

# London Evening Standard



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**Fashion, Style & Sex**

Pages 36 & 37

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EU CHIEF WANTS COUNTRIES TO COPY STANDARD CAMPAIGN

# OUR LITERACY BATTLE HALLED AS A BLUEPRINT FOR ALL EUROPE

## GET LONDON READING

Evening Standard Campaign

David Cohen

THE Evening Standard's Get London Reading campaign could be used as a blueprint to improve literacy across Europe, it was revealed today.

The EU commissioner for education has asked her officials to study our award-winning project and could invite all member states to follow the same model.

Androulla Vassiliou visited a Tower Hamlets school to see our campaign in action as the amount raised hit the £200,000 mark, enough to fund 400 reading mentors for children who need help. She said: "In

Continued on Pages 6 & 7



Good read: commissioner Androulla Vassiliou with Tower Hamlets pupils and volunteer Abigail Golob



Legal battle: the Olympic stadium

## 2012 stadium deal collapses – and we pay

Matthew Beard  
Olympics Editor

TAXPAYERS face an extra multi-million-pound bill for the Olympic stadium after West Ham's deal to buy the venue collapsed today.

Ministers conceded that some of the cost of developing the £500 million stadium after the Games would have to met from the public purse.

The deal for the East End football club to buy the stadium in partnership with Newham council broke down with no end in sight to a legal battle triggered by rival bidder Tottenham Hotspur.

The process was halted to end months of uncertainty which threatened the deadline for reopening the stadium in 2014 and jeopardised London's bid for it to host the 2017 world athletics championships. Taxpayers will take over

Continued on Page 2

## Joanna's fight to stop strangler

JOANNA YEATES suffered a slow, painful death as her neighbour strangled her with his hands, Bristol crown court heard today. Vincent Tabak was said to have used his height and build to overpower the 25-year-old, who was 5ft 4in tall, as she desperately fought for her life. He denies murder.

Full story Page 9

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## News

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# 'A success story that could help in places you've never heard of'

**T**HE welcome sign at the entrance to William Davis Primary School in Tower Hamlets had EU Commissioner Androulla Vassiliou flummoxed: "I recognise the English and Arabic, but what is that third language?" Headteacher Catherine Mor-

The Standard's campaign is now being acclaimed in Europe. **David Cohen** meets the woman who wants to use it as a blueprint to tackle the problems of illiteracy abroad

## GET LONDON READING

Evening Standard Campaign

gans-Slater replied: "Bengali – but if I was to put up that sign today, it would only be in English." Asked to explain this apparently politically incorrect admission, Ms Morgans-Slater added:

"Eighty per cent of our pupils come from Bengali families and they need to get a clear message that English is the common language and the key to their success."

Mrs Vassiliou, 67, the EU Commissioner for education, culture, multilingualism and youth, nodded vigorously. "Nearly 50 years ago, when I was studying law at Middle Temple in London, racism was rife and we foreigners stood out and were hardly ever spoken to by the British," she said. "Today London is a friendly and amazingly diverse place, but the challenge has changed, because with so many children speaking a different language at home, multiculturalism presents a huge challenge to literacy."

A passionate champion of literacy, Mrs Vassiliou, whose husband is a former president of Cyprus, was in London to endorse the Standard's Get London Reading programme – which has raised £200,000 in just four months – and to see it in action. She joined Abigail Golob, a newly-trained Evening Standard volunteer, and the six-year-olds she has been assigned to help, Abeda, Jibraieel and Sofian, in the school library where they excitedly read from their favourite books, Horrid Henry and The Sea.

"The only way to tackle illiteracy," said Mrs Vassiliou, "is by mobilising as many different actors as possible – teachers, parents, even ordinary citizens. One of the appealing aspects of your campaign is that you have gone beyond simply identifying the problem."

"By funding volunteers to go into schools with your partner charity Volunteer Reading Help, your campaign offers a practical solution."

With one in five 15-year-olds in Europe lacking basic reading skills, Mrs Vassiliou has made tackling literacy one of her top targets.

This year she launched a Europe Loves Reading awareness initiative and appointed a group of 11 experts from the worlds of academia, politics and business to find Europe's best practice and come up with recommendations to national governments as to how to tackle the problem.

"Your campaign has created a lot of interest in the EU and I will be asking our expert group to look closely at what



**New chapter:** Androulla Vassiliou with Evening Standard volunteer Abigail Golob and children at William Davis Primary School

you are doing," she said. "There are other literacy campaigns in Europe – there is one in Poland called All of Poland Reads to Kids that has spread to the Czech Republic, and there is one in the Netherlands, but Get London Reading appears to be unique in that it is the only one that is newspaper-led."

"We need more initiatives like yours. I want our expert group to evaluate your campaign and for it to be potentially highlighted, when they report back in 2012, as a blueprint for best practice for others to follow. So your campaign will not only impact the UK, but could be rolled out and have ripples through Europe."

The UK fares relatively poorly in the student assessment study, trailing half-way in 15th place with 18.4 per cent of 15-year-olds unable to read properly, behind countries such as Finland (8.1 per cent), the Netherlands (14.3), Poland (15), Ireland (17.2) and Hungary (17.6), but level with Germany and France. With their large itinerant Roma populations, Bulgaria and Romania bring up the rear, with four in 10 teenagers illiterate. "There is a crisis among



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## As number of volunteers

Continued from Page 1

Europe we have a big problem with one in five 15-year-olds reading to a very low level. Literacy is not just about reading, it is the foundation for life.

"I will be asking our expert group to look at what you are doing and for your campaign to be potentially highlighted as a blueprint for others to follow. So your campaign will not only impact the UK, but could have ripples through Europe. The Evening Standard campaign is unique in that it is the only newspaper-led literacy

initiative in Europe." Donations from several FTSE-100 companies today to Get London Reading included £5,000 from HSBC, £2,500 from Capita, £1,000 from Kingfisher and £500 each from Next and packaging group Rexam.

The Standard's partner charity, Volunteer Reading Help, is training the volunteers who will read to 1,200 children in primary schools.

So far more than 700 Evening Standard readers have completed applications to become volunteers.

Ms Vassiliou paid tribute to the project as she described how tackling



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News



MATT WRITTLE

## 'I want to open their eyes to the immense fun reading can be'

David Cohen

ABIGAIL GOLOB, 23, a physiotherapy undergraduate, signed up as a Standard reading volunteer with our partner, the charity Volunteer Reading Help. She has just started at William Davis primary where 80 per cent of the pupils are from non-English speaking homes. Ms Golob said: "I have been given three children to read with, a girl and two boys, and so far I have done four sessions with each child. "Abeda is six, her mother is Bangladeshi and speaks very little English, so she has nobody to read with at home. "Abeda is a self-critical, easily disheartened little girl, and when she gets words wrong she gives up. She is the weakest reader of my three, yet she is also the most studious and our one-on-one

sessions are building her confidence. I relate to her because I was also a slow reader at her age. "The boys Jibraieel and Sofian are much more boisterous and so the challenge there is to settle them down to quietly focus and concentrate. They like playing Top Trumps because its competitive and fun, but the key has been finding books they enjoy, like Horrid Henry, where they love doing the dialogue with great expression." She added: "The training I did with Volunteer Reading Help was superb and prepared me well and I am already seeing good progress in the children's reading. "I have a boyfriend who grew up in care and has a reading age of 10, and I see how people regard him as stupid and won't give him a job. I want to help these children avoid that fate and open their eyes to the immense fun that reading can be."

Sign up to our campaign:  
**standard.co.uk/  
getlondonreading**

You can also donate by text. Just text **DONATE** to **70300** to give £10 to Volunteer Reading Help. The full amount goes to the fund and you can make as many £10 donations as you want.

the Roma we have to tackle now," said Mrs Vassiliou.

But can we learn from the EU's best performers? "Many countries that do well, such as Poland and the Netherlands, have national programmes that involve volunteers, so it seems that properly trained and supported volunteers – like you have with Get London Reading – are part of the EU-wide solution. Finland is a special case because everybody, from old to young, reads and they make sure their libraries are beautiful places."

Part of the problem, insisted Mrs Vassiliou, is that teachers have become too soft. "My experts tell me

that it is important for children to read aloud, but many teachers are reluctant to ask children to do this for fear of embarrassing them. They might be laughed at, but I say, so what? I know from my childhood that I felt fear when I was asked to stand up and read. I had the same fear at the Bar when I started practising law and had to learn public speaking, but the fact that I had overcome these fears as a child helped me to cope as an adult. Reading aloud is the start of learning to be courageous in life."

Another difficulty we face is one that played out in front of her in the library at William Davis Primary, where Abeda read diligently but Jibraieel and Sofian were quickly bored and sought to take her on in Top Trumps.

"We have a real challenge keeping boys interested in reading and we have to do better," she said.

Mrs Vassiliou, a Greek-Cypriot married for 45 years and with three children, one of whom lives in Maida Vale and runs a clothing company, comes from a provincial town in Cyprus, but

calls London her "second home". "Because I studied here, London will always hold a special place for me."

Mrs Vassiliou, one of the 27 Commissioners responsible for proposing guidelines, says she is "thrilled" with the success of the Get London Reading campaign. She wields considerable clout and her education, training and youth budget is €8.8 billion over seven years - she may harness this to improve literacy rates using the Standard model.

She is determined that the recommendations made in 2012 by the expert group on literacy are passed on to member governments and rolled out across the EU.

"I am especially thrilled to witness what you are doing with Get London Reading and to see the way you've mobilised the whole city for this cause. I don't want to prejudge what the experts will say, but the Evening Standard could be one of our ambassadors for promoting volunteering – and for changing the lives of children in places your readers will never even have heard of."

## grows, donations continue to pour in

literacy is one of her top targets. She said: "One of the appealing aspects of your campaign is that you have gone beyond simply identifying the problem to try to help children being failed by the education system."

"By funding volunteers to go into schools with Volunteer Reading Help, your campaign offers a practical solution. You're actually an actor helping to solve the problem."

"You are also making children read aloud to an adult, something often lacking in schools because

teachers don't want to embarrass slow readers, but reading aloud in class is the start of learning to be courageous in life."

Donors also praised the campaign. Simon Martin, head of corporate sustainability at HSBC Holdings, said: "Literacy should be a birthright and is a fundamental requirement to enable every child to fulfil their potential. HSBC are very aware of the connection between literacy rates and economic development, and we are delighted to support Get London Reading." Paul Pindar,

chief executive of Capita Group, said: "The Standard's inspiring campaign is opening up new opportunities for young people and allowing them to create better tomorrows for themselves."

Ian Cheshire, group chief executive of Kingfisher, added: "By helping people to read better, this campaign could improve the prospects of thousands of people across the country, which in turn could prove a fillip for British businesses and the economy."

Editorial Comment: page 14

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