Ten year old Maxine discovers a wonderful world of witches with her Ablaze Reading Buddy.

Maxine, a year 5 pupil at Whitehall Primary School, told us how her Ablaze Reading Buddy has helped her discover her love of reading and have more confidence in her ability.

Before she started working with her buddy, Nic Reisner from local publishing firm Intellect, Maxine was finding it hard to engage with books and therefore didn’t get the most out of quiet reading time in class. Now, thanks to weekly sessions with Nic, she is confidently choosing books and motivated to read.

Ablaze visited Maxine and Nic at Whitehall Primary School to find out what they had to say about their reading relationship.
Nic Reisner from Intellect Books has been a Reading Buddy at Whitehall Primary School for over five years, mainly reading with children in Years 5 and 6 (9-11 years old). She visits the school every week during term time to read with her two Reading Buddies.

Ablaze visited Whitehall Primary School during a Reading Buddies session to ask Nic what it is like being a Reading Buddy and why she wanted to volunteer:

“I thought it would be a good way to give something back and hopefully use some of the skills I have. I used to be a teacher, so I really enjoy the opportunity to work one to one with the children, and give them more attention than they would get in a class setting. I love reading and I want to help children learn to love reading as much as I do. I work for a publishing company, so it’s really good to foster a love of reading in the next generation.”

“It’s a very rewarding and worthwhile experience - the children get a lot out of reading and they really seem to enjoy having a Reading Buddy. The children who don’t have a Reading Buddy keep on asking if they can read too! The fact that we’re coming from a business means the children get a very different perspective. They ask us questions about what we do and we’ve organised a visit to our office, so it means they’re learning a bit about the world of publishing.”

Maxine is ten years old and in Year 5. Her first language is English, but she also speaks the African language Shona. She has been reading with Nic for a few months and during that time her love of reading has grown and her confidence has blossomed. We asked Nic what she did to help Maxine’s reading:

“Maxine was already quite strong in her technical reading ability, so I’ve tried to foster her understanding a bit more, as well as her enthusiasm. I encourage her to pick books that she enjoys and are at the right level for her. I ask questions about the story so far, just before we start, so I can check how much she has understood. Sometimes, whilst she is reading, I will ask her questions about how the characters might be feeling.”

“She’s becoming more confident in her reading, I’ve really noticed that she’s enjoying her reading more. The difference in her enjoyment, engagement and understanding is evident.”

“I get the satisfaction of making a difference, of helping someone improve. It’s improved my mentoring and listening skills. Also, I get to read some great children’s books!” Nic Reisner, Intellect Books
Maxine’s teacher has really noticed the positive effects of having a Reading Buddy for Maxine:

“She is more confident in class generally. Before having a Reading Buddy, during quiet reading time, Maxine was struggling to get engaged in a book. Now, she will confidently choose a book and be really motivated and interested in her reading.”

“Her writing has also improved, as she is reading through her work more and is working hard to make her writing better for others to read.”

Maxine was very happy to talk to us about her experience of having a Reading Buddy:

“The reading and learning are great. It makes me feel really special to have a Reading Buddy. I enjoy reading more now and I love the Worst Witch books.”

“I liked reading before, but I wasn’t really confident with sounding out the words and my spelling was not very good. Now I will ask more questions about the books we are reading, and I am happier to put my hand up in class”

“I read with my Dad at home. This year I asked for some books for my birthday and I was really pleased when I got them!”

Emma Cutmore, Reading Recovery Teacher at Whitehall Primary School, is really pleased with the progress made by the children who have an Ablaze Reading Buddy. Whitehall Primary School is supported by volunteers from Intellect Books and Thrings Solicitors. The volunteers visit their Reading Buddies on a regular basis, so they get to know the pupils well. Emma commented:

“At Whitehall Primary School we invest in reading, as we know that being able to read well is important for the children’s futures. Most of our pupils read well, but having a Reading Buddy really helps children deepen their understanding and enjoyment of books, so they are happy to read more.”

“The Reading Buddies scheme is fantastic and bring so many benefits to those who take part. Some pupils have been lucky enough to visit the Intellect Books offices, so it helps give them an insight into future careers too.”

“Maxine’s self-motivation, understanding and vocabulary have all improved since having a Reading Buddy ” Maxine’s teacher

“Nic is really nice and she corrects me if I make a mistake when I’m reading ” Maxine
Ablaze is an independent charity that exists to tackle inequality of opportunity for young people in the West of England region. We do this by utilising the skills and commitment of business volunteers.

We aim to

- raise young people’s confidence and aspiration
- support their attainment and skill levels
- empower them with knowledge to make informed choices about their future.

Since 2005 thousands of young people across the wider Bristol region have been supported by business and community volunteers delivering Ablaze programmes in schools. These programmes aim to raise aspiration and attainment and improve skill levels to boost young people’s chances in continuing education, employability and life.

Reading Buddies is one of the Primary School programmes organised by Ablaze. Reading Buddies aim to encourage primary pupils to read more, read better and be more confident in their ability.

Schools have reported that when a pupil’s confidence grows from their reading sessions with a business volunteer, their comprehension & ability to master literacy improves at a greater speed than it would without this additional support. Volunteers are paired with pupils who need extra support and they visit a school weekly, for 30 minutes, for an academic year.

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