

# I AM PART OF THEIR STORY

**Cardiff High School,**  
Cardiff, South Glamorgan

Cardiff High School is a large secondary school, with over 1,500 pupils on roll, that was found to be the top performing secondary school in Wales in the 2016 Real Schools Guide. Laura Cope, Leader of Literacy, outlines the school's implementation of Renaissance Accelerated Reader and the changes it has brought about.



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# Impacting Whole School Literacy at Cardiff High School

## Introducing and implementing Accelerated Reader

We originally implemented Accelerated Reader in 2014, as we knew that more would be asked of our pupils' resilience when faced with multiple texts in their English Language exam: we believed that we not only needed to encourage students to read more, but also closely assess their understanding of what they had read. We initially trialled the programme with a low, middle and high achieving class and found it to work very well, so have now expanded it across all of Key Stage 3.

We schedule regular library lessons dedicated to Accelerated Reader, where students can log in and take quizzes. We implement it alongside a 'books in bags' policy, where every student in Year 7 is expected to have a book in their bag at all times: a book is treated like a piece of essential equipment that you need to have with you. Students also have the opportunity to read during registration and each student's planner has a

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**Assessment**

**Celebration**

**Incentives**

**Reading culture**

**Whole-school literacy**

page dedicated to Accelerated Reader; this way their tutor can see what they are reading, if they are challenging themselves with new books, and have these discussions about reading with their students.

## Encouraging a reading ethos across the school

There's more discussion around reading now, particularly across departments. Because of the books in bags policy, if for instance a student finishes their work early a teacher can ask them to read their book for a few minutes while other students catch up. This way staff across the whole school understand what students prefer to read and gain insight into their interests and personalities, and if a book is being read widely then a teacher may read it themselves, and we can then go on to better inform student book choices. This way it isn't just the English Department asking students about what they are: it contributes to an ethos across the whole school, and there are now more opportunities to have these conversations than ever before.

Students really enjoy the quizzing aspect of the programme: it's not a test, it's a quiz. They are very competitive and keen to score highly; sometimes students read books that have not already been quizzed, but as we can create our own teacher-made quizzes within the programme this never really became a problem.

Having the data from Accelerated Reader available helps us to celebrate reading success constantly. We highlight key achievements on our Accelerated Reader display board, which is updated every term. We have ongoing inter-form competitions and students get very competitive; they receive a merit whenever they get 85% or above in a quiz, and so we can have contests around which form can earn the most merits to incentivise students to read books carefully. We also have a Millionaire's Club, which students join when they've read over a million words over the school year – once a term we hold a little party in the library for millionaires, and we actually had some Year 10 students wanting to join, even though they don't use Accelerated Reader. These kinds of discussions led us to introduce a book club, and begin celebrating reading accomplishments in assemblies. Accelerated Reader allows us to constantly celebrate and incentivise reading: for those who aren't naturally inclined towards reading for pleasure these incentives are beginning to have an impact, and we're seeing reading becoming the norm.

### **Determining accurate reading levels**

We administer the Renaissance Star Reading test four times per year; in September, before Christmas, before Easter and before the end of the year. Accelerated Reader reports are fantastic for tracking progress book-to-book, but Star really allows us to understand progress over time, and we have found it to be a very useful tool in informing the way we as an English department and a school look at our literacy. In a classroom capacity Star tells us where students are reading at and what skills they need to develop; at Key Stage 3, this information helps us examine how prepared they are for national assessments. The data informs what books students will read next, and helps us to show Estyn how we teach within the classroom.

We try to get parents as involved in Accelerated Reader as possible, and being able to share data from Accelerated Reader and Star allows us to demonstrate the value of simple, practical tasks that can be done at home to help students develop their reading; such as making sure that students are reading as much as possible, that they discuss reading with their children and make sure that they are reading books that are suitable for them in terms of age and ability. Because students have to select books that fall within their reading range, it's easier to encourage them also to read more broadly, and try genres that they wouldn't normally read. In school, the programmes have helped us expand reading beyond the English department, and have helped to cultivate a whole-school reading ethos. Students are more independent with their reading, more excited about it, and we have been given the means to find new strategies to monitor, reward and celebrate reading.

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