

Junior Librarian

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Libraries don't really get the respect they deserve in primary schools. Unlike most secondary schools, not all primaries even have a dedicated library space - some are nothing more than a cramped corridor en route to the toilets. What about yours?

Factors that contribute to a successful school library include effective communication, stock management, marketing, and having a dedicated space run by a member of staff. If your library is none of these things, it sounds as though Junior Librarian might be the very thing you need to professionalise your provision.

Junior Librarian is a classy and extraordinary web-based library management system accessed via a web browser. It manages and tracks each book in your school using a barcode reader, serial code stickers and individual logins. The .net version of Junior Librarian uses a Silverlight environment where children can scan books in and out, as well as reserve and review books online. Ah, the use of ICT on a daily basis for a real purpose - tick. If you want to find out a pupil's borrowing history and their reading level, then just look on the system!

Setting up Junior Librarian takes time to start off with because all your books need registering. The software is helpful here though because it recognises the books you scan and automatically adds an image and summary to your records - it's a breeze.

Once Junior Librarian has been opened there are two different interfaces, either Junior Classic or Beach Scene. The latter is my favourite and is far more engaging for children. The interface you choose then lets you open up a number of interactive features. A first port of call for children is 'New Book In The Library', which links to all the

latest titles you have in stock. Click on a book and this will bring up further details, including - in some cases - an author video, so children get to see and hear from the creator of the story. (This might cut down the cost of author visits for book week.) There is a 'Who Next?' feature that recommends other books that children might like to read, and Junior Librarian also links to ITV's excellent Signed Story site, which is perfect for developing literacy in deaf children.

There is the option to read reviews written by other pupils so children can see what their friends have written about a particular book before adding their own comments and views. I love this feature because it really engages children with a book and encourages them to become writers and leave their own literary footprint on the school system.

If you are wondering how you might access all these features beyond the school gates then remember - this is an online facility, so you can visit your library at any time using an internet connected PC. There is also an app for phones and tablets, so there are plenty of opportunities

for visiting and engaging with the school library. Children can click through to their homepage and customise it to their taste, and this extends to multilingual support for pupils whose first language is not English.

One of the best features is the 'Enquiry' section. Here pupils can search for what they are interested in according to pictures, names, and titles. They can also make use of an advanced search option. If children are undecided on what to read, they can click on a wheel and this will generate some different choices from a range of subjects.

Junior Librarian integrates with Accelerated Reader from Renaissance Learning, which means certain titles can be accessed that link to levelled quizzes.

So, with Junior Librarian you get to create an engaging online library for everyone in your school with bags of pupil appeal. Your books won't get 'lost' because you will know exactly who has what. You can track reading progress and trends simply (e.g. discover books most commonly read by boys and girls), link the library to your school VLE, set up an asset register, embed ICT and literacy, and get parents involved. The user guide is brilliant and would answer any of your questions. What's not to like?

Verdict: A unique experience

Obviously funding, staffing and accommodation are critical success factors, but if you can overcome these considerations and you think a change is long overdue, Junior Librarian would make a great choice. Fifty per cent of primary schools in the UK are already using the service, so this tells you it can't be half bad. Junior Librarian is a brilliant piece of self-service technology and offers children a truly unique experience of the library, even when the school is closed.



Language theme days

La Jolie Ronde's Spring & Easter Theme Day (£49.99 +VAT) is available in French or Spanish and is ideal for engaging pupils on a whole school level to participate in a fun, language learning activity. No specialist language skills are required as all activities are pre-planned by age group. Other themes are also available, including Around my School; Sport - relive the Olympics; Bastille Day; and Fiestas. If you buy the Spring & Easter resource, you can get any other theme day for half price. Just call 01949 839715 quoting TPFTD. lajolieronde.co.uk/themedays

