

Books and Stories is a targeted attainment-raising intervention developed by Bournemouth University. It aims to achieve demonstrable improvement in the reading ability of Year 6 to Year 8 pupils and advance their confidence in and attitudes towards reading.

During the 2024-2025 academic year, ten weekly one-hour sessions were delivered to 9 schools within the Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole area. Each school identified specific Year 6 pupils that had reading ages that were over a year lower than their actual age, and who did not have a special education need.

As part of the programme, pupils took part in a 30-minute guided reading session, followed by an interactive activity to develop reading comprehension skills. This report presents the impact of the programme drawing on data from a pre-and post-survey of 80 participants. This report will look to outline the key findings about participants' confidence and knowledge about reading, as well as feedback on the Books and Stories programme.

Impact on confidence and attitudes

To evaluate the impact of the programme we asked pupils to complete surveys about their confidence in, and attitudes towards reading before and after the programme. A total of 80 pupils completed both surveys, and the following positive findings were demonstrated:

- By the end of the Books and Stories programme, 13% of pupils felt more excited about starting a new book, having previously only felt this way occasionally.
- 23% felt that reading less difficult compared to their peers after completing the programme, whereas they had initially perceived it as more challenging.
- 15% of pupils reported an improved understanding of a story after participating in the programme
- 14% showed increase confidence in their reading ability having previously stated they were not a good reader.
- 20% of pupils found it easier to sound out words, 19% improved their clarity when reading aloud, and 15% gained the confidence to reading in front of a group, having previously answered "no" to all these skills.
- 25% of pupils increased the frequency of reading for fun at home.
- Qualitative feedback from teachers and those delivering the programme highlighted its effectiveness in improving reading engagement but suggests enhancements in training, session structure, and programme length.

Pupil Feedback

In addition, qualitative feedback obtained from pupils further demonstrated the positive impact of the programme. When asked what Books and Stories have taught them, the following feedback was given:

“To not give up”

“To be brave”

“To become more confident”

Pupils were also asked how they felt after completing the Books and Stories programme. 26% used the word “happy”, 25% said they were more “confident” and, 16% said that they were a “better reader”, “enjoyed reading” or were “going to read more”. Finally, when asked what made the pupils better readers, the feedback included:

“I am a better reader because BU helped me”

“I kept practising”

“Sounding and reading out loud”

Falmouth University Books and Stories

Building on the achievements of the previous academic year, Falmouth University re-licensed the Books and Stories programme to continue supporting reading attainment. Positive feedback was found on a number of areas:

- By the end of the Books and Stories programme, 83% of pupils felt more excited about starting a new book.
- 74% felt that reading was not as hard for them in comparison to their peers once they had completed Books and Stories.
- 95% of pupils felt that they understood the story after taking part in Books and Stories.
- 67% agreed that they were a good reader following participation in the Books and Stories programme.
- 88% of pupils were able to say the words clearly when reading out loud, whilst 84% were more confident in reading out loud in front of a group.
- 7% of pupils also increased the number of times they read at home for fun.

Chesil Schools Books and Stories

The Books and Stories programme has had a notably positive impact on pupils' attitudes toward reading across the four Chesil schools involved in the programme. Many students reported feeling more confident and engaged, with several describing themselves as “better at reading” or “more confident” after participating.

The qualitative responses received from pupils showed a significant increase in reading volume and enjoyment. Specifically, pupils highlighted improvements in reading fluency, pronunciation, and comprehension, often attributing their progress to the supportive environment of small group sessions.

Facilitator Feedback

For the first time this year, volunteers were recruited from Marketing & Communications to deliver the Books & Stories programme alongside Student Ambassadors. At the end of the programme, we asked both volunteers and student ambassadors to provide feedback on the following areas:

Preparation & Training: Most felt “somewhat prepared” and suggested additional training in the lead up to delivery, such as a practice session or real examples of session delivery, and strategies for managing challenging behaviour.

Workbooks: Generally well-received, though some minor improvements were suggested. While challenge activities are already included, there were recommendations for further enhancements, such as adding additional tasks or modified activities to reinforce learning and maintain engagement

Impact on Pupils: Most agreed that pupils' attitudes toward reading improved, with increased confidence and willingness to participate with many students excited to attend sessions.

Support from Schools: There was mixed feedback in this area as some felt unsupported due to minimal interaction with school staff and challenges in managing student behaviour, while others found the schools accommodating.

Programme Strengths: Many agreed that the content of Books and Stories was engaging, and the sessions were well structured sessions with positive student engagement.

Areas for Improvement: A few suggestions for improvement included extending sessions, adding refresher training, and considering smaller groups for more one-to-one support. A suggestion was also made around logistics in terms of arriving earlier at schools to allow for more preparation time.

School Feedback

For those schools that participated in the programme, we also wanted to obtain their feedback on the following areas:

Impact on Pupils: Many teachers stated that they observed a positive shift in reading attitudes, with pupils eager to participate in the sessions.

Programme Length: Some felt the programme should be longer to reinforce progress more effectively.

Programme Strengths: Teachers commented on how pupils enjoyed owning books, that there were engaging discussions, and that the reading materials were relatable to the age groups.

Areas for Improvement: Schools suggested adding an extra session to the programme and finding ways to further encourage engagement.

Celebration Event: The celebration event held at BU was highly praised, with children enjoying the graduation day.

Future Plans

As part of Bournemouth University's approved Access and Participation Plan and our attainment-raising intervention strategy, we are progressing towards a Type 3 evaluation of the Books and Stories programme, set for completion and ultimately publication, by 2027-28.

Significant groundwork has already been laid, including securing ethical approval, and we are now advancing towards the next phase. This summer, we will focus on refining our school targeting approach, enhancing communication with schools, and delivering comprehensive information sessions. Additionally, we begin developing pre- and post- reading assessments to demonstrate the programme's quantitative impact while ensuring a robust and effective evaluation process.