



## Reading: a fundamental skill for all

### What does reading look like at Percy Hedley School?

We recognise the importance of literacy and communication for all students within Percy Hedley School. Reading not only allows students to access curriculum learning, but a whole world of learning and enjoyment from books and other reading materials. A lack of functional reading skills can be considered a safeguarding risk, due to the number of situations where a person would have less information to keep themselves safe (e.g., not understanding environmental signs or agreeing to written information without fully understanding). This is especially true for our student population who have additional difficulties with safeguarding implications. Literacy and communication skills are fundamental in students being able to actively engage in their learning.

Our student population includes a wide range of abilities, from those who engage purely through sensory experiences to students with functional reading skills. Five cohorts are used to describe the reading focus throughout the school and the different curriculum pathways:

- Cohort 1: 'Pre-phonics'. The majority of our Engagement Curriculum, these students are not at a stage to access formal phonics teaching. Teaching is not subject specific, and students encounter experience and theme-based learning. Foundational literacy skills are embedded through the week, using aspects of Phase One of Letters & Sounds as appropriate (for example: sound discrimination, rhythm and rhyme).
- Cohort 2: 'Individual Phonics Plans'. These students access early literacy skill teaching but are not yet at a stage to engage with formal learning through a systematic synthetic phonics programme. There are students at this level in all of our curriculum pathways, and their learning is planned and recorded on Individual Phonics Plans.
- Cohort 3: 'Essential Letters and Sounds'. Students accessing formal literacy teaching through our chosen systematic synthetic programme, Essential Letters and Sounds (ELS). We have students within ELTBA & Appropriate Accreditation pathways in this cohort.
- Cohort 4: 'Post ELS'. Students in this cohort have progressed beyond the point of ELS, however continue to access synthetic phonics teaching appropriate to their level, as part of a broad and balanced English Curriculum.
- Cohort 5: 'Post 16 Functional Skills'. Students in this cohort access learning in our Post 16 department focusing on functional literacy skills. These students remain at an early stage of literacy development, and either direct phonics teaching has not been appropriate, or the students have not been able to apply learning to reading and spelling tasks functionally. Instead, literacy teaching will follow a 'Preparation for Adulthood' focus, considering the skills that will be most useful to the students once they leave Percy Hedley School.

Our class teams work in a transdisciplinary way to overcome as many barriers as possible, to promote literacy skills at appropriate levels for all students. Assessment of the skills required to access literacy is thorough, regular, and informs teaching practise and therapeutic interventions.

Reading is prioritised and the staff teams across all pathways ensure teaching of literacy skills is differentiated as appropriate to the student group.

For those students who are engaging in formal written literacy, staff teams are aware of the importance of developing automaticity and therefore fluency when reading, and this is considered from the beginning of phonics teaching through to students sitting formal examinations. There is also a focus on reading with understanding, using strategies to ensure students are taking meaning from texts. Strategies to support literacy (e.g., when learning new words or attempting to spell a less familiar word) follow a consistent format throughout ELTBA and Appropriate Accreditation pathways, though are differentiated to the level of support and detail the students require. For example, 'Boxes and Lines' is a synthetic phonics approach to spelling a word using segmenting skills and a visual frame, which can be used from students writing their first CVC word to students independently spelling subject specific terminology.

A total communication approach is in place across Percy Hedley, with the tools, strategies and devices being used varying dependent on student need. There is a significant crossover in approaches and support for communication and for literacy. We support students to access low- and high-tech AAC (Alternative and Augmentative Communication) to enable them to express themselves and to enable written output (e.g., symbol boards/books, Voice Output Communication Aids). Technology is also used to support those students with significant literacy or handwriting difficulties, to overcome literacy barriers and increase independence (e.g., text to speech equipment or voice dictation software). Technology is often very empowering for students with literacy difficulties and is used alongside teaching strategies as part of our focus on Preparation for Adulthood throughout the school.

All students within Percy Hedley have frequent opportunities to engage in reading activities throughout their day and staff model their love of reading and stories for all ages and abilities. Whole school events take place regularly throughout the school year to celebrate our shared love of reading. The whole school library holds a wide range of reading materials and e-book libraries are available for those who prefer digital access. 'Hi-Lo' Reading Schemes offer books with high interest age but low reading age, to engage reluctant readers in positive reading experiences. These include a range of genres (e.g., sci-fi, fantasy, mystery) and have engaging storylines, but a low word count per page.

Students are encouraged to choose books which interest them from the school library, and books taken home are marked with stickers to indicate to parents and carers if this is a 'Love of Reading' book which is to be shared with an adult, or a 'Phonics' reading practise book where the students will be expected to be able to decode the text themselves.

Staff and students also access our local library, an essential community service to promote a lifelong love of reading. Parents and Carers are acknowledged as key figures to model a love of reading, and reading resources are made available for parents at home. Our staff team are passionate about making reading enjoyable and accessible.

## Reading within the Engagement Pathway (a pre-formal curriculum) Cohorts 1 & 2

*“The foundations for any form of literacy develop through their earliest communication”*

*Flo Longhorn 2021*

Students on the Engagement pathway access non-subject specific learning, and as such, communication and literacy skills are targeted at an appropriate level throughout the day. Literacy skills within the Engagement pathway are based upon progression of symbolic understanding, as students work towards an understanding that an object, picture, symbol, sign or collection of graphemes have or carry meaning. Reading at its earliest level encompasses an ability to ‘read’ faces, situations and the environment as well as an ability to discriminate environmental sounds, voices, images and symbols. Teachers and Therapists work collaboratively to determine a student’s level of symbolic understanding, setting appropriate targets to both consolidate current skills and work towards the next level.

A total communication approach is used throughout, and students have access to a range of approaches to support symbolic development and therefore communication.

At the earliest level this would involve a system of cues, such as TaSSeLs (on-body signing), songs and Intensive Interaction. At an object level, objects of reference may be used, and this would then progress to picture, symbol and written understanding. Activities are planned based upon the student’s current level of symbolic development, with opportunities to develop this further. Where a student progresses, approaches are combined to create a total communication approach for the student to get the most out of their learning. Aspects of Phase 1 Phonics (Letters and Sounds) are embedded within practise across the curriculum as appropriate to ensure opportunities for the development of early literacy skills, for example: sound awareness and exposure to rhythm and rhyme.

Students on the Engagement pathway have opportunities which promote a love of reading on a daily basis, through activities such as sensory stories, story massage and listening to books read aloud. Sensory experiences, objects, images or symbols are used to give further meaning to stories, depending on the students’ assessed levels. Personalised stories are used to engage the students in engaging texts, around familiar characters and favourite interests. Students within the Engagement pathway can respond positively to the repetition and rhythm within familiar books, and with repeated readings of the same book can anticipate events or sounds within the story.

Stories are used to give further context to activities taking place, and this is an approach used by the whole class team to support learning.

## Reading within the ELTBA Pathway (a semi formal to formal curriculum) Cohorts 2, 3 & 4.

All students on the ELTBA pathway have daily ‘Sounds and Spellings’ sessions and a reading session each day, in addition to literacy skills being embedded throughout the curriculum.

For many of the students on this pathway ‘Sounds and Spellings’ sessions involve daily phonics teaching using our chosen Systematic Synthetic Phonics approach (SSP), Essential Letters and Sounds

(ELS). This provides a consistent approach to teaching early literacy skills, and a clear route for progression. Our staff team have carefully adapted use of Essential Letters and Sounds, in liaison with the authors of the programme, to ensure our phonics teaching is adapted appropriately whilst maintaining fidelity to the programme. The students following this programme undertake half termly assessment of their grapheme- phoneme knowledge, and their ability to apply this to reading of real and non words. We have a Phonics Library where students can access decodable texts which are matched precisely to their level of phonic knowledge, allowing students to develop confidence, independence and fluency in their reading skills.

Students within the ELTBA pathway who are not accessing Essential Letters and Sounds, also receive daily input into the areas of literacy development assessed to be most relevant for them. This may include students who require an alternative approach to phonics and this would be made explicit on an Individual Phonics Plan, or students who have progressed beyond ELS and instead focus on individually assessed literacy need. For example: grammatical knowledge (e.g. tense, suffixes), additional spelling rules/ approaches, fluency or inference and reading comprehension skills. Teachers use individual assessment data and the appropriate programme of study from the National Curriculum when selecting target words for teaching (e.g. spelling patterns).

In addition to the direct teaching of phonics or other appropriate literacy skills, there is a focus within the ELTBA pathway on phonological awareness skills. Phonological awareness skills are recognised as the prerequisite to literacy skills, and the class Speech and Language Therapist is key in assessing and setting targets as appropriate. Staff use specific approaches such as Cued Articulation to support students to 'see a sound', and teachers and speech and language therapists may suggest targeted interventions or programmes for an individual in addition to their daily class sessions.

Whilst reading is embedded in all subjects as appropriate throughout the day, timetabled reading slots are designated as either opportunities for decodable reading books (from Phonics Library for those following ELS), guided reading (using alternative reading schemes for those who do not follow ELS) or 'Love of Reading' which varies in structure. 'Love of Reading' may include an adult or child reading aloud for others to listen, a shared class book, free choice from the library, audiobooks, a reading scheme book or a magazine. Students have access to a class library to access books as they wish in less structured times of their day, in addition to the whole school library. Students are read to by an adult on a daily basis, with texts being chosen to be motivating and relevant to current topics/ experiences for the student group but also at an appropriate level for them to access and enjoy.

#### Reading within the Appropriate Accreditation Pathway (a formal curriculum) Cohorts 2,3,4 & 5

Students following this pathway access formal accreditation at an appropriate level, as part of their broad and balanced English Curriculum. This includes 'Developing Literacy and Language' sessions, with targets based on assessed needs, with input from speech and language therapy as required.

Phonological awareness and teaching of synthetic phonics continue to be crucial parts of the teaching of literacy in the Accreditation pathway. Where it is assessed to be appropriate, students

continue to follow the Essential Letter & Sounds (ELS) Programme which can be carefully adapted to the student's specific strengths and needs as appropriate.

For all students within the Appropriate Accreditation Pathway, key vocabulary is identified and assessed within each subject, and awareness of the phonological features of the word is included as part of this. Staff recognise the importance of repeated exposure of key vocabulary in order to develop fluency.

Students who have progressed past the point of needing ELS will continue to use a synthetic phonics approach however students apply this to their topic vocabulary, consider less frequent spelling patterns and grammatical markers (e.g., tenses, suffixes). There is also a greater emphasis placed upon developing fluency and reading comprehension skills. These sessions can also involve learning around language and language use (e.g., figurative language such as metaphors, phrases & sayings, colloquialisms and slang).

Whilst reading continues to be embedded within all subjects, students have timetabled slots to access additional reading and spelling activities. Within 'Developing Literacy and Language' sessions students participate in designated 'Guided Reading', where they access reading scheme resources and have opportunities to read aloud with an adult. This provides opportunities to check the student's understanding of the text, discuss unfamiliar words and practise appropriate prosody as a part of improving fluency. Additionally, these sessions contain a 'Sounds and Spellings' focus, wherein students are introduced to specific vocabulary relevant to curriculum they are following. Here they are supported to broaden their vocabulary and understanding through discussing and recalling the meaning and spellings of words. There are also several reading slots on the timetable each week to support a love of reading, which can vary in format, as in the ELTBA pathway. Each school day ends with students listening to an adult read aloud from a class text, as part of a relaxation session.

Many of our students experience difficulties with generalisation of skills, so they will not necessarily apply skills learnt in a classroom setting to a real-life experience. Whilst this is considered throughout Percy Hedley School, within the Appropriate Accreditation pathway there is an increased emphasis on practising of skills within community contexts. Application of literacy skills in real life contexts may include environmental reading (e.g. road signs, site maps, signs in supermarket aisles), reading of various timetables, recipes or menus. Staff work collaboratively to ensure reading opportunities are varied.