

Invitation to Tender

External Evaluation of the Literacy Pirates' learning programme

Issued by	Literacy Pirates
Contact	David Jones - david.jones@literacypirates.org
Date issued	August 2026
Deadline for proposals	Monday 14 September 2026 at 5pm
Budget	£25,000 (inclusive of VAT)
Contract period	October 2026 – August 2028

1. About Literacy Pirates

Literacy Pirates is a literacy charity supporting children aged 8 to 13 who are falling behind due to socio-economic disadvantage. Founded in Hackney in 2011, we deliver joyful, evidence-based programmes that improve reading, writing, confidence and perseverance.

Our flagship online programme, the Virtual Ship, allows us to work with children anywhere in the UK, overcoming geographic barriers that prevent many disadvantaged children from accessing high-quality support. We currently work with around 650 children per year, over 70% of whom are eligible for Pupil Premium. We are growing rapidly, with an ambition to reach 3,000 children annually by 2030.

Our programme achieves strong outcomes: over 90% attendance, 83% of participants improve their literacy and 90% of teachers report increased confidence in the classroom. We are now at a stage where we want to go further and to move from measuring outcomes to attributing impact.

2. Purpose of this tender

We are seeking an evaluation partner to help us answer the following central question:

What evidence is there that the improvements children (Young Pirates) make can be attributed to Literacy Pirates, and is there evidence that Young Pirates make more progress because of their participation?

Secondary research questions will be finalised with the appointed provider during the scoping phase, but are likely to include questions about programme process, stakeholder experience and the long-term sustainability of our evaluation approach.

Beyond answering the research question, we hope the evaluation will:

- strengthen our case with funders and schools by providing independent, credible evidence of impact
- improve programme delivery by generating actionable insights for the team
- help us establish a repeatable, scalable approach to impact measurement for future years

3. The Learning Programme

Our programme is delivered weekly in sessions of two hours across a term. Each session is led by an experienced Session Leader and supported by trained volunteers (Crewmates), who work with small groups of Young Pirates to develop their literacy, confidence and perseverance.

The programme is built around our pedagogical principles of Reading for Pleasure and Everyone a Writer. It is designed to be joyful, low-stakes and highly relational. We publish children's written work in high-quality books, giving their writing a real audience and purpose.

Children are referred by their schools and are nominated on the basis of falling behind age expectations in literacy and facing economic barriers to educational success.

We currently measure impact through:

- the STAR reading assessment (baseline and endline each term)
- self-report surveys from Young Pirates, families and teachers

Full details of our Theory of Change, pedagogical approach and current monitoring and evaluation plan are available on [our website](#).

4. Scope of work

We have a budget of £25,000 (inclusive of VAT) for this evaluation. We recognise that it may not be possible to commission an evaluation covering all aspects of our programme. We are therefore being transparent about the budget from the outset and inviting providers to propose what they would prioritise and why.

Our preferred approach is a comparative analysis using the National Pupil Database (NPD). This would allow us to compare the SATs outcomes of Year 6 Young Pirates to a matched comparison group of similar pupils who did not participate in the programme.

We would also welcome a complementary qualitative strand - interviews, focus groups or surveys with Young Pirates, families, schools and Crewmates - to capture the human dimension of our programme's impact and generate evidence useful for funders and communications.

We are open to providers proposing alternative or refined approaches where they believe these would deliver greater value within the budget. We are particularly interested in proposals that:

- build our internal evaluation capability and set us up to repeat key analyses in future years at lower cost

- draw on the provider's existing access to the NPD or other relevant datasets, reducing the time and cost of data access
- are honest about what is and is not achievable at this budget, and make a clear case for prioritisation

We do not currently recommend a process review as a priority given existing internal knowledge of our delivery model.

5. Scoping phase

The contract will begin with a dedicated scoping phase, during which the appointed provider will:

- meet with the team to understand the programme, our data infrastructure and our evaluation history
- review our Theory of Change, current monitoring and evaluation plan and existing impact data
- finalise the evaluation framework, including detailed research questions, methods and data collection tools
- confirm whether the proposed approach is deliverable within budget and propose adjustments if needed

We see this scoping phase as a collaboration. We are open to the provider proposing a different approach to the one outlined above if they have good reason to believe it would be more effective. The scoping phase should conclude with an agreed evaluation plan before full delivery begins.

6. Deliverables

We expect the following deliverables, though we are open to discussion on format and timing:

1. **Evaluation plan:** a clear document setting out the agreed research questions, methods, timeline and data collection tools, produced at the end of the scoping phase.
2. **Progress updates:** brief written updates at key milestones (to be agreed during the scoping phase), flagging any issues or adjustments needed.
3. **Final report:** a full written report setting out the evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations. The report should be written for a non-specialist audience and include an executive summary suitable for sharing with funders and stakeholders.
4. **Presentation of findings:** a presentation to the Literacy Pirates team and senior leadership on the final report's findings.

7. Timeline

Timing	Activity
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August 2026	Tender launched
Monday 14 September 2026	Deadline for submitting proposals
15 – 18 September 2026	Shortlisting and invitation to interview
21 September - 2 October 2026	Interviews with shortlisting applicants
Week of 3 October 2026	Provider appointed
October 2026	Kick-off meetings and scoping phase begins
November 2026 – July 2028	Delivery, data collection, analysis and reporting
August 2028	Final report delivered

8. Budget and payment

The total budget for this work is £25,000, inclusive of VAT. This should cover all fees and expenses, including any costs associated with data access, travel or stakeholder engagement.

We ask providers to include a clear budget breakdown in their proposal, showing day rates, number of days allocated to each team member and any other costs. We will agree a payment schedule with the appointed provider based on delivery milestones.

We understand that the budget may constrain the scope of the evaluation. We would rather receive an honest proposal that is clear about what is achievable at £25,000 than one that overpromises.

9. Who we are looking for

We are looking for an evaluation partner who brings relevant expertise and is interested in working with a growing charity at an exciting moment in its development. We would particularly welcome applications from providers who have:

- experience of designing and delivering evaluations of education or youth programmes
- experience of using the National Pupil Database or other equivalent datasets for comparative impact analysis
- existing approved researcher status under the ONS Research Accreditation Scheme, or a clear plan for obtaining it

We are open to applications from independent consultants, academic research teams, specialist evaluation organisations and consortia. If a provider is only able to offer part of contract, we are open to bids for specific elements. However, we are likely to only consider these if there are other providers that can deliver the rest of the contract.

We actively encourage applications from organisations led by people with lived experience of the communities we serve.

10. What to include in your proposal

Proposals should be no more than eight pages (excluding appendices) and should address the following:

1. **About you:** a brief description of your organisation or team, including relevant experience and examples of comparable previous work.
2. **Understanding of our context:** a short summary of your understanding of Literacy Pirates, the Virtual Ship and the evaluation challenge we are trying to address.
3. **Proposed approach:** your recommended methodology, including which elements you would prioritise at this budget and why. We welcome proposals that propose alternatives to or refinements of our preferred approach, provided a clear rationale is given.
4. **Budget breakdown:** day rates, number of days per team member and any other costs, totalling no more than £25,000 inclusive of VAT.
5. **Timeline:** a realistic delivery timeline from appointment through to final report.
6. **Team:** details of who would lead and deliver the work, including brief CVs as an appendix.
7. **References:** contact details for two referees from relevant previous work.

11. How proposals will be assessed

Proposals will be assessed against the following criteria:

Criteria	Weighting
Understanding of our programme and the evaluation context	20%
Proposed approach and methodology	35%
Relevant experience and track record	25%
Value for money	20%

Shortlisted providers will be invited to an online interview before a final decision is made. We expect to notify shortlisted providers by 18 September and to conduct interviews in the weeks of 21 September and 28 September.

12. How to apply

Please submit your proposal by Monday 14 September at 5pm to David Jones at david.jones@literacypirates.org. Proposals received after this time will not be considered.

If you have any questions about this tender, please send them to david.jones@literacypirates.org.

We look forward to hearing from you.

13. Processing your data

Personal data submitted as part of your proposal will be processed in accordance with UK data protection law. We will use it solely for the purposes of this procurement process and will not share it with third parties. If you are unsuccessful, your data will be deleted after 6 months. If you have any questions about how we handle your data, please contact David Jones at david.jones@literacypirates.org.