

A Reading Revolution for Ireland:

Investing in school libraries

2026

#ReadingRevolution





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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 at Children's Books Ireland is 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. We share our expertise and enthusiasm with the adults who guide and influence young readers, and encourage schools and early childhood settings to build a positive culture of reading and reading aloud. We support and promote authors and illustrators and connect them with their audiences through our work.

Continue the conversation with us at
www.childrensbooksireland.ie where you will find more reviews, articles and up-to-the-minute news.

Tá sé mar mhisean againne i **Leabhair Pháistí Éireann** grá don léitheoireacht a spreagadh i bpáistí agus daoine óga ar oileán na hÉireann, agus tacú leis an gceart atá ag gach páiste teacht ar leabhair iontacha. Roinnimid ár gcuid saineolais agus ár ndíograis leis na daoine fásta a threoraíonn iad agus a théann i gcion orthu, agus spreagaimid scoileanna agus suíomhanna luath-óige le cultúr dearfach a chruthú maidir le léitheoireacht agus léitheoireacht os ard. Cuirimid údair agus maisitheoirí chun cinn agus tacaímid leo dul i gcion ar a lucht léitheoireachta tríd an obair a dhéanaimid. Táimid ag súil le bheith ag comhoibriú le loveleabhargaeilge.ie ar 100 scothleabhar Gaeilge na bliana seo do pháistí agus do dhaoine óga idir 0 agus 18 mbliana d'aois.

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



‘Those who read for fun more often have higher levels of achievement in reading and maths, are happier, more self-confident as learners and have fewer socio-emotional difficulties.’

Smyth, E., Arts and Cultural Participation among Children and Young People: Insights from the *Growing Up in Ireland* study.

Why school libraries are essential

The Department of Education and Youth’s vision is ‘a world class education system where every child and young person is supported and nurtured to achieve their full potential and where barriers to their learning are removed’, (*Inclusive Education for All*, 2025). This vision is one of equity and should be a commitment to providing the tools *every* child in the state needs to succeed and thrive. But we have an affordable tool at our disposal which has been proven to have positive impacts on children’s learning outcomes, their future success, and their wellbeing, and we are simply not using that tool to best effect.

Evidence proves that reading for pleasure and fun on a regular basis results in myriad benefits for children, including an increase in academic engagement and achievement. Reading can level the playing field between children who are experiencing disadvantage and their more advantaged peers. It is the key to unlocking multiple facets of education, it has a positive effect on wellbeing, and it is a joyful connection to the arts from the earliest days of life. Many children in Ireland live in homes where there are few, if any, books. Many children are not read to, or do not read for joy regularly. The school library should be a place where every child has equitable access to a wide range of high-quality literature which is curated based on pupils’ needs, abilities and interests.

Every child deserves to read books that reflect their own reality and mirror the diversity of Irish society. Primary and secondary schools need libraries that offer representative and inclusive books which explore the nature of childhood and young adulthood in Ireland today, supporting pupils to engage with a multiplicity of experiences.

And yet, due to a systemic and consistent deficit of sustainable funding from Government, an overwhelming majority of schools all over the country, DEIS and non-DEIS alike, simply do not have the resources to create and sustain functioning libraries. As a result, if a child in one of these schools does not have access to a family culture of reading at home, it is highly unlikely that they will encounter opportunities to access excellent books and will thus miss out on the life-changing benefits of being a reader.

In order to address the systemic need for books across primary and secondary schools in the Republic of Ireland, Children’s Books Ireland is calling for a permanent school library funding stream of €68m annually, which would initially allocate funds to purchase 5 books per pupil in 2027, increasing to 10 books per pupil per year by 2030, with an approximate cost of €137m (based on departmental enrolment data).

Sustained, predictable investment in this fundamental resource is essential, so that schools can plan to develop their collection over time to meet all pupils’ needs, to keep the collection relevant and remove damaged books. A permanent fund will help to overcome the scarcity mindset which has developed in many schools as a result of the lack of funding for libraries, and which restricts pupils’ access to books: in many schools we work with, there is a reluctance to allow pupils to take books home, for fear these books will be lost or damaged, with no way to replace them.

Government must, therefore, commit to the following provisions in Budget 2027:

- Sustained annual funding for books for primary and secondary school libraries
- An expansion of the JCSP Demonstration Library Project to every secondary school in the country, including an immediate widening of access to the SORA digital library system for every secondary school pupil
- Funding for the design and implementation of a new primary school library system, staffed by professional librarians
- The establishment of a National Advisory Group on School Library Provision, as called for by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science in 2022

Only by creating and supporting a society of readers can we expect to nurture critical thinkers who will acquire the knowledge and expertise to combat misinformation and disinformation and to tackle the urgent social justice and climate crises affecting the globe. If children and young people have equitable access in school to excellent books that reflect and represent their lives, they are more likely to overcome educational and socio-economic disadvantage. Only by fostering intrinsic motivation – a genuine desire to read – will we be able to equip our future leaders and decision-makers with the skills they need to realise their full potential and contribute to Ireland’s social, economic and cultural development, as the Department outlines in its Mission.

‘Although not designated as a DEIS school, there is significant evidence of financial and social disadvantage in this rural area. There is no library in the village itself, and many families would not necessarily drive children to the nearest library. As a school we are making every effort to ensure that children have access to a diverse range of modern, attractive books, at their reading level. The school library may be the child’s only chance to access good books and develop a love of reading.’

– Non-DEIS primary school, Limerick

The challenges faced by schools in Ireland

When it comes to creating and sustaining cultures of reading for joy, there are numerous challenges faced by school leaders and educators (and this list is far from comprehensive):

- A systemic lack of funding, resourcing, and infrastructure for the provision of school libraries in primary and secondary settings, including stock procurement and management
- Shortages of qualified school librarians and a lack of funding to employ them – with the exception of 30 JCSP libraries in secondary schools around the country and in a handful of private schools
- A lack of relevant knowledge, professional development, staff time and resources in schools when it comes to choosing new children’s and young adult books and using them in the classroom: recent research shows that only 8% of pre-service teachers could name 3 or more Irish authors and 48%
- Staff shortages and individual burnout – 85% of Irish teachers in a recent DCU survey reported moderate to high work-related burnout
- Distance from local public libraries and lack of mobile library service provision in some communities
- Economic disadvantage in school communities

One of the key success criteria from the *Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy 2024–2033*, is ‘increased time learners in primary and post-primary schools spend reading and writing for enjoyment.’ How can schools be expected to meaningfully achieve this unless they have access to a permanent funding stream for library books?

The reality is that teachers must attempt to motivate children to read using old, tattered, unattractive and, in the case of non-fiction, often inaccurate books. They are promoting reading to increasingly diverse groups of pupils using dated books which are not representative of their own classrooms. Teachers cannot rely on funding that would allow them to purchase contemporary books, books that would allow them to explore difficult topics which can in turn help children to empathise and explore emotions safely. They cannot provide high quality children’s literature by Irish authors and illustrators, leaving children to read donated copies of bestsellers from the UK and the USA. This leads to striking homogeneity in what Irish children are reading, juxtaposed against the remarkable success and renown of our authors for adults.

‘Our school would greatly benefit from the provision of a well-resourced and up-to-date library, as our current collection is both limited and outdated. Many of the books available have been in circulation for a very long time, and any newer additions tend to come from charity shops or are donated by staff. While these contributions are valued, they do not provide the breadth, relevance, or appeal needed to fully engage today’s young readers.’

– Non-DEIS primary school, Cavan

Did you know? Facts about reading in Ireland

Pupils’ socioeconomic status affects their reading lives. ESRI research based on the *Growing Up in Ireland* longitudinal study shows that 30% of children in Ireland whose mothers did not complete secondary education were in the lowest reading quintile, compared with about 8% of children whose mothers were third level graduates. Similar patterns were found for household income and social class.

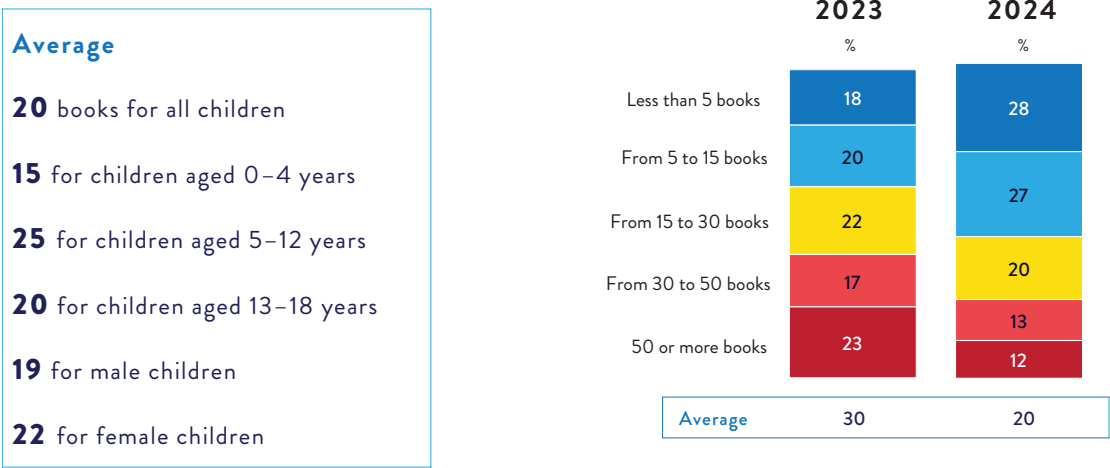
The most recent (2021) *Progress in International Reading Literacy Study* (PIRLS) reveals that pupils aged between 9 and 10 in Ireland with higher socioeconomic status (SES) performed significantly and substantially better, on average, than peers with middle and lower SES.

The most recent (2022) *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA) findings show that pupils in Ireland who experience the greatest levels of disadvantage achieved a mean reading score that is notably lower than the mean scores of all other pupils.

But there is a downward trend in relation to reading across all socioeconomic groups: PIRLS showed that the frequency of reading for fun declined for all pupils between 2016 and 2021, and pupils became less enthusiastic overall in their attitudes to reading.

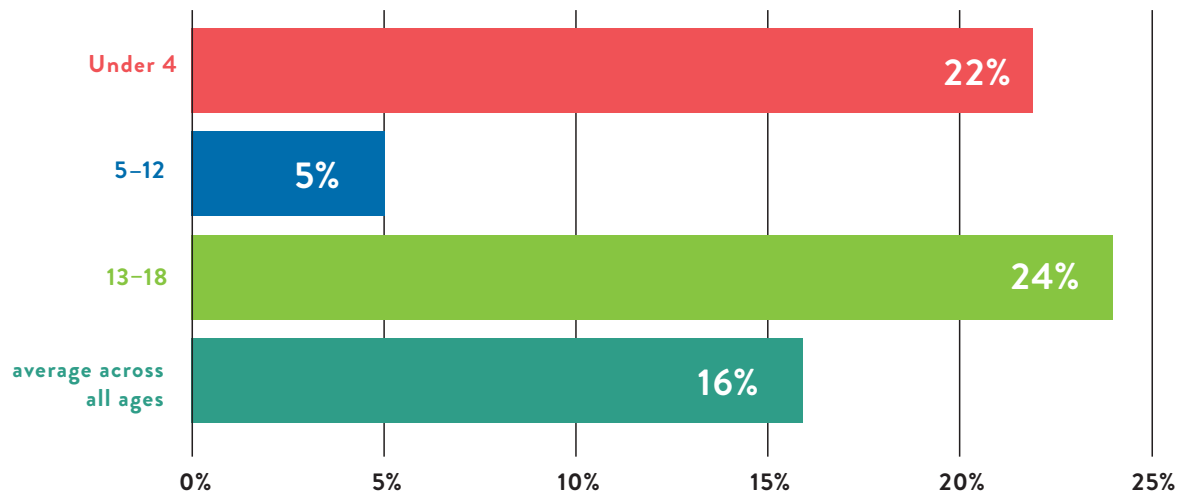
The *Children and Young People’s Reading in Ireland 2025* report, published by Children’s Books Ireland in 2025, also shows that the number of children’s books in Irish homes dropped significantly between 2023 and 2024, from an average of 30 down to 20. More than half (55%) of children aged 0–18 in Ireland own 15 books or less. The same study shows that 1 in 5 children under the age of 4 are not being read to, and that reading declines significantly around the transition from primary to secondary school: 24% of 13– to 18–year-olds never read for pleasure. There is also a significant discrepancy between boys and girls with almost 20% of the former compared to 12% of the latter never reading for pleasure.

Book ownership: number of books owned

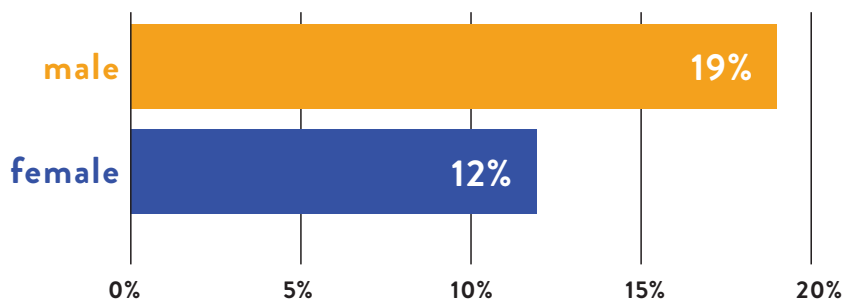


‘Our school is unlike any other school in the area because of the range of pupils that attend it – refugees, members of the Traveller Community, children with disabilities, children from poor socio-economic backgrounds and children from different types of families. It is essential that all of these children see themselves in the books that they read. It will help them feel more confident and that they belong.’

– Non-DEIS primary school, Mayo



Percentage of children who do not read for pleasure



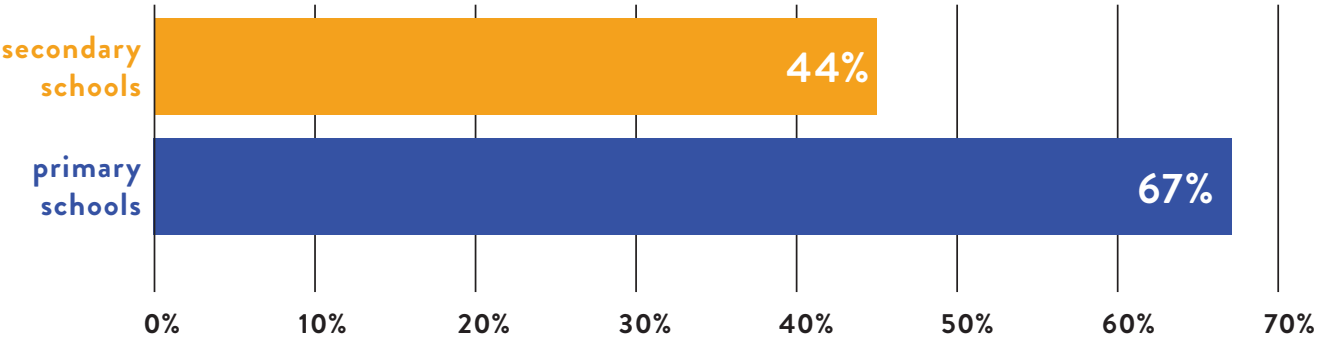
Percentage of children who do not read for pleasure – by gender

What schools are telling us

Each year, Children’s Books Ireland invites primary and secondary schools on the island of Ireland to apply for support in relation to their school libraries and reading cultures. Successful schools enrolled on our book-gifting programmes receive new library books, author and illustrator visits, classroom resources, and expert advice and training on reading promotion, school library management and book procurement.

Between 2023 and 2026, removing duplicate and repeat applications, we received unique applications for book-gifting support from two-thirds (67%) of all primary schools and almost half (44%) of all secondary schools in the Republic of Ireland.

Unique applications for book-gifting support (2023–2025)



Percentage of all schools which applied for Children’s Books Ireland’s support (%)

This level of engagement proves that the lack of access to excellent, diverse and representative books is a systemic problem for primary and secondary schools alike, and that the need is demonstrable across DEIS and non-DEIS contexts – each year, we consistently receive more applications from non-DEIS settings than we do from DEIS settings. Schools all over the country need more books on their shelves to make reading and its inherent benefits a reality for their students.



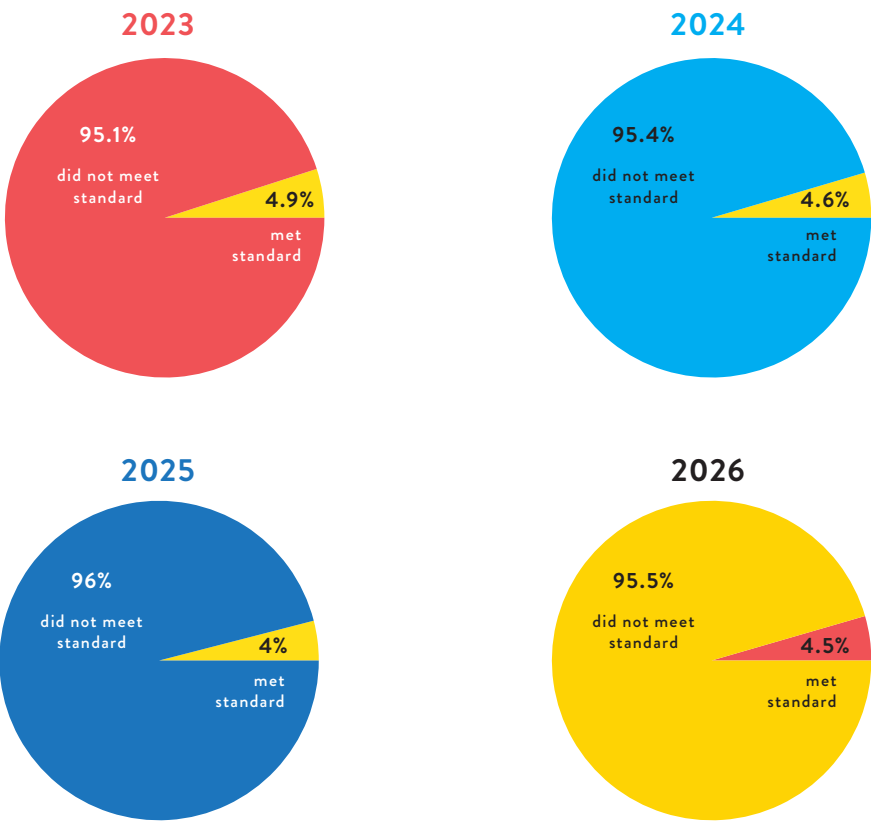
Primary Schools

‘We have a very diverse school population. Our families are varied in make-up, culture, religion and the languages they speak. This year we have children from 46 different countries! We have children from all sorts of family backgrounds. We want all of our children to know that they are just as important, special and valued as every one of their classmates.’

– Non-DEIS primary school, Dublin

The School Library Association in the UK recommends that a primary school library should stock a minimum of ten books per pupil. **The smallest school library ‘should be resourced as if it had a roll of 200 pupils, as a means of ensuring that there is sufficient material to cover all interests and ability levels’**, (*Recommendations for Primary School Libraries*, p. 9). This means that while ideally there should be 10 to 15 books per pupil in a primary school library, the smallest library should have at least 2,000 books on its shelves – an important fact to note given the proliferation of small schools across Ireland.

In 2023, 384 primary schools in the Republic of Ireland applied for book-gifting support. Nineteen of these had enough books on their shelves per pupil to meet the minimum primary school library standard outlined above – just 5%. In 2024, out of 635 schools, twenty-nine had enough books to meet the minimum standard – 4.5%. In 2025, out of 897, just thirty-six met the standard – 4% of all applicants. In 2026, out of 712, thirty-two had functioning school libraries – almost 4.5%. Put simply, the vast majority of Irish primary schools do not have enough books on their shelves to support their pupils to access the myriad benefits that come with being a reader, and for those schools that do, the quality and relevance of those books is simply inadequate to meet the needs of the pupils in their classrooms.



Primary schools meeting library standard

In 2024, of 635 applying primary schools:

- 42% were located more than 5km from their local public library, meaning they could not easily and regularly access it without costly bus transport

In 2025, of 897 applying primary schools:

- Almost 96% agreed that reading helps their pupils relax and positively supports wellbeing
- 60% were supporting pupils who had experienced displacement due to war, persecution or natural disasters
- 24% said that they had never had a visit from an author or an illustrator

In 2026, of 712 applying primary schools:

- Almost 59% said that they currently had no practices or initiatives in place in their school for acknowledging and celebrating diversity
- 67% relied on donations from school staff to stock their library shelves
- For almost 47%, responsibility for the school library fell to a teacher as a voluntary duty, not as a funded position

In 2024, 512 schools told us that they rely on donations from parents, guardians, and the wider school community to keep their bookshelves stocked. In 2025, this number was 736. In 2026, it was 599. **This number of schools having to rely on donations of books in one of the wealthiest countries in Europe, one with a world-renowned literary heritage, is nothing short of scandalous.** A reliance on donations also means that most school libraries largely feature multiple used copies of bestselling series from the UK and the USA, rather than high-quality and diverse literature, including books written by authors and illustrators from Ireland. All reading is good reading, but children should have a wide range to choose from, a broad selection of formats and genres, themes and reading levels. It excludes those who may have special requirements in relation to reading challenges. And it gives children no access to our rich Irish children's literature, made by talented authors, illustrators, publishers and translators who need the support of young readers to keep this crucial aspect of our culture alive.



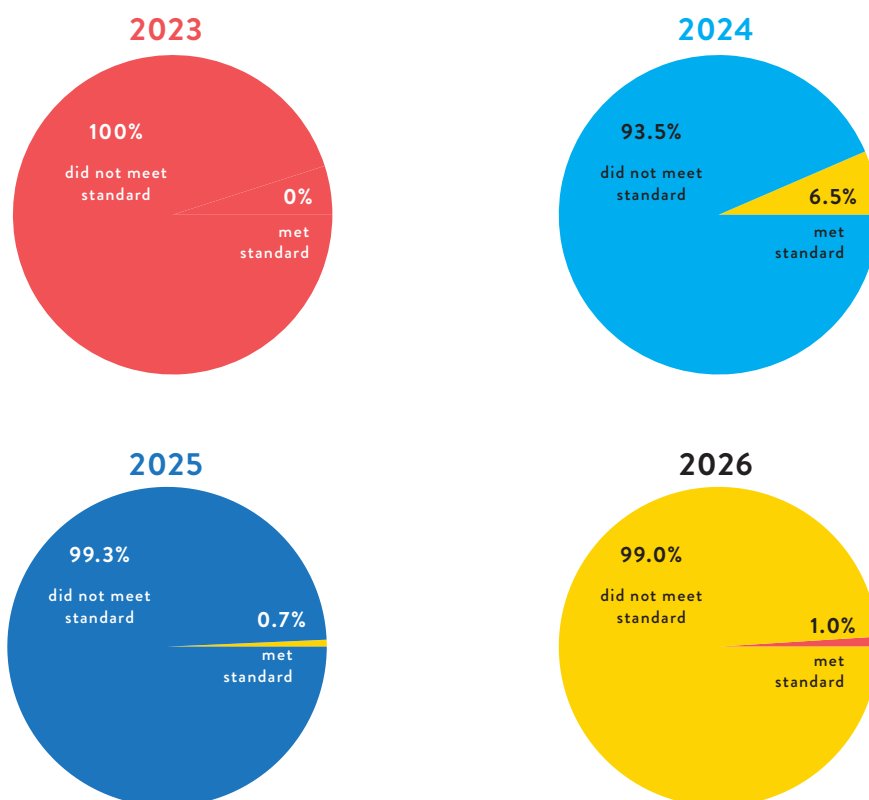
Secondary Schools

‘We live in an extremely rural and isolated area, and pupils sometimes think they are completely alone in the things that they experience. It would be also beneficial for pupils to read about diverse characters as they are not always exposed to people with varying degrees of diversity and we believe books would broaden their horizons.’

– Rural DEIS secondary school, Mayo

The School Library Association recommends that secondary or post-primary school libraries should stock between 13 and 18 books per pupil, for 11– to 16–year-olds, rising to between 17 and 25 books per pupil for 17– to 18–year-olds. When we apply this standard to secondary schools seeking book-gifting support from Children’s Books Ireland, taking 13 books per pupil as the bare minimum, the numbers are stark. In 2023, out of sixty-three applying secondary schools, **none** of these had enough books per pupil to meet the minimum standard for a functioning secondary school library. In 2024 out of 77 schools just five had enough books to meet the standard – 6.5%. In 2025, out of 144 schools, only one had enough books per pupil to qualify as a functioning school library – less than 1%. And again, in 2026, out of 100 schools, only one had enough books on its shelves per pupil to meet the minimum standard of 13 books per pupil.

Currently in Ireland, only 30 secondary schools have dedicated school libraries, managed by full-time professionally qualified librarians, as part of the Junior Certificate School Programme’s Demonstration Library Project. These school librarians work in partnership with school staff to support pupils and improve literacy levels and reading motivation. **A commitment to expand the project to 50 schools has remained unfulfilled since 2008.**



Secondary schools meeting library standard

In 2024, of 77 applying secondary schools:

- 62% relied on donations from the wider school community to stock their library shelves
- 66% stated that they were not in receipt of funding for library books

The largest school applying in 2024 had almost 1,700 pupils on campus. They had less than 100 books on their library shelves.

In 2025, of 144 schools:

- 72% relied on book donations from staff
- 33% stated that they had never received a visit from an author or an illustrator
- Only 25% had dedicated library spaces
- The largest school that applied in 2025 had almost 1,600 pupils on campus, with less than 250 books (less than one book per pupil) on their shelves.

In 2026, of 100 schools:

- 86% were supporting pupils who had experienced displacement due to war, persecution or natural disasters
- 46% stated that they currently had no practices or initiatives in place in their school for acknowledging and celebrating diversity
- 46% stated that responsibility for their library was a voluntary duty

But it's not just about numbers. Every year, teachers and principals tell us that their pupils do not have access to diverse and inclusive books that reflect the lived realities of their classroom and school communities; classrooms have become more diverse but the books on their shelves remain resolutely reflective of a white, able-bodied, heterosexual majority. Despite the fact that, according to Dyslexia Ireland, 1 in 10 pupils in the country have dyslexia, schools do not have dyslexia-friendly books. They lack vibrant graphic novels, non-fiction which contains current and correct information, and books about sport which can engage reluctant readers. They do not have enough books to challenge and stretch exceptionally able pupils, nor enough high-quality books in Irish, which would increase the use and enjoyment of the language, another objective of the Department's Statement of Strategy.



Equitable access to excellent books

‘I have dreamed for years of our school having a library. We have worked hard to promote reading but with limited space we don’t have a library location yet. I believe that having a library of books that are new and are relevant would open the minds of our pupils to the many different worlds that are out there. The books that we have at present are books that were donated and bought in a charity shop, they are dated. I believe having books that deal with a diverse group of people will not only benefit the pupils but all of the school community.’

Non-DEIS secondary school, Waterford

Following the withdrawal of sustained school library funding in 2008, the system that existed at that time has collapsed. Funding was provided by the Department of Education, with guidance and procurement support provided through public libraries. This professional expertise to help schools curate an appropriate, excellent, representative collection which caters for the needs and tastes of its pupils is an essential facet of a properly functioning school library system. While Ireland does not currently have enough qualified school librarians to serve every school in the country, every school should have access to the appropriate expertise and resources staff need to make equitable access to books a reality for their pupils.

The Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science called for a National Advisory Group on School Library Provision in 2022, but the group has yet to be established. This is inexcusable. Put simply, funding from government for school libraries and guidance and support for educators needs to be annualised and made sustainable, starting with book provision, so that every school-going child and young person in Ireland has access to inclusive and representative books.

Reading and access to books is an issue of social justice. It follows then, that every school around the country, both primary and secondary, should have the resources and sustained funding to provide their pupils with high quality, contemporary books that:

- Are inclusive, representative, and reflective of the changing cultural and social diversity of Irish classrooms and communities, allowing every child and young person to see themselves in a book and to empathise with lived experiences that are different to theirs, regardless of their gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, socioeconomic background or family circumstances.
- Offer a range of different reading experiences not restricted to traditional prose, including picturebooks, graphic novels, poetry and informative and engaging non-fiction. This is crucial given that the current Primary Curriculum Framework, the current Junior Cycle Framework, and the Senior Cycle English Syllabus all explicitly state that pupils must be supported to engage with, enjoy, and create a range of different kinds of texts.
- Cater for and support the diverse levels and needs of every pupil, including those with learning difficulties, those who are neurodivergent, those who are exceptionally able and those for whom English is an additional language – the 2014 National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading report identifies only 1% of print books across all libraries in Irish schools attended by Second Class pupils as being in a language other than English or Irish.
- Represent opportunities for pupils to enrich their reading lives by exercising their creative and imaginative autonomy, and to pursue their interests and develop their reading tastes. Under Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, every child has the right to an artistic and cultural life, while every State Party to the Convention is obliged to support the vital production of books for children.

All primary and secondary schools should house a rich, vibrant library on the school premises, stocked with contemporary, representative, and inclusive books, enabling schools to nurture cultures of reading for joy, while being financially and infrastructurally supported to manage and sustain these libraries.

‘Our school serves a diverse DEIS community with a high proportion of pupils experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, mixed literacy attainment and a significant cohort of pupils for whom English is an additional language. We also support pupils across three Special Classes and a large number attending Literacy and Learning Support, many of whom access Reasonable Accommodations, including spelling and grammar waivers. These overlapping needs mean that building literacy confidence, engagement and a sense of belonging is central to our work. A carefully curated selection of books featuring diverse characters would be of particular benefit in this context. Many of our pupils do not consistently see their cultures, languages, family structures or lived experiences reflected in the texts traditionally available in schools. Access to inclusive literature would allow pupils to recognise themselves in stories, strengthening identity, self-worth and engagement with reading. In a school community that values inclusion, such a collection would reinforce the message that every pupil’s story matters and that reading is for everyone.’

– DEIS Band 1 secondary school, Monaghan

Reading is a hugely effective tool for tackling child poverty, a powerful catalyst for social change, but we are simply not investing enough in the creative and imaginative lives of our school communities to drive and actualise that change.

Properly provisioned school libraries are a high-level intervention that would positively affect the lives of every school-going child in the country, from their wellbeing to their academic engagement whilst combating social and educational disadvantage. If primary and secondary school communities around the country could access a permanent school library fund, it would have a hugely positive effect on wellbeing, academic achievement, social inclusion and belonging in Irish classrooms.

The 2025 Programme for Government stated that ‘education is at the heart of all our ambitions as a country.’ If this is true, and if Government is to deliver on its promise of excellent and inclusive education for all children, investment must be made in the provision of a school library system for primary and secondary schools. Yet, nowhere in the Programme for Government: Securing Ireland’s Future is there *any* mention of funding for school libraries – beyond an outdated commitment to expanding the JCSP Demonstration Library Project – whether in relation to books on shelves, expertise from qualified librarians or physical library infrastructure in new schools. If we, as a country, want to invest in our future, and in equipping children and young people with the skills they need to navigate an increasingly complex world, we must ensure that they have access to excellent books, that not only reflect their lives but help them build empathy and experience a sense of belonging in their communities.

The creation of a permanent funding stream for books for school libraries, and sustainable pathways towards a primary and secondary school library system would constitute what was promised in the Programme for Government – an investment in the future of all children and young people in Ireland.

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About Us

As the national reading charity, Children's Books Ireland's mission is 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. Supporting school communities to develop positive cultures of reading for joy is the most powerful way to ensure that every child and young person has the chance to become a reader, regardless of their background. We know that educators need access to best practice examples, up to date knowledge about children's books and the benefits of reading for joy, and sustained funding to create school libraries that are responsive to the needs of their school communities. We have developed key partnerships with the INTO and Education Centres around the country to provide relevant and inspiring CPD opportunities; with Oide, the state support service for teachers to support the WellRead Awards, and with HEIs who provide initial teacher education. We are a founding member, along with Hibernia College, Marino Institute of Education and the University of Galway, of the Centre for Children's Literature and Pedagogy Ireland, which aims to support pre-service and in-service teachers to deepen their knowledge of children's books and their benefits in the classroom. As a member of the Children's Rights Alliance's Education Advisory Group, we advocate for increased and sustained funding for schools to make reading a reality for every child and young person in the Irish education system.

Contact Us

Our Education & Advocacy Manager, Dr. Becky Long, is available for meetings and can be reached via email becky@childrensbooksireland.ie or by phone **087 411 5922**.



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