

# Hitchin Girls' School



## Literacy for Learning 2025

***'Reading is a high priority'*** (Ofsted Inspection of Hitchin Girls' School autumn 2024)

***This guidance challenges the notion that literacy in secondary school is solely the preserve of English teachers, or literacy coordinators. The emphasis on disciplinary literacy makes clear that every teacher communicates their subject through academic language, and that reading, writing, speaking and listening are at the heart of knowing and doing Science, Art, History, and every other subject in secondary school'***

***'Disciplinary literacy is an approach to improving literacy across the curriculum. It recognises that literacy skills are both general and subject specific, emphasising the value of supporting teachers in every subject to teach students how to read, write and communicate effectively in their subjects.'***

EEF (Educational Endowment Foundation, 2022)

Governing Body approval: November 2025

Next review date: November 2028

## Ethos

### **YOU CANNOT READ TO LEARN UNTIL YOU HAVE LEARNT TO READ AND WRITE**

At Hitchin Girls' School Literacy is the responsibility of ALL staff and ALL subjects.

Literacy, with all that it encompasses, is an essential element within the English curriculum but the two are not wholly the same – *English extends far wider than the acquisition of literacy skills.*

For students to thrive in their literacy skill acquisition, understanding and application every aspect of their school experience must model best practice. The importance of this cannot be underestimated; as such literacy in all of its facets is central to all Ofsted frameworks and inspection models.

***'Teachers are the only second chance for some children to have a rich language experience. If these children are not getting it at school, they are not getting it.'*** (Neil Mercer, Cambridge Oracy Centre)

At HGS we strive to ensure that every learning activity, school event and opportunity promotes, supports and teaches the 5 core literacy skills: Reading, Writing, Vocabulary, Oracy and Active Listening. Everyone has a responsibility to actively promote and share best practices of all 5 core skills in all that we do, ensuring that we are modelling what we expect of our students, and what they need to be successful learners. This extends to all methods of communication i.e. newsletters, Google Classroom, emails and signage which actively promotes correct and appropriate use of literacy.

## Rationale

***'Young people who leave school without good literacy skills are held back at every stage of 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'*** (Improving Literacy in Secondary School Guidance Report - EEF 2021)

***'Research shows that young people entering the workplace often lack the speaking and listening skills to communicate successfully. 70% of employers rate literacy skills as one of their three most important considerations when recruiting school and college leavers.'***

(CBI Education and Skills Annual Report 2019)

***The Wolf Report (2011) states that literacy is the 'most vital foundation for employment' and that 'when young people compete for jobs and enter the workplace, they will be expected to communicate precisely and effectively.'***

We are preparing every young person to be able to thrive and succeed in their chosen futures and have the very best life opportunities and chances.

**Therefore, there can never be enough support and consolidation for literacy and it must be at the forefront of everything that we do throughout a student's time with us.**

***'All teachers, irrespective of subject are teachers of literacy'*** (Ofsted Framework 2014)

***'Literacy in schools must not simply be seen as a basket of general skills. Instead, it must be grounded in the specifics of each subject'***

***'Secondary school teachers should ask not what they can do for literacy, but what literacy can do for them'*** (Improving Literacy in Secondary School Guidance Report - EEF 2021)

## Aims

All HGS teachers and staff, regardless of subject, will actively promote, support and teach literacy skills to students of all ages Year 7-13.

Progress checks, student attainment, annual NGRT testing (New Group Reading Test), YARC (York Assessment of Reading Comprehension) screening - for identified students - will form the key methods for monitoring, tracking and evaluating student literacy progress. In addition, Learning Walks, Lesson observations, work monitoring, student voice panels alongside progress checks and summative assessments will form key areas and foci of both our Self Evaluation Framework (SEF) and School Improvement Plan (SIP).

***'Vocabulary at age 13 strongly predicts both English and Maths at GCSE - more strongly than pupils' socio-economic background.'*** (Spencer et al., 2017)

## Disciplinary Literacy

- Knowledge, understanding and application of Disciplinary Literacy at all stages is essential.
- The introduction of subject specific vocabulary/terminology, including the etymology, morphology and pivotally application of new words both in subject specific and wider contexts should be explicitly taught at all key stages.
- When needed, relevant scaffolding/support will be provided to ensure that all students are able to access, understand, spell and appropriately apply/use language required by their curriculum.

HGS students are able to effectively express themselves and communicate their ideas in all subjects; both through written and verbal formats; utilising appropriate technology to support SEND/identified needs such as Read Write technology which is available on school and student devices.

***'By attending to the literacy demands of their subjects, teachers increase their pupils' chance of success in their subjects'*** (Improving Literacy in Secondary School Guidance Report - EEF 2021)

Planning, assessment and feedback provided by teachers and the Learning Support Department must:

- Clearly highlight and promote subject specific vocabulary/terminology including key words. This should include breaking them down into syllables and explaining the etymology (meaning/origin of a word). The Learning Support department provides resources to support and aid the teaching and learning of key words.
- Clear explanation of **command words** in different subjects/contexts so that students can place meaning in different contexts across their curriculum. Pivotaly, the importance and application of

command words is explicitly taught in all subjects so that students understand and are confident in what a command word is asking of them in order to be prepared for assessments at KS3, GCSE and A Level.

- Consistently assess, mark and provide meaningful feedback for students' work (written, comprehension, speaking and listening) using the agreed.

*For frequency of homework, marking and assessment please refer to our Assessment and Feedback and Homework Policies 2023 (available on our website).*

In terms of Literacy, marking and assessment must clearly inform students' understanding of their progress, identifying any errors/misconceptions and explaining areas of development, and how to achieve them.

Feedback (teacher/self/peer) may be written either physically on student's work or digitally via Google Classroom or equivalent. Feedback may also be in a verbal format using Mote (or equivalent) or utilise the effective methods of rubrics/matrices with highlighting/Ragging to clearly show progress and areas for development.

In all formats of feedback:

- Annotation of students' work (both physical and digital) must be clear, legible and in a suitable colour that is immediately evident on the page/screen.
- When correcting spellings/grammar in written work, the correction of all literacy mistakes is not helpful and can be demoralising and demotivating for a student. Teacher judgment here is crucial as they best know the student in the context of the subject/class. Pupil Passports should be taken into consideration as part of this process.
- Teachers will be aware of, take into consideration and support those students for whom English is an additional language (EAL) or who have SEND needs. Again Pupil Passports should be actively used to inform the best support for a student.
- In line with our Behaviour for Learning system, students should receive regular praise for what they have achieved and be made aware of what they need to do in order to improve and make further progress.
- Feedback should take into account previous work and targets. For example, if a student has been repeatedly reminded about incorrectly spelling a subject specific keyword and continues to do so then this must be highlighted and addressed.
- Common errors such as missing or incorrect use of capital letters, commas and apostrophes need to be addressed in all formats including digital work/submissions.
- For any corrections, students must be given time to correct errors, practise spellings and apply them in new contexts in order to embed what they are learning. Teachers must then check corrections so that students are clear what their target is and when they have met it. This is crucial and should be evident in all work. In the best examples, a dialogue is evident in the work between student and teacher using departmental systems to make this explicit, accessible, motivating and rewarding.
- Disciplinary Literacy should be actively used in the classroom with the most relevant keywords for the learning in that lesson being displayed, referred to and embedded throughout the lesson; ideally on the board/BenQ board or relevant display/resource. (Glossaries and word banks are good, but not sufficient and will only be effective if they are actively used).

- Students should evidence these key words in the context of the work they produce during that lesson – how this is done will depend on the context of the subject but students may wish to highlight or underline them to make them clear on the page.
- Exploring the derivation of subject specific words, their roots and how they may be used in other curriculum areas has been identified as outstanding practice by Ofsted.

‘Bad habits’ that should be avoided include:

- Writing in block capitals. Teachers should model correct capitalisation, including keywords.
- Poor handwriting – it must be clear and legible in order to support teaching and learning.
- Using abbreviations unless specific to subject terminology or relevant to the lesson; in these cases it will be explicitly taught firstly in the full followed by the abbreviated format with clear instructions as to when to use which version.


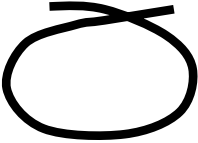

In order to actively promote and support literacy each classroom should:



Make use of student dictionaries and thesaurus. These should be actively promoted as a first point of reference whenever relevant.


# HGS Literacy Marking Codes

**Physical work** - to be done in a colour that stands out from the page

<b>SP</b>	Spelling	<b>P</b>	Punctuation
	Highlights a particular mistake		Highlights an omission or unneeded punctuation
<b>//</b>	New paragraph required		Missing word

# HGS Literacy Marking Codes

**Digital work** - to be done in digital format again in a colour that clearly stands out

<b>SP</b>	Spelling	<b>P</b>	Punctuation
<b>*</b>	Missing word		Highlights an omission or area requiring attention



# HGS Literacy for Learning Core Skills



- ★ Teaching and Learning should use these 5 core skills as part of the planning, preparation and delivery stages.
- ★ Students should be explicitly told how, when and why they need to use these core skills.
- ★ When relevant, Thinking Routines and Frameworks should be used in collaboration with these core skills in order to equip students with the best ways to approach tasks and embed learning.

Disciplinary literacy, key vocabulary word derivation and application in other curriculum contexts and command words should always be explicitly taught, clearly introduced, signposted with examples of application provided.



***'Oracy is a fundamental part of our pedagogy'*** (Mary Myatt)

***'Children who are able to articulate what they are thinking and how they are feeling, and who have those thoughts and feelings valued, are likely to report a greater sense of well being.'***

*(Speak for Change, 2021)*

***'Pupils who participate in speak language interventions make approximately six months' additional academic progress over a year'*** (EEF, 2024)

By promoting and supporting each of the 5 core literacy skills staff should enable and support students to:

- Talk with confidence in a range of contexts.
- Be able to adapt the way they speak to meet a given purpose.
- Be grammatically correct (staff and students) and be able to correct incorrect speech.
- Be able to convey their opinions clearly.
- Be able to engage the listener through use of varied expression and tone, taking into account purpose and the views of others.



- Have opportunities to actively listen to whoever is talking and be able to respond appropriately. For example, teachers and support staff should use relevant and appropriate Thinking Matters Routines/Frames and Rosenshine’s Principles of Instruction to draw out students’ understanding.
- Understand how to listen depending on the context and be able to recall key information using appropriate Thinking Matters and memory strategies.
- Opportunities to debate and discuss ideas and topics.
- Experience regular opportunities where they listen to peers and adults reading.



- Feel confident to read in class – to themselves, to someone else or in front of the whole class.
- Students must be encouraged and supported to fully engage with text, to read questions properly in order to aid comprehension and properly prepare for future exams.
- See good reading strategies modelled by those who support their learning in the classroom i.e. teacher, LSA or Ambassador.
- Be encouraged to actively read independently, to promote and use shared reading i.e. through paired work and feedback in order to ensure that students really digest what they read.
- Be supported and encouraged to demonstrate what they have actually understood and be given time and strategies to address any problems or concerns that they may have.
- Feel supported and be able to benefit from interventions appropriate to their reading level i.e.
  - Students should be encouraged to look at overall page layout and engage with titles, headings and captions in text books.
  - Reading fluently and accurately, along with the ability to ‘Skim or Scan’ texts for information.
  - Students must be able to apply deduction and inference to what they read.



- Students should be taught approaches to thinking using appropriate/relevant Thinking Matters routines/frames and Rosenshine’s Principles of Instruction. Thereby students should be provided ‘Think-Time’ and ‘Wait-Time’ in order that they may think about their answers before feeding back to their partner/teacher/class or continuing with their work.

- Students should be given sufficient time to read over feedback that their teacher/peer has provided and use the appropriate Thinking Matters routine/frame to support their response and enable them to know how and what to do next in order to make progress.
- Teachers should support 'silence stamina' building student confidence and ability to think and work in silence when needed; moments of planned, purposeful silence where *thinking* can take place uninterrupted is essential and an important element of preparing for GCSE and A Level assessments and exams.



- HGS staff must ensure that all written work/instructions/resources are clear (including appropriate format and text size), well written and model the highest standards of correct spelling, grammar, punctuation and use at all times Standard English.
- Teachers are encouraged to actively use exemplary student work that reinforces effective literacy skills (these may not need to be up at all times but are a very powerful tool when relevant).
- Students learn how to effectively check work before submission in order that they correct any 'SPAG' (spelling/grammar/punctuation) issues before their teacher sees their work. This is essential preparation for GCSE and A Level exams.
- For Chromebooks and/or electronic spell checkers can be used but students are encouraged to self/peer review first in order to actively identify errors rather than purely relying on technology.




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***'To improve life chances and outcomes, especially for those who are struggling to fly'***

At Hitchin Girls' School we make adaptations to our curriculum as part of supporting both literacy (and numeracy) development. Bespoke timetables are put in place for students based on the holistic view of their needs and progress; these are done in partnership between school, home and any other relevant agencies. At Key Stage 4 student progress data indicates which students would benefit from a reduced options route. This allows the students more curriculum time devoted to Literacy (and Numeracy skills) and as such helps to support them to be able to access their full curriculum; achieving their best outcome in both their core and other subjects.

Identification may come via student voice, parental concern/request, subject teacher, Learning Support Department, tutor, Head of Year or progress check data.

Depending on individual need, such intervention may include:

- Targeted 1:1 or small group work provided by either Thrive and Fly specialist tutors, HGS subject specialists or our Learning Support Department.
- Pupil Premium (PP) students take priority for all Thrive and Fly support, followed by those non PP students who have been identified as having a need. In addition targeted, individual literacy support for those who receive Pupil Premium funding is made available in order to buy equipment/reading books, access to IT, access to additional courses/opportunities and any relevant trips.
- When required, additional support will be offered for students with EAL, for example students of Indian sub-continent heritage may not readily use the definite 'the' and indefinite 'a' or 'an' as their home language does not have these parts of speech.
- Receiving support from an HGS Ambassador, Reading Buddy or teacher mentor.



### **Whole school Reading strategy**

Our strategy is based upon the research and findings of the EEF Improving Literacy in Secondary Schools framework (2024) and our work with the Reading Fluency Programme (HfL 2024).

### **Our reading strategy goals:**

- To promote, create and support a love of reading at HGS for all students.
- To provide exciting opportunities for students to engage with all forms of reading; integrating events into our House Cup system and Behaviour for Learning Rewards system.
- To identify any student whose current reading age is 2 or more years below that expected for their chronological age.
- Provide identified students with swift, targeted and specialist Thrive and Fly support to develop their confidence and skills; and close the gap. To rapidly increase their reading age.
- Review identified students' progress, report on it to parents/carers and when needed continue with support for as long as is needed.
- To ensure that all students have the reading and literacy skills needed to fully access, engage with and enjoy the full breadth of their curriculum and learning journey while at HGS.

### **Our strategy is based on the following 3 strands:**

<p><b>1. Reading Fluency</b></p>	<p>Develop Prosody, Accuracy, and Automaticity to free up cognitive load for comprehension.</p>	<p>Embedding HfL Principles: Implement regular, short, and targeted fluency practice across subjects using:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Modelled Expert Prosody:</b> Teachers model expressive, paced reading using Echo and Choral reading techniques.</li> <li>2. <b>Echo Reading:</b> Students echo-read clauses/sentences to internalise phrasing. This strategy helps develop reading fluency and expression, especially for multilingual learners or those at earlier levels of proficiency, by providing a clear auditory and visual model for accurate reading</li> <li>3. <b>Repeated Reading:</b> Students re-read key subject texts multiple times for speed and confidence.</li> <li>4. <b>Choral reading:</b> Students read text aloud together in unison. It's a collaborative activity that helps build reading fluency, confidence, and motivation by providing mutual support and access to examples of good reading through a teacher or more experienced reader. The group reads a previously practiced text repeatedly to achieve strong rate, accuracy, and prosody.</li> </ol>
<p><b>2. Disciplinary Literacy</b></p>	<p>All teachers are literacy teachers, explicitly teaching students how to read, write, and communicate specific to their subject.</p>	<p>Content-Specific Practice:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Combine Reading &amp; Writing:</b> Integrate writing activities that require deep reading of subject texts.</li> <li>2. <b>Structured Talk:</b> Provide opportunities for students to discuss, process, and articulate subject-specific concepts.</li> <li>3. <b>Consistently applying our Literacy Codes:</b> to aid comprehension, phrasing and ensure errors are corrected so that progress can be made.</li> </ol>

<p><b>3. Vocabulary and Intervention</b></p>	<p>Systematically teach Disciplinary Literacy and provide targeted support to close the reading gap for struggling students.</p>	<p>Explicit Instruction &amp; Targeted Support:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Morphology:</b> Teach Tier 2 (Command Words) and Tier 3 (Disciplinary Literacy) vocabulary through explicit instruction of prefixes, suffixes, and root words.</li> <li><b>High-Quality Intervention:</b> Provide intensive, age-appropriate interventions for identified struggling readers, focusing on foundational skills (phonics, morphology, and fluency) to rapidly increase their reading age.</li> </ol>
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Our strategy will be implemented through:

- Whole school INSET and CPD including T&L meetings and Friday Briefings.
- PiXL, EEF and HfL resources available in Literacy google drive; to maximise impact for students whilst minimising workload for staff.
- Utilising Thinking Matters to support and deliver reading strategy.
- Relevant staff attending targeted CPD which will then be disseminated to all staff.
- Sharing best practice from departments ie echo reading in MFL lessons.



***‘An attractive and well-stocked library is often an indicator’ (of outstanding, embedded literacy across the whole school) – Ofsted 2014***

Our library is an essential hub in our school community, frequented by students and staff on a daily basis. Full time librarian provision is provided from 8.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. every day and creates a welcoming and extremely positive space which is full at both break and lunchtimes. It is also the base for our very popular Homework Club which runs daily from 3.30-4.30 p.m. The advice, support, guidance and enthusiasm provided by our school librarian and library assistant ensures that students and staff are able to fully utilise the library as a learning space which actively and effectively promotes the highest levels of literacy.

Integral to the promotion, support and provision of literacy at HGS are the following activities and opportunities provided by our library:

- **Year 6 Transition** - Pop us a Postcard programme - where Year 6 are invited to send us a postcard sharing their holiday reading before they join HGS. These are then displayed when they join us each September alongside our 'what are staff reading?' display.
- **Book boxes** Every Year 7 and 8 form group receives a new, tailored 'Book Box' every half term so that students can read during the allocated tutor time slots each week. A range of appropriate books for each year group is selected and feedback asked for at the end of each term in order to respond to the individual reading needs of each group.
- **Library skills lessons** Every student is introduced to the library during their Year 7 Induction Week, where they learn how to effectively use the library and our online library management system Accessit. After this initial introduction they have specific library lessons in Year 7 (1 every half term) so that they develop their understanding and use of the library and everything that it offers. In Year 7 this is followed up with 1 Library Reading Skills lesson every fortnight led by an English teacher. All students work towards our school based Reading Awards. This continues in Year 8 when students have 1 Library Reading Skills lesson every fortnight. These 'Active Reading' lessons allow and encourage students and staff to share book recommendations thus broadening the reading experience and exposure for all. These sessions are used also for group reading, book based research and learning the key skimming and scanning skills required to be effective.
- **Reading lists** A variety of reading lists are regularly created by the librarian and available to view on our Accessit dashboard and on google classroom. These include yearly updated years 7, 8 and 9 reading lists and subject related lists as requested by staff.
- **World Book Day** is an integral part of our school calendar, taking place every March as part of the international campaign. Every student in the school attends a Book Fair during the day, run by a local business partner, David's Bookshop from Letchworth, and held in the library.. The event is promoted by the library staff and a large percentage of students choose to purchase books on the day. In the lead up to 'World Book Day' the library organises competitions featuring members of staff to share with students a love of and importance of reading such as Guess the Reader and The Masked Reader. During World Book Day a section of a short story is read aloud by teachers in every lesson. World Book Day is a real highlight of the school year enjoyed by all.
- **Encouraging reading for all** In conjunction with the BookTrust charity and Pupil Premium funding, every student in Year 7 is given the opportunity to choose a free book from a wide selection. This helps to engage them with reading and marks an important start of their reading journey at HGS. This is through a nationwide initiative called Bookbuzz run by the BookTrust charity.
- **Readings & visiting authors** The librarian arranges regular visits from authors and poets who speak to a range of our students both through English lessons and extra-curricular workshops.
- **Homework Club** Introduced in 2014 to address the increasing need and demand we had from students who wished to do their homework at school, with access to staff and facilities to aid them. Our Homework Club is central to the life of the library after the end of the official school day, welcoming a large number of students on a daily basis.

- **Reading Group** Our librarians organise and run a weekly student Reading Group which is regularly attended by 20+ Year 7–12 students. A wide variety of fun book related activities take place including The North Herts Schools Book Award event. Some students also attend the Evening Book Club which takes place once every half term and is open to our staff, parents and wider community. Numbers are consistent and high.
- **Additional support provided by the library** The librarians work very closely with all departments to provide support and resources for the curriculum. They work in close partnership with the English department including on our Treasure Trove books where students collect word ‘treasures’ that they encounter during their school week.
- **The Library Goblins** Student librarians from Year 9 up help to run the library during lunchtimes and our library Twitter feed @eliot\_elephant which promotes books and reading to the school community and beyond.

In all of these opportunities, our expert librarian team proactively supports and promotes the reading and literacy skills of all students in keeping with Ofsted’s desire that *‘library sessions are not just about reading but punctuated with questions.’*

#### Further whole-school promotion and support of literacy:

- World Book day events.
- Whole school production and Performing Arts Week.
- Oracy: our students’ speaking and listening skills are encouraged and developed through their active involvement in planning, preparing and leading whole school, Year and House assemblies. This happens from Years 7–13 and often involves cross-year group teams working together.
- Every department is expected to have its own subject specific literacy policy relevant to the needs and requirements of their curriculum and actively promotes subject specific keywords, phrases and terminology. This is clearly communicated with and made available to the relevant support staff who may work in that department.
- When relevant/possible, departments actively promote literacy through taking students to see plays and performances that are available in our local area and nearby cities as well as having visitors into school.

#### By implementing our Literacy for Learning policy we aim to ensure that:

- Students are confident, enthusiastic and effective in their use of all literacy skills knowing that this will support their overall love of learning, progress and achievement and open up endless possibilities for their bright futures.

***‘There can never be enough support and consolidation’ - Reading, writing and communication  
(literacy) Ofsted October 2011***

**“Literacy is...the road to human progress and the means through which every man, woman and child can realize his or her full potential.”**

**- Kofi Annan**