

Reading and Phonics

HOW WE TEACH YOUR CHILDREN TO READ AND WRITE AT MERSTHAM PRIMARY SCHOOL

At Merstham Primary school we know that the sooner children learn to read, the greater their chances of success at school. This is why we put reading at the heart of everything that we do. We use a programme called Read Write Inc. Phonics to teach our children to read and write. Some children complete the programme in Year 1 and others in Year 2.

This program is a systematic and structured program that will give children a strong phonic knowledge to build up the confidence to decode and blend effortlessly to read with fluency and expression.

Children are grouped by their reading progress and we re-assess children every half-term/term so we can place them in the group where they'll make the most progress.

How do we make phonics easy for children to learn?

Read Write Inc. Phonics depends upon children learning to read and write sounds effortlessly, so we try to make it simple and fun.

The phonic knowledge is split into two parts.

First, we teach them one way to read and write the 40+ sounds in English. We use pictures to help, for example we make 'a' into the shape of an apple, 'f' into the shape of a flower. These pictures help all children, especially slower-starters, to read the sounds easily.

Children learn to read words by sound-blending using a frog called Frank. Frank says the sounds and children help him blend the sounds to read each word.

Then we teach children the different spellings of the same sounds, for example, they learn that the sound 'ay' is written ay, a-e and ai; the sound 'ee' is written ee, e and ea. We use phrases to help them remember each sound for example, ay, may I play, a-e – make a cake?

How do we ensure children can read every book?

The first thing we do is to give children books we know they can read – without any guessing. (We read lots of other stories to them, but do not expect them to read these yet.)

Before they read the story, they sound out the names of characters and new words, practise reading any of the 'tricky red' words, and tell them a thought-provoking introduction to get them excited about the story.

Then, over three days, children read the story three times: first to focus on reading the words carefully; the second to help them read the story fluently; and on the third, we talk about the story together for example, how characters might be feeling and why. By the time your child reads the story to you at home, they will be able to read it confidently with expression.

How do we teach children to spell confidently?

We use Frank Fingers to spell regular words.

Frank Fingers

We teach children to spell using 'Frank Fingers': we say a word and then children pinch the sounds onto their fingers and write the word, sound by sound.

Children learn to spell new words and review past words every week, they practise spelling them with a partner.

How do we make writing simple for children to learn?

We teach handwriting, spelling and composition separately, gradually bringing each skill together step-by-step.

We teach children to form letters with the correct pencil grip and in the correct sitting position from the very beginning. They practise handwriting every day so they learn to write quickly and easily.

Once children can write simple words, we teach them to 'hold' a sentence in their heads and then write it with correct spelling and punctuation.

Very soon children are able to write down their own ideas. We try out different sentences together, drawing on new vocabulary and phrases from the storybook they've just read. They practise saying their sentences out loud first so they don't forget their ideas while they're writing. They also learn to proofread their own writing using ready-made sentences containing common grammar, punctuation and spelling errors.

How can you help at home?

We appreciate you're busy but here are two things that will make the biggest difference to your child's progress.

1. Talk together

Talking about words and pictures is really important for building up a store of vocabulary and confidence – and it's fun too. The words may be in the street, in a book, on-screen or on your ketchup bottle; it really doesn't matter so long as you talk about them together.

2. Read together

There is something very magical about sharing a book with a child. Just 5-10 minutes at bedtime, bath time or quiet time really does help to hook them in. And even your 7 year old will still enjoy the sharing if it's on offer...

3. Remember when...

Compare events in stories or information books with things you've done together, so your child starts to make connections between these things and their own experiences: 'That's just like when we went to Thorpe Park. Do you remember? Dad was scared...'

4. Sing together

Even if it's not your forte, just sing. Nursery rhymes and songs for your youngest and chart-topping songs you hear on the radio for your 6-7 year old all count – and grandparents can contribute some golden oldies too!

5. New books but old favourites too

You'll notice that your child will want to revisit an old favourite over and over again and that's great (although may be not after the 64th time). But it's also important to build confidence by reading lots of different books at the same reading level too, and continue to re-read earlier books so that you aren't pushing up the difficulty of the read too quickly and causing frustration (to be avoided at all cost as your child won't make progress if anxious).

There's more good advice on how to listen to your child read: www.ruthmiskin.com/parents

In Read, Write Inc. we use pure sounds, ('m' not 'muh', 's' not 'suh', etc.) so that your child will be able to blend the sounds into words with ease.

This video will show you how to pronounce pure sounds from Set 1 Sounds through to Set 3.
<http://www.ruthmiskin.com/en/resources/sound-pronunciation-guide/>