



Reading and Phonics Teaching at Woodlands School

At Woodlands we place very high priority on early reading, including the teaching of phonics. All pupils engage in a robust and highly structured literacy programme with the aim of ensuring all of our pupils leave school, well on their way to achieving their potential.

What do we mean by Phonics and phonemic awareness?

Phonics instruction is where pupils are taught the relationships between the letters (graphemes) of written language and the individual sounds (phonemes) of spoken language. Phonemic awareness is defined as the ability to notice, think about, and work with the individual sounds in spoken words.

The National Literacy Trust explains that: *'Introducing young children to the joy and wonder of books requires a systematic teaching of phonics.'*

It goes on to describe four widely agreed systems of phonics teaching:

- **Synthetic phonics** - *The most widely used approach associated with the teaching of reading in which phonemes (sounds) associated with particular graphemes (letters) are pronounced in isolation and blended together (synthesised).*
- **Analytical phonics** - *Associated with the teaching of reading in which the phonemes associated with particular graphemes are not pronounced in isolation. Children identify (analyse) the common phoneme in a set of words in which each word contains the phoneme under study. For example, teacher and pupils discuss how the following words are alike: pat, park, push and pen.*
- **Linguistic phonics** - *This system can be taught systematically and is also synthetic as it considers how sounds and graphemes are built into words. This method is highly recommended by Ann Sullivan (2023) in the teaching of phonics to pupils with complex needs as it can offer a logical teaching sequence, which can support pupils with complex needs to develop a 'schema' (mental plan) of the relationship between graphemes and phonemes (e.g. they focus on one phoneme and then learn all graphemes that can represent that at one time).*

There has been a long-standing debate over the best way to teach early reading, and this area is widely researched. Wyse and Bradbury, 2022 discuss the three main orientations to teaching early reading as being:

1. Synthetic phonics – a strong focus on teaching phonemes and letters separately from practising reading of whole texts. Decodable books (reading schemes) are often used in the early stages with very controlled vocabulary.
2. Whole language – a strong focus on whole texts from the beginning, using 'real' books (standard publications) with the aim of motivating readers. The whole language approach is driven by reading for meaning. Phonics teaching is incidental through the texts being used and is not systematic.
3. Balanced instruction – strong focus on the balance between using real texts and systematic phonics teaching. It places importance on comprehending the meaning of written language, carefully balanced with acquiring a range of skills and knowledge.



Woodlands English Curriculum: Intent

At Woodlands, we have devised our English curriculum using robust and extensive research alongside the government documents on the teaching of early reading.

We have adopted the 'Comprehensive Literacy for All' approach to our literacy teaching across the school. This approach from Karen Erickson and David Koppenhaver from the Centre for Literacy and Disability Studies, is written specifically for pupils with complex learning and communication needs and is driven by a long-term evidence and research base, with a belief that all children, regardless of disability, have the right to the opportunity to learn to read and write.

Karen and David's book, 'Comprehensive Literacy for All, Teaching Students with Significant Disabilities to Read and Write', 2019, States that:

'Students with significant disabilities need to be taught alphabet knowledge, but the instruction must offer regular and sustained opportunities to apply what they are taught during comprehensive emergent literacy instruction.'

...many students with significant disabilities...struggle to learn or generalise alphabet knowledge when it is taught in isolation using direct instruction techniques (e.g. Nailey, Angell & Stoner, 2011). In contrast, students with significant disabilities can develop alphabet knowledge and apply it meaningfully to reading and spelling when it is taught and immediately applied in the context of comprehensive instruction that extends over a period or months and years (e.g. Allor et al, 2010, Johnston, Buchanan, & Davenport, 2009).

A robust and complete curriculum is in place for pupils from EYFS up to Post 16, which ensures coverage of all elements of the English curriculum. Alphabet knowledge, Phonics and early reading is taught as part of this through our 'Letters and Sounds' curriculum, for all pupils, regardless of age, until they have reached reading fluency. The way this is taught is adapted across the school (e.g. different reading schemes (banded to the Little Wandle phonics scheme as the pupils move into Secondary), to account for age and previous learning and to ensure progression.

Access for all

At Woodlands, the majority of our students are not able to use verbal speech at a level that meets their communication requirements and rely on the use of AAC to communicate and access all curriculum areas. We know that students learning to communicate with AAC require systematic phonics and word study instruction. Spelling is what enables students to eventually communicate any word that they want to, or that they do not have a symbol for, therefore becoming autonomous communicators.

Research shows that phonological awareness is often delayed in students who are learning to use AAC as they don't get to practice learning to manipulate, isolate and delete sounds. Instead, their phonological awareness tends to develop later, as they learn to read. Comprehensive literacy instruction, including a robust systematic synthetic phonics programme, will help them develop phonological awareness, with the aim of becoming proficient readers, writers and communicators.

English Curriculum Implementation

All pupils at Woodlands engage with the Comprehensive Literacy programme. The teaching of the programme is adapted to meet individual pupil needs and abilities. Pupils' progress in reading is assessed formally each term. Pupils' developmental levels determine the specific approach for the implementation of reading and phonics.

Our Emergent students working at levels W1-W5, engage with daily shared reading, working with letters and sounds (Little Wandle foundation for phonics), and Independent and Self-Selected Reading. Our Early Conventional students working from W6-W7 engage with reading comprehension, letters and sounds (Little Wandle, Phase 2), and independent reading and our Conventional students, working from W8 and above, engage with reading comprehension, letters and sounds (Little Wandle, Phase 3+) and independently reading.

Early Phonics



As part of our approach, we recognise that early reading and phonics instruction may span a longer period of time due to the nature of the needs of the pupils. Some pupils may need to work at an 'Early phonics' or 'emergent' level for some time, before being ready to embark on a formal phonics programme. These are generally those pupils who are working within the engagement elements of our curriculum (W1-W5). These pupils will engage in letters and sounds work, based on the alphabet knowledge element of the Comprehensive Literacy programme and incorporating the Little Wandle Foundation for Phonics. This involves exploring letters including the phonemes and graphemes, using a multi-sensory approach, to support the pupil in becoming familiar with these, in an accessible way, e.g., feeling sensory letters, searching for letters in sand and water, sharing letters with adults, sorting letters, alphabet books, rhymes and songs, etc.

Phonics



For pupils who are working at our 'early conventional' and 'conventional' levels in Reception and above, we have adopted the DfE approved Little Wandle Letters and Sounds *revised*. This synthetic phonics programme ensures that all pupils build on their knowledge of the alphabetic code in a structured way, to support the development of phonics to read and spell. The SEND pathway is implemented at Woodlands by teachers adapting each part of the specifically sequenced programme to meet the varying needs of each individual. The Comprehensive Literacy strategies are used to ensure accessibility for all and to promote and enable success and these will draw on elements of linguistic phonics, as recommended by Ann Sullivan, in her book, 'Access to Phonics' (2023).



The Little Wandle programme is taught following the given structure and order of the phases as pupils progress. One whole school adaptation to the programme is that rather than focusing on 1 letter each day for 4 days, with a review on the final day, classes will have 2 focus letters on a Monday and Tuesday, followed by the next 2 letters on a Wednesday and Thursday, with a review on the Friday. This is to enable a 'compare and contrast' activity to accommodate for the fact that most pupils are unable to verbalise the phonemes, making assessment of their understanding and knowledge more challenging. Additional individual adaptations are made by the teachers to enable access to the resources and activities as needed e.g. the use of technology to enable access to the materials or sensory resources for pupils with visual impairments.

We model the application of the alphabetic code through phonics in shared reading and writing, both inside and outside of the phonics lessons, and across the curriculum. We also have a strong focus on language development for our children because we know that skills in communication are crucial for reading and writing in all subjects. It will enable advocacy, and for our pupils to be contributing members of society in life beyond Woodlands.

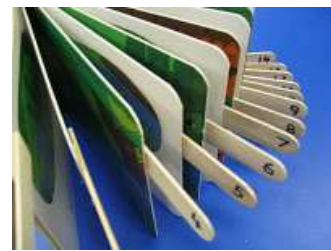
Comprehensive Literacy elements and resources Implemented daily for pupils from Reception			
	Emergent W1-5	Early Conventional W6-W7	Conventional W8+
Reading	Shared Reading	Reading Comprehension	Reading Comprehension
	Independent Reading – Self-selected choice of fiction, non- fiction, electronic, interactive texts daily	Independent Reading Self-selected choice of fiction, non-fiction, electronic, interactive texts daily	Independent Reading Self-selected choice of fiction, non-fiction, electronic, interactive texts daily
Reading Scheme	N/A	Textless reading scheme books (Lilac level Collins Big Cat, Oxford Reading Tree Grey wordless books)	Texts from Pink band Collins Big Cat, Oxford Reading Tree Moon Dog series
Phonics 'Letters and Sounds' SEND programme	Little Wandle foundation for phonics programme (2 letters per day, 4 letters per week)	Little Wandle from Phase 2 (2 letters per day, 4 letters per week)	Little Wandle SSP Programme from Phase 3+
Writing	Writing with adults – Predictable Chart writing Writing from adults Independent writing	Writing – Predictable chart writing Independent Writing	Writing conventions Independent writing

Independent Reading



At Woodlands we want all of our pupils to have access to books that they are able to read independently, whatever level they are working at. As part of the comprehensive literacy programme, opportunities for this are given each day, for all pupils.

Pupils working at an emergent level (W1-5) are given access to age and stage appropriate books, that are of interest to them. The books may need to be made independently accessible through technology (eye gaze, audio books, touch screens and talking books) or through laminating a book to make it more robust and adding 'page fluffers' or 'page turners' to assist with physical access. They will be given opportunities to browse these books independently and learn how they can use reading for pleasure.



For pupils working at conventional levels, independent reading opportunities aim to encourage and develop reading fluency through engaging with reading books at their comprehension and fluency level. Our aim is that through daily engagement with reading, pupils will be able to develop the skills required to decode print in their environment in order to be as independent as possible in life beyond Woodlands, and to develop a love of reading for leisure. Reading for pleasure books are regularly sent home and decodable reading books are sent home for pupils as part of the Little Wandle phonics programme. Parents are encouraged to read with their children and any support with how to do this is discussed on an individual basis.



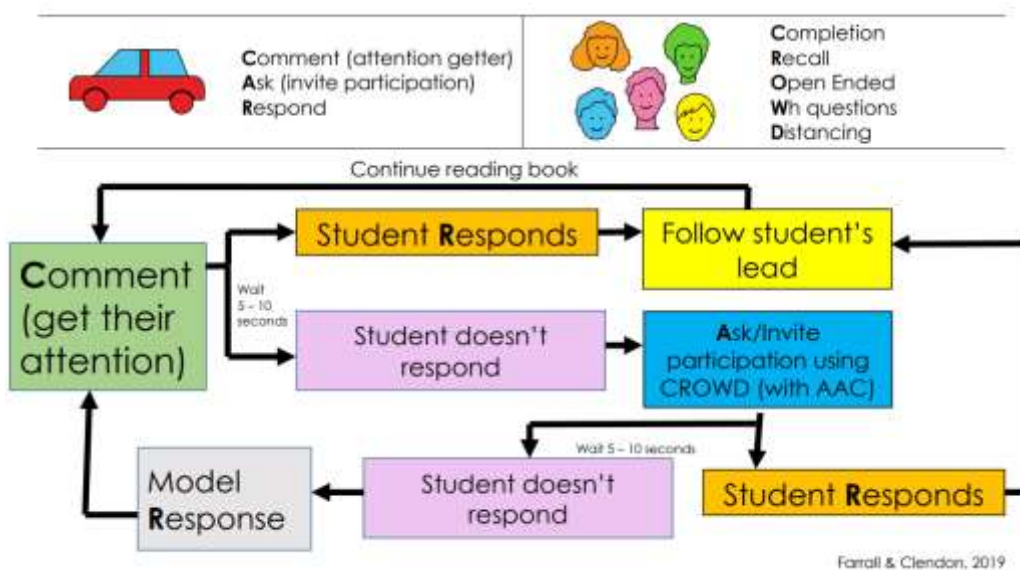
All pupils working at Early Conventional levels and beyond are provided with levelled, decodable reading books. For lower School pupils we use the Oxford Reading Tree and Collins Big Cat. For Upper School pupils we use a combination of Collins Big Cat and Phonic Books Reading schemes. These have been banded according to the Little Wandle phases.

We understand that due to the complex needs of our students, some may find blending phonemes to decode words extremely challenging. We will support those students to develop their knowledge of sight words through targeted individual reading of High Frequency words as well as using the phonics approach.

Shared Reading

For pupils working at an emergent level (W1-5), they will have the opportunity to engage in shared reading as part of their timetable each day. All staff are trained in strategies to support pupils in engaging with shared reading at a level appropriate to their needs and the provision of robust AAC systems for all pupils are a vital part of this engagement.

Shared Reading **Levels 2/3/4** Flow Chart –CROWD in CAR



Impact

Assessment

Assessment is used to monitor progress and to identify any student needing additional support as soon as they need it.

Assessment for learning is used:

- Daily in class to identify any students requiring additional support
- Weekly to assess and address gaps, and secure fluency of graphemes, phonemes, words and spelling

Summative assessment is used:

- Termly to assess progress, to identify gaps in learning that need to be addressed, to identify any pupils needing additional support and to plan and deliver the support required
- To narrow attainment gaps between different groups of children or young people
- To identify any additional support for staff



Fluency Assessments measure pupils' accuracy and reading speed. They are used:

- When pupils are reading Phase 5 set 3, 4 and 5 books.

To assess when pupils are ready to leave the phonics programme. For pupils above year one, this is when they read the final fluency assessment at 90+ words per minute

This rationale has been written with reference to the following Policies, programmes and research:

Phonetic keyboards and AAC, information from the Assistiveware website

<https://www.assistiveware.com/blog/teaching-phonics-children-cannot-speak>

Little Wandle Sounds and Letters Revised

Wyse, D., & Bradbury, A. (2022). Reading wars or reading reconciliation? A critical examination of robust research evidence, curriculum policy and teachers' practices for teaching phonics and reading. *Review of Education*, 10, e3314.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3314>

Sullivan, A. (2023) *Access to Phonics; Practical Access Strategies to Teach Children with Complex Needs of All Ages*. UK: Amazon

Koppenhaver, D. and Erickson, K. (2019). *Comprehensive Literacy for All: Teaching Students with Significant Disabilities to Read and Write*. USA: Brookes Publishing Co