

# **Competitiveness is a great motivator!**

## **GIRVAN ACADEMY, AYRSHIRE**

### **Scale of the challenge**

When first years arrive at Girvan Academy in Ayrshire, they are “fresh and happy”, and quite content to take part in the school’s standard reading programme. However by the time they reach the second year at age 12, their interest has waned considerably.

“They tend to fall away in the second year, especially the boys – they’re not keen to take books out any more,” explains librarian Carol Morrison. “It’s an awkward age. They want to keep face with their friends, and reading doesn’t fit their perception of what they should be doing.”

Carol discussed the issue with other librarians, and found it to be a common problem. The school’s head of English was also convinced that they “needed to do something” for second year English.

She identified the Accelerated Reader program, as a possible solution, and after seeing it in action at a local school, decided to adopt the system at Girvan.

### **Implementation**

Initially Carol and her colleagues introduced Accelerated Reader for the top three English classes in the second year (English Year 8). They subsequently included the bottom English class and Carol also uses it with the Support for Learning group when they visit the library twice a week.

Each second year class has a weekly scheduled period in the library. When they arrive, they choose a book to read and any who wish to can take quizzes. Carol also dedicates two computers to quizzes every lunchtime, and has been amazed to find how many pupils come in during their break.

Girvan has designed its own points scheme so readers of all levels can compete on an equal basis.

Each class is set a target depending on ability. If a pupil achieves the target for their class, they get one point; if they exceed it, their score is doubled. This means a lower level reader who surpasses the target for his or her class has achieved the same score as a high level reader who does the same.

Pupils can win vouchers which give them the opportunity to read magazines during English or to spend a lesson playing games on the school computer – both of which have proved extremely motivating!

## **Results**

After for just six months, Carol is confident both interest and achievement in reading are moving in the right direction. The English teachers are also convinced that the standard of the second year pupils' reading has improved.

"There has been a really good uptake, especially from the boys – particularly those we wanted to target," says Carol. "They come into the library at lunchtime to do the quizzes, which is something I didn't expect."

Carol found the use of computers helped to attract pupils initially. However, what has kept their interest has been the competitiveness, with pupils wanting to get their name at the top of the board and to win prizes.

At the end of the school year she plans to run the Star Reader test to give an objective measure of progress made, and will compare results with those of pupils not using the scheme.

"The fact that we know they are actually understanding the book also helps," she explains. "They really do have to read it to get through the quiz."

"The level of book they are taking is also indicative of their progress. Some groups used to take the easiest book they thought they could get away with – but not now. They are going for books in their own range, which is what we wanted to achieve."