

The Teaching of Literacy – Treloar School

Literacy is essential for the development of young people as individuals to enable them to function with independence as members of society, both now and in the future.

Literacy is a tool and medium for effective learning in other curriculum areas taught within the school.

Treloar School aims

- to develop the ability to read, understand and respond to all types of writing
- to develop the ability to construct and convey meaning in written language
- to encourage the interactive development of speaking and listening, reading and writing
- to organise our work with our pupils so that progression, however small is evident

Treloar School aims for students

- to be able to read and write with confidence, fluency and understanding
- to be able to use a full range of reading cues, to monitor their reading and correct their mistakes
- to be able to plan, revise and edit their own writing
- to have an interest in words and their meanings and a growing vocabulary
- to have a suitable technical vocabulary through which to understand and discuss their reading and their writing

Learning to read and spell is part of a wider language learning process. In order to become fluent at reading and writing, children need experience, knowledge and ability to understand and use spoken language, together with involvement and knowledge of the world around them. This language and experience base is underpinned by the child's own physical, cognitive, sensory and communication skills.

Many of the students at Treloar have significant difficulties in one or more of these areas, and this may have a considerable impact on the way they learn. Acquiring literacy skills is a much more complex and problematic process than for many typically developing children.

Damage to the brain that has affected physical skills may only be limited to areas associated with movement and there may be no other impairments. However damage to the brain can be more widespread; e.g. about half of all children with Cerebral Palsy have some communication difficulties. These may be due to the effects of the damage on the language areas of the brain, or due to poor control over speech organs or muscles.

Children with speech difficulties are at a disadvantage when learning literacy skills because it is through continuous use and practice that awareness develops. Research demonstrates the strong link between a child's difficulties in spoken language and their difficulties in learning to read and write. Listening to other people, particularly proficient speakers of the English language, is an important part of the language learning process, but it is not considered enough. Being able to imitate what they see and hear, becoming experienced and confident in using language, together with thinking and talking about aspects of language is crucial to literacy learning in order to understand how a written code (i.e. the printed word) is devised from the spoken language.

Many children start to learn to read by recognising a limited vocabulary of whole words, as if they were pictures or patterns. They can read familiar words in familiar contexts, in a familiar script. Reading is often inaccurate because no or little letter information is taken into account. Picture and contextual cues provide additional information and for many beginner readers this may be the main source of information about words. Reading whole words by sight is limited because unfamiliar words cannot be tackled and the process is overly dependent on visual memory.

Further development occurs when the child understands the correspondence between letters and sounds. To become a more flexible reader it is important to be able to analyse speech sounds, including an awareness of the minute differences in sounds that make up speech (Phonological development). Hence the need for continuous use and practice to develop the awareness.

Gradually more knowledge about words is required in order to be an efficient reader. This includes each word's meaning, its grammatical properties, its meaning within each context, what it sounds like as distinct from other similar sounding words, how to say it and how it is written.

The extent and nature of the difficulties that children at Treloar may experience in learning to become efficient readers vary; no two students have the same pattern of problems and difficulties may arise at any stage of the processes involved. Many of the prerequisite skills (visuo-motor, auditory, motor, phonological and language) may be significantly delayed, deficient or disordered, and students will require structured, individual teaching programmes to maximise and further develop the abilities they have.

There is also a need to accept that for some students it is unrealistic to expect significant progress in the development of some of these skills and to know when it becomes counterproductive to continue. Staff must be sensitive to limitations and ensure that student self-esteem and dignity is maintained.

Decisions about individual programmes and appropriate ways to support students are regularly and frequently reviewed and recommendations from an Educational Psychologist may be sought. For most students, staff should be able to utilise a wide range of specialist materials and resources and implement a range of assistive technology devices to deliver the teaching programme. Teaching should be diagnostic and flexible, taking into account the individual difficulties and abilities of each student. The teaching should take a multi-sensory approach with frequent opportunities for revision and overlearning. At all stages of learning it is important that the students' age, ability, interests and maturity are taken into account. Teachers are encouraged

to use materials and methods to suit individual students – a single school wide scheme would not be appropriate.

Picture Communication Symbols

For many students working at the P Levels (pre level 1 of the National Curriculum), particularly those students within the Integrated Curriculum classes, symbols are used to support literacy skills. Some students working in other classes in the lower National Curriculum Levels also benefit from the visual nature of symbols to support their literacy and understanding. Symbols can help to support students with communication, independence and participation, literacy and learning, creativity and self-expression, and access to information. Text is supported by symbols – images used to make the meaning clearer and easier to understand and provide a visual representation of the word.

Treloar's has chosen to use Picture Communication Symbols (PCS), although other symbol sets are also available. Students begin to see themselves as readers, which improves self-esteem and their ability to learn. It is possible to change the level of symbol support so that reliance on any visual cues can be removed if it is no longer needed. Concepts are often taught alongside symbols to aid comprehension, with objects and pictures/photographs adding further reinforcement. Treloar's has developed a Core Symbol Assessment which can be used to show progress and development of skills.

Early Years Foundation stage

In Nursery the children are encouraged to enjoy looking at books and other printed material. They have the opportunity to hear rhymes and songs repeated over and over until they are familiar.

They hear stories that they already know, pausing at intervals to encourage them to join in using VOCA, actions or words.

Towards the end of the stage they may be introduced to sounds and letters, and they may begin to read words and simple sentences, for example signs in the environment or their names.

Children are encouraged to give meaning to marks they make as they draw, write and paint

Where appropriate they are given the opportunity to write their own name and other things such as labels, captions, using individualised means.

Primary

In the primary classes we use a combination of approaches to meet the needs of the children and regard reading as more than just an ability to read written text. The learning environment is text rich, to give the student's opportunities to give meaning to signs, words and labels. Enjoyment and a love of stories is continued on from Nursery and many texts will be used as a basis for the cross curriculum themes being taught. Makaton signing may be used to support understanding of text.

To meet the needs of students that are at the pre-reading stage of development, or who are non-verbal, a wide range of strategies are used, including; symbols, pictures, and tactile sensory resources. Listening skills and phonics are introduced using a combination of 'Jolly Phonics' and 'Letters and Sounds' and are taught using a multi-sensory approach. However, other approaches will need to be considered to meet individual learning styles. E.g. 'See and Learn'. We use the Oxford Reading Tree scheme and associated materials where appropriate.

Organisation

For some groups, Literacy is taught separately and in addition to English lessons, and although all staff recognise that there are areas of overlap, Literacy lessons are generally more concerned with developing individual abilities to decode and encode text. For some of these groups the emphasis is very much on word or sentence level work, although every attempt is made to embed that knowledge within text level work where possible and not to over isolate these developing skills. Where students are more able in their literacy abilities, there is more emphasis on whole text level work and the boundaries of what is Literacy and what is English begin to blur. Close cooperation between staff ensure that these lessons compliment each other and provide the practice, over learning and the generalisation that many of the students need.

Teaching programmes and Resources

There is a range of resources available and teachers chose elements to suit the needs of individual students.

Reading Schemes include:

Planet Wobble, Oxford Reading Tree, Wellington Square, Rising Stars, Rapid Readers, Spin Out Stories, Fuzz Buzz

Phonological Awareness programmes include:

Phonological Awareness Training
PASS

Reading books

A very wide range of graded books are available for reading and the Barrington Stoke books have proved particularly suitable.

Computer Software

There are a number of core software programs that enable teachers to deliver the content of Literacy lessons in a variety of different ways, and which enable students to be supported when practising their new skills. Many of these programs allow the content of Literacy lessons to be included and can be customised for individual needs. Programmes include Starspell, Wordshark. Catch Up 1, 2 &3, Clicker 5, Text Thing, Developing Tray

Additionally, many students use some form of assistive access technology equipment or software to enable them to employ multi-sensory methods of learning so necessary to securely acquiring these new skills.

Support for Reading and Writing - A wide range of equipment and software is available from intuitive and predictive typing software to reading games for the ipad.

Whole school reading assessment takes place annually in the Summer Term as one method of tracking student progress in literacy.