



Editorial ? September 1997

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Editorial

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News and comment from the Editor.

School Standards Minister, Stephen Byers, has told parents that they must share responsibility with teachers for helping their children learn to read. He expects them to spend 20 minutes a day reading with their child.

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Parents with poor reading skills will be invited to attend Family Literacy courses to improve their own literacy skills as well as learn how to help their children read. A pilot Family Literacy course in Norfolk has reported dramatic improvements in parents' reading as well as in their ability to help their children develop reading and writing skills.

While it is great to have a government that cares enough about children, books and literacy to tell us to spend time reading with our children, it would have been even more wonderful if the announcement of this important and imaginative measure had emphasised for parents the pleasure and fun to be had from sharing books with their children rather than coming over as a grim diktat.

In this issue of **BfK** Ross Shimmon, Chief Executive, The Library Association, calls on the government to recognise the vital role of school libraries and public libraries in any drive to improve reading and literacy levels needs (see page 16).

A recently published independent review of the school library service by Graham Small found that a quarter of authorities in England and Wales do not operate a service. Budgets have fallen by 18.5% in England and 48% in Wales with staff costs down by 11%. There has been an almost 20% decline in the number of staff employed. The report adds that the service has been hit by education budget cuts and local government reform. Some schools failed to buy into the service following the introduction of local management and the smaller unitary authorities could not afford it.

Creating a new generation of young readers with good literacy skills nurtured by their daily 20 'Byers minutes' reading with mum or dad, will result in additional pressure on the school library service. At the moment the service falls between the Department for Culture, Education and Sport and the Department for Education. Will Chris Smith and Mark Fisher get together with Stephen Byers to halt its dramatic decline?



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