

Builds a reading culture where children can't help but get hooked!

STUKELEY MEADOWS COMMUNITY PRIMARY SCHOOL, HUNTINGDON

Scale of the challenge

Accelerated Reader had to work harder here to create a love of reading but that is just what it has done. Now a gentle word to reluctant readers that they are on 'Karen's reading nag-list' is enough to nudge their noses right back into a book.

Initially it was introduced to help manage reading, particularly in key stage two where reading was becoming unmanageable, and where the reading habit was not being developed, even though the school was awash with literacy strategies.

Staff needed something that would drive itself, and Karen Stanton, Co-ordinator of Reading, set about swotting up on Accelerated Reader to squeeze every drop of value out of the reading management software.

Implementation

It had been bought by her Head who had seen it in other schools, before Karen joined. She spent time refining how they used it, and introduced other changes. She says every second of modification has paid off because the program now runs itself.

Within six weeks of using it in classes, with pupils taking quizzes, earning points and certificates, she and her colleagues were delighted to see "a snowball effect".

The discovery that pupils would read in order to have the satisfaction of taking the quizzes was a revelation, and it all took off from there.

The school created a dedicated, centrally-located Accelerated Reader Library for key stage two pupils. This houses all of the books and materials used with the software, including materials for pupils with special needs. Pupils come here to get their latest books wearing passes. This replaced an earlier method where children below their chronological reading age would need to collect their books from a lower year-group, which had an unfortunate, stigmatising effect.

In fact the school has introduced many bright ideas. Reading teams where children read and earn points as teams, winning team prizes and privileges – like no-uniform days and picnic trips out of school – re-energise the approach and keep the youngsters reading.

Buddy-reading exercises, where year six pupils read with year three children, create a very powerful sense of reading across the year groups. "It's all about reading for a purpose and helping one another and this positive spirit infects everyone", says Karen.

The AR library is managed by the older pupils, appointed as managers and assistant managers, who take pride in the look and feel of the snug, warm, inviting place, quick to chide pupils abusing the place and just as quick to recommend engaging books to them.

Teaching assistants keep a booking-in diary which logs who has done quizzes and who has not and what progress is being made. With diagnostic reports printed out, staff can intervene with children who are not participating in full, urge parents to provide more support and chivvy everyone on to do better.

These reports remove the guesswork on progress and provide a concrete record to share with parents.

Parental involvement is actively encouraged. That means sharing unwelcome news when needed says Karen. Part of the power of the reports, she says, is that they can substantiate reasons for slow progress and support a decision to lower the book level for a struggling reader, when an ambitious parent might otherwise apportion blame.

Results

Karen believes they would never have had such a clearly measurable, manageable record or progress without Accelerated Reader.

"As professionals, we can say categorically which pupils are reading. We can track when things go wrong and take remedial action much faster.

"With the core children, where schools tend to face the greatest challenge, we can also see which are staying at the same level."

But for Karen the real result is that a real reading habit has been established; not just the mechanical page-turning that boys tend to fine-tune, but higher-level reading skills such as inference and deduction.

Accelerated Reader has motivated boys to engage in books knowing they will have to answer a question on them, which in turn has prompted them to think about the books.

Once the reading habit starts, she believes, children do get hooked in, with or without the quizzes. Once they have the confidence to read, they want to read. What really helps is the ability to choose their own books, actively thinking about the kind of book they would like, taking tips rather than orders from staff and other pupils.

Tell-tale signs are there, with children choosing to read books during breaks, and sharing their thoughts on books with others during lunch when they might otherwise linger over other distractions. This is a school that has got the book-bug.

What teachers say...

"We've got a real handle on reading now."

"When you see year 6 pupils, who would normally be de-mob happy running the AR library with real pride, offering to paint it even, you know you have created a positive reading environment."

"When the Lemony Snicket books came out, they went around the place like wild-fire. In fact there was a waiting list for them."

"Pupils are building up their reading repertoire of what suits them. It's a bit like having your own personal reading consultant."

"This gets them reading a wider range of books."

What pupils say....

"I love the quizzes, and its great we can choose our books. My dad says he wish he was me because it wasn't like this when he was at school."

"I'm only 7 but I'm reading books that my big sister is reading, which is ace."