



Reading with the big boys

Year 8 boys at Brewood CofE Middle School in Stafford have been working wonders as reading role models for pupils at local primary schools. Study Support Coordinator, Sallie Cornes describes how they set up their innovative Reading Champions buddies project.

The buddies project was born following a series of meetings, which looked at enhancing reading experiences, re-engaging specific Year 8 boys and supporting the transition process between our feeder schools and Brewood CE Middle School. The project has done just that and more.

After discussions with the Headteacher and our Community and Learning Partnership Co-ordinator, a plan was drawn up to arrange venue, costs and timetable. I attended a Partnership Headteachers' meeting to gain support and the project proposal was discussed with our Key Stage Three Co-ordinator. I managed to secure funding for the project from our Community and Learning Partnership. We then selected the Year 8 boys who we wanted to be part of the initiative. The boys were chosen for a variety of reasons, some because they had not been chosen for a specific responsibility before, some who were known to be more reluctant readers and others who we knew would be enthusiastic about the project.



Year eight student lends a helping hand



Pupils with their reading buddies

19 boys were personally invited to attend a meeting, which I hosted in the school library with squash and biscuits. I explained the initiative and encouraged them to take part. I was delighted to see that, without exception, all 19 boys were keen to join in and a training session was arranged. I attended a course led by Sarah De Zoysa from the National Literacy Trust, to gain ideas for inspiring and coaching the boys. The training session included ideas gained from the course, support from our Teaching Assistant who has primary experience and our part time Librarian who was to accompany the boys to the primary schools.

The boys were allowed to choose the school they wanted to work with. Most of them selected the school they had previously attended. They are taken by minibuses, which we fund, to the first schools every Friday afternoon. The boys are so keen that they requested a “bus route rota” to make sure they all get a turn to be dropped off at their school first in order to get there earlier. They also asked if they could have a badge in recognition of what they are doing, which for most was a first.



Getting stuck into reading

At the primary schools some students are doing individual reading, some are reading with small groups and some are storytelling. They all discuss books, characters and genres and encourage reading for enjoyment. The boys all have a notebook and pen to make notes so they can remember the activities they have completed with the younger pupils and make a note of their interests. The students find resources in our school library on the children’s interests to further engage with the younger pupils.

The boys meet in the school library every Friday lunchtime and discuss their plans for that afternoon before leaving for the primary schools. They return to school afterwards to meet again in the library to talk about how their sessions went and share good practice. The “What went well and what could go even better next week?” discussions encourage the boys to review their own learning. The boys have led a school assembly to inform their peers about their role as Reading Champions, to raise the profile of reading and to encourage year seven pupils to take over the following year.

I regularly get great feedback from colleagues at the primary schools and from our school staff who “drop in” to see the boys in action. The boys have also launched a “Caught Reading” competition and will work with me to complete a display of photos in the school library to encourage new pupils to visit the library. Lending from the school library has increased since our Year 8 boys have become role models for the younger children.



Pupil sharing a story with her reading buddy

The project has given our Year 8 boys an opportunity to support younger pupils’ transition to secondary school and helped them foster an enjoyment of reading as well as improve their reading ability and confidence. For the Year 8 boys it has been an opportunity to learn new skills, inspire peers and increase their own self-esteem. Interestingly, there has been a reduction in the number of behaviour incidents amongst the boys who have been involved in this project.

Many of the boys now have renewed enthusiasm towards their studies. One Year 8 Reading Champion told me, “I feel emotional when I am helping the younger boys with their reading as I am helping them with something they can’t do”. One pupil receiving support from a Reading Champion said, “I look forward to the big boys coming to our school to read with me and am disappointed if I don’t get a turn”. Another enthused, “I love reading with the older boys – it’s better than anything else I do”. Staff at the first schools see the project as a wonderful initiative. One teacher commented, “The boys are wonderful with the younger children and they are great role models to the whole

class. Their encouragement and enthusiasm with the readers is fantastic". We are all looking forward to the project continuing next year and beyond.