

Greenleys First School

'Improving reading skills and attitudes to reading for target groups of low achieving pupils in each year group - those identified as making slow progress and having little support at home.'

We are a smallish school (210 on roll) and decided very early on that our SIG group would include all teaching staff. We were attracted to the network by the opportunity to engage in collaborative research on issues that were important to our school. Our first enquiry related to raising standards in reading for identified groups of learners who were making slower progress and who were receiving little or no support at home. These pupils were, typically, not catching up with their more fortunate peers by the time of Year 2 SATs and even into Year 3.

Groups of pupils (between 6 and 10) were identified in all year groups/classes. Initial assessments were carried out to establish a base line. These pupils completed a questionnaire about their approach to reading (Young Readers' Views on Reading - Appendix 1) and tested using a standard reading profile (Appendix 2). The questionnaire was given at the beginning and end of the project to give a measure of the level of change in attitudes and confidence. Normal end-of-year assessments (including SATs and QCA Optional Tests) gave a measure of the outcomes in terms of NC levels.

Each year group tried a range of strategies to promote more positive reading attitudes within school and foster improved support at home. For example, new resources were purchased, including new structured reading-scheme sets of books, 'real books' and non-fiction books. This wider range was introduced in order to:

- motivate more reluctant readers
- to reflect their different learning styles (much work related to introducing Trevor Hawes' 'Multiple Intelligences' approach was going in school over this period)
- ensure boys were well catered for (non-fiction and other appropriate high-interest content).

Budget restrictions in previous years had meant that the overall quality of reading resources in the school was poor. The school had, in the past, a very cautious approach to books going home due to an intolerably high rate of lost or non-returned books. It was felt that this itself was limiting opportunities for pupils to make progress and that workable systems could, and should, be set up. Home-school contracts were set up to monitor the process of books going home. Parents seemed happy to accept the conditions and the process itself raised further the profile of what we were trying to achieve.

Various class-based activities were introduced in different year groups, including more clearly focused group reading, peer-pair reading and paired reading with older/younger pupils together. TAs were used to help support these activities. More ambitious end-of-year reading targets were set for individual pupils and it was agreed that these could become part of each teacher's personal 'pupil-performance' targets within the annual Performance Management process.

A questionnaire was devised for parents to collect their views, notably their own attitudes and approach to reading (Appendix 3).

Outcomes

a) Reading Project

Every pupil in the target groups exceeded their original target and most achieved the more ambitious target set at the start of the project. Some exceeded these targets. Better than expected gains across the whole class were noted in most cases. This may have been due to the raised profile of reading over the period although some of the strategies used for the target groups worked equally well with more able pupils.

Response from parents was generally very positive although a minority of the target groups' parents, including some who initially seemed 'on-board', did not give as much additional support as we had hoped. Each year group reported that there was virtually no loss of reading books over the period (and indeed very little since). This was as a direct result of the close monitoring by teachers and their support assistants. This was achieved due to the

relatively low numbers of pupils involved but staff feel that, with effort, it would be manageable for whole classes on a regular and longer term basis.

A summary of the outcomes of the parental questionnaire was given to parents and feedback from this has been positive (Appendix 4).

Year R - the structured programme of high-quality books (provided by Sure Start) going home was a great success; the target group responded particularly well to 'Jolly Phonics' and, in one class, to the earlier introduction of reading scheme books (this was done in collaboration with individual parents).

Year 1 - a structured (and carefully monitored) programme of new picture books going home worked best and helped improve confidence and increase enjoyment of books. The target groups showed an impressive range of 'book skills' and knowledge of authors, illustrators and book structures.

Year 2 - The use of a programme of structured reading-scheme books going home worked well although picture books were kept for use in school. Paired reading was relatively successful but need a lot more organisation than expected. The target groups were given additional opportunities for guided reading together.

Year 3 - Good quality paired readers were introduced with clear expectations of subsequent detailed book reviews at the end of the process. Mixed ability pairs worked very well and very positive attitudes to this throughout the classes were noted. More able readers particularly enjoyed the process.

Meetings took place to share outcomes and one was attended by Andy Thompson (Nottingham University) who steered our reflections. Several of the successful approaches are now embedded in year groups or across the school as appropriate.

The second round of pupil questionnaires showed that attitudes had improved significantly in all year groups although how much of this was as a result of the generally higher profile of the focus and how much to specific strategies was not clear.

The implications for resource budgets have been significant but there is strong agreement among all staff and leaders that this is inevitable in order to support the raising of standards.

b) Becoming a member of the PSLN

Staff have benefited hugely from engaging and working together within the school on an initiative that they knew was important to them. Skills in carrying out research have been developed and sharing these within the network has been invaluable in the learning process. Motivation to go forward and tackle a new initiative is high. Improved techniques in setting up objective test criteria have been learned and the process will be organised better next time!

This first project was carried out in relative isolation from other PSLN schools although 'similar' schools in the LEA were visited to research the range of strategies being used to promote positive reading habits at home. Other schools already in the network had paired up and had gained more from working together. Although we had shared our work with schools within the network, through displays and presentations, we still felt a little 'out of it'.

The benefits of the networking process became more clear to us in subsequent 'Learning Walks' to network schools. We were able to share what we had done in our school more effectively when showing colleagues around. In the return visits we were able to explore what they were doing in relation to reading in their own schools as well as learning at first hand the impact of their own initiatives. This has become a launch pad for several more learning walks. These have been planned as part of the first stage of our new network-wide initiative based on 'pupil-voice'.

Management and decision making processes have been broadened to include all staff. The incorporation of PSLN-linked initiatives into our revised School Improvement Plan is now well established. There is a better, shared vision for the school over the next few years.

Future Plans

We have taken part in one very successful round of Learning Walks with two partner schools within the PSLN (May 2005), with both teachers and teaching assistants involved. These were very well received by all involved. Staff have appreciated time to visit, to observe, to discuss and, most importantly, to reflect together.

Our next major focus within the network will be related to **pupil voice** and is already underway. It is a central feature within our school improvement plan. Our next Learning Walk, arranged for the second part of the summer term, is planned to include children. They will visit partner schools and be encouraged and guided in observing, discussing, reflecting and reporting back. We are working on how best to manage this in the context of very young children, many of whom have limited language skills.

Watch this space!

June 2005