

News story: Boost for school standards with primary literacy drive

A Centre of Excellence for Literacy Teaching is one of a range of measures launched today by Education Secretary Justine Greening to help more children from disadvantaged backgrounds master the basics of reading in primary school.

Today's series of announcements represents the next steps towards delivering on the Government's ambitious social mobility action plan [Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential](#), published on 14 December.

The plan identifies how the Department for Education will deliver equality of opportunity for every young person, regardless of where they live, through five key ambitions. Today's measures will deliver progress in the first two core ambitions, Ambition 1 to close the word gap in the early years and Ambition 2, closing the attainment gap in school outcomes between disadvantaged young people and their peers.

Education Secretary Justine Greening said:

School standards are rising with 1.9 million more children being taught in good or outstanding schools than in 2010.

Our ambition is that no community will be left behind on education. Today's literacy investment will help make sure that not just most, but every child arrives at school with the vocabulary levels they need to learn. And our investment will mean that once they are at school, every child will get the best literacy teaching. We've already seen what a difference our approach on phonics has made for children in England.

It is thanks to the hard work of teachers, and the government's drive to raise school standards to make Britain a country fit for the future, that there are already 1.9 million more children in schools rated good or outstanding than in 2010. Last month a new study found English children had risen up the international literacy league tables, and were now significantly better readers than their American, Canadian and Australian counterparts.

However, too many children arrive at school struggling with language and literacy, making it harder for them to master the fundamentals of reading that many children take for granted. Research has shown that five-year-olds who struggle with language are six times less likely to reach the expected standard in English at age 11 than those with good language skills.

The social mobility action plan focuses £800 million of government resources to close these gaps and level up opportunity for every child, ensuring no community is left behind. This will ensure that Britain is a country that

truly works for everyone, ready to make the most of the opportunities provided by Brexit and could provide a £20 billion boost to the economy.

Programmes announced today (Saturday 6 January) include:

- A new Centre of Excellence for Literacy Teaching that will set up a national network of 35 English Hubs across the country – backed by £26 million investment – to work with schools in challenging circumstances and help raise standards. The centre will also promote and share effective practice with a particular focus on language and literacy teaching in reception. This mirrors the already successful approach with Maths Hubs – high performing schools which share their knowledge with other schools locally;
- From April 2018, new phonics and reading partnerships will be set up, to drive improvements in teaching and encouraging more pupils to enjoy reading a wide range of literature. Another 20 phonics and reading roadshows will also be run across the country and include a specific focus on reception teaching. This new investment worth £435,000 will build on the successes of the phonics programmes, which have already helped put 154,000 more six-year-olds on track to become fluent readers since 2012;
- £5.7 million through our Strategic School Improvement Fund for initiatives that boost literacy and numeracy skills in early years and primary education in 469 schools around the country, benefitting around 40,000 children; and
- Inviting organisations to bid for the contract to launch a £5 million fund to trial approaches across the North of England that will help parents and carers to support early language development at home. Research shows that this early home learning environment plays a vital role in developing a child's vocabulary, and provides additional benefits to those gained from attending formal early education.

The Government is also announcing today a new £7.7 million curriculum fund – delivering on a manifesto commitment – to encourage the development of high quality teaching resources by organisations, including by leading cultural and scientific institutions. These resources will help teachers deliver the government's new curriculum while reducing workload and giving them more time to focus on what they do best – teaching.

The new Centre of Excellence for Literacy Teaching will be tasked with establishing the network of hubs, similar to the successful Maths Hubs established in 2014 that are helping to improve maths teaching across the country, including in schools in challenging circumstances. A procurement exercise to set it up will be launched later this year.

The establishment of a new national network of school-led English Hubs will promote and share excellence around the country – drawing on and developing the evidence base – with a particular focus on reception year.

Good phonics teaching, as highlighted by England's highest ever results in the [2016 PIRLS study](#), provides an excellent foundation for reading. The Phonics Screening Check, put in place in 2012, encourages teachers to use this method and since its introduction has helped put 154,000 more six-year-olds on track to become fluent readers since 2012.

To help teachers use this method the government has funded nearly 50 roadshows – designed to promote the effectiveness of phonics and showcase best practice – and today's investment of £100,000 will fund another 20.

Alongside this, a £335,000 fund will be used to create 20 enhanced Phonics and Reading partnerships in 2018-19. These partnerships will still address phonics, but also how schools can encourage pupils to enjoy reading and improve effectiveness in teaching in reception.

Since 2010 the government has introduced a range of reforms to improve standards in schools including a brand new primary curriculum, more rigorous Key Stage 2 tests and continuing investment in core school funding which is rising from almost £41 billion in 2017-18 to £43.5 billion in 2019-20.

As a result, latest figures show the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their more affluent peers in a combined measure of English, reading and maths has fallen in each of the last six years and by more than 10% at Key Stage 2 since 2011.