

Autumn Update 2026

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Launch of Our New Charity Film

Our 2025/26 Impact Report - Out Now

Secondary school demand for Reading Lab

We also feature a guest column from Professor Teresa Cremin, CBE, and take a closer look at the recent Independent Inquiry into White Working Class Educational Outcomes and the Education Committee's report on Reading for Pleasure.

Capturing the heart of what we do

We are delighted to launch our new charity film, created with the generous support of the Media Trust and Buddy Films, and funded by The Mercers' Company, Trustee to The Mercers' Charitable Foundation.

How do you bring to life a high-impact specialist literacy intervention in a short, powerful film which shows not just what makes our work so special but really helps to explain how we achieve such strong outcomes?



Not an easy brief but the Media Trust matched us with the volunteer team at Buddy Films who brought their skills, experience and insight to the challenge and we are delighted with the result. Shot last June at a partner school in Luton, the film showcases the expertise of our tutors, our strong partnership with schools and the holistic outcomes achieved, not just in terms of closing the literacy gap but in helping to build confidence, resilience and agency. The heroes of the film though are the children and their transformational journey.

WATCH NOW

We are incredibly grateful to The Mercers' Company, the Media Trust and the Buddy Films team and crew who so generously gave their time and enthusiastic support for the project. For schools and funders who may not have the opportunity to see our Labs in action, we think it gives a real sense of the difference our specialist support can make. We are also indebted to our tutor Laura and to Waulud Primary School and headteacher Anne Devereux for taking part in the film.

2025/26 Impact Report out now

Yet again our dedicated tutors, together with the whole education team, have delivered remarkable outcomes. While the measurable improvements in literacy skills are important for us, we know that developing a child's confidence as a reader and learner can be as powerful. The impact of this can be hard to quantify but teachers regularly comment on improvements in self-esteem, engagement, attitude to learning and, in many cases, behaviour. Both partner schools and our tutors report that the changes observed in our Labs have a positive influence far beyond the literacy session itself, helping a child to engage more fully with school life.

Expert Programmes Highlights

Across our Literacy, Reading and Story Lab interventions, over **16,000 expert tuition sessions** were delivered, helping more than **1500 children** who were at greatest risk of falling behind to catch up, step ahead and be able to engage fully with their educational journey. Click here to see the report in full.

"The charity has transformed my school in terms of the reading curriculum. It's one of the most amazing programmes and one of the highlights for me as a head."

Reema Reid, Headteacher, Hollydale Primary School, Lambeth

Literacy Lab - Years 1 & 2 Primary

95%

of our Literacy Lab graduates closed or significantly narrowed their literacy gap

4.2

ratio gain average

The number of months' progress made after one month of our specialist tuition. A ratio gain above 4.0 is considered 'remarkable impact' (Brooks 2007).

Average progress:

Reading age gap

START OF PROGRAMME: **11 MONTHS BEHIND** → ON GRADUATION: **9 MONTHS AHEAD** of age-related expectations

Reading comprehension gap

START OF PROGRAMME: **7 MONTHS BEHIND** → ON GRADUATION: **12 MONTHS AHEAD** of age-related expectations

Working collaboratively with our partner schools, we support children at Key Stage One who may be struggling to make progress in class. The majority of Literacy Lab pupils graduate after two terms of twice-weekly, in-person, 1:1 or 1:3 tuition.

What is notable is that the children not only close their literacy gap but many then step ahead. To achieve this early gives them the best possible chance of engaging fully with the curriculum and successfully with their education.



Watch a short video at this link to find out what some of our partner headteachers say about working with us.

Reading Lab - Years 4-6 Primary & 7-9 Secondary

Average progress:

10 WEEKS' TUITION → **7 MONTHS' PROGRESS**

Reading Lab, our 1:3 catch up intervention for older pupils, goes from strength to strength. Delivered twice weekly in person, the 10-week block of tuition supports children to make important progress with comprehension, reading fluency and vocabulary, ahead of their SATS and the transition to secondary school. 2025/26 also saw demand grow in secondary schools – click here to learn more.



Story Lab

2025/26 marked the second year of our Early Years Story Lab trial, which has expanded to seven schools supporting over 200 nursery and reception children.

The impact was particularly encouraging with 95% of children making progress in their vocabulary scores and 91% in their grammar scores. This represents a significant step in developing the language skills that underpin children's communication, learning and future literacy development.

Reader Leader

While our specialist interventions continue to deliver outstanding results, our Reader Leader mentoring training is also proving popular as a low-cost reading programme to help embed a culture of reading right across a school. In 2025/26, we delivered the training in 55 schools, supporting over 1800 pupils.

Run by one of our specialist team, the one-day programme trains older reading 'Leaders' to support younger 'Readers' through regular, structured reading sessions once a week over an 18-week period. Leaders develop their understanding of reading, mentoring and effective communication, while younger pupils have the opportunity to build fluency, comprehension and confidence and develop a more positive relationship with reading.

"This training course was exceptional - the best I've observed in my 25-year teaching career."



Now is a good time to book us in! Get in touch to find out more at readerleader@theclc.org.uk

Why Gifting Books Works

Dolly Parton's death has brought attention to the extraordinary legacy she leaves in the Imagination Library. Founded in 1995, the programme has now gifted more than 330 million books to children around the world, giving children their own books and encouraging families to read together.



Recent international research by The Dollywood Foundation involving more than 86,000 families found that after receiving just ten books, children enrolled in the Imagination Library were four times more likely to demonstrate stronger emerging literacy skills. They were also significantly more likely to be read to regularly, strengthening the home learning environment.

In Story Lab, our new intervention for nursery and reception children, we see this in action. Every Story Lab child is gifted the five books used in the programme, alongside activities to share with their families. Our experience is that both children and parents are genuinely excited to receive the books, and feedback from parents suggests that they value them hugely.

The books create opportunities for shared reading, conversation and enjoyment to continue at home, beyond the programme sessions.

Julie Taylor, our Director of Education, sits on the book selection panel for The Imagination Library. She comments:

"Dolly Parton's legacy reminds us that gifting a child a book not only gives them something to read, but can also help create a home where sharing stories sparks a love of books."

The Secondary School Literacy Gap

In recent years we have been hearing that too many children are starting secondary school without the literacy skills needed to engage with lessons right across the curriculum. This is supported by the data: DfE KS2 attainment statistics from 2025/26 show that 51% of pupils from a isadvantaged background leave primary school without having achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and maths combined.

Unaddressed this attainment gap persists, with only 10% of children behind at that stage going on to achieve passes in English and Maths at GCSE, according to a 2019 Education Endowment Foundation Report.

In light of this, we have expanded our work with older pupils, bringing our specialist 10-week catch-up Reading Lab into more secondary schools to help accelerate the acquisition of reading skills for the pupils who have the greatest catching up to do and who will benefit from additional support with reading fluency, comprehension and vocabulary.





While the assessment data is strong, with pupils making on average seven months of progress after the 10-week programme, it is the anecdotal evidence which is also powerful. Schools have reported that after completing Reading Lab, pupils have shown greater focus, reduced classroom disruptions, and increased participation across all of their learning, with improvements in both attendance and behaviour. One stand-out case study comes from a school where a student was referred to Reading Lab having previously received over 100 negative behaviour points and three internal exclusions. Since completing the programme there has been a remarkable change, with no internal exclusions, 34 positive points earned and significantly better engagement in class.

"The Children's Literacy Charity has had a really transformative impact on not only the literacy and reading fluency of our most vulnerable learners, but it's also had a fantastic impact on their wider commitment and engagement to their learning in school, whether that be in their effort and commitment across lessons, their attendance into school, their punctuality and their engagement in extracurricular activities."

Ben Russell, former Principal, Leigh Academy Halley, Bromley, Kent

Literacy: Balancing the skill and the will

We invited Professor Teresa Cremin, Professor of Education (Literacy) and Co-Director of the Literacy and Social Justice Centre at The Open University, to share her insights on why developing reading skills and enjoying reading must go hand in hand. We greatly admire Teresa's work and the Open University's contribution to promoting and supporting children's literacy and we have particularly welcomed the opportunities they provide to build networks and connections with others working towards similar goals.

Children who choose to make time to read and write at home and who do so regularly, are self-evidently keen readers and/or writers. These motivated youngsters are likely to have a strong sense of their own self efficacy and positive identities as readers and/or writers. The research evidence is clear that these children will benefit - academically, socially and emotionally - from their self-chosen literacy engagement. Longitudinal studies from right around the globe indicate that childhood readers develop enhanced comprehension, wider attainment, richer vocabularies, better narrative writing and have stronger psychological wellbeing than their peers who do not yet have the habit of reading.

Less experienced readers - those who struggle to read or write and who don't feel good about their literacy skills, are unlikely to spend their free time reading or writing. These children will find school challenging, learning difficult and may lack confidence as well as literacy competence. Disproportionately these less engaged learners come from underserved contexts and will not have experienced the same opportunities in life as their more advantaged peers. The need to address inequalities in children's literacy experiences - openly and strategically - has never been more urgent and this is at the heart of the Children's Literacy Charity which seeks to close the literacy gap for disadvantaged young people - thus changing their life chances.



Professor Teresa Cremin, CBE

These children, and indeed all children, need focused support to develop both the skills of reading and writing and the will or desire to read and write. It is not an either-or situation, nor should we be waiting until children have developed their literacy skills before they are invited to experience the many satisfactions involved. As the Education Select Committee Inquiry into Reading for Pleasure clearly recognised, the skill and the will to read are mutually supportive; they enrich each other. So, nurturing both simultaneously is a matter of social justice and a key focus of The Open University's Centre for Literacy and Social Justice which, through working with teachers, schools, charities, universities and policy makers, seeks to build systemic, collaborative capacity in order to redress inequalities for young readers and writers.

Through our reading for pleasure research and practice coalition, we work to create reciprocal and interactive reading communities in different contexts with children and adults. Our website is packed with resources and examples of professional practice that can inspire and engage, much of it created by the community for the community. Do feel free to explore!

Professor Teresa Cremin, CBE.



Click here for Open University resources on Developing Reading for Pleasure, including a free badged course.

Making Reading Meaningful

The principle that reading proficiency and reading enjoyment must go hand in hand is central to The Children's Literacy Charity's ethos. We were, therefore, pleased to see that this was highlighted in the UK Parliament's Education Committee report on Reading for Pleasure, published in July, and also that our thinking aligns closely with the 'skill and the will' approach taken by Professor Cremin in her guest column for this newsletter.

The Reading for Pleasure report also highlights the need for targeted support for disadvantaged children and those with SEND as well as the importance of diverse, high-quality books, oracy and parental engagement. These factors are all integral to our specialist work helping children to develop the foundational literacy skills needed to access books and the wider curriculum, while nurturing the enjoyment and curiosity that make reading meaningful.

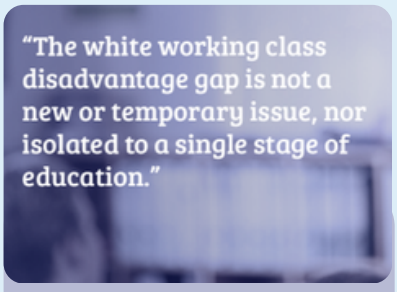


Julie Taylor, Director of Education at The CLC, says:
"Building confident readers and inspiring a love of books are mutually reinforcing goals: without the literacy skills necessary to read and comprehend, it becomes much harder to want to read. We have long known we must do both, especially for less advantaged children,. We submitted evidence to the Inquiry to this effect and were pleased to see the final report reflect this view."

Read more

We were also interested to see the findings of two other recent reports - the Independent Inquiry into White Working-Class Educational Outcomes and Alan Milburn's Young People and Work report - both of which identify low educational attainment as a significant barrier.

The White Working-Class Inquiry found that educational gaps emerge early, widen through primary school and can accelerate at the transition to secondary school. It cites lower attainment, weaker engagement and children's limited confidence in how education can lead to future opportunities, while stressing that these challenges are systemic rather than a result of low aspiration.



From the report into White Working-Class Educational Outcomes

Alan Milburn's report similarly identifies poor educational attainment and a lack of essential skills as important factors in the growing number of young people who become NEET. Around one million 16–24 year-olds are currently not in education, employment or training, with the report describing this as a major social and economic challenge.

We feel that both reports underline the importance of early, targeted intervention to reduce inequality and improve the life chances of young people. Helping children to develop the literacy, communication skills and confidence they need is essential if they are to engage successfully at school and beyond and we look forward to the next steps in addressing the issues at the heart of these reports.

New schools for the new academic year

A warm welcome to:

- Donnington Primary School, St Andrew and St Francis Primary School, Brentfield Primary School and St Mary's CofE Primary in Brent
- Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School and Moreland Primary in Islington
- Pimlico Gardens Primary School in Westminster
- Woolwich Polytechnic School for Girls in Greenwich
- Orion Ravensbourne and Orion Coopers in Bromley
- Bluecoat Beechdale Academy in Nottingham



Message for Supporters



Finally, it is never too early to think about the end of term and the festive season, so do please consider giving the gift of life-changing literacy this Christmas. A donation to The Children's Literacy Charity will help more children to close the literacy gap and broaden horizons.

Click here for fundraising ideas and seasonal inspiration or get in touch at fundraising@theclc.org.uk

A donation to The Children's Literacy Charity means the children who need the most help can develop the literacy skills needed to thrive.
Click here to donate now.

Please follow us on social media:

For more information about our school partnerships or supporting our vital work please contact: info@theclc.org.uk

The Children's Literacy Charity works in socially and economically disadvantaged areas, helping to close the literacy gap for children who have the greatest need. Our provision of one to one and small group tuition helps children realise their true potential. Registered Company No. 6251103. Registered Charity No. 1124257