

A parent's guide to...

Literacy

As a parent, literacy is probably the area that you are most determined for your child to succeed in. It is important, both in school and in life, and being able to read and write confidently and fluently are vital skills that we all need.

Literacy – or the lack of it – often forms the main focus of any media coverage of education, and politicians of all persuasions are keen to pronounce on the merits or otherwise of various approaches. It has, quite understandably, become the measure of success, both of individuals and entire systems and approaches.

We all have our own distant memories of learning how to read and write – perhaps the sense of achievement and possibility that it brought, and the confidence it gave us in all areas of life and schooling.

As your child begins to grow and mature, it is perfectly normal for you to refer back to these experiences as templates for supporting them in acquiring these most important of skills. However, it is also important to be aware of what we know about how children learn to read and write.

Over the past 20 years or so, a huge amount of research has been undertaken to establish the facts, and we are now in a much better position to see



Children become aware of meaning from quite young and start asking questions

what works, how it works and how best to enable children to read and write successfully.

What helps most when learning to read and write?

LANGUAGE

Fundamental to literacy skills is a well-developed use and understanding of language, so talking to your child at every opportunity is crucial. Educationalist James Britton once said that 'Reading and writing float on a sea of talk', and it is no surprise that having a good vocabulary, understanding of sentence structure and the ability to communicate effectively using the spoken word are directly linked to later reading and writing. After all, what we

read or write is simply what has been said and then recorded, and this is not possible without the language that allows it to happen.

PLAY

Aligned to the role of language is children's opportunity to play, of equal importance. All learning and understanding depends on this – and literacy is no exception. When children play, they make sense of what they have learned or seen and make it 'real' for themselves so that they know how to use it.

Literacy play will involve those underpinning skills of language through talking, conversing, thinking out loud, questioning, imagining, storytelling and finding out. ➤