

# **Changing the Story Reading Programme: Final evaluation**

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## Executive summary

Changing the Story Reading Programme was developed by the National Literacy Trust in partnership with Hachette UK. The programme combines teacher training, resources, books, including the Reading Planet Scheme, and one-to-one reading sessions to provide targeted support to the schools and pupils in most need.

Data from Progress in Reading Assessment (PiRA) tests across three years indicate significant improvements in pupils' reading ability after taking part in the Changing the Story Reading Programme:

- Pupils' standardised scores increased over the course of the programme, from 86.6 in the autumn term to 95.0 in the summer term.
- In addition, fewer children were below average in their reading after taking part, decreasing from half (50.7%) before taking part to 1 in 4 (27.0%) after.

Another key aspect of the programme was to improve children's reading enjoyment:

- 43.4% of pupils increased their reading enjoyment as a result of the programme.
- In particular, the number of children who enjoyed reading 'very much' increased from 25.5% to 39.0% following the programme.

The programme also aimed to support the schools' reading-for-pleasure culture:

- 3 in 4 (75.9%) teachers agreed that the Reading Planet online library enhanced guided or whole-class reading, indicating the benefit of the programme in supporting whole-school reading culture.
- 7 in 10 (70.4%) teachers agreed that the programme enabled them to put more emphasis on developing higher-order reading skills.

We extend our sincere gratitude to Hachette UK and its divisions, Hodder Education and Hachette Children's Group, for their generous support in funding this programme over the past three years to ensure more young children improve their early reading skills and develop a love of reading.

# Introduction

The Changing the Story Reading Programme for pupils in Key Stage 1 was initially developed by the National Literacy Trust through a strategic partnership with Hachette UK. It was later extended to include children in lower Key Stage 2 who require additional support with early reading skills. The programme combines Hodder Education's Reading Planet scheme, supplementary books from Hachette UK Children's Group books, and the National Literacy Trust's expertise and trusted reputation to provide targeted support to the schools and pupils most in need.

Over the past three years, the programme has been delivered in 38 schools with a high percentage of children eligible for free school meals, in areas with high literacy vulnerability. Pupils at risk of falling behind in their reading development were identified and asked to take part in the programme. Teachers and teaching assistants were provided with initial training at the beginning of the academic year, after which they started to deliver reading sessions with pupils. Continued support through network meetings, email communication and additional reading-for-pleasure training was offered throughout the academic year.

This report presents insight collected from pupils and teachers across the first three years of delivery. It shows the benefits for children's reading skills, enjoyment and confidence, as well as benefits to the school more widely.

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## The programme

### Aims of the programme:

The Changing the Story Reading Programme was designed to achieve the following objectives in schools with high levels of socioeconomic disadvantage:

- **Improvement in reading skills:** Supporting children to improve their reading skills and catch up.

- **Enhanced enjoyment of reading:** Fostering a positive attitude towards, and enjoyment of, reading.
- **Increased reading frequency and diversity:** Encouraging children to read more frequently and to explore a variety of genres.
- **Enhanced teacher expertise:** Increasing teachers' and teaching assistants' knowledge of early reading instruction and strategies for accelerating pupils' progress.
- **Familiarity with Reading Planet resources:** Enhancing educators' understanding of the Reading Planet materials and the importance of diversity and representation in children's literature.

## Teacher training

Teachers and teaching assistants from 38 schools across areas of disadvantage in London, Salford, Manchester, Leicester, Sunderland, Darlington, Peterborough, Norfolk, Southampton, Stoke-on-Trent, The Wirral and Bradford attended a two-part online training session that was co-delivered by the National Literacy Trust and Hodder Education staff. This training introduced the Reading Planet resources, including the online library, and highlighted books that celebrate diversity and individuality. Participants explored the components of successful reading instruction, with a strong emphasis on the significance of phonics in early literacy development. The support structures for the programme and ongoing reading assessment processes were also outlined.

Additional training opportunities were offered throughout the years. For example, in response to feedback from the 2022-23 delivery, a practical training session was added to assist schools in utilising MARK, Hodder Education's online assessment platform. In January 2024, Martin Galway, Head of School Programmes at the National Literacy Trust, led two sessions on Reading for Pleasure that guided participants through selected picture books and highlighted the National Literacy Trust's research into how reading for pleasure emphasised the role of empathy in reading.

Participants were also invited to attend a series of network meetings throughout the last two years of delivery, allowing them to share successes and challenges, and to discuss additional support, training or resources that could enhance the programme's effectiveness.

## The Changing the Story Reading Programme reading sessions

The core of the Changing the Story Reading Programme is the structured three-part reading session (see Table 1). Each one-to-one session lasts approximately 20 minutes and takes place three times a week for a period of nine months.

Participating schools received a comprehensive package that included the full set of books from Hodder Education’s Reading Planet scheme, alongside a free subscription to the online library. Schools supporting Key Stage 2 pupils also received the Astro from Reading Planet series, which are designed to engage older children while still giving the opportunity to apply phonics learning at an appropriate developmental stage. In total 26,396 Hodder Reading Planet books were gifted along with 10,700 Hachette UK Children's Group books.

**Table 1: Structure of the reading sessions**

Section	Detail
<b>Part one (5 minutes)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcome the child.</li> <li>• Talk about the Reading Planet book that they have in their book bag, which should be the book that they read in the last session. Look to see if there are any comments from home. Ask: What did you think about this book? Did you enjoy it? Why/why not?</li> <li>• If the child did enjoy it, ask them to re-read the book or some of the book, then ask some open-ended comprehension questions. If the child struggles, model your thinking by explaining how you reached your answer.</li> </ul>
<b>Part two (10 minutes)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce the new Reading Planet book that they will be taking home.</li> <li>• Discuss what type of book it is, as well as who the characters are, or what the book will be about.</li> <li>• Give the child time to read the book, supporting where necessary.</li> <li>• Ask some open-ended questions to assess comprehension and enjoyment.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that the child takes the book home to read.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Part three (5-10 minutes)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• From a selection of reading-for-pleasure books that may be of interest to the child, ask them to choose a book they want to look at. Talk to the child about it and begin reading it to them. Continue with the book in the third part of the next session, unless the child wants to choose another book.</li> </ul>

## Adapting the programme

The insights gained from the first two years of the programme significantly informed its subsequent delivery in 2023–2024. Challenges related to the use of technology, administration of PiRA assessments and data sharing through the MARK platform were addressed through targeted training, ensuring that staff felt confident in these areas. Concerns from schools about the fidelity and alignment between their phonics programmes and the Reading Planet books were thoughtfully addressed during the school–recruitment process.

A key theme that emerged from schools during the programme's delivery was the need to adapt the programme. To explore this further, we asked schools to share how they had modified the programme to support older age groups. Six schools shared examples of how they had adapted the programme:

“I deliver Changing the Story [Reading Programme] to a group of 10 year 3 students who have struggled with reading, either phonetically or in terms of developing an interest. The programme is great! I have seen a huge difference and improvement from the group I work with and their interest in reading has greatly improved.”

“We worked with Year 3 children and felt that it was successful and really engaged the more reluctant readers in the class.”

“The current year 3 cohort are roughly one third working at age related expectations and two thirds working towards. Changing the Story [Reading Programme] has given us a new set of resources to target children who have been

identified as those who could make good progress over this academic year with extra support.”

Some teachers utilised the Astro from Reading Planet books, which are high-interest books, to read as part of the intervention with the older pupils and described how these texts were engaging and helpful in building pupils’ confidence in their reading:

“The books were very useful and the children thoroughly enjoyed the selection.”

“The children enjoyed these texts and were engaged.”

“I think it’s great for the lower reading ability groups in Key Stage 2. The variety of books and topics the children can pick from is fantastic.”

## Evaluation of the programme

Across the three years of delivery, we used several approaches to evaluate the changes for pupils, teachers and schools following participation in Changing the Story Reading Programme:

### Pupil data

To evaluate changes in pupils’ reading ability, we used standardised [PiRA](#) reading tests (Progress in Reading Assessment), which provided us with participants’ reading age as well as their standardised test scores<sup>1</sup>. Across the three years of delivery, we collected data from 214 pupils whose pre- and post-scores have been matched<sup>2</sup>.

In addition, we gathered pupils’ views on reading using pre- and post-attitudinal

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<sup>1</sup> PiRA standardised scores are age-standardised scores. The average score is 100. The scores are curriculum-matched and taken in the first and last school term. The underlying principle behind standardised scores is that the test score follows a normal distribution, meaning that the mean score would be 100 and the standard deviation would be 15. Producing standardised scores enables schools to build a comprehensive profile of each pupil’s attainment and progress in reading over the school year.

<sup>2</sup> n = 80 in 2021/22; n = 55 in 2022/23; n = 79 in 2023/24

surveys. Overall, we were able to collect pre- and post-surveys from 141 pupils across the three years<sup>3</sup>.

## Teacher data

Overall, 55 teachers across the three years responded to our feedback survey at the end of each academic year.

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# Changes in pupils' reading skills

Pupils completed a PiRA standardised reading assessment in the first and last term of the academic year. The findings showed that before taking part in the programme pupils' average standardised score was 86.6<sup>4</sup>, which indicates that their reading ability was towards the lower end of normal for their age nationally. After taking part in the programme, their average score had increased to 95.0<sup>5</sup> and the difference in the scores was statistically significant<sup>6</sup>.

We can also see positive changes in the percentage of children whose reading skills were below, at or above the national average for their age. For example, as Figure 1 shows, after taking part in Changing the Story Reading Programme, fewer children were below average in their reading, decreasing from half (50.7%) before taking part to 1 in 4 (27.0%) after.

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<sup>3</sup> n = 38 in 2021/22; n = 25 in 2022/23; n = 78 in 2023/24

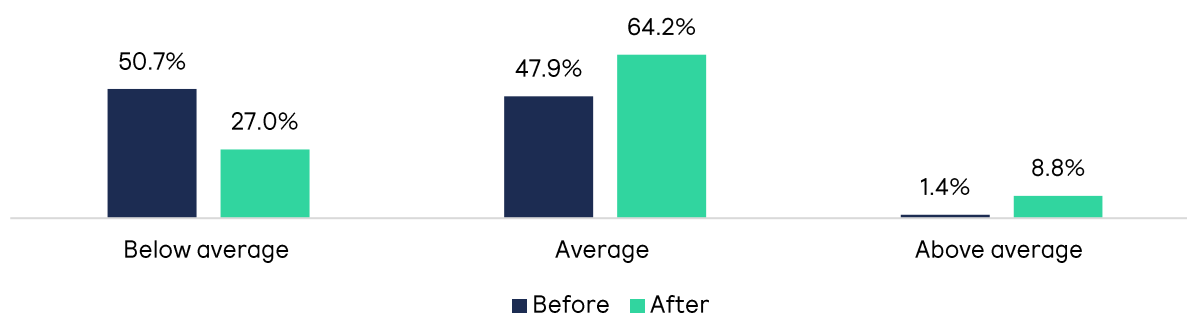
<sup>4</sup> Standard Deviation = 12.1

<sup>5</sup> Standard Deviation = 14.3

<sup>6</sup> t = -8.507, p < .001



**Figure 1: Pupils’ reading levels before and after taking part in Changing the Story Reading Programme, across three years of delivery<sup>7</sup>**



“I can see the progress made within the reading programme and the books are tailored to each phonics phase which makes it easier to choose a book at their individual level. This has given the children more confidence.” (Teacher, 2023–24)

As well as standardised testing, teachers also noted the benefits of the programme for pupils’ reading. For example, as Figure 2 shows, more than 9 in 10 felt children were more resilient in their reading while nearly 9 in 10 felt children’s vocabulary had improved.

**Figure 2: Percentage of teachers who agree with below statements**



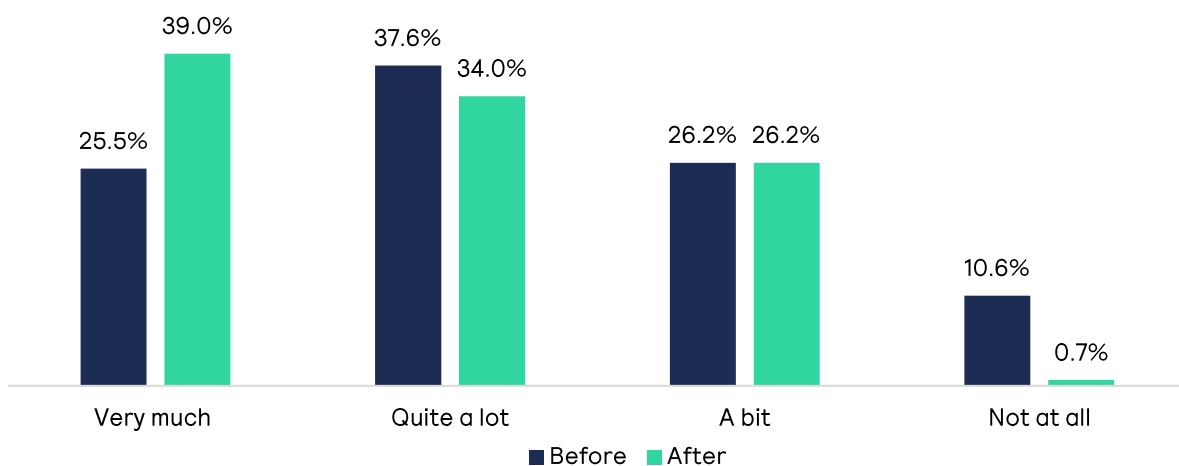
<sup>7</sup> Below average = Standardised score of up to 84, Average = 85 to 115, Above average = 116 or more.

# Changes in pupils' reading enjoyment and confidence

“The children I read with didn't like reading before this programme started and now they ask me every day if they can come to read.” (Teacher, 2023-24)

Alongside supporting reading skills, a key aim of the programme was to promote pupils' reading enjoyment. Overall, 43.3% of children saw an increase in their reading enjoyment as a result of taking part in Changing the Story Reading Programme. Looking at this more closely, Figure 3 shows a particular increase in children who enjoyed reading 'very much' and a decrease in those who enjoyed reading 'not at all'.

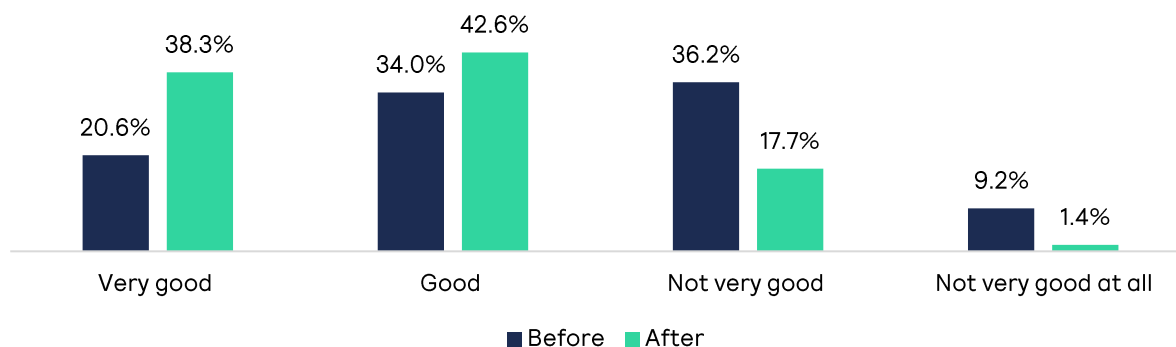
**Figure 3: Pupils' reading enjoyment before and after the programme**



“Changing the Story [Reading Programme] encourages children to enjoy reading and builds confidence.” (Teacher, 2023-24)

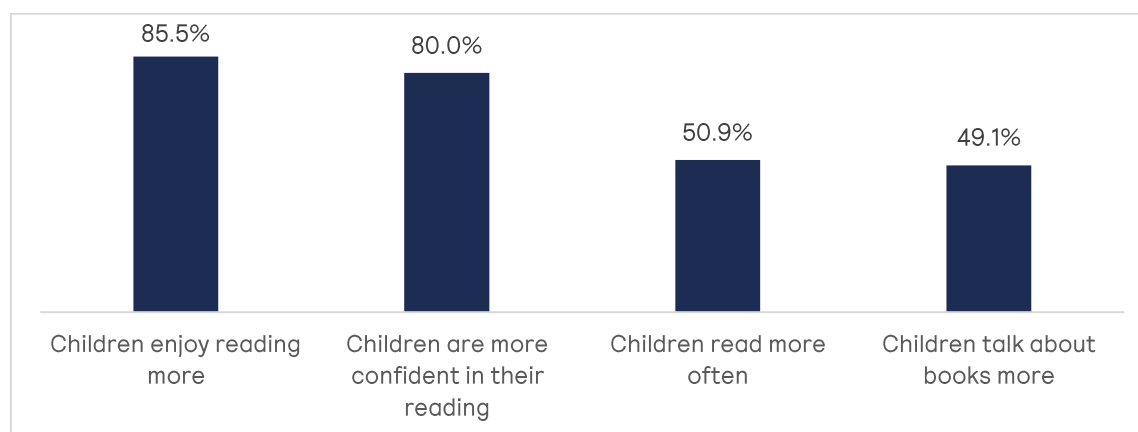
We also saw improvements in how pupils rated themselves as readers over the course of the programme. Half of the children (50.4%) saw themselves as better readers after taking part in Changing the Story Reading Programme. As Figure 4 shows, twice as many children saw themselves as 'very good' readers at the end of the programme.

**Figure 4: Pupils’ rating of their reading confidence before and after the programme**



Teachers also perceived changes in pupils’ reading enjoyment, attitudes and confidence. Exploring changes that teachers observed for participating pupils, Figure 5 shows that more than 4 in 5 teachers noticed changes in pupils’ reading enjoyment and confidence.

**Figure 5: Percentage of teachers who noticed changes for pupils after taking part in Changing the Story Reading Programme**



Indeed, teachers’ comments similarly reflected the benefit of the programme on pupils’ reading enjoyment and confidence:

“Wanting to read more, especially those who weren’t interested in reading that much before [is an outcome I’ve observed].” (Teacher, 2021-22)

“Children have genuinely overcome their fears and resistance to reading. They love reading and story time.” (Teacher, 2021-22)

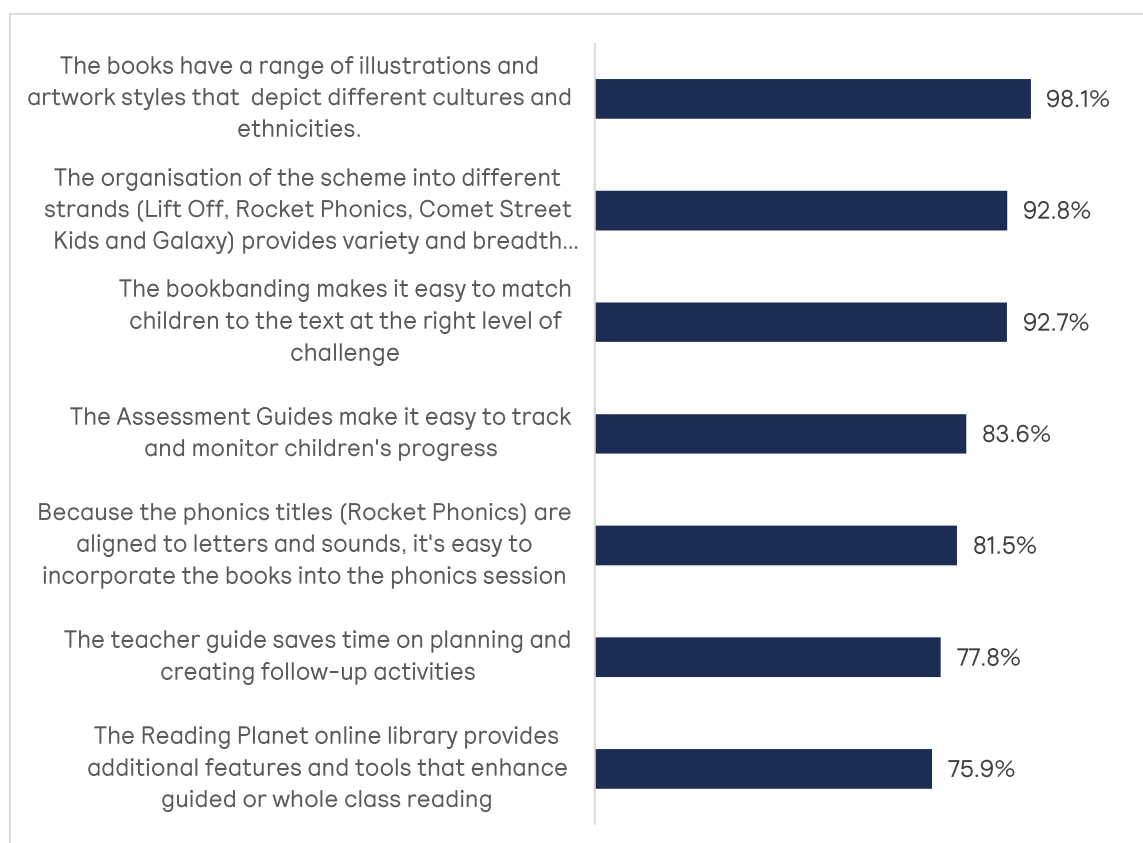
“The children’s reading and confidence with reading improved massively over the course of the year.” (Teacher, 2022–23)

“The children’s confidence has increased and they enjoyed having a story read to them.” (Teacher, 2023–24)

## Benefits for teachers and schools

Data from teachers suggests that the programme and its resources have benefited the schools more broadly. For example, as Figure 6 shows, 3 in 4 teachers agreed that the Reading Planet online library enhanced guided or whole-class reading, indicating the benefit of the programme in supporting whole-school reading culture.

**Figure 6: Percentage of teachers who agreed with statements about the benefits of the resources provided as part of Changing the Story Reading Programme**



In addition, teacher insight suggests that the Changing the Story Reading Programme has been beneficial for the schools more widely. As shown in Figure 7, these included improved reading engagement for children with special educational needs, links being made between the programme and wider curriculum, and a greater emphasis on developing higher-order reading skills in the school.

**Figure 7: Impact of the Changing the Story Reading Programme on the school**



## Conclusion

For the last three years of the Changing the Story Reading Programme, insight has consistently indicated that the programme has a positive impact on the pupils who take part. We see an increase in pupils' reading skills, as measured by standardised tests and teacher observations. Additionally, pupils report a greater enjoyment of reading and increased confidence in their reading abilities at the end of the programme. The programme has also benefited teachers and schools more broadly, such as by providing resources that support whole-school reading culture.

We are immensely grateful to Hachette UK, Hodder Education and Hachette Children's Group for their ongoing support and dedicated contributions to the success of the Changing the Story Reading Programme. Their partnership has been

invaluable in helping more young children enhance their early reading skills and foster a love of reading.

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## Appendix A: Teacher feedback on the programme

The overall feedback from the teacher surveys indicates that schools had a positive experience with the programme:

- All but one teacher rated the Changing the Story Reading Programme as ‘very good’ (58.2%) or ‘good’ (40.0%).
- Nearly all (92.7%) teachers told us they would recommend the programme to other schools.

The Rising Stars Reading Planet Scheme, Astro from Reading Planet books<sup>8</sup> and Hachette children’s books were rated highly by all teachers who accessed them.

The Hachette children’s books and books as part of the Reading Planet Scheme were described as good quality and as having a range of topics and genres, and stories that were interesting and relatable:

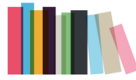
“The books are good quality. The stories are interesting and relatable.” (Teacher, 2023-24)

“The books are very engaging and there is such a great variety of text types. The questions at the back are extremely helpful too. Having the same books online is fantastic for the children to engage their parents too!” (Teacher, 2021-22)

“The books are great and there is a nice selection for different abilities. It has lots of questions at the end that you can use or make up your own questions depending on the child.” (Teacher, 2022-23)

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<sup>8</sup> Please note that feedback on the Astro from Reading Planet books was only collected in 2023-24.



“The books are engaging and the children love the fact that they can read them online. They also love the doing the quizzes. Having questions at the back of the books is a real bonus.” (Teacher, 2021-22)

“This programme was really good for children lacking in confidence. The children really enjoyed reading these books and being able to take a book home to read with family really helped.” (Teacher, 2022-23)