



Reading Schools Case Study

Coatbridge High School

North Lanarkshire



BACKGROUND

This case study is about Coatbridge High School, a large secondary school in North Lanarkshire with over 1,000 pupils. It is informed by a discussion with two teachers, two parents, seven pupils and one local project partner.


The school began its Reading School journey during the second national lockdown in early 2021. The programme is led by an English teacher who believes that reading has the power to build empathy and improve pupils' life experiences. The school is working towards accreditation.

READING INITIATIVES

There has been a shift in the way the school thinks and talks about reading. Buy-in across all departments is encouraging different conversations and creating a culture of reading across the whole school.

The school has created a Library Leadership Group with volunteer librarians drawn from across the year groups. Staff reported that the S6 librarians in particular have been fantastic and are working with younger pupils to encourage reading. The library has become a hub of activity through the Reading Schools journey. Some of the ways the volunteer librarians have been involved include:

- curating titles for classes to use on different projects, such as science or art projects
- advising on and recommending books to other pupils
- visiting a local bookstore to choose books
- encouraging access with less confident readers
- giving out certificates to younger pupils using the library
- checking books in and out of the library.

 **With being the young librarian, he's been asked to review books, so he's talking to the teachers about what books they recommend."**

- Parent

EXAMPLES OF READING INITIATIVES

There have been a range of activities developed throughout the school's Reading School journey, including:.

Reading periods: protected opportunities for free reading where pupils can read whatever they want.

Future Fridays: a book club where pupils meet every Friday to read and share book recommendations.

Read to Succeed: all first-year pupils receive a book that they can keep.

Pupils Picks: pupils write book reviews which are then shared in the library.

Book recommendations: pupils can request that the library buys specific books.

Book vending machine: pupils receive tokens as a reward for achievement which they can use to buy a book from the school's vending machine.

'What am I reading?' posters: all teachers display what they are reading in or outside their room to encourage dialogue about books and reading.

Class activities: introduction of new activities such as 'speed dating', when pupils get three minutes to pitch a book, and quizzes using opening lines to different books.

Graffiti project: pupils create a graffiti wall with quotes from books.

Special events: taster sessions and quizzes for Book Week Scotland and World Book Day.

Regular activities: 'Future Fridays Book Club', 'Chill out Tuesdays', Creative Writing Club, library treasure hunt and coffee and hot chocolate mornings.



He's been in the library seeing more books coming in and speaking to the teachers and hearing what they're reading. There's been a lot more social conversation with teachers about books. He's been going around and asking them what they're reading and getting their recommendations."

- Parent

THE DIFFERENCE IT MAKES FOR PUPILS

Staff reported a particularly strong impact on a core group of pupils who regularly visit the library but also an observed increase in the number of pupils coming into the library just for chat.

Library as a safe, calm space: Pupils said that the library feels like a safe, calm space that provides an alternative to the noise of the school playground. They appreciated that it provides an opportunity to socialise with pupils from across the various year groups and allows time just to be quiet, even if they don't want to read.

Staff hope that as pupils begin to spend more time in the library, even the more reluctant pupils will develop an interest in reading and start to engage with books more.

 **If the library wasn't there, there'd be more arguments.”**
- Pupil

 **Some people don't want to read – but they want the quiet space.”**
- Pupil


Increased reading for pleasure: Staff and parents reported an increase in pupils engaging in reading for pleasure, with pupils exchanging book recommendations and talking to both staff and parents about the books they are reading. Pupils spoke about how they have access to a wider range of books at high school and they feel that they now have a peer group to talk to about books.

 **He just talks about reading now! That's the biggest difference. Now he's saying he's really enjoying reading.”**
- Parent

Increased access to a range of literature: Staff and parents stated that pupils have access to a wider range of literature and are supported to make their own choices about what to read. The school has introduced reading lists, genre colour-coding, and 'book match' lists, where pupils can identify books that they might like based on other books that they have read. Pupils said books help them to experience worlds that are different to their own and helps to develop their imaginations.

 **It started off with him looking at Manga¹ but there's been that small introduction, that dropping of the small seed, about what other books he could look at.”**
- Parent

¹Manga is an umbrella term for a wide variety of comic books and graphic novels originally produced and published in Japan.




Increased confidence and self-esteem: Parents reported that they have seen improvements in their children's confidence. They felt that reading and access to literature has supported their children through the transition from primary to secondary school. Pupils reported that through their involvement in the library, they felt that they have more confidence to try new things.

 **I have really seen her confidence grow.”**
- Parent

 **Having the library has been fundamental to him coping with high school. I'm just grateful that there were the reading opportunities through the library and Future Fridays.”**
- Parent

Promoted relationship development: Parents reported that they felt reading had helped their child to build new friendships and identify people with similar interests to them.

 **She has found her place in high school and met new friends with similar interests.”**
- Parent


 **He was struggling with friends, but this has given him something to talk about. It's helped him be able to develop relationships. And it's given him something to help others with.”**
- Parent

Improved health and wellbeing: Staff reported that they see the library being used as a safe and welcoming space in which pupils are able to relax and connect with other children. Pupils were very aware of the positive impact of reading on their mental health and said they find reading relaxing and it helps them to escape their worries.

 **You don't need to worry about what else is happening at home.”**
- Pupil

 **If it has been a stressful school day it helps you unwind.”**
- Pupil

Impact on wider learning: Pupils felt that reading has helped them to improve their vocabulary and spelling but also helped in other areas of the curriculum, including drama, history, through reading Manga and art.

 **If you are reading a book with interesting characters, you can use that [in drama] as you think about how they walk and how they act.”**
- Pupil

THE DIFFERENCE IT MAKES FOR STAFF

Staff reported a general increase in dialogues about reading and literature both among staff and between staff and pupils. Staff noted that they felt that this has had a positive impact on pupils who have at times been surprised by what their teachers are reading.

 **There have been so many more conversations around books. I've had so many amazing conversations in here about books with staff I'd just not have talked with before.”**
- Lead Teacher

 **We get to talk with more teachers, and build relationships with teachers.”**
- Pupil

In a recent survey, staff reported that knowledge of children's and young adult literature focused mainly on the classics, so they plan to introduce a dedicated space in the staff room to promote contemporary authors and books on topics such as mental health and young carers. Other plans include promoting reading for pleasure in staff training and encouraging the nurture classes to make better use of the library to support engagement of reluctant readers.

THE DIFFERENCE IT MAKES FOR PARENTS AND CARERS

Parents reported improvements in their relationships with their child, particularly in terms of the topics that come up in conversation through the range of literature their child is reading. Parents also felt that reading has helped their relationship with their child to mature, with books becoming a mechanism by which to spend time together.

“He’s recommending books to me now and I never thought that would happen with him. It’s really nice to have that part of the relationship. It’s not just a parent-child relationship now. You can now sit in a room together and be reading. There’s not that need to entertain now in the same way. Just being comfortable in the silence.”

- Parent

WHAT'S NEXT

Staff plan to introduce a dedicated space in the staff room to promote contemporary authors and books on topics such as mental health and young carers. There are also plans to promote reading for pleasure during staff training and encouraging the nurture classes to make better use of the library to support engagement of reluctant readers.

Engagement with the wider community has been limited due to the pandemic and restrictions that were placed on schools. The school hopes to develop reading events with senior citizens in the local area as restrictions continue to ease.

The Reading Schools programme is becoming embedded, so the school will continue to be proactive on the programme and stay focused on reading for pleasure, and its benefits. The school is looking forward to continuing its Reading Schools journey to accreditation.

“It is becoming embedded, so the school will continue to be proactive on the programme and stay focused on reading for pleasure, and its benefits.”

- Lead Teacher