

Why are all these children saying sh...?



**Jolly
Phonics**

A Case Study

And why are all these children pretending to click castanets?

The story of one school that changed its teaching of reading and writing

from St Michael's School,
Stoke Gifford, Bristol



Why we changed

by Pat Smith, Reception teacher,
pictured on the front cover

In our school, we had always had children who got frustrated with reading. The single letter sounds did not help them read many of the unfamiliar words. It was worse with the writing. The children would write the initial letter of a word and then just put a 'magic line'. We had been using Letterland for the single letter sounds, which the children enjoyed. However, as in previous years, we felt we had got as far as we could go. In particular, the children were getting stuck on the characters and we had difficulty getting them to say the actual letter sounds.

Making the change

It was our Educational Psychologist, Dr Marlyne Grant, who introduced us to *Jolly Phonics*, through Trudy Wainwright, our Reading Teacher. We started using the material in April, at the start of the summer term, although the children had been in school since the previous September. We felt it was important to concentrate fully on *Jolly Phonics*, so during the first 7 weeks we suspended our normal reading sessions.

Parents involved

We began by having a meeting with the parents to explain what was happening and to encourage their full participation at home. We taught 6 sounds each week and encouraged children to use blending skills from the very beginning. The sounds and blending skills were taught in whole-class sessions, while being reinforced within groups and individually. There was active participation from home and school, and most of the parents were very supportive. As the children completed worksheets they took them home. They

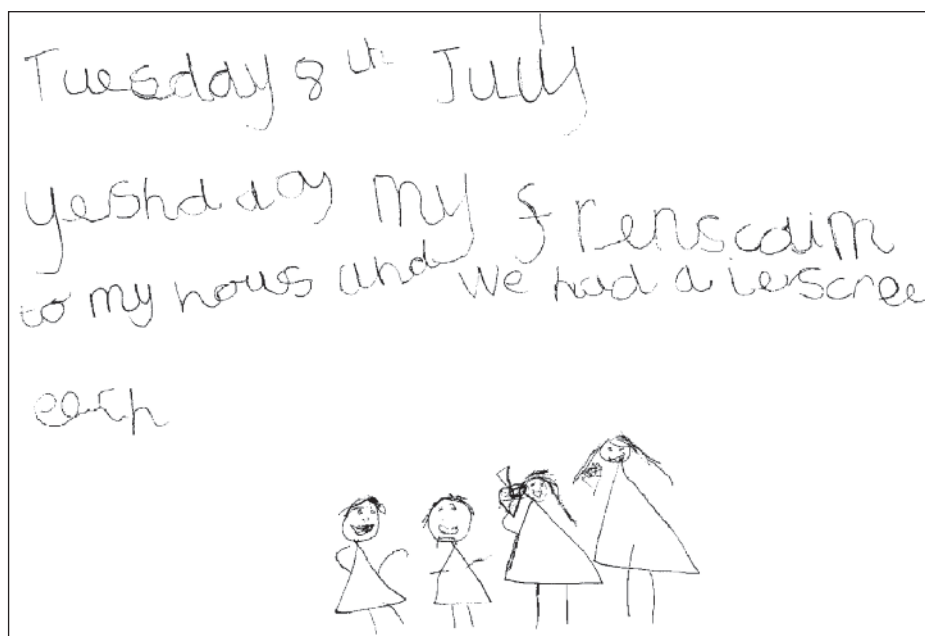
also took home a 'Soundbook' which had the new sounds added each week. As soon as they were able they took home word-lists to practise blending skills. These became very popular as children developed the ability to use these skills, and many of the children were asking for new lists each day. Many parents also purchased *Jolly Phonics Workbooks* to complete at home. We used the *Jolly Phonics Videos 1 & 2* regularly in school, and also made a rota for the parents to borrow them to watch at home – some parents were so keen on these videos that they purchased their own copies.

Children's improvement

It became clear very quickly that not only was this scheme very enjoyable for all concerned, but also it was very successful. By the end of the summer term, after about 3 months of the programme, almost all of the children's reading and writing skills were dramatically improved.

All of the children could recognise the 42 sounds, and decode the actions. With the exception of 1 or 2 children they could also blend sounds together, and were transferring these skills to other reading activities, including their 'normal' reading books. However, the greatest improvement has been in the children's writing – the sample below is typical. This girl used digraphs in words like 'hous' and 'ies creem' that are logical and readable. Where in previous years there was just a beginning sound, now the children were all writing out their news. None of the children were frightened to attempt writing any of the letter sounds they had been taught.

I have now started to teach Year 2 at this same school and realise that most of these children do not have the phonic skills of their now-Year 1 counterparts. We have decided to teach *Jolly Phonics* to these Year 2 children in the confidence that they too will benefit.



A typical writing sample by one of these Reception children.

Rethinking our teaching

by Richard Sloper, Reception teacher, pictured on the left

Any new material brings about change, but with *Jolly Phonics* we needed to change some of the practices that we had taken for granted.

As an example, we were asked to teach a new letter sound every day. Although it seemed very fast at first, the children were quite capable of doing it, even the digraphs, and even though some of them were not yet 5. The actions, such as pretending to click castanets and say 'ck, ck' (shown above) were all good fun. They helped the children remember the sounds.

When my class started in Reception they tested at below the County average. Now they have made a huge improvement. They enjoy reading and writing and are much more confident. I see other teachers who use *Jolly Phonics*, but less whole-heartedly, and I find myself telling them how much their results could improve if they followed it more thoroughly.

We had been teaching initially by the 'sight' word approach, with the children developing

Easier reading, easier writing

by Trudy Wainwright, Reading Teacher & Special Needs

a sight vocabulary as they worked through a variety of school books. They were also taught alphabet sounds and key words. To maintain the flow of writing, children were encouraged to use phonic or trial spellings where possible, and 'magic lines' with an initial sound. So to launch a programme that teaches the 42 sounds of English, and in a multisensory way with actions and joined-up writing, was a dramatic change! Encouraged by the *Using Jolly Phonics* video, research into the programme in Toronto, and the support of Dr Marlyne Grant, we decided to take the plunge.

For two weeks before the start of term, parents helped to make flash cards for sounds, 'word boxes', handwriting sheets and class games, by photocopying from *The Phonics Handbook*. We also bought the *Jolly Phonics Videos* and the *Finger Phonics Books*. During week 1 of our 7-week programme, each class was introduced to the first group of letters – 's, a, t, i, p, n', with the children recognising the letter shape, saying the sound and doing



the actions. Great fun! The children quickly began to blend the initial sounds into words, as with 's-a-t = sat'. As the programme developed they learned consonant and vowel digraphs (two letters which make one sound) and were soon able to read more difficult words.

Because the children were taught to listen to a sound, match it to letters and then write, spelling became more accurate. Joined handwriting meant that words were remembered more easily and so confidence increased. English spelling is not always regular, so 'tricky words' were taught and learned through 'look, cover, write, check', 'say it as it sounds', and mnemonics. When I visited one reception class at the end of the year, a group of children were writing a story about the Ugly Duckling. All the group were writing whole words, usually with an accurate letter-sound match, using 'tricky words' and some capital letters and full stops. The stories ranged from four lines to three pages of writing – fluency of writing is not an issue!

At the end of term, about a month after the completion of the programme, all the children in both classes were assessed in reading and spelling. They read with confidence, sounding out and blending unfamiliar words. All attempted a letter sound match for spelling. Of the 65 children assessed (aged between 4 years 10 months and 5 years 9 months), 28 had reading ages as high as 6 years or over, and 36 had spelling ages as high as 6 years or over. On average the children were now 6 months ahead of their actual age – and after just 3 months of teaching. All the children have been making progress and although it is early days, we expect very many fewer of them to need remedial help. Interestingly the boys made just as much progress as the girls.

We are delighted with the progress made by all the children on the programme. *Jolly Phonics* has been an invaluable means of ensuring that our youngest children make a secure, confident start on the exciting journey to literacy.

How Emma has improved:

Reception Class 1, Mrs Pat Smith

Pupil:	Boy/ Girl:	Actual Age:	Reading Age:	Spelling Age:
WK	b	5.9	5.10	5.8
HM	b	5.8	5.11	6.5
EJ	g	5.8	5.11	6.5
CT	b	5.6	6.7	7.5
MK	b	5.6	6.2	6.1
IT	b	5.6	6.10	6.4
TI	g	5.6	6.6	6.7
MF	g	5.5	6.3	6.6
MP	b	5.5	5.11	5.1
CS	b	5.5	NS	NS
NE	b	5.5	5.8	5.10
MB	g	5.4	6.1	6.5
YM	g	5.4	5.4	5.1
NR	b	5.4	5.10	6.1
SN	g	5.4	6.2	6.7
IE	b	5.3	6.0	6.2
DI	b	5.3	5.3	5.1
RM	g	5.2	6.2	6.6
IK	b	5.2	6.5	6.4
TD	g	5.2	5.11	6.2
KM	g	5.2	NS	NS
IB	g	5.3	6.3	6.5
YN	b	5.1	6.6	6.2
YS	g	5.1	NS	NS
MD	b	5.1	6.5	6.5
KT	g	5.0	5.3	NS
DM	g	5.0	6.5	6.7
MD	g	5.0	5.5	5.1
YD	g	5.0	5.10	6.5
BT	g	5.0	5.7	5.8
IE	b	4.11	6.6	5.6
IM	g	4.10	5.5	NS
CN	b	4.10	6.1	6.5

Average: 5.4 5.11 5.11

Boys: 5.4 6.0 6.0
Girls: 5.4 5.9 5.9

% above Actual Age: 90.6% 71.0%

Reception Class 2, Mr Richard Sloper

Pupil:	Boy/ Girl:	Actual Age:	Reading Age:	Spelling Age:
MC	b	5.9	6.6	6.6
CK	b	5.9	5.5	5.4
BS	g	5.8	6.1	6.1
CT	g	5.8	6.1	5.10
IN	g	5.8	5.10	6.4
NO	b	5.7	5.7	6.1
WM	b	5.6	6.0	abs
SU	b	5.6	5.3	NS
OS	g	5.5	6.1	6.4
YO	g	5.4	6.1	6.6
SH	b	5.4	6.4	6.2
DO	g	5.4	6.5	6.8
DB	g	5.4	5.10	6.5
RC	b	5.4	NS	NS
DK	b	5.3	5.3	NS
EE	b	5.3	6.6	6.7
YE	g	5.2	5.11	6.1
HI	g	5.2	5.7	5.11
RT	g	5.2	NS	NS
IS	g	5.2	6.4	6.1
NK	g	5.1	NS	5.5
DS	g	5.1	5.10	6.4
MN	b	5.1	6.5	6.8
FC	b	5.0	5.5	NS
MU	g	5.0	5.3	5.1
TO	g	5.0	5.11	5.10
CK	b	5.0	6.5	6.1
IF	g	4.11	5.9	5.10
HK	g	4.10	5.7	6.0
ML	g	4.10	5.9	5.4
SB	b	4.9	5.6	5.4
ED	g	4.9	NS	NS

Average: 5.3 5.9 5.8

Boys: 5.4 5.10 5.6
Girls: 5.2 5.9 5.10

% above Actual Age: 81.3% 78.1%

Lowest possible scores:

Reading 5.3 years (Burt Single Word Reading Test). NS considered as 4.9 years.

Writing 5.0 years (Schonell Form B Test). NS or absent considered as 4.6 years.

a parent's reaction by Diane Lewton

Jolly Phonics made learning the sounds fun by combining them with actions. Emma and I used to teach each other, with one of us doing the actions and the other saying the sounds. The extra sounds like 'ou', 'or' etc, are a great help when sounding out words like 'shout' or 'recorder'. Reading is not as painful for either of us when Emma takes time to break down, and phonically sound out, the words. You need to be patient, especially with the longer words, but Emma thrives on learning new words, and the praise she gets when she achieves this.

The system has also helped with learning to spell, and while it doesn't work with all words, it goes a long way towards getting it right. My son is two years older than Emma and at this stage of his schooling he was nowhere near as

advanced as Emma with either reading or spelling. I would highly recommend *Jolly Phonics* – I don't know many 5-year-olds who want to work when they get home, but the *Jolly Phonics Workbooks* changed that because they were so much fun.

Meeting our needs by Rod Jones, Headteacher

We had been looking for some time for a suitable phonics scheme to complement our core Reading Scheme.

We have been delighted with *Jolly Phonics* which has given an excellent flying start to our 4 and 5 year olds. All the head-shaking and arm-wagging makes it most entertaining and enables the children really to remember the sounds. The structured method has been welcomed by the teachers and we believe it would fit in well with the Literacy Hour approach.



Helping the school achieve by Dr Marlynne Grant, Chartered Educational Psychologist

When I first came across *Jolly Phonics* I was looking for an early literacy programme which was in line with the experimental research. I was impressed by the main elements of the *Jolly Phonics* teaching method and its other important feature: a brisk pace of learning. It advocates learning letter sounds at the rate of one per day. This pace enables children from the outset to see how sounds are used in real words. Its auditory training and interactive teaching methods also engage children's attention and help their memory so that they can learn at an early stage how to use their knowledge of sounds to read and write independently.

My role as Educational Psychologist involves me daily with children who have reading and writing difficulties. At St Michael's School, I have had close contact with Trudy Wainwright as Reading and Special Needs Teacher. We would plan individual teaching for such children and as

I became familiar with *Jolly Phonics* I began to introduce ideas from *The Phonics Handbook*. However our discussions were always far-reaching and we took every opportunity to talk about whole school literacy teaching. I was keen to introduce a systematics phonics programme like *Jolly Phonics* for all children in Reception from the beginning, not just as an afterthought when difficulties arose. Trudy was receptive but cautious as she knew how well-established existing teaching practices were at Key Stage 1. Then she attended some training in *Jolly Phonics* which I gave to a group of Speech & Language Therapists. Trudy took further ideas back to St Michael's where increasing interest was growing among the staff. Eventually a decision was taken, supported by Senior Management, to 'go for it'.

Some apprehensions remained about the changes, and staff wondered if they could possibly teach at the astonishing rate of one letter sound per day. But success was within their grasp and after three months they had covered all 42 phonemes and had achieved excellent reading and spelling results. What marked out the success at St Michael's was their decision as a whole staff to raise their expectations and 'take the plunge'. This made all the difference – a partial dabbling would have been much less effective. The *Using Jolly Phonics* video and some whole-school training helped to give staff the confidence and to firm their resolve during the planning stage. The school also involved parents who helped to prepare the materials for the Summer Term start date.

Inevitably, the initial focus with *Jolly Phonics* is on teaching the letter sounds and actions, which is great fun. But there is more to the teaching method and schools often need some guidance and encouragement to get children to use these sounds in words from the very beginning. Within the first two weeks of starting the programme,

the children know sufficient letter sounds to blend them into real words and to identify the sounds in real words. Such success is marvellous but it is quite within the reach of all schools given a willingness to make changes, to raise expectations and to have a go at a brisk pace of learning.

At St Michael's we are now into another academic year. The new Reception children have already begun the *Jolly Phonics* programme and those children now in Year 1 who started last Summer Term need to move on, to sustain and develop their flying start. Again at this point schools may need some support and encouragement to understand the complexities of the next stages where further phonics, alternative spellings, more advanced blending and phonological awareness training, and a systematic spelling programme should be tackled. All these aspects are covered in the *Jolly Phonics* programme, but this is not always recognised. Some schools just introduce the basic letter sounds, then leave it at that. Their children will certainly have had a flying start, but their rate of progress is less likely to be sustained.

Thanks to the *Jolly Phonics* programme, the special needs provision at St Michael's can now be more precisely targeted to the very few children who have been slow starters. As their Educational Psychologist I have already been asked to assess two of these children. Because of their systematic start it was possible to identify the specific letter sounds which these children had not grasped. In both cases it was also evident that the children needed a greater emphasis on blending and phonological awareness training.

Given the enthusiasm and raised expectations which *Jolly Phonics* makes possible I look forward to working with St Michael's in the future to deepen their understanding of *Jolly Phonics* and to witness continuing progress in their literacy achievements. It has been exciting to work with them.