

# I AM PART OF THEIR STORY

Sir Herbert Leon Academy,  
Milton Keynes

Sir Herbert Leon Academy is based in an area of high economic deprivation, close to Milton Keynes.

Since Accelerated Reader was introduced to Years 7, 8 and 9 in 2012, the culture of reading in the school has been transformed. Patty Goddard, the Library Assistant and AR Support, observes that “there has been a whole-school attitude change.”



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Library use

Reading culture

Reading for pleasure

# “Students feel more confident about being seen to enjoy reading.”

“Before AR was introduced to our Year 7, 8 and 9 students, the school had a “Books in Bags” policy. This required the students always to have a book to read. The theory of this was good but in reality most students didn’t really care what book they were carrying as long as they had one to please the teacher – and some didn’t actually read the book!

## Educated choices

This changed with the introduction of AR! Now students are making educated choices about the books they want to read due to the ZPD range we give them after taking the STAR test three times a year. The ZPD range helps them learn how to choose the right level of book as this choice can be very challenging for some students, especially our lower ability students. They tended just to choose a book by its cover but now they know this doesn’t always work so well. They also realise they can choose a ‘thin’ book if they prefer but still maintain their correct levels and challenges.

They know they are progressing (and so do the teachers) as students are passing their quizzes! They also know that if they didn’t do so well on the quiz, they need to figure out why. This usually generates a lovely conversation with the librarians, teachers or friends. Most of our students love to work their way through a series of books and often request specific books for us to order. So now our students have a completely different attitude about reading and visiting the library!”

*AR has a high profile in the library and across school, with learners’ success being celebrated*

## Focus for our tutors

This attitudinal shift has also been noticed by the Head Librarian, Amber Sexton. “Since introducing AR our circulation figures have increased dramatically, with loans going up three fold in the first term. In addition to the increase in circulation figures, we have observed greater numbers of students visiting the library at lunch and break to exchange their books and sit and chat to their friends about books. We encourage our students to discuss what they are reading with each other and support each other to select books.”

This co-operative approach to reading has transformed relationships between students and staff as well as between pupils themselves. Sue Jagger, the Head of Literacy, comments, “we now have students stopping staff in the corridor to talk about the books they are reading. The programme has provided a focus for our tutors to discuss reading with their tutor group. Similarly, the Home Connect feature has given us a way of sharing children’s reading progress with their parents. The data given in the reports has provided a vehicle for the SLT and Governors to monitor the children’s engagement with reading, while the STAR tests have given us a systematic approach to measuring their reading ages and monitoring their progress. By providing the time and space to read for pleasure in school, Accelerated Reader

has raised the profile and value of reading among the whole staff as well as the students.”

### **Raised the profile of reading**

Amber agrees: “AR has a high profile in the library and across school, with learners’ success being celebrated. As a result, we have successfully raised the profile of reading and made students feel more confident about being seen to enjoy reading.

The introduction of AR has refocused students’ reading as they now visit the library biweekly with their English class and are encouraged to borrow books frequently within a structured framework which is supported by the English department and the Library staff. AR visits to the library involve supporting students to borrow the right books for them and make the best choices.

Having the book levels displayed on the spine of the books along with coloured stickers helps to guide students to the appropriate level for them. This inspired us to reorganise the library and sequence our books within colour order, which makes it easier for the students to quickly find what they’re looking for. We aim to buy AR books mainly. Being aware of the range of levels has helped us to direct funds to gaps in the range of reading levels we offer and ensure that funds are targeted toward the books we need.

We offer immediate prizes and rewards for quiz passes, which incentivises students to engage with their book with the aim of passing their quiz. Each term we do a larger reward, such as a trip or a film, which celebrates the success of the students who have made the most progress and gives the other students something to strive for.”



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