



ST. STEPHEN'S CATHOLIC



PRIMARY SCHOOL

‘Love Like Jesus. Learn Like Jesus. Live Like Jesus.’

Phonics And Early Reading Policy 2025-26

DOCUMENT STATUS

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Phonics And Early Reading Policy

1. School Context

St Stephen's Catholic Primary School has 204 pupils on roll, approximately 39.7% are eligible for free school meals (reflecting a significant Pupil Premium cohort). We work hard to support all pupils, including those with SEND, and EAL pupils, alongside maintaining strong attendance and punctuality procedures to support consistent learning. It is essential that our approach to teaching phonics and reading is accessible to all learners, regardless of background.

2. Intent

At St Stephen's Catholic Primary School, we believe that all our children can become fluent readers and writers. This is why we teach reading through "Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised," which is a systematic and synthetic phonics programme. We start teaching phonics in Reception and follow the Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised progression, which ensures children build on their growing knowledge of the alphabetic code, mastering phonics to read and spell as they move through school. As a result, our children are able to tackle unfamiliar words as they read.

At St Stephen's Catholic Primary School, we also model the application of the alphabetic code through phonics in shared reading and writing, both inside and outside of the phonics lesson and across the curriculum. We have a strong focus on language development for our children because we know that speaking and listening are crucial skills for reading and writing in all subjects.

At St Stephen's Catholic Primary School, we value reading as a crucial life skill. By the time children leave us, they read confidently for meaning and regularly enjoy reading for pleasure. We encourage our children to see themselves as readers for both pleasure and purpose.

Because we believe teaching every child to read is so important, we have a Reading Leader who drives the early reading programme in our school, and they regularly monitor and support our reading team, so everyone teaches with fidelity to the "Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised" programme.



3. Implementation

3.1 Teaching Phonics

3.1.1 Daily Phonics (Reception And Year 1)

- We teach phonics for 30 minutes a day. In Reception, we build from 10-minute lessons in Week 2 of the Autumn term, with additional daily oral blending games, to full-length lesson as quickly as possible.
- In both Reception and Year 1, we review the week's teaching every Friday to help children become fluent readers.
- We follow the Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised expectations of progress:
 - Children in Reception are taught to read and spell words using Phase 2 and 3 GPCs, and words with adjacent consonants (Phase 4) with fluency and accuracy.
 - Children in Year 1 review Phase 3 and 4 and are taught to read and spell words using Phase 5 GPCs with fluency and accuracy.

3.1.2 Daily Keep-Up (Reception And Year 1)

- Any child in Reception and Year 1 who needs additional practice has Daily Keep-Up support, taught by a fully trained adult.
- Daily Keep-Up lessons follow the Little Wandle progression and use the same procedures, resources and mantras, but in smaller steps with more repetition so that every child secures their learning.

3.1.3 Daily Phonics And Spelling (Year 2)

- Year 2 begins by using assessment to ensure that children have completed the Little Wandle Year 1 progression. Any gaps in teaching are addressed through daily phonics lessons until the programme is completed. Corresponding summative assessments are carried out to ensure this content is secure.
- Once all Year 1 content has been taught and assessed, we teach a five-week Phase 5 review. This ensures that children secure the trickier elements of Phase 5 and can apply this alphabetic knowledge in both reading and spelling.
- We use the Phase 5 review assessment before teaching in Year 2 to identify any children who may need more support when teaching. We reassess after teaching the Phase 5 review.
- Once the Phase 5 review is secure, we teach the Bridge to spelling before moving to the Spelling units.
- Children with larger gaps in their phonic knowledge than their peers have daily phonics teaching and follow the Rapid Catch-Up programme.

3.1.4 Rapid Catch-Up (Year 2 And KS2)

- We timetable daily phonics lessons for any child in Year 2 and above who is not at age-related expectations for reading or has not passed the Phonics Screening Check. These



children urgently need to catch up, so the gap between themselves and their peers does not widen.

- In addition, we also use the Rapid Catch-Up assessments to assess children in KS2 who are new to our school, new to the country or new to English, to quickly identify their needs.
- We use the Rapid Catch-Up assessments to identify the gaps in children's phonic knowledge and teach these using the Rapid Catch-Up resources – at pace.
- These short, sharp lessons last 15 to 20 minutes daily and have been designed to ensure children quickly catch up to age-related expectations in reading.
- We assess children every four weeks using the Rapid Catch-Up summative assessments to assess progress and inform teaching.

3.2 Teaching Reading

3.2.1 Reading Practice Sessions

- We teach children to read through reading practice sessions three times a week. These:
 - are taught by a fully trained adult to small groups of approximately six children
 - use books matched to the children's secure phonic knowledge using the "Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised" assessments and book matching grids
 - are monitored by the class teacher, who rotates and works with each group on a regular basis
- Each reading practice session has a clear focus, so that the demands of the session do not overload the children's working memory. The reading practice sessions have been designed to focus on three key reading skills:
 - decoding: teaching children to use phonic knowledge to read words
 - prosody: teaching children to read with understanding and expression
 - comprehension: using dialogic talk to help children to understand the text
- In Reception, these sessions start in week 4 of teaching at the latest. Initially, children will read wordless books. In these sessions, children review GPCs and are taught blending using teacher-led blending. Once children can blend, they progress onto decodable books matched to their secure phonic knowledge.
- Children read each book three times a week to develop phonemic awareness, vocabulary and comprehension as well as book behaviours.
- In Year 2, we ensure children complete reading the core programme decodable books (up to Phase 5 Set 5). To exit the programme, we complete the final fluency assessment to ensure children can read with adequate speed and accuracy: approximately 60 words per minute with 90%+ accuracy.
- Reading in Rapid Catch-Up lessons mirrors the core programme. Children following the Rapid Catch-Up programme are taught to read using the 7+ fully decodable books.



These follow the same progression as the core programme but are more appropriate for older readers.

3.2.2 Home Reading

- The decodable reading practice book is taken home to ensure success is shared with the family.
- Reading for Pleasure books also go home for parents to share and read to children. We share the research behind the importance and impact of sharing quality children's books with parents through workshops, leaflets and the "Everybody read!" resources.
- We use the "Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised" parents' resources to engage our families and share information about phonics, the benefits of sharing books, how children learn to blend and other aspects of our provision, both online and through workshops.

3.2.3 Additional Reading Support: Vulnerable Children

- Children in Reception and Year 1 who are receiving additional phonics Daily Keep-Up sessions read their reading practice book regularly to an adult in school.
- We prioritise children who may not have reading support at home or who may not have access to books. We ensure that they have individual reading times with volunteers and staff to share quality children's literature to promote a love of reading.

3.2.4 Ensuring Consistency And Pace Of Progress

- Every teacher in our school has been trained to teach reading, so we have the same expectations of progress. We all use the same language, routines and resources to teach children to read so that we lower children's cognitive load.
- Weekly content grids map each element of new learning to each day, week and term for the duration of the programme.
- Lesson templates, prompt cards and "How to" videos ensure teachers all have a consistent approach and structure for each lesson.
- The Reading Leader and SLT use the audit and prompt cards to regularly monitor and observe teaching; they use the summative data to identify children who need additional support and gaps in learning.

3.2.5 Ensuring Reading For Pleasure (RfP)

- We highly value RfP and work hard as a school to grow our RfP pedagogy.
- We read aloud to children every day. We choose these books carefully as we want children to experience a wide range of books, including those that reflect the children at St Stephen's Catholic Primary School and our local community as well as books that open windows into other worlds and cultures.



- Every classroom has an inviting book corner that encourages a love for reading. We curate these books and talk about them to entice children to read a wide range of books.
- In Reception and Year 1, children have access to the reading corner every day in their continuous provision time and the books are continually refreshed.
- Children choose from our range of carefully chosen RfP books to take home and share with an adult.
- As children progress through school, we take time to get to know them as readers and ensure that we engage in meaningful conversations about the books that they have read. Each child has a reading record to keep a log of books they've read. In KS1, we encourage a two-way communication with parents. As the children progress through the school, particularly in KS2, they are encouraged to write their own comments and keep a list of the books/authors that they have read. By doing this we can recommend authors and genres of books to expand their interests.
- As well as class reading corners, the school library is made available for classes to use, including at lunchtimes with our year six librarians, where the children are read with, or to.
- Children have opportunities throughout the year to engage with a wide range of RfP events, such as national events including National Poetry Day, Michael Rosen Day, etc.
- We use the Everybody read! resources to grow our teachers' knowledge of current books, the most recent research and to grow our own RfP practice.

4. Impact

4.1 Assessment

Assessment is used to monitor progress and to identify any child needing additional support as soon as they need it.

- **4.1.1 Formative Assessment** is used:
 - daily within class to identify children who require Daily Keep-Up support, as well as words and GPCs that need additional teaching
 - to plan repeated practice throughout the day to ensure all children secure learning
 - weekly in the Friday review lesson to assess gaps, address these immediately and secure fluency of GPCs, words and spellings
- **4.1.2 Summative Assessments** are uploaded onto the Assessment tracker for Reception and Year 1. These are used:
 - to generate visual reports (pupil heatmaps, pupil trends and books levels, and a summary analysis) for individual children, classes and whole year groups



- by teachers, the Reading Leader and SLT who drill down and look at the data at GPC, word, tricky word and sentence level
- by SLT to scrutinise and plan how to narrow the attainment gaps between different groups of children and to put in place any additional support for teachers

We assess:

- every six weeks to assess progress and to identify gaps in learning that need to be reviewed or retaught
- to establish if learning is secure for more than 70% of children before new content is taught
- to identify any children needing additional support and to plan the Daily Keep-Up support that they need
- we reassess every child who is not on track

- **4.1.3 Fluency assessments** measure children's accuracy and reading speed in short one-minute assessments. They are used:
 - in Year 1 and Year 2, when children are reading the Phase 5 Set 3, 4 and 5 books
 - with children following the Rapid Catch-Up programme in Years 2 to 6, when they are reading the Phase 5 Set 3, 4 and 5 books
 - to assess when children are ready to exit their programme*

*Year 2 children can exit the Rapid-Catch-Up programme when they can read the final fluency assessment at 60-70+ words per minute. Older children can exit the Rapid Catch-Up programme when they read the final fluency assessment at 90+ words per minute. At these levels, children should have sufficient fluency to tackle any book at age-related expectations. After exiting their programme, children do not need to read any more fully decodable books.

4.2 Statutory Assessment

- Children in Year 1 sit the Phonics Screening Check. Any child not passing the check re-sits it in Year 2.

Through this consistent, structured, and supportive approach, all children develop the skills, confidence, and enjoyment needed to become lifelong readers.