



Oxford School
Improvement

Teaching the Reading Curriculum

The role of high-quality
guided reading

Revised
and updated
2017



Building an outstanding reading school

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As with any teaching approach, it is not the process of guided reading that raises standards: it is how the process is used that makes the difference.

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CONTENTS

02 The purpose of this report

04 The context for guided reading

05 The Simple View of Reading

06 Ofsted and the teaching of reading

08 Guided reading in practice

10 The benefits of guided reading

12 Organising guided reading

13 Guided reading for extra support

14 Guided reading throughout a school

19 Resources to support the teaching of reading
Endnotes

The purpose of this report

The purpose of this report is to signal how high-quality **guided reading** has the potential to make a vital contribution to children's progress in reading.

It takes a fresh look at guided reading: what it is (and isn't), what it can be used for, how it might evolve at different stages, and how to organise it effectively and productively.

The report is the latest in a series of reports intended to support teachers in building an outstanding reading school.

Who is this report for?

This report is written mainly for subject leaders of English to support them in developing high-quality guided reading and in providing continuing professional development (CPD).

However, it will also be useful for initial teacher education, particularly for trainees and NQTs. One of the key findings in Ofsted's report *From Training to Teaching* was that 'nearly half the trainees [in the survey] were not sufficiently aware of how learning in one age group related to pupils' previous and subsequent learning in language and literacy'.¹

Why do guided reading?

In its 2012 report *Moving English Forward*, Ofsted noted that: 'Many primary schools ... appear to believe that guided reading in itself will improve standards.'² As with any teaching approach, it is not the process of guided reading that raises standards: it is how the process is used that makes the difference. This is perhaps why some schools have abandoned guided reading – because they see it as a 'bolt on' to their core teaching.

The reality is that well-planned, high-quality guided reading, using carefully-chosen texts, and linked in with effective assessment, is a key part of the overall provision for reading in a school. Synthetic phonics teaching, whole-class English lessons, adults reading to children, children's own independent reading, and reading across a range of subjects, all contribute to the progress children make as readers. Used well, and in conjunction with effective assessment, guided reading has the potential to make a real difference to children's skills as readers, their understanding of what they read, their pleasure in reading and their fluency. It provides opportunities for introducing them to a wide range of texts and authors, with those choices matched closely to the needs and interests of particular groups. It provides good opportunities for children, among other things, to:

- Apply their phonic knowledge and skills
- Improve their fluency
- Discuss their understanding of what they read
- Gain new vocabulary
- Talk about grammar in context
- Discuss ideas and learn from one another.



Good guided reading – what it looks like

Dispelling myths

This report focuses on what is most important in teaching guided reading. Guided reading was first introduced to schools in the early days of the carousel approach of the National Literacy Strategy's literacy hour in England.

As time has gone on, and the old 'literacy hour' has evolved and changed, myths and misunderstandings have grown up about it. However, provided it is planned and flexibly taught by highly-trained adults, guided reading is a powerful and effective way of improving children's reading.

GOOD GUIDED READING...

Staff and organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> organises groups around children's needs to ensure optimum conditions for learning is led by well-trained, knowledgeable staff reflects a strong, agreed rationale for allocating staff to different groups is organised so that any independent tasks are meaningful and serve to consolidate or extend children's learning
Planning, teaching, learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> draws on earlier assessments, matches the text closely to the pupils' needs and has clear objectives is clear about whether the focus of the teaching is primarily word reading or comprehension requires children to apply phonic knowledge and skills as the prime approach to reading an unknown word shows evidence of teachers' and other adults' good subject knowledge engages children actively has a positive impact on the progress children make in a lesson, including those with specific needs makes good provision, in planning, for the groups that are working independently
Assessment and groupings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses assessments well to group children initially and inform planning records the progress of each child – not simply the group as a whole provides clear feedback to move children forward is flexible about moving children between guided reading groups on the basis of assessments
Texts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> provides phonically regular texts at the earliest stages so that children are required to apply their phonic knowledge and skills and their knowledge of common exception words matches texts effectively so that children develop their word reading and comprehension in line with their needs introduces older children to a wide range of authors and genres, giving them the opportunity to encounter high-quality texts with language and ideas that will challenge them.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Janet Brennan

Janet Brennan is an education consultant and spent 14 years as one of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) in Ofsted, with particular involvement in literacy in primary schools and initial teacher education. During 2005/06 Janet was a member of the advisory panel for Sir Jim Rose's independent review of early reading. She also worked with the Department for Education on the National Curriculum 2014 for primary English. Janet has been a teacher, a teacher trainer and a primary English adviser in a large local authority.



James Clements

For ten years, James was a teacher and senior leader at an outstanding inner-city primary school. He was also a local authority lead teacher, leading training, and supporting teaching and learning across a network of schools. James was consulted on the 2014 National Curriculum for primary schools. James is now an education writer and researcher, specialising in the teaching of reading, writing and drama. He is the founder of Shakespeare and More, a not-for-profit organisation that promotes effective English teaching.

The context for guided reading

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All pupils must be encouraged to read widely across both fiction and non-fiction to develop their knowledge of themselves and the world in which they live, to establish an appreciation and love of reading, and to gain knowledge across the curriculum.

National Curriculum

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The National Curriculum

The aim of the National Curriculum is to raise expectations about what children should know, understand and be able to do by the end of Year 6. It's about making sure that they enjoy language but also that they are very well-equipped to move to secondary school.

Some of the critical elements of the National Curriculum have been familiar for a while, particularly the emphasis on systematic, synthetic phonics.

The key distinction made in the programmes of study for reading is between word reading and language comprehension. These are the two dimensions of the Simple View of Reading that Sir Jim Rose drew on in his report on early reading in 2006, which are further explained on page 5.³ Understanding their implications is particularly important for teaching reading at the earliest stages.

If children's word reading is only just developing, most of their brain, quite literally, will be engaged in decoding the print on the page: there isn't enough cognitive capacity left over to process and understand information as well as decode. However, when children's word

reading is sufficiently fluent, they can process phonically regular words and 'tricky words' – 'common exception words,' as the National Curriculum calls them – quickly enough for their word reading not to hold up their understanding.

The processes children need to understand written text are the same as those they need to understand what they hear. This is why the Simple View of Reading refers to 'language comprehension' and not 'reading comprehension'. The main difference is that in reading comprehension, because the text is written down not spoken, children gain access to it through their eyes and not their ears – through the visual information of the print on the page. This is why it's vital that children's word reading is as automatic and as fluent as it possibly can be.

Children's comprehension improves whether they learn to read or not because they are taking in information from the world around them all the time. However, when they learn to read independently, they have a real chance to meet new vocabulary, including words that they might not come across in everyday life. This learning then feeds further into their comprehension.

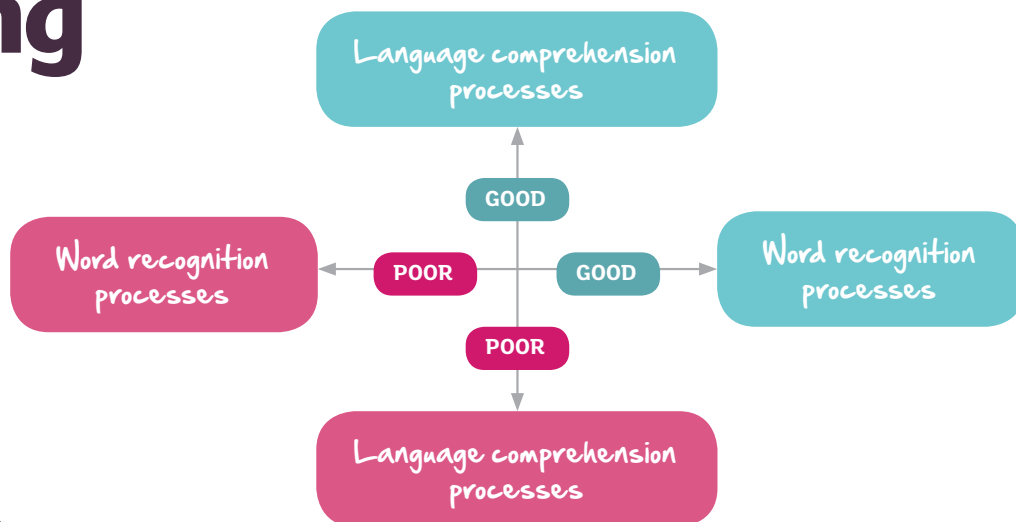
Guided reading is an ideal context for all of this teaching: for comprehension, for giving opportunities for children to apply their phonic knowledge and skills and to practise reading fluently, and for developing their appreciation and love of reading.

Ofsted's 2010 report, *Reading by six*, looked at the practice of 12 outstanding primary schools in terms of what they did in reading. The report said that 'the diligent, concentrated and systematic teaching of phonics' was central to the success of those schools. It went on to emphasise: 'Pupils are given opportunities to apply what they have learnt through reading, – including time to read aloud to adults to practise their decoding skills – writing and comprehension of what they are reading.'⁴





The Simple View of Reading



To get the most from this report, it's worth revisiting the Simple View of Reading model (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The Simple View of Reading model

The National Curriculum deals first with the horizontal axis – word recognition:

‘Skilled **word reading** involves both the speedy working out of the pronunciation of unfamiliar printed words (decoding) and the speedy recognition of familiar printed words. Underpinning both is the understanding that the letters on the page represent the sounds in spoken words. This is why phonics should be emphasised in the early teaching of reading to beginners (i.e. unskilled readers) when they start school.’

Second, it looks at the vertical axis:

‘Good **comprehension** draws from linguistic knowledge (in particular of vocabulary and grammar) and on knowledge of the world. Comprehension skills develop through pupils’ experience of high-quality discussion with the teacher, as well as from reading and discussing a range of stories, poems and non-fiction.’⁵

Different kinds of teaching are needed for each [dimension],’ says the National Curriculum. It follows, therefore, that guided reading will have different emphases as children make progress in learning to read and start to become independent readers.

Assessment should consider word reading and comprehension separately because this helps teachers to be much more specific about what teaching is needed next. This way, it’s almost as if the objectives for guided reading begin to write themselves.

Children will not necessarily progress at the same rate in both dimensions. Some will have difficulties with word reading even when they don’t have any difficulties in understanding language; others will have difficulties with language comprehension, even when they don’t find word reading difficult.

Oakhill, Cain and Elbro’s 2015 handbook on teaching reading comprehension gives an excellent overview of the Simple View of Reading (SVoR) and how it can provide insights into children’s reading.⁶

TOP TIP

If a child is finding reading difficult, ask yourself this question. “If I read this to him, would he understand it?” If the answer is ‘yes,’ it’s very likely that he is finding word reading difficult – and not comprehension. It’s a good starting point for further assessment, including finding out exactly what aspects of word reading might be causing the difficulty.

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Different kinds of teaching are needed for each dimension.
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National Curriculum

Ofsted and the teaching of reading

It's useful to look at what Ofsted has said in its reports about reading, including guided reading. In the report, *Excellence in English* (2011), inspectors provided a case study of George Eliot Primary School in Westminster. This had a 'distinct and well-developed approach to group work' in English, adapted to suit the needs of its pupils:

'Central to the programme is that children think of their own questions to discuss with their peers. This develops reading comprehension alongside independence and thinking skills.'⁷

Reading by six in 2010 focused on the early stages of learning to read in 12 highly-successful schools. Particularly helpful are its references to the importance of developing children's oral language, establishing their phonic knowledge and skills and giving them opportunities to apply these. The report also referred to progression 'from simple texts that the children could read by themselves to a wider range of books'. It commented helpfully on 'locating the curriculum for reading within the wider school curriculum, so that each aspect complemented and reinforced the other'.

When inspectors found successful provision in *Removing barriers to literacy* (2011), they referred to the 'highly-effective use of time, staff and

resources' and 'rigorous monitoring of the impact of provision'.⁸ A year later, *Moving English forward* in 2012 picked up the theme of effectiveness, saying:

'The important question for schools is not whether they make use of a guided reading approach but how effective it is.'⁹

In *Removing barriers to literacy*, schools that were most successful said that there was no "eureka" moment. Instead, in the words of one of the schools inspected, they made "painstaking adjustments" to what they did when their monitoring provided evidence of weaknesses and "stuck with what worked".

From training to teaching early language and literacy, also published in 2012, reported that the ITE trainees in Ofsted's survey rarely had enough training and support to work with other colleagues and to make sure that they received information about the children in their class who were taught by other staff. This has implications for supporting trainees – and, indeed, NQTs – in teaching and managing guided reading. The inspectors also found gaps in some of the new teachers' skills in assessing language and literacy.¹⁰

One other important message needs to be added from *Moving English forward*: teachers should be 'encouraged to be creative and adventurous in their teaching, and to vary approaches depending on the nature of the learning planned for the lesson ... a plea for teachers to focus on the key actions that affect pupils' learning and progress within lessons'.¹¹

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Focus on the key actions that affect pupils' learning and progress.

Ofsted

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ACTION POINTS

- 1** Integrate guided reading into your wider reading policy – it's not an add-on – and base your policy on a conceptual framework (i.e. the SVoR, as described in the National Curriculum).
- 2** Develop children's spoken language as part of teaching them to become readers and give them time to discuss their views.
- 3** Use guided reading as a way of developing close reading skills.
- 4** Use your time, staff and resources effectively and monitor the impact of what you provide.
- 5** Make sure you have good systems for communicating information about children if they are taught by someone other than their class teacher.
- 6** Support trainees and NQTs in the areas they find particularly difficult or where they have not had enough training, particularly assessment, progression and working with other staff.



Guided reading in practice

Sam Bone is Deputy Head Teacher at Oldway Primary School in Paignton, Devon. She's seen first-hand the advantages of teaching guided reading and the impact it can have on children's reading progress. It's one of her favourite sessions of the week. Working closely with a group and using assessment for learning effectively, Sam finds she has a better understanding of each child's reading, particularly their difficulties and the 'next step' targets for them all.

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Guided reading gives you quality time with children who are reading at a similar level.
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Janet Brennan: *What would you see as the benefits of guided reading – for children and teachers?*

Sam Bone: Guided reading gives you quality time with children who are reading at a similar level. The teacher is able to model, explain, observe and ask questions, as well as making links to real-life experiences, working in other curriculum areas and previous learning in reading and writing. Focusing on specific targets enables the children to make real progress.

JB: *What's helped you understand how guided reading should be done best?*

SB: Understanding the processes of reading (the Simple View of Reading) helped me to identify what to teach and to understand why some children find reading difficult. The SVoR is really helpful in planning medium-term and short-term targets for groups, too. Knowing what characterises progress when children are learning to read helps me to identify next steps for them and to focus sharply on their specific needs. I used to plan guided reading questions and refer to particular pages in the book quite closely, but I'm much more flexible now. I might photocopy a passage and annotate it with questions or decide where the children need to read independently. We get used to asking the same sort of questions as teachers, but Barrett's taxonomy has been useful in making me think about the sorts of questions to ask. When planning for a new book, I always have a copy of it next to me now.

JB: *What do you think teachers find most difficult about guided reading and how can they build their confidence?*

SB: The most common question teachers ask me is about grouping pupils. We group for guided reading across the whole of Year 2, with guided reading taught in sets. My advice is to consider the group size – six, ideally, but up to ten is still effective, with the lowest-attaining children in the smallest group – and to choose a text that is decodable but still challenging for the least-able readers in the group. This allows the adult to consolidate decoding as well as teaching skills such as deduction and inference. Choosing an interesting, challenging text that will engage, enthuse and motivate the pupils (and the teacher) is key!

TOP TIP

Sam's advice for teachers seeking to improve guided reading:

- The choice of text is crucial so that you can plan thought-provoking questions and activities. Also, it is vital to know the text inside out. The time this takes needs to be considered, especially for less experienced or new teachers.
- For those working in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, or teachers working with low-attaining pupils, it is really important to monitor attainment closely, as children make progress in reading at very different rates at this stage.
- Designate time in the weekly timetable for guided reading.
- Be a role model for enjoying reading, learning through reading and enjoying language.



ACTION POINTS

- 1 Explore the range of videos on guided reading in the 'issues' tab of Professional Development & Best Practice on *Oxford Owl for School*.
- 2 Identify the positive features of the teaching of reading. What are the key objectives for these sessions?
- 3 Consider the use of questioning across these videos. What techniques are used to assess children's understanding or provide further challenge?
- 4 What have the children in these videos learned about reading?

The benefits of guided reading

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Children should have opportunities to talk together, discuss ideas with their peers and learn new vocabulary.

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Guided reading can be highly effective in developing children’s word reading and comprehension, while providing a regular and supportive context for children to read different texts and genres. The next few pages explore how guided reading can support children’s reading development.

Spoken language

The National Curriculum in the introduction to the programmes of study – not just for English but all subjects – says:

Pupils should be taught to speak clearly and convey ideas confidently using Standard English. They should learn to justify ideas with reasons; ask questions to check understanding; develop vocabulary and build knowledge; negotiate; evaluate and build on the ideas of others; and select the appropriate register for effective communication.¹²

Guided reading is an ideal context for developing spoken language. Good guided reading is a collaborative experience. Children should have opportunities to talk together, discuss ideas with their peers and learn new vocabulary. Importantly, guided reading gives them a chance to learn how to use spoken language to learn.

Phonics

Using books that are closely matched to children’s level of word reading complements the learning from whole-class phonics lessons. Effective, well-planned guided reading gives them the opportunity to apply their



phonetic decoding skills and recognise the common exception words (the ‘tricky words’) that they have learnt in the context of their reading.

Comprehension

The texts studied in guided reading should provide each child with appropriate challenge. In the National Curriculum, reading texts of increasing complexity is an important part of making progress in comprehension. Banded or levelled books can provide useful support for teachers to match texts to the level of challenge that pupils need.

Reading for pleasure

Schools play a vital role in helping all children to develop a love of reading. Regular guided reading helps to broaden their reading experience, giving them access to the language of books and literature, and helping them to form opinions about books and authors. A carefully-selected text will be one that children are able to read reasonably confidently but which also provides an appropriate challenge in terms of language and subject matter.

Regular guided reading can provide time for children to read texts that will engage them, resonate with their interests and capture their imagination.



ACTION POINT

As a staff team, look at the key objectives on pages 14 to 18 and think about the extent to which they reflect the learning needs of current year groups in your school. Since they are taken directly from the National Curriculum, they might help you to get a sense of its expectations. Encourage teachers to look at the objectives for the year group(s) above and below their own, too.

Grammar and punctuation

Guided reading provides an excellent opportunity for developing children's understanding of grammar and punctuation. Learning about language in the context of a high-quality text, rather than through a series of discrete exercises on grammar and punctuation, enables children to see how language really works and how writers have made specific choices. They also learn about the relationship between grammar and punctuation, that is, that they do not work independently of one another.

TOP TIP

Using guided reading to learn how grammar works in context

At Upper Key Stage 2, a novel such as Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* can be read over a series of guided reading sessions. As well as introducing children to classic literature, sections of the book can be used to teach specific objectives in relation to grammar and punctuation. For example, the first few pages of chapter three, where Mole enters the Wild Wood, can be examined with the group to analyse how grammar and punctuation have been used to bring a sense of pace to a story and communicate a character's feelings. This is equally applicable to younger children, with texts that provide appropriate challenge.

Learning objectives

Importantly, information gained from guided reading sessions should feed into learning objectives. Planning should drill down to the level of the individuals in the group. The teacher should be able to go into the session with a very good idea about each child's strengths and weaknesses and use that information to start closing gaps.

The objective for the group as a whole might be, for example, to use evidence from the text to justify opinions, but the teacher might want to focus particularly on certain children that day. She may think: 'I'm going to target my questioning at Katie, to see how much she's understood: this text should be a real stretch for her'; 'I'll definitely listen to Jamal read aloud as I'm a bit worried about his fluency. I'll also get Jake to read aloud, he's a good model for Jamal.'

For assessment in guided reading to work well, the learning objectives need to be very clear. The session is not simply a chance for the children to practise reading and to talk about books, important though this is.

Formative and summative assessment

The opportunities for all children to make substantial contributions are inevitably quite limited in whole-class teaching. Guided reading provides much more opportunity for all the children in the group to spend time interacting with the teacher. Not only is this good for the child but, just as importantly, it provides the chance to identify and deal straightaway with any misconceptions – formative assessment at its best.

Assessment against the learning objectives for a session and other, wider observations provide valuable information to support judgements about achievement. Guided reading,

done properly and regularly, helps to build up a complete picture of each child's reading ability. This feeds valuable information into summative assessment. It's important that assessment done in guided reading focuses on individuals – not simply on how the group as a whole got on. The information from guided reading should be used to build in support for individual children – or for a group, if a group of children has common needs.

Recording assessments

The key to recording assessments in guided reading is that they are specific to each child. Teachers need to be flexible and to group children according to their individual needs, so one record for each guided reading group won't be sufficient.

TOP TIP

Using each child's home-school reading book

Note the main target(s) for each guided reading session in each child's home-school reading book, then comment on how well each child got on in relation to that target, adding any other specific comments. Make sure you record these comments in your main teacher's record book, as well as any follow-up comments you might want to use. These will give you the information you need for the next guided reading session with this group.

Organising guided reading

One of the advantages of guided reading is flexibility. A good system of continuous assessment means that a teacher should be able to make confident decisions about grouping children according to where they will learn best.

In *Reading by six*, Ofsted said:

There will always be the need to consider whether some children are making faster or slower progress than the rest of the group. It will not remain a homogeneous group in terms of their learning. Schools and teachers must exercise professional judgements about organising teaching groups to provide optimum conditions for learning.¹³

MYTH-BUSTER

Children should be organised into five small, equal-sized groups

Just because there are 30 children in a class and five days in the week, it doesn't automatically follow that each guided reading group should be the same size. Although six chairs often fit neatly around a classroom table, teachers should decide on groups for educational reasons, not practical ones.

Children who would benefit from more attention should be in smaller groups, but it is perfectly valid to have larger groups, so that more children can contribute to discussion.

The key question is simply this: are children learning to read as effectively as they can? Improved teaching and organisation should be making a demonstrable difference to children's word reading and comprehension, which should be seen through assessment.

MYTH-BUSTER

Each child should work with the teacher at least once a week.

This comes down to the needs of individual children. When children are first setting out as readers in the Foundation Stage and Year 1, it's good practice for each group to have a weekly session with the teacher.

As the children get older, those who are struggling with reading will still benefit from as much time with the teacher as possible. For others, another well-trained adult can provide suitable support. The most effective systems for guided reading ensure that teachers are able to work regularly with each of the guided reading groups. This makes them well-placed both to assess children's progress and to check assessments that others have made. This can support planning across the whole curriculum.

TOP TIP

Invest time in teaching the children the routines you expect when they move to their groups. It is time that will easily be paid back once the class can organise itself smoothly. Remember that every minute that children spend procrastinating is a minute lost when they could be learning.

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Decide on groups for educational reasons, not practical ones.

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Guided reading for extra support and challenge



For children who are still struggling to become readers, guided reading remains essential, providing a supportive context for working with them on the areas where they need direct teaching. It can be used to give them more help with either decoding or comprehension.

Using the pupil premium funding

Children who need extra support do not necessarily need to have this individually, although a small minority will. Finding time and space for extra sessions can have a huge impact on their learning if they are not yet fully on the road to reading. Providing this support in the form of guided reading gives the teaching a familiar context.

The research gathered together for the Education Endowment Foundation's *Teaching and Learning Toolkit* suggests that: 'it may be sensible to trial small group tuition as an initial option, before moving to one-to-one tuition is small group tuition is ineffective.' Have a look at what the Toolkit says about this at: educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit/small-group-tuition/

Pupil Premium funding could be used to support these extra groups, with the important proviso that teachers should be absolutely clear about the impact they are intending to achieve if they use the funding in this way. It is important to consider how that impact will be measured before starting and to establish a baseline.

Guided reading to challenge the highest-achieving

For children who are already accomplished readers, guided reading can be structured in the form of literature circles, almost like book groups, with children reading the text independently before the guided reading session, either at home or in designated independent reading time during the school day. The advantage is that this allows the group to spend more time in the guided reading session discussing the text and developing comprehension.

The key to using literature circles successfully is the same as that which underpins all effective teaching: rigorous, objective-driven planning based on accurate assessment of the next steps each child needs. Using these sessions simply as a chance to 'talk about the book' misses the point.

MYTH-BUSTER

All children must read aloud during their guided reading session with an adult

The National Curriculum says that children 'should be able to read silently, and then discuss what they have read'.

Although some children will still benefit from reading aloud to an adult, by Key Stage 2 the great majority should have developed strong word reading skills. Guided reading is therefore an opportunity for high-quality discussion based on the text, with children using the book they have read to justify their views.

Guided reading throughout a school

Guided reading in the Early Years Foundation Stage

Each year some children are likely to arrive at school without having had a positive experience of reading – or, indeed, any experience of reading.

Guided reading can help them catch up quickly with their peers through having a chance to handle books, learn early reading behaviours and develop word reading knowledge and skills, learning from the behaviour of other children as well as from direct teaching.

When reading in a group with an adult, the children should begin by using simple, phonically regular texts that give them the opportunity to apply their growing phonic knowledge and skills and their knowledge of common exception words. Regular guided reading of this sort allows the teacher to listen to the children read and assess their progress accurately. These assessments then feed into planning.

While one group reads with the teacher, the other children are likely to be engaged in the usual life of a well-run Foundation Stage classroom. This might include listening to books read to them by an adult, which develops their comprehension and oral language rather than their word reading knowledge. At this stage they will also be involved in activities that have nothing to do with reading.

EYFS INDICATORS: 'COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE' AND 'LITERACY'	HOW MIGHT GUIDED READING SUPPORT THESE?
Listening to stories, accurately anticipating key events	Reading, listening and talking about stories in a small group setting provides children with a chance to develop their comprehension skills.
Using phonic knowledge to decode regular words and read them aloud accurately	Through reading phonically regular texts, children can develop and apply their phonic knowledge and word-reading skills in the context of reading simple sentences.
Reading some common irregular words	
Reading and understanding simple sentences	Planning for talk can teach children to articulate their opinions and contribute to discussions, helping them to develop both their speaking and listening skills.
Responding to what they hear with relevant comments, questions or actions	
Demonstrating understanding when talking with others about what they have read	

MYTH-BUSTER

Guided reading shouldn't begin until Year 1

Many schools use guided reading effectively in the Foundation Stage to support children to learn to read. Regular time with a teacher and a small group of their peers, with a carefully-selected text to stimulate learning is a perfect fit with the culture of many Early Years classrooms; the rest of the class is engaged in independent learning activities, either inside or outdoors. Whatever stage children are at in their reading, small-group interaction with the teacher can support them to take the next steps.

ACTION POINTS

- 1 Review the teaching of reading across the whole of the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- 2 What is the part played by guided reading in teaching reading and, importantly, is it effective in complementing and supporting what else is being taught, e.g. systematic phonics, 'tricky' words, the development of children's reading fluency and oral language skills?



Guided reading in Year 1

Guided reading in Year 1 should be giving children good opportunities to read aloud – and practise reading – texts that are closely matched to their developing phonic knowledge.

This knowledge has been taught in whole-class lessons but guided reading gives children a chance to use their decoding skills, applying their phonic knowledge and their knowledge of common exception words to texts. It's important that they are reading the text fluently enough for any decoding difficulties not to get in the way of their understanding. Discussion, both with the teacher and their peers, will support their developing comprehension.



READING OBJECTIVES FROM THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM	HOW MIGHT GUIDED READING SUPPORT THESE?
Becoming very familiar with key stories, fairy stories and traditional tales	By reading a range of texts across the year, including poetry, rhyming texts and different versions of traditional tales, children can become accustomed to these stories and their conventions. Non-fiction texts can be used for the direct teaching of knowledge and skills.
Learning to appreciate rhymes and poems, and to recite some by heart	
Discussing information books and other non-fiction	
Apply phonic knowledge and skills as the route to decode words	Through reading texts that are closely matched to children's phonic knowledge, the teacher can focus on application of phonic knowledge and word reading skills in context.
Read common exception words	
Read aloud accurately books that are consistent with their developing phonic knowledge	Children have regular opportunities to read aloud to both adults and their peers.
Drawing on what they already know or on background information and vocabulary provided by the teacher	Small-group work with frequent adult-child dialogue means teachers can support pupils with contextual knowledge about texts, support them with their developing vocabulary and prompt children to check their own reading.
Checking that the text makes sense to them as they read and correcting inaccurate reading	
Making inferences on the basis of what is being said and done	Texts closely matched to pupils' development as readers and well-planned questioning provide an opportunity for pupils to make simple inferences.
Predicting what might happen on the basis of what has been read so far	
Participate in discussion about what is read to them, taking turns and listening to what others say	Through planning opportunities for discussion and careful questioning, the teacher can offer children the opportunity to take part in quality discussion about texts.
Explain clearly their understanding of what is read to them	

Guided reading in Year 2

Year 2 is an important year in ensuring that all children become confident and competent readers who enjoy reading.

All children should achieve well in reading by the end of the key stage, so that they can move confidently into Year 3.

More than ever, guided reading has a key role to play. Guided reading groups, led by well-trained adults, should have specific objectives that focus sharply on whatever it is that those children need to learn. There is no time to be wasted. Assessments from the end of Year 1 and the start of Year 2 should provide essential information.



TOP TIP

Invite a stronger reader to join a group

Just occasionally, try inviting one of your stronger readers to join a guided reading session with a group of developing readers. If you manage this sensitively, the presence of the stronger reader allows the rest of the group to see what is possible and to learn from their language and reading behaviour.

But it works the other way around, too. Allow one or two children to read with a group studying a more demanding text. It gives those one or two children the opportunity to absorb some of the language used in the group and – you never know – they might surprise you by how much they can do.

READING OBJECTIVES FROM THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

Listening to, discussing and expressing views about a wide range of poetry, stories and non-fiction at a level beyond that at which they can read independently

Answering and asking questions

Participate in discussion about books, poems and other works that they can read for themselves, taking turns and listening to what others say

Explain and discuss their understanding of books, poems and other material

Checking that the text makes sense to them as they read and correcting inaccurate reading

HOW MIGHT GUIDED READING SUPPORT THESE?

Through reading a wide range of texts across the year, children can learn about the features of different texts and begin to express their views on them. Non-fiction texts can be used for the direct teaching of knowledge and skills.

Through planning opportunities for discussion and careful questioning, the teacher can offer children the opportunity to take part in quality discussion about texts, assessing children's understanding and using this to plan further learning.

Listening to children read aloud in a group context and using questions to ascertain understanding offers an opportunity for children to learn to correct their reading.

Through reading texts that are matched to children's increasing phonic knowledge, the teacher can ensure all pupils are reading accurately, without undue hesitation, and without needing to blend the sounds out loud first by the end of Year 2.



Guided reading in Years 3 and 4

Guided reading can be especially effective in supporting children across the wide range of attainment found in many Year 3 and 4 classrooms.

As children become more mature, the range and complexity of the independent activities they can undertake grows, giving more flexibility in planning. Lindsay Pickton gives some 'top tips' for tasks that children can do independently on Oxford Owl for School under 'Experts' in Professional Development and Best Practice.

The introduction to the programmes of study for Years 3 and 4 provides a useful summary description of what guided reading might need to look like in these two year groups if children are to make progress as readers. This has implications for teaching at Key Stage 1.

By the beginning of Year 3, pupils should be able to read books written at an age-appropriate interest level. They should be able to read them accurately and at a speed that is sufficient for them to focus on understanding what they read rather than on decoding individual words.¹⁴

READING OBJECTIVES FROM THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM	HOW MIGHT GUIDED READING SUPPORT THESE?
Accurate reading and good decoding 'Good approximation' in pronouncing words that children might not have heard before but which they can decode (using phonics)	Focusing on the application of phonic knowledge and skills ensures these are secured for all children. Guided reading provides a forum for making sure that any children who are still struggling develop this knowledge and skill as a priority.
Reading at a speed that is sufficient for children to focus on understanding rather than on decoding Learning how to read silently	Careful planning ensures children have opportunities both for reading aloud and silent reading.
Breadth, depth and range in reading to include stories, poetry, plays and non-fiction Increasing their familiarity with a wide range of books, including fairy stories, myths and legends	By reading a wide range of texts over the year, children learn about the features of different texts and begin to make comparisons based on style and purpose. Children will be able to express preferences about texts and genres based on evidence of the texts they have read.
Identifying themes and conventions in a wide range of books Reading books that are structured in different ways and reading for a range of purposes	
Independent, fluent and enthusiastic readers Knowledge and skills in reading non-fiction 'about a wide range of subjects'	Guided reading provides an excellent context for teaching the range of knowledge and skills children need to read non-fiction texts. Children can learn to use these texts with increasing efficiency to locate information.
Retrieve and record information from non-fiction Drawing inferences such as inferring characters' feelings, thoughts and motives from their actions, and justifying inferences with evidence, predicting what might happen from details stated and implied – 'with support at the start of Year 3 and increasingly independently by the end of Year 4'	Discuss texts, so that children move towards independent critical skills. Well-planned questioning can support children in developing their comprehension of increasingly complex texts.
Identifying how language, structure, and presentation contribute to meaning Discussing words and phrases that capture the reader's interest and imagination	Planning should identify opportunities to teach children about specific language or text features, asking children to consider their effect on the reader.

Guided reading in Years 5 and 6

Guided reading should continue across Years 5 and 6 as it provides a good opportunity for teachers to work closely with groups of children studying texts that, while still matched to children's reading level, offer some degree of challenge.

For the majority of children who are making good progress with reading at this stage, guided reading can be key to developing and securing their comprehension skills and preparing them for secondary school. The frequent interaction and dialogue with children that good guided reading generates means that it continues to provide opportunities for accurate assessment.

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It is essential that, by the end of their primary education, all pupils are able to read fluently, and with confidence, in any subject in their forthcoming secondary education.

National Curriculum

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READING OBJECTIVES FROM THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM	HOW MIGHT GUIDED READING SUPPORT THESE?
Continuing to read and discuss an increasingly wide range of fiction poetry, plays, non-fiction and reference books or textbooks	Planning for a wide range of texts ensures children are broadening their reading diet, encountering different types of text. They are introduced to genres and authors they may choose to find and read in their own time.
Reading books that are structured in different ways and reading for a range of purposes	
Increasing their familiarity with a wide range of books, including myths, legends and traditional stories, modern fiction fiction from our literary heritage, and books from other cultures and traditions	
Identifying and discussing themes and conventions in and across a wide range of writing	Reading texts that provide an appropriate level of challenge across many genres and types enables children to make comparisons and hold opinions based on their knowledge of different texts.
Making comparisons within and across books	
Drawing inferences and justifying these with evidence	
Locate information from the text	Challenging texts can be used to provide opportunities to teach specific elements of more complex comprehension skills, including inference and understanding figurative language.
Predicting what might happen from details stated and implied	
Summarising the main ideas drawn from more than one paragraph, identifying key details that support the main ideas	
Identifying how language, structure and presentation contribute to meaning	Specific planning to develop children's understanding of language, especially vocabulary, can support their fluency and their comprehension, and will be reflected in children's writing.
Discuss and evaluate how authors use language, including figurative language, considering the impact on the reader	
Participate in discussions about books that are read to them and those they can read for themselves, building on their own and others' ideas and challenging views courteously	Careful planning of discussion and questioning allows children the opportunity to take part in genuine dialogue about texts. The teacher can assess children's understanding and use this to plan further learning. Through guided reading, children can develop and rehearse the oracy skills they will need to succeed at secondary school.
Ask questions to improve their understanding of what they have read	
Provide reasoned justification for their views	



Resources to support the teaching of reading

Oxford Primary offers a range of teaching and professional development resources to support you in building an outstanding reading school.

Project X Origins	<p><i>Project X Origins</i> is a guided reading programme specifically designed to address the gender gap and raise boys' achievement.</p> <p>With its action-packed adventure stories and fascinating non-fiction, <i>Project X Origins</i> will engage children from Reception to Year 6. Comprehensive Guided Reading Notes are available for every book, covering phonics skills, comprehension, vocabulary, fluency, spelling, grammar, punctuation and writing.</p> <p>www.oxfordprimary.co.uk/projectx</p>	
Oxford Baseline Assessment Year 1	<p><i>Oxford Primary Reading Assessment</i> combines Oxford's levelling system with the <i>Oxford Reading Criterion scale</i>, developed by Ros Wilson and updated for the 2014 National Curriculum in England. This is a clear, reliable and proven system that allows you to assess every child and identify their reading level as well as choose the right books to move them on and provide evidence of their progress.</p> <p>www.oxfordprimary.co.uk/assessment</p>	
Building an Outstanding Reading School report	<p>This report is about the relationship between a school's reading culture and children's attainment. It considers how reading for pleasure can be organised to support all children to become confident, keen and capable readers. It is about becoming an outstanding reading school</p> <p>www.oxfordprimary.co.uk/building-an-outstanding-reading-school</p>	
Phonics report	<p>This report provides a short overview of Ofsted's report on reading, <i>Reading by six: how the best schools do it</i>. It is written to help you reflect on any implications for your own school. It also includes a self-evaluation tool – a set of questions to get you thinking about how you teach reading.</p> <p>www.oxfordprimary.co.uk/phonics</p>	
Parental Engagement report	<p>This report describes ways of increasing a parent's engagement with their child's learning. It summarises the research and provides a self-evaluation tool to help you think about current practice.</p> <p>www.oxfordprimary.co.uk/parental-engagement</p>	
Pupil Premium report	<p>The aim of this report is to provide practical support to school leadership teams and governors in identifying and deploying the Pupil Premium to raise achievement and narrow the gap between children from low-income and other disadvantaged families and their peers.</p> <p>www.oxfordprimary.co.uk/pupil-premium</p>	
Teaching Assistants report	<p>The purpose of this report is to offer practical support and advice to school leaders and teachers about the ways in which they organise and deploy teaching assistants.</p> <p>www.oxfordprimary.co.uk/teaching-assistants</p>	
Guided reading videos	<p>Nikki Gamble explores ways to get the most out of guided reading, looking at the importance of talk, developing comprehension and managing the whole class.</p> <p>www.oxfordprimary.co.uk/guided-reading-videos</p>	
Building an Outstanding Reading School video	<p>James Clements introduces six strategies for building an outstanding reading school; a school in which children <i>can</i> read and <i>choose</i> to read.</p> <p>www.oxfordprimary.co.uk/building-an-outstanding-reading-school-video</p>	

ENDNOTES

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Teaching the Reading Curriculum

The role of high-quality
guided reading

For further support please call
our customer care line on **01536 452610**.

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The photographs of children in this report are for
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England: Framework document. September 2013*.