

English

Literacy is an essential skill which everyone needs to succeed in both education and the wider world. However at Downs Infant School we don't just want to teach children to read and write, we want to plant the seeds for a lifelong love of language and literature.

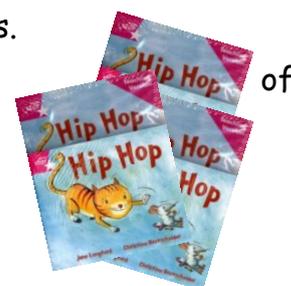


The first step for this is sharing fantastic, entertaining books that captivate our children's imaginations, resonate with their own experiences or simply represent a great source of fun and enjoyment. Experience of—and enthusiasm about—stories is the beginning of the process of internalising not just grammar and sentence structure but also a rich and varied vocabulary; as such it represents a vital factor in a child's language development. By sharing effective writing in stories they share with their classes, teachers can also make overt links between reading and writing and encourage children to aspire to emulate the writing skills successful authors use.



Reading

Alongside a rich and varied diet of 'real books', we use the Rigby Star reading scheme to target specific skills development in individual and guided reading experiences. The scheme books are carefully graded to incorporate measured amounts repeated and patterned language and a developing range of sight vocabulary which increases in complexity as children's skills progress. Books are sent home each week for further practice.



Applying phonic knowledge is a fundamental skill which all apprentice readers will need. We use the 'Jolly Phonics' multisensory approach to introduce basic letter sounds to our youngest children, later combined with elements from the 'Letters and Sounds' programme for further consolidation and development of reading and spelling skills. Every class throughout the school has a 15-20 minute phonics session every day. However, phonics skills are only part of the story in a language as phonetically irregular as English, so from the beginning we encourage children to use a wide range of cues—picture, phonic, contextual and syntactical—to help them decode unfamiliar words.



From the outset, children are encouraged to voice opinions about what they've read, discuss their understanding of stories and relate them to their own experiences. All of these elements set the foundations for more subtle comprehension skills, such as inference and deduction, which they will develop as their reading confidence grows.



Writing

In order to write effectively, children need to develop effective skills in a wide variety of areas: vocabulary, composition and a range of 'secretarial' skills including handwriting, punctuation and spelling. For children as young as ours, this is no mean achievement! Nevertheless, we understand that success at writing is as dependent on enthusiasm and confidence as it is on technical skills, and we pride ourselves on the creativity of our approach.



Great writing begins with complete immersion in a writing stimulus, whether that be a film, a painting, a piece of music or an experience (eg. a school trip). Drama will often be used to deepen understanding, and oral rehearsal (practising by speaking out loud) is another vital step in the compositional process which allows children to hone their ideas and begin to structure their writing—whether it be a story, report, poem or recount.



By making explicit links between what we read and what we write, we can develop the children's ability to analyse the elements of successful writing and 'magpie' ideas which they can use in their own compositions.



Starting in Reception, we encourage children to use a cursive style of handwriting, this means that every individual letter features entry and exit strokes to enable easy joining as the children gain confidence with their writing.