

## How to help your child become a successful, fluent reader and accelerate progress

Most parents of young children were taught to read using a different strategy to some of those used today, which is why it can be hard to know what to do for the best. This guide provides some information and advice from teachers and recent research.

The way children are taught to read these days is partly by phonics, sometimes referred to as “Letters and Sounds”. There are some other useful words you might want to know like phoneme (the sound of each letter) and grapheme (what each letter looks like). Phonemes and graphemes are now taught in a particular order because educational specialists have worked out that this is the best way to help children learn to read. The phonemes/graphemes are also split into groups called phases. This is to help teachers assess where children are with their phonics.

What differs from when most of us were children is the very short sounds that letters make. You may remember being taught “t” as a “ter” sound, now it has a very short and snappy “t” – if you whisper it, it’s easier to make the sound. The two you may find particularly tricky to pronounce are “l” and “n”. With the “l” sound, pronounce as you would at the end of “Hull” more of an “ul” sound. With “n” don’t be tempted to say “ner” nor “rer” for “r” as you might think, but more of a growling “rrr” sound.

When you say a letter think how it actually sounds in a word rather than in isolation.

For quite a lot of letters, there is a temptation to put an “er” on the end, “h” “j” “t” being a few examples. It is really important though that you keep the sounds really short because if you think about it, when children are blending – putting the sounds together to make words – it won’t work if all the sounds have “er” at the end!

The vowel sounds – a,e,i,o,u – can be taught as you normally say them – as in apple, elephant, igloo, under, orange. There are of course, some exceptions to these general rules, but these are then addressed as your child progresses through school. There is a list of tricky words that do not follow the normal pronunciation of other words – the joys of the English language!

Research has also proved that regular practice at skills, including reading, makes a big difference to the rate at which children become proficient. The science behind this tells us that the “neurones” in the brain transmit information through making connections called “synapses”. The more we keep our brains working on a skill, the more connections are made and the stronger they become. Hence the more frequently a child reads, the stronger the connections for reading are, so you can see why it is vitally important for children to read regularly both in school and at home. Short, sharp reading times at home, on a frequent basis, are better than a less often, longer reading session. Children will often resist and not wish to engage with reading at home because it can be hard work, but all the more reason for keeping them at it as this develops both reading skills and resilient learning behaviours. It is appreciated that parents are busy people but if parents allow reading to slip from the daily priorities, think about the message being given to the child – that reading is not as important.

In school children read in many ways, individually to an adult, independently, in groups in various ways in various learning situations, but reading at home, with a “significant other” parents, older siblings etc, is hard to replicate in school.

The partnership between home and school is very important when it comes to reading so we ask parents to support the school by making reading a priority and to listen to your child read as frequently as possible. Even when your child is a proficient and fluent reader, sharing some reading time helps them continue to improve and value the reading process. Encouraging and helping your child to record what they have read in the reading diaries also helps enormously.

Developing a positive “mindset” and “stamina for learning” are vitally important for their academic progress and for their development of resilience and ability to face challenges in learning and life in general.

It is hoped you find this information useful and please ask your child’s teacher if you would like any other advice about these matters