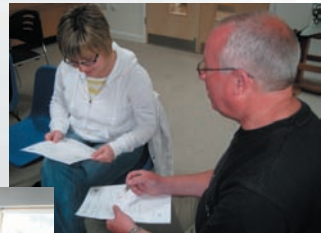




Engaging parents in literacy initiatives in schools in the Afon Taf cluster



Participating Schools:

Afon Taf High School
Abercanaid Community School
Bedlinog Primary School
Edwardsville Primary School
Mount Pleasant Primary School
Trelewis Primary School
Troedyrhiw Primary School
Ynysowen Primary School

Lead School:

Afon Taf High School

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of our RAISE (Raising Attainment and Individual Standards in Education) project was to engage parents in literacy initiatives in schools in the Afon Taf Cluster. Below are the main aims of the project and the ways in which we achieved them: -

1. Improve pupil's reading ages

One of the primary aims of this project was to improve pupil's poor reading ages. This project was built upon current good practice by further developing and delivering the successful "Catch-Up" reading programme in each school.

This programme, when delivered efficiently, has been found to produce excellent results in regards to helping struggling readers; this was also found to be the case when it was used to support our project.



2. Enhance parental involvement

Obtaining parental encouragement and support was an invaluable dimension for this project. We were able to engage parents through an emphasis on the importance of this initiative for their child's transition to the secondary school.

Parents were invited into their child's primary school on several occasions, not only to find out more about the project but also to observe their child receiving a catch-up session; this then enabled them to learn some of the strategies used within "Catch-Up" so that they can deliver a similar session at home as skilled partners in reading.

In the lead high school, Afon Taf, parents were approached in a slightly different manner; one to one informal meetings were held for parents half way through the project, rather than at the beginning. This way we were able to discuss the progress each individual child had made and highlight how parent's extra help and support could boost their child's reading even more. Parents were all very enthusiastic and agreed to read regularly with their child at home using the reading records and materials that were provided for them.



3. Develop parents as skilled partners in reading

Not only did we want to enhance parent's involvement in regards to reading with their child but we also wanted to raise their awareness of their own skills and demonstrate the different ways in which they can support their child.

In order to address this aspect of the project, the project leader and the family literacy co-ordinator worked collaboratively to create a workshop specifically for the parents of pupils in years 5 and 6. The workshop ran for two hours and in addition to the information and training that parents received during the session, parents were also provided with leaflets created specifically for this project so that they had guidance notes to refer to whenever they worked at home with their child.

The feedback from this workshop was extremely positive: -

When asked how parents rated the workshop overall; (Excellent, Good, Average, Poor or Very Poor), every parent reported that they thought it was "Excellent". Every parent also felt that they would now be more inclined to help their child to read/learn at home as a result of the workshop. The main ways that parents reported that they will use the information and ideas gained from the workshop included:

- ◆ Improving their own skills so they can support their child with reading;
- ◆ Being more aware of their child's learning needs, visual, auditory etc;
- ◆ To encourage & support their child more when they have difficulties; and
- ◆ Incorporating reading through other activities (e.g. allowing their children to read shopping lists, TV guides, instructions).



"The workshop was very informative, things will change in my house!"

"I will read with my child more every day and take the time to listen"

"I will be more aware of my children's learning needs"

PROCEDURE

1. A Project Leader and three Learning Support Assistants were recruited to commence work as soon as possible in September 2009.
2. Within the first week of being appointed the project leader and learning support assistants attended "Catch-Up" training so they were all fully conversant with the reading programme and were therefore able to deliver the intervention themselves.
3. The project team then visited each primary school with the head teacher of Afon Taf where they were introduced to the teachers and head teachers and were able to familiarise themselves with the layout and arrangements at each individual school.
4. Once the project was then successfully up and running with the schools, meetings were held for parents with an emphasis on the importance of this initiative for transition to the secondary school. Parents were able to view Catch-Up resources, ask questions and gain a better understanding of the project. At the end of the meeting, parents were invited to come back into the school to observe the LSA or Project Leader delivering a catch-up session to their child so that they could learn how to use the intervention themselves.
5. The team then began working closely with family literacy to utilise their knowledge and expertise. Both the project leader and the family literacy co-ordinator devised a "reading workshop" for parents. This workshop was designed to not only help improve their literacy skills but it also enabled parents to learn strategies to help and support their child's skills.
6. Leaflets were also created for all parents involved within the project so that they had guidance notes to refer to while they were trying to help and support their child's learning at home.

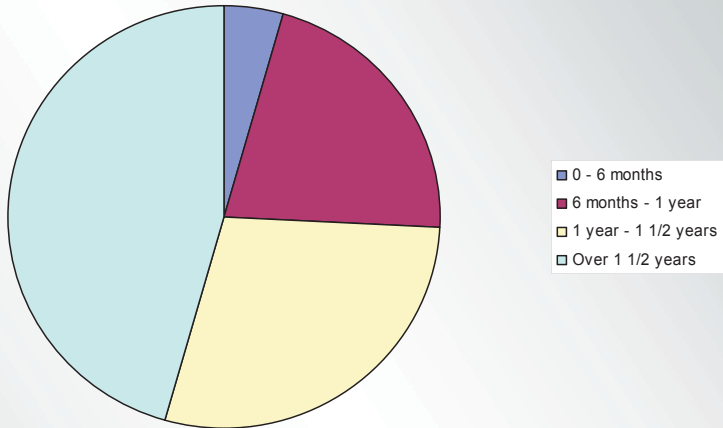


RESULTS

Pupil's reading age results

This project provided children with support and encouragement from both LSA's and their parents. As a result, in just eight months children's reading ages improved substantially. Below is a graph and table demonstrating their results:-

Average reading age gains



	Beginning of project	End of project
Primary School reading age results	7 years, 6 months	8 years, 10 months
Lead secondary school reading age results	8 years, 4 months	9 years, 7 months

Overall, findings showed that on average children's reading ages improved by one year and five months in the eight months that they were involved in this project.



PUPIL EVALUATIONS

Reading interview

At the beginning of the project, we interviewed the children to gain an insight into how they felt about reading. In order to discover if the extra parental and LSA support provided by the project had helped them emotionally, we repeated the reading interview at the end of the project. One of the main questions we asked them was, "How do you feel if someone asks you to read out loud?", the differences in the answers from the beginning to the end of the project are highlighted in the table below: -

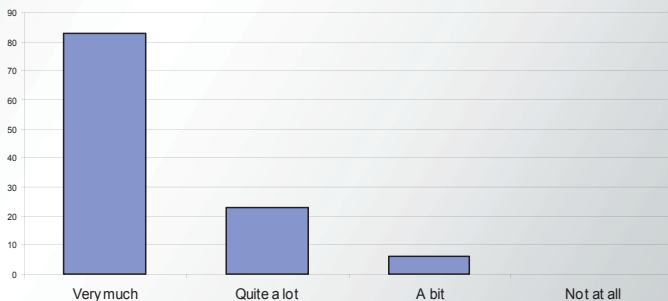
	Beginning of project	End of project
Nervous	34	17
Scared/frightened	20	12
Embarrassed	11	5
Okay	14	24
Confident/happy	3	24

When we first asked this question, the majority of children on the project said that they felt nervous, scared or frightened when asked to read out loud. However, at the end of the project most of the children reported that they now felt okay, confident or happy. Consequently, this project has not only helped to improve pupil's reading ages but it has also improved their self esteem.

End of year questionnaire

In addition to the reading interview, we also gave pupils an end of year questionnaire to fill in asking for their opinions of the project. Below is a graph demonstrating how much the pupils reported that they enjoyed the project: -

How much did you enjoy being a part of this project?



The evaluations also showed that 85% pupils felt that this project had made them more likely to read at home with their family and 94% pupils felt that it had made them feel more prepared for transition to their new high school.

GUIDANCE NOTES FOR OTHER SCHOOLS

Below some are useful tips that may help you should you wish to repeat a similar project in your school/cluster: -

- ◆ **Despite differences in approach and practice in individual schools, a project like this can work successfully if you are able to gain support from head teachers and other members of staff.**
- ◆ **The intervention that is implemented in schools should be one that is quick and easy for parents to learn. It should also be easily adapted so that they can deliver it at home using their own reading materials.**
- ◆ **Try to carry out early initial meetings with parents so they feel included and understand the importance of what you are trying to do as a school or a cluster.**
- ◆ **Emphasising the importance of the project for transition really seems to help when holding meeting for parents. We believe that this is because parents are much more eager to come in when they realise that they would get the opportunity to meet their child's new head teacher. It also helped in reducing the worry for both parent and child about the transition to their new high school and it created a sustainable relationship between primary/secondary schools.**
- ◆ **Holding parent workshops are an excellent way both to get to know parents and to also teach them about helping and supporting their child. However, if you do decide to hold these workshops then it is probably best to;**
- ◆ **Open it up to a wide group to ensure larger numbers (e.g. all of the parents of pupils in years 5/6); and**
- ◆ **Try to keep the workshops informal but informative (Remember that you will have parents with a wide range of skills so having extra staff at hand is an excellent way of ensuring that all parents feel supported and included).**
- ◆ **Always try to hold regular review meetings with staff so that you can consistently evaluate the project in order to continue with the positive outcomes and improve the less effective ones.**

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This initiative is funded by The Welsh Assembly Government as part of RAISE and is working in partnership with Family Programmes.



For more information about Catch-Up and for further tips on how to support children's reading, please contact:

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