

Reading Schools Case Study

Netherburn Primary School

South Lanarkshire



BACKGROUND

This case study is about Netherburn Primary School. It is informed by a discussion with one teacher, five pupils, two parents and a Home Link Worker.

Netherburn was the first school in South Lanarkshire to achieve a Reading Schools Gold Award, in February 2022. Four of its classes (97 pupils) took part in the Reading Schools programme. The nursery accommodates 27 children who have also been involved in reading initiatives.

The Reading Schools programme is led by a teacher (the Literacy Coordinator). Research undertaken by this teacher found that over 90% of families in the community didn't use libraries due to the cost of travel. The school is located in an area of high deprivation. After attending a Scottish Book Trust training event about the Reading Schools pilot, the Literacy Coordinator decided that Netherburn should get involved. The school was already involved in work around literacy before becoming a Reading School and the Head Teacher, Literacy Coordinator and colleagues wanted the opportunity for accreditation through the programme.

READING INITIATIVES

The school has delivered a variety of activities to encourage reading for pleasure, including:

- Designing the school library and interviewing pupils for librarian posts.
- Logo competition to design logos for the school library.
- Remote reading activities during the Covid-19 pandemic such as online reading and an outdoor book hunt.
- 'Read and relax' time before and after school.
- Book Buddies and school Literacy Champions who support their peers to find and choose books to read.
- After school and breakfast reading clubs.

 **Our mission was to get our village reading."**
- Head Teacher

 **Reading for pleasure is central to the programme, which aligns with the school's aims."**
- Literacy Coordinator

 **The kids run a lot of the activities."**
- Literacy Coordinator

Before the school and its pupils established the library, the library space was not the inviting, relaxing and welcoming space it wanted for its pupils. Now it is, and the school provides a wide range of reading materials including fiction and non-fiction books, graphic novels and magazines to offer pupils and their families choice to read what they are interested in.

Once the library was created, pupils underwent formal interviews to secure jobs as librarians, and the library staff were tasked with leading Reading Schools activities. Library classes were scheduled into the timetable. Classroom libraries were developed so that reading for pleasure could take place in all classes, and teachers were encouraged to have reading time in all classes. All school staff, including non-teaching staff, were included in reading activities such as discussions and sharing book recommendations during in-service days, to create a reading culture across the school.

The Literacy Coordinator said that getting involved in the programme was straightforward, the resources were high quality and communications were good.

**“ Reading Schools has been a great support for me.”
- Literacy Coordinator**

The Literacy Coordinator emphasised that creating a reading culture is not an overnight change and cannot be achieved through one-off events. It requires a longer term, embedded programme of activities to become sustainable.

**“ It is a journey”
- Literacy Coordinator**



**“ The school library is used regularly throughout the school day, before school, during the school day by all of the classes and after 3pm by after school clubs.”
- Head Teacher**

THE DIFFERENCE IT MAKES FOR PUPILS

Pupils now enjoy reading for pleasure where they might not have done so previously. Staff, pupils and parents highlighted the importance of having a choice of reading materials for pupils and their families. Some pupils said that they like to read fiction books, and others preferred graphic novels and non-fiction. Their interest in reading was encouraged by the range of literature available in different formats. Pupils like sharing books and learning about new books, and listening to others' recommendations.

 **Reading for pleasure is at the heart of everything that we do.”**
- Literacy Coordinator

 **It's about having a choice. Choice is important.”**
- P7 pupil

 **It opens up their imagination.”**
- Parent


Pupils are more active readers since becoming part of the Reading Schools programme. The Literacy Coordinator reported that they ask for books that they want to read and make recommendations to help other pupils decide what to read. Pupils affirmed they choose what they want to read by browsing the school library, sharing books with others and seeking out books by authors that they like.

Pupils said that they choose to read more at home since being involved in Reading Schools. Some reported that they read to their younger siblings, and a few told us they didn't read out of school before the programme, which they do now, because it made them more interested.

 **I read every day at school.”**
- P7 pupil

 **It's a good start to the day.”**
- P7 pupil

 **She went from not reading at all to reading at home every night.”**
- Parent

 **Regularly, pupils are given the opportunity to request books to be purchased that they would like to read.”**
- Head Teacher

Pupils have opportunities to become reading role models in the school, including becoming library staff, Literacy Champions, Book Buddies, and leading activities including the after school and breakfast book clubs. Pupils explained how they enjoy being reading role models for other children, and older pupils reported a strong sense of demonstrating the benefits of reading to their younger peers. Some pupils said that they read to their younger siblings.

They are reading role models across the school at all levels. Everyone is a reading model.”
- Literacy Coordinator

I like showing others that reading can be relaxing.”
- P7 pupil

The Literacy Coordinator said that becoming a Reading School has benefited the pupils' health and wellbeing. Pupils reported feeling safe in the library because they feel it is a relaxing and welcoming space, that they can enjoy. Reading can be a positive distraction for some pupils who might live in challenging circumstances outside of school and gives them something to focus on. A pupil with a visual impairment benefits from reading QR codes created by the school. This enables all pupils to access audio and video books which makes them “...*feel like everyone else*”.

A parent said that by working in the school library, their children meet more people and interact with others who they wouldn't normally speak to. Parents felt that being involved in more reading activities gives them increased responsibility and “...*takes them away from screen time*.” Parents described the school library as a comfort zone for pupils, giving them a safe space to wind down which helps their health and wellbeing.

It lets my thoughts escape my head.”
- P7 pupil

It's calming when you are anxious.”
- P7 pupil

It is very inclusive.”
- Literacy Coordinator

I like to come to the library because it helps me if I feel angry.”
- P7 pupil

Our library is a welcoming space that can be accessed by all pupils throughout the school day, some pupils choose to use the library at interval time.”
- Head Teacher

Pupils and staff reported how the Reading Schools programme empowered them by giving them opportunities to take on leadership roles and lead reading activities. Pupils designed the library, choose books and reading materials, deliver reading activities and promote the library in and out of school. Pupils talked about the leadership responsibilities they have taken on, and described how they have improved their confidence, self-esteem and belief in themselves. They like being in a position where they can help other pupils and that there are many opportunities to get involved.

“ I believe in myself more.”

“ It has changed me for the better.”

“ I felt so honoured to be trusted.”
- P7 pupils

“ It has been pupil-led from the outset. They shape the activities and designed the library. This has given them ownership over their reading activities – it is theirs.”
- Literacy Coordinator

“ They have responsibilities. They are more organised at home now.”
- Parent

“ The roles that our pupils have taken on in the library have developed their skills for life, learning and work.”
- Head Teacher



THE DIFFERENCE IT MAKES FOR STAFF

The Literacy Coordinator reported that staff have also been keen to become reading role models for pupils and for each other, delivering reading activities and participating in CPD through the Teacher Reading Group and also in in-house training including classroom delivery techniques. This has resulted in a supportive community of practice within which teachers can develop new literacy skills and approaches. The Literacy Coordinator sends staff updates about literature, and they share books and make recommendations to each other.

The teacher said that one of the main benefits of the Reading Schools programme is that it has provided a comprehensive framework for all of the school's reading activities. They have used the framework developed by the Scottish Book Trust to coordinate literacy activities and embed reading for pleasure throughout the school.

**It's all about taking the fear away, not about testing."
- Literacy Coordinator**

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Netherburn Primary School

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PIXL

ATTAINMENT

Changes for pupils are measured through Learner Conversations, a Reading for Pleasure questionnaire and Family Reading survey, alongside observation, videos and photos, quotes and comments. Pupils do not receive awards for reading activities based on the number of books that they have read; rather they are given awards for attendance and participation.

The Literacy Coordinator has noticed an improvement in attainment levels in reading and writing, with pupils more engaged in reading in the classroom, and teachers more enthusiastic about reading activities in class. They have observed that attainment in literacy is increasing, and that the attainment gap is reducing slowly.

“Netherburn always had a commitment to improving literacy. It is quite passionate about it.”
- Youth Family Community Learning Coordinator

Pupils described how Reading Schools improves their reading skills. They talked about their literary interests such as ‘visualisers’ where they predict what happens next in a story, drawing characters from a book and writing about a story they have read. Some pupils said that they take ideas from books that they read to make their own creative stories and characters. Pupils said that reading more has helped them to learn new words and develop their writing skills, drawing skills, creativity and imagination. Parents agreed that their children’s reading skills have improved, because they talk in more depth about books, analyse the stories they read and their handwriting has got better.

“It helps my imagination.”
- P3 pupil

“Before the library I didn’t really like reading. Everyone likes reading now.”
- P3 pupil

“I read longer books now and I can finish a book.”
- P7 pupil

“She has better reading and writing skills.”
- Parent

ENGAGEMENT IN THE WIDER COMMUNITY

The community library opened by the school was very well received by the community. Parents and carers of pupils are invited into the school every four weeks to take part in a Book Bletcher. The school buys books for families, including magazines and cookbooks and trained parents and carers how to use the QR codes so that they can access books in different formats depending on their abilities and preferences. Literacy workshops have been facilitated for families enabling pupils to teach them what they have learned about reading and writing. Pupils also give families tours of the school library.

The school's Youth Family Community Learning Coordinator said that the school is equipping parents and carers with the tools and resources they need to support their children. They said that "*reading and health and wellbeing go hand in hand*". While it can be challenging to engage parents and carers in their children's learning, Netherburn primary school "*has a unique place in the community*".

“We've never had a school do that before.”
- Parent

“It's a good thing in a small community.”
- Parent

Parents talked about being involved in reading initiatives, including the opening of the school library, and said the QR codes were "*brilliant*". They enjoyed participating in reading activities and seeing what their children were doing as part of Reading Schools.

Parents described the reading activities that the school ran during the pandemic which helped children and their families to keep reading. They felt that they have good connections with the school, staff and pupils and parents themselves have developed the self-confidence to build relationships because of the programme.

“There is a community connectedness.”
- Youth Family Learning Coordinator



WHAT WORKED WELL

Embedding reading activities

Embedding reading activities in the school in a sustainable way has been achieved by making reading for pleasure part of everyday school life.

 **The library is at the heart of our school."**
- P7 pupil

Reading materials

Providing a range of reading materials requested by pupils and making books available in more accessible formats have increased young people's enjoyment and frequency of reading.

Reading during the pandemic

The pandemic made the delivery of reading activities more difficult, but the school staff found socially distant ways of ensuring that pupils kept reading at home and with their teachers online.

Creating leadership opportunities

Creating leadership opportunities for pupils has improved their confidence, self-esteem and sense of responsibility towards the school and other pupils.

 **Our children are developing leadership skills."**
- Parent

Parental involvement

Parents feel valued and involved and supported by the school. Reading is encouraged as an inter-generational activity.

 **It is about going to where the parents are."**
- Youth Family Community Learning Coordinator

Sharing learning

The Literacy Coordinator has presented the work of the school to South Lanarkshire Literacy Leads to share learning across the local authority.

WHAT'S NEXT

Reading initiatives will continue to be embedded into learning across the school, as momentum builds after activities were impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

It is important that reading is embedded into school, and not treated as an add on.”
- Youth Family Learning Coordinator

The school has received recognition for its achievements in literacy, winning an award at the Scottish Education Awards in June 2022. The school also won a Pearson's Silver Award and will present to a Pearson Judging panel for the Gold Making a Difference in a Primary School UK award. They will find out if they are successful at an awards ceremony in London later in the year.

