

Helps pupils understand what they're reading

MARGARET McMILLAN PRIMARY, BRADFORD

Scale of the challenge

When Margaret McMillan primary school moved to a new building with a purpose-built ICT suite, Pam Green, deputy head and ICT co-ordinator, grasped the opportunity to improve reading comprehension, boys' in particular, by introducing Accelerated Reader.

The school is set in one of the poorest districts in the UK. All of its 520 pupils have English as their second language, with their native tongue being the predominant language used at home and with no-one to discuss their reading with to help stretch their vocabulary.

Pam is now a part-time gifted and talented co-ordinator. Roughly ten per cent of each year group is defined as gifted and talented.

Implementation

Two thirds of the school is now using the reading software, managed by nine teachers and a number of teaching assistants. The other third can access it one lunchtime per week when Pam opens up the ICT suite to any pupils hungry to learn.

"We implemented it throughout all year groups in key stage 2. In year 4 we started off with two of the more able children, who are now training the other children in their class.

"We are now also using it with the brighter ones in year 2, to make reading special for the gifted and talented pupils and support their transition into the next year," explained Pam.

The school is also looking to extend the programme to pupils with learning difficulties.

Successfully passing quizzes means that children get certificates in assembly. "I also announce new book titles in assembly, which means the children then pester their teachers for them," added Pam.

Accelerated Reader is part of the school's wider programme of encouraging reading. The school welcomes a guest author once a year, including local writer Penny Dolan. The librarian runs competitions and dresses up as characters from books. The school also runs workshops for parents to discuss how to help with reading.

Results

"We set out to use Accelerated Reader to encourage regular reading and get the children excited about reading. We can confidently say we have seen this outcome, particularly among the boys," said Pam.

"It's amazing – boys became hooked who would not have done so without the quizzes. As more quizzes have been produced we have re-stocked the library, spending £20,000 on books and resources," she explained.

Pam says the motivator, particularly for boys, is that pupils get instant feedback. "Even if they don't pass the quiz it's still encouraging as it leads to dialogue between teacher and pupil as they discuss the feedback and the need to read carefully, thinking about the subject matter and anticipating the questions.

"Lots of children can decode information but not always understand it. This shows them how to use text to find answers."

£20,000 was spent on new books and resources for the school library last year, taking the book quota to 11,100, the equivalent of 21 books per pupil.

What teachers say...

"Accelerated Reader has encouraged the children to want to read, particularly boys."

"The children like the instant feedback and sense of achievement."

"There is a good range of books at all ability levels and to suit a variety of reading tastes."

"We are totally committed to Accelerated Reader as it is such a positive tool."

What pupils say....

"I'm having a race to see who passes the most quizzes!"

"We have lots of nice new books to choose from."