Unlocking Letters and Sounds
Glossary

A shared understanding and use of phonics and early reading vocabulary is essential to ensure consistency and fidelity to **Unlocking Letters and Sounds**. It supports teacher-subject knowledge and, by using consistent terminology, it also supports children's learning, especially amongst those in your lowest 20 per cent.

Term	Explanation
Phonics	Phonics is a way of teaching reading, writing and spelling based on hearing and identifying letter sounds and matching them to letters or letter patterns.
Grapheme	A grapheme is a letter or sequence of letters that represent a phoneme (one sound). When we read aloud, we decode written words by converting graphemes into phonemes.
Phoneme	A phoneme is a single spoken sound, e.g. *c* as in *c-a-t*, or *sh* as in *sh-i-p*. It is the smallest sound in the English language. There are approximately 44 phonemes in English, each made up of one or more letters.
Digraph	A digraph is a single sound (i.e. a phoneme) that is made up of two letters, e.g. **ee** as in *t-r-ee* or **ie** as in *t-ie*.
Trigraph	A trigraph is a single sound (a phoneme) that is made up of three letters, e.g. **igh** as in *high*.
Split digraph	A split digraph is a digraph that is separated by one or more consonants. For example, the *ee* sound in *complete* is split by the letter **t**.
Blending	Blending letter sounds (phonemes) together enables children to decode and read words. For example, *h-a-t* = *hat*. Children need to practise this so it becomes an automatic skill.
Segmenting	Segmenting is the opposite of blending. Segmenting a word is to break the word down into its component phonemes, e.g. *hat* = *h-a-t*. Segmenting enables children to break down words they are trying to spell.
Decode/decoding	Decoding is the key skill in reading words. Children use their phonics skills to blend the phonemes in a word to decode it.

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Sound buttons	Sound buttons help children recognise where the phoneme/sound is in a word, and which letters in the word make that sound. A dot shows that the sound is made from a single letter and a line shows that the sound is made from a digraph or trigraph. For example, tree, kick.
Phoneme frame	A phoneme frame supports a child, enabling them to break a word into its individual sounds and identify which letters make this sound. For example | t | r | ee |
Phoneme fingers	An instruction to the children to count the number of phonemes in a word and show the number using their fingers.
Common exception words	Common exception words (CEW) are words that contain one or more irregular or unusual letter sequences, or phonemes that the children may not yet have been taught. It is important when teaching common exception words to highlight the parts of the word that the children have already been taught at that point.
Consonant	A consonant is a basic speech sound that is made by constricting or obstructing the air flow from the lungs to the mouth to form the sound. Apart from the five letters that are vowels, all letters in the English alphabet are consonants.
Vowel	A vowel is a basic speech sound formed with a relatively free air flow. The vowel letters are **a**, **e**, **i**, **o** and **u**.
Adjacent consonants	Many consonants contain similar consonant and vowel spelling patterns. Learning these patterns can support both reading and spelling. Words containing adjacent consonants have two consonant sounds before and/or after a vowel sound. They are known by these spelling/sound patterns: **CCVC** words e.g. *trap*, *drip*, *slip*. **CVCC** words e.g. *milk*, *pink*, *sand*. **CCVCC** words e.g. *black*, *grasp*, *stamp*.
Syllable	A syllable is a unit of speech that contains a vowel sound and that makes up part of a word. For example one-syllable word – **hat** two-syllable word – **may**/**be** three-syllable word – **diff**/**i**/**cult**
Alternative pronunciations	Some letters have multiple pronunciations. These must be recognised in reading. For example, **ea** appears in *sea* and *heard*, but is pronounced differently in each case.
Prefix	A prefix is added to the beginning of a word to change its meaning, spelling and/or word function in a sentence. For example, *un-happy*.

Term	Explanation
Root words	A root word is a core word that can have a prefix or suffix added to it. For example, *happy* is the root word in *unhappy* and *happiness*.
Suffix	A suffix is added to the end of a word to change its meaning, spelling and/or word function in a sentence. For example, *hat-s* or *happi-ness*.
Phase	**Unlocking Letters and Sounds** splits the progression of teaching phonics into phases. Each phase is a distinct stage and the phases are cumulative and progressive. It is important that children are only expected to read words from phases they have been taught.