



Birches First School

Believe, Grow, Succeed

...to be the best 'me' I can be.



Phonics and Early Reading Policy

Updated January 2023

At Birches First School we recognise the importance of secure phonological understanding as a key factor in developing skills of early reading and writing. As children begin to access the world of the written word and begin to develop a love of reading with growing understanding and a widening range of texts, they begin to express themselves, thus becoming more independent readers and writers.

It is essential that our approach to teaching phonics and reading is accessible to all learners, regardless of background.

Aims

- To provide pupils with a clear understanding of how the alphabet works for reading and spelling;
- To enable our pupils to become fluent and confident readers with a strong phonological awareness;
- To develop pupils' sight vocabulary to aid fluent reading;
- To enable our children to become confident and independent writers with accurate application of phonic skills and understanding;
- To provide opportunities for repetition and consolidation so that spelling and reading become automatic;

Phonics (Reading and Spelling)

At Birches First 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 Nursery 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. We implemented the 'Little Wandle' phonics scheme after researching various approved schemes ensuring that we make an informed decision which is right for our children.

As a result, all our children are able to tackle any unfamiliar words as they read. At Birches First 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. Throughout the curriculum, children are encouraged to apply their phonic skills and knowledge of spelling rules. 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.

Our youngest children in Nursery develop secure foundations in key phonological skills through games and activities which engage and capture the children's imagination to begin to make recognition between sounds and objects which begin with focus sounds.

The most important aspects of Foundations for Phonics to develop in Nursery are:

- *Sharing high-quality stories and poems with children*
From the start of Nursery, children have lots of opportunities to engage with books that fire their imagination and interest, as well as immerse them in language they would not otherwise be exposed to. They are also provided with a range of high-quality books to choose and read (in their own words), as well as to share with an adult. Children benefit from reading both as part of a class or key group and one-to-one with an adult.
- *Learning a range of Nursery rhymes and action rhymes*
Singing a range of nursery rhymes and action rhymes is part of the daily routine. Children need to experience a rich repertoire of nursery rhymes and action rhymes that include multi-sensory experiences, such as action rhymes in which children have to add claps, knee pats or foot stamps, or move in a particular way. They need to build a stock of rhymes through hearing them in different contexts.
- *Activities that develop focused listening and attention, including oral blending*
Oral blending is the breaking down of words into phonemes (the smallest units of sound). It helps children identify and hear phonemes in words and blend them together to read a word. It is important that children at Birches have plenty of experience of listening to adults modelling oral blending and joining in with oral blending activities before they are introduced to grapheme– phoneme correspondence. This ensures they are ‘tuned into’ sounds when they begin Phase 2. Within Nursery this is a short daily activity. Oral blending will continue into Phase 2 and beyond.
- *Attention to high-quality language with children*
Adults in Nursery consistently model high-quality language with the children during continuous provision and during adult led input.

Comprehension

At Birches First 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.

Because we believe teaching every child to read is so important, we have our Reading Leaders, Mrs Kandola and Mrs Buckley, who drive the early reading programme in our school. Both members of staff are 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.

Teaching and Learning of Phonics

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
 - develop an early love of reading
 - attention to high-quality language.
 - environmental and instrumental sounds
 - sound of the week focus
- 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 20 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.

Little Wandle advocates whole class teaching as its primary approach however there are instances where this may not be appropriate, and children may be taught in a smaller group or in a group at their own level (SEND programme). At Birches, we know our children well and ensure that we meet the needs of individual learners.

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 and above 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 Rapid Catch-up assessments to identify the gaps in

their phonic knowledge and teach to these using the Rapid Catch-up resources – at pace.

- These short, sharp lessons last 15-20 minutes daily and have been designed to ensure children quickly catch up to age-related expectations in reading.

Vocabulary:

Hand to ear	Teaching strategy for chn to repeat after T.
Speedy sounds	Process of recapping previously taught GPCS.
Pronunciation phrase	A memorable phrase used to support the children in saying the letter correctly using directional vocabulary.
Formation phrase	A memorable phrase used to support the children in forming the letter correctly using directional vocabulary.
Shuffle time	Used to shuffle GPCS during teaching
Copy me	T instructs children to copy them
Watch me	T instructs children to watch them
Segmenting fingers	Teaching strategy to use fingers to segment a word
Sound talk	Teaching strategy used for oral blending
Tricky bit	Used to identify part of a tricky word (the part that cannot be decoded)
Grapheme spotter	Used to identify new GPC amongst previously taught GPCS
Whisper blending	Teaching strategy to support children to bridge the gap between sounding and blending aloud and doing the process silently “in their head”.
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
2/3 letters – 1 sound	Teaching strategy used to explain digraphs and trigraphs.
Catchphrase	A type of mnemonic in the form of a memorable (often funny) phrase. Generally used in some of the later GPCs learned, where a picture alone might not give enough of a “hook”.

Teaching reading: Reading practice sessions three times a week

- 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
 - 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 Years 2 and 3, we continue to teach reading in this way for any children who still need to practise reading with decodable books until they become Phase 5 secure.

Home reading

- The decodable reading practice book is taken home to ensure success is shared with the family once they have read it 3 times in school.
 - Reading for pleasure books from our school library also go home for parents to share and read to children each week. We share the research behind the importance and impact of sharing quality children's books with parents during our parent workshops. We regularly share letters, resources and important information through Marvellous Me.
 - 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.

Ensuring consistency and pace of progress

- Every adult 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 all staff 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 on Insight 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 Birches First 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 Nursery/Reception, children have access to the reading corner every day in their free flow time and the books are continually refreshed.
- Children from Nursery onwards use BoomReader to log reading comments (both home and school). The parent/carer records comments to share with the adults in school and the adults will comment 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 on Boom Reader which will keep a list of the books/authors that they have read.
- Each class visits our school library each 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).
- 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.

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 Insight, 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 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. 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 and above 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 Rapid Catch-up in Years 2 to 6

- Children in Year 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.