

St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Bognor Regis



# **Phonics Policy**

**Approved: June 2026**

**Review by: June 2027**

## **Introduction / Philosophy statement**

At St Mary's Catholic Primary School, we believe that fostering the love of reading is the key to all learning and as such children are exposed to books on a daily basis from the moment they enter the school. Learning to read is therefore a top priority and as a school we teach synthetic phonics as the main approach to the teaching of reading.

We want all pupils at St Mary's Catholic Primary School to begin their journey to read with confidence, develop a love of reading and apply their skills competently to writing. We use a consistent and structured approach to support a smooth transition as children progress and gain skills, involving parents and giving teachers the flexibility but security to plan to the needs of their cohort through targeted daily intervention. Oral skills are at the forefront and we use Voice 21 strategies to engage the children in learning a wider vocabulary, which will then support their understanding of what they have read.

## **Intent**

The aims and objectives of this policy are:

- To ensure a consistent, high quality approach to the teaching of phonics across the school.
- To ensure that children have direct phonics teaching daily, from Reception to Year 2 and beyond if needed.
- To ensure that children are given opportunities to use and apply their phonics learning.
- To ensure that all children use phonics, as their primary approach, when reading and writing.
- To ensure that children are identified for phonics intervention as soon as needed.
- To ensure that all children entering KS2 are secure at decoding unfamiliar texts.
- To ensure that children are taught high frequency irregular (or harder to read and say) words alongside decodable words appropriate to their age and stage of learning.
- To ensure that all children learning phonics can write a dictated sentence using words taught so far so that they have the opportunity to practise and apply their spelling.

## **Implementation- Curriculum design**

At St Mary's RC Primary School, we begin teaching phonics in Reception from the third week. As a school we have adopted the Essential Letters and Sounds approach to the teaching of phonics and as such the friezes, phonics mats, rhymes and mnemonics are used throughout the school. This consistent approach gives the children reference points, particularly with their writing.

### ***Teaching of phonics – Reception, KS1 and KS2***

Reception begins the Essential Letters and Sounds programme near the start of the Autumn term.

Teachers follow the Essential Letters and Sounds programme teaching a sound a day for four days of a week.

The Essential Letters and Sounds (ELS) approach:

ELS was created to ensure every child can read well, quickly.

The principles of ELS are based upon:

- the delivery of whole-class, high-quality first teaching with well-structured daily lesson plans
- the use of consistent terminology by teachers, children and parents
- the use of consistent resources that support effective teaching
- repetition and reinforcement of learning
- regular and manageable assessment to ensure that all children 'keep up' rather than 'catch up'
- the 'E' model.

### **The 'E' model**

The 'E' model underpins all teaching and learning in ELS.

| 'E' model components | Description   |
|----------------------|---|
| <b>Embed</b>         | The theory and pedagogy behind ELS                          |
| <b>Enact</b>         | How to deliver ELS lessons in your school                   |
| <b>Enable</b>        | How to ensure all children 'keep up' rather than 'catch up' |
| <b>Execute</b>       | How to lead ELS in your school                              |
| <b>Evaluate</b>      | How to assess children's progress                           |
| <b>Evolve</b>        | Optional bespoke training                                   |

In **Reception** this is done through whole class sessions:

- 5 mornings a week they have a 15-40 minute phonics session from the Autumn Term, developing throughout the year in order to consolidate previous learning.
- Children will follow the ELS lesson plans as a whole class, with same day intervention being given during and after the lesson for those who need it.
- The children are assessed using a baseline test and then each half term during week 5. This gives time to fill any gaps before teaching new sounds. There are also review weeks and are incorporated so that for example after a school holiday, time is given to consolidating and revising what has been taught before.

In **KS1** this is done through whole class sessions:

- ELS phonics is taught for 40-45 minutes each morning.
- Children will follow the ELS lesson plans as a whole class, with same day intervention being given during and after the lesson for those who need it.
- The children are assessed using a baseline test and then each half term during week 5. This gives time to fill any gaps before teaching new sounds. There are also review weeks and are incorporated so that for example after a school holiday, time is given to reinforcing and revising what has been taught before.
- In the Spring Term, the groups are split so that those needing further support are given extra time to learn phase 3 and 5 sounds. The other group work on phase 5 and alternative graphemes.

In **KS2** this is done through a catch up/keep up group:

- ELS is only used with the lowest ability Year 3/4 children and/or new arrivals to the school.
- The sessions are taught as for KS1 with a teaching assistant.
- Daily intervention takes place in the afternoon with a dedicated TA.
- The children are selected because they did not pass the Y1 phonics screening check or pass the Y2 retake.
- Essential Spelling and Word Knowledge is done with the rest of KS2 children.

## **Lesson design**

ELS teaches children to:

- decode by identifying each sound within a word and blending them together to read fluently
- encode by segmenting each sound to write words accurately.

For children to engage with the wider curriculum, they need to be able to read well, making inferences and drawing on background knowledge to support their developing understanding of a text when they read. To do this, they need to be able to draw not only on their phonic knowledge but also on their wider reading and comprehension skills, each of which must be taught. The first step in this complex process is the link between spoken and written sounds.

ELS whole-class, daily phonics teaching begins from the first few weeks of Reception. Through the rigorous ELS teaching programme, children will build an immediate understanding of the relationship between the sounds they can hear and say (phonemes) and the written sounds (graphemes).

### Weekly lesson structure for teaching new phonemes and graphemes

| Day 1   | Day 2   | Day 3   | Day 4   | Day 5   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Review<br>Teach new sound<br>Practise<br>Use the Apply sound-specific sheet<br>Review | Review<br>Teach new sound<br>Practise<br>Use the Apply sound-specific sheet<br>Review | Review<br>Teach new sound<br>Practise<br>Use the Apply sound-specific extract sheet<br>Review | Review<br>Teach new sound<br>Practise<br>Use the Apply sound-specific extract sheet<br>Review | Review newly taught sounds for the week, previously taught graphemes, and harder to read and spell (HRS) words<br>Practise – reading and writing words<br>Apply – reading decodable books and writing phrases and sentences |

### Weekly lesson structure for review weeks and Phase 4 teaching

| Day 1                                 | Day 2                                 | Day 3                                 | Day 4                                 | Day 5                                 |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Review<br>Teach and practise<br>Apply | Review<br>Teach and practise<br>Apply | Review<br>Teach and practise<br>Apply | Review<br>Teach and practise<br>Apply | Review<br>Teach and practise<br>Apply |

*(For more information about how Essential Letters and Sounds is used to support Reading, please see the Reading Policy).*

## EYFS (Early phonics)

Early Years Foundation Stage Classrooms have:

### Indoor environment:

- A quiet space, for reading and listening including a cosy chair/ soft furnishings for comfort
- Books appropriate for the cohort's age and stage of development. Including a mix of picture, rhyme and non-fiction texts. These are quality texts, with display space for those books they have enjoyed.
- Technology including interactive whiteboard.
- Musical instruments
- Rhyming and story character puppets
- In sand and water – open ended tools to transfer
- Display words in sensory areas to reflect sound/ actions. Eg. squash
- Writing areas – including ELS grapheme cards, assorted papers, ruler, mark making materials
- Helicopter stories. Teachers capture a child's own story using the helicopter technique then it is acted out within the class.
- Provision for talk as an activity and stimuli to aid talk.

### Outdoor:

#### Shared reception outdoor classroom

- Writing area, assorted mark making materials for paper and large scale marks. Large space for children to explore painting/ chalking and removing their own marks
- Water area to explore sound and effects of large scale movement on sound
- Stage, instruments and dance equipment (pom poms and dance ribbons)
- Den building
- Rhymes, stories and songs.

In Reception, teachers use literacy sessions to model writing ideas and model the use of phonics to support the child's writing. Equipment is left for children to explore freely and alongside adults in continuous provision.

Drawing Club builds on the child's ideas of what they will write after having a sentence modelled on the board.

During child initiated learning, adults pick up on any opportunity to model:

talk: phonics, rhyme and alliteration, voice 21 sentence starters.

reading: phoneme-grapheme correspondence, blending, whole sentences.

Writing: mark making, letter formation, segmenting, how to write and hold a sentence, leave spaces between words and early punctuation.

### **Parent/ Carer Links**

At St Mary's RC Primary School we believe strongly that partnerships with families are key to supporting a child through their whole development, and reading and phonics is an area that many parents are keen to develop early on with their child. To support parental understanding of our teaching of phonics and how to encourage skills at home, we:

- Hold regular reading and phonics workshops. Parents/Carers are invited to share activities to support and model the teaching of early reading/ phonics.
- Meet the teacher – class teachers explain the approach to teaching of reading and phonics, a leaflet is provided in their reading journals.
- Ongoing Next Steps meetings throughout the year (in Reception) to share progress (however parents can request a meeting in between if they wish)
- Reception Six Weeks in meeting – senior management team and class teachers explain the whole school approach to reading and phonics.
- Reading books are changed once a week, on a Friday. The expectation is that books will be read four times during that week, including a pre-read in class before it is sent home.
- We have a dedicated space on our web site to help parents and carers with pronunciation, tips to help reading, the strategies used in school and explaining about how we teach Essential Letters and Sounds in school.

### **Classroom environments**

The ELS sounds and images are used throughout the school and are displayed in all classrooms throughout the school. This is checked during Environment walks.

We only include ELS resources for the children so that all alphabets, sound mats etc. are showing the same depictions of the sounds.

In KS1 and KS2, class teachers display the weekly spellings in their room.

### **Assessment**

#### ***Assessment of phonics – Reception and KS1***

Assessment of the children's reading skills is key to ensuring that all children make rapid progress though the programme, and that they keep up rather than catch up. Using the assessment cycle alongside daily in-class assessments ensure that all the Reading Teachers know where every child is in their early reading journey. ELS is designed to remove the likelihood of 'gaps' in children's knowledge occurring, to avoid children falling behind and to ensure rapid progress where children are transferring their decoding and encoding skills to reading and writing.

Assessment occurs in the fifth week of each half term, to allow all members of staff to target and close any gaps that may be present in either sound knowledge or reading skills.

By undertaking assessment in the fifth week we are able to action a direct intervention before any upcoming school holidays.

ELS includes specific revision points throughout the programme. Each of these revision points focus on specific skills to support children's rapid movement through the programme, the consolidation of their understanding and the re-activation of knowledge.

### **Areas to be aware of when hearing children read:**

#### **Phonological awareness**

The ability to recognise and manipulate the spoken parts of sentences and words. Examples include being able to identify words that rhyme, recognizing alliteration, segmenting a sentence into words, identifying the syllables in a word, and blending and segmenting onset-rimes. The most sophisticated — and last to develop — is called phonemic awareness.

#### **Phonemic awareness**

The ability to notice, think about, and work with the individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words. This includes blending sounds into words, segmenting words into sounds, and deleting and playing with the sounds in spoken words.

Phonological awareness (PA) involves a continuum of skills that develop over time and that are crucial for reading and spelling success, because they are central to learning to decode and spell printed words. Phonological awareness is especially important at the earliest stages of reading development. Explicit teaching of phonological awareness in these early years can eliminate future reading problems for many students. However, struggling decoders of any age can work on phonological awareness, especially if they evidence problems in blending or segmenting phonemes.

### **Accountability**

#### **Role of Class Teacher**

- To follow the plan for individual ELS lessons on a weekly basis
- To use book with only known GPCs for the children according to the ELS structure
- To follow the policy structures when planning lessons
- To take part in ongoing CPD through coaching sessions
- To assess on a daily basis
- To put names onto the daily intervention whiteboard to be actioned by TAs
- To provide resources to support independent learning
- To use FFT at every assessment point (within the 'reading' and 'writing' strands) and keep it updated throughout the year.
- To use the phonics statements to help assign a step in 'reading' and 'writing', each half term, using test data, performance in class and statements to inform judgements
- To carry out gap analysis to identify next steps of learning
- To provide evidence of adhering to the policy for appraisal
- To respond to feedback from lesson observations, book scrutinies and learning walks

#### **Role of Essential Letters and Sounds manager**

- To write and review the phonics policy on an annual basis
- To write an action plan and review it frequently
- To review the assessments of children every half term throughout the year and provide data and feedback to teachers, leaders and SLT
- To organise and carry out ongoing CPD for staff in the form of lesson observations and coaching
- To organise and lead meetings for parents
- To update the web site so that parents are informed about what is happening and how they can help at home
- To advise all leaders about new or updated practices in line with new guidance.

- To model lessons when necessary
- To keep an up to date checklist of resources
- To order appropriate resources
- To keep up to date on developments within the subject nationally
- To provide support and guidance for staff in relation to the teaching and assessment of the subject
- To ensure that there is curriculum coverage and appropriate pitch and progression across the school
- To monitor teaching and learning, through a learning walk
- To collect data on a regular basis in order to track standards
- To lead staff meetings/INSETs to help raise standards within the school
- To demonstrate good/outstanding teaching in the subject in order to lead by example

### **Role of SLT**

- To monitor whole school data on a half termly basis and discuss with the SLT
- To identify areas of need across the school and make suggestions with regards to intervention and support programmes for staff
- To provide materials/advice for intervention groups
- To hold staff accountable for performance data during performance management and pupil progress meetings
- To track the progress of pupil premium children, identifying any gaps in learning and finding ways to address it
- To monitor teaching and learning termly – planning scrutiny, learning walks, discussion with children
- Support subject leads through performance management targets and by giving them opportunities to discuss any issues and give advice
- Lead by example in all areas of the curriculum

### **Role of Governors**

- Meet with co-ordinators to gain a thorough knowledge of the subject; standards, strengths and areas for development
- To have a good understanding of the policy
- To hold subject leads to account by asking challenging questions
- To be involved in some monitoring of teaching and learning each year
- To hold SLT to account in the governor's meetings
- Approve all relevant policies
- Have an understanding about progress and standards across the school

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