

The Alderton Infant School

Early Reading – Information for Parents 2016

The way reading is taught has changed over the years, and the current method in British primaries is through phonics. The Government has backed this approach.

At the end of Year 1 all children take a nationwide phonic screening test. Towards the end of Year 2 all children sit the reading SAT tests. In 2016 there will be two written tests and teachers will assess reading using the Interim framework.

Phonics approach

Schools have some freedom to choose their teaching materials and books to support their phonics teaching so this varies. Here, we use the Department of Education's own Letters and Sounds materials, combined with Jolly Phonics and practice rooted in experience. Since January, the reception children have been put in broad ability groupings for one phonic session a day, a second daily session takes place in their respective classrooms. Similarly Year 1 and Year 2 children are grouped from September. Groupings may alter after assessment and review of progress.

Learning the letter sounds is merely the first step. The really important bit is to teach the children what to do with them i.e how to blend them together for reading and how to listen for them in a word to spell it. We start simply with CVC words [consonant vowel consonant words, such as cat, hat, hop] and gradually introduce longer and more complex words. Children are “decoding.”

Tricky words - some words such as 'friend' can't be decoded easily. Children might need other strategies to work these words out, including looking at context, sounding out some of the word if part of it is regular and using that to work out the rest of it, and thinking of other words that look the same and could provide clues.

Reading Books

We have chosen to use a variety of reading scheme books, broadly banded into colours. Wordless picture books are renowned for confusing parents who struggle to see the point of them. Books with no words can prove beneficial if discussed and explored at depth with an adult. They're a useful tool to get young children discussing stories and characters and will help their reading comprehension longer term. Your child's reading band is a “best fit” for their current phonic level, including key words, fluency and pace.

Changing Books

Different schools have different systems for book changes. Here, the children have a daily opportunity to choose their own book from a colour box. We do this because it helps younger children foster skills of choice, selection and independence. Parents are welcome to help their child change books at the end of the day and during the weekly, shared reading session. The children will also choose a library book to bring home each week.

Reading Diary

Every child has a reading diary and there is guidance on both inside covers. The diary is designed for:

- Parents to log reading and communicate on any relevant issues (so a parent might write that their child found a particular book too hard or they struggled with specific words). The teacher will collect this in and comment once a week. However, teachers also keep other records of reading development and progress.
- Children to write in once a week. This is to develop critical thinking skills and comprehension.

Reading to an Adult

Children will be doing some reading of one sort or another daily and reading individually at the very least once a week. This might not always be to their teacher though (remember if he or she heard all 30 children for 10 minutes each, that would be 300 minutes - a huge chunk of lesson time). Many schools have children read to teaching assistants and outside volunteers, including parents instead.

How can you help your child?

Parents could aim to provide bedtime stories, have story CDs in the car, DVDs of classic tales, to make regular visits to the local library. The result of this exposure to books and stories will hopefully be children who can retell favourite stories, have opinions about books and authors, can discuss a range of different stories, and predict what's likely to happen next in a narrative. These skills are vital to future success.

Parents being role models as absorbed and intent readers can demonstrate to children the power and pleasure of reading.

Remember it's not just books that will help your child learn to read. Encourage him or her to read newspapers, TV guides, comics, cookery books and magazines too. They are all valid forms of literature.

One tactic worth trying if you have the time, is to write a few simple stories 'starring' your child and/ or on a subject close to their heart. It doesn't need to be the next prize-winning novel - just 10 sentences. Keep it simple and perhaps add pictures too!

Becoming a “thinking” reader

Comprehension is absolutely key. Even if your son or daughter can 'decode' the words on a page and read them out loud, it doesn't mean they'll truly take in what's going on. If they don't understand the story, then they will struggle to enjoy reading.

To help with this, make sure you don't just listen to your child read - ask them some questions about the book too and make observations yourself. Make up your own versions of what could happen next in a story you are sharing. Talk about what the author decided. What else could have happened?

Some school reading scheme books have comprehension questions inside the front and back cover.

This book's too easy?

As your child is learning to read, their books should have a small amount of challenge, but not be so difficult that they are struggling regularly throughout the story. Just enough reading work consolidates children's existing reading skills - too much reading work and the reading process breaks down. Books that are too difficult will not accelerate reading progress – in fact these may turn emergent readers into reluctant readers.

For newer readers, a rule of thumb often used is that they should be able to read 90% of the words. If a book is a little too difficult or your child is tired but you and they want to read it anyway try sharing out the reading by taking it in turns to read.

Most of all, remember to be supportive even when they are struggling. Really praise a child for all of the words that they are getting correct. When you're learning to read in the beginning each new word read is a huge step. Learning to read well is not a race!

Phonics Definitions for Our School

- **Phoneme/Sound**
- **Grapheme/Spelling Choice** – the letters used to write the sound
- **Graph** – an individual letter that makes one sound
- **Digraph** – two letters that make one sound e.g. ch in **chop**
- **Split Digraph** – split letters that make one sound e.g. a-e in **make**
- **Trigraph** – three letters that make one sound e.g. igh in **night**
- **Quadgraph** – four letters that make one sound e.g. eigh in **neighbour**
- **Synthesising** – blending sounds together to read words.
- **Segmenting** – breaking words into sounds to be able to spell them.
- **Blends** – When there are two adjacent consonants in a word e.g. sl in **slip**
- **Easy Words** – high frequency words that are decodeable using phonics e.g. but, him, at
- **Tricky Words** – high frequency words that are not decodeable using phonics e.g. she, was, the
- **Polysyllabic words** – words containing more than one syllable e.g handshake, toothbrush