

Hillcrest Early Years Academy



Phonics and Early Reading Policy

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Phonics and early reading policy

The context of our school

Hillcrest Academy located in Gainsborough is in the West Lindsey district of Lincolnshire. We are an infant academy which specialises in providing quality early years education. The school sits in a high area of deprivation with 19% SEND and 60% of our pupils eligible for pupil premium. There are currently 247 children on roll with a two-form entry class structure.

At Hillcrest Academy the starting points for children have traditionally been low, especially within the levels of development within communication and language, due to the demographics of the catchment area. As a school we started our little Wandle journey in February 2022 following in depth research in to the different SSP offers and the pedagogy behind them.

Intent

Phonics (reading and spelling)

At Hillcrest Early Years, 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 Nursery/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 Hillcrest Early Years Academy, 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 Hillcrest Early Years Academy, 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

Foundations for phonics in Nursery

- We provide a balance of child-led and adult-led experiences for all children that meet the curriculum expectations for 'Communication and language' and 'Literacy'. These include:
 - Follow the 'Love for Reading' planning for Foundation 1 from Little Wandle.
 - Following the 'Foundations for Phonics' programme from Little Wandle.
 - learning a range of nursery rhymes and action rhymes
 - activities that develop focused listening and attention, including oral blending
 - attention to high-quality language.
- We ensure Nursery children are well prepared to begin learning grapheme-phoneme correspondences (GPCs) and blending in Reception.

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 2 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 Phases 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 who needs additional practice has daily Keep-up support, taught by a fully trained adult. 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.
- We timetable daily phonics lessons for any child in Year 2 who is not fully fluent at 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 placement assessments and support children with daily blending interventions and precision teach.
- With 30 minute phonics lessons each day and daily interventions, children are supported to be able to read fluently at a rapid pace.

Teaching reading: Reading practice sessions twice a week

- We teach children to read through reading practice sessions twice 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 11–20 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 four key reading skills:
 - Decoding and comprehension.
 - Prosody and fluency: teaching children to read with understanding and expression. Teaching children to read without decoding.
- In Reception these sessions start in Week 4. Children who are not yet decoding have daily additional blending practice in small groups, so that they quickly learn to blend and can begin to read books.
- In Year 2, we continue to teach reading in this way for any children who still need to practise reading with decodable books. After this, children take part in fluency reading sessions once a week if they have come off the Little Wandle programme.

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.

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.

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 Hillcrest Early Years Academy and our local community as well as books that open windows into other worlds and cultures.
- Every corridor area 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 Nursery, reception, and KS1, children have access to the reading corner every day in their discovery time and the books are continually refreshed.
- In Reception and Year 1, we have daily 'book vote' for story time so that children have an input into what book they want to read.
- Throughout the school we have a daily 10-minute story time before assembly.
- 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.
- Children are given a book bag by Hillcrest Early Years Academy at the start of the year to support with the transporting of both reading books and reading for pleasure books from home to school.
- 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.
- Every Wednesday, children have an additional Drop Everything and Read time whereby they have the opportunity to read a book together as a class or with friends and enjoy reading for pleasure.
- We have a Book Spine across the Academy which is progressive and ensures that children from Little Sparkles to Year 2 have access to and are exposed to a wide range of texts.

Guided Reading

Reception

In Reception, the children start by been exposed to a wide range of high-quality texts through daily story reading times and throughout the provision. This is further enhanced by D.E.A.R (Drop Everything and Read) on a Wednesday afternoon where the children are able to vote for their favourite story to be read by the class teacher. Little Wandle Reading Sessions in the Early Years are designed to foster a love for reading and build foundational literacy skills in young children. Starting from Week 4 in Reception, these sessions are held three times a week and focus on three key aspects: decoding, reading with prosody, and comprehension. Each session is structured to ensure children practice reading in a supportive environment, using books that match their secure phonic knowledge. The sessions are typically 20 minutes long and involve small groups of children, allowing for individual attention and repeated practice. The "three

reads" model used in these sessions helps children become confident readers by providing multiple opportunities to engage with the text. Additionally, the program emphasises reading for pleasure and encouraging children to develop a lifelong love of books.

Year 1

In year 1 the children continue to be exposed to a wide range of high-quality, engaging texts throughout their school day. This is further enhanced by D.E.A.R (Drop Everything and Read) on a Wednesday afternoon where the children are able to vote for their favourite story to be read by the class teacher. Little Wandle Reading Sessions in Key Stage 1 continue to build on the foundational literacy skills developed in the Early Years. These sessions are held three times a week and are designed to help children become fluent and confident readers. The focus remains on three key areas: decoding, reading with prosody, and comprehension.

In Key Stage 1, children read books that are carefully matched to their secure phonic knowledge, ensuring they can apply what they've learned in phonics lessons. The sessions are structured to provide repeated practice, which helps to reinforce learning and build confidence. Small group settings allow for personalised attention and support.

The program also emphasises the importance of reading for pleasure, encouraging children to develop a lifelong love of books. By the end of Key Stage 1, children are expected to be fluent readers, ready to tackle more complex texts as they move into Key Stage 2

In addition to the reading groups above, the children will also access material from Head Start Primary. These texts feature a reading page and a separate activity for the children to complete. The texts closely follow the English National Curriculum guidelines and help to promote a love of reading whilst developing language skills and vocabulary development. They help to support independent learning and cover a wide range of genres. These can be used as whole class sessions, teacher led sessions or independent guided reading sessions depending on the ability of the child.

Year 2

In year 2 the children continue to be exposed to a wide range of high-quality, engaging texts throughout their school day. This is further enhanced by D.E.A.R (Drop Everything and Read) on a Wednesday afternoon where the children are able to vote for their favourite story to be read by the class teacher. Little Wandle Reading Sessions and Fluency Reading Groups in Year 2 are designed to ensure children become fluent and confident readers. These sessions are held three times a week and focus on three key areas: decoding, reading with prosody, and comprehension. In Year 2, children continue to read books that are carefully matched to their secure phonic knowledge, allowing them to apply their phonics skills effectively. The sessions are structured to provide repeated practice, which helps reinforce learning and build confidence. Small group settings allow for personalised attention and support.

Additionally, the Fluency Reading Groups aim to build reading speed and accuracy. Using the Big Cat for Little Wandle Fluency books, children progress through different levels, starting from a reading speed of 60 words per minute and advancing to 120 words per minute. These groups help children develop the ability to read smoothly and with expression, enhancing their

overall reading experience. By the end of Year 2, children are expected to be fluent readers, ready to tackle more complex texts as they move into Key Stage 2. The program also emphasises the importance of reading for pleasure, encouraging children to develop a lifelong love of books.

In addition to the reading groups above, the children will also access material from Head Start Primary. These texts feature a reading page and a separate activity for the children to complete. The texts closely follow the English National Curriculum guidelines and help to promote a love of reading whilst developing language skills and vocabulary development. They help to support independent learning and cover a wide range of genres. These can be used as whole class sessions, teacher led sessions or independent guided reading sessions depending on the ability of the child.

Impact

Assessment

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

- **Assessment for learning** is used:
 - daily within class to identify children needing Keep-up support
 - weekly in the Review lesson to assess gaps, address these immediately and secure fluency of GPCs, words and spellings.
- **Summative assessment** for Reception and Year 1 is used:
 - every six weeks to assess progress, to identify gaps in learning that need to be addressed, to identify any children needing additional support and to plan the Keep-up support that they need.
 - by SLT and scrutinised through the *Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised* assessment tracker, to narrow attainment gaps between different groups of children and so that any additional support for teachers can be put into place.
- **Fluency assessments** measure children's accuracy and reading speed in short one-minute assessments. They are used:
 - in Year 1, when children are reading the Phase 5 set 3, 4 and 5 books
 - with children following the Rapid Catch-up programme in Year 2, when they are reading the Phase 5 set 3, 4 and 5 books
 - to assess when children are ready to exit their programme. For Year 1 children, this is when they 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.
- 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 to quickly identify any gaps in their phonic knowledge and 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 Year 2.

- Children in Year 2 are assessed through:
 - the placement 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.