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Dear Parents and carers

PHONICS – ESSENTIAL LETTERS AND SOUNDS



Following an update from the Department for Education recently regarding phonics teaching in schools, we are excited to announce that we are now an **Essential Letters and Sounds** (ELS) school. ELS is a phonics programme based on the Letters and Sounds programme we previously followed, and will support your child in making quicker progress to become a fluent and confident reader.

Teaching using the ELS programme has begun in FS2, Year 1 and Year 2 this week, and the reading support we offer to pupils in KS2 will also change to be brought in line with the ELS scheme over the coming weeks. We have already begun to receive delivery of the 2000+ new books we have ordered so this is a very exciting time for pupils, parents and staff at Glapton!

This letter includes key information about the new scheme, guides to help you support your child at home and a FAQ section to answer some of the key questions you may have.

Reading

Whilst your child is working through the ELS programme, all books sent home (except for reading for pleasure books) will be carefully matched to the teaching taking place in school. Your child will be practising what they have been taught in school with you at home. **To ensure all children have access to the books they need, we will be monitoring and chasing up any missing books, so please ensure your child's book is returned each week.**

- In EYFS and KS1, **books will be sent home on a Friday**. These must be read at least 4 times at home, recorded in the partnership book and **returned to school the following Thursday**.
- Further decodable texts will be set each week for your child on the Oxford Owl E-Library. These can be accessed via tablet, phone or computer through your child's Oxford Owl account (see the How to Use Oxford Owl sheet at the end of this letter).
- Videos modelling how to pronounce the sounds your child will be learning at school will be available on Class Dojo and on the school website.

Spelling

The ELS scheme includes plenty of opportunities for children to practise the spelling of words containing the grapheme/phoneme correspondences they have been learning (GPCs). It also builds in opportunities for children to learn to read and spell Harder to Read and Spell words (HRS words): previously known as tricky words. **As a result, whilst your child is completing the ELS programme, they will not be sent home with animal words or spelling lists each week.** Instead:

- Each half-term, your child will be sent home with a physical copy of the HRS words they will be learning that block. Display these around the house so that your child sees and reads the words as often as possible.
- The HRS words taught each week will be posted on Class Dojo, along with the focus phonemes/graphemes for the week. Please practise reading and spelling these words with your child.
- Formal weekly spelling tests will begin once your child has completed the ELS scheme (usually at the start of Year 2).

Handwriting

To ensure consistency across school and support the development of writing for our youngest children the following changes have been made to handwriting. The handwriting expectations for KS2 remain the same.

- EYFS: **will learn non-cursive handwriting in line with the ELS scheme.** A list of rhymes and images to aid letter formation are included as part of this letter.
- Year 1: **pupils will continue to write in non-cursive script**, but will practise the skills necessary for preparing them to join as they move into Year 2.
- Year 2: pupils will learn the horizontal and diagonal strokes required to join letters and **will begin to join letters as appropriate.**

FAQs

My child has been sent home with a book of a lower book band than they were previously on. Why is this?

We are no longer banding books by colours, instead books are assigned based on the GPCs they contain to ensure they are fully decodable. Additional books will be assigned to your child on Oxford Owl to ensure they have a range of texts to read. Sometimes your child's assigned decodable book may be a 'partner text'. These have more challenging text for you to read alongside your child. This will help to develop your child's vocabulary and general knowledge.

My child has already read their book twice. Why do they need to read it at least 4 times?

Children need to be provided with the opportunity to re-read words and sentences that they can decode (sound out) until they are fluent (read with ease and precision). By reading texts several times, children have the greatest opportunity to achieve this fluency.

What do I do if my child can already read and spell the HRS words they have been sent home with?

This is fantastic and means that your child is now ready to practise applying these words when reading and writing. Encourage them to spot these words in books they are reading and to include these words when writing.

Can I read books that aren't decodable with my child?

Of course, it is so important for children to enjoy books that are above the level they can read independently. Sharing books like this helps to instil a love of reading from the very beginning of their reading journey. These could be read together with your child reading the words they are able to decode or could simply be read to your child.

Why is my Year 2 child still following the ELS phonics scheme?

Due to disruptions to education caused by Covid-19, some pupils in Year 2 are still working on the phonics scheme of learning. This is to ensure they continue to develop their fluency, so they are able to read quickly and confidently. Once your child has completed the ELS scheme, they will have daily spelling sessions addressing key spelling patterns covered in KS1. This is when the formal weekly testing of spellings will begin.

My child can already form letters using cursive handwriting and/or is joining their letters. Should I teach them non-cursive instead?

If your child is already able to form letters correctly using cursive script then encourage them to continue doing so. We are not un-teaching the children. The key thing is that the main body of the letter is formed correctly (see Letter formation rhymes at the end of this letter).

Where can I find out more about where to support my child with their reading?

We will be hosting a phonics parents session to explain the ELS scheme in more detail in Block 4. We will also be providing additional information explaining how to support your child with developing their fluency at parent's evening. We would encourage you to ask your child's class teacher any questions you may have about supporting your child's learning at home.

We understand that the move to ELS means some significant changes from our previous reading and phonics provision, but this change will benefit our pupils enormously. We appreciate your support at this time and are really excited to work with you to ensure that every child leaves KS1, a quick, confident and fluent reader!

Please let your class teacher or myself know if you have any further questions. Thank you for your support.

Yours sincerely

L Husbands

Mrs Husbands
Year 2 teacher, Phonics and Music Lead