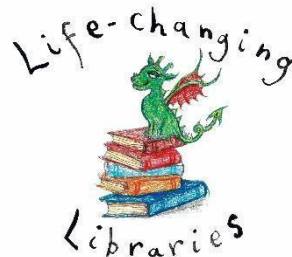


**Media Release: Embargoed until 00.01 BST on Tuesday 13 April 2021**

**WATERSTONES CHILDREN'S LAUREATE CRESSIDA COWELL LAUNCHES 'LIFE-CHANGING LIBRARIES' INITIATIVE WITH CALL ON BORIS JOHNSON TO PUT PRIMARY SCHOOL LIBRARIES AT HEART OF LONG-TERM PANDEMIC RECOVERY WITH RING FENCED, YEARLY INVESTMENT OF £100m**

*'Millions of children, particularly those from the poorest communities worst hit by the pandemic, are missing out on opportunities to discover the life-changing magic of reading – one that OECD research suggests is a key indicator in a child's future success. How can a child become a reader for pleasure if their parents or carers cannot afford books, and their primary school has no library, or that library is woefully insufficient? I am writing – with the support of former Laureates, literacy organisations, and publishing industry leaders – to ask the Government to help reverse the spiralling inequality in education by putting primary school libraries at the heart of our long term response to the pandemic with a ring fenced, yearly investment of £100m.'* **Cressida Cowell MBE, Waterstones Children's Laureate 2019 – 2022**



[booktrust.org.uk/lifechanginglibraries](https://booktrust.org.uk/lifechanginglibraries) | [#LifeChangingLibraries](https://twitter.com/LifeChangingLibraries) | [Images](#)  
Read Cressida Cowell's Open Letter to Boris Johnson in full [here](#)

**London, 13 April 2021:** Waterstones Children's Laureate, Cressida Cowell MBE, has called on the Prime Minister to help reverse the spiralling inequality in education by putting primary school libraries at the heart of our long term response to the pandemic with a ring fenced, yearly investment of £100m.

The internationally bestselling author-illustrator of the *How to Train Your Dragon* series has today published an open letter – supported by former Laureates, literacy organisations, and publishing industry leaders – asking the Government to demonstrate their commitment to levelling up the country by improving primary school library provision to *'help children whose future now lies in the balance.'*

The Children's Laureate highlights the shocking reality – and severe long-term underfunding – of England's primary school libraries with evidence showing a lack of the key ingredients: space, resource and expertise. Whilst every prison has a statutory library, research shows one in eight primary schools has no library space at all - a statistic that doubles in schools with a higher proportion of children on free school meals.<sup>1</sup>

Cowell stresses that this lack of provision means millions of children – particularly those from the poorest communities worst hit by the pandemic and whose parents cannot afford books at home – are missing out on the opportunity to become a reader for pleasure and the vital benefits this chance brings. Alongside public libraries, school libraries are vital to giving all children access to books and reading. Decades of research shows the importance this has on a child's educational development, health and well-being, personal growth and future prospects no matter their starting point in life, and how pivotal this is in not only determining a child's later economic success, but also the economy.<sup>2</sup>

Cressida Cowell's letter outlines how a ring fenced, yearly investment of £100m could help ensure that all schools have access to the key ingredients required to create and sustain a library space and develop a culture of reading for pleasure. It also refers to the PE and sport premium introduced in 2013 helping ensure

<sup>1</sup> Great School Libraries, [National survey to scope school library provision in England, Northern Ireland, and Wales](#) (October 2019)

<sup>2</sup> National Literacy Trust, [Read On Get On: How reading can help children escape poverty](#) (2014)

that all young people have the opportunity to experience the numerous benefits of physical activity, with Cowell asking: ***'Surely the opportunity to become a reader for pleasure is just as important? How is it fair that some children are being given this immeasurable advantage in life, but stark book poverty means many more are denied this same chance to change their future?'***

Today, Cowell has also announced plans for a new initiative to showcase the transformative impact a well-resourced primary school library has on a child's opportunities in life, alongside the vast inequality currently facing children across England.

**'Life-changing Libraries'** is Cressida's flagship project as the prestigious Waterstones Children's Laureate. Over the course of a year, six very different primary schools across England – all of which have at least 25% of pupils eligible for free school meals – will be helped to develop a reading for pleasure culture, with the support of BookTrust and Cressida.

The project will spotlight the four pillars of a successful 'gold standard' school library – space, book provision, expertise, and whole-school and parent involvement. It is inspired by Cressida's twenty-year experience visiting schools and grounded in the most recent research into the benefits of reading for pleasure and the challenging financial reality facing primary school libraries.

A bespoke, dedicated library space will be created by BookTrust in each of the six primary schools and stocked with a specially curated book list of approximately 1000 titles, selected by BookTrust's expert book selection team with guidance from the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education, to inspire and engage children. Staff will be provided with professional training and mentoring from specialists at the School Library Association, as part of a two year-membership.

The project is being supported by: Reading Cloud, who are providing a library management system subscription for each school; FG Library and Learning, who are helping refresh spaces with furniture and display products; Promote Your School, who are creating bespoke wall art; Rising Stars Reading Planet and Jobtrain; Tonies, who are providing each school a Toniebox; leading UK publishers, who are donating books to stock the new library spaces; and CLPE who are providing access to their Power of Reading resources.

Building is set to begin on the libraries in April ahead of officially opening in June 2021. The project will monitor the impact on pupils' engagement, attitudes and reading behaviour across 12 months, collecting qualitative stories and case studies.

The six schools are: Benwick Primary School (Cambridgeshire), Dinnington Community Primary School (Rotherham), Griffin Primary School (Wandsworth), Saviour CE Primary (Manchester), Skerne Park Primary School (Darlington) and Woodchurch C of E Primary School (Wirral).

**Kate Chisholm, Headteacher at Skerne Park Primary School, said:**

*'Many children do not have access to books at home. Parents, when living in poverty, often have to choose between essential food and luxuries such as books, toys, or clothes. The children at Skerne Park Primary School have some access to books at school, but with declining budgets these are old and well used, and not very enticing for children to pick them up and read at home. Reading is a gateway to an excellent education and also an enabler for social mobility. Without the right literacy skills children often fall behind and disengage from education. Our school does its level best to encourage firm foundations however this is sometimes challenging with very little in the way of resource. As our children and their families are amongst some of the least engaged with realising their aspirations, having new, glossy books presented in a lovely library space would be such an enticement to enabling excellent love and positive associations with books and reading. After what has been a hugely difficult year, we are thrilled to be part of Cressida's 'Life-changing Libraries project, and very much looking forward to building work beginning!'*

**Diana Gerald, CEO at BookTrust, said:**

*'It is impossible to overstate the life-changing impact that books and reading have on a child's life prospects, their mental health, wellbeing, self-esteem, educational achievement and so much more. Reading opens up a world of new possibilities for children and develops aspiration, with research showing that it can drive social mobility and mitigate the effect of social inequality. As custodians of the prestigious Waterstone Children's Laureate role, BookTrust is delighted to be supporting Cressida's 'Life-changing libraries' initiative, and helping develop new library spaces that inspire a long-standing reading for pleasure culture within these six selected schools.'*

For further details on Waterstone Children's Laureate Cressida Cowell's 'Life-changing Libraries' initiative, please visit [www.booktrust.org.uk/lifechanginglibraries](http://www.booktrust.org.uk/lifechanginglibraries) and to search and support the campaign on social media, please follow #LifeChangingLibraries.

**ENDS**

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### **About the Waterstones Children's Laureate**

The Waterstones Children's Laureate is managed by BookTrust, the UK's largest children's reading charity, and sponsored by Waterstones. It is awarded once every two years to an eminent writer or illustrator of children's books to celebrate outstanding achievement in their field, and celebrates children's literature as an art form, recognising its contribution to culture and bringing it to the attention of a wider audience.

This prestigious role was originally created by Poet Laureate Ted Hughes and author Michael Morpurgo. The 'League of Laureates' are the foremost representatives of children's literature, showcasing the extraordinary and dynamic art form and its rich contribution to culture in the UK. Each Laureate brings their own passion to the prestigious role and focuses on their own particular themes to create a unique legacy.

The current Waterstones Children's Laureate is Cressida Cowell, the international bestselling author and illustrator of the *How to Train Your Dragon* and *The Wizards of Once* series and author of the *Emily Brown* picture books. The previous ten Laureates are: Quentin Blake (1999-2001), Anne Fine (2001-2003), Michael Morpurgo (2003-2005), Jacqueline Wilson (2005-2007), Michael Rosen (2007-2009), Anthony Browne (2009-2011), Julia Donaldson (2011-2013), Malorie Blackman (2013-2015), Chris Riddell (2015-2017), Lauren Child (2017-2019).

### **About Cressida Cowell**

Current Waterstones Children's Laureate Cressida Cowell is the number one bestselling author-illustrator of the *How to Train Your Dragon* and *The Wizards of Once* book series, and the author of the *Emily Brown* picture books, illustrated by Neal Layton. She has sold over 11 million books worldwide in 38 languages. *How to Train Your Dragon* is also an award-winning billion-dollar DreamWorks film series, and a TV series shown on Netflix and CBBC; *The Wizards of Once* has also been optioned for film by DreamWorks.

Cressida is an ambassador for the National Literacy Trust, a trustee for World Book Day, founder patron of the Children's Media Foundation and is on the Council of the Society of Authors. She has won numerous prizes for her books, including the Blue Peter Book Award and the Ruth Rendell Award for Championing Literacy. She is an honorary fellow of Keble College Oxford, and has a honorary doctorate from the University of

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Brighton. She grew up in London and on a small, uninhabited island off the west coast of Scotland and she now lives in Hammersmith with her husband, three children and two dogs called Pigeon and Zero.

### **About BookTrust**

BookTrust is dedicated to getting children reading because we know that children who read are happier, healthier, more empathetic and more creative. Their early language development is supported and they also do better at school. We are the UK's largest children's reading charity; each year we reach 3.9 million children across the UK with books, resources and support to help develop a love of reading, because we know that reading can transform lives. We work with a variety of partners to get children excited about books, rhymes and stories, because if reading is fun, children will want to do it. Our books are delivered via health services, libraries, schools and early years practitioners, and are supported with guidance, advice and resources to encourage the reading habit. [booktrust.org.uk](http://booktrust.org.uk)

### **About Waterstones**

Waterstones is the UK and Ireland's leading high street bookseller with 293 bookshops, including Foyles, Hatchards, Hodges Figgis and branches in Ireland, Brussels and Amsterdam. It is the only national specialist book retailer of scale in the UK, with the average sized shop carrying a range of around 30,000 individual books and with over 200,000 titles in the largest shop. [Waterstones.com](http://Waterstones.com) | [@Waterstones](https://twitter.com/Waterstones)

### **About Hachette Children's Group**

Hachette Children's Group is one of the largest children's publishers in the UK, with an excellent track record in creating bestselling and award-winning books for children.

The Group aims to cater for every child, with baby and pre-school books, picture books, gift, fiction, non-fiction, series fiction, books for the school and library market and licensed publishing and comprises the imprints Hodder Children's Books, Orchard Books, Orion Children's Books, Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, Quercus Children's Books, Pat-a-Cake, Wren & Rook, Franklin Watts and Wayland Books.

The Group publishes a wide range of authors, illustrators, series and licenses including: Cressida Cowell, Kes Gray, Jim Field, Jessica Townsend, Onjali Raúf, Kiran Millwood Hargrave, Matthew Syed, Bryony Gordon, David Almond, Lauren Child, Patrice Lawrence, Dermot O'Leary, Francesca Simon, Alex T. Smith, Zanib Mian, Nadiya Hussain, Giles Andreae, Piers Torday, Rainbow Magic, Beast Quest and Pokémon.

Hachette Children's Group is also the publisher of author Enid Blyton, and the owner of Enid Blyton Entertainment.

[hachettechildrens.co.uk](http://hachettechildrens.co.uk)

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