

Success story

Carr Hill High School, Lancashire

School Profile

Number of pupils	1200
EAL	tbc
Free School Meals	tbc

When Carr Hill High School in Lancashire needed a solution to very low reading levels amongst some of their pupils, they did not have far to look.

A neighbouring school were happy to show them the Accelerated Reader management program. For Ann Monk, Learning Resource Centre Manager, it offered an answer to many of the school's challenges.

A massive specialist school with 1,200 pupils to manage, one of its challenges was turning around the sheer scale of pupils with limited reading skills coming through their intake of Key Stage 2 pupils. At one point, a quarter of these pupils had a reading age below their chronological age. 22% of 11 year olds had a reading age of about nine. A small number could not read at all.

There was a particular need to motivate boys to read and the school had been encouraged by Ofsted to address their focus on reading, making the English department particularly receptive to any tools to improve the situation.

Reading at home was limited amongst some children so the school was struggling to get a reading habit established. Many pupils totally resisted the notion of reading.

Much of the appeal for Ann was the fact that Accelerated Reader provided a structure and clear measurement. She knew that would enhance its appeal to management and to fellow teachers, and her first task was to measure Year 7 pupils' reading levels.

Starting in September 2005, she tested all pupils in Year 7, and then began using the program with samples of Year 7 pupils at different levels.

She started to run the normal program of online quizzes, which pupils carried out after reading a book, in order to get higher scores and so move up and up through more demanding and interesting books.

Continued overleaf

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Success story

Carr Hill High School, Lancashire *continued...*

Seven staff were involved, from library professionals to teaching staff. Parents also became "very, very supportive" when they saw their children making swift progress, showing off certificates presented for progress, winning prizes and growing in self-esteem.

Real measurement data was a principal outcome for many of the staff, who found that the structured results and reports removed the guesswork and uncertainty about reading practice and progress. "When a pupil says they have read the book and have understood it, staff have little concrete data to back this up, without Accelerated Reader."

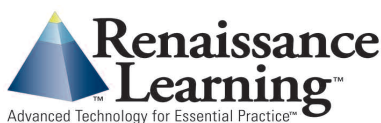
For Ann, it was also very useful to grasp the sheer difficulty of grading books for differing reading levels. She admitted she was stunned at the difference between what adult professionals deemed to be at the right development level for a pupil, particularly struggling readers, and reality. "Even for professionals, it is hard to put yourself into the mind of an early reader."

English teaching staff found the program, the points and quizzes motivating for a good number of their pupils, who enjoyed the whole experience. One English teacher described it as "incredibly useful" to create an opportunity to talk about books and so create a focus around it, and Ann says her highly charged approach is typical of the high response she is keen to foster.

While Ann believes there is more room for improvement, particularly if she extends it across all Year 7 pupils, she says the main outcome is an uplift in the amount of library books circulating. She says that reading levels have climbed; some even shooting up.

"We have pupils who really love it, who are encouraged to read and to read more widely, and it has been a huge boost to some of them. That has to be good news."

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