INTERVENTIONS

USED IN WEST AUCKLAND

TO HELP CHILDREN EXPERIENCING

DIFFICULTY IN LITERACY

DURING YEARS THREE TO SIX

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Contents

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Executive summary

This project was based in West Auckland and set out to investigate the type of support schools gave to children in Years Three to Six who were causing concern in literacy. Two main areas of support were investigated in more depth, teacher aide support and commercial programmes. Aspects of the delivery of an intervention such as the frequency of monitoring and time allocation were surveyed. Data was also gathered on the wide range of commercial programmes currently being used in the area. The results show that schools are trying to find something to help the children in Years Three to Six who are causing concern in literacy. Sixty six different types of intervention were mentioned by the thirty schools included in the survey.

Purpose

To investigate the type of support West Auckland Schools are providing for children who are experiencing difficulty in literacy during Years Three to Six

- Are they using commercial programmes?

- If so which ones are they using?

- If not then what do they have in place for the children with literacy needs?

- How is the success of these programmes being measured?

- What are the most popular interventions in the area?

- What are the programmes designed for?

I did not include Year One or Two students in this study as if they are not underway in literacy during the first year Reading Recovery may be offered during the second year.

Background

As a Resource Teacher Literacy I often go into schools where there are children experiencing difficulty in literacy acquisition and am told by the class teacher or literacy leader that the child is receiving a particular programme. When I enquire further as to what the programme is designed to help and how it relates to the child's actual learning needs the teachers are often unaware of, or have not considered these aspects. They do not always know if the programme links specifically to the areas that the child is experiencing difficulty with. At times it seems to me that the hardest to teach children may be provided with a literacy programme without a full assessment or understanding as to whether it will meet their needs. Another aspect can be that because the children are receiving an intervention teachers do not take responsibility for the child's learning, expecting the intervention to solve all the problems. Sometimes children have been on these programmes for a long time (even years) but little or no assessment has been done to see if it is working for that child or that it is still the most appropriate help for them. I wanted to investigate to see if what I was thinking was actually what was happening in West Auckland schools. From this background the idea of a resource listing the most frequently used interventions as well as what they were designed to teach was developed.

Methodology

The methodology used for this investigation was a questionnaire that was given to schools in West Auckland. There are three Resource Teacher: Literacy clusters in West Auckland; Avondale, North West and Waitakere. My colleagues in each of the other clusters distributed the questionnaire to some of the schools in their areas to allow a more comprehensive coverage of schools.

A questionnaire was chosen as the method to gather data because it provided an opportunity to collect information from a wider sample of schools thus making it more representative of the West Auckland area. It allowed for a number of questions to be asked about a given topic and for clear responses due to the focus provided by standardised questions. There were four main parts to the questionnaire (see Appendix One).

Schools were first asked to list the types of intervention they used for the children experiencing difficulty in literacy in Years Three to Six. They were then asked to identify if there were any non-commercial programmes that schools used. The next section looked specifically at Teacher Aide support. It asked how the support was designed and allocated. The final section related to commercial programmes offered by the schools. It looked at what programmes were used and the areas that the schools thought the programmes were designed to assist. It also asked how the success was measured and the time allocation for each programme.

Findings

Thirty primary schools in West Auckland filled out and returned the questionnaire. There were sixty six different types of interventions indicated as being used by these schools. I was aware that there were a number of interventions across the schools in the area but I did not realise the extent of these. Most schools were using multiple interventions to assist children experiencing difficulty in literacy however some of these only occurred at one or two schools

The five most popular interventions listed are in Table One.

Table One: Top Five Interventions

Rank	Intervention	Number of schools
1	Teacher Aide	30
2	Resource Teacher Learning and Behaviour	23
3	Resource Teacher: Literacy	22
4	Rainbow Reading	15
5	Parent reading programmes	10

What was clear to see was that all schools provided some element of teacher aide support to children causing concern in literacy. The teacher aide support was funded from within the schools and the way in which they were used differed between the schools.

Many listed the use of Resource Teachers, a Ministry of Education resource, as an intervention used to support these children. Some schools also commented that the problem with the Resource Teachers was that there were not enough of them and so they sometimes had to wait a long time before the children were accepted onto the Resource Teacher's roll and received any support.

Rainbow Reading, a repeated reading programme designed by a Resource Teacher of Reading, was used by half the schools. The data showed that some interventions are used more widely in the area. In contrast the next five interventions (Table Two) were mentioned by only six of the thirty schools (not necessarily the same schools).

Table Two: Next Five Interventions

Rank	Intervention	Number of schools
6	Specialist Teacher Programmes	6
7	Price Milburn Software (PMCD's)	6
8	Pause Prompt Praise – with parents or buddies	6
9	Talk to Learn	6
10	Phonics support	6

It was pleasing to see that a number of schools recognised the need to have the hardest to teach children with specialist teachers. Many schools were referring their children to Resource Teachers or providing specialist teaching within their own schools. I was pleased to find that the children who needed the most support in literacy were often receiving it from the more experienced or specialist teachers.

The Nelson Cengage Price Milburn Software (PMCD's) is a read along programme that is based on the PM readers used for instructional reading. It is a computer programme that allows the children to read along while turning the pages on the text, to read the book by themselves and also provides follow up activities that can be completed once the book is read. Pause, Prompt and Praise is a programme that provides support for parents, teacher aides or buddy children on how to help children when reading. Talk to Learn is a practical oral language programme from the Ministry of Education. It is designed for use in junior classes and provides teachers with innovative tools to meet needs of students beginning school who have delayed oral language. The phonics support probably incorporated a wide range of approaches but would involve teaching how to connect the sounds of spoken English with letters or groups of and teaching them to blend the sounds of letters together to produce approximate pronunciations of unknown words.

When looking at the non-commercial programmes schools are using there were three main types of support being offered:

1) Specialist Teacher programmes: This is when schools use an experienced teacher to provide support to children causing concern. In many cases it was the Deputy or Assistant Principal or Senior Management who were providing support for small groups or individuals.

2) In class support by a teacher aide: A teacher aide was in the classroom during literacy time and providing support as requested by the class teacher. Sometimes this was working with individuals and at other times it was hearing groups of children read.
3) Teacher aide support: A teacher aide took small groups or individuals outside of the classroom. These children often had additional funding such as English Speakers of Other Languages.

The third area of the questionnaire looked in more depth at the work undertaken by Teacher Aides. Support provided by them was allocated in different ways by schools, most using multiple factors to allocate support. There were five main methods of allocating this resource (see Table Three). Most schools allocated on a needs basis often using the data collected from the previous year or assessments undertaken throughout the year. Teacher concerns were also a main indicator of the need to provide support to children and the funding allocation appeared to be monitored by the schools Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO).

Table Three: Allocation of Teacher Aide support

Rank	How Allocated	Number of Schools
1	Needs based	15 schools
2	Based on data collected	9 schools
3	Class teacher concerns	7 schools
4	Dependent on funding	6 schools
5	SENCO	5 schools

There were only a few schools that responded to the question relating to how the programmes used by the teacher aides were designed, and from those that did respond it became clear that two main groups of personnel were involved. The majority of schools stated that the classroom teacher was the person who planned the work to be undertaken by the teacher aide. If the class teacher was not involved then the design of the intervention would be developed by the SENCO or Assistant /Deputy Principal who usually had responsibility for special needs in the school. What was surprising but very pleasing to see was that no school who responded said that they left the planning for the teacher aides to do. I know there are some very skilled teacher aides in the work force who do a very good job but when you have children who are not succeeding it is best if they receive support from the most experienced who can tailor a programme to meet their specific needs.

The questionnaire was designed to look at the support given to children causing concern in literacy, consequently the next areas looked at were how the progress of the children was measured while they were receiving support and how often this assessment occurred. As can be seen in Table Four the main method of checking on children's progress was through the use of Running Records which allows a tester to capture a child's behaviour while reading a continuous text. Frequently the text used when taking a Running Record is an instructional reader that the child has seen recently, often the reader from the previous day. The PM Benchmark kit and Probe also involve capturing the child's behaviour while reading a piece

of text but they have a more rigid approach using specific texts that have not been seen by the child.

Table Four: How progress was measured

Rank	How Measured	Number of Schools
1	Running Records	17 schools
2	Individual Education Plan	10 schools
3	Price Milburn Benchmark Kit	8 schools
4	PROBE	8 schools
5	Teacher Feedback	8 schools

One of the interesting findings relates to the frequency of assessment of progress (Table Five). Of the schools who responded to this question, nine schools assessed the students only at the start and end of the intervention. If we add to that the four schools who said they only assess at the beginning and end of the year then almost half of the schools that responded did not formally check on the progress of the students while they were receiving support. Considering that these children need to move at a faster pace than those of their peers if they are to catch up, not checking that the programme being given is having the desired effect is of concern. In order to get the most value from an intervention regular and frequent assessment should occur to ensure that progress in the desired areas is being achieved, and if it is not, then the programme needs to be adapted.

The main aspect that needs to be considered is that the children concerned are processing at a lower rate than their peers and if the trajectory of their progress is not changed then it is likely they will fall even further behind. To leave a child who is causing concern on a programme that may or may not be meeting their needs for up to a year without formally checking the effect may not constitute value for money for the school or value for the child.

Table Five: Frequency of assessment

Rank	When	Number of Schools
1	Pre and Post Intervention	9 schools
2	Regularly	6 schools
3	Beginning and End of Year	4 schools
4	Three times a year	2 schools

Table Six shows the frequency of sessions children would have with a teacher aide. Over half the schools (19) provide support for those experiencing difficulty in literacy on four or five days each week. This is a very pleasing finding as if acceleration is to be achieved children need teaching as often as possible. This result recognises the need to provide children with almost daily intensive instruction to try to improve their literacy achievement.

Table Six: Frequency of sessions

Rank		
1	4 days	15 schools
2	3 days	7 schools
3	5 days	4 schools
4	2 days	4 schools

The allocation of time for lessons was very wide ranging from 10 minutes to 1 hour 40 minutes. Table Seven gives the five most allocated time frames with 30 minutes being the most used session time. The school that gave one hour forty minutes provided a specialist literacy class with small numbers of students, a teacher aide and an experienced teacher. The students attended this class for their literacy instruction rather than in class instruction. Communication with the classroom would be a vital component for ensuring strategies being taught are reinforced in the classroom across the curriculum.

Table Seven: Time allocation

Rank	Length of Time	Schools
1	30 minutes	13 schools
2	45 minutes	7 schools
3	20 minutes	6 schools
4	1 hour	5 schools
5	15 minutes	4 schools

The final area of the questionnaire looked at the types of commercial programmes schools were using to help provide support for children experiencing difficulty in literacy. Twenty six different commercial programmes were listed as being used in schools in West Auckland. The majority of these programmes were only used in one or two schools. The five most used commercial programmes are shown in Table Eight.

Table Eight: Five most used commercial programmes

Rank	Intervention	Number of Schools
1	Rainbow Reading	15
2	Lexia	8
3	STEPS	4
4	PMCD's	4
5	Fast For Word	4

Five schools in the study did not use any commercial programmes while most of the other schools usually had at least two occurring. As a result of the low number of schools having the other programmes I have focused the remaining feedback from the questionnaire on the five mentioned in Table Eight.

The responses regarding commercial programmes used in schools showed that Rainbow Reading was the most prominent with almost twice as many schools using this programme as any of the others listed. This resource was developed by Meryl-Lynn Pluck who was previously a Resource Teacher: Reading and so had considerable experience working with the hardest to teach in literacy. Fast for Word is a computer programme being trialled in the region at the moment by Resource Teachers Learning and Behaviour and as such comes with funding which may explain the prominence of a lesser known intervention. The other programmes on the table are those which are supported by the Resource Teachers Learning and Behaviour in the West Auckland area with computers and/or software being provided to some schools. Further information on these programmes can be found in Appendix Two.

The time allocation given to the various programmes differed for each school. Table Nine shows the allocation of time given to the five most used programmes. Unfortunately not all schools responded to this section of the questionnaire so I have indicated the number of schools in each time slot.

Table Nine: Time allocation

Intervention	20 minutes	30 minutes	40 minutes	45 minutes
Rainbow Reading	5 schools	5 schools		
Lexia	2 schools	2 schools		1 school
STEPS		3 schools		
PMCD's		2 schools		
Fast For Word	1 school		2 schools	

Rainbow Reading had either 20 or 30 minutes per session while the Lexia programme ranged from 20 minutes to 45 minutes. The information I found on the internet regarding Fast For Word indicates that the programme is designed to work in 50 minutes time slots, but no school indicated that as the time frame allocated, one school giving 20 minute sessions and two schools giving 40 minutes sessions (www.fastforword.co.nz). I considered this to be significant as the programme is currently being trialled in schools so I thought the guidelines would be more rigorously adhered to. The interventions STEPS and PMCD's had a time allocation of 30 minutes for all schools who reported on this and contrasts with Lexia which had a range from 20 minutes to 45 minutes.

Table Ten indicates the range in frequency for delivery of the interventions that schools were offering. Rainbow Reading and Lexia had a wide range of frequency occurring from 3 times a week up to five times a week (daily). This may be due to their having a higher number of responses from schools. The intervention with the narrowest range of frequency was the Fast for Word programme with all four schools giving the frequency between 4-5 lessons each week. This may reflect the fact that it is being trialled but contrasts to the time allocation as mentioned above.

Table Ten: Frequency of sessions

Intervention	Daily	4-5 times	4 times	3-4 times	3 times
Rainbow Reading	2 schools	1 school	3 schools	1 school	2 schools
Lexia	1 school		1 school	1 school	1 school
STEPS					1 school
PMCD's			1 school		1 school
Fast For Word	2 schools	2 schools			

Table Nine and Ten do not show complete data as the question asked schools to give the frequency of sessions and the time allocated to interventions but did not ask them to list these answers in relation to the intervention. The data contained in these tables is that from schools who decided to stipulate how much time was given to a specific intervention. It does however show the range of both the time and frequency of lessons that was allocated to the commercial programmes.

The other question asked in relation to commercial programmes was how and when progress was tracked. Most schools indicated that child progress was monitored but the regularity of this tracking varied greatly with some schools indicating they only assessed children at the start and end of the programme which was reported to be the usual classroom testing at the beginning and end of the year. Other schools said their tracking was done through the school monitoring system (e.g. etap or school master) but the frequency of entries varied between schools. Discussion with schools suggested that the most frequent entries would be once a term.

The comments made above on monitoring, support my initial suggestion that children receiving literacy assistance may not be monitored frequently enough to ensure they are making sufficient progress or that the intervention is providing for their needs. These children need to make accelerated progress if they are to catch up to their peers and if they are to do this they need to have close monitoring followed by changes to their programme as indicated by the assessment. If a child is not showing progress faster than the average child then they are still going to fall further behind their classmates.

Success was also said to be measured through regular classroom data collection and teacher observations. The five most used commercial programmes schools indicated that the assessment tool used was Running Records. These can be an extremely reliable and valid method of assessing progress in reading particularly at the earlier stages, as they provide an insight into how a student is working on text. They are valuable tools but if a programme is designed to assist in the development of a particular strategy it would be useful to include a measure of that specific skill alongside other measures that indicate more general literacy progress. If a lack of progress was found within the first few weeks of an intervention then a programme more suited to the child's needs could be investigated. It does appear that at times the hardest to teach children may be provided with support that may not suit their specific needs.

Schools were asked to comment on what areas of literacy the intervention was designed to assist with (multiple responses were given). Table Eleven shows the responses for the five most used commercial programmes.

Table Eleven: Interventions and aspects of literacy

Intervention	Reading Comprehension	Reading	Reading mileage	Fluency	Phonics	Phonemic Awareness	Spelling	Vocabulary	Writing
Rainbow Reading	12 schools	5 schools	4 schools	2 schools	3 schools				
Lexia	2 schools					5 schools	2 schools	1 school	
STEPS	3 schools	1 school			1 school	2 schools	1 school		1 school
PMCD's	2 schools	2 schools				2 schools			
Fast For Word	2 schools					2 schools	1 school	1 school	

The first four categories of aspects of literacy shown in the table relate to the actual reading of the text. Rainbow Reading is indicated by the schools to be related mainly to the reading process as a whole. This compares with Lexia and Fast ForWord where twice as many schools stated the interventions were more related to the mechanics of reading rather than the overall reading process. Appendix Three lists main points given in the literature (on the associated internet website) that relates to these programmes.

Implications

The main implication from this study is the need to develop an awareness of the concept of acceleration that children who are not achieving in literacy need to attain if they are to catch up to their peers. This means those children need to move at a pace faster than their peers if they are to catch up. If they continue to progress at their previous rate they will fall further behind. If they improve so that they progress at a similar rate to their peers then they will merely maintain the current gap. Teachers need to help them achieve at an accelerative rate so that the gap can be reduced.

Along with this aspect the lack of frequent and on-going monitoring while a student is involved in an intervention needs to be addressed. If a child is to make accelerated progress careful close observation needs to occur to ensure that change is being achieved and that the rate of progress is accelerative. If this does not occur these children may remain on programmes that may not be creating enough change. Frequent monitoring will also allow for changes to be made to the intervention to improve acceleration.

Benefits

The data collected showed that the schools in West Auckland are all providing support to children in Years Three to Six who are causing concern in literacy. The type and frequency of this support differs greatly but the important thing is that the support is available. More can be done to ensure the success of the interventions but the key point is that help is being offered.

One benefit from this study is that schools can look at the results and see the many options available to support children experiencing difficulty in literacy and the variety from which to select an intervention that best suits their children's needs.

The personal benefit is that I now have a better understanding of what goes on in schools with regard to the allocation of time and resources as well as the wide variety of programmes available and in use in schools in my cluster and wider West Auckland.

Conclusions

There is a large variation in the types of programmes being offered and in how the progress of children on these programmes is being tracked. The use of teacher aides is by far the most prominent method of support but the planning and tracking of progress of children working alongside the teacher aides differs enormously across the area. The positive thing is that schools are searching for ways to help these children and they are not being left unsupported. Some schools do not use commercial programmes at all preferring to use teacher aides to work with individuals or small groups.

My concern about children being put on a programme without a full assessment was not confirmed as most schools indicated there was some assessment made prior to the intervention, but I did not investigate how wide ranging this assessment was.

My concern regarding the lack of understanding of what a commercial programme was designed to help was confirmed with schools listing many aspects of literacy for each intervention, and some schools information contradicted that of other schools.

It was pleasing to see that a number of the commercial programmes indicated on their websites that they were supplementary to class programmes and were not to take the place of the normal classroom reading lesson. As I stated at the beginning of this investigation I was concerned that at times teachers were not continuing their classroom programmes with the children receiving an intervention on the basis that they were already receiving support. The fact that the programme information on the internet commented about the intervention being supplementary and not a replacement for classroom teaching would help reinforce this point with teachers.

Another aspect that was good to see happening in schools was the use of experienced or specialist teachers. There were a number of schools using experienced teachers, often those involved in management, to work in literacy with the hardest to teach children.

In most cases it seemed to me that progress is not being monitored closely enough to ensure the children are improving and to check that the intervention is the most appropriate for that child's needs. These children are usually well below the level of their peers and if they are to catch up they need to make progress at a faster rate than that of their classmates. If they do not then the best they can expect to do is maintain the gap between them and their peers, so it is vital that the support being given to each child is creating change. Frequent assessment will help determine if the support being given is helping the child to accelerate their rate of progress.

This survey has provided useful data on what schools are doing to help children causing concern in literacy in Years Three to Six and about the wide variety of programmes being used to support these children. The top five most frequently used interventions found in this study included the use of specialist teachers, an indication of the value New Zealand educators put on experience. Two of the most frequently used top five commercial programmes are developed here in New Zealand and another in Australia which means they are developed with our children in mind; they are based on the pedagogy we use in New Zealand schools. It confirms that schools are trying to provide support for these children.

References

WEBSITES

www.nvcc.edu/home/elanthier/methods/questionnaire

www.wikipedia.org/wiki/survey_methodology

www.rainbowreading.co.nz

www.lexialearning.co.nz

www.learningstaircase.co.nz

www.nelsonprimary.com.au

www.fastforword.co.nz

Appendices

Appendix One

Waitakere Literacy Centre
FRUITVALE SCHOOL
9 Croydon Rd Road, New Lynn. 0600
Phone: 827 2752

I am undertaking a survey of West Auckland Schools to investigate the types of support offered to children in Years Three to Six who are experiencing difficulty with Literacy. My aim is to develop a useful resource for cluster schools showing the range of options most often used and in what areas they are designed to provide support. I would appreciate your help by filling in this survey.

Sharon Pond

Resource Teacher: Literacy Waitakere Literacy Centre

Please list and/or describe all types of interventions your school provides for children experiencing difficulty in literacy in Years Three to Six.

(e.g. Rainbow reading, RTLB, RT Lit, Parent Programmes, Steps, PMCD's, Pause Prompt Praise)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

If you provide support other than commercial programmes or Teacher Aide support (covered separately) could you please describe below (e.g. In class support above the normal class lesson).

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Teacher Aide Support

How is this designed and/or allocated?

How is progress measured?

What assessment is done and when?

How is progress tracked?

How much time is allocated for this support?

    Duration/Frequency

    Length of lesson

<u>Commercial Programmes</u>

What programmes are used in your school?

_____

_____

_____

_____

What areas of literacy are these programmes designed to assist?
> (e.g. Reading, comprehension, phonemic awareness, writing, handwriting , spelling)

_____

_____

_____

How is the success of these programmes monitored?

_____

_____

What assessment is done and when?

_____

_____

_____

How is progress tracked?

_____

_____

_____

How much time is allocated for this support?

Duration/Frequency

_____

_____

Length of lesson

_____

_____

Appendix Two

Information obtained from the associated websites for the five commercial programmes most frequently used by West Auckland Schools.

1) Rainbow Reading

Information gained from the associated website (see reference below).

Rainbow Reading is an audio-facilitated reading programme consisting of a series of books, at seven colour-coded levels, with accompanying audio support and activities. Rainbow Reading is believed to improve students' enjoyment, confidence and competence in reading.

The Rainbow Reading Programme has been developed, thoroughly researched and trialled by qualified reading specialists. It is said to be non-threatening, supportive, interesting, enjoyable, economical, easy to implement and effective at improving reading skills.

Rainbow Reading has been designed to present students with a variety of topics, authors, styles and illustrations to make reading interesting while skills are improved. Each story or article has been carefully selected because of its educational value and attraction to a wide range of students with varying needs and interests. Books are levelled, colour coded, and are accompanied by a specially recorded CD (with MP3 file) to provide support for readers. A comprehensive Teacher's Manual and Training DVD ensure that this simple, yet effective, programme can be easily implemented. Assessment sheets feature the titles of the books presented for teachers to take Running Records to monitor progress. Cloze (Text Completion), Text Sequencing, Word Search, Writing and Dice Game sheets provide meaningful text-related activities.

Comments made about Rainbow Reading indicate that teachers have found the programme useful for maintaining and building the reading fluency of students but that students do need to have attained some basic reading skills for it to be used. These skills include being able to recognise the English alphabet and know how each letter sounds, being able to recognise basic high-frequency words, having a reasonable knowledge of concepts about print especially one-to-one matching and directionality and have attained at least a 5-6 year reading level (approximate Reading Recovery levels 7 - 11).

On the website, teachers are reminded that the Rainbow Reading Programme is designed to complement rather than replace existing literacy programmes. It provides supported reading that consolidates skills learned elsewhere. It encompasses two programmes for intensive, individualised instruction of students reading below expected levels and a programme for reluctant readers.

Access to research into the effectiveness of the Rainbow Reading programme is available through the website. This research is from a variety of sources and as most of it has been conducted in New Zealand it is particularly relevant to our schools.

Reference
www.rainbowreading.co.nz

2) LEXIA

Information gained from the associated website (see reference below).

Lexia New Zealand provides Evidence Based Software which helps students of all ages acquire and improve essential reading and thinking skills. According to the website, it is scientifically based, peer reviewed and proven to efficiently increase reading proficiency.

It is a computer based programme that is said to provide foundational reading skills instruction, support reading acquisition, prevent reading failure, remediate reading difficulties, assess and monitor reading progress and differentiate reading instruction. It also states that Lexia is suitable for all readers, students with Dyslexia, English as a second language students, and students of any age requiring reading remediation.

The Lexia reading software is said to reinforce skills a student has learned with fun activities aimed at practicing phonemic awareness, phonics and decoding skills, word-level fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension skills. The programmes are said to help bring a student from learning a reading skill to automatically applying that skill for fluency, while reading for comprehension and pleasure.

There are a number of comments on the Lexia website relating to the programme being evidence based. There are links to many testimonials indicating the results that Lexia has had in a number of schools in New Zealand. I could find no links to actual research but the testimonials did provide evidence as to the effect the programme has had on children's reading in certain schools. Anecdotal comments from those who use it say that the ability to quickly see where the areas of concern are for each student is one of its main features. This was reflected in one of the testimonials which said that using the Lexia programme allowed the teacher to identify the areas of difficulty for each child and as a consequence focus the teaching to individual need.

According to the website Lexia provides a broad range of exercises that deliver effective practise for readers at all levels. Students who use Lexia Reading skills in sequence are logically building an understanding, while gaining fluency and preparing for the next skill. The interactive exercises are said to branch automatically, providing practise where it is needed and increasing in difficulty when the student is ready. The level of work is geared to a student's ability, keeping the student at an appropriate level of challenge. Students can work independently, thereby increasing confidence in their skills.

It is also said to correlate to the NZ Ministry of Education's Literacy Learning Progressions.

Reference

www.lexialearning.co.nz

3) Learning Staircase (STEPs)

Information gained from the associated website (see reference below).

Ros Lugg is a UK and NZ trained educational specialist who runs the specialist education company, The Learning Staircase Ltd and whose main foci are remedial literacy, Dyslexia and other learning disabilities/difficulties.

The Learning Staircase Ltd is a Christchurch based company set up in 2001 by a group of specialist teachers and assessors. As assessors of children with learning difficulties, they constantly came across parents and teachers who were desperately looking for the right kind of resources to use to address their children's needs. They found that there seemed to be a real need for resources that also offered guidance and advice, particularly for people who were non-specialists. They set up The Learning Staircase to produce resources which were enjoyable to use, high quality and versatile. The company designs and develops teaching resources and materials for learners with literacy or processing difficulties.

The Learning Staircase Ltd recently launched the Steps programme, which is NZ's first major literacy software programme. Ros is the author of the successful remedial literacy courses which have three elements First Steps, Steps and Steps to Literacy. These are the courses that are currently being used in some West Auckland schools.

Steps is a literacy software programme which can be customized for any learner or school. It is designed to cater for learners with difficulties, such as dyslexia or dyspraxia, but it is equally effective with any learner who needs a boost to their literacy skills. It can also be used for general literacy support, whole class teaching, ESOL and extension.

According to the website it is multi-sensory, fun and highly effective. It includes extensive word banks covering sight vocabulary, spelling rules/patterns, word families as well as topic lists. It also has the facility to add and record your own lists including the ability to add Maori words. There is a strong emphasis on language development so it is also suitable for second language learners. It has a multitude of aspects of reinforcement including games and a comprehensive selection of printable resources to help teachers produce their own teaching materials.

The website gives direct access to New Zealand schools trial data and testimonials. It has been designed in New Zealand and as such supports the New Zealand curriculum.

Also on the website you can access presentations by Ros Lugg on topics such as Understanding Dyslexia and Helping Learners with Learning Disability.

Reference

www.learningstaircase.co.nz

4) **Price Milburn Software (PMCD's)**

Information gained from the associated website (see reference below).

P
M

a
n

d PM Plus story books are described as being used as instructional readers in schools. They feature a classic story structure with tension, climax and resolution to engage young readers.

The books have been written using carefully selected vocabulary to ensure children experience reading success. The PM and PM Plus software complements the printed books allowing children to explore the book's content and meaning by completing a range of interactive activities. The activities focus on all aspects of the text – whole text, sentence, word and word parts. Software is available for Magenta to Silver levels (Ready to Read colour wheel).

The philosophy that underpins all of the material within the PM Collection is that students learn to read well if they are encouraged to use a variety of skills, processes and behaviours, rather than a particular method or approach. When students are learning to read, they should be given materials that have been carefully crafted to meet their needs; books that give them, from their earliest experiences with the printed word, success, enjoyment and understanding.

Included in the software are activities that expose children to storytelling and provide children with the temptation to read the story themselves, allows the child to click on a button to listen to a story or on a word to hear that word. The activities involve making rhyming words, matching rhyming words in complete a sentence, matching sentences to a picture, word order, writing, letter recognition and comprehension exercises.

There are over 1000 levelled PM fiction and non-fiction titles which provide quality and variety to help children enjoy learning to read and experience reading success. They have been carefully levelled to ensure there is a gentle learning gradient with new high frequency words introduced slowly and then reinforced in books at the same and succeeding levels.

The illustrations and photographs in the PMs help children to interpret the story and derive meaning from the text, they 'hook' children into reading with child-centred stories and a classic story structure – character introduction, problem introduction, rising tension and a satisfactory resolution. High interest non-fiction topics are designed to spark interest and enthusiasm in reading non-fiction, the PMs focus on topics that are child-centred with clear and logical presentation of facts, with clear illustrations and photography.

Reference

www.nelsonprimary.com.au

5) Fast ForWord

Information gained from the associated website (see reference below).

Fast ForWord

Fast ForWord is a series of educational computer training programs that exercise students' brains to help them process more efficiently. According to the website, it simultaneously develops fundamental cognitive skills and the foundational reading skills of vocabulary, phonemic awareness, decoding, fluency and comprehension. The website comments that Fast ForWord trains the brain to optimise learning potential.

The website describes Fast ForWord as working on improving the brain's "hardware" so that the teaching and tuition can be better absorbed and retained. It is said to be unlike any other learning program or educational software and adapts exactly to each student's development needs. Fast ForWord identifies the student's individual learning weaknesses by analysing their responses to the exercise tasks and continuously adjusts the degree of difficulty to keep the student challenged.

Fast ForWord provides short (8 to 12 weeks) concentrated training that is said to produce enduring learning gains. The patented Fast ForWord technology creates unique programs that rapidly impact a child's ability to read and learn. In a 50-minute session, participants are said to be exposed to more carefully designed learning activities than participants in any comparable program. Students can make gains of up to 1 -2 years in reading competency and these gains are maintained without additional training.

The catch phrase 'Fit Brains Learn Better' is quoted frequently on the website. It is said that after participating in Fast ForWord students are better able to follow instructions, concentrate and participate in classroom discussions. They improve their reading, spelling and comprehension and find they enjoy school more. Their self-confidence is said to increase which can lead to better behaviour and sociability.

According to the website the Fast ForWord programmes have been developed following extensive scientific research. There are claims that it is one of the most researched programmes of its type in the world with the research coming before the programme, in the sense that the neuroscience was done in universities and labs and the Fast ForWord program was built on the basis of the understanding that came from the research.

There are links made to a number of pieces of research worldwide on the site. There was reference to two pieces of research from Australia, one from Western Australia conducted in

2007 and the other from New South Wales in 2006 both conducted by people involved in speech pathology. I was unable to find any links to any pieces of New Zealand research.

Reference

www.fastforword.co.nz

Appendix Three