

The Culture of Reading at Somervale School

“The importance of reading for children cannot be underestimated. Reading for pleasure can benefit a child’s education, social and cognitive development, their wellbeing, and their mental health.”

(<https://www.highspeedtraining.co.uk>)

At Somervale School we place a huge value on the importance of reading and have developed and embedded a culture in which a love of reading is encouraged and fostered. We support, motivate and challenge students to read on a daily basis and students understand that independent reading is central to their academic success.

Our vision is that all students achieve their full potential. We use and promote reading strategies throughout the curriculum so our students not only perform better academically, but have a larger and more extensive vocabulary. We believe that strong readers develop imagination, creativity, empathy and gain a greater understanding of their world.

Reading Programmes

The school has successfully used the Accelerated Reader programme for many years, which supports students to read a wide range of books from our school library and complete termly STAR reading comprehension tests to monitor their reading levels. Accelerated Reader supports students by guiding them through their personal goals and providing suggestions of titles linked to their interests and reading ability. It also provides opportunities for monitoring comprehension and to build students’ literacy skills mastery, which motivates students to engage and read more frequently. Students are expected to complete a minimum of two quizzes on books or articles they have read each term and this is encouraged and monitored by the English department through library lessons and homework.

Our inviting school library has over 10,000 books and students have access to the library before school, during the school day, at lunchtime and after school. Students at Key Stage 3 take part in a library reading lesson at least once a fortnight, where they have a chance to choose books, quiz and take part in structured reading activities. In addition, students in Year 7 and lower ability groups in Years 8 and 9 have access to the Lexia literacy programme which supports their reading skills in areas of phonics, fluency, comprehension, vocabulary and grammar.

Reading ages are generated through the STAR reading test and are updated and shared with teaching staff throughout the academic year. This supports staff to ensure that all information used within lessons is presented in a way that is appropriate to each student's reading needs.

Reading Across the Curriculum

At Somervale School we use the High Five Reading Strategy (Dymock and Nicholson 2010) to promote active reading of texts and support students' comprehension.

1. Support students to read by providing **background** information.
2. Encourage students to make **predictions** about the text.
3. **Actively read** the text together, making annotations and asking questions.
4. Support students with tricky **vocabulary**.
5. Encourage students to **summarise** the text.

In addition to this, staff use a wide range of strategies to support reading within lessons, enabling students to develop their comprehension of information, reading fluency, cognitive processing and vocabulary use. These include:

- Presenting reading tasks at a suitable level and breaking texts down into smaller chunks of information to aid processing.
- Modeling fluency through appropriate use of pace, expression, punctuation and phrasing.
- Encouraging students to follow texts by reading aloud, displaying texts on a whiteboard or visualizer or using rulers or reading ruler overlays.
- Stopping at various intervals and checking students' understanding of the text before moving on.
- Supporting students to make connections between the text being read and their prior knowledge of the topic.
- Ensuring students understand how to read diagrams or images.
- Showing students how to work on a text when they are expected to read alone (e.g. skim and scan, how to take notes, how to summarise key points)
- Pre-teaching vocabulary and ensuring students understand how to use words in context.

Reading for Pleasure

Reading for pleasure is actively encouraged in the school day. Students in all year groups are expected to choose a book from the school library, or from home, and bring this with them to school each day. In tutor time, students start the day with silent independent reading and there is also a dedicated PM registration slot for each year group focused on reading. During this time, tutors will check in on Accelerated Reader and support students to talk about their reading and make suitable book choices. In addition to this, all Key Stage 3 English classes have assigned

'library lessons' as part of their curriculum time and are actively encouraged to broaden their horizons and choose challenging texts.

To reward students' engagement in reading and completion of Accelerated Reader quizzes we hold celebration events promoting our reading culture across the whole school and students who are word millionnaires are provided with rewards. Students are also able to gain house points for quizzing and making progress in their STAR test. The use of Accelerated Reader is having a positive impact, engaging students and motivating them to read regularly, evident in the positive responses within student voice surveys.

Throughout the year the school is involved in a large number of events and activities that help to promote reading for pleasure. These have included: the Scholastic Book Fair, Year 7 Book Exchange event, World Book Day celebrations, visiting author events, trips to the Bath Literature Festival, the Carnegie Book Award reading group and the MNSP Library Book Awards. This year our team of Reading Ambassadors in Year 9, have worked very hard to promote the library with their peers; as well as supporting the librarians with events and competitions, they have offered students a book clinic during tutor time. Students can visit the library and get diagnostic advice on suitable reading materials. To ensure fair accessibility, Pupil Premium students are given free books from visiting writers and the book fair.

Students are also encouraged to support their peers with reading through our very successful Peer Reading Programme. Students in year 9 and 10 volunteer to read with students who are reading below their expected reading level in years 7 and 8.

Students and staff take part in the National Literacy Trust Survey which provides us with a really clear picture of how reading is perceived in the school.

- In 2025, 83% of students who took part in the survey said that they enjoyed reading, 62% said they read more than twice a week and 76% believed themselves to be good readers.
- 48% of students felt that reading helped them to learn new things, learn new words and to relax.
- 82% of students said they had taken part in a World Book Day activity and many felt it gave them an opportunity to access new texts.
- 84% of staff agreed that they have had sufficient training to meet the literacy demands of their subject.
- 94% of staff also felt that reading for pleasure is promoted effectively in the school.

Additionally, in an internal survey of Key Stage 3 reading in English, 73% of students said they enjoyed reading, which is well above the national average of 43%. 46% of students said they

read for at least 20 minutes a day, as opposed to 28% nationally. 88% of students said they enjoyed their library lessons.

SEND Reading Support

Where students have specific needs in literacy they are placed on the SEND register and a provision plan listing individual strategies is produced and shared with teaching staff to support the acquisition and support of core literacy skills as part of Quality First Teaching.

Where students find reading more challenging a number of strategies are used to develop students' reading ability and enjoyment in reading. In addition to the Accelerated Reader programme and the use of MyLexia for homework and in library lessons, struggling readers and those diagnosed with dyslexia are involved in IDL intervention. This is a speaking-computer based multi-sensory system which supports learners with dyslexia and other learning difficulties to increase their reading and has been assured by the British Dyslexia Association. On average our Y7 Reading Ages on IDL, increase by 20.9 months in the academic year.

Furthermore, research has shown that this programme has a positive impact on improving both reading and spelling ages (Scrase, 2002; Lifting Barrier, 2014 and research by the University of Lancaster, 2018). This programme is used primarily with students in Key Stage 3 and students are identified for this programme initially through information passed on from primary schools during transition, spelling tests in Year 7 and referrals by class teachers.

This programme runs through afternoon registration slots and each student works on an individualised programme based on their initial spelling and reading assessment. The progression through the programme follows a standard path similar to that defined in any standard phonics-based scheme, e.g: Alpha-Omega (Hornsby and Shear, 1993). Additionally, a touch typing course is woven into the fabric of the exercises.

IDL supports phonological awareness and re-reading pulls together the available information to make the sentence (or phrase) whole, clarifying meaning. The design of short, finely graduated exercises ensure over-learning and frequent positive feedback. Particular letter/sound correspondence is secured before moving on.

Further strategies such as using computers, reader pens and coloured overlays support the development of students' independence in reading within the classroom. Teaching Assistants have been trained in Active Reading Strategies and also in precision teaching to support students with acquisition of skills in reading e.g. when learning specific skills and knowledge such as phonological awareness and phoneme-grapheme correspondence. Teaching Assistants are also trained in how to support students as readers both within lessons and in internal and external assessments, in line with JCQ regulations.