

Good Practice Case Studies

As part of the focus on improving outcomes in phonics across Cumbria, members of the CASL Primary English Group visited five schools from across the county with a proven track record in improvement in the Year 1 phonics screening check since 2013. We would like to thank the schools involved for their willingness to share their good practice:

- Distington Community School, Distington, Workington (Read Write Inc.)
- Orgill Primary School, Egremont (Read Write Inc.)
- St. Bridget's Catholic Primary School, Egremont (LCP, Jolly Phonics and Phonics Play)
- St. Margaret Mary Catholic Primary School, Carlisle (Letters and Sounds)
- Vickerstown School, Walney, Barrow-in-Furness (Phonics Play)

Thanks to the following members of the CASL Primary English Group for producing the case studies:

- Jo McGill, Deputy Headteacher, Jericho Primary School
- Carl Barnes, Deputy Headteacher, Distington Primary School
- Lucy Meyers, Deputy Headteacher, Brook Street Primary School
- Louise Payton, SLE, St. Patrick's Catholic Primary School
- Karen Stringer, Deputy Headteacher, St. George's Church of England Primary School, Barrow-in Furness.

Distington Community School

School Context

Distington Community School is a smaller than average sized primary school located in a large village between Workington and Whitehaven in West Cumbria. The school has four mixed- aged classes across Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 as well as single form Reception and Nursery classes. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is 34%. 8% of children have a special educational need and 5% of children have English as an additional language. The school has sustained success in phonics and is currently ranked in the top 3% of all primary schools in the country.

Approach

After identifying areas of phonics teaching that required improvement, Distington Community School adapted their approach to ensure that a consistent, effective and progressive approach to phonics across the school was embedded. This involved an initial analysis of what the children at Distington Community School required the most. It was evident that over 85% of children entered the school in EYFS below the expected standard in speaking, listening and attention and understanding, with a large proportion significantly below in all three areas. With additional time spent in EYFS developing these three areas, the children were delayed in accessing phonics programmes. Because of this, the school has developed an adapted Read Write Inc. approach to the teaching of phonics. This includes a significant amount of time for the overlearning of each sound as well as maximising opportunities for rehearsing and applying. The school also has a specific action plan for phonics. All members of staff contribute to the plan and it is carefully monitored to ensure it supports both progress and attainment.

Lessons

Distington Community School adopts a 'Phonics first' mentality. Phonics is taught for 30 minutes every day without fail and it is specifically timetabled across school to ensure that as many adults as possible are available to deliver sessions. This helps to ensure group sizes are as small as possible. Lessons are fast paced and focused. Lessons are consistent and children have become extremely familiar with this approach which allows for increased time spent developing their knowledge and understanding.

Spelling is taught discretely from Year 2 with children receiving additional phonics intervention as and when required.



Staff training and development

Ensuring the development of all staff who teach phonics is a key priority at Distington Community School. Members of staff observe each other on a regular basis and use what they have observed to take part in coaching sessions. This has proven highly effective as it gives staff the opportunity to learn from each other and develop their own practice while ensuring a consistent approach.

Assessment

Formative and summative assessment of phonics is crucial. Children's knowledge and understanding of each sound is assessed every half term. Results are shared with all members of staff and actions are put in place to ensure all groups of children are making the expected level of progress. Through effective assessment, gaps in learning are identified. Teachers then ensure that these gaps in phonic knowledge are addressed through sharp, focused interventions. These interventions follow the same approach as the daily phonics lessons. However, they provide children with additional time to rehearse and apply their knowledge in context.

Parental engagement

At Distington Community School teachers are very aware of the importance of home learning. As part of the school's on-going action plan, they ensure that all parents of children in EYFS and Year 1 are fully aware of the importance of phonics. The school actively encourages parents to engage with staff regarding their child's home learning. The school also provides training for parents. This is in the form of 6-8 week blocks of phonics support and guidance where parents come into school for 45 minutes a week and develop their own knowledge and understanding of the school's phonics system and how they can best support their children at home. This has proved highly successful and has been extremely well attended by parents in the past. This has also supported the consistency of the sounds children hear from adults. Parents are also informed of the sounds that their children have been learning each week so that they can further support their child at home. Spelling homework is also linked closely to sounds children have been learning.

Independence

From EYFS onwards, children at Distington Community School are taught how to be independent learners. The school has adopted 'Empowering Learning', a programme which teaches the children to develop their learning behaviours in order for them to take greater ownership of their own development. When applying phonics skills across the curriculum, children are actively encouraged to independently utilise resources to assist them with their development.

Sustained success

Distington Community School has been able to sustain success in phonics for the past three years. This has also had a positive impact on the end of Key Stage 1 reading results with 83% of children achieving the expected standard or above in 2016.

	2014	2015	2016
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard in the Year 1 phonics screening test	95%	100%	100%

	2015	2016	2017 (prediction)
Percentage of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading at the end of KS1	95% (2B+)	83%	85%

Reading

Applying phonics skills into reading is a key priority for the school. Children read to an adult in all classes. Paired reading is also used throughout school to develop reading skills and confidence. Children from Key Stage 2 listen to and read to children from EYFS and Key Stage 1 on a regular basis. This has further developed independence across the school. Parental engagement in reading at home is also encouraged with the school adopting a 'Strive for five' approach. This system rewards children for engaging in a reading activity at home at least five times a week. Children are rewarded with prizes such as trips to the park or new books to take home. This has proven highly effective with parental engagement in reading at home improving dramatically.

Top Tips

- Ensure all members of staff are using clear, consistent language when teaching phonics, reading and spelling
- Ensure sounds are introduced in the context of a word
- Engage parents to support home learning
- Utilise effective assessment to ensure sounds are embedded

Carl Barnes (Deputy Headteacher at Distington Community School)

Orgill Primary School



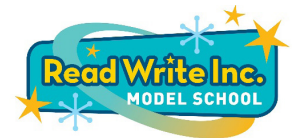
School Context

Orgill Primary School is a smaller than average-size school situated in Egremont, West Cumbria. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above the national average. The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is below the national average.

Background

Prior to the introduction of Read Write Inc (RWI) at Orgill, phonics was taught using Letters and Sounds. Children received twenty minutes teaching of phonics per day but it was generally felt that there was a lack of consistency and continuity. Children were grouped according to ability; however the approach to the teaching of phonics was felt to be somewhat ad hoc, resulting in some children in Years 4 and 5 still working at phases 4 and 5. The Reading Leader felt that staff members were unsure of starting points and how to move forward with their phonics teaching strategies.

Members of Orgill staff visited Flimby School, a RWI model school, in 2012. Staff were excited by what they saw and were eager to begin using the RWI programme in school.



Staff Training

Every member of staff including teachers, teaching assistants and regular supply teachers, undertook the two day intensive RWI training, subsequent refresher training and termly development days. The programme was updated in 2016 and all staff were retrained. Four staff have been specifically trained to teach 1:1 RWI for any children who may be falling behind.

“The training for RWI is inspirational. The 2 days are intensive but staff feel thoroughly prepared and enthused to teach phonics. The trainers are incredibly knowledgeable and passionate about reading and this is contagious!” Holly Collins (RWI Reading Leader at Orgill)

RWI Reading Leader

Holly Collins, Orgill's Reading Leader, does not teach a phonics group herself but undertakes constant learning walks assessing phonics teaching throughout school. Based on her observations, Holly will offer staff training in weekly master classes.

The staff utilise the Ruth Miskin training videos and presentations. Every Monday, staff will unpick the videos and rehearse the teaching steps with partners. The following week, the Reading Leader will monitor to see if the teaching steps are being taught appropriately. Holly also does all the reading assessments to ensure consistency of practice. This, combined with structured training, monitoring and weekly feedback, ensures that standards and expectations are adhered to and that the phonics teaching at Orgill is always of the highest standard.

Parental Involvement

Orgill School has an adjoining nursery, meaning that from the onset the children are exposed to phonics and RWI.

In the final term of nursery, prior to beginning Reception class, Holly holds a workshop for parents explaining how RWI works. The children will learn a few sounds a week, learning them in a fun way.

Further parent workshops are provided when the children begin Foundation Stage. This workshop gives parents the chance to examine all of the RWI resources.

During the year, every half term, parents are encouraged to visit school to take part in 'Parent Learning Walks', so that they can see RWI in action.

Teaching Groups

All Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 children have phonics lessons at 9.00 every morning. The children are grouped by ability with group sizes ranging from 6 to 14. There are four Reception groups and three groups of Year 1/2 children. The children are assessed every half term and regrouped according to their current ability.

In Reception, no reading books go home until children, thus ensuring that children will always experience success in their reading. On a weekly basis, children will take three books home; one current reading book, one previously read and one book to share.

Speed Sound books are sent home for parents to keep and use with their children. These are funded by the school.

Lessons are structured so that, in Reception, the time spent teaching RWI increases termly starting with a 20 minute phonics lesson in the autumn term and progressing to a 60 minute session in the summer term, in preparation for Year 1.

Holly believes that the children really enjoy their phonics sessions and has never found that the children are reluctant to engage. In terms of continuous provision, RWI cards are always out so that the children can 'play teachers!'

A Year 2 pupil said, **“RWI made me feel excited about reading. We learned new sounds every day. Our lessons were fun.”**

Impact of RWI

Traditionally, data shows that on entry to Orgill School, children are below average in terms of communication and language. By the time children leave Reception and enter Year 1, they are above average. Phonics screening data indicate that Orgill school's results are consistently well above national averages.

In November 2016, Ofsted commented, 'Some aspects of teaching are excellent. Children develop quickly throughout the early years stage. By the end of Year 1, almost all pupils have made a highly successful start in learning phonics. Pupils spell well because phonics teaching is so strong.' **Jo McGill (Deputy Headteacher at Jericho Primary School)**



St. Bridget's Catholic Primary School, Egremont

School Context

St. Bridget's is a smaller than average-sized primary school. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium funding is higher than average. Nearly all pupils in the school are White British. The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs who are supported through school action is in line with the national average. The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

Ofsted

In 2013, Ofsted stated, "In the Reception class, children make rapid progress in their linking of sounds and letters. In Key Stage 1, phonics is well taught. Many Year 1 pupils exceeded the national average in a phonics check at the end of last year."

Phonics Data

Figures below show an improving trend in relation to outcomes in the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check since 2013.

2013	2014	2015	2016
58.3%	68.0%	70.4%	95.0%

Phonics Overview

The school use LCP as a guide for planning and this is supplemented with Jolly Phonics in Reception. When children enter Reception they complete three weeks of baseline assessment before moving onto Phase 2. Children complete half termly assessments and are streamed according to the phase they are working within. Children are moved to the next phase when they are ready, not just on completion of their half termly test. Phase assessments are also highlighted when new sounds have been learned. Rigorous tracking highlights any gaps and teaching assistants are used to provide specific interventions where necessary, either in small groups or 1:1 depending on the need. Phonics is taught every day for 20 minutes: 4 days with their streamed group and 1 day in their own class.

Phonics lessons

Phonics lessons are practical and fun, with www.phonicsplay.co.uk being used to support learning. Phase boxes have been set up in school for every phase and these include any resources needed to cover the specific sounds taught across each phase. Staff make and laminate a range of engaging resources to link with each phase. Children have access to a range of phonics based books, for example, Songbirds, in order to consolidate their phonic understanding. During the Spring Term, Year 1 children are given extra afternoon phonic sessions and they use phonic flashcards with the whole class. Phonics activities are always available in the reading and writing areas.

Home/school Links

The school has strong links with parents and ensures that parents fully understand the importance of phonics. Phase booklets are sent out to parents when their child starts a new phase. These include information about the new sounds the children will be learning within that phase. Staff hold a meeting with Year 1 parents before the phonic screening check. During this meeting, staff ensure that parents understand what their children will be tested on, giving them the opportunity to view past papers.

Strengths of the School

All members of staff in Reception and Key Stage 1 have excellent subject knowledge in terms of phonics. Teachers and Teaching Assistants are all highly experienced.

Effective tracking and streaming of children has ensured that children make rapid progress and any gaps in knowledge are quickly acted upon through interventions.

Children from Year 1 upwards use IDL to support their reading and spelling. This is an online multi-sensory programme using sight, sound, touch and voice to improve reading and spelling. It has been designed to make it easy for pupils and teachers to use. Pupils are able to work independently or with minimum supervision, whilst teachers are able to track and monitor progress.

Louise Payton, SLE, St. Patrick's Catholic Primary School, Workington.

St. Margaret Mary Catholic Primary School, Carlisle

School Context

The school is average-sized and is in the South Carlisle area between Currock and Upperby. It welcomes both Catholic and non-Catholic children between the ages of 3 and 11. The school was graded as 'Good' during its most recent OFSTED inspection in April 2013. The behaviour and safety of children was graded as 'Outstanding'. The school has an improving three year trend in relation to outcomes in the Year 1 phonics screening check.

English Mission Statement

The English Mission Statement emphasises the intention to make learning vivid, real and enjoyable. It highlights the inclusive nature of the learning community and the importance of developing children's ability to listen, speak, read and write for a wide range of purposes.

The Phonics Curriculum

The policy for phonics at St. Margaret Mary makes the following points:

- Phonics teaching is part of a broad and rich curriculum that engages children in a range of activities and experiences to develop their speaking and listening skills and phonological awareness
- It is multisensory, encompassing simultaneous, visual, auditory and kinaesthetic activities that are tightly focused on the learning goal
- It is time-limited, so that the great majority of the children are confident readers by the end of Key Stage 1
- It is systematic, following a carefully planned programme, reinforcing and building on previous learning and consolidation to secure good progress
- It is taught as part of a planned literacy lesson both discreetly and daily to ensure pace and progress

The approach

St. Margaret Mary Catholic Primary School use Letters and Sounds as their main guidance. They also use planning from www.phonicsplay.co.uk. This website is particularly useful as the resources and activities are available to download and print. Both teachers and teaching assistants deliver phonic sessions and therefore, this is also a good resource to ensure consistency.

Lessons

At St. Margaret Mary, children from Reception to Year 2 are streamed for phonics. Both teachers and teaching assistants deliver sessions so group sizes usually range between 15 and 20 children.

The children take part in 4 x 25 minute sessions per week. Each session is delivered at the beginning of the school day. These sessions target the children within the phase they are working. The fifth session in the Year 1 class allows the teacher to teach or revise Phase 4 and Phase 5 with the whole class. The teacher is a strong advocate of this approach and feels that this has had a significant impact. In particular, she described the benefit of exposing those children currently working at Phase 3 to the higher phase content in order to help and support them during the phonics screening check.

The school use formative assessments to informally review and adapt the groups as needed each half term. At the end of each term the children are formally assessed and groups and adults are adapted according to need. The school finds that there are more Phase 3 groups in September but these quickly change and move forward.

Home/school Links

The school has strong links with parents and ensures that parents fully understand the importance of phonics. Phase booklets are sent out to parents when their child starts a new phase. These include information about the new sounds the children will be learning within that phase. Staff hold a meeting with Year 1 parents before the phonic screening check. During this meeting, staff ensure that parents understand what their children will be tested on, giving them the opportunity to view past papers.

Involving Parents

Parents obviously play a vital role in helping their children to develop their phonic skills.

Pupils complete mock Phonics Screening Checks in the Autumn and Spring terms of Year 1. After the Spring term check, the class teacher writes to individual parents informing them of progress and invites the parent into school to discuss further.

Parents are given a list of phonics websites and games that they can play at home.

Top Tips for supporting talking and listening at home as outlined in the school's policy for phonics are as follows:

- Make the time to listen, walking to and from school, travelling in the car, meal times, while shopping, bath times, bedtimes... ANYTIME!
- Switch off the TV, radio and mobile phone. Show children that you are interested in what they have to say. Make sure you look at your child, make response to show you have been listening.
- Make a collection of different toy creatures and make the sounds as you play.

- Listen at home - switch off the TV and listen to sound both inside and outside the home.
- Play a tune – and follow me. Buy some simple shakers, drums and beaters, then play a simple tune and ask your child to copy. Have fun!
- Use puppets – make up stories or retell known ones.

Top Tips

- Ensure phonics sessions have pace and allow children to lean through a multisensory approach. Make sure it is fast and fun!
- Use regular formative assessment to review and adapt groups accordingly.
- Make sure there is regular, set time allocated to the teaching of phonics.
- Utilise all adults and target specific children requiring intervention.

Lucy Meyers, Deputy Headteacher, Brook Street, Carlisle.



Vickerstown Primary School, Walney, Barrow-in-Furness

School Context

Vickerstown Primary School is a one-form entry school in Barrow-in-Furness. Ofsted judged the school to be ‘Good’ in March 2013. 25% of children are entitled to Pupil Premium funding.

The Teaching of Phonics

The school started with a whole school approach to the teaching of phonics (Early Years, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2) in 2013 as some children were not confident with decoding words. Over time, growing phonic knowledge and understanding has permeated throughout school and, as a result, phonics teaching is now confined to Key Stage 1 and Early Years with only a few SEND pupils in Key Stage 2 receiving regular phonics teaching. Key Stage 2 pupils follow Support for Spelling. Differentiation occurs within each year group, with groups changing regularly following frequent assessments, thereby targeting the specific needs of the pupils. There has been a steadily improving trend in attainment in the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check since 2013.

Phonics	2013	2014	2015	2016
Vickerstown Primary School	50%	50%	67.9%	80.8%

Vickerstown introduced a phonics programme with clear progression throughout school. This is the web-based Phonics Play programme which has a yearly subscription. It provides assessment sheets, interactive games, phonic planning and teaching ideas. Lessons are observed at least termly by the Key Stage 1 English Coordinator. Regular CPD ensures that teaching assistants receive frequent input and training. All staff have good phonics knowledge for each phase and know the tricky words to focus on. Staff know which groups their children are in and what they are learning so this is reinforced throughout the day. The Year 1 teacher and the Reception teacher have swapped year groups so they have a good understanding of the requirements in each year, which they believe has contributed to even higher expectations.

Reading books are linked to the phonic phase for tracking purposes. Tricky words are sent home for children to learn. Pseudo words are sent home by the Year 1 teacher so pupils can practise reading them. Year 1 has additional phonic sessions in the afternoon in the spring term, which includes a lot of visual teaching. For example, the split digraph ‘a-e’ is taught with two pupils holding hands and a consonant placed between them so that pupils can see it makes the ‘ay’ sound but is split.

Reception and Key Stage 1 pupils spend 20 minutes every day on phonics with phonics teaching starting the first week in Reception class. Correct letter formation is taught from the start in Reception. Pupils learn simultaneously both the name and sound of each letter.

SEND pupils who are unable to access Phonics Play use the sensory room and receive rhythm and rhyme teaching. Letter formation forms part of the phonics teaching although pupils receive additional and separate handwriting sessions during the day.

Vickerstown School implements additional writing opportunities to those suggested by Phonics Play because pupils visually recognise the phonemes but do not always apply them to their writing. Reception and Year 1 classes use a Big Book (wide lined paper) with coloured felt tip pens, which pupils use to write in and practise their phonics. This book is not marked and gives pupils the confidence to scribble out and change words. Children are given the freedom to find a page and pen to write with.

Following assessment, pupils are re-grouped. Pupils are constantly assessed through the revisit, teach, practise, apply programme and any gaps in pupils’ learning are plugged and addressed.

Parents

The school has considered involving parents in phonics through modelling pronunciation of phonemes. The intention is to use Year 6 pupils to create a video to demonstrate how to say the name and sound of phonemes for parents to access on the school website, but this is a development for the future.

Impact

Phonics has had a positive effect on reading results in Key Stage 1. The consistency of approach has resulted in the improving three year trend in the Year 1 phonics screening check. In addition, pupils are confident in choosing the correct phoneme throughout school as they have received a consistent approach and have a good grounding in phonic rules.

Top Tips

- Revisit regularly, plug gaps and apply the learning throughout the day.
- Have a high expectation of achievement.
- Identify pupils in need of intervention as quickly as possible

Karen Stringer (Deputy Headteacher, St. George's Church of England, Barrow)

