Changing the Story Reading Programme 2021/2022: Evaluation – Summary


Background

The Changing the Story Reading Programme is a new programme for pupils in Key Stage 1 created in partnership with Hachette UK. The programme brings together reading books from Hodder Education’s Reading Planet scheme, additional Hachette Children Group’s fiction books, and the National Literacy Trust’s expertise and trusted reputation to support the schools and pupils in most need.

The programme engaged 25 schools in places identified as literacy-vulnerability areas, with high percentages of children in receipt of free school meals. Year 1 pupils at risk of falling behind in their reading development following the Covid-19 pandemic were identified to take part in the programme. In June 2021, initial training for teachers and teaching assistants took place, with baseline assessments and Changing the Story Reading Sessions commencing in September 2021. Continuing support through email, school visits, network meetings and additional reading for pleasure training took place throughout the 2021–22 school year.

‘It is very rewarding to see children who, in autumn, were struggling to read a sentence, working at the above level now. The books are very accessible, and most children are familiar with the online library; some log in and read daily. A particular area of interest has been Reading for pleasure, which gave children the opportunity to explore different genres and writing styles. I am proud to say that Changing the Story reading programme has been a success in Old Palace Primary School.’

Key Findings

Pupils’ improvement in reading ability:

Data from New Progress in Reading Assessment (New PiRA) tests indicated significant improvements in pupils’ reading ability over the course of the Changing the Story programme:

- Reading age on average improved by 11 months across a nine-month period.
• The percentage of children whose reading skills were below the national average decreased from 43.8% at the start of the programme to 16.3% at the end.
• At the same time, the percentage of children reading at the average level increased from 55.0% to 72.5%.
• The percentage of children reading above the national average increased almost tenfold, from 1.3% to 11.3%.

Data collected from teachers reflects the positive changes in pupils’ reading skill:
• 4 in 5 (78.3%; n = 18) teachers felt that participating pupils made more progress than pupils who did not take part in Changing the Story using the Reading Planet scheme.
• 9 in 10 (91.3%; n = 21) teachers agreed that all children show greater resilience when it comes to applying their phonic skills and decoding after taking part.
• 4 in 5 (82.5%; n = 19) teachers agreed that children’s use of vocabulary has improved, while 3 in 4 (73.9%; n = 17) agreed that reading comprehension has improved.

‘One girl has made two years progress in reading and has passed her phonics test, from starting Year 1 in the bottom 20% of readers.’

‘The programme has really helped children make accelerated progress in reading.’

Pupils’ reading enjoyment and self-perception of skills:

Attitudinal data from pupils shows positive changes in their reading enjoyment and self-perception of reading skills as a result of taking part in the programme:
• The percentage of pupils who said they enjoyed reading very much increased from 1 in 4 (23.1%) before taking part to 1 in 3 (35.9%) after taking part.
• The percentage of pupils who said they did not enjoy reading at all decreased from 12.8% before taking part to 2.6% after taking part.

‘Reading makes me happy.’

‘Reading makes me excited.’

Again, these changes are also evident from data collected from teachers:
• All teachers agreed that children’s level of engagement with reading improved, and that children are more interested in reading and books.
• 9 in 10 (91.3%; n = 21) agreed that children enjoy reading more, while 2 in 3 (69.6%; n = 16) agreed that children are more confident in their reading.

‘One boy lacked confidence and found it a struggle. Since doing the programme he has developed a love for reading and asks to read every day.’
‘The Rising Stars decodable books have made a positive impact on our children’s reading skills. We have seen significant improvement in the children’s confidence. All children look forward to reading sessions and are enjoying the variety of books we have received.’

Benefits for the school

Data from teachers also show a positive impact of Changing the Story on the wider school ethos:

- 4 in 5 (78.3%; n = 18) teachers agreed that their school has put more emphasis on developing higher-order reading skills since taking part in Changing the Story.
- Half (52.2%; n = 12) agreed that children with SEN have engaged in reading more since taking part in Changing the Story.
- 2 in 5 (39.1%; n = 9) agreed that parental engagement has improved since taking part in Changing the Story.

Feedback from the programme

Nearly all (94.7%) pupils said they liked the reading sessions they took part in for a wide variety of reasons, including enjoying the books and stories, finding the sessions fun, or noticing that the sessions supported them with their learning and reading skills.

- All 23 teachers who completed the post-programme survey rated the programme as ‘excellent’ or ‘good’.
- Over 9 in 10 (91.3%; n = 21) teachers rated the Hachette children’s books as ‘excellent’ (n = 17) or ‘good’ (n = 4)
- All but three teachers (87.0%; n = 20) rated the Rising Stars Reading Planet Scheme as ‘excellent’ or ‘good’.
- All teachers (100%; n = 23) agreed that the books provided had a range of illustrations depicting different cultures and ethnicities.
- 9 in 10 (91.3%; n = 21) agreed that the book banding made it easy to match children to text at the right level of challenge.
- Almost 9 in 10 (87.0%; n = 20) agreed that it was easy to incorporate the books into phonics sessions.
- Teachers rated the training as either ‘excellent’ (25.0%; n = 3) or ‘good’ (75.0%; n = 9).

The resources and books provided were also highlighted positively in teachers’ comments:

‘The online library has been great as an incentive to get children ‘reading’ in different ways. I know parents have enjoyed it with children as well, especially parents of EAL children.’

‘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!
The system to track progress is time efficient and the whole programme is fantastic!’

‘The reading-for-pleasure books were of great quality and [covered] a wide range of topics.’

**Conclusion**

This report has shown that Changing the Story has been beneficial for the pupils who took part. Indeed, we saw improvement in children’s reading skills and reading age as well as enjoyment and self-perception of reading skill. These improvements were also reflected in teachers’ responses. Pupils also indicated that they enjoyed taking part in the programme and they felt that the programme helped them with their reading skill.

Additionally, the data indicate that teachers had a positive experience with the programme and felt that children were encouraged to be more interested in reading. The programme was described as accessible, well resourced, and providing visible results. The training offered was seen as good by the teachers and met their expectations. Teachers improved their knowledge of the importance of diversity and representation in children’s books through the programme and their engagement with the Reading Planet scheme.

Learnings from year one of the programme will inform the delivery going forward. Challenges around using technology, administering PiRA and sharing data through MARK were common, and more training will be put in place to support staff to feel confident with this aspect. Schools’ concerns around fidelity to phonics programmes and alignment of the Reading Planet books are being taken into account as schools are recruited and on-boarded for the new academic year. Individual and tailored support for schools to implement all the elements of the programme is essential, with support visits and session observations proving invaluable to continuing engagement in the programme, with the quality assurance involved leading to successful delivery and improved outcomes for children. With this in mind, a reduced number of 15 schools will be recruited to the programme for the 2022–23 academic year.

We would like to thank Hachette UK and Hodder Education for their generous support in funding this programme, gifting over 22,000 books to the most disadvantaged children and schools and providing support in kind from their brilliant team to co-create and co-deliver the training and provide technical support. We look forward to the continuing success of the Changing the Story Reading Programme next year and working in partnership to ensure more young children improve their early reading skills and develop a love of reading.