



LEARNING LADDERS

CASE STUDY:

Ridgeway Primary Academy, South Shields, UK

How Learning Ladders helped a previously failing school become number one in the country for writing progress



Proud · Unique · Ambitious

Introduction to the school

“Since this transition, we have become the number one mainstream school – out of 23,500 across England – for progress in writing. We have achieved this through brilliant teaching and the help of Learning Ladders’ fantastic assessment system.”



ALEX GOLDEN

Head of School

Ridgeway Primary Academy is a primary school that became academised five years ago due to having ‘failing school’ status. Since then, we have grown from 167 to 370 pupils – we took on 70 new children last year alone – and have moved from one-form to two-form entry.

There are high rates of deprivation in our local area which affects our school tremendously – we are almost at the top of the poverty index for the UK. 70% of our children are FSM, 60% have household unemployment and this is alongside a high level of SEND. Many children arrive 0% on track in nursery – some are unable to speak when they arrive – but we manage to raise most to on track by the end of reception.

When we became an academy, all the existing teachers were replaced. This new staff knew what to expect: the school was undergoing a huge overhaul and implementing systems that had been completely absent before. There is a ‘yes economy’ and lots of enthusiasm in the new team; we are determined to open up the untapped potential of our children.



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Our journey to success

The journey has been a rapid acceleration and raising of standards from a very low starting point. Our impressive progress results have been, not only due to excellent teaching but also the sheer rock-bottom level we started at. This enabled us to show progress quickly, as little had been shown with these children for so long.

Previously, there had been no assessment systems – no systems of any kind – in the school. Before I started, Classroom Monitor was used. The staff found it to be a huge and unwieldy platform to use and difficult to adapt to our school and its individual needs. It does more than is necessary which overcomplicates things. After two years of using Classroom Monitor, at no point did anyone on the team fully understand the programme.

After Life Without Levels began, we decided to develop our own system a year before we had to, to get ahead. We needed a system which offered flexibility to be able to adapt assessments for the needs of our children in an ongoing way and to tailor it to our school – we recognise that our pupils and families are not like many others.

The previous Assessment Coordinator went to look at three or four approved schemes, and travelled down to London to a training day with Learning Ladders. We still had a year to go with our Classroom Monitor package but Learning Ladders was so clear as an assessment tool, we wanted to start using it right away.

“So we bought Learning Ladders and allowed our Classroom Monitor licence to run out – which wasn’t cheap – this is an expression of our commitment to Learning Ladders.”



How Learning Ladders helps our school

“I think Learning Ladders has set our teachers free to teach without assessment being an additional burden.”



The Learning Ladders platform stood out to us because of its flexibility and simplicity. Assessment software has to be the link that makes assessment productive and supportive to teaching, learning and progress – not an additional task that takes lots of time and has no network.

When one of our teachers sits down to plan, the expectation is that the planning journey starts with a look at Learning Ladders which defines the teaching. Then you see the learning in the books which is fed straight back into Learning Ladders online, which then feeds into the next part of the teaching & learning cycle.

This is the way we are told to conduct assessment when training as teachers at university; to allow the learning to lead the teaching. But we all know that if you come to an assessment system and it's too heavy and cumbersome or the interface is too complicated, you delay it, then it becomes a troublesome task which does not support the teaching & learning cycle. The method can become a backwards task where you end up retrospectively looking for evidence through books to track that a child has met a certain objective, instead of formatively reviewing skills.

“Learning Ladders allows for more discussions between staff. It shows a trust in our teachers and that their professional opinions matter. If there’s ever a gap between teacher judgements and score cards, then conversations can happen – both are required to form a comprehensive view of a child – but the front end is that the teacher’s opinions are valued.”

They are free to deliver and know the assessment software is supporting progress and helping them keep focused on the direction of learning they want their pupils to go in. Learning Ladders is not the centrepiece but it allows the progress to happen without becoming a cumbersome task.

Our aim as an academy in the last couple of years has been driven towards reducing teacher workload – so our use of Learning Ladders is also changing. It’s always formed a structure for progress meetings but the difference now is when data is asked for, teachers’ judgements are also requested, not just score cards. This helps teachers feel in control of assessment, but the background numbers are not the ‘be all and end all’.

Staff were very receptive to Learning Ladders from the start – the attitude was that everything in the school was going through a huge transition so why not the assessment system, too? There’s a positivity amongst our staff and lots of enthusiasm. Everyone loves and understands Learning Ladders because of how simple it is, which is a stage we never got to with Classroom Monitor.



What's next for Ridgeway Primary?

“The key thing about the Learning Ladders team is that you feel they are listening because they want to grow and get it right – they aren't a company who says “here's our product, take it or leave it.”

We have plans to change and continue developing the use of Learning Ladders at Ridgeway Primary Academy; we want it to always be evolving as our school changes. So far, maths, reading and writing have taken the focus, but from this year we will be introducing the foundation subjects – more as a skills tracker with one tick per skill – to Learning Ladders. This means data can be used initially as a light-touch assessment tool for foundation subjects.

The adaptations that Learning Ladders has made to the platform have been great; they want to take feedback on board to make it the best it can be. It's a two-way relationship where we know our suggestions and questions are taken on board so that they can continue building a product that is great and that we will be able to use well into the future of our academy.

Their customer services are great – we mainly work with Tom and he manages to make everyone feel like they're getting a personal service. They genuinely care about the job we are doing in school, and it feels like this is at the heart of everything they do.





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Contact Learning Ladders

We would be happy to discuss any requirements for your school. You can contact us below:

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