



# James Young High School

## West Lothian



## BACKGROUND

This case study is about James Young High School. It is informed by a discussion with three teachers, one pupil support worker, seven S5 and S6 pupils, and the school librarian. The school achieved Gold accreditation in November 2021.

The school roll is 1,200 and all pupils have been involved in some reading activities since the programme began. Around 600 pupils have participated in multiple Reading Schools sessions during the course of the programme, and all senior pupils have had the opportunity to discuss reading for pleasure in English classes and take part in events promoted in Pupil Support Time.

The school librarian wanted James Young High School to be involved in Reading Schools, so she coordinated and led the programme. The motivation was to gain literacy accreditation, to demonstrate the value of the school and its library. Some schools in West Lothian have experienced the loss of dedicated library staff and libraries due to funding, therefore, the school wanted to show the positive impact its library resources.

Additionally, there was a big focus on raising literacy levels in the school before the programme, therefore participating in Reading Schools seemed like a logical practical step for the school. There was also a sense of healthy competition with other schools in the area.

## READING ACTIVITIES

Class-specific reading activities are made available to every pupil and whole school opportunities are available to all in their free time through reading events, clubs, and leadership roles. The school library offers 30 weekly literacy lessons and extra reading lessons for pupils who require additional support. The school librarian has run some large projects with staff and pupil-led reading initiatives as part of the Reading Schools programme.

The school librarian worked with West Lothian Council libraries to deliver a Read Woke project which focused on social injustice and human rights. They linked with South Ayrshire Council libraries who set up #Read Woke Scotland based on an idea from the US librarian, Cicely Lewis. James Young High School provided funding for core Read Woke books and reward badges, which have been developed into a wider collection by the school librarian. The Read Woke titles are marked with a gold star so that pupils can identify them. When pupils read four titles they earn a silver badge, and when they read eight, they achieve a gold badge. Pupils write reviews of the books they have read and discuss them with their peers and teachers. They are encouraged to develop projects and posters about the books focusing on race, class, culture, inequalities and wider social injustice issues.



Other reading activities in the school have included:

- Library clubs including an LGBT club, Manga club and Dungeons and Dragons club.
- Library events and displays such as National Poetry Day, World Book Day and Book Week Scotland.
- Sponsored reading events including readathons and Reading for Ukraine.
- Book quizzes, promotions and themed events including Comic Cons.
- Scottish Storyteller visits working with pupils to write their own stories.
- Literacy tasks undertaken in tutor groups.

**“Pupils enjoyed the reading tasks in tutor groups.”**  
- Class teacher

**“The readathon in the school library is amazing.”**  
- Pupil

## THE DIFFERENCE IT MAKES FOR PUPILS

### Leadership opportunities

The Reading Schools programme creates involvement and leadership opportunities for pupils. The school had around 45 pupil volunteers who led and supported reading activities pre pandemic and has about 20 volunteers still engaged post pandemic. These pupils help to organise and run events and clubs, and the library.

**“It gives them ownership. It is getting pupils more involved.”**  
- School librarian

Some pupils have been active reading role models for their peers, leading reading activities in the school. While some of these opportunities fell away during the Covid-19 pandemic, they are starting to gain momentum again. Pupils who want to be, are included in all decision making about reading activities and library developments. Pupils can apply to be library monitors, who work in the library, and a head monitor is nominated by the school librarian.



**“We are constantly consulting pupils about ideas and changes in the library. There is collaborative decision making. I include young people wherever I can, both formally and informally.”**  
- School librarian

## Confidence and self-esteem

The school librarian said that the Reading Schools activities have helped pupils to develop their confidence, given them the ability to be themselves, and have been a good tool for tackling anxiety, particularly since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. Reading activities have created social opportunities for pupils which have further improved their confidence and self-esteem. The school librarian noted that some pupils lost some social skills during the pandemic therefore meeting others through reading activities who they would not normally interact with has been beneficial.



**Reading activities have created social spaces and opportunities and pupils have made new friends through the library.”**  
- School librarian



**Reading is having a positive effect on pupils.”**  
- Class teacher

## Health and wellbeing

Reading activities have created a sense of community in the library which has been beneficial for those who can be naturally quieter and more reserved. Reading activities have promoted inclusion in the school through a wide range of reading materials and clubs, and has led to increased pupil involvement. Teachers said that the library offers pupils a “safe and welcoming space”. Teachers and staff felt that a positive impact of increased reading for pleasure was that pupils spent less time on social media, which was beneficial for health and wellbeing. The programme has also encouraged staff and pupils to develop reading relationships which is beneficial for the health and wellbeing of young people. Some pupils said that reading can be a distraction from mental health problems.



**Reading more makes pupils seem more settled, calmer and more able to engage. They have increased focus.”**  
- Class teacher



**Reading does help wellbeing. Reading can be a positive distraction for young people.”**  
- Pupil support worker



**Creativity and reading are an escape.”**  
- Pupil

## Additional support

James Young High School offers a facility for pupils who require additional support to engage in school through iLearn. Pupils involved in iLearn are encouraged to get involved in reading activities because these activities help start conversations about books with pupils who may not engage well in mainstream learning and are less likely to read at home. The pupil support worker said that the Reading Schools programme works well for pupils with lower literacy levels, non-verbal pupils and those with English as a second language as there are reading materials for all stages including graphic novels. Where iLearn pupils are reluctant to read for pleasure, the school librarian orders two copies of the same book so that the pupil support worker can read with pupils.

Reading Schools activities are adapted for pupils with additional support needs to ensure they are inclusive. iLearn pupils can find it challenging to use the library however, supported reading activities in small groups are good tools to build their confidence and encourage them to think about using the school library and begin to choose their own books.



**It is building their confidence. I have seen some children read for the first time and ask for more books because of the reading activities.”**

**- Pupil support worker**



**The school librarian is really supportive. We get all the books we need.”**

**- Pupil support worker**

## Reading for pleasure

The school librarian said that reading for pleasure has made books more accessible for pupils, as they are not pressured to read, and programme reading activities are not formally measured or tracked. Although not all pupils have engaged, some have become more active readers because of the programme, reading different formats and genres. Some teachers promoted reading for pleasure prior to becoming involved in the programme, as a more informal way to engage pupils in reading and raise literacy levels. One teacher encouraged reading for pleasure by delivering a ‘free’ weekly reading session in his class, where pupils designed posters and wrote book reviews for reading materials of their choice. Pupils said that they enjoyed reading for pleasure because it allows them to read a wider variety of materials and genres than normal, such as mythology, fantasy, murder mystery, classics and graphic novels. Their favourite reading activities included conventions, readathons, book quizzes and reading clubs.




**I spend a lot of time reading and enjoy spending time in the library.”**

**- Pupil**

## Literacy levels

The Reading Schools programme has been important for encouraging whole school literacy and improving reading and writing skills. Teachers incorporated literacy tasks in their morning tutor registration groups, including quizzes and reading short stories. Some pupils were reluctant to get involved in reading activities to begin with, but the programme has gathered momentum. Giving pupils the choice to read a wider range of reading materials in different formats worked well. One teacher said that the Reading Schools programme has contributed to the school having more advanced higher English classes than before it started, and more pupils are planning to study English at university.

Pupils agreed that reading activities helped to broaden their knowledge which in turn improved their literacy skills. They said that the programme helped with their general knowledge, vocabulary and languages, and learning interdisciplinary concepts such as science and religion.

 **The more reading the better. It gives pupils better literacy skills in all subjects and builds their confidence.”**  
- Pupil support worker

 **We gain knowledge, learn to interpret and analyse structure.”**  
- Pupil

## Raising attainment

The Reading Schools programme has been valuable because it is another tool to raise literacy levels. The programme exposes pupils further to new reading materials and vocabulary, and expands their knowledge, which was viewed by teachers as positive for attainment. The school library has expanded its collection of books to include Scottish authors which some pupils said they enjoyed because they could identify with and relate to the characters. Teachers generally agreed that Reading Schools is likely to contribute to raising attainment in literacy.

 **[Pupils] are seeing themselves represented. Some don't engage with books where they can't identify with characters.”**  
- Class Teacher

 **Embedding literacy takes time and planning, to do it right.”**  
- Class Teacher

 **It helps with development and raising attainment. We are moving in the right direction.”**  
- Class Teacher



# THE DIFFERENCE IT MAKES FOR STAFF

## Reading awareness

The school librarian highlighted that staff across the school have developed an increased awareness of different reading materials to engage pupils, and books for different age groups and abilities. Since the programme started staff have a wider awareness of the reading activities that are happening in the school and are more likely to get involved.

The programme has encouraged cross-departmental reading projects and a supportive community of practice. Some class teachers have developed their own classroom libraries for pupils and whole school reading.

“It's given staff a wider purpose, and it is another way for them to talk to pupils...it has got staff reading.”  
- School librarian

“The teaching staff are involved...Senior management has bought in and has been really supportive.”  
- School librarian

## Reading for pleasure

Teachers said that the programme has resulted in more staff reading for pleasure, sharing books and recommendations with each other. The staff-parent book club has been a positive development for the school. A pupil support worker talked about the secret staff book club that involves surprise books being delivered monthly to staff members.

“Staff are having conversations and swapping books.”  
- Class teacher

## Reading role models

School staff are also encouraged to be reading role models – for pupils and their colleagues. All staff support the wide range of reading events delivered in the school, demonstrate what they are reading and encourage conversations about books. The ‘What am I reading’ initiative allows staff to role model reading to pupils and talk about books. Photos are taken of staff with books and shared on school social media to show what they are reading.

“It is all the little things that build a reading culture.”  
- Class teacher



## WHAT WORKED WELL?

Having a dedicated school librarian has been crucial to the success of the programme. Without a proactive librarian teachers felt that reading activities would not have been as impactful. Pupils felt that the school library has improved because of the efforts of the school librarian and seems to be used more because of the range of reading activities.

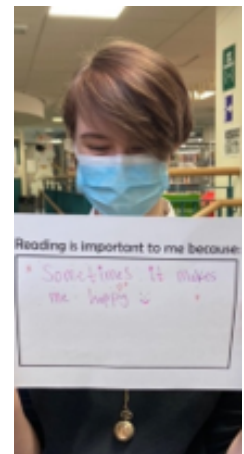
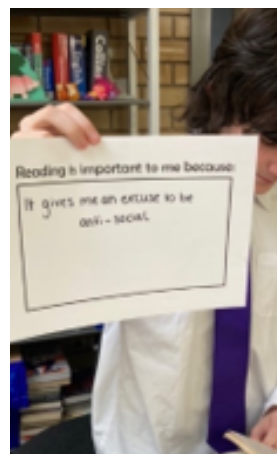
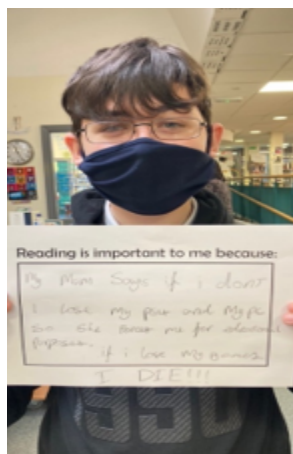
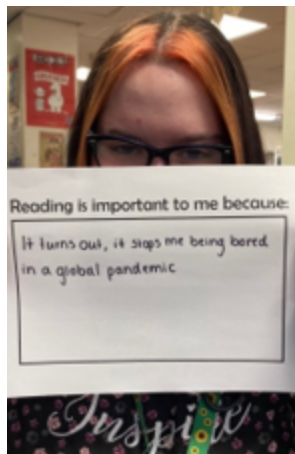
**I don't think it would have happened without such a proactive school librarian, which is a resource under threat. She has coordinated and driven it.”**  
- Class Teacher

**There are more communal spaces in which to read now, and the library is a better use of space. It is a social space.”**  
- Pupil



The Read Woke project worked well, with high levels of pupil engagement. The school librarian hopes that more pupils will engage in the project as it continues. The school leadership team are happy to continue funding the project because it meets a lot of the school's literacy criteria.

The staff-parent book club that started during the pandemic has continued online after lockdown. This is an indication that staff and parents are engaged in reading for pleasure, which is a beneficial role modelling approach to engage pupils in reading.





# CHALLENGES

## Engagement

Some pupils and staff highlighted that there could be wider participation in the programme. Unless young people already use the school library, they are unlikely to know about all of the reading activities. Pupils added that the same pupils – mostly senior pupils – take part in reading activities and use the library regularly. Staff agreed that pupil participation in the programme could be stronger from pupils in the lower school. Participation in the programme was heavily impacted by the pandemic, which affected engagement in reading activities.

**Unless you use the library you don't know things are on.”**  
- Pupil

**Lots of clubs stopped after the pandemic and haven't quite built back up again.”**  
- School librarian

## Staff capacity

School staff said that a barrier to getting more pupils engaged in the Reading Schools programme and expanding reading activities was lack of staff time and capacity and increased use of social media. Some teachers commented that while they know it is important, reading for pleasure cannot always take priority given the curriculum requirements and finding time to bring staff together outwith these.

**The main issues are demands on staff time and social media usage of pupils. Social media is always a challenge.”**  
- Class teacher

# WHAT'S NEXT

The school librarian wants to start an after school book club for pupils with a focus on social injustice and activism, which will link to the Read Woke project. Planning is also underway for a social club for pupils called Equalitea, that will link with the after school book club.

A teacher wants to introduce whole school reading weekly in classes, on a subject rotation basis, so that all pupils read for pleasure in class regularly without too much pressure on teachers' time and capacity.

**Whole school literacy is the best tool we have. We will get a wider variety of role models.”**  
- Class teacher