

Phonics at Townlands

Phonics plays an important role in the development of reading and writing. It deals with the individual sounds that make up the words we use every day. These individual sounds can be made by single letters (**c, a, t**), pairs (**pay**) or groups of letters (**high**). There are a number of sounds that can be made in more than one way (**day, made, wait**) and groups of letters that can make more than one sound (**school, chop**).

Children at Townlands begin developing their understanding of these sounds early in their Reception year.

Our Phonics is based upon the Sounds Write programme which is in line with Government recommendations.

<https://www.sounds-write.co.uk/>

Reading

When learning phonics, children start with individual letter sounds; matching a letter to a given sound and also making the correct sound when shown a letter.

They then make use of this knowledge to break simple words down (segmenting) into their component sounds (cat -> c-a-t) and then put them back together (blending) to work out the word (c-a-t -> cat). Children then learn sounds made up of two or more letters.

The books we send home make good use of the children's developing phonic skills and as the children's phonic knowledge develops, the range and number of words used increases.

The books are part of the Dandelion Readers reading scheme in EYFS and the sounds write reading scheme in year one and are directly aligned with the sounds the children are learning in class and have covered through the phonics programme. As the children progress through their reading journey and become confident readers they will then move onto the accelerated reader programme which builds on fluency and comprehension.

As children read more and more, they begin to recognise familiar words, rather than having to work them out each time, and reading becomes more fluent. As children develop as readers, their internal word banks also expand. The need for phonics diminishes but remains in the background and is called into play when they come across new words.

With increased fluency comes recognition of punctuation – full stops, exclamation marks, commas; this helps in the development of expression, intonation and prosody.

To help children understand stories and other texts more fully, we ask them questions on what they have read: Why do you think they did that? How do you think they are feeling? How do you know? When is this happening...

At Townlands, children see and hear their teachers modelling reading, for example, this could include an adult sharing a story, or a poem. This demonstrates to children the value of books and that reading is a worthwhile and enjoyable activity.

How we supporting families at home

At Townlands we aim to deliver a phonics workshop to Reception class parents/carers early in each new academic year to illustrate how phonics is taught and how it can support reading at home.

A child's reading journey starts with parents/carers sharing books and having books available at home to read. Books may come from school, family, friends, a library or elsewhere. Sharing books with a child allows them to begin to feel the joy that comes from the printed page, the words and the pictures, which in turn builds interest and appeal.

Writing

Phonic knowledge is also used when children begin to write. Writing is a more complex process and tends to develop at a slower rate than a child's reading. As part of the phonics programme, children begin writing by practicing letter formation and simple words alongside their learning of the initial sounds, segmenting and blending.

Early stages of writing develop through talk, through using and sharing language. A language rich environment shows children how language works, how words go together to let us say what we want to say. At Townlands, we believe that children who are surrounded by language are better placed when it comes to putting this language onto the written page.

In order to develop a child's writing, we develop experiences for children, which will inspire ideas for writing to emerge. These ideas are shared aloud with others to a point where a sentence or two are formed. Children are encouraged to say their sentences out loud so that the sentence sticks in their minds while they attempt to write it down.

As children write, they are encouraged to sound out their sentences a word at a time, breaking the words into individual sounds, and then work out how to write those sounds. When a word is completed they have to go back to their sentence (hopefully remembered) to get their next word and so on until their sentences are completed. The first letter of their sentence needs a capital letter and they need to finish it with a full stop.

In the initial stages of writing, children make marks on paper. These marks start to have some meaning and gradually, over time, begin to look more like letters we can recognise. These 'letters' are then grouped into words separated from each other by spaces.

These words will be made up of sounds that they have learnt and will most likely be spelt incorrectly but are made up of the right sounds – a child learns **ow** as in **now** and uses this to spell house, **hows**. Wrong spelling, right sounds. This is an important stage in a child's writing development. It is seen as children trying their best, having a go and gaining in confidence.

Children are encouraged to use the sounds they know when writing and at the appropriate point in their development they either use their new skills to spell correctly, or they are shown the correct spelling.

As the children become confident with matching sounds to letters, we introduce the letter names (the alphabet). We tend to do this later in Year 1 and Year 2 rather than in EYFS so that we don't overload the children with too much information at the outset.

If you are trying to spell a word, it is more helpful to know a letter's name rather than use its sound as there may be more than one way to make that sound, as an example there are lots of ways to make the 'c' sound: c, k, ck, ch. Knowing the names of the letters helps you to be more precise in your spelling.

Tricky Words

There are however many words in the English language that cannot be worked out using phonics as they don't conform to the rules. Children are taught that these words can't be sounded out and must just be learnt. Children will bring these words home to practise alongside their reading books.

There are also words that children will struggle with in the early stages of their phonic development, as they haven't learnt the sounds needed at that point in time. As children's ability to recognise a greater range of sounds improves, so will their ability to decode words and these tricky words will become effortless words.