

Learning to read at Ardtornish Primary School.

When will my child bring home a 'reader'?

At Ardtornish we use a synthetic phonics approach to teaching reading. This method ensures students first develop a correct understanding of the reading process, before they begin to read simple phonic based texts, in about the 8th week of school.

Therefore your child will only bring home 'readers' after we have ensured they can:

- quickly and accurately say the sounds of the alphabet (not the name of the letters)
- recognise 6 additional phonograms – these are two or more letters that represent one sound e.g. "sh"
- blend simple sounds to hear the words 'they make' e.g. "p-i-g makes pig." "b-u-s makes bus."

This focus on synthesising words, by blending their individual sound components, is why the teaching approach is called synthetic phonics.

To avoid your child coming to think reading relies on just guessing words, from the picture on the page, or trying to memorise words by their shape, we ensure they master the basic letter/ sound combinations before sending home phonics based reading materials.

The first texts your child will be given to read independently will be simple sentences called 'ditties', after which they will start to bring home phonically controlled 'readers' from the "Read Write Inc." series of books.



Why are you using phonically controlled readers?

One of the central principles of Synthetic Phonics is that **a child should never be asked to read something that is too difficult for them, or that they do not have the skills to read.**

Therefore we first teach students to decode simple words and read simple sentences, before presenting them with short texts and finally readers, which are matched to their level of phonic knowledge and skills.

Using this synthetic approach to teaching reading we empower children to “sound out” unknown words,’ as a first strategy, whenever they encounter them. By not encouraging students to memorise words by their shape before they understand letter sound relationships (as the whole word approach to teaching reading does), we avoid them developing poor reading habits such as:

- wildly guessing at a word’s meaning based only on its first letter
- using picture clues as their main way of identify an unknown word
- constantly looking to an adult to provide them with the answer to every unknown word they encounter rather than attempting to sound it out for themselves.

When a child’s first reflex, when they come upon an unknown word, is to sound it out, they develop independence as a reader.

Of course support from an adult is vital for assisting students to improve as readers but the child should only seek their aid as a last resort not as their first reflex when they encounter a reading difficulty.

Then when an adult does intervene it can be to support the child to use their existing phonics knowledge to work out the word for themselves (Do you remember what sound ‘ph’ makes?) or failing this provide them with new phonic information. e.g “In the word elephant the “P” and “H” go together to make a “F” sound.

Our aim in reception is to ensure every child acquires the skills, knowledge and attitudes to be successful at reading from their very first experiences.



What should I be reading to my child prior to them bringing home a phonically controlled reader?

Picture books are the best texts to be reading to your child, on a regular basis, because it's the enjoyment of good literature that motivates a child to become an avid reader.

Therefore we will send home a story book each night for you to share with your child.

What can I do to support my child's growing understanding of texts as I read them story books before 'readers' come home?

Help them to predict what the story will be about, discuss the flow of events and have them answer questions about what they have read.

Every day your child will be learning more about sounds and practising word blending. The first words they are introduced to are simple and phonically regular but many can still be found in picture books. One fun activity involves challenging your child to find simple words in the book you are sharing. They can then be encouraged to read these words to you.

For example in the story of 'Goldilocks' the highlighted words, in the text below, might be some your child could proudly sound out & read.

Once upon a time there was a beautiful little girl called Goldilocks. She lived in the forest. One day her mother, who had much to do, asked her to run and get a big basket of firewood from the forest.

Being able to hear individual sounds and/or syllables and synthesis them into a word is an important skill for your child to practice.

You can improve your child's phonological awareness by challenging them to identify words as you sound them out syllable by syllable or by each discrete sound (phoneme).

1. Sounding out each phoneme (discrete sound):
"Can you work out which word I am sounding? m-u-ch." / 'd-ay" / "w-oo-d"
2. Sounding out a word's syllables:
"What is this word? for - est." or
"beau - ti - ful" / "lit-tle"





Why is my child given homework in reception?

We will be teaching your child to memorise words and sounds and to write letters correctly from their first day at school.

This is a very demanding intellectual task.

The homework we set consists of a short revision of the sounds and letters they have learned to say and write at school. Supporting them to undertake these tasks at home will enable you to:

- Celebrate their success
- Support them to write correctly
- Monitor their progress
- Refresh their memory- to ensure they retain their new learning more easily until the following day.

Each night, while we sleep, our brain undertakes a process by which it actively stores information in its long term memory that it deems to be important while discarding other information it considers to be irrelevant.

By doing a few minutes of revision each night students teach their brains that learning letters and sounds is important and therefore increase the possibility that this information will be retained more easily.

There is a strong link between the amount of sleep a child gets and their performance as a learner.

A Short revision of what they have learned, during the day, before they go to sleep, increases a child's retention of information.