

## ***Developing Reading in Hammersmith and Fulham during the COVID-19 pandemic***

### **Overview**

In June 2020, Hammersmith and Fulham's primary advisory team began to review reading provision with reading leaders in eight primary schools and one special school during the lockdown triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our aim was to explore the challenges faced by schools with remote reading across the primary school stages. It was remarkable how schools overcame many of the initial difficulties and began to develop effective remote reading strategies and practices across the age groups.

In this report we have captured some examples of schools' best attempts to meet the pandemic with innovative and sometimes exciting initiatives; nonetheless these remain partial solutions. Everyone knows there is still far more to do should there be another lockdown.

Since this fieldwork project was undertaken, the government has issued extensive advice and guidance to support schools' full re-opening.<sup>1</sup> Our recommendations are based on this advice, reading leaders' ongoing concerns about remote reading, Ofsted's evaluation criteria for reading<sup>2</sup>, and recent expert research findings.<sup>3</sup>

### **Methodology**

The primary advisers, Lesley Leak and Teresa Kiely, assisted by Ruth Dollner HMI, interviewed reading leaders about their schools' experiences of managing reading during lockdown.<sup>4</sup> All of these discussions, based on a wide range of questions, were held remotely online. At the final session, each reading leader presented an aspect of good reading practice, undertaken at his/her school during lockdown, to the rest of the group.

The primary advisory team has drawn together key themes and lessons learned from the interviews and presentations to inform this report.

### **Findings**

Everyone agreed there were many challenges to overcome to secure effective progress in reading during lockdown. Here is a list of the issues that were raised:

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools>

<sup>2</sup> See Annex A of this report, where Ofsted's reading criteria is reproduced in full.

<sup>3</sup> <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk> See Annex for precise details

<sup>4</sup> Ruth Dollner, HMI, was redeployed to Hammersmith and Fulham for during lockdown from Ofsted.

- How do we ensure that the home/school reading programme of books is matched to younger children's phonic abilities and continues remotely?
- How do we enable children to access reading materials that promote language development, motivation and interest?
- How do we loan out reading texts, or take in and assess children's written reading homework when there are COVID-19 safety restrictions on handling paper and card?
- How do we teach new phonemes and extend children's blending and segmenting skills?
- How do we develop a rigorous remote reading programme for our youngest children who struggle with sustained concentration?
- How do we develop deduction and inference skills when we cannot interact with the children to build on their learning?
- How do we support reading when children cannot interact with one another? This is particularly important in English, where reading for meaning is underpinned by high quality speaking and listening?
- How do we support parents to help and encourage their children's reading development? This applies particularly to phonics, hearing reading, and sharing a book with younger children?
- How do we up-skill all parents so that they know to use the school's chosen technology to help their children access and successfully use online resources?
- How do we ensure all children read regularly and maintain their reading fluency?
- How do we assess children's reading remotely to enable them to tackle more demanding texts?
- How do we ensure that remote learning offered matches our typical school reading curriculum?
- How do we ensure that no child slips through the net because they do not have access to online learning?

- What do we do with children and families who do not engage in remote learning?<sup>5</sup>

### **Some solutions emerged:**

**All reading leaders placed a high emphasis on developing a love of reading** and motivating pupils to read during lockdown. Leaders identified a range of successes. They found that 'live' interactions between teachers and pupils developed enthusiasm for reading. Many teachers made videos of themselves reading books and stories on *Youtube*. Some made individual calls to pupils to hear them read or talk about their reading. Teachers found this strategy to be particularly successful with vulnerable pupils or those less likely to engage with online learning. Some teachers led *Zoom* live guided reading lessons for lower attaining pupils and another participant described how a book club was run online for the most able readers.

One school created a 'lockdown' library, which enabled parents and pupils to collect books from the school gates on a regular basis. For some, this became the sole reason for venturing out during lockdown. Staff were scrupulous in ensuring books were cleaned and safe to use. Some reading leaders personally delivered books to children's homes. One school invited all pupils with a parent/carer into school once a week to listen to a story and to talk about key themes. They sat on mats two metres apart on the playground and were delighted to have the opportunity to talk about the text they read together. Another school introduced 'guest stars'; trainee teachers and ex members of staff who were encouraged to set challenges and read stories to children online.

One school introduced a 'waiting list' for books; this suddenly made books incredibly popular! Reading leaders said that competitions helped enthuse pupils to read more often and more widely. In one school pupils recorded their book reviews so that their peers could hear about their recommendations.

Reading leaders reflected on lessons learned from the experience and agreed that 'live' peer-to-peer interaction and adult-to-pupil interactions were the most effective strategies to motivate children, when learning at home.

**All schools prioritised phonics in their remote learning offer and used online resources with varying success.**<sup>6</sup> In the beginning, schools

---

<sup>5</sup> We have used the term remote learning throughout the report to define learning of any type that takes place when children are at home. Online learning is used to refer to materials that can be accessed via the internet (either live or pre-recorded lessons and resources). The term 'paper packs' is used to refer to materials for children to work on at home.

<sup>6</sup> The schools all acknowledged the need to underpin early reading with effective speaking and listening skills, and this was often best achieved with active playful learning. Some schools started with paper packs and only gradually introduced online texts.

found it challenging to deliver a reading programme to the youngest of their children where it relied on parental support. All schools reported making compromises.

As lockdown proceeded, schools found alternative ways of dealing with online learning for the children and planned support for parents too. One school gave parents access to videos of effective phonics teaching.<sup>7</sup> All schools found online materials or resources to guide parents in articulating phonemes correctly.<sup>8</sup> One school sent out weekly parental guidance along with an email and telephone support, flash cards and sound charts. Children at this school followed the same planned phonics progression at home as would have been undertaken at school. Another school offered regular phonics lessons on *Youtube* for key Stage 1 pupils. Some teachers used software such as Google Classroom to pre-record their phonic sessions. Some schools used easily available online national literacy lessons.<sup>9</sup>

In discussions with the reading leaders about early phonics practice, particularly where lessons were available online, there were as many questions as answers. Leaders' sticking points were around how young children needed to have support in accessing online materials; how much time they should spend online; how to apply their new phoneme by decoding it in meaningful text, and how to make learning interactive.

A range of phonics websites such as *Reading Eggs*, *Alpha Blocks* and *Phonics Play* were used in the planning and delivery of phonic sessions. One school provided home learning packs for the pupils currently in Year 2 who did not meet the requirements of the phonics screening check. The work focused on the phonics progression for Year 1. Most of the schools in the sample planned to provide pupils with 'summer holiday learning' packs that also prioritised phonics.

Teachers in two schools targeted pupils, who were not engaging in reading remotely and appeared to be falling behind, by establishing routine phone calls to the children with their parents. This strategy enabled teachers to establish reading routines and reading support for these vulnerable children. For example, teachers would ask children in this group to read an extract of text over the phone and give individual guidance on what to work on next.

**Reading leaders identified a range of resources they felt worked well to support pupils' reading during lockdown.** The reading leader in the special school setting, reported that pupils with the special educational needs benefited from the online prerecorded lessons and 'real time' learning opportunities that were available through *Firefly*.

---

<sup>7</sup> <https://wandleenglishhub.org.uk/lettersandsounds>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MOW3pB2KwGA> or [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BqhXUW\\_v-1s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BqhXUW_v-1s)

<sup>9</sup> *The Oak National Academy*: <https://www.thenational.academy>

Some schools found that electronic books such as *Oxford Owl* and/or *Big Cat Phonics* were enjoyed by pupils. Reading leaders reported that *Google classroom* had been the most useful to use with Key stage 2 pupils. They said they would have liked more opportunities to have 'real time' guided reading sessions but this was hard to organise where children did not have access to the appropriate technology.

The special school and one other primary school in the sample had ensured that all their pupils had the necessary equipment to be able to work online. These schools had made sure that appropriate safeguarding protocols were established between home and school when requiring children to work online.

Several reading leaders highlighted the value of using audio books and reported that some children with English as an additional language would then benefit from reading and hearing stories in their own language. During lockdown Hammersmith and Fulham provided remote access to books in their library collection and in one school half the children took advantage of this resource.<sup>10</sup>

The reading leaders reported that there is an abundance of online resources for pupils to practice their comprehension skills by answering questions related to texts. Some schools had access to *Accelerated Reader* which asks children to complete online quizzes when they have finished reading a book. However, all reading leaders agreed that reading independently all of the time could not replace quality discourse around texts that take place within interactive 'live' guided reading sessions.

Some leaders spoke very highly about the *Reading Eggs app* because of its competitive element where children collect *eggs* as rewards for reading achievements.

**Leaders identified a range of ways in which they assessed pupils' reading development during lockdown.** Schools were more confident about checking pupils' engagement with reading activities rather than progress in reading. They explained how it was more problematic to evaluate children's progress without regularly hearing them read or discussing texts with them. Some schools referred to software such as *Accelerated Reader* that charts children's progress through progressively challenging texts and the completion of online quizzes; others referred to checks they made on children's resilience and frequency of reading alongside the number of texts they had read. A few leaders reported gauging pupils' interest in texts through comments made on *Google Classroom* and through online book reviews. To increase motivation, teachers reported arranging for 'shout outs' about children's reading achievements during online assemblies and pre-recorded videos.

---

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.lbhf.gov.uk/libraries/online-and-audio-visual-resources>

Most leaders prioritised the importance of securing accurate assessments of children's reading and comprehension skills when schools reopened in the autumn, and all said they needed to create robust catch up plans to get children back on track.

**Schools found a lack of technology at home to have an impact on pupils' reading and learning.**<sup>11</sup> All schools found it a significant challenge to ensure that every child in their school had access to technology despite their best efforts. It seemed that older siblings at home tended to have priority access where equipment was limited. One school invited those pupils who did not have access to technology back into school for some face-to-face sessions. At the very least, all schools provided 'paper packs' of materials to support children's reading but all of the leaders in the sample were aware that this was not always the most effective method.

**Schools used a range of ways to support and engage with parents during lockdown.** All reading leaders said that they had provided comprehensive paper packs of materials to support children at home with reading, as well as guiding them to online reading resources. One school offered parents video material to show them what a 'good' phonics lesson looks like. Reading leaders also modelled how to make reading sessions more interesting. Some leaders described how enthusiastic parents were at the start of lockdown about supporting their children's reading but then 'ran out of steam'. This led to discussions around how to maintain pupils' and their parents' interest in reading activities should a lockdown occur again. For example, reading leaders felt that pre-recording instructions for use of the required technology and/or online live interactive sessions with parents would be helpful.

In every school there were several parents or carers who did not or could not engage with the school and were therefore unable to support their children with home learning. This remains one of the deepest concerns for schools.

However, on this note, some schools reported some unexpected 'surprises' when pupils returned to school in June. Some parents who were working from home had been able to read with their children more than usual. This meant that while some pupils had made significant improvements in their reading; others, particularly those who had not engaged with the school, had not and the widened achievement gap in reading was felt to be one of the schools' biggest challenges for the autumn term.

**Leaders agreed that there were a proportion of pupils in each school who did not engage with reading at home.** Reasons for this were many

---

<sup>11</sup> See references to 1) Increasing children's internet access through free BT hotspots: <https://get-help-with-tech.education.gov.uk/about-bt-wifi> and 2) increasing the laptops available to children: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/get-help-with-technology-for-remote-education-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

and varied across the schools. While the main barriers were a lack of technology and parental engagement, some reading leaders found that pupils who were 'school refusers' were also reluctant to use technology to access learning. All reading leaders struggled to support those parents who spoke little or no English during lockdown because of communication difficulties. Consequently, children who were beginners in English, were encouraged to read books with their parents, written in their first language as well as in English to increase their reading fluency.<sup>12</sup>

Leaders in all schools recognise that the pupils who did not maintain contact during lockdown will need significant support to settle back to school and to all kinds of learning, including reading, when they return.

---

<sup>12</sup> One participant used online books such as those from Mantra Lingua have dual language texts but have costs attached: <https://uk.mantralingua.com/kitabu>

## **Recommendations:**

The Primary Advisory Team has made the following recommendations that schools may wish to consider once schools resume in September 2020. If schools experience full or partial closures, as predicted, there are some useful suggestions here for operating a 'blended learning' approach in the Remote Learning section, at the end of this report.

### ***Catch up phonics***

Prepare Year 2 children to take the Phonic Screening Check in Autumn 2.<sup>13</sup>

Ensure all Year 3 children who did not achieve phonic screening in 2019 receive the catch-up support they need. For example:

- using soft data, assess all the Year 3 children in Autumn 1 to identify which children will need phonic support;
- design a phonics intervention programme that matches the recommendations of the Education Endowment Fund<sup>14</sup>;
- teach whole class phonics if this is still needed at the start of the autumn term.

Ensure that the youngest children continue to develop rich speaking and listening skills and that those behind 'catch up' quickly.<sup>15</sup>

### ***Matching phonemic knowledge with the right reading materials***

Review your school's early reading resources so that banded books (which are not necessarily all decodable) enable children to apply their current phonic knowledge when tackling continuous text by:

- making sure that phonemes and graphemes, taught in phonics sessions, are reinforced at every opportunity when books are shared with the whole class;
- ensuring that children have opportunities to 'bump into phonics' many times during the school day.

### ***Prioritising reading from September onwards***

Assess pupils' reading ability on return to school sensitively; for example:

---

<sup>13</sup> The details of the autumn term phonic screening check in Year 2 are now available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/914784/Administering\\_the\\_phonics\\_screening\\_check\\_to\\_year\\_2\\_pupils\\_in\\_the\\_2020\\_autumn\\_term\\_PDFA.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/914784/Administering_the_phonics_screening_check_to_year_2_pupils_in_the_2020_autumn_term_PDFA.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> The EEF says that there is strong evidence that one-to-one tuition is an effective way to improve literacy and is interested in structured TA led programmes (see Annex for recommendations on the use of TAs in interventions). Individual and small group catch up for literacy might also be dealt with through the National Tutoring Programme: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/covid-19-resources/national-tutoring-programme/>

<sup>15</sup> The Education Endowment Fund has the offer of free intervention support, The Nuffield Early Language intervention (NELI) details at: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/nuffield-early-language-intervention/>



- when listening to children read, evaluate their reading fluency, understanding and use of decoding skills to identify and provide for lost learning;
- use formal assessments when children are emotionally ready so that early support and intervention can be given.

Provide children with high quality texts that are suitable challenging to enable them to apply and consolidate their reading skills that might have been fragmented in lockdown.

Read aloud to children to increase their vocabulary, thinking skills and love of reading.<sup>16</sup>

Increase older children's familiarity with a wide range of books including myths, legends and traditional stories, fiction from our literary heritage and books from other cultures and traditions.

Provide early readers with phonic books that are fully decodable, matches their phonic level and so are very satisfying to read independently.

Where children have struggled with reading over the lockdown period, consider personalising 'I can' targets to build confidence.

### ***Transition Priorities***

Provide Year 6 with a rigorous programme of whole texts, which enables them to 'catch up' with the demands of the end of year reading expectations.

Build a robust early phonics programme in Reception that includes, from the beginning, decoding simple texts.

Check Year 3 readers to ensure that they have moved from learning to read to reading for meaning.

### ***CPD for reading leaders new to phonics***

Prioritise training in phonics for any new staff or staff who have changed year groups and are new to phonics:

- give clear guidance on how to apply phonics learning into reading continuous text
- consider creating a library of pre-recorded phonics lessons to use with different pupil groups, as homework, and as CPD for leaders new to phonics.

---

<sup>16</sup> Listen to Mary Myatt on reading aloud to children: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZkN09SmopDY>

## ***Reading and the recovery curriculum***

Consider using texts about emotional resilience to meet the requirements of the recovery curriculum across a range of subject areas.<sup>17</sup>

### **Planning reading activities when remote learning is necessary:**

- Make sure every child across the school has enough reading materials, including real books when they are learning at home.
- Ensure that books and e-reading materials offered to children cover a wide range of genres.
- Provide an overview for pupils and their families (either a video talk through or paper plans) that show how the reading activities link together.
- Communicate to parents/carers:
  - the best ways to read to younger children;<sup>18</sup>
  - how to help children to read independently using their growing decoding skills.
  - how best to share reading texts with children, who are fluent readers, to develop deeper understandings.
- Consider providing pupils with reading challenges that encourage them to collaborate with their peers.
- Encourage tactile activities that enable children to engage in planned purposeful play with their parents/carers.
- Build a bank of online lessons and resources that can be drawn down should there be another lockdown.
- Use your bank of online lessons for CPD, catch up lessons and for remote work with small groups.
- Try to include 'real time' remote teaching of reading with groups of children.

---

<sup>17</sup> CLPE have published a free two week recovery curriculum programme that can be used from EYFS to Year 6 around Oliver Jeffer's book, *'Here we are, notes for planet earth.'* <https://clpe.org.uk/aboutus/news/clpes-recovery-curriculum-primary-schools-teaching-notes-here-we-are-notes-planet-earth>

<sup>18</sup> The D of E has published guidance for parents: 'Ten Tops for parents to support children to read: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/10-top-tips-to-encourage-children-to-read/10-top-tips-to-encourage-children-to-read>

- Where you are using the nationally available online reading or phonics lessons, check that they are appropriate for the ability range in your classes.
- If you are using pre-recorded online reading materials, make sure these form part of your weekly planning for reading, not as stand alone lessons.

**Many thanks to the schools who took part in this project:**

Avonmore  
 Ark Conway  
 Good Shepherd RC  
 Holy Cross RC  
 Queens Mill  
 Wormholt  
 Larmenier and Sacred Heart  
 Old Oak  
 Flora Gardens

**Addendum**

We have included, in the annexes, a range of useful references that will support schools with planning a robust reading curriculum, across all ages. The most recent government advice says that schools need to offer a high quality reading curriculum regardless of where this is delivered. The aspiration is for remote learning to be as good as it can be, so that no pupils are disadvantaged. The references are up to date and were accessed on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2020.

**Annexes**

|         |        |   |
|---------|--------|---|
| Annex A | p12    | Ofsted’s current reading criteria                                 |
| Annex B | p13-14 | Resources and advice from the Education Endowment Fund            |
| Annex C | p 15   | EYFS and overall guidance from the government for remote learning |

## **Annex A: Ofsted's (Nov 19 ) Inspection Handbook**

### **Reading section:**

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/843108/School\\_inspection\\_handbook\\_-\\_section\\_5.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/843108/School_inspection_handbook_-_section_5.pdf)

### **Applying the EIF to the teaching of early reading in infant, junior, primary and lower-middle schools**

***Of particular importance is p87-88, point 298; this is reproduced in full***

In reaching an evaluation against the 'quality of education' judgement, inspectors will consider whether:

- the school is determined that every pupil will learn to read, regardless of their background, needs or abilities. All pupils, including the weakest readers, make sufficient progress to meet or exceed age-related expectations
- stories, poems, rhymes and non-fiction are chosen for reading to develop pupils' vocabulary, language comprehension and love of reading. Pupils are familiar with and enjoy listening to a wide range of stories, poems, rhymes and non-fiction
- the school's phonics programme matches or exceeds the expectations of the national curriculum and the early learning goals. The school has clear expectations of pupils' phonics progress term-by-term, from Reception to Year 2
- the sequence of reading books shows a cumulative progression in phonics knowledge that is matched closely to the school's phonics programme. Teachers give pupils sufficient practice in reading and re-reading books that match the grapheme-phoneme correspondences they know, both at school and at home
- reading, including the teaching of systematic, synthetic phonics, is taught from the beginning of Reception
- the ongoing assessment of pupils' phonics progress is sufficiently frequent and detailed to identify any pupil who is falling behind the programme's pace. If they do fall behind, targeted support is given immediately
- the school has developed sufficient expertise in the teaching of phonics and reading.

## **Annex B Education Endowment Fund references**

### **Literacy specific:**

Preparing for literacy – Seven recommendations to support improving early language and literacy:

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/tools/guidance-reports/preparing-for-literacy/>

Improving literacy in KS1 – Eight recommendations to support the literacy of 5 – 7 year olds:

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/tools/guidance-reports/literacy-ks-1/>

Improving literacy at KS2 – details to be published during this autumn term, see comment in:

[https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/news/eef-blog-key-stage-1-literacy/?utm\\_source=site&utm\\_medium=search&utm\\_campaign=site\\_search&search\\_term=reading%20literacy%20ks](https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/news/eef-blog-key-stage-1-literacy/?utm_source=site&utm_medium=search&utm_campaign=site_search&search_term=reading%20literacy%20ks)

Early Years speaking and listening programme:

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/nuffield-early-language-intervention/>

### **Interventions and catch up**

Making the best use of Teaching Assistants:

[https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/tools/guidance-reports/making-bestuse-of-teachingassistants/?utm\\_source=site&utm\\_medium=search&utm\\_campaign=site\\_search&search\\_term=teaching%20assistant](https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/tools/guidance-reports/making-bestuse-of-teachingassistants/?utm_source=site&utm_medium=search&utm_campaign=site_search&search_term=teaching%20assistant)

Poster of key recommendations for the effective use of TAs

[https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Publications/Teaching\\_Assistants/TA\\_RecommendationsSummary.pdf](https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Publications/Teaching_Assistants/TA_RecommendationsSummary.pdf)

National Tutoring Programme

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/covid-19-resources/national-tutoringprogramme/>

### **Special Educational Needs in mainstream schools**

Five recommendations on special educational needs in mainstream schools:

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/tools/guidance-reports/special-educational-needs-disabilities/>

## **Annex C**

### **Early Years**

Bold Beginnings (Ofsted publication on the Reception curriculum in good and outstanding schools):

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reception-curriculum-in-good-and-outstanding-primary-schools-bold-beginnings>

Revised Development Matters – September 2020 (non statutory curriculum guidance for the EYFS):

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/914443/Development\\_Matters\\_-\\_Non-statutory\\_curriculum\\_guidance\\_for\\_the\\_early\\_years\\_foundation\\_stage\\_1\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/914443/Development_Matters_-_Non-statutory_curriculum_guidance_for_the_early_years_foundation_stage_1_.pdf)

### **Remote Learning from September 2020**

Guidance for opening: schools (includes Section 5: Contingency planning for outbreaks, with a comprehensive section on remote learning):

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools>