

Important Dates 2026 – 27

Our office will be
closed from:

October Half Term

23/10 – 02/11 incl

Christmas Holidays

18/12 – 03/01 incl

February Half Term

12/02 – 21/02 incl

Easter Holidays

26/03 – 12/04 incl

May Half Term

28/05 – 06/06 incl

Please see our Dates
for your Diary page
for more information
on area specific
dates



Message from our CEO, Marcia Rowlinson



Welcome to the new academic year! We hope you had a relaxing summer break and are looking forward to returning to your ABC to read sessions. If you haven't already done so, please contact your school to confirm the date your sessions will begin.

Before we begin the new academic year, we would also like to thank all of our volunteers for their flexibility during the end of the summer term, when the heatwave meant some schools had to close or change their arrangements at short notice.

Within this newsletter, as we start the new school year, we would like to share a few reminders and practical tips to help you make the most of your volunteering, including guidance on communicating effectively with school staff.

May I take this opportunity to thank you for your continued support and I wish you an enjoyable term.

Advance Notice – Christmas Get-Togethers!

Following the positive feedback we received from last year's local Christmas get-togethers, we are delighted to be hosting Christmas coffee mornings in each of our areas again this year, rather than holding one large festive event in Reading. These smaller gatherings give volunteers a chance to meet and celebrate with others in their local area.

Please refer to Page 11 of this newsletter for all the festive dates.

We will also be selling our popular Christmas cards at these coffee mornings. If you would like to purchase your cards before your local event, please let your Fieldworker, or the office know and they will be happy to help.



Please follow us on social media



<https://www.facebook.com/abctoread2>



<https://www.linkedin.com/company/78337811/admin/>



<https://www.instagram.com/abctoread1/>



<https://x.com/ABCtoread>



Spooky Story Competition ... is now LIVE!



As promoted in our July 2026 Newsletter, with this year being the National Year of Reading, we wanted to launch another exciting competition before the year ends.

The ABC to read Spooky Story is taking place **NOW throughout September**, giving one school the opportunity to win an author visit from award-winning children's author Peter J Murray during October.

Open to Key Stage 2 children, Peter inspires young readers aged 7–13 to pick up a book, use their imagination, and enjoy reading for pleasure. He is best known for his spooky and fast-paced stories, particularly the popular Mokee Joe series, and is especially recognised for inspiring reluctant readers.

Before becoming a full-time author, Peter worked as Deputy Headteacher at Cheam School. His own journey often resonates with children, as he left school with few qualifications before later studying at Cambridge University and building a successful career as an author.

Schools are often looking for seasonal literacy activities, and we hope this competition will encourage creativity, storytelling, and a love of reading amongst the children taking part.

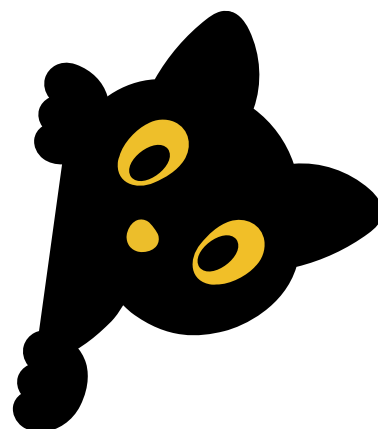
The competition deadline is 1 October 2026.

If you support Key Stage 2 children and would like to take part, please send your entries to us, either:-

By email: info@abctoread.org.uk

By post: ABC to read, St Mark's Church Hall, 94 Cranbury Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG30 2TA

Please turn over the page for the poster which has already been emailed to our schools.



SPOOKY STORY COMPETITION



Things that go bump
in the night!



**CALLING ALL KEY
STAGE 2 PUPILS**

**THE WINNING SCHOOL
WILL RECEIVE**

YOU CAN ENTER BY:

- Writing a spooky story
- Drawing scenes or characters from a scary book
- Designing a creepy book cover
- Creating a comic strip
- Writing a spooky poem
- Creating your own monster or haunted setting
- Sharing a review of your favourite scary story
- Or any other creative idea inspired by reading!

A visit from award –
winning author Peter
J Murray

A fun and inspiring
session celebrating
stories, imagination
and reading for
pleasure

CLOSING DATE

1 OCTOBER



Useful Practical Tips for Volunteers

Bring a Notebook

Consider carrying a notebook to jot down children's names and the page they reached in their books. This can be especially helpful as children don't always remember what page they got up to.

Promote Comprehension

Encourage understanding by asking questions like, "How do you think the character feels?" or "What might happen next?" This helps children develop comprehension and analytical skills.

Choose a Quiet Spot

If you're reading in a public area, position yourself and the child so your backs are to the traffic flow. If it is busy and noisy the children can get distracted but having your backs to the hullabaloo helps!

Assist with Difficult Words

If a child is struggling with challenging words, read a sentence aloud, discuss it with the child, and then have them read the same sentence back to you. This method enhances engagement and improves vocabulary.

Be Patient and Take Initiative

Understand that teachers are often busy and overwhelmed and may not always be able to make time to chat with you. Be patient and proactive, taking the initiative to build a warm and friendly relationship. Over time, as they witness the children's progress, they may become more engaged with you.

Adapt to Changes

Lessons do sometimes change, and this can impact on your sessions – you may have to fill in ten minutes if assembly or a PE lesson is scheduled and clashes with your allocated session time. When this happens it is fine to say to the teacher that your volunteer period is set and that because of the change you will have to read with one less pupil and pick them up the following week. Of course, if you have the flexibility to stay an extra 10 minutes to read with them that is great.

Spread Smiles and Fun

Remember to greet each child with a smile as they arrive, and most importantly, have fun during your time as an ABC to read volunteer!

Bonus Tip: Encourage Reading at Home

If appropriate, gently encourage the children you read with to keep reading over the school holidays. Even just a few minutes a day can make a big difference and help them retain the progress they have made with you over the school year.

Enhancing Communication with Class Teachers

We know that one of the most common challenges reported by our volunteers is limited contact with class teachers. While schools are incredibly busy places, there are a few simple strategies that may help build and improve communication.

Catch teachers at the start or end of the day

Some volunteers arrive early to speak with teachers before their class returns from lunch or stay behind at the end of the school day for a quick word. Establish friendly connections with the whole staff whenever possible, especially those on reception. They are often a great source of information and can help ensure your visits go smoothly.

Use the staff room

Volunteers are welcome to use the school's staff room. Bringing a packed lunch to eat there may give you a chance to chat informally with school staff.

Make use of e-mail

The Child Details form asks for the class teacher's email address. If you have it, do feel free to send a short message to introduce yourself or update them on a child's progress.

Ask at the school office

If you don't have email access, you can leave a note or request an appointment via the school office.

Send a short summary at the end of term

Teachers value knowing how their pupils are progressing. A brief end-of-term summary from you can be very helpful and may encourage feedback from the teacher in return.

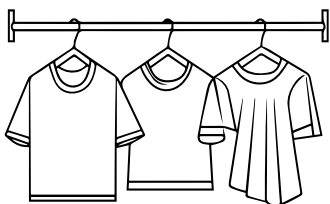
Check for

Any upcoming INSET days, class trips, or events that may interrupt your sessions, particularly at the start and end of term. Schools all run slightly differently, and knowing the calendar in advance can save you a wasted trip!

Don't be shy!

Some people feel nervous about interrupting a class to pull out the readers. There is no need to feel you are being disrespectful. Teachers would usually prefer you to pop your head in to say hello and to let them know you have arrived so you can collect the first child.

ABC to read Branded Clothing Available



Some of our volunteers suggested that we produce some branded clothing to enable them to feel a bigger part of the ABC to read community. **The link below** enables volunteers to be able to make a purchase directly, for any ABC to read branded clothing (sweatshirt, fleece jacket and t-shirt), at a cost price.



<https://www.skoolkit.co.uk/school-uniform/1372>

Could you help shape the future of ABC to read?

We are looking for a new Chair of Trustees to lead our Board and help ABC to read grow its impact and reach even more children across Berkshire.

Our current Chair will step down in June 2027, and we are now beginning the search for their successor.

As Chair, you would work closely with our CEO and fellow Trustees to provide strategic leadership, ensure good governance and act as an ambassador for ABC to read. You would play an important role in helping us build on more than 20 years of supporting children who are struggling with their reading.

You do not need to have a background in education. We are looking for someone with leadership experience, strong communication and relationship-building skills, sound judgement and a genuine commitment to improving children's lives.

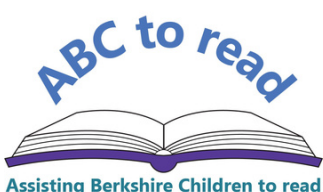
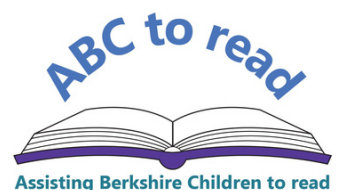
The role is voluntary and requires approximately 4–6 hours per month, with an initial three-year term.

Could it be you?

We know that many of our amazing volunteers bring a wealth of professional and life experience, and we would love to hear from you if you think you could contribute as Chair.

Equally, you may know someone outside ABC to read who would be an excellent fit. Please share this opportunity with them. To request the full Job Description and Person Specification, or to arrange an informal conversation, please contact info@abtoread.org.uk.

We would be delighted to hear from you.



Nick represents ABC to read at Salesforce World Tour

Our Volunteer Recruitment Manager, Nick, recently attended the Salesforce World Tour, where he had the opportunity to connect with a wide range of inspiring people and organisations.

The event was a great opportunity to strengthen existing relationships and raise awareness of the work ABC to read does to support children who are struggling to read across Berkshire.

We are incredibly grateful for the ongoing support from Salesforce and Nick. Partnerships like these make a real difference, helping us recruit, train and support volunteers who give children the confidence and skills they need to develop a lifelong love of reading.



School Evaluation Results

We were delighted with the wonderful evaluation results, which reflect the positive impact of the ABC to read support and the difference you are making for children. We have now shared the results with schools, volunteers and supporters and are continuing to receive valuable feedback.

"[Volunteer] has built strong relationships with both staff and children and feels very much like part of our school team."

"We like reading with our ABC to read volunteer because they make reading fun."

"They help us believe in ourselves and have made us enjoy reading even more."

Our Fieldworkers will be able to share with you directly, any individual comments received from schools, that are not provided anonymously, as schools can also choose to provide feedback anonymously, and we fully respect and support that choice.

From internship to the next chapter

We are delighted to be able to support young people at ABC to read and have Olivia work with us while she completed her BSc in Business and Management at the University of Reading.

Olivia has now graduated and begins looking towards full-time employment, she has reflected on her internship, what she has learned and how the experience has helped prepare her for the next stage of her career. Please read her story below. We wish Olivia every success as she takes her next steps.

Our Intern



ABOUT MY EXPERIENCE

I'm Olivia, a Fundraising and Marketing Intern at ABC to read, and a recent Business and Management graduate of the University of Reading.

I wanted to gain practical experience alongside my degree, so I applied through the Reading Internship Scheme. ABC to read stood out because it combines fundraising and marketing while contributing to a meaningful cause.

I've built valuable skills in grant writing, fundraising, and creative marketing through hands-on experience. Being involved in staff meetings, volunteer training, and workshops also gave me a great understanding of how a charity operates.

Over the past three years, I've researched and written grant applications, created marketing materials, designed social media content, and helped raise awareness.

Continuing my internship throughout university has been incredibly rewarding. Knowing my work has helped secure funding and support hundreds of children to grow in confidence through reading is something I'm really proud of.



ABC to read Competition Winner!



You may recall that we held a competition earlier this year, giving our schools the opportunity to win a visit from author, Sue Palmer.

Winkfield St Mary's CE Primary School were the winners and they have kindly provided us with the following summary about their visit which we would like to share with you.



Sue visited our Key Stage 2 classes in May 2026, with a workshop based around her book, 'The Shell Secret'.

The children and adults attending were all fascinated to hear all about her captivating story as well as more about Cornwall, where the story is set.

Sue kept the children engaged throughout and was extremely knowledgeable about all things Cornish. Everyone attending learnt a lot and there was even talk in the staff room about Cornish pasties afterwards!

A big thank you to Sue for visiting our school and sharing her knowledge and love of Cornwall.



Fundraising News and Opportunities

We are always exploring new funding opportunities to support our work. If you have any connections with local businesses or organisations that may be willing to support us, please let us know. Every bit of support helps us continue our mission.

We're proud to be registered with the Fundraising Regulator, demonstrating our commitment to honest, transparent, and responsible fundraising. This means we follow the Code of Fundraising Practice, ensuring we always treat our supporters fairly and with respect.

Fundraising Challenges and How You Can Help:

Fundraising for charities, especially in today's economic climate, can be a real challenge. Many organisations, including ABC to read, are constantly looking for ways to ensure we can continue delivering our vital services. As we work to expand our reach and support more children who struggle with reading, we rely heavily on the generosity of our community and supporters.

We kindly ask you to consider supporting some of the following initiatives that can help us raise the funds we need:

- ♥ Sharing our campaigns: By sharing our social media posts or talking to friends and family about ABC to read, you can help spread the word and increase awareness of our work.
- ♥ Fundraising events: If you have any ideas for local events, whether large or small, we would love to hear from you. Even simple initiatives like sponsored walks or bake sales can make a difference.
- ♥ Corporate support: If you know of any businesses that may be able to support us, either through donations or by providing volunteers, please consider reaching out on our behalf.
- ♥ Regular giving: Setting up a regular donation, no matter how small, can provide us with a steady income to help support our ongoing projects.
- ♥ Using one of the following schemes we have set up. **Just click on the logo for more information.**



Fundraising Spotlight

**DontSend
MeACard**

DontSendMeACard.com is a fantastic way to raise funds for ABC to read.

With every e-card that you send, saves time, helps our charity and reduces carbon.

Please click on the logo above to find out more!

We truly appreciate your continued support and involvement with ABC to read. Your contributions make a real difference in the lives of the children we help.

Autumn Term 2026: Dates for your Diary

Everyone is welcome to attend any event

Book Exchanges

Tuesday, 6 October

10.30 am to 12.00 noon

with Lindsey Livingstone

Redwood House
9 Queen Annes Road,
Windsor, SL4 2BJ
(Please park on the road)

Thursday, 8 October

10.00 am to 11.30 am

with Jody Prescott

Whiteknights Indoor Bowls Club
21 Beech Lane, Earley, Reading, RG6 5PT

Thursday, 8 October

10.30 am to 12.00 noon

with Laura Clayton

Thatcham Garden Centre Cafe
Benham Hill, Thatcham, RG18 3AN
(This is a combined book exchange and coffee morning)

Friday, 9 October

9.45 am to 11.15am

with Claire Tootill

Jennett's Park Community Centre
1 Tawny Owl Square, Bracknell, RG12 8EB

Coffee Mornings

Thursday, 8 October

10.30 am to 12.00 noon

with Laura Clayton

Thatcham Garden Centre Cafe
Benham Hill, Thatcham, RG18 3AN
(This is a combined coffee morning and book exchange)

Wednesday, 2 December

9.45 am to 11.30 am

with Lindsey Livingstone

Thames Hospice Cafe on the Lake
Windsor Road, Maidenhead, SL6 2DN

Thursday, 3 December

10.00 am to 11.30 am

with Claire Tootill

The Foxes Den
Benetfeld Road, Binfield, RG42 4EW

Thursday, 3 December

10.00 am to 11.30 am

with Jody Prescott and Laura Clayton

The Mansion House
Liebenrood Road, Reading, RG30 2ND

Virtual Coffee Mornings

Monday, 28 September

11.00 am to 11.30 am

with Claire Tootill

<https://us04web.zoom.us/j/74796920998?pwd=r0LWDaZeSpVWdzlway9fkSigijpmR1.R>

Thursday, 5 November

10.30 am to 11.10 am

with Laura Clayton and Jody Prescott

<https://us05web.zoom.us/j/81326423459?pwd=1k7GYSACpby77RWDnwwA262JtkLoFD.1>

Meeting ID: 813 2642 3459

Passcode: D93CpM

Tuesday, 10 November

10.00 am to 10.30 am

with Claire Tootill

<https://us04web.zoom.us/j/79123310077?pwd=8oOFANawiEkrCq9451ksyW0YBKdfDr.1>

Thursday, 12 November

11.00 am to 11.40 am

with Lindsey Livingstone

<https://us04web.zoom.us/j/3238844229?pwd=aEFBcGdkcWIPNXk5YlBJY2hWQWhsUT09&omn=77773321385>

Meeting ID 323 884 4229

Passcode: chat

Resources Recommendation

Following on from feedback from our Volunteer Survey completed last year, we will be sharing a book or a game that we recommend for sessions. If you have a favourite that you have found particularly useful, please let us know so we can share it!



Kim's Game is a firm ABC to read favourite but have you tried any of these?

- Start by taking one item and then with each turn take more and see who has the best memory.
- If you've updated the objects, ask the child to close their eyes and guess what each object is before playing.
- Make a story with the objects, how many can they include in their tale.
- Use descriptive words to win "a blue badge", "a small tyre".

Helpful Reminders for Volunteers



DBS Certificates – Keep it safe

Please keep your original DBS certificate in a safe place and also check that the personal information on your certificate is correct. Schools often ask to see our volunteers' certificates, particularly when they are about to undergo an OFSTED inspection. The DBS do not issue duplicate certificates.



Phones and Personal Electronic Devices in School

As a reminder, **mobile phones and personal electronic devices must not be used in schools whilst volunteering with ABC to read.** This is in line with school safeguarding policies to ensure a safe and focused environment for the children. If you need to use your phone / device for any reason, please step outside of the school premises.



Data Protection and Confidentiality

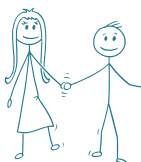
An essential point to remember is the importance of data protection and confidentiality. Please remember to pass the child details forms to your fieldworker, or to the office, securely and promptly and to anonymise any information relating to a child in all correspondence e.g., using child 1, 2, 3 instead of names. We hope schools will always be mindful of this too. Remember to not identify children when talking with other volunteers at our events e.g. coffee mornings.



ID – Your ABC to read Lanyard

As you know, the service ABC to read provides to Berkshire primary schools is unique in this county. There are other charities offering a similar service in other parts of the country; for example, Oxfordshire has ARCh, Dorset has Dorset Reading Partners and other areas of England are covered by Coram Beanstalk (formerly Volunteer Reading Help).

We all provide fully vetted, trained, and supported volunteers to schools. Some volunteers have come across an organisation called School Readers and asked us about their work. Their offer is entirely different as it is the school's responsibility to carry out DBS checks, training, support and to provide resources for their volunteers who listen to children read. So, to avoid confusion, please make sure you **always** wear your ABC to read lanyard when you are in school.



Safeguarding Training

Safeguarding is, of course, an essential part of ABC to read training. Sadly, incidents of child abuse seem to be on the rise according to media channels. Volunteers get to know their children well, often better than their class teacher; children may confide in them, or they can notice changes in a child. For instance, a change of mood. It does no harm to report any concerns, no matter how small, and in confidence, to school. Do also remember to let us know if you have had to report any concerns. All reports are kept strictly confidential. We are always available to listen to any concerns that volunteers may have.

1:1

Working one to one with children

Please ensure that your reading sessions are taking place in appropriate school spaces where school staff are nearby and that you are not left alone in an isolated room.

Your DBS – why it is important to renew your annual subscription

Every year, with your permission, we carry out a check to ensure that there have been no changes since your DBS certificate was issued to you. To enable us to do this important check, you must also be registered with the DBS update service and **your subscription must be renewed on an annual basis**.

What do you need to do? Please check the **date of issue** on your DBS certificate and then make a **diary note** to expect an email from the DBS (donotreply@db.s.gov.uk), 30 days before the date of issue. **For example**, if your certificate date of issue is 31 March, you should receive an email from the DBS on or around 1 March.

What will the email ask me to do? The email will **either** say:-

1. Your subscription is on a manual renewal and you are required to log into the update service and renew your subscription. **All you need to do is to follow the instructions within the email asking you to renew your subscription.** This will take no longer than 5 minutes to action and is completely free.

2. Your subscription is on an automatic renewal and you don't need to do anything.

What if I don't receive an email within the 30 day period?

Please email the office at **info@abctoread.org.uk**, and we will be happy to help you.

SAVE THE DATE: Tuesday, 2 February 2027



We are excited to announce that our next Volunteer Workshop, will take place at the Mansion House, in Reading, on Tuesday, 2 February 2027, starting at 10.00 am until 12.00 noon (registration from 9.40 am).

We are delighted to have writer, Peter Murray, sharing his journey to becoming an author, his experiences as a teacher, and his thought on inspiring children to develop a love of reading.

Further details will be communicated to you in the New Year, including how to reserve your place. Tickets are limited to 60 and will be allocated on a first come first served basis.



Wishing you all a happy and successful term ahead!