

Learning to read and reading to learn

**This is a very brief description of how we teach reading and what you can do to support your child learn. I am very happy to answer questions or to talk to you individually at the end.

- The children come into school with different levels of preparedness for learning to read. Some can even read.
 - However, one thing they all need as an essential *pre-reading/reading skill* is **good speech**. If a child cannot use the same language that books are written in, how can they ever learn to read them? There is a truism that says, "**You can't read until you can speak and you can't write until you can read.**"
 - Another way in which children can be prepared for reading is to play with language. Children naturally go through a phase of making 'silly' words that rhyme, e.g. slimy, limy, pimpy, rimy..., ; **rhyming** is a really important word play. If you want to help a young child starting reading, chant all the nursery rhymes with them, sometimes changing the rhymes or setting the rhyme slightly differently and letting the child finish the rhyme, e.g. if I say to you, "Humpty Dumpty sat in the tree, H D saw a big..." what would you finish that line with?
 - The other way children play with language is to put words together that are **alliterative**, that is, start with the same letter. So you might make silly sentences, "silly snakes sat silently sipping strawberry squash."

- The children also have to be able to **discern different sounds** so lots of listening activities and opportunities to make a variety of sounds in a variety of ways; noisy, quiet - and everything in between!
- Lastly, the children have to see a purpose to learning to read.... ...for enjoyment and to find things out. If they share books with people they love, then they will realise that books are GREAT!

Let me tell you how we "get them off the ground."

- In the autumn term we teach the children 2 different but equally important strands of learning to read. We begin the teaching as soon as the children are ready.
 - We start the teaching of **synthetic phonics** once we have assessed their needs.
 - And we start the ORT books.
 - We introduce background information about the characters they will encounter in the series. Can anyone here remember Kipper's real name?
 - Alongside this we commence sharing ORT books without text - You'll remember that I said good speech was important? Well, we hope that the children will take the book home and **tell** the story to their loved ones, *before* the adult reads the book to them. They are developing "story book" language - as well as strengthening their knowledge of Kipper's family.

- And they also start learning the key words - Kipper, etc. YOUR HELP IS REALLY IMPORTANT.

I'll begin with the phonic programme.

- Synthetic phonics is where we teach all the sounds - or **phonemes** - used as building blocks in our English reading and writing system. There are 44 phonemes to learn. Sadly for the children there are only 26 letters so they then need to be combined to generate the other sounds - phonemes.
- The phonics programme is vital for your child's ability to be able to read - and write - independently. It carries on through to Year 3/4 as necessary. Every child moves through at their own pace and it is essential to consolidate learning at one level before moving on to the next. It is a programme with inbuilt progression, moving from Phase 1 to Phase 6.
 - For example the children generally start at Phase 2 of the Letters and Sounds programme and learn the basic single letter-sound correspondences, e.g. the letter a says a.
 - They are quickly able to read C-V-C words by blending the sounds they have learned
 - And soon begin to spell C-V-C words by segmenting.
 - As they move into Phase 3 they start to learn about **digraphs** and **trigraphs**. Would anyone like to try and explain

what a digraph or a trigraph is? I suspect there are more children in my class that can accurately answer that question than there are here, because technical vocabulary is taught straight away.

- Phase 4 offers a chance to consolidate their learning and to extend their ability to read and write 3-letter words to words with 2 consonants at the beginning such as **s-t-o-p**, 2 consonants at the end, **h-a-n-d** or words that incorporate the digraphs they've recently learned, **t-r-ai-n**, or **f-l-igh-t**. You can see that they're already able to read and write quite sophisticated words. In fact, recently one of the children in my class wrote the word 'dishwasher' correctly - including the a that sounds like an o!
- Phase 5(may start in the final term of YR) shows the children that there are, unfortunately, different ways of writing the same phoneme. If I want to write the sound 'ai' I can use ai or ay - or even what we call a split digraph, a-e. These graphemes do follow some rules and the children are helped to recognise as many of these as possible. The children are taught that the letter 'i' does not like to be at the end of a word so changes to a 'y'. Thus the 'ai' phoneme becomes 'ay' at the end - not **d-ai** but **d-ay**. By the end of Phase 5 the children will have been taught all the phonemes that are used in English. Lots of reading practice gives them the experience they need to deepen their recognition of and understanding of these phonics.

- In Phase Six the main aim is for children to become more fluent readers and more accurate spellers. At this stage many children will be reading longer and less familiar texts independently and with increasing fluency. This is when **the shift from learning to read to reading to learn takes place and children read for information and for pleasure.**

PLEASE remember that every child moves through these phases at a different rate. What we, school and home, have to do is to work together to ensure that they make the best progress possible.

Whichever phase your child is at, **you** are invited to assist your child by knowing what they are doing and finding a way of consolidating their learning. At the start it is through showing your child the letter and getting them to tell you the sound, then telling them the sound and asking them to find the matching letter. Later it could be that you look for words with digraphs in that your child has been taught, e.g. **b-r-ai-n**. It is far harder for the children to spot di/trigraphs within words than it is for them to write a word with a digraph in. Expect them to have a go at reading the word, but choose your time carefully not to spoil their enjoyment of the book. In Phase 5 it could be that you collect words that have the same phoneme but different spellings, e.g. snail, day, gate. It could be that you look for words that have -ed at the end, e.g. jumped, called, looked; what's the pattern?

Again, those that make best progress are the children whose parents are interested in, and become involved in, their child's learning. The children whose parents support their phonic development **throughout** will make much better progress and better links with reading in the

wider context of home and the wider environment, not just within the school setting and the limited range of "reading books" Aren't all books for reading?

Alongside the phonics the children are also taught to read with **key word flash cards**. In the ORT books words are introduced with specific books and then reinforced in subsequent books. Although we try very hard to use those words in a variety of contexts, the children who progress fastest are those who have support from home to look at the flash cards **every day** until the child recognises them *instantly*. And then you can look for them in as wide a range of texts as possible. Then you can be sure your child really **knows** them!

The key words provide the scaffolding that support your child to read new texts.

We like to think that we **teach** your child to read - and then you **extend** their exposure to the wonderful world of reading. When your child brings a 'reading book' home he or she can already read it but would like to celebrate their success with you.

With each new book we introduce the key words to them and strengthen the strategies that they need to tackle the texts. Our aim is to give them a range of strategies they can employ to tackle new books. Key words and phonics are two but they need to understand that the **text should make sense** and will be about the **picture**.

Going back to the need for good speech, if the children speak in sentences then they will also be able to use the normal structure of

speech to help them predict the next word - **semantics**. If I say, "My dog has a long ..." You know that the next word needs to be a noun and it needs to be something a dog could have a long one of!

Progression within the reading scheme is dependent on the children having **instant** recall of the key words, and, *according to the level*, independent application of the strategies expected at that level. This is one reason we prefer you not to have the same ORT books at home as we have in school; we cannot tell whether the child has a good memory or whether he is actually applying the strategies we are looking for. Also your child will be fed up with the book, rather than excited by their achievement of tackling a new book successfully. And, not to stress the point too much, but, why read ORT books when there are so many fantastic books out there that your child can enjoy and help to read, even if they can't read the whole thing.

(If you really want some ORT books there is a "Read at Home" series that is levelled.)

By the way, the ORT books seem to be a good means for delivering an introduction to reading. However, we do have, and use, other books.

As reading progresses we ask that the children become

- 1. More fluent readers**
- 2. Able to use expression when reading speech - look at the characters faces for clues**
- 3. Able to use punctuation to convey the meaning better**

To become successful readers, children must understand what they read and this starts at the earliest stages, and gathers momentum as children develop their fluency. Without spoiling enjoyment, ask questions about the pictures, the characters, the setting and the story.

Questions can range from the basic, "What are they doing? Where is...?" to the how and why questions. There is a developmental hierarchy of understanding of questions. I've put a sheet on the side if you're interested.

Other things you could think about doing:

- Develop your child's ability to retell the story - in sequence
- Remember books are a great place to develop vocabulary.
- Think about variety of types of books, e.g. fiction, non-fiction, poetry & rhymes
- Try other books by the same author/illustrator
- Talk about whether you and your child liked the book - and why

It is important throughout that children continue to have opportunities to listen to experienced readers reading aloud and that they develop a love of reading

What can you do to help?

A. Develop early reading skills:

- Speech
- Love of stories
- Rhyming
- Alliteration
- Sound discrimination

B. Rehearse phonics - talk to child about what they are doing and use this knowledge to expect your child to be able to read words at that level. Develop your knowledge of phonics' vocabulary so you know what they're talking about.

C. Consolidate key words

D. Share books

E. Value their achievements.

F. Read to your child as frequently as possible; it is important throughout that they have opportunities to listen to experienced readers reading aloud.

G. Let the child see you (both parents) read.