



## St. Mary's C of E Primary School, Selly Oak, Birmingham

### Doing the expected exceptionally well

Caroline Cole - English Leader

#### Context: Who we are

Our school is a Church of England School which is situated in Selly Oak, in the south of Birmingham. It was founded in 1860 and has relocated and evolved over the years. St Mary's has recently become a two form entry school. We are in close proximity to Birmingham University and the Queen Elizabeth Hospital for which some of our parents work. Our school community speaks 27 different languages.

Our school's motto of 'Bringing the Best out in Everyone' is intrinsic in everything that we do. As practitioners, we are forward thinking and reflective, but realistic. We have designed a personalised curriculum which paves the way for: critical, independent and ambitious learners and we recognise that **reading is the key to unlocking children's potential**. Therefore, the practice of reading is a priority for us and is a driver for our whole curriculum.

I joined St Mary's School in 2019 bringing with me 18 years of primary teaching experience. Within my first few months at the school, I worked with the staff to create our vision for reading:

#### Reading at St Mary's C of E Primary School



Reading is at the heart of everything we do.

- Our love of reading opens minds and is the gateway to our future.
- Teachers are the role models who show children how to read for enjoyment, meaning, and to research.
- We want children to read with fluency, enthusiasm and have an informed view about what they have read.

#### Explore: The picture in September 2019

With the support of the SLT, I made 2019-20 'The St Mary's Year of Reading'. As the school had grown, it was essential that we delivered consistent approaches for the *teaching of reading* skills. We developed a bespoke way of delivering: 'Read and Reflect' guided reading sessions. In these sessions, we explicitly teach and rehearse reading skills progressively and deeply over time.



In addition, we needed to change teachers' perceptions of Reading for Pleasure (RfP) and celebrate exactly what it is: *reading is for pleasure*. Sandwiches taste bland without the filling and staff recognised that it was essential to **balance** 'the bread and butter of reading skills' with the 'tasty' elements of RfP.

As shown in the table below, taken from *Building Communities of Engaged Readers Reading for Pleasure*, our school needed to show '**that the reading for pleasure agenda is distinct from, although closely related to, a reading instruction agenda**' (Cremin et al., 2014).

<b>Reading Instruction is oriented towards:</b>	<b>Reading for Pleasure is oriented towards:</b>
Learning to Read	Choosing to Read
The skill	The will
Decoding and comprehension	Engagement and response
Reading for the system	Reading for oneself
Teacher direction	Child direction
Teacher ownership	Child ownership
Solitary reading	Social and collaborative reading
Attainment	Achievement
The minimum entitlement (A set reading level)	The maximum entitlement (A reader for life)

(Cremin et al., 2014p. 157)

We embarked upon the journey of teaching RfP through the Open University project as we wanted to learn how to widen our children's experiences of a range of texts and to learn how to model a true appreciation of reading that was embedded into our daily practice. The initial conference, led by the Open University, was attended by all staff and as a leader, this supported the weighting of the messages that I had previously shared 'in house.' Staff were aware of some of the shocking statistics:

**'50% of prisoners in the UK are functionally illiterate. This means half of the 85,000 people currently incarcerated have a reading age of 11 or lower – with 20% falling well short of that mark. Many prisoners are completely illiterate. Illiteracy denies you access; you can't engage with society'** (Stephen Moss, The Guardian, June 2017).

Being a passionate team, staff wanted to know instantly: 'What can we do to address this problem?' The conference ignited a real buzz in our staff, with people saying: *"I went out and bought this (book) as it was recommended to me."* *"I did the voting system for Reading Aloud books with my children and they loved it."* *"It gave me such good ideas."*

This enthusiasm was celebrated and encouraged but as a leader wanting to implement significant change, I knew that this was not going to happen through 'throw away activities,' or as described in her article *Reading Communities: Why, what and how? 'empty demonstrations'* (Cremin, T., 2019).

## You have to start somewhere!

1. To start us off, we launched 'The St Mary's Year of Reading,' with our children and parents. We threw open our doors on a Friday morning to have a **protected Reading for Pleasure time**. Parents of all aged children enjoyed choosing books with their children whilst munching on popcorn or sipping hot chocolate. We explored different genres; staff read to different year groups and we had pyjama parties. The most feedback we had though was from a Karaoke fundraiser for Children in Need. Parents were able to see RfP in a completely different light: what fun the actual practise of reading could be.

Reading around the fireside in Year 2.



2. The second significant change that we made was to **change our reading environments**. Many corridors had bookshelves and reading nooks. However, book corners were only seen in the Early Years and in some classrooms. If children in Upper Key Stage 2 were asked to get a book, they wouldn't naturally have one to hand and would need to leave the classroom to get one. An expectation was made that all classrooms were to have a book corner highlighting the importance of reading. Each class moved books off the corridors into classrooms and appointed librarians to: help sign in and out library loans, to protect the presentation of these areas and to promote book recommendations through display and discussion.
3. The next thing to happen was to share the **expectation that every class would have a read aloud slot every day**.
4. As the OU project began, a **change team**, made up of staff with different roles in school (teachers, TAs and our librarian) was formed.

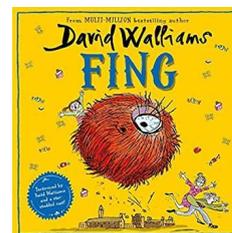
Then the real work began.

## Research: Our baseline

A staff meeting was used for staff to complete a [questionnaire](#) by the Open University regarding their own reading knowledge and practice as adults. The change team worked with me to collate and process the data. These are the key findings.

### Teacher's knowledge of children's literature summary

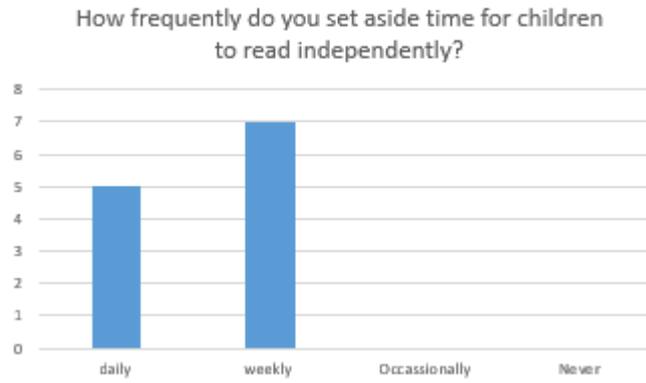
- The responses for fiction books were very traditional. The authors that were named instinctively and repeatedly were: Roald Dahl, David Walliams and Dr Seuss. Julia Donaldson and Anthony Browne featured heavily for picture fiction. Very traditional titles (not authors) were named for picture books and not current ones (*The Large Family*, *The Hungry Caterpillar*, *The Tiger who came to Tea*).
- There was a very limited awareness of poets. The names Michael Rosen and Benjamin Zephaniah immediately came to people's minds.



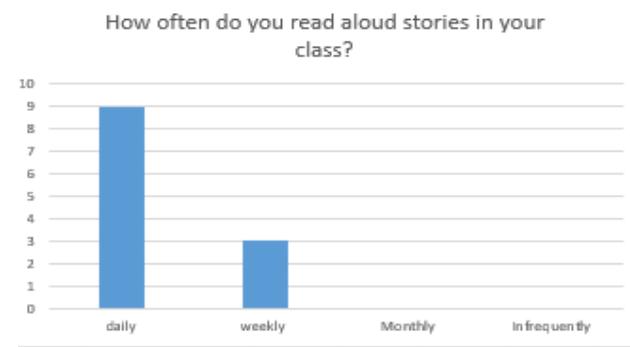
### Children's reading practices summary

- Most staff said that they ask the children about what they like to read or that they observe what the children choose to read from the book corner/ RfP time.
- When asked to rate their knowledge of children's reading habits and preferences for both in and out of school on a scale of 1-6 (6 being the highest) the staff gave an average of 3/6.

By October, due to the rise in expectation around book corners, reading aloud and protected RfP times the statistics were starting to show that **changes were happening**:

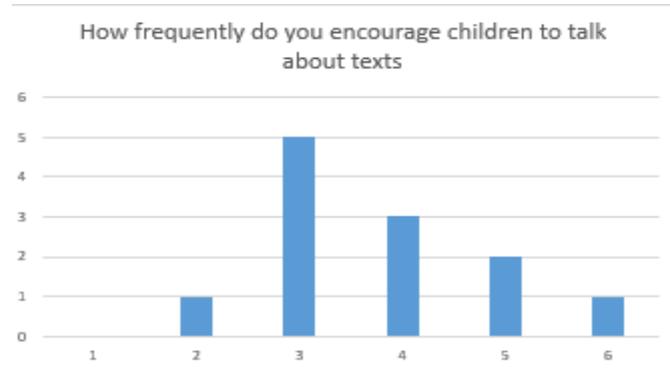


This was an increase from July 2019.

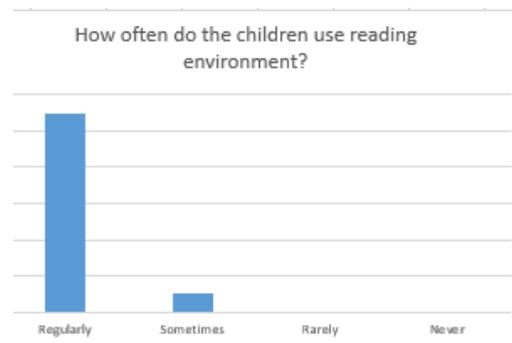


This was an increase from July 2019.

Scale 1-6  
with 6 being  
the most



Year 2-6



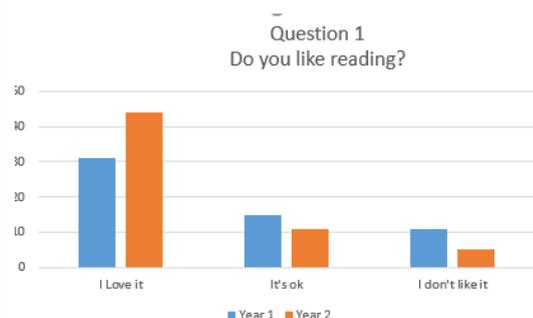
In addition to not having a current and diverse knowledge of children's authors, it **was apparent that staff didn't know our children as readers** and that we didn't give children enough of an opportunity to discuss their reading

preferences. As a school, we asked all of the children to conduct a [Reading River](#) as a way for them to share their interests and reading behaviours with us. However, the results only proved what we had thought:

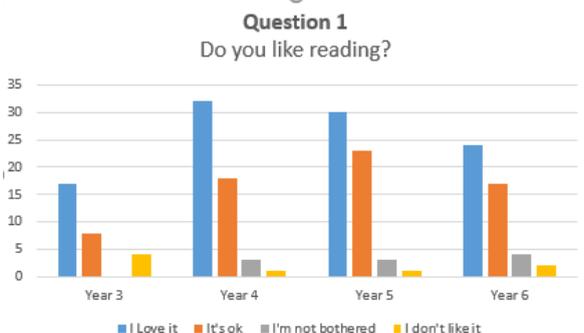
- children themselves had a very limited knowledge of authors with JK Rowling and David Walliams as their favourite writers
- the children referred to specific texts that their teachers had read to them.

The children also conducted [questionnaires](#) devised by the Open University

### Key Stage 1. Children's surveys



### Key Stage 2 Children's survey



#### Key Stage 1:

The majority of the children across the key stage said that they 'loved reading,' interestingly however they linked enjoyment to achievement.

Most said that they liked it *'because they found it easy' or 'that they were good at it.'*

There were more children in one year 1 class that said that they disliked reading compared to the other class.

#### Key Stage 2:

It was apparent that most children liked reading but most linked enjoyment to success: *"Reading is easy." "It makes me smarter than other people."*

Children thought that they were good readers if they were: fluent, if they were able to decode and the complexity of a text gave them gratification as one child in year 5 stated, *"I read thick books as I'm clever."*

Children who struggled to read found it *'scary'* or it made them *'angry'* or *'sad.'* Many children felt self conscious about reading aloud in school as they worried about the mispronunciation of words as a child in Year 4 shared: *"I don't like reading. It's boring. I'm not a very good reader because I say some words wrong."*

Interestingly, children said that they read more at home because it was comfortable and one could infer that reading at home was a safe place where there is less pressure for them to answer technical questions.

I decided that we were going to **track a number of children across the school through this project to gain measurable results** at the end of the academic year 2020. These children would be those who disliked reading and who had a very limited knowledge of different authors or genres.

Despite the fact that our whole School RfP sessions on a Friday were well attended (75% of parents attending in Key Stage 1 and a good proportion in Key Stage 2) it was felt by some staff that this was not an **authentic Reading for Pleasure session**. We recognised that our reading influences were intrinsic to sharing a range of work by different authors and that we were the drivers to model book talk and recommendations further if we were going to create a *'rich reciprocal reading community,'* as described by Kimberly Safford, *Building Communities of Engaged Readers Reading for Pleasure* (in Cremin et al., 2014).

## Our project needed to develop:

1. Teachers as Readers who know texts well, share these with enthusiasm with children and model how to discuss texts beyond comprehension skills
2. Social reading environments.

## Prepare: Action planning and time setting

Armed with this information, the change team and I worked together to establish our exact angle for the Reading for Pleasure project. Then actions, roles and time lines were drawn up through this action plan.

### AIM 1: for all staff to have a deepened knowledge of children's texts

#### Success Criteria

- Staff will be able recommend five or more 'new' authors/poets to their children (which are different to the ones listed on their original questionnaire) and can discuss different texts by these authors/poets.
- Staff are to actively share 'good books' across their phases through informal conversations with pupils and staff and through designated RfP sessions/ reading aloud slots/ natural opportunity. (Teachers are to introduce the authors/poets as well as titles and use the OU websites to investigate further titles.)

### Aim 2: the school environment will reflect a sociable and positive reading culture.

#### Success Criteria

- Children will have access to a secure, comfortable reading environment where they might go when choosing to read for pleasure.
- Displays in the classrooms and shared spaces will promote book recommendations and the benefits and pleasures gained from reading.

## Deliver

### The power of the change team

A number of staff meetings were held by myself with the help of the change team. They always began with reading, usually a poem which we would briefly discuss *'as a way of demonstrating the potential of reading aloud and the potential to share books with the rest of the staff'* (Cremin et al., 2014).

One staff meeting was given over to explaining the action plan and how this supported our School Improvement Plan to promote The St Mary's Year of Reading. **Staff were made aware of the importance of their reading areas as 'social spaces' and so the expectation was set for [book shelfies](#), *Post Its*, teacher book recommendations and class voting system.**

The change team were intrinsic in the monitoring of these actions as they could look objectively across the school noting successes and areas for development. The team were able to share ideas and practise, and could meet with focus children whom we wanted to track through the process to see if their reading behaviour had changed over time.

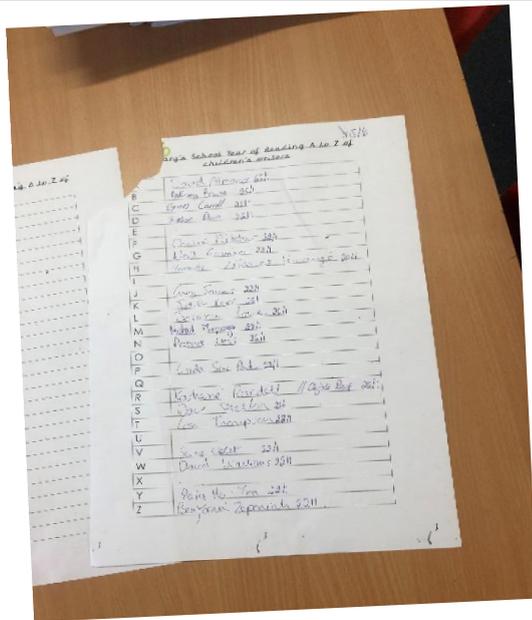
### Changes in action

#### AIM 1: for all staff to have a deepened knowledge of children's texts

The staff were asked to work in phases to create an **A to Z of authors**. We dated the entries and then developed a working wall in our staff room for staff to keep adding new authors and book recommendations onto it.

#### October 2019- January 2020

By January the repertoire of authors began to increase and the range was much more current than in September 2019.  
(March- Sept Covid school closure)



#### November 2020 IMPACT

8 teachers conducted the original survey again. **42 new authors** were added to our list including the works of: Nathan Bryon, Tom Percival, Lisa Thompson, Charlie Mackesy and Saadia Faruqi, Noel Streatfeild, Robert Swindells, Linda Newbery, Alison Hawes, Floella Benjamin, Polly Ho-Yen, Katherine Rundell, Emma Carroll, Fleur Hitchcock, Philip Reeve.

This meant that our average of 5 new authors per teacher had been met.

The range of authors were of different genders, there was evidence of more BAME authors and the texts were more contemporary.

b) Staff were asked to display **'book shelfies.'**



October 2019 - March 2020

All classrooms and offices housed a 'book shelfie' outside their classrooms, showing the titles of books that children and staff had read in and out of school for pleasure. A book shelf had been erected outside the Head Teacher's office where titles were displayed and children enjoyed: engaging with the books, 'having that conversation' about the books with our Head and watching the choices evolve over time.

#### IMPACT

By March, many of the 'shelfies were full.' Repeats of book titles shot up around school due to the informal conversations people were having about texts and children and staff engaging in conversation about books. One text that captured the children's attention was *Bear Moves* by Ben Bailey Smith as the poster and book appeared on display in the Deputy Head's office. He lent the book to a Key Stage 1 class who shared the song and moves to others in the playground. Instantly, their class teacher bought another title by the same author so that the children could compare and contrast the books without any adult input.

September 2020

All classrooms and offices have continued to promote their books using the shelfies.

Staff were required to **model how to recommend books to children**, little and often, through whole class discussion, on a 1:1 or group basis, but as teacher Jon Biddle from Moorlands Primary Academy, Norfolk states on the OU RFP site: **'The creation of spontaneous conversation about books doesn't happen overnight' and as he said: 'at the beginning of the year (for his school) it (book talk) needed to be teacher led.'**

At St Mary's, **the change team was a powerful tool for modelling how to hold an informal chat** with children on the corridor and in the playground about texts. Conversations were then beginning to roll out by other members of staff and children. Indeed, the conversations about books grew between adults too in the staffroom where people were openly sharing their current book of choice. A **staff library** of book recommendations for both children's and adult texts was homed in the staffroom and people were often borrowing texts and adding to the collection.

It was **suggested by our Year 5 teacher that as a staff, we ran a book club for ourselves.** Nine members of staff met on a regular basis to engage in book talk. We have been able to share this practise then with the children. This book group even continued to meet via Zoom during the lockdown and continues to 'meet' every 6 weeks.

**Aim 2: the school environment will reflect a sociable and positive reading culture**

As staff were becoming more familiar with different children's authors and children's preferences, they could then recommend books for the children to read and they were asked to use a voting system so that their children could choose their class read- aloud text. These were placed on display in the book corners.



Across the school, children were and are still voting for their reading aloud book based on recommendations from their teacher, each other, book awards and trends.

**IMPACT**

Informal book talk happens between children and staff. Children were keen to talk about their class book, their own book of choice and were using snippets of time in the day to recommend books and to just read!



Since September 2019, Staff have shared their book preferences and 'special' texts with their classes that children are able to access and enjoy.

**IMPACT**

Children have been introduced to new authors, genres and old favourites. These boxes acted as a social display of loving a book. Children take great care of these texts and because they belonged to their teachers, they naturally wanted to talk about the texts.

Children then started to add post its to the front covers of books to share their thoughts and many classrooms displayed these recommendations.

**Staff CPD around pedagogical aspects of RfP**

To develop staff's awareness of *informal book talk* and how to empower the children to lead their own discussions to add to the sociality of the reading environment, training was then given. In a staff meeting, books were placed onto tables; they were given time to Read for Pleasure and they were asked to use a crib sheet to direct their 'book talk'. After a set time, they were given a coloured lolly stick and asked to move into groups with people who had the same coloured lolly stick as themselves. Then using the crib sheet, they were to introduce their book to the group and have a conversation about it.

**IMPACT**

This method was then adopted by some members of staff in their following Friday Reading for Pleasure sessions so that the children were engaging in meaningful discussions.

**Year 3 Teacher:** *“Following the staff meeting, I modelled to my class how to engage in a discussion about a book by sharing a new book with the whole class and telling them why I liked/disliked it. I then offered the opportunity for a Q&A session and then asked who would be interested in reading the book following our discussion. I then encouraged the children to have similar conversations such as this during all reading sessions.”*

Encouraging the children to recommend books in front of their parents too during our Friday RFP time meant that the parents were also seeing how they could engage in informal book talk at home with the children. As one parent of a Year 2 child said: *“I don’t know what you’ve done but P is now actually picking books up at home and is sharing them with us.”*

A similar activity took place across the school where we were asked children to recommend books that we could buy for the book corner. A book retailer allowed us to loan titles for the children to explore. In the set up (shown in the photograph below) children were told that they needed to be careful of these titles as they were so good that they needed to be handled with care. Whilst combing through the books, the children put on surgical masks and gloves, and then they signed the yellow slips if they thought it was a good title to buy for our class libraries. **This gave us a good insight into their reading preferences** but also exposed them to genres that they may never encountered.



### **The midpoint**

At the midpoint of the project, the change team began to **interview our focus children** from across the school to see if their opinions about reading had changed from the initial questionnaires. These are some of the highlights.

#### L In Year 6

*“He was ‘uncritically’ positive about reading at school and just said he “loved reading” as much now as at the beginning of the year. What he did say though was that he was trying some different books now and had moved away from Diary of Wimpy Kid so that was a development. Looking at his borrowing record he was changing his book regularly and taking out 3 books a month and was certainly borrowing a wide range of books.”*

#### A in Year 6:

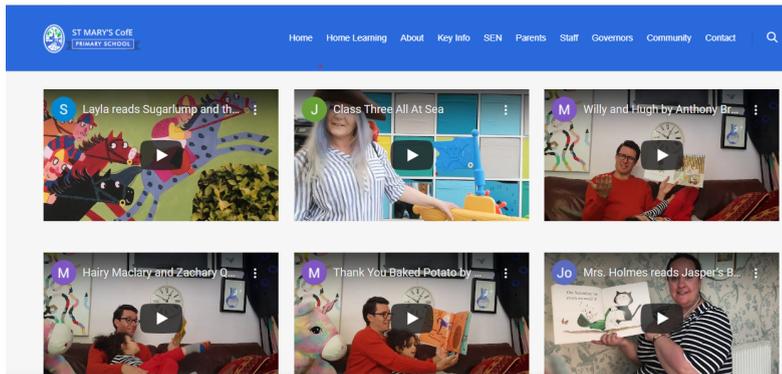
*‘He explained to me that he had not had any English when he came to school and struggled with reading. He talked about being a refugee from Syria. When I asked what he enjoyed reading he said “Diary of a Wimpy Kid” and told me about all the books in the series he had read. I asked what he enjoyed about the books and he said they were funny, he really liked the pictures and there was not too much writing. I asked if he had tried anything else and he said “Boy at the back of the Class”. Apparently the book had been recommended by other class members. He remembered someone saying to him, “This is a book about you”.*

## And then the whole world changed.

In March 2020, Covid -19 hit the world and schools were closed! However, we were not going to give up on the project and in fact RfP became even more important for our children when they were in lockdown.

With bookstores and libraries closed, it was our responsibility to ensure that our children had access to new, free reading material. Our school website became our driving force. A RfP page was set up on our school website with access to hundreds of free titles for children to download and read.

On the page, we developed a Padlet so that Staff and children could share their book recommendations with one another. Many members of staff came forward to film themselves reading their recommendations to the children and uploaded these onto the site.



One very enthusiastic member of staff read an entire novel to his class over a number of weeks. They had their own class padlet where they posted comments about the book. After they had finished the text, the teacher created an online voting system for the children to choose their own books.

As we approached the summer, we developed a Reading page called **Summer of Reading**. Each week, a new text/ extract of a new text was read to the children by a member of staff who videoed themselves. The children were encouraged to take part in 'Staycation activities' and to post photos of themselves doing the reading challenges on our website.

A screenshot of the 'Summer of Reading' website page. The page is titled 'READING CHALLENGE OF THE WEEK!' and features a green circular graphic with the quote: "READING GIVES US A PLACE TO GO WHEN WE HAVE TO STAY WHERE WE ARE." by MASON GOOLEY. The page also includes a list of challenges: 'Could you read a book to someone who doesn't live in your house?', 'Maybe a Zoom call, over the phone or a video?', 'Or could you do a poster about a book that you like and put it in your window at home?', and 'Could you send us a video or photo of what you've done?'. There is a small image of a child reading a book on a laptop. The page is set against a light background with a blue header and a green footer.

<http://www.stmarys-sellyoak.co.uk/summer-reading-ks2-shouting-rain/>

## Sustain

Due to the current Covid situation whereby children have missed 5 months of school, we are operating in bubbles and are under strict health and safety rules. We have been unable to mix in the same way as before so the whole school ethos of informal, book chat has been limited to our classrooms and the staffroom. We have not been able to send books home with the children to read and it has been increasingly difficult to conduct accurate feedback to compare our initial data to that which we would have done in July by repeating the questionnaires with staff and children. Year 6 children had left, there have been staff changes and we were concerned to find out if children had been reading much at home..

Interviews were repeated with 48 target children from 2019-20 most of whom originally said that **they disliked reading in September 2020**. These children were reluctant readers who found it boring or difficult.

**However they now said:**

27/48 (56%)	Now love reading
15/48 (31%)	Now find reading ok
6/48 (13%)	Were still not bothered



**So 87% of these children have changed their attitudes towards reading.**

We can highlight all of our original aims and actions:

**Aim 1: For all staff to have a deepened knowledge of children's texts**

**Success Criteria:**

- a) Staff will be able recommend five or more 'new' authors/poets to their children (which are different to the ones listed on their original questionnaire) and can discuss different texts by these authors/poets
- b) Staff are to actively share 'good books' across their phases through informal conversations with pupils and staff and through designated R4P sessions/ reading aloud slots/ natural opportunity.

**Aim 2: The school environment will reflect a sociable and positive reading culture.**

**Success Criteria: Success**

- a. Children will vote for the class read aloud text. The names of the texts and number of votes will be listed and place on display in classes
- b. Each class will have a book 'shelfie' displayed on the door of their classroom which shows children's and staff's reading recommendations.  
Children write post its and stick in the front of books to recommend choices.  
RfP sessions on a Friday have an element of book recommendations.
- c. Staff display examples of their recommendations in book areas. (e.g: Staff book shelf)
- d. Staff to monthly look at book loan folder in book corners and check the regularity and range of books borrowed-especially those who are reluctant readers.
- e. Children to work with their school partners to read and recommend books to each other.

**The staff survey too demonstrated this practice:**

When asked about how their feelings had changed towards RfP since the beginning of the project, some replied:

*I feel I have a much greater understanding of the benefits that it has for children. I feel more confident allowing time for Reading for Pleasure in class as I can support its use, rather than being seen to 'just read'. I really like the changes that have been brought in to support reading for pleasure in school.*

**More focus on this, more time spent promoting this in the classroom and have had more time to enjoy reading myself.**

**It is a valuable time for children to immerse themselves in a book. The children's enjoyment of reading has increased.**

**When asked how children choose their books when reading for pleasure, they said:**

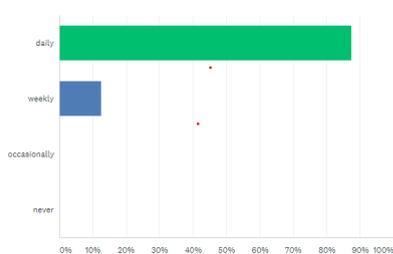
Showing 8 responses

<input type="checkbox"/>		<a href="#">View respondent's answers</a>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Based on the front covers, other children's recommendations or if they have read books from that author previously.	<a href="#">View respondent's answers</a>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Recommendations (teacher and peer) Choice from the class book corner.	<a href="#">View respondent's answers</a>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Independently from a selection of signposted and recommended books in the classroom library.	<a href="#">View respondent's answers</a>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Free choice from the book corner. Discussions about books in class, recommendations from each other, appeal of teacher's 'special books'	

**And when asked:**

How frequently do you set aside time for children to read independently?

Answered: 8 Skipped: 0



**87% of staff are continuing to read aloud to their classes everyday.**

In conclusion, we have pathed the way for a Reading for Pleasure culture in our school that exceeds the 2019-20 St Mary's Year of Reading and has created a Reading for Pleasure school community that will progress into the future.

As Woods, 2001: 4-5 describes in Chapter 10 (Cremin et al., 2014) **Reading can change your life, it can inform, motivate, inspire and elevate,** and as stated in our St Mary's Philosophy on reading back in 2019, Reading is at the heart of everything we do:

- Our  of reading opens minds and is the gateway to our future.

**Therefore, this is a case where our actions speak as loudly as our words.**