Phonological awareness is fundamental to the development of phonics for reading and spelling. It also plays a part in vocabulary development, which involves storing and internalising the sound patterns of and within words. In addition, the ability to process sounds has an impact on the development grammatical skills and understanding.

The teaching of phonics in Northern Counties School is valued and promoted dependent upon each individual student’s SEN and learning potential.  We teach using a Total Communication learning environment which encourages the use of sign, gesture, speech/vocalisations, text, symbols and pictures for all cohorts.

**Pupils with HI**

For deaf pupils acquiring phonics skills is only one key skill in developing literacy, having ongoing opportunities to develop language skills and to read texts is vital as they may have fewer opportunities than other pupils to learn spoken language incidentally (through overhearing what other people are saying).

Access to a language-rich environment with appropriately qualified BSL signing staff helps them to develop good language skills. Consistent use of hearing aids, cochlear implants and other amplification technology, means most deaf children can perceive the full range of speech sounds, however they do don’t generally hear with as much clarity, or as easily, as hearing children: being able to perceive a sound is not the same as being able to hear and understand it.

THRASS (Teaching Handwriting Reading and Spelling Skills) is used with those students with good listening skills. Phonics for our profoundly deaf students is taught using BSL and grapheme correspondence.

Teaching phonics skills requires differentiation for each deaf pupil dependent upon their hearing levels.  A variety of active learning techniques are utilised such as using scooter boards, outdoor learning opportunities and specific teaching in visual phonics utilising individual students motivation and learning styles.

**Phonological awareness and the use of THRASS with deaf students**

Many grammatical forms are signalled by subtle changes to sounds in words, for example, boy/boys, walk/walked and man/men. Many of the smaller, ‘non-content’ words that make a sentence grammatically complete are difficult to listen to, as they are unstressed or shortened, for example, ‘I am going to the café for my tea,’ could sound like, ‘I’m going t the café f  m tea’ to a deaf child using their amplification.

Visual phonics supports the development of phonological awareness and supports ‘phonological cognition’. Visual phonics can be a useful tool in supporting the internal representation of new vocabulary. For students with HI and/or auditory processing difficulties it provides information which may not be available using the auditory system alone. Cued Articulation is a visual phonics system in which simple hand cues relate directly to articulation features. These features can also be illustrated by simple symbols called ‘articulograms’.

The THRASS system, complimented by visual phonics, illustrates the link between speech sounds (phonemes) and spelling (graphemes), which can otherwise be very confusing for students with weak auditory skills. The logical, visual environment of the chart enables students to analyse and make decisions about English spelling.

**Pupils with ASD**

As every child with an autism diagnosis learns in a unique way, a range of strategies is used to teach phonics. Most of our autistic pupils are visual learners and need to have their materials presented to them visually. Staff use minimal language as students with autism learn more effectively with simple, concise and minimal instructions for completing a task.

Dependent upon ability some of our students use the Jolly Phonics programme.  Other pupils are taught to read whole words, using a combination of photographs, picture symbols, concrete objects and words. All of our Literacy materials are adapted for individual needs. Depending on the student, different materials are used; including communication devices, Braille, Voice Output Communication Devices, or picture communication systems, such as PECS.

Additionally, teachers adapt materials to use pupils’ individual interests: this increases motivation and focus. For example, if a child’s specific interest is trains, reading would be taught through the use of train images. Books are also selected depending on individual interests. Some of our pupils learn more successfully whilst moving, therefore some reading activities may take place on a swing, a tricycle, or on roller skates.  We aim to teach functional words that will impact upon a pupil’s life and independence skills.

**Pupils with PMLD and complex needs**

Our curriculum starting point for phonics teaching in our PMLD cohort starts with the communication skills within any social interaction encountered by our students within the sessions or the environment of the school. Basic elements are present in all encounters with our students which include the appropriate communication approach, the repetition of the language used in routines, motivation, comfort and physical environment. Communication is supported by familiar staff who know the students well and who allow enough in order to enable them to process what is happening and to give them the opportunity to respond.

We create motivational learning opportunities that both enable and challenge using appropriate communication techniques which include the use of voice, cues, on body signing and BSL which all depend upon each pupil’s learning needs.  Through the use of sensory objects/stimuli/switches we promote independence to develop the student’s ability to make choices.

Throughout the whole school day all specific learning opportunities, personal care, lunch times, moving and handling or when out in the community staff verbally prompt the students before any activity happens. For example, speaking ‘we are going to roll you onto your side’ whilst including a touch prompt and then a count of ‘ready, steady, roll’.  This spoken sequence is used throughout the school day in a variety of activities encountered by the students.

Ongoing observation, full team discussions and rigorous and accurate assessment procedures informs teaching, drives the recording of progress and is the key to the successful progress of phonics learning or the understanding of language for our students.