



# Talking Point

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**Kevin Jeffrey** describes how his bookshop changed its outlook.

The school bookshop at Eastcombe Manor Secondary School, Gloucestershire, is branching out. **Kevin Jeffrey**, Head of English and organiser of the bookshop, describes what happened and asks

## If It's Good, Why Keep It To Yourself?

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One of the arguments in favour of a school bookshop is that children will be more willing to go there and browse than to the local booksellers, where they may not feel particularly welcome or at home. What if there *is* no local bookseller though? In many areas, rural, city or suburban, a bookshop is harder to find than a parking space in Oxford Street. In that case, there is no choice; if children are to become book buyers, then the school must become the bookseller.

This is exactly why many school bookshops have been set up, including ours. Eastcombe Manor is in a small village and has a large rural catchment area. But what about those schools, in rural areas particularly, which are too small to support a permanent bookshop? All right. there are countless book clubs available, but many teachers will know the difference between choosing from a catalogue and handling the genuine article - particularly if the children concerned are not that familiar with books in the first place. And what about the rest of the community? Surely, if it's worthwhile turning your pupils into book buyers, the same is true of their parents. And what about the old lady down the road? How does *she* get her diet of books, if the only shop in the village is the grocer's, and it costs £1 to get to the nearest town by bus (if there is one)?

These were some of the questions which prompted us to expand the normal operations of the Manor School Bookshop. And they began to be raised the moment we operated.

We started in the Autumn term of 1979, with a big splash. Kit Williams lives nearby. **Masquerade** was all the rage, so we tried, and amazingly succeeded, in booking him for the opening night. Our bookseller had produced a glossy brochure of 100 best buys for Christmas. We begged six hundred copies and despatched them to parents, while we crammed the bookshop with copies of the books, and all the pegboard and clips that we could muster. Result: a four-day book fair, with takings over £900 swelling to £1200 in a fortnight, and lunchtimes a seething mass of humanity crammed into the space between the books.

Then came the questions and some re-thinking about what we were for. Firstly, local junior schools, invited to send parties to the book fair, mentioned regretfully that they were not big enough to support their own bookshop. For any event we have had since then we have sent out invitations to all infant and junior schools within our catchment area.

Talks have also been held about organising regular termly visits to the bookshop. Details of stock to be carried that term, in the form of lists or leaflets, will be sent to the schools in advance.

The second development concerned people in the community. One local woman remarked at the book fair that it was difficult to get books unless you went all the way to Stroud; this led to the establishment of a small group of local people, not all parents, who were willing to open the bookshop two evenings a week, to test reaction. We have now settled on one evening a week, to coincide with the use of the school for evening classes, plus extra nights for special occasions, such as concerts, open evenings, exhibitions, and so on.

The third development also resulted from the publicity gained by our opening book fair. A local member of the Pre-school Playgroups Association was involved in organising a one-day regional conference in the area, and needed a local bookseller to mount an exhibition of relevant books - from picture books for toddlers to texts on childcare. Having received an apathetic response from the local bookseller, she approached our two suppliers and duly put on a very successful exhibition. Since then, we have done other similar exhibitions, arranged to supply books to local playgroups, and begun discussions with the local PPA about a possible one-day event later this year, combining visiting authors, speakers and entertainers, and a book exhibition.

What does the school gain from all this? A great deal, we think.

.Much-needed bridges are built between school and community. Schools are too often remote from the community which surrounds them, and suffer bad images as a result.

- Equally important, bridges are built between junior and senior schools, creating smoother transition for pupils and greater understanding between staffs. Our pupils are affected by the increased local approval of the school, and become favourably disposed towards the object of that approval!
- Perhaps most importantly, it helps us to thrive and a thriving lively bookshop will attract the attention of the most unexpected children.
- We involve our pupils in running the bookshop - they are an essential part of the bookshop operation. It's valuable educational experience; but much more so when the customers are not simply the other pupils of the school.

If you want to expand into the local community:

- Spread the burden by making use of local people to help run the bookshop - they will also publicise the venture by word of mouth.
- Seek out local knowledge on communication channels - there are probably local newsletters which go to every house - and evenings to avoid because of traditional local events.
- Make use of Arts Council grants and invite authors to your opening or special event - with 50% of the fee plus travelling expenses refunded, the cost is not as high as you might think.
- Foster good relations with the local press - they can offer useful publicity for events, and may also be keen to use articles on books, both adults' and children's, at odd times of the year.

Manor School Bookshop is now just over a year old. Pupils in the school seem to regard it as a permanent fixture and no longer ask when it is going to close. Incoming pupils and their parents arrive knowing of its existence, and the reading and buying of books are increasingly regarded as normal and unremarkable activities. We think that is good. We don't believe in keeping it to ourselves.

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