Phonics is recognised as a key tool in the acquisition of literacy skills for all children and is used when teaching children to read and write. Phonics is the ability to hear, identify, and manipulate sounds and understand the link between the sound (phoneme) and the way it is written (grapheme).

At Elmfield School we follow the Letters and Sounds programme. This is a phonics programme in which individual letters or letter sounds are ‘blended’ to form groups of letters or sounds, and those groups are then blended to form complete words. We use ‘Visual Phonics by Hand’ hand cues and strategies to ensure that phonics teaching is made accessible to all deaf children. We believe that developing an understanding of phonics will support your child’s reading and writing skills along with developing their lip reading and spoken language skills.

In ‘Visual Phonics by Hand’ sessions, as the sound is said, a particular hand shape or movement accompanies the sound. The combination of hearing the sound and seeing the hand shape, the hand position and lip shape clarifies the sound being taught and also in some cases, the link between the sound and its letter (grapheme). All 44 sounds (phonemes) of English can be clarified or reinforced in this way. This technique enables children to ‘see the sound’ and so are helped to discriminate between sounds.

As your child learns the visual hand cues, your child’s class teacher will support you as parents to learn these hand shapes cues too. Workshops for parents will be offered during the year, but your child’s class teacher will answer your questions at any time.

Children throughout the Primary School take part in a daily phonics session. These focus on developing reading, writing, lip reading and speaking and listening skills.

The NDCS have produced a factsheet for parents of deaf children who would like to know more about phonics, i.e. knowing the letter sounds, and how it can be used to help your child learn to read and write. It provides background information on how phonics is taught and looks at how you can ensure your child benefits as much as possible from it. It can be accessed here http://www.ndcs.org.uk/family_support/order_and_view_our_publications/using_phonics.rma

Helping with phonics at home - Hints and tips

- Learn the ‘Visual Phonics by Hand’ hand cues and use them with your child at home.
- Try to say the short sound of the letter, not the letter name. This will help children when they come to blend words together. E.g. ‘d’ ‘o’ ‘g’ blend together to make ‘dog’.
- Read regularly with your child - Encourage children to recognise sounds and as they grow more confident, encourage them to blend the sounds together and to read sentences independently.
- When you are reading to your child, emphasise the rhyming words and ask what is special about them.
- Initial letter sound hunt – Say a sound to your child and see if they can find something in their house that starts with that letter. This also works well with ‘I spy’ but remember to use the letter sound and not its name.