

Results show steady upward climb in ability!

DOON ACADEMY, AYRSHIRE

Scale of the challenge

Doon Academy, a 400-pupil secondary school at Dalmellington, in East Ayrshire, is in one of the most deprived areas in Scotland. It is a factor that has had a serious impact on the educational backgrounds of its pupils.

Many of the children joining the roll are poor readers, which presents an immediate problem when it comes to teaching large parts of the curriculum. For them to gain the full benefit from their education they need to have their reading skills improved virtually from the moment they step into the classroom.

Implementation

When the school's librarian Kirsten Bax, joined the staff in 2000, one of the first briefs she was given by her line manager was to follow-up material that had been received about Accelerated Reader. Kirsten duly investigated and reported back that she thought it sounded like a very good idea.

The wheels were set in motion. Extra funding was applied for and secured and a pilot was launched in January 2003, with a single class in the first year trying the system for a term.

So well did it go that after the Easter holidays Accelerated Reader was rolled out to the whole of the intake, covering around 70 children, and at the start of the 2004 academic year it was extended to a further 80-odd pupils in S2 as well as a small group of 14-year-olds in S3, for whom reading was particularly difficult.

In addition it was opened up to the school's feeder primaries to give youngsters about to join an early introduction. In rotation, four classes of Primary 7s (ages 10-11) take one period a week for seven weeks, meaning that where Accelerated Reader is concerned, when they arrive at their new school they "hit the ground running".

Money has been found to buy sufficient new books to bring the quiz-match up to almost 1,400 – "but you can't rest at that", Kirsten points out. "You also need funds for duplicates, and to replace books that have been lost or damaged."

Just as important as building up as large and wide a range of Accelerated Reader titles as possible is, in her view, the acquisition of the associated Star Reading program, which she feels provides an easier means of matching pupils to books than national test levels.

And, for anyone as involved in running the system as she is – “it’s essential to have the Accelerated Reader Quiz Manager program. It dramatically cuts down the paperwork.”

Results

All the English teachers reported significant and progressive improvement in reading ability from the introduction of the pilot scheme onwards, particularly among older boys who had previously shown little motivation.

Using national test levels as a benchmark, Kirsten did a comparison of non-Accelerated Readers, Year One Accelerated Readers and Year Two Accelerated Readers.

She then presented the figures to a major Scottish educational seminar. “They showed a clear and steady upward climb in ability”, she says. “It was the proof of what we already knew, that the system was giving us positive results, and it was quite uplifting.”