Research and development of Pathways to Read

Pathways to Read is a whole-class reading programme based on high-quality texts and a mastery approach. It supports the teaching of reading comprehension skills and develops reading fluency. Key skills are taught and repeated; there are multiple opportunities to use and apply the skills until they can be mastered fully and applied in independent reading. This follows the processes around research in mathematics: "the idea/concept that all children need a deep understanding of what they are learning in order that they can recall it fluently, use it flexibly and apply it readily" (NCETM).

Each unit builds progressively and contributes to the programme as a whole: "A rigorous and sequential approach to the reading curriculum develops pupils' fluency, confidence and enjoyment in reading" (DfE, 2024). Within each unit, pupils use and apply skills called the **Mastery keys**. These have been selected from the reading section of the national curriculum (DfE, 2013), with the full range of year group skills covered to meet age-related expectations. Throughout each unit, the **Mastery keys** are taught explicitly, and pupils have multiple opportunities to practise and apply them. This repeated structure "over time builds pupils' reading fluency, linguistic knowledge and knowledge of the world, and does not limit them to responding to exam-style questions" (DfE, 2024).

How are the texts chosen in Pathways to Read?

As Doug Lemov (2016) states, there is a need to "consider not just whether each book students read is "good" but what the totality of the texts [teachers] choose for students accomplishes." Across KS1 and KS2, pupils are introduced to a range of fiction, non-fiction and poetry to ensure their primary school reading diet is varied and rich. **Pathways to Read** books are chosen primarily on their literary merit, engaging images, appropriate word reading pitch and the right amount of new vocabulary. Ofsted's *Telling the Story* report urges that schools should "choose texts for study in English first and foremost on literary merit" (DfE, 2024).

In terms of pitch, "it is important to consider how a text may extend pupils' reading comprehension capabilities: too easy and pupils do not need to use the strategies, too hard and they cannot understand the text" (EEF, 2021). Therefore, complexity of language and theme develops over time as do the **Mastery keys**. Whilst engaging with these texts, pupils will experience "mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors" (Sims Bishop, 1990) so that they see themselves reflected in what they read and "have the opportunity to investigate other lives, worlds and perspectives" (Johns-Shepherd, 2020). The texts are matched appropriately to the **Mastery keys** so there is plenty of opportunity to practise and master them. For schools that also use **Pathways to Write**, there is a direct link with the texts used so that learning is connected across the curriculum. This is supported by Hirsch's research, "that children must develop deep knowledge of both the 'word and the world', and in so doing will build greater reading comprehension abilities" (Hirsch, 2003).

How does Pathways to Read develop reading fluency?

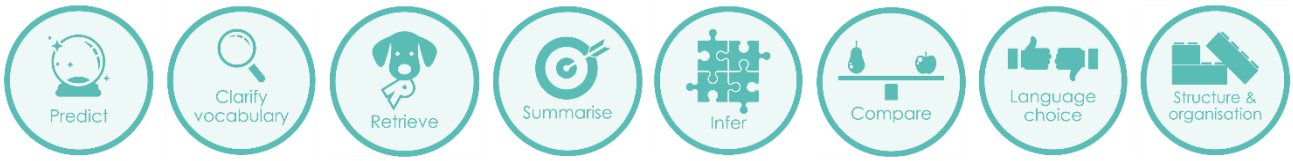
"As children gain fluency, their motivation increases: they start to enjoy reading more and are willing to do more of it" (DfE, 2023). The EEF has defined reading fluency as "reading with accuracy (reading words correctly), automaticity (reading words at an appropriate speed without great effort) and prosody (appropriate expression, stress and intonation)" (EEF, 2021). A growing bank of evidence

suggests that developing fluency is key to supporting pupils in becoming competent readers. Fluency is considered to be a bridge from word recognition to comprehension (Green, 2021).

Within **Pathways to Read**, teachers are given clear instructions on how to model fluency effectively, considering pace, smoothness, phrasing and expression. This is particularly effective in supporting those pupils who are not keeping up with the curriculum (DfE, 2013) as pupils are able to hear the text modelled fluently first, supported by their peers or repeating reading. Pupils are then given the opportunity to practise explicit fluency strategies in pairs before reading independently. This aligns with the EEF's recommendation of a Gradual Release of Responsibility approach (EEF, 2021).

How does Pathways to Read meet the needs of all learners?

Unit by unit, year by year, texts used within **Pathways to Read** become increasingly more challenging and the mastery skills progress. However, the programme also supports pupils who are not keeping up with the curriculum through "flexible grouping, cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies [and] explicit instruction" (EEF, 2021).



The *Progression in Reading Skills* document supports teachers in how to adapt their questioning to challenge and support all pupils and target individuals' needs. This document will aid in supporting pupils with lower prior attainment who "may particularly benefit from being explicitly taught reading comprehension strategies" (EEF, 2021). This would run alongside a catch-up programme of phonics, but it is important that pupils who participate in catch-up phonics should be supported to develop reading comprehension strategies using books pitched at their age-group standard. This follows DfE (2013) guidance, which states that "as far as possible, these pupils should follow the…programme of study in terms of listening to new books, hearing and learning new vocabulary and grammatical structures, and discussing these".

How does Pathways to Read support reading for pleasure?

"When children's personal responses are honoured and connections are made with the texts of popular culture and their interests, their involvement and pleasure in learning and writing increases" (Cremin, 2017).

A vast amount of research has been carried out on the importance of instilling a love of reading, particularly since the publication of the DfE's research evidence on reading for pleasure (DfE, 2012). Evidence from recent PIRLS surveys (DfE, 2021) also shows that independent, choice-led reading was a strong predictor - not just of reading attainment but also broader educational achievement. In England, children who reported that they like reading attained significantly higher on average than those who reported that they did not like it (PIRLS, 2021). As such, developing a love of reading is a cornerstone of **Pathways to Read**: from the choice of rich, engaging texts to the weekly session that

is devoted to book talk and reading for pleasure. The use of real books and a variety of styles of fiction and non-fiction is paramount in supporting budding readers to foster a love of books and reading.

Why is oracy such an important feature of Pathways to Read?

James Britton said "reading and writing float on a sea of talk" (Britton, 1970), a concept echoed by the national curriculum (DfE, 2013) which states "pupils should be taught to participate in discussion about books, poems and other works that are read to them and those they can read for themselves, taking turns and listening to what others say" (DfE, 2013). Therefore, oracy is a golden thread running through all the Pathways Literacy programmes. Spoken language is integrated progressively so pupils may develop their ability to communicate effectively, talking to learn whilst also learning to talk through drama, group discussion, speaking and listening activities. This ensures that pupils are immersed in stories and characters, can articulate their thoughts and use exploratory talk to develop their ideas.

How does Pathways to Read develop pupils' vocabulary?

Alongside key reading skills, Pathways to Read builds in extensive opportunities to develop and apply vocabulary. As Alex Quigley says, teachers must have an "awareness of choosing the right words to teach," and investigate meaning with pupils before reading a text (Quigley, 2018). In every Pathways to Read unit, specific tier 2 and 3 vocabulary is identified (Beck, McKeown and Kucan, 2013) and time to investigate these words is built into the planning. This ensures coverage across the year and supports teachers in identifying words that need explicit teaching. This planned approach to clarifying words and the meaningful, repeated exposure through engaging and purposeful activities is recommended by the EEF in their guidance report of 2021.

How is early reading developed?

Approaches to develop early reading should be integrated successfully alongside developing communication and language. In EYFS and Year 1, phonics should be taught systematically and rigorously to support pupils to master word reading. A key component of Pathways to Read in KS1 is the continued focus on accuracy with decoding so that pupils develop their fluency, which is "the bridge from phonics to word study and comprehension" (Rasinksi, 2022). Reading fluently allows pupils to redirect their cognitive resources from decoding to comprehending the text (Green, 2021).

Pathways to Read follows a structured sequence of learning: pupils develop early reading skills, make predictions, learn new vocabulary, answer retrieval questions and make inferences. In Year 2, a whole-class and grouped reading model is recommended to ensure pupils work in groups matched to their word reading ability. Group sessions allow for the modelling of key strategies and the application of targeted support. This builds on the models used in SSP programmes. It supports pupils to develop their confidence and fluency with a text matched to their GPC knowledge without losing exposure to high-quality texts through the shared sessions. "During Year 2, teachers should continue to focus on establishing pupils' accurate and speedy word-reading skills…. The sooner that pupils can read well and do so frequently, the sooner they will be able to increase their vocabulary, comprehension and their knowledge across the wider curriculum" (DfE, 2013). In Pathways to Read,

pupils will also have the opportunity for repeated practice of mastery skills which will continue to build throughout KS2 as new skills are introduced.

Pathways to Read is constantly evolving and adapting to the educational climate. The latest research and pedagogy drive reflection to ensure that the programme remains a relevant and high-quality product to support the teaching of reading in primary schools.

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