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Version 01

A Guide to Phonics for Schools in Wales

CAL:ON CYMRU

Canolfan Addysgu Llythrennedd:
Offer tuag at Newid

Centre for the Advancement of Literacy:
research-led Outcomes and Nation-wide change

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From Anna Brychan MS

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Foreword

Every child in Wales should have the opportunity to become a confident, capable and conscientious reader and writer. Literacy enables learners to participate fully in education, express their ideas and explore the world around them. It also opens up the enjoyment of literature and a deeper connection with our languages, cultures, and communities.

I am pleased to welcome A Guide to Phonics for Schools in Wales and its companion guide for teachers. Developed specifically for Wales, these freely available, research and evidence informed resources provide high-quality, practical support for the teaching of foundational literacy within the Curriculum for Wales. Their publication takes forward an important commitment within our Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Plan.

Our Plan is clear that systematic synthetic phonics has an important role in teaching children to decode words. These guides translate the research and evidence about effective phonics teaching into clear, practical support for schools and practitioners. They place phonics within the broader provision children need to become successful readers and writers, alongside oral language, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and opportunities to enjoy a wide range of texts.

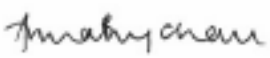
The guides reflect Wales's distinctive bilingual context. They address teaching in Welsh and English, recognising both the knowledge learners can draw upon across languages and the differences that require explicit teaching. This provides practitioners with support that reflects the characteristics of our languages and the context in which they teach.

> **Every child in Wales should have the opportunity to become a confident, capable reader and writer.**

The guides form part of wider support available through CAL:ON Cymru to help schools strengthen literacy teaching and put evidence into practice. This includes free, bilingual support bringing together professional learning, whole-class teaching programmes, targeted interventions and assessment tools. These resources draw on research and are being evaluated and refined with schools to ensure their relevance to practice in Wales. Alongside the professional learning and resources provided by Dysgu and Adnodd, this will help ensure schools and practitioners have access to high-quality guidance, professional learning and educational resources. Together these elements will reinforce one another, so that practitioners encounter consistent messages in the guidance they read, the professional learning they undertake and the resources they use.

Our practitioners bring considerable knowledge, experience and commitment to supporting learners. They deserve clear guidance and sustained support to put it into practice. I encourage schools to use these guides to inform professional discussion, strengthen teaching and identify where further support is needed. High expectations for all learners must be accompanied by teaching that responds to specific learners' needs, including timely help for those who experience difficulties with reading.

I would like to thank the practitioners, researchers and partner organisations whose expertise has contributed to these guides. Through this shared endeavour, we are strengthening the support available to schools and helping more learners develop the skills and confidence to read, write and learn throughout their lives.



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Contributions through development and review, specialist advice, or external review do not imply endorsement of every aspect of the final guide.

Who this guide is for

Welsh Government has set out its expectation that schools use a type of systematic phonics teaching called systematic synthetic phonics (SSP). This guide sets out a shared, Wales-wide understanding of SSP and how it supports reading and spelling in Welsh and English. It is designed to be practical: it includes clear expectations, uses accessible language wherever possible, and explains essential technical terminology through definitions and examples. Schools can apply it using phonics programmes and resources that meet the teaching and evidence criteria in this guide. It aligns with the Curriculum for Wales emphasis on progression in literacy across the curriculum.

The Welsh Government's Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Plan (2026) states that all schools should use SSP as part of their approach to teaching children to read. In SSP, teachers explicitly teach grapheme-phoneme correspondences in a planned, cumulative sequence; teach learners to blend phonemes; to decode unfamiliar words; and teach them to segment spoken words into phonemes for spelling.
These practices sit within a broader literacy curriculum that develops oral language, vocabulary, comprehension, and engagement with texts from the outset. Section 2 explains the approach and the evidence underpinning it.

Systematic synthetic phonics (SSP) is critically important for learning to read and spell in Welsh and English but is often considered 'finished' by the end of early primary school. The need for explicit phonics teaching reduces as learners become accurate and fluent word readers. Some learners need further phonics in later primary or early secondary education; others need support principally with fluency, oral language, or reading comprehension. Assessment should identify the knowledge and skills requiring support and consider teaching history. Persistent difficulties may reflect previous teaching opportunities and experiences, interrupted learning, additional learning needs, or an interaction between these factors. This guide therefore covers early teaching and assessment-informed support in later schooling.

This guide is also based on the Literacy Expert Panel's Principles for Language and Literacy in Wales (2026):

01. A strong foundation in spoken language is essential for the successful development of learners' literacy across all stages.

02. The teaching of literacy should be systematic, structured, and explicit.

03. Making connections between listening, speaking, reading, and writing is vital for supporting learners to learn, communicate, and make meaning.

04. Teaching should generate enjoyment, success, and motivation.

05. Purposeful assessment is fundamental to supporting the informed, responsive teaching of language and literacy skills.

This guide mainly addresses Principle 2. It also places phonics within a strong foundation of spoken language (Principle 1), the connections between listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Principle 3), teaching that builds enjoyment, success, and motivation (Principle 4), and purposeful assessment that informs responsive teaching (Principle 5).

Literacy Expert Panel's Principles for Language and Literacy in Wales (2026):

This document is the full point of reference. A related publication, **A Summary for Teachers and Teaching Assistants**, provides a condensed guide and signposts readers to the relevant sections and appendices.

This guide comprises five sections. The sections do not need to be read in order and can be read in isolation. These sections include:

Section 1: Why phonics matters for reading and spelling

Section 2: What is phonics?

Section 3: Progression and content

Section 4: What high-quality phonics teaching looks like

Section 5: Supporting all learners

Appendix A: How the Welsh and English codes compare

Appendix B: A checklist for choosing a phonics programme

Each section includes selected additional reading for those readers who wish to explore its topics further. These lists are not intended to be comprehensive. Full details of sources cited in the guide appear in the References section.

In writing this guide we reference the strongest available research evidence about phonics in a clear and accessible way, mindful of the bilingual setting in Wales. We recognise that although the wider phonics evidence base is substantial, there are areas in which the research is either mixed or limited. We therefore provide clear, practical recommendations about what is most likely to work for schools in Wales based on robust evidence, whilst explicitly noting current areas of uncertainty.

This guide covers:

- A shared definition of phonics and key terms used.
- What high-quality phonics teaching looks like (including blending, segmenting, review, and error correction).
- Principles for using decodable texts and teaching tricky/common exception words.
- Expectations for assessment and how to use assessment to adapt teaching.
- How to support learners who need additional practice (keep-up/catch-up and intensified teaching).
- How schools can evaluate phonics programmes and resources against quality criteria and evidence of effectiveness without endorsing specific products.
- Support for later primary and secondary settings.

This guide does not:

- Prescribe a single commercial programme[1] or scheme.
- Provide a mandatory national scope and sequence.
- Replace professional judgement about curriculum planning, wider reading, or language comprehension teaching.
- Endorse specific products.

Schools can decide how to organise and deliver systematic synthetic phonics teaching. Whatever the approach, high-quality phonics requires a consistent commitment to systematic instruction, sufficient practice and application, and assessment-informed support so that all learners become accurate readers and spellers.

[1] *Commercial programmes are sometimes known as packages to schools.*

01

Section 1: Why phonics matters for reading and spelling

This section explains why phonics matters, how it contributes to reading and spelling, and how SSP fits within broader literacy teaching in Welsh and English.

Why phonics matters for reading and spelling

Learning to read and spell in alphabetic languages such as Welsh and English depends on learning the alphabetic code: how the sounds in spoken words (phonemes) are represented by letters and letter groups (graphemes). Phonics teaching supports learners to use this code explicitly and fluently. Welsh has a relatively transparent written language (orthography). This means its written letters and groups of letters generally represent sounds predictably. English has a less transparent orthography, with more alternative spellings for sounds and pronunciations. In both languages, learning the spelling-sound correspondences supports accurate word reading and spelling.

Leaving learners to only work that out from exposure tends to favour those who already have the language and support at home, so teaching the code directly is a matter of equity as well as effectiveness.

Systematic synthetic phonics helps learners to:

- Decode unfamiliar words by identifying the phonemes represented by the graphemes and blending them. For example, the English word *cat* and the Welsh word *mam* are each represented by three letters: <c> <a> <t> and <m> <a> <m>, respectively. In each word, the graphemes represent three phonemes that learners blend to read the word.
- Spell words accurately by segmenting words into phonemes and selecting the graphemes that represent them. For example, in English, *ship* is represented by <sh> <i> <p> → *ship*; In Welsh *llaw* is represented by: <ll> <a> <w> → *llaw*. This shows that a grapheme can contain more than one letter.
- Build a store of words that are recognised at sight, because each successful attempt at decoding a word helps to fix its spelling, sound and meaning in memory (see orthographic mapping in the **Key Terms** table).
- Develop automatic word reading, reducing the effort needed to decode and recognise words so that learners can focus increasingly on meaning.
- Build foundations for reading comprehension, spelling, writing fluency, and wider curriculum access, particularly for learners who find reading and writing more difficult.

The evidence strongly supports explicit, systematic, and cumulative phonics teaching, with frequent opportunities to practise and apply learning in both reading and spelling. SSP provides the instructional approach recommended by Welsh Government. SSP should be taught within a language-rich curriculum. Adults and learners talk about experiences, stories, and information, develop vocabulary, and discuss ideas and meanings. Early independent reading practice should match the code learners have been taught. Adult read-alouds (where adults read stories and non-fiction texts with rich and varied language aloud to learners) and supported shared reading also give access to texts beyond learners' current decoding ability, so that language and comprehension develop alongside word reading.

Phonics Should be Taught Alongside Other Knowledge and Skills

Reading comprehension depends on both word reading and language comprehension (Gough & Tunmer, 1986). Learners may struggle because they cannot read the words accurately and fluently, because they do not understand the vocabulary, sentence structures, or ideas in the text, or because of both. Teaching and assessment should attend to both dimensions.

Accurate and fluent word reading enables learners to access the language of a text from print. When word reading becomes efficient and automatic, cognitive resources are freed to focus on meaning. In this way, word reading is not an end in itself but a means to understanding the meaning of texts.

Accurate word reading alone is therefore not sufficient for comprehension. Even when learners can read words correctly, they may not understand a text if they lack vocabulary knowledge, relevant background knowledge, or the ability to interpret sentence structures and meaning across a passage. For this reason, phonics should be taught alongside other aspects of reading and spelling that develop the broader knowledge and language comprehension skills required for understanding and for writing.

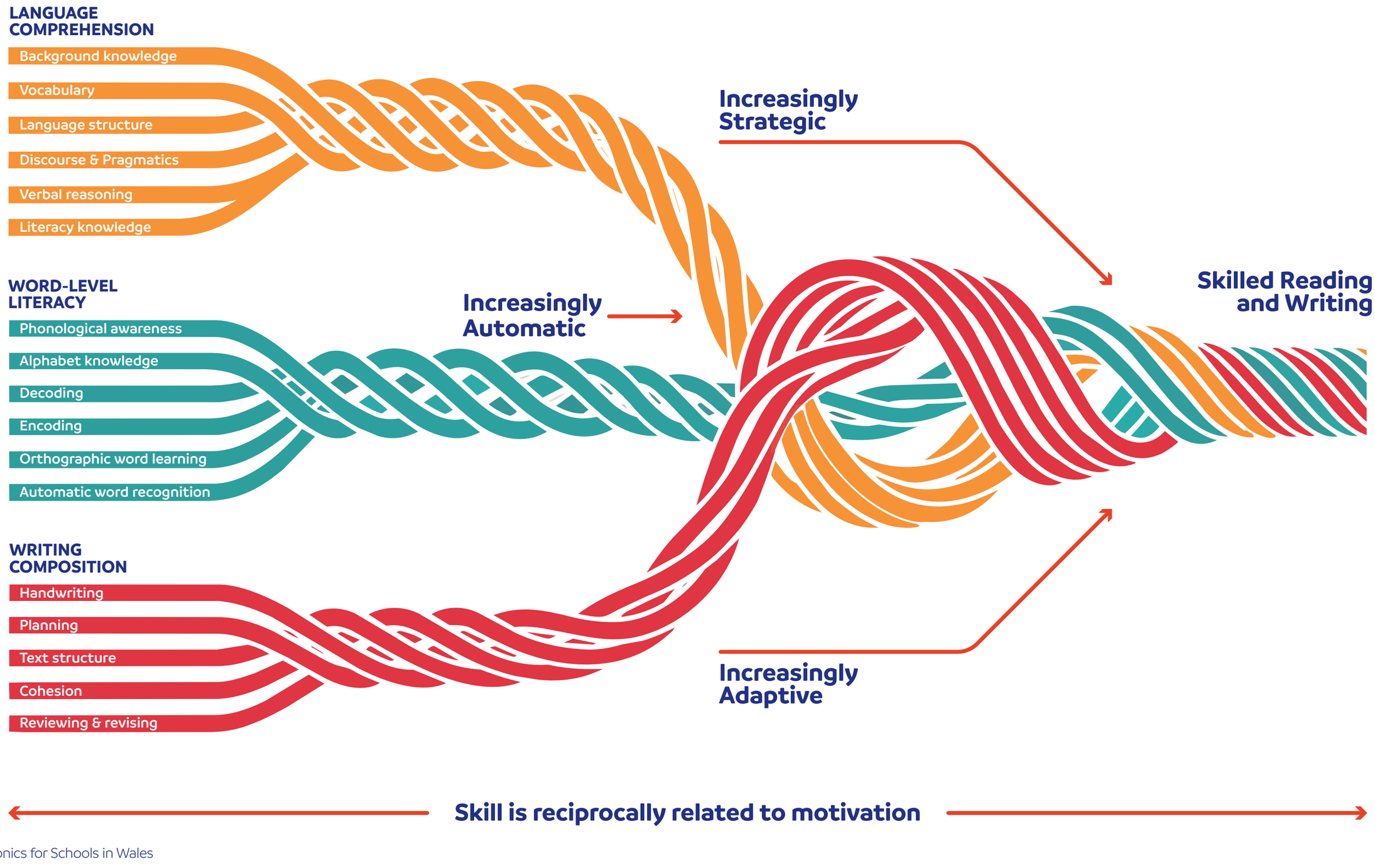
A helpful way to understand how phonics fits within literacy development is the CAL:ON Literacy Rope: (see below), which builds on Scarborough's Reading Rope (Scarborough, 2001) and extends it to writing and to bilingual development. It shows skilled literacy as the weaving together of three groups of strands:

- Word-level literacy, including phonological awareness, decoding, word recognition (reading familiar words automatically), and spelling.
- Language comprehension including vocabulary, background knowledge, language structures, and verbal reasoning.
- Writing composition, which draws on the same language knowledge to produce text.

These strands also make clear the terms used throughout this guide. **Decoding** means reading a word by translating its graphemes into phonemes and blending them. **Word recognition** means reading a familiar word automatically, without sounding it out. **Word reading** covers both. Because the strands are universal, the same picture applies in Welsh and in English, with learners developing the strands across both languages.

This integrated approach is consistent with the view that skilled reading develops when multiple strands are integrated and strengthened together over time. Teaching can also be aligned with principles described as structured literacy (International Dyslexia Association, 2019), in that teaching is planned, explicit, cumulative, and links reading and spelling with wider language development.

CAL:ON Literacy Rope:
Universal Strands for
Bilingual Development



The reading models describe how reading develops; they do not, by themselves, establish the effectiveness of a teaching programme. Recommendations here draw on research on early reading and on intervention research, with the relevant learner groups distinguished where they affect interpretation.

In practice, this means:

- Systematic phonics is important for accurate word reading and spelling.
- Accurate word reading and spelling are in turn necessary for reading comprehension and for writing. As transcription (spelling and handwriting/keyboarding) becomes automatic, more attention is free for understanding a text and for composing one.
- Teach phonics alongside oral language (including vocabulary), comprehension skills, and opportunities to respond to texts from the outset. As word reading becomes more fluent, learners can devote more attention to understanding and discussing increasingly complex texts.

What about bilingual learners?

In both Welsh and English, reading comprehension depends on decoding the print in that language and understanding the language of the text. However, bilingual learners are likely developing word reading and language comprehension across two languages. Evidence shows that decoding and oral language remain central, while the relative contribution of each can vary with language experience and proficiency.

Teaching should therefore:

- Build secure word reading in each language using systematic phonics.
- Explicitly develop oral language skills in each language used for reading and writing.
- Make planned, purposeful connections across languages where helpful (e.g., shared concepts and knowledge), without assuming that progress in one language automatically transfers to the other.



Additional Reading

August, D., & Shanahan, T. (Eds.). (2006). Developing literacy in second-language learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Castles, A., Rastle, K., & Nation, K. (2018). Ending the reading wars: Reading acquisition from novice to expert. Psychological Science in the Public Interest, 19(1), 5-51. https://doi.org/10.1177/1529100618772271

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Scarborough, H. S. (2001). Connecting early language and literacy to later reading (dis)abilities: Evidence, theory, and practice. In S. B. Neuman & D. K. Dickinson (Eds.), Handbook of early literacy research (Vol. 1, pp. 97-110). Guilford Press.

02

Section 2: What is phonics

This section sets out a shared definition of phonics, clarifies how phonics supports both reading and spelling, and explains key terms used throughout this guide.

What is Phonics

Phonics is the explicit and systematic teaching of the relationships between spoken sounds (phonemes) and the letters or letter groups that represent them in writing (graphemes). It also includes teaching blending and segmenting: learners blend the sounds of graphemes they know to decode unfamiliar words, and segment words into their sounds and select the corresponding graphemes in order to spell them accurately.

Phonics Approaches

Schools may encounter different labels for phonics approaches. The distinctions below explain these terms.

Common labels include:

- Synthetic phonics: teaches grapheme-phoneme correspondences (GPCs) in a planned sequence and teaches learners to convert graphemes to phonemes and blend to read words.
- Analytic phonics: a whole-to-part approach in which learners analyse whole words to identify letter-sound correspondences. Some approaches organise this work through parts of words such as onsets, rimes (the vowel and following consonant(s)), or word families.
  Analytic phonics and larger-unit phonics are related terms, but they are not interchangeable.
- Other systematic phonics: teach phonics systematically but do not fit neatly into either description above, or their published descriptions are not clear enough to classify.

The Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Plan (2026) states all schools should use systematic synthetic phonics (SSP) as part of their approach to teaching children to read. This guide sets out how schools can use SSP effectively in Welsh, English, and bilingual contexts. For the purpose of this guide, SSP is defined by its core instructional features, rather than by a particular commercial programme or by the detailed requirements of another country's policy.

'Synthetic' does not mean artificial. The name comes from synthesising, which is blending phonemes to form a word. In an SSP approach, learners are taught sounds represented by graphemes directly, in a planned order, from the start of learning to read, and they use them straight away: blending phonemes to read words, and segmenting spoken words into phonemes to spell them.

In practice, this involves teaching the grapheme-phoneme correspondences directly, following a planned, step-by-step sequence in each language, making decoding (blending the phonemes represented by the graphemes they have been taught) the main way learners read new words, and segmenting the main way they spell them. Application of learning is an important part of phonics teaching. Give learners daily chances to use what they have been taught in words, sentences, and connected text, checking that learning is secure before moving on to new material. Decoding is not only a beginner's strategy. Skilled readers can draw on decoding when they meet unfamiliar words, alongside their knowledge of vocabulary and word structure.

SSP forms one part of the broader literacy teaching illustrated by the CAL:ON Literacy Rope. These strands develop alongside phonics, rather than waiting until decoding is secure. Sections 3 to 5 explain how to connect them.

Commercial programmes[1] can support effective teaching when they meet the quality and evidence criteria set out in this guide, including robust assessment, inclusive design and strong implementation support. A programme[1] may be designed for one language. Schools should consider how their provision supports progress in Welsh and English where both are taught. **Appendix B** provides a checklist for judging phonics programmes[1].

How Phonics Supports Reading and Spelling

Phonics supports two closely related skills that draw on the same alphabetic code:

Word Reading

Decoding is the term used to describe reading words by translating graphemes into phonemes and blending those phonemes to say the word. With practice, decoding becomes more fluent and supports automatic word recognition. This is how word recognition develops. Each time a learner decodes a word successfully, more of its spelling is stored in memory, so that the word is later recognised without conscious decoding.

Word Spelling

Encoding is the term used to describe spelling words by identifying the phonemes in a word, segmenting them in order, and choosing graphemes or grapheme strings to represent those sounds. As learners progress, spelling instruction should also help them learn common spellings for a sound (and when they are more likely to occur), patterns and conventions of the writing system, and how spelling can reflect meaning (e.g., morphemes).

What Phonics is Not

- Guessing words from pictures, context, or the first letter.
- Relying primarily on memorising whole words as the route to word reading.
- A replacement for teaching oral language skills (e.g., vocabulary, background knowledge, narrative, and understanding of texts).
- Limited to younger learners. Older learners who need it benefit from accelerated, systematic teaching of phonics.

What the Evidence Says

Large reviews consistently show that systematic phonics teaching improves word reading and spelling outcomes compared with approaches that provide little or no systematic phonics (National Reading Panel, 2000; Ehri et al., 2001). Comparisons between different systematic phonics approaches are less conclusive. The US National Reading Panel (2000) did not find statistically reliable differences between synthetic, analytic, and other systematic phonics approaches in its analysis. This does not weaken the case for systematic teaching or prevent a clear recommendation for SSP. In line with Welsh Government policy, this guide recommends explicit teaching of GPCs in a planned, cumulative sequence, blending phonemes to decode unfamiliar words, and segmenting spoken words for spelling, with assessment, practice, and application.

The effectiveness of phonics instruction also depends on the orthography being learned (that is, the writing system that links a language's sounds to its spellings). Welsh has a more transparent orthography than English, with generally more consistent sound-spelling correspondences. English includes more variable and complex mappings. As a result, learners may achieve accurate decoding relatively quickly in Welsh once common correspondences are taught, whereas English typically requires more extended teaching, review, and practice to master alternative spellings and pronunciations. In both languages, instruction should be systematic and tailored to the orthography, with explicit teaching about where Welsh and English correspondences overlap and differ. In transparent orthographies such as Welsh, teaching should move quickly from establishing accuracy to developing automaticity and fluency, so learners can decode efficiently in connected text and focus on comprehension.

For learners with persistent decoding difficulties, select suitable provision and check the quality, amount, and impact of teaching. Provide explicit, cumulative teaching of the alphabetic code, sufficient practice and review, and adaptations informed by assessment. Learners who experience difficulties with reading benefit from a multicomponent intervention: systematic code instruction alongside support with fluency, oral language, vocabulary, or comprehension, according to their assessed needs. Section 5 explains how to identify these needs, monitor progress, and adjust provision. Learners with secure decoding should receive support for their remaining difficulties rather than unnecessary repetition of phonics.

A note on notation

Throughout this guide, angle brackets < > are used to show graphemes (letters or groups of letters in writing), for example <s>, <sh> and Welsh <ll>. Forward slashes / / are used to show phonemes (sounds in spoken language), for example /s/, /sh/ and /ll/. To keep the guide accessible to practitioners, sounds are represented using familiar letter forms rather than symbols from the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). These representations are intended to show the sounds being taught, rather than to provide formal phonetic transcriptions.

Additional Reading

Ehri, L. C. (2005). Learning to read words: Theory, findings, and issues. Scientific Studies of Reading, 9(2), 167-188. https://doi.org/10.1207/s1532799xssr0902_4

Ellis, N. C., & Hooper, A. M. (2001). Why learning to read is easier in Welsh than in English: Orthographic transparency effects evinced with frequency-matched tests. Applied Psycholinguistics, 22(4), 571-599. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0142716401004052

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Table 1: Key Terms

The glossary explains key terms and gives their Welsh equivalents. In examples, < > marks written letters or letter groups and // marks spoken sounds. Sound examples use familiar letter forms rather than formal phonetic symbols.

TERM	WELSH	WHAT IT MEANS	Examples
Blending (synthesising)	Cyfuno	Combining individual phonemes to form a spoken word. In decoding, learners identify the phonemes represented by the graphemes and blend them to read the word.	/d/ /r/ /a/ /m/ /a/ → drama
Decoding	Dadgodio	Reading words by applying knowledge of GPCs (see below) and blending.	-
Digraph / trigraph	Deugraff/trigraff	Two/three letters representing one phoneme. In Welsh, digraphs such as ll, ch, dd, ff, ng, ph, rh, and th are letters of the alphabet in their own right.	In English: sh (digraph), igh (trigraph) In Welsh: ch, dd, ff, ng, ll, ph, rh, th
Encoding	Amgodio	Spelling words by segmenting phonemes and selecting graphemes.	-
English common exception words (sometimes called tricky or irregular words)	Geiriau eithriad cyffredin Saesneg (gelwir rhain yn eiriau anodd weithiau)	High-frequency words that cannot yet be read or spelled fully using the GPCs taught so far, or that use less common spellings learners have not yet learned. Teach these explicitly, while drawing attention to the parts that are decodable.	*the, said, one*
GPC (grapheme-phoneme correspondence)	CGFf (cyfatebiaeth graffem-ffonem)	The relationship between a grapheme and a phoneme.	In English, <s> → /s/. In Welsh, <f> → /v/.
Grapheme	Graffem	A letter or group of letters representing a sound.	In English: s, sh, igh. In Welsh: l, ll, ch.
Letter knowledge	Adnabod llythrennau	The ability to recognise letters, know their names, and understand the sound(s) they represent in print.	-
Morphology	Morffoleg	How words are built from meaningful parts, such as base words, prefixes, and suffixes. A prefix comes before a base (*un*happy) and a suffix comes after it (help*ful*).	-
Orthographic mapping	Mapio orthograffig	The process by which readers store written words in memory by connecting their spellings to their pronunciations and meanings, so that words can later be recognised quickly by sight (i.e., word recognition).	-
Phoneme	Ffonem	The smallest contrastive unit of sound in a language.	The three sounds in *mam*: /m/ /a/ /m/
Phonemic awareness	Ymwybyddiaeth ffonemig	A specific type of phonological awareness: the ability to identify and manipulate phonemes.	Hearing that *sat* is made up of /s/ /a/ /t/.
Phonological awareness	Ymwybyddiaeth ffonolegol	Awareness of the sound structure of spoken language, including words, syllables, and rhyme.	Identifying and manipulating sounds in spoken words.
Segmenting	Segmentu	Breaking a word into phonemes to spell it.	piano → /p/ /i/ /a/ /n/ /o/
Sight words	Geiriau cyfarwydd	Words that have been learned and can be retrieved quickly from memory.	-
Word reading	Darllen geiriau	Reading a written word, either by decoding it, or by recognising it automatically.	-
Word recognition	Adnabod geiriau	Reading a familiar word accurately and automatically, without conscious decoding. This develops through successful decoding and learning the word's written form.	-

03

Section 3: Progression and content

This section describes the knowledge learners need and how teaching can build on it.

Progression and content

There is no mandated national scope and sequence, and keen observers will notice that each phonics programme has variations in sequence. Programmes differ and research has not established one optimal order for every learner. Analyses identifying grapheme–phoneme correspondences (GPCs) that enable readers to decode many words can inform planning (Vousden et al., 2011), but do not establish the most effective teaching sequence. Similarly, the school-phase examples later in this section are intended to support planning, but they do not prescribe a teaching sequence or set national age-related attainment standards.

Developing Phonemic Awareness and Code Knowledge Together

Phonics teaching builds on learners' understanding that spoken words are made up of sounds, and that these sounds can be represented in print. Phonemic awareness and knowledge of GPCs support each other's development as learners link the phonemes in spoken words to the graphemes that represent them when reading and spelling. Learners' understanding of the alphabetic principle depends on both. Oral language, comprehension, and engagement with texts develop alongside this learning.

During early teaching, help learners to:

- Hear, blend, and segment phonemes while connecting them with the graphemes being taught.
- Understand the alphabetic principle: that print represents speech.
- Learn GPCs and apply them to read and spell words.
- Move from simple words to more complex words as knowledge grows.

In both Welsh and English learners need secure word reading and language comprehension, but decoding accuracy often develops more quickly in languages with more consistent sound-spelling mappings, such as Welsh. This means that often the pace at which teaching emphasis shifts toward fluency and broader language work can happen sooner in Welsh, while still maintaining systematic code teaching for those who need it.

Phonemic Awareness Training Alongside Phonics

Phonemic awareness is the ability to identify and work with the individual phonemes in spoken words. For example, a learner with phonemic awareness can identify that the English word *sat* is made up of the sounds /s/ /a/ /t/, can blend /m/ /a/ /m/ to say *mam*, and can segment the spoken word *ship* into /sh/ /i/ /p/. Similarly, a child learning Welsh will hear that the word *pen* is made up of /p/ /e/ /n/, will blend /a/ /r/ /th/ to say *arth* and will segment the spoken word *ceg* into /c/ /e/ /g/. The skill concerns spoken sounds and teaching it with letters helps learners understand how speech and print connect.

Phonemic awareness is a specific part of phonological awareness. Phonological awareness is the broader awareness of the sound structure of spoken language, including larger units such as words, syllables, and rhyme. Phonemic awareness focuses specifically on phonemes: the smallest units of sound in spoken words. This distinction matters because phonics requires learners to connect individual phonemes in speech to graphemes in print. To use phonics for reading, learners need to blend phonemes together. To use phonics for spelling, they need to segment spoken words into phonemes and choose graphemes to represent them. The reason is straightforward: learners who can hear the separate sounds in a spoken word find it much easier to map those sounds onto the letters that represent them.

In Nursery, brief, playful activities with speech sounds can sit alongside songs, rhymes, stories, talk, and early encounters with print. There is no requirement to complete a period of oral-only phonemic-awareness teaching before beginning phonics. SSP should be underway in Reception, in the language in which learners first learn to read. Teach phoneme blending and segmenting alongside the graphemes being introduced, adapting the pace and support to learners' responses. Learners who find blending or segmenting difficult should receive additional modelling and guided practice alongside letter–sound teaching; they do not need to master these skills before phonics begins.

Good phonemic awareness teaching:

- Focuses on individual sounds: learners practise hearing, saying, blending, and segmenting phonemes in spoken words.
- Is brief and frequent: activities are short, regular, and carefully modelled.
- Uses listening and speaking (aural and oral) routines, showing and manipulating the taught graphemes as learners blend or segment phonemes.
- Models clearly: say a familiar word, draw attention to its phonemes, and show how the taught graphemes represent them. Use examples whose pronunciation is familiar in the language being taught.
- Makes the connection to print explicit from the start of SSP because phonemic awareness and GPC knowledge support each other.
- Uses brief checks to decide what to model or practise next, not to decide whether a learner is ready to encounter letters.
- Expects teachers to be attentive to the phonemes of the language being taught and should make differences between the languages explicit when helpful.

Examples of useful phonemic awareness activities include:

- **Blending:** show a short word made from taught graphemes, point to each as the phonemes are spoken, then blend them to read the word. Oral blending can be used briefly to model the process.
- **Segmenting**: say a familiar word, identify its phonemes, and use taught letters or letter tiles to represent them. For example, map the three phonemes in Welsh *pen* onto <p> <e> <n>.
- **Identifying phonemes**: ask learners to identify a phoneme in a familiar spoken word and connect it to a taught grapheme, for example the first phoneme in English *sun* and <s>.
- Asking learners whether two spoken words begin or end with the same sound.
- **Changing a phoneme:** where useful, use letter tiles to change one taught grapheme and read the resulting word, for example English *sat* to *sit*. More complex phoneme-manipulation tasks are not prerequisites for reading instruction.

The National Reading Panel (2000) found that phonemic-awareness teaching improved reading and spelling, with stronger transfer when letters were included than when they were not. This supports teaching phoneme awareness alongside GPCs. It does not imply that all oral sound activities are unhelpful or establish one optimal starting age or fixed amount of training. Keep activities purposeful and connect them directly to reading and spelling.

Introducing and Revisiting GPCs

Learners learn GPCs most effectively when teaching is systematic, cumulative, and revisited frequently.

Introduce new GPCs in small, teachable steps. When introducing them consider:

- Teaching linguistic terms (e.g., digraphs: two letters that represent one sound, such as <sh> in *ship* or <ll> in *llaw*), as they provide a shared language for discussing and consolidating learning.
- Explicitly teach by showing the grapheme, saying the phoneme, and modelling how to use it in reading and spelling.
- Practise immediately both by reading words using the new GPC and spelling words containing it.
- Plan spaced practice (revisit taught GPCs in reading and spelling over time, with gaps between practice sessions).
- Use brief cumulative checks to decide whether to move on to the next steps or do more practice.

Welsh and English have different alphabetic codes. Schools should ensure learners have systematic opportunities to learn and practise the GPCs and conventions relevant to their school's language(s) and avoid assuming that secure decoding in one language automatically means secure decoding in the other.

Building Accuracy and Automaticity

Accuracy must be the key focus in early phonics teaching. Learners learn to decode and spell reliably using taught GPCs. Teaching should also build automaticity so learners can allocate more attention to meaning.

Tips to support progression:

- Maintain high success using words made from the GPCs taught.
- Use repeated, successful practice (including re-reading words and short passages).
- Keep practice cumulative so learners apply earlier learning alongside newer content.

Because Welsh is a relatively transparent orthography, learners typically reach high levels of decoding earlier in Welsh than in English (in Welsh-medium settings, this partly reflects that learners have so far been taught to read only in Welsh), whereas English's more opaque spelling-sound mappings can slow accuracy growth and increase the need for item-specific practice (e.g., irregular words). In both languages, instruction should continue past accuracy, building fluency through plenty of successful reading practice, including re-reading words and passages that use the correspondences learners have been taught, while anticipating that some learners may require more cumulative practice to become automatic in English, even when they appear accurate relatively quickly in Welsh.

Introducing English Phonics in Welsh Medium Settings

Year 3 is the expected point at which explicit English phonics begins in Welsh-medium settings. English phonics is added once Welsh literacy teaching is established, rather than exchanged for it. This is a practical sequencing recommendation, not a research-established optimal starting point. Welsh-medium settings introducing English should read this subsection and English-medium settings introducing Welsh should read the following section.

Welsh has a relatively consistent sound-spelling system, which helps many learners develop strong phonemic awareness, early decoding skills, and confidence as readers. By Year 3, most learners understand that reading involves turning letters into sounds and blending them, and spelling involves turning sounds into letters. When learners begin to learn to read and spell in English, however, they encounter a different phonics system. English spellings are less consistent than Welsh, and many sounds can be represented in several different ways (e.g.,, the sound */ee/* in *see, seat, happy*). Because of this, learners benefit from explicit teaching of English phonics, rather than being expected to transfer automatically from Welsh.

Learners can use skills developed in Welsh, including phonemic awareness, blending, and an understanding of how print represents speech, when learning English. This means learners are well placed to learn English phonics efficiently. When introducing English phonics, build on the skills learners have developed through Welsh, such as identifying individual sounds in spoken words, blending sounds to read words, and understanding how letters and letter groups represent sounds. These skills can support reading in English, but learners also need to learn how the English code differs. Check which English letter–sound correspondences they can already use, then explicitly teach and practise those they still need. Use these checks to guide the content and pace of teaching: secure reading in Welsh does not mean that learners already know the English code.

Introducing English phonics explicitly in Year 3 allows teachers to:

- Build on learners' strong foundations from Welsh phonics.
- Make clear where English is similar to and different from Welsh.
- Support accurate decoding and spelling in English from the outset.
- Reduce later difficulties with reading fluency.

This approach does not mean starting again with phonics. Instead, it involves re-using familiar routines (e.g., blending, segmenting, cumulative practice) while teaching learners the specific sound-spelling patterns of English. Over time, this supports learners to become confident, accurate readers and writers in both languages. It also helps to tell learners what to expect from the English code. In English, graphemes have alternative pronunciations more often than in Welsh, the same letters can say more than one sound, so learners will sometimes need to try an alternative pronunciation and check whether the result is a word they know.

Many schools choose to use an established SSP programme[1] for English when learners begin learning English reading and spelling in Year 3. This can be an effective and efficient approach, provided the programme is adapted thoughtfully to reflect learners' prior experience of Welsh phonics.

The key principle is that learners are not beginners in phonics. They are beginners in English phonics.

When introducing an English SSP programme in Year 3, schools should acknowledge most learners will already understand the core phonics concepts:

- That words are made up of phonemes.
- That phonemes are represented by letters or letter groups.
- How to blend for reading and segment for spelling.

Teaching should therefore move briskly through familiar routines, while focusing teaching time on what is new in English. Many SSP programmes are designed for younger children. In Year 3, it may be appropriate to:

- Move more quickly through early stages.
- Combine early units where appropriate.
- Ensure learners are not held back by unnecessary repetition of concepts they already understand.
- Check that practice texts and materials suit learners' age as well as their level, since materials designed for much younger children can feel demeaning and reduce engagement.

Teaching should highlight where English differs from Welsh, for example:

- Multiple spellings for the same sound in English.
- Less predictable vowel spellings.
- Double letters: Welsh <ll>, <ff> and <dd> are digraphs and letters of the Welsh alphabet, each representing a single phoneme. In English, doubled consonants may reflect a spelling convention, as in *hop* → *hopping*, or a boundary between morphemes, as in *mis-* + *spell* → *misspell*. Teach the relevant spelling pattern or word structure explicitly.
- Differences in spelling conventions and morphology. Making these contrasts explicit helps learners avoid confusion and supports accurate spelling.

English phonics should support, and be supported by, purposeful teaching of:

- English vocabulary and oral language.
- Reading fluency.
- Spelling and writing.
- Comprehension.

This supports learners to use their decoding skills meaningfully as they encounter increasingly complex English texts.

Avoid:

- Treating Year 3 learners as if they are new to phonics altogether.
- Relying on informal exposure to English text without explicit teaching of the English sound-spelling system.
- Assuming that strong Welsh decoding will automatically transfer to accurate English spelling.
- Overly reducing pace to fit a programme's original age design, rather than learners' actual level of understanding.

Year 3 Transition to English Phonics in Welsh Medium Contexts

Schools should plan the introduction of English phonics deliberately, rather than letting it develop through incidental exposure to English text. Some considerations are set out below and schools should adapt the detail to their own context and learners.

Timing: Begin explicit English phonics early in Year 3, once classroom routines are established. Welsh literacy teaching continues throughout, and English phonics should be added alongside it. Use short, regular sessions -- for example, 15–20 minutes -- the duration and frequency informed by learners' needs and progress.

Starting points: Begin with a brief check of what learners already know of the English code (e.g., letter-sound knowledge and simple word reading), and place learners within the programme or sequence accordingly, rather than starting at the programme's nominal beginning. It can be helpful to group by need, where it is practical.

Sequencing content: It is helpful to begin where the two codes are the same. The opening stages of most English programmes (e.g., s, a, t, p, i, n) are largely shared with Welsh, so learners experience early success with familiar routines, and you should not need to reorder a programme. Content that belongs only to English, such as vowel teams (ee, oa, igh) and split digraphs, should be regarded as new learning and follow the programme's cumulative sequence in the usual way.

The graphemes that appear in both languages with different sounds (e.g., f, u, w, y, ll, ch, dd) require careful teaching. Plan when each will be introduced, teach it through explicit contrast with its Welsh counterpart, and avoid introducing the English equivalent while the same letter is the focus of new Welsh teaching. Once both are secure, bring them together deliberately. This can be done by contrasting and mixing them. In practice this builds reliable discrimination. **Table 2** (see below) sets out the three groups, and **Appendix A** includes a chart with the two codes grapheme-by-grapheme.

Keeping the two codes distinct: Teach English phonics in clearly signalled English sessions and keep the language of instruction consistent within a session. Learners will sometimes read an English word with a Welsh sound, or a Welsh word with an English one. For example, reading *fun* as "vun", because <f> says /v/ in Welsh. This is known as transfer because the learner is sensibly using what they know from one language in the other. We should treat this as a sign of learning. Correct the language-specific reading supportively through a brief contrast, then ask the learner to read the word again. For example: "In Welsh, <f> says /v/, as in *fel*. In English, <f> says /f/, as in *fun*."

Reviewing the balance between English and Welsh. As accuracy in English grows, adjust the weekly balance between English and Welsh so that learners practise reading in both languages, in decodable and wider texts. Over Years 3 and 4, most learners move on to increasingly complex texts in both languages, with phonics teaching continuing for those who need it.

Build on the routines learners already use in Welsh, check which skills transfer, and teach English-specific correspondences explicitly. The sequence and amount of practice should respond to assessment. These practical recommendations draw on knowledge of the two writing systems and transfer research; they are not an experimentally established optimal bilingual sequence.

Table 2: How the Welsh and English codes relate

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CODES	EXAMPLES	WHAT THIS MEANS FOR TEACHING
Same letter, same or very close sound	b, d, h, l, m, n, p, s, t; ff and ph (/f/); ng; th as in *thin*	Check whether learners can use these correspondences in the new language before deciding how much teaching or practice is needed.
Same letter, different sound	f (Welsh *fel*, English *fun*); u (Welsh *munud*, English *cup*); ll (Welsh digraph *llaw*, English *hill*); ch (Welsh *bach*, English *chip*); dd (Welsh *eistedd*, English *add*); w (Welsh as a vowel: *cwm* (also serves as a consonant: *wyn*), English as a consonant *wet*; y (Welsh *dyn*, *yn*; English *yes, happy, my*); c and g before e and i (Welsh *ceg*, *gardd*; English *cell*, *gem*); r (trilled or tapped in Welsh *rowlio*, English *red*)	Plan these deliberately. Teach each one through explicit contrast (In Welsh… In English…), and avoid introducing conflicting correspondences at the same time. In Welsh, <w> can represent either a vowel (e.g., *cwm*) or a consonant (e.g., *wyn*). The pronunciation of <u> varies regionally. Welsh <y> also represents different vowel sounds according to its position in a word: in non-final syllables it is often pronounced as a schwa (e.g., the first <y> in *mynydd*), while in final syllables and monosyllabic words it has a different vowel sound (e.g., *mynydd, dyn*). Model the Welsh pronunciations learners will hear locally.
Specific to one language	English: vowel teams and split digraphs (ee, oa, igh, a-e), k, v, x, qu, sh, ck. Welsh: rh, circumflex vowels (â, ô, ŵ) and, for learners new to Welsh, the sounds of ll and ch. Welsh also uses á (*caniatáu*) and ï (*sgïo*); both are rare and sound close to the unaccented vowels, so they need noting rather than teaching in depth.	Teach as new learning in the usual explicit way. Often the sound is familiar and only the spelling is new: English <v> writes the sound Welsh writes as <f>, and English <sh> writes the sound Welsh writes as <si>. Where the sound itself is new (/ll/> and /ch/ for English speakers), model it directly and give plenty of practice. Learners new to Welsh often read <rh> as /r/ followed by /h/; it needs teaching as a single letter with its own sound.

Introducing Welsh Phonics in English-medium Settings

Many English-medium schools introduce Welsh reading from Year 3 and often begin with phonics. Welsh has a consistent code, and learners who already read in English typically learn to decode Welsh quickly. These learners are not beginners in phonics, but they are beginners in Welsh phonics, and, crucially, often, in the Welsh language.

Reading in Welsh, like reading in English, depends on both decoding and on language comprehension together. Welsh spellings represent sounds relatively consistently, although some sounds vary with position or word. Knowing the correspondences supports accurate word reading and understanding what is read also depends on vocabulary, language knowledge, and background knowledge. Assess both, especially when learners are developing Welsh as an additional language.

Welsh phonics should therefore be taught within Welsh language teaching and alongside a planned sequence of Welsh GPCs. Teaching should also develop the vocabulary learners will meet in their reading, build listening comprehension and talk in Welsh, and make sure learners regularly read Welsh they can understand. Practice texts should match both the correspondences, and the vocabulary learners have been taught, and progress checks should ask what learners understood, as well as how accurately they read aloud.

The shared correspondences in **Table 2** (see above) can be useful for planning. The letters with different sounds in the two languages also need to be taught with explicit contrasts. Welsh-specific sounds such as /ll/, /ch/ and /rh/ are new for these learners and need direct modelling and practice. It also helps to tell learners what to expect from the Welsh code. Once they have learned a correspondence it will nearly always represent the same sound, so accurate decoding should come quickly.

Avoid:

- Treating Welsh reading as decoding only, with progress judged by accuracy of reading aloud alone.
- Leaving Welsh vocabulary and oral comprehension to incidental exposure.
- Using Welsh texts learners can decode but cannot understand.
- Assuming English reading habits transfer readily to Welsh.

Texts for Decoding Practice and Wider Reading

Decodable books often accompany phonics programmes and are designed so that most words can be read using the grapheme-phoneme correspondences (GPCs) learners have been taught. Their purpose is to increase the likelihood that learners will apply decoding successfully, because the text largely requires use of the taught code. It also gives learners the experience of succeeding, which supports confidence and motivation. This supports consolidation and reduces reliance on guessing.

However, the research evidence does not show that relying only on decodable texts is the most effective way to practise phonics, including for learners with reading difficulties (Price-Mohr & Price, 2018). A recent meta-analysis of decodable-text studies (Odo, 2024) found that practising with decodable texts had a moderate effect on learners' ability to sound out made-up words (pseudowords), and a smaller effect on their reading of real words. Pseudowords cannot be recognised from memory, so they are a test of whether learners can apply the code. In other words, decodable texts improve the skill they are designed to strengthen, but that advantage carries over less strongly to reading in general. The review therefore concluded that decodable texts should be used in combination with other reading materials. Whilst this evidence is limited by the way studies describe the texts used, it supports a mixed approach.

Learners learning to read in Welsh and English need structured opportunities to practise decoding in each language. Decodable texts aligned to the correspondences taught provide this structure. At the same time, learners should experience a wide range of high-quality texts (including stories and non-fiction) through read-alouds (where an adult reads aloud and learners listen) and shared/assisted reading, so that decoding develops alongside vocabulary, knowledge, comprehension, and motivation. Evidence also suggests that exposure to both narrative and informational texts broaden vocabulary development.

Use matched decodable texts for early independent decoding practice alongside adult-supported access to wider reading. In read-alouds, adults read while learners listen and discuss ideas. Adults can model phrasing and expression and explain unfamiliar vocabulary. In shared reading, the adult and learners attend to the same text, with modelling, discussion and supported participation. These activities allow access to richer language and ideas than learners can yet decode independently.

This approach reflects a wider principle that phonics should sit within a coherent, language-rich literacy curriculum. Decodable texts are a useful tool for building the code, but they are not a complete reading curriculum on their own.

Practical Tips:

- Decodable texts should be used for early independent reading practice in the language learners are learning to read, alongside regular supported engagement with richer texts to develop language, comprehension, and enjoyment of reading.
- Do not rely on decodable texts alone. Maintain regular read-alouds and shared/assisted reading with a wide range of Welsh and/or English texts, including both narrative and informational texts, to build language, knowledge, and enjoyment.
- For learners who are not making expected progress, increase opportunities to practise accurate decoding in decodable texts (often especially important in English), whilst continuing supported access to richer texts. In practice, this often means keeping decodable texts at the centre of independent practice and deliberately combining this with supported reading of wider texts to strengthen transfer, vocabulary, and motivation.
- Include opportunities to choose books and share reading with peers, with help to access texts where needed. These opportunities support engagement with reading; they complement, rather than replace, the explicit teaching a learner still needs.

Morphology

As learners' knowledge grows, more of the words they meet are supported not only by sound-spelling relationships but also by morphology, which is the knowledge of meaningful word parts (such as roots, prefixes, and suffixes) and how they combine. Morphology can be part of phonics teaching from the start, for example when inflectional endings such as -s, -ing and -ed are read and spelled, and common prefixes and suffixes are introduced and revisited as learners' knowledge develops.

The importance of morphology grows as learners meet longer and more complex words in texts, where spelling reflects meaning and word structure as well as sound, which is true from early on (e.g., the -ed ending keeps the same spelling in *kicked* and *landed*, although it is pronounced differently), and where spelling conventions govern how word parts join. In Welsh, spellings stay close to sound even in longer words, while endings and mutations carry much of the grammar and meaning.

Teaching morphology is especially useful when learners:

- Can decode many unfamiliar words using their grapheme-phoneme correspondence (GPC) knowledge.
- Are reading longer, morphologically complex words common in curriculum areas (e.g., science, history).
- Need support to make accurate spelling choices and to expand vocabulary efficiently.

Integrating Morphology

Morphology should be taught explicitly and systematically, while continuing to practise decoding and encoding routines. Effective approaches include:

- Teaching a small set of high-utility morphemes and word families explicitly and revisiting them across contexts.

English examples of high-utility morphemes include:

Common prefixes:

- un- (not): unhappy, unsafe
- re- (again): rewrite, rebuild
- dis- (not/opposite): disconnect, disagree
- pre- (before): preview, preheat
- mis- (wrongly): mistake, misbehave

Common suffixes

- -ed: jumped, helped
- -ing: running, playing
- -er / -est: smaller, fastest
- -ful / -less: helpful, hopeless
- -ion (often written as tion, sion): information, discussion

Roots and word families

- act: action, active, react
- help: helpful, helpless
- move: movement, remove
- struct (build): structure, construct, instruction
- geo (earth): geography, geology
- graph (write): autograph

In Welsh examples of high-utility morphemes include:

Common prefixes

- an- (not): anhapus (unhappy), anaddas (unsuitable)
- ail- (again/re-): ailddechrau (restart), ailysgrifennu (rewrite)
- cam- (wrong/mis-): camddeall (misunderstand)

Common suffixes

- -iad (noun formation): adrodd → adroddiad, datblygu → datblygiad
- -ol (adjectival): cenedl → cenedlaethol, safon → safonol
- -wr / -ydd (agent nouns): dysg → dysgwr, amaeth → amaethydd

Roots and word families

- dysg- (learning): dysgu, dysgwr, addysg
- ysgrifen- (write): ysgrifennu, ysgrifennwr, ysgrifenedig
- cenedl- (nation): cenedl, cenedlaethol, cenedlaetholdeb
- Linking morphemes to pronunciation, spelling, and meaning. For example, by exploring how adding a suffix or prefix changes a word's meaning or grammatical role, while often preserving its spelling (e.g., help → helpful; dysg → dysgwr).

Using morphology to support spelling decisions and curriculum vocabulary, such as:

- Understanding consistent spelling across word families (e.g., sign → signal; datblygu → datblygiad).
- Making informed spelling choices when words cannot be resolved by phonics alone.
- Supporting subject-specific vocabulary through shared roots and affixes (e.g., construct, construction; cenedl, cenedlaethol).

In English, morphology is particularly important for spelling and vocabulary development because many spellings preserve meaning and word structure in addition to reflecting sound. This is also why some spellings do not follow the most common correspondences. Research evidence shows that explicit morphology instruction improves morphological awareness and can support spelling accuracy and vocabulary growth, with more variable but sometimes positive effects on word reading and reading comprehension, particularly in later primary and secondary school.

In Welsh, the relatively consistent sound-spelling system can support earlier decoding accuracy. However, learners still benefit from explicit teaching that helps them understand how word parts and grammatical morphology relate to meaning and written forms, including:

- How prefixes and suffixes modify meaning.
- How word families support vocabulary growth.
- How grammatical morphology (e.g., inflections) signals meaning and function in text.

While the direct evidence for morphology instruction in Welsh is currently more limited than in English, planned and purposeful teaching of word structure is well-motivated and aligns with evidence from other highly consistent or transparent languages such as Spanish, German, and Italian. Teaching word structure also strengthens the links between reading, writing, and spoken language.

Across all schools, it is helpful to make planned, purposeful links between languages where appropriate (e.g.,, shared concepts), while continuing to teach the language-specific patterns learners need for accurate reading and writing in each language.

Morphology Across the Development of Reading and Spelling

The role of morphology in reading and writing develops over time. Instruction should therefore be planned, cumulative, and age-appropriate, building on learners' growing decoding, spelling, and language knowledge. It may be that your current phonics programme also incorporates morphology. However, below, we provide some suggested approaches for early primary, later primary, and secondary, that you may wish to include.

Early Primary

The focus in early primary schools should be on building early awareness that words have meaningful parts, alongside systematic phonics instruction. This will help learners notice that words can be built from smaller meaningful units, as well as supporting spelling, early vocabulary, and grammatical awareness without overloading working memory. At this stage, morphology complements but does not replace phonics. The primary route to word reading remains applying GPCs.

Practical suggestions:

- Teach a small set of high-frequency inflectional endings explicitly and orally (e.g., -s, -ed, -ing in English; plural and verb endings in Welsh where appropriate).
- Explore simple word families in context (e.g., help, helping, helped; dysg, dysgu, dysgwr).
- Use oral activities (sorting, clapping, building words aloud) alongside reading and writing.
- Draw attention to meaning changes, not just spelling changes (e.g., play vs played; fferm vs. ffermwr).
- Keep morphology embedded within reading and spelling routines, rather than as a separate topic.

Later Primary

The focus of using morphology here should be to support spelling accuracy, vocabulary growth, and efficient reading of longer words. You should help learners to use morphological structure to read, spell, and learn new words and support the transition from predominantly phonological strategies to morpho-phonological strategies, especially in English. At this stage, morphology should be taught explicitly and cumulatively, not assumed to develop incidentally through reading alone.

Practical suggestions:

- Teach high-utility prefixes and suffixes explicitly, revisiting them across curriculum areas.
  - In English: un- (not), re- (again), dis- (opposite/not), pre- (before); -tion, -ment, -ful
  - In Welsh: an- (not), ail- (again/re-), cam- (mis-/wrongly), rhag- (pre-/before); -iad (noun formation), -ol (adjectival), -og (descriptive), -wr / -ydd (agent nouns)
- Teach frequently occurring Latin and Greek roots, and how the same root recurs across curriculum areas (e.g., struct: structure, construct; geo: geography, geology; graph: autograph, paragraph).
- Build word families around curriculum vocabulary. Word families are groups of words that share a base word form and a core meaning (e.g., construct, construction, reconstruct; cenedl, cenedlaethol). Seeing the shared base helps learners read, spell and understand the whole family.
- Use morphology to support spelling, particularly where phonics alone is insufficient.
- Encourage learners to analyse unfamiliar words by identifying known morphemes during reading.
- In bilingual contexts, make planned cross-language links where helpful (e.g., shared concepts and grammatical patterns), while teaching language-specific patterns explicitly.

Secondary

The focus in later school years should be to use morphology as a tool for disciplinary literacy, academic vocabulary, and independent word learning. Morphology should support learners in understanding and learning subject-specific vocabulary, giving access to meaning through the root word. Morphological knowledge will enable more efficient reading and spelling of low-frequency, morphologically complex words, and strengthen links between word meaning, spelling, and grammar. Morphology instruction at this stage helps learners who may not acquire academic vocabulary incidentally through reading outside school. Word study belongs within each curriculum area rather than to English and Welsh lessons alone, supported by a whole-school agreement about the terminology teachers use.

Practical suggestions:

- Teach morphology as part of vocabulary instruction across subjects (e.g., photosynthesis = photo + synthesis in science; geography = geo + graph + y; prehistoric = pre + histor + ic in history).
- Highlight shared roots and affixes across academic vocabulary (e.g., In English: bio-, geo-, trans-, -ology; In Welsh: bio-, geo-, traws-, -oleg).
- Teach learners to break an unfamiliar word into meaningful parts, use the parts to pronounce it and to work out its meaning, then check that the word makes sense in the sentence (e.g., reconstruction: re + construct + ion; ailadrodd: ail + adrodd). This is morphological analysis, and it gives learners a reliable way into the long words of curriculum texts. A simple form of this can be taught from early primary onwards, not only in secondary school.
- Support spelling and writing accuracy by linking morphology to word class, meaning, and sentence structure.
- Use short, explicit teaching episodes rather than assuming learners will infer patterns independently.

Phonics Development Across School Phases

The examples below support planning across broad school phases. They are not Curriculum for Wales progression steps, fixed attainment thresholds or a replacement for national guide on progression. Learners may need content from more than one phase. Move learners on when assessment shows secure learning and continue targeted support wherever it is needed.

Table 3: Nursery (typically ages 3–4)

Oral language, stories, songs and playful attention to speech sounds alongside meaningful encounters with print.These experiences are not a readiness test for SSP.

FOCUS	EXAMPLES OF LEARNING AND TEACHING
Strong foundations in speech sounds	» Listening attentively to and distinguishing between environmental, instrumental, and vocal sounds. » Identifying and matching sounds to their source (e.g., guessing hidden sounds). » Exploring voice sounds (loud/quiet, high/low, long/short) through playful activities. » Recognising and producing rhyme in songs, stories, and oral games. » Clapping, tapping, or moving to the rhythm and syllables in familiar words.
Early phonemic awareness	» Identifying the initial sound in spoken words (e.g., "What sound does *mop* begin with?"). » Identifying final sounds in spoken words. » Hearing and saying the first sound in a word and matching words with the same initial sound (alliteration). » Draw attention to individual phonemes in familiar words and connect them with letters where appropriate, for example the three phonemes in English *cat* and <c> <a> <t>, or the sound represented by <th> in *thin*. » Use simple oral models, objects and letter tiles to help learners connect spoken phonemes with print; adapt the amount of support to their responses. » More complex oral phoneme manipulation is not a prerequisite for learning GPCs or beginning to read words.
Texts	» Daily read-alouds and shared books, chosen for language, and enjoyment. » Talk around books: new words, ideas, and story language, in the language(s) of the setting. » Building the spoken language that decoding will later connect to (see Types of Text).

Table 4: Reception and early primary (typically ages 4–7):

SSP in a planned, cumulative sequence, daily blending and segmenting linked to print, reading matched connected text, and early spelling and handwriting.
Teach common inflections and word parts as they become useful. Oral language, vocabulary, comprehension, and wider reading develop alongside this teaching.

FOCUS	EXAMPLES OF LEARNING AND TEACHING
Systematic teaching of the alphabetic code	» Teaching new grapheme-phoneme correspondences in a clearly sequenced order. » Revisiting and reviewing previously taught correspondences daily. » Teaching alternative spellings for known phonemes (e.g., /ai/ – <ai>,<ay>, <a-e>). » Teaching alternative pronunciations of known graphemes (e.g., <ow> in *snow* and *cow*). » Explicitly modelling how to apply known correspondences in reading and spelling. » Practising automatic recognition of taught graphemes.
Daily blending and segmenting	» Reading and spelling simple words made from taught GPCs, then extending to words with adjacent consonants, alternative correspondences, and more complex structures as knowledge grows. » Segmenting words into phonemes for spelling using sound buttons, fingers, or phoneme frames. » Blending and segmenting words with adjacent consonants. » Blending and segmenting words containing digraphs and trigraphs (two- and three-letter spellings of one sound, such as <ch> and <igh>; in English the most common consonant digraphs are usually taught among the first correspondences). » Developing fluency through short, daily, cumulative practice routines.
Texts	» Reading fully decodable sentences that match taught correspondences. » Reading short decodable books aligned to the taught sequence. » Re-reading decodable texts to build accuracy, fluency, and expression. » Demonstrating comprehension of decodable texts through discussion and simple retrieval questions. » Applying taught code knowledge independently while reading connected text. » Continuing daily read-alouds and shared reading of varied narrative and informational texts above learners' independent decoding level.
Early spelling and transcription habits	» Spelling words using taught GPCs » Writing simple dictated sentences containing taught patterns. » Using phoneme frames (boxes with one space for each sound in a word) or segmenting strategies independently. » Developing correct letter formation and orientation. » Leaving spaces between words in simple sentences. » Beginning to apply simple punctuation (capital letters and full stops). » Teaching common exception words in English for reading and spelling, attending to the parts that are decodable.
Building morphological knowledge	» Recognising that some words are made up of smaller meaningful parts. » Adding common inflectional suffixes (e.g., In English: -s, -es, -ing, -ed; In Welsh: -au, -ydd, -odd) to base words. » Understanding how adding or changing a suffix can change meaning (e.g., jump → jumped; canu → canodd). » Exploring simple compound words and identifying their parts (e.g., snow + man; pen + gwyn). » Noticing common prefixes in high-frequency words (e.g., un- in *un*do; an- in *an*hapus). » Understanding how common prefixes and suffixes influence the pronunciation of words when reading. » As learning becomes secure, using common prefixes, suffixes and base words to read unfamiliar words, and identifying word families that share a base word (e.g., help, help*ful*, unhelp*ful*; iach, iech*yd*, *an*iach).

Table 5: Later primary (typically ages 7–11):

Consolidate any remaining code knowledge and extend fluency, spelling, morphology, vocabulary, and comprehension. Teach English-specific correspondences when English literacy is introduced in Welsh-medium settings. Reduce dedicated phonics teaching for secure decoders and provide targeted support for learners who still need it.

FOCUS	EXAMPLES OF LEARNING AND TEACHING
Consolidation and extension (more complex word structures)	» Applying taught strategies independently, with accuracy and without adult prompting. » Reading and spelling words with adjacent consonants in longer combinations (e.g., In English: spl-, -mpst; In Welsh: str-, pl-, tr-). » Reading and spelling polysyllabic words by chunking into syllables. » Blending and segmenting longer words containing multiple morphemes. » Reading and spelling words with less common grapheme choice. » Applying knowledge of alternative spellings and pronunciations in unfamiliar words.
Greater automaticity and fluency	» Reading decodable and then wider texts with accuracy and reduced hesitation. » Recognising previously taught words automatically without overt sounding out. » Reading with appropriate pace, phrasing, and expression. » Demonstrating stamina when reading longer passages. » Applying blending and segmenting strategies efficiently and independently.
Spelling conventions	» Applying common morphological spelling rules when adding suffixes (e.g., In English: doubling consonants, dropping <e>, changing <y> to <i>; In Welsh: choosing between <y> and <u> in spelling patterns and applying correct spelling for mutation patterns). » Selecting appropriate graphemes for phonemes in different word positions (e.g., In English <oi> and <ai> are used inside words, <oy> and <ay> at the end). » Spelling common exception words accurately. » Editing and correcting spelling independently. » Applying accurate punctuation and sentence demarcation consistently.
Extending morphology	» Identifying root words (the base that carries the core meaning) within longer words. » Revisiting and applying the common prefixes and suffixes taught earlier (e.g., In English: un-, re-, dis-, -ment, -ness, -ful, -less; In Welsh: an-, ail-, cam-, -iad, -ol, -og, -wr / -ydd) » Understanding and applying less common prefixes and suffixes, and the relationships between root words and derived forms. » Learning common Greek and Latin roots and how they support the reading and spelling of academic and curriculum vocabulary. » Explaining how prefixes and suffixes change meaning. » Using morphological knowledge to support spelling of unfamiliar words. » Exploring relationships between words sharing common origins (etymology), and combining phonics, orthographic knowledge, and morphology when reading unfamiliar words.
Texts	» As decoding becomes secure wider independent reading grows and decodable texts should be phased out for most learners. » Continuing read-alouds and shared class texts that stretch vocabulary and knowledge beyond what learners read independently. » Reading for meaning and pleasure across narrative and informational texts, with talk that builds comprehension.

Table 6: Lower secondary (typically ages 11–14):

Assess remaining word-reading needs and provide targeted teaching where required. Develop fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and the reading and writing demands of curriculum areas. Word study can include multisyllabic words and morphology without repeating phonics content already secure.

FOCUS	EXAMPLES OF LEARNING AND TEACHING
Accelerated support for any learners still developing secure decoding and fluency	» Identifying learners who still require support with accurate and fluent decoding. » Providing targeted, intensive teaching to secure gaps in phoneme-grapheme knowledge. » Revisiting key alphabetic code correspondences where needed. » Practising blending and segmenting to increase reading accuracy. » Developing reading fluency through repeated reading and guided practice. » Monitoring progress closely and adjusting support based on assessment.
Explicit instruction in multisyllabic word reading	» Teaching learners to break longer words into syllables or chunks to support decoding. » Practising reading multisyllabic words common in subject texts. » Identifying vowel patterns and syllable boundaries within longer words. » Blending syllables together to read complex words accurately. » Applying decoding strategies independently when encountering unfamiliar longer words. » Reading longer and more complex vocabulary with confidence.
Morphology and vocabulary for curriculum texts	» Identifying roots, prefixes, and suffixes in subject-specific vocabulary. » Understanding how prefixes and suffixes change the meaning of words. » Exploring word families linked to key curriculum terms. » Using knowledge of morphology to infer the meaning of unfamiliar words. » Learning and practising vocabulary commonly found in curriculum texts. » Applying morphological knowledge to support both reading and spelling of academic vocabulary. » Using knowledge of word origins (etymology), including borrowed words, to work out unfamiliar terms. » Recognising how technical word forms can differ from everyday uses of related words. » In Welsh, recognising and applying common mutation patterns when reading and spelling academic vocabulary.

Table 7: Later secondary (typically ages 14–16):

Develop disciplinary literacy, including academic vocabulary, morphology, spelling and word origins where useful. Provide targeted code instruction only where assessment identifies persistent decoding or spelling gaps.

FOCUS	EXAMPLES OF LEARNING AND TEACHING
Continued word study for disciplinary literacy	» Developing understanding of morphology within subject-specific vocabulary. » Analysing roots, prefixes and suffixes in complex academic words. » Recognising how morphological patterns support meaning across related word families. » Applying morphological knowledge to interpret unfamiliar words in subject texts. » Using word structure to support accurate spelling of complex vocabulary.
Targeted intervention for learners with persistent decoding or spelling needs	» Providing structured intervention for learners who continue to experience difficulties with decoding. » Revisiting phoneme-grapheme correspondences where gaps remain. » Supporting accurate spelling through explicit teaching of phonological, morphological, and orthographic patterns. » Developing fluency and confidence through structured reading practice. » Monitoring progress through regular assessment and adjusting support accordingly.

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04

Section 4: What high-quality phonics teaching looks like

This section sets out the core features of effective SSP teaching and provides practical guidance on classroom approaches, practice, assessment, and choosing and using phonics programmes and resources.

What high-quality phonics teaching looks like

Core Features of Effective SSP Teaching

Schools may use different SSP programmes[1] and resources, but effective teaching shares the core features below. Research supports systematic phonics as an instructional approach. Wider research on learning also informs practical decisions about modelling, practice, and review. Not every feature or suggested routine has been tested separately in rigorous phonics trials.

01. Systematic teaching

SSP is planned, sequential, and cumulative.
This means teaching is organised so that learners learn the code in small steps, practise it enough to use it confidently, and retain it over time through planned review.

02. Follow a clear, cumulative scope and sequence

Teaching should introduce new learning in manageable steps, revisit and consolidate prior learning, and move from simpler to more complex GPCs and word structures. The essential requirement is that teaching is explicit, planned, cumulative, and well implemented.

Illustrative example (not a mandated sequence):

- **GPCs:** Begin with a core set of common correspondences and gradually introduce additional letter groups and patterns (e.g., digraphs/trigraphs), and in English alternative spellings and pronunciations as learners' knowledge grows.
- **Word structures:** Progress from simple CVC words (e.g., sat, pin) to words with consonant clusters (e.g., stop, clap), then to longer words (including two-syllable words) and more complex spelling patterns.
- **Spelling:** Teach segmenting and spelling with taught GPCs from the outset, then expand to alternative spellings and spelling conventions over time.

Develop phonemic awareness alongside GPC teaching from the start of SSP. Learners hear, blend, and segment phonemes while learning how they are represented in print. Phoneme-level awareness is particularly important for decoding and spelling using the alphabetic code. Broader work with rhyme, syllables, songs, and talk remains valuable within oral language provision. It is not a stage learners must complete before code teaching.

Ensure coherence across Welsh and English where learners are developing biliteracy. Where learners learn to read and spell in both languages, plan the two together so that they connect; do not teach them in isolation or leave the relationship between them to chance. In practice this means:

- **Coherence.** Teaching in the two languages should fit together and make sense as a whole. Learners should not experience Welsh and English as two entirely separate systems, and where possible learning in one language should support and reinforce learning in the other.
- **A clear scope and sequence for each language.** Decide which GPCs and spelling patterns are taught first, next and later, in Welsh and in English, so that the order in each language is planned rather than left to chance.
- **Explicit similarities and differences.** Show where Welsh and English use the same or similar correspondences and where they differ. Welsh is generally more predictable, but some graphemes vary by position or dialect whereas English has more alternative spellings and pronunciations.

Practice materials in each language should match the correspondences learners have already been taught in that language. Align independent reading and spelling with taught content. Learners should not be expected to read or spell patterns independently before they have been explicitly taught and practised (except for a small set of taught common exception or 'tricky' words in English). **Types of Text** in Section 3 sets out the evidence on decodable and other texts and how to combine them. At the same time, learners should continue to experience rich language and a wide range of texts through listening, read-alouds, and shared reading, even when these include patterns not yet secured.

03. Use explicit instruction

High-quality phonics teaching is explicit. The teacher makes the learning goal and success criteria explicit, and ensures learners practise with high levels of support before moving to independent work.

Explicit instruction typically includes:

- Clear explanation ("Today we are learning…", "This grapheme represents…because…").
- Teacher modelling (thinking aloud, demonstrating blending/segmenting).
- Guided practice with feedback (whole-class responses, partner practice, supported small-group work, whiteboards).
- Independent practice only once learners are ready. Independent practice of taught content after modelling and guided practice show that learners can attempt it accurately; continue feedback and support where needed.

04. Reviewing Learning Over Time

Retrieval means recalling what has been taught without first being shown the answer. For example, saying the phoneme for a displayed grapheme, or writing the grapheme for a spoken phoneme. Give prompt feedback and model again where needed. Research on learning has shown that spacing this practice over time helps retention (Cepeda et al., 2006). However, it is likely that phonics learning is strengthened when learners regularly retrieve previously taught content, rather than only re-reading or re-teaching it, and when this retrieval is spaced over time. In both Welsh and English, build brief, low-stakes opportunities for daily phonics practice, according to your school's medium of instruction).

Examples:

- In Welsh: quick retrieval of recently taught correspondences and reading/spelling words that use them.
- In English: quick retrieval plus practice with any taught alternative spellings/pronunciations and common exception words.

Spacing

Spacing means returning to previously taught content after a gap. Brief reviews spread over time can help learners remember what they have been taught. In phonics, this means revisiting grapheme–phoneme correspondences (GPCs) and practising their use in reading and spelling alongside new learning.

Provide modelling and practice when a correspondence is first taught, then return to it in later lessons. Use learners' responses to decide what needs further practice or teaching. Evidence supports spacing as a general learning principle, but research specifically on phonics provides limited guidance on the most effective intervals between reviews.

For example, a teacher might:

- Review a newly taught correspondence the next day, in isolation and in words.
- Revisit it later that week and in subsequent weeks, checking both reading and spelling.
- Increase the gap when recall is reliable, and revisit sooner if errors or hesitation show that further support is needed.

These are illustrative planning examples, not research-established intervals. Apply the principle within each language's teaching sequence.

05. An approach to teaching common exception words

In English, common exception words are high-frequency words that learners cannot yet read or spell fully using the GPCs they've been taught, and/or that include less common spelling-sound mappings. Phonics still helps with these words because learners can decode most of the word and use the parts that work to assist in recognising it. In Welsh, there are typically fewer true exception words because the orthography is more consistent. Instead, learners are more likely to encounter high-frequency words that are temporarily challenging because a required correspondence or word structure has not yet been taught. Welsh also typically has longer words than is the case in English, which can pose a greater challenge to sequencing in order to accurately and fluently decode. This distinction reflects the greater transparency of Welsh compared with English and aligns with what is known about early reading development across orthographies.

The evidence suggests that fluent word recognition is built through forming links between spellings, sounds, and meanings (sometimes described as orthographic mapping), and that decoding attempts play a key role in establishing these word-specific representations. This means exception words should not be taught as purely visual whole-word shapes. Instead, effective instruction focuses attention on the letters within the word and supports learners to reconcile what they can decode with the correct spoken word form.

Example:

01. Say the word and confirm meaning.

02. Decode the parts of the word using correspondences which have already been taught/children know (in that language). Most of an exception word can usually be sounded out; often only one part is genuinely unpredictable.

03. Teach the tricky part explicitly

- English: the part with a less common mapping (or not-yet-taught mapping).
- Welsh: usually a not-yet-taught correspondence/structure (rather than an irregular mapping).

04. Map sounds to letters (point at/underline the graphemes as you say the phonemes, then blend).

05. Spell it with attention to the tricky part (not rote copying): segment, write, then check.

06. Revisit through spaced retrieval (quick read/spell checks over days and weeks).

Some programmes call these heart words: the regular parts are identified, and the tricky grapheme is marked to be learned by heart. This shares the principle of the routine above: active attention to the word's spelling. In the first trial to compare them, heart-word teaching and mispronunciation correction produced similar gains in reading and spelling the words taught, and both did better than sending the words home to be read as wholes (Lithgow et al., 2026).

When teaching Welsh and English, avoid teaching tricky words as one mixed list. Teach exception words within Welsh lessons and English lessons separately, aligned to each language's scope and sequence, and make contrasts between language explicit. Where morphology is used to explain a spelling, check that the explanation works for every word on the list, since a rule that works for some examples but not others will confuse rather than help.

For learners with decoding difficulties, keep the same approach but increase the dose: smaller sets, more guided practice, and more spaced retrieval. In English, it can be helpful to teach learners to self-correct when the decoded pronunciation doesn't match a known spoken word (this is known as set for variability, or mispronunciation correction). This strategy depends on the learner already knowing the word in speech, since they have to recognise the correct pronunciation. Where spoken vocabulary in that language is still developing, teaching the regular parts and the tricky grapheme may work better, alongside teaching what the word means.

06. A systematic approach to correcting errors

When learners make an error during phonics, aim to correct it quickly, briefly, and in a way that leads to the learner producing the right response (and then using it again). A practical routine teachers can use is Stop, Prompt, Model, and Re-check:

01. Stop the error calmly so it isn't practised.

02. Prompt the learner to use the taught routine (e.g., "Point to the grapheme, what's the sound?").

03. If the learner still can't produce the correct response, model it clearly ("The sound for this grapheme is...") and have the learner repeat it.

04. Recheck by having the learner read the word again from the beginning (and then reread the whole sentence), or spell the word correctly and then read it back. It can help to make the language explicit where relevant (e.g., "In Welsh, this grapheme sounds like... and in English, it can sound like...") especially if an error reflects cross-language interference. Keep corrections short (one clear teaching point), maintain pace, and build in a quick revisit later in the lesson so the correct response is retrieved again.

Example:

If the target word is *mam*, but the learner writes *map*.

- Stop: "Let's check the last sound."
- Prompt: "Say the word *mam*. Now say the sounds slowly." (/m/ /a/ /m/)
- Model (if needed): "The last sound is /m/. In Welsh, we use m for /m/. Let's fix the last letter."
- Recheck: Learner writes *mam*, then reads it aloud.

Choosing phonics programmes and resources

Schools may use a commercial programme[1], locally developed materials, or a combination. This guide does not endorse specific programmes. Any programme or resource should be judged against clear, quality criteria and implemented with ongoing professional learning. **Appendix B** turns these criteria into a checklist schools can use when comparing programmes. To ensure consistent, high-quality delivery, schools should plan for initial training, regular refresher training, and induction for new staff, supported by coaching and observations where appropriate. In Wales, phonics teaching in Welsh and English is typically supported by separate programmes or materials, so schools should ensure they have a clear, systematic programme for Welsh and a separate one for English, with an agreed plan for coordinating routines and terminology across the two. It is important to note that consistency means preserving the core features of effective phonics teaching, not delivering identical instruction regardless of learners' needs.

A high-quality programme set should provide:

01. Content and sequence

- A systematic, cumulative scope, and sequence with manageable steps, clear lesson structure, and planned review (including guidance on pacing and what to do if learners need more time).
- Explicit routines for reading and spelling, using clear teacher language and examples, including blending (reading/decoding), and segmenting (spelling/encoding).
- Phonemic-awareness teaching integrated with GPCs, including blending phonemes to read words and segmenting spoken words to spell them.

02. Practice and consolidation

- Planned cumulative practice that builds accuracy and moves learners toward automaticity.
- Practice opportunities that include retrieval of previously taught content, so learners regularly revisit and discriminate between patterns.
- Sufficient practice at multiple levels, including:
  - GPC
  - Word
  - Sentence
  - Connected text (in both reading and spelling)

03. Reading materials and word learning

- Decodable texts (or equivalent matched reading materials) that align with the correspondences taught, with clear guidance on how and when to use them.
- Clear guidance on common exception words (especially in English), including how to teach them explicitly while still drawing attention to any decodable parts.
- Guidance on developing fluency through accurate oral reading (with modelling and immediate feedback), progressing from word reading to connected text.

04. Progression beyond early code (where relevant)

- If intended for use beyond early primary school, clear progression into:
  - multisyllabic word reading/spelling
  - morphology and spelling conventions (where appropriate)

05. Assessment

- Assessment tools should check key components of early reading/spelling, such as:
  - Phonemic awareness
  - Taught GPCs and decoding (including unfamiliar/nonword decoding where appropriate)
  - Spelling/encoding
  - Fluency checks where relevant
- Clear decision rules: check that learners can recall and apply taught GPCs accurately in words, reading and spelling. Reteach patterns that remain insecure, increase supported practice where performance is hesitant, and adjust pace or support when repeated checks show insufficient progress. Use the programme's assessment guidance alongside professional judgement. A single score should not be the only basis for the decision.

06. Support

- Practical guidance for learners who need additional support (including struggling readers), such as smaller steps, more review, additional guided practice, and structured rechecks. It should also include assessment that identifies which gaps to target, so that support is matched to learner's need.
- Practical implementation support: training materials, lesson scripts/examples, common misconceptions, coaching/QA tools, resource lists, and realistic time guidance.

Explicit Phonics and Application in Reading and Writing

The useful distinction is between planned, explicit teaching of the alphabetic code and incidental teaching that depends on which words happen to arise. SSP provides a cumulative sequence and makes blending and segmenting explicit. Applying that knowledge in meaningful reading and writing is part of this teaching, not a competing approach. Terms such as contextualised and decontextualised can obscure this distinction because they are used in different ways.

The terms contextualised and decontextualised phonics are used inconsistently, and it is important to be clear what is meant by these terms because the evidence base looks different depending on the definition. In some cases, contextualised phonics refers to embedded or incidental phonics, in which phonics is taught mainly during book reading and learners are encouraged to use context cues (such as pictures or sentence meaning) alongside letters and sounds to identify unfamiliar words. In other cases, contextualised refers to the application of taught phonics in meaningful reading and writing, for example practising newly taught correspondences in words, sentences, dictation, and connected text, while still treating decoding as the primary route to accurate word reading.

Taken together, the evidence supports a pragmatic position for classroom practice: learners benefit from explicit, systematic teaching of the alphabetic code, and they also need structured opportunities to apply this learning in reading and writing. In practical terms, this means introducing and practising new GPCs through short, focused teaching and practice (sometimes described as decontextualised), and then moving to in-context application through the use of words, sentences, and texts. Context is important for comprehension and motivation, but in the earliest stages it should be used primarily to check meaning after decoding. It should not be used as a strategy for guessing words in place of decoding.

This approach applies in Wales whether learners are learning to read in Welsh, English, or both. In Welsh sessions, teachers should teach the Welsh alphabetic code explicitly and provide early opportunities to apply it in words, sentences and texts matched to what has been taught. Because Welsh has a more transparent orthography, many learners will secure accurate decoding quickly and can then focus on developing fluency and automaticity. In English sessions, teachers should also teach correspondences explicitly with substantial cumulative review. Practice should be carefully matched to the scope and sequence of the programme and support consolidation of a more complex and variable code, including explicit teaching of common exception words while continuing to draw attention to decodable elements.

In biliteracy contexts, schools will typically use separate programmes or materials for Welsh and English. The key is to maintain consistent instructional routines (review-teach-practise-apply) while being explicit about language-specific correspondences and ensuring that practice texts align with what has been taught in each language. When choosing materials, it is worth checking how far routines and terminology of the Welsh and English materials can work together, and agreeing how any differences will be resolved, so that learners receive one consistent way of learning.

What Evidence of Effectiveness Should Schools Look For?

Most schools choose to use a commercial programme[1] to deliver phonics teaching. When selecting a programme, schools should consider the evidence carefully. Many programmes make claims about impact. Schools should look for credible, well-designed evaluations and interpret findings with care, particularly where evidence comes from contexts that differ from Wales.

Evidence from other countries, including England, can be highly informative. However, schools should consider contextual fit. Differences in language(s) of instruction, assessment language, and the linguistic features of Welsh and English mean that an approach shown to work well in one context may not transfer automatically without careful adaptation and evaluation.

It can also help to think of evidence as building over time. Programmes typically move from early development and field testing to efficacy studies conducted under optimal conditions, to effectiveness studies in everyday school settings, and eventually to longer-term implementation/maintenance evidence. Newer programmes may have less published evaluation simply because robust studies take time to design, conduct, and publish. Limited evidence is not the same as a programme not being effective.

Tips for identifying high-quality evidence:

- A study with a clear comparison group, with well-matched learners/schools.
- Tests which measure decoding/word reading accuracy, fluency, spelling.
- Assessments which measure the content taught and independent, standardised, or well-validated measures of word reading and spelling.
- Transparency about who was studied and how: participant characteristics, duration, dosage, training, fidelity, and implementation conditions.
- Evidence that findings are likely to generalise, such as replication across more than one setting/cohort, or a clear rationale for why the programme should transfer.

Consider where the programme is on its journey to evidence:

- Early-stage evidence may include some simple pilot/field-test outcomes.
- Stronger evidence comes from studies testing impact under optimal conditions (efficacy) and then in routine school conditions (effectiveness), alongside evidence about implementation and sustainability over time.
- If a programme is earlier in its evidence journey, you can still make sensible decisions but should treat claims more cautiously and prioritise careful implementation, ongoing staff training, and measure change using the assessments you usually use.

Questions to Ask When Reading Claims of Effectiveness

- Compared to what? What was the comparison group?
- Measured how? Assessments measuring taught content, independent tests, or both?
- Who is it for? Age, starting points, language context, and ALN/EAL considerations.
- Under what conditions? Training, time, staffing, and what's required to achieve results?
- How meaningful is the impact? Educationally meaningful, not just statistically significant?

Two kinds of measure answer different questions. Assessments testing the content that was taught show whether learners have learned that content, whereas independent measures of word reading and spelling show whether the learning reaches reading beyond the programme. It is important to look for both. Gains on taught content alone may not generalise to reading and spelling, while an absence of gains on taught content means the programme has not done what it set out to do. This matters most where phonics runs as an intervention and takes time from other curriculum learning.

Fidelity of Delivery in Phonics Teaching

High-quality phonics teaching depends not only on what is taught, but on how consistently and accurately it is delivered. Research from reading intervention studies and the wider implementation science literature shows that variation in outcomes can be explained by differences in fidelity of delivery. That is, the extent to which teaching reflects the intended approach over time.

What is fidelity?

Fidelity of delivery refers to how closely and consistently phonics teaching matches what was intended, whether this is an off-the-shelf phonics programme or a locally developed sequence of lessons.

Fidelity is typically described in terms of:

- **Adherence:** Following the agreed lesson structure, sequence, and routines.
- **Dosage:** Teaching phonics as often and for as long as planned.
- **Quality of delivery:** This includes clear modelling, guided practice, feedback, and error correction.
- **Consistency over time:** This refers to maintaining agreed approaches across classrooms and through staff changes.

Research evidence shows that differences in these features help explain why the same phonics approach can be effective in some classrooms or schools but less effective in others. For this reason, attention to fidelity is central to achieving impact at scale.

Fidelity does not mean identical teaching for every learner. It relates to keeping the same core instructional components of the agreed approach while making purposeful, assessment-informed adaptations. Teachers may adapt pace, dosage, grouping, examples, materials, language support, and scaffolding, while maintaining explicit teaching, cumulative progression, blending and segmenting, sufficient practice, and accurate feedback. The effects of adaptations should be reviewed through brief checks of pupils' learning, and scaffolds should be reduced when they are no longer needed.

A programme should make clear which adaptations preserve its core components and which change what makes it work, so that staff can adapt confidently while knowing what must be kept. Schools may also find the implementation guidance published by the Education Endowment Foundation useful. It was produced for schools in England, but its principles apply more widely.

Supporting fidelity

Schools can support strong fidelity through a small number of practical, proportionate actions.

01. Staff training

- Where an off-the-shelf programme[1] is used, staff should attend the programme's recommended training so that routines, terminology, and progression are clearly understood.
- Where schools use locally developed materials, there should be a shared understanding of lesson structure, sequencing, and expectations for modelling and practice.
- Induction arrangements should ensure new staff are supported to deliver phonics in line with the agreed approach.

02. Materials

- Ensure staff have timely access to the correct lesson materials (e.g., plans, decodable texts, assessments).
- Avoid mixing resources from different programmes or sources unless this has been planned carefully, as ad hoc substitutions can unintentionally change lesson sequence and routines.
- Keep key reference materials aligned to the agreed sequence (e.g., grapheme charts, word lists) so learners are practising what has been taught.
- Ensure systems are in place so materials are easy to locate and consistent across classes.

03. Timetabling

- Phonics sessions should be given a protected place in the timetable.
- Frequent shortening or displacement of sessions can undermine fidelity by reducing dosage.
- Where sessions are missed, schools should plan how they will be recovered.

04. Consistency

- Agreed lesson plans should be used consistently across classrooms.
- Phonics teaching should be aligned with:
  - Matched texts for independent decoding practice and wider reading with appropriate support.
  - Spelling and encoding instruction.
  - Any additional intervention provision.

05. Accurate and consistent modelling

- Clear modelling of phoneme-grapheme correspondences is important.
- Teachers should aim to pronounce phonemes clearly and consistently in ways that support blending and segmentation.
- For continuous sounds, this means sustaining the sound smoothly (e.g., /s/, /m/).
- For stop consonants, this means keeping the sound brief and clipped, avoiding the addition of unnecessary vowel sounds (such as a trailing schwa[2] , the unstressed vowel at the end of the words *teacher* or *banana*) that may make blending more difficult (e.g., /buh/ instead of /b/).
- Agree clear modelling approaches across staff while respecting legitimate accent and dialect differences. Model pronunciations learners hear locally in the language being taught and do not treat a valid accent variant as a decoding error. For example, the vowels in English *bath* and *grass* vary across accents, and *mam* occurs in Welsh and in some varieties of English. Explain such differences where they affect a GPC example.
- The aim is not perfect articulation, but modelling that supports successful blending, word reading, and spelling.

[2]Schwa is the name given to a short, neutral vowel sound, often represented as /ə/. In phonics teaching, it is important to avoid adding an extra vowel sound (a schwa) when pronouncing consonants, particularly stop consonants. For example, <t> should be pronounced as a short, crisp sound rather than "tuh". Adding an extra vowel can make it more difficult for learners to blend sounds accurately.

06. Practice

- Lessons should include sufficient guided practice before learners work independently.
- Errors should be corrected quickly and neutrally, followed by immediate successful re-practice.
- Practice should remain active and focused on reading and spelling words, rather than worksheet-heavy activities.

07. Assessment-informed pacing

- Assessment should be used to decide when learners need: more review, breaking down of instruction into additional steps, additional practice.
- Where progress is slower than expected, check teaching quality, attendance, opportunities to practise, and the match between teaching and the learner's assessed needs. Use this information to adapt content, intensity, or delivery and seek additional assessment where needed. Fidelity should not mean persisting unchanged with provision that is not helping.

08. Peer support between staff

- Fidelity is best supported through ongoing coaching rather than one-off training.
- Peer observation and team teaching can provide focused feedback on lesson structure and pacing, modelling and practice, and consistency.
- Feedback should be supportive and developmental.

09. Leadership

- Leaders play a key role in sustaining fidelity by ensuring training and materials are in place, protecting teaching time, prioritising phonics within the school's improvement work, and building a shared understanding of its purpose among staff.
- Monitoring should be used to support improvement and consistency, rather than to create pressure or discourage professional dialogue.

Additional Reading

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05

Section 5: Supporting all learners

This section explains how to use assessment to identify learners' needs and adapt teaching and support, taking account of different language backgrounds, additional learning needs, and the needs of older learners.

Supporting all learners

SSP should be responsive to diverse learners. Use assessment to identify barriers and adapt pace, amount of teaching, grouping, materials, language support, and scaffolding. For learners who need help with decoding or spelling retain explicit, systematic code instruction, blending, segmenting, and sufficient practice. Many learners also need teaching in other components, including oral language, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension, or support for other identified needs. Match the combination to the learner. Learners whose decoding is secure should not repeat phonics unnecessarily. Reduce teaching scaffolds as independence develops, while retaining any access support the learner continues to need.

Motivation

Phonics progress depends on consistent practice. Where learners struggle, barriers may be practical (e.g., confidence, anxiety, disrupted learning) as well as instructional.

Some tips for improving motivation include:

- Explain the approach, and the reasons for it, in plain language.
- Provide a brief targeted individualised recap after a learner has been absent.
- Share simple home practice materials (e.g., 2-3 minutes daily, aligned to taught content).
- Ensure tasks are achievable and success is frequent because high success rates build confidence.
- Normalise effort and practice.
- Avoid public comparison by providing discrete feedback (where possible) and celebration of improvement.
- Use short and engaging tasks with lots of participation.
- Support motivation for reading more broadly through meaningful texts, opportunities to choose and discuss books, and supported reading with adults and peers. For older learners, use age-appropriate topics, and avoid materials that feel younger than their age.

Learners with additional learning needs (ALN)

Learners with ALN are a diverse group (e.g., learners with word-reading and spelling difficulties, oral language difficulties, or difficulties with attention, hearing, or learning). Many will benefit from more intensive, explicit, carefully sequenced instruction, with high levels of guided practice and cumulative review. Evidence from meta-analyses indicates that intensive multi-component early reading interventions including phonics alongside the training of other key skills (e.g., vocabulary) improve outcomes for learners with reading difficulties, and that severe reading and spelling difficulties can be substantially improved with appropriate, evidence-based teaching.

Key considerations

- Maintain expectations but adapt the teaching approach so that learner(s) can succeed. Include systematic code instruction when decoding or spelling requires it, alongside any necessary teaching in language, fluency, or comprehension.
- For many learners with ALN, learning is most efficient when tasks are broken down and success is frequent (with immediate feedback).
- Use brief, frequent checks to decide whether to slow the pace, increase review, increase scaffolding, or increase intensity.
- Identify the individual learner's needs through assessment and knowledge of their teaching and language experience. Consider opportunities to learn, attendance, and exposure to each language. Where possible, assess relevant skills across the languages the learner uses. These factors inform assessment and support without determining what any individual learner can do.
- If progress is inadequate, review the assessment and teaching promptly, check whether provision was delivered as intended, and change the content, support or intensity accordingly. Seek specialist advice where appropriate and check the impact of the change. Do not continue an ineffective approach unchanged.

Practical suggestions

01. Increase intensity or dosage

- Increase the number of teaching opportunities across the week.
- For learners with significant needs, consider additional short daily sessions (e.g., 10–20 minutes) to increase opportunities for spaced practice and retrieval.

02. Use smaller instructional steps (with cumulative teaching)

- Keep each lesson tightly focused on one small new element, followed by extensive application.
- Avoid introducing multiple new patterns and multiple new routines in the same session.

03. Build in high cumulative review (spaced).

For example, include brief review in every session (e.g., a short dictation activity).

04. Extend guided practice and provide immediate feedback.

- Continue practising until the learner is consistently successful.
- Correct errors quickly and neutrally and then immediately re-practise the same item successfully.
- Keep practice active with plenty of positive feedback (e.g., verbal responding, finger tracking).

05. Reduce cognitive load (especially where attention/working memory are weak)

- Use short tasks and only change one thing at a time.
- Present fewer items on a page, using uncluttered print and minimise visual distraction.
- Use consistent prompts and a consistent lesson sequence so working memory is used for the literacy task.

Suggested Scaffolding for Decoding

Learners with blending difficulties often need more support with blending than we assume. Helpful approaches include:

- Continuous sounds first (where possible) to support smooth blending (continuous sounds, such as /m/, /s/ and /f/, can be sustained; stop sounds, such as /b/ and /t/, cannot).
- Slow-to-fast blending, moving through:

  01. Say phonemes slowly

  02. Blend with reduced pauses

  03. Blend normally

- Repeated successful opportunities using short, high-success word sets (e.g., 5-10 words), repeated over days with spacing.

Suggested Scaffolding for Fluency

- Use re-reading of short, decodable passages to build automaticity.
- Ensure fluency work still requires accurate word reading (avoid strategies that bypass decoding).

EAL and multilingual learners

Many multilingual learners can make rapid progress in decoding with systematic phonics. At the same time, they may need additional support with oral language, vocabulary, and comprehension especially in the language of instruction.

Key principles

- Retain systematic code teaching for learners who still need it, adapting the amount and form of practice. Once decoding is secure, direct support towards remaining needs in fluency, language, comprehension, or spelling.
- Ensure learners can hear and produce phonemes that may be unfamiliar (you may need to provide short, targeted pronunciation practice as needed).
- Pair phonics with deliberate language teaching:
  - Pre-teach key vocabulary for decodable texts.
  - Build sentence-level understanding (grammar, connectives, morphology where appropriate).
  - Develop background knowledge to support comprehension.

Secondary Schools

By secondary school, most learners will have secure phonics, particularly where high-quality phonics teaching has been implemented effectively in the primary phase in both Welsh and English (where relevant). For these learners, phonics teaching is no longer required, and literacy support should focus on fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and curriculum area-specific reading and writing demands (disciplinary literacy). However, a minority of learners enter secondary school without fully secure word-reading skills. These learners may still experience difficulties with:

- Decoding unfamiliar words accurately.
- Reading longer or multisyllabic words efficiently.
- Spelling accurately, particularly where sound-spelling correspondences are inconsistent (as in English).
- Reading fluently enough to access the secondary curriculum.

For these learners, phonics and word-level instruction may still be necessary, even at secondary school.

This is because weaknesses in word reading and spelling continue to place a significant constraint on reading comprehension, vocabulary growth, and learning across curriculum areas. Importantly, phonics at secondary school is not a return to early reading instruction for all learners, nor is it whole-class teaching (unless all learners need it). Instead, it is best understood as targeted, time-limited intervention for learners whose assessments indicate ongoing word-level difficulties.

The proportion of learners needing phonics support falls sharply across the school years, so support in secondary should be closely targeted and indicated by assessment rather than by general concern about a learner's reading. Where a small number of learners still need it, this does not mean that earlier teaching has not worked. Some learners need more teaching, and for longer, even where identification and teaching in primary have been good. Word reading and spelling can improve at secondary school where teaching is targeted and sustained.

Research evidence suggests that for older struggling readers, interventions are most effective when they address the specific area of difficulty. Where learners have insecure decoding or word recognition, interventions are effective when they include explicit, systematic teaching of the alphabetic code, often alongside instruction in syllable structure and morphology. Word-level difficulty is often not the only difficulty a learner has, and phonics should not become the default response to every reading difficulty.

It is also important to recognise that many phonics programmes are designed for younger learners. They can feel developmentally inappropriate, demotivating, or stigmatising when used in secondary settings. This can reduce learners' motivation and willingness to participate, even when the underlying instructional content is relevant. Learners who have had word-level support for several years may also be disengaged from it. That is a reason to choose age-appropriate materials and to be clear with learners about why the teaching is happening and how long it is expected to last.

Effective secondary phonics provision therefore needs to:

- Be age-appropriate in language and materials.
- Focus on high-utility content (e.g., common spelling patterns and multisyllabic word reading).
- Be delivered in small groups or one-to-one.
- Be positioned as support to enable access to learning.

In secondary schools, the aim of phonics is to address specific gaps in learners' word reading and spelling so they can access the wider curriculum, not to re-teach early reading.

Practical tips include:

01. Assessment

Before introducing phonics or word-study intervention, schools should use brief, focused assessments to identify learners whose main barrier to reading is at the word level. Useful indicators include difficulties with:

- Decoding unfamiliar words.
- Reading multisyllabic words accurately and efficiently.
- Difficulties reading fluently, which limit comprehension.
- Difficulties with spelling.

Where a reading or spelling need is suspected, assess word-level skills and consider comprehension separately. Some learners read accurately but do not understand the text. Word-level checks should distinguish taught and untaught content and help identify which correspondences, or word structures need teaching. These checks may include:

- A short word and nonword reading check.
- A multisyllabic word reading task.
- A brief spelling test.
- Observation of reading accuracy and fluency.

Assessment outcomes should guide decisions about whether phonics is needed, what content to teach, and the intensity and duration of support. A brief standardised measure of word and pseudoword reading is useful for identifying where additional phonics teaching may be appropriate. Poorer performance on pseudowords than on real words may indicate difficulty in applying phonics knowledge and skills, while low performance on both suggests a broader word-reading need that should be explored further. Schools can use such a measure to screen learners on entry to Year 7, to decide who needs further assessment or targeted phonics teaching, and to review progress over time. One such assessment, ReadingScreen, is currently available to schools for free through the CAL:ON Cymru national programme.

02. Targeted intervention

In secondary settings, phonics should usually be delivered as:

- Small-group or one-to-one intervention.
- Scheduled regularly (e.g., several times per week).
- Opportunities to review learner progress.

Teaching should focus on high-utility content, such as:

- Common and less consistent English spelling patterns
- Strategies for decoding and encoding multisyllabic words.
- Links between phonics, syllable structure, and morphology.

This ensures that limited intervention time is spent on content that is most likely to improve learners' reading and spelling for curriculum access. Word-level need should not be inferred from a global reading score alone, nor from indicators such as English as an additional language or socio-economic disadvantage. Secondary schools also face real constraints of timetable and space, and any intervention takes time from other curriculum learning, so the case for it should be clear and its impact considered.

03. Adapting materials

Many phonics programmes are designed for younger learners. When working with secondary learners:

- Use age-appropriate texts, examples, and contexts (it can be difficult to find decodable texts for this age group). Texts that interest the learner, including magazines and other short material, can work well where decodable texts are unsuitable.
- Make the purpose explicit (e.g., "This will help with other aspects of school and life").

It is difficult to find off-the-shelf phonics programmes for older children. If schools consider using one designed for younger children, you may need to:

- Adapt pacing and starting points.
- Prioritise relevant sections of the programme.
- Supplement with materials linked to curriculum areas.

04. Ensure systematic instruction

Even in secondary school, effective word-level teaching should follow the principles discussed earlier. This includes:

- Explicit and systematic teaching.
- Cumulative teaching with regular review and consolidation.
- Focused on accuracy first before moving to build fluency.
- Support reading with immediate feedback and error correction.
- Avoid approaches that encourage learners to guess from context or pictures as a substitute for accurate word reading.

05. Review progress

Intervention should be reviewed regularly using the same types of measures used to identify the need for phonics. Schools should consider:

- Whether word reading accuracy and fluency are improving.
- Whether learners are transferring skills to curriculum reading.
- Whether continued phonics support is needed, or whether focus should shift to other areas of literacy.

Table 8:
Common and less consistent English spelling patterns

CATEGORY	PATTERN/FOCUS	COMMON SPELLING	EXAMPLES
Alternative vowel spellings	/ee/ /ai/ /oa/ /igh/ /oo/ (long/short)	<ee>, <ea>, <e-e>, <y>, <ie> <ai>, <ay>, <a-e>, <eigh>, <ey> <oa>, <o-e>, <ow>, <oe> <igh>, <i-e>, <y> <oo>, <u-e>, <ew> / <oo>, <u>	see, mean, these, happy, field rain, play, name, eight, they boat, home, grow, toe light, time, crymoon, rule, few/book, push
Reduced vowels & stress	Schwa in unstressed syllables Stress-related vowel changes	<a>, <e>, <i>, <o>, <u> Various	about, problem, family, separates photograph, photography
Consonant spellings	/k/ /j/ /f/ /s/	<c>, <k>, <ck>, <ch>, <que> <j>, <g>, <dge>, <ge> <f>, <ff>, <ph>, <gh> <s>, <ss>, <c>, <sc>	cat, kite, back, school, unique jam, giant, bridge, change fun, off, photo, laugh sun, lesson, city, science
Morphological Spelling conventions	Doubling consonants Dropping <e> <y> to <i>	double final consonant drop (e) before suffix <y> → <il> before suffix	Hop, hopping ,Begin, beginning Make, making, Hope, hoping Happy, happiness, Carry, carried
Morphology	Inflectional endings Noun-forming suffixes Adjective-forming suffixes	<-s>, <-es>, <-ed> <-ion>, <-ian> <-ous> <-ial> <-ive>	played, jumped, wanted Information (in + form + at + ion), discussion (dis + cuss + ion), musician (music + ian) dangerous (danger + ous); special (spec+ial); active (act+ive)

Table 9:
Common and less consistent Welsh spelling patterns

CATEGORY	PATTERN/FOCUS	COMMON SPELLING	EXAMPLES
Vowel spellings	Long and short vowels y/u distinction Diphthongs Stress and vowel quality	<a>, <e>, <i>, <o>, <u>, <w>, <y> <y>, <u> <ae>, <ai>, <au>, <ei>, <eu>, <oe>, <wy> final/non-final y	mam, pen, tin, mor, mur byd, dyn, mur, sul cae, taith, haul, eira, gwneud, coeden, mwyn cymydog, mynydd, ysgol
Consonant spellings	Welsh diagraphs Consonant clusters	<ll>, <rh>, <dd>, <ff>, <ng>, <ch>, <th>, <ph> <str->, <bl->, <tr->, <-nth>	llaw, rhif, dydd, ffrind, bach stryd, plant, bron, trên
Mutation patterns	Soft mutation (p, t, c, b, g, m, ll, rh) Nasal mutation (p, t, c, b, g, m) Aspirate mutation (p, t, c,)	<p> → <b>, <t> → <d>, <c> → <g> <c> → <ngh>, <p> → <mh>, <t> → <nh> <c> → <ch>, <p> → <ph>, <t> → <th>	pen → ben, tad → dad, cath → gath, cath → nghath, pen → phen cath → nghath pen → phen
Spelling conventions	y and u spelling choices Double consonants	<y> / <u> <nn>, <rr>	byd, dyn, mur, cwm ennill, torri: doubled letters, unlike the digraphs above, where two letters represent one sound
Morphology	Hyphenation and compounds Inflectional endings Common suffixes Common prefixes Word families	compound forms <-au>, <-odd> <-iad>, <-ol>,<-og>, <-ar>, <-wr> / <-ydd> <an->, <ail->, <cam->, <rhag-> root + derived forms	pêl-droed, rheilffordd llyfrau, canodd datblygiad, cenedlaethol, pigog, lliwgar, dysgwr anhapus, ailwneud, camddeall, rhagweld dysgu, dysgwr

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Appendix A: How the Welsh and English codes compare

Below, you will find tables that will be useful for:

- Planning the move into English phonics in Year 3 in Welsh-medium schools.
- Planning Welsh phonics in English-medium schools.
- Making sense of errors. When a learner writes *fan* for *van*, or reads Welsh <u> as the vowel in *cup*, the tables show you why, and what to teach next.

The tables cover the correspondences that early phonics programmes actually teach. Rare spellings, and endings that belong to morphology rather than phonics (such as -ed and -tion), are left out on purpose.

How to read the tables

Each row shows one grapheme, what it says in Welsh, what it says in English, and how the two relate. The colour gives you the relationship at a glance:

- **Green (Shared):** it transfers.
- **Yellow (Partly shared):** the main correspondence transfers, but one language adds something extra.
- **Red (Different):** the same letters say different things in the two languages.
- **Blue (Welsh only or English only):** new learning, taught in the usual explicit way. The note tells you when learners already know the sound, so only the spelling is new.

Sound symbols used in the guidance are illustrated below. The length mark /ː/ indicates a long vowel. These broad examples describe sounds, not the number of written letters.

/θ/ as in thin, cath

/ð/ as in this, eistedd

/ʃ/ as in shop, siop

/ʧ/ as in chip

/dʒ/ as in jam

/ŋ/ as in sing, llong

/ɬ/ as in Welsh ll (llaw)

/χ/ as in Welsh ch (bach)

/ə/ as in about, yn

/ɨ/ — north Welsh u and clear y

long marks (ː) as in a lengthened vowel.

Where north and south Wales say things differently (/u/, /y/ and /i/), the notes say so. Check the examples against the Welsh your learners use.

Table A1:
Single letters

GRAPHEME	IN WELSH	IN ENGLISH	OVERLAP
a	/a/ short, long a: afal, tad	/æ/: cat; long spellings differ (Table A4)	Partly shared. Similar short vowel; long vowels written differently
b	/b/: bara	/b/: bat	Same
c	/k/ always: ci, ceg	/k/: -cat; /s/ before e, i, y: cell, city	Partly shared. English adds /s/; Welsh <c> never softens
d	/d/: dant	/d/: dog	Same
e	/ɛ/ short, long e: melyn, hen	/ɛ/: bed; long spellings differ (Table A4)	Partly shared. Similar short vowel
f	/v/: fel, afal	/f/: fun	Different. English <f> and <ff> both sound like Welsh <ff>
g	/g/ always: gardd, gêm	/g/: got; /ʤ/ before e, i, y: gem	Partly shared. English adds soft <g>; compare Welsh *gêm* and English *gem*
h	/h/: het	/h/: hat	Same
i	/ɪ/, /iː/: cinio, ci; consonant /j/: iaith	/ɪ/: sit; long i spellings differ (Table A4)	Partly shared. Short vowel close; Welsh consonant <i> has no English parallel
j	/ʤ/: jam (borrowed words)	/ʤ/: jam	Same
k	not used; c writes /k/	/k/: kit	English only. Sound = Welsh <c>
l	/l/: lolfa	/l/: leg	Same
m	/m/: mam	/m/: man	Same
n	/n/: nain	/n/: net	Same
o	/ɔ/ short, long o: toc	/ɒ/: hot; long spellings differ (Table A4)	Partly shared. Similar short vowel
p	/p/: pen	/p/: pig	Same
q	not used	always qu, /kw/: queen	English only
r	/r/ (rolled): radio	/r/: run	Same. Sound quality differs; the mapping transfers
s	/s/ always : sedd	/s/: sun; /z/ in is, dogs	Partly shared. English adds /z/; Welsh has no /z/
t	/t/: tad	/t/: top	Same
u	north /ɨ/, south /i/: un, munud	/ʌ/: cup; /ʊ/: put	Different. Completely different vowels
v	not used; f writes /v/	/v/: van	English only. Sound = Welsh <f>
w	vowel /ʊ/, /uː/: cwm, dŵr; consonant /w/: wedi	consonant /w/ only: wet	Partly shared. Consonant use shared; Welsh vowel <w> has no English parallel
x	not used (bocs)	/ks/: box	English only
y	/ə/: yn, mynydd (first syllable); clear vowel: dyn, final syllables	consonant /j/: yes; vowel: happy, my, gym	Different. The two systems differ entirely
z	not used natively (sw for zoo)	/z/: zip	English only. Welsh has no /z/

Table A2:
Consonant digraphs and other consonant spellings

GRAPHEME	IN WELSH	IN ENGLISH	OVERLAP
ch	/χ/: bach (a letter of the alphabet)	/ʧ/: -chip; /k/: school	**Different**
ck	not used	/k/: duck	**English only. Sound = Welsh <c>**
dd	/ð/: eistedd (a letter of the alphabet)	doubled d, /d/: add	**Different. Welsh <dd> sounds like English <th> in this**
ff	/f/: ffenest (a letter of the alphabet)	doubled f, /f/: off	**Same. Same sound; a letter in Welsh, a doubling convention in English**
ll	/ɬ/: llaw (a letter of the alphabet)	doubled l, /l/: hill	**Different. The Welsh sound is not used in English**
ng	/ŋ/: llong (a letter of the alphabet)	/ŋ/: sing	**Same. Occasionally <n> + <g> in Welsh (Bangor)**
ph	/f/: ei phen (mainly under mutation)	/f/: phone	**Same**
rh	voiceless r: rhaff (a letter of the alphabet)	not used	**Welsh only**
sh	not used; si writes this sound	/ʃ/: shop	**English only. Sound = Welsh <si>**
si	/ʃ/: siop	not a spelling unit	**Welsh only. Sound = English <sh>**
th	/θ/: cath (a letter of the alphabet)	/θ/: thin and /ð/: this	**Partly shared. Voiceless <th> shared; English adds /ð/, which Welsh writes <dd>**
wh	not used	/w/: when	**English only**
tch	not used	/ʧ/: catch	**English only**
dge	not used	/dʒ/: badge	**English only**

Table A3:

Vowel combinations

GRAPHEME	IN WELSH	IN ENGLISH	OVERLAP
ai	diphthong: gwaith	/eɪ/: rain	**Different. The sound represented by Welsh <ai> is close to that represented by English <igh> and <i-e> (light, time).**
au	diphthong: haul; very common plural ending (llyfrau)	/ɔː/: sauce	**Different**
aw	diphthong: mawr, llaw	/ɔː/: saw	**Different. The sound represented by Welsh <aw> is close to that represented by English <ou> / <ow> (out, cow)**
ei	diphthong: eira	/eɪ/: vein (less common spelling)	**Different**
eu	diphthong: teulu	rarely taught	**Different**
ew	diphthong: tew, mewn	/juː/, /uː/: new, flew	**Different**
iw	diphthong: lliw	not used	**Welsh only**
yw	diphthong: byw	not used	**Welsh only**
oe	diphthong: coed	long o: toe	**Different**
oi	diphthong: troi	/ɔɪ/: coin	**Same. A rare exact match**
oy	not used	/ɔɪ/: boy	**English only. Sound = Welsh <oi>**
ou	rare	/aʊ/: out	**English only**
ow	loanwords only	long o: snow; /aʊ/: cow	**English only.**
wy	diphthong: bwyd, mwyn	rare (Wye)	**Welsh only**
â ê î ô û ŵ ŷ	circumflex marks a long vowel: tân, môr, dŵr	not used	**Welsh only. English marks long vowels with letter patterns instead (Table A4)**

Table A4:

English-only vowel spellings, grouped by sound

ENGLISH SOUND	ENGLISH SPELLING	EXAMPLES	WELSH COMPARISON
long a	a-e, ay, (ai)	make, day, rain	No Welsh parallel; Welsh <ai>, <ei> sound different
long e	ee, ea, e-e, y	see, eat, these, happy	A similar vowel occurs in Welsh <i> as in *ci*. In southern varieties of Welsh, <u> may also have a similar pronunciation.
long i	igh, i-e, ie, y	light, time, pie, my	Close to Welsh <ai> (gwaith)
long o	oa, o-e, ow	boat, home, snow	Welsh long o (môr) is a pure vowel, not a glide
long oo	oo, ue, u-e, ew	moon, blue, flute, flew	Welsh writes this sound as <w> (dŵr)
short oo	oo	book	Welsh writes this sound as <w> (cwm)
or / aw	or, ore, aw, au	for, more, saw, sauce	No Welsh parallel; Welsh <aw> and <au> sound different (Table A3)
er	er, ir, ur	her, bird, turn	Welsh has no /ɜ/ vowel
ou / ow	ou, ow	out, cow	Close to Welsh <aw> (mawr)
oi / oy	oi, oy	coin, boy	Matches Welsh <oi> (troi)
air / ear	air, are, ear	hair, care, bear	No Welsh parallel

Appendix B: A checklist for choosing a phonics programme

This guidance describes what a strong programme provides, and what good evidence for it looks like.

This checklist evaluates phonics teaching and its application in reading and spelling. It does not assess the school's whole literacy curriculum. Schools should also consider how the programme will work alongside their provision for oral language, vocabulary, comprehension, engagement with a wide range of texts, and wider writing. A phonics programme need not supply all of this teaching or its resources, but its implementation should allow these elements to develop alongside phonics.

As an initial requirement, the programme or approach should meet the definition of SSP in Section 2: grapheme-phoneme correspondences are taught explicitly in a planned cumulative sequence; blending is the primary strategy for reading unfamiliar words; and segmenting is taught for spelling.

Work through it with the programme materials in front of you, and record where you saw each thing. Mark each item **Y** (clearly met), **P** (partly met) or **N** (not met).

This checklist draws on the programme criteria, evidence guidance, and fidelity guidance in Section 4, the definition of SSP in Section 2, and the bilingual guidance in Section 3.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR	NOTES	Y / P / N
CONTENT AND SEQUENCE		
A systematic, cumulative scope and sequence, in manageable steps, with a clear lesson structure. Planned review built in, with guidance on pacing and on what to do when learners need more time. Explicit routines for blending to decode and segmenting to spell, with clear teacher language and examples. Phonemic awareness linked to letters and print.		
PRACTICE AND CONSOLIDATION		
Cumulative practice that builds accuracy first, then automaticity. Spaced retrieval of previously taught content. Practice at every level: GPC, word, sentence and connected text, in reading and in spelling.		
TEXTS AND WORD LEARNING		
Decodable or matched texts aligned to the taught correspondences, with clear guidance on how and when to use them and on combining them with richer texts. An explicit approach to common exception words that draws attention to the decodable parts. Fluency developed through accurate oral reading, with modelling and feedback, moving from words to connected text. Beyond the early code (if used past early primary) Clear progression into multisyllabic words, morphology, and spelling conventions.		
ASSESSMENT		
Built-in checks of phonemic awareness, taught GPCs and decoding (including nonword reading where appropriate), spelling, and fluency where relevant. Clear decision rules about what counts as secure, when to reteach, when to increase review, and when to provide additional support.		
SUPPORT AND INCLUSION		
Practical guidance for learners who need more support: including smaller chunks, more review, more guided practice, and structured rechecks. Implementation support: training materials, example lessons, common misconceptions, coaching tools, resource lists, and realistic time guidance.		

WHAT TO LOOK FOR	NOTES	Y / P / N
EVIDENCE AND TRANSPARENCY		
Impact claims name a comparison: compared with what, for whom, and under what conditions.		
Outcomes were measured with independent, standardised or well-validated tests, not only the programme's own assessments.		
The evidence is transparent about who was studied: participants, duration, dosage, training, fidelity, and implementation conditions.		
There is reason to expect the findings to transfer: replication across settings or a clear rationale, and attention to fit for Wales (language of instruction and assessment).		
The school knows where the programme sits on its evidence journey and treats early-stage claims with proportionate caution.		
The study design supports the claim: random or well-matched comparison groups, low dropout, and analysis that matches how learners were grouped (for example, by class or school).		
Before-and-after gains alone are not treated as evidence of impact (without a comparison group, improvement cannot show that the programme caused it)		
TRAINING AND FIDELITY		
Staff can access the recommended training, refresher training, and induction for new staff.		
The school can deliver it as designed: adherence, dosage, quality of delivery and consistency over time, with coaching or observation where appropriate.		
An explicit approach to common exception words that draws attention to the decodable parts.		
Fluency developed through accurate oral reading, with modelling and feedback, moving from words to connected text.		
Beyond the early code (if used past early primary)		
Clear progression into multisyllabic words, morphology, and spelling conventions.		

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