
DIXONS MANNINGHAM READING MASTERY REPORT

SECTION I – CONTEXT

In December of 2025 I was asked by the National Institute for Direct Instruction (NIFDI) to visit Dixons Manningham Primary School in Bradford. This was an exciting opportunity to visit a school that had chosen to implement the primary Direct Instruction (DI) programme *Reading Mastery: Signature Edition* in the earliest years. *Reading Mastery* has shown vast gains in student performance in several schools in the US, but had not been used in the UK prior to 2019, when the Manningham implementation began. I was keen to see if the spectacular student success observed in the US could be replicated in the UK, or if there was something inherent in the regional difference that had made this impossible.

Dixons Manningham Primary is a large primary school with 430 students. It is in one of the most deprived wards in the UK: 29% are on free school meals (FSM). On entry to Reception, the earliest grade level, most students are already two years behind age-expected attainment. Language is the biggest barrier to student success: many students have English as an additional language (EaL), with 33 different languages spoken in the school. 98% of students are from an ethnic minority group. 13% of students have special educational needs (SEND).

SECTION II – STUDENT & STAFF SUCCESS

Manningham has seen considerable student success since implementing *Reading Mastery*. Their DI journey began several years ago when they implemented the remedial programme *Corrective Reading*. *Corrective Reading* was used for the bottom 20% of students in Years 4, 5 and 6. Staff reported improved student fluency and confidence coming out of the programme, but wanted to address the root cause of the low performance in the early years. They implemented *Reading Mastery* in September 2019 for Reception Year.

Here are the gains students have made since *Reading Mastery* was implemented:

- Before *Reading Mastery*, sixty students placed into *Corrective Reading*. After it was implemented, the number of students placing was less than ten. This shows that by putting an effective programme in place from the start, schools can virtually eliminate the need for later intervention.
- After the COVID lockdown, students who were in *Reading Mastery* had regressed the least. Because of this, the following year the implementation was extended to Years 1 and 2.
- In 2019, 45% of students met the 'Expected Level' in the Standard Assessment Tests (SATs); the first *Reading Mastery* cohort (2025) achieved 71%. In 2019, 10% of students met the 'Greater Depth' standard, the highest achievement category for the tests; the first *Reading Mastery* cohort (2025) achieved 35%.
- The school has repeatedly increased the standard of their Key Stage 2 curriculum to meet the high performance of students exiting *Reading Mastery*.

SECTION III – CHALLENGES AND HOW THE SCHOOL HAS RESPONDED

The school faced several barriers to implementing *Reading Mastery* successfully. One was the size of the groups. The programme specifies that groups should be small in the lower levels (between six and twelve students per group). This required a high number of staff to be used to teach the programme. The school worked around this issue, deploying teaching assistants to meet the staffing need.

Another issue was the difference between American and British English. Sometimes, language such as ‘pitcher’ for jug or ‘football’ for American football would be used, which is understandably confusing for students. However, in lessons the coach prompts the teacher to explain briefly the meaning of the word, so that the confusion is eliminated and the lesson can continue at pace.

The Phonics Screening Check became another issue the school had to find a solution to. By the time students did the Check in June of Year 1, some of them had not finished the sounds sequence of *Reading Mastery*. Therefore, the school put on additional phonics lessons to teach students the missing sounds and to prepare them for the Check.

Some of the sounds taught in *Reading Mastery* are different to those taught in other programmes. Because of this, there was a period of adjustment as the staff saw the students reading successfully despite the differences.

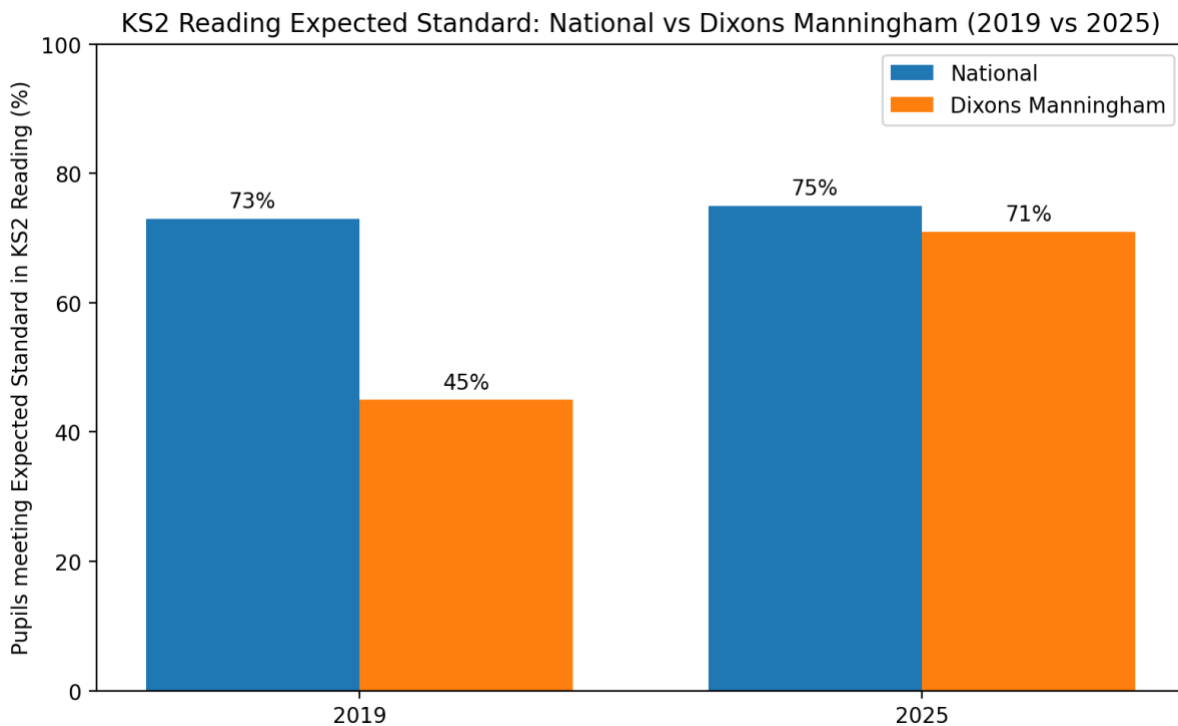
Finally, the school found the materials expensive. However, they still decided to put the students first and purchase them.

As mentioned above, the school has faced several barriers to the implementation of *Reading Mastery*. However, they have consistently found solutions to problems to ensure students receive a high-quality curriculum.

SECTION IV – CONCLUSION

Reading Mastery is a transformational programme for students’ reading ability and, ultimately, their lives. Indeed, no other programme has the same level of research validation and student results. Manningham has taken pioneering steps to implement this programme at the earliest year as core instruction for all students with support from NIFDI, something no other school in the UK has done. As a result, their students have gone from strength to strength. It is rare that a school needs to repeatedly revise its curriculum in Key Stage 2 because it is not advanced enough, but that is what happened at Manningham.

The school has been successful in closing performance gaps. Below is a chart showing the change in Manningham’s student performance vs. the national average in 2025 compared with 2019:



The national benchmark was stable, so the improvement cannot be attributed to a wider systemic rise. It was *Reading Mastery* that made this difference for the students. It’s also important to note that this is only the first cohort of students: usually it takes a few years for instructors to become fluent deliverers of DI and for leaders to arrange the support pieces to maximize the effect of DI. It may well be that student performance is accelerated beyond the national average in future years.

As mentioned, Manningham has seen considerable student success as a result of implementing *Reading Mastery*. The future is bright and exciting for a school that took a leap and is now reaping the benefits of their bravery!

Jon Owen
Kent, England
5th March 2026