

Celebrating Reading for Enjoyment

Findings from our Annual Literacy Survey 2016

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Whether or not children and young people enjoy reading has been a focus of recent research and policy, and evidence is now accumulating that shows that reading enjoyment is beneficial not only for reading outcomes but also for wider learning.

For example, it is well established that reading enjoyment is closely connected to reading proficiency in general (e.g. OECD, 2010; Twist, Schagen & Hodgson, 2007; Blunsdon et al., 2003) as well as to specific components of reading proficiency, such as vocabulary development (Sullivan and Brown, 2015) and text comprehension and grammar (Cox and Guthrie, 2001). Furthermore, reading for enjoyment has been related to proficiency in mathematics (Sullivan & Brown, 2015) and learning in general (OECD, 2011).

Reading for enjoyment has not only been at the heart of our programmes, but it has also been a central element of our research activities. This report pulls together what our evidence tells us about reading enjoyment.

The following findings are based on data from 42,406 pupils aged 8 to 18 who took part in our annual literacy survey in November/December 2016.

Key findings

How many children and young people in the UK enjoy reading?

- 1 child in 4 in 2016 said that they enjoy reading very much, with another 1 child in 3 saying that they enjoy reading quite a lot. Overall, nearly 6 children in 10 (58.6%) say that they enjoy reading either very much or quite a lot.
- While enjoyment levels had been rather stable between 2005 and 2012, they have been rising steadily since 2013, and in 2016 we recorded the highest percentage of reading enjoyment levels. Levels in 2016 were 14% higher than they were in 2005.

Who enjoys reading?

- In 2016, more girls than boys said that they enjoy reading, with 64.9% of girls overall enjoying reading either very much or quite a lot compared with 52.4% of boys.
- Nearly twice as many children aged 8 to 11 than those aged 14 to 16 said that they enjoy reading (77.6% vs. 43.8%).
- The gap between boys and girls increases with age. Overall, twice as many boys aged 8 to 11 said that they enjoy reading compared with boys aged 14 to 16 (72.4% vs. 35.7%), suggesting that teenage boys are a group that are of particular concern in terms of reading enjoyment. The equivalent drop for girls is also present but not as dramatic (82.8% vs. 53.3%).
- In 2016, there was no difference in reading enjoyment between pupils who receive free school meals and those who don't (58.3% vs. 58.3%).
- However, there is a relationship between gender and free school meal uptake, with more boys on FSMs than boys not on FSMs saying that they enjoy reading (54.3% vs. 51.7%), while more girls who don't receive FSMs saying that they enjoy reading compared with girls who receive FSMs (65.0% vs. 62.6%).
- Pupils from White ethnic backgrounds were least likely to say that they enjoy reading, while pupils from Asian backgrounds were most likely to enjoy reading (57.5% vs. 64.8%).

Why does reading enjoyment matter?

- Previous research has shown how important reading enjoyment is, not only for reading outcomes but also for wider learning.
- Our own data show that compared with children who don't enjoy reading, children who enjoy reading:
 - Are more likely to read daily (47.5% vs. 9.9%)
 - Are more confident readers
 - Read more books in their free time in a typical month (6.26 books vs. 2.38 books)
 - Read a greater range of different materials (6.6 vs. 4.96)
 - Spend more minutes reading a book (44.23 vs. 19.41), on average and less time reading something online, on average (76.34 vs. 100.52)
 - Are more motivated to read by interest and achievement and less likely to read for approval
- Our own data also indicate that children who enjoy reading are more likely to do better at reading than their peers who don't enjoy reading. Our reading attainment data (Digital New Group Reading Test) for 603 children showed that pupils who enjoy reading had higher reading scores, on average, than those who do not enjoy reading (105.53 vs. 94.01).
- As a result, children who enjoy reading also did better in terms of their sentence completion (testing children's word knowledge, knowledge of sentence structure and knowledge of grammatical features) and passage comprehension (inferential knowledge and deduction skills) than children who don't enjoy reading.
- Alternatively, if we divide them into three groups based on their score: below average, average and above average, then we find that only 3 in 10 (30.7%) pupils who score below average enjoy reading very much or quite a lot compared with over

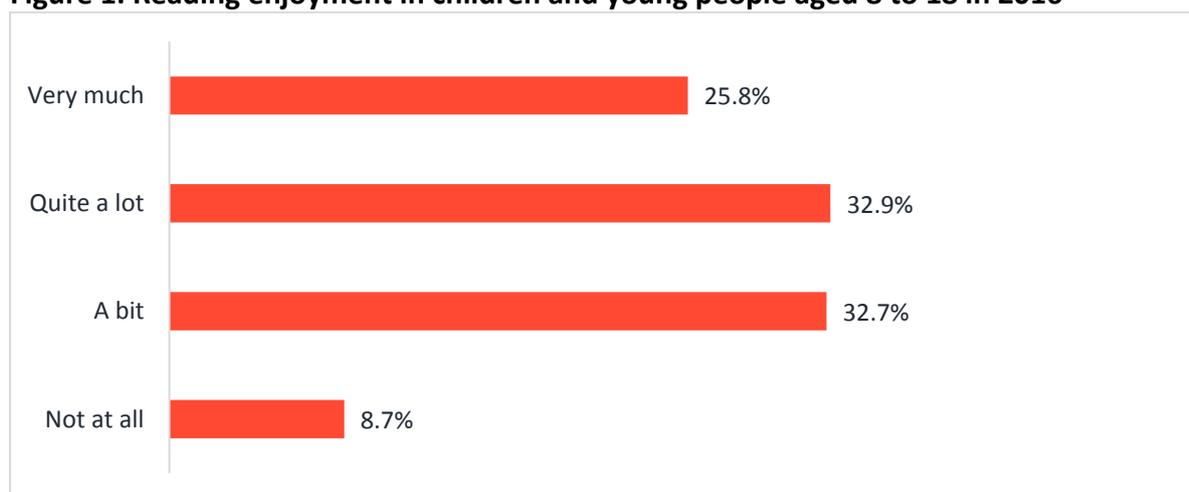
6 in 10 (62.2%) pupils scoring average and 8 in 10 (80.0%) pupils scoring above average.

- Using reading ages instead of reading test scores, we find that the gulf in reading age between those who enjoy reading and those who don't increases with age. At age 10, the average reading age of those who enjoy reading is 10.8 years, while those who don't enjoy reading at that age have an average reading score of 9.5 years: a difference of 1.3 years. However, at age 14, children who enjoy reading have an average reading age of 15.3 years, while those who don't enjoy reading have an average reading age of just 12 years, a difference of 3.3 years.

How many children and young people enjoy reading?

Our data from 42,406 pupils who participated in our survey at the end of 2016¹ show that 1 child in 4 enjoys reading very much, with another 1 child in 3 enjoying reading quite a lot (see Figure 1). Overall, nearly 6 children in 10 (58.6%) say that they enjoy reading either very much or quite a lot. However, that leaves 4 children in 10 who either only enjoy reading a bit or not at all.

Figure 1: Reading enjoyment in children and young people aged 8 to 18 in 2016

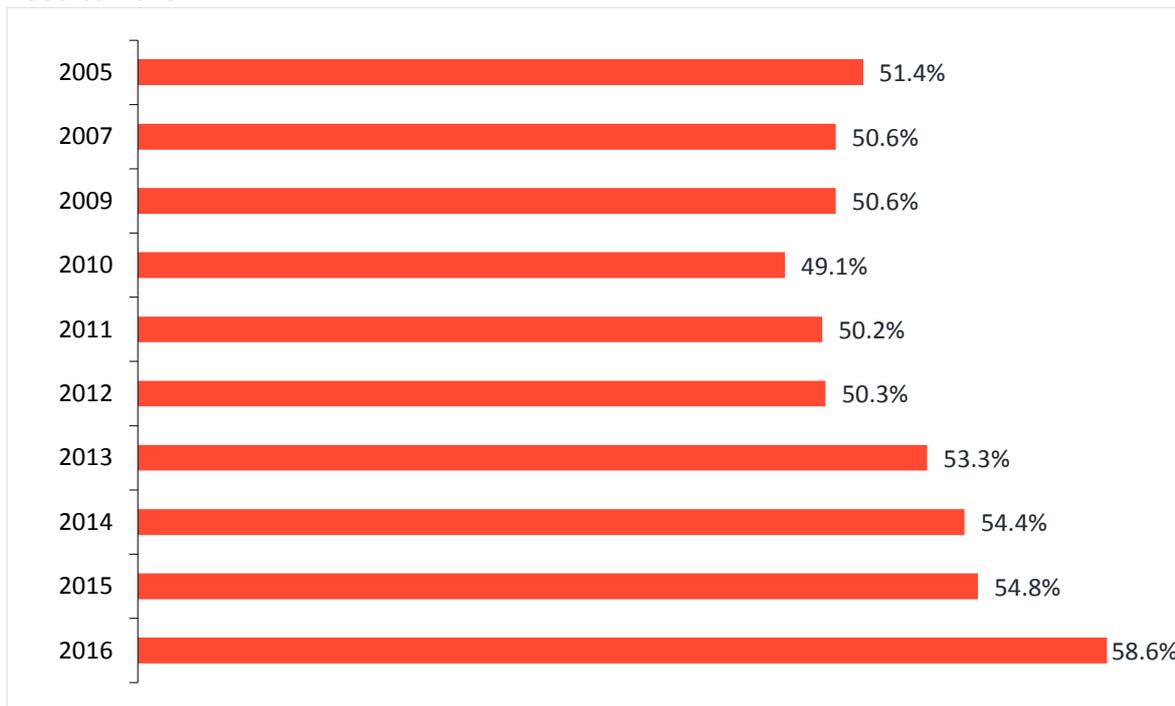


While we don't have data on children's and young people's reading enjoyment for the past 20 years, from when we first started running the Young Reader's Programme (then called Reading is Fundamental) in 2005, we do have data going back to 2005.

As can be seen in Figure 2, children's and young people's levels of reading enjoyment (enjoying reading either very much or quite a lot) had remained stable between 2005 and 2012. However, levels of reading enjoyment have been **rising steadily since 2013** and we recorded the highest levels in 2016. Overall, there has been a 14% increase in the number of children and young people who say that they enjoy reading between 2005 and 2016.

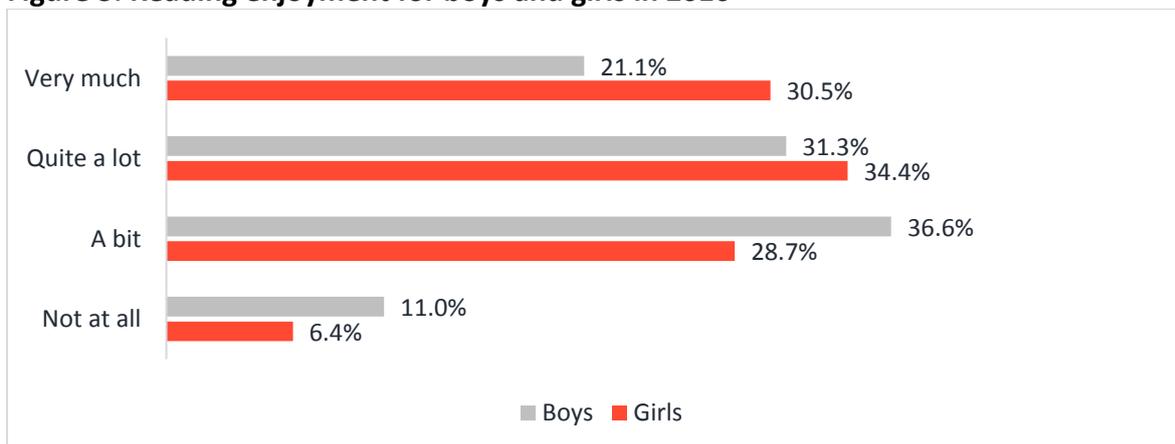
¹ 42,406 children and young people aged 8 to 18 from over 200 schools participated in this online survey, which we conducted in November/December 2016.

Figure 2: Percentage of young people who enjoy reading either very much or quite a lot in 2005 to 2015



However, not everyone enjoys reading. **Who enjoys reading?** Our data from 2016 show us that **girls are more likely to enjoy reading than boys**². Figure 3 shows that more girls than boys say that they enjoy reading very much (30.5% vs. 21.1%), with 64.9% of girls overall enjoying reading either very much or quite a lot compared with 52.4% of boys. Conversely, nearly twice as many boys as girls say that they don't enjoy reading at all (11.0% vs. 6.4%).

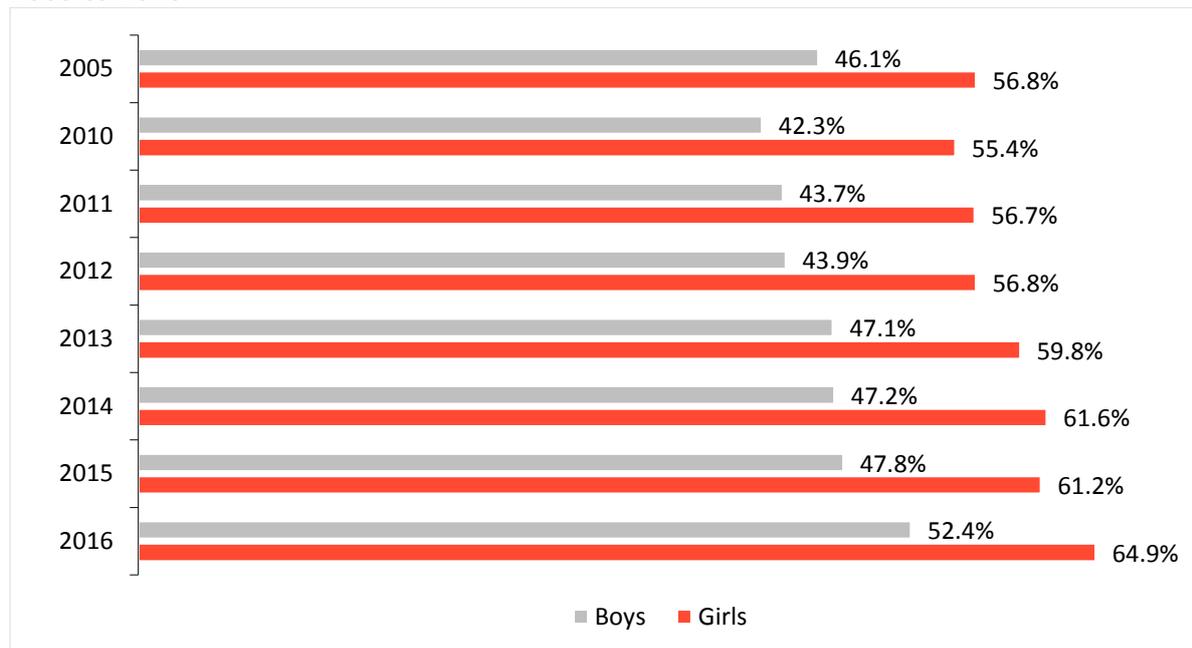
Figure 3: Reading enjoyment for boys and girls in 2016



The gap between boys and girls in their enjoyment has been quite variable over the years (see Figure 4). Over the past couple of years the gender gap has narrowed, reducing from a 13.4 percentage point difference in 2015 to a 12.5 percentage point difference in 2016. Nonetheless, the gap is wider than it was in 2005, where there was a gap of 10.7 percentage points.

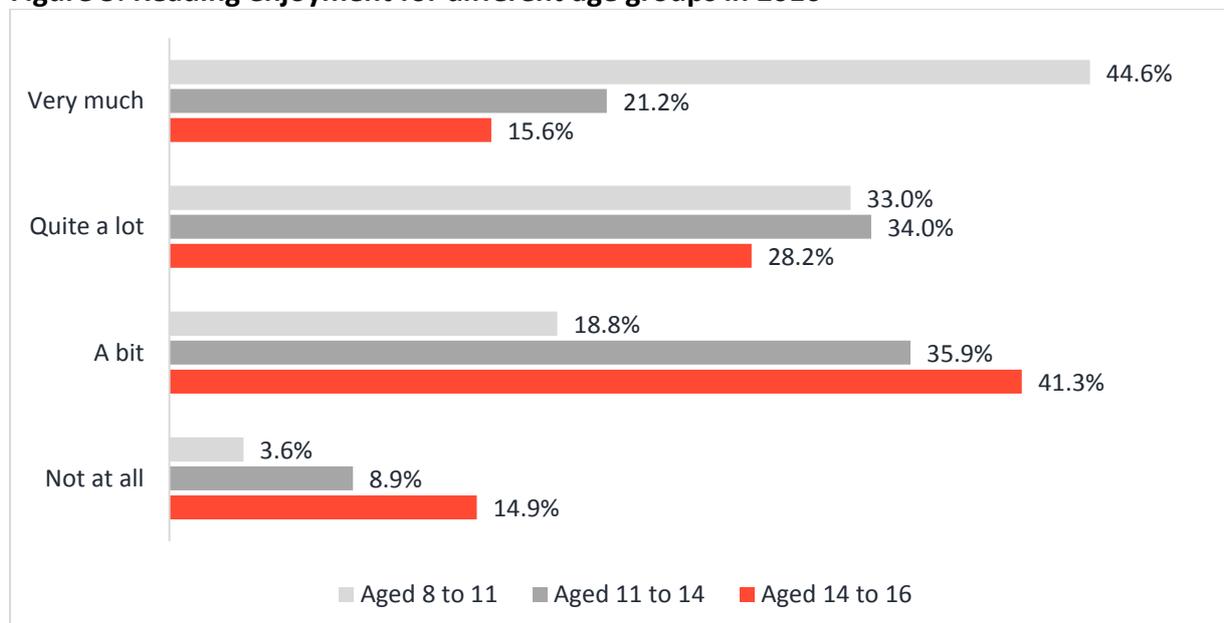
² There was a near identical gender split in our sample in 2016, with 21,353 (50.4%) of boys participating versus 21,053 (49.6%) of girls.

Figure 4: Percentage of boys and girls who enjoy reading either very much or quite a lot in 2005 to 2016



How old you are also affects how much you enjoy reading, with **young children being much more enthusiastic about reading than older ones**³. As Figure 5 shows, in 2016 nearly three times as many pupils aged 8 to 11 than pupils aged 14 to 16 in 2016 said that they enjoy reading very much. Conversely, four times as many pupils aged 14 to 16 than those aged 8 to 11 said that they don't enjoy reading at all.

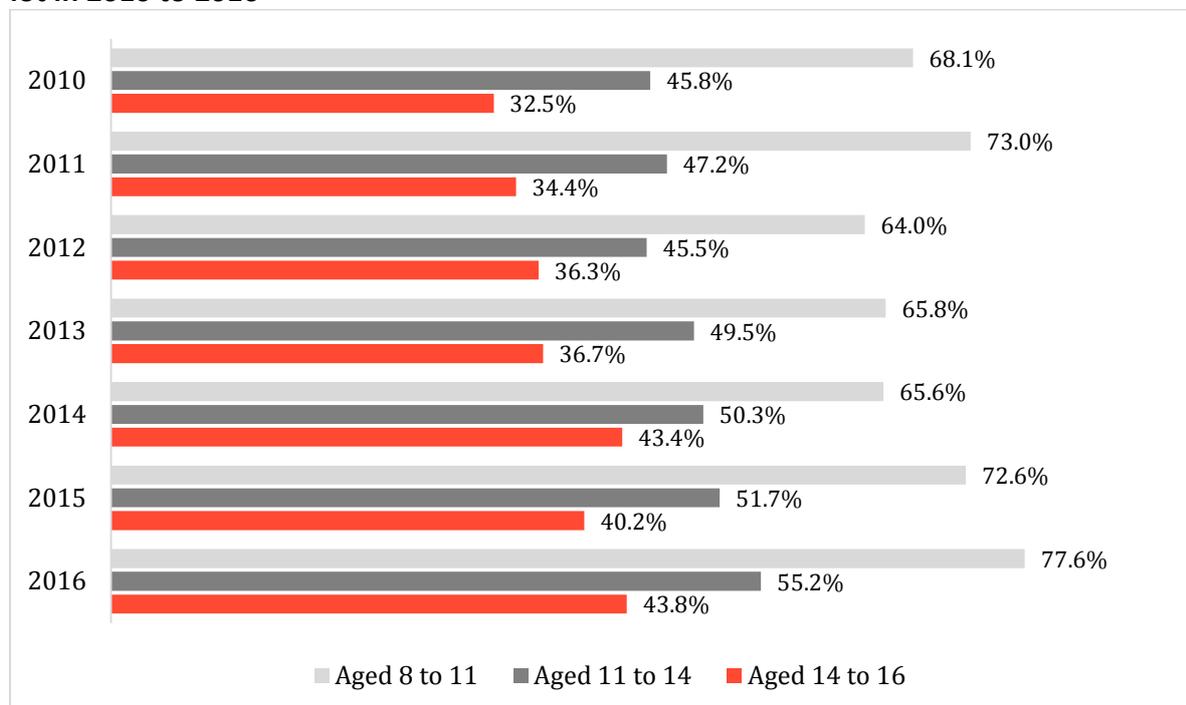
Figure 5: Reading enjoyment for different age groups in 2016



³ 9,754 pupils were in Key Stage 2 (aged 8-11), 24,960 pupils were in Key Stage 3 (aged 11-14), 6,620 pupils were in Key Stage 4 (aged 14-16) and 1,072 pupils were in Key Stage 5 (aged 16-18). Pupils aged 16 to 18 they were excluded from this analysis due to low numbers.

Figure 6 compares reading enjoyment levels by age group over time and shows that differences between the age groups have remained largely stable.

Figure 6: Percentage of pupils by age group who enjoy reading either very much or quite a lot in 2010 to 2016



So, having established that more girls enjoy reading than boys and younger pupils are more likely to enjoy reading than their older peers, we then wanted to know whether there is a difference in reading enjoyment between boys and girls depending on how old they are.

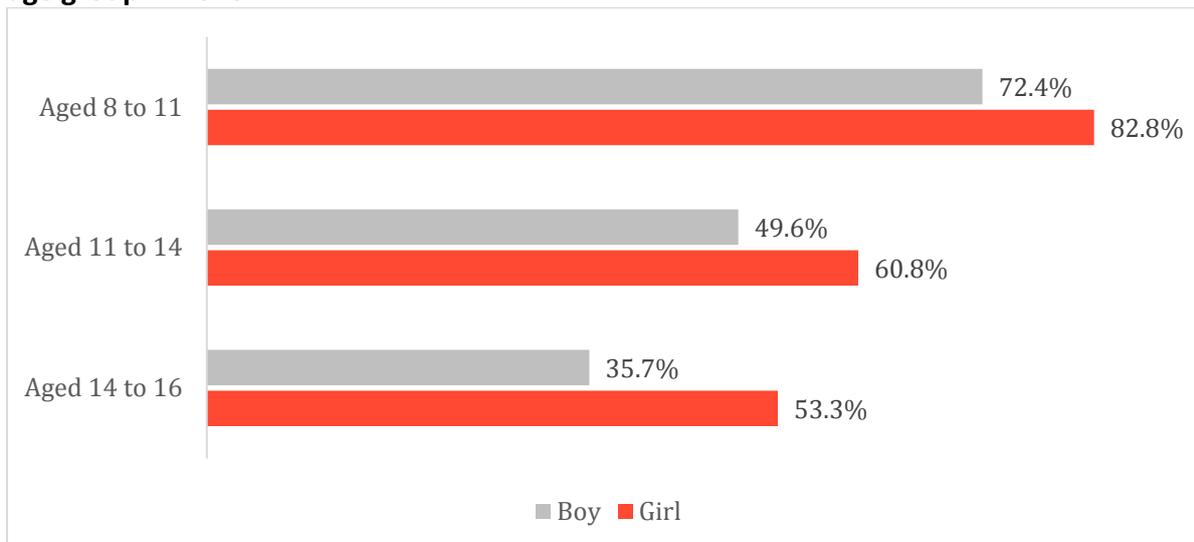
Figure 7 outlines levels of reading enjoyment for boys and girls across the three age groups and shows that the **gap between boys and girls increases with age**, rising from a 10.4 percentage point difference at age 8 to 11, to a 11.2 percentage point difference at age 11 to 14 and a 17.6 percentage point difference at age 14 to 16⁴.

It also shows that the drop in reading enjoyment is greatest between ages 8 to 11 and ages 11 to 14 for both boys (22.8 percentage points) and girls (22 percentage points). However, the drop in reading enjoyment for boys between 11 to 14 and 14 to 16 is nearly twice that of girls (13.9 percentage points vs. 7.5 percentage points), which means that only a third of boys aged 14 to 16 enjoy reading compared with over a half of girls of that age.

Overall, twice as many boys aged 8 to 11 say that they enjoy reading compared with boys aged 14 to 16, indicating that teenage boys are a group that are of particular concern in terms of reading enjoyment.

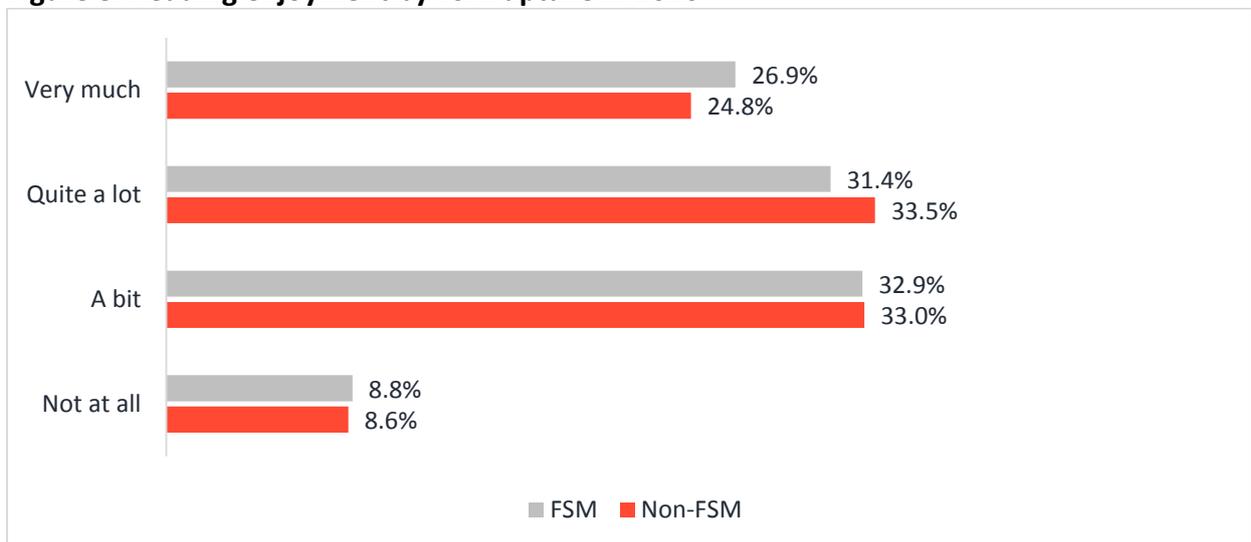
⁴ In terms of the sample make-up, there was no significant gender difference by key stage, with 4,855 (49.8%) of boys aged 8 to 11 vs. 4,899 (50.2%) of girls aged 8 to 11; 12,442 (49.8%) of boys aged 11 to 14 vs. 12,518 (50.2%) of girls aged 11 to 14; and 3,578 (54.0%) of boys aged 14 to 16 vs. 3,042 (46.0%) of girls aged 14 to 16 taking part. Please note that because of their low number (N = 1,072) this analysis doesn't include pupils aged 16 to 18.

Figure 7: Percentage of boys and girls who enjoy reading either very much or quite a lot by age group in 2016



Interestingly, in 2016 a pupil’s **socioeconomic background**⁵, using free school meal (FSM) uptake as a proxy, **was not associated with enjoyment of reading**. Figure 8 shows how well matched responses were, resulting in an identical percentage of pupils who receive free school meals (FSMs) and those who do not saying that they **enjoy reading** either very much or quite a lot (58.3%).

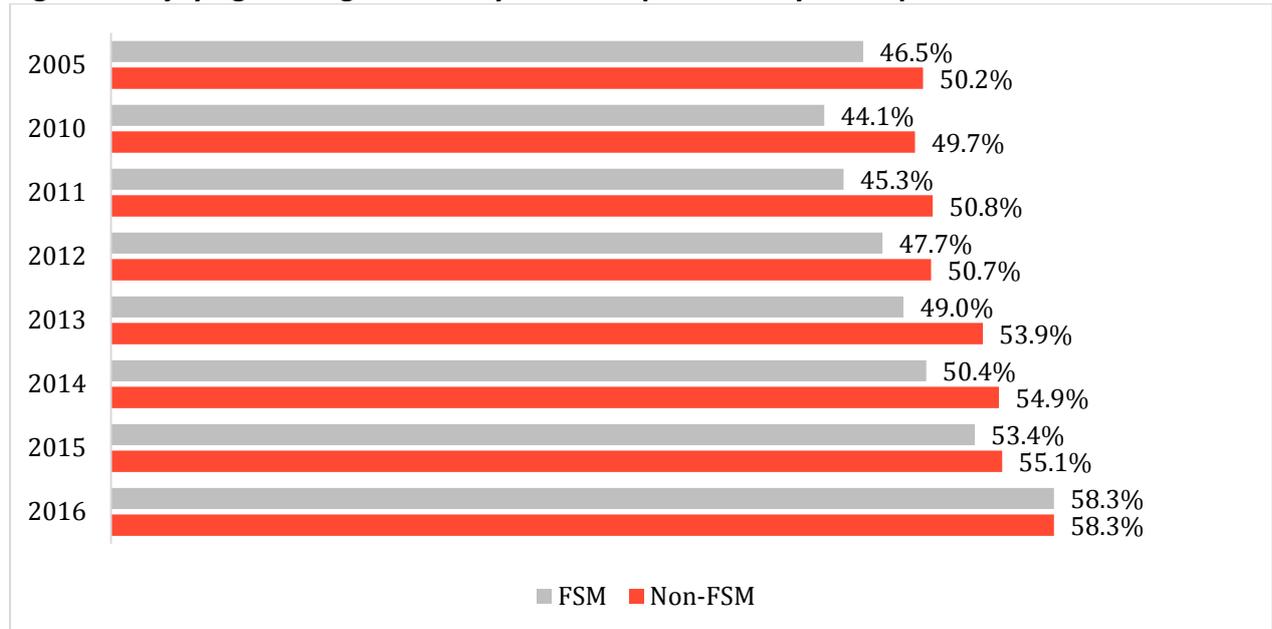
Figure 8: Reading enjoyment by FSM uptake in 2016



As can be seen in Figure 9, it is the first time in 11 years that we have not recorded a difference in reading enjoyment by socioeconomic background.

⁵ Our overall sample in 2016 contained 4,835 (11.4%) FSM pupils and 32,291 (76.1%) non-FSM pupils. 4,300 (10.1%) pupils didn’t know whether or not they received FSMs and 711 (1.7%) would rather not say. There was no significant gender difference by FSM uptake.

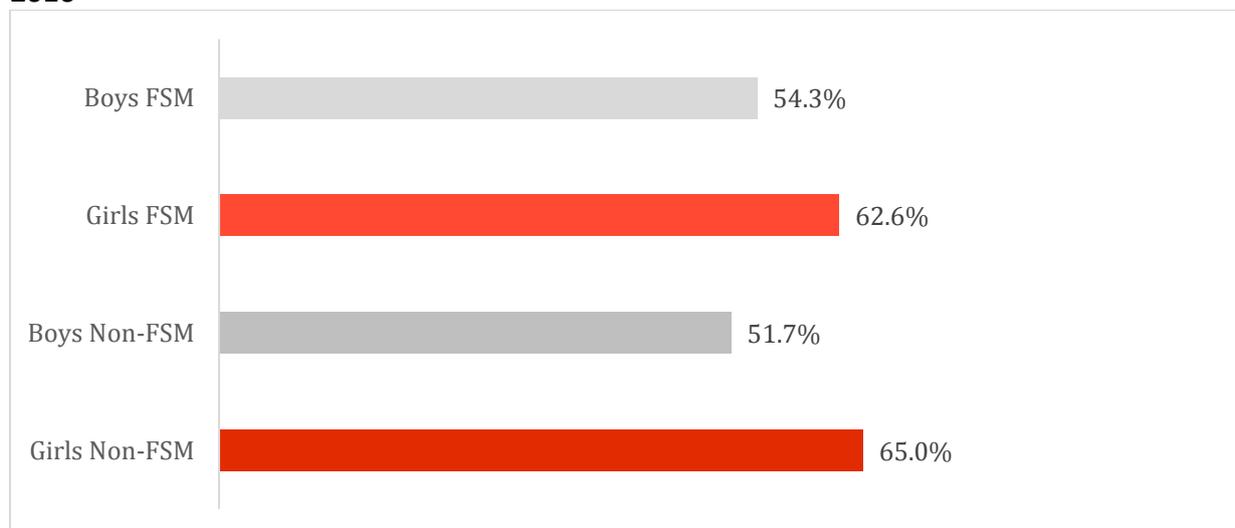
Figure 9: Enjoying reading either very much or quite a lot by FSM uptake in 2005 to 2016



We now know that there are differences in reading engagement by gender as well as by FSM uptake. Next, we wanted to know whether girls on FSMs differ from boys on FSMs as well as their peers who don't receive FSMs in terms of their enjoyment of reading.

Our data suggest that there is a difference. As can be seen in Figure 10, **more boys on FSMs than boys not on FSMs say that they enjoy reading**, while that **dynamic is reversed for girls**, with more girls who don't receive FSM saying that they enjoy reading.

Figure 10: Enjoying reading either very much or quite a lot by gender and FSM uptake in 2016

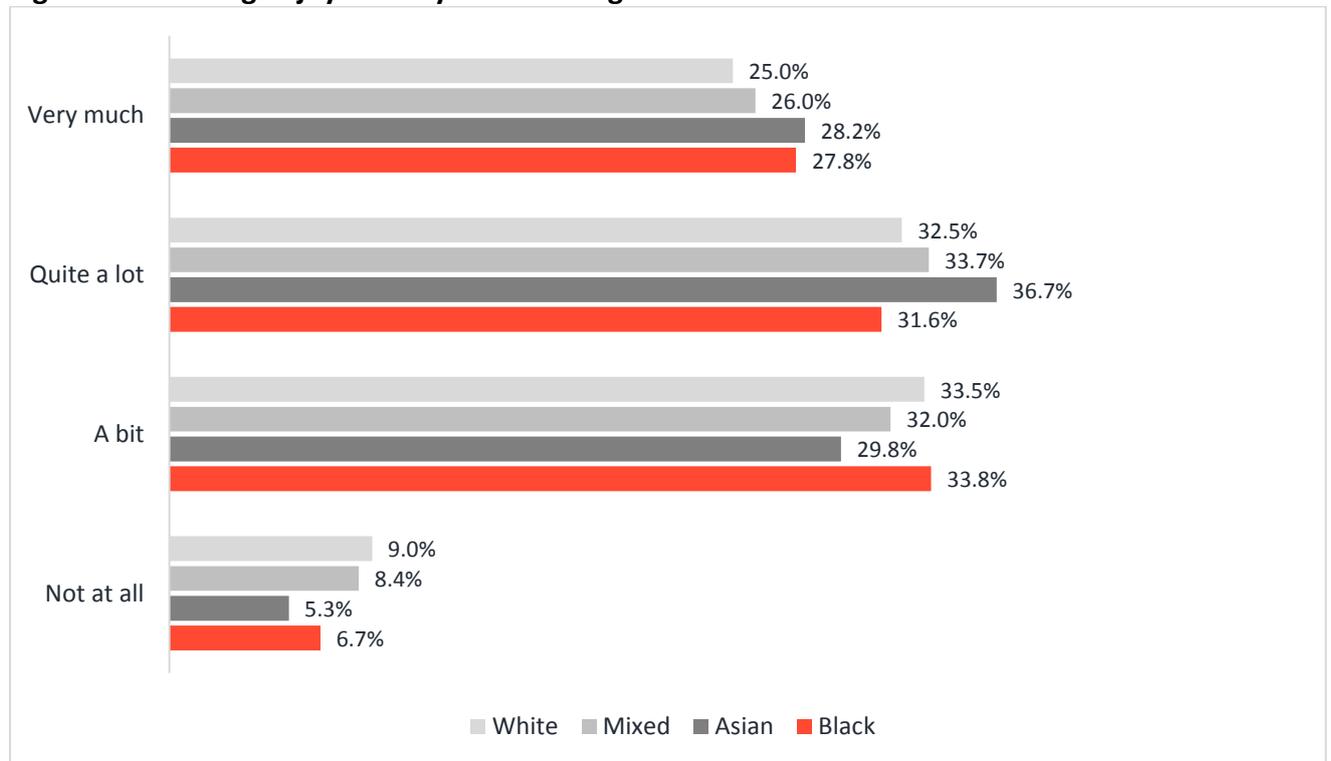


Finally, in 2016 there were also differences by ethnic background⁶, with **fewer pupils from White ethnic backgrounds** enjoying reading compared with pupils from Mixed or Black

⁶ 72.9% (N = 25,418) pupils in our sample identified themselves as coming from a White ethnic background, 6.3% (N = 2,207) identified themselves as "Mixed", 14.4% (N = 5,009) identified themselves as "Asian", and 6.4% (N = 2,241) identified themselves as "Black".

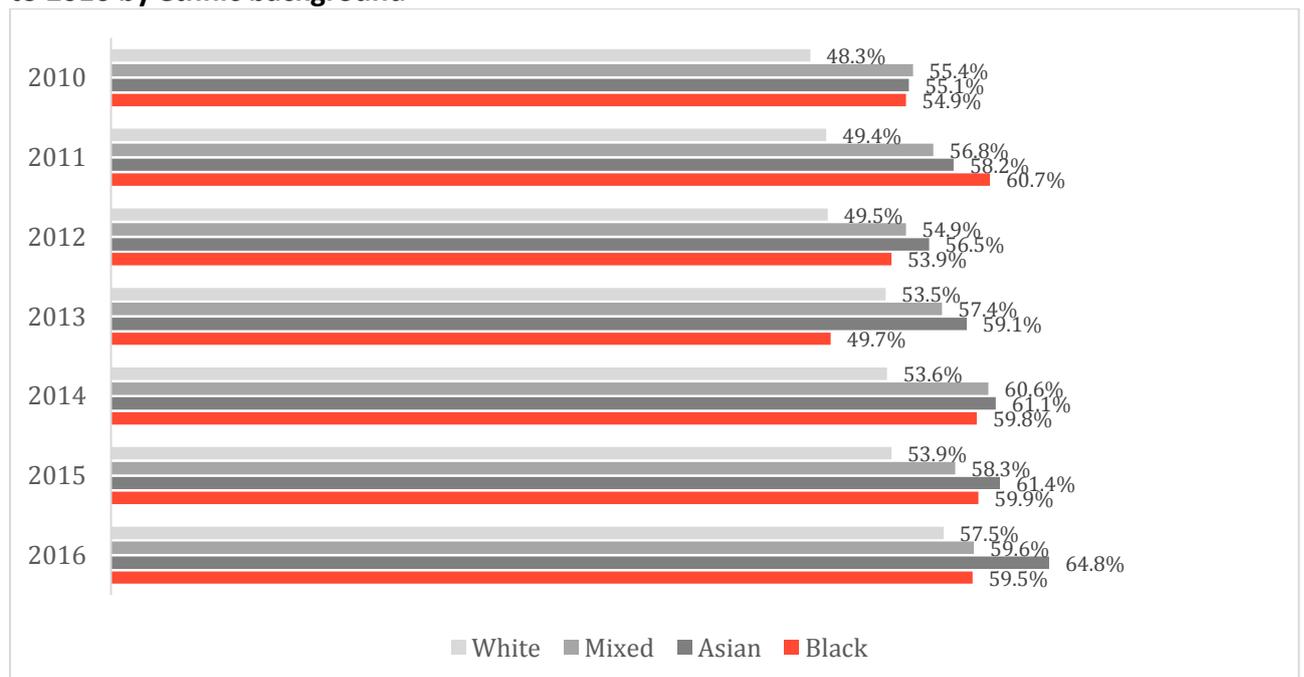
ethnic backgrounds (see Figure 11). Pupils from Asian backgrounds were most likely to say that they enjoy reading.

Figure 11: Reading enjoyment by ethnic background in 2016



This dynamic has remained more or less the same since 2012 (see Figure 12).

Figure 12: Percentage of pupils who enjoy reading either very much or quite a lot in 2010 to 2016 by ethnic background

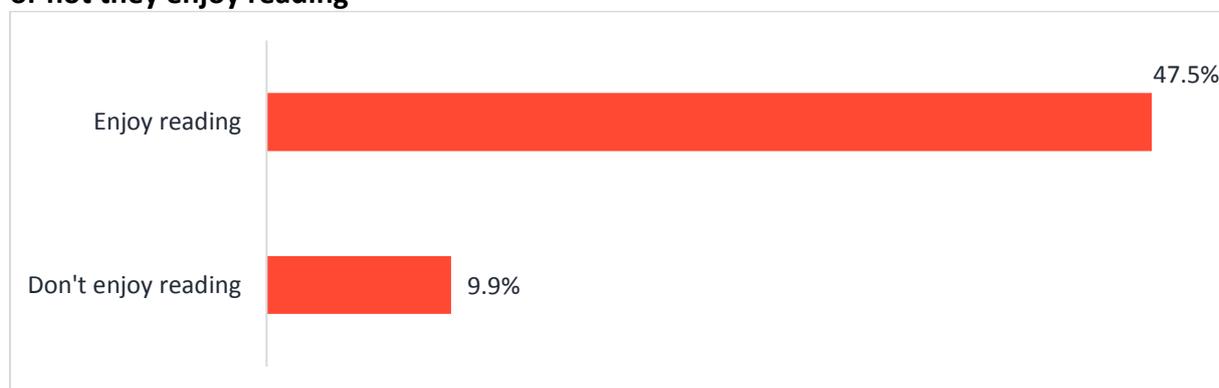


We now have a better idea about how prevalent reading enjoyment is in children and young people in the UK and we also know which demographic groups are associated most with enjoyment. Next, **we explore how reading enjoyment relates to wider reading engagement**, i.e. we will outline the relationships between reading enjoyment, reading behaviour, reading motivation and reading skills.

Several variables are associated with children and young people enjoying reading. To illustrate the differences, we split the sample into children who enjoy reading (either very much or quite a lot, N = 24,853 or 58.6%) and those who don't enjoy reading (either a bit or not at all, N = 17,553 or 41.4%).

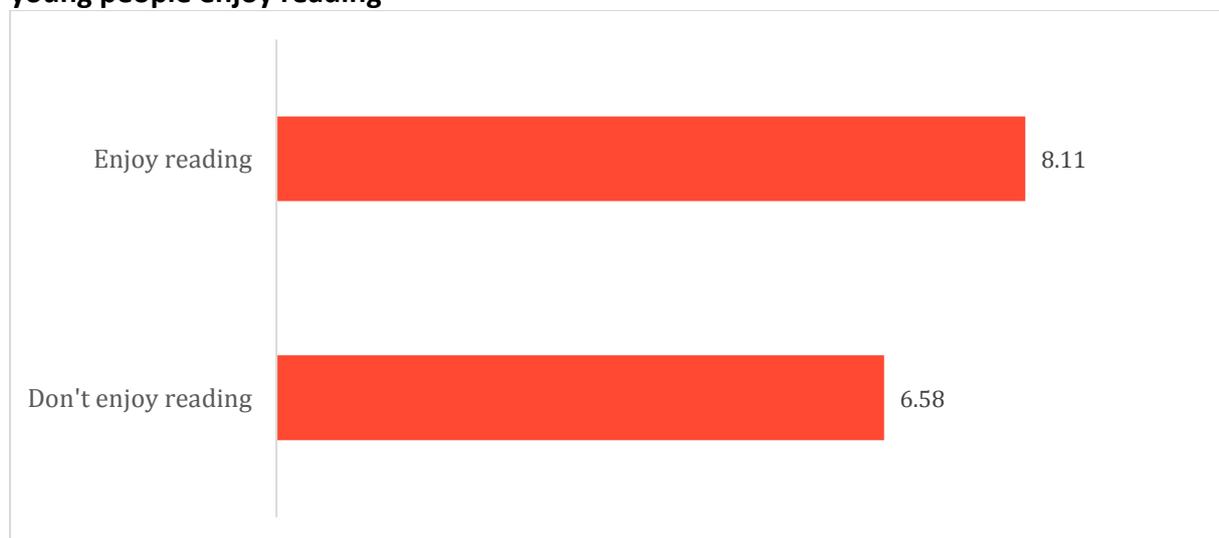
For example, **children who enjoy reading are nearly five times more likely to read daily** outside class than those who don't enjoy reading (see Figure 13).

Figure 13: Percentage of children and young people reading daily outside class by whether or not they enjoy reading



Children and young people who enjoy reading also report higher perceptions of their own reading skill (see Figure 14) measured on a scale of 1 to 10, than children and young people who do not enjoy reading.

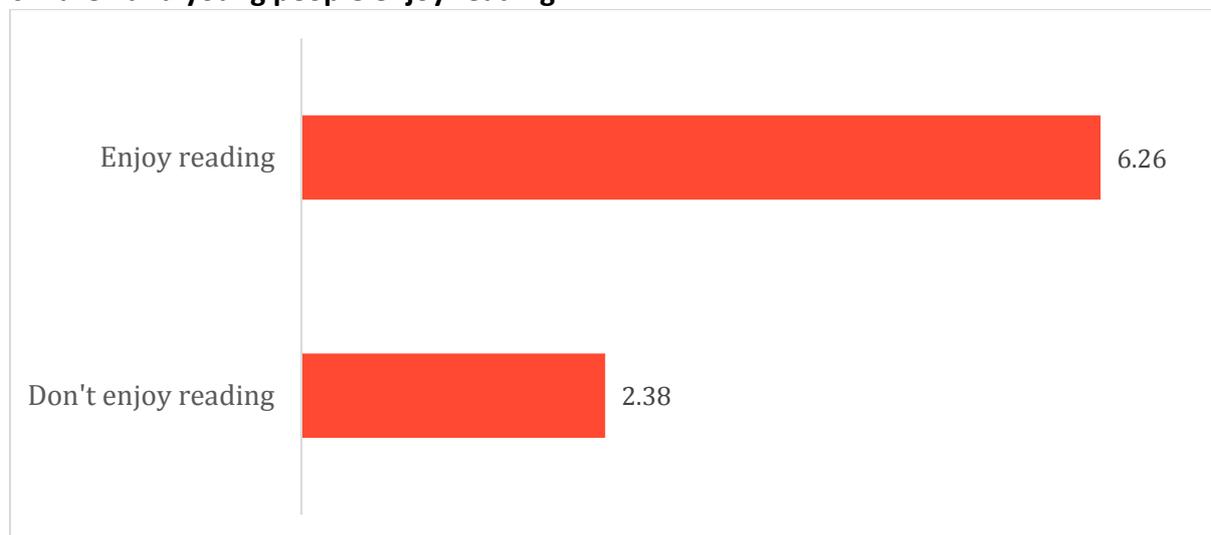
Figure 14: Average (mean) reading skill self-perception by whether or not children and young people enjoy reading



10-point scale from 1 = not very good to 10 = very good

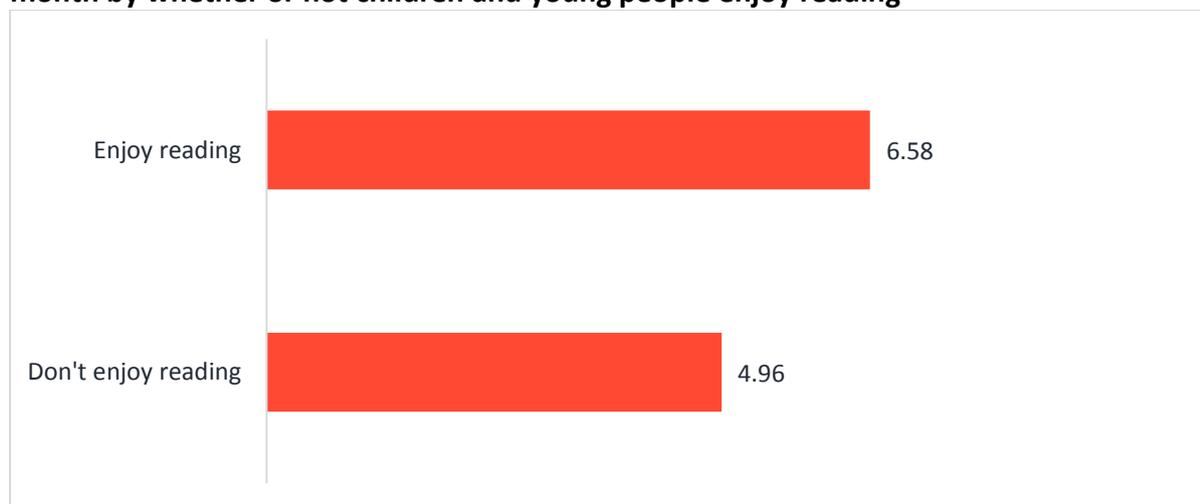
As can be seen in Figure 15, on average children and young people who enjoy reading also read more books in their free time in a typical month than those who don't enjoy reading.

Figure 15: Average (mean) number of books read in a typical month by whether or not children and young people enjoy reading



Overall, children who enjoy reading read more widely⁷ than do children who don't enjoy reading. As can be seen in Figure 16, children who enjoy reading on average read 6.6 different materials in a typical month compared with 5 different materials read by children who don't enjoy reading over the same time period.

Figure 16: Average (mean) number of different materials read in free time in a typical month by whether or not children and young people enjoy reading

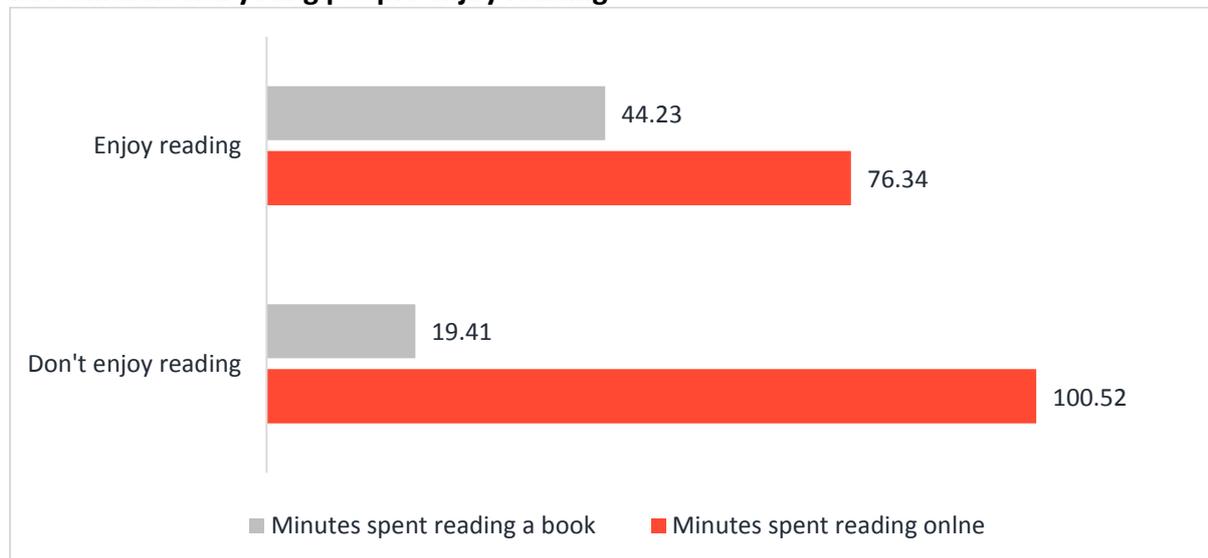


Whether or not children enjoy reading is also related to how many minutes on average they spend reading a book or reading online. As shown in Figure 17, whether or not they enjoy

⁷ To measure how widely children read in their free time, we counted up the responses to our questions that asks pupils to tick whether they read any of 19 materials provided (maximum score 19) in their free time at least once a month. The range of materials provided includes poems, fiction, non-fiction, website, instant messages, text messages, song lyrics, comics and many more.

reading children spend more time reading online than reading a book. However, on average, children who enjoy reading spend more minutes reading a book than those who don't enjoy reading, who spend more minutes reading online.

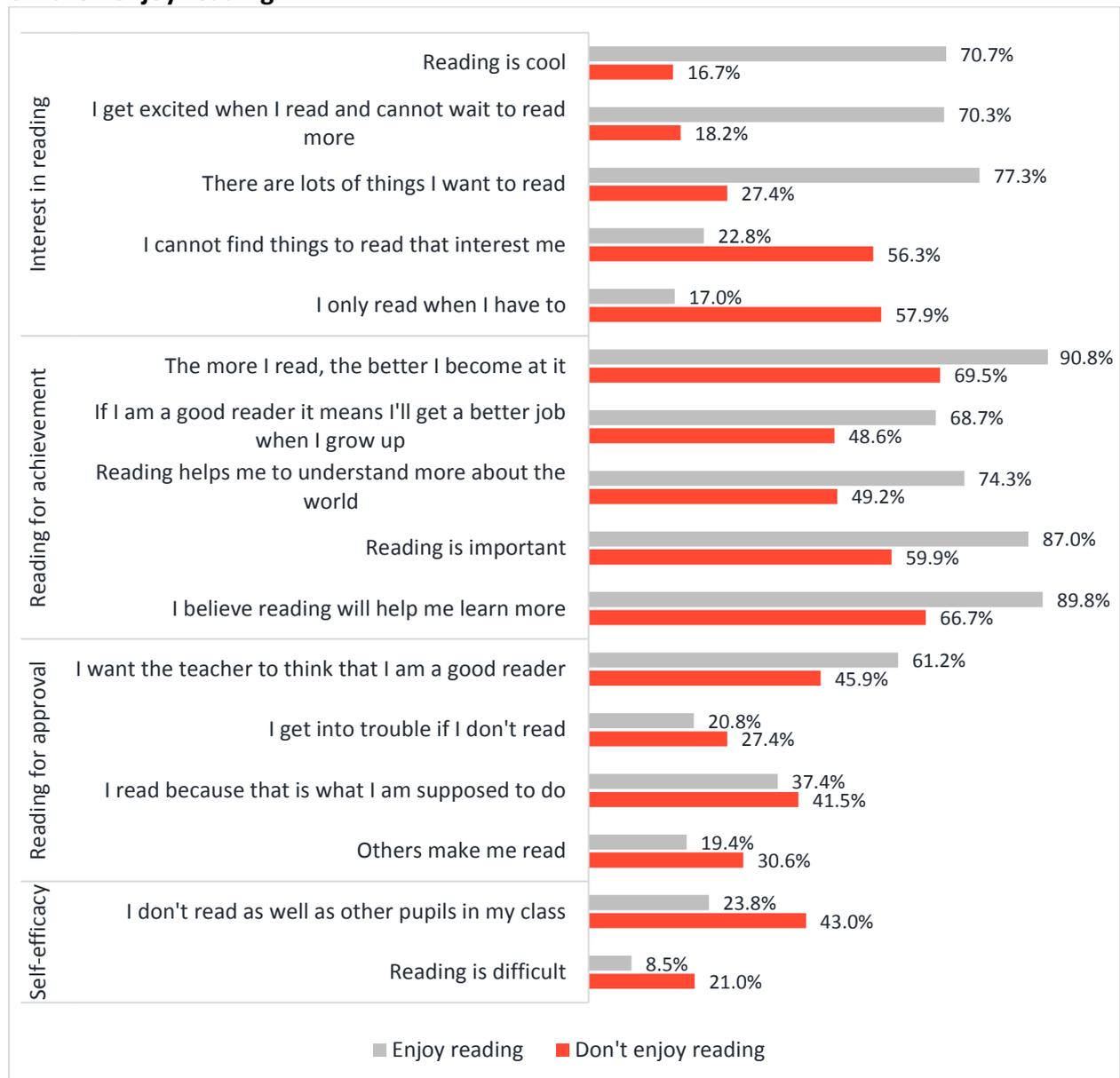
Figure 17: Average (mean) number of minutes spent reading a book or something online (such as websites, instant messages, ebooks) in a typical day outside class by whether or not children and young people enjoy reading



Children who enjoy reading are also more likely to be motivated to read by interest and achievement than children who don't enjoy reading, who are more likely to be motivated by external reasons. To illustrate these differences in greater detail, Figure 17 outlines the percentage agreement for each motivational statement by whether or not children enjoy reading.

Figure 18 shows that children who enjoy reading are four times more likely than children who don't enjoy reading to agree that reading is cool, that they get excited when they read and that there are lots of things they want to read. They are also less likely to agree that they cannot find things to read that interest them and that they only read when they have to. Additionally, they are more likely to agree that if they are a good reader they will get a better job when they grow up and that reading helps them understand about the world. They are also less likely to agree that others make them read and they find reading difficult.

Figure 18: Percentage agreement with motivational statements by whether or not children enjoy reading

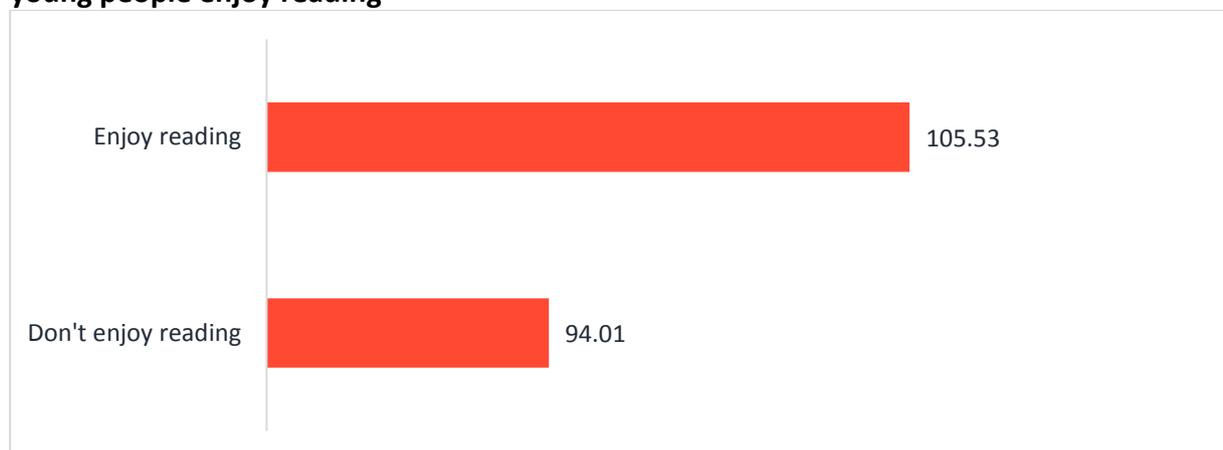


Finally, **we also explored how children's reading enjoyment relates to their reading skills.** We had reading skill data (Digital New Group Reading Test⁸) as well as information from our attitudinal survey for 603 pupils. Our findings show that there is a positive relationship ($r = .383, p < 0.001$) between pupils' overall reading score and their reading enjoyment, which indicates that pupils who score more highly in the reading tests also report higher levels of reading enjoyment.

⁸ The New Group Reading Test (link to GL Assessment) provides standardised reading scores that take into account children's age and are easily interpretable. Like most other educational skill tests, the test is standardised so that the average score is 100, while the spread of the scores (the standard deviation) is set for 15. This means that children who have standardised scores of 85-115 fall within the average reading skills band, while children who score below 85 have below average reading skills and children who score above 115 have above average reading skills.

This association is also seen in the differences in reading enjoyment based on the overall reading score. As shown by Figure 19, children who enjoyed reading (N = 359) had higher average reading scores than children who don't enjoy reading (N = 238).

Figure 19: Average (mean) age-standardised reading score by whether or not children and young people enjoy reading



Children who enjoy reading also did better in terms of technical skills and reading comprehension than children who don't enjoy reading, as children who enjoy reading had higher sentence completion scale scores (343.13 vs. 322.03; indicating that they are better at word knowledge, knowledge of sentence structure and knowledge of grammatical features) and higher passage comprehension scale scores (337.11 vs. 305.65; suggesting that they have higher inferential knowledge and deduction skills) than children who don't enjoy reading.

In order to compare pupils with different reading scores, they were divided into three groups based on their score: below average, average and above average⁹. Figure 20 (overleaf) shows that 3 in 10 pupils who don't enjoy reading read below the average level for their age, which is 3.5 times as many as those who enjoy reading.

Finally, we can also explore differences in reading ages by whether or not children enjoy reading. We will focus here on children and young people aged 10 (Year 5, N = 141), aged 12 (Year 7, N = 166) and aged 14 (Year 9, N = 73) as these are the year groups for whom we had the greatest number of children.

As can be seen in Figure 21 (overleaf), the gulf in reading age between those who enjoy reading and those who don't increases with age. At age 10, the average reading age of those who enjoy reading is 10.8 years, while those who don't enjoy reading at that age have an average reading score of 9.5 years: a difference of 1.3 years. However, at age 14, children who enjoy reading have an average reading age of 15.3 years, while those who don't enjoy reading have an average reading age of just 12 years, a difference of 3.3 years.

⁹ Below average (score below 85): n= 103; average (score 85-115): n= 390; above average: (score above 115): n= 110

Figure 20: Children who enjoy reading and those who don't and their expected reading level

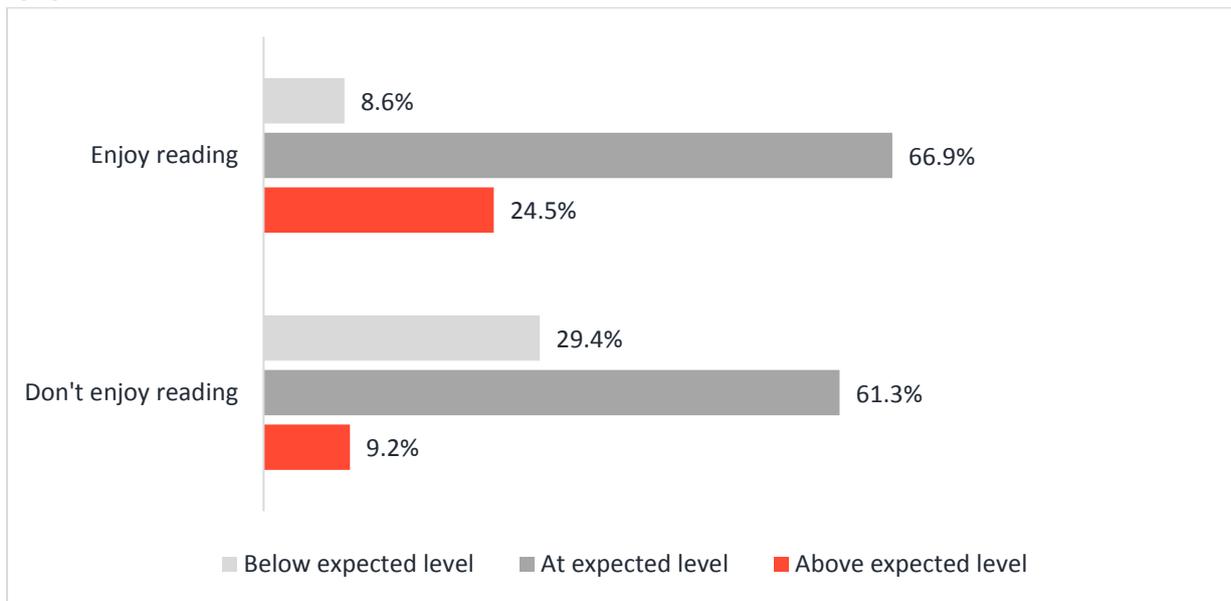
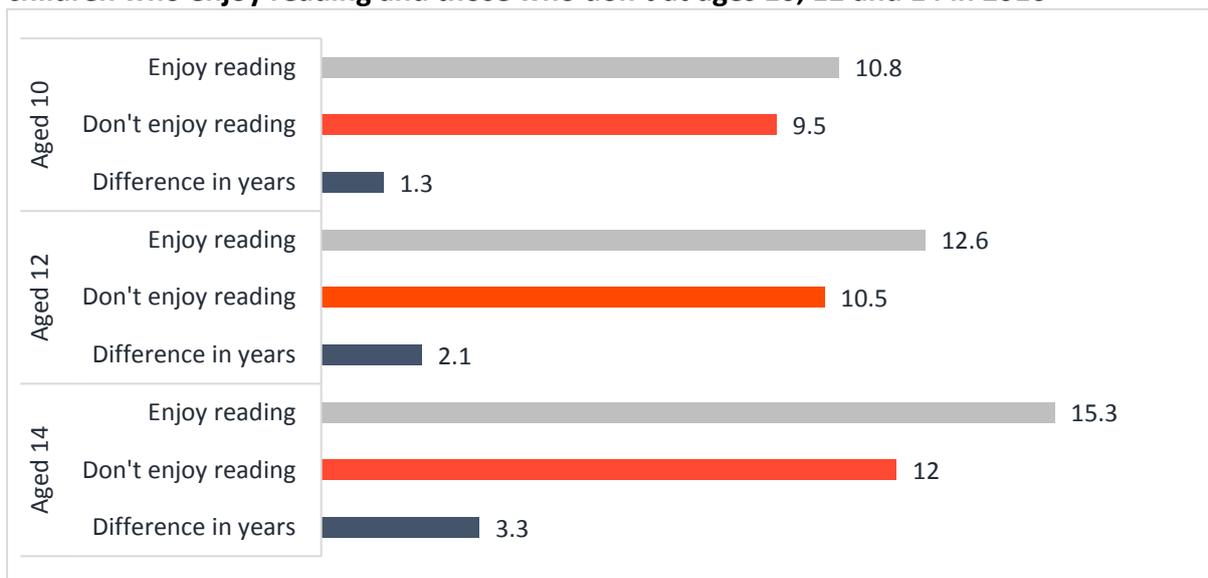


Figure 21: Average reading ages (in years) and average difference in reading ages for children who enjoy reading and those who don't at ages 10, 12 and 14 in 2016



To sum up, the level of reading enjoyment in 2016 is 14% higher than in 2005, with nearly 6 in 10 children enjoying reading. More girls than boys enjoy reading with the gap increasing with age. In general, younger pupils are more likely to enjoy reading than their older peers. While there is no difference between pupils who receive FSMs and those who don't, more boys on FSMs enjoy reading than boys who don't receive FSMs, with the dynamic being reversed for girls. Pupils from Asian ethnic backgrounds were found to be most likely to enjoy reading while pupils from White backgrounds were least likely to say they enjoy reading.

Reading enjoyment is also connected to reading behaviour, reading motivation and reading skills. More pupils who enjoy reading read daily, more widely and more books compared with those who don't enjoy reading. They are also more confident readers, spend less time online, and are more motivated by interest and achievement and less motivated by approval.

Pupils who enjoy reading have higher overall reading scores and higher scores in sentence completion and passage comprehension compared with their peers who don't enjoy reading. The differences are also visible in reading ages with the gap between those who enjoy reading and those who don't increasing with age. Thus, these findings clearly demonstrate the importance of reading enjoyment to children's outcomes.

Our sincere thanks to Slaughter and May for their generous financial contribution that enabled us to conduct this annual survey.

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We are a national charity dedicated to raising literacy levels in the UK. Our research and analysis make us the leading authority on literacy. We run projects in the poorest communities, campaign to make literacy a priority for politicians and parents, and support schools.

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