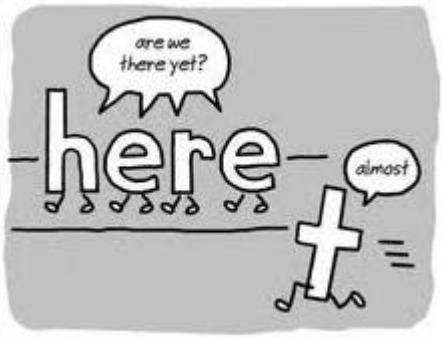
At St Mark's CE Primary School we believe that phonics opens up the world of reading and writing for your child.

Phonics

Phonics is a method of teaching children to read and write. Phonics works by breaking words down into individual sounds. There are 44 different sounds in the English language. Learning to read and write with phonics is therefore a bit like learning a code, after learning just a few sounds, you will be able to use this code to read and write hundreds of words. The more sounds you know, the more words you will be able to work out how to read and write.

Not all words are phonetically decode-able however and we call these "tricky words" that need to be memorised.

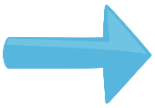


What is phonics?

Let's start at the beginning...

Each one of the 26 letters in the alphabet has its own 'sound'. This is very different to how a letter is 'said' in the alphabet. For example:

'a' in 'arrow' **'b' in 'bat'.**



arrow



bat

Of course phonics is not that simple! There are more than 26 sounds in English language, in fact there are 44 sounds in total. Some of these sounds are made up of 2 or 3 letters. 2 letter sounds are called digraphs and three letter sounds are called trigraphs.

digraph **trigraph**



scout



earth

It gets a bit more complicated than that too!

For example the 'n' sound, like in 'nail' is also spelt 'kn' like in 'knot' or 'gn' like in 'gnome'.



nail



knot



gnome

Still with us? Good!

The sound that children struggle to spot the most when breaking down words into its individual sounds is the 'split digraph'. Like a normal digraph, this is when two letters work together to make one sound, however with a split digraph, they are separated and have a letter in the middle.

Fortunately 'split digraphs' always end with an 'e' which does make them a little easier to spot!

Examples of split digraphs include:



bone



cake

So that's it! We appreciate there have been a few new words that you may have never heard of, so below is a little phonics codebreaker to help us out before we go any further!

The phonics codebreaker

Phoneme	A spoken sound
Grapheme	A sound when used in writing
Blending	Blending phonemes or digraphs together to make words
Di-graph	Two letters that make one sound. For example **c + h = ch**
Tri-graph	Three letters that make one sound. For example **i + g + h = igh**
Split di-graph	Vowel sound that has been split. For example **a + e = a_e = cake**
Blend	Two separate sounds which can be blended together to make a word easier to read. For example **fl**
Cluster	Three separate sounds which can be blended together to make a word easier to read. For example **spr**
Alien Word	A made up word which helps the children to practise the skill of reading.
Sound Button	Can be drawn underneath words to help the children to spot the graphemes. 

Why is phonics the best method for teaching my child to read and write?

Phonics makes learning to read and write easier, simpler and crucially gets children reading and writing quicker. This helps to increase a child's confidence and instil a love of reading and writing from an early age. Rather than memorising 1,000's of words individually, children are instead taught a phonics 'code'.
This code helps children work out how to read 95% of the English language.

How is phonics taught at St Mark's?

The first lessons in phonics teach children to recognise and differentiate between different sounds. This typically starts by asking children to listen to sounds that you can hear, such as the sounds that animals make, or sounds you hear when you go outside.
As schooling progresses children are then taught simple, single letter sounds from the alphabet, before moving on to learning about digraphs, trigraphs and split vowel digraphs.
To make phonics fun at St Mark's, we teach sounds through multi-sensory activities such as singing, dancing or by playing games, both physical and online. All children learn differently so we make learning as varied as possible whilst carefully matching learning to each child's stage of development, not age.

Practising sounds as they are taught in school, when at home, is one of the biggest ways children improve their reading and writing.