

East Hunsbury Primary School

Early Language Vocabulary Progression Document

This document is a vocabulary progression grid suitable for any children who are new to the English language (including EAL) and for children at the early stages of language acquisition (including EYFS and SEND children). It focuses on high-frequency words and common everyday vocabulary that children need to navigate school life confidently, including nouns, verbs, directional language, emotions and routines.

The vocabulary is organised progressively over the school year to support gradual language development, moving from familiar people and objects to actions, concepts, and social language.

It is intended to be taught in class using **sentence stems and practical activities** to model and support speaking, listening and writing. Families can also use the grid at home to reinforce learning, build confidence and support children's communication and participation in school routines.

The words in bold are the **core high frequency words** and will often be repeated during the learning sequence due to their importance in the English language.

Autumn Term — Everyday Nouns, Feelings & Instructions (Weeks 1–13)

Week	Theme	Words
1	People at school	teacher, child's name, friend, you, me
2	My things	coat, bag, shoes, lunchbox, book, my
3	My body	head, hand, feet, eyes, mouth
4	Feelings	happy, sad, angry, hurt, tired
5	Around school	toilet, playground, hall, classroom, outside, inside
6	Classroom objects	chair, table, pencil, carpet, board, the, a
7	Classroom	glue, scissors, carpet, whiteboard, pack
8	Instructions	look, hands-up, stand, listen, help
9	Instructions	stop , run, walk, line-up, follow, be quiet
10	Daily routine	morning, lunch, afternoon, home, next
11	School objects	computer, paper, bookcase, Headteacher
12	Clothes	jumper, hat, trousers, socks, shoes, dress, skirt
13	Home/House	house, bed, car, family, pet, garden

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Spring Term — Verbs & Early Concepts (Weeks 14–26)

Week	Theme	Words
14	Food & drink	drink, snack, tray, plate, bottle, knife, fork
15	Movement	run, jump, walk, stop , go
16	Play actions	build, draw, cut, stick, share
17	Routine actions	eat, drink, wash, sit, stand, pack-away
18	Learning actions	read, write, count, colour, try
19	Colours	red, blue, yellow, green, brown
20	Size & shape	big, small, long, circle, square
21	Counting & quantity	one, two, more , many, all
22	Toys & play	the , a , blocks, doll, car, puzzle, paint
23	Days & school	Monday, Friday, today, tomorrow, week
24	Classroom talk	yes, no, finished , help , wait
25	Outside play	sand, water, bikes, ball, outside, inside
26	Weather & nature	rain, sun, wind, leaf, sky

Summer Term — Directions, Emotions & Social Language (Weeks 27–39)

Week	Theme	Words
27	Where things are	here , there, on, in , under
28	Movement directions	up, down, back, forward, around
29	Space & distance	near, far, next to, behind, front
30	Classroom directions	come , bring, put, take, show, work hard
31	Playground directions	wait, safe, share, join, is
32	Toys & play	blocks, doll, car, puzzle, paint (<i>adapt to age of child</i>)
33	Social words	kind, help , talk, turn, listen, me
34	Problem-solving	safe, sorry, gentle, careful, believe
35	Praise & behaviour	good, try, ready, busy, quiet, to
36	Celebrations	party, song, card, cake, candle
37	Celebrations	birthday, party, gift, sing, card
38	Trips & outside	bus, teacher, line, pack, bag
39	Review & consolidation	my , your, we , they, because, I

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Core High Frequency Words– see information below:

Word	Why it's important
I	Allows children to talk about themselves and express needs (I am sad)
you	Helps with interaction and social language (you are my friend)
my	Ownership & belonging (my bag, my turn)
the	Highest-frequency English word, builds sentences (The cat)
a	High-frequency article for early sentence structure (a chair)
is	Essential for basic sentences (it is big)
to	Key function word for direction & purpose (go to lunch)
in	Everyday preposition for classroom routines (put the pen in the pot)
go	Core verb for following school routines (go to the back of the line)
want	Empowers children to express needs & requests (I want a drink)

In addition to topic-based vocabulary, it is essential that children who are new to English or at the earliest stages of language acquisition (including EAL, EYFS and some SEND learners) are explicitly taught a core set of high-frequency functional words.

Research into early language development shows that children first acquire and use language to express needs, communicate socially, follow routines, and build simple sentences. Therefore, words such as *I*, *you*, *my*, *the*, *a*, *is*, *to*, *in*, *go*, and *want* form a critical foundation for meaningful communication and participation in classroom life.

These high-utility function words support children in making requests, understanding and following instructions, engaging with peers and forming early sentence structures such as “*I want...*,” “*You go...*,” and “*It is...*”.

This mirrors expectations in the EYFS Communication and Language framework and aligns with the National Curriculum’s emphasis on spoken language as a gateway to reading, writing and wider learning.

Other words such as ***me, we, it, can, like, here, come, stop, help, more and finished*** further enable independence, social interaction and confidence across school routines.

Prioritising these essential words ensures children develop the functional language needed to participate fully and access learning, before progressing to more complex vocabulary and grammar structures.

Why these words?

These words support:

- **Communication & requesting**
- **Following instructions**

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- **Making friends**
- **Participating in routines**
- **Early sentence building**

Children need functional, high-frequency vocabulary first - *not just nouns*, but **words that let them use language socially and practically**.

Examples and usage

- **"The," "a,"**

and "and": These are articles and conjunctions that connect ideas and specify nouns.

- "The dog is big" vs. "A dog is big."
- "I see a cat and a dog."

- **"To," "is,"**

and "it": These are common prepositions, verbs, and pronouns that are essential for basic sentence construction.

- "I want to go to the park."
- "The ball is red."
- "It is a sunny day."

- **"I," "you,"**

and "that": These are personal pronouns and a demonstrative pronoun used to refer to oneself and the person being spoken to, or to point out something.

- "I like pizza."
- "You can have some too."
- "Look at that car!"

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Teacher Guidance

Recommended New-Word Introduction Rates by Age/Phase (For EAL learners and early-language learners, including EYFS & SEND)

Phase	Age	Recommended New Words per Week	Focus	Notes
Reception (EYFS)	4–5 years	4–6 words/week	Everyday functional language; key nouns first, then simple verbs & prepositions	Requires repeated exposure; embedded in routines, play, and story language
KS1 (Years 1–2)	5–7 years	6–10 words/week	Core functional words + curriculum vocabulary + emotions & routines	Still high repetition; use sentence stems and visuals
Lower KS2 (Years 3–4)	7–9 years	8–12 words/week	Functional language; curriculum-linked vocabulary; subject literacy	Increase academic language gradually; revisit & recycle vocabulary
Upper KS2 (Years 5–6)	9–11 years	10–15 words/week	Academic vocabulary (reading/writing); morphology & connectors	Teach word families, prefixes/suffixes, abstract vocabulary

Key message:

Depth and use are more important than speed or quantity.

Children learning English as an additional language, and those at early stages of language development, benefit from a structured and manageable approach to vocabulary acquisition.

Research suggests that while native English-speaking children can absorb dozens of new words weekly, EAL and early-language learners require explicit teaching, repetition, and meaningful use to embed vocabulary into working language.

The rates above prioritise mastery through exposure, modelling, rehearsal, play and sentence-level practice. Introducing a small number of high-utility words each week allows children to develop both *breadth* and *depth* of vocabulary, aligning with the EYFS focus on communication and language and the National Curriculum emphasis on spoken language as the foundation for reading, writing and wider learning.

Teachers should:

- revisit and recycle vocabulary frequently,
- provide visual and contextual cues,
- encourage children to regularly use new words in authentic contexts so that vocabulary becomes functional, not just familiar.
- engage families

Useful website: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/english/features/easyenglish>