The focus of this project was to diminish the difference in literacy outcomes for lower attaining and disadvantaged pupils who are eligible for catch-up funding in Year 7.

Of the students identified as eligible for catch-up literacy funding in year 7 in 2016-2017 and 2017-2018, 35% of these students were disadvantaged on entry, compared to 28% of the whole school population, and 28% nationally. Additionally, 33% of the catch-up literacy cohort are EAL, compared to 12% of the school population and 16% nationally. Students with SEN comprise 20% of the catch-up cohort, compared to 5.9% of the school population and 10.7% nationally.

Initial strategies for improvement were to identify inhibitors to progress in Acclerated Reader (AR), engaging support staff in raising standards, and having a structured sequence of data capture points to track progress, as well as using EEF research to underpin practical approaches.

Question-level analysis of key stage 2 data gave the following rank-order to students' main barriers to reading progress.

1. Meaning of words in context
2. Make and justify inferences
3. Explain word choices
4. How information/content is related
5. Retrieve and record information

This analysis showed the importance of improving students' reading comprehension rather than de-coding skills, and that AR would be the most effective resource that had capacity for immediate improvement. AR would provide the main sources of tracking data for the improvement project through reading age data generated by STAR reading tests: Sept/Jan/Apr/Jun and reading comprehension scores generated by AR book quizzes on a fortnightly basis.

AR requires 85% correct answers to pass the test, while 95% comprehension is required for reading to be fluently understood [Alex Quigley*, Closing the Vocabulary Gap* 2017]. Historically, students in catch-up literacy groups achieved a reading comprehension rate between 40% and 50%. With this in mind, I wanted to get catch-up students as close to 90% as possible.

In the end the project exceeded its target, delivering reading comprehension scores for the catch-up cohort above 95% within two terms.

Fostering a successful curriculum

Support staff were key to the progress achieved by students, particularly the contribution of the library assistant. We discussed a different type of AR report from the usual one that was produced, that showed individual students' activity on AR quizzes. This enabled her to direct her questioning when working one-to-one with students towards their reading choices and how to engage them with reading more challenging texts, moving towards the upper end of their reading range.

In assessing the effectiveness of our Accelerated Reader and wider library lessons, I considered Charles Deforges' suggestion that a successful curriculum fosters:

- the will to learn

- the ability to form learning objectives (i.e. they are self-challenging)
- persistence in adversity
- knowledge of learning processes
- basic skills
- creativity and flexibility

Accelerated Reader has these principles built in and so fully supports the principles of an effective curriculum.

The improvement project demonstrably reduced variation in pupil progress. Most strikingly, the improvement in percentage reading comprehension was beyond expectation. Disadvantaged students made rapid progress from 40% correct answers in AR reading comprehension quizzes (November) to 95% correct across the cohort by March. The class as a whole moved from 51% to 90% correct in the same period. The improvement was similar in 7BY. The project not only narrowed the gap but disadvantaged students, most of whom were in the catch-up cohort, outstripped their peers.

Consistency – the 'broken record'

This work also demonstrated the importance of consistency of delivery to reading progress. During the Autumn Term, I introduced weekly library lessons, instead of fortnightly. This could have been a risk because it would mean that these students would have less 'English time'. As Head of Department, based on my study of EEF research into reading at the transition, I decided that this wasn't a genuine risk. The greater risk to progress comes when students cannot comprehend fluently, then cannot access the higher order skills that are required in English lessons. To ameliorate this issue I re-planned the programme of study for Year 7 so that there was emphasis on developing skills across the year, rather than focusing on content.

This evaluation of risk was borne out during the Summer Term, when the library was closed for exams and students returned to the previous pattern of lessons. Reading progress declined significantly to one month's progress in three months, rather than 5 months progress in the preceding 10 weeks.

The Impact of Leadership

Being a leader who is a learner would be at the heart of the improvement project, and this philosophy was shared by the support staff who were involved. By reviewing strategies on a termly basis, we had to be self-reflective and develop change. For example, dropping the shared reading of a play from the library lesson as this proved difficult to implement due to staff absence and the noise created for students who were not part of the play-reading group. We also had to make sure that the impact of change was cohesive and shared, and that we modelled a consistent example of expectations, not just of delivery but also reflection. Frequent conversations-in-passing with the support staff who were delivering the change enabled the project to 'flow': experienced staff who were being asked to refresh and renew existing practice felt happy and confident about doing so.

Effective partnerships were key to the success of the improvement project. Changing the timetable for library lessons meant that the library assistant had greater demands on her time and English classes would lose curriculum time. Changes to the structure of library lessons meant that student performance would be more closely monitored and discrepancies would be addressed within the

English Department. Teachers would also be expected to engage more directly with students' reading progress.

It was agreed to try things with one class, see how they worked out and if there were any problems, to have open discussion about why these were and how to solve them. Successes would be rolled out to other groups, led by the library assistant. The strategy proved successful in generating measurable progress, and established a positive experience for students. Our next problem was getting students to increase the challenge in their reading choices. Support from the library staff in how to develop stretch within Accelerated Reader has proved invaluable to helping us to progress students' quality as well as quantity of reading.

Moving on from here

Creating a process that promotes disciplinary literacy and an understanding that fluency drives attainment are essential elements to today's classroom practice across subjects and at all levels of teaching and learning.

Our next step is to move the challenge of improving reading comprehension out of the library and into classrooms.