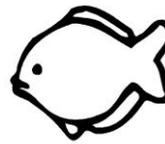# Our Lady's Bishop Eton Phonic Factsheet for Parents

Phonemes

- A phoneme is the smallest unit of sound in a word that can change its meaning (e.g. in /bed/ and /led/ the difference between the phonemes /b/ and /l/ signals the difference in meaning between the words *bed*, *led*).
- It is generally accepted that most varieties of spoken English use about 44 phonemes. In alphabetic writing systems (such as English) phonemes are represented by graphemes.

Graphemes

- A grapheme is a symbol of a phoneme, that is, a letter or group of letters representing a sound.
- There is always the same number of graphemes in a word as phonemes.
- The alphabet contains only 26 letters but we use it to make all the graphemes that represent the phonemes of English.
- These words each have three phonemes (separate sounds). Each of these phonemes is represented by a grapheme. A grapheme may consist of one, two, three or four letters.

1	2	3
c	a	t
b	ir	d
f	i	sh
kn	igh	t

Grapheme–phoneme correspondences (GPCs) and phoneme–grapheme correspondences

- We convert graphemes to phonemes when we are reading aloud (decoding written words). We convert phonemes to graphemes when we are spelling (encoding words for writing). To do this, children need to learn which graphemes correspond to which phonemes and vice versa. In order to read an unfamiliar word, a child must recognise ('sound out') each grapheme, not each letter (e.g. sounding out ship as /sh/-/i/-/p/ not /s/- /h/ - /i/ - /p/), and then merge (blend) the phonemes together to make a word.

Segmenting and blending

- Segmenting and blending are reversible key phonic skills. Segmenting consists of breaking words down into their constituent phonemes to spell. Blending consists of building words from their constituent phonemes to read. Both skills are important. The skill of blending (synthesising) phonemes, in order, all through the word to read it, is a very important skill which supports children to read unknown words.
- In synthetic phonics programmes (Letters and Sounds) children are systematically taught grapheme-phoneme correspondence. The teaching of systematic synthetic phonics (the relationship between letters and their corresponding sounds) supports pupils across all age phases to develop skills to decode/ blend (read) and encode/ segment (write).

Tricky words

- Not all words can be blended and segmented as they are phonically irregular. These are known as 'tricky' words and need be learnt as sight recognition words.

- It must always be remembered that phonics is the step up to word recognition. Automatic reading of all words – decodable and tricky – is the ultimate goal.