# Evaluation: Reading Schools

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## Introduction

### About this report

This is an evaluation report of Scottish Book Trust’s Reading Schools programme during 2021/22. It explores how the programme is delivered and the outcomes achieved, as perceived by school staff and stakeholders.

### About Reading Schools

Reading Schools was first developed in 2019. It is an accreditation programme that aims to help schools build and sustain a reading culture.

The programme began with a pilot, which was delivered in 39 schools during 2019/20. The pilot was delivered across the Forth Valley and West Lothian Regional Improvement Collaborative (RIC), which includes Clackmannanshire, Stirling, Falkirk and West Lothian local authorities.

In 2020/21, the pilot programme was expanded; all schools in Forth Valley and West Lothian were invited to take part and 30 schools across the Tayside RIC, which includes Angus, Dundee City and Perth and Kinross local authorities, were selected by local authority partners to participate. In 2021/22, Reading Schools was extended to include the West Partnership, which includes eight local authorities: East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, Glasgow City, Inverclyde, North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, South Lanarkshire, and West Dunbartonshire. In 2022/23 the programme will be rolled out nationally.

Reading Schools is delivered in partnership with the RICs. Each area is led by a working group which includes partners from the RIC, the local authority, the library service, Education Scotland and Scottish Book Trust.

Schools signing up to the programme are supported to engage through workshops and professional learning sessions, delivered by Scottish Book Trust. Each school then submits an action plan, outlining its current practice and plans for development. The plans are informed by the Reading Schools framework.

Following Scottish Book Trust’s approval of the action plan, schools set about carrying out their planned activities and collected evidence. Schools can then submit their completed evidence plan to Scottish Book Trust for accreditation in due course. Schools taking part in the first pilot were given a deadline to submit their evidence in order to inform programme development. However, firm deadlines have not been used in subsequent years to give schools the flexibility to engage meaningfully in the way that best suits their setting.

### Reading Schools participation

As at August 2022, there are now 197 schools which hold Reading Schools accreditation: 109 Core, 61 Silver and 27 Gold.

Many of these schools achieved their accreditation during 2021/22. During this year: 93 Core, 47 Silver and 12 Gold.

There were also 370 schools working towards their accreditation in 2021/22:

* 304 working towards Core – of which 253 began their application during 2021/22
* 51 working towards Silver – of which 38 began their application during 2021/22
* 15 working towards Gold – of which 11 began their application during 2021/22.

Many of the schools which achieve a Core or Silver award then go on to apply for the next level up. Over a third (38%) of schools achieving a Silver award had registered for the Gold award and a similar proportion of schools achieving a Silver award also registered for a further level (36%). Many schools registered to begin their application for their next award very soon after achieving their first award. For example, most schools achieving Silver and going on to apply for Gold began their application within one month (60%).

### Evaluation method

#### Surveys

We conducted two online surveys of schools involved in the 2021/22 Reading Schools programme.

The first survey focused on the process of participating in Reading Schools, and received 105 responses. Most (97) provided details about their school. Of these, most (74%) were from primary schools, some (20%) were from secondary schools, and a small number (6%) were from schools with both primary and secondary provision. The largest proportion of responses were from class teachers (45%). Others responding to the survey included principal teachers (18%), heads and deputy heads (17%), school librarians (10%) and others such as classroom assistants.

The second survey focused on the difference that Reading Schools had made, and received 87 responses. Again most responses were from primary schools (74%) and a quarter (26%) were from secondary schools. Respondents followed a similar profile to the process survey.

#### Stakeholder interviews

We conducted interviews with five individuals who were involved in Reading Schools. These interviews explored their views on the programme, their expectations, their experiences, their perceptions on the impact of the programme and suggestions for development. We also interviewed four staff members at Scottish Book Trust involved in planning, managing and delivering the Reading Schools programme.

#### Case studies

We developed four case studies. The schools were selected based on a range of characteristics, including location, size and pupil demographics. The schools were also at different stages in their reading journeys. The case studies demonstrate how each school has engaged in Reading Schools to develop a reading culture, and the impact this has had so far. Each case study involved a face to face visit to the school, speaking with teachers, head teachers, librarians, pupils and parents.

The case studies are included as an Appendix to this report, and learning from the case studies is referenced throughout.

## Outcomes achieved

### Introduction

This chapter explores the outcomes achieved for pupils, staff and schools, through the Reading Schools programme. It is based on a survey of schools conducted from April to June 2022.

### Impact on reading

Most respondents stated that Reading Schools activities had impacted positively on pupils. Respondents reported that as a result of Reading Schools, there was a significant impact on pupils in relation to their reading[[1]](#footnote-1): 91% were interested in reading; 90% were modelling positive reading behaviours; and, 84% were enjoying reading more.

#### Increased engagement with reading activities

Almost all school staff felt that because of Reading Schools, reading for pleasure had become a routine activity at their school (97%).

Respondents stated that Reading Schools activities have promoted engagement in reading across different age groups and increased the number of pupils actively enjoying reading. Activities include paired reading within and across year groups, reading circles, live literature and author visit sessions, reading buddies, reading clubs, pupil librarians, pupil book reviews and recommendations, story sacks, readathons, ‘masked reader’ storytime, and the use of Therapet animals.

### Impact on reading spaces and access to literature

Most survey respondents felt that because of Reading Schools, pupils now have comfortable spaces to read at school (93%).

Respondents reported that they had observed positive impacts from the creation of new library spaces and reading nooks, in both communal school areas and classrooms. Staff felt that these spaces provide welcoming and calming environments, stating that this has positively impacted on pupils’ behaviours and promoted wider learning. Staff reported increases in the use of these spaces throughout the school day, during class time, during breaks and before and after school. Some respondents felt that the availability of these calm, safe spaces has been particularly impactful for pupils with additional support needs.

#### Example: Libraries as safe spaces

“One particular child really struggled with being in school and understanding the demands of everyday school life. When our library spaces were fully developed, this child absolutely loved the safe, calm and relaxing environment and used it every day. He spent hours reading books and playing with den building materials. The support assistants loved using this space to. I would say that as a result of Reading Schools this child was much happier, safer and willing to engage in his learning.” **Head/Deputy head teacher**

Staff highlighted the positive impact of having a wider range of contemporary literature, including fiction and non-fiction books, graphic novels, specialist and accessible literature, and foreign language books. Respondents indicated that this has promoted inclusion, improved engagement and increased enthusiasm for reading. School staff provided numerous examples of pupils who have found a genre of books that reflects their interests and who are now actively sourcing their own literature.

*“One S2 pupil would not engage in any reading activity but since the increase of new, inclusive books in the library they regularly come to class and are able to sustain reading books that they see themself in. The ability to have LGBT books has given this pupil confidence.”* *English teacher*

“One pupil said the motto 'it doesn't matter what you're reading, as long as you're reading' really helped her and it took away the stigma of reading picture books in the library when her friends were reading long chapter books.” **Head/Deputy head teacher**

#### Example: Use of non-fiction literature

“Prior to beginning our Reading Schools journey there was a child in the Primary 7 class who would not engage with reading. He would complain if asked to choose a book or listen to texts read by the teacher. With the introduction of Reading Schools, and in particular looking at children's interests, the school bought in contemporary books which he became more interested in. He loved sport and science, so the new non-fiction books sparked an enthusiasm and interest not seen before. He began to choose books and even did a talk to the class about a science experiment he had read about.” **Class teacher**

#### Case Study: Coatbridge High School

“In Coatbridge High School pupils now have access to a wider range of contemporary and accessible literature. They are supported to make their own choices about what to read through the use of reading lists, genre colour-coding, and ‘book match’ lists, where pupils can identify books that they might like based on other books that they have read. Pupils reported that the range of books available to them has enabled them to experience worlds that are different to their own and helps to develop their imaginations.”

### Impact on leadership and pupil voice

Survey respondents reported that Reading Schools had a significant impact on pupil voice and leadership opportunities. Almost all felt that the programme helped pupils to have their voice heard (98%), and to take on leadership roles (93%).

Respondents reported a range of leadership activities developed as part of their Reading Schools programmes. Leadership activities include roles on Library Leadership Teams, pupil librarians, reading buddies and reading volunteers. Respondents reported that these activities have supported pupils to build relationships across year groups, promoted more positive relationships between staff and pupils, increased levels of engagement with reading, and positively impacted on pupil behaviours.

#### Example: Reading Volunteers

“One of our learners in P5 has ADHD and although she has well-developed reading skills she does not choose to read in school. During our 'Softstart' she would often have disagreements with others and would not always make good choices with regards to behaviour. This often meant she did not have a positive start to the day. Through our 'Reading Volunteer' project she now loves to read to younger pupils in the morning. She puts on her lanyard and goes off to classes to find others who would like to hear a story. She enjoys talking to the younger pupils, talking to them about book choices and organising them so they are ready to listen to the story. She has a purpose to this time now and has a sense of responsibility. Her class teacher noted she is more willing to read in class and is really ready to begin her learning each day. When she read to a primary one class the teacher observed the class was calmer too.” **Literacy lead**

### Impact on a range of pupils

Most survey respondents felt that there had been an increase in reading for pleasure across all the target groups. However, the activities had been particularly impactful for boys, for pupils with additional support needs and for pupils from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Survey respondents reported that they had noticed an increase in the level of reading for pleasure because of Reading Schools: 91% pupils who were not previously enthusiastic readers; 93% increase in reading for pleasure among boys; 80% increase in reading for pleasure among girls; 80% pupils with additional support needs; and 80% socio-economically disadvantaged pupils.

#### Impact on boys

Respondents felt that the availability of a wider range of more contemporary literature has been particularly impactful for boys. Respondents provided examples of staff taking time to understand and find books that reflect pupils’ interests, stating that they felt this has increased engagement, enthusiasm and motivation for reading. School staff provided examples of boys engaging more enthusiastically with non-fiction literature, comics and graphic novels.

“One boy in P5 was very disinterested in books and reading. He found it a challenge and he didn't enjoy reading time. He now looks forward to going to the library and choosing books all about football and WWII. He is even taking books home to finish!” **Class teacher**

#### Impact on pupils with additional support needs

School staff reported particularly positive impacts of Reading Schools activities on pupils with additional support needs. Activities highlighted include the availability of a wider range of fiction, non-fiction and dyslexia-friendly literature, including graphic novels and comics, the use of audio books, and the introduction of leadership roles. Respondents highlighted how improvements to school libraries had created ‘safe’, calming spaces, noting how this has been particularly impactful for this group of pupils. Respondents provided examples of increased levels of engagement, increased enthusiasm for reading, improved reading levels, and fewer incidents of disruptive behaviours.

“Pupils in ASN particularly have responded well to Reading Schools and are much more confident in choosing books appropriate for their reading level by using the library more regularly.” **School librarian**

“One particular individual in upper primary has a diagnosis and struggles with his behaviour. He now uses reading as a regulation strategy to calm himself down, taking himself into the library for some personal time.” **Class teacher**

##### Example: Keep the Heid and Read

“A group of reluctant readers from the HIVE (unit for pupils with additional support needs) visited the library as part of Keep the Heid and Read. They read books for pleasure for six minutes and enjoyed it so much they have asked the teacher if they can make the six-minute read a regular activity in the unit.” **School librarian**

##### Case Study: Netherburn Primary School

Netherburn Primary School has introduced a system of QR codes to increase accessibility of audio and video books to all pupils. A pupil with a visual impairment has benefitted from this, accessing books via the QR codes. The school reports that this approach has enabled all pupils to access audio and video books, promoting inclusion and ensuring that any pupil with additional needs is able to read alongside their peers.

#### Impact on socio-economically disadvantaged pupils

Respondents provided examples of the impact of reading for pleasure for pupils from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Activities to increase access to books included book giveaways and gifting, book swaps and exchanges, drives to increase library membership and use of digital books. In some cases, respondents highlighted how these activities have not only increased access to literature but also improved the school’s awareness of pupils who may not have access to books at home.

“Getting all of our children library cards was beneficial to everyone but particularly for a group of children who did not have as much access to books. The online library opened up a whole new world to them at no financial cost.” **Head/Deputy head teacher**

“Two boys who previously had no books at home have gained access to reading material through our book swaps. This has given them ownership of reading and also motivation to continue to involve themselves in the book swaps.” **Class teacher**

#### Impact on pupils with English as an additional language

A few respondents provided examples of activities for pupils with English as an additional language. Activities included use of native language literature and ensuring availability of graphic novels and age-appropriate picture books. Respondents stated that these targeted activities have increased confidence levels among this group of children and improved engagement with parents and carers.

##### Example: Native language literature

“Polish children within our school are now given opportunities to come together to speak in their first language using books to support discussions and to structure sessions. This is led by a Support for Learning Assistant and a P7 child. The families of the children are delighted that the children's cultural language is being recognised and valued. Prior to Reading Schools, there were no opportunities for these children to come together. One P7 boy who has autistic tendencies is usually found on his own in the playground and limits his social interactions with others. As lead of this group, we have seen him much more expressive and smile when he is in the group!” **Principal teacher**

##### Example: Valuing life experiences

“We have a boy who moved from overseas last year. Due to having EAL he can struggle with literacy tasks, and this can negatively impact on his behaviour. We have introduced lots of graphic novels and picture books to the class. Recently we were reading and discussing 'The Arrival' by Shaun Tan. When I asked if anyone had chosen to read it this boy raised his hand. When we went on to discuss the book, the insight this child had and the inferences he had deduced were astute. Through discussion, it was clear he was able to analyse the images and interpret the meanings on a relatively deep level. His lived experience of moving to a strange land made him the expert. It was wonderful to see him so engaged and animated in this lesson.” **Principal teacher**

### Impact on health and wellbeing

Respondents reported a positive impact of reading for pleasure on health and wellbeing for both pupils and staff. Respondents from across primary and secondary schools suggested that reading helps to settle classes, builds empathy and supports the development of new friendships. Staff reported that they believe regular reading helps to facilitate learning through supporting pupils to focus on the lesson, irrespective of the subject being taught. Some respondents indicated that the wider range of contemporary literature has enabled pupils to find books that reflect their lived experiences which has improved self-esteem and confidence.

“The children are more empathetic and are able to talk about their feelings and the feelings of others.” **Class teacher**

“Children are calm and more ready to learn after reading for pleasure. They are settled and more able to focus.” **Principal teacher**

#### Example: Reading at start of lessons

“I think the Reading Schools scheme literally gave both pupils and staff "permission to read". Life in a secondary school is very much geared towards tasks, timetables, homework, assessment etc. We needed the opportunity to recognise that simply sitting with a good book can and does contribute to attainment, as well as having a multitude of other benefits. We now recognise reading - just reading - is enough. The 10-15 minutes reading at the start of every lesson has been transformative. It calms and focuses pupils, setting the tone for the remainder of the period so the whole lesson benefits, even when it is not related to books.” **School librarian**

#### Case Study: James Young High School

James Young High School has focused on building a library of representative literature through delivering a ‘Read Woke’ project. Developed in partnership with the local authority, the project originates from the US and focuses on social injustice and human rights. The ‘Read Woke’ titles are marked with a gold star so that pupils can identify them. When pupils read four titles they earn a silver badge, and when they read eight, they achieve a gold badge. Pupils write reviews of the books they have read and discuss them with their peers and teachers. They are encouraged to develop projects and posters about the books focusing on race, class, culture, inequalities and wider social justice issues.

Some respondents also highlighted an increase in reading amongst staff, noting the positive impact that this has had on health and wellbeing. Respondents reported that staff are discussing books more, sharing recommendations for both adult and children’s literature, and protecting time for daily reading. Alongside the positive impact on staff wellbeing, respondents further suggest that this has promoted dialogue between staff and pupils.

“I had lots of staff tell me how nice it was to be able to read and to have a platform outwith their subject that allowed them to interact with pupils.” **Principal teacher of English**

#### Example: Daily reading time

“The children have described reading time as relaxing, time to be calm, quiet time, switch off, a time to escape. The classes also choose the time that suits them best to stop and read. This has allowed the staff and their children to take ownership of this time. The staff have reported this as a time they didn't know they needed. A time to stop and enjoy their own book for 15 minutes each day was beneficial.” **Acting principal teacher**

### Impact on attainment

Most respondents reported that Reading Schools has helped them to recognise and reward pupil’s achievements, support attainment and reduce the poverty related attainment gap to some extent.

* Reading Schools helped us to recognise and reward pupil’s achievements – 3% said a little; 11% said somewhat; 44% said quite a lot; 41% said a lot.
* Reading Schools has contributed to improved attainment at school – 11% said a little; 28% said somewhat; 41% said quite a lot; 20% said a lot.
* Reading Schools has contributed to reducing or closing the poverty related attainment gap for pupils – 2% said not at all; 15% a little; 37% said somewhat; 35% said quite a lot; 10% said a lot.

Respondents provided examples of positive impacts on attainment, including rapid improvements in reading levels once pupils have identified a genre of books that reflects their interests. One respondent reported that in a recent assessment, they had identified significant improvements in reading levels and reduction in the attainment gap in literacy for their P6 class. This respondent indicated that this is directly related to the prioritisation of reading for pleasure within the curriculum.

#### Example: Reduced attainment gap

“A P7 boy, who lives in one of the more socially deprived areas of the village, had very little interest in reading. We have struggled throughout his primary years to engage him, and this has impacted his attainment and opportunities for success. The drive to increase library membership is what has impacted him. He lives near the library, so he now gets off the bus a stop early and visits the library regularly on his way home from school. He loves to show his latest new book and the increase in the amount he reads has been significant. He is 'hooked'! This in turn has increased his attainment and he is now reading at expected levels and is in a strong position for moving on to find success in high school.” **Head/Deputy head teacher**

#### Case Study: Netherburn Primary School

Pupils from Netherburn Primary School were able to clearly articulate the ways that they feel that Reading Schools activities have improved their reading skills. Pupils said that they are reading more and that this has helped them to learn new words and develop their writing skills, drawing skills, creativity and imagination. Parents agreed that their children’s reading skills have improved, stating that they talk in more depth about books and are now able to analyse the stories they read. Parents also reported improvements in their children’s handwriting.

### Impact on families and communities

School staff reported an overall increase in the number of families engaged in reading for pleasure (98%) and the frequency of engagement activities (98%). All respondents indicated that they felt that reading for pleasure brings their school community together, however some felt that engagement with families and the wider community was still developing, primarily due to Covid restrictions.

#### Case Study: Netherburn Primary School

Due to their rural location, staff at Netherburn Primary School realised that high public transport costs were creating a barrier to accessing public libraries. The school decided to address this through opening a community library. The library has been very well received by the local community, with pupils providing tours for families, and parents and carers being invited into the school every four weeks to take part in a Book Blether. The school buys books for families, including magazines and cookbooks and has trained parents and carers on how to use QR codes to access books in different formats to reflect abilities and preferences. The school has also facilitated literacy workshops for families, providing leadership experiences for the pupils through enabling them to teach their families what they have learned about reading and writing.

“We've never had a school do that before." **Parent**

“Our mission was to get our village reading**." Head Teacher**

### Impact on professional practice

Survey respondents felt that Reading School contributed significantly to professional development.

* 100% said staff recognise the value of reading for pleasure
* 100% said staff are modelling positive reading behaviours
* 99% said Reading Schools has significantly contributed to professional development
* 95% said staff are benefitting from the Library Leadership Group

Respondents state that Reading Schools has contributed to professional development through encouraging new collaborations across staff teams. Some respondents felt that it had reduced the workload on school librarians through highlighting how literacy can be integrated across the curriculum.

“It has allowed Library staff to learn so much more about how other areas in the school were already supporting reading for pleasure in their own ways. This is turn has forged new collaborations and opportunities for mutual support.” **School librarian**

Respondents reported the positive impact of staff and pupils working together within the Reading Leadership Group, noting how this has raised the profile of reading and facilitated pupil voices within the school. Some respondents suggest that this has developed pupils’ leadership skills and created positive role models for reading, as well as increasing pupils’ enthusiasm, confidence and sense of pride.

“Staff unity, working together rather than doing a role on your own has been invaluable. The engagement from the children and their enthusiasm for the project has maintained the momentum.” **Acting principal teacher**

#### Case Study: Rosebank Primary School

Rosebank Primary School has invested time and energy into designing a welcoming, comfortable library for the pupils. As the building does not have a dedicated library space, staff worked with their Library Leadership Team, made up of a small group of P3-P7 pupils, to transform a space along one of the upper corridors into a beautifully welcoming open access area. After writing to a local theatre for advice on how to create scenery, the Leadership Team designed a forest-themed library area full of bean bags and calming imagery. The Leadership Team runs the library with the support of one member of staff.

School staff felt that the Reading Schools programme has raised the profile of reading for pleasure and helped them to create a culture for reading. Respondents reported that they have seen more excitement about reading within their schools and teachers reported feeling more able to make space for reading within their daily timetables. School staff felt that Reading Schools has also raised the profile of libraries within schools and enabled new discussions and conversations to happen.

“The love of reading has been restored in our school.” **Class teacher**

“There is a focus on reading across the school so it is more acceptable to make extra room for it in your daily timetable.” **Class teacher**

## Views on engaging in reading schools

### Introduction

This section explores the views of school staff on the process of engaging with Reading Schools, including the success factors, challenges and areas for development. It is based on surveys conducted with school staff.

### Overall experience of the Reading Schools programme

School staff felt positive about their experience of the Reading Schools programme. In particular, respondents commented that they found the website easy to navigate, the guides clear and suggested activities useful for sparking new ideas. Respondents noted that they felt supported with additional advice being available when needed.

* When asked, how would you rate your experience of the Reading Schools programme? (N=105) 6% said fair; 43% said good; and 51% said very good.

### Views on programme structure

School staff were very positive about the programme structure. Specifically, almost all respondents liked the provision of Scottish Book Trust resources, the tools for self-evaluation and action planning, and the professional development opportunities. Respondents also noted that it was useful to map the framework to How Good Is Our School (HGIOS) and were supportive of the potential for accreditation.

#### Views on the programme (n=103/105)

* Accreditation – 1% said not useful; 13% said a little useful; 80% said very useful; 6% said not applicable.
* Self evaluation and action planning – 7% said a little useful; 91% said very useful; 2% said not applicable.
* The framework mapped to HGIOS 4 – 10% said a little useful; 85% said very useful; 6% said not applicable.
* Professional development opportunities – 24% said a little useful; 69% said very useful; 8% said not applicable.
* Training and support from Scottish Book Trust – 15% said a little useful; 76% said very useful; 9% said not applicable.
* Collaboration with other schools – 1% said not useful; 25% said a little useful; 31% said very useful; 43% said not applicable.
* Scottish Book Trust resources – 16% said a little useful; 84% said very useful; 1% said not applicable.

### What works well

School staff identified the following success factors:

* provision of a self-evaluation framework
* provision of a clear, flexible and inclusive action plan
* accessible and informative training and resources
* provision of case studies and practice exchange events
* programme flexibility to adapt to specific school contexts
* potential for accreditation
* mapping to existing education policies
* digital platform for submission
* supportive and responsive staff team
* focus on inclusion and pupil voice.

#### Flexible self-evaluation and planning framework

Most respondents were positive about the Reading Schools structure, highlighting that it provides a focused but flexible framework that supports schools to develop individualised plans. Staff noted that the programme has encouraged them to plan more activities and events alongside supporting them to showcase literacy across the whole school curriculum.

“It was great to have a framework and a clear set of guidelines to work towards as a whole school.” **Class teacher**

“The Self-Evaluation Tool and Action Plan have been very helpful in supporting us in beginning and developing our Reading Schools journey.” **Principal teacher**

#### Accreditation and evidence requirements

Respondents stated that evidence requirements for each stage of the action plan are clear and indicated that they found the mapping to HGIOS useful for both evaluation and planning. Some respondents stated that they found the online platform user-friendly and the process for uploading evidence easy.

“The framework linked to HGIOS has allowed us to take a closer look at what we are doing already and given us targets to improve reading.” **School librarian**

#### Accessible, informative training and resources

Most respondents were positive about the quality and range of training and resources. Specifically, respondents highlighted the quality and frequency of the webinars along with the usefulness of case studies and practice exchange events. Some respondents also reported a positive impact of the Bookzilla app to widen staff and pupil knowledge of books.

“Fantastic and frequent webinars full of information.” **Class teacher**

“The ideas and resources are a great help. I enjoyed watching the webinars and learning about the different ways of engaging pupils.” **English teacher**

#### Inclusion and pupil voice

Respondents were positive about the focus on pupil voice within the Reading Schools programme. Staff reported that the resources and training has supported them to identify new ways to involve students, particularly through the Library Leadership Teams. Staff noted that this had been particularly impactful for quieter, more reserved pupils and for pupils with additional support needs.

“We like that pupils' voices are at the centre of all of the Reading Schools targets.” **Principal teacher of English**

“I think the most important point about Reading Schools is that it is fully inclusive through awarding and valuing reading simply for enjoyment.” **Literacy lead**

### Challenges

#### Time and restrictions

Some respondents highlighted the impact of Covid restrictions, noting that these limited their ability to work across year groups and with the wider community. Some respondents pointed to the difficulties of finding time for this work due to the demands of delivering an already crowded curriculum.

“With COVID restrictions, we feel we didn't do as much as we would have liked with our families and the wider community.” **Principal teacher (Primary)**

#### Evidence requirements

A few respondents suggested that there was lack of clarity about the quantity and type of evidence required for the different criteria. Some noted that collating evidence could be challenging and the uploading of individual photos and videos onto the platform time-consuming. Some respondents suggest that an overview of the different sections of the plan, with hyperlinks to the relevant sections, along with the ability to upload ‘bundles’ rather than individual images might be useful. Some respondents pointed to the usefulness of the evidence for school inspections.

### Views on no fixed deadlines

Most respondents expressed support for the flexible deadlines, with some noting that this was a key factor in their decision to sign up for the Reading Schools programme. Respondents suggested that the flexible deadlines reduce pressure on staff and supports the embedding of a reading ethos within the school. Some respondents felt that the flexibility makes the awards more achievable through enabling coordination with school development plans. A few respondents felt that having no deadline reduces the priority level for the work, suggesting that a time-limit of 6 months may be a useful approach.

“I liked this aspect of the programme as at no point did we feel under pressure. It ensured we were building solid foundations of our reading culture before we felt ready to submit.” **Recovery teacher**

“A deadline would keep you focused, but in terms of stress having no deadline is more attractive - it means you can do it at your own pace.” **Principal teacher (Primary)**

### Areas for development

Respondents made the following suggestions for areas for development:

#### More resources

A few respondents suggested the introduction of branded resources such as bookmarks and certificates, along with the development of child-friendly book lists and leaflets, particularly in relation to equalities issues. Other suggestions included: the development of editable digital reading resources to enable personalisation; an online book borrowing system; a platform for schools to upload and share resources; audio books for pupils with English as an additional language; the availability of iPad software to listen to stories; and more suggestions for S1-S3 book projects.

#### More events

A few respondents suggested that they would like to see more ‘meet the author/illustrator’ and storytelling events, suggesting that these could be offered as prizes for accreditation. A few suggested more local events specific to their local authority areas and a few suggested more competitions and quizzes, with the possibility of winning funding or books for schools.

#### Case studies and exemplars

Some respondents suggested that more case studies and exemplars of good practice may be useful, particularly from schools which have been awarded Gold level accreditation. Other suggestions include provision of exemplar action plans and evidence logs for each level, with examples of evidence for each criterion.

#### Professional development

Some respondents suggested that they would like to see more professional development and practice sharing opportunities. Suggestions include supporting knowledge of the pedagogy on reading for pleasure and of the breadth of children’s literature.

#### Evidence requirements

A few respondents highlighted that they found gathering evidence challenging due to their school size. Small schools reported difficulties in gathering the range of evidence required, while larger schools reported difficulties in collating and submitting evidence due to the volume required.

#### Systems/Processes

A few respondents made specific suggestions regarding processes, including:

* uploading batches of photos as evidence
* including the option to type an explanation for a photo to improve evidence quality
* use of hyperlinks in the plan that link directly to the various sections
* ability to preview and download a submission, including the photographs and text, to enable schools to keep this on file
* more direct contact between Reading Schools staff and children, either through school visits or Teams calls with pupils
* use of editable resources to enable schools to adapt and individualise, for example through including their school logo
* more opportunities for discussion, feedback and sharing of ideas
* a mentoring system to support staff at the start of their Reading Schools journey

## Stakeholder reflections

### Introduction

This chapter explores the views of staff and wider stakeholders on the Reading Schools programme. It is based on discussions with five stakeholders involved in education or libraries, and four Scottish Book Trust staff involved in planning, managing or supporting the programme.

### Programme design

All stakeholders were enthusiastic about the Reading Schools programme and positive about the programme aims, delivery methods, programme management and the intended outcomes.

All stakeholders expressed strong support for the design of the Reading Schools programme. Stakeholders particularly welcomed the clear framework for action planning, noting that this facilitates an honest initial assessment while proactively encouraging the development of new ideas.

“It gives ideas. It opens up their eyes about what they can be doing to promote reading for pleasure.” **Education Officer**

Stakeholders appreciated the clear alignment with the curriculum and HGIOS, noting that this ensures that Reading Schools activities can be clearly linked to school development plans. Partners indicated that this in turn encourages engagement with the programme as schools can easily identify how Reading Schools supports them to achieve other targets.

Staff emphasised that the alignment of Reading Schools with How Good is Our School was fundamental, and necessary for the programme to be valuable, useful and beneficial to schools. Having the programme embedded with wider self-evaluation and planning helps to give weight to the programme, and be useful to schools.

All stakeholders supported the programme’s approach to accreditation, particularly welcoming the way Reading Schools identifies current good practice alongside encouraging the development of a new programme of activities. The removal of deadlines was appreciated, with some partners identifying this as a key factor in schools’ decisions to engage with the programme.

“It’s allowed schools to put this back on the agenda and include it in improvement plans again.” **Education Officer**

All partners expressed confidence in the Reading Schools resources, stating that they often signpost school staff to these resources.

“We promote the programme really heavily. My colleague and I will be working in a school and right at the beginning of the planning meeting we say ‘why don’t you sign up for Reading Schools?’” **Public Librarian**

Staff were pleased with the uptake of Reading Schools during 2021/22 and felt that recovery from the pandemic had played a key role in opening up participation. Both staff and wider stakeholders highlighted that Reading Schools could support recovery and build positivity and sense of achievement within schools. Some felt that many schools had made reading and literacy a priority, to address gaps in learning, which has supported engagement with the programme.

“It provides motivation and inspiration and a sense of achievement. The psychological impact of the achievement is a real benefit.” **Education Officer**

Staff felt that the quality of evidence submitted was high, with schools using beautiful, creative and imaginative approaches to demonstrating their impact. This does result in a lot of evidence, and requires a focus in on some aspects to celebrate one or two achievements, because there is so much that schools have done.

### Partnership working

Staff felt that the roll out of the programme through Regional Improvement Collaboratives had been vital, and worked well. It allowed the programme to start small, adapt based on learning, and grow organically over time. This has involved working with the RICs on their journey around reading, and working in a way that suits each region. RICs played a key role in showcasing the benefits of Reading Schools and encouraging uptake and staff believed that the programme would not be where it was without the support and engagement of the RICs.

Some staff reflected that the smaller scale enabled personal relationships to be developed with RICs and with schools, and it was important to think about how to maintain that personable relationship as the programme expands and grows.

Wider stakeholders were broadly positive about their experience of working with Scottish Book Trust, noting that staff were helpful and available. Local authority partners were particularly positive about programme management, noting that they always knew who to contact about an issue. They reported that Scottish Book Trust staff were always proactive with providing relevant information and that this meant they were better able to support schools in their authority area.

“All the staff I’ve worked with at the Scottish Book Trust and Reading Schools have been beyond helpful.” **Education Officer**

“I don’t think I could do my job in the way I do without their support. They’re really genuinely asking how can we make things better? They’re very accessible. It’s a lovely symbiotic relationship.” **Public Librarian**

“My remit is quite big, so having that connection is not just helping but it’s actually making my job doable.” **Education Officer**

Some partners were positive about the level of engagement with public partners, noting that this has strengthened partnerships between schools and public libraries. Partners reported that Reading Schools has increased the profile of school librarians, highlighting their knowledge and how this contributes to the wider curriculum. A few felt that there should be a clearer path for how public libraries can participate in Reading Schools and use the framework and expressed a desire to extend partnership working opportunities between public libraries and schools.

### Outcomes achieved

All partners stated that they believed the programme to be increasing engagement with and enthusiasm for reading. Partners within local authorities stated that they have received positive feedback from schools. Public library partners reported seeing an increase in the numbers of children coming into the library and talking to library staff about both the books that they are reading now and the books they would like to read in the future.

“Reading is an essential part of our curriculum and Reading Schools is the most viable path to continue to promote it across our schools.” **Education Officer**

All partners felt that the programme was impacting positively on pupils. They reported that the programme is making reading more accessible and relevant to children’s lived experiences which in turn is enabling children to make more informed choices about the books that they read. This is then enabling libraries to have conversations about different genres of books with children which is then influencing the types of books they buy.

Partners reported an increased enthusiasm for reading, stating that they have seen a marked increase in the number of children wanting to read books. Partners welcomed activities like the author and illustrator visits, noting that these demystified writing and enabled children to see authors as real people.

“It’s a joy to see how much they are enjoying reading and how engaged they are.” **Public Librarian**

Some partners highlighted that schools have actively targeted children who would not normally engage with reading and reported that they have emerging data indicating a significant reduction in the numbers of children reporting that they dislike reading. While most partners did not have direct data to demonstrate impact, they all stated that they believed interest and enthusiasm for reading to be key to reducing the attainment gap.

“For attainment, we know that if kids want to read, you’re halfway there.” **Education Officer**

All partners stated that they believed the programme to be having a positive impact on schools. They felt that Reading Schools has given staff permission to prioritise reading for pleasure. They noted increased awareness of the range of available literature and felt that the programme is encouraging schools to review their libraries and think about whether the books reflect the life experiences of the children.

Partners further reported an increased awareness among school staff of the different ways to promote reading for pleasure. They welcomed the increased awareness of different platforms to engage children, highlighting how the use of audio books can encourage interest among children with lower reading levels.

### Success factors

Staff and wider stakeholders identified the following success factors:

* Relevance and language – framework alignment with educational policy and practice, including clear links to How Good is Our School helps to ensure the programme is robust, relevant to schools and closely linked to existing self-evaluation processes which are fundamental to schools.
* Robust accreditation – provides quality assurance, validation of existing good practice and tailored constructive feedback.
* Flexibility – allowing schools to submit evidence at any time with no fixed deadlines.
* Focus on learning journey – recognition of individual circumstances and focus on improvement rather than outcomes.
* Training and development – provision of online training and networking opportunities.
* Resources – availability of high-quality resources and examples of best practice on the website.
* Joint work with RICs and local authorities – bringing teachers and librarians together and helping raise awareness of the programme and increase engagement.
* Organisational culture – approachable and friendly staff who are easily contactable.

### Areas for development

Staff were pleased with Reading School uptake, and keen to see this increasing year on year. Staff wished to ultimately see all schools in Scotland having a level of Reading Schools accreditation. Staff felt that Covid-19 continued to impact on school capacity and priorities during 2021/22, and that there was ongoing work to have conversations with schools about how to prioritise and build capacity for literacy and reading. New approaches being developed included online drop in sessions and face to face visits to areas that have low to no uptake.

Wider stakeholders suggested organising more showcase events within local authorities to encourage uptake. Partners working in public libraries expressed a desire to work more closely with Reading Schools to encourage more children to use their local library and suggested the use of more promotional material to increase visibility of the programme.

Staff were very aware that rolling out the programme resulted in more applications and assessments for accreditation, which needed careful planning. There is no upper limit for evidence submitted, so it does take time to work through the evidence and then issue the relevant trophies and certificates. Staff were considering providing guidance deadlines so that schools could understand when to submit evidence if they had a target in mind for when they wanted to be accredited. This would be particularly important as the team works to accommodate larger numbers of schools being involved, which may impact on times for processing evidence and moving schools through their Reading Schools journey. A few staff and stakeholders suggested more guidance for schools on volume and type of evidence to submit may also be useful.

One stakeholder suggested that it would be useful to consider a route for Gold schools to move on to – such as Gold Plus or Platinum - or to re-accredit to focus their ongoing work around reading. Schools at Gold level are required to re-register after three years. Staff also indicated that they were interested in ensuring that Gold level schools were connected with one another, to share ideas, support one another and act as ambassadors for the programme. Staff were keen to avoid ‘initiative fatigue’ where schools focus on one initiative for a while, and then move on to the next thing the following year, by ensuring that schools saw the value in Reading Schools beyond achieving the award.

Staff were also keen to help schools to do more in-depth work, beyond simply ticking off that they had achieved an award, and use their award as an opportunity to build their evidence on an ongoing basis. Staff also work closely with schools to make sure they go in at the right level, and achieve core and silver before going for the gold award, to make sure they are meeting the core foundational requirements.

Finally, one interviewee suggested it would be valuable to see recognition of individual people within the programme – pupils, teachers or librarians who have really championed reading in amazing ways or overcome certain challenges.

## Conclusions

### Reading Schools participation

Reading Schools was piloted with the Forth Valley and West Lothian Regional Improvement Collaborative in 2019/20 and has expanded to include the Tayside RIC and West Partnership over time. During 2021/22, participation in Reading Schools continued to grow. 152 schools achieved accreditation during 2021/22, and the total number of schools accredited within Reading Schools increased to 197. There were also 370 schools working towards their accreditation in 2021/22.

### Outcomes achieved

Schools, partners and staff felt that Reading Schools had impacted positively on pupils, schools and libraries. Almost all school staff felt that because of Reading Schools, reading for pleasure had become a routine activity at their school (97%). Most felt that because of Reading Schools, pupils now have comfortable spaces to read at school (93%).

School staff said that as a result of Reading Schools, there was a significant impact on pupils in terms of their reading. Pupils had become more interested in reading (91%), modelled positive reading behaviours (90%) and were enjoying reading more (84%). School staff found that they had observed an increase in the level of reading for pleasure because of Reading Schools, particularly for boys, for pupils with additional support needs and for pupils from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Survey respondents reported that Reading Schools had a significant impact on pupil voice and leadership opportunities. Almost all felt that the programme helped pupils to have their voice heard (98%) and to take on leadership roles (93%). Respondents from across primary and secondary schools also said that reading helps to settle classes, builds empathy and supports the development of new friendships.

Most respondents reported that Reading Schools has helped them to recognise and reward pupil’s achievements, support attainment and reduce the poverty related attainment gap to some extent. Reading Schools has also contributed to development of a reading culture in schools, and supported professional development. All school staff taking part in the evaluation felt that Reading Schools helped staff to recognise the value of reading for pleasure (100%) and model positive reading behaviours (100%).

“The love of reading has been restored in our school.” **Class teacher**

### Success factors

School staff and wider stakeholders were positive about their experience of the Reading Schools programme. Key positives included:

* Mapping the framework to How Good is Our School
* The tools for self-evaluation and action planning
* The quality of resources
* The professional development opportunities
* The accreditation opportunities
* The flexibility of the programme.

Wider stakeholders and staff managing Reading Schools also emphasised that promoting the programme through Regional Improvement Collaboratives worked well, and involved a flexible approach to working with each RIC on their journey around reading. Stakeholders were positive about Reading Schools programme management and found working with Scottish Book Trust a positive experience.

Staff involved in managing the programme identified similar success factors, and also stressed that the quality of evidence submitted by schools is high, with schools using beautiful, creative and imaginative approaches to demonstrating their impact.

### Areas for development

* **Programme roll out** – Staff, stakeholders and schools were keen to see the programme continue to expand and grow across Scotland. Staff involved in managing the programme were keen to ensure that they were able to support RICs, local authorities and schools in a flexible and tailored way while growing, requiring careful planning and consideration of capacity within the team.
* **Guidance on evidence** – Schools were keen to see more guidance on evidence requirements, and a streamlined process for uploading and reviewing evidence (being able to upload bundles and print evidence submitted). Staff managing the programme valued the depth and quality of evidence provided by schools, but highlighted that reviewing this would need to be manageable as the programme grows. This may require the introduction of some guidance on how long it takes to assess evidence and distribute trophies and certificates, and possibly some guide deadlines for schools wishing to be accredited by certain times of the year.
* **Opportunities for Gold schools** – Stakeholders, schools and staff felt there were opportunities to connect Gold schools to share their experience, to encourage Gold schools to act as champions or ambassadors, and to develop case studies on Gold schools (and evidence submitted) to support schools on their Reading Schools journey.
* **Resources and events** – Some schools were keen to see more branded resources such as bookmarks, certificates and book lists. Some schools would like to see more events such as meet the author or illustrator opportunities, competitions or quizzes. And some school staff would like more professional development opportunities around reading, through the programme.
* **Libraries** – A few stakeholders would like to see clearer routes for how public libraries can participate in and support the Reading Schools programme.
1. Respondents stating that there had been ‘quite a lot’ or ‘a lot’ of impact as a result of Reading Schools activity [↑](#footnote-ref-1)