Welcome to Rapid Phonics.

As you embark on Rapid Phonics I believe you will have an effective tool to teach every child to read and spell well. I created Rapid Phonics from my years of experience as an Educational Psychologist with children who have reading, writing and other complex learning difficulties.

It was once thought that some children would never acquire adequate literacy, eventually getting a diagnosis of dyslexia. I could not accept this and devised a synthetic phonics programme, to get all children off to a flying start with their reading and writing. The programme, called Sound Discovery, has been researched with hundreds of children of all abilities and backgrounds. It has achieved reading and spelling success for whole classes of children including vulnerable groups and those who were slow-to-start. Teachers and children enjoy its simplicity and the structured way of teaching called the Snappy Lesson. It works!

The research highlighted how crucial it is that children who struggle are identified early and receive the best extra teaching possible. There appears to be a critical period in a child's development which can make a huge difference. This is why, a decade later, I used this experience to create the Rapid Phonics programme.

Rapid Phonics is designed to support children as soon as any problems with their phonics learning are observed. It is fun, multi-sensory and engaging. It aims to give all children a firm grasp of phonic knowledge and skills. At the core are the Snappy Lesson plans. The lessons are fast-paced and interactive which keeps vulnerable groups of children motivated and focused. Simple assessments are used to monitor progress and move children along at the right pace. Finely graded decodable reading books build confidence and fluency as children apply their sounding and blending skills successfully. The children can then build independence through reading eBooks.

I believe that helping every child to learn to read and spell takes passion, commitment and vigorous teaching but with an effective programme the rewards can be huge.

I wish you well as you start this programme. It is supremely satisfying as a teacher to know that you are making a massive difference to your children's life chances. You are giving them the precious gift of literacy.

Dr Marlynne Grant

Rapid Phonics is a programme designed to support you in your work with children who find reading difficult. It provides:

- Snappy Lesson plans to secure children's phonic knowledge, blending and segmenting skills
- ready-made flashcards and photocopiable resources to use during these sessions
- finely-levelled 100% decodable readers for children to practise and apply their new skills
- eBooks for further practice and to build confidence and fluency
- assessment tests to help pinpoint children's needs and set them on the right path
- professional development and training to help teachers, TAs and SENCOs get the most out of the resources.

Five principles of Rapid Phonics

1. Teaching is interactive and lively.
2. Direct instruction (modelling): I do, we do together, you do.
3. Sessions have a fast pace to engage children's attention and manage behaviour.
4. Strategies are multisensory, integrating what you SEE (letters) with what you HEAR (sounds) and with what you DO.
5. Practise – little and often – with materials at exactly the right level.

Who are the target children?

Rapid Phonics is designed to support children as soon as any problems with their phonics learning are observed. It is aimed at children from Year 1 upwards, or for children younger or older, as your professional judgement dictates.

Teaching synthetic phonics to struggling learners

In synthetic phonics there are four essential tools for literacy:

- letter/sound matches (also known as grapheme/phoneme correspondences)
- the phonological skill of blending (synthesis) for reading
- the phonological skill of phoneme segmentation (hearing sounds in words) for spelling and writing
- understanding that blending and segmenting are reversible processes.

Young children learn these tools very quickly. Older children and adults with literacy difficulties can also learn them but the process will be harder, as they have probably acquired unhelpful strategies and hypotheses about what reading and spelling are all about.

Systematic, synthetic phonics programmes can provide beginner readers with the very best start. They can also unlock the secrets of reading success for older children with literacy difficulties. Rapid Phonics provides an overview of the bare bones of alphabetic knowledge which are a must for competent literacy. The 'bones' are presented in a sequence of teaching steps from simple to more complex.

Simply learning the alphabetic code is not enough, however. Children need to master the skills of blending and segmenting, and to realise that these are reversible processes, i.e. that they can write down what they say and they can read back what they write. Rapid Phonics provides the explicit teaching and the repeated practice that is necessary for children to master these skills.

Using Rapid Phonics with other programmes

Rapid Phonics can be used alongside other high-quality, systematic synthetic programmes. It follows a unique structure that has a strong correlation with many other phonics programmes, such as Letters and Sounds. To see the correlation between the Rapid Phonics Steps and Letters and Sounds Phases and Sets, please see page 9. Like many other phonics programmes, Rapid Phonics starts with the alphabetic code with simple letters of the alphabet before progressing to digraphs and trigraphs, and then to alternative spellings.

By using Rapid Phonics you can be sure that children will become confident with all of the letter/sound correspondences they need and that they will secure the skills of sounding and blending for reading and segmenting for spelling. They will also be supported in their learning of high-frequency 'tricky' words.

All schools will use their professional judgement to decide when and how to carry out interventions such as Rapid Phonics, depending on the needs of the individual children, the availability of staff, and the school timetable. Many schools find that the best way to support children needing extra help is to use the intervention materials with children while the rest of the class is having their phonics or spelling session. This will help minimise confusion for children and ensure that they have the frequent, structured sessions that they need in order to progress.

Rapid Phonics and Rapid Reading

Rapid Phonics is designed to ensure that all children have a firm understanding of phonics and that this is their prime approach to decoding print. Rapid Phonics should be used as soon as problems are identified, to prevent children slipping further behind. The Rapid Phonics books share many of the features that make the Rapid Reading books so motivational and enjoyable for children. The difference is that the Rapid Phonics books are decodable, which means that children can apply their phonics from the beginning.

Once they have mastered the basic code, some children may benefit from the additional breadth that the Rapid Reading Starter Level books offer. Teachers should draw children's attention to any 'tricky' words in the Rapid Reading books and encourage children to use their phonic strategies to decode as much of the word as possible, pointing out the tricky bit.

Rapid Reading Series 1 and 2 are ideal for children who have a good understanding of the alphabetic code but who need the extra confidence and motivation that the finely-graded structure brings. Rapid Reading reinforces phonic learning through the Phonic Focus sections in the books themselves, as well as the photocopiable sheets. It also supports the development of further comprehension skills.

The structure of Rapid Phonics

The progressive, carefully-controlled structure of Rapid Phonics is a special feature of the programme. It is this structure that makes it so effective as a systematic, synthetic phonics catch-up programme.

Step 1

Step 1 is based on the letters of the alphabet. This step provides one-to-one mapping between the letters of written language and the sounds of spoken language. Hence written English, at this stage, can be 100% consistent and regular. It is really important that children have an automatic grasp and complete mastery of letter/sound matches and it is worth taking some time to build up this automaticity. Rapid Phonics begins with consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words at Step 1.1 because research indicates that these words are learned more easily than vowel-consonant (VC) words.

Step 1.2 introduces CVC compound words as an optional step for older children. It has been found to be especially motivating and encouraging for struggling learners. End consonant clusters are deliberately introduced next at Step 1.3 before initial consonant clusters at Step 1.4 because research indicates that end clusters are learned more easily. Step 1.5 extends blending and segmenting skills to five and six phoneme words.

Step 2

Step 2 introduces consonant and vowel digraphs for children who have secure and automatic letter/sound matches at Step 1 and well–developed blending and segmenting skills. Research indicates that consonant digraphs are learned more easily than vowel digraphs, so these are taught first.

Step 3

Step 3 teaches the most frequently occurring spelling choices for children who have a secure and automatic grasp of the 40+ letter/sound matches at Steps 1 and 2 and well-developed blending and segmenting skills. This stage should be an essential part of any literacy programme as it takes account of the unique nature of the complex and ancient code which is the English writing system. When spelling alternatives are learned at this stage, written English can become much more predictable and regular.

Teaching tricky or irregular words

A small percentage of words in the English language can be considered to be irregular. In Rapid Phonics, a word is designated 'tricky' if it contains a phoneme-grapheme correspondence that is unusual, or is one that hasn't yet been taught in a Snappy Lesson. These words are often high-frequency words such as he, she, go, to, said and as such are encountered frequently by children. When introducing a tricky word, teachers should point out the irregular part(s) of the word, and encourage children to use their phonic knowledge to blend the rest.

Code knowledge assessment

Name ....

You can assess a child's code knowledge using the phoneme cards supplied as part of Rapid Phonics:

1. Show the child each card in turn and ask them to say the sound that it represents.
2. Make a note of their responses using Sheet 1.
3. Give the child a mini-whiteboard with lines or piece of lined paper and ask them to write down the phonemes as you dictate them.
4. Use Sheet 1 to make a note of their responses, and/or photocopy their whiteboard and/or keep the piece of paper they have used for writing.

Alphabet graphemes				Digraphs and trigraphs		
Sound/ Grapheme	Can child say the sound?	Can child write the sound?		Sound/ Grapheme	Can child say the sound?	Can child write the sound?
s				ck		
a				sh		
t				ch		
p				**th** (as in this)		
i				th (as in thin)		
n				ng		
c				ai		
e				ee		
h				ie (as in pie)		
r				oa		
m				ue		
d				ar		
g				er		
o				or		
u				oi		
l				ou (as in house)		
f				oo (as in look)		
b				**oo** (as in zoo)		
j				air		
v				ear		
w				ure		
z						
y						
k						
q						
x						

Total number of alphabet graphemes read .... /26
Total number of digraphs and trigraphs read .... /20
Total number of alphabet graphemes written from dictation .... /26
Total number of digraphs and trigraphs written from dictation .... /20

Name ....

Oral blending test

Say "I am going to say some sounds. You tell me what words you can hear."

Say each phoneme in the first word with a one-second gap between each. Help children if they cannot do it. Present the next example in the same way but accept the first answer.

Example

d-o-g	ou-t	p-ai-n	m-u-s-t	f-r-o-m	p-r-i-n-t

Total   / 5

Oral segmenting test

Say "This time I will say the word and you tell me all the sounds in the word." Demonstrate with the example word 'sat'. Try to ensure the child understands the task.

Present each word in turn and accept the first answer.

Example

sat (3)	posh (3)	boat (3)	camp (4)	stop (4)	ground (5)

Total   / 5

A score of less than 5/5 for either test indicates a weakness in either blending or segmenting skills.