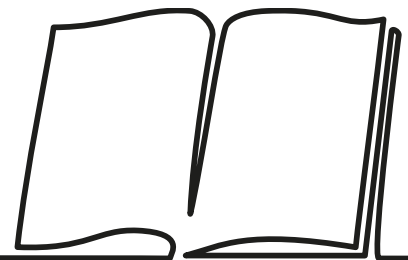




# Equal futures?

An imbalance of opportunities





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# FOREWORD



The overarching theme of this report is one of change and transformation. The research we are presenting shows that school libraries are adapting to their financial, educational and local environment. In some cases this is not a positive change as school libraries fall victim to funding cuts but there is some evidence in this report which shows that there are school libraries which are leading the way in developing their role in school to ensure that the work of the library and its librarians are valued and make a significant and multi-faceted contribution to school life.

“Every child growing up in the UK should have the chance to learn and develop through a good school library. Poor literacy skills stand in the way of children and young people achieving their potential. In an increasingly digital world, we need to teach young people how to evaluate and understand unprecedented amounts of information. The ability of businesses to recruit people with the right skills and the success of our economy are underpinned by literate and knowledgeable people. Good school libraries build these skills.” So wrote Lord Tope in the Foreword of the All Party Parliamentary Group’s report into school libraries in 2014.

The first phase of the Great School Libraries campaign built on this report when it launched in 2019, providing the first insights into school library provision and building a library of best practice and a network of committed individuals.

This phase of the campaign aims to move things forward again, and has carried out the largest piece of research into school library provision across the UK. We are grateful to the NLT Primary Alliance, supported by the Foyle Foundation, Penguin Random House and the Lightbulb Trust for providing the funding for this large-scale survey which we hope will be the catalyst for policy change and strategic development across all nations and regions of the United Kingdom.



This report illustrates the importance that many head teachers, teachers and governors place on their school libraries for their learners and their schools. However, it also paints a picture of services which are being undercut and an inequality of access (both across and within nations) that cannot be acceptable by today’s standards.



Our recommendations address these findings and set out a clear framework to allow us to ensure that every child has access to a school library and that every library is staffed by a librarian or library staff who receives the training and support to allow the library to be the beating heart of the school.

*Nick Cavender, Chair,  
CILIP School Libraries Group*

*Nick Poole, Chief Executive, CILIP*

*Alison Tarrant, Chief Executive,  
School Library Association*



# ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN



Great School Libraries started as a three-year evidence-based campaign to bring back libraries and access to librarians in every school in the UK. The first phase of the campaign ran from September 2018 to December 2021.

Phase 2 of the campaign aims to position great school libraries as part of the successful provision of formal education with the mission that “Every school-age child deserves to benefit from a great school library”. The campaign will achieve this by:

- ▶ Clearly defining what constitutes a great school library in terms of staff, stock and space.
- ▶ Demonstrating impact of a great school library through a strong evidence-base.
- ▶ Engaging with heads, teachers and governors and raise awareness with decision makers of the impact and value of school library staff to generate better opportunities both for themselves and the students they work with, conditions and pay.
- ▶ Empowering school library staff to articulate and evidence their impact on attainment, wellbeing and value-added for children and young people.



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

School libraries are places where curiosity is sparked, where criticality and creativity flourish and where ideas are born. The importance of the school library in an ideas based economy cannot be underestimated. Our students need complex skills and blended literacies to negotiate the world around them. They need to be self-directed learners and empathetic human beings. Without a school library and crucially library staff to scaffold and support their intellectual and emotional development in school, this is increasingly hard to achieve.

The research in this report shows that school libraries are adapting and changing to become multi-functional platforms for blended teaching and learning. There is evidence of cross curricular support with libraries no longer being focused entirely on the English department but also enhancing teaching across science, mathematics and arts subjects. In a quarter of schools where there is a librarian, the librarian has Head of Department status and just over a third are line managed by the Head Teacher. It is clear that in places, a new dynamic relationship between the school and its library is emerging which reflects and supports schools' educational aims and supports and extends curriculum based teaching and learning. However, it is also evident that this is not reflected across the country and across the different school sectors.

In England, it is clear there is a three-tier system in operation, with pupils in schools that have a high percentage of children eligible for Free School Meals least likely to have access to a library space and a dedicated librarian or library staff. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds have less access to fewer books than those in more affluent areas.

Meanwhile, two-thirds of school libraries in Scotland have no library budget at all, and there are significant regional inequalities, with rural areas less likely to have access to a school library and librarian than urban areas.

## ► Children eligible for Free School Meals are least likely to have access to a library space

In Wales a quarter of schools are without a school library, and of those that have a library space, over three quarters are not looked after by specialist school library staff. A third of all schools in Wales indicated a decrease in their budget.

Pupils in Northern Ireland are the least likely to have access to on-site provision, and those school libraries which do exist are least likely to have a designated budget.

Fewer than a third of primary schools have a dedicated member of staff working in the library while just over one in ten secondary schools do not have a librarian and the average time that the school library is staffed has dropped to under two hours per day. When viewed in light of the findings that many library staff are engaged in a myriad of other roles throughout the day (80% of library staff state that their librarian role is not their sole responsibility), these figures point to a worrying decline in the value that school leaders put on their library staff. It is an underlying principle of this report that a school library can only be fully effective and called a 'great



school library' when it has a dedicated member of staff running it who is recognised as a member of the school's professional staff and has access to training and professional development.

Our aspiration is that every child has access to a library and a librarian (possibly through a School Library Service or shared across a group of schools where required) and it is clear that while there are schools who understand and value the school library, there are many who face systemic barriers to achieving this. The research shows that lack of funding is the main obstacle but it is also policy and local leadership which are having a detrimental effect on school library provision across the country, with school leaders having a limited expectation and understanding of the impact a well-resourced school library and well trained school librarian can have on children's progress and attainment as well as on the school community as a whole.

### ► **Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds have less access to fewer books**

Reading is a particular area of concern, and to have evidence that children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds have less access to fewer books than those in more affluent areas is a significant concern.

It is unacceptable that the children experiencing today's education system are at the whim of their region, postcode or school demographic when it comes to reading and learning provision – something which sits at the very core of educational success. This lack of provision is shown to be restricting reading development, with schools without a school library notably more likely to say that reading is restricted than those with school libraries.

This research makes it clear that immediate action is needed to address the imbalance of provision and opportunity so that all children can benefit from having a great school library to support their intellectual and emotional development throughout their school years.





# WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF A GREAT SCHOOL LIBRARY?

► ***“School libraries have been proven to lead to better academic attainment, better learning outcomes, and better attitudes towards learning”***

(Williams, Wavell and Morrison, 2013)

A fully functioning school library is a hub of learning, inquiry and intellectual curiosity. It can and should support far more than reading for pleasure; research and inquiry learning, media and information literacy and curriculum development are all fundamental roles that the school library and its staff provide, not to mention providing creating a space which prioritises wellbeing and develops creativity and imagination.

Literacy (in all its forms) is the bedrock of learning and is a core part of what school libraries can offer: a reactive, nuanced and whole school approach which includes but is not limited to author/illustrator/poet visits, events, competitions and literacy-based experiences for example shadowing the Yoto Carnegie medal or the Information Book Award. Both the primary and secondary library should be at the heart of the whole school literacy policy, creating connections and collaborations between departments and ensuring that reading and research is embedded into the curriculum to benefit subject specific knowledge, vocabulary and to allow students' curiosity and passions to flourish.

In 2008 it was estimated that a lack of information literacy skills in small and medium enterprises currently was costing the UK economy 3.7 billion pounds a year (De Saulles, 2007) and as the UK educational landscape turns its attention to visions of a new modus operandi the skills that school libraries and their staff deliver could have a core supporting role. Whether it's for further education, in the workplace, or for democratic purposes, the ability "to think critically and make balanced judgements about any information we find and use" (CILIP, 2018) is an essential skill for all children in today's world. Any educational programme which puts inquiry and project learning at the heart will rely on individualised access to information.

A school library can only be described as 'great' when it has a professional member of staff running it. The unique skills of school library staff – their knowledge of the students, their understanding of the curriculum, their ability to work collaboratively and their key role in the information to knowledge journey of the students as well as their 'traditional' skills of reading promotion, collection development and resource

► ***“Sometimes we need to get it wrong before we get it right. I thought a librarian was nice to have. I was wrong. Thank you to all the great librarians out there. A great librarian is the heartbeat of a great school.”***

Matt Ball, Headteacher, Bishop Gilpin Primary School



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management – make them an invaluable addition to any school staff body. When the school librarian's multi-faceted role and their potential to impact the success and attainment of the students is recognised by the leadership of the school, the potential of the school library to change lives is supercharged.

► ***“Our school library is the heartbeat of our school and is core to the ethos we create. It is a safe place, a social hub, a learning centre and an incredibly vibrant environment. The work the library does impacts on all our pupils in terms of wellbeing but also in terms of supporting our raising attainment agenda. I cannot speak highly enough of the library and advocate the impact this has across our whole school.”***

Kyle Scott, Head Teacher, Elgin Academy





# METHODOLOGY



An initial survey invitation for the full-length survey was sent to all primary, middle, secondary and all-through schools in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales where an email address was readily available by BMG Research. Each invitation contained a unique link to an online survey, allowing for responses to be matched with publicly accessible demographic information about the school, with the respondent's permission. The survey was marked for the attention of the person at the school with responsibility for the library or learning resources. Entry into a free prize draw to win range of prizes including a bundle of books was offered to encourage schools to respond to the survey.

The survey was also promoted via social media and school networks, with schools able to contact BMG directly for their invitation. To ensure as representative sample as possible, including schools that do not have a dedicated school library, after one week of the survey being in field, telephone-chasing was employed to encourage participation from underrepresented school types. Quotas were set by education type and phase within country to ensure as representative sample as possible.

Overall, 1,824 school took part in the full-length survey. These results have been weighted by nation, school phase and education type to correct for oversampling in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and any under or over representation by school type. School population data was drawn from Gov.UK, Gov.Scot, Education-NI and Gov.Wales.

Following on from the full-length survey, a short survey consisting of one question was launched. The aim of this short survey was to increase the robustness of the data for the main question of whether the school has a dedicated library area on site. In the case of the short survey, a telephone only methodology was employed. Any individual who answered the phone at each school was able to take part as they did not require detailed knowledge of scope or nature of library provision, simply to know if there is a dedicated library area on site or not. Only those schools who did not complete the full-length survey were targeted for the short survey.

2,506 schools completed the short survey. These have been combined with the 1,824 schools who completed the full-length survey to give a sample of 4,330 schools where there is data on whether there is a dedicated school library area on site or not. These results have also been weighted by nation, school phase and education type to correct for any over or under-sampling.



# 1. UK WIDE FINDINGS

## 1.1 UK WIDE FINDINGS – PRIMARY SCHOOL LIBRARIES

This research shows that school library provision is unevenly distributed across the UK (14% indicate not having a library). 70% of primary school libraries do not have a dedicated member of staff, the main reason for this being budget restrictions but a significant percentage shows that this is because the role can be fulfilled by another member of staff, which highlights the fact that school leaders do not fully appreciate the what a great school librarian can do.

Even where provision exists most primary schools (84%) use their library space for other purposes, namely as a classroom for non-library lessons (53%) and for meetings (46%) which is echoed by the finding that of the schools who removed their dedicated library area, 85% reported lack of available space as the reason.

### ▶ **Two thirds of primary libraries (65%) are open for six hours or less during the week**

Just over two thirds of primary libraries (65%) are open for six hours or less during the week. Under a third are open before school and after school, and half at breaktime (31% open before and after school; just over half open at break time) which indicates serious limitations on a child's ability to browse and find suitable reading resources, as well as indicating that they are not seen by school as places which promote and are used for independent inquiry, as otherwise we would have seen that the library was open to students more than they are currently.

This limitation on opening hours may be due to staffing; less than a third have designated library staff, and only 8% of primary librarians have no other role in the school, with most of them having the role alongside that of teacher, literacy lead or TA. This hampers the ability for the library to deliver academically focused work – such as inquiry learning or information literacy skills – as the library is an 'add-on' to an alternative role. This is supported by the fact that only 3% of primary school respondents report that they deliver regular timetabled research lessons. Encouragingly, 24% of main library staff report having a Head of Department role and more report that they attend Head of Department meetings (29%, an increase from 2019).

### ▶ **Nearly two thirds of primary schools (62%) report that they do not have a designated library budget**

Again, even where the space exists, nearly two thirds of primary schools (62%) report that they do not have a designated library budget – this clearly hampers efforts to run an engaging and attractive library as new resources cannot be purchased, and energies go on fundraising rather than pupils' reading and learning. This is corroborated by the fact that 40% of primary school respondents indicated that reading was restricted – that's nearly half of respondents who know the resourcing is having a negative impact on children's reading.

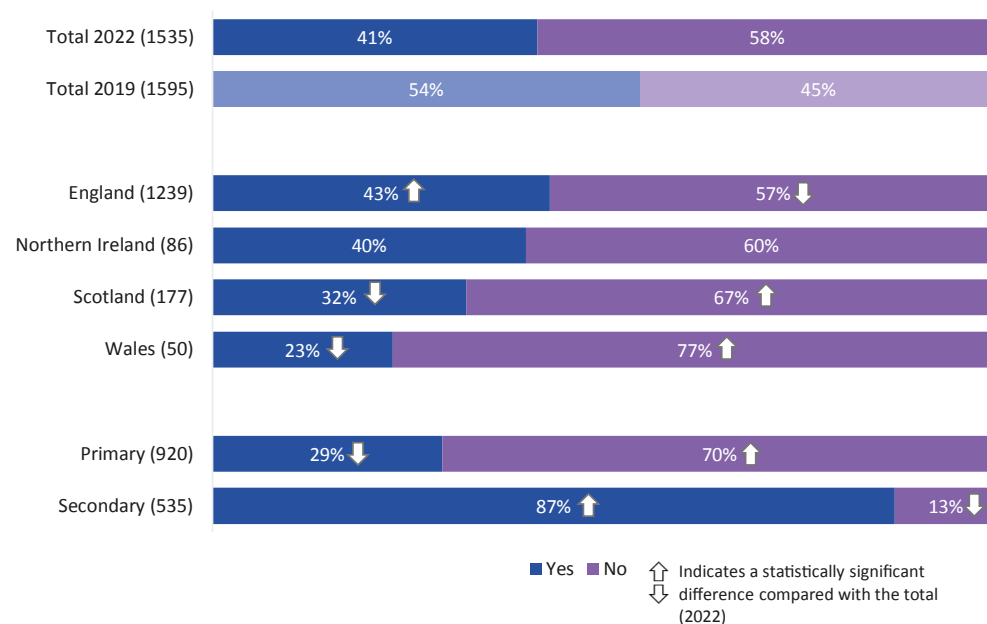
### ▶ **40% of primary school respondents indicated that reading was restricted**



45% of schools report not knowing how many physical items they have in stock, a significant increase from 2019 when 36% reported this. Of the schools who do know how many books they have in stock, there has been a 7% decrease in the number of physical resources in their collections. This decrease is more pronounced among primary schools, which typically have a lower budget. The mean budget has decreased by 16% compared to the previous year (£1,688 for the current year, compared to £2,014 for the previous year). Primary schools are more likely to say the pandemic has led to a decreased investment (13%) compared to secondary schools (7%).

These figures point to a worrying trend which suggests that school leaders are not able to prioritise the library, or perhaps there is a lack of value or recognition for its contribution to curriculum delivery, teaching, learning and information literacy skills, as well as reading development.

**Figure 1.1: Percentage of schools that have designated library staff**



Q15. Does your school have a designated library staff?

Base: All who have a designated library area on-site (unweighted base sizes in parenthesis)

Source: National survey to scope school library provision in the UK

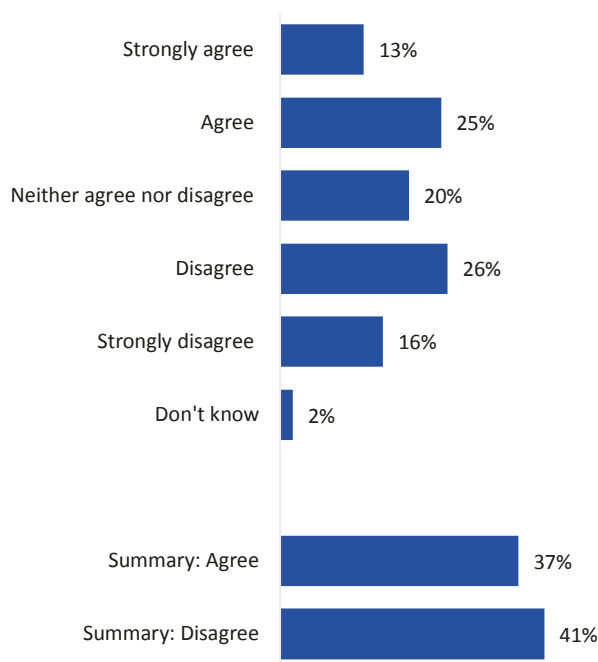
## 1.2 UK WIDE FINDINGS – SECONDARY SCHOOL LIBRARIES

86% of secondary schools have a designated on-site library area while the same proportion of secondary schools have such a library on site, a notable drop from 96% in 2019. All colleges with 16-19 provision that took part have a dedicated library area on site.

Half of all secondaries with library spaces are likely to open them for between six and eight hours daily (55%), but the staffing doesn't match the opening times, with 50% saying secondary school libraries are attended by library staff for between six and eight hours, this too is a reduced number of staffed hours for secondary schools compared to 2019 (61%). Additionally, 80% of secondary schools use their library space for other purposes, further reducing the time when it can be used by pupils.



**Figure 1.2: Children's reading restricted by limited library resources**



Q5 To what extent do you agree or disagree that children's reading in your school is restricted by limited library resources/availability of books?

Base: All who have a designated library area on-site (1552)

Source: National survey to scope school library provision in the UK

The level of stock has fallen since 2019. Then, 12% said they had 10,001 or more physical resources in the library stock, now that number is 8%. Secondary schools report an average of 10,187 items, a drop of 12% compared to 2019 (11,629). It is possible this is due to the pandemic, and attempts to get books to pupils at home, and a higher number of lost and non-returned books over that period.

Just over one in ten secondary school libraries add new stock on a yearly basis (12%); with a quarter (24%) adding new stock on a termly basis. This may be due to budgetary limitations; not all secondary libraries report having a budget – 15% are trying to provide services with no financial support. Of those that do have a budget, 69% reported it staying the same or decreasing, both of which mean reduced spending power.

As mentioned previously, this reduced spend has a huge array of consequences, from reduced reading resources, to fewer author visits, to less CPD to less support for teaching staff. Just over half of secondary schools agreed that reading was limited by library resources or the availability of books (49% felt it wasn't restricted by limited stock). It seems clear that while spaces are being held onto, the overall quality of provision is dropping, which is having a noticeable impact on children's reading.

Secondaries are more likely to have a designated member of library staff as the person with overall responsibility for the library compared with primaries (85% cf. 13%), but this includes school librarians, senior school leaders, TAs and literacy leads. The range of provision will vary significantly as a result – having someone to support individual reading choices and work with teachers is different from having someone who opens the room for an hour a day.

Nearly a quarter of secondary schools reported not having a designated member of library staff due to budget constraints (23%), but the majority of secondaries



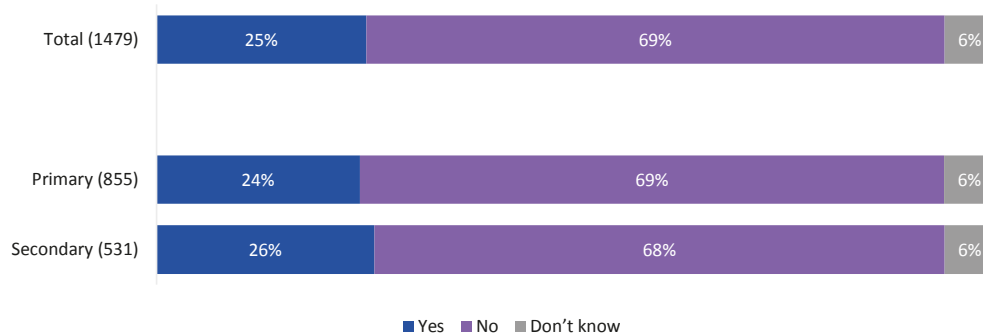
indicated it was because they think appropriate levels of staffing are achieved without having a designated staff member in place (57%). This is concerning as the reading and learning support which can be delivered by a trained member of library staff is clearly being underestimated.

Even in those secondaries with library staff, a third receive no training and schools with a designated library budget are significantly more likely to experience any type of CPD compared with those without (59% cf. 34%). This may be a general mark of support from the school, but may also indicate that library staff are paying for their own training from the library budget, as opposed to the school's CPD budget.

Over a third of school library staff manage a formal reading programme in secondary schools (39%) than in primaries (32%). The delivery of ad-hoc library lessons and regular timetabled library lessons are both more common (57% and 51% respectively). So there is a significant amount of work being undertaken in secondary school libraries to develop reading and information literacy skills.

However, 40% indicated that they spend less than three quarters of their time carrying out their core library duties due to the range of other roles and responsibilities held by the member of staff. It is encouraging to see that 26% of secondary library staff have Head of Department status, although fewer of them attend Head of Department meetings (21%, a decrease from 2019).

**Figure 1.3: Does the main member of library staff have Head of Department status**



Q21. Does the main member of library staff have Head of Department status? Base: Where have main member of library staff (unweighted base sizes in parenthesis)

Source: National survey to scope school library provision in the UK

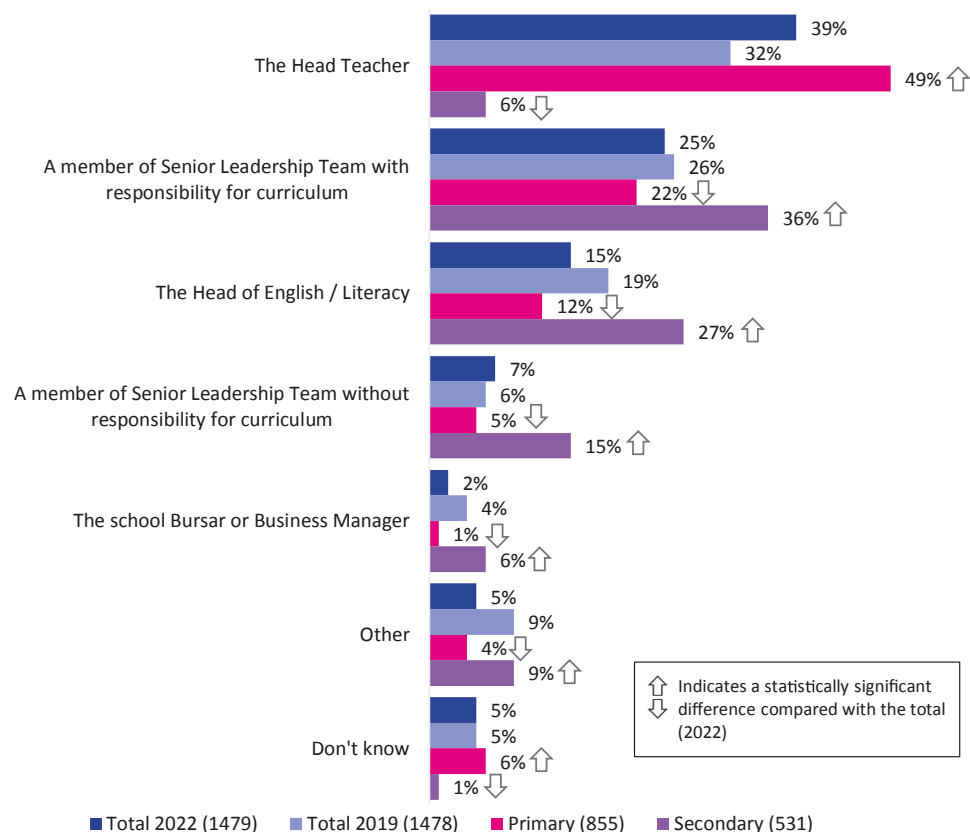
Schools were also asked which staff members their main member of library staff works with. The most commonly selected response was the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (64%) followed by the pastoral/welfare lead (54%) and the Gifted and Talented Coordinator (20%). This indicates a range of impacts that the library has facilitate and support – challenge, wellbeing and support for children with SEND. These are impacts which aren't being experienced in schools which don't have a fully functioning member of library staff.

The range of subjects worked with was broad, and 42% of secondary school library staff were line managed by either the head or a member of SLT. In over a quarter of secondary schools, the main member of library staff is not contracted to work on inset days (27%). Just over a third are contracted to work for term-time plus inset days (34%), which while an improvement from being excluded from school training days, still causes an issue for school library provision.





Figure 1.4: Main member of library staff's manager



Q23. Is the main member of library staff's line manager...  
Base: Where have main member of library staff (unweighted base sizes in parenthesis)

Source: National survey to scope school library provision in the UK

Only a quarter (27%) of secondary schools report that this member of staff works term-time, inset, plus additional weeks – this is the recommended minimum by sector bodies, though 13% report being contracted to work 52 weeks.

### 1.3 UK WIDE FINDINGS – SCHOOLS WITHOUT A DESIGNATED SCHOOL LIBRARY SPACE

Of those schools that do not have a designated school library space, 85% say it is due to a lack of space, with budget constraints being mentioned by one in five. These schools are notably more likely to say that reading is restricted.

Where there is no designated school library, over half of these schools indicated this loss in provision happened at least three years ago (4% three years ago, 13% four years ago, and 35% five or more).

#### ► 85% of these schools gave the reason for not having a school library as a lack of available space

85% of these schools gave the reason for not having a school library as a lack of available space, while budget constraints were mentioned by one in five (20%).

Instead of a school library, over half reported having a reading area that was part of a shared space (such as a classroom or office – 59%). Over a third indicated they



used their School Library Service (34%) and over a quarter indicated they relied on the public library for this purpose (27%). It is worth mentioning here that whilst schools are relying on their School Library Services for their library provision, they themselves are facing similar financial pressures as schools. There have been significant closures in the last few years and provision is by no means guaranteed.

### ► **A third used their School Library Service and a quarter relied on their public library**

As such, access differed by nation, with schools in Northern Ireland more likely than average to say that they access this provision via Schools Library Services (77% cf. 34% overall), while schools in Scotland indicated they were more likely to access school library services at other schools nearby (8% cf. 2% overall).

There were also differences by education phase. Primary schools were more likely than average to cite Schools Library Services as a form of alternative provision (38% cf. 34% overall) while secondary schools are more likely than average to state that they use shared public and school libraries (9% cf. 2% overall). This is possibly reflective of the differing focus of School Library Services.

There were also clear differences between schools in rural and urban areas. In rural areas, schools were more likely to indicate that they access library services in a designated area in a shared room (67% cf. 53% urban). In contrast, urban schools are more likely to state that they access library services in public libraries (32%) than those in rural areas (18%).

Additionally, schools in urban areas are more likely than average to be able to identify a main member of staff with responsibility for the library area (50%) while schools in rural areas are less likely to be able to do so (31%).

### ► **One in twenty say there is never open access to their school library**

Unfortunately, only one fifth of schools provide access to the reading area at all times (21%), and one in twenty (6%) say there is never open access (access during free times and before and after school). Just half of schools provide access to these spaces at lunchtime (50%) or breaktime (49%).

Not having a school library doesn't seem to have resulted in savings for reading, as investment in reading resources is still decreasing. The average designated budget for the current year was £1,298. This compares to an average budget of £1,189 for the previous year, a reduction of just under 10%. Physical resources do not seem to be being supplemented with e-resources either; take up of e-readers is limited, with fewer than one in ten schools (7%) providing access to these. Just 3% of schools have 'bring your own device' as part of their digital services provision.

Over half of all the schools without a standalone designated library area on-site report that they haven't received a visit from a writer, author or poet in the past year; the proportion of schools who have received a visit from a writer/author/poet is lower than in 2019 (40% cf. 56%).



Schools that utilise the School Library Service offer are the most likely to agree that their pupils have the necessary access to the level of resources (60%), and least likely to disagree (21%). These schools are also more likely to agree that their provision provides pupils with the quality of resources needed to support their development (66% compared with 47% overall).

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for those reliant on public libraries – only a third of those schools agreed that their pupils have the necessary level of access to resources, and 45% disagreed with that statement. It is likely this speaks to the unique role that school libraries answer, as well as the practicalities of getting pupils to the public library and the impact of opening times.

Of all the schools without a designated school library space, half (49%) of schools agreed that children's reading in their school is restricted by limited library resources and availability of books. This is notably higher than the proportion of schools who have a designated library area on-site (37%).

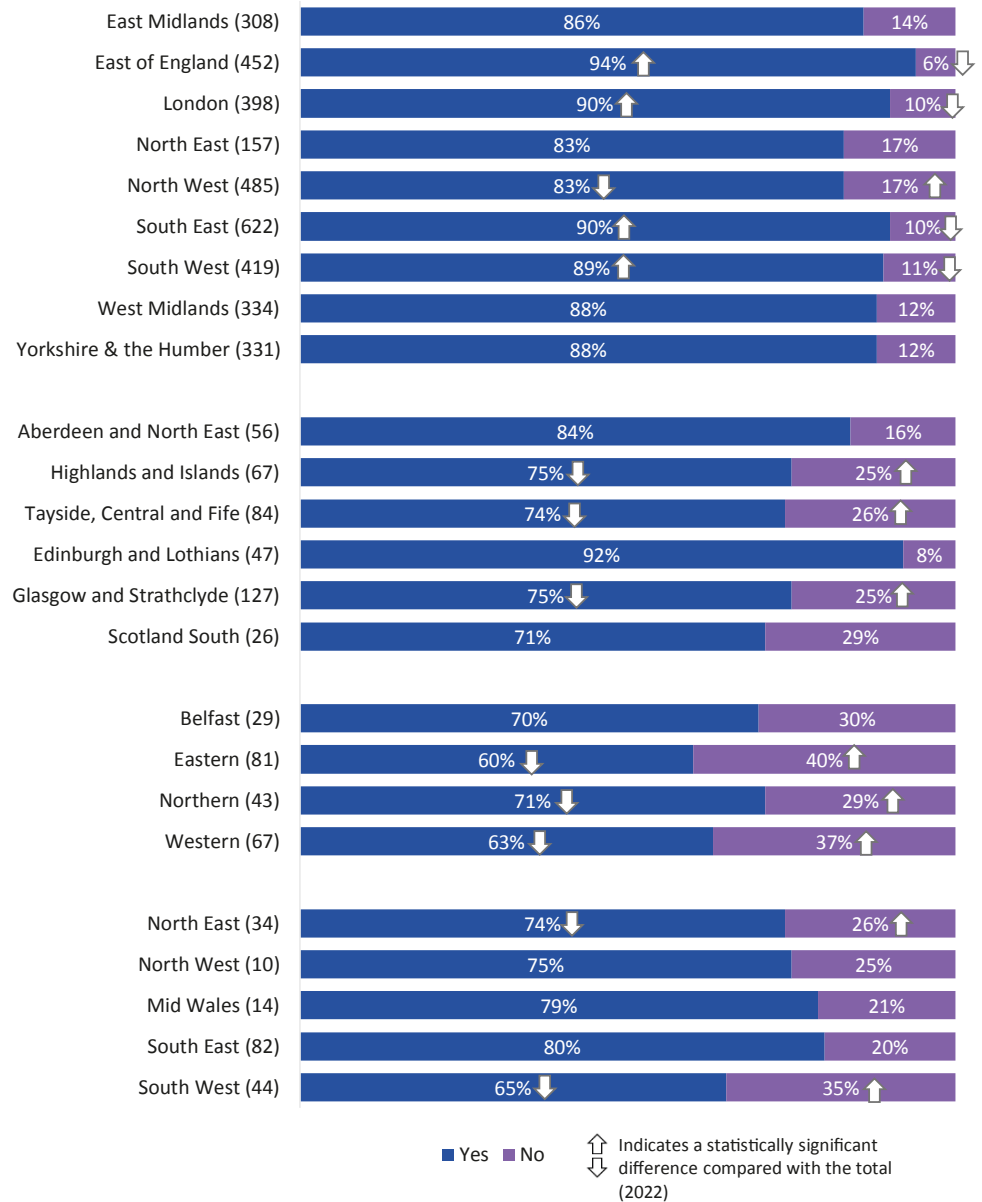


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## 2. NATIONAL FINDINGS

**Figure 2.1: Percentage of schools that have a designated library area on-site by country and region**



Q4/Q1. Does your school have a designated school library area on-site? By designated school library area, we mean an area separate to a classroom or other shared space that provides access to a curated collection of resources to benefit pupils' learning and development.

Base: all respondents (unweighted base sizes in parenthesis)

Source: National survey to scope school library provision in the UK

### 2.1 NATIONAL FINDINGS – ENGLAND

England is the most likely nation to have a physical school library overall, but provision is not universal or equal, and is leading to restricted reading choices for children.

Schools in England are most likely to report having a designated school library area on-site (88%), but schools in the East of England (94%), London (90%), South East (90%) and South West (89%) are all more likely to have access to a designated school library area on-site. Meanwhile, schools in the North West (83%) are less likely to have this in place. Even in those schools with a space, half do not have a designated library



## ▶ **Half of schools with a library space do not have a designated library budget**

budget (50%). English schools were also significantly more likely to have no level of e-book resource available (52%) compared to Scotland (37%) and Wales (30%).

This research makes clear that there is a three tier system at play in England, with independent schools more likely to not only have a school library space, but also to have it housed in a separate space with increased opening times, higher stock levels, increased frequency of author visits, larger budgets and more likely to have designated staff who are trained. At the other end of the spectrum are schools with a higher level of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) which is explored in the next section.

Almost all independent schools have a designed on-site library area (92%), compared to 89% of local authority (LA) maintained schools in England, while the proportion of academies with a designated on-site library area sits at 91% and free schools at 84%.

Independent schools are significantly more likely to have their library housed in a separate space (82%) while LA maintained schools are notably lower (61%). These spaces are also significantly more likely to be open before school (57%) and after school (55%). Among LA maintained schools, just 26% of libraries are open before school and 24% after school. Open access throughout the day is similarly muted, with just 16% of LA maintained schools open all day compared to 39% of independents. Academies are also more likely to have a library open before school (38%) and after school (39%) than average.

## ▶ **Independent schools have more than double the number of resources that a LA maintained school has access to**

This inequality in provision continues as independent schools have more than double the number of resources that a LA maintained school has access to (12,120 for independents, opposed to 5,049 for LA maintained schools). However, it doesn't seem to be the case that state schools are growing their collections – they are three times less likely to add to it on a fortnightly basis (12% for independent schools, compared to 4% for state schools). Additionally, the proportion of independent schools with a library budget is more than double that of LA schools (69% cf. 32%) while LA maintained schools (32%) are significantly less likely than average to have a budget in place.

Adding to this picture of restricted reading experiences, under half of LA maintained schools in England report having a visit in the last 12 months (49%) while independent schools are considerably more likely to say that they have had a visit from a poet, author or writer (62%).

This inequality in provision continues through to staffing; 72% of independent schools say they have designated library staff compared to 37% of LA maintained schools, while independent schools in England are more likely to have experienced Continued Professional Development (CPD) (66%). There are also regional differences in the





accessibility of CPD for school library staff; London (56%) is the English region where the main member of staff is most likely to have experienced some form of CPD and the South West (35%) is the region where this is least likely.

Given these findings, it is no surprise perhaps that in England, LA maintained schools are also more likely to agree reading is restricted (40%) compared to 24% of independent schools.

### ▶ **LA maintained schools are more likely to agree reading is restricted (40%)**

Although independent schools are undoubtedly better resourced and supported than other types of school in England, the responses indicate that the number of school libraries has still dropped since 2019 (92% compared to 97%).

## **2.2 NATIONAL FINDINGS – ENGLISH SCHOOLS WITH A HIGHER LEVEL OF CHILDREN ELIGIBLE FOR FREE SCHOOL MEALS**

The results for England can be further analysed by the percentage of pupils that are eligible to claim free school meals (FSM) – a commonly used proxy measurement of socio-economic disadvantage in education. The change in methodology in the 2022 survey has allowed for a more detailed breakdown of schools and we can see more clearly the difference between schools with an FSM rate between 25%-49% and 50%+.

The research unmistakably indicates that provision for those pupils in school which have a higher percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is worse than for children not in those schools.

### ▶ **Children attending schools with a higher percentage of pupils eligible for FSM are less likely to have a school library**

At the most basic level, those children are less likely to have a designated library area (83%, compared to the England average of 88%); this is consistent with the research from 2019.

Unfortunately the disparity continues, with pupils in schools with a high percentage of children eligible for free school meals less likely to be able to access the library, even if they have one, as they are more likely to be open for six hours or less (52% for schools with 0-9% eligibility cf. 72% of schools with 50%+ eligibility).

This restriction may be due to the limited staffing – 7% of schools with the lowest proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals have a library staffed for more than eight hours, compared to no schools with over half of pupils eligible for free school meals. This is then further compounded by those pupils also being less likely to have open access during the day compared to the schools with less pupils eligible for free school meals (23% cf. 14% for schools reporting 50%+ FSM).



So, children attending a school with a higher number of pupils eligible for free school meals are less likely to have a library, and to be able to use that library when they need to, but what about the quality of resources they have access to?

### ▶ **FSM students have access to, on average, 60% fewer physical resources than those with the lowest rates of FSM**

Essentially, the higher the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals, the lower the average number of physical resources. Schools with the highest proportion of proportion of students eligible for FSM have access to, on average, 60% fewer physical resources than those with the lowest rates of FSM. Schools with the lowest proportion of students entitled to FSM (0-9%) have an average of 7,260 physical resources, up from 6,353 items in 2019. Schools with 50%+ FSM have on average just 2,870 physical resources available.

### ▶ **One in five schools with higher levels of pupils eligible for FSM have reported a budget decrease**

The resources on offer will be impacted by staff, but the other component is budget, and again, there is notable disparity. One in five schools with higher levels of pupils eligible for FSM have reported a budget decrease (20%), while for those schools with the smallest proportion of FSM the opposite is true, with 1 in 5 reporting a budget increase (23%).

For those schools with higher levels of FSM eligible children, the consequences are vast. Stock quantity and quality will decrease. Limiting access to high quality, current reading material is going to have a detrimental impact on those students' reading and learning as it cannot appeal to individual tastes, reading abilities, or passions or support their learning in classrooms.

A lack of choice for these students when selecting reading material will have a detrimental impact on their reading experiences; potentially re-enforcing the assumption that reading 'isn't for them'. A recent report on reading choices states that "most of the young people sourced their next book simply by checking the shelves" (56% and 32% choose the same author (Cremin and Coles, 2022); in order for this to be a valid method for young people to develop their reading, there must be a well-stocked and maintained library and as we know that children searching shelves is not always the best method for finding reading material to develop their reading (both ability and love for) then a librarian or library staff to introduce and guide readers to new resources is a prerequisite.

To further understand how the lack of resources impacts a school, the survey introduced a new perceptions based question which asked schools whether they thought children's reading in the school is restricted by limited library resources or the availability of books. There is a telling disparity between those schools who have the fewest number of children who receive free school meals and those with the most. Two thirds (66%) of schools who had 22.5%+ pupils receiving free school meals agreed that their pupil's reading was restricted, compared with just less than half (48%) of schools who had 0-9% of pupils receiving free school meals.



Compounding this problem is that these pupils are also less likely to have a visit from a writer, poet or author (41% for schools with 22.5%+ pupils eligible compared to 51% of schools with an eligibility rate of 0%-9%).

This may well be as a consequence of the reduced staffing and budget, as there is both less time to plan and organise a visit, and less budget to pay for it. The impact of author visits is well known and when combined with the reduced resources and support it paints a worrying picture.

But there are indications there is still disparity among those schools that don't have a school library. Schools with the highest rates of FSM eligibility are more likely to say that they have no alternative provision in place (37%). This result should be interpreted as indicative only given that the base size for this sub-group is very low (8) but it is an area where more research is required.

Schools are currently operating in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has hit the socio-economically disadvantaged pupils hard. The attainment gap is wider than before the pandemic and shows no sign of reducing (Education Endowment Foundation, 2022). Given this, every opportunity to stem the gap should be taken, and support should be given to these schools to develop their school libraries.

## ▶ **People from disadvantaged backgrounds have less access to fewer books**

Reading is a particular area of concern, and to have evidence that children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds have less access to fewer books than those in more affluent areas is deeply concerning and is likely a contributing factor to the widening attainment gap. Recent research has shown that low income households often have fewer books in the home and the cost of living crisis will be hitting these families hard. Now is the time to be investing in the school libraries, providing a wide range of reading material and regular opportunities for this particular cohort of children and young people in order to support their reading and contribute towards closing the gap.

### **2.3 NATIONAL FINDINGS – NORTHERN IRELAND**

Schools in Northern Ireland are the least likely to have on-site provision, or a designated budget; perhaps consequently they have stock added less frequently. Despite this, the staff are some of the most experienced in the UK.

One third of schools in Northern Ireland have no designated library area on site (64%). The region with the highest proportion of schools with a library is Northern (71%), closely followed by Belfast (70%). Schools in the Eastern and Western regions are less likely to have a library with just over half having one (60% and 63% respectively).

Schools in Northern Ireland are significantly less likely to have a designated library budget compared with schools in England (13% respectively, compared to 36% in England); indeed, schools in Northern Ireland are the least likely to have a designated library budget of all the UK nations (Scotland 25% and Wales 18%). This may be as



a result of the lack of political leadership in relation to education, and an educational funding model which is under intense pressure.

### ▶ **Schools in Northern Ireland are the least likely to have a designated library budget of all the UK nations**

Most schools in Northern Ireland are typically open up to six hours a day (74%), but this highlights an inequality with pupils in English schools, whose school libraries are more likely to be open between six and eight hours a day (37% compared to 24% in Northern Ireland).

Over two thirds of schools in Northern Ireland (67%) are adding stock on a yearly, or less frequent basis. A quarter of schools have not had an author visit in the past year. As a pupil, experiencing an author visit is almost twice as likely if you are in England as if you attend school in Northern Ireland (47% to 24%).

### ▶ **A quarter of schools in Northern Ireland have not had an author visit in the past year**

School library staff in Northern Ireland are less likely to have experienced any CPD (free or paid) (28%), and yet are more likely to have in excess of 10 years' experience (50%) than those in England (36%) and Scotland (29%).

## **2.4 NATIONAL FINDINGS – SCOTLAND**

Two thirds of school libraries in Scotland have no library budget at all, and there are significant regional inequalities.

### ▶ **Nearly a quarter of schools in Scotland do not have a school library space**

The proportion of schools with a designated school library area on-site varies by country; with nearly a quarter of schools not having a school library space (22%).

Similarly, only a quarter of schools in Scotland have a designated library budget compared with schools in England (25% compared to 36% in England). Nearly two-thirds (63%) report having no budget whatsoever; while 12% said they didn't know or would prefer not to say.

### ▶ **Schools in the Scotland South region are the least likely to report having a library**

Regionally, there are significant variations in Scotland. The region with the highest proportion of schools with a library is Edinburgh and Lothians (92%); while schools in the Scotland South region are the least likely to report having a library (71%).

Staff in Scotland are the least likely across all the UK nations to have more than 10 years' experience (29% compared to 50% in Northern Ireland). Despite this, they are



more likely to be contracted for more hours a week; it is likely this is due to different staffing structures for some school libraries in Scotland.

Schools in Scotland are less likely to say that their budget has increased (11%); and are less likely to have a designated school library budget at all (25% to 36% in England). This is probably an unintended consequence of many educational budgets being ring-fenced. As ring-fenced budgets are put under pressure those which are not protected get cut, leaving school libraries vulnerable as one of a few places savings can be made.

It seems that Scottish school libraries are doing a better job of providing e-books to pupils. About a third of school libraries in Scotland indicated that there were no e-book resources available (37%). This is significantly less than England (52%) and may be as a result of combined provision with the public library system and good reach with e-book providers.

At the time of writing, two authorities have proposed cuts to their school libraries, and one has already acted and deleted all school librarian posts. If these proposals go ahead in 2023, this would add to declining levels since 2008. Given the stated support of the Scottish Government for school libraries and the important role of reading, this seems to show an extraordinary lack of understanding from the local authorities as to the role of school libraries, or their ability to fund it.

The role of a school librarian cannot simply be filled by the public library service because a school librarian is a specialist role which has learning at its core and which can only be fully effective when the library staff are collaborating and co-working with teachers and have improving learning for pupils as their core outcome.

## 2.5 NATIONAL FINDINGS – WALES

In Wales a quarter of schools are without a school library, and of those that have a library space, over 77% are not looked after by specialist school library staff. A third of all schools in Wales indicated a decrease in their budget.

### ▶ **77% of school library spaces in Wales are not looked after by specialist school library staff**

Schools in the South East and Mid Wales are the most likely to have a library (80% and 79% respectively), while those in the North East and North West are less likely to (74% and 75%).

Schools in Wales are significantly less likely to have a designated library budget compared with schools in England (18% compared to 36% in England). Budgets have decreased in Wales, with 18% saying they have a designated budget, opposed to 62% who said they don't have a budget (and 18% who answered don't know). Responses indicate the mean budget has decreased from £2,014 in 2019, to £1,688 in 2022, and this is corroborated by 36% of respondents saying their budget has decreased, while 37% indicated it had remained the same. This lack of budget may mean library budgets are incorporated within other budgets, such as the English department, but





the increased pressures on budgets all round are a cause for concern when it comes to children's reading provision and reading across the curriculum.

### ▶ **36% of respondents in Wales said their budget has decreased**

However, schools in Wales were less likely than schools in England to say there was no level of e-book resource available (30% compared to 52%).

Welsh schools are less likely to have a designated member of school library staff, with only 23% answering positively, and 77% saying there was no dedicated member of staff. This is an increase since 2019, and in comparison to England, where 43% of schools have a dedicated member of staff, raises concerns. School libraries in Wales were mostly likely to be led by a literacy lead (31%), then a senior leader (22%), and then a teaching assistant (18%) with only 12% being led by a member of school library staff. This may mean that those responsible for the library have limited experience, time and knowledge about how the library can be maximised for learning.

More schools in Wales have time allowed for pupils to run the library with no or limited adult supervision than the other nations of the UK (39% with any time at all cf. 22% total); this is in-line with the Welsh curriculum focus, however poses questions around reading privacy for pupils. Can they borrow books about bullying or to support their mental health from a peer without making themselves vulnerable? Pupil voice is vital for all school libraries, but they should not be responsible for running a school library.

The impact of having a non-specialist lead the library is that there is increased workload on teaching staff, the library is not maximised due to other pressures, and any support the librarian could have provided is non-existent. Perhaps unsurprisingly given the restricted budgets and increased workload of the library being led by non-library specialists, stock is added to most schools in Wales yearly or more infrequently (51%). The impact of this on responding to current affairs, individual tastes and reading ability cannot be underestimated. The focus on learner-led learning within the Welsh curriculum, as well as media and information literacy, means that school libraries and librarians should be heralded and supported but instead this crucial resource for teachers and pupils is not receiving any investment. Without the expert guide of a librarian to ensure there is something to read for all pupils, the combination of weak literacy skills, disengaged communities and an inability to see themselves reflected in their reading leads to much reduced reading journeys and learning experiences.



# CONCLUSION



It is clear that children today are having an unequal educational experience, depending on socio-economic factors beyond their control. Urgent work must be done across all of the United Kingdom to develop school libraries so pupils can take advantage of the benefits they can deliver in relation to learning, reading and wellbeing in order to ensure that this generation are prepared for the world of work, education and can play an active role in democratic conversation.

The education sector, policy makers and researchers should be familiar with the potential of school libraries to offer meaningful and significant contributions towards solving some of the issues we are facing today. The recommendations on the next page are a first but essential step in creating equal opportunities to learning.



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# RECOMMENDATIONS



## NATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS TO GOVERNMENTS:

1. Ensure every school has a library with a librarian
2. Encourage school leadership to make the best use of their library
3. Embed school libraries into the inspection frameworks for schools and make it a part of the annual reporting system

## TO SECTOR BODIES:

1. Continue to provide guidance and resources to schools on embedding libraries into the Curriculum
2. Build relationships with Governments to highlight the impact of great School Libraries
3. Ensure that governments maintain up-to-date qualitative and quantitative data on school library provision

## TO SENIOR LEADERS IN EDUCATION:

1. If you are already a school library champion, engage with sector bodies to develop a vision for the future.
2. If you have a school library, engage with the librarian to discover how they can further enhance your school's educational offer.
3. If you don't have a school library or library staff, actively support the sector bodies in their work to ensure all pupils can benefit.

## DEVOLVED NATIONS

The research highlights disparities in provision between the Devolved Nations. We have worked and will continue to work closely with sector bodies and elected representatives in the Devolved Nations to address the findings of the research.



## NEXT STEPS



If you have been impacted by reading this report, there are some steps you can take:

- ▶ Download a letter to send to your local MP from [www.greatschoollibraries.org.uk](http://www.greatschoollibraries.org.uk)
- ▶ Donate to the campaign via the Great School Libraries website
- ▶ Write to your local school highlighting the impact school libraries can have and asking about their provision.
- ▶ See if the company you work for can support your local school, or encourage them to get in touch with the campaign.



## HOW TO GET INVOLVED



- ▶ Follow [@GreatSchLibs](https://twitter.com/GreatSchLibs) on Twitter
- ▶ Share stories, photos and videos of your great school libraries and the impact they make on your students and school to [#GreatSchoolLibraries](https://twitter.com/GreatSchoolLibraries).
- ▶ Sign up as a supporter of the campaign, and encourage others to do so too at [www.greatschoollibraries.org.uk](http://www.greatschoollibraries.org.uk)
- ▶ If you work in a school library submit a case study for the campaign at [www.greatschoollibraries.org.uk](http://www.greatschoollibraries.org.uk) and encourage others to get involved.



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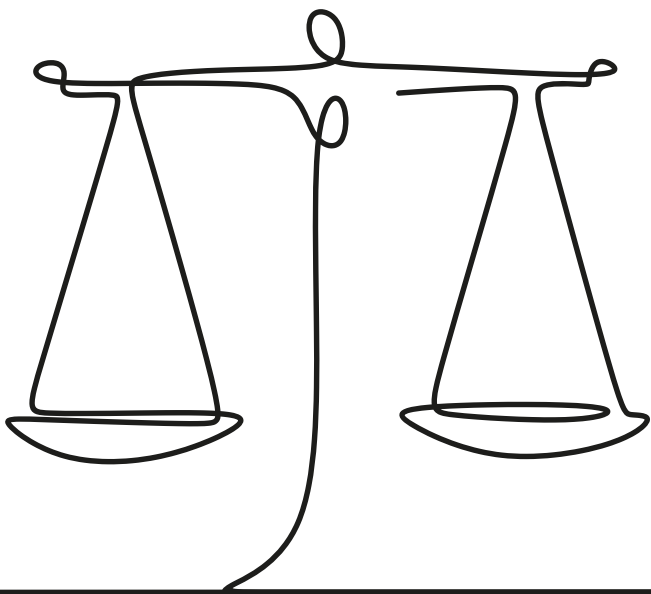


## REFERENCES



See [www.greatschoolibraries.org.uk/2023research](http://www.greatschoolibraries.org.uk/2023research) for full references and bibliography

# Great School Libraries



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