



Ten-week literacy intervention in West Yorkshire boys' school improves reading age by more than a year in 80% of Year 8 pupils

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Head teacher at Upper Batley High School Samantha Vickers explains how [Supply Desk's](#) reading intervention programme 'Love to Read' improved pupils' reading age across the school, which has a high proportion of English as an additional language (EAL) and special educational needs (SEN) students.

About the school

Upper Batley High School (UBHS) in Batley, West Yorkshire is a secondary school catering for boys aged between 11 and 16. Of 674 pupils on the roll, 90% come from ethnic minority groups (the national average is 28%) and for 61%, English is an additional language. 33% of pupils receive free school meals – 5% higher than the national average. UBHS also has a high intake of lower ability learners (based on reading, writing and mathematical ability) at 30% – the national average is 10-16%. The school has a low proportion of high ability learners at approximately 20%, which is half the national average of 40%. The proportion of SEND pupils is 34%, against the national average of 28%. In 2014, UBHS was rated 'Inadequate' by Ofsted but has improved rapidly over the past three years, achieving a 'Good' rating in its 2016 Ofsted inspection. Attendance has improved considerably, and is now in line with the national average; persistent absence and exclusion have decreased and GCSE and literacy outcomes have improved. Additionally, enrolment of high achieving pupils has increased over the last three years, from 481 to 676.

The challenge

Despite significant improvements in literacy outcomes throughout the school since 2014, increasing reading comprehension continues to be a key focus for UBHS, with particular attention on our large ethnic minority and EAL population.

For many of these pupils, English is not the spoken language at home and their access to English reading material outside of school is limited. Typically, a child's reading age improves through parents reading bedtime stories but in our community this is less common.

For pupils to access and comprehend their GCSE papers in Year 11, a reading age of 15 years and six months is required – currently the majority of our pupils are well below this level. It is imperative that we support UBHS pupils, especially those in the years preceding GCSEs, in increasing their literacy skills. With improved confidence in accessing and understanding exam papers, they are better placed for success across all subject areas.

The solution

Supply Desk, one of the UK's leading education recruitment specialists, contacted us about 'Love to Read' – a reading intervention pilot running in schools across West Yorkshire – and we agreed to participate. The intervention is driven by the shocking statistic that approximately 1 in 5 (20%) of school-aged children are unable to read and is designed to boost pupil reading ages by up to two years in 10 weeks.

The 10-week intervention ran at UBHS from January 2018 to June 2018 and consisted of pupils undertaking two 20-minute, or one 50-minute, one-to-one reading sessions per week with a teaching assistant trained in Love to Read, provided by Supply Desk. The programme was a book-based approach which supported our pupils with their literacy, enabling them to activate both dimensions of reading – word recognition processes (including phonics) and language comprehension processes. Students were also encouraged to read at home between sessions and an after school reading club was opened and supported by the Love to Read teaching assistant.

28 pupils, from Years 7 to 10, participated in the reading intervention.

- 8 pupils were mainstream
- 5 had an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP)
- 4 pupils were EAL
- 4 had Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD)
- 3 had MLD and Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs (SEMH)
- 2 had SEMH
- 1 had dyslexia
- 1 had an attention deficit disorder/autism spectrum disorder (ADHD/ASD)

Key results

The results were incredible – the impact of the reading intervention was widespread across the participant group with some of the boys increasing their reading age by two years in the space of a term. 80% of our Year 8 pupils improved their reading age by more than a year, with one pupil progressing by over three years in the 10 weeks.

Year 7 results:

- 69% made an average increase of 7.6 months over the 10 weeks
- The most significant rise was 18 months – the pupil progressed from a reading age of 14.01 to 15.07
- The second greatest improvement overall was a Year 7 pupil with MLD who improved by 14 months – from a reading age of 7.04 to 8.06

Year 8 results:

- 80% made an average increase of 14 months
- The highest improvement was 3.5 years – with the pupil moving from a reading age of 6.09 to 10.03

Year 9 results:

- For 50% of the Year 9 participants, the average increase was four months.

One of the most important outcomes of the programme was the high level of engagement and intrinsic motivation shown by our pupils – they really enjoyed working with the Love to Read teaching assistant. He was great at improving their comprehension and vocabulary by ensuring new words were practised in sentences throughout the week. Parents were also engaged in their children's literacy journey and the triangulation between school, the pupils and their parents ensured encouragement, support and praise from all sides.

Conclusion

All of the pupils who took part in the Love to Read programme substantially increased their reading age – the project was a great success both quantitatively and qualitatively. The intervention boosted

our pupils' confidence and self-esteem. They enjoyed the consistent support and loved seeing the progress they were making on a daily basis. The headline results of the programme were astounding and the pupils who participated in the intervention have kept reading. We now have a school-wide reading culture, evidenced by pupils increasingly reading in their own time as well as in lessons. Perhaps the greatest benefit was observed among our EAL pupils – the programme increased their access to English reading material and the one-to-one support they received, particularly around new vocabulary, greatly improved their confidence and empowered them to read in English. We aim to continue the intervention and encourage our pupils to keep engaging in reading – it is reading little and often that makes the biggest difference for our pupils. We are expanding the project this year to include more parental involvement as this ensures the development is sustainable. We would definitely recommend the Love to Read intervention to other schools.