

# MVFS English Curriculum

## Intent

Due to their complex needs/backgrounds and experiences in previous settings, almost all of our children arrive at MVFS with significant gaps or delays in their acquisition of fundamental literacy skills; including speaking, listening, reading and writing. As these skills underpin learning across the curriculum, we recognise that this puts our children at a very real disadvantage. It can also have a grave impact upon their mental health and wellbeing; and can limit their future life chances – putting them at risk of being disenfranchised as they grow older. As such, we are passionate about and committed to helping all of our children overcome barriers, develop positive attitudes and start believing in themselves (as learners first, then as readers and writers).

As soon as they start their journey with us, we set about building positive relationships with the children, which enables them to feel safe and begin to take risks as we work together to reframe adverse past experiences and take positive steps forward. By consistently championing and coaching our children to try new skills and extend their comfort zone, we empower them to challenge negative views of themselves, start to build resilience in learning and celebrate their unique achievements. Ultimately, we aim to empower our children to view themselves as life-long learners who are capable of building their knowledge and skills to pursue their interests and achieve success.

We believe that, by carefully considering the needs of our children (both in the moment and the future), we provide a carefully sequenced English curriculum that raises the aspirations of every child and enables them to thrive. In line with our Curriculum Policy, the first priority of our English curriculum is to re-engage all children in education by providing them with positive experiences that raise their self-esteem and enable them to make progress from their individual starting points. Through our English curriculum and its cross-curricular links, we aim to inspire and motivate our children, fostering curiosity and an intrinsic desire to keep learning; and enhance their self-perception.

## Our Key Aims: At MVFS, we strive to...

- ensure that every child can access and build core literacy skills in a way that suits their current developmental stage and learning profile.
- develop confident communicators through structured, purposeful oracy opportunities that build self-esteem and help our children to express themselves clearly and to listen actively.
- build strong foundational skills in phonics, vocabulary and grammar through differentiated teaching and modelling and multi-sensory experiences.
- encourage a love of reading by providing engaging, accessible and diverse texts that reflect the children's interests and experiences.
- teach writing as a meaningful tool for communication, self-expression and storytelling.
- nurture independence and resilience by recognising and celebrating progress at every step.



We have developed the aims of the National Curriculum for English, thus, in order to meet the needs of our learners:

National Curriculum Aims to “ensure that all pupils...”	MVFS Aims to empower our children to...
<i>use discussion in order to learn; they should be able to elaborate and explain clearly their understanding and ideas</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• develop their oracy skills to become more effective speakers and listeners; and better understand themselves, each other and the world around them</li> </ul>
<i>are competent in the arts of speaking and listening, making formal presentations, demonstrating to others and participating in debate</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• find their voice and harness its power to help them successfully communicate and advocate for themselves in school and life</li> </ul>
<i>acquire a wide vocabulary, an understanding of grammar and knowledge of linguistic conventions for reading, writing and spoken language</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• develop the confidence, knowledge and skills to access information effectively; and to communicate their own ideas and opinions coherently and articulately</li> <li>• make choices about their preferred means of communication; and have the knowledge and skills to access non-traditional methods of recording</li> </ul>
<i>write clearly, accurately and coherently, adapting their language and style in and for a range of contexts, purposes and audiences</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• engage in positive experiences that help to build self-esteem; challenging their expectations of themselves and allowing them to see themselves as a writer</li> <li>• develop the skills and knowledge to create written text; embarking on a journey which will ultimately enable them to communicate effectively for a range of practical and social purposes</li> </ul>



## Implementation – Ethos and Approach

In all of our classes, we have children from a wide range of previous schools and settings; each of which has given them a different start in their educational journey. Our commitment to placing children in classes based on the needs of the whole child (rather than simply by their chronological age) also means that we have classes with a considerable mix of ages.

It is, therefore, essential that our bespoke English curriculum and the varied approach that we take in delivering it is flexible enough to enable us to meet a wide range of needs and empower all children to make progress, whatever their starting point.

## Implementation – Reading: Ethos & Approach

- As the National Curriculum for English states in its aims; *“Through reading, pupils have a chance to develop culturally, emotionally, intellectually, socially and spiritually... Reading also enables pupils both to acquire knowledge and to build on what they already know.”*

As well as being an essential life skill, we believe that reading has the power to enhance and transform lives – to enable people to see and understand the world through the lives of others, to build empathy, and to develop a better understanding of the role we can play in shaping our world. Similarly, reading for pleasure can provide inspiration and a positive form of escapism, and can be very beneficial for mental health and wellbeing.

## Implementation – Reading: Phonics

- As a school, we follow the RML “Read, Write, Inc.” programme to teach phonics; and children who need to develop their phonic knowledge and application receive individual/small group intervention four times a week. Importantly, unlike many mainstream schools, at MVFS the systematic and regular teaching of phonics is not restricted to children in Key Stage 1. Indeed, many of our children are in Key Stage 2 when they join us but have limited phonological awareness so we work hard to assess and meet their phonic needs, regardless of their age.
- In line with the DfE’s Reading Framework, we demonstrate *“fidelity to the programme”*. However, due to the complex and varied needs of the children, our staff have become skilled in adapting the programme materials in order to maximise engagement and progress.

Whilst adapting sessions to meet individual needs, we ensure that sessions:

- have clear objectives (and make sure that the children understand them)
- make the most of the time and use activities that maximise opportunities to consolidate, embed and extend learning
- practise prior knowledge until children can use it automatically (thus, freeing up capacity to learn new knowledge)
- support children to connect new knowledge with previous learning; and demonstrate new learning in bite-sized chunks
- ensure children are given opportunities to apply what they have learnt
- use assessment to clearly determine next steps



## Implementation – Reading: Individual Reading Books

- All of our children have an individual reading book which they read and discuss with adults at least 3 times a week.
- For children who are accessing RML phonics sessions, these books are decodable “Read, Write Inc.” books which link directly to the stage at which they are in the phonics programme. Children who have completed the phonics programme are assigned levelled books using Active Learn’s “Bug Club”.
- As well as being a regular opportunity to develop their fluency (accuracy and speed), these 1:1 sessions are also used to engage the child in book talk – to explore their depth of understanding about what they have read, and to discuss connections, commonality and difference.

## Implementation – Reading: Class Story Time

- At MVFS, we understand the cognitive consequences of the story format – that our minds treat stories differently to other types of material and find them interesting, easy to understand and easy to remember. As such, we use daily class story time sessions to share important, inspiring and engaging texts. Through these sessions, we want to enable the children to use their imagination to transport themselves to other places, inhabit the lives of people who are similar/different to them, and be able to imagine themselves as the protagonist in a story.
- Our class novels are carefully chosen to ensure that they:
  - have a strong narrative that will encourage and sustain a strong emotional response
  - are diverse and inclusive in representing people from a wide range of cultures, groups and backgrounds
  - extend the children’s knowledge and vocabulary
  - introduce significant authors, especially those from groups who are typically under-represented

Our class novel discussion books support teachers to engage children in conversations about key points from the story – exploring ideas, sharing opinions and deepening understanding of concepts and vocabulary.



## Implementation – Reading: Library & Additional Reading Opportunities

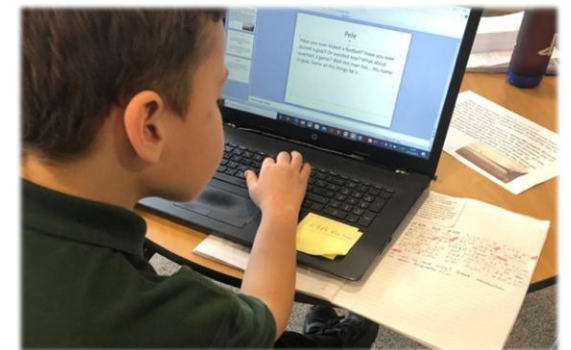
- We have a library on site with a range of picture books, novels for children, non-fiction and poetry. Each class visits the library once a week and the children are supported in choosing a book. Each classroom also has additional selections of books which are carefully curated and regularly refreshed.
- As children will sometimes choose books which are beyond the level at which they can read independently, they are sensitively supported to access these books via shared reading with either adults or peers.
- Across the year, we take part in a range of events to celebrate and raise the profile of reading; and children also have online access to the MVFS Virtual Library at home and school (where they can watch professional retellings of a wide range of stories).

## Implementation – Writing: Developing Writers

- Negative attitudes towards writing (often based on prior adverse experiences, low self-esteem and a fear of failure) are, perhaps, one of the greatest barriers to learning that we enable our children to overcome during their time at MVFS. We are sensitive towards the children's feelings and 'meet them where they are' on their literacy journey.
- The children participate in daily English lessons with clear input and tasks set by the class teacher. Whilst expectations for the children's engagement and effort are consistently high within and across classes; the style and content of lessons often varies as they are carefully designed and tailored to meet the needs of and facilitate good progress for individuals.
- Using Grammarsaurus, teachers follow a consistent approach for planning and delivering units of work; working through three main phases:
  - Explore – Children spend time exploring high quality examples of the text type/genre being studied; breaking them down into their constituent parts and discussing key features of their organisation and language.
  - Experiment – Following careful explanation and modelling, children use imitation and innovation to adapt and create examples of specific features of the text type/genre.
  - Plan and create – Children apply their growing knowledge of language and organisational features to plan and create their own original version of the text type/genre.

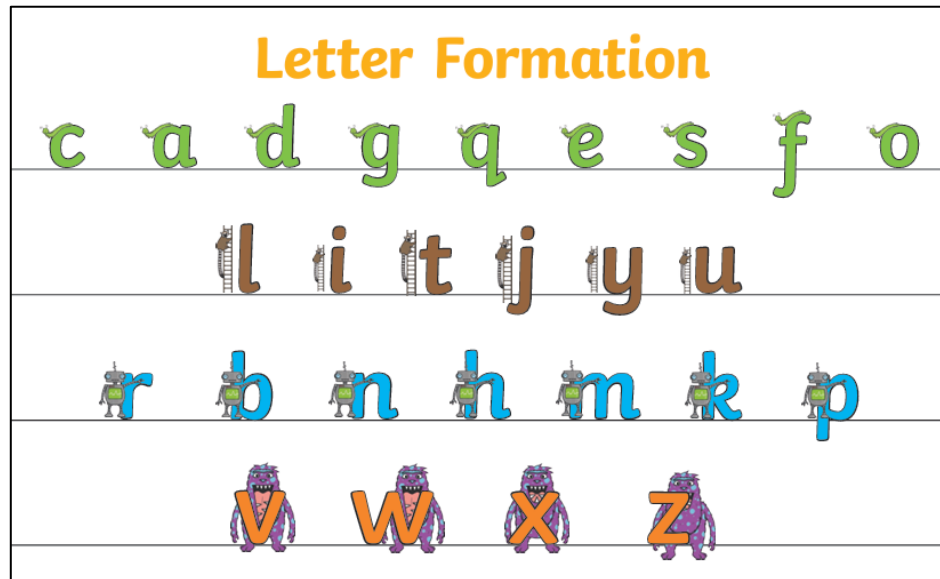
Throughout all of these phases, children are encouraged and supported to reflect upon and evaluate their work – both to recognise and celebrate their successes; and to identify aspects that they can edit and improve.

- Grammarsaurus also discretely teaches the 'Place Value of Punctuation and Grammar' [PVPG] – a strategy that focuses on building strong, foundational knowledge of sentence structure before introducing more complex grammar. It uses a systematic, structured method to teach pupils the function and application of punctuation and grammar, along with pictorial resources and practical activities to support pupils' understanding of grammatical concepts.
- As many of our children's technical writing skills lag behind their ability to communicate ideas orally, adults will occasionally act as scribes for them in order to help them stay emotionally regulated. This is managed very carefully to ensure that children do not slip back into negative attitudes towards writing or develop dependency upon adult support and intervention.
- Similarly, when appropriate, children will be offered and taught how to use non-traditional and digital means of recording (including making audio recordings or using voice-to-text technology) in order for them to be able to truly showcase their ideas, composition and vocabulary.



## Implementation – Writing: Handwriting

- We know that research indicates that slow or effortful handwriting requires a significant amount of children’s focus when writing. This limits the amount of thought that can be given to the content of their writing and, in turn, can impact negatively upon their wider ability to learn and communicate. To combat and prevent this, we follow a comprehensive series of programmes, written and advocated by occupational therapists working for the NHS.
- After an initial assessment, each child joins the programme at the level which will meet their needs and bring them the most benefit; and engages in short, focused sessions four times a week for six weeks (at which point a further assessment is carried out to identify their next steps). Each level includes gross and fine motor skill exercises to ensure that children have the physical strength and dexterity to hold and guide a writing implement, along with repeated opportunities to practise carefully sequenced movements. [Children with the most significant difficulties may also receive additional input from occupational therapists in school and/or at home, in line with the EHCP.]
- Progressively, direct instruction is then used to teach and model correct letter formation, using ‘Letter Families’ to help children learn and recall the correct motions for each letter. Initially, this takes place on a large scale – using whole arm movements and implements such as paintbrushes and wands – before gradually reducing the scale to achieve the ultimate goal of writing with a regular pencil on paper.
- As children begin to create accurate letter shapes using the correct formation, teachers then use guidance from the National Handwriting Association to teach them about: *Space, Size, Sitting, Stringing, Slant, Speed and Style.*



## Implementation – Writing: Spelling

- To spell (encode) words, our children are first taught to identify the sounds (phonemes) in spoken words – often referred to as segmenting; then they learn to write the letters that represent the sounds.
- Matching phonemes and graphemes is a core part of the RML “Read, Write Inc.” phonics programme that we use, and our children incrementally build up a secure bank of phonological knowledge and awareness that enables them to start making phonetically plausible attempts at spelling simple words. As they develop their understanding of alternative ways to spell phonemes, they are then encouraged to use what they have learnt about common spelling patterns to make their attempts increasingly accurate.
- Once the children have secured basic phonological awareness, they begin the Grammarsaurus Spelling Programme. This program is a systematic, research-informed approach that builds children's spelling skills beyond foundational phonics by focusing heavily on morphology (the study of the meaningful parts of words) and etymology (word origins).
- To help them become increasingly independent and accurate in spelling words with unfamiliar spelling patterns, the children are also taught how to access and use a range of spelling aids; including word banks, dictionaries and ‘spell checker’ devices and technology.

## Impact

Our unwavering commitment to improving outcomes for our children enables them to overcome negative experiences and leave us believing that they are speakers, readers and writers. Similarly, our focus on nurturing the whole child enables them to develop positive behaviours for learning – they are able to recognise and celebrate their progress, build resilience to accept and manage setbacks, and no longer feel the need to disrupt or sabotage learning for themselves or others. This marks the start of a journey that has the power to reframe their experiences and attributes in a positive way, and significantly improve their life chances and outcomes.

Our children are able to transfer the knowledge, skills and confidence that they learn in English lessons across the curriculum, and to life outside of school. As readers, they are able to access information to better understand their world and experience the calm and joy that reading for pleasure can bring; and, as speakers and writers, they can communicate their ideas and make their voice heard.

