North Walsham Infant School
Norfolk

North Walsham is an average-sized infant school, federated with a junior school, in a Norfolk market town. The area has a high level of deprivation and unemployment, a large number of very young parents and low levels of parental literacy. Many children come into Nursery with book handling skills but without any of the rich book language or the experience of listening to stories. HT Clare Fletcher and DHT Jackie Hallam joined the school 10 years ago and have overseen a huge improvement in literacy, due in no small measure to the introduction of RWI in 2005.

RWI does not exclude a love of books
Though the main focus in Nursery and Reception is decoding, the school hasn’t lost any of the other elements, such as reading stories to children, role play and encouraging them to read books themselves. “The best way to start the process of reading for pleasure is by giving children a solid grounding in phonics.” To enrich learning, the school is building up a bank of books linked with RWI titles or themes for use in the classrooms. Once children are fluent readers, it’s important to have a range of resources to catch their interest, including information books and collections by the same author for the juniors, so that they have somewhere to go with their reading.

“Reading for pleasure is the ultimate goal when we’re teaching them how to read. The aim is that they like books enough to read for pleasure. We reach almost everyone in terms of them enjoying listening to stories, but maybe 5% of children still find reading quite a chore. If you have enough books matched to ability and their maturity, hopefully they will enjoy reading them.”

Opportunities to read every day
The timetable is tight but valuable spare minutes are used for reading to supplement the reading in literacy lessons. There are opportunities to read, either individually or with a partner, while the register is being taken, and teachers will often use a 15-minute snack time to read the class a story. As well as providing extra reading practice, starting an afternoon session with reading can have a great calming influence.

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preparing children to settle down after the excitement of the playground. All pupils do RWI for 45-60 minutes a day, which includes both reading and writing activities. There’s also a large bank of story sacks used with the younger children.

Each year group has a list of 15 core story books, which are read regularly so that the children become very familiar with them, “they’re almost learnt off by heart in the same way that a pre-school child might learn nursery rhymes.” They’re kept on a special shelf where children have access to them. These stories might be read for pleasure two or three times during the year and then may be used in another way: for instance, Jackie Hallam’s Year 2 class read The Twits in September and they will revisit it before SATS to look at writing a description of a character. Similarly, The BFG was read in January and was then used as a stimulus for some enquiry work.

Reading for pleasure is central to the rest of the curriculum too, where enquiry work often revolves around a storybook. The school makes sure that it has a variety of interesting books from the local library, and lessons involve a lot of partner work so that books are shared. “Children who can’t necessarily read as well as others have the opportunity to find out what a book says about a particular topic. And there’s no pressure on them because they are doing it with a partner.” With the grounding of RWI, pupils are confident about their reading and use it for interest and to find out more.

“I’m so excited to have this book!”

There is no formal training to address reading for pleasure, but teachers share their own passion for books with their pupils. They often bring in books from home or from the library, perhaps their own childhood favourites. Their enthusiasm is infectious. “It’s not enough for a teacher to say, ‘It’s 10.30 so it’s time for a story,’ and grab the first book that comes to hand. What inspires children is when a teacher can say ‘I’m so excited to have this book to read with you today. I’ve just found it in the library and I thought you would love it...’”

“I have read at home three times this week”

The school doesn’t specify the exact amount of time that should be spent reading at home, just that it should be at least three times a week. Staff will ‘very strongly encourage’ children to nag their parents about it, and there is a display in every classroom to celebrate pupils who achieve home reading three times a week. For the parents, modelling is key, since they may have had little or no experience in sharing a book. To this end, the school runs induction sessions for new Reception pupils, ‘breakfast with a book’ sessions, and reading cafes after school. “We say to parents that sharing a book at home can mean looking at the pictures or talking about the characters instead of reading it word for word,” says DHT Jackie Hallam. In the Junior School, children are encouraged to write their own comments about the book and their progress in their reading diaries to reduce the pressure on parents who may have poor literacy skills.

Using all available space

Space is at a premium in the school buildings. Classes are large and classrooms small so there’s not always space for a book corner. However, the school is lucky enough to have space outside which it uses to the full instead: a Victorian garden area with benches, a ‘giant’s chair’, and a stage for role play around stories. Playtime boxes of books go out to the garden for the children to use along with colouring pencils and paper. There is also a field adjoining the school with an outdoor classroom for whole classes or groups.

Raising the profile of reading

The school uses a variety of initiatives to keep reading ‘fresh’. Some of the most successful are:

- Reading caterpillars – for the youngest children in the school. They are challenged to read 10 books in a week. As they complete a book, they colour in a segment of the caterpillar.
- Year 2 leavers are presented with a book by the HT, with a personalised bookplate in the front.
- Reading passports – for the juniors. Children ‘travel’ around the world as they read more and more books, with the aim of reaching a particular country. Then they celebrate with a party.
- Inviting different people to come in and enthuse about books works well. These include the local librarian and a specialist children’s bookseller, who is a mine of information about unusual texts.

Comment on the six strands

Jackie Hallam: “We have discovered that the power of teaching them how to read is the basis of all of this. We are real advocates of RWI. We always thought we did all these things but now the children are actually real readers because they can read. They access so much more and enjoy so much more because they can read for themselves.”
Dunkirk Primary School is an urban primary in the centre of Nottingham with a high proportion of pupils on Free School Meals and high EAL. The school has a highly mobile population, and a very wide ability range.

DHT Heidi Hollis and LitCo Alice Elsmore are both Leading Literacy Teachers for the Local Authority. Both are passionate about all things literacy, and drive the reading agenda in school, but they stress that every single member of staff, and this includes TAs, is committed to ensuring that reading permeates all aspects of school life and is trained to do so. Reading is ‘built-in, not bolt-on’. As soon as children enter the Foundation Stage, they are immersed in books and storytelling. This allows them to develop a love of stories and positive attitudes towards reading.

Well below the baseline

Many children enter Reception well below the baseline and so the school does a lot of preparation, e.g. outdoor phonic activities linked to gross motor movements and outdoor rhyme and rhythm activities, before the children come inside for their systematic phonics session. Children who are struggling have ‘pre-teach’ sessions, which means that they are familiar with new concepts before they are introduced to the whole class.

Every member of staff, including TAs, is trained in phonics, up to Year 6, and a child doesn’t move on until they’ve mastered a concept. There’s no point in a ‘false foundation’.

Into broader reading

Guided reading is considered particularly important in KS1, when it helps to facilitate the development from decoding into reading with understanding. The school prioritises budget for book purchasing and boasts a vast collection of books, organised by book bands, including cross-curricular content. Their philosophy is: you learn to read, then read to learn.

“We are relentless. We don’t give up. If we feel it’s not happening, we do something about it.”
**Rewarding parents**

Dunkirk has a diverse parent population, including many working parents and those for whom English is a second language. The school makes a point of communicating with parents in as many different ways as possible, so as to maximise their chances of reaching every parent. Parents have an induction session where teachers take them through the booklet, *How to read with your child* and this is followed up with presentation evenings, informal chats at the school gate, weekly information sheets, notes in reading records, information on the school website, a DVD featuring the children, invitations to school events, and so on. “We are relentless. We don’t give up. If we feel it’s not happening, we do something about it.” The school also extends its reward scheme to parents, sending home stickers that recognise those parents who have made consistent efforts to support their child’s reading progress.

**Giving power to the staff**

Story-reading is part of the daily classroom routine and teachers know that the SMT believes in story-work as a good use of time. Budget is set aside for CPD to support skills such as storytelling and TAs are also trained in the teaching of reading. The SMT sets out minimum expectations, but teachers are given a lot of leeway to decide when and how they deliver the story-work element. There is an emphasis in this school on teachers learning from each other in a supportive and informal way, through staffroom discussions and classroom observations. Teachers are encouraged to be experimental and reflective. “There’s a culture of ‘have-a-go’. Crucially, if it’s not working, we change it.”

**The Book Club - a crucial key to success**

Alice Elsmore describes the Book Club as a crucial ingredient in the success of reading for pleasure at Dunkirk.

At the start of Year 1, each child receives an individual savings book which they use to build up a small pot of money. Books are sourced through suppliers such as The Book People, and typically cost between 70p and £1.20. Located in the library, the Book Club showcases a wide range of reading material and allows children the opportunity to buy their own books and build up a personal home library. Book Club Advocates are appointed to champion the benefits of the Book Club and special assemblies focus on promoting it.

The impact of this club, in terms of children getting excited, wanting to read, choosing what they are going to read, talking about what they’re reading, going home and telling parents about their new book, is immense. Dunkirk now plans to extend its book club to parents too.

**No library or bookshop near the school**

Because of the geography of the school, access to books is a key issue. The school pays for library bus visits, but also focuses on making its own library appealing and extensive.

The school library is in a very communal space, and children walk through it on a regular basis, allowing them to see easily what’s new, tempting them to pick up a book.

When the school needed to move the library into a new space, Alice Elsmore nominated the Year 3 class to undertake this job. They became experts in library systems, learnt the Dewey Decimal System, re-organised and re-labelled the books and then explained the new set-up to the other classes in school.

In addition to the main library, every classroom has a small library area and there is an outdoor library in a reading shed, which also houses some of the children’s own home-made books.

Most teachers have their own small collection of personal books, which they lend out to children, and this has proved very popular.

**The joy of outdoors**

In warmer months, children are allowed to take books outside and often class activities will happen outdoors. For 1-2-1 tuition, staff take picnic rugs out onto the school field to create a relaxed environment and alleviate pressure.

Other initiatives include setting up small tents filled with books, storytelling round the fire, and storytelling on the outdoor stage.

Ultimately, Dunkirk staff reflect that much of the success of their reading initiatives in school hinges on the strength of relationships between staff members, parents, volunteers, and children.

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Peel Park Primary School
Accrington

A large school with big ideas

Peel Park is a large primary school in Accrington, Lancashire, and serves a very mixed catchment area. Children come into school significantly below national averages, having had little contact with books and reading and often with a low level of language skills.

Seven years ago, literacy teaching was disorganised: there was no understanding of the literacy strategy, only haphazard hearing of individual children’s reading, and unappealing books. However, with the arrival of HT Judith Williams and DHT Alison Padgett, all that began to change.

Basic skills in literacy and numeracy became part of the School Improvement Plan, and in 2012, Peel Park Primary was designated outstanding by Ofsted.

The right people in the right roles

Reading is the number 1 priority in the school. “It’s a gift that the school can give to children.” Key to the school’s success in reading has been putting the right staff in place. “The staff are passionate about reading,” says the HT, “and new staff must have a combination of a ‘can-do’ attitude and subject knowledge.” There are Lead Literacy Teachers in Foundation, Year 2 and Year 5 – role models who link with other schools to share best practice, then pass their enthusiasm and expertise on to the rest of the staff through INSET, coaching and informal discussion. They lead the way, but they are building on staff members’ energy and positive attitudes across the whole school.

Protecting time for reading

The school timetable has been reorganised so that the whole morning, every morning, focuses on literacy and numeracy. Assembly times and playtimes have been moved to accommodate this, and the school ensures that the time is protected. Daily literacy consists of 20 minutes phonics, 20 minutes whole class reading, 20 minutes guided reading and 25 minutes independent reading, plus a literacy hour.

Intensive phonics in Early Years is one key to reading success. At Peel Park, phonics is a mixture of Letters and Sounds and RWI – fast-paced with full engagement from the pupils – and good quality resources. Staff – teachers and TAs – are highly trained.

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Encouraging parents
Worksopas using story sacks have been a big hit with underperforming and FSM pupils and their parents. It’s a way for parents to have fun with their children in the school environment and to learn how to support reading at home. “They can see how much their children enjoy reading and they can get involved,” says Gina Seddon, KS1 LiTaCo. Every day for a week, the school runs a workshop for parents and children that combines teacher readings with activities around the book. Pupils then take a story sack home that includes a wide range of activities and prompt cards to help parents support their children’s reading and understanding. Peel Park has just completed a 6-week period of workshops this term and parents have specifically asked for them to continue next term.

There are always some parents who need extra encouragement to get involved with their children’s reading, and staff at Peel Park use a variety of strategies to entice them, from texting invitations to come into school, arranging meetings at different times of the day to suit as many parents as possible, offering goody bags, to even plying them with cups of tea and a free breakfast first thing in the morning.

Every free space is a reading space
With 600 pupils on the roll, space is at a premium, but the school appears to use every spare inch to encourage reading. Inside each classroom there are ‘wandering book boxes’, where children can put a favourite book from home when they have finished it, and choose another. (There’s a similar mini library in the staffroom where teachers bring in books from home to share.) Outside in the playground, there’s a ‘reading chair’ and a shelter where pupils take books at break and lunchtimes all year round. There’s also what the school calls ‘The Willow Classroom’, a dome of living willow branches, where a whole class can sit and read together. “In the summer, it’s like a beautiful green igloo,” says Alison Padgett, the DHT. The library is in constant use: a reading club meets there, children read there at dinner times, and the librarian works to keep book displays linked to current topic work “although as soon as the children see the books, they want them, and strip the library of them very quickly!” The school stage is also used for retellings of the class reading books, so there’s often a buzz of excitement around it and a pile of weird and wonderful props.

The power of new resources
Over the past 7 years, the school has made major investments in its library stock, reading areas, and home reading books. In particular, replacing the home readers appears to have had a positive effect. “Previously, the home readers were very old scheme books, but now they have all been replaced, and both pupils and parents are much more motivated to use them,” says Alison Padgett.

“10 days to Pete Johnson!”
The school celebrates reading with readers in many different ways. There are ‘Get Caught Reading’ certificates for the reader of the week, and the library reading club issues bronze, silver and gold awards to encourage pupils to keep reading. For those pupils who simply try really hard with their reading in class, there are stickers to celebrate their achievements too.

Author visits are especially popular. A recent visit for the Upper Juniors by author Pete Johnson was advertised with signs around the school counting down to the day of the visit. “10 days to Pete Johnson!” “9 days to Pete Johnson!” to whip up enthusiasm.

As well as national events such as World Book Day, the school takes an active part in annual local events such as Accrington Reads, where Year 5 pupils from local schools all read the same book before coming together for a live joint retelling event (through dance, drama, animation, acting and puppets) at the high school. Last year the event was filmed and put online to be shared afterwards.

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A dogged commitment to make up a deficit

St George’s is a primary school near Battersea Power Station, in an area of very high deprivation. The majority of children enter school with low levels of language and prior learning, so the school has a significant deficit that it needs to address. The school is absolutely ‘dogged’ in ensuring that every child reaches age appropriate reading levels by the end of Year 2 and will accept no excuses for underachievement.

Inundated with stories

As soon as children enter Nursery, they are inundated with stories, and, typically, will have a story read to them at least twice a day. They are encouraged to learn stories off by heart, and are specifically taught ‘story language’, so that they are comfortable using terms such as ‘Once upon a time...’, or ‘At that moment...’, or ‘Suddenly...’, when they tell their own stories.

Immersion in stories occurs alongside rigorous phonics teaching, using the Sounds Write programme. Teachers and TAs are extremely well trained in Early Years reading so that they are equipped to support pupils. The school aims to move children off phonics books as soon as possible in Year 1, to ensure a smooth transition from decoding to fluent reading.

Theresa Plummer, the specialist reading teacher, tutors children who require extra support in order to reach their full potential. Every child in Year 1 and Year 2 reads twice a day with a highly trained member of staff. This has proved to be phenomenally successful – last year 97% of children met the national average in the Year 2 SATS. This year, the school has invited children who require additional support with reading for extra lessons over the Easter break. The children loved it because it was made fun for them and ‘Easter School’ worked so well that the school is considering doing something similar during the summer holidays. Older children are paired with KS1 children to support them with their fluency. They love sharing stories together.

WHAT MAKES AN OUTSTANDING READING SCHOOL

CASE STUDY 4

School: St George’s C of E Primary School
Location: London SW8
Ofsted 2011: Outstanding
Number of pupils: 225
FSM: 52%
EAL: 40%
Value added for English: 101.2

Teachers have found that sometimes it just takes one book to unlock the pleasure of reading for a child.

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Books are a major budget priority

The HT is absolutely committed to maintaining a high quality and varied stock of books. If a particular book proves popular, the school makes every effort to obtain multiple copies, and will buy in all the books in a popular series whenever possible. Children are encouraged to use a suggestion box to request books that they would like to read.

There is a well-resourced book corner in every classroom and all classes visit the school library at least weekly. Books are also kept outside in the playground so that children can easily choose to read during breaks. St George’s has established a relationship with a major children’s book publisher who regularly sends the school books for pupils to review, and it has also benefited from donations from local businesses, which are used to buy new books.

Engaging parents

The school expects that parents will listen to their child read a book every day. Family learning sessions, where the teachers demonstrate how reading is taught and explain how parents can help, are extremely useful and popular with the parents. Parents with little English are invited to tutorials in small groups to learn how to read with their children. Parents of the lowest-achieving readers in Year 1 are also invited to come into school to observe a 1-2-1 reading session between the teacher and their children so that they will be better equipped to support them at home. Older children are encouraged to read to themselves at home and answer questions in their reading journals.

There’s nothing to beat teacher enthusiasm

Teachers take every opportunity to share their own enthusiasm for reading with the children. For example, at an assembly at the start of term the Head will ask a teacher to share details of whatever book they most enjoyed reading during the holidays. Children are then encouraged to share their involvement in local library challenges with the rest of the school. A member of the support staff has recently set up a Boys’ Book Club on her own initiative. The opportunity to read boy-friendly texts fosters a love of reading for pleasure. Samantha Limon says, “It’s wonderful if the children feel they can come to you and say, ‘Can we have this book in school?’ ” From an early age, children start to share their own writing by reading it out to other year groups. They start to think of themselves as authors and this is tremendously motivating for them.

The pupils often publish their own writing and share it with different audiences, including the schools supported by St George’s in its capacity as a National Support School. This year, Year 6 have had their writing on display in the local library. The children are eagerly awaiting a visit from author and poet Pie Corbett, who is working closely with the school.

Sometimes it just takes one book...

Teachers have found that it just takes one great book to unlock the pleasure of reading for a child. *Horrid Henry* has shifted many boys from ‘hating’ reading to becoming avid readers. Other titles that have proved immensely popular as class reads include *Traction Man*, which boys in particular love, *Varjak Paw* for Year 3, *The Iron Man* for Year 4 and *Ice Palace* and *Floodland* for Year 6.

More to do

St George’s wants to provide children with a huge variety of rich and engaging texts that ensure there is something to cater for every child’s interests. Local charities and sponsors are helping with this. The use of drama (including dressing up), puppets, audio books, and Kindles in the classroom and playground enhance the children’s reading experiences and the school wants to extend this range. The commitment of the whole team at St George’s to developing reading skills, their infectious enthusiasm, and the availability of excellent resources make for a very effective and happy reading community in school.

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St Joseph’s RC Primary School
London NW10

From well below average to exceeding expected levels

St Joseph’s is a large primary school in Willesden, north London. When children join the Nursery, they generally have little experience of books and their language, social and personal development skills are well below average. However, they make rapid progress in Reception and Year 1, with a love of reading instilled in them from the very first class. “Our expectations for pupils are limitless,” says HT, Dawn Titus, and this aspirational vision is central to everything the school does.

Four years ago the curriculum was stripped down to give priority to basic skills and to raise attainment. Now that levels of attainment are excellent, the school has been able to extend the curriculum again. An emphasis is placed on listening to pupils and exploring their interests to engage them.

The confidence to read

Emma Foley, Year 2 teacher and LitCo, puts pupils’ early success in reading down to RWI. It gives them the confidence to read and to move quickly to choosing books for themselves. RWI is particularly important for children who do not get help with reading and language at home. Most pupils are fluent decoders by the end of Year 1, but older children who struggle to decode are encouraged to use the principles of RWI, and all staff and TAs are RWI-trained so they can help at any stage. Reading is assessed through RWI and also through comprehension: the latter is particularly important for EAL pupils who may be good decoders but have a poor understanding of what they read.

After RWI, pupils move on to Project X for Guided Reading. Even though the programme has been in school only a few months, the reaction from children is ‘amazing’ and expectations for reading success are high. The children love the range of genres, and girls are just as engaged as boys.

Pupils’ skills are supported through a daily opportunity for independent reading: Guided Reading four days a week, a class read at least three times a week, and a comprehension lesson and a library session once a week. Older pupils have

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their reading book on their desk and can read whenever they complete an activity. Younger children visit the themed book corner. “They would read under the desk instead of doing their Maths or Science if their books were on their desks.”

**Home reading unlimited**

Children take a levelled book home every day and an additional book from the library or reading corner chosen purely for pleasure. It’s important to give children a free choice, to build on their interests and encourage selection, even if that results in a choice that is too difficult for them to access alone. “We don’t want their choice to be limited to books from one particular box if they are drawn to something else.”

**No reading diaries for KS2**

Many parents do not have English as their first language, so they aren’t able to support their children with reading. “The school expects to be the main focus for learning. Some children are lucky enough to have a parent at home when school finishes, but others are not so lucky, and it’s up to the school to give them all the same high level of input for their reading.” Younger children are encouraged to read to a parent when that is possible, but older children mostly read independently. There are no reading diaries to complete for the older pupils either, the staff monitor pupils’ progress by how often they change their book and the kinds of books they are taking home.

**Teachers champion their favourite books**

Staff nurture a love of reading through demonstrating their own excitement about books. This term, Emma Foley has been championing Anthony Browne with her Year 3 class. Pupils will come into class saying “Look what I got at the weekend!” and brandishing another title by him, or “I watched the story being read on YouTube!”

Pupils gain from all the varied reading tastes of a staff of different ages, experience, and backgrounds, who choose texts that they have a particular affinity with. Teachers are encouraged to read favourites from their own childhoods and 15 books for each year group, selected by staff, will be class reads next year. There will also soon be a display where teachers review their favourite books, with copies of the books available for children to borrow.

Authors such as Malorie Blackman are popular but so is Enid Blyton. Books don’t need to be completely up to the minute to engage children if staff present them with enthusiasm.

**Giving staff ownership of the English policy**

St Joseph’s has recently had a whole staff INSET day on Reading for Pleasure, which will be followed up at the start of the next school year. As well as INSET, experience and skills are shared amongst staff informally. Teachers are encouraged to drop in on each other’s classes to share good practice, and the LitCo monitors all classes regularly. Staff with a particular passion for books help those with less knowledge and experience. They will all be involved in revising the English policy later this year: they have lots of ideas as to how to make further improvements and the SMT feels their ownership of the policy is vital to its success.

**Giving children experiences that they don’t get at home**

The school has a wide range of books and other resources for reading. The LitCo has a good understanding of what children will respond well to, and has recently ordered graphic novels for Years 5 and 6. She has also ordered classic stories to help bridge the gap with secondary school reading. The Project X e-books are very popular, as is watching authors and poets reading their work on YouTube, but staff will use anything to engage pupils, from newspapers to catalogues, packaging to leaflets. “It’s our job to give the children experiences that they don’t get at home.”

**You don’t need to do everything**

Book-themed days are extremely successful at building excitement around books and reading. Recently the school had a Roald Dahl day, where staff and pupils dressed up as their favourite characters, and a three-day special event on the theme of Heroes and Villains. In Year 3 all lessons were based around the theme of Batman: Maths and Science focused on the gadgets, for instance. However, the school limits the number of such days because they put a financial burden on parents who feel that a homemade costume isn’t as good as an expensive shop-bought one.

Author visits have worked well in the past, but they can be difficult to arrange and costly, so they don’t happen as often as the school would like. Watching authors reading their work on YouTube can be just as inspiring.

The school used to have a book club for Year 3 and 4 pupils but found that it simply didn’t work. Parents didn’t buy the books, pupils didn’t read them. There is a lot of excitement around reading in the school without trying to do everything.

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www.oxfordprimary.co.uk/readingforpleasure
Austhorpe aims to give its pupils access to as many books as possible.

“Austhorpe aims to give its pupils access to as many books as possible.”

From Special Measures to Good in 7 years

Austhorpe Primary is a small, 1 form entry school on the outskirts of Leeds. In the last 7 years it has changed from being in Special Measures to being designated good and improving by Ofsted in 2011. Children come into Reception from up to 15 different settings with little comparability in phonic knowledge. RWI was introduced in January 2012 and has proved very successful.

Reading is given a high priority in school. The DHT, Matthew Browne, who joined the school four years ago, drives reading, and has built up a culture of the whole staff sharing their knowledge and expertise. Detailed information about pupil progress is collected through the school’s rigorous system of reading assessment.

Bringing the magic to phonics

Key to the school’s reading success is RWI, but at Austhorpe, the scheme has been adapted to reinforce the magical nature of learning to read. Pupils become part of the ‘Austhorpe School of Word Magic’ and each level is given a different magical name. This simple adaptation works on several levels. Teachers take ownership of the scheme and have fun with it, often dressing up and making bags for the flashcards. Pupils are excited and engaged by the work, with added elements such as using a wand to point at the words as they read, and their success is celebrated with a ‘graduation’ certificate on completion of each unit. In addition, parents accept the necessary streaming across year groups much more happily than they would without such a creative presentation. Matthew Browne realised that it was vital that parents bought into and understood the programme from the start, and consulted them at an intensive parents’ evening. His strategy seems to have worked: “When the parents left that evening, they were over the moon,” he says.

Class Novels and Book Boards

Austhorpe Primary addresses the principles of Guided Reading through working with Class Novels. The school invests in whole class sets of a book, and lessons are a mixture of reading
practice, discussion and activities over a period of 3–12 weeks. For instance, Matthew Browne’s Year 2 class worked with Dear Greenpeace by Simon James over 12 weeks because they found so much to explore and discuss in it and he prefers to spread the work out over a term. In contrast, a Year 5 class had Bill’s New Frock by Anne Fine. “They blitzed it in just 3 weeks,” says Matthew, “they were so desperate to read it, and ended up making a movie about it. It just depends on the text and how the teacher and the pupils want to approach it.”

Each class will also have a Book Board based on their Class Novel. “This is a working wall where pupils put up their thoughts, questions, comments, or any research they’ve done on the book, as and when they want,” says Matthew. “It might be a Post-it or a neat piece of written work – the full range. The Book Board is a great way of capturing pupils’ ideas which are then shared with everyone in the next Class Novel lesson.”

A special place for special books

Each class also has a ‘Top Text’ which is a special picture book read by the teacher. It is kept in a special place, for example in a ‘Treasure Chest’, which generates excitement around reading, and reinforces the idea that special books should be treasured and savoured. Sometimes the Top Texts are selected by the pupils, and sometimes by the teacher. For instance, Matthew Browne has just chosen Bigfoot and the Hendersons as a Top Text because he’s particularly fond of the book and its film version. In this way, he reinforces his own role as an enthusiastic reader with his pupils.

“I read every night”

Austhorpe Primary used to stipulate the amount of time to be spent on reading at home, but now the only stipulation is that each pupil does some reading every night. This seems to take the pressure off both pupils and parents and helps to encourage reading for pleasure rather than racing through one book and on to the next as quickly as possible.

The school manages to encourage most parents to engage with their children’s reading. It provides initial guidance through a workshop for Reception parents before the start of the school year, and advice and printable materials on the website, backed up with input from individual class teachers on open days and parent evenings. However, it doesn’t hold back from being tough if parents do not engage. For instance, failure to comment on their children’s reading diary quickly leads to a call from the school. “It’s not make it his home reading book?”

Books and reading everywhere

Austhorpe aims to give its pupils access to as many books as possible, so as well as the Class Novel and the Top Texts, they can borrow books from the school library, have a ‘free reading’ book from their class library, or explore topic boxes from the local school library service. The importance of selecting one’s own books is reinforced in this way, and also through the choice of home reading books.

“There’s nothing worse than carrying on reading a book if you don’t like it,” says Matthew, “so if a child brings in a book from home, for instance Horrid Henry, and really wants to read it, why not make it his home reading book?”

Once the pupils have finished with the relatively restricted reading diet of RWI they are ready to tackle anything and everything, so the school has invested in a wide range of reading resources. One class might be inspired by a horror story, another by a graphic novel, and a third by newspapers. “In one lesson I introduced my class to newspapers,” says Matthew. “It was the first time that many of the children had come across them, and it was a real hit. A few days later, I was driving into school first thing in the morning and I passed Jack, a boy from my class, sitting on the steps with his mum outside a shop, happily reading a newspaper. I was so impressed! Jack won a class reading award for that.”

Recently, the school has had Reading Volunteers from local businesses coming in, and this has given an important boost to reluctant readers, pupils with little opportunity to read at home, and those whose progress may be slow. “It’s great for them to have the extra reading practice, and it also boosts their confidence. There’s another person who wants to hear them read in a relaxed way that’s not tested or tracked.”
Alwoodley Primary School
Leeds

Mixed intake

Alwoodley Primary is a large school in the northern suburbs of Leeds. The intake is mixed, with children from both wealthy backgrounds and many from hard-pressed families. This is a potentially challenging range to deal with, but the school is lucky enough to have great resources and enthusiastic, dedicated staff, including two LitCos in Nursery and Year 6, which combine to create a successful school with high-achieving pupils.

Reading embedded in everything

A love of reading is encouraged from the very first days in school. When children go to the school library with their parents once a week. In Foundation and KS1 classrooms there are story corners, story trays and a storytime every day. KS2 pupils read independently for 20 minutes each day, following the Everybody Reading in Class (ERIC) model: they have a completely free choice in what they read, so it might be a magazine from home, a First News children’s newspaper or the Guinness Book of Records. ICT reading software connected to ORT and Project X are very popular, especially with the boys across the school. There’s also lots of shared reading and paired reading across the year groups, such as Reading Buddies, where a Year 6 pupil is teamed with a struggling reader in Year 2. As well as helping to improve reading, the scheme fosters new friendships and a noticeable maturity in the older pupils.

In a similar vein, the school does class swaps where every child reads their own work to a child in a lower year, for instance pairing Year 6 with Year 3. A portfolio of stories is then put in the school library where it can be read alongside the normal library stock. “Through reading and sharing their own work regularly, children can more easily identify errors and uplevel their work, which improves their writing” says LitCo Kate Hanbury.

Another very popular initiative is Reading Ambassadors, where representatives from each KS2 class meet once a week to discuss what they’ve read and to think about how to encourage reading in the school. They then feed back to their classes. They can recommend new books

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for the library, put recorded book reviews on the VLE, and have the opportunity to speak in assembly on World Book Day. ‘It’s a really rewarding role,’ according to Dominic, one Year 6 Reading Ambassador.

Of course, for some children, reading is more of a chore, but individual teachers find simple ways to encourage them. A number of reluctant boy readers in Year 6, for example, have been motivated and encouraged to read by having a personalised weekly reading challenge. These children, after reaching their target, are rewarded in a variety of ways. “Individual children have a variety of reading needs. Some children need more motivation and support, which we must offer using a wide range of methods,” says Kate.

Sharing good ideas

For Kate Hanbury, Alwoodley’s success with reading is in no small part due to its enthusiastic and knowledgeable staff. There is lots of collaboration and communication between all teachers, to share good practice, take on new ideas and try new approaches. Classes are moderated regularly, and the LitCos share their training with their Key Stage colleagues through written reports and regular briefing meetings. Kate recently attended a course given by Gervase Phinn on how to use different types of books with different groups, in particular how to use picture books with older children. After discussions with staff, the school is now using Silver Swan by Michael Morpurgo with Year 6 – the atmospheric illustrations and sparse text make a wonderful stimulus for the children’s creative writing, imagination, and discussion.

The school also works with a local theatre company on a regular basis. The children love the opportunity to present stories through drama, and the company has taught the teachers a huge amount about bringing books alive and engaging children, which they now use in literacy and other lessons as well.

Teachers are encouraged to develop their own ideas to engage the interest of their particular classes. A current Year 4 teacher has set up the ‘Starbook Awards’, otherwise known as ‘Alwoodley’s Got Reading Talent’, where every child in a class is encouraged to read three books of their choice. A wall display charts their progress and prompts anyone failing to meet their target. When every child has read their books, they have a so-called ‘Starbooks café’ with hot chocolate, biscuits and lots of books. Pupils can even wear their pyjamas. This is proving to be very popular.

Communication with parents is key

Parental support for reading is considered to be vital to children’s progress, and to that end the school makes its expectations of parents very clear from when the child joins the school. In the lower school, there are regular newsletters, ‘stay and play’ sessions, and workshops, which parents are expected to attend at least once – they are given half a term’s notice. “Parents of the Pupil Premium and lower ability children are targeted most strongly because they are the ones that need the greatest variety of strategies to support their children. Parents of the higher ability children always want to come in.”

The school VLE and website is used constantly for communicating with parents, children and extended family. As well as detailed guidance about how to help their child with reading, and information about projects and up-and-coming events, pupils’ work is uploaded and so can be shared at home and progress celebrated. “It’s about building a relationship with parents,” says Claire Ruggles, LitCo. “It’s important that contact celebrates children’s progress and learning. Parents are always welcome to read children’s work and the children’s writing books are regularly sent home to share.” The school disco and school fair are very good for getting to know parents because they are relaxed, fun events.

Street cred around reading in Year 6

The library is a great resource, where the stock is regularly updated with new up-to-the-minute titles. It has lots of new, boy-friendly books and “There’s quite a lot of street cred around reading among the Year 6 boys,” says Kate. “There’s a lot of ‘What are you going to read? What are you going to read?’ and there’s a race to get down there first and get the books when they come in.” Every class has a 20-minute slot in the library each week, but children can go there at lunchtimes to browse or do their homework, and a library club meets regularly.

In addition to the library, children have access to books of all kinds through the class reading corners and through book boxes of contemporary books from the city’s library system. Teachers have a good knowledge of current authors and titles, some of which they learn from the children themselves, who bring books in from home for their ERIC reading sessions.

A whole-school celebration

Among the many ways that Alwoodley celebrates reading, the Readathon builds a lot of excitement. Pupils have completely free choice of reading – anything from a novel to a recipe book is acceptable – and it is the number of hours that they read, not the number of books that counts. The pupil who has read for the longest over a 3-week period wins a book voucher and is celebrated in assembly. “The Readathon happens across the whole school from Nursery upwards, makes it inclusive and accessible to all,” says Claire.

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