



Friday 8<sup>th</sup> October 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

### **READING AND PHONICS UPDATE**



In light of new Government guidance we are having to change some aspects of our reading and phonics provision at Christopher Rawlins. Some of these changes are still in progress, but I am writing to give you an update as to where we are now, and what our next steps will be. Phonics, as many of you will be aware, has been proven to be the best way to teach reading to young children. Phonics is basically the understanding that letters work by themselves (e.g. c, a, t), in pairs (e.g. sh ow) or groups (e.g. igh in sigh) and once we recognise how they are put together in a word and know how to say those sounds, we know how to pronounce a word when reading.

#### **The recent changes have two main focuses for schools:**

1. *Schools are strongly encouraged to buy into a phonics scheme from an approved list. This scheme is then used for children in Reception, Year 1 and sometimes into Year 2 and beyond, depending on the progress of an individual child.*
2. *Every scheme chosen has specific reading books that are used alongside it. These follow the phonics scheme precisely.*

**Phonics scheme:** We have chosen to purchase a scheme published by OUP called “Essential Letters and Sounds.” This teaches the phonemes in a similar order to the one we have been using for a few years now (parents of older children may be familiar with their child starting with s a t p i n.) Most of the resources we need for teaching have been published within the last few weeks, and teachers in Reception and Key Stage 1 have started using these. This will affect all children in Reception and Year 1 and selected children beyond these years.

**Reading books:** At the moment, all of our reading books are organised into book bands and children will tell you that they are on a particular level (e.g. green), which are broadly in line with a child’s ability to read. However, with the new approach to phonics, children in Reception and Year 1 will only read books with the exact sounds they have learnt. That means that if a child has been taught only the sounds s a t p i n m d g, their books will only have words in such as pat, pin, dig, dad, in... and there won’t be any other words in the book at all. This is going to mean some lovely new books, which will be with us after half term. It doesn’t mean children can’t read any of our other books, but it does mean that the purpose of these books will change. Once a child is fluent in many aspects of phonics, sometime during Year 2 or beyond, they will have learnt all the “codes” needed to read more widely. At this point, children will be on a specific colour within the reading scheme again. One important aspect of this change is that children will not bring home a reading book within the first few weeks of Reception. Instead, children will learn the phonics sounds and be able to blend them (put the sounds together to make words) and only bring home a book when they are ready to read it independently. This doesn’t mean we are slowing down progression, in fact the opposite is true – in fact, we are raising our aspirations for all children as readers.

**Next Steps:** We would like to invite you to an information session after half term on Monday 8<sup>th</sup> November at 6pm where we will show you some of the new resources, explain the changes that are taking place, and make it much clearer which books children will be reading and when. We will also explain how phonics is used to help children decode words. This will be most appropriate for parents of children in Reception to Year 2, but all will be welcome.

Just as important as phonics is enjoyment of reading. Last summer, a review of reading was published by the Government, which clearly showed that reading at home is the most important indicator of a child’s future success. This is something we have always understood at Christopher Rawlins, and is one of the reasons we are passionate about reading. Please continue to read to your child, share books together, develop your child’s love of a good story, explore language, rhythm and rhyme together, and enjoy each other’s company over a good book! We will over the year deliver various things to further engage children with reading for enjoyment, and have some different activities and challenges – do look out for them!

Mrs R Hughes – Phonics and Early Reading Lead