

# I AM PART OF THEIR STORY

St Columba's Primary School,  
Co. Tyrone

Situated in the small village of Clady in Co. Tyrone, Northern Ireland, St Columba's Primary School has 123 students and five teachers. Students, both boys and girls, range in age from 4 to 11. Approximately 20% of the students are entitled to free school meals and 12% have been identified as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning.



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Data review

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Reading for pleasure

Professional development

## “Non-readers are now readers and boys have become more motivated.”

A small village school in Northern Ireland was looking for a way to accelerate standards in reading. After implementing Accelerated Reader a year ago, the staff have been thrilled with the results. A strong reading culture has developed in the school and results are already improving.

Colette Maguire, the school's principal, explains why she chose to implement AR and describes the impact it has had on children's learning.

### “We felt that we needed further to address raising standards in reading”

“For the past 4 years we have been writing action plans focusing on targeted classes and pupils to raise standards in reading. After-school classes in literacy facilitated by the Literacy Co-ordinator were organised to support the classes. However, having analysed individual pupils' scores in standardised tests, we felt that we needed further to address raising standards in reading.”

*Staff, parents and the board of governors are so thrilled with the success of the AR programme that we are now going to launch Accelerated Maths in our school next year.*

The principal began to research Accelerated Reader, seeking advice from other teachers and school leaders who had implemented the programme. Their experiences convinced the principal to introduce AR, with the full support of the staff team.

### “There has been a clear improvement in raising achievement with underachievers since the launch of the programme.”

When AR was introduced in the school, reading skills immediately and noticeably improved. It was not only the increased quantity of reading practice that impressed the staff, but also the breadth of books read and the impact of purposeful reading on the wider curriculum. “Pupils are reading a greater quantity of books and a wider range of material. Pupils have improved their inferential skills, non-readers are now readers, and boys have become more motivated, responding to the competitive element. Pupils are also becoming a lot more confident and independent in relation to their application to learning in the classroom.”

The school introduced a range of rewards and incentives to compliment AR in motivating children to read. “Each classroom now has a ‘leader board’ and pupils are able to move their names up the list as they increase their points. Every time a pupil achieves 100% in a quiz his or her name is put in a box for a draw of prizes at the end of each month. The pupils with the highest points in each class are awarded prizes; the names of the winners are published in the monthly newsheet to parents and photographs of the prize winners are displayed in the library.”

The staff team transformed the library, using the physical space to reinforce the motivating aspects of AR. “Roles and responsibilities were given to staff, who worked as a team to prepare the library and make it a stimulating and attractive environment. Shelving in the library was made available and the books were placed on the shelves according to their points levels with colourful markers to separate them. The lowest levels were on the bottom shelves so that as pupils’ ZPD levels increased, their books of choice were on higher shelves. This shelving method was also an incentive for pupils to read more books and complete more quizzes as they could observe their progress. We purchased additional books for the programme and contact was made with our WELB Library Service to provide books.”

### **“They are now all prolific readers!”**

The incentives have helped not only to promote reading in the school, but also to maintain their high level of reading through the course of the school year. “As one teacher explained, they are now all prolific readers! The pupils also appear to be reading for enjoyment.”

AR also helps the school to praise and encourage those who are reading significantly more than their peers. Three boys were identified as ‘word millionaires,’ reading over a million words in the space of seven months. Marking this achievement helped to motivate more gifted readers alongside the incentives normally associated with struggling readers, extending the reading culture across all abilities.

Parents have also welcomed the improvement in reading habits, as the children’s reading habits had changed at home as well as at school. “Parents were delighted that their children had developed such a love of reading and appreciation of books. Some commented that they were surprised to see their sons with a book in their hand in the mornings before school and even at mealtimes!”

### **“It was essential that teachers had a strong input into the performance of each pupil.”**

Staff at the school have found the detailed reports generated through Accelerated Reader invaluable in monitoring progress and motivating individual students in their reading practice. Time is set aside each week to analyse AR reports, providing rapid feedback and ensuring that any steps to intervention can be taken swiftly.

“Continuous monitoring of individual pupils and the detailed data analysis provided at the end of every half term were crucial to the success of the programme. Teachers are finding that having access to each individual pupil’s records is invaluable to them in helping to ensure that every pupil experiences a sense of achievement.”

In addition to using the reports within AR, teachers use other personalised methods to monitor progress. Each pupil is given a booklet to record the names of the books they have read and the scores they have achieved in each quiz. Space is given for teachers to leave comments, reinforcing the data gleaned from reports with personalised conversational feedback. This practice complements one of the key benefits identified with the programme: “It is essential that teachers have a strong input into the performance of each pupil.”

### **“The online training was excellent”.**

“Renaissance Place also played its part in the success story of our school. There was regular consultation throughout the first year of usage and the Renaissance team was always available at the end of the phone to advise, encourage and provide practical guidance on techniques to ensure we achieved the best results. The online training was excellent and the facilitators were always patient, professional and competent. The ICT co-ordinator reported that the instructions for importing pupil data were very easy to follow.”

*The most significant improvement was the change in pupils’ attitude to reading and especially with regard to boys.*

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