

The complete literacy solution: a Q&A with primary headteacher Richard Slade

Plumcroft Primary School, Greenwich

Plumcroft Primary School can be found in Greenwich, London. The school has over 830 pupils on roll age 3-11: the pupil number grew significantly when the school expanded onto a second campus in September 2018. Ofsted inspected the school in September 2017 and judged that it continues to be a 'Good' school. Richard Slade is the headteacher of the school, and has 15 years of experience in turning around failing & under-performing London schools. His expertise lies in using assessment data to transform outcomes for pupils and accelerate the systemic improvement of schools.

You have been using Renaissance's literacy solution at Plumcroft Primary School since 2014. What encouraged the move to the software?

When national levels disappeared in 2014, we had to think very carefully about the way forward and what would be best for our students. We sought an assessment process that would monitor student progression throughout the year without the students feeling like they were constantly under observation. Standardised testing for literacy was a breakthrough for us and [Star Assessments](#) was an opportunity for the whole school to be assessed as often as necessary with very accurate results.

Star Assessments gave us as a school an opportunity to monitor, measure and report on classroom progression, without the added pressures of testing conditions for students and the additional admin for the teachers – yet still getting the data needed to inform next teaching steps. The 20-minute tests are not work intensive and ensure we spend our time teaching rather than testing.

How does Star Assessments inform teaching and learning at Plumcroft Primary School?

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Star Assessment has transformed our assessment processes at the school and is an incredibly useful tool to guide and inform next teaching steps. We conduct assessments on half-term intervals, meaning that we are provided with accurate data every six weeks, helping teachers to see where intervention is required, what is working well and how the entire class is performing in comparison to a large national sample. The data set provided is instant and bulletproof, and the teachers trust the data. This level of trust has enabled my teachers to do what they do best: teach.

Star Assessment data is available instantaneously and the visual aspects of the dashboard allows teachers to immediately pick up those students who are stalling and put intervention methods in place. Since using this software, we have been able to accurately predict the outcomes of high-stake tests. As we have collated enough data over the last few years, this year we used the information to predict the SAT scores of our KS2 pupils. Our Star scores and SATs results were closely aligned, within percentage points of each other, and thanks to Star working collaboratively with Renaissance's Accelerated Reader, our students were 6% above the national average in their reading abilities.

As Star Assessments were the key driver behind the implementation of Renaissance's literacy solution at your school, what impact has Accelerated Reader had on reading habits?

We chose to implement Star Assessments to closely monitor and track students' reading progress and wanted teachers to trust the data that was being provided by Renaissance. Once we were confident, we began to delve deeper into the software and decided that if the data is accurate, the ZPD scores and reading ages in [Accelerated Reader](#) must be just as accurate. At our school, it was important to acknowledge that even though our students could read, we had to ensure that they could understand the language and improve their comprehension skills. Accelerated Reader has targeted reading in a focused way, helping to stretch students' comprehension levels to ensure that they are understanding what they read. Every child at Plumcroft Primary School knows their reading level and can read a variety of books which are suitably challenging for them, ensuring they continue to improve their current reading performance without losing confidence.

Reading has become a natural part of the daily routine and thanks to Accelerated Reader, we have successfully managed to create a reading culture at our school where everyone reads and

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enjoys reading. So much so, that I set an incentive for the students every half-term. For every child who reads at least 15 books with a 95% quiz pass rate, I buy them a book of their choice from Amazon. 95% may seem high, but we had to raise the pass rate as so many students were achieving the 90% that we originally set!

Has Accelerated Reader assisted with struggling or disengaged readers?

It has been an objective at our school to get more boys interested in reading. By accurately finding their individual reading levels and introducing them to a wider range of books that are suitable to them, Accelerated Reader has helped to engage their interest. Accelerated Reader is also great for helping us to track and celebrate successes and the competitive element has had a massive impact on boys, encouraging them to not just read, but truly take an interest in the text. Also, Accelerated Reader's ability to work alongside [myON by Renaissance](#), has brought our library to life at Plumcroft Primary!

In addition, Accelerated Reader helped us to identify the power of non-fiction titles to help struggling readers to understand the text. This has changed our emphasis on fiction books, as struggling readers are enticed into the text by being provided with more information, helping them to become more successful in the quizzes, therefore increasing both confidence and comprehension.

How has myON by Renaissance helped with the ambition of cultivating a love for reading?

The educational environment is difficult for schools at the moment, with budgetary restrictions and pressures, so when Renaissance introduced myON to its product portfolio we were keen to try it. Since piloting myON, access to the digital library of thousands of books has given the students more material to read, across multiple genres, ensuring that there is something for everyone.

As a student-centred literacy platform, myON offers unlimited access to an enhanced library of books. As it is a digital solution, students can read books anywhere at any time and can make notes, interact with or highlight the text as they wish, without damaging a tangible book. Not only does this mean that students have access to more reading material, they also have the

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opportunity to read the same books together at the same time, encouraging reading groups and peer-to-peer reading, whilst reducing the cost of purchasing books for our library.

What impact has Renaissance's literacy solution had on the school as a whole when used collectively?

Renaissance's literacy tools have completely transformed the environment at our school, and we have successfully made reading an integral part of the school's ethos. As all the solutions work in conjunction with each other, all the data produced has allowed us to understand what is working for our students. We have also been able to establish what they enjoy and then provide them with even more material to support their passion for reading.

Star Assessments have ensured that we can understand where a student's attainment and progress levels are, compared to a massive national database, and how to help them to achieve the best possible results in high-stake tests like SATs. Using this assessment method, students also have access to their reading ages for Accelerated Reader, meaning that they are only ever reading material that is suitably challenging for them and they are celebrated for their success. Finally, myON has meant that our students are not limited to books available in our library. They have unlimited access to a range of books and genres, that all have ZPD scores, helping to encourage reading for pleasure whenever a student so wishes.

Finally, the literacy solutions have helped our teachers to trust the data and see the results. Teachers are able to identify gaps in progress and adjust their teaching to bridge these gaps, creating compelling and fascinating lessons that inspire the children to enjoy the work they are doing without feeling under constant observation. It has completely transformed our assessment processes. We are thoroughly happy with Renaissance's solutions!

Read more about Renaissance's complete literacy solution and how it could work for your school [here](#).