

RENAISSANCE®

# I AM PART OF THEIR STORY

**Belhaven Hill School,**  
Dunbar, East Lothian

Belhaven Hill School, based in East Lothian, is one of the only full boarding and day prep schools in Scotland. The school accepts children from age 7 to 13, and has used Renaissance Accelerated Reader for the past 5 years with P3-S2. The school was recognised at the 2016 Renaissance Awards as one of Scotland's top performing schools. Amanda Parks, Librarian, describes the school's usage of the programme



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**Boys**

**Incentives**

**Reading for pleasure**

**Target Setting**

**Whole-School Literacy**

# Encouraging all kinds of readers at a boarding school in Scotland

## Starting out with Accelerated Reader

We initially brought in Accelerated Reader because we noticed it was used in several local schools with great success. We visited Dunbar Primary School to see how they used the programme. This left us very excited. The programme was new to us and we immediately recognised how useful it could be.

Once implemented, we agreed to continue to allocate quiet reading sessions after lunch and before bedtime. And, at the start of the day, around 15-minutes are set aside for the younger children to read. During this, staff will be listening to some pupils read, while others read independently. They can also take a quiz or change their books. After lunch, we have a 20-minute quiet reading time across all age groups. Being a boarding school, pupils can go and lie on their beds to read, and all students are able to quiz. In the evening, we expect day pupils to read at home, either independently or with their parents. Our boarders have a dedicated reading period in the evening with the house staff, where they also have the option to read comics or magazines.

Once children get into the cycle of reading and quizzing, we find there are very few who don't enjoy the reading process.

English teachers follow up this reading by setting points targets within Accelerated Reader. This is one of our ways of enthusing our children with reading. Targets are set on a termly basis; if a child reaches their target they are presented with a certificate in assembly. They also have their name published on a board in the library if they have read over a million words under the Accelerated Reader system. This year we had a Quadruple Millionaire!

## Creating readers at every age and ability

Because we are mainly a boarding school, children come to us from many different primary schools. Some are very able, but there are others who have missed parts of their education for various reasons. We are not selective in any way and some children can be very weak readers when they first arrive. Just reading the quiz questions is an achievement for them. Once children get into the cycle of reading

and quizzing, however, we find there are very few who don't enjoy the reading process.

Children are very enthusiastic about reading because they enjoy taking quizzes, they receive a reward for reaching their target, and because, without necessarily realising it, they are becoming very involved in the books they encounter. We encourage them to read primarily within their Zone of Proximal Development, and Accelerated Reader makes it easy for us. If they quizzed on a book that was too hard for them and they are disappointed with their mark, we can explain to them why and similarly, if they're reading easy books and scoring 100% in every quiz, we can step in, suggest they try something more challenging and make recommendations based on what they enjoy. Accelerated Reader is excellent when encouraging more able children to read longer books

The programme has been particularly effective with our boys – it has really encouraged them and we often see boys getting certificates more frequently than the girls. This is also because there is a competitive aspect to the system. The most important thing is that the target can be set to suit the child's individual ability. We also give house points when children reach their target or become Millionaires. They all want their house to win, and seeing themselves contribute to that really inspires them to read. It's contagious: when they see other pupils reading they're more likely to get into it themselves, and pick up on popular books and series.

Accelerated Reader genuinely encourages children to read, while enabling us to keep an eye on their progress. We can check our site at any time and spot who is in need of intervention, and who has earned a reward. All kinds of readers have engaged with the programme, including our most able and those at the top of the school, in early secondary years.

## Reading recognition at the Renaissance Awards

Belhaven Hill was recognised as one of the top performing schools in Scotland in the 2016 Renaissance Awards, which celebrated schools' implementation of Accelerated Reader.

Everyone was delighted to receive the award! We've put a lot into our implementation and, as well as seeing the marvellous progress the children are making, being recognised by Renaissance in this way reminds me that it's all been worthwhile.

Our academic standard is as high as it's ever been. Reading is so important across all subjects. Whether children are doing research in History or learning new concepts in Science it's absolutely essential that they can read, and our children are exceeding in all areas. Many parents don't realise that being able to read the words on a page doesn't necessarily mean that a child understands the text. Accelerated Reader has made us focus on how important reading is, and on the importance of comprehension.

We have parents who come to us saying that their child loves reading and loves Accelerated Reader, even when they've had trouble engaging them previously.

I would say that everyone at Belhaven loves reading. Children go to the library, the classrooms, the computer room, even the boarding house and quiz in their free time, because they want to, not because they've been instructed to by a teacher.

Accelerated Reader has helped us foster a love of reading, and enabled us to focus on children of all abilities. We have parents who come to us saying that their child loves reading and loves Accelerated Reader, even when they've had trouble engaging them previously. I don't think a single child, wherever they begin, doesn't ultimately enjoy reading here. That's amazing, and alongside book fairs, visiting authors and a vibrant library, this is largely because we have this consistent system across the school.

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