

Schoolreaders pledge in The National Year of Reading 2026



National
Year of
Reading
2026

Schoolreaders
improving literacy • increasing life chances

Mercer
&Hole



Our Pledge

National
Year of
Reading
2026

2026 is the National Year of Reading - a vital campaign to address the steep decline in children's reading.

Schoolreaders is proud to play a leading role in this initiative.

During the year, we have pledged to deliver **1.5 million individual reading support sessions** to children in primary schools nationwide, with a focus on those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds.

To achieve this ambitious goal, we will need to work more closely than ever with our partners, funders and corporate supporters and secure increased financial support so we can make a lasting impact for the children who need us most.

Dear Friends and Supporters of Schoolreaders,

The National Year of Reading 2026 comes at a pivotal moment.

Across the country, too many children are falling behind in their reading. **One in four** pupils leave primary school unable to read at the expected standard. This will impact on their secondary education, and can have lifelong negative consequences, especially for those most disadvantaged.

Each year, only 10% of disadvantaged children who leave primary school with their reading below the expected standard pass English and Maths at GCSE. Without the foundation of literacy, children face barriers in education, in employment, and beyond.



At Schoolreaders, we believe every child deserves to learn to read well. That's why, for over a decade, we have been providing primary schools with free, additional one-to-one reading support through our network of dedicated volunteers. Week after week, these sessions provide the vital reading time children need to build confidence, fluency, and a love of reading that lasts a lifetime. The demand for our provision from schools is growing: one in five schools are registered with Schoolreaders requesting volunteers, and we started the 2025/26 academic year supporting 30% more children than the year before.

The National Year of Reading offers us a once-in-a-generation opportunity to make a real difference. We have pledged to deliver 1.5 million individual reading sessions in 2026, focusing on the children who need us most. It is an ambitious goal - and one we cannot achieve alone.

To succeed, we will need to grow our network of volunteers, deepen our partnerships with schools, and secure the support of funders and corporate partners across the country. Together, we can ensure that thousands more children leave primary school with the skills and confidence to thrive not only in their literacy, but for a lifetime of learning to come.

I invite you to stand with us in this vital mission. **With your help, 2026 can be remembered as the year we changed the story of children's literacy.**

Thank you for your support.

With best wishes,

Sally Wrampling
Chief Executive, Schoolreaders

Vision, Mission and Model



Our Model

Schoolreaders recruits, places and supports volunteers to go into local primary schools to give children one-to-one reading support on a weekly basis. Our volunteers commit to a minimum of one year, and a minimum of one hour each week. Our unique live mapping system underpins our volunteer recruitment and placement process. Priority is given to support the most disadvantaged children in the most deprived areas, providing additional support to help bridge the gap.

The Schoolreaders model of improving child literacy is simple, scalable, proven by annual impact research and cost-effective. Every £1 is highly leveraged with 130 volunteers for every staff member.



One in five
primary schools in England have registered requesting our volunteers

99%

of our partner schools consider in-school, face-to-face volunteering to be the 'gold standard' and most effective form of reading support

Focus on Disadvantage

Prioritising the most disadvantaged children

There is a significant disadvantage gap in Literacy. Many children from disadvantaged backgrounds begin school without key early learning milestones, and often struggle with phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension. Some may have special educational needs or are learning English as an additional language. One in eight don't own a single book and most lack opportunities to read one-to-one with an adult at home - a crucial factor in developing literacy, which further compounds their disadvantage.



Each year, only 10% of disadvantaged children who start secondary school with their reading below the expected standard, pass English and Maths at GCSE. Poor literacy limits education and employment opportunities, reduces confidence, and can have lifelong consequences.

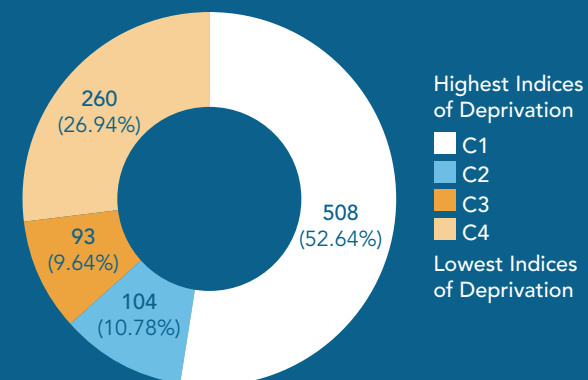
In the UK 6.6 million adults are currently functionally illiterate. This means that one in six of us struggle to read a WhatsApp message, bus timetable, or fill in a high quality job application. Those not reading to the expected standard on leaving primary school will earn £65,000 less over their lifetime.

Schoolreaders is working to break this cycle - by ensuring that every child learns to read well, regardless of background. Through trained volunteers delivering one-to-one reading support in primary schools, we reach children who might otherwise slip through the cracks. We prioritise schools serving disadvantaged communities, directing support to where it can make the greatest impact.

More than 50% of our partner schools are in areas of high deprivation and/or have more than 25% of pupils on Free School Meals. Our volunteers give these children the extra reading practice and encouragement they might not receive elsewhere, helping to bridge the gap so that they are on an equal footing with their peers and helping them to build the skills and confidence to succeed.

By focusing on disadvantage in literacy, we are tackling one of the root causes of inequality.

Volunteer Matches by School Deprivation Category

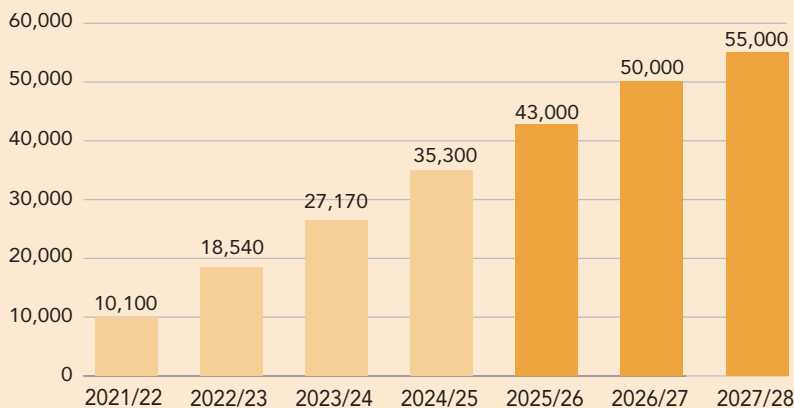


Research and impact

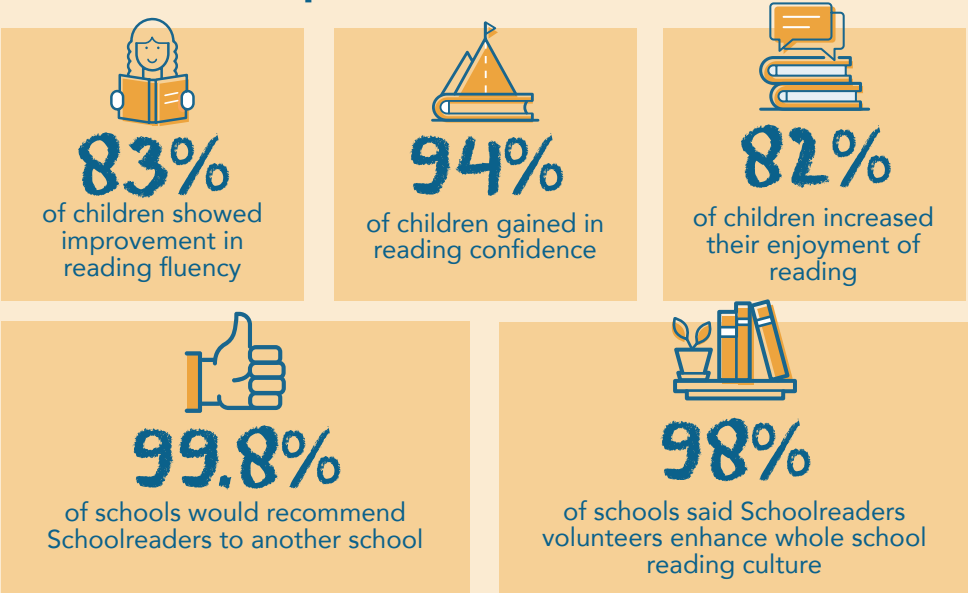
Measurement of the impact and outcomes of our provision is of key importance. We conduct robust annual research in partnership with the Institute for Research in Education at the University of Bedfordshire.



Growth in number of children receiving weekly one-to-one reading support with aims to 2027/28

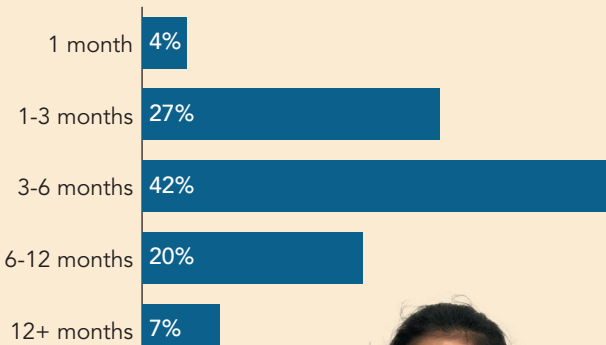


Our 2024/25 Impact Research shows:



Incremental reading age improvement

Above the expected level of progress when reading support is provided by a Schoolreaders volunteer over three terms



Schools reporting on reading age improvement over three terms noted that all children showed reading progress.

42% of children supported made 3-6 months progress, a further 27% exceeded six months' progress of which 7% achieved over one year's reading gain.



What sets Schoolreaders apart?

Our evidence-based model

The Schoolreaders national model of providing free one-to-one, in-school child literacy support is unique in offering vital interventions for as long as the child needs it, and putting each school in full control of how this resource is used.

Unique role of our volunteers

Time with our trained volunteers benefits not only a child's reading ability and enjoyment, but their confidence and self-esteem too. The minimum one year commitment made by each Schoolreader means that as a trusted adult, who is not a parent or a teacher, they are able to develop a unique supportive relationship, making children feel valued and increasing their motivation to read.

Our service is free to schools

Schoolreaders service is provided to schools at no cost, ensuring that every child, regardless of their school's financial status, has access to this vital reading support.

Prioritising the most disadvantaged

There are proven links between poverty and low literacy. As a response, our Deprivation Strategy prioritises recruitment and placement of volunteers in primary schools within the top 20% of areas of deprivation or where over 25% of pupils receive free school meals. 43% of children supported by Schoolreaders receive pupil premium funding versus the national figure of 24%.

Our use of technology

We have developed an interactive mapping system which enables our team to view real-time activity data on our partner schools during the volunteer interview and placement process. This ensures a 'best fit' between schools and volunteers, maximising impact and efficiency. All our volunteers are provided with access to a bespoke e-learning training platform, including mandatory safeguarding training and other resources to support their role and enhance the impact of their sessions.

Proven impact

We carry out annual impact research in partnership with The Institute for Research in Education at the University of Bedfordshire. Results are consistently strong, showing that Schoolreaders intervention has proven impact. 2025 results found Schoolreaders volunteers improved children's confidence (94%), fluency (83%) and, most crucially 82% of children supported increased their enjoyment of reading.



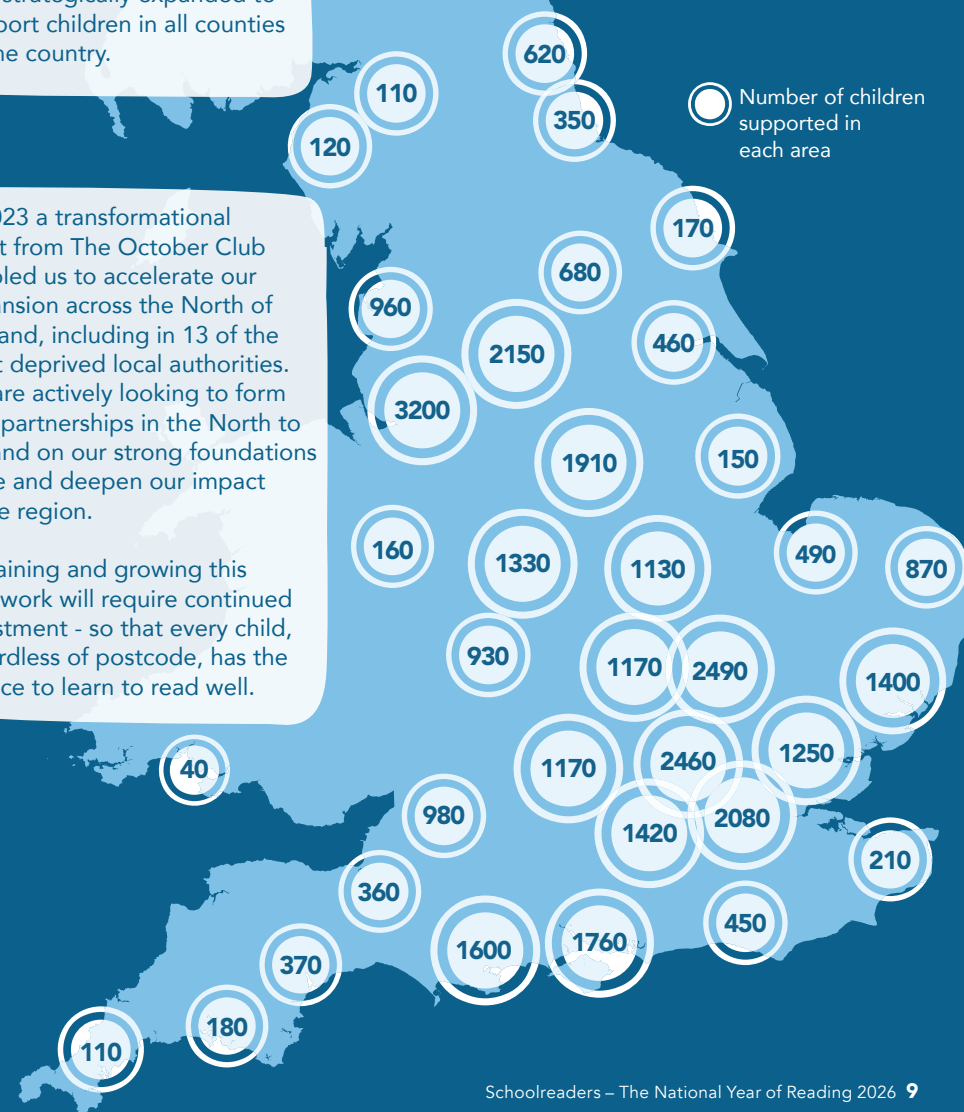
Where do we work?

Schoolreaders is both a national and local charity supporting children in primary schools in every county in England.

Born in Bedfordshire in 2013, Schoolreaders has steadily and strategically expanded to support children in all counties of the country.

In 2023 a transformational grant from The October Club enabled us to accelerate our expansion across the North of England, including in 13 of the most deprived local authorities. We are actively looking to form new partnerships in the North to expand on our strong foundations there and deepen our impact in the region.

Sustaining and growing this vital work will require continued investment - so that every child, regardless of postcode, has the chance to learn to read well.



“The best part is seeing children grow in confidence, and genuinely begin to discover the joy of reading and books.”

Case Study:

Carolyn Jones



When Carolyn first heard about Schoolreaders from her neighbour, she felt it was the perfect way to share her love of books and help children discover the magic of reading.

Three years on, Carolyn still travels to her local primary school every single week, where she listens to 10–12 children from Years 1 and 2 read aloud. Each session is only ten minutes long, but the impact on the children, and on Carolyn herself, has been incredible.

“At the start of the year, some children are almost rigid with shyness. Over time, you see them open up, smile more, and gain confidence. Watching them discover the joy of books is the most rewarding part.”

Carolyn brings to the role her experience of having worked as a Family Court Judge. Working in the legal sector she was able to support many families and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

“In my career I have often had to sit behind children and young people in dreadful situations.

Many families I worked with had a disadvantaged background, often including poor literacy not only among children, but their parents too.”

“Now, it is great to have the chance to sit beside children and help them to learn a skill which will set them up for better opportunities in life.”

One particularly moving achievement has been seeing children go from being reluctant to engage, to opening up and discovering the joy of reading. One little girl who read with Carolyn was very withdrawn, often napping during her lessons. However, after opening up to Carolyn she is now a lot more engaged in class.

With steady encouragement, Carolyn has seen these children flourish, becoming more confident and capable readers.



When Aleksander arrived in the UK from Ukraine, he spoke very little English. Starting school in a completely new country without reading skills or language skills was daunting, but he soon met Carolyn, a Schoolreaders volunteer, who began listening to him read every week. With her steady encouragement and gentle support, Aleksander began to find his voice, and is now passing his love of reading on to his younger sister.

“At first, Aleksander would barely speak,” Carolyn recalls. “He was shy and hesitant, often looking to others for help with every word. But he was determined. Week by week, his vocabulary grew, and with it, his confidence.”

As Aleksander’s English improved through his weekly reading sessions with Carolyn, so did his love of books. He was soon sharing stories and rhymes with his younger sister. Reading by example, she is now also confident in English and doing well with her literacy.

Aleksander’s transformation is remarkable. He speaks excellent English, takes part in class discussions, and proudly acts as an

interpreter for his mum at school meetings and in the community. His journey is a fantastic example of how reading can open doors far beyond the classroom.

“Seeing Aleksander’s progress has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my time as a volunteer,” says Carolyn. “It shows what can happen when a child is given time, patience and a love of reading.”

“It was hard when I wasn’t able to read, but reading with Miss Jones helped me a lot.” says Aleksander



In the National Year of Reading, we are calling for more incredible volunteers to help us reach children who need additional reading support. If you can spare just an hour a week, find out more at schoolreaders.org/volunteer

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Theory of Change

The problem

1 in 4 children in England fail to reach the expected standard of reading by age 11 (more for disadvantaged children), with lifelong negative consequences.

What we do

Through trained, local volunteers we provide free, consistent, in-person reading support to the children who need it most.

Our Deprivation Strategy prioritises schools within the 20% areas of highest deprivation and/or where over 25% of pupils receive Free School Meals

How we deliver



The outcomes

FOR CHILDREN:

- Increased comprehension, fluency (83%) and confidence (94%)
- Consistent relationship with uniquely-placed, positive role model
- Greater enjoyment of reading (82%)
- Better equipped to fully access secondary education
- Increased life chances

FOR SCHOOLS:

- Trained, consistent, committed volunteers
- Additional reading support, free of charge
- 98% of schools report an improved whole-school reading culture
- Incremental improvements in reading age for 100% of children, 42% by 3 months+ and 27% by 6 months+

FOR VOLUNTEERS:

- In-person engagement with local community
- Reading with others has been proven to reduce stress and feelings of isolation
- An increased sense of purpose (74%) and wellbeing
- Positivity from making a difference to the lives of others (85%)

More than half of our reading volunteers have an education background

We rely entirely on voluntary income to deliver our services, which are provided free of charge to schools. Every £1 invested is highly leveraged, with 130 volunteers for every staff member. It costs just £40 to provide reading support per child for a whole year.



Thank You to Our Supporters

Every donation, partnership, and act of generosity helps Schoolreaders bring the joy and power of reading to more children across the country. Thanks to your support, we delivered over one million reading sessions in primary schools over the past year - a remarkable milestone and a 30% increase in the number of children supported compared to the previous year.

Whether through donations, legacy pledges, corporate partnerships, grants, or volunteering your time, your contribution has made a lasting impact. Thank you.

During The National Year of Reading, we have pledged to deliver 1.5 million reading sessions to children who need them most. It's a bold and ambitious goal, and one we can only achieve with increased support.

We are especially thankful to the organisations that have already committed to supporting our work in 2026, including the following:

The Beatrice Laing Trust, The Bernard Sunley Charitable Foundation, The Buffini Chao Foundation, Colonel W H Whitbread Charitable Trust, The Dulverton Trust, The Hadley Trust, The Harpur Trust, The House of Industry Estate, The Golden Bottle Trust, The John Armitage Charitable Trust, The Julia Rausing Trust, The Mulberry Trust, The October Club, Simons Developments Ltd., Stamptastic, Tritax Big Box REIT plc, The Wixamtree Trust and The Westminster Foundation.

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Thank you to The Julia Rausing Trust

The Julia Rausing Trust is delighted to support Schoolreaders, whose extensive network of volunteers delivers effective, low-cost reading interventions to primary school children across the country."

Daniel Chapman
Head of Grants



How you can get involved

Become a volunteer - just an hour a week can transform a child's future

Partner with us - together we can reach more children in disadvantaged areas

Fund our mission - every £40 will provide one child with a year of reading support

Corporate support - engage your teams, drive social impact and champion literacy

Spread the word - help us raise awareness during the National Year of Reading

Visit [Schoolreaders.org](https://www.schoolreaders.org) to get involved

“My Schoolreader makes my reading better and I like to talk to her about my reading, she takes time to read with us and makes us feel important.”

Year 5 pupil,
Cambridgeshire

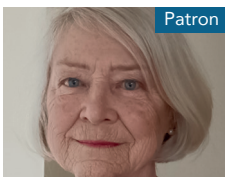
With your help, we can deliver 1.5 million reading sessions in 2026, providing more children than ever with life-changing literacy.

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Our Patrons and Author Supporters



Gyles Brandreth



Kate Adie



A F Steadman



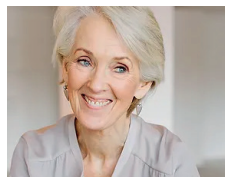
Julia Jarman



Mel Taylor-Bessent



Sophie Neville



Joanna Trollope



M G Leonard

Thank you to all these authors and more who are proud to support Schoolreaders!



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improving literacy • increasing life chances

A huge thank you to all the trusts, corporate sponsors, individual donors and all who support our mission of sharing life-changing literacy.

Thank you also to our staff, Trustees, and of course, our volunteers. Without you, this work would not be possible.



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