

Phonics Policy.



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

Here is the revised policy incorporating Phonics Tracker, EAL support, phonics mats, and drip-fed boosters across the school. It remains in British English with no bold text in the body copy and no speech marks.

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 and Writing Framework, which promotes systematic phonics as the most effective approach to early reading. We follow a carefully sequenced, consistent programme that reflects the expectations of EYFS Development Matters and Firm Foundations guidance, prioritising language development, physical foundations, 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.

In line with EYFS Development Matters, we provide a rich language environment that develops attention, auditory 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 systematic synthetic phonics programme. 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 national Reading and Writing Framework, ensuring that books are fully decodable and matched strictly 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 is 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.

To maintain high exposure and keep learning alive outside the dedicated phonics lesson, regular drip-fed boosters are delivered across the school. These short, snappy retrieval sessions happen throughout the school day to keep phonics front of mind and secure retention. Furthermore, phonics mats are readily available for children across all classrooms, serving as a constant visual reference to support independent reading and writing in all subjects.

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 reading session with a text that is linked to the child's current phonetic level. This is designed to be a high-quality intervention, taught by skilled teachers who continuously assess the children and move them on as needed.

Just like in Key Stage 1, older children benefit from regular drip-fed boosters to close gaps quickly, and they have full access to phonics mats on their tables to remove barriers to learning during independent writing.

Assessment: Phonics Tracker

To ensure no child slips through the net, we use Phonics Tracker to regularly assess children and pinpoint precise gaps in their sound knowledge or blending skills. This live data allows teachers to adapt daily lessons instantly and plan immediate, targeted interventions. Phonics Tracker ensures our assessment is thorough, consistent, and drives learning forward so that all children can keep up with the pace of the curriculum.

Reading

In Nursery, children are introduced to short, focused 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 EYFS Development Matters, 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 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 and Writing Framework's emphasis on ensuring that children only read texts that contain grapheme-phoneme correspondences they have already learned. These sessions provide time for repetition, rereading, and developing fluency.

In Year 2, 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

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, utilising individual learning plans and differentiated resources across the four broad areas of need:

Cognition and Learning

We break learning down into small, highly structured steps with frequent repetition to support working memory. Staff use visual aids, Widget, Clicker, and physical letter manipulatives to make abstract sounds concrete. Daily intervention groups focus on closing gaps and building confidence, ensuring that children master current sounds before moving on. 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.

Communication and Interaction

In line with the Reading and Writing Framework, we explicitly teach and model speech sounds, tracking mouth movements and articulation. For children with speech and language needs, we integrate communication aids, visual timetables, and sign-supported language

where appropriate. We give children ample processing time to respond during phonics questioning, ensuring that oracy and phonics develop hand-in-hand.

Social, Emotional and Mental Health

We recognise that struggling to read can cause anxiety. We create a safe, low-stakes learning environment where mistakes are celebrated as part of the learning journey. Bug Club Phonics lessons incorporate familiar, engaging characters to build intrinsic motivation. We nurture perseverance and hope, celebrating small successes to build a positive reading identity and protect pupil well-being.

Sensory and Physical

We accommodate learners with sensory and physical needs by adjusting the classroom environment. This includes utilising enlarged print, high-contrast text, tactile letter shapes, and ensuring optimal seating positions for visual and acoustic clarity. In the Early Years, we place a massive emphasis on physical development, ensuring children build the gross and fine motor skills needed to physically engage with letters, boards, and books comfortably.

English as an Additional Language (EAL)

We provide comprehensive, high-quality support to our children with EAL so they can access the full phonics curriculum rapidly and confidently. We understand that learning phonics in a new language requires tailored strategies. Teachers explicitly model the physical pronunciation of sounds, using mirroring techniques and heavy visual support to bridge vocabulary gaps. EAL learners are provided with rich contextual clues, dual-language materials where appropriate, and pre-teaching of key vocabulary before phonics sessions so that language barriers do not hinder their phonological progression.

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.

To support this partnership, our reading books are perfectly matched to our phonics scheme and are allocated to children for online reading. Rather than taking physical books home, children log in online to access vibrant stories that link directly to their current phonics level. This allows them to successfully practise, complete interactive rewards, and consolidate their learning at home with their families, living out our values of love and friendship.

Policy Alignment

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

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- Firm Foundations in Reception – early phonological awareness and language development
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- Reading and Writing Framework (DfE) – fluency, comprehension, spelling, and reading for meaning
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- National Curriculum for English – statutory expectations for word reading and spelling
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- Early Years Foundation Stage Framework and Development Matters – communication, language, physical foundations, and literacy
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