

EYIT transition advisory document

Phonics instruction for nursery children with complex needs transitioning to Reception

'Literacy is at the heart of education; everything that we do revolves around the development of the ability to understand and communicate about the world around us'

(Moseley, 2023, p. 21)

UNESCO defines literacy as a human right intrinsically important for human development and well-being. As educators, we shouldn't deny any learner access to systematic phonics-based instruction due to their assumed level of disability, as low expectations often become a self-fulfilling prophecy (Browder et al. 2009; Bryan, 2018).

According to the Reading Framework,

'Schools are expected to enable access to appropriate phonics instruction for pupils who have complex needs. Under the Equality Act 2010, they are required to make reasonable adjustments to enable pupils with disabilities to have full access to the curriculum and to be able to participate in it' (DfE, 2023, p. 77).

Although schools are expected to enable access to phonics instruction for all, children with SEND may find whole-class teaching and formal learning challenging due to developmental differences in attention, listening, self-regulation, and executive functioning.

This guidance was developed with input from the Inclusive Intervention Team, Camden Learning and Early Years Leads in Camden. It aims to:

1. Help Nursery settings know what information to provide to schools about a child's learning profile so that appropriate adaptations to the phonics curriculum can be planned for at transition to Reception.
2. Support Reception teachers to use this information in planning an appropriate phonics curriculum for individual children with SEND.

The table below summarises responses collected from Early Years Leads in Camden in June 2024 related to the following two questions:

- What do you need to know about children's skills when they start reception?
- What can we do to support successful transitions in the future?

Children's skills	Tools to support transition
Ability to follow instructions	One Page Profile
Joint attention skills and attention span	Communication Passport
Ability to join whole class – small group – 1:1 teaching	Visual timetables used or copies of their daily routines
Children's interests	Resources previously used (e.g. choice boards for nursery rhymes)
Assessment information on rhyming, oral blending and foundations for phonics	Photos of their provision and resources used in the nursery

Based on the above responses, the following recommendations are made:

Recommendations for nursery settings preparing children with SEND for transition to Reception:

We recommend nurseries provide the school with the following information about the child:

- How does the child learn best? (Whole class teaching, small group or 1:1?)
- Do they engage in adult-led tasks or prefer child-led activities?
- Do they need support with shifting their attention from one task to another?
- Do they follow one or two-step instructions?
- Do they need support with turn-taking and waiting?
- Do they recognise, differentiate, remember and recall sounds (eg. environmental, instrumental and speech sounds)?
- Do they understand that visual figures or symbols can 'stand for' or represent something?
- Are they interested in books and rhymes?
- Do they fill in songs or phrases with the missing words?

We recommend Nurseries complete a **One Page Profile or a Communication Passport**, containing the above information, along with the child's interests, communication preferences and needs, self-regulation strategies and independence skills. A One Page Profile template with these additional headings is included in *Appendix 1* of this document.

Recommendations for Reception teachers and SENDCos:

To be ready to learn to read and spell, children need to be able to:

- *Recognise, differentiate, process, remember and recall auditory information, specifically speech sounds or phonemes*
- *Understand that visual figures or symbols can 'stand for' or represent something*
- *Recognise, differentiate, process, remember and recall visual information*

(Sullivan, 2023, p.15)

Using the assessment criteria of the Systematic Synthetic Phonics (SSP) programme the school follows (e.g. Little Wandle or Read Write Inc), a judgement should be made regarding the child's ability level. You may wish to consider the following questions before teaching Grapheme Phoneme Correspondence (eg phase 2 Little Wandle) for children with identified SEND:

When being read a motivating book or rhyme (1 to 1 or small group), can the pupil:

- recognise pictures of the characters and objects either by using spoken words, symbols, or non-verbal means (e.g. pointing)?
- show anticipation about what is going to happen (e.g. by turning the page or a change in their facial expression)?
- join in with some actions or repeat some words, rhymes or phrases when motivated and supported by an adult?

If the child is unable to meet the above criteria, **then the teachers should consider teaching phonological awareness skills** (e.g. Foundations for phonics programme if the school follows Little Wandle) alongside the teaching of phase 2. However, adaptations should be made to the above questions to respond to the child's communication and learning style. For example, a learner who is very self-directed might not respond to an adult's prompt when asked to label a picture in a book, but they might be able to receptively identify or label pictures by using symbols or non-verbal means in motivating activities. Remember to always give children with limited communication skills unrestricted access to alternative ways of communication (e.g. Makaton signs, visuals and symbols, gestures, communication boards).

Reception children who may be dysregulated during whole class teaching, should access small group or 1:1 support, and appropriate adaptations should be made to phonics sessions. Teachers should consider whether sitting on the carpet and taking part in whole-class activities is appropriate if the child does not display joint attention and listening skills or is not able to actively self-regulate. Teachers should also consider appropriate adaptations for children who appear to be regulated and will comply with carpet sessions, but do not show active engagement and participation.

References

Browder, D., Gibbs, S., Ahlgrim-Dezell, L., Courtade, G.R., Mraz, M. and Flowers, C. (2008). Literacy for Students With Severe Developmental Disabilities. *Remedial and Special Education*, 30(5), pp.269–282. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741932508315054> .

Bryan, J. (2018). *Eye Can Write : a Memoir of a Child’s Silent Soul Emerging*. Blink Publishing.

Department for Education (2023). *The reading framework*. [online] Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/664f600c05e5fe28788fc437/The_reading_framework_.pdf.

Equality Act (2010). *Equality Act 2010*. [online] legislation.gov.uk. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>.

Kliewer, C., Biklen, D. and Kasa-Hendrickson, C. (2006). Who May Be Literate? Disability and Resistance to the Cultural Denial of Competence. *American Educational Research Journal*, 43(2), pp.163–192. doi: <https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312043002163> .

Moseley, S. (2023). *Teaching Reading to All Learners Including Those with Complex Needs*. Routledge.

Standards & Testing Agency (2024). *Pre-key stage 1: pupils working below the national curriculum assessment standard*. [online] GOV.UK. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pre-key-stage-1-standards/pre-key-stage-1-pupils-working-below-the-national-curriculum-assessment-standard> [Accessed 26 May 2024].











Sullivan, A. (2023). *Access to Phonics: Practical Access Strategies to Teach Children with Complex Needs of All Ages*. Independently published.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Example of One Page Profile including information useful for phonics instruction

<p>Communication </p> <p><i>How I communicate:</i></p> <p><i>How you can help me understand:</i></p>	<p>My Likes </p>	<p>My Dislikes </p>	<p>Emotional Regulation </p> <p><i>What I need to feel calm and happy:</i></p> <p><i>My early warning signs:</i></p> <p><i>What to do when I am upset:</i></p>	<p>Child's voice:</p> <p>Parent's voice:</p> <p>Key person's voice:</p> <p>Information about Reading and Phonics: (delete the prompts and fill in the information)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the child learn best? (Whole class teaching, small group or 1:1?) • Do they engage in adult-led tasks or prefer child-led activities? • Do they need support with shifting their attention from one task to another? • Do they follow one or two-step instructions? • Do they need support with turn-taking and waiting? • Do they recognise, differentiate, remember and recall sounds (e.g. Environmental, instrumental and speech sounds) • Do they understand that visual figures or symbols can 'stand for' or represent something • Are they interested in books and rhymes? • Do they fill in songs or phrases with the missing words?
<p>People who support me </p>	<p>Name & Known:</p> <p><u>A</u>  photo</p>	<p>Medical </p>		
<p>Self-Help  </p> <p><i>Eating & Drinking:</i></p> <p><i>Toileting & Dressing:</i></p>	<p>How Best to Support Me: </p>	<p>Sensory and/or Physical Differences: </p>		

Appendix 2 – Example of complete One Page Profile for a pupil transitioning to Reception

<p style="text-align: center;">Communication </p> <p>How I communicate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NB communicates using a combination of speech and non-verbal means. For example, she will pull an adult's hand to show them what she wants, or she will use single words to make requests, e.g. 'banana'. NB repeats phrases and lyrics from songs in the form of delayed echolalia during the day. She will use this to also communicate and share interests with familiar adults. NB has started using communication boards to ask for motivating songs and nursery rhymes. She will take an adult's finger and jointly point to the symbol she wants. <p>How you can help me understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use symbols and visuals to support NB with her understanding. Focus on key words and reduce language when giving her instructions. Give NB processing time to respond. 	<p style="text-align: center;">My Likes </p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letters and numbers Nursery rhymes Painting Sand and water play Bubbles Sensory and light-up toys Books Figurines Filling and emptying containers Puzzles YouTube Outside play Large construction 	<p style="text-align: center;">My Dislikes </p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unexpected changes in her routine Noisy and busy environments Being directed by an adult and asked to sit for long periods 	<p style="text-align: center;">Emotional Regulation </p> <p>What I need to feel calm and happy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NB benefits from having a key person that she trusts and can develop a positive and trusting relationships. She is very self-directed and benefits from having time for free flow play in the day and many opportunities to make choices. NB needs a consistent and predictable routine. Adults need to prepare her for change and transitions. <p>My early warning signs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NB will communicate her emotions through vocalisations and changes in her facial expressions. She can protest and will say 'no' when she doesn't want to do something. <p>What to do when I am upset:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acknowledge NB's feelings and give her time to calm down, offering her physical comfort. Redirect her to a motivating activity. 	<p>Child's voice:</p> <p>NB has a special interest in letters and numbers. She loves singing nursery rhymes and she is most happy when involved in independent play.</p> <p>Parent's voice:</p> <p><i>'NB is a happy child and enjoys playing independently at home. She loves watching songs on her iPad and looking at books. I'm hoping NB will get support with her communication skills and her eating next year.'</i></p> <p>Key person's voice:</p> <p><i>'NB, it's been a pleasure getting to know you this year. You have made great progress and achievements. I wish you best of luck in your new journey in Reception'</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Information about Reading and Phonics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NB learns best in child-led situations. She will join carpet time for up to 5 minutes when singing songs or nursery rhymes. During 1:1 interactions, NB can focus and maintain her attention for up to 10 minutes for motivating activities. She needs support with shifting her attention when engrossed in a task but will show great joint attention skills when engaged in intensive interaction, singing nursery rhymes, and playing people games. NB needs support with turn-taking, waiting and sharing. NB can follow one-step instructions when supported by visuals and symbols. NB loves nursery rhymes and can fill in the gaps with words and anticipate what is coming next. During shared book reading activities, she will label pictures of familiar objects or actions (e.g. swimming, drinking) by using single words or symbols.
<p style="text-align: center;">People who support me </p> <p>NB lives at home with her family. Her parents and siblings are important to her. At nursery, NB has developed a special relationship with her key person.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Name & Known: NB Age: photo</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Medical – no allergies or medication </p> <p style="text-align: center;">Other professionals involved:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">MOSAIC CDT (ASC diagnosis), IIT, SLT</p>		
<p style="text-align: center;">Self-Help  </p> <p>Eating & Drinking:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NB is a fussy eater; she eats bananas, cheese string and crackers for snack. During lunch time, she will eat slices of bread with cheese. Always offer her safe foods and use a learning plate to provide alternatives. She can hand-feed herself independently and can drink water from an on open cup and a sports bottle. <p>Toileting & Dressing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NB can use the toilet and follow the steps of the toileting routine with an adult shadowing her. She needs to be reminded to go to the toilet as she can have accidents during the day. NB can pull her trousers up and down, and she can take off and put on her coat. She needs support with dressing and undressing. 	<p style="text-align: center;">How Best to Support Me: </p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NB needs increased adult support during the day, and she is very self-directed. Approaches that support NB at nursery are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intensive Interaction and ShREC, where the adult follows her lead in motivating interactions. Use of transition symbols to support her with moving between activities and rooms Activity-based communication boards to encourage NB to communicate in a range of functions. Use of Emotion Coaching approaches to support NB with her emotion regulation. Small groups with one or two peers to encourage early language and shared attention skills, with motivating activities (e.g. nursery rhymes or letter-based activities). 	<p style="text-align: center;">Sensory and/or Physical Differences: </p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NB presents with sensory processing differences. She shows sensitivity to loud noises and will often take her shoes off at nursery. NB tends to mouth and eat non-edible items, such as sand and playdough. She needs close adult supervision when engages in such activities. 		