

New
Philanthropy
Capital

Read on

Literacy skills of young people

A guide for donors and funders

March 2007

John Copps



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Summary

Imagine not being able to read this sentence ...

... Imagine how different life would be if you struggled to read. Even the everyday jobs that most of us take for granted would become mountainous tasks—reading the instructions on a medicine bottle, writing a note to your child's school or using the Yellow Pages. Doors that access the most basic information would slam shut. Many of life's opportunities would simply be out of reach. Ask yourself: if you couldn't read properly, would you be where you are today?

Most of us take reading for granted. But while for the majority, being unable to read is unthinkable, for a significant number of people, this is reality.

Around twelve million adults—or one third of the workforce—have literacy skills at or below the level expected of an 11 year old child. The problem begins early in life. More than one in five 11 year olds leaves primary school with literacy skills below the expected standard. Included in this, 6-7% is at or below the standard expected of a 7 year old.

Simon's experience

When Simon first started school, it was obvious that he was finding his new life difficult. He struggled to keep up in class. When all the other children were doing their 'private reading', he just stared out of the window at the trees.

Simon was anxious in class. He found it difficult to make friends. Towards the end of his first year at school, he was beginning to become disruptive and develop bad behaviour. His mother started to wonder where she was going wrong.

After Simon began having daily half-hour lessons with the intensive Reading Recovery programme, his whole manner changed. After each session, he grew visibly more confident. His reading ability vastly improved, which meant that he worked harder and stopped being disruptive in class.

By the end of the year, Simon was able to read as well as most of the children in his class. At parents' evening, his mum talked about the change in him. At national assessments at the end of the

year, his score was average for his class. After such a bad start, the improvement in Simon's literacy was stunning.

Learning to read

Not being able to read well is a severe hindrance to leading a happy and fulfilled life. Anyone who cannot read and write well has a very limited range of economic and personal opportunities and is more likely to end up in low-paid employment.

The cost to the public purse of poor literacy is estimated at between £45,000 and £53,000 per person. Around 60% of this comes from reduced tax income and increased benefit claims, 15% from education services (such as special needs support and exclusion), 15% from health and social care, and 10% from crime (including court appearances, youth justice and prison costs).

Confidence and enjoyment are crucial for developing good reading skills. If children lack self-belief or are bored then they will avoid reading. This habit is likely to persist, producing adults with low levels of literacy.

How charities can help

Most children pick up reading without difficulty. For those who do not, individual attention is crucial. In Simon's case, despite the efforts of his class teacher, the school could not provide the one-to-one support he needed. This is where charities can offer most help. With their support and expertise, children begin to develop a love and enthusiasm for reading. For example:

Every Child a Reader helps children who have developed limited or no reading skills by the second year of primary school. It funds Reading Recovery, an intensive programme delivered by a qualified teacher to tackle failure of the weakest 6-7% of readers.

Springboard for Children works with the weakest 6-7% of readers at all ages of primary school. Trained volunteers help children to master the basics and develop strategies to support independent reading.

Volunteer Reading Help recruits, trains and places volunteers in primary schools to support the 14-15% of children who

have grasped the basics but struggle with reading. Volunteers work with children twice a week to support, inspire and build their confidence.

Reading Matters works with children who begin secondary school with poor literacy skills. Similar to Volunteer Reading Help, volunteer mentors combine fun games with reading activities to support children to become more able and confident readers.

What makes an effective charity?

NPC's research suggests that effective charities display a number of common characteristics. These include:

- attention to measuring the results of their work and an ability to articulate these results. For example, Every Child a Reader carefully tracks its effect on children's reading skills using well-established standard tests;
- a clear and focused model for supporting children. For example, Volunteer Reading Help has a simple and effective model, developed and tested over 30 years; and
- good value for money, based on demonstrable results achieved at a reasonable overall cost. If it can prevent just a small proportion of the costs of poor literacy, £150 to £2,400 per child spent by the charities described in this report is an excellent investment.

What donors can do

If you couldn't read, you would probably not have picked up or downloaded this report. However, by reading this report you can find out how you could help to change lives by supporting charities that give people the chance to learn how to read.

There are no simple answers in deciding where to give. Giving should be based on evidence of what works, as well as a desire to change lives. Effective charities produce excellent results. Understanding what charities achieve means donors can be confident about giving, and more children can benefit.

Simon was lucky in receiving support early in his school career. Thousands of other children are not so fortunate.

If you can read this,
thank a teacher.

Anonymous

If you can read this,
thank a donor.

New Philanthropy Capital

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Introduction

21% of 11 year olds left primary school with literacy skills below the expected standard.

Imagine how different life would be if you struggled to read. Even the everyday jobs that most of us take for granted would become mountainous tasks—reading the instructions on a medicine bottle, writing a note to your child's school or using the Yellow Pages.

Doors that access the most basic information would slam shut. Many of life's opportunities would simply be out of reach. Ask yourself: if you couldn't read properly, would you be where you are today?

Most of us take reading for granted. But while for the majority, being unable to read is unthinkable, for a significant number of people, this is reality.

In 2006, more than one in five 11 year olds left primary school with literacy skills below the expected standard.¹ Included in this figure is 6-7% of children—or 38,700—at or below the standard expected of a 7 year old.

Not being able to read well is a severe hindrance to living a happy and fulfilled life. Literacy is the building block of learning. Anyone who cannot read and write well has a very limited range of economic and personal opportunities, is more likely to end up unemployed or in low-paid employment, and is more likely to spend time in prison.²⁻⁴ The consequences for the economy are also profound. A recent study estimates the cost to the public purse of poor literacy is between £45,000 and £53,000 per person from school to age 37.⁵ Around 60% of this comes from reduced tax income and increased benefit claims, 15% from education services (such as

special needs support and exclusion), 15% from health and social care, and 10% from crime (including court appearances, youth justice and prison costs).

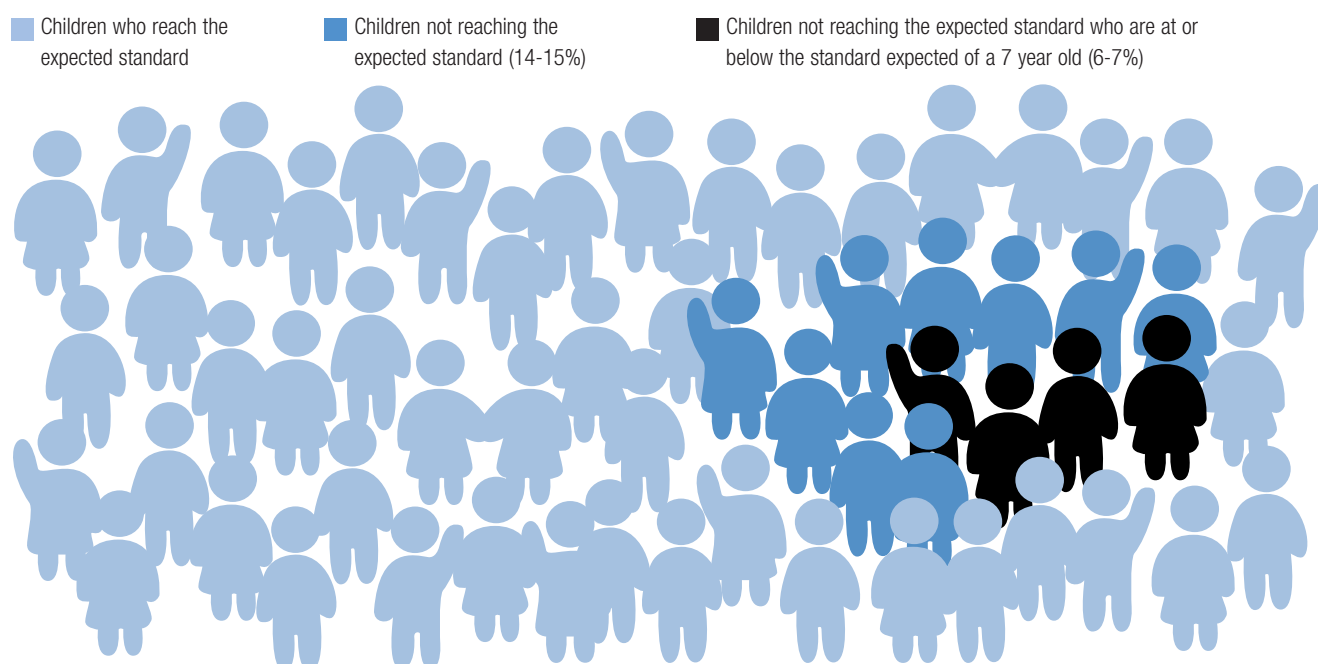
The purpose of this report

This report introduces donors and funders to the subject of improving the basic literacy skills of children in the UK. It is intended to inform donors about how they can support the most vulnerable young people, helping them to improve their reading skills.

This report has five sections. The first discusses the current state of literacy. The second looks at how children learn to read and what is available to support this process, in the classroom and at home. The third looks at which groups of children most need help. The fourth presents options available for donors to support children through charities and projects working alongside schools. The fifth provides guidance about what makes a successful charity.

This report focuses on literacy support for the most vulnerable children who, without extra help, would not reach the expected standard of reading. It does not assess mainstream literacy programmes or literacy work with young children below school age. It does not look in detail at the many competing programmes that already provide materials or training to schools that are not in need of extra funding. It concentrates only on those charitable programmes that will interest donors and that provide a vehicle for private giving.

Figure 1: The class of 2007 - Children's literacy skills at age 11 (representing a year group or two classes of 60 pupils)



Background

What is reading?

Reading is the interpretation of the written word. It is a prime means of communication and the building block upon which all learning depends. Not only is reading required to master any subject, it is needed to access that subject in the first place. Reading is fundamental to the way our society functions.

Writing is the visible recording of language. In our system of communication, it goes hand-in-hand with reading. Literacy is the ability to communicate through reading and writing.

Good reading and writing skills are essential. They are important for work and leisure, and for participating in economic and social life. As text and language is so ubiquitous in our modern, urban society—in newspapers, on the television, on billboards—it is easy to assume that everybody can read and write. However, this is not the case.

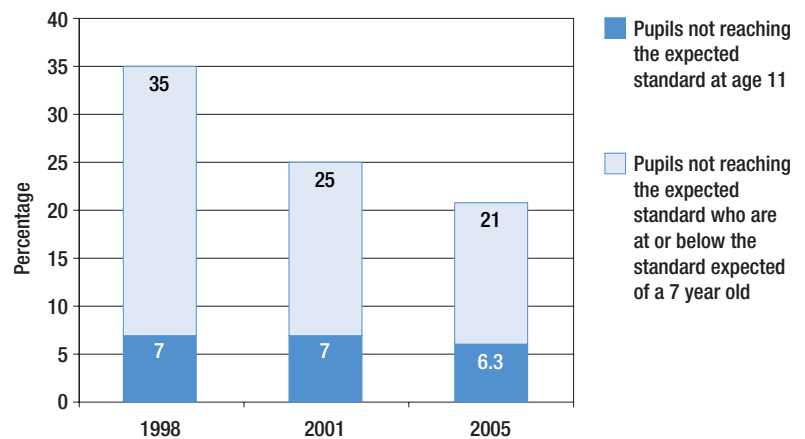
What are literacy levels in the UK?

As we have already seen, one in five 11 year olds left primary school in 2006 with literacy skills below the level expected of them. Included in this figure is 6-7% of children who only achieve level 2 or below in English (the standard expected of a 7 year old).⁶ This means that there are around 250,000 primary aged children in the UK who are functionally illiterate.

Although still high, these figures should be put in context of increasing literacy standards in primary schools over the last decade. In 2005, 79% of children left primary school at the expected standard, compared to 65% in 1998.^{6, 7} Figure 2 illustrates how the proportion of children achieving basic literacy standards at age 11 has changed compared to 1998. The upsurge in results has been attributed to the government's focus on improving basic skills in primary schools, in particular with the daily 'literacy hour'. Despite this general trend, there is much variability between similar schools, suggesting wide variation in teaching quality.⁸

However, despite general improvement in results, the proportion of children with the most severe literacy difficulties—the 6-7% described above—has remained static during the last decade. For these children, school is failing.

Figure 2: Graph showing pupils leaving primary school below the expected standard in English



Poorly performing groups

Low literacy is strongly related to social and economic disadvantage.⁴ Children eligible for free school meals, the most frequently used indicator of poverty, are more likely to be weak readers. Figure 3 (overleaf) shows the relationship between free school meals and literacy levels at age 7, 11 and 14. At all ages, those young people eligible for free school meals perform worse than their peers. This gap widens as they progress through school.

Literacy rates are also strongly related to gender. Girls significantly outperform boys at every level in school. At age 11, the gap is 10 percentage points with 84% of girls reaching the expected standard compared to 74% of boys.¹

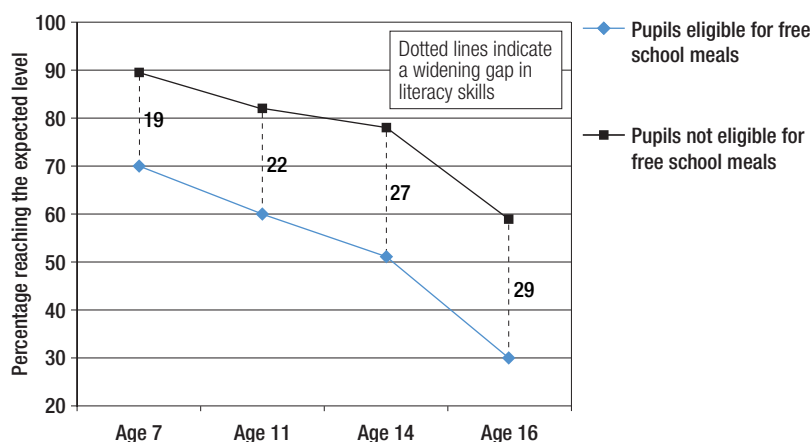
Ethnic background is a strong predictor of achievement. For example, at age 11, 30% of black children fail to achieve the expected standard, compared to 21% of white children and 16% of children of Chinese origin. The lowest performing group is black boys: 37% fail to achieve the expected standard.⁶ Other groups also underachieve. Children in care, children from single parent families and children who have English as a second language are disproportionately represented in the group that fails to achieve the expected standard.

There are around 250,000 primary aged children who are functionally illiterate.



By international comparisons, literacy levels among young people in the UK are relatively good. In two separate recent studies covering the major industrialised nations, the UK came seventh overall in literacy standards at age 15 and third at age 10.^{8,9} However, the studies noted that the UK has one of the largest span of abilities and that there were more pupils than would be expected in the lowest levels of achievement. This long tail of under-achievement provides the context for this report.

Figure 3: Graph showing the widening gap between the achievements of pupils as they progress through school (2005 figures)



Expected levels of achievement at age 7, 11, 14 and 16

- Age 7 Key Stage 1 Reading, Level 2 or above
- Age 11 Key Stage 2 English, Level 4 or above
- Age 14 Key Stage 3 English, Level 6 or above
- Age 16 GCSE, five or more grades A* to C

Childhood literacy difficulties translate into adult illiteracy. Estimates suggest that around one third of the working population in the UK has literacy skills at or below that expected of an 11 year old.^{10, 11} The purpose of improving childhood literacy is to improve the skills of adults, producing a more productive and more able workforce.

Attitudes towards reading

If children do not have a positive perception of reading or are not confident readers, they will avoid reading. The gender gap in reading ability is mirrored in attitudes towards reading. From the age of 6, girls read more books than boys.¹² This trend continues throughout their lives. Girls are three times more likely than boys to borrow books from a public library.¹²

Attitudes towards reading have changed over recent years. A survey of 9 and 11 year olds in 2003 found that children were more confident readers but enjoyed reading less, compared with pupils in 1998. Boys in particular showed a decline in interest in reading for pleasure.¹³ Despite relatively high performance in reading by international standards, pupils in England have relatively poor attitudes towards reading.¹⁴ This coincided with the government putting increased emphasis on reading, and the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy.

How children learn to read

2

Most children pick up reading without difficulty. As a rule of thumb, around a quarter will learn to read effortlessly and a little more than half can learn with effective classroom teaching. However, there will usually be around 20% who struggle. For these children, individual attention and intensive support is crucial if they are to develop good reading skills. If this group are not given the chance to catch up, they fall behind their classmates, missing out on much of the rest of the curriculum and often becoming frustrated and disruptive.

Most children are taught to read and write at school. However, the foundations for learning literacy skills are developed earlier. Young children constantly absorb and react to stimuli around them, developing thoughts and gaining experiences. Both the home and the school environment are important for literacy.

Learning in the home

The majority of parents believe that it is the responsibility of the school to teach children to read and write. However, research shows that what happens in a child's life before this point is also enormously important. Household background is amongst the most important determinants of ability in reading. Research has shown that, at 22 months, there are already clear differences in cognitive abilities of children from different backgrounds.¹⁵ Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to be strong readers.⁶

A small number of children are taught to read before starting school, but most parents do not have the expertise or time to do this. The most common way for parents to help their children learn to read is by reading aloud to them.

Beyond this, there is little research on what sort of home is most conducive to producing children who are good readers. It is generally believed that children who have a quiet place to study, a desk and have parents who read and enjoy books are more likely to excel.

Confidence and enjoyment are important for developing good reading skills. This is thought to be strongly related to parents' attitudes to reading. If children lack self-belief or are bored, then they will avoid reading. This habit is likely to persist, producing adults with low levels of literacy.

Learning in school

Learning to read and write is the most important function of primary school.

Teachers teach pupils to read in a mixture of whole class (up to 30 pupils), small groups (two to six pupils) and individuals. Teaching is usually orientated around 'reading schemes'. Reading schemes are structured programmes teaching children to read, often combining letter sounds with fun and memorable activities. Popular reading schemes include Letterland, where every letter learnt has a character, for example, a robot 'Munching Mike' for the 'M' sound and 'Harry Hat Man' for the 'H' sound; and Jolly Phonics, where each letter sound is associated with a gesture and image. Every reading scheme is slightly different and it is up to teachers to choose which reading scheme they use. Different reading schemes may suit different children depending on their individual preferences.

There is much debate about which is the best way of teaching children how to read. A recent government-commissioned report emphasised the value of 'synthetic phonics', an approach that breaks down the English language into basic sounds allowing children to decode words that they have never seen before.¹⁶ Box 1 explains how children learn to read in more detail.

Effective learning requires effective teaching. Boring or poor teaching methods will cause young people to 'switch off' in class, learning at a rate below the standard that should be expected. Teachers have the responsibility to ensure that lessons remain interesting and stimulating, so that pupils stay engaged.

“I don't like reading 'cos it is boring. There is no point—I can't do it.”

Child, age 7



Photograph supplied by Every Child a Reader

Box 1: Teaching children to read

Reading is the process of mentally interpreting written symbols. It involves decoding words on a page. For those with experience, this process can be done without thinking. However, for those learning how to read, other strategies have to be used.

There are two main approaches to reading. These are:

- 1 The whole word approach—where children learn to identify a whole word and then are able to read books that contain these words.
- 2 Synthetic phonics approach—where children learn sounds of letters and combinations of letters, for example ‘a’ (ah) or ‘ch’, and then use these to read words.

In both cases, words or sounds may be linked with different gestures, songs or pictures to help children to memorise the sounds.

There is much debate about the best way to learn to read. A recent government-commissioned report from the former Chief Inspector of Schools, Jim Rose, concluded that teaching children to read should have a strong element of synthetic phonics.¹⁶ It recommended that more emphasis should be given to this in the National Curriculum, a recommendation that the government has fully adopted.

The whole word approach and synthetic phonics are just two strategies for teaching children to read. In reality, teachers use a combination of the two approaches. Some words can be spelt out phonically, such as ‘conifer’ (con-i-fer), whilst some words require learning as a whole, such as ‘choir’.

What the Rose review has done is to renew the focus on synthetic phonics as a crucial part of teaching children how to read. It does not ask teachers to abandon other approaches, but advises that they should ensure that synthetic phonics is at the heart of the method they use. It has also placed new pressure on the government to ensure all teachers are well-trained in the approach.

Box 2: Causes of reading difficulties

All pupils learn to read in a slightly different way. The reasons why some young people pick up reading more easily than others are complex. We have already noted how a child’s background is a strong indicator of his or her reading ability. However, more directly, reading difficulties may be caused by a variety of problems in development. Some of these problems are physical, some are related to attitude and culture, and some are emotional and behavioural. Causes of reading problems include:

- sensory difficulties, such as poor hearing or poor sight;
- dyslexia and other cognition difficulties;
- concentration, attention deficit and behavioural difficulties, often linked to children’s emotional state; and
- negative associations with reading and poor attitude towards learning.

Often children will only learn effectively if their needs have been identified early and they are receiving help. All these problems have their own sources and methods of tackling them, which are beyond the scope of this report. Many of these issues have been dealt with in other NPC reports, listed on the inside back cover.

The National Curriculum

The National Curriculum is the national framework for teaching and learning in schools. In 1998, the government introduced the National Literacy Strategy. This is now housed under the Primary National Strategy.¹⁷

The essence of the Primary National Strategy is a focus on basic skills. At its centre is improving levels of literacy. In the classroom this has meant that, since 1998, most schools have implemented a daily ‘literacy hour’—one hour of time dedicated to the teaching or improvement of literacy skills. Additionally, every school has to produce a two-year literacy plan, and teacher training has been strengthened to ensure that all trainee primary school teachers can teach literacy well. Until recently, the Primary National Strategy also produced its ‘Searchlights’ guidance for teachers helping children to read. It is now rewriting this guidance in the light of new evidence about how children learn to read (see Box 1).

According to the National Literacy Strategy, effective school literacy provision comprises three ‘waves’ of support.¹⁹ These are:

Wave 1—effective whole class teaching of all children in a daily literacy hour;

Wave 2—additional small-group work with children to help them catch up with their peers; and

Wave 3—specific targeted support for children having difficulties reading and identified as needing special educational needs support.

This report focuses mainly on ‘wave 3 support’ for those children who do not reach the expected standard at aged 11. Schools have two different options to provide this support. They can either provide it in-house, by freeing up teachers, employing more teaching assistants or asking parents to volunteer. Or they can look to outside agencies, including charities. Usually, schools do not have the resources to support all the children who are struggling. In areas where charities are present, they can help with extra support. In areas where there are no charities, children rely on the support the school can provide for them.

The remainder of this report looks at which children could most benefit from extra support and the options available for supporting schools in providing this help.

Who needs help?

3

By the time they leave primary school, it is reasonable to expect that all but those with severe learning disabilities should be able to read. However, last year more than one in five children did not reach the expected standard.

From this statistic alone, it is clear that many children do not get what they should from the education system. The cause of the problem is a mixture of the child's background and attitudes, poor teaching and the fact that schools do not have enough resources to give adequate individual support to every child who needs it. Despite a doubling in the number of teaching assistants over the last eight years and increased funding, schools still fall short of resources.

Where are the most acute gaps, and where will extra resources make the biggest difference? NPC's analysis suggests that the most effective investment will be made in the following areas:

- **The most difficult 6-7%**—directly supporting the 6.3% of children at age 11 whose literacy skills are at or below the level expected of a 7 year old. These children require intensive one-to-one supervision with skilled reading instructors.
- **The remaining 14-15%**—directly supporting the rest of the children who fail to achieve the expected standard at age 11. These children will often have a grasp of language but require individual attention to build their confidence and give them the practice that they need.
- **Weak readers in secondary school**—directly supporting pupils who enter secondary school below the expected standard.
- **Developing children's love of reading**—building children's enthusiasm for reading, to encourage children to read more and develop their skills.
- **Increasing access to books and family participation in reading.**

Box 3: Children's experiences

Without adequate attention, poor readers will often be demotivated and develop a poor attitude towards reading. The example of one 8-year-old boy illustrates this:

*'I [the child's teacher] pick up the book and ask if we can read ... together. He hesitates and looks away ... He picks up the book a few minutes later and tries to read the title. He spells the word and sounds out each letter but cannot blend them. He is frustrated and says "I don't know the cover, how can I read it?" ... his frustration is visible. He gives up and says that he is rubbish and can never read.'*⁸

Extra support can help children develop strategies towards reading that they may not have picked up in class. With continual encouragement, children can develop a better attitude. The example below of a 7-year-old child illustrates this:

*'I break the word into little bits and then read it quickly from the beginning. I pulled "polished" out all in a string to make the right word and for "personages", I squashed "person" and "aged".'*⁸

All the evidence suggests that teaching reading is best done when the child is young. Children who fall behind in the early years of school not only miss out from the curriculum, but they are more likely to 'switch off' and develop behavioural problems. However, it is also important to support those young people who have already fallen behind. Even a moderate increase in reading skills may significantly improve their life chances.

As already noted, some groups of children are more likely to fall within the groups requiring more intensive support. Boys are more likely to struggle with their reading than girls, as are children from disadvantaged economic backgrounds and some ethnic minorities. The next chapter looks at how donors and funders can support these children.

Boys are more likely to struggle with their reading than girls, as are children from disadvantaged backgrounds.



Photograph supplied by Every Child a Reader

The role of donors and funders

4

Where the state fails, there is a role for private giving to support children who miss out.

Some schools do not have adequate resources to provide the level of support needed for all children. Many of those who need extra support do not get it.

This section is concerned with the question: what can be done to address these gaps? What is the government's responsibility and what can donors do to support children with literacy difficulties?

The government's responsibility?

Literacy is a top political priority and there has been much emphasis and investment in improving standards in basic education over the last decade.

After a sharp rise in the proportion of literate children in the six years after 1998, the trend has since plateaued. Although there have been improvements, many children are still not progressing at the rate that we should expect. The 6-7% of lowest performing children at age 11 has remained stubbornly consistent.

The biggest barrier to increasing literacy rates seems to be lack of resources. Weak readers need individual attention, which schools often cannot provide.

What can donors do?

Literacy remains the primary responsibility of the government. Yet the statistics show that the government and schools are not doing enough.

Where the state fails, there is a role for private giving to support the children who miss out. The 'advancement of education' is a fundamental charitable purpose, forming part of the definition of charities in England and Wales and there are a host of charities working alongside schools to improve children's educational opportunities.²⁵

This report concentrates on what charities are doing to improve literacy for children who struggle to read. It looks only at charities that offer a viable opportunity for donors to give. This distinction needs to be drawn because there is a large number of organisations (including charities) that sell mainstream reading resources and training for teachers and classroom assistants to schools. Box 4 describes the work of five of these organisations.

As every school needs basic reading resources and trained staff, it seems reasonable to expect that these organisations should continue to run without donations. Donors should instead concentrate on initiatives that can bring in additional resources.

Box 4: Organisations selling reading resources and training to schools

The Fischer Family Trust has developed a 'Wave 3' programme for schools to use to improve the literacy of their weakest readers.²⁰ It uses teaching assistants to deliver intensive reading support to children. The Trust trains teachers and teaching assistants to deliver the programme.

The Catch Up Project is a programme for young people between 6 and 11 who are struggling with their reading.²¹ It is based on one or two individual ten minute sessions a week (15 minutes for 10-11 year olds). There is also an optional 20 minute group session. It can be delivered by teachers or teaching assistants after they have been trained.

Better Reading Partnerships is a project based within Bradford Local Authority. It trains 'reading partners' to work with school children of all ages.²² Reading partners might be teaching assistants or volunteers. Each reading partner spends 15 minutes with a pupil three times a week for ten weeks to support their reading. The model has been disseminated across the country and is now present in a large number of local authorities.

Toe By Toe is an approach used by a number of primary schools.²³ Toe by Toe is taught from a manual and does not require any formal training. It is therefore also a popular approach in other circumstances, in particular to train young offenders. Research evidence is mainly anecdotal but suggests positive results.

Ruth Miskin Literacy training and Read Write Inc. resources have developed a programme that is built on a strong base of synthetic phonics and can be adopted in schools.²⁴ The programme is for all children, with specific teaching for those who struggle. The approach has been popular and has been bought by around 900 primary schools across the UK. Feedback from schools and Ofsted reports indicate that it is an effective method.

Charities supporting children's literacy

This section identifies and describes a number of charities. It is organised around those gaps identified in the last chapter. In each case, we describe the work of the charity, what it achieves and discuss how it relates to other organisations in the area.

- **The most difficult 6-7%**
- **The remaining 14-15%**
- **Weak readers in secondary school**
- **Developing children's love of reading**
- **Increasing access to books and family participation in reading**

The most difficult 6-7%

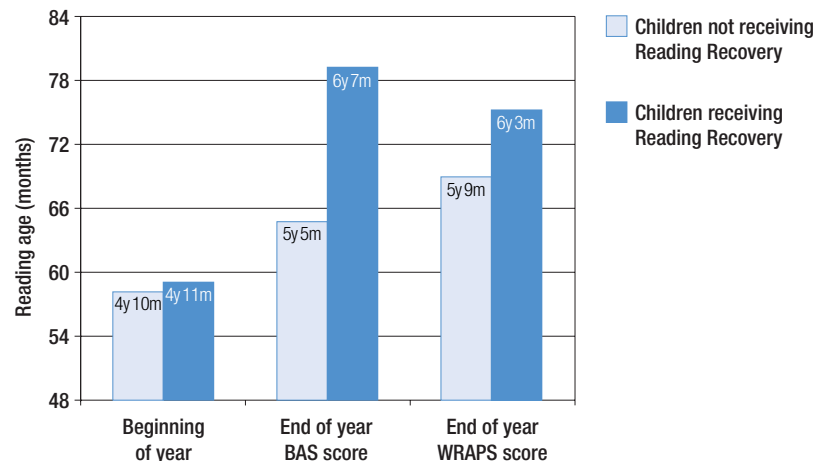
Reading Recovery is an intensive programme designed to meet the needs of the poorest readers in the second year of primary school (at age 5 to 6). Each child receives half an hour of reading support from a qualified teacher every day for 12 to 20 weeks. These teachers are trained in Reading Recovery methods and have to complete a year-long course before they can teach the programme. Reading Recovery does not follow a set reading scheme but trains teachers to vary the approach to suit the needs of the reader. Teachers are observed every year to ensure that they are meeting the required standard.

Reading Recovery is not a charity. It is an approach for supporting struggling readers at age 6. In England, Reading Recovery is being funded by **Every Child a Reader**, a partnership of charitable trusts, the Department for Education and Skills and the private sector, led by the KPMG Foundation. Every Child a Reader aims to raise £10m to spend in schools in England between 2005/2006 and 2007/2008. Its ultimate aim is to demonstrate the success of Reading Recovery and promote the approach to government so that it can be built into HM Treasury's spending review for 2009.

Using only trained teachers means that Reading Recovery is quite expensive. The cost to each school for a Reading Recovery teacher (paid for two-and-a-half days a week) is around £20,000 per year, for which the teacher can support eight to ten children. There are also costs associated with the management and infrastructure of Reading Recovery, as it is coordinated by local authorities and quality assured by the Institute of Education at the University of London. Overall, the total cost of the whole Reading Recovery programme is between £2,400 and £2,650 per child.

Reading Recovery is the most widely evaluated literacy programme in the UK. There

Figure 5: Graph showing improvements in reading scores after Reading Recovery (two measures given—British Abilities Scale (BAS) and Word Recognition and Phonic Skills Test (WRaPS))



is also evidence about the success of the programme from studies in other English-speaking countries, including the US and New Zealand.^{26, 27} In the UK, Reading Recovery publishes an annual report detailing its progress and achievements.²⁸

Reading Recovery's internal evaluations suffer from not having a comparison group of similar children, making it difficult to separate the effects precisely from other interventions that may go on in the school. However, a recent evaluation of London schools commissioned as part of the Every Child a Reader programme provides conclusive proof of significant effects on children's reading ability.²⁹ The study showed that those children who received Reading Recovery support achieved greater increases in reading scores compared with the group who did not. Figure 4 shows the effect on reading age (measured by two separate tests) after 11 months. On the British Abilities Scale, Reading Recovery children were 14 months ahead of the comparison group, an overall improvement of 20 months or a gain of 1.82 months for every month. On the Word Recognition and Phonic Skills Test, children were six months ahead of those without support. The study also found that Reading Recovery pupils ended the year over 11 'book levels' above the comparison group, on course to reach the national expected standard at age 7.²⁹

All children benefit from Reading Recovery but some achieve more than others. Reading Recovery's 2005/2006 annual report shows that 85% of children had caught up with their class and were able to continue learning without the need for further specialist support at the end of the programme. The remaining 15% make progress but will require continued support from their school. On follow-up six months later, all pupils maintain steady progress. Bearing in mind that Reading

“He's a different boy now—because he can do it. His whole attitude has changed.”

Parent of child on Reading Recovery programme

“Yeah, I think it made me better at reading ... I don't dread it no more.”

Abigail, age 11, who attended Reading Matters



Recovery is only available to the poorest readers, this is an impressive achievement.

Most UK evaluations of Reading Recovery look only at the short-term outcomes of the programme. A study of London and Surrey in 1998 looked at the effects of Reading Recovery on 95 children after four years. Compared to a similar group who did not receive Reading Recovery support, these children performed better on all the measures used. However, the difference with the comparison group did not reach statistical significance. Most significant positive impacts of Reading Recovery were on those children who were total non-readers at the start of the programme and those children eligible for free school meals.³⁰ Both groups were six months ahead of their peers at each stage.

In a separate study of 600 children who received Reading Recovery in 1998, 51% achieved the national expected standard at age 11 and 20% failed to reach the standard expected of a 7 year old.³¹ As these children are from the lowest achieving group, under normal conditions most could be expected to fall below the standard expected of a seven year old. As this study lacked a comparison group, it should be judged with greater caution. However, if we compare it to the figures above, it suggests that whilst for some children reading gains reduced, for most children Reading Recovery had a significant long-term benefit.

Springboard for Children runs a programme for primary school children of all ages who are struggling to learn to read in schools. It works in nine schools in London and three in Manchester. Each child receives 30-45 minutes of reading support twice a week for a period of one to two years. This support is provided by trained volunteers who come into the school. Springboard children follow a reading scheme called Soundworks, which combines fun activities, word games and reading tasks.

Since Springboard for Children uses trained volunteers, it is less expensive than Reading Recovery. Based on its 2006 expenditure of £677,000—when it reached 365 children—the cost of Springboard's support over the course of a year is around £1,850 per child. Springboard recovers just over 30% of these costs from the schools and funds the rest through charitable fundraising.

Springboard conducts its own internal monitoring and evaluation. Results from 2005 indicated that, over the first year, children made around 1.56 months progress in reading on average for every month they attended the course. This progress was fastest in the first term of support, and slowed later in the year (see Table 1). Overall, Springboard reports that 88% of children who completed the programme were able to catch up to the level of their classmates.

Table 1: Progress in reading over one year (measured in months gain for every month attending Springboard for Children)

Stage of support	Progress in reading in months
First term	1.76
Second term	1.45
Third term	1.47
Subsequent six months	1.00

Making direct comparisons between Springboard for Children and Reading Recovery is difficult because of the differences between the children they work with. Reading Recovery works only with pupils in the second year of primary school, across a wide range of schools. Springboard works with children between age 6 and 11, in a more limited number of schools. Both also use slightly different tests to measure reading scores.

The differences between Reading Recovery and Springboard for Children mean that it is not helpful to see them as rivals. Used together, they can even be complementary. For a discussion of where both are used in a school, see Box 8.

The remaining 14-15%

Volunteer Reading Help (VRH) recruits, trains, places and supports volunteers in primary schools in England. It has 2,000 volunteers who support 5,000 pupils in around 1,000 schools each year—which represents 6% of all schools. It works with children between age 6 and 11 years old who are having difficulties or who lack confidence with reading. Children typically already have a basic grasp of written language, but could benefit from more intensive support.

Before Springboard [my daughter] had no confidence. Now when we are out she will try to read the street names, posters and signs.

Mother of child on Springboard programme

Volunteers spend half an hour twice a week with each child, playing games to improve literacy and reading books of their choice. Each volunteer supports three children. Volunteers tend to be middle-aged women in part-time work, although there are people from all walks of life. Volunteers receive ongoing support and training from VRH. Box 6 gives an account of the experiences of a VRH volunteer.

Based on its annual expenditure of just over £2m, supporting 5,000 children, the cost per child is around £400 per year. As VRH increases the number of children it reaches (to 9,000 by 2010), this cost is likely to fall significantly.

VRH collects information from schools on the progress made by children. Teachers complete a questionnaire to monitor the effect of the support given. In 2006, 98% of children showed an improvement in their achievement, 61% made outstanding or significant progress in reading and 63% showed outstanding or significant progress in their self-confidence. The questionnaire also includes changes in reading scores, although information collected is patchy. VRH is not able to provide information on improvements in reading age, but plans to improve its measurement in the next three years.

Pooh Bear Reading Assistance Society in Hull recruits, trains and places volunteers in primary schools to help children with their reading. Schools value the work of the charity highly. It recruits volunteers from disadvantaged areas of Hull, giving them experience that can offer a step towards employment or further education.

Literacy Volunteers in Nottinghamshire also recruits and trains volunteers to work in primary schools. Schools value the work and believe that it makes a difference. In 2005, the charity placed 217 volunteers, helping around 1,000 children.

Other organisations that provide volunteers in schools include Business in the Community and Community Service Volunteers.

Weak readers in secondary school

Reading Matters works in secondary schools in the North of England. It places trained volunteers in secondary schools to support weak readers. Each young person receives one-to-one tuition twice a week for ten weeks. Its model is very similar to Volunteer Reading Help (above).

It costs Reading Matters £150 to support each child, based on an annual expenditure of nearly £200,000, supporting 1,300 pupils. This low cost compared to VRH is caused by the duration of support offered to each pupil. Reading Matters supports each pupil for a

Box 5: Volunteer Reading Help and Reading Matters volunteers give examples of children's experiences

'Charles is age[d] 9 and diagnosed as suffering from Asperger's Syndrome. When he started with Volunteer Reading Help he was described by his teacher as a "loner", lacking in confidence, fluency and comprehension. He was tense, didn't make eye contact and spoke quietly.'

'While working with his volunteer, Charles began to relax. His body language improved and he developed a sense of humour. His teacher noticed how he began to interact better with his classmates and made overall improvements in his work. A year later, Charles is firm friends with two boys in his class. He looks out for his helper and at times confides in her.'

'Colin was at the end of his first year at secondary school when he came along to Reading Matters. He was a very poor reader and showing challenging behaviour. When Colin first arrived, he was clearly a little unsure. He started reading books appropriate for his age. He clearly had weaknesses but showed an amazing knowledge of facts and loved doing competitive word games. We worked hard on building up his confidence and self-esteem, which had been very low. When he realised that he was a talented boy, even though reading was hard for him, he tried even harder.'

'The school coordinator kept in close contact and reported back how well Colin was doing. She told me that he had changed his behaviour in class.'

period equivalent to one school term, compared to three for VRH. This difference in the models reflects the different needs and attitudes of primary and secondary school pupils.

A recent independent evaluation testifies to the benefits of Reading Matters support. Pupils show clear benefits in terms of improvements in self-confidence and self-esteem. There is also an increase in reading scores measured against a comparison group. Reading Matters collects information from schools on pupils' reading scores and asks some of its volunteers to administer a simple reading test before and after the programme. However, it has not yet developed a way to accurately compile and analyse this data. Like VRH, Reading Matters could improve its processes for recording the outcomes of its work.

Developing children's love of reading

LIFT (Learning for Life with Technology) runs 'Digismart', a programme that combines computer-based activities with activities and games in after-school clubs. It is run for children in the penultimate year of primary school who attend 1.5 hours a week for two terms. It is designed for 10-year-old children to give them a boost before entering the transition to secondary school.

Established in 2002, Digismart has since expanded to 40 schools across seven local authorities. Reported outcomes of the programme include improved literacy and computing skills, alongside improvements in children's confidence, behaviour and self-esteem.³²

VRH is wonderful for children ... it provides the opportunity for them to build a relationship with an adult, improve communication skills and share a love of books.

Teacher talking about the benefits of VRH

Box 6: Volunteering to improve literacy: Volunteer Reading Help volunteer, Christine Wheeler

'I help four children aged nine and ten, who are bright as buttons but whose language at home is Arabic, Bengali or Albanian, so they were behind before they even started. Are they upset that they have been singled out for special help? Not a bit of it. They like the undivided attention in a bustling, busy school. They blossom with praise, encouragement and having someone who will give them the confidence just to try, even if they get it wrong at first.

The children have to be engaged in something they enjoy before you can even begin. Having fun is the aim, with the use of word games, crosswords and Top Trumps, as well as the books that they choose from the VRH book box. My four have their own reading diaries and lots of stickers to celebrate even one new word deciphered.

One boy loves his car stickers and is teaching me the intricacies of motor racing. He feels very proud that he has an expertise he can show me. Another volunteer plays chess with one of her children because she discovered he liked it and he discovered he was good at something—great for his self-confidence.

It is immensely rewarding when a small girl, who initially communicated with shoulder shrugs and “hated reading”, suddenly beams because, for the first time, she worked out a difficult word by breaking it down into syllables and understood its meaning. She now says “don’t help me, I can do it” and always turns up early, being most annoyed when a recent fire drill cut into her reading time.

Another boy brought in a rather crumpled newspaper he had been reading at home (reading at home! Oh joy!) about the World Cup. (We had long, in-depth conversations about Thierry Henry in particular and England in general.) He had suddenly realised that reading was not just about “boring books” at school, but could include great stuff like football. He has since produced a Harry Potter book he bought “with my own money”. I nearly wept.

Getting to know these funny, immensely likeable kids who try so hard as they battle through their literacy minefield, and seeing them beam with delight at every achievement, however small, is worth the many setbacks and days when they can’t concentrate, and worth every hour spent patiently coaxing and praising, persuading and perhaps repeating the same thing over and over again. After all, it could make a difference—it might change a life.'

I'm not embarrassed to read [out loud] now ... They don't laugh as much, 'cause I think I take my time now.'

Stephen, age 14

Learning Partnerships aims to improve education, training and employment opportunities for the people of Leeds. As part of its work, it runs after-school literacy clubs for primary school children. In the clubs, children play games, read to each other and share snacks. The clubs are designed to increase children's love of books and to improve their reading and writing skills. A survey of the clubs revealed that 80% of children always enjoyed attending the club and that it helps to increase children's reading ability.

ContinYou is a national community learning charity. It provides toolkits to schools to help them set up and run after-school clubs, including clubs for primary school children to improve literacy skills. This includes a toolkit for a programme entitled 'Book it!' to promote primary school literacy skills. It also runs a number of its own projects in schools.

It costs ContinYou £2,000 to run an after-school club for one term for 30 children, a cost of £60 per pupil. NPC's future publication on out-of-school hours learning will cover this in more detail.

Studies show that participation in after-school clubs increases children's self-esteem, and improves motivation and behaviour. A study of 8,000 pupils found firm evidence that those who participate in clubs achieve higher grades than would otherwise be expected.

Increasing access to books and family participation in reading

The National Literacy Trust is a national charity dedicated to improving literacy skills of children and adults, and creating an environment where reading can flourish. It carries out a strategic and practical role, working alongside all the organisations and professionals concerned with improving literacy.

As well as providing information and resources and policy work, it runs a number of projects including the scheme Reading is Fundamental, UK, which aims to promote a love of reading among children and their families. It is based around three events a year at which children receive a free book and participate in motivational activities, often involving their families.

Reading is Fundamental (RiF) projects are run by teachers and librarians on a voluntary basis and are typically based in areas of disadvantage where children are least likely to have access to books in the home. RiF is a flexible model that the Trust can adapt to suit the needs of the group. For example, there are projects that focus on children in care, or pupils in the transition between primary and secondary school.

In 2005, RiF involved over 24,000 children and distributed around 69,000 free books. The Trust evaluates RiF through sending questionnaires to the coordinators. Overall, 94% of coordinators say that the programme improves children's attitudes towards reading, 92% said that it increased the amount children read and 80% said that library use increased as a result of the project. This is achieved at a cost of around £20 per child, which includes the cost of three free books.

The Book Trust encourages people of all ages to enjoy books. It runs the National Book Week every October, during which schools and libraries run events and activities aimed at encouraging children to view reading as a source of pleasure. For this event, it sends out resource materials to over 28,000 primary and special schools. The Book Trust also runs a series of creative writing projects in schools and produces information on published children's books.

The next section discusses these organisations in the context of what donors should fund.

Table 2: Summary of the approaches and benefits of four different literacy projects

	Description	Target group	Benefits	Cost
Every Child a Reader (run by The KPMG Foundation) supporting Reading Recovery	<p>Intensive one-to-one reading support to six-year-old children who cannot read after the first year of primary school.</p> <p>Children attend a half hour session every day for 12-20 weeks.</p> <p>Programme delivered by qualified teachers instructed in Reading Recovery.</p>	<p>Children in the second year of primary school (5-6 years old) who have made little or no progress in reading. Children in the weakest 6-7% nationally.</p> <p>Works nationally. Every Child a Reader runs for three years from 2005/2006 to 2007/2008.</p>	<p>85% of children who attend reading Recovery reach a standard that means that they can continue in class without extra support. A recent evaluation reports that after 11 months, Reading Recovery pupils are 14 months ahead of a comparison group, a rate of 1.82 months gain in reading age for every month.</p>	£2,400 to £2,650 per child
Springboard for Children	<p>Intensive one-to-one reading support to children who are struggling to read and write in all years of primary school.</p> <p>Children attend Springboard for half an hour, twice a week, for one or two years.</p> <p>Programme delivered by trained volunteers.</p>	<p>Six to 11 year olds who are struggling with reading and writing and not making progress in class. Children in the weakest 6-7% nationally.</p> <p>Works in South London, North London and Manchester.</p>	<p>Springboard for Children reports an average of around 18 months improvement in reading over one year at a rate of 1.56 months per month. 88% reach the level of their classmates.</p>	£1,850 per child
Volunteer Reading Help	<p>Reading support and fun activities for weak readers and readers who lack confidence in primary school.</p> <p>Children attend two half hour sessions, twice a week, for one year.</p> <p>Programme delivered by trained volunteers.</p>	<p>Primary school children who are struggling with reading and lack confidence. Children must have a basic grasp of language.</p> <p>Works nationally.</p>	<p>Children benefit in self-confidence, self-esteem, behaviour and ability in reading as reported by their teachers. 61% of children make significant or outstanding improvement in reading. VRH is developing a quantitative measure for tracking improvements in reading ability.</p>	£400 per child
Reading Matters	<p>Reading support for weak readers who are falling behind at secondary school.</p> <p>Children attend two half hour sessions, twice a week for ten weeks</p> <p>Programmes delivered by trained volunteers</p>	<p>Eleven to 16 year olds who are weak readers and whose ability is hindering their progression at secondary school.</p> <p>Works in Leeds, Bradford, Manchester and Birmingham.</p>	<p>Children benefit in self-confidence, self-esteem, behaviour as reported by their teachers. 53% of children make significant or outstanding improvements in reading performance. A sample of Reading Matters children showed a small improvement in reading age scores when compared to a similar group.</p>	£150 per child

What to fund?

5

Effective charities can demonstrate their achievements.

A clear process for collecting results helps a charity to learn from its mistakes and refine its work.

The previous chapter gave examples of some charities working with young people to improve literacy.

How should donors choose which charities to support? What do we know about what makes an effective literacy charity? Is it possible to compare the different approaches, and which should donors support?

Giving should be based on evidence of what works, as well as a desire to change lives. Effective charities produce excellent results. Understanding what charities achieve will ensure that donors can be confident about giving.

What makes an effective charity?

NPC's research, and a review of the available evidence from elsewhere, suggests that effective charities display a number of common characteristics. These include: attention to measuring the results of their work and an ability to articulate these results; a clear and focused model for supporting children; and good value for money. This section deals with each in turn, discussing what we know and what we do not.

Measuring results

Effective charities can demonstrate their achievements. Capturing information can be a challenge, even though measuring the literacy abilities of children is a long-established practice. Schools use reading tests and 'book levels' to assess children's progress and national tests at ages 7, 11 and 14 provide an overall national picture.

Self-confidence, motivation and enjoyment of reading are also important benefits to measure as they will encourage the child to improve beyond the short term. Unlike reading scores, these are difficult to capture precisely.

A clear process for collecting results helps a charity to learn from its mistakes and refine its work. Reading Recovery uses the British Abilities Scales test to measure reading age and Springboard for Children uses a combination of the Word Recognition and Phonic Skills test (WRaPS) and Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT), depending on the age of the child. By contrast, Volunteer Reading Help and Reading Matters rely primarily on questionnaires distributed to

teachers to measure their benefit. These are effective at showing the benefits to children's confidence and self-esteem. However, both charities could do more to assess the effect on reading scores.

What rate of improvement should be expected from literacy support programmes? A report by the University of Sheffield suggests that 'good impact—sufficient to double the standard rate of progress—can ... be achieved and it is reasonable to expect it'.³³ This gives no indication of the time frame over which one should expect this change. For example, Springboard manages a 1.56 month gain for every month of support, but this is maintained over the course of a whole year, rather than a matter of weeks.

Short-term results are easier to measure than long-term results. Few organisations track the impact of their work beyond their direct involvement with the child. However, when discussing literacy programmes it is important to consider 'washout', or the degree to which the benefits are maintained in subsequent years. Do the initial benefits of the reading support persist? Or once the support has finished, do children regress?

In general, we know little about the effects of washout.³³ Of the charities discussed in this report, only Reading Recovery has any detailed long-term follow-up studies, but these were conducted in the mid-1990s.^{30, 34} At one year follow-up, children were significantly better than the comparison group. By four years, on average the children were ahead of the comparison group but the difference was not statistically significant. However, children eligible for free school meals and children who had been complete non-readers had sustained their gains and were ahead by around six months. In a more recent study, 51% achieved the national expected standard at age 11. When compared to the results after one year, this suggests that whilst for some children reading gains reduced, for most children Reading Recovery was beneficial in the long-term.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that some schemes can have positive effects beyond the pupils they were designed to benefit.³³ For example, schools report that instruction in Reading Recovery methods helps to improve general classroom teaching.

Model for providing support

Effective charities have a clear and consistent model for supporting children.

The charities described in this report use a variety of different approaches to support children and young people. NPC was impressed by the clarity and simplicity of many of these models. It appeared that those charities that focused on their core activity had the best processes for monitoring progress and the strongest sense of purpose.

Volunteers versus paid staff

Many charities use volunteers to support children. Volunteers can be an effective and low-cost way of supplementing provision in schools. The largest volunteer charity, Volunteer Reading Help, has around 2,000 volunteers, making a huge contribution to the education system. Volunteers are greatly beneficial if used correctly. There is some evidence in studies of mentoring that children value the attention they receive from volunteers more than attention from paid professionals as they know that volunteers are unpaid and are giving their time because they care.^{35, 36} Volunteers may also be able to offer an impartial 'listening ear' and build up a greater level of trust with a child than the teacher can. Box 7 estimates the financial value of VRH's volunteers.

However, research suggests that the use of volunteers has limitations. For those children with the greatest reading difficulties, highly skilled, intensive, one-to-one support is required to overcome problems successfully.³³ This suggests that the Reading Recovery model is perhaps the approach most suited to the weakest readers.

There are also some other considerations for using volunteers effectively. Volunteers must be selected carefully to ensure their reliability. They must also be trained. Training should include elements of child safety and protection, how children learn to read and how to deal with issues as they arise. This means that donors should be wary of projects that are very low cost, as this might indicate that volunteers do not receive enough support. It should also raise doubts as to whether the quality and quantity of initial training given to them is sufficient. In the best charities, volunteers will have access to ongoing support and advice.

Duration of support

How does the length of activity affect the quality of results? Is a quick ten-week burst of activity better, or is a whole year of support better? Is it better to have four sessions a week, or two?

It appears that this depends on the type of problem the charity is trying to solve. For the

Box 7: The financial value of Volunteer Reading Help's volunteers

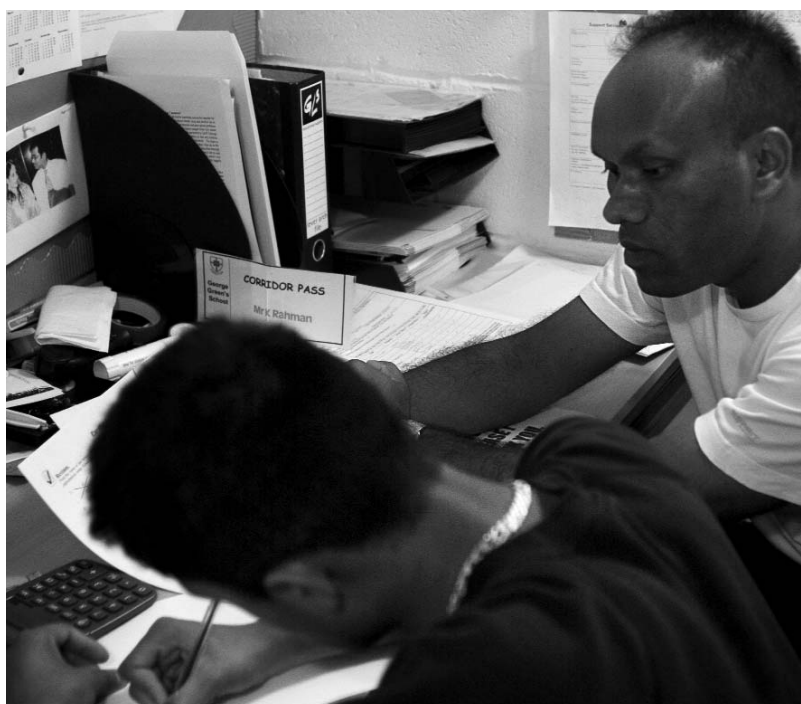
Volunteer Reading Help (VRH) uses 2,000 volunteers to help children become better and more confident at reading. Each volunteer sees three children for half an hour, twice a week for a year.

There are 36 weeks in the school year. Including one hour preparation time per week, each volunteer therefore spends a total of 144 hours per year working with children. Based on a minimum wage of £5.35 per hour, the annual value of each volunteer is around £770. (In reality, many of VRH's volunteers are professional people, including retired teachers and business men and women working part time, whose normal jobs would pay far more than this.) Taking into account all 2,000 volunteers, this means VRH is able to lever in over £1.54m of extra resources to benefit children.

Based on an annual expenditure of around £2m, it costs VRH £1,000 per year to support each volunteer. Therefore, for every £1,000 donated to VRH, it is able to lever in an extra £770 worth of volunteers' time. This equates to an extra 77 pence for every pound spent or, in investment terms, a return of 77%.

most challenging readers, intensive support is required. The study by the University of Sheffield mentioned earlier suggests that support programmes that last longer than one term do not necessarily produce proportionally greater benefits.³³ This fact is, in part, corroborated by the results for Springboard, where gains in the first term exceed those in the second and third.³⁷

However, longer-term support makes sense in other contexts. For children with a basic grasp of reading who lack confidence, support can help them gain self-belief. Evidence from the US suggests that a combination of short-term intensive support and long-term sustained support can be beneficial for children with severe literacy difficulties.³⁸ For example, combining short-term intensive support, such as Reading Recovery, with long-term support, such as Volunteer Reading Help, can help maintain benefits.



Photograph supplied by Kristian Buus

Literacy schemes can contribute to the overall effectiveness of a school.

Other issues

Our discussion of charities that support children with literacy difficulties raises a number of other questions.

Which children benefit most from support with their reading? Evidence from the Reading Recovery programme suggests that, in the long-term, children from disadvantaged backgrounds (indicated by their eligibility for free school meals) benefit most. A study in 1998 in London and Surrey found least evidence of washout among this group.³⁰ Figure 3 in the first chapter shows the ever-widening gap between pupils who receive free school meals and those who do not as they progress through school. The evidence from this study suggests that intensive reading support might be a way of reducing this gap.

Do literacy schemes make an impact beyond the children they directly work with? A control study suggests that the presence of Reading Recovery in a school may benefit other children as the techniques of the programme are applied in other contexts. More than four out of five teachers reported that having the interventions in the school had changed the ways that they taught reading.³⁴ This suggests that, if well integrated into the curriculum,

literacy schemes can contribute to the overall effectiveness of a school.

Does voluntary attendance make literacy schemes more powerful? Those charities that run after-school clubs rely on voluntary attendance from children, but the lack of quantitative research findings means that this question is difficult to answer. Anecdotal evidence suggests that voluntary attendance means that children are more motivated.

Cost

The information on the costs of poor literacy skills suggests that even for those literacy interventions that are relatively expensive, the investment is justified in terms of the savings to society later on. For example, the recent study for the KPMG Foundation suggests that every pound spent on Reading Recovery gives a return of £15 to the public purse.⁵ Around 60% of these savings come from taxes and reduced benefit claims, 15% from education services (such as special needs support and exclusion), 15% from health and social care, and 10% from crime (including court appearances, youth justice and prison costs). Similarly, one US study suggests that every dollar spent on early intervention saves seven dollars of social expenditure later. In the UK, around 70% of children excluded from school

Box 8: What works for the weakest 6-7%—Oliver Goldsmith Primary School, South London

Oliver Goldsmith is a large red-brick Victorian primary school next to the deprived North Peckham Estate in South East London. Its catchment area is among the poorest in England—more than half of its pupils are eligible for free school meals (the national average is 14%). The majority are of Black British Caribbean or African descent and a total of 35 languages are spoken. A quarter of pupils have special educational needs. Oliver Goldsmith made the national news in 2000 as the school of murdered schoolboy, Damilola Taylor.

Like many inner city schools, Oliver Goldsmith has its share of problems. Pupils often have difficult home lives, which influences their behaviour and achievements in school. Whilst in an average class of 30 children you would expect two or three children to be very weak readers, in Oliver Goldsmith, it is more likely that six to ten will struggle to read. Overall, in the national tests at age 11, Oliver Goldsmith does well with 71% achieving above the expected standard in English, compared to the national average of 79%.

The school is unique in using both **Springboard for Children** and **Reading Recovery** to tackle literacy difficulties.

Springboard for Children has operated in the school since the programme was founded in 1991. The charity has a unit within the school and supports around 85 children every year. Reading Recovery is being introduced into the school with financial support from Every Child a Reader. Once their Reading Recovery teacher has been fully trained, she will be able to support eight to ten of the poorest performing pupils each year.

Oliver Goldsmith Primary sees both Springboard and Reading Recovery as important parts of its literacy strategy. Deputy Head, Angie Low, explains:

'Both approaches are integral to the education of our pupils. Springboard works for us because it is well-established in the school, has a record of good results and we are able to send children that need it, whatever stage of school they are at. In particular, there is a high mobility rate among children in Peckham. Many of our pupils join mid-way through the school. Support needs to be available for all ages if these pupils are to be given a fair chance.'

Reading Recovery works a bit differently. It allows us to focus on the needs of the least able pupils at age six. It is less flexible, but it makes an astonishing difference.

Both approaches are highly valued by the school but for different reasons.'

The evidence suggests that Reading Recovery is the most effective way of rapidly improving reading ability, at least in the short term. However, the Springboard model is also very effective. It is proven to achieve a steady increase in reading ability, it can reach more children than Reading Recovery and it can work for children of different ages. Oliver Goldsmith Primary also values the therapeutic approach the Springboard teachers and volunteers offer to struggling children.

Oliver Goldsmith Primary anticipates that, once Reading Recovery is better established, the two approaches will work well together. Those children who leave Reading Recovery and still require extra support may attend Springboard should that be necessary and appropriate.

have basic literacy difficulties.³³ NPC's forthcoming study on the costs of truancy and exclusion indicates that preventing an exclusion from school saves society around £70,000 over the lifetime of the person.

What should donors be prepared to spend on improving the literacy skills of one child? The information NPC has collected shows that intensive support, such as that provided by Reading Recovery and Springboard for Children, is relatively expensive, at £2,400 to £2,650 per child and £1,850 per child respectively. The less intensive support provided by Volunteer Reading Help and Reading Matters costs less, at £400 and £150 per child respectively. Other approaches to improving literacy through after-school clubs and one-off events are less expensive at between £25 and £60.

Compared to the costs to the UK of poor literacy mentioned above, the cost of charitable activities is tiny. This makes the prospect of supporting any of these organisations look very attractive. The difference between costs reflects the intensity of the programmes and the resources devoted to each individual child. Each approach identified here has a different role in improving literacy, and each charity does a valuable job with its target group of children.

Charities in context

The charities described in this report offer support to children throughout their school years. These organisations do different jobs, with different groups of young people. Some focus primarily on improving children's attitudes towards reading and others focus on their attainment. Rarely are these organisations in direct competition with each other.

Figure 6 shows how the work of these organisations overlaps across the primary and secondary school spectrum. For example, Reading Recovery works only with children in the second year of primary school.

Springboard for Children works with primary school children of all ages. Volunteer Reading Help works with primary school children and Reading Matters with secondary school children.

Partnerships

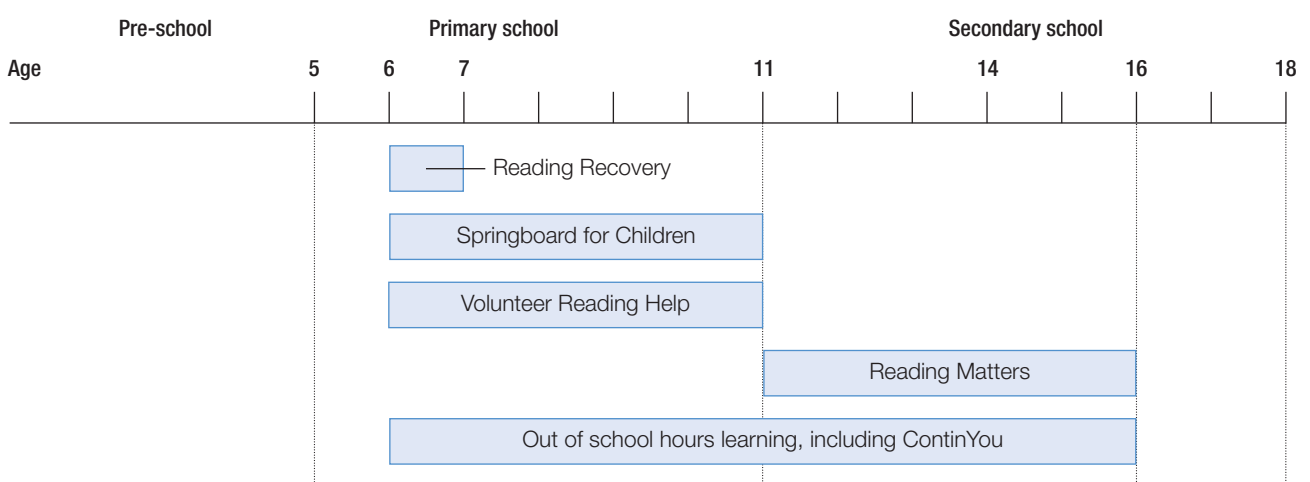
Partnerships between literacy charities demonstrate how organisations often complement each other, rather than directly compete. There is some evidence that working together, these organisations can be most effective. For example, longer-term literacy support working on confidence and self-esteem can prevent washout in the shorter-term intensive interventions. Box 8 gives an example of two organisations mentioned in this report that are working together.

A combination of intensive support and long-term sustained support can be beneficial for children with severe literacy difficulties.



Photograph supplied by Reading Matters

Figure 6: Charities and age of children with which they work



Conclusion

If you couldn't read, you would be unlikely to have even picked up or downloaded this report. Not being able to read immediately reduces the life chances and opportunities available to us. Today, reading is so fundamental that most of us have learnt to take it for granted.

Alongside schools, charities have much to offer in supporting young people to become better at reading. The examples of Simon, Charles and Colin given in this report—three ordinary children—vividly illustrate this. The charities described in this report offer a lifeline to young people who do not get enough support as part of schools' provision.

Giving a child the ability to read can be genuinely life-changing. It gives that child the chance to succeed where otherwise he or she would be more likely to fail. It can be the route out of poverty and the chance to fulfil ambitions. It is an opportunity to be a happy and productive member of society.

NPC urges donors to adopt a critical approach when giving away their money.

Effective giving

Donors can change lives. Improving literacy is one sure-fire way to achieve this. However, there are no simple answers in deciding where to give.

NPC recognises that improving education is an emotive subject, but we urge donors to adopt a critical approach when giving away their money. Giving in response to emotions is so much more potent when combined with thought and analysis.

Accompanying all of NPC's reports are charity recommendations. These describe how donors can support effective charities. These recommendations suggest charities that have made a proven impact on young people.

Improving the literacy of young people is one of the most profound things donors can do. Simon's story, referred to at the start of this report, is just one example of what charities can achieve. Generations of schoolchildren have been able to smile as they read the old saying: 'if you can read this, thank a teacher'.

With the help of donors, a future generation of children may be able to write a new saying:

'If you can read this, thank a donor'.



Photograph supplied by Volunteer Reading Help

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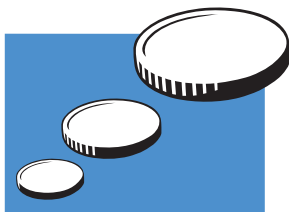
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