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Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State

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Jonathan Douglas CBE
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By email: jonathan.douglas@literacytrust.org.uk

16 June 2021

Thank you for your letter of 10 May, addressed to the Prime Minister, about the role of businesses in the national literacy recovery strategy. The Prime Minister has invited me to respond as the Secretary of State for Education. I would be grateful if you could share this response with your co-signatories.

I support the excellent work of the National Literacy Trust and other organisations who have worked hard throughout this period to ensure that young people are able to continue reading. I agree that literacy is an essential foundation for children's future success. Ensuring that every child has access to world-class teaching of literacy will form a vital part of this government's mission to 'level up' education across the country. All children in our schools, without exception, should become fluent, confident readers and develop enjoyment of reading.

We recognise that extended school and college restrictions have had a substantial impact on children and young people's literacy and are committed to helping pupils make up learning lost due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. To address this challenge, the Prime Minister committed to working with parents, teachers and education providers to develop a long-term plan to help education settings support pupils in making up their learning over the course of this Parliament.

As part of the next step in the government's plans to boost education recovery, a total of £1.4 billion is being invested, including £1 billion to support up to 6 million 15-hour tutoring courses for disadvantaged school children, as well as an expansion of the 16-19 tuition fund, targeting key subjects such as maths and English. This builds on the £1.7 billion already announced to help children catch up on what they missed during the COVID-19 outbreak, bringing the total investment to over £3 billion.

We are also investing £14 billion more, in total, into our schools during the financial years 2020-21 to 2022-23, compared to 2019-20, allowing schools to invest more in resources, such as library provision, to ensure all children receive the top-quality education they deserve. We are committing £1.8 billion this financial year in capital funding to help maintain and improve the condition of school buildings, including primary school libraries. Local authorities, academy trusts and other responsible bodies are best placed to priorities capital allocations according to local need – including when it comes to library facilities where that is the priority.

The government is committed to continuing to raise literacy standards – ensuring all children, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, can read fluently and with understanding. In 2018, we launched a £26.3 million English Hubs Programme dedicated to improving the teaching of reading, with a focus on supporting children making the slowest progress in reading, many of whom come from disadvantaged backgrounds. We have since invested a further £17 million in this school-to-school improvement programme which focuses on systematic synthetic phonics, early language and reading for pleasure. Throughout the COVID-19 outbreak, English Hubs have continued to offer support to schools across the country by bringing much of their offer online. This has involved opening up virtual training and professional development events to a wider pool of schools, and distributing materials targeted specifically at remote education and recovery.

The government aims to make the UK the best place to start, scale up and grow a business, and recognises the role of businesses in supporting education recovery throughout the COVID-19 outbreak. The government will continue to work closely with a wide range of organisations, including businesses, to ensure all children, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, can read fluently and with understanding. The government values the contribution of businesses in supporting children's education.

Thank you for the invitation to attend the business summit in early July. I welcome the opportunity to meet with the National Literacy Trust alongside the businesses concerned and would be grateful if you could share more details about the summit with my officials. They can be contacted at: english.businessofstate@education.gov.uk.

Thank you for writing on this important matter.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gavin Williamson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education