

The Rt. Hon Justine Greening MP
 Secretary of State for Education
 Department for Education
 Ministerial and Public Communications Division
 Piccadilly Gate, Store Street
 Manchester, M1 2WD

21/11/2017

Dear Secretary of State,

We the undersigned are writing to request your urgent intervention to halt the decline of library provision and the numbers of qualified librarians in state-funded schools and colleges in England.

We note that in Scotland, following constructive engagement with Scotland's school librarians, Deputy First Minister John Swinney has signalled his intention to bring forward a *National School Library strategy for Scotland* to secure the impact of school libraries on educational outcomes. We now urge you to use your position as Secretary of State for Education to signal your belief in the value of literacy to learning by bringing forward a similar strategy to secure the future of England's school and college libraries.

You will be aware that the UK is in the midst of a literacy crisis. According to the most recent OECD PIAAC rankings, rates of teenage literacy in England are lower than those of other OECD nations. We are the only nation in the OCED in which rates of literacy for 16-24 year-olds are lower than those of people aged 55 and over. You may also be aware that over 33% of the prison population in the UK cannot currently pass a basic literacy test.

Since 2008, the provision of adequately-staffed libraries in schools and colleges with up-to-date learning and reading resources has declined sharply. I share with you the table below which has been shared with us by the librarian at a 'split site' state secondary school:

	2014	2015	2016	2017
Staffing	1 f/t librarian per site	1 p/t librarian covering both sites	Librarian leaves in October	No school librarian in either site
Books loaned to children (between 01/09 and 20/11)	1508	665	338	48
% decline	-	56%	49%	85%

These figures represent a 97% decline in books issued to children at that school to support their learning and development. In the same period across the UK, the usage of e-books and electronic resources in schools in particular has flatlined and even in the last year begun to decline – it is not the case that use of books is being replaced by technology. It is the case that children are not receiving the support and encouragement they need in order to become readers.

We know from the National Literacy Trust's *Read on Get on* campaign that if a child cannot read well by the age of 11, the negative impacts on their attainment last for the rest of their lives. Unless action is taken urgently to address these historically low levels of literacy, there is no way that HM Government can achieve the stated objective of delivering a future-ready 'advanced skills' economy. Before they can read to learn, children and young people must first learn to read, to research and successfully to navigate today's information-rich world.

As the situation stands in England, whereas the provision of appropriately-staffed public and prison libraries is statutory on Local Government and HM Prisons Service, the provision of school and college libraries is not.

Following a positive discussion with Nick Gibb MP earlier this year, we are in the process of discussing with Ofsted the possibility of including in the revised Common Inspection Framework from 2019 a guideline for inspectors to consider how schools and colleges access the support of a trained librarian. However, the urgent need is with us now – we must act now to counter the loss of school and college libraries before we consign a generation to a lifetime of low attainment and mobility.

We remain at your disposal and that of your team to meet with you at your earliest convenience to discuss how we can best work together to halt the decline of library provision and the number of qualified librarians in England's schools and colleges.

Yours sincerely,

Dawn Finch, Immediate Past President, CILIP

Co-signatories:

- Tony Ageh, Chief Digital Officer, New York Public Library
- Judy Allen, Author
- Laura Ellen Anderson, Author
- Steve Antony, Author
- David Baddiel, Comedian, Novelist and Television Presenter
- Gareth Baker, Author
- Chris Naylor Ballesteros, Author
- Barbara Band, Past President, CILIP
- Hayley Barker, Author
- Sara Barnard, Author
- Margaret Bateson-Hill, Author
- Rob Biddulph, Author
- Caroline Bird, Poet and Playwright

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- Lord John Bird, Peer
- Malorie Blackman, Author
- I C Blackman, Author
- Daniel Blythe, Author
- Helena Brothwell, Author
- Stephanie Burgis, Author
- Cerrie Burnell, Actress, Author, Playwright and Television Presenter
- Tanya Byrne, Author
- Elen Caldecott, Author
- Chris Callaghan, Author
- Steven Camden (Polarbear), Author
- Perdita Cargill, Author
- Margaret Casley-Hayford, Chair, Carnegie Greenaway Diversity Review
- Anne Cassidy, Author
- Sophie Cleverly, Author
- Lucy Coats, Author
- Matthew Cock, Chief Executive, VocalEyes
- Joseph Coelho, Author
- Tamsin Cooke, Author
- Elizabeth Corr, Author
- Katharine Corr, Author
- Jo Cotterill, Author
- Frank Cottrell-Boyce, Author
- Cressida Cowell, Author
- Alan Dapre, Author
- A.M Dassu, Author
- Lindsey Davis, Author
- Juno Dawson, Author
- Miranda Dickinson, Author
- Berlie Doherty, Author
- John Dougherty, Author
- Jonathan Douglas, Director, National Literacy Trust
- Ruth Eastham, Author
- Maz Evans, Author
- Kieran Fanning, Author
- Natasha Farrant, Author
- Stewart Foster, Author
- Clare Francis MBE, Novelist and Yachtswoman
- Jo Franklin, Author
- Lady Antonia Margaret Caroline Fraser DBE, Author
- Dan Freedman, Author
- Neil Gaiman, Author
- Tim Godfray, Chief Executive, Booksellers Association

- Candy Gourlay, Author
- Simon James Green, Author
- Lorraine Gregory, Author
- Karen Gregory, Author
- M.A. Griffin, Author
- Philip Gross, Author
- Charlotte Guillian, Author
- Swapna Haddow, Author
- Matt Haig, Author
- Maggie Harcourt, Author
- Francis Hardinge, Author
- Celestine and the Hare, Author
- K Millwood Hargrave, Author
- Georgina Hargreaves, Author
- Nick Harkaway, Author
- Sophy Henn, Author
- Brian Herbert, Business Manager
- Will Hill, Author
- Fleur Hitchcock, Author
- Mary Hoffman, Author
- Ellie Irving, Author
- Rhian Ivory, Author
- Lauren James, Author
- Catherine Johnson, Author
- Gabrielle Kent, Author
- Fiona Laing, Author
- Tanya Landman, Author
- Patrice Lawrence, Author
- Sarah Lean, Author
- M G Leonard, Author
- Angus MacLennan, General Manager, White Horse Bookshop
- Irfan Master, Author
- James Mayhew, Writer, Illustrator and CWIG committee member
- Karen McCombie, Author
- Roger McGough, Poet and Author
- Sarah McIntyre, Author
- Hilary McKay, Author
- Meg McLaren, Illustrator
- Sarah Mears, Immediate Past Chair ASCEL (The Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians)
- Jonathan Meres, Author
- Nicola Morgan, previous Chair of the Soc of Authors Children's Writers and Illustrators group
- Morten Morland, Political Cartoonist and Illustrator

- Emily Morris, Author
- Brian Moses, Author
- Miriam Moss, Writer and Society of Authors Committee Member
- Tamsyn Murray, Author
- Joanna Nadin, Author
- Sinead O'Hart, Author
- James Oswald, Author
- Tom Palmer, Author
- Helen Peters, Author
- Liz Pichon, Author
- Helen Pielichaty, Author
- Jo Platt, Author
- Kate Poels, Author
- Nick Poole, Chief Executive, CILIP
- Non Pratt, Author
- Philip Pullman, Author
- Bali Raj, Author
- Shoo Rayner, Children's author and illustrator, Chair Children's Writers and Illustrators Group of the Society of Authors (CWIG)
- Philip Reeve, Author
- Gillian Reynolds, Author
- Chris Riddell, former UK Children's Laureate and President of the School Library Association
- Caroline Roche MA MCLIP, School Librarian and Chair of CILIP School Libraries Group
- Dave Rudden, Author
- SF Said, Author
- Melinda Salisbury, Author
- R Saravan, Primary School Governor
- Anne Sebba, Author, Lecturer and Journalist
- Fiona Sharp, Author
- Nick Sharratt, Author
- John Shelley, Illustrator, Creator & Childrens Book Maker
- Francesca Simon, Author
- Dan Smith, Author
- Nicola Solomon, Chief Executive, Society of Authors
- Chitra Soundar, Author
- Alex Spencer
- Keris Stainton, Author
- Robin Stevens, Author
- Lucy Strange, Author
- Jeremy Strong, Author
- Mimi Thebo, Author
- Chris Thorpe, Technologist
- Piers Torday, Author

- Jean Ure, Author
- Rachel Ward, Author
- Holly Webb, Author
- Elizabeth Wein, Author
- Tony White, Author
- Tamsin Winter, Author
- Eleanor Wood, Author
- Katherine Woodfine, Author
- Elli Woollard, Author
- Philip Ziegler, Biographer and Historian