

# I AM PART OF THEIR STORY

Thorp Academy,  
Ryton, Tyne and Wear

Recently converted to academy status, Thorp Academy is a relatively large mixed comprehensive in Ryton, Tyne and Wear. Approximately one in five students is eligible for Pupil Premium allocation; only one student speaks English as an additional language.

The past few years have seen a good deal of change at Thorp Academy. Originally a comprehensive, it amalgamated with another local secondary three years ago and moved to a single site a year later.

Becoming an academy this year, the school is due to move into a new building in the near future.

One of the most significant changes in the life of the school, though, has been the development of a strong culture of reading that is yielding positive results for students.



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“Accelerated Reader has increased the engagement and focus of lower achieving students throughout the school”

## Engaging students through literacy

The school’s LRC Manager, Beth Khalil, helps to run the Accelerated Reader (AR) programme alongside English teacher and AR Co-ordinator Margaret Dickson. Beth explains the role AR has come to have at Thorp Academy. “We initially introduced Accelerated Reader because we needed a way to measure progress through reading skills. We had heard of its success in other schools and decided to implement it through the English department. It has proved to be a positive way to promote reading for pleasure as well as building on vocabulary skills and engaging the students through literacy.”

Accelerated Reader was already in place at one of the amalgamated schools, but the programme was expanded when they merged. Books in the library were labelled and integrated into the rest of the stock, while both parents and students were given information to prepare them for using the programme.

“To prepare the staff for AR,” Beth explains, “the initial introduction was to the English department. We gave the following key messages: students should be reading within their ZPD range, reading regularly, and achieving an 85% attainment level on their quizzes.”

*(Students) are also taking the initiative by seeking out new literature to read and volunteering additional work based on what they have read*

## Using data to monitor and intervene

AR has been fully embedded into the new literacy policy at Thorp Academy. Data from Accelerated Reader and the STAR Reading assessment are used to demonstrate progress and inform learning strategies.

“We monitor and adjust the AR lessons regularly to show we are taking action to improve reading and literacy standards. For Ofsted inspections, we have provided the data we get from the STAR Reading tests. Students are tested four times per year, allowing us to track their progress each term.”

Quiz scores and progress towards targets are tracked closely by tutors and LRC staff, who also listen to students reading from the books they have chosen and provide individual help where it is needed.

One example of how this has worked in practice is the reading tutorial scheme that started this academic year. “Students read for half the tutorial session each week, and their

reading focus has improved a lot. The scheme helps students to recall information, which positively affects their progress in other subjects. The results from the scheme have proven to staff, students and parents that a confident, regular reader will achieve better results across the curriculum.”

This has had a particular impact on the SEN department, Beth says. “We use the reports from AR and STAR to intervene with students who are struggling with their targets. Some of these students with special educational needs worked with members of staff during registration time once a week, practising their reading and quizzing. Now in Year 8, many of these students are finding reading and taking quizzes easier to do.”

The SEN department has a dedicated awards board in the Learning Support area, which records students’ successes in passing quizzes at 100%. “The students in this department love doing their quizzes,” Beth comments, adding that many have asked to carry on with the programme beyond Year 8. “They find reading with AR very rewarding, and their interest in reading for pleasure is growing steadily.”

### Increasing motivation and engagement

Students are engaged with their reading and motivated to make progress. Bookmarks and certificates are given to the top readers in year-group assemblies, making the recognition of progress very public. These awards complement a series of rewards offered in the LRC, which runs a prize draw and other incentives for students who pass their quizzes at 90% or above.

The result of this focus on progress and student motivation is a big and growing culture of reading at Thorp Academy. The LRC is busy throughout the day, both before and after school and during break times. A record number of students have received reward stamps for passing quizzes at 90% or above, and the latest figures show 2,505 books being borrowed in one half term. The LRC has been visited by students over 10,000 times in the same period.

Students have a dedicated AR lesson once a fortnight, but Beth has seen an impact beyond timetabled LRC lessons. “The LRC is used much more for personal reading during social times, as well as during lessons. Students are getting used to quizzing regularly and independently outside their AR classes.”

### Supporting independent reading for pleasure

One of the most noticeable results of using AR at Thorp Academy has been the increasing independence with which students are approaching their reading practice. They are not only more engaged with reading than they used to be, but are also taking the initiative by seeking out new literature to read and volunteering additional work based on what they have read.

Beth describes this as a result of the increasing confidence students are showing with their reading. “Students are taking the time to choose their reading books more carefully and are starting to request books and ask for recommendations when they find an author or genre that they particularly like. They now have confidence in their reading abilities and trust their own judgment when choosing books for themselves. They are learning to challenge themselves, but aren’t afraid to bring the books back if they find them too hard at that time.”

“Lots of our students are also starting to review the books they are reading for the LRC – we had 50 reviews or recommendations last half term. The students are finding it easier to reflect on what they have read because they have to recall that information to pass their quizzes, so their reviews are well written and contain lots of detail using a wider vocabulary.”

“We love Accelerated Reader and how much it engages our students in reading for pleasure every day,” Beth concludes. “It has increased the engagement and focus of lower achieving students throughout the school as we are seeing that the top quizzing classes on the leader board are actually from the lower band sets rather than the top sets. Reading has become a positive activity across the school: there are many more students within school reading for pleasure and getting used to carrying a reading book with them at all times.”



*Accelerated Reader displays in the LRC help to motivate students and recognise their achievements.*

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