and asked to locate their partner with the same GPC; using actions to make words with a specific GPC in them; giving children a list of focus words and asking them to play 'Countdown' – how many can the children read/write in a minute?

**Teach** – where new GPCs (Grapheme Phoneme Correspondence) were introduced. An example of such an activity is using words with the focused GPCs in them, showing the children how to separate the phonemes through robotic speaking and adding sound buttons to each GPC, e.g. the word 'feet' would be robotically spoken as 'f-ee-t'. To sound button the word 'feet', the children try to identify how many units of sound there are and the teacher (or child) places an appropriate number of sound buttons underneath e.g.

Feet

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**Practise** – where children are encouraged to practise blending, reading, segmenting and spelling words with new GPCs. Activities include children using magnetic letters to make words; phoneme frames and letters fans are also used.

**Apply** – where children are asked to read or write words or sentences using high frequency words and words containing the new GPC. Activities involve GPC relays, where children are given parts of words and asked to put the correct GPC in the gaps within a specified time limit; silly sentences, where children are asked

to read a sentence, see if it makes sense and then make a written or verbal response; 'golden river' game, where children are given a GPC or a word or sentence with the day's focus GPC and allowed to cross the 'golden river' if they can identify a specific GPC.



### Engaging in and with research - group action planning

The English Curriculum leader met with staff from lower Key Stage 2. They decided to establish goals for the research and developmental work. In particular, they specified where staff wanted their children to be by the end of lower Key Stage 2. From this, they created an action plan built on a number of elements including:

- Staff discussed the role of guided reading, guided writing and Letters and Sounds in children's learning
- Staff familiarised themselves with different phases of Letters and Sounds derived from the research underpinning the Rose review. They focused, in particular, on phase 5, which is where Year 1 children should be by end of year 1. Phase 5 extends the acquisition of vowel grapheme/phoneme/correspondence (GPC) and alternative spellings for different phonemes
- The Curriculum leader produced plans for staff to use and worked with them to develop ways of collecting evidence to enable evaluation and progress

### Resourcing

- Resourcing for Pilot CLLD Programme – resources had to be selected and made to support learning. The school decided to invest in Jolly Phonics and Smart Phonics materials to support learning across the school
- As staff produced plans and resources, these were kept centrally on the staff drive

### Continuing Professional Development

A key part of the programme was CPD aimed at ensuring that all staff were enabled to deliver the programme. The CPD included the following activities:

- Teachers from Nursery, Reception and Year 1 attended training facilitated by the Local Authority led by a CLLD consultant on the CLLD Programme
- CLLD Consultant led an awareness raising staff meeting for whole staff
- Key staff attended the launch of the Letters and Sounds Programme
- Key staff led school INSET to ensure a whole school approach was adopted

- Key staff delivered INSET to Foundation, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 teachers and teaching assistants. This outlined origins of the programme, introduced Jolly Phonics, discussed the simple view of reading and explained how to use the assessment materials recommended to support the programme. Timetabling issues were raised. Staff agreed to share planning and any resources made across the school, and scheduled implementation and assessment. Staff planned a trial session with support of key staff

### Outcomes

We have found that the phonics programme had positive effects on children and staff. In particular our data showed that:

- A daily phonics lesson in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 impacted positively on the children's reading and writing
- Practitioners understood the concept of 'fidelity to the programme' and used resources to support this across the school
- Children are enjoying the regular phonics lessons which they are receiving as part of a systematic programme and are gaining satisfaction from putting their learning into practice in their reading and writing. There is a noticeable change in both achievement and attitude to reading and writing
- Teachers have been amazed by their own enthusiasm and are enjoying teaching phonics
- All phonics lessons observed were 'good' or 'outstanding'!
- In June 2008, 85% of children in Reception are working within phase 3, which is where they are expected to be by the end of the Foundation Stage
- 75% of children in Year 1 are working within phase 5 which is the expected level by the end of Year 1. This is in line with national expectations
- Because Year 2 children started the programme in Year 2, they are working within phase 5. We have found it is essential children are taught all phases in order
- We found that 65% of lower-achieving children in Years 5 and 6 had made at least one sub-level improvement in writing and 75% improvement in reading by Easter 2008. Both of these results were higher than previous years

### Research methods

Research methods included scrutiny of work, observation of the way children apply letters and sounds knowledge across the curriculum, lesson observations and tracking of children's performance and staff delivery of the programme by a CLLD consultant.

### Conclusion

Pupils now use strategies for decoding and encoding fluently and confidently. We have observed that our children are more likely to complete tasks and can concentrate for longer.

To enhance the effectiveness of the programme, children need to progress through each phonic phase to acquire the appropriate phonic knowledge. In our case in lower Key Stage 2 most children accessed the programme at phase 3, however, some SEN children worked within phase 2. Children were assessed using the assessment procedures in the Letters and Sounds materials and accessed the programme at the phase which most met their needs.

We have found that an active approach to learning is essential. Letters and Sounds caters for all learning styles, resulting in most children being highly motivated to learn.

### Suggestions for further reading

Rose, J. (2006) *Independent Review of the Teaching of Early Reading, Final Report*.

DCSF. *The Children's Plan – Building Brighter Futures*. (Parliamentary Hotline Lo-Call 0845 7023474)

*Letters and Sounds – Principles and Practice of High Quality Phonics – Primary National Strategy*, DCFS Ref 00281 – 2007FLR-EN

<http://whatworkswell.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/viewcasestudy>

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*All conference materials are available at [www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/ntrp](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/ntrp)*

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