



The Mill Academy
Approach to teaching
of
Early Reading



Intent

At The Mil Academy, the teaching of reading is at the heart of everything we do. We are committed to ensuring that every teacher has the knowledge, skills, and determination to teach all children - regardless of age, background, or need - to read with confidence.

We passionately believe that all children should be equipped with the skills and opportunities to become successful readers. From the very beginning of their school journey, children are immersed in a rich reading environment that combines phonics with carefully chosen storybooks, rhymes, and texts.

We strive to encourage a well-rounded approach to reading, where children apply their phonics skills to build fluency and comprehension. Our reading books are carefully levelled to match progression in phonics, ensuring that every child is challenged appropriately and supported in making rapid progress. Alongside phonics, we create a culture of reading for pleasure - developing a lifelong love of reading through exposure to a wide range of fiction and non-fiction texts.

Implementation

At The Mil Academy, we deliver a structured and successful literacy programme, supported by clear information for parents and carers on how they can help their children at home. This ensures that pupils get the best possible start in their reading journey.

What is Phonics?

Pupils at The Mil Academy learn to read through *Read Write Inc. Phonics (RWI)*, a highly effective and widely used phonics programme. Children are taught to read in a simple but powerful way by learning to:

- Recognise letters by their sounds.
- Blend these sounds into words.
- Read these words in stories.

Pupils in Reception, Year 1, and Year 2 follow the RWI programme daily. For children in Key Stage 2 who have not yet met the end of Key Stage 1 expectations, phonics teaching continues to ensure they receive the support they need.

In Foundation Stage 1, children begin with listening games and sound discrimination activities. These skills are vital in Early Years and continue to be developed throughout Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 to strengthen listening, speaking, and sound awareness.

What pupils learn through RWI

During the programme, children are taught to:

- Read confidently, fluently, and with expression using a *storyteller's voice*.
- Decode letter-sound correspondences quickly and accurately.
- Identify and read common exception (tricky) words.
- Demonstrate understanding of what they read.
- Spell accurately and efficiently.
- Develop correct letter formation and handwriting.

Sounds are displayed in classrooms using friezes and charts. Children use this knowledge to blend sounds into words, spell, and write sentences. As their learning progresses, they are introduced to alternative spellings for sounds, shown on the complex speed sound chart.

Phonics Curriculum

We follow a systematic approach to phonics teaching using the RWI programme. Lessons are carefully sequenced to reinforce and build on prior learning, enabling children to make strong and sustained progress.

Synthetic phonics has been proven to be the most effective approach to developing early reading skills, and at The Mil Academy we use it as part of a broad and balanced curriculum. Our aim is for pupils to become fluent readers by the end of Key Stage 1.

Assessment is central to our practice. We ensure children *keep up, not catch up*. Any child falling behind receives immediate, targeted support through fast-track tutoring and personalised interventions.

Supporting learning with mnemonics and Fred Talk

To support recall, each sound is taught with a picture and a handwriting rhyme (e.g., "*curl around the caterpillar*" for the letter *c*). Children are also introduced to Fred the Frog, who can only speak in sounds (e.g., c-a-t). Using "Fred Talk," children practise blending sounds into words, helping them to develop early decoding skills.

Once children are confident in oral blending, they take home a blending book to practise with their families.

Organisation of Phonics Sessions

- **Early Years:** Daily sessions begin at 20 minutes and increase to 45 minutes as the year progresses.
- **Key Stage 1:** Daily 45-minute sessions.
- **Grouping:** Pupils are grouped by *stage, not age*, ensuring teaching is closely matched to individual needs.

For children in Key Stage 2 who need additional phonics support, RWI continues alongside targeted interventions to ensure rapid progress and secure reading fluency.