

## Collaborating with School Librarians to Create Reading Communities

The 2014 National Curriculum is clear on the need for pupils to 'read for pleasure' and schools have devoted considerable energy on being seen to promote this in the classroom. It is not possible to develop a reading culture within a school, or to create a thriving reading community, as an individual, it is a joint responsibility. Good working relationships enable schools to work smoothly and school librarians and teachers can achieve more by working in partnership to support and develop pupils' learning. Principal among the possible outcomes of this collaboration is that of creating readers for life.

Research has found that social reading environments are vital to developing successful reading communities. (Cremin et al., 2014) The school library is ideally placed to provide that environment. The librarian is able through experience and training to support teachers in broadening and developing their knowledge of children's literature. Through a network of organisations, public bodies and charities such as the School Library Association, the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals and local libraries, librarians gain information and guidance which adds to teachers' educational expertise.

In addition to comprehensive book knowledge school librarians offer support to weaker readers and opportunities to extend the more confident pupils. Targeted reading clubs prioritising according to needs and potential outcomes can be run in the school library. It is increasingly difficult for class teachers to find time to hear children read aloud, something that as a school librarian I have done frequently. Research carried out in Australia supports the view that school librarians play a significant role in encouraging reading engagement in reluctant readers and thus improve their literacy outcomes (Merga, 2019) .



Specific reading related projects managed by the librarian and the class teacher can be extremely successful. Among those I have been involved in was when Year 6 created and published their own picture books. This encouraged a closer in depth look at high quality picture books of differing types in the library and learning how to write for a target audience. The finished books were sold to raise money for charity at the

summer school fete thus allowing parents to be part of the process. A School Book Award shared with our senior school encouraged pupils to read more widely and to feel that their opinions on books mattered when they were able to vote for the winners in different categories. As school librarian I acted as a bridge between the different departments and groups involved in this project. Leia Sands, [School Librarian, Steyning C of E Primary School, Sussex](#) started a library committee which gives all interested parties within the school the chance to share ideas and work together to create a reading community. There are examples of several other excellent initiatives among the case studies available on the [Great School Libraries website](#). As school librarian I also produced a weekly update on children's book news for parents and regular emails to all staff with details of new books.

The library space itself offers opportunities to encourage a love of reading in addition to the obvious ones. A venue seen as subtly different from the classroom by pupils, it can be utilised by teachers to mark an event or a celebration linked to reading, to make a presentation or to host a reading activity. In some schools the library is used as a 'makerspace' hosting STEM activities or Lego clubs, although not directly linked to reading this does encourage the library and therefore books to be viewed in a different way by some children.



There is considerable evidence demonstrating that school libraries support improved attainment, successful curriculum or learning outcomes and positive attitudes to learning. (Williams et al 2013) Involving the school librarian in cross curricular planning will ensure high quality fiction linking to the subject will be at the heart of learning. The wide range of source material available to the librarian makes it easier for them to assist in this way. Time pressed teachers need the assistance of a fellow professional so that they are able to concentrate on the educational requirements. Teachers and librarians working together to ensure that reading for pleasure is not an optional extra but at the heart of the school's learning is an aim for us all.

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