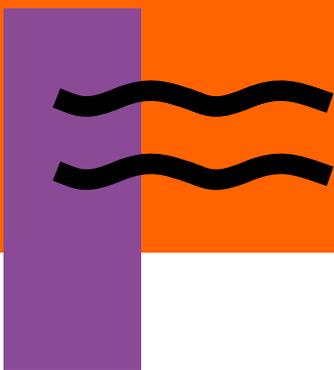


Working Together Towards a Library In Every Primary School

An update from the Primary
School Library Alliance

November 2022



Supported by



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Foreword

As CEO of the National Literacy Trust, I'm excited to be sharing this report with you on behalf of all the partners and supporters of the Primary School Library Alliance (PSLA). Since the PSLA launched a year ago, we have driven forward our mission to transform 1,000 libraries and reading spaces by 2025 - by galvanising support from partners across the public, private and third sectors. In one year, with the support of all our partners and ambassadors, we have delivered over 330 libraries meaning the life-long benefits of reading for pleasure are now reaching over 120,000 children. But more needs to be done as new research shows that over 750,000 children are still not gaining access to a school library. This, coupled with families struggling to afford books at home, means children are missing out on building critical literacy skills that will set them up to succeed in life.

The challenge of transforming and sustaining primary school libraries is a large-scale challenge and this report clearly sets out the gap in provision. Whilst the multi-partner approach of the Primary School Library Alliance may help us solve almost half this unmet need, we would welcome a positive dialogue with the Department for Education. This would enable us to move closer to every school having a primary school library or designated library space with diverse, modern book stock and trained, skilled staff.

Alongside this, we will continue to encourage more partners to join us, with the hope of extending our programming and campaign impact in schools and communities that most urgently need our support.

Thank you for reading this report and continuing to support this valuable and life-changing campaign.



Jonathan Douglas

Jonathan Douglas CBE,
Chief Executive Officer, National Literacy Trust



The context in 2022



1 in 7
state primary schools do not have a dedicated library space which impacts educational outcomes and the greater wellbeing of over **750,000** children in the UK



Primary school libraries are a vital part of the education system. Numerous studies across the world have clearly highlighted the link between good school libraries and children’s academic achievement and literacy outcomes, as well as positive attitudes to learning¹.

Despite their importance for children’s literacy and wider learning, there is no statutory requirement in the UK for schools to have a school library. Therefore, to find out how many schools in the UK have a library², the Primary School Library Alliance commissioned research agency BMG to conduct the biggest UK survey on this issue, in partnership with the Great School Libraries Campaign. Overall, 3,752 or almost 1 in 5 state primary schools across England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales answered a range of school library-related questions between July 2022 and September 2022.

This survey showed that only 86% of state primary schools across the UK said they have a designated school library area. This means that 1 in 7 (14%), equating to roughly 2,900 state primary schools across the UK, said they do not. In turn, this means that over three-quarters of a million primary school children³ across the UK don’t have access to books that enable better educational outcomes and greater well-being. This is even more challenging for the 1 in 11 children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who say they don’t have a book of their own at home⁴, where school is often the first opportunity for children to discover the magic and benefits of reading.

Differences between regions were also apparent. Within England, the North East and the North West were the regions which had the highest number of state primary schools claiming that they don't have a school library. These are also the regions in England with the lowest levels of children achieving expected levels in reading at Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2 and beyond.

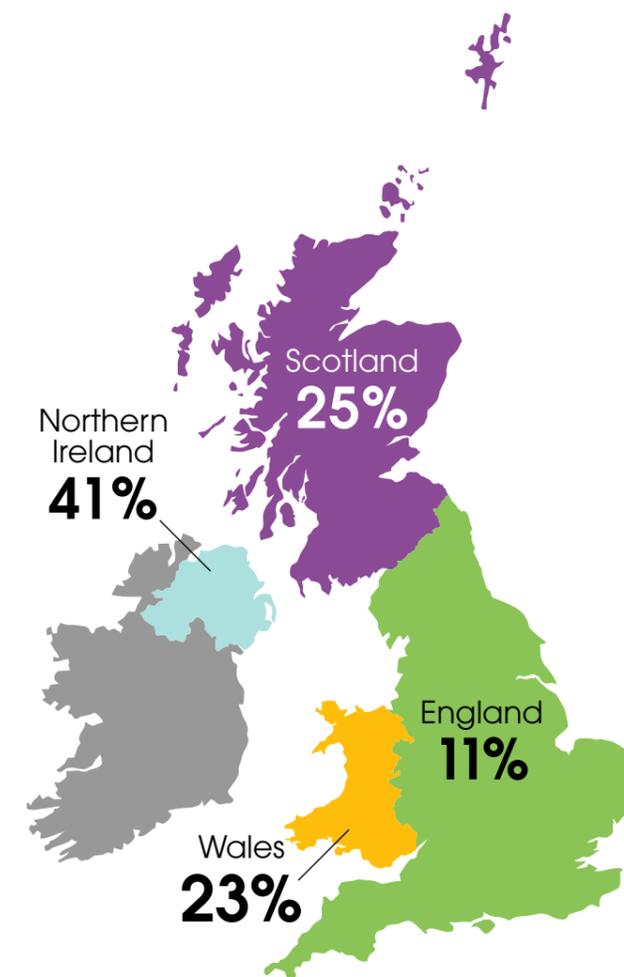
For the UK nations, more state primary schools in Northern Ireland (41%) said they don’t have a dedicated school library area, followed by Scotland (25%) and Wales (23%). One in nine (11%) schools in England said that they don’t have a dedicated school library area.

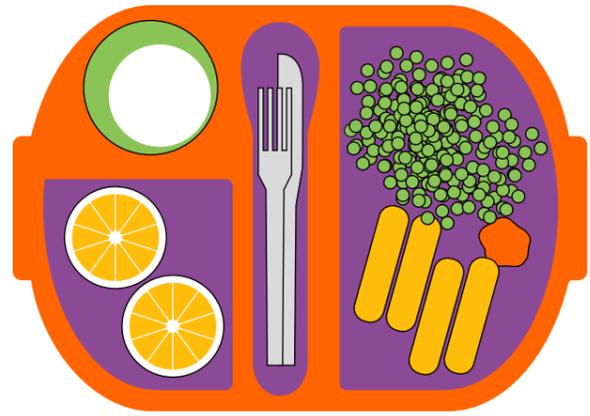
1 in 11
disadvantaged children and young people said they don’t have a book of their own at home.



Figure 1: Percentage of regions in England which do not have a designated library area

North East	18%
North West	16%
West Midlands	13%
East Midlands	12%
Yorkshire & the Humber	12%
South West	9%
London	8%
East of England	7%
South East	6%





Schools that had an above average intake of children eligible for free school meals were **over 50% more likely**

to say that they don't have a school library compared with schools with a below average intake of children eligible for free school meals (16% vs 10%).



Additionally, more schools in England which had an above average intake of children eligible for free school meals said that they didn't have a dedicated school library space, compared with schools with a below average intake of children eligible for free school meals (16% vs. 10%). This is particularly worrying as 2 in 5 (39%) children eligible for free school meals in 2021-2022 left primary school unable to read at expected level, compared with 26% of those not eligible.⁵

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a lasting impact on how 2 in 5 (40%) state primary schools access library services, with cuts in investment and staffing decreases most impacting library provision in schools. With libraries' potential to support the education recovery and help to reverse learning loss brought on by the pandemic, such lasting impact may be detrimental.



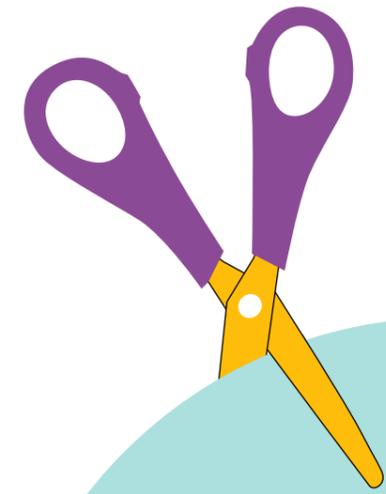
I like going to the school reading space because it's a calm, relaxing space where you can chill out, read and let the book come to life."

- Pupil, Black Country



Why does this matter?

One in two (48%) schools that had no dedicated library space said that their pupils' reading is restricted by limited library resources and availability of books. This lack of access does not just impact children but also the economy. It has been estimated that if all children were to read for pleasure, the economic impact of their increased skills and therefore increased incomes, would raise the UK's GDP by £4.6 billion per year within a generation⁶.



40% of state primary schools reported a lasting impact from COVID-19 on their access to library services

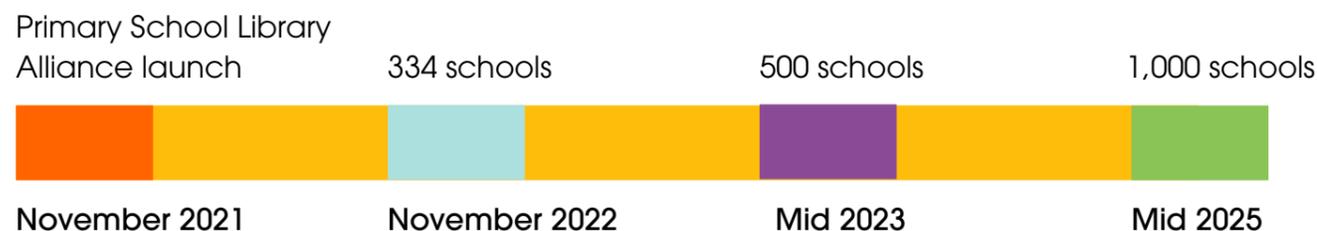


What the Alliance and partners have achieved in the past year

The Primary School Library Alliance was founded by the National Literacy Trust and Penguin Random House to help raise awareness and address the need for library and reading space provision across the UK. Since October 2021, the Alliance has aimed to bring partners together to help solve this urgent issue. The immediate goal is to transform 1,000 primary school libraries by 2025 - giving schools the books, training and support they need. The campaign launched with a report, *The Future of Primary School Libraries*⁷, which recommended four success criteria for a primary school library space:

- 1. A wide range of diverse books which are regularly refreshed**
- 2. An attractive and engaging library space to capture pupils' imaginations**
- 3. Trained, skilled staff managing the library or reading space**
- 4. The library at the heart of the wider school community**

Figure 2: Impact and aims of the Primary School Library Alliance



Since the launch of the Primary School Library Alliance a year ago, it has:

- Worked with 334 schools
- Supported these schools to transform their libraries
- Improved access to books and reading materials for children in disadvantaged communities across the UK.

The National Literacy Trust's findings, from the evaluation of the three largest programmes, show that they have successfully supported schools to improve their school library provision.

For example, as Figure 3 (right) shows, four times as many practitioners felt their library provision is good or very good for diverse materials after taking part in the programme than before (increasing from 20.5% to 81.4%). Moreover, the percentage of practitioners who rated the diversity of the authors, topics and characters represented in their books collection good or very good almost doubled, from 61.8% to 91.8%.

Figure 3: Percentage of practitioners who rated the various aspects about their school library provision as good or very good before and after the programme



Staff from schools who received support described the changes in their school, as:

"Due to (the programme), the provision that we now offer in the school library is so enticing to the children. They are now actively seeking out books and recommending these to their peers."
 – Teacher, North East of England

"We have updated our collection to include more diverse books that the children can see themselves in. We are also building our range of bilingual books so that parents can get involved in reading at home to their children."
 – Teacher, Black Country

"(Our provision is) much improved thanks to the books donated through this scheme! We have had a good clear out of the old-fashioned titles and filled it with engaging, diverse and interesting texts."
 – Teacher, Nottingham

Comments from pupils also reflect the positive changes indicated by teachers. The word cloud on page 10 shows that pupils used various positive descriptors when describing the new library space. They included: relaxed, comfortable, calm, safe, good and fun.

Case study

School: Southern Road Primary, Newham, East London

Number of pupils: 629

Programme: World of Stories, 2021/22



Pupils and teachers at Southern Road Primary School in East London took part in the World of Stories⁹ programme in 2021/22. They received a staggering 400 diverse books (300 from Penguin Random House and 100 from independent publishers), a Yoto player with cards, e-learning teacher training on reading for pleasure, webinar training and valuable network sessions with other schools on the programme. Authors Harry Meredith and Andrew Beattie have visited the school, and pupils also joined an online event with author Natalie Costa.

Rebecca Colkett, who is English lead at South Road Primary, said there has been a whole school focus on the school library and reading this year.

"It's amazing to watch those little moments where they find something and they see themselves as a reader."

The school was also a focus of a Daily Mirror feature¹⁰ about getting children reading, in August 2022. Mrs Colkett told readers how "unique" and "simple" the library programme was to access and how it has led to huge benefits for her students.

"For children who live and go to school in typically disadvantaged areas, it's a very real possibility that they may go through their entire childhood and not own a single book...Having access to a school library can be absolutely vital in their development and well being."

“

My favourite book is an emotional book...It takes me to another world."

- Anisah, Year 6, Junior Librarian



Our recommendations

In the Schools White Paper, the government set a target of 90% of primary school children reaching the expected standard in reading by 2030. The government can signal its commitment to this target by supporting the development of primary school libraries in the following ways:

- 1. The Secretary of State for Education** publicly acknowledging the positive role that primary school libraries can play in boosting literacy and endorse the aims and approach of the Primary School Library Alliance.
- 2. The Department for Education** committing to ensuring that every primary school has a library by 2025 and publish an action plan setting out how it will work in partnership with others to achieve this goal.
- 3. The Department for Education** working with the Primary School Library Alliance to agree upon a sustainable, long-term funding model. For example, the introduction of a government matched funding programme, in which the government pays a proportion of the total costs, could help to leverage further private sector investment and secure high-quality resources.

By working together, we can ensure that every child, no matter their background, has access to books that are engaging and inspiring. We hope the government will support us in this endeavour.



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Further Recommended Reading

- CLPE (2021). Reflecting Realities. Available at: https://clpe.org.uk/system/files/2021-12/CLPE%20Reflecting%20Realities%20Report%202021_0.pdf
- ParentKind (2022). Primary School Library Provision Poll. Available at: <https://literacytrust.org.uk/news/libraries-week-3-9-october-2022-new-poll-reveals-parental-support-for-primary-school-libraries/>

The Primary School Library Alliance would like to thank all our partners, funders, supporters and ambassadors for their role in transforming children's access to books and reading spaces.

About Penguin Random House UK

Penguin Random House is the UK's leading consumer publisher, made up of nine creatively and editorially independent publishing houses and over 2,000 colleagues. From bestselling writers and bold illustrators, to big thinkers and political commentators, trailblazing entrepreneurs and wellbeing experts, we are home to some of the world's most celebrated authors. Our mission is to make books for everyone, because a book can change anyone. We've worked in partnership with the National Literacy Trust for over a decade as part of our commitment to help create the readers of the future.

About the National Literacy Trust

Our mission is to improve the reading, writing, speaking and listening skills of those who need it most, giving them the best possible chance of success in school, work and life. We run Literacy Hubs and campaigns in communities where low levels of literacy and social mobility are seriously impacting people's lives. We support schools and early years settings to deliver outstanding literacy provision, and we campaign to make literacy a priority for politicians, businesses and parents. Our research and analysis make us the leading authority on literacy and drive our interventions. Literacy is a vital element of action against poverty and our work changes children and young people's life stories. Our Words for Life website also provides simple, fun and educational activities for children and young people aged 0-24 to support learning at home and help them feel more confident.

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More information:

literacytrust.org.uk/libraryalliance

Illustrations: Alicia Fernandes, Victoria Ford

