

# Encourages children to read books of their own choosing to suit their ability

## COULTER PRIMARY SCHOOL, S. LANARKSHIRE

### Scale of the challenge

The 28 pupils who attend Coulter Primary School come from a very diverse background. Reading ability is varied with some pupils encouraged and supported at home while others have less support and opportunity.

Getting reluctant pupils and those with less ability to take an interest in literature was challenging - but it was the plight of a single child that did most to encapsulate the scale of the task. He had, says Miss Cruickshank, a high intelligence, "but probably the worst case of dyslexia I have ever seen, and I've encountered many."

It convinced her that for his sake, as well as that of other pupils, she needed to seek a radical new method of teaching. After examining the options she chose the online Accelerated Reader program from Renaissance Learning.

### Implementation

Coulter Primary began using the computer-based system in 2004 and when it did so, was the first of 13 small rural schools in its area of South Lanarkshire, to break from traditional methods.

The school is evenly divided between two 14-strong classes, class 1 for 5-8 year-olds and class 2 for pupils aged 9-11. The system was launched in class 2, with initially mixed results.

Caroline and the two colleagues assisting her found that though many pupils made rapid strides, some poor readers were not achieving the expected progress. To overcome the problem they decided in their case to turn things around – giving them the questions first then asking them to find the answers as they read, rather than have them read and then answer questions.

It worked. Soon all the pupils were reading the books, doing the quizzes, gathering points, demanding more difficult, more absorbing challenges.

They spend 20 minutes a day silent reading, with individual attention where required from Caroline and her colleagues, and there is particular emphasis on taking books home and involving parents.

## **Results**

In the two years since it was introduced, virtually all the children who have used Accelerated Reader have made significant progress – with one nine-year-old found to have a reading age of 13.

Children who showed little interest in the written word – flicking over pages, making their boredom plain – now eagerly compare notes with their friends, discussing different authors' styles as well as plot and characterisation.

The school now has the largest library for a small school in the area, and Caroline spends a large part of her budget adding to it.

Furthermore, parental support has increased, with children being encouraged in their home reading, and parents wanting to know what more they can do to help.

## **What teachers say...**

"To put the whole thing in a nutshell", says Caroline, "Accelerated Reader is great – brilliant, in fact.

"It encourages children to read books of their own choosing to suit their own ability at their own, steady pace. Building up points towards individual targets is a key element but there is no pressure on them."

"The outcome is that they enjoy reading so much more. They want to press on to more serious, challenging works and develop comprehension and retention they would never have had before. Even under-achievers made comparatively major strides."

"I have recommended Accelerated Reader to colleagues in other schools in the area because it works. The progress at Coulter is proof of the pudding."