Reading Policy

Hazel Oak School

November 2026

To be reviewed November 2027

Agreed by Governors on: 12th November 2026

Signed by: Chair of Governors

Reading, phonics and communication for pupils aged 4 to 19

Belong. Believe. Become.
Every pupil known. Every person valued. Every future possible.

Document control	
Reading / English leads	Claire Wood, Tom Melville and Emma Dudley
Approved by	Governing Board
Date approved	
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Next review	July 2027

1. Introduction and Vision
Hazel Oak School is a special school for pupils aged 4 to 19. All pupils have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), and many have complex autism, ADHD and moderate to severe learning difficulties.

We believe every pupil can become a reader and a communicator. For some pupils, this means becoming a fluent, independent reader who reads for pleasure, learning and work. For others, it means taking part in shared stories, understanding symbols, photographs and objects, and recognising the words and signs that help them live as independently as possible. Whatever the starting point, reading opens up the curriculum, the community and adult life.

Reading at Hazel Oak is taught through one curriculum, adapted to each pupil's needs, communication profile and EHCP outcomes. It is grounded in the Department for Education's reading framework and the evidence that systematic synthetic phonics is the most effective route to word reading for pupils who can access it, including pupils with SEND.

> **Everyone Matters. Everyone Belongs. Everyone Grows.**

2. Aims

This policy aims to make sure that every pupil:

- is taught to read through a systematic, consistent and well-led approach;
- has access to reading through their preferred communication methods, using our Total Communication Approach;
- learns the alphabetic code through systematic synthetic phonics, taught with fidelity and adapted where needed;
- develops fluency, vocabulary and comprehension once they can decode;
- takes part in rich language and story experiences every day, whatever their stage of reading;
- develops a love of reading and sees books and stories as a source of enjoyment;
- uses reading in real-life contexts that prepare them for adulthood, work and community life;
- makes progress that is regularly assessed, with quick additional support when they fall behind.

3. Curriculum Intent

Our curriculum is guided by our vision, **Belong. Believe. Become.** and our five values of Respect, Creativity, Growth, Wellbeing and Community. Everything in our curriculum is designed to help pupils belong, believe in themselves and become as independent as possible, with the relationships, resilience, confidence and skills to navigate life beyond

school. Communication and Reading is one of our four curriculum drivers (see the Curriculum Policy).

Reading sits at the heart of the Hazel Oak curriculum. We have one curriculum for all pupils, delivered in a way that matches each pupil's stage of development rather than age alone. Reading is taught explicitly in English and phonics lessons and is applied across every subject, in life skills and careers learning, and in the community.

4. Statutory Basis and Guidance

Requirement or guidance	How it applies at Hazel Oak
DfE: The reading framework	Sets out the DfE's evidence-informed position on teaching reading, including talk, stories, systematic synthetic phonics, fluency and comprehension, from Reception to Year 9. It includes a section on pupils with SEND and is written for specialist provision as well as mainstream schools.
EYFS statutory framework	Communication and Language and Literacy requirements for Reception pupils, including the Early Learning Goals for word reading and comprehension.
National curriculum in England: English programmes of study	The reading curriculum for Key Stages 1 to 4, adapted to pupils' needs.
Phonics screening check: assessment and reporting arrangements	Statutory requirements for the Year 1 phonics screening check, which apply to maintained special schools.
The engagement model	Statutory assessment for pupils working below the standard of national curriculum assessments and not engaged in subject-specific study.
SEND Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years	EHCP-led provision, the graduated approach and Preparation for Adulthood outcomes.
Equality Act 2010	Reasonable adjustments so that disabled pupils can access reading.

5. Reading Across the School

Reading is taught as a continuum from Reception to the sixth form. Pupils move along it at their own pace, so the approaches below are matched to a pupil's stage, not their department.

Department	Main focus for reading
EYFS and Key Stage 1	Talk, stories, rhymes and songs; Drawing Club; daily Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised phonics, or Little Wandle SEND where a graduated approach is needed; Total Communication; pre-reading and engagement approaches for pupils not yet ready for phonics.

Department	Main focus for reading
Lower school	Continued systematic phonics for pupils still learning to decode; fluency practice with decodable books; whole-class reading lessons and Talk for Writing as pupils become readers; targeted interventions for pupils at risk of falling behind.
Secondary	Phonics and catch-up for pupils who cannot yet decode well; fluency and comprehension; reading across the curriculum; functional reading in life skills, cooking and careers lessons.
Upper school	Reading for accreditation, independence and work; functional reading in community and work-experience settings; continued decoding support where needed.
Sixth form	Entry Level, Functional Skills English and ASDAN accreditation; reading for adult life, work, travel and leisure; Preparation for Adulthood outcomes.

6. Communication, Language and Talk

The reading framework is clear that spoken language and talk are the foundations of reading. At Hazel Oak, language and communication are developed through our Total Communication Approach, as set out in the Hazel Oak Communication and Reading Framework. Depending on each pupil's needs, this includes spoken language, Makaton, symbols, photographs, objects of reference, visual timetables, aided language displays, core boards, symbol exchange and paper-based or digital AAC.

Speech and language therapists (SaLT) visit weekly. They help set and review targets, model strategies for staff and advise on individual pupils. We use Colourful Semantics to help pupils understand and build sentences, which supports both comprehension and writing.

7. Early Engagement with Reading

Some pupils are not yet ready for phonics. They are still entitled to a rich reading curriculum that builds the attention, communication and understanding needed for later reading. Approaches include:

- sensory stories and Bag Books, which use objects and sensory experiences to bring stories to life;
- objects of reference, photographs and symbols, building understanding that things can stand for meaning;
- symbol reading, including reading symbol-supported texts, timetables and instructions;
- Attention Autism, to develop shared attention, anticipation and engagement;
- daily shared stories, songs and rhymes, with repetition and predictable language;
- listening and attention activities that develop the phonological awareness pupils need for phonics.

Pupils' engagement and progress are assessed using the engagement model, through its five areas of exploration, realisation, anticipation, persistence and initiation. Staff check regularly whether a pupil is ready to begin systematic phonics, so that no pupil is held back from learning the alphabetic code.

8. Phonics: Systematic Synthetic Phonics

Our programme

Hazel Oak uses Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised, a DfE-validated systematic synthetic phonics (SSP) programme. We teach it with fidelity, so that pupils meet the same routines, language and resources in every class.

For pupils with complex needs that affect cognition, we use Little Wandle SEND. This programme mirrors the core programme but breaks learning into smaller steps through a graduated approach, with grapheme-by-grapheme plans, oral blending work with images, and inclusive resources developed with special schools.

Phonics for pupils with SEND

We follow the evidence that pupils with SEND learn to decode using the same processes as other readers. They need the same knowledge of the alphabetic code, though the way it is taught may differ and many pupils will need much more practice. We do not move pupils away from phonics because progress is slow; instead we look carefully at how we teach it. We avoid teaching whole-word sight reading as a replacement for phonics, as it does not give pupils a way to read unfamiliar words.

Teaching is adapted through:

- smaller steps, slower pace and extra repetition and consolidation;
- visual supports, Makaton and Total Communication approaches;
- AAC, for example to show blending and segmenting without speech;
- multi-sensory methods and sensory grapheme cards;
- small-group and 1-to-1 teaching.

Daily phonics

Pupils learning to decode have daily phonics teaching. Lessons are 15 minutes long and pupils stop daily phonics once they have complete Phase 5 and can read fluently.

Phonics continues for as long as a pupil needs it, including in secondary, upper school and sixth form. Older pupils use age-appropriate resources such as Big Cat for Little Wandle 7+ books, so that texts match their interests.

9. Keeping Up and Catching Up: Interventions

Pupils who are not keeping up are identified quickly through phonics assessment and given extra practice the same day or the next day where possible. Pupils who need more support may also take part in the following interventions:

Intervention	Purpose
Little Wandle SEND	Graduated, small-step phonics teaching for pupils with complex needs.
Dancing Bears	Phonics-based reading intervention for pupils who are struggling to read.
IDL	Computer-based literacy intervention to support reading and spelling.
Direct Phonics	Structured phonics catch-up, particularly for older pupils.
Precision teaching	Short, frequent sessions to build accuracy and speed with graphemes and tricky words taught in the phonics programme.
Little Wandle Rapid Catch-up	Phonics catch-up for older pupils who have not yet secured the alphabetic code.
Pocket folders	Pocket folders are personalised to store differentiated phonics materials, tricky words and fluency passages for targeted daily practice. They help students build reading automaticity and comprehension.

Interventions complement, rather than replace, the main phonics programme. They use the same grapheme–phoneme correspondences and language so that pupils are not confused. Their impact is reviewed each term by the reading leads.

10. Reading Books

Decodable books

Pupils who are learning to read are given decodable books that closely match the phonics they have been taught. We use the Little Wandle scheme and Big Cat books. Pupils take part in reading practice sessions in school, in small groups, reading the same book several times to build decoding, then fluency (prosody), then comprehension.

Books going home

Pupils take books home every week. Pupils learning to decode take home a decodable book they can read with growing fluency, and a sharing book from the library for an adult to read with them.

Library and reading spine

The school library gives all pupils access to a wide range of fiction, non-fiction, poetry and accessible formats, including sensory, symbol-supported and high-interest, lower-reading-age books. The Hazel Oak Reading Spine sets out the core high-quality texts that every pupil will meet as they move through the school, so that they build a shared knowledge of stories, poems and information texts.

11. Fluency and Comprehension

Once pupils can decode, the focus moves to fluency and comprehension. Pupils have whole-class reading lessons, where the teacher models fluent, expressive reading and teaches vocabulary and comprehension explicitly, using carefully chosen texts from the reading spine.

We use Talk for Writing to link reading and writing. Pupils learn model texts orally, using story maps, actions and talk, then explore them closely as readers before using them to write. Story mapping and dual coding are especially helpful for pupils with SEND, as they reduce the load on working memory.

Fluency is developed through repeated reading, echo reading, choral reading and paired reading. Reading lessons follow the two lesson structures (word reading and phonics; language comprehension and book talk) set out in the Hazel Oak Communication and Reading Framework. Comprehension is supported through talk, Colourful Semantics, visual supports and questioning adapted to each pupil's communication level.

12. Reading for Pleasure

We want every pupil to enjoy books and stories. Every class has a daily story time, where adults read aloud from high-quality books, including those from the reading spine. Pupils also have regular reading-for-pleasure time, when they can choose books, share them with peers and adults, and talk about what they like.

Classes have inviting book areas, and pupils visit the school library and take books home each week. We are introducing visits to the local public library so that pupils learn to use it and see reading as part of community life.

13. Reading Across the Curriculum and Preparation for Adulthood

Reading is applied in every subject. Staff choose and adapt texts so that all pupils can access the curriculum, using symbols, dual coding, pre-teaching of vocabulary and read-aloud support where needed.

From Key Stage 2 onwards, life skills and careers lessons give pupils practice in reading for real purposes. This includes reading signs, labels, menus, recipes, timetables, prices and instructions. Reading is built into:

- weekly cooking lessons, reading recipes, ingredients and equipment labels;
- life skills trips into the community, including shops, cafés and transport;
- volunteering at the St James church café;
- work experience in the school tuck shop and community café.

Accreditation

In upper school and the sixth form, pupils work towards accreditation that recognises their reading, including Entry Level qualifications, Functional Skills English and ASDAN. Courses

are chosen to match each pupil's needs, aspirations and Preparation for Adulthood outcomes.

14. Assessment

Assessment	How we use it
Little Wandle assessments	Regular phonics assessments identify gaps, inform keep-up support and make sure books match each pupil's phonic knowledge.
EYFS Profile	Reception pupils are assessed against the Early Learning Goals for Comprehension and Word Reading at the end of the EYFS.
Phonics screening check	Pupils who are ready in Year 1 or can retake in Year 2 complete the check and their results are communicated to parents at their parents evening in the summer and confirmed in their end of year reports.
The engagement model	Used for pupils who are not yet engaged in subject-specific study, to assess and set targets for engagement.
Hazel Oak assessment framework (Trackable)	Tracks progress in reading against the Hazel Oak learning intentions.
EHCP targets	Reading and communication targets are reviewed through the annual review process and with SaLT.
Accreditation	Entry Level, Functional Skills English and ASDAN outcomes in upper school and sixth form.
Other tools	YARC assessments to identify gaps in reading knowledge for both phonics and comprehension. This tool gives reading ages. IDL also gives reading ages and spelling ages.

15. Partnership with Parents and Carers

Parents and carers play a vital part in helping their children learn to read. We support families through:

- parent workshops on reading and phonics, showing how phonics is taught and how to help at home;
- weekly reading books sent home, with guidance on how to share them;
- Tapestry, where staff share reading progress and families can share reading at home;
- reading and communication targets discussed at EHCP reviews and parents' meetings.

16. Leadership, Training and Quality

Reading is led by Claire Wood, Tom Melville and Emma Dudley. In line with the reading framework, leaders make sure that reading is a whole-school priority and that phonics is taught consistently and with fidelity.

All staff who teach reading are trained in the school's phonics programme. Training is provided by the reading leads and through Little Wandle CPD sessions, including SEND-specific training. New staff are trained before they teach phonics, and the reading leads check teaching regularly through observation, coaching and feedback.

17. Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Responsibilities
Governing board	Approves this policy and monitors the quality and impact of reading.
Headteacher and senior leaders	Make reading a whole-school priority, provide resources and time for training, and meet statutory assessment requirements.
Reading / English leads	Lead phonics and reading, train and coach staff, monitor teaching and progress, manage interventions and resources, and report to governors.
Teachers and support staff	Teach reading and phonics with fidelity, adapt teaching to pupils' needs, assess progress and provide keep-up support.
Speech and language therapists	Visit weekly, advise on communication and language targets and strategies, including Colourful Semantics.
Parents and carers	Share books at home and work with school to support their child's reading.

18. Inclusion and Equality

Every pupil, whatever their needs, is entitled to be taught to read. Reasonable adjustments, specialist resources, AAC and personalised support remove barriers to reading. Books and resources reflect the diversity of our pupils, families and community, and include pupils with disabilities, so that every pupil can see themselves in what they read.

19. Monitoring and Review

The reading leads monitor this policy each term through observations, book and assessment reviews, pupil voice and feedback from staff and families. They report to the governing board each year on reading standards, interventions and training. This policy will be reviewed in July 2027, or sooner if national guidance changes.

20. Related Policies

- English and Writing Policy
- EYFS Policy
- Curriculum Policy
- Curriculum Handbook (including Teaching and Learning at Hazel Oak)
- Assessment Policy
- SEND Policy and Information Report
- Accessibility Plan
- Equality Policy
- Hazel Oak Communication and Reading Framework
- Hazel Oak Reading Spine
- Preparation for Adulthood Framework
- The Hazel Oak Way

Appendix: External References

- DfE – The reading framework: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-reading-framework-teaching-the-foundations-of-literacy
- DfE – Early years foundation stage statutory framework: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2
- DfE – National curriculum in England: English programmes of study: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-english-programmes-of-study
- STA – Phonics screening check: assessment and reporting arrangements: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/phonics-screening-check-assessment-and-reporting-arrangements-ara
- STA – The engagement model: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-engagement-model
- DfE – SEND Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25
- Ofsted – Pupils with SEND who have fallen behind with reading: https://educationinspection.blog.gov.uk/2023/03/02/pupils-with-special-educational-needs-and-or-disabilities-who-have-fallen-behind-with-reading/
- Little Wandle – SEND programme: https://www.littlewandle.org.uk/whats-included/send/
- Little Wandle – Rapid Catch-up: https://www.littlewandle.org.uk/whats-included/rapid-catch-up/
- Talk for Writing: https://www.talk4writing.com/