



# PRESS RELEASE

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## **ITALIC: Reading and Comprehension Upgrade**

The ITALIC (Improving Teaching and Learning in the Cayman Islands) software programmes *Reading Upgrade* and *Comprehension Upgrade* are currently being used in all government high schools (Years 7–12) to teach reading and writing by using songs, video and games. “The programmes help a wide variety of students overcome literacy problems and the system works because pupils are motivated to complete lessons,” said ITALIC Programme Manager Mrs. Ann Hale.

Teachers with struggling readers aged eight upwards can first use the *Reading Upgrade* course which can improve reading by several grade levels after 20 hours of instruction. The course teaches the fundamentals of reading including phonics, decoding words, reading sentences, and understanding simple passages. It is targeted at high school students who are reading at year 5 level (or below), those who pause frequently when reading out loud, have trouble sounding out unfamiliar words, or who read very slowly. In three to eight weeks of 30-60 minute sessions, students complete 50 research-based lessons for which they receive certificates.

Head of the Reading Unit at George Hicks High School (GHHS), Ms Anola Smith said, “We have approximately 150 students in our reading unit and I am definitely seeing progress amongst the students using the *Reading Upgrade* programme. Some of the boys are now showing more initiative and volunteering to read in class. Even if they don’t know a word they are trying harder and making an effort.”

Year 9 GHHS students said they enjoyed the *Reading Upgrade* programme because it was fun and helped them expand their vocabulary through learning and pronouncing new words.

The GHHS Special Needs teacher Ms Marge Quinland said: “The pupils are very competitive at this age which motivates them to move through the different levels. The

programme teaches students important skills like patience, interaction and motivation. Having computers in the classroom should be about enhancing learning and we encourage the children to transfer the skills they learn from the sessions into reading books.”

If a student reads at a sixth year level or above, does not pause or stumble when reading, and reads at a normal speed, they can start with *Comprehension Upgrade*. Students learn to read and understand textbook, literature and functional text, build vocabulary, and learn critical thinking skills.

Students who complete the course typically make reading gains of one to two years. Middle and high school students completing both *Reading Upgrade* and *Comprehension Upgrade* courses can make additional gains: “ Results vary depending on the student’s reading ability, time spent on the course, the attitude towards the course and the motivation to learn to read,” said IBM Project Manager Anne Patterson.

Reading Specialist at John Gray High School (JGHS) Mrs Reina Jefferson said: “We have three Year 11 and nine Year 12 students using *Comprehension Upgrade*, and three Year 12 pupils have already completed it. The different stages within the software mean that students can work at individual levels and pace; being able to progress through the different levels often acts as an incentive for students.”

JGHS students said that working on the ITALIC reading programmes helped them to learn because it was fun and easy and helped improve their everyday reading ability.

“The students have a high interest in computers and technology, so this ITALIC programme fits easily into their learning style,” explained Mrs Jefferson. “They are highly motivated and have even asked if they can use the programmes at home.”

English teacher at JGHS Ms Polly Holt said: “Approximately 40 Year 10 pupils are using the *Reading Upgrade* programme. It allows them to use the computer in a positive way – to learn instead of play. We produce a report for them at the end of their session and this gives them instant feedback on their progress and acts as a real incentive for them.”

Ms Sharon Thompson JGHS English teacher added: “The students get very excited and involved with the ITALIC programme because it is very visual and holds their attention. I have a few students who have just started *Comprehension Upgrade* and they are already reading more fluently. The ITALIC reading programme is different to the ordinary classroom experience but there is still always a teacher on hand to help pupils out and work through any problems.”

Education Officer for Language Arts Mrs. Gloria Pollard helped introduce the ITALIC reading programmes into the schools: “Due to the enthusiasm and commitment of our

teachers, the “at risk” readers in the secondary schools now have an opportunity to improve their skills in a non-threatening environment,” she concluded.

Photo Captions:

1. Students at George Hicks High School work on the *Reading Upgrade* programme.
2. John Gray High School teacher Ms Sharon Thompson helps out with *Comprehension Upgrade*.

**(GIS)**