Matching Books to Children

The move from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 marks a shift in the way in which we think about matching books and readers. Once children are secure in reading at Level 3, what constitutes difficulty in reading is not as closely related to the reader’s ability to decode the print on the page. Increasing challenge is not simply a matter of increasing the length of a book or introducing more challenging words. Complex concepts and ideas can be expressed in simple language and simple ideas may be wrapped up in difficult language.

For struggling readers at the top end of Key Stage 2, it’s important to offer a range of age-appropriate reading material. Consider:

- magazines and websites that relate to children’s out-of-school interests
- short, engaging stories that use relatively simple language
- books with short chapters and spacious page layouts
- the look of the books as well as the content, because older children often find it embarrassing to be faced with books designed for younger children.

Matching books to readers requires two things of teachers:

1. A good knowledge of children’s books and the resources that are available. Online resources such as Write Away and Books for Keeps provide book reviews, author interviews and reading themes. Carousel and the Ultimate Children’s Book Guide are essential for the teacher’s bookshelf.

2. A good knowledge of their pupils as readers in terms of ability, experience and interests. Reading interviews can start a conversation about reading preferences. Make sure that children realize that you value their own reading preferences and choices, and that comics, magazines and websites are also recognized as valid, free-choice reading. Experienced readers need to make their own judgements about the challenge and interest of the book by sampling and using the blurb, recommendations etc.