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NEW FILM ‘H IS FOR HARRY’ CALLS FOR MORE TO BE DONE TO BREAK THE CYCLE OF ILLITERACY

Through the story of an 11-year-old boy and his classmates, documentary film H IS FOR HARRY seeks to raise awareness and spark public debate about illiteracy and educational inequality in the UK.

“What are you going to be doing when you’re 25 Harry?” - Sophie
“Tryin’ to stay alive” - Harry

On World Book Day (07.03.19), a new documentary film, H IS FOR HARRY, directed by Ed Owles and Jaime Taylor, stirs much-needed debate around literacy and social mobility in the UK. The filmmakers hope to spark public debate and encourage policy-makers to recognise the urgent need for an earlier, more holistic approach to support children like Harry and break the cycle of illiteracy.

H IS FOR HARRY is a coming of age story about Harry, a charismatic 11-year old boy, who arrives at secondary school in suburban London unable to read or write. With the help of Sophie, his extremely dedicated teacher at Reach Academy Feltham, he tries to overcome the illiteracy ingrained across generations of his family.

Through his story and that of his father Grant, audiences gain a snapshot into an intergenerational cycle of illiteracy. As Grant says: *‘It’s just repeat, repeat, repeat. My dad’s had it, I had it, and now my son’s gonna have it.’* Against the backdrop of a Britain riven with debates around class, identity and social mobility, the film follows Harry over two years as he fights not only to improve academically but also to believe in a different future for himself.

H IS FOR HARRY intends to create a constructive public debate on the issues surrounding illiteracy through creating empathy with those who actually experience the impact of public policies - in this case a child and parent in a low income community.

The film directors of H IS FOR HARRY strongly believe in the power of telling stories from the perspective of people you might not normally see or hear. In debates around educational inequality and illiteracy the child’s voice is often absent, in place of talking heads and statistics such as the fact that [1 in 5 children in England cannot read well by the age of 11](#) and [4.1 Million British children live in poverty](#). H IS FOR HARRY puts a face to these statistics and is firmly from Harry’s point of view.

Sophie, Harry’s dedicated teacher said: “The film raises an important issue - intergenerational illiteracy - experienced by all too many teachers and children. Harry’s story is not an isolated one and deserves public debate and action.”

H IS FOR HARRY shows how social mobility in the UK has stalled and the real-life effect of what happens when [1 in 8 disadvantaged children in the UK don’t own a single book](#). The filmmakers are working with multiple charities such as the National Literacy Trust, World Book Day, Fair Education Alliance, Achievement for All and TeachFirst.

Jonathan Douglas, Director of the National Literacy Trust said: “It is a national scandal that the life chances of so many children are being determined by their inability to read and where they are born. The national picture is stark but, as the film highlights, inequalities in literacy and social mobility are deeply entrenched within local communities. To give every child the best possible start in life,

regardless of their background, we must take urgent and coordinated action at a local level give children child the literacy skills they need to succeed at school, at work and in life. It is never too late to change a child's life story."

Sam Butters, Director of the Fair Education Alliance, said: "H is for Harry gives a heartfelt insight into thousands of similar stories up and down the country. We see a real 11 year old struggling with this reading and writing, and much more than 8 months behind his peers."

Kirsten Grant, Director of World Book Day said: "Harry is the embodiment of the children and young people we are trying to reach with this year's World Book Day Share a Story campaign. We know that a love of reading, instilled at an early age, by reading together, can transform life chances. That's why we're putting out a nationwide call for action for World Book Day (7 March), asking parents, carers and siblings everywhere to sit with children and young people for ten minutes on World Book Day, and every day – and share a story. With high-profile public figures championing our message on social media, and events across the country, especially where low levels of literacy are seriously impacting people's lives, we'll be putting the spotlight on shared reading this week, because it can do so much to improve our children's future."

The message of Harry's story is that had Harry had a different start in life, with a greater level of support in his early years, his life would have mapped out very differently. Evidence shows that early years intervention can transform a child's life chances, and the film is a call to action for parents, teachers, children, young people, policy-makers and politicians to act now.

The film is available in selected cinemas and via schools and settings. Find your nearest showing at www.hisforharry.com/watch.

For further information on H is for Harry visit <https://www.hisforharry.com> or search @HisforHarryFilm on Twitter (<https://twitter.com/HisforHarryFilm>) and Facebook (<https://facebook.com/HisforHarryFilm>)

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ABOUT REACH ACADEMY FELTHAM

Reach Academy Feltham was founded in 2012, received an 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating in 2014 and received its first GCSE in 2017, which ranked the school 16th in the country by Progress 8. The school is in an area of high deprivation with 46% of pupils eligible for the Pupil Premium and Harry's neighbourhood has been identified as a Higher Education 'cold spot,' with only 20% of children progressing to Higher Education.

The school is highly inclusive, with almost 5% of pupils holding an Education Healthcare Plan, which is far higher than typical mainstream schools and has the highest number of Looked After Children in its Borough. Reach Academy has been visited by the Prime Minister, the Duchess of Cambridge, The Mayor of London and a number of ministers.

The school has continued to develop the Reach Children's Hub which has received a significant investment from Save the Children to develop a blueprint to support vulnerable families with children aged 0-5 years old to work with children and families as early as possible in their lives, and also has a Feltham Futures fund to support young people plan for after they leave school.

ABOUT HARRY, GRANT & SOPHIE - WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Harry is still at the specialist school that he goes to at the end of the film. He is taking functional english classes and exploring is options for further education once he is 16. He still receives some mentoring support from staff at the Reach Children's Hub, mentioned in the closing text of the film. Grant says in the film 'I try to stay in my bubble... how am I going to know where I'm going if I can't read?' but following their attendance at the film's festival premiere, which was a really positive experience, Grant and Harry sent off for their passports and visited France for a couple of days over New Year and are now hoping to visit Spain.

Meanwhile, Sophie has bought a house in Feltham and is the head of year for the class we see in the film, who are due to take their GCSEs this year.

ABOUT WORLD BOOK DAY

World Book Day is the registered charity behind the world's biggest annual celebration of children's books. It is dedicated to celebrating the benefits of reading for pleasure for everyone, everywhere – promoting the magic of books, the power of imagination and the importance of sharing stories. Designated by UNESCO as a worldwide celebration of books and reading, World Book Day is marked in over 100 countries around the globe.

It is sponsored by National Book Tokens and supported generously each year by the publishing industry, book trade, authors and illustrators. Every year, with a host of publishers and booksellers, World Book Day curates a list of bespoke £1 books for children and young people across the UK and Ireland. World Book Day's mission is to encourage children and young people to explore the pleasures of books and reading by providing them with the opportunity to have a book of their own. To mark the day each year, children are welcomed into bookshops and supermarkets across the nation where they can redeem their £1 World Book Day book token (or equivalent €1.50 in Ireland) to redeem for a free World Book Day title or, if they prefer, they can use it to get £1 off any book or audiobook of their choice, costing £2.99 or more. The day also sees children bringing books to life through an array of organised events and activities in schools, bookshops, libraries and at home. www.worldbookday.com

NOTES TO THE EDITOR

- Harry's story is hard to watch at times and can stir emotions, not least anger at his predicament and those of his classmates. It is tempting to try and find a focus for that anger.
- We think it's really important to avoid the 'blame game', which offers perhaps some catharsis, but no sustainable solutions. It is common in public debate to find a scapegoat: The parent, the school, the local authority, central government or even the child. Harry's story reveals a complex, systemic issue to which there is no easy answer.
- We live in a country where children from the poorest backgrounds arrive at school many months behind their peers and rarely catch up, where 1 in 5 children leave primary school unable to read properly and where, unsurprisingly, social mobility has stalled. These sad facts are in evidence up and down the country.
- As a teacher in the film says 'We have had children come to us this year in Year 7 [aged 11] who can't tell the time, can't tie their own shoelaces and struggle to spell their own name'.