

I AM PART OF THEIR STORY

All Saints Catholic College
Duckinfield, Cheshire

All Saints Catholic College is a co-educational school catering for 829 11-18 year-old students, 20% of which are on Action, Action+ or have statements. Although a faith school, the college draws on a wide range of approximately 70 feeder primary schools.

Julie Carss has worked as Learning Resources Manager at the college for over 13 years, following previous experience in HE and FE libraries. In addition to managing All Saints' implementation of Accelerated Reader since its introduction in 2009 Julie has recently taken on an additional post as Literacy Intervention Leader, and has found AR to be pivotal to her work in this area.



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Library use

Progress monitoring

Ofsted

Reading culture

Staff engagement

“Monitoring student progress is at the core of planning and delivering learning programmes and Accelerated Reader is indispensable to this.”

In January 2013 All Saints Catholic College received a positive report from Ofsted, which praised the structured approach taken to raising literacy standards – within which Accelerated Reader plays a significant role.

This success is testament to the hard work undertaken to improve attitudes towards reading, not just in the LRC but throughout the school, as Julie Carss, Learning Resources Manager at the College explains: “Since the introduction of AR there is much less stigma attached to reading – every student has a reading book with them every day – and they are eager to ‘share’ and even recommend books to each other.”

The college utilises the structured approach offered by AR and STAR Reading, and has found that the students respond positively to the challenge and competition involved. “Reading at the correct level gives children confidence, as does success in quizzes and being able to progress through the levels, which all makes their reading experience so much more enjoyable and less stressful.”

In addition to allocating time for quiet reading during Academic Review (form time), Julie is in the process of providing every Form Group with a ‘book box’. Several departments offer students 10 minutes reading time as a matter of course, which is already standard practice within the English department. As a result, the students have become accustomed to getting

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reading books out at the beginning of a lesson, whilst the teacher takes a register/prepares resources, etc. “Since we introduced this initiative, colleagues have remarked on a calmer start to lessons and appreciate the consistent classroom practice, which students are familiar with and which the SLT (and Ofsted inspectors) look for.”

Although some AR quizzes are taken on a NEO 2 in the LRC, which is very popular, the majority are completed on the school computers. Quiz results are often the starting point for conversations about books between staff and students, and Julie’s colleagues from other departments have commented on how much they all benefit from this extra interaction. “During daily reading sessions, students are more inclined to ask about the meaning of words or about particular events and situations referred to in the books they are reading. We have also noticed an improvement in their spelling. I have just introduced an AR staff reading challenge within the English department, which has got the students buzzing with excitement – other departments are now showing an interest as the connection with reading is such a great way to motivate and engage with the students. It has been noted that AR reading time at the beginning of their lesson allows the children to settle and focus and one colleague said that he noticed the whole AR experience gave children more confidence. Children will protest if they are not allowed their 10 minutes reading time!”

Twice a week Julie organises ‘Break for Reading’ sessions in the LRC during which only students who want to read or take quizzes can enter. This provides them with the opportunity to read alone or to older students and staff in a peaceful environment. “We often set reading as homework, which is actually welcomed by students as they are able to do more quizzes and gain further reward. However, the teacher no longer needs to rely on the word of the student to find out if reading homework has been completed – quiz results speak for themselves! Similarly, parents can check their child’s reading record using Home Connect.”

The students’ appetite for reading is now so great that not only has the profile of the LRC been raised within the college, but also the number of books borrowed has risen significantly over the last three years. “I find that I have to replace books at an alarming rate, not least because they are being worn out through constant use! The positive attitudes toward reading have been noticed throughout the college. One teacher commented to me recently that ‘it is very apparent that significantly more of my students are reading much more actively thanks to AR – this is evident from the number of hands that go up at the start of every lesson to request permission to take a quiz and change their books.’”

When it comes to reward and recognition, the staff nominate an ‘Accelerated Reader of the Week’ who appears on the LRC display boards as well as in the college newsletter. The students also select an ‘Accelerated Reader Book of the Month’ and special assemblies are held each term to reward effort and achievement. At Parents’ Evenings and review days Accelerated Reader is used to show parents how their children are progressing and to give advice about book choices. On Open Evenings when Year 5 and 6 students visit the college with their parents, Julie encourages them all to take a sample quiz on a book they have read recently and find AR to be a popular activity with all concerned.

There has been a very significant increase in the number of books borrowed by students annually and the daily average since the introduction of AR. Although still significantly lower than the girls, the percentage of items borrowed by boys has also steadily increased over the last three years.

“During our recent Ofsted inspection the inspectors were hugely impressed with Accelerated Reader – not only in terms of the figures they were able to scrutinise (borrowing trends/reading test results/quiz results and average daily reading time, etc.), but also from speaking to the children who were enthused by AR. They said of the programme: ‘Students read regularly. They use the school’s recently introduced structured reading material (i.e. AR) which ensures they extend their thinking, understanding and experience. Boys especially enjoy the competition of the tasks set.’

One of the questions I was asked by an inspector was about how I was able to monitor the suitability and appropriateness of books the children were choosing, and explained that the classification of the interest level (Lower Years, Middle Years and Upper Years) of AR-quizzed titles meant I could make an instant judgement as to whether a book is appropriate or not.”

In their report, the inspectors also found the majority of students to be making good progress, with the proportion achieving five or more GCSE A* to C grades (including English and mathematics) having steadily increased since 2009. In 2012, 81% of all KS4 students were making expected progress in English. When considering the students’ National Curriculum levels in reading, approximately 25% started Year 7 above Level 4, but by the end of the 2011/12 year this had risen to some 65% – which can in part be attributed to the regular reading and comprehension quizzing practice provided by AR.

The Instant ‘up-to-the minute’ data provided by AR allows meaningful snapshots of students’ reading activity to be captured as well as showing trends over a chosen period of time, which is particularly important. “Monitoring student progress is at the core of planning and delivering learning programmes and AR is indispensable to this – it is almost like having an extra member of staff to take care of one of the most important areas of the subject.”

Chart 1: Total number of books borrowed annually

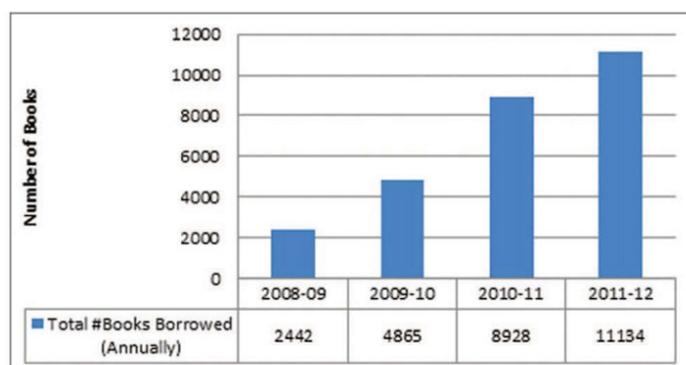


Chart 2: Percentage of students achieving 5+ A*-C GCSEs (or equivalent) including English and maths GCSEs



The introduction of Accelerated Reader to All Saints Catholic College in 2009 has had a positive effect on literacy standards and attitudes towards reading – not only in the English department and LRC, but throughout the school.

“I can say with confidence that AR has been instrumental in promoting Reading for Pleasure in college and promoting the LRC to the heart of the school. Allowing children to see the average number of minutes they are completing each day is a massive incentive, as is number of words read. I am constantly amazed at the wealth of useful features offered by AR – Home Connect, automatic target setting, the option to create your own quizzes and especially the ability to show progress. I find the Sample Quiz feature particularly useful with students who are lacking in confidence.

For the first time I am able to confidently direct children to books within their range of ability. Children are encouraged and motivated by the immediate feedback of the results of their quiz, and many thrive on the success, praise and rewards of the competition generated by AR. It is also useful to be able to give parents information about their child’s reading age and book level to enable them to support their child at home and to provide them with suitably challenging reading material. Children who have always struggled are able to see measurable progress, in some cases for the first time. Without AR, we had no reliable way of checking if a child had read a book – with AR the proof is in the quiz results, and the diagnostic codes take it further by enabling colleagues to understand why a child is not making progress. Because the programme is tailored to students’ individual needs, the burden of differentiation is removed from the teacher. Students are provided with instant feedback, which is something that cannot be guaranteed after every completed piece of work in other subjects. The level of personalisation offered by AR also takes the work out of planning and delivering intervention.”



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