

Case Study: Leia Sands, School Librarian, Steyning C of E Primary School, Sussex

Using the Foyle Primary School Library Course to help create a whole school community of readers

The National Literacy Trust online Foyle Primary School Library Course, funded by the Foyle Foundation, helps primary school staff develop the skills and knowledge they need to transform their school libraries. The course is available to all National Literacy Trust members. For more information, visit: literacytrust.org.uk/programmes/love-our-libraries.

Shortly before Leia's appointment as School Librarian at Steyning C of E Primary School, the PTA had fundraised for and installed a new, modern and vibrant library. Children who were the most-able readers welcomed the new library but, after getting to know the pupils and the school better, Leia realised that her greatest challenge was to encourage all children to visit the library more regularly, borrow more frequently and fall in love with books.

She took part in the Foyle Primary School Library Course, which really helped her reflect on what she had already achieved and guided her thinking as to where to take the library next. Using the resources from the course and the school development plan, Leia started thinking about how she could make improvements to the school library, considering the four main modules from the course:

1. The importance of the school library and reading for pleasure
2. Children's books
3. Creating the library environment
4. Creating a reading community

The importance of the school library and reading for pleasure

Pupil Librarians played an important role in the school library; without them Leah admitted that she would struggle to keep the library organised. Pupils applied for the position, were interviewed and completed a training programme in order to become 'qualified'.

The pupil librarians are great reading ambassadors and fantastic role models to the younger children and the school decided to extend their role by involving them in organising events that promote reading for pleasure.

In February, to celebrate Harry Potter Night, the school was transformed into Hogwarts! The pupil librarians ran a wide range of activities including potion making, wand making and Quidditch practice, and opened The Three Broomsticks pub to serve Butterbeer and a Bertie Botts sweet shop full of jelly beans. After the event, pupil librarians visited a local bookshop to buy new books for the school library with the money they raised. The library also enjoyed running storytelling sessions to celebrate World Book Day in March and Elmer Day in May.

In addition to running events, Leia noticed that picture books and illustrations provided a way into the wonderful world of books for many of the reluctant readers. Equally, when she ran a trail or hunt event, the library was often packed with children who don't regularly visit it. With this in mind, she launched a new initiative called Reading Rocks that she hoped would raise the profile of illustrators and encourage more children to come into the library. Leia hid 20 pebbles (or 'rocks') around the school for the children to find; on each pebble there was an illustrated character from a book and when the children found a pebble, they came to the library to get their Reading Rocks bookmark stamped.

To bring the project to life, the library also received pebbles from a range of wonderful children's illustrators including Chris Riddell, Liz Pichon, Elys Dolan, Nick Sharratt, Jim Smith, Lydia Monks, Danny Noble and Guy ParkerRees. In addition, an Illustration Club was started which gave pupils new opportunities to learn how to draw book characters, as well as develop creative work based on their favourite illustrator's style. Children illustrated their own pebbles which were added to the new favourite book character pebble garden in the library.

Children's books

The school is lucky to have an excellent Schools Library Service (SLS) that supports them in ensuring the book stock is relevant, appealing and supportive to all their young readers. New sections have been added to encourage more reluctant readers to visit the library, such as picture books for older readers, popular culture, joke books, graphic novels, comics and magazines. As with many schools, it is challenging to find the budget for new books, so there is a need to be creative. Using the School Reading Survey from the Foyle Primary School Library Course, Leia asked teachers to survey pupils about the books they most enjoyed reading. Using the results, she created a wish list of books children wanted to see in the library. Many parents have also donated new or second-hand books to enhance the collection.

Leia entered competitions to win books and also reviewed books for websites in exchange for new titles. In addition, our PTA provided the library with a budget for new books after Sue presented them with evidence contained in the Foyle Primary School Library Course about the importance of reading for enjoyment for children's academic, social and emotional development. There is an excellent and supportive independent bookshop in the local community; the Steyning Bookshop has facilitated author visits from children's favourites Abie Longstaff, Jim Smith and Helen Peters, which have been inspirational and have generated huge interest and excitement about their books.

Creating the library environment

Leia believes it is important to create an enticing, attractive space for children to enjoy reading so she has tried to involve children more in the process of designing the library space. Although the library had new shelving and cushions, the walls were bare. Leia put up some pin boards to brighten the space and provide children with new things to read about, as well as general information about using the library. As she works part-time, she created a rota for updating the displays and, where possible, involved the pupils whether it was using their own drawings or work to bring themes and topics to life or giving them responsibility for creating and updating specific displays. Leia created new book displays to entice reluctant readers into the

library such as: Score with a Book, a World Cup themed display featuring football-inspired texts; you've seen the movie, now read the book; your teachers' favourite books; and Superheroes.

Leia made a number of 'tweaks' to the environment to attract new interest in the library, as well as to keep the library organised. These included: a Book Buddy box (a box of soft toys which younger children can choose to read a book to); Book Hospital (for books needing repair); Poet Tree (children write their own or their favourite poem on to a paper leaf and stick it on to the tree). She also reorganised the Easy/Quick Read section by segregated books into three stages of reading difficulty to cater for different children.

Creating a reading community

It was important for Leia to involve the wider school community in supporting and shaping how the library develops. She started a library committee Love Our Library which meets annually and gives all interested parties an opportunity to share ideas and be updated on new library developments. The first meeting was part-led by the pupil librarians and brought together the Headteacher, librarians from the public library, the Schools Library Service, the local secondary school, parents, governors, the local bookshop owner and the Love our Libraries Programme Manager from the National Literacy Trust. A Twitter account was launched the school library, and the children were tasked with designing a Twitter handle (@SPS_lovetoread) and a logo for it. Twitter has been a fantastic tool for bringing children closer to the authors and illustrators of the books they enjoy as they have communicated with and received feedback on their work from the authors whose books they are reading. The library has also had fun entering competitions and sharing ideas with other school libraries around the world. Leia felt it was important to involve parents in their children's reading. She started a group in the summer term to encourage parents to read with their child at home, with the aim of boosting pupils' enjoyment of reading and closing the reading attainment gap between those on Pupil Premium and their peers. On a weekly basis, she brought together a target group of children who were reluctant readers and their parents and carers to make Chatterpacks based on the child's interests.

These Chatterpacks contained activities, games and resources that relate directly to a specific book or topic. The Chatterpacks evaluation found that children and their parents gained a greater love of reading and sharing books after taking part with parents saying their children had developed more positive attitudes to reading and the activities made reading at home more fun.

The impact of these developments on child M

At the beginning of Year 5, child M was a struggling and reluctant reader. Over the course of the school year, she became involved in many of the developments that were put in place to improve the school library. She became a pupil librarian and was able to familiarise herself with the way the library is organised. Due to the new 'Quick Read' section, M was able to locate books within her reading capability with ease. By helping to run events, such as wand making on Harry Potter Night, M was able to see the positive effect books have on other children; she began to grow in confidence and chose books of her own to read – she loves Lego Ninjago! – and the books purchased for the library from the fundraising fed her desire to spend more time looking at books. M's grandmother attended the Chatterpacks group and told us that the project had increased the amount of reading they do at home, made M feel more positive about reading and had *"boosted M's confidence in publicly speaking to others."* It was fantastic to see this in action when M had the confidence to share what she had been doing at the first Love Our Library committee meeting. M's teacher said: *"The school library provided a source of real wonder and inspiration for M. The best example of the impact of the library on M's reading was when she was inspired by a visiting author [Abie Longstaff] to create her own story and accompanying story box. This was something M would not have done 12 months ago. The pride that she took in her work was clear to see and the excitement generated by the author retweeting her idea was the icing on the cake, boosting her confidence no end!"*