



Watlington Primary School

Reception Curriculum Meeting

Jo Tanner and Helen Hanger | October 2026

Bright Futures

Be Responsible • Be Respectful • Be Resilient

We come

Introduction

We are the Reception teaching team.

We are supported by three teaching assistants, who work across the week.

- Our Aims
- Share our ethos about learning in early years
- Give you some of the rationale behind our approach
- Share 'a typical day'
- Explain approaches to teaching English, maths, Reading and Phonics
- Provide you with practical ideas use at home

Why are the early years so important?



These early years of development are critical for lifelong success

- The way in which young children learn is different to adults.
- This period of their life is transformative.
- Young children's brains are wired for learning. They have more active neural networks than adults, which allow them to acquire new knowledge more efficiently. The adult brain is less flexible and less efficient.
- Children learn through play and exploration.
- **"Nothing lights up a child's brain like play." ~ Dr Stuart Brown, M.D.**



Play-based Curriculum

What we do

- Follow Development Matters and The Statutory Framework. Research based.
- Plan a carefully considered curriculum that covers essential learning experiences for optimal results and enjoyment. Lifelong love of learning.
- Mix free, unstructured play with adult-directed play, adult-led play and whole class direct teaching.

Why it matters

- Thinking and planning creatively and following the children's interests promotes curiosity and engagement.
- Balance of activities devised by and run by the children and those structured and led by adults ensure children are not sitting for extended periods, listening to a teacher.
- More interactive and well-paced playful teaching and learning results in children remaining interested and regulated, so they can learn.



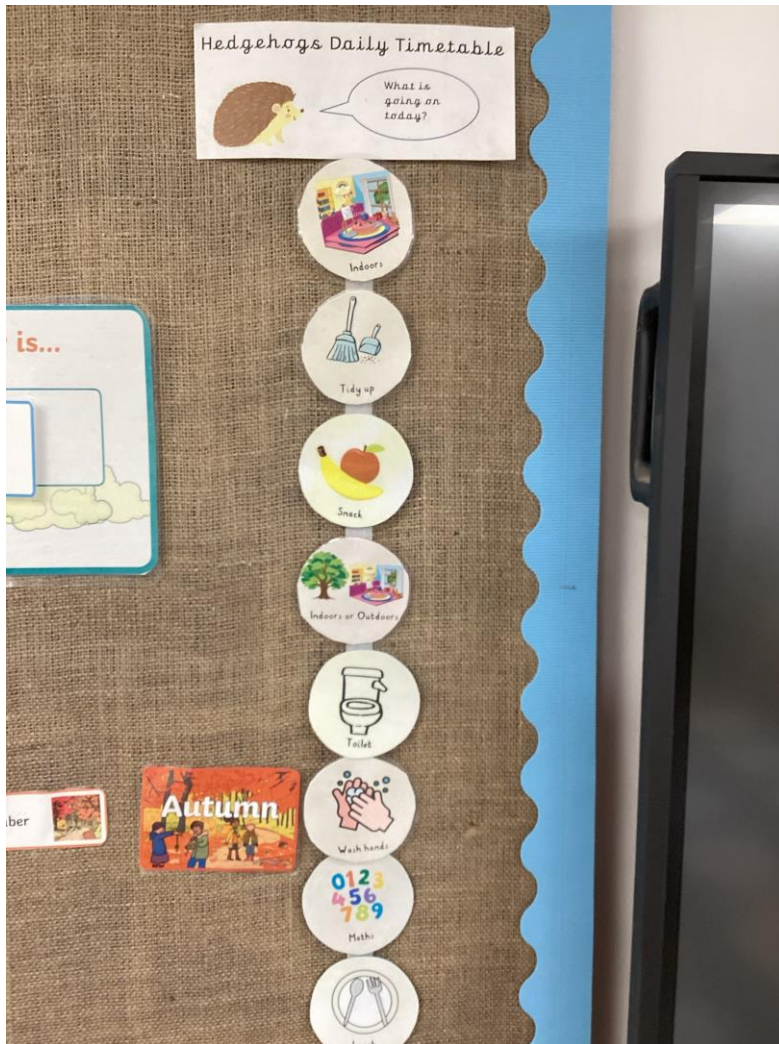
- Playing IS learning
- There is no such thing as ‘just playing’
- Powerful connections are formed through play
- Young children learn faster through play than by sitting and listening
- Play is active and lights up the brain
- Valuing children playing and extend upon opportunities – take their lead
- The environment is carefully planned to develop children’s progress
- Challenging activities to support learning
- Careful balance between adult and child led learning
- Play-based curriculum continues and extends into Year 1 – Bats Class

When and how is direct teaching introduced?



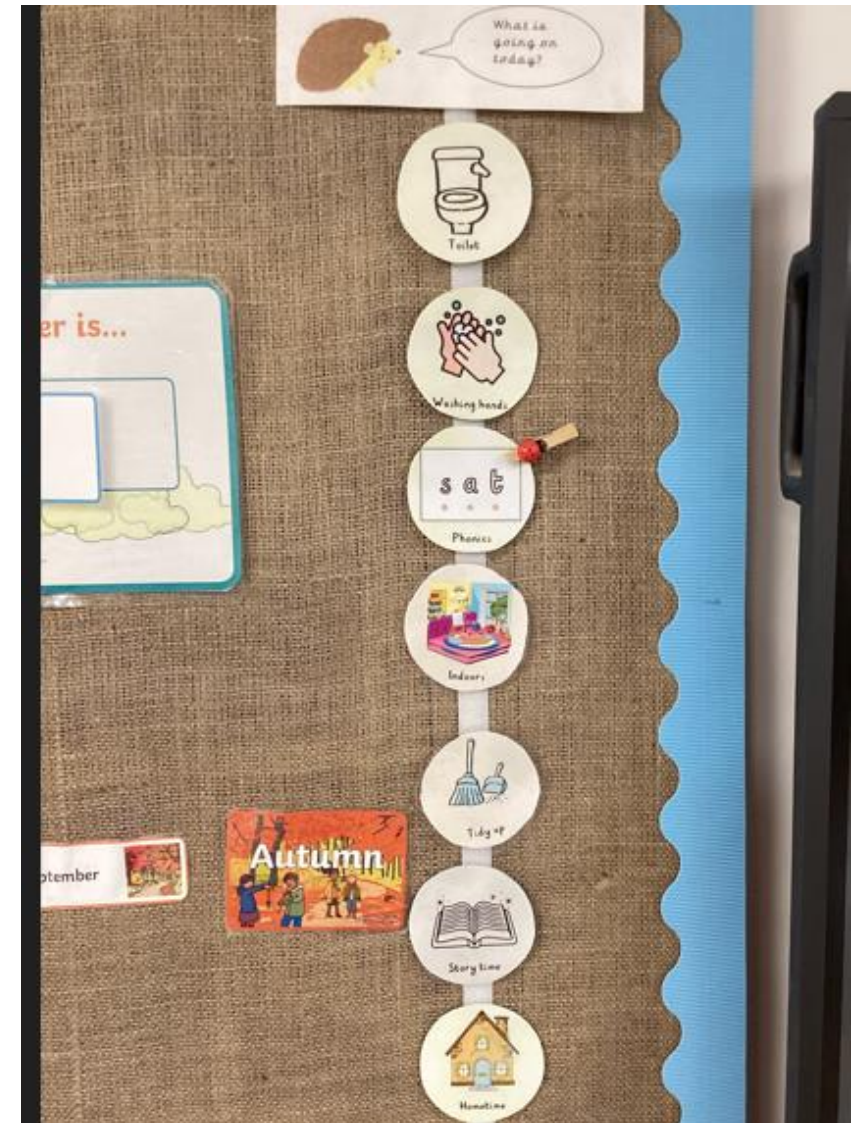
- From day one!
- Some information is better shared to everyone at once
- Children have to learn to stop, shift their focus and actively listen
- Tune in (to input) and tune out (distractions)
- While we value play as the most powerful tool to enable children to progress, we accept that not all learning can or will occur through play
- Teachers are skilled at supporting whilst stretching, encouraging and challenging

The early years are a unique opportunity to build the architecture of children's brain development. – Jean Gross



A typical day in Hedgehogs (see visual timetable)

- Register / settle / free play
- Interventions
- Snack / Daily visuals / Check in
- Indoors/Outdoors continuous provision
- Maths / Writing activities
- Toilet/Hands
- Maths
- Lunch in the hall
- Playtime
- Phonics/phonics activities
- Indoors/Outdoors continuous provision
- Story
- Home time



Let's start at the very beginning....

- We need to get to know you and your child – ‘All About Me’
- Assess your child from their starting point – ‘Baseline’ and information gathering day to day
- We work hard to make sure they have an exciting and **challenging** learning experience with us
- Ongoing observations, tracking and assessments
- We will contact you if we have any specific concerns, ‘no news is good news!’



Which subjects are taught directly and how are these delivered?



- English – specifically writing skills, including handwriting and spelling
- Reading – children have a ‘reading day’ when they will spend time, one to one, reading with their teacher or teaching assistant
- Phonics and Maths – taught daily to whole class
- Jigsaw – PSHE development, taught in whole class lesson

All of these subjects are also followed up through play; inside and outside. This re-enforces teaching and enables children time to rehearse, revisit and play with the new concepts introduced that week. It allows staff time to observe and assess and review how individuals and groups are learning.

Phonics



- Nursery Class – Phase 1 (Listening, Rhyme, Rhythm, Music, Alliteration, Blending sounds)
- Reception following Early Letter Sounds (ELS) - starting from Phase 2.
- Introduce letter sounds and shapes which build to make words - s-a-t, p-a-t, p-i-n, t-i-n
- Children learn to write the letter shapes – not cursive.
- Secret to success – GOOD LISTENING!
This starts at home.

Phonics

- **Phase 1** – teaches children to listen to familiar sounds and distinguish one sound from another
- Strong focus on listening, rhyming and saying the sounds
- **Phase 2** – graphemes introduced, ‘segmenting’ and ‘decoding’ begin alongside ‘blending’
- Direct teaching AND exploring through play
- Consolidated through daily reading at school and at home

How do we teach phonics?

- We use a simple, consistent approach to teaching phonics.
- We have mnemonics and rhymes to support learning and recall
- We teach phonics every single day from the first days of Reception

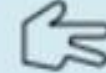
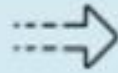


Building up sounds isn't easy!



ELS Essential
Letters and
Sounds

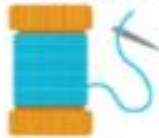
Supporting your child with writing at home



You can use the spelling sequence with your children at home to support them with their writing.

Let's try this with the word: rain

We also practise saying our sentences before we write them to make sure we write the sentence we have planned and to ensure it makes sense!



Learning to Read



Supporting your child with reading at home

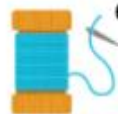
- Only 1 in 3 children are read a bedtime story night
- Reading a bedtime story every night to your child improves their outcomes
- If your child views themselves as a 'good reader' when they leave Primary School they are more likely to earn a higher salary in their 40s.



Supporting your child with reading at home

- Children are only reading from books that are entirely decodable
- Your child should be able to read their book confidently
- We only use pure sounds when decoding words (no 'uh' after the sound)
- We want them to practise reading their book 4 times across the week working on these skills:

decode
fluency
expression



“Reading less than weekly to a three-year-old is associated with a child being four months behind a child who was read with daily when they were three.”

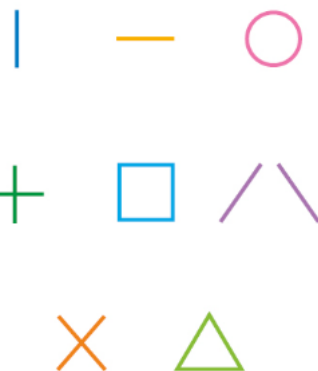
How Talking builds Reading

- Language ability at ages 3 to 4 predicts reading comprehension skills through secondary school.
- Vocabulary at age 5 is a strong predictor of qualifications at school leaving age and beyond.
- Early language development is the foundation upon which all future success is built.

Source: Best Start in Life - a research review for early years, DFE 2021



Pre-Writing Shapes



Becoming a Writer!

Pre-writing shapes

Gross/Fine motor skills

Phonics linked

Mark making everywhere!



Maths

- Daily teaching, whole class with support from TA (s)
- Active listening and full engagement
- Follows predictable pattern to support every child
- Strategic questioning challenges thinking
- Number sense, counting skills, talking about number and number patterns, maths vocabulary
- NCETM – visual, models, representations, subitising, finger counting, Number Blocks
- White Rose – challenges and leads into Year 1



The million word gap

If a child is never read to they will have heard approximately 4,662 words by the time they are 5 years old.

If a child is read to 1-2 times per week, they will have heard approximately 63,570 words by the time they are 5 years old.

If a child is read to daily, they will have heard approximately 296,660 words by the time they are 5 years old.

If a child is read 5 books a day, they will have heard approximately 1,483,300 words by the time they are 5 years old.

Signing the contract!

What we will do

- Start from your child and always advocate for them
- Provide an exciting learning environment
- Plan learning which is fun, purposeful and impactful
- Share any concerns with you and listen to you

How you can help

- Support us by establishing routines around sleep, exercise, eating and screen time.
- Encourage active listening and talk to your child about everything!
- Read to your child every day
- Engage with website, Oxford Owl and yellow reading diary
- **Register with a local dentist!**
- **Use your health visitor (under 5's)**

One key message

Read to your child every day

Reading is crucial for children because it strengthens brain development, builds language and literacy skills, fosters empathy, and supports emotional and social growth.

Reading is not just a tool for literacy; it is a **powerful driver of cognitive, emotional, and social development**, laying the foundation for lifelong learning and well-being.



The more that you read,
the more things you will know.
The more that you learn,
the more places you'll go.

Dr. Seuss





Thank you

Bright Futures

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