

# **Instant results give immediate positive boost and motivator to do better**

## **HOLMESDALE TECHNOLOGY COLLEGE, SNODLAND**

### **Scale of the challenge**

To Caroline Roche, Research Centre Manager at Holmesdale Technical College in Snodland, Kent, reading standards among the 650 pupils left room for improvement.

She admits her view was coloured by the fact that she had been instrumental in introducing Accelerated Reader in two other schools and had seen its merits close up.

"I'm not saying Holmesdale was particularly poor", she says, "because it wasn't, and I bore in mind that there had been a general decline in reading levels across the country.

"But having seen the enhancement Accelerated Reader from Renaissance Learning could attain, I determined to use it to raise the levels of the entire cohort. In this school we have a mixture of pupils from different backgrounds and with different reading abilities, but I felt that all needed to improve and the adaptability of Accelerated Reader was fundamental to achieving that."

### **Implementation**

As a head of department Caroline applied to the college's senior management team for funding for the computer-based program and for additional books – the 8,000-volume library being central to her domain.

They were happy to support her – with the result that in March, 2005, the system was introduced to 250 first year pupils aged from 11 and 12.

With her previous experience of Accelerated Reader to build on, she first tested all 250 children to establish at what level of reading they should start.

From them she chose a "sample" of 30 to re-sit the test three months later. By then half had been using the system, and the new check showed that within that short space of time they had advanced their reading age by between six and 18 months. The other half had not been using the program and were found to have either stayed where they were or gone backwards, some by up to a year.

It was more than ample evidence for Caroline to demonstrate to her senior managers that the money and the effort had not been misspent, and with the start of the new term in September the whole of the first year was put on to Accelerated Reader along with around 60 special needs pupils.

Altogether 40 teachers and more than 300 pupils are now on the system, with small prizes given out as an additional incentive to the certificates awarded for reaching targets.

## **Results**

For Caroline, the extraordinary success of one special needs pupil alone is in itself enough to justify Accelerated Reader's introduction.

"He was virtually off the scale as a reader", she recalls. "In fact he had huge difficulty getting through a single paragraph. But in his first test he got 10 out of 10. To say it brought him absolute delight and spurred him on to do better and better is a huge understatement."

Increase in motivation has been marked across all levels, with the healthy rivalry created by the winning of points a key factor, along with the attraction of online quizzes. "It is natural for children to want to compete", she says.

Caroline has also introduced a motivator of her own. She arranges books along the library shelves in book level order. "Children can see themselves progressing as they move along the shelves", she says, "and they can see the end point. It is a marvellous encouragement."

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

"There is no question Accelerated Reader has brought about a notable raising of standards. Its success springs from the fact that it makes reading positively enjoyable. Children actually want to read, which these days is quite extraordinary."

"One of the most rewarding aspects from the teachers' point of view is that they can see something positive for the effort they put in."