

Diocesan and Payne Smith Church of England Primary School

A whole school approach to literacy

Diocesan and Payne Smith is an inner city primary school serving the poorest ward in Canterbury, Kent, where social issues have a huge impact on learning and where the capacity of parents to support the learning of their children is seriously compromised by their own experience of failure within the educational system and the fact that their children are often the outcome of teenage pregnancies.

Diocesan and Payne Smith is '*a good school with many outstanding features*' (Ofsted, 2008) where all children make good progress although results at the end of all Key Stages have remained well the national average for some years. In order to improve outcomes, the school has participated in two programmes designed to support the raising of standards: 'Ensuring Success' and 'RAYs'. The school aims to build on its many existing attributes of a successful school, including 'High Quality Teaching'.

The school has an excellent record of strong pastoral support and adopts a highly creative and flexible approach to the delivery of the curriculum, taking account of individual learning styles and providing high quality teaching that is supported by the implementation of individual learning programmes. The use of this multi-layered approach to teaching was recognised by Ofsted as an outstanding feature of the school, particularly due to the fact that highly skilled staff were given dedicated time to implement specific programmes.

Synthetic phonics is taught daily by trained teachers in all classes, augmented in the Early Years through to Year 2 by the CLLD programme. However, despite having all of this in place, the leadership team recognised in November 2007 that, despite huge improvements in the collective performance of pupils, there were still a significant group of pupils for whom we were not making a difference and that barriers to learning were impacting right from the Foundation year. The process of identifying the groups most at risk of underachievement identified the impact of EAL (13%) FSM (65%) and high levels of mobility (30%) with the numbers of pupils moving into the school exceeding those pupils leaving, and less than 50% of pupils in Year 6 having made a complete journey through the school from Foundation. However, analysis also acknowledged that these factors alone did not account for the significant group of pupils that were experiencing failure from a very early age and for whom no difference was being made.

In 2006, 80% of pupils transferring from the maintained Nursery to the Foundation Class scored only 1 against the Early Learning Goals. 70% of pupils transferring from Reception to Year 1 performed only at the lowest level in phonological awareness and only 60% of pupils achieved a level 2C or above at the end of Key Stage 1.

The school therefore, grasped the opportunity to offer by Kent local authority in January 2007, to become part of the Every Child a Reader programme and to join the second cohort of training for Reading Recovery teachers. We were able to identify a strong candidate for training as a Reading recovery teacher. The principles of the programme: early identification and an individualised intervention programme with dedicated time implemented by a highly

trained teacher were totally compatible with the whole school approach to teaching and learning. We were excited by what the programme had to offer.

Since joining the ECaR programme, individual performance has improved within the group of children identified by the school to receive Reading Recovery as 'hardest to teach'. Impact has been measured by week to week monitoring of individual progress; however, far wider impact has been seen - most noticeably in terms of attitude to learning, ability to access learning through self-belief and improved attendance.

Of eight pupils who were part of the Reading Recovery Programme during 2007 / 08, improvement in attendance has been dramatic, with 6 pupils exceeding 97% and one pupil now achieving 100%. The starting points for these children were averages that were below and in some cases well below the acceptable 95% of attendance.

At the end of Key Stage 1 in 2008, 85% of pupils achieved a level 2C or above in reading and 82% achieved a level 2C or above in writing. The parallel improvement in writing is particularly pleasing and this clearly demonstrates the combined impact of our multi-layered approach. It is with close interest that the school is now monitoring the progress of the first cohort in Year 3. In terms of children learning EAL, current results demonstrate that better than average language acquisition is achieved as a result of participating in the Reading Recovery programme.

Overall impact from implementing ECaR has been supported by the school's adoption of the Better Reading Partnership (BRP) from September 2007, with Better Reading Partners supporting years 1 through 5 in successfully raising the attainment of 45 pupils across an academic year, complementing the 8-10 pupils benefiting from Reading Recovery. This layered approach to intervention has had a significant impact on standards of reading across the school. The Reading Recovery teacher has co-ordinated the implementation of BRP and continued to support the development of good practice by provided ongoing training for Teaching Assistants in the analysis and interpretation of running records, book introductions and the use of prompts.

The Reading Recovery teacher has been encouraged to develop her role as a whole school expert in teaching literacy. The school has whole-heartedly absorbed the ECAR programme into its day to day working practice and, as a result, all staff members are fully aware of the implications of these programmes, and can see their benefit on a daily basis. The whole staff have now begun a programme of professional development with the expectation that techniques and strategies employed by Joy, our Reading Recovery teacher, will be incorporated into daily guided reading sessions delivered by teachers across the school.

Initially, teachers went to watch Joy and her team of Better Reading Partners at work out of professional interest - because they saw the overwhelming impact of their work on individual pupils. Building on this, we have now organised scheduled observations by all staff, followed by the use of directed time after school hours to reflect on the practice observed and its potential application in the classroom. Our next step is to train all staff in the use of running records, the techniques of introducing a book and how to listen constructively to reading.

As a Head, I was given the opportunity to observe Reading Recovery teaching behind the screen at a Head teachers' Network meeting. I was amazed by the power of observing and discussing 'teaching behind the screen'. I have since arranged with the local authority Teacher Leader to bring all staff to the Reading Recovery Centre as part of the school's Continuing Professional Development programme, so that they may benefit from the same experience and then have the opportunity to discuss, in further detail, the techniques observed and why the responses to teaching were as witnessed.

The success of this programme in our school has been loudly celebrated within our local cluster of schools and many teachers and teaching assistants from neighbouring schools have visited the school in order to observe the staff fulfilling their expert roles in Reading Recovery and the wider classroom impact. We have shared our whole school approach to developing 'Quality First Teaching' and supported this by presentation of statistical evidence through our data analysis, at many levels across the county: to schools, at area Additional Educational Needs meetings and to colleague heads at the East Malling Centre. That this process is supported by such a skilled duo as Christine Cork and Jennifer Harrison, Reading Recovery Teacher Leaders, further adds benefit to the whole process and ensures that, always, the principle of : 'Quality Teaching First,' is maintained.

The reason why the ECAR programme been such a success in our school, finally turning a stubborn trend of low achievement into a success story is very much the result of the whole school approach, implemented with skill and flexibility and for which there is total commitment from all parties. We have struggled to find dedicated space for the delivery of Reading Recovery and Better Reading Partnership, but everyone is willing to approach this problem positively and gradually more and more space is being created.

Parents watching their children in a taught session have commented that: "*I wish that reading had been taught like this when I was at school,*" and Joy now receives hopeful requests from parents on the playground that their child will be a beneficiary of the Reading Recovery programme because they have heard nothing but positive comments from other parents whose children have participated. Another child's mum cried when her child took out a book at home and was able to read it without support. She had been so worried that her child would never learn to read.

Pupils take great pride in their work and several have independently recommended a peer who they feel would benefit from time spent as part of either the Reading Recovery programme or the BRP. "*Bradley needs to come and join you to learn to read.*"

This has been a life enriching experience for all of us at Diocesan and Payne Smith and as Head Teacher, I am in no doubt that - whatever the future might bring in terms of funding - this is one programme that will not be lost. In this aspiration, I am supported by the Governing Body, all staff at all levels, parents and pupils. We consider our journey to have only just begun and look forward to the future.