

ILLUMINATE MINDS TRUST

PHONICS AND EARLY READING POLICY



Reviewed:
Next Review:

Summer Term 2025
Summer Term 2026

Phonics and Early Reading policy

Intent

Phonics (reading and spelling)

At The Illuminate Minds Trust, 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 synthetic phonics programme. We start teaching Little Wandle Foundations in our Nursery and then, from Reception, we 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 The Illuminate Minds Trust, 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 Illuminate Minds Trust 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 in 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:
 - 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.
- ❖ Little Wandle Foundations is aligned to the non-statutory guidance on Development Matters and Birth to 5 Matters as well as the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework. We use it as part of our wider provision for Communication and Language, and Literacy. It supports children to:
 - develop their phonological awareness, including rhyme, alliteration, syllables, initial and voice sounds, and oral blending

- love stories and rhymes, and learn by heart a bank of familiar favourites
- increase their vocabulary and confidence to talk
- improve their listening and ability to take part in back-and-forth conversations.
- ❖ We believe that the priority in Nursery should be to build the foundations for phonics for all children. Research tells us that disadvantaged children start Nursery behind their more fortunate peers. By leaving formal phonics teaching to Reception, Foundations allows us to devote more time to working with children who need extra help to develop the skills and behaviours that underpin successful reading.

Phonics in Reception and Year 1

- ❖ We teach phonics for 30 minutes a day in both Reception and Year 1, with two additional opportunities within the school day to review/revise current GPC's and tricky words being taught using flash cards.
- ❖ In Reception, we build from 10-minute lessons, with additional daily oral blending games, to full-length lessons within the first autumn term. 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.**
- ❖ Research tells us that nursery rhymes can support children to develop their language, their awareness of sounds within words and even their later reading ([Bryant et al. 1989](#)).
 - We use the Little Wandle Rhyme time videos and accompanying phonological awareness planning to complement and reinforce our Phase 2 teaching.

Phonics and spelling in Year 2

- ❖ We teach phonics for 30 minutes a day in Year 2, with one additional opportunity within the school day to review/revise current GPC's and tricky words being taught using flash cards. For children with significant phonological gaps there will be two additional opportunities in the school day.
- ❖ When children enter Year 2 an assessment is carried out to ensure that children have completed the Little Wandle Year 1 progression. Any gaps in knowledge will be taught during the daily phonics lessons until the programme is completed. Corresponding summative assessments are carried out to ensure this content is secure.
- ❖ Once all Year 1 content has been taught and assessed, **we teach a five-week Phase 5 review unit.** This ensures that children secure the trickier elements of Phase 5 and can apply this alphabetic knowledge in both reading and spelling.
- ❖ We then use the **Phase 5 review assessment** to ensure children's knowledge is secure, in addition to identifying any children who may need additional support. We reassess after teaching the Phase 5 review.
- ❖ Once the Phase 5 review is secure, we teach **the Bridge to spelling** before moving to the **Year 2 Spelling units.**
 - Children with significant gaps in their phonic knowledge (on phase 2-5) have additional daily phonics lessons five times a week using the **Rapid Catch-up programme.**

Daily Keep-up lessons ensure every child learns to read

- ❖ Any child who needs additional practice in Reception and Year 1 has Daily Keep-up support, five times a week, 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.

Children in Year 2 to Year 6: Rapid Catch-up

- ❖ 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.
- ❖ These short, sharp lessons last 10 minutes and take place at least three times a week. They are carefully planned by the Phonics/Reading leads to ensure children quickly catch up to age-related expectations.
- ❖ We use the Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised assessments to identify the gaps in their phonic knowledge and teach to these using the rapid catch up resources - at pace!
- ❖ Any child new to our school, new to the country or new to English will be assessed in Phonics using the Rapid Catch-up assessments to quickly identify their needs.
- ❖ We assess children every three weeks using the Rapid Catch-up summative assessments to assess progress and inform teaching.

Teaching reading: Reading practice sessions (at least three times a week)

- ❖ We teach the children to read through reading practice sessions **five times a week** and **three times a week in Nursery**. 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 Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised assessments and book matching grids. wordless books with a focus on oral blending
 - 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: teaching children to use oral phonetic knowledge and tune into sounds and rhymes.
 - prosody: looking at the pictures together, considering what sounds characters make, what is happening in each picture and learning to hold the book and turn the pages.
 - comprehension: talking about the book, looking at the pictures and talking about them.
- ❖ **In Nursery** these sessions start in Spring 1 using wordless books as a way of building important literacy skills, including listening skills, vocabulary, comprehension, and an awareness of how stories are structured. Wordless books are told entirely through illustrations and engage children.
 - This is monitored by the class teacher, who rotates and works with each group on a regular basis.
- ❖ **In Reception**, these sessions start in week 4 of the autumn term. Initially, children will read wordless books. In these sessions, children review GPCs and are taught how to blend using teacher-led blending. Once children can blend, they progress onto decodable books matched to their secure phonic knowledge.

- ❖ **In Year 2**, we ensure children complete reading the core programme decodable books (up to Phase 5 Set 5). To exit the programme, we complete the final fluency assessment to ensure children can read with adequate speed and accuracy: approximately 60 words per minute with 90%+ accuracy.
 - Reading in Rapid Catch-up lessons mirrors the core programme. Children following the Rapid Catch-up programme are taught to read using the 7+ fully decodable books. These follow the same progression as the core programme but are more appropriate for older readers.
- ❖ Children read each book at least three times to develop phonemic awareness, vocabulary and comprehension as well as book behaviours. Books are changed once a week in all year groups.

Teaching reading: Fluency programme

- ❖ · We teach the Fluency programme to children in Year 2 and above who have exited the core programme using Little Wandle Fluency.
- ❖ · Each Fluency reading lesson is 30 minutes and taught daily. The structure of every lesson is the same:
 - A pre-read to practise reading words and to support vocabulary
 - Children read aloud for ten minutes and the teacher 'taps in' to hear every child read
 - Focused teaching of prosody, repeated reading and comprehension through discussion.
- ❖ We assess reading speed and accuracy at the end of every full term and use these assessments to monitor progress and allocate books.
- ❖ We also use Assessment for Learning (AfL) and our professional judgement to assess each child's progress in reading, so we can ensure that they have the right books to meet their needs.
- ❖ We review children's prosody by using the Prosody grid. This gives us a picture of how well the child is reading aloud.
- ❖ Comprehension is taught through both dialogic talk and comprehension questions recorded in the children's exercise books. In addition teachers use their AfL to quickly address misconceptions and develop children's curiosity and engagement with each book during the live session

Home reading

- ❖ A decodable reading practice book is taken home by every child in the school to ensure success is shared with the family.
- ❖ Reading for Pleasure (RfP) 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.

Home Reading Expectations (Reception/KS1/KS2)	
Frequency	Children must read their phonetically decodable book to an adult daily.
Responsibility	Parents/carers must sign the reading record.
Type of book	Phonetically decodable book and a reading for pleasure book.
School systems	School adults will check daily to ensure that the books have been returned. If a book is not returned, the school will make contact with parents/carers and subsequently, it should be returned as soon as possible following this. All phonetically decodable books will be changed on Friday and a new one given to the pupils on Monday. Children will still take home a reading for pleasure book for their parents to read to them at the weekend.

Nursery	
Type of book	BIG CAT wordless book and a reading for pleasure book.
School systems	School will hand out new wordless books every Monday and collect them on Friday (From January) to be changed. Adults will check to ensure that the books have been returned. If a book is not returned, the school will make contact with parents/carers and subsequently, it should be returned as soon as possible following this. Children take home a reading for pleasure book for their parents/guardians to read to them at the weekend.

Additional reading support for vulnerable children

- ❖ Children in Reception and Year 1 who are receiving additional phonics Daily Keep-up sessions read their reading practice book regularly to an adult in school.
- ❖ We prioritise children who may not have reading support at home or who may not have access to books. We ensure that they have individual reading times with volunteers and staff to share quality children's literature to promote a love of reading.

Ensuring consistency and pace of progress

- ❖ Every teacher and support staff 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.

Ensuring Consistency and pace of progress

- ❖ Every teacher in our trust 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.
- ❖ Senior Leaders, Phonic/Reading Leaders will
 - monitor reading weekly with lesson walks and lesson observations providing constructive feedback for members of staff.
 - monitor lessons plans to ensure there is high quality teaching happening in all year groups and fidelity to the scheme is being given.
 - moderate summative assessments to identify children who need additional support, planning for their gaps in learning.
 - Conduct weekly reading checks with children across the school to ensure all children have a decodable book in school and to take home.
 - Deep dive into reading three times a year to ensure there is high quality teaching happening across the school.
 - Carry out regular book looks to ensure plans are being followed and correct year group coverage is being delivered. Providing feedback to teachers.
 - Undertake regular pupil voice with small groups of children from across the school ensure they can articulate their learning, the skills they have been taught.

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 (AfL)** is used:
 - daily within class to identify children who require Daily Keep-up support, as well as words and GPCs that need additional teaching
 - to plan repeated practice throughout the day to ensure all children secure learning
 - weekly in the Friday review lesson to assess gaps, address these immediately and secure fluency of GPCs, words and spellings.
- ❖ **Summative assessments** are uploaded onto the Assessment tracker for Reception and Year 1 and all year 2 children that are phase 5 or below in their phonics. These are used:
 - to generate visual reports (pupil heatmaps, pupil trends and books levels, and a summary analysis) for individual children, classes and whole year groups
 - by teachers, Reading Leaders and SLT who drill down and look at the data at GPC, word, tricky word and sentence level
 - by SLT to scrutinise and plan how to narrow the attainment gaps between different groups of children and to put in place any additional support for teachers.

❖ **We assess:**

- every six weeks to assess progress and to identify gaps in learning that need to be reviewed or retaught (Little Wandle Assessments & past phonics screening check papers to familiarise children with the format of the paper)
- to establish if learning is secure for more than 70% of children before new content is taught
- to identify any children needing additional support and to plan the Daily Keep-up support that they need.
- Every three weeks, we reassess every child who is not on track.

❖ **Fluency assessments** measure children's accuracy and reading speed in short one-minute assessments. They are used:

- in Year 1 and Year 2, 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 children in Year 2 and above who are taught Little Wandle Fluency. These assessments identify the best Fluency book level for each child. We assess the children every term (every 12 weeks or so).
- Year 2 children can exit the Rapid-Catch-up programme when they can 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 to plan and provide appropriate extra teaching.

Statutory assessment

Children in Year 1 will sit a phonics screening baseline assessment in September. This will allow for teachers and leaders to place children into the correct phonics groups and ensure the correct level of support is provided from entering year 1. All children in year 1 and those in year 2 that did not pass the phonics assessment will be tested using past statutory papers at the end of each half term.

In June all children in year 1 and those that did not pass in year 2 will sit the statutory phonics assessment set out by the Government. All adults administering the assessment will receive training on how to administer the assessment in line with statutory guidance.