



Glenfrome Primary School

“We use benchmark kits to track progress in school and use this as a guide to attainment. The fine levels make that very straightforward.”

Claire Banham is a specialist reading teacher at Glenfrome Primary School in Bristol. Having been a Year 1 and Year 2 class teacher for 14 years and returning to the profession after having children, Claire re-trained as a Reading Recovery teacher – an accredited school-based literacy programme for the lowest achieving pupils aged five and six that enables them to reach age-expected levels within 20 weeks.

For Claire this is her third school – all Reading Recovery schools – which has adopted the award-winning PM reading programme. “PM works so well because it is so finely levelled,” she explained. “Vocabulary is limited in the first book with simple repetition, then gradually this builds up slowly through the levels. There is not too much of a focus on phonics and the pace is just right. There are other schemes out there which try to level, but unless you write down all the vocabulary you are expected to know at each stage it’s very hard to fit that in to levels. We use text levels 1-30 until a child is a free reader.”

The benchmark kits, which help teachers understand what levels their pupils are reading at, are particularly valuable. Claire said: “Benchmark kits are so finely graded that you can see the visual level moving up from 1-30.

I give children a sticker for moving up a level and there is a sense of pride in making progress. It’s also a good tool to show parents where their child is in terms of expectation. It’s great to see progress in book level week-by-week. We use benchmark kits to track progress in school – we will undertake a formal assessment every other term using the benchmark kit, and use this as a guide to progress in attainment. The fine levels make that very straightforward.”

In her role at Glenfrome, Claire works with Year 1 and Year 2 children as well as directly supporting literacy teachers and overseeing volunteers. This includes providing relevant interventions for the lowest achieving readers. “I spend a lot of time using PM as a Reading Recovery teacher,” she revealed. “I see four children every day, using PM fiction and non-fiction books, and assessing progress through the benchmark kit. With EAL pupils – who I spend a significant amount of time with – we use mainly fiction books which provide vocabulary within reach for EAL children. With EAL children, however, we will talk about the book a lot more. PM doesn’t tend to be too ambitious, and we find that phonetically it is decodable and provides just the right challenge for EAL pupils.”

Claire added that PM ultimately provides teachers with reassurance that every child can progress with reading. “The government has prioritised phonics-based learning – but there is a difference between phonics and reading real books,” she said. “Phonics doesn’t always make sense or mean anything. PM provides a good range of proper sentence books, and we invest additionally in phonics to support any gaps there. We are fortunate in that we have a very supportive head and there is a huge commitment to supporting children with lots of different needs.”

Case study developed in January 2017.