

Debbie Hepplewhite's criteria for evaluating and selecting a synthetic phonics programme and supporting resources

	YES	NO	COMMENTS
NO initial sight vocabulary or 'High Frequency Words' to learn where words are learnt as whole shapes. Phonic knowledge and skills are established with regular words before trickier words are introduced slowly and systematically.			
Emphasis is on the systematic introduction of a 'simple alphabetic code' (42 letter/s-sound correspondences) prior to introducing the 'complex alphabetic code' of spelling and pronunciation variations (44 sounds, 175+ graphemes). Charts are provided for the scheme's basic code and complex code to support learning.			
Emphasis at first is on the sounds associated with the letters and letter combinations - NOT the names of the letters (NB: The Rose Report does not say this but 'sounds first' is promoted by the country's leading synthetic phonics programmes).			
Emphasis is on the PHONEME as a unit of sound (that is the smallest <i>single</i> identifiable sound in speech) - NOT syllable chunks at first (cob-web), and NOT consonant blends (scr, st, dr) and NOT onset and rime (r-at, st-ink, sm-ell).			
Emphasis is on tracking all-through-the-word from the very beginning NOT first letter or sound, last letter or sound, medial letter or sound.			
In the main, phonemic awareness (that is, awareness of sounds in speech) is developed along WITH looking at the corresponding letter shapes.			
Rhyming and alliterative activities are understood to be a valuable part of the rich literacy provision but are NOT pre-requisites to starting synthetic phonics teaching. Beware of extraneous and distracting activities and over-elaborate mnemonic systems.			
Letter/s-sound correspondences are introduced at a fast pace (4 to 6 per week) in groups which include both consonants and vowels to enable immediate application of the reversible skills of all-through-the-word blending for reading and all-through-the-spoken-word segmenting for spelling.			
Pupils can select limited letter/s choices in early spelling activities, for example, through using magnetic letters, or letter tiles or cubes with letter/s. Digraphs (two letters representing a phoneme) should be available as one 'unit'. Emphasis on segmenting the individual sounds all-through-the-spoken-word for beginning spelling then select the letter/s - and NOT 'look, cover, write, check'.			
Pupils are given ample opportunities to practise correct handwriting with tripod pencil hold as this adds to the multi-sensory approach. Avoid long continuous strings of writing patterns as this does not emulate letter or word writing. [Note that small fingers have difficulty gripping fat writing implements.]			
Only when a pupil can both pull the letter/s shapes from memory and handwrite competently, should he/she be expected to write down spellings rather than select letter/s from practical resources.			
Pupils are not expected to read books by themselves which do not match their phonic knowledge and blending skills. Guessing words from their whole shape and guessing words from picture clues, context and initial letter cues is NOT acceptable. Early words to read, and early reading books, should support the systematic introduction of cumulative phonic knowledge. Irregular words should still be approached phonically and the tricky part noted. [NB: Bookband coding is not suitable for early synthetic phonics teaching.]			
Pupils are not precluded from looking at, or sharing, any books which are a part of enrichment. A story book, for example, can be provided to share at home whilst the correspondences being learned or an appropriate word list for blending (synthesising) is provided for the pupil to practise decoding. Does the phonics programme provide a helpful cumulative word list?			
Is comprehension development part of the programme? It does not need to be. [Comprehension can be developed orally through enrichment activities and through sharing books, and separately from learning phonic knowledge and skills. Identify when phonics knowledge and skills are the learning intention and when comprehension development is the learning intention. Eventually, pupils apply their growing phonic knowledge and skills to the wider curriculum.]			
Assessment guidance and resources are provided.			
Guidance is provided to inform parents and to work in partnership with parents.			