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**WATERSTONES CHILDREN’S LAUREATE CRESSIDA COWELL MBE REVEALS TRANSFORMATIVE ‘LIFE-CHANGING LIBRARY’ RESEARCH WITH RENEWED CALL ON THE PRIME MINISTER FOR £100M ANNUAL PRIMARY SCHOOL LIBRARY FUNDING**

*“The positive impact on the children and teachers in ‘Life-changing Library’ schools has been extraordinary: the project has not only sparked a passion for books and a joy for reading but has transformed school life far beyond the library doors. Teachers have reported boosts to motivation, ambition, and attention in the classroom; and there are significant improvements in well-being, alongside increased empathy, confidence and self-worth. Libraries are a space that nothing else can replicate, and the results are clear: they are an intervention that works. I urge everyone to read the teachers’ quotes in the report for just a glimpse of how life-changing a library can be.*

*Reading for pleasure unlocks a world of new possibilities for children, irrespective of their background, and primary school libraries are a key part of this story. And yet millions of children are falling further behind because one in four primary schools in disadvantaged communities still has no library space at all: a staggering and shameful statistic.*

*The Government continues to declare their commitment to levelling up and closing the education gap. Supporting primary school libraries is a proven and cost-effective way to creating a fair and even playing field for all children. I will keep campaigning until every single child in this country has a life-changing library and a reading for pleasure culture in their school.”* ***Waterstones Children’s Laureate 2019-2022, Cressida Cowell MBE***

*“For years we have been looking for interventions to boost attainment to help close the gap between disadvantaged and SEN children and their peers. The library was the only intervention they needed.”*

***Headteacher at Woodchurch of England Primary School (Woodchurch Estate, The Wirral)***



[**booktrust.org.uk/lifechanginglibraries**](https://www.booktrust.org.uk/what-we-do/childrens-laureate/lifechanginglibraries/#!?q=&sortOption=MostRecent&pageNo=1) **| #LifeChangingLibraries |** [**Report**](https://www.dropbox.com/s/y7z9x6a6c9yuv9l/Embargoed%20until%208%20June%202022_Life-changing%20Libraries%20report.pdf?dl=0) **|** [**Images**](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/bfzlqahstz8okdr/AADUNK7v-4Nc2dxBlc8A4ox4a?dl=0)

**London, Wednesday 8 June 2022:** Waterstones Children’s Laureate Cressida Cowell MBE has revealed the transformative impact on the pilot primary schools taking part in her ‘[Life-changing Libraries](file:///%5C%5CUXENSVR%5C%7BFD34A37F%7D%5CEXT%5CK7%5Cbooktrust.org.uk%5Clifechanginglibraries)’ initiative, with an increase in a love of reading, motivation towards learning, well-being and feelings of self-worth.

The key findings in the ‘Life-changing Libraries’ report, published today, describe a transformation in attitudes towards reading, with an enthusiasm and passion for books ignited amongst the students of the six pilot schools and a considerable uptake in the time spent engaged in reading for pleasure both at school and at home. Teachers have reported increased attention, engagement and motivation to learn amongst students in the classroom, alongside a significant improvement in both children and staff wellbeing, as well as a boosted sense of pride, confidence and self-worth. The full report is available to view [here](https://www.dropbox.com/s/y7z9x6a6c9yuv9l/Embargoed%20until%208%20June%202022_Life-changing%20Libraries%20report.pdf?dl=0).

On launching the report, **Waterstones Children’s Laureate, Cressida Cowell MBE**, said:

*“This report shares the powerful stories of the ‘Life-changing Library’ schools, adding to the raft of evidence about the crucial role reading for pleasure and school libraries play in a child’s life chances. A great library positively affects an entire school ecosystem, encouraging teachers, parents, students, as well as the wider community.*

 *In addition to the evidence of increased engagement, aspiration and well-being, I find it compelling that the words ‘safe, calm and quiet’ were frequently used by teachers and students when talking about their new library. The pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on children’s mental health and these libraries have provided a special space for students to find ‘shelter’, to relax, to regulate and to share their new-found love of books and reading.*

*This research has come at crucial time when schools are not only trying to close the learning gap created by the pandemic, but are also being affected by rising costs: every child deserves the educational, economic, health and mental health benefits a school library and reading for pleasure bring to their lives, and the chronic problem of inequality - left unsolved for too many years - is now a crisis. We must take action now.’*

**Quotes from Life-changing Library schools**

***“It’s changed the feeling of the school, the attitudes of children and staff, it has changed everything.”***

*English Lead at Benwick Primary School (Benwick, Cambridgeshire)*

***“Many of our children are in their emotional overdraft but every time they pick up a book it is making an emotional deposit.”*** *Head of School at Dinnington Community Primary School (Dinnington, near Sheffield)*

***“Before the library was here the books weren’t interesting to me. Now reading makes me feel like everyone has a place in the world and you can always achieve your dreams. It has expanded my love of books forever.”***

*Pupil at Griffin Primary School (Wandsworth, London)*

***“The biggest impact on our school has been the change in attitudes. Staff and children are now avid readers. They’re making choices about books and exploring different titles and texts. The impact has been amazing.”***

*Headteacher at Saviour Church of England Primary School (Collyhurst, Manchester)*

***“We are improving the life chances of our children. This is the thread that pulls everything together for them... It’s such a quiet and warm, safe space. Homes aren’t always like that.”***

*Community Governor at Skerne Park Academy (Darlington)*

***“For years we have been looking for interventions to boost attainment to help close the gap between disadvantaged and SEN children and their peers. The library was the only intervention they needed.”***

*Headteacher at Woodchurch Church of England Primary School (Woodchurch Estate, The Wirral)*

**Background**

Cowell announced the ‘Life-changing Libraries’ initiative, delivered in partnership with BookTrust, in April 2021 to showcase the transformative impact a well-resourced primary school library has on a child’s opportunities in life, as well as the shocking inequality currently facing children across England. Whilst every prison has a statutory library, one in eight primary schools has no library space at all: a statistic that doubles in schools in disadvantaged communities.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Over the course of a year, six very different primary schools across England – with at least 25% of pupils eligible for free school meals – were helped to develop a reading for pleasure culture, focused on the four pillars of a successful ‘gold standard’ school library – space, book provision, expertise, and whole-school and parent involvement.

The internationally bestselling author-illustrator launched the campaign with a call on the Prime Minister – supported by former Laureates, literacy organisations, and publishing industry leaders – 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.

‘Life-changing Libraries’ has been Cressida Cowell’s flagship campaign as Waterstones Children’s Laureate, and the culmination of this project marks the end of her three-year tenure in this prestigious role. For the past twenty-five years, Cowell has campaigned for the necessity of school libraries, and she will continue to fight until every child has access to a great one: *“My tenure as Waterstones Children’s Laureate comes to an end in June, but my quest goes on: every single child has the right to this life-changing opportunity.”*

BookTrust will continue to work with the six Life-changing Libraries, building deeper understanding about the role that they can play in supporting families to continue reading, and their connection with communities and public library services. BookTrust is also proud to support the Great School Libraries Campaign which believes all children should have access to a school library, and supports schools, policy-makers and others in helping create this change through sharing best practice, building networks and conducting research.

**ABOUT ‘LIFE-CHANGING LIBRARIES’ & CRESSIDA COWELL’S OPEN LETTER TO BORIS JOHNSON**

Waterstones Children’s Laureate, Cressida Cowell MBE, the internationally bestselling author-illustrator of the *How to Train Your Dragon* series, launched **‘**[**Life-changing Libraries**](https://www.booktrust.org.uk/what-we-do/childrens-laureate/lifechanginglibraries/#!?q=&sortOption=MostRecent&pageNo=1)**’** in April 2021 with an [**open letter**](https://www.booktrust.org.uk/news-and-features/features/2021/april/libraries-change-lives-read-cressida-cowells-open-letter-to-prime-minister-boris-johnson/)to the Prime Minister – 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.

*“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.”*

The Children’s Laureate highlighted 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.

Cowell stressed 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.

Cressida Cowell outlined 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.

The project spotlighted the four pillars of a successful ‘gold standard’ school library – space, book provision, expertise, and whole-school and parent involvement. It was 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 was created by BookTrust in six very different 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 (CLPE), to inspire and engage children. Staff have been provided with professional training and mentoring from specialists at the School Library Association as part of a two year-membership, and teachers have access to the CLPE’s Power of Reading Training and Membership.

Full information about the Life-changing Libraries project [HERE](https://www.booktrust.org.uk/what-we-do/childrens-laureate/lifechanginglibraries/).

**ENDS**

**NOTES TO EDITORS**

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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 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://www.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 | @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, Laurence King Children’s Books, Pat-a-Cake, Wren & Rook, Franklin Watts and Wayland Books.

The Group publishes a wide range of authors, illustrators, series and licences including: Cressida Cowell, Kes Gray, Jim Field, Jessica Townsend, Onjali Q. Raúf, Kiran Millwood Hargrave, Matthew Syed, David Almond, Lauren Child, Sinead Burke, Rachel Bright, Marion Deuchars, Dermot O’Leary, Nick East, Dean Atta, Francesca Simon, Alex T. Smith, Zanib Mian, J.K. Rowling, Giles Andreae, Guy Parker-Rees, Benjamin Zephaniah, Piers Torday, Alice Oseman, Juno Dawson, Pippa Curnick, Dr Ranj Singh, Simon Farnaby, Leigh Bardugo, 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.

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1. Great School Libraries, [National survey to scope school library provision in England, Northern Ireland, and Wales](https://d824397c-0ce2-4fc6-b5c4-8d2e4de5b242.filesusr.com/ugd/8d6dfb_8b81a7c94c2c4c4a970265496f42307a.pdf) (October 2019) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)