

Ormiston Meridian Academy and Stoke Secondary Schools Project

“In the most recent (January 2022) Ofsted report of one of our schools, it was recognised that ‘pupils who need help with their phonics knowledge are supported by trained staff’”.

In 2021, Stoke Opportunity Area funded a project to help students transition from primary to secondary schools. Staff from six secondary schools received training and support to teach the Fresh Start programme to students reading below their chronological age.

We spoke to Rachel Johnson, Key Stage 3 English lead for Ormiston Meridian Academy (part of the Ormiston Academies Trust) and lead of the Stoke project.

Essential training for phonics teaching in secondary schools

Six schools received training and ongoing support from an experienced consultant trainer. For many staff, this was their first training on phonics and reading. This year, seven schools will have three places on a regional Fresh Start training, a development day and two remote progress meetings each to continue to develop expertise and plan next steps for students.

Online support for teachers and students

All schools in the project have access to the Ruth Miskin Training online subscription. This really helps staff gain extra knowledge and opportunities to practise the programme. Teachers set homework for students too via the virtual classroom.

Success cracking the phonics code

Despite the challenge of the pandemic and its significant impact on both staff and student absence, Fresh Start students at Ormiston Meridian Academy can now read accurately. They have cracked the alphabetic code. Some still need to develop as fluent and comprehending readers. During the weekly whole-school reading period, these students read the Fresh Start anthologies for extra practice.



We have invested in the Literacy and Language programme for some students too as they are not yet ready to fully access the English curriculum.

Two years and one month’s reading progress in less than a year

Over two and a half terms, 13 students from Ormiston Meridian Academy and Ormiston Sir Stanley Matthews made an average increase of two years and one month in their standardised reading age. This is despite not having a full year of Fresh Start teaching due to delays with implementation and covid absences. Some students will continue in Year 8. We aim to keep these students with the member of staff who taught them in Year 7. The relationships that have been established are key to success. The impact of Fresh Start is clear; not just on students’ reading ages but on their confidence.

The timetable challenge: our solution

As reading leader I ensure students at our school have a balance of high-quality phonics and reading teaching and access to a full and wide curriculum. We teach Fresh Start during some English lessons for three sessions a week in small groups. However, we make sure our Fresh Start students still access some English

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lessons. We have two groups: a group of six with a teaching assistant and a group of eight with a teacher. Groups change depending on half-termly assessments.

Next steps for Ormiston Meridian Academy

We are keen to train all teaching staff, no matter the subject they teach, on the complex code of the English language so they can help students transfer their Fresh Start knowledge to other subjects. We know there are students in our school who don't need Fresh Start teaching for reading but would benefit from a refresher of the alphabetic code for spelling. Our lowest English set will benefit from a short burst of phonics teaching to plug these gaps.

In terms of helping to teach students who can't read effortlessly, I don't think there's anything better than Fresh Start.

