

# SACRED HEART HIGH SCHOOL



## LITERACY POLICY

NOVEMBER 2025

*To be reviewed November 2027*



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## 1 VISION

*'Young people who leave school without good literacy skills are held back at every stage of their life. Their outcomes are poorer on almost every measure, from health and wellbeing, to employment and finance. The most recent estimates suggest that low levels of literacy cost the UK economy at least £20 billion a year.'*

Sir Kevan Collins, Chief Executive – Education Endowment Foundation

Good literacy is the means to ensure that all students are supported to fulfil their potential within the wider curriculum and the wider world. It is essential for their development as learners that students have the ability to understand and engage with written texts, write with accuracy and clarity and communicate orally with confidence and purpose. The whole school community has a crucial role to play in supporting students' literacy development. *All teachers are teachers of literacy.* As such, the staff of Sacred Heart High School are committed to developing literacy skills in all of our students.

This policy reflects and supports the ethos and philosophy of High Performance Learning and the Five Goals of Sacred Heart Education:

1. Active Faith
2. Valuing Intellect
3. Social Awareness
4. Building a Community
5. Personal Growth

## 2 SACRED HEART HIGH SCHOOL LITERACY GOALS

The purpose of Literacy at Sacred Heart is:

- To empower all students with the knowledge and skills to read, write and speak effectively

### Reading

- To ensure that all students develop their abilities to read, understand and interpret an increasingly sophisticated range of fiction and non-fiction texts as they progress through the school to the end of KS5
- To ensure that all pupils develop a love of reading for pleasure, a confidence when reading out loud and that they have read a wide range of complete novels from writers of many cultures, backgrounds and perspectives

### Writing

- To ensure all students understand the components of written literacy – punctuation, spelling, grammar and sentence structure.
- To ensure that all students are able to write with increasing confidence, fluency and sophistication for a range of different purposes.

### Spoken Language

- To ensure that all students can talk with confidence for a range of purposes through explicit teaching of spoken language skills

### **Vocabulary Development**

- To enable all students to develop a wide and sophisticated vocabulary, including tier 2 and 3 vocabulary, and have the skills to decode more complex words.

## **3 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

In order to support the achievement of these goals, the following roles and responsibilities apply:

- **Senior Leaders:** drive forward continuous improvements in literacy;
- **Literacy co-ordinator:** support departments in the implementation of strategies and encourage departments to learn from each other's practice by sharing ideas; provide appropriate literacy resources for use in the classroom and at home; lead literacy training in the school; lead monitoring and intervention for literacy alongside the Curriculum Access Department;
- **Teachers of English:** provide students with knowledge, skills and understanding they need to read, write and speak and listen effectively; to provide training and support to other subject areas;
- **Heads of Department:** to develop, implement and monitor the use of LAC in their curriculum areas;
- **Librarian:** support the development of reading throughout the school, through promotion of reading, organising competitions and events, updating reading lists, supporting interventions and running clubs.
- **SENCO** – support and organise literacy interventions and provide guidance on appropriate strategies for supporting students;
- **Teachers across the curriculum:** contribute to students' development of speaking, listening, writing and reading by following the school LAC policy and their own department's LAC strategy;
- **Literacy Focus Group:** share best practice across the curriculum; research and develop effective literacy resources; model, monitor and evaluate impact; embed effective practice; to develop links and connection outside of school with parents and primary schools;
- **Parents:** to support their children with homework and reading for pleasure;
- **Students:** take increasing responsibility for recognising their own literacy needs and making improvements;
- **Governors:** Review this literacy policy annually.

## **4 STRATEGIES**

This section explains the strategies to achieve the aims of the policy. These are:

- Prioritise disciplinary literacy across the curriculum
- Provide targeted vocabulary instruction in every subject
- Develop students' ability to read complex academic texts
- Break down complex writing tasks

- Combine writing instruction with reading in every subject
- Provide opportunities for structured talk
- Provide high quality literacy interventions for struggling students

These strategies are taken from the Education Endowment Foundation's publication *Improving Literacy in Secondary Schools: Guidance Report (2018)*.

#### **4.1 Prioritise Disciplinary Literacy Across the Curriculum**

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Disciplinary literacy recognises that literacy skills are both general and subject specific. As students progress through an increasingly specialised secondary school curriculum, there is a growing need to ensure that students are trained to access the academic language and conventions of different subjects. Strategies grounded in disciplinary literacy aim to meet this need, building on the premise that each subject has its own unique language, ways of knowing, doing, and communicating.

By anchoring literacy clearly in subjects, disciplinary literacy aims to support students to develop relevant 'disciplinary habits of mind'.<sup>5</sup> These are subtle but important differences in reading in subject specific ways.<sup>6</sup> For example, in Biology, a student may read an informational text about photosynthesis and assume that is it an authoritative account, suppressing thoughts about the author of the text. In contrast, in the English classroom, a student could read with an active awareness of the author and the context in which the text was authored. For maths teachers, explicitly teaching mathematical vocabulary and specific reading strategies for written problems could support students to read like mathematicians.

##### **How can school and subject leaders prioritise disciplinary literacy?**

- Auditing existing literacy practices, attitudes, and resources in school— involving both teachers and students; this could include an evaluation of existing literacy policies and roles such as the literacy coordinator;
- Creating subject specific literacy plans, rooted in the discipline, that address barriers to accessing the curriculum related to reading, writing and communication;
- Supporting teachers to define effective reading, writing, and talk in their subjects; for example, history teachers might discuss what reading strategies are deployed by historians to appraise historical sources;
- Evaluating the quality and complexity of existing reading materials in school, assessing the degree of academic challenge such texts pose to our secondary school students as they progress through school; relating this to baseline data of students' reading ability, and;
- Ensuring that the development of disciplinary literacy is coherently aligned with curriculum development—for example, in Art, that the development of drawing skill is paired with teaching students how to make high quality annotations utilising specialist vocabulary.

#### **4.2 Provide Targeted Vocabulary Instruction in Every Subject**

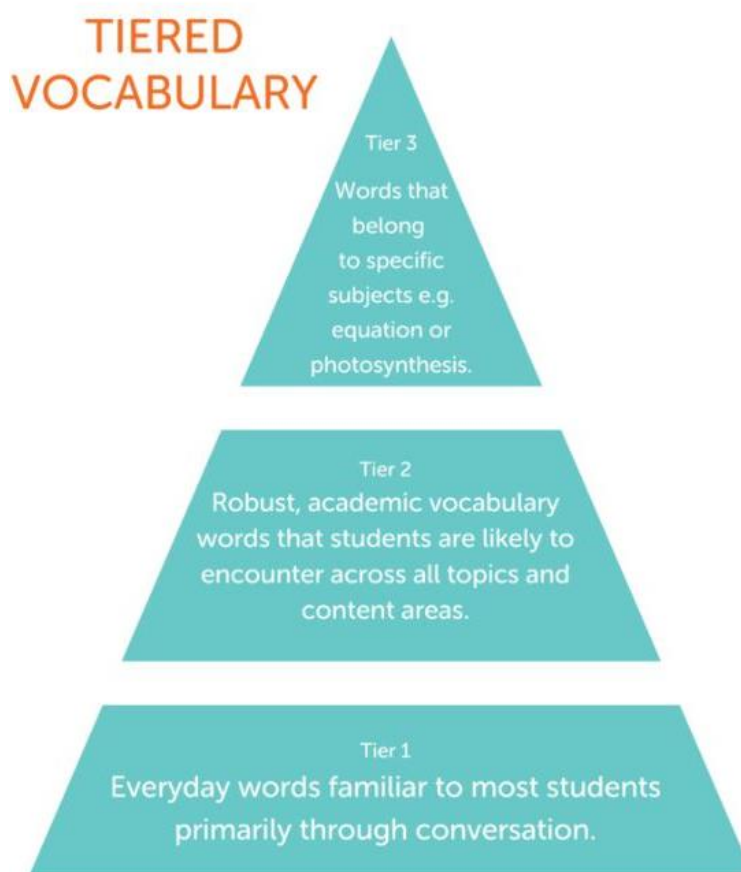
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Students develop their language skills throughout secondary school as they read both in class and independently, and from engaging in academic talk and listening. Nurturing the development of the academic language of secondary school is crucial, given the increasingly specialised language of subject disciplines. This can be supported by targeted vocabulary instruction.

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.

As students move from one subject classroom to another, they need to navigate and switch between subtly different forms of communication and vocabulary use. Increasing the challenge still further, the subject specific academic vocabulary of the subject disciplines differs considerably from the language students habitually use to communicate outside of the school gates.

Several helpful frameworks exist to help secondary school teachers identify complex vocabulary (including phrases and idioms) and select words to teach explicitly. Isabel Beck and colleagues developed a model presenting tiers of vocabulary that helpfully delineates between vocabulary used in subject disciplines and across the curriculum. A key insight from this model is the need to explicitly teach Tier 2 and Tier 3 vocabulary, which will be unfamiliar to many students.



While there is relatively limited evidence about how best to teach vocabulary explicitly, promising ways to promote targeted instruction of academic language in the classroom include:

- Exploring common word roots. For example, in science, analysing the etymology of 'photo' ('light') and generate other scientific vocabulary that includes the root 'photo' such as 'photosynthesis', 'photobiotic' and 'photon'. The word roots model is explored in further detail in the EEF's Improving Secondary Science Guidance Report.

- Undertaking 'word building' activities, such as matching prefixes and root words for example, 'anti-body' or 'anti-matter.'
- Encouraging independent word-learning strategies, such as how to break down words into parts and how to use dictionaries, to support students as they read more widely.
- Using graphic organisers and concept maps to break down complex academic terms in visual ways to aid understanding.
- Undertaking regular low-stakes assessment, such as quizzes, to provide multiple exposures to complex subject specific vocabulary, before applying this vocabulary in use; for example, in essay writing.
- Consistently signposting synonyms so that students recognise how some Tier 2 vocabulary items can enhance the accuracy and sophistication of their talk and writing in the subject domain.
- Combining vocabulary development with spelling instruction. For example, highlighting morphological patterns that determine complex spelling of subject specific vocabulary.

#### **4.3 Develop Students' Ability to Read and Access Academic Texts**

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A major part of the challenge of literacy in secondary school is related to demands of academic reading. Whilst some students may learn to navigate subject specific texts naturally, others are likely to struggle, particularly when working asked to work independently.

Reading strategies aim to support the active engagement with texts that improve comprehension. Given the complexity of academic reading, students need to be able to deploy an array of reading strategies, which can be modelled and practised in the classroom to develop students as strategic readers.

Reading strategies include:

**Activating prior knowledge**—students think about what they already know about a topic from reading or other experiences, such as visits to museums, 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. Example: students are asked to recall the 'push and pull factors' that determine international migration.

**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. Example: students could be asked to predict the impact of international migration on English seaside towns.

**Questioning**—students generate their own questions about a text to check their comprehension and monitor their subject knowledge. Example: students generate five key questions on 'the impact of increased net migration into the UK since 2004.'

**Clarifying**—students identify areas of uncertainty, which may be individual words or phrases, and seek information to clarify meaning. Example: students check they understand a graphic presenting net migration figures presented alongside the text.

**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. Example: students generate a short summary of the impact of internal migration on the UK since 2004.

#### **4.4 Breaking Down Complex Writing Tasks**

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Writing is challenging, for teachers and students alike. Writing tasks, including high mark questions in exams, can require students to recall and marshal large quantities of information, communicate with accuracy and group ideas in structured ways. Kellogg, an American literacy expert, argues that writing tasks can be as cognitively demanding as chess. Understanding why writing is challenging and how complex writing tasks, including essays and extended answers, can be broken down can help students succeed across the curriculum.

Teachers can help students cope with the challenge of writing in several ways, but a common theme running through effective forms of writing instruction is that they support students to break down complex writing tasks and help students to become fluent in as many of the processes involved in writing as possible. Teachers can help students break down writing tasks by:

- Providing **word-level, sentence-level and whole-text level instruction**. There is evidence to suggest that by focusing on the micro elements of writing for longer, students will ultimately be able to write longer, high quality responses. For example, in history, sentence starters can encourage students to analyse sources more deeply (for example, 'While initially it might appear that..., on closer inspection...').
- Ensuring that students understand the subject-specific connotations of **Tier 2 vocabulary** used in writing questions. For example, in English Literature, "evaluate" questions often require students to justify their answers with reference to a personal response, whereas in Physical Education evaluation may require students to refer to the likely consequences, strengths and weaknesses of particular choices.
- Explicitly teaching students planning strategies, such as how to use graphic organisers. Over time students should develop proficiency using a range of strategies, and develop the ability to choose between them depending on task and audience.
- Helping students monitor and review their writing, for example by providing a checklist of features included in high quality answers or using it as a self or peer-assessment tool.

When introducing any strategy, it is helpful if first the teacher models how the strategy should be used, for example, by speaking aloud to explain what she is doing and why, before students use the strategy themselves. After attempting to use the strategy, students should be given an opportunity to reflect on whether and why the approach was helpful in order to help them make links between the use of the strategy and success in the task.

In common with wider evidence about modelling and scaffolding, it is recommended that over time assistance from the teacher is gradually removed, supporting students to become increasingly independent. Strategies can also be grouped together into sequences to create longer writing cycles. A typical writing cycle will include planning, drafting and editing stages. While not every writing task will require every step in the cycle, an important part of teaching writing is ensuring that students

understand that expert writers in any subject follow multiple steps to create high quality work.

Teachers can also support students by:

- Ensuring students' transcription skills become automatic so that they can focus on other aspects of writing, and by quickly identifying students in need of extra support, which might include practising spelling, handwriting or typing.
- Recognising that students with difficulties with transcription – for example, related to dyslexia or dyspraxia – may not be able to demonstrate their true knowledge of a topic through written work unless extra support is available.
- Providing a computer can help improve the length and quality of writing from students identified as weaker writers, particularly when instruction in typing is also provided.
- Using pre-writing activities that ensure students have secure background knowledge related to the topic they are writing about. For example, recapping key ideas before beginning a writing task will help students use them in writing more successfully.

#### **4.5 Combine Writing Instruction with Reading in Every Subject**

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It can be tempting to see good writing as something that flows seamlessly from an understanding of the ideas and concepts that have been studied: if students understand the material, then shouldn't they be able to write about it effectively?

However, while subject knowledge is undoubtedly necessary to write about a topic, this view is likely to be unhelpful for two reasons. First, content knowledge alone may not be enough to enable students to write well. Students are likely to benefit from instruction in the 'rules of writing', which will vary in each subject area. Second, it overlooks the potential of writing to deepen students' understanding of key concepts and ideas.

Reading high quality texts in every subject, for example those that effectively illustrate the conventions of particular types of writing, gives students an opportunity to observe the discipline-specific aspects of writing that relate to particular subjects.

In English Literature, this might mean developing an understanding of how writers use form and language to create coherent themes within texts, while in art lessons this might mean understanding how critics identify layers of meaning within paintings.

Effective ways of combining reading and writing might include:

- **Writing before reading**, for example by asking students to bullet what they currently know about a topic or generate questions they will later try to answer through reading;
- **Using annotations** to identify information or explore key features of texts, e.g. underlining information about the types of evidence being cited in a science textbook;
- Asking students to write **short summaries** of texts they read; although this is a skill which some students may struggle with initially, writing a one-sentence summary of a paragraph, for example, can help students

think more carefully about the meaning of what is written, and monitor their comprehension of the text;

- **Creating checklists** based on examples of good writing in each subject. For example, while reading a geography textbook, the teacher might ask students to highlight words related to cause and effect, such as 'Due to this...'; 'A contributory factor was...'. Students can subsequently use checklists and examples in their own answers;
- **Anticipating common misconceptions** or errors and highlighting how writers avoid them in high quality texts. For example, in Psychology, students might mistakenly believe that theories can be 'proved'; it would therefore be beneficial to highlight phrases that experienced writers use instead. For example, instead of saying "This proves the theory that..." expert writers say: "This theory is supported by the fact that..." or "This evidence is consistent with the theory that..."

### **Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar**

- Fast and accurate spelling is a key component of writing fluency. While there is limited high quality evidence about how best to teach spelling, one core principle is that spelling should be actively taught, rather than simply tested.
- Promising strategies for teaching spelling include:
- Teaching groups of related spellings alongside a discussion of the morphology and etymology (see Recommendation 2), prioritising words that are linked to content that is currently being studied rather than from decontextualized word lists
- Pre-teaching spellings of challenging words and anticipating common errors, for example, 'government' in politics or 'Shakespeare' in English Literature, homophones such as 'there' vs. 'their' or joining errors, for example, 'alot' instead of 'a lot';
- Helping students recognise familiar patterns of letters within words and sound out words based on their knowledge of phonics;
- Collaborative approaches, for example, grouping students and asking pairs to come up with memorable strategies for spelling challenging words;
- Teaching students to self-quiz using retrieval practice, for example, using flash cards

Multiple reviews indicate that teaching grammar as a stand-alone topic in a de-contextualised way does not have a positive impact on writing quality, with some syntheses even indicating a negative effect. Instead, it appears more promising to teach grammar in a way that highlights how grammatical changes can convey different types of meaning in the context of given types of writing, rather than on defining and describing grammatical terms in the abstract.

In addition, there is consistent evidence supporting sentence-combining activities, which involves asking students to create more sophisticated sentences by combining two or more basic sentences. For example, students might be given the basic sentences, 'Tudor clothing was uncomfortable'; 'The Tudors dressed up for extravagant parties' and asked to combine them, for example, 'despite the fact that Tudor clothing was uncomfortable, the

Tudors dressed up for extravagant parties,’ as part of a lesson about the importance of image and reputation in Tudor England.

#### **4.6 Provide Opportunities for Structured Talk**

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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.

In many subject areas—not only English—developing students’ skills of communication and argument is also a curricular end in itself. For example, Jonathan Osborne, an American academic, contends that in Science: ‘Critique is not some peripheral feature [...], but rather it is core to [the subject].’

While all students benefit from classroom discussion activities, talk also appears to be particularly beneficial for low attaining students and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Quality of talk is likely to be more important than quantity. Improving quality means much more than getting students to talk more, or, as a teacher, trying to talk less. Instead, quality is more likely to be improved by considering structure and variety.

One helpful structure for thinking about discussion in the classroom, developed by the academic Lauren Resnick and colleagues, is known as “accountable talk”. The framework highlights the importance of accountability to:

- **Knowledge**—for example, by seeking to be accurate and true;
- **Reasoning**—for example, by providing justifications for claims; and
- **Community**—for example, listening and showing respect to others.

Importantly, the framework encourages teachers to think about the subject specific features of discussion. For example, in seeking to make students accountable to knowledge during a debate, a religious studies teacher could prompt speakers to refer back to quotes from key texts. Likewise, the teacher will be prepared to step in to correct misconceptions that arise as the debate develops.

Reasoning is also often subject specific. The word ‘evaluate’ has different meanings across different subjects. Some subjects will require students to assess the reliability of sources, while others will invite personal responses. While some students may pick up these subtleties implicitly, the majority are likely to benefit from explicit teaching of how to reason within each discipline.

There is likely to be commonality in the ways students are accountable to community in different subjects and schools may find it useful to consider curriculumwide routines and expectations, for example, listening carefully and speaking calmly. However, in addition to expectations about conduct, accountability to community also emphasises the importance of making students feel that their contributions in class matter, for example, by emphasising the value of errors.

#### **Effective ways of promoting high quality talk might include:**

- Teachers modelling what effective talk sounds like in their subjects. This includes using subject specific language and vocabulary, explicitly

introducing the ways of reasoning that matter within their discipline, and the ways in which experts use metacognitive talk.

- Deliberately sequencing talk activities alongside reading and writing tasks to give students opportunities to practise using new vocabulary, develop ideas before writing, or discuss ways to overcome common challenges ('tell your partner what to do if they get stuck').
- Using sentence starters and prompts to help students to structure and extend their responses. For example, starters such as 'my claim is based on the fact that...' can help students link to evidence, while a shorthand like ABCQ (Agree, Build, Challenge, Question) sets out different ways to contribute to a discussion. Teachers can prompt students to extend their answers with questions, e.g. 'Can you use 'moreover' to link to a second piece of evidence?'
- Selecting questions that are open-ended, well-suited to discussion and allow opportunity for authentic student response rather than direct replication of teaching: for example, where there are several plausible answers and where students' own views might develop.
- Setting goals and roles, particularly for small group discussions. By ensuring students have a clear goal—for example, a question to answer—it is more likely that talk will be focused and that students fully participate. It can also be beneficial to assign roles, such as summariser or questioner, though as students become more used to routines, it may not be necessary to make roles explicit.
- Using wait time to develop students' responses, by leaving a pause after they have first given an answer, which gives them a chance to reframe, extend, or justify their reasoning.
- Giving precise feedback relating to different elements of accountability. For example, in addition to praising a student's use of evidence, teachers might praise the way in which students follow the norms of discussion, for example, by naming classmates or linking new contributions explicitly to previous points. Students can also be trained to provide peer feedback during talk activities, for example, related to the use of new vocabulary.
- Considering how to promote high quality talk as part of departmental and whole school training. It will be helpful to create some whole school routines, for example, related to behaviour expectations, while other approaches, such as the use of prompts, may be subject specific.

#### **4.7 Provide High Quality Literacy Interventions for Struggling Students**

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Students who start secondary school with low levels of literacy are a group in particular need of support. In 2018, 25% of students began secondary school without having reached the 'expected standard' in their Year 6 SATs reading assessment. The trajectory of similar students in previous cohorts is stark; in 2018, fewer than 1 in 5 of the students who had not reached the expected level in reading at primary school went on to achieve a 4 or above in GCSE English. Crucially however, the consequences of their low literacy are highly likely to be felt across the curriculum.

While providing additional support should not be an alternative to investing in efforts to improve the quality of teaching in the classroom, preparing a strategy that offers tiers of support to struggling students is recommended.

Tiers of support move from whole class teaching through small group tuition to one to one support, increasing intensity with need. In most cases, schools should consider small group tuition as a first option, taking care to bring together students who are struggling in the same area of literacy, before moving to one to one tuition if small group tuition is ineffective.

The model of intervention is based on the following tiers:

<b>Tier</b>	<b>Support Strategies</b>
3 One-to-one	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• One-to-one reading support through structured programme</li><li>• Additional tutoring</li></ul>
2 Small group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Y12 Reading Buddies</li><li>• After-school reading interventions</li><li>• Small group morning literacy interventions</li></ul>
1 Whole class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Implementation of whole school literacy strategies</li><li>• Core English curriculum</li><li>• Form-time reading</li><li>• Bedrock online English and vocabulary development (Y7 and Y8)</li><li>• Retrieval practice of key vocabulary for each unit using Carousel Learning</li><li>• Reading Initiatives and Celebration Events</li></ul>

It is therefore important that accurate assessment data is used to identify which tier of support is appropriate for each student. The following assessment data is used:

- Baseline GL assessments for English and Reading Age at the start of Y7, Y8 and Y9
- Prior-attainment in KS2
- Handover information, including access needs, from primary schools
- End of Y6 CATS tests
- Termly assessments
- Informal identification in reading lessons or through ongoing book marking

Students identified for additional support will be given interventions appropriate to their needs. Students will move between tiers based on the impact of intervention on their progress.

Effective interventions are likely to have the following features:

- Regular sessions that are maintained over a sustained period and carefully timetabled to enable consistent delivery
- Training from experienced trainers or teachers;
- Structured supporting resources and/or lesson plans with clear objectives;

- Assessments to identify appropriate students, guide areas for focus, and track student progress;
- Tuition that is additional to, and explicitly linked with, normal lessons;
- Connections between the out of class learning and day-to-day whole class learning.

## **5 CREATING A READING CULTURE**

The benefits of reading for pleasure are well-documented and it is essential that Sacred Heart has a strong a vibrant reading culture throughout the school. In order to do this:

- All students in Y7-10 and Y12 tutor groups read one specifically chosen novel per term, with their tutor in order to create a shared SHHS canon of literature across the school and support students who do not have access to quality literature outside of school.
- The school will celebrate reading events such as World Book Day
- The school will organise ongoing events such as Y10 reading challenge;
- Departments will provide readings lists to all pupil and foreground the importance of wider reading in their subject areas;
- The librarian and English teachers will organise reading clubs in all Key Stages
- Teachers will use displays to foreground their own reading and possible reading books for their subjects;
- Reading lessons for Year 8 and 9 will take place as part of the English curriculum;

## **6 FURTHER READING AND USEFUL LINKS**

Improving Literacy in Secondary Schools | EEF  
([educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk](https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk))

*Reading Reconsidered*, Doug Lemov 2016

*Bringing Words to Life*, Beck, McKeown and Kucan 2013

*Closing the Vocabulary Gap*, Alex Quigley 2018

*The Writing Revolution*, Hochman and Wexler 2017

*Closing the Word Gap* - OUP

<https://global.oup.com/education/content/dictionaries/key-issues/word-gap/?region=uk>

<https://literacytrust.org.uk/>

<http://www.sec-ed.co.uk/best-practice/every-teacher-is-a-teacher-of-literacy-teaching-literacy-across-the-curriculum-part-1/>

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## **7 REVIEW AND RATIFICATION**

This policy has been approved and ratified by the Headteacher and the Curriculum Committee of the Governing Body in November 2025

Mrs S O'Donovan  
Headteacher

Anne Gregory  
Chair of Curriculum Committee