



West Lothian
Council

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Schools in West Lothian Council have used a range of PM resources to support a comprehensive, impactful, literacy development journey.

Over the past few years, the council has implemented a multi-faceted approach to decoding, fluency and phrasing, and comprehension – the components of a ‘balanced reader’ – using pedagogical approaches and resources including [PM Benchmark Kits](#), [PM Reading](#) and [PM Writing](#) to provide universal and targeted support for children based on their assessed need.

Marion Cochrane, the Council’s Lead Literacy and English Pedagogy Officer, explained how teachers use benchmarking to plan bespoke interventions for their whole class or a targeted group. RAG analysis shows where individual children’s gaps are, and some teachers review their data several times per year to inform next steps. PM Benchmarking sits alongside a range of other assessments, underpinned by teacher judgement across West Lothian.

“Many of our schools use benchmarking to find a reading age for learners,” Marion said. “We create an overview based on professional judgement and analysis of the assessments, to identify specific reading difficulties. We then interrogate the data and identify the particular area of reading each learner is struggling with. We put targeted, evidence-based interventions in place to support learners, linked to comprehension, decoding, or fluency and phrasing.”

Amongst a range of approaches used by West Lothian Council, [Short Reads](#) is one of Scholastic’s resources being utilised by teachers to promote ‘think aloud’ approach, teacher modelling as well as promoting fluency and phrasing. [Connectors](#) have also been used successfully to support learners to develop comprehension skills and promote pupil leadership and voice.

“We know that research tells us there is strong correlation between reading fluency and comprehension – 90% of comprehension problems are thought to be due to a lack of fluency,” Marion said. “We have therefore worked hard to ensure we focus on teaching reading with fluency and decoding in order to ensure learners can read with automaticity which will allow them ‘room’ in their heads to focus on comprehension skills as they progress through school.”

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Reciprocal reading is therefore used to develop children’s reading skills, promote higher order thinking, develop listening and talking, and ensure access to the curriculum for all learners. Studies have also demonstrated that children transfer their learning into other contexts. Its aims are to improve reading comprehension through the use of four reading strategies: predicting, questioning, clarifying and summarising.

“[Connectors](#) promotes reciprocal reading strategies and provides children with sentence starters to support meta-cognitive skills,” Marion said. “They offer a framework to help learners shape sentences and thinking whilst using reciprocal reading strategies. The approach supports learners to lead their reading group through teacher and pupil modelling, reflecting the ‘gradual release’ of responsibility model. This can be taught using Teacher’s Apprentice, our peer-to-peer learning approach where pupils teach a lesson to the rest of the class, using Connectors, which builds confidence and reiterates key comprehension skills and strategies as well as allows learners the opportunity to read with fluency during ‘Reader’s Theatre’ sessions.”

Primary 5, eight to nine year olds, traditionally have particular problems with comprehension. As a result of this many West Lothian schools have focused on teaching reciprocal reading skills.

“An example of how we used the benchmarking was the work we carried out with a pilot school in February 2022,” Marion

said. "We analysed the data and identified comprehension as a focus moving forward with targeted learners. We used Teacher's Apprentice approach with this group and they received targeted intervention for a period of four months. We could see the improvement in comprehension over time with increased PM levels. By June 2022, for example, all learners achieved more than 2-3 reading levels. One child improved reading levels by 10 PM benchmarks (3.6 years), the average improvement for the group being 6-7."

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Marion added that West Lothian Council follows up-to-date evidence based research including the EEF guidance which focuses on an active learning, pupil-led approach. "Using this range of resources supports us as teachers to teach pedagogy in an active, creative way as well as providing us with a way of capturing and analysing data," she said. "Recent inspections have highlighted improvement in literacy outcomes overall and have identified that our children are able to talk with more confidence and knowledge about the strategies and approaches they are using. I must thank Scholastic for the ideas and know-how their team bring for supporting us across different approaches."

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