

EYFS progression of skills in Communication and Language (Listening, Attention and Understanding & Speaking)

Context: The importance of Communication and Language:

The development of children's speech, language and communication underpins all seven areas of learning and development. As children develop speaking and listening skills, they are building the foundations for literacy, learning and social development. The number and quality of conversations children experience with adults and peers throughout the day, within a language-rich environment, is crucial to their success.

At Heatherlands, we recognise the importance of teaching and modelling a small number of core communication skills that enable children to listen, talk, ask questions and share their ideas. These foundational communication and language skills are explicitly taught, modelled and practised daily and are made explicit within the progression grids through the use of bold text, supporting children to access learning, build positive relationships and develop confidence as communicators.

Children's language at age five is a significant predictor of later academic outcomes. A strong foundation in communication and language supports children to become confident learners, effective communicators and positive members of their community. Language is central to children's emotional wellbeing, their ability to build relationships and their capacity to access all areas of the Foundation Stage curriculum.

We pride ourselves on providing high-quality adult interactions, rich storytelling experiences and carefully planned opportunities for children to develop and extend vocabulary. Adults consistently model high-quality language, encourage children to elaborate on their ideas and support them to use new and ambitious vocabulary across the curriculum. Through play, storytelling, discussion, role-play and shared thinking, children are given meaningful opportunities to practise and embed their communication skills. At Heatherlands, adults use the SHREC approach alongside evidence-informed EEF questioning prompts to ensure children experience a wide range of purposeful questions and high-quality talk. This supports children to clarify their thinking, extend their responses, use new vocabulary, explain their ideas and develop deeper understanding across the curriculum.

Rationale:

At Heatherlands, we believe that every child should be supported to become a confident and effective communicator. Our Reception Communication and Language Progression has been designed to provide a clear, sequenced pathway for developing children's listening, understanding, vocabulary, sentence structure, storytelling and social communication skills.

This progression is rooted in the understanding that children enter Reception with varied language experiences and starting points. All children are screened on entry using the WellComm Communication Toolkit to identify strengths, gaps and areas requiring additional support. This ensures that teaching, provision and adult interactions are responsive to children's individual needs.

The progression map sets out the expected development of communication and language skills across the Reception year. It supports staff to plan purposeful adult interactions, targeted support and curriculum opportunities that enable all children to make strong progress.

Our Aspirations and Communication & Language

Our Communication and Language Progression directly supports the Heatherlands EYFS Aspirations:

Heatherlands Aspiration

How this is developed through Communication & Language

To manage emotions and show resilience when facing challenges

Through explicit teaching of emotional vocabulary and the language of feelings using the Jigsaw PSHE programme and Scribble Spot activities. Children are supported to use talk to identify and name emotions, explain how they feel, negotiate, resolve conflict, take turns and explain choices, developing resilience and emotional self-regulation.

To be able to talk about life events and retell a story in their own way

Through storytelling, narrative sequencing, explanation and recall. This is further developed through regular first-hand experiences, visits and visitors that provide meaningful real-life events for children to talk about, sequence, explain and retell using increasingly complex language and narrative structure.

To be curious and respectful about others

Through listening, questioning, conversation and social interaction. This is strengthened through visitors, community links and real-life experiences that expose children to a range of people, cultures and roles, providing rich opportunities for discussion, questioning, explanation and respectful conversation.

To explore and understand the world

Through topic vocabulary, questioning, explanation and discussion. Carefully planned visits, visitors and outdoor learning experiences such as Forest School provide meaningful contexts for children to use new vocabulary, ask questions, make observations and explain their understanding of the world.

To develop rich vocabulary and use it confidently

Through daily exposure to high-quality fiction, non-fiction, rhymes and poems, alongside explicitly taught Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 vocabulary. Adults model ambitious language, explicitly teach the meaning and use of new words, and provide repeated opportunities for children to practise and embed vocabulary through discussion, storytelling, play, role-play, small-group work and whole-class teaching.

Communication and Language is the vehicle through which these aspirations are achieved.

Autumn 1 – Theme: Bright Beginnings

Key Question: Where do I belong?

Attention and listening	Vocabulary	Grammar and Sentence Building	Verbal Storytelling and Narrative	Conversations and Social Interaction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I listen to familiar stories, songs and rhymes in small groups and whole-class times. • I maintain attention during short adult-led inputs and carpet sessions. • I respond to simple instructions related to classroom routines. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I understand and use classroom vocabulary (e.g. school, teacher, friend, safe). • I begin to use new words introduced through stories and play. • I name familiar objects and people within the classroom environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I use simple sentences to express needs and ideas. • I begin to extend sentences using “and”. • I talk about what I am doing using simple present tense. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I enjoy listening to familiar stories and rhymes. • I talk about personal experiences using simple sentences. • I join in with repeated refrains. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I take turns in conversations with familiar adults and peers. • I express needs and feelings using words. • I begin to respond to others’ ideas in play.

Autumn 2 – Theme: My Place in Space

Key Question: Where in the World am I?

Attention and listening	Vocabulary	Grammar and Sentence Building	Verbal Storytelling and Narrative	Conversations and Social Interaction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I follow one- and two-step instructions. • I maintain attention during longer stories and group discussions. • I begin to listen and respond to simple “why” and “how” questions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I use topic-related vocabulary linked to space and the wider world. • I understand and use descriptive words (e.g. hot, cold, light, dark). • I begin to use Tier 2 vocabulary introduced through stories and non-fiction. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I use longer sentences (4–5 words or more). • I begin to use “because” to explain ideas. • I use plurals and simple past tense in talk. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I retell simple stories using pictures or props. • I sequence simple events in the correct order. • I make predictions about stories. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I engage in longer conversations with peers. • I ask simple questions to find out more. • I use talk to organise my play and include others.

Spring 1 – Theme: Crazy Creatures
Key Question: How am I like an animal?

Attention and listening	Vocabulary	Grammar and Sentence Building	Verbal Storytelling and Narrative	Conversations and Social Interaction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I listen attentively to stories and non-fiction texts and respond appropriately. • I look at the person who is speaking and think about my response. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I use topic-specific vocabulary related to animals, habitats and diets. • I use new Tier 2 and Tier 3 vocabulary introduced through stories and discussions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I use more complex sentences including plurals, tenses and negatives. • I use connectives such as <i>and</i>, <i>but</i>, <i>so</i> to extend sentences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I retell familiar stories using story language. • I use descriptive language to talk about animals and their habitats. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I take turns in longer conversations with peers and adults. • I ask purposeful questions to find out more.

Spring 2 – Theme: Blooming with Colour
Key Question: What makes our World so colourful?

Attention and listening	Vocabulary	Grammar and Sentence Building	Verbal Storytelling and Narrative	Conversations and Social Interaction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I follow more complex instructions with several elements. • I listen and respond to others' ideas during discussions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I extend my vocabulary by grouping, naming and exploring the meaning of new words. • I use descriptive language linked to colour, seasons and celebrations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I use talk to organise, sequence and clarify ideas, feelings and events. • I use past and future tense accurately. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I tell stories using a clear sequence of events. • I respond to stories and texts to deepen understanding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I negotiate in play, giving reasons for my choices. • I express thoughts and feelings clearly during play and discussion.

Summer 1 – Theme: Cracking the Egg Mystery

Key Question: What might crack from an egg?

Attention and listening	Vocabulary	Grammar and Sentence Building	Verbal Storytelling and Narrative	Conversations and Social Interaction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I follow stories and explanations without picture or prop support. • I listen attentively during longer discussions and whole-class inputs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I understand and use a wide range of topic vocabulary linked to dinosaurs and life cycles. • I use descriptive and comparative language. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I link statements and maintain a main theme in my talk. • I use a range of connectives to extend sentences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I tell stories with a clear beginning, middle and end. • I explain what has happened and why. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I respond appropriately to what others say in discussion. • I use talk to solve problems and organise thinking.

Summer 2 – Theme: Tides and Ripples

Key Question: What if there was no water?

Attention and listening	Vocabulary	Grammar and Sentence Building	Verbal Storytelling and Narrative	Conversations and Social Interaction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I listen attentively and respond with relevant comments and questions in discussions. • I maintain back-and-forth conversations with adults and peers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I confidently use recently introduced Tier 2 and Tier 3 vocabulary. • I explain ideas using topic-specific vocabulary. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I express ideas using full sentences with correct tense and conjunctions. • I use talk to predict, speculate and draw conclusions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I retell and invent stories using rich story language. • I offer explanations for events and changes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I participate confidently in small group and class discussions. • I listen, respond and build on the ideas of others

*Our Summer 2 progression represents the direct pathway into the Communication and Language ELGs. By this point in the year, children are working at, and often beyond, the expected end-of-Reception standard.