

“Since implementing AR our students are embracing the power of reading.”

Friern Barnet School North London

Friern Barnet School is a mixed comprehensive school of approximately 800 students, in North London.

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“My school is a modern community comprehensive,” explains Gary Beck, the Learning Resources Centre manager. “We seek to achieve the very best for all our students through the use of advanced technology and a rich variety of educational approaches. We have a highly skilled and caring staff, dedicated to ensuring that our students achieve their full potential.”

Although it serves a challenging catchment area in North London, Friern Barnet School has consistently improved its examination results year-on-year for the past seven years. In 2006 just 37% of students received at least 5 GCSEs at A*-C; rising to 93% last year. It was judged by Ofsted to be Outstanding in its most recent inspection.

“Here at Friern Barnet School we have an intake of many students who are below the national average. We have many students who enter at Level 3 or below. 40% of our students speak English as an additional language, 32% are on our School Action intervention scheme, 24% receive free school meals, 23% have additional intervention (School Action Plus), and 3% are statemented.”

Because many students join the school with low reading ages, staff found that they were struggling to access the curriculum. Accelerated Reader (AR) was introduced in 2012 to support ongoing reading practice and target intervention where it was needed. There has been a noticeable impact across the school.

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There is a significant intervention programme already in place at the school, which AR has complemented well. Gary uses the reports from AR and the STAR Reading assessment programme to inform his teaching and identify students in need of intervention. “I produce and print the reports off monthly for every student I teach. I seek early intervention on those highlighted and identify specific areas to assist the student.”

“Since we launched AR in the Learning Resource Centre the enthusiasm for reading in the school has seen unprecedented levels of students reading and borrowing books.” In the last six months, students have read 1,730 books between them, amounting to over 46 million words.

The programme has proved to be highly motivating for students, providing regular opportunities for praise and encouragement. In addition to the intrinsic sense of achievement gained upon successfully passing a reading practice quiz, wider initiatives foster a sense of competition and help to maintain perseverance with continued growth in reading skills. “The students absolutely love taking quizzes! I run a monthly ‘Accelerated Reader of the Month Competition’ which has been enormously successful as prizes are given to the overall winner and two runners-up. Prizes so far have included an electronic dictionary bookmark and a summer trip to Thorpe Park.”

Gary is pleased with the transformative impact AR has had not just in fostering a reading culture at Friern Barnet School, but also in developing literacy skills that are helping students to make progress in other subject areas. Along with motivational initiatives and an effective intervention strategy, AR has helped even the most struggling students to make strong progress across the curriculum. Gary concludes, “A complete transformation has occurred since implementing AR, and our students are embracing the power of reading.”

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