



EARLY LITERACY SKILLS

AT SHALFLEET AND YARMOUTH CHURCH OF ENGLAND PRIMARY
SCHOOLS

Bold beginnings: The Reception curriculum in a sample of good and outstanding primary schools

Key Findings of successful schools:

The headteachers recognised that a successful Reception Year was fundamental to their school's success. They were clear that children's achievements up to the age of five can determine their life chances. They did not accept the view that some will 'catch up later'.

They therefore designed their Reception curriculum to give children the necessary foundations for the rest of their schooling. **These schools were clear that Reception children need more than a repeat of their pre-school experiences in Nursery or earlier.**

Reading was at the heart of the curriculum. Children read out loud frequently from carefully selected books that closely matched their phonic knowledge. **Story time was a valued part of the daily routine.** Staff recognised it as essential in developing children's language, vocabulary and comprehension.

19 In the schools visited in which outcomes by the age of five were above the national average, and in which this trend continued across the school, leaders and staff focused resolutely on doing certain elements of the Reception curriculum exceptionally well:

- making language a priority, embedding spoken language, vocabulary development and listening comprehension into all aspects of their work
- teaching reading in a systematic and structured way, building up children's phonic knowledge and skills explicitly
- providing regular story times where children could be taught to understand what they had heard
- teaching writing composition by building on children's spoken language and their comprehension of stories
- teaching spelling and handwriting directly
- deepening children's understanding of core mathematical concepts rather than moving them on too quickly to formal calculations and written algorithms
- securing children's personal, social and emotional readiness to learn, including resilience, perseverance, concentration, the ability to listen, to take turns and to cooperate.

All primary schools should:

- make sure that the teaching of reading, including systematic synthetic phonics, is the core purpose of the Reception Year
- attach greater importance to the teaching of numbers in building children's fluency in counting, recognising small numbers of items, comparing numbers and solving problems
- ensure that when children are learning to write, resources are suitable for their stage of development and that they are taught correct pencil grip and how to sit correctly at a table
- devote sufficient time each day to the direct teaching of reading, writing and mathematics, including frequent opportunities for children to practise and consolidate their skills
- use the EYFSP as a guide to end-of-Reception expectations rather than to define what should be taught.

7 Put simply, by the end of Reception, the ability to read, write and use numbers is fundamental. They are the building blocks for all other learning. Without firm foundations in these areas, a child's life chances can be severely restricted. The basics need to be taught – and learned – well, from the start.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY AND ENABLING ENVIRONMENTS

28 In every school, leaders and staff were clear about the purpose of play and understood its place in the curriculum. They were even clearer about its implementation. They knew when play was the right choice in terms of what they wanted children to learn and when other approaches might be more effective. Even within play, teachers made decisions about how structured or unstructured, dependent or independent each opportunity would be.

35 All the schools visited used role play effectively to increase children's opportunities to talk. Many had more than one role play area, one creating a familiar everyday context, such as a home corner or shop, and another extending children's imagination, such as a space ship or jungle. Inspectors observed children playing together to create imaginary situations, often based on the book

36 Teachers sometimes directed children's play until they became confident to play without adult intervention. For example, at the end of the Reception Year, children were playing confidently with traditional board games, playing snakes and ladders, doing jigsaws, building models with blocks (Lego), matching dominoes and creating complex wooden railway tracks. This was because, at the start of the year, teachers had spent time teaching children how to play, use equipment carefully and take turns. Losing games as well as winning was considered necessary learning.

OUR INTENT

The reception year is a fundamental stage in a child's life and one in which we aim to welcome and settle our children and their families into our school community. We aim to provide children with the opportunities to develop a love of learning through positive relationships, memorable experiences and by giving them an active role in their learning by tailoring learning to the children's interests . But, we also know the importance of the reception year to equip children with the fundamental skills as they prepare for the National Curriculum in Year 1.

We aim to equip children with a strong foundation of Early Literacy Skills on which their learning can continue to build as they move through their school years. We understand how early communication and Language and Literacy skills weave throughout the whole of the Early Years Curriculum and are the pathway for children's success to access learning and new knowledge.

Through a range of play based and adult led approaches, we work to ensure children secure a strong foundation of reading, writing and communication skills. We work to support our families too, to enhance their understanding of the key role they play in their child's learning journey.



The Federation of the Church Schools of Shalfleet and Yarmouth - Curriculum for Learning Overview

What are we trying to achieve?

Lifelong Achievement and Wellbeing

Curriculum Values

Design principles to inspire & challenge

Our purpose is to educate children in an atmosphere of Christian love where all achieve the very best they can, now and throughout their lives

Conscious Community, Community Map, Cultural Capital

Relationships
We have strong partnerships and positive relationships

Determination
We are determined to do our very best to achieve

Respect
We show respect to others and the environment

Coherent learning links and pathways

Strong working partnerships

High quality outcomes, deep learning

Valuing all children, learning is accessible to all

Challenging, engaging and motivating

Opportunities for memorable experiences

Promotes independence and curiosity

Broad, relevant and balanced
Local, Mainland, Global

The curriculum as the entire planned learning experience

How do we implement?

Components

Teaching for Learning

Approaches

EYFS/National Curriculum

Lessons Topics Events/Trips Environment Enrichment/Inspire Partnerships

Clear understanding of cognition and learning – Good subject knowledge – Skilful instruction, coaching and facilitating – Flexible and responsive teaching strategies – Stimulating and well organised learning environments – Effective use of assessment - High expectations and productive interactions

Sequences of learning that link key ideas in subject domains - rich connected learning journeys – clear progression of learning – flexible inclusion strategies to tackle educational disadvantage - social, moral, spiritual, cultural education



What is the impact?

Successful Learning

Our curriculum impact can be measured by...

Positive relationships and interactions	Appropriate learning opportunities understood by pupils	Children understand how to be successful	Oral and written feedback that has impact	Dialogic talk and rich questioning	Developing meta-cognition	Moderation underpins standards	Effective use of assessment driving tailored learning	Target setting and review
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Systematic monitoring, action and review : Do design principles translate into an inspiring and challenging curriculum for all?
Evidenced by...

High achievement and outcomes for all across the curriculum	Good behaviour, positive attitudes and high attendance	Teaching that is engaging and consistently good for all	Motivated teams & positive learning culture	Confident, kind, respectful, determined learners
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THE NEW EARLY YEARS CURRICULUM

- there is a new focus on early language and extending vocabulary, with more examples on how to embed and develop vocabulary skills across all 7 areas, because this improves child development in a broad curriculum

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Communication and Language:

Listening, Attention and Understanding

- Listen attentively and respond to what they hear with relevant questions, comments and actions when being read to and during whole class discussions and small group interactions.
- Make comments about what they have heard and ask questions to clarify their understanding.
- Hold conversations when engaged in back and forth exchanges with their teacher and peers.

Speaking

- Participate in small group, class and one to one discussions, offering their own ideas, using recently introduced vocabulary.
- Offer explanations for why things might happen, make use of recently introduced vocabulary from stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems when appropriate.
- Express their ideas and feelings about their experiences using full sentences, including use of past and present and future tense and making use of conjunctions with modelling from their teacher.

Literacy

Comprehension

- Demonstrate understanding of what has been read to them by retelling stories and narratives using their own words and recently introduced vocabulary.
- Anticipate, where appropriate, key events in stories.
- Use and understand recently introduced vocabulary during discussions about stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems during role play.

Word Reading

- Say a sound for each letter in the alphabet and at least 10 digraphs.
- Read words consistent with their phonic knowledge by sound blending.
- Read aloud simple sentences and books that are consistent with their phonic knowledge, including some common exception words.

Writing

- Write recognisable letters, most of which are correctly formed.
- Spell words by identifying sounds in them and representing the sounds with a letter or letters.
- Write simple phrases and sentences that can be read by others.

Preparing to write:

Physical Development

Gross Motor Skills

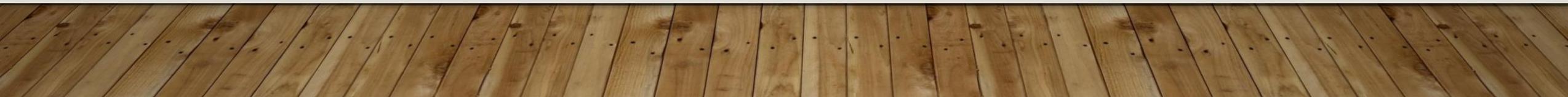
- Negotiate space and obstacles safely.
- Demonstrate strength, balance and coordination when playing.
- Move energetically, such as running, jumping, dancing, hopping, skipping and climbing.

Physical Development

Fine Motor Skills

- Hold a pencil effectively in preparation for fluent writing – using the tripod grip in almost all cases.
- Use a range of small tools, including scissors, paintbrushes and cutlery.
- Begin to show accuracy and care when drawing.

LINKS TO READING TO FURTHER UNDERSTAND THE NEW CURRICULUM:

- * Prime and Specific Areas
 - * 7 Features of Effective Practice
 - * Characteristics of Effective Learning
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MAKING LINKS TO THE ONWARD JOURNEY TO THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

- [Onward links to the National Curriculum portfolios.docx](#)

School Literacy Statement:

We know that Literacy is fundamental to all areas of learning, as it unlocks access to the wider curriculum. A literate individual is granted greater life opportunities and the foundation for lifelong learning and employment, which strongly contributes to the development of all aspects of social and academic life. In 2018, Ofsted said that it was hard to overstate the importance of early literacy, as reading is the gateway to almost every other subject and to children discovering their own unique interests and talents. build a robust vocabulary and 'unlock the door' to their curriculum.

School Literacy Policy:

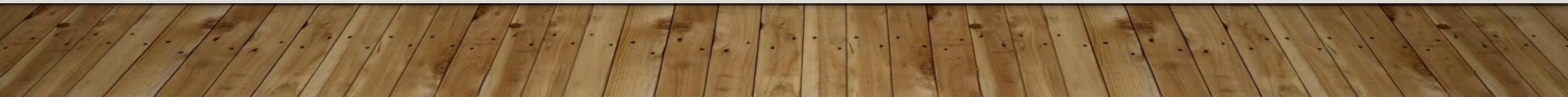
[School Literacy Policy](#)



WHAT PRIORITIES DID WE OUTLINE TO DEVELOP OUR TEACHING OF COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE / LITERACY IN EYFS?

In light of the new curriculum and various training sessions and wider reading, we identified the following areas to develop to enhance our teaching:

- Wider reading opportunities – teaching reading in a variety of approaches including weekly guided reading, book boxes linked to interests around the zones of the classroom and weekly visits to the school library.
- Standardising the teaching of phonics – updating our Phonics Programme:
- More work to engage parents in the value of communication – including Dojo videos and our daily Time to Talk board.
- The value of talk alongside play – increasing opportunities to play alongside and with children, taking time to model the serve and return nature of communication, develop language, sentence structure/tense and introduce new vocabulary. Furthering children’s opportunity and confidence to communicate their ideas, thoughts and opinions.
- Gross Motor time each week – opportunities and exercises on large playground / hall to further develop balance, coordination.



DEVELOPING CHILDREN'S SPOKEN LANGUAGE AND LISTENING

- **High quality adult interactions.**

Adult interactions and the role of questioning by an adult is key to unlocking the full potential of child led learning. Staff are supported to deepen their understanding of the value of questioning children to extend a child's thinking but also the value of being the observer – listening and taking note from a distance. We have expanded opportunities in the timetable to maximise time for adults playing with and alongside children to develop their spoken language and listening skills. We value fruit and lunch time as times of the day to sit together and talk – sharing experiences and listening to those around us. These times also provide excellent links to be made to developing children's understanding of oral and physical health.

- **Modelled language.**

The positive use of rich language is embedded within our early years classrooms. Adults model language continuously to children, repeating back ideas in full sentences, introducing children to new words, consolidating the meaning of existing language.

- **Time to listen to stories, books, poems, rhymes.**

Story time is a key part of each day, with several opportunities for the children to join together as a class to listen to a story, rhyme, poem or extract of a book by an adult. We also join together with Little Stars each Wednesday to visit the school library, taking time to share books informally together as well as joining for a whole group story time and discussion.

Later this year we hope to introduce story time via class dojo/google drive whereby children can listen to bedtime stories at home. Members of the school community, including governors, caretakers, teachers and volunteers are asked to read a story to ensure children hear stories from a range of role models. Story CD's are also available within class to allow children to access quiet listening time during child led learning.



DEVELOPING CHILDREN'S SPOKEN LANGUAGE AND LISTENING CONTINUED

- **Following instructions.**

Daily routines in class allow children to enhance their listening skills and to process / respond to information of increasing complexity. Instructions are also given in play based scenarios e.g. repeating patterns with music and beats

- **Opportunities to discuss own ideas.**

Weekly Show and Tell sessions are incredibly valuable for allowing children to practice their speaking in a familiar group, whilst allowing them to listen to others and ask questions. Children develop the confidence to share their ideas and are encouraged and supported to speak in sentences to explain their thoughts. Rich play based opportunities in the Early Years setting also provide children with opportunities to share ideas together and explain their thoughts.

- **WOW word celebrations.**

Developing children's vocabulary is a vital part of literacy development during the early years. Children need to feel able to explore new words, understand their meaning, their context and have confidence to try to use them in their own speech. Our WOW words allow us to celebrate and share new words for children. These words are displayed around the classroom e.g. on our literacy working wall or in our Book Detectives board.



FURTHER READING AND RESEARCH LINKS

- [Oxford Language Report 2020](#)
- [National College Training Resources\Bringing-Words-to-Life-Booklet.pdf](#)
- [Milestones poster What's Typical Talk at Primary.pdf](#)
- [Snow Model - Oral Competency](#)

DEVELOPING CHILDREN'S READING

- Regular reading 1:1 giving children time to practice their reading strategies.
- Helping children to discover that love of reading.
- Engaging and supporting families.

WHAT PRIORITIES DID WE PUT IN PLACE TO SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN'S READING SKILLS FOR 2021/22?

We made tweaks to further enhance the positive progress we had made in the teaching of early reading skills.

- Delivering a systematic phonics programme – standardising phonics delivery across The Federation.
- Increasing reading schemes to support early reading – book audit in classes, particularly linked to phonetically decodable books in line with Little Wandle phonics programme.
- Celebrating the value of books with children through daily story time and weekly library time.
- Weekly guided reading to delve into aspects of books e.g. language, story structure, plot, predictions, characters further.
- Observing the role and importance of reading (role models).
- Song time, singing nursery rhymes and songs related to books that we explore.

RESEARCH EXTRACTS

Box 1. What Is Reading?

The goal of reading is to understand what has been read, and thus the goal of reading development must be to develop a system that allows children to construct meaning from print. Our review takes a broad perspective on reading development, reflecting the fact that reading is complex. To set the scene, consider the challenges posed by this simple, two-sentence text:

Denise was stuck in a jam. She was worried what her boss would say.

What needs to happen for us to understand this text? First and foremost, we need to identify the **individual words**. This in itself is hugely challenging, requiring us to distinguish a word such as *jam* from all the numerous similar-looking words it could be, such as *jar* or *ham*. We must have a means of identifying words that may be unfamiliar, such as *Denise*, and of analyzing words which appear in a complex form, such as *worried*. Words are the building blocks of comprehension, but it's not just a matter of identifying words: Their **meanings** need to be activated, appropriate for the **context**. This means understanding *jam* with respect to traffic, not the fruit preserve. **Causal connections** need to be made within and across sentences to understand that *she* and *her* in the second sentence refer to *Denise* in the first sentence.

Despite its brevity, this text demands a good deal of **background knowledge**: that Denise was probably on her way to work but was running late because of heavy traffic. We can further infer, perhaps prompted by our knowledge of Denise, her routines or her attitudes. Perhaps she is in a car or on a bus; we might wish to ponder her relationship with her boss. Perhaps she has been late several times recently and is thus especially worried about their reaction; maybe she is en route for a meeting that, if missed, will have important consequences. We might know her boss, and make **inferences** based on his or her reputation, prompting us to think about the extent or nature of Denise's worry. We have no idea, but these are just some of the potential elaborations and inferences that are licensed by the text.

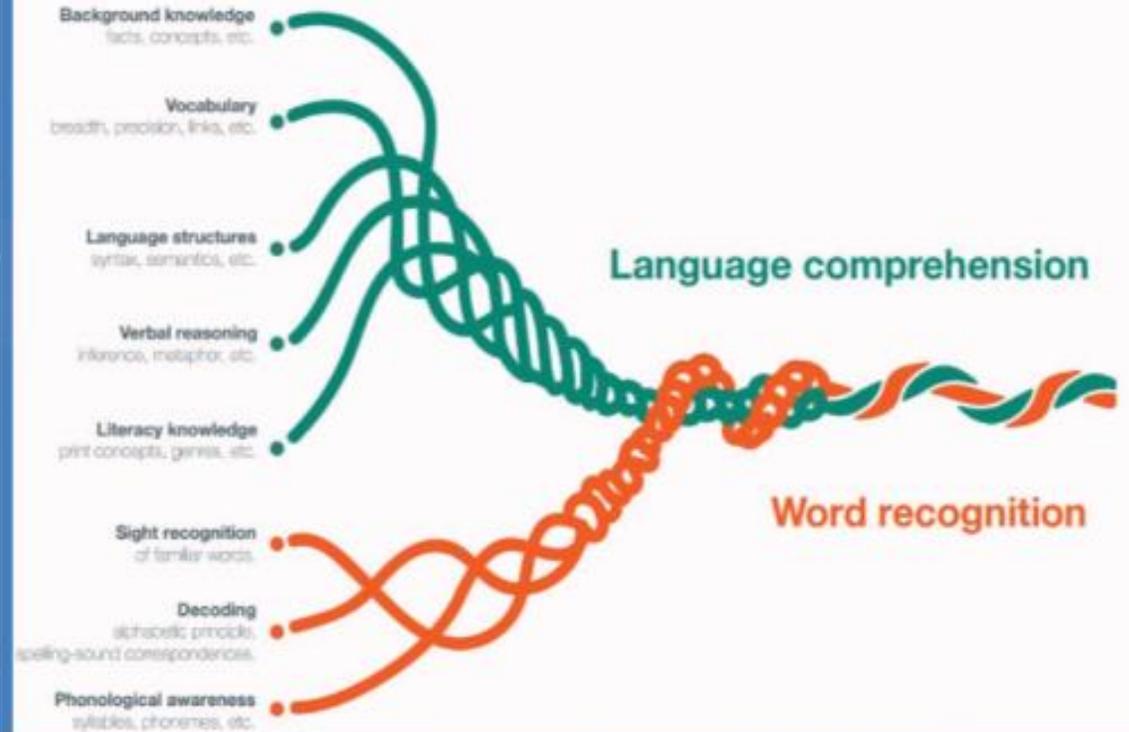
Other factors also add complexity. Making connections within a text and integrating information with background knowledge places demands on **working memory**. Dealing with an ambiguous word such as *jam* might engage **executive** skills if the contextually inappropriate meaning is activated and then needs to be ignored.

This brief analysis makes clear that reading is complex. Even a straightforward, two-sentence text has the potential to require a range of mental operations, ranging from word recognition through to an appreciation of theory of mind. The challenge facing the beginner reader is thus substantial.

Source: Castles, Rastle, & Nation (2018) *Ending the Reading Wars: Reading Acquisition From Novice to Expert*

15:21

FIGURE 1: THE MANY STRANDS THAT ARE WOVEN INTO SKILLED READING⁷



Source: Scarborough (2001) *Connecting early language and literacy to later reading (dis)abilities: Evidence, theory, and practice*.

DEVELOPING CHILDREN'S WRITING

- Funky Fingers and Physical Development. Learning to write from the core of our body to our hands.

We recognise that writing is a complex skill with many important skills needing to work together, including bilateral co-ordination skills, crossing the midline and the development of gross, fine and visual motor skills. Through the year, children's skills are built upon, with an emphasis on building body strength/control/coordination in gross motor development, progressing to finer motor skill development. Funky Fingers offers children fun activities within the daily environment (free choice and adult led) to support the development of key strength and coordination in preparation for the physical demands of writing.

It is also important to remember that children are still figuring out which hand is dominate between the ages of 2 and 4 and may not fully develop until age 6. Many are also not ready for handwriting until age 6 or 7. This will have an affect on how they hold the pencil, as the dynamic tripod grasp is not developmentally appropriate until age 4-6.

WRITING CONTINUED...

- **Phonics**

During phonics, children are offered focused opportunities to apply their developing skills, using sound buttons to sound out individual words, progressing to whole sentences. Tricky words are embedded into the teaching of phonics, with opportunities given to children to read, write and apply the new words they acquire.

- **Handwriting**

Handwriting goes through a journey during the Reception year, progressing from opportunities offered through play to short, regular, discrete handwriting sessions. In play a range of resources will be embedded within the environment with links to the children's interests e.g. copying letters/words with paints, chalks, a range of pens (including invisible spy pens, highlighters) and word wands/props. When we progress to more formal handwriting lessons, more emphasis is then needed on supporting posture, seating position. The Read, Write inc. rhymes are used throughout the year to embed correct letter formation. As a Federation we support our children to form letters correctly, progressing to exploring the lead out line during their time in Reception.

- **Opportunities to write**

We work from the children's interests in the Reception year, meaning children engage in purposeful opportunities to write where their motivation and interest to write has meaning. Writing will progress through the year, progressing from mark making that serves meaning to the child, labels and captions, sentences and then to longer pieces. Resources are placed around the environment to ensure children can easily and independently access the tools they need to support their writing.

- **Modelled writing**

Opportunities for adults to model transferring the children's spoken ideas into writing are a fundamental part of children realizing the value and role of written text. This may be a whole class opportunity to write a letter back to a story character or member of the community but each time the hook we use will be in response to the children's themes and interests. Links are made to other year groups too, with opportunities taken e.g. for older year groups to interact with Reception children and write stories based on their interests.

OUR IMPLEMENTATION - ASSESSMENT

Class teachers use assessment to track the achievements of all pupils at key milestones throughout the year across all areas of the Early Year Curriculum. This is particularly important for monitoring Early Literacy Skills because we understand that this is a thread that runs throughout the whole curriculum. We begin initially with the baseline assessment and information provided through our robust transition from pre schools. This data will influence starting points and next steps for pupils and the level of support needed.

With the new curriculum, whilst the progress of all pupils is essential, early identification of those children who are in danger of falling behind is identified as critical. Early identification allows practitioners to quickly identify the needs of children and implement measures and interventions to close gaps in learning. Assessment findings link to the class provision map, identifying those steps being taken to support children in danger of falling behind.

Phonic assessments take place at the end of each phase, alongside more informal daily teacher observations, allowing teachers to ensure the provision meets the needs of all children in the class. This allows us to offer additional support and challenge where needed.



MONITORING AND EVALUATING

Impact of the implementation of the teaching of Early Literacy Skills is measured in a variety of ways.

These include:

- Talking to children and families about their experiences
- Time spent in the learning environments, playing with and observing children.
- Assessment data
- Looking at samples of children's work