

# Reading and Number Partners

Guidance notes for establishing  
successful volunteer partnerships  
between businesses and schools

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## Purpose

The purpose of these notes is to provide guidance on setting up and operating a Reading Partners and/or Number Partners programme.

Both programmes are based on volunteers from a local business working on a one to one basis with Key Stage 2 children (aged between 7 and 11) to help them improve their confidence and skills in literacy or numeracy.

Although the outcomes and training provided for volunteers are specific for each programme, the operational requirements for both school and business in order for them to be effective and successful are the same.

We have described the roles which are necessary in both organisations, together with their key responsibilities, and an outline of the processes which they should follow to set up and run the programmes.

## Business roles and responsibilities

### Champion

A member of the business's SLT who endorses the programme's importance within the business and is actively involved in promoting it to members of staff.

S/he must establish and agree within the SLT exactly what the business expects from a link with a local primary school. Does it expect to be the only business partner for that school? Is it expecting to establish a small pilot scheme initially and then build on this?

### Key responsibilities

- Represents the programme within the business and is actively involved in volunteer recruitment and training
- Ensures that suitable volunteers are permitted time to participate in training and other programme needs through liaison with appropriate functional managers.

### Business programme co-ordinator

This role will be appointed by the SLT and is pivotal to the success of the Reading Partners or Number Partners programmes within the business. S/he will be the internal point of contact for the School programme co-ordinator and will play a vital role in keeping volunteers informed and involved.

### Key responsibilities

- To recruit volunteers for programme(s), as and when required and particularly for the start of each new school year and to keep an up to date list of volunteers.
- To ensure that all volunteers complete their application for a Criminal Records Bureau enhanced level Disclosure.
- To liaise with the School Co-ordinator to arrange the initial training session for volunteers and ensure any volunteers who are unable to attend receive appropriate briefing and programme guidance materials.
- To ensure that all the employees involved are able to attend on a week-by-week basis, arranging cover wherever possible or informing the school when volunteers are absent.

## Business roles and responsibilities

### Business programme co-ordinator (cont'd)

- To liaise regularly with the School Co-ordinator to ensure the smooth running of the scheme, to agree dates for review/support sessions and to work collaboratively to address any difficulties or concerns
- To inform volunteers of key programme information, including school holiday dates and dates of review / support sessions
- To attend and facilitate termly review/support sessions, together with the School Co-ordinator, taking any agreed follow-up actions, as appropriate.
- To distribute annual evaluation forms to volunteers and ensure completed forms are returned for collation and analysis
- To help organise any spin-offs that result from your partnership, such as visits to the business for pupils.

### Volunteers

Volunteer Reading or Number Partners must be willing to commit one lunch hour of their time every week during term time. Building trust between adult and child is a critical element of these programmes, so commitment and consistency is essential.

They must undergo Criminal Records Bureau enhanced level checks before they are able to work with children.

### Key responsibilities

- To attend training sessions appropriate to the programme they are participating in.
- To observe the school's policies and procedures for security, emergencies and Child Protection.
- To notify their partner child and the Business programme co-ordinator in advance if they will be unable to attend any regular sessions.
- To notify the Business programme co-ordinator wherever possible if they are unable to attend a session unexpectedly.
- To provide feedback to the Business programme co-ordinator as required and take part in planned review meetings.

## School roles and responsibilities

### Head Teacher

Champions the programme(s) within the school and endorses its importance to members of the SLT and staff.

Appoints the School programme co-ordinator, takes an active role in the launch and review processes and communicates outcomes across the school's team.

### School programme co-ordinator

This role is pivotal to the success of the Reading Partners or Number Partners programme. It is his or her role to take responsibility for the running of the programme within their school. S/he must have the support of the head teacher and ideally have access to a telephone, fax or e-mail during the school day.

### Key responsibilities

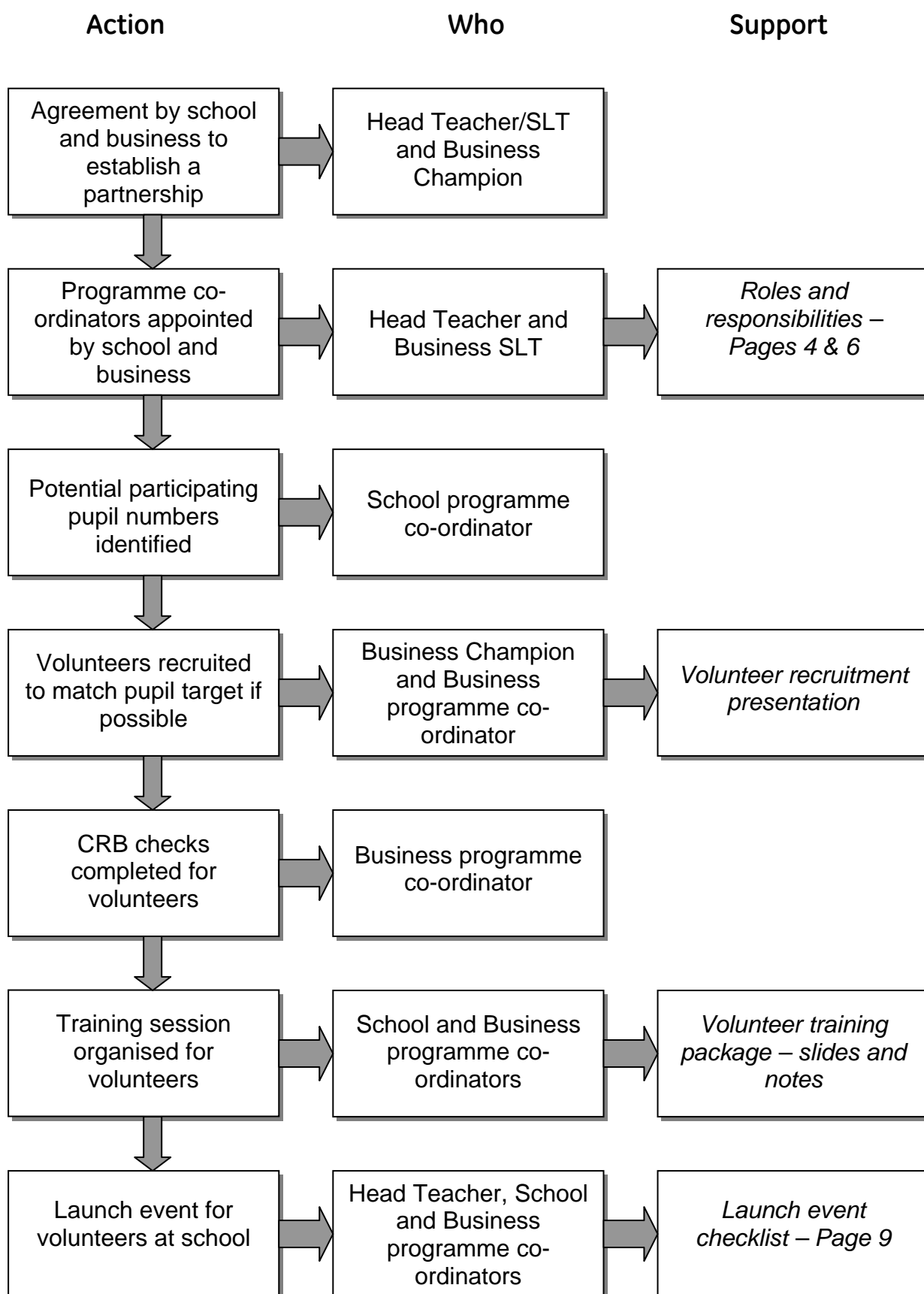
- To agree with the Head and teaching staff the school's commitment to release pupils from their lessons or their lunchtime.
- To decide what the minimum number of volunteers the school will need in order for the scheme to be viable; the maximum number that the school could manage and agree a target number of volunteers with the Business programme co-ordinator.
- To liaise with other members of the teaching team in choosing suitable pupils who would benefit from the extra support, to take part in the programme.  
**Note:** *Pupils with significant special educational needs, behavioural difficulties or lacking a reasonable level of fluency in the English language would be beyond the scope of volunteer Partners.*
- To help deliver the initial training session for new volunteers or arrange for a colleague (e.g. literacy or numeracy co-ordinators) to do so.
- To organise and host an initial visit to the school for the Business programme co-ordinator and volunteers to familiarise them with school systems, facilities and procedures (see checklist on page 9)
- To maintain a Programme Diary recording the dates on which individual pupils and their Partners are scheduled to meet and to check it regularly against the register to identify pupil absences on a scheduled meeting day.
- To notify the appropriate Partner via the Business programme co-ordinator in the event of their pupil's absence on a scheduled meeting day.

## School roles and responsibilities

### School programme co-ordinator (cont'd)

- To ensure volunteers receive support, advice and appreciation from school staff, including pupil-specific guidance where needed and have easy access to appropriate meeting space and programme resources.
- To use the Programme Diary to respond to queries and requests from volunteers and monitor scheme progress.
- To liaise regularly with the Business programme co-ordinator to ensure the smooth running of the scheme, to agree dates and times for regular programme sessions, and termly review/support sessions and to work collaboratively to address any difficulties or concerns.
- To inform the volunteers, usually via the Business programme co-ordinator, of term time and school holiday dates plus staff Inset dates.
- To attend and facilitate termly review/support sessions, together with the Company Co-ordinator, taking any agreed follow-up actions, as appropriate.
- To provide regular feedback to volunteers on the impact of the scheme for pupils and complete annual evaluation processes.
- To help organise any spin-offs that result from the partnership, such as visits to the business for pupils.

## Setting up the programme



## Launch event checklist

Prior to beginning to work with the pupils, the volunteers will visit the school and be shown around by the School programme co-ordinator. This visit can happen immediately before the first meeting with the children.

The School co-ordinator should ensure that the following points are covered, plus any others particularly relevant to their school or scheme.

### Welcome and introductions

- Introductions to reception and appropriate teaching staff and a welcome from the Head Teacher. Why the scheme and the volunteers are important and what the school hopes that the programme will achieve.

### Security and other procedures

- How and where volunteers should enter the building and sign in – (this may include a register to claim matched funding for the value of time that volunteers donate to the scheme) - and who they should report to.
- Provide volunteers with a copy of the School's Child Protection policy.

### Logistics

- Where key facilities are – including toilets, staff room, fire exits and evacuation procedure.
- Where to meet the pupils they will be working with on each visit and where the sessions will take place.
- School dress code - (e.g. if the school has a relaxed dress code and the staff dress casually, volunteers may look strange in a suit and may prefer to remove their ties and jackets, for example)
- Name systems – how would the school prefer volunteers to be addressed, i.e. by first name or last name.
- Where the Number Partner games will be kept or how books will be selected for Reading Partners and where these will be kept.

### Communication

- How volunteers can expect to communicate with the School programme co-ordinator and receive advice or support – this should include contact details and where the Programme Diaries will be kept to enable volunteers to communicate with the School co-ordinator and to record what they've done in their sessions.

## Launch event checklist (Cont'd)

### Pupil behaviour

- Behaviour rules – including procedures for pupils going to the toilet, eating, or getting a drink while in a Partner session.
- Dealing with disruptive behaviour – this is rarely an issue with the Reading and Number Partners programmes, but volunteers need to know who they should ask for help if there is a problem they are not confident in handling.

### Partner information

- Confirmation of the group of pupils the volunteers will be working with and how they have been selected – and what these pupils have been doing recently in class.
- The names of the pupils the volunteers will be supporting. It is useful to see these written down. Volunteers should check the pronunciation of names they are unfamiliar with.
- Guidance for each volunteer on the appropriate level of books for reading or Number Partner games for each child and any relevant targets or skills they are working on that the volunteer would benefit from knowing about.
- Confirmation of days and times for volunteers to visit school for their sessions

## Programme reviews

It is strongly recommended that the school and business programme co-ordinators jointly organise a review at the end of each term to be attended by the volunteers, both co-ordinators and other school staff, as appropriate. This checklist sets out some key considerations and recommendations for these reviews.

### Purpose of the Review

- To review together how the scheme has been going and share key successes and difficulties
- To agree plans for resolving any difficulties or anticipated problems
- To provide the volunteers with direct feedback on how the scheme is benefiting the children and advice from school staff on how best to support the children
- To strengthen the partnership between the school and business and ensure both parties feel valued and share responsibility for the success of the programme

### Arranging the Review

- Schedule your reviews for the end of term or right at the start of the following term
- Agree dates and times well in advance (e.g. at the start of the school year)
- Agree where to hold the review. It may be in school (e.g. after the usual time volunteers are in school) or at the business.
- It is vital that a school representative attends, otherwise the value of the meeting is greatly diminished and the volunteers are may feel frustrated by the lack of feedback or support from the school
- The School co-ordinator may wish to ask another member of staff to attend (e.g. a class teacher if the volunteers have been working with a particular class)
- The school representatives should bring along information on the impact the scheme is having for the children and the progress each child is making.

## Programme reviews (Cont'd)

### Suggested Structure for the Review

- Agree the time that you have available for the meeting and clarify the purpose of the meeting.
- What has been working well this term – feedback from school and business.
- What has been difficult this term or any anticipated future problems – feedback from school and business.
- Work together to develop solutions to these problems and agree actions to be taken.
- Opportunity for volunteers to ask questions of the school staff and for school staff to respond.
- Feedback from school staff on pupil progress – it's always helpful for the volunteers to get a sense of how each individual child is benefiting from the scheme.
- Check practical arrangements are working well e.g. timings of visits, space available in school, use of diaries for communication between volunteers and staff, use of volunteer attendance registers etc.
- Agree time and date for next review

### End of Year Review

For the final review in the summer term, a more in depth review of pupil progress is helpful ideally based on quantitative data which identifies improvements in pupils' reading levels.

Volunteers will also appreciate receiving thank you cards or messages from the children they have partnered.

## Growing the partnership

The most important factor determining the success of these programmes is the time commitment and enthusiasm of both the volunteers and the school. Volunteers are not expected to give anything further than this.

However, exciting developments can occur as a result of the partnership between a school and business. Here are some examples of how the relationship has grown beyond the initial programme goals.

- ❖ Some companies have invited their Reading or Number Partners to visit their offices and take part in activities or tours to help them understand the world of work.
- ❖ Schools have invited their Reading or Number Partner volunteers to assemblies, concerts and other events.
- ❖ One company invited the entire junior school to their offices for a Christmas party including a magician, party games and a visit from Santa Claus!
- ❖ Companies have sponsored art, music, poetry and theatre workshops.
- ❖ Pupils have performed at celebration events at their partners' businesses.
- ❖ Schools have made photo displays of the volunteers and children have made sketches of themselves and their volunteers.
- ❖ Companies have donated money to buy books or maths games for the schools and given computers.
- ❖ One company has helped the school to refurbish their library and create a quieter space for children to meet their Reading Partners.
- ❖ Some schools have arranged tea parties to thank their volunteers ~ sometimes inviting parents as well.
- ❖ Children have written thank you letters and designed cards to give to their Reading or Number Partners.
- ❖ Schools have designed their own certificates to show their appreciation of the commitment made by volunteers.

The possibilities are endless!

*(material adapted from Tower Hamlets Education Business Partnership)*