



Oxford School  
Improvement

# Building an Outstanding Reading School

Six strategies to make reading  
for pleasure work in your school



# What research tells us



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## The purpose of this report

**T**his report is about the relationship between a school's reading culture and children's attainment. It considers how reading for pleasure can be organised to support all children to become confident, keen and capable readers. It is about becoming an outstanding reading school.

The report explores six strategies that help to develop a reading school. These strategies will support leadership teams in reflecting on existing provision within their schools and how to build effective systems to embed a culture of reading. Recent research and case studies from successful schools illustrate good practice. The report includes practical ideas to inspire staff, inform classroom practice and help a reading culture to flourish.

For each strategy, action points are suggested to prompt discussion and support schools to reflect on their provision and its impact. At the end of the report there is an audit form to help schools plan for development.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### James Clements

In his role as a senior leader of an outstanding inner city primary school, James helped develop effective reading provision and was consulted on the new National Curriculum for primary schools. He was also a local authority Lead Teacher, leading training, and supporting teaching and learning across numerous schools. James is now an English adviser, supporting schools and local authorities to develop the teaching of reading, writing and drama. He is the creative director of Shakespeare and More, a not-for-profit organisation that promotes effective English teaching.





## Benefits of reading for pleasure

While learning discrete reading skills is vital, recent research into reading shows that developing positive attitudes towards reading can also play a key role in children's development:

*Young people who enjoy reading very much are nearly five times as likely to read above the expected level for their age compared with young people who do not enjoy reading at all.*

*Children's and Young People's Reading Today, National Literacy Trust, 2012<sup>1</sup>*

Research also shows that reading for pleasure has a positive impact on children's attainment in reading assessments.<sup>2</sup> Children who read for pleasure have enhanced levels of text comprehension, an increased knowledge of grammar and show improvement in their writing. They also have more positive attitudes towards reading than their peers.<sup>3</sup> In fact:

*Developing a love of reading can be more important for a child's educational success than their family's socio-economic background.*

*OECD, 2002<sup>4</sup>*



The advantages of reading for pleasure go beyond academic achievement:

*Other benefits include an increased breadth of vocabulary, pleasure in reading in later life, a better understanding of other cultures, better general knowledge and even 'a greater insight into human nature'.*

*Reading for Pleasure: A research overview, National Literacy Trust, 2006*

## Children's reading habits

Research by the National Literacy Trust indicated a number of concerns about children's reading habits:

*The researchers found that only three young people in 10 were reading daily in their own time and that the number of children and young people who enjoyed reading 'very much' or 'quite a lot' had barely changed since 2005 (50% in 2011 and 51% in 2005).*

*Children's and Young People's Reading Today, National Literacy Trust, (2012)*

The researchers went on to suggest that many children and young people enjoyed reading but that it was 'pushed out' in favour of other activities. They reported:

- › more than a fifth of children and young people (22%) rarely or never read in their own time
- › more than half (54%) prefer watching TV to reading
- › nearly a fifth (17%) would be embarrassed if their friends saw them reading.

Evidence from Ofsted, too, in 2012 suggests that the decline in reading for pleasure extends to what happens in schools:

*In too many schools there is no coherent policy on reading overall; schools put in place numerous programmes to support reading, especially for weak readers, but do not have an overall conception of what makes a good reader... there is not enough curriculum time to focus on wider reading or reading for pleasure.*

*Moving English forward, Ofsted, 2012<sup>5</sup>*

## Making a difference

The principal message of this report is that schools can make a difference:

*In schools that have success with their pupils' reading, teachers read, talk with enthusiasm and recommend books, the results of which are seen not only in test results but also in an enthusiasm for reading which extends beyond the classroom.*

*Excellence in English, Ofsted, 2011<sup>6</sup>*

This report has been written in the light of the two key messages taken from research and inspection: that developing a love of reading has huge benefits for children; and that fewer young people are now making time for themselves to read at home. By teaching every child to read well, making time within the school day to read, and embedding a culture of reading into the core of what it does, a school can tackle these concerns. By becoming an outstanding reading school, every school has the opportunity to make a profound difference to children's lives.

# What is an outstanding reading school?

**O**utstanding reading schools believe in both the importance of developing children's discrete word-reading skills and comprehension, and the need to engender their love of books and reading. These schools recognise that the two elements are intertwined; each relies on the other if children are to become life-long readers.

Outstanding reading schools:

- place reading and books at the centre of the curriculum
- recognise that being able to read well is a key life skill for children, whatever their background
- believe that every child can learn to read with the right teaching and support
- acknowledge that not all children will have had the opportunity to develop a love of reading at home, so this has to be taught and encouraged at school – just like any other area of the curriculum
- build time for all children to read independently, read aloud and be read to during the school day
- develop a coherent whole-school strategy for promoting reading for pleasure
- spend money and time to support reading, including buying books and developing the school environment to support reading
- believe that every teacher should be an advocate for reading
- devote time to training staff so they are equipped to support children's enjoyment of reading

➤ involve parents to ensure the culture of reading that the school has developed extends into the home.

At a reading school, all children learn to love books, and the school is prepared to make this an absolute priority. This relentless focus on reading is important for many reasons.

## Achievement

Research shows that children who enjoy reading achieve more highly right across the curriculum. Developing a love of reading is one of the most effective ways a school can raise attainment. Success in reading can improve national test results in all areas but, more importantly, it also sets children up as readers for life, with all the accompanying benefits that follow.

## Entitlement

Every child deserves the chance to become a reader. For many children, including those growing up in a household where reading is not valued, school will be the key place where they come into contact with books. Children who are not introduced to books are missing out on a lifetime of enjoyment. So, if families are unable or unwilling to introduce children to reading, it falls to schools to take responsibility. If schools fail to do this, the consequences for children are stark. We know that links can be demonstrated between, for instance, illiteracy and offending.<sup>7</sup>

## Successful schools promote reading

*Schools that take the business of reading for pleasure seriously, where teachers read, talk with enthusiasm and recommend books, and where provision for reading is planned carefully, are more likely to succeed with their pupils' reading. This success*

“  
After nourishment,  
shelter and companionship,  
stories are the thing we  
need most in the world.

Philip Pullman

*was seen in the survey schools, both in good test results and an enthusiasm for reading beyond the classroom.*

*Excellence in English*, Ofsted, 2011

## The National Curriculum

The new National Curriculum for English at Key Stages 1 and 2, which will become statutory for maintained schools in England in September 2014, places reading for pleasure at the heart of the English curriculum. Alongside the expectation that every school teaches children to read well, schools will be expected to develop a love of reading in every child.

## Expanding children's experience

Reading is a passport to the world. The benefits of reading go beyond the opportunities offered by being well-read with a good command of English. Reading great literature opens children up to ideas, experiences, places and times they might never otherwise experience in real life. Reading for pleasure gives opportunities to learn about a multitude of things that cannot be covered by a school curriculum.

## Building an outstanding reading school

The next sections of the report can be read in any order. They deal with the practical strategies that a school can follow to develop a culture of reading in terms of supporting staff, engaging families, developing spaces for reading and using resources and opportunities effectively.



## ACTION POINTS

- 1 Look at the list of statements about outstanding reading schools on page 4. How many of these statements are true of your school? Before sharing the list with your staff, ask them to devise their own list of features of 'reading schools'
- 2 Watch Ofsted's film about St Thomas of Canterbury School, which moved from special measures to become an outstanding school after placing reading at the heart of the curriculum. <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/good-practice-film-st-thomas-of-canterbury-salford-english>. If a film were made of your school detailing good practice in reading, what would it show?

# Six strategies to build an outstanding reading school

A successful approach to developing reading in a school could follow six interlinked strategies. Reading schools use each of these strategies to help all their children become life-long readers.



Six strategies to build an outstanding reading school					
1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>SUPPORTING STAFF</b>	<b>TEACHING THE READING CURRICULUM</b>	<b>ENGAGING PARENTS</b>	<b>DEVELOPING THE READING ENVIRONMENT</b>	<b>TARGETING RESOURCES</b>	<b>CELEBRATING READING</b>
Equipping staff with the skills and knowledge they need to teach children to be accomplished and keen readers	Making use of every opportunity the curriculum offers to teach children to become life-long readers	Harnessing the enthusiasm of parents to ensure the culture of reading developed by the school extends into the home	Understanding the role the physical environment, including libraries, book areas, and displays can play in teaching children to be readers	Using a wide range of different reading material to teach children to become readers	Involving the school community in special events to raise the profile of reading and engage children
PAGE 7	PAGE 8	PAGE 12	PAGE 14	PAGE 16	PAGE 17



# Strategy 1

## Supporting staff

“  
It is essential that, by the end of their primary education, all pupils are able to read fluently, and with confidence, in any subject in their forthcoming secondary education.

National Curriculum (consultation draft), February 2013

”

The key factor in enabling all children to learn to read, and to help them engage positively with reading, are the skills, knowledge and enthusiasm of the staff who teach them.

### Outcomes for children’s learning

Outstanding reading schools are systematic in teaching reading to ensure that every child will leave for secondary school with certain key competencies in reading. Teachers take responsibility for the following:

- › word-reading skills – both phonic decoding skills and the quick recognition of ‘common exception words’ (tricky words)
- › comprehension – including retrieving information, summarising, making inferences and using evidence from the text to justify these.

This Simple View of Reading, highlighted in the Rose review of early reading, forms the backbone of provision for reading.<sup>8</sup> Developing word-reading and comprehension through high-quality teaching is the priority for a reading school. Children are taught to apply these skills to read for meaning across a wide range of genres.

The first two dimensions constitute being able to read, but the essential element is about being a reader. This is about developing the love of reading and books and the desire to read that should be intertwined so closely with learning to read. Reading schools explicitly teach:

- › knowledge about authors and books
- › the language of books
- › reading stamina

- › choosing books – encouraging children to choose to read and also enabling them to choose a book they might enjoy.

Word reading, comprehension, and developing a love of reading form the basis for reading in the proposed new National Curriculum. In the light of this and the findings of recent research into children’s reading habits (see pages 2 and 3), it is increasingly important that schools teach each of these elements effectively through their reading curriculum.

### Effective teaching of reading

For children to become life-long readers, teachers must be skilful at teaching each of the above elements. They need a strong grasp of the demands of the National Curriculum and a clear understanding of what children of different ages should be able to achieve.

Staff need a good knowledge of books to help them meet the different demands of the school curriculum and to support pupils to choose books. Not everyone has an encyclopaedic knowledge of literature, and keeping up to date with the latest children’s books can be difficult, so part of this is simply about knowing where to go to find out.

The key element in teaching every child to become a life-long reader is combining a passion for teaching children to read with knowledge about how to engage children by encouraging reading and promoting books at every opportunity.

### Assessment

Effective formative assessment is one of the major factors in teaching every child to become a reader. This means teachers need a strong grasp of where every child is as a reader, both their strengths and the areas in which they need to develop. While National Curriculum levels can be useful

in providing a relatively crude indicator of a child’s reading, a strong teacher will dig deeper in order to understand the set of competencies that underpin that level. Through carefully assessing pupils against the requirements of the National Curriculum, teachers can identify where the gaps in children’s skills and knowledge lie and then plan how to close them.

### Supporting staff development

With a clear vision of what skills and knowledge teachers need and an accurate picture of their existing strengths and their areas for development, effective professional development can be used to close any gap between the two. The most effective way might not always be whole-staff professional development; coaching and mentoring from experienced staff, online resources, observations and team-teaching can all play a part in supporting staff.

## ACTION POINTS

- 1 Use the audit on page 18 to consider your teachers’ and support staff’s confidence and knowledge as teachers of reading. What are their strengths and where are the areas for development? As a leadership team, use this information to plan professional development.
- 2 Return to the results of your audit later and repeat it, using the findings to evaluate the impact of the development you have undertaken.

# Strategy 2

## Teaching the reading curriculum

“  
*Good-quality books can be the driver for a range of activities right across the curriculum.*  
 ”

**R**eading schools use every opportunity there is to support children’s discrete reading skills and comprehension, and teach them to develop a love of reading.

### Teaching reading in English lessons

An effective way of developing children’s love of reading is through organising units of lessons around motivating books and texts. The texts might be a specific book, a play or poem, or with older children, a specific genre such as journalistic writing, with a range of different newspapers used as texts. A good-quality text will provide opportunities for children to meet objectives drawn from across the National Curriculum for English. Good, text-based, whole-class teaching provides opportunities for learning and reinforcing:

- › word reading – as children encounter unfamiliar words
- › grammar and punctuation – through seeing them in context and considering how they are employed for effect
- › comprehension – through listening to, reading, and discussing challenging texts
- › vocabulary and spelling – by encountering new language
- › spoken language through participating in discussions about books, learning from both specific language modelled by the teacher and also that of their peers
- › writing (both transcription and composition).

In addition, studying whole texts in lessons can develop children’s love of reading by giving them the opportunity to read and listen to texts and authors that



they might not have chosen to read for themselves. They also have the chance to encounter new or unfamiliar genres.

While each lesson must have clear objectives, teachers must also be confident to deviate from their planning if they sense that the level of challenge is not right or if an ideal opportunity arises to explore a specific aspect of English. There is not just one way of structuring an effective English lesson; the teaching should be driven by what is to be learned:

*The quality of pupils’ learning was hampered in weaker lessons by a number of ‘myths’ about what makes a good lesson ... an excessive pace; an overloading of activities; inflexible planning; and limited time for pupils to work independently. Learning was also constrained in schools where teachers concentrated too much or too early on a narrow range of test or examination skills.*

#### Moving English forward

Poems can be perfect texts for reading in English lessons, not least because they offer a richness that will challenge

even the highest-achieving child. A unit of work on a single poem over the course of a week could include:

- › reading the poem several times, discussing it as a class and maybe learning some lines – or all the poem – by heart
- › learning about the structure, vocabulary and language of the poem
- › discussing the idea, message or feeling the poet is trying to communicate
- › writing, in the form of a personal response or the children’s own poems.

Learning about several poems as a class then asking children to find poems that they enjoy could form the basis of a class poetry anthology or performance-based assembly. The choice of poems to read with children is practically endless, but narrative poems such as *Flannan Isle* by Wilfrid Wilson Gibson, classic poems such as those included in *IF: A Treasury of Poems for Almost Every Possibility* by Allie Esiri and Rachel Kelly, or new poems such as *New and Collected Poems for Children* by Carol Ann Duffy are all good places to start.





## Classroom dialogue

Central to good English teaching is meaningful dialogue between teacher and child and between children themselves. This is crucial in developing both children's spoken language and their attitudes to reading.

Although closed questions can generate a superficial sense of pace in a classroom, it is much more important to provide time for children to think. They need to learn to interact with the text, develop their understanding and their critical thinking skills, and express opinions. Asking the children to discuss an open question in pairs or groups before feeding back to the class gives many more of them the opportunity to speak and think. The teacher's role is to manage the discussion in such a way that the children's thinking and learning move forward in terms of what they have read.

## Starting early

Children arrive at school with disparate reading experiences. Research shows that even by the time they are 15 years old, children who have been read to frequently at an early age can still remain well over half a year ahead of their peers who have not had such support.<sup>9</sup> It is the school's responsibility to make sure that children hear books read aloud; this is particularly important if parents are unable or unwilling to read to their children themselves.

Learning to love books begins when children first start school. Children should begin to interact with books in Nursery and Reception classes in ways that help them to become life-long readers.

The first step is systematic phonics teaching, continuing throughout Key Stage 1, ensuring every child can read. Learning to decode fluently and accurately will allow children to become readers, able to access all the enjoyment and excitement books can bring. In addition to the direct and systematic teaching of word-reading knowledge and skills, children need to listen to books and stories to develop their comprehension, making links between books and their developing knowledge of the world.

As well as being read to and sharing books together in a group or as a class, young children should have the chance to browse through books on their own, developing the skill of handling them independently.

Developing a love of reading in younger children requires a wide, language-rich curriculum and classroom environments that immerse children in books and

stories. Good-quality books support the development of spoken language and can also be the driver for activities right across the curriculum: games and puzzles; imaginative play and drama; art and music.

Setting up role-play areas based on stories the class have listened to can help children to:

- › become familiar with characters and stories
- › develop their spoken language and vocabulary
- › understand the structure of stories
- › explore ideas and experiences that are unfamiliar to them.

It may take only the addition of some cardboard furniture and three plastic bowls and spoons to create The Three Bears' Cottage, while upturning a large cardboard box and providing a collection of soft toys can be enough for children to play *Mr Gumpy's Outing* by John Burningham. Children's imaginations will fill in the rest.

Giving children the opportunity to share the texts they are reading can have a hugely positive effect on the reading culture within a classroom, raising the status of reading and providing another source of recommendations. When new books arrive in school, they should be shown and promoted to the class.

Children should be welcome to bring in books from home or the local library. The books children are reading may be taken home to be enjoyed in their own time, or be left in school ready to be picked up the next day.

## Reading with others

Parents, grandparents and adult volunteers from the local community or businesses can be a useful resource in supporting children's reading. Volunteers can support individual and group reading, become involved in school book clubs and groups, and provide children with a valuable model of adults reading for pleasure.

It can be useful occasionally to pair older and younger children for reading activities. Older students often enjoy mentoring younger readers, and younger children can benefit from reading alongside a more fluent child. This sort of pairing gives both children the opportunity to learn from each other, and to enjoy reading different styles of books that, perhaps, they would not have chosen independently.

## ACTION POINTS

- 1 Observe a selection of English lessons across the school that involve reading. Focus on the following questions in each lesson you see:
  - What is the quality of the teaching?
  - What is the quality of questioning?
  - How much opportunity do children have to discuss views and listen to the opinions of others?
  - How far do the pace and flexibility of the teaching help to make sure that important points are considered and that all children are learning?
- 2 Read Ofsted's report *Reading by six: How the best schools do it* (2010).<sup>10</sup> Use the 'four key components' on page 27 to reflect on your own reading provision.
- 3 Read Ofsted's report *Excellence in English* (2011). Focus on the case studies from successful schools (page 8). What good practice could you implement in the short- or medium-term and the longer term that could make a difference to your school's reading culture?
- 4 Read *Narrowing the Gap* (OUP), in particular pages 8 and 9. Could you develop the use of 'reading ambassadors', older children working one-to-one to support the reading of younger children?
- 5 Discuss *English inside the Black Box* with your staff, focusing on the sections about dialogue (page 8) and feedback (page 10).<sup>11</sup> Consider the extent to which dialogue in your classrooms is effective in supporting children to learn.

Reading aloud

*Inspectors also noted the loss of once popular and effective strategies such as reading stories to younger children, listening to children read, and the sharing of complete novels with junior age pupils.*

*Moving English forward, Ofsted 2012*

Although reading aloud is a regular feature of Early Years and Key Stage 1 classrooms, opportunities to listen to books often decrease as children move through the school. Sharing a novel or fascinating non-fiction text with a class should form an important part of the reading curriculum throughout the school – not just for the youngest children.

*Pupils should be taught to: participate in discussions about books that are read to them and those they can read for themselves, building on their own and others' ideas and challenging views courteously.*

*National Curriculum (consultation draft), February 2013<sup>12</sup>*

Listening to longer or more complex texts than they would be able to read alone increases children's knowledge and understanding and, along with the rich vocabulary they encounter, develops their reading comprehension. When the teacher reads aloud, it makes literary language accessible and also provides a

model of expressive reading. It is also a joyful time of the day – a chance to share a story as a class for sheer pleasure.

The table below gives some ideas for great books to read aloud to children. Although they are organised by year group, these are just indications. The suggestions focus on fiction books, but an engaging non-fiction text can work equally well, extending children's familiarity with a range of text types and introducing them to some specific characteristics of such texts.

Independent reading

With the reported decrease in the time children spend reading at home (page 3), reading independently at school for a sustained period is important if children are to develop as self-reliant readers, able to select a book and sustain their concentration. Providing time for independent reading is equitable because it means that every child, including those who do not read at home, has time to enjoy a book. Purchasing books and other reading resources is a legitimate way of spending Pupil Premium funding, within certain critical parameters. For example, the funding should be ring-fenced so that it is spent on the target group of pupils and you should be absolutely clear about the impact you are intending to achieve by allocating funding in this way. Consider how you would measure the impact of the spending.

ACTION POINTS

- 1 Read Ofsted's latest report on the Pupil Premium: *The Pupil Premium – How schools are spending the funding successfully to maximise achievement.*<sup>13</sup> In particular, read the important overview on page 3 and the primary school case studies.
- 2 Read the OSI report, *The Pupil Premium – Making it work in your school.* Page 18 gives useful advice on tracking and demonstrating impact.

It is vital that, alongside quiet reading time, children are given opportunities to talk about and celebrate the books they are reading. This can have a hugely positive effect on the classroom's reading culture, raising the status of reading and helping to make reading a part of everyday life.

*Pupils should be taught to maintain positive attitudes to reading and understanding of what they read by: recommending books that they have read to their peers, giving reasons for their choices.*

*National Curriculum (consultation draft), February 2013*

During the time given to independent reading, the teacher will be supporting children to choose new books, answering questions about the texts and engaging children in discussion.

Guided Reading

Guided Reading can be a powerful way of supporting children to make progress in reading, providing a regular and supportive time for children to encounter engaging texts that will resonate with their interests and capture their imagination.

Over the course of a school year, children will have the chance to encounter a wide range of genres, some of which will be unfamiliar. All this helps to broaden their experience, helps them to form opinions about books and authors, and gives them the opportunity to use literary language. They will also have the satisfaction of enjoying a whole book from beginning to end.

YEAR GROUP	CLASSICS	OLD FAVOURITES	YOU MIGHT NOT KNOW...
RECEPTION	<i>Mother Goose's Nursery Rhymes</i> by Axel Scheffler	<i>Hairy Maclary</i> by Lynley Dodd	<i>One Gorilla</i> by Anthony Browne
YEAR 1	<i>Each Peach Pear Plum</i> by Janet and Allan Ahlberg	<i>The Tiger who Came to Tea</i> by Judith Kerr	<i>Oh No, George!</i> by Chris Haughton
YEAR 2	<i>Fairy Tales</i> told by Berlie Doherty	<i>Oh the Places You'll Go!</i> by Dr Seuss	<i>Night of the Gargoyles</i> by Eve Bunting
YEAR 3	<i>Aesop's Fables</i> retold by Alice Shirley	<i>Clockwork</i> by Philip Pullman	<i>The Last Polar Bears</i> by Harry Horse
YEAR 4	<i>The Adventures of Odysseus</i> by Hugh Lupton and Daniel Morden	'Diamond Brothers' books by Anthony Horowitz	<i>Coraline</i> by Neil Gaiman
YEAR 5	<i>Beowulf</i> retold by Kevin Crossley-Holland	<i>The Ring of Words</i> by Roger McGough	<i>Montmorency</i> by Eleanor Updale
YEAR 6	<i>Shakespeare Stories</i> by Leon Garfield	<i>Once</i> by Morris Gleitzman	<i>Fly by Night</i> by Frances Hardinge



## ACTION POINTS

- 1** As a leadership team, consider how you can make time for sustained independent reading within the school day. In addition to timetabled curriculum time, could there be opportunities for children to enjoy reading outside during break times? Or before and after school?
- 2** Observe a series of independent reading sessions across the school. Focus on the following features:
  - › How far is the atmosphere in the classroom conducive to sustained reading?
  - › What is the teacher doing during this time? Is he or she actively supporting children's reading?
  - › How are the different spaces in the classroom used for reading sessions?
  - › Talk to the children about what they are reading. How did they choose this text? How long have they been reading it? Are they enjoying it? Do they have any plans/ideas for what they might read next?
- 3** Set aside time in a staff meeting to compile a list of teachers' favourite read-aloud books (see our list on page 10, too). Supplement this with suggestions from children, the local library, internet lists and good bookshops. Update the list periodically. How will this list be shared? Will families have access to it?
- 4** Read OUP's report on Guided Reading (available summer 2013). Use the audit tool to consider how effective guided reading is at your school.

# Strategy 3

## Engaging parents

### Practical ideas for involving parents

**I**nvolving families can play an important part in developing the reading culture of a school. As the results of international reading studies have shown (page 3), children who are supported in their reading at home are more likely to enjoy reading and tend to achieve more highly at school.<sup>15</sup>

Ultimately, reading schools want children to be reading at home through choice. For this to become a reality, schools need to engage with families. Making effective links with them can help to extend the culture of reading that the school has developed, into the home.

For the many families that have a positive relationship with the school, getting support for reading at home is relatively straightforward. It is a matter of harnessing parents' enthusiasm so



school and home are working towards the same goal. However, some families find it more difficult to engage with their children's school, possibly because they have had negative experiences of education themselves. Put yourself in the shoes of those parents and consider how your approach might come across to them or to those who struggle to find time to read with their children.

#### Inviting families to school

Non-threatening forums such as coffee mornings with parents can provide opportunities to talk about the importance of reading with children at home.

Some parents, grandparents and adult volunteers from the local community can be a useful resource in supporting children's reading. Parents can support individual and group reading, become involved in school book clubs and groups, and provide children with a valuable model of adults reading for pleasure.



#### CASE STUDY

At Austhorpe Primary School in Leeds, the school provides initial guidance for parents through a workshop before the start of the school year, advice and printable materials on the school website, along with input from individual class teachers on open days and parent evenings.

On a day-to-day level, bookmarks printed with a child-friendly version of the reading target – always set for the level above where the child currently is – are another good way to keep parents engaged with their children's progress, while giving the pupil a clear aim as well.



### Setting reading as homework

In homework diaries or sheets detailing homework, teachers could write, 'Read for at least 30 minutes each day.' Although it is difficult to assess whether this happens, some families will make sure their child reads – simply because it is in print.

The impact of home-school reading records on improving reading is not always clear if they do not have a clear purpose and rationale. They can be time-consuming for both parents and teachers to keep up to date and, on a practical level, some parents may lack the language or literacy skills to be able to write comments. Other effective strategies include:

- › using a simple chart format for recording whether a child has read at home, either independently or with an adult. This can be motivating for children and allows a teacher to keep an overview of reading. Stickers, stamps or a simple tick indicate what the child has read.
- › giving parents clear targets for the next steps children need to make to develop their reading. This might be specific grapheme-phoneme correspondences in Year 1 or reading for a purpose in Year 5. This approach reinforces the partnership between home and school and targets can help to focus the enthusiasm of many parents.
- › ensuring regular communication. Specific issues or perceived problems can be tackled through brief face-to-face meetings or telephone conversations. A genuine dialogue may be more effective than sending written notes back and forth.
- › considering whether a response is needed at all, if children and parents are enjoying books together and the systems in place at school are robust enough to ensure all children are learning to read – and do read.

### Reaching every family

Ultimately, it may be impossible to reach every family. Reading schools see reading at home as an extra. They do everything they can to ensure it happens, but accept that it may not. Reading schools ensure equality in this area, making sure every child can read and has the opportunity to read for pleasure every day.

### Working with families

Here are some practical ideas for activities to keep families involved in reading:

- › Celebrate children's reading successes in school, and invite parents to be part of this. Children could be acknowledged for the number of books they have read, or parents could be invited to an assembly where photos of the children with their favourite books are displayed onscreen.
- › If you have an author's visit, invite parents to the session. Make it a relaxed session with refreshments and time to socialise..
- › Children's Laureate and author of *The Gruffalo*, Julia Donaldson, is a household name for many. Provide a link to Julia's top tips for parents on the school website: <http://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/GetReading/index/7>.
- › Invite parents and other community members into school to help support children's reading.
- › Create short three-minute videos with commentary showing different ways in which children engage in reading for pleasure in school, and share them with parents via the school website.
- › Invite parents in to explain what the teaching of reading involves and what you expect from them. See the 'Starting School and Your Child's Reading Journey' Powerpoint presentation at [www.oxfordprimary.co.uk/parentalengagement](http://www.oxfordprimary.co.uk/parentalengagement).

## ACTION POINTS

- 1 Read OUP's report *Parental engagement*, especially Steps 3 and 4, before considering the rest of these action points.
- 2 As a school leadership team, talk about how best to communicate with parents about reading, based on what has worked best for you in the past and some of the ideas in *Parental engagement*, particularly those related to reading.
- 3 Consider how you can sustain your relationship with parents as active partners (mothers and fathers) so that reading for pleasure becomes part of the school's core ethos.
- 4 Ask the governor responsible for reading to do a critical evaluation of your school website's pages on reading. How much support does the website offer families? Where do families who do not have internet access get information from? And what about those parents whose own reading skills are poor?
- 5 Consider how you can audit the views of families about reading. What works well for them? What would they like more support with? What challenges do they face about their children reading at home? Analyse the responses as a staff team and consider how the school can support parents.

# Strategy 4

## Developing the reading environment

### Places to read

**L**ibraries, book areas and displays play an important part in building a reading culture in schools.

#### CASE STUDY

At Dunkirk Primary School in Nottingham, the geography of the school makes access to books a key issue. The school pays for library bus visits, but also focuses on making its own library as appealing and extensive as possible.

The school library is housed in a communal space, and children walk through it on a regular basis, allowing them to easily see what's new, tempting them to pick up a book.

When the school needed to move the library into a new space, English subject leader Alice Elmore nominated the Year 3 class to undertake this job. They became experts in library systems, learnt the Dewey Decimal System, reorganised and re-labelled the books and then explained the new set-up to the other classes in school.

In addition to the main library, every classroom has a small library area and there is an outdoor library in a reading shed, which also houses some of the children's own home-made books. Most teachers have their own small collection of personal books, which they lend out to children, and this has proved very popular

The reading environment of a school should appeal to children of all ages and abilities, and to both boys and girls. At an outstanding reading school, the library and book areas are welcoming, working spaces, where children visit, read, choose and talk about books. In order to use all the time that is available to promote reading, reading areas, including the library, should be accessible before school, during break times, and after school for parents and children to visit together.

#### The school library

Ideally, the library should have space for a whole class to visit together. Classes can have timetabled library time each week to choose books to read at school or take home.





Reading schools ensure that children, including the youngest, learn to use the library from the time they join the school. Children from the Foundation Stage should be helped to become familiar with using it and given regular opportunities to visit it, both for structured activities and to choose books freely.

Book areas, including libraries, must be inviting. Spaces should be well organised to ensure there are areas for both working and reading for pleasure. Displays of books and resources need to be attractive, advertising the books in stock. The displays, and the books themselves, can be rotated around different age-group appropriate classrooms each term to keep the spaces fresh and prevent them being neglected.

Spending a professional development day in the library can involve the whole staff in auditing the library and allow discussion about how it can be used to best effect. Outcomes and priorities from this might include:

- › updating stock, with children involved in stock selection
- › supporting less able readers to find books quickly, without marginalising these children
- › revamping the non-fiction section to make it more obvious that non-fiction can be read for pleasure
- › revitalising the displays of books to engage all readers
- › setting up dedicated areas for study and quiet reading
- › developing a suite of activities to support teachers in promoting reading for pleasure
- › creating a new timetable for the library, including after school – with parental involvement.

### CASE STUDY

At Heaton Park Primary School, staff took photographs of where reading took place, and where reading could potentially take place. They extended their walk beyond the obvious places, and included the reception area, corridors, outside spaces, classroom reading corners and the school library. The headteacher commented, 'We put the photographs of our reading spaces around the room and teachers walked past them recording the positives and adding 'even better ifs'. We hadn't realised how tired the reading areas around school had become. No wonder the children didn't have any great desire to use them ... We could have been downcast by this activity but we promised ourselves that we would repeat the exercise once we'd developed the spaces.'

## The wider reading environment

### CASE STUDY

At Peel Park Primary in Accrington, Lancashire, with 600 pupils on the roll, space is at a premium, but the school uses every spare centimetre to encourage reading. Each classroom has an inviting themed reading corner that is updated every month. In the hall, there are 'wandering book boxes', where children can put a favourite book from home when they have finished it, and choose another. (There's a similar mini-library in the staffroom where teachers bring in books from home to share.) Outside in the playground, there is a 'reading chair' and a shelter where pupils take books at break and lunchtimes all year round.

## ACTION POINTS

- 1 As a leadership team, or with governors, plan how you will audit your library and the reading spaces around the school to build up a picture of their effectiveness. Who will lead this process? Consider to what extent they contribute to your school's reading culture and promote a love of reading. At what stage will you revisit the audit to judge the impact of any changes you have made in the meantime?
- 2 Ask the children for their opinions. While it might not be possible to respond and replace stock immediately, draw up a strategic plan for where investment is most important.
- 3 Once the audit is completed, consider who will lead the development of the library and reading spaces. Will this be the same team that is leading the development of reading across the school? If not, how will you ensure a consistent approach?
- 5 Visit the children's section of your local library or local bookshop. Consider the space and how the books are displayed. What else is offered to children? What ideas could you adapt for your school library?

“

*The library is the heart of the school, which itself has learning at its core ... good libraries can empower the learner.*

DfES (2004)<sup>14</sup>

”

# Strategy 5

## Targeting resources

**T**hrough reading, sharing and discussing exciting, engaging texts, children will be helped to develop a love of reading. Resources, however, have to be introduced to children through excellent teaching and learning.

### Range of texts

Outstanding reading schools manage their resources strategically. The books and other resources used to teach reading are carefully matched to the curriculum the school has planned and to the needs of readers.

Libraries and book areas should be stocked with engaging books from a wide variety of types and genres: poetry, fiction and non-fiction, picture books, and non-book materials, such as magazines, newspapers, comics and graphic novels. Reading schools believe that children should choose their own reading material for independent reading. Children will not always get the choice right, but by making mistakes, they will learn to make correct judgements. In practice, a good teacher will be at hand to guide their choices if necessary. It is important that children are introduced to books that are beyond their current knowledge. Other resources such as artefacts, reading games, 'story sacks' and audiobooks; and ICT resources, such as computers and tablets, ebooks and online texts can be used judiciously to engage children in reading.

### Challenging texts

For guided reading or whole-class lessons, texts should be carefully selected to ensure they are both motivating and challenging. Not only can the challenge of learning about something 'hard' be motivating, but for many children, school will be

their only opportunity to explore these books. If children can be taught to read great literature before secondary school, where their attitudes can harden, they stand a much better chance of enjoying them. A reading school views access to great literature as an entitlement – not as something elitist. It is a way of giving children access to a world beyond their immediate experience. Being forced to wade alone through 'the classics' will do little to engender a love of literature. However, well-planned, engaging lessons, with time to talk and discuss the ideas in such texts, can support and enhance children's love of reading.

### CASE STUDY

At Thomas Jones School, London, the headteacher David Sellens teaches English to Year 6 children. The children, many of whom come from homes where English is not the first language, study literature such as 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' by Tennyson, *Oliver Twist* by Dickens and a range of plays and sonnets by Shakespeare, including *Romeo and Juliet* and 'Sonnet 18'.

Over a series of lessons, children are taught to develop their reading, writing and spoken language. First children read the texts, leading to high-quality discussion that allows them to develop their comprehension, enhance their vocabulary, and discuss and debate complex ideas. In addition to making children better at English, studying rich texts such as these can provide a chance for children to discuss ideas, people, times and places outside their immediate experience.

### Levelled texts

Quality levelled reading schemes help to build the fluency, stamina, confidence and the important reading skills that children need before they move on

“  
A reading school views access to great literature as an entitlement - not as something elitist.  
”

to a wider range of books. Supporting notes and resources can help teachers with effective questioning and promote discussion. Linked resources are often provided to enable parents to work more effectively with their children at home.

### Children's views

Listening to children's views about reading and involving them in selecting books and resources is hugely motivating for them. Involving them also plays a part in strengthening the school's reading culture.

*Close involvement of pupils in decisions about English, and very good procedures for getting pupils' feedback on their learning, were key features of the success of a number of schools in the survey.*

*Excellence in English*

## ACTION POINTS

- 1 Audit the texts studied and read across the school. Is there sufficient range and variety? Are they aspirational enough? To what extent do they provide sufficient challenge for more able children?







# Strategy 6

## Celebrating reading

**A**t a reading school, books are celebrated and promoted every day, not just on special occasions.

### Promoting books every day

At every opportunity, teachers should talk with enthusiasm about reading, sharing examples of good books. Children should be given the opportunity to recommend books they have read to their peers, whether as a written exercise or orally, and give their views. This is also mentioned in the programmes of study for Years 5 and 6 in the proposed new National Curriculum.

A good approach is for the teacher to take a pile of high-quality books and 'sell' them to a class, explaining briefly what each one is about and why someone should be reading it. This can be done through a brief introduction, or by:

- promoting a range of books by one author
- offering a range of books on a similar theme or genre, maybe at different levels of difficulty
- reading opening paragraphs of several books and leaving them as cliff-hangers
- reading a key incident from part-way through a book
- Reading up to a cliff-hanger and then stopping – with a dramatic pause...
- showing children just the covers of a whole set of new books and asking them what they think the books are about
- sharing pictures from a book, and asking children to make predictions about the story
- asking children for their top reads
- presenting books that have won book competitions. A short search on the internet will provide you with the

winners of the Carnegie and Greenaway Medals, the Blue Peter Book Award, The Waterstone's Children's Book Prize, The Nestlé Children's Book Prize (formally the Smarties Prize) and many others.

### Partnerships

Developing good links with the local library is vital. Younger children can be taken to join as individual members and to meet the staff. School library services are an excellent source of advice and resources. They offer a book exchange service to help keep your reading material fresh.

Schools with interactive websites or managed learning environments can make links to lots of resources such as Booktrust and Oxford Owl. Links with local secondary schools can be made, using their library pages and any recommended reading lists that they have put together as a catalyst for discussion.

### Special events

Assemblies and special events such as World Book Day, National Poetry Day and key writers' birthdays provide reading schools with an opportunity to promote reading with a 'sense of the special'. Visits from authors and illustrators can also enthuse children.

### CASE STUDY

At Dunkirk Primary School in Nottingham, a special book club is crucial to the success of reading for pleasure. Each child receives an individual savings book which they use to build up a small pot of money. The book club showcases a wide range of reading material and allows children the opportunity to buy their own books and build up a personal library.

Book club advocates are appointed to champion the benefits of the book

club and special assemblies focus on promoting it. The club has an immense impact in getting children excited and talking about what they're reading.

## ACTION POINTS

- 1 Use a staff meeting to collect teachers' ideas for promoting reading. Use assemblies and other events as opportunities to talk about and promote books.
- 2 Put key events such as World Book Day into the school calendar and, as a whole staff, begin planning how they will be celebrated at school.



# Auditing provision in your school

The audit tool below will help you to consider your school's provision for reading against the strategies outlined in this report. Evidence for your judgements can come from a range of different sources:

- Data on outcomes: key information from RAISE online (including outcomes from national tests and the Year 1 phonics screening check), and tracker data can provide an overview of children's achievements in reading.
- Surveys: collecting the views of children, parents and staff about various aspects of reading can provide useful information.
- Observations: watching teaching in English lessons, guided reading, independent reading time.
- Audits of environment and resources: observing how the library and other reading areas are used and monitoring books and other reading resources.

BECOMING A READING SCHOOL – AUDIT OF PRACTICE	
TEACHING READING	<p><b>Key Question: Does every child leave the school able to read well?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do all children develop strong word-reading skills?</li> <li>• Do all children meet or exceed the age-appropriate requirements of the National Curriculum?</li> <li>• Do all children make good progress in reading?</li> <li>• Do all children develop a love of reading?</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Key Question: How effective are your staff as teachers of reading?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are teachers familiar with the Simple View of Reading?</li> <li>• Do teachers understand how to develop children's word-reading through phonics and teaching 'tricky' words?</li> <li>• Do teachers have effective strategies for teaching comprehension?</li> <li>• Are all your staff – teachers and teaching assistants – advocates for reading, promoting a love of reading in all children?</li> <li>• Do they have a good knowledge of children's books and literature?</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Key Question: How effective are the following activities in supporting children to become readers?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whole-class English lessons, guided reading, independent reading, reading aloud, phonics and reading in curriculum areas other than English.</li> <li>• Do these elements work together strategically to develop children as readers?</li> <li>• Does your school make time in the school day for all pupils to read independently, read aloud and be read to?</li> </ul>
ENGAGING PARENTS	<p><b>Key Question: How do you support parents to develop all children's reading?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How effective are the support and advice you give parents to help their child become a reader?</li> <li>• How do you encourage reading with families who find it harder to engage themselves with the school?</li> <li>• Do you have a policy for home-school reading?</li> <li>• What kinds of resources do you provide to support parents with reading at home?</li> <li>• Are parents invited into school for events connected with reading?</li> </ul>
DEVELOPING THE READING ENVIRONMENT	<p><b>Key Question: How effective are your library, book areas and displays in promoting a culture of reading?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Whole-class English lessons</li> <li>- Guided reading</li> <li>- Independent reading</li> <li>- An adult reading aloud</li> <li>- Phonics</li> <li>- Reading in curriculum areas other than English</li> <li>• Do these elements work together strategically to develop children as readers?</li> <li>• Does your school make time in the school day for all pupils to read independently, read aloud and be read to?</li> </ul>
TARGETING RESOURCES	<p><b>Key Question: How effective are books and other resources in ensuring every child becomes a reader?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What steps do you take to ensure you have a broad range of texts in school?</li> <li>• Who has specific expertise about children's reading material at your school? How is she or he involved in choosing, buying and developing reading resources?</li> <li>• How are electronic texts such as eBooks or online texts used to teach children to read?</li> <li>• How effectively are levelled books or reading schemes used to teach children to read?</li> <li>• How well do you use resources other than books to support reading?</li> </ul>
CELEBRATING READING	<p><b>Key Question: How is the importance of reading celebrated and promoted in your school?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you promote reading at your school?</li> <li>• What are the special things that you do to help children to love books?</li> <li>• How do you celebrate children as readers?</li> <li>• How do you mark national events or initiatives such as World Book Day or National Poetry Day?</li> <li>• Do you host visits by authors or illustrators? How does this develop children as readers?</li> </ul>



# Helping you achieve the best results

YOUR NEED	SUMMARY OF RESOURCE	FIND OUT MORE
Do my teachers have the training they require?	<b>Oxford School Improvement</b> is a free online service that contains videos and advice on reading from experts such as <b>Nikki Gamble</b> and <b>Sue Palmer</b> . Nikki Gamble and Oxford Primary offer free regional training on wider reading. Submit your details on the OSI website for more information.	<a href="http://www.oxfordschoolimprovement.co.uk">www.oxfordschoolimprovement.co.uk</a>
Is the teaching of reading in my school as good as it needs to be?	<b>Project X</b> is Oxford Primary's Guided Reading programme, which encourages talk, exploration and reading to learn, plus support for the explicit teaching of reading.	<a href="http://www.oxfordprimary.co.uk">www.oxfordprimary.co.uk</a>
Do I have levelled reading material so that I can support my children's progression effectively?	<b>TreeTops</b> is a large library of levelled readers for independent use. It includes graphic novels, myths and legends, humour, non-fiction and general fiction.	
Do all my children have the decoding skills to read fluently?	<b>Read Write Inc. Phonics</b> is a proven, systematic, whole-school phonics programme developed by national literacy expert Ruth Miskin. Rigorous and inspiring whole-school training for all staff and teaching assistants is also provided. <b>Oxford Reading Tree Floppy's Phonics Sounds and Letters</b> is a structured synthetic phonics programme, developed by phonics expert Debbie Hepplewhite. It offers a rigorous approach to teaching reading through popular characters, and training is also offered. <b>Project X Phonics</b> is a systematic synthetic phonics resource built with experts for practice and consolidation in an exciting and boy-friendly context.	<a href="http://www.oxfordprimary.co.uk">www.oxfordprimary.co.uk</a>
How can I engage my reluctant boy readers?	Oxford Primary's <b>Project X</b> uses exciting character-based stories and 3D digital artwork to motivate boys.	<a href="http://www.oxfordprimary.co.uk">www.oxfordprimary.co.uk</a>
	<b>Oxford School Improvement</b> offers advice and professional development from renowned expert on boys' achievement <b>Gary Wilson</b> , plus a free Getting the Best Out of Boys school improvement kit.	<a href="http://www.oxfordschoolimprovement.co.uk">www.oxfordschoolimprovement.co.uk</a>
How can I make classic literature accessible for young readers?	<b>TreeTops Classics</b> offers adapted versions of 24 classic texts, such as <i>Robinson Crusoe</i> , <i>Macbeth</i> and <i>Black Beauty</i> .	<a href="http://www.oxfordprimary.co.uk">www.oxfordprimary.co.uk</a>
Where can I go for general high-quality reading material?	<b>Oxford University Press Children's Books</b> is a useful starting point to view a wide range of titles from series like Dinosaur Cove, to classics like <i>Pippi Longstocking</i> , to modern award-winners like <i>Sky Hawk</i> .	<a href="http://ukcatalogue.oup.com">ukcatalogue.oup.com</a>
Are my parents involved and informed about the role they can play?	<b>Oxford Owl</b> is a free website designed to help parents with their children's learning at home. It includes over 260 FREE eBooks for infants and juniors, plus reading lists for different types of reader, advice on keeping juniors reading and much more.	
Where can I go for further advice and information?	The <b>National Literacy Trust</b> website contains information and research evidence about children's reading.	 <a href="http://www.literacytrust.org.uk">www.literacytrust.org.uk</a>
	The <b>School Library Association</b> offers a wide range of resources for school libraries including advisory and information services, practical publications, INSET and a network of branches for local support.	<a href="http://www.sla.org.uk">www.sla.org.uk</a>
	<b>Just Imagine Story Centre</b> is Nikki Gamble's centre for a broad portfolio of activities around professional development and promoting reading.	<a href="http://www.justimaginstorycentre.co.uk">www.justimaginstorycentre.co.uk</a>
	<b>Book Trust</b> provides resources and tools to support professionals in helping children on their reading journeys. It also features recommendations and book lists.	<a href="http://www.booktrust.org.uk">www.booktrust.org.uk</a>
	<b>Books for Keeps</b> is a children's books magazine with reviews of books, information on authors and other related features.	<a href="http://www.booksforkeeps.co.uk">www.booksforkeeps.co.uk</a>
	<b>LoveReading4kids</b> is a free online service that offers recommendations of children's books.	<a href="http://www.lovereadings4kids.co.uk">www.lovereadings4kids.co.uk</a>

# Building an Outstanding Reading School

Six strategies to make reading for pleasure work in your school

Available to download at  
[www.oxfordprimary.co.uk](http://www.oxfordprimary.co.uk)

For further support please call our customer care line on **01536 452610**.

Oxford University Press is grateful to the headteachers and staff of those schools referenced in the case studies.

Please note: The photographs of children in this report are for illustration purposes only. They do not show children from the schools featured.



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## ENDNOTES

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