

Patron of Reading – My Vision

Over the next few pages, I will explain my vision of the role of Patron of Reading, as well as tell you about some of the things that I have achieved over the last three years as a Patron of Reading (PoR) in schools across Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire.

I believe that learning to read is the single most important life-skill a child will ever learn. It is not as simple as being able to read an advert for a job, an important letter or email, reading to learn a new skill or information, or even reading for pleasure. The reasons why it's so crucial are far deeper, and some may not become apparent until later in life. Reading reduces stress, improves memory, focus and concentration, empathy, and all-around well-being and mental health.

The fact is, the more you read, the more opportunities are open to you. I want children to have the best possible start in life, and I believe that along with support, nurture and challenge, developing a life-long love of reading is at the very core of it.

Having a PoR is a (relatively) low cost/high impact initiative to help schools develop a reading for pleasure culture. The idea, first mooted by headteacher Tim Redgrave, has grown and spread into a nationwide initiative over the last seven years, and it is easy to see why.

One of the key strengths of the PoR initiative is that, while it has key aims and objectives, it is not government-led, and therefore has no hidden agenda. This means the school and Patron can pursue it in such a way that suits the school and the needs of the children. It is therefore important for the school to find someone who can fulfil their needs, be part of their team, as well as work well with and inspire children.

I am able to use my past experience as a teacher to meet these educational needs by creating sessions, workshops and activities that have educational value, and are motivating, engaging and entertaining. This background also means that I effectively communicate with children, staff and parents.

While these are powerful additional skills that I can bring, ultimately it is the magic of meeting, knowing and working with a "real life" author that really matters. The ultimate aim of the PoR is to help the school develop a culture of reading by creating a buzz about books, something that this "author magic" impacts considerably.

A vital part of the PoR role is directly linked to the PoR's personality and charisma, their "Pied Piper Effect", as I call it. I have a proven record of inspiring children and

“taking them with me”. The PoR should have a unique relationship with the children, which enables him or her to engage with the children in a range of enriching activities, leaving them excited for the PoR’s return and wanting to share their reading journey. The activities the Patron carries out, are dynamic, engaging and fun! A visit from your PoR is something that everyone in school – children, teaching staff, middays...everyone – will look forward to.

This magic alone, however, is not enough. Over the last three years, I have carried out a wide range of motivational activities, and this repertoire continues to grow as I work with more and more schools as a PoR or with one-off visits. They have included a growing range of enrichment activities, including drama, art, the use of music, and dance. I now also offer joint visits with the illustrator I work with, though I realise this may not be appropriate here.

So far, I have supported six schools move towards their reading (and writing) goals by:

- Carrying out a range of workshops and projects based on my books, how I work, as well as other authors.
- Donating books to the school from the latest authors and then advising the librarian whether to buy additional copies. These have included books by Abi Elphinstone, Maz Evans, Keiran Larwood, Peter Bunzl, Katherine Rundell, Emma Carroll, Lisa Thompson, my own, (of course) and many others.
- A termly newsletter, including news and competitions. Prizes have included book vouchers, free books and having a character named after you in my next novel.
- Website space, though this is a WIP.
- Attending school events on top of the agreed number of paid visits – Christmas plays, PTA events, Year 6 Leavers Assembly etc.
- Working with parents.
- Making effective links with the PTA and working with them at events to raise money. (PTA have also funded projects).
- Additionally, when I visit, I eat with the children and spend most playtimes on the playground finding out what they like to do as well as their reading habits.

The two projects I have been most proud of have been a short story I wrote especially for Albany as a “bedtime story” for World Book Day 2017. The children created illustrations for the book, then the PTA bought every family a copy. This was then featured on Notts TV, including interviews with the children who spoke of

their pride of being in a published book. Making a book was never the intention, it was something the PTA asked if they could after hearing the bedtime story. This shows that the PoR has an impact on all who work with and in the school.

The second was a whole school project about empathy based around Shawn Tann's *The Arrival*. This included dance, drama, descriptive writing and diary writing.

If you would like any additional information, please don't hesitate to get in touch. I am certain that Adam Newman at Farmilo Primary School would be happy to offer a reference, if you would like one.

My fees depend on the number of visits per year you have. Typically, I charge £1050 for 3 visits, or £1800 for 6. I am happy to discuss these fees with you.

Thank you for your interest. Please feel free to ask any questions you may have.

Gareth Baker