



★ Phonics in Northern Ireland

A guide for primary schools

What you need to know, your next steps, and how we can help



DfE Validated Phonics Scheme

If you teach in a primary school in Northern Ireland, you will have noticed a lot of change in early reading. This short guide sets out what it means for your school, the steps that will make the biggest difference this year, and how Monster Phonics can help, whichever programme you use today.

What schools need to know

The Department of Education's literacy framework, Strong Foundations, recommends that every school adopts a systematic phonics programme in the Foundation Stage. It does not tell you which programme to use, but it does ask schools to look at the evidence for synthetic phonics. In the classroom, it comes down to five things.

- ✓ **One programme, taught the same way in every class.** A child moving from P1 to P2 picks up exactly where they left off, and everyone who teaches phonics is trained in it.
- ✓ **Decoding, not guessing.** Children learn to sound out and blend words rather than guess from pictures, context or the first letter.
- ✓ **Books that match the sounds children know.** Every book a child reads in school or at home gives practice in what they have just been taught.
- ✓ **Phonics for as long as a child needs it.** Children who are not yet secure keep receiving phonics teaching beyond P2.
- ✓ **Spelling taught step by step to P7.** Spelling builds on phonics in a planned sequence right through primary school.



What is coming and when

Now

Strong Foundations is the expected practice in every school.

Date to be set

A baseline check in P1 and a phonics check in P2, introduced when schools are ready. Results will not be published school by school.

September 2028

The draft Curriculum 2028 gives systematic synthetic phonics a stronger place in the Foundation Stage. The final version is awaited.

From 2030

Reading fluency checks from P3 to P5, starting with P4 in March 2030.

None of this means starting from scratch. Settling your phonics now means you are ready for each change as it comes, and many schools are closer than they think.

Your next steps

You do not need to wait for any announcement. These steps follow directly from Strong Foundations, and most can start this term.



Find out where every child is

Check which children in P1 and P2 know their sounds and can blend, and repeat the check each half term.



Look at your reading books

Make sure the books children read in school and at home match the sounds they have been taught.



Agree one way of teaching

Make sure every P1 and P2 class follows the same programme in the same order.



Train everyone who teaches phonics

Include classroom assistants, so children hear the same language from every adult.



Keep going beyond P2

Identify children in P3 and above who are not yet secure, and plan how their phonics will continue.



Plan spelling to P7

Make sure spelling builds on phonics in a planned sequence through Key Stage 2.

Why assessment matters so much

Until the statutory checks arrive, your own assessment is the only thing that tells you which children are secure and which need help. A good phonics assessment is quick, checks each sound and each child's blending directly, and turns the results into groups for teaching and the next sounds each child needs. Done every half term, it means no child goes unnoticed, and it is the best preparation for the checks to come.

"Thank you so so much for the resources we are very grateful. ... Without your support this year we wouldn't be where we are now."

Megan Shiels, Phonics and Literacy Lead, Ballysillan



We will support you every step of the way

At Monster Phonics we are all educators, and we have helped schools across the UK and internationally make the move to systematic synthetic phonics. Our training demystifies the approach and builds on the good practice you already have, so your whole team teaches phonics with confidence and consistency. Monster Phonics is validated by England's Department for Education, and children love it. Selective colour coding makes tricky graphemes visible, and our sound-linked monster characters help every learner remember them.

Approved
Phonics
Teaching
Programme



Department
for Education



★ Whole-team training in your membership

★ Digital tracker showing where every child is

★ Strong support for SEN and EAL

★ Every lesson and resource ready to teach

★ 300+ decodable books

★ Nursery to P7, with Superhero Spelling

Wales has made this journey with us

In a year-long independent study, ten Welsh primary schools moved to Monster Phonics, with around 700 children assessed at the start and end of the year. Every school had taught phonics before, and every school reported a significant improvement in phonics standards. Many staff said it was the first time they had been trained in how to teach phonics. In Cardiff, every primary school now has access to Monster Phonics through a three-year partnership.

"Never done anything that has had an impact on this scale. The ripples are far reaching."

Headteacher, Wales

The Monster Move

Join this year and receive a books and resources voucher with your membership.

Mega 3 in 1 Bundle

£899 a year

Nursery Programme (ages 2 to 4), Monster Phonics School Programme (ages 4 to 7) and Superhero Spelling (ages 7 to 11), for your whole school.

Plus a £500 books and resources voucher

Complete Phonics Bundle

£649 a year

Nursery Programme (ages 2 to 4) and Monster Phonics School Programme (ages 4 to 7), from first sounds to fluent reading.

Plus a £250 books and resources voucher

Both bundles include lifetime training for your whole team, award-winning lessons and resources, the online assessment tracker and our intervention programme.

"The live Monster Phonics event in Belfast was incredibly informative and well worth attending. It offered clear, practical insights into how the programme supports early literacy in an engaging and effective way."

Mrs Hennessy, Vice Principal, St Malachy's Primary School, Belfast

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*Go faster, enjoy learning, **change lives.***

