



“We can’t thank you enough for this beautiful library”

Julie Neil, Head of Science

Calthorpe Academy

Calthorpe Academy is one of the largest special educational needs schools in Birmingham. The school caters for pupils aged from 2 to 19 with a range of educational difficulties.

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Summary

In 2015 the Academy was awarded a Basic Skills Quality Mark which set in place a number of action plans, one of which was to focus on reading for the 400 pupils at the school, particularly reading for enjoyment. Senior managers, led by Julie Neil, Head of Science, set about looking into their current reading offer and were mindful that the recent Ofsted report noted that the provision on offer was not conducive to a positive reading culture for the pupils.

“We looked at what our pupils were getting from the current library and realised we had some work to do! The book stock itself was all wrong. The books were too ‘highbrow’ with high impact words and not at all accessible for our children. This was our starting point. We then started to look into the environment itself and watched how pupils were using the library. We could see they were uninspired. There was no awe and wonder – it was completely missing.”

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Challenges

BookSpace was asked to provide design ideas for two spaces; one which was to be a reading for pleasure space and one a little further down the corridor which could be used for reading scheme books and story sacks. "We were really keen to not replace like for like. This was a really big thing for us as a school and you only do this once so we wanted to push the boundaries and explore what ideas were out there. When Jane visited from BookSpace she talked of including lots of soft seating and secret reading space in the main library which was exactly what we needed. For many of our children, particularly those with conditions such as autism, having a safe quiet space to retreat to is exactly what they need. BookSpace also included a lot of tactile elements into their plans: wall trees with beads and mirrors, an audio book station and a tree canopy suspended from the ceiling providing stimulation for our pupils who are wheelchair bound and spend a lot of time looking up at the ceiling."

How BookSpace helped

BookSpace's designer, Jonathan was really excited to work on this project. "For me it was a chance to explore new ideas and have a play whilst still staying true to the BookSpace ethos of making the books king", says Jonathan. "At the end of the day, we're all about making the books look great and designing a space that makes children want to dive in and start exploring all those fantastic books out there. I decided to give the school three options, two using our classic design and one using our woodland theme, which allowed me to drop in woodland themed wall stickers, one of our [Book Trees](#), a tree canopy and little [Toadstool seats](#).

"We absolutely LOVED the designs from BookSpace when we saw them. They were what we wanted and more!" says Julie. "We especially loved the woodland theme. The nooks and crannies, the fact that all the books were displayed face-out, the tactile beads, the colours, the magnetic board. It was all amazing. We did change one thing from the original plan because we needed 'flat' trees against the wall in the corridor with no books on – just beads and mirrors. We felt that having the books in the corridor part of the space would be too much of a distraction for our pupils and cause a few issues but BookSpace quickly adapted the design, sending back a revised version within a couple of days. They were really easy to work with".

The larger space was designed to make it as easy as possible for children to not only see the books but to reach them independently too. Given that many pupils are in wheelchairs the bookshelves were kept at a lower height and face-out shelving was used



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throughout to ensure that it was really easy to pick up a book. The space was essentially two corridors and a space in the middle where they met. By using the mid-floor area for some book display it now looks less like a corridor and more like a library but still retains enough access for pupils and teachers to move through the space. The smaller space was designed with a small study table in the middle for guided reading sessions and then shelving was used to partially enclose the space to provide some privacy. Storage hooks were used across one wall for story sacks to be displayed. Both spaces were coordinated in terms of colour and small wooden woodland animals were displayed on the walls in both spaces to continue the woodland theme throughout.

Results

The two library spaces were installed just after February half term in just one day, fortuitous when the next day they received a phonecall to say that Ofsted would be visiting!

The libraries have been well received by everyone including the Lord Mayor of Birmingham who visited recently. "Our pupils just love it" says Julie. "We haven't time-tabled classes to use the library and it seems to be working really well. Teachers know that it is a new resource and are using it as and when they feel their pupils need it. Generally small groups of 3 or 4 children are coming down at a time which is great as it gives each child enough time to explore and find what they need. They especially love the quiet zones like the [Picturebook Tunnel](#) and the Hideyhole and of course the interactive TV with the headphones is real hit. Teachers are using the space a lot for their PSHE sessions which works really well. They can cover topics like sharing and respect in terms of respecting the new furniture. We can't thank BookSpace enough for the beautiful library. Ofsted loved it and so did the Lord Mayor of Birmingham I get so emotional when we watch the children enjoy the space. It is magical."

