



---

Academies Trust

# Early Reading and Phonics Policy

Applicable from: 1st September 2021

Next review date: September 2022

Introduction

Coop Academy Trust (CAT) understands that pupils' 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). CAT academies base their early reading curriculum on either the Read, Write Inc or Letters and Sounds programme<sup>1</sup>. 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 pupils' understanding (comprehension) of books and text, including for the youngest children.

From the start of Reception, children learn letter-sound correspondences. For academies with a phased start for children, letter-sound correspondences are taught from the third week of the autumn term at the latest.

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 pupils' knowledge systematically. The curriculum is suitably ambitious to ensure pupils 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 pupils in remembering the curriculum. For example, academies may choose to use actions, mnemonics, sound buttons, sound mats and so on, to aid pupils' memory.

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

Pupils 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 pupils use to practise early reading contain only the words and sounds they know. Pupils read these books several times, both at school and at home, to develop their fluency.

---

<sup>1</sup> Use of Letters and Sounds will be reviewed in 2021/22 when the DfE publishes the new list of validated SSP programmes.

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.

Pupils 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 pupils 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 pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). In phonics lessons, pupils 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 pupils with SEND so that all pupils learn to read well.

All staff working with pupils 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 pupils are remembering the phonics curriculum. They are attuned to pupils' performance and use this information to focus on the aspects in which pupils are less secure. Any pupils 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 pupils can read each sound and whether they can read the sound within words. Once pupils reach a specified point within the phonics curriculum, the half termly assessment also includes a measure of fluency. Pupils 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 pupil and informs the core and additional provision which is put in place.

Each academy records individual pupils' outcomes from the diagnostic assessment on a tracking document every half term. The tracking document shows the age-related expectation, as outlined in the phonics curriculum. Leaders and teachers use this tracker to identify both pupils who are below the age-related expectation and those who are not making expected progress.

Towards the end of the spring term, Year 1 pupils carry out a practice Phonics Screening Check (PSC), usually using the published paper from the previous academic year. Pupils 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. Pupils in key stage 2 who have not yet passed the PSC will also complete the PSC in the summer term.

If pupils are absent during diagnostic assessments and/or PSC, they will complete the assessment on their return to school. A very small proportion of pupils 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 pupils, 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 pupils.

During visits to phonics lessons and additional practice sessions, leaders check that the curriculum is being implemented as intended. They focus on pupils' 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 pupils' independent reading and gather pupils' views on reading. Visits to story times also take place. Leaders use this information to evaluate their effectiveness in fostering pupils' love of reading.

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

Leaders use this information, along with pupils' 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.