

Evaluation of First Minister's Reading Challenge 2018/19

Annex 2 Primary School case studies



First Minister's Reading Challenge

Scottish Book Trust
inspiring readers and writers

Castleton Primary School

Background

Castleton Primary School is a primary school in Glasgow. The school has just over 400 pupils almost all of whom (90-95%) live in the 20% most deprived areas in Scotland.

This case study was developed following discussions with three P7 pupils and two members of staff - a class teacher and the Literacy Leader of Learning.

Getting started

Castleton Primary School has been involved in the Reading Challenge for three years, having embarked on its Reading Challenge journey in 2017, during the first year of the Challenge. At the outset, the aim of the Reading Challenge in this school was to foster a sense of enthusiasm for literacy and to help incorporate reading into the daily routine.

“When we started, nobody really liked reading and we had a horrendous reading scheme.”
Staff

With the support of a dedicated member of staff who has a role as Literacy Leader of Learning, the school has sustained Reading Challenge activities over the past three years.

“She works hard, encouraging us all to take part and having her there to support us, makes staying involved easy.”
Staff

Activities

At the core of the activities in Castleton Primary is a shared reading programme between upper and lower primary pupils, which was inspired by the Bookbug Picture Book Prize. The programme initially paired pupils from P1 with a P7 buddy to engage in weekly reading and book-based activities. The older pupils received a training session from a librarian at the Mitchell Library to build their confidence in leading the programme. Pupils were encouraged to take leadership and plan activities for themselves based on the books they were reading together. In order to facilitate regular shared reading sessions, the school altered its timetable to make sure that upper and lower classes were available at the same time each week.

This year, pupils have contacted authors directly and had an author visit their school. The school has also used reading to provide soft starts to lessons after break and lunch time, which they have found works well.

More broadly, the school has:

- used Reading Passports;
- delivered 'Stop, Drop and Read' and Everyone Reading In Class (ERIC) time; and
- engaged in activities on World Book Day.

In the community, the school has maintained a good relationship with the local library, taking pupils for regular visits and author events organised by the library.

In the past year the programme has developed and adapted to suit pupils' interests. More recently, the programme has expanded across the school and there is now a shared reading programme between P6 and P2 pupils as well.

Impact

Over the past three years, the school has seen a noticeable improvement in pupils, in terms of confidence, wellbeing, teamwork, leadership and literacy.

Pupils said that they enjoyed the shared reading activities and working with younger pupils. They enjoyed spending time with the younger pupils, exploring the illustrations in the picture books and encouraging the younger pupils to choose their own books.

"Every Friday we go down to P1 and read to them. Then the following week we do a workshop around the book."

"I love reading to the P1's."

"It's always nice reading with someone else."
Pupils

They also enjoyed reading a wide variety of materials, including books, newspapers and material online. They felt that reading for pleasure was encouraged in their school, and that it was important to read.

"There's been a lot more reading in the classroom. I think the teachers are encouraging us to read more."
Pupil

Pupils noted that in the past few years there were more reading opportunities for them at school. They enjoyed reading and felt that as well as having fun, it had a relaxing effect. They also reported that reading had wider benefits for them, such as helping them feel calm, fuelling their imaginations and improving their vocabulary, reading and writing skills.

"When I was in P5 we started doing ERIC [Everyone Reading in Class] time. It wasn't just about getting us to read it was calming us down."

"I've got a good imagination, but I have a lot of laziness. I've been inspired by the books we've read."
Pupils

One pupil said that before the Reading Challenge he had not been interested in reading. But accessing books about football, which he was already interested in had inspired him. Another pupil noted that the books she had read at school gave her new perspectives on the world. In particular, a book about bullying had helped her to understand the different perspectives of the characters involved. Staff also noted that fictional books had helped them to talk to pupils about sensitive issues such as sectarianism, racism and sexuality.

“I like when there is a moral behind it.”

Pupil

One pupil at the school has lived in Scotland for one year, having moved from a non-English speaking country. She has developed a passion for reading and has read over 100 books. For this pupil, the Reading Passports provided a useful way to track her reading, and reflect on the number and types of books that she had read.

Through the shared reading programme, pupils were able to demonstrate their teamwork and leadership skills by working together and planning out their activities. The programme also helped develop relationships between pupils in upper and lower classes.

“I believe that the FMRC has helped to improve my children’s confidence and wellbeing, I also believe that it has encouraged a number of children to engage with literacy in a way that they never would have otherwise. For example, reading aloud, creating characters, exploring genre, choosing books for another child etc.”

Staff

They reported that younger pupils were demonstrating preferences and sharing these with their older buddies. Upper primary buddies have shown an improvement in reading skills and creativity. They showed enthusiasm for reading expressively to their buddies, with some putting on voices and going into character. All pupils were developing confidence in reading aloud and sharing recommendations. And in particular, staff noted that pupils with Additional Support Needs had shown a lot of improvement in their reading ability.

“I have P7 pupils who are achieving second level now, where at the beginning of the year I was unsure they would make it. I believe this has a lot to do with the time they spend reading aloud to their buddies.”

“I genuinely believe that a number of children in my class are only achieving second level now because of their work as a Reading Buddy.”

Staff

Staff also reported that young people were becoming more confident to try new and different things, beyond what their peer group was reading.

“Their book choices were made based on what they friends liked or books that looked like ‘P7 books’ and now they don’t care about all of that and choose books because they are genuinely interested. They are also not ashamed to try new things and explore new genres.”

“I have been at the school since 2005 and I have never seen the love for reading so high.”

Staff

Staff reported that pupils appeared more confident overall, and were engaging better with literacy in class – demonstrating that they were becoming active readers. Over the past three years the school has seen an incremental increase in literacy levels, measured through the Progress in Reading Assessment (PIRA). Staff also felt that pupils were understanding the value of reading for pleasure, and that this was most impactful for the most disadvantaged pupils, some of whom would not have books at home.

“They’re understanding that reading will help them learn.”

“We’re a long way from closing the gap, but we’re going in the right direction.”

Staff

For themselves, staff felt that there had been benefits in terms of improving knowledge and awareness of the benefits of reading for pleasure and professional development. The Reading Challenge has encouraged them to keep up-to-date with children’s literature and had provided the opportunity for them to highlight the school’s activities through blogs and social media posts.

“It has been an excellent few years taking part in the FMRC and has felt like yearlong CPD – communicating and working closely with outside agencies as well as my colleagues.”

Staff

What worked well

The launch of the Reading Challenge coincided with a number of influencing factors for the school, including a strong push towards literacy within the local authority, a newly refurbished school library, a new Head Teacher and an award of £250,000 through the Pupil Equity Fund. These factors facilitated the school’s engagement in the Reading Challenge, and have helped staff to sustain their involvement over the past three years. Staff noted that there was total buy-in from senior management and that they were allowed the freedom and flexibility to deliver activities without constraint.

“We’ve stayed involved because of the [school’s] focus on literacy, closing the attainment gap and raising attainment overall.”

Staff

Pupils, particularly in upper primary, had a wide range of needs and were reading at different levels. The shared reading sessions were designed to be flexible, and therefore accessible to all pupils, including those with Additional Support Needs. The sessions ensured that pupils were accessing books at their reading level, whilst still being part of a wider group activity.

Staff noted that younger pupils benefitted from the ‘one on one’ time and attention from their older reading buddy, as they had a chance to focus on their specific interests.

“It’s been a really rich experience.”

Staff

Challenges

Parental engagement in reading continues to be a challenge for the school. Staff reported that some parents remain difficult to engage because of their own negative experiences and perceptions around school. However, some parents have come forward to support the school and a few have donated books to the school library.

What’s next?

Going forward, the school hopes to develop its library further. At the moment there is no formal lending system within the school library. To encourage pupils to read and to try new books the school hopes to develop a lending system and to hold book swap events.



First Minister's Reading Challenge

Scottish Book Trust
inspiring readers and writers

Sgoil Stafainn

Background

Staffin Primary School is a Gaelic medium school with an English unit, in the Highlands. The school has 25 pupils from around the local area, which is mostly croft land. It also has a nursery class, supporting 10 infants. The school has a small school library and receives regular visits from the local authority library bus.

This case study was developed following discussions with two teachers and 15 pupils in the school.

Activities

Staffin Primary School has been involved in the First Minister's Reading Challenge for three years.

Year 1

In the first year of the Reading Challenge, all pupils were encouraged to take part and to read as much as they could in Gaelic. The school also took this opportunity to re-organise the school library, creating a new, more usable space with the existing resources. P7 pupils were instrumental in organising the library and cataloguing books. Having the Challenge throughout the school created a lot of buzz and allowed pupils to feel part of big group activity, beyond their own class.

Year 2

In the second year of the Challenge, the focus was on the upper school and reading from a wider variety of materials and genres. In this year, the school introduced daily dedicated ERIC (everyone reading in class) time and ran a successful book swap event. Pupils were encouraged to take the lead and direct their own reading activities.

Year 3

During the third year of the Reading Challenge, the school continued with the activities from previous years. The new area of focus was on developing reading amongst the early years pupils through an upper and lower primary shared reading scheme. The class teacher could see the benefits of reading a story with pupils everyday, and wanted to make the most of story time for the youngest pupils in the school. One of the teachers also ran a survey with parents to find out about their awareness and understanding of the Reading Challenge. The survey received 11 responses and showed mixed levels of awareness of the Reading Challenge, but positive attitudes towards reading.

“Each year, we’ve tried to make it a bit different.”
Staff

Impact

For the youngest pupils in the school, daily reading and repetition of stories has led to an improvement in language skills and vocabulary. After just a few repetitions of the story, pupils in P1 were able to retell the story to their peers and engage in activities demonstrating their understanding of it.

“I definitely know their language has come on.”
Staff

Pupils said that they had enjoyed the Reading Challenge activities, and most pupils we spoke with enjoyed reading a lot. Pupils in upper primary classes said that reading for pleasure helped them feel happy and relaxed. They also felt that it helped them with their learning at school, particularly improving their vocabulary and speaking aloud. One pupil said that reading helped her to learn new words, and that she felt more confident using new vocabulary which she had learned through reading for pleasure.

“It cheers me up sometimes, when I’m sad.”

“I think it helps me to use my new words.”

“It gives you a lot of imagination and it gives you ideas for drawing.”
Pupils

Younger pupils said that reading was important to help develop their vocabulary and because they knew they would have to read to access information as they got older.

“It’s good for you to read, because if you do, you’ll learn all the words.”
Pupil

Most pupils said that they were reading more at home, with some saying they read every night before bed, and one pupil saying that she reads every morning as soon as she wakes up.

What worked well

The whole school events worked well to involve pupils at all stages and because of the small size of the school, these events were relatively straightforward to arrange. Pupils said they had enjoyed the group, class and whole school activities, as it gave them a good opportunity to mix with pupils in the school.

“I like doing the group reading in class because you get a chance to hear other people reading.”
Pupil

One of the key areas of success has been letting older pupils take the lead in terms of planning, organising and delivering reading activities. Upper primary pupils were given autonomy to decide how they wanted to pursue Reading Challenge activities, and the focus on reading for pleasure gave one pupil the opportunity to take on the role of school librarian. This pupil took the initiative to organise the small school library, to maintain it and monitor borrowing.

One teacher noted that although it was sometimes challenging to give the pupils full control over activities, it had worked well and allowed pupils to flourish and develop their skills.

“You’ve got to let go and let them take ownership.”
Staff

Overall, staff felt that the Reading Challenge was a useful tool to engage pupils in reading and to provide a focus for reading and literacy activities.

“It gives you a focus.”

“It’s just a fun way to bring reading into the classroom.”

“It gets kids excited about something.”
Staff

Challenges

Initially, there was a challenge in ensuring that all staff were on board with the Reading Challenge. One of the teachers in the school was hesitant and was keen to avoid a focus on the quantity of books a pupil had read, rather than the quality or variety of their reading. It was thought that an approach such as this may prove to be a further barrier to pupils who were reluctant to read for pleasure.

“I was hesitant to begin with ... I wasn’t sure that it was getting to the pupils that needed encouragement to read.”
Staff

However, the teacher was still able to engage her class in the Reading Challenge, in a flexible manner, using her own resources. In her class, rather than talking about reading books, the class uses various ‘texts’, which may be taken from anywhere, including books, magazines, comics and the internet. Pupils who struggled to read were encouraged to use audio alongside the text and to try a range of different reading materials. In this class, pupils were able to read for pleasure, and read for information, through project-based activities. The teacher felt that this approach had resulted in more confident and independent learners.

“The children are more confident and able and are producing better texts themselves.”
Staff

What’s next?

A recent survey conducted by a teacher found that very few parents were aware of the Reading Challenge, despite pupils being involved for three years. At the end of the 2018/19 school year pupils put on a special First Minister’s Reading Challenge celebration event, which was attended by 20 parents and grandparents. The school hopes to continue raising awareness and engagement with parents.

The school had conducted a baseline survey of pupils’ attitudes towards reading in 2016. Having completed three years of focused reading activities, they plan to conduct a follow up survey, to see if and how the results have changed.

For next year, the school is also hoping to encourage pupils to explore reading independently, and submit individual challenges highlighting their interests.



First Minister's Reading Challenge

Scottish Book Trust
inspiring readers and writers

St John's Primary School

Background

St John's Primary School is based in Ayr and has just over 270 pupils. Pupils in the school come from a range of backgrounds. Over half of the pupils in the school are from the most disadvantaged areas in Scotland, and many speak English as an additional language. The school is the only Catholic denominational school in the local authority area and takes pupils from a wide catchment.

This case study was developed following discussions with 11 pupils from P3, P5, P6 and P7, one support for learning teacher, five class teachers, the deputy head teacher and two parents.

Getting started

St John's Primary School has been involved in the Reading Challenge for the past three years. The initial impetus to engage in the Reading Challenge came from the local authority, as the programme was seen as a good way to engage pupils in literacy based activities. School staff were keen to try something new. They hoped to encourage pupils to read more and foster a positive attitude towards reading.

The school faced particular challenges at both upper and lower primary levels. In lower primary, many pupils transitioning from nursery have speech and language difficulties, and limited vocabulary. And in the upper primary classes, teachers found that there was not a positive attitude towards reading, particularly amongst boys. The school hoped to use the Reading Challenge to address these issues and to improve literacy across the school.

"We want to give them the best possible start."
Staff

Activities

The school began its Reading Challenge journey with a shared reading programme between P1 and P6 pupils. The school already had a buddy programme and a 'buddy passport', which made it easy to incorporate the Reading Challenge passports.

During the second year of the Reading Challenge, the shared reading scheme continued and the focus of activities was mainly P6 pupils, with a range of individual and whole class challenges to promote reading for

pleasure. One of the key activities was a campaign run by pupils to raise awareness of their local community library and to encourage people to use it. In recognition of their efforts and progress, the school was awarded with the Pupil Reading Journey award for all of class P6B.

This year, the Reading Challenge has been extended to the whole school. Pupils in P7, who had been heavily involved in the Challenge the previous year delivered an assembly to the whole school to share ideas and recommendations for how other pupils could take part. The whole school has been involved in reading activities on World Book Day and Book Week Scotland. One of the key activities was a whole school creative writing project, with each class in the school contributing a chapter to create a book.

“This year we have been making a bigger deal of World Book Day and Book Week, and we’ve seen better engagement from the pupils.”
Staff

To engage pupils at all levels, and develop home-school links, the school invited parents of pupils who speak English as an additional language to read with their children in their native language. The school has also invested in a range of bilingual books to support these pupils. Although designed for bilingual readers, the books have proved popular with a lot of pupils. In one instance, two pupils with the same native language were paired to read together, one from the upper school and one from the lower school. The younger pupils had been very reluctant to read at all, but with the support of the older pupil is now confidently reading aloud in groups and at assembly.

Impact

Pupils spoke enthusiastically about the Reading Challenge activities at school. They said that they enjoyed reading and told us they read from a wide range of materials and genres. In particular, they enjoyed the shared reading activities between P6 and P2 pupils, at both stages.

Pupils said that they liked choosing what to read and voting on which books to include in their classroom libraries. They felt that that reading had become a lot more enjoyable now that they were reading ‘actively’, for example, reading in unusual places or developing games around reading. Pupils also said that reading made them feel calm and relaxed, and helped them develop their imaginations.

Staff and parents said that they had noticed a marked increase in pupils’ enthusiasm and motivation to read. More pupils were choosing to read for pleasure in their free time and pupils were actively discussing and choosing reading materials. They also felt that the increased motivation made pupils more willing to engage in targeted interventions, such as Reading Wise or Catch Up Literacy.

“They want to share what they’ve read.”
Staff

“It’s made reading fun, not a chore.”
Staff

“Now he’s choosing his own books and he just never tires of them.”
Parent

Staff said that over the past three years they had noticed an improvement in pupils’ reading ages, particularly amongst pupils that were previously unwilling to engage in reading and those who speak English as an additional language.

“I thought reading was boring until the activities came along.”
Pupil

“We’ve seen their English coming on, and their vocabulary is improving.”
Staff

Staff felt that that the increased confidence and enthusiasm for reading had a knock on effect on their writing, spelling and vocabulary. Scottish National Standardised Assessment (SNSA) tests for P1, P4 and P7 pupils have shown some of these improvements, particularly in talking and listening skills amongst P7 pupils. Staff also said that pupils were more confident in approaching the test and engaging with the questions.

“They’re able to access more of the questions.”
Staff

“I think it’s increased their enjoyment of reading, even when it’s for work, like reading comprehension.”
Parent

Pupils themselves also commented that reading for pleasure had helped them improve their grammar, vocabulary, writing skills, speaking skills and confidence to read aloud.

“I think it makes you better at reading in front of people, and not feeling judged.”
Pupil

In addition, a pre and post Reading Challenge survey conducted with P6 pupils found that most pupils said they were more motivated to read for pleasure and felt more confident about reading.

Staff noted that the increase in literacy skills gave pupils better access to the rest of the curriculum. And some staff had noticed this change, for example, pupils demonstrating increased ability to access problem solving questions in numeracy, or non-fiction texts for their subject topics.

“It opens up a lot of doors.”
Staff

For staff themselves, the Reading Challenge had encouraged them to read more, and had introduced them to a range of new children’s authors. Seeing the positive effect of reading for pleasure, some teachers have incorporated reading activities into homework, and used stories as a way to engage pupils in discussions around mental health and growth mindset.

“It’s reminded me how good books are!”
Staff

Parents we spoke with had noticed an increase in reading activities at the school, and felt that their children were reading for pleasure more than before, both at school and at home. They felt that the shared reading programme had worked well, and supported children to develop good relationships and to develop their confidence.

“It builds relationships, there’s a closeness to reading that other activities don’t have.”
Parent

One parent noted that the key seemed to be finding reading materials that the pupils were interested in. She felt that her child became a more confident reader and speaker when he engaged with topics that he was passionate about.

“For my child, the biggest thing has been the book presentations. At first, he didn’t want to do it at all, and by the end of the year he loved doing it.”
Parent

What worked well

Making reading activities fun and introducing a competitive element worked well to engage pupils in the first instance. For example, the ‘Read in a Strange Place’ competition engaged all pupils, including those who prior to the Challenge would not have chosen to read for pleasure. Pupils said that they liked turning their reading activities into a game or a challenge.

Staff said that they had encouraged pupils to link their reading to their hobbies and interests. This approach had worked well and had encouraged some reluctant readers to engage in reading. A few young people who had previously refused to engage in reading are now avid readers, having found reading materials that they enjoy, such as football programmes. The more reluctant readers, and pupils with Additional Support Needs were also encouraged to read through initiatives during Dyslexia Awareness Week. The school invited an author with dyslexia to visit and speak to pupils about their work. Pupils also reported that they enjoyed author visits to the school, and attending BBC Authors Live in Glasgow.

The Reading Challenge has provided useful and practical opportunities for parents to engage with the school, either through targeted interventions, access days at school or by supporting their children with reading at home. Staff felt that the Reading Challenge provided an informal, non-threatening way to invite parents to engage, and to reduce the barriers for parents, particularly those who did not feel positive about their own school experiences.

The Reading Challenge fitted in well with the school improvement plan and other school activities and initiatives, such as the Award of Ambition and the Pope Francis Faith Award. The school has also taken the opportunity to link the Reading Challenge activities with Bookbug and Read, Write Count. In addition, a recent HMIE inspection identified that the school should continue to support pupil leadership. Staff felt that the Reading Challenge allowed them to develop this quite organically, through the Library pupil voice group.

“It seamlessly blends into the other initiatives; it doesn’t feel like an add on.”
Staff

Staff and pupils felt that giving pupils a leading role in the Reading Challenge worked well. Pupils from the Library pupil voice group suggested ideas for reading activities and were supported to implement them throughout the year.

“They instigate it, we just facilitate it.”
Staff

Over the three years the school has amended activities to ensure that pupils have the best possible experience of reading. For example, staff noticed that ERIC (Everyone Reading in Class) time did not always work well to begin with, as pupils felt they had to read a novel, and they were not sure what to choose. The school now does regular ‘Stop, Drop and Read’ sessions which work very well. Pupils are excited, engaged and confident to choose their own reading materials.

“Everybody does it and you could hear a pin drop.”
Staff

What's next?

The school library is being refurbished, using funds allocated by the local authority. The school hopes that this will provide a new, exciting and welcoming space for pupils to enjoy reading at school, as well as a new range of books to choose from.

The school plans to continue delivering Reading Challenge activities, and to further develop leadership opportunities for pupils through reading. A key area of focus next year will be training new staff members to ensure that all staff are up to date.

The school also hopes to begin working with parents at an earlier stage in the year, to allow more opportunities throughout the school year.

“It's now virtually embedded in the school. I think if we tried to stop, the children wouldn't let us.”

Staff



First Minister's Reading Challenge

Scottish Book Trust
inspiring readers and writers

Our Lady's RC Primary School

Background

Our Lady's RC Primary School is based in Dundee and has 176 pupils. The school serves a broad demographic of pupils. More than half of the pupils live in the 20% most deprived areas in Scotland and more than a fifth are from minority ethnic backgrounds. A higher than national average proportion of pupils are bilingual or speak English as an additional language. The school also has enhanced provision status within the local authority and serves pupils with a range of Additional Support Needs, including pupils with physical and sensory impairments. The school has an inclusive ethos whereby all pupils are included in mainstream lessons, and activities are delivered in a way that allows all pupils to take part.

This case study was developed following discussions with 16 pupils, the principal teacher for literacy and health and wellbeing, and the head teacher.

Getting started

Three years ago, the school was approached by Scottish Book Trust to be part of a pilot programme for the Reading Challenge during its first year of delivery. Throughout the pilot year the school was supported with funds and resources from Scottish Book Trust and the activities were recorded through blog posts.

The Reading Challenge has always fitted in with the school's wider aims to promote literacy and numeracy. In particular, it fits in well with the focus on enjoyment of reading within the School Improvement Plan.

The school has continued to deliver reading-based activities for pupils, however the intensity of activity has changed due to a range of circumstances.

Activities

During 2018/19 the school has maintained some of the activities that were first implemented through the pilot programme in 2016/17. These included:

- dedicated time for reading and tooth brushing after lunch;
- Junior Librarians; and
- delivering activities during World Book Day and Book Week Scotland.

Pupils have 15 minutes of time at the end of lunch break to brush their teeth and read a book. This activity ties into Health and Wellbeing for pupils and allows reading time to be embedded into the school day.

All pupils have a small library in the space outside of their classrooms and time allocated within the school week to access it. The library is managed by P7 pupils who are trained as Junior Librarians with responsibility for overseeing lending.

Key partnerships with community organisations this year have been with local libraries, a supermarket and a care home.

Pupils took part in a range of activities during Book Week Scotland. One of the key activities was a whole school creative writing project. Each class in the school wrote a chapter for a book based on the topics they had been studying in class. The chapters were put together to create a book. And pupils now hope to perform their story as part of the 'Stage a Scottish Story' initiative.

Staff felt that reading was embedded into the school day, and all pupils read or are read to at some point in the school day. For early years pupils this is usually through picture books, and upper primary pupils have a class novel.

Partnership working

The Reading Challenge has helped the school to build and sustain good relationships with community partners.

The school is located between two public libraries. One is more accessible than the other for pupils with Additional Support Needs, so the school uses both. Pupils have monthly visits to the library and also attend for special events.

The school also has a good relationship with the local supermarket. Pupils were involved in fundraising to have a defibrillator installed in the supermarket and due to the close relationship that developed through this activity, the supermarket donated books to the school.

Primary 7 pupils regularly visit a local care home and engage with the residents. Some of the pupils have been reading with the older people during these visits, as part of a range of shared social activities.

Staff noted that the Reading Challenge provided a good opportunity for the school to develop partnerships. Over the three years of activity the Reading Challenge has facilitated visits to the school from high profile local role models such as the Lord Provost, Chief Constable, Chief Executive of the local authority and members of the local football team. These partners have come to the school to read to pupils and talk to pupils about their favourite books and the value of reading in their roles.

Parents have also been involved in supporting a positive reading culture in the school. As well as reading in English, bilingual parents have come into school to read in Polish, French and Italian.

Impact

Overall, staff felt that the Reading Challenge had helped pupils to read for pleasure more, to read more widely and to explore their interests through reading.

Staff said that developing a love for reading had allowed more pupils to access the curriculum across all of their subject areas and there has been a noticeable improvement in vocabulary.

Pupils have demonstrated a love for reading and it is an activity that they choose to do. For example, P7 pupils are not allowed to take tech gadgets with them on school trips. Initially some pupils found this challenging, however many are now happy to take a book for entertainment.

“They wouldn’t have picked up a book before...now the whole class is scrabbling for books.”

Staff

“I thought that books are useless, but now I understand that they can be interesting.”

Pupil

Pupils said that they loved reading and that they felt happy to come to school if they knew there would be reading activities. Some pupils said that reading helped them relax and they enjoyed being able to escape into another world through books. They also said that reading for fun helped them to learn, particularly with creative writing, spelling and vocabulary.

“It definitely helps me.”

“I’m starting to write my own stories.”

“It helps your imagination and it helps you with your writing.”

Pupils

Pupils also said that they enjoyed recommending books to one another. Some pupils had used their Reading Passports to reflect on their reading and rate books in order to recommend them to others.

Over the past three years, reading has become fully embedded into the school day, for both pupils and teachers. Staff felt that there had been a positive impact on themselves, in terms of developing a better understanding of the value of reading for pleasure.

“I’ve been teaching for 20 years and I always read to my infant children everyday...I did everything I was meant to do, because I was meant to do it. But now I know that there is an impact of doing this.”

Staff

This has led to staff actively measuring the impact of reading, rather than just delivering the activities. Through this monitoring they have a better understanding of the gaps, and can target initiatives where they are required. For example, writing and spelling have been identified as focus areas, and staff have worked to improve these through Reading Challenge activities, as children will readily engage in reading activities.

“With a love of reading that is absolutely embedded in the school now, that makes our job a lot easier.”

Staff

Sustaining activity

Being a pilot school during the launch year of the Reading Challenge helped kickstart activities and boost reading in the school. It also helped to raise the profile of reading, develop enthusiasm amongst staff and pupils and embed reading activities into the curriculum.

“Because of the initial year of involvement, the enjoyment and desire for reading is like day and night.”

“We have fostered a love of reading and our teachers have bought into it, which can be our biggest challenge.”

“It’s very nice to see teachers starting a lesson with a story. It shows that they place value on it.”

Staff

Staff felt that the ideas on the Reading Challenge website were useful and hope that these would be updated regularly.

The daily toothbrushing and reading time has worked well. The initiative allowed reading to become embedded into daily school activity. Staff also felt that it helped pupils ease back into learning after the lunch break, and helped them focus.

“It minimises down time and loss of learning time.”

Staff

However, staff felt that over time, some of the momentum of the Reading Challenge had been lost. And the level of support they have received during the second and third years of the Reading Challenge is different to that of their first year as a pilot school.

“It made us a bit more creative and adventurous...If we didn’t begin as a trailblazing school, it might not have taken off.”

Staff

Staff noted that the level of activity the school has maintained is primarily because the school has a principal teacher for literacy who has dedicated time to develop literacy initiatives and focus on attainment in literacy. Without this additional resource, which provides time for planning and preparation of reading activities, staff did not feel that classroom teachers would be able to engage in the Reading Challenge.

“There’s a lot of prep and planning that goes into everything behind the scenes.”

Staff

Challenges

The main challenge for the school this year has been the move to a new school building. The new building is over two levels, where previously the school was on one level with a very open layout. The move itself has disrupted some activities, and the design of the building has meant that some activities are not as easy to deliver as they had been.

Going forward

The head and principal teachers are keen to continue delivering innovative reading and literacy initiatives. Feedback from classroom teachers has been positive, and some have specifically asked for additional reading activities. For example, some staff have requested ERIC time to be reinstated and early years staff have requested library visits to be embedded into the early years curriculum.

This year the school has delivered a growth mindset project with early years and P1 pupils. Staff are keen to better understand the impact of reading and Reading Challenge activities on pupils transitioning from early years into primary school and from primary to secondary school.

The school is currently developing book bags to allow children to take home books, and encourage parental engagement in reading activities.