

# [News story: Pupils in England climb global rankings in reading and literacy](#)

Pupils in England are outperforming peers across the world in reading and literacy, according to an international [study](#) published today (5 December).

The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) ranks England joint eighth out of 50 countries, and among the highest performing countries in Europe.

The results – which are based on a study of the reading comprehension and enjoyment of a cohort of 340,000 nine-year-olds around the world – mean England's nine-year-olds are significantly better readers than their American, Canadian and Australian counterparts.

The study was first introduced in 2001, and this year's results are the country's best to date and a dramatic improvement on the 2006 results, when England was ranked 19th out of 45 countries. The study also reveals that while all pupils are making improvements it is low-performing pupils who have made the greatest progress.

It follows the publication of figures in [September](#) which show 154,000 more six-year-old children are on track to become fluent readers compared to 2012.

School Standards Minister Nick Gibb said:

Today's results put the success of our increased emphasis on phonics and continued focus on raising education standards on a global scale. Thanks to the hard work of teachers across the country, 154,000 more six year olds are reading better than ever before – this is fundamental to our ambition of helping every child fulfil their potential.

Our rise through the global rankings is even more commendable because it has been driven by an increase in the number of low-performing pupils reading well. This demonstrates our determination to ensure this is a country that works for everyone, regardless of background.

Mark Lehain, Director of Parents and Teachers for Excellence and Founder of Bedford Free School, said:

This adds to the already substantial base of evidence that systematic synthetic phonics are the most effective way of starting a child's lifelong love of reading. The hard work of the teaching

profession is shown in the excellent results that these children have achieved, and we should all be proud of what we as a country have done here.

There is also a wider point about the reforms of the past seven years. A great deal of bravery was required to really shake up the system and implement them, but here is yet more evidence that this was the right thing to do.

Michaela Khatib, Head Teacher at Cobham Free School, said:

I'm really pleased to see that English pupils have done so well in this test. Reading is one of the core skills that all pupils should be able to master by the time they turn 10, and I think that the recent work put in by teachers to implement the phonics check across the country has definitely begun to pay dividends. It's also great to see that so many children say they have a real love of reading, and we must keep working towards the goal of every child being able to access the best of what their cultural heritage has to offer.

Clare Sealy, Headteacher at St Matthias School, Tower Hamlets, said:

These results are hugely encouraging because they are further evidence that the hard work of the profession and focus on both reading high quality literature alongside excellent phonics teaching is really making a difference.

As a profession we are determined that every child gets the best possible start to their school career, and skilled phonics teaching, alongside immersion in the amazing riches of the best of children's literature, are both absolutely crucial if we are to kick start a life-long love of reading.

We know from research that children who read for pleasure do best at school, so it is particularly heartening to see that children are developing a love of reading, not only because this will help them thrive at school but also because their lives will be so much richer as a result.

The pupils who took part in this study are the first to be assessed since the government's wide ranging education reforms, which saw the introduction of the more rigorous, knowledge-rich primary school curriculum.

This includes an increased focus on phonics – the internationally approved approach to teaching children to read by breaking words down into their component sounds and 'blending' these sounds together – as well as a focus on children reading more and enjoying more challenging texts in the classroom.

The improved PIRLS results reflect the raising of standards in schools more generally across the country. Thanks to the dedication of teachers and the government's reforms the proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard in phonics has risen from just 58% in 2012 to 81% in 2017, with 92% of pupils reaching this standard by age seven.

The attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their more affluent peers has also closed by 9.3% at age 11 and 7% at age 16 and this summer secondary schools rose to the challenge of the new more demanding GCSEs in English and maths.

PIRLS is a worldwide research project that takes place every five years to look at trends in children's reading literacy achievement over time. The study assesses the knowledge and skills of pupils aged 9 to 10 around the world. England is joint eighth of 50 countries in this year's study with an average score of 559, the highest the country has achieved in the last four PIRLS cycles, significantly above the international median of 539.

The PIRLS study looks at the strategies used to teach reading. For example, in England, teachers are encouraged to use the phonics approach in their classrooms. It examines four main comprehension processes of reading. These are the abilities to:

- focus on and retrieve information explicitly stated in text
- make straightforward inferences from a text, understanding parts of a text that are not stated
- interpret and integrate ideas and information
- examine and evaluate content, language and features of texts

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## [News story: DAC D'Orsi meets with representatives from cities affected by terrorism to share collective experience](#)

Addressing policing and government officials from around the world at an event in London last week, DAC D'Orsi stressed the importance for the commercial sector to start factoring protective security measures into event planning and new infrastructure projects at the earliest possible stage.

She said:

Methodologies to protect our cities from the increasing terrorist threat are constantly evolving, to ensure that we are prepared to

effectively respond and recover from attacks. We in policing will rightly lead on this vital work, but there is always a limit to what we can do and I believe that our colleagues in the private sector also have an important part to play.

DAC D'Orsi made the comments while co-chairing a 'Safer Cities' round table discussion alongside the Home Office. Taking place at the UK Security Expo at London Olympia on Wednesday 29 November, 'Safer Cities' was created in conjunction with the Cross-sector Safety and Security Communications (CSSC), and hosted officials from Melbourne, Barcelona, Brussels and Rotterdam.

The purpose was to bring together representatives from cities which have been recently affected by terrorism, to share our collective experience of dealing with attacks in the hope it can promote best practice and help keep the global public safer.

DAC D'Orsi used the platform to appeal to companies to make protective security key to their future events planning and building management.

She continued:

Terrorists are using low sophistication, high impact methodologies which are often planned and executed in a short time frame, minimising our ability to disrupt attacks before they occur. Protective security is therefore a key strand of our activity to reduce the impact of attacks.

The private sector has become more willing partners in recent years. Together we have developed communications packages like CSSC and have partnered with business under the Step Change initiative – but to do more to protect the public we need to deliver a more fundamental shift of approach.

The police have a duty to protect the public from terrorist threats, but many responsible private sector entities are already asking how they, too, can contribute. By sharing this 'duty' more widely we can increase its reach, scope and efficacy even further.

Senior officers working for Counter Terrorism Policing are developing plans for how policing can better support the private sector in contributing to the UK's collective Protective Security measures. These include developing accredited private sector security advisory services, creating bespoke products and communications networks for specific sectors, such as entertainment venues or commercial buildings.

Specialist officers could also support testing and exercising across the country to ensure a national standard of security training across private sector workers, as well as developing develop protocols and systems which would allow for the police and government to recover the costs of the use of national assets to protect private events.

DAC D'Orsi added:

Private companies looking to host public events or begin new infrastructure projects must meet stringent targets to ensure they have valid fire safety certificates, and I see no reason why we can't do the same for Protective Security measures.

Similarly, commercial entities such as football clubs must contribute to the policing operations which protect their sites and their customers. So surely it is only right they do the same when utilising national protective security resources.

I know from speaking to private sector representatives that the vast majority of private companies are ready to work alongside police to make the UK safer place, and I believe we now have the blueprints to make that a reality by making our public spaces as hostile as possible for those looking to do us harm.

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## **Press release: Back the fight against puppy smugglers and backstreet breeders, says animal welfare Minister**

People planning to add a four-legged friend to the family this Christmas need to be wary of unscrupulous breeders and sellers, animal welfare Minister Lord Gardiner has warned today.

The UK is a nation of animal lovers, and each year thousands of us consider welcoming a pet into the family at Christmas time to add to the UK's 8.5 million pet dogs and 7.4 million cats. However, puppy smugglers and unlicensed sellers are ready to take advantage of the high demand by illegally importing them into the country, neglecting their health and welfare and not properly vaccinating them – leading to steep vets' bills and heartbreak for buyers when the puppies fall ill or in some cases, sadly die.

Consequently, it's now more important than ever that buyers are armed with the knowledge they need to buy responsibly and avoid inadvertently fuelling the illegal puppy smuggling trade.

Minister for animal welfare, Lord Gardiner, said:

We all know that a dog is for life, not just for Christmas. But that life could be cruelly cut short if they haven't been properly looked after by the breeder, bringing heartbreak to the family.

We are a nation of animal lovers and buyers can do their bit to avoid the dishonest sellers by never buying a puppy younger than 8 weeks old, seeing the puppy interact with its mother and checking on its health history.

The government announced earlier this year that some of the [Pet Advertising Advisory Group's minimum standards](#) will become mandatory for online sellers as part of a [swathe of reforms to the animal licensing system](#). The reforms will make it illegal to sell puppies younger than eight weeks and require anyone breeding and selling three or more litters a year to apply for a formal licence. Anyone trading commercially in pets online will need to be properly licensed.

The plans will be laid in Parliament in the new year and will empower local authorities to take tough action on 'backstreet breeders' and help ensure the pets we buy are healthy, happy and from reputable sellers.

Minister for animal welfare Lord Gardiner recently hosted a roundtable with a number of animal charities and websites including Gumtree, Preloved and Vivastreet to discuss the progress made so far. The Minister has since written to those invited to the roundtable to praise their work in helping to stop illegal sellers and encouraging further action.

Lord Gardiner has also set out five simple tips to help anyone thinking of committing to a new pet to choose the right animal:

- Always consider a rescue dog in the first instance.
- If you are buying a puppy, only buy from reputable breeders and sellers – and make sure they're licensed if buying from a business rather than private seller.
- Never buy a puppy that's younger than 8 weeks old.
- Check the puppy's health history – check vaccinations, make sure it's microchipped, and consider asking the seller to complete the ['Puppy Contract'](#).
- See the puppy interact with its mother.

If something still doesn't feel right, don't be afraid to walk away and look elsewhere. You should also report suspect breeders and sellers to your local council or Trading Standards.

Paula Boyden, Dogs Trust Veterinary Director and Chair of PAAG said:

The ease and popularity of the internet means that the impulse buying of pets has increasingly become an appealing option for many prospective buyers. However, the lure of a quick sale also attracts many unscrupulous breeders and dealers to websites.

We urge buyers to be cautious when looking to buy an animal via an online advert and if they have any concerns, walk away and report the seller to Trading Standards.

John Fishwick, President of the British Veterinary Association, said:

Vets see first-hand the tragic consequences that can result from poorly bred and illegally imported puppies. We've heard awful stories of people buying puppies only for their puppy to be dead 24 hours later because of the way it was bred and cared for in its early days.

Owning a dog is a life-changing commitment and we'd advise anyone thinking about getting a dog to first speak to their local vet about the right breed for them and then use the free online Puppy Contract to ensure they get a happy, healthy and well-socialised puppy.

A dog should never be bought 'for Christmas' as it can be a stressful time of year for pets, with lots going on, so we'd recommend waiting until the new year to welcome a new dog into your home.

This announcement comes as the UK embarks on a package of reforms to make sure we are a leader in animal welfare once we leave the EU. From bringing in tougher prison sentences for those who abuse animals to mandatory CCTV in slaughterhouses, the UK is leading the way with some of the highest animal welfare standards in the world.

1. More [information on the Pet Advertising Advisory Group](#), including a list of websites which are currently meeting their minimum standards.
  2. Further [information on the RSPCA's Puppy Contract](#)
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## News story: Views sought on early years education for disadvantaged children

Thousands more disadvantaged two-year-olds will become eligible to receive the government's free 15 hour childcare entitlement, under new proposals outlined today.

In light of the national roll out of Universal Credit, the Department for Education has launched a [consultation](#) today (Monday 4 December) asking for views on how the government should continue to offer early years education to the families who should be receiving the 15 hours of free childcare for two-year-olds from disadvantaged families.

The government wants to expand the offer to ensure that around 8,000 more disadvantaged children will benefit from high quality early education, once Universal Credit is fully rolled out.

As of January 2017 around 160,000 two-year-olds are already taking up the free offer. Under the proposals, all children who are taking up the offer will continue to have access, and the entitlement will be targeted to ensure it reaches those most in need in the future, seeing thousands more families benefit as a result.

Minister for Children and Families Robert Goodwill said:

Expanding access to high-quality early education is essential if we are to give every child the best start in life, which is why we are investing a record amount in childcare – £6 billion by 2020.

Our proposals not only ensure that no two-year-old who is already benefitting from the free 15 hour offer loses it, but will give thousands more the chance to benefit, supporting their early development.

This is an important issue and it is important that we get this right. We want to hear from families, early years' professionals and other experts throughout this consultation so we can identify those children who need our support most.

The introduction of Universal Credit lies at the heart of the government's commitment to help people improve their lives and raise their incomes. This consultation will make sure the two-year-old entitlement continues to be targeted where it is needed most.

This is part of the government's total childcare offer which is backed by a record investment of around £6 billion per year by 2020. The proposals

outlined in the consultation include introducing a net earnings income threshold of £15,400 per year for those in receipt of Universal Credit – typically equivalent to between £24,000 and £32,000 in total household income.

No child will lose access to the free hours once they are already in receipt of the offer, regardless of the introduction of the new earnings threshold. We are not proposing any other changes to the two-year-old eligibility criteria.

Universal Credit is replacing a number of qualifying benefits for the two-year-old entitlement, including Jobseeker's Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance, Child Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit and Income Support.

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## [News story: Lord Duncan visits The HALO Kilmarnock](#)

Lord Duncan today [4 December] saw work getting underway on the £65 million urban regeneration project, which is supported by £3.5 million of UK Government funding.

The funding will support a new Enterprise & Innovation Centre to foster the next generation of entrepreneurs, with strong focus on innovation, digital skills, and cyber security.

The HALO Kilmarnock, located on the site of the former Johnnie Walker bottling plant, is a multi-faceted brownfield regeneration scheme which will create an innovative, inspirational and imaginative urban park with a dynamic commercial, educational, cultural, leisure and lifestyle quarter. Its low carbon, renewable deep geothermal district heating network will address fuel costs on the site and have the capability of being extended to service other areas of the community – a first for the UK. The development will also include a light manufacturing facility and key worker private rental accommodation.

Lord Duncan said:

Supported by a £3.5 million UK Government investment, The HALO Kilmarnock is an ambitious, important development that will create jobs, grow the economy and drive innovation. The project will attract international companies to locate in the town, benefiting from the excellent transport links and a local, well-trained workforce. The HALO Kilmarnock represents marks a fresh start for Kilmarnock and Ayrshire and I hope that the project is a catalyst for further regeneration in Scotland and beyond.

Marie Macklin, founder and director of The HALO Kilmarnock, said:

The HALO will play an important role in the UK Government's UK Industrial Strategy, to which we contributed at its consultation stage. The economic benefits of this community led development will be felt not just in Kilmarnock and East Ayrshire, but across the whole of Scotland and driving down into the Northern Powerhouse, harnessing the power of the 4th Industrial Revolution – the digital revolution.

We welcome the UK Government's support for The HALO Kilmarnock which is a major infrastructure project in its own right and we hope that it will prove to be a catalyst for other infrastructure projects, such as the improved road and rail links that will connect it with the rest of the UK.