



St Michael's
C.E. Primary School

Phonics and Early Reading Policy

2026-2027



"Courage to Flourish in the Love of God"

Our Theologically Rooted Christian Vision



Courage to Flourish in the Love of God

"I have come that [you] may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10)



"Be strong and courageous... the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:9)

These biblical texts underpin our vision summary, 'Courage to Flourish in the Love of God'. Jesus' words from the New Testament describe his desire for everyone to be a full and flourishing version of their created selves, experiencing life in all its vibrant fullness, individually and in community. Our ambition is for everyone to encounter this fullness through the life and work of the school, whatever their background, beliefs or circumstances. God's words to Joshua from the Old Testament illustrate how life, and learning, can be challenging, bringing setbacks and discouragement. These words inspire us to keep on going in those circumstances, confident that God watches over us and walks beside us.

The joining of these biblical texts is meaningful for the particular circumstances of our school community. It gives coherence to our aspirational vision that will grow courage and resilience as enablers of 'life in all its fullness' for everyone. To support our vision, we have seven overarching Christian values:

COURAGE



Philippians 4:13

"I can do all things through him who strengthens me."

HOPE



John 1:5

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

LOVE



1 Corinthians 13:4-8

"Love is patient and kind... it does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth."

FORGIVENESS



1 John 1:9

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us"

TRUST



Proverbs 3:5-6

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight."

COMMUNITY



Hebrews 10:24

"Let us be concerned for one another, to help one another to show love and to do good."

THANKFULNESS



1 Thessalonians 5:18

"Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you"

1. School context and rationale

St Michael's C.E. Primary School serves a diverse community. Our pupils include children with SEND, children learning English as an additional language, disadvantaged pupils, pupils who join the school at different points and children whose attendance or punctuality may create gaps in learning. It is therefore essential that our approach to phonics and early reading is ambitious, consistent, carefully assessed and accessible to every learner.

Early reading is a priority because secure decoding and fluency open access to the wider curriculum. We are determined that no child should fall behind because of background, additional need or starting point. Where gaps are identified, support is immediate, systematic and closely matched to the Little Wandle progression.

2. Our vision for reading

Our school vision, "Courage to Flourish in the Love of God", underpins our ambition for every child to become a confident, fluent and enthusiastic reader. Reading enables pupils to achieve well, belong within a community of readers and thrive through access to knowledge, vocabulary, imagination and wider opportunities.

3. Intent

Phonics: reading and spelling

At St Michael's, we believe that all children can become fluent readers and writers. We teach early reading through Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised, a systematic synthetic phonics (SSP) programme. We start with Little Wandle Foundations in Nursery and, from Reception, follow the Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised progression with fidelity. This enables children to build cumulatively on their knowledge of the alphabetic code and to apply this knowledge accurately in reading and spelling.

We model and expect the application of phonics beyond the daily phonics lesson, including in shared reading, writing and across the curriculum. We place strong emphasis on language development because speaking, listening and vocabulary are essential foundations for reading and writing in every subject.

Comprehension and reading for pleasure

We value reading as a crucial life skill. Our ambition is that pupils leave St Michael's able to read accurately, fluently and confidently for meaning, with the vocabulary and comprehension strategies needed to access increasingly complex texts. We want children to see themselves as readers for both pleasure and purpose.

The Early Reading Leader drives the implementation of the programme, supports and coaches staff, monitors outcomes and ensures that teaching remains faithful to Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised.

4. Implementation

Foundations for phonics in Nursery

We provide a balance of child-led and adult-led experiences that meet the expectations for Communication and Language and Literacy.

Children experience high-quality stories and poems, a rich range of nursery and action rhymes, focused listening and attention activities, oral blending and consistently high-quality language.

Little Wandle Foundations is aligned with Development Matters, Birth to 5 Matters and the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework. We use it as part of our wider provision for Communication and Language and Literacy, ensuring children develop the phonological awareness, vocabulary, listening and speaking skills that underpin successful early reading.

Children are supported to build vocabulary, confidence in talk, listening and back-and-forth conversation, and to learn a bank of familiar stories and rhymes.

The emphasis in Nursery is on building the foundations that prepare children to begin formal GPC teaching and blending successfully in Reception; formal Reception phonics is not brought down into Nursery.

Language and nursery rhymes in Reception

Little Wandle Rhyme Time resources and phonological-awareness planning are used to complement and reinforce Phase 2 teaching.

Adults deliberately develop vocabulary, oral language and listening alongside phonics so that children can understand as well as decode.

Daily phonics in Reception and Year 1

Phonics is taught every day for approximately 30 minutes. In Reception, lessons build from around 10 minutes, with additional oral blending practice, to the full lesson as quickly as appropriate.

Children make a strong start: formal phonics teaching begins in Week 2 of the Autumn term in Reception.

Friday review lessons revisit the week's learning and help secure automaticity and fluency.

In Reception, children are taught to read and spell using Phase 2 and Phase 3 GPCs and words with adjacent consonants (Phase 4).

In Year 1, children review Phases 3 and 4 and are taught to read and spell using Phase 5 GPCs with increasing fluency and accuracy.

Daily Keep-up: keeping children on track

Assessment for Learning identifies children in Reception and Year 1 who require extra practice as soon as a need emerges.

Daily Keep-up is delivered by a fully trained adult and follows the same Little Wandle progression, language, routines, resources and mantras as the main lesson.

Keep-up teaching uses smaller steps, additional modelling and more repetition so that children secure learning quickly and can rejoin the pace of the main programme.

Keep-up is additional to, not a replacement for, the daily phonics lesson.

Year 2: phonics, Phase 5 review and spelling

Year 2 begins with assessment to confirm that children have completed and secured the Year 1 Little Wandle progression. Any gaps are addressed through daily phonics until the core content is secure.

Once Year 1 content has been taught and assessed, children complete the five-week Phase 5 review to secure the more complex elements of the alphabetic code for reading and spelling.

The Phase 5 review assessment is used before and after teaching to identify pupils requiring additional support and to measure impact.

Once the Phase 5 review is secure, we teach Little Wandle Bridge to Spelling before moving into the Little Wandle spelling units.

Children with larger gaps follow daily Rapid Catch-up rather than being moved prematurely onto spelling content they cannot yet access.

Years 2–6: Rapid Catch-up

Any pupil in Year 2 or above who is not reading at age-related expectations because of insecure phonic knowledge, or who has not met the expected standard in the Phonics Screening Check, is assessed and receives daily Rapid Catch-up teaching where appropriate.

Rapid Catch-up lessons are short, focused sessions of approximately 15–20 minutes and are taught at pace so pupils can close gaps quickly.

Pupils who are new to the school, new to the country or new to English are assessed promptly where decoding is a concern; provision is based on identified phonic knowledge rather than assumptions about age or language background.

Rapid Catch-up assessment identifies precise gaps and the programme resources are used with fidelity to address them.

Rapid Catch-up pupils are assessed every four weeks so teaching can be adapted and progress monitored.

Teaching reading: reading practice sessions

Reading practice sessions are taught three times each week by a fully trained adult, usually in small groups of approximately six children, using books closely matched to each child's secure phonic knowledge.

Books are matched closely to each child's secure phonic knowledge using Little Wandle assessments and book-matching guidance. Children are not asked to decode books containing substantial untaught code.

The class teacher maintains oversight of groups and rotates regularly to hear and teach each group.

The three reading-practice focuses are decoding, prosody and comprehension. This structure supports fluency and understanding without overloading working memory.

In Reception, reading practice starts by Week 4 of phonics teaching at the latest. Children initially use wordless books while securing blending and move to decodable books as soon as they can blend.

Children read the same carefully matched book three times in school to build accuracy, automaticity, prosody, vocabulary, comprehension and effective book behaviours.

In Year 2, children complete the core programme decodable books through Phase 5 Set 5. The final fluency assessment is used to confirm readiness to exit the core programme; this is approximately 60 words per minute with at least 90% accuracy.

Pupils on Rapid Catch-up use the Little Wandle 7+ fully decodable books, which mirror the core progression but are age-appropriate for older readers.

Little Wandle Fluency

For pupils in Year 2 and above who have exited the core programme but need structured support to develop fluent reading, we use Little Wandle Fluency.

Fluency lessons last approximately 25–30 minutes and include a pre-read for vocabulary and word practice, sustained oral reading, explicit teaching of prosody, repeated reading and comprehension through discussion.

During each session, children read aloud for approximately ten minutes and the adult 'taps in' to hear every child read. Teaching then focuses explicitly on prosody, repeated reading and comprehension through discussion.

Reading speed and accuracy are assessed approximately every 12 weeks and are considered alongside Assessment for Learning and professional judgement when allocating books and evaluating progress.

Prosody is reviewed using the Little Wandle prosody grid and comprehension is developed through purposeful dialogic talk.

Home reading and partnership with families

The decodable reading-practice book that has been read successfully in school is taken home so children can practise with confidence and share success with their family.

A separate Reading for Pleasure book also goes home for an adult to share with the child; this book is not expected to be independently decodable.

Parents and carers are supported through workshops, communication and Little Wandle parent resources so they understand blending, pronunciation, how books are matched and the importance of reading aloud and talking about books.

Home reading complements, but does not replace, the direct teaching and practice children receive in school.

5. Inclusion and access for all

Our ambition is the same for all pupils. Children with SEND, disadvantaged pupils, pupils with EAL, pupils with social care involvement and pupils with interrupted schooling are entitled to high-quality, systematic teaching and rapid support when gaps emerge.

We maintain fidelity to the Little Wandle sequence rather than mixing programmes or teaching children to guess words from pictures, context or initial letters.

Where pupils need additional support, adults increase practice, repetition, modelling and opportunities to respond while keeping the same core routines and language.

Appropriate reasonable adjustments may include seating and positioning, visual clarity, reduced distraction, additional processing time, movement or sensory breaks, enlarged resources or assistive technology where needed. Adjustments enable access without diluting the phonic content to be learned.

The Early Reading Leader, class teacher and SENDCo work together where a pupil is not making expected progress despite high-quality teaching and targeted support. Assessment is used to identify barriers and decide the next appropriate step.

For pupils with significant and complex needs, provision is carefully personalised while retaining the highest appropriate ambition for communication, language and reading.

6. Additional support for vulnerable readers

Children receiving Daily Keep-up are given additional opportunities to read their matched practice book to an adult in school.

We prioritise pupils who may have limited reading support or access to books outside school and ensure they have frequent opportunities to read, hear high-quality texts and talk about books with trained adults.

Attendance and punctuality are monitored because absence from the phonics sequence can create cumulative gaps. Missed learning is identified and addressed promptly through assessment and targeted practice.

Transition information, including gaps in phonic knowledge and current book level, is shared between teachers so support continues without delay.

7. Consistency, training and fidelity

All adults who teach phonics or reading practice receive Little Wandle training appropriate to their role and have access to programme guidance, lesson templates, prompt cards and training videos.

Adults use consistent terminology, routines, pronunciation, resources and teaching behaviours so children do not have to relearn how lessons work.

Weekly content grids map new learning across each day, week and term and are followed consistently.

The Early Reading Leader provides induction and coaching for new staff and identifies refresher training where monitoring indicates it is needed.

The Early Reading Leader and SLT regularly observe teaching, review assessment information, check book matching and evaluate the effectiveness of Keep-up and Rapid Catch-up.

Monitoring focuses on the quality and impact of teaching, not simply whether materials are present. Leaders act quickly where inconsistency or underachievement is identified.

8. Reading for pleasure

We value reading for pleasure as an essential part of becoming a lifelong reader. Decodable reading practice and Reading for Pleasure serve different but complementary purposes: one develops successful independent decoding; the other widens children's experience of literature, language and ideas.

Adults read aloud to children every day from carefully chosen, high-quality texts.

Book choices reflect our pupils and local community while also opening windows onto other lives, cultures, places and experiences.

Every classroom has an attractive, well-curated reading area and books are actively recommended and discussed with pupils.

Nursery and Reception children have daily access to books within continuous provision.

Pupils choose books to take home and staff get to know children's preferences so they can make increasingly well-informed recommendations.

As pupils move through school, adults engage in meaningful conversations about books, authors and genres and encourage children to broaden their reading choices.

Pupils have regular access to the school library and a range of reading events and experiences, including opportunities such as book fairs, author visits, workshops and national reading events.

9. Impact and assessment

Assessment is purposeful: it identifies what pupils know, what they need next and whether additional teaching is working. It is used to ensure that pupils keep up with the programme and that those who fall behind catch up quickly.

Assessment for Learning

Adults assess continuously within lessons to identify pupils requiring Daily Keep-up and to identify GPCs, words or tricky words that need further teaching.

Repeated practice is planned across the day where necessary.

The Friday review lesson is used to identify and address gaps and secure fluency in GPCs, words and spelling.

Summative assessment

Little Wandle summative assessments are completed approximately every six weeks in Reception and Year 1 and entered onto the programme assessment tracker.

In line with Little Wandle assessment guidance, new content is taught when learning is secure for more than 70% of children. Where this is not the case, teaching is adapted and key content is reviewed or retaught before moving on.

Assessment information is reviewed at pupil, class, year-group and group level so teachers and leaders can identify patterns, gaps and differences in attainment.

Leaders use assessment to evaluate the impact of teaching and intervention, identify pupils needing support and decide whether staff require additional coaching or resources.

Any pupil not on track is reassessed approximately every three weeks so the impact of support is visible and provision can be adjusted quickly.

Assessment information is analysed at individual, class and cohort level. Teachers, the Early Reading Leader and SLT interrogate assessment information at GPC, word, tricky-word and sentence level so that gaps are identified precisely and additional teaching can be targeted effectively.

Fluency assessment and programme exit

One-minute fluency assessments measure reading speed and accuracy in Year 1 and Year 2 when pupils are reading Phase 5 Set 3, 4 and 5 books, and for relevant pupils on Rapid Catch-up.

Year 2 pupils may exit Rapid Catch-up when they can read the final fluency assessment at 60–70+ words per minute. Older pupils may exit when they read the final fluency assessment at 90+ words per minute, in line with Little Wandle guidance.

After pupils have securely exited the appropriate programme, they no longer need fully decodable books and move to the next stage of reading provision.

Placement assessment is used for pupils new to the school in Reception and Year 1 where needed to identify gaps quickly and plan appropriate extra teaching.

10. Statutory Phonics Screening Check

All eligible Year 1 pupils take the statutory Phonics Screening Check in accordance with current Standards and Testing Agency guidance.

Pupils who do not meet the expected standard in Year 1 receive continued systematic support and normally retake the check in Year 2, in line with statutory requirements.

The check is one source of evidence. Leaders also use Little Wandle assessments, classroom performance and fluency information to evaluate pupils' knowledge and determine next steps.

Screening outcomes are analysed by leaders to identify strengths, gaps and group patterns and to evaluate the effectiveness of the school's phonics provision.

11. Roles and responsibilities

The Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team

ensure early reading remains a whole-school priority and is adequately staffed and resourced;

hold leaders to account for implementation, pupil progress and the impact of support;

ensure staff training, induction and coaching are sustained;

use monitoring and outcome evidence to identify and address weaknesses swiftly.

The Early Reading Leader

leads implementation of Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised with fidelity;
ensures staff training and ongoing coaching are effective;
monitors phonics teaching, reading practice, book matching, Keep-up, Rapid Catch-up and assessment;
analyses attainment and progress, including the progress of vulnerable groups;
works with class teachers, the SENDCo and SLT to ensure pupils who are behind receive precise and effective support;
engages parents and carers in understanding the school's approach to early reading.

Teachers and trained adults

follow the agreed Little Wandle sequence, routines and resources;
use assessment accurately and respond promptly to identified gaps;
ensure books are matched to secure phonic knowledge;
model a love of reading and provide high-quality language and discussion;
communicate concerns about progress to the Early Reading Leader without delay.

Governors

monitor the strategic priority given to early reading and the impact of leadership actions;
seek assurance that disadvantaged pupils, pupils with SEND and other vulnerable readers are receiving effective support;
consider phonics and reading outcomes alongside other evidence of curriculum quality and pupil progress.

12. Monitoring and quality assurance

The school evaluates implementation and impact through a proportionate programme of monitoring. This may include lesson visits, coaching, scrutiny of assessment information, review of pupil books and writing, checks on book matching, pupil reading, pupil voice, staff discussion and review of intervention records. Findings lead to clear actions, support and follow-up.

The effectiveness of this policy is judged by what pupils can do: children learn the intended code, apply it accurately to unfamiliar words, develop fluency, understand what they read, enjoy books and, where they have fallen behind, make rapid progress towards age-related expectations.

13. Related guidance and policies

Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised programme guidance and assessment materials

Department for Education: The Reading Framework – Teaching the Foundations of Literacy

Current Ofsted school inspection toolkit and operating guidance

Current Standards and Testing Agency Phonics Screening Check guidance

English / Reading curriculum documentation

SEND and Inclusion Policy / SEND Information Report

Assessment Policy

Curriculum Policy

Equality and Accessibility policies