Reading at Heathbrook Primary School

“Reading is everything. Reading makes me feel like I’ve accomplished something, learned something, become a better person. Reading makes me smarter. Reading gives me something to talk about later on. Reading is the unbelievably healthy way my attention deficit disorder medicates itself. Reading is escape, and the opposite of escape; it’s a way to make contact with reality after a day of making things up, and it’s a way of making contact with someone else’s imagination after a day that’s all too real. Reading is grist. Reading is bliss.” Nora Ephron

Reading helps us order, enlarge and make sense of our lives. At Heathbrook, we deliver a comprehensive phonics programme but we also understand that reading phonetically is not the same as reading: we recognise and promote the fact that reading is for enjoyment and to discover new things. We promote reading for meaning.

Phonics:

“To learn to read is to light a fire; every syllable that is spelled out is a spark.” Victor Hugo

Letters and Sounds - At Heathbrook, we use Letters and Sounds to help us to teach phonics in conjunction with Thrass and Jolly Phonics.

Even before school - Our Children’s Centre supports early reading using principles from the Book Start programme. Parents are introduced to local library services and encouraged to kick-start reading at home.

A balanced approach:

“We don’t need to have just one favourite. We keep adding favourites. Our favourite book is always the book that speaks most directly to us at a particular stage in our lives. And our lives change. We have other favourites that give us what we most need at that particular time. But we never lose the old favourites. They’re always with us.” Lloyd Alexander

Not just phonics - From the very beginning of their time at Heathbrook, children are encouraged to focus on making sense of words and to develop a habit of mind that expects the words they decode to make sense. This allows them monitor their own performance from an early stage and to make corrections when they misread.

A digital age - We recognise that reading after/out of school is no longer confined to books and newspapers so encourage children to use multimodal texts: they are taught to learn from visual, digital images and sounds as well as the written word.

A home-school partnership - Through regular learning surgeries, Reading Journals and Reading Records, staff stay in contact with parents/carers regarding reading: to offer support as well as encouragement and thanks for the hard work going on at home as well as in class. Pupils are given a reading book according to the level at which they are working to read to/with parents/carers. These are changed on a weekly basis according to teacher assessment as well as parent/carer comments. In addition to this, children are given reading lists to widen their horizons and help parents choose presents!

A lifelong love of reading:

“We do not need magic to change the world, we carry all the power we need inside ourselves already: we have the power to imagine better.” JK Rowling

References: Dombey, Henrietta ‘Teaching Reading: What the evidence says’ (UKLA, 2010).
Progress of individuals - Classrooms are filled with interesting written texts – on screen as well as on paper – giving pupils rich experiences of putting these texts to use. Guided Reading is taught every day (from Reception onwards) which allows teachers to pay close attention to children’s individual literacy needs/skills, experiences and interests through high-quality interaction and close monitoring of individual progress.

Staff are given the autonomy to respond to individual children’s needs/interests as well as whole classes’. Last year, Year 4 teachers responded to their year group’s ‘obsession’ with Beast Quest books by creating an entire topic around the books. This had a tremendous effect on the children’s engagement and progress. Similarly, each week, children are given the opportunity to choose their own books to take home (in addition to formal reading practise) purely for enjoyment and discovery. They choose these from our wonderful, extensive library which is run by parent/carer volunteers.

A wide range of quality literature - Staff use the CLPE’s Power of Reading as an approach that emphasises the enjoyment of good quality children’s books as the basis for reading, writing and talk in the classroom. There is also an enthusiasm amongst staff for poetry, non-fiction and traditional tales which is infectious! SEN pupils are supported in accessing the same texts as their peers. We promote use of local libraries by inviting Lambeth Local Library Service into speak in assemblies and setting holiday reading challenges.

Drama and dressing up - Literacy days/weeks are common throughout each academic year. The staff here never miss a chance to dress up as a character from a story or biography so that the children can ask them questions and develop a deeper understanding and love for a text. We also encourage the pupils to dress up and take part in a range of drama activities in order to get to know characters/scenarios better. In the coming year, as a whole school, we will celebrate Roald Dahl Day, World Book Day, Camelot Day, Shakespeare Week and read a whole-school text to ensure siblings/cousins/friends/family can all share, discuss and enjoy a text together.

Reflecting our diverse community:

“You think your pain and your heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read. It was books that taught me that the things that tormented me most were the very things that connected me with all the people who were alive, or who had ever been alive.” James Baldwin

Here at Heathbrook, we are passionate about our community and maximise children’s learning potential through responding to their interests and experiences. We recognise and value the language pupils bring to school. Parents/carers/staff are encouraged to sing in our community choir, a new Spanish club has begun to encourage Spanish speakers to come into school more, make new friends and feel more involved. Parents are encouraged to read to their children (as well as the others in the class!) in their own languages and to use their own language when writing in Reading Records or Reading Journals. Extra support is also offered to parents/carers who would like it. This is often phonics support.

Community volunteers - We have a thriving reading volunteer group who come into school to hear children read and run our extensive library.

Community curriculum - Similarly, we have created our own community, creative curriculum. Reading and writing play a large part in this as the children are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning through discovering things about their topics themselves.

Conclusion

Written by Lucy Coates for Heathbrook Primary School, November 2014

References: Dombey, Henrietta ‘Teaching Reading: What the evidence says’ (UKLA, 2010).
“Be awesome! Be a book nut!” Dr. Seuss

At Heathbrook, your child will gain a lifelong love of reading. They will be motivated not only to learn to read but also to read to learn whether that be facts for an essay they have been asked to write or something more philosophical about themselves.