

Education Committee

Reading for Pleasure

Second Report of Session 2026–27

HC 150

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

Education Committee

The Education Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Department for Education and its associated public bodies.

Current membership

[Helen Hayes](#) (Labour; Dulwich and West Norwood) (Chair)

[Jess Asato](#) (Labour; Lowestoft)

[Sureena Brackenridge](#) (Labour; Wolverhampton North East)

[Jodie Gosling](#) (Labour; Nuneaton)

[Dr Caroline Johnson](#) (Conservative; Sleaford and North Hykeham)

[Darren Paffey](#) (Labour; Southampton Itchen)

[Rebecca Paul](#) (Conservative; Reigate)

[Manuela Perteghella](#) (Liberal Democrat; Stratford-on-Avon)

[Mark Sowards](#) (Labour; Leeds South West and Morley)

[Peter Swallow](#) (Labour; Bracknell)

[Caroline Voaden](#) (Liberal Democrat; South Devon)

Powers

The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No. 152. These are available on the internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publication

This Report, together with formal minutes relating to the Report, was Ordered by the House of Commons, on 14 July 2026, to be printed. It was published on 17 July 2026 by authority of the House of Commons.
© Parliamentary Copyright House of Commons 2026.

This publication may be reproduced under the terms of the Open Parliament Licence, which is published at www.parliament.uk/copyright.

Committee Reports are published on the Committee's website at www.parliament.uk/education-committee and in print by Order of the House.

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Education Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The Committee's email address is educom@parliament.uk.

Follow the work of committees on Bluesky [@HOCcommittees.parliament.uk](#), Facebook [UK House of Commons Committees](#), Instagram [@UKCommonsCommittees](#), LinkedIn [House of Commons Committees](#), Reddit [u/UKCommonsCommittees](#), X [@HOCcommitteesUK](#) and YouTube [Commons Committees playlist](#).

Contents

Summary	1
1 The importance of reading	4
Our inquiry	4
The benefits of reading for pleasure	5
Children's descriptions of their reading habits	10
The decline in reading	12
The role of screens	14
Other factors causing the decline	17
National Year of Reading	20
Other interventions and programmes	22
2 Early years and the home learning environment	25
The importance of the early years	25
Early years settings	27
Parents and the home learning environment	30
Barriers and challenges	32
The system of support for parents	34
Best Start Family Hubs	34
Health visitors	37
3 Schools and the curriculum	40
Practice in schools	40
Disadvantaged children	46
Children with SEND	48
Boys	49
Teacher training and development	50
Curriculum and assessment	53
Secondary English curriculum	56

Year eight reading test	59
School libraries	63
4 Reading in the community	70
Public and community libraries	70
Funding and reductions in services	75
Work with schools and early years settings	78
The wider industry	81
Diversity and representation	82
Partnerships with schools and early years settings	85
Conclusions and recommendations	87
Annex 1: Summary: Engagement session with primary school children on reading for pleasure	99
Annex 2: Reading for pleasure: Summary of distributed dialogue with children	102
Participating schools	109
Questions	109
Formal minutes	112
Witnesses	113
Published written evidence	115
List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament	122

Summary

We launched this inquiry in response to worrying reports of a long-term decline in reading for pleasure among children and young people. Last year, the proportion of children reading in their free time sank to its lowest in 20 years and stood at under one in three children. This represents a generational shift in reading that must be reversed.

There is a great deal of compelling evidence on the benefits of reading for pleasure among children and young people. Reading improves academic attainment, mental health and wellbeing, development of empathy and much more. It acts as both a “mirror” and a “window”: reflecting children’s own experiences while also offering them the opportunity to learn about different cultures. The decline in reading for pleasure is therefore not simply an educational concern but has repercussions for the whole of society and should be a clear priority for the government to address. We are particularly concerned about the low rates of reading among boys and teenagers, as well as the specific challenges encountered by children growing up in low-income families and children with reading difficulties such as dyslexia.

The rise in recreational screen use is undoubtedly a major factor crowding out children’s time to read for pleasure and affecting their attention spans. To address this, the government must implement in full the remaining recommendations of our response to its consultation on Growing up in the Online World. However, screens cannot take all the blame for falling rates of reading: pressures such as the cost of living and rising poverty, modern work patterns, lack of access to libraries and competing curriculum demands all play their part. The government must commit to a National Reading Guarantee ensuring that every child has frequent, regular opportunities to enjoy books, stories and shared reading experiences from birth to 18 as part of everyday life. As part of this, the Department for Education (DfE) should build on the National Year of Reading and turn it into a National Decade of Reading in order to ensure that reading for pleasure remains a long-term priority.

Shared reading in the early years is of critical importance for building the foundations of reading for pleasure in later life. Fun must come first in the early years: as Frank Cottrell-Boyce, author and Waterstones Children’s Laureate 2024–26 told us, “No parent says to a child, “When you’ve learned the offside rule, then I’ll play football with you.”” Early years settings must

ensure that they are leading with pleasure and enjoyment when introducing children to reading and books, and practitioners must be adequately trained and supported to do this.

Parents and carers play a key role in supporting children to read, especially through shared reading in the early years. Adults who were read to by a parent or caregiver as children are 130% more likely to enjoy reading as adults and to read to their own children. We heard about a range of barriers and challenges faced by parents and carers in reading with their children, including time pressures, stresses associated with poverty, and lack of confidence in their own abilities. Best Start Family Hubs represent a crucial opportunity to improve support for parents: the Department must ensure that all Best Start Family Hubs are embedding reading for pleasure into their work by offering sessions and advice for parents and carers as well as training for early years practitioners.

The importance of schools in supporting reading for pleasure cannot be overstated. For many children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, schools may be their only source of books and the main place where reading is discussed and encouraged. However, currently, the Department's focus is overwhelmingly on reading proficiency over pleasure, with an overloaded curriculum and heavy focus on assessment crowding out opportunities to show children the joy of reading. We are particularly concerned about the secondary English curriculum and the limited response of the Curriculum and Assessment Review to reports that GCSE English Literature is turning children off reading—the opposite of what a literature qualification should be aiming to achieve. The Department must focus all its work on developing the new English curriculum through the lens of reading for pleasure, and take steps to improve the diversity of texts that pupils study.

School libraries are powerful equalisers that ensure every child, regardless of background, can engage with reading and realise their potential. It is striking that libraries are statutory requirements in prisons, but not schools. The Department should extend its pledge to fund a library in every primary school to include every secondary school, and follow this up by placing school libraries on a statutory footing.

We cannot hope to build a reading nation without the places where reading lives. Public and community libraries play an essential role in supporting children and their families to access books, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The impact of closures and cuts in provision is deeply concerning; it is imperative that all communities have access to libraries to help reverse the decline in reading for pleasure. The government must commit to restoring the funding for public libraries that has been lost since 2010 by the end of this Parliament. We also support calls to introduce

an auto-enrolment scheme through which every child is issued with a library card on registration of their birth, to ensure that no child misses out on the benefits that libraries bring.

We were encouraged to hear the enthusiasm and support from the wider literary industry, including authors, publishers and booksellers, for reading for pleasure, demonstrated in their involvement in initiatives such as the National Year of Reading. However, there is still a long road to travel in terms of improving the diversity in the texts available to children and the industry cannot afford to be complacent about this issue. The government should work with the industry to set measurable goals and outcomes on this which should be achieved by the end of the decade.

1 The importance of reading



Pupil aged 10–11, participant in the distributed dialogue activity

Our inquiry

1. We launched this inquiry in November 2025 in response to worrying reports of a long-term decline in reading for pleasure among children and young people. The National Literacy Trust's annual survey showed that the proportion of children reading in their free time had sunk to its lowest in 20

years and stood at under one in three children.¹ In light of the clear evidence underpinning the benefits of reading for children’s academic attainment and mental health and wellbeing, as well as for society as a whole, we undertook to look into the reasons behind this fall and what steps the government could and should be taking to reverse the trend.

2. We received almost 200 pieces of written evidence and held five oral evidence sessions with experts, authors and practitioners from across the sector, finishing with a session with the Minister for Early Education, Olivia Bailey MP. Hearing the voices of children and young people themselves was of critical importance to us in this inquiry and we conducted two engagement events to hear from children directly. On World Book Day, we were privileged to welcome a group of nine children aged between eight and 11 to Parliament from Mulberry Canon Barnett Primary School in east London, supported by the National Literacy Trust, for a private roundtable where they spoke about their views on and approaches to reading. We also conducted a distributed dialogue activity, run by the Select Committee Public Engagement Team, where we provided schools with discussion packs to support them to hold conversations and activities with pupils about their reading habits and opinions on reading. We received responses from seven primary schools and one secondary school. Fully anonymised summaries of both engagement activities are included at the end of this report. Some primary schools also submitted drawings by their pupils, some of which are included in the body of this report. We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to all the schools and children who took part and to the National Literacy Trust for their support with this work.

The benefits of reading for pleasure

3. We heard a great deal of wide-ranging and compelling evidence on the benefits of reading for pleasure among children and young people. Reading has an impact both on the day-to-day wellbeing of children and their relationships, learning, and academic attainment, as well as far-reaching effects on long-term outcomes, with its benefits being seen long into adulthood.
4. We heard that reading for pleasure has “considerable power and potential;”² that it is “the single biggest indicator of a child’s opportunity and future success;”³ that it delivers “significant developmental,

1 National Literacy Trust ([RFP0018](#))

2 The Open University Literacy and Social Justice Centre ([RFP0093](#))

3 The Reading Agency ([RFP0145](#))

educational and societal benefits;⁴ and that children who read for pleasure are “happier, healthier and have improved attainment across outcomes.”⁵ Evidence set out a range of well-researched benefits, including:

- *Academic attainment:* children who read for pleasure, and/or are read to by parents and carers, demonstrate higher academic achievement across a range of measures including: school readiness; spelling, grammar and numeracy skills; speech and language development; concentration and attention span; and non-verbal and spatial skills.⁶ Children who are read to frequently at age five are over half a school year ahead in reading performance at age 15, and by age 16, reading for pleasure is a much stronger predictor of progress in vocabulary, mathematics, and spelling than parental education.⁷ It is estimated that, if all school-aged children read daily, 1.1 million more students could achieve five good GCSEs over a 30-year period.⁸
- *Mental health and wellbeing:* shared reading in the early years creates opportunities for joint attention and emotional closeness between a child and their parent or carer, as it lifts parents’ mood, increases warmth, and reduces stress. Children who read regularly report higher self-esteem and more effective emotional regulation, with fewer emotional and behavioural challenges, such as anxiety and aggression, than peers who read less frequently.⁹ A survey found that children said that reading helped them relax (57.2%), manage stress (43.3%), and feel happier (39.1%), alongside gains in confidence, problem-solving, and emotional language.¹⁰
- *Vocabulary development:* evidence explained that the language used in books differed substantially from everyday spoken language, as it contained a wider range of vocabulary, more complex sentence structures, and richer narrative forms.¹¹ Dr Jo Taylor, Associate Professor of Language and Cognition at University College London, clarified that “book language is very different from the language you get in spoken context, in TV, in listening to podcasts” and that “you cannot use those things in your own writing either if you are not exposed to them.”¹²

4 National Literacy Trust ([RFP0018](#))

5 The School Library Association ([RFP0137](#))

6 ESRC Centre for Lifecourse Health Equity ([RFP0059](#)); Nuffield Foundation ([RFP0095](#)); UK Literacy Association ([RFP0109](#)); BookTrust, [The benefits of reading](#)

7 BookTrust, [The benefits of reading](#)

8 Publishers Association ([RFP0121](#))

9 BookTrust, [The benefits of reading](#)

10 National Literacy Trust ([RFP0018](#))

11 Professor Saloni Krishnan ([RFP0169](#))

12 Q2

- *Cognitive development:* evidence from neuroscientists stated that “there is clear evidence that learning to read shapes the brain, resulting in the tuning of an area specialising in word processing.”¹³ Dr Jeanne Shinskey, Department of Psychology, Royal Holloway, University of London, highlighted that reading with young children helped them to develop attention and memory skills, and also supported “symbolic thinking” - “understanding that you can learn about the real world indirectly from something as simple as a picture book that teaches you the name of an apple.”¹⁴
- *Development of empathy:* evidence highlighted that exposure to fiction reading in childhood enabled the development of theory of mind [understanding that others may think differently], as well as interpersonal and empathic skills across age groups.¹⁵ Dr Jo Taylor gave the example of her son learning about empathy from the book “Not Now, Bernard”: “Bernard is being ignored by his parents, and the child is basically learning about this whole concept of potentially being ignored, how that might make you feel and what you might do in response [...] he is getting a much more complex set of emotional experiences through that book than he might be getting—because we don’t ignore him—through his everyday experiences.”¹⁶

5. Children themselves told us about a range of reasons they liked reading. The children we spoke to on World Book Day described reading as “entertaining” and particularly enjoyed books which made them laugh. They said they enjoyed discovering new and interesting words and found reading calming before bed. One pupil said:

I like chapter books because when there are no pictures you can imagine it in your head. When you’re bored you can read a book - it’s calling out to you like, “Read me, read me!”¹⁷

6. Children who participated in the distributed dialogue activity also described reading as “relaxing”, “peaceful” or “soothing” and said that it helped them to calm down if they felt upset or angry. They said it allowed them to picture characters and places in their heads and enjoyed the ability to “escape” from the real world through reading, with many commenting that reading was an opportunity to be transported to different places or different worlds. Children described getting “lost” in books and spoke of a feeling that there were “no limits” or that “anything could happen” in a book. One pupil said:

13 Professor Saloni Krishnan ([RFP0169](#))

14 Q2

15 The Open University (Early Literacy Research Group) ([RFP0122](#))

16 Q4

17 World Book Day engagement event (summary in annexe)

I like reading because it makes you feel free and you use your imagination. Reading makes you enter a whole new world full of new adventures that you can come across.¹⁸

7. We heard that reading is most effective when it acts as both a “mirror” and a “window”: reflecting children’s own lives, experiences and backgrounds, while also offering them the opportunity to learn about experiences and cultures far from their own.¹⁹ Frank Cottrell-Boyce, author and Waterstones Children’s Laureate 2024 to 2026, said that books were “crucial in any kind of attempt at any kind of diversity” as they “capture all the voices.”²⁰ Professor Jessie Ricketts, Professor of Psychology at Royal Holloway, University of London, highlighted that books showed children “characters and environments that are not part of [their] lived experience,” which was “particularly important for people who are not moving around much and may not have access to those things.”²¹ Onyinye Iwu, a children’s author, illustrator and art teacher, said:

It is very important, especially for ethnic minorities, for readers to see themselves, to feel like they can be part of the conversation, part of literature and part of art, because that makes a person feel that they are part of the society. For a lot of us, especially growing up, we have a bit of a segregated element, in our minds that when you read you do not really read about yourself, Peckham is not part of the conversation, that type of thing. It is important that everybody can see themselves and also that everybody can see everybody else. If we are really trying to create a multicultural society, we need to be accepting that we need to know everybody’s experiences.²²

8. Evidence highlighted the importance of having a broad definition of reading and ensuring that various forms of texts, such as comics, graphic novels and audiobooks, were included in work around reading for pleasure. The National Literacy Trust stated that “multimodal literacy boosts engagement, empathy, and comprehension, and is often a gateway into wider literacy”.²³ Audiobooks in particular were held up as an example of a mode that offered many of the same benefits as traditional books, but were more accessible, especially to children with dyslexia and other forms of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Dr Jo Taylor said that audiobooks “contain all of that fantastic language, complex syntax, complex vocabulary, complex emotional interactions” which bring

18 Distributed dialogue activity (summary in annexe)

19 Q45 [Debbie Hicks]; Q61 [Onyinye Iwu]; Q63 [Anjali Patel]

20 Q120

21 Q2

22 Q63

23 National Literacy Trust ([RFP0018](#))

benefits to children.²⁴ Ellen Broomé, Chief Executive of the British Dyslexia Association, said that schools with strong support for dyslexic children were “moving away from the narrow definition of reading as decoding text,” explaining that:

It is about enjoying the content, reading age-appropriate stuff. Something that is attractive to a 14-year-old, is not going to be the same as something attractive to an eight-year-old. If your reading is slow and cumbersome, you still need to access age-appropriate stuff when you are 14. If that is through an audio book, graphic novel or a comic strip, it does not matter, because it is about all the other things that you learn: complex syntax, complex character developments, richer vocabulary, technical language, all things that children and young people need.²⁵

9. The children we spoke to on World Book Day talked about enjoying various forms of books, including chapter books, e-readers, and books with interactive features such as flaps. They also liked non-fiction books and recognised that books could have different purposes for example to inform, persuade and discuss as well as to entertain. Some children listened to audiobooks, while others did not.²⁶ Participants in the distributed dialogue activity said they liked chapter books, picture books, horror, fantasy, and adventure books. The majority of children mentioned comics and graphic novels, and books linked to hobbies such as gaming and TV shows were also mentioned. One pupil said:

I like graphic novels, audio books, comics, fantasy and adventure books. I like comics because they are not only funny; they are full of images that are bright and colourful. I like adventure books because they take you on journeys that you have never been on. They are full of problems that are waiting to be solved.²⁷

10. However, we also heard that physical books in a traditional format bring specific benefits to children and that their importance should not be overlooked. Academics told us that the benefits to development of empathy come from reading fiction specifically,²⁸ and Dr Jo Taylor highlighted that “the complexity of the language in a graphic novel will not be the same as the complexity of a language in a traditional novel.”²⁹ The Children’s Commissioner argued that books “confer certain cultural capital benefits

24 Q14

25 Q72

26 World Book Day engagement event (summary in annexe)

27 Distributed dialogue activity (summary in annexe)

28 Q5 [Dr Helen Hendry]

29 Q14

that other forms (such as comics and magazines) simply cannot.”³⁰ We heard evidence that physical books had clear benefits over digital texts for young children: Dr Jeanne Shinskey highlighted research showing that digital books brought more distractions for young children than physical books, and said that audiobooks should not be used with young children as a substitute for face-to-face reading as “children under two do not understand the language that comes out of screens at all.”³¹ Academics also suggested that research with older children had found some benefits for reading physical texts over reading on a screen, but emphasised that the research in this area was not well-developed.³²

Children’s descriptions of their reading habits

11. As part of the distributed dialogue activity, we asked children to tell us about when and where they read. After school and bedtime were the most commonly mentioned times for reading at home, and weekends and school holidays were also mentioned. More reluctant readers said they did not read often outside school. Many primary school pupils also said they read at school during free time or in the school library. Secondary school pupils (aged 11–13) were more likely to say they read after school and at the weekends than at school, but many also said they read at bedtime. More unusual reading locations included in a tree and while sitting on a swing. Some children submitted drawings of themselves reading, a selection of which are below and distributed throughout this report. Children generally drew pictures of themselves reading on comfortable surfaces such as beds and beanbags, although some drew themselves reading at desks or tables. Most drawings featured the child reading alone, with some exceptions.³³

30 Children’s Commissioner’s Office ([RFP0170](#))

31 Qq10–11

32 Qq11–12 [Professor Teresa Cremin; Dr Helen Hendry; Dr Jeanne Shinskey; Dr Jo Taylor; Professor Jessie Ricketts]

33 Distributed dialogue activity (summary in annexe)



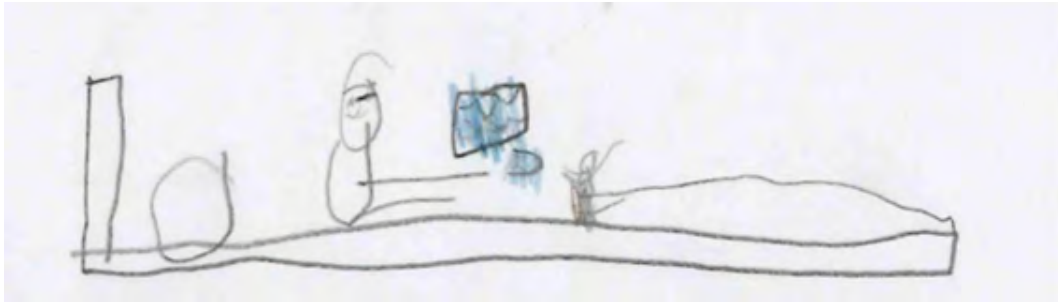
Pupil aged 9, participant in the distributed dialogue activity



Pupil aged 9, participant in the distributed dialogue activity



Pupil aged 9, participant in the distributed dialogue activity



Pupil aged 6–7, participant in the distributed dialogue activity

12.

CONCLUSION

Reading for pleasure brings a wealth of benefits to children and to wider society that cannot be ignored. Reading can give children a huge amount of joy and pleasure, and its benefits extend far beyond educational outcomes for an individual child. Reading acts as a window, offering the opportunity for children to gain insights into other backgrounds, cultures and experiences regardless of their start in life, forming a key cornerstone of social cohesion. It also acts as a mirror, helping children to see themselves in the world and to understand their own identity. It is not only a driver of attainment but a powerful force for connection, trust and shared experience, strengthening relationships within families and communities and supporting children's emotional development and sense of belonging.

13.

CONCLUSION

The decline in reading for pleasure is not simply an educational concern but has repercussions for the whole of society and should be a clear priority for the Government to address. Schools, early years settings, local authorities, the literary industry, parents and carers, the voluntary and community sector and others, play an essential role in making sure that every child has the opportunity to have access to reading for pleasure throughout their lives.

The decline in reading

14.

We initiated this inquiry in light of mounting evidence pointing to a concerning long-term decline in reading among children and young people. In 2025, the National Literacy Trust's (NLT) annual literacy survey found that the percentage of children and young people who said that they enjoyed reading was at its lowest in 20 years, with only 33% of children aged 8 to 18 saying that they enjoyed reading in their free time in 2025, down from 51%

in 2005. The NLT described this as a “generational challenge.”³⁴ The latest statistics, published in June 2026, showed a small improvement, but rates are still low at 36%. In 2026, 20% of children and young people said they read daily in their free time, down from 38.1% in 2005, but a small increase from 19% in 2025.³⁵ While rates of reading are going down across different countries, evidence suggests that England is experiencing particular challenges: the most recent Progress in International Reading and Literacy Study (PIRLS) in 2021 found that just 29% of English pupils said they “very much like reading,” compared with the 42% international average.³⁶

15. We heard evidence on the specific groups of children who are least likely to read for pleasure. These include:

- *Boys:* In 2026, 29% of boys aged eight to 18 said they enjoyed reading in their free time, compared with 42% of girls.³⁷ The 2021 PIRLS study found that gender differences were seen in attitudes towards reading across most education systems as well as in England.³⁸ Witnesses highlighted that this could be due to a number of factors, including: reading being viewed as a “gendered” activity; higher levels of SEND and reading difficulties among boys; lower numbers of male teachers; and boys seeing fewer male role models who read.³⁹ Jonathan Douglas, Chief Executive of the National Literacy Trust, told us that “from birth girls are more likely to be bought books as presents and to be taken to the library, so the gendering of reading as an activity happens almost unconsciously at quite an early stage.”⁴⁰
- *Teenagers:* Reading for pleasure declines with age, with a particular drop around the time of transition to secondary school. In 2026, 62% of children aged five to eight said they enjoyed reading in their free time, compared with 48% of those aged eight to 11, 33% of those aged 11 to 14, and 35% of those aged 14 to 16.⁴¹ An NLT report into teenage reading found that teenagers cited a lack of time, difficulty reading, and being too easily distracted as reasons why they did not read for pleasure.⁴² Evidence highlighted increased screen use and smartphone ownership, reduced shared reading with parents and carers, and

34 National Literacy Trust ([RFP0018](#))

35 National Literacy Trust, [Children and young people’s reading in 2026](#), June 2026

36 Department for Education ([RFP0171](#))

37 National Literacy Trust, [Children and young people’s reading in 2026](#), June 2026

38 Department for Education ([RFP0171](#))

39 Q61 [Luke Taylor; Onyinye Iwu]

40 Q41

41 National Literacy Trust, [Children and young people’s reading in 2026](#), June 2026

42 National Literacy Trust, [Teenage reading: \(Re\)framing the challenge](#), February 2026

social pressures as key causes of this;⁴³ Professor Jessie Ricketts highlighted that teenagers are guided by their peers and “do not see reading as a social activity and so feel that it is somewhat selfish.”⁴⁴

- *Children from low-income families:* In 2026, 32% of children eligible for free school meals said they enjoyed reading in their free time, compared with 37% of those not eligible.⁴⁵ The impact of poverty on reading is discussed further in a later section of this chapter.
- *Children with SEND:* While we received limited evidence on the reading habits of children with SEND overall, we heard particular concerns about the difficulties faced by children with dyslexia and other reading difficulties. The British Dyslexia Association stated that, for children with dyslexia, “reading is a slow, effortful and unrewarding process, focused on decoding words rather than engagement or enjoyment. Reading can be extremely tiring, leading to frustration, exhaustion and avoidance.”⁴⁶ Ellen Broomé told us that dyslexic children and young people had “quite a heavy backpack of educational failure or feelings of failure and embarrassment and stigma around their reading.”⁴⁷

16. The children who participated in the distributed dialogue activity gave several reasons for not enjoying reading. Most of the children who did not enjoy reading spoke about finding reading difficult or not understanding the words in the book, particularly those with dyslexia or other difficulties with reading; one pupil said “I get embarrassed when my friends are reading hard books and I can’t read them.” Children also spoke about lack of access to books and books being expensive, and that families did not encourage reading at home or have time to read with children. Many children also described reading as “boring” and said they preferred other activities. Some children also mentioned a dislike of being “forced” or told to read by parents, suggesting that they were likely to disengage if they saw reading as being something they did not choose to do.⁴⁸

The role of screens

17. We heard that the rise in recreational screen use was a key factor in declining rates of reading among children and young people. The NLT highlighted that children “grow up in a digital-first environment where high-reward, rapid content competes with reading time and can weaken habits of

43 The Reading Agency ([RFP0145](#)); Scholastic ([RFP0062](#)); Q41 [Jonathan Douglas]

44 Q17

45 National Literacy Trust, [Children and young people’s reading in 2026](#), June 2026

46 British Dyslexia Association ([RFP0083](#))

47 Q61

48 Distributed dialogue activity (summary in annexe)

sustained attention.”⁴⁹ The English Association said that “digital distractions such as online videos and games are highly stimulating and can make reading feel slow in comparison.”⁵⁰ The Department for Education (DfE) said that, while “the links between screen time and child development are complex, and the evidence of a causal relationship is mixed at all ages [...] it is clear from the evidence that screen use can displace activities which favour literacy and reading.”⁵¹ Onyinye Iwu said:

I told my students that I was coming here and I asked them, “Why do you guys not read?” A lot of them were like, “Miss, but we have TikTok. What is the point?” That is it. You have TikTok, you have Netflix, you have the film coming out; why would you read the book?⁵²

18. A survey by Parentkind found that 4 in 10 parents (40%) said that encouraging their children to read rather than use screens caused arguments at least weekly, including more than half (52%) of parents of primary-aged children.⁵³ Parents’ own screen use was also cited as a factor reducing reading among children. Frank Young, CEO of Parentkind, explained that parents spending time on devices themselves meant that they were not visibly modelling reading to their children: “We as adults may think, “Well, we are reading,” and we might be reading a newspaper or even a book on our phone, but a six or seven-year-old child cannot distinguish that visually.”⁵⁴ World Book Day research found that children were more than twice as likely to report seeing parents relax by watching TV than reading.⁵⁵
19. Academics described the concerning impact that this was having on children’s familiarity with physical books. Dr Helen Hendry, Senior Lecturer in Education at the Open University, told us that screen use at home “may limit knowing which way around you hold a book, that you need to turn pages and you follow it in one direction” and cited research showing that “children are arriving in reception and “swiping” physical books.”⁵⁶ Dr Jo Taylor explained that this created “disadvantage that is then compounded by difference when they get to school with a new environment” as schools used physical books rather than digital devices.⁵⁷

49 National Literacy Trust ([RFP0018](#))

50 English Association ([RFP0102](#))

51 Department for Education ([RFP0171](#))

52 Q61

53 Parentkind, [Reading for fun – parents’ views](#), January 2026

54 Q80

55 The Reading Agency ([RFP0145](#))

56 Q12

57 Q12

20. The children who participated in the distributed dialogue activity listed a wide range of activities that they preferred doing in their spare time instead of reading. These included screen-based activities such as gaming and TV, but also many non-screen-based activities such as sports, playing games, drawing, and spending time with family and friends. Secondary school pupils were more likely to say they preferred gaming or spending time with friends, but also mentioned sports and music.⁵⁸
21. The Minister for Early Education, Olivia Bailey MP, agreed that “the proliferation of screens is undoubtedly a significant factor” in declining rates of reading.⁵⁹ In March 2026, the government published new guidance on screen time for children aged under five. The guidance set out that screen time for this group should be limited wherever possible: children aged two and under should have no screen time “other than for shared activities with family that encourage bonding, interaction and conversation” and children aged over two should have a maximum of one hour per day.⁶⁰ The government also launched a consultation in March, *Growing up in the Online World*, which gathered evidence on a wide range of measures relating to children and young people’s use of devices and social media.⁶¹ In June, the government announced that it would ban social media for children aged under 16 and restrict certain functions for young people aged 16 and 17.⁶² The government has also launched a consultation to develop guidance on screen use for children aged five to 16.⁶³
22. Alongside this inquiry, we held a short inquiry looking at screen time and social media use and published a report to contribute to the government’s consultation. We found that addictive design features such as infinite scrolling, autoplay and algorithm-driven content feeds are significant drivers of excessive screen use, sleep disruption, reduced attention and behavioural problems among children, which is having an impact on schools, teachers and children’s education as well as their wider wellbeing. We heard that pupils were often arriving at school tired, distracted and struggling to maintain attention, often as a result of late-night screen time and social media use. This was supported by academic evidence linking children’s screen use with sleep disruption and reduced readiness to learn. We recommended that, as well as introducing a ban on social media for children under 16, the government introduce a risk-based and

58 Distributed dialogue activity (summary in annexe)

59 Q155

60 UK Government, [Screen time guidance for under 5s](#), 27 March 2026

61 Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, [Growing up in the online world: a national consultation](#), 2 March 2026

62 UK Government, [Social media to be banned for under-16s in landmark government move to give kids their childhood back](#), 15 June 2026

63 UK Government, [New guidance on screen use for children aged 5–16](#), 8 June 2026

age-appropriate regulatory framework that applies consistently across social media, gaming and hybrid platforms, private messaging sites and AI chatbots, including sites and platforms widely used by children.⁶⁴

23. CONCLUSION

The rise in recreational screen use is undoubtedly a major factor crowding out children's time to read for pleasure and affecting their attention spans, starting in the very earliest years with babies and young children spending time on devices instead of engaging with books. Parents' and carers' use of screens also set early expectations for children of how adults spend their own time. Our concurrent work on screen time and social media use has highlighted the severe risks associated with screen use. It is welcome that the government is finally taking action on this important area, but reform is long overdue and the negative effects of screen use will take time to reverse.

24. RECOMMENDATION

The government must implement in full the remaining recommendations of our response to its consultation on Growing up in the Online World as a first step to tackling the harmful effects of screen time on children. In particular, it must introduce mandatory restrictions on high-risk and addictive design features, such as infinite scrolling, disappearing messages and algorithmic messages for under-18s, with appropriate age-related restrictions enabled by default.

Other factors causing the decline

- 25.** Evidence emphasised that screen use was not the only factor leading to the decline and highlighted a range of other issues. In particular, we heard about the role of rising poverty and the barriers faced by disadvantaged children in reading for pleasure, including lack of access to books, a lack of quiet reading environments due to overcrowded housing, and parental stress. The NLT found that one in 10 (10%) children and young people reported having no books of their own at home, rising to one in six (16%) pupils receiving free school meals, and 71% of teachers said they worried their pupils lacked sufficient access to books beyond school.⁶⁵ One in five parents (20%) said they were buying fewer books due to the cost-of-living crisis, increasing to over one in three (36%) among families struggling financially.⁶⁶ Evidence also highlighted that children eligible for free school

64 Education Committee, First Report of Session 2026–27, [Growing up in the online world: The Education Committee's response to the Government's consultation](#), HC 187

65 National Literacy Trust ([RFP0018](#))

66 Department for Education ([RFP0171](#))

meals were less likely to have access to dedicated library spaces in their school⁶⁷ and that those who lived in wealthier areas had access to better public library provision than those in poorer areas.⁶⁸

- 26.** We also heard that time pressures and stress among parents in poverty led to less shared reading at home, discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. Jonathan Douglas said that high levels of cortisol in the first few years, which are linked to stress and poverty, inhibited early language development.⁶⁹ Annie Crombie, Co-Chief Executive of the BookTrust, also said that children in care or at risk of being taken into care experienced “multiple different factors that make it hard to establish regular reading [such as] the dysregulated nature of the child’s emotional state or the family experience.”⁷⁰ Frank Cottrell-Boyce highlighted the role of insecure housing and furniture poverty, saying:

If you are moved into social housing as a result of an emergency, it tends to be let void, which means it is literally empty. No child is going to have a bedtime story if they have not got a bed. No child is going to dream that they are going to Narnia through the wardrobe if there is no wardrobe. No child is going to relate to “Little House on the Prairie” or think, “There’s no place like home,” if their clothes are stored in a bin bag because they might have to move again.⁷¹

- 27.** In addition to the role of poverty, we also heard about a number of other factors linked to the decline in reading, which are discussed in detail in later chapters of this report. These include: pressures arising from school and homework; curriculum and assessment; cuts to public library services; a lack of school libraries and insufficient resources for existing school libraries; and pressures on parents and declining reading among adults leading to less role modelling and less shared reading at home.

67 HarperCollins Publishers UK ([RFP0020](#))

68 CILIP ([RFP0166](#))

69 Q41

70 Q41

71 Q113

28.

CONCLUSION

Beyond screen time, there are myriad other pressures on childhood restricting the opportunities for children to read, and for parents to read with their children. England is lagging so far behind the international average that we cannot place the blame solely on screens. The pressures of the cost of living and modern work patterns mean that many parents and carers do not have the time and capacity to share books with their children at home. For children living in poverty, the inability to access the essentials can be a huge barrier to enjoying books. Work to address the decline must therefore be multi-faceted and look more broadly at the evidence on what works and how parents and carers, teachers and other school staff, early years practitioners, library staff and the literary industry can reverse the decline.

29.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the inquiry, we have seen that the decline in reading for pleasure is not inevitable. It is the result of policy choices, fragmented systems and unequal access. With coordinated national leadership, sustained investment and a renewed focus on joy and connection, reading for pleasure can be restored as a defining part of childhood and a foundation for a fairer, more cohesive society.

30.

RECOMMENDATION

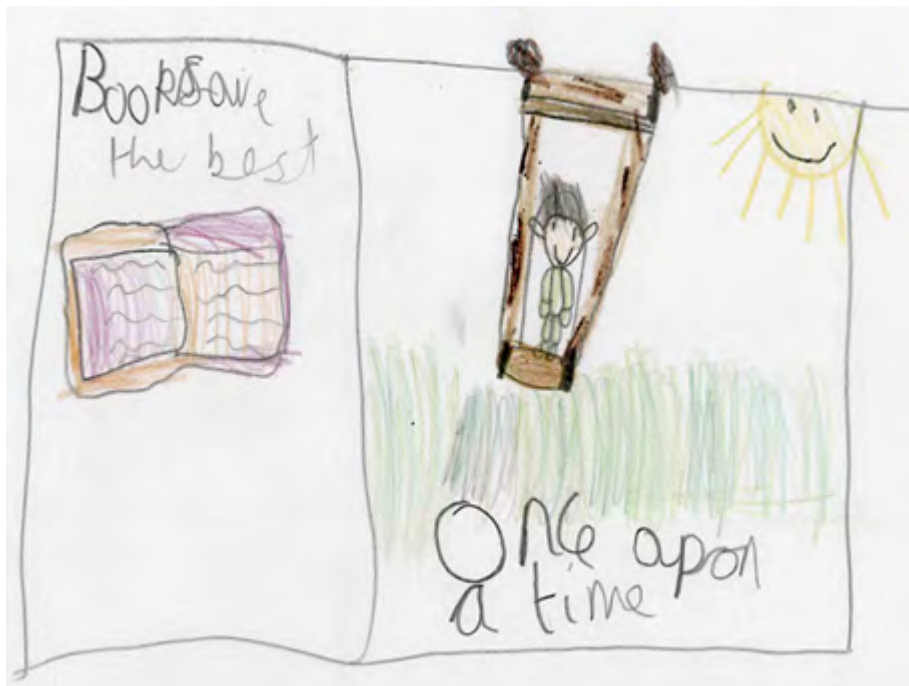
The Government must commit to a National Reading Guarantee ensuring that every child, regardless of background, has frequent, regular opportunities to enjoy books, stories and shared reading experiences from birth to 18 as part of everyday life. The National Reading Guarantee should encompass early years support and childcare, school and public libraries; and it should have a particular focus on access to books for disadvantaged families and consideration of whether initiatives in this area could be expanded. Children cannot fall in love with books they have never held. The Guarantee should adopt a broad definition of reading and go beyond traditional books to include as broad a range of texts as possible, including accessible texts for children with SEND; however, it should include a strategy for encouraging children to engage with traditional books as well as other forms of texts, recognising the particular benefits that traditional books bring.

31.

RECOMMENDATION

A central part of the National Reading Guarantee must include a comprehensive Reading for Pleasure strategy. This should be led by the Department for Education working with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and set out its long-term plans for reversing the decline in reading for pleasure among children and young people. The strategy should, at a minimum, include: reviews of the available evidence on what works; guidance on best practice for parents and carers, schools, teachers and early years practitioners; expectations on schools and early years settings as to best practice, including relating to the diversity of texts available and opportunities for shared reading; proposals to raise levels of reading among particular groups of children, including boys, teenagers, disadvantaged children, and children with SEND; and the steps the Department will take to implement the recommendations of this report.

National Year of Reading



Pupil aged 6–7, participant in the distributed dialogue activity

- 32.** In July 2025, the DfE announced that 2026 would be designated a National Year of Reading (NYR).⁷² This is the third such campaign, following previous National Years of Reading in 1998 and 2008.⁷³ It is being delivered by the National Literacy Trust for the DfE. The DfE described the National Year of Reading as a “collective impact campaign, allowing multiple agencies and partners to participate, including publishers, retailers, brands, libraries, booksellers, and the voluntary sector.”⁷⁴ The Minister said that, in June 2026, 2 million children had been supported through in-school events in the National Year of Reading, with 11,000 teachers signed up and 6,500 schools registered.⁷⁵
- 33.** Although the National Year of Reading is aimed at all groups, the DfE has identified three priority audiences which it is targeting, which are:
- boys aged 10–16 (including a focus on KS2-KS3 transition)
 - parents from disadvantaged communities
 - early years (children aged 0–5 and their parents / caregivers).⁷⁶
- 34.** There will be an independent external evaluation of the National Year of Reading, which will be published in 2027 and will examine “how the campaign influences reading behaviours, connects with audiences and shapes attitudes towards reading, particularly among the campaign’s priority audiences: teenage boys, the early years, and families from disadvantaged communities.”⁷⁷
- 35.** Evidence to the inquiry was positive about the National Year of Reading but emphasised the importance of ensuring that it creates a lasting legacy, rather than being a one-off event. Pan Macmillan stated that previous National Years of Reading “evidence a high engagement within the year itself, only for this to fall away.”⁷⁸ Annie Crombie said that “the real thing that matters is that longer-term, slower-burn embedding of activity within communities and networks, which will be the key to any kind of longer term success and making the investment worthwhile.”⁷⁹ Jonathan Douglas called for the National Year of Reading to be “turned into a decade of reading to sustain the foundations that are being laid, the partnerships that are being created this year, and to sustain momentum.”⁸⁰ Debbie Hicks, Creative

72 Department for Education, [Parents urged to read more to boost children’s life chances](#), 6 July 2025

73 Department for Education ([RFP0171](#))

74 Department for Education ([RFP0171](#))

75 Q157

76 Department for Education ([RFP0171](#))

77 Department for Education ([RFP0171](#))

78 Pan Macmillan ([RFP0100](#))

79 Q51

80 Q58

Director of The Reading Agency, said that there were good resources available, but that “the best way to invest that resource is to invest it in the amplification of best practice and programmes that we know work and have the capacity to be amplified and grown.”⁸¹

- 36.** The Minister agreed that in previous National Years of Reading, “big progress was made but not necessarily sustained”, and said that the DfE had reflected on that and was “determined to make sure that it is not just one year of good numbers, which then all peters away, but that that progress is sustained and contributes meaningfully to reversing this decline in a love of reading.”⁸² Jenny Oldroyd, Director of Curriculum, General Qualifications and Digital Strategy at the DfE, stated that the evaluation would “look at how the year has been successful in shaping attitudes to reading” and focus on the “longer-term impacts on the literacy sector, and on whether we have built the foundations for longer-term change.”⁸³

Other interventions and programmes

- 37.** Beyond the National Year of Reading, we heard about a wide variety of programmes, events and interventions with the goal of encouraging more children and young people to read. World Book Day is the most notable example of this: run by a charity of the same name, it distributes 23.5 million £1 book tokens to schools annually, as well as 2 million free £1 books. In 2025, 91% of UK children aged 5–8 took part in a World Book Day activity and 93% of UK adults are aware of the event.⁸⁴ Jonathan Douglas told us that a quarter of children on free school meals said that the first book they owned came as a result of the World Book Day £1 book tokens.⁸⁵
- 38.** Witnesses told us that one-off events such as World Book Day had “immense value” and that they make those working on the ground “feel that they are part of something bigger,” but highlighted that they should not be limited to one day per year and only brought real value if they were “embedded in what the school is doing and in a wider infrastructure of reading activity.”⁸⁶ Professor Teresa Cremin, Professor of Education (Literacy) at the Open University, told us that “if you had a rich reading pedagogy in your classroom, every day is World Book Day [...] It is not an occasional piece and World Book Day, the organisation itself, does not argue that.”⁸⁷ We also heard about the importance of the Summer Reading Challenge, which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

81 Q51

82 Q157

83 Q157

84 World Book Day ([RFP0042](#))

85 Q52

86 Q52 [Annie Crombie; Jonathan Douglas]

87 Q27

39. We received evidence about the impact of a wide range of other programmes run by charities, local authorities, publishers, booksellers, community groups and others. For example, we heard about the importance of book gifting schemes which provide families with free books and resources;⁸⁸ reading volunteers in schools and early years settings;⁸⁹ local book festivals and fairs;⁹⁰ literacy programmes and community projects working with parents;⁹¹ and many more. Frank Cottrell-Boyce described effective programmes that he had worked with across the country, such as a programme working with the community in Knowsley, and said:

We have an infrastructure in place for reaching out from the world in which people are familiar with books, to get books into different places, and to people who genuinely think that books are nothing to do with them. That can be done—I keep seeing it done, over and over again—and it can be done at very little cost, and it can work magic when it happens.⁹²

40. **CONCLUSION**

The National Year of Reading is a welcome acknowledgement from the government of the importance of reading and has enabled a range of positive activities to take place, but there is little evidence that it has impacted the core work of the Department in terms of schools and early years. Without long-term prioritisation and appropriate investment, it risks becoming a one-off event with minimal lasting impact.

41. **RECOMMENDATION**

The Department should build on the National Year of Reading, transforming its focus into a National Decade of Reading in order to ensure that reading for pleasure remains a long-term priority, and use it as an opportunity to effect much more far-reaching change to embed reading for pleasure into all areas of education.

88 The Children's Literacy Charity ([RFP0087](#)); Dollywood Foundation UK ([RFP0097](#)); Give a Book ([RFP0133](#)); BookTrust ([RFP0132](#))

89 Chapter One UK ([RFP0070](#)); Centre for Social Justice ([RFP0080](#)); Doorstep Library ([RFP0090](#)); Read for Good ([RFP0094](#)); Schoolreaders ([RFP0103](#)); Read with Me ([RFP0113](#))

90 Shropshire Bookfest ([RFP0060](#)); Cheltenham Festival ([RFP0107](#)); Clare McGreevy ([RFP0155](#)); Scholastic ([RFP0062](#)); Bookmark Reading Charity ([RFP0085](#))

91 Reading Fairy Global Ltd ([RFP0045](#)); MakeBelieve Arts ([RFP0054](#)); Bookmark Reading Charity ([RFP0085](#)); Learning with Parents ([RFP0126](#)); Premier League ([RFP0135](#))

92 Q120

42.

RECOMMENDATION

One key priority group missing from the National Year of Reading is children with SEND, particularly those with dyslexia and other reading difficulties. The Department must set out what steps it is taking to support these children to develop an enjoyment of reading and ensure that all future work on reading for pleasure is accessible for children with SEND.

43.

RECOMMENDATION

Building on the success and universality of World Book Day, the Government should establish more national moments to promote reading for pleasure throughout the year.

44.

CONCLUSION

The private, voluntary and community sectors are stepping up to play their part in getting children reading. The necessary foundations for change are already present - there exists a rich and committed ecosystem working to promote reading for pleasure. We have heard of many inspiring examples of programmes run by charities, schools, libraries, publishers, booksellers, and other groups, which are having a positive impact in their communities. However, access to these opportunities are not evenly distributed and children's experiences of these will vary widely according to what is available and funded in their local area and, in the case of paid-for events, their families' income. The government should take on a leading role in ensuring consistent and more equitable access to programmes.

45.

RECOMMENDATION

The Department must act decisively and evaluate the benefits of the different programmes being undertaken, with a particular focus on supporting children from those groups least likely to read for pleasure. This should include looking at the benefits of book gifting schemes; reading volunteers in schools; and programmes supporting parents with shared reading in the early years. This evaluation should be completed within a year, and the Government should then move to scale what works nationally and with urgency as a lasting legacy of the National Year of Reading.

2 Early years and the home learning environment



Pupil aged 8–9, participant in the distributed dialogue activity

The importance of the early years

46. We heard a great deal of evidence emphasising the crucial role of the early years in creating the foundations for developing a love of reading and books. The National Literacy Trust stated that shared reading in the first 1,001 days boosts language, attachment, wellbeing, creativity and cognition, and builds communication, vocabulary, comprehension,

attention, fine motor skills and early print awareness.⁹³ The BookTrust’s evidence highlighted that starting shared reading early makes it more likely to continue throughout childhood and stated that “sharing a physical book creates shared moments that stimulate multiple senses, enhance trust and create memories.”⁹⁴ An evidence review by the BookTrust found that shared reading in the early years creates opportunities for joint attention and emotional closeness between a child and their parent or carer. It lifts parents’ mood, increases warmth, and reduces stress, enabling the sensitive and nurturing interactions young children need to thrive.⁹⁵

- 47.** Frank Cottrell-Boyce, author and Waterstones Children’s Laureate 2024 to 2026, told us that the early years are “when the cake is baked” and that his focus as Children’s Laureate had been to “shift the focus of the national conversation towards early years.”⁹⁶ He highlighted the importance of putting the pleasure of reading first in the early years, saying:

We can teach them all the steps, but the important thing is that they dance. It seems to me blindingly obvious that what you do is prioritise the pleasure before you get into the learning. This is something we do with everything else. No parent says to a child, “When you’ve learned the offside rule, then I’ll play football with you.” No parent says to a child, “When you’ve learned how to catch and gut a cod, then you can have a fish finger.” We always put the pleasure first, and it seems simple to me that what you do is make sure that happens as early in life as possible.⁹⁷

- 48.** The Department for Education (DfE) stated that “early language skills are essential for fostering a love of reading and laying the foundations for lifelong learning.” It highlighted that, as part of the National Year of Reading, “early years children and their families are a priority audience, reflecting our commitment to nurturing a lifelong love of reading from the earliest years.”⁹⁸ The Minister for Early Education, Olivia Bailey MP, agreed that fostering a love of reading was critical and said that it was “embedded across the board” in early years, saying that she saw “day in, day out, children having fun, enjoying learning, enjoying learning new things about themselves and their communities.”⁹⁹

93 National Literacy Trust ([RFP0018](#))

94 BookTrust ([RFP0132](#))

95 BookTrust, [The benefits of reading](#), 2025

96 Q114

97 Q114

98 Department for Education ([RFP0171](#))

99 Q167

Early years settings

49. Early years settings play a key role in introducing children to books and stories and encouraging an enjoyment of reading. Early years settings include a wide variety of settings, such as private nurseries, nursery classes in schools, playgroups, maintained nursery schools, and childminders. The DfE's early years foundation stage statutory framework, which sets out the standards that early years providers must adhere to, states that it is "crucial for children to develop a life-long love of reading." It sets out that "reading frequently to children, and engaging them actively in stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems, and then providing them with extensive opportunities to use and embed new words in a range of contexts, will give children the opportunity to thrive."¹⁰⁰
50. Ofsted's early years inspection toolkit includes a number of references to supporting shared reading. Ofsted inspects to what extent the curricula for communication and language and literacy in a setting includes "oral storytelling and shared reading with plenty of opportunities for repeated practice in a range of contexts" and develops their love of stories, rhymes, songs and books. To meet the expected standard for curriculum and teaching, settings need to demonstrate a "sharp focus on developing children's communication and language and their love of books."¹⁰¹
51. The Open University's Early Literacy Research Group stated that early years settings are "unique in providing a thoughtful combination of adult-led and child-initiated activities creating time, space and choice around reading activities, three strategies associated with supporting RfP [reading for pleasure]."¹⁰² The BookTrust stated that early years settings play a "leading role" in encouraging reading for pleasure, through supporting families to read together at home, sharing books in settings, and providing ongoing touchpoints with key messages from trusted professionals.¹⁰³ Julie Cigman, Early Education associate, consultant and author, highlighted that early years settings can play a key role in introducing children to books by "having books everywhere", having "exciting and inviting" areas with books, and linking books with play so that children can link books with a purpose.¹⁰⁴
52. We heard that many early years practitioners lacked the necessary skills and training to be able to support reading for pleasure. The Open University's Early Literacy Research Group explained that, although reading with young children may seem simple, "practices that foster young children's active engagement in reading [...] require pedagogical

100 Department for Education, [Early years foundation stage statutory framework](#), July 2025

101 Ofsted, [Early years inspection toolkit](#), September 2025

102 Open University Early Literacy Research Group ([RFP0122](#))

103 BookTrust ([RFP0132](#))

104 Q86

knowledge and skill” and that there is currently “great variation in shared reading practices in EY [early years] settings.”¹⁰⁵ Frank Cottrell-Boyce highlighted that early years professionals were “often among the lowest paid people in the country” and had “only just stopped being children themselves”, meaning that they themselves had grown up during a period of declining reading for pleasure and challenges due to the pandemic.¹⁰⁶ Dr Helen Hendry, Senior Lecturer in Education at the Open University, said:

Early years practitioners need help [...] There is such a varied range of qualifications and skills in the early childhood workforce [...] There are statements that Ofsted will inspect early years settings and look at whether shared reading is happening, but do the practitioners know how to develop the kinds of interactions that are supporting children to want to read, to talk about reading with their friends and all of the wonderful things we have already talked about this morning? There is definitely more work to be done there.¹⁰⁷

- 53.** We also heard evidence that some early years settings are prioritising reading proficiency and phonics over engagement with books and reading for pleasure. Annie Crombie, Co-CEO of the Book Trust, said that “reading is seen too narrowly with too much of a school-readiness focus in the early years to put children on the path to literacy.”¹⁰⁸ Dr Helen Hendry said that there was a “dripdown effect coming from school curricula” with a “worry that practitioners need to get children ready for school and they might need to do lots of phonics but they may not have the appropriate training and skills to do it.”¹⁰⁹
- 54.** In its written evidence, the DfE highlighted that almost 10,000 settings are part of Stronger Practice Hubs, which provide free resources and training to early years settings and childminders, and that it was doubling the number of hubs from 18 to 36. It also stated that it was continuing and expanding the free, universally accessible online Early Years Child Development training, which includes communication and language.¹¹⁰ The Minister said that “literacy and encouraging the joy and love of reading are embedded [...] in all the qualifications that staff working in early years acquire” and highlighted that there were “literacy leads in each of the Stronger Practice hubs, whose job it is to go out to work in the early years settings to support staff to enable that love of reading.”¹¹¹

105 Open University Early Literacy Research Group ([RFP0122](#))

106 Q114

107 Q23

108 Q58

109 Q23

110 Department for Education ([RFP0171](#))

111 Q168

55.

CONCLUSION

The early years is a crucial stage for developing a love of reading and engagement with books and stories. We agree with the Department that developing literacy and reading skills is essential, but at this early stage, joy must lead the way. Fun and enjoyment must come first in the early years, as this provides the foundation and motivation for learning to read at later stages. Without this early positive association, without the warmth of shared stories and the enchantment of turning pages, children are far less likely to carry a love of reading into later life.

56.

RECOMMENDATION

Many younger childcare practitioners entering the profession will themselves have grown up during a period of decline in reading, and other new practitioners may have struggled with reading for pleasure themselves. The Department must therefore ensure that reading for pleasure is built into all levels of training for early years practitioners and make continuing professional development on reading for pleasure available to practitioners.

57.

RECOMMENDATION

The Department and Ofsted should update the early years foundation stage profile and early years inspection framework to emphasise that, for young children, reading should be focused on building enjoyment and engagement over school readiness and the teaching of phonics.

Parents and the home learning environment



Pupil aged 9, participant in the distributed dialogue activity

58. The evidence to this inquiry emphasised the essential role played by parents and carers and the home learning environment (HLE) in supporting reading for pleasure. This is evident across all age groups, but particularly important for babies and young children. The National Literacy Trust stated that the HLE is “one of the strongest influences on RfP [reading for pleasure] and long-term outcomes. Shared reading, conversation, play and access to books shape language development and reading identity.”¹¹² Jonathan Douglas, Chief Executive of the National Literacy Trust, told us that what you do with a child at home is “four times more impactful than the impact of even high-quality education on the early development of a child.”¹¹³ Professor Christine O’Farrelly, Research Professor and UKRI Future Leaders Fellow at the University of Cambridge, stated that there was a “whole host of evidence” on the importance of the home learning environment, particularly around book sharing and daily reading, which had been shown to “equivalise some of the income disparity in children’s skills.”¹¹⁴ Professor O’Farrelly said:

You have heard evidence about these interactive, participatory, playful moments of sharing and exploring books together [...] When that happens, the caregiver or parent follows a child’s interest; they expand on it in a way that is meaningful to the child, and that brings in their other experiences and what they already know about the child in

112 National Literacy Trust ([RFPO018](#))

113 Q44

114 Q76

a playful way; and they use an animated voice and actions. All those things make it engaging and fun [...] which brings both the parent and the child back to read again. That is where we get a snowball effect where it is enjoyable, so they want to do it again.¹¹⁵

59. Parents’ and carers’ own reading habits have a strong influence on children’s reading for pleasure. Research by The Reading Agency found that UK adults who were read to by a parent or caregiver as children are 130% more likely to enjoy reading as adults and to read to their own children,¹¹⁶ and the BookTrust has found that children are 40% more likely to enjoy reading if their parents or carers do.¹¹⁷ Julie Cigman explained that it was important for adults to model reading, because “children do what they see the adults around them doing. They play cook and play driver, but they will not play at reading if they are not seeing it.”¹¹⁸ Research by The Reading Agency found that 53% of UK adults read regularly for pleasure in 2025, compared to 58% in 2015.¹¹⁹

60. Research has found that parents are, on the whole, aware of the benefits of reading with their children. A survey by Parentkind of 2,000 parents of children aged 4 to 18 found that parents “near-universally” (98%) agreed it was important to encourage their children to read for fun, and that almost two-thirds (63%) said it was “very important”.¹²⁰ Annie Crombie, Co-CEO of the Book Trust, said:

What we see there is not an entirely bleak picture. There are some things that are really encouraging. For example, we see strong levels of positivity about reading among parents, and 95% of parents think it is important to read with their child, and know that it is important to start early. We see that really strongly in our research. We also see that when parents do read with their child, they find it a positive experience.¹²¹

61. However, evidence suggested that levels of reading with children were declining, and that daily reading in particular is uncommon. Parentkind’s survey found that 20% of parents said they read books or stories for fun every day, with 71% saying they did this at least weekly.¹²² The National Literacy Trust stated that daily reading among parents of 0–5s had declined from 66% in 2019 to 46% today.¹²³ Research by HarperCollins found that

115 Q77

116 The Reading Agency ([RFP0145](#))

117 Department for Education ([RFP0171](#))

118 Q79

119 The Reading Agency ([RFP0145](#))

120 Parentkind, [Reading for fun – parents’ views](#), January 2026

121 Q40

122 Parentkind, [Reading for fun – parents’ views](#), January 2026

123 National Literacy Trust ([RFP0018](#))

there had been a “dramatic decline” in 5–7-year-old children being read to frequently, and only around one fifth of 8–10-year-olds are read to often. By the time children reach 11–13, over a third (35%) are ‘rarely or never’ read to at home.¹²⁴

- 62.** The children we spoke to on World Book Day had a range of experiences of reading at home, from children who did not read for pleasure at home at all, to children who sometimes did and those who read every night before bed. One pupil highlighted that their parents had given them a 15-minute screen time limit per day, which meant they did not spend much time on screens at home.¹²⁵
- 63.** In the distributed dialogue activity, we asked children whether they read alone or with an adult when they read at home. Responses varied by age group, with younger pupils (aged 4–7) saying they read mainly with an adult, and older pupils (aged 7–11) saying they read mainly alone. Many children in the 9–11 age range suggested a preference for reading alone, saying that they found this “calmer” and “more peaceful” and that it was easier to concentrate. However, some children also preferred reading with an adult, particularly so that adults could help them with words they didn’t understand. Several children said they did not need to read with an adult as they could read independently, suggesting that they saw shared reading as something only for children who could not yet read. One pupil said: “I read by myself and with my adult because with my adult if you read it wrong they will help you. With myself I will read easy books, then I will have no mistakes.”¹²⁶

Barriers and challenges

- 64.** The evidence we received outlined a number of barriers and challenges preventing parents and carers from reading with their children at home. As discussed in Chapter 1, screen use among parents and children was one factor. Lack of time and pressures from work was a key barrier, and evidence highlighted that parents on lower incomes were particularly likely to experience time pressures due to long working hours, irregular shifts or having multiple jobs.¹²⁷ Frank Young explained that the causes of time pressures were “different for different families”: “for a middle-class family, it might be long hours, but for families involved in shift work, it might be different hours that are not conducive to supporting your child outside school.”¹²⁸ The Fatherhood Institute highlighted that fathers were less likely

124 HarperCollins Publishers UK ([RFP0020](#))

125 World Book Day engagement session (summary in annexe)

126 Distributed dialogue activity (summary in annexe)

127 Schoolreaders ([RFP0103](#)); Penguin Random House UK ([RFP0027](#))

128 Q79

to read to children than mothers, in part due to longer working hours.¹²⁹ Some children who participated in the distributed dialogue activity said that their parents or family members did not have time to read with them; one child said “I read by myself. My stepmum is always looking after my sister. My Dad is at work.”

- 65.** We also heard that the pressures and stresses associated with living in poverty, as well as lack of access to books, made shared reading at home more difficult. Professor O’Farrelly explained that families experiencing housing or food insecurity found it more difficult to make reading part of the daily routine, stating: “Some families are facing acute stress, and where your stress levels are acute, it can often be hard to have the rewarding, responsive, attuned interactions with your child that you might otherwise want to have.”¹³⁰ She cited evidence showing that around 77% of families in the highest income quintile read daily to their two-year-olds, compared with 32% in the lowest income quintile.¹³¹ National Literacy Trust research found that 1 in 10 (10%) children and young people reported having no books of their own at home, rising to 1 in 6 (16%) pupils receiving free school meals, and that 71% of teachers said that they worried their pupils lacked sufficient access to books beyond school.¹³²
- 66.** Lack of confidence in their own abilities was another barrier mentioned: research by the BookTrust found that half of parents and carers (50%) were not fully clear how to support their child to enjoy reading, and one in five (19%) did not find reading easy.¹³³ Annie Crombie said that it was “quite easy sometimes to assume that families know how to do it [reading with children]” and highlighted that “groups who have had disrupted family circumstances are again likely to suffer from a lack of intergenerational tradition and passing on the reading habit.”¹³⁴ Frank Young said that Parentkind’s research had found that a third of parents had avoided reading to their children because they worried about their own reading ability, and that parents “know, almost instinctively, it is important, but their own abilities are preventing them.”¹³⁵
- 67.** Frank Young also highlighted that some parents and carers saw it as primarily the school’s responsibility to support children to read, rather than theirs, with around one in five parents saying it was mainly the responsibility of schools to help children read for fun.¹³⁶ Onyinye Iwu, a children’s author,

129 Fatherhood Institute ([RFP0084](#))

130 Q78

131 Q78

132 National Literacy Trust ([RFP0018](#))

133 BookTrust ([RFP0132](#))

134 Q41

135 Q77

136 Q77

illustrator and art teacher, explained that some families, particularly ethnic minority communities, saw reading primarily as an educational or school activity, saying: “A lot of communities do not encourage children to read for pleasure. They focus on textbooks. You have to study for your exams. You do not have to read for pleasure, because that is not going to get you a job.”¹³⁷

68. The DfE has published a short piece of guidance for parents of primary-aged children to read at home, entitled “10 top tips for parents to support children to read.” This sets out that parents should encourage children to read at home, that they should read aloud regularly, create a comfortable environment, and make use of their local library.¹³⁸

69. **CONCLUSION**

Parents and carers know the benefits of reading with their children and want to do more but face multiple barriers in doing so. Pressures and stresses exist for families across the income distribution; however, these are particularly acute for parents living in poverty. Lack of confidence in their own abilities alongside a gap in understanding of how best to do it compounds these problems, but action can and must be taken to fill these gaps in knowledge and support parents and carers.

70. **RECOMMENDATION**

Alongside its recently published guidance on screen use for the under-5s, the Department must update its guidance for parents of primary-aged children on supporting children to read and expand this to parents of children of all age groups. The guidance should clearly set out the benefits of reading for pleasure, why shared reading is beneficial for the youngest children, and provide strategies and support for parents to read with their children at home. This is a quick win for the DfE and should be completed by the end of the year.

The system of support for parents

Best Start Family Hubs

71. In July 2025, the Government published its early years strategy, *Giving every child the best start in life*. The strategy set out a commitment to introducing Best Start Family Hubs, which will bring together parenting, healthcare and education support services to ensure all babies, children and families

137 Q61

138 Department for Education, [10 top tips for parents to support children to read](#), 25 April 2022

have access to the early intervention and support they need.¹³⁹ The DfE’s written evidence stated: “By linking health, education, and community services, Best Start Family Hubs provide the foundations for early learning, where language development and a love of reading begin. This integrated approach ensures families have the guidance and resources to embed reading into everyday life, to ensure every child has the best start in life.”¹⁴⁰

72. In March 2026, the DfE published a press release stating that 200 Best Start Family Hubs had opened in areas that had not previously been funded. It stated that it would be operating 800 hubs by the end of April 2026, and that there would be up to 1,000 hubs across all local authorities by the end of 2028.¹⁴¹ The DfE has also published guidance to local authorities setting out the expectations for Best Start Family Hubs. The guidance states that local authorities should “ensure play and shared reading resources including stay and play sessions are embedded within the HLE [home learning environment] and parenting offer, providing parents with evidence-informed practice and opportunities to support language-rich, independent exploration at home and in the community.”¹⁴²
73. Evidence to the inquiry was positive about family hubs and the opportunity they represented to embed reading for pleasure into early years policy. Frank Young said that there was “huge capacity for family hubs to be a very radical policy solution and a new part of our public service.” He suggested that family hubs could be distinct from previous and existing children’s centres by having a “more holistic view around parents and families, rather than just a singular focus on children” and providing a space to support parents.¹⁴³ Professor Christine O’Farrelly said that there was “huge opportunity” for what the hubs could do around reading for pleasure and suggested that they should provide both universal support for all parents to demonstrate the importance of books and shared reading, as well as more targeted support for parents with the greatest needs.¹⁴⁴
74. The National Literacy Trust set out a number of ways in which Best Start Family Hubs could support shared reading, including: embedding support for the home learning environment within the Best Start in Life strategy and as a universal element of the Family Hub offer; normalising shared reading through regular story and rhyme sessions that model positive practice; increasing access to books through library partnerships, lending schemes,

139 Department for Education, [Giving every child the best start in life](#), July 2025

140 Department for Education ([RFP0171](#))

141 Department for Education, [Hundreds of Best Start Family Hubs open nationwide](#), March 2026

142 Department for Education, [Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies: guidance for local authorities](#), March 2026

143 Q85

144 Q84

book swaps and removing cost barriers; and applying behaviour-change approaches to build parental confidence, opportunity and motivation.¹⁴⁵ The Booksellers Association suggested that hubs could work more closely with local bookshops by commissioning them to deliver regular story and rhyme sessions, acting as referral points into bookshop-led programmes, and integrating bookshops into multilingual and inclusive provision so families can access bilingual and culturally representative children's books.¹⁴⁶ The BookTrust recommended that the DfE include shared reading in all relevant early years guidance, frameworks and funding, including for Best Start Family Hubs.¹⁴⁷

- 75.** We also heard of the importance of bringing local services together to collaborate to provide effective support for parents. Frank Cottrell-Boyce described an example of a successful programme in the Dearne Valley, South Yorkshire, which brought parents on low incomes together to read with their children, connecting services including libraries, the health services, schools, social workers and faith groups. He said:

Many of those parents had had incredibly negative experiences, but seeing it done properly a couple of times brought it out. They were learning and being empowered as well, and they were gaining from the shared reading as adults. It is incredibly powerful and it costs nothing. We got very granular on this. I think someone from the council found that it was 18 grand [£18,000] to give someone extra hours to make sure that all the departments were speaking to each other. That de-siloing happened and made an enormous, measurable and visible difference.¹⁴⁸

- 76.** The Minister highlighted that family hubs offered a “non-stigmatising experience” for parents and that they were designed to be places “where you want to go, make connections, make friends, see other parents, and where your children enjoy spending time.” She described a number of activities delivered by hubs, including training for parents to support their child to read at home; interactive reading sessions and providing access to books; and joining up services to forge connections with nurseries in their communities. She said that the Department wanted local authorities to “do more to force those connections, so that children are getting the full suite of support available to them.”¹⁴⁹

145 National Literacy Trust ([RFP0018](#))

146 Booksellers Association ([RFP0028](#))

147 BookTrust ([RFP0132](#))

148 Q115

149 Q166

Health visitors

- 77.** We heard about the role of health visitors in introducing new parents to shared reading approaches. Health visitors are qualified nurses or midwives who deliver a statutory offer of five health and development reviews to new parents at specific stages of their child’s life (antenatal, new birth, six to eight weeks, 12 months, and two to two and a half years). Additional health and development reviews can also be completed at any point up to age five in response to assessed need. The guidance for health visitors states that reviews should “assess child health and development as well as family needs to ensure appropriate support is or will be offered.” It sets out a range of areas that practitioners should consider when doing the reviews, including: emotional wellbeing and communication; public health and health promotion including areas such as breastfeeding, safe sleep practices, and oral health; linking families to local resources; and screening for domestic abuse and other forms of harm. The guidance includes “promotion of early communication and reading” as core components of every review.¹⁵⁰
- 78.** There are several examples of successful programmes gifting books to new parents, often delivered in partnership with health visitors and other partners. The BookTrust runs a programme, BookStart Baby, through which every child in England, Wales and Northern Ireland aged zero to 12 months is eligible for a free book pack, provided through health visitors, libraries, registrars and other partners.¹⁵¹ The Dollywood Foundation’s Imagination Library gifts a free monthly book to children from birth to their fifth birthday, and report that families receiving these books “read more frequently, enjoy reading more, and report stronger bonding experiences through shared reading.” They recommend supporting universal book gifting from birth in geographic areas of highest need, with pathways to wider coverage, and embedding reading promotion within health visiting, early years, and family hub models.¹⁵²
- 79.** Annie Crombie said that 90% of health visitors talked about books with new parents and gifted books in partnership with the BookTrust’s BookStart programme, but that “the degree of confidence with which the health visitor does that, whether they actually open the book and show how to do it and help to build some of that confidence, will be more variable.”¹⁵³ Professor Christine O’Farrelly said that health visitors have a “huge role to play”, referencing the importance of the BookStart programme in introducing families to books, and suggested building on what was already

150 Department of Health and Social Care, [Part 2: health visiting \(ages 0 to 5\)](#), March 2026

151 BookTrust, [BookStart Baby](#) (accessed 12 June 2026)

152 Dollywood Foundation UK ([RFP0097](#))

153 Q43

happening to “extend that touchpoint momentarily, model some of the skills and give supportive feedback to families to enable them to take the next step and make that habit forming.”¹⁵⁴ However, Frank Young said that he would be “slightly hesitant” about health visitors as they are “significantly overloaded, and there is probably a limit to what they can do effectively, because of the pressures on their time.”¹⁵⁵

80. CONCLUSION

Best Start Family Hubs represent a crucial opportunity to support parents, carers and practitioners to develop good practice on reading for pleasure. Support for parents and carers must focus on the joy of reading and make it easy and attractive for them to engage with young children.

81. RECOMMENDATION

The Department must ensure that all Best Start Family Hubs are embedding reading for pleasure into their work by offering sessions and advice for parents and carers as well as training for practitioners and support to early years settings on good practice. Every Hub should have a designated Reading for Pleasure lead who is responsible and resourced for designing and leading this work which should include automatic book gifting and guided sessions for parents and carers.

82. RECOMMENDATION

The Department should ensure that Best Start Family Hubs provide support for parents and carers on appropriate screen time use for children of different ages, as well as explaining their own role as an adult in modelling appropriate screen time use to their children.

83. RECOMMENDATION

Best Start Family Hubs should work hard to develop inclusive activities specifically designed to be welcoming to parents and carers who may not have had a positive experience of reading aloud at school or who may struggle to read themselves. The Committee received evidence that such groups can be transformative in unlocking the joy of reading with children for parents and carers and in building confidence.

154 Q81

155 Q82

84.

RECOMMENDATION

There are many examples of effective programmes having a positive impact in supporting parents and carers to read with their children. These programmes should be scaled up to ensure they reach families right across the country. As a first step the Department should carry out a review to inform decisions on which programmes to scale up; this should be completed within one year.

85.

RECOMMENDATION

Health visitors should include supporting reading for pleasure in their work with parents and young children as a critical tool for bonding and good social and emotional development; the Department for Education should work with the Department of Health to set out clear steps to ensure this happens in all areas of the country.

3 Schools and the curriculum



Pupil aged 10–11, participant in the distributed dialogue activity

Practice in schools

86. Evidence to the inquiry emphasised the crucial role that schools play in developing and nurturing a love of reading among their pupils. The BookTrust stated that schools “play a critical role in providing structured, supportive reading opportunities” and that their research found that 85% of

parents/carers of children in Reception to Y4 agreed that teachers positively influenced their child's enjoyment of reading.¹⁵⁶ The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education said that schools could "create a whole school culture of reading for pleasure by developing an ethos and environment that values reading and excites, enthuses and inspires readers."¹⁵⁷ The National Literacy Trust's survey found that more children enjoyed reading at school than in their free time (41% vs 35%).¹⁵⁸

87. The national curriculum for key stages one to four states:

Teachers should develop pupils' reading and writing in all subjects to support their acquisition of knowledge. Pupils should be taught to read fluently, understand extended prose (both fiction and non-fiction) and be encouraged to read for pleasure. Schools should do everything to promote wider reading. They should provide library facilities and set ambitious expectations for reading at home.¹⁵⁹

The Department for Education (DfE) has also published a reading framework for schools, which sets out guidance for primary and secondary schools to meet existing expectations for teaching reading. The DfE's written evidence stated that the framework "encourages teachers to make reading a social experience through regular storytime and reading aloud in Key Stages 1–3. It promotes structured opportunities for reading for pleasure, such as independent reading sessions and dedicated reading spaces, making reading an enjoyable and routine part of the school day."¹⁶⁰

88. The DfE has also developed a network of English Hubs, which were launched in 2018 and aim to improve the teaching of reading, particularly for children who struggle the most.¹⁶¹ The DfE's written evidence states that the Hubs programme "currently consists of 34 high-performing primary schools that provide school-to-school support focused on systematic synthetic phonics, early language development, and reading for pleasure."¹⁶² Hubs also deliver Medium Level Support via a range of continuous professional development (CPD) programmes, including the Transforming Schools Reading Culture (TSRC) programme, which was introduced in the 2021/22 academic year to focus on reading for pleasure, with more than 2,000 schools participating

156 BookTrust ([RFP0132](#))

157 Centre for Literacy in Primary Education ([RFP0161](#))

158 National Literacy Trust ([RFP0018](#))

159 Department for Education, [National curriculum in England: framework for key stages 1 to 4](#), December 2014

160 Department for Education ([RFP0171](#))

161 Department for Education, [English Hubs](#) [accessed 15 June 2026]

162 Department for Education ([RFP0171](#))

to date. The DfE also stated that it was rolling out a £2.3 million secondary pilot through the English Hubs programme this academic year, providing support to around 300 secondary schools.¹⁶³

89. There is a strong body of academic evidence demonstrating how schools can best support their pupils to develop a love of books and reading. The United Kingdom Literacy Association and the Open University have developed a Reading for Pleasure Quality Mark, which recognises and rewards primary and secondary schools that have developed, embedded and enriched their Reading for Pleasure (RfP) culture and ethos. Their written evidence summarises the main practices seen in the schools awarded the Quality Mark, which include:¹⁶⁴
- *Leadership of staff and resources:* leadership teams demonstrate a sustained commitment to RfP, regularly audit and replenish their school library and class collections, and are recognised by Ofsted as ensuring that reading is “at the heart of everything”
 - *Subject knowledge of young people’s texts and of readers:* time and resource is dedicated to continually widening staff repertoires of children’s texts, and staff demonstrate secure knowledge of individual child readers
 - *High-quality reading aloud:* schools have dedicated time for daily reading aloud, supported by sustained professional development focused on how to read well and promote recreational reading in this time
 - *Informal book talk and recommendations:* schools create regular, informal opportunities for children to talk about books as readers
 - *Choice-led reading time:* protecting time for independent reading and ensuring that children have genuine agency over what they read. Teachers guide choices where necessary, but ownership remains with the child.
 - *Social reading environments and school libraries:* books are highly visible and accessible in classrooms and communal areas, and school libraries function as active social hubs, supported by adults and trained pupil librarians who recommend books, facilitate choice and read with younger pupils.

163 Department for Education ([RFP0171](#))

164 The Open University, United Kingdom Literacy Association (UKLA) ([RFP0031](#))

- *Targeted additional support:* schools regularly track the lowest 20% of readers and design additional opportunities to engage these children, such as lunchtime clubs, reading buddies and champion sessions, involvement in libraries and book ordering.
- *Partnerships with parents, carers, families and the wider community:* schools engage with parents and carers through initiatives such as prospective parent meetings, transition events, and inviting parents into classrooms for storytime where staff model reading aloud and informal book talk. They also work with authors and other external organisations and have partnerships with local libraries.

90. Dr Roger McDonald, Associate Professor of Primary Education at the University of Greenwich, explained that the most effective schools have a “sustained culture of RfP that is shaped by their beliefs, values and habits” and warned against seeing RfP as simply a list of activities for schools, as they would just “tick those and say, “Right, we’ve now done it.””¹⁶⁵ Professor Teresa Cremin, Professor of Education at the Open University, spoke of the importance of teachers taking both individually and socially oriented approaches to supporting RfP. Individually oriented approaches involve teachers getting to know the reading habits of individual pupils, “trying to understand them in the round and understand their friends, to understand their reading practices at home” and recommending appropriate texts. Socially oriented approaches “enable young people to make connections with others, to have affinity groups or friendship groups”. Professor Cremin gave this example:

The three of us are trying to finish this graphic novel, or whatever, we only have one copy and we are sharing it [...] between us because we are moving it around, we have promised to have one chapter each and we are so excited, and now I am reading something else different but us three are connected. As a teacher then, back to our book talk research, we found that those socially oriented pedagogies help children feel they belong. They belong as a reader in this classroom because they are readers, not that they are doing reading but they are readers, which is a very different point.¹⁶⁶

91. The children we heard from on World Book Day told us about how their school and teachers supported them to read. They described enjoying opportunities to read in groups and talk about books with their friends; one pupil described acting as characters from books during morning play time with their friends. They spoke of having class story time at the end of the day, where the blinds were put down and fairy lights put on, and one child was chosen to sit on a bean bag. Children enjoyed this, finding it “calm and

165 Q92

166 Q27

relaxing”, with one pupil saying they felt “sad” when this time was over. They told us about how their teachers supported them to read and comprehend texts, which included having questions alongside the text, using a pointer while reading, discussing the books after reading time, and teachers helping with unfamiliar words. They also described particular support for children speaking English as a second language to enable them to read in English.¹⁶⁷

92. We asked children in the distributed dialogue activity whether they talked about books or reading with their friends, and if they would like to have more opportunities to talk about books with their friends. Responses were very divided on this, with some children showing strong support for discussing reading with friends, while others felt that they preferred not to discuss this with friends as they saw reading as more of a solitary activity. Some children felt that their friends were not interested in reading, or preferred to play together. One pupil said: “I talk about different genres and different books because it’s nice to talk about different books you haven’t read before and you can share your ideas” while another said “I like to keep the things I read to myself.”¹⁶⁸
93. Similarly, responses among children were divided as to whether they wanted more opportunities to discuss books or not. Pupils who did not enjoy reading were less likely to say they talked about books with friends, but some of these pupils nevertheless suggested they would like more opportunities to do this. One teacher held a discussion with pupils about how the school could support that, and the children said that they found their reading lesson in the library a great way to discuss books.¹⁶⁹
94. We heard that there is currently a mixed picture in schools in terms of implementing evidence-based best practice on reading for pleasure. The Children’s Literacy Charity said that it “varies from school to school” and highlighted that time during the school day and budget to invest in school libraries and specialist support were the biggest factors affecting whether schools implemented these measures or not.¹⁷⁰ Currently, fewer than 70 schools have achieved or are working towards the RfP Quality Mark, and Dr Roger McDonald explained that it is aimed at schools which have already developed their RfP practice to a high standard across the criteria outlined above.¹⁷¹

167 World Book Day engagement session (summary in annexe)

168 Distributed dialogue activity (summary in annexe)

169 Distributed dialogue activity (summary in annexe)

170 The Children’s Literacy Charity ([RFP0087](#))

171 Q95

95. The Open University said that there were “misconceptions of the nature of RfP and how to nurture it in schools” and warned of an “overemphasis on fun profile-raising reading ‘activities’ which lack any strategic educational purpose and are neither underpinned by research nor evaluated.” They also highlighted the difference between “extrinsic” motivation, such as rewards, challenges and recognition, and “intrinsic” motivation (curiosity and involvement) and suggested that some schools relied only on extrinsic approaches to motivate children to read.¹⁷² Professor Cremin explained:

We cannot make them read for pleasure but we can entice, invite, model, engage but there is a pressure in some schools to read. Perhaps the worst-case scenario would be, “We have independent reading time and you will read”. We are not giving them book talk time, we are not supporting them to make choices, we are not reading aloud to them but they will read in this time. There is no infrastructure to encourage them.¹⁷³

96. Witnesses also highlighted that the evidence on best practice is overall more relevant to primary schools, rather than secondary schools. Professor Jessie Ricketts, Professor of Psychology at Royal Holloway, University of London, said that, although there was good practice happening in secondary schools, more was known from the evidence about how to motivate primary school children to read rather than those at secondary school. She said that she would “caution against assuming that what works in primary will work in secondary” and that “there has been some work to try to translate primary practice to secondary and it has not gone all that well.”¹⁷⁴ However, Dr Roger McDonald argued that “the core principles are the same between primary and secondary” and that “it is about children and teachers having time, being able to talk about texts and having a range of choice.”¹⁷⁵
97. Witnesses highlighted some key differences between supporting reading in primary and secondary schools, most notably the shift to more fragmented timetables and separation between different subjects. Jonathan Douglas, Chief Executive of the National Literacy Trust, explained that, in primary schools, “reading is everybody’s business all the time”, while in secondary schools it is seen mainly as the job of the school librarian and English department. He said that secondary schools should have a pedagogy that ensures that “literacy and reading becomes the business of the entire school and not simply an hour at lunchtime if you choose to go to the library

172 The Open University [Literacy and Social Justice Centre \(RFP0093\)](#)

173 Q28

174 Q30

175 Q96

or something about Charles Dickens.”¹⁷⁶ Similarly, Dr Roger McDonald highlighted the need to ensure that RfP is “not the possession of the English department, but a culture across the school.”¹⁷⁷

98. The Minister for Early Education, Olivia Bailey MP, said that “in every school in the country a love of reading and learning to love reading is really embedded and central to our education system” and highlighted the work the Department is doing on English Hubs, access to books, and changes to the curriculum.¹⁷⁸ Jenny Oldroyd, Director of Curriculum, General Qualifications and Digital Strategy at the DfE, said that the Department “know[s] what excellent practice looks like” and that it is “still on a journey to making that best practice and universal practice in every single school in the country.”¹⁷⁹ She explained that the English Hubs programme offered schools up to eight days of support to “plan a whole-school approach to make sure you have that culture around reading,” and that the DfE was engaging with 1,100 schools this year to support them with that. She also accepted that there was more work to be done in secondary schools to ensure that reading for pleasure was “not just the English teacher’s job.”¹⁸⁰ The Minister committed to looking into how the lessons from the Reading for Pleasure Quality Mark could be scaled up to reach more schools across the country.¹⁸¹

Disadvantaged children

99. We heard evidence around how schools could better support those groups or children who are least likely to read for pleasure, in particular those from low-income backgrounds; those with SEND; and boys. Evidence emphasised the particular importance of schools for supporting children from disadvantaged backgrounds to read for pleasure. The National Literacy Trust’s research found that 1 in 10 (10%) children and young people reported having no books of their own at home, rising to 1 in 6 (16%) pupils receiving free school meals (FSM), and 71% of teachers said they worried their pupils lacked sufficient access to books beyond school.¹⁸² The Reading Agency highlighted that, although children who are eligible for FSM report lower levels of reading enjoyment overall, they report higher levels of reading enjoyment at school than non-FSM eligible children.¹⁸³

176 Q46

177 Q96

178 Q175

179 Q175

180 Q175

181 Q178

182 National Literacy Trust ([RFPO018](#))

183 The Reading Agency ([RFP0145](#))

- 100.** The National Education Union said that “working-class students see little recognition in school of the activities they enjoy and succeed at outside of school” and that this should be considered when determining which texts are read in school.¹⁸⁴ The English Association said that it was important for teachers to have an “astute awareness around the accessibility of books at home for disadvantaged children” and use their role to recommend books and model reading for these children.¹⁸⁵ Anjali Patel, Lead Advisory Teacher at the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education, said that “we need to ask ourselves how the teaching and assessment of reading, based on what teachers are told to do, what is in place for them, the policy and the curriculum, affect our most educationally vulnerable children who may not have had what we would think of as the foundational experiences of being a reader from birth.”¹⁸⁶
- 101.** The government is currently rolling out free breakfast clubs to all primary schools in England.¹⁸⁷ We received evidence from Magic Breakfast, a charity delivering free breakfast clubs to schools, about how breakfast clubs could be combined with reading activities to support literacy and reading for pleasure. They said that their programme, Breakfast Bookstars, provided reading activities alongside breakfast provision, including making books freely available, providing time for solo reading, opening sessions to family members to read alongside children, targeted reading support with staff, and staff and children reading to each other. A survey found that 91% of schools said that including reading in their breakfast provision had had positive impacts on attitudes to reading. Magic Breakfast recommended that the government embed Reading for Pleasure in the free breakfast clubs programme by ensuring schools have access to guidance and case studies on how to do this, alongside the necessary financial resources.¹⁸⁸
- 102.** Jenny Oldroyd highlighted the relationship between reading and the disadvantage gap in attainment, and said that the National Year of Reading provided a “real opportunity [...] to address not just reading for pleasure, but the overall outcomes for children from more disadvantaged backgrounds.”¹⁸⁹

184 National Education Union ([RFP0047](#))

185 The English Association ([RFP0102](#))

186 Q61

187 Department for Education, [Free breakfast clubs: guidance for schools and trusts for phase 1 of the national rollout from April 2026](#), 15 June 2026

188 Magic Breakfast ([RFP0101](#))

189 Q158

Children with SEND

- 103.** We heard evidence that improvements were needed in how well schools supported children with SEND to read for pleasure, particularly those with dyslexia. The British Dyslexia Association called for schools to “broaden the concept of reading and create an inclusive reading culture” by offering texts in a diverse range of formats and avoiding a perception that “reading is just about decoding words on a page.”¹⁹⁰ Ellen Broomé, Chief Executive of the British Dyslexia Association, said that there are “some great schools who do this well,” setting out some examples of what best practice in schools looked like:

They have assistive technology embedded as a matter of course from key stage 2 at least. They ensure their teaching staff, teaching support staff and reading volunteers, who often teach children how to read, are trained to support children with reading difficulties, to spot signs and intervene properly. They are also moving away from the narrow definition of reading as decoding text. It is about enjoying the content, reading age-appropriate stuff.¹⁹¹

- 104.** She also highlighted the high levels of unidentified need of children with dyslexia and the impact this had on reading and attainment, and stated that girls, children with English as an additional language, and children in more disadvantaged schools were less likely to be identified as dyslexic.¹⁹² The British Dyslexia Association is calling for a range of measures to enable schools to be more supportive of children with dyslexia, including: universal assessment from key stage one to ensure early identification of dyslexia and other reading difficulties; publishing a new definition of reading which is inclusive of all forms of reading; and ensuring classroom teachers and support staff know how to support children with dyslexia and other reading difficulties.¹⁹³
- 105.** Outcomes First Group, a provider of education and care for children with SEND, said that, for children with SEND, “engagement is strongly influenced by whether reading resources are accessible, age-appropriate, and relevant.” They suggested that schools and parents can encourage reading by “developing spaces for reading in a relaxed setting, without the strict expectations—for example, silence—of a traditional library. Multi-purpose reading and library spaces in schools can provide environments for quiet reflection, low-level social interaction, or calm, focused engagement with texts.”¹⁹⁴

190 British Dyslexia Association ([RFP0083](#))

191 Q72

192 Q68

193 British Dyslexia Association ([RFP0083](#))

194 Outcomes First Group ([RFP0075](#))

106. The Minister said that access to reading would be a “central part” of the reforms the government is making to the SEND system,¹⁹⁵ and stated that English Hubs provided resources, co-designed with organisations such as the British Dyslexia Association, to support teachers to work with children with SEND.¹⁹⁶ Jenny Oldroyd said that English Hubs had two programmes targeting pupils who were struggling with reading: Unlocking Reading, which targets children struggling with reading in years 7 and 8, and Reading Ambition for All, which works with children in primary schools.¹⁹⁷

Boys

107. Witnesses also highlighted the particular approaches that schools and teachers could take to support boys to read for pleasure. The National Literacy Trust’s annual literacy survey for 2026 found that 29% of boys aged eight to 18 said they enjoyed reading in their free time, compared with 42% of girls.¹⁹⁸ Luke Taylor, Senior Researcher at the Centre for Social Justice, highlighted the higher numbers of female teachers in the workforce, particularly in primary schools, and called for more male volunteers in schools to provide positive role models for boys around reading.¹⁹⁹ Witnesses emphasised the importance of having a wide variety of texts available in schools relating to typically male interests such as sports, action figures and superheroes, and having non-fiction available as well as fiction.²⁰⁰ Onyinye Iwu, a children’s author, illustrator and art teacher, highlighted that evidence showed that visual aids worked well to engage boys, saying:

We know that [boys] are visual and love social media, scrolling, all of that stuff [...] One of them was so engaged that he printed his own book and was sharing across the school, and it was like “Miss, have you seen this year 8 boy’s book?”. They are all so excited because it is about them and it has the drawings, little stick men. They love it [...] It is important to push them on to all the picture books and graphic novels, speaking to the publishers about that, but also the teachers and librarians to focus on getting more of that for the boys.²⁰¹

195 Q186

196 Q159

197 Q186

198 National Literacy Trust, [Children and young people’s reading in 2026](#), June 2026

199 Q66

200 Q69 [Luke Taylor]; Q71 [Onyinye Iwu]; Q71 [Anjali Patel]

201 Q71

- 108.** Jenny Oldroyd highlighted that boys were one of the priority groups for the National Year of Reading, which she said provided a “real chance to try and address it and be clear that reading is not just for girls.”²⁰² The Minister said that there were “brilliant teachers in all our schools who are instilling that love of reading with young boys every day.”²⁰³

Teacher training and development

- 109.** Evidence highlighted the importance of teachers and other school staff having adequate skills and expertise to implement best practice approaches to supporting reading for pleasure. The UK Literacy Association said that, in schools which had achieved the RfP Quality Mark, “time and resource is dedicated to continually widening staff repertoires of children’s texts” and schools “seek to enhance teachers’ capacity to tailor text recommendations and influence young readers’ repertoires, choices, preferences and frequency of recreational reading.”²⁰⁴ Having a knowledge of children’s and young adult texts was cited as particularly important, so that teachers could recommend up-to-date books aligning with pupils’ interests and abilities.²⁰⁵
- 110.** However, evidence suggested that many teachers lacked the appropriate knowledge, skills and training to properly support reading for pleasure. The UK Literacy Association said that “limited professional understanding of reading for pleasure constrains development” in RfP and The Reading Agency said that underdeveloped knowledge of contemporary children’s literature “curtails [teachers’] ability to discuss books with pupils and to curate texts that engage and motivate pupils.”²⁰⁶ A submission from academics stated that “increasing numbers of young student teachers do not, themselves, identify as regular readers,” which makes them less likely to effectively promote reading for pleasure with their pupils.²⁰⁷
- 111.** Dr Helen Hendry, Senior Lecturer in Education at the Open University, said that, in a study of nearly 600 student teachers across 10 initial teacher training providers, 31% of the students who said they read frequently in their own time could not name a single author for children at the beginning of their teaching practice. She explained that, as initial teacher training (ITT) was usually only 9 months long, it was difficult to incorporate reading for pleasure pedagogies into this time. She also said that, while the need

202 Q158

203 Q160

204 The Open University, United Kingdom Literacy Association (UKLA) ([RFP0031](#))

205 Channing School for Girls ([RFP0067](#)); Bookmark Reading Charity ([RFP0085](#)); The Reading Agency ([RFP0145](#))

206 The Reading Agency ([RFP0145](#))

207 Anonymised ([RFP0081](#))

to teach or engender reading for pleasure was part of ITT curricula, “the focus on assessment for teachers is really more around skills,” creating a tension with reading for pleasure because “the teacher standards measure specifically whether they are ready to teach systematics and phonics.”²⁰⁸

- 112.** Dr Roger McDonald said: “There is a real focus on teaching the skill of reading within the core content framework, or the ITTECF. Within that, it mentions reading in 16 related areas, but only one of them is about RfP, so you can see where the emphasis is.” He suggested that there should be continuous professional development (CPD) focused on reading for pleasure, and that this should not just be one-off events, but also be followed up over time.²⁰⁹ A submission from academics said that the ITT framework “makes only brief reference to RfP” and highlighted that the ITT framework did not align with the Department’s Reading Framework, which sets out how teachers should promote and encourage reading for pleasure.²¹⁰ The Open University called for RfP to be embedded explicitly within the Teachers’ Standards and national training frameworks, including ITT, the Early Career Framework, and National Professional Qualifications.²¹¹
- 113.** Witnesses also highlighted the importance of teachers being able to access regular continuing professional development (CPD) on reading for pleasure. Dr Roger McDonald said that CPD should be ongoing and not simply focused on one-off events, explaining that one-off CPD “will not have the impact unless it is followed through and unless teachers really work on developing it within their classrooms.”²¹² However, Professor Jessie Ricketts, Professor of Psychology at Royal Holloway, University of London, said that she had been working with the DfE to develop CPD on reading proficiency and engagement, which was “encouraging”, and that they were seeing “as a result of sometimes some quite quick CPD that only takes an hour teachers reporting that they feel they have much more knowledge about reading and the complexity of reading.”²¹³
- 114.** The DfE’s written evidence stated that English Hubs deliver support via a range of continuous professional development (CPD) programmes and that Hubs “have supported over 10,000 schools through Medium Level Support to date. This includes the Transforming Schools Reading Culture (TSRC) programme, which was introduced in the 2021/22 academic year to focus on reading for pleasure, with more than 2,000 schools participating to date.” The Department also highlighted that it was launching Unlocking Reading, a free, universal, CPD programme to help secondary schools embed a whole-

208 Q33

209 Q98

210 Anonymised ([RFP0081](#))

211 The Open University Literacy and Social Justice Centre ([RFP0093](#))

212 Q98

213 Q30

school approach to reading and improve outcomes for struggling readers, and that, by the end of this academic year, 75% of secondary schools will have engaged with this training.²¹⁴

115. The Minister said that a love of reading was “embedded in the initial teacher training and early careers framework” and stated that there was a National Professional Qualification (NPQ) on leading literacy, which 6,500 teachers have completed and which was under review by the Department.²¹⁵ Jenny Oldroyd said that they had not yet evaluated programmes such as the TSRC, but said that the Department “would like to deliver more” of the programmes run by English Hubs.²¹⁶

116. **CONCLUSION**

Schools play a key role in developing a love of reading among children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds who otherwise lack opportunities to access books. The Department acknowledges this, but its policies do not reflect this, with work on reading focusing overwhelmingly on proficiency over pleasure.

117. **CONCLUSION**

There is a wealth of academic evidence demonstrating what good practice in schools looks like to encourage reading for pleasure, focusing most strongly on primary schools. It is now time for the Department to make use of this evidence and ensure that it is disseminated to every school and that schools and teachers are supported to implement good practice. The evidence on secondary schools must also catch up so that reading for pleasure is not solely seen as the remit of primary schools.

118. **RECOMMENDATION**

In its strategy on Reading for Pleasure, the Department should set out the core elements of good practice shown by schools who have achieved the Open University’s Reading for Pleasure Quality Mark for schools and set out guidance on how all schools can deliver this. As part of this, the Department should set out expectations for all schools to include protected time in the school day for reading and discussions about books with examples of how this can be achieved that are relevant both to primary and secondary schools up to key stage three.

214 Department for Education ([RFP0171](#))

215 Q186

216 Q187

- 119. RECOMMENDATION**
The Department must commission and fund research into best practice to support reading for pleasure in secondary schools and ensure that this is disseminated to schools and teachers.
- 120. RECOMMENDATION**
The new school breakfast clubs provide a key opportunity to introduce disadvantaged pupils to reading and books in a fun environment away from the pressures and stresses of learning. The Department must ensure that schools delivering the new breakfast clubs are encouraged to include books and reading activities as part of them and provide them with the guidance and support they need to do this.
- 121. RECOMMENDATION**
The Department must include a stronger focus for English Hubs on reading for pleasure, alongside reading proficiency. This should include work on how to support reading for pleasure among children with SEND, especially those with dyslexia and other reading difficulties.
- 122. RECOMMENDATION**
The Department should introduce ongoing continuing professional development for primary and secondary school teachers on reading for pleasure and monitor take-up to ensure that as many teachers as possible are trained in best practice. As a first step, it should evaluate the effectiveness of the Transforming Schools Reading Culture programme on training teachers to promote reading for pleasure and roll it out across the country if it has been proven to be effective.

Curriculum and assessment

- 123.** As set out earlier in this chapter, the national curriculum for key stages one to four sets out that schools are expected to promote wider reading and encourage pupils to read for pleasure.²¹⁷ Pupils also undergo a number of assessments relating to reading during their school years, which include:
- The reception baseline assessment during the first six weeks of Reception year, which assesses pupils' starting points in language, communication, literacy and maths.²¹⁸

²¹⁷ Department for Education, [National curriculum in England: framework for key stages 1 to 4](#), December 2014

²¹⁸ Standards and Testing Agency, [Reception baseline assessment: information for parents](#), September 2025

- The early years foundation stage profile between April and June of Reception year, which assesses children’s learning and development against 17 early learning goals, including goals relating to communication, language, and literacy.²¹⁹
- A phonics screening check at the end of year one, to test foundational reading skills.²²⁰
- National curriculum assessments (SATs) at the end of key stage two, which test English reading, grammar, punctuation, spelling and maths, as well as teacher assessments in English writing and science.²²¹
- GCSEs at the end of key stage four, including English literature and English language.²²²

124. In July 2024, the government commissioned Professor Becky Francis CBE to convene a panel of experts to conduct the Curriculum and Assessment Review (CAR). The CAR looked at the curriculum and assessment system in England across the primary, secondary and 16–19 phases, and published its final report in November 2025.²²³ The CAR made a number of conclusions and recommendations relating to English and the teaching of reading, including:

- The English curriculum contains a “high volume of grammatical content and terminology” assessed at the end of key stage two, which is “advanced and overly theoretical at this key stage.” The grammatical content in the primary Programmes of Study should be reviewed and streamlined in order to place greater emphasis on content that supports pupils’ ability to read and write effectively.
- The current grammar, punctuation and spelling test at the end of key stage two should be amended, including new tasks to more effectively assess writing composition and the use of grammar and punctuation.
- There is a disconnect between curriculum content at primary and secondary key stages, meaning that “pupils who did not master key skills and knowledge by the end of key stage two are left behind.”

219 Department for Education, [Early years foundation stage profile handbook](#), September 2025

220 Standards and Testing Agency, [Phonics screening check: information for parents](#), September 2025

221 Standards and Testing Agency, [National curriculum assessments: key stage 2 tests](#), September 2025

222 Department for Education, [GCSE English language and GCSE English literature](#), November 2013

223 Curriculum and Assessment Review, [Building a world-class curriculum for all](#), November 2025

The government should ensure that the English curriculum sets out a clearer purpose, with more clarity and specificity at each key stage, including clarifying the distinction between English and literacy.

The CAR also made recommendations relating to GCSE English Literature and the introduction of a new year 8 assessment, which are discussed in more detail in later sections of this report. The government published its response to the CAR on the same date, which accepted many of its recommendations.²²⁴ The DfE is currently developing the new curriculum with teachers, curriculum experts, pupils and parents. The final curriculum will be published in spring 2027, and schools will start teaching it from September 2028.²²⁵

- 125.** Some evidence argued that an overcrowded curriculum and a strong focus on assessment meant that reading for pleasure was sidelined in schools. The National Association for Head Teachers stated that “overcrowded curricula leave little room for children to consolidate their learning and pursue their interests through wider reading” and argued that “in many countries an overemphasis on teaching and assessing the skills of reading, at the expense of attending to the desire to read, has contributed to reduced engagement in reading.”²²⁶ The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education stated that “primary teachers are stretched by the demands of an overloaded English curriculum, assessment and inspection frameworks, which emphasise discrete knowledge and technical skills and can lead to superficial teaching and learning.”²²⁷ Frank Young, Chief Executive of Parentkind, also highlighted that homework may be crowding out opportunities to read for pleasure at home.²²⁸ Dr Roger McDonald said:

A SATs paper can have up to 2,300 words in the part that children read, and a further 1,300 in the questions. There are a lot of words for children to read. That, again, can skew the teaching [...] The teaching—the pedagogy within schools—is responding to policy. That is all it is doing. The teachers are not wrong; they are not bad teachers. They are just responding to what they feel they have to do. They are then trying to find space for RfP, and that is done ... [squeezed into an afternoon, a specific week or] in the last month in year 6.²²⁹

224 UK Government, [Government response to the Curriculum and Assessment Review](#), November 2025

225 Department for Education, [What you need to know about the changes to the National Curriculum](#), 5 November 2025

226 NAHT ([RFP0104](#))

227 Centre for Literacy in Primary Education ([RFP0161](#))

228 Q79

229 Q101

- 126.** Some evidence expressed concerns about the focus on phonics teaching at the beginning of primary school. The BookTrust said that “overemphasis on phonics” can limit children’s overall literacy development and reading enjoyment, and called for a balanced approach combining phonics and reading enjoyment.²³⁰ The Children’s Literacy Charity said that “emphasis on technical accuracy and the rigour of teaching phonics has taken time away from immersing children in books”²³¹ and the NAHT said that “there is a risk that an overly rigid focus on only exposing children to books matched to their current level of phonics attainment could harm levels of reading for pleasure.”²³² Dr Roger McDonald said that some schools perceived the year one phonics screening check to be a “high-stakes test,” which skewed the teaching towards focusing on the test, and that phonics is “being introduced in a way that says, “This is the one way to teach children to read,” and it has stopped any other talk and other ways of teaching children to read.”²³³
- 127.** However, Dr Jo Taylor, Associate Professor of Language and Cognition at University College London, highlighted that there was a strong evidence base on the effectiveness of phonics as a means of teaching children to read, and argued that phonics is important as it teaches children to “link the letters in a word to the sounds in a word” which “enables you to then activate all those spoken language areas and knowledge that you need to understand the words that you are reading.”²³⁴ The Curriculum and Assessment Review’s final report found that “the effectiveness of phonics is well evidenced, and respondents to the Call for Evidence generally praised the role of phonics in teaching literacy.”²³⁵ The Minister stated that the “evidence for the phonics approach is very well established, and it works.” She agreed that teaching needed to emphasise fun as well as learning but argued that she “would not want to do the fun at the expense of learning to access, because you need both and they need to be hand in hand.”²³⁶

Secondary English curriculum

- 128.** The key stage three English curriculum states that its aim is to “promote high standards of language and literacy by equipping pupils with a strong command of the spoken and written word, and to develop their love of literature through widespread reading for enjoyment.” It sets out that pupils are expected to read a range of high-quality works from English literature,

230 BookTrust ([RFP0132](#))

231 The Children’s Literacy Charity ([RFP0087](#))

232 NAHT ([RFP0104](#))

233 Q101

234 Q6

235 Curriculum and Assessment Review, [Building a world-class curriculum for all](#), November 2025

236 Q169

both pre-1914 and contemporary, including prose, poetry and drama; Shakespeare (two plays); and seminal world literature.²³⁷ At key stage four, DfE guidelines for GCSE English Literature set out that pupils should study “a range of high quality, intellectually challenging, and substantial whole texts in detail”, which must include: at least one play by Shakespeare; at least one 19th century novel; a selection of poetry since 1789, including representative Romantic poetry; and fiction or drama from the British Isles from 1914 onwards.²³⁸

- 129.** We heard particular criticisms of the influence of the secondary English curriculum on reading for pleasure. The English and Media Centre said that the English curriculum “often discourages reading for pleasure” as students have limited choice over what to read, and much of their experience is of reading “short, exam length texts which do little to foster a love of reading.”²³⁹ The National Education Union described secondary English content as “dispiritingly dull.”²⁴⁰ Professor Robert Eaglestone, Professor of Contemporary Literature and Thought at Royal Holloway, University of London and Policy Lead at the English Association, told us that the secondary English curriculum had “had a deleterious influence on reading for pleasure.” He said:

The curriculum has become increasingly narrow. It is being taught with a pedagogy that is inimical to reading for pleasure, to personal response and to authentic response. It is being taught to the test and to high-stakes assessment. I think that the English curriculum, bizarrely, has worked against reading for pleasure, despite the hard work of teachers and librarians.²⁴¹

- 130.** We also heard concerns about the lack of diversity in the secondary English curriculum. The English and Media Centre said that a “narrow diet of often 19th century texts, taught through close textual analysis from an early age, leaves many students disengaged.”²⁴² Research by Penguin Random House and the Runnymede Trust found that, in 2019, 0.7% of pupils said they had studied a book by a writer of colour at GCSE, and 7% had studied a book by a female author. 82% did not recall ever studying a text by a Black, Asian or minority ethnic author.²⁴³ In 2023, 1.5% of GCSE students studied a book by

237 Department for Education, [English programmes of study: key stage 3](#), September 2013

238 Department for Education, [English literature: GCSE subject content and assessment objectives](#), 2013

239 The English and Media Centre ([RFPO039](#))

240 National Education Union ([RFPO047](#))

241 Q99

242 The English and Media Centre ([RFPO039](#))

243 Victoria Elliott, Lesley Nelson-Addy, Roseanne Chantiluke and Matthew Courtney, [Lit in Colour: Diversity in Literature in English Schools](#), June 2021

a writer of colour.²⁴⁴ Anjali Patel said that pupils could “get to key stage four without seeing [themselves] at all represented, not only in the book stock but in the curriculum, until you meet perhaps problematic and stereotyped characters.”²⁴⁵

131. The CAR noted that GCSE English Literature had “seen a marked increase in entries since 2015/16,” but that take-up at A Level had fallen, and said that many respondents to the Review had argued that “a ‘dry’ curriculum diet in GCSE English has contributed to a reduced enthusiasm for English at A Level.”²⁴⁶ Entries for A Level English Literature have been declining over the past decade, and dropped by 6% between 2025 and 2026,²⁴⁷ and the numbers of students going on to study English and associated subjects at university is also in decline.²⁴⁸ The CAR heard similar concerns to us about lack of diversity, concluding that it is “crucial that all students, regardless of background, continue to study our rich literary heritage,” but also that the curriculum “must also allow space for teachers to exercise autonomy in selecting from a broader range of texts and authors, so that students are able to see themselves in the curriculum.”²⁴⁹
132. The CAR recommended that the government review the genres specified in the GCSE English Literature subject content to ensure that students continue to study texts drawn from the “recognised body of English literature,” including the expectation of at least one play by Shakespeare, a selection of poetry, fiction or drama from the British Isles from 1914 onwards, and at least one 19th century novel, and that they “also benefit from studying texts drawn from the full breadth of our literary heritage, including more diverse and representative texts.”²⁵⁰ The government’s response to the CAR agreed with this conclusion and said that it would “consider the amounts of literature required to avoid an increase in content” and that it wanted schools to “have the flexibility to choose a range of texts and authors, including those of local significance.”²⁵¹

244 Penguin Random House UK ([RFPO027](#))

245 Q63

246 Curriculum and Assessment Review, [Building a world-class curriculum for all](#), November 2025

247 Ofqual, [Provisional entries for GCSE, AS and A level: summer 2026 exam series](#), 9 June 2026

248 The English Association, [English Studies in numbers: data on student enrolment and trends](#), August 2025

249 Curriculum and Assessment Review, [Building a world-class curriculum for all](#), November 2025

250 Curriculum and Assessment Review, [Building a world-class curriculum for all](#), November 2025

251 UK Government, [Government response to the Curriculum and Assessment Review](#), November 2025

- 133.** Professor Robert Eaglestone argued that “what [the CAR] gave you with one hand it took away with the other.” He welcomed the recommendation for more diversity in the curriculum but highlighted that the recommendation to retain the requirements to study a Shakespeare play, 19th century novel and a post-1914 text from the British Isles left “no room for the diversity that it wants” and resulted in a “kind of gridlock.” He recommended that the 19th century novel requirement either be taken away, or extended to a much longer period, such as from the 19th century to 2000, and that the requirement to study literature from the British Isles be expanded to a broader definition of literature in English.²⁵²
- 134.** In the distributed dialogue activity, we asked secondary school pupils about whether studying English at school had any impact on how much they enjoyed reading. Some pupils said that reading books in class made them enjoy reading more as it introduced them to more books and helped them learn about the book. Others said that asking too many questions about books sometimes put them off the book. It should be noted that we only had responses from one secondary school, who held the discussion with pupils in years seven and eight.²⁵³
- 135.** The Minister said that “a love of reading is embedded in everything that teachers are doing and is embedded in the curriculum.” She highlighted that, following the CAR, the Department was making changes such as removing repetition in the curriculum and looking at the texts pupils were studying, which included “making changes to ensure that schools can pick more texts that we think their children will love.”²⁵⁴ Jenny Oldroyd explained that having a “wonderfully broad curriculum” could come “at the expense of real depth and of the chance to really examine, understand and appreciate.”²⁵⁵

Year eight reading test

- 136.** In October 2025, before the publication of the CAR’s final report, the government announced that it would introduce a new statutory reading assessment for pupils in year eight. The test is intended to “set clear expectations to support parents, teachers and pupils alike—identifying gaps early and targeting help for those who need it, while enabling the most able to go further.”²⁵⁶ This had not been mentioned in the CAR’s interim report,

252 Q102

253 Distributed dialogue activity (summary in annexe)

254 Q180

255 Q181

256 Department for Education, [Focus on reading in secondary years to drive up standards](#), 15 October 2025

but the final report recommended introducing a diagnostic test in English, to be taken in year eight, with the aim of supporting teachers to identify and address any areas of weakness before gaps widen further.²⁵⁷

- 137.** The inquiry heard mixed responses to the introduction of the test. Some evidence suggested that an additional reading assessment may reinforce pupils' views of reading as schoolwork rather than pleasure, and would take up teachers' time with preparing for the assessment rather than promoting reading for pleasure.²⁵⁸ The National Education Union highlighted research that found that 60% of secondary teachers believed that the test would reduce the time available in the curriculum for other subjects, and said that it was "beyond belief" that the government's response to pupils disengaging with reading was to introduce a new test, rather than to look at the impact of existing tests on pupils.²⁵⁹ The English and Media Centre said that they did not believe that the test would have "any beneficial effect on reading for pleasure and may even have a detrimental effect with time and resources being allocated to preparing for the test, taking the test, and analysing the results."²⁶⁰
- 138.** However, others were more positive: the Nuffield Foundation said that it would be "an opportunity to ensure that children's needs are identified early in secondary school" and said that schools should be supported to target resources at those shown to be in most need.²⁶¹ Professor Jessie Ricketts said that there was a need for "very carefully selected assessments that give [schools] the information that they need to know who among their cohort has a reading need and what they need to do to support them," and that this was important at secondary level as some pupils' reading needs only emerge at a later stage.²⁶² Professor Robert Eaglestone said that the English teaching profession was "divided" on the question, as "some people think it is a good idea, but more people are aware that the risk of it becoming another accountability measure is quite strong."²⁶³

257 Curriculum and Assessment Review, [Building a world-class curriculum for all](#), November 2025

258 Penguin Random House UK ([RFP0027](#)); The English and Media Centre ([RFP0039](#)); Chapter One UK ([RFP0070](#)); NAHT ([RFP0104](#))

259 National Education Union ([RFP0047](#))

260 The English and Media Centre ([RFP0039](#))

261 Nuffield Foundation ([RFP0095](#))

262 Q36

263 Q103

139. Some evidence also suggested that the test came too late: the British Dyslexia Association said that by year eight, “too many children will have missed out on significant amounts of learning and struggled to access the curriculum”²⁶⁴ and Professor Eaglestone suggested that year seven would be a more appropriate time to identify problems with reading.²⁶⁵

140. The DfE’s written evidence stated that the test would be “designed to ensure schools are identifying and providing support to pupils who need it at the beginning of secondary school, enabling them to access the entire curriculum and go on to succeed in their GCSEs.”²⁶⁶ The Minister said that many schools are already “checking in with pupils at this crucial stage to make sure that they can access the curriculum and also access reading for pleasure” and that the test would enable schools to benchmark themselves against other schools and “make sure that they are giving individual pupils the support that they need.”²⁶⁷ Jenny Oldroyd explained that the Department had chosen year eight as the point for the test as, by then, schools would have had the opportunity to spend time working with the children and building their reading skills, but it was not “too late to do something about it.”²⁶⁸ The Minister confirmed that the test would not be used as an accountability measure for schools.²⁶⁹

141. CONCLUSION

The Curriculum and Assessment Review was a missed opportunity to create more space for pupils to develop a true enjoyment of reading and literature. The Committee has received evidence that the current GCSE English Literature curriculum is overloaded and that children are being put off reading for pleasure as a result. This is also reflected in falling numbers of pupils taking A Level English literature and going on to study the subject at university. The government must rebalance the education system so that reading is no longer driven primarily by assessment, but also focuses on engagement, identity and enjoyment. In particular, the GCSE English Literature curriculum must be revised to include a core objective of ensuring that pupils finish key stage four having developed a love of and interest in books and literature.

264 British Dyslexia Association ([RFP0178](#))

265 Q103

266 Department for Education ([RFP0171](#))

267 Q182

268 Q184

269 Q185

142. CONCLUSION

If reading is to provide children with both mirrors of their own worlds and windows into the lives of others, the curriculum must be designed to support this. It is unacceptable that, in 2023, only 1.5% of students had studied a text by a writer of colour at GCSE, and we do not understand why the Curriculum and Assessment Review failed to address this crucial issue.

143. RECOMMENDATION

The Department should ensure that its work on developing the new English curriculum is considered through the lens of reading for pleasure, especially with regards to GCSE English Literature. It should consider removing content to allow teachers more time and flexibility to help pupils develop an enjoyment of reading and a deeper understanding of literature.

144. RECOMMENDATION

The Department should take steps to revise the GCSE English Literature curriculum, including improving the diversity of texts that pupils study. It should expand the definition of literature from the British Isles to a broader definition of literature in English and extend the requirement for a 19th century novel to a longer period. It should also work with exam boards to explore ways in which they can give schools more flexibility to choose from a broader range of texts and to allow teachers to choose texts which strongly resonate with the pupils in their local area.

145. CONCLUSION

Establishing the proficiency of children's reading is important in ensuring that additional support can be provided to those who need it, but we heard different views on when this should take place. The government's new year eight reading test during secondary school may be a useful tool for teachers to identify children with reading difficulties, but it is important that this does not take further time and resources away from reading for pleasure and result in young people being more likely to view reading as a source of hard work and stress. We welcome the Minister's assurance that the new test will not be used as an accountability measure for schools and urge the Department not to change its position on this.

146.

RECOMMENDATION

The Department must monitor the impact of the year eight reading test and be open to feedback from the sector as to how it is working. If feedback shows that year eight is too late to identify pupils needing additional support with reading, the Department should consider moving the test to an earlier stage of education. We will follow up on this at regular intervals.

School libraries



Pupil aged 9, participant in the distributed dialogue activity

147. There is no statutory requirement for schools to have libraries. It is for individual schools to decide how best to provide and maintain a library service for their pupils, using their core funding from the DfE. However, the national curriculum states that schools “should provide library facilities”²⁷⁰ and the DfE’s reading framework suggests that schools should encourage library use and provides suggestions for organising books in school libraries and reading corners.²⁷¹ The DfE also provides suggestions for the amount of library space per pupil in its guidelines for school layout.²⁷² The DfE does not collect data on school libraries, but research by the Great School Libraries campaign in 2023 found that 86% of schools in the UK had a library on site, with the proportions the same for primary and secondary schools. Schools with higher levels of children eligible for free school meals were less likely to have a library.²⁷³

270 Department for Education, [National curriculum in England: framework for key stages 1 to 4](#), December 2014

271 Department for Education, [The reading framework](#), July 2023

272 Department for Education, [Area guidelines for mainstream schools](#), June 2014

273 Great School Libraries, [Unequal Futures? An imbalance of opportunities](#), March 2023

- 148.** In September 2025, the government announced that it would provide over £10 million in funding to guarantee a library for all primary schools by the end of this Parliament.²⁷⁴ The Department for Culture, Media and Sport confirmed in February that it had allocated £12.5 million from the Dormant Assets Scheme for this.²⁷⁵ As part of the National Year of Reading, the DfE is also investing £5 million for secondary schools to purchase books, which will be allocated to every secondary school in England in 2026. This can include both fiction and non-fiction books, but the funds cannot be spent on textbooks or GCSE texts.²⁷⁶
- 149.** We heard a great deal of evidence about the importance of school libraries, and library staff, in supporting and encouraging reading for pleasure. The National Literacy Trust said that well-resourced school libraries “sustain RfP and information literacy, promoting autonomy, inclusion, and engagement through diverse texts, particularly for disadvantaged pupils”²⁷⁷ and an evidence review by the National Literacy Trust sets out a body of research showing a positive impact of school libraries on attainment in reading and writing, pupils’ learning skills, and reading for pleasure behaviours.²⁷⁸ Victoria Dilly, Chief Executive of the School Library Association, highlighted research showing that 73% of children and young people who used the school library had better levels of reading enjoyment, reading for pleasure and reading confidence and attainment than those who did not.²⁷⁹ We heard of positive examples of the ways in which school libraries could engage pupils and make sure that all children felt welcome and confident in using the library, such as pupil librarians, regular library lessons, book groups, and book buddy schemes.²⁸⁰
- 150.** Evidence emphasised that school libraries were particularly important for children from disadvantaged backgrounds who may otherwise not have much access to books, and were also crucial in providing access to diverse texts for children with SEND.²⁸¹ Victoria Dilly said:

When [children] get to school and come into a school library, it might be the first time they have ever come across that many books in one room. It might also be the first time they experience the joy that we associate with reading, because they may not have necessarily had

274 HM Treasury, [New youth guarantee for eligible young people and funding for libraries in all primary schools](#), 29 September 2025

275 [School Libraries: Primary Education](#), UIN 109092, 2 February 2026

276 Department for Education ([RFP0171](#))

277 National Literacy Trust ([RFP0018](#))

278 National Literacy Trust, [The impact of school libraries on children and young people’s literacy outcomes: An evidence review](#), November 2023

279 Q96

280 Q111 [Victoria Dilly]; Penguin Random House UK ([RFP0027](#))

281 British Dyslexia Association ([RFP0083](#)); Penguin Random House UK ([RFP0027](#)); The English and Media Centre ([RFP0039](#))

that at home. Therefore, reading for pleasure in school is so important because, if you like, we are filling a gap in providing something that these young people have not had before they get to school.²⁸²

151. The children we engaged with in this inquiry were positive about school libraries and the role they played. The pupils we spoke to on World Book Day talked about using their school library to find books and have a quiet space to read, with weekly library sessions offering the opportunity for children to spend time in the library and choose books. They explained that the school runs a librarian programme where children are appointed as librarians and help to run the library, and talked about how they thought about ways to make the library more appealing to their peers, including decorating the library, organising books and promoting children's favourite books.²⁸³
152. The vast majority of children who took part in the distributed dialogue activity said they got books from school, mainly the school library, with many saying that the school library had the best selection and catered well to children's needs. Several pupils also mentioned that they only got books from the school library because they were free. One pupil said: "I get the best books from school because they listen to kids' suggestions."²⁸⁴
153. The evidence we heard welcomed the government's investment into libraries for primary schools, but called for sufficient funding for all schools to develop and maintain libraries. Victoria Dilly said that the investment was "amazing" for those schools which lacked libraries, but also highlighted that 65% of primary schools which did have a library had no budget for it.²⁸⁵ The School Library Association also stated that the government's £5 million investment for all secondary schools to buy books for their libraries equates to approximately £1,450 per school - approximately 200 books.²⁸⁶ Research by Great School Libraries found that 15% of secondary schools did not have a library budget, and of those that did, 69% reported it staying the same or decreasing since 2019.²⁸⁷ Bookmark Reading Charity said that many schools "describe their reading spaces as cramped, outdated, poorly organised, or simply not inviting [...] Book areas often lack comfortable seating, suitable furniture, or are not easily accessible. Reading spaces are often stocked with old, unattractive books."²⁸⁸ Onyinye Iwu, a children's illustrator, author and teacher, told us that in her teaching role she had bought books for pupils out of her own money, as her school was not able to fund them.²⁸⁹

282 Q92

283 World Book Day engagement session (summary in annexe)

284 Distributed dialogue activity (summary in annexe)

285 Q106

286 School Library Association ([RFPO184](#))

287 Great School Libraries, [Unequal Futures? An imbalance of opportunities](#), March 2023

288 Bookmark Reading Charity ([RFPO085](#))

289 Q66

- 154.** We heard concerns about the lack of data collection and that school libraries are not statutory. The School Library Association (SLA) recommended that the Department collect data by incorporating questions about school libraries into the school census, and recommended making school libraries statutory.²⁹⁰ The SLA said that school libraries' non-statutory status had led to "libraries bearing the brunt of funding cuts to school budgets"²⁹¹ and the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) highlighted the difference in approach to prison libraries and public libraries, both of which are statutory.²⁹² A submission from academics suggested that it should be mandatory for all schools or phases of education to have libraries, and to not to be allowed to close or repurpose existing library spaces.²⁹³ Some submissions also called for School Library Services, which exist in some local authorities to provide library services and support to schools, to be made statutory.²⁹⁴
- 155.** However, the National Association of Head Teachers suggested that there can be "valid reasons why a school doesn't have a dedicated library, including the staffing and running costs or a lack of space" and said that reading spaces "do not need to be organised, or labelled, as a traditional library."²⁹⁵ The Minister said that her view was that "heads are best placed to decide how they build a reading culture in school" and Jenny Oldroyd said that she would "struggle with what you would be making statutory", citing examples of libraries including "double-decker buses that make fantastic libraries in the playground [...] amazing year group libraries, class libraries and all sorts."²⁹⁶
- 156.** We also heard about the importance of trained library staff to support and manage the school library and help build a culture of reading for pleasure in a school. World Book Day stated that "physical space and books are not enough to encourage children to read for pleasure" and that libraries "need adult staff who know the children, their interests and the range of books on offer."²⁹⁷ The Great School Libraries campaign highlighted that school librarians are "experts in children's literature" while teachers "often have outdated and scant knowledge of children's literature".²⁹⁸ Dr Roger McDonald said that "having a room of books doesn't create readers" and

290 School Library Association ([RFP0184](#))

291 School Library Association ([RFP0137](#))

292 CILIP ([RFP0166](#))

293 Anonymised ([RFP0081](#))

294 CILIP ([RFP0166](#)); Libraries Connected ([RFP0074](#))

295 NAHT ([RFP0104](#))

296 Q188

297 World Book Day ([RFP0042](#))

298 Great School Libraries ([RFP0152](#))

highlighted that librarians needed to be on the senior leadership team, so that they could be involved in conversations about the work of the whole school.²⁹⁹ Victoria Dilly said:

One of the many things that school librarians are brilliant at is creating inclusive communities that are welcoming for everyone. They use their expertise to feed into collection development so that there is something for everyone [...] A librarian said once, “A child comes through the door, and I know exactly what to recommend. I know who they are.” It is about building relationships [...] You can be the knowledgeable person who can talk to them about myriad things and tap into their interests.³⁰⁰

- 157.** Research by Great School Libraries found that 70% of primary school libraries did not have a dedicated member of staff, and only 8% of primary librarians had no other role in the school. Nearly a quarter of secondary schools reported not having a designated member of library staff due to budget constraints (23%), but the majority indicated it was because they thought appropriate levels of staffing were achieved without having a designated staff member in place (57%).³⁰¹ The Minister said that it was up to individual schools to make a choice about how to offer library provision, and that there were “fantastic examples of schools where a range of staff do that role in different and engaging ways.”³⁰²
- 158.** There were also calls to extend the commitment to fund a library in every primary school to include secondary schools. 86% of secondary schools currently have a library, the same proportion as that for primary schools, which the SLA has estimated translates to around 484 secondary schools without library provision.³⁰³ The Independent Publishers Guild said “as much of the decline in reading is in secondary-age children, we noted that the funding for secondary school libraries could have been more generous.”³⁰⁴ A submission from academics stated that “many new secondary schools have been built with no library space at all, restricting the opportunities to enact good practice.”³⁰⁵ Jonathan Douglas, Chief Executive of the National Literacy Trust, called for a universal commitment to providing school libraries which included secondary schools.³⁰⁶ The SLA estimated that a one-off capital investment of £15 million would be needed to fund a library

299 Q108

300 Q111

301 Great School Libraries, [Unequal Futures? An imbalance of opportunities](#), March 2023

302 Q189

303 School Library Association ([RFPO184](#))

304 Independent Publishers Guild ([RFPO120](#))

305 Anonymised ([RFPO081](#))

306 Q58

in every secondary school.³⁰⁷ Jenny Oldroyd said that she was “not sure that [it] is the case” that the Department was not investing in secondary school libraries, highlighting its £5 million investment in access to books for secondary schools.³⁰⁸

159. CONCLUSION

Access to books is not a luxury but a fundamental driver of educational success. For many children, schools are the first and only place they encounter a wide range of books and stories. School libraries are not optional enhancements but essential infrastructure—powerful equalisers that ensure every child, regardless of background, can engage with reading and realise their potential. School libraries must form a central pillar of the National Reading Guarantee which we are recommending.

160. RECOMMENDATION

The evidence the Committee has seen points to a sharp drop off in reading for pleasure amongst teenagers, but the Department is focusing its efforts on school libraries in primary schools. The Department should extend its pledge to fund a library in every primary school to include every secondary school.

161. RECOMMENDATION

It is striking that libraries are statutory requirements in prisons, but not schools. Once funding for primary and secondary schools is in place, the Department must recognise school libraries as essential public services and place them on a statutory footing. As part of this, it should consult on the definition of a library and be open to including book corners in classrooms or other reading spaces, as well as dedicated rooms. As a first step, it must start collecting data on school libraries and the presence of dedicated library staff by adding this to the school census. This must be completed by the end of the next academic year.

162. RECOMMENDATION

The Department should introduce a school library development fund to enable schools to refresh their book stock and train staff to run their school library with maximum impact.

307 School Library Association ([RFP0184](#))

308 Q197

163.

RECOMMENDATION

In its Reading for Pleasure guidelines for schools, the Department should set an expectation for all schools to include dedicated library lessons in the school timetable, to ensure that all pupils are encouraged and supported to use their library.

164.

RECOMMENDATION

The Department must update its design guidelines for new schools and new school buildings to ensure that a library is specified as an essential component of every new school, including primary, secondary and special schools.

4 Reading in the community



Pupil aged 10–11, participant in the distributed dialogue activity

Public and community libraries

- 165.** Under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, each local authority in England and Wales must “provide a comprehensive and efficient library service”.³⁰⁹ Data from Libraries Connected shows that there are around 3,000 public libraries (static and mobile) in England, most of which are run directly by local authorities, and in England and Wales, approximately 78%

309 [Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964](#)

of the population are within a 30-minute walk of a public library.³¹⁰ There are also many community-led libraries, which operate via community volunteers and organisations within a range of governance models, including statutory provision, charitable trusts, and community-managed partnerships.³¹¹

- 166.** In September 2022, the previous government commissioned an independent review into public libraries in England to inform future work on a government public libraries strategy. The review published its report in July 2023, which identified some key challenges facing libraries and made a number of recommendations.³¹² The government published its response to the report in January 2024, stating a commitment to implement a number of recommendations put forward by the review, including: a national data hub to better evidence the role libraries play in our society; undertake a scoping exercise for a consistent national branding campaign to raise awareness of our libraries; an expanded library membership; and the creation of a Libraries Minister and a more joined-up approach within government.³¹³
- 167.** In March 2026, the current government said that it would publish a new strategy for public libraries later this year to “restore their position at the heart of communities and their pivotal role in improving the lives of working people. This will highlight how libraries support this government’s Plan for Change ambitions to provide opportunities for all and will encourage cross-government action to ensure public libraries are fit for the future.”³¹⁴ Witnesses set out a number of measures that they wanted to see included in the strategy, including: recognition of community-managed libraries; a national strategy around reading with libraries at the heart of it; recognition of the role of local government and integration with other services; funding; and focus on the workforce.³¹⁵ The Minister for Early Education, Olivia Bailey MP, said that it was a “fairly safe guess” that reading for pleasure would be included in the strategy, and committed to following up with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) on this point.³¹⁶
- 168.** Evidence to the inquiry emphasised the crucial role that libraries play in providing access to books and supporting reading for pleasure among children and young people. The Reading Agency stated that “access to public library reading provision is a key determinant in building a reading

310 Libraries Connected, [Facts and figures](#) (accessed 18 June 2026)

311 Community Libraries Network ([RFP0052](#))

312 Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [An independent review of English public libraries](#), July 2023

313 Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [An independent review of English public libraries - Lord Parkinson’s response](#), January 2024

314 Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [Public libraries set to benefit from cash boost to support National Year of Reading](#), 2 March 2026

315 Q154

316 Q195

identity: the provision of universal library membership has a positive impact on reading behaviours.”³¹⁷ The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) said that librarians “expertly provide their diverse and unique user communities with safe and welcoming spaces for reading” and “proactively engage readers of all ages through a wide range of events, literacy programmes and other activities.”³¹⁸ Donna Pentelow, Chair of the Chief Cultural and Leisure Officers Association, highlighted the unique role that libraries play in providing free access to books, and also highlighted that libraries are often “the last public sector space in high streets” and are “trusted, safe and designed to be welcoming and inclusive.” Isobel Hunter, Chief Executive of Libraries Connected, said:

Libraries are important as somewhere to bring together partners as well as doing direct delivery themselves. One bit of the library recipe—the magic ingredient—is the spaces; 80% of the population is within a 30-minute walk of a library and we have nearly 3,000 libraries in England, so it is still a very large and incredibly accessible network [...] Libraries are the gateway to vast collections. If you are a member of a library that is part of the Libraries Consortium in London or the south-east, you have access to 7.6 million books, which is staggering. If you are into rainbows or zombies, you will find an amazing book that will suit you, and there are different formats: everything from comics to novels, e-books and audiobooks.³¹⁹

- 169.** We heard about the particular importance of libraries for disadvantaged children and for those with SEND. National Literacy Trust research found that 1 in 10 (10%) children and young people reported having no books of their own at home, rising to 1 in 6 (16%) pupils receiving free school meals.³²⁰ Arts Council England said that libraries “offer particular value to those experiencing economic hardship in terms of access to reading resources and safe spaces in which to discover literature.”³²¹ The Community Libraries Network said that community-led libraries “promote a broad and inclusive definition of reading” and offer access to texts including picture books, comics, graphic novels, audiobooks, eBooks, and dyslexia-friendly and large-print texts,³²² and Isobel Hunter highlighted that many libraries had “really thought about the needs of children, families and children with special needs” such as through autism-friendly design.³²³

317 The Reading Agency ([RFP0145](#))

318 CILIP ([RFP0166](#))

319 Q136

320 National Literacy Trust ([RFP0018](#))

321 Arts Council England ([RFP0065](#))

322 Community Libraries Network ([RFP0052](#))

323 Q136

170. However, we heard that some families face barriers to accessing and engaging with libraries. Research by DCMS found that, in 2023/24, 30% of adults engaged with libraries at least once in the last 12 months,³²⁴ and an earlier survey found that, in 2019/20, 61% of children aged five to 15 had visited a library in the last 12 months.³²⁵ Dr Jeanne Shinskey, Department of Psychology, Royal Holloway, University of London, said that “a lot of families might find libraries to be intimidating, inaccessible or inconvenient places where they do not feel comfortable.”³²⁶ Sonia Ramdhian, Chief Development Officer of CILIP, said “if you do not have an immediate environment where you or your family have books, why would [going to the library] occur to you?”³²⁷

171. Witnesses cited examples of libraries taking positive steps to identify and remove barriers to participation, such as removing fines; targeted summer reading challenges; outreach to asylum seekers; stocking books in language other than English; and making parents aware that children did not need to be quiet in the library.³²⁸ Isobel Hunter spoke about a project, Poverty Proofing Libraries, which looked at the barriers faced by families in poverty:

It is about things like families worried that there might be spend. Might there be fines? Do they have to pay to join the library? A lot of people don't know that it is totally free [...] It is important to go out and make that human contact with families who, quite frankly, might be scared. If you are a family that has only ever had very negative experiences of school, the council or social workers, you need a friendly face to invite you in so that you do not feel scared. It can be scary entering a big formal building, the library.³²⁹

172. The Cultural Policy Unit published a report in December 2025 which called for the introduction of a National Library Card to improve children's engagement with libraries. They recommended issuing every newborn with a library card to their local library upon the registration of their birth, without requiring separate application procedures.³³⁰ Witnesses supported this suggestion, and highlighted that outreach and partnership working with

324 Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [Main report for the Participation Survey \(May 2023 to March 2024\)](#), February 2025

325 Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [Libraries - Taking Part Survey 2019/20](#), September 2020

326 Q25

327 Q137

328 Q137 [Donna Pentelow; Sue Kerr]

329 Q137

330 Cultural Policy Unit, [The National Library Card: A Birthright to Library Membership](#), December 2025

other agencies such as health visitors would be needed to make it effective; Isobel Hunter estimated that it would cost £7.5 million to fund an outreach engagement person in every library service.³³¹

- 173.** DCMS stated that The Reading Agency had been working with some local authorities to deliver library-led, council-wide reading for pleasure strategies. They state that this model was “driven by the library service, aligned to the needs of local communities and delivered in partnership with key partners across the authority, using reading to deliver local priorities and targets.”³³² Isobel Hunter said that these strategies were “being delivered with libraries at the heart, using libraries as the infrastructure to bring in partnerships, support children to access the resources, and provide venues and networks, very much around that whole life pathway of a child from baby through school and wrapping around them.” She said that, in areas where those strategies were in place, library use and membership had risen between 12% and 23%, and enjoyment of reading had increased by 10% to 12%.³³³
- 174.** Libraries are also key partners in delivering the Summer Reading Challenge. The Challenge is the UK’s largest reading for pleasure programme for children aged 4–11 and is delivered by The Reading Agency in partnership with public libraries during the school summer holidays. More than half a million children take part in the Summer Reading Challenge each year.³³⁴ Many evidence submissions supported the Challenge and said that it was effective in encouraging more children to use libraries and read for pleasure.³³⁵ However, we heard some suggestions that the format of the Challenge, under which children read six books, did not always engage reluctant readers or older children, and that the costs involved in delivering it could cause problems for libraries.³³⁶
- 175.** The Reading Agency said that to address some of these barriers, they had had funding from the Arts Council to pilot a 3-year “cross-authority” approach, where libraries partnered with other community agencies to connect with children who did not use libraries, which had increased participation by over a third, especially among children who had never used a library before.³³⁷ Isobel Hunter said that this model was “fantastic” and “the gold standard of how it could be delivered.”³³⁸

331 Q139

332 Department for Culture, Media and Sport ([RFP0139](#))

333 Q136

334 The Reading Agency, [Summer Reading Challenge](#) [accessed 18 June 2026]

335 National Literacy Trust ([RFP0018](#)); The Booksellers Association ([RFP0028](#)); Community Libraries Network ([RFP0052](#)); Publishers Association ([RFP0121](#))

336 Libraries Connected ([RFP0074](#)); Q140 [Sue Kerr]

337 The Reading Agency ([RFP0145](#))

338 Q142

Funding and reductions in services

- 176.** We received a great deal of evidence raising concerns about the impact of reductions in funding to library services. Public libraries are funded by local authorities and in 2023/24, net current expenditure on library services was £694 million, which was a 30% decrease in real terms for the figure in 2014/15.³³⁹ DCMS estimated the number of static libraries open as of 31 December 2023 as 2,877, and the number that have closed (and not been replaced by or relocated to a new static library) since 2010 as 276.³⁴⁰ Data from Libraries Connected shows that 27% of services said that their opening hours had been reduced in the last three years and that 54% of services had seen a decrease in staffing over the last three years.³⁴¹
- 177.** Evidence set out the impact of closures and service reductions on children and young people. Arts Council England said that “declining numbers of branch libraries and restricted opening hours translate directly into reduced access for all people including children and young people, thereby diminishing opportunities for reading for pleasure in libraries.”³⁴² CILIP explained that funding cuts had meant that libraries often closed by 3pm or 4pm on their open days, meaning that fewer children could visit after school; that there were limits on capacity with the number of class visits that could be accommodated and the number of children’s events that could be offered; and that there had been reductions in space for books and reading to accommodate other services and council departments, or to provide income from renting space to outside agencies. They also stated that deprived areas were four times more likely to have seen their public library closed or taken over by volunteers than more affluent areas.³⁴³ Sonia Ramdhian highlighted that service reductions particularly affected those who were less likely to use the library, saying:

Where you have reduced opening hours, that impacts the physical accessibility of going to a library at the time that you have available, whether that is after school, with your parents in the evening or at a weekend. If there is less budget for outreach, to make an engaging space and to have well-trained staff, that impacts more on those struggling with the engagement, who thought that the library was not the place for them or did not know that the library was welcoming and free. If you do not have those activities, you stop reaching the people who were hard to reach in the first place even more.³⁴⁴

339 House of Commons Library debate pack, [The future of public libraries](#), 13 May 2025

340 Department for Culture, Media and Sport ([RFP0139](#))

341 Libraries Connected ([RFP0074](#))

342 Arts Council England ([RFP0065](#))

343 CILIP ([RFP0166](#))

344 Q149

178. In March 2026, DCMS announced that public libraries would receive a funding boost of up to £150,000 as part of the National Year of Reading. The fund is expected to support projects across 72 library authority areas which are disadvantaged by high deprivation, weak social infrastructure and low library engagement. The government will also award a £1,000 cash prize to each of the five English regional winners of The British Book Awards Library of the Year.³⁴⁵ Isobel Hunter welcomed the additional funding, but said that it was a “drop in the ocean” and was equivalent to around £1,500 to £2,000 per library service, which would not be enough to address the key issues such as staffing and the cost of books.³⁴⁶

179. CONCLUSION

We cannot hope to build a reading nation without the places where reading lives. Public and community libraries play an essential role in supporting children and their families to access books, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The impact of closures and cuts in provision is deeply concerning; it is imperative that all communities have access to libraries to help reverse the decline in reading for pleasure.

180. RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government must commit to restoring the funding for public libraries that has been lost since 2010 by the end of this Parliament. They should also establish a ‘library sufficiency standard’ for local authorities and work with local authorities to fill gaps in provision, including through partnership working with community organisations and universities and colleges.

181. RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Education, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government must work together to create a ‘golden thread’ of reading support across a child’s life and ensure that the forthcoming strategy for public libraries has reading for pleasure among children and young people at its heart. At a minimum, they must fully implement the findings of the 2023 review into public libraries, in particular those which relate to expanding library membership and more joined-up work on libraries in government. This should be completed within one year.

345 Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [Public libraries set to benefit from cash boost to support National Year of Reading](#), 2 March 2026

346 Q151

182. CONCLUSION

Many public and community libraries do innovative and effective outreach work to engage reluctant readers and bring more families into libraries, but too many children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are still missing out on the benefits that libraries offer. The Summer Reading Challenge is an important part of the story, but work must be done to ensure that it genuinely engages those children who do not already enjoy reading in order to have a truly transformational impact.

183. RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport must work with other relevant departments and local authorities to introduce an auto-enrolment scheme through which every child is issued with a library card on registration of their birth. This must come alongside the necessary infrastructure and resources to implement the change, including guidance for health visitors and other professionals to support parents and carers to use the library, and support for libraries to provide introductory sessions to new parents and carers.

184. RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport should require all local authorities to put in place dedicated community reading for pleasure strategies with libraries at the heart of them. These should focus on bringing together services, including early years settings, Best Start Family Hubs, schools and other local services to boost library use and membership among disadvantaged families.

185. RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport should work with the Arts Council and The Reading Agency to extend their existing cross-authority model of the Summer Reading Challenge to more local authorities across the country. This should enable libraries to partner with other community agencies such as children's services, education settings, family hubs, and the Holiday Activities and Food scheme to target those families and children who do not usually use libraries.

186. RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport should put funding in place for a dedicated outreach officer for all library services, which is estimated to cost £7.5 million.

Work with schools and early years settings

- 187.** Evidence highlighted the important role libraries play in working with schools, early years settings and other partners to encourage library use and coordinate events. Libraries Connected stated that “public libraries are the only statutory service for early years and offer rhyme times, Bookstart service, story times and early years programmes to boost parental understanding and confidence around supporting children to read and role modelling home learning environments.” They suggested that the new Best Start Family Hubs should have formal partnerships with libraries, incorporating reading for pleasure into local authority early years strategies.³⁴⁷ The Community Libraries Network said that community libraries “play a central role in early literacy through regular story times and rhyme times” and support early years providers by hosting nursery and childminder visits, providing curated book collections, and supporting practitioner confidence in shared reading.³⁴⁸ Donna Pentelow said that libraries are “absolutely part of the delivery of [the Best Start in Life] strategies for early years, from day one to those first 1,000 days” and highlighted the importance of engaging parents in early years work.³⁴⁹
- 188.** Many submissions emphasised the importance of schools having strong partnerships with public libraries.³⁵⁰ The UK Literacy Association said that “partnerships with and trips to local libraries, linked to the Summer Reading Challenge for instance, encourage membership and family involvement, extending reading beyond school boundaries.”³⁵¹ The Community Libraries Network said that libraries supported schools in a number of ways, including by hosting class visits and library inductions; extending access to reading materials beyond the school day; and supporting reading for pleasure outside assessment frameworks, “offering flexible, interest-led engagement that complements curriculum demands.”³⁵²
- 189.** Of the children we spoke to on World Book Day, most had only attended the public library when taken there by the school. All the school classes had had trips to the local library, and some children had brought in books they had borrowed from the library to show us. Children said that they also enjoyed the other activities offered by the public library to link their hobbies to books; for example, one child described attending a Lego day, where children built with Lego and explored books about Lego.³⁵³

347 Libraries Connected ([RFP0074](#))

348 Community Libraries Network ([RFP0052](#))

349 Q146

350 National Literacy Trust ([RFP0018](#)); Arts Council England ([RFP0065](#)); The Reading Agency ([RFP0145](#))

351 UK Literacy Association ([RFP0031](#))

352 Community Libraries Network ([RFP0052](#))

353 World Book Day engagement session (summary in annexe)

- 190.** Research by Libraries Connected found that 79% of library services described their relationships with primary schools as strong, but 73% described their relationships with secondary schools as weak.³⁵⁴ Sonia Ramdhian suggested that this could be due to a number of factors, including primary schools being smaller; children being taught by individual subject teachers rather than having one class teacher; and parents being more removed from secondary school than at primary.³⁵⁵ DCMS said that it was working to “encourage more and increased partnerships between educational settings and public libraries benefiting both partners so children can have a seamless experience, moving between them” such as school visits and special assemblies.³⁵⁶ The Minister said that the DfE “always want[ed] to be forging connections, whether between public libraries and schools or whatever it may be” and committed to following up with DCMS on that point.³⁵⁷
- 191.** We heard suggestions for more data sharing between schools and libraries. DCMS highlighted that some library services had had success through auto-enrolment and appropriate data-sharing between schools and library services, such as for Summer Reading Challenge sign-ups, but that this was not a universal approach adopted by councils.³⁵⁸ Sonia Ramdhian said that this should be prioritised, as for some children, “sometimes there are reasons why the school library is not the library for them, and sometimes the public library is not for them, but to have the closer link, the opportunity for both and auto-enrolment brings real gain.”³⁵⁹ Isobel Hunter said:

Some authorities like Newham have data sharing with schools and libraries—happy days, they can do it. In other authorities, the interpretation by the GDPR team has been, “No, we can’t do that.” It is extra complex when you have schools that have spun out into academies, so it is not a single data share. It is obviously easier if it is a single data share with the school and if the library is part of the same authority. It is why we have been talking to DCMS and asking, “Is there anything you can do? Can you have a discussion with the Information Commissioner’s Office?” It is an area where, if some authorities have found a way through, surely there is a fix and a way forward here that would benefit everybody.³⁶⁰

354 Libraries Connected ([RFP0074](#))

355 Q146

356 Department for Culture, Media and Sport ([RFP0139](#))

357 Q197

358 Department for Culture, Media and Sport ([RFP0139](#))

359 Q148

360 Q147

192. CONCLUSION

Schools and early years settings play a crucial role in connecting children with libraries and showing them all that their local library has to offer. We heard from children themselves that the only trips they took to their local library were those organised by the school. The role of education settings in boosting library use cannot be overstated.

193. RECOMMENDATION

As part of the strategy on reading for pleasure which we are recommending, the Department for Education should set an expectation for all schools and early years settings to organise regular visits to public libraries continuing to the end of key stage three. Schools should also work with parents and carers to include them in visits where possible and helping to link up parents with their local libraries.

194. RECOMMENDATION

We heard that reluctant readers can be motivated to use libraries and engage with books when libraries offer activities relating books to children's hobbies and interests. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport should publish guidance for libraries setting an expectation for them to offer this, with suggestions and examples of best practice.

195. RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Education and Department for Culture, Media and Sport should take steps to facilitate data-sharing between schools and public libraries, to enable measures such as auto-enrolment of children to libraries and help children to sign up to the Summer Reading Challenge. This can make use of the single child identifier once established. The Departments should work closely with the Information Commissioner's Office to provide local authorities with clear guidance and support as to how this can be done within the confines of GDPR legislation.

The wider industry



Pupil aged 7–11, participant in the distributed dialogue activity

- 196.** As part of this inquiry, we took oral evidence from representatives of authors, illustrators, publishers and booksellers, and received written evidence from many more. We heard about the crucial role that the industry plays in supporting reading for pleasure, and were encouraged to hear the level of enthusiasm and commitment across the industry to being involved in this work.
- 197.** Rebecca Sinclair, President of the Publishers Association, said that raising levels of reading needed “collective action across the whole ecosystem” and said that publishers were “super-invested” in this, as it was “both a moral and a commercial imperative for us to build a future pipeline of readers.”³⁶¹

Meryl Halls, Managing Director of the Booksellers Association, said that booksellers were “in the business of selling books because they want to get people reading, and their motivation and mission is very strong.” She highlighted the importance of bookshops as a “third space” where children could go and get support from a bookseller in choosing books, as well as the importance of partnerships between bookshops, schools and libraries.³⁶²

- 198.** We heard examples of many positive programmes and initiatives run by the publishing and bookselling industries helping to improve access to books and encouraging children to read more.³⁶³ We also heard evidence on the importance of authors and illustrators in creating engaging and diverse texts and in working with schools through author visits and other events.³⁶⁴ Annie Crombie, Co-CEO of the Book Trust, also spoke of the particular role of the Children’s Laureate, saying that laureates bring “stardust” and “act to open doors and they unite people from diverse sectors.”³⁶⁵
- 199.** The Publishers Association stated that publishers were “influential in establishing the National Year of Reading”, as their members had donated money and were supporting the National Literacy Trust and the DfE in delivering the year. They said that publishers “stand ready to shape the lasting legacy of the year by engaging with government, schools, families, libraries, charities and other stakeholders to ensure meaningful change is achieved.”³⁶⁶ Rebecca Sinclair said that they were “really committed to working in a public-private set-up” on further work on the National Year of Reading.³⁶⁷

Diversity and representation

- 200.** We heard about the key role that the publishing and bookselling industries play in improving diversity of children’s literature. The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE)’s research found that 24% of children’s books published in 2024 featured a racially minoritised character. This is an increase from 4% in 2017, but a decrease from the peak of 30% in 2022.³⁶⁸ Anjali Patel, Lead Advisory Teacher at the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education, told the Committee that there had been “an unprecedented drop in representation in picture books. That has never happened in the life

362 Q114

363 Publishers Association ([RFP0121](#)); Hachette UK ([RFP0125](#)); Independent Publishers Guild ([RFP0120](#)); Q114 [Joelle Owusu]

364 Society of Authors ([RFP0073](#)); Booksellers Association ([RFP0028](#))

365 Q55

366 Publishers Association ([RFP0121](#))

367 Q129

368 Centre for Literacy in Primary Education, [Reflecting Realities - Survey of Ethnic Representation within UK Children’s Literature](#), November 2025

of the survey. It is difficult to find books that are not animal characters as main characters for young children, and that is a problem for our earliest readers.”³⁶⁹

- 201.** Onyinye Iwu, a children’s author, illustrator and teacher, said that publishers held “significant responsibility” in ensuring that children see themselves represented in books, saying:

It is about the end to tokenism when it comes to representation. We do not need just one book about the experience of these children. It is important that there is choice. A lot of times where it comes to diverse creators, it is like if one person does a book about shoes, no more books about shoes now, that is enough, when we do need more choice so that children have ownership of what they are reading.³⁷⁰

She also argued that there was a lack of marketing of books that already existed, saying that there were “plentiful stories showing mirrors into maybe disadvantaged backgrounds, but students do not know about them [...] they are not reaching the right students.”³⁷¹ She said that although there had been a “big jump forward when it comes to diverse books, characters, stories and realities” she saw that we were “highlighting the same authors in shops and to an extent even within schools and libraries, because that is what we are comfortable with.”³⁷²

- 202.** Rebecca Sinclair said that publishers are “really committed” to improving diversity and highlighted the Publishers Association’s inclusion pledge, which ninety members have signed up to, as well as schemes by big publishers to support under-represented writers.³⁷³ Joelle Owusu, Editorial Director at Merky Books, highlighted their New Writers’ Prize, which had opened up publishing to younger, more diverse authors who may not have agents to represent them.³⁷⁴ She also argued that “you cannot have diverse books if the workforce is not as diverse”³⁷⁵ and Rebecca Sinclair suggested that more should be done to promote writing and publishing to diverse groups of children:

How do we go and speak to children as they are considering their GCSEs about publishing, writing or illustrating being an aspirational career? I would say that over the past decade there has not been a celebration of creative industries and creative subjects. We are doing

369 Q65

370 Q66

371 Q62

372 Q63

373 Q116

374 Q118

375 Q117

work in that space, but we would love support from the Government. That feeds the pipeline of who we hire, which will shape and inform who we are acquiring and publishing.³⁷⁶

- 203.** Meryl Halls also emphasised the importance of having a diverse workforce in the bookselling industry, and said that she thought they were “well on the way” to improving diversity among booksellers. She cited examples of bookshops working to engage different groups, including bookshops owned by minority ethnic owners and bookshops designed to support neurodivergent and disabled customers.³⁷⁷

204. CONCLUSION

The wider industry, including authors, illustrators, publishers and booksellers, bears a strong responsibility alongside government to play its part in getting more children reading for pleasure and sustaining their engagement. We were heartened to hear of their commitment and enthusiasm to being involved in initiatives such as the National Year of Reading, and hope that this continues long beyond this year.

205. CONCLUSION

There is still a long road to travel in terms of improving the diversity in the texts available to children. Too many children still do not see themselves represented in books, and, while some progress has been made, the trends in this area are concerningly variable. The literary industry cannot afford to be complacent about this issue. We urge the publishing and bookselling industries to make this a real priority and throw their energy behind work to effect meaningful and lasting change in the diversity of texts that are published, marketed and sold.

206. RECOMMENDATION

In the extension of the National Year of Reading to the National Decade of Reading which we are recommending, the Department for Education must make authors, publishers and booksellers partners in the design and delivery of activities and initiatives, including co-design of and joint funding for activities and initiatives and guidance on best practice approaches that can be taken to encourage and support children to read for pleasure. As part of the National Decade of Reading, the Department should work with the industry to set measurable benchmarks on this which should be achieved by the end of the decade. It should also ensure that the role of these industries is included in its forthcoming evaluation of the National Year of Reading.

376 Q116

377 Q119

207. RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Education should work with the Careers and Enterprise Company to develop high-quality information and advice on careers in the writing, publishing and bookselling industries and ensure that these are being promoted to children and young people, especially those from underrepresented backgrounds.

Partnerships with schools and early years settings

- 208.** We heard of the importance of education settings having strong partnerships with authors, publishers and booksellers. The Booksellers' Association stated that booksellers "complement early years provision as accessible community "next steps" for families" through recommending age-appropriate and accessible texts, and called for bookshops to be formal delivery partners of Best Start Family Hubs to enable them to "curate and advise" on book stock and improve links with local bookshops.³⁷⁸ They also highlighted that booksellers said that sustaining relationships with schools had become harder in recent years and called for the government to support closer partnerships between schools and bookshops, including funding for author visits, reading events and literacy enrichment, and encouraging schools to source stock through local bookshops.³⁷⁹
- 209.** We heard of the particular importance of author visits to schools and early years settings: research by the National Literacy Trust found that reading enjoyment levels were significantly higher among children who said that they had experienced an author visit at school.³⁸⁰ In the distributed dialogue activity, pupils talked about the importance of visits to schools by authors. They felt that meeting a real author and hearing about their writing made books feel more exciting and inspiring, and suggested that this should happen more often.³⁸¹ Frank Cottrell-Boyce, author and Children's Laureate 2024–2026, said:

I guess that at nearly every school visit, some kid has come up and told me or given me something. When you talk to the teacher, you discover that is the kid who never speaks. There is something about human contact, especially now, when we have had a period of knowing what it means to lose that. There is something about voices and being

378 Booksellers Association ([RFP0028](#)); Q122 [Meryl Halls]

379 Booksellers Association ([RFP0028](#))

380 National Literacy Trust ([RFP0018](#)); Society of Authors ([RFP0073](#)); The Children's Literacy Charity ([RFP0087](#))

381 Distributed dialogue activity (summary in annexe)

there for author visits that is game-changing [...] I come out of nearly every school visit thinking, “Wow. I’m so glad. What was I going to do that was more valuable today?”³⁸²

- 210.** The Society of Authors highlighted the cost involved in organising author visits, arguing that authors should be fairly remunerated and recommending that there should be dedicated funding for author visits beyond World Book Day.³⁸³ Sonia Ramdhian called for the introduction of a national author database so that libraries and other services could assess which authors were available and willing to give talks.³⁸⁴
- 211.** The Minister agreed that “doing as much as we can to support and facilitate those to support schools, not just to maximise the investment but more broadly, is great.” She said that the Department was “working very hard on those partnership approaches” and stated that more information on this would be available in due course.³⁸⁵

212. RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Education should publish guidance for schools and early years settings outlining how they should work with the wider literary industry, including visits to public libraries, author visits, links with local bookshops, and the publishing industry.

213. RECOMMENDATION

Author visits to schools and other education settings can be transformational in inspiring young readers and helping children see the person behind the magic. The Department for Education should develop resources for schools and early years settings with clear points of contact to support them to identify and contact authors and illustrators who are available to offer talks and workshops with children.

382 Qq124–125

383 Society of Authors ([RFP0073](#))

384 Q152

385 Q193

Conclusions and recommendations

The importance of reading

1. Reading for pleasure brings a wealth of benefits to children and to wider society that cannot be ignored. Reading can give children a huge amount of joy and pleasure, and its benefits extend far beyond educational outcomes for an individual child. Reading acts as a window, offering the opportunity for children to gain insights into other backgrounds, cultures and experiences regardless of their start in life, forming a key cornerstone of social cohesion. It also acts as a mirror, helping children to see themselves in the world and to understand their own identity. It is not only a driver of attainment but a powerful force for connection, trust and shared experience, strengthening relationships within families and communities and supporting children's emotional development and sense of belonging. (Conclusion, Paragraph 12)
2. The decline in reading for pleasure is not simply an educational concern but has repercussions for the whole of society and should be a clear priority for the Government to address. Schools, early years settings, local authorities, the literary industry, parents and carers, the voluntary and community sector and others, play an essential role in making sure that every child has the opportunity to have access to reading for pleasure throughout their lives. (Conclusion, Paragraph 13)
3. The rise in recreational screen use is undoubtedly a major factor crowding out children's time to read for pleasure and affecting their attention spans, starting in the very earliest years with babies and young children spending time on devices instead of engaging with books. Parents' and carers' use of screens also set early expectations for children of how adults spend their own time. Our concurrent work on screen time and social media use has highlighted the severe risks associated with screen use. It is welcome that the government is finally taking action on this important area, but reform is long overdue and the negative effects of screen use will take time to reverse. (Conclusion, Paragraph 23)

4. The government must implement in full the remaining recommendations of our response to its consultation on Growing up in the Online World as a first step to tackling the harmful effects of screen time on children. In particular, it must introduce mandatory restrictions on high-risk and addictive design features, such as infinite scrolling, disappearing messages and algorithmic messages for under-18s, with appropriate age-related restrictions enabled by default. (Recommendation, Paragraph 24)
5. Beyond screen time, there are myriad other pressures on childhood restricting the opportunities for children to read, and for parents to read with their children. England is lagging so far behind the international average that we cannot place the blame solely on screens. The pressures of the cost of living and modern work patterns mean that many parents and carers do not have the time and capacity to share books with their children at home. For children living in poverty, the inability to access the essentials can be a huge barrier to enjoying books. Work to address the decline must therefore be multi-faceted and look more broadly at the evidence on what works and how parents and carers, teachers and other school staff, early years practitioners, library staff and the literary industry can reverse the decline. (Conclusion, Paragraph 28)
6. Throughout the inquiry, we have seen that the decline in reading for pleasure is not inevitable. It is the result of policy choices, fragmented systems and unequal access. With coordinated national leadership, sustained investment and a renewed focus on joy and connection, reading for pleasure can be restored as a defining part of childhood and a foundation for a fairer, more cohesive society. (Conclusion, Paragraph 29)
7. The Government must commit to a National Reading Guarantee ensuring that every child, regardless of background, has frequent, regular opportunities to enjoy books, stories and shared reading experiences from birth to 18 as part of everyday life. The National Reading Guarantee should encompass early years support and childcare, school and public libraries; and it should have a particular focus on access to books for disadvantaged families and consideration of whether initiatives in this area could be expanded. Children cannot fall in love with books they have never held. The Guarantee should adopt a broad definition of reading and go beyond traditional books to include as broad a range of texts as possible, including accessible texts for children with SEND; however, it should include a strategy for encouraging children to engage with traditional books as well as other forms of texts, recognising the particular benefits that traditional books bring. (Recommendation, Paragraph 30)
8. A central part of the National Reading Guarantee must include a comprehensive Reading for Pleasure strategy. This should be led by the Department for Education working with the Department for Culture,

Media and Sport and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and set out its long-term plans for reversing the decline in reading for pleasure among children and young people. The strategy should, at a minimum, include: reviews of the available evidence on what works; guidance on best practice for parents and carers, schools, teachers and early years practitioners; expectations on schools and early years settings as to best practice, including relating to the diversity of texts available and opportunities for shared reading; proposals to raise levels of reading among particular groups of children, including boys, teenagers, disadvantaged children, and children with SEND; and the steps the Department will take to implement the recommendations of this report. (Recommendation, Paragraph 31)

9. The National Year of Reading is a welcome acknowledgement from the government of the importance of reading and has enabled a range of positive activities to take place, but there is little evidence that it has impacted the core work of the Department in terms of schools and early years. Without long-term prioritisation and appropriate investment, it risks becoming a one-off event with minimal lasting impact. (Conclusion, Paragraph 40)
10. The Department should build on the National Year of Reading, transforming its focus into a National Decade of Reading in order to ensure that reading for pleasure remains a long-term priority, and use it as an opportunity to effect much more far-reaching change to embed reading for pleasure into all areas of education. (Recommendation, Paragraph 41)
11. One key priority group missing from the National Year of Reading is children with SEND, particularly those with dyslexia and other reading difficulties. The Department must set out what steps it is taking to support these children to develop an enjoyment of reading and ensure that all future work on reading for pleasure is accessible for children with SEND. (Recommendation, Paragraph 42)
12. Building on the success and universality of World Book Day, the Government should establish more national moments to promote reading for pleasure throughout the year. (Recommendation, Paragraph 43)
13. The private, voluntary and community sectors are stepping up to play their part in getting children reading. The necessary foundations for change are already present - there exists a rich and committed ecosystem working to promote reading for pleasure. We have heard of many inspiring examples of programmes run by charities, schools, libraries, publishers, booksellers, and other groups, which are having a positive impact in their communities. However, access to these opportunities are not evenly distributed and children's experiences of these will vary widely according to what is available and funded in their local area and, in the case of paid-

for events, their families' income. The government should take on a leading role in ensuring consistent and more equitable access to programmes. (Conclusion, Paragraph 44)

14. The Department must act decisively and evaluate the benefits of the different programmes being undertaken, with a particular focus on supporting children from those groups least likely to read for pleasure. This should include looking at the benefits of book gifting schemes; reading volunteers in schools; and programmes supporting parents with shared reading in the early years. This evaluation should be completed within a year, and the Government should then move to scale what works nationally and with urgency as a lasting legacy of the National Year of Reading. (Recommendation, Paragraph 45)

Early years and the home learning environment

15. The early years is a crucial stage for developing a love of reading and engagement with books and stories. We agree with the Department that developing literacy and reading skills is essential, but at this early stage, joy must lead the way. Fun and enjoyment must come first in the early years, as this provides the foundation and motivation for learning to read at later stages. Without this early positive association, without the warmth of shared stories and the enchantment of turning pages, children are far less likely to carry a love of reading into later life. (Conclusion, Paragraph 55)
16. Many younger childcare practitioners entering the profession will themselves have grown up during a period of decline in reading, and other new practitioners may have struggled with reading for pleasure themselves. The Department must therefore ensure that reading for pleasure is built into all levels of training for early years practitioners and make continuing professional development on reading for pleasure available to practitioners. (Recommendation, Paragraph 56)
17. The Department and Ofsted should update the early years foundation stage profile and early years inspection framework to emphasise that, for young children, reading should be focused on building enjoyment and engagement over school readiness and the teaching of phonics. (Recommendation, Paragraph 57)
18. Parents and carers know the benefits of reading with their children and want to do more but face multiple barriers in doing so. Pressures and stresses exist for families across the income distribution; however, these are particularly acute for parents living in poverty. Lack of confidence in their own abilities alongside a gap in understanding of how best

to do it compounds these problems, but action can and must be taken to fill these gaps in knowledge and support parents and carers. (Conclusion, Paragraph 69)

- 19.** Alongside its recently published guidance on screen use for the under-5s, the Department must update its guidance for parents of primary-aged children on supporting children to read and expand this to parents of children of all age groups. The guidance should clearly set out the benefits of reading for pleasure, why shared reading is beneficial for the youngest children, and provide strategies and support for parents to read with their children at home. This is a quick win for the DfE and should be completed by the end of the year. (Recommendation, Paragraph 70)
- 20.** Best Start Family Hubs represent a crucial opportunity to support parents, carers and practitioners to develop good practice on reading for pleasure. Support for parents and carers must focus on the joy of reading and make it easy and attractive for them to engage with young children. (Conclusion, Paragraph 80)
- 21.** The Department must ensure that all Best Start Family Hubs are embedding reading for pleasure into their work by offering sessions and advice for parents and carers as well as training for practitioners and support to early years settings on good practice. Every Hub should have a designated Reading for Pleasure lead who is responsible and resourced for designing and leading this work which should include automatic book gifting and guided sessions for parents and carers. (Recommendation, Paragraph 81)
- 22.** The Department should ensure that Best Start Family Hubs provide support for parents and carers on appropriate screen time use for children of different ages, as well as explaining their own role as an adult in modelling appropriate screen time use to their children. (Recommendation, Paragraph 82)
- 23.** Best Start Family Hubs should work hard to develop inclusive activities specifically designed to be welcoming to parents and carers who may not have had a positive experience of reading aloud at school or who may struggle to read themselves. The Committee received evidence that such groups can be transformative in unlocking the joy of reading with children for parents and carers and in building confidence. (Recommendation, Paragraph 83)
- 24.** There are many examples of effective programmes having a positive impact in supporting parents and carers to read with their children. These programmes should be scaled up to ensure they reach families right across the country. As a first step the Department should carry out a review to inform decisions on which programmes to scale up; this should be completed within one year. (Recommendation, Paragraph 84)

- 25.** Health visitors should include supporting reading for pleasure in their work with parents and young children as a critical tool for bonding and good social and emotional development; the Department for Education should work with the Department of Health to set out clear steps to ensure this happens in all areas of the country. (Recommendation, Paragraph 85)

Schools and the curriculum

- 26.** Schools play a key role in developing a love of reading among children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds who otherwise lack opportunities to access books. The Department acknowledges this, but its policies do not reflect this, with work on reading focusing overwhelmingly on proficiency over pleasure. (Conclusion, Paragraph 116)
- 27.** There is a wealth of academic evidence demonstrating what good practice in schools looks like to encourage reading for pleasure, focusing most strongly on primary schools. It is now time for the Department to make use of this evidence and ensure that it is disseminated to every school and that schools and teachers are supported to implement good practice. The evidence on secondary schools must also catch up so that reading for pleasure is not solely seen as the remit of primary schools. (Conclusion, Paragraph 117)
- 28.** In its strategy on Reading for Pleasure, the Department should set out the core elements of good practice shown by schools who have achieved the Open University's Reading for Pleasure Quality Mark for schools and set out guidance on how all schools can deliver this. As part of this, the Department should set out expectations for all schools to include protected time in the school day for reading and discussions about books with examples of how this can be achieved that are relevant both to primary and secondary schools up to key stage three. (Recommendation, Paragraph 118)
- 29.** The Department must commission and fund research into best practice to support reading for pleasure in secondary schools and ensure that this is disseminated to schools and teachers. (Recommendation, Paragraph 119)
- 30.** The new school breakfast clubs provide a key opportunity to introduce disadvantaged pupils to reading and books in a fun environment away from the pressures and stresses of learning. The Department must ensure that schools delivering the new breakfast clubs are encouraged to include books and reading activities as part of them and provide them with the guidance and support they need to do this. (Recommendation, Paragraph 120)

- 31.** The Department must include a stronger focus for English Hubs on reading for pleasure, alongside reading proficiency. This should include work on how to support reading for pleasure among children with SEND, especially those with dyslexia and other reading difficulties. (Recommendation, Paragraph 121)
- 32.** The Department should introduce ongoing continuing professional development for primary and secondary school teachers on reading for pleasure and monitor take-up to ensure that as many teachers as possible are trained in best practice. As a first step, it should evaluate the effectiveness of the Transforming Schools Reading Culture programme on training teachers to promote reading for pleasure and roll it out across the country if it has been proven to be effective. (Recommendation, Paragraph 122)
- 33.** The Curriculum and Assessment Review was a missed opportunity to create more space for pupils to develop a true enjoyment of reading and literature. The Committee has received evidence that the current GCSE English Literature curriculum is overloaded and that children are being put off reading for pleasure as a result. This is also reflected in falling numbers of pupils taking A Level English literature and going on to study the subject at university. The government must rebalance the education system so that reading is no longer driven primarily by assessment, but also focuses on engagement, identity and enjoyment. In particular, the GCSE English Literature curriculum must be revised to include a core objective of ensuring that pupils finish key stage four having developed a love of and interest in books and literature. (Conclusion, Paragraph 141)
- 34.** If reading is to provide children with both mirrors of their own worlds and windows into the lives of others, the curriculum must be designed to support this. It is unacceptable that, in 2023, only 1.5% of students had studied a text by a writer of colour at GCSE, and we do not understand why the Curriculum and Assessment Review failed to address this crucial issue. (Conclusion, Paragraph 142)
- 35.** The Department should ensure that its work on developing the new English curriculum is considered through the lens of reading for pleasure, especially with regards to GCSE English Literature. It should consider removing content to allow teachers more time and flexibility to help pupils develop an enjoyment of reading and a deeper understanding of literature. (Recommendation, Paragraph 143)
- 36.** The Department should take steps to revise the GCSE English Literature curriculum, including improving the diversity of texts that pupils study. It should expand the definition of literature from the British Isles to a broader definition of literature in English and extend the requirement for a 19th century novel to a longer period. It should also work with exam

boards to explore ways in which they can give schools more flexibility to choose from a broader range of texts and to allow teachers to choose texts which strongly resonate with the pupils in their local area. (Recommendation, Paragraph 144)

37. Establishing the proficiency of children's reading is important in ensuring that additional support can be provided to those who need it, but we heard different views on when this should take place. The government's new year eight reading test during secondary school may be a useful tool for teachers to identify children with reading difficulties, but it is important that this does not take further time and resources away from reading for pleasure and result in young people being more likely to view reading as a source of hard work and stress. We welcome the Minister's assurance that the new test will not be used as an accountability measure for schools and urge the Department not to change its position on this. (Conclusion, Paragraph 145)
38. The Department must monitor the impact of the year eight reading test and be open to feedback from the sector as to how it is working. If feedback shows that year eight is too late to identify pupils needing additional support with reading, the Department should consider moving the test to an earlier stage of education. We will follow up on this at regular intervals. (Recommendation, Paragraph 146)
39. Access to books is not a luxury but a fundamental driver of educational success. For many children, schools are the first and only place they encounter a wide range of books and stories. School libraries are not optional enhancements but essential infrastructure—powerful equalisers that ensure every child, regardless of background, can engage with reading and realise their potential. School libraries must form a central pillar of the National Reading Guarantee which we are recommending. (Conclusion, Paragraph 159)
40. The evidence the Committee has seen points to a sharp drop off in reading for pleasure amongst teenagers, but the Department is focusing its efforts on school libraries in primary schools. The Department should extend its pledge to fund a library in every primary school to include every secondary school. (Recommendation, Paragraph 160)
41. It is striking that libraries are statutory requirements in prisons, but not schools. Once funding for primary and secondary schools is in place, the Department must recognise school libraries as essential public services and place them on a statutory footing. As part of this, it should consult on the definition of a library and be open to including book corners in classrooms or other reading spaces, as well as dedicated rooms. As a first step, it must start collecting data on school libraries and the presence of dedicated library staff by adding this to the school census. This must be completed by the end of the next academic year. (Recommendation, Paragraph 161)

- 42. The Department should introduce a school library development fund to enable schools to refresh their book stock and train staff to run their school library with maximum impact. (Recommendation, Paragraph 162)
- 43. In its Reading for Pleasure guidelines for schools, the Department should set an expectation for all schools to include dedicated library lessons in the school timetable, to ensure that all pupils are encouraged and supported to use their library. (Recommendation, Paragraph 163)
- 44. The Department must update its design guidelines for new schools and new school buildings to ensure that a library is specified as an essential component of every new school, including primary, secondary and special schools. (Recommendation, Paragraph 164)

Reading in the community

- 45. We cannot hope to build a reading nation without the places where reading lives. Public and community libraries play an essential role in supporting children and their families to access books, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The impact of closures and cuts in provision is deeply concerning; it is imperative that all communities have access to libraries to help reverse the decline in reading for pleasure. (Conclusion, Paragraph 179)
- 46. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government must commit to restoring the funding for public libraries that has been lost since 2010 by the end of this Parliament. They should also establish a 'library sufficiency standard' for local authorities and work with local authorities to fill gaps in provision, including through partnership working with community organisations and universities and colleges. (Recommendation, Paragraph 180)
- 47. The Department for Education, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government must work together to create a 'golden thread' of reading support across a child's life and ensure that the forthcoming strategy for public libraries has reading for pleasure among children and young people at its heart. At a minimum, they must fully implement the findings of the 2023 review into public libraries, in particular those which relate to expanding library membership and more joined-up work on libraries in government. This should be completed within one year. (Recommendation, Paragraph 181)
- 48. Many public and community libraries do innovative and effective outreach work to engage reluctant readers and bring more families into libraries, but too many children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are still missing out on the benefits that libraries offer. The Summer

Reading Challenge is an important part of the story, but work must be done to ensure that it genuinely engages those children who do not already enjoy reading in order to have a truly transformational impact. (Conclusion, Paragraph 182)

49. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport must work with other relevant departments and local authorities to introduce an auto-enrolment scheme through which every child is issued with a library card on registration of their birth. This must come alongside the necessary infrastructure and resources to implement the change, including guidance for health visitors and other professionals to support parents and carers to use the library, and support for libraries to provide introductory sessions to new parents and carers. (Recommendation, Paragraph 183)
50. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport should require all local authorities to put in place dedicated community reading for pleasure strategies with libraries at the heart of them. These should focus on bringing together services, including early years settings, Best Start Family Hubs, schools and other local services to boost library use and membership among disadvantaged families. (Recommendation, Paragraph 184)
51. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport should work with the Arts Council and The Reading Agency to extend their existing cross-authority model of the Summer Reading Challenge to more local authorities across the country. This should enable libraries to partner with other community agencies such as children's services, education settings, family hubs, and the Holiday Activities and Food scheme to target those families and children who do not usually use libraries. (Recommendation, Paragraph 185)
52. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport should put funding in place for a dedicated outreach officer for all library services, which is estimated to cost £7.5 million. (Recommendation, Paragraph 186)
53. Schools and early years settings play a crucial role in connecting children with libraries and showing them all that their local library has to offer. We heard from children themselves that the only trips they took to their local library were those organised by the school. The role of education settings in boosting library use cannot be overstated. (Conclusion, Paragraph 192)
54. As part of the strategy on reading for pleasure which we are recommending, the Department for Education should set an expectation for all schools and early years settings to organise regular visits to public libraries continuing to the end of key stage three. Schools should also work with parents and carers to include them in visits where possible and helping to link up parents with their local libraries. (Recommendation, Paragraph 193)

55. We heard that reluctant readers can be motivated to use libraries and engage with books when libraries offer activities relating books to children's hobbies and interests. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport should publish guidance for libraries setting an expectation for them to offer this, with suggestions and examples of best practice. (Recommendation, Paragraph 194)
56. The Department for Education and Department for Culture, Media and Sport should take steps to facilitate data-sharing between schools and public libraries, to enable measures such as auto-enrolment of children to libraries and help children to sign up to the Summer Reading Challenge. This can make use of the single child identifier once established. The Departments should work closely with the Information Commissioner's Office to provide local authorities with clear guidance and support as to how this can be done within the confines of GDPR legislation. (Recommendation, Paragraph 195)
57. The wider industry, including authors, illustrators, publishers and booksellers, bears a strong responsibility alongside government to play its part in getting more children reading for pleasure and sustaining their engagement. We were heartened to hear of their commitment and enthusiasm to being involved in initiatives such as the National Year of Reading, and hope that this continues long beyond this year. (Conclusion, Paragraph 204)
58. There is still a long road to travel in terms of improving the diversity in the texts available to children. Too many children still do not see themselves represented in books, and, while some progress has been made, the trends in this area are concerningly variable. The literary industry cannot afford to be complacent about this issue. We urge the publishing and bookselling industries to make this a real priority and throw their energy behind work to effect meaningful and lasting change in the diversity of texts that are published, marketed and sold. (Conclusion, Paragraph 205)
59. In the extension of the National Year of Reading to the National Decade of Reading which we are recommending, the Department for Education must make authors, publishers and booksellers partners in the design and delivery of activities and initiatives, including co-design of and joint funding for activities and initiatives and guidance on best practice approaches that can be taken to encourage and support children to read for pleasure. As part of the National Decade of Reading, the Department should work with the industry to set measurable benchmarks on this which should be achieved by the end of the decade. It should also ensure that the role of these industries is included in its forthcoming evaluation of the National Year of Reading. (Recommendation, Paragraph 206)

- 60. The Department for Education should work with the Careers and Enterprise Company to develop high-quality information and advice on careers in the writing, publishing and bookselling industries and ensure that these are being promoted to children and young people, especially those from underrepresented backgrounds. (Recommendation, Paragraph 207)
- 61. The Department for Education should publish guidance for schools and early years settings outlining how they should work with the wider literary industry, including visits to public libraries, author visits, links with local bookshops, and the publishing industry. (Recommendation, Paragraph 212)
- 62. Author visits to schools and other education settings can be transformational in inspiring young readers and helping children see the person behind the magic. The Department for Education should develop resources for schools and early years settings with clear points of contact to support them to identify and contact authors and illustrators who are available to offer talks and workshops with children. (Recommendation, Paragraph 213)

Annex 1: Summary:

Engagement session with primary school children on reading for pleasure

As part of its inquiry into reading for pleasure, the Education Committee held an engagement session with primary school children to hear their views on reading and how more children could be encouraged to read. The session took place in Parliament on Thursday 5 March to align with World Book Day.

Nine children from Mulberry Canon Barnett Primary School in east London attended the session, accompanied by teachers and school staff, supported by the National Literacy Trust. The children were aged between 8 and 11 (years 4 to 6) and included four girls and five boys. We would like to extend our thanks to the staff of Mulberry Canon Barnett Primary School and the National Literacy Trust for supporting us with the session.

Views on reading

The children were asked to speak about what they liked and disliked about reading. Sometimes it can be entertaining. Children who enjoyed reading described it as “entertaining” and particularly enjoyed books which made them laugh. They said they enjoyed discovering new and interesting words and found reading calming before bed. One pupil said:

I like chapter books because when there are no pictures you can imagine it in your head. When you're bored you can read a book - it's calling out to you like, “Read me, read me!”

The children who did not enjoy reading described it as “boring”, with one pupil explaining:

When I read it makes me bored, just reading words.
I don't get interested in whatever I'm reading.

Children spoke about enjoying various forms of books, including chapter books, e-readers, and books with interactive features such as flaps. They enjoyed series of books and books which taught them new words and sentence structure. They also liked non-fiction books and recognised that books can have different purposes for example to inform, persuade and discuss as well as to entertain. Some children listened to audiobooks, while others did not.

Use of libraries

The children spoke about using their school library to find books and have a quiet space to read, with weekly library sessions offering the opportunity for children to spend time in the library and choose books. The school runs a librarian programme where children are appointed as librarians and help to run the library. They explained how they thought about ways to make the library more appealing to their peers, including decorating the library, organising books and promoting children's favourite books. For World Book Day, they planned to nominate a pupil who was the best at reading and display their picture in the library.

The children had also made use of the local public library, primarily through school trips. All the school classes had had trips to the local library and some children had brought in books they had borrowed from the library. Children also enjoyed the other activities offered by the public library to link their hobbies to books; for example, one child described attending a Lego day, where children built with Lego and explored books about Lego. Most of the children had only attended the public library when taken there by the school.

Reading in school and at home

When asked about how their school supported them to read for pleasure, children described enjoying opportunities to read in groups and talk about books with their friends; one pupil described acting as characters from books during morning play time with their friends. One year group had put book recommendations on sticky notes for other children, which they found helpful.

Children spoke of having class story time at the end of the day, where the blinds were put down and fairy lights put on, and one child was chosen to sit on a bean bag. Children enjoyed this, finding it "calm and relaxing", with one pupil saying they felt "sad" when this time was over.

Children spoke about how their teachers supported them to read and comprehend texts. This included having questions alongside the text, using a pointer while reading, discussing the books after reading time,

and teachers helping with unfamiliar words. They described particular support for children speaking English as a second language to enable them to read in English.

Children's reading habits at home varied among the group, from children who did not read for pleasure at home at all, to children who sometimes did and those who read every night before bed. One pupil highlighted that their parents had given them a 15-minute screen time limit per day, which meant they did not spend much time on screens at home.

Many of the children attended after-school religious classes, which could last up to three hours, and included reading religious texts. This meant that they often did not have time or did not want to spend more time reading at home after doing this.

Recommendations for encouraging children to read

The children made a range of suggestions about how more children could be supported and encouraged to read for pleasure. In particular, they suggested making books more interactive, with opportunities for the children to engage more actively with the books. This included a suggestion for books to include black and white pictures that children could colour in, and a suggestion for books which leave the last lines blank so that children could finish writing the book themselves.

Other suggestions included playing calming music in the school library, and for there to be greater choice of the level of books available, so that children could choose easier or more demanding books according to their need.

Annex 2: Reading for pleasure: Summary of distributed dialogue with children

As part of its inquiry into reading for pleasure, the Select Committee Engagement Team organised a distributed dialogue with school pupils. As part of this, we provided schools with discussion packs to support them to hold discussions and activities with pupils. Schools were free to respond in whatever way they chose: some held discussions with pupils and sent back a summary of the pupils' answers, while others asked children to write their answers down and sent back scanned copies of the pupils' written responses. Primary schools were also invited to submit drawings of children reading, or children's own designs of book covers.

We received responses from seven primary schools and one secondary school. Full details of the schools who responded and the questions that the pupils were asked are at the end of this summary.

What pupils liked about reading

Children were asked whether they liked reading, and what it was they liked or disliked about reading. Children who did not enjoy reading were asked what they preferred to do in their free time.

Many of the children who participated said they enjoyed reading in their spare time and gave a range of reasons for this. Many children described reading as “relaxing”, “peaceful” or “soothing” and said that it helped them to calm down if they felt upset or angry. Many children saw reading as a way to wind down before bed and said that it helped them to sleep.

I like reading in [my] free time because if I'm angry or bored it makes me relaxed. – Primary school pupil, age 9–11

I like reading because I can escape from stress.
– Primary school pupil, age 9–11

I like to cut out outside noise so it is calm.
- Primary school pupil, age 9–11

A common theme in the responses was that reading allowed them to use their imaginations, as it allowed them to picture characters and places in their heads. Some children said that they enjoyed reading because it influenced their dreams and made them more exciting. Children enjoyed the ability to “escape” from the real world through reading, with many commenting that reading was an opportunity to be transported to different places or different worlds. Children described getting “lost” in books and spoke of a feeling that there were “no limits” or that “anything could happen” in a book.

I like reading because it makes you feel free and you use your imagination. Reading makes you enter a whole new world full of new adventures that you can come across. - Primary school pupil, age 9–11

I like reading because it expands my imagination and there are no limits and you don’t have to come back to reality.
- Primary school pupil, age 9–11

I like travelling into another world whether it’s as a spectator or a character - Primary school pupil, age 9–11

Children also saw reading as a source of learning and understood that it brought benefits to vocabulary, spelling and handwriting. Children particularly enjoyed the opportunity to learn new words and saw reading before bed as beneficial for them.

I enjoy reading to my younger brother at his bedtime. I love the pictures and exploring vocabulary. I like new words.
- Primary school pupil, age 10–11

I like practising reading new words that we learned in school.
- Primary school pupil

Reading before bed is like charging your brain overnight.
- Primary school pupil, age 9–11

What they disliked about reading

The Committee also received responses from children who did not enjoy reading in their free time; those teachers who gave numerical breakdowns said that around half of children in the class or group who participated in the activity did not enjoy reading.

The reasons children gave for not enjoying reading centred around finding reading difficult or not understanding the words in the book, particularly for those with dyslexia or other difficulties with reading. Children also spoke about lack of access to books and books being expensive, and that families did not encourage reading at home or have time to read with children. Many children also described reading as “boring” and said they preferred other activities.

I find reading hard and new words are hard to learn by yourself; although I do try. – Primary school pupil, age 7–11

I get embarrassed when my friends are reading hard books and I can’t read them. – Primary school pupil, age 7–11

I am not saying I hate it, but I also don’t not like. The bit what I don’t like is having to plough through a big book.
– Primary school pupil, age 10–11

Children listed a wide range of activities that they preferred doing in their spare time. These included screen-based activities such as gaming and TV, but also many non-screen-based activities such as sports, playing games, drawing, and spending time with family and friends. Secondary school pupils were more likely to say they preferred gaming or spending time with friends, but also mentioned sports and music.

Some children also mentioned a dislike of being “forced” or told to read by parents, suggesting that they were likely to disengage if they saw reading as being something they did not choose to do.

I generally like to read something that I like if I’m not specifically told to.
– Primary school child, age 9–11

Types of texts

Children were asked about what kind of things they liked to read, and were given “books, comics, graphic novels, and audiobooks” as examples.

Many children said they enjoyed reading books, including chapter books, picture books, horror, fantasy, and adventure books. They showed strong preferences for books that were funny and scary or exciting.

Comics and graphic novels featured heavily in children’s responses, with the majority of children saying they enjoyed these (although it should be noted that these were suggested to children as examples, so children may have been responding to the suggestion). Some also mentioned audiobooks, and younger children aged 6–7 mentioned fairy tales. Books linked to hobbies

such as gaming and TV shows were also mentioned. Secondary school children (aged 11–13) were more likely to include non-fiction in the books they liked to read.

I like graphic novels, audio books, comics, fantasy and adventure books. I like comics because they are not only funny; they are full of images that are bright and colourful. I like adventure books because they take you on journeys that you have never been on. They are full of problems that are waiting to be solved. - Primary school pupil, age 9–11

Graphic novels, comics because you can't read a book without pictures in my opinion. - Primary school pupil, age 9–11

I like books full of writing because I get to doodle what I imagine. - Primary school pupil, age 9–11

Audio books because you can listen and if you read a book you might get tired. - Primary school pupil, age 9–11

Reading habits at home

Primary school pupils were asked whether they read alone or with an adult when they read at home. Responses varied by age group, with younger pupils (aged 4–7) saying they read mainly with an adult, and older pupils (aged 7–11) saying they read mainly alone. Many children in the 9–11 age range suggested a preference for reading alone, saying that they found this “calmer” and “more peaceful” and that it was easier to concentrate. However, some children also preferred reading with an adult, particularly so that adults could help them with words they didn't understand.

I read by myself because it is more peaceful and grants me freedom. - Primary school pupil, age 9–11

We read by ourselves because it feels better when you're reading it than someone else. You can see all the great pictures when in your room by yourself and it feels calm. - Primary school pupil, age 9–11

By myself, but my mum and cousins do help me when I get stuck on a word. - Primary school pupil, age 8–9

I read by myself and with my adult because with my adult if you read it wrong they will help you. With myself I will read easy books, then I will have no mistakes. - Primary school pupil, age 8–9

Several children suggested they did not need to read with an adult as they could read independently, suggesting that they saw shared reading as something only for children who could not yet read. Some also mentioned

that their parents or family members did not have time to read with them. A number of pupils in older age groups mentioned that they read to younger siblings and enjoyed this.

I read by myself. My stepmum is always looking after my sister.
My Dad is at work. – Primary school pupil, age 6–7

I read by myself at home. It's better in a quiet room and plus parents have to work. – Primary school pupil, age 9–11

I read by myself because we don't need to read with our adults. I just like reading in my head. – Primary school pupil, age 9–11

Children were also asked when they read, and were given suggestions of “after school, the weekends, and the school holidays”. After school and bedtime were the most commonly mentioned times for reading at home, and weekends and school holidays were also mentioned. More reluctant readers said they did not read often outside school.

Many primary school pupils also said they read at school during free time or in the school library. Secondary school pupils (aged 11–13) were more likely to say they read after school and at the weekends than at school, but many also said they read at bedtime. More unusual reading locations included in a tree and while sitting on a swing.

In the school (library) because it's calm and relaxing and my mind is very peaceful when I am alone. – Primary school pupil, age 9–11

Bedtime because it charges your brain before you go to sleep and for the next day. – Primary school pupil, age 9–11

Whenever I'm not allowed to use my iPad. – Primary school pupil

Secondary school pupils were asked whether their reading habits had changed since they were younger. Most said that they read less now than they had when they were younger, and suggested that reasons for the reduction in reading included smartphones and social media, no longer being asked to read to the teacher as they were in primary school, and having more homework and other responsibilities. However, some said that they read more now, either because they had found books or genres that they liked, or because they were now more competent at reading.

I read a lot not long ago, but now I forget – but I still want to read.
– Secondary school pupil, age 11–12

I read in a different way now to escape reality a bit.
– Secondary school pupil, age 11–12

Access to books

Children were asked where they got their books from, and were given “school, the library, parents and friends” as suggestions. The vast majority of children said they got books from school, mainly the school library, with many saying that the school library had the best selection and catered well to children’s needs. Several pupils also mentioned that they only got books from the school library because they were free.

Children also said they got books from shops (both physical and online shops), the local library, book fairs, local book swaps, and World Book Day. Some pupils felt that their local community libraries did not always have as wide a range of new or popular books available, and one teacher commented that the pupils who described themselves as reluctant readers were also the pupils who did not currently have a county library card. Books were commonly received as gifts on birthdays or Christmas. Some also borrowed books from friends or siblings.

I get the best books from school because they listen to kids’ suggestions. – Primary school pupil, age 9–11

Books in school are better than my nearest library due to school buying new books. – Primary school pupil, age 9–11

Talking about reading with friends

Children were asked whether they talked about books or reading with their friends, and if they would like to have more opportunities to talk about books with their friends. Responses were very divided on this, with some children showing strong support for discussing reading with friends, while others felt that they preferred not to discuss this with friends as they saw reading as more of a solitary activity. Some children felt that their friends were not interested in reading, or preferred to play together.

Similarly, responses were divided as to whether they wanted more opportunities to discuss books or not. Pupils who did not enjoy reading were less likely to say they talked about books with friends, but some of these pupils nevertheless suggested they would like more opportunities to do this. One teacher held a discussion with pupils about how the school could support that, and the children said that they found their reading lesson in the library a great way to discuss books.

Pupils shared that they appreciate the way their teachers regularly talk about books in class and introduce them to new stories and authors. They explained that hearing teachers speak enthusiastically about books often makes them curious to try those books themselves.

Yes, I talk about different genres and different books because it's nice to talk about different books you haven't read before and you can share your ideas. – Primary school pupil, age 9–11

No because I like to keep the things I read to myself.
– Primary school pupil, age 9–11

No one knows I like reading because I never talk about it.
– Secondary school pupil, age 11–12

Suggestions for encouraging reading

Children were asked to suggest ideas as to what would make them want to read more. The types and range of books available was the most common theme, with suggestions including: more pictures in books; more colourful books; books with more interesting facts; books linked to hobbies; books for children with dyslexia or reading difficulties; and more adventurous or exciting books. Several pupils suggested that having more choice over what to read would help, such as through the school library buying more books or by teachers offering the pupils more choice over what they read in class.

Having more comfortable or fun areas in schools where pupils could read was also mentioned by many children, with suggestions for silent reading areas or areas with calming music. Children suggested book clubs and more discussion time in class, and author visits to schools were valued by children as they felt that meeting a real author and hearing about their writing made books feel more exciting and inspiring. Some also suggested incentives such as awards in assembly. Secondary school pupils suggested that spending less time on screens, and seeing adults spend less time on screens, would encourage them to read more.

Secondary school pupils were also asked about whether studying English at school had any impact on how much they enjoyed reading. Some pupils said that reading books in class made them enjoy reading more as it introduced them to more books and helped them learn about the book. Others said that asking too many questions about books sometimes put them off the book.

Most kids now like gaming and watching movies. Try to put out more books based on games and films. – Primary school pupil, age 9–11

If it was quiet and [I] don't have to be embarrassed about what book I still like. – Primary school pupil, age 9–11

Maybe in class if we had a very comfortable area as a little bedroom and a blanket. – Primary school pupil, age 9–11

Instead of just grabbing us a book to read as a class the teacher could select a few and offer us some choice. – Primary school pupil, age 9–11

Set an example. If parents are on their devices it makes me want to be on my device too. – Secondary school pupil, age 12–13

Participating schools

Aldington Primary School

Belmont Primary School

Cirencester Kingshill School

Emmaus Primary School

Miriam Lord Primary School

Moorlands Primary School

Newquay Junior Academy

Sir Donald Bailey Academy

Questions

Pre-activity Discussion

Objective: to help participant think about the books they read, who they read them with and when they read them.

Before you ask the pupils the questions, discuss:

What's their favourite book, or what was their favourite book when they were younger?

What kind of genre of book do they like reading?

Who's their favourite book character?

Questions for primary school pupils

Do you like reading in your free time?

If yes, what is it that you like about reading?

If no, why not? What do you prefer doing instead?

What kinds of things do you like to read? E.g. books, comics, graphic novels, audiobooks?

When you read at home, do you read by yourself, or with an adult, or both?

Where do you get books from? E.g. school, the library, parents, friends?

When do you like reading? E.g. after school, at the weekends, or in the school holidays?

Do you ever talk about books or reading with your friends?

Would you like to have more opportunities to talk about books with your friends?

If you don't read much, what would help you to read more?

What could schools and teachers do to help more children like you to enjoy reading?

Optional additional activities for primary school children:

Drawing of child reading

Drawing of pupil's book cover (Ask the pupil to come up with their own story, and design a book cover for that story)

Questions for secondary school pupils

Do you like reading in your free time?

If yes, what is it that you like about reading?

If no, why not? What do you prefer doing instead?

What kinds of things do you like to read? E.g. fiction, non-fiction, comics, graphic novels, audiobooks?

When do you like reading? E.g. after school, at the weekends, or in the school holidays?

Where do you get books from? E.g. school, the library, parents, friends?

Do you ever talk about books or reading with your friends?

Would you like to have more opportunities to talk about books with your friends?

Have your reading habits changed over time? E.g. did you read more when you were younger and now read less, or the other way around?

Why do you think this is?

Does studying English at school have any impact on how much you enjoy reading?

What do you think could be done to encourage more young people like you to read in their spare time?

What could schools and teachers be doing?

What could parents be doing?

Formal minutes

Tuesday 14 July 2026

Members present

Helen Hayes, in the Chair

Jess Asato

Jodie Gosling

Caroline Voaden

Reading for Pleasure

Draft Report (*Reading for Pleasure*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 213 read and agreed to.

Annexes and Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Second Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order 134.

Adjournment

Adjourned till Tuesday 1 September 2026 at 2pm.

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Tuesday 3 February 2026

Professor Teresa Cremin CBE, Professor of Education (Literacy), Open University; **Dr Helen Hendry**, Senior Lecturer in Education (Primary), Open University; **Professor Jessie Ricketts**, Professor of Psychology, Royal Holloway, University of London; **Dr Jeanne Shinskey**, Department of Psychology, Royal Holloway, University of London; **Dr Jo Taylor**, Department of Language and Cognition, Division of Psychology and Language Sciences, University College London (UCL) [Q1-37](#)

Tuesday 3 March 2026

Jonathan Douglas, Chief Executive, The National Literacy Trust; **Annie Crombie**, Co-Chief Executive, Booktrust; **Mrs Debbie Hicks**, Creative Director, The Reading Agency [Q38-59](#)

Luke Taylor, Senior Researcher, Centre for Social Justice (CSJ); **Ellen Broomë**, Chief Executive, British Dyslexia Association; **Ms Anjali Patel**, Lead Advisory Teacher, The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE); **Onyinye Iwu**, children's author, illustrator and art teacher [Q60-75](#)

Wednesday 13 May 2026

Frank Young, Chief Executive, Parentkind; **Professor Christine O'Farrelly**, Research Professor and UKRI Future Leaders Fellow, PEDAL Centre for Research in Play, Education, Development and Learning, University of Cambridge; **Julie Cigman**, Early Education Associate, consultant and author, Early Education [Q76-91](#)

Mrs Victoria Dilly, Chief Executive, School Library Association; **Professor Robert Eaglestone**, Professor of Contemporary Literature and Thought, Royal Holloway, University of London and Policy Lead, English Association; **Dr Roger McDonald**, Associate Professor of Primary Education (Literacy), Faculty of Education and Health, The University of Greenwich [Q92-111](#)

Tuesday 19 May 2026

Frank Cottrell-Boyce, screenwriter, novelist, and children's author and Waterstones Children's Laureate 2024 – 2026;

Rebecca Sinclair, President, The Publishers Association;

Meryl Halls, Managing Director, The Booksellers Association;

Joelle Owusu, Editorial Director, Merky Books

[Q112–134](#)

Isobel Hunter MBE, Chief Executive, Libraries Connected;

Sonia Ramdhian, Chief Development Officer, Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP); **Sue Kerr**, Chair of Trustees, Community Libraries Network; **Donna Pentelow**, Chair, Chief Cultural and Leisure Officers Association (CLOA)

[Q135–154](#)

Tuesday 2 June 2026

Olivia Bailey MP, Minister for Early Education, Department for Education;

Jenny Oldroyd, Director, Curriculum, General Qualifications and Digital Strategy, Department for Education

[Q155–198](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

RFP numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

1	Action Tutoring	RFP0068
2	Addis, Richard; and Miskin, Ruth	RFP0064
3	Andrew, Lizzy	RFP0130
4	Aniket, Dr Kumar (Director of Studies in Economics, Wolfson College, University of Cambridge); and Grangier, Ms Marie-Camille (Author, Artist, Fully qualified English Teacher, Freelance)	RFP0160
5	Anonymised	RFP0021
6	Anonymised	RFP0014
7	Anonymised	RFP0176
8	Anonymised	RFP0016
9	Anonymised	RFP0015
10	Anonymised	RFP0067
11	Anonymised	RFP0081
12	Arts Council England	RFP0065
13	Aussems, Dr Suzanne (Associate Professor, University of Warwick); Brewer, Dr Rebecca (Senior Lecturer, Royal Holloway, University of London); Chu, Ly (Principal Research Specialist, Booktrust); Horst, Professor Jessica (Professor, University of Sussex); Muhinyi, Dr Amber (Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Royal Holloway, University of London); Ricketts, Professor Jessie (Professor, Royal Holloway, University of London); Shapiro, Dr Laura (Reader, Aston University); and Shinsky, Dr Jeanne (Senior Lecturer, Royal Holloway, University of London)	RFP0024
14	Bagshaw-McCormick, Ms Sarah	RFP0143
15	Belmont Primary School	RFP0142

16	Biddle, Mr Jonathan	RFP0007
17	Bishop Road Primary School	RFP0168
18	Bloomsbury Publishing Plc	RFP0092
19	Bone, Dr Jessica (Senior Research Fellow, University College London); and Mak, Dr Karen (Hei Wan) (Senior Research Fellow, University College London)	RFP0043
20	Book Clubs in Schools	RFP0156
21	Bookmark Reading Charity	RFP0085
22	Booksellers Association	RFP0028
23	Booktrust	RFP0132
24	BoomReader	RFP0078
25	Bradford Diocesan Academies Trust	RFP0049
26	McBreen, Dr Miriam (Lecturer in Psychology, University College London); and McGeown, Professor Sarah (Professor of Literacy, University of Edinburgh)	RFP0048
27	British Dyslexia Association	RFP0178
28	British Dyslexia Association	RFP0083
29	Buckley, Professor Sue (Emeritus Professor of Developmental Disability and Director for Science and Research, University of Portsmouth and Down Syndrome Education International); Burgoyne, Dr Kelly (Senior Lecturer in Psychology of Education, University of Manchester); Cain, Kate (Distinguished Professor of Language and Literacy, Lancaster University); Jarrold, Professor Christopher (Professor of Cognitive Development, University of Bristol); and Loveall, Dr Susan (Associate Professor, University of Nebraska-Lincoln)	RFP0123
30	Burkinshaw, Dr Laura; Cauchi, Dr Caroline; Metcalf, Dr Josephine	RFP0165
31	Buziuk, Hleb	RFP0001
32	Cakan, Miss Ayse (PhD Student, Aston University); McCarthy, Dr Kathleen (Reader, Queen Mary University of London); Heath, Dr Gemma (Senior Lecturer, Aston University); and Shapiro, Dr Laura (Reader, Aston University)	RFP0144
33	CILIP	RFP0166
34	CILIP Youth Libraries Group	RFP0091
35	Calibre Audio	RFP0112

36	Castle, Jeanette	RFP0118
37	Centre for Policy Research on Men and Boys	RFP0147
38	Centre for Research on Play in Education, Development, and Learning (PEDAL), Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge	RFP0136
39	Chapter One UK	RFP0070
40	Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals CILIP	RFP0076
41	Cheltenham Festivals	RFP0107
42	Chen, Dr Wenqing (Researcher, Durham University); Gorard, Professor Stephen (Professor of Education, Durham University); See, Professor Beng Huat (Professor of Education, University of Birmingham); and Yang, Fujia (PhD Researcher, University of Birmingham)	RFP0086
43	Children's Commissioner's Office	RFP0170
44	Cirencester Kingshill school	RFP0012
45	Clayton, Carmen (Professor of Family and Cultural Dynamics, Leeds Trinity University); and Clayton, Rafe (Senior Lecturer, University of Leeds)	RFP0150
46	Collett, Dr Clementine	RFP0050
47	Collis, Simon	RFP0148
48	Community Managed Libraries National Peer Network	RFP0052
49	Cooksley, Sarah	RFP0106
50	Cornwall Education Learning Trust	RFP0082
51	Crane, Ms. Haley (Head of English and Drama, St Stephen's International School, Thailand); Knapper, Mr. Adam (Individuals and Societies teacher, West Island School, Hong Kong); Waller, Dr. Alexander (Secondary Pastoral Coordinator, St Stephen's International School, Thailand); and Woodhouse, Mr. Peter (Senior Science Teacher, St Stephen's International School, Thailand)	RFP0111
52	Datta, Shouvik	RFP0164
53	Dean Bank Primary and Nursery School	RFP0009
54	Department for Culture, Media and Sport	RFP0139
55	DfE	RFP0171
56	Diamond, Miss Serena	RFP0158

57	Dixon, Professor Pauline (Professor of International Development and Education, Newcastle University, UK); and Humble, Dr Steve (Reader in Global Development, Newcastle University, UK)	RFP0026
58	Dollywood Foundation UK	RFP0097
59	Doorstep Library	RFP0090
60	Elibraries for Schools	RFP0128
61	Elmhurst Primary School	RFP0040
62	EmpathyLab	RFP0117
63	Equalise: ESRC Centre for Lifecourse Health Equity	RFP0059
64	Fatherhood Institute	RFP0084
65	Findlay MBE, Mrs Tania	RFP0019
66	Fischer Family Foundation	RFP0098
67	Geey, Hollie	RFP0006
68	Give a Book	RFP0133
69	Great School Libraries	RFP0152
70	Hachette UK	RFP0125
71	Handley, Mrs Kathryn	RFP0061
72	HarperCollins Publishers UK	RFP0020
73	HarperCollins UK; Open University; and UK Literacy Association	RFP0023
74	Harrison, Dr Anish (Chartered Librarian & Literacy Hub lead (Swindon), National Literacy Trust); and Maisuria, Professor Alpesh (Professor of Education Policy, UWE Bristol, UK)	RFP0034
75	Harrison, Dr Anna (Roehampton University)	RFP0053
76	Helen Hamlyn Centre for Pedagogy (0 to 11 Years) (HHCP). UCL Institute of Education.	RFP0058
77	Hopkins, Paul	RFP0003
78	Independent Publishers Guild	RFP0120
79	Joseph, Professor Holly (Professor of Language and Literacy Development, University of Reading); and Powell, Dr Daisy (Associate Professor of the Psychology of Written Language, University of Reading)	RFP0108
80	Kiernan, Dr Anna	RFP0105
81	King, Ms A	RFP0114

82	Kirk, John	RFP0030
83	Krishnan, Prof. Saloni (Professor of Developmental Language Sciences, Proffesor Saloni Krishnan)	RFP0169
84	Learning with Parents	RFP0126
85	Lee, Mr Eric (Editor, LabourStart)	RFP0035
86	Levontine, Marie (Library Assistant, Channing School); and Ramsden, Isobel (Librarian, Channing School)	RFP0088
87	Libraries Connected	RFP0074
88	Libraries Rising (Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians)	RFP0141
89	Lin, Dr Yuwei (Senior Lecturer, University of Roehampton)	RFP0154
90	Lipka, Dr Sigrid	RFP0162
91	Little, Professor Sabine	RFP0131
92	Magic Breakfast	RFP0101
93	MakeBelieve Arts	RFP0054
94	Medway Council	RFP0138
95	Miriam Lord Primary School	RFP0051
96	Moses, Ms Theresa	RFP0153
97	My Kind of Book	RFP0146
98	NAHT	RFP0104
99	National Education Union	RFP0047
100	National Literacy Trust	RFP0018
101	New Vision English Hub (based at Elmhurst Primary School)	RFP0046
102	Nichols, Mr Mark	RFP0008
103	North Star Community Trust	RFP0099
104	Nossiter, Julie	RFP0057
105	Nuffield Foundation	RFP0095
106	Oak National Academy	RFP0022
107	Oakhill, Professor Jane	RFP0036
108	Olave, Dr Maria Angelica Thumala (Senior Lecturer, University of Edinburgh)	RFP0149
109	O'Neill, Richard, Mr Richard	RFP0017
110	Outcomes First Group	RFP0075
111	Oxford University Press	RFP0163

112	Pan Macmillan	RFP0100
113	Parentkind	RFP0066
114	Penguin Random House UK	RFP0027
115	Premier League	RFP0135
116	Price-Mohr, Dr Ruth	RFP0033
117	Priestley, Ms Kate	RFP0055
118	Publishers Association	RFP0121
119	Read With Me	RFP0113
120	Read for Good	RFP0094
121	Reading Fairy Global Ltd	RFP0045
122	Renaissance (incorporating GL Assessment)	RFP0134
123	Ricketts, Professor Jessie (Professor, Royal Holloway, University of London, Egham, Surrey, TW20 0EX); Shapiro, Dr. Laura (Reader in Psychology, Aston University, Birmingham, B4 7ET); and van der Kleij, Dr. Sanne (Assistant Professor, University of Birmingham, B15 2TT)	RFP0072
124	Roberts, Professor Celia	RFP0056
125	Scholastic	RFP0062
126	School Library Association	RFP0184
127	School Library Association	RFP0137
128	Schoolreaders	RFP0103
129	Scottish Book Trust	RFP0096
130	Seven Stories The National Centre for Children's Book	RFP0011
131	Shail, Ms Cathy	RFP0129
132	Shropshire Bookfest	RFP0060
133	Simpson-Hargreaves, Rebecca	RFP0025
134	Sneinton C of E Primary School	RFP0010
135	Society of Authors	RFP0073
136	Southbank Centre	RFP0124
137	Speech and Language UK	RFP0089
138	Sreenivas, Dr Shubha	RFP0151
139	Steel, Abigail	RFP0037
140	Strong, Mr Guy	RFP0041
141	Sutherland, Professor Julia	RFP0167

142	Taylor, Dr. Jo	RFP0174
143	Thacker, Dr Deborah Cogan	RFP0069
144	The Bell Foundation	RFP0110
145	The benefits of reading fiction across the lifespan Min Hooi Yong	RFP0119
146	The British School of Brussels	RFP0077
147	The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE)	RFP0161
148	The Centre for Social Justice	RFP0080
149	The Children's Literacy Charity	RFP0087
150	The Comics Cultural Impact Collective (CCIC)	RFP0013
151	The Day News & Media Ltd	RFP0079
152	The English Association	RFP0102
153	The English and Media Centre	RFP0039
154	The Laurel Trust	RFP0032
155	The Open University (Early Literacy Research Group)	RFP0122
156	The Open University Early Literacy Research Group	RFP0180
157	The Open University Literacy and Social Justice Centre	RFP0183
158	The Open University Literacy and Social Justice Centre	RFP0093
159	The Reading Agency	RFP0181
160	The Reading Agency	RFP0145
161	The Role of Schools in Transforming Children's Lives through Reading for Pleasure Clare McGreevy	RFP0155
162	Thompson, Lisa	RFP0038
163	Tobin, Mr Mathew	RFP0071
164	Unitd Kingdom	RFP0109
165	United Kingdom Literacy Association (UKLA); and The Open University	RFP0031
166	University of Strathclyde	RFP0044
167	Upper Norwood Library Trust	RFP0172
168	Voice 21	RFP0115
169	Walker Books	RFP0029
170	Walton High	RFP0140
171	Whiteley, Dr Sara	RFP0127
172	World Book Day	RFP0042

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Session 2026–27

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Growing up in the online world: The Education Committee's response to the Government's consultation	HC 187
2nd Special	Historical Forced Adoption: Government Response	HC 538
1st Special	Solving the SEND crisis: Government Response	HC 382

Session 2024–26

Number	Title	Reference
9th	Higher Education and Funding: Threat of Insolvency and International Students	HC 807
8th	Historical Forced Adoption	HC 1713
7th	Foundations of Learning: replacing RAAC and securing school buildings	HC 1399
6th	Further Education and Skills	HC 666
5th	Solving the SEND Crisis	HC 492
4th	Children's social care	HC 430
3rd	Appointment of Professor Edward Peck CBE as Chair of the Office for Students	HC 731
2nd	Scrutiny of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill	HC 732

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Appointment of Sir Ian Bauckham CBE as Chief Regulator of the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual)	HC 429
8th Special	Foundations of Learning: replacing RAAC and securing school buildings: Government Response	HC 1842
7th Special	Solving the SEND Crisis: Government Response	HC 1565
6th Special	Further Education and Skills: Government Response	HC 1555
5th Special	Children's social care: Government Response	HC 1350
4th Special	Scrutiny of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill: Government Response	HC 925
3rd Special	Screen time: Impacts on education and wellbeing: Government Response	HC 915
2nd Special	Delivering effective financial education: Government Response	HC 628
1st Special	Teacher recruitment, training and retention: Government Response	HC 627