

OFSTED praises reading progress at rapidly improving academy in Lowestoft

East Point Academy

Lowestoft, Suffolk

East Point is a medium-sized academy in Lowestoft, Suffolk. The number of students eligible for pupil premium funding is above the national average, and 17% of students are supported by School Action Plus or have a statement of special educational needs.

Certification

OFSTED

Motivation

Progress monitoring

Reading culture

“When OFSTED came, we showed AR data for Pupil Premium students, showing the progress that group was making.”

Mary-Jane King was a teacher in the school’s English department when Accelerated Reader™ was first launched at East Point. A below-average number of students achieved A*-C grades in English, and many students lacked the literacy skills to learn across the curriculum. “Many of our students had very low reading ages,” Mary-Jane explains. “We launched Accelerated Reader because we wanted to engage students with reading and create a reading culture in the academy.”

A colleague did the initial work of setting up the programme and getting it off the ground, but Mary-Jane took responsibility for it not long afterwards. The academy joined the Renaissance School Partnership (RSP) programme, where a dedicated programme manager works closely with a school to implement AR™ successfully. “There was an element of trial and error when I first took over AR. I used a remote session with the programme manager to get some initial guidance and to help me identify the things I needed to focus on.”

Data monitoring and remote training

RSP provides schools with weekly data monitoring, remote training and a series of on-site consultation days that are tailored to the specific needs of the school. “On one of our consultation days, our programme manager met with the senior leadership team and informed them about the impact of the programme. She was able to show them what kind of data OFSTED was interested in seeing. When OFSTED came, we showed AR data for Pupil Premium students, showing the progress that group was making. They seemed quite impressed.”

Dedicated reading time is now a permanent feature of the timetable. Labelled “Drop Everything and Read”, twenty minutes of tutor time or class time is set aside each day for reading. The result is that every student has a book on the go at all times. The amount of engaged reading time per day has increased by 50% since East Point joined the RSP programme, while the average number of quizzes passed per student has more than tripled from 4.6 to 15.5.

Mary-Jane’s role has changed as AR has become more fully embedded in students’ daily lives at East Point. Now Literacy Lead across the academy, Mary-Jane is responsible for raising literacy standards. With the support of the RSP programme manager, she has focused on working with staff to trickle down best practice that will help students to succeed. “Now my role is very much about engaging with staff. I print out reports and jot down handwritten comments about things they can focus on. The regular reports from our programme manager have been really useful in this because they highlight the things we need to work on, highlight the students at risk, and point out the next steps we need to take, which makes it easy to focus.”

Establishing a reading culture

The team’s aim of establishing a reading culture at the academy has now become a reality. Resources supplied by the RSP programme manager have helped to make World Book Day a significant feature on the academy’s calendar, while a range of schemes and initiatives have been supplemented by additional support throughout the rest of the year. The library has hosted a scavenger hunt, which not only gave students a positive experience of the space but also introduced them to the range of resources available to them. Other activities, like the CILIP Carnegie Award shadowing scheme, have been given a visual presence in the library with book recommendations and posters on display.

One of the things that has characterised East Point’s time as part of the RSP programme has been a focus on Renaissance Certification. Certification is a scheme to recognise the successful implementation of Accelerated Reader according to research-based best practices. Classes achieving the rigorous standards are awarded a certificate for the wall and badges for every student. The class teacher is given a mug, which has been known to prompt envy and a spirit of healthy competition between staff members as they seek to foster success in their classrooms. “The teachers make a big deal of the mugs,” Mary-Jane remarks. “The children want to get the badges, but the teachers also want them just as much!”

Because over three-quarters of the AR classes have achieved Model Class status, East Point has been awarded Model School –the first in the country this academic year. Mary-Jane is justifiably pleased with the success her students have had with Certification, commenting: “we’re all very proud of the pupils’ fantastic achievement. I am consistently impressed by the enthusiasm and commitment to reading from the pupils and staff at East Point Academy.”

Impressing OFSTED

The success of the programme was noted by OFSTED inspectors when they visited the Academy recently. It had been in special measures, but because it has undergone such a positive change recently its rating has now improved. Reading received particular attention in the inspection report:

The teaching of reading, particularly in Years 7 to 9, is increasingly good. Many students, particularly in Year 7, are making rapid progress in developing good reading skills.

In particular, the inspectors drew attention to the effective use of additional funding, targeted towards particular groups but benefitting all students in the process. The attainment gap between disadvantaged students and their peers has effectively been eliminated, with progress strongest in reading.

The academy makes good use of the Year 7 catch up funding to promote better reading. It is doing this with great success in Year 7 and across Years 8 and 9... The academy uses all additional funding effectively. The Year 7 catch up funding is having a very positive impact on the improvement of students’ reading skills. The academy uses the pupil premium funding effectively to bridge the gap between these students’ achievement and the others. There is now little discernible difference between the attainment and progress of disadvantaged students currently in the school and those of other groups. A rising proportion of pupils eligible for support from the additional funding are doing even better than their peers.

Mary-Jane credits the Renaissance School Partnership with contributing to the Academy’s improvement. “RSP has been instrumental in raising standards at East Point. OFSTED highlighted the progress we’re making in reading because it’s outstripped the improvements we’re making elsewhere. The partnership programme

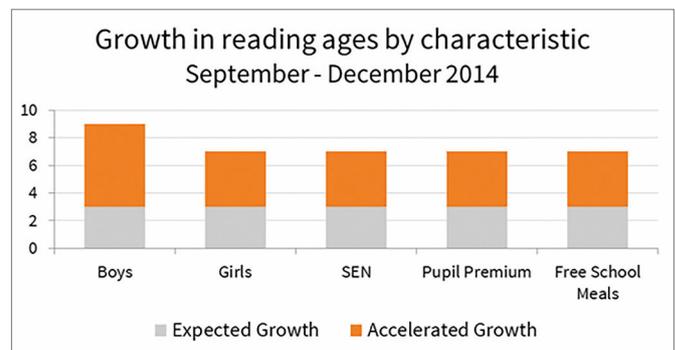
has played an important role in this, giving us the tools we need to make big gains in progress and the support we need to measure and report on that most effectively.”

Growing strongly in the second year

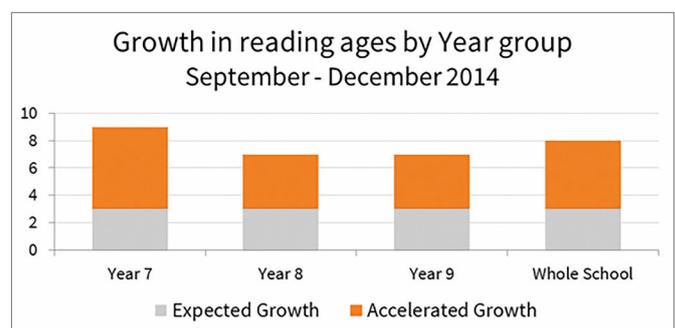
“We have renewed RSP for a second year because the programme has been really successful”, Mary-Jane concludes. “Our programme manager has been brilliant and is really helpful, and the kids have become more engaged with reading as a result.”

East Point Academy’s second year as part of RSP has been even more successful than the first so far. The school has seen an average of eight months’ growth in reading ages for the three months September – December. The growth in reading ages at East Point is more impressive the closer you look at it. Studying the data for individual teachers reveals that every teacher has seen an average increase in reading ages well above the expected level.

These statistics show that the development of a reading culture and the ongoing training of staff yields strong results for students that will prepare them well for future learning.



Data from the three months September – December 2014 shows that students are achieving strong growth regardless of their sex, although boys are progressing particularly well. Students on Free School Meals, those attracting Pupil Premium funding and those stated for SEN have made over twice the progress expected.



Almost every class at East Point Academy is making greatly accelerated progress with reading. Each year group is achieving more than twice the expected growth, with a school-wide average of eight months’ growth in the space of three months.

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