

# How Ebooks NOW revolutionised reading access for Ark Elvin Academy

Ark Elvin Academy is a secondary school and sixth form serving students in London, where they cater to a primarily working class cohort. Around 78 percent of students at Ark Elvin are English as an additional language (EAL) learners - meaning that reading and literature are of particular importance to their studies. So, in 2017, Ark Elvin brought in Librarian Jo Jenner, who worked to open their physical school library from scratch.

Then, in 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic forced an abrupt transition to remote learning, it became clear that Ark Elvin would need more than just a print library to keep meeting students' needs.

"In the UK, about one in eight disadvantaged children don't have their own books in their own homes, and we recognise that in our community that's going to disproportionately affect our students," she says. "We really realised as soon as our libraries were going to be closed that we needed to make sure that our pupils had access to good books."



## DELIVERING READING CHOICE TO STUDENTS ANYTIME, ANYWHERE

In order to keep delivering reading resources to students, Ark Elvin partnered with OverDrive Education to add ebooks and audiobooks to their collection. They started with Secondary Ebooks NOW, a shared digital collection of over 2,000 high-quality titles accessible through OverDrive Education's Sora student reading app. The collection, available for an annual fee of £1,250, is curated specifically to the secondary level and includes popular bestsellers, GCSE and A level set texts, study guides, and sports and leisure interest content, with a focus on UK authors and titles. Secondary Ebooks NOW also includes a selection of simultaneous-use titles that can be borrowed by an unlimited number of students at once, without holds or wait lists.

"The shared collection is up to date. It's very clearly well-managed. A lot of thought goes into it. And I just can't stress enough how useful those simultaneous-use titles are," says Jenner.

Increased reading choice wasn't the only thing that Ark Elvin gained via Secondary Ebooks NOW adoption. Jenner identifies access to Sora as one of the main benefits of the service, primarily due to the app's device versatility, ease of use and powerful feature set. Device versatility was particularly key as they went into lockdown.

"Some students have tablets, some were lucky enough to have their own computers or laptops, so it was great to be able to roll out Secondary Ebooks NOW through the Sora app and tailor instructions specifically to each pupil without having to put too much work into it, because it works exactly the same on all devices," says Jenner.

She also cites Sora tools like personalisation features - especially high-contrast mode and adjustable fonts and text sizes - annotations and highlights, in-app definitions and Google Translate access as major



advantages. Plus, offering unique-to-digital formats like audiobooks and Read-Alongs has been especially advantageous for building reading fluency in Ark Elvin's EAL students.

Ark Elvin has also extended use of Sora beyond independent reading, leveraging it for book clubs and read-a-thons, plus certain types of homework and classroom lessons.

"I share my screen on (Microsoft) Teams and I open up the Sora app and we'll read a book together," Jenner says. "I can use the reading settings to make text bigger so it's more accessible to the students. I can highlight and annotate in real time. And you can do all that on the screen, which has been a huge benefit."

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## **OVERDRIVE ADVANTAGE: CUSTOMISATION AND CURATION, ONE TITLE AT A TIME**

In addition to the Secondary Ebooks NOW shared collection, Ark Elvin also maintains an OverDrive Advantage account, which enables the school to purchase and curate its own independent collection of digital books based on its students' unique reading and learning needs. Students can seamlessly access both in Sora.

"That's been great, because we looked into other products and found that we could only really buy ebooks in bundles or packages." says Jenner.

Using Advantage, Jenner has been able to curate collections based on student interest and reading requirements, including lists for Black History Month, LGBT+ History Month and more.

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## **FORWARD PROGRESS: HOW SECONDARY EBOOKS NOW FITS INTO THE FUTURE**

Jenner is enthusiastic about the results of Ark Elvin's first full year with Secondary Ebooks NOW and Sora. According to school data, 82 percent of pupils and staff have begun using Sora since the 2020 launch - an impressive figure, considering the roll-out was conducted largely online, amid school closures. Anecdotally, Jenner has also seen an uptick in reading enthusiasm.

"Those peoples who are very keen, always in the library, always the first to attend an event or be there in the morning, knocking on the door, they've loved that it's brought the library into their homes essentially," she says. "But it's also been great to see those reluctant sort of readers, when they were in school or if they're in our key worker provision while schools are closed, it's lovely to look over their shoulder and see that they're on the Sora app, on their computers doing a bit of reading in between the lessons."

Furthermore, she notes that user data indicates that their EAL cohort was more likely to sign-in and borrow books than their non-EAL learners, underscoring how important high-quality, easily accessible reading options are to this subset of students in particular.

"I would strongly recommend the (Secondary Ebooks NOW) subscription, especially with the Sora app," Jenner says. "We've gone from having no digital collection at all to advocating for digital collections in all our schools and the network within the space of a year. I think that's really a testament to digital libraries and the platform that (OverDrive is) providing us."

Going forward, Jenner is excited about the advantages that having both a physical and digital school library provide.

"It offers so much more choice for our students, and it does help us meet the needs of our children better," she says.