**Focus:  Decoding (sounding out) challenging words**

When your child is attempting to decode (sound out) a challenging word, it is important they use a range of strategies to assist them in their efforts to become independent readers. While listening to your child read, encourage them to try a range of strategies to assist them in their decoding attempts.

* Ask your child to point to each letter (single letter) or letter blend (a letter combination that makes one sound, such as ‘th’, ‘sh’ or ‘ch’) when decoding. This will assist them in making sure they don’t add in, jumble up or omit sounds within the word.
* When decoding, encourage your child to decode aloud as this will help them hear if they are making any mistakes with the sounds they are linking to the letters in the word.
* This strategy will also enable the listener (you, the parent or guardian) to hear any letter/sound combinations that your child is getting muddled up and needs to practise.
* Remind your child to refer to the illustrations, photos or diagrams on the page as this will often provide a cue or prompt that may assist them in their decoding efforts. Pictures are chosen specifically to support readers in their efforts to make sense of what they are reading on the page.
* If your child is finding a regularly used word challenging ask, ‘Have you seen that word in the text before?’ Encourage them to look back and use previous sentences to guide or support them in their decoding efforts.
* Encourage your child to reread the sentence if it doesn’t make sense, as this may assist to indicate whether or not they have decoded a word correctly. They may also like to ‘read on’ and see if additional information provided by the author assists them in their decoding attempts.
* Does your child use ***all*** the letters in the word when decoding? Some children rely on only part of the word to guide their attempts. An example of this is when children use the first letter in a word to decode that word. These children often need reminding to check their attempts by looking more closely at the middle and end letters in the word.
* Encourage your child to cover the prefix (letters added to the start of a word - ‘un’ as in ‘**un**comfortable’ or ‘dis’ as in ‘**dis**like’) or the suffix (letters added to the end of a word – ‘ed’ as in ‘jump**ed**’ or ‘ing’ as in ‘read**ing**’). When a child is struggling to read a word, this strategy reduces the information they need to focus on when starting to decode the word, in turn making the word appear less daunting.
* Encourage your child to read to the end of the sentence to see if their decoded word sounds right. If not, perhaps they simply need to say the word a different way.
* Ask your child to look for smaller words within the word. This is particularly beneficial when they are attempting to decode compound words (eg. ‘sunrise’ where they may see the words, ‘sun’ and ‘rise’ or  ‘underestimate’ where they may see the words, ‘under’ and ‘estimate’).
* Your child may benefit from trying to ‘chunk’ the word they are trying to decode. This involves them breaking the word into chunks they already know (eg. ‘cat’ could be chunked into ‘c’ and ‘at’ whereas ‘jumping’ would be chunked into ‘jump’ and ‘ing’).
* Encourage your child to stretch out the challenging word. This requires them to slowly stretch out each letter or letter blends in the word, before joining them altogether again (eg. ‘ship’ would be stretched out as ‘sh - iiii - p’)

IMPORTANT: Once your child has successfully decoded a word they find challenging, remind them to reread the whole sentence containing that word. This strategy will assist in enhancing your child’s comprehension of what they are reading.

Reading is all about developing strategies that students can use to help them read and understand what they are reading independently. It is essential that children read every night as this will support them in their efforts to practise their reading strategies and enhance their confidence and  their developing independence as thinking readers.