



Phonics and Early reading Policy

Updated: September 2025

Next Review: September 2026



The National Curriculum for English (2014) aims to ensure that all pupils:

- read easily, fluently and with good understanding
- develop the habit of reading widely and often, for both pleasure and information
- acquire a wide vocabulary, an understanding of grammar and knowledge of linguistic conventions for reading, writing and spoken language.

Reading underpins children's access to the curriculum, and it clearly impacts on their achievement. There is considerable research to show that children who enjoy reading and choose to read benefit not only academically, but also socially and emotionally too. Children need to be taught an efficient strategy to decode words in order to be able to read. That strategy is phonics. It is essential that children are actively taught and supported to use phonics as the only approach to decoding. Other strategies must be avoided.

Phonic decoding skills need to be taught and practised until children have adequate accuracy and automaticity to become fluent readers.

Fluent decoding is only one component of reading. Children need to be guided to understand what they are reading through discussion and by linking what they read to their experiences.

Children grow their language through reading. When children read books, it increases their vocabulary because they encounter words they would rarely hear or use in everyday speech. Children who read widely and frequently also benefit from knowing more about the world.

Reading practice sessions

Children need regular opportunities to apply the phonics they have learned by reading fully decodable books. The phonic progression in these books must match the progression of *Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised*. Using the 'Collins Big Cat Phonics for Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised' books is the easiest way to ensure that your decodable books are perfectly matched to the Little Wandle programme progression and to children's secure phonic knowledge. See page 5 for more information about the Little Wandle books.

Timetabling

Little Wandle reading practice sessions must be scheduled at least three times a week and be taught by a trained adult. Children are taught with books that match their secure phonic knowledge. This means you will have several groups in each class. Timetabling advice and guidance can be found in the document 'Some ways you can organise and timetable your reading practice sessions'.

We also run regular '[Getting started: Reading practice sessions](#)' webinars which will guide your team through all the practical aspects of running reading practice sessions.

Focus and structure of the sessions

Children read the same book aloud in each of the three sessions with growing automaticity and accuracy. The pre-read and independent reading parts of the sessions are essential in providing the repeated practice needed for children to build fluency.

Each session in this 'three read' model has a clear focus:

- Read 1: decoding
- Read 2: prosody – reading with meaning, stress and intonation
- Read 2: comprehension – understanding the text.

Each of these sessions follows the same structure:

- Pre-read: Revisit and review
- Reading practice: Practise and apply
- Review: Pacy review of any misconceptions

Organisation of resources

It is essential that your reading practice sessions and resources are well organised to maximise teaching time. Choose a central area to store all your reading packs and check this regularly to make sure everything is there and is ready to use. We recommend that you create a 'grab-and-go pack' for each book containing:

- enough copies of the book for each child plus a 'teacher copy'
- grapheme cards to use in the pre-read
- word cards, vocabulary words and tricky word cards, downloaded and cut up from the [Collins website](#)
- teacher notes including vocabulary guidance and questions to support comprehension discussion from the [Collins website](#).

You may also wish to consider:

- including pictures to support vocabulary
- marking up the 'teacher copy' of the book for prosody.

Getting ready to teach

Before every reading practice session, make sure your teaching space is uncluttered and that you have space to place the grapheme cards and word cards in four rows in the middle of the table so that children can clearly see them. Ensure that the children are facing the teacher, are focussed and are joining in.

Pre-read (Revisit and review)

Aim: increased automaticity of GPC and word reading.

This part of the session is short and pacy. The teacher ensures all children practise:

- reading graphemes
- reading words with increased fluency
- reviewing tricky words

The teacher teaches vocabulary words to the children.

Reading practice (Practise and apply)

Aim: increased automaticity and fluency.

This is the core part of the session: children read the book independently and the teacher 'taps in'. It is vital that the teacher gets up to tap in to every child as they read so they hear each child in every session. This supports the teacher's Assessment for Learning and ensures that the teacher encourages children to read with increased fluency.

In Read 2 prosody is taught after the children read independently. The teacher should prepare the two double-page spreads they are using to teach prosody.

In Read 3 there is time to explore comprehension after the children read independently. There are questions to support the comprehension discussion in the back of the book. You can also download a copy of these from the Collins website.

Review

Aim: to address and errors or misconceptions

Use your Assessment for Learning from the reading session for a pacy review to address any errors with GPCs, specific words in the book or tricky words.

The three reading practice templates and 'How to' videos for teaching decodable books are in the Reception and Year 1 areas of the website on the Reading tab. They give step-by-step guidance for each reading practice session. Watch these videos and look at the templates with colleagues to understand how to teach reading effectively. Reading leaders can also use the templates to support monitoring.

Record keeping

You can use the document 'Reading practice record sheet' to keep track of children's attendance and progress. Do not waste time writing notes such as: 'read well', 'decoded and blended' 'read with expression.' Only write notes if there is an issue that needs to be addressed in the next teaching session or that needs to be communicated to the class teacher. It should be your priority to listen to children read and teach them in these sessions. Your valuable time should focus on this and not writing comments.

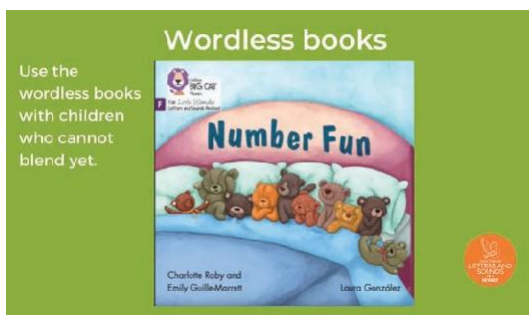
Big Cat for Little Wandle reading books

The 'Collins Big Cat Phonics for Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised' books were written to match the Little Wandle progression and are the best-fit books for the programme. There are three types of reading practice books.

Wordless books

These books are used from week 4 in Reception with children who are not blending yet. Teachers start each reading practice session with teacher-led blending and then the children and teacher explore the book together. Sessions focus on:

- building phonemic awareness,
- playing oral blending games
- making links to nursery rhymes and action rhymes
- making links to children's experiences.



The three templates and 'How to' videos for teaching reading with wordless books can be found in the Reception area of the website on the 'Reading' tab.

As soon as children can blend, they start reading the Phase 2 decodable books matched to their secure phonic knowledge.

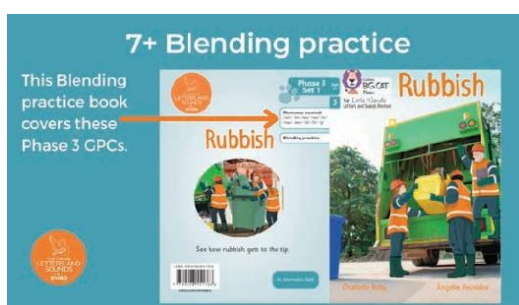
Blending practice books

Most children in Reception should be blending by Christmas and begin reading the Phase 2 Set 1 decodable books. Some children take longer to learn to blend and need more support and practice. Blending practice books are a useful bridge for these children once they can blend; they have fewer words and words have sound buttons beneath them to support the reader.

Each session starts with practising the graphemes in the book. The children then read the book, becoming more fluent with each read. The primary purpose of each read is to decode every word so that the children become more confident at blending these words.

The illustrations can be then used as a springboard for discussion and to grow language. Teachers encourage the children to talk about the book and link it to their experiences.

The three templates and 'How to' videos for teaching reading with blending practice books can be found in the Reception area of the website on the 'Reading' tab.



Decodable books

As soon as children are blending, we need to get them reading fully decodable books. Some children in Reception will be ready to read before their first assessment. Don't hold them back – get them reading the Phase 2 Set 1 books!

All children who are blending with confidence should be taught reading three times a week using decodable books matched to their secure phonic knowledge. The correct book level is worked out using your regular summative assessment. The Assessments tracker will give you a suggested book level in the 'Pupil trends and book level' tab. Use that suggestion alongside the Matching grid to ensure each child has the correct level book.

7+ decodable books: There are decodable books for children following the Rapid Catch-up programme too. The 7+ books have been created with older readers in mind. They have a higher word count and include bonus material to increase language development and comprehension. The core programme books can be used if schools do not have these books or if children need additional practice. You can find the three templates and 'How to' videos for teaching reading with the 7+ blending practice books in the Rapid Catch-up area of the website on the 'Reading' tab.

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Matching books to children's secure phonic knowledge

How do I know which book to use?

Use the termly assessments in conjunction with the Matching grid to match each child's secure phonic knowledge in reading words to the appropriate decodable reading books for the next six weeks. The Assessments tracker will give you a suggested book level after each assessment in the 'Pupil trends' tab.

Children who are not on track:

- These children need daily additional support with Additional blending practice or one-to-one Daily Keep-up.
- Re-assess these children every three weeks so that their book level reflects their progress.

Children making quicker progress in between assessments:

- Move these children onto the next level of books, so long as those books contain GPCs that have already been taught.
- Do not give children books with GPCs that have not been taught yet.

Judging if a book is the correct level

If you want to move a child to another book level in between assessments, or if the Assessments tracker suggests a book level that you feel is not correct, choose a book from the level you think is correct for the child. Check that they can read:

- the GPCs in the book effortlessly
- the practice words at the front of the book fluently (with little or no overt blending)
- the tricky words.

Now ask them to read the first double-page spread. Can they read it without hesitation at Phase 4 and beyond?*

If so, then this book is the correct level.

*At Phases 2 and 3 we do not expect the children to read the words fluently. However, children should be confident in sounding out and blending the words on a double-page spread.

Reading in Reception

The goal of Reception is to get all children blending and reading books! We want every child blending by Christmas – deploy staff to make sure this happens. Reading practice sessions are vital. They show children the purpose of their phonics lessons.

In Reception we move from wordless books to decodable books and the blending practice books are the bridge to reading for those who need it.

From Reception Autumn 1 week 4 at the latest:

- Use wordless books to establish book behaviours, book talk and to grow vocabulary with small groups of children.
- Some children in Reception will be ready to practise reading Phase 2 Set 1 books before the first assessment. Do not hold them back.
- Children who are not blending by week 3 need ten minutes of Additional blending practice daily. See the document '[Identifying for Keep-up in Reception](#)'.

In Reception Autumn 2:

- Some Reception children will be ready to read Phase 2 Set 1, 2 or 3 books.
- Some other children will take a little longer to blend. Use the wordless books for these children. Make sure you include teacher-led blending in every reading practice session. As soon as the children are blending, start them on the Phase 2 books.
- Some children will need additional support **once they can blend**. Use the blending practice books with these children to help them gain confidence.
- Also consider using the blending practice books if children are wobbly, for example when they start reading words with Phase 2 digraphs.

Term of assessment	Assessment results	Term child reads the books	Child can read books containing the following	Matched books for Collins <i>Big Cat for Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised</i>	Matched blending practice books N.B. Use these books as a bridge to build confidence
Autumn 1	Not blending	Autumn 2	N/A	Wordless books: Old MacDonald Had a Farm Number Fun Sound Walk People Who Help Animal Fun At the Beach	N/A
	Can blend words with the graphemes: s a t p i n		s a t p i n	Phase 2 Set 1 Pat it Sit Sip Nap Sit Sit Tip, Sit, Nap Pat a Pan Sit Tip Pat	Phase 2 Set 1 A Pin A Nap

In Reception Summer 1:

- A few Reception children will be very confident at reading in Summer 1. If they can easily read the Phase 3 Set 2 books and they need more challenge, they can begin the Phase 4 Set 1 books in Summer 1, so long as they can read the tricky words in these books.
- Children need to be reading some words automatically to progress to the Phase 4 books. Make sure you ask the children to 'blend in your head' when they read the words in the assessment. Mark any word read without overt blending as 'A' on the assessment. Children will not be given a Phase 4 book level on the Assessments tracker unless they have read at least five words automatically in the assessment.

In Reception Summer 2

- Very confident Reception children can read the Phase 4 Set 2 books. They do not have any new tricky words or new GPCs in them. But they should not read the Stretch and Challenge books as they will be needed in Autumn 1 and 2 in Year 1.

Reading in Year 1

Children should only be given books that are matched to their secure phonic knowledge. They should not be given books with GPCs that they do not know. Ensure children with large gaps have additional Daily Keep-up. Consider additional reading sessions to support them.

Providing challenge in reading practice sessions

- Aim for fluency in every session.
- Make time for more prosody practice and ask the children to apply this when they read independently.
- Discuss how characters feel, how they change and explore why this might be.
- Make links to children's wider experiences, especially with non-fiction.
- Do NOT ask children to write answers to comprehension questions.

In Year 1 Autumn 1:

Ensure children are on the correct level book at the beginning of Year 1.

- Use the Reception Summer 2 assessment results to match children to the correct level book.
- Use the Assessments tracker 'Pupil trend' tab to establish the book levels for children who are not on track.
- Do not use Phase 5 books this term as the children have not yet been taught Phase 5 GPCs. The Phase 4 books the children are reading will increase their reading stamina and fluency, ensuring that they are confident and ready to read books with the Phase 5 GPCs they have learned in Autumn 2.

Automatic reading in assessments

Children need to be reading some words automatically to read books at Phase 4 and beyond. Make sure you ask the children to 'blend in your head' when they read the words in the assessment. Mark any word read without overt blending as 'A' on the assessment. Children will not be given a Phase 4 or Phase 5 book level on the Assessments tracker unless they have read the required number of words automatically in the assessment.

In Year 1 Autumn 2 week 4:

- Some children can read Phase 5 Set 1 books. Use your judgement and the process set out on pages 7 to check if this is the correct level for the children.

From Year 1 Spring 2 – Fluency assessments

Use the Fluency assessment with any child reading Phase 5 Set 3 books. This will help you assess their reading speed and accuracy, ensuring you have a clear picture of all aspects of their reading.

Continue to use the Fluency assessment in Summer 1 and 2 for children reading Phase 5 Set 3 and Phase 5 Set 4 books.

Keep reading in Year 2

Reading practice sessions must continue for all children until they have secured Phase 5 and have graduated from the Phase 5 Set 5 books.

The 'What to do with Year 2' flowchart gives detailed information about organising your teaching of phonics and reading.

In Autumn 1

Ensure children are on the correct level book at the beginning of Year 2:

- Use the results of the Year 1 Summer 2 assessment to give each child a book level. Children on track will be reading Phase 5 Set 4 or 5 books. The Stretch and Challenge books provide additional challenge for children who are very confident reading these books.
- Children should only be given books that are matched to their secure phonic knowledge. They should not be given books with GPCs that they do not know.
- Use the Assessments tracker 'Pupil trends' tab to establish the book levels for children.
- Children with larger gaps, who are being taught Phase 2, 3 or 4, must be given books that match their secure phonic knowledge. If less than 50% of your class has larger gaps, consider using the Rapid Catch-up programme for these children. After teaching for four weeks, use the Rapid Catch-up assessments which match the children to the correct level 7+ book. Refer to the 'What to do with Year 2' flowchart for more information.
- Assess all children who have been taught the Year 2 Phase 5 review. Use this assessment to determine if more phonics teaching is needed or if the class can progress to the Spelling programme.

In Autumn 2

Use the Fluency assessments to determine if children are ready for Little Wandle Fluency or should continue with the Phase 5 books.

Children reading Phase 5 Set 5 books: Assess using the Phase 5 Set 5 fluency assessment. Children reading this assessment at 60–70wpm and with at least 90% accuracy are ready to graduate to Little Wandle Fluency.

Children reading Phase 5 Set 4 books: Assess using the Year 1 Summer 2 assessment and move to Phase 5 Set 5 books if indicated by the Assessments tracker or Matching grid.

Assess using the Phase 5 Set 4 Fluency assessment to give you a clearer picture of children's reading speed and accuracy.

Children on Rapid Catch-up: Children who are following the Rapid Catch-up programme should be assessed every four weeks and continue until they have secured Phase 5. Use the final Phase 5 Set 5 Fluency assessment to determine if they are ready to graduate to Little Wandle Fluency.

From Spring 1 onwards

- Continue to assess all children. Ensure that they complete the Phase 5 books before considering Little Wandle Fluency.
- Children who are following the Fluency programme should be assessed every term using the Fluency assessments provided.

Books going home and supporting parents

Decodable book

After the children have read their book in the Reading practice sessions, it should go home for the children to practise their independent reading. They should be able to read this book fluently and independently.

Sharing book

We want all children to grow a love of reading. That means giving them lots of opportunities to experience a wide range of quality children's books that are either read to or with them.

These books should be chosen by the child to share and enjoy at home.

Support for parents

There is ample support for engaging parents and carers in their child's learning.

- In the [Engaging parents](#) area of the website, you will find PowerPoints for running parent workshops plus downloads and guidance on supporting parents in their understanding of how Little Wandle teaches phonics and reading.
- You will find a PowerPoint and leaflet about the importance of reading aloud at home in [Everybody read!](#)
- There is further support, including videos and downloads, in the [For parents](#) pages.

To be agreed by staff and governing body

Reviewed: September 2025 by Michelle Neal and Catherine Smith

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