

Read, Write, Count adds up

The First Minister backs an initiative established in 2015 called Read, Write, Count which has gifted almost quarter of a million books to children in Primary 2 and 3 in all 32 local authority areas this year.

The project is run along with Education Scotland and Scottish Book Trust, gifting free book bags and learning materials to children of primary school age. Those under school age receive books in the Baby Box and also as part of the Bookbug programme run through libraries with every child receiving four free Bookbug Bags between birth and age five. Gaelic versions are also available with around 8,000 books being distributed in 2,000 bilingual bags, and the idea is firmly to encourage everybody to read, write and count as part of their daily routine.

The announcement that 126,000 children received free books as part of this programme is on the face of it both positive and good news, but there are 1.1 million children and young people under the age of 19 in Scotland (as at 2021) so in strict numerical terms the programme only reaches a tenth of them. However, the effect could also be assessed as cumulative. As reported by Scottish Book Trust in 2022, after seven years of gifting book bags there are now around 1.7 million books in Scottish homes which might not otherwise be there.

The government evaluated the 2021/22 campaign finding then

that an overwhelming 90% of parents liked the contents of the bag and that 94% said they had read the books with their children, with many saying these books became their favourites.

In November during Book Week Scotland the First Minister, Humza Yousaf, visited Craigentinny Primary School to help the children there to open their book bags.

Mr Yousaf said: “I want to encourage all children to enjoy reading, writing, and counting. Reading for pleasure is crucial in developing children’s literacy skills, and our funded national programmes such as Read, Write, Count with the First Minister are about supporting and enhancing a love of reading from an early age.

“When I was young my favourite books were the ones that were fun and that taught me something new. A good story, or a good book, can open new worlds to us. Reading can even help us if we feel sad, or if we’re unsure about something, and want to learn more about it.”



The First Minister, Humza Yousaf visiting Craigentinny Primary School November 2023 PHOTO courtesy of The Scottish Government

The contents of the bag change from year to year, and there are also materials included to provide advice and support to “learning professionals” and parents about other online resources. The bags are distributed at schools and teachers are encouraged to hold a big event around the day when the bags are handed out.

Stephanie Dean, Head Teacher at Craigentinny Primary School, said: “The Read, Write, Count bags is a fantastic initiative that has a huge impact on our pupils. As well as providing equity of access to books and resources, the bags also encourage families to support their children with reading, writing, and counting in a fun way.

“This is so important as research shows the benefits of parental engagement on their child’s learning and future successes. When they receive their bags, the children are engaged and excited and we hope this will help to promote a passion and lifelong love of learning.”

Read, Write, Count is supported with The Scottish Government allocating £932,132 to the 2023-24 programme.

Chief Executive Officer of Scottish Book Trust Marc Lambert said: “Gifting books to children through the Bookbug and Read Write Count with First Minister programmes is one of the highlights of Book Week Scotland each year. For many children in Scotland, the only books they have at home are the ones they are given by Scottish Book Trust.

“Our Bookbug and Read Write Count bags reach children from birth up to Primary 3, and we know they can make a big impact to children’s lives. We’re grateful to the First Minister for joining us at Craigentinny Primary School as the pupils and their families were gifted the bags.”

If by any chance you are a parent or carer of a child eligible

for a book bag but who has not received one then you can contact the Schools and Lifelong Learning Strategy Officer by email es-ilr@ea.edin.sch.uk or phone 0131 242 8042.

The P2 bag this year includes two books and an activity booklet as well as a tangram and a pack of cards – which contain the games Shape Shuffle, Act it Out and Talk it Out.



The P3 bag this year includes two books, a tape measure and another pack of cards including the games Beastie Battle, Story Cards and Dominoes.





