



# **Evaluation of Booked Up**

## **Final Report**

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### **Collaboration Sheffield**

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## Introduction

Booktrust is an independent charity, established in 1992, with the aim of building a literate and creative society by encouraging engagement with books. The charity runs a number of national book-gifting programmes, one of which is *Booked Up*. *Booked Up*, launched in 2007, provides a free book for Year 7 students soon after their transition from primary to secondary school, at a crucial time when formative attitudes towards reading develop. In 2011/2012 *Booked Up* reached 4,700 secondary schools.

Students choose from a list of 17 titles selected by an independent panel of experts on children's literature. The *Booked Up* programme includes 5 titles for students with additional educational needs. A designated coordinator (usually the school librarian) uses support materials provided by Booktrust to help students make their choices from the list, then collates and places the order for each school. The books are then delivered to the school for distribution to the students. Schools are encouraged to use *Booked Up* as:

- an opportunity to focus on reading for pleasure;
- an opportunity to develop students' abilities to choose books; and
- a way of promoting the school library and encouraging book discussion.

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Between December 2011 and March 2012 the Collaboration Sheffield initiative<sup>1</sup> was commissioned to undertake an evaluation of the *Booked Up* programme on behalf of Booktrust. The aims of the evaluation were to:

1. Examine how *Booked Up* engaged with Year 7 children and how this could be improved to help maximise the impact of the programme;
2. Consider how this varied for less confident readers, those who struggle, children who can read but are reluctant to engage with books and children who are confident readers<sup>2</sup>; and
3. Explore what improvements could be made to *Booked Up* and/or the communication about the programme to increase engagement with the process and resources by both children and school staff.

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<sup>1</sup> A collaboration between the Centre for Education and Inclusion Research (CEIR) at Sheffield Hallam University, and the School of Education (SoE) at the University of Sheffield

<sup>2</sup> These categories were developed and modified as the research progressed. This is explained in more detail on pages 8 - 9

## Background

There is an urgent need to address the issue of raising children's confidence, motivation and engagement with reading. This need has been identified in a variety of research, including the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). The PIRLS study produced comparable data on the reading achievement of 10-year-old children within 35 countries (NFER, 2003). Solity and Vousden (2009:474) emphasise that the 2003 report showed that 'although children from England came third out of 35 countries on measures of reading accuracy, they scored poorly in terms of attitude towards reading (and) read less often for fun than pupils in comparable countries'. Following this, the 2006 PIRLS (Twist et al., 2007) indicated that England had now dropped to 15th place in terms of reading accuracy, with attitudes towards reading continuing to decline.

Given that current policy efforts to 'raise' literacy standards appear to have reached a plateau, there is a continuing need to develop strategies to tackle attitudes towards reading which is why the Booktrust programmes, *Booked Up* and *Beyond Booked Up*, are significant. Furthermore, book-gifting is especially important given that it is now recognised that book ownership is not only associated with educational attainment, but is also related to more specific factors such as reading enjoyment, confidence in reading, and positive attitudes towards reading (Clark and Poulton, 2011).

This evaluation of *Booked Up* has two main aims. Firstly, by investigating stakeholders' perspectives on the effectiveness of *Booked Up* we hoped to understand how schools have made use of the programme, and to indicate where improvements can be made. Secondly, we wanted to understand the ways in which the programme has helped to engage different 'categories' of readers. While it is important to recognise that no two students will fall into the same 'category', research has identified that certain factors do indeed have an impact on students' interactions with reading.

For example, issues of gender have remained central to debates on achievement and attitude towards reading (DCSF 2009; 2010), suggesting that the current literacy curriculum may be less engaging for boys than girls (Millard, 1997; Barrs and Cork, 2001). Given that a considerable amount of literature has been published over the last couple of decades to suggest that boys are less engaged with reading in comparison with girls (Millard, 1997; Barrs, 2001), and do not achieve as highly as girls in reading assessment (NFER, 2003), a great deal of attention has been given to the need to raise boys' achievement in reading.

However, many have argued that to reduce the debate to simplistic notions of 'successful girls' and 'unsuccessful boys' is misleading and unhelpful (Smith, 2003; Weaver-Hightower, 2003). Consequently, this literature suggests that, to understand factors associated with gender and achievement in literacy, there is a need to take into account the 'real issues' of disadvantage (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000) which include issues of social class and racial inequality.

With this in mind, it has remained clear for some time that social class and ethnicity also have an impact on students' success within the educational system, and

therefore influence attitudes towards reading. Research has suggested that students from middle class backgrounds are more likely to be successful in literacy (van Steensel, 2006). They often present skills and abilities that are valued in the schooling system - in contrast to those of students from working-class homes who may not (Tudge et al, 2003).

It has also been documented that students from certain cultural backgrounds may experience disadvantage in the education system, as their home learning activities may not align closely with the aims of the school (Brooker, 2002). Such research not only underlines the importance of the home literacy practices, but demonstrates that factors such as social class and ethnicity may have an impact on students' attitudes and motivations for reading. Finally, further research indicates that a disparity between school and community literacy practices may also cause disruption for some children (Heath, 1983; Gregory, 1994; Pahl, 2002; Levy, 2010;), particularly given the recent influence of changing technologies upon children's out-of-school literacy and reading practices (Anning, 2003; Marsh, 2004; Carrington, 2005; Merchant, 2010).

This short review of the literature has highlighted that factors associated with students' confidence and motivation for reading are complex and multi-faceted. As a consequence, the evaluation that is reported here was particularly concerned with understanding how some of these factors were relevant to the ways in which *Booked Up* engaged and motivated different types of readers.

## Methodology

In order to address the research aims, case study visits were undertaken with a sample of six secondary schools where interviews were carried out with 13 members of staff and 46 Year 7 students involved with the *Booked Up* programme. The research was qualitative in nature and used a variety of innovative methods with the students. This meant that although only a small number of schools were involved in the study the limitations of the sample size were addressed to some extent by the in depth nature of the interviews.

### School sampling

The sample was drawn from the full list of 4,710<sup>3</sup> secondary schools participating in the *Booked Up* programme. For comparison purposes it was decided to base the sample on mainstream schools, and not to include single sex secondaries. Schools from the North West, Yorkshire and Humber and London were targeted, and a stratification matrix was then applied to the selection.

In order to identify a range of schools with differing characteristics, the sampling matrix was stratified by a number of factors:

- whether schools were located in an urban or rural setting;
- the socio-economic background of the students on roll<sup>4</sup>;
- local levels of deprivation;
- ethnic composition of the school; and
- number of students on roll.

Limited timescales meant that concerns arose around school willingness to participate with the evaluation. Therefore Booktrust made initial contact with the sample of schools, on our behalf, to inform them about the research. Booktrust made a free selection of the *Booked Up* books available to case study schools as an incentive for participation. This also meant that the books could be used as a focus for activities during the fieldwork visits. These books were provided after *Booked Up* had been run in the school, so they did not affect the way in which the programme was used in evaluation schools.

The initial email from Booktrust was followed up a few days later with an email from the research team and a phone call to see whether they would be willing to take part in the evaluation. Schools were assured that, although Booktrust would be aware that they were taking part in the research, they would not be identifiable in the final report. Visits were arranged to take place over the ensuing weeks.

As anticipated, some difficulties arose in recruiting schools, and this meant that one of the case study visits took place in the East of England rather than London. The

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<sup>3</sup> This can be broken down into 2,102 mainstream schools, 1,039 other state schools (e.g. academies/faith schools; 821 fee paying schools; 683 special schools; 34 PRUs; 19 LAC education services; 5 home education coordinators; 3 education support centres; 3 hospital schools and 1 children's hospice.

<sup>4</sup> The proportion of students eligible for Free School Meals was used as a proxy for this.

recruitment difficulties may have also meant that those schools participating in the research were more likely to have librarians who were enthusiastic about Booked Up, and this may in turn have created some bias. The final sample contained two schools in the North West, two in Yorkshire and Humber, one in London and one in the East of England. The six case study schools had a range of background characteristics, further details can be found in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Case study school characteristics and codes**

Code	Region	Characteristics
School 1	Yorkshire and Humber	Large school in a deprived locality. Students are mainly of White British heritage. FSM twice national average and above average SEN and/or disabilities, but statements below average. Attainment is low but rising. Ofsted grading = satisfactory.
School 2	Yorkshire and Humber	Large school with high White British intake. Below average FSM eligibility, and low levels of SEN and/or disabilities. Average attainment. Ofsted grading = good.
School 3	East of England	Medium sized school, with higher than average proportion of pupils from ethnic minorities. FSM close to national average. Significant number of mid-year starters who cannot speak English fluently. SEN and/or disabilities are a little higher than national average. Attainment is well above national average. Ofsted grading = good.
School 4	London	Larger school with well above average proportions of students from minority ethnic groups and EAL being well above national average. Wide range of ethnic backgrounds, with majority being White British, Bangladeshi and Black African. FSM eligibility is above average and school is located in a deprived area. Proportions of students with SEN and/or disabilities and of those with statements are well above national average. Attainment is rising. Ofsted grading = good.
School 5	North West	Larger than average school, located in semi-rural area. Low deprivation. High levels of White British students and low EAL. FSM much lower than average as is the proportion of students with SEN and/or disabilities. Outstanding attainment. Ofsted grading = good.
School 6	North West	A medium sized secondary school located in an affluent, semi-rural/village location, mostly White British students. The proportion of students with SEN is well below national average as is FSM eligibility. Standards at KS3 & 4 are consistently and significantly above national average. Attainment on entry is above average. Ofsted grading = outstanding.

Each case study visit involved interviews with eight Year 7 students (40 minutes in length), and an hour-long focus group with staff involved with the *Booked Up* programme. Researchers spent up to two days in each of the six case study schools.

Prior to the fieldwork visits schools were asked to select sixteen Year 7 students of which eight would then take part in the research. This allowed for a degree of attrition, given that some of the students may have declined the invitation to participate in the study or might have been absent from school on the day. Students were not aware that they had been identified before the event, and were selected on

the day of the visit. School staff identified potential students on the basis of their reading engagement and ability, and were asked to choose equal number of boys and girls, where possible reflecting the ethnic diversity of the school. When forming the gender subgroups, teachers were also asked to select one boy and one girl who they felt fitted into each of the four reading categories outlined in the following section.

## Categorisation of the students

One of the aims of the evaluation study was to explore the extent to which different categories of readers can be further engaged in reading and how *Booked Up* can best address this in the future. Through the identification of different 'categories' of readers, the project explored barriers to reading with a view to understanding how *Booked Up* can help schools and teachers to engage different types of readers.

It was recognised from the outset that any attempt to place students into categories would be limited due to the complexity of issues associated with motivation and confidence in reading (see p.3) However, given the necessity to include different types of readers within the student sample, research tools were devised to allow school staff to identify students that fell into four main categories. These categories, adapted from the work of Moss (2000), were:

- Can Read and Does (CRDR);
- Can Read and Does Not (CRDN);
- Struggles to Read and Does (SRDR); and
- Struggles to Read and Does Not (SRDN).

Staff were given guidance on how to apply these categories during their sample selection (See Figure 1). They were told that the categories were deliberately broad in nature and were not intended to be taken too literally. As a consequence, staff from all six schools were able to select a broad range of readers which included students who had various levels of confidence in reading, different attitudes towards reading and different motivations for reading.

**Figure 1: Identifying categories of readers**

- **Can read and does read (CRDR):** This student will probably be a confident reader who sees herself/ himself as being 'good at reading'. S/he will probably read regularly for pleasure, is experienced in reading a variety of texts and is enthusiastic about reading.
- **Can read and doesn't read (CRDN):** This student will possibly be described as a 'reluctant reader'. S/he will be 'able' to read, but may lack confidence in ability and/or lack enthusiasm for reading. It is likely that this student will rarely read for pleasure.
- **Struggles to read but does read (SRDR):** This student will probably be regarded as having a 'low ability' in reading, but does read (if not book texts, this student may read digital texts, screen texts etc). It is expected that this student will have a more positive attitude towards reading than students in the 'struggles to read and doesn't read' category.
- **Struggles to read and doesn't read (SRDN):** This student will probably be regarded as having a 'low ability' in reading and low enthusiasm for reading. It is likely that this student will lack confidence in his/her abilities as a reader and rarely chooses to read for pleasure.

During the fieldwork visits it was discovered that the categorisation had worked more effectively in some schools than others. For instance, in two of the schools the *librarians* had to categorise the students who were taking part in the research. This was not ideal since the librarians often had less contact with the students and had to use their reading levels from available school records rather than their own personal knowledge. In another school there was a minor issue where two girls were accidentally selected for the 'can read and does read' group and two boys for the 'struggles to read and does not read' group, where there should have been an equal number of girls and a boys in each category.

Issues of student categorisation were mostly resolved by the care that was taken in planning the student interviews. The interview schedule was designed to ensure that factors such as frequency and content of reading were explored in depth, together with student attitude, confidence, perception of ability and aspiration. This meant that it was possible to gain a deeper and richer understanding of each student and the individual factors that influenced his or her engagement with reading. We were then able to compare this data with the schools' categorisation of the students. In summary, the use of the categorisation was highly effective in ensuring that the sample contained a wide variety of readers, including those who were confident readers and those who were not, as well as students who had differing attitudes towards reading. Furthermore, the interviews themselves provided more detailed information about the ways in which these students differed in their attitudes, abilities and perceptions of reading.

## Interviews with Year 7 students

### The sample

Between seven and eight Year 7 students were interviewed on a one-to-one basis in each of the six case study schools. Each interview took between 20 and 50 minutes. The aim was to try and explore their perceptions, attitudes and beliefs about reading as well as to understand the impact of the *Booked Up* programme on their engagement and motivation for reading.

Table 2 outlines a breakdown of the number of Year 7 students in each of the different reading categories that participated in the research.

**Table 2: Breakdown of types of reader**

Type of reader	Girls	Boys	Total
Can read and does read	9 (41%)	4 (16%)	<b>13</b>
Can read and doesn't read	6 (27%)	5 (21%)	<b>11</b>
Struggles to read but does read	4 (18%)	7 (29%)	<b>11</b>
Struggles to read but doesn't read	3 (14%)	8 (33%)	<b>11</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>46</b>

The sample contained 46 students overall. The majority of these were of White British heritage (n=35) with the remainder from a variety of different ethnic groups (n=11). Some of this smaller group were recent migrants from places such as Somalia and Kosovo and therefore had begun to speak English later in life. Others were second or third generation and these included families where English was used across age groups (e.g. African-Caribbean families). The intention was to have equal numbers of boys and girls in each category, but due to some schools mistakenly selecting two students of the same gender to make up certain categories, the sample was a little unequal with boys constituting 52% and girls 48%.

### The activities

A range of age-appropriate activities were used to explore the ways in which the programme had helped to engage different types of reader.

In the first activity the students were given a series of laminated cards with a range of feeling statements<sup>5</sup> printed on them. They were subsequently asked how they related to a number of different school-related activities:

- How does maths make you feel?
- How does writing make you feel?
- How does reading make you feel?
- How does working on the computer make you feel?

The students were then asked to select all of the cards that applied to them in response to each of these questions.

For the second activity a range of laminated photographs of students were provided as an elicitation device. These photographs depicted students from a range of ethnicities, of both genders, and of the same age group as the participants. The intention was that each student interviewee would be able to relate to one of the students depicted.

Participants were then told that one of the students in the photograph could read but chose not to, and they were asked whether they knew of any reasons why this may be the case. They were then shown another photo of a student with the same characteristics as the first, and were asked by the researcher whether they could think of any reasons why this student, who struggles to read, might want to be able to read better. This was followed by a number of follow-up questions around how the interviewee thought the student felt, what might put them off reading, and what could be done to help them. As well as providing data around the students' views of different types of reader, this activity also elicited information about the students' feelings about themselves as readers.

Finally, a semi-structured interview was conducted, which first investigated the student's attitude towards reading, and their current reading behaviour at home and school. The researcher then asked specific questions about the *Booked Up* programme such as:

- how the initiative was introduced to them and how they felt;

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<sup>5</sup> Such as challenged, bored, calm, interested, and successful

- what they thought about the books on offer;
- their particular choice of book;
- their experience of reading the book; and
- any other experiences related to *Booked Up* and their experience of the initiative.

The *Booked Up* books were used as props during the interviews so that the student would be able to recognise the various texts and subsequently be able to discuss the reasons why particular books were either selected or rejected.

As part of this final section of the interview, the students were shown a scale from 1-5 and were asked to score themselves on a number of questions around reading ability and interest.

### The pilot

The student interview schedule was piloted with two Year 7 students in order to see whether they were comfortable with the length, type and difficulty of the questions. The piloting revealed that the schedule needed to be reduced to include fewer questions. Students were happy using the photographs and laminated cards - remarking that it was helpful to have something to look at, and that it had made them feel more confident for the rest of the interview.

### Staff Focus Groups

Focus groups with staff were organised in each of the participating case study schools. The groups included any member of staff who had been involved with *Booked Up* and were in a position to comment on the impact of the project, and upon children's attitudes and engagement with reading and/or the delivery of the programme. The breakdown of roles for the thirteen staff who took part in the evaluation can be found in Table 3 below. The table outlines the main role that staff were responsible for, although it should be noted that a few interviewees had more than one role, for instance in School 1 one of the interviewees was a Year 7 tutor, a study supervisor and occasionally ran the library, but is noted down as a Year 7 tutor.

**Table 3: Breakdown of staff interviewed**

Staff role	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4	School 5	School 6	Number
Librarian/Library Manager	1	1	2	1	1	1	7
English teacher	0	1	0	0	2	0	3
Year 7 tutor	1	0	0	1	0	0	2
Senior Teaching Assistant	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>13</b>

The focus groups took around an hour, took place with library and teaching staff, and covered the following themes:

- students' general reading habits;
- how reading in general feeds into the curriculum;
- how *Booked Up* operates in the school;
- the communication of the *Booked Up* programme;
- the perceived impact - including the effect on different types of reader; and
- recommendations for modifications to the programme.

The focus groups were limited by the number of interviewees that were available at the same time in each school. Furthermore, fewer members of staff than had been envisaged were actually involved with the *Booked Up* programme in each school. Therefore, the intended 'focus groups' consisted of paired interviews rather than larger groups of staff in all but two case studies. The research team was more likely to talk to library staff and a handful of English teachers and Year 7 tutors, than staff such as head teachers - who were unlikely to be involved in the administration of the programme.

## Analysis

The interviews with students and staff were recorded and were then partially transcribed as soon after the fieldwork as possible. On the basis of this reduced data, themes were created, using the research questions as a guide. Brief profiles were created for each student using their gender, ethnicity and engagement and enjoyment of reading. This enabled analysis to be carried out specifically on the responses of students who were more or less able readers and those who enjoyed or had more of an unwillingness to read as well as other dimensions such as gender and ethnicity.

Student data cited in this report is accompanied by a categorisation code (e.g. CRDR or SRDN see Fig. 1 p.8) together with other information such as gender, which will allow the reader to know how the student was initially categorised by staff. While this will help the reader to engage more fully with the report, it is important to bear in mind that these codes were never intended to provide an accurate description of each individual reader. For example, students who were identified as 'Struggles to Read and Does Not Read', often revealed that they did engage with certain texts when interviewed. In summary, these categories did ensure that the initial sample included a variety of different types of readers, however, in-depth data gathered during the interviews has allowed the research team to understand how different factors such as motivation and confidence influence students' engagement with reading.

## Findings

### General views on the *Booked Up* programme

All schools, regardless of their locality, social profile, and other background characteristics, felt that the *Booked Up* programme was an excellent, high quality, and popular scheme that promoted an interest in reading in the student population. Teachers and librarians working with the scheme were all very positive, typically saying things like:

*"It does work really well. If it didn't I would tell you, because reading books and literacy is one of my passions" (Year 7 teacher, School 1)*

*"It's one of our most popular things" (Library Assistant, School 3)*

*"I think if they weren't particularly good books I don't think we'd invest the time in it. We've always been happy with what they've got. The kids have enjoyed them" (English Teacher, School 5).*

One librarian compared the *Booked Up* programme to World Book Day, suggesting that he found the latter 'slightly chore-like' in comparison to the 'more interesting' *Booked Up* initiative. By emphasising book choice and providing structured guidance, the book-gifting scheme was seen as being particularly worthwhile. As one librarian observed:

*"Because if you give a kid something that says 'here's a book, I'll order it for you for free', that's a good thing, that's fine, that's wonderful. But if you give a kid a piece of paper saying 'that's a pound off a book', that you've got to go to [the shops] and buy yourself, you're passing on the hard work from yourself onto that child and the child might not always be bothered with it" (Library Manager, School 2)*

This finding was echoed in another school (School 5) where it was felt that the *Booked Up* books were more suitable for their Year 7s than those provided through other reading initiatives such as the Carnegie Award. Although we make some observations on the suitability and range of texts later in this report, our data overwhelmingly shows strong support for the selection and quality of the books on offer in the *Booked Up* scheme.

There were concerns from staff that we interviewed that this high quality programme might be a target for spending cuts. As one English Teacher observed:

*"I think it's a great scheme. I was concerned a year ago and I thought there was a possibility of them not being able to afford to continue it. I enjoy doing it every year" (Library Manager/English teacher, School 5)*

This was a sentiment that was widely shared across the schools in our study:

*"I'm really happy with it. I was really worried last year that it might go, that it might be for the chop with everyone trying to save money and things. I think it's a good thing and the students really appreciate it" (Librarian, School 6)*

## Summary

- *Booked Up* was regarded as a high quality and popular programme for promoting reading.
- School staff rated the programme more highly than other similar reading initiatives, and described how it was appreciated by students.
- Concerns were noted around *Booked Up*'s funding being decreased.

## The communication and administration of the *Booked Up* programme

Overwhelmingly, communications from Booktrust and general information provided on the *Booked Up* programme were considered to be clear and effective, with staff stating that they had felt a strong sense of engagement with the process and programme:

*"The information is very clear and straightforward" (Librarian, School 1)*

*"I found the ordering online incredibly easy, it was really well laid out – it wasn't a chore – half an hour it was done...All in all I thought it was very well organised" (Library Manager, School 2)*

*"Personally I just think it's great. It's a lovely, lovely opportunity for us and the children. The admin was very smooth. Website, email communication, everything very smooth, very easy. Everything was delivered when it should have been delivered" (Library Manager, School 3)*

*"I think they've been great. They've been very helpful...I think their website's really well designed and everything was really clear and I knew what I had to do" (Library Manager/English Teacher, School 5).*

*Booked Up* coordinators were happy with communications, and when asked about recommendations for improving the process, the vast majority stated that there was nothing that could be done better. One Library Manager stated that he was not surprised that most secondary schools in the country were already taking part in the programme. He observed that:

*"If the vast majority of schools are already doing it then they're clearly getting it right" (Library Manager, School 2)*

The Library Assistant from School 3 recommended that communications from Booktrust should be spread even further afield:

*"It deserves all the publicity it can get really [in relation to the general public]. It's bubbling below the surface – I think it needs to sell itself perhaps more than it does, because it is a really worthwhile scheme" (Library Assistant, School 3)*

A number of the case study schools indicated that although parents had not been involved with *Booked Up* this was something that they might consider in the future. For example one Year 7 teacher spoke about how it might be useful to invite parents into the school to help their child to choose a book. Similarly a librarian from School 4 talked about how parents may be encouraged to persuade their children to read at home if they were more aware of the programme. In the light of our findings on the role of parents in encouraging reading in this age group (see Pupil and Staff Responses section p.30) this would be an attractive and influential extension of the programme.

Schools generally felt that they had effectively communicated information about *Booked Up* to other members of staff, and this was commonly a function taken on by school library staff. In each of the six school contexts we studied, the programme was administered through the library. There was some variation in the involvement of other members of staff in the school.

In some schools there were operational connections with the form tutors (School 2), in others with the English department (Schools 1 and 5), and some formed links with both (School 4). Others administered the programme solely through the library (Schools 3 and 6). One school spoke about how creating a relationship between the library and the English department helped students to see a connection between the two. They felt that this encouraged the students to make ongoing use of the library. The schools in the study sample all tended to perceive their libraries as having an important role to play. We would predict that it would be difficult to effectively administer the programme without school support for library services.

All schools in our study launched the programme within the library itself<sup>6</sup>, some used it as a way of introducing the students to the library (School 3), others as part of a regular library lesson (School 4), one as part of an Accelerated Reading session already taking place in the library (School 1), and others as a standalone session (Schools 2, 5 & 6).

The timing of the programme was considered to be ideal by all schools but one. It was viewed as a very good time to get the students thinking about reading for pleasure when they were new to secondary school, and the delivery of the books just before the Christmas break worked well – possibly due to the students' association with presents at that time of year:

*"It gives that focus and generates that enthusiasm" (Librarian, School 6)*

*"I think the quicker we can get them into the habit of reading and having a look at books because I know they come from primary and they haven't got a library that is as large as ours, so I don't think they are used to going into somewhere and choosing stuff, so I think as soon as we get them reading and enjoying a book – I think the quicker the better" (NQT English teacher, School 5)*

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<sup>6</sup> School 5 launched the programme in the library, followed by subsequent sessions in the English classroom

*"It's the best time, because you've got the Year 7s new in the school, who then get a free gift that they perceive to be from the school. You get them thinking about reading for pleasure, and you get them remembering what it was like when they were at primary school....for a lot of schools it can be the least busy time, and just before Christmas is great as well because you get the association with presents and everything" (Librarian, School 2)*

The only school that had concerns about the timing of the programme felt that it may be more effectively administered during January or February, when there were no other events occurring at their particular school. However, this librarian did go on to say that for the students themselves the timing was ideal.

Variability existed in terms of how the *Booked Up* programme was introduced to the students, particularly in relation to the amount of information they received about the selection of books. It is certainly possible that some students had insufficient information or support to make informed choices about the books. Here is a typical comment from a Year 7 teacher who felt that the students required more information to make their decisions, it was apparent from the interview that she was unaware of the *Booked Up* website containing short films about each of the books:

*"I don't know how you can do it but just having a set of books and a poster and expecting the kids to choose one just from that...I think a lot of our kids just looked at the cover and thought 'oh that looks colourful'" (Year 7 Teacher, School 1)*

In one school the launch and selection of books had occurred during the last 10 minutes of a library session, whereas in another it had taken place during English and was spread over a period of several lessons. In this instance, the teacher had 'dipped into' each of the books in turn before the students made their final choice. However, the majority of case study schools launched the *Booked Up* programme over the course of a single lesson in the library.

All of the case study schools had used the sample set of books to help the students make their choices and some staff noted how important this had been. As this librarian remarks:

*"We do have just one set of books, so we end up having to pass those round from class to class but we think it's nice for the kids to actually see the books physically rather than just see the authors talk about them" (Library Manager/English teacher, School 5)*

Another librarian talked about how the presence of the books themselves had enabled the students to have a wider appreciation of the texts on offer. They were able to move beyond simply judging the book by its cover, they could read extracts or judge the level of difficulty of each one. One school used the books as part of a game in which staff read out the back covers to the class and asked students to guess its genre before making their choices. This school had also left time between the launch lesson and the choice making, and encouraged the students to visit the library to have a look at the books if they wanted further help in making their decision.

Not all students had used the books to help make their choices however, and it was unclear why this had been the case for some students and not other students in the same schools:

*"We couldn't read blurb because there was just the front cover...it looked interesting" (CRDN, Male, White British, School 1)*

Variation existed in the use of the *Booked Up* website which contained a number of short films with each of the authors discussing their specific book. A few of the schools had integrated the films into *the Booked Up* lesson, and had then subsequently discussed the options with the students. However, some did not use the films at all, with one stating that they had limited access to appropriate technology. One of the librarians who had shown the films had felt that although they had been helpful, this needed to be complemented with the use of the books themselves – for example, asking the students to read a few paragraphs.

In the school where the librarian had not been able to access the website, laminated leaflets had been produced. Each laminate included a picture of each book with a short description about the book which included the number of pages.

A number of schools made comments about the DVD that Booktrust had sent the previous year to help launch the programme. It was generally felt that it was too long and there were suggestions that the students had become bored whilst watching it:

*"[The DVD was too long] each author may only get 2 minutes but it all adds up, listening to each author telling you why you should choose their book" (Librarian, School 2)*

This may indicate that for most of those who used it, the website was more effective than the DVD had been last year, with one of the benefits being that it enabled the students themselves to view it any time they wanted.

To assist teachers and librarians with administering the programme, schools are provided with a *Booked Up* bookmark for each student. This has a space to record the name and class/form of the student and tick boxes alongside images of each of the books on offer so the student can indicate their chosen book. The bookmarks were thought to be a good addition to this year's programme, but for some it was felt that they were not enough and that a leaflet would help to provide the students with the additional information they needed to make an informed choice:

*"The bookmark idea is a really good one; it makes it so much easier to administer it" (Librarian, School 6)*

*"[The bookmark] isn't enough...just looking at the picture, it isn't enough" (Librarian, School 4)*

One of the schools had decided to use the bookmarks in a slightly different way than intended, but found this added to the excitement around the delivery of the books and potentially encouraged student recognition of the selection. In this school they had not used them as a way of noting down each student's choice, they had

produced their own paper slips for this, and instead had included the bookmarks as part of a larger gift when the students received their free books:

*"We thought it were nice to keep the bookmarks as another special thing, we also had some reading bags that we had been given from somewhere out in the community, so there were enough of those to give them all one as well so they got it like a little package really" (Year 7 teacher, School 1)*

Staff from all of the case study schools maintained that their students had been both excited by and enthusiastic about *Booked Up* when they had initially heard about it:

*"Children were very excited about it and really enjoyed the 'lesson' where the video was played and the books were introduced.... [the] children were 'very very very enthusiastic....they loved it" (Year 7 teacher, School 4)*

*"During that period when we are waiting for them to arrive, you get pupils continually pester you 'when's me book coming?' They do value it... I've never come across a student who has been negative about it [although concedes not all read the book]" (Library Manager/English teacher, School 5)*

*"I mean overwhelmingly they are excited by it. They ask the questions 'do I have to give it back?' and then you know some of them are so keen they want more than one book and they agonise over their choices" (Librarian, School 6)*

This echoed the views of most of the students, who tended to react to *Booked Up* with enthusiasm when it was introduced to them.

*"And straightaway, I was in Year 7 and I was going to get something, so I was like 'whoah, whoah', and my friends were also interested...I was absolutely delighted!" (SRDR, Male, White British, School 1)*

*"It was a free book so I thought it was awesome...It took me by surprise I didn't realise we were going to get a free book" (SRDN, Male, White British, School 6)*

Those who were not so keen on the programme were students who had been categorised as reluctant readers<sup>7</sup>:

*"I weren't bothered" (CRDN, Female, White British, School 1)*

Every school had made good use of the extra set of books, and had found that it was incredibly helpful to have the books present when the students were making their choice. The extra books were also deemed to be important in relation to sustained engagement. Once the launch was over they would be placed in the school library, and it was noted that some students who might not normally borrow books could be more likely to choose one that they recognised from the original *Booked Up* launch (see Pupil and Staff Responses section p.30). One librarian mentioned how she tended to construct a display of the books once *Booked Up* was up and running, feeling that this tended to encourage her students to read other books from the selection due to the fact that they now recognised the titles:

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<sup>7</sup> Please note that this was only the case for some reluctant readers and not all of them

*"So they can spend a little bit more time at their leisure looking at the books and then take them out. Try and encourage them if perhaps they've read one book to read another one. Because it gives them a bit of a focus I think, because it's quite hard choosing a book when they're all on the shelf"*  
(Librarian, School 6)

Another school talked about how the extra copies of the books had been beneficial for the small number of students who were disappointed with their book choice as it had meant that they had been able to swap it for something they preferred.

Some schools simply gave out the books once they had been delivered and then left the students to their own devices. Others used the books within the allocated reading time students already took part in. Furthermore, a minority of the schools had incorporated other activities into their *Booked Up* programme; one had run a creative workshop over lunchtimes where the students could create a hand which named five aspects of the book on each finger, and had subsequently created a collage of the hands on the wall of the library. One student who was a reluctant reader from this school spoke about how he had enjoyed the activity:

*"I wrote that it were funny and interesting and not too difficult to read"* (CRDN, Male, White British, School 1)

Another school mentioned how they had tried to run a book swap and a reading group with the *Booked Up* books this year, but went on to say that it had not been as successful as it had been the previous year:

*"I did try to run a book swap and a reading group this year but it wasn't very successful this year, but last year we had a book group [with around six students] and we read about three or four of the titles so that worked quite well. I think it just depends sometimes on the students"* (Librarian, School 6)

From an organisational point of view, the data suggest that *Booked Up* works well when a number of school staff are involved (examples include close liaison between the school librarian and their assistants, English teachers and form tutors). In these situations connections between the curriculum, wider school and out-of-school initiatives and events was often made explicit, and was planned for. Although there was an acknowledgement of how the pressures of time and coverage in the English curriculum limits the time for extended reading, using the *Booked Up* book in the library or classroom was generally welcomed.

Several schools encouraged English teachers and form tutors to take students to the library or had more formal arrangements for library lessons in place. Teachers and librarians were able to use *Booked Up* as part of this and sometimes, because of the timing of *Booked Up* were able to incorporate it into library induction. Visits to the school library varied from ad hoc arrangements, to fortnightly visits or structured weekly library lessons. Situations in which students regularly visited the library were more conducive to a more considered approach to choosing the *Booked Up* book.

Some schools were also able to find synergies between *Booked Up* and other initiatives in the school. A number of schools felt that *Booked Up* complimented their

use of the *Accelerated Reader*<sup>8</sup> scheme. Other schools made links with book quizzes, reading races as well as with local and national book awards. *Booked Up* seemed more likely to make an impact in schools in which it was integrated into a wider vision of promoting reading.

### Summary

- Communications from Booktrust and information about the programme were clear and effective and school staff were engaged with the programme.
- Parental awareness and involvement with the programme was being considered by some of the case study schools.
- The programme was being administered through the school libraries in all cases, although there was variation in terms of the links made between form tutors and the English department.
- Libraries had an important status in these schools. In those schools where this may not be the case, consideration may need to be given to who administers the programme.
- All schools had launched *Booked Up* from their library, some integrating it into the school timetable, others running it as a stand alone lesson.
- The timing of the programme (in the Autumn term) was ideal for nearly all.
- Variability existed around the amount of information provided to students about the programme and books as well as the amount of time allocated for its launch.
- The importance of enabling the students to handle and use the books to make their choice was noted.
- The website and bookmarks used this year were felt to be useful additions by most schools; however other methods, such as leaflets, were used in some schools where access to appropriate technology was limited.
- The majority of students were excited and enthusiastic about the *Booked Up* programme. Those who were not so keen were those who had been categorised as reluctant readers.
- The extra set of books helped encourage sustained engagement with reading as students would recognise them in the library and be more inclined to borrow them.
- A few case study schools linked activities to the *Booked Up* programme.

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<sup>8</sup> The Accelerated Reader programme is based on commercial software that reinforces and monitors daily reading practice.

## The Booked Up books

The project data suggest that students and staff were generally very positive about the *Booked Up* book selection. Although a number of recommendations were made with regard to future selections, many of these were suggestions for types of books that should be *retained* rather than changed. On the whole, staff and students reported that the *Booked Up* books addressed the needs of both weaker and stronger readers, covered a range of genres and interests, and included books that appealed to girls and boys. However, the data also suggest that some students may not be as well served by the selection as others. This section examines a range of factors including gender, ability and attitude towards reading, all of which have implications for the choice of books that Booktrust may want to include within future programmes.

### Gender

Whilst the majority of students reported that *Booked Up* provided them with sufficient choice, there was also general agreement that the choice was wider for boys than girls. This was identified by girls and boys, as well as members of staff:

*"There's one girl one, there could probably be one more girl one so that girls have a better choice... [there was a good choice for boys] there's that Mortlock and the football one" (CRDN, Male, White British, School 2)*

One boy commented on this, saying that it was important *'that girls have a better choice'*. Similarly a girl from the same school stated that she thought there was a good choice, *'but there could be a few more for girls'*.

A significant number of students spoke about the books in terms of being *'for girls'* and *'for boys'*, but it must also be noted that many of the books on offer appealed equally to boys and girls. For example *Mortlock*, *Dead Man's Cove* and *The Name of this Book is Secret* were all chosen by boys and girls. However, the project data suggest that weaker boy readers may have had more choice than weaker girl readers. *Big Nate*, for example, was selected by many of the boys including those who were confident readers and those who struggled, however very few girls chose this book. Moreover, several of the weaker boy readers also reported that they had selected *Boffin Boy*, while one other boy stated that he had chosen *The Dragon Machine*.

On the other hand, weaker female readers tended to select either *The Ghost Box*, *Frankie Foster: Fizzy Pop* or in some case *Artichoke Hearts*, but the interviews revealed that this finding was not really indicative of 'choice'. Firstly, and not surprisingly, *Frankie Foster: Fizzy Pop* was clearly regarded by the boys, girls and staff members as being a book 'for girls'. While the project data revealed that many of the girls not only chose this book, but also read and enjoyed it, several of the girls reported that they did not want to select this book *because* 'it was girly'. For example one girl stated that she immediately rejected *Frankie Foster: Fizzy Pop* because *'there was too much pink on it [the cover]'*. She went on to suggest that the book was not her *'type'* because she prefers *'to read books about mysteries'*. Another girl stated that she had selected *Frankie Foster: Fizzy Pop*, but later felt embarrassed

that she had done so, suggesting that she came to regret having chosen the obviously 'girly' book.

Although not as evidently 'girly', *Artichoke Hearts* was another book that tended to be selected by girls; however, this book was technically more difficult to read in comparison with *Frankie Foster: Fizzy Pop*. *Artichoke Hearts* was selected by a few of the weaker female readers - but they tended to report that they found this book too hard to read. Both students and staff reported that they thought *The Ghost Box* was a very welcome addition to the selection - partly because the printed text was accessible for most children. One librarian (School 5) went on to state that they had found that '*publishers like Barrington Stoke are really good for weaker readers*' because their books are 'challenging and exciting'. In other words, *The Ghost Box* appeared to be a particularly successful text within *Booked Up*, as the content was '*mature*' and '*grown-up*', whilst at the same time being 'thin' and 'short', which suggests that it was also manageable for weaker readers and appealing to students of both genders. However, as several members of staff from different schools pointed out, if weaker female readers were not drawn towards, or in fact felt unhappy about reading 'ghost' stories, then they tended to select *Frankie Foster: Fizzy Pop*. Moreover, one librarian and one teacher also pointed out that *Frankie Foster: Fizzy Pop* was still technically 'too hard' for some of their readers – a fact that was confirmed by the student interviews.

These data suggest that many of the books within the *Booked Up* programme were selected, read and enjoyed by both boys and girls. However, the general feeling among participants was that the selection as a whole offered more choice for the male reader, while the needs of weaker female readers were not accommodated. Although this follows the trend of trying to compensate for the low engagement and underachievement of male readers, notions about 'successful girls' and 'unsuccessful boys' over-simplifies the situation and may lead to a narrowing of opportunities for young female readers.

It appears that while the books in the *Booked Up* programme do meet the needs of a wide variety of readers, they also reflect this perceived need to prioritise the engagement of boys above girls. The selection of books appears to be engaging and appropriate for many girls, but weaker female readers do not appear to be well served by the *Booked Up* programme at present.

### Summary

- Many of the *Booked Up* books were engaging and appealing to both boys and girls. This should be maintained.
- In 2011, the needs of weaker female readers were not fully met by the *Booked Up* programme.
- It is recommended that Booktrust continue to include books from the Barrington Stoke series (or similar), but ensure that the content is appropriate for a range of students (see below).

## Student ability and attitude to reading

The evaluation explored the extent to which *Booked Up* was able to engage different 'types' of readers. We recognise that any attempt to categorise participants will always be open to debate, but steps were taken to try and identify how students perceived themselves in terms of ability, and how this influenced their attitude towards the programme and their engagement with the books.

There was much to suggest that the programme was regarded by almost all of the students interviewed as 'a good thing' and that reading, in general, was perceived in a positive light. Whilst it was no surprise that this was reported by students in the 'confident readers' category (CRDR), it is important to note that positive attitudes towards reading were also reported by the majority of students from the other categories. The only notable exception was data collected from one particular school (School 5), where a number of students reported that reading was not regarded as 'cool' in that particular school culture. Interestingly, this school is situated within an affluent semi-rural location, with very little deprivation and a record of 'outstanding' attainment. Moreover, these perceptions were reported by girls and boys who were regarded as being confident readers, as well as students who were seen to struggle with reading. Comments included:

*"There's a group of girls who are always talking about them [people who read] because they come in here [library] and they see them read at lunchtime and I can see that they think they are really strange" (CRDR, Female, White British, School 5)*

*"Some don't like it and some are ok about it... [Reading is] not something that is cool" (SRDR, Male, White British, School 5).*

*"In our class it's the top set so everybody reads, so nobody can take the mick out of you, but if you might be in a lower class and people don't read as much, then they might" (CRDN, Male, White British, School 5)*

This does seem to suggest that local school culture may be a significant influence on how reading is viewed by the students. Moreover, this also underlines the importance of running programmes such as *Booked Up* in all schools, including those who have been rated as 'outstanding' by Ofsted. Given that school culture clearly does have an impact on the ways in which some students develop attitudes and perceptions of reading, it is clearly important that *all* students are encouraged to develop positive attitudes towards reading, and not just those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In contrast, data gathered from the remaining five schools suggest that students from all categories did not report on a negative culture around reading. For example, speaking of reading, one boy (SRDN, Male, White British, School 3) reported, *'I don't think it's nerdy or dreadful – children are never teased'*. This is not to say that all students reported that they *liked* reading. Comments such as *'I'm not a fan of reading'* (SRDN, Male, White British, School 3), were fairly typical from students who had been identified as less engaged with reading, however the majority of students from this category did not seem to think that those who read regularly and enjoyed reading were seen to be 'nerdy' or 'uncool'.

A number of struggling students from various schools also reported that they wanted to improve their reading and be able to read more challenging texts. One boy stated:

*"I'm kinda worried with my reading sometimes, and I'm kinda interested...because I do go to reading lessons, so I'm gonna go in there, I'm gonna read, I'm gonna make sure I get the best level I can" (SRDR, Male, White British, School 1).*

Interestingly, when asked to rate himself, this student reported that out of 5 (a score of 1 being the lowest), he gave himself a 5 for 'enjoying reading' and only a 3 for 'how difficult reading is'. This suggests that even though this student did not find reading especially easy, he did enjoy reading and wanted to get better.

Similar attitudes were reported in many of the other schools. For example, two Somali students (a boy and a girl) were interviewed in another school (School 4), and both reported that they worked very hard at improving their reading. The boy spoke in detail about the fact that he tries not to be put off by long words in books, stating that he will often '*keep going to the end of a sentence*' to try and help him make sense of unfamiliar vocabulary. He also stated that while he does enjoy reading, he does not like books like *Harry Potter*, because the books are too thick and he '*is not confident to read all those pages*'. Similarly the girl also reported that she has to work hard at her reading as most books are still too hard for her. She reported that she will often read the first 20 pages of a book and then will go back and read them again if she feels she hasn't understood them sufficiently. Coupled with this, when asked to rate herself this student gave herself a 5 for 'enjoying reading', yet claimed that 'how difficult reading is' was rated a 1<sup>9</sup>. This indicates that this student does find reading very difficult, but she is prepared to work hard at it because she also finds it enjoyable. This was illustrated further in the fact that this student also reported that when she first came to the UK a few years ago, it was very difficult for her to find books to read because the only texts that she could read were '*too babyish*'. However, she did persevere and is now able to read all of the *Harry Potter* books.

Staff interviews from almost all the schools confirmed that while some students did indeed require very 'easy' books, they felt that care had to be taken so as not to patronise students with books that looked as if they were designed for younger children. For example one librarian (School 6) stated that if picture books were included they should have '*a lot of narrative through their images...have a depth to it*'. Another librarian (School 2) reported that she would like to see more graphic novels within the selection, claiming that *Boffin Boy* was '*very young*' and therefore not suitable for most of their students. Speaking of graphic novels, librarians from a third school (School 4) agreed that while *Boffin Boy* may have suited some weaker boy readers, there was a need to include other more sophisticated graphic novels such as those from the Shakespeare series:

*"The only one I would have is to include graphic novels into the programme...Wider range of books including graphic novels and non-fiction books" (Librarian, School 1)*

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<sup>9</sup> This question asked how difficult they felt reading was, with 1 being '*very difficult*' and 5 '*very easy*'.

The lack of graphic novels was also mentioned by two other schools, for example this librarian from School 2 stated:

*"I'm always slightly disappointed to see again that there's no graphic novel on there and no Manga title on there. I think that that might just be a cultural thing. But there are plenty of UK publishers that could get involved with this...the more varied the better the list, it would be nice to see that on there, they'd probably argue that Boffin Boy was a graphic novel but it's a very young one if it is" (Librarian, School 2)*

Several schools mentioned the importance of including non-fiction texts, for students who were less confident or less able readers. Whilst many of the schools seemed to think that it would be useful to include more non-fiction, schools disagreed on their opinions of *Why is Snot Green?* Several members of staff reported that this book was very popular and that 'it worked' for them, however other schools seemed to think that this was not the most appropriate non-fiction text - especially for weaker readers. For example one Librarian (School 3) clarified that it was 'a very thick book' and that 'it looks like a story' which could be off-putting for students who struggle to handle too much printed text. There was a general feeling that a wider range of texts would be appreciated:

*"Some people from my old school like fact books, and non-fiction books, some like scary books and creepy books and some of them liked humorous books, so like if they had a bigger range, like girly ones, boy ones, in between ones [that would be better]" (CRDN, Female, White British, School 2)*

Finally, when asked about the extent to which *Booked Up* engaged different types of readers, several schools stated that they were confused about the 'additional books' (e.g. *You Choose*, *The Dragon Machine*, *Little Bo Peep has Knickers that Bleep*), the extent to which these books could be offered to the students, and how they should be used. They reported that they would have appreciated more guidance about the role of these books and the extent to which they could be regarded as part of the general selection. Two of the schools (Schools 3 and 4) also reported that they felt that an audio book would have been a very useful addition to the selection. One of these librarians stated that she only discovered that an audio book for *How to Train a Dragon* was available when she was placing her order, and although she attempted to order this, she was unsuccessful in doing so, though it is not clear why exactly this was the case. Given that information about the audio book was included in the co-ordinator leaflets and appeared on the website, this suggests that it may be useful for Booktrust to consider providing further clarity for co-ordinators about the 'additional books' and the availability of the audio book.

All of this has major implications for the books that are selected to form the *Booked Up* offer. These students all reported that motivation for reading is both the desire to 'succeed' in reading as well as the experience of enjoying books. Yet for many students, it is particularly important that they have exposure to books that meet their needs for age-appropriate content, but are not too challenging in terms of textual difficulty. The issue of content is discussed in more detail in the next section, but this again points to the need to include more books that are 'thin' and manageable in terms of textual construction, but at the same time have exciting and 'grown-up' themes. However it must be recognised that given the current literature available for

pre-teen readers, Booktrust are subject to various constraints. In particular, this finding highlights the urgent need for publishers to recognise that there is indeed a gap in the market, and that very little literature is available to meet the needs of these young readers.

### Summary

- The project data indicated that while it is not always the case, reading is generally regarded positively within school culture.
- Whilst not all students enjoy reading, it is clear that many students of this age are concerned about their ability as readers and want to improve their reading.
- Certain students (including some students for whom English is an additional language) are put off books because they are either too thick and/or too difficult in terms of textual complexity. At the same time, these students do not want to read books that appear to be designed for younger children.
- There is a need to consider the balance between age-appropriate content and textual difficulty within the *Booked Up* selection.
- When selecting books for *Booked Up*, Booktrust may want to consider including different kinds of non-fiction text as well as graphic novels that have more sophisticated narratives.

### Book content

Interviews with the students revealed that the home reading and personal interests of students were well matched by the selection of books within the *Booked Up* Programme. It was clear that established favourites such as *Harry Potter*, and authors such as Roald Dahl, remain popular with many students. Girls from within all reading categories reported that they read Jacqueline Wilson, while boys from all categories spoke of reading the *Alex Rider* series and the *Cherub* books. As a group, these students reported a liking for horror, adventure, mystery and action - though certain types of non-fiction were also read regularly by a few boys and girls from each of the categories. In particular, several students reported that they enjoyed reading books such as *The Guinness Book of Records* and *Ripley's Believe it or Not*. While some students stated that they read magazines, comics and various screen texts, the project data suggest that the majority of students like books and prefer them in print form.

The data on students' existing interests in book content provide a number of considerations for the *Booked Up* programme. Firstly, given that students reported an interest in horror/ action, it is not surprising that *Mortlock* and *The Ghost Box* were both very popular choices. While *Mortlock* appeared to suit the needs of many of the confident and able readers, some were put off by its length:

“...if there were a shorter version of it most people would choose it...the same sort of book but a bit shorter” (CRDR, Male, White British, School 2)

*The Ghost Box* allowed weaker readers access to this popular genre. One boy (SRDR, Male, West Asian, School 5) claimed that *The Ghost Box* was 'the best' book he had ever read. He reported that 'it was quite scary', but it also made him 'feel excited about what was coming next'. Similarly a boy from a different school (SRDR, Male, White British, School 6) reported that he has continued reading *The Ghost Box* because 'it's really interesting and quite like you want to get into it more'. This again underlines the importance of including accessible books with exciting storylines.

The data suggest that there is also a need to continue including a book like *Frankie Foster: Fizzy Pop*, given that so many girls appeared to connect to the 'teenage girl life-drama' theme (also evident in Jacqueline Wilson books). An example of this was evident in School 2:

"[There is a good selection] but there could be a few more for the girls...maybe get ones that are on TV, like the *Wizards of Waverly Place*, because I enjoy that programme, and then there's *Tracy Beaker*, there's quite a few of us that like *Jacqueline Wilson*, so maybe some *Jacqueline Wilson*...a load of the girls went for *Frankie Foster* because it's really one of the only girl books" (CRDN, Female, White, School 2)

Many students stated that they thought *Big Nate* was very similar to *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, which was reported as being very popular with students from all categories of reader; however *Big Nate* appeared to be especially popular with boys. Importantly though, some students who selected *Big Nate* stated that they surprised themselves by not only reading the whole book, but enjoying it too. What is more, comments from students suggested that even when *Big Nate* was not chosen, this was one of the titles that students would want to read from the library or swap with a friend. This was also confirmed in staff interviews with one librarian (School 4) reporting that she has just put in an order for the whole *Big Nate* series, because students 'had been checking on the internet' and told her there were four books in the series and 'you have to get them'. This also underlines the significance of books that are part of a series.

As well as encouraging engagement with familiar and popular genres, it also appears that *Booked Up* was successful in introducing many students to a new genre or author. This was especially evident in relation to *The Name of this Book is Secret*. This was a very popular title, even though most students who mentioned the book stated that they had never seen it before, or heard of the author. Students reported that they chose the book because they were intrigued by the title, they liked the front cover, they thought the blurb looked interesting, and they enjoyed the author introduction on the film. Comments suggested that not only was this book read and enjoyed, but it encouraged students to read the other books in the series. For example one girl reported (CRDR, Female, Eastern European, School 4) that after reading the book she gave it to her younger sister who also read it. They then went to town to try and find the next book in the series and were 'disappointed' when they couldn't find it. Moreover, the Librarian at School 4 also stated that students had been coming into the library asking for *The Name of this Book is Secret* in

particular. She went on to report that '*I have actually had to go and buy the whole series – they are very much into it, and that has sent them to a new author actually*'. She continued, stating that '*most of the students who chose *The Name of this Book is Secret* are coming back in for the second in the series*'.

This raises another important issue with regard to the books selected for Booked Up. In the case of *The Name of this Book is Secret*, students were not only introduced to a new title and author, but to a whole series of books that extended beyond those in the *Booked Up* programme. A number of students spoke of their desire to read other books in the series following the *Booked Up* Programme; as well as *The Name of this Book is Secret*, this was also the case for *Big Nate* and *Frankie Foster: Fizzy Pop*. In fact several students spoke of the fact that they actively avoided books that were not part of a series because they found it so disappointing when the book came to an end and there was nothing to follow.

The final issue with regard to the content of the books concerns the inclusion of non-fiction. As stated in earlier sections, students reported very different attitudes towards *Why is Snot Green*, but it was clearly greatly enjoyed by a number of students. However, comments from students and staff suggested that Booktrust may want to consider including some different kinds of non-fiction. For example two girls from different schools (School 1 and School 4) said that they really liked true stories, like Anne Frank. Both boys and girls also mentioned that they had enjoyed reading books set in war-time that again felt as if they were 'real'. This may again suggest the need to consider including a wider range of non-fiction (or stories based within historical contexts) within future *Booked Up* provision.

## Summary

- The home reading and personal interest of students were well matched by the selection of books in *Booked Up*.
- Themes such as adventure, horror, action and mystery remain popular with students and should continue to be represented in the selection. There is probably a need to continue to include books that are similar to existing popular genres (eg Fizzy Pop/ Jacqueline Wilson and Big Nate/Diary of a Wimpy Kid) which already own an extensive readership.
- *Booked Up* is a good opportunity to introduce students to a new genre, text and/or author.
- It is important that at least some of the books are first books in a series, as this has been seen to encourage students to engage with a whole series.
- There may be a need to extend the range of non-fiction texts, and to include true stories.

## Other factors influencing the selection of a book

A number of other factors appeared to influence the choices that the students made. Firstly there was variation in the way in which students were introduced to *Booked Up*, and the level of information the students received before making their final choice (see p.16). Despite this, the majority of schools spoke of attempting to provide the students with an opportunity to look at the set of books before they made their selection on the bookmark; however it was clear that this was not always possible because of the number of students involved.

The students themselves reported considerable variation in the extent to which they felt they had received sufficient information about the books before having to make their choice. For example, the librarian in School 1 stated that the *Booked Up* programme is introduced to the Year 7's during one of their 100 minute 'library sessions'. Students from this school generally reported that they had received sufficient information about the books before being asked to make their choice, and they appeared largely satisfied with the choices they made. Similarly, students from School 4 also reported that they felt they had received enough information about the books and that they were happy with the books they had selected. Moreover almost all of the students in this school reported that the book they chose was appropriate for the reading ability, even if they had not finished the book.

Some students reported that they had not received enough information about the books prior to making their choice and as a consequence had made 'the wrong choice'. For example a girl from School 3 (CRDR, Female, White British) said that she did not have 'a good description' of the books, so it was 'a bit pointing in the dark'. She went on to state that as she 'didn't know the authors' it was not a very informed choice and she would have really liked to be able to see all of the books in advance. Similarly, a boy from the same school (SRDR, Male, African-Caribbean) reported that he had chosen *Pumpkin Grumpkin*, but when he received the book he thought it was 'quite boring'. Interestingly, this student also stated that he had discussed the selection with his mum and told her that he was interested in *The Ghost Box*, however she had dissuaded him because she thought it may have been 'too hard'. Yet he now claims that he wishes he had chosen this book, because when he did eventually see it, 'it was easy – I could read it'. Moreover a girl from School 5 (CRDN, White British) stated that she had selected *Dead Man's Cove* because she 'went to Cornwall not long ago and it's about Cornwall' but when she began reading the book she went on to explain, 'I wasn't really interested – I only read a few pages'.

This suggests that the impact of *Booked Up* could be increased further if more attention was focused on the introduction of the programme to the students. Given that a number of students are failing to make appropriate choices, it is recommended that this aspect of the programme could be developed. While it must be acknowledged that the introduction of the programme is the responsibility of schools, this also suggests that some schools may benefit from receiving more guidance on how to effectively introduce the programme to their students so as to maximise the potential for students to make appropriate book selections.

## Summary

- Some students felt they did not receive sufficient information about the books, prior to making their choice.
- Schools appear to be quite varied in how they introduce students to the books in the programme. It is recommended that more guidance is made available to schools on how to effectively introduce the programme to students.

## Pupil and staff responses to the Booked Up programme

All members of staff interviewed reported a high level of regard for the *Booked Up* programme and drew attention to the positive affect it had had on most of their students. Class teachers, Librarians and Teaching Assistants, unanimously communicated an upsurge of student engagement when they were informed about *Booked Up* and were introduced to the books on offer. This was followed by a period of intense anticipation to actually receive their chosen book:

*"They are really excited when they see the books I find... They can actually pick up the books and it's 'Ahh – which one shall I have?'" (Library Manager, School 3)*

"They were very excited about the Booked Up project, 95% of them - the day we took the books to the classroom and gave them out – they were thrilled to bits!" (Year 7 teacher, School 1)

*"For weeks before that I'd had kids badgering me in the library and in the corridor saying 'when are our books coming, when are our books coming?', so they were really keen for them to arrive...so that was nice, they were keen!" (Librarian, School 2)*

The majority of students agreed with their school's favourable description of *Booked Up* (see p.21), frequently conveying a willingness to engage seriously with the programme:

*"I heard there were free books for Year 7s, I was – hooray!" (CRDR, Female, White British, School 3)*

Although for the more reluctant readers the level of enthusiasm directed towards the scheme was usually not as high as from those from other categories, it should be emphasised that the majority still welcomed the scheme and were generally more than keen to engage. Even in the instances where there was no real enthusiasm displayed towards *Booked Up*, their approach could most accurately be characterised as indifference as opposed to outright hostility or even reluctance towards the idea of engaging with the scheme:

*"I wasn't like umm [sounds excited]. I was just like oh [sounds indifferent]" (CRDN, Female, White British, White, School 6)*

*"I was hoping when I was told that we were going to get free books they would be the kind of books that I would want<sup>10</sup> – and they weren't. I kind of read the book that I got...but I just put it down and went on to other books" (CRDN, Male, White British, School 3)*

The widespread appeal of engaging with *Booked Up* is described in more detail by the Librarian at School 2:

*"You don't get that that cynicism [with Booked Up] that you tend to get 'ooh I don't want that', they don't take their bookmark and throw it in the bin or anything like that, you do get an enthusiasm for it...it's not something a minority of nerdy kids do, it's something that they'll all get involved with"*

Students tended to ascribe a high level of importance to book-gifting and book ownership. For many, the experience of receiving a free book was a unique one, indeed there was almost a sense of disbelief among students that they would actually be able to keep their books:

*"It was a free book so I thought it was awesome...it took me by surprise I didn't realise we were going to get a free book" (SRDN, Male, White British, School 6)*

*"Well it's a positive start to the year certainly. I think they are surprised that they get to keep a book" (Library Manager/Head of English, School 5)*

Students' comments suggest there was something appealing, even empowering about being able to choose from a range of books entirely of their own volition without the interference of teachers:

*"You got to choose whatever book you wanted" (CRDR, Female, mixed heritage black and White British, School 1)*

However, it is worth noting that one boy, who was in a high ability set, cautioned that although the teachers did not directly interfere or try to persuade him to read a particular book, he had felt intimidated by his peers to choose a book that was 'thick' to be in-keeping with his perceived ability level. A limited number of teachers also implied that they had employed certain tactics to steer student choice - usually in relation to their level of reading ability. This raises questions about how *Booked Up* is organised for different ability groups: it is of course though a delicate balance to reconcile giving sufficient guidance to students without impeding their right to free choice:

*"Nobody told us what books to choose but sometimes you feel pressure because like if some books are thick and some are thin. Some are more challenging than others. If some say a more challenging book and you don't*

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<sup>10</sup> Previously this student outlined a preference for books he found 'believable'. He conveyed a strong dislike for the horror books on offer, claiming the way they were described as horror was patronising. He claimed he would have liked books like 'Adrian Mole' and other stories based on 'real life'

want that book then you feel a bit uneasy" (CRDN, Male, White British, School 5)

"...some of those students [Can read and don't read] were the ones who were trying to pick the picture books. I think they were trying to be a bit clever in front of the other students. Just this kind of blanket thing 'I don't like reading. I don't do that'...I mean I did a little bit of manipulation I basically said they couldn't have them. They weren't for them" (Librarian, School 6)

Nevertheless, the importance of receiving a book to keep did appear to have a layered significance. For example, students stated that by having a book that was their own, they could more meaningfully take ownership of their reading in terms of genre interest and take greater control in relation to when and where they elected to read their book; something that may be particularly significant for disengaged readers and/or those readers that 'struggle' with reading:

"It's good to have your own book so if you are bored you might just choose it one day and might get into reading" (CRDN, Female, mixed heritage black and White British, School 4)

"It was kind of clever – because in school you can borrow a maximum of two to three books. But if you finish these, you can read this in your spare time" (SRDR, Male, Somalian, School 4)

Staff also voiced awareness about the positive affect ownership of a book seemed to instil in certain students, particularly those with lower reading abilities:

"I know the children do enjoy choosing a particular book. Taking it home and knowing that it's been given to them...The children I've spoken to have enjoyed reading them. A little boy I've spoken to has read his twice...You can say children are reading all the time in school but it's not what they're wanting to read. This book is something they've chosen" (Teaching Assistant, School 5)

"For my lower sets there's that sense of ownership just to have a book that's theirs to take home had an impact on them...Even though some of them hadn't finished them, they still say that they are going to try and work through them as they get better" (NQT English Teacher, School 5)

*Booked Up*, for many students, was a means of engaging parents in their reading. At School 3, the Library Assistant revealed how certain parents had expressed their gratitude - stating that it had been the first book 'their child had actually received'. A lack of access to books at home was explicitly mentioned by one student as being a prime factor responsible for his own reading experience:

"I don't read a lot because I ain't got any. I've asked my dad to get me some, so I can keep them" (SRDR, Male, White British, School 1)

For others *Booked Up* acted as a catalyst for increased parental involvement. The Senior Teaching Assistant at School 5 revealed how the *Booked Up* book had

provided an impetus for getting one particular student's mother - who had previously not been particularly supportive, to become more involved.

In response to those who might think that one book is insufficient to make a difference, this teacher described how:

*"... there's one particular little girl who comes to mind who was very conscious about not reading aloud and doesn't have a mum who will sit there very long and listen to her. So I said to her 'well even if your mum is just cooking or washing up just try reading just say mum can you just listen while you're doing your work and I'll read to you and it's taken her a few weeks and now she's on about her third book and that was kicked off by the first book that she had this year in Year 7 so she's found a genre she likes. She's got the ability to read aloud now and is confident with her reading and that even with just one child out of 30 that is a brilliant thing!" (Senior Teaching Assistant, School 5)*

On other occasions the free book offered by *Booked Up* helped to reinforce an existing positive relationship, where a parent was already acting as an advocate for their child to read. The following example relates to a struggling and reluctant reader, who chose a *Booked Up* book that was too difficult to read independently. The student's father read the book with the student and recommended an alternative, more suitable book for his son to read:

*"My Dad said why don't you try the 'Horrid Henry ones' and he thought they were a bit easier...because the text was easier... Dad read it with me...we read a page each" (SRDN, Male, White British, School 5)*

Throughout the research, there was strong evidence to suggest that parents play a crucial role in supporting and inspiring children to read. Although the importance of parental involvement in beginning reading is well-documented, continued support into the early years of secondary education receives less attention. Parental support took the form of recommending book titles to read, active encouragement to read, access to books at home and the provision of funds (e.g. pocket money) for students to buy their own books.

In all instances the *Booked Up* scheme operated at the beginning of the first term in Year 7. Schools tended to launch the scheme early in the academic year to create a 'buzz' and set an expectation that reading was seen as something that was valued at secondary school. The following NQT English teacher who taught lower ability groups testified to the positive atmosphere *Booked Up* helped create, something that she was able to capitalise on for teaching them English:

*"As a new teacher it helps me to get the children enthusiastic about reading for the first couple of weeks. So it definitely helped me because they were practically jumping out of their skin for these books and talking about them and those lessons based on Booked Up were so successful and it's great to sort of start the year off with that sort of enthusiasm" (NQT English Teacher, School 5)*

Librarians in particular spoke of how much they appreciated *Booked Up* as a means of galvanising students' interest in books, alongside positively influencing their perception of the school library from an early stage. As previously stated (see p.15) the *Booked Up* programme was often run through the library and was regularly first introduced to students as part of an introduction to the library session. Being able to conclude an introductory session to the library - which might involve a lot of sitting and listening, with the carrot of the *Booked Up* scheme provided a powerful means of creating a favourable first impression of what the school library was about.

The librarians from School 3 spoke at length about the value of the programme in terms of introducing the students to the library as well as helping to demystify the concept of the library; something that some students often had little understanding of. In addition, one librarian from School 2 spoke of how *Booked Up* was a useful tool for cultivating interest and fitted in perfectly with their wider view of the role of the school librarian:

*"My view on librarianship is that it's not good enough anymore to sit behind your desk and expect everyone to come to you, you've got to be a larger than life figure and get out there and engage kids as much as you can and I think this helps to do that. If you can take it onboard and champion it, and roll it out to teachers, and roll it out to kids and be seen as the focal figure of it all, then it's only a good thing" (Librarian, School 2)*

*"It does really help you to promote the library in a positive way...especially when some of them think you've bought the books yourself. There's always four or five people each year who think you've gone out one weekend [and purchased the books yourself]!" (Librarian, School 6)*

*"It has enabled us to have a really positive, a really exciting, fresh approach that says 'wow this is the library' and the first thing that gets put in your hand? A book that costs £10 all for you to take home and put on your shelf which you can keep for your whole school career. Unfortunately I think there is still something with the library that is a little bit – oh well you know – it isn't for me, or books aren't for me – and it's always going to be a bit like that. But to have something that says 'welcome and here's something free' and it's yours to keep, it's lovely. And the timing in my opinion couldn't be better" (Library Assistant, School 3)*

Engaging in *Booked Up* frequently facilitated greater collaboration between the English department and the library, and in one instance between the library staff and form tutors. Staff intimated that integrating *Booked Up* sessions between English lessons and library lessons implicitly sends a powerful message about the value and status of reading. It can also act as a tool for aiding the students' smooth transition from primary to secondary school. By providing an enjoyable activity for students to engage in at the very beginning of their secondary journey, *Booked Up* allows both librarian and English teacher the opportunity to get to know their Year 7 classes in a less formal manner; while at the same time presenting them with a window to observe their students' attitudes and preferences towards reading:

*"This benefits me a lot as I get to know the Year 7s whilst doing the lesson, I introduce them to how the LRC [Learning Resource Centre] works and it encourages them to take books home to read while waiting for the Booked Up books to come. I also have more contact with Year 7 tutors. I also do a book evaluation when the students have had their book for a few weeks" (Librarian, School 1)*

When considering the more enduring, intermediary and longer term influences on students' reading habits and behaviours, it is important to acknowledge that *Booked Up* rarely operates in isolation. It is therefore most accurate to think of *Booked Up* as being one link (often a very important one) within a wider chain of professionals, parents, initiatives and programmes all aiming to influence an improvement in students' reading experience.

One area where *Booked Up* made no impact was in terms of the explicit linkage to the school curriculum. Given the emphasis on reading culture in the new Ofsted framework, schools may need to be encouraged to consider how to maximise the impact of *Booked Up*. A variety of reasons were offered to explain why making these sorts of connections were problematic. These include timetable saturation, the lack of time for incorporating the books into lesson plans (schools would need to know far in advance what the books were going to be in order to do so) and that the diversity of the books on offer would make it logistically difficult to make formal links with the English curriculum. Nevertheless, although not having a direct link to the curriculum itself, *Booked Up* was often praised for complementing the other schemes/initiatives previously mentioned:

*"As some of the Booked Up books this year were quizzed as part of the AR [Accelerated Reading] Reading programme they can also link this to the English reading lesson" (Librarian, School 1)*

*"It [Booked Up] fits in perfectly [with the Accelerated Reading] because I think most of the titles [from Booked Up] are on the list" (Library manager/Head of English, School 5)*

*"We have a dedicated reading lesson once a fortnight. Which I would think is not that common anymore with the amount of stuff that's on the curriculum...we've piloted a couple of schemes to keep the momentum going. But we do Reading Race which one of the teachers got from Teachit [resources website]" (Librarian, School 6)*

Given the plurality of other schemes and initiatives operating within schools with similar goals to *Booked Up*, it is difficult to isolate with any degree of certainty the specific effect that *Booked Up* has had on students' reading habits and behaviours. Despite the complexities previously identified, this section attempts to make some tentative conclusions about the extent to which *Booked Up* was responsible for both engaging and impacting upon different categories of readers.

Impact in terms of reading is, of course, always relative to the students' existing abilities and engagement with reading. Perceived 'impact' therefore manifested itself in different guises. For the more able and engaged readers, the key enduring

influence *Booked Up* had was in terms of broadening students' range of genre and type of book that they would be willing to consider in the future or introducing them to a new author with whom they were keen to follow up, this was particularly the case where they were part of a longer running series of stories:

*"I really love reading, but it's got me to read even more, different types of books than what I was reading [before]" (CRDR, Female, White British, School 2)*

*"I suppose it has [encouraged me to read more] because now I like, like spy books that have something to do with spying and mystery and things like that...Yes, I mean there's like more to books than just the sort of supernatural type of thing that I kind of like" (CRDR, Male, White British, School 6)*

*"It's encouraged me to give that genre a try but not really that much because I'm already really into books...It's encouraged me to give that type of book a chance because I've realised it's ok and don't usually go for these deep dark things, that is set in the wood and are all scary and stuff but I find that one quite nice actually" (CRDR, Male, White British, School 6)*

However, for the majority at the 'Can Read and Does Read' end of the reading continuum, the *Booked Up* scheme needs to be considered in a context where reading has often already become an established and well-liked activity. Consequently, the perceived impact on this group may be comparatively modest. Instead *Booked Up* was often characterised in terms of being a bonus (saving pocket money) or a welcomed light read.

There was also some evidence to suggest the *Booked Up* free book was less favourably received in comparison to other books students were waiting to read - there were instances where the *Booked Up* book had not been read fully yet due to a backlog of other books students possessed or were awaiting to buy. One Senior TA at School 5, made an explicit connection between the favourable socio-economic circumstances of most pupils in the 'Can Read and Does Read' category:

*"There's another boy and he's from a more affluent family and he said 'well miss I actually haven't read my book yet because I've got three others to read' but it means he will read it. Even though now it's stood on his shelf. But you can see the difference reading has made in terms of affluence" (Senior TA, School 5)*

*"Nice easy read and it was quick and I like some books like that...It was easy but it was really good" (CRDR, Female, White British, School 5)*

*"I was quite happy. You get a free book it saves me £7 because I'm already quite interested in books ...I've read a bit of it [sixth of it] because I normally like read two books at a time. It's a bit weird [laughs]...I think my record was like reading four books at a time... [attributes not reading all of 'Mortlock' to the fact a Rick Riordan book, his favourite author had just come out and he had ordered that]... I kind of choose Rick Riordan over it" (CRDR, Male, White British, School 6)*

*"Now when people are reading in our class most of them are reading the books they got from this Booked Up programme, so I think it was a good idea to get it... Since we got these books, it made me realise how many books you can choose from, if you look around in the library there must be around a hundred maybe two hundred books and you don't realise... there's a wide range of choice, you just don't realise how many books you can read, and since I did get these books I have wanted to read on, and I like books that have cliff-hangers and paragraphs that make you want to read on" (CRDR, Male, White British, School 2)*

For the disengaged reader, the scope for impact is greater but often harder to achieve – and, of course, it must be remembered that the *Booked Up* programme involves just a solitary book. The extent of the challenge to alter sometimes ingrained resistance to reading was starkly highlighted by the following librarian:

*"I don't think it would turn a reluctant reader into a frequent library visitor, but that's a big leap anyway" (Librarian, School 2)*

Inevitably there were some reluctant readers for whom the *Booked Up* programme did not seem to have had any effect upon at all. This appeared to be due to a variety of reasons including the difficulty of the book (this was particularly the case for the 'struggles to read' category, irrespective of whether they read or not), whether it was deemed boring or simply because of a fundamental and persistent dislike of reading:

*"No [I do not feel any differently about books since the Booked Up programme], because I like the same things [as I did before]" (CRDN, Female, White British, School 2)*

*"I don't really use it [the library]. I only really use it on library lessons" (CRDN, Female, White British, School 6)*

*"But I've got some children in my class that are such low ability they couldn't approach those books at all. They were just too difficult". (NQT English Teacher, School 5)*

*"[My first thought was] I won't be able to read any of these... All fancy writing!" (SRDN, Female, White British, School 3)*

Contrastingly though, there were a small number of pupils for whom *Booked Up* seemed to have made a significant impression on their reading behaviour. This became apparent in a variety of forms.

There was evidence of *Booked Up* being the breakthrough event to alter their behaviour and challenge existing prejudices in relation to reading. For some students *Booked Up* gave a flavour of the possibilities that reading offered, that it could be a pleasurable activity and motivated them to consider that reading was something they could engage with. The novelty of the *Booked Up* programme, combined with the interest of their chosen book captivated some reluctant readers sufficiently to read a book through to the end for the first time, whilst at the same time enjoying the experience. This represented a significant achievement in itself,

and in turn, helped to inculcate a much needed boost in confidence and facilitate the realisation that perhaps reading was something that could be engaged with and even liked:

*"Now I don't just read half of it, I read all of it [because the book I read was] interesting" (SRDR, Male, Asian, School 5)*

*"I can't say for definite but for some of them it does [improve confidence] because immediately they're part of a process. It gives them a focus for coming in the library. Especially if the book's part of a series or we've got similar books, I'll sort of try and recommend books - 'if you like this book you'll like', so I think that makes them more confident in choosing the books themselves, obviously with some sort of support" (Librarian, School 6)*

*"We have had feedback from parents saying that this is the first book that their child has actually managed to finish" (Library Assistant, School 3)*

*"I feel a bit more confident about reading, I get more books to read" (SRDR, Male, White British, School 1)*

Staff testified that *Booked Up* had, in a number of instances, offered reluctant readers (both high and low ability) the necessary 'push' they needed to give reading a real chance:

*"I think it's helped the 'can read and doesn't read' because it was put in front of them, some nice interesting titles, a range of abilities. If you don't push something in front of those children and say 'there you are, that's it, you're going to have one, you're going to do it, it's free, it's dead exciting', they wouldn't - on their own - come into the library and want to borrow anything. So you certainly get those children" (Year 7 Teacher, School 1)*

*"From my experience of working with children [from lower ability sets]. Once they get into reading a book, they tend to go on and get a different book. So it actually does help them. I mean some children will never pick up a book unless they are actually pushed a little bit which is actually what this does...I mean I have some children that come in in the mornings which aren't brilliant readers but they will bring their books and we do read and they are finding that there's a story that they've sort of never thought about reading before, so that really does help their imagination which is sort of poked and prodded a bit and they will sort of go and look at other sorts of book...I actually think they need that especially if they are not read to at home and if they've had an upbringing where there's not a lot of books or different types of books in their home" (Senior TA, School 5)*

The *Booked Up* book sometimes gave disengaged readers a platform on which to take their reading forward. Where the students picked a book that they liked, this opened their imagination to the possibilities that reading could offer them. Staff and pupils introduced the notion of 'getting hooked' on reading; most regularly in relation to a particular author, genre or series of books:

*"Yeah because it's like that [getting hooked on a series]. Sometimes I think that it's like it ain't me who's controlling it. It's my arms and my eyes and they're just dragging me to the book. That's what I think of" (SRDN, Male, White British, School 3)*

*"Because it's kind of mysterious and it's interesting and really makes you want to get into books more, because there might be some books that are mysterious and interesting like *The Ghost Box*" (SRDR, Male, White British, School 6)*

*"I think she's read two of the same author and one of the same types of book. So she's on her third book and that child before was not reading aloud and not reading hardly at all" (Senior Teaching Assistant, School 5)*

However, for the majority of the disengaged readers, *Booked Up* should not be seen as a panacea to improved reading or a quick fix. Even in those where the scheme appeared to have been influential, the effects of *Booked Up* were not always felt immediately but instead inspired a degree of curiosity about reading that provoked a gradual step-by-step improvement. *Booked Up* represented a catalyst to beginning to break down the barriers behind not choosing to read that represented an opening, an opportunity to combine with other initiatives at school, parental involvement and the library to positively direct the previously disengaged student towards reading:

*"For some children it just lets them know that they can read a whole book" (Library Assistant, School 3)*

*"We had a few of those students [Struggles to read and does not read] at the beginning when *Booked Up* was introduced and they were the ones who were quite frightened of reading and daunted by it. So at the beginning I think they struggled with being given this book and I don't think they made much of an impact on it but now that their reading has come on I spoke to them in lessons this week to find out if they're thinking about reading their *Booked Up* book and they're interested in it and they want to try it as their reading gets better" (NQT English Teacher, School 5)*

*"[I already had a book by the same author] and I didn't really read it...and when I got that and I read a little bit it made me want to read the other one" (SRDN, Male, White British, School 2)*

*"I read a bit of it [close to a chapter] but I wasn't grabbed at the start that much but I'm starting to read it again now" (CRDN, Male White, School 6)*

Despite previous comments made by librarians about the influence *Booked Up* had on creating a more favourable impression of the library, the students themselves were more cautious in describing the relationship between *Booked Up* and library use or attendance. A minority of pupils mentioned an upturn in the amount they visited their school library since *Booked Up* began but it is difficult to disentangle whether this was because of the *Booked Up* programme exclusively or more because typically the *Booked Up* programme began so early in the year, making it inevitable that students would be more likely to visit the library more frequently

anyway. More often than not though students were either ambivalent as to whether *Booked Up* had made them use the library more or emphatic that it had not.

So although *Booked Up* seemed to go some way towards challenging stereotypes of what school libraries were about, there remained a sense that some of the prevailing culture that libraries were not seen as 'cool' places to go remained. For example, in relation to other *Booked Up* books on offer, some students claimed that they would be more inclined to get the books from a shop as opposed to going to the school library itself:

*"I don't go to libraries so I don't really look for them. If there's one in a shop [in the future] I'll ask for it and try it out" (SRDN, Female, White British, School 1)*

*"If I saw one of these in a shop [the Booked Up books he hadn't picked] I might try to buy one and have a look at what it's about...because I've seen it on here and I get calm and I just want to relax and read" (SRDN, Male, White British, School 1)*

To conclude, although students sometimes struggled to think of explicit ways in which *Booked Up* had impacted on them, not a single student stated that it should not run in the same format next year. The students universally saw *Booked Up* as a worthwhile initiative and all were keen to see it repeated the following year, even if their rationale was typically rooted in a vague sense that it would be helpful to future cohorts:

*"Definitely will help other Year 7s" (CRDR, Female, East European, School 4)*

However, readers who had already developed a keen enjoyment from books saw the potential the scheme offered for enthusing more reluctant Year 7 readers. For example the following student stated *Booked Up* had the scope to 'open their [disengaged readers] eyes [to reading]' (CRDR, Female, White British, School 3). A further specific example came from an able but reluctant reader who felt *Booked Up* could assist with resetting reading as a priority once they had started secondary school. The transition period of moving from primary to secondary school was often identified as a time when reading for pleasure became vulnerable, due to the significant upheaval and revised demands and pressures simultaneously exerted upon students' during this transition phase:

*"...definitely [do it next year] because it gets them back into confident reading. Because I know like when you move up you're a bit scared of the school and then you forget to read when you get home because you're telling your mum and dad all about your days and homework and then it helps them back into reading" (CRDN, Female, White British, School 2).*

## Summary

- Staff universally reported the *Booked Up* programme in a favourable light.
- While reluctant readers were not as enthusiastic as more engaged readers, the vast majority of students were keen to engage with the scheme.

- In a number of instances book-gifting and book ownership assumed a layered significance in terms of heightening engagement with and motivation for reading, particularly amongst reluctant and/or struggles to read categories of student.
- The *Booked Up* book offered a focus for parents to support/take an interest in their children's reading habits (both those who were already doing so and those less engaged).
- Librarians valued the effect *Booked Up* had on galvanising their students' interest in books and their perceptions of the school library.
- Engaging in *Booked Up* frequently facilitated greater collaboration/dialogue between staff from English departments and school libraries.
- *Booked Up* can help provide continuity in students' transition from primary to secondary school. It may also help reset reading as a priority following the upheaval of transition.
- *Booked Up* had no impact in relation to making explicit links to the school curriculum. Timetable saturation, the lack of time to be able to plan the books in lesson plans and diversity of the books in the offer were stated as contributory factors.
- For the more able and engaged readers, *Booked Up's* key influence was to broaden students' range of reading, introducing them to new genres and authors (this was particularly the case where books were part of a series).
- There is some evidence to suggest that for engaged readers (particularly those from affluent backgrounds), the *Booked Up* free book was less favourably received in comparison to other books students were waiting to read or buy.
- *Booked Up* sometimes acted as the breakthrough event to alter disengaged readers' existing prejudices in relation to reading.
- The novelty of the *Booked Up* programme, combined with the interest in their chosen book captivated some reluctant readers sufficiently to read a book through to the end for the first time.
- Staff testified that *Booked Up* had, in a number of instances, offered reluctant readers (both high and low ability) the necessary 'push' they needed to give reading a real chance.
- Although students sometimes struggled to think of explicit ways in which *Booked Up* had impacted on them not a single student stated that it should not run next year. The students universally saw *Booked Up* as a worthwhile initiative and all were keen to see it repeated the following year.

## Recommendations

### The launch and administration of Booked Up

- Steps should be taken to encourage the active involvement of parents and carers in the *Booked Up* initiative, building on the high quality material on the website. Although research suggests that parental involvement declines with age, we found there was still a significant role to be played by parents and carers. Activities such as: reading with students, buying books, and taking a general interest in their reading are valuable. Marketing and administration could encourage parental involvement (e.g. a letter home from school with leaflets and suggestions for how *Booked Up*, and reading in general, might be supported).
- Booktrust might consider promoting wider use of the 'Guide to the Booked Up Books' leaflet so that students can take this information away with them and discuss it with friends and family.
- There was some confusion over the 5 additional titles for children with additional needs. Although these books are an important part of the offer, Booktrust could clarify the purpose of including the smaller selection of books, the intended audience, and how this list is used.
- Booktrust should consider enhancing the use of the *Booked Up* website. One approach might be to build on the 'view an extract' feature in the co-ordinators' space and introduce an Amazon-style 'look inside' feature. This might be more helpful to students at the book-choosing stage.
- It would be useful for schools to encourage students to access the website from home (a link could be sent through personal email at school). Information could also be included in a letter to parents. Having longer to decide is crucial because getting the 'right' book was clearly a key factor in determining how successful *Booked Up* was.
- It may be helpful for Booktrust to consider ways of increasing awareness about web materials, such as the video content, which is designed to support the launch of the programme in school.
- *Booked Up* works well when a number of differing types of staff are involved. Schools should consider how they can best involve staff with the programme along with creating linkages with the curriculum and wider school activities and events.
- Booktrust should consider effective ways of administering *Booked Up* in schools where there is no library or a library with low level status.

## The Booked Up books

We recognise that *Booked Up* works under financial constraints and that the book selection is likely to reflect trends in book publishing. Co-ordinators, school staff and students were positive about the selection, but freely offered advice about future selections.

- Some students suggested they enjoyed reading books in a series. It is therefore perhaps prudent to include the first book in a series within the *Booked Up* offer. Libraries could be encouraged to support this by stocking other books from the series (Booktrust could provide a comprehensive list of other books in the series/by the same author).
- Whilst we recognise the financial implications, it may be worth considering whether it is beneficial to send all schools the 5 accessible titles.
- Booktrust might consider offering schools more than one set of books (especially larger schools) in order to provide more of an opportunity for students to see copies of the books before making their selection. This appeared to be a very beneficial way of introducing the students to the books and might encourage them to recognise and borrow these titles from the library in the future.
- Booktrust should explore ways of tailoring the range of books to meet the needs of different types of readers. This is a particularly significant issue for EAL students who sometimes end up with 'babyish' books (a source of embarrassment), and would appreciate books with more mature themes matched to their language ability. Other categories of readers also seemed to appreciate 'thin' books which are not too challenging but have content appropriate to the age group.
- Adventure stories, horror, action and mystery books should continue to be included in the selection. Booktrust might also consider including a graphic novel in their selection.
- There is also an important need to include the 'life-drama' genre which continues to be popular with teenage girls. In addition Booktrust should consider including books that meet the needs of weaker female readers.
- Although we did not directly explore views on the number of titles on offer book choosing was sometimes time-consuming and we found no evidence to suggest that the number of books on offer should be increased.

## Conclusion

This evaluation shows that schools were consistently positive about the *Booked Up* scheme and, with no prompting, key staff felt that it was important for the DfE to continue funding this initiative. Although teachers and librarians made some suggestions for minor improvements, the principles of informed book selection and book ownership (Clark and Poulton, 2011) were upheld. *Booked Up* was carefully implemented, often being used to create strong links with the school library early in students' secondary school careers. Schools were creative in forging links between *Booked Up* and other reading initiatives. Given that complex and persistent issues of confidence, motivation and engagement in reading exist (Twist et al., 2007), it is useful to think of *Booked Up* as being an important link in a wider chain of professional, and parental involvement. From this perspective, *Booked Up* plays a key role in an overarching policy drive to improve students' reading experience.

Our study showed variations in the administration of *Booked Up*, and this is to be expected in an operation of this scale. However, many features of the programme are constant irrespective of how it is administered in school. Differences were noted in the amount of information given to students, and particularly to the emphasis and length of time allotted to book choosing. The research team noted some different models for integrating the programme into school life, and the best of these could be disseminated more widely. On the basis of this limited study it seemed to us that *Booked Up* was most effective in situations where:

- there was close liaison between the school librarian and their assistants, English teachers and form tutors;
- there was time set aside to launch *Booked Up*, and for students to consider and discuss the selection both before and after placing their order;
- *Booked Up* was part of a regular timetabled library session;
- there was some use of the *Booked Up* selection in the English curriculum

The librarians and teachers we spoke to reported that *Booked Up* was greeted with enthusiasm by students. In a number of instances it was said to have offered reluctant readers the necessary 'push' they needed to begin to enjoy reading. In some of the instances in which the scheme appeared to have been influential, the impact of *Booked Up* was not always felt immediately, but instead inspired a degree of curiosity about reading that provoked a gradual improvement. This constitutes a challenge for researchers and evaluators – a book-gifting programme might be an important contributory factor to attitude changes which take place over a longer period of time than most studies can take into account.

The majority of students we interviewed were excited and enthusiastic about the *Booked Up* programme. Those who were not so keen were often those who had been categorised as reluctant readers, and may well have brought with them quite deep-rooted feelings, born out of frustration or failure. Where these students showed no real enthusiasm for *Booked Up*, they were indifferent rather than hostile to the scheme. There was also some evidence to suggest that for confident readers, and particularly those from affluent backgrounds, the *Booked Up* free book was less

attractive than other books that they were interested in borrowing or buying. Despite these variations, we feel that the overall impact of *Booked Up* is substantial.

While the research team felt that the student reading categories could be developed further in future study, they agreed that the categories did provide an important way of selecting a broad sample of readers. From the evidence here, it did seem that those students in the 'struggles to read but does' were particularly well-served by the programme. It was felt that the book selection was highly appropriate for this group. Some of the students assigned to this category claimed to have completed and enjoyed a book for the first time.

In this study, as in others, the patterning of reading attitudes across categories of readers and between schools proved to be highly complex (Moss, 2000). In some instances, students in less than favourable circumstances showed a sophisticated understanding of the significance of reading in their lives. Where a strong school reading culture is established, this combination of aspiration and support could have a significant impact on students' life chances. However, we also saw a school, rated as 'outstanding' by Ofsted and located in an affluent area, in which there were less positive attitudes to reading. This illustrates the complexity of the situation, and we therefore strongly feel that any attempts to target a book-gifting programme on a perceived area of need would be misguided. In the first instance, identifying an area of need with any degree of accuracy would be fraught with difficulty, and second, the danger of stigmatising those who may already feel marginalised would be considerable.

Students, teachers and librarians were consistently positive about the selection of books provided by *Booked Up*. Our research approach enabled us to explore attitudes to this selection in more depth and consequently we have made some observations on the suitability and range of books in this report. The data gave overwhelming support for the range and quality of the books on offer in the *Booked Up* scheme. However, we felt that the needs of two specific groups of students might be better served in the book selection. These are weaker female readers, and students with English as an additional language. For the latter group, balancing the linguistic needs with age-appropriate material is an important, but a difficult challenge. Book choices that fulfilled this criterion might well have a broader appeal across the different reading categories. In this year's selection, we were critical of the narrow range of non-fiction. In addition our research shows that teachers and librarians would appreciate the inclusion of graphic novels in future selections.

Whilst there were limitations in terms of the sample size, the richness of the data gathered during interviews gave the research team an insight into how different factors such as motivation and confidence influence students' engagement with reading. We were particularly interested in the prestige given to reading in the case study schools. As expected reading was highly prized by school staff, but for the majority of students it was also seen in a positive light. Given persistent concerns about attitudes to reading (Twist et al., 2007), this was surprising, as well as encouraging. In all but one of the study schools reading was not only seen as 'cool', but also as a key to later success. We noted many cases of students, in all categories, associating improvement in reading with their future lives and employment. It is perhaps worth noting, in passing, that the one instance in which a positive reading culture was not well established was in a school in an affluent area

with 'outstanding' attainment. This may be an anomaly, but points to the need to understand more about school reading cultures. Importantly, though, what we learnt here is that a positive reading climate can be nurtured in all schools, whatever the context.

This study raised some interesting issues about students' reading habits and preferences. Given that *Booked Up* materials are chosen by a panel of adult experts, there are some interesting tensions. Students reported that they enjoyed adventure stories, horror, action and mystery books. The 'life-drama' genre was also popular, particularly with teenage girls. There is a relatively good match with the *Booked Up* selection here. Students also enjoyed works by 'cult' authors (such as Jacqueline Wilson) and repeatedly mentioned books which were part of a series. In the light of this, *Booked Up* may legitimately wish to broaden students' reading horizons - and there is some evidence to suggest that it is successful in doing this. However, less confident readers may well wish to establish themselves as readers, by immersing themselves in a narrower range of reading, before building upon this. Furthermore, students' reading confidence was also influential in their perception of textual difficulty; 'thin books' were often attractive to struggling readers because of this, whereas 'thick books' were off-putting.

Finally, it is intriguing that despite the fact that it is widely believed that students are strongly embedded in digital culture (Levy, 2010; Merchant, 2011) there was little evidence of this in the current study. This could be accounted for by a number of contextual factors: the study was about *Booked Up*, interviews took place in the school setting, and the *Booked Up* selection was used as an elicitation prompt. It may also be the case that digital literacies are so embedded in everyday life that they are not actually seen, by students, as a kind of reading – particularly if they associate 'reading' with 'books' and 'school'. In a similar vein, there was relatively little mention of popular culture. A few students mentioned reading magazines and comics, but they were a small minority. This suggests that further study of reading preferences with this age group is needed. Nevertheless, a key message for Booktrust is that data from this project shows that the majority of students like books and prefer them in print form.

To our knowledge, a book-gifting scheme for this age range is original, and the study underscores the high regard for the work of Booktrust and for *Booked Up* in particular. The beneficial effects of introducing students to school libraries early in their transition to secondary education cannot be under-estimated. Schools could maximise these benefits by integrating *Booked Up* with wider school policies and initiatives, working across departments, and by securing parental involvement. We hope that Booktrust is able to sustain and develop this particular scheme in ways that build confidence, motivation and engagement in reading.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Topic guide for interview with students



The  
University  
Of  
Sheffield.

## EVALUATION OF BOOKED UP

### INTERVIEWS WITH CHILDREN

#### Warm-up

- Explain the aims of the research (understand what the Booked Up project was like for the children) and reiterate that it is important for us to hear their opinions – be them positive or negative. Tell them that their comments will help to improve the scheme for next year.
- Attain consent and explain issues of confidentiality.
- Explain that they can withdraw at any time.

Can you tell me something about yourself – what do you like doing in your spare time?

*Explain that first activity is a warm-up – a game. We are using cards to help them describe how various school subjects make them feel... (lead into Activity One)*

#### Activity one

*The children will be given a series of cards with the following words printed on them: challenged, worried, bored, excited, tired, happy, calm, successful, annoyed, no feeling, unsuccessful, sad, interested. They will then be asked the following questions.*

- How does maths make you feel?
- How does writing make you feel?
- How does reading make you feel?
- How does playing/working on the computer make you feel?

The children will be asked to select all of the cards that apply to them in response to each of these questions.

The children can add more words if they want.

Researchers can also ask 'why' this is the case (especially in relation to the 'reading' question – but it will be too repetitive if they are asked to explain every response).

## **Activity Two**

*The children will be shown a picture of a child (of the same age and gender as the respondent) and told that this child can read but doesn't choose to. The participant will be asked:*

- Can you suggest any reasons why this is the case?
- What do you think might encourage this boy/girl to read more?

*The children will be then shown a picture of another child (of the same age and gender as the respondent) and told that this child struggles to read, but wants to be able to read better. The following questions are then asked:*

- Why do you think this boy/girl struggles to read?
- What can be done do you think to help this boy/girl to read things that s/he wants to?
- How can teachers/ parents help?  
(Additional/ potential questions)  
What will put this boy/girl off reading?

How does this boy/girl feel about reading?

## **Activity Three**

*This final activity will be a semi-structured interview with the respondent to investigate this child's attitude towards reading, current reading behaviour at home and at school and the impacts of the programme for this respondent.*

### **General Questions (warm up)**

- What do you think about school?

### **(Supplementary Questions)**

- Can tell me something about the lessons and subjects that you enjoy most at school? Why?
- Are there any subjects that you don't enjoy? Why?

### **Reading (General questions and identification of categorisation)**

- How do the children in your class (year group) feel about reading? Do you have friends that like reading?
- Do people in your class think that it is 'cool' to want to read/ be good at reading? How do you feel about that?
- How would you describe yourself - would you say that you enjoy reading? Do you read for pleasure at home/ school? What do you read? Why?

Further questions:

- Would you like to be better at reading than you are now?
- Are there any books that you would like to read that you feel are too hard for you?
- Would you like to be able to read other things (e.g. instructions for games on the computer, magazines etc) more easily than you do at the moment?
- Does anything put you off reading?

## **Activity/ Questionnaire**

Scale of 1 – 5. 1 is lowest score, 5 is highest. I want you to score yourself on each of these questions

- How much do you like reading? (1 is don't like it at all, 5 is like it very much)
- How difficult do you think reading is (1 is very difficult, 5 is very easy)?
- How good are you at reading? (1 is not got at all, 5 is very good)
- Do you like reading when the words are on a screen (e.g. computer, gaming station, Ipad etc) (1 is not at all, 5 is like it very much)

## **Previous and current reading**

- What makes you want to read?
- What is the best book you have ever read/ or had read to you? (Prompts: What was so good about it? How did it make you feel? Did this encourage you to read anything else for yourself? Why?)
- If you read books yourself, what kind of books do you tend to read? How often do you read?
- Do you read other things at home? (Prompts: Comics? Web pages? Newspapers/magazines?)
- Do you have books in your bedroom? (Prompts: how many? What kind of books?)
- Are you reading a book at the moment? (Prompts: Which one? Why did you choose it? Have you read others in the series?)
- What do you think about using digital technology (e.g. kindles, Nintendo DS, Ipads) to read books? (Prompts: Does it make a difference whether a book is in 'book form' or is on a screen? Why? In what ways?)

## **Evaluation of programme**

### Overview

- Can you tell me something about the way that the Booked Up programme was introduced to you? What happened?
- What did you think of Booked Up? Were you interested in this? Not interested?

### The books

- What did you think about the books that were on offer? Were you free to choose whichever book you wanted?
- Would you have preferred different types of books? For example?

### Choosing the book

- Which book did you choose? Why?
- How did you make your choice?
- Was it easy to choose the book? (Why? Why not?)
- Did you recognise any of the books on offer?
- Did you discuss the choice of books with anyone? (E.g. friend/ parent teacher)
- Can you tell me about the books that were on offer? Were there books there that you definitely would NOT want to choose? Why?
- What books did your friends choose? Did you talk about this with your friends? What did you say?

### Reading the book

- Did you read your chosen book? If not, why not? What did you think about it?
- Can you tell me anything about the book that you chose? Was it funny/ interesting/ boring/ good pictures? (If 'boring' then ask why? Was it too difficult?)
- Were these books used in school at all? In what ways?
- Was the book easy to read? Would you have wanted something easier/ harder?

### Impact from reading the book

- Has this book encouraged you to read other books? Which ones? Why
- Have you read any other books by the same author?
- Have you talked about or shared your book with anyone else?
- Have you read any of the other Booked Up books?
- Have you used the school library more often since you got your Booked up book?
- Have this made you want to download books from the internet – or not?
- Do you feel any differently about books and reading since doing Booked Up?

### Conclusion of evaluation

- Do you think that Year 7 should be offered this again next year? If so, do you have any suggestions for making it better – and suggestions for changes?

Notes

Gender:

Ethnicity:

Type of reader:

## Appendix 2: Booked Up 2011 booklist

*Pumpkin Grumpkin* by John Agard and Grace Nichols (Walker Books)

An accessible introduction to poetry, which has wide boy and girl appeal

*The Name of This Book is Secret* by Pseudonymous Bosch (Usborne)

A page-turning adventure story which has wide appeal; a mid-level read and the first in a series

*Artichoke Hearts* by Sita Brahmachari (Macmillan Children's Books)

A coming-of-age story with strong appeal for confident girl readers

*How to Train Your Dragon* by Cressida Cowell (Hodder Children's Books)

A funny story with boy and girl appeal; an easy read and the first in a popular series

*The Ghost Box* by Catherine Fisher (Barrington Stoke)

A spooky tale with boy and girl appeal, written specifically for struggling, reluctant and dyslexic readers

*The Kick Off* by Dan Freedman (Scholastic Children's Books)

A football story with strong boy appeal that is a mid-level read

*Mortlock* by Jon Mayhew (Bloomsbury)

A historical horror with strong boy appeal; a challenging read

*Why is Snot Green?* by Glenn Murphy (Macmillan Children's Books)

An interesting and informative non-fiction title with wide appeal particularly for reluctant boy readers

*Big Nate – The Boy with the Biggest Head in the World* by Lincoln Peirce (HarperCollins)

A funny, illustrated book with wide appeal; an easy read and the first in a series

*Dead Man's Cove* by Lauren St John (Orion)

A mystery story with appeal to both boys and girls; a mid-level read

*Frankie Foster: Fizzy Pop* by Jean Ure (HarperCollins)

An easy to mid-level read with strong girl appeal

*The Truth About Leo* by David Yelland (Puffin)

A contemporary story which addresses real life issues and challenging themes, this book appeals to emotionally confident boys and girls alike

## **Accessible titles**

*Boffin Boy and the Wizard of Edo* by David Orme & Peter Richardson (Ransom)

This manga-style comic books features speech bubbles and simple text making this ideal for children who need a book with a very low reading age (6-7 years) but high interest level

*Little Bo Peep has Knickers That Bleep* by Laurence Anholt & Arthur Robins (Orchard Books)

Accessible and well-illustrated, this collection of rhymes has been selected based on its suitability for children with moderate to severe learning difficulties - and with themes like exploding underwear is guaranteed to entertain

*The Dragon Machine* by Helen Ward & Wayne Anderson (Templar Publishing)

This beautifully illustrated picture book is simple and accessible, and yet it works on many different levels. The book comes with an audio version which helps bring the story to life for many audiences including those who are visually impaired or have learning or concentration difficulties

*You Choose* by Nick Sharratt & Pippa Goodhart (Random House Children's Books)

This very popular picture book offers a wealth of material which can be shared and discussed or explored alone. It is ideal for audiences with moderate to severe learning difficulties, but likely to have far wider appeal

*Don't You Dare, Dragon* by Annie Kubler (Child's Play)

A highly interactive book featuring a puppet and offering multiple ways for children to join in; good for retaining the interest of those with attention difficulties and moderate to severe learning difficulties