

The secret in getting children to read

Suzanne Aldridge explains what makes a flourishing school library

Today's school library should no longer be a place for children to sit in silence with eyes firmly fixed on a book. These days it can be a hive of activity, providing children with access to a wealth of information. Quite often a library is placed in the heart of a school enabling easy access. A well-stocked library can encourage reading for pleasure, provide the ability to increase knowledge and support and extend learning.

It is well known that children introduced to books from a very early age continue to enjoy books and reading as they get older. Activities such as bedtime reading, singing nursery rhymes and browsing through picture books can all help with a child's development.

Imagination

Just by simply reading a book a child can increase their imagination, improve their reading skills, their language and even their attention span. It provides an opportunity to escape to another world and by reading a poem or an extract from a book out loud a child can improve their speech and confidence.

A well-stocked school library can provide various reading materials including fiction and non-fiction books, magazines, newspapers, graphic novels and



audio books. Children enjoy finding information by browsing through encyclopaedias, atlases, reference collections. And increasingly, Internet and online sources appear to be a popular way of locating up-to-date information.

The school library can offer a friendly and relaxing atmosphere. It is quite often a meeting point for children during break times and after lunch, when they can enjoy reading, finding information in books and from the Internet. They can produce a piece of project work, take part in a quiz, read a poem out loud, discuss books they like or dislike or simply just talk to friends.

It is essential for a school library to be an inviting and comfortable place with colourful displays whilst being stocked with a wide variety of reading materials to suit every need. This all helps with enticing even the most reluctant of readers and it provides children with the impression that the library is a really cool place to be.

With the introduction of an easy-to-use library computer system, children are able to learn useful skills which will remain with them throughout life. As a librarian, part of my job requires me to teach children to locate stock using the library catalogue and subject index. They learn about the arrangement of stock using the Dewey Decimal System and how to find a favourite fiction author or a different genre. Children enjoy learning how to operate the issue and return system and soon come to understand about the importance of sharing and being responsible for

looking after library books. These are all skills that can be transferred to the public library or information service.

Children are often influenced by their friends and quite often a book is taken out of the library or reserved on the recommendation of a friend. It's great to hear children talking about books and seeing faces light up when a new box of books arrive. They tend to all gather round, sort through the box between them and always want to be the first to take one home to read.

Encouragement

Lively storytelling sessions are always popular and children look forward to visits from authors, talking about their books. These events can give lots of encouragement and can give a child the confidence to try a book which they may not have considered reading before, broadening their horizons.

Reading can be introduced to children as a fun thing to do by arranging a reading challenge or a quiz. By giving rewards such as stickers, bookmarks, certificates and book tokens a child is able to enjoy the element of competition and once they see their friends reading everybody wants to join in.

It is so encouraging to think that school libraries continue to enhance children's learning and contribute to allowing them to reach their full potential. So long may this continue! **PS**

■ The author is school librarian, Aldwickbury School, Harpenden

