

Information about Farshore and HarperCollins Children's Book Group Trial

Introduction

The premise of this trial is that when 'reluctant readers' experience reading as a social activity, with no links to formal learning, they will come to see it as an enjoyable experience and be encouraged to participate.

We want to capture evidence from 20 secondary schools around England, Wales and Scotland who agree to run a weekly bookclub with students in Year 8 to promote Reading for Pleasure to find out whether social reading environments are an effective approach, and to explore what works, and what doesn't.

What does the trial involve?

- English teachers will select 5-8 students in each Y8 class who are reluctant readers. These are students who can read, but choose not to. We will provide a pre-trial questionnaire which could be used to identify children who don't read in their own time, or who have poor attitudes to reading.
- Every week, each child selected will take part in a timetabled book group discussion led by a member of the library team. Group sizes should be no larger than 8 (up to six is ideal), and the same member of staff should work with the group for the duration of the trial. The duration of the book group session should be one timetabled lesson 'period'. The number of book group discussions held every week will depend on the size of the Y8 cohort.
- Research indicates that 'agency' is an important part of encouraging reading for pleasure. For this trial, agency means allowing students to decide what to call their book group, which books to read, and the themes explored in 'book chat'. Depending on school policy, students could also be invited to wear a special item of clothing during book group (such as a fleecy jumper), bring along a fidget toy or something to hold (excluding phones or digital devices), or bring a snack or drink to the session.
- Our own research indicates that children are far more likely to see reading as pleasurable if it isn't linked with learning or followup tasks. Children must not complete quizzes about the book or be asked to complete worksheets or literacy activities.
- Many schools use 'rewards' to incentivise reading. This can encourage children to see reading as a task or a competition. For this trial, children shouldn't receive points or rewards for the books they've read. We want to promote the idea of reading being intrinsically rewarding.
- Creating a welcoming, cosy 'social reading space' is a key aspect of the trial. This means that reading shouldn't happen at desks or tables used for formal learning, and the format of the session should be inclusive and child-led. The £100 Amazon voucher incentive must be spent on additional accessories aimed at enhancing schools' social reading space. Schools can decide whether to involve children in choosing how to spend the voucher.
- Each session will include opening a personalised letter written by a well-known children's author. The group will also select three books from a short list compiled by the librarian leading the session, and an extract will be read aloud. The rest of the session will be spent on 'book chat' and borrowing a book to take home.

About the 200 free books:

- In September, each trial school will receive 100 books published by HarperCollins from their children's book lists, including Farshore Books and Barrington Stoke. The collection will be a mixture of popular fiction and non fiction genres, written by leading authors, chosen by the publishers and SLA. For the duration of the trial, these books should be used exclusively with the children participating in book group.
- At the end of the Autumn Term, the second batch of 100 books will be selected. Each child on the trial will be invited to choose two books from a list provided by HarperCollins, with the balance made up by books chosen by the library lead. These will be delivered at the start of the Spring term.

About the trial tasks:

- The trial will start with an optional webinar towards the end of September in which you will have a brief introduction from the researcher, publisher and SLA. This is a chance to ask any questions before getting going.
- We will send out online pre-trial questionnaires for students, library staff and English teachers. We won't collect any personal data from students, including names, date of birth or any information that would identify students.
- We will check in with you half way through the trial to find out how the trial is going. A member of SLA will call every 4 weeks and will be available throughout on email, to provide support and guidance if it is needed
- The library staff running the trial will be asked to keep a weekly diary in which they log the books read and children's reactions to them.
- At the end of the trial, all students who've taken part in the trial and library staff will be sent a post-trial questionnaire to complete.
- We may also run focus groups for some students and /or library staff. These will take place via zoom.