



## **The Trial**

High School, Pudsey, LS28  
2000 – 2008

The Word Wasp was the core text of a trial that was undertaken over an eight-year period. However, the initial work began some years earlier, using information and analysis gleaned from work with our private students which was then introduced to the students in our school trials.

The Hornet Literacy Primer was created during the early stages of our trials (2005) to deal with students for whom the Wasp was found to be too difficult. It provided a lower, slower start for the most challenged students but crucially, we upped the scale of the vowel discrimination exercises. The impact was noticed immediately. We now had a good programme for the really challenged students.

Both the texts were trialled and tested with students of mixed ages and abilities, from 11 to 16 years, in what began as a small-scale exercise to allow the authors to monitor the effectiveness of their work with a handful of students, but it gradually evolved into a trial with over a hundred students.

The logistics were determined by the school curriculum. Initially, each student was given one hour a week, which was woefully inadequate for the scale of the problems we were to encounter. Many of the students were statemented with no discernible spelling or reading ages. Behavioural problems were endemic. Although we were happy to have been given a room to carry out the necessary work, it was close to the behavioural unit (Learning Enhanced Behaviour) and students with literacy problems had to run the gauntlet of hostility and general mayhem. Unfortunately for the Wasp trial, many of our students were LEB recruits.

However, in spite of the problems, early efforts began to show results and before long, we started to receive a steady stream of fresh students. The steady increase in students left us with a dilemma: It was obvious that they needed help but it was left to us to supply it. The text was up to the task if the school could supply us with coaches. LSA's, parents and sixth form students were recruited, not only for the coaching: but also for the testing.

The testing was another problem: there wasn't a phonic test available! We had only been prepared to trial our text with a few students and not to trial the programme with over a hundred. Later, we invented our own test to help us determine whether a student needed the Hornet or the Wasp. It was not used

to determine a spelling or reading age.

Initially, we used the Blackwell Spelling test; even though we were anxious to demonstrate the texts potential for teaching decoding, because we had little doubt then, as now, that the surest way to teach decoding was by encoding and we wished to test the effectiveness of the balance. The first students were not subject to testing because initially, that was not the nature of the exercise. As numbers grew, we sought both data and coaches from the school. All the available tests were based on frequency and were thus entirely unsuitable: as were all the tests we used. We were not aware then of a suitable test for measuring phonic ability. The lowest test score for the Blackwell is 6 spelling years. In theory, that score is achievable without the necessity of getting at least one spelling correct. A reading or spelling age of six would have flattered a huge number of our students: even at age 14. Words like 'nice', 'page' use the **soft c** and **soft g** rule, which don't figure early in our programme. We were aware that it would be difficult for students to register a score that would reflect their progress for quite some time. The Salford Sentence Reading Test, could only measure reading ages up to 10 yrs 6 months.

The Burt test was perhaps the most useful but it wasn't introduced until 2006. Furthermore from the outset, we only prepared to test our students for spelling ages because the presumption was that spelling reflected a students literacy level more than reading tests. Some early spelling ages and reading assessments were made available by the school. Testing for us was a necessary evil and that which we were using was totally unsuitable and furthermore, it used a large proportion of the student's coaching time. The test only showed real gains when students were significantly through the programme. We were aware of our student's real progress and it was frustrating when students were being asked to spell words containing digraphs, tri-graphs, diphthongs and rules that had yet to be reached in the programme. Absences of both coaching staff and students further complicated the administration of both lessons and testing.

Some struggling teachers were only too glad to be rid of the unruly students but other students were not allowed extra hours on our programme because it interfered with a modern language lesson: many of these students could neither read nor spell the simplest of words! Neither could they form anything that could even loosely be described as handwriting. However, as unruly students became noticeably more agreeable after encountering the Wasp, many teachers relaxed their grip and the school insisted that these students should attend the Wasp coaching sessions.

Many of the LSA's realized that they too could learn as they coached the students, then we had them on a mutual learning curve which gave us the feedback we needed to shape and improve the texts.

Fortunately, there were enough students whose main problem was just keeping-up with their peers. They hadn't learned the literacy skills to deal with the curriculum. These students were the easiest to teach and gave us

interludes of sanity. Once they had grasped how the language worked they began to enjoy the programme. Their test results showed they had made significant gains. Some of these students, having completed the Wasp, volunteered to be coaches and that relieved the pressure on LSA's who were having to deal with students who exhibited severe problems.

Once it became clear that the inundation of students was not going to stop we had to think long and hard about our classroom practice. It was decided that each coaching session should be segmented into 4 fifteen-minute periods and a score of one to four given for each, depending on the amount of time given over to actual teaching. It also allowed for poor punctuality, absences and bad behaviour. Moreover, this would give us a more accurate reckoning of progress over time; it would also give us a true reckoning of students' engagement over a period of years.

A major fire robbed us of three complete terms. One student described the Wasp hour as the 'learning hour' in recognition that it was the only time he learned anything!

In spite of our frustration, all our students' reading and spelling ages had risen and we had some spectacular successes. We were informed that one student would not be attending the Wasp programme as her speech therapist and a surgeon had agreed that she was to have an operation on her palette in an attempt to remedy her speech problems. After pleading for a stay of operation while we took her through the initial exercises, the operation was then deemed unnecessary. The day she managed to shout the word 'shrimp' was noted throughout the school!

We have categorized the 60 students into the following groups:

**A) Students with the potential to return to the regular school curriculum:  
1-30**

These students couldn't keep up to their peers. All had reading and spelling deficits when tested but demonstrated some phonic awareness. Their higher end vocabularies were entirely memory driven as a result of earlier whole-word interventions. These students usually had legible, or even good handwriting. The more committed of these students were able to re-access the curriculum. Some were potential coaches. They finished the text with good results with little or no evidence of the problems with which they started.

**B) Students who became literate but were too late to access the curriculum:  
1-15**

These students had poor phonic awareness supported by a limited memory based vocabulary with poor, but not necessarily illegible, handwriting. Many had behavioural issues. They had the potential to handle the curriculum but were reluctant to engage with it. These students were largely alienated from the school for a variety of reasons. When their wayward behaviour was contained they worked and drew satisfaction from their progress. These students would have progressed further had we been given the time to

capitalise on their gains. They would leave school with the literacy skills imbued by the Wasp programme but without credible qualifications.

### **C) Students with dyslexia / SpLD:**

#### **1-9**

These students did not have behavioural related issues. Phonic awareness, including vowel discrimination was not discernible. Their sequencing of sound and the repetition of phonic cues were extremely weak. Eg. students C2 and C3 presented the most severe problems of the trial. They were introduced as dyslexic and we were able to make good but limited progress with C3 and more substantial progress with C2. It was as if C2 had reached the light switch just as she was closing the door. Regrettably, our time was limited with these students.

### **D) Students with the greatest difficulty:**

#### **1-6**

These students were functionally illiterate. Many had poor motor skills; their handwriting was largely illegible. Some had speech and hearing problems. In each case, vowel discrimination was very poor. Most of our statemented students belonged to this group. Some were diagnosed with ADHD, Asperger's Syndrome or dyslexia. These students needed daily help but we were lucky to teach them for more than 2 hrs a week.

### **Summary**

The categories have soft borders: some students, notably from Category B and perhaps an individual from category C could qualify for category A.

Our best results came from category A. We drew upon their progress to administer the programme at an elementary, but nevertheless critical, level. Their problems were mainly about improving their access to the curriculum. Had they experienced an intervention at primary school then perhaps they would not have needed the intervention at high school, where it is more difficult to engage students who already feel self-conscious about their ability to keep up.

Category B students demonstrated some latent abilities which we exploited and improved considerably and once again, had we been given the time we could have made a greater impact. The skills that we managed to engender may remain inert but the potential to activate them is live.

However, student C2, whom we deemed to exhibit the most intractable problems and who we managed to coach for longer has recently written to us thanking the Wasp programme for the advances she made which eventually led her to university. Student C 6 left school with a good standard of literacy and gained good results in his GCSEs.

The remaining Category D students gained literacy skills way beyond anyone's expectations. We taught them for a maximum of two hrs per week; we should have coached them for a minimum of five hrs a week! We can only

speculate on the outcome.

Finally:

Coaches sharing and enjoying their students' success; pupils knocking on the Wasp room door; asking to join the programme; parents insisting that their children joined the Wasp programme; coaches with poor literacy skills learning alongside their students; Wasp graduates coaching the Hornet in 'Buddy Systems'; these were the hallmarks of a programme that worked then and it works now. If we had been given the time the impact of this programme would have been even greater.

## WORD WASP/HORNET - RESULTS

| Group | No. | Name        | Student Age (Yrs & Mths) |    | Reading Age |    |     |    | Spelling Age |   |     |   | Total Coaching Hours | Percentage of text completed |           | Notes |
|-------|-----|-------------|--------------------------|----|-------------|----|-----|----|--------------|---|-----|---|----------------------|------------------------------|-----------|-------|
|       |     |             |                          |    | Start       |    | End |    | Start        |   | End |   |                      | Hornet                       | Word Wasp |       |
|       |     |             | Y                        | M  | Y           | M  | Y   | M  | Y            | M | Y   | M |                      |                              |           |       |
| A     | 1   | Dale S      | 11                       | 0  | 9           | 0  | 11  | 10 | 8            | 3 | 11  | 0 | 57.5                 |                              | 90%       | ADHD  |
| A     | 2   | Mellissa R  | 11                       | 0  | 9           | 5  | 11  | 7  | 8            | 8 | 10  | 1 | 43                   | 100%                         | 50%       |       |
| A     | 3   | Ryan A      | 11                       | 10 | 8           | 1  | 11  | 6  | 7            | 4 | 10  | 6 | 47.25                |                              | 85%       |       |
| A     | 4   | Charlotte W | 11                       | 3  | 8           | 1  | 10  | 2  | 8            | 7 | 11  | 5 | 24                   |                              | 70%       |       |
| A     | 5   | Bradley J   | 11                       | 9  | 9           | 6  | 13  | 3  | 8            | 8 | 12  | 5 | 57.5                 |                              | 75%       |       |
| A     | 6   | Luke D      | 11                       | 4  | 10          | 6  | 12  | 4  | 9            | 9 | 10  | 7 | 17.75                |                              | 50%       |       |
| A     | 7   | charlie D   | 11                       | 4  | 8           | 11 | 11  | 9  | 10           | 1 | 11  | 7 | 16.5                 |                              | 50%       | LEB   |
| A     | 8   | Luke T      | 11                       | 5  | 8           | 4  | 10  | 6  | 7            | 4 | 9   | 2 | 55.75                |                              | 75%       |       |
| A     | 9   | Marcus B    | 11                       | 6  | 8           | 8  | 10  | 3  | 7            | 8 | 11  | 6 | 46.25                |                              | 75%       |       |
| A     | 10  | Michael D   | 12                       | 10 | 7           | 0  | 10  | 2  | 6            | 6 | 9   | 3 | 34.25                | 100%                         | 40%       |       |
| A     | 11  | Jack H      | 11                       | 8  | 7           | 1  | 12  | 6  | 6            | 2 | 11  | 0 | 52.75                |                              | 80%       |       |
| A     | 12  | Thomas H    | 11                       | 9  | 8           | 1  | 10  | 2  | 8            | 7 | 9   | 8 | 16                   |                              | 40%       |       |
| A     | 13  | Brett S     | 12                       | 0  | 9           | 6  | 12  | 7  | 9            | 3 | 10  | 6 | 16                   |                              | 50%       |       |
| A     | 14  | Terrie H    | 12                       | 2  | 9           | 11 | 10  | 2  | 9            | 6 | 10  | 1 | 14.25                |                              | 30%       |       |
| A     | 15  | Brandon L   | 12                       | 2  | 7           | 1  | 10  | 2  | 8            | 1 | 9   | 1 | 14.5                 |                              | 40%       |       |
| A     | 16  | Nicola S    | 12                       | 4  | 10          | 2  | 12  | 6  | 10           | 9 | 14  | 5 | 41                   |                              | 100%      |       |
| A     | 17  | Matthew S   | 12                       | 8  | 8           | 8  | 9   | 6  | 8            | 8 | 9   | 0 | 12.5                 |                              | 30%       |       |
| A     | 18  | Daniel H    | 12                       | 3  | 10          | 6  | 13  | 9  | 10           | 7 | 14  | 2 | 50.5                 |                              | 100%      |       |
| A     | 19  | Robyn W     | 13                       | 0  | 9           | 8  | 11  | 6  | 9            | 5 | 12  | 2 | 38.75                |                              | 90%       |       |

|   |    |             |    |    |     |     |    |    |    |   |    |   |       |      |      |          |
|---|----|-------------|----|----|-----|-----|----|----|----|---|----|---|-------|------|------|----------|
| A | 20 | Billy G     | 13 | 6  | 8   | 7   | 11 | 9  | 8  | 3 | 11 | 5 | 27    |      | 80%  |          |
| A | 21 | Hannah S    | 13 | 7  | 9   | 5   | 12 | 0  | 9  | 4 | 12 | 6 | 41.5  |      | 100% |          |
| A | 22 | Neil P      | 14 | 10 | 8   | 0   | 10 | 2  | 8  | 7 | 10 | 1 | 10.5  |      | 50%  |          |
| A | 23 | Maria T     | 14 | 2  | n/a | n/a | 10 | 6  | 10 | 4 | 11 | 9 | 32    |      | 100% |          |
| A | 24 | Charlotte R | 15 | 6  | 10  | 2   | 12 | 10 | 10 | 0 | 12 | 4 | 16.75 |      | 70%  |          |
| A | 25 | Ben W       | 12 | 10 | 10  | 6   | 12 | 5  | 9  | 2 | 13 | 9 | 60    |      | 100% |          |
| A | 26 | Joshua M    | 11 | 3  | n/a | n/a | 10 | 6  | 11 | 0 | 13 | 3 | 31.25 | 100% | 25%  | Speech   |
| A | 27 | Kristian W  | 10 | 11 | 7   | 6   | 8  | 9  | 7  | 1 | 8  | 4 | 13.5  | 90%  |      |          |
| A | 28 | Lewis T     | 11 | 4  | 9   | 7   | 12 | 5  | 9  | 3 | 10 | 4 | 32    |      | 70%  | Dyslexia |
| A | 29 | Kay L       | 13 | 11 | 7   | 8   | 10 | 6  | 6  | 4 | 10 | 3 | 21.75 |      | 60%  | Dyslexia |
| A | 30 | Connor W    | 14 | 11 | n/a | n/a | 10 | 6  | 10 | 2 | 13 | 0 | 20.75 |      | 90%  | Dyslexia |
| B | 1  | Andrew H    | 12 | 0  | 9   | 5   | 13 | 4  | 6  | 7 | 8  | 0 | 16    |      |      |          |
| B | 2  | Chris R     | 11 | 6  | 7   | 7   | 8  | 8  | 7  | 2 | 10 | 1 | 84.5  | 100% | 20%  | ADHD*    |
| B | 3  | Jacques T   | 11 | 3  | n/a | n/a | 7  | 9  | 6  | 1 | 7  | 1 | 42.5  | 75%  |      | LEB      |
| B | 4  | Brandon S   | 11 | 4  | 8   | 3   | 11 | 4  | 7  | 7 | 9  | 8 | 25.25 |      | 60%  | LEB      |
| B | 5  | Ashley W    | 12 | 1  | 8   | 5   | 9  | 7  | 7  | 4 | 10 | 8 | 35    |      | 50%  | LEB      |
| B | 6  | Daniel P    | 11 | 10 | 6   | 3   | 8  | 0  | 6  | 4 | 6  | 9 | 38.25 | 60%  |      |          |
| B | 7  | Conner B    | 11 | 10 | 7   | 4   | 8  | 11 | 7  | 2 | 8  | 2 | 33.75 | 80%  |      |          |
| B | 8  | Jozef W     | 11 | 3  | 8   | 0   | 11 | 7  | 7  | 0 | 7  | 7 | 33    |      | 40%  |          |
| B | 9  | Rebekah R   | 11 | 4  | 7   | 2   | 12 | 11 | 6  | 9 | 12 | 3 | 49.75 |      | 75%  |          |
| B | 10 | Gary T      | 11 | 4  | 6   | 9   | 8  | 5  | 6  | 3 | 7  | 7 | 57    | 100% | 5%   |          |
| B | 11 | Scott D     | 11 | 0  | 8   | 0   | 11 | 9  | 7  | 7 | 9  | 6 | 57.75 |      | 75%  |          |
| B | 12 | Fern B      | 12 | 1  | 6   | 8   | 8  | 8  | 6  | 4 | 8  | 1 | 51.5  | 100% | 50%  |          |
| B | 13 | Jared C     | 12 | 9  | 6   | 11  | 8  | 5  | 6  | 7 | 7  | 0 | 45.25 | 75%  |      |          |
| B | 14 | Devan H     | 13 | 3  | 8   | 3   | 11 | 1  | 7  | 1 | 9  | 2 | 43.5  |      | 60%  | LEB      |

|          |           |              |    |    |    |   |    |   |   |   |    |   |       |      |      |          |
|----------|-----------|--------------|----|----|----|---|----|---|---|---|----|---|-------|------|------|----------|
| <b>B</b> | <b>15</b> | Michael S    | 14 | 6  | 9  | 3 | 12 | 4 | 8 | 8 | 13 | 0 | 65    |      | 100% | SpLD     |
| C        | 1         | Kelly Anne S | 11 | 0  | 7  | 6 | 10 | 2 | 6 | 8 | 9  | 5 | 31.75 | 100% | 30%  | Dyslexia |
| C        | 2         | Bridget D    | 11 | 7  | 6  | 6 | 9  | 3 | 6 | 5 | 8  | 8 | 103   | 100% | 50%  | Dyslexia |
| C        | 3         | Conner G     | 12 | 10 | 6  | 3 | 10 | 2 | 6 | 3 | 7  | 6 | 47.5  | 50%  |      | Dyslexia |
| C        | 4         | Adrian W     | 12 | 9  | 6  | 2 | 9  | 6 | 6 | 2 | 9  | 1 | 52.25 | 100% | 30%  | Dyslexia |
| C        | 5         | Sean M       | 14 | 4  | 9  | 1 | 13 | 6 | 8 | 7 | 12 | 2 | 75.75 |      | 100% | Dyslexia |
| C        | 6         | Adam K       | 14 | 1  | 6  | 2 | 14 | 0 | 6 | 2 | 14 | 0 | 60    |      | 100% | Dyslexia |
| C        | 7         | Isobel H     | 11 | 1  | 10 | 0 | 12 | 6 | 9 | 5 | 13 | 2 | 35.5  |      | 90%  |          |
| C        | 8         | Matthew C    | 11 | 8  | 7  | 7 | 10 | 2 | 7 | 4 | 9  | 6 | 68    | 100% | 25%  |          |
| C        | 9         | Ashley A     | 11 | 5  | 7  | 6 | 10 | 7 | 7 | 1 | 8  | 6 | 48.25 |      | 50%  |          |
| D        | 1         | Ceadain M    | 11 | 9  | 6  | 2 | 7  | 1 | 6 | 1 | 6  | 4 | 43.25 | 50%  |      | SpLD     |
| D        | 2         | Alice S      | 11 | 1  | 6  | 8 | 10 | 6 | 7 | 1 | 11 | 4 | 70    |      | 100% | SpLD*    |
| D        | 3         | Samantha H   | 11 | 5  | 6  | 5 | 10 | 6 | 8 | 2 | 14 | 0 | 90    |      | 100% | SpLD*    |
| D        | 4         | Toni B       | 12 | 1  | 6  | 6 | 10 | 6 | 6 | 3 | 10 | 0 | 75.75 |      | 100% | SpLD*    |
| D        | 5         | Liam H       | 12 | 7  | 6  | 3 | 10 | 2 | 6 | 1 | 8  | 7 | 96    |      | 85%  | SpLD*    |
| D        | 6         | Katie W      | 11 | 10 | 7  | 6 | 8  | 8 | 6 | 9 | 8  | 3 | 9     | 50%  |      | SpLD*    |

\* = Statemented





