

Helping your Child at Home

At Holy Cross Catholic Primary School we use a systematic phonics programme called Letters and Sounds which is extremely effective and a lively, fun way to begin the reading and writing journey. The children learn to use their phonic knowledge for reading and writing activities and in their independent play.

In order to make a good start in reading and writing, children need to have an adult listen to them and talk to them. Speaking and listening are the foundations for reading and writing. Even everyday activities such as preparing a meal; tidying up; putting shopping away and getting ready to go out, offer you the chance to talk to your child, explaining what you are doing. They are hearing the way language is put together into sentences for a purpose.

Books are a rich source of new words for your child – words you would not use in everyday conversations appear in books. Children need to have a wide vocabulary to understand the meaning of books – so read aloud and share books as often as you can.

Learning how to “robot talk”

We show children how to do this –c-a-t = cat. The sounds (phonemes) are spoken aloud, in order, all through the word. This is called blending – it is a vital skill for reading.

They will also learn to do it the other way around – cat = c-a-t. The whole word is spoken aloud, and then broken up into its sounds (phonemes) in order, all through the word. This is called segmenting – it is a vital skill for spelling.

This is all oral (spoken). Your child will not be expected to match the letter to the sound at this stage. The emphasis is on helping children to hear the separate sounds in words and to create spoken sounds.

Ways you can support your children at home – Sound Talking.

Sound-talking

Find real objects around your home that have three phonemes (*sounds*) and practise ‘sound talk’. First, just let them listen, then see if they will join in, for example, saying:

‘I spy a p-e-g – peg.’

‘I spy a c-u-p – cup.’

‘Where’s your other s-o-ck – sock?’

Initially, children are taught single phonemes (the sounds that letters make) and the graphemes (what the letter looks like written down) such as /s/ /a/ /j/. When they are ready, children will also be taught the phonemes and graphemes for a group of letters such as /ai/ and /igh/ and that a phoneme can be represented by more than one letter, e.g. /ll/ as in b-e-ll. They may be using pictures or hand movements to help them remember these.

CVC – letter shapes and words: cat, rug, sun

The children also see letters and words, as well as hearing them. They are shown how to make whole words by using post-it notes or pushing magnetic or wooden letters together to form words, reading words on the interactive whiteboard, and breaking up words into individual sounds which will help their spelling. These will be simple words made up of two phonemes, e.g. am, at, it, or three sounds, e.g. cat, rug, sun, tick, bell.

These little words are often referred to as VC and CVC words

e.g. in the word bell –

B = consonant e = vowel ll = consonant

Tricky words

They will also learn several tricky words such as: the, to, I, go, no.

Children will still be practising oral blending and segmenting skills on a daily basis. They need plenty of practice at doing this.

Saying the sounds

Your child will be taught how to pronounce the sounds (phonemes) correctly to make blending easier.

We help children to listen to different letter sound such as s, f, t and l and recognise the different sound that each makes. They will say the sounds like this: “sssss” not “suh”, “ffff” not “fuh” “t” not “tuh” and “lll” not “luh”. Wherever possible it is a good idea to try to leave out the “uh” sound – blending is easier, and words sound correct, e.g. “mmmm-aaaa-tttt” = mat.

Ways you can support your children at home – Magnetic letters.

Magnetic letters

Buy magnetic letters for your fridge, or for use with a tin tray. Find out which letters have been taught – have fun finding these with your child and place them on the magnetic surface.

Making little words together

Make words together, for example, *it, up, am, and, top, dig, run, met, pick*. As you select the letters, say them aloud: ‘*a-m – am*’, ‘*m-e-t – met*’.

Breaking words up

Now do it the other way around: read the word, break the word up and move the letters away, saying: ‘*met – m-e-t*’.

Both these activities help children to see that reading and spelling are reversible processes.

Spelling is harder than reading words – praise, don’t criticise. Whiteboards and pens or using chalks are a good way for children to try out spellings and practice their handwriting.

Getting ready for writing

We model how to form letters (graphemes) correctly, so that children can eventually acquire a fluent and legible handwriting style. These skills develop over a long period of time. A child’s ability to form a letter correctly is a separate skill from phonics. Holding a pen or pencil needs considerable co-ordination and practice in making small movements with hands and fingers.

In the early phonic phases children can use letter cards, magnetic letters or the computer to write to demonstrate their knowledge of phonics.

Writing in lower-case letters

We teach lower-case letters to start with, as well as capital letters. As most writing is in lower-case letters it is useful if you can use these at home. A good start is for your child to write their name correctly, starting with a capital letter followed by lower-case letters. It is easier to get children into good habits rather than trying to change bad habits at a later stage. We emphasize that capital letters are used at the beginning of a name, as well as at the start of a sentence.

Ways you can support your children at home – Using their whole body.

Using their whole body

For handwriting children need to be well co-ordinated through their whole body, not just their hands and fingers. Games that help co-ordination include throwing balls at a target, under-arm and over-arm, and bouncing balls – also skipping on the spot.

Hand and finger play

Action rhymes such as *'Incy wincy spider'*, *'One potato, two potato'* and *'Tommy Thumb'* are great fun and get their hands and fingers moving. Playing with play dough really helps strengthen little fingers, as does cookery and using simple tools.

Hand–eye co-ordination

Pouring water into jugs and cups of different sizes, sweeping up with a dustpan and brush, cutting, sticking, tracing, threading beads, completing puzzles, peeling off stickers and sticking them in the right place – these all help hand–eye co-ordination.

Pencil hold

The 'pincer' movement needs to be practised. This is important as it enables children to hold a pencil properly as they write. Ask them to help hang out the washing using the pincer grip on the pegs, completing inset puzzles and even unscrewing lids on jars.

Tips for reading at home

- Turn off radios and televisions – it needs to be a quiet and cosy time.
- **Books without words**– it is very important for the children to talk about the pictures and tell their own stories about what is happening.
- **First books with words**– encourage children to point under each word as they read it. When you read to them model pointing to each word yourself.
- Let them use the pictures to help them – this is not cheating! –they are learning to use a valuable clue.
- Encourage them to look at the first letter of a word and say the sound that it makes if they are stuck – this is another clue for them to use.
- Ask them to think “does it make sense?” when attempting an unknown word.
- Don't worry if they make a mistake – tell them the correct word.
- Memorising stories is all part of learning to read!
- Harder books don't make better readers – children need lots of opportunities to read and reread easier books and gain confidence.
- Praise and encouragement are very important.
- Reading shouldn't be a battle! If they are not in the mood wait until later.
- Finally, have fun reading!

Important Reminders about writing:

- We will be teaching the children to write their names using the correct letter formations.

- Children should use a capital letter at the beginning of their name and then small (lower case) letters.
- Please encourage them to experiment with writing as much as possible at home, for example shopping lists, letters and cards.
- As they learn more letters they will begin to use these in their writing and be able to write the correct letter for the sounds in their words.
- Giving them sentences to copy does not help them learn to write. Please encourage them to “sound out” simple words – they will soon surprise you!

Other activities:

- Read rhyming books or get the children to continue a rhyming string such as cat, mat, hat etc
- Sing Nursery Rhymes – the more rhymes that children know off by heart when they start school the better they will be reading by the time they are 8 years old.
- Go to the library regularly
- Use good quality computer programmes or apps to support your child’s learning.

<http://www.phonicsplay.co.uk/>

<http://www.letters-and-sounds.com/>

<http://www.jollylearning.co.uk/> (also look at the Jolly Phonics app for tablets)