

“I would definitely recommend AR other schools”

DOWNHAM FEOFFES PRIMARY SCHOOL, ELY

Scale of the challenge

Motivating children in Key Stage 2 to read regularly is always a challenge for primary schools, irrespective of the school’s catchment area.

In deputy head Jenny Maynard’s experience, Key Stage 1 is very well catered for with reading schemes which enable pupils to progress their reading step by step. But in Key Stage 2 it was more difficult to ensure that the children were choosing books at the right level of challenge.

When Jenny became deputy head at Downham Feoffes three years ago, she immediately introduced Accelerated Reader to address this issue: in other words, to provide a graded reading programme for Key Stage 2.

“I had used it at my previous school, and thought it was the ideal tool to fill this gap,” she explains. “We had a very similar intake of children, with the same motivational issues, so I was confident it would be effective.”

Implementation

Jenny began with Years 5 and 6, then a year later added Years 3 and 4. She also introduces the programme to Year 2 pupils who have completed their reading scheme, to keep them progressing and give structure to their reading.

“It helps pupils build up their skills in a structured way,” she explains. “It also provides a lot of information for the teachers.”

At Downham Feoffes, Accelerated Reader is not used during the Literacy Hour, which is devoted to meeting specific curriculum objectives. All classes have additional dedicated reading time, which may include group reading, individual reading and the opportunity to take quizzes. Pupils are also encouraged to read when the register is being taken and at other times during the day.

“Children need to be reading daily,” Jenny says. “It’s also important that they read aloud regularly or they lose their fluency – so I encourage them to take the books home and if their parents are too busy, I tell them to read to their teddy bear or their pet.

“The lovely thing about this is that it’s real books they’re reading.”

Results

Jenny believes that any new initiative takes two-three years to embed fully within a school, so it is still early days. However, it has already made an impact.

In 2005, the first complete year of using the program, everyone in Year 6 obtained Level 4 in their SATs and 50 per cent reached Level 5 – a significant improvement on the previous year. Progress has continued at this level since.

“Some children in particular have made huge improvements to their reading,” says Jenny. “It’s especially motivational for boys, who tend to be very competitive and like to keep up their percentage in the quizzes.

“One boy who was below average in his reading made such progress that he came top in his year’s SATs results. I would definitely put that down to Accelerated Reader.

“As a teacher, you would try anything to get pupils to read,” Jenny concludes. “We have found this is very motivational, and I would definitely recommend it to other schools.”

What teachers say...

“It’s very motivational, particularly with the boys”

“It’s graded, so it helps pupils build up their skills”

“For some children, it’s been the best thing since sliced bread!”

What pupils say....

“I’ve read all the books at my level now”

“I really like the quizzes – especially when I get a better score than my mates!”