

Reading and writing in the infants

Early stages of reading and writing - Nursery/reception/year one.

Reading

There are two dimensions to reading; whole word recognition and an ability to decode words, and language comprehension. Both are necessary for proficient reading. As children develop as readers the focus changes from learning to read to reading to learn and for pleasure.

Nursery

Within nursery the focus is on developing children's speaking and listening skills; to enlarge their vocabulary, to learn to talk with confidence in different situations. Throughout the school we follow the document '**Letters and sounds**'. This document is divided into 6 Sections, that we base activities around throughout the infants and into the juniors where necessary.

In **phase one**, which is aimed at nursery children, the children are given lots of opportunities to discriminate between sounds. They will play games listening to different sounds, playing rhyming and alliteration games, experimenting with making different sounds orally and moving on to orally blending sounds. The focus is on children being able to hear different sounds in words and not so much on the written letter or word at this stage, although obviously some children may be ready for this and so we differentiate accordingly. Most children learn to recognise their name, and maybe some of their friend's names. By the end of the year many will also be able to write their own name, even if the letters are not formed correctly.

Children are encouraged to use pencils and pens and to 'write'. We seek to make the writing part of their play and purposeful - putting out pencils and paper in the role play area so they can write people's orders in the café for example, Using paintbrushes etc outside on the walls, chalks etc.

Alongside this, as is the case throughout the school, the children are constantly exposed to writing and letters - children may recognise a letter in their name in a sign in the classroom, or out on the street.

Reception

When children come into reception they will have experienced a wealth of activities; listening and participating in songs and rhymes.

Some children will be able to orally segment and blend words - c a t - cat. Others may not, that's ok. We identify the level the child is at and differentiate accordingly. In reception children are introduced to the written letters and begin to blend these together when reading and when beginning to write.

Again we follow the 'Letters and sounds' document and adapt this to suit our children's needs. The aim of phonic teaching is for children to secure the crucial skills of decoding

that lead to fluent and automatic reading, thus freeing them to concentrate on the meaning of the text.

We begin by teaching some individual letter sounds and quickly use these to blend together for both reading and writing.

We teach both letter names and sounds although more focus is placed on the sounds as it's this that they use when reading and writing.

We learn the letters in the order suggested by letters and sounds. In Phase two 19 letter sounds are introduced. By the end of this phase, half way through reception, many children will be able to read some cv words and cvc words by blending sound sounds together. Some children will be able to write these words too, or at least hear the individual sounds and know the letters that make these sounds even if as yet they are not confident at forming those letters.

The order of letters learnt in phase two:

s a t p i n m d g o c k ck e u r h b f ff l ll ss

This is so that very quickly we can use the letters we have learnt to form words. - sit, pan, it, is, in etc.

When teaching the individual letter sounds we use an accompanying action. The actions are used to reflect how we produce that sound and really help to cater for those children that learn kinaesthetically - ie through actions. They also help as prompts when reading or writing.

We use a wide variety of resources and lots of different activities to make the teaching of letters and sounds engaging and fun.

You can see a video clip of Natalie teaching the letter 's' to a small group on the website. Other examples of activities we do when learning individual letter sounds includes things like playing buried treasure, sorting objects into hoops with the correct initial letter sound, playing i-spy.

Each week we put up in our classrooms a list of the letters/sounds and words that we are learning so you will have an idea of which sounds they might recognise etc.

Once the children have learnt a few letter sounds we start to work on blending sounds together to read simple words.

We often use 'sound buttons' that we 'press' under each individual letter to make their individual sound and then we blend these sounds together to read the word. Sometimes we do this by using what we call the 'train method'. On the school website there is a video clip of Laura, a year one teacher, doing this with her class and when working in a small group.

When starting to write we also use this technique of segmenting the sounds in the word. We do lots of work in whole class situations and in small groups where we try and break down the word for writing, listening for the initial, middle and final sound in the word. We then blend the sounds at the end to read the word and check we have got it right. Often we might use magnetic letters in this activity as the focus is on the children hearing the sounds and matching it to the written letter and not on the actual process of writing. Before children can write they need to be able to hear the sounds they are writing and link this to the written letter.

At the same time as learning letter sounds and blending we also introduce the children to some 'tricky words'. These are words that we cannot sound out and just have to recognise. Tricky words include: the, no, go, I.

When teaching these words we use a variety of different methods - focusing on the shape of the word, playing matching games etc

As the children progress through reception and year 1 the next step is to learn digraphs or 2 letters that make one sound ch, sh, ng, ow. Moving on to trigraphs - 3 letters that make one sound such as ear, air etc. This is done in similar ways as when teaching individual letter sounds and blending and segmenting. In both whole class situations and in small groups.

For some children phonics does not always work and they learn through recognising the shape of words and learn words as a whole as opposed to sounding them out. It must always be remembered that phonics is the step up to word recognition anyway.

Ultimately we want children to build up their sight vocabulary, words that they can read without sounding out. While we encourage children to segment words to help them decode them (like h... a... n... d) automatic reading of all words by decoding silently and quickly is the ultimate goal. (hand)

Listening to children read in the early years

In reception a big focus is on children developing the confidence in themselves as readers. We want them to enjoy reading and feel successful.

We read with the children one to one once a week alongside all the phonic and writing work that we are doing.

The children move through our banded system as their reading develops.

Children should be able to read 90% easily of a book before moving on to next level.

They shouldn't be deciphering or struggling on each word. This means they lose the focus of the story and all their energy is on deciphering each word. It means the enjoyment is lost and it becomes more of a chore.

The banding system - we have a range of different books that vary in content and style. Many of the first books are very repetitive and the children can use the pictures to help them 'read' the sentences.

Often the teacher will read the first sentence, and parts of the others until they pick up on the rhythm of the story. It's all about them getting a sense of fluency and rhythm to their reading.

It's about them understanding how a book works - turning the pages in the right order, knowing where the words are on the page, how we read from left to right etc. It's about them feeling confident that they are readers.

When we are confident that they know enough letter sounds and have some ability at being able to decode words using different clues then we move them on to more phonetic books. In these books the children are able to sound out the words using their phonic knowledge but they are also still able to use the pictures for support and there may still be a degree of repetition in the story.

Within these books are many 'sight' words that we hope they can read without having to sound them out. The right level book is one where the children can read 90% unaided.

Reading at home

- Talk about the story and look at the pictures, often before focusing on any words. Drop in key vocab that might come up. Ask questions about what happening, what might happen next how characters feeling, how they know etc.
- On an initial look through of the book let them choose their own pace, if they want to go quite quickly to find out what happens then let them.
- Go back and look at the words - Encourage them to follow the words with their finger as they read if this is necessary. For the repetition stories maybe read the first sentence to them.
- Remember reading should be about making them feel successful, not pointing out what they can't do.
- Find a good time - when you have the time and they are not tired or distracted.
- Be positive and supportive.
- Please don't cover up the pictures! When the children are reading it is not a test. A strategy for reading is to look at the pictures and use this to help them guess the words. That's fine for them to do that.

Handwriting

In reception we have a handwriting workshop once a week. Children move around five different stations where they practise forming the letter of the week correctly in different ways - using their finger in sand, using a whiteboard and pen, using chalks, pencils etc. We then consolidate this by working with the children in small groups or one to one where necessary to write it with a pencil in their book.