

Essex Education Task Force

Essex Year of Reading 2022

A collection of articles and blogs

Reading is the golden key to a lifetime's opportunities

Roy Blatchford, January 2022

The Covid pandemic has changed not only the habits of work, but also those of leisure. Having spent more time at home for much of the past two years, we have all shown a renewed enthusiasm for reading - and book buying.

More than 200 million print books were sold in Britain in 2020 - worth £6.4 billion.

So the familiar pleasure of turning the pages of a book have not been replaced by screens. Thank goodness. The old-fashioned technology of the written word is the entertainment of the age - and for all ages.

What better news then to kick off the Essex Year of Reading 2022! Let us get Essex reading - in every family, every business, every community.

And what can this mean for schools? Let us be properly ambitious for 2022:

- Every primary school to say to itself: almost all children will, at age 11+, have a reading age which at least matches their actual age. *And track reading ages from the early years to Year 6.*
- Every secondary school to say to itself: no matter the child's starting point, almost all will read at least in line with their actual age by the time they reach 16+. *And track reading ages from Year 7 to Year 11.*

So what's to do?

An easy reading agenda

First, schools need a rigorous approach to word recognition: enabling children to use a phonetic approach, to divide words into syllables for pronunciation, to have a knowledge of prefixes and suffixes.

Second, a planned approach to vocabulary development: learning new words, keywords and concepts, technical abbreviations and etymology, symbols and formulae - through regular and consistent use of a dictionary and a thesaurus.

Third, a systematic engagement with comprehension and organisation of text: summarising what has been read, distinguishing essential from non-essential, fact from opinion, drawing inferences and conclusions, noting cause and effect, reading between the lines.

Fourth, a programme to promote reading interests: voluntary reading for pleasure, reading for personal information, developing a passion for particular subjects, the use of the school library, the downloading onto the iPad of a favourite biography.

Fifth, a whole-school approach to study skills: sitting still long enough to read, using skimming for different purposes, reading maps and graphs, learning how to take notes, reading more rapidly with adequate comprehension, forming the study habit.

Skilled practitioners will not make the mistake of adopting simply an age-related approach to the teaching of reading. Rather, they will select what works for a given child or group of children at a particular point in their reading journey. Fluency is the goal.

Teachers and tutors must be driven by the belief that every child *can* tackle texts with confidence, whether on the printed page or the Kindle.

Roy Blatchford chairs the [Essex Education Task Force](#) which is launching the Essex Year of Reading 2022
