National Literacy Trust

Change your story

Libraries for Primaries

Insights from 2024–25

Vedika Puri, Christina Clark & Anne Teravainen-Goff

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Executive summary

Rising living costs mean many families cannot afford books, with disadvantaged children most affected. Meanwhile, reading for pleasure is at a 20-year low, despite strong evidence of its benefits for learning, wellbeing and lifelong outcomes. Limited access to books and declining enjoyment of reading highlight the urgent need for better school library provision.

Yet many schools, especially in disadvantaged areas, lack dedicated libraries, leaving thousands of children without opportunities to read (PSLA, 2022). Strengthening school library provision can bridge this gap by providing essential access to books and fostering a love of reading that supports both educational achievement and broader personal development.

Founded in 2021 by the National Literacy Trust and Penguin Books, the Libraries for Primaries campaign aims to ensure every UK primary school has the resources, training and book stock to embed libraries at the heart of school reading culture.

This report covers the findings from the 2024-25 programme evaluation and shows that:

- Participating teachers engaged in a range of professional development opportunities that enhanced their understanding and confidence in creating and maintaining engaging library environments and supporting reading for pleasure.
- Teachers rating their school's reading for pleasure provision as 'good' or 'very good' went from 33% before to 96% after taking part in the programme.
- 3 in 4 (73.3%) children had noticed changes in the library and, due to this, 2 in 5 (39.4%) children reported enjoying reading more and 1 in 3 (32.7%) had started to read more often.

Revisiting schools a one year later showed that:

- Most schools sustained or expanded initiatives around library development and nearly 9 in 10 (87%) teachers reported continued improvements in school-wide reading for pleasure.
- 2 in 3 (66.3%) children said that they enjoyed reading more and read more often than they did a year ago.
- Children most in need of support made meaningful improvements in standardised reading tests, with 44% progressing to a higher level of performance.

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Overall, the evaluation demonstrates the short- and long-term impact of investing in school libraries and their crucial role in fostering reading for pleasure.

Introduction

The need for improved school library provision is ever-growing and increasingly urgent. The cost-of-living crisis has made it harder for many families to buy books for their children at home (National Literacy Trust, 2023). In 2025, 1 in 10 (10.3%) children and young people aged 5 to 18 reported not owning a single book. This figure rises to 1 in 6 (15.7%) among children receiving free school meals compared with 1 in 11 (9.0%) of their more advantaged peers (Clark et al., 2025). At the same time, reading for pleasure is declining and has reached its lowest point in two decades. In 2025, only 1 in 3 (32.7%) children and young people aged 8 to 18 reported enjoying reading in their free time and fewer than 1 in 5 (18.7%) read daily. Among younger children aged 5 to 8, 3 in 5 (62.6%) said they enjoyed reading while only 2 in 5 (44.5%) read daily (Clark et al., 2025). This downward trend is concerning given the well-documented benefits of reading for pleasure.

With fewer opportunities to access books at home, schools play a critical role in ensuring children experience the benefits of reading. However, in 2022, 1 in 7 UK state primary schools lacked a dedicated library or reading space, and this figure rises to 1 in 4 in the most disadvantaged communities. This gap leaves over three quarters of a million primary school children without access to books that support both educational success and wellbeing (PSLA, 2022)

Extensive research highlights the transformative role of school libraries. Access to a well-resourced library has been shown to improve children's attitudes towards reading, their reading and writing skills, and their overall academic attainment (Clark, 2010; Clark & Teravainen-Goff, 2017). Moreover, positive attitudes towards reading and reading for pleasure have been consistently linked to higher reading comprehension, vocabulary development, and literacy outcomes. Beyond academic gains, reading fosters imagination, empathy, and mindfulness, strengthens social connections, and enhances psychological wellbeing (Cremin & Scholes, 2024). Longitudinal studies also demonstrate that children who read regularly for pleasure are more likely to experience better cognitive development, improved mental health, and healthier lifestyle behaviours as they grow older (Sun et al., 2023).

Given these findings, school libraries are uniquely positioned to address both the lack of book access and the decline in reading for pleasure. By providing children with engaging reading materials and nurturing a love of reading, libraries can

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deliver both immediate educational, social, and psychological benefits, as well as long-term positive life outcomes for children and young people.

Libraries for Primaries

Over the course of an academic year, primary-school leaders, teachers and teaching assistants participate in blended online and in-person training designed to equip them with the knowledge and skills needed to develop a library and use it to inspire more children to become active and engaged readers. With the support of National Literacy Trust experts, they aimed to develop a long-term strategy to drive their school reading culture and form a community of practice with other participating schools through which knowledge and ideas could be shared. The training connects schools with a wider network of educators and organisations that can support them as they continue to develop their reading-for-pleasure culture now and in the future using, where relevant, School Library Services (SLS), local independent bookshops, public libraries, and wider National Literacy Trust resources like our Literacy Hubs. Where possible, this is done using a regional place-based approach but schools in outlying areas are also able to participate in an online-only pathway. Author visits, both in person and online, are available for schools to access, animating the new reading spaces and engaging readers with their new book collections.

Programme objectives include:

- An enhanced library space that captures children's imaginations and supports the development of a lifelong love of reading.
- The children most likely not to have access to reading material at home have increased access to a wide range of high-quality books through their school library.
- Trained staff manage the library or reading space as part of an integrated school-wide reading-for-pleasure strategy
- The school library is positioned at the heart of the school community and networks are built with the wider literacy ecosystem in the area, including public libraries and School Library Services, booksellers and National Literacy Trust Hubs, as well as other local cultural organisations such as museums and charities.

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Evaluation of the programme

In 2024-25, Libraries for Primaries was evaluated using an existing strategy that used a series of end-of-year surveys from which to collect insight:

- 2,258 **children** whose school participated in the programme for the first time. This captured immediate changes in their library use and reading engagement.
- 171 **teachers** after their first year of participation, gathering feedback and reflections on immediate changes because of the training and the revamped library.
- 1,158 **children** whose new or revamped library had been in place for the second year to explore continued benefits on their library use and reading behaviours.
- 126 **teachers** in their second year of participation, exploring sustained changes in their schools as a result of the programme.

In addition, this year we explored the long-term impact on children's reading attainment using Star Reading, a standardised reading test. To do this, we used data collected from **428 children** who completed the tests in the 2023-24 and 2024-25 summer terms.

Immediate changes following the programme

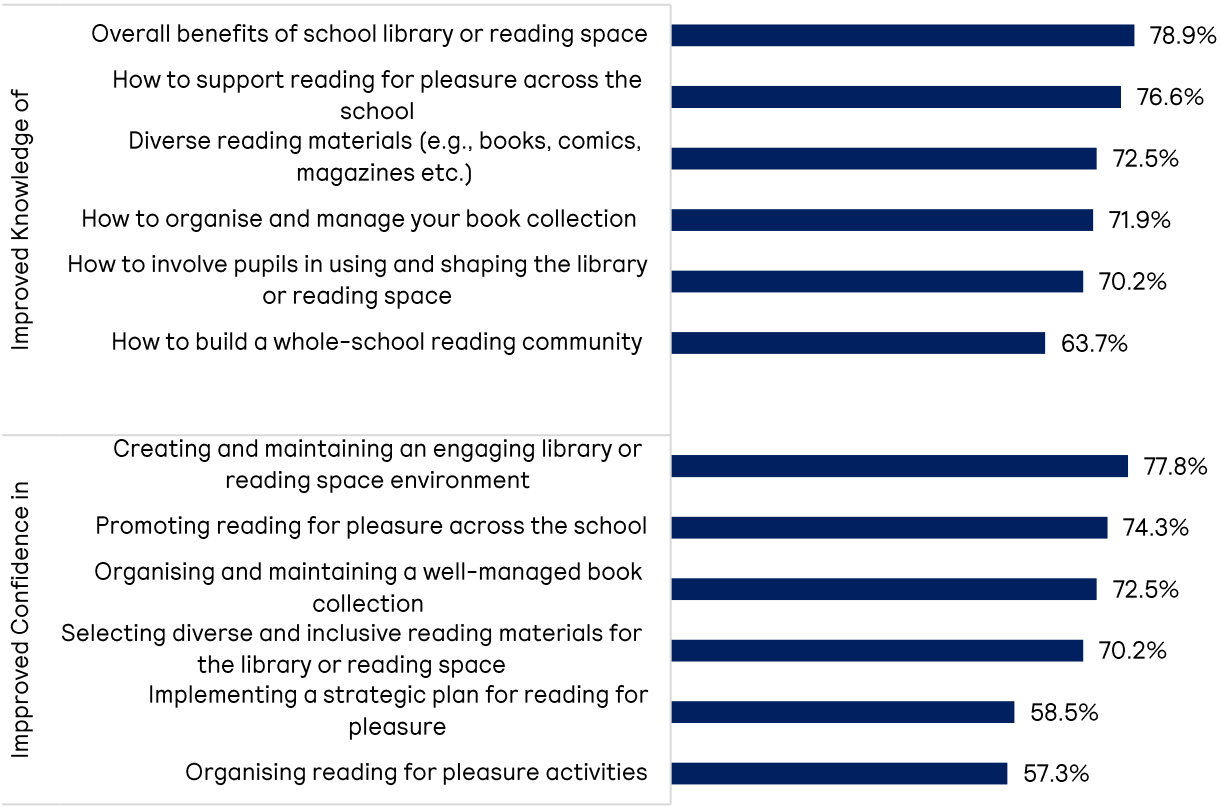
Changes in teachers' knowledge, confidence, and practice

"I feel more confident in organising our school library to make it more appealing and engaging for our children. Using ideas from other people on the programme, we have been able to add things to our library to make it more engaging."
(Participating teacher)

Following the first year of participation, teachers reported greater knowledge and confidence in creating engaging library spaces and improving reading for pleasure in their schools (see Figure 1). For example, nearly 4 in 5 teachers reported greater awareness of the benefits of a school library or reading space, while 3 in 4 had improved knowledge of how to support reading for pleasure. Similarly, more than 3 in 4 felt their confidence to create and maintain an engaging school library had improved. Gains were more modest in teachers' understanding of how to build a school-wide reading community and their confidence in implementing strategic plans and organising activities, potentially indicating that such wider goals might take more time to achieve.

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Figure 1: Percentage of teachers who rated their improved knowledge and confidence in different areas after the programme



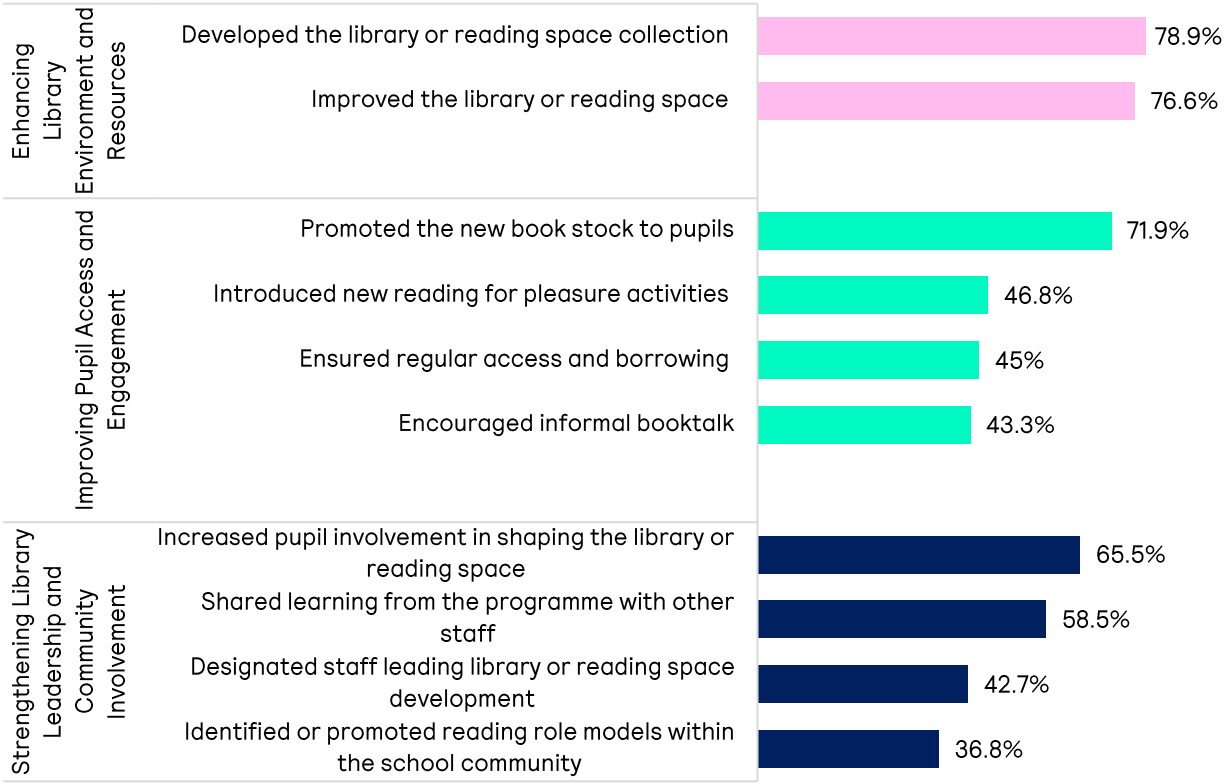
As a result of the improvement in knowledge and confidence, teachers reported that changes were implemented across three key areas of school library or reading space development:

- **Enhancing Library Environment and Resources:** 4 in 5 (78.9%) teachers mentioned that they had developed their book collection by refreshing stock and including diverse resources.
- **Improving Pupil Access and Engagement**: 7 in 10 (71.9%) had promoted their new book stock to children.
- **Strengthening Library Leadership and Community Involvement:** 3 in 5 (58.5%) had shared programme learnings with other staff.

It is interesting, but not unexpected, to see that fewer teachers had begun to implement changes in the second and third areas of library development as these require greater time and investment. For instance, fewer than half of the teachers reported progress in introducing new reading-for-pleasure activities (46.8%) or designating staff to lead library development (42.7%). This indicates a need for time and ongoing support for teachers.

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Figure 2: Percentage of teachers who improved three areas of their school library provision



Looking to the future, all but one teacher (99.4%) expressed their intention to continue implementing changes around the three key areas of library development and almost all (96.4%) stated their intention to further improve their library or reading space in the future. Teachers also outlined plans to inspire a love of reading among children:

"We have only implemented phase 1 of our school reading for pleasure plan. We hope that the promotion of reading for pleasure will be very good next school year when we actively teach children how to use the library and utilise our librarians to promote and recommend books, as well as teachers actively engaging in story time daily." (Participating teacher)

"We are going to continue with the initiatives promoting reading for pleasure with the children. We have a library at the heart of our school, and we very much want to offer all of our children the opportunity to find the genre of book that sparks within them a life-long love of reading. Running book clubs, competitions, authors visits are all ways in which we are endeavouring to do this." (Participating teacher)

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Changes in schools' reading-for-pleasure provision

"We have embedded a reading for pleasure culture across the year groups with children eager to share and read the new titles in our library." (Participating teacher)

Reflecting improved teacher knowledge and confidence, the findings also suggest an improved reading-for-pleasure culture within schools. While only 1 in 3 (33.3%) teachers rated their school's reading-for-pleasure provision as 'good' or 'very good' before taking part, almost all (95.9%) did so after taking part in the programme (see Figure 3). Specifically, the percentage of teachers rating their reading-for-pleasure provision as "very good" increased from 2% to 41% over the course of the programme.

Figure 3: Percentage of teachers rating their school's reading for pleasure provision before and after the programme



Changes in children's library use and reading engagement

"It is more space for a lot of people to sit in and read and there are more and more books in the new library and that is amazing for everyone to read and feel calm in." (Girl, Year 5)

Children enjoyed the welcoming environment of their transformed school library. In the months following the library transformation, 3 in 4 (73.3%) children noticed changes in the library, which in turn led to a range of positive developments:

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- **Emotional changes:** 2 in 5 (43.5%) children felt more comfortable or relaxed in the library, and 1 in 3 (34.2%) felt greater excitement about visiting libraries.
- **Social changes:** 1 in 3 (33.1%) said they enjoyed spending time with friends or classmates in the library.
- **Behavioural changes:** 1 in 5 (22.4%) had visited libraries or bookstores outside school, while 1 in 10 (10.5%) took part in more library activities in school.
- **Changes in confidence and skills:** Over 1 in 3 (35.5%) found it easier to find relatable books, and more than 1 in 4 (27.5%) felt more confident using the library or reading space.

Children's growing enjoyment of the library, along with more positive attitudes and engagement, is mirrored in their increased love of reading, stronger confidence, and more consistent reading habits. After the first year of the programme:

- 2 in 5 (39.4%) said that they enjoyed reading more.
- 1 in 3 (32.7%) said that they read more often.
- 1 in 3 (35.3%) said that they had become better readers.[1]

"It is very comfortable, and you have lots of choices of books to choose from. It is quiet and peaceful, and it feels like you disappear to another world. That's how concentrated people get when they read their books. It helps lots of people's vocab and reading skills. Every school should have a school library. It's amazing. I love it." (Girl, Year 6)

Impact after one year of delivery

Sustained changes to library provision and reading-for-pleasure culture

As changes due to library transformations often take time to embed, we revisited some schools a year later to see how the changes were being sustained and the

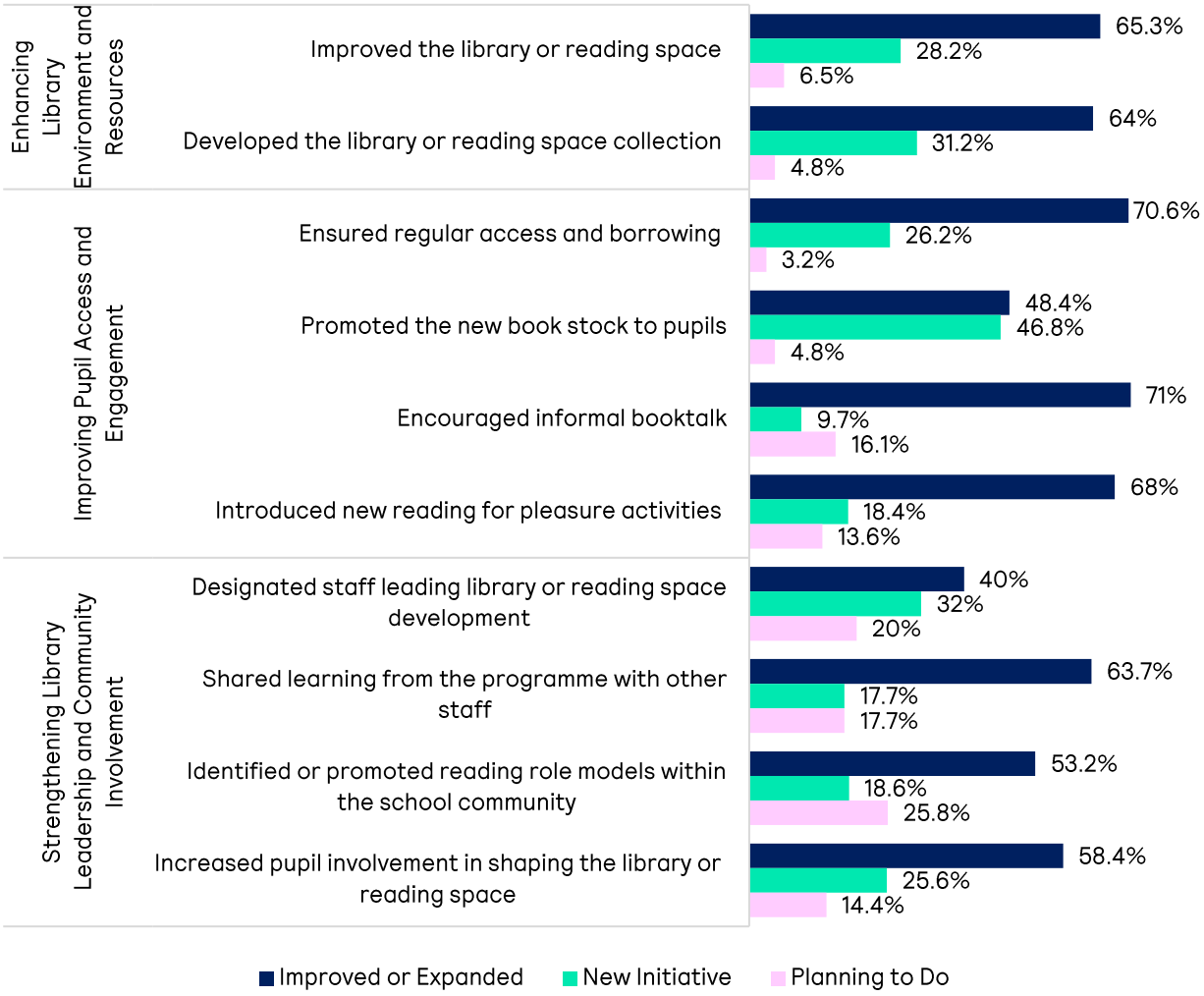
[1] Importantly, these benefits were more or less consistent across gender and FSM status, suggesting equitable impact of the programme. FSM pupils improved on par with their peers while girls showed higher improvement in reading enjoyment compared with boys

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impact they were having. At the end of the second year of the programme, most teachers reported that they had either improved or expanded existing library development initiatives or launched new ones in their schools around the three areas of enhancing the library space and resources, ensuring regular pupil access and engagement with resources and activities, and fostering a culture of reading through better leadership and community engagement (see Figure 4). For instance:

- Nearly 2 in 3 mentioned that they had improved or expanded the changes to their library space and their book collection.
- 7 in 10 stated they had improved children's access to the library and borrowing of books since the last year and encouraged informal book talk.
- Over 3 in 5 also reported they had shared programme learning with staff members.

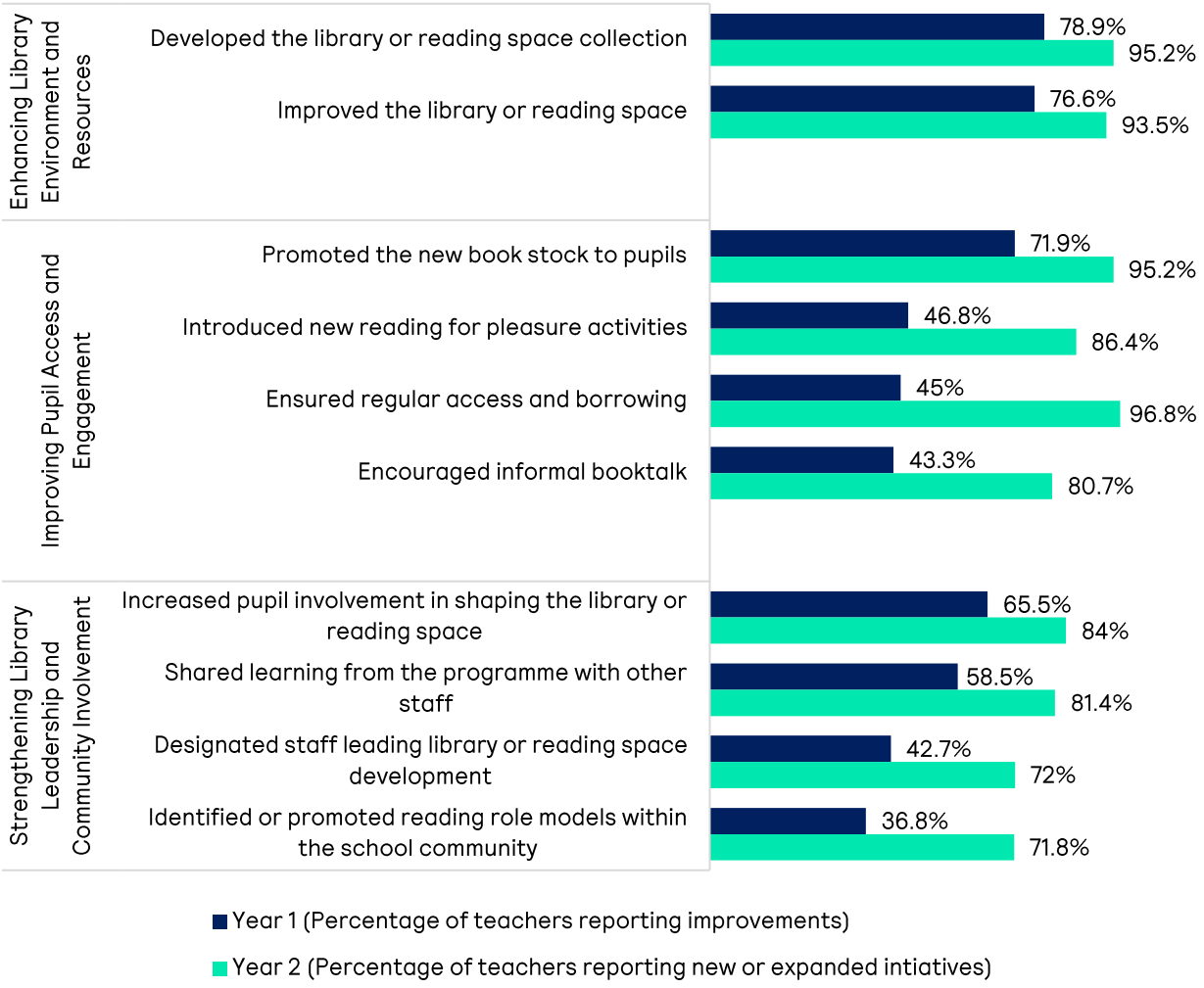
Figure 4: Percentage of teachers who continued to improve three areas of their school library provision in the second year



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The second and third areas of library development, which fewer teachers had begun to implement in the first year, saw progress in the second year (see Figure 5). For instance, in the second area, just over 2 in 5 had ensured regular access and borrowing after the first year but almost all had improved their efforts or launched new initiatives by the end of the second year. Similarly, in the third category, teachers reported enhanced or new efforts around having designated staff to lead library development along with identifying reading role models, from around 4 in 10 in the first year to over 7 in 10 in the second.

Figure 5: Percentage of teachers reporting improvements around the three areas of school library development (first year vs second year)



Moreover, teachers' comments showed how they had enhanced the library environment, resources, and leadership by clearing out old stock, introducing new titles, expanding libraries into corridors and playgrounds, and fostering learning among staff. Importantly, children's engagement and community involvement were

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improved by getting children to decorate and manage spaces, promoting reading role models and introducing new activities such as lunchtime clubs, book swap sheds, reading cafés and book fairs:

"We have invested money in furniture to develop spin off book areas in corridors and shared spaces. We now have a beautiful EYFS library and a gorgeous multi story reading castle in the KS1 shared area." (Participating teacher)

"Year 6 Librarians have been recruited and most attend a Monday Night Library Club which they host for others to use the library after school. They have planned events at Easter and end of term to encourage children to come to the library." (Participating teacher)

"We have established pupil librarians who maintain the collections, sign books in and out and suggest texts to peers. This has promoted the reading culture in classes Year 3 to 6 as children have the option to visit the library and read for pleasure during breaktimes. This has also created a role for passionate readers to become role models to others." (Participating teacher)

The improved library development continued to have a positive impact on reading for pleasure across schools and among children. Over 9 in 10 (93.7%) teachers mentioned they had prioritised reading for pleasure more, while 8 in 10 (79.8%) stated that they had noticed a further impact on children's reading.

Teachers' comments also reflected how this improved school library provision in the three areas affected children's reading as they showed greater enthusiasm, discussed books more openly, and recommended titles to peers:

"One key initiative has been redesigning our library into a calm, inviting space with comfortable seating, bean bags, and dedicated areas for reading and writing. This has had a noticeable impact on children's engagement with books and their overall attitude towards reading. Children now see the library as a space they enjoy spending time in, which has helped foster a stronger reading culture across the school." (Participating teacher)

"One change that became more evident this year is the sustained impact on children's attitudes towards reading. While the physical transformation of the library was immediate, we've since seen a gradual increase in how often children choose to read independently and talk about books with their peers." (Participating teacher)

As a result of the continued commitment to improving school library provision, meaningful changes to school-wide and pupil-level reading for pleasure that were

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not immediately apparent became clearer over time and almost all teachers (96%) reported that they would like to continue these initiatives in the future:

"I think the idea of a reading community has developed more this year. Children talk about books more and will approach adults to ask about books or recommend books." (Participating teacher)

"Next year we plan to have new librarians and children will then be able to promote book talk with different year groups." (Participating teacher)

Sustained impact on children's library engagement and reading behaviours

"I really like the library because it is so colourful and peaceful. It is so calm. I love the books in the library. They are really fascinating and brilliant. Also, it is really spaceful (spacious)." (Girl, Year 3)

"I like going to the school library because I get to look at different type of books and I can get more better at reading." (Girl, Year 4)

With the transformed libraries embedded for a year and schools demonstrating continued commitment to sustaining library development practices and improving reading-for-pleasure provision, our follow-up after the second year of the programme allowed us to assess the longer-term impact on children's school library engagement and reading behaviours.

We saw continued engagement with libraries across the four areas compared with the previous year.

- **Emotional changes**: 7 in 10 (72.8%) felt more comfortable and relaxed in their library space and nearly 3 in 5 (56.2%) were more excited to visit the library compared with a year prior.
- **Social changes:** 7 in 10 (69.7%) also enjoyed spending more time with their friends in the library than they used to.
- **Behavioural changes:** Around 2 in 5 had visited more libraries or bookstores outside of school (43.3%) and reported greater participation in library activities in school (37.7%).
- **Changes in confidence and skills:** 7 in 10 (70.0%) felt more confident using the library while 2 in 3 (65.9%) found it easier to find relatable books than they did when the programme first ended.

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Consequently, sustained library use and enjoyment along with improved attitudes and engagement influenced improvements in children's **reading enjoyment**, **reading frequency** and **reading confidence**:

- 2 in 3 (66.3%) children told us they enjoyed reading more now than they did a year ago.
- 2 in 3 (66.3%) told us they read more often now than they did a year ago.
- 4 in 5 (81.3%) felt they had become better readers in the past year.

Improved reading attainment and narrowed educational gaps

Star Reading tests[2] were used to assess changes in children's reading skills over the year following their school's first participation in the programme. Although statistically significant, the increase in average reading scores across the whole sample was small (from 96.0 to 96.8 NRSS).

However, improvements were more substantial when focusing on children with the greatest support needs. Star Reading groups children into five categories based on their initial test score: Above Benchmark, At Benchmark, On Watch, Intervention and Urgent Intervention[3] To explore the benefits for those who are most in need of support, we looked at the changes specifically for children in the last three categories (n= 196). These children showed significant growth in reading scores: around 44% moved up by at least one category, suggesting meaningful improvement within the group most in need of support.

Table 1 shows that 45.4% of those in Urgent Intervention improved by at least one benchmark category; 50% in the Intervention group improved by at least one benchmark category and 38.3% from the On Watch group improved by at least one benchmark category.

[2] Star Reading Test is an online, computer-adaptive assessment for ages 6 to 16 that measures a student's reading skills, including vocabulary, comprehension of literary and informational texts, and language abilities. It allows teachers to identify learning gaps in reading, monitor progress, and inform practice. To learn more, go here: https://uk.renaissance.com/products/star-reading/

[3] Categorisation is performed based on pupil's percentile rank, that is, how they perform in comparison with others in their year group. Typically, pupils at the 40th percentile and above are classified as reaching the benchmark, meaning those below this are considered in need of some form of intervention.

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Table 1: Improvements across Star Reading Benchmark Categories for those most in support

Test 1 \ Test 2	Urgent Intervention	Intervention	On Watch	At Benchmark	Above Benchmark
Urgent Intervention	54.5%	31.8%	12.1%	1.5%	0%
Intervention	22.2%	27.8%	38.9%	8.3%	2.8%
On Watch	4.3%	11.7%	45.7%	13.8%	24.5%

Overall, the results are promising, indicating that the Libraries for Primaries programme may support reading development, with particular benefits for lower-attaining readers.

Conclusion

This report outlines the impact of the Libraries for Primaries programme, which aimed to provide a positive and encouraging reading environment for children in school through high-quality training, resources such as new books, and library revamps. Overall, findings suggest that the programme was successful in enhancing school library provision and promoting reading for pleasure.

In the short term, teachers' engagement in professional development significantly enhanced their understanding and confidence in creating engaging library environments and supporting reading for pleasure. This led to meaningful changes in three key areas of improved library provision, which, in turn, strengthened the reading-for-pleasure culture across schools.

Children also benefited from transformed school libraries. Within months of the changes, children noticed improvements that increased pupil library usage, frequency of visits and enjoyment. These improvements led to more positive attitudes towards –and deeper engagement with – libraries through emotional, social and behavioural interactions, as well as changes to confidence and skill levels. As a result, after the first year of the programme, children reported enjoying reading more, reading more often and considering themselves better readers.

A year later, continued investment and engagement ensured that the benefits endured and grew. Teachers reported ongoing improvements across the three library development areas resulting in sustained reading-for-pleasure benefits. Children's library use and enjoyment was sustained and drove more positive attitudes towards – and deeper engagement with – their libraries. This resulted in greater reading enjoyment, frequency and confidence, all of which were reflected

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in their Star Reading tests. Children most in need of support made meaningful improvements in standardised reading tests, with nearly half progressing to a higher attainment band.

Overall, the evaluation demonstrates that investing in the transformation of school libraries and improved library provision have both immediate and lasting impacts, and these measures play a crucial role in fostering reading for pleasure and supporting broader educational outcomes.

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About the National Literacy Trust

Our charity is dedicated to improving the reading, writing, speaking and listening skills of those who need it most, giving them the best possible chance of success in school, work and life. We run Literacy Hubs and campaigns in communities where low levels of literacy and social mobility are seriously impacting people's lives. We support schools and early years settings to deliver outstanding literacy provision, and we campaign to make literacy a priority for politicians, businesses and parents. Our research and analysis make us the leading authority on literacy and drive our interventions.

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