Vernon Primary School

Phonics and Early Reading

POLICY



'Nobody Else is Quite Like Me'

Purpose & Principles

At Vernon Primary School, we believe every child is entitled to become a confident, accurate, fluent and enthusiastic reader. Reading is both a fundamental entitlement and a gateway to the wider curriculum. We teach systematic synthetic phonics (SSP) through Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised, maintaining fidelity to its progression, routines, resources and assessment procedures.

Our approach combines precise word-reading instruction with rich spoken language, high-quality literature, vocabulary, comprehension and a culture of reading for pleasure. We have high expectations for every pupil and respond promptly when children need additional teaching. We do not assume that SEND, disadvantage, English as an additional language, interrupted attendance or mobility limits a child's potential.

Intent

Children develop phonological awareness and oral language; learn grapheme–phoneme correspondences (GPCs); blend to read and segment to spell; become increasingly accurate, automatic and expressive readers; understand and discuss texts; and choose to read for pleasure and purpose.

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 can tackle any unfamiliar words as they read. At Vernon 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.

Teaching follows the carefully sequenced Little Wandle programme so that pupils can apply their knowledge in reading and writing across the curriculum. Older pupils who have not secured decoding receive age-appropriate, urgent support.

At Vernon 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. 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.

Early language and phonics foundations in Reception

In Reception, adults strengthen children's listening, attention, spoken language, phonological awareness, oral blending, vocabulary and enjoyment of stories and rhymes alongside the systematic teaching of GPCs through Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised. Across the early years, staff read aloud, share songs and rhymes, extend vocabulary and model responsive conversations. Language and communication needs are identified early and provision is adapted without lowering ambition.

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 1 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 & Responsive teaching

Teachers use ongoing checks to identify children who have not secured the taught GPCs, blending or word reading. Reception and Year 1 pupils needing additional practice receive Daily Keep-up, delivered by trained adults using Little Wandle materials and the same routines in smaller steps with increased repetition.

Support is additional to, not a replacement for, high-quality whole-class teaching. Staff check whether learning is retained and change provision swiftly where progress is insufficient. Pupils with attendance disruption receive prompt assessment and planned opportunities to catch up. Keep-up lessons match the structure of class teaching, and use the same procedures, resources and mantras, but in smaller steps with more repetition, so that every child secures their learning.

Year 2: secure the code and develop fluency

At the start of Year 2, assessment identifies any gaps in the Year 1 progression. Children requiring further teaching receive it daily until content is secure. Pupils complete the five-week Phase 5 review and are assessed before and after the review. Once secure, children follow the Little Wandle Bridge to Spelling programme before progressing to the Little Wandle Spelling units. From Year 3, children build upon these secure phonics and spelling foundations through Spelling Shed, which provides a structured approach to developing spelling knowledge, including spelling patterns, rules and morphology, as pupils progress through Key Stage 2.

Children continue to read fully decodable books until they have completed the core sequence and demonstrated sufficient accuracy and fluency. Little Wandle specifies a final assessment of approximately 60 words per minute with at least 90% accuracy for exiting the core programme; staff must apply the current programme guidance and professional judgement.

Years 2–6: Rapid Catch-up

Any older pupil who is not yet decoding at the level needed to access the curriculum is assessed promptly using Little Wandle Rapid Catch-up. Staff deliver targeted daily sessions of approximately 15–20 minutes using the programme's age-appropriate resources, alongside reading practice with accurately matched 7+ decodable books.

Rapid Catch-up assessments are used approximately every four weeks to identify progress and adjust teaching. A pupil who has not met the Year 1 phonics screening standard receives appropriate further support and is entered for the statutory Year 2 recheck where required. Pupils are not withdrawn from a rich, ambitious curriculum.

Teaching Reading: decoding, prosody and comprehension

Pupils learning to decode take part in three structured reading practice sessions each week, led by trained adults using texts precisely matched to secure phonic knowledge. The sessions focus separately on decoding, prosody (meaningful expression) and comprehension (understanding through discussion). Repeated reading builds accuracy, confidence and understanding.

We teach children to read through reading practice sessions. These:

- are taught by a fully trained adult to small groups of 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 11–20 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
- prosody: teaching children to read with understanding and expression
- comprehension: teaching children to understand the text.

In Reception these sessions start from Week 4 in the Autumn term and are incorporated into the children's daily guided reading sessions:

- Monday – decoding (whole class)
- Tuesday – prosody (whole class)
- Wednesday to Friday – comprehension (small group sessions)

Books used for the sessions are matched to the children's secure phonic knowledge using the Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised assessments and book matching grids from the 'Application of Phonics to Reading' document.

In Year 1 these sessions start from Week 1 in the Autumn term and are incorporated into the children's daily guided reading sessions:

- Monday – decoding.
- Tuesday – prosody.
- Wednesday – comprehension.
- On a Thursday and Friday, Year 1 follow the guided reading structure outlined for the rest of the school

Books used for the sessions are matched to the children's secure phonic knowledge using the Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised assessments and book matching grids from the 'Application of Phonics to Reading' document.

In Year 2, we continue to teach reading in this way for any children who still need to practise reading with decodable books.

Beyond decoding: fluency and comprehension

Once pupils have secured decoding, teaching increasingly emphasises automatic word recognition, reading accuracy, prosody, vocabulary, inference, retrieval, discussion and comprehension of increasingly complex texts. Teachers model fluent reading and provide purposeful repeated reading.

Reading fluency is developed through appropriately matched reading practice, repeated reading, explicit modelling of prosody, discussion and ongoing assessment. Children who still need phonics teaching receive targeted support through the Little Wandle programme, including Rapid Catch-up where appropriate.

Inclusion & Equity

The Reading Leader, class teachers and SENDCo work together to identify barriers early and provide appropriate adaptations, including accessible presentation, communication support, carefully considered group size, repetition and additional opportunities to practise. Staff take account of pupils' individual plans and reasonable adjustments while preserving the sequence and ambition of phonics teaching.

Assessment is used to distinguish gaps in taught phonics from broader language, hearing, speech or literacy needs. EAL learners are assessed sensitively and supported through vocabulary and oral-language teaching; English proficiency alone is not treated as a SEND indicator.
Leaders monitor the experience and progress of disadvantaged pupils, pupils with SEND, children known or previously known to children's social care, pupils with low attendance and pupils who join

mid-year. They respond to disparities in access, participation, attainment and progress, including where support outside school is limited.

Reading for pleasure and a reading culture

'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 Vernon 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, 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.
- Each class visits the local library every term.
- The school Reading Hub is made available for classes to use at protected times. 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).
- We use the Everybody read! resources to grow our teachers' knowledge of current books, the most recent research and to grow our own Reading for Pleasure practice.

Home–School Partnership

Children learning phonics take home a decodable practice book matched to their secure knowledge and a separate reading-for-pleasure book to share with an adult. Families are given accessible guidance on supporting blending, sharing stories and encouraging talk, using Little Wandle parent resources, workshops and communication.

Assessment, transition and impact

Daily formative assessment and weekly review inform immediate teaching. Little Wandle summative assessments for Reception and Year 1 are undertaken in accordance with programme guidance (typically every six weeks); Year 2 and Rapid Catch-up assessments are administered at their prescribed points. Reading fluency is assessed where indicated by the programme.

The Reading Leader and senior leaders analyse GPC-level gaps, group trends, attendance, programme participation and individual progress, with particular attention to disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND. Decisions are recorded, interventions reviewed for impact and approaches changed promptly where progress is weak.

Transitions between Reception, Year 1, Year 2 and Key Stage 2 include accurate information about phonic knowledge, book matching, fluency, intervention and next steps. 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 plan and provide appropriate extra teaching. The Rapid Catch-up assessment is used with any child new to the school in Year 2 and above to quickly identify any gaps in their phonic knowledge and plan and provide appropriate extra teaching.

The statutory Year 1 Phonics Screening Check and any required Year 2 recheck are administered according to current DfE instructions.

Ongoing assessment for children receiving Rapid Catch-up in Years 2 to 6 are assessed through:

- the Rapid Catch-up initial assessment to quickly identify any gaps in their phonic knowledge and plan appropriate teaching
- the Rapid Catch-up summative assessments to assess progress and inform teaching
- the Rapid Catch-up fluency assessments when children are reading the Phase 5 set 3, 4 and 5 books for age 7+.
- The fluency assessments measure children's accuracy and reading speed in short one-minute assessments. They also assess when children are ready to exit the Rapid Catch-up programme, which is when they read the final fluency assessment at 90+ words per minute.

Leadership, training and quality assurance

The Reading Leader oversees implementation, staff induction, coaching, assessment quality, resources and programme fidelity. Class teachers remain accountable for pupils' reading progress, including where teaching is delivered by other adults. The SENDCo advises on inclusive provision; senior leaders and governors monitor impact and resourcing.

Monitoring combines supportive lesson visits, pupil reading, book matching checks, staff discussion, assessment analysis and feedback from pupils and families. Leaders identify training needs and evaluate whether improvements are sustained, rather than relying solely on phonics screening scores.

Leaders share effective practice internally and, where impact is securely evidenced, through appropriate external professional networks.

To 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 maps show elements of new learning for 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.

Policy Date: November 2026
Review Date: November 2029
Ratified by Governors: November 2026