

Systematic Synthetic Phonics (SSP) Programmes

ADVICE FOR SCHOOLS

This guidance document has been created by Witham St Hughs English Hub. The guidance and advice that follows is based on the School Inspection Handbook, DfE guidance, the English Hub 'Challenge Checklist' and The Reading Framework.

The English Hub and DfE both strongly recommend that, along with this guidance document, all school leaders should:

- read *The Reading Framework* for further, detailed guidance on teaching early reading
- use The Reading Framework Audits (pages 96- 103) to evaluate their own school's practice before deciding on next steps
- use Appendix 7 (pages 93 – 94) of The Reading Framework for guidance on choosing an SSP programme.



Which SSP programmes are DfE validated?

DfE Guidance and School Inspection Handbook

The list of DfE validated SSP programmes can be found [here](#)
DfE Validated SSP Programmes

If your school is in need of support or training for teaching high quality SSP, the Department recommends purchasing a full SSP programme from the validated list.

English Hub Advice/Support and The Reading Framework Guidance

This list will be updated again in November 2021 and March 2022.

At these points, further SSP programmes may be added to the validated list.

By March 2022, any programmes on the current list who have not submitted for revalidation will be removed from the DfE list (see footnotes on the DfE accredited list).

If your Year 1 PSC results can be improved and/or the phonics provision in your school needs improving, then we strongly advise purchasing a full SSP programme from the validated list.

Leaders and teachers should aim for all children to meet or exceed age related expectations. Unless a school's Year 1 Phonics Screening Check results consistently reflect this outcome, then the DfE strongly recommends buying into a full SSP programme from the validated list, as these programmes are the most effective way of raising standards in phonics.



Why did the DfE launch a new validation process?

DfE Guidance and School Inspection Handbook

The aim of the validation process is to ensure there are more **high quality** SSP programmes for schools to choose from, including full SSP Programmes *based around* the Letters and Sounds Framework.

This process will also ensure schools can access training and support through full SSP programmes, as these are the **most effective way of raising standards in phonics teaching**.

DfE SSP Programmes Validation Criteria

English Hub Advice/Support and The Reading Framework Guidance

Full SSP programmes will:

- ensure 'fidelity' to one phonics programme
- provide training for **all** school staff
- provide full guidance for teachers
- provide a systematic approach to teaching phonics
- provide resources to support teaching
- provide opportunities for children to practise and apply the core phonics they have been taught, and phoneme/grapheme correspondence
- provide sufficient decodable reading materials (or support for schools to organise and select decodable reading materials)
- enable children's progress to be assessed
- meet the needs of children falling behind.

Why is the Letters & Sounds Framework not on the new DfE accredited list?

DfE Guidance and School Inspection Handbook

The 2007 Letters and Sounds handbook, published under the previous Government, has never been a **full** Systematic Synthetic Phonics (SSP) programme.

For a number of years, effective teaching using Letters and Sounds has relied on schools themselves building a programme around the handbook. Some schools have done this very successfully, and it was for this reason that schools achieving outstanding results using 2007 Letters and Sounds were included in the English Hubs programme in 2018.

The Department recognises, however, that for many schools, especially those who **need** or **want** to improve their practice, 2007 Letters and Sounds is 'not fit for purpose' and does not provide the support, guidance, resources or training needed. This is why, in 2021, the government decided to remove it from its list of validated **full** phonics programmes.

English Hub Advice / Support and The Reading Framework Guidance

The Letters and Sounds Framework is not on the new DfE accredited list as it is not a **full** SSP programme.

However, Letters and Sounds 2007 is accredited (as a Framework) until Spring 2022. This gives schools using the Letters and Sounds Framework time to consider their approach and to consider any new SSP programmes on the Department's validated list.

Schools **wanting** or **needing** to improve their practice will be strongly encouraged to use a **full** SSP programme from the validated list, although this will not be mandatory.



Do schools have to stop using the 2007 Letters and Sounds Framework?

DfE Guidance and School Inspection Handbook

No. Schools do not have to stop using the Letters and Sounds Framework 2007 now, or at all. Ofsted do not have a preferred programme or approach. However, what is important is that schools take an approach that is **rigorous, systematic, used with fidelity** (any resources used should exactly match the Grapheme Phoneme Correspondence (GPC) progression of their chosen SSP approach), and **achieves strong results for all pupils, including the most disadvantaged**.

The only exception to this is if you are receiving support from an English Hub. Schools receiving support through the English Hubs programme must follow a programme from the validated list. These schools are advised to contact their local English Hub for more information.

[The Removal of the Letters & Sounds Framework 2007](#)

English Hub Advice / Support and The Reading Framework Guidance

If your school *is* using the Letters and Sounds Framework, evaluate its effectiveness:

- Do **all** children (regardless of their backgrounds, needs or abilities) meet, or exceed, the expected standard in the Year 1 PSC?
- Is phonics taught rigorously, systematically and consistently in Rec, Yr 1 and Yr 2?
- Do all reading teachers show fidelity to the chosen SSP programme? (consistency in resources, friezes, word cards and terminology etc. no mix match of resources from different SSP programmes).
- Are children who are falling behind identified quickly with a rigorous assessment system?
- Do children read phonically decodable books that match their phonic abilities?

If the answer is 'no' to any of the above questions, then a school should make these improvements, as soon as possible, to ensure the best outcomes for all pupils. The easiest way to ensure a rigorous, consistent and systematic approach that achieves strong results for all pupils, including the most disadvantaged, would be to use a full SSP programme from the DfE validated list.

If your school has received English Hub funding to purchase an SSP programme, then you must choose one from the DfE validated SSP programme list.

Can schools continue to use their own programme without having to get it validated?

DfE Guidance and School Inspection Handbook

If your school uses its own approach based around Letters and Sounds 2007, which **includes appropriate resources, has decodable books matched to pupils' phonic knowledge, high-quality staff training and achieves strong results**, there is no need to change approach. Schools should check that the approach taken is sustainable and works for all children, including the most disadvantaged.

There is no obligation to bring a programme for validation. Applications from schools wishing to share their good practice more widely, and who have the capacity to do so, are encouraged. However, schools can continue with their approach even if it is not validated.

It is for individual schools to decide which approach to phonics teaching they use, although the Department recommends schools consider an SSP programme from the validated list, as these programmes will have met robust criteria and will have been tested and assessed to be of high quality.

English Hub Advice / Support and The Reading Framework Guidance

Schools should use *The Reading Framework Audits* (pages 96-103) to evaluate their own school's practice and decide if they need to buy into a full SSP programme from the validated list.

Will my school be penalised by Ofsted if we continue to use the 2007 Letters and Sounds Framework?

DfE Guidance and School Inspection Handbook

Ofsted does not have a preference for what programme or approach is used **but** Ofsted will be looking for high quality teaching of systematic, synthetic phonics with a full package of resources, including matching decodable books.

Some schools teach effectively using the Letters and Sounds Framework, having built their own SSP programmes around it. If your school currently uses Letters and Sounds, alongside a full programme of resources, including matching decodable books, and achieves **outstanding** results, there may be no need to change approach. Schools should check that the approach taken is sustainable and works for all children, including the most disadvantaged.

“Schools wanting or needing to improve their practice in phonics teaching will be strongly encouraged by Ofsted to use a full SSP programme from the resulting validated list”.

English Hub Advice / Support and The Reading Framework Guidance

Ofsted will want to see:

- high quality phonics lessons that are consistent and effective across all classes for **all** children, including the ‘lowest 20%’
- ‘fidelity’ to one programme (not mixing resources or decodable books from different SSP programmes)
- that children are reading phonically decodable books correctly matched to their phonic ability
- that all reading teachers (including TAs) are fully trained in the school’s chosen SSP programme
- regular monitoring, coaching and CPD for all reading teachers to become experts
- a school where the leadership team and every teacher is determined that all pupils will learn to read.

Ofsted inspects how well primary schools teach their pupils to read using SSP by:

- taking account of the outcomes of phonics assessments & data
- observing phonics lessons
- listening to children read
- considering the schools’ policies for teaching reading
- talking to children, parents and staff.

Do we have until March 2022 to decide on a validated SSP programme for our school? Is there a transition period?

DfE Guidance and School Inspection Handbook

A transition period for validated SSP programmes will exist from now until the final validation panel in March 2022 has closed. Programmes on the current validated list will remain on the list until March 2022.

Any programme that has not been validated by this time will be removed from the list.

English Hub Advice / Support and The Reading Framework Guidance

A school may wish to wait until March 2022 to decide on a validated SSP programme for their school. However, a school may need to make changes immediately to ensure the best possible outcomes for all children between now and March 2022.

Changes may include:

- organising books to ensure they are fully decodable for all children
- showing fidelity to one programme by replacing wall charts or flashcards that are not consistent to one SSP programme
- aligning all phonics lessons to ensure consistency
- provide training and/or coaching for school staff to ensure they are teaching quality first lessons
- ensuring children are receiving at least five high quality phonics lessons per week
- ensuring robust assessments are in place to identify gaps in children’s phonic knowledge
- ensuring high quality, effective interventions for children falling behind.



Will my school now need to buy new sets of decodable books?

DfE Guidance and School Inspection Handbook

We highly recommend that schools use a full SSP programme with decodable texts matching pupils' phonic knowledge. The Ofsted inspection handbook states:

'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

Validated SSP programmes will either have produced their own matching fully decodable books/texts or will be able to recommend a scheme of books/texts that matches the progression of GPCs in their programme exactly.

Schools choosing decodable reading material for pupils that is not included within or recommended by the SSP programme they are using should ensure it is fully decodable and only includes sounds pupils have already learnt and with which they are fully secure.

Schools that are currently using the Letters and Sounds Framework with decodable books that match pupils' phonic knowledge will be able to continue using these.

If a school chooses to move to a validated SSP based on the Letters and Sounds Framework we anticipate that many of their existing books will continue to match the programme. We would expect all validated programmes to provide details about decodable books to support schools to understand any potential changes.

English Hub Advice / Support and The Reading Framework Guidance

See page 51 of *The Reading Framework*.

If a school is not using a fully validated SSP programme, with recommended decodable books, then it is important that all decodable books are organised to match your chosen SSP programme's progression of GPCs.

Some decodable books may state that they 'fit' with 'set 3' of their progression of GPCs but this may not necessarily correspond to 'Phase 3' for a different SSP programme. Equally, common exception words (tricky words) may appear in some books before these words are introduced in the teaching progression of their chosen SSP programme.

If a school is not using a fully validated SSP programme, then it is important that leaders and teachers spend time looking inside each decodable book to ensure that they organise the books progressively to match the teaching sequence. This will ensure that children only read decodable books with the sounds in that they know.

Leaders should spend time listening to children read their 'reading book' regularly to ensure children are being given books that are actually decodable.

We would not advise putting books that do not match your school's chosen SSP programme or progression into the school library, or on class book shelves, as this will cause confusion for children and teachers. Staff need to be confident that the books they select for children can be easily decodable to ensure success.

If your school has any surplus decodable books that do not match your chosen SSP programme or you are in need of additional decodable books, then please contact ehadmin@leadtshub.co.uk as we are keeping a list of schools who are interested in exchanging books.

What do school leaders need to do?

DfE Guidance and School Inspection Handbook

'The school is determined that every pupil will learn to read, regardless of their background, needs or abilities. All pupils, including the weakest readers, make sufficient progress to meet or exceed age-related expectations.'

SIH p87: 293

English Hub Advice / Support and The Reading Framework Guidance

See Section 5 (pages 72- 77) of *The Reading Framework*.

LEADERS:

- believe that **all** children can learn to read, regardless of their background, needs or abilities and are determined to make this happen
- adopt a rigorous, systematic programme to teaching phonics
- ensure **all** children make sufficient progress to meet or exceed age-related expectations
- build a team of expert teachers and draw on expert training, practice and coaching to achieve this
- ensure that ongoing assessments of children's progress in phonics is frequent and detailed to identify those children who begin to fall behind and provide targeted support immediately
- make efforts to involve families in supporting children's reading at home
- ensure children are taught to read from the start of Reception
- develop a programme for reading aloud to children and encouraging a love of reading.

How do we teach with 'fidelity' to one SSP programme?

DfE Guidance and School Inspection Handbook

'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

English Hub Advice / Support and The Reading Framework Guidance

A school should adopt **one** Systematic Synthetic Phonics (SSP) programme that they teach with fidelity, consistency and continuity from Reception to Y2.

The leadership team should ensure that:

- SSP training is booked for all school staff, including the leadership team, with an accredited training provider
- the SSP programme sets out daily expectations for teaching phonics
- correct resources are particular to the school's chosen SSP programme (sound charts, friezes, flashcards, word cards and cumulative texts/ decodable books)
- sufficient time is given to teach phonics, reading and writing
- teachers and TAs understand the specific activities in the school's chosen SSP programme
- teachers and TAs teach these activities confidently and do not use a variety of teaching resources from different SSP programmes
- teachers pay particular attention to pupils who fall behind during SSP lessons and provide extra daily practice, following the school's chosen SSP programme
- the pace of teaching is not slowed for pupils who fall behind
- parents are informed of the SSP programme adopted by the school: 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.

We would not recommend trialling one SSP programme in one year group, whilst other year groups continue to use a different SSP programme.

How do we ensure children are making a strong start in Reception?

DfE Guidance and School Inspection Handbook

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

SIH 2019

English Hub Advice / Support and The Reading Framework Guidance

In the most successful schools:

- leaders set clear expectations about the reading of phonics from the beginning of Reception
- phonics is taught daily and directly, with the whole class or individual groups in a settled environment
- children read and write sounds, words, captions and dictated sentences that help them to practice spelling and letter formation they have been taught in their phonics lessons.

How do we build a team of expert reading teachers?

DfE Guidance and School Inspection Handbook

'The school has developed sufficient expertise in the teaching of phonics and reading.'

SIH p87: 293

English Hub Advice / Support and The Reading Framework Guidance

See page 74 – 76 of *The Reading Framework*.

"High quality in-service training is the first step. But training is just the beginning and, on its own, is insufficient to ensure consistency and effectiveness and to help teachers become experts. Progress depends on practice and coaching."
The Reading Framework.

Headteachers should appoint a Literacy or Reading Lead. That person should become the expert in the school's chosen phonics programme and have dedicated time to provide coaching and practice sessions for all staff to ensure consistency and accountability.

How do we ensure we are reaching the lowest 20% pupils?

DfE Guidance and School Inspection Handbook

'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

English Hub Advice / Support and The Reading Framework Guidance

See pages 61-65 of *The Reading Framework (Assessment)*.

See page 66-71 of *The Reading Framework (Children at risk of reading failure)*.

The school:

- ensures SSP lessons are of the highest standard to reduce the number of pupils who need extra support
- uses the programme's SSP assessment to identify immediately pupils falling behind
- organises extra daily practice for pupils falling behind, following the school's SSP programme
- provides regular CPD for teachers to support pupils falling behind
- fast tracks late-entry pupils
- engages the support of parents, where appropriate.

If you have any questions, or would like any further support or advice to 'audit' your school's current phonics provision, please contact your local English Hub.

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