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Dear Parents and Caregivers,

This year we are focussing on teaching students to read using primarily a phonics strategy. This means that we want students to learn the sounds most commonly made by letters and groups of letters, and use these sounds to work out words. Remember we are teaching them the sounds, not the names of letters or sight words. We call this learning the ‘Code’ for reading and then we practise using the code.

***“If a child memorises ten words, the child can read only ten words, but if a child learns the sounds of ten letters, the child will be able to read 350 three sound words, 4,320 four sound words and 21,650 five sound words.” (Martin Kozloff, 2002)***

Sounding out words should be the first strategy your child uses when reading each word. We want them to make sure they read the sounds left to right all the way from the start of the word until the end. This will reduce the amount of guessing they do and errors they make.

There are many words that are difficult to read using the most common sounds letters make such as ‘said’ and ‘was’. We say that these words have tricky parts. In the word ‘said,’ the ‘s’ and ‘d’ sounds are made by the ‘s’ and ‘d’ but the ‘e’ sound in the middle is made in a tricky way-by the ‘ai.’ This is something to talk about with your child.

At school we will be reading decodable books which are books that have mostly decodable words (words that are made by common sounds). Student will progress through the books by learning 1-2 new sounds each week in groups of students at their level. We don’t want to overload our students with all the sounds at once because they won’t remember them and they will become frustrated and lose confidence.

For home reading in Year One we will be sending home books at a reading level lower than last year. The reason for this is because our home readers aren’t decodable books and have a lot of words that have ‘tricky’ parts. We don’t want your child to become frustrated by the code not working and use other strategies such as guessing by looking at the first letter of a word or looking at the picture. If your child comes to a tricky word and they can’t work it out, please just tell them the word. Please don’t worry about the level your child is on, this is not a focus of the home reading. Reading needs to be enjoyable and students need the story to flow. Students need to achieve success, not spend 30 seconds on one word.

Reading other books to your child is very important. You can model phrasing and how punctuation affects how we read, eg. a small pause at a comma and a longer one at a full stop. Talk with your child about speech marks and show them about using expression when we read.

Ask them lots of questions during and after the story, whether they read it or you. You can ask them about what is happening in the story, what they think might happen next, how the characters are feeling, what they know about things in the story. It is a great opportunity to introduce new words to your child’s vocabulary.

Thank you for taking the time to read this and please don’t hesitate to speak to your child’s teacher if you have any questions about our reading program. Remember not to put pressure on your child, encourage and praise their efforts. The most important part of reading is the enjoyment of it.

Kind Regards and Happy Reading Together,

Simone Elliott, Graham Enright and Anne Jones, February 2016