

Reading and Phonics at Merstone School

Reading is a complex skill with many components. At Merstone we focus on the importance of laying firm foundations in this crucial area of the curriculum and apply a consistent, whole school approach to the teaching of reading, encouraging children to use a variety of strategies in their pursuit of meaning and taking into account individual skills and needs.

Our aim is for all children to enjoy reading experiences at whatever level they are working at. For some children this will be to experience objects related to texts, stories and poems, others will develop the skills needed to be learners who read confidently and independently.

The school aims to:

- To develop happy, healthy and curious learners who read confidently and independently
- To begin to develop lifelong enjoyment and pleasure in reading
- To enable children to access all areas of the curriculum
- To enable children to access, understand and begin to manage information
- To begin to understand the meaning of what is read to them and what they read
- To begin to respond to what they read; to say whether they like or don't like it and why
- To begin to understand and respond to the feelings that words can arouse in us like happiness, sadness, anger
- To link an object to an experience or familiar place
- To experience objects related to texts, stories and poems

Where appropriate every day each child will be engaged in

- Planned speaking, listening, reading and writing activities which allow them to explore and practice their pre reading skills, phonic knowledge, blending and segmenting skills

- Opportunities within continuous provision to develop pre reading and reading skills independently
- An interactive multi-sensory phonics session (Letters and Sounds)
- Shared reading and/or writing led by the teacher to demonstrate reading and writing strategies (including phonics) in a meaningful way

Phonics: Letters and Sounds

Reading is taught following the 6 phases of the synthetic phonics "Letters and Sounds" system, cued articulation and progressive phonic reading books suited to pupils' interest and word level. A whole word approach is used to teach 'tricky words' which are not phonetically plausible or where a phonic approach is not best suited to an individual pupil. We use a 'Book Banded' reading scheme, which allows pupils to read books using skills with phonics, pictures, patterned language, whole words and their own experiences. Book banding uses a variety of books, includes fiction, non-fiction and poetry, all banded together by reading ability level. This ensures access to a wide variety of texts and styles and is key in developing reading and comprehension skills.

The six phases within the Letters and Sounds Programme allows our phonics teaching and learning to be progressive, and where it is appropriate children phonic knowledge will be assessed according to their phonic phases the children are working at linking to 'Letters and Sounds'. These assessments will take place when classroom staff identify they have achieved all elements of one phase and are ready to move on to the next phase.

Phonics is taught primarily within the Primary age class groups, with all lower school classes (Reception to end of Key Stage 2) having a daily scheduled phonics session alongside their weekly English lessons. Throughout used cued articulation which is a set of hand cues for teaching the individual sounds in a word, to support pupils' production of phonetic sounds. The hand movements are logical - each hand movement represents one sound and the cue gives clues as to how and where the sound is produced. In our Early Years classes we may also support this by using Jolly phonics, as due to the assessment nature of our pupil placements in these classes, some pupils may move into alternative provisions (such as mainstream schools) whereby Jolly phonics actions are primarily used to support progress in phonics.

In our Secondary aged class groups, whilst pupils still have weekly access to the school reading schemes, pupils are no longer taught phonics as whole groups and instead phonics and interventions are planned according to individual pupil need. In some circumstances there may be smaller groups of pupils who continue to regularly use the "Letters and Sounds" scheme to support their phonics development and reading. With those pupils who are not making progress using a synthetic phonics approach, instead being supported to further develop their reading ability by being taught skills that will help them in the wider world, to comprehend their environment through observing how things work around them, reading signs, dialling emergency numbers and recognising words. This is supported through taught English lessons and ASDAN accreditation modules.

Reading Scheme

We support the children's application of phonics through their reading by using the "Merstone Reading Scheme" which has been created using a range of purchased schemes to provide a breadth of reading, especially for our pupils who may find themselves on a particular level for a long period of time. The reading scheme is organised into colour bands so that pupils have a wide variety of reading material at each level to ensure that they can develop their skills and be confident readers.

Alongside the physical books, our reading scheme is further supported by online Bug Club Reading Books. This online system is used both in school and also by pupils and their families at home to further support their reading skills and develop fluency.

There are two primary reading schools used at Merstone School. The "Symbols Making Sense" scheme which provides symbolised books for pupils who require symbols to support their reading and comprehension; and the "Merstone Reading Scheme" a progressive levelled synthetic phonics reading scheme delivered alongside weekly phonics lessons. Through our differentiated provision all children have opportunities to enjoy reading at their own level. For some this will be through sensory stories with objects and experiences which help develop their awareness and understanding. For others it will be through a structured approach following the phases in "Letters and Sounds" to help them develop knowledge of phonics.

For pupils that are unlikely to become confident readers of words there will be a greater emphasis on functional reading. This includes teaching pupils to recognise social sight vocabulary and symbols (name, days, and places of importance) as well as 'reading' using symbols. Merstone uses a programme called 'Communicate in Print' to produce symbol supported text. with these symbols also being used in the Symbols Making Sense reading books

Reading for pleasure

At Merstone, we believe that all pupils should have access to and develop "reading for pleasure". All classrooms have a designated reading area within their classroom or in an alternative daily accessible location such as the school library bus. Reading areas in classrooms are designed specifically for the pupils who will be using them and include a wide range of materials including but not restricted to: fiction and non-fiction books, sensory stories, labels, comics, story Cd's, catalogues, leaflets, and menus. Reading areas are an area where pupils have the freedom to choose the items that they like to "read" for pleasure and therefore are not restricted by age, word level or type. It is recognised that not all pupils will have the ability to learn to read. Staff are however expected to encourage all pupils to have an interest and enjoyment of books. Pupils are therefore exposed to a range of genres through the literacy schemes of work as described above and to increase enjoyment they are delivered in multi-sensory ways.

Merstone School English Curriculum

At Merstone School English is an essential part of the curriculum. It is a part of every subject and area of learning. The teaching of English enables effective communication to take place. Through the development of our pupils' confidence and communication skills we are giving them the broadest, deepest and richest experience of life they can possibly have. Merstone follows recommendations from the National Curriculum for English and has adapted this document to meet the needs of our pupils. We believe that it is important to promote a positive attitude towards English amongst all our pupils in order to develop self-confidence and a sense of achievement, celebrating success in English, and adopting a total communication and child centred approach to learning where pupils have access to their own means of communication including PECS and AAC throughout the day.

The teaching of English, as a discreet subject, covers:

- Reading (For more information see Reading and Phonics at Merstone School)
- Writing
 - Composition: through organisation of ideas and events, vocabulary and sequencing skills
 - Planning and Drafting: developing and using strategies to aid their planning and organisation of their writing
 - Punctuation: Use and understanding of simple punctuation
 - Spelling: patterns, strings, letter sounds and sound-symbol relationship
- Speaking and Listening
 - Developing skills in listening to others
 - Helping to sustain concentration
 - Asking questions
 - Taking into account their listeners needs

In particular, English offers pupils with learning difficulties opportunities to:

- develop the ability to respond, to listen and to understand
- interact and communicate effectively with others in a range of social situations
- make choices, obtain information, question and be actively involved in

decision making

- develop creativity and imagination
- have access to a wide range of literature to enrich and broaden their experience.

Language and communication skills are essential for *all* our pupils and we recognise that the skills developed in English promote learning across the curriculum. We aim for our pupils to be able to express themselves creatively and imaginatively, and to communicate effectively both verbally and non-verbally with others in a range of social situations, appropriate to their levels and needs. In addition to this, a pupils' individual pupil Educational Health care plans (EHCs) may result in a dedicated programme of work used to address identified targets which are also reinforced where possible across the school day. Staff are trained in the use of a range of strategies including PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System), Makaton, Colourful Semantics, intensive interaction, shared attention strategies and the use of various electronic communication aids including switches and iPads. Throughout the day a range of alternative communication methods are used to support and encourage speech and language development. These are not used in isolation and a pupil may use several of these methods. These include PECS symbols, communication aids, Makaton, signing, communication books, objects or reference, AAC devices and on-body signing.

Merstone's English curriculum follows the National Curriculum requirements differentiated to the needs of our pupils and includes Communication (Speaking, Listening), Reading and Writing. Communication skills are key and pervade our curriculum through non-verbal methods (intensive interaction, objects of reference, photographs, pictures, symbols, Makaton signing) in addition to verbal speaking and listening skills. Visual clues support pupils' understanding. Individual and small group sessions are planned to suit individual pupils.

Curriculum delivery

The delivery of English at Merstone is divided into three key areas; Reading, Writing and Spoken Language. English is a statutory entitlement in all key stages (KS) including Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), KS 1, 2 and 3. It

also features part of the 14-19 Curriculum. The decision whether the strands of English are timetabled discreetly or delivered together is the responsibility of each individual class teacher, dependent upon the needs of pupils in each particular class. It may be timetabled as literacy, reading, phonics, writing, speaking & listening, PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System), Colourful Semantics, shared attention activities, Intensive Interaction, Makaton/signing, Drama or communication.

To provide adequate time to teach and develop English skills in KS1 - KS4, all pupils will have a dedicated daily English lesson at least 4 days per week. Within these lessons there will be a good balance between whole class, group work and individual practice. English is to be taught discreetly but it contributes to many subjects, and opportunities should be sought to draw English experience out of a wide range of activities across the curriculum. This will allow children to begin to use and apply English skills in real contexts. For more information on English in the Early Years and 14-19, please refer to the EYFS and 14-19 curriculum documents.

The curriculum overview for English sets out the genre focus for each class for each term, linked to an overall topic of the term for the class where possible. Each term pupils study a fiction genre and a non-fiction genre giving them a broad range of literature across the key stage.

The medium term plans contain information and guidance for delivering the literacy curriculum each term, for each Key Stage. They are to be used as a planning tool for the class teacher in order to aid delivery and help focus on appropriate objectives and expectations. They each contain the following information:

- A list of suggested texts - divided into 3 main groups (sensory, main, gifted and talented) to provide further differentiation for ability groups.
- A list of suggested resources - This is not an exhaustive list and other resources may be used, or considered more appropriate to use, for the unique cohort of children being taught.
- Suggested Activities - Again this is not an exhaustive or prescriptive list, but an ideas bank of possible activities that may be appropriate to use with the whole class or small group in order to aid delivery of the genre.
- Expectations - These are broken down into 3 key areas -
 - **Most Children Will** - these are the expectations that would be hoped to be reached for the main population of the class

- ***Some Children Will*** - these are expectations that would be held for those children in the class achieving higher literacy skills than the main SLD population
- ***Through Sensory Exploration Some Children Will*** - these are the expectations that would be held for those in the class group who need a more sensory approach to learning and would develop very small steps to learning through experiential means

Each of these expectation categories are linked to *Specific assessment based key learning objectives for individual or groups of pupils will be specified within Medium Term Planning*, which are used as a guide for the class teacher to aid differentiation and clarify and assess learning of individuals.

Assessment

The assessment of English follows the same procedures as set out in the Overall Curriculum policy.