

Evaluation of First Minister's Reading Challenge 2018/19

Annex 1 Secondary school case studies



First Minister's Reading Challenge

Scottish Book Trust
inspiring readers and writers

Hillhead High School

Background

Hillhead High School is a secondary school in Glasgow. The school has just over 1,000 pupils, almost half of whom speak English as an additional language. The school serves a broad demographic of pupils, including over a third of pupils from the 20% most deprived areas in Scotland.

This case study was developed following discussions with seven S1 pupils, the head teacher, six English teachers and the school librarian.

Getting started

The First Minister's Reading Challenge in Hillhead High School was led and developed by two English teachers.

Hillhead High School has five core values: kindness, ambition, integrity, resilience and respect. The school aimed to tie the Reading Challenge into the values of kindness and respect, with a focus on mental health and wellbeing. Staff felt that these were important topics, particularly for S1 pupils transitioning into high school. And that beginning with S1 pupils would allow them to track pupils' progress over a number of years.

The focus areas also aligned well with the wider school and local authority priorities around mental health and development of growth mindset.

“We felt that focusing on mental health and wellbeing would be useful to guide them.”

“It really fits in with the school ethos, we are a nurturing school.”
Staff

In preparation for the Reading Challenge, the two key staff members attended the Scottish Book Trust Launch event and utilised resources from the Reading Challenge website that were relevant to their planned programme of activity. Staff used the Reading Challenge resources as inspiration

for their own personalised school resources. For example, they created their own version of the 'What I'm currently reading' poster for teachers. And as well as using the recommended reading lists, they encouraged pupils to create their own.

Activities

The Reading Challenge activities were primarily focused on S1 pupils, however the school also delivered some whole school activities.

The focus of all the Reading Challenge activities was mental health and wellbeing. Staff developed a book list with categories of relevant books. The list included a range of books at different levels and covered an array of topics, including sensitive issues such as anxiety, bereavement and body image.

Pupils were encouraged to select books from the list, or find books on their own which covered similar issues. After completing a book, pupils were encouraged to complete a light touch review card, which helped them reflect on how the book had made them feel. Pupils then received a stamp on their book reward card. Rewards were offered for whole classes and for individual efforts.

Reading Challenge activities for pupils included, completing book reward cards, producing a creative response to a book they had read and writing and filming segments for 'The Hillhead News'.

Pupils involved in the S1 book club have been key contributors to the Reading Challenge, sharing their ideas and encouraging their peers to read more.

At the end of the school year, staff began recruiting pupils to become S2 literacy leaders. They received 30 applications and after individual interviews, ten pupils were selected. These pupils will have a role in supporting teachers and leading initiatives to encourage reading for pleasure.

Activities for teachers involved displaying the book that they were currently reading, and personalised invitations to a staff 'Book and a Bite' event. This was a lunchtime event for staff to discuss what they were currently reading and swap books with one another.

A highlight for both staff and pupils was the 'Drop Everything and Read' session, held on World Book Day. There was a lot of excitement built up in advance of the session with creative notices and posters throughout the school. During the session staff captured people on film as they dedicated a period to reading for pleasure.

Across the school, all staff (teaching and non-teaching) were encouraged to display posters indicating what book they were currently reading. The school ran a Drop Everything and Read session.

Throughout the year staff awarded prizes not just for the number of books read, but also for the effort that pupils had put in. Prizes included a World Book Day party, movie screenings and invitations to a lunchtime Book Bar.

The school library and the local public library were involved in supporting Reading Challenge activities. The local library has helped to source books for the expanding school book club. In addition, the school librarian has an informal pastoral support role around supporting pupils with

LGBT issues and running an LGBT writers club. These activities have linked in well with the Reading Challenge theme of mental health and wellbeing.

Impact

Overall, the Reading Challenge activities have encouraged pupils to read for pleasure more than they used to and to increase their awareness of the range of books available.

Pupils told us that they enjoyed reading and that they often read for pleasure at school and at home. As well as giving them opportunities to read for pleasure, they felt the Reading Challenge had helped them access a wider range of books.

“I’ve never been into reading action or sci-fi, but I read *The Hunger Games* and now I love it, it’s one of my favourite books.”

“[Because of the Reading Challenge] I’ve been more open to books of any genre.”

“I like that the Challenge made me read things that I wouldn’t normally read.”
Pupils

A few pupils told us that they had not been confident readers or had not considered themselves ‘readers’ prior to the Reading Challenge. They now said that they enjoyed reading and self-identified as readers. A few pupils also commented on their peers, noting that one pupil in their class who never read books has now read more books than any other pupil.

“Everyone was encouraging each other to read...it was a nice environment to be in.”

“What encouraged a lot of people in our class was that there were prizes along the way.”
Pupils

A few pupils we spoke with said that they were not always keen or confident readers. However the Reading Challenge had exposed them to reading material that they were interested in and this has started them on a reading journey.

“I used to not like reading at all and now I’m obsessed with reading and I read all day, every day.”

“For me, I think, if you just find one book you like, that’s all you need [to get started].”
Pupils

Pupils noted that it was important to find books that were interesting, and at the right level for their reading ability. They felt that this was key to engaging people who did not read for pleasure.

Pupils demonstrated leadership and initiative through the 'Creative Response' challenge and by providing recommendations and suggested book lists for their peers. A few of the pupils we spoke with had been selected to be Literacy Leaders when they move into S2. They were excited by the opportunity and hoped to get more of their peers reading.

"I really enjoyed doing the Creative Response challenge.
It gave us a lot of open space to do what we want."

"I think it's really cool."

"I feel like a lot of people who don't read have no
incentive to read. They need someone to look up to,
and we're more relatable because we're their age."
Pupils

Similarly staff felt that the approach taken by the two key staff members helped rebrand reading as an activity that was "glamorous" and "cool".

Staff felt that the Reading Challenge worked well, and built on a strong reading culture and embedded activities such as S1-S6 paired reading and the book club. They reported that the competitive element of the Challenge activities encouraged boys to take part, and fostered a healthy competition between classes.

Staff reported that more pupils had joined the S1 book club, including pupils who would previously have been unlikely to attend a reading based club. The club has also seen an increase in the number of boys attending. While a very positive outcome for the school, the club now faces the challenge of sourcing enough books to meet demand. They also noted that the Reading Challenge activities got pupils involved in a range of literacy based activities, beyond reading.

For themselves, staff felt that the Reading Challenge provide a good opportunity for them to model a positive attitude towards reading for pleasure. It also helped staff develop relationships with pupils through a shared love of reading, as all staff were encouraged to display an "I'm currently reading..." sign on their door. Pupils said that they enjoyed seeing these and finding out what their teachers in different subjects were reading.

"It's opening a discussion about reading, with any
teacher from any subject."

"It was important for kids to see teachers reading and
modelling. It sets the tone."
Staff

Staff noted that there was already a strong reading culture within the school, but that this was limited to within the English department. The Reading Challenge brought reading into focus across the whole school, as well as shining a light on mental health and wellbeing issues that were relevant to all pupils.

The Reading Challenge has contributed to the wider work around literacy and health and wellbeing in the school. The selection of books has facilitated discussions on a range of sensitive and challenging topics, which staff felt was beneficial for young people transitioning into high school. They felt that the Reading Challenge allowed pupils to be introduced to the school values of kindness and resilience in a proactive and practical way, and to develop a common language based on those values.

“The whole thing has promoted a lot of discussion on these issues, which is really good for S1 pupils during the transition.”

“Because of the First Minister’s Reading Challenge, pupils are using books and the library to explore themselves and their feelings.”

“I liked the angle that it’s been linked to mental health and health and wellbeing, and the notion that reading gives you an escape route.”

“Encouraging reading to lessen anxiety with relevant, up-to-date texts has been brilliant.”
Staff

Staff mentioned one pupil who was a very reluctant reader. This pupil was interested in mental health and said that she wanted to work in the field. The Reading Challenge focus on mental health was the impetus for this pupil to begin reading for pleasure and staff felt that the activities helped her see the wide range of options available to her.

Pupils noted that reading helped them to feel calmer, happier and more relaxed. They also said that reading helped to open their mind and help them better understand people and the world around them.

“If I’m sad or something I can get into a book and kind of forget about it.”

“It’s a good break from your life. It’s a good place to go.”

“I think it can help shape your opinions about things, like seeing things from another side.”

“It gives you different opinions...I think your views can change if you read a book.”
Pupils

In order to track progress of pupils and to better understand the impact of the Challenge activities, the staff conducted a survey with S1 pupils at the beginning and end of the school year. The survey found that pupils reported increased motivation and enthusiasm around reading, with some feeling more confident and more able to help others.

What worked well

The school already had a strong reading culture with good levels of attainment in reading and a well used school library. The Reading Challenge provided a focus for literacy based activity and allowed the school to support pupils and develop their understanding of two of the school’s themes.

The two staff members leading the Challenge within the school delivered an information session to other staff at the beginning of the school year, to explain their plans and aims. They expressed

enthusiasm for the Challenge activities throughout the year and undertook a significant amount of preparatory work to ensure that delivery of Challenge activities did not add to their colleagues' workload. This approach enabled them to engage staff from across the school and to maintain a high level of support from colleagues and senior management.

“...all of the SLT [Senior Leadership Team] has been really, really invested...they've been really supportive.”
Staff

Due to the high proportion of pupils from disadvantaged areas, the school receives a significant amount of funding through the Pupil Equity Fund (PEF). Some of this funding was used to support the Reading Challenge through prizes, developing a library of health and wellbeing related books and restocking the English classroom libraries.

“There was a significant amount of PEF money for class books because the Head Teacher could see that there was a vision underpinning it.”
Staff

Pupils noted that they enjoyed reading through the Reading Challenge because they were able to choose what they read, rather than it being prescribed.

Challenges

The main challenge identified by staff delivering Reading Challenge activities was the lack of time. The two key staff leading the Reading Challenge dedicated space within their schedules as well as their personal time to plan and organise activities. This minimised the time and effort required by other staff to get involved. The lack of time available meant that staff were not able to fulfil all of their plans this year. However, they felt they now had a good foundation on which to base wider engagement with parents and the local community in the future.

The school librarian worked in close partnership with the two staff leading Reading Challenge activities. The key challenge with this partnership again was time, as the librarian is split between two schools, and is only at Hillhead for three days per week.

“We did have plans to do more community and parental engagement work, but we ran out of time!”
Staff

What's next?

During the final weeks of term the school will be holding its annual Health Week, which this year, will link closely with the First Minister's Reading Challenge activities. During Health week the school plans to hold a second Drop Everything and Read session and an outdoor reading session.

Over the summer holidays, staff will be taking pupils to Edinburgh attend the Edinburgh International Book Festival, visit the café where J K Rowling wrote Harry Potter and to visit some of the oldest book shops in the city. Going forward, the school hopes to:

- continue developing the health and wellbeing booklist;
- develop the role of Literacy Leaders for S2 pupils;
- work more closely with P7 pupils prior to transition;

- hold more Drop Everything and Read sessions; and
- develop further links with parents and with the wider community.



First Minister's Reading Challenge

St John's RC High School

Scottish Book Trust
inspiring readers and writers

Background

St John's RC High School is a secondary school in Dundee. The school has just over 1,000 pupils around half of whom live in the most disadvantaged areas in Scotland.

This case study was developed following discussions with the key contact, the school librarian, 12 S1-S3 pupils and five community stakeholders.

Getting started

The Reading Challenge in St John's RC High School was led by an English teacher with a dedicated role as Literacy Coordinator, funded through the Pupil Equity Fund. The school became involved in the Reading Challenge because pupils had reported that they did not read for pleasure very often. A focus group with pupils found that they did not enjoy their dedicated reading period and did not feel they were getting anything out of it. This prompted the English department and senior management to begin making changes to encourage reading for pleasure and to ensure that pupils were making effective use of their time at school.

Activities

The school has used the Reading Challenge to deliver a range of ongoing activities and one-off events.

To address pupils' reluctance to engage in the dedicated reading period, the school developed the Literature Circle programme. This was a whole class book group, engaging pupils through a range of fiction, non-fiction and graphic novel texts. The Reading Challenge lead worked closely with the local librarian to assemble a shortlist of options. Pupils then voted as a class to decide what they would read. The local library also helped source around 500 books, to make sure that there were enough for all pupils to have a copy.

The Literature Circles were delivered flexibly across S2 and S3 classes. Top set classes read the books at home and held open discussions during class time. Pupils in lower ability classes were supported to read the book during class and used a set of questions to guide their discussions.

To encourage pupils and reward those demonstrating improvements in their reading habits, teachers set up a Book Bistro in the library. Pupils were awarded with golden tickets to attend the Bistro during Book Week Scotland where they were served snacks and hot drinks, and encouraged to read or talk about what they had been reading.

On World Book Day pupils attended a Books for Breakfast event in the school library and received book tokens. All S1 – S3 registration classes took part in a challenge to create their favourite character out of a potato.

To further encourage pupils to read, the school developed a Literacy Leaders programme. Two pupils from each year group were appointed as Literacy Leaders, with responsibilities for championing the Reading Challenge activities.

Pupils from the school were also invited to voice their opinions on the development of a new App as part of a Scottish Book Trust Youth Advisory Panel.

One of the highlights of the Reading Challenge was the school Literacy Day. This was funded through the First Minister's Reading Challenge Creative Workshop fund and led by the Literacy Leaders. The Literacy day involved around 600 S1 – S3 pupils.

The inspiration for the Literacy Day came from a pupil who had read a book by a local author called Time Tram Dundee. The book provided the basis for a range of cross curricular literacy-based activities, including sessions delivered by the author.

Pupils took part in literacy based activities in their classes and out in the city. The school coordinated with ten organisations in the community including Dundee University, Dundee Science Centre, Dundee United FC, Verdant Works and McManus galleries.

Throughout the year pupils also took part in a range of activities including: book-based quizzes, National Poetry Day; the Scholastic Book Fair; P7 transition information evening; the Book Spine challenge; a reading lunch; Valentines Day book crush; shadowing the Carnegie Children's Book Awards and taking part in the Two Moons Festival. In addition, staff have been involved in a staff reading group, involving teachers from different departments.

Impact

Staff felt that the Reading Challenge had supported pupils to read more, read more widely and build their confidence. The Literacy Circle activities encouraged pupils to engage in group discussions and to voice their opinions. In some cases, pupils that had previously been shy or unwilling to engage were now eager to read aloud.

*"It gives the quieter ones a voice and a common ground between them."
Teacher*

The Literacy Day gave Literacy Leaders a real opportunity to organise, promote and lead an event for their peers. Pupils came up with ideas for activities and supported teachers to deliver the

event. They said that they had enjoyed the role a lot and felt that because of their work more pupils were reading and using the library.

“It was fantastic. It was an opportunity to see different parts of Dundee and the different sides of literacy, like listening and talking...it showed the interesting side of literacy.”
Pupil

Staff said that pupils were reading more books, and crucially, finishing more books than they had before.

“Pupils used to browse books, start them and then drop them. Now they’re finishing books that they never would have started.”
Teacher

“Everyone has found at least one book that they like.”
Teacher

Pupils noted that they and their peers were reading more. A few pupils said that most of their classmates did not enjoy reading, or would usually have chosen to do something other than reading in their leisure time. Due to the Reading Challenge activities, these pupils were now more inclined to read for pleasure and had a more positive attitude towards reading and English lessons overall. For example, they said that a lot of pupils were not keen on the Literature Circles to begin with. However after a few weeks it became a normal activity, and eventually most pupils became interested and enthused.

“It makes people who don’t read, get reading.”
Pupil

“It’s made people realise that reading can be fun.”
Pupil

“Our generation is mostly known for being on tech a lot. But it’s made people realise that reading can be fun, that reading is cool.”
Pupil

Staff said that the Literature Circle programme gave quieter pupils a topic and opportunity to speak up in class. It also helped develop relationships within the class, between pupils and between pupils and teachers – through a shared interest.

For staff, the Reading Challenge has placed a spotlight on reading and young adult fiction. Staff have been introduced to new books and genres. The Reading Challenge lead said that she enjoyed reading and discussing the books along with her pupils.

Pupils said that they were reading a lot more at school because of the Reading Challenge activities, particularly because of the whole class initiatives. Some pupils said that they now always had a book with them, or that they always had a book “on the go”.

“I used to read and then I stopped, but when I came here [secondary school] all of my friends were talking

about all these books they'd read and it kind of got me
back into reading."
Pupil

Pupils also said that they had been introduced to new genres, and they were open to trying new types of book and new authors.

"This time last year I didn't think I'd be picking up all the
scary books I'm reading now."
Pupil

"It makes you read things you wouldn't normally
choose."
Pupil

Pupils said that they used it as a way to relax and calm down if they were stressed or upset. They also felt that the reading activities helped improve their skills, particularly vocabulary, creativity and handwriting. A few pupils noted that they understood literary techniques better because they had been reading more, and could identify and use techniques such as symbolism and pathetic fallacy with confidence now.

Community partners delivering activities on the Literacy Day felt that pupils benefited from attending the different places in their community. They felt that this kind of activity helped to widen access and participation to learning, and showed pupils the range of opportunities available to them.

"...as the workshop progressed, we saw more and more
engagement and sparks of curiosity in the pupils. We
hope to have inspired them to consider careers outside
what they may have originally thought were possible for
themselves."
Community partner

What worked well

In terms of the Reading Challenge, staff liked that it was flexible and did not necessarily require large amounts of input, but that you could do a little bit every few months. The Reading Challenge lead said that the #FMReadChallenge was useful as it allowed her to share and pick up new ideas on Twitter.

Pupils said they liked the fact that reading was purely for pleasure and there were no specific tasks associated with the reading. They felt that this allowed them to fully enjoy the experience of reading.

"I liked that we didn't have to do essays on the books."
Pupil

The Reading Challenge lead had a role as literacy coordinator, and additional time to dedicate to literacy initiatives. The additional time, as well as good support from senior management facilitated the range and depth of reading activities that she could deliver. The timing of the Reading Challenge was also fortuitous and coincided with a whole school focus on literacy, initiated by

senior management. Staff noted that class teachers needed to buy into the programme and the activities in order to engage pupils, particularly in activities such as the Literature Circle.

“It depends on if you have the time – time for meetings and for organising everything.”
Teacher

“It absolutely depends on the teacher. It’s not an easy period for the teacher...they have to sell it.”
Teacher

During the Literacy Day pupils were randomly allocated activities and were deliberately placed in mixed year groups. This gave pupils an opportunity to meet new people and make new friends across the year groups.

“You got to learn about things from different perspectives.”
Pupil

“It gave the school a bit more life, more energy.”
Pupil

Community partners delivering activities during the Literacy Day felt that it was a good opportunity for pupils to get out of the classroom and use literacy skills in a practical context. One partner commented that their session reinforced the importance of writing diaries, songs and stories, to serve as historical records.

“It was good for them...to legitimise the stories that they had been reading in class.”
Community partner

A few partners commented that the Literacy Day had helped them to develop their relationship with the school, and they hoped to work with pupils again. One partner appreciated that it was a very easy way to engage with pupils and that it did not require any financial outlay for them to deliver these activities.

“It helped us build relationships with teachers from the school. We already have our next activity planned which will be working with them more closely to develop some ways we can build research into the curriculum.”

“I think this project allowed us to bring in a crop of pupils who may not have engaged with us otherwise.”
Community partners

Challenges

Delivering the Literature Circle sessions was sometimes a challenge, as both staff and pupils were not always sure about dedicating a whole period for reading when there is a full curriculum of learning to complete. S2 pupils already had a ‘library’ period, however S3 pupils did not, which made it difficult to incorporate dedicated reading time into the timetable.

Developing the Reading Challenge across departments was challenging at times. Although staff from every subject area were invited to be an FMRC representative, only a few took up this opportunity.

What's next?

The school plans to continue its reading journey in the coming years. In particular it hopes to use reading to encourage parental engagement in education and to support pupils transitioning from primary school into secondary school.



First Minister's Reading Challenge

Scottish Book Trust
inspiring readers and writers

Portobello High School

Background

Portobello High School is a secondary school in Edinburgh. The school has over 1,300 pupils.

This case study was developed following discussions with 11 S1 and S2 pupils and three teachers, including an English teacher, a Maths teacher and a Geography teacher.

Getting started

The First Minister's Reading Challenge in Portobello High School aimed to develop work that began in 2016 to create a reading culture at school and raise awareness of the health and wellbeing benefits of reading. The school first began this work in 2016 after the Reading Challenge lead (English teacher) became inspired by a Creative Conversation event discussing the benefits of reading for pleasure in terms of health and wellbeing.

During 2018/19 the focus has been on changing pupils' attitudes towards reading and encouraging the development of positive reading habits. Throughout the year staff have emphasised that the aim is only to read for pleasure, and not necessarily to read many books or to read any specific books.

“Beginning to think like that was a bit of a game changer.”
Teacher

Activities

The key Reading Challenge activities in Portobello High School have been:

- reading during Key Adult (registration) time in the morning;
- using a Read Well template for pupils to monitor their reading;
- supporting Scottish Book Trust to develop an App; and
- celebrating reading with visual displays.

All pupils across the school have been encouraged to read or take part in reading activities during the 20-minute morning registration period with their Key Adult. The Key Adults have been encouraged to discuss books and reading, to model reading and to share their interests with pupils. All staff in the school were provided with door posters showing what they were currently reading.

In order to focus on attitudes towards reading, rather than volume of books read, pupils have used Read Well templates to help them reflect on their reading behaviour and habits. The templates encourage pupils to think about the act of reading for pleasure and the benefits that this has. It also allowed teachers track pupils' reading habits and how they changed throughout the year.

Pupils from the school were invited to help develop the new Reading Challenge App. Pupils worked with staff from Scottish Book Trust on a range of activities and shared their ideas for the App. Pupils in S1 participated in the Scottish Teenage Book Prize, reading all of the shortlist and then voting for their favourites.

All English classes in the school have been encouraged to display their reading achievements in creative ways. Some classes used the FMRC Group Reading Passport, others designed their own based on a book worm, book butterfly or a shelf of books. The school also used Twitter to share and promote reading activities, using #portyreadswell.

Impact

Reading during Key Adult time in the morning is now embedded into the school routine. Pupils are familiar with the concept and understand what is expected of them during this time. Teachers said that they liked starting the day with reading. They felt that it gave pupils a chance to relax and get ready for the school day.

“It can be about a social interaction, and creating a soft start to the day.”
Teacher

“It's helping make registration a valuable use of time.”
Teacher

Teachers felt that the reading during Key Adult time had helped improve relationships between them and their pupils. Using reading as a basis, staff and pupils have shared their personal interests and encouraged each other to read more widely.

“For me, it's not just about reading. There should be a social element to it, like a book group.”
Teacher

“It definitely helps in terms of relationship building.”
Teacher

Teachers said that they had seen increases in confidence and reading ability amongst their pupils, due to the Reading Challenge activities. They noted that some pupils began by reading comics or graphic novels, but by the end of the year were choosing to read a range of different books and bringing in books from home. Crucially, some teachers had noticed that pupils were reading in a sustained manner, by finding things that they enjoyed accessing. Teachers were flexible about the

types of materials pupils could read, for example, senior phase pupils often enjoyed bringing in a newspaper.

“A lot of the time, the challenge is finding the right book.”
Teacher

“I love reading graphic novels.”
Pupil

Teachers also said that pupils had adopted positive language and positive attitudes towards reading, and were using terms such as “getting absorbed” in a book. And some pupils had started to recognise that reading could be used to have fun or to get involved in something, not just for attainment. For one pupil who had poor attendance, the morning reading sessions contributed to better attendance and engagement in Key Adult time.

Pupils we spoke with had mixed feelings about reading. Some said that they loved reading and read a lot in their spare time, both in and out of school. A small number of boys said that although they would not choose to read at home, they didn’t mind the reading sessions in Key Adult time.

Other pupils said that they really enjoyed reading because it sparked their imagination and allowed them to access new worlds. A few pupils said that they liked reading books that were part of a series, and they enjoyed the sense of anticipation between book releases.

“It can give you ideas for things you might want to do. Like travel...you can read books about things you might not be able to do or places you can’t go to.”

“I wait for a whole series to come out and then I read them all.”

Pupils

Pupils also noted that they enjoyed matching films and books, and analysing the differences. Some like to watch the film first and then read the story, others preferred to read the book and then see how it had been interpreted into film.

“I like to read a book and then watch the movie.”
Pupil

The lead teacher for the Reading Challenge conducted an evaluation, exploring how pupils’ habits and attitudes had changed through the Reading Challenge activities. The evaluation found that most pupils were more confident about reading and choosing books. Pupils said that they had found books at charity shops, libraries, book shops, at home and through apps. The most common factor that encouraged pupils to read was being given recommendations by friends or teachers.

Pupils reported their perceived benefits of reading for pleasure. These included:

- feeling relaxed;
- reducing stress;
- improving reading ability overall;

- improving vocabulary;
- improving spelling;
- improving concentration; and
- improving awareness.

“It takes away stress and anything you’re worried about.
It makes you happy if you’re reading a book you enjoy.”
Pupil

What worked well

Staff liked that the Reading Challenge resources were flexible and easily adaptable. Most of the resources used by the school were adapted to make them as useful and accessible as possible. And in some classes, pupils designed their own.

The Reading Challenge lead liked the resources, some which were simple and easy to use. She also liked that being part of the Reading Challenge gave pupils a way to celebrate their reading, at any level.

Where Key Adults understood the value of reading and modelled reading behaviour during registration, the initiative worked well. Similarly, the overall Reading Challenge concept was supported by senior management because it articulated well with the wider school agenda around literacy and health and wellbeing.

“It’s very important that Key Adults read whilst pupils read, otherwise it comes across as a task you’ve given them.”
Teacher

Challenges

One of the key challenges for the school this year has been the absence of a school librarian for eight months. This has limited the activities that have been delivered and the resources available for pupils. It was also an important and challenging task to bring on board staff from across the school and ensure that the focus on enjoyment was understood and implemented.

Pupils said that they read for pleasure in different ways: in silence, with music, on their own and in a group. Some pupils liked reading traditional books or written material on paper, whereas other liked reading on their phone. Each Key Adult had their own rules around what was permissible in the classroom, for example, some teachers did not allow pupils to use their phones during Key Adult time. Meeting all of their needs and creating the ideal environment for everybody was sometimes challenging.

What’s next?

The school hopes to continue building on its work next year. As of April 2019 the school has a librarian in post and staff hoped to develop reading initiatives alongside the librarian. The main aims going forward are to:

- incorporate digital reading into the Reading Challenge activities in a positive and meaningful way;

- engage senior phase pupils in reading activities;
- develop reading and writing communities; and
- gather feedback from staff to improve reading activities during Key Adult time.



First Minister's Reading Challenge

Dunfermline High School

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inspiring readers and writers

Background

Dunfermline High School is a secondary school in Fife. The school has around 1,600 pupils and a slightly higher than average proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds.

This case study was developed following discussions with 29 S1-S3 pupils, nine English Teachers, two social studies teachers and one member of senior management.

Getting started

The Reading Challenge activities in Dunfermline High School were led by an English teacher, and supported by the English department. The English teacher had become aware of the Reading Challenge when it was first introduced to primary schools and had kept abreast of the programme developments.

The school was keen to focus on literacy for S1 – S3 pupils. The school has a mix of pupils transitioning up to secondary school, with mixed abilities. Staff recognised that not all pupils were able to access the curriculum at the same level, and improving literacy would help with their overall attainment.

“We recognise that reading is fundamentally difficult and challenging for some of our pupils.”
Teacher

Two English teachers attended the launch event. They found the event useful and inspiring. In particular, seeing ideas and examples from the pilot schools made them feel confident in their ability to take part.

“It made it sound interesting, exciting and achievable. And not overwhelming.”

“We absolutely knew that we wanted to do it, but we needed to work on making it manageable.”
English teachers

Following the launch event, the English department delivered a dedicated Reading Challenge information session to the entire staff teaching team in the school. The English department staff explained their aims for the Reading Challenge and how they hoped staff and pupils across the school would be involved. This session was encouraged and supported by the school’s senior management.

“It captured staff with the realities of reading. Their eyes opened to the role of reading in their own subjects.”
English teacher

Activities

Dunfermline High School implemented a 10-minute reading session at the beginning of English lessons for S1-S3 pupils. Pupils are able to bring their own books or choose from a selection of books and reading materials within the classroom. The concept of the reading session was shared across the school and some teachers from social studies have chosen to implement the reading session into their classes.

Prior to this intervention, pupils had fortnightly reading sessions, where a period of 30-40 minutes was dedicated to reading. Staff were aware that not all pupils were engaging and many were unable to concentrate on reading for that period of time.

Teachers have taken a flexible approach and encouraged pupils to engage with a range of different reading materials. In social studies classes teachers have supported pupils to read newspaper and online articles relating to class topics, or have sourced fiction books that tie in with topic themes. Teachers have also curated small ‘secret’ class libraries with books that they feel will encourage reluctant readers to engage. Often these books are high interest / low ability, and shorter in length, to encourage young people who might be overwhelmed by mainstream young adult fiction.

Around the school pupils have displayed posters of book reviews and recommendations. Pupils who were keen readers have been involved in a book group shadowing the Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Children's Book Awards by reading and reviewing books on the shortlist. The school has also delivered events to encourage pupils and parents to try reading, or to try a new book.

Impact

For the most part, pupils enjoyed having time to read for pleasure at school. They felt that it was a useful way to relax, to transition into ‘learning mode’ and that it gave them an opportunity to take time for themselves. A few also felt that it got them in the right mindset for learning.

Similarly, staff reported that taking 10 minutes at the start of a lesson to relax, read and focus the mind had a demonstrable impact on pupils’ engagement during the remainder of the lesson. They also felt that the atmosphere within the English department was calm and tranquil, which was a better environment for engagement and learning.

“It gets you in the mood for your English lesson.”

“It gives you a chance to read if you’ve been busy throughout the week.”

“You can take a step back when things are hectic.”
Pupils

“It’s part of the routine that means that the rest of the lesson flows.”
English teacher

Pupils said that they enjoyed sharing what they had read with each other. They did this by sharing written reviews, creating a wall display of the books they had read and discussing books with each other.

“I like seeing what other people are reading...I’m always looking for suggestions.”
Pupil

Some S1 pupils said that they did not read a lot in primary school, or that they rarely finished a book until they came to secondary school and got involved in Reading Challenge activities.

“I’m not really a strong reader, but then I got reading more and the teachers really encouraged me. You just have to find the books you like.”
Pupil

A few pupils said that because of the reading sessions at school, they had started to read more at home, because they wanted to get through their books and find out what happened next. Pupils also said that they were reading a wider range of books than before, because they had been introduced to new genres by their teachers and peers.

“I didn’t used to read a lot in school but I am now, and I’m reading at break too.”

“I’m definitely reading more at home now.”

“Before I used to just read adventure books, but now I’m reading sci fi.”
Pupils

Both pupils and staff commented on the culture of reading at school. Because reading for pleasure has been implemented into classes regularly and consistently, there is now a positive culture of reading in the school.

The Reading Challenge has supported both pupils who were not actively engaged in reading for pleasure, and those who were. In particular, pupils who said they had always enjoyed reading said that they felt happy that their hobby was recognised and valued, and not seen as an act of social isolation.

“Before if you were sitting reading people would think that you were upset or there was something wrong.”
Pupil

The school has seen a real shift in attitude towards reading. Pupils commented that they felt reading was now an acceptable activity for them to take part in, where previously it would not have been. They felt that this change in the perception of reading was because everyone was reading together, including staff.

“At primary school it wasn’t cool to read. Now, because everybody’s reading its not such a big thing to read, like, it’s not so nerdy.”
Pupil

Other pupils said that they only really read during the 10 minutes before class, but that this was more time than they would have spent reading previously, and that they did enjoy the time and the books that they were reading.

“I hardly used to read, I never liked it. Now you sort of have to and I don’t mind.”
Pupil

Staff reported that pupils generally had a better attitude towards written text, and some said that they now felt comfortable setting reading as a homework task. They felt that pupils were less reluctant to access reading materials and had much more confidence reading aloud. Some pupils who were previously reluctant to read at all are now happy to read aloud to the class, and seemed to enjoy putting on a performance.

“There’s a sense of pride and enthusiasm.”
Teacher

Staff felt that the Reading Challenge activities had worked well, particularly the introduction of the 10 minute reading sessions. They felt that the activities had supported pupils to read for pleasure, to improve their wellbeing and to raise attainment in literacy. A few teachers commented that pupils were concentrating better in class because they had built up a daily reading habit.

“Crucially, it’s the building of a habit.”

“The impact on their wellbeing is just as important as their attainment.”
Teachers

Staff felt that it was also important for teachers to be visible, active readers at schools. Staff from subjects other than English said that the Reading Challenge had introduced them to the idea that reading for pleasure was a valuable activity.

“Just read and enjoy it. There doesn’t have to be a task attached to it.”
Teacher (social studies)

“I can understand why the pupils are loving it, because the staff are loving it too.”

“I used to be a Maths teacher. Reading to a class is a very peaceful thing, which you don’t appreciate if you’re not from an English background.”
Senior management staff

Some staff commented positively and felt that reading for pleasure alongside the class had been beneficial for them as well. They had started reading more and developing their awareness of young adult fiction.

“Occasionally I read to the class and it’s lovely. I would never have done that before.”

“I’m reading more than I’ve ever read.”

“It’s increased accountability for teachers to try more fiction. Pupils are setting targets for their teachers!”

“I wasn’t reading at all [before I started at this school], coming into this department everybody is so enthusiastic about reading.”

Teachers

As the initiatives have only been running for one academic year, staff did not yet have quantitative evidence to show the impact on attainment. However most said that they had seen improvements in pupils, across a range of areas.

“I’d be very surprised if evidence of the impact of this across the curriculum didn’t emerge. If we didn’t believe it was going to have an impact, we wouldn’t do it.”

Teacher

What worked well

At the outset, teachers within the English department were keen for the Reading Challenge to be delivered across year groups and across the curriculum. In order to achieve this they worked closely with staff from different departments and with senior management. Staff said that being supported by colleagues at all levels helped them deliver the Reading Challenge successfully.

Staff in the English department had been planning to deliver activities focusing on literacy and reading, and this was an important focus area for the school. The timing of the Reading Challenge helped to anchor these activities and allowed staff from other subjects to work on literacy across the curriculum.

“It’s given us an impetus, focus and the motivation to do things that we had been talking about doing...it was the opportunity to bring all of that together.”

Senior management staff

“There’s a great energy in the department at the moment, with people who genuinely have a passion for reading. The pupils get a consistent experience, regardless of their teacher.”

“We have used it to meet our particular needs.”

Teachers

Some pupils said that liked the 10 minute reading sessions because it gave them a chance to try lots of new books. The short taster helped them decide if they liked a book and if they did, it gave them the motivation to finish the chapter or the whole book. Some pupils spoke of their peers and said that the 10 minutes of reading in class was the only diversionary reading these pupils engaged in, and they felt that it was an important part of the school day.

“I think for some people in our year, the ten minutes is the only reading that they do.”
Pupil

Staff also noted that delivering reading activities as a small amount every day, rather than in a large chunk, had worked well.

Having a library of carefully selected books within each classroom helped pupils, particularly those who previously did not read for pleasure. Staff noted that all pupils could borrow from this library, and that this was a good leveller, as some pupils did not have their own books at home.

Staff from the English department who led the Reading Challenge activities noted that having the First Minister’s Reading Challenge initiative was useful. They felt that it provided clear branding and a framework to work within.

“The First Minister’s Reading Challenge has legitimised it. It’s not just English teachers banging on about reading.”
English teacher

Challenges

Staff said that the 10 minute reading initiative was relatively straightforward to implement across the English department, but that some classes and other subject departments were more challenging. In these classes, teachers have used a range of techniques to engage pupils, such as reading aloud to pupils and seeking out recommendations for individuals.

“Some classes are easier than others, because you’re trying to encourage a habit when there isn’t really one.”
English teacher

A few pupils noted that, although it was fine to read for pleasure during English classes, they did not feel it was appropriate in other subjects. They did not feel there was great value in reading for pleasure during other subjects, particularly if the reading material was not directly related to course work.

What’s next?

The school would like to continue developing parental engagement activities. They received good feedback from the parental engagement event and would like to increase participation in events like this. The school is also hoping to continue developing links with the local library.

“It’s spiralled in a positive way and our aspirations have only grown bigger.”
Teacher



First Minister's Reading Challenge

Trinity High School

Scottish Book Trust
inspiring readers and writers

Background

Trinity High School is a secondary school in South Lanarkshire. The school has just over 1,000 pupils. Almost half of the pupils in the school are from the most disadvantaged parts of Scotland. The school also has a higher than average proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds.

This case study was developed following discussions with eight S2 pupils, five teachers, the head teacher and one community partner. Teachers we spoke with from a mix of subjects: English, History, Math, Technology and Religious Studies.

Getting started

The First Minister's Reading Challenge in Trinity High school built on two years of focused literacy work in the school, and a successful 'Whole School Novel' project. The school hoped to build on this successful work and further develop the community reading culture.

*"The thinking behind the whole school novel was to create a whole school reading culture and push forward the notion of a reading culture."
Teacher*

Activities

Reading Challenge activities in Trinity High School were delivered across the whole school and through a range of subjects.

All S1-S3 pupils, and all staff in the school read a shared 'Whole School Novel.' The novel acted as a basis for a range of discussion and activities across subjects.

In Technology lessons pupils designed their own book covers and magazine covers. They then wrote about how and why they had developed their chosen design. In Religious Studies, pupils were asked to reflect on the themes of the novel and to consider the perspectives of the characters. Some subject teachers employed reading for pleasure to provide a soft start to the lesson, with 10 mins of reading incorporated into the beginning of the class. And reading for pleasure was also extended into tutor time, which takes place at the end of the day.

“It’s a lovely way to end a really hectic school day.”
Teacher

Pupils attend a literacy period once a week. This is separate from their English classes, and is delivered by teachers from different subjects.

To help all pupils access the novel, staff recorded themselves reading chapters of the book and provided it to pupils as an audio book.

Staff modelled reading and engaged pupils through a range of games and activities. These included guessing their teachers favourite book (from a picture of the teacher hiding their face behind the book), guessing which teachers had read each chapter of the audio book and teachers dressing up and decorating their rooms for World Book Day.

The school delivered a paired reading programme between S1 and S6 pupils. The English department also worked closely with P7 pupils transitioning into secondary school. All P7 pupils were given a literacy passport and copy of the same book to read over summer, so that when they arrived at secondary school, they would all have a common text.

“The reading culture starts even before they arrive at high school.”
Teacher

As well as all pupils in S1-S3 being involved in Reading Challenge activities, some pupils in S1 and S2 were targeted to receive additional support and focused reading interventions aimed at improving their literacy and attitudes to reading.

The school also liaised with community partners such as Waterstones, Orion Children’s Books, Interfaith Scotland, Glasgow Central mosque and St Pauls’s Youth Forum. These partners helped to provide resources or activities relating to the whole school novel.

Impact

Teachers felt that the reading initiatives in the school had worked well. They said that pupils were reading for pleasure more than before. In addition, they felt that there was evidence of pupils reading for pleasure more at home and that parents had become engaged in some reading activities. Pupils also said that they were reading more because of the whole school activities.

“Parents were emailing in and saying how great it was.”
Teacher

“One of the reasons I got into reading so late was because I didn’t really see the point. But I like that with books you can imagine it your own way.”
Pupil

“I’ve always been quite interested in reading, but it got me reading more.”
Pupil

Pupils and teachers said that the whole school novel had been a useful way to engage pupils in a range of important topics such as mental health, single parent families, alcohol use and gang violence. They said that the book provided a natural vehicle and activities could be tailored to pupils in each year group.

“It helps you relate to issues in different contexts...it makes you aware of the world and other people’s opinions.”
Pupil

“We’ve used it as a vehicle to talk about experiences and outcomes in other subjects.”
Teacher

“It felt age and stage appropriate because we could differentiate it to pupils at all levels.”
Teacher

They felt that it was important for pupils to discuss these topics, and that doing so helped them develop valuable skills in communication, emotional intelligence and critical thinking. It also helped pupils develop better relationships with one another and with their teachers.

“It’s creating an opportunity for discussion and strengthening their bonds.”
Teacher

“It was brilliant. Their higher order thinking skills were raised.”
Teacher

“It was good to talk to other people about it.”
Pupil

Pupils said that reading made them feel happy and relaxed, particularly if they were preparing for a test. They also felt that reading helped broaden their minds, and allowed them to be creative.

“It helps you when you’re having a hard time...it takes you away.”
Pupil

Most pupils we spoke with felt that as they read more , their own vocabulary, grammar and sentence structure was improving.

“A lot of the words in the books I’m reading, I don’t know, so I’ve started putting them in my work.”

Pupil

Overall, teachers felt that pupils had a more positive attitude towards reading because of the Reading Challenge activities at school. In particular, there has been a marked improvement in the attitudes of pupils who were previously reluctant readers, through the paired reading programme between S1 and S6 pupils.

“You look forward to lessons more when you have stuff like that going on.”

Pupil

“The novel had a strong impact on them...it changed their perception of reading.”

Teacher

The school conducted a survey with the targeted S1 and S2 pupils to measure any change in their attitudes towards reading. The survey found that pupils had a more positive attitude towards reading, with a 19% increase in S1 pupils reporting that ‘reading is really interesting’. The survey also found that pupils were reading more books, reading more often and developing confidence in their reading abilities. The targeted pupils were also assessed before and after the focused reading intervention. The assessments showed that targeted pupils improved their reading scores by 29% on average, compared to 5% for the non-targeted pupils. And the improved reading scores for the targeted pupils brought them up to the level of their peers, effectively reducing the gap in attainment.

“It was also interesting to note that the average score of our target group in the second assessment was almost identical to the average score of their non-targeted peers. This was significant as in the first assessment they had recorded some of the lowest scores in the year group.”

Teacher

For some pupils, teachers noted that the whole school novel was the first novel that they had ever completed. Teachers felt that this gave them a real sense of achievement, and the confidence to go on and read more.

Staff also felt that the reading activities had clear impact on pupils’ health and wellbeing. As well as discussing topics pertinent to health and wellbeing, pupils demonstrated improvements in themselves, their moods and their attitudes.

“The health and wellbeing impact, for me, is quite clear – they’re calm, they’re relaxed.”

Teacher

Teachers also felt that the reading initiatives had helped improve literacy amongst pupils, and that this was beneficial across the curriculum. One teacher noted that, in Maths, a lot of the questions were not accessible to pupils who were not good readers, but that this had improved over the past year.

What worked well

The level of engagement from across the school staff helped to engage pupils and ensured that reading activities were seen to be for everyone. In particular, the audio book created by teachers helped less confident readers to read along with the novel and to gain confidence reading aloud.

The school's use of social media also worked well to promote activities and engage pupils. The school Book Club created an Instagram page to provide recommendations, and invited pupils to submit reviews.

“Most people in the school follow the Book Club on Instagram.”
Pupil

Staff felt that having a novel with themes that were relevant to the pupils, which they could relate to was helpful, both in terms of engaging pupils and scaffolding learning.

“I liked that it [Tribes] was to do with where we live.”
Pupil

“We're building the ethos that we're a community that likes to read together.”
Teacher

Staff from across the school had used the recommended reading lists. One teacher said that the texts were useful and would relate directly to the kinds of texts and questions that pupils would encounter in their exams.

Challenges

The school takes in pupils with mixed levels of literacy and pupils beginning S1 are often working at different levels. The school has evidence that over half of the parents and carers of pupils do not read or have a reading age below 11. The low levels of literacy and interest in literacy have made it difficult for the school to engage all pupils, and to engage with parents.

What's next?

Staff and pupils are considering options for the next whole school novel and preparing for an upcoming author visit, arranged through Live Literature. They hope to maintain the high level of interest and excitement generated through the Reading Challenge and the whole school activities.

The school feels that now a strong school reading culture has been developed, the next step is to develop the home-school partnership. There has already been some indication that pupils were reading the whole school novel at home with family members. Staff hoped to build on this to further engage parents and families in positive reading activities.



First Minister's Reading Challenge

St Andrew's and St Bride's High School

Scottish Book Trust
inspiring readers and writers

Background

St Andrew's and St Bride's High School is a secondary school in South Lanarkshire. The school has just over 1,400 pupils and a higher than average proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds.

This case study was developed following discussions with 11 pupils, three teachers, the school librarian, the head teacher and a parent.

Getting started

St Andrew's and St Bride's High School first became involved in the First Minister's Reading challenge as a pilot school during 2017/18. The main impetus behind the school's involvement was to encourage pupils to read for pleasure. Prior to the Reading Challenge the staff had become aware that pupils were not reading for pleasure. Those who read did so mainly with a focus on academic achievement. The classroom libraries had not been upgraded for some time and pupils only accessed the school library once a fortnight. As well as the decrease in reading seen when pupils transitioned from primary to secondary school, staff also noticed that pupils in S3 were reading a lot less than pupils in S2.

“It was serendipity in terms of timing. We had identified that there were gaps and this really allowed us to focus.”

“When we were asked to get involved, we jumped at it.”
Staff

Activities

In order to implement reading across the school, and to encourage reading from an early stage, staff introduced a 10 minute reading session at the beginning of English classes and registration classes for all pupils in S1, S2 and S3. As well as the daily reading, pupils have had the

opportunity to engage in reading through a range of activities throughout the school year, including a special programme of activities and challenges during Book Week Scotland and World Book Day.

The school also developed a Literacy Leader programme involving 13 pupils from S1 – S3. Pupils were invited to apply for the role which gave them the opportunity to liaise between pupils and staff and to work, to improve literacy based activities and to lead them. The Literacy Leaders manage the school Instagram account where they share recommendations. They were also involved in supporting Scottish Book Trust to develop a new reading App for young people. The Literacy Leaders have been involved in updating and refurbishing the school library, conducting their own research on which new books they would like. They also coordinated a range of activities during Book Week Scotland, including a school book swap, book bistro and a book party.

Staff have tried to make reading and reading based activities as visible as possible throughout the school, using tools such as ‘What I’m reading’ posters on doors and displaying pupils’ literacy work prominently. They have also modelled reading as a positive activity, reading alongside pupils in class and discussing books during English and registration periods. In addition, the school has chosen to invest in the school library to make it a more comfortable and inviting space for pupils.

More targeted activities have been delivered through a paired reading programme and four pupil-parent workshops. Paired reading was between pupils in S6 and reluctant readers in S1 and S2. The PEF funded programme ran in the morning, with breakfast included. The pupil-parent workshops aimed to improve literacy across English, Modern Languages and Science. These workshops were open to all families, but were targeted at pupils with specific needs

“There’s nothing really radical in what we’re doing, we just cherry picked from the best practice.”
Staff

Impact

Staff reported that pupils had engaged well in all of the reading activities. Most pupils were reading more than they had prior to the Reading Challenge, and some pupils were beginning to access different types of reading materials.

“They’re trying other things that they wouldn’t have picked up before.”
Staff

The attitude towards reading in the school has changed, with pupils talking more positively about reading and actively engaging in activities. In terms of behaviour, some staff reported that having 10 minutes of reading time in registration and English class made pupils calmer and more able to engage in lessons. It has also been beneficial for staff, as the classroom is a more focused environment for learning.

“I think that the ten minutes of reading in registration is calming...it’s a good use of their time.”
Parent

“You can feel that you’re coming back to yourself again, and you’re in a better place to start teaching.”
Staff

The reading activities in class and registration time have opened the gateway for discussions between staff and pupils, stemming from the books that they have read. This has allowed pupils to open up to staff or to discuss personal issues.

“The opportunity to have these kinds of conversations is
kind of a gift.”
Staff

Staff noted that pupils who had previously been averse to reading had shown the most improvements. Some of these pupils were not only engaging in reading at school (where previously they would not have) but were choosing to read for pleasure in their spare time, having found reading materials that they enjoyed.

“You see these pupils that don’t think they’re readers
find a series of books that they love and lap them up.”
Staff

In terms of attainment, staff noticed a significant improvement in pupils’ vocabulary, when writing and speaking. This has prompted the school to introduce pupils to more challenging vocabulary in all of the subject areas. SNSA test results also showed that pupils in S3 were attaining at a higher level than anticipated.

The Reading Challenge also provided opportunities for staff to work inter-departmentally. The school developed a summer reading list and poetry list which has now been circulated to all schools in North and South Lanarkshire. Staff felt that this initiative had helped improve communication between staff in different departments.

The pupils we spoke with were Literacy Leaders. They were mostly keen readers, or formerly reluctant readers that had recently developed a passion for reading. Pupils said that they were reading more than they did before and appreciated that they had more opportunities to read and relax at school. They felt that their peers were also becoming more interested in reading, and that most pupils looked forward to reading activities, particularly DEAR (drop everything and read) time. Pupils also said that they the special activities, such as the book bistro had been very popular and had encouraged everyone to take time to read for pleasure.

“I’m definitely reading more than I used to, because
there are more opportunities to read in peace.”
Pupil

The literacy Leaders said that they enjoyed their role. They liked having a say in how reading activities were delivered and seeing improvements in their school based on opinions of the student body.

“I think it’s really good because we get to know what’s
going on and we get to have a say.”

“Our voices are being heard.”
Pupils

What worked well

Being a pilot school during 2017/18 helped to kickstart the Reading Challenge in the school. The additional financial support provided during this year, as well as additional funds allocated from the school budget helped push the reading activities and provided high quality resources for pupils. In particular, the senior management team chose to quadruple the school library allowing for a significant improvement in the range of reading materials available for pupils. The school worked closely with pupils to select new library resources that would appeal to a range of pupils and would allow them to engage in topics that interest them.

The school librarian has electronically tagged all books in the library to enable close monitoring of books. At present, it is clear that the most borrowed books are the new books, purchased with Pupil Equity Funding and chosen by pupils. These include some books that have worked well to engage reluctant readers, such as sports biographies that are age appropriate and written to be accessible. Going forward, this monitoring system will allow the school to track patterns in borrowing and to better understand which reading materials appeal to particular groups of pupils.

“The boys think that they’re cool to read, and nobody is going to make fun of them.”
Librarian

Staff liked that the Reading Challenge was flexible and allowed them to use it where they saw the need. They felt that the Reading Challenge had come at the right time for the school, and had acted as a catalyst for a range of activities and interventions supporting the development of pupils across the curriculum.

Staff felt that the paired reading programme between S6 pupils and reluctant readers in S1 and S2 worked well. The programme helped to build confidence amongst pupils and developed positive relationships between pupils in upper and lower school.

“It was just a joy to see.”
Staff

More broadly, the reading activities have linked in well with the wider curriculum and have provided good opportunities for cross-curricular learning. For example, the school has a ‘Better Eating, Better Learning’ programme, which pupils engaged with by writing their own recipes based on their favourite books. Similarly, pupils were asked to provide a creative response to a book they had all read. Pupils responded in a variety of ways using skills and techniques from different subject areas including art, home economics and modern languages. Similarly, the librarian felt that the new reading materials in the library cover a range of topics in fiction and non fiction, that allow pupils to access ideas and improve their understanding of the wider world.

“There are lots of themes in fiction that can make you feel things...a well written book takes you somewhere you’ve never been before.”
Librarian

Challenges

For the most part, the Reading Challenge has worked well. One of the challenges the school has faced is maintaining the library stock and the limitations of having a part-time, rather than full-time librarian. Both staff and pupils said that they would appreciate more time to access the library, and more time with the school librarian. The school librarian noted that it has been a challenge to maintain library stock, as pupils were often keen to read the same book at the same time.

What's next?

The new approach to reading is now embedded in the school. The school now hopes to bring the Reading Challenge out into the community, and to bring the community into the school, using the school library as a hub.

“I think that the initiatives will help to foster better links
between school and home.”

Parent

Staff hoped to continue with these activities, and to continue offering pupils opportunities to lead. In the longer term, they hope to see sustained improvements in literacy, health and wellbeing, and to foster a lifelong love of reading.

“What we want is for our pupils to go on reading when
they leave school.”

Staff