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Mountbatten School

Romsey, Hampshire

The Mountbatten School is a large co-educational academy for students aged 11 to 16. The school is situated in the Test Valley in Hampshire, close to the New Forest National Park, serving a largely rural catchment area. Accelerated Reader was implemented in 2011 as an intervention strategy for students in Year 7 who enter the school with reading ages below their chronological ages. **Vanessa Glistler**, lead teaching assistant for English and literacy, runs the programme alongside librarian **Sue Moody**.

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We implemented the Accelerated Reader™ (AR™) programme as an intervention tool to raise literacy standards as part of the school’s focus plan. AR seemed the perfect solution to achieve this, and we have tailored its usage to meet our students’ needs.

Because we have been using AR as an intervention tool, Pupil Premium funding has been key to our implementation of the programme. We have used it to purchase books to be used with the programme and to support it with other resources such as prizes and incentives. We have been extremely fortunate to have the full backing of our Senior Leadership Team in allocating the necessary budget and teaching resources for the programme.

Each year we target approximately 50 students in Year 7 who have a reading age of 10 years or below, as well as some students who may have a slightly higher reading age but who would benefit from smaller teaching groups. Each AR class has three members of staff supporting it, and the classes are sub-divided into smaller working groups of 4 or 5. AR is taught as an intervention and is timetabled as a curriculum subject through the English faculty, not through Learning Support. As a result, students do not feel as though they are being singled out for special attention due to their low reading ages.

We have also noticed that some of our more behaviourally challenged students perform well during our AR lessons. There are fewer issues with poor behaviour as the students are able to access reading material which is tailored to their individual learning needs. The students are always able to succeed: our motto is “Everyone’s a winner in Accelerated Reader.”

Our emphasis in AR lessons is on achievable success, so small gains are always rewarded. When we asked students for their feedback, we received only positive comments. “In the past I didn’t enjoy reading,” one child wrote, “but since I came to Accelerated Reader I enjoy reading books”. Another wrote: “At the start of Mountbatten I was not that good a reader but now I am confident and good and this is a real fun programme to do.” As such, we are seeing that the positive engagement with reading and the library that is developed in Year 7 is being carried forward by these students.

AR runs alongside other interventions, which are delivered by our Learning Support department. We have been running the AR programme for three years, and during this time we have been monitoring the progress of students very carefully.

We regularly use the reports in AR and STAR Reading™ to monitor progress. In addition to the reports we can generate automatically, we use STAR™ data to calculate our own measure of “ratio gain” – that is, the reading age gain per calendar month. This data

is regularly presented to the Senior Management Team. We have 46 students in Year 7 using Accelerated Reader (AR) this year. When they joined, the 11 students in receipt of Pupil Premium funding had an average reading age of 8 years 9 months (1 year 5 months lower than non-Pupil Premium students). After using the programme for one term, their reading ages increased by an average of 6.2 months.

Out of 61 students identified as needing reading intervention on entry into Year 7 in 2011, 44 have now achieved a reading age of 12 years or higher. Only three have been left with reading ages of ten years or below, all of whom have special educational needs. We have found that achievement in reading is being transferred across the curriculum, with many of the students using AR achieving two levels in progress in English.

We are no longer seeing the very negative attitudes to reading that we once did. Students who were reluctant to come into the library are now both comfortable and confident when selecting books. We have also seen an increase in independent learning. Students who have been participating in the programme for several years are very self-motivated, especially when a competitive element is added. Our aim was to raise literacy standards, which we feel we have achieved through the use of the programme.

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