



A guide to our whole school  
Literacy approach: Reading,  
Writing, Phonics and  
Communication  
Harlow Fields and College

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## **1. Introduction**

Literacy and communication form the foundation of learning at Harlow Fields School and College. Our pupils access literacy through highly personalised, developmental pathways that reflect their individual strengths, needs and communication profiles.

Many pupils begin literacy through non-verbal, sensory and pre-symbolic experiences, while others develop early phonics, symbolic understanding or conventional reading and writing. Our approach ensures that every pupil experiences success and meaningful progress, regardless of verbal ability, cognitive profile or communication method.

This policy brings together all elements of literacy:

- Communication
- Phonics
- Reading
- Writing
- Functional and life-skills literacy

These are delivered within a communication-rich environment that values strong relationships, nurturing practice, meaningful engagement and high expectations for every learner.

## **2. Intent**

Our aim is to deliver a literacy and communication curriculum that:

- Promotes functional communication across all pathways
- Develops symbolic understanding from objects → photos → symbols → words
- Provides accessible reading experiences for every pupil
- Supports the development of phonics where appropriate and implements a year 7/ 11+ approach when our phonics programme is not successful.
- Builds writing skills through mark-making, symbolic writing, AAC, typing or pen control
- Embeds reading and writing for pleasure
- Ensures purposeful literacy experiences linked to real life
- Aligns with the continuum of communication and PLTs/EHCP outcomes
- Ensures literacy is fully accessible, inclusive and meaningful

We aim for every pupil to:

- Communicate intentionally
- Understand meaning
- Access stories, books and text at their developmental level
- Develop independence and confidence
- Engage in literacy experiences with joy and purpose

### **3. Our Continuum of Communication**

Communication is the foundation of literacy. Pupils progress through the following developmental stages:

#### **1. Recognising Objects and People**

Responding through looking, facial expression or movement.

#### **2. Showing Preferences**

Using eye-pointing, reaching, gestures or vocalisations.

#### **3. Choice Making**

Communicating choices using objects, object cues, photos or symbols.

#### **4. Recognising Faces**

Linking people to motivating objects and contexts.

#### **5. Labelling**

Naming objects, photos or symbols to build vocabulary.

#### **6. Commenting – Verbs**

Understanding and expressing action words.

#### **7. Commenting – Adjectives**

Describing qualities and details.

#### **8. Sentence Building (verbs & adjectives)**

Combining symbols/photos/words to create meaning.

#### **9. Reading Words**

Recognising written words and linking print to meaning.

This continuum underpins reading, writing, phonics and all communication planning across the school.

## Continuum of Communication

<u>Skill</u>	<u>Description</u>
<b>Recognising objects and people</b>	Responding through looking, facial expression and increased movement.
<b>Showing preferences</b>	Pupils may show preferences through eye pointin, contact pointing, reaching, gestures and vocalizations.
<b>Choice making</b>	Pupils to develop choice making through communication method applicable to them. For example looking, reaching, real objects, object cues, photographs and symbols.
<b>Recognizing faces</b>	Creating a purpose for interaction by linking people to motivating objects.
<b>Labelling</b>	Developing generalization skills, commenting skills and increasing vocabulary.
<b>Sentence building</b>	To place symbols together in order to comment and request developing pupils sentence structure.
<b>Commenting - verbs</b>	Increasing vocabulary to understand actions using both commenting and request. To add to sentence building.
<b>Sentence building - verbs</b>	
<b>Commenting - adjectives</b>	Learning to describe through labelling, commenting and requesting. To add to sentence building.
<b>Sentence building - adjectives</b>	
<b>Reading words</b>	Developing an understanding of letters and sounds with an aim to develop writing/ typing skills.

## **4. Implementation Across Pathways**

### **Sensory/Semi-Formal Pathway**

Focus on early communication and engagement:

- Sensory stories
- Mark-making
- Objects of reference
- Anticipation routines
- Exposure to sound, rhyme and rhythm
- Early functional literacy such as recognising personal symbols
- Early phonics teaching (Twinkl) Phase 1

Focus on emerging symbolic literacy:

- Photo and symbol recognition
- Choice making
- Labelling
- Colourful Semantics for sentence building
- Sensory writing experiences
- Early phonics exploration

### **Semi-Formal/Formal Pathway**

Focus on structured literacy development:

- Early phonics teaching (Twinkl) Phase 2-6
- Developing reading fluency
- Writing simple words and sentences
- Sequencing stories
- Functional writing (lists, labels, signs)

More conventional literacy:

- Full Twinkl Phonics programme
- Reading Revival when Twinkl Phonics has not engaged
- Extended writing

- Comprehension skills

All pathways reflect the HFS ethos: relational practice, strong routines, communication-rich environments and personalised support and working together to succeed.



## **5. Phonics**

### **Twinkl Phonics, Reading Revival and Home Reading Offer**

At Harlow Fields, all pupils have access to Twinkl Phonics as our core systematic synthetic phonics programme. Twinkl Phonics is available to every pupil, regardless of pathway, and is introduced when developmentally appropriate.

However, we recognise that not all pupils engage or make progress through a traditional phonics route. Therefore:

- Twinkl Phonics is offered to all pupils in the first instance.
- If a pupil does not engage meaningfully with Twinkl, or progress is limited, they will transition to Reading Revival at Year 7 or age 11.
- All pupils that remain at Phase 1 will continue to be exposed to phase 1 phonics in a meaningful way that is embedded throughout the curriculum and highlighted during communication and interaction lessons.

Both Twinkl Phonics and Reading Revival remain available across the school, and staff adapt reading materials flexibly to meet the needs, interests and communication profiles of each learner.

This ensures that reading remains motivating, accessible and developmentally appropriate for all pupils.

### **Home Access to Reading Materials**

To support consistency between home and school:

All parents are provided with their own Twinkl Phonics log-in, giving access to

- digital decodable books
- phonics games
- home activities
- pupil-specific reading materials

Physical phonics books are also available, matched to each pupil's phonics phase.

These can be sent home for families who:

- prefer physical books
- do not have access to tablets
- want additional reading materials

Parents are encouraged to read with their child and share progress through home-school communication and Earwig.

## **Phase One**

Most pupils begin in Phase One, focusing on:

- Listening and attention
- Environmental and instrumental sounds
- Rhythm, rhyme and alliteration
- Oral blending and segmenting

Activities are sensory, practical and repeated regularly.

## **Beyond Phase One**

For pupils who are ready:

- Phoneme–grapheme correspondence
- Blending and segmenting
- Tricky words
- Early spelling
- CVC/CCVC words

Progress is personalised and not led by age or year group.

## **6. Reading**

We promote reading for pleasure and functional reading across all pathways.

### **Reading Materials**

- Reading Revival (decodables)
- Sensory story books and Bag Books
- Picture books
- Non-fiction
- Poetry and rhyme
- Personalised books with photos
- Community symbols and signage

## **Reading Experiences**

- Daily story time and reading corners in every classroom
- Reading corners
- Weekly shared reading sessions with a paired class from a different pathway/phase to promote inclusion and interaction between pupils of differing abilities.
- Reading across the curriculum
- Cultural Capital Week themed reading and activities
- Traveling Librarian
- World book day celebrated across the week to ensure embedding

## **Symbolic Reading Progression**

1. Objects
2. Photos
3. Symbols
4. Words

## **7. Writing**

Writing is taught through a highly inclusive, developmental framework tracked on our bespoke Harlow Fields Earwig assessment.

### **Early Writing (Sensory/Semi-Formal Pathway)**

- Mark-making
- Exploration of media (foam, sand, paint)
- Tracing and hand-over-hand support
- Recognising their name symbol or photo
- Tracing letters
- Letter formation when appropriate
- Copying and overwriting
- Selecting symbols to “write” meanings
- Colourful Semantics sentence-building

### **Developing Writing (Semi-Formal/Formal)**

- Writing CVC words
- Writing simple sentences
- Using tricky words
- Writing for purpose (lists, instructions, labels)
- Paragraph writing
- Narrative writing
- Genre study
- Editing and improving work

Writing may be done through:

- Pen or pencil
- Keyboard/typing
- AAC
- Symbol selection
- Drawing or visual representation

All forms of communication-as-writing are valued.

### **8. Functional Literacy**

Across all pathways pupils learn to read and write for real-life purposes:

- Recognising symbols (toilet, exit, hot, danger)
- Reading timetables
- Reading and writing their name
- Reading menus and prices
- Completing simple forms
- Navigating the community

This prepares pupils for independence and adulthood. This is focused on across the departments but is more evident in our sixth form.

## **9. Assessment**

Assessment is ongoing and may include:

- Earwig evidence
- Observations
- Engagement Model
- Individual targets (PLTs)
- EHCP progress
- Phonics tracking
- Writing samples
- Communication continuum
- Bespoke Harlow Fields assessment framework on Earwig.

We do not administer the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check.

## **10. Roles and Responsibilities**

**Literacy TLR lead: Emily Charles and Rebecca Willers leading on Curriculum development.**

- Oversees literacy provision
- Ensures consistency across pathways
- Supports staff through training
- Monitors teaching and progress

### **Teachers**

- Plan & deliver literacy and communication
- Track progress using assessment framework and Phonics assessment on Earwig.
- Adapt teaching
- Work closely with families

### **LSAs**

- Support communication throughout the day
- Deliver interventions and 1:1 support
- Model communication strategies