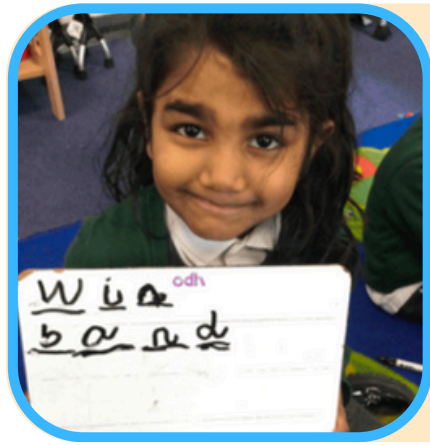


‘Children develop more independence as readers and writers’

Whinney Banks Primary, Middlesbrough, November 2025



In 2019, Whinney Banks chose Sounds-Write as its phonics programme. Ruth Verrill, Early Reading and Phonics Lead, tells us how this led to a transformative journey for the school.



- School: **Whinney Banks Primary**
- Location: **Middlesbrough, England, UK**
- Pupils on roll: **400**
- Age range: **2-11**
- Free school meals: **47%**
- Special Educational Needs: **18.5%**
- English as an additional language: **14.1%**



Many of our pupils start school with low levels of speech and language, so an approach rooted in spoken language made sense. Sounds-Write stood out as it starts with the sounds of speech and gives children a strong and developmentally appropriate foundation for learning to read and write.

The way Sounds-Write approaches teaching also fits well with how we work as a school. It promotes whole-class, inclusive teaching, with a strong focus on high-quality formative assessment and personalised support to help every child make progress. The excellent training gave our staff a clear understanding of the skills, code and conceptual knowledge children need to succeed.

The structure of the programme, with a mix of lessons that build specific skills and gradually introduce new code knowledge, helps manage cognitive load really effectively. This is especially helpful for our more vulnerable readers and writers, giving them the support they need to grow in confidence. The programme is now fully embedded from Nursery to Year 6, and continues to support our Key Stage 2 learners with spelling and vocabulary knowledge.

Every member of staff, including support staff, is trained in Sounds-Write and several have taken on further training in leadership, interventions and KS2 teaching. We've introduced a coaching model to raise the quality of teaching and achieve consistency across all year groups. It means children are confident with the language and structure of the programme, and as they move through school, there's no lost time—they can pick up where they left off and keep moving forward.

The phonics leader has regular time dedicated to coaching and monitoring school-wide practice, plus an extra weekly session for planning and reflection.



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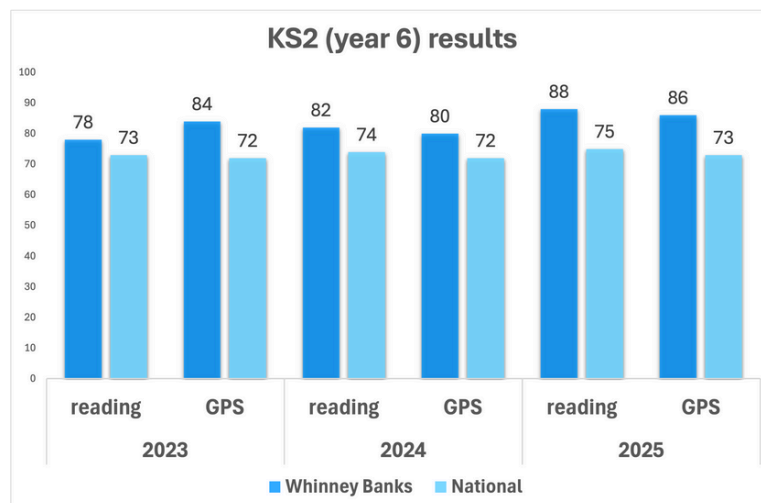


Our staff all use the same Sounds-Write language when talking about reading, writing and spelling, helping children build on what they already know. This benefits everyone, but especially those who find reading and writing more challenging.

Our pupils really enjoy their phonics lessons and quickly become experts themselves. The variety of lesson types, whether recapping, learning something new or applying it in reading and writing, means children get lots of practice. This repeated exposure helps them become more accurate, fluent and confident over time.

By using a consistent approach when children make mistakes, we've helped them develop more independence as readers and writers. They're much better at spotting tricky parts in words and working out how to correct them. The Sounds-Write approach isn't just limited to phonics sessions, it runs through all subjects and classrooms, giving children the chance to practise and apply their skills in lots of different contexts.

Phonics Screening Check outcomes keep improving, with almost all children passing by the end of Year 2. By the end of KS2, our reading, writing and spelling (GPS: grammar, punctuation and spelling) results are well above the national average. This is **significant progress when, on average, only 35% of our children are working at the expected level when they join us in Early Years.**



We're proud to have achieved Sounds-Write Gold School Accreditation. This award reflects our ongoing commitment to providing the very best phonics education and supporting our pupils to become confident, independent readers and writers.

All of this is a credit to our staff, whose hard work, dedication and commitment make a real difference every day. We place great importance on early literacy and know just how crucial it is in setting our pupils up for future success. Even with an experienced team, we never stop learning. Our staff are always looking for ways to improve, so we can continue giving every child the strongest possible start.



Awarded for exemplary teaching
and leadership of phonics