

## Case Study: Charlotte Bratt, Librarian, Redmaids' High School, Bristol

### Library Lessons

Redmaids' High School, Bristol, is an independent school for girls aged 3 to 18. When Charlotte arrived at the school, seven years ago, library lessons had recently been introduced into the English curriculum with Years 7-9 having fortnightly lessons where they were expected to read and fill out reading logs. However, Charlotte was not expected to take part in these as they were the responsibility of the English department. This did not make any sense to her as she knew the English department's knowledge of the contents of the library was limited as was their awareness of modern Children's/Young Adult literature. The teachers also used the time to catch up on marking, expecting the pupils to work out how to find books and what to read by themselves. There seemed no connection between the library as a space and her purpose as a librarian in the minds of the teachers; they considered being in the library itself enough. Also, as the teachers did not acknowledge her presence neither did the pupils.

Charlotte's aims were to inspire the pupils to find and read books for pleasure, to develop their confidence as readers, and for the librarian to become an integral part of library lessons by encouraging teachers to see the librarian as a support for their subject and not a background presence.

She started to address these issues by asking if she could share some book ideas at the beginning of each lesson. Seven years later, Charlotte now leads the library lessons encouraging the pupils to share their own reading and the teachers take part as well. She makes a point of speaking to each pupil about what they are reading and has built up a level of trust so that they believe in her recommendations. She also listens to their recommendations and buys them if appropriate. Charlotte has also updated the reading logs. Each year group has a different challenge to read more widely and not just note down what they have been reading.

Part of the school's mission statement is to facilitate the intellectual, academic and pastoral development of the pupils. It also emphasises the importance encouraging them to develop their independence and understanding of the wider world. The library lessons present an ideal opportunity to respond to this mission. By taking an active role in the lessons, as the librarian, Charlotte is able to help the pupils' to develop their independence in choosing books that they genuinely wish to read, without pressure from other sources. Library lessons also provide them with the confidence to express their own views by sharing their understanding and interests with their peers.

Charlotte decided that the best way to measure the success of the new format of the library lessons was through borrowing statistics; not just comparing two years in a row but also the long term impact. During the past seven years fiction loans have increased by 300% and pupils have continued to borrow books once the library lessons end in Year 9; when Charlotte arrived at the school no Years 10-13 borrowed books - now they do so. This has highlighted that, even without the support of library lessons, they return to the library - in their own time - to borrow books to read for pleasure. The pupils are also actively encouraging and recommending books to each other, not just within their year group but to other years as well; the phrase "You have to read that, it's amazing" is often heard.

Library lessons are an ongoing project. Their legacy can be seen in the pupils independently borrowing books outside of the lessons. There is now a steady flow of pupils asking for book recommendations as they trust Charlotte to know what they like to read. Her relationship with the English department has also changed and she is now always included in discussions that involve the reading development and habits of the pupils. In addition, the English department actively ask for suggestions and send pupils to Charlotte that they are concerned about in terms of their reading.

Every year Charlotte reviews the reading logs and style of lessons to ensure that their format and their content are always stimulating and supportive to the pupils.

**Three tips:**

1. If you recommend books that you genuinely like the pupils will respond positively and begin to trust you.
2. Take the long view, change takes time but is worth pursuing.
3. Treat every class and year group differently. Recommendations need to match the interests of the class; every class/year group has a different personality.