

What has contributed most to improved standards in reading in England?

To what might we attribute the rising trend in reading standards in England? At least four elements have come together to make a positive impact on children's progress.

- First, there has been a powerful political and professional drive to prioritise and strengthen literacy, especially through the systematic teaching of reading in primary schools, and in the training of teachers.
- Secondly, this momentum has been backed by an unprecedented growth of good commercial and government-funded resources for teaching reading, with due attention to phonic work, designed to make sure that children understand how the alphabet works for reading and writing.
- Thirdly, there has been a spectacular growth of excellent children's literature by our world-class authors.
- Finally, the last decade or so has seen advances from research, for example, in neuroscience and cognitive psychology that have given us a better understanding of

dyslexia, reading disorders and how the brain learns to read.

It is often said that learning to read is a complex and difficult task but it is often forgotten that the brain is a complex and highly adaptable endowment that is well-capable of coping with that task in the great majority of children by the age of seven.

All that said, there is still a great deal more to do if we are to secure and build upon the gains in reading and make a real impact on reducing the widening gap in the social-economic divide and other factors that continue to hamper the progress of many children.

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