

Pupils and teachers at schools join in World Book Day fun

PUPILS and teachers in mid-Essex have celebrated World Book Day.

Reading champions at St John Payne Catholic School, in Patching Hall Lane, Chelmsford, led a book hunt in the library, before students read passages from a Roald Dahl short story throughout the day.

The library was overrun with literature lovers at break and lunch time with a range of activities taking place, from crafting bookmarks to Guess the Book - Emoji Edition. During a staff versus students reading competition, the challenge was set to stack books to the estimated height of head teacher Tom Coen.

Assistant head teacher Abbie Gosling said: "There is no doubt that reading is a core pillar to accessing a wide and enriching curriculum, but that is not its only importance; reading is also a pleasure that should be encouraged and protected in this modern digital age.

"School is a crucial place to foster, encourage and develop a love of literature as young minds are

shaped into fluent readers. At St John Payne Catholic School, we are proud to hold that mantle.

"The library, normally a peaceful sanctuary, became abuzz with eager students from all year groups, proving that a love for reading is still very much alive at St John Payne Catholic School."

Meanwhile, students and teachers at Woodend Farm School, in Hatfield Road, Witham, dressed up to celebrate the special day.

The school predominantly supports children with autism, ADHD, speech and language challenges and pathological demand avoidance (PDA) profile - where they physically cannot manage everyday tasks or demands, even if they want to.

As a result, the school offers a unique curriculum where learning is disguised through play and students' individual interests.

Head teacher Gemma Quantrill said: "World Book Day is an important celebration at Woodend Farm School because stories help



World Book Day celebrations at Woodend Farm School

our children to make sense of themselves, others and the world around them.

"Many of our pupils learn best through imagination, play and connection and World Book Day creates a joyful, low-pressure opportunity for them to explore language, build confidence and share interests.

"Through storytelling, dressing up and book-based activities, children practise communication, strengthen relationships with trusted adults and experience success in a way that feels safe, creative and fun."



World Book Day at St John Payne Catholic School, in Chelmsford

Reservation charges at county libraries 'having to pay to borrow a book'

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ESSEX County Council has been accused of "effectively charging people for borrowing books" after deciding to introduce a reservation charge at its libraries, potentially raising hundreds of thousands of pounds

One Chelmsford resident and library user has added her voice, questioning the county council's decision to charge £1.15 to reserve a book from another library.

The decision comes two years after the county council agreed to pause its plans to charge readers reservation fees after being told about an avid reader in Essex who was taking out about 20 books every fortnight.

At the time, Councillor Mark Durham, the county council's cabinet member for the arts, heritage and culture, told a meeting that rather

than unfairly disadvantaging people like her, "it may be better to address the issue of those who selfishly make multiple reservations and not collect them all."

The council said that between February 2023 and February 2024, of the 413,000 items reserved each year, only about 76,000 - equivalent to about 18 per cent - were ever collected.

But those figures have been raised by the Chelmsford resident, who said the new system would penalise the great majority of people who do not abuse the system, and wondered what the council would do with the almost £500,000 it could generate.

She said: "It's obvious to anyone who uses libraries that the stock has been much reduced. It's no longer circulated as the way it used to be.

"Readers have to put a reservation on because you can't possibly find a book in your library, given the fact that there are so few books and circulation is so poor. So in effect, you're having to pay to borrow a book.

"All I want them to do is be honest. What is that money going to be used for, and why did they do a U-turn? I'm just angry because of my background."

Cllr Durham said: "We are absolutely committed to keeping libraries at the heart of communities in Essex.

"The proposed reservation fees -

which have been adopted by many other libraries in the UK - would only be for adults at a small cost of £1.15 per item and would not apply to children's books.

"The reduction of the book fund is six per cent from the total amount, and our stocks will be kept up to date.

"Our library users will still have a wide range of hard-copy and e-resources to choose from, and we will expand our digital offer to minimise the impact on our stock costs.

"Several of our libraries are already cashless, and if these plans go ahead, they will include staff training plus phone and online payments that are fully accessible.

"Libraries continue to be an intrinsic part of the services we offer residents, and we have significantly invested in their future, including recent refurbishments at Colchester and Harwich and the new library at Shenfield."

“It's obvious to anyone who uses libraries that the stock has been much reduced.”
Chelmsford resident

Nathan wins district council seat for Reform

REFORM UK has won a seat on Braintree District Council.

Nathan Robins is the new councillor for Coggeshall on the council, after a by-election on Thursday of last week (March 5).

He won the support of 554 voters at the polls. The turnout was 37.13 per cent.

Colin Albert (Independents) came second with 517 votes. Sarah Neal (Labour) was third with 366 votes.

India Jayatillake (Conservative) got 311 votes and Barry Fleet got 55 votes for the Lib Dems.

The new councillor said: "Coggeshall is a wonderful community, and I am committed to working with you and for you, listening to residents, addressing local issues and making sure your voices are heard. The real work starts now."

The council is run by the Conservatives, who have 25 members, followed by Labour, with nine, Independents with seven, Green with four and Halsted Residents' Association has three.

A Reform UK spokesman said: "It's clear that all the momentum is with Reform UK in the run-up to May's elections across Essex."