

Reading Pledge

A plan to have all students reading proficiently



March 2024





five from five

Five from Five is a community education initiative of MultiLit Pty Ltd. Five from Five provides educators, parents and policy makers with information and resources about evidence-based reading instruction.



Learning Difficulties Australia (LDA) is an association of teachers and other professionals dedicated to assisting children with learning difficulties, both directly and through publications and events to raise awareness of evidence-based teaching practices.

Reading Pledge

Pledge:

To reduce to near zero the number of children who finish primary school unable to read, or who struggle with reading in secondary school, by providing both primary and secondary school teachers with the training and resources they need to deliver targeted assessments and effectively address the needs of those students who are struggling, through the provision of effective intervention.



Rationale:

Every year since the National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) was implemented in 2008, a substantial number of students have not met the literacy standards necessary to make good progress in education. In 2023, almost 90,000 Year 7 students were placed in the lowest two standards, indicating that they did not meet the 'Strong' proficiency standard of "challenging but reasonable expectations" in reading. Of these, close to 27,000 were in the lowest proficiency standard and identified as 'needs additional support'. There are too many students leaving primary school not meeting proficiency standards in reading.

Action:

Every child who does not meet the designated achievement benchmark in the Year 1 Phonics Check (or similar assessment) or the NAPLAN Reading assessments is referred for standardised reading assessments and, on the basis of those results, provided with appropriate evidence-informed interventions.



The *Primary Reading Pledge* published in 2020 highlighted the number of students who were unable to read well after seven years of primary school and that these students should have been provided with support much earlier in their education. It provided an evidence-based framework for schools and systems to use to reduce this number. The *Primary Reading Pledge* said:

“Thousands of children each year are being denied this basic right, most of whom are casualties of a system that has become accustomed to an unacceptable rate of failure.”

Many schools adopted the Pledge and have been working toward a goal of 100% literacy. This updated version, called the *Reading Pledge* also extends the framework and guidance on intervention and assessment to secondary schools.

The *Reading Pledge* is both a call to action for all involved in education, and a practical and useful tool for schools. It once again draws on the combined expertise and experience of two organisations who have been supporting teachers to help struggling readers for, in some cases, decades.

Thousands of children finish primary school each year without sufficient reading skills

The National Assessment Plan for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) changed in 2023. The timing changed from May to March, all students completed an online assessment instead of paper and pen, and there was a new way of reporting results. This means that 2023 results are not directly comparable to previous years.

From 2008 to 2022, the categories of achievement in NAPLAN were ‘Below National Minimum Standard’, ‘At National Minimum Standard’ and ‘Above National Minimum Standard’, corresponding to six achievement bands in each year level.

In 2023, NAPLAN results were reported in four categories of achievement or ‘proficiency’:

- **Exceeding:** the student’s result exceeds expectations at the time of testing.
- **Strong:** the student’s result meets challenging but reasonable expectations at the time of testing.
- **Developing:** the student’s result indicates that they are working towards expectations at the time of testing.
- **Needs additional support:** the student’s result indicates that they are not achieving the learning outcomes that are expected at the time of testing. They are likely to need additional support to progress satisfactorily (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2023b).

These descriptions indicate that the proficiency target level is ‘Strong’ or ‘Exceeding’. In NAPLAN 2023, almost 27,000 students in Year 7 across the country – 9% of the cohort – were identified as ‘needs additional support’. Another 63,000 students (21%) were in the ‘developing’ proficiency standard, bringing the total number of students with literacy below the target ‘Strong’ proficiency standard to 90,000 – almost one in three students.

Table 1. Number and percentage of Year 7 students not meeting proficiency standards for reading (2023)

	Needs additional support		Developing		Total not meeting 'Strong' proficiency standard	
	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number
NSW	8.1	7,654	19.9	18,805	28	26,459
VIC	6.3	4,718	19.6	14,678	25.3	19,397
QLD	11.2	6,990	23.8	14,855	35	21,846
WA	10.4	3,514	21	7,095	31.4	10,610
SA	9.1	1,781	23	4,502	32.1	6,283
TAS	13.3	798	23.7	1,423	37	2,221
ACT	7.4	422	17.2	982	24.6	1,404
NT	35.3	884	19.7	493	55	1,378
AUSTRALIA	9	26,945	21	62,873	30	89,818

Source: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (2023a)

It should be noted that the cut-off point between 'Developing' and 'Strong' is not definitive and that the use of these labels is problematic. A student classified as strong may still be struggling in many areas of reading and in need of additional support. Logically, students do not jump straight from 'Developing' to 'Strong' literacy skills. There will be students in the low range of the 'Strong' category who are, in fact, not strong readers and are still developing many aspects of literacy. In Western Australia, one of the general requirements for the Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE) is that students must be able to demonstrate a basic, functional level of reading (and writing). These skills are described in Level 3 of the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF). There are five levels of skill in the ACSF with Level 3 representing a moderate skill level. According to information provided by ACARA, the score corresponding to this skill level falls within the 'Strong' category (572) but is well above the lower boundary of the category (Western Australian School Curriculum and Standards Authority, 2023). This will result in a large number of students (and their families) being led to believe they have 'strong' skills in reading in NAPLAN, only to be told they have failed to meet the minimum standard for the WACE. This is not because the WACE standard has been set too high; rather, it is because the NAPLAN term 'strong' is misleading.

NAPLAN results for previous cohorts have shown that every year, similar numbers of students begin their secondary education without the necessary literacy skills to enable them to succeed in education and beyond.

Nor is it the case that these students are identified for the first time in Year 7. Analysis of longitudinal data has shown that 72% of students identified as struggling readers in NAPLAN Year 3 were still struggling in Year 5, and 88% of students identified as struggling readers in Year 7 were still struggling in Year 9 (Productivity Commission, 2022).

Table 2. Percentage and number of Year 3 and Year 5 students not meeting proficiency standards for reading (2023)

	Year 3 reading			Year 5 reading		
	Needs additional support	Developing	Total not meeting 'Strong' proficiency standard	Needs additional support	Developing	Total not meeting 'Strong' proficiency standard
	Number (%)	Number (%)	Number (%)	Number (%)	Number (%)	Number (%)
NSW	7,277 (7.7%)	19,753 (20.9%)	27,030 (28.6%)	6,474 (6.6%)	16,283 (16.6%)	22,757 (23.2%)
VIC	4,808 (6.3%)	15,265 (20.0%)	20,073 (26.3%)	3,342 (4.3%)	11,349 (14.6%)	14,691 (18.9%)
QLD	7,518 (12.0%)	15,913 (25.4%)	23,431 (37.4%)	5,561 (8.6%)	12,674 (19.6%)	18,235 (28.2%)
WA	3,859 (11.3%)	8,231 (24.1%)	12,090 (35.4%)	3,003 (8.6%)	6,634 (19.0%)	9,637 (27.6%)
SA	1,709 (8.8%)	4,624 (23.8%)	6,333 (32.6%)	1,432 (7.1%)	3,773 (18.7%)	5,205 (25.8%)
TAS	711 (11.8%)	1,410 (23.4%)	2,121 (35.2%)	606 (9.9%)	1,237 (20.2%)	1,843 (30.1%)
ACT	448 (7.9%)	1,123 (19.8%)	1,571 (27.7%)	265 (4.7%)	824 (14.6%)	1,089 (19.3%)
NT	865 (32.8%)	649 (24.6%)	1,514 (57.4%)	850 (30.4%)	545 (19.5%)	1,395 (49.9%)
AUST	27,374 (9.1%)	66,780 (22.2%)	94,154 (31.3%)	21,658 (7.0%)	53,218 (17.2%)	74,876 (24.2%)

Source: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (2023a)

The students in Tables 1 and 2 are those that NAPLAN identified as being below the target proficient standard for reading. However, students who have not participated in NAPLAN (who were withdrawn or absent) should not be neglected. Non-participating students may require intervention and they should also have screening assessments. In 2023, this represented another 4.7% of students in Year 3 and 4.1% of students in Year 5. Indeed, the prospect of receiving an effective reading intervention if it is required may encourage greater participation in NAPLAN.

Students who are exempt from participating in NAPLAN have, by definition, already been identified as needing special education or intervention and therefore do not need to be assessed through the *Reading Pledge* process. They should already be receiving high quality learning support.

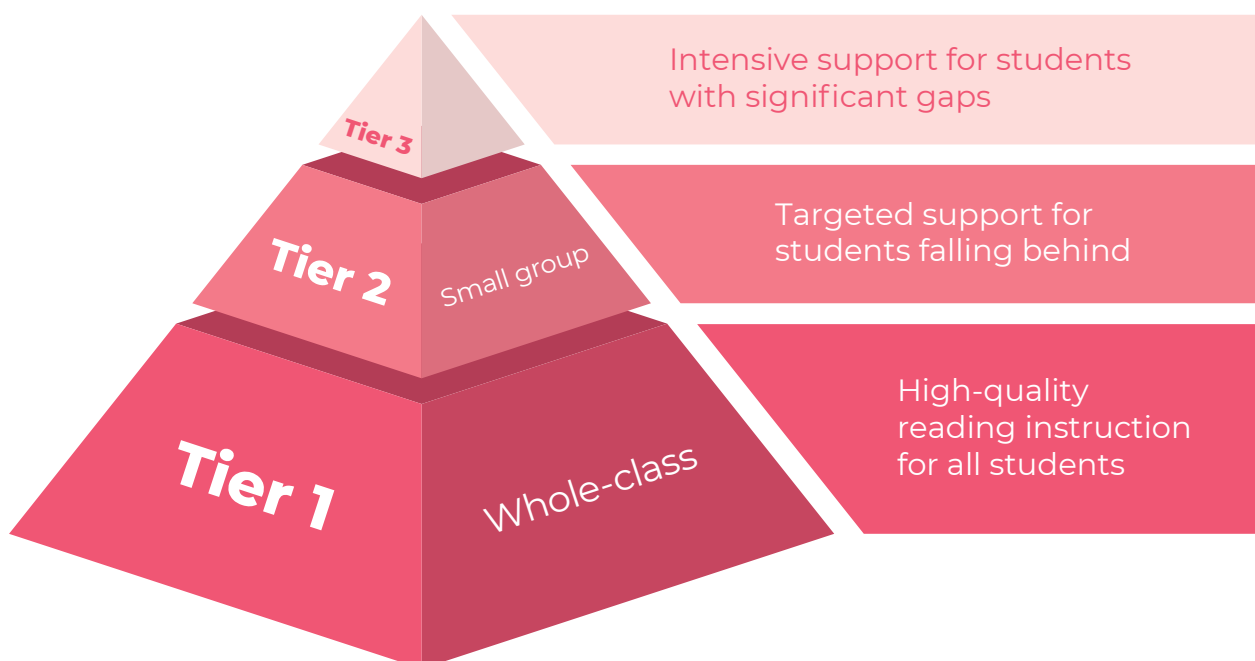
Given that students who perform below learning expectations are at high risk of continuing this trajectory as they move through school, the need for them to be provided with standardised screening assessments and receive suitable evidence-based intervention is severe and urgent (Lamb et al., 2015; Williams et al., 2023). Without it, these children are highly likely to struggle with the demands of the curriculum.

The NAPLAN assessments provide an opportunity to identify every child in need of support and for a systematic response to be implemented. At the moment, there is little guidance and support for schools to respond to NAPLAN results for low achieving students.

Utilising an evidence-based approach to intervention gives all students, including those with learning barriers, the instruction and support they need to learn to read

Response to Intervention (RtI) is a tiered model of instruction and intervention for students experiencing difficulties in acquiring basic skills and appropriate social behaviours (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009). The goal of RtI is to provide screening and/or assessment, deliver effective intervention, monitor student progress and then use the students' response to the intervention provided to determine 'next steps'. It can be used to assist in the identification of students with persistent and enduring difficulties, such as specific learning disorders (Turse & Albrecht, 2015). The terms RtI and MTSS (Multi-tiered Systems of Support) are often used interchangeably, however, the focus of RtI tends to be on the provision of high-quality, whole-class instruction and the direct services, supports and interventions that are available (and can be put in place) for students at risk; whereas descriptions of MTSS are often quite broad, with a focus on the systemic practices that are required to ensure that the needs of all students are met (Harlacher et al., 2014). Both describe the need for: evidence-based instruction for all students; data-based decision making; progress monitoring; and, explicit, targeted intervention, delivered at increasing levels of intensity (i.e. small groups – and in some cases one-to-one). For the purposes of this paper, the term RtI will be used.

Figure 1. Response to Intervention model



RtI typically has three 'tiers' of instruction and intervention. With initial whole-class reading instruction based on evidence-based best practice ('Tier 1'), the vast majority of students will get off to a good start in learning to read. Those students who begin to fall behind, often operationally defined as those in the bottom 25% of what might be expected for the age cohort, are then offered 'Tier 2' instruction.

Tier 2 instruction typically takes the form of a more intensive, more targeted, small group literacy intervention, again based on what scientific research has shown to be the most effective methods and curriculum content for teaching lower-progress readers. Assuming the instruction delivered at Tier 1 is evidence-informed, it is likely that the Tier 2 group will receive more of 'the same', delivered in a more targeted, explicit manner with additional opportunities for feedback and practice. Using the same or similar curriculum materials, scope and sequence, and instructional language as that which is being used at Tier 1 reduces the cognitive load and language demands on the students. Such instruction should be provided four to five times a week for at least half an hour, and for up to 20 weeks (Harlacher, Sanford, & Nelson Walker, n.d.). It should ideally be provided in addition to whole-class Tier 1 lessons so that students receive a 'double dose' of instruction. Tier 2 intervention is likely to resolve the difficulties experienced by the great majority of low-progress readers and will enable them to get 'back on track' and progress at a similar level to their classroom peers (Wanzek et al., 2015; Hall & Burns, 2018).

In the early years of school, Tier 2 intervention can occur within the classroom or as small group withdrawal sessions. In both cases, it works well if the intervention is delivered by the classroom teacher (who can reference the content that has been delivered in the classroom and who knows the students' needs well) but can also be delivered by a well-trained tutor or teacher, aware of the content that has been taught and the specific gaps in student knowledge. Both modes of intervention require a well-defined curriculum of systematic and explicit instruction and are, again, the same as (or very closely aligned with) the Tier 1 reading curriculum.

However, in the upper years of primary, students who do not meet proficiency benchmarks in the NAPLAN assessments often have a reading skill gap of several years below their peers. For these students, small group support within the Tier 1 classroom will almost certainly not be enough to accelerate their progress. These students will need remedial reading interventions either in a small group or one-to-one that include the development of foundational reading skills. With a high quality intervention of sufficient duration, the majority of older low progress readers will acquire reading proficiency appropriate for their age in reading accuracy and fluency but may need additional vocabulary and knowledge support going forward.

Tier 3 intervention is even more intensive, tailored to the specific needs of the individual student, and preferably provided by a reading expert. If Rtl is implemented well, only a very small number of children are likely to require this level of support on a continuing basis, but they may need it for several years.¹

Within the Rtl model, students with a specific learning disorder in reading (including those with dyslexia), may be defined as those students who present with persistent and enduring difficulties in reading, and despite the provision of at least six months of targeted intervention, fail to reach age-appropriate levels and/or fail to improve at the same rate as their peers (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). These are typically the students who are likely to need continuing literacy support, possibly over many years.

The Rtl model is most often used in primary schools, but it is also an effective approach in secondary schools, following the same principles of assessment, intervention and monitoring (de Haan, 2021).

¹ Tier 3 intervention is commonly characterised as specialised one-to-one instruction; however, it is sometimes also defined by the content of the instruction, that is, how different it is to the students' usual classroom curriculum. By this definition, a small group intervention that is teaching foundational reading skills in secondary school could be described as Tier 3.

In the context of the *Reading Pledge*, intervention for struggling readers in Year 1 should follow the standard RtI protocol where Tier 2 is the first stage of intervention. For students in Year 3 and beyond, the decision to provide Tier 2 intervention first, or go directly to a Tier 3 intervention, should be based on a) whether they have already had a Tier 2 intervention, and/or b) the severity of their difficulties (see Figure 2) (Vaughn et al., 2010; Wanzek, et al., 2015).

Schools and systems should ensure that all students receive the evidence-based instruction and intervention they need

The best setting for students to learn to read is primary school. Ideally, all students will receive exemplary Tier 1 reading instruction. This should be the expectation for all schools. Application of the RtI model will identify students who need additional support and provide intervention early. This will result in fewer students progressing to secondary school without adequate reading skills.

Once students reach secondary school, it is much more difficult to catch them up for a number of reasons. First, the skills gap is often very wide so it can take a long time for them to reach the level of their peers (Colleu Terradas, 2023). Second, many students have developed anxiety or low self-concept around reading well before they reach adolescence (McArthur, 2022). Third, finding time in the secondary school timetable for intervention is challenging. And fourth, few secondary schools have teachers with specialist literacy skills (de Haan, 2021).

State and territory NAPLAN results for 2023 provide an estimate of the number of children who would be eligible for intervention through the *Reading Pledge* in Year 3 and Year 5 (Table 2). While the proportion of children requiring intervention is high in the Northern Territory, the absolute numbers are lower than in other jurisdictions.

The costs associated with intervention on this scale are considerable but not unrealistic, especially if managed efficiently at a systemic or sector level. The costs of not intervening through intergenerational impacts on employment, income, health, welfare, and crime are far greater. It has been estimated that illiteracy costs the economy up to \$44 billion each year. With adequate investment to ensure appropriate interventions reach the students who need it and evidence-based reading instruction accessible to all Australian students, it is estimated that a 13-fold return on this investment is possible (Del Rio & Jones, 2023).

While NAPLAN can and should be used as a source of information to identify students who need intervention in Years 3 and 5, evidence-based intervention should be provided in schools as a matter of course much earlier than Year 3. All students in Foundation to Year 2 should be given valid and reliable screening and progress monitoring assessments in reading subskills, including the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check. This is a recommendation of the expert panel report review to inform the National School Reform Agreement as well as a recent report from the Grattan Institute (Hunter et al., 2023; O'Brien et al., 2023).

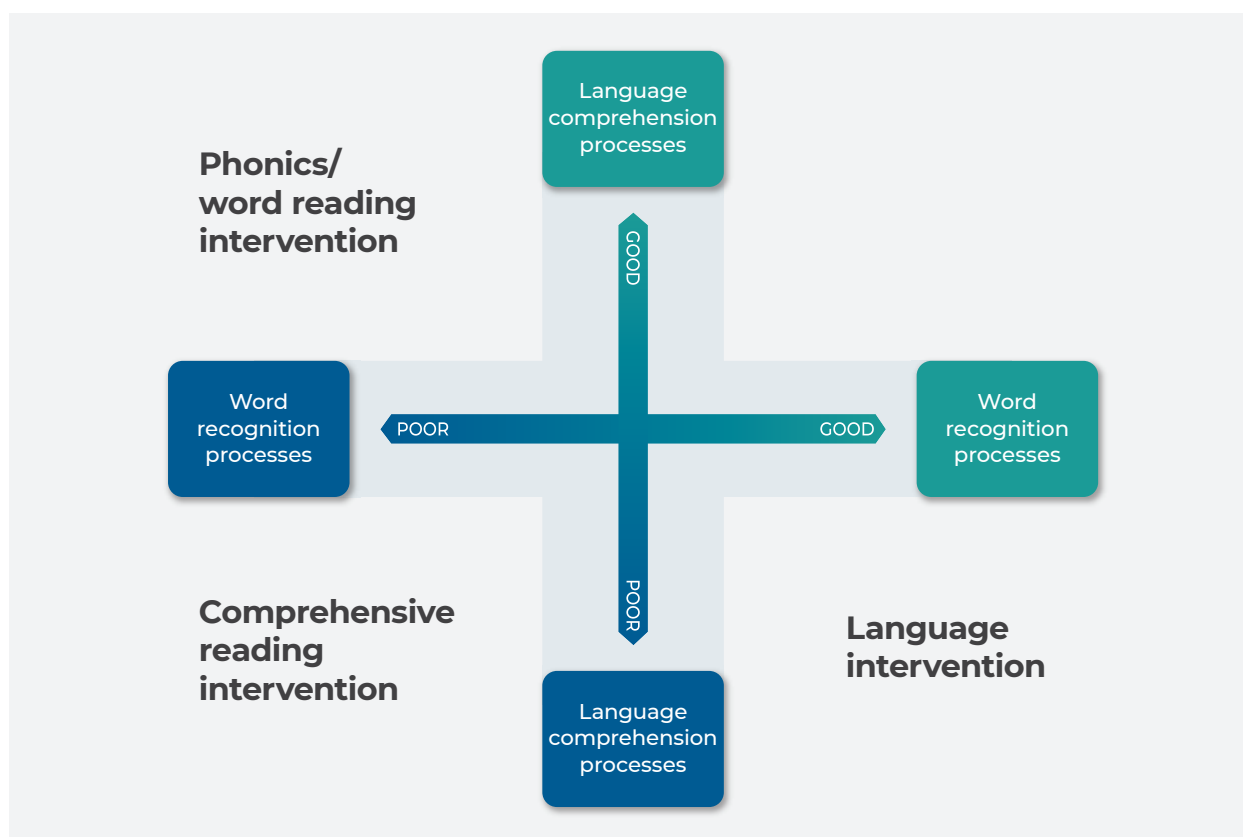
The Year 1 Phonics Screening Check is already being used or will be used as a systemic assessment in South Australia, New South Wales, Tasmania and Queensland. Data from South Australia in 2023 show that 71% of Year 1 students achieved the benchmark score of 28/40, up from 43% in 2018 (Government of South Australia, 2023; Government of South Australia, 2018). This indicates that significant improvement has already occurred in South Australia, but further improvements are required to classroom reading instruction (Tier 1 in the RtI model). In New South Wales, data for 2023 showed 59% of Year 1 students met the benchmark, an increase of two percentage points since 2021 (NSW Government, 2023). Tasmania's results are not yet available, and Queensland will implement the assessment from 2024.

Provision of early intervention can represent a significant investment, but effective intervention at this stage will reduce the number of children requiring intervention in Year 3 and Year 5, at which stage their difficulties will be harder and more expensive to remediate.

The use of standardised screening assessments will help determine the subskill deficits that underlie a child's reading difficulties

The Simple View of Reading offers an empirically validated model of reading that can be used to make evidence-based decisions about interventions (Hoover & Tunmer, 2018). The Simple View of Reading states that reading comprehension has two broad components: word identification (decoding) and language comprehension. A child who has low proficiency in either one (or both) of these areas will have poor reading comprehension.

Figure 2. System for classifying good and poor readers according to the SVoR. Adapted from Catts et al., 2005.



The reading assessment in NAPLAN is a general comprehension measure. If a student obtains a low score, the test does not provide information about the particular aspects of reading with which they are having difficulty and thus can only be used as an indicator of low reading ability that needs investigation through further assessment. If additional assessments reveal no serious problems and indicates that the NAPLAN result was not an accurate reflection of the child's reading ability, there is no need to intervene further. Appendix 1 contains a list of recommended assessments that can be used for this purpose.

Standardised screening assessments of reading subskills are used to identify specific strengths and weaknesses in the reading abilities of individual students. They are designed to pinpoint the underlying factors of a student's reading difficulty and provide the basis for intervention decisions.

If children continue to make low progress in reading despite a high quality intervention, they may have a specific reading or language disorder. *Diagnostic assessments* are more comprehensive and specialised instruments used (often also with reference to standardised norms) to identify specific difficulties in the reading profiles of individual students. Most diagnostic assessments are administered by allied education and health professionals, such as psychologists and speech pathologists.

Diagnostic assessments are necessarily time-consuming. They are usually only used to provide more detailed information when general assessments of reading for a student's age and stage of learning are inadequate (for example, from curriculum-based assessments and standardised tests).

Reading interventions should be evidence-informed and precisely targeted

The results of standardised screening assessments should be used to determine which type of intervention a child needs (Hoover & Tunmer, 2018).

Students who have difficulties at the word level will often guess what the word might be from the first one or two letters of the word, the context or picture clues. Their reading is likely to be effortful and not automatic. As a consequence of the effort that goes in to reading each word, their comprehension of the text suffers. These students need a phonics-based intervention that will assist them to become accurate and fluent readers.

In cases where students demonstrate strong accuracy and fluency (that is, they do not rely on guessing and they read words at a reasonable rate) but they struggle to comprehend both what they read and what people say, then a language-based intervention to develop vocabulary and understanding of text and oral language structures is needed.

Numerous reading interventions are available and are currently being used by schools. Almost all schools offer reading support in some form. However, reading intervention is not consistently evidence-based and targeted, and is often limited to the first few years of school – sometimes due to lack of knowledge of evidence-based intervention and sometimes due to lack of resources and support. Children who continue to struggle with reading after receiving some (but not enough) early support will be among the children identified as “needing additional support” or “developing” in NAPLAN.

Schools should therefore be provided with guidance about which specific intervention approaches and/or programs, and which types of intervention programs (phonics or language), meet the criteria for being evidence-based or evidence-informed. Intervention programs should use materials and pedagogy that are age appropriate and, most importantly should be delivered by teachers with knowledge and training in the delivery of the school's program of choice.

The Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) defines evidence as “any type of information that supports an assertion, hypothesis or claim. This includes both research evidence and practitioner-generated evidence” (Australian Education Research Organisation, 2021). However, greater weight should be attached to scientific research evidence.

Evidence-based interventions have been developed using scientific research on reading instruction and development and have been found to be effective through quantitative evaluations using strong research protocols. These programs have a high likelihood of success with struggling and low-progress readers.

Evidence-informed interventions have been developed using scientific research on reading instruction and development but may not have been subjected to the same level of experimental evaluation. Many of these programs have, however, been found to have high levels of success with struggling and low-progress readers through evidence gathered from practice.

Departments of education and non-government school authorities should provide a list of interventions that meet evidence-based and evidence-informed criteria, and guidelines for how to make decisions about which intervention will be most effective for each child who requires it, similar to the diagram in Figure 3.

AERO has published a decision-making tool to help practitioners determine the level of evidence supporting a particular teaching program or approach. It is published online at <https://www.edresearch.edu.au/guides-resources/practice-resources/evidence-decision-making-tool-practitioners>

Supporting struggling readers in secondary school

While it should be the goal of all school systems to have students reading well by the time they finish primary school, the reality is that many secondary students do not have sufficient reading skills to succeed in secondary education. While it may be more difficult, it is never too late to help a student learn to read and it is the responsibility of secondary schools to provide the necessary intervention and supports to ensure these students can access curriculum content at their grade level. There is an extensive evidence base supporting the use of a multi-tiered Rtl approach in secondary schools, following the protocols of assessment, intervention and monitoring described above (de Bruin et al., 2023).

It is unreasonable to expect that all secondary teachers should have expertise in teaching reading; however, there are a number of ways in which literacy intervention and support can be effectively provided in secondary school settings.

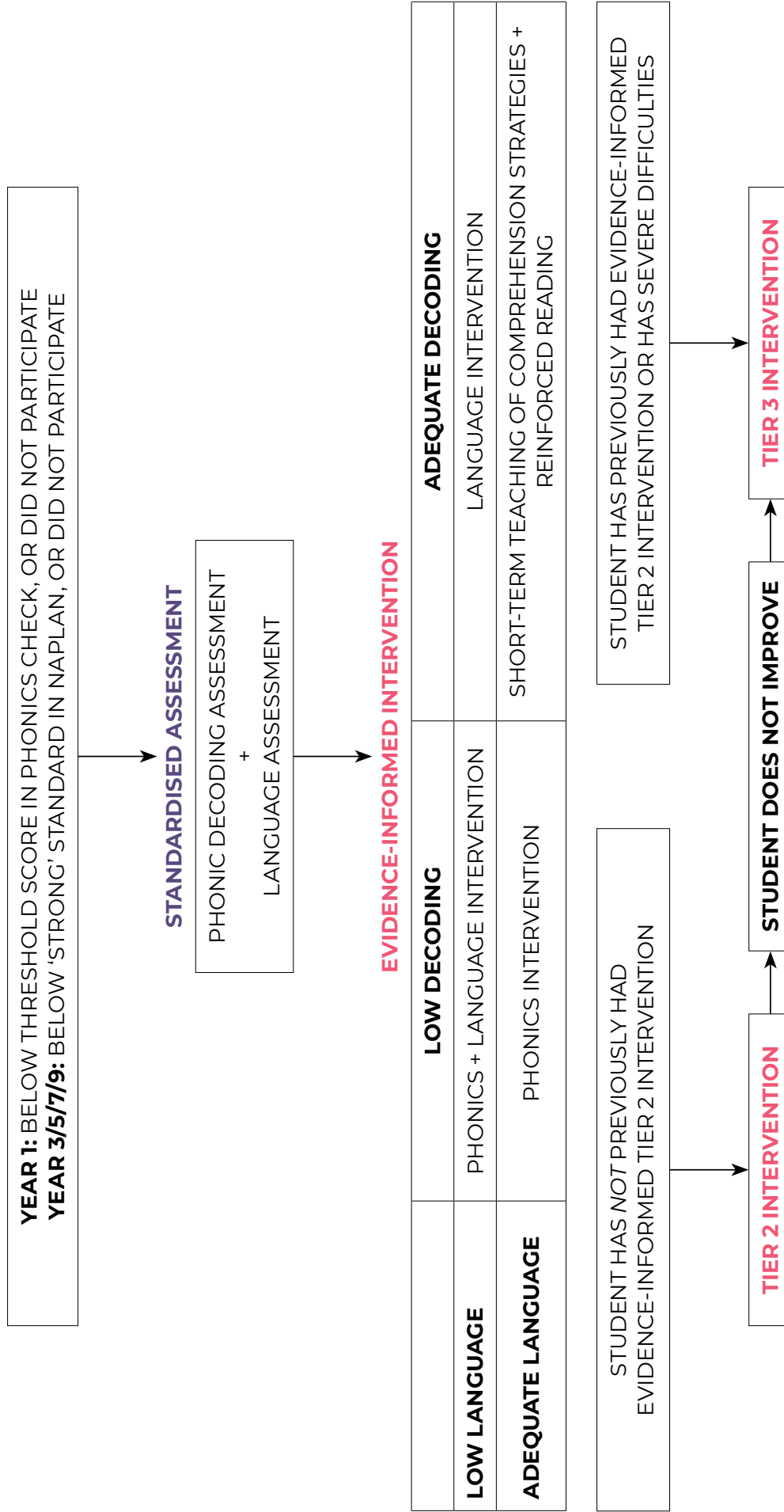
1. Develop school capability

Intervention is most effective when it is embedded into the school culture and all teachers understand the role they have to play. Employing an Rtl framework may help with this. It is important that there are frequent collaborative discussions to review data, make strategic instructional decisions and select and implement evidence-based intervention programs. A whole-school approach, encompassing all subject areas, to improve reading outcomes is crucial. At the Tier 1 level, this would necessitate the provision of explicit and active instruction in the knowledge, vocabulary and reading skills related to the text structure of their specific subject area, by all teachers (de Bruin et al., 2023; Colleu Terradas, 2023; de Haan, 2021; Murphy, 2019).

2. Tackle the logistical challenges

- **Timetabling:** Any withdrawal of students should ideally happen on a rotating timetable so students don't miss the same subjects all of the time (Colleu Terradas, 2023). An alternative to this pull-out approach is to adopt a model where students can be grouped flexibly across year groups to provide data-driven targeted, short-term interventions (de Haan, 2021). This will minimise disruption, ensure any interventions are completed with fidelity, and students attend for the necessary duration and frequency (Colleu Terradas, 2023).

Figure 3. Assessment and intervention decision framework



- **Resourcing:** The implementation of an RtI framework helps ensure that resources are used in the most effective and efficient way. Robust screening and diagnostic assessments are vital to ensure that students are being met at point of need (see Appendix 1) (Del Rio & Jones, 2023).

3. Support/adjustments for struggling readers in subject classrooms

While subject teachers have an enormous amount of content to cover within their curricula, students who struggle with reading (and writing) experience considerable difficulty accessing this content. Students with poor reading skills can be supported in all classes by:

- explicit pre-teaching of vocabulary, using student-friendly definitions and interactive, robust activities where word meanings can be explored allowing for cross-curricular generalisation; making morphology a focus across all subject areas (whole-school approach) to assist in vocabulary building (Colleu Terradas, 2023)
- building background knowledge with supplementary texts at a lower reading level
- reading text aloud with students following along (shared reading)
- assistive technology
- frequent checking for understanding in all classes and opportunities for oral discussion and debate around text (de Haan, 2021; Colleu Terradas, 2023)
- supporting students' writing skills as reading and writing are closely related (Kim & Graham, 2022).

If education ministers and school sector authorities make the Reading Pledge, it is far more likely that students will receive the support they need to learn to read in school

It is a constitutional responsibility for state governments to provide education to all children. Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, a treaty to which Australia became a signatory in 1976, recognises “the right of everyone to an education” and that “education shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society” (Department of Foreign Affairs, 1976). Arguably, there is no education without literacy.

As stated above, thousands of students each year are being denied this basic right, most of whom are casualties of a system that has become accustomed to an unacceptable rate of failure. The Grattan Institute's *Reading Guarantee* (Hunter et al., 2024) provides a set of recommendations for policies to change this situation. Policy changes take time but this document – the *Reading Pledge* – provides specific guidance for schools to enact immediately.

There is no excuse for children spending seven years in full-time education without learning to read. Every state and territory education minister must pledge to provide the keys to literacy to every child before they leave primary school and to do what is necessary to support those students still struggling in secondary school.

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Appendix 1. Valid assessment

Appropriate assessment depends on the stage of reading development and the purpose of the assessment.

The reading, spelling and language assessments listed here are examples of standardised assessments appropriate for use in a Response to Intervention model. It is not suggested that all are necessary. For example, choose one phonics assessment and one language assessment, or an instrument that assesses both.

Foundation to Year 2

	Examples of standardised assessments	Skill(s) assessed
Screening for intervention Curriculum-based phonics and oral language assessments; curriculum-based fluency measures	Phonics and oral reading fluency	
	<i>Castles and Coltheart-2</i>	Phonics
	<i>Educheck (Neal Phonemic Skills Screening Test)</i>	Phonics
	<i>Wheldall Assessment of Reading Nonwords (WARN)</i>	Phonics; oral reading fluency
	<i>Wheldall Assessment of Reading Lists</i>	Oral word reading fluency
	<i>Letter Sound Test (Motif)</i>	Phonics
	<i>Diagnostic Reading Test for Nonwords (Motif)</i>	Phonics
	<i>Foundations of Early Literacy Assessment (FELA)</i>	Phonological awareness; phonics
	<i>CUBED Dynamic Decoding Measures</i>	Phonics
	<i>DIBELS Nonsense Word Fluency</i>	Phonics
	<i>UK Year 1 Phonics Screening Check</i>	Phonics
	<i>Sutherland Phonological Awareness Test (SPAT-R)</i>	Phonological awareness; phonics
	<i>School Entry Alphabetic and Phonological Awareness Reading Test (SEAPART)</i>	Phonological awareness; phonics
	<i>Test of Word Reading Efficiency (TOWRE-2)</i>	Phonics
	<i>Acadience Reading K-6 – Nonsense Word Fluency</i>	Phonics; oral reading fluency
	<i>Gray Oral Reading Test, 5th ed (GORT-5)</i>	Oral reading fluency
	Language	
	<i>Grammar and Phonology Screening (GAPS)</i>	Oral language
	<i>Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals-5 Screening Test (CELF-5)</i>	Oral language
<i>CUBED Narrative Language Measures (Language)</i>	Oral language	
<i>Screen of Communication Skills (SOCS)</i>	Oral language	

	Examples of standardised assessments	Skill(s) assessed
Assessment for Tier 3 intervention Diagnostic assessments	Multi-component	
	<i>Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills</i>	Phonics, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension
	<i>York Assessment of Reading for Comprehension – Early Reading</i>	Phonological skills, alphabetic knowledge, word reading
	<i>Acadience Reading K-6</i>	Phonemic awareness, phonics, oral reading fluency, comprehension
	<i>EasyCBM</i>	Phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency
	<i>Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals-5 (CELF-5)</i>	Semantics, pragmatics, morphology, syntax
	<i>Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing (CTOPP-2)</i>	Phonological awareness, phonological memory, rapid naming
	<i>Test of Integrated Language and Literacy Skills (TILLS)</i>	Phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, listening comprehension
	<i>Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-4</i>	Receptive vocabulary
	<i>Acadience Reading Diagnostic: Phonological Awareness and Word Reading & Decoding</i>	Phonemic awareness, phonics and word reading accuracy
<i>Acadience Reading Diagnostic: Comprehension, Fluency and Oral Language</i>	Oral reading fluency, vocabulary, comprehension	

Year 3 to Year 6

	Examples of standardised assessments	Skill(s) assessed
Screening for intervention Curriculum-based phonics and oral language assessments; curriculum-based fluency measures	Phonics and oral reading fluency	
	<i>Castles and Coltheart-2</i>	Phonics
	<i>Wheldall Assessment of Reading Passages (WARP)</i>	Oral reading fluency
	<i>Martin and Pratt Nonword Reading Test</i>	Phonics
	<i>Letter Sound Test (Motif)</i>	Phonics
	<i>Diagnostic Reading Test for Nonwords (Motif)</i>	Phonics
	<i>Sutherland Phonological Awareness Test (SPAT-R)</i>	Phonological awareness; phonics
	<i>Test of Word Reading Efficiency (TOWRE-2)</i>	Phonics
	Language	
	<i>Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals-5 Screening Test (CELF-5)</i>	Oral language
<i>CUBED Narrative Language Measures (Language)</i>	Oral language	

	Examples of standardised assessments	Skill(s) assessed
	Multi-component	
	<i>CUBED Narrative Language Measures (Reading)</i>	Decoding, comprehension, vocabulary
	<i>York Assessment of Reading for Comprehension – Passage Reading (YARC-PR)</i>	Reading accuracy, rate, reading comprehension
	<i>Tests of Reading Comprehension (TORCH)</i>	Vocabulary, reading comprehension
	<i>Neale Analysis of Reading Ability</i>	Reading accuracy, rate, reading comprehension
	<i>Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills</i>	Phonics, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension
	<i>Acadience Reading K-6</i>	Phonics, oral reading fluency, comprehension
	<i>EasyCBM</i>	Oral reading fluency, vocabulary, reading comprehension
	<i>Gray Oral Reading Test, 5th ed (GORT-5)</i>	Oral reading fluency, comprehension
Assessment for Tier 3 intervention	<i>Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals-5 Screening Test (CELF-5)</i>	Semantics, pragmatics, morphology, syntax
Diagnostic assessments	<i>Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing (CTOPP-2)</i>	Phonological awareness, phonological memory, rapid naming
	<i>Wechsler Individual Achievement Test-III (WIAT-3)</i>	Oral language, listening comprehension, decoding, word reading, reading comprehension
	<i>Waddington Diagnostic Standard and Advanced Reading and Spelling Tests</i>	Picture vocabulary knowledge, speech irregularities and potential word reversals, specific vowel differences, two letter consonant blending knowledge, ability to verify/discern beginning/endings of words, graphophonic and syntactic/semantic based skills, conceptual understanding of specific words, correct use of indirect picture cues/comprehension of complex sentences
	<i>Test of Integrated Language and Literacy Skills (TILLS)</i>	Phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, listening comprehension
	<i>Acadience Reading Diagnostic: Phonological Awareness and Word Reading & Decoding</i>	Phonemic awareness, phonics and word reading accuracy
	<i>Acadience Reading Diagnostic: Comprehension, Fluency and Oral Language</i>	Oral reading fluency, vocabulary, comprehension

Secondary

	Examples of standardised assessments	Skill(s) assessed
Screening for intervention Curriculum-based phonics and oral language assessments; curriculum-based fluency measures	Phonics and oral reading fluency	
	<i>Martin and Pratt Nonword Reading Test</i>	Phonics
	<i>Letter Sound Test (Motif)</i>	Phoneme-grapheme knowledge
	<i>Diagnostic Reading Test for Nonwords (Motif)</i>	Phonics
	Language	
	<i>Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals-5 Screening Test (CELF-5)</i>	Oral language
	<i>Oral Passage Understanding Scale (OPUS)</i>	Oral language
	Multi-component	
	<i>York Assessment of Reading for Comprehension – Passage Reading (YARC-PR)</i>	Reading accuracy, rate, reading comprehension
	<i>Tests of Reading Comprehension (TORCH)</i>	Vocabulary, comprehension
	<i>Neale Analysis of Reading Ability</i>	Reading accuracy, rate, reading comprehension
	<i>Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS/MAZE)</i>	Reading accuracy, rate, reading comprehension
	<i>New Group Reading Test (NGRT) (online, adaptive)</i>	Decoding, reading comprehension
	<i>Oral and Written Language Scales – Second Edition (OWLS-II)</i>	Listening comprehension, oral expression, reading comprehension, and written expression
	<i>Acadience Reading 7-8</i>	Oral reading fluency, reading comprehension
<i>EasyCBM</i>	Oral reading fluency, vocabulary, reading comprehension	
<i>Gray Oral Reading Test, 5th ed (GORT-5)</i>	Oral reading fluency, comprehension	
<i>Progress Test in English in Secondary Schools (PTE)</i>	Spelling, punctuation, grammar, reading comprehension	
Assessment for Tier 3 intervention Diagnostic assessments	<i>Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals-5 Screening Test (CELF-5)</i>	Semantics, pragmatics, morphology, syntax
	<i>Weschler Individual Achievement Test-III (WIAT-III)</i>	Oral language, listening comprehension, decoding, word reading, reading comprehension

Examples of standardised assessments	Skill(s) assessed
<i>Waddington Diagnostic Standard and Advanced Reading and Spelling Tests</i>	Speech irregularities and potential word reversals, syntactic/semantic based skills, correct use of indirect picture cues/comprehension of complex sentences
<i>Test of Integrated Language and Literacy Skills (TILLS)</i>	Phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, listening comprehension
<i>Woodcock-Johnson IV Tests of Achievement</i>	Phoneme-grapheme knowledge, reading accuracy, fluency, non-word reading, comprehension, spelling and written expression
<i>Woodcock-Johnson IV Tests of Oral Language</i>	Phonological processing, story retell, non-word repetition, oral vocabulary
<i>Test of Dyslexia [TOD]</i>	Phonological awareness, phonics, RAN, letter/word recognition, sight word acquisition, decoding, vocabulary knowledge, reading comprehension, fluency, orthographic processing
<i>Acadience Reading Diagnostic: Phonological Awareness and Word Reading & Decoding</i>	Phonemic awareness, phonics and word reading accuracy
<i>Acadience Reading Diagnostic: Comprehension, Fluency and Oral Language</i>	Oral reading fluency, vocabulary, comprehension

For more comprehensive information about assessments, see Wheldall et al. (2023). *Effective Instruction in Reading and Spelling*. MRU Press.

Appendix 2. Evidence-based and evidence-informed intervention programs and resources

A non-categorical approach to intervention

According to the non-categorical model, instruction should be tailored to the specific instructional needs of the individual child, not to the perceived needs of categories of students. In this sense, it is truly 'child-centred'. There is likely to be more variation within categories of reading difficulties or disabilities than there is between them. Children with specific disabling conditions do not need programs based on their condition but rather a program that is based on the best scientific evidence for efficacy of instruction (Wheldall, 2009).

This is not to say that 'one size fits all' but rather to argue that 'a coat should be cut according to the cloth'. What differs is the child's initial instructional level and the progress that they may make. Some children, regardless of profile or category, may need more frequent, and more intensive, instruction than others. Some children will quickly master the sequence of instruction while others may need many repetitions. The Rtl model, described earlier, provides a paradigm for this, the appropriate tier of instruction being determined by continual monitoring of student performance and progress using appropriate curriculum-based assessments (see Appendix 1).

While the selection of an appropriately targeted and high quality intervention program or resource is important, it does not abrogate the need for teachers to be well informed about evidence-based reading instruction and intervention. The best results will be achieved by a combination of the two. Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions will also be most effective if they are consistent with, and supportive of, Tier 1 instruction.

Criteria for selecting intervention programs

Consistent with the non-categorical approach to reading intervention, children who are struggling with reading rarely need a different type of instruction. The differences between evidence-based Tier 1 and Tier 2 instruction, other than the logistics associated with group size, are the intensity and duration of instruction.

Therefore, evidence-informed Tier 1 programs can be used effectively with smaller groups of children as long as fidelity to the key elements is preserved.

AUSPELD provides guidance for teachers and parents in selecting effective reading programs for instruction and intervention. The criteria associated with the highest likelihood of effectiveness are:

1. Evidence-based or evidence-informed

It is important that the program is based on current research evidence and, ideally, that its effectiveness is supported by independent reviews (i.e. not evaluated solely by the program manufacturer). Structured synthetic phonics (SSP) programs are considered to be evidence-based because they have been the subject of systematic reviews.

2. Explicit and direct instructional methods

Content is taught clearly and directly, not in an embedded or implicit manner. Explicit instruction directs student attention towards specific learning in a highly structured environment.

3. Incorporates dual coding

Programs that involve the effective combination of language (either spoken or written) and visual images (i.e. pictures, icons, diagrams, displays, slides, graphic organisers etc.) to deliver information can assist students to remember information and consolidate learning.

4. Cumulative sequence

Builds on what has already been learned and previous learning receives further practice.

5. Sequential

A prescribed sequence of learning targets presented in small steps.

6. Repetitive

Regular systematic review of concepts and over-learning to ensure learning is retained in long term memory.

7. Systematic

Concepts and skills are taught in a step-by-step manner. For example, in a structured synthetic phonics program, a complete set of phoneme-grapheme relationships are taught sequentially, cumulatively and systematically.

8. Appropriate pace

It is important to introduce concepts and skills in small steps but at a reasonable pace. Each component is taught on its own with ample opportunity for practice. In subsequent sessions (preferably daily) – previous learning is reviewed, new concepts and skills are taught, and – again – ample opportunity for practice is provided.

9. Cover all areas of instruction needed

For example, possible areas for literacy remediation include: instruction targeting phonemic awareness, phonics, decoding, fluency, comprehension, spelling, grammar, sentence structure, and vocabulary.

10. Assessment

Regular ongoing assessments of concepts taught to ensure the student is provided with instruction, resources and activities at the right level.

Evidence-based and evidence-informed reading programs and resources that can be used as Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions for struggling readers

Note: This is not a definitive list and schools should investigate each option carefully to ensure it meets their needs.

Program/Resource ¹	Suitable School Years ²
Ants in the Apple	F-6
Barton Reading and Spelling System	F-12
Corrective Reading*	3-12
Cracking the ABC Code	F-12
Early Intervention in Reading*	F-2
Fitzroy Method	F-6
Foundations	F-3
Get Reading Right	F-2
HillRAP/95 Rap*	1-8
Jolly Phonics/Jolly Grammar*	F-6
Language!Live	5-12
LanguageLift	F-2
Let's Decode	F-3
Letters and Sounds	F-4
Little Learners Love Literacy	F-6
MiniLit*	1-2
MacqLit*	3-12
MultiLit Reading Tutor Program*	2-12
Nessy Reading and Spelling	F-6
Orton-Gillingham*	F-6
Phonic Books Readers	F-9
Phonics International	F-12

¹ Programs marked with * have been shown to be effective in published experimental trials.

² Some programs and resources are suitable for use with children in preschool.

Program/Resource¹	Suitable School Years²
PLD Structured Synthetic Phonics	F-6
Read Write Inc. One-to-One Phonics Tutoring	F-3
Read Write Inc Fresh Start	3-6
Reading Doctor*	F-6
Reading Mastery*	F-5
REWARDS Intermediate*	4-6
REWARDS Secondary*	6-12
Sounds-Write	F-6
SPELD-SA Intensive Literacy Program	3-12
Teach Your Child to Read in 100 Easy Lessons	F-3
Toe by Toe	2-12
University of Florida Literacy Institute (UFLI) Foundations	F-6
Word Connections*	3-6
Word Wasp	2-12



“ To reduce to near zero the number of children who finish primary school unable to read, or who struggle with reading in secondary school, by providing both primary and secondary school teachers with the training and resources they need to deliver targeted assessments and effectively address the needs of those students who are struggling, through the provision of effective intervention. ”



Published March 2024 by MultiLit Pty Ltd.

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