

# **An Effective System for Schools**

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Current definitions of dyslexia / specific reading disability / learning disability mean that **PHONOLOGY** ( and the terms **PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS, PHONOLOGICAL PROCESSING SKILLS, PHONEMIC AWARENESS**) must be understood as different and distinct from **PHONICS TEACHING**.

- **PHONOLOGICAL** *..how we hear, process and remember sounds*
- **PHONICS** *...learning about letter symbols that represent sounds – **print***

**See glossary on Page 2 for all definitions of “phon” words.**

Tests of phonological processing skills to identify the at-risk group\* have now become the first important operational identification of dyslexia / reading disability / learning disability. These processing skills include:

- Phonological discrimination of sounds (awareness)
- Phonological memory
- Retrieval of sounds and symbols from memory

Screening tests are available that are quick and easy to use and are more than 90% accurate. They take about 15-20 minutes per child and the at-risk group should be formed of those scoring below the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile. Typically this phonological skills screening test should take place after Year R children have been in school for 1 term. This leaves sufficient time for two terms of phonological skills teaching. Then re-test.

**“At-risk means at risk for some degree of reading/spelling difficulty – mild to severe continuum”**

This test should be separate from “baseline screening” that examines other language skills (e.g. vocabulary). *Most baseline screenings do not contain adequate phonological tests and are not designed in the same way as a purely phonological skills screening test.*

### **Method of Delivery**

Individual or small group delivery of training is the only proven way to significantly improve the skills of at-risk children (low phonological skills).

Class wide activities will be good for all children but are not likely to significantly change things for the at risk group. They need to have many more experiences of repeating sounds, listening to sounds and exploring sounds presented to them in different ways with individual feedback.

### **Definitions**

- (\*i) phonology – the aspect of language concerned with sound, whether overt or internal, including everything from subphonemic distinctive features, to intonation and inner speech (Brooks, 1999).
- (\*ii) phonological awareness – recognising the different speech sounds in words and being able to consciously reflect on them and manipulate them.
- (\*iii) phonological processing skills – reading related phonological processes are a set of mental activities or skills that are required in reading and learning to read, and that involve accessing, storing or manipulating phonological information.
- (\*iv) phonological memory – the ability to represent phonological information in short term memory (and working memory).
- (\*v) rate of access – the speed of accessing phonological information which is coded in long term memory.

- (\*vi) phonics teaching – work on letter sound-correspondences within the print domain.
- (\*vii) phonemic awareness – the ability to focus on and manipulate phonemes in spoken words. Phonemes are the smallest meaningful units constituting spoken language.

Most children come to school with existing links between spoken language and meaning. However two kinds of research (see *“Neurobiology”* and *“Educational Research”*) have shown us that this is not the case for a large group of individuals.

It was found that:

- Firstly, that a child's ability to understand speech did not reveal how well he or she could analyse language into its component parts (for example having the understanding that “cat” has three phonemes which are “c” “a” and “t”).
- Secondly, that the awareness that language could be split up into words, syllables and even smaller parts (phonemes) was very important for the beginning reader.
- Then, different tasks were developed by researchers to measure the status of phonological awareness skills. Probably the most widely used kinds of tasks were tapping tasks, oddity tasks, and same-different judgements. Children were asked, for example, to tap out the number of sounds in a word, or to listen to a group of spoken words and select one that was different, or to listen to pairs of words and decide whether or not they shared the same sound.

*The above tests are now commercially available as are systematic and proven intervention programs that have been designed for delivery in the classroom.*

**[www.fixreading.co.uk](http://www.fixreading.co.uk)**

