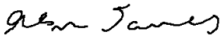


Sacred Heart Catholic Voluntary Academy

St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Multi-Academy Trust



Phonics and Early Reading Policy

Review date		October 2026	
Signed Headteacher		Signed Chair of Governors	
Alison James Marie Sexton		Caroline Pinto	



Phonics and early reading policy

The context of our school

Sacred Heart school has some two form classes and some mixed year groups (year 1 and 2, and year 3 and 4) with a full-time F1 class in the middle of a diverse area of Leicester City with high deprivation. There are 313 pupils (Oct 2025) in total across the school with a 50/50 boy/girl split. 25% of the children are in receipt of the Pupil Premium grant and 94% are from non-white British heritage. 76% of the children have English as an additional language. Our largest ethnic groups are Indian (62%), White British (6%) and then Other Black African (5%).

Intent

Phonics (reading and spelling)

At Sacred Heart 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 Foundation 1 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 Sacred Heart, we also model the application of the alphabetic code through phonics, guided reading and spelling, both inside and outside of the phonics lesson and across the curriculum. We have a strong focus on vocabulary development for our children because we know that speaking and listening are crucial skills for reading and writing in all subjects.

Comprehension

At Sacred Heart, 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 two Early Reading Leaders who drive the early reading programme in our school. These people are highly skilled at teaching phonics and reading, as are all our staff, 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:
 - sharing high-quality stories and poems
 - 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 lessons 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 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 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 or 3 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 *Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised* assessments to identify the gaps in their phonic knowledge and teach to these using the keep-up resources – at pace.



- We implemented the year 2 Little Wandle bridge to spelling programme to ensure children have secure knowledge of spelling they can apply in Key stage 2.
- If any child in Year 3 to 6 has gaps in their phonic knowledge when reading or writing, we plan phonics 'catch-up' lessons to address specific reading/writing gaps. These short lessons will last 15-20 minutes and take place at least three times a week and daily if possible.

Teaching reading: Reading practice sessions three times a week

- We teach children to read through guided 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 11–20 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 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 1 children have guided reading sessions three times a week which focuses mainly on decoding.
- In Year 2 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.
 - Year 2 children take home an additional book accessed from the programme- Accelerated reader, to build on their comprehension skills.
 - 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 phonic 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.

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 Leaders and SLT 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 culture.

- 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 Sacred Heart 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 Foundation 1 and 2, children have access to the reading corner every day in their free flow time where books are continually refreshed. Books are also evident in other areas of the classroom for children to access freely.
- Year 1 and 2 have a reading corner they access on a daily basis during 'reading for pleasure'. These books range from fiction to non-fiction and open a world of imagination through reading.



- As the children progress through the school, they are encouraged to develop their own taste in authors and read widely.
- From Year 2, children use 'Accelerated Reader' and this keeps a record of all books read; reading ages; progress each year and comprehension quiz scores for each book.
- The school encourage all children to take part in the library summer reading challenge and distributes extra resources to enable more families to take part.
- The school library is made available for classes to use at protected times. It must be booked via the school booking system. 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).

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](#) 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 'Phonics Tracker' and Little Wandle phonics tracker, to narrow attainment gaps between different groups of children and so that any additional support for teachers can be put into place.

Statutory assessment

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

Ongoing assessment for catch-up

- Children in Year 2 to 6 are assessed through their teacher's ongoing formative assessment as well as through the half-termly *Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised* summative assessments.
- In addition, children's reading progress is monitored through Accelerated Reader by the use of comprehension quizzes and reading age checks.

