



GLOUCESTERSHIRE SCHOOLS IN CRISIS

THE FUTURE OF OUR CHILDREN'S LITERACY

A SNAPSHOT OF THE SITUATION IN 2023





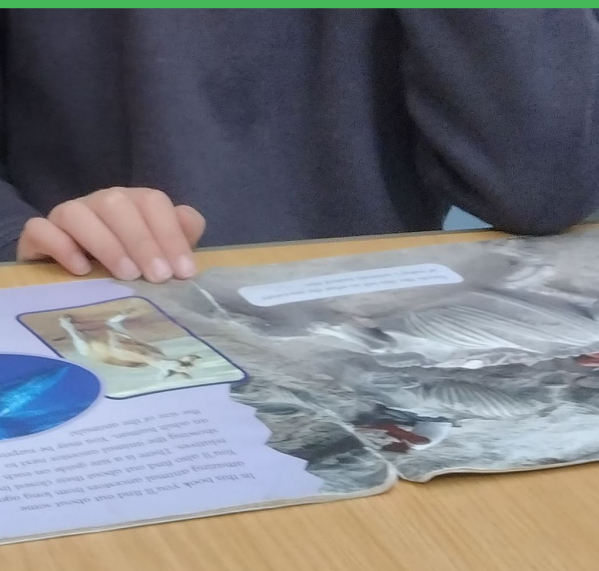
Read With Me has unrivalled and privileged access to schools across Gloucestershire. We've had the opportunity to witness every day the incredible challenges that our teachers face, challenges which are just not understood by the Government and the public. Our schools are in crisis, the ability for our children to learn the basics in literacy, numeracy and verbal communication skills are at risk and with it their futures. This is a snapshot of the situation after listening to the testimonies of head teachers.

Linda Cohen, Founder, Read With Me

“

With the 10% support staff pay rise and 5% teacher pay rise, both of which were unfunded, salaries now make up 91% of our expenditure. In the long term, this will affect our ability to purchase new resources and fund new initiatives - Head Teacher

”



[An unfolding crisis]

"Our school system is broken on every front, everything that could go wrong has gone wrong resulting in a perfect storm. By the start of the next academic year, nine out of ten schools will have run out of money. This will mean cutting teaching hours, teaching assistants and teachers" National Union Of Head Teachers.

"Staffing cuts will mean larger class sizes, reduced curriculum options and less support for students" Association of Schools and College Leaders Union.

After paying for pay increases, energy costs (that have increased threefold) and other costs out of reserves, schools are also having to spend more on mental health support for staff and children who are struggling with the cost of living crisis.

Schools regularly provide food for families as well as giving parents and carers support with extra benefit claims and challenging rent rises.

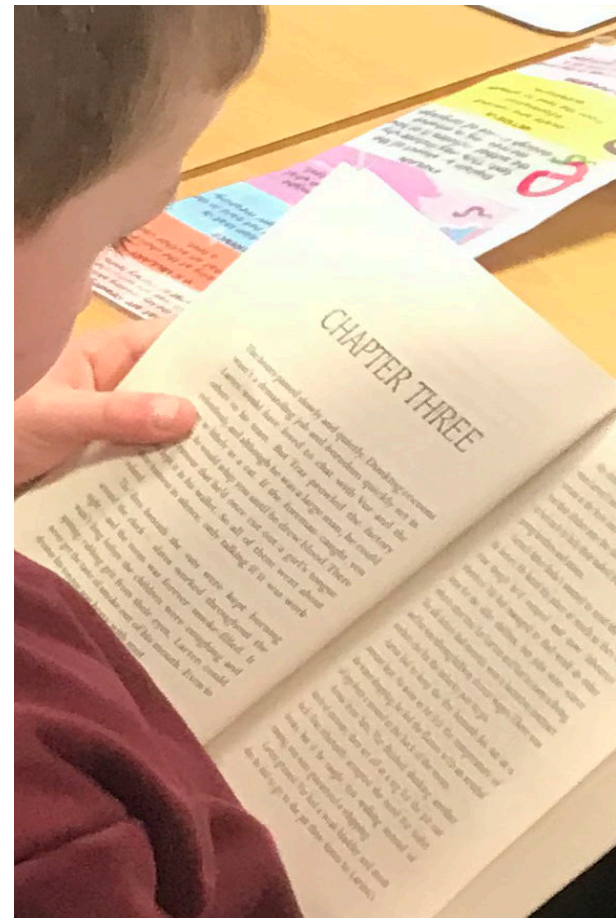
[The impact on children's literacy]

The Government has set a target of 90% of all children achieving the expected level by 2030 and yet in 2022, 41% of Year 6 children left primary school without achieving the expected standard in literacy and maths. Only 43% of disadvantaged children (those receiving free school meals or in care) achieved the expected standard,

The UK has the strongest link between low literacy and socioeconomic background in the developed world. This means that children with poor vocabulary levels at five years old are twice as likely to be unemployed at the age of 34.

As well as creating poverty, low literacy is led by poverty. Children from the most disadvantaged communities start school at five years old with a vocabulary 19 months behind their contemporaries. It's a gap which will never be made up. Of this cohort, three-in-five will fail to achieve a good Maths or English GCSE.

Low literacy affects outcomes beyond economic impact. Poor literacy results in poor health, and mental health and reduces life expectancy. Low literacy can also lead to prison. More than 50% of the prison population in the UK are functionally illiterate. 20% cannot read at all.



“

The failure to master basic literacy skills costs the UK £80 billion a year - World Literacy Foundation

”





[Covid and its legacy]

Children are now arriving in school in reception year with poor social and toileting skills, an inability to concentrate and often to speak. 55% of children in Gloucestershire are unprepared for school.

There is a significant increase specifically in Early Years children presenting with complex difficulties, with no diagnosis. Parents are either completely unaware that their children have needs, have no idea what to do about it, or where they can get help.

It would be a misnomer to say that there are more autistic children, but these children have missed more of their social early learning. They have missed their 2 year old health checks. They have missed their toddler/play groups. They have missed pre-school. They needed early support which has not been available. Children are now coming into schools with no support in place for them, no understanding of their needs, and an impossible wait to get specialist help.

Across all age groups of primary school children, these are common factors:

- No knowledge of how to socialise and share things with others

“

Schools worked solidly through the pandemic and all the holidays, doing double shifts. In poorer communities children could not access live lessons, (Immense digital poverty – appliances, wifi and knowledge of how to use them) so our staff were teaching during the day, and then going home to record lessons in the evening. We all worked through every school holiday directly with our community – Head Teacher

”

- Low resilience – children are quick to give up when they find something difficult
- Attention span – children are struggling to focus for sustained periods
- Tablet/device addiction – children are spending enormous amounts of time on tablets and other devices

Primary schools are seeing a huge increase in children presenting with SEMHN difficulties (Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs). This is in every age group: Early Years, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.

When breaking down these difficulties, specific issues emerge: limited language, communication issues, limited social skills, frustration, lack of diagnosis, lack of opportunities to address these issues. All manifest themselves as behavioural challenges but when analysed there are reasons for them.

[Special needs provision]

The overwhelming need is compounded by a broken special educational needs system. The pathway is so congested currently, that it has come to a halt. Specialist provision has been cut drastically (e.g Educational Psychology and advisory teaching service).

Adult social care funding has also been significantly cut – but vulnerable adults in this system are often our parents.

It is estimated that there will be 1000 new Education, Health and Care Plans this academic year in Gloucestershire. That is nearly a 300% increase in four years.

[The cost of living crisis]

It is believed that more than one-in-four of all children in the UK now live in poverty, with millions facing the risk of going hungry. Living in poverty can mean a child is living



“

We have subsidised clubs and educational trips, are providing families with food hampers through a partnership with a local church and hosting finance/benefit workshops for parents – Head Teacher

”

“

Parental involvement is definitely on the decline. Parents will present as being engaged and involved by attending parents evening and workshops but do not want the hassle/arguments that come with supporting/encouraging their children to read or do school work at home – Head Teacher

”

“

Public sector services (including schools) are under enormous public and external scrutiny on all fronts. The public are empowered to feel they have ownership over public sector services, and have a right to demand whatever they want, whenever they want it. The time taken to deal with these demands is immense and takes away from the day job. As caring professionals, we are knackered and feel broken. A staff member has said they feel as if they have PTSD because of situations in the classroom – Head Teacher

”

in a cold home, going hungry, or without everyday essentials, often arriving at school without having eaten since the previous lunchtime.

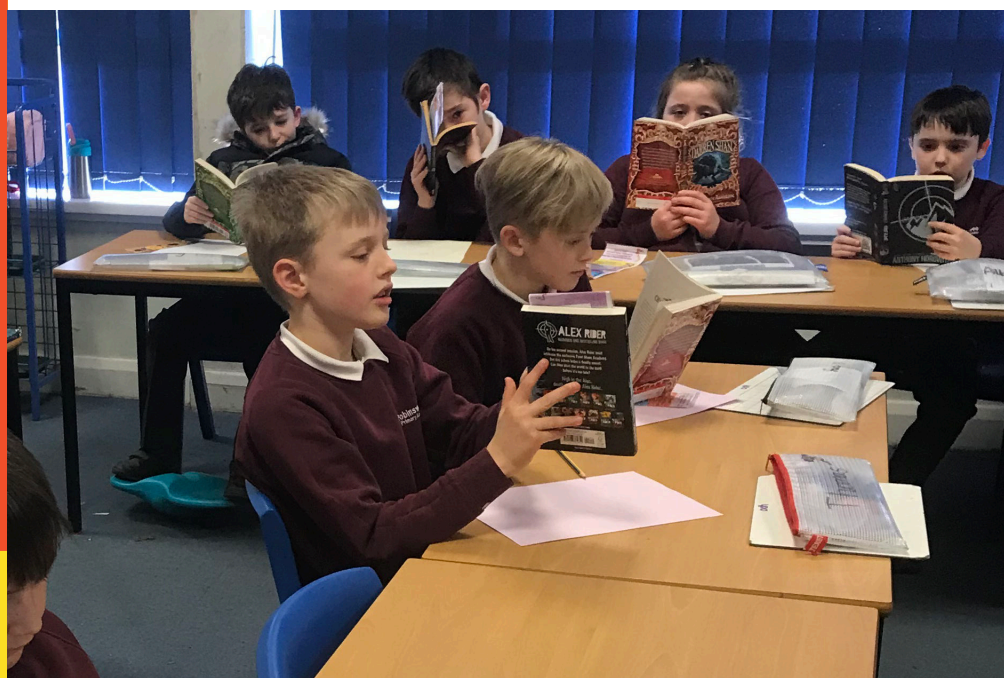
[Parental responsibility]

Parents and carers have more rights than ever to challenge the care and provision that is given to their children in school, which all schools feel has increased the pressure on teaching staff and allowed many carers to ‘opt out’

[Teacher morale and recruitment]

Crisis point has been reached. The ‘good will’ which kept schools running against all the odds has now gone. Many teachers are burnt out, having taken on extra roles like social worker, relationship counsellor or carer. Many feel that they are portrayed inaccurately by the press. Respect for the profession is low. Recruitment of teaching assistants is incredibly difficult at the moment due to their low pay. Despite a recent 10% pay rise, schools are losing many experienced teaching assistants to the retail sector, where they can work less hours yet earn more money.

Across the UK, teacher retention is a huge issue. DfE statistics show that nearly a third of teachers who qualified in the last decade have since left the profession. Job vacancies are at a 20 year high.



“

Reading sits at the centre of everything in a primary school – it is pivotal in a child's ability to access the secondary curriculum. Research shows that a child's ability to read is more important for their life chances than their parent's level of education or social-economic status. Read With Me is the most incredible organisation that helps school with the capacity to hear children read on a one-to-one basis – Chris Brown, Reading Lead, Moat Primary Academy

”

[Read With Me]

Set against the backdrop of a primary education system which, like the children it educates, has a series of critical and complex needs, the Read With Me proposition is very simple.

Spend 10/15 minutes twice a week with each child to listen to them read. Use that time to also engage properly with each child and to use the one to one sessions to develop social and communication skills, alleviate anxiety and build confidence.

[Our impact]

After less than three years we now have 200 volunteers in 30 schools. We hear more than 2,500 children read every week. By the end of 2023 with support we can double these numbers.

We currently operate in Gloucester, Tewkesbury, Cheltenham, Cirencester, Stonehouse, Stroud, South Gloucestershire and the Forest of Dean.

“

Children are spending hours on screens and parents are distracted, busy and often lack the skills themselves to effectively bring the text to life for their children. Resources are scarce due to dreadful underfunding, especially for children with behaviour and SEND needs. These children take time. Listening (really listening) to children read takes time. Talking about books takes time. Our Read With Me volunteers are worth their weight in gold. For some of our children, this is the only time they are heard to read by an adult who is not their teacher – Cannie James, Robinswood Primary Academy

”



“

The reading volunteers that give up their time to hear readers in school are invaluable. The ability to read is a social leveller and as educators, we are passionate that every child has the right to read and read quickly. However, with huge funding demands in education, there are fewer adults to help children develop their reading skills on a daily basis. The volunteers play a vital role in meeting the need and developing strong and important relationships with the children they read with. This need is only going to increase so we need their support more than ever.

– Kat Wood, Reading Lead, Upton St Leonards

”

Case study

In a Year 1 class where only 45% of the children were achieving the Expected Standard, after 12 months of Read With Me volunteers hearing the children read twice a week (this was the only time they were heard to read) 80% achieved the expected standard.

Value for money

It only costs £50 per year to hear a child read twice a week for a year and give them additional provision with our Not So Secret Book Club during every school holiday – Christmas, Easter, Summer and half terms.

Every child excluded from school costs the UK £360,000.

[How you can help]

- * VOLUNTEER
- * FUNDRAISE
- * [DONATE](#)
- * SPREAD THE WORD



Contact: Linda Cohen linda@readwithme.org.uk or call: 07791 110906

www.readwithme.org.uk [f](#) readwithme2020 [t](#) read_with_me_

“

Reading is the most important thing in life... it is the key to success. 'Read With Me' brings a full set of keys to our school! Without them, things would be so much harder – Head Teacher

”