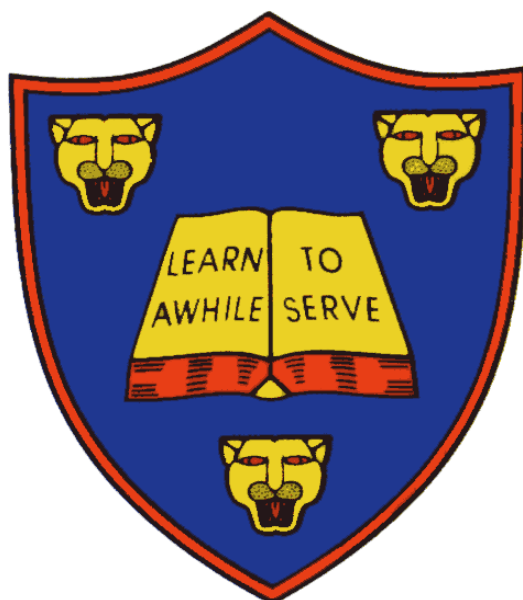


STRATFORD UPON AVON PRIMARY SCHOOL



Phonics and Early Reading Policy

Date adopted by Governors:	October 2024
Date for policy review:	October 2026
Person responsible for review:	English Lead
Signed by Chair of Governors	October 2024

The context of our school

Stratford-Upon-Avon is a culturally rich area, with a wealth of significant local history. The town is comparatively affluent, with a thriving tourist industry. The school has a long track record of achieving higher than the national average in statutory testing. Children arriving in Reception are starting school broadly in line with age related expectations, although speech and language needs and referrals are increasing year on year. Many of our children have dual heritage and speak two languages, we currently have 16 languages across the school.

The percentage of children in our school with SEND and EAL is above the national average for primary schools. Pupil Premium is below the national average of 25%.

It is essential that our approach to teaching phonics and reading is accessible to all learners, regardless of background – we promote accessibility and love of reading across the school. Our policy and approach is fully inclusive and embraces the diversity of our pupils, reflecting the full make-up of our school.

Intent

Phonics (reading and spelling)

At Stratford Primary, 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, all our children are able to tackle any unfamiliar words as they read. At Stratford Primary, 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.

Comprehension

At Stratford Primary, 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. Our readers are equipped with the tools to tackle unfamiliar vocabulary. 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. This person is highly skilled at teaching phonics and reading, and they monitor and support our reading team, so everyone teaches with fidelity to the *Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised* programme.

Implementation

Language and nursery rhymes in Reception

- Research tells us that nursery rhymes can support children to develop their language, their awareness of sounds within words and even their later reading ([Bryant et al. 1989](#)).
- We use the Little Wandle Rhyme time films and accompanying phonological awareness planning to complement and reinforce our Phase 2 teaching.

Daily phonics lessons in Reception and Year 1

- We teach phonics for 30 minutes a day. In Reception, we build from 10-minute lessons, with additional daily oral blending games, to the full-length lesson as quickly as possible. Each Friday, we review the week's teaching to help children become fluent readers.
- Children make a strong start in Reception: teaching begins in Week 4 of the Autumn term.
- 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.

Daily Keep-up lessons ensure every child learns to read

- Any child in Reception and Year 1 who needs additional practice has Daily Keep-up support and is 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.

Daily phonics and spelling in 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 the 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.

Children in Year 2 to Year 6: Rapid Catch-up

- We timetable daily reading sessions 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.
- 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.
- Following this assessment, we deliver the rapid catch up sessions at least three times a week with the identified children.
- These short, sharp lessons last up to 20 minutes 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.
- We assess children who are new to our school, new to the country or new to English using the Rapid Catch-up assessments to quickly identify their needs.

Teaching reading: Reading practice sessions three times a week

- We teach 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 on pages 11 to 20 of 'Application of phonics to reading'
 - 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 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.
- In Year 2 and 3, we continue to teach reading in this way for any children who still need to practise reading with decodable books.

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 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.

Additional reading support for vulnerable children

- Children in Reception and Year 1 who are receiving additional phonics keep-up sessions read their reading practice book to an adult daily.
- 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.

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 checklists and templates to regularly monitor and observe teaching; they use the summative data to identify children who need additional support and have gaps in learning.

Ensuring reading for pleasure

'Reading for pleasure is the single most important indicator of a child's success.' (OECD 2002)

'The will influences the skill and vice versa.' (OECD 2010)

We value reading for pleasure highly and work hard as a school to grow our Reading for Pleasure pedagogy.

- We read to children every day. We choose these books carefully as we want children to experience a wide range of books, including books that reflect the children at Stratford Primary 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, children have access to the reading corner every day in their free flow time and the books are continually refreshed.
- Children from Reception onwards have a home reading record. The parent/carer records comments to share with the adults in school and the adults will write in this on a regular basis to ensure communication between home and school.
- As the children progress through the school, they are encouraged to write their own comments and keep a list of the books/authors that they have read.
- The school library is made available for classes to use throughout the week. Children across the school have regular opportunities to engage with a wide range of Reading for Pleasure events (book fairs, author visits and workshops, national events etc).
- Children choose from our range of carefully chosen books to take home and share with an adult. We keep a record of the children's choices, so we get to know them as readers.

- 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. By doing this we can recommend authors and genres of books to expand their interests.

Impact

Assessment

- Assessment is used to monitor progress and to identify any child needing additional support as soon as **Assessment for Learning (AfL)** 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.
- **Summative assessments** are uploaded onto the Assessments 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, Reading Leaders 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 Keep-up support that they need

We reassess every three weeks every child who is not on track.

- A **placement assessment** is used:
 - with any child new to the school in Reception and Year 1 to quickly identify any gaps in their phonic knowledge and to plan and provide appropriate extra teaching.

Statutory assessment

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

Ongoing assessment for rapid catch-up

- Children in Year 2 to 6 are assessed through:
 - their teacher's ongoing formative assessment
 - the *Little Wandle Letters and Sounds* placement assessment

- the appropriate half-termly assessments.

Glossary of Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised terminology

Adjacent consonants

Two or more consonants that come together in a word without any intervening vowel or vowels (for example, 'd-r' in 'drop', 's-t-r' in 'strap'). Adjacent consonants do not constitute a discrete unit of sound and are read by blending the individual consonant phonemes involved.

Alien words

A child-friendly term for 'pseudo-words'.

Alphabetic code

The relationship between the sounds that can be identified in speech (phonemes) and the letters used to represent them in writing (graphemes).

Alternative pronunciation

A different way of pronouncing a grapheme. For example, the letters 'ow' can represent the sounds /ow/ as in 'crown' and /oa/ as in 'snow'.

Alternative spelling

A different way of spelling a phoneme. For example, the sound /w/ can be represented in writing by 'w' as in 'wave' and 'wh' as in 'what'.

Blend

To combine individual phonemes into a whole word, working all the way through from left to right. Once the GPCs involved have been learned, blending is the key process involved in reading words effectively. It is a skill that needs extensive practice. Practice in oral blending is very helpful, both before and during the process of learning to read. It is important to understand that blending sounds into a word is not simply a matter of saying them more quickly, nor of mixing them together like paint. Phonemes need to be joined into one continuous stream of sound to make a spoken word. Extensive practice, following teacher modelling, is the key.

Catchphrase

A type of mnemonic in the form of a memorable (often funny) phrase. Catchphrases are generally used in this programme to help children remember some of the later GPCs learned, where a picture alone might not give enough of a 'hook'.

Chunk it up

To break up a longer word and read it one part (chunk) at a time, to avoid being overwhelmed and to ease the process of blending.

Compound word

A word made by joining two individual words together, for example, 'houseboat' is 'house' + 'boat'.

Digraph

A grapheme using two letters to represent one phoneme. With children, we frequently reinforce it with the mantra *'two letters, one sound'*. At the appropriate stage, it is useful for children to learn to use the term and to understand what it means.

Fluency

The ability to read accurately with speed and expression. Fluent readers read words automatically without needing to decode. It is at this point that we see them able to focus on comprehension and make sense of what is being read.

Formation phrase

A memorable phrase used to support the children in forming the letter correctly using directional vocabulary, such as 'down', 'up', 'across' and 'over'.

Under the snake's chin, slide down and round its tail.

GPC

This stands for grapheme–phoneme correspondence, the sound–letter relationship between each element of the alphabetic code. Written English is quite complex and does not have one-to-one grapheme–phoneme correspondence. The same phoneme can be represented by different graphemes in different words, and the same grapheme can represent different phonemes in different words. To ensure learning is systematic, and to avoid cognitive overload, this programme generally teaches one fairly common grapheme representation of each phoneme first. Alternative spellings of the same phoneme, and alternative pronunciation of the same grapheme are usually taught later, mostly in Phase 5.

Grapheme

A letter or group of letters used to represent a particular phoneme when writing. With children, we sometimes call this 'a sound written down', although, as with 'phoneme', it is helpful for children to learn to use the correct term from the beginning. The way graphemes are used to represent phonemes in our written language is known as the 'alphabetic code'.

Group reading practice

A group reading session where the children read alongside an adult from books containing known GPCs and tricky words, and have the opportunity to apply and practise their knowledge. The children should be able to access these books with 90% accuracy. (Also known as 'teaching reading with books'.)

Grow the code

To systematically and incrementally teach additional GPCs so that the range of words children can read continually extends.

Homograph

Homographs are words that have the same spelling but different meanings, for example, 'pen' (writing implement) and 'pen' (animal enclosure).

Homophone

Homophones are words that have the same pronunciation but different spellings or meanings, for example, 'prey' and 'pray'.

Mnemonic

Any simple device used to assist memory. In this programme, it is a combination of an engaging picture with a letter and is used as a 'hook' to help children remember a particular GPC when they first learn it.

Multi-syllable word

A word with more than one syllable. Syllables are easy to recognise when words are spoken, but hard to distinguish in printed words until you know how to say them. The best way for children to learn to recognise syllables is to count (or clap) them when reciting known rhymes, songs, and so on.

Oral blending

A technique for the early practice of blending. The teacher articulates each phoneme in a word separately, in order, and children respond by saying the whole word aloud. Alternatively, they can be asked to blend the word silently and show they have done so by responding with some action, for example, touching their head, after the teacher has pronounced the separate phonemes in the word 'head'. Such practice is valuable both before and during the early stages of learning to read. (Also known as 'sound-talk'.)

Orthographic store

Children learn to read by first sounding and blending words, and then reading them 'straight off', without overt sounding and blending. Once this has been practised sufficiently, recognition of these words becomes automatic and they are held as an orthographic store in a highly specialised area of the brain that expert neurologist Stanislas Dehaene calls 'the brain's letterbox'. This orthographic store, and the instantaneous recall it enables, is the basis of fluent reading. It is important to remember that the orthographic store is most effectively built up through extensive practice of the sounding–blending–reading process, which establishes the necessary neural pathways, not through trying to memorise countless whole words.

Overt blending aloud

Sound-talking aloud every phoneme in turn before blending them together to form the word.

Phoneme

The smallest unit of sound that can be identified in words. We sometimes simply call this a 'sound', although it is helpful for children to use the term 'phoneme' from the beginning of our programme. (Note: We do not usually notice discrete sounds in words. We deliberately separate them out so that children can learn how our writing–reading system works. Children are first helped to identify the separate sounds in words through oral blending and segmenting, and this is reinforced as they begin to work through our systematic synthetic phonics programme.)

Phonetically plausible

Comprising grapheme–phoneme correspondences that can be found in English words,

even if they are not correct spellings of the (or any) actual word, for example, ‘thor’ instead of ‘thaw’.

Phonics screening check

A statutory national assessment in England, conducted internally by schools towards the end of Year 1. Its sole purpose is to determine whether a child can phonically decode single words to an annually predetermined national standard.

Phonics

The method by which we teach children to read by recognising the connections between the sounds of spoken words (phonemes) and the letters that are used to write them down (graphemes).

Point and sweep

A technique for reinforcing the process of sounding and blending involving the teacher pointing to each phoneme in a word, in sequence from left to right, and then sweeping a finger below the word, again from left to right, to indicate the blending. It can be used with the teacher and/or children vocalising each stage, or as a reinforcement to silent sounding and blending as children become more confident.

Prefix

A recognisable unit of language added to the beginning of a word to change its meaning. For example, ‘rewrite’ is ‘write’ with ‘re-’ added at the beginning, so ‘re-’ is the prefix. Examples of other common prefixes are ‘un-’, ‘dis-’, ‘sub-’. Prefixes usually carry a particular meaning, whatever word they are applied to.

Prosody

The rhythmic and intonational aspect of speech that manifests as expressive reading. It comprises timing, phrasing and intonation, and helps to convey meaning and add ‘life’ to reading.

Pseudo-words

Simple, phonetically plausible ‘words’ that don’t actually occur in the English language; used (as in the Phonics screening check) to assess whether a child can correctly read a word they haven’t seen before, using phonic decoding; use should be confined to assessment.

Reading

The process of looking at written symbols and getting meaning from them – making meaning from print.

Regional pronunciation

In a few instances, regional accents result in a noticeably different pronunciation of a phoneme in some words. It is recommended that teaching is adapted to suit this. For example, whereas in southern areas it will be necessary to teach an /ah/ sound as an alternative pronunciation for the vowel in words like ‘bath’, in some northern regions, where such words are consistently pronounced with a short form of the vowel, this will not be necessary. In this programme, the progression chart indicates where this is most likely to apply.

Revisit and review

The first part of the lesson where the core purpose is to activate prior knowledge – bringing prior learning to the forefront of the children’s minds and promoting the transference of working memory into long-term memory.

Segment

To identify each of the individual phonemes in a word, working all the way through from left to right. This is an important first stage of writing (spelling) a word but needs to be practised orally first. Counting the phonemes is often helpful in reinforcing this process.

Sound button

A graphic device to help children recognise the separate phonemes in a printed word. Sound buttons can be used as a support in the early stages of learning. For each word, a dot is placed under any single-letter grapheme and a short horizontal line under the group of letters that form a digraph or trigraph, as shown below.

Sound talk

See ‘Oral blending’, above.

Speedy sounds

The rapid recall of previously taught GPCs.

Speedy words

Fluent reading of previously read words containing known GPCs that are read without blending.

Split vowel digraph

A digraph representing a vowel sound where its two letters are split by an intervening consonant (for example, ‘a_e’ in ‘take’). Despite having a consonant in between them, the two letters involved (here ‘a’ and ‘e’) still count as one digraph, making one sound. The vowel sound is pronounced at the position of the first of the two letters of the digraph (that is, in the middle of ‘take’). At early learning stages, a split digraph is often highlighted with a short line joining the two halves of the digraph above the intervening consonant, as shown below.

Suffix

A recognisable unit of language added to the end of a word to change its form, such as the tense of a verb. For example, ‘playing’ is ‘play’ + ‘-ing’, so ‘-ing’ is the suffix. Examples of other common suffixes are ‘-er’, ‘-ed’, ‘-est’.

Tap in/tapping in

The process by which the teacher listens in to individual children as they are engaged in reading their book during group reading practice.

Teaching reading with books

See ‘Group reading practice,’ above.

Tricky words

High-frequency words that, although decodable in themselves, cannot be decoded by children using the GPCs they have been taught up to that point. Not all high-frequency

words are 'tricky words'. Many tricky words cease to be tricky in the later stages of our programme, as more GPCs are learned.

Trigraph

A grapheme using three letters to represent one phoneme. With children, we frequently reinforce it with the mantra *'three letters, one sound'*. At the appropriate stage, it is useful for children to learn to use the term and to understand what it means.

Vocabulary

All of the words that a person knows and uses within their language.

Vowel sound

Although we have five vowel letters in English, each one can be pronounced in different ways and there are, therefore, far more than five vowel phonemes (vowel sounds). Each one has a short vowel form, with a fairly staccato pronunciation; these are the vowel sounds heard, for example, in 'hat', 'bed', 'big', 'hot' and 'tub'. Each also has a more elongated pronunciation, the long vowel form heard, for example, in 'play', 'seed', 'high', 'blow' and 'tube'. There are, additionally, more complex vowel forms, for example, those heard in 'bear' and 'farm'. Graphemes for short vowel phonemes are the easiest to learn and are taught first. Most GPCs for long vowels involve digraphs or trigraphs and are taught later, generally in Phase 5.

Whisper blending

An intermediary stage that can help children bridge the gap between sounding and blending aloud and doing the process silently 'in their head'.