

Stops children from skimming books, they read them properly now!

SOUND PRIMARY, LERWICK, THE SHETLANDS

Scale of the challenge

With 293 pupils, Sound Primary is the main town primary school in the Shetland Isles. Its pupils had most advantages, except that of an established reading habit.

They had many reluctant readers, boys in particular, who would not sit and read a book readily, at school or at home. Boys lagged behind girls, and if they did read, they hardly ever chose fiction. Their level of attainment needed to be raised and their reading diet broadened.

When more and more parents approached teaching staff with the same question – how to get their child to read - deputy head teacher Kate Grieve introduced Accelerated Reader in a pilot exercise.

Implementation

This exercise with the reading management software started with 20 pupils and, as it proved its worth, was expanded to cover 40 pupils aged around eleven.

Each pupil is tested for their reading level, and then allowed to choose and read books suited to their individual level from a reading list. Then they completed a computer-based quiz to test their comprehension and reading level.

They score points and are directed to more books at increasingly high levels as their reading improves, raising their exposure to new types of books – the harder books yielding more points and so appealing to their natural desire to compete.

Dovetailing with their daily diet of reading practice in school and inspiring them to read during their own time, they were soon making good progress with the quizzes and advancing through the book-levels.

Logging onto a suite of wireless, classroom-based laptops to take the quizzes proved irresistibly attractive to boys in particular, who also relished the instant feedback reports, which they would show with pride to teachers and to parents and file in their private folders as a reminder.

Teaching staff meanwhile started to monitor the changing individual and class attainments to see who was progressing and who needed extra support.

Results

Within just a few short months, real achievements have been noticed, Kate says. Some children are reading so much more that they are completing books and taking quizzes twice a week.

Parents who were "all for Accelerated Reader" at the outset, say that their children are coming home delighted to have achieved scores of up to 90 per cent in the quizzes.

"One mum said she had never seen her son read so much", said Kate. "We are seeing a constant stream of pupils going in and out of the school library and they are using the municipal library outside of school time more, showing us what they have read during their holidays."

The reading habit has become ingrained and pupils are reading properly. "They know they cannot just skim the book but need to have understood it to get the points. One or two pupils at the start suggested the quiz was at fault and we had to diplomatically suggest they read the book more closely," said Kate.

One girl in primary 7 who would only read about animals – the Animal Ark being a favourite – has just started Treasure Island, a book she would never would have tried before, and is now the proud owner of around 80.5 points as a result of taking on more challenging books. Her reading growth has soared as a result.

Pupils now find that taking books home is a pleasure, not a task. Teachers say that one boy, who would previously never read a book, now enjoys it so much that he has finished his seventh book in just two months.

Creative writing skills have spiralled upwards at the same time, as pupils' advanced spellings and vocabulary skills open up their horizons and deepen their confidence.

Kate agrees with other teachers who say that the new experiences they are gaining through different books are showing them that there is "a whole new world out there" literally enriching their lives.

Self esteem and increased concentration are two more by-products of this method. Kate describes another little girl who started at level 4.3 but is now at level 5.7, having read ten books in 2 months, and "justifiably proud of herself".

The fact that pupils have to focus on the work, having to read properly and not skim, has helped concentration levels overall.

What teachers say...

"To get a scheme where all ranges of ability are catered for and where everyone can succeed and progress at their own rate is very worthwhile."

"We can see the difference in the children."

"One particular boy's imaginative writing has come on so well, particularly after reading Harry Potter. We can see what he has learned being translated into his imagination."

What pupils say....

"It's great - I love it."

"My parents are dead proud of me now."

"I want the next Harry Potter book for Christmas."