Phonics Policy

Believe, Achieve, Celebrate

Reviewed October 2026 by Julia Turland

Review November 2027

Thurnby Mead Primary Academy

Policy on English

1 Intent

1.1 Phonics (reading and spelling)

At Thurnby Mead 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.

As a result, all our children are able to tackle any unfamiliar words as they read. At Thurnby Mead, 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.

1.2 Comprehension

At Thurnby Mead, 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.

2 Implementation

2.1 Nursery start teaching ‘Foundations for Phonics’ in the second half of the Autumn term. 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.

2.2 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.

2.3 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.

2.4 We teach children to read through reading practice sessions three times per book. 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 Collins Big Cat Little Wandle Letters and Sounds revised books.
- 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 2, we continue to teach reading in this way for any children who still need to practise reading with decodable books.

2.5 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.

2.5 To ensure 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 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.

2.6 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 Thurnby Mead 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 and Year 1, children have access to the reading corner every day in their free flow time and the books are continually refreshed.
- All children have the opportunity to take home a library book, every week, to share with their parent/carer.
- The school library is made available for classes to use at protected times.
- 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.

3 Phonics planning

3.1 All teachers follow the Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised planning. The planning follows six-week planning and assessment cycles. Each half term has five weekly plans followed by a revision week, carefully planned to individual class needs. Each weekly plan has five daily lessons, including a review lesson.

4 Impact

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

4.2 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.
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4.3 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.

4.4 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
- 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 ready any more fully decodable books.

4.5 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.

4.6 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.

4.7 **Statutory assessment**

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

4.8 **Ongoing assessment for Rapid Catch-up in Years 2 to 6**

Children beyond Year 1 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.

5 Phonics and Inclusion

5.1 At Thurnby Mead, we teach Phonics to all children, whatever their ability and individual needs. Through our Phonics teaching, we provide learning opportunities that enable all pupils to make good progress. We strive to meet the needs of those pupils with special educational needs, disabilities, special gifts and talents, and those learning English as an additional language. For further details, see separate policies: Special Educational Needs; Disability Discrimination; Gifted and Talented Children; English as an Additional Language (EAL).

5.2 When progress falls significantly outside the expected range, the child may have special educational needs. Our assessment process looks at a range of factors – including classroom organisation, teaching materials, teaching style and differentiation – so that we can take some additional or different action to enable the child to learn more effectively. Assessment using Target Tracker, Pivats and other materials allows us to consider each

child's attainment and progress against expected levels. This ensures that our teaching is matched to the child's needs.

5.3 For children with special educational needs we write Education and Health Care Plans (EHCPs) which may include specific targets relating to Phonics. The plans are reviewed every term.

5.4 We enable all pupils to have access to the full range of activities involved in learning Phonics.

5.5 Teaching assistants provide help by providing:

- alternative communication, such as signs and symbols
- translators and amanuenses
- additional and/ or individual instructions
- questions to support the learning of individuals and groups

6 Resources

6.1 All classrooms, from Nursery to Year 3 (including DSP), display large Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised 'Grow the code' or 'Grapheme' charts. Years 4, 5, and 6 display an A3 copy of the 'Grow the code' chart.

6.2 Small grapheme mats and 'grow the code' charts are used to support writing in Reception and Year 1. Years 2- 6 have 'grow the code' charts in their writing first aid kits.

6.3 Reception and Year 1 classrooms display large grapheme friezes, according to the Phase(s) being taught.

6.4 All lessons are supported with Collins Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised grapheme cards and word cards.

6.5 Videos on Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised are used as a resource to support CPD for all staff.

7 Monitoring and review

The Principal and SLT carry out a programme of monitoring and evaluation of the teaching and learning of Phonics. Reports are made to the Governing body. Teachers are given a summary of the main findings as well as individual feedback.