

Celebrating Classics

PUPILS have become curiouser and curiouser as they strive to improve their reading with a classic tale.

ALICE in Wonderland became the theme of the week as Springfield Academy pupils celebrated the Lewis Carroll timeless tale.

Reading continues to be a priority at the primary school giving children one of the most important basic building blocks of learning.

The school, which is part of the Education Village Academy Trust, Darlington, extended the annual World Book Day to a full week to strengthen pupils' love of reading.

Principal Richard Gartland said: "The focus for us is very much on reading not on fancy dress. This is in line with our policy of poverty proofing which means that parents don't have to spend money needlessly on costumes for their children who can then concentrate on reading and enjoying literature.

"Studying books like Alice Wonderland builds up cultural capital for the children. For us this is not a commercial day, this is about the love of reading and getting the children to celebrate books in the right way without pressurising parents to spend."

Pupils took part in a host of activities during the week including visiting the learning resource centre.

Years five and six took part in a book quiz and children in Years 1-4 enjoyed a Where's Wally hunt, all children left with a book and a book token.

English lead Lynne Simpson added: "We have brought the focus back to reading and studying the books. We've looked at classics, including Alice in Wonderland and Shakespeare. Reading is massive in Springfield and there's a huge focus on it with us all working really hard to embed the culture.



“The children get lots of opportunity to read to themselves and with adults. There is whole class reading and we have author visits and an author pen pal in Laura Trinder, who wrote *The Midnight Hour* and *The Midnight Howl*. She sends the children postcards asking them lots of questions and introducing us to new books.”

Mrs Simpson also attends a half termly teacher book club at Seven Stories, the National Centre for Children’s Books in Newcastle, and is one of just 10 teachers from the North-East invited to the Cheltenham Reading Festival from which she brings new books back to school.

The school also takes part in live lessons with the National Literacy Trust.

“Reading out loud really boosts pupils’ confidence and they are desperate to do it,” she said. “It’s something to be really proud of that we have created a culture where they are so keen to learn and want to join in. Reading is also a useful antidote to digital devices and we have a monthly newsletter highlighting all the good work we do. We have a prize for star reader and Mr Gartland runs a bookshop where, if they’ve done really well, they can choose a book.”

Reception and nursery classes use Sounds Write, a phonics system that is having a huge impact on how they read which is embedding phonics and allowing them to read more confidently and fluently. “We have seen a significant improvement in reading ability in the early years classes,” said Mrs Simpson.

Eight-year-old Tyler said: “When I read it trains me to use more words. I love reading.” Lacey, eight, added: “I have three little sisters and when I read a book I can escape into a whole new world which is great.”

In 2021 the school launched a Year 1 reading programme after securing funding from the National Literacy Trust.

The programme aims to fill a gap caused by the pandemic and home learning that had impacted on reception age children.

From September pupils have been helped to make accelerated progress by being given a full set of phonics books to boost their learning.

There have also been parent workshops to encourage them to read and listen to their children at home. Children who read at home develop vocabularies way in advance of those who don’t.

