

Improving reading standards at KS1 Barton Hill Primary School

Local Authority:

Bristol

Context:

Barton Hill is an inner-city primary school with 176 children on roll. It serves the Lawrence Hill ward, among the 2% most disadvantaged wards in the UK. 50 % of the children are eligible for free school meals. Historically the school served a mainly white working class population, but the intake is now more ethnically diverse, with just over half the children white. The largest single minority ethnic group is Black African (29%), mainly Somali. Mobility is very high. Many children join the school in KS1 and 2 without having been in any formal education system before.

The problem

The last Ofsted report on the school in 2002 commented ‘When children enter the school at the age of four, many have standards of attainment that are well below the national average... the teaching ensures that they make generally appropriate progress across the school, with some good recent progress in reading...attainment in reading is higher than in other similar schools, but is still below the national average’. The school wanted to find out if it was possible to raise standards further, to at least the national average, and to iron out large swings in test results in different cohorts.

The catalyst

The school accessed training for a Reading Recovery teacher in 2000, when EAZ and LEA funding enabled the then deputy head to take part. Now acting headteacher, she saw the potential of Reading Recovery to impact further on standards for all children in the school, and in 2003 bid successfully for further funding to enable the implementation of the programme to grow. The school is now in its third year of New Deal for Communities’ funding, and employs 1.2 FTE Reading Recovery teachers.

Developing quality first literacy teaching in the school

The acting headteacher has introduced all staff to key aspects of Reading Recovery. All staff have watched Reading Recovery lessons, and taken on ideas such as the use of practice books for writing, sound boxes and running records. Staff are currently pairing up to do at least one running record each a week, sharing their observations and conclusions. All the reading books in the school have been levelled using Reading Recovery levels, so as to secure an accurate match to children’s reading stage and ensure continuity when they move from KS1 to 2.

In Y2 all children are assessed by the Reading Recovery teachers, using the Reading Recovery observation survey. The assessment profiles have proved very useful in

pinpointing children's needs and identifying curricular targets for the class and for groups. The survey provided information, for example, on weaknesses in knowledge of long vowel sounds, and revealed that many children still had gaps in concepts about print – being unsure, for example, what a word or a letter was.

Children are assessed again at the end of Y2, and the information on their progress in specific areas fed back to their teachers. Seeing 'what has been going on for their own children' has proved powerful in feeding into teachers' practice.

Developing intervention

The school uses Early Literacy Support (ELS) in Y1. In Y2 the lowest achieving children receive the full Reading Recovery programme – 30 minutes a day one-to-one with a trained Reading Recovery teacher for a period of between 15 and 22 weeks.

All the remaining children receive 'booster' intervention from the Reading Recovery teachers. The booster teaching is tailored to the results of the assessment and different for each child. The highest attaining children might, for example, read one-to-one with the teacher for five minutes three times a week, with a focus on comprehension, punctuation and phrasing. Other children might read with the teacher more often, or for ten to fifteen minutes, with a focus on developing phonic skills. Children with very low attainment for whom no Reading Recovery place is available might have half an hour two or three times a week, for a full year, following a full Reading Recovery lesson pattern with the exception of the writing element.

In all the one-to-one teaching the emphasis is on analysing with the child what they already know and what they need to know, making this very explicit ('What I expect to see is...') and developing independent reading strategies that put the responsibility on the child rather than on the teacher.

The outcomes

In 2005 95% (18 out of 19 children) achieved Level 2B or above in the end of Key Stage 1 reading assessment. The only child not achieving this level had arrived in the school two weeks before the tests, with no spoken English.

The following charts show the predicted and actual levels of attainment in reading for children receiving different levels of intervention. Predicted levels came from the observation survey at the start of Y2, and reflected levels children were likely to achieve without additional intervention. These predicted levels were low (below L2 in all but one case), reflecting in part mobility in pupils who had been successful with ELS in Y1 but left the school (and pupils new to the school who had not taken part in ELS), and in part the difficulty of identifying Y1 pupils working at a level sufficiently high for ELS alone to secure accelerated learning.

Booster reading only

<i>Child's initial</i>	<i>Number of booster lessons</i>	<i>Predicted test result</i>	<i>Actual test result</i>
L	20	1	3
S	21	1	3
A	17	1	3
E	18	1	3
J	16	2A	3
L	23	1	3
L	26	1	2A
E	23	1	2A
S	28	1	2B

Booster followed by Reading Recovery

<i>Child's initial</i>	<i>Number of booster lessons before RR</i>	<i>Number of Reading Recovery lessons</i>	<i>Number of booster lessons after RR</i>	<i>Predicted test result</i>	<i>Actual test result</i>
A	20		5	W	2B
T	27	31	0	W	2B
A	34	34	0	W	2B

Full Reading Recovery

<i>Child's initial</i>	<i>Number of Reading Recovery lessons</i>	<i>Number of booster lessons after RR</i>	<i>Predicted test result</i>	<i>Actual test result</i>
A			W	2B
C		2	W	2B
T			W	2B
S	91	13	W	2B
A	82	4	W	2A
A	91	8	W	2A

The school attribute the high standards achieved by the cohort to the combined effects of the Reading Recovery programme for the lowest attaining children ('If you boost this group then expectations for the whole class are lifted, and the teacher has more time to focus on the more able') and the tailored booster programme, with its precise targets based on assessment for learning.

The progress of the cohort will be carefully tracked through to the end of KS2, for those children who remain in the school. The acting headteacher expects to see the gains they have made maintained, as long as any attendance problems can be tackled. The Y1 children who took part in Reading Recovery when the programme was introduced to the school in 2000, now in Y6, are on track to achieve Level 4 or 5 in English at the end of the year.