

# Early Reading



At HCAT, pupils follow a systematic synthetic phonics teaching programme as the foundation for their reading development. All schools within the trust implement either **Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised** or **Read Write Inc. (RWI)**, ensuring consistency, structure, and fidelity to each programme. These approaches are designed to systematically teach the relationships between sounds and letters, enabling children to decode and read with increasing confidence and accuracy. Once pupils have successfully mastered and completed their phonics programme, they transition seamlessly onto the wider **HCAT approach to the teaching of reading**, where the focus broadens to include comprehension, vocabulary development, fluency, and the full range of reading domains. This ensures that all children are equipped with the decoding skills they need before moving on to develop higher-level reading strategies and a deeper understanding of texts.

In Year 1, it is equally important that reading objectives are embedded within the wider **literacy sequence** to ensure pupils are developing a broad set of early comprehension skills alongside their phonics knowledge. Through carefully planned literacy lessons, children are given opportunities to explore key reading domains such as making predictions, drawing simple inferences, making links between texts, and expressing their personal opinions about what they have read. This exposure helps to lay the groundwork for deeper understanding and engagement with texts as pupils begin to move beyond decoding. By weaving these objectives through the literacy curriculum, pupils develop a more holistic approach to reading that supports both word recognition and comprehension, in line with the expectations of the HCAT reading curriculum.

The HCAT early reading approach is designed to build strong foundational reading skills by placing a firm emphasis on phonics, while also ensuring children develop a love for reading from the very beginning of their learning journey. At the heart of this approach is the principle that texts must be closely matched to pupils' phonics knowledge. All reading materials used in early reading sessions are phonetically plausible and appropriately matched to the stage each child is working at. This careful alignment supports growing confidence and fluency, allowing pupils to practise and apply their phonics knowledge in meaningful and accessible contexts.

Reading sessions in the early stages are not solely limited to decoding. They are structured to begin developing the wider reading skills laid out in the HCAT reading curriculum, including key reading domains such as retrieval, vocabulary, inference and fluency. Vocabulary development, in particular, plays a central role. Sessions are designed to expose children to new and rich vocabulary in context, helping them understand and use language effectively from the earliest stages. Explicit teaching of new words supports comprehension and builds the foundation for future learning across the curriculum.

As with all stages of reading at HCAT, book selection is key. Texts are carefully chosen from the HCAT reading spine to ensure quality and alignment with curriculum expectations. There is a deliberate focus on providing a balance of fiction, non-fiction and poetry, even in the early stages, so that children develop a broad and deep appreciation for different forms of literature. The newly designed *reading year on a page* document for Year 1 & Year 2 includes progressive objectives that guide planning and ensure consistent development of reading skills across the year. These objectives allow for appropriate challenge and support, helping teachers to tailor their teaching to the needs of their class while maintaining a high-quality, progressive reading journey for every child.

Where pupils have gaps in their phonics knowledge, timely and targeted adaptations are made to ensure every child receives the support they need to succeed. HCAT schools place a strong emphasis on early identification of need, using regular assessment to pinpoint specific areas where pupils may require additional help. Intervention is delivered in a focused and systematic way, aligned

with the phonics programme the school is using—whether that be Little Wandle or Read Write Inc.—to ensure consistency and effectiveness. These interventions may include small group sessions, one-to-one support, or additional phonics practice within the school day. By addressing gaps promptly and appropriately, HCAT ensures that no child is left behind in their journey towards becoming a confident and fluent reader.