Summary of recommendations

1
Develop students' speaking and listening skills and wider understanding of language

A focus on developing oral language skills is especially important for the development of a range of reading and writing skills in this age group.

Useful speaking and listening activities include:

- students reading books aloud and being encouraged to have conversations about them;
- the teacher modelling inference making by asking relevant questions aloud and answering them his/herself;
- students engaging in paired or group work so they can share the thought processes that lead them to make inferences;
- activities which extend students' spoken and receptive vocabulary; and
- a teacher encouraging children to clearly articulate what they are going to say in their writing

2
Use an engaging approach to developing reading which integrates both decoding and comprehension skills

Both decoding (the ability to translate written words into the sounds of spoken language) and comprehension (the ability to understand the meaning of the language being read) skills are necessary for confident and competent reading, but neither is sufficient on its own.

It is also important to remember that progress in literacy requires motivation and engagement, which will help children to develop persistence and enjoyment in their reading.

Children will need a range of wider language and literacy experiences to develop their understanding of written texts in all their forms. This should include active engagement with different media and genres of texts and a wide range of content topics.

3
Effectively implement a systematic phonics program

Systematic phonics approaches explicitly teach students a comprehensive set of letter sound relationships through an organised sequence.

A phonics program will only be effective if it is delivered using effective pedagogy. How phonics is taught is important.

Consider the following when teaching a phonics program:

- Training – ensure all staff have the necessary pedagogical skills and content knowledge
- Responsive – check if learning can be accelerated or extra support is needed and identify specific capabilities and difficulties to focus teaching.
- Engaging – lessons that engage students and are enjoyable to teach.
- Adaptations – carefully consider any adaptations to the program, as they may reduce its impact.
- Focus – a flexible approach to grouping students is likely to help focus effort and improve teaching efficiency.

4
Teach students to use strategies for developing and monitoring reading comprehension

Reading comprehension can be improved by teaching students specific strategies that they can apply to both check how well they comprehend what they read, and overcome barriers to comprehension. These include:

- activating prior knowledge;
- prediction;
- questioning;
- clarifying;
- summarising; and
- inference.

Teachers can introduce these strategies using modelling and structured support, which should be strategically reduced as a child progresses until the child can complete the activity independently.

5
Teach students to use strategies for planning and monitoring writing

Students' writing can be improved by teaching them to effectively plan and monitor their writing. Teaching several different strategies is likely to help, depending on the current skills of the writer. These include:

- pre writing activities;
- drafting, revising and editing; and
- sharing.

Teachers can introduce these strategies using modelling and structured support, which should be strategically reduced as a child progresses until the child can complete the activity independently.

6
Promote fluent written transcription skills by encouraging extensive and effective practice and explicitly teaching spelling

Transcription refers to the physical processes of handwriting or typing, and spelling.

Children must develop their fluency in these skills to the point that they have become automated. If children have to concentrate to ensure their transcription is accurate, they will be less able to think about the content of their writing.

A large amount of practice, supported by effective feedback, is required to develop fluency. Achieving the necessary quantity of practice requires that children are motivated and fully engaged in the process of improving their writing.

Spelling should be explicitly taught. Teaching should focus on spelling of words that are relevant to the topic or genre being studied.

7
Use high-quality information about students' current capabilities to select the best next steps for teaching

Collect high quality, up to date information about student's current capabilities, and adapt teaching accordingly to focus on exactly what the student needs to progress. This approach is more efficient because effort is spent on the best next step and not wasted by rehearsing skills or content that a child already knows well.

Teaching can be adapted by:

- Changing the focus. Models of typical literacy development can be used to diagnose students' capabilities and select a particular aspect of literacy to focus on next.
- Changing the approach. If a student is disengaged or is finding activities too easy or too hard, adopt a different approach to teaching the same aspect of literacy.

8
Use high-quality structured interventions to help students who are struggling with their literacy

Schools should focus on core classroom teaching strategies, which improve literacy for the whole class. However, even when excellent classroom teaching is occurring, it is likely that a small number of children will also require more focused literacy instruction to make expected progress.

The first step should be to use accurate diagnosis of capabilities and difficulties to match students to appropriate interventions.

There is a strong and consistent body of evidence demonstrating the benefit of one to one or small group tutoring using structured interventions for children who are struggling with literacy.