International School of London

Primary School Phonics Policy

Date reviewed:
August 2026

To be reviewed:
August 2027

Mission statement

Since 1972, we have established a welcoming and inclusive community. Our diverse cultures and languages drive all our learning experiences. We nurture creativity and curiosity to stimulate deep thinking. We foster insight, compassion and resilience to enable us to play a meaningful part in a changing world.

Vision statement

We celebrate our stories, our worth and our purpose to make a difference in a shared world. At the International School of London, we believe in: Empowering students to maximize their learning opportunities and to fulfil their potential. Actively integrating cultural diversity in the curriculum. Creating inclusive, vibrant and innovative learning communities. Offering a diverse and extensive international programme that supports personal, social and professional growth.

Relevant policies:

- Assessment Policy
- Learning Support and SEND Policy
- Teaching and Learning Policy
- Online Safety Policy

1. Aims

ISL London strives to ensure that all children become successful, fluent readers and believe this is achievable through a combination of strong, high quality, and systematic phonics teaching that is supported by integrated literacy practices across the curriculum.

This policy is aimed at reinforcing a consistent, high-quality approach to the teaching of phonics across the Early Years, lower primary and into upper primary for those students who still need further support.

We aim to:

- Provide an environment that supports students to use their full linguistic repertoire, leveraging the use of their home language as they develop their English language proficiency as they develop their speaking, listening, reading and writing skills.
- Teach children aural discrimination, phonemic awareness and rhyme to aid reading, writing and spelling development.
- Encourage the use of segmenting and blending so that decoding skills provide a sound foundation for reading, writing and spelling.
- Ensure the teaching of phonics is lively, interactive and investigative.
- Enable children to use phonic awareness across the curriculum.
- Ensure that children know the 44 phonemes within the English language.
- Teach children to recognise the graphemes within words and associate them with the appropriate phoneme when reading.
- Provide children with strategies to identify and decode irregular spelled words that do not follow the typical phonics patterns.

Our objectives in providing a high-quality phonics programme is to:

- Provide consistent, high quality phonics teaching tailored to the individual needs of our students to ensure they have a strong foundation upon which to tackle the complex processes of reading and writing.
- Ensure that the teaching of phonics is systematic and progressive from early years through primary for those children needing interventions to support phonetic knowledge and understanding.
- Ensure that children have sound phonetic knowledge, understanding and skills so that they can decode words confidently and engage with higher order reading and writing skills.

2. Planning and Delivery:

AT ISL we believe that phonics teaching should be:

- **Systematic:** Students learn the relationships between the sounds (phonemes) of spoken language and the letter symbols (graphemes) of the written language.
- **Discrete:** Daily lessons teach discrete phonics skills following a research-based skill progression.
- **Interactive:** Students are provided with hands on activities to consolidate and apply their knowledge of phonemes, graphemes and sight words. Lessons include the use of songs, stories, games and real-life application of phonics skills.
- **Transferrable:** Students have authentic opportunities to transfer their phonics skills to reading and writing throughout the curriculum.
- **Engaging:** Lessons are student-centred and levelled appropriately to each child.

Planning:

The school takes a collaborative and developmentally responsive approach to early literacy, drawing on the scope and sequence of Little Wandle Letters and Sounds in EC and the University of Florida Literacy Institute (UFLI) framework in KG-Grade 5. Phonics instruction is carefully sequenced to support students as they build conceptual understandings about how language works, develop confidence as communicators, and apply new learning authentically in reading and writing contexts.

Recognising the linguistic diversity of our community, phonics instruction includes explicit modelling of phoneme articulation and sound production, providing targeted support for multilingual learners and students requiring additional intervention. Through differentiated learning experiences, students are supported in making connections between spoken and written language, fostering independence and agency in their literacy development.

Teachers engage in ongoing collaborative planning along with the PYP Coordinator and team members to ensure a coherent progression of learning and consistency of

practice across year levels. Student progress is monitored through shared tracking systems, enabling teachers to use assessment information to inform instruction, respond to individual learning needs, and align reading and writing experiences with students' developing phonological and literacy skills. This reflective and data-informed approach supports all students in achieving success as confident, capable, and lifelong learners.

Resources:

A range of developmentally appropriate resources supports the teaching and learning of phonics across the school, ensuring that all students can access learning at their current stage of development. In EC, teachers use the Little Wandle Letters and Sounds platform to access learning experiences, resources, and materials that strengthen connections between school and home learning. In KG-Grade 5, teachers draw on the UFLI framework to provide high-quality lesson materials, texts, and instructional resources that support systematic phonics development.

Classrooms are equipped with decodable texts that align with the school's phonics progression, enabling students to independently apply and transfer newly acquired skills in meaningful reading experiences. These resources support students in building confidence, fluency, and a sense of agency as readers. Home learning opportunities are intentionally connected to classroom instruction, fostering strong partnerships between school and families and providing students with additional opportunities to practise and consolidate their learning in authentic contexts.

Through the purposeful selection and use of resources, students are supported in developing as confident communicators who can apply their growing literacy skills across a range of learning experiences.

Lessons:

Phonics is taught through purposeful, daily learning experiences that support the development of foundational literacy skills and empower students as confident communicators. In EC through Grade 3, students participate in dedicated 30-40 minute phonics lessons each day. Students in Grades 3-5 who require additional support engage in targeted small-group phonics instruction, providing differentiated learning experiences that meet their individual needs and promote continued growth.

Learning experiences integrate phonemic awareness, auditory and visual discrimination, blending and segmenting, word study, and the application of skills through authentic reading and writing opportunities. Students actively engage as readers, writers, and spellers, enabling them to construct understanding, apply new learning, and develop increasing independence and confidence in their literacy journey.

Phonics learning is intentionally connected to broader language learning experiences whenever possible. Teachers support students in making meaningful connections between their phonics knowledge and their reading and writing workshops, helping them transfer skills across contexts and apply their learning in authentic and purposeful ways. Through ongoing practice, reflection, and application, students develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to communicate effectively and engage successfully with a variety of texts.

Classes:

Students are provided with phonics instruction that is responsive to their current stage of development and informed by ongoing assessment. Teachers use assessment data to identify students' strengths, needs, and next steps, ensuring that learning experiences are appropriately differentiated and targeted. Students are grouped flexibly according to their demonstrated phonics knowledge and understanding, recognising that literacy development occurs at different rates and that our diverse and internationally mobile student population brings a wide range of prior experiences and learning pathways.

Groupings are reviewed regularly and adjusted as needed to ensure students receive the support and challenge necessary for continued growth. Teachers may collaborate across grade-level classrooms to create flexible learning groups that maximize student engagement and meet individual learning needs. Teaching assistants, who receive ongoing professional learning in phonics instruction, play an active role in supporting student learning and facilitating small-group experiences.

When additional support is required, smaller intervention groups are established to provide targeted instruction and accelerate progress. This flexible and student-centred approach enables all learners to access instruction that is responsive,

inclusive, and aligned with their individual literacy journey, fostering confidence, agency, and success as communicators.

Supporting Newcomers:

The school recognises that students joining our community bring diverse linguistic backgrounds, prior experiences, and strengths as language learners. Newcomer students who are in the early stages of acquiring English receive targeted support designed to develop both their foundational literacy skills and their confidence as communicators. Learning experiences are responsive to individual language profiles and build on students' existing knowledge and understanding of language.

Students participate in differentiated phonics instruction that is tailored to their identified needs, ensuring equitable access to the wider curriculum and supporting successful participation in the life of the school. In Grades 3-5, newcomer students may engage in strategic, age-appropriate intervention using the UFLI framework, with a focus on accelerating language and literacy development while maintaining dignity and engagement for older learners.

Through ongoing assessment, collaboration between classroom teachers and support staff, and a strengths-based approach to multilingualism, students are supported in developing the skills, confidence, and agency needed to communicate effectively, access learning, and thrive within the PYP community.

3. Assessment and Intervention

Assessment

Assessment is viewed as an essential component of the teaching and learning process, informing instruction, supporting student growth, and promoting continuous improvement. Through ongoing assessment practices, teachers gather evidence of learning to identify strengths, monitor progress, determine next steps, and ensure that instruction is responsive to the individual needs of each learner. While students may participate in flexible phonics groups, the classroom teacher maintains responsibility for monitoring and supporting the literacy development of every student in their class.

Assessment for Learning

Assessment is embedded within daily teaching and learning experiences. Teachers gather evidence of student understanding through observations, conversations, conferencing, questioning, and the analysis of student work. This ongoing formative assessment enables teachers to adjust instruction, provide timely feedback, differentiate learning experiences, and support students in identifying their next steps as learners. Students are encouraged to reflect on their progress and develop increasing ownership and agency in their literacy development.

Assessment of Learning

Student achievement and progress in phonics are monitored through a range of assessments, including skill-based checks, benchmark assessments conducted throughout the year, and evidence gathered from authentic reading and writing experiences. These assessments provide insight into students' application of phonics knowledge and support teachers in evaluating growth over time.

A comprehensive literacy assessment programme is implemented across all grade levels to develop a holistic understanding of each learner’s literacy development. Assessment data is used collaboratively by teachers to inform planning, guide intervention and enrichment, identify trends, and ensure that all students receive the support and challenge needed to progress as confident, capable, and reflective communicators. Through this balanced approach, assessment serves to enhance learning, celebrate growth, and support success for every student.

Feedback:

Feedback is recognised as a vital element of the learning process, supporting student growth, reflection, and continuous improvement. Students receive timely, specific, and constructive feedback throughout their learning experiences, enabling them to understand their progress, celebrate successes, and identify meaningful next steps. Through ongoing dialogue with teachers, students are encouraged to reflect on their learning and develop increasing agency and responsibility for their literacy development.

Strong partnerships between school and home are fostered through regular communication about student learning. Families are provided with updates on their

child’s progress and achievement through conferences, reporting processes, and ongoing conversations that support a shared understanding of learning goals and development. This collaborative approach strengthens the connection between home and school and promotes student success.

To ensure continuity of learning, assessment information and insights about each learner's progress, strengths, and next steps are shared as part of transition processes between year levels and phases of the school. This enables teachers to build on prior learning and provide responsive support from the outset.

All students are assessed within their first six weeks of joining the school by their classroom teacher and/or English Language Learning (ELL) teacher. These assessments help develop a comprehensive understanding of each learner’s literacy profile, language development, and individual needs. Where additional support or intervention is identified, targeted learning plans and appropriate support structures are implemented to ensure equitable access to learning and continued progress. Through this responsive and student-centred approach, all learners are supported in developing as confident, capable, and successful communicators.

Identification and Intervention:

Assessment data is used collaboratively to ensure that every student receives the support and challenge needed to progress in their literacy development. Beginning-of-year and ongoing phonics assessment data is reviewed by teachers in partnership with curriculum leaders to identify patterns of achievement, monitor growth, and determine students who may benefit from additional support or targeted intervention. Students reading below grade-level expectations participate in phonics assessments to help identify their current understandings, strengths, and next steps within the phonics progression.

When assessment evidence indicates that a student requires additional support, intervention decisions are made on an individual basis and are responsive to each learner's specific needs. Wherever possible, support is provided within the classroom learning environment through targeted instruction delivered by the classroom teacher and teaching assistant. This may include brief daily review and practice opportunities designed to reinforce and consolidate previously taught skills.

For students requiring more intensive support, collaborative planning may involve additional intervention provided through the Student Support (SEN) and/or English Language Learning (ELL) teams. These interventions are informed by assessment data and are regularly monitored to ensure they are effective in accelerating student progress.

As an international school with a highly mobile student population, we recognise that learners join our community with a diverse range of educational experiences, language backgrounds, and literacy profiles. We therefore adopt a personalised and strengths-based approach to phonics instruction, meeting students where they are in their learning journey while maintaining alignment with the developmental progressions outlined in the UFLI and Little Wandle frameworks. Through responsive teaching, ongoing assessment, and collaborative support structures, all students are empowered to develop the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to become successful readers, writers, and communicators.

4. Home-School Connection

At ISL, we recognise that families are essential partners in the learning process and that meaningful collaboration between home and school strengthens student success. The development of phonological awareness, phonics knowledge, and early literacy skills is most effective when students experience consistent support across both learning environments. We are committed to building strong partnerships with parents by sharing information about our literacy programme, its goals, and practical strategies that families can use to support learning at home. This is achieved through ongoing communication, parent workshops, and opportunities for families to engage with their child’s literacy development.

To strengthen the connection between school and home learning, students in EC-Grade 2 take home decodable texts that are carefully aligned with their current phonics phase and instructional level. These texts provide authentic opportunities for students to practise and apply newly acquired skills, building confidence, fluency, and independence as readers. Students in Grades 3-5 who are participating in phonics intervention also receive access to appropriately matched decodable texts to reinforce and consolidate targeted learning goals.

By fostering collaborative partnerships with families and providing purposeful home-learning experiences, we create a supportive environment in which students can continue to develop as confident, capable, and motivated communicators. This shared commitment to literacy development reflects the PYP belief that learning is a collaborative process involving students, teachers, and families working together to support each learner's growth and success.

5. Professional Learning and Safeguarding

At ISL, we believe that high-quality literacy instruction is strengthened through continuous professional learning and collaboration. Teachers and teaching assistants engage in ongoing professional development and instructional coaching to build their understanding of evidence-based phonics practices, including the Little Wandle Letters and Sounds and UFLI frameworks. Professional learning focuses not only on programme implementation but also on the underlying principles of phonological awareness, phonics instruction, blending, segmenting, and effective literacy development, ensuring that teaching practices remain responsive, consistent, and student-centred.

All staff who support literacy learning are expected to develop a thorough understanding of the school's phonics approaches, resources, and instructional practices. Through the use of shared language, common instructional routines, and collaborative planning, educators provide a coherent learning experience that supports continuity and progression across year levels. This shared commitment promotes consistency for learners and contributes to equitable outcomes for all students.

In alignment with the values and philosophy of the PYP, educators are reflective practitioners who continually evaluate the impact of their teaching on student learning and wellbeing. Through collaboration, professional inquiry, and ongoing reflection, staff work together to create learning environments that support every student in developing as a confident, capable, and successful communicator.

Safeguarding and Student Wellbeing

At ISL, the wellbeing, safety, and dignity of every learner are at the centre of all decision-making and practice. Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is

a shared responsibility among all members of the school community. Every adult who works with students has a responsibility to contribute to a safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environment where children can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

Consistent with the child-centred philosophy of the PYP, all staff are expected to act in the best interests of students at all times, considering each learner's individual needs, rights, strengths, and circumstances. Through nurturing relationships, responsive support systems, and a commitment to student wellbeing, ISL fosters an environment in which every learner feels valued, respected, and empowered to achieve their full potential.

At ISL London, Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is everyone’s responsibility. Everyone who comes into contact with children and their families has a role to play. To fulfil this responsibility effectively, all practitioners should make sure their approach is child-centred. This means that they should consider, at all times, what is in the best interests of the child.