

# I AM PART OF THEIR STORY

**River Beach Primary School,  
Littlehampton, West Sussex**

Accelerated Reader has made a real impact on pupil progression at River Beach Primary School, helping to develop a positive reading culture and inspire a love for books in both pupils and teachers alike. Following the retirement of Headteacher Judy Grevett, the responsibility for managing the programme was taken on by Joe Neale in his position as the school's English Subject Leader, which sparked keen interest in the role of Star tests...here Joe shares his journey of delving deeper into Star Reading and the key learnings he is making along the way.



Find out more  
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**Assessment**

**Attainment**

**Growth**

**Progress monitoring**

**Target setting**

**Whole-school literacy**

**ZPD**

# Going beyond AR with Star

**Providing powerful insights, more than just a ZPD...**

While I'd had experience of using Accelerated Reader from a classroom perspective, with the mantra 'read a book, take a quiz' embedded into daily school life, it was only when I became responsible for managing the programme on a more strategic scale that I had to better understand the fundamentals of how it worked. A natural starting point was the Star tests. We always run these to obtain the ZPDs we needed to ensure the children were reading the appropriate level of book, but we'd never really considered the timing of these tests... until I started looking at the data in the reports in a bit more detail. At this point I realised that we couldn't possibly accurately compare pupil progress as the children had all sat tests at different times!

This eureka moment was the catalyst for introducing set assessment periods. This means all the children will now sit their Star tests at the same time, five times a year, which is recorded in Star as a designated 'assessment period'. Now, that might sound like a tall task, but with the right planning and communication we've succeeded in completing our first whole school assessment for years two to six. It took us a month to do, which Star classes as an acceptable period to make the data accurately comparable. We're now armed with some really powerful insights, which has been further enhanced by adjusting our benchmarks.

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## Raising the bar

What I didn't realise until I explored the potential of Star Reading in more detail was that we could adjust the benchmarks within the system. After speaking with the very helpful team at Renaissance, I learned that we could change the original four categories to five and set the benchmarks to be more challenging. In doing so, we're now in a stronger position to be able to identify the children who are 'on watch' as well as those who are gifted and talented. From a teaching perspective this helps to focus our support where it is needed most and ensure that appropriate interventions are in place.

## From standardisation to validation

Now, I don't profess to be a data expert, but delving further into the detail of Star reporting has produced some really useful insights – especially when it comes to validation. Looking beyond the ZPD scores I've started to learn more about what the standardised scores (NRSS) can tell us. As Star tests are taken on a computer as compared with the paper based NFER reading assessments, I was interested to explore how the two would correlate. After comparing the NRSS of our Star tests with those of NFER, it was reassuringly reliable in that the results were extremely similar. So now we can confidently use Star results throughout the year to identify those children who might need additional support to perform well in the national assessments at the end of Key Stage 2.

Beyond this validation, we're also using the standardised score to compare performance between tests. In a life without levels, the 'expected', 'above expected' and 'below expected' categories are simply too broad to make a meaningful judgement on how much progress is being made. Star data gives us a much greater level of detail to overcome this.

If you're using AR, I'd urge you to find out more about Star. It's not just for ZPDs. It's a really powerful tool that can make such a difference to school assessment and pupil progress.

## Making progress

Personally, I feel we've already made significant progress in terms of how we use Star Reading and the way we interpret the data it can give us...but this is just the beginning! It is very much a journey and we're looking to build on our learnings as we dig deeper into what Star can do for us. Over the next term our plan is to get to grips with the Scaled Score as we know this can give us a more accurate method of assessing individual pupil progress.

We also want to look at carrying out our own SATs correlation study as we've seen how Gary Alexander Deputy Head Teacher at Battle & Langton CE Primary School has gained greater confidence in judgements as to how his school is performing.

Who would have thought that from all the positive work we've been doing with Accelerated Reader that this would all have been possible? I was certainly surprised. So, if you're using AR, I'd urge you to find out more about Star. It's not just for ZPDs. It's a really powerful tool that can make such a difference to school assessment and pupil progress.

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