

# Life-changing Libraries Report 2022



# Foreword



Decades of research show that if a child reads for pleasure they are likely to be happier, healthier, to do better at school, to vote and to be more economically successful later in life – all irrespective of background. The more a child reads, the greater the

benefits and that is where libraries come in. Libraries are where the magic happens.

**Put simply, libraries change lives.  
Reading changes lives.**

People assume that all primary schools have libraries, and that those are well-stocked and resourced. But this is simply not the case. One in four primary schools in disadvantaged areas have no library space at all. How can a child become a reader for pleasure if their parents or carers cannot afford books, and their primary school has no library, or that library is woefully insufficient? I have asked this question many times, to many people, for many years, but nobody has given me a satisfactory answer. This is because it is just impossible. And this is why campaigning for primary school libraries has been at the heart of my time as the Waterstones Children's Laureate for 2019 – 2022.

My flagship Laureate initiative – 'Life-changing Libraries' – was designed to showcase the transformative impact a well-resourced primary school library has on a child's opportunities in life, alongside the vast inequality of library provision currently facing children across England. To spotlight the four pillars of a 'gold standard' school library – space, books, expertise, and whole-school and community involvement – BookTrust and I began working with six very different primary schools across England: building a bespoke, dedicated library stocked with more than 1000 specially curated books, and supporting staff with training and mentoring from specialists to develop a culture of reading for pleasure.

It has been incredible to see the transformative impact of these 'Life-changing Libraries' on the schools, the teachers and the children. In the words of the English Lead at Benwick Primary School has said, 'it has changed everything'. The project has sparked

a passion for books and a joy for reading – both at home and at school. It has boosted motivation and attention in the classroom, alongside significant improvements in wellbeing, and increased empathy, and feelings of confidence and self-worth. The impact has been life-affirming in so many different ways, as one pupil has said: 'now reading makes me feel like everyone is wanted in the world.'

In less than one year, the ripple effects of the Life-changing Libraries and the development of a reading for pleasure culture across the schools have been extraordinary. This report will share the powerful stories of this impact, adding to the raft of evidence about the crucial role school libraries play in a child's life.

Reading unlocks a world of new possibilities for children, and libraries are a key part of this story. Every single child deserves this life-changing opportunity, because books and reading are magic and this magic must be available to absolutely everyone.

The words of a young boy in Griffin primary school keep returning to me. When asked, 'What does this library mean to you?', his reply was; 'Well, it's wonderful, because it means I don't have to read the same book, again and again.' As Waterstones Children's Laureate, I pledged to fight for children's reading with passion, conviction and action. The chronic problem in primary school library provision – left unsolved for too many years – is now a crisis, and we must take action now.

**Cressida Cowell,  
Waterstones Children's  
Laureate 2019 – 2022**

# Background

## Life-changing Libraries key findings

The six Life-changing Libraries schools saw considerable impact in the following areas:

### Reading engagement

- A transformation in attitudes towards reading, igniting an enthusiasm and passion for books among pupils
- A considerable increase in the time pupils spent engaged in reading for pleasure both at school and at home
- Pupils reading more widely, talking about books and making recommendations to peers and staff
- An increased uptake in reading among previously 'reluctant readers', children with SEN and boys
- An increased uptake of home reading practices

### Learning behaviours

- Increased attention, engagement and motivation to learn in the classroom
- Anecdotal positive impact on attainment (difficult to measure due to the disruption of Covid-19)
- Improvements in pupils' writing, particularly in the use of vocabulary and imagination
- Strengthened teacher/pupil relationships
- Improvements in behaviour within the classroom and at playtimes

### Learning provision

- A more tailored curriculum, reflecting children's interests
- Greater ethnic, cultural and situational representation in reading resources
- Improved teacher knowledge and expertise
- Greater flexibility in a learning environment, which was particularly important for children with SEN

### Wellbeing

- Significant improvements to pupil and staff wellbeing
- Increased peer empathy
- An increased sense of pride, confidence and self-worth in pupils
- Increased use of local libraries outside of school
- Friendships forming between children in different year groups
- Pupils gaining a broader outlook and understanding of the world beyond their immediate communities
- Strengthened relationships within schools and with wider communities



**A school library is so much more than an educational space. Good school libraries generate an excitement around literature and facilitate a lifelong love of reading. Reading enjoyment is important; OECD research shows that it is the single most important indicator of a child's future success, and Ofsted has also recognised the vital role that reading for pleasure plays in improving literacy levels. Investing in libraries is investing in children's futures.**

Despite a wealth of international evidence demonstrating that school libraries have a considerable positive impact on pupil attainment, learning outcomes, attitudes to learning and pupil wellbeing, there have been significant cuts to library budgets in the last decade, with only 34% of primary schools having a designated library budget in 2019 [Great School Libraries 2019].

The Great School Libraries report highlighted the crisis of school libraries in the UK, finding that one in eight primary schools did not have a library at all. Furthermore, many libraries were found to be woefully inadequate and not fit for purpose, with books that are unappealing or outdated, and without the breadth of literature needed to create a purposeful space that inspires a love of reading.

In areas with higher levels of economic deprivation where schools had over 25% pupils on free school meals, pupils were more than twice as likely not to have access to a designated library space. This highlights an inequality in access to quality reading materials, with children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds less likely to experience the range of positive benefits a school library can provide.

It is important to note that in these areas of economic disadvantage, children are also less likely to make use of a local public library, meaning

that without a school library, they are unlikely to be accessing any library facilities at all. There may be no library in the area (several have not reopened after the Covid-19 closures), it may be too far away to travel to, or perhaps there is no family interest or engagement in reading, so children are not taken to the local library. Between 2009 and 2020, local authority spending on libraries fell by 44% in real terms and 33% of sites closed [Institute for Government 2022].

Studies have shown that vulnerable children benefit from library facilities the most [Curry Lance and Schwarz 2012] and that reading for pleasure is more important for a child's academic success than their parents' socio-economic status [Sullivan and Brown 2013]. This suggests that increasing children's access to school libraries could yield huge value, particularly within disadvantaged communities.



The benefits of school library use and reading for pleasure spread well beyond the academic, with studies highlighting a strong positive influence on personal and interpersonal outcomes. Billington [2015] found that ‘Reading for pleasure enhances empathy, understanding of the self, and the ability to understand one’s own and others’ identities.’ His study also showed that ‘those who read for pleasure have higher levels of self-esteem and a greater ability to cope with difficult situations.’ These findings suggest that a school library can have a hugely positive impact on pupils’ mental health and wellbeing – something that is of utmost priority in schools, particularly following the Covid-19 pandemic, which resulted in a rapid rise in children presenting with poor mental health across the UK.

Overall, there is a considerable body of research to suggest that investing in school libraries has great potential to be life-changing and improve the future success of young people. So often the children who need books the most are in schools that cannot provide them with even an adequate school library, let alone a good one. Budgeting for all schools to have a good library would provide huge opportunities for ‘levelling up’ and create equal opportunities for all children.

## Life-changing Libraries

In her **open letter** to the Government, Waterstones Children’s Laureate Cressida Cowell cited considerable evidence of the positive impact of reading and called for ringfenced Government funding of £100 million a year to invest in primary school libraries. This would give all schools the ability to develop, maintain and improve a designated library space, and to purchase at least one book per child.

The central aim of the Life-changing Libraries laureateship project was to show ‘the transformative impact a well-resourced library has on a child’s life opportunities.’ [Cressida Cowell 2021]

“Reading unlocks a world of new possibilities for children, and libraries are a key part of this story.”  
**Cressida Cowell**



## What makes a gold-standard primary school library?

Cressida describes four elements essential to the creation and development of a gold-standard school library:

- **Space** – A gold-standard school library is a distinct space, clearly defined for this purpose, that suits the needs for the school community. It is functional and purposeful but also inviting and relaxed, engaging readers and drawing them in. Careful planning considers the flow and curation of the space, creating both open areas and cosy nooks for communal and individual reading preferences. Offering different options for seating – stools, bean bags, settees – and providing accessible shelving, including kinderboxes at floor level, also helps create a reader-led library space where the design facilitates its use. It is obviously a space designed with children in mind.

- **Resources** – A library is nothing without its books. In a gold-standard school library texts are up to date, look appealing, and encompass a wide variety of interests and genres – poetry, graphic novels and picture books sitting alongside fiction and non-fiction books. Audio books and other accessible text formats (such as braille books and e-readers) are also available to meet the needs and preferences of all readers. The books in a gold-standard school library are updated regularly, allowing children to be introduced to a broad range of quality authors and illustrators. They are also representative of the diverse and multicultural world in which we live and provide children with ‘windows and mirrors’ through which they can see themselves and learn about the lives of others [Sims Bishop 1990].

- **Expertise** – A gold-standard library helps develop expert teachers who have excellent knowledge of children’s books, library systems and who share recommendations. They also cultivate expertise in their pupils, encouraging a rich dialogue around reading. Schools with gold-standard libraries ensure that time is dedicated to developing staff expertise through quality CPD. Teresa Cremin (a leading expert in developing teachers’ reading practices to support reading for pleasure in schools) emphasises in her 2014 report that the key to embedding a culture where pupils are intrinsically motivated to read is teachers becoming experts in children’s literature. When adults in schools talk enthusiastically about books pupils pick up on these behaviours. They in turn become experts too, developing a strong pupil voice, making recommendations and sharing their knowledge.

- **Community** – A gold-standard library facilitates communities in different ways. The library is championed by the whole school, including governors, auxiliary staff and parents. When pupils and teachers have ‘books in common’ and make reading recommendations to each other, positive peer-to-peer and pupil-to-teacher relationships are built [Cremin 2014]. A gold-standard library will facilitate the involvement of volunteers, parents and community groups, contributing to a wider sense of community through shared use of the space, books and expertise within.

## The management of a gold-standard primary school library

Managing a gold-standard library requires weaving together all the above elements and is a constantly evolving project. Although it is important to have a trained librarian or library leader overseeing and driving the school reading culture, using pupil librarians and wider community support makes the maintenance of the library much easier and more sustainable.

- **Space** – The design and curation of the space is unique to each school setting, but giving pupils a voice from the outset will garner enthusiasm and excitement. Shelving and seating elements can be built up over time and adapted to meet the changing needs of the pupils.

- **Resources** – Less can be more! Outdated, factually inaccurate and dilapidated books need to be removed. Books that look old or unappealing will not be picked up and read, and can suggest that the library is something for the past, not for now. Children will also be using these texts for learning, so information, such as names of countries in an Atlas should be correct. All books then need to be catalogued and alphabetised before being displayed on shelves in a variety of ways, with some front-facing. This is to break up the shelving and show pride in the presentation of the space, but primarily to make it easier for children to find books and entice them to read. Library management software can help accelerate this initial process, and having a digital record of what is stocked also supports the borrowing of books and provides statistics on which books are most popular.

- **Expertise** – Training multiple staff (including teachers and teaching assistants), volunteers and pupil librarians supports and speeds up day-to-day library management. It also helps pupils become experts who then support their peers within the space. Pupil librarians and volunteers facilitate the use of the school library at break and lunchtimes, allowing greater access to the space beyond timetabled class sessions. They are able to scan books out and in, return them correctly to the shelves, and direct other pupils to recommended reads. They hold responsibility for keeping the library tidy and ordered, and can also help create displays within the space.

- **Community** – A gold-standard library belongs to all. Communal responsibility cultivates a respect for the space. Creating 'library rules' together will ensure that books are cared for and the space is left tidy and clean. Pupils' and teachers' voices, for example through ownership over the choice of new texts, will help develop the library space in a way that is personal to the school. Sharing stories together will strengthen bonds and relationships between staff, pupils and parents, creating a culture of reading for pleasure that is far-reaching.

## Sustaining the school library

A gold-standard school library is continually updated and developed, with a yearly allocation made in the budget for new texts. A library of at least 500 quality books give children the means to access deeper learning to nourish the mind and get away from the stresses of daily life. Staff continually engage with the library, making it a regular space for staff meetings as well as learning, and

build their own expertise through both developing themselves as readers and continually engaging with relevant expertise. Engaging in frequent book talk and facilitating the sharing of recommendations between pupils, peers and staff keeps the library and books at the heart of the school, giving strength to the reading for pleasure ethos driven by the library.



## Cressida's six Life-changing Libraries

**Life-changing Libraries saw the creation of new gold-standard libraries in six primary schools in disadvantaged communities across England. School nominations were put forward by BookTrust partners and six schools were chosen by the Life-changing Libraries' steering group and Cressida.**

Schools were eligible if they had: more than 25% of pupils on free school meals and poor or no library provision. The six schools were selected to be as diverse a mix as possible, reflecting the many different communities across England. The group included: academy, local authority-maintained and voluntary aided schools; a mix of inner-city, estate and rural schools; large and small schools; and some within very diverse and others in very homogeneous communities.

"A library is key to developing a love of reading, and without it a book becomes a stand-alone thing. Our Life-changing Library means so much more. Everyone can benefit from it, regardless of background."  
**Headteacher,  
Dinnington Community  
Primary School**

The chosen primary schools were:

**Benwick Primary School** – a small local authority-maintained school in rural Cambridgeshire with poor school library provision, few transport links to local towns and very limited amenities in the community.

**Dinnington Community Primary School** – an academy near Sheffield with poor school library provision, situated in a former mining community in an area of high deprivation.

**Griffin Primary School** – an inner-city academy in Wandsworth, London, with a high percentage of ethnic minorities pupils and no school library provision.

**Saviour CofE Primary School** – an inner-city CofE school in Manchester with no school library provision and a high percentage of ethnic minorities pupils.

**Skerne Park Academy** – a large academy with no school library provision in a homogeneous white British area of very high deprivation in Darlington.

**Woodchurch CE Primary School** – a local authority-maintained church school in the Wirral with poor library provision.

In all schools – particularly Benwick, Dinnington and Skerne Park – the number of children with SEN was higher than the national average. More than 25% of pupils in each school received free school meals – in some cases, this proportion was significantly higher.

Despite the diversity of the schools selected, they faced many similar challenges. These included limited access to books for pupils, both in school and at home. Within the schools, tight budgets had focused spending on books aimed at teaching phonics rather than those designed to be read for pleasure. Schools also described their books as 'old

and tatty'. As a result, they found it hard to motivate their pupils to read. Poor language acquisition was another common theme, with children starting school with very low levels of spoken language. Low aspirations within communities and limited life experiences of the children were also cited as barriers by all six schools.

The schools had common aspirations: to support the wellbeing of all their pupils; to raise children's confidence and resilience; to 'open doors to the wider world'; and to give children the best chance for success in the future. They all believed the Life-changing Library would support these aims.



## Each school received:

### Space

- A new library space, designed and provided by **FG Library and Learning**, a company specialising in custom-made library furniture and fittings
- Bespoke wall art provided and fitted by **Promote Your School**, featuring artwork specially designed for the six schools by Cressida Cowell

### Resources

- A collection of 1000 books curated by **BookTrust** and other industry experts (with guidance from the **CLPE**) designed to be relevant, representative, inclusive and to encourage reading for pleasure. The list, which included modern and classic fiction, non-fiction, graphic novels, poetry and picture books, can be found [here](#). Six months after the libraries opened, schools were given the opportunity to choose 100 additional books of their choice
- Library management system software and support from **Reading Cloud**, including a scanner to allow children to scan books in and out of the library
- A **Tonie Box**, an interactive device allowing pupils to listen to audio books
- Access to **Rising Stars Reading Planet**, an online ebook subscription service

### Expertise

- A subscription to the **School Library Association** for access to high-quality staff CPD and resources online. This gave schools access to information regarding how to set up a library and curate books – invaluable library skills for teachers in charge of their new space
- A year of CPD and support from **Reading for Pleasure UK** to embed reading for pleasure into the school culture, including an initial and end point audit of reading practices throughout the school and bespoke staff training
- Access to the **CLPE 'The Power of Reading' programme** for a year – a course and resources that support schools to plan their English curriculum based on high-quality children's literature

### Community

- A launch event with Cressida Cowell and further opportunities to coordinate virtual and in-person events with authors and illustrators via **Authors Aloud**

“Children change when they go in [the Life-changing Library]. They walk in and without fail go ‘wow!’ The effect ripples out. It’s not just a room with lots of books. It is much more than that... It’s opened a window – no, a door – for the children to the world”

**Head of School,  
Dinnington Community  
Primary School**



Throughout the project, a detailed account of each school's experience was captured through a combination of observational activities and in-depth interviews with school representatives. We heard from executive headteachers, academy trust board members, headteachers, governors, parents, community volunteers, teachers, teaching assistants and pupils about their practical experience of the project and its impact. We describe key themes across all schools below and share individual **case studies** to demonstrate the unique impact within each setting.

### Key findings

All schools spoke passionately about the transformative impact of their new libraries. As a result of the facilities, pupils were spending more time reading for pleasure and, consequently, experiencing improvements in their wellbeing. Attention, engagement, confidence and motivation to learn were all reported to have increased, and there were reports of improved academic achievement and/or more rapid academic progress since the libraries were installed. In particular, demonstrable improvements in children's writing ability were described

as a result of increased access to books that ignited children's imaginations and enhanced their vocabulary. The schools also reported increased enthusiasm and desire to learn to read amongst key stage 1 and lower key stage 2 pupils, as the library facilitated a shift in children's attitudes towards reading. Rather than seeing it as a chore, they began to see reading as pleasurable and were excited to improve their reading ability so they could access the wealth of texts in the new library.

## Space

**The experiences of all six schools demonstrated the positive impact of a quality space dedicated to reading and the enjoyment of books.**

### A sense of pride and self-worth

All the Life-changing Libraries, with their high-quality fixtures and fittings, were reported to have generated a sense of pride across school communities and to have fostered a sense of self-worth within the children. The Headteacher from Skerne Park commented that, 'The children feel so special because someone outside our school feels we're worthy enough to give us this. It's wonderful.' The Head of School at Dinnington felt the Life-changing Library investment 'made the children feel proud and valued, reinforcing the school's core belief that all Dinnington children "can".' The schools spoke of the great respect children had for both the space and the new books – the libraries are regularly tidied and books revered as 'precious' and 'special'. This pride in their property and in themselves was said to be creating a ripple effect, flowing from the library to other areas of school and into homes.

### A safe haven

Billington [2015] states that 'regular readers for pleasure report fewer feelings of stress and depression than non-readers.' One word used across all schools when describing their Life-changing Libraries was 'safe'. These spaces have become a haven of calm, particularly for the most disadvantaged children, some of whom are processing trauma and/or experiencing chaotic lives outside of school. Many children talked about the library being a safe and quiet space that made them feel more relaxed, while staff extolled the value of having a place in school with different rules to the classroom, and the positive impact this can have on children's wellbeing.

### Improvements in behaviour

Staff described classes with challenging behaviour being transformed within the library space, with the children visibly relaxing and becoming more able to enjoy reading without the pressures of the classroom. The beanbags, wobble stools and cubby holes built into the design of each space allowed children with heightened emotions to self-regulate within a calm, safe space, using the combination of a comforting sensory stimulus and stories, and so they returned to their classrooms ready to learn.



## Resources

**All schools placed huge value in the book selection provided with the Life-changing Library and appreciated the benefits that having experts curate the collection had brought to the library. The new libraries gave children and teachers in participating schools access to a broad and diverse book selection, as well as access to new authors and book formats. In cases where books at home and parental support were both limited, this was the first time children had access to such a wide choice of reading materials.**

### Generating excitement

All schools described an excitement around reading generated by their new library. The new, up-to-date, attractive books were described as instantly drawing children in like 'sweets in a sweet shop', encouraging them to browse, explore and discover new texts. The quality and range of the book selection was lauded in each school as the element of the library that had generated the most excitement among both pupils and staff, and initiated the development of a whole-school reading for pleasure culture. The Life-changing Libraries were described as 'treasure troves' with new books found at every visit, and with something for every reader to discover and enjoy. The opportunity to choose an extra 100 books after the library was established was greeted enthusiastically by the schools. Often pupils chose the next books in a series they had become hooked on, which increased sustained engagement in reading.

### Increased motivation to read

All schools reported that the increased choice of books has given children a huge appetite for reading, backing up previous findings that engagement levels improve when children can choose their own books [McBride 2017]. Leaders described how the breadth of texts in their library supported reluctant and less confident readers, providing for different lexical abilities in texts that still 'look like chapter books'. Poetry, graphic novels, non-fiction and picture books – accessed by all age groups – were reported to have empowered children and provided a gateway to reading for pupils with lower reading stamina. Many stories were shared of previously reluctant readers who, following the opening of the new library, became hooked on a series, discovered a new genre or book format that caught their attention, or became motivated to improve their reading to access a particular book they wanted to read.

### The powerful impact of representation in books

Across the schools, children have discovered new authors beyond the most popular mainstream writers. All schools described the diverse book selection as opening a door to the wider world for their children, helping them become more curious and empathetic. In schools with a higher proportion of pupils from an ethnic minority, both staff and pupils felt that children seeing themselves reflected in the characters and authors of the new texts was hugely important, both as a mechanism for showing value in diversity and for raising self-esteem.

## Expertise

**Cremin [2014] talks about the importance of ‘teachers who read and readers who teach, and who explore the classroom consequences of their insights into pupil’s reading practices.’ In the Life-changing Library schools, as teachers have become more attuned to what their pupils liked to read, they have changed their practice in the classroom. Every member of staff spoken to believed the library had had a positive impact on their teaching.**

### A tailored curriculum

The introduction to new titles altered the curriculum in all participating schools, with lessons now including book choices and genres more tailored to the specific needs of pupils. This has improved engagement and motivation, particularly amongst boys and pupils with SEN, and has played a critical role in facilitating a swift catch up after the ‘learning loss’ of the pandemic. One headteacher commented that they had been looking for interventions for years to boost attainment in children and help close the gap between disadvantaged children and their peers, and that the library was it – the only intervention they needed.

### Broader reading recommendations

Development of expertise through Life-changing Libraries has not been limited to adults. At first, children gravitated to books they were familiar with or were ‘the biggest ones they could find’, but as they became more

used to the library, they broadened their interests to include a wider variety of texts. This expertise has been enthusiastically shared among children through book talk, reviews and reading recommendations. Pupils, particularly, have enjoyed sharing their expertise with children in other year groups, helping develop younger readers and finding new friends in different age groups through reading suggestions.

### Developing leadership

All the English subject leaders in the Life-changing Library schools reported having increased confidence in their role and enhanced leadership skills since the installation of their new library. The libraries have given a clear focus for embedding a reading for pleasure ethos throughout school communities and have allowed teachers to disseminate their strategic vision to staff, governors and parents. Other subject leaders (in areas such as science and PSHCE) were also reported to be benefitting from the library, using the wealth of non-fiction available to support curriculum development and teaching as well as their own subject knowledge.

**“It’s created a reading culture around the whole school. I didn’t think it’d have as big an impact and snowball so much. I had high expectations, but it has definitely exceeded them.”**  
**English Leader,  
Saviour CofE Primary**

## Community

**The Life-changing Libraries have supported relationships within schools and strengthened connections between the schools and their wider communities. Libraries have enabled friendships to be forged and strengthened – initially within classes, then across year groups and between children and staff members that would not normally have cause to interact.**

The latter stage of embedding the library into school culture involves inviting the wider community to use the facilities eased, enabling a broader appreciation of the space, a broader appreciation of the books and expand the positive impact of the Life-changing Library.

### Stronger staff-pupil relationships

A common thread was the impact of books on rebuilding trust and strengthening relationships between staff and pupils – a key priority in all the schools post pandemic. Cremin [2014] explains that ‘book talk’ has the ability to build relationships, ‘creating connections and enabling new relationships to begin’, as teachers and pupils gain a deeper understanding of each other beyond the academic. The bonds that have been built through books in the six schools appear to have transcended the library into the classroom. Staff are more aware of children’s interests and are building this knowledge into planning – helping them design lessons that are more engaging and motivating for pupils. One staff member commented that ‘[pupils] feel seen. They know we care about them and are interested in them.’

## Improved teacher wellbeing

Staff also spoke passionately about their timetabled library slots, feeling that they were as valuable – if not more – for learning as classroom time. In the library, teachers were building relationships with pupils and felt able to relax and recharge, which enabled them to direct more energy into their teaching. Teachers reported that this protected time in the library allowed them to take a quieter and slower approach to learning and relationship-building, and to have broader and deeper conversations with their pupils.

**“Time to relax has helped build relationships between teachers and pupils. Children feel teachers are humanised, more approachable and less focused on teaching when in the library space.”**

**Teacher,  
Skerne Park Academy**



### Uniting the school community

A common theme in the schools was generating a renewed sense of collaboration and community after the restrictions of the pandemic had caused classrooms to isolate from each other. In all six settings, children and staff were making recommendations to each other, creating a 'book buzz' around the whole school. Cremin [2014] says that 'in schools where staff and senior leaders share their reading lives and blether about books and thus about life, a deeper sense of connection and community will develop' and evidence from the Life-changing Libraries appears to support this.

### Building community beyond the school

In all schools, there was a palpable sense of excitement about how their Life-changing Libraries could be used to support their wider communities to develop the confidence, aspiration and love of literature they saw in their pupils. When Covid-19 guidelines allow, there are plans to include communities by initiating parent and pupil reading sessions; open library sessions for the wider public for coffee mornings; social sessions for older people; and a parents' lending library. There are also plans to involve community groups, such as toddler groups and local midwifery services.

## Conclusion

*"It genuinely has been life-changing."*  
**Deputy Head,  
Griffin Primary School**

The gold-standard libraries created for the Life-changing Libraries initiative have been transformational within the six chosen schools. They have become an integral part of school cultures, engaging children in reading for pleasure and facilitating the curiosity and motivation seen in lifelong learners. With so many similar themes emerging across the schools, our findings give weight to the premise that investment in gold-standard libraries can have truly 'life-changing' effects in schools, particularly in areas of high economic deprivation.

*"Before the library was here, the books weren't interesting to me, and now reading makes me feel like everyone is wanted in the world."*  
**Pupil,  
Griffin Primary School**



The books and the space have transformed attitudes to reading, helping to create a newfound reverence and enthusiasm amongst pupils.

Yet it is not just the physical 'makeover' that has been important. The people have been vital to the libraries' success. Inspiring leaders and motivated staff embracing the new school culture and engaging with training have all benefited from and contributed to the library. School communities have been strengthened and relationships deepened as pupils and teachers have become more and more enthused by the broad selection of books and the inviting spaces they now have available.

Throughout the pandemic, schools have faced significant challenges. The libraries have helped staff nurture their pupils through this difficult time and have enabled the children not just to return to school ready to learn, but helped them thrive. Children need to be engaged in their learning to succeed; the libraries have facilitated strong

learning environments with schools seeing more motivated and enthusiastic pupils since their installation. The libraries have proven to be joyous, safe spaces that have become essential to everyone in the six schools.

The six Life-changing Libraries have worked their magic on over 1000 children. But statistics show that more than 700,000 children in the UK don't have access to a school library at all, and many more have facilities that are far from gold-standard.

A lack of school libraries, particularly in deprived areas, is a social justice issue. Young people in the UK are missing out on the everyday benefits of quality school libraries we have evidenced through the Life-changing Libraries campaign. Funding school libraries is a way we can level the playing field for disadvantaged children, and a year-on-year investment of £100 million could make this a reality by enabling schools to create their own Life-changing Libraries.

# What next

Although Cressida Cowell's laureateship is coming to an end, BookTrust is committed to supporting schools that want to set up their own life-changing library. **Our website** provides a toolkit with tips and guidance on how to set up your own school library based on learning from our Life-changing Libraries project and on the wider evidence we have drawn on for this report. And we are proud to support the **Great School Libraries Campaign**, which believes all children should have access to a school library, and supports schools, policy-makers and others in helping create this change through sharing best practice, building networks and conducting research.

To support schools to choose high-quality books that reflect the communities our children live in, BookTrust publishes a new book review every day.

**Our website** is regularly updated with book recommendations and themed booklists and our annual **Great Books Guide** for primary schools suggests a range of the best recently published books for each age group. The next edition will arrive in primary schools in October 2022.

For schools that want extra support and guidance to help start a reading revolution within their library we suggest getting in touch with **Reading for Pleasure UK**, or by contacting the **School Library Association**. All schools are invited to join the **Great School Libraries network**.

BookTrust will continue to work with our six Life-changing Libraries, building deeper understanding about the role that they can play in supporting families to continue reading, and their connection with communities and public library services.



**For the past twenty-five years, Cressida Cowell has campaigned for the necessity of school libraries, and she will continue to fight until every child has access to a great one.**

*"The results from this report are incredibly clear: gold standard library provision and a reading for pleasure culture have a transformational impact on children's lives. Each of the six schools has made their Life-changing Library their own, and used this invaluable resource to support their teachers, their children and their local communities in the most vital ways. My tenure as Waterstones Children's Laureate comes to an end in June, but my quest goes on: every single child has the right to this life-changing opportunity."*

**Cressida Cowell,  
Waterstones Children's Laureate 2019 – 2022**



## Statistics:

- **Location:** Benwick, Cambridgeshire
- **Number of pupils:** 96
- **Ofsted grading:** Requires Improvement
- **Pupil Premium:** 41%
- **Free School Meals:** 33%
- **SEN:** 20%

## Key strengths:

- Strong leadership and a committed staff team
- Sufficient physical space
- Supportive library volunteers from the wider community

## Key challenges:

- Limited bus links to local libraries
- Current library not fit for purpose
- Attitudes to reading in the wider school community
- Limited funds for new books or resources

## Backstory

Benwick Primary is a small village school, nestled within in the rural fenlands of Cambridgeshire. Local amenities are extremely limited. There is no public library and limited access to public transport, meaning children's experiences there are largely tied to their immediate locality.

Reading was a priority within Benwick's School Development Plan and the school had carried out research into pupils' reading behaviour. Results showed that a significant proportion of children were without access to books at home, and many were not read a bedtime story. Benwick did have a small library space, but the book selection was dated and did not provide the exposure to the broad range of authors and genres the school aspired to offer.

The management of Benwick Primary School hoped that the Life-changing Library would help capture pupils' interest and enhance their overall education by promoting a wider knowledge of the world and exposing

them to a range of rich and purposeful language. It was hoped that the project would transform both pupil and parent perceptions of reading and encourage a lifelong love of books.

"I want them to have that 'wow' feeling – that moment when they see the library and their eyes light up. I want them to feel euphoric about it. I want them to have a lifelong lasting memory of our shelves. I want the library to be a different world they can disappear into, but one that's safe and reliable and always there for them."

**Headteacher**

## The transformation: from 'dark, outdated and cramped' to 'bright, welcoming and relaxing'

Benwick had an existing school library, but the space was described as dark and uninviting. The room was predominantly used as an intervention space for small group work, not as a library, and the books were tired, worn and outdated. Staff did not feel the library encouraged reading for pleasure or provided the diversity they wished to offer, as a limited budget prevented spending on new books by current authors.

The Life-changing Library has transformed the space into a bright, welcoming and relaxing room, with striking bespoke wall art designed by Cressida Cowell, new furniture and a range of comfortable seating options. Old book stock was culled to make way for 1000 new books, specifically selected by BookTrust experts to provide a broad range of authors, genres and inclusive themes. Six months into the project the

school was able to choose a further 100 books, which was 'an easy job'. The children were excited to add to their collection and a range of titles to complete series as well as stand-alone books were chosen.

Removing the bulky classroom furniture created space for more shelving, including floor-level kinderboxes. This has meant that books are no longer cramped onto the shelves and can be displayed with their covers facing outwards to entice young readers. The English Lead, who manages the library, has created a group of experts throughout the renovation by training knowledgeable pupil, staff and volunteer librarians to help manage the space. A number of displays have been added in both the library space and the corridors to encourage purposeful book talk and help to embed a culture of reading for pleasure throughout the school.

**From this...**



**To this...**



## The difference the Life-changing Library at Benwick Primary has made

### Engaging reluctant boys

Previously disengaged boys, who 'preferred football to books' and labelled reading as 'un-cool', have begun to alter their attitudes since the library renovation. The wealth of new books within the library, many with a sporting theme, initially helped ignite their interest, and an inspiring author visit from Dan Freedman further shifted their mindset by providing a reading role model. Staff described the 'hard-to-reach' boys as 'enthralled' as Dan spoke and these same boys have frequently borrowed his Jamie Johnson football series from the library collection. Pupils proudly showed off the 'Dan Display' in the library and talked animatedly about the stories. These books have made the boys feel recognised and valued as readers, providing a familiar character they can relate to and storylines that reflect their lives and interests. Staff reported that the Life-changing Library's extensive provision of full series of books has helped sustain and embed the engagement in reading for this group, who are starting to see sport and reading as activities that can co-exist.

"I couldn't put [the impact] into words. It's changed the feeling of the school, the attitudes of children and staff. It has changed everything."  
**English Lead**

"I've noticed more boys coming [to the library.] To me, you have to engage a boy. If they find a book or an author they like, they'll come back. Before it didn't look cool to read a book and now that is changing."  
**Library volunteer**

### Increased enthusiasm for reading

The new library has encouraged children to read regularly and widely. Staff, pupils and parents all talked about the new enthusiasm and increased engagement they have seen in reading for pleasure since the Life-changing Library. Children were reading at lunchtimes, reading outside and desperate to get their names down for the after school book club! The community librarian and teaching assistant responsible for opening the library at lunchtimes reported that children queued up to be first into the space. 'They all talk about books now. They are lining up to share books and swap them. They're excited about what they are reading and want to tell you about it.'

A parent described the excitement around reading as infectious and filtering from school to home. 'Parents are enthusiastic too. It feeds from the children coming out of school talking about what reading they've done.' This suggests that a well-resourced school library can form a tangible core within a school's reading for pleasure culture that then expands into the wider community.

### Supporting children with SEN

Each Life-changing Library included a Tonie box, giving pupils access to audio books as well as physical texts. For pupils at Benwick with additional needs, taking themselves to the calming library space and listening to a story has proved to be a positive strategy to support self-regulation. One child in particular frequently used the Tonie box as a regulation strategy, helping him de-escalate within a safe space. He listened and relistened to stories and found them familiar and comforting when in crisis. His one-to-one teaching assistant noted that he now has another tool in his box to support himself when feeling overwhelmed, a skill he can take with him into the future.

"The Tonie box has been used a lot for our children with SEN when emotions are high. It gives them calming, quiet, down-time. It is a tool in the kit. They have a choice, so they take control back."  
**Deputy Head**

### Developing middle leaders

The Life-changing Library has developed the leadership skills of the English Subject leader. It has given a clear focus for embedding a reading for pleasure ethos throughout school and allowed her to disseminate her strategic vision to staff, governors and parents. She has developed both creativity and critical thinking in her approach to the leadership of the Life-changing Library. For example, she has used social media to engage parents and promote the benefits of reading for pleasure, and created a detailed, strategic plan to make sure the Life-changing Library had a long-lasting impact throughout and beyond the immediate school community. Other middle leaders are also benefitting from the library, using it to support the development of their subject areas by using the wealth of non-fiction to support teaching in areas such as science and PSHCE.

"Everyone is far more engaged. I've promoted a reading for pleasure ethos, and everyone is on board and that's wonderful."  
**English Lead**

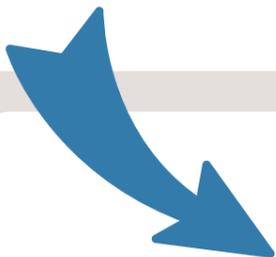


## Engaging parents in home reading

The English Leader skilfully used pupil surveys to delve deeper into school-specific issues related to reading engagement at Benwick and responded to the findings with focused actions. In a class of 6 to 8-year-olds she found that only 20% of children had a bedtime story, whereas 100% would like one. The 'bedtime story challenge', where parents are encouraged to post photos to the school social media page of them and their children enjoying a bedtime story from the library, has already prompted an improvement in the uptake of reading for pleasure at home.

By allowing children to borrow bedtime books from the library alongside their phonics reading book, the school has helped parents become more engaged and enthused in reading as they enjoy exploring the variety and quality of the new texts.

*"Their parents are wanting to read more with them. The books are engaging the parents as well as the children."*  
**Teaching Assistant**



## Poppy's story

Poppy – a quiet, hardworking pupil, who lacked confidence within the classroom and among her peers – has benefitted enormously from becoming a school librarian. Taking on responsibility for the library has helped her to find her voice and has seen her self-esteem grow. She has developed new skills and become an expert at using the library software, making recommendations to both younger children and her peers, and confidently liaising with staff when children have overdue loans. Already a reader, the library has furthered a passion for Poppy, and she enjoys discovering new books and authors and discussing them with her best friend. The Life-changing Library has given Poppy a sense of identity at school, increased her belief in her own abilities and opened up her world to a wealth of new possibilities.



## Books creating bright futures for Benwick

There has not just been a transformation of the library space at Benwick; there has also been a powerful and growing pupil voice that has developed alongside the Life-changing Library. Pupils enjoy having choice and ownership over their reading and their library space, and this has not only led to increased engagement with reading but a growth in book talk and peer-to-peer recommendations too. Pupils are vocal about the books, authors and series they enjoy, and non-fiction has become popular throughout the school. This eagerness was evidenced by the overwhelming number of suggestions children made when they were asked which new books they would like to see in the library.

Future plans at Benwick involve further author visits to inspire and sustain the excitement built around reading, and initiatives to engage parents of pre-school age children – offering shared story times in the library and nurturing a love of books before school.

Before, there was no library within the immediate community of Benwick. Now there is one, and for these children, their families and the wider community, it has the ability to offer a world of discovery, both now and for the future.



*"They all talk about books now. They are lining up to share books and swap, and they are all talking about them and much more excited about what they are reading."*  
**Teacher**

## Statistics:

- **Location:** Dinnington, Sheffield
- **Number of pupils:** 211
- **Ofsted grading:** Requires Improvement
- **Pupil Premium:** 52%
- **Free School Meals:** 52%
- **SEN:** 25%

## Key strengths:

- Passionate leadership and committed staff team
- Sufficient physical space
- A supportive Academy Trust

## Key challenges:

- Judged Inadequate by OFSTED 2019
- New leadership team
- Low reading confidence in pupils
- Limited funds for new books or resources
- Low parental engagement with home reading
- Lack of aspiration within the wider community

## Backstory

Dinnington Primary School, a member of the White Woods Academy Trust, is located on the outskirts of Sheffield. An ex-mining community, Dinnington sits within an area of economic deprivation. School leaders felt there was a lack of general investment in the community, and that this could lead to a lack of aspiration among school-aged children. They believed that a Life-changing Library would show the pupils at Dinnington Primary that others are invested in their future and help to instil a belief that they can succeed. Before Life-changing Libraries, the value of reading was recognised by school leaders at Dinnington and they had begun to create a library space in school. They felt, however, insufficiently resourced to create a space that fitted with their vision. They hoped that a Life-changing Library would support them

in bringing the magic of books to their pupils both at school and into their homes – and that it would invigorate learning and inject a sense of pride and vitality throughout the entire school.

“For many children, finding the right book can be the key to unlocking the world of reading or discovering a new passion; however, without sufficient resources, this is something that we are unable to achieve to the level which we aim to do.”

**Head of School**

## The transformation: from ‘a small, limited selection’ to an ‘amazing, magical space’

Dinnington had already begun to create a library within an empty classroom and this was renovated to become their Life-changing Library. Cressida Cowell’s colourful, personalised wall art immediately transformed the space, and seeing her personal investment in the school made pupils feel special and valued.

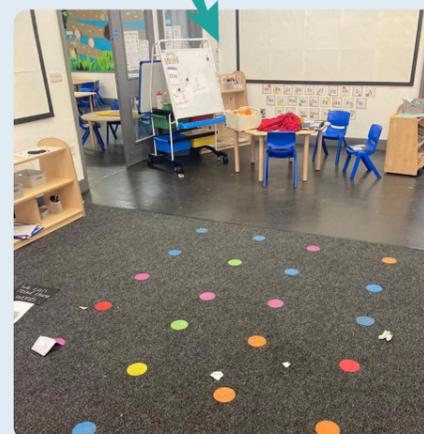
Old shelving was replaced with curved, free-standing shelves and wall shelving, as well as kinderboxes to give low-level access to picture books for younger children. The library design allowed opportunities for the books to be displayed with covers facing forward to entice readers, and the school pupil librarians carefully curated the space to ensure the most appealing, vibrant covers were on show.

The school also personalised their shelving by adding bespoke labelling and sorting baskets to curate collections of books around topics and genres. The large library furniture is interspersed

with a variety of comfortable and colourful seating options, creating opportunities for group, paired and individual reading. A favourite spot is the cosy circular nook nestled within the wall shelves.

The 1000 books chosen for the Life-changing Library by BookTrust experts – which included picture books, poetry, non-fiction, graphic novels, modern fiction, a number of full series and classics – were designed to appeal to a wide range of interests, to act as ‘windows to the world’ for children and expand their knowledge of authors and genres. The broadened range of reading the pupils now had access to was reflected in the book choices they made when choosing their next 100 titles six months into the project. The pupils at Dinnington took pride in their ownership of the space, adding high quality reading displays, pupil recommendations and hanging colourful umbrellas from the ceiling to make it theirs.

From this...



To this...



## The difference the Life-changing Library at Dinnington Community Primary has made

### Transforming children's reading practices through choice

Before the Life-changing Library, teachers described a lack of reading stamina and low enthusiasm for reading in many pupils. Now the opposite is seen. Children talk passionately about reading, recommend books to each other and read more frequently with increased concentration.

Credited for this transformation is the priority given to reading for pleasure, timetabled weekly library sessions and the incredible new book stock, which gives children choice and control of their reading.

Instead of being encouraged to read within their 'level' or 'ability', pupils now have absolute choice over the books they read for fun – whether that be a Year 6 reading picture books, a child with SEN reading non-fiction around a special interest, a confident and fluent reader choosing a graphic novel, or a less confident reader asking an adult or peer to read a chapter book with them.

This choice has had a positive impact on all pupils. Previously struggling readers are gaining in confidence and skill, aspiring to read beyond their current reading level, and children who already enjoyed reading are now demonstrating an incredible breadth of knowledge of authors and genres.

"The children are so excited and proud of their library; they are so respectful of everything. Their passion and love for literature is something I've not seen before."  
**Class Teacher**

### Enthusiasing reluctant readers

School staff reported an increase in motivation, desire and confidence in previously reluctant readers. The Life-changing Library has facilitated this change through the wide variety of books available, particularly picture books and graphic novels suitable for key stage 2, which have empowered less able readers and created equality within the space. Opportunities for communal reading within the library appear to have also helped less skilled readers gain confidence and enjoy books by sharing them with friends.

Ben, who is on the SEN register, was very inspired by author Michael Rosen's virtual visit. His favourite book is *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*, and after the visit Ben went back to his class and asked to read the story to them. He then shared it in assembly later that day. Another previously reluctant reader in Year 6 had his interest ignited by Marcus Rashford's book, *You Are a Champion*. He also read a section from the text in assembly, sharing both his enthusiasm and the book's motivational message with his peers.

One family gave the library credit for the significant improvement in their daughter's reading skills. She was

previously struggling with her phonics and fluency when reading, and having to take frequent breaks to maintain concentration. Since having access to the new library, she has started to read whole books and enjoys reading much more. Her parents attribute this to a new aspiration to be able to read the chapter books she had seen in the library.

"We are seeing children become readers and discovering what they like. The breadth of texts is conscious of reluctant readers. There are different lexical abilities in texts that 'look like' chapter books. Graphic novels have completely empowered some children."  
**Executive Head**

### A sense of value and pride

From the start, school leaders saw huge value in the library as a visible sign of investment in the school. The result of this investment – a fully resourced, gold-standard library – has instilled an immense sense of pride across the school community and beyond. It shows a clear commitment to Dinnington's core school values: for children to have equal opportunities; to feel valued; to experience a happy and welcoming place; and to leave the school well prepared for the future.

Leaders felt that the library had given a boost of morale at a challenging time as they navigated the Covid-19 pandemic, and helped both staff and pupils feel they were valued and worth investing in.

Pupils used the word 'proud' to describe their library, along with 'beautiful, calming, peaceful, unique and immersive'. Teachers also spoke of the transformational impact the library has had on their pupils. The Head of School explained, 'Children change when they go in there. They walk in and without fail go "wow!" The effect [of the library] then ripples out into the school community.'

"Many of our children are in their emotional overdraft, but every time they pick up a book it is making an emotional deposit."  
**Head of School**

### Increased engagement at home

Both staff and parents reported a wider uptake in home reading as a consequence of the new library, demonstrating impact of the investment beyond the immediate in-school community.

The quality of the available texts has prompted greater interest in taking books home, with younger children now taking a library book home alongside their phonics reading books and older pupils choosing their reading material from the library. Many pupils reported a significant increase in their reading since the Life-changing Library – they read before bed and talk about books at home. The texts seemed to be engaging the interest of parents too, giving weight to the school's core message that learning to read is a fundamental life skill that should be nourished by – and for – the whole family.

"It has provided a 'levelling up' within the wider community, giving students access to books at home."

**Executive Head**

"The children want to share books with their families."

**English Lead**

## Supporting rapid curriculum development

Access to the breadth of texts in the Life-changing Library has increased pupil and staff expertise and supported curriculum development throughout the school. School leaders reported that a wider knowledge of texts enabled subject leaders to think in more depth about how to plan lessons and

provide a broad and diverse curriculum to expand the knowledge and experiences of their pupils, exploring important and complex issues such as gender stereotypes and racial bias.

The English Lead reflected that an unexpected impact of the library had been the swift improvement in the upper key stage 2 pupils' capacity to make links across texts shortly after developing broader reading practices. Children grasped the opportunity to explore texts, reading a more extensive repertoire than they previously had access to. Throughout the school day, children talked about books and made recommendations based on their new knowledge. This has fed into comprehension lessons.

Staff and children have explored wider themes from books and had rich conversations together, allowing the school to rapidly develop their reading curriculum and raise attainment.

## Mark's story

Mark was described as an incredibly anxious child with an unstable home environment, including multiple foster placements. He had a passion for reading but struggled to get access to books. Those he did own were kept on a special shelf inside his wardrobe and were his prized possessions. Staff described the hugely positive impact the library has had on Mark. He loves the space and 'comes alive' when in the library or when talking about the books he has discovered. Mark said, 'I've been to lots of different schools, and this has more library books than any of them!' The Life-changing Library allowed staff to quickly connect with Mark and build positive relationships with him, using the calm, safe space to support him emotionally and help him to settle within school. The Head of School reported that seeing the way the school values reading, which is 'his thing', has in turn made him feel valued and included by the school community: 'He feels he has a place here.'



"Subject leaders are thinking in more depth about windows and mirrors across all subjects."

**Head of School**

## Books open doors for Dinnington's pupils

"It's not just a room with lots of books. It is much more than that. For the children, it's opened a window – no, a door – to the world."

**Head of School**

Since its Life-changing Library was installed, the love of reading has become visible throughout Dinnington Community Primary School – it has 'washed the children in reading'. The Head of School's passion has driven the significant impact of the library, and her vision is shared by the whole school. Leadership within the White Woods Academy Trust has now allocated funding to all schools in the Trust to develop their own Life-changing Library space. At Dinnington, the children's love of literature has begun to open them up to new ideas, experiences and cultures beyond their local area, and is bringing books into their hands, their hearts and their homes. The positive impact this could have on each individual's future is huge.

"The library sets the tone. We don't need to say, 'We value reading.' Everyone can see it."

**Head of School**

Ambitious plans for the future include the completion of a new, inviting and inspiring early years library for 0-5 years. There are also plans to share this space with community toddler groups and the local midwifery service for its clinics. Educating new parents about the importance of early reading, helping nurture relationships and providing books for households could help combat some of the frequently seen challenges in areas of economic deprivation, giving children a positive start in life and opening a world of possibilities for their futures.

## Statistics:

- **Location:** Wandsworth, London
- **Number of pupils:** 200
- **Ofsted grading:** Requires Improvement
- **Pupil Premium:** 66%
- **Free School Meals:** 70%
- **SEN:** 25%

## Key strengths:

- A strong, committed staff team
- Sufficient physical space
- A creative approach to learning

## Key challenges:

- Insufficient representation of ethnically diverse pupils in school reading material
- Poor engagement with reading, particularly among boys
- Low reading confidence in pupils
- Limited funds for new books or resources

## Backstory

Griffin Primary School is in an economically deprived area of South West London. Nine in ten pupils at Griffin are from ethnic minority backgrounds and a significant proportion speak more than one language. Learning at Griffin is innovative and creative, allowing pupils' wider experiences to explore and develop their own skills and ideas beyond the statutory curriculum. School leaders felt that a high-quality school library would enhance this approach.

Before the Life-changing Library, many pupils at Griffin did not read for pleasure at home, own their own books or visit the local library. Increasing engagement with reading was seen as a key priority by the school's leadership, but opportunities to make a real impact in this area were limited by budgetary constraints. Creating a school-wide culture of reading, with a calm, safe

and purposeful library at its heart where pupils could read, research, explore and create, was the central motivation for involvement in Life-changing Libraries.

"A school library will give our community ownership of a space through which the children can 'escape' – disappear into different worlds – and develop as readers. This project will support our aim for every child to be a reader."

**Deputy Head**

## The transformation: from 'small, boring and distracting' to 'beautiful, inviting and inclusive'

An empty classroom space at Griffin Primary School was transformed into a Life-changing Library. Personalised wall art designed by Cressida Cowell brightened the space and created a 'wow factor', and desks and furniture were replaced with new shelving that formed purposeful pathways around the space. Kinderboxes ensured low-level access to books for younger children, and creative shelving solutions enabled books to be displayed in an appealing way, showcasing front-facing covers to entice readers. A variety of movable seating – wobble stools, bean bags, mushroom stools and padded seating areas – were added to the library to create opportunities for group, paired and individual reading.

The 1000 books chosen for the Life-changing Library by BookTrust experts were designed to appeal to a wide range of interests and to reflect the

diversity of the community. Picture books, non-fiction, graphic novels, modern fiction and classics were all included in the selection to engage all pupils and expand their reading repertoire. There was great excitement in being able to choose the extra 100 books that were provided as part of the project, which represented their community through the authors and characters they chose.

The library space at Griffin is used for whole-class teaching as well as creative arts lessons. To support this, the school chose to retain the interactive whiteboard and sink from the former classroom. Griffin has put its personal mark on the library by opening the doors to an outside area and bringing plants into the library space. Pupils' artwork has also been displayed, creating a sense of ownership.

**From this...**



**To this...**



## The difference the Life-changing Library at Griffin Primary School has made

### Increased sense of calm and improved levels of concentration

Pupils reflected on the comfortable and safe feeling within the library space. They described how it offers them a quiet, purposeful haven that helps them feel relaxed, calm and focused. Some pupils reported getting very distracted before having the library, but said having this special space that they can use when they need to 'escape' or regulate their emotions makes it easier for them to concentrate through the day.

The library has had a significant impact on pupils in one year group, many who were disengaged from learning and found returning to school after lockdown very challenging. The Deputy Head reported a profound impact on their wellbeing, describing the library as a critical tool for managing difficult behaviour. She explained, 'The library and two exceptional teachers have worked magic. When [the pupils] are wobbling they say, "We just need to go to the library." I didn't see that coming. The behaviour has settled and they want to talk about reading.'

"Sometimes if we are sad we can just read and it takes our mind off things. It's a safe place to stay and a place I can find a lot of peace."

**Pupil**

### Improved reading engagement from boys

An unexpected impact reported by teaching staff was the positive effect of the library on boys' reading practices in key stage 2. Getting some boys to read was previously described as 'like pulling teeth', but teachers reported a sharp increase in engagement since the library, with many boys keen to visit the space and/or asking to read once they have finished their work. They have also started using books to influence their writing, hoping to emulate the style of their favourite authors. Teachers believe this transformation in attitude is due to the increased selection of genres and authors in the new library. As well as enabling the children to focus their reading material on their individual interests, the new choice of books (designed to be read for pleasure rather than purely focused on increasing reading ability) has given them the opportunity to read outside the 'levels' or 'bands' they were previously restricted to. This has eased reading pressures and been a source of great inspiration for children.

"What's happening? The amount of boys who want to read is amazing! They have more options and know what they like."

**Teacher**

### Raised aspirations and sense of possibility

Staff noted that the Life-changing Library had created a sense of pride within the school community. The children respected the books and the library space, but have also spoken about themselves and their futures in a more positive and aspirational way since the new facilities. The books had opened a new world of learning, ideas and possibilities to them, helping them to be more ambitious and their dreams feel less abstract. Part of this transformation was thought to be due to the books better reflecting the diversity of the school community than previous reading material available. Several stakeholders reported having heard the phrase 'this girl/boy/superhero looks like me' from children using the library space. Developing a more inclusive book collection has enabled Griffin to strengthen its community, allowing all children to feel represented, valued and equal.

"Before the library was here the books weren't interesting to me. Now reading makes me feel like everyone has a place in the world and you can always achieve your dreams. It has expanded my love of books forever."

**Pupil**

"It genuinely has been life-changing!"  
**Deputy Head**

### Books supporting the curriculum

A motivated and engaged staff team reported that through timetabled library sessions, their knowledge of texts and authors has broadened and their understanding of their pupils' reading preferences has developed. As a result of this, they were making more informed book choices and re-designing curriculum sessions to personalise learning and better inspire, engage and meet the needs of their pupils. This has in turn led to improvements in motivation to learn from pupils. Early years children were more incentivised in their phonics work as the library made their learning purposeful and they saw the joy of reading alongside learning the mechanics of decoding. In key stage 2, many pupils showed improvements in their writing, using the range of books they were reading as models for language use and developing a better sense of setting or characterisation in their writing. They also described a more organic learning process in curriculum areas such as Science and History, with children keen to explore their own avenues of learning using the library books and making links between different areas of learning. Through inspiring this curiosity amongst pupils, the Life-changing Library has supported the learning ethos at Griffin and also supported their aim to give their pupils a wider view of the world.

"It's hard to put into words [the difference the library has made,] as it's huge. Reading is our priority. The library is the lynchpin for that. Teachers' book choices are now exceptional. Teachers are reading. Their expertise has developed, and children are exposed to higher quality language."

**Deputy Head**



## A future of possibility at Griffin Primary School

The Life-changing Library has begun to open pupils' eyes to new possibilities for their future and given them a safe space to explore and learn about the world. The improvements in children's confidence, curiosity and motivation to learn has been immense.

Griffin Primary School has ambitious plans for its Life-changing Library moving forward. Early Years phonics meetings for parents have already been held in the library, making explicit to parents the link between learning to read and reading for

pleasure, and allowing parents to experience the beautiful, inviting and inclusive space that has made such a positive impact within the school. The hope is to further involve the wider community by inviting in parents to read alongside their children; hosting English language teaching sessions; and for community toddler groups to access the space for story sessions. By broadening access to the library and introducing new and exciting books to pre-school children and their families, Griffin Primary School hopes to engage parents early in the joy of reading for pleasure, help children start school on a stronger footing and build brighter futures for children in the community.



### Asim's story

Before the Life-changing Library, Asim wouldn't read at all. In class reading time he would stare out of the window and refuse to read his book. As a capable reader with secure comprehension skills, this battle over reading caused frustration for both him and his class teacher. The library renovation has allowed Asim to explore a wider variety of texts; he has discovered the Amulet graphic novel series and is hooked. The freedom to choose anything to read according to his interests rather than having to read books 'matched to his ability' means he now reads avidly. With this new knowledge of Asim and his reading habits, the class teacher has adapted her teaching to engage and motivate him by seeking out other graphic novels for use in lessons a self-perpetuating virtuous circle of positive learning, relationships and impact.



"My daughter's reading has improved hugely this year – it's been an eye opener. She's come out of her shell and has many more opinions about the books she wants to read. We have a really strong bond and it's making another connection and solid ground between us. Her Dad now reads with her and they're forming a bond, through reading. She's talking to him more about books and it's now part of her routine. The library has changed her for the better."

**Parent,  
Griffin Primary School**

## Statistics:

- **Location:** Collyhurst, Manchester
- **Number of pupils:** 184
- **Ofsted grading:** Good
- **Pupil Premium:** 67%
- **Free School Meals:** 66%
- **SEN:** 21%

## Key strengths:

- Passionate and enthusiastic leadership and a dedicated staff team
- Committed to developing a reading ethos throughout school

## Key challenges:

- High numbers of pupils speaking English as an additional language
- High deprivation within the community
- No library provision
- No single space large enough for a library
- Limited budget for new books or resources

## Backstory

Saviour CofE Primary School is in Collyhurst, Manchester, which is an area of high economic deprivation. A large proportion of pupils speak more than one language. Many parents also have poor literacy skills, limiting their ability to provide learning support to their children.

Pupils generally do not have access to books at home, and the nearest public library is a 30-minute walk from school, making it too far for classes to be taken to borrow books. Having no school library therefore meant no access to books at all for many children. The determination of the school's leadership to change this led to its involvement with Life-changing Libraries. It was also felt that a new library would be a key resource for teachers, helping them develop skills to better meet the needs of Saviour CofE's pupils.

The school's leadership was passionate about transforming outcomes for pupils and their families. Initiatives

had already been developed to encourage reading, such as 'Team Read' – a group of children identified with special badges who love books and acted as advocates for 'reading a book over a boxset'. There was a strong desire to create a culture of reading at Saviour CofE, but the budget to make the vision a reality was lacking.

"It's really clear when you talk to children about books and about what they know about books that it's not something they get from home – it's what they get from their teacher. We can see the reading attitudes in the classes of the teachers who are readers; the library will be a good source of CPD."

**Headteacher**

## The transformation: from 'non-existent' to 'awe-inspiring, eye-catching and buzzing'

Space is an issue for many schools, and at Saviour CofE there was no spare classroom to transform into a single library. Before the new library, all the school's books were in classrooms with different sets split up and mismatched, and some books older than the school leadership. Having invested in books for the teaching of phonics, there was no budget available for books designed to be read for pleasure.

The Life-changing Library transformed two small offices/store rooms into two different library spaces – one for key stage 1 and one for key stage 2. The key stage 1 space has front-facing shelves including one in the shape of a tree which children can sit under and listen to their Tonie Box, taking in the magnificent wall art by Cressida Cowell. Toadstool stools contribute to the woodland theme, and staff have added wooden boxes to curate books according to author (Julia Donaldson, Oliver Brown...), theme (stories by the sea, stories about dragons and monsters...), genre (poems and rhyming stories), and have also introduced age-appropriate pupil voice in these boxes (favourite stories).

Not all Saviour CofE's picture books were placed in the key stage 1 space. To give older readers more choice and make the space inviting to those with a lower reading ability, the selection

in the key stage 2 space also included picture books alongside other formats such as non-fiction, graphic novels and classics. The key stage 2 children have enjoyed exploring their selection, discovering new formats and genres that appeal to them, rather than being restricted to reading levels or book bands.

The transition to the key stage 2 library not only allowed for the opportunity to introduce children to a broader range of genres and authors, but also allowed for the development of library and curation skills. Books are organised alphabetically by author surname with front-facing sections to entice children. Pupil voice is encouraged through recommendation slips, Scott Evans' **#BookMatch** recommendations are on display and the school coined **#authorwall** to build a lasting memory of authors who have visited the school. Each author is encouraged to sign a wall in the libraries. Cressida Cowell was first, then Tom Palmer cheekily added his favourite football team (a local rival) to his signature. These author visits have been shown to inspire pupils to read and write, and the school plans to cover the walls with autographs providing children with both inspiration and aspiration for their own future.

From this...



To this...



## The difference the Life-changing Library at Saviour CofE Primary School has made

### Understanding pupils

The Life-changing Library at Saviour CofE has deepened relationships between staff and pupils, helping teachers understand their pupils better. One child who was new to the school settled more quickly than other new arrivals had previously, and this has been attributed to the library. The child was enthused by – and excited to explore – the broad range of texts in the beautiful, safe space, and the staff were able to identify his interests more quickly through his book choices. There has also been an impact on relationships beyond the classroom, with children approaching teaching assistants to discuss books they have enjoyed.

“I thought the excitement would wane, but it’s been sustained and just keeps getting better and better as children find new books and share them with their friends.”  
**Teacher**

### Improving focus during story time

Young children don’t always find it easy to listen to a story when they haven’t been used to it. At Saviour CofE, teachers often struggled to keep their pupils’ attention during story time before the library renovation. The book selection was uninspiring, and children used to flit from book to book – often choosing what to read on the basis of, for example, how thick

a book was, rather than its content. The opportunity to have age-related texts and to tailor book choice to individuals has allowed the children to read books they’re interested in. This has had a positive impact on learning behaviour and has led to an increased ability to concentrate on a story. One teacher explained, ‘The children can now “endure” and enjoy a story! They are so much more engaged in story time and love listening to stories now. It’s no longer hard work for them.’

“The biggest impact in our school has been the change in attitudes. Staff and children are now avid readers. They’re making choices about books and exploring different titles and texts. The impact has been amazing.”  
**Headteacher**

### The impact of inspiring leadership

When the current Headteacher arrived at Saviour CofE, she was ‘horrified’ to find that there wasn’t a library in the school. The key stage 2 space was an intervention room and the key stage 1 space was an office. Passionate about creating a community of readers, she established ‘Team Read’ and opened it up to staff as well as children. Keenly aware of the need to have adults as positive reading role models, she set up her own bookshelf of favourite reads outside her office and started trying to create a library space, which was ‘difficult for schools always on a shoestring budget’. The Life-changing Library has enabled her to implement her vision and as such has been supported wholeheartedly

by the entire school. The Headteacher said that staff and pupils have fully embraced the library, are reading a broader range of authors and have been able to find joy in a book.

“The key stage 1 library is snug and cosy, and the key stage 2 is more spacious, with the books arranged alphabetically. The progression in library skills and using the space has helped with transitions through schools, and we’ve made a link with our feeder high school so the children’s library journey is continued into the next stage and doesn’t finish with primary.”  
**Headteacher**

“The children used to say the books we sent home were boring, and I would agree. The quality of the books in the library has helped me explain how we teach reading to parents, namely that some books help your child to decode and others are for enjoyment, and their purpose is to share a story with you.”  
**Teacher**

## Giving children a voice

There are two children in Year 6 who have always been on the teachers' radar as being quieter and less confident than their peers: 'They were nervous and swallowed by the loudness of others.' The teachers said the library has helped them flourish as they've met other like-minded children outside of their year group. They now laugh in school, which the teachers had never heard before. 'It's surprising and lovely that the library has given a voice to the more vulnerable children.' The library has helped foster a sense of community and gratitude among the pupils, with pupils reporting to Ofsted that they feel 'lucky' to have the library and the opportunities it brings, such as having a say in the extra 100 books they received six months after the library launched.

"There are more boys engaging and coming to the library now. They pester us to buy new books. Interest in reading has improved – we've got a passion for reading now and recommend books to each other."

**Higher Level Teaching Assistant**

"It's very easy to read about how to influence people, and the library has helped me see the theory in action – I've seen staff change, staff become readers and influence children as well. The library has really helped develop my confidence as a leader."

**English Lead**

## Courtney's story

At the start of the year, Courtney was quiet, low-achieving and lacked confidence. Since the library opened, she has flourished. She loves finding books ahead of the next topic, borrowing the same book repeatedly to help her learn and deepen her understanding. She is now putting her hand up more in class to share her knowledge with her peers. This new-found confidence has spread beyond the classroom, and she has demonstrated this by speaking to the whole school in assembly. Her subject knowledge has become better than other children's and she is now seen as the class expert.



## Sustaining Saviour CofE's buzz about books

At Saviour CofE, the transformation the library brought about in both staff and children surprised even the Headteacher. She described how teachers and teaching assistants had been recommending books to her that she hadn't heard of, which created a real sense of pride among staff. The library has created a buzz around books at Saviour CofE and reading is visible everywhere through school.

Covid-19 had stalled plans to open the library up to a wider audience, but parents are beginning to be invited in. Future plans include regular coffee mornings and opening up the library after school. In the absence of real-life events, staff have used social media to engage parents, with a video encouraging reading at home and showcasing the school's new library pinned to its Twitter feed.

"The library is well supported by the governors and feels like a good opportunity for this area. It has made reading more of a joy than a chore and being in the Headteacher's reading group is seen as a special reward. There is a joy to reading here."

**Governor**

"The unexpected impact of the library has been on the whole culture around school. I didn't think it'd have as big an impact and snowball so much. I had really high expectations, but they have definitely been exceeded!"

**English Lead**



## Statistics:

- **Location:** Darlington
- **Number of pupils:** 325
- **Ofsted grading:** Requires Improvement
- **Pupil Premium:** 63%
- **Free School Meals:** 61%
- **SEN:** 26%

## Key strengths:

- A passionate leadership and committed staff team
- Sufficient physical space
- Highly engaged governing body and community team
- Focus on wellbeing space

## Key challenges:

- Within an area of very high deprivation and lack of aspiration in the wider community
- Low reading confidence in pupils and parents
- Limited funds for new books or resources

## Backstory

Skerne Park Academy sits within an area of high economic deprivation. The school encounters all the social, emotional and academic challenges that are associated with this, all of which impact pupils' learning, concentration and motivation. Developmentally, children entering Skerne Park's early years are typically behind what is expected for their age, and this is particularly acute within the area of speech and language.

The school has a strong emphasis on community integration and works closely with the on-site community hub, the Coleridge Centre, which provides adult education and hosts group activities for toddlers. However, the combination of local authority budget cuts and the effects of the pandemic has resulted in a decline of the building's usage.

School leaders at Skerne Park are passionate about the power of reading as a gateway to an excellent education and social mobility. They felt the Life-changing Library would help them provide a firm foundation on which pupils could build positive futures –

supporting pupils' wellbeing, stimulating their curiosity and broadening their knowledge of the world beyond Skerne Park.

"Without the right literacy skills, children often fall behind and disengage from education. Many children don't have access to books at home as parents, when living in poverty, often have to choose between essential food and luxuries such as books, toys or clothes. The children have some access to books at school but with declining budgets these are old and well-used and not very enticing for children to pick up. As our children and their families are some of the least engaged with realising their aspirations, lively, new, glossy books presented in a lovely library space would be such an enticement to enabling love and positive associations with books and reading."

**Headteacher**

## The transformation: from 'dog-eared and devoid of high-quality texts' to 'inviting, inspirational, calming and safe'

Although Skerne Park had a large central atrium space, the school leaders, knowing their pupils' needs, decided to create their Life-changing Library in an empty classroom. This way, children are able to walk into a calming, quiet and safe space, where they can literally and metaphorically close the door on the outside world. The route to the library is marked through the school with arrows and book characters pointing the way, making each visit a special adventure.

With the classroom furniture removed, the room was transformed into a bright, welcoming and calm space. Cressida Cowell's customised dragon wall art and the bespoke shelving, all entice the reader. Once inside, the tables and varied seating (including wobble stools, bean bags and a popular reading nook) create different areas for pupils to read communally or to escape on their own.

The old 'dog-eared books' described as 'from the 1970s' have been

replaced with 1000 diverse texts chosen by BookTrust experts.

Spanning many genres and designed to capture the interest of pupils, opening their eyes to wider experiences of the world and sparking their imagination. The inclusion of whole series of books has continued to engage pupils, particularly those who are less confident. Knowing what to read next and having it immediately accessible has helped them become readers. When choosing their next 100 books six months after the library renovation, the children were sure to include more series in their suggestions, showing their popularity.

Reading Ambassadors keep the space tidy, as do those who attend a popular lunchtime reading club. According to the pupils, their Life-changing Library is 'the best place to relax and have a calming time.'

### From this...



### To this...



## The difference the Life-changing Library at Skerne Park Academy has made

### Improved wellbeing amongst pupils and staff

Anxiety and mental health issues have been more prevalent at Skerne Park since the Covid-19 pandemic. As such, supporting pupils' wellbeing was a key priority for the school as it developed its Life-changing Library.

The library was described as safe, calm and quiet by teachers, school leaders and pupils. They felt it was a special space to find 'shelter' or relax, sharing stories and talking about books in a more informal, social setting than the classroom. The design of the space and seating options played a huge part in this, as being able to read while cocooned within a bean bag or wriggling on a wobble stool helps pupils relax and regulate their moods.

The library was also greatly valued by teaching staff as a supportive space that had a positive effect on their own mental health. They reflected that making space in the curriculum for 'time out' in the library had strengthened the relationships they had with pupils, helping them be more effective in their work. They also described the library as 'taking a weight off' when planning, as they now know they have 'a book to start or support any lesson'.

"They've not GOT to read, they WANT to read."  
**English Lead**

"It is a little pocket of calm. Children with SEN who are heightened come down here and I see them glancing at books and regulating themselves. They just need a few minutes in the library. It's a safe space to get away from everything except the books."

**Parent and midday supervisor**

### Encouraging home reading

The school has used the enthusiasm generated by the Life-changing Library to increase engagement with home reading. School leaders gifted each child a soft toy 'reading lobster' – a reading partner for life – making the link between the Life-changing Library and a lifelong love of reading. This initiative ensures that every child, regardless of their home circumstances, has a special reading 'buddy'. The toys have added to the sense of 'fun' around reading and are a visible sign outside of school that reading for pleasure is valued and important.

Parents described a tangible change in their children's reading practices, reporting that they were much more interested in books since the Life-changing Library. Younger children were reported to be more confident in their reading ability, keen to share books over video calls with family and friends, and excited about using the new library. One father told us that his son was coming home and

asking to read his old Harry Potter books. They were amazed by this transformation, as he was previously a keen gamer but is now reading books rather than stuck to a screen.

"He's gone from not reading to sat on his bed reading. He was wanting to play on the computer all the time and now he wants to read books!"  
**Parent Governor**

### Supporting vocabulary development

Low levels of language on entry to early years classes was a challenge at Skerne Park, and one that continues to impact children through their time at the school. The extensive range of new books in the library has supported teachers in addressing this key need of their pupils, broadening their access to rich vocabulary and igniting an interest in language. Younger children were reported to be playing with rhyme and beginning to use descriptive phrases, and in key stage 2 classes children are contributing to discussions about language and its impact on the reader. Staff described seeing adventurous word choices being used in writing, with children taking words and phrases from books they are reading to enhance their own story writing ideas.

"The language is coming out in their writing from the books they are reading."  
**Headteacher**

### Facilitating an enthusiasm and passion for reading

Pupils talked passionately about their increased enjoyment and engagement in reading for pleasure, and school staff described the children as 'glowing with enthusiasm' when talking about reading. The extensive range of books in the Life-changing Library has broadened the reading diet of all pupils. This has facilitated more positive reading experiences as there is 'more choice and something for everyone'. Alongside their altered attitudes to reading, pupils noted that their reading practices were also transforming. These changes included: reading more frequently and widely, reading with siblings, reading at home every night and talking with their friends about books – all of which had not occurred before the library renovation.

The positive impact of meeting Cressida Cowell was tangible, with pupils describing her books in great detail and recalling anecdotes from the visit. This suggests that in addition to the excellent space and book provision, author visits have given further value in terms of inspiring and engaging children in reading.

"I used to think reading was boring but now it's fun because there's more books and lots more genres... it's the best place to find something you like."  
**Year 6 pupil**

## Akram's story

Akram joined the school in Year 2 as a refugee from Syria. Having experienced considerable trauma in his early years, he found aspects of school very challenging. Aggressive behaviours and fighting were frequent, and he was disengaged from learning, particularly reading – an activity he stated he did not enjoy. Now in Year 6, senior leaders describe how Akram's teacher has used the Life-changing Library and the calming, relaxed atmosphere it creates to connect with him and inspire him to engage in learning through literature. His self-confidence has increased and he displays positive behaviours around school. Akram described the way the library made him feel as 'fun, calm and safe', and he talked passionately about a series of books that he loved by Darren Shan, which he had recommended to friends. The library space has helped alter both his perception of learning and his experience at school, and offered him a space to explore his potential.



"Books have switched him on to something different... a different path for the future."  
**English Lead**



## Building a community library for the future

"We are improving the life chances of our children. This is the thread that pulls everything together for them... It's such a quiet and warm, safe space. Homes aren't always like that."

**Community Governor**

Reading for pleasure is visible throughout Skerne Park. Every display, classroom and corridor demonstrates this. Leaders feel the library has already had a huge impact on broadening pupils' outlooks and knowledge of the world, as well as raising their confidence and self-esteem. This gives them hope for the future.

The Skerne Park leadership team are passionate about sharing their Life-changing Library and making it accessible to the wider community, and the space has been carefully designed so that it can be accessed by the public. Ambitious plans made alongside governors and community centre leaders include: opening the space as a community library with coffee mornings, holding toddler groups, developing of an adult lending library and purchasing reference books to support parents, particularly those of children with SEN.

By placing their Life-changing Library at the heart of the community, Skerne Park hopes to invest not just in the future of their young people, but in families and the wider community to positively impact as many lives as possible.

"There are lots of elderly people on the estate and lots of loneliness. [A community library] would be good for people who can't travel or can't afford the bus fare into town. Everyone has the right to read and if we make it accessible, then they can."

**Governor**

## Statistics:

- **Location:** Woodchurch Estate, Wirral
- **Number of pupils:** 206
- **Ofsted grading:** Requires Improvement
- **Pupil Premium:** 46%
- **Free School Meals:** 44%
- **SEN:** 16%

## Key strengths:

- Committed to developing a reading ethos
- Passionate and dedicated English and library leader
- Large space for the library in the corridor, making it visible and accessible for all

## Key challenges:

- High deprivation in the community
- No previous library provision
- Poor parental engagement around reading
- No budget available for books or library
- Many children arrive at school with literacy skills significantly below average

## Backstory

Woodchurch CE Primary School is a voluntary aided church school based in the Wirral, near Liverpool. The pupil population is homogeneous, with most children from white, economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Results and progress scores at Woodchurch CE are below average for England, with poor language acquisition cited as a key reason for this. Low levels of disposable income and poor parental literacy mean children have very limited access to books at home and the local library closed during the Covid-19 restrictions and has not reopened.

Staff at Woodchurch CE were committed to engaging children with reading, but with limited books and no dedicated reading space, this was a challenge – particularly as children were increasingly immersed in screens and social media at home. Leaders felt that having a Life-changing Library would ignite a passion for reading among staff, pupils

and parents, and place reading for pleasure at the heart of the school. It would also provide crucial opportunities for staff development. The vision for Life-changing Libraries was strongly aligned with the school's Christian values and the belief that 'books provide an open door to a wonderful future for our children'.

"We battle against electronic monsters, so having somewhere inviting about reading means we will have an armoury to fight against technology – there's nothing like holding a real book in your hand."

**Headteacher**

## The transformation: from 'a dumping ground' to 'a stunning, engaging haven'

Woodchurch CE had an existing library space within a corridor at the centre of the school, but this had gradually fallen out of use and become an intervention space and storage area. A lack of books meant the space was sparse and uninviting for the children to visit.

Life-changing Libraries transformed Woodchurch CE's library space with Cressida Cowell's art placed onto the curved walls surrounding the central space, making it bright and welcoming. Curved bookshelves lead the eye to this stunning centrepiece, with further shelving for picture books on each side. The library remains corridor-based, which means it is on view to children as they move around the school, placing it at the heart of the building and making reading visible to the whole school community. Although outward facing, the library feels cosy and contained as the clever shelving solutions act as walls to enclose the space. These

shelves are filled with 1000 new books, carefully chosen by BookTrust experts to engage all readers and provide the 'hook' into books that leaders felt was needed at the school – these include graphic novels and books of different lexical abilities to support reluctant readers. Flexible seating options are offered throughout the space with the bean bags, wobble stools and mushroom cushions the most popular spots to sit and read. A passionate teaching assistant has developed topic-based learning displays around the library space that personalise it and make a concrete link for pupils between reading quality texts and their own learning. Staff have also personalised the library with a shelf dedicated to books they use to support the curriculum, and the ability to further personalise their collection by adding 100 books six months after the library launched created excitement among staff and pupils.

From this...



To this...



## The difference the Life-changing Library at Woodchurch CE Primary School has made

### Creating a culture of reading for pleasure

Since the Life-changing Library was created, reading for pleasure is much more visible throughout Woodchurch CE. Displays promoting reading fill the corridors that branch out from the central library space and classrooms have inviting reading areas of their own as well as a daily class story. Pupils stated how much they loved their library time – both listening to stories and choosing new books. They were described as walking around the corridors with their noses in books on the way back to the classroom. With encouragement from staff, children are beginning to broaden their reading practices and making book recommendations to each other and to staff. A unique element of the reading culture in Woodchurch CE is that it has spread beyond the pupils and classroom staff, with cleaners and the office team also borrowing books from the library and being seen reading and talking about them. The impact of pupils seeing all members of the school community reading was described by leaders as ‘incredibly powerful and empowering’.

“We see children on the yard with books, walking down the corridor with beautiful new books they can’t wait to get back to classroom to read. Reading is seen in the staffroom. Books are everywhere. Everybody is really hooked in.”  
**Headteacher**

### Improved progress for pupils with SEN

School data suggests that since the Life-changing Library, the number of pupils with SEN making academic progress has increased, with 90% making expected progress in autumn term – the highest rate of progress for this group the school has ever seen. While it is not possible to say this improvement has been entirely down to the library, school leaders reported that no other interventions had been added at the time, and that the only change to their support for children with additional needs was improved access to quality books and the new reading for pleasure culture in school.

“For years we have been looking for interventions to boost attainment to help close the gap between disadvantaged and SEN children and their peers. The library was the only intervention they needed.”  
**Headteacher**

### Increased passion and confidence from staff

The research and training provided alongside the Life-changing Library has shown great value at Woodchurch CE, improving expertise and developing a passion for reading among staff, both on a personal level and in the classroom. Staff have utilised the practical ideas given at their training session from Reading for Pleasure UK to create

‘quick wins’ and generate an excitement around reading for their pupils. Staff show themselves to be reading role models. The staffroom has a selection of books chosen from the library each week by different staff members with the help of pupils. Staff then browse and read at lunchtime, widening their knowledge of the library stock and making recommendations to each other as different classroom topics and themes arise. An early career teacher and several teaching assistants described how they have gained in confidence, particularly when reading aloud to the children, and are now using different voices for characters to increase engagement when reading the class a story.

“I just enjoy the library. I’m not confident in anything else but I’ll sit and read with kids. It gives you a bit of a confidence boost that you’re passing on something to the children and passing different ideas on to colleagues. It means a lot.”  
**Teaching Assistant**

### A space for calm

Calm, safe, colourful and comfy were the words most frequently used by children to describe their library space. As well as talking avidly about the books, pupils described the library as a place they could go when they were feeling anxious or angry to help quieten themselves and feel calmer. They talked about reading books that helped them forget their worries by being transported to ‘the moon, the universe and other worlds’, and it was clear that relaxing in the

library supported their wellbeing. Pupils described how special they felt having a quiet space to read in, and compared this to their homes, which could be noisy and distracting due to constant interruptions from siblings. The Headteacher also talked about children with challenging behaviour using the library as a ‘safe haven’ at break times, seeing the library as somewhere supportive and safe to be. While the youngest children in school were somewhat overwhelmed by the exciting new library, teachers have skilfully managed this to help them to experience the space calmly too.

“Reading takes you to another world. Sometimes if you have had a bad day, or you’re just not really feeling good, you can put your nose in a book and feel much better.”  
**Pupil**



## Amy's story

Amy is an articulate, bright and bubbly key stage 2 pupil. Before the Life-changing Library, she said she enjoyed reading but did not own any books. She had never visited a library and told us her parents said, 'Reading was for school.' Reading at home was a challenge as her older brother would come into her room and question what she was doing, undermining her confidence in enjoying reading. After the Life-changing Library, she has increased her love of literature and delighted in the wealth of reading material available to her. Amy's teachers reported that her confidence has improved since the library. She is now putting her hand up in class more and making more contributions to class discussions. She now owns seven books of her own and is reading at home.



"I've never owned a book and now I have seven!"  
Amy

## Looking forwards: incorporating the library into family values

"I would, hand on heart, say that reading for pleasure needs to come before the mechanics of reading. Children need the passion and the purpose before the phonics."

**Deputy Head and English Lead**

School leaders at Woodchurch CE are determined to continue to build on the passion and drive harnessed by the Life-changing Libraries project. Initially, the library was championed

by two people – the English Lead and a passionate teaching assistant, but the leadership team quickly realised that all staff had to be on board to ensure the library's success. Further whole-school training about why a library is so important has led to all staff determinedly supporting the library and a consistent desire for the library to be a success is firmly embedded amongst the leadership team, governors and staff. Engagement with the research behind reading for pleasure, and the impact a library can have, has been crucial to this change in attitude and prompted plans to

sustain the library moving forward. There is a fierce determination not to lose the progress the library has already helped the school make.

The library has inspired a love of reading throughout the school and leaders now hope to share their vision by extending this into the wider community. Being a church school, Woodchurch CE has a strong sense of Christian values, and developing a passion for reading has become part of the school's ethos. There are plans to take reading beyond the school walls; a special shed in the playground is being created to host a book swap for

parents, and the school's close links to the church are being utilised to create a mini community library in the church.

Community groups are also being invited to use the space; for example, a parent-toddler group will hold craft and story sessions, fostering a love of literature and helping develop speech and language before children start school. Transition sessions for the new cohort are held in the library so the message to new parents that Woodchurch CE is a 'reading school' is loud and clear.



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