

Dear Parents and Caregivers,

We are delighted to welcome you to our school community. Thank you for taking the time to partner with us in supporting your child's learning journey. We also appreciate your prayers for the school and the work we do with our students.

As parents, you play a crucial role in your child's literacy development, both before they start school and throughout their early years of learning.

### **What is Literacy?**

When we talk about literacy, we refer to reading, spelling, printing, and writing. Research over the past 20 years has given us significant insights into how children learn to read, particularly through the use of MRI scans to study brain development. We now have strong, evidence-based practices that guide effective literacy instruction for all children.

### **The Five Key Elements of Reading**

For a child to become an independent reader, they need to develop five essential reading skills:

1. **Phonemic Awareness** – The ability to hear and manipulate sounds in words. This is an oral skill that helps children recognize that words are made up of distinct sounds. Many children who struggle with reading have underdeveloped phonemic awareness, so we focus on building these skills early on.
2. **Phonics** – Understanding the relationship between letters and sounds. Learning letter sounds is a fundamental step in reading and spelling.
3. **Fluency** – The ability to read accurately, at an appropriate pace, and with expression. Fluency supports comprehension by allowing children to focus on the meaning of the text rather than the mechanics of reading.
4. **Vocabulary** – Knowing and understanding words is critical for reading comprehension. A strong vocabulary helps children make sense of what they read and communicate effectively.
5. **Comprehension** – The ability to understand and gain meaning from what is read. Comprehension is developed through discussion, questioning, and practice.

Each of these elements is interconnected, like strands of a rope, and together they form the foundation for confident, independent reading. If you would like to learn more, we recommend visiting [fivefromfive.org.au](http://fivefromfive.org.au).

### **Our Approach: Structured Literacy**

At Ponatahi Christian School, we use a **Structured Literacy** approach to teaching reading and writing. This means:

- **Explicit Instruction** – We provide clear, direct teaching with guided practice and gradually reduce support as children become more independent.
- **Systematic Teaching** – We follow a planned, sequential progression of skills, ensuring that concepts build on one another.
- **Decoding First** – Early reading instruction focuses on letter sounds before introducing whole words. Comprehension develops as decoding and fluency improve.

We primarily use the **Little Learners Love Literacy Readers**, an evidence-based programme that teaches reading in a structured, sequential way. It includes phonics-based reading, spelling, and writing activities.

### What to Expect in the First Year

- In the first term, the focus is on learning letter sounds, so readers will not be sent home initially.
- Daily literacy lessons include multi-sensory activities such as craft, handwriting, and oral discussions to reinforce learning.
- Once students know enough sounds to start blending them, they will begin reading words and simple texts.
- **Heart Words** – These are high-frequency words that cannot be easily sounded out, such as “the” and “come.” These will be explicitly taught.
- Readers will be sent home once they have been introduced in class. Children should read each book multiple times to develop fluency.

### Year 2 Literacy Programme

In Year 2, students continue to develop their literacy skills with a strong emphasis on **phonological awareness**, including:

- Identifying syllables in words
- Segmenting and blending sounds
- Spelling through sound recognition
- Dictation exercises
- Reading books containing newly learned sounds and words
- Practising reading through engaging activities such as read-and-grab games and word-building exercises

To improve fluency, children will bring home **speed words** (laminated cards with words to decode) and **Elephant Readers** (photocopied A4 stories for colouring and reading).

### How You Can Support Your Child’s Reading

- **Talk with your child** – Engaging in conversations and answering their questions builds vocabulary and comprehension skills.
- **Read with your child** – Continue reading aloud to them, even after they start learning to read.
- **Encourage daily practice** – Like learning to drive, reading takes time and repetition before it becomes automatic.
- **Provide a quiet reading space** – A calm, distraction-free environment helps children focus.
- **Listen to them read** – If you are unavailable, an older sibling can help.

## Other Important Information

- **Morning Tea** – Please ensure your child has a nutritious breakfast and brings a drink bottle.
- **Book Bags** – Each child will need a book bag to take readers home.
- **Toys for Play-Based Learning** – Toys should be brought to school only for structured activities.
- **News Sharing** – Personal toys should be kept at home unless it is their scheduled News day.
- **Absences** – Please inform us if your child will be away for reasons other than illness.
- **Changes in Family Circumstances** – Letting us know of any significant changes at home can help us support your child in the classroom.

We are grateful for your partnership in your child's learning journey. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask. We look forward to working together to foster a love of reading in our students!