House of Commons 30 March 2023

London
SW1A 0AA

**By email only**

Dear Keir Starmer,

I am the chief executive of the Society of Authors (SoA), a trade union for authors based in your Holborn and St Pancras constituency. I am writing to you about the need for every child to have access to a school library and a librarian.

The Society of Authors is the UK’s largest trade union for all types of writers, illustrators and literary translators, with over 12.500 members. Many of our members create books for children, who are represented in our Children’s Writers and Illustrators Group. Working closely with this group, for whom school visits are integral, we know only too well the difference a great school library has on education. In 2017, we set up our [Reading for Pleasure Awards](https://www.societyofauthors.org/Groups/Childrens-Writers-and-Illustrators/Reading-for-Pleasure-Award) to promote the vital work schools do in this area.

We would like to know whether school libraries are a priority for Labour heading towards a general election and to bring to your attention the [Great School Libraries campaign](https://www.greatschoollibraries.org.uk/) which is supported by the Society of Authors.

Great School Libraries is a national campaign to ensure that all children have access to a school library and librarian and to promote their impact in schools. Their [recent report](https://www.greatschoollibraries.org.uk/2023research) into the state of school libraries in the UK, while positively highlighting schools where libraries are ‘changing to become multi-functional platforms of teaching and learning’, showed that this is not reflected across England and across the different school sectors, due to financial pressures on councils to cut school libraries and budgets.

Schools that have a high percentage of children eligible for Free School Meals are least likely to have access to a school library or dedicated library staff. There are also significant regional inequalities, with rural areas less likely to have access to school libraries. Two thirds of school libraries in Scotland have no budget at all and pupils in Northern Ireland are the least likely to have access to a school library or designated budget.

65% of primary schools reported that they do not have a designated library budget and the proportion of secondary schools with a library on site dropped from 96% in 2019, to 86%.

The impact of this on children’s education cannot be overstated. A school library that is properly funded and facilitated is where literacy and the spirit of independent inquiry are instilled. These are integral to every aspect of learning. It is where collaborations between departments happen, offering gateways from one subject to another, and crucially where a love of reading is fostered. There is a wealth of research to suggest that this also aids every aspect of learning as well as increasing happiness and empathy.

As we head towards a general election, we would like to know:

* Is it Labour’s ambition that every school has a school library staffed by a qualified librarian?
* Would Labour include school library provision in the schools' inspection framework?
* Would Labour make changes to include a question about school library provision in the school census?

We hope that Labour will support and further the Great School Libraries Campaign. Please contact the Campaign chairs to further discuss how you and Labour can support the Campaign and help it gather momentum at info@greatschoollibraries.co.uk.

Yours sincerely,



Nicola Solomon

Chief Executive, The Society of Authors

Chair, Creators’ Rights Alliance