



professional development

setting up and managing a school library



primary school



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Children's Books Ireland is the national charity and arts organisation that champions every child's right to develop a love of reading. Our mission is to inspire a love of reading in children and young people in Ireland, to share our expertise and enthusiasm with the adults who guide and influence them, to champion every child's right to excellent books and live literature events and support the artists who make that goal possible across the island of Ireland.

Continue the conversation with us at www.childrensbooksireland.ie

where you will find more reviews, articles and up-to-the-minute news.

If you'd like advice about developing your reading culture, get in touch with our Education Outreach Manager, Becky Long on becky@childrensbooksireland.ie

Is é **Leabhair Pháistí Éireann** an carthanas agus eagraíocht ealaíon náisiúnta a thacaíonn leis an gceart atá ag gach páiste grá a chothú don léitheoireacht. Tríd an iliomad gníomhaíochtaí agus imeachtaí, tá sé d'aidhm againn suim i leabhair a spreagadh i bpáistí, tuiscint níos fearr a chothú ar a thábhachtaí is atá leabhair do dhaoine óga agus feidhmiú mar acmhainn thábhachtach do dhaoine a bhfuil suim acu i leabhair do pháistí in Éirinn. Is é an misean atá againn grá don léitheoireacht a spreagadh i bpáistí agus daoine óga in Éirinn, ár gcuid saíneolais agus díograise a roinnt leis na daoine fásta a bhíonn á dteorú agus ag dul i gcion orthu, tacú leis an gceart atá ag gach páiste ar leabhair den scoth agus ar imeachtaí litríochta beo, agus tacú freisin leis na healaíontóirí ar fud oileán na hÉireann a fhágann gurbh fhéidir an sprioc sin a bhaint amach.

Bí ag comhrá linn ag childrensbooksireland.ie áit a bhfaighidh tú tuilleadh léirmheasanna, ailt agus an nuacht is déanaí.



Setting Up and Managing a School Library

A welcoming library, either in a centralised space, in individual classrooms, or a combination of both, is essential to building a reading culture in a school. The following guidelines are intended to support teachers, school staff, parents, guardians and librarians who wish to set up and run a school library. We know that funding, resources and infrastructure vary hugely from school to school, and that not all of these suggestions may be achievable or even appropriate for your school context, but we hope that this guide will be a useful starting point when planning a school library from scratch or working with an existing library. Children's Books Ireland's other resources provide further guidance on 'Creating a Reading Culture in Your School' (many of these ideas being free or low-budget as well as impactful) and 'Running a Book Club or Reading Group in Your School'. These resources can be accessed and downloaded for free on our website.

Before you start planning in earnest, especially if you're starting a new library, contact the School Libraries Group of the Library Association of Ireland (<https://schoollibrariesireland.com/>), a dedicated group of librarians who campaign for school libraries and resources for all schools in Ireland. They provide guidance, support and resources on all aspects of school librarianship, including budgeting, cataloguing and classification, stock selection and library activities.

We also hold webinars on 'Setting up and Managing a School Library', if you're interested in attending please sign up to our Schools Newsletter (www.childrensbooksireland.ie) and keep an eye on our website.

The Function of the School Library

A good school library contributes to a holistic and joyful culture of reading in a school by;

- Empowering young readers to expand and diversify their reading experiences, not least by offering them a wide and inclusive choice of reading material.
- Creating confident and imaginative readers by augmenting the library's books with meaningful activities and programmes (see the next section for tips and ideas).
- Supporting reading across the curriculum with engaging and accessible books, both fiction and non-fiction.
- Supporting readers to gain agency and independence in their learning and develop their research and information literacy skills.
- Offering everyone in the school a safe and creative space in which to engage with stories in a community of readers.

Library Activities

The library is the central hub for books in the school and it can also be a space for communal reading and creative activities. If your library is large enough to accommodate class groups, you can think about using the space to host the following activities;

- Book clubs and reading groups (see our resources section on our website for more information on setting these up).
- Paired reading sessions where pupils from senior classes can read with junior classes.
- Book tasting sessions where books are displayed on tables and pupils get to sample new genres, authors and illustrators.
- Author and illustrator visits (again, see our resources section on our website for advice on planning these visits).
- Your local librarian might also use the space to talk about the local public library and to share reading ideas.
- Book talks and information sessions for parents and guardians.
- Staff book clubs where staff can enrich their knowledge of children's books, and where recommendations and activity ideas can be shared.
- Storytelling or read aloud sessions with teachers or parents and guardians could lead class groups in exploring new stories.
- Book displays on different topics or themes.

This list is by no means exhaustive or prescriptive and we are always interested in hearing from schools about how they use their libraries, sharing best practice and ideas, and any innovations that have worked, so do get in touch via our website!

Questions to Consider

A good school library will support pupils and staff alike to read for joy and to excel in their learning. So, when thinking about establishing a school library in a dedicated space or rejuvenating an existing school library, ask yourself the following questions;

How will the space be used?

- Is the main purpose of the library to lend books and facilitate pupil engagement and host book clubs or reading groups? Or will it be used for teaching as well?

Who will use and manage the library?

- Will the library be used solely by pupils and staff, or will it be open for family activities such as book clubs, homework clubs, or workshops?
- Will the library be managed and overseen by staff, parents and guardians, a school committee with pupil input, or a mixture of all three?

When will it be used?

- Will there be timetabled visits throughout the school day/week for each class, from junior infants, to sixth class?
- Will pupils be allowed to use the library outside of timetabled visits and will there be supervision available?



Creating the Environment

The school library should be a welcoming space for all pupils in the school, a whole-school resource accessible to all, whatever their particular needs. The ideal school library accommodates a fiction and a non-fiction collection, a range of formats and media types, including picturebooks, verse novels, comic books and graphic novels, magazines, newspapers, audio books. The space should be bright, inviting and well laid out, in other words, easy to navigate. It might be useful to refer to Health and Safety Authority (HSA) guidelines and to the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) Designed for Learning resource when planning the layout of your school library (see the Additional Resources list in this guide).

It's not always feasible to have a dedicated or centralised school library but if your school does have this facility, there should still be a focus on classroom library shelves or Book Corners (see the **Classroom Book Corners** section in the guide for more information). Regardless of your school's particular setup, an emphasis should always be placed on refreshing the visual displays in school and classroom libraries, making sure that new books are highlighted on a regular basis, to ensure pupil interest and engagement. To make organic connections between the central library and classroom libraries, each class could take turns to display some of their favourite books from their classroom collection, possibly including reviews or reasons why their peers should read different books.

Shelving

The Library Association of Ireland (<https://www.libraryassociation.ie/>) and CILIP (the UK library and information association: <https://www.cilip.org.uk/>) provide specifications for library shelving (you can watch the YouTube video in the resource list in this guide for more details) but due to budget and space constraints, it might not be possible for your school to invest in specialist library furniture. Library shelving should be safe, sturdy, and provide back-edge book support (again, see the resource list in this guide for more information). Ideally, shelves will be capable of accommodating different formats or sizes of books and media types, including CDs and audio books.

Furniture

Library furniture should be functional, comfortable and adaptable to a range of formal and informal purposes, including workshops, discussion groups, pupil performances. If possible, the library space should include;

- Appropriately sized tables and chairs for reading and creative work, such as drawing.
- Comfortable chairs, bean bags or cushions to encourage reading for joy.
- A desk and computer for issuing and return of books (if using software for borrowing and returning).
- Display facilities for pupils' projects, book reviews, recommended reading lists, resources on chosen subjects or themes, information about library activities, new books, Top 10 Lists, etc.

Signage

Signage can be a great opportunity to ensure inclusivity and accessibility in a school library. Pupils and staff alike need to be able to find specific books easily in order for the library to function, but it should also be easy to browse genres, subjects or authors to find something unexpected and new to read. There are lots of ways to personalise the signage in your school library and to make it fun and engaging for pupils and staff alike:

- Ask pupils for ideas about different sections, e.g. Space Books, Animal Books, Mystery Books, etc.
- Pupils from different classes can design posters or images for each section.
- A navigation chart that explains each of the sections could be designed with input from a pupil committee.

Collection Management

Selecting the right books and resources for the library is incredibly important. A school library with a diverse and inclusive collection will be impactful for its users, and a well-curated collection inspires the imagination, provides for information needs and fosters a lifelong love of reading and learning. To keep the collection fresh, relevant and appealing to students, the Library Association of Ireland recommends that 10% of the stock be replaced annually where possible. Before selecting new books and resources;

- Look at your existing stock and weed out any old or tatty books.
- New editions of older (in terms of publication date) books are great to have, but don't forget to prioritise new books, especially when it comes to non-fiction titles.
- Check in with teachers to select books and resources that are accessible across age groups and classes, and relevant across the curriculum.
- Give pupils the opportunity to feed into the selection process by conducting a survey or providing a suggestion box.
- Consult recommended reading guides, reviews, and reading lists on the Children's Books Ireland's website, as well as Books for Keeps (<https://booksforkeeps.co.uk>), the School Library Journal (<https://www.slj.com/>), The School Librarian (<https://www.sla.org.uk/Services/Public/About-Us/MembershipOffer/TSL.aspx>), and BookTrust (<https://www.booktrust.org.uk/>).
- Try to make sure that the overall collection is balanced and represents a diversity of cultures, ethnicities, religions, races, languages, genders and abilities. Our *Free to Be Me* reading guide is a great resource for this. You can find this and other reading lists and reading guides under the 'Recommendations' tab on our website (<https://childrensbooksireland.ie/our-recommendations>).
- Contact local booksellers to find out who can offer you the best value and ask about library/school discounts for bulk purchases.



Organising Your Library

The library should be organised in a clear and logical manner so that students can navigate the collection easily and effectively. In general, the collection should be divided into fiction and non-fiction and sections should be clearly labelled.

Fiction

The easiest way to arrange fiction is alphabetically by author surname. Depending on how much signage you're prepared to use, you could sub-divide the fiction section into genres, such as Fantasy, Science Fiction, Adventure, Sports Stories, etc.

Dividing fiction into different age ranges can be counterproductive when it comes to engaging pupils and promoting choice and agency. Less confident readers might feel self-conscious about choosing a book from a younger age range. You could use a 'Junior' and 'Senior' system, as this is more flexible and allows for a little more crossover between age ranges.

The same principle applies when it comes to highlighting dyslexia-friendly books. You want pupils who can benefit from these books to be able to find them, but you don't want them to feel that they've been singled out or that these books are markedly different. You could categorise dyslexia-friendly books under 'Short Reads' to make them accessible and attractive.

Picturebooks

Picturebooks should be shelved separately to fiction or displayed in kinder boxes, which are low height and have an open display, so they're easy to interact with and explore. As picturebooks are usually larger than traditional prose books, they can be awkward to store, and their narrow spines mean that titles can get lost unless they're displayed cover out.

Non-Fiction

Public libraries will use the Dewey Decimal System for non-fiction books and resources, and there are 10 main categories, including Science, Technology and Arts. If you'd like to implement a Dewey system in your library, you can check out a summary here:

<https://www.oclc.org/en/home.html>

Alternatively, you can look at dividing non-fiction by broad topics that are relevant to your collection. Within each topic, you could alphabetise the titles by author surname, like in the fiction section. This system is more flexible and less work to set up, and is probably more suitable to a primary school library.



Library Management Systems

A computerised library management system (LMS) allows you to manage your school library electronically. It enables you to create a searchable inventory of books, letting you keep track of what's on loan, issue items and check in returned items, and provides useful insight into what's being read and what isn't. A computerised LMS is the most effective and efficient way to manage your school library but there are costs involved in setting one up that need to be kept in mind;

- Hardware: computer, barcode reader, printer.
- Software: library management software.
- Ongoing maintenance, upgrades and support.
- Staff training.

There are a lot of LMSs out there, which vary in price and scope, so figuring out which one best suits your school library is important. If you're looking for a place to start, the Library Association of Ireland have some suggestions about what you should be looking for;

- Does the catalogue offer all the fields you need, i.e. title, author, subject area?
- Is the interface user friendly?
- Can items be added to the catalogue easily?
- Are issuing and returning straightforward?
- Is there a limit to the number of resources that can be catalogued?
- Can items be reserved?
- Does the system issue overdue notices?
- Does the system generate lists and statistical information that you might find useful?
- Does the software provider offer installation and technical support?

Most library management systems operate on a per annum subscription rate depending on the size of the school; however, for some the pricing structure is based on the number of books being catalogued. Talk to colleagues in other schools about what they are using and perhaps pay them a visit to see the system in use. Some popular library management systems to consider are as follows:

- Aladdin library module: primary schools already using the Aladdin school administration software can upgrade their package to include the Aladdin library management system: <https://www.aladdin.ie/upgrade.html#library>
- Softlink: <https://www.softlinkint.com/product/oliver/>
- TinyCat: <https://www.librarycat.org/>
- Leabharlann: <https://leabharlann.ie/>
- Koha: <https://koha-community.org/>
- Databiz: <https://databizsolutions.ie/>
- Librarika: <https://librarika.com/>



Classroom Book Corners

Book Corners in each classroom and book displays across your campus are essential, both for schools who have a dedicated library space and schools who don't. Book displays in the foyer or along suitable corridors are a great way to focus on a specific author or genre or on a relevant whole-school theme such as environmental awareness or wellbeing.

Book Corners in individual classrooms should be a place for children to browse and choose from a diverse range of books, both fiction non-fiction, multiple formats (picturebooks, graphic novels, verse novels, comic books and graphic novels), including books that teachers have read aloud in class. Children should be able to borrow books to bring home, to read for the first time or to share with their family.

The focus in a Book Corner – for which space may be limited, depending on your school layout and the resources you have to hand – should always be on making books attractive, appealing and accessible:

- Try and display as many covers outwards as possible to encourage engagement.
- Refresh those covers frequently, so the children in the class don't become bored with what's on offer.
- Easy to understand signs – genre, author name, topic that echo the system in the central school library – will help children choose books that pique their interest.

Book Corners should maximise reading for joy opportunities for each pupil in the class. Textbooks and workbooks should be stored in a different section of the classroom, if possible.

General Tips for School and Class Libraries

- Face some books forward (put the cover on display).
- Don't pack or overfill shelves – pupils have to be able to take books down!
- Focus on themed displays by authors, genres and themes, rather than on reading ability or age.
- Make sure the library space is multi-functional (discussion areas and quiet reading areas).
- Non-fiction has to be as exciting and relevant as fiction.
- Make sure pupils are involved in the running of the library, and parents and guardians, too, where possible.
- Facilitate peer to peer recommendations with noticeboards or 'shelfie' recommendations.
- If a book isn't being checked out regularly, it probably shouldn't be on the shelf in the first place.
- Make the library a welcoming space for book clubs and reading groups.
- Students could vote for genres/create genres and design a symbol guide that's unique to the school.

Quick Questions to Consider

- How can we make the library space work for us?
- Who will manage the library?
- How are we going to create sections and can we involve pupils in this?
- What library system are we going to use?
- Where are returns going to go?
- What supplies do we need?
- Where to get everything?
- Can we involve parents and guardians?

Additional Resources and Guidelines

CILIP Resource, Designed for Learning: School Libraries: www.youtube.com/watch?v=3nKzEYPKG1U

Library Shelving (back-edge book support):

https://wearelibrarypeople.com/media/8303/gb_user_manual_backedge_book_support_bci.pdf

HSA – Guidelines on Managing Safety, Health and Welfare in Primary Schools: www.hsa.ie/eng/Education/Managing_Safety_and_Health_in_Schools/Primary_Schools_Guidelines/Guidelines_on_Managing_Safety_Health_and_Welfare_in_Primary_Schools.pdf

The Library Association, The Primary School Library Guidelines: librarynext.files.wordpress.com/2008/05/primary.pdf

Specialist library furniture, supplies and equipment are available from the following websites;

- Gresswell: www.gresswell.ie
- AJ Products: <https://www.ajproducts.ie/school>
- Parsons: <https://www.parsons.ie/category/libraryfurniture>



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