

## Woodlands Park Primary School

### Context

Woodlands Park is mid-sized primary school with 340 pupils arranged into two classes per year group. The percentage of children that receive pupil premium funding is around average for England and Wales. We chose to join the OU RfP programme following governor/English Lead monitoring 18 months ago. Although the children spoke well about their own reading habits and our reading progress data was positive, I realised that the children gave little thought to how they chose books to read for pleasure and their discussions around books were limited. Most books chosen came from children's own homes.

### Explore

At the start of the Open University RfP programme in September 2021, we undertook a baseline survey and observation to learn more about children's and staff attitudes to reading. These revealed:

#### Positives

1. *High percentage of children liked class story and commented that this took place regularly.*
2. *Majority of children positive about reading 80-90%*
3. *Some staff confident in their knowledge of children's literature and were allowing time in the week to share this with children.*

#### Areas to develop

1. *Between 40 to 60% of children spoke about how they chatted about books in school. (We wished to increase the quantity and quality of formal and informal book talk across the school).*
2. *Some teachers were less confident about their own knowledge of children's literature in comparison to others. (We aspired to improve all staff's knowledge of children's literature).*
3. *Staff unsure about the reading habits of the children in their class.*

### Prepare

The Change Team used the pupil and teacher surveys to identify the following two aims to develop RfP across the school.

1. **Subject Knowledge - To broaden teacher knowledge of children's literature and other texts, particularly for their year group.**

From the surveys, the Change Team identified that there was a range in the expertise and knowledge of children's literature held by adults working in the school. This echoed research from Cremin et al., 2014 which identified that teachers were predominantly discussing and reading aloud books from their own childhood favourites or were otherwise reliant on highly promoted celebrity authors such as Dahl and Walliams. The Change Team recognised '*Knowledge of children's literature and of individual children and their reading interests is essential in order to develop young readers who can and do choose to read for pleasure.... Those teachers are in a better position to create a community of readers in the classroom*' (Younger and Warrington 2005 Kwek et al 2007).

2. **Pedagogy - To improve the quantity and quality of informal book talk, inside-text talk and recommendations.** Pupil conferences carried out before starting the project found that although children were able to talk in detail about the books they were reading, they were unable to state why they had chosen the book beyond the attraction of the front cover or the blurb. This was reflected in the pupil surveys in which only **50% of children said that they talked about books in school**. Talking about texts and talking about reading is at the heart of RfP pedagogy as identified in the TaRs research. *Book talk and recommendations are one of the four core practices for reading for pleasure (Cremin et al 2014)* and as the Change Team we felt addressing this pedagogical strand would have the greatest impact on improving reading for pleasure at Woodlands Park.

## Deliver

**Aim one: Subject Knowledge** - To broaden teacher knowledge of children's literature and other texts, particularly for their year group.

- **Training for staff** on the impact of RfP and the effect of teacher subject knowledge of text.
- **Guidance to all staff on where to find quality age-appropriate** texts.
- **£20 voucher to be used by all staff to buy children's literature** of their choice.
- **Front facing teacher's library** of children's text in the staff room.
- **Promotion of informal staff discussion** of texts by those staff with wealth of knowledge of children's literature.
- **Class story 3-5 times a week with record kept of stories** read to ensure no repetition, and assess breadth of genre, gender culture etc.

**Aim two: Pedagogy** - To improve the quantity and quality of informal book talk, inside-text talk and recommendations.

- Staff training about RfP led by OU including a strand on the **importance of book talk**.
- Introduction of *formal* book talk once a week to show children how they might discuss texts.
- Staff across the school use *formal* book talk as means to begin **informal book talk** at opportune moments during the school day with children in their own class but also across the school. E.g. partner teachers spotting children reading certain authors, head teacher talking about books in assembly.
- Change Team list of strategies which could be used to initiate a conversation about books, shared with teachers. E.g. **book blankets, book recommendations on front facing book displays, start of the day bring a book to school** (Year1)
- Children asked by class teachers to suggest texts they would like to see the school purchase for their classroom. **All teachers were asked to submit a list of books their children would like to buy and the texts were ordered quickly from our local book shop** and on the shelves within three weeks. (For the first term the books purchased remained in the classroom before moving out into the school library).
- **Link developed with new local book shop** in the town. Books ordered through shop and invoiced directly to the school with discount, allowing staff to purchase books requested by children quickly.

## Review

### 1. Data – summary results from latest pupil survey

Each half term the change team met to discuss how the strategies were working within their own teams. In June the children repeated the surveys completed in September and although the children completed all the questions, Q11 '*Do you ever chat about what you have chosen to read in school?*' was the main priority. Here there had been a significant change showing the impact of our work:

- Percentage of children answering 'yes' rose **from 52% in October to over 85% in June**.
- **11/12 classes had significant improvements** in the number of children answering yes.

### 2. Pupil conferences –

Although the data is significant; there are just two possible answers to the question '*Do you ever chat about what you have chosen to read in school?*' and the black or white responses offer no nuance. For this reason, it was good to use the pupil conferences **to see the ways in which talk had improved from the children's perspective**.

- Children from 12/14 classes said they **talked regularly about books**
- Many children stated they had chosen the book they were reading **based on a recommendation** by an adult or another child.
- **Nearly all children could recall the class stories they had been read already** this year and **talked enthusiastically about the stories and which they preferred**.
- Many children said **they had recommended a book to another person** in their class this year and could give the name of the text.

- Many children **talked about a range of authors and a range of texts** that they had read or enjoyed in comparison to conferencing the previous year.
3. **Through anecdotal snapshots**, I also asked teachers to comment on how they felt their own subject knowledge had impacted on the children's ability and willingness to talk about and recommend texts. Although anecdotal these **snapshots gave an indication of the success from the strategies**. Some of these can be viewed on the accompanying PowerPoint presentation.
  4. We also **looked at the impact on the focus children of RfP over the last year**. Each class was asked to select 3 focus children, these were put onto our provision maps for intervention and closely monitored. The **results from the pupil survey showed an increase in motivation of those children** that put that they either don't like or were not bothered about reading to they are ok or love reading, which can be seen on the results for these Key Stage 2 classes. Unfortunately, with the Key Stage 1 children only having a show of hands I don't have the data for focus children from these classes yet.
  5. Using a case study of impact approach for one focus child per teacher, we asked **teachers to think about strategies that have been successful with their focus children and record a paragraph of the impact of those strategies for one child**. A number of teachers stressed the **importance of finding out about the children's reading preferences and then having the funds provided by school to purchase the texts**. For example, Sophie found Lewis in Year 1 loved magazines whereas in Year 6 Riley liked the Ronaldo biography but there was only one copy in school. More examples can be seen on the PowerPoint display.

## Sustain

A wealth of research shows the impact that teacher knowledge of children's literature has on developing children's motivation to read and this has definitely been the case at Woodlands Park. Improved subject knowledge has in turn had an impact on the quality of book talk and the willingness of adults to discuss texts in and around school.

**The selection of a Change Team with a teacher from each part of the school allowed clear communication** to every key stage and the **opportunity to listen, share and evaluate the ongoing success** of the project. Looking forward it is important to continue to promote, monitor and where necessary support RfP in classes across the school. **RfP will now form part of the whole school monitoring cycle to ensure standards remain high.**

To help sustain the benefits gained by taking part in the project over the last year we have developed some key principles that each class will have next year:

- Regular (weekly) **formal and informal book talk**.
- **Front facing book displays** in each class with a small number of recommended texts changed regularly
- **3 common class books** for partner classes and a **record of the remaining class books shared** over the course of the year.
- **A record of class books displayed** in the classroom.
- Regular **opportunities for teachers to find out the reading preferences** of their children and **purchase the books** for the classroom.
- The **continued use of the staffroom library** of children's texts with every couple of weeks, texts presented to the children by teachers.

For next year an area we need to address as a school, which came up from the pupil surveys, is **to improve our community of readers supporting parents with reading at home**. This is something we can look at in conjunction with other curriculum areas such as Maths where, after COVID, we can think carefully about engaging parents and reintroducing strategies such as parental workshops that were successful before 2020.