

## Ashfield School e-Library

*A Case Study by Alex Sankowski, Librarian*

Ashfield School is one of the largest schools in the country and serves 2,700 secondary and sixth form students. The school has been designated a High Performing Secondary School for a number of years and retains specialisms in three areas: Technology, Applied Learning and Languages. The school is also a designated Training School.

As the librarian I was aware in 2013 that e-Library solutions were available and carried out in depth investigations of three of these. In November 2013 I prepared a justification document and approached our Deputy Head, and ensured that our I.T. Department was happy we selected VLeBooks from Browns Books for Students. The initial funding was obtained from our 'Catch-Up', whole school literacy budgets

The three main reasons for selecting VLeBooks were:

- Integration with Renaissance Learning and the Accelerated Reader program. The focus on our e-Library program was to assist reluctant readers.
- The functionality of the Online Reader and especially the ability to share notes for collaborative learning.
- VLeBooks is also used in many universities and therefore excellent preparation for our sixth form students

We began by ordering almost 150 eBooks, mostly popular fictions titles (Jacqueline Wilson, Anthony Horowitz, Malorie Blackman, etc.) for years 7 & 8 that were linked to low level Accelerated Reader and had direct links to the AR quiz, but also some core non-fiction titles. Ordering was simple and exactly the same as ordering print titles through the Brown's website. To provide access we purchased an initial batch of android tablets for the library and upgraded the library Wi-Fi to ensure faster and more reliable connectivity. We have continued to purchase addition fiction and non-fiction eBooks, including a significant number for our sixth form, and now have 400 titles in our e-Library. Where available we prefer to purchase a multiple user access licence which better supports a whole class approach to reading. We've also increased the number of tablets available to students in the library to 54, and many of our students use their own mobile devices. When we purchase an e-Book it is made available to our students within minutes and a Marc catalogue record is made available to us. We load this directly into our heritage LMS using the Browns import module and the link to each eBook is automatically added. Heritage is also loaded onto all of our tablets providing the students with the simplest of means to accessing any of our titles.

Access to VLeBooks for our students uses a straightforward username and password system. We provided a spreadsheet of student user identifiers with a standard password for an initial Login and then each student is prompted to create a new password at this point. We also created 30 'library users' which can be used for training and to give immediate access if the student has not yet activated their own account. We believe it is important to be in a position to provide instant access while the student is engaged. We have used the content restrictions available in VLeBooks to ensure that the sixth form titles are only available to sixth form students

and with a few exceptions all other content is available to all year groups. Most access to our e-Library is from home using the students own PC's, laptops, or tablets. The online reader works with all standard browsers and requires no additional software or plug-ins.

We have chosen to promote reading using the VLeBooks cloud-based online reader only, although as we purchase additional copies of the most popular fiction we will likely allow students to download these for 1-2 weeks for off-line reading. The online reader is very intuitive and very easy to use, even for our youngest and most reluctant readers. The colour wheel allows a change to the background colour and text size can be increased. Both features are very popular with all students and also with helping students with a variety of visual impairments. The ability to search the full text is much appreciated, especially in non-fiction.

The support we have received from Browns Books for Students is fantastic. The initial setup of VLeBooks was completed in two days, eBooks are available in just a few minutes once ordered, and when the occasional support call has been required they are always dealt with in a prompt and efficient manner.

Most of our staff and students are extremely enthusiastic about eBooks and many of our students find it exciting. It has also significantly raised the profile of the library within the school. The enhanced infrastructure has also allowed us to further expand the range of services that we can offer.

This year we have introduced an MFL reading race for lower ability year 8 students using 20 copies of '101 Facts about France' at £1.99 per copy. Students have to answer a set of questions about France by working as a team and using the search functionality in VLeBooks to locate the necessary information. This exercise requires that they learn to identify keywords in questions, locate the correct section, and read to obtain the correct answer.

We have also purchased eBooks to support a year 7 Science research project, and a year 8 boy's intervention group which used the Jags series by Tom Watt. The novelty of eBooks has worked well in encouraging these boys to read and complete the AR quizzes. We have made available a number of eBooks for our school counsellor about sensitive areas such as anxiety and stress that can be recommended to students and can be read in privacy at home and without others being aware but gives easy access.

On World Book Day we have selected a number of eBooks and during every lesson the teacher will read a chapter or set number of pages to the class so that by the end of the day every student will have heard the entire book.

In the next few months we have a number of plans to further promote our e-Library with the school

- Adding links to eBooks and specific chapters within our VLE
- Creating targeted reading lists using Library Lists within VLeBooks
- Producing laminated sheets containing the jacket image, annotation, and a QR code and displaying within the library
- Providing information to parents

While we can already see the obvious and expected benefits such as ease of access, space saving, and no re-shelving it is too early to provide conclusive evidence regarding reading improvement among students, but there is plenty of anecdotal evidence that we are seeing students accessing eBooks that would not otherwise have been reading and that is ideal for encouraging independent learning. Usage reports allow me to check reading for individual students. It is clear that our e-Library is complementing our print books, but certainly does not replace them.