

Case Study: Pheasey Park Farm Primary School

Reading is a life skill. When a child can read well, they have the building blocks for learning. They will be able to interpret a maths problem, access a historical source and understand the method of a science experiment.

That's why it's so important to be able to spot reading difficulties early and take steps to remedy them so children are not held back in their future learning.

At Pheasey Park Farm Primary School, teachers understand how challenging it can be to identify pupils who are at risk from reading difficulties as issues can often be hidden. Some children have problems with silent reading, others struggle to concentrate and some more able children try to read too fast and make careless errors.

To assess children's literacy skills and put support in place for those who need it, Pheasey Park uses eye-tracking software from Lexplore Analytics.



Addressing new challenges

Pheasey Park Farm Primary near Wolverhampton welcomes children from a range of backgrounds and a mixed demographic. The school is acutely aware of the fact that many families' circumstances have changed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Not only has the pandemic disrupted face-to-face teaching and learning, it has also widened the gap for disadvantaged children.

Andrea Welter, assistant headteacher, recognises the extent of the impact on her pupils. "Many children spent a long time out of the classroom and have missed face-to-face teacher time.

"Now all our pupils are back at school, there's an urgent need to support the children in basic skills such as literacy so that their life chances are not affected."

A fresh insight into literacy

Pheasey Park had been relying on paper-based reading tests which told the school which questions a pupil answered correctly and what their reading age was, but did not shed any light on how a child reads.

"We wanted a clearer insight into each pupil's literacy skills," says Andrea. "As well as being able to read fluently aloud, children need to be able to read in their head, build a strong vocabulary and decode the meaning of what they see on the page.

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"The eye-tracking technology from Lexplore Analytics shows us how long a child's eyes rest on certain words and this can indicate if they are finding reading difficult. Their software allows us to see if a child can skim a piece of text to get an understanding of it, and scan to find specific information. We can also tell if a child has drifted off the task altogether.

"One boy who we thought was a strong reader was actually struggling with his silent reading, and our previous testing process would not have alerted us to these difficulties and without this technology we wouldn't have known he needed additional help."

"Lexplore Analytics gives us a window into a child's mind while they are reading," says Andrea.

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Andrea Welter, Assistant Headteacher

Fast track support

Having rapid access to nuanced information about reading ability helps the school get targeted interventions in place, and this is vital in helping children rebuild skills that have slipped during the pandemic.

"The problem with some of the tests we used previously was that it took a long time to assess all your pupils and by the time you get round to the last few children, they may have missed out on weeks of support."

"Lexplore analytics is so quick and easy to implement, it takes around three minutes per child, which means we get vital information on a child's reading ability and can act quickly if there are any issues. It's great for reducing teacher workload too because instead of clocking up hours of marking and analysis, you get the results instantly. The important thing is that our school has absolute confidence in those results."

"Many children have been through tough times during the pandemic," explains Andrea. "We don't want to add to their anxiety by making them worry about tests. However, the children are always really excited by the Lexplore Analytics testing and they often ask if they can do it all over again."

Andrea Welter, Assistant Headteacher

Rebuilding confidence and self-esteem

Pheasey Park puts its pupils' mental health and wellbeing at the top of the agenda, and Lexplore Analytics is an important part of that.

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"Children with lower ability levels are never made to feel they have failed. The assessment is designed to encourage children, in fact it gives their confidence a much-needed boost."

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