



Date	July 2015
Key stages	KS3
School type	LA maintained, secondary special
Themes	Phonics, English, reading

An age-related approach to basic phonics

Batchwood School

Context

Batchwood School is a secondary school for pupils with social, behavioural and emotional difficulties, located in the St Albans district. Most pupils at the school have additional learning needs including autism, speech and language difficulties and moderate learning difficulties. Over a third of pupils join the school after year 7 and many of the pupils have attended at least three schools before attending Batchwood. The proportion of pupils eligible for pupil premium funding is above the national average.

Brief description

The attainment of pupils who arrive at Batchwood is often very low and the majority of pupils have poor literacy and numeracy skills when they join. Sharon Coubray, Head of English at Batchwood, found that pupils lacked basic literacy skills and had huge gaps in their learning which would normally have been filled in primary school. There was evidence that children had not learnt sounds properly in reception, with some pupils entering the school at a reading level of age five. Those who were more able readers often struggled with spelling.

The low literacy levels of pupils became a barrier to learning in all subject areas and as a result the school decided that literacy should become a priority for development in key stage 3. Supported and trained by Herts for Learning English Teaching and Learning Advisor, Sharon implemented a whole school approach to improve the phonics skills of pupils. Although this was a 'back to basics approach', it has been tailored for secondary school pupils to close the gap from primary school. Pupils have responded very well to phonics teaching and have been making rapid progress in reading and writing as a result.

Phonics teaching at Batchwood

Age-appropriate resources

The resources which Sharon uses for teaching phonics at Batchwood have been made from scratch, using guidance from the Letters and Sounds Programme (published by the DfE). The resources were produced for different levels including a basic level, to teach children long vowel sounds, and a higher level to help more-able pupils with spelling. Pupils functioning at lower levels often take part in activities which involve spoken answers and group discussions.

Initially phonics activities were used as starters in English lessons, but phonics has now been embedded into all topics in the lesson. Although the work aims to fill in the gaps from primary school, the resources are always age appropriate and are not similar to primary school material. Secondary school pupils can relate to the images used on the activities. Some phonics activities involve music and videos, all of which are age appropriate. Although pupils at Batchwood are constantly building on primary level phonics skills, they are only taught topics which are designed for their age level. For example, an English class which studied *The Boy In The Striped Pyjamas*, a secondary school level book, were set phonics activities which looked at keywords and quotations in the text, including sound-buttoning words and writing definitions.

Spelling, punctuation and grammar

At Batchwood, pupils are very aware when they are building on their spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPAG) skills and consider it a fundamental part of their learning. The school has created a SPAG logo and marking labels, and there is time set aside in all English lessons for a SPAG correction task. Instead of underlining a word which is spelt incorrectly, teachers underline the area of the word which is incorrect so that pupils can pin-point exactly where they are making mistakes. It is part of the school's marking policy to use phonics for SPAG, and the two themes go hand-in-hand at the school.

Impact

Inclusion for all

Sharon has developed a way of teaching that has worked for all pupils and all pupils in key stage 3 engage in phonics activities. This is because Sharon believes that phonics is “not an add-on, it's part of what we do” at Batchwood. Resources are available for all abilities and as a result pupils do not feel left out or different to their peers, as they may feel with individual interventions from teaching assistants.

Progress of pupils

Batchwood School was judged as outstanding by Ofsted in April 2014 and the report acknowledged that pupils make good progress, quickly become engaged and “start to make up lost ground straight away.”

Since 2011 the progress of pupils in reading has improved. Pupils who entered the school at a reading age of seven or below had made an average of over one year of progress between 2012 and 2013. This was a significant improvement compared to pupils making an average of 5.5 months of progress in between 2011 and 2012 and 3.5 months between 2010 and 2011.

Many pupils who did not make any progress in primary school have made sub-level gains at a rate that is faster than expected for their profiles. A pupil with mild learning difficulties, which included discrepancy between their verbal and non-verbal reasoning and a weak memory, made progress of one reading and writing level in 2014. Sound buttoning worked well for this pupil who is now more confident and engaged with learning. Another pupil with a complex language disorder and autism had a reading age of 6.8 in year 7 which has gone up to age 8 in year 8.

Behaviour of pupils

Sharon feels that improving the confidence of pupils in reading and writing has resulted in better behaviour. Some pupils often became frustrated when reading or writing which caused them to be disruptive and disengaged. However since working on phonics those pupils have become more engaged and interested in learning. All pupils are now less anxious about spelling and feel a great sense of achievement when they spell correctly rather than losing focus. A year 7 pupil told Ofsted inspectors that “he hated reading at his last school but that now he can read about cars, he really enjoys it.”

Next Steps

Since Sharon started working with a HfL English Teaching and Learning Advisor to develop her role as the leader of phonics at Batchwood she has successfully embedded phonics into all English lessons. This year phonics has started to become present in other lessons, for example pupils have started working with phonics in mathematics lessons by sound-buttoning mathematical vocabulary and number bonds. However Sharon aims to build on this further in the future and ensure that phonics is firmly embedded into all lessons. She also hopes to extend the use of phonics in key stage 4.

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Related documents and links	http://www.batchwood.herts.sch.uk/ https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/letters-and-sounds

If you have an aspect of interesting practice that could be shared or are interested in finding out more about a case study please get in touch by emailing exchangingexcellence@hertsforlearning.co.uk

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