

[Learning to read at Aqueduct Primary School](#)

Teaching children to read and write independently, as quickly as possible, is one of the core purposes of a primary school. These key skills not only hold the keys to the rest of the curriculum but also have a huge impact on children's self-esteem and future life chances.

Reading and writing are both two part processes: readers decode and comprehend, writers create and encode. In one respect, decoding and encoding are the 'mechanical' skills that children need to master in order to be able to comprehend what they read and write creatively. Research has shown that by teaching phonics thoroughly and rigorously to children, we can ensure that they can use this knowledge to decode effortlessly and automatically. This means all energy can be focused on understanding and enjoying what is read and on composing and creating fantastic writing.

(Ofsted: Reading by Six)

How do you teach a child to read?

The English spelling code is one of the most complex in the world. It has evolved over hundreds of years and has had many different influences. As a result, our words are made up of combinations of 44 different sounds but many of these sounds are spelt in different ways in different words. Furthermore, we only have 26 letters to write these sounds down. This can lead to real confusion for children as letters combine together in different words to make different sounds. For example, the letter 'a' sometimes makes the sound /a/ (c-a-t), or, with other letters, the sound /ay/ (d-ay) or the sound 'air' (f-air). So, in order to help the children conquer this complex code, we teach it to them systematically, using the [Read Write Inc. Programme](#).

We start by teaching children to read the first thirty graphemes and to say their sounds (Set 1 Sounds) and to be able to blend these sounds to read words (i.e. to know that the sounds c/a/t can blend together to read the word cat). Once they have conquered this skill, they start reading stories and texts that have words made up of the graphemes/sounds they know. This means that they can embed and apply their phonic knowledge and start to build their reading fluency. At the same time, we teach them how to write the graphemes that represent these sounds and use this knowledge to spell words, leading to writing short sentences.

As their confidence and fluency grows, we start to introduce more graphemes and their sounds (Set 2 and then Set 3) and the children read texts with increasingly more complex graphemes/sounds (different ways of spelling the sounds, e.g. /igh/, /ie/ or /ay/, /ai/). They learn

that a sound can be written using 2 or 3 or even 4 letters. We call this a grapheme (e.g. /igh/ in the word night). Equally they learn to use these graphemes to spell words.

In short, the essence of our reading programme is based on the belief that by reading the graphemes and saying the sounds, you can read the words, and so the story. But, if it is hard to understand what sounds the words are made up of, it is hard to read the words accurately and so it is hard to understand what has been read. Additionally, if it takes too long to work out what the words are, it is difficult to understand the story as the meaning gets 'lost' in the individual words. Fluency and accuracy are key to comprehension.

What about comprehension?

Being able to decode a text alone is not enough. Children need to comprehend what they are reading and need to be actively taught key comprehension skills from a very early age. We do this through comprehension activities linked to the stories the children come to read with Read Write Inc., and also through a range of different literacy activities based around core texts shared with the children in class. We know that good readers question, check and engage with their own understanding – these are some of the skills we seek to develop. We know that decoding and comprehension should not be taught in linear progression but need to be taught simultaneously.

Where does vocabulary fit in?

Our entire curriculum has a strong emphasis on vocabulary acquisition. Vocabulary is key to understanding and learning. Children need to know, through active teaching, what words mean in order to understand what they have read.

How can we help at home?

There is much you can do to support your child at home.

- Talk to them! The most important thing you can do is to talk to your child and listen to them when they are talking to you. Try to extend their vocabulary range and their skill at talking in increasingly more complex sentences. For example, try to teach them alternative words for ideas, or nouns they already know. You could teach them alternative words for sad and happy; big, little;
- Read to them and always discuss the story you are reading to try to build your child's comprehension skills and understanding.
- Practice the sounds they know at home. Follow this link to find information on each Set.
- Listen to your child read every night. Find a quiet time to hear your child read and use lots and lots of praise to encourage them. This only needs to be for a short period of 5-10

minutes but the regularity of this is so important. Please do make notes in their Reading Diary. We love to hear about their reading at home.

- Look out for our Reading Workshops for parents, where you can find out more details of how to help at home.
- There are some further ideas here: <http://www.icanteachmychild.com/2012/02/10-steps-to-teaching-your-child-to-read/>

If you need further advice or support with how best to help, please do ask your child's class teacher or contact Miss Waring. We would be delighted to meet with you.

What does this all look like in practice?

The table below outlines our expectations, showing some variations in development. All children are individuals and learn at different rates. Some children will make more rapid progress and some may need further support. For this reason, we organise our RWI literacy classes into ability groups so that all children can have the appropriate level of challenge. We operate additional one to one tutoring for any children who may need further support.

Stage	Year group	Term
Set 1 sounds	Reception	Autumn
Red Ditties, Green books and Purple books	Reception	Spring/Summer
Set 2 sounds	Reception	Spring/Summer
Pink and Orange books	Reception Year 1	Summer Autumn/Spring
Set 3 sounds	Year 1 Year 2	Spring Spring/Summer
Yellow, Blue, Grey books	Year 1 Year 2	Spring/Summer Autumn/Spring

What happens next?

Once children have learnt to read independently, they move onto our Literacy programme. All of our teaching and their learning is now directed at developing their comprehension skills and writing. Work is focused on a series of carefully chosen quality core texts which act as the stimulus to teach higher level comprehension, build knowledge and develop a love of reading and literacy