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Why your school needs a patron of reading

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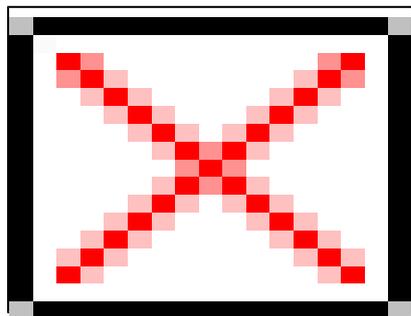
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Byline:

The new **Patron of Reading** scheme

Author visits to schools can often be one of the highlights of the academic year, enjoyed by children, staff and writers alike. However, after the initial 'high', the enthusiasm and energy created by the visit can sometimes be lost as the reality and pressure of the school timetable takes over. **Jon Biddle**, teacher at **West Earlham Junior School** in Norwich and the [Patron of Reading](#) [3] website webmaster describes the Patron of Reading initiative, designed to ensure that the moment created by an author visit is maintained.

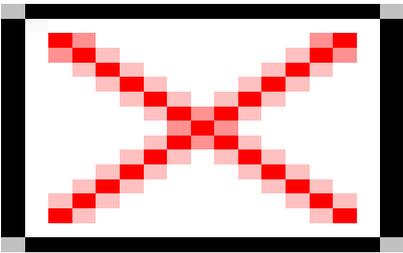
Tim Redgrave, the headteacher at **Ysgol Esgob Morgan** in North Wales, came up with the simple yet effective idea of schools having a patron of reading. A patron of reading is an author (or possibly a poet, illustrator, scriptwriter or storyteller) with whom a school forms a long term attachment. The author and the school work closely together to promote reading for pleasure over a period of, say, three years and create a real reading 'buzz' in the school.



The idea originally came about when Tim took one of his classes to **St Asaph Library** in Denbighshire to hear author Helena Pielichaty give a talk as part of **Denbighshire Libraries Book Week**. He quickly realised what a big impact the visit had made on his pupils and started to think about how he could make the most of the opportunity created. He emailed Helena and they spent time sharing ideas about how to promote a love of reading in schools. Eventually the ideas turned into the **Patron of Reading** initiative.

Helena, now at the end of her tenure describes how much she enjoyed being **Ysgol Esgob Morgan's** first patron of reading. 'The buzz it has generated is wonderful; there is no doubt that this school is a school that reads for pleasure - the evidence is everywhere. When I visit, children can't wait to tell me about the books they are reading; there are folders full of reviews, innovative displays and plays being rehearsed - and lots of blogging going on. In addition, Ysgol Esgob Morgan is the only school (as far as I know) to have had 100% participation in the [Summer Reading Challenge](#) [4] for three years consecutively. It's all so inspiring. I've benefitted enormously, too. The role has enabled me to have a unique relationship with the staff and children that a one-off visit can't provide. Ofsted talks a lot about 'enrichment' and I think this reading initiative provides that in spades.'

The idea, which works equally as well in primary and secondary schools, has quickly spread and there are now over a hundred patrons in place, including John Dougherty, Sita Brahmachari Nicola Morgan, Tom Palmer, Cathy McPhail, Gillian Cross, Julia Jarman, Brian Moses and Alan Gibbons.



The role of the patron varies widely from school to school, but there are some key ideas which have been adopted by most of the partnerships. Most important is to host a patron visit at least once per year during their tenure, but in many cases it is more often. This aspect of the partnership is organised and paid for just like any other author visit. Patrons can also maintain contact between visits by Skype, email or newsletter.

The beauty of the scheme is there are no hard or fast rules. Several partnerships have set up successful blogs which contain contributions not only from the patron, but also from the staff, the pupils and their parents. Parents participation is key and they are invited to special assemblies, book signings, after-school meetings, etc. Some schools have also sent home a flyer, jointly written by the school and the patron, introducing the scheme and providing some tips on how parents can support and nurture their children's passion for reading.

Schools considering getting themselves a patron of reading should think carefully about which author to approach. Although it is not always possible, ideally it should be one with whom there is already some kind of connection. For example, Molly Naylor, the patron of reading at **City Academy Norwich**, spent two or three years working regularly in the feeder primary schools and had already developed a good relationship with many of the students. They already knew much of her work and her methods.

Although the idea is spreading rapidly across the country, it is still relatively new. Most patrons are only in their first term or haven't yet started, so it is difficult to assess the impact that the idea has had. Tim Redgrave is in no doubt. 'Having a patron of reading has made a significant difference to all of our children and their approach to reading for pleasure. It has inspired all of them to visit libraries, explore a range of books and authors and is changing their lives - literally! We have a school full of confident readers and it doesn't take a genius to know how this is improving standards across the board at our school.'

Abridged from an original piece written by Jon Biddle, teacher at West Earlham Junior School in Norwich and the [Patron of Reading](#) [3] website webmaster.

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