



CHALLENGE CHECKLIST

January 2026

Key Performance Indicators

English Hubs are responsible for supporting schools and leaders in ensuring that Reception and Year 1 pupils in Partner Schools, and in particular the lowest progress pupils, meet the Key Performance Indicators for reading and language development.

Aims of the Hubs' Programme

1. To ensure all pupils make speedy progress in phonics and reading

Pupils' progress in reading is dependent upon both the speedy working out of the pronunciation of unfamiliar printed words (decoding) and the speedy recognition of familiar printed words.

2. To develop pupils' understanding and use of spoken language

Pupils' vocabulary, grammar, understanding of the world, and their ability to communicate effectively depend upon the quality and variety of language they hear and the opportunities they have to speak and interact, in particular with adults. The frequency, depth and quality of these exchanges are fundamental to this progress. Good reading comprehension draws upon this linguistic knowledge.

3. To develop pupils' love of reading

Reading widely and sharing books feeds pupils' imagination, their vocabulary and knowledge of the world. Pupils' progress at school is dependent on the breadth and frequency of the books they have read to them and the books they read for themselves: the more they read and have opportunities to talk about what they read, the more words, people and worlds they encounter and understand.

To achieve these three aims, partner schools must be *'determined that every pupil will learn to read, regardless of their background, needs or abilities. All pupils, including the weakest readers, [must] make sufficient progress to meet or exceed age-related expectations.'*

Schools Inspection Handbook (SIH) May 2019 p87: 293.

Note: First criteria to be addressed are in green text.

A. Teach with fidelity to an SSP programme

'The school's phonics programme matches or exceeds the expectations of the national curriculum and the early learning goals. The school has clear expectations of pupils' phonics progress term-by-term, from Reception to Year 2.' SIH p87: 293.

The partner school leadership team is confident that their chosen SSP programme will ensure success for *all* pupils.. They adopt one systematic synthetic phonics (SSP) programme that

they teach with fidelity, consistency and continuity. Leaders have discussed the barriers and challenges with staff before they commit to becoming a partner school.

The leadership team ensure that:

Training

1. SSP training and CPD is booked with an accredited training provider.
2. The SSP provider shows teachers how to teach the lowest progress pupils to read, including those with SEND.

Resources

3. The SSP programme sets out daily expectations for teaching the NC elements listed below.
4. Correct resources are particular to the SSP programme (flashcards, sound charts, friezes, sound and word cards, cumulative texts).

Teaching

5. Sufficient time is given to teach phonics, reading and writing.
6. Teachers and TAs (who are teaching reading) understand the specific activities in the SSP programme.
7. Teachers and TAs teach these activities confidently.
8. Teachers pay particular attention to pupils who fall behind during SSP lessons.
9. The pace of teaching is not slowed for pupils who fall behind.
10. Teaching takes place in a quiet space.

Progress and assessment

11. There are clear term-by-term expectations of progress from Reception to Y2.
12. The reading leader/ class teacher assesses pupils using an individual termly/half termly reading assessment to record letter-sound knowledge and word reading (using assessments in the SSP programme).
13. Half-termly SSP assessment data for all pupils on roll YR-Y2 is submitted to your English Hub by the specified dates.
14. Assessments are used to organise pupils efficiently to maximise progress.

NC 2014 Year 1 Word reading, spelling and handwriting (*additional to NC)

Pupils are taught:

Reading

1. Respond speedily with the correct sound to graphemes (letters or groups of letters) for all 40+ phonemes, including, where applicable, alternative sounds for graphemes.
2. Blend spoken sounds into words* (oral blending).
3. Read accurately by blending sounds in unfamiliar words containing GPCs that have been taught.
4. Read common exception words, noting unusual correspondences between spelling and sound.
5. Read aloud accurately books that are consistent with their developing phonic knowledge and that do not require them to use other strategies to work out words.
6. Re-read these books to build up their fluency and confidence in word reading.

Building Fluency

7. Teachers decide how to organise pupils into groups so they can practise reading a 'decodable' book or text. This might be within the main class or group phonic lesson, or in groups throughout the day
8. Teachers share with pupils how they plan to read aloud a text, showing how they decide the best words to emphasise, the pace, the voices, pauses and how they use punctuation to help them
9. Pupils apply fluency skills, by asking them to work with a partner to prepare a short text, poem, or part of a text to read aloud or to perform to the class.
10. Use strategies such as echo reading, where the teacher reads a text aloud sentence by sentence or line by line and pupils echo the teacher's reading, copying its pace, intonation and emphasis or choral reading where pupils can be allotted different lines to practise reading together.
11. Develop comprehension through pupils' experience of high-quality discussion with the teacher, as well as from reading and discussing a range of stories, poems and non-fiction.

Handwriting

12. Sit correctly at a table, holding a pencil comfortably and correctly.
13. Form lower-case letters in the correct direction, starting and finishing in the right place.

Spelling

14. Spell words containing each of the 40+ GPCs already taught by:
 - Writing letters in response to hearing a sound*
 - Segmenting and encoding to spell words.

Writing

15. Write sentences by saying out loud what they are going to write about; composing a sentence orally before writing it; sequencing sentences to form short narratives; re-reading what they have written to check that it makes sense.
16. Respond to dictation from the teacher, practising writing words in sentences that include only the GPCs and exception words they have learnt.
17. Build compositional skills upon a strong foundation of transcriptional fluency.

B. Make a strong start in Reception

'Reading, including the teaching of systematic, synthetic phonics, is taught from the beginning of Reception' SIH 2019.

Reception teachers:

1. Timetable daily SSP lessons from the second week in reception.
2. Ensure at least 20 minutes is given to teaching of phonics, reading and writing right from the start, building to at least 60 minutes by the end of the year (this may be one session or organised throughout the day).
3. Follow the same SSP programme as Y1 and Y2.
4. Know how to cope with 'staggered' starts.
5. Identify pupils who are falling behind, by the third week in school using the SSP assessment tracker.
6. Give all pupils practise in reading letter-sound correspondences and oral sound-blending a few times each day.

7. Give daily extra practice to pupils falling behind in a small group or individually.
8. Ensure extra practice matches the school's SSP programme.
9. Display the necessary friezes and charts for the SSP programme so all pupils can see it, the teacher can refer to it and is accessible to pupils throughout the day.
10. Ensure all pupils sit where they can see the teacher and resources during SSP lessons.
11. Teach SSP in a quiet space to help pupils focus in lessons.
12. Set up frequent meetings to show parents how to help their children practise reading sounds and words at home.

C. Resources and Parent Engagement

'The sequence of reading books shows a cumulative progression in phonics knowledge that is matched closely to the school's phonics programme. Teachers give pupils sufficient practice in reading and re-reading books that match the grapheme-phoneme correspondences they know, both at school and at home.' SIH p87: 293.

Leaders ensure that:

1. Decodable reading books are organised in the given sequence in their chosen SSP programme i.e. reading books build letter-sound correspondences cumulatively. Books are *not* sorted by traditional 'Book-Banding' criteria based on a mix of methods, i.e. sequential 'decodable' books are not mixed with texts that rely on repetition, prediction and 'look and say'.
2. Pupils read texts/books that closely match the letter-sound correspondences they can read at home as well as in school.
3. These texts/books contain few exception words, as listed in the school's SSP programme.
4. Pupils are *not* asked to read books that require them to guess words or deduce meaning from pictures, grammar or context clues, or taught words using whole word recognition.
5. Pupils practise sounding out the words in the story and read exception words before they read the text/book.
6. Pupils falling behind are given extra practice to re-read these texts/books.
7. Pupils continue to read books in a progressive sequence until they can decode unfamiliar words confidently.
8. As soon as pupils can read unfamiliar words confidently, they read wider literature and no longer read books in the school's levelled reading programme.
9. Teachers keep records of the books pupils read in school and at home.
10. Pupils practise reading books at home once they have read them at school.
11. Parents are informed of the SSP programme adopted: what is taught and how they could provide extra practice to develop fluency; how the school will provide extra practice to prevent serious problems developing.
12. Parents know how to increase their children's fluency in reading sounds, words and books, at each point in their children's learning.
13. Teachers provide extra reading practice for pupils who do not practise at home.
14. Parents understand the difference between stories to share and stories that children read aloud.
15. Set up frequent meetings to show parents how to help their children practise reading sounds and words at home.

D. Build a team of expert reading teachers

'The school has developed sufficient expertise in the teaching of phonics and reading.' SIH p87: 293.

The headteacher:

1. Has appointed a reading leader with expertise in and experience of teaching phonics.
2. Gives the reading leader dedicated time to fulfil the role (see below).
3. Ensures all grades of management (including the headteacher), teachers and teaching assistants attend the SSP provider's training.
4. Ensures that SSP training is provided for new staff.

The reading leader:

1. Meets frequently with the headteacher to discuss the impact of each teacher on pupils' progress, particularly the pupils who are not meeting age related expectations.
2. Uses the *SSP practice map* to plan activities for teachers to practise.
3. Uses assessment data of pupils not achieving expected to decide areas for practice.
4. Timetables practice times (weekly if possible) and ensures all reading teachers attend.
5. Knows how to run practice sessions.
6. Coaches reading teachers (who need extra support) during SSP lessons.
7. Coaches reading teachers who support pupils who have fallen behind.
8. Keeps a record of all practice and coaching sessions.

E. Reach the children who are not meeting age related expectations

'The ongoing assessment of pupils' phonics progress is sufficiently frequent and detailed to identify any pupil who is falling behind the programme's pace. If they do fall behind, targeted support is given immediately.' SIH p87: 293.

The reading leader:

1. Ensures SSP lessons are of the highest standard to reduce the number of pupils who need extra support.
2. Uses the programme's SSP assessment to identify immediately pupils falling behind.
3. Organises extra daily practice for pupils falling behind, following the school's SSP programme.
4. Supports and monitors interventions closely and the impact on pupil's progress is evaluated regularly.
5. Builds a profile of pupils receiving extra support (SEND, EAL, speech delay, attendance, time in school, previous teaching).
6. Provides regular CPD for teachers in both the content and teaching manner to support pupils falling behind.
7. Fast tracks late-entry pupils to catch up with their peers.
8. Designates a member of staff to improve attendance for these pupils.
9. Engages the support of parents, where appropriate.
10. Provides extra practice for pupils who need support in developing fluency.

F. Talking and Listening

'High quality adult-child interactions are important and sometimes described as talking with children rather than just talking to children. Adults have a vital role to play in modelling effective language and communication.' EEF Preparing for Literacy, June 2018.

Headteachers:

1. Plan and deliver Early Language CPD across the year.
2. Ensure a member of senior / middle leadership has an up to date understanding of Communication and Language.
3. Have appointed a Communication and Language Lead with expertise in Early Years Development.
4. Ensure the lead has time to fulfil the role.
5. Ensure all staff involved in supporting Early Language development are appropriately trained.
6. Organise for systematic ways to share best practice for supporting communication throughout the school.

Teachers:

7. Identify pupils with delayed language acquisition quickly and organise frequent, sustained one-to-one and small group discussion for these pupils.
8. Are confident in identifying a child's skill gaps in speech, language and communication (speech, content, use, form)
9. Assess pupil's progress and teaching is planned to ensure all pupils achieve age related expectations
10. Timetable time for staff to engage with pupils during periods of play / activities which facilitate pupil-led communication
11. Provide appropriate resources that encourage interaction / talk for guided activities.
12. Teach pupils to follow clear expectations for partner, class and group discussion including:
 - listening behaviours
 - routines for talking with a partner
 - routines for giving feedback to the group
13. Organise activities and discussions for pupils to learn and use new vocabulary throughout the day, in each area of learning appropriate to age related expectations
14. Model how to use new vocabulary and syntax through the day by using words and phrases relevant to the area of learning, deliberately, systematically and repeatedly.
15. Help pupils articulate their ideas and thoughts in well-formed sentences by:
 - using a level of language which is appropriate to the age and ability of children
 - using simple and correct language with the correct use of grammar and form
 - building sentences orally and rephrasing what they say
 - teaching new vocabulary before a given activity
 - modelling how they think out loud to embed thinking skills and model language and vocabulary
 - model speaking in different contexts / in approaching different activities
 - asking questions to check pupils' understanding
 - allowing time to think and respond
 - extending their ideas
 - provide running commentaries to support longer interactions / play
 - asking both closed and open questions.

Assessment:

16. There are clear expectations of progress from Nursery (if appropriate) through to Y1 in Communication and Language
17. Staff regularly collect speech samples from children.
18. Progress and achievement in speech, language and communication is assessed.

Learning rhymes, poems and songs

Teachers:

1. Timetable a ten-minute rhyme and singing session every day.
2. Have a list of traditional and contemporary poems and rhymes for children to listen to and learn.
3. Have a list of songs that will develop pupils' vocabulary.
4. Show enjoyment and use voice and manner to emphasise words and phrases, particularly those that rhyme and word play.
5. Help pupils to join in with refrains and learn some verses by heart.

G. Listening Comprehension and Language

'Stories, poems, rhymes and non-fiction are chosen for reading to develop pupils' vocabulary, language comprehension and love of reading. Pupils are familiar with and enjoy listening to a wide range of stories, poems, rhymes and non-fiction.' SIH p87: 293.

Headteachers:

1. Plan and deliver Reading for Pleasure CPD across the year.
2. Continue to develop staff knowledge of children's texts appropriate to their class / cohort.

Teachers:

Reading Aloud

1. Timetable a daily 20-minute storytime.
2. High quality Reading for Pleasure fiction, non-fiction, graphic novels and poems are planned across the year and across year groups to ensure a diverse range of texts are covered.
3. Provide a library area where children have access to a range of diverse and inclusive high quality texts by new and traditional authors.
4. Staff are aware of strategies of how to encourage informal book talk at opportune moments across the day / week.
5. If following Talk Through Stories, timetable a daily 10-minute 'Vocabulary time'.
6. Show enjoyment of each story using their voice and manner to make the meaning clear.
7. Read aloud, re-read and talk about stories to build familiarity and understanding.
8. Each class has allocated time to read independently.
9. Staff engage in ways to get to know their children as readers.
10. Teach new vocabulary in the context of the story.
11. Provide extra small group storytimes for pupils with delayed language acquisition.
12. Help pupils retell the story and take on different roles in imaginative play.
13. Organise appealing book corners.
14. Show parents how to read aloud and talk about stories with their children and send home quality books.

Non-fiction books

Teachers:

1. Read aloud non-fiction books that will extend their knowledge of the world and illustrate a current topic.
2. Make books with photographs and narratives of everyday events and activities, and places they have visited.
3. Talk about these books with pupils, introducing specific vocabulary and building sentences orally.
4. Read and re-read these books so pupils learn to use the language necessary to explain

what is happening in each illustration/ photograph.

5. Make the books available for pupils to share at school and at home.