

strategic plan

2024–2028



children's
books
ireland
every child a reader



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Foreword

Imagine discovering incredibly early in your life a habit that will enhance your mental health, one that will educate you and advance your career; a pastime that has the power to soothe, inspire, relax, amuse, and enchant you. Imagine finding out too that it's free and available to everyone, regardless of class, gender, or race. And, that once attained, this habit can be lifelong and life changing. Its bonuses are endless.

It's not magic. It's reading.

For all these reasons, the foundation block of Children's Books Ireland is to encourage a love of reading among all children and young people. Whether it's starting them early, helping those who need support to access books, or maintaining their interest through the teenage years, we approach it from as many angles as possible. Consequently, we nurture the authors who write the board books and the playful rhymes, the graphic novels and the middle-grade fiction, the teen romances and the dystopian fantasies, and the illustrators who paint and sketch them into life.

In a frantic world of short attention spans and lengthy screen time, our vision – every child a reader – feels more urgent and vital than ever. Through our many initiatives, from our Book Clinics to our conference, from our annual awards to our gifting campaigns, we constantly try to produce ways to amplify one of life's greatest joys.

So passionately do we believe in the power of books to enlighten and inform, that – with the invaluable support of the Arts Council – we give our young readers their own personal champion in the form of the Laureate na nOg.

As we embark upon our next chapter, it is important to recall with deep gratitude the years of growth and development, since our establishment in 1997, and all those who went before us, leading the way with vision, energy, and determination.

Looking to our forthcoming 30th birthday as we launch this new strategic vision, I want also to pay tribute to and acknowledge the wider community of which we are a part. Truly, it is a privilege and an honour to work in the Irish children's literature sector. This generous, diligent collective shares our values of excellence, connection, warmth, and joy as we all strive to make the next generations know that books are the destination and the journey.

Madeleine Keane,
Chair

‘Books are the plane, and the train, and the road. They are the destination, and the journey. They are home.’ – Anna Quindlen



Introduction

It might be easy to think, in our busy world, that reading doesn't matter quite as much as it used to for children and young people. After all, there are so many ways for them to spend their time – not just on devices, or gaming, but playing sports, making art, learning languages and instruments, spending time with friends.

And yet, we believe that reading matters. It *really* matters. Sometimes, it can be life-saving.

We know that reading for joy has a positive impact on literacy and numeracy, mental wellbeing, cognitive development and academic success. But more than that, reading is freedom – it opens the world up to be explored and introduces important ideas to young readers: equality, justice, kindness, empathy. Reading is freedom of expression, freedom of speech, and it matters that everyone can tell their story and can read a version of their story in a book. Reading matters because every single thing that children and young people will face in life can be found in a book and explored safely there. There is power in reading. Reading is a joy.

We are striving to achieve our vision: an Ireland in which every child is a reader. In which every young reader has easy access to excellent books. Where knowledgeable and motivated adults are ready to be enthusiastic guides. And where a thriving community of Irish and Irish-based authors and illustrators are supported to make excellent work which reflects the richness and diversity of our culture.

We are grateful to the funders, partners, donors and other supporters who enable our work and share our vision and values, and to our members, many of whom have supported Children's Books Ireland since its inception and whose valuable feedback helped to shape this strategy. Our sincere thanks to the artists, teachers, booksellers, publishers, librarians and fellow resource organisations whose input we appreciate hugely as we identified our strategic priorities, and most especially to those who will help us to achieve them over the coming years.

Elaina Ryan,
CEO



Vision

Every child a reader.

Mission

To inspire a love of reading in children and young people on the island of Ireland, and to champion equitable access for all to excellent books.

To share our expertise and enthusiasm with the adults who guide and influence young readers, and to encourage schools and early childhood settings to build a positive culture of reading and reading aloud.

To support and promote authors and illustrators and connect them with their audiences.



Values

Excellence

We are an energetic, creative, and flexible organisation, and we take pride in maintaining an extremely high standard across all our work and supporting an equally excellent and committed sector. The people who make up Children's Books Ireland care deeply about encouraging every child to be a reader, and ensuring that every child has access to the best quality books.

Connection

We nurture an environment that is vital to children's reading, and work in partnership with those who share our aims. Children's Books Ireland is at the heart of the children's book community.

Warmth

We are open, friendly, fair and accessible in all our interactions and activities. Kindness and inclusion are paramount to how we work, and we look for these values in our partners.

Joy

We know that reading can delight, excite, and enhance the lives of children and young people, and we are excited to share that in our communications, our publications and at our events. Children and young people benefit significantly from reading, and while we raise awareness of these benefits with adults, we talk to children about enjoyment. We provide opportunities for young readers to have joyful experiences with reading and to delight in the artforms of writing and illustration.

Why do we do what we do?

Ireland performs well in international reading assessments, with PIRLS (at primary level) and PISA (at secondary level) being the two on which most emphasis is placed. Both measure reading literacy and Ireland is among the highest performing countries in both studies. But there is a marked difference between performing at reading literacy and reading *for joy*.

Reading frequency at an early age is highly predictive of reading habits as a child grows older, which tells us how important it is to encourage reading to and with children right from the start of life, and how crucial it is for young readers to have books that excite and interest them at every stage. Irish and international studies show that those from less advantaged backgrounds and boys from all backgrounds perform less well at reading literacy and read less than girls and those from more advantaged backgrounds. Our view, which is supported by evidence, is that we must encourage reading for the sheer *joy* of it at every age in order to develop lifelong readers who can reap the many benefits of being a reader, *and* delight in the artforms of literature and illustration.

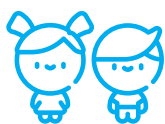
Research published in 2023 by BookTrust (UK) on the benefits of reading shows that children who read are more likely to overcome disadvantage caused by inequalities; are more likely to be happier, healthier and experience better mental wellbeing and self-esteem; are more likely to do better at school and make progress across the curriculum; and are more likely to develop empathy and creativity. Reading is more important for children's cognitive development than their parents' level of education and is a more powerful factor in life achievement than socio-economic background. According to the OECD, finding ways to engage students in reading may be one of the most effective ways to leverage social change.



Data from the *Growing Up in Ireland* longitudinal survey shows that:



At the age of 9 months, 19.5% of infants are never read to.



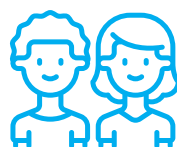
At three years old, 20% of children are read to infrequently – three or fewer days a week.



At nine years old, only 6% of children report never reading for pleasure.



At thirteen years old, 19% say they never read.



At age 17, the proportion who never read increases to 53%.



Strategic aims and objectives

Our goals and how we will achieve them

1: To encourage a love of reading among all children and young people

We will bring readers together so that children can encourage each other and engage critically and playfully with books. Giving every child and young person an opportunity to become a reader gives them equitable access to the many benefits of reading, and opens up a lifetime of stories for all children regardless of their background.

- Create opportunities for every child to become a reader, with most supports for those with the highest level of need.
- Inform and inspire children and young people's reading from birth through the teenage years, in English and Irish, and respecting the language of the home.
- Deliver the Laureate na nÓg programme to engage and inspire children, young people, and their communities through literature.
- Include children and young people in our work and in our decision-making in meaningful ways.
- Support the development of communities of readers around a shared love of reading.



2: To support authors and illustrators who make work for young readers

There is a unique value in children's literature from Ireland, made by our talented authors, illustrators, translators, poets, publishers and storytellers. We will nurture our community of artists throughout their careers and connect them with their audiences, so that young readers in Ireland can experience the richness and diversity of Irish society and culture expressed in literature. We will defend artists' rights to creative freedom of expression and readers' rights to access excellent books.

- Raise the profile of Irish and Irish-based authors and illustrators.
- Advocate for appropriate pay, conditions and other supports which will enable authors and illustrators to have sustainable careers, and continue to model good practice in this area.
- Lead in implementing and advocating for positive changes to make the sector more inclusive.
- Develop creative and practical supports for début authors and illustrators and provide continuing professional development in live literature event practice for artists at all career stages.
- Provide mid-career and established artists with the time and space they need to create.
- Create communities of practice for artists at all career stages to connect, formally and informally, around Ireland.





3: To share our expertise and enthusiasm with the adults who guide young readers

We will grow and strengthen our network of champions – people who can encourage children’s reading as a family member or trusted adult, and those who have professional connections to children, including our invaluable booksellers and librarians. We will consolidate our reputation as the go-to organisation for independent advice and recommendations on books and reading at every stage from birth through the teenage years.

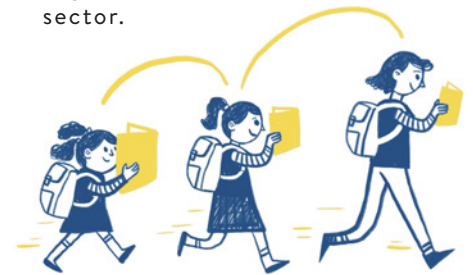
- Increase our impact by reaching more families and community groups through strategic partnerships.
- Continue to develop our media presence and maintain strong relationships with key partners.
- Produce inviting, accessible publications which showcase excellent Irish children’s literature, and keep our community informed about international books, trends and developments.
- Emphasise the connection between reading for joy and wellbeing.



4: To embed reading for joy in the education sector

Developing a positive culture of reading for joy from early childhood through secondary school is the most powerful way to ensure that every child has the chance to become a reader, regardless of their background. We will share our expertise and enthusiasm widely and raise the profile of Irish children’s books in this sector.

- Advocate for policies and investment at Government level which will encourage children and young people to develop a lifelong love of reading and allow all children equitable access to this cultural right.
- Support the development of reading for joy in schools and early childhood settings.
- Upskill and support educators in early childhood settings, primary and secondary schools, particularly in relation to Irish children’s books.
- Increase awareness of the organisation in the education sector.



5: To be inclusive, effective and sustainable

Children’s Books Ireland is a charity that lives our values every day, in everything we do. We value the many relationships which are the foundation of our work, and which support our ambitions. We work with integrity, in a way that is respectful, responsible and connected. We rely on many strategic partnerships to achieve our aims and to grow our impact exponentially.

- Work with honesty and transparency, adhering to the principles of the Charities Regulator and fulfilling our charitable purpose.
- Maintain an evidence-informed practice, measuring our impact and communicating it to our key partners.
- Value our team, ensuring that Children’s Books Ireland is a good place to work and that we respect and encourage the people who work so hard to achieve our aims.
- Minimise our impact on the planet and work sustainably.
- Be part of an international community, using our voice at a European and international level, learning from our peers, sharing information, and promoting Irish children’s literature.
- Ensure that we are properly resourced to achieve our ambitions.

Policy context

This strategy for 2024–2028 will span our 30th birthday, and a period in which there will be significant learning and change in relation to climate action, AI and inclusion. As we develop our own organisational policies in these areas and others, we align with the *Arts Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy*; *Paying the Artist*; *Ag Fás leis na hEalaíona/Growing with the Arts: Arts Council Policy for Children and Young People's Arts*; *Literature Policy and Strategy*; *Litríocht na Gaeilge A Chothú: Beartas Maidir le Litríocht na Gaeilge* (Irish language literature policy) and indeed *Making Great Art Work*, the Arts Council's ten-year strategy for 2016–2025. We are guided by the *National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making*. As an all-island organisation, we align with the Arts Council of Northern Ireland's Strategic Plan 2024–34 and look forward to progressing towards their vision of a society where all people can experience a thriving arts sector that is recognised as essential to creativity, wellbeing and social and economic prosperity.

Our work is relevant to and aligns closely with several key government policies and strategies, including *Young Ireland: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2023–2028*, *The Library is the Place: Information, Recreation, Inspiration – National Public Library Strategy 2023–2027*, the *Creative Youth Plan 2023–2027*, *First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019–2028* and the *Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy 2024–2033: Every Learner from Birth to Young Adulthood*. The latter is a significant piece of work from the Departments of Children and Education which counts among its measures of success 'Increased time learners in primary and post-primary schools spend reading and writing for enjoyment' and which sees the mainstreaming of several book-gifting initiatives for babies and pre-school children, excellent steps towards our vision: every child a reader.



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