

## Pegasus Primary School- Reading for Pleasure project 2020-2021

Case study by B. Hammond (English lead)



### Context of school

Pegasus primary school is a one-form entry school in Castle Vale, Birmingham with seven classes (Reception to Year 6). Fifty five percent of our children receive Pupil Premium funding and mainly come from working-class, white-British backgrounds with many students also having parents who attended the school as children. The school received *Requires Improvement* judgements from Ofsted in 2015, 2017 and 2019. The most recent Ofsted inspection was in June 2021 where Pegasus was graded as *Good* in all areas.

Children are taught early reading through the Read, Write Inc. phonics programme and children in Years 2 and above are taught whole-class reading through a whole text approach.

### Explore- define the problem and establish a baseline

In October 2020, we gathered baseline data regarding *Reading for Pleasure* (RfP) to give us an accurate picture of our strengths and areas for development. We used the surveys provided on the Open University's research-rich-pedagogies website. We conducted the surveys with all teachers and some support staff and all children in school. Some members of staff also shared their views orally. We analysed the surveys and identified key findings as follows:

### Staff

- Poor knowledge of contemporary authors (both novels and picture books) and poets. The authors listed by staff are either very well known (celebratory) authors or authors of texts on the school's taught reading curriculum.
- *In-text talk* (spontaneous talk about books) is not evident/does not often happen.
- Teachers do not share their personal reading habits with children or other members of staff. Many teachers shared verbally that they do not tend to read for pleasure themselves.
- Teachers read aloud to children every day and give time for children to read independently daily.

## Children

- 48% of children loved reading. The number of children decreased as children got older. Year 5 disliked reading the most of any class.
- 15% of children said they do not like reading. Over half of these children were in Upper-KS2.
- Almost all of the children who said they did not like reading commented that it was because of words they did not know or could not pronounce.
- 12% of children said they were not good at reading.
- 56% of children say they read at home. This happens most often with grandparents or siblings.
- Children do not have a good knowledge of books- many children said their favourite book/author was whatever their class were reading at the time.
- Few children wrote about what they read during lockdown- many commented that they couldn't remember.

## Prepare- establishing aims for the project

We wrote an improvement plan to address the issues raised. The plan had the following aims:

Aim number 1: Broaden staff knowledge of children's authors

In the baseline survey results it was apparent that staff at Pegasus were not familiar with a wide-range of children's authors. When asked whose work they valued, the most common answer was *JK Rowling* and *Roald Dahl* followed by *Michael Morpurgo*.

Therefore, broadening staff knowledge of children's authors became the first aim of the project as ensuring staff have better knowledge of children's texts is essential to offer the best book recommendations to our children and expose them to a wide range of texts and authors, as noted by *Cremin*; "*Subject knowledge development is critical to the development of rich pedagogic practice and necessary to support children's reading for pleasure.*" (p. 56 *Cremin et al* 2014).

Aim number 2: Increase in-text talk at school between all stake holders.

Another observation from the base-line teacher survey was that teachers did not give their classes opportunities to talk about books that were not a literary focus (part of the 'taught' curriculum) and they did not give children the opportunity to informally discuss their reading. Many teachers commented that a lack of time-tabled sessions were a barrier to this along with a question of how valuable discussions were considering the pressures the school was under with an impending Ofsted inspection and the general pressure of making up lost time after a long period of school closure in the previous academic year due to the coronavirus pandemic.

There was clearly a lot of work to be done to bring staff on board with the project.

These beliefs of teachers at Pegasus are shared with teachers nationally who often feel under pressure to *get something in the [children's] books* and ensure everything is evidenced (p.52 Morrison McGill 2019). They were also shared by teachers on the original *Reading for Pleasure* project; "it appeared, at least at first, that a reading for pleasure agenda was incompatible with a culture of specific learning outcomes, success criteria and target setting." (p.150 Cremin et al 2014). Changing this *everything-must-be recorded* mind-set and making time for book talk is pivotal in forming reader relationships as noted by F. Collins, "Talk about texts is one of the key ways in which readership networks are established. It is through talk about texts that what it means to read and to be a reader are jointly negotiated." (p.53 Cremin et al 2014) Therefore, reassuring teachers of the value of book talk and its place in developing children as readers became an essential aim of the project.

Aim number 3: Increase self-esteem with and enjoyment of reading with the lowest 20% of readers (excluding SEN)

In addition to the two RfP pedagogical aims, an important part of the project was to establish a focus group of children (reluctant readers) where the aim was to improve their enjoyment of reading. As there was already a focus group of children (known at Pegasus as *Tiger Children*- children who are in the bottom 20% for reading attainment but excluding SEND pupils) in each class teachers chose 3 or 4 of *these* children (each class has six *Tiger* children) to become the focus children for the project. Teachers were asked to notice these children's reading habits and responses and jot down anything interesting. In their baseline surveys, these children showed mixed results in terms of enjoyment of reading. Many said they did indeed enjoy reading although this number decreased as the children got older and in Years 4, 5 and 6 only ¼ of the focus children said they loved reading.

Children's self-esteem in reading in the same group of children showed that children do not see themselves as able readers. 63% of children said they were "OK" or "not very good readers". In the comments section many children who answered that they were not good readers cited that this was due to a lack of vocabulary and "too many new words" in the books they read.

Establishing a Change Team was difficult but there was one other member of staff who was able to join me in leading this work. This made a difference, particularly as she was able to bring her expertise of early years. It also felt very supportive to have another colleague who understood the difference RfP can make to children's life chances.

### Implementation of aims and ongoing impact

Aim number 1: Broaden staff knowledge of children's authors

<u>Strategy used</u>	<u>Reflection</u>
Introducing staff to	Findings from the teacher surveys regarding poor knowledge

<p>contemporary children's authors in staff meetings (English)</p>	<p>of children's texts made the need for widening their repertoire very apparent. The idea of introducing contemporary authors and texts into staff meetings was in favour of a more <i>drip feed</i> approach, in order to not cognitively overload staff at the end of a working day. This strategy was first introduced in November 2020 and included the whole-school INSET day in January 2021 which happened the day before the second period of school closures were announced by the government.</p> <p>The feedback from staff was positive. Some teachers borrowed the texts introduced in these meetings to read to their classes or to themselves at home. However the frequency of this was hindered by staff meetings working differently because of the pandemic as well as some cancelled meetings due to Ofsted visits. As a result, this strategy did not become a habit. I want to establish the habitual, snap-shot of new authors and exciting tit-bits of tempting texts. It had started well and staff liked it. However, this is something that could continue to happen as normality resumes and meetings will be conducted as they were pre-Ofsted/global pandemic. There could also be the opportunity to share a new text at the beginning of every staff meeting and not just ones with an English focus.</p>
<p>Pegasus staff library</p>	<p>Towards the end of the project, I made a staff library for the staff room to include contemporary children's authors, anti-discrimination and diversity texts and a staff book swop. The intention of this was to provoke more staff discussion of texts and ensure staff (support staff as well as teachers) have access to books they can borrow, talk about and recommend to the children. Initial responses from staff have been positive and the books have provided a talking-point in the staff room, thus planting the seeds of a reading culture amongst the staff.</p> 

<p>World Book Day</p>	<p>World Book Day this year took place virtually and teachers were asked to share a graphic novel with their children and thus expand their (and their children's!) knowledge of different text genres. Many members of staff commented that they really enjoyed the opportunity to teach from a</p> <div data-bbox="580 443 1417 698" data-label="Image"> </div> <p>different kind of text and that their children enjoyed the change too.</p>
<p>Change of whole-school text overview</p>	<p>As so many teachers included authors from our reading curriculum in their base-line surveys, one way of introducing teachers to new authors was by ensuring the Pegasus reading curriculum included more contemporary texts and authors while not dismissing classical texts that are still brilliant books. These contemporary texts were well received by teachers who commented that their children enjoyed them and many children also made reference of their enjoyment of these texts in their end-of-year surveys.</p> <div data-bbox="560 1182 1430 1384" data-label="Image"> </div>

Aim number 2: Increase in-text talk (book talk) at school between all stake holders.

<p><u>Strategy Used</u></p>	<p><u>Reflection</u></p>
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Book blanket activities

During the January INSET day, staff received training on implementing *Book Blankets* into their practice which included an activity for them to partake in and reading and reflections from Benjamin Harris' case study of the use of *Book Blankets* as a facilitator for book talk.

Following the INSET (after the spring term school closure) each class took part in a book blanket activity and the teachers used this as an opportunity to better understand their classes as readers and hone in on the needs of the focus children.

Feedback from teachers said this was "enlightening" and they enjoyed the opportunity to sit back and listen to conversations between children about books. The general mind-set of teachers improved also in the sense that they were able to see the value of the task and how important exposure to books was in facilitating a love of reading for their children.



Dedicated *Reading for Pleasure* sessions

Quite a few members of staff in the baseline surveys commented that a lack of time was a barrier for them to speak informally with their classes about books. It became quite clear therefore that adding a dedicated *Reading for Pleasure* session into the timetable would be the most effective way of ensuring this book talk took place.

These RfP sessions take place in the library as being out of the usual classroom context ensures the sessions are perceived by the children as



different and special. Being in the library also ensures children have a wide range of books available for them to read and borrow beyond their usual classroom book corners and giving children access to bean bags, sofas *etc.* facilitates relaxed, independent reading which became referred to at Pegasus as “comfy reading”. In the most recent Ofsted inspection, the inspectors noted the effectiveness of the library saying, “The school library is an exciting place to visit, where pupils can look at a wide range of high-quality books or listen to stories.” (Ofsted June 2021)

These *Reading for Pleasure* sessions are child-led but include the following book talk activities:

#### *Story Share Chair*

The *Story Share Chair* is quite simply a chair where a child can sit and talk to their class about the book they have read from the library the previous week. Teachers facilitate class questions and encourage comparisons between texts to promote further excitement of the text being discussed. Children love the opportunity to talk about their books and as this became more regular practice, children developed *books in common* from each other’s recommendations which prompted further informal book talk.



### Recommendation Station

The *Recommendation Station* is an area of the library where children can write mini-book reviews on post-it notes to entice the next reader. This initiative was introduced by the Pegasus librarians to each class and children have enjoyed reading the



reviews and seeing if the book is suited for them from their peers' recommendations. Now during *Reading for Pleasure* sessions, children actively seek out books with post-it notes to see what their peers have said about the book.



Aim number 3: Increase self-esteem with and enjoyment of reading with the lowest 20% of readers (excluding SEN)

<u>Strategy</u>	<u>Reflection</u>
1:1 reading	From November 2020, <i>Tiger</i> children began reading with an adult 1:1 (either their class teacher or class TA) in the mornings before lessons start for the day. This ensures that the focus children have the opportunity to read with somebody (often these children do not read at home with family members). <i>Through this 1:1 time, the Tiger children have the opportunity to talk about the books they are reading with a trusted adult, helping these adults to better understand their reading habits and make recommendations accordingly.</i> TAs have been involved with the RfP improvement work, so they are able to understand the importance and value of this time. This has had a big impact on the focus children's self-esteem and the way that they responded to reading. Many now actively wanting to have the opportunity to read and they show more assurance as readers. It is early days but we are beginning to understand more about tailoring support to encourage RfP.
Focused observations	In addition to 1:1 reading, these focus children were observed regularly by their class teachers during book talk activities and <i>Reading for Pleasure</i> sessions. This gave their class teachers a real insight into the children's reading habits and enabled them to better support their focus children by guiding them to books that they thought they would enjoy. Teachers also communicated with me about ordering more reading material that they thought would benefit these focus children.

Review - End of year Reading for Pleasure surveys

In June 2021 children in Years 1 to 6 and class teachers and teaching assistants retook the survey. Our analysis showed the following:

Staff:

- Staff have a much better knowledge of children's authors and made reference to a much wider range of authors whose work they valued.

- All members of staff say they *now regularly or sometimes* talk to children about books that are not a literacy focus and they provide opportunities for children to discuss books informally.
- Staff are beginning to share their reading habits with children more. A few members of staff acknowledged this as an *aspect of development* for them to work on in their practice next academic year.
- Teachers still read daily to their class. It is great that despite the pressures of the year that they did not stop doing this.
- Many members of staff said that promoting a reading culture was becoming strength in their practice and at our school in general.

### Children:

- The number of children who say they don't like reading had decreased.
- The number of children who say they are bad readers had decreased.
- The number of children who say they are good or very good readers had increased.
- The number of children who say they read at home had substantially increased (from 80 to 104 children which is almost one whole extra class of children reading at home).
- In the baseline surveys in October, one of the popular reasons children gave for not being good readers was that they couldn't understand what certain words meant. Not a single child said this was an issue in June which was most likely due to the change in the reading lesson structure whereby teachers explicitly pre-teach vocabulary in all reading lessons.
- Unlike October, more children made reference in their surveys to books that they have clearly read in their own time and not just in class. Many of these were books that are available in our school library that children have chosen to read and take home from their *Reading for Pleasure* sessions.
- 90% of children could recall a book they had read whilst schools were closed (Spring term 2021).

Despite the positive findings above, slightly fewer children said they like or love reading. This was a curious finding as it did not match with positive feedback shared with me verbally from children and staff and the fact that more children are now choosing to read at home more. To further delve into this finding, I conducted a pupil voice with children whose surveys were the most damning (and therefore- on deduction- our most reluctant readers). It became quite clear from this that these children had misinterpreted the question as "Do you like Reading?" (the noun and the lesson) as opposed to "Do you like reading?" (the verb and past time). Ensuring the questions on the surveys are more explicit will be something I can adapt if we ever re-distributed these surveys.

These pupil voices with the most reluctant readers (who were not focus children) was enlightening for me to see what more we can do as a school to ensure our children love reading. Many children said they did not enjoy reading as they found it difficult and got overwhelmed at times from texts with “too many words.” These comments link to the teaching of reading and not *RfP* but there were a few children who commented on a lack of relevant reading material for their personal interests which is something we can easily address to support their enjoyment of reading and really highlighted to me the importance of taking time to speak directly to the children (especially the most reluctant readers) and not making preconceptions about their reading habits, a point echoed by Sacha Powell when she highlighted the importance of exploratory conversations with the children and not making assumptions about children’s attitudes to reading. (p.130, *Cremin et al* 2014).

End of year impact on focus children – data from surveys and pupil voice

Comparisons between baseline and end of year data:

	Baseline	End of year
<i>I love/like reading</i>	14 children	12 children
<i>I don't like reading</i>	6 children	2 children
<i>I am a very good/ good reader</i>	10 children	14 children

(Note that the slight decrease in children who love/like reading was attributed to misunderstanding the question as discussed in the previous paragraph).

In addition to the pupil voice with the most reluctant readers, I conducted a pupil voice with two focus children from each year group. One focus child who teachers observed was taking greater pleasure in reading and one focus child who teachers felt was still a reluctant reader.

These reluctant readers chosen by teachers included 4 boys and 2 girls. The children included had always historically struggled academically with reading and said they did not read at home. The two boys in Upper-KS2 commented that they had never liked reading for as long as they can remember. These attitudes are hard to shift. Many of these children said they did not have the time and space to read at home and therefore the conversation focused more on what more we can do as a school to support them to enjoy reading. Like the pupil voice with the children who had the most damning surveys, they too commented on sometimes having a lack of reading material that reflected their personal interests and hobbies. I know that we have further work to do to make sure that we drill down to find ways of supporting these most vulnerable young readers. They are the ones that can so easily get lost.

The children who were deemed as *enjoying reading* by their teachers had many positive things to say about their reading habits and how they have changed as readers this academic year. One child in Year 1 said he now enjoys reading dinosaur books at home with his dad (this was one of his topics in Year 1) and loves reading the dinosaur books available in his classroom and the library. A child in Year 6 said he enjoys reading more this year because he has learnt so many new words in Year 6 and it means he can read any book that he wants. He also told me that he had enjoyed reading the books from the Year 6 reading overview so much that he had bought himself personal copies. "I don't like reading actually, I love it!" commented one girl in Year 4 who said the books she had read in class inspired her to read more at home. She also said the library was her favourite place and she loved her *Reading for Pleasure* sessions there.

### Challenges and learning over the course of the project

This year was my first year at Pegasus, first year as an English lead and first, second and third time being involved in an Ofsted inspection all of which brought challenges to the project. The (seemingly constant) looming Ofsted visits caused a lot of pressure on staff members and often meant they put the *Reading for Pleasure* agenda in the background in favour of ensuring quality of work in books and regular routines for the children. The spring term school closure due to the coronavirus pandemic also caused disruption to the teaching of all RfP pedagogies although we were able to conduct a successful virtual *World Book Day*, pre-record or have live read aloud sessions available to children online and teachers were able to incorporate some book talk into their live TEAMS lessons. The success of our remote reading offer was noted in the school's remote monitoring inspection where Ofsted



A virtual "book wave" from Reception

commented, "*Throughout the period of partial closure, and currently, reading has remained an important daily activity..... All pupils are encouraged to read for pleasure.*" (Ofsted March 2021)

With regards to leading change, this project taught me that- as expected- it is indeed very, very hard. It relies heavily on convincing staff to *buy into* something that will initially involve additional work. Small, manageable targets and reiterating the *why* of the project was what I found to be most effective in this respect. Creating positive staff relationships and a culture whereby staff members ask for support when need we two key learning points. I also learnt that building a culture of reading in a school does not



happen overnight and it is a long game that you have to convince staff is worth the continued, unwavering effort for the undeniable benefit to our children. As the OECD found, "*Reading for pleasure is the single most important indicator of a child's future success*" and success is what we want for our children. The (completely unstaged) photo on the right is the beginning of an ingrained reading culture at Pegasus. Year 3 boys so engrossed in their library books that they were not aware the photo was being taken: this is what we want to continue at our school.

### Moving forward

During the year on this project, we have begun the journey to adopting a strong reading culture at Pegasus but I am in no denial that we still have some way to go on this.

Our next steps as a school are:

<p>Sustain (what we will continue doing)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue dedicated library sessions and <i>book-talk</i> activities.</li> <li>• Continue to ensure staff have access to contemporary children's books and to promote sharing reading practices.</li> <li>• Continue to make time to talk to the reluctant readers.</li> <li>• Continue to keep <i>Reading for Pleasure</i> as a school priority.</li> </ul>
<p>Improve (what our next steps are)</p>	<p>Before the end of the academic year...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set up school magazine and newspaper subscriptions (following feedback from reluctant readers).</li> <li>• Purchase game guides and other reading material related to gaming (following feedback from reluctant readers).</li> <li>• Make more graphic novels/non-fiction available in the library so children are able to borrow these types of texts and take them home (following feedback from reluctant readers).</li> <li>• Introduce the <i>Summer reading challenge</i> to continue to promote a love of reading at home.</li> <li>• Continue to identify and support the reluctant readers with sensitive and careful interventions.</li> </ul> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center;">  </div>

	<p>From September...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve teacher and children’s knowledge of poets (following feedback from teacher surveys).</li> <li>• Extend the reading community further and involve parents more in the <i>Reading for Pleasure</i> vision.</li> <li>• Ensure new staff are aware of the whole school <i>Reading for Pleasure</i> ethos at Pegasus.</li> </ul>
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