Early Reading and Phonics Policy

Reviewed by Trustees: June 2023

Adopted by Trustees: June 2023

Next Full Review Due: June 2026

Reviewer: Education Director

Introduction

South Pennine Academies (SPA) understands that students' efficient early reading development is key to their future successes. As such, ensuring an effective early reading and phonics curriculum is a priority in every academy. In line with DfE statutory guidance, all academies teach systematic synthetic phonics (SSP). SPA academies base their early reading curriculum on either the Read, Write Inc or Little Wandle. This policy applies to all academies, regardless of the curriculum they have chosen.

Curriculum Intent

Each academy has strategies in place to promote a love of reading from the point children start school. For example, children of all ages will be read to at least daily and this will expose them to a range of high-quality books and engaging authors. Academy leaders document the carefully selected books, nursery rhymes and counting songs children will learn off by heart when they are learning to read. These daily story times are also used as a vehicle to develop students' understanding (comprehension) of books and text, including for the youngest children.

From the very start of Reception, children learn letter-sound correspondences.

The phonics curriculum provides full coverage of the National Curriculum. It is mapped out, showing the sounds and common exception words to be taught each week. These aspects are sequenced to build students' knowledge systematically. The curriculum is suitably ambitious to ensure students progress at an appropriate rate.

Implementation

Each academy has its own phonics policy which sits beneath this Trust-wide policy. The academy policy outlines the expectations for the structure and implementation of phonics lessons. It also states the strategies adults use to support students in remembering the curriculum. For example, academies may choose to use actions, mnemonics, sound buttons, sound mats and so on, to aid students' memory.

All students working on early reading have a daily phonics lesson as a minimum. Phonics sessions give students plenty of opportunities to: hear and practise sounds and blending; use their phonics knowledge in writing words and sentences, including through dictation.

Students also have opportunities to read to an adult in school. The frequency of these sessions is strategically determined by leaders in each academy. The books students use to practise early reading contain only the words and sounds they know. Students read these books several times, both at school and at home, to develop their fluency.

In the early years, children have opportunities to practise and consolidate their growing phonics knowledge through self-initiated and adult-led activities within the areas of provision. They also have access to high-quality books during continuous provision.

Students at risk of not keeping up with the pace of the phonics curriculum have additional opportunities to practise letter-sound correspondences (including through pre-teaching) and to practise reading with an adult. Each academy has a clear strategy for the frequency of these additional sessions. The intensity of the planned provision for these students reflects a determination that every child will learn to read well. As a part of this strategy, each academy identifies its lowest attaining 20% of readers and prioritises this group for intensive extra practice. The adults with the most expertise always work with the most vulnerable readers on early reading development.

Academy leaders ensure that the phonics curriculum is well designed for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). In phonics lessons, students with cognitive needs benefit from building their knowledge in small steps, whilst recapping their prior knowledge on at least a daily basis. Additional opportunities to practise are provided for those who need them. Academy leaders ensure that the implementation of the phonics curriculum is adapted effectively for students with SEND so that all students learn to read well.

All staff working with students who are learning to read are well trained in teaching phonics effectively. Intensive professional development is provided for staff new to our academies. Annual refresher training then follows, along with training in response to the findings from monitoring activities.

Assessment

Teaching staff use phonics sessions and other opportunities to check that students are remembering the phonics curriculum. They are attuned to students' performance and use this information to focus on the aspects in which students are less secure. Any students struggling to keep up with the pace of the phonics curriculum are identified through ongoing formative assessment and through half-termly diagnostic assessments. Diagnostic assessments check whether students can read each sound and whether they can read the sound within words. Once students reach a specified point within the phonics curriculum, the half termly assessment also includes a measure of fluency. Students in Key Stage 2 and beyond who are not yet reading fluently are also included in the half-termly assessment cycle.

In the interest of consistency, half termly assessments are administered by the phonics and/or reading leaders. The information gathered from these assessments is shared with all adults working with a student and informs the core and additional provision which is put in place.

Each academy records individual students' outcomes from the diagnostic assessment on a tracking document every half term. The tracking document shows the age-related expectation, as outlined in their phonics curriculum. Leaders and

teachers use this tracker to identify both students who are below the age-related expectation and those who are not making expected progress.

Towards the end of the spring term, Year 1 students carry out a practice Phonics Screening Check (PSC), usually using the published paper from the previous academic year. Students in Year 2, who did not pass the PSC while in Year 1, will also complete a practice PSC in the spring term. Both of these groups will complete the statutory PSC in June, in line with DfE advice. Students in Key Stage 2 who have not yet passed the PSC will also complete the PSC in the summer term.

If students are absent during diagnostic assessments and/or PSC, they will complete the assessment on their return to school. A very small proportion of students may not be able to access the diagnostic assessments, or the PSC, due to complex special educational needs or because they are recently new to learning English. For these students, an alternative measure of attainment and progress will be in place.

Monitoring

Academy leaders monitor the implementation of the phonics curriculum on at least a half termly basis. Monitoring activities particularly focus on the experiences of the lowest attaining 20% of students.

During visits to phonics lessons and additional practice sessions, leaders check that the curriculum is being implemented as intended. They focus on students' participation and whether they have sufficient opportunities to hear, say and write sounds and words, including through blending and segmenting.

Academy leaders monitor the frequency of students' independent reading and gather students' views on reading. Visits to story times also take place. Leaders use this information to evaluate their effectiveness in fostering students' love of reading.

Monitoring also includes listening to students reading. Leaders check that the books students (particularly the lower attaining students) are reading contain only the sounds and words they know.

Leaders use this information, along with students' assessment outcomes to evaluate the effectiveness of the early reading and phonics curriculum.

Parental Engagement

We understand the value of parents'/carers' contributions to their child's early reading development. As such, each academy has a strategy for engaging parents in this work. This includes, as a minimum: sharing the content of the early reading and phonics curriculum; providing resources to support parents' 'pure' articulation of sounds; encouraging parents to read with their child frequently at home.