PRIMARY READING SIMPLIFIED

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO CLASSROOM TEACHING & WHOLE-SCHOOL IMPLEMENTATION

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For Silvia

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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INTRODUCTION

This book is my attempt to address one of the most daunting problems in education: how do we maximise the chances that all pupils in our schools will become capable, confident readers? My first book, *The Art and Science of Teaching Primary Reading*, was designed to help teachers and school leaders understand key principles derived from the wealth of research on reading development and instruction. The idea was that these principles could be used to devise a multitude of sensible approaches to teaching reading. I was determined not to advocate one specific approach, but instead to empower schools to find their own way.

However, I have become increasingly convinced that there is an appetite for much more than a set of evidence-informed principles. The aim of this book is to detail how I approach classroom teaching and whole-school coordination of reading, and to do justice to every practicality, including those to which research provides scant guidance.

In other words, my last book offered a bird's eye view of the terrain of reading instruction so that teachers and school leaders could safely plot their own paths. In contrast, this book describes *my* preferred route through that terrain, addressing every potential problem faced along the way. It is certainly not the only effective approach, but it is one that has been refined over several years to allow all teachers to thrive. To be exact, a single guiding belief underpins this book:

Any approach to teaching reading should be judged both on the scope it provides for expert teachers to excel and on the support it provides for novice teachers to achieve adequacy.

Much of this book's contents has already been put into practice by many schools I have supported. The feedback on this has been overwhelmingly positive, and I wouldn't have written this book if I didn't think this approach had the potential to be effective. However, it would be wrong to suggest that this book describes a foolproof method of achieving stunning results in every possible context. No such thing exists, nor is it ever likely to. Ultimately, all significant change in a school relies on conscientious implementation by teachers and school leaders. This book offers an approach that makes this implementation as simple as possible without compromising every pupil's right to meaningful reading experiences. I hope you find it useful.

HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

One of the joys of working with young people is that they provide challenges you could never have imagined. This means it is impossible to create a truly comprehensive list of problems that teachers and school leaders might face when teaching reading. However, there are several common questions faced in every school by those seeking to improve reading. Regardless of whether you follow the exact advice offered in this book, if you have a good answer to the questions listed below, then you're almost certainly doing justice to your pupils and ensuring they have every opportunity to become capable, confident readers.

There are two ways to use this book. First, and most obviously, this book has been designed so that you can read it from start to finish. But it has also been designed so you can skip to the parts of the book that are most relevant to the questions you are looking to address in your classroom or across your school.

FOR CLASSROOM TEACHERS

What do I need to know about reading and how it develops? **Turn to Chapter 1 – What Every Teacher Needs to Know about Reading**

How do I teach pupils to begin to decode words? **Turn to Chapter 3 – Teaching Phonics**

How do I lay the foundations of language comprehension while pupils are still learning the basics of decoding? **Turn to Chapter 4 – Supporting Spoken Language Development**

How do I introduce pupils to whole-class reading in year 1? **Turn to Chapter 7 – Scaffolded Reading**

How do I help pupils become fluent when they are just beginning to read? **Turn to Chapter 8 – Fluency Reading**

How do I ensure pupils get the vast amount of text experience required to become capable, confident readers? **Turn to Chapter 9 – Extended Reading**

How do I support pupils to develop strategic, critical, appreciative dispositions towards reading? **Turn to Chapter 10 – Close Reading**

How do I foster independent reading in my classroom? **Turn to Chapter 17 – Nurturing a Reading Culture**

How do I develop pupils' vocabulary and knowledge of the world? **Turn to Chapter 18 – Developing Vocabulary**

How do I teach spelling in a way that will support reading development? **Turn to Chapter 19 – Supporting Reading through Writing**

How do I ensure pupils feel prepared for statutory reading assessments? **Turn to Chapter 20 – Preparing Pupils for External Assessments**

How do I identify pupils who need extra support and provide interventions that target their individual barriers to reading development? **Turn to Chapter 21 – Identifying and Addressing Barriers to Reading Development**

How do I make the most of opportunities for one-to-one reading? **Turn to Chapter 22 – Maximising the Impact of One-to-One Reading**

FOR THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR READING ACROSS A SCHOOL

How do I support colleagues to have a shared understanding of reading development? **Turn to Chapter 1 – What Every Teacher Needs to Know about Reading**

How do I ensure that phonics provision is effective? **Turn to Chapter 3 – Teaching Phonics**

How do I ensure that pupils' language comprehension develops while they are learning the basics of decoding? **Turn to Chapter 4 – Supporting Spoken Language Development**

How do I structure a timetable to ensure a balance between fluency development, breadth of text experience and meaningful discussion of texts? **Turn to Part III – Organising Classroom Teaching**

How do I implement changes to how reading is taught across the school in a sustainable way that encourages buy-in from colleagues? **Turn to Part IV – Implementing Change across a School**

How do I build a diverse, challenging reading curriculum that balances narrative fiction and other forms of texts? **Turn to Chapter 16 – Building a Reading Curriculum**

How do I foster independent reading across the school? **Turn to Chapter 17 – Nurturing a Reading Culture**

How do I support other leaders across the school to develop a curriculum that builds pupils' vocabulary and knowledge of the world? **Turn to Chapter 18 – Developing Vocabulary**

How do I organise spelling instruction across the school in a way that supports reading development? **Turn to Chapter 19 – Supporting Reading through Writing**

How do I ensure pupils feel prepared for statutory reading assessments? **Turn to Chapter 20 – Preparing Pupils for External Assessments**

How do I employ a systematic approach to assessment and intervention that tackles pupils' specific barriers to reading? **Turn to Chapter 21 – Identifying and Addressing Barriers to Reading Development**

How do I support my colleagues to make the most of opportunities for one-to-one reading? **Turn to Chapter 22 – Maximising the Impact of One-to-One Reading**

This book is written in reference to English schools. Table 0.1 is presented to support readers from other countries to access this book.

Table 0.1 Ages of year groups in English schools

	Year group	Age in years
	Reception	4–5
Key stage 1	Year 1	5–6
	Year 2	6–7
Key stage 2	Year 3	7–8
	Year 4	8–9
	Year 5	9–10
	Year 6	10–11

3

TEACHING PHONICS

WHAT IS PHONICS?

Few aspects of primary education are the focus of as much debate, and as many misconceptions, as the teaching of phonics. It is worth pinning down exactly what is meant by phonics and its associated terminology before we proceed any further:

As we saw in Chapter 1, at the heart of the English writing system are relationships between the sounds of spoken language and the letters used to represent them. Specifically, these are correspondences between basic chunks of spoken sound we can break words into for the purposes of reading, called phonemes, and the individual letters or small groups of letters that represent them, called graphemes. These are commonly called grapheme–phoneme correspondences or GPCs. Phonics is any attempt to teach the correspondences between letters and sounds and how to use them. Using these correspondences involves blending identified phonemes together to reconstitute words (e.g. /c/ /a/ /t/ → 'cat') and segmenting phonemes within words (e.g. 'dog' → /d/ /o/ /g/). This identification and manipulation of phonemes, called phonemic awareness, is sometimes discussed as something separate from phonics (National Reading Panel, 2000). However, evidence suggests that phonemic awareness is best taught in the presence of letters, and consequently it is an integral part of teaching phonics (Moats, 2019).

The word 'phonics' is also sometimes used to describe the knowledge and skills relating to the relationships between letters and sounds, in the same way that 'science' might be used to describe the processes of systematic observation undertaken by scientists *and* the things we know about the world from these observations.

Systematic phonics is the attempt to teach phonics with a defined scope and sequence (i.e. an organised curriculum of what will be taught and in what order). In most cases, this means starting with the simplest and most common GPCs and incrementally introducing greater complexity.

Synthetic phonics is the teaching of phonics in which pupils are introduced to GPCs individually and shown how to blend these into words. This contrasts with approaches that initially introduce pupils to words before deriving GPCs from analysis of these words. A key advantage of synthetic phonics is that it makes it easier to ensure targeted GPCs are taught explicitly and in a predetermined sequence (Castles et al., 2018).

WHY SHOULD WE TEACH PHONICS?

The argument for teaching phonics is simple: to use the English writing system, all readers must acquire an understanding of GPCs and how to use them. Thus, it makes sense to teach pupils the most common GPCs and the related skills, using a specified curriculum to gradually build pupils' understanding. Of course, learning to read requires much more than expertise with GPCs, but developing this expertise is a necessary condition of becoming a fluent reader.

When some argue 'phonics doesn't work for everyone' or 'not all pupils learn the same way', they are misunderstanding what phonics actually is. One way or another, if a pupil is to become a fluent reader, then they must acquire knowledge of the code of GPCs that is central to the English writing system. We can teach them this (i.e. phonics), or we can hope pupils will work it out for themselves. Some pupils do seem to have the ability to derive GPCs for themselves with minimal teaching, but these pupils are categorically *not* those who struggle to recognise words. The more difficult a pupil finds it to learn GPCs and how to use them (i.e. how to decode), the more they need patient, persistent teaching of phonics that takes account of this difficulty and the impact it can have on motivation and self-efficacy (Wagner et al., 2022).

WHAT ARE THE LIMITS OF PHONICS?

We've seen that phonics is most accurately and productively defined as the attempt to teach pupils to begin to recognise words for themselves using common relationships between letters and sounds. However, phonics is also sometimes described simply as a method of teaching reading. While understandable, this latter framing of phonics is unfortunate for two reasons:

1 It downplays the importance of various other aspects of teaching reading that constitute an effective curriculum.
2 It implies that *all* those who are struggling with reading need to be supported through phonics.

To counter these issues, it is helpful to understand the limits of phonics.

The goal of phonics is to teach pupils enough about GPCs so that they can begin to recognise words for themselves. No phonics programme aims to teach all the GPCs that might be identified in written English; nor would it be sensible to do so. Instead, the goal of phonics is to teach pupils an initial knowledge of the most common GPCs, enough to allow them to begin adding to this knowledge through their own text experience.

It is also worth reiterating that the English writing system is more than just a code of correspondences between letters and sounds. In some words in English, it is of no use to try to attribute phonemes to every letter (e.g. 'cupboard', 'one', 'Gloucester').

Knowledge of GPCs and their application is essential, but expert word recognition is more than just application of this knowledge (Wagner et al., 2022).

Learning to recognise words can be compared to learning to play chess. It is beneficial for those new to chess to be explicitly taught the basics of how the different pieces move. But further expertise then requires the application of this basic knowledge to new situations, learning the complexities of the game through vast experience of actually playing chess. Subsequent explicit teaching of more complex aspects of chess continues to be useful, but there is no substitute for plenty of experience playing the game.

Similarly, it is beneficial for those new to recognising words to be explicitly taught the basics about GPCs and how to use them. But further expertise then requires the application of this basic knowledge to new situations, learning the complexities of the English writing system through vast experience actually recognising unfamiliar words. Subsequent explicit teaching of more complex aspects of the English writing system continues to be useful, but there is no substitute for plenty of experience recognising words.

HOW DO PUPILS BECOME MORE EXPERT AT RECOGNISING WORDS?

What does this word recognition development look like in practice? Some words that are unfamiliar to a novice reader are simple to decode. Even if a pupil has never seen the word 'stuck' written down before, their first attempt at decoding it will easily provide them with new knowledge of how this word is spelled. After decoding this word a few times, the pupil will become able to recognise this word without conscious effort (Dehaene, 2009; Ehri, 2014).

However, what about unfamiliar words that aren't so easy to decode? Imagine a pupil encounters the word 'cafe' in text for the first time. If they were to read the word aloud, their initial attempts at decoding the word might sound like 'caif' or 'caffee'. After a moment, though, they might realise there is a word already in their vocabulary that sounds quite like 'caffee'... cafe! And from this they have learned something new about the English writing system. They have made a useful connection between the spelling and pronunciation of this word, and they have also learned that the letter 'e' sometimes represents an /ay/ sound. We saw in Chapter 1 that this process is called mispronunciation correction (Colenbrander et al., 2022). Again, with repeated exposure to this word, the pupil becomes able to recognise it without conscious decoding.

It is the accumulation of these moments of learning that builds pupils' word recognition expertise. This is the reason why pupils must be encouraged to use their knowledge of GPCs throughout the entirety of each word they encounter, paying attention to every letter. Where pupils don't do this – often decoding just part of the word and then guessing from context – they miss an opportunity to increase their understanding of the English

writing system. Over time, these missed opportunities add up, leading to diminished word recognition expertise, the consequences of which often only reveal themselves after several years of impeded development.

HOW SHOULD PHONICS BE TAUGHT?

The short answer to this question is that it makes sense to teach phonics in the way that aligns with your school's chosen systematic phonics programme. However, there are some principles that teachers should bear in mind, regardless of the specific phonics programme they are using:

- Ensure phonics is taught for the allotted time each day.
- Embed the use of GPCs throughout the entire word as the go-to approach to recognising unfamiliar words. Put another way, you should make sure every pupil decodes unfamiliar words through reference to every letter in the word. Many pupils who develop a 'partial-decode-then-guess' strategy find their development hampered by this over the long term. This can be identified when pupils guess words in ways that suggest they are not paying attention to all the letters in that word, e.g. incorrectly identifying 'jumping' as 'jumped' or 'junking' or 'leaping'.
- Use consistent routines that allow pupils to focus their attention on the learning at hand.
- Ensure teaching is focused and pacy to allow pupils to get plenty of practice decoding and spelling words.
- Enunciate the individual phonemes within words in ways that support pupils to develop phonemic awareness. This means minimising the 'uh' sound (also known as schwa) that can follow consonant phonemes (e.g. 'm' should be pronounced as 'mmm' not 'muh'). Sometimes, it is only possible to minimise this sound; it can't always be removed entirely. While evidence on this aspect of phonics instruction is currently lacking, the experience of countless teachers of early reading suggests that enunciating phonemes in this way is helpful. It is also worth noting that phonemes are abstract entities that are identified within words for the purposes of reading, so – strictly speaking – there isn't a 'pure' or 'correct' way to pronounce any given phoneme.
- Be consistent with any terminology that is part of your school's phonics programme.
- Ensure the teaching of GPCs within words takes account of the accents used by pupils in the classroom (e.g. the vowel sound in the middle of the word 'pass' will differ based on the pupils' accents, and teaching should reflect this).
- Align decodable books that pupils read with the learning they have undertaken through the school's phonics programme. This means the words that pupils encounter in decodable books should either include GPCs they have learned or be whole words to which they have already been introduced.

- Use **responsive teaching**. In other words, assess pupils' learning regularly so that extra support can be provided where required. In some cases, this might entail support that allows pupils to 'keep up' with the pace of learning of their peers. In other cases, it might entail more frequent support that allows pupils to 'catch up' with the pace of learning of their peers.

As well as ensuring the above is taking place, there are further considerations for those who lead phonics across a school:

- Give relevant training to every person who teaches phonics or decoding interventions in your school, including teachers in key stage 2, teaching assistants and colleagues new to the school.
- Offer pupils' parents/carers opportunities to understand how phonics is taught in your school and how they can support their child at home. (See Chapters 17 and 22 for more on this.)
- Help teachers to organise and monitor the in-class provision and interventions provided for pupils who need extra support learning to decode. This support can be adapted through changes to teacher–pupil ratio, changes to frequency/length of interventions, changes to frequency of modelling or targeting of specific barriers to decoding, such as specific gaps in GPC knowledge, difficulties with blending or difficulties decoding polysyllabic words (i.e. words with more than one syllable).

It is worth taking a moment to consider in more detail the support offered to pupils through interventions. Obviously, what constitutes an appropriate pace of learning in any area of the curriculum is set arbitrarily. It can thus seem odd to suggest that a pupil is somehow 'behind' the pace of learning of their peers. However, primary education requires large groups of pupils to be taught by individual teachers, so pragmatism dictates that, where possible, pupils should be given extra support to allow them to be taught alongside the rest of their peers. (For more on assessment and interventions, see Chapter 21.)

Alternatively, phonics can be taught with pupils placed into different groups based on their current attainment. This allows teaching to move at different paces and focus on the immediate needs of pupils. However, this can be challenging to organise, especially in small schools. Regardless of how phonics teaching is organised, pupils who require extra support should receive it.

SHOULD THE TEACHING OF MORPHOLOGY BE EMBEDDED INTO PHONICS INSTRUCTION?

In Chapter 1, we learned that words are composed of morphemes, which we can think of as basic chunks of meaning from which words are built. The study of these morphemes is called morphology. Some argue that because of the impact of these morphemes on spelling, GPCs should be taught primarily in the context of word

families that make a word's morphology clearer (Bowers, 2022). However, organising the teaching of GPCs in this way makes it close to impossible to organise phonics instruction systematically (i.e. to incrementally introduce pupils to increasingly more complex and less common GPCs). And evidence suggests that systematic phonics is an essential component of decoding instruction (Castles et al., 2018).

This does not mean we should avoid sensitising pupils to the morphological patterns in the English writing system during the teaching of phonics. For example, the relatively consistent way words are pluralised (i.e. by adding the letter 's') can be pointed out to pupils (Department for Education, 2013). As pupils encounter other common morphemes, especially affixes (prefixes and suffixes) like 'un-' and '-ing', their meaning can be introduced and their existence in other familiar words can be discussed. This supports pupils in understanding the meaning of the words they decode, a key part of phonics instruction. And this understanding can be subsequently developed as pupils learn about morphemes in the context of vocabulary and spelling (see Chapters 18 and 19).

WHY IS DECODABLE TEXT VALUABLE?

Decodable text is any text that primarily uses GPCs that are already familiar to pupils. In other words, these texts are phonically controlled to ensure they do not exceed pupils' nascent GPC knowledge, in line with the phonics programme they are learning from. Such text may also include words containing unfamiliar GPCs if the words in their entirety are already familiar to pupils. As such, whether or not a text is decodable depends on the knowledge of the pupil relative to the text.

There is scant research that focuses specifically on the use of decodable text in early reading instruction. We are left to our experience, intuition and understanding of learning more broadly to help us determine how to make use of such text. Anyone who has sat alongside a novice reader and watched them fail to decode many of the words in a 'normal' text will know the value of decodable text. Pupils' motivation to engage in any activity is linked to the extent to which they can feel successful while practising. Decodable text offers pupils the opportunity to practise what they have learned and, crucially, to embed the key strategy of attending to every letter in a word, all while experiencing a motivating sense of success.

Texts that align with pupils' limited knowledge from the first few weeks of phonics will be unavoidably narrow in the range of words they require pupils to recognise. Such texts are often derided as artificial, but such protestations miss the point: pupils who do not learn to recognise words for themselves will never want to read independently, whatever the quality of the books in front of them. Regardless, all pupils will experience a wide array of 'normal' texts across the curriculum throughout their time in school. Decoding practice with texts that are controlled so that pupils can experience much-needed success is an essential part of any reading curriculum.

WHAT ARE THE LIMITS OF DECODABLE TEXT?

At the very beginning of pupils' journey to reading proficiency, it is essential they practise accurate decoding, and decodable text is designed for this purpose. However, pupils should engage with 'normal' texts as well, especially in partnership with an adult. Ideally, in the first two years of learning to read, pupils should have access to decodable texts that are aligned with their developing understanding of GPCs *in addition to* free choice from a selection of children's books. Decodable texts provide necessary decoding practice while 'normal' books selected by pupils can be shared with parents/carers to build motivation for reading and develop pupils' understanding of written English more generally. Beyond this, pupils can experience the variety of written English beyond decodable books when teachers read aloud and point at the words under a document camera (i.e. a visualiser) or when they read aloud using oversized books (sometimes called 'big books'). One way or another, at no point should pupils' experiences of written language be limited to decodable text only.

At the early stages of learning to decode, it would be counterproductive to require pupils to persistently decode unfamiliar words that weren't based on their newly developed understanding of GPCs. To do so would be to encourage them to identify words without reference to all the letters within them. If pupils are successful in identifying words without paying attention to all the letters, they might embed a 'partial-decode-then-guess' strategy that is likely to impede their reading development. And if they are not successful in doing this, then they are likely to find these reading experiences demotivating. One way or another, at the very early stages of decoding proficiency, it is a bad idea to expect pupils to persistently identify unfamiliar words containing unknown GPCs.

However, this early stage of decoding proficiency doesn't last forever. At the core of criticisms about the artificiality of decodable text is an issue worth consideration. As described earlier in this chapter, a crucial part of a pupil's journey to reading proficiency is the countless experiences with unfamiliar words containing unfamiliar GPCs. And decodable text is designed to *minimise* such experiences. This means we need to have a clear idea of how to manage pupils' transition from decodable text to 'normal' text.

WHEN AND HOW SHOULD PUPILS TRANSITION TO READING 'NORMAL' TEXTS?

As stated above, it is not problematic for pupils to engage with 'normal' books at any stage of their reading development. Shared experiences of good books are always beneficial. However, at the early stages of learning to decode, it is a bad idea to require pupils to persistently decode unfamiliar words containing unknown GPCs. This means

we need to think carefully about when we begin asking pupils to do this. In other words, the transition from decodable books to 'normal' books requires consideration.

When pupils start reading 'normal' books (i.e. texts that are not phonically controlled), they will need to use the set of GPCs they have already learned. This knowledge bootstraps their learning of the rest of the complexities of the English writing system through mispronunciation correction. To achieve this, pupils need to:

- Know enough of the most common GPCs so that they can deal with most of the unfamiliar words they face
- Have developed as an embedded habit the strategy of decoding through the entire word (i.e. paying attention to all the letters) when dealing with unfamiliar words
- Know that unfamiliar GPCs exist and that they can figure these out by identifying unfamiliar words
- Have the requisite vocabulary that will allow them to use the meaning of words to correct near-miss decoding attempts with many of the unfamiliar words they encounter.

It is difficult to know when the best moment is to ask a pupil to begin regularly dealing with words that contain unfamiliar GPCs (i.e. practising reading with 'normal' texts). Some pupils will be ready to independently read such texts inside their first year of reading instruction. Others will benefit from much more time practising with decodable text. As a general rule, the vast majority of pupils are ready for 'normal' texts by the end of their second year of formal reading instruction (i.e. the end of year 1 in English schools). However, there is no need for all pupils to wait this long. As already stated, pupils should be engaging with 'normal' texts at *every* stage, assuming they are not expected to regularly decode words with unfamiliar GPCs. But we can judge when a pupil is ready to profitably move their reading practice to 'normal' texts by hearing them read aloud. As soon as a pupil can successfully decode most words in an age-appropriate 'normal' text – decoding through the entirety of each word – then they are ready for independent reading of 'normal' texts. This doesn't mean every word needs to be decoded accurately although 90% of words is a sensible minimum. But it does mean that pupils should *not* be resorting to a 'partial-decode-then-guess' strategy for unfamiliar words. The use of a 'partial-decode-then-guess' strategy for word identification is a clear warning sign that the habit of decoding using all the letters in a word has not fully developed and further practice with decodable text is likely to be beneficial. (For further discussion of productive one-to-one reading, see Chapter 22.)

When making the transition from decodable text to 'normal' text, the choice of book matters. No initial reader is going to successfully recognise more than 90% of the words in *Pride and Prejudice* or even *Charlotte's Web*. Pupils' first experiences with 'normal' text should provide a gentle introduction to the complexities of the English writing system.

When pupils make this transition at a young age, this is not a problem as they can simply begin reading the age-appropriate texts from their classroom or school library. (As we will discuss in Chapter 17, there is no need for elaborate book-banding systems beyond the support they offer teachers in recommending books to children.) However, where pupils make this transition at a later age – perhaps even at secondary school or in adulthood – it is vital that texts provide pupils with the same gentle introduction to the complexities of written English but in the context of age-appropriate content and presentation. Many providers of decodable books have designed texts for this purpose, sometimes called 'Hi-Lo' books.

This Chapter in a Nutshell

- Phonics is the attempt to teach correspondences between letters and sounds and phonemic skills. Systematic phonics includes a defined scope and sequence (i.e. which correspondences are learned and in what order). Synthetic phonics is the teaching of phonics in which pupils are introduced to GPCs individually and shown how to blend these into words.
- All fluent readers are experts in the code of GPCs at the heart of the English writing system. The central goal of teaching phonics is for every pupil to acquire enough knowledge of the most common GPCs so that they can begin recognising words for themselves. Where pupils lack this knowledge, there is no reason not to teach it to them.
- Once pupils *can* begin recognising words for themselves in 'normal' texts, they can then learn the true complexity of the English writing system through vast amounts of text experience. This is a vital, though often underappreciated, component of a pupil's journey to reading proficiency.
- Phonics lessons should embed the strategy of using GPCs throughout the entirety of each word as the go-to approach to recognising unfamiliar words. Phonics lessons also benefit from routines that allow for plenty of focused practice of decoding and spelling words.
- Phonics teachers should take care to enunciate phonemes in ways that support the development of pupils' phonemic awareness, minimising the 'uh' sound (schwa) after consonant sounds.
- Regular assessment should be used to identify pupils who require further support. This support can be adapted through changes to teacher–pupil ratio, changes to frequency/length of interventions, changes to frequency of modelling and targeting of specific barriers to decoding.
- Decodable text is designed to provide initial readers with accurate decoding practice using GPCs they have already learned. The transition to practising decoding with 'normal' texts should be monitored to ensure pupils do not begin to employ a counterproductive 'partial-decode-then-guess' strategy.

Further Reading

- Ending the reading wars: Reading acquisition from novice to expert (Castles et al., 2018)
- *Early Reading Instruction: What Science Really Tells Us about How to Teach Reading* (McGuinness, 2006)
- Teaching children to read irregular words: A comparison of three instructional methods (Colenbrander et al., 2022)
- Connected phonation is more effective than segmented phonation for teaching beginning readers to decode unfamiliar words (Gonzalez-Frey & Ehri, 2021)

Retrieval Quiz

- What is meant by 'systematic phonics'?
- What are the limits of phonics?
- How might elements of morphology be included in early reading instruction?

Questions for Professional Discussions

- To what extent do all teachers and teaching assistants in your school have an adequate grasp of the underlying purpose of phonics?
- When, if ever, are pupils in your school introduced to the role of morphemes within words? How is this achieved?
- How does your school support pupils to make the transition from decodable texts to 'normal' texts at a time that matches their individual reading capabilities?

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