BENSHAM MANOR School

Reading Strategy 2026–2029

Last reviewed: September 2026

1. Vision and Purpose

At Bensham Manor School, reading is fundamental to communication, learning, independence and preparation for adulthood.

Every student is entitled to an ambitious reading curriculum. Expectations are not lowered because of SEND. Instead, teaching, resources and communication are adapted so that all students can access high-quality texts, develop independence and make meaningful progress from their individual starting points.

Reading teaching develops accuracy, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension so that students can access the full curriculum and become increasingly independent.

Reading provision is planned from each student's individual strengths, needs and aspirations, ensuring high expectations and equitable access to learning.

As a specialist secondary SEND school, we recognise that reading develops through different pathways and at different rates. For some students, reading may involve conventional print; for others, it may include symbols, photographs, objects of reference, electronic text, audible narration, Communication in Print, Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

Our ambition remains the same for every student: to develop communication and reading at the highest level possible from their individual starting point.

Our values of Safe, Ready and Kind underpin this strategy. Students should feel safe to attempt unfamiliar reading, ready to participate and supported with kindness, patience and encouragement.

This strategy sits beneath the school's Whole-School Literacy Policy. The policy establishes the school's principles and expectations; this strategy explains how these are implemented in practice.

This strategy explains how Bensham Manor School will:

- provide an ambitious and inclusive reading curriculum
- identify students' strengths and barriers accurately
- teach decoding, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension systematically
- provide targeted support for students who experience difficulty with reading
- make reading accessible to students with communication and learning needs
- develop reading across every curriculum subject
- promote reading for pleasure and personal interest
- prepare students to use reading confidently in everyday and adult life
- monitor the quality and impact of reading provision.

1.1 Strategic Priorities for 2026–2029

During the strategy period, Bensham Manor School will prioritise:

- establishing clear pathways from pre-reading through to independent and functional reading
- embedding consistent assessment of decoding, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension
- ensuring that Twinkl Phonics is delivered systematically.
- strengthening fluency teaching for students who can decode but do not yet read automatically
- developing explicit vocabulary and comprehension teaching across all subjects;
- identifying the specialist reading demands of each curriculum area;
- strengthening accessible provision for students who use AAC, symbols, Communication in Print and sensory approaches;
- evaluating the impact and suitability of Lexia, Accelerated Reader and myON;
- developing a visible and inclusive reading-for-pleasure culture;
- strengthening functional reading and preparation for adulthood;
- providing sustained professional development for staff;

● using assessment more precisely to match students to appropriate teaching and intervention.

The review will consider:

● changes in student need
● assessment and progress information
● staff training
● programme impact
● student and family feedback
● developments in national guidance and research
● school improvement priorities.

Operational details, programmes and assessment tools may change during the three-year period where evidence indicates that adaptation is necessary.

2. Evidence-Informed Principles

The strategy is informed by:

The National Curriculum for English, the Department for Education's Reading Framework, the SEND Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years, Ofsted's English subject report, Telling the Story, the Education Endowment Foundation's guidance on improving literacy, current evidence relating to phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, communication and reading motivation.

The DfE Reading Framework applies to primary and secondary schools, including specialist provision. It emphasises the importance of language development, systematic synthetic phonics, reading fluency, access to high-quality texts and effective support for older students whose reading remains insecure.

The National Curriculum expects students to encounter increasingly challenging fiction and non-fiction, develop an appreciation of reading, learn new vocabulary, make inferences and refer to evidence. At Bensham Manor, these expectations are adapted to individual starting points while maintaining ambition for every learner.

Ofsted's English subject report highlights the importance of identifying students who do not read fluently and ensuring that support is matched to the precise nature of their difficulty.

The EEF recommends a whole-school approach in which every subject contributes to literacy. Its guidance emphasises:

● explicit vocabulary teaching
● structured opportunities for communication and discussion
● support for reading challenging texts
● development of reading fluency
● teaching comprehension strategies explicitly
● targeted intervention based on accurate assessment.

At Bensham Manor, this evidence is applied through the following principles:

● Reading is a whole-school responsibility.
● Teaching begins with an understanding of the individual student.
● Difficulties with reading are identified precisely rather than treated as a single general need.
● Systematic phonics is provided where decoding is a barrier.
● Students are taught to read accurately, fluently and with understanding.
● Vocabulary and background knowledge are developed across the curriculum.
● Students experience rich, age-respectful texts, including texts beyond their independent reading level.
● Intervention complements rather than replaces high-quality classroom teaching.
● Communication, accessibility and engagement are central to reading development.
● Progress is recognised from each student's individual starting point.

3. How Reading Develops

Reading comprehension depends upon the interaction of several connected areas of knowledge and skill.

3.1 Communication and Language

Students need frequent opportunities to listen, communicate, discuss, question and build knowledge through spoken, signed or augmented language.

Communication and language support:

- vocabulary development
- understanding of concepts
- reasoning
- comprehension
- expression of ideas
- responses to texts.

Students may demonstrate understanding through speech, gesture, eye gaze, symbols, AAC, choice-making, matching, sequencing or other appropriate communication methods.

3.2 Word Reading and Decoding

Students learn to recognise words accurately. Where appropriate, this includes understanding the relationship between letters and sounds and blending sounds to read words.

Some students may also develop recognition of:

- meaningful whole words;
- symbols
- photographs
- environmental print
- signs
- labels
- functional vocabulary.

The pathway used will depend upon the student's assessed needs and method of communication.

3.3 Reading Fluency

Fluency includes:

- **accuracy —** reading words correctly;
- **automaticity —** reading without excessive effort;
- **prosody —** reading with appropriate phrasing, stress and expression.

When word reading becomes more automatic, students can direct more attention towards understanding the text.

3.4 Vocabulary and Background Knowledge

Students need knowledge of words and the wider world to understand what they read.

Teachers explicitly introduce, explain, revisit and apply:

- useful academic words that appear across subjects;
- specialist words used within particular curriculum areas;
- words and concepts needed to understand individual texts.

Vocabulary is taught through accessible explanations, visuals, objects, symbols, examples, demonstrations and repeated opportunities to use new words.

3.5 Reading Comprehension

Students are taught how to understand, interpret and respond to texts.

Depending upon individual need, this may include:

Retrieving information, sequencing events, predicting, summarising, visualising, making connections, identifying cause and effect, making inferences, identifying purpose and audience, using evidence, recognising text structures and checking whether a text makes sense.

Comprehension strategies are taught explicitly, modelled by adults and practised through supported and increasingly independent reading.

4. The Reading Curriculum

Reading is taught through English lessons, targeted reading provision and the wider curriculum.

Teaching is planned from students' assessed starting points and may include:

- communication and pre-reading development
- phonological awareness
- systematic synthetic phonics
- word recognition and functional sight vocabulary
- reading fluency
- vocabulary development
- reading comprehension
- reading for pleasure
- functional reading for everyday life and adulthood.

Reading is not restricted to intervention sessions. Students encounter meaningful reading throughout the school day.

Texts are selected to: match students' reading and communication needs, provide appropriate challenge, reflect students' chronological age wherever possible, broaden knowledge and experience, represent diverse cultures, identities and perspectives, develop empathy and curiosity, support curriculum learning, provide enjoyment and motivation, prepare students for everyday and adult life.

Students are not limited only to texts that they can decode independently. They also experience rich and age-respectful literature through:

- teacher reading
- shared reading
- guided reading
- audio books
- symbols and visual support
- adapted text
- supported discussion
- drama and sensory experiences.

Reading across the curriculum is carefully planned. Teachers explicitly teach students how to understand the vocabulary, texts and forms of communication used within their subjects.

For example:

- Science may require students to understand technical vocabulary, diagrams, instructions and explanations.
- Mathematics may require students to interpret symbols, specialist vocabulary and multi-step problems.
- Food Technology may require students to read recipes, measurements and safety instructions.
- Vocational and life-skills lessons may require students to understand forms, labels, timetables, signs and

workplace instructions.

Each curriculum area identifies:

- essential vocabulary;
- common types of text;
- likely reading barriers;
- appropriate scaffolds;
- meaningful opportunities to apply reading.

This approach is sometimes called disciplinary literacy. At Bensham Manor, it means teaching the particular reading and communication skills students need to participate successfully in each subject.

5. Phonics, Word Reading and Fluency

Students whose assessment identifies difficulties with decoding receive systematic and carefully sequenced phonics teaching.

Bensham Manor School uses Twinkl Phonics as its systematic synthetic phonics programme. Twinkl Phonics is included on the Department for Education's list of validated systematic synthetic phonics programmes.

Phonics teaching will:

- be based upon diagnostic assessment
- follow the agreed progression of the programme
- be delivered consistently by trained staff
- include regular review and cumulative practice
- provide opportunities to apply taught sounds when reading
- use reading materials that match the phonics being taught where appropriate
- continue for as long as individual students require it
- use age-respectful presentation for older learners
- be monitored to ensure students are making progress.

Where conventional phonics is not the most appropriate pathway, students may develop functional word recognition through personalised teaching with specialists from SaLT.

Students who can decode words but read slowly, hesitantly or without appropriate phrasing may require explicit fluency teaching.

Approaches may include:

- teacher modelling
- echo reading
- choral reading
- repeated reading
- paired reading
- phrase-cued reading
- supported reading aloud
- pre-teaching unfamiliar vocabulary
- rereading familiar texts
- immediate and supportive correction.

Fluency practice should use short, manageable passages and should not place students under unnecessary pressure.

Progress is considered through accuracy, ease, phrasing and understanding rather than reading speed alone.

6. Vocabulary and Comprehension

Vocabulary is taught deliberately across the curriculum.

Teachers:

- select the words students need to understand a lesson or text
- explain words using accessible language
- connect new words to existing knowledge
- use visuals, objects, symbols, examples and demonstrations
- revisit words regularly
- model words in spoken and written sentences
- provide opportunities for students to use new vocabulary
- check whether words are understood over time.

Staff may refer to Tier 2 and Tier 3 vocabulary, but these terms should not make teaching unnecessarily complicated.

Useful academic vocabulary means words that appear across different subjects, such as compare, identify, evidence, sequence and consequence.

Specialist subject vocabulary means words associated with a particular curriculum area, such as evaporation, denominator, monarchy or texture.

Comprehension teaching is matched to the student's reading profile.

Teachers model the thinking involved in understanding a text and provide structured opportunities for students to practise.

Teaching may include:

- activating relevant background knowledge
- introducing key vocabulary
- asking and answering questions
- retrieving explicit information
- sequencing information or events
- identifying the main idea
- predicting
- making inferences
- explaining cause and effect
- summarising
- identifying purpose and audience
- using evidence to support an answer
- checking and repairing understanding.

Visuals, symbols, objects, drama, discussion and practical experiences may be used to support comprehension.

Students are taught that successful readers notice when meaning has been lost and use strategies such as rereading, looking for clues, asking for help or referring to supporting information.

7. Personalised Reading Pathways

Assessment information is used to identify the most appropriate reading pathway for each student.

A student may receive a combination of:

- high-quality classroom reading instruction
- systematic phonics

- targeted fluency practice
- vocabulary teaching
- comprehension instruction
- shared or guided reading
- individual reading
- functional reading
- accessible technology
- communication support
- personalised intervention.

The following programmes may be used where they are appropriate to the student's assessed needs.

7.1 Twinkl Phonics

Used for systematic synthetic phonics teaching where decoding is identified as a barrier.

7.2 Lexia Core5 Reading

Used to provide personalised practice in areas including phonological awareness, phonics, word analysis, automaticity, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension.

7.3 Lexia PowerUp Literacy

Used where appropriate with older students to provide personalised practice in word study, grammar and comprehension.

It complements direct teaching and does not replace interaction with skilled adults or meaningful reading experiences.

7.4 Accelerated Reader

Used where appropriate to support book choice, independent reading, comprehension practice and the monitoring of reading engagement.

Quiz scores are considered alongside wider assessment information and are not used as the sole measure of reading ability.

7.5 myON

Used to increase access to a range of digital texts and provide adjustable and accessible reading opportunities.

Digital programmes are tools within a wider reading curriculum. They do not replace high-quality teaching, reading aloud, discussion, direct feedback or access to literature.

8. Reading Culture and Preparation for Adulthood

Bensham Manor aims to create a culture in which reading is visible, valued and enjoyed.

Students should encounter adults who model positive attitudes towards books, stories, information and reading.

The school promotes reading through:

- regular protected reading opportunities;
- teacher and staff reading aloud;
- class and school libraries;
- independent book choice;
- Accelerated Reader and myON where appropriate;

● displays and recommendations;
● diverse and age-respectful texts;
● poetry, fiction and non-fiction;
● magazines, newspapers and graphic texts;
● accessible and audio books;
● author experiences where appropriate;
● World Book Day and wider reading events;
● links between reading and students' interests;
● celebration of engagement and progress;
● opportunities to discuss and recommend texts.

Protected reading should be purposeful and matched to student needs. It should not simply involve every student silently reading the same type of material for a fixed period.

Students who cannot yet read independently should receive an equally valuable reading experience through shared reading, adult reading, audio, symbols, sensory texts or supported interaction.

Reading for pleasure should not be over-assessed. Students need opportunities to enjoy texts without completing a worksheet or quiz after every reading experience.

Reading is also taught as a practical skill for everyday life and preparation for adulthood.

Functional reading may include:
● signs, labels and instructions
● timetables and travel information
● forms and digital communication
● workplace and financial information
● community and public information.

Teaching is linked to students' individual preparation-for-adulthood outcomes and supports increasing independence, participation and informed decision-making.

Parents and carers are valued partners in reading development. The school will, where appropriate:
● share information about students' strengths and priorities
● recommend accessible books and resources
● explain approaches used in school
● provide guidance on supportive shared reading
● celebrate engagement and progress
● provide suitable materials for home use
● listen to families' knowledge of students' interests, communication and responses.

Home reading arrangements should be realistic, individualised and accessible.

9. Assessment, Intervention and Staff Development

Assessment should identify:
● what a student can do
● the nature of any difficulty
● the teaching or intervention needed next
● whether the support being provided is effective.

The school uses an appropriate combination of:
● formative assessment;
● teacher observation;

● communication and engagement evidence;
● phonics assessment;
● reading records;
● fluency assessment;
● comprehension activities;
● curriculum-based assessment;
● standardised reading assessments where accessible and valid;
● Star Reading where appropriate;
● Lexia reports;
● Accelerated Reader information;
● student voice;
● evidence from families and other professionals.

Not every assessment is suitable for every student. Standardised assessments should only be used where the results are likely to be valid and useful.

Assessment information is used to:
● establish starting points;
● identify barriers;
● plan teaching;
● select interventions;
● monitor progress;
● evaluate impact;
● decide whether support should continue, change or stop;
● communicate progress with students, families and professionals.

Assessment should not be used simply to generate data. It must result in an appropriate teaching response.

Reading interventions will:
● be based upon identified need
● have a clear intended outcome
● use a structured and evidence-informed approach
● be delivered by trained staff
● complement classroom teaching
● provide sufficient frequency and consistency
● be monitored at agreed intervals
● be adjusted or discontinued when they are not producing the intended benefit
● support students to apply learning beyond the intervention session.

Students should not repeatedly miss the same curriculum subject in order to receive intervention.

Intervention decisions should consider the whole student, including communication, cognition, sensory needs, emotional regulation, attendance, motivation and access to appropriate technology.

Staff need the knowledge and confidence to support reading effectively. Professional development may include:
● systematic synthetic phonics
● early reading and decoding
● reading fluency
● vocabulary instruction
● comprehension teaching

- reading aloud
- supporting students with a range of communication and learning needs
- AAC and accessible communication
- use of assessment information
- delivery of intervention programmes
- effective use of digital reading platforms.

Staff delivering specialist programmes receive appropriate training and ongoing support.

10. Monitoring, Priorities and Review

The impact of the strategy will be monitored through:

- reading assessment information
- phonics and intervention records
- progress from individual starting points
- lesson visits and learning walks
- curriculum review
- work and reading record scrutiny
- student engagement
- student voice
- family and staff feedback
- library and digital platform information
- evaluation of interventions
- progress towards preparation-for-adulthood outcomes.

Monitoring will consider both attainment and wider impact, including:

- confidence
- willingness to engage
- communication
- independence
- enjoyment
- access to the curriculum
- application of reading in everyday life.

Information will be used to celebrate effective practice and identify priorities for improvement. It will not be used to impose one identical reading pathway upon every student.

11. Key References

- Department for Education, The Reading Framework: Teaching the Foundations of Literacy.
- Department for Education, National Curriculum in England: English Programmes of Study.
- Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care, SEND Code of Practice: 0 to 25 Years.
- Ofsted, Telling the Story: The English Education Subject Report.
- Education Endowment Foundation, Improving Literacy in Key Stage 2.
- Education Endowment Foundation, Improving Literacy in Secondary Schools.
- Education Endowment Foundation, Lexia Reading Core5 Evaluation.