

The Great School Framework

Phonics in the Early Years

A rich, broad, balanced and bespoke curriculum

Case Study - Mandeville Primary School

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Mandeville Primary School is a one form entry school located in Sawbridgeworth.

Children enter the setting predominantly working at age related expectations. Children arrive from several providers with a varied phonic experience. It was agreed that a focus on the acquisition on phonics in the EYFS would complement the whole school priorities - English and writing.

The end of EYFS results showed that most children in the setting were working at or above age related expectations. However, spelling had been identified as a wider school issue. Staff in Reception and Key Stage 1 deliver daily phonics sessions to groups. In the Nursery, phonics sessions are also timetabled to be delivered daily, but kept short in duration. Staff in the EYFS identified the need for phonics sessions to be more interactive and there was a hope for wider engagement from parents and carers.

Within the school, phonics in EYFS and Key Stage 1 has always been a priority and staff have ensured sessions are delivered daily, mainly following the letters and sounds programme. However, teaching has been traditional, with teachers delivering content and children remaining quite static in their learning. Staff have also focussed heavily on sounds of the week, flashcards and writing on whiteboards. This is something that many of our younger children struggle with, particularly those with poorer fine motor skills. Parental engagement with phonics has also been limited. Progress in phonics of some children working below age related expectations has been a concern and this, we believe, was due to their limited engagement.

The Reception teacher began using some of the HfL Supersonic phonics cards with groups of Reception children back in 2018. These were extremely easy to use and the activity ideas were engaging for the children. She then attended the Supersonic phonics training delivered by the HfL EY team. This provided an additional set of activity cards and resources ideas. It became apparent that in using these cards and activities children were learning the key phonic skills whilst being actively engaged in their learning. The activities were initially trialled in the Reception classroom by the class teacher but quickly after this, the teaching assistants (TAs) were on board and started using them with their groups too. A parent/carer 'stay and play' session was held and the cards were introduced during the session with sample resources. Parents and carers were able to see how simple and easy the activities were to set up and the engagement levels they provided. It was then decided, in liaison with the English Leader, that training would be delivered to all EYFS and KS1 staff, as well as the school's PPG lead. Staff commented that they could really see the benefit of these highly engaging activities and the potential to adapt them for different groups of children. As a consequence, the TAs began to use these in their daily intervention sessions. Staff then started to make and share resources and ideas and use the cards with groups of children. We saw less pressure being put on children to just recite and follow instruction; instead they were engaged whilst focussing on key skills of spelling and reading.

On our journey we have faced many barriers, one of the main ones being making and storing resources. The cards are quick and easy to use but we have had to think about how the resources can be multi-functional to save on preparation time. This has been solved by laminating items such

as leaves, potato cut outs and fish so the resources that fit in with several activities, can be written on with dry wipe pens and reused. We also saw reluctance at first from some members of the team to adapt their usual way of teaching, but this has been achieved through gradual modelling and team discussions on how activities fit in with what they are teaching. There has been a realisation that the same skills can be taught in different ways.

In terms of impact, we have seen greater engagement and enthusiasm from children. They love putting on their spy suits or preparing their eggs and baskets for 'chicken run'. Children within Nursery are focusing on key phase 1 skills in a variety of ways, supporting their move into Reception. All staff now use these cards to support small group interventions and to plug gaps in learning. No longer do the children just sit and listen to the teacher or TA. Phonics is now fun and enjoyable!

Feedback from both parents/carers and children has been positive overall. Below are some examples:

Parents:

- "We love the games, they are fun and interesting."
- "Great games that we can easily play at home that are fun and enjoyable."
- "My daughter loves codebreakers. It's such good fun and lively too!"
- "Tricky word wiggle is a big hit in our house."

Children:

- "I love singing the fish song. It helps me learn and practise new words."
- "I love tricky word wiggle. I like moving and dancing, its lots of fun, I know the, he, we, she and now!"
- "I love singing and playing the games."
- "I love codebreakers. We get to learn new sounds and read new words."

Impact data

This data looks at Communication and Language and Literacy on entry and on exit (percentage of children on track). The results of the phonics screening check are also included.

2017	On Entry	On Exit
Communication and Language	70%	93%
Literacy	47%	80%
Phonics screening	93% pass rate	

2018	On Entry	On Exit
Communication and Language	77%	93%
Literacy	60%	77%
Phonics screening	90% pass rate	

2019	On Entry	On Exit
Communication and Language	90%	90%
Literacy	76%	80%
Phonics screening	96% pass rate	

On reflection, we were very ambitious and recognised the need to teach the activities to small groups first (for example, the rules of the game and what is expected from pupils) before moving on to the key phonics learning. We have also had to adapt some activities to fit in with the resources and space we have in school. We have also, most importantly, learnt that some activities are not always suited to being carried out outside on a windy day!

Looking ahead, we hope to begin to build a key bank of resources and have a central area where resources are stored and can be easily accessed and used by all staff. We also hope to begin to use these cards regularly with our parents/carers and to set up home learning bags for children to borrow. We also hope to work with local settings on the use of these resources.

We have thoroughly enjoyed and embraced using the Supersonic phonics cards that have been an extremely valuable addition to our phonics teaching.

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