

**National Foundation
for Educational Research**



**Rapid reading intervention:
Case study report**

July 2006

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Introduction

Rapid is a reading intervention programme published by Heinemann that is aimed at assisting key stage 2 pupils who have low literacy levels. There are 12 Rapid levels which comprise 6 stages and which correspond to the National Curriculum reading levels. The Rapid programme is a collection of resources that includes reading books, a software package and assessment texts. The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) recently trialled the Rapid reading materials and software on behalf of Heinemann and this report details the findings.

A sample of schools in England, Wales and Scotland were selected to trial the materials. From this sample, 12 schools agreed to participate in the trialling exercise (see Table 1) The sample consisted of 11 primary schools and one secondary school, representing a range of types and contexts.

Table 1

| LOCAL AUTHORITY | Location | No. of pupils | % FSM | % pupils with statements | % white British | No. of ethnic categories in school | Achievement band ¹ |
|------------------------|-----------------|----------------------|--------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| Edinburgh | urban | 161 | 75 | - | - | - | - |
| Dundee | urban | 292 | 26 | - | - | - | - |
| Swansea | urban | 270 | 62 | - | - | - | - |
| Bristol | urban | 295 | 3 | 2 | 82 | 13 | 5 |
| | urban | 365 | 7 | 1 | 97 | 7 | 2 |
| Manchester | urban | 498 | 48 | 2 | 88 | 9 | 4 |
| | urban | 198 | 45 | 2 | 93 | 7 | 2 |
| Lambeth | urban | 468 | 47 | 2 | 10 | 16 | 1 |
| | urban | 200 | 14 | 3 | 25 | 16 | 4 |
| Kent * | urban | 1138 | 24 | 7 | 92 | 16 | - |
| Surrey | rural | 192 | 3 | 3 | 88 | 5 | 4 |
| Worcestershire | rural | 425 | 3 | 3 | 96 | 8 | 5 |

**secondary school*

Schools provided NFER with the details of the reading levels of pupils with whom they wished to trial the materials. The appropriate level of Rapid reading materials

¹ Key stage 2 overall performance (1= lowest)

was then sent directly to the school. The trialling of materials took place during May and June 2006 for a period of around three to four weeks.

Case studies

The following report provides individual case study reports for 11 of the twelve schools which participated in trialling the Rapid reading intervention materials². Three schools provided information via a telephone interview and the remaining nine schools were visited by a researcher from the NFER. Eleven of the schools were primary schools and one was a secondary school. For the purpose of this report the school case studies have been presented anonymously.

Each school chose how they would trial the materials both in relation to the members of staff who were involved and the number of pupils using the materials. Some schools used the materials with one or two pupils and others chose to use the materials with a larger group. Some schools used the materials only with boys and others with both boys and girls. Most schools used the reading books on a 1:1 basis but this was mainly due to the fact that they only had one copy of each of the books and this made it difficult to work with a group of pupils.

Interviews were carried out with those members of staff who had used the materials. Staff interviewed included:

- the headteacher
- teachers
- teaching assistants.

In one school a parent also provided some feedback on the reading books. Where possible, the pupils who had used the reading books were also spoken to. In schools where pupils were spoken to directly about the books, they were asked to provide their opinion on the reading books and to give the books a 'thumbs up' or a 'thumbs down'. This is also presented in the case studies.

Rapid software

Each school was asked about the software. Three schools had used the software by the time their case study visit took place. Of these, two had problems with the voice recognition aspect of the software and reported that the software corrected pupils when they had pronounced a word correctly. This was highlighted by the school in Swansea and one of the Scottish schools. These schools were concerned about the responsiveness of the software to regional dialects. The other school had not used the software extensively but were positive about it.

² One school are yet to provide or finalise case study information and is not included in this report.

Nine schools were unable to trial the software in time for the case study visits. Two of these schools were undergoing refurbishment to their ICT suites and there were no computers available for trialling the software. However, they did say they thought the software was a good idea and that they would be using it in the future. One school did not have the facilities to trial the software. Two schools had not been able to find the time to trial the software. The other four schools had all experienced problems installing the software. Two of these schools were sent new copies of the software to allow them to re-install it.

Where schools had successfully installed the software, their comments are provided in the case study write-ups. In the schools which had experienced technical difficulties or issues of a practical nature these were:

- **Voice recognition**

There appeared to be three main problems regarding the voice recognition feature: recognising different dialects; responding to pupils who spoke quietly; and saving the pupils' voice recordings. Firstly, the software seemed to have difficulty in recognising some of the pupils' voices and occasionally accepted some words which were incorrect or would not accept words which had been pronounced correctly. This happened in two of the schools. There seemed to be a particular problem distinguishing between 'hard s sounds', like its and his. One example when it had accepted something incorrectly was when in one of the books an elephant squirts water at someone/something. In the book it says 'ha, ha, ha' one child read this as 'hoorah, hoorah, hoorah' and the software accepted this. On other occasions, it challenged something which was correct. Secondly, one school commented that the voice recognition stopped with one pupil who spoke quite quietly. Thirdly, another school said that they had been unable to save the voice recordings of pupils in the initial set-up, which meant they had to record the pupils' voices each time they used the software.

- **Reading speed**

Two schools reported that pupils sometimes had to read quite slowly for the computer to recognise the words, and this was a barrier in trying to develop fluency and speed. One pupil began to read in a staccato voice to encourage the software to respond positively to his reading.

- **Headsets**

One school reported that some of the headsets had broken and that the microphone 'arm' was not strong enough. Another school said the headsets were tricky to use.

Overview

Reading books

The overwhelming response to the reading books was a very positive one. There were some aspects of the materials on which most people agreed. For instance, the

Before Reading page and the Quiz were features of the reading books which were particularly well liked. Other key findings included:

Visual presentation

- The way the books were presented was valued by most schools. This included the mixture of cartoons with real-life images, short paragraphs of text and colourful images
- Schools liked the length of the books, which they felt were motivational and helped improve pupil confidence because pupils were able to finish a book
- Feedback about the identification of the reading level of the books was mixed. Some schools felt the books should be more clearly marked to assist with identification on bookshelves. Others preferred the more discrete approach which the books used to identify reading levels, because it helped minimise any stigma which may be associated with lower reading levels.

Content

- Some schools felt that the books had a 'grown up' feel to them which was particularly useful in working with older pupils who may not have felt comfortable reading books they felt were 'babyish'
- The separate fiction and non-fiction texts were well liked. Some schools felt that the non-fiction text was particularly appealing to pupils and that they liked reading about real life facts and information
- One or two schools expressed concern about the content of some of the books, in particular the book on ghosts. It was felt that, for younger readers, this subject area might be unsuitable

Usability

- Teaching staff and pupils liked the size of the books. They were easy for pupils to carry around school and also fitted into their school bags and drawers
- Pupils liked the attention of 1:1 reading sessions which the books facilitated and enjoyed working closely with a teacher, teaching assistant or parent
- On the whole, the books worked well in 1:1 reading sessions. However, many schools were keen to use the books as guided reading and for work with larger groups of pupils
- Many of the schools were positive about the teaching guides and felt they would be particularly useful for teaching assistants to use

- Schools generally agreed that the books were most relevant to older boys. Many felt there was a shortage of suitable reading materials for reluctant readers in this particular group and welcomed what they felt could fill a gap in this area.

Impact

- Many teachers and teaching assistants were impressed with the impact on pupils' confidence and their socialising skills. It was felt that being able to take facts back to class and share them with others and talk about the jokes was a valued aspect of the books
- Many schools felt the books were motivational and highlighted examples of reluctant readers who were quite captivated by the books and were enjoying using them.

Reading software

The responses to the reading software were mixed. In total, five schools were able to provide some comments about the software. Technical difficulties had been a significant issue in schools being able to successfully trial the software. However, the schools who used the software all agreed that they would like more time to use it in the future and were excited by the concept itself. One teacher felt it would be a particularly good idea to use it with pupils with special educational needs in her school. The Quiz and Glossary were both mentioned as useful features. Another teacher liked the confidentiality the headphones permitted, in that pupils could build up their confidence reading by themselves rather in front of the class or another adult.

CASE STUDY 1

School A

Lambeth

School Background

School A is a large, two-form entry primary school situated in the inner London Borough of Lambeth close to Brixton. The area is mostly residential and has a high level of deprivation. The school serves a diverse ethnic community with a school population of over 400 pupils. The school has recently undergone a major refurbishment programme following the amalgamation of the infant and junior schools on to one site.

| Area | % FSM | % Pupils with statements | % White British |
|-------|-------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Urban | 47 | 2 | 10 |

Source: NFER Register of Schools

How have the materials been used in school?

A year 5 teacher had been using the reading books with four pupils in her class. The pupils were two boys and two girls and all of the pupils were ten years old. The teacher had worked with the pupils on a 1:1 basis in the classroom. Each pupil was reading a different book and individual reading sessions lasted about 10 to 15 minutes about twice a week.

What did the school think of the reading books?

The books were easy to use with pupils on a 1:1 basis but the teacher also felt they would be suitable for group work. The mixture of fiction and non-fiction texts within each of the books was felt to be a particularly useful aspect, *'they give information about Big Foot and then they use Big Foot in the story and introduce characters, that's nice, it's more realistic'*. The teacher felt some of the pictures were quite *'loud'* and that sometimes the text obscured the pictures. She felt that making the books larger in size might overcome this.

The text and the themes were felt to be good.

'When I first started using the books with the pupils they were worried about what sort of books they were going to be but after one or two sessions they

started showing interest'. The pupils stayed on-task whilst they were reading the books. However, the teacher felt the books could be slightly longer. 'The length of the books are good but by the time you have the pupils' interest the book is finished. If the books were a little longer that would be more effective'.

The teacher had also used the teaching guide and had found the activities in it useful.

The teacher also said *'The Quiz section is good but more questions might be good and the pupils liked the jokes'.*

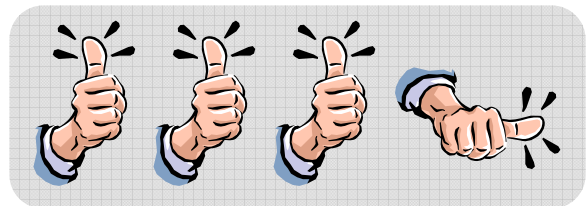
The Before Reading page was felt to be a good idea.

What did the school like most about the reading books?

'I most liked how they turned the information into stories and the Quiz page and the guidance for the teacher is good because it tells you exactly what to do and teaching assistants could use it aswell'.

What do the pupils think?

Each of the four pupils were asked to give the reading books a 'thumbs up' or a 'thumbs down'. Three pupils gave a thumbs up and one pupil gave a half thumb.



Overall

The school were, on the whole, positive about the reading books. Both the teaching assistant and the pupils had enjoyed using them. The pictures in the books were particularly well liked, although one suggested improvement was to arrange the text so as not to obscure any pictures or to make the books slightly larger.

CASE STUDY 2

School B

Bristol

School Background

School B is a mixed community primary school situated on the south side of Bristol. Provision is for pupils from 3-11 years. There are 365 pupils on roll and this includes nursery provision. The school mainly draws its pupils from the local area and the vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage.

| Area | % FSM | % Pupils with statements | % White British |
|-------|-------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Urban | 7 | 1 | 97 |

Source: NFER Register of Schools

How have the materials been used in school?

The reading books had been used with six pupils in the school. Two pupils had been selected from each of year groups 3, 4 and 5 and there was an equal split of boys and girls. The pupils were introduced to the books by the headteacher and the literacy coordinator and were able to select which book they wished to read first. There was an initial session so that the pupils and the teacher could go through the books and familiarise themselves with them. The books were then read on a weekly basis with the teacher and pupils in 1:1 sessions.

What did the school think of the reading books?

The teacher who used the reading books was very impressed. She said the pupils were, *'very motivated and excited to use the books'*. She also felt the pupils liked the size of the books and the photographs. It was felt that the books were especially good for year 5 pupils, particularly those who were struggling with their reading because being able to complete a whole book was a confidence boost for them. *'Not picking up a huge book that they have to plough through, that's a confidence builder'*. Her first impressions were, *'Wow – we have something here that is suitable for all ages'*. The teacher initially felt the books were more suitable for boys but this was quickly disproved when the girls who were reading the books were just as motivated to use them.

'One girl went for 'Under the Sea', another one went for the animal one. They all chose differently'.

It was also felt that the way the books incorporated small chunks of text and the mixture of real photographs with cartoons was good.

What did the school like most about the reading books?

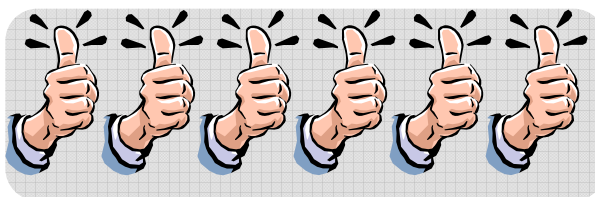
The teacher was particularly impressed with the Before Reading page and the Quiz. She also liked the subtle way in which the stages of the books were presented on the back page so as not to be too obvious.

'A lot of the subjects [in the books] were things [the] children were already doing in class.'

The motivational aspect of the books was felt to be particularly appealing. The children were very excited to use the books and the teacher spoke about how they would continue to use them in school.

What do the pupils think?

The six pupils who used the books were asked to rate the reading books by giving a 'thumbs up' or a 'thumbs down'. All six pupils gave the books a 'thumbs up'.



The teacher said that the pupils liked the size of the books and the fact that they could fit them into their school drawer. They really liked the real life facts in the books and could tell their friends about things they had learnt.

Typical comments from pupils included:

'I liked the titles'

'I liked the pictures'

'There were all different subjects and I liked the things the books talk about'

'You could use them for information and we could learn things'

'The colours suit the pictures and the titles'

'The writing is the right size and suitable for young people'

'Tricky Words section is good'.

What did the school think of the software?

The teacher who used the reading books had not had the opportunity to use the software with any pupils but had trialled the materials herself. She felt the software would be particularly useful with pupils with special educational needs. She liked the idea of pupils being able to record their reading and the fact that if they were stuck on a word the software would read it for them. The teacher felt this was useful because problem words could sometimes be off putting for pupils. She also liked the use of the Glossary and felt the headset was useful for pupils because they could all work together in a room but still read by themselves.

Overall

The school was very positive about the reading materials. The pupils were motivated to use the books and enjoyed the topic areas and the way the books were presented. The school was happy to continue using the reading materials and looked forward to using the software with other pupils in the school.

CASE STUDY 3

School C

Bristol

School Background

School C is a mixed, community junior school located in a suburb of north west Bristol. Provision is for 7-11 year olds and there are 295 pupils on roll. Almost all pupils have English as their first language. The number of pupils entitled to free school meals is below the national average.

| Area | % FSM | % Pupils with statements | % White British |
|-------|-------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Urban | 3 | 2 | 82 |

Source: NFER Register of Schools

How have the materials been used in school?

The reading books had been used with seven year 3 pupils, two girls and five boys. All of the pupils had started on stage 4 reading books but some had progressed on to stage 5. Both the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) and a teaching assistant were reading the books with the pupils. The books were introduced to pupils by everyone reading the same book initially.

What did the school think of the reading books?

The teacher and teaching assistant who had used the books with the pupils felt that there had been a dramatic improvement in the children's reading accuracy after only a couple of books. They felt the Before Reading page was a good idea and said that pupils seemed to identify the Tricky Words in the text. The Quiz page was also well liked and it was commented that this approach could be extended further by incorporating further questions within the body of the text. The teacher felt at first that the books might be more 'boy friendly' which she thought was good but subsequently after using the materials she found the girls were equally motivated to use the books.

Other aspects of the book which received positive comments included the size of the text and the way it was presented, '*the text is slightly larger than in other books, which is good, but [the] pupils don't question it*'. The yellow paragraphs were well liked and the way in which the text was presented in short chunks with not too much text on each page was felt to be helpful, '*there is a happy medium between pictures and text*'.

The teacher also spoke about how the pupils remained on-task whilst reading the books, *'we were reading in a lobby area with other children going past but they kept reading and other children were really interested'*.

It was felt the books would be particularly suitable for reluctant boy readers, *'often they like a subject but it is too advanced. We don't have much non-fiction stuff.'*

The teacher summed up the books by adding, *'I can't imagine putting these on the bookshelf and them not being chosen'*.

What did the school like most about the reading books?

The mix of fiction and non-fiction texts was particularly well liked. It was also noted that pupils particularly liked it when the non-fiction text came first. This had been found to be a particularly successful approach in the 1:1 reading sessions.

Comments included:

'Perfect length and size'

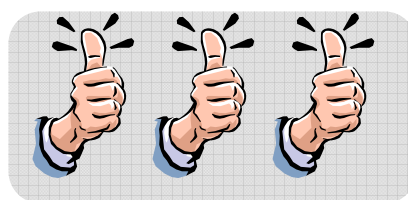
'[I] liked the idea of the theme running through the books'

'Happy medium between pictures and text'

The Quiz page was also particularly well liked.

What do the pupils think?

The three pupils who were spoken to about using the books were asked to rate the reading books by giving a 'thumbs up' or a 'thumbs down'. All three pupils gave the books a 'thumbs up'.



The teacher said that all pupils have been *'totally captivated'* and went on to mention that, *'all other children in year 3 are asking when they get their go'*. She also said, *'I had to take some children out of ICT and dance lessons to read and not one child complained'*. The teachers also commented that all the pupils remembered the name of the book they had been reading when they were asked about it the following day and they could remember information from it, *'they were recommending the books and really talking about them'*.

The teacher spoke about specific examples of impacts the books had on pupils. One pupil in particular had been a reluctant reader both in school and at home but had enjoyed using the books and had taken the books home to read with a parent. For another pupil, the books had fired his imagination and he had become very involved in the subject matter. Another pupil had become more aware of her speaking and listening skills, *'I found she was a more able reader than I thought she was. [It] was very motivating for her.'*

The pupils themselves also spoke positively about the books, *'It was fun because you read and learn'*, they said they had learnt new things in the books, *'you have a real section and a story and you have questions. You don't often have real pictures in your stories'*.

The pupils also liked the jokes and said they looked forward to their reading sessions.

Overall

The school was very positive about the reading books and pupils were keen to use them. The reading books were already having an impact on several of the pupils, both in their reading ability levels and motivation to read.

CASE STUDY 4

School D

Worcestershire

School Background

School D is a two-form entry primary school with nursery provision providing for pupils from 3-11 years. The school is located on the outskirts of Birmingham in a relatively affluent area. The school population is mostly drawn from the local area but some pupils are from less affluent surrounding areas. Very few pupils qualify for free school meals and they are largely of White British heritage. The school population is 425 pupils.

| Area | % FSM | % Pupils with statements | % White British |
|-------|-------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Rural | 3 | 3 | 96 |

Source: NFER Register of Schools

How have the materials been used in school?

The reading books were trialled by four teaching assistants and eight pupils in total. One pupil was in year 6, another pupil was in year 3, three pupils were in year 5 and a further three pupils were in year 4. All pupils were boys. The duration and frequency of the reading sessions changed depending on the approach taken by the teaching assistant. However, all books were used on a 1:1 basis with pupils.

One teaching assistant had used the books for ten minutes a day and then the pupil had taken the book home to read with a parent. The pupil had chosen the book they wanted to read first, *'they chose the ghostly one'*.

Another approach taken by one of the teaching assistants was to hold 20 minute reading sessions on a weekly basis.

Twenty minute reading sessions were also used by another teaching assistant and these had taken place about three times a week.

What did the school think of the reading books?

One teaching assistant was initially unsure about the use of cartoon people but she found she soon liked them and felt they were good for older children. She also felt

the books were a good size, '[they] *fit into a book bag easily* [and are a] *nice length, not too long*'.

Another teaching assistant spoke about how she liked the small blocks of text which were, '*not too scary*'. She went on to say, '*as a teaching assistant it is good for a stopping point to talk about what you've read*'.

A number of teaching assistants commented on the Tricky Words, some thought they were a good idea but others felt it was sometimes more difficult to introduce such words to pupils when they were out of context.

Another teaching assistant felt it would be a good idea to include poems in the books.

Most of the teaching assistants agreed that the books were easy to use on a 1:1 basis but one teaching assistant was unsure about the content of some of the books, particularly the book about ghosts and whether it was suitable for younger children.

What did the school like most about the reading books?

The teaching assistants provided many comments about what they liked most about the books.

They liked various aspects of the content of the books:

'Before Reading page was quite useful'

'I liked [the] Tricky Words section'

One teaching assistant said they liked the Quiz because it was sometimes difficult to think of questions yourself, '*I liked the Quiz, [it was] fun to do [and I] liked the word detective*'.

'I liked the fiction and non-fiction'. One teaching assistant noted that the books alternated the order of the fiction and non-fiction texts and felt this was a good idea.

'Repeating characters works really well'. It was noted by one teaching assistant that this helped with comprehension and fluency.

They were also positive about the way the books were presented:

'Very attractive, particularly for boys, [the] use of photography and cartoons is good'

'Arranged very well, [I] liked how there were different forms of presentation'

'I like them particularly for the boys, [they are] very different from books in school [the] colours and design are very different'

'The size of the books is ideal, too big and they get dog-eared, too small and they get lost'. It was also felt that this size of book helped pupils stay focused as larger books could sometimes be a distraction.

What do the pupils think?

Pupils were not spoken to directly in this school although feedback from the pupils was provided by the members of staff who were interviewed. Feedback was also provided by a parent who had been reading the books at home with one of the pupils. She liked the idea of the books but had concerns about the content of some of the books, in particular the book on ghosts.

The teaching assistants said that the pupils had enjoyed using the books and had been very excited about using them. One pupil thought the books had great comic appeal and that they looked fun.

One teaching assistant felt the books had been good for pupils' confidence and that the pupils had been showing the books to other children. Another teaching assistant said that the pupils liked looking at the pictures and liked the speech bubbles.

The joke also seems to have been a popular element with pupils. One teaching assistant commented that the pupils always asked what the joke was.

What did the school think of the software?

The software was trialled with two eight-year-old pupils who had used the reading books. The school had only had the opportunity to trial the software over a short period of time. Their initial impression was that they would have liked more time to spend using the software and would continue using it next term. The software had many elements which the teacher felt would be useful for pupils and which they would like the opportunity to explore in more depth. Despite some initial technical difficulties the teacher thought the Quiz was a good idea and that features such as the Glossary were useful. The teacher planned to use the software with a group of older children next term.

Overall

On the whole, the school was very positive about the books. The way the books were presented was particularly well liked and pupils seemed interested in the books and motivated to use them. There were some issues about certain topic areas which were covered in the books and their suitability for younger children but most comments were positive and reflected the comment by one teaching assistant, *'I think they are brilliant and would like to recommend them'*. The school planned to continue using the software with pupils and was keen to explore its full potential.

CASE STUDY 5

School E

Surrey

School Background

School E is a small, one-form entry primary school providing for pupils from 4-11 years. Situated in the north of Surrey, it draws pupils from a wide catchment area. The school population draws from both the immediate, affluent local area and further afield from less affluent areas. The school has low numbers of pupils who are eligible for free schools meals or who are from ethnic minority backgrounds. The school population is 192 pupils.

| Area | % FSM | % Pupils with statements | % White British |
|-------|-------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Rural | 3 | 3 | 88 |

Source: NFER Register of Schools

How have the materials been used in school?

The reading books were used with five year 3 pupils, all boys. The reading sessions were carried out on a 1:1 basis with teaching assistants and pupils and on the whole this worked well. However, the school would have liked the option to use the books with groups of pupils. The reading sessions took place on a twice weekly basis.

What did the school think of the reading books?

The layout of the books was well liked. It was felt they were an accessible length for the pupils and the pupils were keen to use the new materials.

'They were appealing to the children, they liked the layout and the books were an accessible length for them'.

Having books which are an accessible length was something that the school felt was important for pupils with a lower reading ability. It was felt that finding enough reading materials aimed at less able older readers was sometimes difficult. *'It's not something they are going to have seen already in the infants, they haven't got someone else saying I read that when I was in year 1'.*

The school also found that the books matched the reading levels of the pupils quite well. They also thought it would be interesting to see the impact of paired reading

sessions with less able readers reading alongside pupils with a higher reading level. Using the books to complement literacy lessons was another possibility.

Some concern was expressed about the content of a few of the books and their suitability for younger children. The book about ghosts was cited as an example. The school felt the books were specifically aimed at boys.

What did the school like most about the reading books?

The Tricky Words section and the teacher guide were particularly well liked, *'the Tricky Words were good and they were the ones the children would have had difficulty with'*.

The fiction and non-fiction texts were also viewed positively, *'children who are reluctant readers will often prefer non-fiction'*. It was felt that fictional texts were often more frequently available and so having the opportunity to read non-fiction was viewed positively.

Other comments included:

'The size of text is accessible to the children, keeping it in small chunks is good'

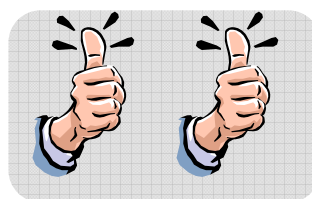
'The teaching guide and the guided questions were useful, anything that means you can put something into place without lots of additional planning. As a teacher if you know the supporting material is there rather than having to search around is helpful'

'Even though the books are at different stages you could tie in a book with what you were doing in your literacy'.

It was also felt the books were of a good size and length and that there was a good mixture of cartoons and pictures which would appeal to different pupils.

What do the pupils think?

The two pupils who were spoken to about using the books were asked to rate the reading books by giving a 'thumbs up' or a 'thumbs down'. Both pupils gave the books a 'thumbs up' and said they had enjoyed using them. The books about monsters and snakes were well liked.



The pupils retained quite a lot of information from the books and were keen to talk about the things they had learned with their classmates.

The headteacher said that the pupils had been very motivated to use the books but was unsure whether this was due to the books, the opportunity to work with an adult on a 1:1 basis, or a mixture of both.

Overall

The school was positive about the books. They would have liked the option to use them with groups of pupils but felt that 1:1 reading sessions were helpful for pupils requiring more targeted support. The school was happy to continue using the books and felt they could be an additional resource to supplement other reading materials.

CASE STUDY 6

School F

Manchester

School Background

School F is a small primary school situated in a relatively deprived area of north Manchester. A large proportion of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The school provides for pupils from 3-11 years and the majority of the school population are of White British Heritage. The number of pupils with special educational needs is average and the school population is 198 pupils.

| Area | % FSM | % Pupils with statements | % White British |
|-------|-------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Urban | 45 | 2 | 93 |

Source: NFER Register of Schools

How have the materials been used in school?

The reading materials had been used by two teaching assistants in the school and a total of seven pupils. Three of the pupils were in Year 6. A further two pupils were 8 years of age and the remaining two pupils were both aged 9 years. Five of the pupils were boys and two were girls. Two of the pupils had statements of Special Educational Needs. Reading sessions were carried out with each pupil on a 1:1 basis and tended to be 25 to 30 minutes in length.

The pupils had chosen the book they wished to read first and they enjoyed having this choice. They knew that the books were to help improve their reading. One teaching assistant said, *'we try and get through one story in a session so they can do the questions and enjoy the joke at the end'*.

Another teaching assistant said, *'we ask the pupils who the author is, what the title is, who illustrated it and the contents page before we start reading'*.

What did the school think of the reading books?

The school were very positive about the reading books. One of the teaching assistants particularly liked the way the text was organised and the fact that there was not too much text on a page.

She also liked the Before Reading page, *'the Before Reading page worked well with the pupils, [it was] like a reference for them'*.

The Quiz page had also worked well. Both the teaching assistants found that the pupils could remember bits of the story better when they used the Quiz, '*[the pupils] are good at it and they enjoy it*'. They also enjoyed the Word Detective where pupils had to go back through the text to find certain words. After reading the books and completing the Quiz some of the pupils then wrote about what they had liked or not liked about the book. One of the boys had said he liked the Quiz but did not like the spelling even though he spelt the words correctly.

One teaching assistant had also used the worksheets from the teaching guide and had found these really useful as a way of reflecting on and supplementing the information in the books. She enjoyed using the teaching guide and found it easy to understand. The pupils also enjoyed using the worksheets.

Other comments about the reading books included:

'The joke was a bit of a reward, [the pupils have been] going off telling other people'

'There's a lot to read but there doesn't look like there is a lot to read'

'The pictures are good and they are learning to know about things'

'It's a nice way of doing reading with them, it's very different from what they have done before'.

What did the school like most about the reading books?

The Tricky Words section was felt to be a really good idea. One teaching assistant said how helpful it had been with the pupils, '*the Tricky Words section was felt to be a good idea, [the pupils] remember them in the book*'.

The use of repeating characters across the series had also been viewed positively. One teaching assistant said, '*one of the children couldn't read the teacher's name in the first book but when he saw it in the next book he recognised it as the same teacher and could link all the stories. They want to know what is going to happen in the next story, I think that's what keeps them motivated*'.

When asked what made these books different from other reading books, one of the teaching assistants thought the titles of the books made a difference, '*the titles were really catchy – if the story [is not] good you are not going to keep them on task*'.

The fact that the books were modern was also commented upon, '*[the books] seem more up to date with the children of today*'.

The way the books were presented was also welcomed. Comments included:

'The pictures are bright and colourful'

'Size is manageable and just the right length'

'It's fantastic the way it is set out'.

The teaching assistants also said:

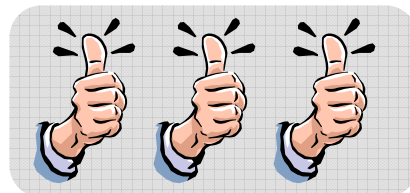
'The Before Reading page gives them confidence and they don't feel as apprehensive when reading, [they] feel more calm'

'I think they would interest all children'

'Having fiction and non-fiction is good, it keeps them interested'.

What do the pupils think?

The three pupils who were spoken to about using the books were asked to rate the reading books by giving a 'thumbs up' or a 'thumbs down'. All three pupils gave the books a 'thumbs up'. The pupils had enjoyed using the books.



Comments from the pupils included:

'I liked the writing in the boxes'

'[I] liked the size of them'

'[I] liked the stories'.

Some of the pupils had been apprehensive initially when introduced to the new reading material but they soon enjoyed using them. They continued to talk about the information they had learnt whilst reading the books when they were in class. The pupils liked the use of repetition in the books and felt that they were progressing with their reading. One of the pupils had struggled with not wanting to read but the teaching assistant who was reading the books with him said, *'he wants to read this and he wants to read it to the end'*.

One teaching assistant had mentioned that the pupils had felt confident using the books especially because they found it manageable to finish a book.

One of the pupils had read the book on rats and had extended her knowledge in this area which she then shared with some of her classmates. Another pupil had enjoyed reading the books about the Yeti and liked talking about what he had learnt. Reading the books had often led to further discussion, *'the pupils must have been discussing the books with each other which is really good because these children find it hard'*.

Pupils were motivated to read the books, *'one child would not read and guess words but wants to read these'*.

It was felt that the books could also be used more generally by other pupils in the school.

Overall

The teaching assistants and pupils enjoyed using the books. One teaching assistant said she would like to see the books being used in school. The Quiz and Before Reading pages were felt to be particularly helpful and the way the books were presented was also liked. Many of the pupils had continued to talk about the reading books outside their reading sessions. The books were felt to be a *'really nice way of doing reading'*.

CASE STUDY 7

School G

Edinburgh

School Background

School G is a small primary school located in central Edinburgh with a population of 161 pupils. The school is located in a relatively deprived area and a high number of pupils are eligible for free school meals.

| Area | % FSM |
|-------|-------|
| Urban | 75 |

Source: *NFER Register of Schools*

How have the materials been used in school?

The books were used with the learning support teacher and with groups of pupils in primary 4, primary 5 and primary 6. All the pupils were boys. The younger pupils used the books on a 1:1 basis and the older pupils used the books in groups of three or four. On the whole, this approach worked well. The school found that the topics in the books related well to work they were doing in school, particularly the book on knights and castles.

What did the school think of the reading books?

On the whole, the way the books were presented was viewed positively by the teacher. She felt the books were appealing and the photographs were excellent. The covers were, *'upbeat and cheerful'*.

The use of repeating characters in the stories was something the teacher also viewed positively. However, she did feel that although the Quiz page was a good idea for some pupils she would like to see more challenging questions for older pupils.

The books were seen as a, *'handy additional resource'*.

What did the school like most about the reading books?

The aspects of the books which were particularly liked by the school included the Before Reading page and the inclusion of non-fiction texts in the reading books.

'[The] Before Reading page is an excellent idea and something that I did in the past when I had more time. It is so beneficial to highlight Tricky Words to the pupils before they begin.'

The teacher was particularly impressed with the Tricky Words section, *'I particularly liked the Tricky Words and will recommend to colleagues that they use this technique'*.

The way the reading levels were displayed on the back of the books was also seen as a good idea.

What do the pupils think?

Most of the pupils were enthusiastic about the books but the older pupils found the books less beneficial than the younger ones. The jokes were particularly well liked by pupils.

Overall

The school were positive about several aspects of the reading books. They had particularly liked the Before Reading page and the colourful appeal of them. They felt that the books would be most useful with younger pupils.

CASE STUDY 8

School H

Dundee

School Background

School H is a mainstream primary school for pupils from 4-11 years. The school population is 292 pupils. A relatively low number of pupils are eligible for free school meals.

| Area | % FSM |
|-------|-------|
| Urban | 26 |

Source: NFER Register of Schools

How have the materials been used in school?

The books were used in school by the support for learning teacher. Reading sessions were carried out with two pupils on a 1:1 basis. One pupil was 11 years old and the other was 9 years old, both were boys. One pupil was described as a reluctant reader and the other pupil had dyslexia.

What did the school think of the reading books?

The reading books were viewed positively by the school, '*they are short and very attractive*'. The teacher valued the non-condescending approach of the books and thought they were very modern and up to date materials.

The way in which new words were highlighted in the Tricky Words section was felt to be a good idea particularly because the words were pointed out in the books and not just in supplementary teacher materials.

The Quiz was also seen to be a good idea and the teacher liked the fact that it was called a 'Quiz' rather than comprehension.

The cartoon characters were seen as useful for younger children and the way the books were split in to two texts made them more manageable in that pupils could get to the end of a story.

The subjects which the books talked about were also viewed positively, '*the books use a lot of animals which was very good too, it encouraged the children to want to read*'.

The teacher also felt the books would be relevant to some subject areas throughout the school, in particular volcanoes and links to the natural world.

What did the school like most about the reading books?

Both the Quiz and Before Reading pages were well liked. The preparation provided at the beginning of the books was felt to be particularly useful and meant that parents could easily work with children at home. The photographs were also felt to be of a high quality.

'[The] size of [the] book was good and the way the text was spaced was good'.

The colour coding was also felt to be a good idea which was clear and helped in navigating the different books.

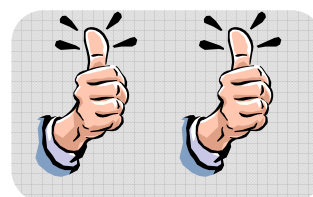
Another valued aspect of the books was the fact that the pupils were not expected to do a lot of writing, something which the teacher felt, *'could be offputting if there is too much required'*.

What did the school think of the software?

The headteacher had installed the software in school and the support for learning teacher had found it easy to use despite the fact she was not an expert in ICT. The Read to Me option was liked by the teacher who used the materials and the pupils enjoyed using the voice recognition software. On the whole, it was felt the software was easy to use and many of the options were motivational for pupils.

What do the pupils think?

The teacher said the materials had worked very well with the pupils and said both the pupils would have given the books a 'thumbs up', *'they loved it'*. They particularly liked the non-fiction sections. The teacher also said how much the children had liked the jokes.



The pupils had enjoyed the use of repeating characters, *'it is like following a series'*.

Pupils had also used the software and the teacher found that, *'the children loved using the software – especially the headphones and being able to record their voices. Children respond so much faster to their own voices'*.

'[The] content of the books kept the children motivated and [the] software made them really keen to get the headphones on and let them work on their own. [I] could anticipate that [the] children could even work in class with this'.

Overall

The teacher and pupils enjoyed using the materials and felt they were, *'addressing a need for these struggling readers'*.

They would like to use the materials in the future and would recommend to other colleagues, particularly support teachers. *'There are big gaps in the market for good books for struggling readers and this could be the filler'*.

CASE STUDY 9

School I

Lambeth

School Background

School I is an average size primary school located in the Streatham area of Lambeth. Provision is for pupils from 4-11 years. The school has a high percentage of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds. Pupils are drawn from both affluent and relatively deprived areas. The number of pupils currently on roll is 200.

| Area | % FSM | % Pupils with statements | % White British |
|-------|-------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Urban | 14 | 3 | 25 |

Source: NFER Register of Schools

How have the materials been used in school?

The reading books and accompanying software had been used by the school Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO). In total, around 10 pupils from Years 2, 3 and 5 had used the materials as part of their regular work with the SENCO. The SENCO had worked with pupils using the materials on a 1:1 basis with approximately twice weekly sessions. Most of the pupils who used the materials were boys.

What did the school think of the reading books?

The SENCO described the books as very good. He liked the layout of the books and the use of cartoon drawings and photographs. He felt that some of the photographs were '*a bit scary*' but added that that was an adult's view – '*the children like them!*' The mixture of fiction and non-fiction was also well liked. The length of the books was described as '*just right – not too long, not too short*'. He commented, '*in the short time they've been reading these I've seen a keenness developing*'.

The SENCO would, however, have liked to have seen some poetry in the books.

What did the school like most about the reading books?

The SENCO was particularly impressed by the Before Reading page. '*I think it's a really good warm up activity – you go through the characters and any Tricky Words. I think that's a good reminder of good practice*'. The Quiz was also seen as a key

feature: *'I think it's essential - rather than just put the book down and say that's it. It [explores] different realms of comprehension'*.

What did the school think of the software?

The SENCO had found the software easy to set up and felt that the accompanying user guide was clear and helpful. He felt that the pupils liked using the software (many of the pupils particularly enjoyed wearing the headphones!) and that it could be an incentive for reluctant readers.

It was felt that it was easy to personalise the software to individual pupils, which made it special. The SENCO felt that the pupils found the software easy to use, *'once they see their name on screen, they've got their password and they are straight in'*. He added *'If they want to get into it themselves they can be quite independent as a learner'*.

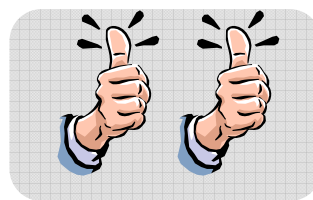
What did the school like most about the software?

The SENCO felt that many of the features were *'excellent'*, particularly the Read to Me feature which was seen as a useful warm-up activity. The Read and Record feature was also seen as positive component; the pupils liked hearing themselves read and the recording could be shared with parents if they came into the school.

It was also felt that the pupils enjoyed the competitive element of seeing how many stars they could get when using the software.

What do the pupils think?

One of the pupils who had used the books and software was asked to rate the materials by giving a 'thumbs up' or a 'thumbs down'. He gave the materials two 'thumbs up'. He was very keen to show his 'favourite page' in one of the books he had read. He said that he liked the pictures in the books and that some of the cartoons were funny. He said he also liked the jokes in the books, the Quiz and seeing how well he had done at the end.



Overall

The materials were seen as having a positive impact on the pupils that had used them. The SENCO felt that the materials had helped pupils in terms of confidence, fluency and self-esteem as a reader. *'I wanted to send the books home as well as I wanted them to have success with their parents'*.

The SENCO described the materials as a way in to reading. He also added that they were *'a way in to other areas of the curriculum as well... as fluency develops here it has that knock on effect'*.

The SENCO would like to continue using the materials and to use them with a wider group of pupils. He had already recommended the materials to a colleague in another school.

CASE STUDY 10

School J

Swansea

School Background

School J is an average size primary school located on the outskirts of Swansea and provides for pupils from 3-11 years. The school has a current population of 270 pupils, the vast majority of whom are drawn from the surrounding local area. The school has a high incidence of pupils who are eligible for free school meals.

| Area | % FSM |
|-------|-------|
| Urban | 62 |

Source: NFER Register of Schools

How have the materials been used in school?

The materials have been used by the headteacher, a year 5 class teacher and a Learning Support Assistant (LSA). The headteacher had worked with a group of approximately ten year 3 pupils. The class teacher and LSA worked with nine year 5 pupils. The materials had been used on a 1:1 or 2:1 basis with pupils. At least one group of pupils used the materials each day.

What did the school think of the reading books?

The school was very impressed with the reading books. All three members of staff said that the books seemed to be very popular with the pupils. The class teacher commented, *'The books are great. The children really enjoy them. They are really positive about them and want to read them'*. The headteacher agreed and added, *'they love the humour of them'*.

The use of colour, the types of pictures (cartoons and photographs) and size of text were all felt to be positive features that appealed to the pupils they had worked with.

The jokes were considered to be another aspect of the books that were popular with the pupils and were felt to help encourage an interest in reading.

The phrases at the back of the books such as Text Detective and Super Speller were felt to be positive phrases which the headteacher and pupils liked to use.

What did the school like most about the reading books?

The members of staff made many positive comments about the reading books. In particular, the Before Reading page was felt to be an example of good practice - the pupils knew what the book was going to be about, and this page, along with the Quiz, often set up a lot of discussion.

The length of the books was felt to be a key positive feature. The class teacher commented, *'There's not a massive amount of literature to get through. They can [finish a book] in one session, so they feel that they are moving on and that gives them confidence'*. The headteacher agreed, *'they feel successful'*.

What did the school think of the software?

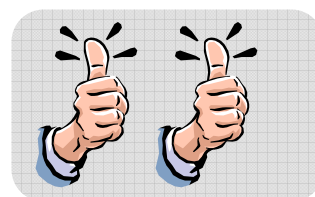
Due to the demands on the headteacher's and class teacher's time, it was not always possible to hear pupils read as often as they would have liked. With the software, pupils were able to read or be read to every day. Sometimes they read to the computer and another time to their headteacher, teacher or LSA. It was felt that some pupils may feel less self-conscious reading to a computer rather than an adult, especially if they were having initial difficulties with a couple of words. After a pupil had finished on the computer, the teachers could go back into the software, identify any problems that the pupils may have had and then go back through it with the pupils.

What did the school like most about the software?

The pupils were felt to particularly enjoy hearing themselves read. The star system was also felt to be a positive feature as the pupils liked to see how many stars they got at the end. The headteacher commented, *'one child was struggling a bit. He read it through twice and could see that he had earned more stars than last time. He could see the progress he had made which was great'*.

What do the pupils think?

Two pupils who had used the books and software were asked to rate the reading books by giving a 'thumbs up' or a 'thumbs down'. Both pupils gave the materials a 'thumbs up'. The pupils talked about their favourite stories and showed the pictures they liked best. One of the pupils was particularly keen to use the materials and wanted to know if he could do this 'right now!'



Overall

The school was very positive about the materials. The materials were felt to have had an impact on pupils' self esteem and to have encouraged an interest in reading. *'They love to come and read and if you can get them interested, that's half the battle'*.

The headteacher explained *'When I go into the classroom with my list of children [to use the materials with] I've never seen children come out of a class so fast. They actually jump out the classroom. They're like 'yes!' which is great...they're really pleased to be able to do it'*.

The school would *'definitely'* like to use the materials in the future. They were planning to buy two more computers for their library and put the software on to these computers as well.

The headteacher had already recommended the materials to other teachers in their cluster of schools.

CASE STUDY 11

School K

Kent

School Background

School K is a large secondary school located in a relatively deprived area towards the north of the county. The school has a high number of pupils with special educational needs and includes a specialist speech and language unit. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The school population is currently 1138 pupils.

| Area | % FSM | % Pupils with statements | % White British |
|-------|-------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Urban | 24 | 7 | 92 |

Source: NFER Register of Schools

How have the materials been used in school?

The materials were trialled with a group of 27 pupils in the speech and language unit at the school with the language teacher. Pupils were from years 7, 8 and 9 with more boys than girls. The pupils had a range of reading abilities within the trial group. Some had significantly lower reading abilities than others. Pupils with higher reading abilities were also involved in trialling the books and were sometimes paired with less able readers for reading sessions. Reading sessions were either on a 1:1 basis or in pairs. The teacher felt the books were easy to use in both of these types of reading sessions. Sessions lasted about 20 to 25 minutes and were usually on a twice weekly basis.

What did the school think of the reading books?

The teacher who used the books was very impressed both with the content and presentation of the books and the pupils' responses to them, *'when I first looked at the books I thought, colourful and good sized print'*. She had been slightly reticent at first as to whether the pupils would think the books were more appropriate for younger children but she said this was not the case. The pupils had enjoyed using the books and were particularly positive about the non-fiction texts, *'the non-fiction lended itself to a lot of discussion'*.

The pictures in the books were also popular, *'the real pictures are what the pupils commented on more than anything else, a lot of it made them laugh'*.

The teacher also liked the Before Reading page and the Tricky Words section. However, she did think some of the lists of Tricky Words were quite long and for some pupils being able to read the words in context might have been easier for them. The Quiz page was also liked and the phonics section in the Word Detective was felt to be particularly useful.

What did the school like most about the reading books?

The colour and the content of the books were felt to be particularly attractive features which had worked well with the pupils.

The non-fiction texts had been especially popular. Some of the topics were in areas pupils were learning about in other lessons and some of the topics were about subjects pupils had little experience of and wanted to find out more about, the teacher said, *'they were good choices of non-fiction'*.

The fact that the text was blocked was also liked and the fact that some of the sound words were highlighted was also felt to be a good idea.

Other comments included:

The print was *'a good size'*.

'The covers are quite good aswell'.

'[I] thought the stories were very good, I enjoyed them'.

What do the pupils think?

The pupils had enjoyed using the books and had been very motivated to use them. The books had been used by pupils with a range of reading abilities and seemed to be suitable for all the pupils in the group. The non-fiction text was particularly well favoured by the pupils. They were interested to learn about the topics which were featured and to share the information with their friends. One of the pupils had enjoyed reading the book on rats. The teacher said they had been learning about the plague in one lesson and the book on rats fitted in well with this.

Comments from the teacher included:

'The pupils loved the books'.

'Some things just fascinated them. I'm looking at the Under the Sea [book]it fascinated them and we had to share it with a lot of others!'

'They liked the space one, they liked the robots and at the upper end they liked the ghost stories and UFOs and the one about extreme fear'.

'They were far more interested than I imagined they would be'.

'From the pupils it was all enjoyment and you usually do get a groan about reading'.

The pupils also liked the use of real pictures and enjoyed reading the jokes and sharing them with each other.

The teacher described three of the pupils in particular as reluctant readers, she commented, *'I have never really seen these pupils interested in reading'*. The teacher went on to explain that it was largely the colour of the books, the presentation and the topics which she felt were particularly motivating for pupils.

One of the pupils had read a book called Scary Hair and after reading it had said, *'that made me laugh and books don't usually make me laugh'*. This was seen as a really positive comment from a pupil who tended to be a reluctant reader.

Another pupil who was a less able reader had been paired with another more able reader and they had read a book about volcanoes. This had been a topic which both had been interested in and both pupils were keen to read the book to the end.

Overall

The books had been well received by both the teacher and the pupils. The pupils, many of who were reluctant readers, looked forward to using the books and had been motivated to use them. They had particularly liked how the books were presented and the content of the non-fiction texts.

The teacher was positive about continuing to use the books in school, she said: *'After all these years there still isn't a lot that really inspires 13 and 14 year olds with a reading age of 6 or 7 years'*.