





Contents

Culture of literacy	3
Literacy within the CHILD Curriculum	4
Teaching reading	4
Reading strategies	5
Promoting reading	7
Teaching writing	7
Supporting literacy	9

Culture of literacy

At Chailey Heritage School we recognise the importance of developing a love of stories, and where appropriate books and reading for pupils. Good quality stories and texts are incorporated into topic-based learning across St Martin's and Seymour departments, and are also a key part of the curriculum for older students in Hanbury department. These may be presented in a variety of different ways, depending on the learning needs of the cohort in each class.

Some examples are:

- **Story Massage** – This combines the benefits of positive touch with the fun and creativity of words. Ten simple massage strokes form the basis of the programme and these are used alongside simple stories, rhymes or songs.
- **Sensory Stories** – A range of sensory materials, often including sounds, smells or tastes as well as objects to explore and touch, are used alongside a story to enhance pupil engagement and understanding.
- **Sharing stories** using technology (e.g. using a touch screen or eye gaze controls to turn the pages and activate the text)
- **Listening to stories** with predictable and patterned language. Pupils have the opportunity to listen to the same book multiple times and to begin to anticipate and show preferences for specific stories and texts.
- **Exploring stories through role play**, e.g. by using a BIGmack switch to join in with familiar key lines or phrases.

We seek to encourage behaviours that may lead to engagement with text. We encourage children to engage in sensory activities accompanied by text-based exposure (without expectation or testing) and we provide error free activities that involve engagement with text.

Reading aloud to pupils happens as an integral part of the learning experience of all pupils across the school. There are a range of appropriate and engaging texts available in every classroom and within in each department.



Literacy within the CHILD curriculum

All of our children and young people have “My Next Steps” (MNS) specifically targeted at developing their language, vocabulary and communication skills (incorporated into their Communication profiles).

These next steps are written jointly by teachers and Speech and Language Therapists (SALT). Opportunities to practice and develop communication skills are integrated into all learning experiences across the Chailey Heritage Individual Learner Driven (CHILD) curriculum, with classroom colleagues trained to carry out and support therapy strategies by the SALT.

Chailey
Heritage
Individual
Learner
Driven
Curriculum

The majority of pupils at the school have such significant learning disabilities, physical disabilities, sensory impairments and complex needs that it is not appropriate to begin to teach them to read. They have a bespoke, child focussed curriculum which is entirely based on their individual areas for development and does not include the teaching of specific national curriculum subjects. For a very small minority of individual pupils in the school, it is appropriate to teach reading as a discreet subject area. These are our most cognitively able students - although it is important to remember that at Chailey, even the pupils with the highest cognitive ability still have profound and multiple barriers to learning (PMLB). For example, they may be non-verbal, visually or hearing impaired, unable to use their hands to hold or manipulate objects, having frequent seizures, or in most cases they are facing several of these barriers at the same time. They may also be experiencing pain or discomfort and may need a high number of time consuming medical and care interventions throughout the day, which impacts on their time in class. This means that even our most cognitively able students are not working at a level that is typical for their age group.

Teaching Reading

Those pupils who are taught reading as a discrete subject will have a Specific Learning Profile detailing their current skills in this area and the MNS that they are working on. The MNS will vary for every individual pupil, in line with our ethos of teaching what is most relevant and meaningful for each child or young person. They will have a Specific Learning evidence folder containing evidence of their progress towards these next steps. The majority of the children and young people who have Specific Learning profiles are still working towards the EYFS goals for reading (i.e. knowing the sound for each letter in the alphabet plus some digraphs, reading words using phonic knowledge by sound-blending, and recognising some common exception words). Very few students are working at a level beyond this.



Reading Strategies

The vast majority of our pupils at Chailey Heritage School are non-verbal. They have not had the opportunity to 'babble' and then progress to making speech sounds as babies and young children. They may have a good understanding of spoken language, but without the ability to verbalise and practise the use of these words themselves, their expressive language development is delayed.



Many of our pupils rely on Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC) systems to communicate. These may be symbol based communication books or high-tech communication systems, on iPads or tablets. Students who rely on AAC will almost always have vocabulary understanding that is very much in advance of their spelling and decoding skills. They will often be able to read individual words without context to a much higher level than reading single words within the context of a sentence, particularly if these words are accompanied by symbols. This group will spend much longer acquiring the skills to read and comprehend a whole sentence than their non-disabled peers. Sometimes they will be able to answer fairly complex questions from text they have listened to and watched, but find it difficult to track text and decode words. This leads to a very uneven profile, so they may be learning spelling at Foundation Stage level, whilst engaging in year 3 (early key stage 2) comprehension activities.

A purely synthetic phonics-based strategy for learning to read can be very challenging for students who are unable to verbalise the phonemes themselves, as it requires them to have and to use an 'inner voice' in their head. Not all students are able to do this, and therefore, for these students it is important that other strategies for learning to read are used alongside the synthetic phonics approach.

These include:

Whole word

AAC users often have a preference for this approach. They can learn to recognise a wide range of words and symbols within a systematic category based communication system.

Embedded phonics

Embedded phonics involves teaching phonemes and graphemes when they arise in teachable moments. It focuses on learning to decode language during every day reading tasks, rather than through structured lessons. It emphasizes the importance of learning through context and ongoing exposure to words. This strategy is particularly relevant for our AAC users who learn to read new words as they encounter them in their environment or in texts, often then finding those words on their VOCAs. Tying in with developing expressive communication, these YP will often be taught the spelling of a word as they attempt to communicate it (e.g. when using alphabet spelling boards) with the motivation of being able to make themselves clearly understood.

Symbol recognition:

For many AAC users, being able to recognise symbols is a key skill in being able to use their communication aids effectively. Symbols are used alongside texts in many learning activities to support reading for meaning.





Some pupils might rely heavily on one approach, while others use a mixture of several approaches. When observing the teaching of reading at Chailey Heritage, some of the strategies you might see are:

- Developing pre-phonics skills, focussed on listening to and making sounds, and activities to develop awareness of rhythm, rhyme and alliteration.
- Activities in which children practice how to turn pages (if physically able to, or using technology such as eye gaze), how to find the tops and bottoms of pages, and how to recognise the front and back covers.
- The use of online phonics-based reading programmes such as Bug Club and Reading Eggs, with adult support to interpret answers and enable choice making (e.g. giving multiple choice answers)
- Access to phonics based reading books, which match the children's level of phonics skills.
- Developing word awareness to help children become conscious of individual words (e.g. their appearance and their length) such as their own name and words that have meaning and relevance to them. This may involve selecting given words from a choice of options, playing finding/matching games or finding specific words within categories in symbol based communication systems such as the Chailey Communication System (CCS) using a Voice Output Communication Aid (VOCA).
- The use of symbols, starting with concrete symbols (those with a picture that links directly with the word they represent) and moving on to more abstract symbols.
- Sorting words, symbols and objects into categories to support the future use of category based communications systems (e.g. putting all the animals in the animal box)
- Activities that teach understanding of print found in the environment, such as classroom signs, labels, notes, posters, calendars, and directions.
- Opportunities to follow written or visual instructions (which may or may not be accompanied by symbols) with support in practical and meaningful situations e.g. a recipe when cooking , driving to a designated place, pointing to a place on the body.
- Answering questions about texts by selecting from a choice of words, symbols, signs or objects to demonstrate comprehension.



Promoting Reading

We have a range of resources from sensory massage stories to individually read books using their AAC devices. In order to promote reading throughout the day pupils in the St Martins and Seymour departments have "book bags" which go home with them with a reading journal for the parents to fill in. The "book bags" contain accessible reading/story material for the individual pupil so will look different depending on their needs. Because the pupils require repetition and routine the same "story" may be read to them for the duration of a half term instead of being changed weekly. They have reading record books to track the books shared at home and ensure they have access to a varied range of texts.

St Martins has a designated reading area which is accessible for any pupils across the school. All classes have stories within them which can be accessed and shared when appropriate to do so whether through technology or in book form.

Teaching Writing

Because the pupils at our school all have significant physical disabilities, they are not able to hold mark making tools such as pencils with the control needed to form letters. Therefore, letter formation and handwriting are not relevant for most of our learners. For our learners who are taught writing as a discrete subject, this ties in very closely with their communication next steps. There is a focus on composition, i.e. constructing simple phrases and sentences for meaning, either by linking words or symbols rather than the physical act of mark making. Activities may include:

- Story writing with a structured framework using communication systems (e.g. selecting a person, place and activity from a choice of words or symbols)
- Making sentences by selecting words in order using flashcards or technology such as Grid 3 (which may be accessed using touch screen, eye gaze technology or switches) to share weekend news or ask a question.
- Record recounts of a story using photographs e.g. "When I visited the horses".
- Role-play writing and 'read' it to an adult (e.g. making marks or using symbols or eye-gaze to "say" what you want to do next)
- With help, retell a story/event through role-play.

Teaching Writing (Continued)

- Record audio messages on a switch or voice activated device to send messages to other departments or at home
- Using an alternative pencil – use method applicable to pupil (eye gaze frame or flip chart)
- Adult scribes and child attempts to copy underneath, or child dictates to adult and adult scribes
- Activities where they produce a recognisable or capital letter for start of own name, either with pen/paint/switch or by indicating it to adult
- Activities which relate to holding mark-making implements such as a pencil
- Select some words/symbols when composing text, e.g. by choosing between two alternative words/symbols shown to them
- Write random strings of symbols, which may include letters, numerals and invented letter shapes – attribute meaning to scribble
- Write dance – The music and the dance is used to guide and aid children's imagination and language development, so the pieces of music, with the corresponding movements, are structured into 'narrative' themes that can be developed as stories or these can be enjoyed as separate and 'stand-alone' session
- Creating and using remnant books together
- Rehearse then dictate a sentence for an adult to scribe, or select symbols to make a sentence by eye-pointing
- Using a keyboard page on a VOCA to spell phonetically
- An adult dictated sentence on a big mac that can reproduced by a young person on a VOCA.



Supporting Literacy

Teachers are encouraged to choose resources and strategies that are specific and appropriate to the literacy level of the pupil or young person. We use a program called CandLE to ensure that we have a consistent approach to teaching phonics and developing literacy skills. This programme enables the pupils to access literacy through AAC. It has different levels of literacy so the pupils are able to work on skills appropriate to their level of understanding.



These are:

- **Pre-emergent:** Where we are still assessing what literacy skills a pupil may have. Typically for those pupils requiring the engagement model and have a diagnosis of PMLD
- **Emergent:** Where the pupil is showing interest in listening to simple stories and may recognise either one or two letters or words
- **Transitional:** Where the pupil shows an active interest in listening to stories, recognises most of the letters most of the time and has a clear means of communication such as a communication book or high-tech vocabulary they use intentionally
- **Early Conventional:** Where pupils are beginning to engage with simple literal comprehension, reading simple sentences, engaging in conversations (at one- or two-word level such as 'want drink') and able to occasionally identify the correct beginning letter of a word when writing or typing
- **Developing Conventional:** Where pupils are beginning to engage with simple inferential and evaluative comprehension and connect text with own experiences. They are reading sentences which include adjectives, verbs and adverbs and can identify parts of speech. Their spelling will often contain more than one correct letter but not necessarily in the correct order.
- **Conventional:** Where pupils are able to answer all types of comprehension questions with relative ease. They are able to read more than one sentence or text independently (with voice output if needed) and able to spell many words (with word prediction if needed).

CandLE also provides us with a wide range of accessible books so we are able to access the hard copy alongside a version using eye gaze or a switch that the pupils can access independently or with less support. All teachers have had training in this program which has then been cascaded down to the education assistants in class or department meetings. All teachers also have access to a toolkit of literacy resources which range from bespoke equipment to programs such as Look to Learn and Purple Mash.



Chailey Heritage Foundation
Haywards Heath Road
North Chailey, Lewes
East Sussex BN8 4EF

office@chf.org.uk
01825 724 444
www.chf.org.uk