

Blackburn Primary School



Context

Blackburn Primary is a 1 to 1.5 form entry community school, located about 2.5 miles west of the centre of Rotherham, South Yorkshire. About half of Blackburn's pupils live on the housing estates on either side of the school, but significant numbers of pupils are also drawn from the neighbouring districts of Kimberworth and Richmond Park. A few other children live further afield, in various areas of Rotherham and Sheffield. Currently, there are 245 children on the roll, and just over 61% of these children are boys. Overall rates of Free School Meal eligibility, which are used as a broad indicator of deprivation, are broadly in line with national, but are much higher in KS2 than in KS1. IDAC12 and IMD3 measures indicate that about a quarter of the school's pupils live in areas where levels of deprivation are very high, and that most pupils live in areas with above average levels of deprivation. IMDii data indicates that as well as low income and poor employment opportunities, deprivation issues relating to limited educational backgrounds, poor health and high crime rates are key to understanding the long-term challenges faced by local communities.

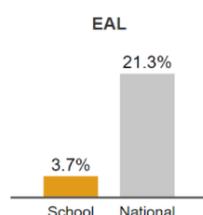
Our SEN data:

Fig 1:



As a school, we have only a small number of BAME pupils, and our EAL figures are low.

Fig 2:



In terms of development, children are coming to us in Foundation Stage with progressively lower standards of entry year on year in terms of their language and communication. We are currently addressing this by accessing support from St Wilfrid's English Hub, who have worked alongside staff to implement a more rigorous Synthetic Systematic Phonics programme in school, as well as provide funding for quality decodable reading materials. Although the project is in its infancy, early

monitoring and feedback show that this is having a significant impact upon phonics outcomes thus far.

Our end of Y6 outcomes in terms of reading show a lower standard of attainment in reading than in Maths and Writing. Despite having consistent reading instruction which is well-monitored and of good quality, it was clear that reading for the pleasure of it was not taking place in the day to day timetable of the school and beyond the classroom.

Explore

Prior to embarking upon the project, as advised, a change team was put together in order to share observations, opinions, tasks and ideas. In agreement with the headteacher, we asked two class teachers, Danielle in Y1 and Karen in Y6 if they would like to participate, based on the knowledge of these members of staff as avid readers who would approach the project with enthusiasm. Pleasingly, they accepted.

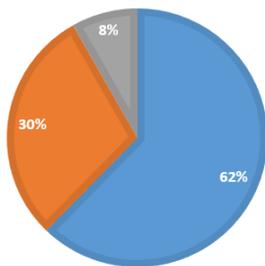
In order to know our particular starting points, we began the project by sending out the OU Reading Surveys to children and staff. We decided that, although it was not deemed essential, we would distribute the surveys to all children, rather than a sample, so that we could get the best overall 'big picture' possible. Similarly, adult surveys were completed by all teachers and teaching assistants, with the expectation that reading for pleasure was not just a project, but an underpinning culture that we were trying to cultivate in our school.

The first, and probably most important question demonstrated interesting results:

Fig 3:

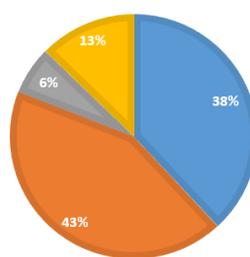
KS1 - DO YOU LIKE READING?

■ Love reading ■ It's OK ■ Don't like



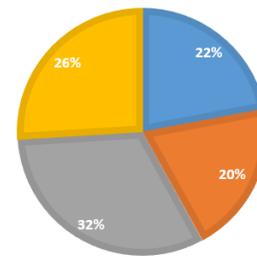
LKS2 DO YOU LIKE READING?

■ Love reading ■ It's OK ■ Not bothered ■ Don't like



UKS2 DO YOU LIKE READING?

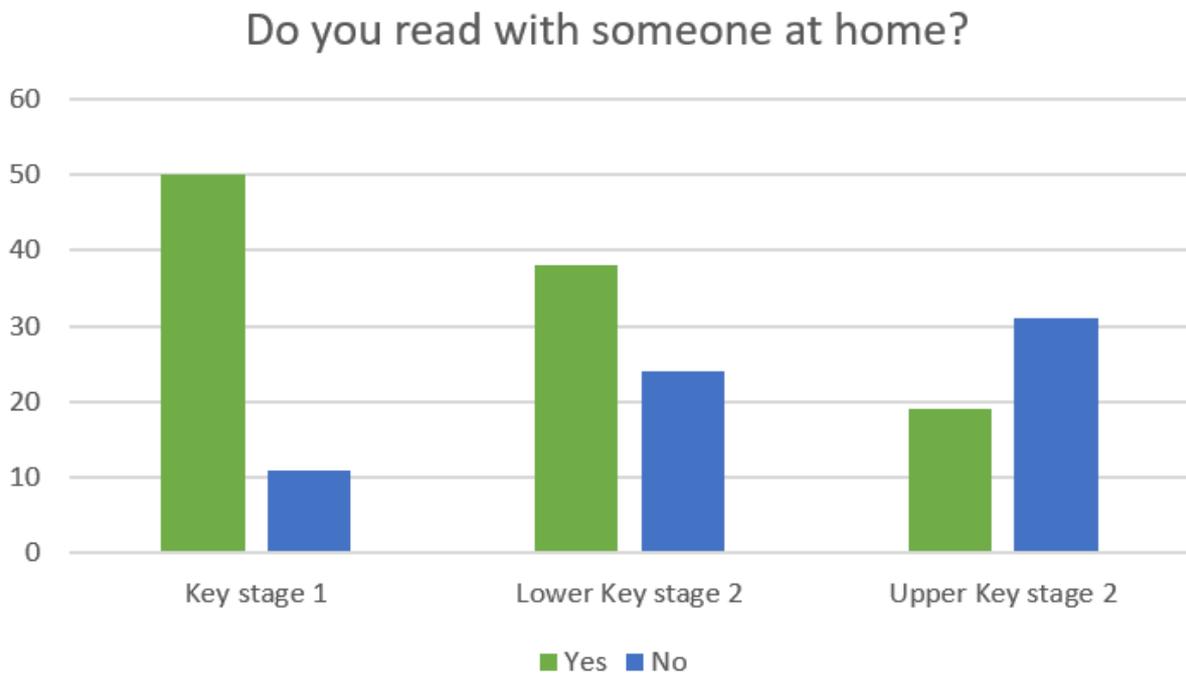
■ Love reading ■ It's OK ■ Not bothered ■ Don't like



It appeared that the enjoyment of reading was declining as children were progressing through school, which led us to question 'How was practice different in those early years compared to later on?'

Overwhelmingly, through the surveys and pupil interviews, children stated that they enjoyed their teacher reading to them (only 1 pupil in KS1, 3 pupils in LKS2 and 5 pupils in UKS2 did not enjoy it and enjoyed reading themselves). This made it clear that children were actually enjoying engaging with texts in the classroom; it seemed that the issue was with children actually having the will to pick something up and read it for enjoyment. Unfortunately, data also showed that, although children seemed to enjoy the storytelling / information sharing going on in class, this was not being replicated at home.

Fig 4:



Unsurprisingly, the numbers of children in each stage of school who were *read to* by an adult were significantly lower than the above. This was particularly concerning for children who, out of the data pool, saw themselves as 'not very good' readers.

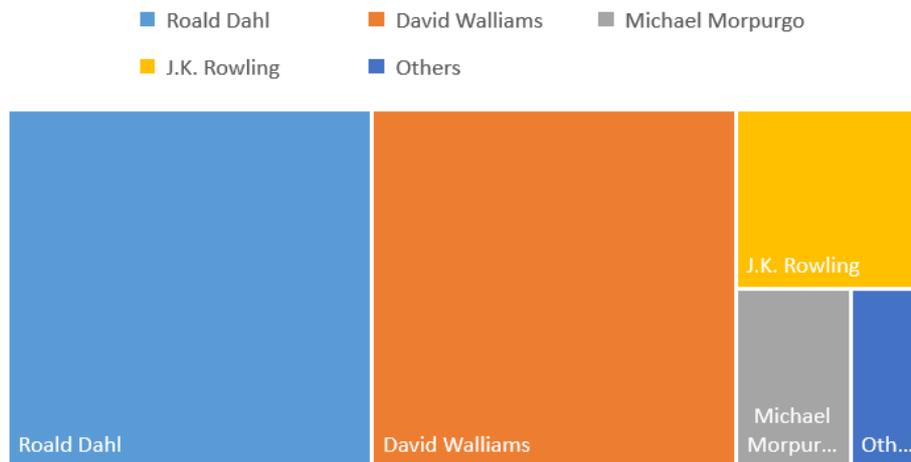
In Key stage 1, the majority of children preferred reading storybooks, but this was very closely followed by non-fiction. It posed us with the question, do children get the opportunity to read non-fiction for pleasure enough? Favourite books seemed to be based on superheroes or TV shows / films favoured by the children and were lacking in contemporary materials.

In Key Stage 2 (both lower and upper) favourite books tended to be from three authors in particular: Roald Dahl, David Walliams and Daisy Meadows. With such a limited diet, as a school, were we as staff exposing children to the plethora of new, quality reading materials available?

Staff questionnaires were equally interesting and gave clear direction in terms of where we needed to delve deeper.

Fig.5.

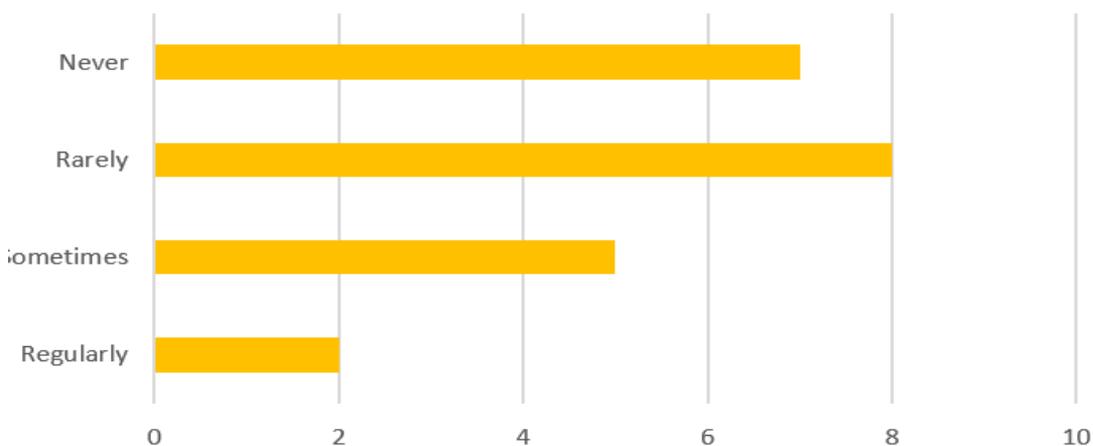
Authors whose work is valued by staff.



When asked on the questionnaires, name three authors whose work you value, the proportion of the famous names above was very high. Did we know enough as a staff about children’s literature, both old and gold, to ensure that we were giving children the maximum opportunity to find something out there that would spark their interest? The following data seemed to suggest a lack of confidence amongst us all in doing so:

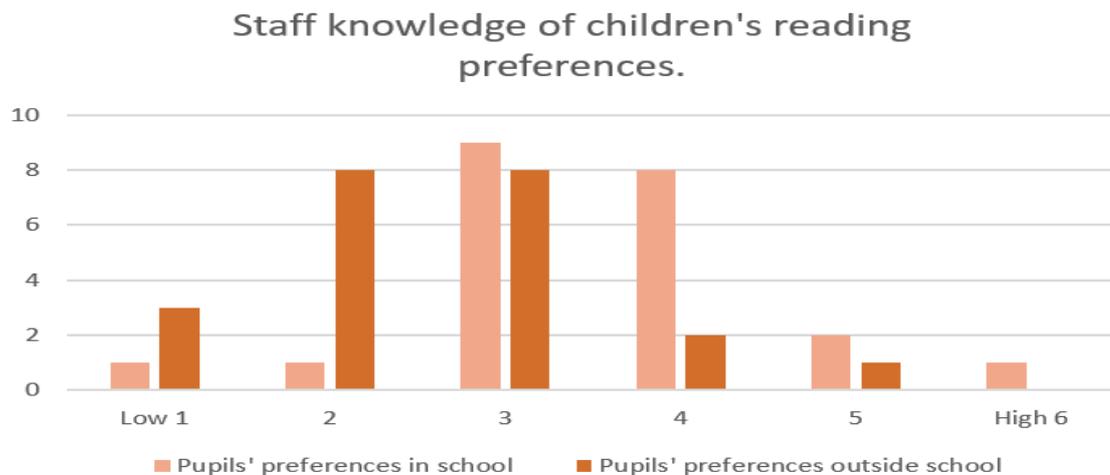
Fig 6:

How often do you make tailored recommendations to pupils?



It was evident that we needed to know as much as possible about the tastes and preferences of our pupils, in order to be able to recommend materials to them. All staff were very honest about their knowledge of children’s preferences in reading both in and out of school.

Fig 7:



Following the analysis by myself and the change team, an action plan was put together based on the needs of our school.

Prepare

In response to our initial analysis, our action plan had three principal objectives:

1. Develop staff knowledge on a range of children's literature.

There was a clear need to broaden our repertoire of materials and authors old and new in order to stand a chance igniting a spark of interests amongst reluctant readers.

Reason for focus:

'Teachers need knowledge of a range of texts to suit and engage the diverse profiles of the children and young people they teach. They need to be comfortable and confident in using them within lessons and as materials for pupils' personal reading outside of the classroom.' (APPLG, 2012:13)

2. Develop staff knowledge of children's reading practices and preferences.

This would enable us to target materials in the right places, as we know that when deliberate and targeted action is taken, impact occurs.

In addition, each class chose 2 focus children whose reading journey would be monitored. The children were chosen using the selection criteria of being good / competent readers who chose not to read for pleasure, as shown on their surveys. We decided upon this group of children in particular, as we thought we might make obvious impact here, since reading confidence was not a hurdle.

3. Increase the use of Book chat throughout the school day.

To make sure that the book chat itself in the classroom did not wander into 'comprehension' territory, but stayed within the parameters as informal discussion and opinion sharing for sheer enjoyment. We know that this would be an important focus, as Teresa Cremin et al (2014) stated in 'Building Communities of Engaged Readers' –

'Effective teachers of reading use literature to engage in wide-ranging discussions with children.'

Deliver

The most effective strategies for each aim are highlighted in the table below.

Knowledge of children's literature.	Knowledge of children's reading practices and habits.	Increase book chat
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Storytime for staff with a recommended text by the headteacher at the start of the CPD session. • Text and author recommendations made weekly by change team. • Book Club • Padlet for information sharing. • CPD showing where to find quality recommendations / extracts / book news on the internet. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of book blankets during lockdown. • Creation of reading rivers by all children. • Conversations with children by class teachers and feedback to Literacy Lead. • Consultation with staff when ordering materials from the library service for their class. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Book chat modelled at the end of each CPD session with staff all taking part. • Daily reading to class at timetabled time with time allowed to nurture this. • Pass on any of the recommendations from CPD to targeted children.

When embarking on the Reading for Pleasure project, although I was leading the initiatives along with the change team, as a school, we had already prioritised reading as an area of focus in our School Development Plan. We had committed ourselves to ensuring that reading outcomes for all children were as best they could be, but we added RFP to the plan as well in order to try to cultivate lifelong readers for pleasure. This ensured a shared, collective vision as a staff to keep reading at the heart of all that we did. We began the year committed to increasing the amount of time staff read aloud to children, and put in place a 'set-in-stone' storytime every day after lunch. Even with the best of intentions, in the past, staff found that when time was under pressure to complete such a broad curriculum, reading to children had often been shelved to the end of the day and even left out altogether. This was to prove pivotal.

The Teachers as Readers (TaRs) research project explains: 'Knowing children better enabled teachers to be more effective in choosing and recommending texts' (Cremin et al., 2014). For this reason, as a staff we decided that a 'book blanket' would be a useful

conversation starter. As we were about to launch, it was at this time that a second national lockdown was announced due to the spread of Covid-19. With only children of key workers and children considered vulnerable in school, we encouraged children at home to prepare one there. With staff enthused by the practical strategies that could be done remotely from the first OUP Reading for Pleasure conference, staff also decided to produce and share theirs, and have regular 'book waves' as was suggested at the conference too.



Examples from children.



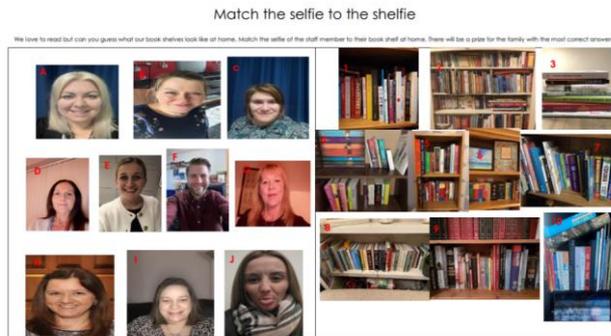
Staff also produced these and uploaded them to Class Dojo.



A book wave



Encouraged by the response to the book waves and blankets, we decided to keep up the momentum of putting books at the heart of the school, by organising a fun-packed World Book Day with craft competitions, online activities and fun quizzes.



Below are the answers to the Masked Reader from yesterday. You can still watch the videos by clicking on the links.

Video 1

Miss Jagger
Mrs Gallagher
Miss Wallwork
Miss Smith
Mr Brady

Video 2

Mrs Pearce
Miss Gillot
Mrs Brooks
Mrs Wagstaff

Video 3.

Mr Bennett
Mrs Harper
Mrs Gelsthorpe
Mrs Weightman
Mrs Woodcock
Mrs Hastie

Let us know how many you got right! 🤖

5 likes 1 comment 146 views

To provide a greater variety of materials available to pupils and staff, the school signed up to the local authority schools' library service back at the end of the previous academic year. Towards the end of the last Autumn term 2020, we became aware of the myriad ways that we could benefit from the SLS, in addition to receiving collections of 'topic' books for the classrooms. We managed to obtain a large collection as a 'library boost' on long term loan for the year, which definitely brightened up (as well as updated) our meagre stock. We also managed to borrow a classroom fiction collection to boost reading corners, which has been invaluable in enthusing pupils with a range of choice.

Develop staff knowledge on a range of children's literature.

Spring 1 term's CPD and staff meetings were all blocked with reading as a focus in order to feature reading at the forefront of all we do. The timetable looked like this:

6th January 2021 – The Blackburn reading Offer. Sharing the vision of what a child at Blackburn could expect in their reading journey throughout school. Here, we set out our intentions that we were not only aiming to develop pupils who *could* read, but also ones who *wanted* to do so.

13th January 2021 – What is reading for pleasure? In this session, we outlined the project, our survey findings, our collective ethos and how we would drive this at classroom level.

19th January 2021 – RFP Twilight workshop with OU.

20th January 2021 – Early Reading – feedback about our work with the English Hub, and our rigorous approach to decoding throughout school.

27th January 2021 – Guided Reading / VIPERS recap. A reminder about the structure of our reading lessons through KS1 and KS2, and a discussion about the variety of texts to use for this purpose. These texts also had a part to play in capturing the interest of children in text.

2nd February 2021 – RFP Twilight workshop with OU.

3rd February 2021 – The Importance of Fluency - An information sharing session about the research surrounding the importance of reading fluency, and how this would be incorporated into our VIPERS reading approach.

10th February 2021 – A Reading Round Robin – consolidation of our CPD this half term with time for discussion, questions and answers.

To maximise exposure to new or unknown texts, all of these school sessions began with 'Storytime' with the headteacher, who would share a quality picture book with staff using work by authors which had not been highlighted by staff in the reading surveys.

Furthermore, the change team would follow this with recommendations of the week: One for FS/KS1, and one for KS2. Again, the aim was to introduce staff to authors or texts that were new to staff. These recommendations were varied, in terms of fiction, non-fiction, poetry and graphic novels, which would hopefully filter through to our recommendations in the classroom.

During these sessions, there was also an opportunity to share resource 'gems' that teachers could use to delve into. 'Love Reading for Kids' was introduced, as well as sites like the OU RFP website, Literacy Trust, CLPE as well as recommendations of the wealth of teachers on Twitter who regularly post and blog about their latest good-reads. We wanted teachers to be an excellent source of information regarding reading materials, even though they themselves may not have personally read them.

At the end of every CPD session, we ended with 'book chat', led by myself, in order to demonstrate the kinds of prompts that could lead to classroom book talk. The importance of avoiding the temptation to step into comprehension was strongly put across, and these conversations often continued beyond the end of the scheduled meetings, when staff, apprehensive at first, discovered they had more to say than they realised!

With a robust timetable of staff development in place, following advice from Helen, our mentor at the Open University, I also put together a 'Padlet' page to support our RFP journey. It was a place to record and reference recommendations from staff meetings, potential new people to follow on Twitter, highlight new and upcoming books and communicate with staff who wished to take their RFP journey further: a book club. With a good 10 staff interested, we chose a new title-The Boy Who Made Everyone Laugh by Helen Rutter – and organised a date the following half term on which to meet up and discuss our thoughts.

Develop staff knowledge of children's reading practices and preferences.

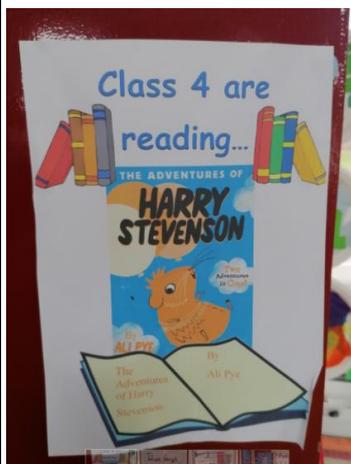
This has been one of the most difficult aims to address, since a national lockdown had been put in place which meant only small numbers of children were coming into school. Pressure on technology in children's homes (and often lack of access to it at all) meant that the lines of communication were not always secure.

To delve deeper into the practices and preferences, we did three things.

1. We asked the children at home and in school to create a 'book blanket' and photograph this. Staff also made their own to give an example to children, and pass on the message that we were readers too and we loved to share what we were reading. We had a good response to this and the information gleaned helped us to ascertain the types of texts we required to tempt children to read.
2. When children returned, we had class sessions making 'Reading Rivers' to raise awareness of the amount of reading that we actually do in our day to day lives as well as take a peek into children's habits at home. All classes completed these and provided important feedback which we used to inform our requests for our library service stock, as well as VIPERS texts to engage.



3. We gave the children more say in the books we share in class. With the immovable story time in place, it was essential that the material we shared during this time was engaging, enticing and chosen by children. By offering various systems in class, children were able to do this. Sometimes, this was done by a 'World Cup' of books, voting from a selection with counters, book chat with the class or feedback of interest from VIPERS texts. Conversations with staff on subsequent CPD sessions through the year almost all demonstrate a marked engagement of classes with the quality story books read to them every day.

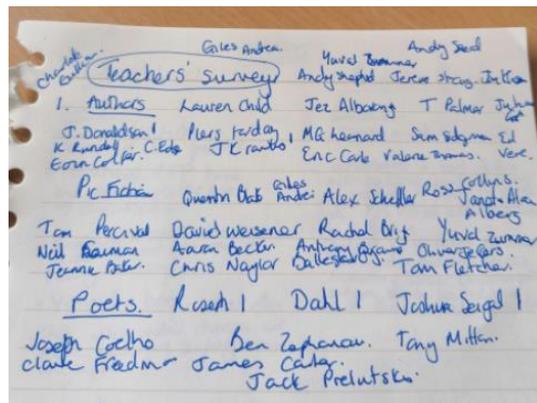


Review

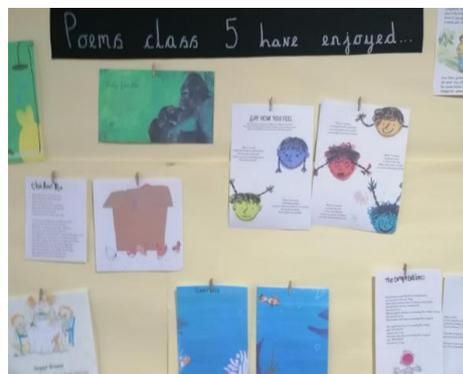
It is clear that we are on an established path towards becoming a 'Reading School'. It is evident in our hallways, our conversations and children's behaviours.

Impact upon staff

From initial surveys, we found that the authors, poets and picture fiction known by staff was very limited (Fig 5). From our follow-up surveys, the results were very different. Due to the lack of repetition of names provided for these questions, a graph would not represent this well enough. Instead, I scribbled down the different authors as I went. The collection was fantastically varied.



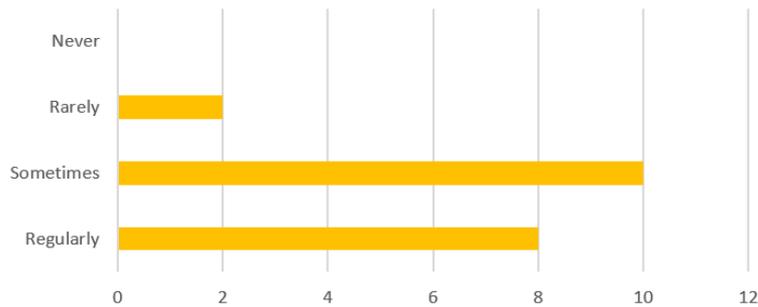
This was also evident in the displays in classrooms depicting the class books chosen by children from a staff selection.



This has led to a greater confidence in being able to make tailored recommendations (see fig 6 initial survey)

Fig 8:

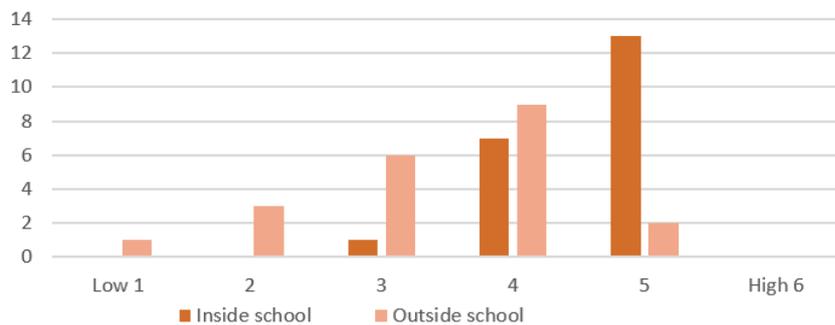
How often do you make tailored recommendations to pupils?
June 2021



We also knew it was essential to know the habits of the children in the classroom. Our final survey results show that there is still work to do in order to drill down deeper into this, outside school particularly.

Fig 9:

Staff Knowledge of children's reading practices and preferences.
June 2021



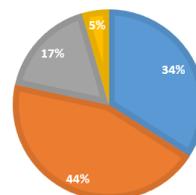
Due to the varied materials that staff are now using with children, our final survey showed that 18/21 staff regularly provided opportunities to chat informally about books and reading, 2/21 sometimes provided it and only one rarely. Initially, the data showed the greater number of staff in the 'rarely' or 'never' categories.

Fig 10:

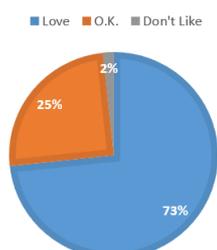
Impact upon pupils

DO YOU LIKE READING UKS2?
JUNE 2021

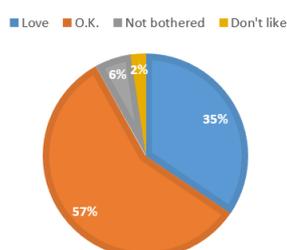
Love O.K. Not bothered Don't like



DO YOU LIKE READING KS1?
JUN-21



DO YOU LIKE READING LKS2?
JUNE 2021



Compared to starting data, we now have many fewer children with negative attitudes towards reading. Although the trend of having less positive views is still prevalent higher up the school, it appears that we are moving in the right direction.

When children revealed their favourite authors in the second surveys, the range of authors' names was much broader and more varied. Almost all children had favourite books that they could name. What was particularly evident, was that the children were so clearly influenced by us as teachers in their choice of reading materials: with many children reading books by authors we had engaged with in class either through VIPERS or through class book. For example, a quote from a Y5 child said that their favourite book was 'Orphans of the Tide' and claimed it was 'the best book ever!' Five other children followed suit with this choice as favourite from the same class. The class now have copies of the sequel and children are awaiting their turn to read it.

Working in KS2 myself, I have witnessed a shift in the way that children interact with books in their spare time. Enthusiastic book talk in class, teachers modelling clear enjoyment in reading and a greater variety of materials have all contributed towards raising the profile of being a reader. In Y5 in particular and Y6, a gradually increasing number of pupils have chosen to take out a book at playtime to either read or show a friend. Children are also actively seeking out books that have been recommended to them, either by asking to access the library or asking their teachers to ask in other 'bubbles' whether they have copies.

Some memorable quotes from our final surveys from the children demonstrate an increase in engagement:

DB "I like to go to different worlds."

ND "I like to read now because it makes my imagination more creative."

EO "My teacher got me into reading, and now I enjoy it"

FH "I love reading now because you never know what you're going to find and books really bring you in like you're really there."

LB "I didn't like reading, but then I picked up this one and I tried it and started to love books."

Impact upon focus children

KS1

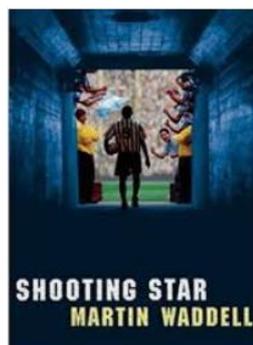
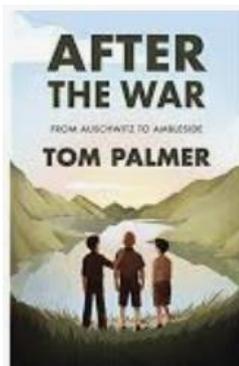
Focus children in KS1 have shown good changes in attitudes towards reading during the project. Child A in Class 3 does not now speak negatively about reading (which was also shown in his initial survey) and indicated they 'love it' in their final survey. As well as demonstrating more engagement with books when given time to choose his own activity,

observation from the class teacher say that he is now appearing much more confident during fluency sessions in class. The class teacher has also said that our half termly change of stock from the school Library Service has kept Child A's interest piqued, and he has now shown more thorough browsing in his choice of books, rather than just 'flicking' as was the case before.

Child W showed herself to be very keen on football. She was active herself in a team, and was always happy to chat about games and players with her peers, TAs and Teacher. The Class Teacher selected sports themed books to read to the class for a week, and sought out some books about the biographies of well-known players. This kept the child interested, who then wanted to know more about the countries that these players came from. This led to engagement in an atlas, then to books specifically about different countries from the non-fiction section.

KS2

Child N and Child M both gave negative feedback about their attitude towards reading at the start of the survey. These two boys were very active and sporty, and the class teacher recommended some of the football fiction from Tom Palmer. Neither of these children took to them, but coincidentally, we had a live online webinar with Tom Palmer during that same week. Those boys were able to say that they had read some of his books, and Child M went on to read 'After the War' by Tom Palmer, based on the extracts shared during that event and enjoyed it. He has since chosen another book By Palmer (Armistice Runner) that he is currently reading. Child N, following his taster of Tom Palmer fiction, was urged to try one of the teacher's own books – Martin Waddell's Shooting Star – and loved it! Spurred by the completion of reading an actual full book, he is now reading the Middle School series by James Patterson, and recommending them to his peers.





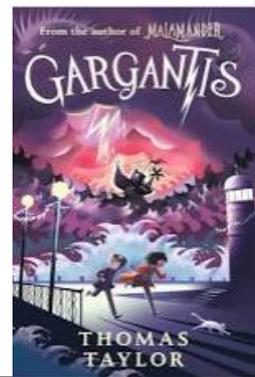
Child L in Class 9 was encouraged to sample some of the class teacher's own books, but was not particularly enthusiastic. After persevering, Child L finally tried 'Land of Roar' by Jenny McLachlan and loved it. The child even went on to make a lovely 'Land of Roar' bookmark as a gift for the teacher. The child went on to other books in the teacher's collection, and book chat increased between them, as the teacher was knowledgeable about the books that the child was choosing or deciding between. A pleasing by-product of this increase in reading, has been the child's end of year reading assessment result, which showed an age-related expected result – the first time this child had managed to get to ARE since starting at the school in Year 1.



In Class 10, Child Z's final survey indicated that he was still 'not bothered' about reading. However, knowing this child myself from my own class, I know that this may not entirely be true. I chose this child as a focus child because he would be a challenge (he chose a book for reading time at the start of Autumn 1 and did not want to change it at all, despite looking clearly disinterested). Whenever free reading time occurred, z would pull out the same book. Then, just before Christmas, as a class book, we chose 'Malamander'.

This was highly popular with the class as a whole, and Z began to get drawn into the book chat about it, demonstrating a clear following of the story and actual enjoyment! Z then became more invested in the choice for the next Class choice, which was 'Orphans of the Tide'. While as a class we were reading Orphans, Z decided to re-read Malamander. Orphans proved to be equally popular with him, so after we finished it, I gave him my copy of the sequel – Shipwreck Island – to borrow.

He asked if he could take it home, and I agreed. I kept checking in with him about how it was going, but was getting little feedback from him. When the book was eventually returned, it had been well-thumbed and he waxed lyrical about the story and characters. He had enjoyed it. At the end of Summer 1, he was reading 'Gargantis', the sequel to Malamander and fully absorbed, despite indicating that he 'wasn't bothered' about reading in his survey.



Sustain

We have learned many lessons through our RFP journey. The most prevalent being that teachers' knowledge of literature is fundamental. We learned about the impact that reading for pleasure has upon a child's future success, job prospects, wealth and positive mental wellbeing during our twilight sessions with the OU, and this stark message has been our key driver in our delivery.

'Readers of literature who share their pleasure in the classroom will not only be building the habits of a lifetime, but will be fostering children's personal growth, provoking and challenging them to consider the complexity of the human condition' Byatt 1998.

Clearly, how we, as practitioners, model excitement around literature is fundamental in creating readers of the future (choices of material by children have shown an overwhelming influence of the adults they interact with). To ensure that this remains a priority, we are going to keep in place the most successful strategies used to expose staff to new texts.

- Storytime for staff at the start of every staff meeting / CPD.
- Recommendations given in every meeting (staff on a rota to champion someone / something of their discovery – not just the change team).
- Padlet to be maintained by English Lead with pointers to information and events all book related.
- Assemblies will incorporate stories / texts at their heart.

In addition, our leadership team have been working to overhaul our foundation subject curricula, and linking each topic area to a key text to use alongside classroom content. This will begin in September, and new, quality, non-fiction books have been purchased for the different year groups. Maximising exposure to a variety of text types is key, and will be celebrated by 'The Blackburn Book Awards' which will hold its first presentation at the end of Summer 2022.

CPD about reading this year was mostly blocked within a half-term. Next academic year, this will be spread more throughout the year in order to reflect the presence of RFP on the School Development Plan for the next academic year. The content of this CPD will be decided where we think the need will be, and target children chosen more than likely from the bottom 20% of readers in school in order to enhance the will of these children, which we hope will in turn affect the skill (as well as key targeted interventions to boost). The inclusion of RFP on the School development Plan means that the Headteacher has prioritised this as an area of spending. School Fundraising money will be directed towards building up our current book stock, based upon preferences gleaned from surveying the children at the start of the next academic year. We have also upgraded our membership to the Library Service gold level, which affords us a greater choice of materials, workshops and artefacts than we have had before.

Our most successful change this year, has been the simplest: making a strict, timetabled storytime after lunch daily. Without exception, staff have confirmed, that this is one of their favourite parts of the day (pupils' responses on their exit surveys were identical). This, doubtless, will continue from now on, and the pleasure drawn from this daily practice for adults and pupils alike will be kept as a priority.