

Insight report into reading initiatives and
reading for pleasure at Key Stages 3 and 4
Spring 2022

Introduction

Welcome to MBE Books' second insight report into reading initiatives and reading for pleasure at Key Stages 3 and 4. It aims to provide an overview of the issues and trends facing secondary schools in reading from Year 7 upwards, as well as practical pointers on reading initiatives and books for literacy teams to try within their own settings.

The report itself draws on feedback gained from our community of SLT, Heads of English, English teachers, literacy leads/co-ordinators and librarians on their approaches to the teaching of reading with 11-15 year olds – and I would like to personally thank everyone who has taken time to complete our survey up to the end of half-term in February 2022.

Our findings suggest ongoing challenges around Year 7 students' reading ability, related blockages to reading for pleasure, but also how more and more schools are turning to Tutor Time Reading as a key supporting reading initiative.

Separate to this report, I was interested to read the findings of [Scholastic's exploration of the key issues and trends in the teaching of reading in primary schools](#) and the launch of their [Daily Reading Lesson](#). This, it would seem to me, is part of the solution to the issues facing students going into secondary schools.

At MBE Books we have supplied books to thousands of schools for over 30 years, offering the most popular English set texts and latest titles spanning

Key Stage 2, Key Stage 3, GCSE and A-Level set texts. Our aim is to be the preferred partner to schools on their improvement journey and towards the end of this report we have included a case study of how we work with Kent Catholic Schools' Partnership to do just that.

Beyond the 'issues-led' findings shared in this report, we also asked respondents to our survey how often they replace their Key Stage 4 GCSE set texts, whether they would prefer to purchase editions that had more space on the page for students to take notes or annotate the text, as well as who has responsibility for purchasing different types of books in their schools.

We will take the intelligence gained from these questions, and use this to develop an even more bespoke and personalised approach to what we do.

Jeremy

Jeremy Stallman
Managing Director
MBE Books



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Summary

73% of respondents undertake Tutor Time Reading every day or most days as a supporting reading initiative in Key Stages 3 and 4.

Most schools give 10-15 minutes to reading for pleasure in school every day – only 12 respondents say they allocate more than 20 minutes.

‘Not enough book stock’ is a bigger issue for schools in encouraging reading for pleasure than it was 18 months ago (6% increase).

Of 55 respondents who do not encourage reading for pleasure, 69% say this is because there is not enough time in the school day.

The most popular books that schools read with Year 7 students are:

1. Alice in Wonderland
2. A Monster Calls
- 3 = A Midsummer Night’s Dream; The Tempest; Treasure Island

55.5% of respondents are ‘concerned’ or ‘very concerned’ about the reading ability of Year 7 students – only one reported no concerns.

Schools’ favourite books to teach Key Stage 3 students are:

1. Animal Farm
2. Of Mice and Men
3. A Monster Calls

To grab the attention of reluctant readers at Key Stages 3 and 4 schools mostly recommend:

1. The Hunger Games
- 2= Noughts & Crosses; The Hate U Give

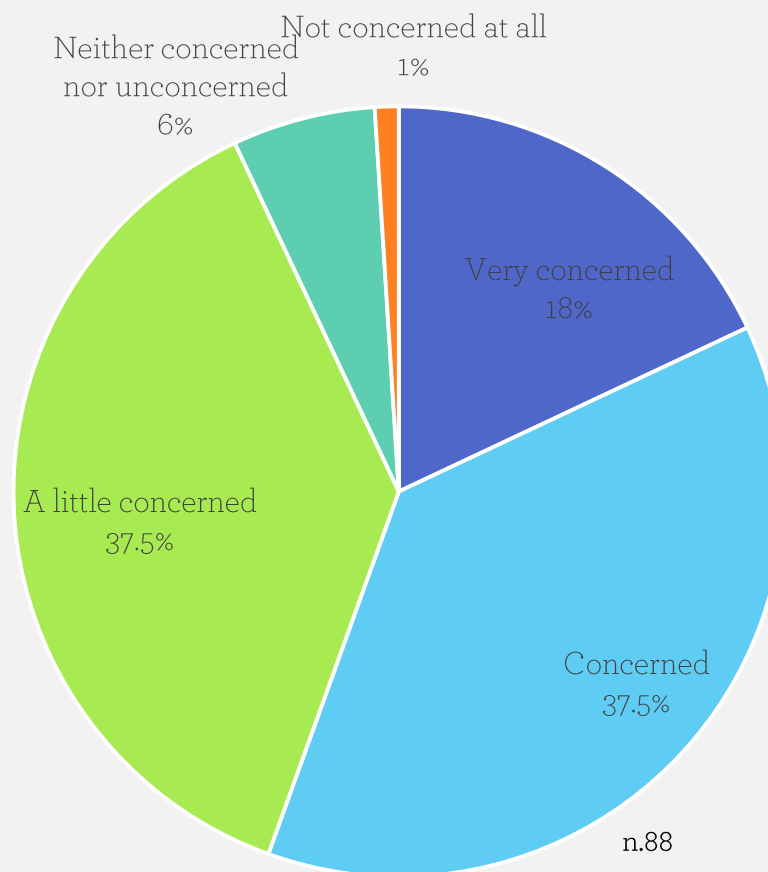
Key findings: Year 7 students' reading ability

The next three pages focus on respondents' sentiments on the reading ability of students in Year 7, the underpinning issues around reading that may be causing concern, and the initiatives put in place by schools to address any issues.

One of the key findings of this research is that over half of respondents (55.5%) are 'very concerned' or 'concerned' about reading ability in this Key Stage 3 group. This is generally in line with feelings expressed in our Autumn 2020 report, where 41% were 'concerned' and 19% were 'very concerned'. This year, 37.5% are a 'little concerned' compared to 31% previously. Only one respondent reported no concerns at all.

Whilst there does not appear to be any significant change in terms of sentiment around reading ability, and this may signify 'no progress', it could be interpreted that supporting initiatives have helped to prevent any further decline in the pandemic.

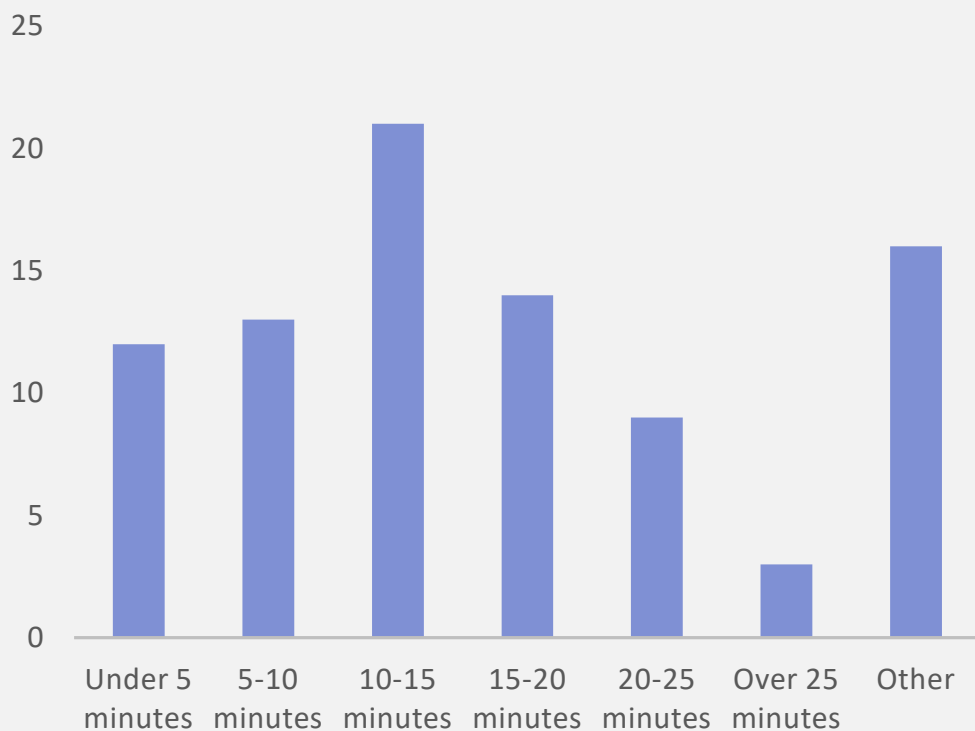
How much of a concern is the reading ability of students in Year 7?



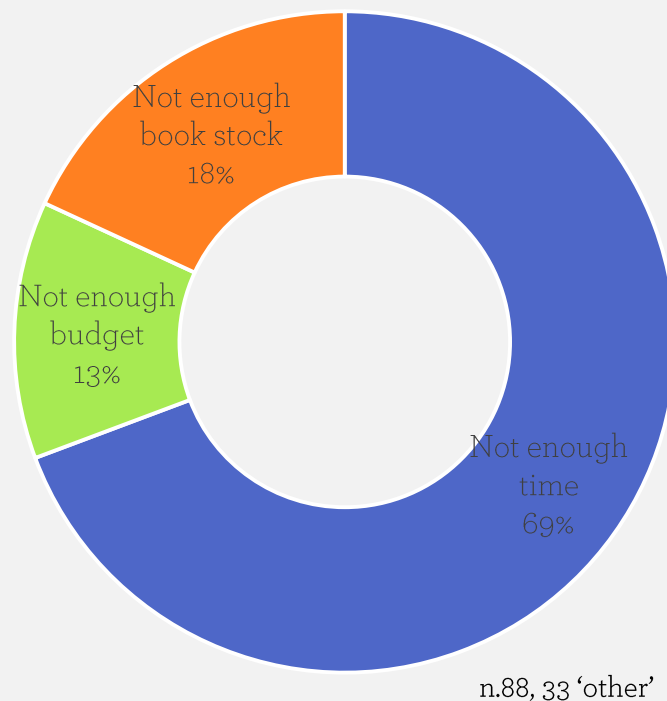
Key findings: Underpinning issues around reading

Most schools give 10-15 minutes time to reading for pleasure in school every day. Only 12 respondents say they allocate more than 20 minutes. Of the 55 schools who do not encourage reading for pleasure in school time, 69% say this is mainly due to 'not enough time' – 5% up on responses published in our Autumn 2020 report. However, where 18 months ago 24% said 'not enough budget' was a main reason, this year only 13% of respondents said this was a key factor. 'Not enough book stock' is an issue for 18% of respondents this year (compared to 12% previously) – but it is finding time/sufficient time in the school day to give to reading for pleasure that remains the biggest challenge for schools.

How much time do you give to reading for pleasure in school every day?



If you do not encourage reading for pleasure in school time, what are your main reasons why?



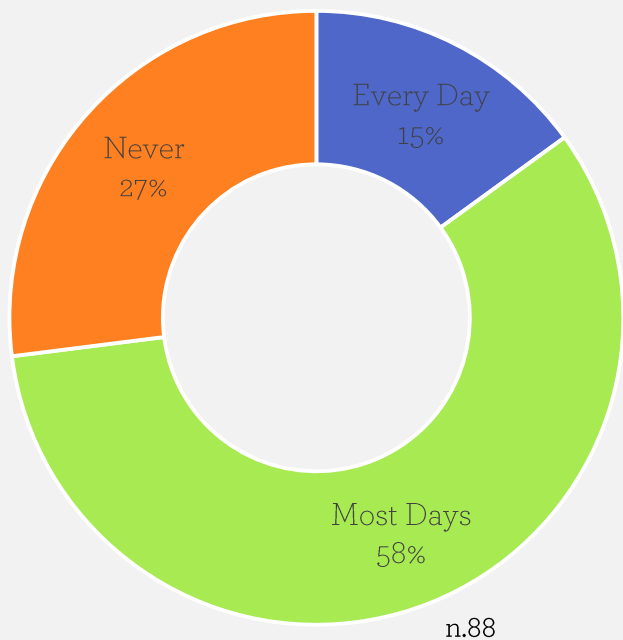
Key findings: Reading initiatives in Key Stages 3 and 4

To help address some of the concerns that schools have about reading levels of students, our research found (as in Autumn 2020) that approximately three quarter of schools undertake Tutor Time Reading most days, if not, every day.

The most frequently used other reading initiative is Accelerated Reader, which in our last report was adopted by 55% of schools.

Others highlighted in free-text comments include Drop Everything and Read, Lexia PowerUp, Carnegie book shadowing and school reading activities e.g. reading buddies, book clubs, library lessons, celebratory events etc.

Do you do Tutor Time Reading at your school?



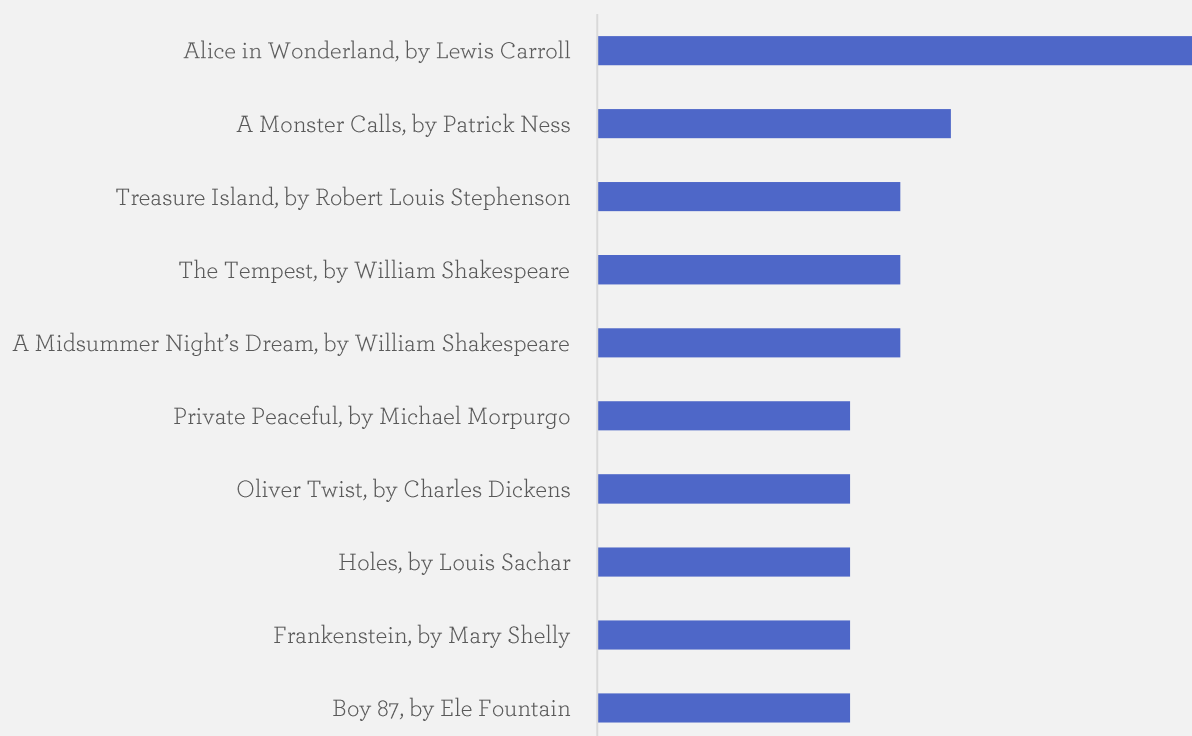
Top 5 other reading initiatives:

1. Accelerated Reader (see back page for details about our sister company, a specialist AR supplier)
2. Drop Everything and Read
3. Lexia PowerUp
4. Carnegie book shadowing
5. School reading activities e.g. reading buddies, book clubs, library lessons, celebratory events

Top 10: Books for reading with Year 7 students

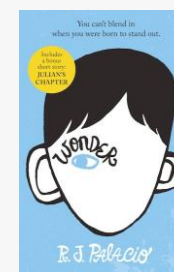
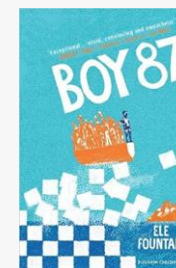
In the last report that we conducted, it was noted how many respondents had suggested that their book lists were in need of updating. Looking at this updated 'top 10', it is clear that this change has yet to materialise. If anything, the list has become 'older'! This time around, 60% of our chart are books written well over 100 years ago.

The only remnants of our last chart are *Private Peaceful* and *Holes* (chosen for their shorter chapters, morals and high interest levels) and our new entrant is *Boy 87*, by Ele Fountain which provides a chance for discussion in the classroom.



“Students tend to love the action from the start”

“Fast paced, emotionally-driven with strong characterisation and discussion opportunities”

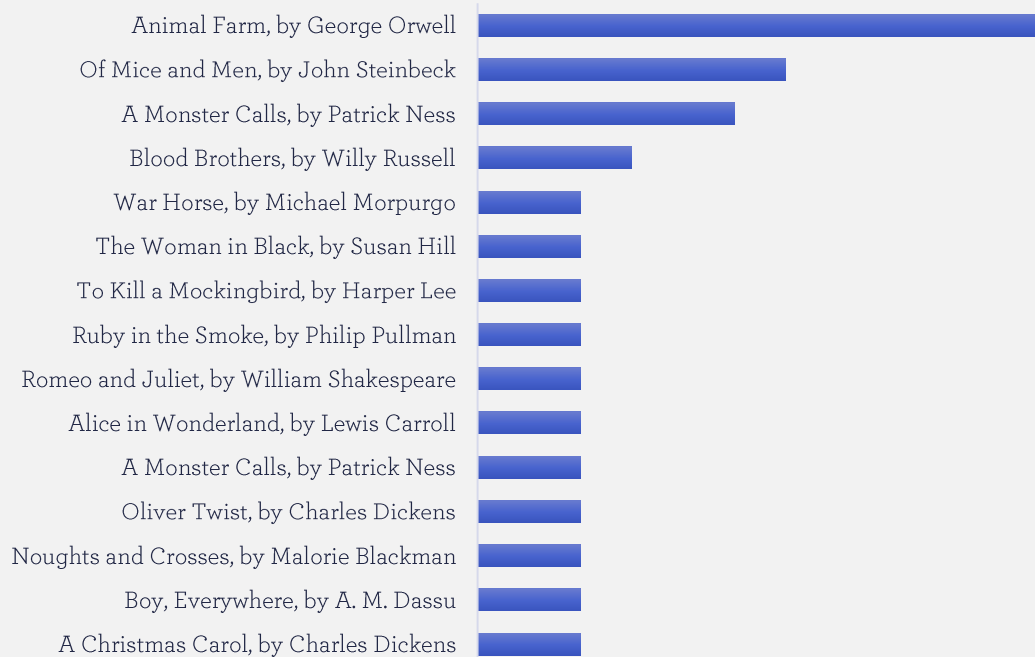


“Small chapters and a lovely story with a great meaning”

Top 10: Books for teaching Key Stage 3 students

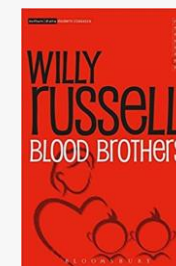
Books chosen for this list need to be ‘compelling’, be able to generate ‘great responses’ and allow students to be ‘invested’ and to ‘get their teeth into’ the characters and storyline.

Our top two titles are the same top two as the last chart we produced (albeit in a different order), and although many of these books were written over 50 years ago, it is interesting to note that *Boy, Everywhere* by A. M. Dassu, published in 2020, has made it into our top 10.



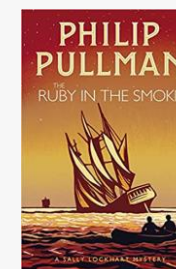
“Great way to get students into politics and understanding the power of their voice”

“The students love it, it's a play that really encourages them to get involved”



“Well-suited to all abilities, cultural capital, and captures students’ interest”

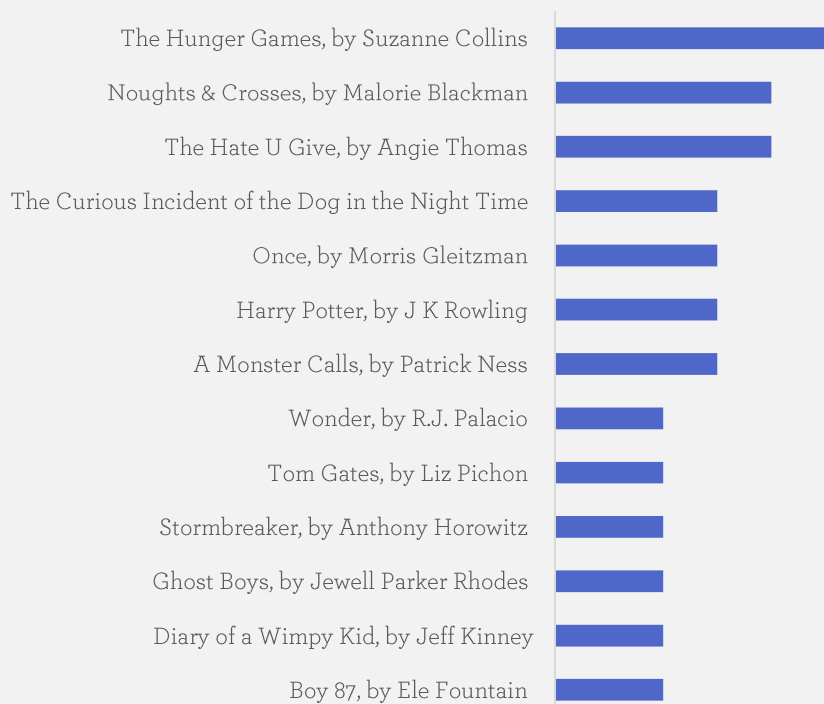
“Really interesting Victorian context. Gripping mystery”



Top 10: Books to grab the attention of reluctant readers

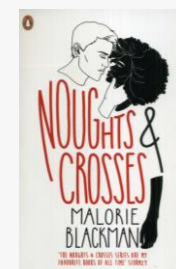
This chart in 2020 was very different from the previous two sections, and we see this repeated in 2022. The books on this list are much more diverse, inclusive and recently published than either of the other charts. Books on this list have to be ‘relevant to current issues’ (*The Hate U Give*), ‘fast paced, emotionally-driven with strong characterisation and discussion opportunities’ (*Boy, 87*), ‘not patronising’ and ‘relatable’.

Harry Potter has slipped from the number one slot in 2020 and is replaced by new entrant *The Hunger Games*. *The Hate U Give* was at the bottom of our chart last time and is now third behind *Noughts and Crosses* – a perennial favourite!



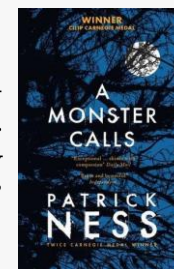
“Yet to find a child it hasn’t hooked”

“Very relevant for teenagers, awakens them to issues they may not be fully understanding of”



“Covers societal issues but also explores relationships and has some action”

“Relatable and straightforward. Promotes really lovely discussion”



Tutor Time Reading case study



Megan Nee is a Literacy Coordinator and English teacher at St Anslem's Catholic School, one of five secondary and 14 primary schools within Kent Catholic Schools' Partnership, who she joined in February 2020. Since the start of the 2021-22 academic year, however, Megan has also taken on a Trust-wide role, working across all secondary schools to support the implementation of the Tutor Time Reading programme. For 20 minutes at a time, every day of the week, the programme sees form tutors reading books aloud whilst each student follows along using a tracker in their own copy of the book.

Outlining her mission to “make reading a priority, raise its profile, and deliver excellent CPD to support teachers”, Megan hopes that this will “shortcut some of the answers to common questions across schools” and lead to more best-practice sharing within the Trust. “Literacy is the beating heart of any school improvement plan,” she explained. “We need to make it structured, habitual and routine, and develop a consciousness that culturally all teachers are responsible for improving literacy rates. In our secondary schools, we have pockets of students who are not at their chronological reading age, and in some cases years below where they should be. More and more Year 7 children are not secondary-ready having made the transition from primary, and Tutor Time Reading gives them extra reading support which is mutually enjoyable for both students and tutors.”

Under the Tutor Time Reading programme, form tutors model fluent and expressive reading whilst highlighting difficult language to close the vocabulary gap and expose students to high-level words. “We found out about Tutor Time Reading after a teacher in one of our Dover schools read a case study on Greenshaw Learning Trust, and we got our follow-on inspiration from that,” Megan revealed. “We trialled it in one school last year and it has been in development in four other schools since September 2021. As yet we do not have enough data analysis, of course, to point to firm conclusions about the programme's impact. But from a student perspective we know that Tutor Time Reading has acted as a really good settling-in activity and left them ready to learn in the first period. We also know students love being read to, it gives them purpose and consistency, every day.”

Through the Tutor Time Reading programme, Megan added that staff have reported how “they know their tutees in a more structured way, and understand them on a different wave length. The texts, genres and ideas coming through – these have to be right for individual schools and their context – and they have not had before”.

Going forward, Megan said that as well as ‘hard’ measurement around having as many students as possible at, or above, their chronological reading age, her aspiration was for the Tutor Time Reading programme to support a cultural shift within the Trust. “We want students to see themselves as readers, getting in the habit of it, and as part of that for Tutor Time Reading to improve footfall in libraries,” she explained. “By that, I mean we are doing a lot of reading of first texts of a book series within classroom settings, and we want students to seek out the second and third books on their own.”

She continued: “Teachers should clearly see their role in improving literacy rates and be developing their own displays of Tutor Time Reading in their classrooms to build awareness. Anecdotally we want them to spark conversations on book choices and inspire a love of reading, improving the reading for pleasure mindset in school. Developing competent and confident readers will lead to reading for pleasure.”

To deliver the Tutor Time Reading programme, and a range of texts which can be used across five years of school, the Trust needed a partner. MBE Books has been supplying books to thousands of schools for over 30 years and offers an unrivalled service delivering all orders for stock titles the following day. All books come supplied and fitted with free plastic jackets, saving schools a lot of time and prolonging the life of the books. Megan said: “MBE Books have been absolutely amazing to work with. They were recommended by one of our schools and now we are using them in Tutor Time. The plastic jackets have been particularly popular with staff, and practically are very beneficial, but generally the team are just so responsive and quick to reply. If they do not have a book, they will find it for us. We get such a brilliant service.”

How can you get involved?

If you have found this report useful, please contribute to the research we will be undertaking again in 2022-2023 by visiting <https://bit.ly/MBESurvey2022> and you will be entered into a prize draw to win £1,000 worth of class set books for your school.





About MBE Books

MBE Books has supplied books to thousands of schools for over 30 years. We offer the most popular English set texts and latest titles, all fitted free-of-charge with plastic jackets, saving schools time and prolonging the life of the books.

Our catalogue spans Key Stage 2, Key Stage 3, GCSE and A-Level set texts and we offer a one-stop book supply service to schools, providing class sets of any titles in print. We provide an unrivalled service, delivering all orders for stock titles the next working day.

Our sister company, Laburnum House Educational, are Accelerated Reader partners and their half-price AR titles can be found [here](#).



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