

Durham County Council

THORNHILL PRIMARY SCHOOL



## English Policy

created by : Mrs. J. Jones

reviewed : September 2025

## **1.) Aims and objectives**

At Thornhill Primary School we recognise the importance of studying the English Language. Being proficient in speaking and listening, reading and writing are vital skills which unlock learning and enable our children to go on to become confident members of society who can make a positive contribution. The teaching and learning of language skills are therefore given a high priority in our school with our overarching aim being to equip our children with a strong command of the spoken and written word and to develop their love of literature through widespread reading for enjoyment and reading to learn.

Additional aims include:

- to read accurately, fluently and with good understanding
- to develop the habit of reading widely and often, for both pleasure and information
- to acquire a wide and rich vocabulary, together with a clear understanding of grammar and a knowledge of the linguistic conventions for reading, writing and speaking
- to appreciate our rich and varied literacy heritage
- to write clearly, accurately and coherently, adapting their language and style for a range of different contexts, purposes and audiences
- to use discussion to learn, becoming able to elaborate and explain clearly their understanding, ideas and opinions
- to become competent in the art of speaking and listening, to be able to make formal presentations with confidence and to participate in debates, sharing their ideas and responding to those of others.

## **2.) Teaching and Learning**

From Reception class through to Year Six children experience high quality English lessons via quality first teaching. There is a clear structure of English lessons timetabled across the week to ensure all the strands of the National Curriculum are covered.

Children are assessed carefully throughout the year and each class has time within the structure of the day where specialist English teaching is delivered to meet each child's specific individual needs and to ensure that every child reaches their full potential.

## **3.) Curriculum Planning**

In planning our English curriculum reference is made to the National Curriculum. This is the basis of our long term plan. Medium term plans and the progression of knowledge and skills grids allocate specific objectives and resources to each year group to ensure progression. Short term weekly and daily plans have a clear lesson objective phrased as a WALT for each English lesson. Work is quality marked with rigour to ensure mistakes and misconceptions are picked up and corrected immediately, in line with our Marking and Presentation of Work policy. Quality marking and assessment inform planning.

English is also developed through all other areas of the curriculum, which provide rich and varied experiences for pupils to draw upon in their writing and reading and therefore a real purpose and opportunity to apply their English knowledge and language skills.

#### **4.) Approaches to Spoken Language**

The four strands of spoken language; speaking, listening, group discussion and drama permeate through our whole curriculum.

Interactive teaching strategies are used to engage all pupils to raise reading and writing standards. Children are encouraged to develop effective communication skills in readiness for later life. We aim for all our children to be able to speak clearly, fluently and coherently, to be able to listen attentively with understanding, pleasure and empathy and to contribute to group discussions effectively.

We achieve this by;

- giving our children confidence in themselves as speakers and listeners by showing them that we value their conversations and opinions. We also encourage a respect for and tolerance of the views and opinions of others.
- being aware that as adults we provide a model of speakers and listeners in our day-to-day interactions with them and with other adults in our school.
- helping them to articulate their ideas and provide purpose and audiences for talk within a range of formal and informal situations and in individual, partner, group and class contexts.
- by providing opportunities to perform to a larger audience, in assemblies and productions, where children's efforts and skills are acknowledged by staff, parents, carers, visitors and peers.
- by providing a range of experiences where children can work collaboratively and participate in opportunities to reflect on talk and explore real and imagined situations through role play, hot-seating, drama and discussions.

- by developing the children's ability to listen with attention and understanding in all areas of the curriculum and where necessary asking and responding to questions appropriately.

### **5.) Approaches to Phonics**

When children start our school in Nursery or Reception class, they begin a structured and rigorous programme of systematic phonics teaching. We use a pre-phonics programme in Nursery while we use the Jolly Phonics systematic synthetic phonics programme in Reception. Here our Reception children are taught the correspondences between sounds (phonemes) and letters (graphemes) using a multisensory approach. They are taught the phoneme and the graphemes simultaneously, together with an action and this helps our children to identify and blend different letter sounds and letter combinations together to make a word - for example, pronouncing each phoneme in shop /sh/o/p/ and then blending those phonemes to produce the word. Through this, children take the first important steps in learning to read. They can also use this knowledge to begin to spell new words they hear; this is called segmenting.

A systematic approach to teaching synthetic phonics means teachers take a planned, thorough approach, teaching children the simplest sounds first and progressing all the way through to the most complex combinations of letters. The sequence of letters taught can be found in our document titled, 'Progression in Reading Sequence of Phonemes.'

Using a systematic synthetic phonics approach, almost all children quickly become confident independent readers. They soon move away from the mechanics of identifying and blending letter sounds (or 'decoding' words) and start reading fluently, even when they come

across words they have never heard or seen before. Once the process of reading becomes automatic and easy, they can devote all their attention to understanding the meaning of what they have read and are then able to read to learn.

In Years One, Two and Three all children have a 15-minute daily phonics input and then additional time, in the form of structured interventions, should also be given to children who are not secure with the sounds already taught.

It is important that phonics teaching does not stop in Key Stage One and that any children who have gaps in their knowledge continue to receive this high-quality phonics teaching and assessment into Key Stage Two. Our Phonics Assessment grids help us to identify any children who need extra support with their phonic knowledge throughout the school.

### **Assessment of Phonics**

Assessment tracking grids for children's phonic knowledge are set up in the Early Years Foundation Stage and then follow the children throughout the school until they leave at the end of Key Stage Two. These grids are completed by the class teacher for individual children at the end of each term and provide a detailed analysis of which stage (Jolly Phonics) the children are working at, indicating which letter sounds are secure and which are not. These grids track the children as they progress through their phonics in both reading and writing. They also assess decodable and tricky word recognition.

Alongside this phonics assessment teachers should also assess children's sight vocabulary using the high frequency word lists. Children must be able to read these words quickly from memory without the need for word building.

## **6.) Approaches to Reading**

Reading is a very important life skill as well as being a source of pleasure, enjoyment and enrichment. At Thornhill Primary School we aim to equip children with skills that will enable them to access the curriculum and foster an interest in reading to enrich their personal and working lives.

In learning to read, children need to use a range of cues. We actively encourage our children to become enthusiastic and independent readers by providing them initially with a range of decodable books, matched to their phonic ability and then they progress onto a wide variety of quality graded texts, 'real' books, electronic texts, comics and magazines.

The 2014 National Curriculum splits reading into two clear sections in the programme of study for reading;

### **Word Reading**

Skilled word reading involves both the speedy working out of the pronunciation of unfamiliar printed words (decoding) and the speedy recognition of familiar printed words. Underpinning both is the understanding that the letters on the page represent the sounds in spoken words. That is why phonics is emphasised in the early teaching of reading to our children when they start school.

### **Comprehension**

Good comprehension draws from linguistic knowledge and an understanding of the world. Comprehension skills develop through children's experience of high-quality discussion with the teacher, as well as from reading and discussing a range of stories, poems and non-fiction texts. All children must be encouraged to develop their knowledge of themselves and the world in which they live, to

establish an appreciation and love of reading and to gain knowledge across the curriculum.

In all Key Stage Two classes the children have a weekly taught comprehension lesson using a range of quality texts and extracts from the Nelson Comprehension Scheme. Also, all Key Stage Two children have four guided comprehension sessions per week (Monday to Thursday) based around the Project X reading scheme, using a class set of books and Schofield and Sims Complete Comprehension. While in addition to this, Year Four, Five and Six complete an intensive comprehension skills taught programme called Comprehension Express in the Autumn term, which is completed by the end of Spring half term.

In Key Stage One currently all children have a weekly guided reading session in a small group with their class teacher, as well as sessions with additional support from additional class teachers and support assistants. This system ensures that for four days a week (Monday to Thursday) all children take part in a daily adult led session. Here the children focus primarily on phonics, word recognition and reading fluency, but undertake early comprehension tasks as appropriate also.

While class texts are also used as an opportunity to further develop comprehension skills as they focus on reading text aloud, questioning, discussion and the identification and extension of vocabulary.

In the Early Years Foundation Stage children have up to five stories read to them each day. This develops early comprehension skills as well as ensuring that all children can share a daily story with an adult as some do not get this opportunity at home.

In Years One and Two children always have a story read to them at least twice a day, from a range of genres and quality authors. These texts will often be at a level beyond that which the children can read themselves and include our 'Inside Out Books and Rhymes.

### **Vocabulary**

All children from Year One onwards have a vocabulary section in their personal planner in which they are encouraged to collect good words that they come across during their reading. They also record definitions of new words here to support their comprehension.

Teachers should always discuss the meaning of new vocabulary and encourage the children to ask if they are unsure of the meaning of a word. This section of the planner should be monitored periodically to ensure children are collecting new vocabulary.

### **Reading Books**

Once children can blend and segment some CVC words orally and they can recognise some of the first set of tricky words they will receive their first reading book along with a certificate of their achievement.

We use the Oxford Reading Tree and Rigby Star schemes supplemented with Usbourne books. We extend our most able children with a range of quality 'real' books and support our less able readers with books which are carefully matched to both their reading age and their interest level.

All pupils have a protective plastic reading bag in which to keep their reading books and planner. Children are expected to read for between 20 to 30 minutes each night to parents (dependent upon age) who are asked to sign and comment in the reading diary section of the planner. Reading books are changed regularly and planners are

monitored at least three times per week, with targets from guided sessions added, to ensure that children are reading at home.

Teachers to ensure that a written comment is made every week in the planner and a target for development can also be included.

### **Guided Reading / Comprehension**

Across school there is a daily timetabled 30-minute session for reading in each class (Monday to Friday).

In Key Stage One children read every day, with at least one focused session with their class teacher per week. During these daily sessions the children are split into four or five groups of similar ability and reading age so that tasks can be tailored to individual needs. In Year One the focus is furthering phonic ability, developing word decoding, word recognition and reading fluency, together with very early comprehension. While in Year Two there is still a focus on phonics and word reading with greater development of comprehension skills such as information retrieval and simple inference.

In Key Stage One we use Rigby Star and from stage 7 OUP Project X as the core reading schemes alongside Oxford Reading Tree.

In Key Stage Two the children also have a 30-minute timetabled daily session (Monday to Friday) where a range of learning opportunities are facilitated e.g teacher led guided comprehension sessions based on OUP Project X, Comprehension Express, Schofield and Sims Complete Comprehension, Nelson Comprehension extension tasks and KS2 SAT papers.

## See Appendix A Guided Reading Procedures

### Reading Scheme Stages

Children progress through the reading scheme up to a predetermined point in each year group and then they move onto quality free choice books matched to their year group and Lexile level, which are stored within each classroom in Free Choice Box A.

For lower achieving readers there is also a Free Choice Box B which contains books which are of high interest but low reading ability. These books are also often printed on dyslexia friendly yellow paper.

Year Group	Read on the scheme up to the end of level
Reception	4
Year 1	7/8
Year 2	11
Year 3	14
Year 4	16
Year 5	18
Year 6	20

## **Assessment**

- Formative assessment is made during each teacher led guided sessions and is recorded on the guided comprehension planning form. This informs planning and enables the teacher to write weekly reading targets in each child's personal planner.
- Staff use the Durham LA reading assessment grids to record evidence to facilitate the updating on the NC statements on the Arbour tracking system.
- From Year 1 to Year 6 children complete termly Cornerstone reading tests to track reading development and progression. This data is also used to update the NC statements on the Arbour tracking system each term and to help set individual pupil termly targets.
  
- CEM InCas are used in September to give a baseline reading age for each child from Year 1 to Year 6. While the statutory baseline assessment is used in Reception class to recode entry points.

## **7.) Approaches to Spelling**

We believe spelling is successful at Thornhill Primary School because it is given 'high status' with a clear expectation that it is a skill which must be mastered and should be correct. This is articulated to pupils, staff and parents from the head teacher and the message is reinforced by all staff.

**Key points:**

- At the beginning of each year, in all year groups, the 100 high frequency words are assessed and any incorrect words taught and learnt.
- Pupils are then assessed on the Schonell spelling lists and allocated a differentiated group to meet their learning need. Schonell is a structured, progressive list and it forms the main body of our weekly spelling lists.
- All classes have a weekly taught spelling lesson on a Monday. A proportion of their weekly spelling list words match the spelling rule taught and so reinforce the rule.
- A record of tricky words for the class to spell, generated from marking, NC words and topic words is kept (class target sheet) and these are added to the weekly spelling list.
- Daily dedicated time in school to learn spellings and reinforce their use in sentences (grammar) 8.45 – 9.00 during registration.
- KS2 children have access to an online application to help reinforce and learn weekly spellings called Doodle Spelling. Each class has at least two 30-minute sessions per week to use this app and as well as the additional Doodle English app as required.
- Time at home to learn spellings. Spelling lists are written in the planner and emailed to parents, also weekly scores are recorded here to engage parents and enable them to support children with their spelling at home and keep track of their child's progress.
- Incorrect weekly spellings in the test are addressed on a one-to-one basis in extra learning time with the class teacher.
- Spellings are monitored and checked across all written work, including mathematics, and incorrect spellings are corrected and practised \*3, \*5, \*10. This ensures that the correct spelling is applied in written work and spellings are not just

learnt for a test and then forgotten. They are highlighted in work as follows;

sp. because (\*3)

- Prize incentives - our children are rewarded each term for gaining 100% in weekly spelling tests, with a significant prize and recognition at the end of the year for anyone who has 100% over the whole year.
- The children in KS1 are given a model to copy so that they do not get into incorrect spelling habits which require over learning to correct.

Our system is rigorous and structured with links across the whole curriculum. Our pupils are given the time, support, incentive and expectation to succeed, and they do.

## **8.) Approaches to Writing**

In the early stages of writing instruction, we focus immediately on establishing the correct pencil grip, letter formation, writing sitting on the line and accurate spelling (no emergent writing) from Reception except for opportunities for free writing in extended provision.

Children learn graphemes alongside phonemes and copy on top and underneath before writing them independently. The same method is used for the high frequency words.

Children are also encouraged to dictate sentences during guided writing lessons. The teacher will then scribe the dictated sentence for the child to write on top of or underneath.

The aim is correct, accurate letter formation, handwriting and spelling right from the beginning, avoiding the development of learned and practised mistakes which can happen with emergent writing and phonetically plausible attempts.

This system continues into Year One where the expectation is two or three correct sentences and then moving towards short paragraphs, still guided by the teacher, in Year Two.

From Year Three to Year Six writing becomes more independent and time is spent teaching the children the features of each text genre. All children have a weekly extended writing session, although the drafting book is also be used to develop short, specific sections, building to a final piece over several sessions.

Children write for a range of purposes and audiences. Class texts are used as sources of inspiration for writing as well as writing linked to other areas of the curriculum. Reference Appendix B Progression in Class Texts and Appendix C Class Text Year Group Allocation.

Our writing curriculum is underpinned by the Talk for Writing Process where a text is selected and analysed and internalised so that the children become very familiar with the structure and vocabulary. Next it is innovated, here shared and guided writing can be used to help children to create their own version based on the original model. Finally, children can write their own version of the text type.

Our aim is high quality written work, and we prefer a lower volume of separate pieces of writing, rather encouraging drafting, editing and redrafting until a quality final piece is produced.

The impact of our rigorous, structured approach is children who are confident in all areas of writing, children who have the 'tools in the

tool box' to be 'secondary ready', children who can build upon the basic foundation secured at primary school and who are ready to be successful writers when they move into Year Seven.

### **9.) Approaches to Handwriting**

We believe developing a fluent, efficient handwriting style is critical. Children must develop their fluency in handwriting to the point it becomes automatic, this will enable them to concentrate on the content of their writing rather than the process of writing. Whenever possible the link between handwriting and spelling must be reinforced as children set up muscle memory patterns when spelling words and these need to be accurate. Handwriting at Thornhill Primary School is given 'high status' with a clear expectation that it is a skill which must be mastered and should be correct. This is articulated to pupils, staff and parents from the head teacher and the message is reinforced by all staff.

#### **Key points:**

- Tree tops - occupational health intervention - gross and fine motor programmes for target children. Need to have secure gross motor skills before we can develop and refine fine motor skills.
- Children are taught to sit correctly in postural chairs with both feet on the floor and to angle paper appropriately for left or right handers.
- Children use sharp pencils, larger grip pencils in Nursery and Reception for writing and colouring, moving to regular pencils in Year 1 and 2 - staff have electric pencil sharpeners to keep pencils sharp and avoid time wasting.

- Children can gain a pen licence from Year 3 onwards. They are given a school pen with fibre nib therefore still some resistance, like a pencil. Children are not allowed to bring in pens and pencils from home to use in school.
- Nursery - emphasis on prewriting skills, painting, mark making with different mediums - left to right orientation, finger and hand strength with play dough (dough gym), cutting skills, hand eye coordination.
- Reception - hand eye coordination, continue with finger strength exercises. Teach, monitor and insist on correct tripod grip -targeted daily colouring sheet, completed by every child in the class linked to phonics insist on correct colours, within the line, no white spaces and it is sent home to parents. Graphemes are taught (see phonics folder) alongside the sounds, correct formation, rainbow letters and teach all children to sit letters on the line from the start. Write name on every piece of work, use of yellow pen to overwrite, underwrite always giving children the perfect model to copy - no emergent writing.
- Year One continue with hand and eye and finger strength (see resource box) and daily practise linked to phonics.
- Year One to Six - weekly timetabled handwriting lesson. Supported by the Collins scheme which has strong links to spelling, punctuation, and grammar as well as links to poetry to learn by rote, classic fiction extracts and nonfiction tasks such as letter writing.
- Initially, at the beginning of term lower- and upper-case letters revised in formation groups e.g. c based, r based (see sheet) in handwriting book, also number formation.

- Specific interventions are given as required e.g. Tree tops, Right from the Start, the Teodorescu Perceptuo Motor Programme.

Our system is rigorous and structured with links to spelling, punctuation and grammar. Correct posture, pencil grip, letter and number formation are monitored and insisted upon across the whole curriculum. Children are given correct models to copy right from the start so that errors are not practised and embedded.

## **10.) Library**

Children currently can loan one library book per week. We have a well-stocked library with an excellent selection of election of Infant and Junior fiction books as well as non-fiction books and magazine subscriptions.

10.1) Nursery Library - Our nursery children and families have access to a weekly story sack which contains a quality text with a range of props and games to enrich the reading experience.

10.2) Reception Library - our Reception children and families have access to a weekly story lending library where parents are encouraged to share 'bedtime stories' rich in language to develop experience and vocabulary.

## **11. Cross- Curricular Links and Computing**

Computing makes a very valuable contribution to the teaching of English. We have a range of specific online platforms to develop English and spelling, and staff use QR codes to direct pupils to safe and reliable sources of information for written projects. Computing also enables our children to produce professional documents and presentations, films and podcasts to showcase their written work.

## **12. Assessment for Learning and Target Setting**

Our teachers assess the children's work in English in line with the Assessment Policy.

Informal formative judgements are continuously made, as teachers observe interactions during lessons and mark pupil work. Pink highlighter (I love it pen!) is used to identify elements which demonstrate that the WALT for the lesson is secure. While, corrections and challenges are added to written work to embed and extend learning.

Formal assessments are used at the start of the year using CEM and this data is used for target setting. Then at three further points in the year formal assessment are undertaken using the Cornerstone Assessment materials for Reading and SPaG. Written work is formally assessed at four points across the year against the schools writing assessment grids. While phonics is assessed across the whole school as required at termly intervals.

We report pupil achievements in English to parents each year at parent's evenings and with two written reports, an interim report and a summative report.

## **13.) English and Inclusion**

We teach English to all children, regardless of their ability. Our teachers provide learning opportunities matched to the individual needs of children with learning difficulties. Intervention can lead to the creation of a support plan and when teaching English teachers must consider the targets set for children in their support plans, some of which maybe specific to English.

For gifted and talented pupils teachers will provide additional opportunities for mastery and for pupils to take responsibility for their own learning through the development of leadership skills, creative thinking and individual projects.

#### **14.) Equal Opportunities**

All children are provided with equal access to the English curriculum. We aim to provide suitable leaning opportunities regardless of gender, ethnicity or background.

#### **15.) Resources**

We have a wide range of high-quality teaching resources both paper and online based. Some resources are stored centrally while others can be located within classrooms.

Professional Development	Creating Storytellers and Writers - Pie Corbett Teaching English in Primary School - Letts English for Primary Teachers - Letts
English Texts / Resource Books / online subscriptions	NLS Grammar for Writing NLS Developing Early Writing Jolly Phonics Handbook PNS Letters and Sounds NLS Progression in Phonics

	<p>NLS Spelling Bank</p> <p>Jolly Grammar Handbooks 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5</p> <p>Collins Primary Focus Handwriting</p> <p>Write from the Start (Teodorescu Motor Programme)</p> <p>Collins Primary Focus Grammar and Punctuation</p> <p>Nelson Grammar</p> <p>Grammar Success - Pie Corbett</p> <p>Jumpstart Grammar - Pie Corbett</p> <p>Nelson Comprehension</p> <p>Schofield and Simms Comprehension</p> <p>Schofield and Simms Complete Comprehension</p> <p>Oxford Comprehension Success</p> <p>Oxford Comprehension Express Year 4-6</p> <p>Improving Comprehension -Andrew Brodie</p> <p>Read and Respond and Cornerstone Classics - linked to class novel</p> <p>Wide selection of Big Books and Story Sacks.</p> <p>library books</p> <p>Eco Schools Magazine subscription</p> <p>Reading scheme resources</p>
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### **16.) Monitoring and review**

The planning and coordination of the teaching of English are the responsibly of the English subject lead who also;

- supports colleagues in their teaching, by keeping informed about current developments in the subject and by providing a strategic lead and direction for English;
- gives the head teacher an annual curriculum development plan, aligned to the SIP to support future developments;
- use specifically allocated SAD time to undertake lesson observations, work scrutiny, review the English provision across the school and undertake Governor monitoring visits.

### **17.) Parental Involvement**

Parents play a vital role in the development of English skills. We aim to foster strong home-school partnerships regarding reading, initially by using our pupil planners as a tool for communication between home and school and by encouraging parents to record daily reading and to support vocabulary development and monitor weekly spelling scores. Parents are also invited to annual Parent Events such as the Autumn Term Meet the teacher sessions and the class assembly which is based on reading and significant authors.

### **18.) Policy Review**

This policy will be reviewed at least biannually.

Mrs. J. M. Jones English subject lead.

Date: September 2025

## Appendix A

### Guided Reading Procedures

Reception	Monday to Thursday - Phonic split three adult led groups. Friday consolidation and assessment.
Year One	Monday to Thursday - adult led guided reading session to include phonics using Rigby Star. Friday - reading for pleasure
Year Two	Monday to Thursday - adult led guided reading using Rigby Star and from Stage 7 Project X Friday - one guided group and reading for pleasure activities.
Year Three	Monday to Thursday - adult led guided reading Project X using a whole class set. Friday - phonics session.
Year Four	Monday to Thursday - adult led guided sessions using Comprehension Express up to Spring Half Term. Then move onto Project X whole class set.
Year Five	Monday to Thursday - adult led guided sessions using Comprehension Express up to Spring Half Term. Then move onto Project X whole class set.

Year Six	<p>Monday to Thursday - adult led guided sessions using Comprehension Express up to Spring Half Term. Then complete practice KS2 SAT papers.</p> <p>After SATS move onto Project X whole class set.</p>

## Appendix Two

### Class text book progression

- **Year One** – book choices show clear progression from familiar picture book to orally chant, to a classic story and then a humorous story.
- **Year Two** – texts are longer, we introduce chapter books with language to support specific writing techniques such as alliteration and dialogue.
- **Year Three** - longer books with more complex language features e.g. similes in the Iron Man and a longer diverse, contemporary book. Good links to science and history e.g. Mary Anning biography.
- **Year Four** – books with strong female leads e.g. Matilda and Little People Dream Big series to focus on people such as Martin Luther King to compliment Black History Month.
- **Year Five** – classic fiction which is multi-layered e.g. Lion Witch and Wardrobe which has links to the Creation and Easter stories, good for metaphors, female leads.
- **Year Six** – Shakespeare chosen to enhance transition to secondary school and contemporary poetry to develop understanding of variety in living situations e.g. Overheard in a Tower Block, to highlight life in inner cities.

## **Appendix C**

### **Class Text Year Group Allocation**