

I AM PART OF THEIR STORY

St. Peter's Primary School
Collegeland, Ireland

St. Peter's Primary School is a small rural school in Collegeland, Ireland, running from ages 5-11 with under 150 pupils on roll



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'A tremendous success': AR™ leads to increased enjoyment of reading and a strong reading culture at Northern Ireland primary school

St. Peter's Primary School has been using Accelerated Reader™ (AR) since June 2014. The school's principal, Jim McAlinden, says: "We have a great culture within the school that you don't have to be sick to get better. We are very proud of the reading tradition in our school, and the standards that the children attain. But it was a situation that AR was providing something that helped children across the board. Accelerated Reader was a scheme which had made a very positive impact across a wide range of school settings and we believed that it could enhance the reading experience for our children."

Introducing AR at St. Peter's

"The setup did take some time, as we were implementing a completely new system," said Mr. McAlinden. "We found the online training very helpful, and I was able to go to a number of schools in the local area that were having success with AR to look at examples of good working practice. We also had an onsite visit from a teacher to give us some pointers about how to manage the system and the setup. All of the support that we had,

AR has made an improvement to every child's reading within the school

set up by Renaissance Learning, helped us tremendously in grounding ourselves and finding what direction we wanted to go with AR. Our research enabled us to utilise the good practice we observed in other schools and adapt accordingly to our scenario."

Jim also found that AR was popular with parents. "When we first set up AR, we ran a parents' information meeting. Parents were particularly enthusiastic about Renaissance Home Connect, where they can receive an email to let them know how their child has performed in a quiz. It's a great way of communicating their child's progress, they have that instant link from AR, and can go on to ask their child about the books. It becomes a topic of conversation over the dinner table."

Promoting a Reading Culture throughout the school

Jim feels that AR's implementation at St. Peter's has been hugely successful. "AR has made an improvement to every child's reading within the school, from Primary 4 up to Primary 7. It has given these children high interest levels in reading. There's a great buzz about books, both within the school and outside it. It's amazing to hear from parents about the impact

Assessment

Incentives

Progress Monitoring

Reading Culture

Reading for Pleasure

Student Engagement

AR has had on their children's approach to reading. Children are now reading in the car on the way to and from school, they're even reading in the cloakrooms. If it's a wet day, they're in, reading, as opposed to finding other things to do. They're going and picking up the books, they're extremely interested, they're discussing book titles and authors, they're discussing interests, exchanging books and allowing other children to read."

Incentivising reading for boys

St. Peter's uses a range of motivators alongside AR to encourage students' interest in reading. "We use a range of incentives," says Jim. "For instance, we give out certificates for 100% scores in our assemblies. Three or more 100% scores in one week earns a night's homework pass. We have a monthly top class, where the class with the highest overall averages gets an extra PE lesson, and they can choose whatever game they wish to play. Every week the names of two children in each class who have earned 100% on a quiz are pulled from a hat, and they win pencils, rubbers, small tokens really. There is a millionaire's club, for children who have read over a million words, ice cream vouchers, and a range of other draws, lucky dips and small prizes. These are examples of good practice we've seen in other schools."

The school has noticed that AR has led to a particularly noticeable improvement in boys' reading, their attitudes towards it and the results they achieve. "Educational research indicates that boys tend to deviate away from reading as they move through KS2 into KS3," says Jim, "and this is something we had noticed as well. There are so many distractions for boys, particularly sports and gaming. Since AR, and I know this as a parent as well, boys in KS2 have become much more involved in their reading. The children are really keen and competitive with regard to the incentives, which has helped increase boys' enjoyment and participation a great deal."

Assessing throughout the year using STAR

As well as AR, St. Peter's has experienced great success with STAR Assessments™. Jim says: "We initially used the Graded Reading Test (GRT), a standardised test, which we would administer every year in the autumn term. This was the only assessment measure, aside from the observations made by teachers, we used to inform our teaching. With STAR Reading, because we administer the test every half term, we are equipped to continually monitor how the children progress with their reading, and from that we are more able to tailor our teaching to match their needs on an individual level. It lends itself to clearer differentiation within the classroom, and we've found that it is a much clearer method of informing our teaching, so much so that we have entirely replaced the GRT with STAR."

The school has found that, as well as complementing Accelerated Reader, STAR has also proven useful as a standalone assessment tool. "We use it from our Primary 3 year upwards," Jim explains.

"The P3 students don't use AR, but we've found that assessing a child's reading age with STAR Reading is a great way to inform parents of progress. The progress made during this time is huge, and STAR informs us precisely where they are when they begin using AR in P4. Teachers at class level have a clear picture of progress and can pitch differentiated lessons more appropriately. If a child is scoring particularly low in a STAR test, we can take a look at the reading levels they are working from, their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), and we can look at how we would provide reading support. STAR helps us to identify children who need support, but at the same time we're able to move children up groups accordingly as they achieve success."

Recognising success

The school's success has even been recognised by the Renaissance Certification scheme, which rewards successful implementation of Accelerated Reader according to research-based best practices, which have recently been updated. Mrs. Phil Johnston at the school has been awarded Model Project Manager, which acknowledges that at least 50% of the school's AR classes qualify as Model Classes. These classes have received a certificate for the wall and badges for every student, as well as a mug for the teacher! "We're pushing now for model school," says Jim. "That's our target this year as a whole school, as we move through the year."

"When we first implemented AR, we had spent a lot of time looking at support programmes we could put in place to help children with reading difficulty, but we ultimately felt that now was the time to look for something that had an impact on reading levels across the board, and AR has ticked every box in that regard. Our children are leaving and heading off to secondary education with a love of reading, a good level of reading, and good understanding. And we believe this is the foundation of all learning. AR has made a huge positive impact on our whole school family: staff parents and children. It has established a reading culture that is thriving and the improvements in standards are evident through the data produced but more importantly in the smiles of parents and children alike. A tremendous success."

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