

## Reading and Writing in the Early Years Foundation Stage

### Reading

Reading is a very complex skill which takes children along time to acquire. Learning to read involves many stages and skills. These include: having the attention and concentration span to focus on a book, sequencing events/stories, learning the direction we read, how to handle books, using their sounds when reading, recognising letters and sounds, understanding punctuation and sentence structure, plus developing their keyword sight vocabulary to name but a few. Sharing a school reading book is an important part of a much bigger jigsaw of learning. Our overall aim is that children develop a love of reading and read for pleasure. Research tells us that children who read regularly do better at school, than children who do not! The gift of reading is a wonderful life skill we can all give to a child.



Strategies children use to read:

### Pictures

Using the pictures is a very important part of developing early reading skills and should not be rushed. The pictures give a lot of information about the story and where the book is set. Using the pictures is very important for comprehension skills which are developed throughout your child's time at school. The children need to understand what they are reading and be able to answer questions and retrieve information from the book.

### Phonics

The children learn and practise letter sounds on a daily basis in school. We teach phonics using Letters and Sounds and Phonics Play. Letters and Sounds supports children's awareness of sounds and the emphasis is on segmenting and blending sounds to read and write. Phonics Play has lots of interactive resources and games to make phonics fun. We play lots of games to help the children use the sounds that they are learning in reading and writing. It is important that children learn each letter by its sound, not its name. For instance, the letter 'a' should be called a (as in ant) not ai (as in aim). Similarly, the letter n should be nnn (as in net), not en. This will help in blending. The names of each letter can follow later. If you are unsure about how to pronounce any of the sounds then please come and ask. There are various mobile phone Apps to support your child with their phonic skills. Don't forget our explanation of how to say the sounds in our 'Supporting Phonics at Home' guidance.

Segmenting is the process of sounding a word out and splitting it into sounds e.g. cat = 'c', 'a', 't'. This is important for decoding new words when reading and with writing/spelling. Blending is the process of saying the individual sounds in a word and then running them together to make the word. For instance sounding out d-o-g and making dog. It is a technique every child will need to learn, and it improves with practise. To start with you should sound out the word and see if your child can hear it, giving the answer if necessary.

Some children take longer than others to hear this. The sounds must be said quickly to hear the word. It is easier if the first sound is said slightly louder. Try little and often. Play robot talking games with your child and ask them to listen for the word they can hear. Children often can hear the sounds and find blending easier if an adult sounds words out.

### Keywords

These words are the high frequency words that the children will come across most in their early reading experiences. The children have already made a great start with reading their keywords and are spotting keywords everywhere. This will continue to support them and raise their confidence when reading as they spot words they know. Please find included in your information pack some ideas for games and activities to play with your child to keep learning the keywords fun.

### Reading in School

We value sharing books in school and so the children have access to a wide range of books throughout the day as well as during our literacy sessions. Children are free to access books independently from our book area in the Unit. The book area is decorated to be highly stimulating and inviting. High emphasis is placed on print in the environment and so areas are labelled and words are displayed throughout the Unit. As the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum is interlinked literacy appears continuously throughout the day through speaking and listening, books, phonics, reading and writing.

The literacy sessions are obviously our focused time for looking in depth at certain reading skills and we discuss in detail the different strategies to help us read during whole class time. Literacy sessions consist of sharing a story, poem, rhyme, poster or a non-fiction book. This may be done through role play or drama, not always reading a book every time. In addition to this whole class time the children will also take part in small group time (guided reading) where we all look at a book together. Independent reading happens alongside the literacy sessions.

### Reading books

Now that the children have had a half term to settle into school they are ready for the challenge of reading as the building blocks have been put in place (sounds, keywords etc.) Your child will be heard read once a week by a member of the Foundation Stage Unit staff. This may be increased if there is a concern. We will chat to your child about the reading they have been doing at home, share a book together and then will write a comment about how well they have done and any next steps to help your child progress.

**Please ensure your child brings their reading folder with their books, sound and keyword cards into school every day. Your comments are very important and reading diaries will be looked at regularly. Please write how your child has got on with their books, any reading they are doing outside school, any worries or questions. We are here to help and support both you and your child.**

## How is our reading scheme organised?

In school we organise the books into colour bands. The books are graded by difficulty and each have a coloured sticker on their spine. The books begin with only pictures so that the children can develop the skill of using the pictures to tell the stories and deduce what is happening. They move onto letter books to support your child's sound and letter knowledge and then short stories with a repeating pattern. We have in school some books which are 'phonic decodable' i.e. the children can sound the words out which links in with the phonic work that we do in school.

The children will gradually move through the different reading bands as they progress throughout school. It is important to remember that this is not to be seen as a race. Reading is a complex skill made up of different strategies and children will need to learn and practise these at different times. The children all have different needs and abilities and will progress at their own pace. It is important not to compare children as they will all progress at different rates.

Don't worry if your child has the same book a number of times. Repetition is a good thing and you will find that on the second time of reading your child will pick up on things they did not notice the first time they read it. Also, reading a book again gives the child an immediate confidence boost as they recognise it and can remember some words.

## How you can support your child at home

Children learn to read step by step in a process that takes time and patience. They vary a great deal in what holds their interest and in the rate at which they make progress. Reading little and often is often more beneficial than reading for long periods of time and don't worry if your child is not in the mood or is too tired to read. It will be more enjoyable and a more valuable learning experience if they are excited and want to read. Think of how many times you have read your favourite book!

### You can help with this process:

- Look for words everywhere – spot keywords, read labels, lists, signs, spot sounds the children know.
- Be a reading role model. Read books, newspapers and magazines in front of your child and share with them why you are reading. They will follow your example.
- Create a quiet, special place in your home for your child to read, write and draw. Keep books and other reading materials where your child can easily reach them.
- Share different stories with your child, alongside the reading books from school. A bedtime story is one of our favourite memories and it is a wonderful way to spend time with your child. Just think how many books you will share with your child if you read a book with your child every day this year!!
- Visit your local library.

- The local library is a wonderful resource with a wide range of books, story sacks and videos. When you visit your local library they should be able to:
- Help you find age-appropriate books to use at home with your child;
- Show you creative ways to use books with your child and other tips to help them learn;
- Provide year-round children's reading and educational activities.

There are also lots of resources and eBooks on the Internet to encourage your child to read. The website [www.oxfordowl.co.uk](http://www.oxfordowl.co.uk) has links to the Oxford Reading Tree books and has eBooks that are tablet friendly and spelling games for the iPad. Another good website is [www.wordsforlife.org.uk](http://www.wordsforlife.org.uk) from the National Literacy Trust. This website has lots of downloadable colouring and activity sheets linked to popular stories and advice on supporting your child with reading. The Booktrust website [www.booktrust.org.uk](http://www.booktrust.org.uk) is fantastic with lots of book recommendations, booklists and tips to support your child. They also produce a yearly guide of the best 100 books for each age range.

## **Writing**

Writing and reading go hand in hand. As your child is learning one, they are also learning the other.



A child's scribbles or drawings are their first writing and we value greatly any child's effort to communicate meaning through marks made on paper. We call it their 'special writing' and it is the first step on their journey to becoming a writer. This emergent writing is a very important step and the children should be encouraged to 'have a go.'

Emergent writing is a process made up of different stages. The first stage is your child realising that marks are made for a purpose and this begins with random scribbles, which build up to scribble that looks like writing. As they learn letters they use individual shapes in their writing that look like letters. They then begin to use some real letters randomly, starting by using the ones in their name. As they learn the direction of writing they write letters and shapes across the page. Once they become aware of sounds they use individual letters to represent words (usually the first sound). Once their phonic knowledge increases they will begin to use more than one letter to represent a word. They usually write the more dominant sounds in words (the beginning, middle and end sounds) and this is what we call 'sounding out'.

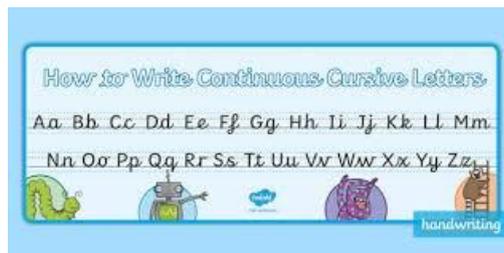
A child's very early learning about letters and sounds gives them ideas about how to begin spelling words. When they begin writing words, don't worry that they don't spell them correctly. Instead, praise them for their efforts. In fact, if you look closely, you will see that they have made a pretty good try at spelling a word for the first time and that they have spelt it the way it sounds.

Later on, with help from teachers (and from you); they will learn the right way to spell words. For the moment, however, they have taken a great step toward being a writer.

In school we teach the children the correct way to hold their pencil and form their letters. This is a long process and it starts in Nursery and Reception with lots of large gross motor movements to build up the strength in the children's arm to write. The children mark make using chalks, painting with water, playing with scarves etc. Alongside this the children also do lots of activities to strengthen their hands and fingers using play dough, threading, pegs, and treasure hunts for sequins in the sand etc. These 'funky finger' activities are vital to support the children's development to write as handwriting is a movement skill.

It is very important that a child holds their pencil in the correct way. The pencil should be held in the 'tripod' grip between the thumb and first two fingers. In school we call it the 'snappy crocodile' as the two fingers snap the sides of the pencil. The grip is the same for both left and right handed children. Your support in helping your child using this grip would be appreciated.

If your child is left-handed they may find writing more difficult and they will need special attention when modelling letter formation. Model letters left-handed and ensure that the paper is slanted to the left and that they have plenty of room on their left-hand side to write. There is a lot of support, information and resources available. A video demonstrating practice, resources such as pencil grips and advice on the teaching of handwriting are available from 'Anything Left-handed' on the website [www.anythingleft-handed.co.uk](http://www.anythingleft-handed.co.uk). If you have any concerns please do not hesitate to come and speak to us.



### Cursive style of handwriting

As a school we teach the cursive style of handwriting. This style teaches pupils to join letters in words as a series of continuous movements or patterns.

We practise forming the handwriting patterns first which occur in different letters (anti-clockwise circles, zig-zags, waves and up the slide movements). This patterning precedes letter formation to establish the feeling of continuous flow and to teach the hands the most frequently used movements.

We then move onto practising letter formation regularly in lots of different fun ways e.g. writing in cornflour goo, sand or glitter, with scarves and ribbons and using different media such as paint, water and chalks. We teach the children by saying a jingle for each letter which the children pick up really quickly and it helps them to remember how to form the letter. The jingles have been adapted to the cursive script and the most important thing for the children to remember is that all letters start from the line. We have taught this as 'going up the slide' and the children have picked this up quickly.

The children who have been part of the Unit since Nursery have had experience of the cursive patterning to teach them the idea of continuous movement. Children who are new to the school are being taught the patterning alongside the letters. The children are picking up the new script brilliantly and are excited by it. They are all using the new jingles well and are beginning to add slides to their letters.

We teach the children to write 'pre-cursive' first, i.e. they write each letter alone focusing on the slide before they are expected to join. They may find it confusing and tricky at first as they will have to almost 'unlearn' what movements have been taught before. This will be most obvious with their name which they are used to writing using the print script. Don't worry if your child still writes in print and sometimes uses joins but not consistently. We are happy for them to have a go at writing and value this process over the style of writing that they use. As they move through Reception and into Key Stage 1 the cursive movements will become second nature. If your child is not keen to write please don't push them, they will write when they are ready and once they start they will fly.

### How you can support your child at home

- Provide lots of opportunities for them to write e.g. notepads, diaries, shopping lists etc.
- Be a writing role model. Children learn by watching and if they see you writing then they will want to copy you. Engage them in everyday writing, such as writing a shopping list, writing in their reading diary etc.
- Praise their mark making. The emphasis is on them having a go and being confident in their writing. Young children are very sensitive to making mistakes and they can be easily afraid to have a try. If they make a mistake then sometimes show them by saying, "Well done, now I am going to have a try." This way you are modelling to them what good writing looks like. Also make mistakes when you are writing, the children will love to correct you and they will learn the valuable lesson that it is ok to make mistakes.
- Make sure that children have a good work surface to write on, which is not too high. Check the lighting so the children can clearly see their writing.
- Support them with their pencil grip. Lots of everyday jobs will support their fine motor control, such as cooking, doing up their zip or buttons. Also you can provide play dough or threading activities.
- When writing make sure that they are using their non-writing hand to support the paper and have plenty of space around them.
- Reinforce the patterning for the cursive script so that the children establish the feeling of continuous flow.
- Reinforce the letter formation jingles that we teach the children, this will really help the children pick them up quicker. Have fun practising letters outside – write letters in the soil with sticks, use chalks, scarves etc. Make writing fun!

### Finally

If you have any further questions, please don't hesitate to ask us. No matter how small or silly it seems to you, we are here to help. We hope that you enjoy your reading and writing activities at home.