

Inviting & inclusive school libraries

Empowering more than 3,000 children in 15 Gloucestershire primary schools to discover their own love of reading



The Library





Read for Good wants all children and young people to develop a life-changing love of reading.

Read for Good is the home of inspiring reading challenges including [Readathon](#)® and [Track My Read](#)®. The charity’s flagship hospital programme delivers the magic of books and storytelling to children in hospitals across the UK.

Find out more: readforgood.org

Get in touch: reading@readforgood.org



Gloucestershire Libraries are welcoming, vibrant safe places at the heart of our diverse communities. Giving free access to a wide range of books is the core of the library offer but that is just the beginning. We provide services for education, run Innovation Labs and nurture culture and creativity in our communities.

Find out more: gloucestershire.gov.uk/libraries/

Get in touch: lse@gloucestershire.gov.uk



Little Box of Books curates collections of books so that more children see themselves in the stories that they read and learn to expect and accept the diversity of our population. They find representative, inclusive, brilliant books from a diverse range of authors and work to diversify school bookshelves so they truly reflect society.

Find out more: littleboxofbooks.co.uk

Get in touch: info@littleboxofbooks.co.uk

This report is dedicated to all the teachers, librarians and school staff working tirelessly to champion inviting and inclusive school libraries, and reading for pleasure.

To the school staff who worked with us on this project – we hope this report makes you feel proud of your incredible efforts, and highlights the myriad ways you are changing the lives and futures of the children in your care.

With huge thanks to Pat Lipinski whose knowledge, experience and expertise made all the difference.

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“We now have a library for our school!!! It is an organised, welcoming and warm space for all the children to visit.”

Executive Summary

Why reading for pleasure and libraries matter

Reading for pleasure changes children’s lives. Children who discover their own love of reading are happier and hold the foundation for success in almost all areas of adult life. Yet, 750,000 children don’t have a library in their primary school. Where libraries exist, they often lack the range and diversity of books, or accessibility, to inspire children to read.

Our joint response

Read for Good, in partnership with Gloucestershire Libraries and inclusive book specialist Little Box of Books, set out to reach more than 3,000 children in the greatest need across Gloucestershire - supporting 15 primary schools to create inviting and inclusive library spaces that empower all children to see themselves in stories and discover their own love of reading.

The state of primary school libraries in Gloucestershire

The project highlighted the challenges the 15 primary schools faced. Despite an enormous commitment from staff, with a number of staff using their own time and money to source and purchase new books, primary schools were confronting significant resource constraints.

14 of the 15 primary schools on the project had no reading for pleasure budget. As a result, the initial audits of primary school libraries revealed “unloved” spaces. Many libraries were full of

outdated and inaccurate books, had a lack of inclusive books, books muddled together and books in boxes or on the floor rather than on shelves. As a result, the libraries were often totally uninviting and unusable for children. Libraries lacked books that children would choose to read - with many children unable to find books that spoke to their identities, experiences or interests.

What we delivered

In total, the 15 primary schools received 4,500 brand-new books, including 1,500 specially curated inclusive titles. Gloucestershire Libraries provided each primary school with 2-3 days of specialist, bespoke in-person support. This included removing inaccurate and outdated books, including books containing harmful stereotypes, and organising book collections and spaces to create “welcoming” libraries.

Schools also received: a year-long weekly subscription to Phoenix Comics; a range of resources to champion both reading for pleasure and the use of the new inclusive titles, and; support to ensure sustainability and ongoing impact from the project.

The impact for children

The results from the project mean each primary school has been able to offer books that children want to read, and provide a library space where children want to spend their time.

100% of respondents said that, as a result of the new books, their book collections now ‘completely’ or ‘very nearly’ reflect the identity and experiences of children in their primary school, and the diversity of the wider UK population. The impact of the new collection was particularly marked for children who saw themselves reflected back within the stories:

“One of our refugees found a book about a refugee - his face when reading it was magical.”

The project changed children’s reading habits. 100% of respondents said that, as a result of the project, children across the school were enjoying reading more. 100% of respondents said that, as a result of the project, children across the school were reading more frequently.

Significantly, the project changed the reading habits of children who don’t normally choose to read. 85% of schools told us the new books and comics had encouraged ‘reluctant readers’ to read more.

“In my class, I have a child with significant learning difficulties. He loves football and found the book about Marcus Rashford. He was desperate to take it home and show his mum and has talked about ‘the football man’ ever since. He wants to play with him and find more ‘football books’.”

Before the project this is how school staff described their school libraries:

Unloved Lack of choice
Neglected Limited resources
Not diverse Not accessible
Difficult to maintain No budget

And after the project:

Modernised Child-friendly
Well-stocked Accessible
Refurbished Motivational
Organised Diverse Magical
Sustainable

The project in numbers

750,000
UK primary school children have no school library

15 primary schools and more than 3,000 children reached

14 of the 15 schools had no reading for pleasure budget

4,500 brand-new books and 780 comics delivered to participating schools

2-3 days of specialist bespoke support for each school

100% of schools said their new book collections ‘completely’ or ‘very nearly’ reflected the identity and experiences of children within their school

85% of schools said the new books and comics had encouraged reluctant readers to read more

100% of schools said that children across the school were enjoying reading more

100% of schools said that children were reading more frequently

85% of school staff said the project increased their confidence in talking about diversity

Why reading for pleasure and libraries matter

It is now well-established that reading for pleasure changes children's lives and futures

Around 6 million adults in the UK are functionally illiterate.¹ Reading for pleasure offers a solution – supporting children to learn to read and, as a result, providing the foundation for success in almost every area of life.²

Reading for pleasure is more important for a child's success than their background: a disadvantaged child who reads will outperform an advantaged child who doesn't. A child who reads is more likely to do well in school and get a better job.³

Children who have opportunities to choose what they want to read, and discover their own love of reading, have improved mental health and wellbeing. Children who read report being happier than their peers and having increased confidence.

“It helps me cope with things better. I read books that either relate to me and that I find safety in or help me know I'm not alone.”⁴

Books can offer 'mirrors' – building children's understanding of themselves and their identities. They can also provide 'windows' – transporting children into worlds beyond their own, fostering greater empathy and understanding of the world.⁵

Yet, reading for pleasure relies on children being able to find something they want to read.

It relies on children being able to see themselves and others reflected in stories.

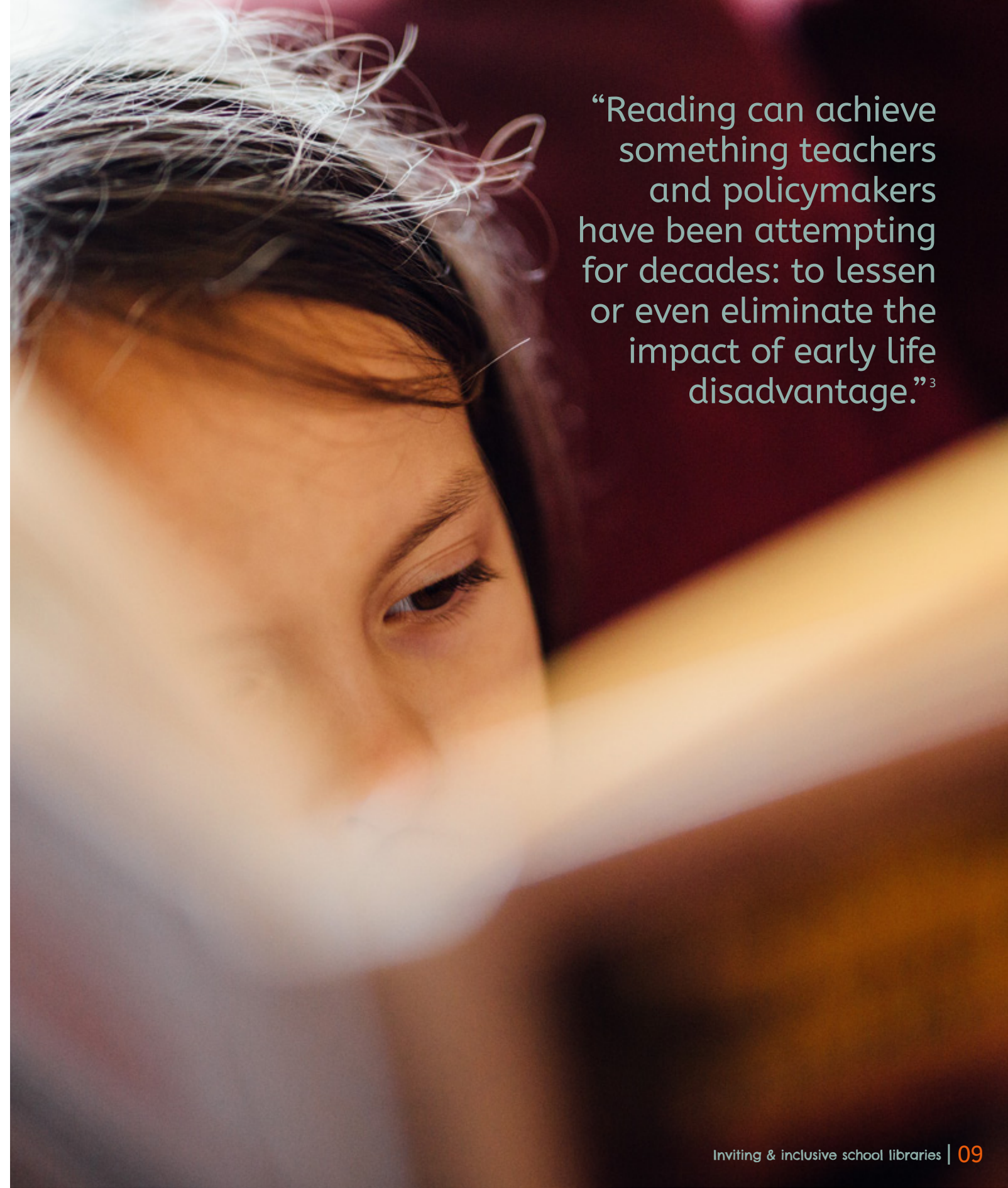
Despite the research showing the importance of children having access to a selection of books, 1 in 5 children in England, between the ages of 5 and 8, do not have a single book at home.⁶ Although many people assume that children will be able to access quality books within their school library, this is simply not the case.

Libraries are statutory in prisons but not in schools. 1 in 7 primary schools has no library space at all – that's more than 750,000 children. It is children facing poverty, who will benefit most profoundly from reading for pleasure and who need school libraries the most, that are most likely to be missing out.⁷

Behind the statistic that 1 in 7 primary schools has no library at all is the fact that there is no set definition of a school library. As a consequence, the school libraries that do exist vary hugely in quality and accessibility. Where primary schools have a library, 4 in 10 report that a lack of reading resources is limiting children's reading.⁸

Read for Good believes that all children deserve access to a quality library packed full of stories that reflect their identities, experiences and interests. A quality library is one that gives all children choice, brings joy and empowers all children to discover their own life-changing love of reading.

“Reading can achieve something teachers and policymakers have been attempting for decades: to lessen or even eliminate the impact of early life disadvantage.”³



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2. OECD (2002). Reading for Change: Performance and engagement across countries. Results from PISA 2000. <https://www.oecd.org/education/school/programme-for-international-student-assessment-pisa/33690904.pdf>
3. Farshore Insight (2021). Learnings from Lockdown. <https://www.farshore.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/46/2021/03/Learnings-From-Lockdown-18th-March-2021.pdf>
4. Quote from: National Literacy Trust (2022). Children and young people's reading engagement in 2022: Continuing insight into the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on reading. <https://literacytrust.org.uk/research-services/research-reports/children-and-young-peoples-reading-engagement-in-2022/>
5. With credit to Dr Rudine Sims Bishop for the analogy of books as windows, mirrors and sliding glass doors; The Reading Agency (2015). Literature Review: The Impact of reading for pleasure and empowerment. <https://readingagency.org.uk/news/the-impact-of-reading-for-pleasure-and-empowerment.pdf>
6. National Literacy Trust (2022). Annual Literacy Survey. <https://literacytrust.org.uk/research-services/research-reports/5-to-8-year-old-childrens-reading-in-2022/>
7. National Literacy Trust (2022). Working Together Towards a Library in Every Primary School: An Update from the Primary School Library Alliance. Available at: <https://literacytrust.org.uk/news/one-in-seven-state-primary-schools-does-not-have-a-designated-library-space/#:~:text=1%20Nov%202022-,%20One%20in%20seven%20state%20primary%20schools%20does%20not%20have%20a,primary%20school%20libraries%20%5B1%5D%2C>
8. Great School Libraries (2023). Equal Futures? An Imbalance of Opportunities. https://www.greatschoollibraries.org.uk/_files/ugd/8d6dfb_b6f1af1fa9ec48b08b93566dc7608d95.pdf

Our joint response

In response to these challenges, Read for Good, Gloucestershire Libraries and inclusive book specialist Little Box of Books joined up to give more than 3,000 children opportunities to discover their own life-changing love of reading.

Focusing on children in the greatest need

15 primary schools across Gloucestershire were offered support. The schools were selected to ensure resources were focused on the children who would benefit the most. To determine where resources were best spent Read for Good drew on quantitative data, including the % of children on free school meals, % of children reaching the expected standards of reading, % of children with English as an additional language and % of children on Pupil Premium (a grant to improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged pupils).



Well over a third of schools on the project reported that more than half of children in the school had no or limited access to books at home (much higher than the national average). How can we expect a child to discover a love of reading if they are unable to access books they are inspired to read at home or at school?

Quantitative data was reviewed alongside advice from social enterprise [Read With Me](#). Read With Me holds detailed practical knowledge of schools

across Gloucestershire from their work providing volunteers to hear primary school children read.

Despite all 15 schools facing significant challenges, there was huge variation across the schools. The schools ranged in location from inner-city Gloucester to rural schools in the Forest of Dean; from a small school of 30 children to a school of over 400 children. Similarly, the schools' library spaces ranged from dedicated rooms - to shelves in a corridor (and even a library bus)!

Challenges faced by the schools, in their own words...

"We are classed as a deprived area, we have 44% of children on free school meals, we have 39% of children with English as an additional language, including some Ukrainian refugees."

"There is a lot of rural poverty in the area. Over 40% of the children are pupil premium with a household income of under £7,400 per year."

"We have a high percentage of pupil premium children whose parents do not engage with their reading at home."

"As pupils enter the school, our assessments show a significant deficit in vocabulary, social/emotional awareness and speech and language. These challenges impact on the Literacy of all."

Developing libraries that foster a love of reading

Each school on the project received:

- 200 brand-new reading for pleasure books
- A year-long weekly subscription to Phoenix Comics
- Posters and printed resources championing reading for pleasure
- 100 specially curated books from inclusive book supplier Little Box of Books
- Resources and a CPD session championing the inclusive titles, delivered by Little Box of Books
- 2-3 days of specialist, bespoke in-person support from Gloucestershire Libraries, based on best practice standards for libraries, including:
 - An initial audit of the library, leading to tailored recommendations
 - Support with the weeding of book stock
 - Expert-led, child-driven, reorganisation of books and the library space
 - Further individual recommendations for sustaining the library after completion of the work
- Access to a range of (on-going) wider activities to inspire reading for pleasure, including Read for Good's [READ Gloucestershire!](#) celebration

These components were designed to:

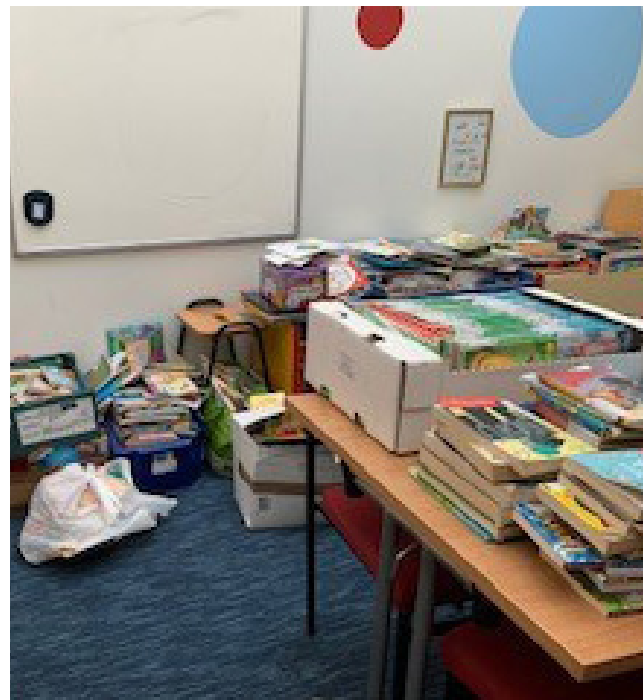
- Ensure more than 3,000 children, many of whom do not have access to books at home, have access to books and comics they want to read in their school library
- Support children who don't enjoy reading to see themselves as readers and give reading a try
- Champion inclusive reading materials so all children are able to find reading materials that reflect their stories, as well as fostering increased understanding and empathy towards others
- Create an inviting and usable library space where children want to spend their free time and are able to easily find and explore what they want to read
- Change reading habits through creating positive reading experiences
- Foster on-going commitment to further develop and sustain the school library, and nurture a whole school reading for pleasure culture and community

The state of school libraries

Learnings from the 15 participating Gloucestershire schools

Initial applications for the project, and the audits of library spaces completed by Gloucestershire Libraries, provide a window into the state of primary school libraries in Gloucestershire. School staff involved with the project were clear that they would love to be able to provide children with a library that enables children to discover their own life-long love of reading. However, all schools agreed a lack of budget created an impenetrable barrier to them creating the libraries they wanted for the children within their school.

“I would love pupils to be able to use the library, selecting books and then recommending them to others. I would love pupils to have a real sense of reading for pleasure.”



This lack of resources had resulted in:



No budget for books

14 of the 15 schools we spoke to had no budget for reading for pleasure.⁹ Budget repeatedly emerged as the overarching reason that schools were unable to provide the books, and library space, staff wanted for the children in their school:

“School budgets are increasingly tight and to complete the refresh we need to, we just don't have the funds. To have the greatest impact our book stocks need a complete overhaul and to do this we need financial support.”

“We are in a deficit budget this year and although reading is a priority, we are limited in what we can achieve without external support.”

“As with all schools, the library budget is stretched as the school is trying to develop lots of areas of the curriculum at once.”

“School budget is extremely tight at the moment and has been for a couple of years now.”



Schools also highlighted the impact of wider resource constraints:

“Subject leadership time is stretched too as the school has 3 teachers, all with multiple subject roles. The library has not been a priority for a while.”

Research by Great School Libraries highlights that fewer than a third of primary schools have a dedicated member of staff working in their library, with many staff engaged in a wide range of other roles throughout the day.¹⁰

Resource barriers were particularly acute given that all the schools on the project were supporting higher than average numbers of children facing disadvantage:

“The demographic of our school means that a lot of our budget is spent on providing children with opportunities they wouldn't get and also staffing. This doesn't allow funds to update and improve our library.”

The lack of resource meant that schools on the project had been unable to recover from the detrimental impact that the Covid pandemic had on library spaces. Covid devastated school library stocks and limited children's use of their school library.¹¹

“Our school has been in a book drought for some years now due to budget cuts, leadership changes, Covid and staffing issues. We would love to build an oasis of books appealing to all children, no matter their background, ability, age, gender or family situation - following this drought period. We would love our library to become a beacon where children are excited to visit and can't wait to choose their next new book. After many initiatives, introducing Y6 librarians, competitions to design our library and promoting reading across the school, it has been extremely difficult to maintain this as we have only a limited number of resources - namely time, money and staffing. I would love some help to get the library back to the status it deserves as 'pride of place' and at the heart of the school!”

9. This is supported by previous Read for Good (2021) research which surveyed 227 UK schools. 81% reported having no reading for pleasure budget.
10. Great School Libraries (2023). Equal Futures? An Imbalance of Opportunities. https://www.greatschoolibraries.org.uk/_files/ugd/8d6dfb_b6f1af1fa9ec48b08b93566dc7608d95.pdf
11. Read for Good (2021) research highlights that 71% of schools reported lost book stock as a result of the pandemic. 85% of schools reported that the pandemic had reduced children's access to their school library.

Libraries in name only

A lack of books children want to read

Resource constraints meant that where schools were able to purchase books they focused on books directly connected to the curriculum, as opposed to purchasing reading materials children would choose to read for fun:

“The budget for reading each year includes Phonics – not enough to purchase books for the library too.”

“Very limited budget to spend on books, especially those that are not directly connected to our curriculum.”

Schools told us that a lack of budget reduced their capacity to buy quality texts, resulting in libraries full of outdated or damaged books:

“Books are outdated and scruffy. The school budget is stretched and it has not been a priority for spending.”

“Over the last 4 years our school has undergone a great deal of changes in leadership which has meant a deficit budget has tied the headteacher’s hands. Therefore whenever I have asked the question as Reading Lead, do I have a budget for books each year – the answer was always ‘nothing’ or ‘fundraise’ or ‘ask for second hand books’. All of which I have done but this has meant making do with less contemporary books and therefore subjects and a lack of choice for children to choose.”

“Our book stocks need refreshing to reflect new authors and new themes.”

The schools had been reliant on the generosity of teachers and parents to buy quality books:

“As staff, we have bought more quality books out of our own money.”

“I can do the research and find the books that are highly recommended or suitable, but I am the one that usually purchases books for my own classroom at my own cost, not for the whole school.”

“We have relied upon the generosity of parents and the PTA to help fund our reading spine.”

Relying on school staff and parents to purchase quality books places an unfair expectation on staff. Most critically, it results in uneven access to the books every child deserves.

The impact of school budgets on the availability of quality books was starkly apparent during the library audits conducted by Gloucestershire Libraries. Despite the appearance of stocked libraries, the audits highlighted significant numbers of books that were 20-30 years old. Many of these books contained factual inaccuracies or were no longer relevant, such as a book about technology from 2001. The audits highlighted repeated gaps in contemporary fiction, reading for pleasure non-fiction and key thematic areas (such as sport) which are known to engage children who haven’t previously enjoyed reading.

Books that didn’t reflect the diversity of the UK and/or the school population

Staff across many of the 15 schools championed the need for inclusive books:

“A diverse book donation would support our school to instil a love of reading in our pupils. It would allow us to provide our children with a mirror by seeing themselves represented, and also a window into other’s lives. This will allow our pupils to build their cultural capital and support them when developing their own identity and sense of self. It will also support development of empathy and understanding of others. These are vital skills that will support the children as they grow older and as members of the local community.”

Yet, 13 of the 15 schools reported that their book collection at the start of the project was not reflective of the diversity of children in their school. As with general book quality, 14 of 15 schools noted the biggest barrier to ensuring an inclusive book collection was budget. 1 of the 15 schools noted the biggest barrier was time.

As a result, there were children across the 15 schools who weren’t able to see themselves or their lives reflected in stories:

“We have a large number of traveller and showman children in the school and a lack of books which reflect their diverse culture. We also have a large number of children with physical needs and other special educational needs who are rarely represented in the collection of books we have.”

“We have two families with Caribbean and African heritage. Autism, dyslexia, gender identity, same sex parents are areas we have no such books for those children to see themselves in stories.”

14 of the 15 schools reported that their book collection at the start of the project was not reflective of the diversity of the UK population. A lack of diversity was also repeatedly noted during the audits of the schools. Having significant numbers of books that were 20-30 years old meant a number of books were identified that contained negative portrayals and stereotypes of people and cultures.

Around 85% of people living in Gloucestershire identify their ethnic group as ‘White’ (Census, 2021). Many of the schools on the project recognised the need for increased diversity in their book collections to build children’s understanding of lives beyond their own:

“Our school’s population is predominantly White-British. Most of our children have very little experience of other places and cultures. Therefore, I feel it is really important to expose them to these different cultures so they can be inspired, interested and respectful of them.”

“Rural – all white British. Some of our children do not experience other cultures or races. This can

lead them to be stereotypical and unaware of cultural differences. Therefore knowledge of the world and diversity has become one of our school’s areas to focus on. Children and their families can be prejudiced without meaning to. A diverse book donation will allow us to work towards our school’s area of development and challenge our children and their families view of the world in a positive way.”

“Just as importantly [to children seeing their own lives reflected] it will enable other children to understand their classmates, friends and family better e.g. someone who has a brother with Autism or has a friend who has been upset as they have experienced a family break up or to help a young person see what having a single parent is like. Ultimately it will help open all children’s eyes to the people around them with a more open minded, better understood stance which they can start to relate to.”

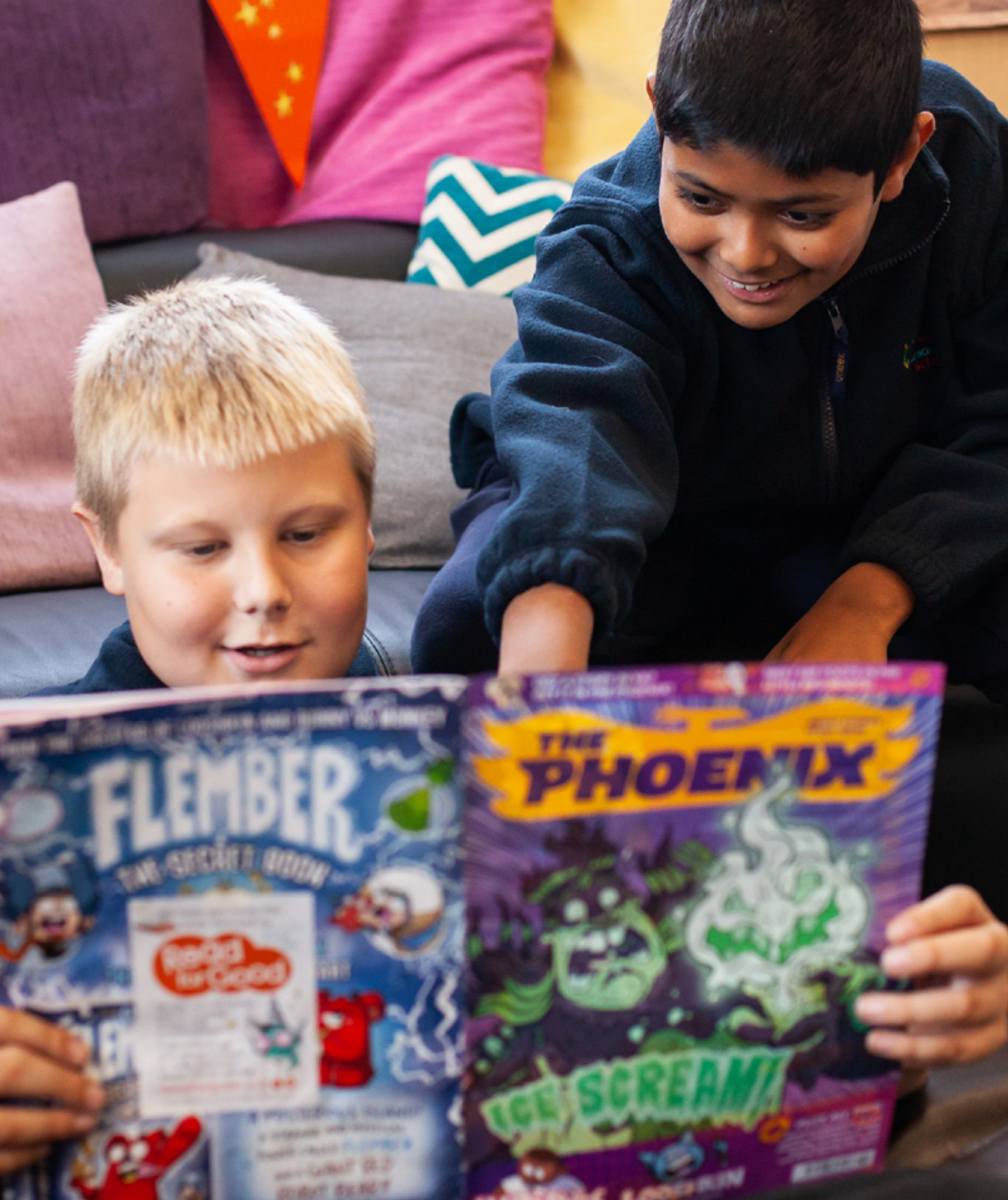
Library spaces that were disorganised and “unloved”

Audits of the 15 schools highlighted that since Covid many of the libraries had become, in staff’s words, “unloved”, “neglected” and “lost space[s]”.

Themes that emerged across several of the libraries on the project included:

- Library spaces not being used as libraries! Libraries were being used to store equipment, as a quiet space for children with special educational needs, for general “intervention work” etc.
- Books not on shelves. Large numbers of books were in bags, boxes, stacked up on tables or simply on the floor.
- Muddled books. Books for all ages, and different genres, were often mixed together. Many books weren’t labelled or coded. In a couple of school libraries, the audit showed that books for adults and teachers were mixed amongst the books for children.

As a result, many of the libraries were not offering welcoming spaces for children to spend time, or enabling them to find a book they wanted to read.



What we delivered:

1. 3,000 brand-new reading for pleasure books, 780 comics & inspiring resources

Brand-new reading for pleasure books

In total, we sent out more than 3,000 brand-new reading for pleasure books that children want to read (from picture books to chapter books; fiction and non-fiction; classics to contemporary texts). Each of the 15 schools received more than 200 brand-new reading for pleasure books, sourced through Read for Good's long-term partner Scholastic Book Clubs.



accessible reading materials ideal for children who may not otherwise choose to read, or for children who simply love reading comics! Providing a year-long subscription gives children a new reason to visit their library every week.

Weekly subscription to Phoenix Comics

Each school received a comic subscription through Read for Good's long-standing partner Phoenix Comics. The subscription provides a full year of weekly comic deliveries to each school – 780 comics in total! Phoenix Comics provide advert-free,

“They [the children] love the library and love being in there. They have used the word ‘wow’ a lot when getting various books off the shelves.”

Reading journeys to help children find a book they will love

We created a range of posters containing reading journeys to accompany the new books. These journeys are designed to encourage children who may not enjoy reading to give reading a try. They deliberately include more accessible books, recognising that a wide book selection is important to give all children a chance to discover a love of reading.

Reading journeys are designed to recognise that a child who does not see themselves as a confident or capable reader will already be engaging with stories in some form (whether that's in video games or through clips on YouTube). Reading journeys meet a child where they are, building from children's wider areas of interest (from football to Nintendo game *Animal Crossing*).

Each school also received blank reading journey posters, enabling them to create their own reading journeys tailored to the interests of children within their school setting. The blank reading journeys support schools to sustain interest in the library and new books – allowing them to refresh the posters and highlight new books throughout the year.



Resources designed to rethink reading and make reading fun

Schools were provided with posters and resources designed to encourage staff and children to rethink reading, and make reading fun. We know children are more likely to discover their own love of reading when all forms of reading are valued, when children are free to make their own choices and when reading offers a fun, enjoyable experience.

We also sent schools *Drop Everything and Read* posters, encouraging schools to take a regular moment to prioritise reading for pleasure.

Providing a range of resources, in addition to the new books, was designed to ensure the new books were used to support reading for pleasure – encouraging schools to use the books to champion children's choice and reading for fun (as opposed to children being told what to read as part of the curriculum). The resources were also particularly targeted at children who may not readily choose to read in their free time.



“A reluctant reader in my class wanted to spend playtimes and lunchtimes in the library.”

The impact

Schools reported that the books had modernised their collections:

“The selection of books were really high quality texts which have modernised our book collections.”

“Children love the ‘fab’ non-fiction.”

From the evaluation it was clear that the new books and comics had made a particular difference in two areas:

First, the new books and resources changed the reading habits of children who haven't previously enjoyed reading, and had affected the reading habits of children who face barriers to reading.

More than 85% of respondents said the new books and comics had encouraged ‘reluctant readers’ to read more.

“A reluctant reader wanted to spend playtimes and lunchtimes in the library.”

“Children are enjoying the Phoenix comic – I have some reluctant year 6 children who are really loving it.”

Schools also commented on the particular difference the new books had made to children who face barriers to reading:

“In my class, I have a child with significant learning difficulties. He loves football and found the book about Marcus Rashford. He was desperate to take it home and show his mum and has talked about ‘the football man’ ever since. He wants to play with him and find more ‘football books’.”

“We do have a child who never remembers his book or reading book or homework but loves to read his new library books. We let him keep his in his drawer at school to read in group reading time.”

Secondly, the new books had generated peer to peer ‘book talk’.

We know that informally talking about books is key to a reading for pleasure culture. Unprompted, a number of schools highlighted that the new books had sparked ‘book talk’ and book swapping amongst pupils:

“They love them [the new books], they enjoy talking about what they have read and recommend to a friend.”

“Year 2 girls are keen readers and have ‘private’ arrangements to swap books amongst themselves and are recommending titles to each other!!”

2. 1,500 inclusive books

Specifically curated inclusive books

A further 100 books, specially curated by inclusive book specialist Little Box of Books, were sent to each school – 1,500 books in total. These books were specially selected to ensure all children were able to see themselves in the new stories, as well as ensuring the books helped to build children's understanding of worlds beyond their own.



Supporting resources and CPD



The new curated book box was accompanied by Little Box of Books' *Change the Story* learning resource. The resource included practical advice on how to talk to children

about diversity, and activities for children to accompany the new books. This was supported by a live CPD session with Little Box of Books, aimed to increase staff's confidence in talking about, and championing, the new inclusive titles.

“One of our refugees pupils found a book about a refugee - his face when reading it was magical.”

The impact

At the start of the project 14 of the 15 schools said their book collections did not reflect the diversity of the UK population. Schools unequivocally agreed that the new books had transformed the diversity of their collections. 100% of respondents said that, as a result of the new books, their book collections now 'completely' or 'very nearly' reflected the diversity of their school and the wider UK population.

The impact of the new collection was particularly marked for children who saw their lives reflected back at them:

“I have an autistic girl in my class and she gravitated to a book about autism and wanted to take it home [...]. It demonstrated to me how important it was to be able to identify and relate to someone like yourself.

It is also good to read the books to experience and feel other people's lives.”

“I am also reading a book about gender identity and I have a girl in my class who is experiencing that in her family.”

Schools with predominantly White-British pupils explained that the books had sparked conversation amongst the children around issues that the children have little direct experience of, such as the challenges faced by refugees.

The new collection, resource and CPD had a significant impact on staff's confidence in talking to children about diversity. More than 85% of respondents said their confidence in talking about diversity had increased as a result of the project. For some staff the impact was even broader:

“It has made me more empathic, aware and active in inclusivity.”

School focus

Widden Primary School



Widden Primary School is a large primary school (with 321 children), located in inner-city Gloucester. Many children in the school are living in poverty, with the school stating that they believe around 70% of children at the school have no, or limited, access to books to read for fun at home.

The school is rich in cultural diversity with 86% of children in the school speaking English as an additional language. At the start of the project, the school was lacking inclusive books that reflected back the identities and experiences of children within the school:

“We had so many Michael Morpurgo, Roald Dahl, David Walliams - we all have to have some of those books because we know the children love them. But, we just needed more diverse books that represent our community from around the world.”

The staff lead on the project described that new children arrive at the school throughout the year. A high proportion of these children are refugees who often arrive “nervous” and sometimes “scared”. The school described the fact that children arriving at the school can now see themselves in the stories in the library which “makes them feel more welcome and it makes those books more accessible... and makes them want to read them more.”

The school library (a bus!) was “such a mess and not accessible.” It is now an “organised space” that all classes use weekly - children ask to go!

Gloucestershire Libraries reorganised the space by topic, and loosely by reading level, which made it easy for children to find the right book for them. The school has a boy who is obsessed with space. Now, as space is a topic, he has been able to find all the fiction and non-fiction books that he wants to read.

The way that the reading levels have been organised fitted the school's specific needs. The school experiences high levels of “turbulence” as children often arrive with reading levels that don't align with their age. The loose arrangement of books by key stage has allowed staff to guide the children to books that are appropriate without being prescriptive. The school has a girl in year 6 who is reading at a level far below her age who absolutely loves the library. She visits at least once a day! The best thing is she “can now easily access books that are appropriate for her.”

Inspired by the project, the school has set up a staff book club where staff read and discuss books from the past year (with copies then being added to the library). The school told us they are “excited” to continue to work with Read for Good, with an upcoming visit from author Andy Seed and the school about to run Readathon®.

“It has given our library a new lease of life.”





3. 15 “child-friendly” and “welcoming” Libraries

Empowering schools to champion quality books

One of the challenges schools face is the pressure to accept any books (regardless of age and quality) and to keep all book stock. There is a wide range of barriers that make it difficult for schools to refuse donations and weed out poor stock - from pressure from well-meaning donors of books, to lack of resource (the time and knowledge it takes to sift through and sort huge volumes of books, and the cost of replacing weeded stock).

Gloucestershire Libraries provided each school with on-site expert support to make this important process easier. Schools were provided with a written report which captured recommendations for weeding stock and advice on future new book selections, empowering librarians and teachers with the confidence and authority to act on best practice in this area. An expert from Gloucestershire Libraries spent 2-3 days on-site with each school, removing poor condition fiction books and non-fiction books that were no longer accurate or relevant (often books that were 20-30 years old).

Enabling children to find what they want to read

The school audits revealed that in many of the school libraries books were not displayed on the shelves. Books were disorganised and muddled together.

In order to create library spaces where the children could find something they wanted to read, Gloucestershire Libraries provided each school with specialist, bespoke library support around sorting and displaying books.

Gloucestershire Libraries offered bespoke recommendations for sorting and displaying books, subsequently categorising and displaying books so they were accessible for the children.

Traditional library systems (such as Dewey) can be difficult for children and staff to understand.

As a result, many schools opted for their books to be sorted thematically into categories such as adventure, sport, funny, real life etc. Some schools opted for books to be colour-coded (a more child-friendly version of Dewey), sorted alphabetically or loosely arranged by reading level (without being too prescriptive). Books were moved off the floor onto shelving, with key texts displayed outwards to support children's process of choosing something to read. Seeing the front of books (as opposed to spines) can make books feel more accessible for children who otherwise struggle to find something they want to read for fun.

The impact

Schools commented on the changes to their libraries and how these impacted on the accessibility of the space, and children's enjoyment and use of the library.

A number of schools noted that their libraries were now more "accessible" and "child-friendly":

"The non-fiction section of our library is now colour-coded rather than pure Dewey which makes it more child-friendly. The fiction has been divided into easier and more challenging fiction."

"Our books are now organised in sections that are more accessible... Outdated books have been removed."

"The library space has been organised into themes which has allowed pupils to use it more productively. We have also been able to improve classroom libraries."

Schools commented that children's enjoyment of the space had increased. This in turn led to schools valuing the library space more, and to children spending more time in the library:

"We had an author visit to open the library and we have used this to launch the new book[s]

as part of this. The library is now full every lunch time (3 days a week), supported by newly appointed librarians."

"It is better organised, well stocked and the children enjoy being there."

"They are really excited to see the new books. They enjoy having the new books in classrooms. There is more motivation to use the library properly."

"It's been so rewarding to see the children become enthusiastic about reading and to see the library being used."

"Tidier, more accessible, non-fiction looks engaging and organised, we use it more regularly, old not appropriate books thrown away."

100% of respondents said that, as a result of the project, children in the school were enjoying reading more and were reading more frequently.

This was not limited to a change in the reading habits of a handful of children but a wide-spread shift across the school community. Over half of respondents said that more than 6 in 10 children in the school were enjoying reading more. Over 40% of respondents said that more than 6 in 10 children in the school were reading more frequently.



St Matthew's Church of England Primary School



school, with colour-coded books by genre. As a result, children can now find something that speaks to their interests.

The new books have made a particular difference to children in the school who don't normally enjoy reading. 'Reluctant readers' have enjoyed choosing books that they want to read.

The work has transformed a locked space that children couldn't access into a school library where children ask to spend their time. The library is open for 3 lunchtimes each week, the space is frequently visited by the children during lesson time and there is a new after-school library club.

The school has thought carefully about how to ensure the library is sustainable and valued by the whole school community - from involving parents in getting the library ready for its launch to introducing a simple child-led book borrowing system (where children write their name in a folder) and training year 5 children to help look after the new library.

St Matthew's Church of England Primary School, located on the edge of Stroud, has 197 pupils. At the start of the project the school had no reading for pleasure budget and no school library. The school had a space that had previously been used as a school library which had become a locked room full of stacked up boxes of books.

Brand-new books and expert support from Gloucestershire Libraries gave the school the starting point they needed to create a school library. The staff lead on the project had a clear vision: "your support and flexibility facilitated my vision and allowed me to create the library I wanted for the children."

The PTA raised funds - transforming the room from a space filled with stacked boxes of books into an inviting space complete with a new mural, bookshelves and soft furnishings.

The influx of brand-new inclusive and appealing books has meant the library is packed full of books that children are excited to read. In the school's words: "children are enticed in by the books." Gloucestershire Libraries replaced the Dewey system that had previously been used by the



4. Libraries that last and a reading for pleasure culture



Information and connections to support sustainable libraries

A school library is never truly finished. Libraries require an on-going investment of resource to: maintain contemporary book stocks; provide relevant and up-to-date non-fiction; keep reading materials well-organised and; continue to develop and maintain the physical space.

Throughout the project Read for Good and Gloucestershire Libraries shared ideas with schools to maintain their libraries and connected them

“We have completely refurbished the library, redecorating it with a mural, quotes from children’s literature linked to our values, new furniture and new books.”

to wider forms of support. These ranged from sharing information on how other schools had secured additional funding for their libraries (sources of library grants, complementary charity programmes and ideas for successful school fundraising), to good sources of specialist library furniture and shelving and practical ideas for maintaining the library space (such as the use of library volunteers).

A reading for pleasure culture: *READ Gloucestershire!*

We also know that libraries only live up to their potential if reading for pleasure is integrated into the wider activities of the school. Reading for fun needs to be embedded across the school community so children see their free choices as valued (they can select what they want to read from the library) and time is made to read for fun (as opposed to reading always being mandated or curriculum linked).

Alongside resources and communications championing this message, all schools have received targeted support to join Read for Good’s annual *READ Gloucestershire!* celebrations. The celebration centres on uniting schools across the county to prioritise and mark the value of reading for pleasure. All schools have been offered a wide range of activities and tools to help build a reading for pleasure culture within their settings. In 2023, these have included:

- In-person and virtual author events including:
 - A virtual author event with one of the UK’s most loved authors, Sir Michael Morpurgo
 - One of the schools on the library project receiving an in-person author visit with non-fiction author Andy Seed

- Access to Read for Good’s virtual Readathon® summer party, featuring a range of authors/illustrators to excite children about all forms of reading and storytelling (from traditional books, to poetry, comics, oral storytelling and graphic novels)
- A *One Million Minutes Challenge* where children were encouraged to log their minutes using Read for Good’s web-based app Track My Read®
- Access to Read for Good’s reading challenge Readathon®
- County-wide moments to prioritise reading for pleasure and listening to stories: *Drop Everything and Read* and *Drop Everything and Listen*

The impact

Feedback from many of the schools on the project showed that the project had acted as a catalyst. Having support to improve their school libraries had given staff the starting point, motivation and knowledge they needed to action wider work. As a result, staff spoke of a transformational and on-going impact to their school libraries and reading for pleasure practice.

A number of schools used the project as a platform for further redevelopment of their school libraries, using the information and connections provided to complete wider refurbishments of their library spaces.

This included: creating completely new library spaces, redecorating with murals and quotes; adding a new library management system; adding new shelving, furniture and soft furnishing, and; raising further funds for new books to meet the particular needs of children within their setting:

“We still have some funding from the PTA to buy some further books, as well as continuing to enhance the space with soft furnishings.”



“It prompted us to raise money for new furniture and we now have a book log system again.”

“We have completely refurbished the library, redecorating it with a mural, quotes from children’s literature linked to our values, new furniture and new books.”

“We are building a new library space so the idea of putting the books into themes will be transferred to here.”

Schools voiced their continued commitment to sustaining the library beyond the end of the project, and their plans to take the project forward through championing diversity and reading for pleasure:

- A number of schools told us they had sourced parents or pupils to enable them to keep books organised:

“I have appointed librarians to make the project self-running and sustainable.”

“We now have a new willing parent helper to support us.”

“We now have year 6 librarians who are diligent in their Library duties.”

As a result, many of the primary schools now have a wider network of reading for pleasure advocates, ensuring the library remains prioritised and at the heart of the school.

- Schools spoke of their commitment to using and maintaining inclusive book collections to ensure children can continue to see themselves in stories and learn from experiences beyond their own. This builds from the best practice shared by Little Box of Books (around building and using diverse book collections):

“We are in the process of looking at how diverse books can be incorporated into our wider curriculum.”

“Being aware of the children and their backgrounds and making sure there are books to which they can identify.”

The practical information shared throughout the project on sourcing and fundraising for new books (as well as book weeding) makes it more feasible for schools to maintain quality book collections.

- Schools identified a huge range of ways they plan to regularly champion reading for pleasure through the library and new books. Some of these strategies are ones that schools were already using to promote reading for pleasure prior to the project (now enhanced by the new books and more welcoming library space). Others are new reading for pleasure activities that schools have introduced as a direct result of the work.

Schools told us of their plans to champion reading for pleasure through: regular *Drop Everything and Read* moments, library fun days, strategies to promote book sharing (book clubs, reading buddies and whole school reads), and regularly showcasing different books (such as through a ‘book of the week’):

“We have *Drop Everything and Read* time daily.”

“I would like to look at ways that I could promote various books each week/month.”

“We will continue to have dedicated library fun days if my deployment allows me the time to arrange them.”

“Start a children’s book club.”

“Share books. Reading buddies.”

“Every Friday the whole school comes together to choose a new book to read and/or share.”

“We would like to increase reading for pleasure in KS1. I would like to use a lot of the new picture books... pupils will take a picture book home to share with an adult as well as a banded reading book.”

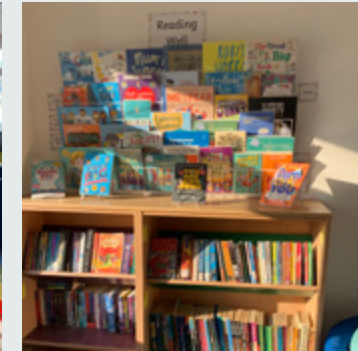
“Welcome Wednesday sessions where we invite parents in to read can be hosted in the library; Author/Book of the week; Recommended reads featuring new and exciting books.”



Cam Hopton Church of England Primary School



The library before...



...and in progress!

Cam Hopton Primary has 208 children and is located in a large village (Cam) on the edge of the Cotswolds. 33% of the children within the school have vulnerabilities due to mental health, medical needs or ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences).

The school believes around a third of children within the school have limited access to books to read for fun at home: “We feel that particularly after Covid some of our families are struggling more than ever before. Parents [that] are struggling have little energy to invest in their children’s reading.”

The main barrier the school faced in developing a library to enhance a love of reading was a lack of budget: “Our Pupil Premium percentage isn’t high however we have an additional 20% of children who are just above the cusp for PPG [Pupil Premium grant].” With a limited budget

“We are so grateful to have been involved in the project. It has opened up so many doors for us. Our school just doesn’t have much money to spend on the library at the moment so it’s been invaluable.”

and increased need, the school’s library had required an overhaul since Covid.

Gloucestershire Libraries’ audit highlighted that a number of books were outdated, with the school lacking new fiction and inclusive books. The previous library systems the school had used were no longer in use and a large number of books were in boxes rather than on the shelves.

As a result of the project, books were organised and sorted by genre – from action and adventure, to art and dinosaurs. The new books were used as part of the school’s World Book Day celebrations.

At the start of the project the school noted that their book collection was “not at all” reflective of the diversity of the UK population. After the delivery of the new books the school felt they now “comprehensively” reflected the UK’s diversity. With only 3.8% of the children at the school from minority-ethnic backgrounds the school saw these books as a window to broaden the children’s understanding of experiences beyond their own.

Involvement in the project, alongside support from Stroud District Council’s promotion of the [Reading Agency’s Reading Well Scheme](#), enabled Cam Hopton Primary to undertake an ambitious library transformation that was beyond the scope of the project itself. The school took up Gloucestershire Libraries’ recommendations for a new library management system, repainted the library and applied for a further grant for new shelving. The school now has a parent coming in to keep books organised and has embraced reading for pleasure – from signing up to Read for Good’s *READ Gloucestershire!* celebration to organising a book fair with a local book shop.

The new library is due to be fully opened to children in September 2023, with the school “excited” about the progress they have made.



Conclusion

New inviting and inclusive libraries have changed the experience of reading for children across the 15 chosen schools. The new books, comics and improved spaces have empowered children to find something they want to read, that brings them joy and speaks to their interests. New inclusive titles have enabled children, that too often don't see themselves in stories, to see their lives reflected back at them.

Children have been excited to share, and talk about, books. Libraries have been transformed from "unloved" and disorganised spaces, into inviting, "child-friendly" spaces where children want to spend their time. Children have enjoyed

reading more and have read more frequently. Importantly, this has included children who wouldn't normally choose to pick up a book for fun.

With reading for pleasure making children happier and laying the foundation for success in almost all areas of adult life, the support provided has given life-changing opportunities to more than 3,000 children across Gloucestershire. But, there are more than 750,000 children in the UK without a school library and many more without a quality library.

Together, we can change this. With your help we can reach more children, building a future where every child can experience the life-changing benefits that come from reading what you love.

How you can help

Fundraise or donate

By fundraising for, or donating to, Read for Good you support our work bringing the magic of books and stories to children across the UK. Find out more at readforgood.org/how-you-can-help/

Philanthropic partnerships

If you are a Philanthropist or Trust interested in partnering with us we would love to start a conversation. Please email lucymartin@readforgood.org

Publisher partnerships

If you are a UK Publishing House with brand-new books to donate we would love to hear from you. Please email tash@readforgood.org

Follow our work

You can find Read for Good on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter. To keep in touch sign up for our newsletter at readforgood.org/updates/

For general enquiries please email reading@readforgood.org

Every child deserves a school library that brings them joy!



Changing life stories

Read for Good is proud to be a supporting partner of the Primary School Library Alliance, with the 15 libraries that received books, resources and support as part of this project contributing to the Alliance's aim to transform 1,000 primary school libraries by 2025. Founded in November 2021 by the National Literacy Trust and Penguin Random House UK, the Primary School Library Alliance works with its flagship partners to address the chronic lack of investment in primary school libraries and bring together relevant parties to help solve this urgent issue.

For more information and how you can help visit:

literacytrust.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/libraryalliance



Read for Good is also a proud member of the Great School Libraries campaign. Great School Libraries is making the case to bring libraries and access to librarians back to every school in the UK. The benefits of a school library are significant, and every child deserves to have one. Launched in 2019, the campaign has conducted two rounds of research into school library provision (as data is not collected by the Department for Education) and unfortunately it shows a huge variety in provision, with school which have a higher percentage of children eligible for free schools meals less likely to have a library space, staff or the quality of resources.

For more information about the campaign and how you can help visit:

greatschoolibraries.org.uk/how-can-i-help

With thanks to our philanthropic partners
who made this work possible:



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Registered charity 1130309 (England & Wales) and SC041036 (Scotland).
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