Understanding the 'Magic E': A Guide for Year 1 Parents and Carers

Key points

- In Year 1 phonics (the method of teaching reading by linking sounds to letters), children learn about 'split digraphs'.
- A split digraph is two letters that make one sound, but are separated by another consonant, such as the 'a' and 'e' in 'cake'.
- The 'Magic E' is a term used in schools to explain that the 'e' at the end of a word is silent but changes the sound of the first vowel.
- This means a short vowel sound, like the 'a' in 'cap', becomes a long vowel sound, like the 'a' in 'cape'.
- These patterns are part of the Phase 5 phonics guidance from the Department for Education (DfE).
- Every child learns at their own pace, and some may find these patterns trickier than others.

Things to try at home

- Play a 'spot the difference' game with word pairs like 'hop' and 'hope' or 'kit' and 'kite' using magnets or letter tiles.
- While reading a story together, gently point out words with a silent 'e' at the end and see if your child can spot the 'magic'.
- Write a short word like 'pin' on a piece of paper and let your child 'cast a spell' by adding an 'e' to the end to make it 'pine'.
- Look for 'Magic E' words on food packaging or street signs during a walk to make learning a natural part of the day.

Find out more

- Your child's class teacher or the school's phonics lead.
- The official GOV.UK guidance on the National Curriculum for English.
- The Education Makes Sense website for more KS1 phonics resources.