

READ ON
GET ON



A strategy to get
England's children reading

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Every year in England, thousands of children leave primary school without the confidence and fluency in reading that they need. The impact on their learning, life chances and engagement with reading is significant. We need to ensure that every child can read well by the age of 11.

Specific groups are far more likely to fail. For some children this will be related to additional needs, but for many children the reason is less clear. The reading gap between boys and girls in England is one of the widest in the developed world. Children from poorer backgrounds are also more likely to fall behind. Every child should have the support they need to prevent this from happening.

This problem is reinforcing social and ethnic inequality and holding our economy back. If it is not addressed it will cost us £32.1 billion by 2025.¹

We must learn the lessons of previous literacy and reading strategies. We need a radical new approach that acknowledges that:

- **Getting children reading is a job for all of us.** The school is vital but so are the home and wider community.
- **The work starts at birth.** Creating readers starts with talking and reading to babies. We can't wait until a child starts school.
- **Enjoyment is a vital element of reading well.** The vital importance of teaching phonics and comprehension in schools needs to be complemented by approaches that help every child to engage with and develop a love of reading.
- **We must have the highest ambitions for all children.** Despite major progress, expectations continue to be too low for particular groups of children, and in particular schools or places.



PHOTO: JONATHAN HYAMS/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Alysha, aged 7, reads to herself during a reading session at school

The *Read On. Get On.* campaign was launched in 2014 with a goal to get all children leaving primary school able to read well by 2025. To do this we are proposing a new strategy, with 10 key steps:

LEADERSHIP

1. The government should restate its commitment to our goal.
2. The *Read On. Get On.* coalition will recruit local leaders to convene campaigns addressing specific literacy challenges, using local assets alongside national programmes.
3. The *Read On. Get On.* coalition will advocate and innovate to ensure services that promote children's reading deliver quality efficiently.
4. The *Read On. Get On.* coalition will work with the government and researchers to create a consistent national measure of children's reading and ways of tracking progress in early language and literacy throughout the early years.

CHANGING BEHAVIOUR AND CULTURAL ATTITUDES TO READING

5. The *Read On. Get On.* coalition will develop a new integrated, national programme of activities including a further behaviour change campaign to support parenting, early language and reading.
6. The *Read On. Get On.* coalition will lead a national campaign and activities to promote reading for pleasure in schools, libraries, at home and in the wider community.

EARLY YEARS

7. The government should increase investment in the early years workforce.
8. The government should refresh the role of children's centres, which are a vital resource in supporting early language and reading skills in disadvantaged communities.

PRIMARY SCHOOL YEARS

9. School leaders and professional bodies should support teachers' professional development and subject knowledge of teaching and encouraging reading.
10. The government should work with academy chains and trusts, local authorities and school leaders to ensure that all primary schools have school improvement support when local authorities no longer have a duty to supply it.



Zaid, 10, and Rayn, 10, share their books at school in Greater Manchester

PART ONE

OUR AMBITIONS AND THE CURRENT CONTEXT

I OUR PURPOSE AND APPROACH

The *Read On. Get On.* campaign was launched in 2014 by a coalition of charities and education organisations in England deeply committed to ensuring that every child leaves primary school able to read well by 2025. To support this, we also want every five-year-old to achieve a good level of development in language, communication and emergent literacy – the building blocks of learning to read and the communication skills they need for life.

Reflecting on the first two years of the coalition, we believe our campaign is at a crossroads. New assessment arrangements introduced in summer 2016 show only 66% of 11-year-olds reading at the expected level. In the past year, the government has also proposed the academisation of all primary schools. In this context we are launching this updated strategy to set out how, as a country, we can achieve the *Read On. Get On.* goals.

We know that our aims are shared by teachers, librarians, early years professionals and parents throughout the country. We want our campaign to celebrate their expertise and strengthen their professional commitment. Our strategy is built on solid research but also on what they have told us.

At the heart of our campaign are the lives of the children we work with. We have talked to them. Many of them love reading; many of them find learning to read hard and don't enjoy it. But the vast majority recognise that it is of vital importance to their futures.

We've joined forces to scale up our impact, and we are mobilising the expertise and resources of others to support our cause – especially in business, the media, publishing and families. We are calling on government – local and national – to do their bit as well. We're also a key partner in the Fair Education Alliance, leading the delivery of the alliance's Impact Goal of closing the attainment gap in literacy at primary school.

Our strategy is built on four core principles that underpin our mission to raise levels of children's reading:

Getting children reading is a job for all of us

Children's early language and reading are influenced by family, peers and culture as much as by schools and public services. We need to mobilise the resources of all parts of society – including business, the third sector, the media, publishers, authors and celebrities – not just rely on teachers, schools or the government to solve the problem.

The work starts at birth

We must start early and support children at every stage to help them read well by the age of 11. Preventative approaches must reflect the strong evidence for the effectiveness of early intervention and high-quality support for families. Parents, carers and other family members need to be empowered with the confidence, skills and knowledge to help their child develop a solid foundation in early language and literacy, and to build and sustain a positive home literacy environment throughout their childhoods. While adult literacy is beyond the scope of this strategy, this may mean tackling adult skills and integrating support for parents and carers too, as the literacy needs of children and their families are deeply interrelated.

Enjoyment is a vital element of reading well

We need to strengthen our focus on the social and cultural influences on reading and ensure that approaches that help every child to engage with and develop a love of reading are as important as teaching phonics and comprehension.

This means building on the work which coalition partners and others are already delivering in this area and involving a wide range of partners who have the potential to reach families in new ways and enthuse them about what reading is and what it can do for them. It includes the use of role models (bearing in mind that male role models are of particular importance to some children).

We must have the highest ambitions for all children

Despite major progress, expectations continue to be too low for particular groups of children, and in particular schools or places. We must have the highest ambitions for all children, including those living in poverty or with additional needs, and strive for inclusiveness as well as high national standards.

This strategy has been developed by the *Read On. Get On.* coalition in England, and so only covers England.



PHOTO: ELIZABETH DALZIEL/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Nawel, 35, and Adam, two, read at home in London

2 WHY OUR CAMPAIGN MATTERS

Our campaign is ambitious: we want to transform the future of some of England's most disadvantaged children. But we also want to improve their experience and enjoyment of childhood itself, feeding their imaginations and giving them the language and stories to enrich their lives.

We believe that reading has three core benefits for children: intrinsic enjoyment; helping children to develop their understanding of the world and empathy for others; and enabling them to do well at school and in later life. Our campaign is on behalf of children, but because of its social, economic and cultural implications, it matters to all of us.

2.1 EARLY LANGUAGE AND READING

Good early language skills are the foundation of all learning and social skills. There is overwhelming evidence linking early language and communication skills with reading and language ability in later childhood, even accounting for differences in children's family background. The core elements of early speech, language and communication – processing sounds, understanding and use of vocabulary, recognising tone and context, the ability to listen and concentrate – provide the building blocks for learning to read and continue to be important right through school. A two-year-old's language development strongly predicts their reading skills on entry to school.² Worryingly, children from low-income families in England lag behind their high income counterparts in vocabulary by the age of 16 months.³

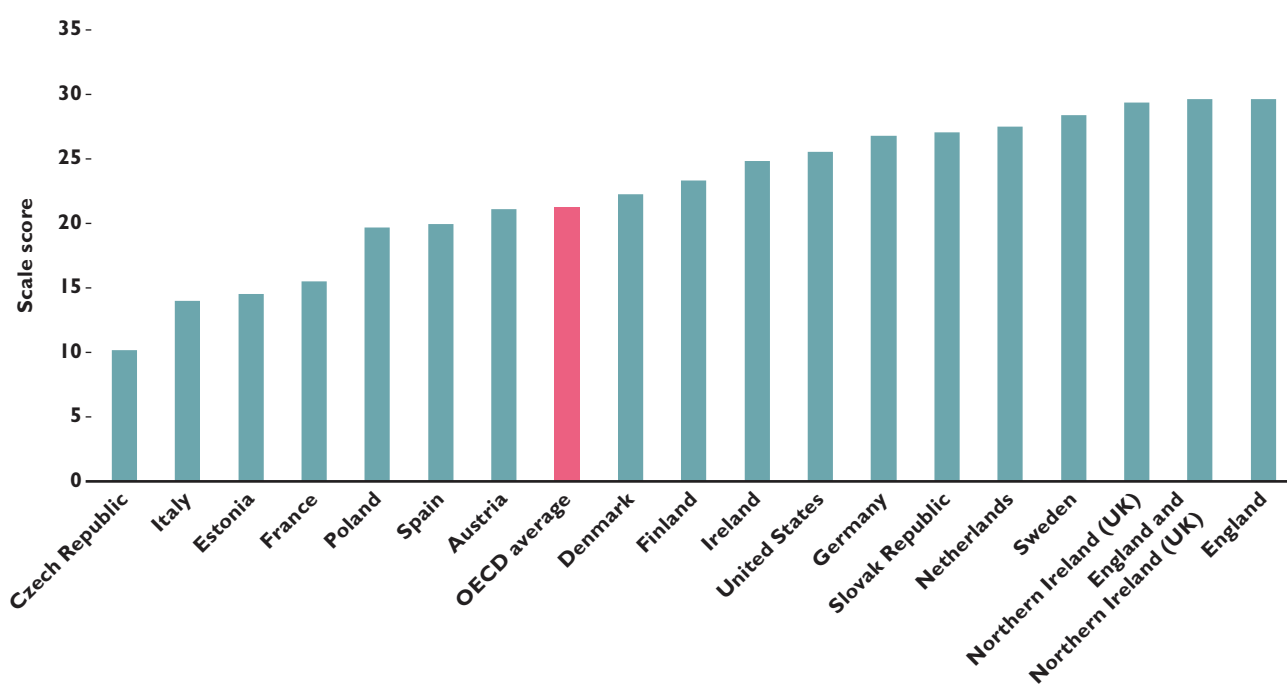
Reading with parents, carers, family and friends at an early age also offers a vital foundation for later learning. Children of all backgrounds who were read to regularly by their parents at age five performed better in maths, vocabulary and spelling at age 16 than those who were not read to.⁴

2.2 READING AND EQUALITY

England is one of the most socially unequal countries in the developed world and recent evidence suggests that the situation is getting worse, with alarming indications that social mobility is decreasing. Literacy and reading reflect and reinforce social and economic inequality. The areas in England with the lowest literacy are the most economically disadvantaged.

The evidence connecting low literacy to social and economic inequality is compelling: adults with functional literacy earn 16% more than those without.⁵ The relationship between literacy levels and employment in England is the strongest in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The implications are stark: children in the UK who fail to learn to read are more economically vulnerable than their counterparts internationally. They have fewer opportunities open to them when they leave school, reinforcing the cycle of disadvantage and preventing social mobility.

FIGURE 1 DIFFERENCE IN LITERACY SCORE BETWEEN THOSE EMPLOYED FULL TIME AND THOSE UNEMPLOYED



Source: National Literacy Trust analysis of OECD PIAAC data; *Literacy Changes Lives 2014: A new perspective on health, employment and crime*. For source data see http://skills.oecd.org/documents/OECD_Skills_Outlook_2013.pdf

2.3 READING AND THE ECONOMY

Reading is also a vital skill for our economy. Research undertaken for *Read On. Get On.* has demonstrated that if every child left primary school with the reading skills they need, our economy could be more than £32.1 billion bigger by 2025.⁶ Based on 2013 National Statistics data this would equate to more than £500 per household in 2014, nearly £900 in 2020 and more than £1,200 per household by 2025.⁷

The skills deficit is felt acutely by many businesses. The CBI has found that 37% of businesses are dissatisfied with young people's literacy skills and use of English, with 40% or more providing remedial training in basic skills to school and college leavers.⁸

2.4 READING AND SOCIAL, PERSONAL, INTELLECTUAL AND HEALTH OUTCOMES

The inequalities extend beyond economic impact: 48% of offenders in custody have reading skills at or below the level expected of an 11-year-old.⁹ Many of these inequalities could be prevented by addressing early literacy failure.

Reading engagement and reading for pleasure lead to a range of social, personal, and intellectual outcomes. These include enjoyment, social and cultural capital, social interaction, knowledge, creativity, empathy, self-expression and understanding of self and others. They also lead to health and wellbeing outcomes such as mental health, physical health and relaxation.¹⁰ 37% of people who rate their health as "very poor" are functionally illiterate, compared with 11% who have these skills.¹¹ This shows that reading for pleasure contributes to wider positive social, cultural and health outcomes.

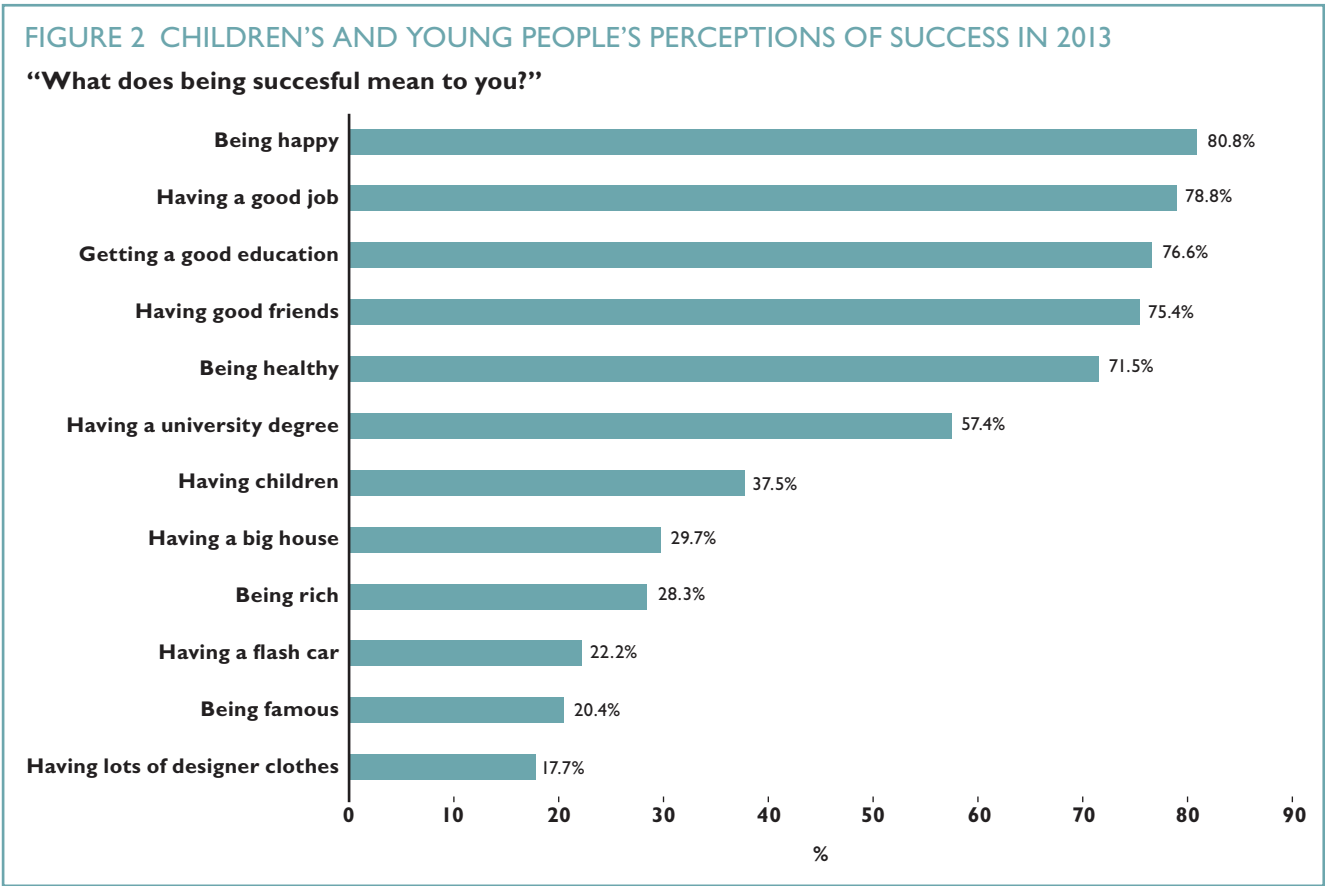
2.5 READING AND CREATIVITY

Reading is also closely linked to creativity. The ability to synthesise ideas, take and understand creative risks and draw on the creative genius of others is fuelled by reading. Children who read widely and enjoy reading do consistently better in their own writing, a sign that their imaginations are being fuelled.

Creativity not only sits at the heart of the arts, it also drives scientific and entrepreneurial development across communities and the economy. Reading fuels and empowers this.

2.6 WHY CHILDREN THINK READING IS IMPORTANT

Children have a keen sense of the importance of reading and see it affecting their happiness, employment and education. In response to the question “Does reading help you to be successful?” 64.6% of 30,000 children and young people between 8 and 18 said yes (9.8% said no; 25.5% weren’t sure).¹² The survey went on to ask them what being successful meant to them. Happiness and employment were the most popular answers.



Source: National Literacy Trust, Unpublished data

3 DEFINING OUR GOALS

3.1 ALL CHILDREN WILL BE READING WELL BY THE AGE OF 11, BY 2025

We believe that by the age of 11, children should be able to read and enjoy age-appropriate books, including whole novels, with confidence and fluency. They should be able to use context to work out the meaning of unfamiliar words; predict what might happen next in a story based on explicit and implicit details; and recognise how authors use language in different contexts.

We recognise that a small number of children will not be able to reach this standard of reading by the end of primary school. Our highly ambitious but achievable target is for around **96% of children in England to read well by the age of 11, and for every child in England to enjoy reading.**

At the moment, the definition of “reading well” and how to assess it is contested. New assessment practices in primary schools have created confusion as to how well our children are reading and what skills and behaviours are included in an assessment of whether a child can read well. The National Curriculum now incorporates requirements to support children’s enjoyment of reading, as well as decoding and comprehension skills, but assessment at the end of primary school covers only children’s comprehension skills (particularly deduction and inference).

We need to work together as a sector to move away from a simple definition of reading well as only the effective mastering of decoding and comprehension skills. There is ample evidence to demonstrate that enjoyment drives the core skills of reading¹³ and that reading enjoyment, reading frequency and reading attainment are all closely linked. The intrinsic value of reading for enjoyment is also well documented and it is particularly strongly related to social mobility.¹⁴

We believe that a wider definition of reading well is required if we are to make a substantive long-term change to children’s reading and create a nation of lifelong readers. We need a stronger focus on affective reading processes – motivation, enjoyment of books and engagement with language and stories – and a greater investment in activities designed to develop and support children’s reading.

There is no one source of data which allows us to measure reading well across both cognitive and affective processes. Therefore, one of our key aims as a coalition is to campaign for, and support the development of, a series of measures which will bring us far closer to this understanding.

3.2 ALL CHILDREN WILL BE ACHIEVING GOOD LEVELS OF LANGUAGE, EARLY LITERACY AND READING DEVELOPMENT BY THE AGE OF FIVE, BY 2020

The early years of a child's life are a critical time when early skills are acquired and behaviours are developed which enable them to develop as a reader.

Fundamental to these are speech, communication and language skills and early reading and literacy. By the age of five, most children should be able to listen attentively in a range of situations, follow relatively complex instructions and speak confidently. We estimate that at least **90% of young children could be expected to reach this level of development in language and communication with the right support.**

The temporary reinstatement of the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile provides a functional non-standardised statutory measure of children's communication and language. This is predicted to change as baseline measures are introduced in the future. Ensuring that children's language and communication is a core part of any baseline measure will be essential to ensure consistency.

As well as these skills, early childhood experiences of reading and literacy, including shared reading, are essential. Children need to start school with familiarity with concepts of print and an emerging interest in books, stories and rhymes. The work of families, early years settings, library-based activity and community services are vital in laying the foundations which create lifelong readers.



PHOTO: ELENA HEATHERWICK/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Ella, 3, balances a stack of books at her school in Greater Manchester

4 TRENDS IN CHILDREN'S EARLY LANGUAGE AND READING

4.1 READING ATTAINMENT

As a country, we have been achieving high standards in reading for the majority of children. In 2015, 80% of 11-year-olds achieved at least the expected standard in reading, up from fewer than half in 1995, with major increases made under the Primary National Literacy Strategy from 1997 to 2000.

However, new primary assessment arrangements introduced in 2016 to complement the new National Curriculum show only 66% of 11-year-olds reached the expected level in reading. This is lower than in writing, mathematics and grammar and spelling. The Government has insisted that this is not comparable with previous years' attainment data.

In 2014 only 56.9% of pupils entitled to free school meals made the expected level of progress in English

between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 compared with 74.1% of all other pupils.¹⁵ While it is arguable that the previous expectation of children's literacy attainment was too low, the latest assessment data suggests an urgent need to develop consistent year-on-year monitoring of how well our children are reading.

Maintaining a clear, comprehensive and consistent picture of the reading skills, behaviours and attitudes of our children is vital. We need to know how well we are serving them and the challenges they are likely to face in secondary school and in life. Good data and evaluation, produced on a collaborative basis, will be absolutely vital in achieving our aims.

We also need to ensure continued support for schools in this drive to raise standards, in the light of proposals to remove this role from local authorities.

CASE STUDY MAKING READING PART OF THE FABRIC OF THE SCHOOL – AND BUILDING GREAT READERS

For one primary school, enjoying reading and learning the fundamental skills of reading go hand in hand to enable children to develop into readers. Reading is part of the fabric of school life and children are involved at every step. The school uses a range of resources from BookTrust and other charities to support driving forward its work. Key Stage 2 pupils are role models to younger pupils and regularly read with their 'book buddy'. Year 6 students are given responsibility for a small book budget in order to learn about managing money and choosing books for their school library. The school links with the local

public library to ensure all children can get hold of a book during school holidays. And pupils don't just study the work of great authors, they have opportunities to meet and talk to authors and illustrators through carefully planned visits and workshops in the school every year.

Every part of the school is designed to be a place where pupils can engage with reading and enjoy a book. And everyone in the school – staff included – sees themselves as a reader. This approach has resulted in significant improvements in student attainment at the end of Key Stage 2.

4.2 READING FOR ENJOYMENT

Recent high reading attainment has been matched by high levels of reading for enjoyment among children and young people. In 2015, only 10.4% of children and young people did not enjoy reading at all; 54.8% said they enjoy reading either very much or quite a lot; and 34.8% said they only enjoy reading a bit.¹⁶

Research also suggests that children are increasingly likely to be spending their own time reading. Levels of daily reading are increasing among children and young people. 32.2% of young people read daily in 2013; this rose to 43.0% in 2015. Only 1 child in 7 (13.5%) rarely or never reads outside class.

These positive trends seem to be the result of a number of factors. These statistics include digital and online reading, which is increasingly popular with all age groups. At the same time, the past decade has seen a growth in understanding of the importance of children's reading and reading enjoyment by parents, teachers and, crucially, by Ofsted and the new National Curriculum. The third sector has led the way with a number of national reading programmes

such as Bookstart, Chatterbooks and the Summer Reading Challenge in libraries, which have become foundation activities for the reading lives of a generation of children.

The current generation of children have also grown up in a golden age of British children's literature. From Rowling to Pullman, a generation of writers and illustrators of unprecedented genius has stimulated young people's reading.

At the same time the increases we have seen in children's reading enjoyment cannot be taken for granted. The easy, free and universal access to books and positive reading environments which libraries offer is under threat in some communities. This is happening despite them being recognised as an established, cost-effective and powerful partner in the fight for poverty reduction, economic development and learning for all.¹⁷

CASE STUDY SUMMER READING CHALLENGE

The Reading Agency's Summer Reading Challenge is one of the country's biggest reading for pleasure programmes. Developed and delivered in partnership with The Society of Chief Librarians and The Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians, it is now in its 17th year and runs in public libraries across the whole of the UK during the school summer holidays. Every year the challenge has a different theme but the goal is always the same – to inspire more children to read more and to do so by making reading exciting and fun. There are lots of incentives and rewards to encourage children to keep reading: special collector cards for every book read, some digital magic via a great app sponsored by SOLUS, a website where children chat to each other about the books they are reading, make recommendations and enter competitions.

Everyone who completes the Challenge and reads six books is awarded a certificate in a special ceremony organised by their local library.

The 2016 Challenge was developed in partnership with the Roald Dahl Literary Estate and called The Big Friendly Read, with art work created by Sir Quentin Blake. It focused on the themes which run through all Dahl's books (invention, mischief, adventure and friendship) and featured some of Dahl's best loved characters.

In 2015 more than 800,000 children, mostly aged between 4 and 11, took part and 9,000 young people volunteered in their local library as part of the Reading Hack programme helping children to get involved and to read their six books.

CASE STUDY BOOKSTART BABY

After receiving books from BookTrust's Bookstart Baby programme, one parent explained about the routine that she had developed and how both she and her partner have been "astonished" by their baby's positive reaction to the Bookstart books, even at a very young age.

"We do it every night and try and do some during the day as well... We're still reading every day... those two books we got given because I was so impressed... the first time I read it to him... lying on the bed and I propped him up on the pillow. I was

just astonished at how engaged he was. A couple of nights after, my husband was like 'come and just watch this!' He took pictures and he couldn't believe it either. My baby's face! You know he was really loving it... and so we've been doing it all the time since then... [We've used] the nursery rhyme books and other stories as well but we always go back to those two [from the Bookstart programme], cos I think they're the right age for him."

Canterbury Christ Church University, 2016. *The role of the Bookstart gifting process in supporting shared reading*, London: BookTrust

4.3 EARLY SPEECH AND LANGUAGE

In 2015, 80% of five-year-olds achieved a good level of development in language and communication, up from 60% in 2007. This development has been driven by programmes like Every Child A Talker and the development of a national strategic perspective established by John Berrow's Review¹⁸ in 2008.

The charity I CAN, a member of the *Read On. Get On.* coalition, has summarised the current situation in evidence submitted for this strategy:

Children's early language levels have improved, particularly where there has been a focus on

supporting children with delayed language development. However, there is an inconsistent pattern nationwide. There continues to be a significant number of children without the language skills needed to start to learn to read. This is highest in areas of deprivation.

Consistent monitoring of our children's early language and communication development is essential. The move away from baseline testing and the reinstatement of the Early Years Foundation Stage profiling of communication, language, early literacy and reading development are to be welcomed. But we need assurance that children's language and communication will be a core part of any baseline measure in the future.

CASE STUDY ACHIEVING EARLY

Achievement for All's Achieving Early pilot had a significant impact on parent confidence, child progress and practitioner confidence.

At the start, 47% of parents expressed a lack of confidence or knowledge about supporting their child's learning. At the end of the two-year pilot 94% of parents said that 'Taking Time for Talk' conversations were helpful or very helpful in supporting their child's learning.

Data also shows that the overall progress of children participating in the pilot was significantly better than for the same groups nationally (participants included children with special educational needs or disability and those eligible

for free school meals). Assessment data in two of the prime areas, communication and language and personal, social and emotional development (PSED) was even more marked. At the start only 23% of PSED assessments showed children were attaining an age-appropriate level; this rose to 73% by the end of the two years.

The programme also had a significant impact in supporting practitioners to gain skills and confidence in working with parents. At the start over 40% of practitioners at Level 1–2 and 25% of practitioners at Level 3 expressed a significant lack of confidence in working with parents. By the end 92% of all practitioners said they were either very confident or confident communicating with parents.

4.4 READING AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT AND CHILD POVERTY

Despite significant gains, some groups of children still face a greater risk of missing out – especially children living in poverty and those with an identified special educational need or disability (with a great deal of overlap between these two groups). The relationship between social class and children's reading by age 11 is stronger in the UK than in any other European country apart from Romania. The challenge starts early: in 2015, nearly a quarter of children eligible for free school meals did not meet the expected levels in communication and language development by the age of five.

In fact, the gap emerges even earlier. New analysis of the Millennium Cohort Study by Newcastle University has identified that children from the lowest income group were on average 17 months behind children from the highest income group at the age of three.¹⁹

We take child poverty seriously because the experience of poverty can lead to low levels of early language development and weaker reading skills. Stronger early language and literacy skills can mitigate the impact of child poverty and support social mobility.

Child poverty statistics indicate a gentle decline in the number of children living in relative low income since 1997, with a more marked decline for those living in absolute low income. However, the Institute of Fiscal Studies²⁰ has predicted a considerable increase in the number of children in relative low income between 2013/14 and 2020/21, which would reverse much of the declining trend experienced since the late 1990s. Predicted reductions in the number of children living in absolute low income households are also likely to be reversed by the end of this period, due to the impact of planned benefits and tax credit changes.

Analysis of these trends will be required to predict where additional early reading and language interventions will be needed. As well as the obvious physical difficulties provided by insecure or overcrowded housing, living under constant financial strain often has an understandable impact on parent–child relationships, which are key for the acquisition of early language and reading skills.

4.5 READING, EARLY LANGUAGE AND GENDER

Boys continue to read less well than girls and the gap is particularly large by international standards. In 2016, Save the Children estimated that 80,000 boys had fallen behind by the age of five the previous year; boys in England are nearly twice as likely as girls to fall behind in early language and communication.²¹ There is an identified gap in the evidence exploring the reasons for this, but a review of available evidence found it likely to be due to a combination of factors involving boys participating less in language-related activities, and being less likely to acquire the characteristics associated with literacy.²²

In 2012 a Commission of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Literacy²³ examining the issue of boys' reading concluded that the gap was the product of an interplay of factors:

- the home and family environment, where girls are more likely to be bought books and taken to the library, and where mothers are more likely to support and role model reading
- the school environment, where teachers may have a limited knowledge of contemporary and attractive texts for boys and where boys may not be given the opportunity to develop their identity as a reader through experiencing reading for enjoyment
- male gender identities, which do not value learning and reading as a mark of success.

Clearly the issue of identity and early reading and language needs to be addressed. The growth in campaigns and programmes promoting reading to children and young people has helped transform the national reading landscape, but more needs to be done specifically for those children who still do not think that reading is for the likes of them.

CASE STUDY PREMIER LEAGUE READING STARS

The National Literacy Trust's flagship football-themed literacy intervention, Premier League Reading Stars (PLRS), engages primary school children in England and Wales who love football but lack motivation to engage with and achieve in literacy. The programme is particularly effective at closing the attainment gap between those who are underachieving and those who are reaching the expected standards. The ten-session programme improves reading scores and motivates participants to enjoy reading and writing with a range of football-focused resources to support schools, libraries, clubs and other settings to harness children's passion for football and create a team of readers.

Evaluation has shown that three out of four children made at least six months' progress in reading in just ten weeks and one child in three made a year's progress or more. Furthermore,

after participating, 77% of pupils agreed with the statement "I'm proud that I'm a reader." While the programme is suitable for both boys and girls, many teachers select boys to take part, as they are often well represented in the group of those who are underachieving. Boys who took part went from having mostly negative attitudes to reading prior to participation (66% said they "disliked reading" or only "liked reading a bit") to mostly positive attitudes after the project (73% said they like reading "quite a lot" or "very much").

A subject leader of English who delivered the programme said: "Without it I honestly believe that we would have continually struggled to engage the children in reading, and certainly wouldn't have made it as fun... it really has made a massive difference in the way that the boys view reading now."

CASE STUDY BOOKSTART CORNER

Halima was interested in taking part in BookTrust's Bookstart Corner programme as she was worried that although she was trying to introduce shared reading activities at home, she didn't feel her son, Modu, engaged in the way she would have expected for his age (for example, he rarely let her read in front of him and would push books away).

Sarah, a children's centre practitioner, delivered the programme to Modu and Halima in their home, and as the visits continued, Modu showed more interest in the books which were included in the programme resources, and would often stop to listen and move to the rhymes and songs.

Halima had been keen to learn about shared reading from an experienced professional. The programme allowed her to see how well Sarah's patient child-centred approach worked and Halima became more involved in the activities with Modu as the sessions progressed. She was very clear that the sessions had had a positive influence on her interactions with Modu generally and recognised a change in Modu's approach to communicating with her as well as showing more interest in books, songs and rhymes.

Rix, Parry, Drury, Messer and Hancock, 2015. *The family experience of Bookstart Corner: an evaluation of Bookstart Corner*, London: BookTrust

4.6 COMMON FACTORS AND LOCAL CONTEXTS

Poverty is a strong risk factor in literacy development. However, while many poor children struggle, others do well despite their challenges. The quality of local schools and services, and the social and community context, are important in determining the impact of poverty on language, communication and reading.

Last year, the *Read On. Get On.* coalition published an important study²⁴ looking at how well children from poorer backgrounds were being supported in their communication and reading development. The report concluded that poorer children in rural communities, market towns and coastal communities faced particular challenges.

In order to achieve our goals, the challenges of supporting the reading and language of children growing up in very different communities need to be recognised. No single model will work for all. Local challenges need to be identified, and local resources need to be harnessed. The common factors that will transform children's outcomes are leadership, focus and partnerships. National programmes are invaluable; we have seen the benefits which come when they are integrated and adapted locally,

particularly to support specific challenges groups of children may face (for example, to support children with visual impairments to have a rich experience of reading).

There is also an opportunity to think more innovatively about what comprises a "learning environment". Public libraries that offer access to free reading materials, professional help and support and reading activities and events are a vital resource for local communities. However, we should be looking to utilise other spaces also. For example, there are hairdressers where children are actively encouraged to read while getting their hair cut, and the Romanian city of Cluj-Napoca provided free use of public transport during a particular week to anyone reading a book. Can we do more to ingrain supported opportunities for childhood reading into locations where millions of us take our children every week? Our towns and cities have many empty shops at present, which offer an opportunity for small pop-up libraries. Or could we provide book corners in supermarkets? We need to further explore how to effectively design provision and services that could support reading to become a social norm in households where it currently isn't. This could act as a springboard to encourage harder-to-reach groups to access libraries and other reading provision.

CASE STUDY THE BLACKPOOL CHALLENGE

The Blackpool Challenge was launched in 2015 to drive up pupil progress across the town, specifically targeting academy and maintained schools rated by Ofsted as inadequate or requiring improvement.

The initiative aims to make all the town's schools "good" or "outstanding" by 2019 and will include a focus on leadership, quality teaching and high expectations of learners, as well as

raising aspirations and employment prospects for young people.

It's an ambitious target set by the council and the Regional Schools Commissioner and follows similar initiatives in London, Greater Manchester and the Black Country, which tackled poor pupil outcomes and supported challenging schools across the areas.

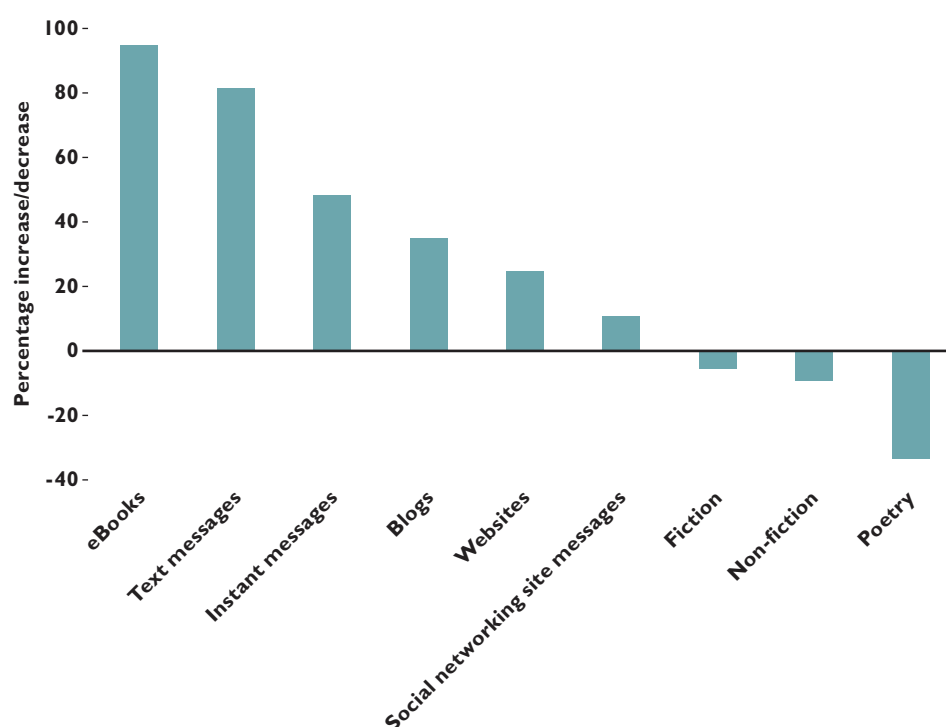
4.7 THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY

Our goals also need to be understood in the context of children's rapidly changing experience of communicating and reading. As well as creating new challenges, social and technological changes provide potentially significant opportunities to raise levels of children's reading. Year-on-year data shows that how children communicate, and what children read, is changing, influenced by technology, trends in publishing and the interests and behaviours of an increasingly culturally diverse market.

It is important that the potential of digital technology is harnessed appropriately and seen as a complementary tool rather than a challenge to

more traditional print media. It could be particularly useful in closing the gender gap, which the National Literacy Strategy of the late 1990s and early 2000s did little to reduce, despite making significant literacy gains across the board as noted above. We need to continue to evaluate and explore the value of eBooks and other digital technology as routes to engage boys with reading, where the greatest impact has been noted among those who have stated their lack of enjoyment in reading. The use of technology in reading is helping to improve the perception of reading as "cool" and increasing the way children can access books, which in turn has a positive impact on the number of children who find enjoyment in reading.²⁵

FIGURE 3 PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN MATERIALS READ BETWEEN 2010 AND 2013



Source: Clark, C (2014). *The Literacy Lives of 8 to 11-year-olds: 2005–2013*. Part of Read On. Get On. (2014) *How reading can help children escape poverty*.

PART TWO

INFLUENCES ON CHILDREN'S READING

5 THE EARLY YEARS

5.1 EARLY LANGUAGE AND LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

The first few years of a child's life are a period of rapid development, making this a vital time for the emergence of language and communication skills. Without strong early language and communication skills, early reading practices and a positive home literacy environment, children will often struggle to learn to read when they start school. As such, a child's early language and literacy development can have an impact which extends far into adulthood. A child with weak language skills at the age of five is much less likely to be a strong reader at the age of 11 than a five-year-old with strong language skills – and good early language skills are even more significant for a child growing up in poverty. In addition, the *Read On. Get On.* coalition's research²⁶ has highlighted that language skills at the age of three have a huge impact on a child's language development by the age of five, demonstrating clearly that concentration on language development from birth onwards is critical. Regular and consistent reading to and with babies and young children in the home was a consistent factor among those children who were reading in advance of their peers.²⁷

The Royal College of Midwives explains that a baby's brain contains approximately 100 billion neurons at birth and, as a result of social interactions, these

make rapid connections. Connections that are not used often die back and hence, by the age of one, a baby's connections for their native language have already been reinforced at the expense of others.²⁸

By the age of five, a child should be able to talk to and be understood by new people, use full sentences and ask lots of "why?" questions. They should be able to understand and talk about events in the past and future and use most of the everyday words that an adult uses.²⁹ In very simple developmental terms, a child should typically start to speak around the age of one, create simple sentences by two, tell simple stories by three and express their thoughts in a more complex way by age four.³⁰

Children should also be displaying knowledge linked to early literacy – building up pictures or characters, exploring a plot or theme, listening to stories, accurately anticipating key events, responding with relevant questions, comments or actions, and making links between text and their own experiences. They should also have knowledge of various written forms and familiarity with the concepts of print – for example, understanding the difference between pictures and print, turning pages and recognising the parts of a book. They should be displaying early literacy behaviours such as an emerging interest in books and stories, wanting to read books and stories, and having a favourite book or story.

5.2 THE INFLUENCES ON EARLY LANGUAGE AND LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

The strongest influence on children's early language and literacy development are parents and carers – through a combination of:

- Parents' physical and mental health in pregnancy and early childhood
- The strength of early attachment and regular positive interactions between child and parents or carers from birth
- Parents' use of language, including tone, rhythm, complexity of grammar and range of vocabulary. Reciprocity of interaction begins at an early stage and babies will stop trying to interact if they continually fail to receive a response.
- The quality and extent of experience of early reading practices, including both being regularly read to from an early age and the depth of this interaction
- The quality of early learning opportunities in the home, including the range of toys, and parents' regular play with their child
- The impact of poverty and disadvantage, which can make consistent, positive interactions more

difficult because of stress and anxiety, as well as the impact of material deprivation.

For cultural, lifestyle and economic reasons, grandparents and the extended family are increasingly significant influences in early childhood and offer valuable ways to enrich the home learning environment.

Childhood is heavily influenced by the social, technological, economic and cultural context of the child and family. These have a formative impact on early language, literacy and reading development. The wider the range of services brought in to support the child's early language development, the stronger their development will be. Key community resources include:

- Early health services, including midwife and health visiting services and GPs, in particular the health checks that are carried out during the first years of a child's life
- Family and parenting support, including children's centres and parenting advice
- Formal childcare, with strong evidence that high-quality childcare provided by well-trained staff from the age of one can boost children's early language, reading and learning



Joanne and daughter Winifred play together at a Stay and Play session at a Children's Centre in south London

- Libraries, museums and other cultural services, which often focus on young children's learning, providing access to books and toys as well as support and activities open to all families, especially rhyme times in public libraries
- Support for early literacy and language from a wide range of local, national and third sector organisations delivered through community resources and community spaces such as public libraries.

5.3 PRIORITIES FOR STRENGTHENING EARLY LANGUAGE AND LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

STRONGER SUPPORT FOR ALL PARENTS

Many parents continue to struggle with regular, sustained and positive interactions, because of a lack of confidence, time or capacity, or because they underestimate their impact on young children. A renewed focus on professional development is required for all early years practitioners (including health visitors and children's centre staff) to enable them to maintain the skills to support parents to assist their children with early language and literacy development and to identify and refer children who need extra help. Early years settings can access support by maximising their use of programmes such as Achievement for All's Achieving Early, the National Literacy Trust's Early Words Together, I CAN's Early Talk Boost, or BookTrust's Bookstart Corner, which are particularly targeted to improve outcomes for children vulnerable to underachievement. Greater priority should be given to early language and reading in local public health strategies, especially in light of the lifelong impact literacy skills can have on long-term health outcomes.

TARGETED SUPPORT FOR PARENTS UNDER PRESSURE

With many family services under intense financial pressure, and major local variations in access and quality, targeted support is vital. Some of the geographic areas most in need of enhanced support are having to reduce services due to competition for resources and this will have a knock-on effect on outcomes. While it may be most appropriate for these targets to be identified at national level, there must be flexibility for local delivery to increase efficiency and respond to local need.

INCREASED EVIDENCE ABOUT WHAT WORKS IN STRENGTHENING THE HOME LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

It is particularly important to know what really works to change parents' behaviour in a way that has a positive effect on children's early communication and literacy skills and behaviours.

MORE AFFORDABLE HIGH-QUALITY CHILDCARE

Quality of childcare remains highly variable across England and there is no national strategy for raising quality while extending entitlements. There is also much excellent childcare on offer which we need to support and learn from. More emphasis is required in assisting and encouraging the most disadvantaged families to access early years settings and particular focus is required to ensure that these pre-school facilities provide high-quality early years education. In addition to the 15 free weekly pre-school hours available to all children aged three and four, access is now provided to the 40% most disadvantaged two-year-olds. The evaluation of the pilot programme of free early education for two-year-olds found that children using this entitlement had stronger vocabulary development than similar children who did not but that the quality of the nursery care was critical to this development.³¹ The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study survey in 2011 highlighted that attendance at pre-school is positively associated with higher reading achievement. Pre-school education has the biggest positive impact on children's language skills when it is led by a trained teacher or early years graduate (as shown by the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education project). As the majority of the sector will likely remain at non-graduate level, further upskilling of the early years workforce is essential, together with improved retention of skilled and experienced early years practitioners. This can be difficult in a sector which is often low paid and hence enhanced continuous professional development (CPD) and progression routes are required to incentivise remaining within the sector and continually extending skill levels. Investment will be needed to meet these aims.

Established, well-evidenced routes to quality CPD such as the Level 3 award Supporting Children and Young People's Speech, Language and Communication, accessed online via The Communication Trust, or I CAN's Early Language Development Programme, should be promoted.

6 PRIMARY SCHOOL YEARS

6.1 THE TEACHING OF READING

Building on the language, communication and emergent literacy developed in early childhood, children's reading skills typically develop rapidly once they start primary school. The latest evidence suggests the key drivers of reading skills at this age are:

- The effectiveness of the teaching of reading at school, especially evidence for the benefits of systematic phonics for young primary children and for a range of reading comprehension strategies
- A continued emphasis on developing oral language skills³² for reading comprehension and decoding more complex syntax, particularly for primary school-aged children with language or reading comprehension difficulties³³
- The frequency with which children read independently, for enjoyment rather than a specific learning outcome³⁴
- Parents' and carers' engagement in children's learning and the creation of a positive learning environment at home, with significant inequalities in engagement by social class, ethnic background and gender. A positive home learning environment is shown to have more impact than parental occupation³⁵
- Parents' and carers' own reading skills and enjoyment of reading
- Support for reading in the community, especially access to a diverse range of books and reading material, including in public and school libraries, and advice on the latest books, authors and reading-related activities³⁶
- Cultural attitudes to reading, particularly the value placed on books and reading in the home, and in peer groups; and wider cultural attitudes to reading.

Reading is an affective as well as a cognitive process and for children to read well by the age of 11 they need to develop an identity as a reader. That means

they need to be given the opportunity to read texts that correspond to their interests, feel in control of their reading and develop an intrinsic motivation to read. For many children this means that they will read for pleasure frequently and extensively.

Recent research has suggested that whether a young person reads for enjoyment is more powerful than the social background of the child in determining their attainment.³⁷ In addition, positive relationships – between teachers and children, between teachers, between children and families and between children, teachers, families and communities – are shown to have a strong influence on reading for pleasure.

6.2 PRIORITIES FOR IMPROVING CHILDREN'S READING

CONSOLIDATE AND BUILD ON MAJOR IMPROVEMENTS IN PHONICS TEACHING

The evidence suggests that phonics is a highly effective way to teach reading, especially for younger learners between four and seven years old.³⁸ The government's strong leadership and advocacy for systematic phonics means that to a large extent it is embedded in the practice of English primary schools. Ofsted inspection of the teaching of phonics and in initial teaching training is supported by rigorous guidance.³⁹

STRONGER FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT OF CHILDREN'S READING

Teachers need to know not only how to teach phonics effectively but also how to teach the other aspects of reading which cannot be addressed through phonics teaching. In particular, it is important that teachers have professional development in effective assessment as well as in the use of particular phonic techniques and materials.⁴⁰

ACCESS TO THE LATEST EVIDENCE-BASED PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES FOR TEACHERS, TEACHING ASSISTANTS AND SCHOOL GOVERNORS

This is essential to support children's acquisition of the full range of reading skills. The evidence base being created by the Education Endowment Foundation offers useful insight into what is effective, as do other evidence digests.⁴¹ But the challenge remains how evidence can be used more widely and in a range of ways to support the design and implementation of programmes that have impact on the ground and are implementable in the contexts in which they are delivered. This includes how research and learning can be better disseminated, and the implications of research communicated in a way that supports learning and understanding of what works for whom, how and why, as well as how professional and leadership decisions can incorporate consideration of evidence and research. This issue, particularly in the context of the teaching of reading, needs to be a fundamental focus for the planned College of Teaching. The Education Endowment Foundation needs to strengthen its dissemination activity and widen its links with the various stakeholders in the system, including advocating for resource and support to develop and apply evidence to service improvement and design.

EXPLORATION OF WHY A CHILD MIGHT BE STRUGGLING WITH READING IN ORDER TO MATCH THE NEED WITH AN APPROPRIATE APPROACH OR INTERVENTION

As well as ensuring that children with additional needs or disabilities are well-supported, it is important to understand why individual children might be finding reading difficult and to acknowledge that different approaches are appropriate for different children. For example, consider the differing needs of i) a child who can read adequately but does not particularly enjoy it; ii) a child who has the basics of literacy but does not read fluently; iii) a child who can decode but cannot comprehend what they are reading easily; iv) a child who cannot decode easily; v) a child who cannot read at all. There are already a wide variety of resources and programmes in existence and it is vital these are made use of by correctly matching the specific need with a corresponding intervention.

A MODEL FOR HOW A "SELF-IMPROVING SCHOOLS SYSTEM" WOULD WORK

Serious consideration is needed about where school improvement capacity will exist when this role is removed from the duties of local authorities. This is particularly the case in geographical areas where there is a concentration of the minority of schools that have significant challenges, including low expectations, weak whole-school literacy strategies and insufficient support for children with additional needs. The spring 2016 Education White Paper accelerated core policy themes which have characterised Conservative education policy. While there is now a new Secretary of State, who will bring her own priorities and themes to the Department for Education, it is unlikely that the themes in the White Paper will be abandoned.

SUSTAINED STRATEGY TO DRAMATICALLY INCREASE READING FOR PLEASURE ESPECIALLY FOR CHILDREN WHO ARE NOT ALREADY EXCITED BY READING

We need a more sustained strategy that promotes reading for enjoyment in schools at the same time as recognising the importance of support for reading outside school. The rich view of reading demonstrates that in terms of motivational factors, a child's connection and involvement with the text is key and, as a result, the appropriateness of the reading material for an individual will almost always be critical for their enjoyment of it. There is currently no consistent training for teachers in mechanisms to potentially excite an interest in reading among different groups of pupils and a lack of up-to-date resources to support this. In particular, the English subject knowledge of primary teachers and how to engage children with reading and reading for pleasure need to be addressed. Many have a tentative knowledge of contemporary children's literature and the wider reading materials that are essential in engaging young readers. This knowledge has been negatively affected by the closure of many local authority school library services. Primary school libraries themselves are not statutory and vary massively in terms of quality and resources. The evidence is clear: school libraries have an impact on attainment when they are effectively managed, have strong and diverse collections and are integrated with the curriculum.⁴² Sadly, few primary school libraries meet these criteria. A campaign to

promote reading for enjoyment in school and outside schools will ensure messages are consistent and support for reading also comes from the home and wider community.

STRONGER SUPPORT FOR PRIMARY LEADERSHIP

Middle leaders specialising in English, literacy or reading are crucial for ensuring that primaries have strong whole-school literacy strategies capable of driving progress for all pupils, including those with extra needs. Middle leaders also promote professional development and effective practice among classroom teachers. Stronger support for

middle leaders could come from new qualifications, supported by teaching schools and academy chains with outstanding literacy provision. Primary heads also have a vital role in driving up reading standards, by setting expectations and holding middle leaders to account for improvements. Organisations like Future Leaders and the NAHT have a key role in developing and supporting the next generation of primary heads. There is also an important role for *Read On. Get On.* coalition members to support heads and middle leaders to be aware of the range of support and provision to help them that exists already.



PHOTO: MAGDA RAKITASAVE THE CHILDREN

A staff member interacts with children at a nursery in Ormskirk, Lancashire

PART THREE

PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

7 A NEW KIND OF READING AND LITERACY STRATEGY

We believe that strategic thinking about children's reading needs to undergo a step change if our ambitious goals are to be met and no child is to be left behind.

The National Literacy Strategy made a significant inroad, but, after initial success, its impact plateaued. Gains were made through a national programme of structured support for teachers, but the government no longer has apparatus to implement this kind of consistent programme. Furthermore, the characteristics of the current challenge are that it is localised so a single uniform, top-down approach will not work.

Therefore, we are proposing a different kind of a strategy. A new type of campaign is needed, which builds on the expertise of teachers and the strengths of settings, schools, libraries and the third sector, and which mobilises society.

Rather than delivering a national literacy strategy we want to develop a shared national literacy plan, building on the strengths that already exist. Fundamentally, this step change is about collaboration. No one organisation or sector can achieve the *Read On. Get On.* goals on their own.

Our campaign must be a shared endeavour; strategic partnerships need to be developed between key players. The *Read On. Get On.* coalition seeks to model this approach but it needs to be replicated between government departments and local services.

Crucially, these partnerships must include the public, voluntary and business sectors as well as new partners – particularly business, publishing and media partners. This will enable us to work at greater scale and tap into new resources. Children, families and communities must also be treated as core partners, with approaches that mobilise their skills and recognise their needs and expectations.

Our work must also build on existing policy and practice to join up, refine and strengthen existing work, and raise its profile. We will only launch new initiatives where there is proven need.

We will also take a sophisticated approach to the use of evidence and ensure resources are directed where the evidence suggests they will have the greatest impact. We aim to strengthen the evidence base where it is needed and ensure that evidence-led approaches are both adapted to suit local needs and implementable in their delivery contexts. A bedrock of high-quality universal services is required alongside targeted interventions for those in need of most support.

These beliefs underpin our new reading strategy, and the ten steps which are outlined in the next section.

8 TEN STEPS TO ACHIEVE OUR GOALS

Building on the four core principles outlined in chapter one, and our underpinning beliefs in a new kind of reading and literacy strategy, we have developed the following ten strategic priorities to achieve the *Read On. Get On.* goals in England.

LEADERSHIP

1. The government should restate its commitment to our goal.

It is a national scandal that so many children are starting school with poor language skills, and leaving school unable to read well. In 2015, the Secretary of State for Education announced her commitment to make English pupils the most literate in Europe in five years. We are calling on the new Secretary of State for Education to build on this commitment and sign up to our goal that every child should be reading well by the age of 11, and start school with a good level of language development at five.

2. The *Read On. Get On.* coalition will recruit local leaders to convene campaigns addressing specific literacy challenges, using local assets alongside national programmes.

The literacy needs of England are not uniform. Coastal communities and former industrial areas are frequently marked by low levels of early language development as well as poor reading at 11. The approach in these struggling communities needs to be local. It needs to build the skills, aspirations and identity of the community. Typically, this includes a mix of political will, local leadership, long-term commitment and consistent implementation of improvement strategies. Effective joint working between partners, and the ability to draw on multi-disciplinary teams, can also be key. National programmes and campaigns remain important, not least for their ability to leverage national partnerships and to achieve efficiencies. They bring benefits of scale and access, expertise and profile while still

ensuring that provision can be adapted to meet local need. Integration with local partnerships strengthens both and we are committed to understanding both the impact and models of delivery that best meet the diverse reading and communication needs in England. The challenge lies in identifying the local leadership and capacity to consistently drive improvements – especially given the changing landscape for education and local government. Struggling places will need to seek new sources of leadership, from academy chains, arts organisations, libraries and public health services to local MPs and non-governmental leaders such as local third sector organisations or businesses. As a coalition, we will seek to add leadership and capacity in a number of places, drawing on our existing work and relationships.

3. The *Read On. Get On.* coalition will advocate and innovate to ensure services that promote children's reading deliver quality efficiently.

Our strategy is built on extraordinary foundations: our education system is universal, committed and professional; we have a professional body of speech and language therapists committed to supporting the development of children's early language; children's literature in the UK is the envy of the world; we have a history of one of the first and most comprehensive public library services in the world; our early years sector has gone through a period of unprecedented development in the past two decades. Yet the truth is these foundations are fragile. We recognise that we are facing uncertain economic times and investment in all areas of public service is scrutinised and potentially vulnerable. In this context it is essential that our campaign advocates for the value of the cultural and educational foundations of children's reading. We need to explain to commissioners and funders their social and economic value as well as their intrinsic value. At the same time the *Read On. Get On.* coalition will continue to innovate to drive value for the taxpayer and for children.

4. The Read On. Get On. coalition will work with the government and researchers to create a consistent national measure of children's reading and ways of tracking progress in early language and literacy throughout the early years.

It is imperative that the nation knows how well its children are reading. But variations in assessment data and gaps in effective measures mean that like-for-like comparisons of children's reading are impossible. Assessment and measures can also fail to value the whole range of activities that define whether a child is reading well. We want to work with the government to develop measures for children's cognitive and affective processes for reading well at age 11. Research teams from universities, charities and government need to work together to develop proportionate, consistent and effective ways of measuring progress that can be used year on year, including supporting access to relevant data sets. We can't wait until international comparison tables are published on a three-year cycle to discover that we are failing our children.

CHANGING BEHAVIOUR AND CULTURAL ATTITUDES TO READING

5. The Read On. Get On. coalition will develop a new integrated, national programme of activities including a further behaviour change campaign to support parenting, early language and reading.

To strengthen the home learning environment of children from our poorest communities, we believe there needs to be a new integrated, national programme of activities to help parents spend more time talking, playing and reading with their children. This should complement existing national and local behaviour change programmes, activities and provision in the early years around reading, early literacy and language. It would draw on key behavioural insights, including parents' focus on children's happiness in the present, the importance of family time, constant use of digital technology and television, and trust in major brands, celebrities and role models. Key elements of our programme will include physical and digital resources, social marketing techniques and "nudging" everyday routines as well as showcasing exciting reading campaigns for families and signposting them to places like libraries to access books and reading. We will

use our expertise, national profile and corporate relationships to harness the power of the media, major brands and celebrities so that parents are engaged through fun and trusted intermediaries. This proposal is based on international best practice and behavioural insight. We believe this could be a powerful way of enriching the home learning environment of children from poor backgrounds and establishing the foundation for their language and literacy skills.

6. The Read On. Get On. coalition will lead a national campaign and activities to promote reading for pleasure in schools, libraries, at home and in the wider community.

Research shows that intrinsic motivation is an integral element of reading well at age 11. If every child is to achieve this, we need to continue to transform the image of reading and books among children – to make reading and books fun, accessible and popular among all children. The campaign will aim to make reading part of the social norm for all children and families, whatever their home context, by building on the insights, provision and approaches developed by partners in the coalition and others, particularly libraries. The goal will be to dramatically upscale the work which is happening across the country and to learn from needs, trends, issues, gaps and opportunities to identify where more support is needed for those who are not engaged with books and reading. The results could include: a sustained national campaign to promote reading for pleasure, shared reading and books, stories and rhymes; innovative new models of library provision; mobilising peer and youth role models through national service programmes; and more support for schools to embed reading for pleasure, books and stories across the curriculum and extra-curricular activities to develop a whole-school reading culture. We intend this activity to cover both children in the early years and primary school-age children and their families and carers.

EARLY YEARS

7. The government should increase investment in the early years workforce.

Childcare quality and workforce standards are rising but remain variable across the country and could be significantly higher. The workforce need to be skilled, knowledgeable and passionate about sharing and

promoting books to children and their families. The *Read On. Get On.* coalition will work with the early years sector and parents to campaign for greater investment and national focus on childcare quality. We will focus on increasing public engagement with this issue in order to increase pressure on the government to act. Our priorities are that the government makes the investment needed to ensure that every nursery and group care setting is led by an early years teacher (or equivalent); and that strong professional development and progression routes are available for the whole childcare workforce to ensure they understand the importance of, and know how to support, children's early communication and language.

8. The government should refresh the role of children's centres, which are a vital resource in supporting early language and reading skills in disadvantaged communities.

Children's centres offer many high-quality services to families with young children to support early language, such as The Early Language Development Programme, based on the principles of Every Child a Talker, and emergent literacy development through initiatives like Bookstart Corner which supports shared reading and the development of the home literacy environment. They also provide important outreach support to hard-to-reach families. However, there are significant differences between how national priorities have been implemented locally, based on local needs and priorities. Given the enormous pressures on funding, it is important that there is a clear vision for the range of objectives that children's centres can and should deliver. The government should urgently publish its planned consultation on children's centres, focusing on their objectives, priorities, coverage and location, so that integrated working can be prioritised.

PRIMARY SCHOOL YEARS

9. School leaders and professional bodies should support teachers' professional development and subject knowledge of teaching and encouraging reading.

There is consistent evidence about the most effective approaches to the teaching of reading – the challenge is ensuring these are happening consistently in every

school, for every child. Every primary school should have a significant commitment to professional development in language and reading for all teachers, drawing on the latest evidence of effective practice. Every school should have its own school library and a strong relationship with a local public library (and, where possible, work with a school library service) to ensure teachers are up-to-date on children's literature, and have access to expertise to support approaches that engage children with books and reading. Schools should also be encouraged to establish reading groups and encourage children to take part in reading activities outside the classroom and in school holidays. Over the next decade, academy chains could have an increasingly important role in developing effective professional development programmes and innovative approaches to library provision.

10. The government should work with academy chains and trusts, local authorities and school leaders to ensure that all primary schools have school improvement support when local authorities no longer have a duty to supply it.

Most primary schools rely on the local authority to stimulate and support school improvement. Conservative education policy seems to favour the school improvement role being held within school partnerships and the Department for Education's 2016 White Paper proposes removing the local authority school improvement role and transferring it to school partnerships such as Multi-Academy Trusts and Teaching School Alliances. However, this model needs to be reviewed: primary Multi-Academy Trusts are unlikely to have the capacity to take a strategic lead on school improvement and Teaching School Alliances are unequally spread across the country. The danger is that small primaries are left without the partnerships, resources and challenge to improve that they need to support increasing reading and literacy attainment. A variety of models needs to be developed which can support primary schools' improvement, with inbuilt safety net provision if the market doesn't autonomously create the capacity that is needed.

ENDNOTES

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READ ON. GET ON.

A strategy to get England's children reading

COVER PHOTO: ELENA HEATHERWICK/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Every year in England, thousands of children leave primary school without the confidence and fluency in reading that they need. New assessment arrangements introduced in summer 2016 show only 66% of 11-year-olds reading at the expected level. This problem is reinforcing social and ethnic inequality and holding our economy back. The vital importance of teaching phonics and comprehension in schools needs to be complemented by approaches that help every child to engage with and develop a love of reading.

Read On. Get On. was launched in 2014 by a coalition of charities and education organisations committed to improving reading levels in the UK. The campaign is now at a crossroads. Therefore, we are proposing a different kind of a strategy, and a new type of campaign, which build on the expertise of teachers and the strengths of early years settings, schools, libraries and the third sector, and which mobilises society.

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