

LIBRARY OF HOPE

As the Daily Express Christmas fundraising campaign for Give A Book continues, JAMES MURRAY visits a primary school whose pupils are already benefiting thanks to the work of the inspirational reading charity

THE library at Larkspur Primary Academy used to be an unloved space filled with worn-looking books and battered shelving dating back to the Sixties. Drab and uninviting, more often than not, pupils ran past without stopping.

Kerry McEwan, headteacher of the school in Ware, Herts, takes up the story: "We're in an area of high deprivation. The school is a horseshoe shape with the library in the centre and four classrooms off that.

"It was dark, a bit of a thoroughfare for everybody. It certainly wasn't a place for stopping and reading. It didn't serve its purpose in any way."

In a bid to revamp the library and get kids – many of whom do not have books at home – reading, the old furniture was taken away and new carpet put down.

Then, as lockdown started in March 2020, Kerry had a brainwave. She asked Daily



Express Christmas charity Give A Book if they could help inspire young minds with a thirst for knowledge and having fun.

The charity arrived with funding, expertise... and lots of books.

"They came along for a site inspection and had a long chat with myself and the deputy headteacher," she continues.

"They listened to what we wanted for our pupils: to encourage reading for pleasure and the love of reading – that was our vision. They put me in touch with a company which came in and designed the library with me."

Kerry, who arrived at the school in 2018, felt a burden lifted off her shoulders as like-minded people came together to help her pupils, aged from five to 11, get a better start in life. "The plans were amazing," she



HAPPY READERS:
(Clockwise from top left)
Rebecca, 10, Miya, nine,
Tobias, eight, Lily, 11, and
Jerome, six, in their new
library at Larkspur Primary
Academy in Ware, Herts

HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT OUR CHRISTMAS CAUSE

GIVE A Book puts books into the hands of those who need them most. A £5 donation will provide one book; £10 will add a book bag; while £25 will give a whole book bundle. To support the Daily Express Christmas Campaign, please send donations (cheques only, payable to Give A Book) to:

**DX Give A Book Campaign,
112-114 Holland Park Avenue,
London W11 4UA**

**Or you can donate online via:
giveabook.org.uk**

UK registered charity no 1149664

addition of one of the school's interactive whiteboards allows pupils to meet some of the country's top authors remotely.

Author Maz Evans made the first virtual visit to talk about her book, *Who Let the Gods Out*, a thrilling adventure yarn. Children sat enraptured as she explained how a boy's life changed forever when a god crashes to earth into a dung heap on a family farm. Other virtual visitors have included author Emma Perry, who told them all about her new book, *This Book has Alpacas and Bears*, and illustrator Rikin Parekh.

AS WELL as Give A Book, the school is now connected to the School Libraries Service and was introduced to the Foyle Foundation to which they have made an application for further funding for books

over the coming year. "We cannot thank Give A Book enough," adds Kerry. "We want to say a huge thank you for bringing a love of books back into our school. They have given us a new adventure in reading."

Staff hope there will be long-term benefits ahead. And Larkspur has formed a lasting partnership with Give A Book, including packages of new books help support whole-class

that reading sessions.

● See above for how you can support Give A Book to help other schools like Larkspur

smiles. "We couldn't wait to see how it would all take shape." Arriving back after lockdown, it was a space transformed.

"Now we have a light, airy space that all children can really enjoy sitting in," Kerry continues. "The furniture is modern and white and everything is easily movable. We've restocked with brand new books. We have an area for tables and chairs and lovely mats where we can join together.

"Now it's a really nice space all the children enjoy. Before, there was no engagement, no draw to the library at all, but now they all want to spend time with the new books. You can see they are enjoying them –

NOT A PLACE FOR STOPPING:
Larkspur's 'library' before its Give A Book revamp



which is what we wanted. Lockdown was difficult for the children, they missed months of school so it felt more important than ever to reconnect children with books and the pleasure of learning." The

BORROWING BOOKS GAVE US OUR START, TOO

I WRITE historical crime fiction – the award-winning Malabar House novels set in 1950s Bombay and featuring India's first female police detective – but growing up there was little spare money for books. Libraries came to the rescue... and the occasional gift. We all know reading is the foundation for learning, but it's also a source of inspiration, entertainment, discovery... and the cheapest way to travel the world.

Reading informs us about the people we share that world with, helping to break down barriers. My favourite childhood book was *Watership Down* by Richard Adams, an adventure story featuring a band of rabbits forced to leave their warren to find a new home. But it's not only children who are empowered by reading. Consider the most famous prisoner of the 20th century. For years, Nelson Mandela was denied reading material of any kind. When the rules were



By Vaseem Khan
Author of the
Malabar House series

relaxed he chose to learn Afrikaans – the language of his oppressors. Why? Because he understood that to defeat his enemy he must first understand them, and that could only be done through reading their literature. Give A Book puts books into the hands of those who need them most – in schools and prisons – and provides them to disadvantaged children. A single book can hook someone into reading and change their lives. That's why I'm delighted to support the Daily Express Christmas Campaign to raise money for Give A Book. Times are hard, but anything you contribute will have an impact.

I GREW up in the Midlands with no books in the house. I was a shy, awkward child, and as soon as I discovered stories I was hooked. But, as the black sheep of the family (the reader) I was lucky that my dear mum would walk me to the local mobile library truck each week.

I'd borrow as many books as they would let me have. I owe mum so much for encouraging that.

Reading enabled me to escape for a while, to learn, to imagine; and it somehow introduced me to a language with which I could understand people.

I felt rather like an alien growing up: an outsider looking in.

Authors like Sue Townsend (the excellent *Adrian Mole* books), Roald Dahl (*Danny, The Champion of the World*, *Matilda*, *The BFG*, *Charlie and*



By Will Dean
Author of the Tuva
Moodyson thrillers

the *Chocolate Factory*, and *Fantastic Mr Fox*), AA Milne (*Winnie-the-Pooh*), and Stephen King (*Misery*, *Pet Sematary*, *IT*, *The Shining*, *Carrie*, *Salem's Lot*, and *Needful Things*) all helped me to grow in confidence.

There will always be kids like me who need stories to make it through to adulthood.

We must do whatever we can to ensure they have access to them.

That's why I'm delighted to support the Daily Express Christmas campaign on behalf of Give A Book.