



## 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 on 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

### **Synthetic Phonics: Jolly Phonics**

Formal reading is taught through the use of the Jolly Phonics synthetic phonics scheme.

Jolly Phonics, teaches children to read and write using synthetic phonics, which is widely recognised as the most effective way to teach children to read and write in English. It is based on the proven, fun and multi-sensory synthetic phonics method that gets children reading and writing from an early age. This means that we teach letter sounds as opposed to the alphabet. These 42 letter sounds are phonic building blocks that children, with the right tools, use to decode the English language. When reading a word, they recognise the letters and blend together the respective sounds; when writing a word they identify the sounds and write down the corresponding letters. These skills are called blending and segmenting. These are two of the five skills that children need to master phonics.

1. **Learning** **the** **letter** **sounds:**

1. s, a, t, i, p, n
2. c k, e, h, r, m, d
3. g, o, u, l, f, b
4. ai, j, oa, ie, ee, or
5. z, w, ng, v, oo, oo
6. y, x, ch, sh, th, th
7. qu, ou, oi, ue, er, ar

2. Children are taught 42 letter sounds, which is a mix of alphabet sounds (1 sound – 1 letter) and digraphs (1 sound – 2 letters) such as sh, th, ai and ue. Using a multi-sensory approach each letter sound is introduced with fun actions, stories and songs. We teach the letter sounds in 7 groups of 6 letters at a pace of 4-5 sounds a week. Children can start reading after the first group of letters have been taught and should have been introduced to all the 42 letter sounds after 9 weeks at school.

3. **Learning** **letter** **formation:**

This is taught alongside the introduction of each letter sound. Typically, children will learn how to form and write the letters letter down during the course of the lesson.

4. **Blending:**

Once the first few letter sounds are learnt, children begin blending the sounds together to help them read and write new words.

5. **Segmenting:**

When children start reading words, they also need to start identifying the phonic components that make the word sound the way it does. By teaching blending and segmenting at the same time children become familiar with assembling and breaking down the sounds within words.

6. **Tricky** **words**

These are words with irregular parts, such as 'who' and 'l'. Children learn these as exceptions to the rules of phonics. Introducing the common tricky words early in the year increases reading fluency (as they frequently occur in those first simple sentences you might expect them to read).

Alongside these skills children are also introduced to the main alternative spelling of vowels. These five skills form the foundation that children build on with each year of grammar teaching.

Phonics is taught primarily within the Primary age class groups, with all semi-formal and formal lower school classes (Moonstones, Sapphires and Emeralds) having a daily scheduled phonics session alongside their weekly English lessons. Throughout these sessions the Jolly Phonics sounds, songs and actions are used to deliver phonics sessions in a multi-faceted multisensory way. Cued articulation which is a set of hand cues for teaching the individual sounds in a word, may also be used with some of our pre-verbal pupils 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 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. Dandelion readers are used with pupils who have established skills in reading but still require age-appropriate synthetic phonics learning to progress further. In some circumstances there may be smaller groups of pupils who continue to regularly use the Jolly Phonics 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 Schemes**

There are two formal reading schools used at Merstone School. The Jolly Phonics reading scheme used by pupils learning to read through a synthetic phonics approach; and the Merstone Symbol Reading Scheme which has been developed for pupils whom are not working at a level where synthetic phonics is appropriate and who require the support of symbols to develop their ability to read and understand “written” language. Through our differentiated provision all children have opportunities to enjoy reading at their own level.

### **Synthetic phonics:**

We support the children's application of phonics through their reading by using the Jolly Phonics. Reading scheme. Synthetic phonics reading is taught initially by pupils learning all of the sounds from the 7 groups alongside 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. The levelled Jolly Phonics reading scheme is used for pupils once all sounds have been established, which allows pupils to read books using skills with phonics, pictures, patterned language, whole words and their own experiences.

### **Extension Reading Scheme for Diamonds pupils (Dandelion Readers):**

We have an extension reading scheme available for our older pupils (Diamonds department) who may remain working within a particular level of the synthetic scheme for a significant amount of time, or as an alternative for pupils who have learned to sight read words rather than to decode using synthetic phonics. There is a wider range of books within this scheme therefore it also provides opportunities for consolidating reading skills and texts which are more age appropriate for some of our older pupils.

### **Merstone Symbol Reading Scheme:**

Merstone school have created our own symbolised reading scheme for our pupils who require the support of symbols to aid their reading.

The books in this scheme are organised according to word level, the first 45 high frequency words and use resources from the Symbols Making sense symbolised reading books, Footlights 45 and Zed 45 words and Zed phase 2 and 3 words symbolised books created by Widgit.

The Merstone symbol reading scheme includes Makaton signing and comprehension sheets to ensure pupils' have a secure knowledge of not only being able to "read" a symbol, but to also understand the content of the book and therefore be able to read for meaning and purpose.

The scheme is used as an alternative for the school Jolly Phonics synthetic phonics based scheme, and accessed by pupils who are not yet able to develop their reading through text alone. Extension symbolised texts are available for pupils who complete the scheme but are unable to move onto text only stories.

### **Additional reading schemes and opportunities**

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

For some of our most complex multi-sensory pupils, reading opportunities will be presented through story massage and multi-sensory stories with objects and experiences which help develop their awareness and understanding. Multi-sensory Bag Books are used to provide individual “reading” opportunities where pupils can engage, interact, anticipate and develop their enjoyment of books in a way which is relevant to their individual learning needs.

### **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.

### **Author of the month, reading spines & Diversity bookshelves**

Everyone is welcome at Merstone and recognising and celebrating individuality is a key thread that runs throughout the tapestry of our school. Due to the complex learning needs of our pupils it is challenging to provide focus texts within our literacy scheme where diversity and difference is a key aspect in the story. More specific discussions regarding issues such as gender, race, religion and equality is addressed within the PSD and RE schemes as relevant to individuals and groups across the school. Each month pupils have access to a range of texts (both fiction and non-fiction) which celebrate diversity and either explicitly or through representation of characters within a story. These books are available for all pupils and classes to borrow and to use within their classroom. Alongside this are author of the month books which celebrate the words of particular authors and our school reading spines which are used in classrooms to further support literary exposure.