



Stanford Infant School

'Exploring and Learning Together, Inspiring Each Other'

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Dear Reception Families

Available on the School Website, or on the Wonderful Workshop page of Google Classroom, are some short information films explaining how we teach phonics, reading and writing in Reception, we hope you enjoyed them! Here is some information regarding our daily phonics and handwriting teaching. We hope you find the information useful, but if you have any questions, please email them to the school office and these will be forwarded to your child's Class Teacher/s.

Learning Letter Sounds with Jolly Phonics:

We use **Jolly Phonics** to teach the letter sounds systematically and fast! Young children learn particularly quickly when there is an activity involved. By doing an action with each letter sound the children are using body movements, ears, eyes and speech to help them remember. This multi-sensory approach is a very effective way of learning, as well as being fun for the children.

All words are made up of sounds. There are **43 phonemes** (sounds) in English but only 26 letters that are used to represent these phonemes. This means that sometimes two letters are put together to create a new phoneme, e.g. sh, ch, th. These are called **digraphs**. **Digraphs** are different to the **blends** you may have learnt at school. A **digraph** has just one phoneme (e.g. 'sh' in 'ship') whereas a **blend** has two **phonemes** (e.g. 'st' in 'stop'). We do not teach **blends** as children with a secure knowledge of their letter sounds will blend the '**s**' and '**t**' automatically, so there is no need to teach '**st**' as a separate unit.

Introducing the Letter Sounds:

The idea behind '**Jolly Phonics**' is that all the letters are introduced at a rapid rate. The children's enthusiasm for learning is high and this provides a meaningful start for them.

It is recommended that the letters are introduced at a rate of one new sound per day. Although this may seem a lot, the children are generally able to cope with it and look forward to their new letter sound. The letter sounds are introduced at this rate so that they can be covered in approximately nine weeks. The result should be that the children become more competent readers much sooner, and can begin to use the letters in their writing.

In the very first phonics lesson that the children have, the letter 's' is introduced. This is done by telling a story that accompanies that sound. The sound and the action are incorporated into the story. In this case the children weave their arms like a snake, making 's' shapes, saying 'sssss'.

At the beginning of the Reception year, the children practise forming these letters in multi-sensory ways (in paint, chalk, rice, oats) and then move on to handwriting practice in books. Reinforcement of these letters is vital. Flash cards of the letters that have been taught are used every day.

Letter Groups:

The letters are divided into seven groups of six. They have been carefully selected to help the learning. The first six letters can be used to make many simple cvc (consonant – vowel- consonant words, e.g. sat, pat, pin). The letters that get easily confused are not too close together, such as 'b' and 'd'. The letter 'c' is introduced early on as it forms the template for the formation of many other letters, e.g. a, d, o, q, g. These

can be referred to as the caterpillar letters, as they all start in the same place and with the same movement ('c')

The 'Jolly Phonic' sets of sounds are as follows:

- **s, a, t, i, p, n**
- **c, k, e, h, r, m, d**
- **g, o, u, l, f, b**
- **ai, j, oa, ie, ee**
- **z, w, ng, v, short oo, long oo**
- **y, x, ch, sh, voiced th, unvoiced th**
- **qu, ou, oi, ue, er, ar**

We are currently part way through the second set and have started to blend simple words using these sounds! Use the Jolly Phonics action sheet (which you will find in your child's book bag) to see which sounds your child has picked up and which ones may need more practice.

Using Phonics in Early Reading:

Our aim is for children to become confident and independent readers who read for meaning. However, before they can do this, they have to be able to work out what the words say. The recognition of the letters/graphemes, the correct articulation of each related phoneme or sound in turn, from left to right within the word, and the ability to then say the whole word, is called **blending**. In the beginning the children are not able to do this and need to be taught. With the ability to blend, children are able to read regular words, but blending needs lots of practice. We start at school once the first six sounds have been learnt, with short words such as 'p-i-n' and 's-a-t'. The children say the sounds correctly and listen for the word. Some children find blending easy, while others find it quite difficult. Here are three possible reasons for them having difficulty:

1. They are not articulating the sounds (phonemes) correctly. They will find it hard to hear the word if the sounds are over pronounced.
2. They do not know their letter sounds well enough. As soon as they see a letter, they should know it automatically. If they have to pause for some time and think, then they will lose track of the word. To put this right, it is necessary to revise the sounds regularly, use the actions and play letter games.
3. The way the sounds are emphasised. The emphasis should be on the first letter, e.g. d-o-g. If the children put the emphasis on the last letter sound they may try to start the word with that sound and fail to hear the word. The first sound needs to be said slightly louder than the rest to help the child remember the starting sound.

As you will appreciate there are a lot of skills that need to be embedded before a child actually begins the process of reading simple texts. One of the most valuable tools in helping a child to read is sharing and reading stories together, including retelling stories verbally and creating imaginative stories.

After half term your child will be bringing home simple texts to read with you. They will be taking texts from the selection outside Alex Class. Each child will be given a 'reading behaviour' sheet in their reading wallet that will give you tips on how to support your child. Please ensure the wallets and sheets remain in your child's book bag. We will endeavour to change the books regularly within the school day.

Handwriting:

Successful handwriting depends upon secure motor control and hand-eye co-ordination. For some children this is very natural, to others it is not natural at all. We therefore provide opportunities for all children to

succeed in handwriting, by addressing the skills at a variety of physical levels, including: physical control through large-scale movement, manipulative skills and fine motor control and hand-eye co-ordination.

To develop handwriting skills throughout the year we encourage the growth of gross motor skills through our PE curriculum and Adventure Area opportunities. Through these the children practise the movements that they use when forming letters on a larger scale, encouraging their gross motor control. The children then have the opportunity to use these movements/patterns during fine motor activities.

Warming Up:

We use a software program called **Penpals** to support the children in further developing their readiness to pick up a pencil and write. We do this by undertaking a gross motor and fine motor warm up. Essentially the warm ups focus the children upon the different muscles they will be using whilst sitting at a table and writing. For example, a short exercise that focuses upon using the shoulder and arm muscles, as well as wrist and hand movements, will help towards establishing the correct posture and pencil grip needed to write effectively. Young children learn particularly quickly when there is an activity involved!

Introducing Letter Formation:

Having spent the first part of the Autumn Term exploring handwriting patterns through multi-sensory activities (e.g. chalk, paint, rice, oats), we then introduce each letter of the alphabet in families. This is so that the children are better able to see how a number of letters are similarly orientated and formed. There are four families of letters and these are referred to as the 'curly caterpillars', 'zig zag monsters', 'long ladders' and 'one-armed robots'. This is illustrated below. The children's enthusiasm for learning is high and this provides a meaningful start for them.

Long ladders: l/t/i/u/j/y

One-armed robots: r/n/m/h/b/p/k

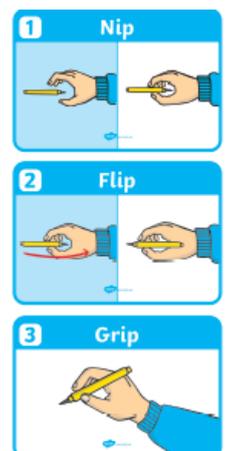
Curly caterpillars: c/o/a/d/g/q/e/f/s

Zig zag monsters: z/x/v/w

The letters 'o', 'v' and 'w' also have a 'lead out' or 'bridge' to prepare them for joining.

As the children see this letter formation being modelled, they are encouraged to practise it in the air as big as they can, with their magic fingers, and then repeat it again, this time smaller on their hand or leg. Doing this for each letter of the alphabet, the children are using body movements, ears, eyes and speech to help them to remember. This multi-sensory approach is a very effective way of learning, as well as being fun for the children. Saying how each letter is correctly formed out loud is also another way in which the children can gain greater confidence and independence.

After introducing each of the letters through multi-sensory activities, we begin the cycle again, this time focusing on only two letters a week. The children have the opportunity to form each in a multi-sensory way, then repeat the same letter on the following day in their handwriting book. At all times the children are encouraged to use a tripod grip and we use the nip, flip, and grip technique. The result should be that the children become more competent writers much sooner and understand that, by forming letters correctly, it is easier for other people to read their writing too.



As you will appreciate, there are a lot of skills that need to be embedded before a child actually begins the process of forming letters and writing. Bearing this in mind, we are encouraging many of the children to continue to mark-make and write for a range of purposes (labels, captions, signs etc) so that it can be displayed within the learning environment, kept safely in their Writing Book and shared with you at home.

We are pleased that so many of the children are keen to practise writing their name. Please can you support us at school by continuing to encourage the correct letter formation; capital letter at the start and followed by lower case letters.

We hope that you found this information useful.

Happy reading and writing!

The Reception Team

