



# How We Teach Reading at Sacred Heart

2024

At Sacred Heart we are committed to delivering on the promise of Education and equipping every child with the ability to read -- and read well. Learning to read is such an essential skill to not only find success in school and to thrive in society but to also experience the joy that reading brings to life. We want every child to be successful in reading! We are learning more about what research says about how children learn to read, how to make sure every student learns to read, and what to do when a child encounters difficulty in learning to read. The research that we are learning about and implementing is called the science of reading.

## The Science of Reading

“The body of work referred to as the “science of reading” is not an ideology, a philosophy, a political agenda, a one-size-fits all approach, a program of instruction nor a specific component of instruction. It is the emerging consensus from many related disciplines, based on literally thousands of studies, supported by hundreds of millions of research dollars, conducted across the world in many languages. These studies have revealed a great deal about how we learn to read, what goes wrong when students don't learn, and what kind of instruction is most likely to work best from most students.” Dr Louisa Moats

## When We Know Better, We Do Better!

The reading scores of Australian children have remained somewhat stagnant for over **40 years**. The progress in the International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) measures Year Four Students reading achievement. The proficiency standard **was not met by 20% of Year 4 students in Australia** and this score has remained consistent in the earlier PIRLS assessment survey conducted in 2016. At Sacred Heart our data fairs much better than this; our results are **above national and state average**, based on the NAPLAN assessment. However, we are always aiming to **improve on that progress!** The research is telling us that while reading is more challenging for some students than others, with **evidence-based reading instruction**, nearly every child can become proficient by the end of **Year 3**. With the research available to us now, we can realistically set a **95% proficiency as our goal in the next three years**. Decades of research have determined that reading occurs in a specific way in the brain in all people. It **does not occur naturally** the way that speech does. This process must be taught! Literacy, by which we mean reading, writing, and spelling are a set of biologically secondary skills, whereas oral language is biologically primary. Reading and writing are taught through a process of building neuro-pathways in the brain that links sounds of speech to written symbols or letters. The strings of letters are attached to meaning and those ‘letter strings with meaning’ are stored in the brain’s letterbox for later retrieval that is **instantaneous and effortless**. This process is called **orthographic mapping** and it is our goal to help our students to build a giant letterbox of instantly retrievable words. That translates into **fluent reading** and subsequent **comprehension**. **Guessing at words based on context** does not aid in orthographic mapping, **phonic decoding** does.

## A New Path at Sacred Heart Sandringham

If your family has been a part of Sacred Heart for some time, you will notice some changes in how we teach reading. If you're new to Sacred Heart, jump on board, it is going to be a fantastic journey! It's an exciting time to be in education as we align our instruction with the science of reading!

Listed on the next page are some points of research that we will be addressing as we embark on a new school year at Sacred Heart Sandringham

## Code of Emphasis in Primary Grades

This means that Years Prep to Two will focus on acquiring the skills to crack the code of our alphabet to speech signs in English. (There are 44 speech sounds in English and 150 ways to spell and read them!) Kids must first learn to decode/sound-out words before they can understand the meaning of text, therefore, we will emphasise instruction in 'cracking the code' in Years Prep to Two.

## Explicit and Systematic Phonics Instruction

We will have an order or continuum of phonics skills, progressing from simple to complex, that will be followed throughout the early years. Students will progress through the continuum as they master the skills in the middle to senior years, the study of words will continue with grammar and morphology (learning about the word parts such as Greek and Latin roots).

## Early Intervention

If we see any signs that your child may be struggling with the foundational skills of reading, we will not take a 'wait and see' approach; we will immediately implement interventions and monitor their progress. The best solution to the problem of reading failure is early identification and intervention.

## Phonemic Awareness

This is the ability to get to the individual sounds in words by listening and to identify and manipulate those signs orally. While this skill will be emphasized in the Years Prep to Two, we will make sure all students at Sacred Heart have this necessary foundation. Students in the middle to upper years may need to practice these skills until they have confidently grasped this foundation of reading. Don't be surprised if you have a Grade 3- 6 student working on phonemic awareness as research has indicated this is hugely important!

## Decodable Readers

Our early readers will be working with decodable readers not leveled readers. These are books and passages that only include words that the students can 'decode' (sound out) according to the skills they have been taught thus far. Our kids need practice with the phonics skills they are learning and these books and passages provide that practice. So be aware that at times, your child may be bringing home a sheet of paper with a passage for practice rather than a book. They will not bring home books with patterned sentences that are easily memorised.

## Assessments

Your child will not be assigned a Fountas & Pinnell reading level such as A or M or R. Students will be assessed using the Dibel's assessment which is standardised for their Year level. These nationally normed, quick assessments give us a good indication of how easy or difficult reading is for your child. As students become proficient word readers, comprehension is a natural outcome. Comprehension will also be checked within our assessments. If your child shows a weakness in any area they will be progress monitored and given interventions to support them in their area of weakness.

## Leveled Readers

Your child will not be assigned a reading level that corresponds to a letter of the alphabet. They will work with a variety of texts. Some texts may address specific phonics needs, some may be grade level text to build knowledge that is pertinent to their grade level, some may be interest-based, some will be at a determined level for fluency practice but they will not be confined to a certain level. Prep and Year One students will not bring home books with patterned sentences that are easily memorised.

## Three Cueing System

This is the practice of teaching kids to identify words by using strategies other than decoding. In the three cueing system students are taught that they can identify a word by deciding if it makes sense, if it would structurally/grammatically 'fit' in a sentence, or if it looks right rather than closely examining the phonics patterns in the word and sounding it out. This is a practice that the research has indicated that we must abandon. Your child will not be taught to check pictures to identify words or make guesses based on the first letter that they see. We want our students to look at every letter in the word, apply phonics knowledge, and sound words out!

## Knowledge Building and Vocabulary

Research has indicated that reading comprehension is closely connected to the background knowledge we have on a topic we're reading about and by understanding the vocabulary contained in the text. Students at Sacred Heart will have the opportunity to build a broad knowledge base of history/social studies, science and the arts. Kids will have access to complex text often read aloud by their teacher and in the process gain more complex vocabulary. The research tells us that building knowledge and vocabulary contributes significantly to their reading comprehension and should be taught beginning in the earliest grades.

## Comprehension

The ultimate goal of all reading instruction is for students to understand what they read. The model of The Simple View of Reading demonstrates that reading comprehension occurs only when students have both Decoding/Word Recognition Skills and Language Comprehension Skills. Children need the essential skills to get the words off the page as well as knowledge, vocabulary, and a good understanding of how our language works in order to comprehend what they read. We must provide instruction that helps students achieve these goals. Because the operator in this formula is a multiplication sign, we are reminded that if the value on either side is zero, then the product will be zero.

## The Simple View of Reading

Word  
Recognition

X

Language  
Comprehension

=

Reading  
Comprehension



## QUICK CHECKLIST

# HOW IS READING TAUGHT AT YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL?

- A systematic synthetic phonics (SSP) program that teaches letter-sound relationships in a clear sequence and how to “blend” letter sounds together to form words.
  - Use of ‘decodable books’ containing words that can be sounded out (decoded) using the phonics skills your child has learned.
  - Home reading guidance that encourages students to use phonics skills as a first strategy for working out unfamiliar words.
  - Vocabulary, grammar, punctuation and sentence structure taught explicitly supported by quality children’s literature.
  - Evidence-based screening tools, such as the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check.
- Methods based on “whole language or balanced literacy” philosophies of reading acquisition.
  - Long lists of ‘sight words” (i.e., Oxford 100, Dolch) to memorise.
  - Slow teaching of letter sounds (e.g., one letter a week).
  - Discourages decoding as a first strategy and promotes multiple reading strategies, including guessing from picture and meaning cues and skipping words altogether (“Skippy Frog”).
  - Home readers for practice that rely on predictable text or levelled readers that contain many words a child has yet to be explicitly taught in class.
  - Use of inaccurate assessment tools such as Running Records.

Multitit/Five from Five



## Parent Tips

# Support Word Reading Success

**Use these to support a reader stuck on a word**

**READ LEFT TO RIGHT**  
Direct the reader to work from left to right when reading

**LOOK AT THE LETTERS**  
Paying attention to the letters and the structure of the word is important. Prompting readers to look at the word teaching them to focus on the word rather than guessing using pictures.

**SOUND OUT THE WORD**  
Encourage the reader to point to the letters and sound out the word. Tracking with a finger helps focus the reader.

**BLEND THE SOUNDS TOGETHER**  
Blending the sounds to form a word is an important step in becoming a fluent reader. After sounding out always encourage blending to form a whole word.

**SAY THE WORD OUT LOUD**  
When learning to read, saying the words out loud helps the reader hear the words and then think about their meaning.

**TALK ABOUT THE MEANING**  
If the reader doesn't recognise the word, tell them the meaning or use the context to discuss the new vocabulary.

**Word Attack Tips**  
Use these tips to support a reader to attack new words

**MORPHEMES**  
Many words have meaningful parts called morphemes (e.g. suffixes, prefixes and base words). Analyse those first:  
unwanted- un + want + ed  
prediction- pre + dict + ion

**SYLLABLES CAN HELP**  
English spelling is not syllabic but sometimes helping a reader break down larger words into smaller syllables can help:  
fan/bas/ic  
won/der/ful

**SOUND OUT THE WORD**  
Encourage the reader to point to the letters and sound out the word. Tracking with a finger helps focus the reader:  
s-l-i-p = slip  
l-ear-sh = leash

**BLEND THE SOUNDS TOGETHER**  
Teach the reader blending strategies to deal with new words:  
Additive blending: s...sa...sat/r...ra...rain  
Continuous Phonation = sssssaaaat = sat / rrrrrainmm = rain

**SAY THE WORD OUT LOUD**  
When learning to read, saying the words out loud helps the reader hear the words and then think about their meaning.  
“Have I heard this word before?”

**WRITE IT OUT**  
Practising spelling the word can help encode that word to long term memory for automatic recall when reading.

**Blending Strategies**  
Use these blending strategies to help students read through the word when they are stuck

**Segment and blend**

m a p

'map'

**Connected phonation**

mmm aaa p

'map'

**Additive blending**

m ma map

'map'

speldnsw