

Libraries NI
Independent Review of Education in Northern Ireland
Final Report: Content for Inclusion

The Northern Ireland Library Authority, known as Libraries NI, is the regional body responsible for the provision and delivery of a public library service in Northern Ireland. Libraries NI is the largest single library authority in the UK. The primary duty, as set down in the Libraries Act (Northern Ireland) 2008, is to provide a comprehensive and efficient public library service for persons living, working or studying in Northern Ireland.

Libraries NI has an extensive network of 98 libraries including Heritage libraries and mobile libraries which provide a wide range of free services including internet access, Wi-Fi, books, eBooks, audio books, eMagazines, eNewspapers and other online resources including curriculum based study resources that support learners. Resources are enhanced and complemented through a diverse and varied range of programmes, events and activities for children including storytime, reading groups, Rhythm and Rhyme, school class visits and storytelling with Libraries NI Storyteller in Residence. Libraries provide learning opportunities including developing IT skills, family history and heritage, access to information and the opportunity to participate in cultural and creative experiences. Libraries offer a social space and study areas for group and individual study. Libraries NI contributes to government priorities through delivering social, health and positive wellbeing activities which address deprivation and specifically reading and literacy exclusions and contribute to reducing social isolation and loneliness.

Libraries NI recognises that a child's education starts before birth and offers activities to support parents and young children in the years before statutory education. The most popular of these is the Rhythm and Rhyme programme. Research has shown that parents who attend sessions regularly have increased confidence in sharing rhymes with their children and also have rhyme times at home with their children more frequently. Children benefit too by demonstrating increased concentration skills, improved vocabulary and better socialisation with other children.

Classes from Nursery, primary and post primary schools regularly visit their local library to choose and borrow books, use computers and engage with storytelling. The class visits programme for P4 and P6 children supports formal learning by promoting and encouraging reading for pleasure, supporting language and literacy development and fostering the development of lifelong learning skills. A mobile library service also visits primary schools to offer children in more isolated areas the opportunity to borrow books.

Libraries NI places an increasing emphasis on reading choices for children, in particular, through a child's early years and then progressing to Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. Book borrowing, the use of resources and participating in reader development activities support the Reading for Pleasure element of the literacy agenda and is strongly linked to a child's overall educational performance. Examples of these activities include Summer Reading Challenge, Book Week NI in partnership with BBC, Children's Mental Health Week and World Book Day.

Libraries NI acknowledges the Independent Review of Education in Northern Ireland report as a significant step to moving towards an education system that supports children of all ages to achieve their best enabling them to fully participate in society. The local library, its resources, services and programmes are a vital element of the education offer going forward.