

Scrutiny 2025- Children's and Read Manchester

Libraries' engagement with children, young people and schools, and the Read Manchester Literacy Hub

Bookstart and Early Years

Our library offer starts with the very youngest children, and the offer of regular storytime activities across our libraries. We also deliver the Bookstart programme and work closely with Early Years colleagues on the Start Well Board and in Sure Start Children's Centres to deliver programmes and books to target families for literacy support. Through our Read Manchester hub we have extensive expertise and community reach through our Early Years Literacy Champions and have also supported a targeted offer around Early Words Matter, which is being delivered via the National Literacy Trust in the Gorton and Abbey Hey ward.

Manchester Libraries and BookTrust continue to gift book packs to babies and 3-4 year olds every year to encourage family reading and an early and enduring love of books. The Manchester Libraries' partnership with Booktrust is hugely successful and has been running for over 25 years now. The baby pack goes to every baby in the city via the Registrars, whilst the Toddler and Preschooler are targeted via the Early Years partners. In 2025 we delivered over 17,000 Bookstart Baby, Toddler, Preschooler, Additional Needs packs and resources to families across the city, including nearly 2000 dual language books, increasing accessibility to reading for our diverse population. Total numbers distributed were as follows:

- **Baby packs - 6750**
 - **Toddler packs – 1834**
 - **Preschool packs – 6566**
- Plus
- **Dual Language – 1932**
 - **Packs for children with additional needs – 265**

Central Library and Manchester Art Gallery were the venue for the launch of Baby Week on 16 June. Sessions included Artful Playground, story sessions and our regular storytimes. We gave away over 300 board books plus over 600 other resources, including reading calendars and booklets, plus engaged with hundreds of families, making them aware of the importance of early literacy and encouraging membership of Manchester Libraries.

School engagement

Engagement with schools has continued to grow. During the academic year September 2024 to July 2025, 153 schools engaged with libraries (73% of total schools). There were 62,755 children attending 1,686 sessions including class visits (in-person and virtual) in the academic year 2024/25. Read Manchester's book gifting programme supported schools and pupils by giving them 29,000 brand new books as part of their transition read and other book gifting programmes.

We have a regular programme of children's author, illustrator and poetry events which are free to schools, and we link into to all major national literacy campaigns. This includes the Summer Reading Challenge, World Book Day and Empathy Day, as well as National Storytelling Week and local literacy events including the Festival of Libraries and Chorlton Book Festival Festival.

Libraries are integral to the cultural offer of the city, and this includes our involvement in the Big Imaginations network, which brings high quality theatre and performance for our younger audiences into our libraries and arts venues. We held five Big Imaginations performance events across the year, for a variety of ages and audiences.

The Summer Reading Challenge supports 4-11 year olds to continue reading over the summer holidays and avoid the literacy slide that can occur during the break from school. This year we didn't automatically enrol any schools, so the overall number of 3,224 joiners was down on last year's total. However, the number of children completing the challenge (reading six books or more) increased to 1,941, a total of 60% completing. The overall number of books read also increased to 25,112 and 86% joiners borrowed at least one item. Library staff worked hard to encourage children to keep on reading, and we also held a prize draw for schools where 10% or more of pupils had completed the Challenge. This helped to boost the numbers of children continuing to read across the holiday. Competitions helped [increase numbers participating](#) too. Children under four are also encouraged to join a mini-challenge and these figures are included in the above statistics.

We also worked with an additional 600 children as we were successful in being awarded funding from the Julia Rausing Trust, in a cross-authority outreach project from The Reading Agency, and decided to work with 12 HAF Providers. This proved really beneficial as we were able to work with groups of children who, for the most part, were not regular library users or aware of the Summer Reading Challenge, and also gave each child a book.

Youth

The main HAF (Holiday Activities and Food) programme has once again been rolled out across Manchester Libraries. These sessions are targeted at children 11-15, eligible for free school meals. In total, 93 sessions were held during Easter, summer and Christmas with a variety of crafts and events, from Aztec arts to robotics.

This year we have extended our focus on youth and completed our consultation around youth voice, encouraging young people to help us develop youth library standards. Young people from the Youth Forums and Young Carers have been actively inputting into our future plans for libraries and programming. Over 280 young people aged 11 – 18 took part, including 25% who had never used a public library and 77% who hadn't visited a public library in over a year. As well as finding out why they did, or didn't, visit the library and what might encourage them to visit, we also wanted to know what was important to them, with free books, access to computers and a welcoming comfortable space to meet topping the list. Students from St Peter's RC High School in Longsight have taken part in the consultation in a more in-depth way. The students are part of our Libraries Rising, Youth Engagement Network and are currently co-creating a 'Manchester Activity Day' session at Longsight Library in March 2026.

Our youth [author offer](#) has been extensive across the year, including Black History Month with the first of two sessions hosted by book blogger Shelley Fleuridor. The *Forged in Stories* sessions saw Shelley donate 45 beautiful copies of *Forged by Blood* by Ehigbor Okosun and leading engaging sessions with year 10 students from Trinity High School and Chorlton High School.

In November we were joined by Manchester author Danielle Jawando. Danielle's sessions gave young people an important insight into the life of a writer, and the lack of representation in books. Danielle visited Abraham Moss Library to speak to students from Abraham Moss High school and visited Dean Trust Ardwick and Cedar Mount High Schools.



Pupils from Trinity High School

Author visits from Kate S. Martin and Tia Fisher explored some of the issues facing young people today in their books based around bullying and gang violence, interlinked with questions that put the students into the shoes of the characters.

Read Manchester

For the last nine years Libraries and Education have worked together to support literacy and reading for pleasure through the Read Manchester campaign, a partnership between Manchester City Council and the National Literacy Trust. The aim is to improve literacy, wellbeing and life skills, leading to improved health, educational attainment and jobs. This works together with our library offer and spans all age groups from storytimes for babies and young children to our offer for young people in high schools, introducing them to new authors and genres of books to encourage them to become lifelong readers.

Some of our main campaigns are detailed below.

Empathy

A focus on empathy has been a continued strand of our work. Read Manchester has recruited ten schools (eight primary and two high schools) to participate in Empathy Lab's Affiliate School programme to embed empathy across the school using books. Each school received a free Empathy book collection and two training days plus extensive resources to use in school, as well as support to create a whole-school action plan. These schools were identified as being in areas where there had been recent unrest and where these skills would be particularly valuable. Their work and support will continue into 2026.

See Myself in Books

In March 2025, Read Manchester held its inaugural [See Myself in Books Festival](#) to promote representation in children's books, featuring an event with top children's authors at the Stoller Hall and an audience of 350 local schoolchildren, as well as a musical performance to welcome pupils to this cultural venue. Devised to complement our neurodiverse and ethnically diverse book [collections](#), 15 diverse authors and illustrators met children in libraries, schools and at the National Football Museum and Stoller Hall during the two-week festival.

The Stoller Hall event on March 18 featured author Maisie Chan and author and illustrator Nathan Bryon and Dapo Adeola who entertained 350 children from seven primary schools, with UK Comics Laureate Bobby Joseph acting as compere. Pupils from Birchfields Primary became our Media Cubs reporters for the day and produced a film about See Myself in Books which can be viewed [here](#). Following this launch event,

twelve top authors visited venues across the city (with two authors meeting children virtually) to speak to children and young people.



Children and authors at the See Myself in Books event at Stoller Hall in March

Bookgifting

Ensuring equal access to books through our bookgifting campaign has been a central aspect of our offer. The books have been given to residents via community groups, foodbanks, youth groups, churches and refugee groups. As far as possible, choice of books is encouraged so that recipients can choose books that appeal to them. Over Christmas, 140 organisations have requested books for gifting to children and families, and we have given 12,956 books to these organisations. One community group told us:

"We love providing books to our centre users. They are often going through financial and mental hardship and the simple act of gifting a book can bring a lot of joy and happiness. Anything that helps provide a present helps relieve parents of financial burden. The gift is also an act of care from us and helps us build the relationships with the centre users".

During 2025, over 67,000 books were gifted to Manchester residents, schools and community groups, valued at nearly £400k, plus magazines and other resources. These resources are received by us for free – mostly from publishers who support our literacy hub, Read Manchester. Book gifting campaigns and activity promote engagement with libraries and library membership.



Bookgifting recipients

Take 10 is a core campaign of Read Manchester, and will be a central component of 2026's National Year of Reading. It encourages people to read for at least 10 minutes a day to support mental wellbeing and literacy. This year, our focus was a series of Take 10 events across the two weeks surrounding World Mental Health Day, which is celebrated every year on 10 October. The day is about raising awareness of the importance of mental health and enabling discussions around the topic. The theme for 2025 was mental health around crises and emergencies. To mark the day, we visited two hospitals - Royal Manchester Children's Hospital and The Christie - to distribute free new books to staff and patients and held conversations about how reading supports mental wellbeing. Comments included;

"Reading is a wonderful and rewarding escape from the stressful working world in the hospital," and *"Thank you. Reading quietens a mind worrying about cancer."*



Staff at The Christie Hospital choosing books

Additionally, 150 children from three Manchester schools joined an event at Manchester Central Library with author and poet Oliver Sykes. Oli shared his personal story about the power of reading for just 10 minutes a day. He has also supported our Take 10 campaign with [this video of his poem *Your Climb*](#).



Author Oli Sykes with children from St Brigid's Primary School

Transition Reads – year 6/7 and Early Years

2025 marked the sixth year of our year 6/7 Transition Read and the third year of our Early Years Transition Read. The year 6/7 book was once again 'Quiet Storm' by local author Kimberly Whittam. All year 6 pupils received a copy of the books to keep at the transition sessions into their new high schools. Reading the same book and taking part in lessons and activities themed around *Quiet Storm* offers pupils a shared experience when they start high school, irrespective of which primary school they attend. Set in Manchester with voices and situations young people could connect with, it made the perfect choice. Kimberly says:

"I wrote *Quiet Storm* for children who struggle with shyness; children who don't speak up, no matter how much they want to. It's also a celebration of the chaotic yet joyous tribulations that occur every day in classrooms across the country."

To support schools, as well as specially made resources, we made visits to Levenshulme High School, Manchester Academy, Loreto High School, St Matthew's RC High School, and CO-OP Academy North on their transition days, with Kimberly presenting to almost 1000 students over 2 days. Kimberley made further visits to libraries over the summer and to more high schools in September.



Kimberly Whittam with her book, Quiet Storm and pupils from Levenshulme High

For our Early Years Transition Read, the chosen book was *The One and Only You* by Shane Hegarty and Ben Mantle, which was given to children during their transition day visits in the summer term. Registered childminders, nurseries and SureStart Children's Centres in the city have also been sent a copy so that they can share the story in their settings. Moving up to school is a big step for children, and the idea behind the transition read is to support and encourage families to chat and spend time together. A 'Take 10 Minutes Everyday' leaflet has been produced to support the programme, with top tips for families about sharing stories. These are available to download in English and nine other community languages – Arabic, Bengali, Farsi, French, Kurdish, Oromo, Polish, Romanian and Urdu.

Non-fiction November

In November 2025 we held our first Non-Fiction November celebration to promote non-fiction to children. Often these books can be a different way in to reading, with boys especially likely to enjoy non-fiction titles. In research carried out by the National Literacy Trust, over half (56%) of children and young people said they read non-fiction. A focus of the 2026 Year of Reading is to encourage readers to 'Go All In!' on the subjects they care about, and access to exciting and varied non-fiction is crucial to this. Working with publishers DK, Guinness World Records, and What On Earth books, we held author visits and gave away books to schools and pupils across the city.

Library of the Year Award

Manchester Libraries has won Library of the Year at the British Book Awards 2025, for its partnership with Blue Peter Book Club in 2024.

The revival of the Library of the Year award at this year's event in May was awarded to Manchester Libraries in recognition of its multi-strand and city-wide Blue Peter Book Club Live programme which made 'superb' use of the Blue Peter brand to bring children and families into contact with libraries and reading.

The [#BluePeterBookClubLive](#) programme of activities in summer 2024 included a 'takeover' of presenters and authors at a launch event at Central Library and a book badge trail around the city. During the campaign, children's library membership increased by 33% compared to the same period in 2023, and 12,308 people became new library members during the campaign period.



National Year of Reading 2026

The National Year of Reading 2026 is a campaign to address the [decline in reading for pleasure](#), amongst children, young people and adults. It is a Department for Education initiative, in collaboration with the National Literacy Trust, as their delivery partner of the campaign.

Announced by Secretary of State for Education, Bridget Phillipson, it is intended to position reading as a powerful contemporary activity and will aim to engage new audiences in reading and to change the national reading culture for good. [Government statement](#). Reading is central to the Government's Plan for Change: it supports success in school, work and in life, boosts wellbeing, brings people together and increases empathy.

Partners from different sectors are working together to bring the campaign alive; more information is available here - [Go All In](#). Our Manchester 'Take 10' campaign has been taken on nationally and will be one of the 'tentpole' moments of the Year of Reading.