Understanding progress in English:
a guide for parents

department for children, schools and families

Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency

Useful websites

National curriculum

qcda.gov.uk/curriculum

Information and services for parents

www.dcsf.gov.uk/familyinformationdirect
www.parentchannel.tv
www.parentlineplus.org.uk

Homework and enrichment

www.bbc.co.uk/schools
www.bbc.co.uk/learning
www.channel4learning.com/apps/homeworkhigh
www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning
www.gridclub.com
www.homeworkelephant.co.uk
www.rigb.org
www.learnthings.co.uk
www.schoolzone.co.uk
www.nrich.maths.org
www.s-cool.co.uk
www.nextgenerationlearning.org.uk/At-home
www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/science

Why this guide?

This guide helps parents[1] and carers understand how children progress in English at each National Curriculum level. Also included are ideas for what you can do with your child to support the development of their speaking and listening, reading and writing at home and help them make progress.

You will find this guide helpful when discussing your child's progress with their teachers.

At the back of this guide is information on the National Curriculum, the key stages of your child's primary and secondary education and the assessments they will be involved in.

Also available is *Understanding progress in mathematics: a guide for parents* downloadable from **www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies**.

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1 Reference to parents in this guide includes carers.

What is progress in English about?

At all levels, learning English is about learning to use language to express, explore and communicate our thoughts ideas and feelings with others. We do this through speaking, listening, reading and writing and getting better at English means making progress in each of these areas.

Children do not usually make progress at the same rate in speaking, listening, reading and writing. In their early years, for example, most children are better speakers and listeners than readers and writers. This is important as early skills with spoken language underpin the development of reading and writing.

However, speaking, listening, reading and writing are closely interrelated. So, for example, effective speakers and writers take account of their listeners and readers because they are hoping to interest or influence them.

Talking to your child is crucial in helping children to make progress in all aspects of English. Questioning, prompting, responding (whether the focus is on reading, writing, speaking or listening) are all important in helping your child to build on what they can already do. Here are a number of suggestions as to how you can help your child to make further progress at whatever level they are working. They all rely on talking with your child in a relaxed, informal way and making their language learning part of everyday life.

What you can do to help your child make progress

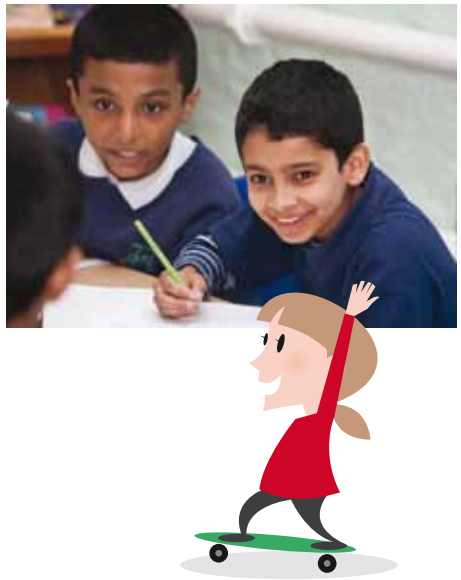
Speaking and listening

- **Ensure that:**
  - they have plenty of opportunities for talk
  - you listen to them with attention, and respond
  - they hear and listen to sustained talk by others.
- **Encourage them to speak at length, by:**
  - helping them take a long turn in a conversation
  - prompting them to help them keep going
  - asking them to tell you about some event in detail or explain to you how something works.
- **Help them understand how speakers help listeners, by:**
  - using repetition and different voices for different characters when telling a story
  - encouraging them to think about how to organise what they want to say
  - changing their pace.
- **Encourage them to notice and talk about:**
  - interesting/unusual words
  - some of the different ways people speak.

What you can do to help your child make progress

Reading

- **Ensure they have:**
  - access to books, magazines and newspapers from home, school and library
  - somewhere quiet to read
  - time to read regularly
  - opportunity to see you as a reader – reading, choosing books, going to the library, talking about what you read.
- **Read to them and take turns with them in reading a section each of the text, supporting and prompting their reading in positive ways.**
- **Talk with them about the books they read:**
  - their favourite part or character and your favourite part
  - how the illustrations support the story
  - their favourite author
  - what makes a book different from (or similar to) others they have read.
- **Talk about the meaning of what they have read. Ask them, for example, to explain:**
  - how they know that X is the villain or Y the heroine
  - why they like or dislike a particular character
  - what will happen next – and why they think so
  - a character's actions or motives.



What you can do to help your child make progress

Writing

- **Ensure they have:**
  - opportunities to write at home
  - pencils, pens, crayons, but also card or folded paper to make booklets
  - opportunities to see you as a writer, for example, writing emails or lists.
- **Read and talk about their writing:**
  - ask them to read their writing aloud to you
  - respond to the writing and praise what you like
  - ask them to explain why they wrote particular sections as they did.
- **Help them with planning their writing:**
  - ask them to talk through their ideas with you before they write
  - prompt them to include more detail, sequence things more clearly, vary the pace.
- **Help them to think about the person who will read their writing:**
  - do they want the reader to like the main character?
  - should they include some clues about the ending?
  - does the writing build up to a climax?

Your child's teacher will be able to explain how they teach spelling and will also suggest ways you can support this. Parents of children working in levels 2 to 5 can support spelling in a general way by focusing on the spelling of words that change according to how they are used. For example, funny, funnier, funniest. At higher levels it is helpful to focus on trickier words, for example, received, environment.

Working at level 1 in English

Children will be able to do many of the following:

Speaking and listening

- express their feelings and ideas as they respond to what happens around them
- make themselves heard and understood by close family and friends
- begin to take turns talking with others when playing
- pretend to be another person in imaginary play.

Reading

- read some familiar and key words on sight
- blend sounds to decode some unfamiliar words
- recall some points from familiar texts
- make some basic inferences, for example, identify who is speaking in a story
- notice some feature/aspect of familiar texts, for example, repetition, rhyme or how an illustration links to text.

Writing

- write short texts with some sense of their purpose, form or reader, for example, a party invitation to a friend, note to a sibling, thank you letter
- write simple, mostly accurate phrases and clauses and sometimes put their ideas in an appropriate order
- use simple vocabulary and usually spell simple high frequency words correctly
- begin to use full stops and capital letters to mark some sentences.

What you can do at home
to help your child make progress

Speaking and listening

- listen attentively to what they say and respond
- help sustain their talk by prompting, asking questions and repeating
- encourage imaginative play by taking a role yourself
- point out and talk about how different people speak.

Reading

- read books regularly together
- talk about the parts you both most enjoyed
- ask them to point to words they recognise
- talk with them about how words and illustrations work together in what they read
- point out words in the world, for example, road signs, shop names, building names.

Writing

- encourage them to have fun with writing, for example, drawing cartoons and writing captions or speech bubbles
- write with them, prompting them with suggestions when they get stuck
- take an interest in what they write, for example, ask them to read their writing aloud to you and respond to it
- help them reflect on their writing, for example, what they were pleased with, how they might develop or improve it.

Working at level 2 in English

Children will be able to do many of the following:

Speaking and listening

- talk about things they have done and imagined
- remember the main ideas in things they have heard
- take turns when speaking in pairs or groups
- change the way they speak in some situations, for example, talking to adults differently from friends or pretending to be other people.

Reading

- read a range of key words on sight and blend sounds to decode unfamiliar words
- recall basic information from texts read, for example, names of characters
- look for information in print and on a website and make simple inferences, for example, how a character is feeling
- express simple likes and dislikes in their reading.

Writing

- have a clear purpose for their writing, for example, to tell a story, recount a visit, give instructions
- use some features of the style they choose to write in, for example, 'once upon a time' in a story
- organise their ideas straightforwardly, for example, by grouping ideas together in sections or sequencing events
- write mainly simple sentences, marking where they begin and end with full stops and capital letters.

What you can do at home
to help your child make progress

Speaking and listening

- talk with them about their ideas, for example, when painting or modelling
- ask them to retell simple stories in their own words
- encourage their play in different roles
- listen together to stories on CDs, radio or television.

Reading

- read books together, reading a section in turn, and talk about:
  - what happened
  - how the pictures support the story
  - which parts they liked best
- encourage them to choose books independently
- encourage them to decode unfamiliar words independently, but prompt them if they lose the gist of what they're reading.

Writing

- encourage writing in play and what they do, for example, lists for shopping, record the results for their favourite sports team
- engage with their writing through:
  - saying what you liked in it
  - asking where their ideas have come from
  - asking them to show you where a sentence begins and ends
- help them to organise and sequence their writing by asking them to talk about their ideas or to draw a sequence of simple pictures to show how the main events in a story might be organised.

Working at level 3 in English

Children will be able to do many of the following:

Speaking and listening

- start conversations and keep them going, building on what other people say
- contribute to a small group, recognising speakers' main ideas
- adapt their speech and gesture to suit obviously different situations or create a role
- notice some differences in people's spoken language.

Reading

- read aloud with fluency, expression and understanding
- use different ways to read unfamiliar words
- get the literal meaning from a text and make some straightforward inferences
- pick out the most obvious points from texts they read
- identify the main purpose of the text.

Writing

- write simple texts with a clear purpose using the main features of the type of writing they choose
- organise their ideas to help the reader, for example, by grouping ideas in sections, or signalling the beginning and ending of their writing
- use capital letters and full stops accurately to separate simple sentences
- attempt some more complex sentences using connectives, such as 'and', 'but', 'so'
- start to enjoy writing independently and use it to support their learning in other subjects.

What you can do at home
to help your child make progress

Speaking and listening

- encourage them to develop their ideas by taking longer turns, adding detail and thinking about how ideas connect
- play listening and guessing games where they have to listen and ask questions, for example, 'I spy', '20 questions'
- encourage them to take different roles when playing in groups.

Reading

- engage with what they read by asking them to:
  - predict what will happen next in a story
  - describe their response when they know what does happen
  - explain why a character behaves as they do
  - point to particular parts of a text that they like
  - talk about what a text suggests or implies
- talk with them about their likes and dislikes in what they read
- encourage them to read a range of texts, for example, fiction and information books, comics and poems.

Writing

- encourage them to write more, for example, a shopping list, a plan for a party or family celebration, a story that they can email to grandparents
- talk with them about how they might improve or rephrase sections, for example, by including more descriptive detail or using connectives (such as 'and', 'but') to combine sentences.

Working at level 4 in English

Children will be able to do many of the following:

Speaking and listening

- express their ideas or feelings or tell a story clearly
- adapt their speech appropriately in more formal situations
- work in groups to plan or fulfil a task
- take on a specific imagined role
- comment on how people's spoken language varies.

Reading

- read full length books independently
- select strategies to help them self-correct when faced with difficult words or unfamiliar texts
- read actively, for example, predict what happens next, visualise what is described, speculate about characters' actions and motives
- get the point, the moral or the message of a text beyond the literal
- read to support their work in all subjects, for example, research a topic in print or on-screen.

Writing

- write reasonably complex texts independently, developing some ideas in detailed, interesting ways, for example, a newspaper report of an incident including eye witness reports
- choose a form of writing appropriate to the purpose and use some words and phrases for effect
- use sections or paragraphs to organise their material to help the reader
- write simple sentences accurately and some extended sentences, using commas to chunk them
- use writing in a variety of forms to support their learning in all subjects.

What you can do at home to help your child make progress

Speaking and listening

- encourage them to talk clearly and at length about their ideas
- listen to and talk about things that are not immediately familiar, such as items on the news
- play memory games, taking turns to answer questions about a story or film they've listened to
- encourage them to take on specific roles in their social life, for example, in a sports team, after school club.

Reading

- help them to think about the writer behind the text, for example:
  - why they chose the language they did?
  - why they organised the text in that way?
  - what effect they hoped to have on the reader?
- when looking for information in print or on-screen, encourage them to scan ahead and think about how helpful the text is, whether it is a biased or reliable source
- when they talk about their reading encourage them to refer to evidence in the text that will support their views
- get them to share their opinions in different ways, for example, blogging, social networking site contributions.

Writing

- ask them to tell you what are the best features of their writing
- discuss possible improvements, for example, how to include more detail, vary the pace of a story, or rephrase a sentence
- help them to use their reading to support them as writers, for example, ask them to look at how a writer they like uses varied sentences or organises paragraphs.

Working at level 5 in English

Children will be able to do many of the following:

Speaking and listening

- narrate, recount or express their ideas clearly in a way that takes account of the listener
- pick up on some nuances or implications in what they hear
- judge the level of formality needed in a situation and adapt their speech accordingly
- adopt different roles and strategies in a group to achieve the purpose or task
- sustain a character in role and work with others also in role
- explain some of the differences they notice in people's speech.

Reading

- select relevant evidence from different points across the text
- quote or refer to the text to support their ideas
- read between the lines and understand meanings that are implied rather than stated
- give a general overview of the purpose of the text and its effect on the reader.

Writing

- establish and maintain a clear purpose for their writing, using a style and form that matches the purpose
- hold the reader's interest by the imaginative development of their ideas and choice of words
- organise and shape paragraphs to suit the purpose of the writing and guide the reader through the text
- express more complex ideas, using varied sentence structures to build up detail or vary pace and emphasis.

What you can do at home
to help your child make progress

Speaking and listening

- find opportunities for them to talk at length about increasingly complicated ideas and situations, for example, explain an experiment they have done in science or a topical subject such as cyber bullying
- help them take more account of the listener's reaction when speaking, for example, when telling a story to a younger sibling making it exciting
- encourage them to listen and express their opinions about local and national issues in the news.

Reading

- give them regular opportunities to make their own choices in what they read at home, for example, visits to the library, magazines that cover out of school interests
- encourage them to develop their response to a text in more detail, for example, ask them to tell you how their feelings towards a character changed at different points in a story
- talk with them about the writer's choice of language, for example, ask them to choose a section they think is good and explain why they think it works well.

Writing

- encourage their personal writing, for example, a journal or diary, social networking, a blog
- talk through their ideas with them before they start to write, for example, prompt them to think about how they intend to tackle a subject
- help them to reflect on their writing, particularly the effect they hoped to have on the reader, for example, is the reader sufficiently prepared for the ending?
- encourage them to read through their work, shaping their sentences for clarity and impact and checking their accuracy.

Working at level 6 in English

Children will be able to do many of the following:

Speaking and listening

- develop and shape their talk to guide or influence the listener
- engage clearly with a speaker's ideas and develop them
- adapt their speech successfully to meet very varied situations
- sustain work in a group to achieve complex tasks and purposes
- use drama techniques with others to explore ideas, themes or feelings
- explore and analyse some differences in spoken language they have observed.

Reading

- summarise points or trace an idea or theme giving evidence to support their comments from across and between texts
- explore different layers of meaning in a text and their implications
- explain how the writer tries to influence the reader by the way the text is organised, the language used and the viewpoint expressed
- compare how different writers deal with similar ideas or events in different texts and explain how the context in which a text is written or read influences its meaning.

Writing

- begin to develop a distinctive style or voice in their writing explaining why they have chosen particular words or phrases or made particular decisions about how to organise their writing
- use sentence structure and punctuation to shape and create impact
- use and confidently adapt a variety of forms of writing.

What you can do at home
to help your child make progress

Speaking and listening

- encourage them to take part in activities that involve presenting to an audience, such as a school assembly, parents' evening, at a place of worship or community centre
- discuss topical subjects of concern with them, for example, health issues such as diet, drugs and alcohol
- encourage them to take part in social activities to broaden their experience of using talk, for example, drama groups, making and performing music with others, taking part in voluntary or community work.

Reading

- keep an active interest in what they read by encouraging a wider reading diet, for example, reading more non-fiction, trying different authors or poetry
- talk to them about why they might either trust or distrust the sources of information they read.

Writing

- be an audience for their writing, feeding back on the impact their writing has had on you
- take an interest in what they write in other subject areas at school
- share newspaper, magazine articles or web texts that are written in interesting or engaging ways and explore how they might use these ideas in their own writing.

If your child is in Key Stage 2 working at level 6 they are likely to be supported by gifted and talented provision in school or elsewhere. Talk to your child's teachers to find out more.

Working at level 7 in English

Children will be able to do many of the following:

Speaking and listening

- operate confidently in a wide range of formal and informal situations
- understand clearly both what is said and implied
- engage with speakers and their ideas, for example, offering ideas in a formal debate
- use a range of strategies to ensure successful group collaboration
- use drama techniques in collaboration with others to explore complex ideas and feelings
- evaluate the impact of the way people speak.

Reading

- summarise and synthesise information succinctly from varied sources
- develop clear personal interpretations of texts based on close reference
- explore different interpretations of a text
- analyse and evaluate how the writer seeks to influence the reader by:
  - the way the text is organised
  - the language used
  - the viewpoint expressed
- analyse how a text relates to others like it and to its context.

Writing

- engage and sustain the reader's interest in writing for a wide range of purposes and audiences
- develop a distinctive individual voice
- adapt and control their style and level of formality
- use a range of devices to organise their material and position the reader
- demonstrate craft in the way they select vocabulary and shape sentences and paragraphs to achieve specific effects
- evaluate the success or effectiveness of their writing.

What you can do at home
to help your child make progress

Speaking and listening

- encourage them to take part in formal debates
- take advantage of opportunities to participate in workshops or study days organised by local theatres, colleges or universities
- discuss the impact of different accents or dialects that can be heard in the media.

Reading

- provide opportunities to include important literature from the past as well as contemporary fiction in their reading diet
- encourage them to talk more formally about what they read, for example, through a book club at school or on the web.

Writing

- encourage them to write to influence people through posting or emailing their reactions and ideas on current affairs and local issues, for example, emailing politicians, commenting or having their own blog, writing for a community, sports or other interest group newsletter or website
- encourage them to continue to write for pleasure in whatever form they enjoy and experiment further, for example:
  - extend fiction writing to drafting a script for a play or film
  - find opportunities to talk with authors or journalists about their craft through writers' websites
  - write and publish critical reviews, for example, of films, video or computer games, sporting events.

Working at level 8 and Exceptional Performance (EP) in English

Children will be able to do many of the following:

Speaking and listening

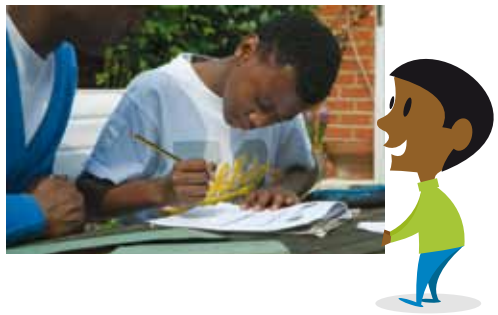
- meet the challenge of occasions where they have to speak and listen with assurance
- adopt a range of group roles as required to ensure successful collaboration
- make creative use of a range of dramatic techniques to explore complex roles
- apply what they know and understand of spoken language to evaluate the impact of their own spoken language in new situations.

Reading

- respond to a wide range of texts with insight drawing on their experience of wider reading
- understand and appreciate how and why the writer has used language and structure to support meaning
- sustain critical analysis of a text relating it to the time it was written
- make perceptive comparisons between texts.

Writing

- adopt a distinctive personal voice in writing a wide range of forms for a variety of purposes
- structure and shape their writing imaginatively, guiding and supporting the reader throughout
- use a wide range of vocabulary imaginatively and precisely.



What you can do at home
to help your child make progress

Build on all the things suggested for level 7 and in addition, you might consider the following.

Speaking and listening

- encourage creative work such as script writing, film making and pod casting through online writing communities or clubs
- support taking part in master classes and enrichment activities to challenge and engage their abilities, for example, youth theatre summer schools.

Reading

- talk to them about how themes or images relate to either the author's purpose or the effect on the audience
- encourage them to read widely, both fiction and non-fiction
- challenge them in their choices of what they read and their interpretations.

Writing

- justify their writing choices and whether they thought them effective. For example, why did they choose particular vocabulary or adopt a certain tone?
- discuss alternative choices they might have made and what their impact might have been
- explore links with their reading by asking them whether and how their writing has been influenced by anything they have read.

If your child is in Key Stage 3 working at level 8 or EP they are likely to be supported by gifted and talented provision in school or elsewhere. Talk to your child's teachers to find out more.

How do I know my child is progressing?

The programmes of study show progress within each subject for Key Stages 1, 2 and 3. In most subjects these are split into eight levels, plus a description of exceptional performance.

Children develop at different rates, but National Curriculum levels can give you an idea of how your child's progress compares to what is typical for their age. Children are expected to make two levels of progress as they move through each key stage, for example:

- by the end of Key Stage 1 (Year 2), most children will be working at level 2
- by the end of Key Stage 2 (Year 6), most will be working at level 4
- by the end of Key Stage 3 (Year 9), most will be working at level 5 or level 6.

Level judgements can be broken down into three sub-levels which can help discussion about progress. For example:

- high 2 or 2a means that the pupil is working at the top of level 2 and is almost into level 3
- secure 2 or 2b means that the pupil is working securely in level 2
- low 2 or 2c means that the pupil's work is just into level 2, but aspects of their knowledge and understanding may not be secure.

What is the National Curriculum?

The National Curriculum defines an entitlement for all children by setting out the stages and subjects your child will be taught during their time at school. Children aged five to 16 in maintained or state schools must be taught the National Curriculum.

What does it set out?

The National Curriculum is used by all maintained schools to ensure that teaching and learning is balanced and consistent. It sets out:

- the subjects taught
- the knowledge, skills and understanding required in each subject
- standards or attainment targets in each subject – teachers can use these to assess your child's progress and plan the next steps in their learning
- how your child's progress is assessed and reported.

Within the framework of the National Curriculum, schools are free to plan and organise teaching and learning in the way that best meets the needs of their pupils.

What are Programmes of Study?

For each National Curriculum subject, there is a programme of study. These describe the subject knowledge, skills and understanding pupils are expected to develop during each key stage.

For more information go to qcda.gov.uk/curriculum

What are key stages?

The National Curriculum is organised into blocks of years called key stages. There are four key stages as well as an Early Years Foundation Stage. The 'Early Years Foundation Stage' covers provision for children from birth to five.

This diagram shows how the key stages are organised and where formal assessments (see page 25) of your child's progress are made. Your child's teacher will be able to tell you more about how the school assesses progress between these key points.

Age	Stage	Year	Assessment
birth-5	Early Years Foundation Stage		
4-5		Reception	Early Years Foundation Stage Profile teacher assessment
5-6	Key Stage 1	Year 1	
6-7		Year 2	Formal teacher assessments in English, mathematics and science
7-8	Key Stage 2	Year 3	
8-9		Year 4	
9-10		Year 5	
10-11		Year 6	National tests and formal teacher assessments in English and mathematics and teacher assessment in science
11-12	Key Stage 3	Year 7	
12-13		Year 8	
13-14		Year 9	Formal teacher assessments in English, mathematics and science and the other foundation subjects
14-15	Key Stage 4	Year 10	
15-16		Year 11	Most children take GCSEs or other national qualifications

What is teacher assessment?

Teacher assessment is an important part of everyday teaching and learning in the classroom. Your child's teacher will be able to explain the range of formal and informal ways they use assessment to support your child's progress.

To find out more about the range of assessment approaches schools use and examples of conversations about learning go to: **www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies**.

What are national tests?

The National Curriculum tests won't give you a complete picture of how your child is doing at school – they provide a snapshot, showing how they performed in selected parts of a subject on a particular day. But schools can use the test results as an independent measure of how they, and their pupils, are doing compared to standards across the country.

At the end of Key Stage 1, the teacher's assessment of your child's progress will take account of their performance in English and mathematics, supported by tasks and tests that are administered informally.

At the end of Key Stage 2, your child will take national tests in English and mathematics.

At the end of Key Stage 3 performance in all subjects is judged by teacher assessment.

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