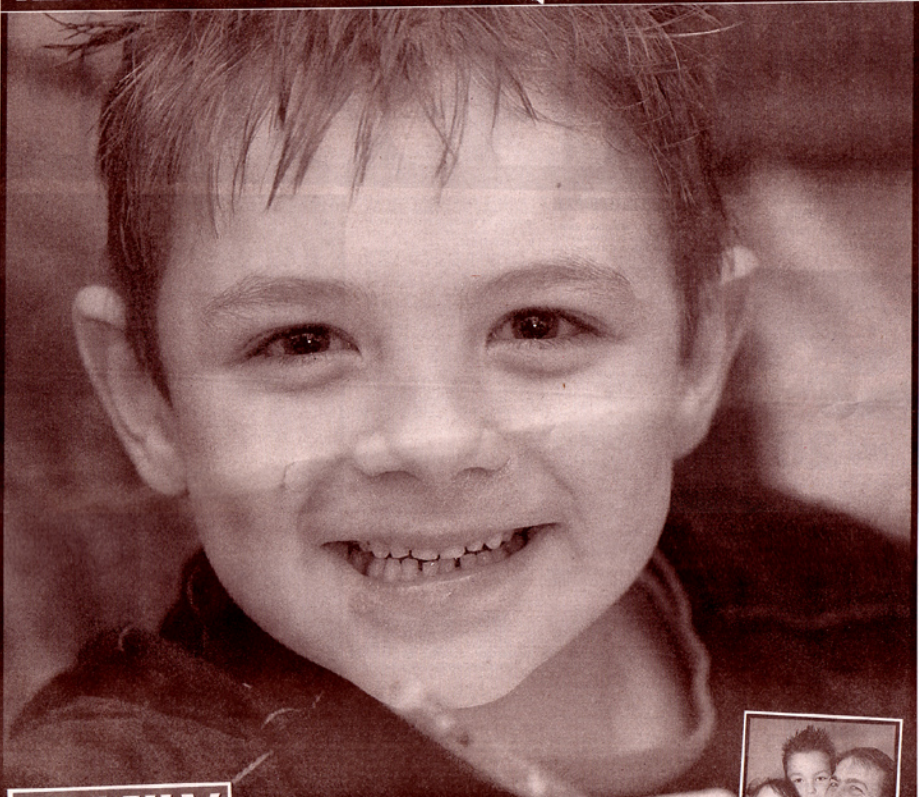


READ ALL ABOUT IT! KIDS WHO CONQUERED A FEAR OF BOOKS



FAMILY life

THERE is nothing Josh Gunn likes better than curling up with a good book.

But just seven months ago the seven-year-old would throw a tantrum if his mum or dad tried to interest him in reading.

Even the mention of a bedtime story made him angry — because until he was six, Josh couldn't read.

"He was not interested in reading," said mum Joanna, 30. "He would get to a mood, or chuck a major tantrum. He wouldn't even listen to a story. He knew he couldn't do it, which made him very frustrated. But now he will pick up a book or read in bed on his own and he loves being read to."

Joanna and her husband, Darren, 33, from Exwick, noticed that Josh was having problems learning to read in his first year at Pochesyes First School.

"We noticed that he wasn't coming along as well as he

should have been when he started school in September 2003," said Joanna. "Back then we were told he was below the national average, but they would keep a close eye on him."

"But by July 2004 he still couldn't read. He really struggled with it."

Josh's nine-year-old sister, Bethany, loved reading and when the couple's youngest daughter, Laura, now five, started school she was soon ahead of her older brother.



BOOKWORM: Sam Andrews, pictured with dad Paul and sister Madison, struggled to read at first. Main picture: Josh Gunn, who used to hate reading books.

JOEY WILCOX (2) F01462_WW_02

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READING RIGHT

FOUND APPROACH

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Even one-to-one attention didn't help Josh overcome his reading difficulties. It was only when the school put Joanna and Darren in touch with trained remedial reading tutor Susan Goddard that they started to notice a change.

Susan specialises in helping children learn to read using a special method called the Sound Reading System.

In July last year, Josh began attending hour-long sessions every week with his parents.

When he started he couldn't read a word — seven months on he has nearly caught up with the other children in his class at school.

What Josh achieved since he's been with Susan has been phenomenal, said Joanna. "He's done amazingly well — he's a completely different child."

"He's come on in leaps and bounds and gone from being shy and reserved to being very confident and robust."

Josh not only gained through being able to read and write properly, he's gained confidence outside school. He's always been very friendly and excitable, but it's like he's a whole new child.

Joanna and Darren accompany Josh to the sessions so that they can help him with the homework Sue gives him.

"It's very helpful," said Joanna. "Laura has benefited as well — when she comes home with her homework, I can help her too."

Josh goes every Thursday for an hour during school time because he's too tired after school.

"We did try one after-school session but because it's quite intense he was shattered at the end of it. What Susan achieves in an hour is fantastic."

"He will keep going until she says there's no more she can do and he's where he should be. It will be fantastic when he gets there."

Susan is the only person teaching the Sound Reading System in the Exeter area.

The programme is based on the work of Professor Diane McGuinness, author of *Why Children Can't Read*, and works by breaking words down into synthetic phonemes, or different sounds.

"The children are taught to build up letters from their individual sounds all through the word," said Susan.

"It starts from the simplest units of sounds and builds up into sounds that are made from two, three or four letters. For example, the word 'weld' is made up of just two sounds, but the first 't' is made up of four letters — a, l, g, and h."

There are approximately 44 sounds in the English language, which can be used in a maximum of 170 different ways.

"We progress from the very simplest sound very quickly and build it up from there. The children make their own sound dictionaries. I also use word cards, which they sort into different sounds. There's a pattern to it — it's a step-by-step approach. Children are very logical, and they can see it makes sense."

Susan, a mum-of-three from Exwick, began researching different methods of teaching reading when she discovered her oldest son, now 18, was dyslexic.

"About five years ago I came across *Why Children Can't Read*. It opened my eyes to my son's difficulties. I became interested in the teaching of reading and read everything I could get my hands on."

"Schools use something called the 'whole word method' as part of the national literacy strategy. It's a mixture of methods with a minuscule amount of phonics in it. Children are asked to guess a word by the first letter, or the picture next to it."

Susan joined the Reading Reform Foundation, an organisation which promotes teaching using synthetic phonics, and is also the author of a website: www.dyslexics.org.uk.

AST year she trained to teach synthetic phonics at Oxford.

"A very important part of the programme is that it needs significant parental involvement," said Susan.

"They stay and watch the lesson so they know what the procedures are. There's a good hour's homework involved, which they do with the child."

"It's hard work but working together is effective and it works really fast. That encourages the parent and the child and within two to three lessons they can see it's working."

"Using this method, all children will learn to read. The only times it will not happen is if a child is profoundly deaf or has really severe learning difficulties."

Susan is surprised when parents report a complete change in their child when they have mastered the skills she teaches.

She said: "When children are late in learning to read, their self-esteem drops and most of the awful things that dyslexia is blamed for come into play. But it's a result of not being taught to read and write correctly from the very first day."

"To teach a child to read is, perhaps, the best gift you can ever give them. It's a cornerstone of our society — and children know that. Not being able to read causes problems — look at the number of people in prison who have reading difficulties."

"Children know that they need to be able to read. If you teach them how to read, they realise they are not stupid. That's when the transformation happens. They are no longer bored in class because they can't read."

"It's a terrible life for a child who can't read."

● Susan Goddard is the author of www.dyslexics.org.uk — which is approved by the DfES. She recommends that a child will usually need between 15 and 24 sessions to fully benefit from the Sound Reading System. She can be contacted on 01392 438914. For more information about Reading Reform Foundation, click on www.rtf.org.uk.



HOOKED ON BOOKS: Six-year-old Josh Gunn at home in Exwick, top picture, received inspiration from remedial reading tutor Susan Goddard, bottom



ORDSMITH: Sam Andrews used the Sound Reading System OLIVER SAUNDERS/ISTOCKPHOTO.COM

How Sam found a way with words

AUL and Jo Andrews from Exwick hardly recognise their seven-year-old son, Sam. Until July last year, Sam couldn't read. His worried parents had him tested for dyslexia, at the tests came back negative. Meanwhile, Sam became withdrawn and frustrated. But seven months on, after arriving to read using the Sound Reading System, he is a different child.

"He can go on the computer now," said Jo. "Before he had to ask me because he couldn't read instructions."

"He's not asking us for help all the time any more. It's nice to now he can do it. You only have to quickly explain it to him and he can carry on."

"At Christmas he read a joke at a cracker which was a big eye because he could never do it before. He read it to his man and got it right."

"Little things like that mean a lot to him. It's a giant step."

Although Sam enjoyed being 'waded' at school, his parents added that he was having trouble reading.

year and would bring home books," said Jo. "We would sit down and read with him and he wouldn't have a clue."

"He used to get frustrated. You would read a sentence with him or even three or four words. The next sentence would begin with the same word and he wouldn't know it."

"We tried doing extra work with him but he just wasn't interested. He didn't have the confidence to learn it. He could spell his name and 'mum' and 'dad' but that was about it."

"It seemed like it was a mental block."

"He just couldn't open that door. He had no less schooling than anyone else. In any other aspect he was a normal boy."

Paul and Jo were concerned because their other three children, Alexander, 13; Louis, 12 and Madison, four, did not have any problems at school.

Despite all their efforts, Sam seemed to be slipping even further behind his classmates.

"We didn't know where to go," said Paul.

When he first started the lessons, he could only know about three. Maths he could do in his head. They did the SATs last year. His English couldn't even be marked — he just didn't know what he was doing. His score for English was zero."

Foxhays First School, where Sam is now a year-three pupil, suggested that Sam might benefit from sessions with tutor Susan Goddard.

"Since starting the sessions in July 2004, Sam has not only learned to read but has a whole new lease of life."

"That was six months ago and now he's up to his reading age."

"It's wonderful. He can sit and read a sentence. You can read what he's trying to write now. In July he couldn't even spell 'he'."

Paul added: "He's a totally different lad now."

"He's come on leaps and bounds. A couple of weeks ago he got a badge from the school saying 'I'm a good reader'. He was so pleased."

Sound Reading System

THE Sound Reading system, used by tutor Susan Goddard, works by breaking the English language down into 44 separate sounds (phonemes):

- /a/ — as in — mat
- /ae/ ape, baby, rain, tray, they, eight
- /ai/ square, bear
- /aɪ/ air, fast
- /ə/ peg, bread
- /e/ sweet, me, beach, hay, dog, gym
- /ea/ hear, bear
- /i/ pig, light
- /iɪ/ pig, wanted
- /iʊ/ like, wild, light, fly
- /o/ log, want
- /oo/ bone, cold, boat, snow
- /y/ coin, boy
- /oo/ book, would, put
- /ow/ fork, ball, sauce, law
- /ow/ down, house
- /u/ pig, glue
- /uɪ/ burn teacher, screw, first
- /ue/ blue, moon, screw, tune
- /uy/ boy, rabbit
- /ɜ:/ cat, key, duck, school
- /ɔ:/ chip, watch
- /ɒ/ dog, ladder
- /f/ fish, coffee, photo, tough
- /g/ gate, egg, ghost
- /h/ hat, white
- /j/ jet, giant, cage, bridge
- /k/ lip, ball, sample
- /l/ min, hammer, comb
- /m/ nut, cream, knoce, gnat
- /n/ ring, sink
- /p/ pin, happy
- /w/ queen
- /r/ rat, cherry, write
- /s/ sun, dress, house, city, mice
- /ʃ/ ship, mission, station, chef
- /t/ tap, letter, debt
- /θ/ thrush
- /d/ shirt
- /v/ vet, screw
- /w/ wheel
- /x/ box
- /z/ zip, zoo
- /z/ zip, zoo, sneeze, is, cheese
- /ʒ/ treasure