

Our approach to English

Text & Context

Our English curriculum is driven by a canon of high-quality texts. This is the stimulus for all reading, writing and context work. We have chosen high-quality texts which lead to the development of the personal and cultural capital of the children. We believe that in order for our children to leave as successful learners they need to have knowledge of a range of these texts. We do not differentiate within the class as to the text they read; we pitch the texts slightly above the national reading level for that age group in order to boost the children's vocabularies and their fluency in reading. We do not choose picture books as a stimulus as these do not offer reading opportunities. We set our expectations high and expect the children to meet those expectations.

Context

We plan our context learning on the knowledge the children will need to understand the book they are reading. Teachers are expected to read the book and identify areas of knowledge that the children will need to know. This knowledge is then the basis for the medium term planning. The medium term planning takes the form of a learning sequence – 'what do the children need to know in order to understand this part of the book?' This sequence shows a progression of learning which can then be broken down into individual lessons. The learning sequence generally follows the plot outline of the book however some teachers may decide to teach certain contextual knowledge earlier in order to support the reading later on. Reception and Year 1 currently study one book per half term while Year 2 and KS2 have one book for a whole term.

The context lessons will have a geographical or historical focus with the expectation that elements of both are taught throughout the course of the term. This is monitored regularly and updated when necessary in order to ensure a balanced curriculum. Alongside this, the planning of music, art, RE and RRS links are to be made where appropriate. Teachers are also expected to identify educational visits or invite visitors into the academy in order to not only enhance the children's learning but also to improve personal and cultural capital.

Reading

The same high-quality text is used in the whole class reading lessons. Across the whole school, specific reading techniques are used to ensure that all children join in with reading aloud. 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. 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. We run our reading lessons in this way in order to expose children to high-quality literature and develop their fluency and prosody.

Writing

Using the same text, teachers plan a learning sequence for writing. This 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 in their English books. They are reminded that their work is in draft form so they are ready to edit and improve. If after professional discussions with year group colleagues the teachers feel they need to return to the skills building, they are able to stop the writing process and return to the skills building element at any time during the writing process. We do not give teachers a time frame on how long a writing sequence may take.

Assessment

Formative assessment takes place in every lesson through regular quizzing of the children to check their understanding. This includes spelling tests of high frequency or context related vocabulary as well as factual information of the context and knowledge of grammatical functions. Previous learning is revisited in the quizzes to embed the knowledge within the long term memory. The children have termly phonics assessment (see phonics approach for details) to check for decoding ability and fluency testing to check progress in their WPM. In terms of summative assessment, PIRA tests and writing assessments are administered termly to measure performance against the whole curriculum. Teacher judgements are made for attainment and progress.