

THOMAS MILLS HIGH SCHOOL LIBRARY

# ANNUAL REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR 2024-25

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Librarian: Elizabeth Vale  
Date Covered: September  
2024-August 2025

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Thomas Mills High School  
Saxtead  
IP13 9HE

# INTRODUCTION

Academic Year 2024-25 was an interesting year in the school library and one from which we learnt a lot. We had some wonderful author visits and connected the students to award winning professionals such as Tia Fisher, Pam Smy, Dave Shelton and Simon James Green. We were also celebrated nationally by the School Library Association as part of their Librarian of the Year award. The association recognised that our 'passion [for literature] has fostered a love of reading that has turned the library into the cultural hub' of the school. They further pointed out that we have 'ensured the library is embedded in the school's daily life through many popular clubs and book events' to encourage reading for pleasure. It was an honour to see the work we have been doing here at Thomas Mills High School nationally recognised and celebrated during the finals in London. Additionally, it was a year of new challenges as we introduced library programmes into the space led by our year 8 and 9 students. These students were trained how to advertise their clubs, create a weekly structure and scaffold information. Particular highlights included our Summer Coding Club run by Thomas Underwood, Henry Colnet, Isaac Osbourne and Camron Courtney. These students visited forms to advertise their group, created posters on Canva and taught small groups how to use Artie Max robots, Microbits and Bee-Bots. We also had year 8 students Lizzie Stringfellow and Isabelle Wellum taking on extra responsibility by creating a weekly Horrible Histories speed reading quiz for students. These programmes were designed to empower the individuals involved, teaching them valuable skills such as delegation, teamwork, planning and scheduling. We also had a group of year 7 and 8 students who took on the role of Reading Ambassadors for the school and started to run their own book award.

Alongside our library programmes, we involved ourselves in more new initiatives outside of school. These included entering teams in Britannica's national non-fiction quiz (What On Earth?), a competition we enjoyed so much that we've already signed a team up for next year, and FCBG's (Federation of Children's Book Group) book award. The latter federation were so impressed with the display our students made, that they were featured in the group's termly newsletter. Students performed well in their Accelerated Reader Star tests this year, with a majority showing consistent improvement. We did, however, have a disappointing drop in library loans and year 7 reading for pleasure. This unfortunately aligns with national trends; National Literacy Trust research reports that in early 2024, just 34.6% of 8-18-year-olds said they enjoy reading in their free time—the lowest level since the survey began in 2005. Daily leisure reading also reached a record low: only 20.5% read daily—down by 7.5 percentage points from the previous year. By early 2025, the trend had continued: enjoyment slipped further to 32.7% and daily reading to 18.7%—both the lowest teen reading figures in two decades. The surveys run by the charity cover ages 8-18, interestingly aligning directly with our Year 7-13 student cohort. This will definitely be something to continue challenging in the next academic year as we try a new approach which is less pressured and more focussed on the enjoyment of reading and 'cosiness' of picking up a book.

# OVERVIEW

## OBJECTIVES FOR 2024/2025

- 1) Increase the number of opportunities for year 8 and 9 students to use the library.
- 2) Run more Sixth Form drop-in sessions on topics such as Referencing, Renters Rights, Public Speaking and Budgeting.
- 3) Run a successful Battle of the Bookworms event.
- 4) Continue to chair Suffolk Librarians' Forum and take on an active role in the profession.

## WAYS THESE WERE ACHEIVED

- There was an increase in year 8 and 9 students visiting the library during English classes. This was particularly successful with J. Ashford's classes.
- More classes were created for these students at the start of the year, focussed on teen titles. Rap and Rhythm: Verse Novels and Rap Music proved especially popular.
- Year 8 and 9 students took leadership roles in the library, helping with book displays and reading promotion.
- We supported our year 8 and 9 students by offering DoE volunteering opportunities.
- House Officials in the Sixth Form were trained in public speaking and how to structure an assembly.
- A new Non-Fiction training session was created for year 12 students.
- Drop in sessions for Sixth Form students advertised in the library.
- Sixth Form students on the library team were trained to lead projects (such as Book Fair Take Over) and structure and lead assemblies.
- Sixth Form volunteers were chosen and trained to run creative writing and craft workshops at Folk East Festival.
- Year 5 students were invited to get involved in our Battle of Bookworms competition.
- We conducted research into what year 5 students were reading last year and used this to shape our competition (which received great feedback from schools).
- We collected feedback following the Battle of the Bookworms event.
- All students involved in assemblies or library events were invited to 'reflection' meetings at the end of their activity. They were taught to celebrate what went well, whilst also thinking about improvements for the next year.
- We chaired meetings for Suffolk Librarians forum each half term and increased CPD sessions in these. These celebrated skill sharing and working together to create a strong library offering for all students attending our schools.
- We found authors to talk at Suffolk Librarian Forum's events.
- We became a member of FCBG (Ipswich branch) and took part in FCBGs book award with students from year 8.
- Attended SLA training events, committee meetings and CPD/Networking events after school. We also attended Saturday SLA Norfolk and Suffolk meetings.
- Hosted SLAs February conference at the school and helped book special guests as a committee member.
- Organised termly author visits (five this academic year, thanks to the invaluable support from the Michael Sim's Memorial Trust).
- Worked with Suffolk Librarians' Forum to arrange county events for students, such as Book Mastermind and Carnegie Battle of the Books.



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### LIBRARY BASED CLASSES

Activities included Accelerated Reader sessions for year 7 and 8 students (led by teachers and our librarian); Super-Library Sweep for years 7 and 8; Percy Jackson Escape Room for year 7; Non-Fiction Quizzes for years 7, 8, and 12; Rhyme and Reason: Exploring Rap Music and Verse Novels for year 9 to name but a few. All were designed to deepen students' understanding of authors and their subjects whilst also sparking interest and engagement.



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### AUTHOR VISITS

We were so lucky to offer students the opportunity to hear and get involved in workshops led by five different authors this Academic Year. These authors included Kate Rolfe (year 7), Simon James Green (year 7 and 8), Pam Smy (year 7-8), Tia Fisher (year 9 and Dave Shelton (year 7-10). Visits were designed to increase student awareness of important issues (in the case of Tia Fisher, County Lines), inspire reading for pleasure and encourage writing and creative skills.



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## SUCCESSFUL INTER-SCHOOL EVENTS

We were involved in three successful inter-school events last year. We played a key role in organising this year's Book Mastermind finals with Suffolk Librarians' Forum (and had a record 28 students compete in our school heats); we ran a very successful Carnegie Battle of the Books event onsite and a Battle of the Bookworms competition in which two of our local primary schools went head to head to compete for our reading trophy.

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## MONEY RAISED FOR CHARITY AND RESOURCES FOR THE LIBRARY

An amazing £897 was raised during our Read for Good *Readathon* with 30 students from year 7. This money was used to organise storyteller visits to children's hospitals. We also raised over £700 for Suffolk Mind, UNICEF, The Little Princes Trust and new books for the library during our annual Comic Con. The Michael Sims Memorial Trust also generously gave us £2087 to buy new fiction books and titles for our students needing dyslexia friendly reads.



# HIGHLIGHTS

## **SLA LIBRARIAN OF THE YEAR AWARD**

In October 2024, the School Library Association hosted its annual awards ceremony in London, celebrating excellence and innovation in school librarianship. We were invited to the event as our librarian was shortlisted for their Librarian of the Year Award, alongside two other candidates from schools in London and Liverpool. The event, held in London and featuring acclaimed author Robin Stevens, brought together professionals from across the UK to honour the transformative role of school libraries in education. The recognition not only highlighted individual contributions but also underscored the collective impact librarians have in fostering literacy, curiosity, and lifelong learning in schools. Being part of such an inspiring event was a true highlight of the year and it was a wonderful opportunity to talk to like-minded individuals and form new networks. The award also led to new opportunities for our students, who were invited to write for the online magazine Books for Keeps and share their opinions with Erin Hamilton from Suffolk Libraries (now Suffolk Community Libraries).

## **LIBRARIES CHANGE LIVES BY CREATING OPPORTUNITIES**

### **PARLIAMENTARY RECEPTION**

As a result of the above, we were also invited to attend a Parliamentary reception in the Terrace Pavilion at the Houses of Parliament. This gave us a chance to meet MPs and to share our school library's story as part of the Libraries Change Lives campaign (aimed to highlight the transformative power of libraries). The event allowed us to talk to policy makes and emphasise the importance of school libraries in shaping inquiry, aiding information literacy and inspiring students to become life long learners.

By placing our library—and our students—at the heart of this national dialogue, we reinforced our commitment to excellence and equity, and returned to school energised to continue building upon our library offering.



# HIGHLIGHTS

## AUTHOR VISITS

We were incredibly fortunate again this year to secure funding for termly author visits to help encourage reading for pleasure. In October, Simon James Green treated pupils to a special Book Week assembly, followed by a lively, laughter-filled session on comedy writing called *Owning the Awkward*. For World Book Day 2025, illustrator-author Pam Smy spoke to students about the creative process behind her graphic novel, *Thornhill*. She demonstrated the artistry, inspiration, and dedication involved in bringing stories and illustrations to life in a special extended assembly for year 7 and 8 individuals. Students who had done exceptionally well in their reading and art lessons were also given the opportunity to join a special pen and ink drawing class led by the illustrator. Our summer Comic Con event further featured award winning author-illustrator Dave Shelton—creator of *A Boy and a Bear in a Boat* and the *Emily Lime* series. Dave engaged students with a fascinating blend of illustration, cartooning, and storytelling workshops for years 7-10. Finally, Carnegie short-listed author and illustrator, Kate Rolfe, joined us for our Diversity Day and spoke to all of our year 7 students about the importance of representation in children's books.

These visits were important as meeting the creators of books sparks curiosity, nurtures creative writing, brings narratives to life, and encourages students to see reading and storytelling as something they, too, can pursue and enjoy ('leading by example').

## ACCELERATED READER AND READING FOR PLEASURE LESSONS

The library continued its series of reading for pleasure lessons within Accelerated Reader and English classes, encouraging students to engage with a wide range of books in an enjoyable and interactive way. This year, special library classes included Rhythm and Rhyme: Verse Novels and Rap Music (year 9), Book Speed Dating (year 7), Book Restaurant (year 8), Super-Library Sweep (year 8), Horrible Histories Speed Reading (year 7), non-fiction quizzes (year 8), Literary Slam Dunk (year 8) and Literary Jenga No Mercy (year 8). Each activity was carefully designed and led by the librarian to make reading dynamic, interactive, and enjoyable. We also reshaped year 8 AR classes during Spring Term so that they focussed on one group read followed by comprehension questions and discussion, encouraging students to read in depth, for pleasure and for information.

# HIGHLIGHTS

## **ACCELERATED READER OVERVIEW**

This year's Accelerated Reader data demonstrates encouraging trends in student reading development in Year 7. 70% of students showed improvement in reading age between Autumn and Summer term, with an average gain of 0.7 years. This reflects steady progress and engagement with our reading initiatives.

Several students achieved exceptional progress, with increases of 2-3 years in reading age. For example, one student improved from 13.04 to 16.01, and another from 12.08 to 16.06. These results highlight the impact of targeted interventions and sustained reading practice. Students starting below a reading age of 9 years generally improved with the support of James Day and the TAs, with gains of up to 1.1 years, demonstrating the effectiveness of our support strategies such as guided reading. Students with reading ages of 15+ maintained or slightly improved their levels, highlighting the fact that they were also continually challenged and engaged throughout the year.

In terms of year 8, the data reveals a generally positive trend in student reading development over the academic year. On average, students improved their reading age by 0.45 years, with the average reading age rising from 11.36 in Autumn to 11.86 in Summer. Out of 145 students, 89 showed improvement, while 40 experienced a decline, and 2 had no change. Notably, a subset of students demonstrated exceptional progress, with gains of over 3 years in reading age, suggesting significant literacy growth. Conversely, a smaller group experienced marked declines, which may warrant further investigation or support. This may equally be a result of over testing at the start of the year - we will alter how many tests we take next academic year to see if this makes a difference to attitude. Overall, the cohort shows encouraging progress, with the majority advancing in their reading ability.

# HIGHLIGHTS

## **SPRING CONFERENCES**

Spring term later offered new opportunities to share knowledge with other librarians and to showcase our initiatives. We were invited by Suffolk Libraries to feature on a panel of professionals discussing the theme 'Reaching the Reader.' This was part of the company's annual conference and was followed by a Q&A session from school literary leads, teachers and library staff. Additionally, we hosted this year's SLA Norfolk and Suffolk conference and worked as part of the SLA committee to organise engaging workshops for librarians focussed on CPD. The conference received outstanding feedback from attendees who commented positively on both content and venue (feedback available on request). As a result of our involvement, we were also able to organise a County Lines themed assembly with award winning author, Tia Fisher, for our older students preceding her talk at the conference itself.

## **SIXTH FORM TRAINING AND PROJECTS**

The library ran two main training sessions with year 12 and 13 students, alongside a short library induction in the performance studio on their first day of school. Year 12 students were taught how to get the most from our non-fiction collection and how to effectively retrieve information from books; our year 13s had an interactive session on referencing skills to prepare them for Sixth Form. During this latter session, we focussed primarily on the Chicago system for arts and humanities and the Harvard system for sciences. We also ran a variety of drop in sessions throughout the term; unfortunately, these didn't have much uptake this academic year (and were mainly focussed on referencing). We did have a successful training session with our House Officials though, in which they were taught how to research, structure and lead assemblies.

We also had a year 12 assembly team who were trained to run our yearly Scholastic Book Fair as part of our Sixth Form Book Fair Take Over project. These students led assemblies for year 7, 8 and 9 students and took up roles in Finance, Marketing, Advertising, Sales and Customer Services. The students involved this year made over £300 in sales and raised an impressive £172 towards new books for the School Library.

# HIGHLIGHTS

## **LIBRARY ASSISTANTS: TRAINING**

We further built upon our library assistant offering this year by developing an interview process, led by last year's student librarians. We had over twenty application forms filled in for the five available positions and asked nine individuals to interview. Each of last year's library assistants had ten minutes to interview three new student 'candidates,' following this, they watched the interviewees complete a task together which would show what type of team player they were. Last year's library assistants then met up to discuss what they had observed and to choose the new library team. We ended up with some great students who helped create displays throughout the year, worked on the library desk and helped out during special events.

We also welcomed four new Duke of Edinburgh students to the team and trained them to conduct stock checks and support events.

## **BOOK WEEK**

The library teamed up once again with the English Department to deliver a vibrant week of literary celebrations, filled with engaging activities and competitions. The week began with a special extended assembly led by acclaimed children's author Simon James Green, who spoke about his popular novel *Finn Jones Was Here*. Students then had the opportunity to meet him during a book signing session.

Throughout the week, year 7 and year 8 students took part in themed library lessons: Year 7s explored new titles through Book Speed Dating, whilst year 8s enjoyed our restaurant-inspired Book Tasting Awards. Daily assemblies focused on literature, and students participated in a variety of form time and library-based events, including Campfire Tales (open to all year groups), Book Week Bake Off, and a Science Non-Fiction Showcase hosted by the Science Department in the library.

A new addition this year was a form time challenge inspired by the game Ex Libris, where students had to guess the opening or closing lines of well-known books.

# HIGHLIGHTS

## WORLD BOOK DAY

March was an exciting month for our school library as we celebrated World Book Day with a series of events designed to foster a love of reading. From an author visit to interactive games, our students immersed themselves in literature in fun and creative ways.

One of the highlights was a visit from award-winning author and illustrator Pam Smy. Year 7 students attended a special assembly where Pam shared insights into her work, passed around her beautifully annotated sketchbooks, and spoke about the creative process behind books like *Thornhill*. Accompanied by a stuffed raven, she discussed the power of illustration in storytelling and how pictures can bring narratives to life in ways words sometimes cannot. Students were captivated by her journey as an illustrator and author, leaving the assembly with a new appreciation for visual storytelling.

Following the assembly, our Read for Good students enjoyed a special pen and ink drawing workshop with Pam. These students, who were part of our *Readathon*, spent the day reading in tents to raise money for charity and promote the importance of reading for pleasure. During the workshop, students used ink wells and nib pens to create their own gothic houses or characters, learning from a professional illustrator and developing their artistic skills.

Additionally, the whole school had the chance to participate in *Literary Cluedo*, a fun game where laminated cards featuring characters, locations, and objects—just like in the classic *Cluedo* game—were hidden around the school. Students worked together to track them down and solve the mystery. They were exposed to a variety of characters (new and old), building upon their literary knowledge!

There were also plenty of other opportunities for students to celebrate their love of reading on the day. They could take part in our World Book Day book swap, purchase a new title from Halesworth Bookshop, enter our Horrible Histories Speed-Reading Quiz and competition, or treat themselves to a delicious cake in the library baked by our school canteen staff.

The day was a huge success and a fantastic opportunity to promote the importance of reading for pleasure among our students.

# HIGHLIGHTS

## **INTER-SCHOOL YOTO CARNEGIE EVENT**

Once again we ran and hosted a YOTO:Carnegie Battle of the Books competition. We welcomed Ipswich School, Pakefield High School and Chantry Academy onsite for this; the morning consisted of a Battle of the Books style quiz, followed by interactive activities, book chat, an interview with previously short-listed author Tia Fisher and a live stream of the ceremony in London. We received excellent feedback for the event from the other librarians and plan to run it again academic year 2025-26. Bravo to Ipswich School who was awarded first place, Thomas Mills Team B who came second and Pakefield High School who was awarded third place.

## **BOOK MASTERMIND**

This year's Book Mastermind event was the biggest yet, with 28 students competing in our school heats and ten schools involved in the county finals. Thank you to Tesco and Waitrose for supporting the event and providing teas, coffees and snacks. Also, thank you to Suffolk Book League for supplying prizes for students and to FCBG for donating a box of books for the winning library.

Questions for this year's final were created by Suffolk Librarians' Forum and schools competing included: Farlingaye High School, Chantry Academy, Claydon High School, Ipswich High School, Ipswich School, Royal Hospital School, Pakefield High School, Sir John Leemans School and Debenham High School. Additional thanks goes to Craig Martin, librarian at the University of Central London (UCL) for agreeing to be our question master for another year and to Annaliese Avery for running writing workshops with the students as our visiting author.

## **BATTLE OF THE BOOKWORMS**

We hosted our second Battle of the Bookworms competition of the academic year, welcoming local primary schools to our school library for a lively contest of literary knowledge. Pupils took part in a variety of fun and challenging activities, including a themed quiz and a set of literary anagrams designed to test their reading and reasoning skills. As part of the experience, students also enjoyed a Year 7-style library lesson inspired by Matt Oldman's *The First Year*.

Congratulations to Snape School, who claimed the top prize for the quiz. Additionally, thanks to a generous book donation, every primary school child involved left with a free title to take home and enjoy.

# HIGHLIGHTS

## **SUFFOLK LIBRARIANS FORUM**

2024/25 marked the second full year of Miss Vale chairing Suffolk Librarians Forum. The group ran two successful events together and provided librarian-led CPD sessions for local school librarians, including a session with award winning librarian and writer Lucas Maxwell. Local librarians wishing to join can contact Miss Vale on [evale@thomasmills.suffolk.sch.uk](mailto:evale@thomasmills.suffolk.sch.uk) and meetings are arranged on a half termly basis.

## **FOLK EAST**

We trained three of our Sixth Form students this year to run creative writing and craft activities with children and teens as part of Folk East's Quill and Dice Tent. The students were taught how to deliver instructions in a clear, scaffolded way and learnt how to adapt to the level of the individual. Additionally, they supported the authors and artists visiting the tent and ensured that their workshops all ran smoothly.

## **LUNCHTIME CLUBS**

Lunchtime clubs continued to be popular this term, with many run by our library volunteers from year 8 and 9. Students were able to get involved in Chess (with Mr J.Cory), Cards and Comics (led by Mr S. Chandler), Horrible Histories Club (led by students Izzy Wellum and Lizzie Stringfellow), Film Club (with Miss Vale, Mrs M. Millband), Quiz Club, Coding Club (led by Isaac Osbourne, Thomas Underwood and Henry Colnet), alongside various book groups for years 7-10 (these included our FCBG group, our Carnegie group and our Reading Ambassadors group).

Our Makerspace area continued to thrive, offering students a calm space to create during break and lunch times. This year's crafts included origami, book hedgehogs, bookmarks, shrinkies, fuse beads, bracelet making, and drawing or coloring. The Makerspace is designed to encourage independent exploration, where students engage in crafts and puzzles that challenge their creative problem-solving skills while supporting their mental well-being.

# HIGHLIGHTS

## **PERCY JACKSON CAMP HALF-BLOOD**

Inspired by the Norfolk Librarians from SLA, we ran our very first Percy Jackson Camp Half-Blood. We chose Percy Jackson as our theme as our library assistants wanted to celebrate one of the character's (Grover's) birthday. Students got involved in a variety of tasks such as prophecy writing, origami flower making, riddle solving and library 'archery.' Each completed task earned them a 'bead from the gods' which eventually made a bracelet for them to take home with at the end of the event, alongside a blue cupcake (as seen in the book).

## **COMIC CON 2025**

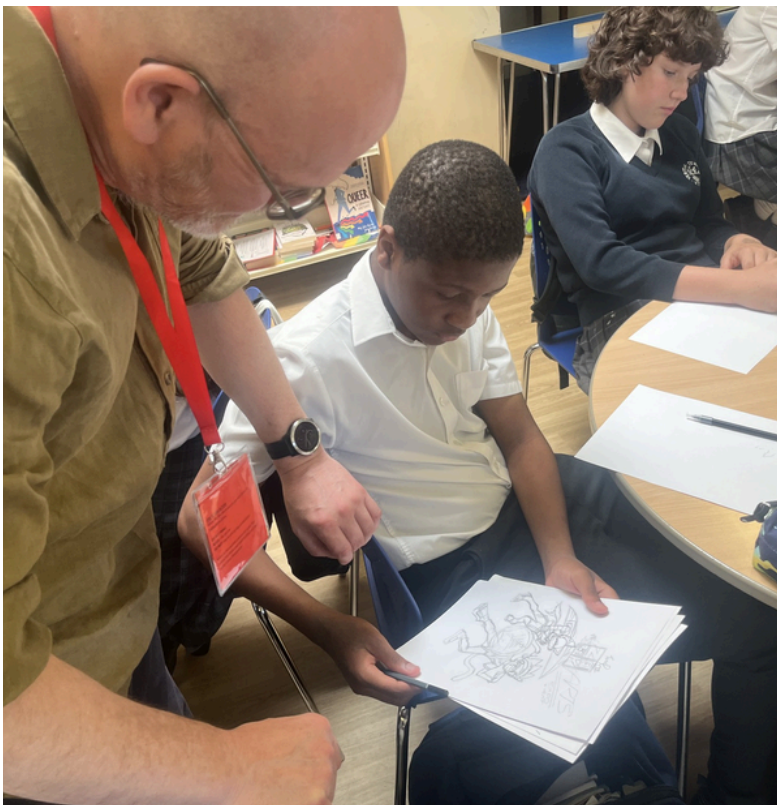
Our Sixth Form students and Cards and Comics members demonstrated outstanding leadership and creativity during Comic Con 2025 (run jointly by Mr S Chandler and Miss E Vale). Both the student charity stalls and the Cosplay competition emerged as standout features of the event. The effort and imagination behind the costumes this year were exceptional, and we extend our thanks to parents for their invaluable support. Congratulations to Archie Watt, whose remarkable Hades costume earned first place.

The event raised an impressive £789.50 for charity and the school library, and we are deeply grateful to staff, parents, and students for their enthusiasm and commitment, which made this achievement possible. Other highlights included a visit from award-winning author and illustrator Dave Shelton, who delivered engaging cartoon workshops for our budding artists of all years. Additionally, Simpson's in town delighted attendees by running a pop-up bubble tea stall as part of our Comic Book Cafe. This year's event was truly memorable and a testament to our community spirit!

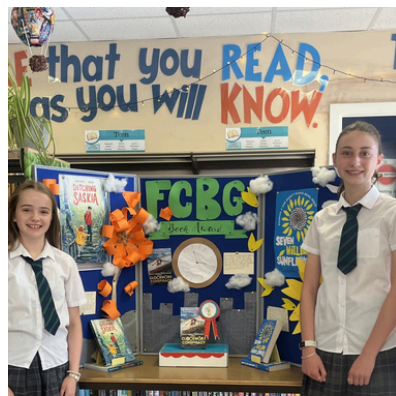
# A YEAR IN IMAGES



# A YEAR IN IMAGES



# A YEAR IN IMAGES



# A YEAR IN IMAGES



# **GOING FORWARD**

## **ALTER OUR APPROACH TO READING FOR PLEASURE**

During Academic Year 2024-25, we had another decrease in library loans. Students borrowed 4,276 in total – that’s a 19.9% decrease in borrowing this year, despite us running all the reading initiatives featured in this report. This number doesn’t include titles students have borrowed for book club, but it is still a lot lower than we would like. To combat this, we are going to try and reframe the way we talk about reading for pleasure. Instead of focussing on the ‘benefits’ and how it helps students ‘academically,’ we are going to focus on finding the right book and reading because it is an enjoyable thing to do. I feel the former approach may have made reading feel a bit too much like ‘work’ rather than a relaxing pastime. This approach seems to be working so far and we’ve loaned 2114 books out to students in two months and thirteen days during Academic Year 2025-26.

I am also ensuring that I’m always at my desk during student breaks and available to talk about books. This is helped by a very strong group of year 9 students who have been trained and are confident enough to lead this year’s library clubs. I’m also prioritising questions about books and ensuring I have time to talk to the students about what they have been reading.

## **ATTRACTIVE AND UP-TO-DATE DISPLAYS**

I have recruited a small team of year 9 students to work on library displays, ensuring that they are up-to-date and relevant. So far they have worked on a FCBG Book Award display, which was so impressive that the FCBG got in contact and asked if they could use the image on their website; they have also competed a science non-fiction display and a Traitors themed one.

## **CONNECT STUDENTS WITH WRITERS AND INSPIRING INDIVIDUALS FROM THE PUBLISHING WORLD**

We have Julian Sedgwick and Ashley Hickson Loveance confirmed to visit our school during Academic Year 2025-26. Author visits are so vital for inspiring reading for pleasure; hearing an author talk about their stories, characters, and creative journey often sparks curiosity and enthusiasm for reading. It can turn reluctant readers into engaged ones. Additionally, we’re running a Where’s the Proof Book Club with Julia from Ottie and the Bea with our older students and are involved in various different external competitions and book award shadowing schemes. It looks like it is going to be a good year!

