Literacy and numeracy are basic to all learning. Children need these skills in order to learn confidently in every area of the curriculum and in everyday life.

**Literacy is** the ability to read, write, speak and listen effectively within different social and cultural settings.

**Numeracy is** the ability to use mathematical understandings and skills effectively within different social and cultural settings.

As society becomes more complex, higher levels of literacy and numeracy will be needed to prepare children for the future.

It is the responsibility of all members of society — families, schools, business and the wider community — to ensure that each child develops the necessary skills and understandings to live effectively within our changing world.

Parents are a child’s first and most influential teachers and continue to help their child’s learning. Parents and schools in partnership can work towards developing shared understandings about learning. By bringing home and school experiences together, children will have a very solid and secure foundation on which to build future learning.
What is reading?

Reading is making meaning from print, which is all around us – books, magazines, posters, advertisements, films and videos, and computers.

Understanding how children learn to read will help you to provide support at home.

**Successful readers:**
- expect what they are reading to make sense
- can predict what is to come next in a text
- can test and correct their predictions.

**Reading involves knowing about:**
- the subject
- how our language is spoken
- the conventions of print — reading from left to right and top to bottom
- sounds and letters and how they are represented in print.

Sources of information used in reading include structure, meaning and visual clues. This is how a child learns to use them – in fact how everyone uses them.

Imagine you come across an unknown word in a sentence.

**It _______ across the grass.**

You know the word must be a verb because of your knowledge of the language structure. This is structural information.

Now look at the sentence in the context of the one before it.

**Lydia dropped her ball.**
**It _______ across the grass.**

From your experience of balls you could now choose a suitable word, such as ‘bounced’ or ‘rolled’. This is information about the meaning.

**Lydia dropped her ball.**
**It r _______ across the grass.**

The initial letter confirms the prediction that the word is ‘rolled’. This is called visual information.

A good reader uses all sources of information to gain meaning from print. It is important to be aware of this so children can be encouraged to use all of these sources to work out the meaning of the texts they are reading.

To read successfully, it is important that children know the names of the letters and the relationships between the letters and the sounds they make. These are taught in real reading and writing situations. Children need help to locate letters and the sounds they make in the words they are reading and writing so that they learn about these relationships.
What is writing?

We use writing to communicate ideas and information. Through writing we explore ideas, record things we've done, or have to do, and share our thoughts, desires and feelings.

Writers assume that someone is going to read what they have written — even if that someone is themselves. This real or imagined reader has an effect on what and how we write.

It is particularly important that children in the early years gain control of spelling and handwriting. Children need support and encouragement as they attempt to write during this time.

This learning is best achieved when children are engaged in real tasks such as writing letters or birthday cards. Children need to be supported while creating their own pieces of writing about significant things in their lives.

What about speaking and listening?

Speaking and listening are at the heart of all learning and, like reading and writing, are used for many purposes. Talk can be used to interact with others, to make things happen, to find things out, to understand better, to share what we know and to express our emotions.

At home, children talk with people they know and who know them. Because families share much in common, not every detail needs to be spoken. Much of the talk is about the events of the day and is between the child and an adult or children of different ages.

Children in the early years will already use most of the grammatical structures of their first language, using the speech patterns of those around them. Most children will have learnt to use speech to do things such as joke, tell stories, share in conversations and give instructions.

At school, children are involved in talking with less familiar people — often about unfamiliar topics. There are many children of the same age and, as a group, they listen for long periods of time.

Children who have had the experience of listening to stories and discussing them, and have had lots of opportunities to talk about their experiences and thoughts, will find speaking and listening at school easier.

Students for whom English is a second language may take more time to develop English literacy skills. It is important to maintain the ESL (English as a Second Language) learner’s first language. Parents are contributing to their child’s literacy development when they interact with their children in their home language.
How does literacy develop?

Children beginning to read and write are learning how a book works, where a story starts and ends and which way the print goes (top to bottom, left to right). They love books and enjoy ‘role-play’, reading old favourites again and again. Some familiar letters and words are recognised.

They are learning that their thoughts and ideas can be written down. They experiment with drawing and making marks on paper, using letters and other symbols, and dictate information for someone else to write.

Building on these early experiences, children gradually see that written information and thoughts hold a constant message.

They begin to match written words to spoken words and are learning the letters of the alphabet and the sounds they make. The pictures help them to understand the story.

Children use conventional letters, relying on the most obvious sounds in the words they write. They like to write about their personal experiences and enjoy showing their writing to special people in their lives.

Children begin to use a range of strategies when reading and writing. They can use meaning, structure and visual sources of information to work out the words they are reading. They are learning about different types of texts (stories, factual information, instructions, and so on).

They are writing more complex pieces, often talking with others to help them plan and revise their writing. They can read and write common words, can ‘have a go’ at spelling unfamiliar words and can correct themselves when they lose meaning in their reading and writing.

Eventually children can read and write fluently. They learn to persevere when reading and writing increasingly difficult texts and use a range of strategies when they come to read or write unfamiliar words.

They continue to read and write longer, more varied and more complex texts. They can recognise and write many words, and use a range of grammatical structures and punctuation. They continue to learn, reflect and think critically about the texts they read and write.
How can you support your child’s literacy development?

In the same way that parents encourage children as they learn to crawl, walk and talk, they can continue to be actively involved in and informed about their child’s learning at school.

Make a special, quiet time to read together every day in English or your home language. It should be a happy part of your day when you enjoy reading together. Depending on the familiarity of the book and its level of difficulty you can decide whether the book should be:

- read to your child
- read with your child
- read by your child.

Reading to your child shows them how reading works and that it is enjoyable and valuable.

Reading aloud with your child builds confidence in reading books that may be too difficult for them to try alone.

When the book is being read by your child, use the 3Ps – **Pause, Prompt, Praise** — to assist:

- **Pause** if the child is unsure; wait a moment. Let your child look at the pictures and words to work out the meaning.
- **Give a prompt** or clue that encourages your child to look closer and have a go. Ask a question such as: What word might make sense? What would sound right? What does it start with?
- **Praise** all efforts. If the child is still unsure after a try, tell them the word so they don’t lose the meaning of the story.

Keep the **Pause, Prompt, Praise** process short, so as not to interrupt the flow of the story. Enjoyment and understanding of the book are most important.
Show your child that you value and enjoy reading and writing. A positive attitude is ‘catching’.

Read print material together:
- at the supermarket
- on the television
- on street signs, shops, billboards
- on computer screens.

Explain what you’re doing when filling in forms, making lists, taking notes, leaving messages, writing cards and letters, keeping diaries, and so on.

Involve your child in writing birthday cards, thank you letters, lunch orders and labels, and responding to stories, keeping a diary, and so on.

Provide pens, pencils, crayons and paper for your child.

Display an alphabet strip with the correct letter formation — these can be obtained from your child’s school.

Sing alphabet chants and play ‘I Spy’.

Play word games like Scrabble and build up personal dictionaries with older children.

Talk about words, their look, sound and meaning.

Join your local library and visit regularly.

Make words on the refrigerator with magnetic letters.
When learning mathematics, children develop their understandings of number, measurement, space, chance and data.

**When learning about number, children:**
* notice and discuss the value of numbers in different places (6 in 26 and 67)
* estimate quantities and count forwards and backwards
* add, subtract, multiply and divide numbers in a variety of situations.

**When learning about measurement, children:**
* describe and use informal measures — hand spans, spoonfuls, and so on, and formal measures such as metres, litres, days, to measure length, mass, capacity and time.

**When learning about space, children:**
* investigate shapes and objects — those in the world around them; two- and three-dimensional geometric shapes
* look for symmetry and patterns (faces, leaves, buildings)
* give directions and read and draw simple maps.

**When learning about chance and data, children:**
* think about, discuss and represent the likelihood of things happening (for example, a visitor arriving)
* collect, sort and classify things
* make and interpret simple graphs.
How does numeracy develop?

**Young numeracy learners** will typically know the names of some numbers and be able to write them. They will recognise numbers in the environment and may enthusiastically — though not always correctly — say some of the number names in order.

They are aware that things in their lives can be described by measurement — *That girl is taller than I am*. They recognise similarities and differences in objects, places and events — *This house is like ours but the door is on the other side*.

Children recognise and use the language of position as it relates to them — *I am putting my arms up above my head*.

**Building on these early experiences,** children learn that numbers are constant and they can state numbers correctly in sequence when counting forwards and backwards. They accurately count small groups of objects, and use their number knowledge to add and subtract in an informal way in their daily lives.

They are learning that many objects and events in their lives can be measured — *We go swimming on Fridays*.

They can identify shapes and think about space, movement and position in their lives — *We line up next to the steps*. They can distinguish possible from impossible events.

**Children become increasingly confident** when using numbers. They can recognise and understand the value of numbers in different positions, such as the different values of the number 5 in 45 and in 459. Children can count forwards and backwards by 2s, 5s, 10s. They are learning the formal processes of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division to solve real-life problems.

They measure events and objects, using basic standard units such as metre, hour and gram. They can confidently classify and represent data.

Their drawings show deeper understandings about shapes and location — *This is a picture of the way I come to school*.

**Eventually, children solve increasingly difficult problems** with larger numbers using an efficient approach.

They understand and use standard units of measurement, such as years, metres and kilograms with greater accuracy. They can distinguish the likelihood of events — always, maybe, never.

They can visualise and represent more complex spatial ideas, such as reading and drawing maps, and recognise and use common shapes to make structures and patterns.
How can you support your child’s numeracy development?

Many everyday situations involve mathematics. Confidence and a positive attitude are crucial.

Help your child to enjoy and learn about maths by encouraging them to talk and answering their questions. You can encourage your child to notice patterns, shapes, size, order and numbers at home and in the world around them.

When talking about maths with your child:

- **Pause** — wait a few seconds if the child is unsure. Allow some time for them to think about what they are doing.
- **Prompt** them to look closer and have a go
  - “Tell me about …”
  - “What do you know about …”
  - “Show me how …”
- **Praise** and encourage. Help them work it out by telling them about the mathematics involved.

**Look** for, and involve your child in the everyday use of maths:
- counting out money for lunch orders or shopping
- counting groups of objects
- on the television and the internet
- measuring ingredients when cooking
- planning events using a calendar
- estimating the timing and length of car trips
- giving and following directions
- sorting laundry, toys, buttons
- using diaries and calendars.

**Talk** about what happens:
- at different times of the day
- on each day of the week
- during each month of the year.

**Use** calculators to play around with numbers and to check answers – Can you make 12? Let’s count by 2s.

**Do** jigsaw puzzles, use LEGO and other materials to build towers and other structures. Draw these structures.

**Practise** counting backwards and forwards, starting at different numbers.

**Play** games such as Snakes and Ladders, Monopoly, card games, draughts and dominoes.

**Talk** about the element of chance in your child’s life – It might rain today.
Literacy and numeracy in the first five years of schooling

The importance of children developing basic abilities in literacy and numeracy in the early years of schooling (Prep to Year 4) is recognised globally. International research has found that the majority of children who leave the early years unable to read, write or perform basic mathematical operations, find it difficult to progress in later years. School systems worldwide are working to improve children’s learning in these areas.

The Early Years Strategy is a plan of the Victorian Department of Education, Employment and Training to improve children’s literacy and numeracy learning in the early years of schooling. It includes the implementation of the Early Years Literacy Program and the Early Years Numeracy Program, as well as the Reading Recovery Program, a one-to-one intervention program for children in Year 1 who are experiencing difficulties in reading.

The programs provide advice to schools in key areas such as the classroom literacy and numeracy program, additional assistance for those students who need it, parent participation in their children’s education and professional development for teachers.

How is progress monitored?

While in the years Prep to 4, your child will participate in the Early Years Literacy and Numeracy Programs. These programs feature ongoing assessment of all children, using a range of procedures, which enable teachers to closely monitor each child’s learning.

The Curriculum and Standards Framework (CSFII) is the basis upon which all Victorian schools plan and deliver curriculum and monitor student achievements. It describes what students should know and be able to do at various stages during years Prep to 10.

Each year your school will provide at least two written reports about your child’s progress and the opportunity for at least one parent–teacher interview. You should contact your child’s school if, at any point, you are concerned about your child’s progress.
What to do if you’re worried about your child’s progress

It is important to make contact with your child’s teacher or the school’s Early Years coordinator to discuss any concerns you may have regarding your child’s progress.

Schools may decide to establish a Home-School Support Group for children identified as needing additional assistance. This group will include the child’s teacher, the Early Years coordinator, and others such as the Reading Recovery teacher or ESL teacher. Parents may take an interested friend or relative to these meetings if they wish. The group will meet regularly to work together to find ways of further supporting the child and monitoring their progress.

The Home-School Support Group will draw up an Individual Learning Improvement Plan. It will set realistic goals for the child and discuss strategies and activities to support the child at school and at home.

As part of your school’s Parent Participation Plan, teachers from your school may contact you to get to know more about you and your child.

Take this opportunity to share what you know of your child’s interests, experiences, literacy and numeracy skills and attitudes so that the teacher can build up a comprehensive picture of your child as a learner. It is also useful to let the teacher know your hopes and concerns so that together you can work to support and challenge your child.

You can request interpreting and translating services to communicate with your child’s school.
How can you find out more?

- Contact your child’s school.
- Browse the Early Years of Schooling website at http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/eys
- Telephone the Education Line on (03) 9637 2222 or 1800 809 834 (freecall)
- Translations of parent booklets in 15 languages other than English are available on the website.