

# Preparing children for school



## Focus this month – Phonics

### Phonics knowledge focus -

- Using story stones or story blocks
- Spelling out names – focusing on the letters in children’s names
- Using letter blocks in playdough
- Sticking shiny gems on letters
- Reading an alphabet book
- Making puppets on sticks and letting the children tell the story
- Playing lots of listening games together
- Choosing a ‘book of the week’ and making up a puppet basket

### **Throughout the month we will also work on**

**Letters and sounds 1 - aspect 1** – environmental sounds

### **Maths –**

- Maths focus – weight and size
- Illustrated maths songs – 1 have 10 fingers; round and round the garden

## **Introduction – March plan**

### **Preparing for school focus – phonics**

**Dear parents,** this month and for the next few months we are going to explore Letters and Sounds Phase 1 and have fun with phonics. We will set up invitations to play and explore each morning

- the children will look forward to finding these invitations to play and we will model how they can be used. We will change the invitations after lunch to help to switch them on to learning through the day.

Here are some invitations to play examples...

- Using story stones or story blocks
- Spelling out names – focusing on the letters in children’s names
- Using letter blocks in playdough
- Sticking shiny gems on letters
- Reading an alphabet book
- Making puppets on sticks and letting the children tell the story
- Playing lots of listening games together
- Choosing a ‘book of the week’ and making up a puppet basket

**Note** – teachers want us to help children to learn the ways of writing they will need in class – they don’t want to have to un-teach them!

### **Letters and sounds 1 - aspect 1 – environmental sounds**

#### **Maths –**

- Maths focus – weight and size
- Illustrated maths songs – 1 have 10 fingers; round and round the garden

Before a child can develop **phonic knowledge** they need to have lots of experience of handling books, reading stories with adults, playing with storytelling and role playing. Through listening to and joining in with stories they will learn to enjoy books and being read to which will, in turn, help them to develop and understanding of how stories work.

When looking at pictures and reading to children we always point to the words. This will help children learn that the squiggles at the bottom of the page relate to the sounds we are making. We can then develop this by pointing out individual letters – usually ones that means something to the child like the initial letter of names they know well – and sounding them out so children copy.

We always use the phonic alphabet when reading to children – they need to learn a, b, c before they can start to learn capital letters. If we do use a capital letter we will say, for example, 'My name is Sarah - it starts with S which sounds like s'.

### **We play lots of phonics games with your child such as –**

- Reading 'Jolly Phonics' books and talking about the letters
- Making up rhyming words – sometimes with hilarious results!
- Challenging children with letter puzzles and jigsaws
- Tracing and writing letters in sand and playdough
- Playing 'I spy' and guess the letter games
- Fun alphabets featuring, for example, animals and trains to complement your child's interests
- Replacing words with pictures so children can read words alongside us – we have some lovely 'PB Bear' books and we make rebus rhymes which are great fun
- We have focus letters linked to our themed activities – for example, we recently learned about penguins and we looked for all the toys in our playroom that start with a 'p'
- Spotting words and labels (environmental print) when we go on outings
- Singing songs and rhymes to learn words and sounds in fun ways
- Playing games from 'Letters and Sounds phase 1'\* such as 'Rhythm safari' and 'Silly Soup'

We love playing phonics games, singing songs and reading books with your child and they tell us that they read lots of books at home too! Please let us know your child's favourite books so we can complement their learning while they are here... and remember this is a slow plod not a race!

\*You can download a copy of 'Letters and Sounds phase 1' here - <http://tinyurl.com/kvkybo5>.

Colour the letters you can name...

**b**

**p**

**d**

**v**

**o**

**l**

**h**

**y**

**m**

**g**

**w**

**u**

**a**

**q**

**t**

**c**

**i**

**n**

**x**

**e**

**k**

**z**

**f**

**r**

**j**

**s**

Challenging children to name the letter and say a word starting with or containing the letter eg a = apple, x is in fox, z = zoo. Using the phonic alphabet - a not Ay, b not Bee, z not Zed etc. We ask them to colour the letters they can confidently name. They might enjoy tracing the letters with their finger - most letters start at the top (not d and e).

# Letters and Sounds aspect 1 -

general sound discrimination –  
environmental

- What do we need to listen?
- What sense do we use?
- Shut our eyes – what can we hear?

## Planning activities...

---

- **Introducing listening -**

Sitting in a semi-circle so all the children can see us. We show them how to cross their legs and put their hands in their laps. Turning on listening ears and... discussing with the children what makes a good listener. - Everyone sit quietly, shutting our eyes and listening carefully to the sounds around us. What can the children hear? Listening to friends – what noises can you hear? Do friends snuffle, shuffle, sniff, click their tongues in their mouths, yawn, sneeze, cough etc.

---

- **Take the children on listening walk -**

Listening carefully and talking about what you can hear –

- Leaves crunching
  - Birds in the trees
  - Aeroplanes in the sky
  - A dog barking
  - Lavender rustling etc.
- 

- **Listen to sounds in the house**

Sitting with the children – We close our eyes – We listen carefully to the sounds in the house. What can the children hear? What do the children think is happening around them? Playing some common household sounds – The phone ringing; The doorbell; A door closing; Someone knocking on the door; The window being opened etc.

## **Sounds hide behind your back**

Sitting the children in a circle in front of us with their eyes closed. Using the musical instruments or common household objects to make a sound. Encouraging the children to take it in turns or put up their hands when they recognise the sound.

Listening carefully for other hidden sounds -

- Dropping objects without the children being able to see what we have in our hand – cotton reels, musical instruments, balls etc
- Playing snippets of instruments from a band – who can guess what they are called?
- Covering empty herb or spice bottles with paper so children cannot see the contents – fill them with rice, pasta, bells, balls etc and try to guess what is inside

**Extension activity** - the next step, when children can recognise a range of sounds, is to guess where sounds are coming from...

---

## **Sounds hide in a box**

Putting some familiar toys that make a noise inside a bag / box. Encouraging the children to listen carefully as we make a noise with the toy. Giving clues –

- We use these to open the door – a set of keys
- We eat these with my lunch – a crisp packet
- This insect makes a buzzing noise – a bee.

Taking the toys from the box when the children have guessed and asking them to find toys in the playroom which they can recognise by sound.

**We will observe** – do the children make connections between the clues we are giving and the sounds they can hear?

---

## **Plan a garden sound scavenger hunt**

A combination of words and pictures work very well for most young children. Things they might find in the garden include –

- Leaves – what sound do they make when you walk on them?
- Grass – what sound does it make when you pull it up?
- Musical instruments hidden behind or under things – what sounds do they make?

**We will observe** – are the children using the learning characteristics – especially 'thinking critically' when working out the answers to the clues you have given?

## **Make a phone**

Using 2 paper cups and a long piece of string to make a phone...Showing the children how to hold the cup to their mouth when they are speaking and their ear when they are listening.

\*This game takes good listening skills and a lot of concentration as well as cooperation.

**We will observe** – can the children work together, speaking and listening to each other?

---

## **Describe and find**

Setting up the small world farmyard with lots of different animals the children know and have played with before.

Describing one of the animals but not telling the children its name. We might say, for example –

- This animal has 4 legs and says 'moo' or for older children 'this animal has 4 legs, black and white skin and horns'
- This animal has lots of white fluffy fur and you can use it to make a jumper
- This animal has horns and says 'maaaaa'
- This bird hisses when it is cross
- This bird has 2 legs and feathers and says 'cock-a-doodle-doo' etc...

**Extension** – when the children know the game they can play with other animal sets, sea creatures, methods of transport etc.

**We will observe** – do the children know different animal names? Read 'Spot goes to the farm' and other farmyard books to extend their understanding.

---

### **Observations –**

Do the children engage with the activities?

Are the children starting to listen carefully?

Can the children sit quietly – legs crossed – listening ears turned on – hands in lap? Are they showing increasing body control?

Are there any concerns about a child's hearing? If yes, speak to parents re hearing check

### **Assessment -**

C & L - talk about what you have done – can the children discuss the activities?

PSED – making friends / self-confidence - can they say what they have heard and tell their friends?

Link learning to the Letters and Sounds phase 1 learning goals

### **Environmental Sounds – I can...**

- Identify sounds in my local area
- Identify indoor sounds
- Identify sounds in a sounds lotto game
- Identify hidden sounds
- Listen carefully
- Make correct animal sounds from set of clues
- Follow a set of clues to find something hidden in the garden

# Maths focus - Weight

**Weighing parcels** – setting up a role play post office with the children including weighing scales. Putting toys in boxes and using the scales to weigh them. Adding lots of literacy – weight charts and money – how much does it cost to post a parcel?

Encouraging children to record what they are doing – can they copy the number on the weighing scales onto paper? Making comparisons – is it a bigger number or a smaller number?

Getting them guessing – estimating – can they guess which is the heaviest / lightest parcel? Now put it on the scales and check. Were they right?

How heavy are the animals? Reading 'Who sank the boat?' by Pamela Allen and talking about weight – why did the boat sink? What do the children think – was it the mouse or the cow which sank the boat? Doing some experiments with boats and small world animals in the water tray to find out...

How heavy are the children? Weighing each child and help them to make a graph from lightest to heaviest.

**Example activity idea** – making a simple balance – 2 buckets on the ends of a sturdy stick.

Providing some resources for the children to weigh and compare. Older children can be challenged to compare, for example...

20 paper clips and 1 story book

3 dice and 2 pieces of paper

1 doll and 2 photos

10 pencils and 2 toy fish

...getting them using their critical thinking skills (develop their learning characteristics) and making estimations first to determine which they think might be the heaviest before trying it out on the scales.

**Supporting home learning** – asking parents for baby photos for each of the children. Using them to help make comparisons between weight as a baby and weight now. Which is heavier / lighter?

# Maths focus - Size

Size is best learned through making comparisons in everyday play – what is big and what is small? Is the sky big or small? Are the flowers big or small? Is daddy big or small... what about mummy and baby brother or sister?

**Books** to support learning include...

- 'Watch out! Big Bro is coming!' by Jez Alborough
- Books about the Large family of elephants eg 'A piece of cake' by Jill Murphy
- 'The Big Sneeze' by Ginger Duncan

**Making a size comparison book** –

- The whale is big ... the mouse is small
- The bus is big... the car is small
- The box is big... the box is small
- The horse is big... the pony is small
- The man is big... the baby is small etc.

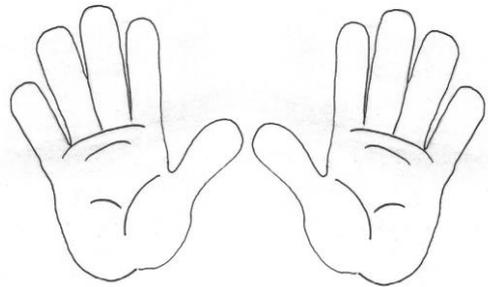
**Sorting basket** - putting together a basket of food items – cans, boxes, bags of flour, different types of fruit and vegetables etc. Using them for a sorting game – can the children decide if they are big or small and put them in the right piles?

**Example activity idea** – drawing a series of different sizes of circles and suggesting the children to cut around them (practicing scissor skills). Putting the circles together into a pile and talking about their size...making size comparisons – are they bigger or smaller?

**Supporting home learning** – explaining to parents that we have been talking about size and making comparisons to teach the children that size is a relative concept depending on what they are doing at the time. A pencil might be long – a ruler might be longer... suggesting that they chat to their child about size when they are out and about and make comparisons.

## **I have 10 fingers**

I have ten little fingers and they all belong to me  
I can make them do things would you like to see?  
I can shut them up tight  
I can open them wide  
I can put them both together  
I can make them all hide  
I can make them jump high  
I can make them jump low  
I can fold them up quietly and hold them just so.



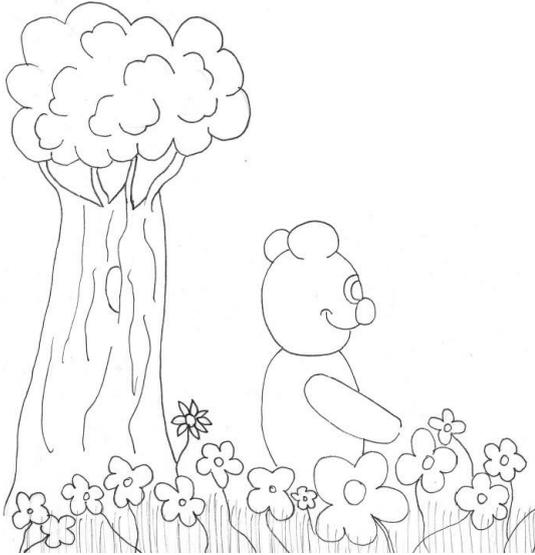
### **Example activity ideas – I have 10 fingers**

- We say to the children 'give me 5 – 1, 2, 3, 4, 5' ... then 'give me 10 – 6, 7, 8, 9, 10' to start teaching them about counting on
- What else can you do with your fingers?
- Playing a hiding fingers game using lots of positional language – behind, in front of, inside, under, on top of etc
- Drawing round hands and decorate them – looking at some hand painting websites for inspiration

**Observing** – do the children know they have 5 fingers on each hand?

**Support home learning** – asking the parents if they do high 5, low 5, slide 5 etc with their child at home

## References



Round and round the garden

Like a teddy bear

1 step, 2 steps

And tickle him/her under there!

...give each child a turn

## Example activity ideas – round and round the garden

- Stretching out the '1 step 2 steps' to build anticipation
- Encouraging the children to play the game on each other
- Talking about being gentle when touching other people and asking permission to invade personal space / waiting for an invitation
- Dancing round the garden, singing the song and creeping up on a teddy bear who is hiding from the children behind a tree / bush
- Reading books about teddies and having a teddy bear's picnic
- Singing more teddy songs eg 'rock a bye your bear' from The Wiggles or 'teddy bear, teddy bear turn around'

**Observing** – do the children understand the importance of personal space – we have a bubble around us and other people should not come into our bubble unless we invite them

**Support home learning** – explaining to parents that we are introducing their child to the PANTS rule very gently through songs such as this one.