

I AM PART OF THEIR STORY

**Mill Chase Academy,
Bordon, Hampshire**

Mill Chase Academy is a small secondary school in rural Hampshire which has approximately 500 students aged 11-16, and is now in its fourth year of using Renaissance Accelerated Reader and Star Reading. Dominic Carney, the school's library practitioner, discusses the school's implementation of these programmes.



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Assessment

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Incentives

Reading culture

Reading for pleasure

Reading age

Progress monitoring

Hitting the reading for pleasure button' at Mill Chase Academy

Introducing Renaissance Accelerated Reader

The decision to implement Accelerated Reader came from senior management in reaction to a perceived need to improve literacy across the school as a core requirement, and Accelerated Reader was seen very much as a tool to enable us to do so. This is now our fourth year using the programme.

Accelerated Reader as a system is very straightforward to drive, and the processes around labelling our books were clear and straight forward, and well supported by Book Guide. The only problem with this was the scale, but here we found value in acquiring help with the manual work from our library prefects. The training we received worked well and gave us enough confidence to move forward with the programme – the coaches were totally expert.

The exhaustiveness and dynamics of Star testing make for a very good assessment of reading age, it's worth its weight in gold

Accurately tracking reading age and assessing on entry with Star Reading

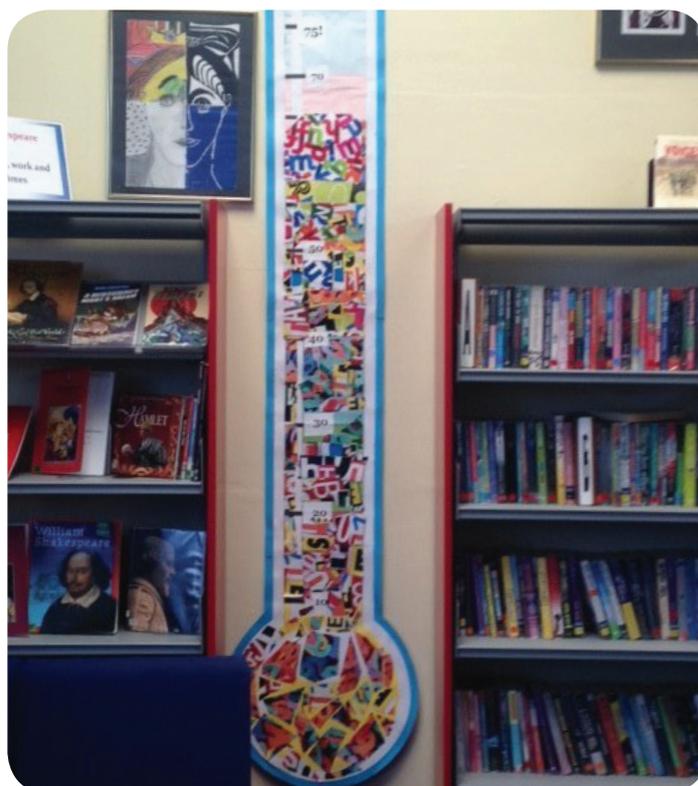
We carry out a Star Reading test every term, so three times per year. There is so much good, strong information within Star – we're very keen on the programme. We are now using Star instead of our other battery of programmes for testing English and have found it very useful in taking a snap shot of progress and plotting this over time. If anyone wants to drill down in further detail then they have all the data available to do so. When we tested our Year 7s coming in from Year 6 the tests showed a disparity between their estimated scores from primary and their Star test scores. This gave us a very strong notion of what their actual reading ages were. The exhaustiveness and dynamics of Star testing make for a very good assessment of reading age, it's worth its weight in gold.

A reading culture across the school

Where we see classes really engaging with Accelerated Reader, then it's almost universally the case that we have seen reading age lead chronological age by anywhere between 25-30%. It's not uncommon for us to see an average class moving through year 7 to shift up 15 or 16 months through the 10 or 11 months of the school year. We also try to push this out and make it an attainment goal for the pupils. For instance, one young lady increased 4 years and 8 months over the period from October 2015 to July 2016, which is astounding. There will of course be lots of factors at play here but Accelerated Reader certainly helped us to track that, and did a lot to contribute towards it.

We are very much driven by our own house system, too. We have four houses of mixed ability and we use Accelerated Reader to drive competition – we have a big house literacy competition and smaller in-class competitions for which we award prizes to students who read the most. We celebrate word millionaires and use certification in this respect too. So that we don't stray too far away from quality over quantity in recognising success we've set up the 100% club, which you can only be in once you have three books read and 100% in each quiz. Last year the school worked towards and achieved a 75 million word target by the end of the year, which has inspired lots of competition within the school and even got the house staff involved. Accelerated Reader is therefore one of the highlights of our end of year summer assembly to recap these achievements.

Qualitatively, students are discussing books and are more and more interested in reading; talking about why they like manga or not, or classic versus contemporary novels for example. It has made what can be something rather dry in school into a very interesting area. From a library practitioner's point of view, I think this is something that really empowers the library and makes it the centre of activity, it gives the whole place a buzz. We have had cases of students who previously were not interested in reading at all suddenly hitting upon one author that they love and ploughing through everything by that author in a matter of weeks. We have had to buy in more titles and they then find more authors who write stuff that they like, so it's really hitting the reading for pleasure button.



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