



Milton Primary School: English Approach

At Milton we believe all our children (from EYFS to Y6) are entitled to an ambitious, knowledge-rich English curriculum that ensures they will become fluent readers and writers who are able to confidently access the demands of the secondary school curriculum. Our English curriculum is driven by a canon of culturally important, high-quality texts. This is the stimulus for all our reading and writing. We have chosen texts, which lead to the development of the personal and cultural capital of children at Milton. We believe that in order for our children leave Milton as successful learners, they need to have knowledge of a range of these texts.

Phonics

At Milton school, we teach children to decode (read the words on the page) using the Sounds Write phonics programme. This is a linguistic phonics programme that teaches children 175 sound-spelling correspondences over YR to Y2 and beyond. Rather than moving on to spelling rules, which have many exceptions and contradictions, children learn and apply more sound-spelling correspondences (the extended code) in their reading and writing throughout their time at Milton. The linguistic phonics approach looks at the relationship between the spoken language and the written word. Children will study three main skills to enable them to learn to read: blending, the skills of blending letters together; segmenting, separating sounds for spelling; and manipulating, swapping sounds to develop reading accuracy.

Throughout KS2, children study etymology (the origin of words) which enables them to discover the meaning of new words and apply their extensive code knowledge. Phonics lessons in KS2 replace spelling lessons.

All teachers receive extensive Sounds Write training to support them to deliver the linguistic phonics lessons and yearly refresher training. The programme takes the children step-by-step through phonics, introducing them to the 44 different sounds in the English language and their different spellings gradually and systematically. The programme is highly specified, carefully sequenced and code knowledge is revisited so that it is taught to be remembered.

Phonics is taught whole-class and any children who did not fully grasp the learning repeat the lesson to ensure gaps do not form. Children working below age-related expectations still join in with the whole-class phonics lesson and then receive additional phonics teaching focused on their stage of code knowledge. This approach ensures children catch up quickly and keep up.

Reading

In YR and Y1, children practice reading the words on the page by reading texts that are fully aligned to our phonics programme. These are different to what you might read at home because they are phonically controlled to ensure they are practising previously taught sound-spelling correspondences. It is vital that children develop their code knowledge to automaticity, so they will practice reading from the same decodable text for several days until they are completely fluent. In addition, they listen to texts read to them from our reading canon to ensure they experience a rich reading diet that develops their vocabulary and background knowledge. As their code knowledge increases, children begin to read aloud texts from the reading canon. When learning to decode, children will take home a phonically controlled text to practise the mechanics of reading. Once



children have learnt sufficient code, the texts they choose to take home will be selected by them with support from their class teacher.

Being able to read quickly and fluently unlocks comprehension of the written texts. Anything that occupies our attention limits our ability to think; if we have to spend too much time thinking about how to decode the words on the page, we will have reduced capacity to consider the meaning of those words. In order to optimise reading fluency, all children read aloud in whole class reading lessons. This may be individually, through echo reading or repeated reading. All children read the text as secondary readers, while the primary reader is reading aloud to maximise the amount of reading done by every child in every lesson. We pitch the texts above the national reading level for each age group in order to develop children's ability to read effortlessly over large sections of academic text as they progress through the school. We set our expectations high and anticipate that children will meet those expectations.

Reading is more than lifting the words from the page; children need a rich vocabulary and background knowledge to help them understand the words they are reading. Our reading canon has been carefully selected to ensure all children develop a broad and deep vocabulary and background knowledge to develop their reading comprehension. We also read in all curriculum areas to further develop this.

Across the whole school, specific reading techniques are used to ensure that all children join in with reading aloud. These include repeated reading and close reading of sections of text. Additional scaffolding may be required for the slower graspers, for example, the teacher informs the child in advance which part they are expected to read, and children may pre-read the text with an adult ahead of the whole class lesson. Teachers plan in advance which child reads which part of the text in order to push the faster graspers with more complex vocabulary or allowing opportunities for fluency for the slower graspers. As well as whole class reading aloud, there are regular opportunities for 'close reading' and 'art of the sentence' where children are expected to answer questions and write specific sentences about the passage of text they have just read. After writing, the class then have an in-depth discussion about the passage they have just read. Teachers also carefully select vocabulary to teach explicitly and implicitly from the text and children are given plentiful opportunities to pronounce the word and use it orally in a variety of contexts. We give children child-friendly definitions and do not promote guessing definitions. We run our reading lessons in this way in order to expose children to high-quality literature and develop their fluency and prosody, as well as to increase their vocabulary breadth and depth.

Writing

Writing is probably the most complex process that we ask children to perform. A runner does not learn to run a marathon by running long distances at the beginning of their training; they build up slowly and develop their running technique over time. Equally, a pianist must learn and practice scales repeatedly in order to perform complex compositions. In the same way, children need to learn basic grammatical skills to automaticity before they can confidently compose extended pieces of writing to a high standard.

At Milton we focus on teaching six text types: recount, report, instructional, explanation, discussion, and persuasive texts. The text types are introduced and revisited in a specified sequence to reduce cognitive load. Additionally, the core grammar knowledge for each phase (KS1, LKS2, UKS2) is specified and carefully sequenced so that children have plentiful opportunities to learn the skills and



practice them to automaticity. Once children are ready to apply these skills, they draft extended pieces. The writing outcomes are based on content from the text read and discussed in the whole class reading lessons or from previously taught content in foundation subjects. Again, this is to ensure the focus is on thinking about grammar, punctuation, and vocabulary choices, rather than making up content, which is something children do naturally when we use rich texts. In early years, the focus is on oral language development, however children will be exposed to writing through encoding the sounds they hear in their phonics lessons. There are opportunities for writing within continuous provision, but children will not be expected to write extended pieces until they are developmentally ready.

This planning process begins with identifying the purpose for writing – to entertain, to inform, to persuade or to discuss. The skills needed for each writing purpose are built and the children have time to practice and consolidate this learning.

Children are taught explicitly how to plan their writing and extensive time is spent re-drafting, so that all children carefully consider the choices they are making. This ensures that every child can become a competent and successful writer. We believe in improving the writer not improving a single piece of writing. The cycle of drafting, responding to feedback and redrafting is repeated until children publish a piece of extended writing. This enables the taught grammar and punctuation to become embedded, so that children think carefully about their language choices and apply this in new pieces of writing across the curriculum. The true assessment of a child's writing ability comes when teachers observe how they are applying the English learning in other curriculum areas, as well as future English writing.

Handwriting

Fluent handwriting is crucial to allow children to think about what, not how, they are writing. We teach and practise handwriting discretely to the point where children no longer have to think about how they are forming, and later joining, their letters. In YR and Y1, children are taught a printed style in discrete handwriting lessons using a scripted pattern. They repeat the pattern as they are learning the print to ensure letters begin and finish at the correct point. The pattern is used for a short period only until they have learned to form the selected letters to automaticity. Children with incorrect letter formation receive handwriting interventions until the formation is correct. In Y2, children are taught joined script, learning the terms horizontal and diagonal joins. This is taught discretely over the first 6 weeks of Year 2. Children then practice the script in discrete handwriting sessions. The teacher uses their discretion as to when all children are expected to use the joined script in their writing. Fluid, automatic handwriting with a correct pencil grip and posture and position is key to writing fluency.

Assessment

Formative (at the point of teaching) assessment takes place in every lesson through regular quizzing of the children to check their understanding. This includes spelling tests from the statutory word lists and key vocabulary, as well as factual information of the context and knowledge of grammatical functions. Previous learning is revisited in retrieval tasks to embed the knowledge within the long-term memory.



The children have termly phonics assessments (see phonics approach for details) to check for decoding ability and fluency testing using DIBELS. The research evidence indicates that generic reading comprehension tests assess children's vocabulary and background knowledge more than their reading ability. We therefore do not use generic reading comprehension tests. Reading fluency tests are a better indicator of children's reading progress. The DIBELS assessments identify whether children are reading at an age-appropriate level and give detailed diagnostic information on key aspects of reading, so that teachers know exactly where and how to give additional support.

We assess pupils' writing termly against our KLI (key learning indicators), and moderate within clusters across our trust. Additionally, every year group participates in a system called Assessing Primary Writing once a year, where children's writing is judged anonymously and ranked with other pupils nationally. This supports our professional judgements and shows us how our children's writing compares across the country.