



Early Reading & Early Mathematics

An Addendum to Our Pre-School Curriculum · 3–5 Years

Play Days Nursery & Academy | EYFS 2026

A simple reference for parents, staff & feeder schools



Why this addendum exists

Parents ask us what we teach & when. Schools ask what children arrive able to do. This addendum sets out plainly what we teach in our pre-school room, what we deliberately leave until Reception, & why.



Early Reading

What we teach

- **Listening & sound discrimination** — environmental sounds, instrumental sounds, body percussion, rhythm & rhyme, alliteration, voice sounds & oral blending
- **Initial letter sounds** — introduced individually, when a child is ready & interested
- **Story language** — through Talk for Writing, Helicopter Stories & daily storytelling
- **Reading for pleasure** — daily shared reading, book corners & our family lending library
- **Environmental print & mark-making** — embedded throughout the provision
- Pie Corbett's Talk for Writing is built on one idea:

Pie Corbett's Talk for Writing, in three steps

A child cannot write a story they cannot tell, & cannot tell a story whose language they have never had in their mouth. So, the story goes in orally first, learned by heart, & only later comes out on paper. In our pre-school room, the writing end barely features — what we are doing is the oral half, which is exactly where the value is for our children.

The three stages

- **Imitation.** The children learn one story off by heart. Not "hear it a few times" — properly know it. Told, not read, by an adult who knows it well. Every telling uses the same words, the same actions, the same voices. A **story map** goes up — a simple line of pictures, drawn in front of the children, that lets them retell it without a book. Within a fortnight they can generally tell the whole thing themselves.
- **Innovation.** Once the story is secure, we change one thing. The giant becomes a dragon. The beanstalk becomes a ladder. The children keep the shape of the story, swap the details & retell it. This is where the thinking happens — they are working out that a story has bones.
- **Invention.** The children make their own story on the same bones. At this age it is usually spoken, acted out, or explored with story pack resources — they may also begin to explore writing with a few emergent marks, a line of squiggles they will read back to you word-perfect.

Not every child will be able to, nor want to engage in this strategy, however focus books will carry key elements of the Talk for Writing strategy, or similar schemes used in our feeder schools

What we deliberately leave until Reception

- Formal, whole-group phonics taught to a programme timetable
- Decodable reading books & reading scheme progression
- Written recording of phonic knowledge

Reading rests on listening, sound discrimination & spoken language — a child who cannot yet hear the difference between sounds cannot map them to letters. Time spent building that foundation in a pre-school room is what makes Reception phonics work.

What this means for our feeder schools

Children leave us able to hear & say initial sounds, tune in to rhyme & alliteration, orally blend & segment simple words, retell a familiar story with structure & story language, & hold a pencil or mark making tool with intent. Individual children will know some letter sounds; we do not present that as a taught cohort expectation. Our approach is aligned with the validated programs, used by our local schools, subject to liaison with each school.

What parents can do at home

- **Talk & listen** — by a distance the biggest thing you can do
- **Share a book every day** — the same book many times beats many books once
- **Play with sounds** — I spy, rhyming games, silly names, clapping the beats in words
- **Tell stories out loud** — then let your child tell them back to you
- **Don't push letters or worksheets** — if your child asks, follow their lead & keep it playful

Early Mathematics

What we teach — the six key areas

Again, not every child will be competent in all areas of mathematics listed below.

- **Cardinality & counting** — one-to-one correspondence, the order of number names & knowing the last number counted tells us how many
- **Comparison** — more, fewer & the same, in real contexts
- **Composition** — numbers are made of other numbers; 5 is 4 & 1, & 3 & 2
- **Pattern** — spotting, copying, continuing & creating
- **Shape & space** — through construction, outdoor learning & everyday problem-solving
- **Measures** — length, weight & capacity through sand, water & cooking

Underpinning all six: **subitising** — recognising small quantities instantly, without counting. On dice, dominoes & fingers, or with holistic resources; leaves, cones, acorns, pebbles. It is the single most important early number skill & the one most often skipped.

A child who genuinely understands 5 — who can see it, make it, break it & compare it — is better prepared for school than a child who can recite to 20 without meaning. We build securely to 5, then to 10. Counting high is not the same as understanding number.

What we deliberately leave until Reception

- Written number formation as a taught expectation
- Recorded calculation
- Number bonds learned by rote

What this means for our feeder schools

Children leave us able to subitise to three — many to five — count objects with one-to-one correspondence, compare quantities, talk about how numbers are made, spot & continue patterns, & use mathematical language to explain their thinking. Our approach follows the six key areas of early mathematical learning & the mastery principle of depth before pace, so that children arrive with foundations a reception teacher can build on immediately.

What parents can do at home

- **Count real things** — stairs, socks, peas — not just numbers in the air
- **Play dice & domino games** — encourage your child to see the pattern rather than count the dots
- **Talk maths through the day** — bigger, smaller, heavier, first, next, how many more
- **Cook & measure together** — weighing, pouring, halving, sharing out
- **Resist the race** — understanding four properly is worth more than reciting to fifty



One principle behind both

Everything above rests on the same belief: children learn to read & to reason through talk, play & secure relationships — not through early formal instruction. Get the foundations right & the formal learning, when it comes, lands on solid ground.

This addendum should be read alongside our **Pre-School Curriculum 3–5 Years** & our **Behaviour & Emotional Support Policy 2026**.

