

Success story

Rush Green Junior School, Romford

School Profile

Number of pupils	361
EAL	tbc
Free School Meals	tbc

High mobility levels had created a real challenge for measuring reading attainment at this large East London school. The area has a shifting population with a varied ethnic mix and some social housing.

The school was taking in pupils from refugee families and other mobile households. Only 60% of pupils in Year 6 have been with the school from the first year. A number of pupils speak English as a second language and live in non-English speaking households.

It is not unusual for pupils to join the school with weak English language skills and no school records to indicate their abilities. The school is highly committed to conducting individual reading tests, but it was finding that it was taking them five weeks to do this. The pressing challenge was to find a more efficient method for this fast-changing pupil community.

Head Teacher Jeff Barrett was impressed by Renaissance Learning's Accelerated Reader program, and launched it into the school in 2005.

The STAR Reading component soon proved its value, allowing the school to instantly place new pupils and measure, with accuracy, each pupil's reading performance as soon as they had completed a test.

Within minutes, teachers were able to determine the appropriate level of challenge for each pupil, and identify those who needed individual help. By streamlining the testing process - literally enabling teachers to test pupils whenever they thought suitable, comparing pupils, classes and year groups and getting instant results - the school was able to get a true picture of individual and group attainment as and when they needed it.

From initially using four laptops with just 150 quizzes, the school now utilises 35

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Success story

Rush Green Junior School Romford *continued...*

net-ready computers between individual classes and the ICT suite, every single quiz is available via Renaissance Place. Plus, all authorised teaching staff can see the test results by individual and group attainment, ensuring that those engaged in day-to-day work of stepping up reading performance can see who is making progress.

That day-to-day work includes some highly original ideas to foster a love of reading, such as special "read-in" sessions. Every fifth week pupils bring in items to create a comforting reading environment - pillows, eiderdowns and cuddly toys - turning their classroom into a reading sanctuary.

Speed and certainty is the main outcome for this school. The critical task of measuring reading skills on a regular basis has fallen from five weeks to a few days, for the entire school. Tracking can now be done "comfortably" every half term, and done better.

"The ability to compare one set of results, to see if one class is way off the others, really helps," says Jeff. Motivation is a real outcome too. *"Reading is always at the top of our priorities,"* he explains. *"Anything helps that create a buzz around reading or that improves the way we track progress."*

Jeff believes that those pupils who get into Accelerated Reader habit do not respond to the quizzes and this spurs them on to read the next, harder book. He has seen an improvement in reading overall and some considerable individual achievements and he is sure that it will lift reading ability further.

"Some pupils have lifted their skills by 300 or 400 points in just two months. The top points score for an exceptional reader is 1400, and we've had instances of pupils at 1290 points," he adds. The school's latest non-statutory SATs results showed that their reading, particularly in Year 5, was better than before. Embedding ICT further into the curriculum is another helpful result for this school that is clearly an 'early adopter' in its uses of technology. *"That alone is a real result at a time when schools are being urged to find smarter uses of ICT,"* concludes Jeff.

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