

Education Committee

Oral evidence: [Reading for Pleasure](#) HC 150

Tuesday 2 June 2026

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 2 June 2026.

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Members present: Helen Hayes (Chair); Jess Asato; Sureena Brackenridge; Dr Caroline Johnson; Darren Paffey; Rebecca Paul; Manuela Perteghella; Peter Swallow.

Questions 155-198

Witnesses

[I](#): Olivia Bailey MP, Minister for Early Education; Jenny Oldroyd, Director, Curriculum, General Qualifications and Digital Strategy, Department for Education.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Olivia Bailey and Jenny Oldroyd.

Chair: Welcome to the final oral evidence session of the Education Committee's inquiry on reading for pleasure, after which we will review all the evidence that we have received and prepare our report to the Government. We are really pleased to welcome Minister Olivia Bailey and her official Jenny Oldroyd to give evidence to us. Minister, would you like to say anything by way of introduction?

Olivia Bailey: I would love to. Thank you so much for having me. I am really looking forward to reading the conclusion of your really important inquiry. What an important topic this is. Reading really matters, not just to access the curriculum but because it helps children and young people to understand the world around them and other people's lives. You have heard over the course of the evidence that it is both a window and a mirror. That is a very powerful phrase that encapsulates the huge value of reading.

That is why as a Government we are very focused on reading. We will talk today, I am sure, about the aspects of it, but they include the National Year of Reading, our investment in school libraries, and the changes that we are making to the curriculum to ensure that it continues to be deeply embedded at the heart of everything we do in our schools. My mum was an English teacher for 40 years, so she instilled very early in me a love of



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and huge passion for reading. But as I have grown older and had my own children, I have also seen the challenges that we have in encouraging reading for pleasure. As a lesbian, I certainly fell out of love with reading for a bit because I did not see myself reflected in the texts. I have been really enjoying the proliferation of more LGBT literature recently, which has really renewed my enthusiasm for reading, so that really matters.

Also, as a parent of two boys in a world of screens, I really see the challenge that we have to compete for attention, to really encourage, and to ensure that our young people are able to continue that real love of a physical book—the passion that you get from it—in that complex world. I am very grateful to you for this very important inquiry, and I really look forward to discussing all these topics in more detail this afternoon and reading your conclusions.

Chair: Thank you. Jenny Oldroyd, would you like to introduce yourself to the Committee?

Jenny Oldroyd: Hello. Thank you for having us. I am Jenny Oldroyd and I am the director for curriculum for general qualifications and for digital strategy in the Department for Education.

Q155 **Chair:** Thank you very much. I want to start with the problem that the Committee is trying to address. We have heard that there has been a very steep decline in children and young people reading for pleasure over quite a short period of time. What do you see as the main causes of that decline?

Olivia Bailey: There has been a steep decline, and it is something that we as a Government, and all of us collectively, are very concerned about. At the end of the last National Year of Reading in 2008, I think 50% of young people were telling us that they enjoyed reading. That was just one in three as we commenced this year's National Year of Reading, so it is a really big challenge. There are lots of contributing factors, and I know you have heard lots of great evidence about what they are. For me, I would probably pick out three.

The proliferation of screens is undoubtedly a significant factor. My day job is Minister for Early Education; I am covering for Georgia Gould in this Committee today, for reasons that I know you understand. We have recently published the early years screen time guidance. Behind that is a very large pack of evidence that we have looked at through our own longitudinal studies and through other evidence on the impact that screens are having, mainly in displacement. The amount of time spent on a screen is pushing out other activities, reading being one of them. The other thing that was really striking from the evidence that we saw for that work was that reading with your child has the biggest impact on their development. The data is astounding on that point, so I would say that screens are one of the challenges.

I think there is also a challenge with access to books. I was reading some data that suggests that one in five parents has said that in these tough



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times, with the cost of living, they are finding it harder to buy books for their children at home. So there is a general challenge. We also know there is time pressure and everything else that comes with those economic pressures on people.

That is why, on access to books, we are investing in ensuring that every primary school has a library by the end of the Parliament, and putting £5 million into secondary schools to ensure that there are additional books provided. Access to books is a really important thing for us to focus on.

I briefly mentioned it in my opening remarks, but the choice of texts and seeing yourself reflected in them are really important. That is one of the reasons why, for our National Year of Reading, the focus is to “go all in”. The idea behind that is: read what you are into, what excites you and where you see yourself—whether that is football, fashion or whatever it may be.

It is important that we are encouraging people not to see reading as this thing that is far away, unattainable or complicated, but as something that helps you bring your passions to life. That is a really important part of how we reverse this decline in access to reading.

Jenny Oldroyd: I agree with all those points. Many of those pressures exist for parents as well as for children, in terms of finding the time to read in busy lives. We recognise that issue exists both ways, and that parents are important role models for reading.

We have seen the reading habits of adults change at the same time as those of children. We recognise that about half of adults no longer read for pleasure. While the willingness is there and parents overwhelmingly want to read with their children, we know that only about half are finding the time in busy lives to do so on a very regular, daily basis.

Q156 **Chair:** Looking at the comparative data for England, the progress in international reading literacy study found that 29% of English pupils said they “very much like” reading, compared with an international average of 42%. Looking at the overall trend, why do you think it is so much worse in England than it is in lots of other countries?

Olivia Bailey: Those are very stark figures—thank you for sharing them. Again, it is a combination of factors, but I would add to what I have already said about the early years. One of the things we saw over the last Government was a reduction in family support services and Sure Start in our communities. That has had an impact, because when you think about reading, it is about early habits and how those habits are formed. Getting that love of reading in the early years is so important.

That is why I am really pleased that, as a Government, through our Best Start family hubs and their expansion across all our communities—1,000 hubs by 2028 and 2,000 partner sites, as well as our online communications campaigns—we are really emphasising chat, play and read.



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I went to a family hub in Southwark with a brilliant author, Selina Brown. She read her book to the kids and parents there. It was called “My Rice is Best!”, which is about different countries and cultures competing over whose rice was best. It is a fantastic book. I recommend it to everybody.

That was a great example of what our Best Start family hubs can do. They were working with the Dollywood Foundation, which distributes books to children in the area, who then had a really engaging storytelling session and could take the books home to share that experience with their families—with their parents sat with them. In that moment, I thought, “This is going to create a generation of excited readers,” because it was really exciting. We cannot forget how important the early years are for that.

Q157 Sureena Brackenridge: We are almost halfway through the National Year of Reading. What has been its impact so far, and what metrics have you used to measure its impact?

Olivia Bailey: That is a really great question. I have just been told by my officials, hot off the press, that I can share that 2 million children have now been supported through in-school events in the National Year of Reading, which I think is fantastic. Some 11,000 teachers have signed up and 6,500 schools are registered. In a moment, I will ask Jenny to talk you through the evaluation that we are intending to do, and the measures of success that we will use at the end of the year, but I will just briefly say the kinds of things that we are doing. You will know that in the National Year of Reading we are focusing on the groups that we think have the biggest challenge for enjoyment of reading—teenage boys, disadvantaged communities and those in early years. I have talked about the early years, but, for teenage boys in particular, I want to mention that we are working with influencers—role models—and producing guidance for parents on how they can encourage their teenage lads to pick up a book. There are also webinars and all kinds of different things that schools are engaging in.

Then, for disadvantaged communities, we have local literacy champions, who are doing a brilliant job, getting out into communities and taking a place-based approach. There was the Sharrabang bus in Hull, for example; they take this bus into communities and there are books on board that children can engage in and take away. That is a great example of a person who knows their community, knows where the communities that would benefit the most from this kind of service are, and going out to reach them. That is having a really big impact.

I am thrilled to see the difference that the National Year of Reading is making. One of the things that we have reflected on from previous National Years of Reading is that big progress was made but not necessarily sustained, because we have seen that number continue to go down. That is why I think our approach of working with partners will really embed the work that we are doing, so that work will continue far beyond the year.



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Our work on access to books through school libraries and in schools will also continue far beyond the year. Our changes to the curriculum, which I am sure we will talk about later, are embedding that culture, too. We are determined to make sure that it is not just one year of good numbers, which then all peters away, but that that progress is sustained and contributes meaningfully to reversing this decline in a love of reading. Jenny, perhaps you could talk through the evaluation?

Jenny Oldroyd: I am happy to. This continues that point about the legacy of this year being the most important thing. The metrics are fantastic, and it is brilliant to see so many children, teachers and schools involved, but it is the lasting impacts that we really want to ensure that we capture. That is very much where the evaluation is focused.

The year will have an independent evaluation by ImpactEd, and we will have an evaluation report next year. That will focus very much on the extent to which the National Year of Reading has achieved that connection with audiences that it really intended to achieve, particularly regarding those priority groups. I think that starts to explain some of those international differences as well, when you see how low some of the figures are for boys engaging with reading, for example.

The evaluation will look at how the year has been successful in shaping attitudes to reading, because it is those long-term, lasting habits that we want really to change, and the effect on the direct behaviours: are people picking up a book? Are they enjoying it? Are they going into their library more? We also want the evaluation to focus on the longer-term impacts on the literacy sector, and on whether we have built the foundations for longer-term change. You made the point that we are halfway through the year; I think we have made some really good progress for halfway through the year, but we are also thinking much longer term than December in terms of the impacts that this year can have.

Sureena Brackenridge: I really welcome your comments on ensuring that there is a lasting legacy to this National Year of Reading, and that engagement does not drop off. I hear what you have said about working with partners, looking at the school curriculum and supporting families as well, so thank you.

Q158 **Manuela Perteghella:** Minister, you mentioned the three priority audiences for the National Year of Reading: boys aged 10 to 16, families from disadvantaged communities and children aged zero to five and their caregivers. Can you tell us about how these groups were selected?

Olivia Bailey: Absolutely. Jenny might have some of the data to hand, but the way that we have approached this is by looking at the overall challenge of the decline in reading and at the data available to us, and trying to make the best judgment about the groups that would benefit the most from this focus. We have used data, our experience from working with schools and our discussions with teachers to ensure that we are picking the right groups and focusing the right way.



I don't want to repeat myself, but I think I have outlined why we are taking different approaches for each of those groups, which I think will be, and is being, very effective. But it is also important that we do select core areas to ensure that our work is properly focused and properly targeted, and so that we know that we can see results from that work. Jenny, do you want to add to that?

Jenny Oldroyd: There is a mix of drivers for including those groups. They are the ones where we think we can make the most difference in addressing low levels of reading now or in their future habits. If I work through them in order, boys tend to report a much lower level of enjoyment of reading. About a quarter of boys say they enjoy reading, whereas we have got that up to 39% for girls. There were lots of reasons we touched on at the beginning in terms of representation and interest and what might be driving that, but the National Year of Reading gives a real chance to try and address it and be clear that reading is not just for girls. It is modern and is a socially relevant habit that boys can pick up. That is why the campaign zones in on the "read what you are interested in". Rather than trying to take boys to new interests, you can use reading to explore those that you are very interested in.

We have early years because forming early habits are so important. We can change the experience of a generation by leaning in much harder into the early years. That is what the National Year of Reading and all of our more sustained interventions are designed to achieve. Also, for disadvantaged pupils, we know that their access to books is lower. They tend to be more likely to report that they do not have books in the home. But we also know that when you look at the phonics reading check and key stage 2 results, there is a disadvantage gap. We know there is an interrelationship and it goes both ways between reading for pleasure and being a confident reader. There is a real opportunity there to address not just reading for pleasure, but the overall outcomes for children from more disadvantaged backgrounds through this programme.

Q159 **Manuela Perteghella:** You mentioned the various excellent and specific activities for the different groups. How are you ensuring that those activities are accessible and engaging for children with, for example, special educational needs and disabilities, and particularly dyslexic children?

Olivia Bailey: That is a really important question. It is central to the work that we are doing with the National Literacy Trust, which is our partner on this, along with the many partners working with us on the programme. The Reading Agency and BookTrust are among a range of others who we are very grateful to for their engagement. This is absolutely core to how they design their programmes. From our perspective, reading is for everybody and the benefits of reading are for everybody. We more broadly have great resources available through our English hubs that we have co-designed, for example, with the British Dyslexia Association to support teachers who engage with pupils on reading so that we can embed that properly in schools. And of course they also reflect the importance of different types of access to books.



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I went on a visit recently in my own constituency to the Guide Dogs Association. They took me to a room that they were very proud of. And they should have been very proud of it because what they were doing there was reprinting books, binding them and sending them to partially sighted children in the paper colour that they wanted and needed and the font size they wanted and needed, because they recognised the value of a physical book and the experience of sitting on the sofa with your family and reading a book. That was really powerful for me and that is embedded throughout the whole programme of work in the National Year of Reading.

Jenny Oldroyd: That is very true. The partnerships that have been built through the programme are fundamental. I should compliment and stress the fact that the presentation of much of the National Year of Reading is incredibly creative and reaches out with very practical tips. No one should doubt the evidence base behind it and exploring what really works for engaging children in reading and with different levels of need as well.

The other thing that is important, particularly in the outreach to different communities, is that the National Year of Reading is trying to build trust and a relationship between Best Start family hubs, libraries, schools and parents so that they start to ask for help when their child is struggling to read or when they find things difficult. That starts a conversation that can lead to early identification should there be any challenges there. Having that conversation about reading and making sure the interventions and programmes are evidence-based can make a real difference in identifying something early and then supporting the child to have a long-term successful journey with reading, because that is possible for so many more children than we are achieving it for at the moment.

Q160 **Jess Asato:** As a quick follow-up focusing on teenage boys, Andrew Tate famously said that he does not read because reading is “for people with slow brains.” You mentioned working with influencers to ensure that you find different mediums to get through to children. How do you know that you can outweigh the cultural impacts of somebody like Andrew Tate on teenage boys? If they have been listening to him and others who eschew books, is there any evidence to assure us you can turn that around?

Olivia Bailey: That question is the hub of everything we are trying to achieve. Let me say how wrong I think Andrew Tate is on that and many other topics—most topics, in fact. We are working with a range of people who we know young boys will look up to—people such as Marcus Rashford and Leah Williamson—and that does have an impact. We are online with all this work to make sure that we are reaching young people in a format that they are used to.

Nothing beats the knowledge and power that a book can give a child. Once you get past that initial barrier, if it is a book that really speaks to them and really excites and engages them, that experience will stay with them forever. Often, it is just that initial barrier, and that is where we are focusing all our work in the National Year of Reading and throughout the curriculum.



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It is not just the National Year of Reading, but an amazing army of brilliant teachers who have the love of reading completely embedded in everything they do. It is in their teacher training. It is at the heart of the curriculum, starting from the earliest years right the way through school. We also have brilliant teachers in all our schools who are instilling that love of reading with young boys every day.

Q161 Chair: But the current evidence is that it is not working. I am not clear whether you are talking about plans the Government have and initiatives that are yet to take effect. I mean no disrespect to teachers all across our schools. We will come on to discuss some evidence about the curriculum and its impact, but the evidence is that we do not have teachers who have the capacity, space or time to really instil that love of reading into our children at all at the moment, because our statistics are so bad.

Olivia Bailey: As you say, we will come on to talk about that, but to respond very briefly, that is why we are doing all the things that we are doing. We are doing it through the changes we are making to the curriculum, which I can go into more detail on now or we can discuss later. We are also doing it through the investment in books in school libraries and the access to books in schools through the English hubs. We have invested £50 million this Parliament and are massively expanding it across schools to give teachers and schools the support they need to get that love of reading instilled in pupils. Right the way across the board, we are expanding access to our public libraries and so on. Our teachers are doing a great job. The love of reading is central to what they do, and I think most teachers would tell you that it all starts with a love of reading. That is how they conduct themselves in the classroom, and that is what they do. We are doing whatever we can as a Government to support them to do that.

Q162 Chair: We would not be doing this piece of work if that was working. It is really important to maintain a distinction between what the evidence tells us is the current situation, which is really pretty bleak in this space, and the ambitions, intentions, policies and initiatives that the Government are introducing that you hope will make a difference over time.

Olivia Bailey: Sure.

Jenny Oldroyd: To add to that, it is striking quite how emergent much of the evidence is about screens, social media and influencers and the reach that they are able to achieve. We are almost the first generation tackling some of those challenges. That is why we are working to grow the evidence base about the impact of screens. That is why things such as the National Year of Reading become so important. What you are saying is that this remains challenging. We do not disagree with that, but there is no space to give up here, and that is why we are continuing to push forward with it.

Q163 Manuela Perteghella: Minister, you mentioned how you fell out of love with reading because you did not see yourself represented in books. Indeed, we have heard about the importance of children from diverse



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backgrounds seeing themselves represented in books. How are the Government working with the publishing and bookselling industry to improve diversity and representation in children's books?

Olivia Bailey: That is a really important question. This is certainly a central consideration for us through the National Year of Reading and the partnerships we are working in with booksellers and others when, for example, we look towards the £5 million that we want to invest in secondary school books.

I have mentioned it for my own purpose, but I am also part of a same-sex family. Seeing different types of families and cultures represented is really important, not just for seeing your own experience represented, but for the window to other people's experiences. Books can be not just mirrors but windows.

One change that we are making in response to the curriculum review in this regard is that we will be giving schools more flexibility to choose texts that they think will excite and reflect the pupils in their school communities. Teachers can work out what would really speak to and work for the pupils they are talking to, which is a really important step to increase the diversity of authors and texts.

Q164 **Manuela Perteghella:** Can you confirm that the Department will expect or encourage education settings to stock a diverse range of books?

Olivia Bailey: We absolutely encourage people to have a diverse range of books, but it is up to schools what books they have in their libraries. That is the right way, because headteachers know their school community the best, and they know what is best, but as a Department we recognise and reflect the importance of a diverse range of books.

Jenny Oldroyd: It is one of the principles we brought out really strongly both in the reading framework and the advice that our English hubs give on creating reading cultures in schools.

One of the main things we hear from schools is exactly the point that you have just identified: if you do not have books that represent children, they are not choosing to read. The connection between recognising yourself and enjoyment is so strong. What we want to do here is create the demand for those texts so that publishers know they are needed and wanted by children, young people and schools. That is why the reading framework becomes important, because it is the foundation for that demand model.

It is also why it is so important that we are putting money into schools in ways where we engage with publishers to create conversations and make deals for getting books into schools in partnership with them. We are having that conversation at the moment as part of some of the funding that we are putting into both primaries and secondaries.

Q165 **Manuela Perteghella:** Of course we want to see more diverse books, which means we need to nurture writing talent. What steps is the Department taking to encourage children to see writing and publishing as



an aspirational career? What are you doing to inspire the writers of tomorrow, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds?

Olivia Bailey: That is a really important question. I am conscious of the literary heritage of your constituency, Manuela. We want lots of Shakespeares to come from all our schools. We might follow up in writing with some more information on exactly what we are doing in this regard, but I will say that it is very important, and I agree with the sentiment wholeheartedly.

Jenny Oldroyd: The first step toward creating the writers of tomorrow is to create the children who love reading right now. The question is, to an extent, kind of a circular one; it is about getting the level of reading and the inspiration there, but it is also about giving children the technical skill to respond to that inspiration in writing. Everything you read is an opportunity to reflect that in your own writing. The work we are doing at the moment on the curriculum and the writing framework is about giving teachers the confidence they need to help children to love reading and to inspire them and support them to bring that through in their writing. It is not one without the other; it is reading and writing. We very much focused on speaking and listening in the curriculum changes as well, so when we bring those together, we should get the flow of future writers—you are absolutely right.

Olivia Bailey: I have an additional, personal reflection. My mum died recently, and I have been talking to a lot of her former pupils and hearing the difference that an English teacher made, not just from the perspective of some people saying, "I'm now an English teacher myself," or "I'm now working in this field myself," but, "Because of the way she enabled me to access this particular text, I have spent my life working for a charity, because I got motivated." It is about not just the next generation of readers and writers, but what literature exposes you to and the potential futures it opens up for you. The power of an English teacher—the power of a teacher—to do that is really profound.

Q166 **Chair:** I am very sorry to hear about your bereavement.

I want to turn to the early years. We have an incredibly diverse landscape of early years settings in this country. That is not completely typical everywhere in the world, but it is the case here. What evidence do the Government have about how, across the diversity of provision, from maintained nurseries to private voluntary sector provision and childminders—the whole mix of it—early years practitioners are supporting and nurturing a love of reading? What approach are you taking, through the changes the Government are making in the early years, to improve work in this area?

Olivia Bailey: First, it starts with the wonderful staff who work in early years settings. Literacy and reading is embedded in early years practitioner training, and that is focused on a love of reading. It is also embedded in the teacher training for the early years foundation stage. The staff who work in these settings are trained in the huge benefits of reading and, of course, in phonics and how to enable children to access reading.



I should also say that we are driving progress in this regard through our commitment to the good level of development. We want record levels of children to hit that good level of development at the end of reception year. Of course, reading comprehension and word reading are key to the early learning goals. Everything in the early years foundation stage is driving towards progress in that regard, so that children get a strong foundation for a real love of reading.

Obviously, we have had a big expansion in the number of children accessing early education, which is fantastic. The Government are investing £10 billion this year in the expansion of the entitlements, which means more and more children are having wonderful experiences with these brilliant, trained staff who are helping them to unlock a love of reading, getting the early phonics and getting them ready for school, which is really important.

We are also doing work with the Best Start family hubs. I have mentioned some of the wonderful things that are happening in those hubs to support the home learning environment. It might be that a parent and a child are at a hub, and the hub identifies that the parent could do with some additional training to support their child to read at home. There are programmes they can use to do that, perhaps to understand how the phonics programme works, or perhaps, if English is not their first language, they can access a reading programme or the adult skills fund. We can do a range of things to support parents. There are also different activities in the hubs in terms of access to books, with fantastic interactive reading sessions.

Overall, we are trying to make the parts of our early years system all speak to each other and connect together, because it is quite disjointed. We are asking Best Start family hubs to forge connections with nurseries in their communities. We have said that we want 2,000 partner sites to open up, and we want to see those in nursery settings, in school-based nurseries, and in libraries, where children are, so that we do not just have children being passed from pillar to post between different services, and instead it is one joined-up service. As Jenny said earlier, reading is a great way to measure that. Perhaps a parent visits a family hub because they have been to a reading session or a stay and play session at the nursery their child attends. We want local authorities to do more to force those connections, so that children are getting the full suite of support available to them.

Q167 Chair: I do not think you have mentioned fun in any of the things you have said. We heard some incredibly powerful evidence from Frank Cottrell-Boyce, who spoke to us very strongly on teaching the skill of reading from early years. We do not do that with anything else in life—he said that we do not wait until children have learnt the offside rule before we allow them to enjoy football; we do not make sure they know how to fillet a fish before we give them a fishfinger. There is something very important about that. If we just lead with the sheer joy of it, rather than all the techniques and skill, we are much more likely to get the skill of it



coming a bit further down the line. Do you think there is something in that?

Olivia Bailey: I really do. I really think there is something in that. Also, Frank has done a fantastic job as the children's laureate, and I think his Reading Rights campaign has been brilliant. As he comes to the end of his year as the children's laureate, I thank him for all his work. He is right and fun is critical. A love of reading is what we are talking about. That is embedded across the board. I definitely have the best job in Government, because I get to see loads of children in early years settings having loads of fun. That is what I see day in, day out, children having fun, enjoying learning, enjoying learning new things about themselves and their communities. Reading unlocks that. I think that that is right and that is the approach that we are taking, not only in our Best Start family hubs, but across the board through our approach to reading in the curriculum, where a love of reading is central in the reading framework. In the curriculum itself, I think it actually says "love of reading", so I agree with Frank.

Jenny Oldroyd: It is probably worth reminding ourselves what building a love of reading looks like in the very early years. It looks like hearing stories, playing with stories, talking about stories, and talking about the characters and stories. That is what the evidence base steers you towards, so that is what we mean by evidence-based interventions; what that feels and looks like to a child is a chance to hear and engage with a story. You will see nurseries that unpack a story over weeks, three weeks of a term, and really give children a chance to hear the story, to use props, to play with the story and to act out the story. That is what great practice looks like. The love of reading does not come after the skills; the skills are critical and come along the way, but where does it really start? It starts with that book, where you sit and have a cuddle, and read the book. It starts with playing with your friends, making up a story and so forth. That is absolutely critical to a love of reading, and that is built into the practice of our schools and the guidance that we give schools and nurseries to support it.

Q168 **Rebecca Paul:** Will you talk in a little more detail about the training that early years practitioners receive with respect to reading-for-pleasure approaches and the steps that you are taking to improve that? It would also be helpful to understand a bit more about the training and development that is offered by Stronger Practice hubs and the Department's early years child development training.

Olivia Bailey: Absolutely. Thank you. As I said, literacy and encouraging the joy and love of reading are embedded, I believe, in all the qualifications that staff working in early years acquire. If you are interested, I can send further information to the Committee on exactly what that looks like in the training context, but it is certainly central to it. It is also central in the Stronger Practice hubs. I believe that there are literacy leads in each of the Stronger Practice hubs, whose job it is to go out to work in the early years settings to support staff to enable that love of reading. As we move into reception year, we have our English hubs,



where literacy leads go in to different settings to ensure that staff have the support they need to enable a love of reading. Jenny, have I missed anything?

Jenny Oldroyd: No. I just want to point out that that last intervention is from the autumn, because literacy leads in early years is a new investment. May I also connect your question to one earlier, about how we support children who may struggle for SEND reasons? Our training is not just universal; it really identifies and targets some of the particular language needs that children may have. Over 11,000 schools engage with NELI, the Nuffield early language intervention, learning to notice the very first signs of people struggling with their oracy and their language, and building that into an intervention that again feels fun and is engaging to the child, but is very evidence-based. That shows promising progress. I am happy to write.

Q169 **Manuela Perteghella:** We have already heard evidence, not just from our Children's Laureate but from academics, that early years practitioners in the UK prioritise reading proficiency and phonics over reading for pleasure, even when it is not developmentally appropriate for young children.

The Committee went on a learning visit to Estonia, where we saw early years education, which is until the age of seven, and it was very much a play-based environment. There was storytelling and reading in groups: the children were not taught rigidly to learn to read and make sense of the sounds—they were learning about letters, the alphabet and reading in a playful way. We saw a very different system there; Estonia has excellent results in terms of qualification outcomes and so on.

What is the Department doing to address the problem of this tension when it comes to school-readiness? We have phonics-based testing; I have three children and they all went through the phonics system. My son is now 22 but was in one of the first cohorts to go through the phonics system, so I have my own views about that. How do we make sure that the structured learning of reading does not detract from children developing a love of reading at a young age?

Olivia Bailey: First of all, the evidence for the phonics approach is very well established, and it works; I point the Committee to the evidence from the EEF in particular. We know that it works for most children. I think that we need both. You need to enable children to access reading themselves and learn how to do that. The phonics approach is the right one to do that and that needs to be fun, but I would not want to do the fun at the expense of learning to access, because you need both and they need to be hand in hand.

I think that we get the balance right, and I certainly see from my experience on the visits I get to go on that our wonderful staff in nurseries get the balance right between fun and enjoyment and building in how you learn the sounds and letters in the phonics-based approach.



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You are right to ask the question and it is the right question to ask, but the two go hand in hand. You have to support children to get to the end of the reception year and start year 1 being ready to learn and access the curriculum. I am really proud that, as a Government, we are committed to getting record levels of children ready for school, because we know, and all the evidence shows, that if you start school behind, it is much harder to catch up. That is the best way to tackle educational inequalities and support children to reach their potential, but also to ensure that they enjoy their learning and reading for pleasure. You have to have both.

Q170 Chair: We have had evidence to the Committee that phonics is also an age-appropriate tool for teaching reading. When phonics is applied in the early years—with the nought to threes—that is not an age-appropriate use of it. That may be part of the problem when it comes to the love of reading. It alludes to the Frank Cottrell-Boyce issue of sitting a child down with a book that may have very few words but tells a compelling story through the images and involves the children in the story and all that good stuff. Deploying an evidence-based methodology at an age for which the evidence is not established might be counter-productive.

Olivia Bailey: I understand. I do not recognise that in what I have seen and in what is happening in our early years settings. In those contexts I see most of our teachers really captivating children's attention in a story and telling that story well, whether that is "We're Going on a Bear Hunt" and stamping on twigs on the floor, or whatever else it may be. I think that the joy of reading is embedded and should be embedded, but it is absolutely right that we are evidence-led, and that we are focusing on supporting children to get to the point of school readiness because otherwise we would be letting them down.

Jenny Oldroyd: I have seen the teaching in Estonia as well, across the two types and in the kindergartens. Our children move at different points in time through different points in a system that is designed differently, but I see so much promise in the things that we do and they do that are quite similar.

When I talk to primaries here, they take phonics as necessary and for granted. They see it as an important part of the system, but they really shout about the toddler group that they have that is getting children into reading and having those conversations before they even arrive with the school. It is about the creative use of the magical hut where they will take children who are struggling with their reading, really help them and have brilliant stories.

There are two things: it is easy to look at some of the more technical interventions and imagine that they are standalone and therefore must be delivered seriously. In schools I see practice that brings them to life, that feels like play, and that feels like a love of reading and an enjoyment. I am happy to share some of those examples with you, if that would be helpful.

Q171 Jess Asato: You have already talked quite a lot about Best Start family



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hubs and you gave the brilliant Southwark example. I want to know more about how reading for pleasure will be embedded. The Department has stated that it is investing £115 million “to strengthen the home learning environment through targeted support in Best Start Family Hubs.” Could you tell us more about how that funding will be spent and how it will support reading for pleasure?

Olivia Bailey: Absolutely. Best Start family hubs are my favourite topic to talk about. Sorry if I have talked about them too much. There is £900 million in hubs overall. You have pointed out the way that we are supporting the home learning environment. Some of the programmes that I mentioned earlier on are examples of what that might look like. We use evidence-based programmes to help parents to engage with phonics or, as I mentioned earlier, to help parents for whom English is not their first language, and to help parents with connections to adult skills.

I mentioned the work that we will do in hubs with parents in Southwark, but it happens elsewhere. Parents are present because that is what happens in a Best Start family hub: it is stay-and-play, where the parent is there. The benefit of a Best Start family hub is that it is meant to be, designed to be and quite rightly is a place where you want to go, make connections, make friends, see other parents, and where your children enjoy spending time. It is deliberately and correctly meant to be a totally non-stigmatising experience because we want people to just want to be there. That is, first of all, the benefit.

Once you have that wonderful community facility—where there is story time, lessons in how to braid your child’s hair, stay-and-play sessions, or whatever else—it means that relationships are developed with the staff. We are funding new staff in those hubs, such as inclusion practitioners and others, who can build those relationships, connect into other services and offer evidence-based interventions. There is a kind of ladder of engagement so that parents can be somewhere that they want to be and when additional help would be useful, we are able to provide it.

Jenny Oldroyd: I just reiterate the point that in those early years so many evidence-based interventions look like talk, chatter and play to get the conversation going. They are based around stories. They are meant to build a love of vocabulary, language and conversation that children can then broaden out from.

Q172 **Jess Asato:** I was coming to the evidence-based interventions next so that was a good segue. Do you directly fund any interventions in this area, rather than just through the Best Start family hubs funding? Are there any programmes that you have already been funding in this space? Are there any plans to scale up existing programmes that have been proven to work?

Olivia Bailey: I will probably miss stuff in my answer, so we can always follow up with more information, Jess.

NELI is a good example of something that we are directly funding and funding for the duration of this Parliament. We have also worked with

Nesta to produce a guide to the evidence-based interventions—a menu, if you like, of interventions that we know work, which we encourage Best Start family hubs to use. We want to encourage local authorities to choose what works best for their families in their own context.

Jenny Oldroyd: I recognise that EEF is playing a bigger role in the early years as well, which is important in understanding the evidence base for what works.

Q173 **Jess Asato:** To clarify, this evidence base is specifically around supporting parents to read with their children in the early years? Might you be able to share with us afterwards anything that you as a Department think are best practice examples?

Olivia Bailey: Absolutely. We can definitely follow up. There are interventions that do that. As Jenny said, a lot of it is early communication. Certainly, there will be examples. Everything that we are doing in Best Start family hubs is around the three words—chat, play and read. These are the three most important things that we want to encourage families to do together, so reading is central to all of the evidence-based work that we are doing.

Q174 **Jess Asato:** Apart from NELI, are there any other plans to scale up any existing programmes? Any extra money on top of Best Start family hubs? Or are you saying it is spreading that through the current funding?

Olivia Bailey: It is a significant investment that we have put into the Best Start family hubs. One of the things I would like to emphasise here is that we have recently had this new stretching target—we want 2,000 network sites. Part of that is about trying to force more connections between things that are already happening in communities.

We had a wonderful Sure Start infrastructure and we have covered what happened to it, but one of the things that happened in that time was that there was a growth in the voluntary sector. There are many examples of good voluntary sector practice happening in communities.

We want to amplify the funding that we are putting in by pulling together all the services that are there, whether that is in a private nursery or in a voluntary sector provision. We are really focusing at the moment on encouraging local authorities to forge those connections so that we can really maximise the impact.

Q175 **Manuela Perteghella:** My question is focused on practice in schools. How do schools currently promote and support reading for pleasure? What is your assessment of how effectively they do that?

Olivia Bailey: I have mentioned before that having a love of reading is something that is in the curriculum. It is also something that is embedded in the initial teacher training and early careers frameworks. I think in every school in the country a love of reading and learning to love reading is really embedded and central to our education system, which is right.



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What we are doing in addition is—and we can go into more detail on all of these: I have mentioned the access to books through £12.5 million to libraries in primary schools, because the National Literacy Trust suggests that perhaps one in seven primary schools does not have access to a library. Access to books is really important. There is also the money that we have got for secondary schools on access to books.

We are making changes to the curriculum, which we will publish in 2027. We have accepted the Becky Francis review recommendations. The changes that we are making there is the new reading test at the end of year 8, which is really important. All the best schools are already doing that—checking in and making sure that pupils have got the reading level that they should have. We are looking at reviewing the grammar content and the sequencing in primary schools to make sure that kids are not getting tangled up with overly complex grammar at the expense of really enjoying their reading.

There are other things that we are doing in the curriculum, such as on the oracy framework and clarifications to the key stage 4 content.

Through our English hubs, which are in 34 high-performing primary schools and support 3,500 primary schools between them, we are also giving targeted support to schools on early reading. That is now expanding into comprehension and the beginning of secondary school to give teachers the support they need. We are also doing a lot on professional development. We have the NPQ on leading literacy, which is a great way of supporting teachers to do this. Across the board, whether it is through access to books, through the qualifications and how teachers are approaching it, or through the curriculum that is being taught, reading for pleasure and loving reading is absolutely central.

Jenny Oldroyd: We know what excellent practice looks like. We know what brilliant looks like. It looks like starting early with stories, talk and so forth. We know that it looks like allowing your pupils to be the driving force in what is stocked in your library and classrooms, the books they choose and giving them autonomy with reading. We know that it involves a passionate workforce that can guide children to support those choices and share their own love of reading with them. We know that it also takes a brilliant combination of data and creativity. The child experiences a huge amount of creativity in their support for reading, but behind the scenes that is very data-led so that schools understand which children are struggling with reading and can support them to be confident readers.

We are still on a journey to making that best practice and universal practice in every single school in the country. That is what the reading framework and the hub support we give is designed to achieve—sharing what that brilliant practice looks like to allow schools to touch, feel and see it, a bit like you had the opportunity to really experience it on your Estonia visit. That is essentially what the hubs programme is about. That is what our reading framework is about—giving you those opportunities in quite a bespoke way. If you are engaged with an English hub, you can have up to eight days of support from that hub, which will come in and help you plan



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a whole-school approach to make sure you have that culture around reading.

There are differences between secondary and primary schools on this. We still have a bit more of a journey in secondary schools than in primary schools for every teacher to see that if a child has their reading book out on their desk, they should have a conversation with them about it. It is not the English teacher's job; it is the job of every teacher in that school to show a love of reading and encourage that in their pupils.

That is the journey we are on. We understand the journey we want to make. We are putting huge amounts of resource into making sure that is the case. This year alone, we are engaging with over 1,100 schools in an intensive way to help them on that journey. This is the first year that we have hub support in secondary schools. In 300 schools this year, we are making sure that support for both the technical aspects of reading and reading for pleasure continues into year 7, year 8 and so on.

Q176 Manuela Perteghella: You talked about the network of English hubs and the important role they play in supporting schools and especially children and young people who are struggling to learn to read. How much of a focus do the English hubs have on reading for pleasure?

Jenny Oldroyd: We know that the whole-school culture matters. What you have on your walls and in your classrooms matters. The conversations you are having matter. All those principles sit behind the programme our hubs offer, "Transforming your school's reading culture". It is not just about how you deliver a curriculum; it is about the whole culture of the school.

We work in schools where we get the senior leadership signed up to making the shift towards a whole-school reading culture so that it affects all the experiences, not least when you are in the playground. Are there books around the playground? It is top to bottom. What does a whole-school shift towards reading for pleasure culture look like? That is fundamental in that programme. We have already delivered that to 1,800 schools over the last four years.

Q177 Manuela Perteghella: I used to be a school governor. In my first year as a school governor, my priority was reading—it was about the love of reading. A buddy system was set up, where year 6 children read to the little ones, and grandparents came into the school to read. It was about promoting the love of reading. How much is best practice shared among schools? How does it work—is it through the English hubs?

Jenny Oldroyd: I think we have embedded that best practice. What do we want here? We want to touch as many schools as possible and to help those that are furthest from the position of being the school that you have just described. More universal guidance, in terms of the reading framework, shows those practices and makes them available to schools, but the work that the hubs do gets more intensive and is able to actually sit alongside a school, with some real time dedicated to help them plan how they are going to go on their reading journey and their literacy



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journey, to support the progress that their children make and the enjoyment their children get from reading.

Different schools are at different stages with this; I am completely open about that. We have some absolutely fantastic hubs—34 across the country that really want to share that practice. If you think that we are being passionate about some points, you should talk to our reading leads in those English hubs. They really see it as their job to take those ideas and that practice and spread them to as many schools as possible.

Olivia Bailey: That sort of school-to-school, peer-to-peer relationship really works. You will know from your experience as a school governor that that is the most effective way of spreading good practice and getting a love of reading.

Q178 **Manuela Perteghella:** My last question is about continuing to look at best practice. Currently, only 70 schools have achieved the reading for pleasure quality mark. Is the Department looking at how the lessons from the quality mark could be scaled up so that more schools are implementing this best practice?

Jenny Oldroyd: I am happy to look at it.

Olivia Bailey: I will definitely have a look at it, because that sounds like it would be very instructive. We can follow up with you, Manuela.

Q179 **Sureena Brackenridge:** I will ask a few questions around school curriculum and assessment. There may be a little bit of a pushback with some of the statements that you made earlier, but I just want to check: Minister, you made the point that you thought that reading for pleasure was well embedded, but we have heard evidence from teachers that they lack the capacity and lack the time. With the curriculum and assessment review, there seemed to be a missed opportunity, especially as we are in the National Year of Reading. There was not a Government response to the CAR about reading for pleasure.

Olivia Bailey: I have said—and I stand by this—that a love of reading is embedded in everything that teachers are doing and is embedded in the curriculum. In fact, it is directly discussed in the curriculum. First, the most important thing to say is that our teachers are doing a brilliant job at that, and I thank them for all their work. The real passion that teachers have, whether they are English teachers or other teachers, in supporting children to access books is fantastic.

In the curriculum and assessment review, there are some changes that we are making, for example by removing some repetition in the curriculum, which I think will assist with the point about time. We are also very conscious that we want to support the good practice that is already happening in schools. That is one reason why we are pushing forward with things like the year 8 reading test, which will spread good practice to ensure that the focus on checking that children's reading is where it should be is well embedded. Jenny, I do not know whether you want to add anything.



Jenny Oldroyd: I am happy to. It is really important that we separate out the curriculum and how we support teaching. We tend not to put pedagogy in the national curriculum, but pedagogy just matters so much in how you share and teach a love of reading to children. As the Minister says, the curriculum does include that love of reading, and we very much want to maintain that.

It was great in the curriculum and assessment review to see that leaning in on the variety of texts that pupils are able to study at all years. Obviously, the curriculum and assessment review went right through to GCSEs. It pushed on the English language GCSE—"How do we encourage more fluent reading? How do we encourage more critical reading?"—but also English literature, where it created more of a chance for pupils to study texts that speak to them, for example. There were helpful recommendations in that space. What it did not do at all—this was quite deliberate—was step into how you teach a love of reading and how you engage with that.

This is one that we have to be quite careful about. My suspicion is that if you break that down in too much detail in the curriculum, you slightly kill the essence of it. We need it there in the curriculum, but the really important bit alongside that is that we know what best practice looks like in achieving it, and that we are sharing that best practice and encouraging schools to pick it up. That is what we are doing through the reading framework, for example.

Q180 Chair: The evidence that we have had overwhelmingly speaks to a catastrophic failure of the English literature GCSE curriculum to foster a love of reading in children. Do you think the curriculum and assessment review has gone nearly far enough in addressing that challenge? It is really clear—we heard it from academics and from teachers. If I can speak to the experience of my own daughter, who did GCSE English last year and learned all these wonderful poems, the only conclusion she drew was that she never wanted to do that ever again in her life. It is failing to foster a love of reading. It is very frustrating to hear you talk again and again about how this is embedded across all our schools, when the system that we have at the moment is stifling a love of reading in our children. Do you think you are anywhere close to meeting the scale of that challenge?

Olivia Bailey: If I can test what you are saying and what you have heard in the evidence, that sounds like a text challenge—what the children are engaging with in the English literature GCSE—and that is something that we are addressing in our response.

Chair: It is also a volume challenge: there is more and more and more and more. There is no time just to learn to love it.

Olivia Bailey: I have tried to address the congestion point and the time point, but on the text point I would just add that we are accepting the recommendations and making changes to ensure that schools can pick more texts that we think their children will love. Whether that is about their place or things that they recognise their children will particularly

enjoy, there are lots of different ways in which they may approach it. We are making that change, because we recognise that that is something that we want to address.

Jenny Oldroyd: Apologies; I do not at all mean to imply that the GCSE works perfectly now, but we have a set of changes from the curriculum and assessment review that we will be implementing. We have accepted those—and those, of course, came from a wide-ranging consultation with the sector about what needed to change and how we keep the best of what we have, but also move it on so that it better reflects the diversity of pupils and the diversity of their interests in our system at the moment.

Q181 **Sureena Brackenridge:** Teachers are not raising concerns about being instructed, in terms of pedagogy and how to teach. That is not their concern; their concern is about the volume and how busy the curriculum is, which means that they do not have the capacity, never mind the resources. It is similar lower down, at key stage 3 and in primary as well, so I would ask you to look into that a little further.

Jenny Oldroyd: Can I come back in on that point? I absolutely recognise that challenge, which was raised by the curriculum and assessment review. That is one that we have picked up in the review and that we are looking at. What I think you pull out is the temptation to rush through the curriculum without being able to pause, to enjoy and to go into depth. We have a wonderfully broad curriculum. Sometimes that comes at the expense of real depth and of the chance to really examine, understand and appreciate. In accepting the recommendations, that is the balance that we have agreed to look at, so I very much hear you on that point.

Olivia Bailey: I agree with Jenny. You will know, Sureena, that our approach with the curriculum and assessment review was to have strong academic foundations, but there is a breadth that we also want to see across sports, music and the arts, and the space and time that we want to see, as we have discussed. We also just want to bring the curriculum into the future, because it has been 10 years since any updates.

Q182 **Sureena Brackenridge:** I will move on to the new year 8 reading tests. I would like to hear your response to concerns from staff who work in schools who say that this would be an additional strain and burden and that it would have the unintended consequence of taking schools away from the direction of resources to build reading for pleasure.

Olivia Bailey: What I would say to that is that loads of schools are already doing this. They are checking in with pupils at this crucial stage to make sure that they can access the curriculum and also access reading for pleasure. It enables the schools—there are lots of schools that are already doing this—to put in place the plans that children need to properly engage with their school experience.

That is really important, and it is the reason that we are pressing forward with this assessment. It will enable schools to benchmark themselves against other schools. It will be an important moment for them to reflect and make sure that they are giving individual pupils the support that they

need. I re-emphasise that lots of schools are already doing this. It is about spreading best practice so that as many children as possible get the benefits of targeted plans.

Q183 Sureena Brackenridge: Will any additional guidance be given to schools on the next steps? Identifying an issue is incredibly important—I know that lots of schools are already doing that, which is great practice—but will there be guidance on what comes next and how to support weak readers?

Olivia Bailey: Yes, there will, I am sure. Jenny, do you want to come in on that?

Jenny Oldroyd: I am happy to. I think we have 25% of children moving up into secondary school without having met the expected standard in reading. I do not buy the idea that it is additional to the day job or more difficult than it should be. What we are really asking for here, with a year 8 assessment, is for schools that do not already—as the Minister says, lots do—to pick up children in year 7 and say, “We want to understand your reading progress, and we want to help you with those areas you struggle with.”

There are programmes out there in the market. There are already reading assessments, where it is happening well and happening termly. It is about building on that infrastructure and coming back to the challenge of how to make that best practice universal everywhere, so that it does not matter where you are from, because you are seen if you are struggling with your reading. We have already built programmes for secondary schools to help them on this journey. Through our hubs, we are delivering a programme called Unlocking Reading that specifically targets struggling readers in years 7 and 8, in that key stage 3 period, and helps professionals to identify what some of their reading challenges might be, while also giving them proactive, age-appropriate support in addressing those reading challenges, knowing that in their interests they have moved on from primary, but their reading needs mean that someone needs to go back a step and support them in managing those steps.

Q184 Sureena Brackenridge: Why year 8? There have been calls for year 7, so it must have been driven by evidence.

Jenny Oldroyd: The review thought about this quite hard. Doing a year 7 test can tell the school the reading profiles of the children, but it does not ask the schools whether they have done anything about it or built on it. If you test in year 9, you are testing at a level at which you know they need to be operating to be successful over their GCSE years, you are intervening too late to do something about it. Year 8 is the point at which you have received those children and have had a year or longer—probably four terms—to do some real work with them to build their reading confidence and build their reading skills. If you find that there are still gaps, you still have time to do something about it, in a period that still allows them to engage with their qualification years.

Q185 Sureena Brackenridge: Finally from me, will you confirm that the year 8 reading test will not be used as an accountability measure?

Olivia Bailey: Yes.

Q186 **Rebecca Paul:** You have already touched on some of this, so I do not expect you to repeat yourself, but could you talk about the training and professional development that currently exists for teachers on reading for pleasure? I am particularly interested in what is available to support those who are teaching children with SEND.

Olivia Bailey: I have mentioned that it is embedded in the initial teacher training and early career framework. I have mentioned the NPQ in leading literacy, which I think 6,500 teachers have completed and that we are in the process of reviewing—I think I am right in saying that—to make sure that that is as effective as it can be. What else would you add to that, Jenny?

Jenny Oldroyd: Some of the other things we have talked about, but we may have brought out the SEND elements a bit less. The hubs programme has two programmes specifically around pupils who are struggling and lowest-attaining. I have just mentioned one of them, Unlocking Reading in secondary, but it has a companion programme for primary schools called Reading Ambition for All. It tries to support schools to really focus on the needs of children who, having gone through their early reading journey, are still struggling. It says, “What are the strategies that work with those children where they are struggling at that point in time?” Those programmes are exactly designed around the needs of those children.

Olivia Bailey: In the reforms that we are bringing forward to the special educational needs system, especially the individual support plans aspect of that and greater access to universal and targeted provision in schools, I would expect access to reading to be a central part.

Q187 **Rebecca Paul:** Can you talk about the impact of the “Transforming your school’s reading culture” programme? Do you have plans to expand it beyond the 2,000 participating schools?

Jenny Oldroyd: We have overall evaluation of our English hubs programmes. We have not yet evaluated, or completed evaluations of, some of the different constituent parts of those programmes, but what we can see is that schools are very keen to engage with the programmes.

We are planning for English hubs programmes over this spending review period, and we would like to deliver more of each of the programmes I have mentioned. What I cannot say is what the balance of individual programmes will be, because that depends on what schools feel they need to take them on their reading journey and build the literacy of their students.

Olivia Bailey: We have significantly expanded the hubs, because we are seeing the huge value of them. There is more money coming next year, and a continued approach to expanding and building on what they are doing. That would be a part of our approach.

Q188 **Rebecca Paul:** School libraries are not currently statutory. Are you happy



with that? Are you considering putting them on a statutory footing?

I also have a question about data collection on the schools that have libraries. Have you looked at Ofsted reporting on that? That is another approach to getting more transparency about which schools have a library.

Olivia Bailey: Thanks for those questions. We have stated a very clear ambition that we want all primary schools to have a library by the end of the Parliament, and we have put the funding forward for that—the £12.5 million through the dormant assets fund that is being managed through DCMS. On the specific question whether they should be statutory, it is our view that heads are best placed to decide how they build a reading culture in school.

On the question of data collection, Jenny may wish to come in on this, but we are acting on the evidence that we have seen, such as the survey by the National Literacy Trust that suggests that one in seven primary schools do not have a library. That is one of the reasons we have taken the decision to try to ensure access to a library across all primary schools. For all the reasons that we have discussed today, the ability to access a range of books presented in an engaging way that helps children broaden their literary horizons—the reading framework talks about how that can happen in a school—is really important, not just for accessing the curriculum but for fostering a love of reading.

Jenny Oldroyd: I will come back to you on whether Ofsted specifically looks at reading for pleasure. It looks at the resources that are available in schools and how they are used, and that includes a whole wealth of things. It does not single out libraries—I am not sure it would be appropriate to do so.

I confess that I start with a question of what a library is, because I have seen so many different versions of it in different schools. I have been on double-decker buses that make fantastic libraries in the playground; I have seen amazing year group libraries, class libraries and all sorts. On the statutory point, I slightly struggle with what you would be making statutory; what really matters to me is the reading culture in that school, and whether there is a really joined-up vision in the books they have on site, how they are used with young people and how adults guide them in their reading choices. It is really compelling when those things are joined together.

I have spoken to schools where the first thing they do in sifting for their staff is to say, “Read me a story for six minutes.” If people cannot read a story, they do not make the first sift—they do not get to do the interview and so forth. Those schools expect every teacher to be able to have a brilliant conversation about what children’s literature they enjoy—they expect them to be reading it and so forth. In other schools, librarians are doing that role; it is different in each school, but the point is, is it powerful? That is what is hard to legislate for, but is the thing that we need to see.

Q189 **Darren Paffey:** On the point you just made, Minister, the majority of



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schools, in whatever form, have a library—something like 86%—but we find that they struggle to resource and staff those libraries. Is the Department willing to commit to making sure that every school not only can have the stock it needs and improve the stock, but employs the staff it needs to make most effective use of the stock in creating that reading culture?

Olivia Bailey: Again, I think this is about the individual school making the choices that are right for them in however they provide their library, in whatever form. Some fantastic school librarians do a brilliant job of helping children to navigate and get excited by the range of books on offer, and there are fantastic examples of schools where a range of staff do that role in different and engaging ways. I think it is right that we allow individual schools to make their own choices about how they do it.

Jenny Oldroyd: Earlier in the session, we touched on some of the additional funding that we are putting in, over and above core schools budgets, not only in primary, to ensure that they are all able to have a library by the end of this Parliament, but in secondary to increase their book stock.

Q190 **Darren Paffey:** Through the core funding, the additional funding or the funding that you have committed to one way or the other, are you satisfied that you are ensuring that the stock is the best it can be, and that the staff that are needed are there? Again, you can leave some of the independence of the schools to the leadership, and that's fine, but they can only do what they can do if there is sufficient resource, so are you satisfied that that resource is sufficient?

Olivia Bailey: Yes. As we have said, for primaries, the £12.5 million is going in with our clear expectation and ambition that every primary school has a library, and with the confidence that every school that I have ever visited understands the crucial importance of children being able to access a wide range of books, not just for access to the curriculum, but for their enjoyment, pleasure and connection to their community and society.

Q191 **Darren Paffey:** Forgive me if you covered this while I was not here, but you just mentioned secondaries. The School Library Association estimated that for about £15 million, the pledge could be extended to them, so is it your intention to introduce that funding for secondary schools, too?

Olivia Bailey: The commitment we made is for the £12.5 million in primaries for libraries, and the £5 million in secondary schools for access to books. At the moment, we are working on that. It is something that we hope to roll out in the autumn term. We are working out how to distribute it among schools. Also, as we mentioned earlier in the evidence session, we are working closely with a load of partners to maximise the benefit of the investment in schools—but that is about the access to books in secondary schools.

Jenny Oldroyd: Recognising that funding is used carefully towards critical resources such as books, let me say thank you to the organisations that support schools in doing that well, and in doing their choices of books. The



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National Literacy Trust, the School Library Association and the Reading Agency are all helping schools—alongside the guidance that we put out—to make some brilliant choices about their library provision, about what books they buy and about how they present them as well, so that everything is engaging and not overwhelming for young people. This is more than a funding question; this is an understanding of how to take the essence of a brilliant library and make it work in the school setting.

Q192 Darren Paffey: Given that we have found that older age groups are least likely to read for pleasure, is that something that you would acknowledge and recognise? If so, what was the thinking behind focusing most—most of the financial resource, at least—more on primary than secondary?

Olivia Bailey: Earlier we discussed the target groups we are looking at. Across the board for the National Year of Reading, we are looking at the early years, because we have to embed that love of reading. We are looking at disadvantaged communities, where we want to make sure we have good access to books, and we are looking at teenage boys, where there is evidence to suggest that they are less likely to enjoy reading than their peers. We are trying to tackle those areas through the National Year of Reading. There is a National Year of Reading programme of work in secondary schools; our aim is for all schools to engage with the National Year of Reading, and 2 million children have already engaged with it. All the other changes we have discussed today around the curriculum, the support we are giving through the reading framework, and other aspects of school life—all contribute towards that. Right across the board, with all the measures we are taking in primary and secondary schools, we are addressing the challenges we are seeing in front of us.

Jenny Oldroyd: It is worth reminding ourselves that we have far more primary schools in this country than secondary schools. That needs to be taken into account in the framework as well.

Q193 Jess Asato: We have heard a lot in our evidence about the importance of schools having really good partnerships with authors, which you have mentioned, but also local bookshops and other industry representatives. What support does the Department give to schools to enable them to develop and maintain these partnerships?

Olivia Bailey: That is a great question that foreshadows what we are currently working on with our secondary schools for the £5 million allocation of funding for books. At the moment—we cannot say more about it at this stage, but we can report back to you when we are there—we are working very hard on those partnership approaches. I agree with you that doing as much as we can to support and facilitate those to support schools, not just to maximise the investment but more broadly, is great. Of course, the National Year of Reading is doing that as well. We are working with such a fantastic range of partners—both national and locally embedded organisations—and we are, through the approach of the National Year of Reading, which the National Literacy Trust is doing a great job of, very much pulling the schooling infrastructure into the wider community as well.



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Q194 Sureena Brackenridge: My question is about public libraries. I must declare that I am a real champion for my local libraries in Wolverhampton and Willenhall. They have really dedicated and skilled staff, which is vital. How is the Department for Education working with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and other relevant Departments to ensure that all libraries are equipped to support children and young people to read for pleasure?

Olivia Bailey: First, I agree with you, Sureena, about the importance of our local libraries, especially with my early years hat on and seeing what I am seeing now, which is more and more local libraries becoming network sites for Best Start family hubs, and the parent sessions they are running for parents to stay and play and read books with them, or whatever it may be. It is fantastic. They are real community hubs and are hugely valued.

They are central to our approach for the National Year of Reading and we are aiming to drive up engagement in public libraries. It is one of our targets for the National Year of Reading. You may also be aware that DCMS has given public libraries £150,000 as part of the National Year of Reading. The aim of that is to boost engagement in libraries and in the National Year of Reading. I think DCMS is going to be coming forward with additional plans for libraries in due course.

Q195 Sureena Brackenridge: In the new strategy on public libraries, which is due to be published later this year, will there be a specific focus on reading for pleasure?

Olivia Bailey: Well, I cannot speak for my DCMS colleagues, but I think it would be a fairly safe guess. I would imagine so.

Q196 Sureena Brackenridge: I would ask that you follow that up with them.

Olivia Bailey: I will follow up with them, absolutely.

Q197 Chair: On that point, 73% of library services describe their relationships with secondary schools in their local area as weak. Do you think there is more that can be done to leverage the fantastic asset and resource that we have in public libraries to supplement a resource that the Government are not putting into on-site secondary school libraries? Is there more than can be made of that?

Jenny Oldroyd: There is an assumption there that we are not investing in secondary school libraries, and I am not sure that is the case. If I have a weakness, it is that I can judge a school by its library. You can walk in, have a good nose around and really understand quite a bit from it. I have seen some excellent, really inspiring libraries. I think that to some extent that is driving the choices young people make and where they tend to choose to spend their time.

Olivia Bailey: We always want to think about more things we can do, and always want to be forging connections, whether between public libraries and schools or whatever it may be. I would be happy when I follow up with DCMS on reading for pleasure as a focus of their libraries programme to raise that point with them as well.

Q198 Chair: In earlier evidence sessions, we heard from some organisations that are advocating for library cards to be issued in the early years. As soon as a baby is born, there might be a role for health visitors in making sure families are aware of the resource of their local public library and really encouraging that to be part of normal family life for the youngest children. Is that something you are looking at?

Olivia Bailey: Yes, and it is integral to the approach we are taking with the Best Start family hubs networks that we are trying to build in communities. I think I am right in saying—I will correct myself following this if I am wrong—that there are examples of local authorities that are driving forward that kind of activity. We really encourage it because, as I say, we have libraries that are acting as network sites for Best Start family hubs, which is fantastic. As I said at the start, early years is too fragmented and, with everything we are doing, we want to use the investment and the focus we are putting on this to really forge those connections, whether between local libraries or PVIs or school-based nurseries. We want the experience that a child has to be joined up. A one-year-old is not conscious of being in a library, or a healthy babies programme, or being in the health visitor's office. It all needs to be one seamless service and that is what we are really focused on with our Best Start programme.

Chair: Thank you very much. That brings our evidence session for today almost to a close, but can I first thank you both for coming to give your evidence to us today?

Olivia Bailey: Thank you. May I briefly cheekily steal the microphone and say a big thank you to Jenny, because it is her last day in the Department tomorrow and she has done an absolutely fantastic job, as you can tell from the evidence today, on curriculum and on tech for the Department. We will really miss her, and I just wanted to thank her for all her fantastic service for the Department.

Sureena Brackenridge: Thank you, Jenny. Good luck.

Chair: Thank you. That brings our evidence session for today to a close.