

30 September 2024

Open letter to the Prime Minister on children's reading

Rt. Hon Sir Keir Starmer KCB KC MP

The Prime Minister

10 Downing Street

London

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Dear Prime Minister,

We write to you as a community of publishers, authors, illustrators, booksellers, librarians, teachers, researchers and others working with children's books and reading.

We call on you as Prime Minister to make a cross-government commitment to prioritise the role of reading for pleasure for children. This would be an investment in the wellbeing, social mobility and life chances of our children and the prosperity and success of the UK.

Evidence shows that we face a growing crisis in reading for pleasure, which has been declining since the pandemic across all socio-economic groups and is particularly pronounced in children from low-income families. There is consistent and longstanding evidence of the benefits of reading for pleasure on outcomes for children and its impact on their wellbeing, empathy skills and behaviour in schools.

While there are many demands on your government in a challenging fiscal climate, an investment in reading for pleasure is an investment in our children's, and the UK's, future. Equipping children to access books and to enjoy reading will help to fulfil Labour's missions of growth and achieving opportunities for all and your commitment to a decade of national renewal. In times of division and social challenge, it will equip our young people with the skills of empathy-building, critical thinking and engagement with big ideas and the world. Reading for pleasure does all this and more.

Publishers and charities have worked with schools, libraries, local authorities and other bodies to plug the policy and funding gap under previous governments, but this is not enough. Our children deserve better. This is a challenge and opportunity that reaches across government departments, contributing to policy ambitions in education, culture, health, local government, employment and more. We ask you to mandate your ministers to work with us to build a national reading for pleasure plan.

Building the reading habit will bring untold benefits to Britain as we face the challenges ahead. We look forward to working with your government.

Yours sincerely,