

I AM PART OF THEIR STORY

Ballykelly Primary School,
Northern Ireland

Ballykelly Primary School is a medium-sized school in the village of Ballykelly in County Londonderry, Northern Ireland. The school caters for children of all denominations from age 4 to 11 years. At present 38% of the pupils at the school are entitled to free school meals.

Helen Cole has been the Principal at Ballykelly since February 2011 and has overseen an action plan to improve standards at the school, which has included the implementation of Accelerated Reader.



Find out more
renlearn.co.uk/partofthestory

Motivators

Progress Monitoring

Data review

Intervention

“Our results show that AR has helped to raise literacy standards just as we had hoped.”

Before the 2012/13 academic year, we analysed our Key Stage 2 data for the previous four years. This showed that standards attained in literacy were consistently below the Northern Ireland average; when compared with schools in the same free school meals band, levels of attainment were also below average. Following this, a focused action plan (led by a new leadership team) with appropriate strategies was agreed, adopted and implemented. One of the initiatives was the introduction of Accelerated Reader (AR) to raise standards in literacy in Key Stage 2.

Implementing Accelerated Reader successfully

Before launching the programme formally, all Key Stage 2 staff undertook online training that in turn was disseminated to classroom assistants. With financial support from the PTA, we purchased a wide range of reading material which was labelled by teachers and assistants. We then launched the programme to parents by inviting them along to an information evening. At this session, we explained the programme to the parents including details of how they could get involved through Home Connect. A professional story teller also attended this session and told stories to both parents and children.

AR has had a huge impact on children's motivation to read, – particularly those children who are more reluctant readers

The wide range of reports available is extremely informative and helps to monitor pupil progress very effectively. We use the STAR Reading assessment to find students' baseline reading levels. We then direct students towards appropriate reading material. On a daily basis the class teachers monitor the children's TOPS Reports and provide instant feedback on progress, suggesting movement to higher or lower levels of books if appropriate.

Every week we print a diagnostic report and share it with the children. Children are informed of their average per cent correct every week, and are encouraged to track their own progress. For those children who are highlighted on the report as needing intervention, we investigate their results immediately and put in place appropriate strategies to make sure they are making expected growth. We keep a particular focus on those students who have been identified as underachieving in literacy, providing further support from classroom assistants.

Motivating students to read for pleasure

All teachers and parents of children in Key Stage 2 agree that Accelerated Reader has had a huge impact on children's motivation to read – particularly those children who are more reluctant readers, especially boys. Through their participation in the programme both at home and at school, the children show an increased enthusiasm to read. Careful consideration of rewards and a variety of target setting challenges has helped to sustain and encourage this enthusiasm – we have purchased a wide variety of prizes and motivational stickers.

We use a variety of target setting challenges to motivate students, including both word targets and points targets within given time limits. These targets are monitored both at home and at school. Once STAR Reading assessments have been re-taken, we share the results with children, staff and parents and amend the students' targets accordingly.

All classes in Key Stage 2 have timetabled access to the central school library, within which is a designated zone for Accelerated Reader books. Children access this provision on a daily basis and also during lunch hours. In each classroom the children have also established book-sharing boxes where they are very keen to share their own reading material with each other. In January 2014, 35 children from Primary 6 joined the local town library. They now make extended use of this service, which has also led to increased use of the mobile library van that visits the village each fortnight.

Improving literacy standards

AR has had a very positive impact on our school. Some of the benefits include: professional development of staff; increased collaboration between home and school; a more child centred approach to reading; improvements in children's self-esteem; and increased reading abilities.

We find it very easy to use, allowing children to take responsibility for their own learning and monitor their own progress. AR is very individualised and tailored to meet the specific needs of a very wide range of reading abilities.

Our results show that AR has helped to raise literacy standards just as we had hoped. Benchmarking data in the 2012/13 school year indicated that all children in Primary 7 are now achieving above the Northern Ireland average, and 83.4% are now achieving Level 4 and above at the end of Key Stage 2.

The school has recently undergone a Follow Up Inspection. The Education and Training Inspectorate commented on the improving trends in the quality of the children's oral and written work and the increase in the overall standards they attain. Recognition was also given to the effective professional practice of staff and how this was beginning to have an impact on the standards achieved by the children.



The wide range of reports available is extremely informative and helps to monitor pupil progress very effectively

Read more stories of success at: renlearn.co.uk/partofthestory