

# Research: The state of reading for pleasure stock in UK schools

Running the national sponsored read 'Readathon' in schools across the UK for almost 40 years has given us a unique insight into the trends which affect schools, and recently, one topic has been mentioned with worrying frequency: a lack of reading for pleasure stock.

School libraries have never been a statutory requirement so access to books beyond class texts and textbooks has long been hugely inconsistent. However, over the past few years, as school budgets have been squeezed and the pandemic has detrimentally affected every aspect of school life, the issue appears more pronounced.

Ultimately, this means that many pupils are not accessing the incredible books, comics, and graphic novels being published today, jeopardising their chances of falling in love with reading. As reading for pleasure has been proven to relieve stress, enhance mental wellbeing, and improve academic attainment, it is a powerful way of overcoming the challenging consequences of the pandemic.

To understand how widespread the problem was, we carried out some research in 2021 - surveying 227 UK schools: 169 primary schools; 34 secondary schools and 24 'other' schools (infant/middle/special schools).

We asked English leads, class teachers, English teachers, and librarians a number of qualitative questions, and the results were deeply concerning:

71%

said that the pandemic had led to missing or non-returned books

81%

said that they had no separate budget for reading for pleasure titles

61%

said that their book budget has reduced in recent years

74%

have had to divert funds from their book budget to support their school

"Limited stock and the necessity to provide every student with a book at their level means often they are being given old, outdated, and pretty dull books. I could cry sometimes handing over a book that I wouldn't usually even give shelf space to."

"Even before the pandemic our budget shrank year-on-year and now, after the pandemic, affording appropriate staffing is becoming critical, let alone replenishing book stock."

"Our stock is very out of date, apart from the books teachers are buying with their own money and donating to the library. Our school is very diverse and has wide-ranging need."

"Since the first lockdown in March 2020 we have lost over 800 books due to misplaced items in homes or pupils moving schools etc. We would like to start replacing the items we have lost."

If this sounds similar to the situation in your school, please email [jonathan@readforgood.org](mailto:jonathan@readforgood.org) to let us know more.



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