



Ireby Church of England Primary School

English: Word reading and spelling

Signed by:

_____  _____ Head Teacher

Date: 20th January 2026

Next review date: January 2028 or sooner if required

School Governance:

Responsibility of the school leadership

Note: this document forms part of our reading policy but has been separated out for ease of reading

Christian vision: 'Created to do Good' Ephesians 2:10

At Ireby, we are dedicated to creating a loving community for all, where all are celebrated as unique individuals and where passions and talents can flourish. We learn how God teaches us how to live our lives, how to grow relationships, accept others and use the words and example of Jesus as a foundation for all our learning.

Our phonics policy supports our children's academic, social development through studying a structured phonics curriculum which enables all to flourish.

Our Intent:

Our curriculum is designed to make sure that all pupils are able to read and write fluently and proficiently by the time they leave year 6, so that they can make progress at secondary school.

A vital element of this is the early and successful teaching of phonics, complemented throughout the school years by teaching that promotes fluency and comprehension (see our reading policy). Understanding that the letters on the page represent the sounds in spoken words underpins successful word reading.

Pupils' knowledge of the English alphabetic code – how letters or groups of letters represent the sounds of the language – supports their reading and spelling.

The [Education Endowment Foundation](#) considers synthetic phonics to be one of the most secure and best evidenced areas of pedagogy and recommends all schools use a systematic approach to teaching it. It is for this reason that we have adopted [Read, Write, Inc](#) as our phonics scheme.

Data from the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLs) in 2016 showed a significant improvement in the reading performance of boys in England (reducing the gap between boys and girls by 11 points since 2011), a finding that could be attributed to the roll out of systematic phonics programmes in England since 2010.

More recent PIRLS data from 2021 show that only 11 countries, including England, did not experience a significant drop in attainment since 2016.

The solid foundation in reading given to pupils in England shows that it was able to withstand the pandemic's disruption. The data also show that the gap between boys and girls has narrowed further, attributed both to a decrease of four points in the average achievement of girls but, more importantly, to a further improvement (by two points) in the scores of boys.

As a school, we are therefore confident in the rationale for teaching synthetic phonics as part of our teaching of reading.

Implementation

Principles underpinning our teaching of phonics

To teach word reading and spelling successfully, our teachers understand the principles underpinning the teaching of word reading (decoding) and spelling (encoding).

This includes understanding how the alphabetic code of English represents the sounds (phonemes) of the language with single letters and groups of letters (graphemes).

Phonemes

A phoneme is the smallest unit of sound that signals a contrast in meaning. For example:

- the difference between the words 'gap' and 'cap' is the difference between the phonemes /g/ and /k/ at the start of each word

- the difference between 'fine' and 'fight' is the difference between the phonemes /n/ and /t/ at the end
- the difference between 'stale' and 'stile' is the difference between the phonemes /æ/ and /igh/ in the middle of each word.

English has about 20 vowel phonemes and 24 consonant phonemes.

Graphemes

A grapheme is a letter or group of letters that usually represents a single phoneme. A grapheme can consist of:

- one letter, for example, 'b' – in big
- two letters (a digraph or a split digraph), for example, 'sh' in ship, 'a-e' in make
- three letters (a trigraph), for example, 'igh' in light
- four letters, for example, 'ough' in bough, 'eigh' in weight.

The number of graphemes in a word usually corresponds to the number of phonemes – hence the term 'grapheme-phoneme correspondence' (GPC).

In a few cases, one grapheme represents two phonemes, for example in the word 'uniform,' the first grapheme 'u' represents /y/ and /oo/.

To simplify the language, some programmes use the terms 'letter-sound correspondences' or 'letter-sounds' to refer to GPCs. The alphabetic code Letters are a code, a way of writing down the sounds of speech. Phonemes are the basis of the code, and the letters are the code.

English has a complex alphabetic code: 26 alphabet letters have to do duty, singly or in combination, to represent the 44 or so sounds (phonemes) of English and they do so inconsistently.

In Spanish, German and Welsh, for instance, one grapheme almost always represents the same phoneme. English, however, has more than 70 common correspondences between phonemes and graphemes and hundreds of rare ones.

Summary tables English alphabetic code

1. One grapheme usually represents a single phoneme

Description of example	Grapheme	Example word
Graphemes (of one, two, three and four letters) represent a single phoneme ⁶⁷	b	<u>big</u>
	sh	<u>fish</u>
	air	<u>hair</u>
	augh	<u>caught</u>

2. Different graphemes can be used to represent the same phoneme

Description of example	Grapheme	Example word
Graphemes (of one or more <u>vowel</u> and <u>consonant</u> letters) represent the single phoneme /oe/	o	<u>old</u>
	oa	<u>boat</u>
	ow	<u>crow</u>
	oe	<u>toe</u>
	o-e	<u>stone</u>
	ough	<u>dough</u>

3. A grapheme can represent different phonemes in different words (less common)

Description of example	Grapheme	Phoneme
The grapheme 'ea' represents three different phonemes in three unrelated words	<u>neat</u>	/ee/
	<u>head</u>	/e/
	<u>great</u>	/a_e/

Phonics gives children the key to unlocking this alphabetic code for their reading and spelling. This is why teaching phonics for reading and spelling is a cornerstone of the programmes of study for English in the national curriculum. Read, write, Inc produce alphabetic code charts which are available to our children in our classroom display, which illustrate the correspondences between phonemes and graphemes.

Synthetic phonics

Phonics is a body of knowledge that is necessary for pupils to learn to read and spell, at whatever age. Because of the complex alphabetic code of English, young children learning to read are taught explicitly the correspondences between letters and sounds (graphemes and phonemes), as well as the skill of blending the individual sounds together to read.

The term 'synthetic' phonics refers to the verb 'synthesise', meaning 'to combine'. The skill of segmenting words into their individual sounds is needed for spelling.

Word reading and spelling are 'reversible processes.' Reading involves blending sounds to say a whole word; spelling involves segmenting a whole word to identify the sounds in it.

Evidence shows that teaching phonics is the best way to teach children to read words, e.g., the EEF considers phonics to be one of the most secure and best-evidenced areas of pedagogy, recommending all schools use a systematic approach to teaching it.

In England, the national curriculum requires maintained schools to teach reading using systematic phonics. When inspecting the curriculum, Ofsted's inspectors consider whether:

- the sequence of reading books shows a cumulative progression in phonics knowledge that is matched closely to the school's phonics programme
- teachers give pupils sufficient practice in reading and re-reading books that match the grapheme-phoneme correspondences they know, both at school and at home.

- reading, including the teaching of systematic synthetic phonics, is taught from the beginning of Reception.

Decoding (word reading)

To decode words, children are taught to look at graphemes in written words from left to right and to say each corresponding phoneme in turn. Then they blend the phonemes to say the whole word.

Children: 1. see the written word 'cat' 2. say the corresponding three phonemes /k/ /a/ /t/ 3. blend the three phonemes to say the word 'cat'.

Children: 1. see the written word 'sheep' 2. say the corresponding three phonemes /sh/ /ee/ /p/ 3. blend the three phonemes to say the word 'sheep'. The pronunciation of some words might need tweaking once the sound has been pronounced. For example, a child reading 'mountain' for the first time might pronounce the 'ai' as a long sound, but then recognise they have heard the word and pronounce it more naturally.

Many children need extra support to blend words with consonant clusters, particularly when they occur at the start of words. Consonant clusters (also known as 'adjacent consonants' or 'consonant blends') consist of separate phonemes and children should be taught to pronounce each one before blending them.

Example word	Phonemes in word (total)	Phonemes in consonant cluster
s-p-i-n	4	/s/ /p/
c-l-u-m-p	5	/c/ /l/ and /m/ /p/
ch-o-m-p	4	/m/ /p/
s-p-l-a-sh	5	/s/ /p/ /l/
s-t-r-ee-t	5	/s/ /t/ /r/
th-r-ee	3	/th/ /r/
f-l-air	3	/f/ /l/

To support children to blend phonemes into words, our teachers pronounce the sounds as purely and clearly as possible (see Appendix 6: Pronouncing phonemes). SSP programmes provide guidance.

Encoding (spelling)

To encode words, children are taught to identify the phonemes in spoken words first. This is also referred to as 'segmenting' spoken words. Then they write the graphemes that represent the phonemes.

Children: 1. hear the spoken word 'dog' 2. say 'dog' – /d/ /o/ /g/ 3. write the three corresponding graphemes 'd', 'o', 'g' to spell the word 'dog'.

Children: 1. hear the spoken word 'goat' 2. say 'goat' – /g/ /oe/ /t/ 3. write the three corresponding graphemes, 'g', 'oa', 't' to spell the word 'goat'. It is more difficult for children to spell 'goat' than 'dog', because the sound /oe/ has different common spellings from which they must choose. Children learn to read more quickly than they

learn to spell correctly. This is why their progress in reading is not be held back by whether or not they can spell accurately.

The national curriculum also says that reading and spelling should be taught alongside one another, 'so that pupils understand that they can read back words they have spelt'.

The more graphemes children learn to read and write, the more words they will be able to read and spell, and, as they decode unfamiliar words, they encounter new vocabulary.

Young readers encounter words that they have not seen before much more frequently than experienced readers do, and they may not know the meaning of some of these. Practice at reading such words by sounding and blending can provide us with opportunities not only for pupils to develop confidence in their decoding skills, but also for teachers to explain the meaning and thus develop pupils' vocabulary.

Phonics continues to play an important role in spelling, even after key stage 1, so our teachers still draw pupils' attention to GPCs that do and do not fit in with what has been taught so far' in terms of spelling.

As they are taught to spell, children have opportunities to practise writing the letters they have been shown how to form.

Systematic synthetic phonics programmes

Systematic synthetic phonics programmes (SSP) are for pupils of all ages who are learning to read. These programmes have three things in common: they teach pupils GPCs, to blend phonemes into spoken words and segment spoken words into phonemes.

However, programmes use programme-specific systems and terminology such as actions, mnemonics, prompts, key words and routines to teach knowledge and skills. At Ireby, we do not to confuse pupils by mixing material from different programmes or across different classrooms – hence the phrase 'fidelity to the programme' – which at Ireby, is Read, Write, Inc.

Teaching grapheme-phoneme correspondences

Programme writers select which GPCs they are going to prioritise for teaching, as well as their order, so that the GPCs generate the most words at each stage of the programme.

Read, Write, Inc starts with a simple code: approximately one grapheme for each of the 44 or so phonemes (maybe including a few common alternative spellings such as 'c', 'k' and 'ck' for the sound /k/).

A complex code follows, starting with the most common alternative graphemes. As the programme introduces more graphemes, the number of words a pupil can read increases rapidly.

Given that there are hundreds of GPCs, Read, Write, Inc focuses on the most common that will generate the most words.

As they read, pupils then have the confidence to apply this knowledge to decode words that contain rarer GPCs.

Read, Write, Inc continues to teach phonics for spelling and we have adopted this at Ireby.

Once pupils can read, including teaching further morphemes, as well as GPCs. Common exception words Programmes include a few common exception words to enable pupils to read texts.

These words are kept to a minimum in the early stages, for example: said, to, was, I, the, me, no, of, all, he, you, they, she, we, are, my, be, some, so, were, go, no.

The national curriculum refers to these as 'common exception words' (sometimes referred to as 'tricky words'), because they contain GPCs that are unusual or have not yet been taught.

Pupils are taught to read and spell these by noting the part that is an exception to what they have been taught so far. For example, in the word 'said', 's' and 'd' correspond to the phonemes /s/ and /d/ as usual, but 'ai' corresponds to the phoneme /e/, which is unusual.

High frequency words

At Ireby, we do not ask pupils to learn lists of high frequency words.

They can read most of these in the usual way, by saying the sounds and blending them, when they have learnt the GPCs in the words, e.g. 'mum' and 'came'.

Read, Write, Inc teaches others systematically as exception words, e.g. 'said' and 'to'.

Capital and lower-case letters

Read, Write, Inc teaches that each lower-case letter has a corresponding capital letter; they share the letter name and represent the same sound.

Pupils are taught, for example, that both 'a' and 'A' are called /ae/ and are usually pronounced /a/. Some programmes teach the names of letters only once pupils have learnt to say the sounds.

'Decodable' books and texts

Experienced readers can decode the specialist words in a book about advanced physics, even if they cannot understand them. However, most texts are not decodable for children who are beginning to learn to read.

The national curriculum says that pupils should be taught to: ... read aloud accurately books that are consistent with their developing phonic knowledge and that do not require them to use other strategies to work out words.

This is why we have invested in books that have been carefully structured in cumulative steps for pupils learning to read, so that they can decode every word as their knowledge of the alphabetic code increases. These books are often referred to simply as 'decodable' books. They give pupils the opportunity to develop their fluency in reading individual words and texts.

Teaching a systematic programme in our Reception and key stage 1

Daily phonics lessons

We begin daily phonics sessions as soon as children start their Reception year, but they are also vital for pupils of all ages who are still learning to read and so this will continue at Ireby until they are assessed as completing the W.R.I scheme.

Learning to read and write letters develops phonemic awareness rapidly. It seems easier for children to identify phonemes in words when they know how they correspond to letters, because letters provide visible and concrete symbols for sounds.

Phonics sessions might be only ten minutes long in the first few days. However, by the end of Reception, children are taught for about an hour a day, which maybe split into different sessions for different activities, to consolidate previous learning, learn new content and practise and apply what they have learnt.

This includes reading books matched closely to their phonic knowledge, practising handwriting and spelling, and writing sentences from dictation.

At Ireby, we focus on high-quality whole-class or small-group teaching as an efficient and effective way of ensuring good progress for most of our children.

Occasionally however, we value one-to-one or small-group support for the few pupils who need extra help to keep up and catch up.

When teachers are engaging and motivating, children mirror their teacher's mood and attitude, pay attention and enjoy learning.

Our teachers:

- are clear about objectives for any session and make sure that the children understand them (e.g. 'By the end of this week you will all be able to read these sounds; today we are learning the first one.')
- Expect all children to participate throughout phonics sessions, for example by using 'call and response'
- make the most of the time for teaching and use activities that maximise the number of words children read and spell
- make sure that children practise using the knowledge they have been taught in previous lessons until they can use it automatically, thus freeing up their capacity to learn new knowledge
- support the children to connect the new knowledge with their previous learning • demonstrate new learning in bite-sized chunks • ensure children are given opportunities to apply what they have learnt
- praise the children for working hard and paying attention, being specific about what they have done well

- use assessment to determine next steps clearly, including identifying children who might need immediate extra support.⁷⁹

Direct teaching

All our children (and other pupils who are learning to read) take part in high-quality phonics sessions.

For some of the time, the teacher teaches directly. All the children participate by listening and responding, and by practising and applying what they are learning.

For reading, children:

- revise GPCs taught in earlier sessions
- be taught new GPCs
- practise reading words containing those GPCs
- be taught how to read common exception words
- practise reading 'decodable' phrases, sentences and books that match the GPCs and exception words they already know.
- re-read these to build fluency

For writing (spelling and handwriting), children:

- practise segmenting spoken words into their individual sounds
- choose which letter or letters to represent each sound
- practise a correct pencil grip be taught the correct start and exit points for each letter, which should not include 'lead-in' strokes from the line (see below)
- respond to dictation from the teacher, practising writing words in sentences that include only the GPCs and exception words they have learnt.

Dictation is a vital part of a phonics session. Writing simple dictated sentences that include words taught so far gives children opportunities to practise and apply their spelling, without their having to think about what it is they want to say.

At other times, the children are given tasks that allow them to practise and apply what they have been taught to read and write independently, while the teacher identifies and helps those who need more support.

Read, write, Inc is essential for our teaching of phonics.

Opportunities sometimes arise, however, to teach more. When that happens, teachers may respond naturally and briefly.

For example, after teaching that /j/ is represented with 'j', George might say that his name has the same sound but no 'j'. The teacher could praise his careful listening and show him how 'ge' in his name represents /j/.

Handwriting in Reception and year 1

Learning to form letters and spell words requires considerable effort and attention. While some pupils who have SEND may need reasonable adjustments, the vast majority of children are taught how to sit with correct posture on a chair at a table, using a tripod grip to hold a pencil.

Developing the right habits from the beginning allows children to write comfortably and legibly. As a school, we delay the teaching of joined handwriting until Key Stage 1.

Calm spaces

At Ireby, phonics is taught in a quiet space as this gives our children the best chance to hear clearly and pay attention, because extraneous noise hinders their progress.

Researchers have also found that highly decorated walls in primary schools undermine children's ability to concentrate and absorb teachers' instructions.

For this reason, we have carpet areas close to the teacher which enables our young children to sit easily during direct teaching, while tables and chairs allow them to sit and write properly, without balancing materials on their laps.

Letter cards, friezes and posters showing GPCs match the phonics programme the school has chosen.

Using 'decodable' books and texts

Read, Write, Inc is a systematic phonics programme which includes sufficient 'decodable' books or texts, so that children can practise, at school and at home, their increasing knowledge of GPCs and their blending skill in meaningful contexts.

This is may also necessary for some of our older pupils who have not learnt to decode well enough, that is, pupils who still need to decode, individually, each word they meet in regular texts.

'Decodable' books and other texts make children feel successful from the very beginning. They do not encounter words that include GPCs they have not been taught. If an adult is not present, they are not forced to guess from pictures, the context, the first letters of a word or its shape.

'Decodable' books and texts that children read should run alongside or a little behind the teaching of the GPCs, so that they always feel a sense of achievement when they are asked to read such books.

It is important that our children practise their reading with 'decodable' books or texts. They speed up the time they need to gain sufficient accuracy to read a wide range of children's literature. It is helpful, therefore, if teachers explain to families how they can help their children to read such books when they bring them home.

Organising 'decodable' books

At Ireby, we ensure our beginner reading books all stem from Read, Write, Inc and this ensures that children read books at the right level of difficulty. The organisation of these books is matched closely to the order in which GPCs are introduced in the programme. For example, a book that includes the word 'play' should be placed so that children are not asked to read it until the digraph 'ay' has been taught.

Implementation of phonics will be in-line with our curriculum Intent policy, our reading policy and our English policy.

Impact

Through the consistent, systematic and daily teaching of the Read Write Inc Phonics programme, our aim is for children to become fluent, confident readers by the end of Key Stage One.

Children are assessed at the end of Year 1 using a Government Statutory Assessment Tool known as the Phonics Screening Check. This screening check confirms whether the child has learnt phonic decoding to an appropriate standard and will identify sounds needing further support in Year 2. The children are assessed one to one by the reading leader, who is a familiar adult to them.

Those who do not pass the screening will continue their phonics lessons in Year 2 by being streamed into the correct group within the Year 1 cohort. This allows for them to consolidate and develop their confidence, within a group aimed at their specific ability, ready to retake the screening at the end of Year 2.

Through the Read Write Inc programme, children will be equipped with the skills to decode unfamiliar words using strategies that they have been taught in their daily lessons. This way, children can focus on developing their fluency and comprehension as they move through the school. Hopefully, this leads to a love of reading and children taking pleasure in exploring the rich literary world around them with a firm phonic basis to support them.

Monitoring and evaluation of effectiveness of this policy

The headteacher and English subject leader are responsible for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of this policy towards meeting our stated vision and aims. This will be achieved through:

Activity	Frequency
Lesson observations	Our English leader will sample phonics lessons during the year
Pupil voice	Samples on phonics during year, Governors reading to children weekly including PPG
Collecting and evaluating summative assessment	Termly Teachers will review learning towards 'end points' and record data for evaluation by the subject leader

The role of governors

Our governors determine, support, monitor and review the school's approach to teaching and learning. In particular they:

- support the use of appropriate teaching strategies by allocating resources effectively;
- ensure that the school buildings and premises are used optimally to support teaching and learning;
- check teaching methods in the light of health and safety regulations;
- seek to ensure that our staff development and our performance management both promote good-quality teaching;
- monitor the effectiveness of the school's teaching and learning approaches through the school's self-review processes, which include reports from the headteacher, senior leaders and subject leaders, and a review of the continuing professional development of staff.

Monitoring and review of this policy

Senior leaders monitor the school's English policy so that we can take account of new initiatives and research or any changes in the English curriculum, developments in technology or changes to the physical environment of the school. We will therefore review this policy every two years or sooner if required.