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Kirkhill Primary School in Aberdeen has been using Scholastic’s award-winning PM resources since August 2017 – and the UK’s largest and most finely levelled reading programme has had an immediate impact on pupils and teachers.

“Last year our school improvement focus was on numeracy – this year it is literacy,” said Kerry Reith, the school’s Deputy Headteacher for Early Years. “Attainment has been down and we realised we needed a big investment in our resources aimed at developing successful readers. We are a forward-thinking school and PM has been our focus for improvement. Feedback over the first few months has been really positive – comprehension is up, reading enjoyment is up, and teachers visibly have a buzz about them too.”

Kerry, who is part of the Kirkhill’s literacy working party, explained why she commissioned PM. “We already had reading schemes underway in school but didn’t want to go down the phonetics route,” she explained. “We analysed what we had available and found gaps in some areas. We were then recommended by our librarian to Scholastic and the initial PM benchmarking exercise gave us some concrete evidence on what to do next. There was limited choice and flexibility in our book range, so we have purchased up to Gold level. Next year, subject to budget, we hope to invest in more.”

With over 1,000 books – beginning with ‘non-level’ books followed by gradual progression up to Level 30 and on to ‘free reader’ – Kirkhill teachers have been able to identify approaches which work for bespoke groups. “We particularly needed to look at our Year 3-5 strategy and PM provides three levels within each band which give the opportunity for targeted intervention at each level,” Kerry said. “A major benefit is that the levels can be broken down to meet the needs of individual children. Generally, the PM books are age appropriate and generate high interest. Children especially like the traditional tales. They want to read and want to know what their next books are. Across the board they are improving, enjoying reading and wanting to read on their own. We are also using the resources for reflective reading – using the story to discuss particular topics and questions too.”

As a school with 25% EAL children, a high proportion of FSM children and a generally mixed demographic, PM’s levels have also helped to break down barriers to attainment for traditionally underperforming groups. “As teachers we can see exactly where a child is at, their areas for development and next steps, which provides reassurance that every child can progress,” Kerry revealed. “On a day-to-day basis some teachers are using PM themselves, others are deferring to a teacher we have employed specifically to work with children on their reading. It has been very easy to roll out.”

Kerry also praised the Scholastic team for their assistance during initial set up: “We spent the summer sorting out the books and the teacher resources are there if we need them. Scholastic attended our first induction meeting for members of staff and benchmarking was well explained. We have focused on four colours and bought into all of them, we are really happy with the books, and plan to extend our use.”

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