



READING FAN: Grade 1 pupil Sergio Hammond reads from an encyclopedia article about cockroaches and earwigs to his classmates at Christel House South Africa Junior School. Sergio is able to read at the level of a Grade 8 pupil.
Pictures: MELINDA STUURMAN

Boy, 7, is in a class of his own when it comes to reading

Education Writer

STANDING in front of the classroom he reads from the encyclopedia, carefully pronouncing each word in his quiet voice.

He is seven years old and reads at the level of a 13-year-old.

Grade 1 pupil Sergio Hammond, usually shy and reserved, enjoys showing off his talents to classmates at Christel House South Africa Junior School.

When asked why he enjoyed to read, Sergio said: "It's fun."

Asked what he enjoyed to read, he answered: "Comics."

Sergio comes from an impoverished home in Manen-

'He has an amazing talent, obviously an innate ability'

berg where he was raised by his grandmother, now 74.

As he tugged on his knee-length socks, Sergio said he could not say what his favourite book was as he had enjoyed reading them all.

Although he was succinct in his answers, there was nothing short about the length of his extensive reading list.

His teacher, Michele Wiener, said Sergio had already read at least 500 books this year.

Every Friday afternoon she sent him home with six books and on Monday morning he returned to school having read each of them from cover to cover.

"He is an advanced reader, way above his peers. He reads at a Grade 8 level. He can pick up any book - any material, any word. He is quite aware he has this talent."

Sergio stood at the front of the class and first read an article to his classmates from the encyclopedia about cockroaches, then from a Grade 9 workbook, a Grade 11 consumer studies textbook and a

Grade 2 reading book.

Wiener said Sergio enjoyed the contents of books aimed at his age group despite being able to understand more complex books.

"He still has the desire to read fairy stories. We try not to push him to the bigger books because he still yearns for those stories."

Sergio read from the story book, using different accents and emphasising important sections. He paused at the end of every page to show off the pictures to his classmate.

Wiener said when Sergio had started at Christel House in Grade R he was already able to read. Teachers first noticed his unique talent when he

picked up a poem written by a Grade 11 pupil and read it with no hesitation.

"His grandmother plays a very active role in his life. I think they started reading together with the Bible," Wiener said.

She said he was a normal little boy who enjoyed drawing, colouring in and soccer.

School principal Midge Hilton-Greene said he had never encountered a child with Sergio's talents to read and comprehend.

"He must have the right genes. I would like to say it is our teachers. But he has an amazing talent. He obviously has an innate ability."

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