



# Help Your Child with Literacy



## A booklet for parents

Helping your child with  
Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing  
&  
Understanding Progress in Literacy at WSL

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## Help Your Child with Literacy

### What is progress in Literacy about at Waltham St Lawrence Primary School?

Developing skills in literacy is about learning to use language to express, explore and communicate our thoughts, ideas and feelings with others.

We do this through speaking, listening, reading and writing and getting better at literacy means making progress in each of these areas.

Children do not usually make progress at the same rate in speaking, listening, reading and writing. In their early years, for example, most children are better speakers and listeners than readers and writers. This is important as early skills with spoken language underpin the development of reading and writing.

However, speaking, listening, reading and writing are closely interrelated. So, for example, effective speakers and writers take account of their listeners and readers because they are hoping to interest or influence them.

Talking to your child is crucial in helping children to make progress in all aspects of literacy. Questioning, prompting, responding (whether the focus is on reading, writing, speaking or listening) are all important in helping your child to build on what they can already do.

At WSL, we aim to teach literacy through cross-curricular activities as much as possible. These are supported through specific grammar, reading, writing and spelling lessons.

Below are a number of suggestions as to how you can help your child to make further progress at whatever level they are working. They all rely on talking with your child in a relaxed, informal way and making their language learning part of everyday life.

#### **General help with speaking and listening progress:**

Ensure that:

- they have plenty of opportunities for talk
- you listen to them with attention, and respond
- they hear and listen to sustained talk by others

Encourage them to speak at length by:

- helping them take a long turn in a conversation
- prompting them to help them keep going
- asking them to tell you about some event in detail or explain to you how something works

Help them understand how speakers help listeners by:

- using repetition and different voices for different characters when telling a story
- encouraging them to think about how to organise what they want to say
- changing their pace

Encourage them to notice and talk about:

- interesting/unusual words
- some of the different ways people speak

#### **FS/KS1- speaking and listening activities (in order of development):**

- listen attentively to what they say and respond
- help sustain their talk by prompting, asking questions and repeating
- encourage imaginative play by taking a role yourself
- point out and talk about how different people speak
- talk with them about their ideas, for example, when painting or modelling
- ask them to retell simple stories in their own words
- listen together to stories on CDs, radio or television
- encourage them to develop their ideas by taking longer turns,
- adding detail and thinking about how ideas connect
- play listening and guessing games where they have to listen and ask questions, for example, 'I spy', '20 questions'
- encourage them to take different roles when playing in groups

**KS2 - speaking and listening activities (in order of development):**

- encourage them to talk clearly and at length about their ideas
- listen to and talk about things that are not immediately familiar,
- such as items on the news
- play memory games, taking turns to answer questions about a story or film they've listened to
- encourage them to take on specific roles in their social life, for example, in a sports team, after school club<sup>3</sup>
- find opportunities for them to talk at length about increasingly complicated ideas and situations, for example, explain an experiment they have done in science or a topical subject such as cyber bullying
- help them take more account of the listener's reaction when speaking, for example, making it exciting when telling a story to a younger sibling
- encourage them to listen and express their opinions about local and national issues in the news

**General ideas for developing speaking and listening at home:**

Talk about:

**The past and the future**

'Do you remember when...' is a good starter to a conversation about shared memories. Talking about the future involves speculation such as 'I wonder what it will be like...'

**Shared jobs or activities**

Talking and listening arise naturally from a shared activity, e.g., jobs around the house, gardening, cooking etc.

**Going out**

Supermarket shopping can create lots of talk about selecting, comparing, planning meals, prices and healthy food.

**Current issues**

As children get older, they are able to take on more of what is going on in the local community and in the wider world. TV news and current affairs programmes, newspapers, magazines, books, films, school work and adults' talk all help them to know more about things and to start to form opinions.

### **Interests, activities and hobbies**

Your child can be the expert and inform you about things they know more than you about! The focus for talk might be football, pop music, sport, dance, TV, computer games, clothes, collecting, even reading! The reversal of the expert and learner role gives children confidence and self-esteem, and, as a result, their language learning improves.

### **Television**

Try to watch some programmes together and talk about them afterwards. You can talk about choosing programmes to watch. Try to use TV viewing as a stimulus for discussion rather than as a substitute for it.

### **Further speaking and listening activities**

#### **In general**

- play board games and card games
- listening games: describe what they can hear, smell, see, etc.
- talk about their day: ask them questions so they give more detail
- retell stories the children have read or stories you have shared together

#### **On a car journey**

- ask the children to describe what they can see in detail
- play I spy
- look at car number plates and make the shortest or longest word
- from the last three letters in order, i.e., TCK, stuck; NLS, English

#### **Rhyming word games**

- start a rhyme string off e.g. cat, hat, bat, sat and then try and put all the words into one sentence

#### **Word games**

- think of a word beginning with...
- how many animals can you think of beginning with b?
- make alliteration sentences: I can see a big, blue, buzzing bumble bee

#### **Join sentences**

Provide two short, simple sentences. The aim of the game is for the children to join them to make one sentence. They will need to use some form of connective and it can be useful to suggest a way of joining them.

For instance:

The camel ate the cake. The cake was full of dates.

You could ask the children to join the two sentences above using the word 'which':

The camel ate the cake, which was full of dates.

#### **Drop in**

Provide a simple sentence and ask the children to 'drop in' a something extra, e.g., adjectives, adverb, a phrase or clause. Be careful not to drop in too much! The sentence can be added to by attaching something either ends as well.

Bertie dug a hole.

Might become:

Bertie dug a deep hole.

Bertie rapidly dug a hole.

Bertie, the farmer's dog, dug a hole.

Bertie, hoping he would soon see a kangaroo, dug a hole.

I went shopping and I bought...

Each person remembers what the previous player has said, i.e., an appetising apple; a beautiful balloon; some chunky chocolate...

### **Inventing metaphors**

First of all, identify something that you want to create a metaphor around, for instance, the stars. Now think of something that is like the subject or something to do with the subject: they shine, glitter, are like diamonds, like jewels, like fiery eyes. Now use an idea to make a metaphor, remembering not to use the word 'like', e.g.

The stars are shiny glitter.  
The stars tin tacked to the night.  
The diamond stars shine.  
The fiery stars eyed the world.

### **A magic box**

What might be in the box? Take it in turns to give a description. You could then ask the children to write their ideas as a poem or story.



## **Reading**

### **General help with reading progress:**

Ensure they have:

- access to books, magazines and newspapers from home, school and library
- somewhere quiet to read
- time to read regularly
- opportunity to see you as a reader – reading, choosing books, going to the library, talking about what you read

Read to them and take turns with them in reading a section each of the text, supporting and prompting their reading in positive ways.

Talk with them about the books they read:

- their favourite part or character and your favourite part
- how the illustrations support the story
- their favourite author
- what makes a book different from (or similar to) others they have read

Talk about the meaning of what they have read. Ask them, for example, to explain:

- how they know that X is the villain or Y the heroine
- why they like or dislike a particular character
- what will happen next –and why they think so
- a character's actions or motives

### **FS/KS1 reading activities (in order of development):**

Read books regularly together

- talk about the parts you both most enjoyed
- ask them to point to words they recognise
- talk with them about how words and illustrations work together in what they read
- point out words in the world, for example, road signs, shop names, building names

Read books together, reading a section in turn, and talk about:

- what happened
- how the pictures support the story
- which parts they liked best

Encourage them to choose books independently and to decode unfamiliar words independently, but prompt them if they lose the gist of what they're reading.

Engage with what they read by asking them to:

- predict what will happen next in a story
- describe their response when they know what does happen
- explain why a character behaves as they do
- point to particular parts of a text that they like
- talk about what a text suggests or implies

### **KS2 reading activities (in order of development):**

Help them to think about the writer behind the text, for example:

- why they chose the language they did
- why they organised the text in that way
- what effect they hoped to have on the reader

When looking for information in print or on-screen, encourage them to scan ahead and think about how helpful the text is, whether it is a biased or reliable source.

Give them regular opportunities to make their own choices in what they read at home, for example, visits to the library, magazines that cover out of school interests.

Encourage them to develop their response to a text in more detail, for example, ask them to tell you how their feelings towards a character changed at different points in a story.

### **Further ideas to support reading development:**

#### **Reading aloud with your child**

Reading aloud with your child is a great way to prepare him/her to read independently and to enjoy reading. Reading aloud can be fun; it can provide some quality time for the two of you together; help you both discover favourite stories and authors.

#### **Choosing books to read aloud together**

The books that you and your child will read aloud together should interest you both, so it makes sense that you and your child should choose these books together.

#### **Discussing what you've already read aloud**

Before you read aloud with your child, take a few minutes to review what you've already read together. Ask your child to summarise the plot so far, as well as to give you brief character sketches to help refresh your own memory. If your child gives a summary or character sketch that isn't quite right, gently correct

them so that you can both start this reading session with the same background fresh in your mind. If your child doesn't believe your version, consider going back a few pages and rereading so that you can both discover together what actually happened.

### **Taking turns reading aloud**

If your child is able to read, use your time together to take turns reading aloud. Use your child's general reading level as a guide for how much of each page or book he/she should be reading. Some children may want to read less, in which case you will need to persuade them to read the amount you've determined, and some may want to read more, in which case you could consider allowing them to read the whole thing themselves.

Don't be in too much of a rush to help if your child gets stuck while reading aloud. Instead, help him/her to sound out words and read through sentences until they can do so fluently. If your child is unfamiliar with a word, help him/her look it up in a children's dictionary and understand what it means and how it is used in context.

### **Using different voices when reading aloud**

Children love to hear an adult read a story theatrically, and a large part of this is to use different voices and/or accents to signify different characters. Some children even become so attached to a particular voice that they will tell you you're 'reading wrong' if you don't use the exact same voice each time! If your child is able to take turns reading aloud, encourage him or her to make up their own voices or accents for each character. Just be warned that many children find this hilarious so factor in some extra time for laughing fits.

### **Stopping at a cliff hanger when reading aloud**

The best place to stop a reading aloud session is at a cliff hanger in the story. Leaving your child with a bit of suspense should keep them eager for the next reading session so that they can find out what happens next.

### **Asking questions when reading aloud**

As you read aloud with your child, ask him or her questions about what is happening and what they think will happen next. Not only do these questions allow you to quickly and easily check your child's comprehension of the story, but it helps to keep them active and involved even when they are not reading. When your child is reading aloud, encourage him or her to ask you questions just as you do them. The questions they ask can be revealing about their comprehension as well, and if nothing else most children enjoy taking on the role that their parent usually plays.

### **Specific questions to ask while reading**

#### **Before reading:**

- Why did you choose this book?
- What is on the front and back covers?
- predict what the book might be about or what will happen and ask for an explanation
- ask if they have read a book by the same author; if so, describe that book
- Take a picture walk through the story: ask what challenges meet the characters; based on the pictures, do they think there will be a happy ending?
- both retell the story so far: discuss and compare your versions
- with a non-fiction book, make a note of everything the child knows already about the topic

#### **During reading:**

- demonstrate fluent reading through the pace and expression of your reading
- ask how the illustrations or diagrams help them to understand the text
- ask the children to think about how each character reacts to situations
- ask for explanations of specific words to develop vocabulary
- How does the author try and capture your interest at the start of the story?
- Can you tell from the first page what type of story you are reading? How?
- Where does the story take place?
- Can you describe the setting? Is it real or imaginary?
- Which sentences help you really picture the setting?
- Who is telling the story?
- Who is/are the main character(s)?
- Can you describe a character in your own words?
- Who do you know the best in this story?
- What is the character like? Can you find words in the book that tell you this?
- Did you dislike any of the characters in this story? Why?
- What do other people in the story think of this character? How do you know?
- How has the author written when people are speaking?

#### **After reading:**

- give the opportunity to research the topic further
- Where did the story take place?
- In fiction, how does the author build excitement?
- In non-fiction, how is the reader's interest grabbed and sustained?
- develop questions based on any vocabulary discussions during reading
- What is the most exciting part of the book? Why?
- Can you find how the author writes in a different way to create excitement or suspense?
- What do you think is going to happen next?
- What did you think of the book? Why?
- Would you recommend it to someone else? Who? Why?
- Can you think of another story that is similar? How is it similar?

#### **Storytelling**

As well as reading books together, storytelling is a rich source of language and an important part of being a child. The favourite time for this is often bedtime when parents are past their best. It is a very precious time together, though, and one that children remember for a long time. Young children like to hear their favourite stories many times.

They can join in and will often remind you when you forget or miss out a part. Tell them well-known traditional stories, or make up a story -perhaps telling different episodes on different nights, with your child as the central character!



#### **Writing**

What you can do to help your child progress with writing:



- Ensure they have:
- opportunities to write at home
- pencils, pens, crayons, but also card or folded paper to make booklets
- opportunities to see you as a writer, for example, writing emails or lists

Read and talk about their writing:

- ask them to read their writing aloud to you
- respond to the writing and praise what you like
- ask them to explain why they wrote particular sections as they did

Help them with planning their writing:

- ask them to talk through their ideas with you before they write
- prompt them to include more detail, sequence things more clearly,
- vary the pace

Help them to think about the person who will read their writing:

- Do they want the reader to like the main character?
- Should they include some clues about the ending?
- Does the writing build up to a climax?

**FS/KS1 writing activities (in order of development):**

- encourage them to have fun with writing, for example, drawing cartoons and writing captions or speech bubbles
- write with them, prompting them with suggestions when they get stuck
- take an interest in what they write, for example, ask them to read their writing aloud to you and respond to it
- help them reflect on their writing, for example, what they were pleased with, how they might develop or improve it
- encourage writing in play and what they do, for example, lists for shopping, record the results for their favourite sports team

Engage with their writing through:

- saying what you liked in it
- asking where their ideas have come from
- asking them to show you where a sentence begins and ends

Help them to organise and sequence their writing by asking them to talk about their ideas or to draw a sequence of simple pictures to show how the main events in a story might be organised.

Encourage them to write more, for example, a shopping list, a plan for a party or family celebration, a story that they can email to grandparents

Talk with them about how they might improve or rephrase sections, for example, by including more descriptive detail or using connectives (such as 'and', 'but') to combine sentences.

**KS2 writing activities (in order of development):**

- ask them to tell you what are the best features of their writing
- discuss possible improvements, for example, how to include more detail, vary the pace of a story, or rephrase a sentence

- help them to use their reading to support them as writers, for example, ask them to look at how a writer they like uses varied sentences or organises paragraphs
- encourage their personal writing, for example, a journal or diary, or blog
- talk through their ideas with them before they start to write, for example, prompt them to think about how they intend to tackle a subject
- Help them to reflect on their writing, particularly the effect they hoped to have on the reader, for example, is the reader sufficiently prepared for the ending?
- Encourage them to read through their work, shaping their sentences for clarity and impact and checking their accuracy.

### **Ideas for helping your child with the development of writing:**

#### **Writing area**

Set up a writing area at home that is initially a play area with old envelopes and pens, pencils, stationery etc.

As children get older, transform this area into a quiet place where they can concentrate and have a dictionary and thesaurus to use.

Link ideas to role play so that children act out and write in role e.g. as a receptionist, travel agent etc.

#### **Diary of trips/visits**

Write postcards/ notes to family and friends.

Make up stories - tell story first - use toys, an old watch as a starting point.

Retell stories you have read together.

Use spelling words to make sentences.

Write shopping lists.

#### **Creative Connections**

Play this game often - just give them a word and ask them to write down as many words as they can think of that are associated with it. Time them - a minute only, and see how many words they've written. Play this many times so that they get used to generating words and ideas rapidly. This is a fundamental creative writing skill.

#### **Ink waster**

To warm up the brain and get into a creative mood - give the children a topic and ask them to write as much as they can e.g. in one minute. Time them and ask them to count the number of words, then try again with another topic. They should write as rapidly as possible. This limbers up and frees up the mind.

#### **Mind maps**

Encourage children to order their thoughts by putting them into a mind map where they can unload all their ideas quickly and then begin to see the links.

#### **Noun and verb game**

Ask for a list of nouns (engine, ruler, pencil, tree, etc.). Then make a list of verbs (sipped, stole, rushed, wished, etc.). The game is to invent sentences that include a noun and a verb from the lists. This can be fun if the nouns and verbs do not match in any sensible way - you will get some quite creative solutions!

The engine sipped...

The ruler stole...

The pencil rushed...

The tree wished...

Now complete the sentences preferably choosing unusual ideas, e.g.

The engine sipped from a cup of silences.

The ruler stole a tongue of ideas.  
The pencil rushed down the stairs and into the garden.  
The tree wished it could turn over a new leaf.

## **Spelling**

Spelling is taught through a wide and varying range of strategies including lessons on spelling rules, suffixes, prefixes, syllables and patterns as well as through investigation. The children also learn scientific and technical vocabulary and they are expected to apply their spelling knowledge throughout the curriculum.

### **Spelling Strategies**

Find words within the word (there's a 'hen' in 'when'!)

- Break the word up into smaller parts/syllables (park – ing). Clap out or tap out the syllables
- say the word as it is written to help you remember it (Wed - nes -day)
- break the word up into sounds (th-a-nk)
- make up a silly sentence using the letters (big elephants cause accidents under small elephants spells 'because')
- Find a word that rhymes with it: is the spelling the same?
- look for patterns in words (ight) and think of as many words as possible with the pattern/sound
- Sort words by different criteria (number of syllables, spelling pattern, initial sound, number of phonemes, etc.
- draw the shape around the word and play 'guess the word' from only its shape
- play word snap with sounds or spelling patterns

### **Ideas for the holidays**

School holidays don't have to mean that your child puts their learning on hold while they're away from the classroom. In fact, educational days out can be the most fun way to learn - plus it gives you the chance to explore new places and subjects with your kids, and spend quality time together.

#### **The keys to successful days out are:**

- to plan them in advance – go online and check out the attraction's website (including the teachers' notes if they're available) to find out when it opens and closes, if there is an admission price and what is on offer for children
- To have activities planned come rain or shine. Make sure that there are things to do at the attraction, whatever the weather
- Not to overload the day. An outing to an art gallery, for example, can be far more educational and enjoyable if you focus on just one artist or on paintings which have a particular theme

### **Follow your child's lead**

At school, learning is mapped out by the National Curriculum and teachers' lesson plans.

Holiday learning can and should be very different. Before you plan where you'll go and what you'll do, find out what your child would like to do. Ask what's been enjoyable during the school year - what subjects have been exciting and inspiring? What would they like to discover more about?

Next, find a place to visit that offers learning opportunities around the interests you have come up with. Don't worry about your child learning 'more' about a subject, or being 'pushed further'. If you find a day out that your child engages with, the learning will come naturally.

Another good way forward is to 'theme' the school holiday. Often, there are too many options for where to go and what to do during school breaks.

To help you focus, decide to concentrate on, say, nature or the Vikings or on a particular author for the week/weeks ahead.

You might like to borrow library books that tie into your theme and provide you with activities ahead of your day out. For example, you might decide to theme a half-term holiday around sea creatures, so you might borrow books on fish from the library ahead of a day out at an aquarium.

### **Record where you've been**

Your child will retain a lot more information from a day out if it's recorded, either at the time or afterwards.

Think of a way to do this that's fun and that your child is enthusiastic about. It could be by taking some photographs together, or maybe your child could fill in a kid's activity sheet (these are often handed out at attractions). Or perhaps your child would rather sit down the next day and draw a picture of their favourite part of the outing.

Your child could also write a fictional story that springs from a day out.

For example, you might visit a Tudor castle, hear accounts of what life was like there from a guide, and your child could then write a story imagining what it would have been like for a child growing up there five hundred years ago.

With a bit of planning, one day out can provide several ideas for educational activities that stretch across a couple of days – and if you hit upon something that really sparks their imagination and interest, it could shape their learning for weeks, months or years to come!

(This booklet has been adapted from DCSF publication DCSF-00266-2010)