

DARWEN ST JAMES'



Phonics Policy

2025/26

Mission – Nurturing ambition through a living faith.

Vision – Our Academy delivers a purposeful curriculum through its living Christian faith. We nurture ambition in all of our learners in order for them to become positive citizens of tomorrow.

Bible – Let us not love with words or speech alone but with actions and truth. 1 John 3:18

Intent

At Darwen St James, we aim to deliver high-quality phonics teaching that gives every child the tools to become a confident, fluent reader. Our approach is grounded in the belief that every child is capable of flourishing — intellectually, emotionally and spiritually — and that reading is a gateway to that flourishing.

We see reading as a key part of our Christian vision. Through our phonics provision, we nurture ambition and provide children with the skills to achieve their potential, inspired by our values of perseverance, hope, and courage. By enabling every child to access the curriculum and enjoy literature, we help lay the foundation for lifelong learning.

Our curriculum reflects the guidance in the Reading Framework (DfE, 2023), which promotes systematic phonics as the most effective approach to early reading. We follow a carefully sequenced, consistent programme that reflects the expectations of the Firm Foundations in Reception guidance, and prioritises language development and word recognition.

Nursery

In Nursery, Phase 1 phonics is taught daily, focusing on listening, vocabulary and sound discrimination. These early phonological skills are essential building blocks of reading, and are supported through rhyme, rhythm, songs, and high-quality talk.

We follow the guidance set out in Firm Foundations, providing a rich language environment that develops attention, memory and vocabulary. Our provision supports each child's spiritual and social development by fostering friendship, love and a joy of learning within our community.

Children are encouraged to be curious and to keep trying, with adults modelling perseverance and celebrating success — no matter how small. We believe every child deserves the opportunity to thrive and flourish.

Reception & Key Stage 1 – Implementation

In Reception and KS1, phonics is taught through Bug Club Phonics — a DfE-approved SSP. Sessions are daily, fast-paced and focused, giving children plenty of opportunities to practise and apply their phonics knowledge.

Our teaching is in line with the Reading Framework, ensuring that books are fully decodable and matched to what children know. This builds confidence and supports fluency, so that children read for meaning and pleasure.

Phonics is more than a technical skill: it's a key part of helping children discover the joy of stories, the power of words, and the confidence to grow. As a Church of England school, we see reading as a way to help children understand themselves and others, with a strong focus on hope, courage, and ambition.

Key Stage 2 - Implementation

Some children continue to require support to consolidate their phonological understanding through Key Stage 2.

This support is delivered through Bug Club phonics being taught in small groups, 5 times per week, followed by a guided reading session with a book that is linked to the child's current phonetic level. This is designed to be a short term, high quality intervention, taught by skilled teachers who continuously assess the children and move them on as needed.

Reading

In Nursery, children are introduced to short, focused guided reading sessions to help them develop an understanding of how books and reading work. These sessions support children in using pictures to tell the story, turning pages independently and moving from left to right across a page. This approach reflects the Firm Foundations in Reception guidance, which highlights the importance of book behaviours, talk around texts, and developing narrative understanding from the earliest stages.

In Reception and Year 1, children take part in high-quality 1:1 reading sessions with an adult. These sessions are designed to develop key early reading behaviours, build decoding skills, and boost confidence. Books are always closely matched to the child's current phonics knowledge, in line with the Reading Framework's emphasis on ensuring that children only read texts that contain GPCs they've already learned. These sessions provide time for repetition, rereading, and developing fluency.

In Year 2, guided reading is linked to phonics where needed, ensuring that children continue to practise reading at their level. Sessions focus on vocabulary, fluency, prosody and comprehension, building depth of understanding as well as reading stamina.

Phonics and SEND

Any child identified as being at risk of falling behind receives an additional 1:1 reading session each week to support decoding and promote fluency. This is based on continuous assessment and responsive teaching, supporting our aim for all children to flourish. By creating time for personal reading support, we reflect our values of love, hope, and perseverance, giving every child the opportunity to grow into a confident reader.

At Darwen St James, we believe every child is unique, valued and capable of flourishing. Rooted in our Christian vision and guided by 1 John 3:18 — "Let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth" — we put love into action through inclusive, purposeful teaching that nurtures ambition in all learners.

Adaptations are made thoughtfully and intentionally for children with SEND, ensuring access to high-quality phonics teaching for all. The phonics lead works closely with the SENCo to identify pupils who need additional support or bespoke approaches, drawing on individual learning plans and using tools such as Widget, Clicker and differentiated resources to meet specific needs.

Children who require further support take part in daily intervention groups, which are carefully planned and delivered by skilled adults. These interventions focus on closing gaps, developing confidence and helping every child progress, in line with our school values of perseverance, courage, and hope.

Our inclusive approach reflects our ambition for all children to flourish — spiritually, academically and personally — and to be empowered to read, write and speak with confidence.

Training and CPD

All staff are trained in Bug Club Phonics and receive regular CPD from the phonics lead. Weekly training keeps practice sharp and consistent, with clear routines and expectations across school.

This commitment to professional development reflects our value of perseverance and our belief in nurturing ambition — not just in our children, but in the adults who teach them. We strive to create a culture where everyone is supported to flourish.

Home/School Partnership

Parents are invited to be part of their child's reading journey. We run phonics workshops, provide supporting materials, and offer weekly story time sessions.

These opportunities help us build strong relationships with families and support a shared ambition for every child to

grow in confidence and skill. In doing so, we live out our values of love and friendship, working in partnership with parents and carers.

Policy Alignment

Our phonics provision is underpinned by national guidance and rooted in our Christian vision:

- Firm Foundations in Reception – early phonological awareness and language development
- Reading Framework (DfE, 2023) – fluency, comprehension and reading for meaning
- National Curriculum for English – statutory expectations for word reading and spelling
- Early Years Foundation Stage Framework (2021) – communication, language and literacy
- Our school values: love, hope, perseverance, friendship and courage
- Our vision for every child to flourish and to be nurtured in ambition