

# Reading ages are going up, particularly for those who use to struggle

## **KNOCKANDO PRIMARY SCHOOL, MORAY**

### **Scale of the challenge**

The challenges of teaching in a rural primary school of 47 children in Scotland are very different from those of a large inner city primary. Children do tend to have a book on the go, according to head teacher Lindsay Scott – perhaps because life in the widely scattered community lends itself to a culture of reading.

However, this does not mean that everyone is a fluent reader, or finishes their books quickly. When Lindsay joined the school, one of her aims was to raise attainment in reading amongst her pupils, especially the boys, and move everyone towards reading materials at the upper end of their capabilities.

She had already seen the Accelerated Reader system of graded books and quizzes used in other local schools to develop reading abilities. When she joined Knockando, she found that it too had invested in the system, and it was already installed on one of the computers. After going on a course to familiarise herself with the details, she could begin using it immediately.

### **Implementation**

In preparation, books in the library were colour-coded by ability and then those for which a quiz was available were also marked with a star. The same system is used at all the nine schools which feed into the local secondary school, which itself uses Accelerated Reader, thus helping children continue their progress after the transition to secondary school

There are two classes at Knockando, for Years 1-4 and Years 4-7 respectively. Lindsay, who teaches the older class, introduced the system to a small group and then gradually rolled it out across the class. With the library set up, pupils could simply go to the library and choose their own book from day one.

A set time is allocated to personal reading every day, and there is a dedicated longer time once a week where pupils can talk about the books they're reading.

The school has now invested in quizzes for books at all levels appropriate to its pupils, and so the scheme is now being introduced to the younger class. By Christmas 2006 Lindsay expects all the children from Year 2 up to be participating.

She plans fundraising to help the school buy more quizzes, as there is always a demand for more material. She also says that she has "poached ideas" and obtained book recommendations from other schools.

Her next step, when time allows, is to add the non-fiction books in the library to the colour-coded scheme, to help children expand their reading range still further.

## **Results**

Lindsay has already seen a difference in pupils' reading since she began the programme. Twice a year she assesses reading levels. "The indications are that reading ages are going up, and in particular those of the pupils I was particularly keen to target," she says.

"The children loved it from the start. They like to do the quizzes and get points. When they see someone else doing a quiz, they start to get a little competitive, especially the boys, and want to do the same thing themselves."

In a school like Knockando, there is a huge spread of ability. Pupils therefore find themselves competing against children in different year groups. To help them track their own improvement, she is now beginning to set individual points targets, and finding this is really popular.

"We also have to explain why different books score different numbers of points," she says. "Interestingly the less able readers often insist on selecting a thicker book so they will score lots of points."

"We explain to them that they can still get points for reading thinner books, and of course then they can change their books more quickly which encourages them."

"I am really quite keen on the scheme, and I definitely want to expand it."

**What teachers say...**

"The children are getting through their books more quickly"

"They really like using it"

"It will be even better when we get more quizzes"

**What pupils say...**

"We like doing the quizzes and getting points"

"Have I got more points than him now?"