

Raising reading standards at Leighton Primary School

An analysis of the logistical and pedagogical issues involved in raising standards in reading across a primary school

Local Education Authority:

Cheshire

Context:

A primary school with 346 mainstream pupils; a 52 place nursery; two LEA special units incorporating a 12 place key stage 1 assessment and diagnostic unit and a 12 place cognition and learning facility for Y3 and Y4.

Background

Leighton Primary school is an urban school serving a regenerating part of Crewe. Historically the school's catchment area, on the fringe of the town near to the Bentley factory, was very disadvantaged. In the last few years private housing estates have been built in the surrounding area whilst an ex-council housing estate was demolished as the houses had become very difficult to let. This extensive plot of real estate is also being developed through private investment. The school continues to serve some distinct areas of disadvantage but the critical mass of children with significant barriers to learning has become, pedagogically, more manageable although a range of challenging literacy difficulties still exist within each year group.

The Problem

Evidence from two previous Ofsted inspections in 1995 and 1999 emphasised major issues with reading, writing and speaking/listening but the literacy difficulties appeared to be almost intractable. The key stage 2 national curriculum assessments as recently as 1999 showed only 47% of pupils achieving level 4+ in English with 50% reaching a similar standard by the year 2000.

The Catalyst

The school accessed training for a Reading Recovery teacher in 1999, using its own budget, as a prelude to creating the role of a dedicated special needs co-ordinator (SENCo).

Just after this training had been completed, the deteriorating social and economic indicators for the whole of the west end of the town were such that Cheshire's Reading Recovery Tutor and Project Manager was successful in accessing finance from the single regeneration budget to support early literacy intervention projects across a number of eligible schools. The bid was called Driving Crewe Forward (2001 – 2002). Leighton Primary met the relevant criteria and became a participant in the two year programme. Briefly the extra government finance supported investment in training for:

- Reading Recovery (RR) teachers (two further teachers in this school to supplement the existing trained teacher)
- Further training for the RR teachers to become trainers themselves
- Support for the RR teachers to train parents and assistants in reading courses leading to accreditation through the Open College Network
- Support for the RR teachers to train assistants in Talking Partners
- Additionally Driving Crewe Forward also provided resources for delivering early literacy support through the ELS programme to extra groups of children whilst providing support materials to help with guided reading.

It was during this period that the SENCo visited New Zealand (May 2001) to observe Reading Recovery through an international study visit sponsored by the DfES.

The school emerged from this investment in good quality professional development with a legacy of informed practice and some key members of staff with a syntactical understanding of the reading process. Most recently, the school's own accredited trainer (SENCo) has ensured all teachers and assistants have achieved level 2 as a minimum in the accredited reading course whilst all key stage 1 teachers and assistants have achieved level 3. Additionally all teachers and assistants in the early years are trained in the use of Talking Partners. We have also promoted the use of this speaking and listening programme in the cognition and learning unit with some pleasing results.

Developing the Special Needs Co-ordinator Role

The SENCo – one of the RR trained teachers – has since become a learning inclusion manager as her role has expanded to incorporate a range of innovations and initiatives. She does not have a class but the following functions are integral to her role:

- Learning support during the literacy hour every day as part of an inclusive approach to a wave 2 intervention in Y1 and Y2
- Reading Recovery teacher working with between 10 -12 pupils per year to provide the ultimate wave 3 intervention available to our mainstream children
- Training parents and staff in accredited reading courses available through the Open College Network at levels 2 and 3
- Developing opportunities for community and family learning with the local further education college (over 80 parents have received training in mathematics, computing, first aid and reading)

Talking Partners

All pupils in the foundation stage participate in the Talking Partners programme and the assessments are recorded and monitored.

Phonological and Phonemic Awareness

Some children require extensive work in developing their phonological awareness. The SENCo has written a research paper (TEACHERNET) exploring this important facet of emerging reading skills.

Assessment

The reading assessment of each pupil using RR levels and running records is pivotal to the improvement in school standards. A teaching assistant uses a running record to assess each pupil in Y1 every half-term. This assessment delivers a benchmarked level to determine progress or to define where extra support is needed. The support is based on a process of 'sieving':

- Wave 2 intervention in the literacy lessons– if insufficient progress then go to NEXT intervention
- Individual intervention from a level 3 trained assistant-if insufficient progress then go to NEXT intervention
- Reading Recovery intervention at key stage 1 in the defined 'window of opportunity.'

In practice the process of intervention is less structured than this list suggests. Sometimes a Reading Recovery intervention is clear from the outset and one of the RR teachers will intervene as soon as the chronological 'window' is reached. The importance of the assessments is crucial, however, in personalising the intervention to suit the severity of need.

For most children, wave 1 teaching using the NLS framework is very successful and the children develop into highly motivated, fluent readers.

Outcomes

The following charts show the percentages of pupils ***NOT achieving level 2b at key stage 1*** in reading and writing starting with the most recent results. Some years have been excluded to save space although the trend is consistent. The results are for mainstream pupils only. The improvements coincide with the high impact, accelerated interventions within the NLS framework.

Intake: 2001
Current Year Group: 3

<i>Level</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Writing</i>
W	0%	4%
1	4%	4%
2c	2%	17%
Total <2b	6%	25%

Intake: 2000
Current Year Group: 4

<i>Level</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Writing</i>
W	0%	0%
1	4%	9%
2c	17%	24%
Total <2b	21%	33%

Intake: 1996
Current Year Group: LEFT 2003

<i>Level</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Writing</i>
W	0%	2%
1	24%	29%
2c	31%	50%
Total <2b	55%	81%

Intake: 1995
Current Year Group: LEFT 2002

<i>Level</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Writing</i>
W	4%	13%
1	31%	21%
2c	23%	46%
Total <2b	58%	80%

The following grids show the progress made by the pupils between key stages 1 and 2 from 2000 to 2004. Even accounting for some of the demographic changes within the catchment area, the impetus gained from the interventions enabled sustained improvements at key stage 2 using the NLS objectives to support planning and assessment.

Reading Key Stage 1 to 2 Progress Grid 2004 – Actual Results

ALL PUPILS	Key Stage 2 2004							
	B2	2	3	4	5	A	n/a	Total
Key Stage 1 2000	A							
	D							
	W							
	1				5	2		7
	2C				6	1		7
	2B				9	2		11
	2A				5	6		11
	3				1	7		8
	4							
	Total				26	18		44

Reading Key Stage 1 to 2 Progress Grid 2004 – Actual Results

GIRLS	Key Stage 2 2004							
	B2	2	3	4	5	A	n/a	Total
Key Stage 1 2000	A							
	D							
	W							
	1				1	1		2
	2C				4	1		5
	2B				2			2
	2A				4	3		7
	3				1	6		7
	4							
	Total				12	11		23

Reading Key Stage 1 to 2 Progress Grid 2004 – Actual Results

BOYS	Key Stage 2 2004							
	B2	2	3	4	5	A	n/a	Total
Key Stage 1 2000	A							
	D							
	W							
	1				4	1		5
	2C				2			2
	2B				7	2		9
	2A				1	3		4
	3					1		1
	4							
	Total				14	7		21

Conclusion

The school operates innovatively within the framework established by the NLS. The detailed assessments determine the precise support required for those children who are at risk of failing to meet the age appropriate standard at key stage 1. The teachers and assistants focus on the children's concepts about print and their capacity to deploy all of those concepts as adept readers. The capacity to improve reading through early intervention has emerged from the school's commitment to good quality continuing professional development and the opportunity for innovation within the framework of the NLS.

In 2004, 95% of pupils achieved level 4+ in English at key stage 2 with 100% achieving the age appropriate standard in reading.