

# Elevating Literacy Learning in Junior Primary

Literacy learning in our Junior Primary years, Prep to Year 2, is continuing to be elevated this term, with all boys engaged in their specific programs through a variety of rich learning opportunities. The considered and evidence-based introduction of structured synthetic phonics (SSP) as a component of our literacy teaching in the Junior Primary years has enhanced our broader literacy program through increased rigor in combined reading and spelling instruction.

The introduction of SSP as part of our literacy program in Prep to Year 2 this year has led to some experiences of change for both boys and families. Like any experience of change, initially the differences between the new and previous experience may seem amplified. As the boys continue their learning, settling into the updated learning program, we trust this feeling of change will lessen over time.

## **What changes the boys are experiencing, and why:**

This year, elements of the boys' learning in literacy have been restructured to be more phonics-focused, combining elements of reading and spelling instruction in an efficient model. Instructional time each morning is focused on specific sound-letter correspondences, moving through a highly structured sequence of learning in which boys are explicitly taught how sounds and letters are connected.

The explicit instruction of SSP provides necessary opportunities for practise and repetition towards all boys reaching mastery of both reading (decoding) and spelling (encoding). Whilst spelling and reading skills are inextricably linked, spelling skills can be slower to develop for many children. Without repetition and highly structured learning, the gap between reading and spelling skills and foundational language understanding can remain over time.

Without SSP, children may appear to be 'good decoders' initially but may also be poor spellers and are much more likely to have less robust skills they can use to read and spell more complex vocabulary. In this case, children over-rely on memorising words without necessarily developing true understanding.

One of the key benefits of SSP is its systematised approach, leading to fewer 'gaps' in learning and children are less likely to experience challenges with literacy later in schooling. Naturally, structured opportunities for practise may mean that initial learning feels 'slower' for some boys but in fact, the initial 'slower' lead-in creates a more solid foundation to move on to more complex learning more efficiently.

Our structured synthetic phonics program allows classroom teachers the space to differentiate and customise learning tasks for individual students. Our staff also use the data from ongoing assessments to inform them where to apply stretch within a lesson to help personalise the learning experience for each boy.

### **What changes families may be experiencing, and why:**

As part of providing further opportunities for practice and repetition towards mastery, families may be experiencing some change with take-home readers. By reading decodable books linked to the sound-letter patterns that have been explicitly taught, boys are able to practise their developing skills using texts that don't require them to 'guess at' words and inadvertently develop misunderstandings or less than ideal reading habits. Again, this may initially feel 'slower', and families may find some books overly simple but this is by design.

Most tennis fans don't see the four hours of practice Rafael Nadal applies to his craft each day. Yet it is this highly structured and repeated practice that has elevated him to a champion in his chosen sport. At Scotch, we would like all boys to master the essential skills of English and become champions in their chosen fields.

As boys progress through their structured learning in literacy, the decodable books will reflect this progression through an increasing range of spelling patterns, broader vocabulary and more complex storylines or content. We encourage families to continue to include school library and home books in home reading routines, reading both to and with boys in addition to those books sent home.

As we move into Semester Two, the school is looking to create opportunities for parents to see our literacy program being taught to the boys in the classroom setting. We look forward to welcoming families into school next semester to see this learning in action. *We encourage parents to read [The Torch](#) regularly for our ongoing updates about literacy learning in Junior Primary.*

Some families may be aware of the recent report the Grattan Institute released in February of this year which proposed a national '[Reading Guarantee](#)' to improve Australian children's literacy skills. The report makes the strong argument that transformation in the way we teach reading is needed to ensure that all children are afforded the 'best chance in life'. This is not only our aspiration at Scotch; it should be the goal at every school.

For some further context, families may like to read below for a further explanation of Structured Synthetic Phonics (SSP) – what it is and why it is a critical element to developing successful readers – and suggestions for home reading routines.

### ***How to support your son's reading at home***

Making reading and Storytime part of your son's daily routine will help build a strong foundation for academic success and foster a lifelong love of reading. Home reading routines should be diverse and include a variety of texts in addition to decodable books.

To support your son's reading at home, we encourage parents to consider home reading routines which include a balance of having boys **read to you**, as well as reading **with** and **to** your sons. As boys' knowledge of sound-letter patterns grows, they may use their skills in day-to-day experiences such as highlighting letter patterns in the subtitles of a Bluey episode.

***Boys reading to you*** – boys in Prep and Year 1 should practise their skills using the decodable books sent home. These books are specifically designed to practise the sound-letter relationships they have learnt at school. Encourage your son to use his knowledge to sound out and blend unknown words. Avoid guessing or less reliable strategies such as picture clues.

Families can also support learning taking place in the classroom by playing sound games such as 'I Spy', e.g. "I spy something starting with /m/". Be mindful of saying the sound and not the letter name; for example, 'mmmm' not 'muh' or 'em'.

Click [here](#) to watch an example of how parents can support children to practise their skills using a decodable text. You may notice the adult supporting the child to read single sounds, high frequency words and to decode a text effectively.

**You reading to and with boys** – boys will continue to be encouraged in their Library lessons to borrow books based on their interests. They benefit from the expert guidance from Mrs Rogers in choosing age and stage appropriate books and we also encourage reading books from their own collections at home to read with you.

At home, families are encouraged to read books to boys that may be more challenging than they are yet capable of reading independently. Shared reading of rich texts exposes children to new words to build their vocabulary, and ideas and themes which expand their general knowledge. Talking about the meaning of unfamiliar words or new ideas before, during and after reading provides valuable learning opportunities.

Families may like to create 'storytime' routines in a favourite place in the house away from distractions like television or devices – this may be special time together as a family to nurture a love of reading whilst all the time enriching your son's language and literacy development.

Lastly, all reading counts! Whilst we encourage boys to read decodable books multiple times to support mastery of skills and fluent reading, please use the Home Reading Journals to record times when boys are enjoying shared reading with you in addition to reading decodable books.

The infographic is divided into two main sections: 'Skills practice' (left, light blue background) and 'Love of reading & rich texts' (right, light orange background). At the bottom, two puzzle pieces are shown: a purple one labeled 'Decodable books' and an orange one labeled 'Library books'.

### Skills practice

Boys reading to you....

Boys read and reread decodable books

Boys are the **expert** teaching families about sound-letter patterns

Play sound games *I spy 'm'...*

Boys look for & read known **patterns** in other books or places...

- Subtitles when watching Bluey!
- In a picture book
- On a menu at a cafe

### Love of reading & rich texts

You reading to and with boys...

Boys read library or home books with an adult's help...

- Boys can read along where they recognise known patterns
- Talk about the story - new words, new ideas, what questions do boys have?
- Together, read chapter books, picture books, nonfiction texts, listen to audio books, explore classic fairy tales
- Make a reading nook for Storytime!

Decodable books      Library books

## What is structured synthetic phonics?

Structured synthetic phonics (SSP) is an evidence-based approach to teaching literacy skills across the essential skills of reading, spelling, and writing. This combined method empowers young learners to become effective readers in an efficient time frame. Decades of research show that SSP is not only the most efficient way to teach children to read, but also the most effective way of preparing young children for all subsequent learning.



"There is consistent evidence that SSP leads to greater reading gains than non-systematic approaches"

The first three years of school are critical to establishing a secure foundation for all future learning. Research tells us that if young learners do not 'master the code' in these early years or move into the middle primary years with 'gaps' in their learning, these gaps can persist over time and have a significant impact on long-term academic success.

MultiLit (2024). Five From Five.

<https://fivefromfive.com.au/phonics-teaching/evidence-for-systematic-synthetic-phonics/>

## What does it mean to 'master the code'?

SSP breaks down the process of learning to read into sequential steps, explicitly teaching children the relationship between sounds (phonemes) and letters (graphemes). These sound-letter relationships are taught systematically, ensuring that children learn the 'code' of the English language.

/sh/     /i/     /p/



Children are taught to listen to the sounds they hear in words, to break words into their sounds and then to think about which letters can be used to record those sounds. Students are taught to think about: how many sounds they hear and how many letters may be needed to represent them. *E.g., the word 'ship' has three sounds, with four letters representing those sounds.*

English is a complex language, with many ways to represent (spell) the sounds we hear. Without systematic teaching and repeated opportunities for practise, the pathway to mastery is made both harder and less certain.

26 letters of the alphabet can...

... represent approximately 44 sounds...

recorded through at least 123 spelling patterns.



moon     through  
screw     fruit  
blue     who  
flute     group  
shoe

*E.g., multiple ways to represent the /oo/ as in moon sound*

MultiLit (2024). Five From Five. <https://fivefromfive.com.au/phonics-teaching/>

To learn the 'code' of the English language, SSP moves sequentially from teaching single sound-letter patterns, e.g., that the letter 's' represents the /s/ sound, to the multiple alternative spelling patterns for sounds in complex words.

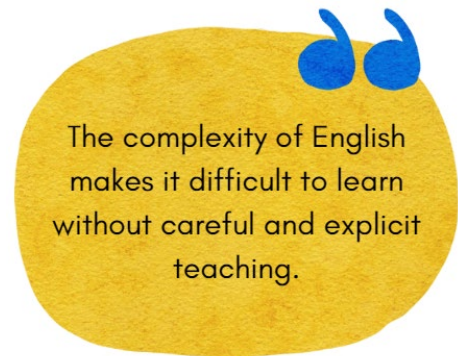
Through opportunities for repeated practice, children are explicitly taught the rules governing sound-letter relationships. This improves both reading and spelling knowledge. The more effectively and efficiently children learn the 'code', the better equipped they are to decode (read), comprehend and respond to more complex texts in later learning.

A key benefit of SSP is its structured and explicit nature, aiming to minimise the possibility of students progressing through school with 'gaps' in their learning which can occur in less rigorous and systematic teaching models.

While structured synthetic phonics reflects a basis in 'phonics', it is not a teaching approach that *only teaches* sound-letter correspondences in isolation. All high-quality SSP programs are taught by guiding children to apply their learning to authentic reading and writing tasks.

Our boys may investigate a particular sound-letter pattern as a focus during a lesson, but this is only a starting point for applying their growing knowledge to a broad range of literacy learning.

During literacy lessons, all boys are enjoying expanding their skills through reading, spelling, writing, handwriting practice, dictation, speaking and listening, interactive games, and targeted small group and individualised learning. In addition to applying their developing skills to 'crack the code' of texts matched to their learning, the boys also enjoy engaging in rich literature experiences and extending their comprehension skills.



MultiLit (2024). *Five From Five*.  
<https://fivefromfive.com.au/phonics-teaching/why-phonics-is-essential/>