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Dear Parents

It has been brought to our attention, via social media, that some of our Year 1 parents have concerns over the way that reading is being taught in this school and in view of this, I would like to take the opportunity to outline the methods that are used for teaching reading at Lincewood and the educational reasoning behind them.

In May 2012 the Government introduced Phonics Screening which aims to ensure that 'all children have learned phonic decoding to an age-appropriate standard' by the end of Year 1. The outcomes of these tests are used to predict pupils' future attainment and also to compare how successful schools are at teaching reading during a child's early Primary education. Research has shown that when phonics is taught in a structured way – starting with the easiest sounds and progressing through to the most complex – it is the most effective way of teaching young children to read. It is particularly helpful for children aged 5 to 7. In addition, almost all children who receive good teaching of phonics will learn the skills they need to tackle new words. They can then go on to read any kind of text fluently and confidently, and to read for enjoyment. Children who have been taught phonics also tend to read more accurately than those taught using other methods, such as 'look and say'. This includes children who find learning to read difficult, for example those who have dyslexia.

At Lincewood, we teach phonics in a structured way so that all children are as well prepared as possible for reading and for the Year 1 tests. Phonics teaching starts in Reception and carries on throughout Key Stage 1. Any children who do not reach the required standard are retested at the end of Year 2 and will continue to receive support as they continue through the school.

Although phonics teaching is an essential part of learning to read, it is also important that children develop their reading skills in other ways and this includes, reading for meaning, reading for enjoyment, reading of tricky words that are not written in a consistently phonetic way etc. For this reason, we have developed many other opportunities for our children to read in a variety of different ways. These include Library sessions, where pupils can select a book for their own enjoyment to bring home and share with parents; sharing books as a whole class; learning texts through Talk for Writing in English lessons and whole class reading lessons which focus on understanding what is read.

In addition, all children are given a colour banded reading book, the level of which is chosen by the class teacher. These books are selected in order for children to practise fluency and intonation when reading aloud but more importantly, to ensure that children can read with understanding. Because of this the teachers will not move children up through the colour book bands as soon as they can read them as they need to ensure that they have fully understood what they are reading and that they have read a selection of quality texts at that level before they meet more challenging vocabulary.

We believe that our methods of teaching reading at Lincewood are very successful and a large majority of our children reach age appropriate standards throughout the school. This is supported by the data in the statutory tests: Our phonics results have been consistently above national averages since 2012 and this year was 7% above and both our end of KS1 and end of KS2 reading results were 2% above national averages. Of course there are sometimes children who struggle with reading and in these cases teachers will discuss this with parents and will ensure that interventions are implemented to support them in making the required progress.

I hope that this information has clarified the situation with regards to reading at Lincewood and that it helps to alleviate the concerns that have been expressed. If however, you do have any further queries, please remember that our KS1 teachers are always available at the end of the day, we have two consultation evenings and one open evening each year and parents can make additional appointments with the teacher if they feel this is necessary. In addition, we have a Reading meeting which is held at the beginning of each reception year and a 'Flying Start' course which may help answer some of the queries. We will also be holding our annual Phonics Screening meeting, for Year 1 parents, during the week beginning 23rd April 2018 which will explain the screening process in more detail.

Yours sincerely,

T Eastwell
Headteacher