

“In the last academic year our pupils read an average of 71 books each!”

Termoncanice Primary School Limavady, Northern Ireland

Staff at Termoncanice Primary School in Limavady, County Derry, have seen big improvements in their students' reading skills by combining STAR Early Literacy with a creative literacy programme.

Vice Principal Leo McCloskey explains how STAR worked hand-in-hand with his Lift Off initiative.

“Our current Primary 7 write better than any other class I have ever taught, not surprising since most have read over 120 novels in the last two years.”

I had a eureka moment when our staff team received training for Accelerated Reader (AR). For years I had been involved with pointless reading initiatives which never got anywhere and yet the solution was so simple: match the complexity of books to children's ability levels.

AR has gone on to be a massive success in our school. The year group we initially targeted has seen approximately 30% of the year group move from below average in reading to average or above average. Our Suffolk Reading scores have risen in all year groups; our average child is now scoring above average in reading in the Suffolk test in all year groups.

AR changed the way we approached Paired Reading practice. The problem we were having with Paired Reading is illustrated with my son, who is mad about Manchester United. He always picked Man United books for his Paired Reading programme, but while they matched his interest level the text was far too complex for him. That is why I brought in the key component of AR, matching ability levels to book levels. The children are still reading books that interest them but we make sure they are accessible for them.

I wanted to extend the success we had seen with Paired Reading, so I devised a literacy programme that combined the data made available with the STAR assessment with an ongoing activity to engage the children with reading. This became Lift Off, which was based around space travel. All good projects require ingenuity from teachers and our staff made sure Lift Off became a big part of school life. A galaxy notice board with pupils as astronauts took pride of place in the corridor so students could see how they were progressing.

I used the STAR Early Literacy programme to ascertain a baseline reading level for children in Primary 2 and Primary 3. Using these results, the children were categorised into four groups: early emergent readers, late emergent readers, transitional readers and probable readers. Teachers then set about dividing their class libraries into four categories to suit these ability groups. A colour coding system was used so children knew which set of books to select from.

Each child was given a Lift Off booklet at a special Launch Meeting. The booklets were differentiated into three levels: the top group (probable), middle (transitional) and bottom (early and late emergent). When a child read a book they would complete a short review. These booklets were an unexpected bonus, helping to involve parents with their children's reading. Over time pupils found it easier to write a short succinct summary, helping to improve writing skills as well as reading skills. In the end of year PIE tests 10 pupils in Primary 3 scored 100%, a school first!

Lift Off helped to motivate students to continue reading new books. After reading five books, students arrived at Planet Five and were awarded a prize. Similar prizes were awarded on landing on Planet 10 and Planet 15. We encountered an unexpected problem when a number of pupils read more than 15 books inside the six weeks. We had to produce a new booklet in a different colour. Pupils who read more than 15 books were then put inside a rocket as they moved onto another galaxy.

At the end of Lift Off the children were tested again using STAR. By testing both before and after the Lift Off initiative, we had data on the growth made by each pupil during the 6 weeks. The data produced by STAR is superb. The tests are child friendly and don't last too long. The big bonus for teachers is the information on where the children performed best and which areas needed further improvement. This information was taken on board and fed into planners.

The STAR assessments showed that our students were doing well in all aspects of literacy. Scale Scores increased by approximately 100 in both year groups, with a particularly large increase in comprehension skills. Oral reading fluency also increased in both year groups, doubling for Primary 2 and rising by an average of 33 words in Primary 3. The feedback from parents was incredible, too: they loved the project. They felt Lift Off succeeded because it made their children readers, writers and talkers.

Every child in the Primary 2 and Primary 3 participated in the programme, with the minimum number of books read being 3. All together, these students read 2500 books between them in a 6 week period. At the closing party all the completed booklets were placed inside specially made rockets. Booklets were drawn out from the boys' and girls' rockets, with winners receiving a £20 voucher.

The success of STAR Early Literacy and Lift Off is reflected by the ongoing reading practice facilitated by Accelerated Reader (AR), backed up by the STAR Reading assessment. In the last term, students using AR have taken quizzes on 8,649 books, totalling a staggering 44 million words between them. On average pupils read for 30 minutes each.

In the last academic year our pupils read an average of 71 books each! On top of the impressive record across the board, several individual students have really shone with the programme. Niamh in Primary 7 is a double word millionaire after only one term, and she is joined on millionaire row by ten others with more on the way. Niamh is now reading War and Peace to help her reach her target of three million words. Conor in Primary 7 was just above average on starting AR. He now has a reading age of 16 years and 7 months, giving him a reading age better than 99% of students his age in the UK.

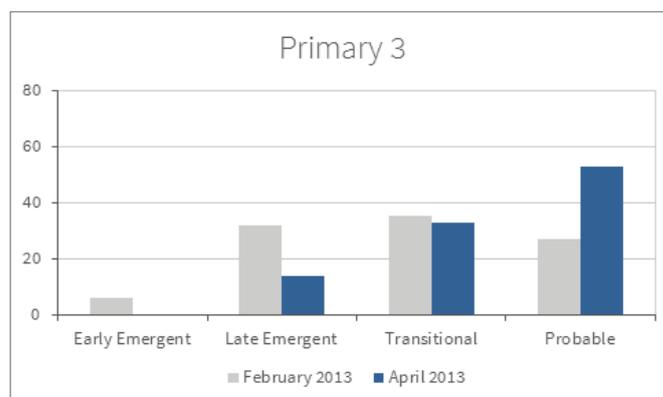
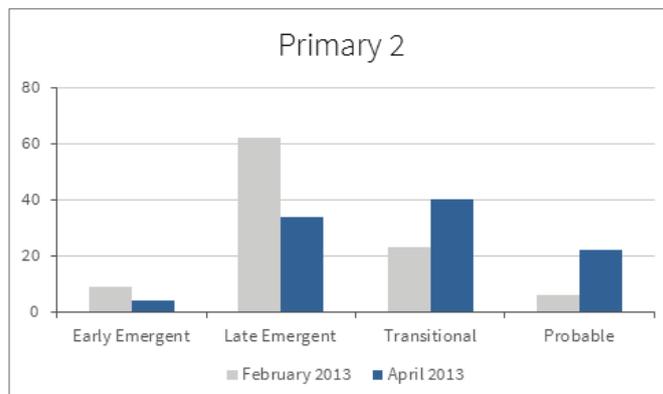
The excellent Screening Report in STAR Reading shows that 10 pupils in Primary 7 (almost 13%) are now reading better than 90% of children their age in the UK; they've come a long way in 3 years. At the end of last year we calculated each year group made an average rise of just less than two years in their reading age, equating to a net gain of almost a year's growth.

Facts and figures can sometimes hide the true success stories. For me, the greatest success has to be pupils being excited by the works of certain authors. My Manchester United fanatic son now loves Tom Gates and devours the *Wimpy Kid* books. My daughter likes the *Faraway tree* books. She reads all the time! I see the benefits in their writing, too: our current Primary 7 write better than any other class I have ever taught, not surprising since most have read over 120 novels in the last two years.

We celebrate success each week at assembly and at the end of term party. In June we have an Oscar ceremony and invite parents. Replica Oscars are given to pupils who score the highest average percent correct in quizzes, gain the highest points score and read the most words among other achievements.

Ultimately the question is, do kids like AR and Lift Off? You bet your bottom dollar they do. On the first day after Christmas children were queuing at the computer room door to take an AR test. One child read 11 books over Christmas and tested on all 11. I asked her not to but she did. She scored 10 100% scores and one 90%. She laughed "*You know I love reading sir!*"

Charts showing the percentage of students in each STAR Early Literacy category in February and April 2013, during the Lift Off programme.



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