

Case Study: Ciara Murray, Librarian, Queen Elizabeth's School

Building The Queen's Library

Queen Elizabeth's is a Selective School for Boys aged 11 to 18 with 1250 on roll. Prior to January 2014, when the Queen's Library was completed, staff maintained collections of reading material in their departments, and a small classroom was used as a lending library. When Ciara was appointed in May 2014, the room had 96 computer terminals and empty shelves – not quite a library but it had potential. Five years later, Ciara has a library assistant, a dedicated team of twenty pupil librarians, a plethora of clubs and workshops, and around 10,000 catalogued resources. There is bright, professional signage, a colourful, user-friendly catalogue, and a resource-rich online portal hosted on the school's Virtual Learning Environment. Ciara initially consulted with all boys and staff to find out what they wanted from their Library, compiled fiction lists based on the boys' favourite authors and series, and selected non-fiction in conjunction with Heads of Department. She shifted shelves and tables into a much more open layout and welcomes all year groups into the library to read every lunchtime, something that was important to her from the outset, and which the boys hugely appreciate.

As well as creating a large collection of current fiction (informed by regular input from the 'Suggest a Book' page on the VLE) a number of special collections has been developed including: a 'Shelf Help' section based on the public libraries initiative Reading Well: Books on Prescription; an LGBTQ+ collection alongside our successful application to be a Stonewall Champion School; and

a graphic novels section encompassing manga, comics and many of the titles nominated for Paul Register's Excelsior Award, all of which have proven very popular and brought a different cohort of pupils into the library.

Ciara wanted to obtain a wide range of subject materials that would push pupils beyond what they are studying in the curriculum. Thanks to supportive parents and alumni, the library gathered a proportion of their resources via online wishlists, with the school's trustees providing funding for the remainder. As well as books, they also subscribe to a wide range of magazines and journals.

Around the time Ciara started working at the school, eQE (hosted by Firefly) was in development which meant that she had the opportunity to put together visually attractive pages that gathered a multitude of information resources together in one place. Other departments later used the library portal as a model for their own subject pages. When deciding which reference resources to subscribe to, the library operated trials with selected staff and gathered qualitative feedback. Those:

- **The Day** (News for Schools), used during tutor time and in class. Subject specific RSS newsfeeds are embedded into eQE department pages.
- **JSTOR**, primarily used by our HPQ and EPQ students but introduced to all sixth formers as part of Y12 induction. Given that 100% of students go on to university study, it's important they learn how to use databases like this and experience sourcing their own reading material.

- **The Philip Allan online archive** which saves time and money with access to around 25 years of magazines which are easily searched.
- **Explora:** an EBSCO database useful for both lower and upper school research that offers.

Ciara offers introductory sessions on all reference resources and if classes are doing a project that requires research, the class teacher can ask her to visit. This has been particularly productive with sixth form groups. Her latest initiative has been to create an information literacy programme for the whole school, focusing on different skillsets in each year, and delivering these in the form of a project so that students gain applicable experience of things like avoiding plagiarism, verifying accuracy of online information, using reference materials, etc.

As Ciara got to know the students better she created events, clubs and activities that captured their imagination, and tapped into their love of competition. Some of the most successful were:

Harry Potter and the Horcrux Hunt:

Participants were sorted into Houses by means of personal character questions. These formed teams for the treasure hunt that led students to various books throughout the library in a race against their peers. There was also a wand-making workshop and a "True Fans" quiz. This spurred the pupil librarians to create their own lunchtime interactive events.

An Audience with Robert Muchamore:

Muchamore is the school's most-borrowed author. He spoke to all of Year 7 & 8, signed books, and I ran a competition for the older boys to give 25 of his biggest fans the opportunity to come to the event as well. Never underestimate the power of a great author talk for bringing people to the library!

Inter-year Kids Lit Quiz: I wanted to bring the celebration "of the sport of reading" to the whole school. Prefects visited forms to challenge them to a series of book-related questions and the winners went on to form a House team for the competition. This was a great way to bring students from different year groups together and promote House spirit. I would recommend the international competition if you have keen readers: <http://kidslitquiz.com>

Kapow: a lunchtime event celebrating comics and graphic novels after our first big push to acquire resources; a great way to gather like-minded readers together and also gain more acquisition tips directly from the students! I ran a weekly club, shadowing Paul Register's annual Excelsior book award and later developed this into a space where we drew our own comics and manga.

Pupil Librarians: this programme gives lower years responsibility of the kind they wouldn't normally have until they reached sixth form. Candidates have to write a letter of application and have an interview which gives them an early taster of the world of work! They can gain Silver and Gold Awards (based on the School Library Association's scheme but tailored to our school). Students work on a variety of tasks and it provides an opportunity for inter-year friendships.

At least one new thing is introduced each term, loosely revolved around books in some way, from more traditional book groups to Board Gaming, Ink (a creative writing group), Film Club (where we compared the books with the film adaptations), and Dungeons & Dragons. The school has an author and poet in residence who run workshops for small groups of boys. The library shadows the Carnegie, Excelsior and the Young People's Science Book Awards and, together with three other local librarians, Ciara set up the Read4Barnet yearly book award.

Ciara states that *“School libraries are many things: sources of knowledge and discovery, places to escape, study havens, a peaceful area in what is otherwise (normally) a busy and noisy institution. Librarians know the manifold and lasting impacts that the space they create can have on children and it is incredibly important that this is recognised more widely in educational circles.”*

A pupil survey that gathered over 700 responses provided a qualitative demonstration of the library’s impact. Staff were also surveyed. Staff comments about the library revealed benefits from a teaching and learning perspective, and many also noted the homework, research and study advantages. However, it was thought-provoking to note the number of times that relaxation, enjoyment and the feeling of being welcome and helped came up in the comments.

“The library has made me more welcome into the school. It has made me a more knowledgeable person. Thank you for being with us.” - Y7

“I can transport myself to another universe by reading the large variety of books. This is so useful sometimes because it allows me to forget all my troubles and any stress that I may have.” - Y7

“I had a rough day until lunchtime. I thought of going to the library to relax. It worked! And I forgot why I had a rough day after I came out.” - Y7

“Anytime I’m bored or feeling sad and lonely the library is always there. It has many different books which allow me to travel to different worlds and allows me to experience action that I can’t in real life.” - Y8

“It provides me with a place to go when I’m not feeling too happy, a place to go when I’m bored, a place that feels like home! I don’t know what I would have done without the library.” - Y9

“Many people with different personalities and interests can all come together to one quiet and special place, where walls of creativity surround them. Whether it’s to delve into a world of fiction or to simply enjoy the peace and quiet, there’s always something to do in the library.” - Y9

“Having the library in my school has encouraged my friends and I to read more books. As well as this, it has also given me the ability to read a variety as the librarians keep on recommending good books that I should read.” - Y9

“When I first came here as a young boy, I had never before had the pleasure of being in a library - and thus when I found myself in the School’s Library, I was astonished by the sight which struck me - books, gateways into alternate realities, glimpses of the future, examinations of the past, fact, fiction, all of it a sea of wisdom pouring into my eyes [...] How does one thank something for being so meaningful? I could write a million pages [...] and still not be able to express my gratefulness.” - Y11

“It is a place like no other. It is a homely haven for those like me who enjoy reading and even for those who don’t. Its quiet atmosphere and extensive range of resources cater to the needs of every individual student. [...] Fundamentally, the library is also a significant influence towards encouraging younger students to integrate themselves into the school as well as helping them discover their own identity and preferences.” - Y11

"Since Year 8 I've held the position of Pupil Librarian, something which has changed me as a person for the better. I've become far more responsible and diligent, as well as gaining unique opportunities which have included attending competitions like the Kids Lit Quiz, helping the younger years and even co-running a club! I've also made many friendships due to the Library, particularly amongst my fellow librarians. I cannot overstate how profound an impact the Library has had." - **Y10 pupil librarian**

"It's a quiet and calm place to study away from distraction. It provides a great variety of resources and is amazing at introducing you to new materials, e.g. scientific journals, magazines, etc. that you wouldn't have otherwise thought to use." - **Y12**

"The online resources allow for such breadth and depth of study for essays and further reading. The library has instilled and developed a desire in me to be well-read, and is now helping me achieve that goal." - **Y12**

*"Having support from the Library has been invaluable in equipping A Level students with the skills they require to be able to confidently complete their A Level Non Exam Assessment. Ciara was able to teach boys how to use research databases such as JStor and Google Scholar so they could find suitable literature to support them in their investigation, in particular the writing of their literature review. Also, having a section in the library of books on the topic of research methodologies got the students into the habit of finding their own literature to support their investigation and become less reliant on directed reading from their teacher (a skill which will be very valuable as they head to university)." - **Head of Geography***

"It had become obvious that although students have an ever increasing array of digital information resources at their fingertips, they lacked the skills needed to access and assimilate this information. Working with the pastoral team Ciara put together a series of lessons which would develop students information literacy skills – but through a creative project called 'Mission to Mars' [Y7 project]. Main objectives were 1) to improve students fact finding skills – they often simply resorted to Google as their only way of searching; 2) make them aware of what plagiarism is and how to avoid it; 3) teach them the basics of referencing. Working in teams students researched how they could successfully colonise Mars and presented their findings to the rest of the pupils. Students really enjoyed the creative side of the project; learning skills in this way makes them more applicable and interesting." – **Head of Lower School Science and Pupil Development**

"Ink is a creative learning space for the students to explore their imaginative talents. Not only are the workshops relaxed and entertaining, they engage the students in extracurricular writing skills and motivate them to read more." – **English teacher**