LITERACY

POLICY

Dormers Wells High School

Maths, Computing and Applied Learning Specialist College

& Leading Edge School

Ratified by Governors	June 2025
Review Date	June 2026
SLT Responsible	Mr S Marker

1. Rationale

At Dormers Wells High School, our goal is to empower students and enhance their future life chances through academic success and we recognise that having high levels of literacy opens the door to success, providing students with the knowledge and skills needed to thrive as an adult. Literacy underpins our curriculum and is integral to our core purpose: to support students in becoming responsible, independent members of society and thrive in a changing world. Young people who leave school with low proficiency in literacy are held back at every stage of their life[1], so it is the responsibility of our teachers and support staff to enhance our young people's life chances through a rigorous literacy programme across all subjects.

2. Aims

2.1 Disciplinary literacy

We aim to empower students to read, write and speak the language of learning in every subject. National Teachers' Standards require that all teachers 'demonstrate an understanding of and take responsibility for promoting high standards of literacy, articulacy and the correct use of standard English, whatever the teacher's specialist subject'[2], but it is our view that this is not enough. 'Literacy' implies mastery of the conventions of a particular domain[3]; for this reason, we prioritise disciplinary literacy, which emphasises ways of knowing and communicating knowledge within a subject discipline[4]. Literacy must be led by subject teachers, emphasising the tools that experts use to engage in the work of that discipline.

2.2. A lifelong love of reading

Reading for pleasure has become the most reliable indicator of the future success of young people[5]. To read is to have access to the store of human knowledge. In reading, we encounter not just knowledge, but the mind that recorded it, with its experiences and biases, its insights and perceptions.[6] This means, as well as improving academic attainment across subjects, reading enables us to better understand the world and increases our empathy, improving our character and relationship with society. In addition to these benefits, there is a range of evidence to confirm that high levels of reading proficiency, combined with regular reading for pleasure, results in children being three times more likely to have a high level of mental wellbeing than peers with below expected reading skills[7]. For these reasons, our library is the hub of our school, and supporting students' lifelong love of reading is the responsibility of all our staff.

2.3 Effective intervention

High quality teaching across the curriculum will reduce the need for extra literacy support; however, some students will require additional support. We aim to provide high quality literacy interventions for struggling students. We proactively support the students with the weakest levels of literacy as part of a structured programme from year 7 and closely monitor their progress as they move up through to year 11 and into the sixth form. We also aim to ensure that struggling readers are identified early and appropriate intervention is put in place. Ensuring that every student leaves school able to read and write properly is a moral responsibility and therefore high quality, structured and targeted interventions are necessary to ensure that students make the progress needed to be successful in later life.

3. Delivery of literacy

3.1 Vocabulary instruction

Whilst we are always aspirational for our students, we understand that no assumptions should be made about the comprehension of vocabulary. One of the significant challenges of secondary school is that all students must develop secure knowledge of the specialised and technical vocabulary needed to access the curriculum[8].

In every subject, teachers are expected to provide explicit vocabulary instruction to help students access and use academic language. Our teachers prioritise teaching Tier 2 (general academic) vocabulary and Tier 3 (subject specific) vocabulary, which students are unlikely to encounter in everyday speech. The explicit

teaching of subject specific vocabulary must form a key part of curriculum planning and should also be combined with the instruction of spelling. Teachers should prioritise the depth of understanding of vocabulary over the breadth of vocabulary acquisition and it is recommended that where relevant students are aware of the etymology of words (their origin) and their morphology (understanding how words are constructed by smaller parts). Teachers should also prioritise vocabulary in planning for oracy, contextualising new vocabulary through talk and monitor ownership of new vocabulary through meaningful oracy-centred activities[9].

3.2 High-quality talk
Talk is a powerful tool for learning and literacy: it can improve reading and writing outcomes, enhance communication skills and increase students' understanding across the curriculum[10]. We aim to deepen students' learning through structured academic discussions with teachers and peers in every lesson. Students should be given time to build knowledge and prepare ideas in advance of discussions and students should have frequent opportunities to discuss and recap on learning in pairs or groups. The quality of student responses should be supported by encouragement and guidance from the teacher and also through using discussion sentence stems or Student Talk Tactics as part of the Voice 21 oracy programme, which are visible on display in classrooms and in students' diaries. Discussion guidance provided by Voice 21 Cambridge Oracy Skills Framework are also approved for use by teachers in supporting oracy in lessons. In planning for oracy in lessons, activities should draw a distinction between 'exploratory' discussion, which is less polished but allows students to think aloud with peers and deepen learning, and 'presentational talk', where the quality of spoken language is more refined[11].

The following discussion guidelines apply to all lessons and support high-quality talk to enhance learning:
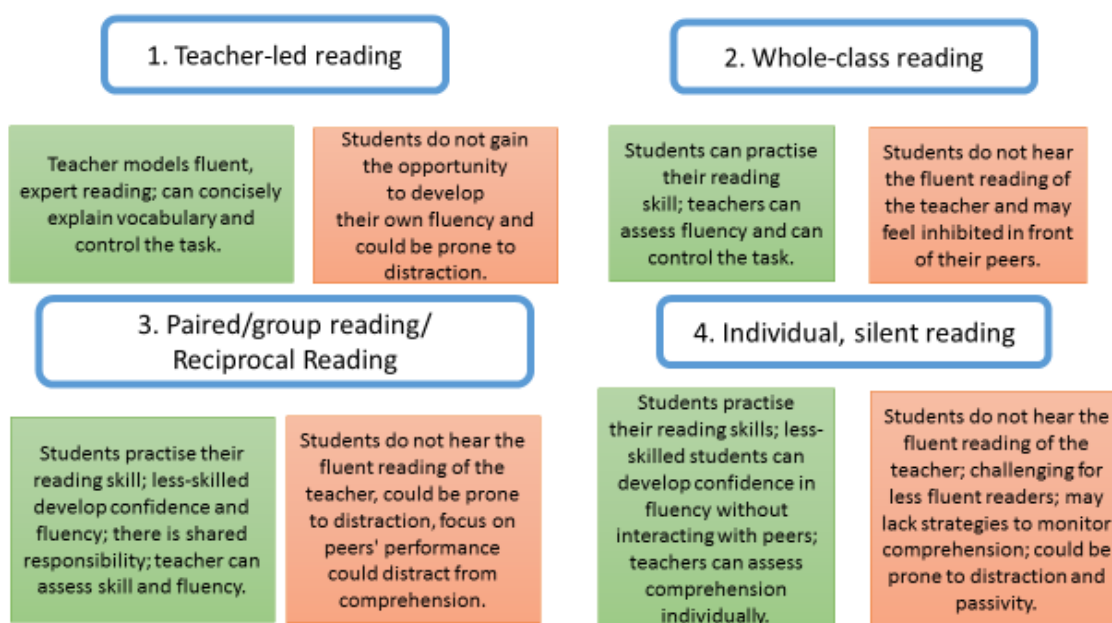
Teaching staff are committed to modelling accurate and precise academic language and in having high expectations of students using accurate Standard English. In their presentational talk, we expect students to 'Say it like a Scholar', which means to use the language of the subject, speak in full sentences, as they would in academic writing, and avoid hesitation words. Consistent with our whole-school focus on disciplinary literacy, each subject promotes the use of Tier 2 and Tier 3 vocabulary through structured talk in lessons. We also aim to increase opportunities for students to take part in extra-curricular activities and competitions that allow students to practise using academic language; for example, through debating competitions and the EPQ programme in the sixth form.

Teachers are expected to model what effective talk sounds like, using the academic vocabulary of the subject, planning and delivering concise explanations and 'thinking aloud' while modelling processes and problem solving. Teachers should also plan for effective questioning (for example, through using Teacher Talk Tactics recommended by Voice 21). When students are prompted by teachers to improve their spoken language, errors should be directly addressed in a supportive way where students are asked to rephrase the response. This may involve revoicing students' responses to model improvements or demonstrating ways of expanding explanations and modelling sophisticated language.

3.3 Reading to learn
(i) Our 'four-pronged' reading strategy
We maximise all opportunities for our students to read by selecting an appropriate method of instruction, depending on the context. Our 'four-pronged' approach outlines the advantages and disadvantages of each strategy:

1. Teacher-led reading

Teacher models fluent, expert reading; can concisely explain vocabulary and control the task.

Students do not gain the opportunity to develop their own fluency and could be prone to distraction.

2. Whole-class reading

Students can practise their reading skill; teachers can assess fluency and can control the task.

Students do not hear the fluent reading of the teacher and may feel inhibited in front of their peers.

3. Paired/group reading/ Reciprocal Reading

Students practise their reading skill; less-skilled develop confidence and fluency; there is shared responsibility; teacher can assess skill and fluency.

Students do not hear the fluent reading of the teacher, could be prone to distraction, focus on peers' performance could distract from comprehension.

4. Individual, silent reading

Students practise their reading skills; less-skilled students can develop confidence in fluency without interacting with peers; teachers can assess comprehension individually.

Students do not hear the fluent reading of the teacher; challenging for less fluent readers; may lack strategies to monitor comprehension; could be prone to distraction and passivity.

The academic reading pupils undertake in school is typically more complex than other forms and requires substantial background knowledge and reading skill. Information texts can prove uniquely challenging for pupils, given they use more specialist and rare vocabulary, and less common text structures when compared with many fiction texts.[12] For this reason, teachers need an awareness of the common barriers to academic reading; for example, limited vocabulary and gaps in background knowledge.

Each curriculum area should have a shared approach to reading instruction in relation to the 'four pronged' reading strategy when encountering challenging academic texts.

Effective reading strategies include[13]:

Activating prior knowledge	Students think about what they already know about a topic from reading or other experiences, such as visits to places they know, and try to make meaningful links. This helps students to infer and elaborate, fill in missing information and to build a fuller 'mental model' of the text.
Prediction	Students predict what might happen as a text is read. This causes them to pay close attention to the text, which means they can closely monitor their own comprehension.
Questioning	Students generate their own questions about a text to check their comprehension and monitor their subject knowledge.
Clarifying	Students identify areas of uncertainty, which may be individual words or phrases, and seek information to clarify meaning.
Summarising	Students summarise the meaning of sections of the text to consolidate and elaborate upon their understanding. This causes students to focus on the key content, which in turn supports comprehension monitoring. This can be supported using graphic organisers that illustrate concepts and the relationships between them.

The strategies above overlap with 'reciprocal reading', a structured approach that teachers can use to develop student discussion around texts. During reciprocal reading, students initially work collaboratively with guidance from the teacher and gradually become more independent, dividing reading into four stages: Summarise, Question, Clarify, Predict[14]. Other useful reading strategies include: DARTs (Directed Activities Related to Texts); effective use of dual coding when presenting information; understanding the difference between skimming and scanning.

(ii) Fluency
While reading to learn, it is crucial that students maintain very high levels of fluency to establish the word and associations in long-term memory and, secondly, free up short-term working memory to focus on comprehension[15]. Skilled readers decode and understand words at a rate of 300 per minute, so about 0.2 seconds each[16]. There are several practical strategies that support reading fluency as well as comprehension, which should be chosen by the teacher as appropriate to context and the nature of the learning. Examples of these reading strategies include: teacher-led whole-class reading; choral reading; paired reading; repeated reading; individual silent reading[17].

For teacher-led whole-class reading, we aim to create opportunities for students to read aloud and also to hear teachers model high quality reading aloud. The strategy of 'Control the Game' reading [18] is recommended as an approach for teacher-led reading in form time and across subjects:

- One student reads aloud at a time, while the rest follow silently
- Durations are kept short to keep the pace lively
- The identity of the speaker is unpredictable
- The teacher sometimes 'bridges' by reading a few sentences between student reading
- Words are read aloud with expression

(iii) Accelerated Reader
Accelerated Reader (AR) is software provided by the company Renaissance and is used to help teachers track the types of books students are reading, the amount they are reading, their progress and reward good reading habits. AR continues to be a core focus for the English department for years 7-8. Post holders in English, the library and the reading lead work together to ensure year 7 and 8 are quizzing on completion of a reading book and making progress in STAR Reading, an online assessment of students' reading growth, which takes place three times over the course of the year.

(iv) Reading for pleasure

We believe in creating a positive reading culture so that our students develop a lifelong love of reading. A key aspect of developing a reading culture is to be a reading model for students[19]: staff should use a range of opportunities to share their own love of reading with students. Staff should also create several opportunities for students discuss their own reading preferences with peers and staff. These include: library lessons in English based around the book choices as part of the AR programme; book clubs and competitions led by the reading lead and library; the work of the student librarians; academic mentoring through peer reading; activities on World Book Day week; form time discussions in the DEAR lesson.

Students should read as widely as possible and be encouraged to read for at least 25 minutes per evening and a range of staff should advise parents on how to support reading at home. While students are advised to read as diversely as possible, we actively encourage students to read high quality literature from the literary canon, which will inevitably enrich students' vocabulary and syntax. Recommended age-appropriate reads are available through the English department or through the librarians. All teachers must be able to recommend wider reading around their subject and offer comprehensive reading lists where appropriate. Students are also encouraged to build an impressive list of authors they have had contact within preparation for their sixth form UCAS applications.

3.4 Writing

Writing is demanding because it requires students to combine three processes: students must be able to transcribe (physically write), compose (generate ideas and translate them into ideas, words and sentences) and use executive functions (plan and be motivated to review and redraft texts)[20]. In order to support students effectively with this challenging process, teachers need to have an excellent knowledge of the complexity of writing, which means a skilful breaking down of writing tasks. Teachers and learning support assistants need to have an excellent understanding of the role spelling, punctuation and grammar plays in writing in their subjects.

Strategies for breaking down writing tasks include[21]:

- Providing precise word level, sentence level and whole text level instruction in subject specific writing; for example, sentence starters that encourage students to analyse sources more deeply (e.g. 'While initially it may appear that…on closer inspection…')
- Ensuring that students understand the subject-specific connotations of Tier 2 vocabulary used in writing questions; for example 'evaluate' questions often require a different approach for different subjects.
- Explicitly teaching planning strategies, such as how to use graphic organisers.
- Helping students to monitor and review their writing; for example by providing a checklist of features included in high quality writing. Self or peer assessment may follow, with explicit guidance from the teacher.

Teachers should model high quality written responses to a task to demonstrate what is expected before students begin writing. Effective strategies for this include live modelling of writing on the board or through using a visualiser or preparing a response beforehand that meets the expected criteria.

For non-fiction extended writing, teachers must consider the genre of writing required for the task to ensure that their register and style is appropriate. Students should always be aware of the format/text type (what), audience (who) and purpose (why) of their writing. There is a whole-school writing frame for non-fiction extended writing to support this process.

Reading and writing instruction should be combined in every subject since they are complementary skills. Reading high quality texts in every subject support students in observing discipline-specific aspects of writing. Strategies for combining reading and writing instruction include: using annotations to explore key features of texts; asking students to read short summaries of texts they read; creating checklists based on examples

of good writing; anticipating common misconceptions through highlighting how writers avoid them in high quality texts[22].

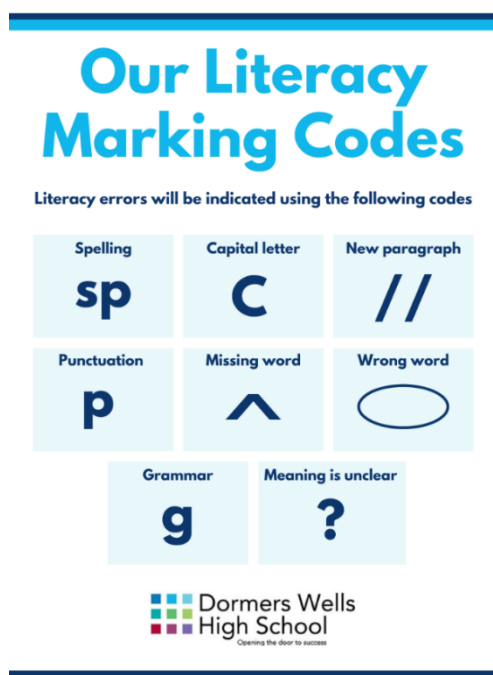### 3.5 Pastoral Curriculum

(i)   My Key Skills

As part of the My Key Skills programme, all tutor groups from year 7 to year 13 take part in set activities focused on a range of literacy skills that we believe are applicable to all subjects. These include oracy, vocabulary work, spelling, grammar and punctuation. Students and staff are expected to draw links between the content of My Key Skills and wider learning in the curriculum.

(ii)   Drop Everything and Read (DEAR)

One form time per week for all year groups involves a focus on fiction and non-fiction reading and this is aimed at improving fluency, comprehension and students' motivation to read for pleasure. There are a range of different approaches to DEAR, which are reviewed each year. These approaches include: teacher-led whole-class reading of a novel as part of the pastoral curriculum; individual silent reading of a book of the student's choice; reading of articles and extracts, chosen by tutors or students.

3.6 Assessment

All teachers are expected to use the literacy marking codes (below) as part of the whole-school assessment policy and embed DIRT (Directed Improvement and Reflection Time) or green pen activities into their marking, assessment and feedback schedule. Individual curriculum areas may have more specific marking codes, but these are the basic codes are expected across the school. Students should have a range of opportunities to re-draft extended writing in relevant subjects.

Our Literacy Marking Codes

Literacy errors will be indicated using the following codes

Spelling	Capital letter	New paragraph
sp	**C**	**//**

Punctuation	Missing word	Wrong word
p	**∧**	⬭

Grammar	Meaning is unclear
g	**?**

Dormers Wells
High School
Opening the door to success

3.7 Intervention

One of our key aims is to provide high quality literacy interventions for struggling students. While providing additional support is not an alternative to investing efforts to improve the quality of teaching in the classroom[23], we provide tiers of support to struggling students, which move from teaching of smaller groups to one to one support, increasing intensity with the level of need. We also use assessment (for example: progress in subjects, NGRT scores, baseline assessments, reading fluency, progress in Accelerated Reader, student voice) rigorously in order to monitor and continually re-evaluate the progress of intervention students so decisions can be made about the next steps.

Any students arriving in year 7 with a reading scaled score of less than 100 are closely monitored and offered structured intervention; for example, through paired reading with an older student with high reading ability, being in a smaller English class or parents inviting in for workshops on how to support reading at home through Accelerated Reader. If the reading scaled score is 80 or below, students will receive one-to-one or small group reading support tailored to the area of need, which may include phonics instruction.

A more tailored intervention, funded by the catch-up premium, is the year 7 literacy catch-up curriculum, where students are selected on evaluation of the intake's assessment from primary school. The literacy catch-up curriculum aims to upskill students in reading, writing and spoken language to enable them access the mainstream curriculum with success from year 8 onwards. Students do not attend discrete lessons for humanities subjects (Geography or History), but instead study these areas of the curriculum thematically as part of an intensive literacy catch-up programme. Students will exit the programme if their progress suggests that they have 'caught up' and are ready to meet the reading and writing demands of the mainstream curriculum. The students are closely monitored on entering new subjects in year 8, and until year 11, with further interventions taking place where needed.

3.8 Staff training
It is the responsibility of the Leadership Team and Curriculum Leaders to ensure that teaching and support staff receive appropriate training in how to teach literacy, especially in relation to literacy. INSET days, PLTS, DLTS and short courses that are tailored to more specific training needs are opportunities to develop further knowledge and confidence in literacy teaching.

4. Monitoring and evaluating impact
The impact of the literacy policy is monitored and evaluated through:
- Lesson observations, book looks and learning walks during the curriculum review and year review cycles
- Curriculum audits
- Student and parental voice through surveys and focus group discussions
- Staff voice
- The academic progress/examination results of key groups of students

The Literacy Policy was reviewed by the Leadership Team on 8th June 2024.

Reviews and Operation of this Policy

The Governors have overall responsibility for the operation of this policy and it will be reviewed annually.

Signed: _____ Date:_____
Chair of Governors: Tan Afzal

Signed: _____ Date: _____
Headteacher: Róisín Walsh

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