

Special Children

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An exciting new scheme for SEN/EAL struggling readers at Key Stage 3

Rapid Plus – a reading scheme for Key Stage 3

Published by Heinemann

www.pearsonschools.co.uk/RapidPlus

£4.99 each; Rapid Plus Stages 3-6 Teaching Guide £75.00

Reviewed by

Graeme Whyte

Rapid Plus builds on the primary school 'Rapid' scheme. It aims to fill a gap in the market for high interest, low difficulty reading material, and to give teachers an easy to use, effective course that will both interest and enthuse their students.

The programme consists of a set of books at each NC level from 1a to 3a/4c. Each book has a mix of fiction and closely related non-fiction texts. There are assessment books for each level, a teacher's guide and online software for independent work at home or at school.

The programme has been thoroughly prepared. The books are carefully graded to move up steadily from a reading age of 6.6 to 8.6. Three new sets appear in 2012 taking the level to 9.6. They are short enough to be read in one session, and the length of the books increases gradually as they rise in difficulty. The characters are the same in each set giving a familiarity that will boost the readers' confidence.

Children will like these books. They underwent rigorous testing to weed out uninteresting text or illustrations. They have a newly designed, dyslexia friendly font, and are printed on cream paper to be easy on the eyes. The themes are perfect for boys, but the characters include girls, so would suit them both.

The higher-level books are designed to look more like 'real' books with chapter

headings and paragraphs, and only a few supporting illustrations. There are also play scripts with four equally weighted parts for groups reading aloud.

The software that accompanies the series does not form part of this review. However, from the description it is easy to imagine children enjoying working with it.

But what about their teachers? In these days of fewer specialist teachers and more teaching assistants, the teaching guide will prove very useful. It gives clear guidance for both one to one, and small group lessons. The emphasis is on activities to build comprehension skills, and to keep the sessions varied and interesting. There are also useful, photocopiable worksheets.

The thorough assessment materials look like the reading books, and, with the characters and themes having already been met, students shouldn't notice the difference. By reducing anxiety, a more accurate assessment can be achieved.

These assessments give a detailed analysis of students' reading accuracy, comprehension and spelling. The results provide clear guidance for future teaching. They are calculated as a score out of 100 – great for target-setting and IEP writing, as well as for giving easily understood



feedback to students and parents.

The versatility of Rapid Plus means it could be a stand-alone programme, or used alongside a phonics course. The teaching guide gives a lot of suggestions for work with EAL students and tips for parents.

This is an excellent series that will be helpful and entertaining for students, easy for teachers and TAs to use, and comes at a price that most schools should be able to afford even in these straitened times.

Graeme Whyte has been a special needs teacher since 1989 in a variety of institutions including primary schools, secondary schools, and FE colleges. He is currently a Senco for Key Stage 3, Rudolf Steiner School, Kings Langley, Hertfordshire.