



BIRCH HILL
PRIMARY SCHOOL AND NURSERY
Learn, believe, achieve together

Year 1

A guide for parents and carers

September 2026

Year 1 is a big step. Your child moves from the play-based Reception year into the national curriculum, and this is the year when reading really takes off. This guide explains what your child will learn and gives you simple, practical ways to help at home.

You do not need to be a teacher to make a real difference. Ten to fifteen minutes a day of reading together, talking and playing with numbers matters more than any worksheet.

The year ahead

What to expect

Phonics

Sounds and spellings

Phonics screening check

What happens in June

Reading

Fluency and good questions

Writing

Handwriting, spelling, sentences

Maths

Number, shape, measures

Useful websites

Including online safety

The year ahead

Year 1 is the first year of Key Stage 1. Your child will study all the national curriculum subjects, with a strong daily focus on phonics, reading, writing and maths.

Children learn English, maths, science, design and technology, history, geography, art and design, music, physical education and computing, alongside relationships and health education and religious education. Learning is carefully sequenced, so each lesson builds on what your child already knows.

Key dates to know

Every day: a phonics lesson, reading practice, a writing session and a maths lesson.

Week beginning Monday 14 June 2027: the Year 1 phonics screening check (see the phonics screening check section). Your child's teacher will share the result with you in the second half of the summer term.

How you can help most

- **Read together every day.** Listen to your child read their school book, then read a story to them that they cannot yet read alone.
- **Talk, and keep talking.** Rich conversation builds the vocabulary children need to understand what they read and to write well.
- **Make maths part of everyday life.** Count stairs, share out snacks, spot shapes and read clocks.
- **Keep it positive and short.** Little and often works far better than long sessions. Stop while it is still fun.
- **Talk to us.** If you have a question or a worry, your child's class teacher is always happy to help.

Phonics

Phonics teaches children that letters stand for sounds, so they can read words by blending sounds together and spell words by breaking them into sounds.

At Birch Hill we teach phonics using **Read Write Inc. Phonics**, a programme developed by Ruth Miskin and validated by the Department for Education. Your child has a lively Read Write Inc. lesson every day. In Reception they learnt the **Set 1 Speed Sounds**: the single letter sounds and the “special friends” *sh, th, ch, qu, ng, nk* and *ck*. In Year 1 they learn the **Set 2 and Set 3 Speed Sounds**, which include the different ways the same sound can be written, and they practise reading and spelling longer words.

Read Write Inc. words your child will use

Speed Sounds

The sounds your child learns to read quickly, taught in Set 1, Set 2 and Set 3.

Fred Talk

Fred the frog can only say words in sounds (c–a–t). Your child helps Fred by blending the sounds into the word: *cat*.

Fred Fingers

Holding up a finger for each sound and pinching each one to spell a word.

Red words

Tricky words with an unusual spelling, such as *said* or *was*. “You can’t Fred a red!”

Special friends

Two or three letters that make one sound together, such as *ay* in *play* or *igh* in *night*.

Fred in your head

Saying the sounds silently, then reading the word aloud, as reading gets quicker.

Green words

Words your child can read by sounding out with the Speed Sounds they know.

Pure sounds

Saying sounds short and clean: “mmm”, not “muh”; “sss”, not “suh”. Extra sounds make blending much harder.

Hear the sounds said correctly. Ruth Miskin Literacy has short films for parents showing how to say each sound and how to help your child blend. You will find them in the Read Write Inc. links at the end of this section.

Set 2 Speed Sounds

Twelve sounds, each made by two or three letters. Most children learn these in Reception or early in Year 1.

ay play, day, may	ee see, tree, green	igh high, night, light	ow blow, snow, low	oo zoo, food, moon
oo look, book, took	ar car, start, park	or for, short, sport	air fair, chair, hair	ir girl, bird, whirl
ou out, shout, mouth	oy boy, toy, enjoy			

Set 3 Speed Sounds

Set 3 teaches more ways of writing the long vowel sounds, including the split special friends such as *a–e* in *cake*.

ea tea, sea, dream	oi spoil, coin, join	a–e cake, made, same	i–e smile, five, like	o–e home, phone, woke
u–e huge, June, rule	aw yawn, saw, draw	are care, share, bare	ur nurse, turn, hurt	er letter, better, under
ow brown, cow, now	ai snail, rain, wait	oa goat, boat, road	ew chew, new, grew	ire fire, wire, hired
ear hear, dear, near	ure pure, sure, cure			

More Year 1 spellings from the national curriculum

The national curriculum also lists these spellings for Year 1. Your child meets them in Read Write Inc. lessons and books as they move through the programme.

ea head, bread, meant	ie lie, tie, pie	ie chief, field, thief	oe toe, goes	ue blue, clue, true
au author, August	ore more, score, before	e–e these, theme, complete	er her, term, verb	ear bear, pear, wear
tch catch, fetch, kitchen	ve have, live, give	ph dolphin, alphabet	wh when, which, wheel	y very, happy, funny
ff ll ss zz off, well, miss, buzz				

Word endings and word building

Pattern	What it means	Examples
-s / -es	More than one (plural), or a verb ending	cats, dogs, wishes, catches
-ing, -ed, -er	Added to a verb with no change to the root word	hunting, hunted, hunter; jumped
-er, -est	Comparing	quicker, quickest; grander, grandest
un-	Changes a word to mean “not”	unhappy, undo, unkind
Compound words	Two words joined together	football, playground, bedroom
Syllables	Reading and spelling longer words in chunks	pocket, rabbit, carpet, thunder

Common exception words for Year 1

These words do not follow the usual rules, or use spellings your child has not learnt yet. Many of them are what your child calls **red words**. Children learn to read and spell them by the end of Year 1, and they also learn to spell the days of the week.

the	a	do	to	today	of
said	says	are	were	was	is
his	has	I	you	your	they
be	he	me	she	we	no
go	so	by	my	here	there
where	love	come	some	one	once
ask	friend	school	put	push	pull
full	house	our			

The phonics screening check takes place in June. There is a full section on it later in this guide.

Helping with phonics at home

- **Practise the Speed Sounds.** We will let you know which sounds your child is learning. Point to each one and ask your child to say it quickly, using pure sounds.
- **Play Fred Talk.** Around the house, say words in sounds like Fred (“Where is your s–o–ck?”, “Put on your c–oa–t”) and let your child blend them.
- **Spell with Fred Fingers.** Say a word, hold up a finger for each sound, then write it together.
- **Read the Read Write Inc. book your child brings home.** Read the green and red words first, then the story. Reading the same book two or three times builds speed and confidence.
- **Keep it short and happy.** Five to ten minutes of practice, with lots of praise, is plenty.

Read Write Inc. links for families

Ruth Miskin Literacy: Learning to read at home – films for parents, Fred Games, handwriting phrases and answers to common questions.

ruthmiskin.com/parentsandcarers

Read Write Inc. parent films on YouTube – short guides to saying the sounds, blending and listening to your child read a storybook.

[Ruth Miskin Training parent playlist](#)

Read Write Inc. free eBooks (Oxford Owl for Home) – free Read Write Inc. eBooks and Speed Sound practice sheets. You will need to create a free account.

oxfordowl.co.uk/read-write-inc-home

Fred Games – simple sound-blending games to play at home.

[Fred Games \(PDF\)](#)

The phonics screening check

Every Year 1 child in England takes a short phonics check in June. It is a quick, friendly check of how well your child can use phonics to read, not a test to worry about.

40

words to read aloud, in two sections of 20

1 to 1

with a teacher your child knows well

14 June

2027: the check happens during this week

Summer

results shared with you in the second half of the summer term

What is it for?

The check confirms whether your child has learnt to decode words to the standard expected for their age. Decoding means working out a word by saying its sounds and blending them together from left to right. It helps teachers spot early any child who needs extra support, so that no one falls behind in this vital first step in reading.

Almost all children who reach the age of 6 by the end of the school year take the check, which for most children means Year 1. There are a few exceptions, and your child's teacher will talk to you if the check may not be right for your child.

What does it look like?

Your child reads 40 words aloud to their teacher. Some are real words. Others are **pseudo-words**: made-up words that follow the phonics rules but have no meaning. Pseudo-words show whether your child can decode a word they have never seen, rather than recognising it from memory.

Every pseudo-word appears next to a picture of an imaginary creature, so children know it is a made-up name and don't try to turn it into a real word. Here are some words of the kind your child might meet (these are our own examples, not words from the check):

chin Real word	frost Real word	spoil Real word	vop Pseudo-word	sheb Pseudo-word	blurn Pseudo-word
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The first section uses simpler sounds. The second section includes more of the Year 1 spellings, such as the Set 2 and Set 3 Speed Sounds on our Phonics pages. The check usually takes only a few minutes, in a quiet space, and children are relaxed about it.

How can I help my child get ready?

Your child does not need any special preparation, and there is no need to practise test papers. The best preparation is the everyday reading you already do together.

- **Use Fred Talk.** When your child meets an unfamiliar word, encourage them to say each sound and blend them from left to right, just as they do in Read Write Inc. lessons, rather than guessing from the pictures. Once they have read the word, talk about what it means.
- **Read the Read Write Inc. book every day.** The book your child brings home uses only the Speed Sounds they have learnt, so they can work words out for themselves. Re-reading it builds speed and confidence.
- **Use the reading record.** A quick note about what went well, or a word that was tricky, helps us know how to support your child.

- **Play with made-up words.** Invent silly names for toys or pets using the sounds your child knows ("This is Zarp the dinosaur!"). Keep it light and fun.
- **Keep it positive.** Children do best when they enjoy reading and don't feel pressure. There is no need to mention the check at home unless your child asks.

Results and what happens next

Your child's teacher will share your child's result with you in the second half of the summer term. If your child found the check difficult, we will explain the extra support we are putting in place, and how you can help at home. Children who do not meet the standard in Year 1 take the check again in Year 2, and we will share that result with you too.

The results help us plan teaching and support. The Department for Education does not publish results for individual schools.

Questions you might like to ask your child's teacher

- Which sounds is my child confident with, and which are they still learning?
- How is my child getting on with blending longer words?
- What is the one thing I could practise at home that would help most?

You can read the Department for Education's own guide for parents on GOV.UK: [Phonics screening check: information for parents](#).

Reading

By the end of Year 1, most children read aloud accurately books that match their phonics, and are beginning to read with fluency and expression. They also listen to, talk about and enjoy many books they cannot yet read on their own.

Two kinds of book, two jobs

A book to read

This is a Read Write Inc. book matched to the Speed Sounds your child has learnt, so they can read it themselves. Encourage them to use Fred Talk for any word they are unsure of, rather than guess from the pictures. Reading it two or three times is a good thing: each time it gets smoother, which builds fluency and confidence.

A book to share

This is a book you read to your child for enjoyment. It can be well above what they can read alone. Talk about the pictures, the characters and new words. This is where vocabulary, imagination and a love of reading grow.

What Year 1 readers learn to do

Reading the words

- Say the right sound quickly for each grapheme they have learnt, including alternative sounds.
- Blend sounds to read unfamiliar words.
- Read common exception words.
- Read words with endings such as -s, -es, -ing, -ed, -er and -est.
- Read words of more than one syllable, and simple contractions such as *I'm*, *I'll*, *we'll*.
- Re-read books to build fluency and confidence.

Understanding what they read

- Link what they read or hear to their own experiences.
- Know and retell key stories, fairy stories and traditional tales.
- Join in with predictable phrases, and learn some poems and rhymes by heart.
- Talk about what words mean, and check that what they read makes sense.
- Talk about the title and events, work out how characters feel, and predict what might happen next.

Building reading fluency

Fluent readers read accurately, at a comfortable pace and with expression. Fluency matters because a child who reads slowly, word by word, uses all their effort on working out the words and has little left for understanding the story. Two simple routines help.

Echo reading

1. Choose a short passage just above your child's current level. Poems work well.
2. Read a sentence aloud with lots of expression, pointing to each word.
3. Your child reads the same sentence back, copying your phrasing and tone and pointing as they go.
4. If they stumble, don't correct them; simply read the line again and let them echo it once more.
5. Finish by chatting about what the passage meant.

Paired reading: Ready Reader and Lovely Listener

1. Your child (the Ready Reader) reads aloud for about a minute, following with their finger.
2. You (the Lovely Listener) say what went well, then give one thing to improve, such as "make the giant's voice sound grumpy".
3. Your child re-reads the same passage, trying the improvement.
4. Praise the difference you heard, then talk about the story together.

Good questions to ask

- What do you think will happen next? Why?
- Can you tell me what has just happened?
- How do you think this character feels? How do you know?
- Can you find the part where it says...?
- What does this word mean? Can you think of another word like it?
- Why do you think the story is called...?
- Is this a story or an information book? How can you tell?
- What was your favourite part? Why?

Looking for book ideas? Our separate Year 1 Reading List has books linked to every topic this year, plus favourite classics and new recommendations from BookTrust.

Writing

Writing brings together handwriting, spelling and composing ideas. In Year 1, children learn to form letters correctly, spell using their phonics, and write sentences that make sense and link together.

Handwriting

By the end of Year 1, your child should:

- sit correctly at a table, holding a pencil comfortably and correctly
- form lower-case letters in the right direction, starting and finishing in the right place
- form capital letters, and the digits 0 to 9
- know which letters are formed in similar ways (letter families)

At home: Read Write Inc. uses short handwriting phrases to help children form each letter correctly; you can download them from the Ruth Miskin Literacy parents page. Strong hands help too. Playdough, threading beads, using tweezers, cutting with scissors and building with small bricks all build the muscles children need to write.

Spelling

Children spell words using the Speed Sounds they have learnt in Read Write Inc., the red words, and the word endings on the Phonics pages. In lessons they use Fred Fingers to spell, holding up a finger for each sound. They also learn the names of the letters of the alphabet in order, and write simple sentences that the teacher reads to them, using the sounds and words they know.

Composing: say it, write it, read it back

1. **Say it.** Before writing, your child says their sentence out loud. If they can say it, they can write it.
2. **Write it.** They write the sentence, sounding out words and remembering spaces.
3. **Read it back.** They re-read it to check it makes sense, then add the next sentence to build a short story or account.

Punctuation and grammar in Year 1

The national curriculum sets out the following for Year 1. Children use these words when they talk about their writing.

Area	What your child learns	Example
Words	Adding -s or -es to make plurals, and un- to change meaning	dog → dogs, wish → wishes, kind → unkind
Sentences	Leaving spaces between words; joining ideas with <i>and</i>	I went to the park and I played on the swings.
Texts	Putting sentences in order to tell a short story or recount	First we... Then we... At the end...
Full stops	Beginning a sentence with a capital letter and ending it with a full stop	The cat sat on the mat.

Area	What your child learns	Example
? and !	Ending a question with a question mark and an exclamation with an exclamation mark	Where is my hat? What a huge dog!
Capital letters	For names of people, places and days of the week, and for the word I	On Monday, Ruby and I went to Bracknell.

Words your child will learn to use: letter, capital letter, word, singular, plural, sentence, punctuation, full stop, question mark, exclamation mark.

Helping with writing at home

- Give writing a real purpose: cards, labels, lists, a note to a grandparent, a diary of a day out.
- Ask your child to say their sentence aloud first, then write it.
- Praise what they did well before pointing out one thing to fix, such as a missing full stop.
- Let your child see you writing, too.

Maths

In Year 1, children build a secure understanding of numbers to 100, learn to add and subtract within 20, and explore shape, measures, money and time. They use real objects and pictures to understand ideas before moving on to written numbers.

Our year at a glance

Autumn 1 - Place value within 10 - Addition and subtraction within 10	Autumn 2 Shape	Spring 1 - Place value within 20 - Addition and subtraction within 20 - Place value within 50
Spring 2 - Length and height - Mass and volume	Summer 1 - Multiplication and division - Fractions - Position and direction	Summer 2 - Place value within 100 - Money - Time

By the end of Year 1, your child should be able to...

Number and place value

- Count to and across 100, forwards and backwards, starting from any number.
- Read and write numbers to 100 in numerals, and 1 to 20 in words.
- Count in 2s, 5s and 10s.
- Find one more and one less than a number.
- Use the language equal to, more than, less than, fewer, most and least.

Addition and subtraction

- Read, write and understand the +, – and = signs.
- Know number bonds and related subtraction facts within 20.
- Add and subtract one-digit and two-digit numbers to 20, including zero.
- Solve simple problems, including missing number problems such as $7 = \square - 9$.

Multiplication, division and fractions

- Solve simple grouping and sharing problems using objects, pictures and arrays.
- Find a half and a quarter of a shape, object or quantity.

Measurement

- Compare and measure length, height, mass, capacity and time.
- Recognise and know the value of coins and notes.
- Put events in order and use words such as before, after, next, first, today, yesterday and tomorrow.
- Know the days of the week, months and years.
- Tell the time to the hour and half past, and draw the hands on a clock face.

Shape, position and direction

- Recognise and name common 2-D shapes (such as rectangles, circles and triangles) and 3-D shapes (such as cuboids, pyramids and spheres).
- Describe position, direction and movement, including whole, half, quarter and three-quarter turns.

Facts worth knowing by heart

Number bonds to 10 (such as $7 + 3 = 10$), then to 20 (such as $13 + 7 = 20$); doubles to double 10; and counting in 2s, 5s and 10s. Quick recall of these facts frees up your child's thinking for harder problems.

Everyday maths

- Spot numbers everywhere: door numbers, bus numbers, page numbers, prices.
- Count forwards and backwards in 10s from different starting numbers: 3, 13, 23, 33...
- Count in 2s, 5s or 10s and clap instead of saying one number. Can your child name the missing number?
- Make deliberate mistakes when counting. Can your child catch you out?
- Have a "fact of the day", such as $8 + 8 = 16$. Say it in a squeaky voice, a whisper and a robot voice, and ask about it later.
- Practise forming digits correctly, especially 2, 3, 5, 7 and 9, which are often reversed.
- Cook together: weighing, measuring, counting spoonfuls and timing.

Games to play

Dicey tens

You need a dice and about twenty 10p coins.

1. Roll the dice and take that many 10p coins.
2. Say how much money you have, then check by counting aloud in tens.
3. If you were right, keep one 10p.
4. The first to collect £1 wins.

Grab bag subtraction

1. Put a set number of objects, such as 15 buttons, into a bag.
2. Grab a handful and count them.
3. Work out how many are left in the bag, then check.
4. Take turns. Whoever leaves the fewest in the bag wins.

Cupboard maths

1. Hold two tins or packets, one in each hand. Which is heavier?
2. Check by reading the weight on the labels.
3. Keep the lighter one and find something lighter still.
4. Carry on until you find the lightest item in the cupboard.

Going round the houses

On a walk, look at house numbers. Is this side odd or even? Can your child predict the next number? Count on and back as you go.

Shape spotting

On the way to school, look for cones, cuboids, spheres and cylinders. Which shape did you see most often?

Sort it out

Sort buttons, beads or toys by colour, size or shape. Then ask your child to find a different way to sort the same set.

Useful websites

A small number of free, reliable sites. Screen time is best kept short and shared, and nothing replaces reading and talking together.

Read Write Inc. Phonics (Ruth Miskin Literacy) – our phonics programme. Films, games and free eBooks for families are listed in the Phonics section.

ruthmiskin.com/parentsandcarers

BBC Bitesize KS1 – short videos and games for maths, science and topic learning.

bbc.co.uk/bitesize/primary

BookTrust – book recommendations by age and interest.

booktrust.org.uk

Topmarks – maths games sorted by age and topic.

topmarks.co.uk

White Rose Education – short home maths practice, including the free 1-Minute Maths app.

whiteroseeducation.com

GOV.UK: Phonics screening check information for parents – the Department for Education's leaflet about the June check.

gov.uk/government/publications/phonics-screening-check-information-for-parents

GOV.UK: The national curriculum – what children learn at each key stage.

gov.uk/national-curriculum

Staying safe online

Young children should use devices where an adult can see them, with parental controls switched on. Talk with your child about what to do if they see something that worries them: stop, and tell a grown-up.

UK Safer Internet Centre – advice for parents and carers.

saferinternet.org.uk

Internet Matters – step-by-step guides to setting up parental controls.

internetmatters.org

Learn, believe, achieve together

Thank you for your support this year. If you have any questions about your child's learning, please speak to their class teacher.

Birch Hill Primary School and Nursery, part of Maiden Erlegh Trust. September 2026.