

THE POWER OF READING

How the next government can unlock every child's potential through reading



READ ON
GET ON

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For too long, too many primary school children in England have been allowed to fall behind in reading. The problem is particularly acute among our poorest children.

A fifth of all children in England, and close to a third of the poorest children, are unable to read well when they leave primary school. This is a crucial contributing factor towards the persistent educational divide in England, which sees thousands of children from low-income families significantly underperform at school each year. An inability to read well risks a life of poverty and struggle for too many of today's children.

Successive governments have spoken of the need to close the educational attainment gap and so realise a vision of society where no child is held back because they are born poor. And while some progress has been made in the last decade, it has been painfully slow. The reading gap – and therefore the overall attainment gap – is still wide. Children's futures are stunted, and the country as a whole pays, as economic growth is held back through the loss of so much potential.

In 2014, a coalition of organisations decided to come together to change this. We will not tolerate so many of our children being condemned to a life of struggle because they lack the essential skill of being able to read well. Changing the story requires a national mission involving charities, businesses, sportspeople, the media, communities – and, crucially, families: all of society must face up to the need to address this crucial problem.

THE CHALLENGE TO OUR POLITICAL LEADERS: THE TIME FOR ACTION IS NOW

The mission of the *Read On. Get On.* campaign is to ensure every child is able to read well when they leave primary school by the year 2025. This election year of 2015 is a pivotal one for achieving this goal.

The message to politicians in the run-up to the election is clear. They should feel the full weight of responsibility for ensuring every child leaves primary school able to read well, and so has a fair chance in life. Whoever forms the next government will have to act quickly if they are to instigate the huge changes necessary to close the reading gap in a decade.

The *Read On. Get On.* campaign is calling for everyone to play their part. But government has a crucial role in stimulating the society-wide change that is necessary – through both national leadership and significant policy change.

At the launch of our campaign, we set out four key drivers leading to children being able to read well:

- supporting children to develop good early language skills before starting school
- providing the right support to primary schools
- supporting parents and carers to help their children's reading
- celebrating the enjoyment of reading for pleasure in every community.

This report sets out the key policy priorities for the next government, and, in particular, in two crucial domains where national government has influence in England: in nurseries and in primary schools. Further reports will consider the roles of other services in England, and of the devolved governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The *Read On. Get On.* campaign is working closely with the Fair Education Alliance and the National Literacy Forum to achieve our core goals, and this report reflects and builds on their recommendations.

INVESTING EARLY: IMPROVING LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN THE EARLY YEARS

We make the case for prioritising action to improve early language skills among the poorest children. Children's early language skills have a major impact on the development of their literacy skills. Yet one in five young children in England are not reaching the expected level of communication and language skills for their age, rising to one in four children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

All three- and four-year-olds in England, as well as two-year-olds from disadvantaged backgrounds, are entitled to free part-time early education. Universal free early education provides a strong foundation for a world-class early education system that enables all young children to build good early language skills. There is a major opportunity to capitalise on this foundation by significantly strengthening the quality of the early education workforce.

Our priorities for early years education over the next parliament are:

1. Early education in every nursery in England to be led by an early years graduate by 2020, with government support initially focused on nurseries serving children from disadvantaged backgrounds.
2. Every nursery in England to have at least one non-graduate member of staff with an intermediate level qualification in young children's speech, language and communication.
3. The creation of a cross-departmental early years minister to coordinate Whitehall strategy and delivery on early years services across health, education and local government.

SUPPORTING SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS TO GET ALL CHILDREN READING WELL BY 11

Strong early language skills give children the essential foundation for learning in primary school. Once children reach primary school, the focus for policy should be to empower teachers with the skills and resources to build on this, or to help struggling children to catch up quickly.

Government should support the work of skilled professionals, with appropriate resources and access to the latest evidence on teaching practices, and hold schools to account for improvements in children's attainment – particularly among children from disadvantaged backgrounds. We are not calling for substantial new resources for primary schools because we recognise the fiscal challenges of the next parliament and believe that the priority for any new investment is in the early years.

Our priorities in primary education for the next government are:

1. A new strategy for improving the teaching of reading comprehension, especially for older primary school children.
2. Working with schools to develop a new generation of school leaders for literacy, focused on primary schools serving disadvantaged children.
3. Focusing school accountability on children from disadvantaged backgrounds who are falling behind, by exploring reforms to the pupil premium.



PHOTO: JO METSON SCOTT/SAVE THE CHILDREN

INTRODUCTION

Most of us read without even thinking about it. It's a skill we take for granted, yet one that is essential for being able to get on in life. As a child grows up, being able to read well not only enables them to discover new facts and to learn at school, but also opens them up to a world of new ideas, stories and opportunities.

Yet, one in five 11-year-olds in England cannot read well, rising to one in three among children from disadvantaged backgrounds.^{1,2} Children who cannot read well at the end of primary school are less likely to succeed in secondary school and, in adulthood, are likely to earn less than their peers.³

Read On. Get On. is a national campaign launched in September 2014 with a mission to get every child in the UK reading well by the age of 11 by 2025. We want to be halfway towards this goal by 2020. Since children's early language skills have a strong influence on their language and literacy throughout childhood,

we are also working to ensure that every five-year-old is achieving good early language development by 2020. One in five young children in England are not reaching the expected level in communication and language. Among children from disadvantaged backgrounds the figure is one in four.⁴

Ensuring that all primary school children can read well and that all young children have good early language skills must be a top priority in the next parliament. This report sets out the policy priorities for the next government to put England on a path to achieving the *Read On. Get On.* goals, focusing on the role of early education and primary schools.

In a parliament that will continue to be characterised by tight public spending, our priority for further investment is early education. Good quality early education has enormous potential to improve children's early language, especially among the poorest children. But quality remains too variable in England, and is often weakest in the poorest

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY ALL CHILDREN READING WELL?

In England, we assume that a child is reading well if they achieve level 4b in reading at the end of primary school. Currently, pupils are expected to achieve at least a level 4 in national tests that they take at the age of 11 (key stage 2 assessments). Level 4b refers to a test mark that is in the upper two-thirds of the level 4 mark. From 2016, new assessments will be in place that will replace 'levels', but the equivalent of a level 4b will become the expected standard for pupils at the end of key stage 2.

Achieving at least level 4b should mean that an 11-year-old can not just read the words on a page, but can also identify themes in a range of fiction and non-fiction, interpret the actions of characters and recognise the difference that context makes

to a story. They should be able to talk about the structure of a story and the way the writer has used language to convey different concepts or emotions. They should be able to read, understand and enjoy books like *Treasure Island* and the Harry Potter series, as well as magazines, websites, emails and reference books.

Analysis conducted for the *Read On. Get On.* campaign suggests that it is plausible that around 96% of children reach this standard of reading by the age of 11. This allows for a small number of children who are not able to reach this level because of severe learning difficulties or disabilities, or because English is not their first language and they have recently arrived in the country.

neighbourhoods. Our ambition is that early education in every nursery⁵ is led by a graduate with an early years degree, supported by skilled staff. We propose new investment through the early years pupil premium to pay for this.

For primary schools, we call for extra support for teachers and reforms within current spending limits. Our priorities are better resources for teachers supporting the reading skills of older primary school children; a new generation of school leaders for literacy; and stronger school accountability focused on children from disadvantaged backgrounds who are falling behind.

Achieving our ambitious goals requires a national mission, with action from across society. Government has a vital role but it is not a job for government alone. And while school has a huge impact on children's literacy, children start learning from the day they are born. Further reports will set out priorities

for employers, parents, charities, the NHS and local government, as well as the devolved governments.

All the major political parties have used the 2015 general election campaign to reiterate their commitment to the highest educational standards for all children, and to the principle that education provides a vital means of boosting the life chances of children from less affluent families. Raising standards of literacy (and numeracy) has been central to these commitments.

We are delighted to see this political consensus on the importance of literacy. Our mission is to ensure that whoever forms the next government turns these commitments into concrete action. The recommendations set out in this report will help the next government to put England on a course to achieving the ambition that every child, including those from the poorest families, can read well by the age of 11.

READ ON. GET ON., THE NATIONAL LITERACY FORUM AND THE FAIR EDUCATION ALLIANCE

Improving children's education across the UK, particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, is a mission shared by several organisations and coalitions.

The campaign, and the proposals set out in this report, are closely aligned with the *Vision for Literacy* manifesto set out by the National Literacy Forum, a coalition of 19 organisations dedicated to raising literacy standards across the UK.⁶ The manifesto sets out four pathways to universal literacy:

- more early language and literacy provision in homes and early years services
- more effective teaching of reading, writing and spoken language skills in schools
- universal access to reading materials and programmes to ensure that children read for enjoyment
- stronger partnerships between education and business to ensure that all school leavers have literacy fit for employment.

The Fair Education Alliance is a coalition of 27 organisations committed to reducing the achievement gap between children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and their better-off peers. The alliance has five goals – to:

- narrow the gap in literacy and numeracy at primary school
- narrow the GCSE attainment gap at secondary school
- ensure young people develop key strengths, including resilience and wellbeing, to support high aspirations
- narrow the gap in the proportion of young people taking part in further education or employment-based training after finishing their GCSEs
- narrow the gap in university graduation, including from the 25% most selective universities.

The *Read On. Get On.* campaign is driving action to achieve the alliance's goal of narrowing the gap in literacy at primary school.

I THE ROLE OF EARLY EDUCATION IN CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT OF READING SKILLS

A core goal of the *Read On. Get On.* campaign is to ensure that every child achieves a good level of early language development by the age of five.

Early language skills have an enormous impact on children's literacy and language in later years. Reaching the headline goal of all children reading well by the age of 11 cannot be achieved unless substantial progress is made in improving children's early language skills, particularly among children living in poverty.

In this chapter, we call for further investment in the next parliament to raise the quality of early education by investing in the workforce, focusing new resources on children from disadvantaged backgrounds. We also point to additional reforms in wider services – including health – to promote strong early language development among the youngest children. We will develop this theme in later phases of the campaign.

EARLY LANGUAGE SKILLS AND READING AT 11

Children's early language skills can have a major impact on the development of their literacy skills during primary school, and their ability to read well by the age of 11 – and this relationship starts very early in a child's life. A child's language skills at the age of two have a strong influence on their school readiness at the age of five, and this can continue to affect how children get on at school as they grow up.⁷ Five-year-olds with poor language and literacy development face a substantially higher risk of low achievement at age seven and beyond.⁸

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to have weaker early language skills than their better-off peers. The gap in vocabulary (the main indicator of young children's language skills) is relatively large for three-year-olds and even larger when children are five.⁹ On average, children from low-income families are nearly 12 months behind their better-off peers in vocabulary by the time they start school.¹⁰

Poorer children who are behind in language when young are also less likely than their peers to catch up. Children living in poverty who experience language delay at the age of three are significantly more likely to be behind in literacy at the age of 11 than children in better-off families who experience language delay.¹¹ In addition, children from disadvantaged backgrounds who do well in vocabulary tests at age three are more likely to fall behind by the age of five than their wealthier classmates.¹²

WHAT DRIVES EARLY LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT?

The precise effects of all the different influences on young children's development can be difficult to disentangle. Broadly, there are three sets of factors at play:

- behavioural and health factors such as parenting styles, parents' health, enrolment in good quality early education, and the home learning environment
- structural factors including the age of the mother, the educational attainment of the parents and the size of the family
- other factors that are not easily picked up in studies of children's development.

Analysis of the Millennium Cohort Study shows that behavioural and health factors play an important role in explaining the gap in vocabulary between young children from poor and wealthy backgrounds. Dearden et al (2010) found these factors account for about one quarter of the difference in early language development among three-year-olds from poorer and richer families.¹³ They are largely factors that could be changed – for example through government policy or enabling parents to get more support. A greater proportion of the gap was explained by differences in family structure, which are largely factors that are more difficult to change. Around a third of the difference was unexplained.

The impact of low income is largely felt through the way it shapes the health, behaviour and attitudes of parents and children. The quality of the home learning environment has a bigger impact on young children's language development than family background. However, parents living in poverty are more likely to struggle to provide at least some aspects of a good quality home learning environment, particularly if they don't have the right support.

Living in poverty is associated with higher levels of stress and anxiety among parents, which tends to make it harder for them to support their child's early development.¹⁴ This may partly explain why low-income parents are less likely to regularly read with their young child.¹⁵ A lack of money also makes it harder for parents to buy lots of books and educational toys. Although these are not essential for children's early learning, they can be a great help to parents.

This is why encouraging a love of reading in the home is so important. Programmes that support parents and extended families, including by providing books and helping families to draw on the support offered through local libraries, can make a real difference to young children's language and reading skills.

THE ROLE OF EARLY EDUCATION

Access to good quality early education has been shown to be one important route through which young children's early language development can be strengthened. It is particularly amenable to policy change, with a strong evidence base on what counts as good quality, and on how government can work with providers and parents to improve access and

quality. This is by no means the only area where action is required to ensure that all young children have strong language skills, but the potential impact on young children, particularly those from less affluent families, should make it a priority for the next government.

Strong evidence on the benefits of good quality early education comes from the Effective Provision of Preschool Education study, which has tracked the progress of more than 3,000 children in England since the late 1990s.¹⁶ In the study, children made stronger progress by the age of five if they had attended a nursery or other form of childcare, but only if the provision was led by qualified staff. The effect was particularly strong when the nursery manager was highly qualified (to at least degree level in a relevant subject) and led the development and delivery of an early learning curriculum.

The presence of trained teachers in nurseries had the biggest impact on children's early development. Nursery teachers provided strong levels of language stimulation for individual children, and had the skills to plan developmental activities and carry out individually tailored assessments of children's development. They also had a strong role in leading professional development within the nursery, helping to improve the practice of less qualified staff. The benefits of attending good quality early education were particularly strong for boys and for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, both of whom are more at risk of experiencing problems in early language development.

Further evidence on the relationship between graduate-led early education, high quality provision and children's language development comes from several other studies:

- The Graduate Leader Fund was launched in 2006 to enable private and non-profit nurseries to employ a suitably-qualified graduate. Nurseries that gained a graduate leader made much more significant improvements in quality for children aged 30 months to five years than settings that did not. Improvements were found across all aspects of provision, including support for communication, language and literacy.¹⁷
- Analysis by Mathers and Smees (2014) found that, in private and non-profit nurseries operating in low-income neighbourhoods in England, only those that were graduate-led were able to provide the same quality as nurseries in wealthier

neighbourhoods.¹⁸ This was most evident in support for language and literacy, as well as in the quality of interactions with children and support for children's individual needs.

- The evaluation of the pilot of free early education for two-year-olds found that children using the free entitlement had stronger vocabulary development than similar children who did not, but only if they were in a good quality nursery.¹⁹ These effects were still present when children turned five.

THE QUALITY OF EARLY EDUCATION IN ENGLAND

There is strong evidence that good quality early education has a positive impact on children's early learning, including their language skills, and that this impact is stronger for children from low-income families. However, despite considerable improvements in staff qualifications, there is still too much variability in the quality of early education in England.

The last 20 years have seen a major expansion of formal childcare in England, transforming the support available to families with young children. Spending on early education per child more than tripled in real terms between 1997/98 and 2009/10.²⁰ More financial support for childcare costs through the tax credit system and childcare vouchers has reduced the costs to parents, making it easier for them to work. A free entitlement to part-time early education for all three- and four-year-olds, extended to two-year-olds in low-income families, ensures that all children have access to early education.

Despite this progress, we are only part way towards the investment that is needed to realise the full potential of good quality early education for children's early language development.

Analysis by Blanden et al (2014) found that the introduction of free early education for three-year-olds had a relatively small impact on children's outcomes at age five, which was even smaller at age seven and had disappeared entirely by the time children turned 11.²¹ This is likely to be because the introduction of free early education has not yet driven a major increase in the number of young children receiving good quality early education.

Free early education can be delivered in a nursery attached to a school, by a childminder, or at a nursery or playgroup run by a private company, charity or voluntary organisation. In this report, we refer to the latter as a private nursery. Take-up of free early education for three- and four-year-olds is very high and nearly all children take a place with a school or private nursery (childminders are often used to provide extra care beyond the free entitlement).

Among three-year-olds, there has been no change in the proportion attending a school nursery, which are led by trained teachers and are more likely to offer good quality early education. Most children were already attending childcare before the free entitlement was introduced and the majority of new places were created in the private sector, where quality is typically lower.²²

Furthermore, although there have been significant improvements in the quality of early care and education offered by private nurseries, there is still much further to go.

Under the previous Labour government, a single early years curriculum was introduced for all nurseries and childminders receiving public subsidy and inspected by Ofsted. New minimum qualification rules were put in place and steps taken to improve the quality of qualifications. The coalition government has led further reforms to strengthen early years and childcare qualifications at both intermediate and degree levels.

This activity has helped to drive a substantial increase in qualification levels among the early years workforce over the last 20 years, particularly to raise the minimum qualification level. In the late-1990s, less than a third (29%) of the workforce had a childcare qualification to at least level 3 (an intermediate level equivalent to A levels).²³ By 2013, the vast majority of staff in nurseries delivering the free childcare entitlement had a minimum level 3 qualification – 87% in private full day care nurseries and 89% in school nurseries.²⁴

However, despite some progress, the number of staff with a relevant degree remains low, with large differences between private and school nurseries. In 2013, just 13% of staff in private full day care nurseries had a degree, compared to 35% in school nurseries. Only three out of five (59%) full day care nurseries had at least one member of staff qualified to degree level in a relevant subject, compared to 100% of school nurseries.²⁵

Poor quality early education is a particular problem for children attending private nurseries. School nurseries serving deprived neighbourhoods typically provide good quality early education on a par with those in wealthier neighbourhoods. And children living in poverty are more likely to attend school nurseries than their better-off peers. However, the quality of private nurseries is, on average, lower in deprived neighbourhoods. Only graduate-led nurseries are able to close the quality gap with nurseries in wealthier neighbourhoods (Mathers and Smees 2014).

At the same time, while it is positive that the majority of staff in both school and private nurseries now have at least a level 3 childcare qualification, the quality of these qualifications is highly variable. Many do not include specific training in young children's language, speech and communication. There is therefore a considerable need for extensive opportunities for continuing professional development for the whole childcare workforce, in order to ensure that all young children can have language development problems properly identified and remedied.

2 IMPROVING LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN THE EARLY YEARS

Reaching the goal of all children reading well by the age of 11 will require all young children to have access to good quality early education. There is strong evidence that good quality early education must be led by a suitably-qualified graduate, supported by skilled staff.

Universal free early education provides a strong foundation for creating a world-class early education system capable of ensuring that all children have good early language. As we look ahead to a new parliament, there is a major opportunity to capitalise on this foundation by investing in the early education workforce, so that every child gets the best early education – especially those growing up in poverty.

Our ambition should be that the entire early years workforce is of a standard that best supports the development of all children, but particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. This means continued investment, training and support for all staff.

We have two immediate priorities for ensuring that the early education workforce has the skills needed to support young children's early language development:

1. By 2020, early education in every nursery in England should be led by an early years graduate, with government support for this initially focused on nurseries serving disadvantaged children.
2. By 2020, every nursery in England should have at least one non-graduate member of staff with an appropriate intermediate-level qualification in young children's speech, language and communication.

We propose incentivising these moves by increasing the early years pupil premium over the course of the parliament, and making the enhanced rate available only to nurseries that employ an early years graduate.

Our early years policy proposals focus on early education. However, there is a major role for wider health and family services to support young children's early language development. Towards the end of this chapter, we set out the priorities in this area, but plan to return to this topic in more detail in future reports.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE NEW GOVERNMENT

Recommendation 1: Ensure an early years graduate leads early education in every nursery by 2020, prioritising those serving disadvantaged children

The next government should have an ambition that every nursery in England delivering free early education is led by a trained early years graduate by 2020. The priority should be to support nurseries serving deprived neighbourhoods to do this. Every young child, but especially those growing up in poverty, should be able to benefit from good quality early education led by a trained early years graduate. Currently, two in five children attending free early education in a private nursery are missing out.

Early years graduates have a vital role in leading the development and delivery of the early years curriculum in nurseries. They plan developmental activities for all children in the nursery and support other staff to deliver appropriate activities. They lead professional development across the nursery staff, helping to improve the practice of less qualified staff. But they should also spend a significant amount of time with children, observing their progress, identifying any weaknesses in development and designing tailored packages of support for children at risk of falling behind.

Delivering an ambition of an early years graduate in every nursery will require additional funding from government to support university places and to subsidise the higher wages of qualified professionals. In many cases, the business models of private nurseries do not allow them to employ an early years graduate. This is particularly true in deprived neighbourhoods where nurseries have to keep their fees affordable for local parents. There is a strong case for the government to step in, given the demonstrable impact of early years graduates on children's early learning. On page 10 we set out our preferred option for how government could incentivise this, focusing scarce resources on the most disadvantaged children.

Further action is also needed to increase the number of qualified early years graduates who can take on a curriculum leadership role in both private and school nurseries. This will ensure that private nurseries are

able to drive up standards and that school nurseries are able to expand provision of high quality places. It will require a mix of higher numbers of people undertaking an early years degree and more people taking the post-graduate certificate in education focused on three- to seven-year-olds, which leads to qualified teacher status. It will also require action to encourage the best candidates to embark on both routes and to work in the early years sector once they have qualified.

The next government should continue to build on existing programmes in this area. This includes supporting Teach First's early years programme, which hopes to be training at least 200 nursery and reception teachers a year by 2018. Trainees are placed in schools where the majority of pupils are from low-income backgrounds, gain qualified teacher status and also complete a placement in a setting caring for children aged 0–3.

WHAT IS AN EARLY YEARS GRADUATE?

The coalition government has introduced a new 'early years teacher' (EYT) status for graduates with a suitable degree in early education. Our ambition is that someone with this status, its predecessor 'early years professional', or qualified teacher status, should lead development and delivery of the curriculum in every nursery in England.

The EYT status is designed to be comparable with the qualified teacher status for school teachers. Degree courses that lead to the EYT status have the same tough entry criteria. However, in practice, the two qualifications are not portable between early education and schools. Someone who qualifies as an EYT cannot work

as a teacher in a primary school, limiting their career development opportunities. This should be rectified by moving towards a single status for all teachers, with an early years specialism for those who want to work with young children.

At the same time, an EYT working in a private nursery does not have to be paid according to the pay scales that those with qualified teacher status benefit from. This potentially disincentivises the strongest candidates from taking the EYT route and from working in a private nursery when they qualify. There is therefore an important role for government to provide the financial support for private nurseries to employ well-qualified EYTs.

Recommendation 2: Ensure at least one non-graduate member of staff in every nursery with an intermediate-level qualification in young children’s speech, language and communication

Ensuring there is an early years graduate leading practice in every nursery would provide strong foundations for children’s early language and literacy, particularly for those children growing up in poverty. However, stronger action is also required to upskill the whole early years workforce, with a focus on early language and literacy. This would ensure that every member of staff has a strong basic understanding of how to support early language skills among the children they work with every day.

Since 2010, modules on young children’s language and communication have been a mandatory element of the training required to achieve a recognised intermediate-level qualification in early education and childcare.²⁶ The next government should commit to retaining this in the training requirements for all intermediate level early education staff.

However, the majority of staff delivering free early education during the next parliament will have been trained before this new requirement was introduced. Although the vast majority of staff delivering free early education now have intermediate level childcare qualifications, the quality of these qualifications is very variable and many would not have included dedicated training on supporting children’s early language and literacy.

The ambition should be that at least one non-graduate member of staff in every nursery has an intermediate (level 3) qualification in young children’s speech, language and communication. Staff who have gained an intermediate level childcare qualification since 2010 will have achieved this already. Staff with older qualifications should be supported to work towards a level 3 award in young children’s speech, language and communications skills. The focus should initially be on nurseries serving low-income neighbourhoods.

A level 3 award in young children’s language gives staff the skills to spot potential problems early and identify appropriate interventions to help children catch up. It should also enable staff to work with parents to ensure they have the skills and confidence to support their children’s early language development at home. The qualification is designed for people already working in early education, and in other services supporting children.

Initiatives like the early language development programme also offer an important first step towards strengthening the early language capacity of the early years workforce. Universal whole setting training such as this can provide a springboard for practitioners to move into a more formal qualification.

Recommendation 3: Introduce workforce improvements paid for through an ‘enhanced’ early years pupil premium for nurseries with an early years graduate

From April 2015, the early years pupil premium will provide extra funding for nurseries delivering free early education for three- and four-year-olds from disadvantaged backgrounds. This includes children from low-income families and those who have been in local authority care. The premium will be worth £300 for each eligible child, and about 170,000 three- and four-year-olds will be eligible in 2015. The money is paid straight to the nursery with no conditions on how it is spent, although nurseries will be accountable to Ofsted for how they use the money to improve the educational development of disadvantaged children.

We propose increasing the value of the early years pupil premium over the course of the next parliament for nurseries that employ at least one early years graduate. This would effectively create two rates for the early years pupil premium: a flat rate for all disadvantaged children; and an enhanced rate for disadvantaged children in nurseries with an early years graduate.

The aim of this move is to incentivise nurseries to recruit an early years graduate and ensure that additional public spending is tied to measures known to significantly improve educational outcomes for children growing up in poverty. Given large variations in quality and workforce standards in early education, there is a strong argument to make additional funding conditional on further improvements in quality.

In line with the Fair Education Alliance, we also propose initially concentrating an enhanced early years pupil premium on nurseries with higher numbers of eligible children.²⁷ This would incentivise nurseries that employ at least one early years graduate to expand provision for poorer children, driving up the number of good quality places for the children who need them most.

HOW COULD AN ENHANCED EARLY YEARS PUPIL PREMIUM WORK?

An enhanced early years pupil premium is designed to enable and encourage a nursery to hire an early years graduate. In most cases, this would mean a nursery finding the money to pay the difference between the salary of an early years worker with an intermediate (level three) qualification and an early years graduate.

The average full-time salary for a senior manager in a full day care nursery is £23,300 and the average for non-managerial childcare staff is £14,100.²⁸ A nursery wanting to replace a non-managerial staff member with a graduate would need to find an extra £9,200.

Full day care nurseries have, on average, 59 children, of whom 21 are aged three and six are aged four. In an average-sized nursery where one third of three- and four-year-olds are eligible for the early years pupil premium, a total of nine children would be eligible for the payment. Under

current plans, a nursery with this number of eligible children would receive early years pupil premium resources worth £2,700 in total each year. An enhanced early years pupil premium set at the same level as the primary pupil premium (currently £1,300) would generate a total of £11,700 income for the same nursery. This would be enough to pay the extra salary costs of a graduate as well as invest in further workforce development.

The maximum cost of increasing the early years pupil premium to £1,300 for all three- and four-year-olds would be £170 million. The goal should be for all nurseries serving disadvantaged children to have an early years graduate and therefore qualify for the enhanced premium. However, these costs would be reduced in the short-term by initially focusing the enhanced early years pupil premium on nurseries serving higher numbers of disadvantaged children.

However, tying further increases in the early years pupil premium to having an early years graduate would not mean that the premium could only be used to pay for a graduate. There would continue to be no restrictions on how nurseries spend the premium, provided they can demonstrate the benefits for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Nurseries would be able to use at least part of the early years pupil premium to support intermediate level training in young children's language, as set out above, as well as wider workforce development to address identified needs.

While government should not put restrictions on how the early years pupil premium is spent, it should continue to strengthen related guidance and the accountability of providers. This should draw on evidence currently being developed by both the Early Intervention Foundation and the Educational Endowment Foundation.

BEYOND EARLY EDUCATION: THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF HEALTH AND FAMILY SERVICES

Our goal of all five-year-olds achieving a good standard of language by 2020 can only be met if the proposals for early education set out in this report are combined with action to ensure that a range of other services are supporting children's early language development.

This is crucial because children's language skills up to the age of two have such a strong impact on their school readiness and literacy in later years, and are influenced by the environment they grow up in from birth. With fewer children under the age of three attending formal early education, other services potentially have a critical role in supporting children's early language and helping parents to do the best for their children.

Between 2010 and 2015, there have been significant reforms in a range of services for families with young

children, beyond early education. These include major reforms to public health:

- From 1 October 2015, local authorities will take over responsibility from NHS England for planning and funding public health services for children under five, including health visiting. Public health budgets for local authorities are ringfenced, putting them under less pressure than many other local services.
- A new public health outcomes framework for 2013–16 sets out the outcomes that local services are expected to work towards. It includes measures of young children’s school readiness (although there are no specific goals around early language); and a proposed new integrated check on children’s development at the age of two.
- The coalition government has expanded the health visiting service, recruiting and training an extra 4,200 health visitors; and has doubled the number of places on the Family Nurse Partnership, an intensive health visiting programme for first-time young mothers.

These moves provide an enormous opportunity to join up the objectives and delivery of services to support children’s early health and learning. This includes support for parents to foster their children’s early language development right from birth.

The Healthy Child Programme, the universal package of support for families with children under five, delivered by health visitors, includes specific objectives around strengthening children’s early learning. But the lack of integration between health and education services can make this objective very difficult to deliver. Empowering local authorities to plan and commission public health services for young children could help to overcome some of the longstanding divisions between health and education services. Local authorities are likely to have broader

objectives for services for young children than NHS services, where the focus is primarily on health outcomes.

In addition, there has been new investment and significant political attention on services to support families with complex needs. The Troubled Families programme initially had a goal to ‘turn around’ the lives of the 120,000 most troubled families in England by April 2015, and has since been expanded and extended. It is led by local authorities, with an investment of £448 million over three years from central government, and an expectation of additional resources of £600 million from local authorities. The programme has an objective to increase school attendance, but has been focused on older children at risk of persistent truancy, although the programme was extended to families with young children in 2014.

We plan to return to the role of health and family services in more detail in a report to be published later in 2015. But as an initial set of priorities, we propose that the next government:

- creates a new cross-departmental early years minister post, to drive the coordination of early years services within Whitehall, as proposed by the National Literacy Forum
- commits to reviewing the impact of reforms to public health and support for families with complex needs, including the impact on support for children’s early language development
- considers how the proposed new developmental check for two-year-olds can help to identify and address problems with children’s early language development
- explores opportunities to include more specific goals on early language development in an updated public health outcomes framework due in 2016; and in updated objectives for the Healthy Child Programme.

3 IMPROVING CHILDREN'S READING IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Over the last two decades, there has been good progress in improving children's educational attainment in England, including in reading. Children eligible for free school meals are catching up with their better-off peers. However, at current rates of progress, significant numbers of children will continue to fall behind in reading, missing out on a world of opportunities at school and beyond.

This risk will remain greatest for children growing up in poverty – yet being able to read well offers an important route out of poverty for many children. If we do not achieve the goals set by the *Read On. Get On.* campaign, in the next decade close to 1.5 million children will turn 11 without being able to read well.³⁰

England has the highest level of inequality in reading levels between better-off and less affluent children in Europe, with the exception of Romania,³¹ and there are also big variations in children's reading ability across England. In the best areas, nearly nine out of ten 11-year-olds can read well; in the weakest areas, just six out of ten children are reaching this benchmark.³² The performance of the strongest areas shows that there are no excuses why nearly every child, including those growing up in poverty, cannot learn to read well, with the right support.

Strong early language skills give children the essential foundation for learning in primary school. In this chapter, we set out how this can be built on in the primary years. Our approach is rooted in the skills and experience of teachers and school leaders. In the past, top-down approaches have helped to raise basic standards in literacy.³³ But as literacy standards in primary schools have steadily improved, the challenges now are to address the full range of complex reasons why some children still fall behind, to stretch children who have the potential to excel,

and to encourage all children to regularly read for pleasure. These more complex challenges require powerful and accountable teachers and school leaders, not standardised national programmes.

Government should support the work of skilled professionals, with appropriate resources and access to the latest evidence on teaching practices, and hold schools to account for improvements in children's attainment – particularly among children from disadvantaged backgrounds. We are not calling for substantial new resources for primary schools because we understand the fiscal challenges of the next parliament and believe that the priority for any new investment is in the early years, as set out above.

But the next government can have a major role driving a national focus on reading attainment in primary schools. Our priorities for the next government are:

1. Improving the evidence base available to schools on reading comprehension, learning from the spread of phonics teaching approaches.
2. Working with schools to develop a new generation of school leaders for literacy.
3. Focusing school accountability on children from disadvantaged backgrounds who are falling behind.

READING POLICY IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Over the last decade, there has been a clear shift towards teaching younger primary school children the basics of reading through phonics. This has rested on a strong evidence base showing the impact of phonics teaching approaches on children's basic reading skills. Independent assessments of the merits of specific phonics approaches have enabled

teachers to confidently select the best strategies for their pupils. In this section, we argue that a similar approach should now be adopted to embed the use of evidence-based teaching practices for reading comprehension.

Phonics is a way of teaching children to read by identifying the sounds of individual letters and combinations of letters. Knowing the sounds of individual letters enables children to 'decode' new words – that is, to work out how to say a new word using their understanding of how to say individual letters. This is a precursor to being able to understand the meaning of the word. There is significant evidence that phonics is the most effective way of teaching the basics of reading, particularly for children aged five to seven.

Phonics became a priority for the previous Labour government following the Rose Review of early reading in 2006,³⁴ and this has continued under the coalition government. The coalition introduced the phonics screening check for six-year-olds in 2012. This short, teacher-led assessment is used to check children's 'decoding' skills and identify those who need extra support. Just under three quarters (74%)³⁵ of children met the expected standard in 2014, up from 58%³⁶ in the first year of the test.

This substantial improvement is likely to be the result of several factors. The introduction of the screening check and the associated national focus on phonics gave schools a clear steer about which teaching practices the coalition expected schools to prioritise. But the government backed this up with new evidence-based resources to help teachers identify the best programmes and approaches for teaching phonics.³⁷ The Department for Education appointed an independent expert to develop a set of criteria for judging the potential effectiveness of phonics approaches. The full range of phonics teaching strategies was then assessed against this criteria and the results published, enabling schools to easily identify which approaches are likely to have the greatest benefit for children – and which should be avoided.

The coalition's focus on phonics has clearly led to improvements in 'decoding' skills among young primary school children. However, there has been less of a focus on the teaching of reading comprehension, which is particularly important for older primary school children. Reading comprehension focuses on improving children's

understanding of the books and other texts they are reading. Strong reading comprehension skills make reading fun, engaging and memorable, and are the source of children's wider learning.

Problems with reading comprehension are one of the main reasons for children not reaching the expected standard of reading by the age of 11.³⁸ Most worryingly, the gap in reading ability between children from poorer and better-off families starts to widen significantly after the age of seven.³⁹ This suggests that stronger interventions are needed to ensure that older primary school children, from poorer families in particular, have more opportunities to build on the strong foundations provided by phonics.

There is a strong academic evidence base supporting the use of reading comprehension strategies to improve the reading abilities of older primary school children (especially those aged eight and over). The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) has found that these strategies add an average of five months to children's reading progress, if used correctly – which equates to 'moderate impact' compared to the full range of interventions reviewed by the EEF.⁴⁰ They are also relatively low-cost, at around £48 per pupil a year to cover teacher training and materials. These costs can easily be covered through existing pupil premium budgets. Reading comprehension approaches seem to be more effective for boosting the reading ability of older primary school children than, for example, phonics.

Reading comprehension approaches typically help children to understand how different kinds of texts are structured, and how they can use this to follow a story or argument. Children learn how to summarise and clarify what they have learned from a text, and to identify for themselves sections or concepts they haven't understood. They learn how to make inferences about behaviours or themes that might be implicit rather than explicit, and to predict what might happen next in a story based on what they've already understood.

An example of a reading comprehension approach is a teacher and pupil(s) taking turns to lead a discussion about a text, with the teacher asking open questions to check comprehension. Teachers can also use visual aids like a flow chart to help children map out the development of a story and the emergence of key themes. Computer-based tutoring can also help children work through a text in a structured way and at their own pace, with individualised feedback.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE NEW GOVERNMENT

Recommendation 1: Empower schools with evidence on teaching reading comprehension

The next government should set out a national mission to improve the teaching of reading comprehension, working in partnership with schools and local authorities across England. Political leadership would help to signal the crucial importance of reading comprehension skills, while the government could use its access to technical expertise to help teachers understand the best approaches. This should be modelled on the coalition's strategy for embedding phonics in the curriculum for younger primary school children.

The major challenge for teachers is that, although the evidence base on reading comprehension is strong, it is highly academic. There is a lack of accessible information and resources on the best approaches to use in the classroom. To rectify this, the Department for Education should commission an independent review of the criteria for judging

effective reading comprehension strategies. This review should also identify existing practical programmes and strategies from across the world, and assess them against the new criteria. The department should commit to publishing accessible information about effective approaches and work with schools, teaching unions and professional associations to get these into the hands of classroom teachers. This database should be developed and refined as new evidence emerges.

As with the phonics evidence review, government could appoint an independent expert to carry out this review. However, in the long term, this detailed evidence base should have an institutional home so that it can be maintained over time, disseminated widely to schools and teachers, and supported by wider activities to drive the continuous improvement of teaching quality in England.

The teaching profession is developing plans for a new College of Teaching, which has been welcomed by the government.⁴¹ This teacher-led body would be committed to raising professional standards across the teaching profession. It will take several

READING FOR PLEASURE

Celebrating the joy of reading is crucial if we want to see all children reading well by the age of 11. Regularly reading for pleasure between the ages of 10 and 16 has a positive effect on children's vocabulary, spelling and maths skills.⁴² However, children growing up in poverty are less likely to read frequently outside school than their better-off peers. They are also less likely to have books of their own and to read a broad range of materials, including books, magazines and emails.⁴³

Promoting reading for pleasure must be a partnership between parents, schools and the wider community. Ofsted encourages schools to develop strategies for promoting reading for pleasure. We back proposals from the National Literacy Forum that Ofsted should examine schools' reading-for-pleasure strategy at inspection time, including consideration of school library provision.⁴⁴

What happens beyond the school gates is just as critical to children's enjoyment of reading. Access to books and choice about what to read are

important drivers of reading for pleasure among children.⁴⁵ Libraries clearly have a huge role here, particularly for children from less well-off families whose parents may struggle to buy a good range of books that keep pace with their children's changing skills and tastes. Librarians typically take an active role in promoting reading for pleasure among children, through activities like reading clubs, author visits, exhibitions and reading competitions.

A major challenge for libraries is to identify new ways of engaging children who do not already use libraries regularly. Nearly half of children say they do not use public libraries at all.⁴⁶ The main reasons given were that their friends don't use the local library and they don't think the library has any interesting reading materials for them. Local and national charities, including members of the *Read On. Get On.* coalition, potentially have an important role in connecting new groups of children to all the fantastic resources and services that public libraries have to offer.

years for this new organisation to be established but in time it could take a lead in promoting effective professional practice around reading comprehension. Alternatively, this work could (at least initially) be led by the Education Endowment Foundation, building on its expertise in evidence-based teaching practices.

Recommendation 2: Train up a new generation of school leaders for literacy

Quality teaching and strong leadership are vital for children to do well at school – and this is particularly true for pupils from deprived backgrounds.

International evidence shows that teaching quality and school leadership have the greatest impact on children's attainment.

In particular, there is a need to strengthen the quality of 'middle leaders' in primary schools. These are teachers who are heads of department or year, or leaders of whole-school strategies, such as literacy coordinators. They lead teams of teachers, set out a vision for raising standards in their area, and design and implement improvement plans. But they also work on the frontline of teaching daily. This means they have both a huge direct impact on children's learning and on the practice of other teachers.

We support proposals set out by the Fair Education Alliance to drive up the skills and capacities of middle leaders, so that every primary school can benefit from strong middle leadership – especially on literacy and reading for pleasure.⁴⁷ The priority should be to build these skills in schools serving deprived neighbourhoods, so that children from disadvantaged backgrounds benefit most from improved leadership on literacy.

Currently, whole-school literacy or English strategies are typically led by a teacher identified as a literacy coordinator. Ideally, the role of the literacy coordinator would be a significant resource within a school, to ensure that children are supported to progress in their reading skills and that those who are falling behind have access to the evidence-based interventions that would enable them to catch up.

Yet this crucial leadership role often attracts little additional investment in training or clear criteria about what the role entails. Literacy coordinators in primary schools do not automatically benefit from the time or development opportunities to build specialist knowledge in the teaching of literacy. They may lack the expertise needed to design and

implement strategies to improve literacy standards, or to help other classroom teachers identify and address the needs of children who are falling behind in reading.

As a result, literacy coordinators in primary schools are not always the effective leaders they could be. One of the central recommendations of Ofsted's 2013 review of literacy teaching was for the Department for Education to do more to increase the number of specialist English coordinators in primary schools and improve the subject knowledge of existing coordinators.⁴⁸

We support proposals from the Fair Education Alliance for the Department for Education to commission the development of a literacy leadership training programme for teachers. This should be a priority for early in the next parliament, with a strong focus on primary schools. The programme should then be piloted in a group of primary schools serving low-income neighbourhoods. In time, a new College of Teaching could take over responsibility for organising and delivering this work.

Any innovations in this field should build on existing work. For example, the National Literacy Trust is working with two academy chains to develop a masters-level accreditation in literacy leadership.⁴⁹ The organisation Teaching Leaders runs a two-year middle leadership programme, including in primary schools, and only partners with schools serving children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Recommendation 3: Ensure stronger support for disadvantaged children who are falling behind

Despite major progress in phonics and decoding skills, a significant minority of children are not reaching the expected standard of reading during primary school. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are at a significantly greater risk of failing to reach the expected standard.

A significant minority of children fall behind in reading during primary school, putting them at greater risk of not being able to read well at the age of 11:

- A quarter of six-year-olds are not meeting the expected level in phonics, rising to two-fifths of children eligible for free school meals.
- One in ten seven-year-olds do not achieve the expected standard in reading, rising to one in five children eligible for free school meals.

- Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are likely to be further behind in their reading than children who struggle with reading but are from wealthier families.⁵⁰
- Children who fall behind in primary school are less likely to catch up and achieve a good English GCSE than their better-off peers.⁵¹

In what is likely to be a tight public spending round, our priority for further investment is to improve the quality of early education for the poorest children, as set out above. However, there are options for reforming existing pupil premium spending for primary school children so that it focuses resources and accountability on children from disadvantaged backgrounds who are falling behind.

Currently, a catch-up premium worth £500 is paid to secondary schools for each Year 7 pupil who did not achieve the expected standard in reading or maths at the end of primary school.⁵² There is no specific catch-up premium for children who start primary school without achieving the expected standard in early language and literacy, or who fall behind while they are in primary school. Yet there is strong evidence that low-income children who are falling behind benefit from earlier support, rather than waiting until they get to secondary school.⁵³

One option proposed by the Fair Education Alliance is to refocus the existing pupil premium on children who are eligible for free school meals and who start primary school behind.⁵⁴ This would use existing funding and accountability mechanisms for the pupil premium to focus attention on children who need the most urgent help to progress, including in reading. It would make primary schools more accountable for how they support disadvantaged children who are falling behind.

The primary pupil premium will be worth £1,300 per pupil in 2015–16 and is paid straight to schools for any child registered as eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years. The FEA proposes halving the existing premium, and redistributing the other half to children who meet the existing eligibility criteria *and* have low prior attainment. New baseline tests for children at the start of the reception year, to be introduced in September 2016, could be used as the basis for measuring the prior attainment of children starting primary school.

CONCLUSION

Children who enjoy reading and can read well by the age of 11 have the door opened to new discoveries and wider interests, to knowledge, creativity and confidence. Reading is the key to unlocking every child's full potential and opens up a world of possibilities.

While we all have a role to play in getting all children in our country reading well by 11, there is an important role for government to play in leading this national ambition for our children's futures. The year 2015 represents a crucial moment in the *Read On. Get On.* campaign – action needs to begin now if we are to meet our 2025 goal of all children leaving primary school able to read well.

Schools, of course, have a huge part to play, and thanks to the hard work of teachers and other school staff across the country, hundreds of thousands of children reach the necessary standard to do well at secondary school and into adulthood.

But what happens before children begin primary school has a big impact on their achievement at age 11. That is why this report argues that we must focus more investment and priority on our early years education system, through improving the quality of the early years workforce. In particular, we want to improve quality through ensuring that more children – particularly those from low-income families – attend nurseries led by a graduate.

We also need to ensure that staff working with very young children are trained in children's early language development, as language development is the building block on which later reading develops.

On schools policy, we argue for further reform in line with policy changes that have been introduced

in recent years, including building on the focus on phonics and the introduction and implementation of the pupil premium. We want to see a focus on reading comprehension, a strengthening of middle leadership in schools, particularly roles such as literacy coordinators, and stronger support for disadvantaged children who are falling behind.

The *Read On. Get On.* campaign's priorities for the next government are:

Early years

1. Early education in every nursery in England to be led by an early years graduate by 2020, with government support initially focused on nurseries serving children from disadvantaged backgrounds.
2. Every nursery in England to have at least one non-graduate member of staff with an intermediate level qualification in young children's speech, language and communication.
3. The creation of a cross-departmental early years minister to coordinate Whitehall strategy and delivery on early years services across health, education and local government.

Primary schools

1. A new strategy for improving the teaching of reading comprehension, especially for older primary school children.
2. Working with schools to develop a new generation of school leaders for literacy, focused on primary schools serving disadvantaged children.
3. Focusing school accountability on children from disadvantaged backgrounds who are falling behind, by exploring reforms to the pupil premium.

ENDNOTES

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THE POWER OF READING

How the next government can unlock every child's potential through reading

An inability to read well risks a life of poverty and a struggle for too many of today's children. The mission of the *Read On. Get On.* campaign is to ensure every child is able to read well when they leave primary school by the year 2025. We're calling on everyone to play their part.

The Power of Reading focuses on the crucial role of government in achieving our goal. Stimulating the society-wide change that is necessary to improve children's reading calls for national leadership and significant policy change.

This election year of 2015 is pivotal. Whoever forms the next government will have to act quickly if they are to instigate the huge changes necessary to close the reading gap in a decade.

This report sets out key recommendations for the next government in two crucial domains where national government has influence in England: nurseries and primary schools.

Helping children read

Achievement for All 

Beanstalk
Read • Grow • Succeed

booktrust
Inspiring a love of books

HarperCollins

i can
helps children
communicate

NAHT
FOR LEADERS, FOR LEARNERS

National
Literacy
Trust

THE PUBLISHERS
ASSOCIATION

THE
READING
AGENCY

 Save the Children

SCL Leading & Managing
Public Libraries

TeachFirst