# Brookfield Primary students fundraise for a diverse library reflecting Camden’s multicultural community



A recent initiative by students at Brookfield Primary School in Highgate has shone a light on the pressing need for an updated library that reflects the diversity of its community. In a commendable effort to raise funds, children engaged in a creative bookmark-making marathon, delivering their artistic creations to local residents and businesses. This innovative approach not only seeks to restock the school's library but also aims to ensure that the collection of books available to students mirrors their identities and experiences.

An audit revealed concerning statistics about the library's current holdings. Parent Charlotte Phillips noted that of the 500 books examined, only 14 per cent featured main characters from minority ethnic backgrounds. This figure starkly contrasts with the demographic reality of Camden, where 58 per cent of primary school pupils belong to such groups. Furthermore, the audit found that 60 per cent of the books had male protagonists, with a significant lack of representation for neurodiverse, disabled, and LGBTQ+ characters. The school estimates that nearly 1,000 new books are needed to adequately represent the diverse tapestry of the student body.

The lack of diverse literature in children's publishing has been a persistent issue, exacerbated by funding challenges and limited support. Anella Wickenden, another involved parent, expressed her frustration at how such deficiencies impact the children's reading experience. She emphasised the importance of the appeal, not only as a solution for Brookfield but as a broader call to action for Camden Council and state schools across London to enhance the diversity of their book collections.

Year 5 teacher Alaa Lafta champions the transformative power of literature, stating, “Books are windows, mirrors and sliding doors.” This phrase eloquently encapsulates the notion that stories allow children to see themselves and their communities while providing glimpses into lives and situations that differ from their own. When children engage with diverse narratives, they foster empathy and understanding, equipping them with essential emotional intelligence in an increasingly interconnected world.

This sentiment is reinforced by research highlighting the critical role of representation in children's literature. A multitude of studies indicates that books incorporating varied family structures and identities enable children to develop empathy and enhance their self-understanding. Exposure to diverse characters not only helps combat prejudice but also encourages an appreciation for cultural differences, ultimately broadening young readers' worldviews.

Headteacher Simon Shiel echoed these sentiments, noting that the landscape of children's literature has evolved, with a rise in diverse authors contributing to narratives that reflect modern society. He is keen to seize this opportunity to enrich the learning environment at Brookfield and reinforce the notion that diversity is a strength. By providing stories that resonate with every child, the school aims to harness the power of literature to cultivate curiosity, compassion, and a deeper understanding of the world.

The project, supported by the local Owl Bookshop, aspires to gather £6,000, with contributions from the community already beginning to materialise. This collective effort not only addresses the immediate need for new books but also highlights a broader societal imperative: ensuring that all children see themselves reflected in the stories they read, fostering a generation that values inclusivity and understanding.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.camdennewjournal.co.uk/article/theres-no-lgbt-characters-schools-outdated-library-is-ready-for-a-new-chapter), [[3]](https://www.unconditionaleducation.org/blog/the-vital-role-of-representation-in-childrens-literature)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.camdennewjournal.co.uk/article/theres-no-lgbt-characters-schools-outdated-library-is-ready-for-a-new-chapter), [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/6ffaa23f2fc5a8e68108918ea69e7bfb), [[4]](https://www.literacymn.org/representation-matters-diversity-in-childrens-books)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.unconditionaleducation.org/blog/the-vital-role-of-representation-in-childrens-literature), [[5]](https://pictureperfectreads.com/blog/why-representation-matters-in-childrens-literature)
* Paragraph 4 – [[6]](https://giglets.com/article/diverse-representation-in-childrens-literature-exploring-the-importance-of-diverse-characters-and-stories-in-childrens-literature-and-how-it-can-help-children-develop-empathy-and-a-broader-world-perspective), [[7]](https://daniel-hamel-author.com/blog/why-diversity-in-childrens-books-matters-for-young-minds)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.camdennewjournal.co.uk/article/theres-no-lgbt-characters-schools-outdated-library-is-ready-for-a-new-chapter> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://apnews.com/article/6ffaa23f2fc5a8e68108918ea69e7bfb> - An article discussing the importance of diverse representation in children's literature, highlighting how books featuring various family structures and identities help children develop empathy and self-understanding. It also addresses the increasing challenges and bans on such inclusive books in the U.S., emphasizing the need for children to see their families and identities reflected in stories to foster inclusivity and combat prejudice.
3. <https://www.unconditionaleducation.org/blog/the-vital-role-of-representation-in-childrens-literature> - A blog post emphasizing the significance of representation in children's literature. It explains how diverse characters and stories serve as windows into different lives, fostering empathy, understanding, and a sense of identity among young readers. The article also discusses how exposure to diverse characters helps children develop emotional intelligence and appreciation for cultural differences.
4. <https://www.literacymn.org/representation-matters-diversity-in-childrens-books> - An article highlighting the benefits of diverse literature in children's books. It outlines how multicultural books help children understand current world issues, promote unity and empathy, and encourage interactions across differing ethnic backgrounds. The piece also discusses the current breakdown of diversity in children's books and the importance of representation.
5. <https://pictureperfectreads.com/blog/why-representation-matters-in-childrens-literature> - A blog post discussing the importance of representation in children's literature. It covers how diverse books help children develop empathy, broaden their worldviews, build self-esteem, and prepare for real-world interactions. The article also highlights how exposure to diverse cultures and viewpoints can inspire creativity in young readers.
6. <https://giglets.com/article/diverse-representation-in-childrens-literature-exploring-the-importance-of-diverse-characters-and-stories-in-childrens-literature-and-how-it-can-help-children-develop-empathy-and-a-broader-world-perspective> - An article exploring the importance of diverse representation in children's literature. It discusses how including a variety of characters and themes helps break down harmful stereotypes, builds empathy, encourages cultural awareness, and broadens children's horizons. The piece also emphasizes the role of diverse literature in fostering inclusivity and preparing children for a diverse world.
7. <https://daniel-hamel-author.com/blog/why-diversity-in-childrens-books-matters-for-young-minds> - A blog post by author Daniel Hamel discussing why diversity in children's books is vital for young minds. It covers how diverse books enhance empathy, broaden worldviews, build self-esteem, prepare children for real-world interactions, and inspire creativity. The article also highlights the role of diverse literature in shaping children's understanding of a multicultural society.