

Curriculum in Focus

At the Heart of Learning: Reading at St Cyres

Welcome to the very first edition of **Curriculum in Focus**, our new half-termly newsletter designed to keep you connected with learning at St Cyres School.

Under the **Curriculum for Wales**, our vision is to raise ambitious, capable learners who are equipped to thrive in a rapidly changing world. Each half term, this publication will take a deep dive into a core aspect of our provision—exploring how we teach it across the curriculum, how we support every individual pupil, and how you can support your child at home.

School Library Refresh



We are thrilled to announce the official launch of our newly updated School Library! We have overhauled our collection to feature many new titles, including a wide range of young adult fiction, non-fiction connected to our curriculum, graphic novels, quick-reads, and bilingual Welsh/English texts. Lower school classes will benefit greatly from the wide variety of books on

offer during their library lessons, and all students will find the space to be a welcoming environment to explore new genres, research key topics, or simply relax and spend time reading.

We will also be continuing our work with Griffin Books and a variety of local authors to offer exciting opportunities for students to develop both their reading and creative writing.

Throughout the year, we will continuously add new books to the collection so that students can find their next favourite read. We are also always welcoming donations, so please feel free to pass on any books you wish to share with our school community.

"A library is not a luxury, but one of the necessities of life." — We encourage all pupils to pop in, grab a bookmark, and discover their next favourite read.

Why Reading is at the Heart of Curriculum for Wales

Under the **Curriculum for Wales**, reading is much more than an English lesson topic, it is an essential life skill embedded across all **six Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLEs)**. Estyn highlights that strong reading skills are the single greatest predictor of success across all GCSE subjects, from interpreting complex source material in History to analysing problem statements in Science and Maths.

Reading regularly:

- **Expands vocabulary** by millions of words per year.
- **Builds empathy**, emotional intelligence, and mental well-being.
- **Sparks imagination and broadens horizons** by encouraging pupils to explore new ideas, perspectives and ways of thinking.
- **Improves comprehension** by helping pupils to understand, interpret and question increasingly complex ideas.
- **Strengthens concentration and focus** by developing the ability to sustain attention for longer periods.
- **Builds confidence** by helping pupils to tackle unfamiliar words and ideas.
- **Prepares pupils** for post-16 pathways, higher education, and the modern workplace.

"Literacy is an essential foundation for all learning. When pupils learn to read like scientists, historians, and critics, they gain the power to think independently and excel."

How We Teach Reading: Our Whole-School Strategy

In line with Welsh Government guidance and Estyn expectations, we take a **disciplinary literacy** approach. This means we explicitly teach pupils *how* to read like experts in every subject:

Subject Area	How Reading is Taught
Science & Technology	Unpacking specialised vocabulary, reading scientific journals, and evaluating evidence.
Humanities	Analysing primary sources, bias, and historical context in dense texts.
Expressive Arts	Interpreting scripts, reviews, and analytical critiques.
Languages, Literacy & Communication	Building vocabulary, comprehension, and reading fluency across languages - using word roots and etymology in English, alongside regular vocabulary recall in Welsh and International Languages.

Targeted Support: Helping Every Learner Succeed

We recognise that pupils progress at different rates. To support learners who find reading challenging or have fallen behind their age-related expectations, we offer structured, evidence-based interventions:

Diagnostic Screening: Early identification of specific reading barriers (decoding, fluency, or comprehension).

Structured Interventions: Small-group or 1-to-1 catch-up sessions using research-backed programs e.g. Lexonic Leap

In-Class Scaffolding: Teachers adapt texts, provide pre-reading vocabulary lists, and use visual supports so all pupils can access high-level learning.

Sparx Reader is an adaptive, online reading platform designed to build a daily habit of reading, improve vocabulary, and boost comprehension skills. Unlike traditional reading logs, Sparx Reader gives pupils access to an extensive library of digital books matched specifically to their reading ability, ensuring every learner is appropriately challenged without feeling overwhelmed.

Supporting Your Child at Home

Supporting secondary pupils with reading looks different than in primary school. You don't need to sit and listen to them read aloud every day: small, regular habits make a massive difference:

- **Normalise Non-Traditional Reading:** Audiobooks, podcasts, news articles, sports blogs, graphic novels, and gaming lore all count as meaningful reading!
- **Keep Books Visible:** Leave interesting magazines, non-fiction books, or novels around the house.
- **Talk About What You Read:** Mention an interesting news article or book chapter you enjoyed. Ask for their opinion on current topics.
- **Encourage 15 Minutes Before Bed:** Swapping phone screens for a printed book 15 minutes before sleep improves both literacy and sleep quality.
- **Support Weekly Reading:** Encourage your child to make Sparx Reader part of their weekly routine and help them set aside some time to complete their reading homework. Regular engagement will help them build confidence, develop their reading skills and discover books they enjoy.
- **Take an Interest:** Ask your child about what they are reading and check their Sparx Reader progress together each week. Praise their effort and celebrate their progress. Your encouragement and positive interest can make a real difference in helping Sparx Reader feel like an opportunity to read and explore, rather than simply another homework task.

If you are looking for inspiration or ideas for your child's next read, please visit our website (Areas of Learning & Experience / Languages and Literacy) to explore our suggested reading lists, organised by year group.

Community Support & Local Libraries

Literacy is a community-wide effort. We work closely with local council services and organisations to ensure support extends beyond our school gates.

Local Public Libraries

Your local library is free to join and offers vast resources for young people and adults alike:

- **Free Book & Audiobook Borrowing:** Physical books plus digital loans..
- **Study Spaces:** Quiet revision areas with free Wi-Fi and PC access.
- **Community Events:** Author talks, homework clubs, and holiday reading challenges.

Visit Your Nearest Branch:

- Penarth Library, 9-10 Stanwell Road, Penarth, CF64 2YT
- Dinas Powys Community Library, Fair Oaks, The Murch, Dinas Powys, CF64 4QU
- Sully and Lavernock Community Library Trust, South Road, CF64 5SP
- Barry Library, The County Library, King Square, Barry, CF63 4RW

Sign up online or bring one proof of address to join instantly.

"Children who own books of their own are 15 times more likely to read above the expected level for their age compared to those who do not."

— National Literacy Trust

Free books are available to our pupils eligible for free school meals by contacting lshearer@stcyres.org

Adult Literacy & Upskilling for Parents

If you or someone you know would like to build confidence in reading, writing, or digital skills, free, friendly, and non-judgmental support is available locally:

- **Adult Learning Wales / Dysgu Oedolion Cymru:** Offers free, flexible courses in basic skills, everyday English, and functional literacy. (www.adultlearning.wales)

Local Authority Community Learning: Free adult literacy classes tailored to your pace.

https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/en/working/adult_and_community_learning/adult-community-learning.aspx

<https://www.adultlearningcardiff.co.uk/#>

- **Multiply Cymru:** Free courses aimed at improving confidence with numbers and everyday problem-solving. <https://cavcforbusiness.co.uk/en/multiply>

"The best way to teach a child the value of learning is to show them that we never stop learning ourselves."

It is entirely normal for adults to refresh their reading, writing, or digital skills. Free courses across the Vale of Glamorgan and Wales offer welcoming spaces designed for adults learning at their own pace—with zero pressure.