



St James' C of E Primary School

Phonics Policy

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'Inspiring and Growing for Fullness of Life' is the vision that underpins all that we strive to do at St. James' C of E Primary School; it is embedded within our ethos and philosophy shaping our spiritual growth. Developing, supporting and nurturing children to fulfil this vision is integral to all we do.



St James' C of E Primary School provides the highest quality education within the context of caring Christian beliefs and practices; in partnership with St Philip and St James Church. St James is a creative, nurturing and inclusive community, shaped by our vision for spiritual growth and our Christian values. Children of any faith or none, are given the opportunity to develop their own spirituality; valuing wisdom, growing in hope, showing respect and exploring big questions.

1. The context of our school

St. James' C of E Primary school is a two-form entry school in Cheltenham. The school is part of The Diocese of Gloucester Academies Trust (joining in April 2017) and has approximately 417 pupils (PAN 420); due to expansion, the catchment has increased and pupils are more socially diverse. There has been a small but steady rise in FSM, SEND and EAL, alongside a gradual rise in the deprivation indicator, but this is still below national average. We are determined that every child will learn to read well quickly, and therefore have implemented Essential Letters and Sounds (ELS), as our chosen Phonics Programme.

2. Aims

The aim of ELS is to get all children to read well, quickly. It teaches children to read by identifying the phonemes (the smallest unit of sound) and graphemes (the written version of the sound) within words and using these to read words. Essential Letters and Sounds is a systematic synthetic phonics programme and was validated by the Department for Education in June 2021.

All members of staff are trained to teach ELS to ensure that we have an expert team of reading teachers led by our English/Phonics Lead. As a staff team, we regularly meet to review our practice and to practise teaching together. This ensures that all children receive high-quality first teaching every day. Our classrooms are well resourced to ensure that every child has the resources required to learn to read well.

Reading is at the heart of everything that we do, and is a central part of every pupil's life at our school. We instil a love of reading from the very beginning of their education; every child at our school is a reader and so are their teachers. We believe all children can become confident readers during their time in primary education. Children's love for reading is evident through their continuous engagement, desire to read for pleasure and their understanding of a range of texts, authors and illustrators and this is further developed throughout or reading curriculum.

2. Phonics teaching and learning

To ensure all children learn to read well, quickly, children learn Phonics from the very start of Reception. It is explicitly taught every day during a dedicated slot on the timetable, and throughout the day, children use their growing Phonic knowledge to support them in other areas of the curriculum. This includes having daily opportunities to practise reading decodable texts precisely matched to the phonic knowledge, such as reading 1:1 with a member of staff, with a partner during paired reading and during whole class reading sessions. We know that reading is a fundamental life skill and ensure that all children leave our school able to read well.

ELS is a whole class teaching model. This means that every single pupil has the same opportunities when learning to read. Learning to read well, early, is a priority for every child. Children who may find it harder to learn how to read are given extra support from their teacher every day. We ensure that all children to learn to read well and keep up rather than have to catch-up.

Daily Phonics lessons continue in Year 1 and further through the school, where required, to ensure all children become confident, fluent readers.

We follow the ELS progression and sequence. This allows our children to practise their existing phonic knowledge whilst building their understanding of the 'code' of our language. As a result, children can tackle any unfamiliar words that they might discover.

We teach children more rarely used GPCs through the ELS progression. This means that they can decode and read more words with increased fluency.

ELS is supported by a wide range of completely decodable texts. These cover both fiction and nonfiction and are exciting and engaging for all our pupils. We match the home reading texts to each child's current phonic knowledge to ensure that they consolidate their most recent teaching and learning at home.

Children experience the joy of books and language whilst rapidly acquiring the skills they need to become fluent independent readers and writers. ELS teaches relevant, useful and ambitious vocabulary to support children's journey to becoming fluent and independent readers.

At our school we begin by teaching the single letter sounds before moving to digraphs (two letters spelling one sound), trigraphs (three letters spelling one sound) and quadgraphs (four letters spelling one sound).

We teach 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.

The structure of ELS lessons allows children to know what is coming next, what they need to do, and how to achieve success. This makes it easier for children to learn the GPCs we are teaching (the alphabetic code) and how to apply this when reading.

ELS is designed on the principle that children should 'keep up' rather than 'catch up'. Interventions are delivered within the lesson by the teacher and any child who is struggling with the new knowledge can be immediately targeted with appropriate support. Where further

support is required, 1:1 intervention is used where needed. These interventions are short, specific and effective.

ELS is designed to make use of all the teaching time during the phonics lesson – through targeted support where required, reducing the need for external interventions - meaning that there is minimal disruption to curriculum teaching time.

Where further phonic support is required in Key Stage 2, this is timetabled daily to ensure that any child rapidly catches up.

Children are assessed in week 5 of each half-termly teaching sequence, to ensure that any specific gaps can be targeted immediately.

We reinforce the link between reading and writing in every ELS lesson through the independent application of the children's understanding. We also ensure that all our teachers reference the learning from ELS lessons when writing as part of the wider curriculum.