

Learning to read-early days (reception)-at White Bridge Primary School

September 2016

(A brief guide for parents)

At White Bridge Primary School we teach children to read using a phonic system known as Optima (formerly called KRM). It is a very successful method of teaching children the early reading skills that they need to become fluent readers. It is well established here. As children join the school, we ask you to start **homework** with your child to support their reading development, and this **daily reading homework** should become part of your daily routine throughout their time at school.

Through the Optima approach we teach the children all of the **sounds** of the letters of the alphabet: how to build words (synthesise) from sounds for reading; how to break words down for spelling (segmenting); and to recognise a core of words on sight (100 word sight vocabulary) which will support them in becoming fluent readers. This is a phonic based reading approach.

We do not teach children the letter names at this point: these are not useful for reading, and children will learn these later. Teaching both causes confusion, so I would ask you not to do this at home either. In reality, we find that many children pick these up over time, and a few know some when they come to school. We teach letter names to most children in year 1 when they know their sounds securely.

As the children learn the skills, we teach them how to apply these to reading text.

The teachers work at a pace that suits the class, and enables them to learn, practise and retain new words, sounds and other skills. They take account of where individual children are.

In school the children do 2 Optima sessions in the morning and 1 in the afternoon. This means that they are being taught reading for 45 minutes *every day*. They work at this as a whole class, and over the year the sessions develop to support the different abilities in the class. In addition, the teachers or teaching assistants aim to read individually with children at least once a week, and in reception we aim for twice. We usually use parent helpers as the year moves on so that the children can read individually in school more often. Probably after Christmas when progress indicates that this is right, one of the Optima sessions for reading will change, and the focus will move towards phonics for spelling and writing.

Helping at home/Homework

We ask you to help at home by reading books with your child, and practising sounds and words with them **every day**.

- For sounds, the teacher will enter the letter sounds that the children are learning in class in the back of their reading diaries. Please ask them to say the **sounds** as you point to them. Sounds will be added to as their learning progresses.

Sometimes point to them in a different order, or write them on paper and see if they still know them. Some children will pick these up quickly, and others will take longer.

- For the sight vocabulary words, the children need to read them without sounding out, and again, as the list develops, sometimes do it in a different order.

As they learn words and letter sounds, you should get them to read these in their books. At first they may not make the link, and you may need to tell them that it is a word or sound that they know. When you come to a word that can be sounded out, and you know that they have learnt those sounds, then ask them to try and do this.

If you are not sure how to say any of the sounds, your child may well be able to help, but please do ask the teachers, who will also be happy to help.

Parents often want us to add letters and words to the list quickly, and I know that this is because the children seem to know them when you do them at home. The teachers are very experienced at this, and they will be adding words and sounds at the right rate for secure learning. As the year progresses, the words added will reflect what individual children know when they are assessed in class. Adding words and sounds too quickly can compromise progress, and the children forget earlier words. Sometimes, if the rate is too quick, they do not transfer their learning to seeing and reading the words in a text. Children are assessed on entry to school, and if children already know sounds and words, their teaching and the sounds and words that they have in their reading diaries will reflect what they know.

Please read a book as well as practising sounds and words. At first children will need you to read most of the words, and they will use their memory of familiar books as well. If reading a very short text that they have read before, they may memorise the whole thing, and will not be reading individual words. This is normal, and is just one of the early stages of learning to read. To help them:

- You read to them, pausing when you come to a word that you know they can read and then get them to read. Point to the words as you and they read. As their skills improve, they will be reading an increasing amount, and you will read less. Try to keep the flow going if you can.
- Sometimes go back over a page and point to sight vocabulary words, asking them what they say again. This will help to secure these words.
- As they learn more sounds, sometimes ask them to try and sound out simple words. Start with 2 and 3 letters. Remember that they will only be able to have a go at this once they know all the sounds in any given word. Putting sounds together to make words (synthesising) has to be taught: on the whole children cannot do this automatically. They may not be able to do this for quite a while.
- Over the year, as children build up their skills, you will be getting them to read with less support, and having a go themselves first. I cannot say when this will be, as all children develop at different rates.

PLEASE sign the reading diary every time you read and practise with your child.

When the teacher reads with your child individually, they will write in the diary too. Your signature lets us know that you have read with them, and helps the teacher to judge progress, and assess difficulties for your child. When a child really struggles with reading, it makes a big difference if we know whether they are reading every day or not at home. This is true for all of their time at school, not just their first year. If you have not signed the diary, we will assume that you have not read with your child: we do ask the children, but they are unreliable in this, and often cannot remember. **This daily reading is their homework.**

When we teach reading in school, and when we read with the children individually, we use what we call real books. This is because the vocabulary and interest levels are much better in real books. This does mean that the amount of text varies from book to book. When you read at home, you may sometimes read a whole book, but at other times you may just be reading a few pages. The children in reception tend to read individually on set days, and will be told to take 2 books when they read in school. They will not change their books in school until they read again. It is good practice to read books more than once, but if you do wish to change books more frequently then you can come into the school at the end of the day to do this with your child. Please do not take more than 2 books at any one time.

If your child is in Beech class you can also change books in the classroom if you wish, once all of the children have come out at the end of the day.

As most parents have access to the internet, there is a useful resource on youtube: 'Mr Thorn does phonics' which you may find really useful and fun for your children. I suggest you start with 'How to learn the letters and sounds of the alphabet', but Mr Thorne does many further activities that put the letters in context within words too.

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