

## Annual Literacy Survey 2019 Aged 5 to 8

### Setting the baseline

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The National Literacy Trust's Annual Literacy Survey has provided essential data on literacy behaviours, attitudes and enjoyment levels for children and young people aged 9 to 18 since 2005. With over 56,000 children and young people taking part this year alone, it is the largest study of its kind anywhere in the world.

In 2019, with support from McDonald's, we developed a version of the survey for younger children to gain an insight into the levels of reading and writing enjoyment, and attitudes and behaviours of children aged 5 to 8. We were thrilled to receive funding to conduct this study as we believe that building up an evidence base of literacy behaviours, attitudes and enjoyment for children in the first years of primary education is crucial for eliminating literacy issues in the UK.

This report provides the benchmark on young children's reading and writing against which to scope future annual trends of children's literacy levels. It will present general trends on reading and writing enjoyment, behaviours and attitudes, as well as taking a closer look at the findings by gender and by literacy engagement.

Overall, 3,748 children aged 5 to 8 from across the UK took part in an online survey. The children were aged 5 (n = 983), 6 (n = 1,085), 7 (n = 990) and 8 (n = 603). Slightly more girls than boys took part (51.8% vs. 48.2%).

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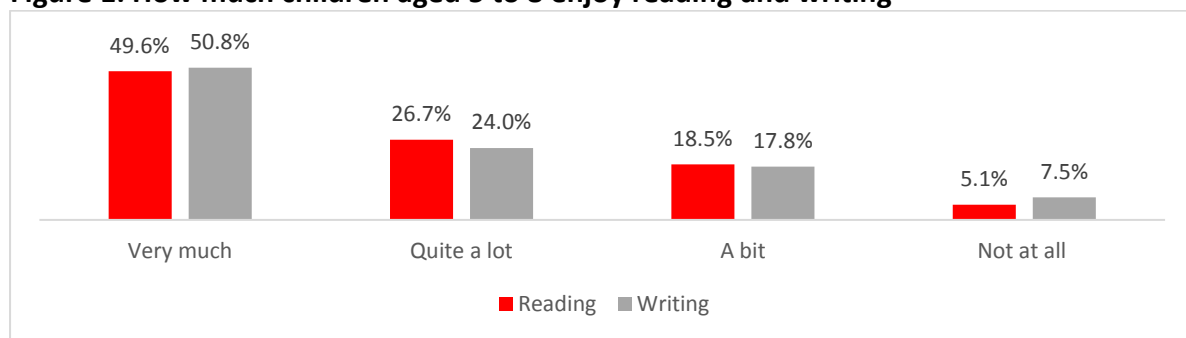
## Key findings

- 76.3% of children aged 5 to 8 enjoy reading and 74.8% enjoy writing in their free time.
  - More girls than boys enjoy reading and writing.
- More children read (53.6%) than write daily (43.6%) outside class.
  - More girls than boys say they read and write daily outside class.
  - Children who enjoy reading and writing are more likely to read and write outside class.
- Children aged 5 to 8 are quite confident in their skills in reading and writing: 78.5% see themselves as good or very good in reading and 75.5% good or very good in writing.
  - Girls, those who enjoy reading and writing, and those who read and write daily are more likely to see themselves as good readers and writers.
- Overall, children hold positive attitudes towards reading and writing. For example, 63.0% would be happy if they got a book as a present. However, many children also hold negative attitudes towards reading and writing. For example, 30.0% say that they only read if they have to.
  - Girls are more likely to hold positive reading and writing attitudes. Similarly, those who enjoy reading and writing, those who read and write daily, and those who see themselves as good readers and writers are more likely to hold positive attitudes.
- 18.6% of children aged 5 to 8 say they do not have any books of their own at home.
- Overall, children aged 5 to 8 are more likely to read and write on paper than on a screen.
  - While there are some gender differences in what children read and write on paper, it is interesting to note that these differences are marginal if reading on screen and typing are considered.
- Going forward, these findings will be used to track trends year on year and will be compared with how children aged 9 to 18 think about reading and writing, and how often they engage in reading and writing. Together, these findings will allow us to establish a long-term picture of reading and writing enjoyment, as well as attitudes and behaviours throughout childhood in the UK.

## Reading and writing enjoyment

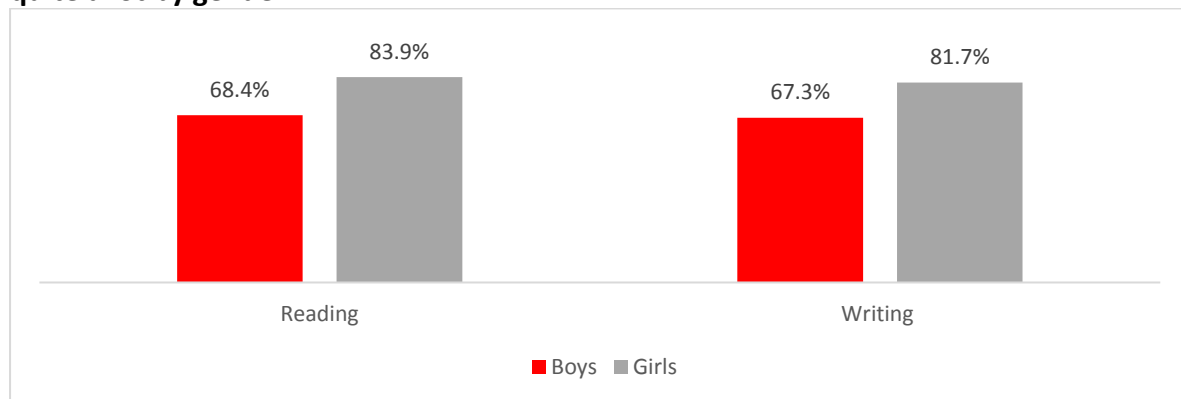
As Figure 1 below shows, children's levels of reading and writing enjoyment are very similar. Over three quarters of children aged 5 to 8 enjoy reading in their free time (76.3%) and writing in their free time (74.8%) either very much or quite a lot. These findings are encouraging as enjoyment of reading and writing has been linked to positive outcomes like increased skills and positive behaviours<sup>1</sup>.

**Figure 1: How much children aged 5 to 8 enjoy reading and writing**



More girls than boys enjoy reading and writing. As Figure 2 shows, more than 8 in 10 girls enjoy reading compared with just under 7 in 10 boys. Similarly, more girls than boys say they enjoy writing very much or quite a lot. The gender differences in enjoyment are consistent with findings with older children from the Annual Literacy Survey.

**Figure 2: Percentage of children aged 5 to 8 who enjoy reading and writing very much and quite a lot by gender**



## Reading and writing behaviour

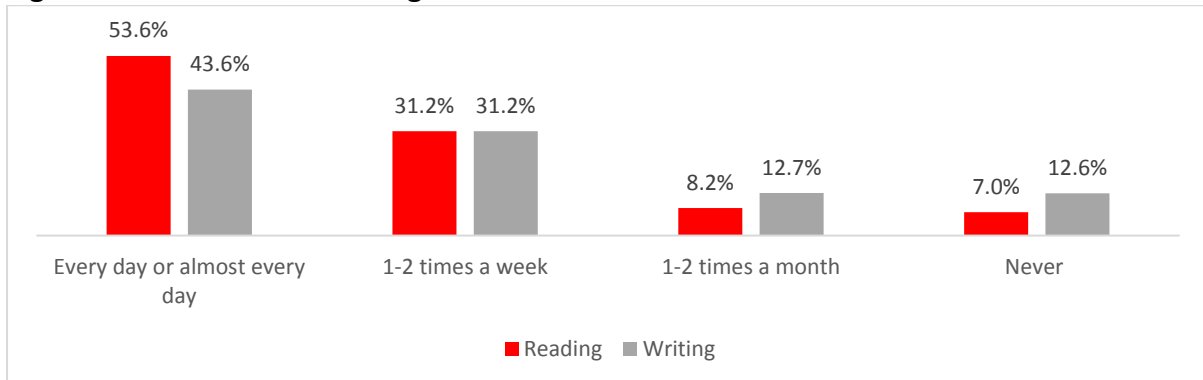
Fewer children actually engage in reading and writing outside class, despite the relatively high levels of reading enjoyment. This is consistent with earlier findings with older children<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> E.g., Clark, C. & Teravainen, A. (2017). *What it means to be a reader at age 11: valuing skills, affective components and behavioural processes: An outline of the evidence*. London: National Literacy Trust; Clark, C. & Teravainen, A. (2017). *Enjoyment of writing and its link to wider writing: Findings from our Annual Literacy Survey 2016*. London: National Literacy Trust.

<sup>2</sup> Clark, C. (2019). *Children and young people's reading in 2017/18: Findings from our Annual Literacy Survey*. London: National Literacy Trust.

Children are also more likely to read than write outside class in their free time. Over half of the children (53.6%) say they read daily outside class compared with under half (43.6%) who say they write daily outside class (see Figure 3). Similarly, while 84.8% of children read something outside class weekly, only 74.8% say this about writing something weekly.

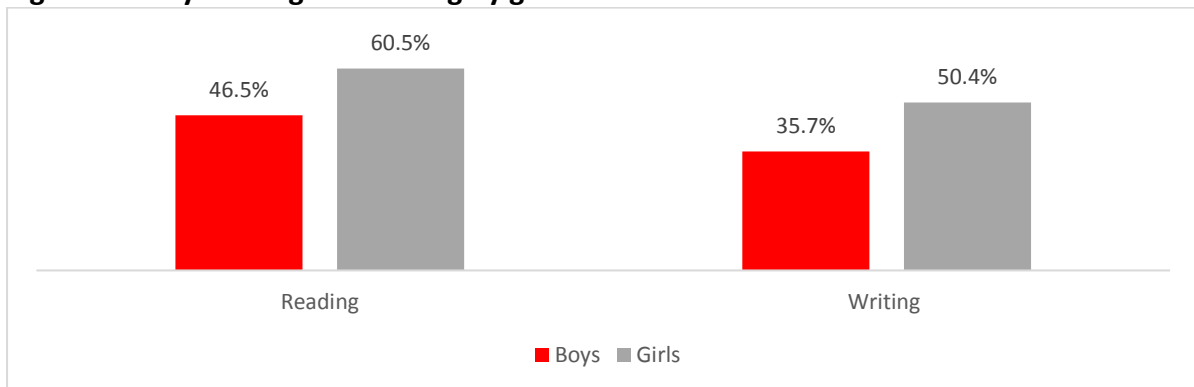
**Figure 3: How often children aged 5 to 8 read and write outside class**



We also asked children how long they read and write for when they engage in these activities. Over 3 in 4 children say they read (77.7%) and write (71.4%) for at least 10 minutes at a time.

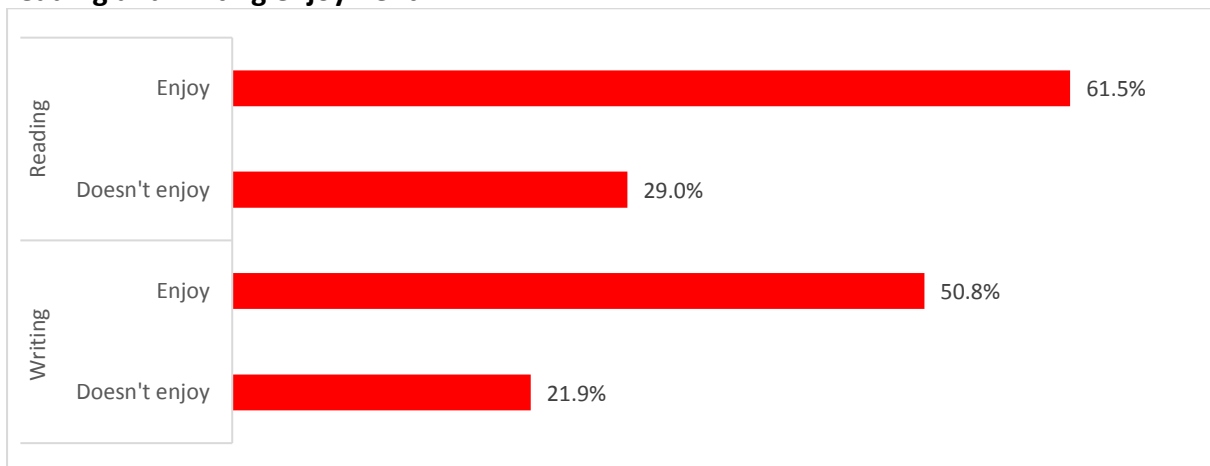
Girls are more likely to engage in reading and writing outside class than boys. As Figure 4 below shows, 3 in 5 girls say they read daily outside class compared with less than half of boys. Similarly with writing, half of the girls and just over a third of boys say they write daily outside class.

**Figure 4: Daily reading and writing by gender**



We also explored the differences in reading and writing frequency by enjoyment. Our data show that reading and writing enjoyment are indeed linked to behaviours for children aged 5 to 8. Over twice as many children who enjoy reading read daily outside class (61.5% vs 29.0%). Similarly, while half of those who enjoy writing say they write outside class daily, only a fifth of those who do not enjoy writing say the same.

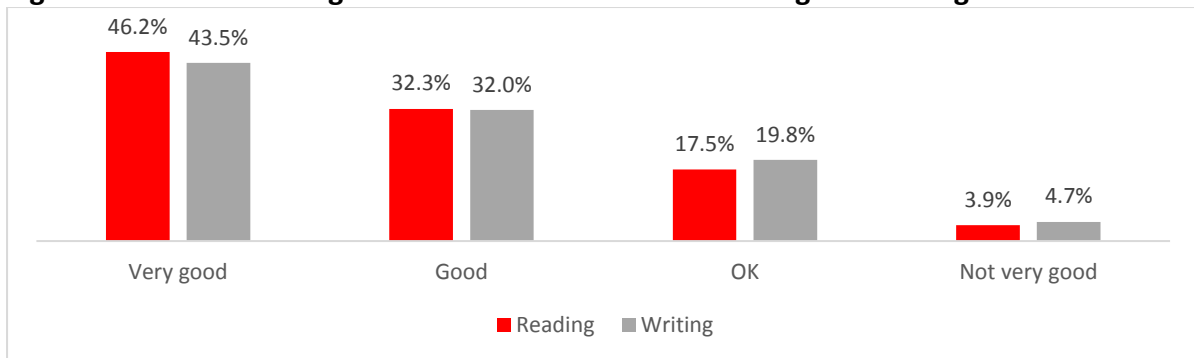
**Figure 5: The percentage of children aged 5 to 8 who read and write daily based on reading and writing enjoyment**



## Self-perception of skills

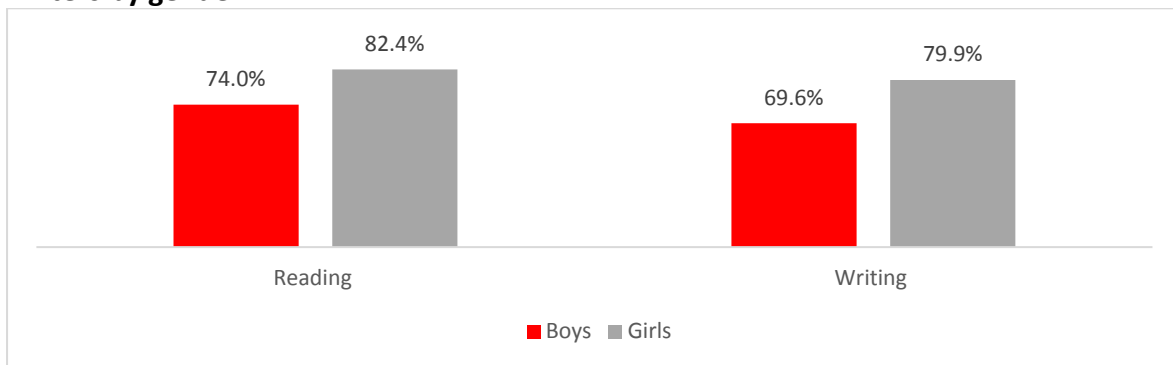
Children were asked how good they see themselves as readers and writers. The findings show that overall children aged 5 to 8 are quite confident in their skills and there are no major differences in how they see themselves as readers and writers. As Figure 6 shows, nearly 4 in 5 (78.5%) felt they are good or very good in reading and three quarters (75.5%) see themselves as good or very good in writing.

**Figure 6: How children aged 5 to 8 see themselves in reading and writing**



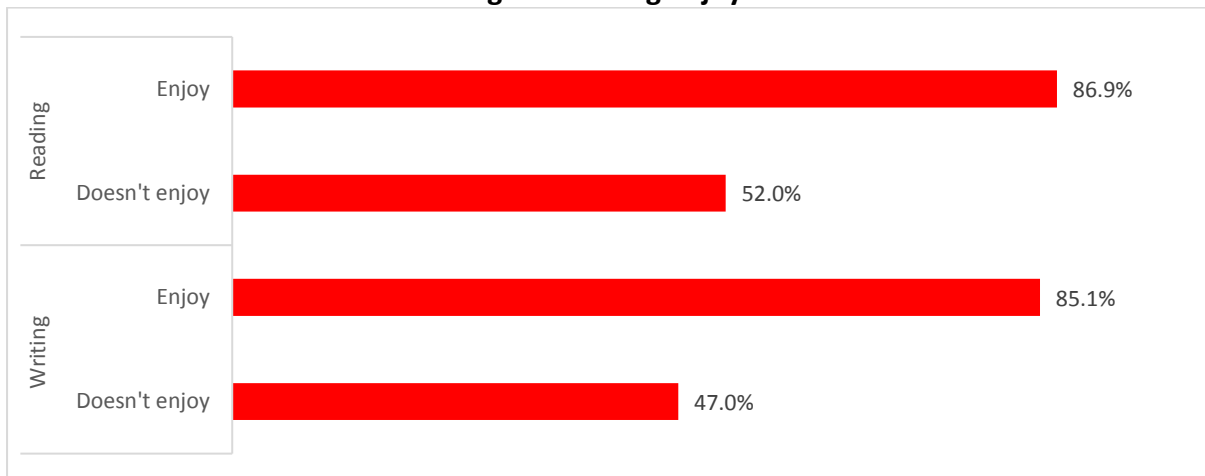
More girls see themselves as good readers and writers than boys (see Figure 7). 4 in 5 girls see themselves as good or very good readers and good or very good writers. On the other hand, three quarters of boys see themselves as good or very good readers and 7 in 10 see themselves as good writers.

**Figure 7: Percentage of children who see themselves as good or very good readers and writers by gender**



Children’s self-perception of their reading and writing skills is also linked to their reading and writing enjoyment and frequency. Figure 8 below presents the percentage of children who see themselves as good or very good readers and writers. It shows that nearly 9 in 10 children who enjoy reading see themselves as good or very good readers compared with just half of those who do not enjoy reading. This is true for writing as well: children and young people who enjoy writing are more likely to see themselves as good writers compared with their peers who do not enjoy writing (85.1% vs. 47.0%).

**Figure 8: The percentage of children aged 5 to 8 who see themselves as good or very good readers and writers based on reading and writing enjoyment**



The same pattern is also observed with daily reading and writing. As Figure 9 below shows, those who read and write daily see themselves as better readers (87.5% vs. 68.6%) and writers (84.9% vs. 68.3%). However, it is interesting to note that the differences in self-perception of skills are largely based on enjoyment.

**Figure 9: The percentage of children aged 5 to 8 who see themselves as good or very good readers and writers based on daily reading and writing**



## Reading and writing attitudes

We also explored how children feel about reading and writing. Overall, children hold positive attitudes towards reading and writing. For example, as Figure 10 below shows, nearly 7 in 10 think learning new words is fun and more than 6 in 10 would be happy if they got a book as a present. Over half the children also think writing is fun and that writing is easy.

However, these results also mean there are many children who do not hold positive attitudes towards reading and writing. For example, 3 in 10 say that they only read if they have to, and over a third say they only write if they have to. Nearly a fifth also feel they never know what to write.

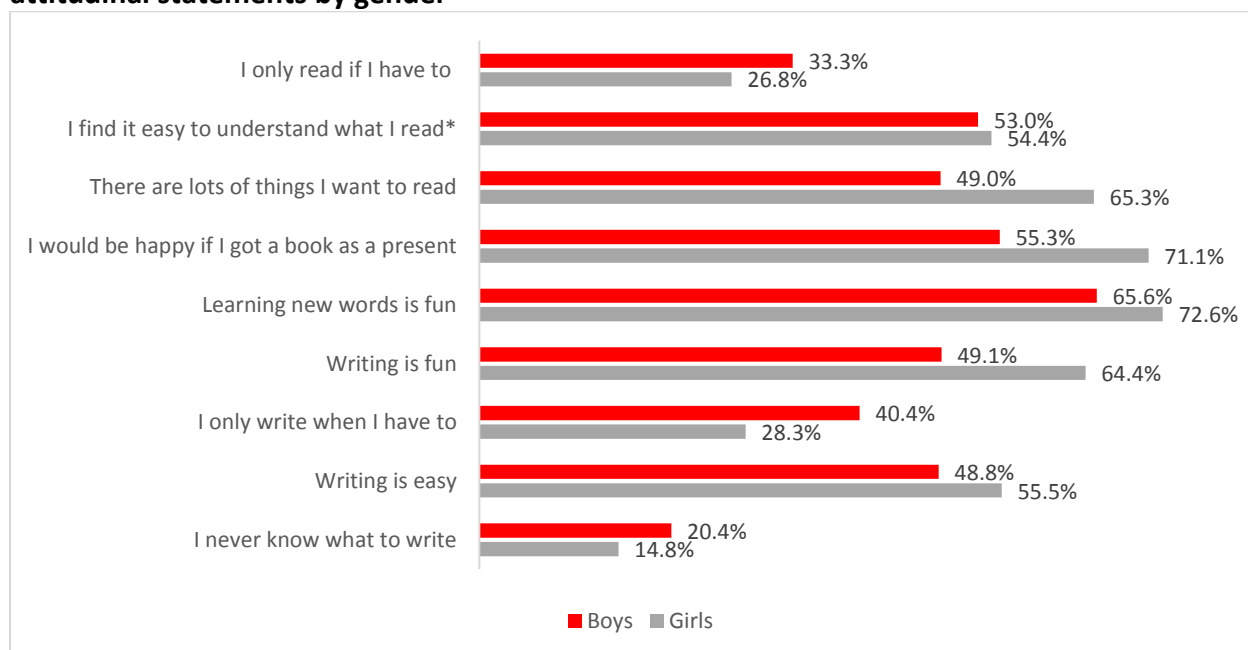
**Figure 10: Percentage of children aged 5 to 8 who agreed to the reading and writing attitudinal statements**



Consistent with the earlier findings on gender, there are also clear gender differences in reading and writing attitudes, with girls having more positive attitudes towards reading and writing (see Figure 11). For example, more girls than boys agree that there are lots of things they want to read (65.3% vs. 49.0%), that they would be happy if they got a book as a present

(71.1% vs. 55.3%), and that writing is fun (64.4% vs. 49.1%). Similarly, fewer girls agree that they only read when they have to (26.8% vs. 33.3%) and write when they have to (28.3% vs. 40.4%). Interestingly, while there was no difference by gender in how easy children find it to understand what they read, more girls find writing easy (55.5% vs. 48.8%).

**Figure 11: Percentage of children aged 5 to 8 who agreed to the reading and writing attitudinal statements by gender**



\*Indicates a non-significant difference

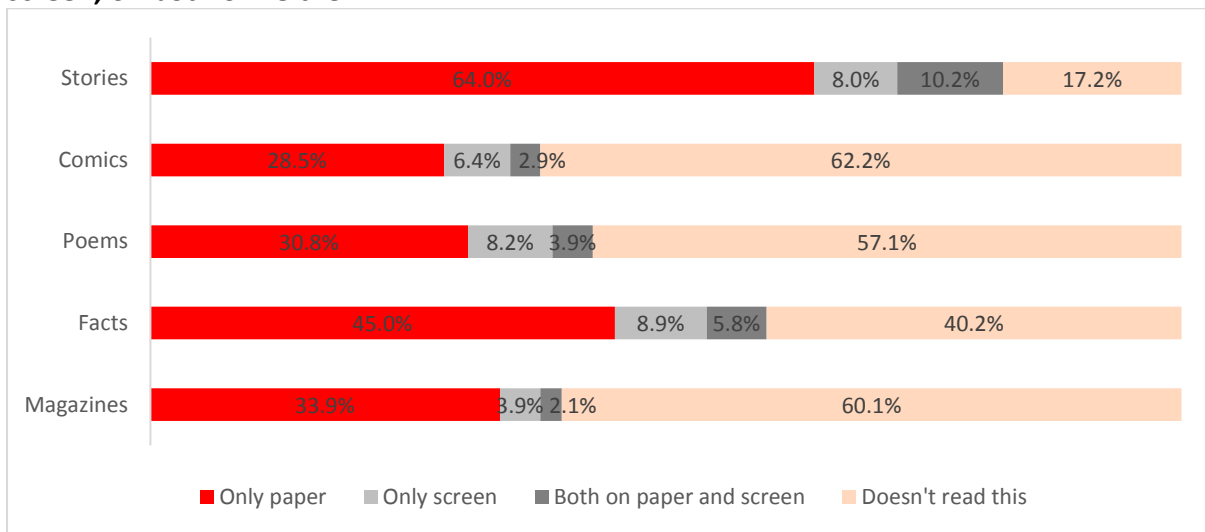
The data also show differences in reading and writing attitudes by reading and writing enjoyment, frequency and self-perception of skills. Unsurprisingly, children who enjoy reading and writing, who read and write daily, and who see themselves as good readers and writers have generally more positive attitudes towards reading and writing than those who do not. The percentage of children who agree with the reading and writing attitudinal items by enjoyment, frequency and self-perception of skills can be found in Appendix 1.

## What do children read and write?

Our survey also explored what and how children read and write. Figure 12 below shows the percentage of children who read various materials on paper, on screen, on both paper and screen or neither. Overall, children are most likely to read on paper. As the figure shows, children most commonly read stories, regardless of the medium, followed by facts. Interestingly, while children are slightly more likely to read magazines than poems on paper (33.9% vs. 30.8%), more children read poems than magazines on screen (8.2% vs. 3.9%).

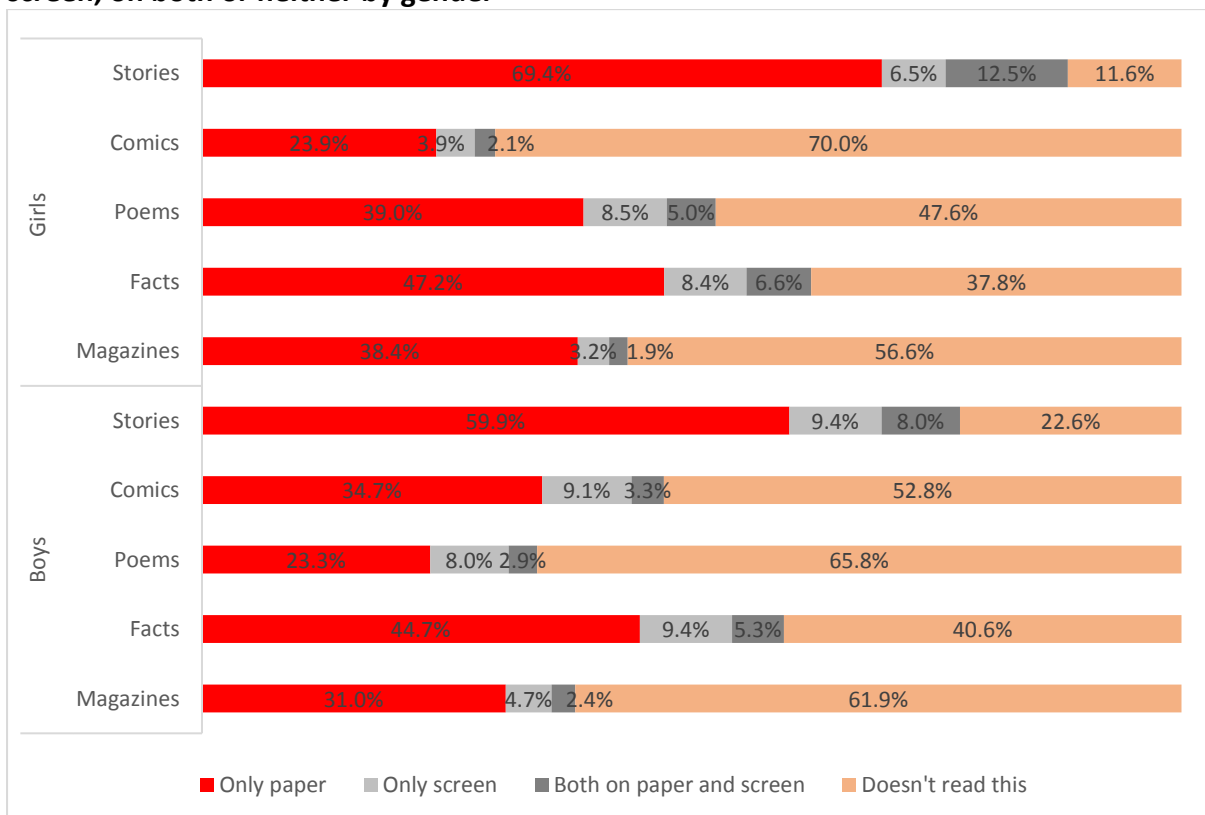


**Figure 12: Percentage of children aged 5 to 8 who read various formats on paper, on screen, on both or neither**



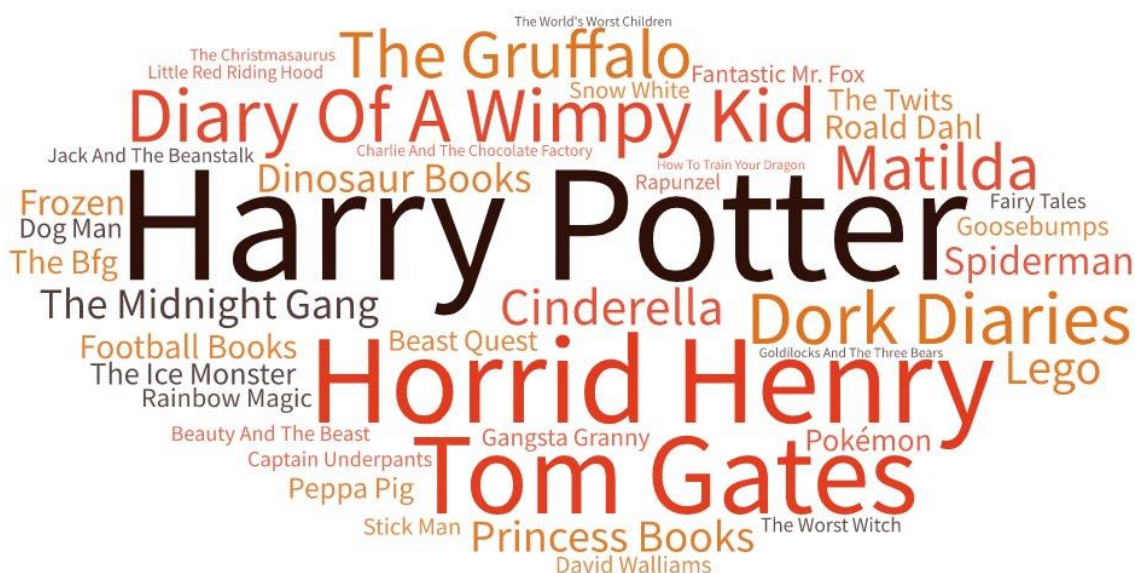
There are also some gender differences in what children read. Overall, more girls than boys read stories, poems and magazines on paper (see Figure 13) while more boys read comics on paper. However, if we look at reading different materials on screen, the gender differences are marginal or non-existent.

**Figure 13: Percentage of children aged 5 to 8 who read various formats on paper, on screen, on both or neither by gender**



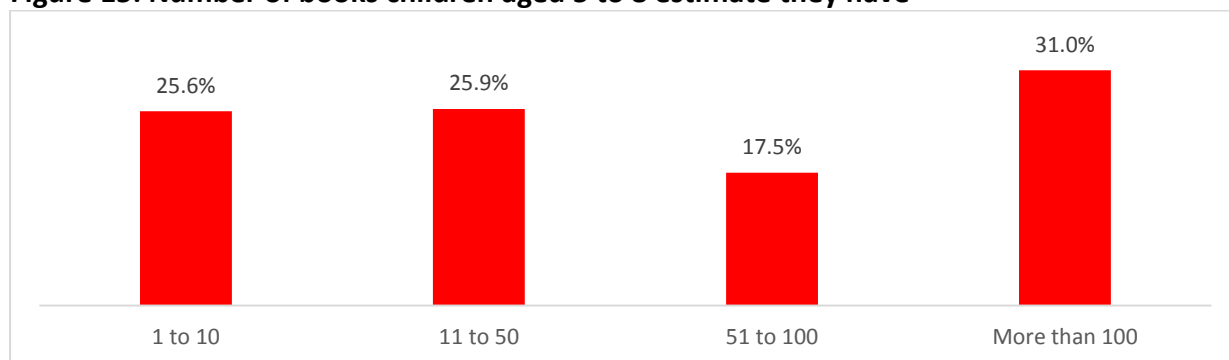
Nearly 9 in 10 (86.2%) children also have a favourite book or story. The word cloud (Figure 14) below shows that titles such as Harry Potter, Horrid Henry, Diary of a Wimpy Kid, Tom Gates and the Gruffalo are among children’s favourites.

**Figure 14: Commonly mentioned books, stories, themes and authors by children aged 5 to 8**



While 4 in 5 (81.4%) children say they have their own books at home, this also means that 1 in 5 children aged 5 to 8 do not have a book of their own at home. Half of the children who have books (51.5%) estimate they have up to 50 books (see Figure 15).

**Figure 15: Number of books children aged 5 to 8 estimate they have**



Finally, we also asked children about what they write in their free time and how they write it. Similarly to reading, children are most likely to write on paper, regardless of the type of writing they do. Figure 14 presents the percentage of children who write different formats on paper, by typing, both on paper and typing, or neither. It shows that just under half of the children write letters, in a diary and their own stories on paper. Fewer children write notes regardless of the medium.

**Figure 11: Percentage of children aged 5 to 8 who write various formats on paper, on screen, on both or neither**

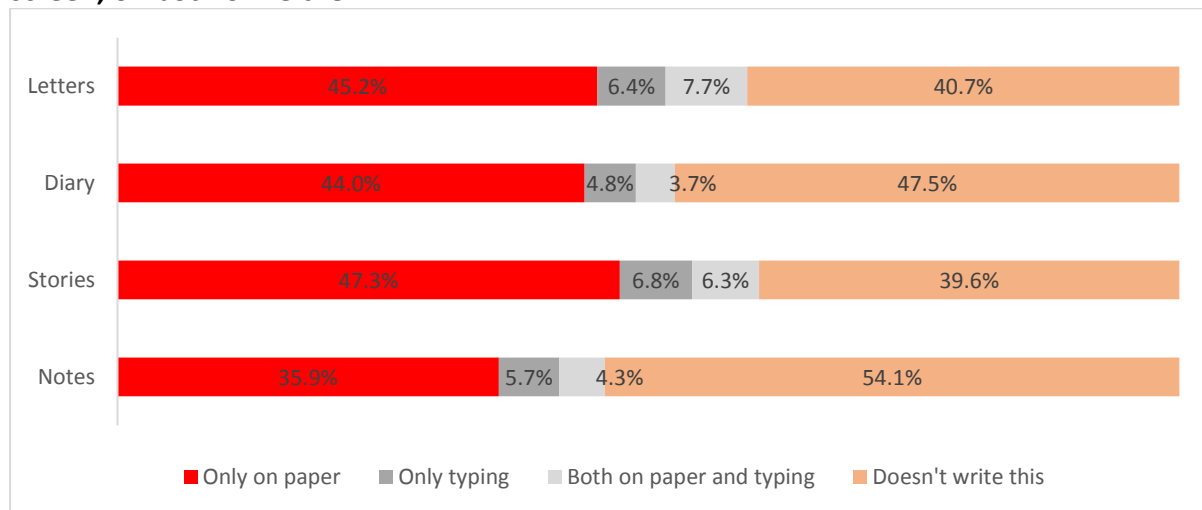
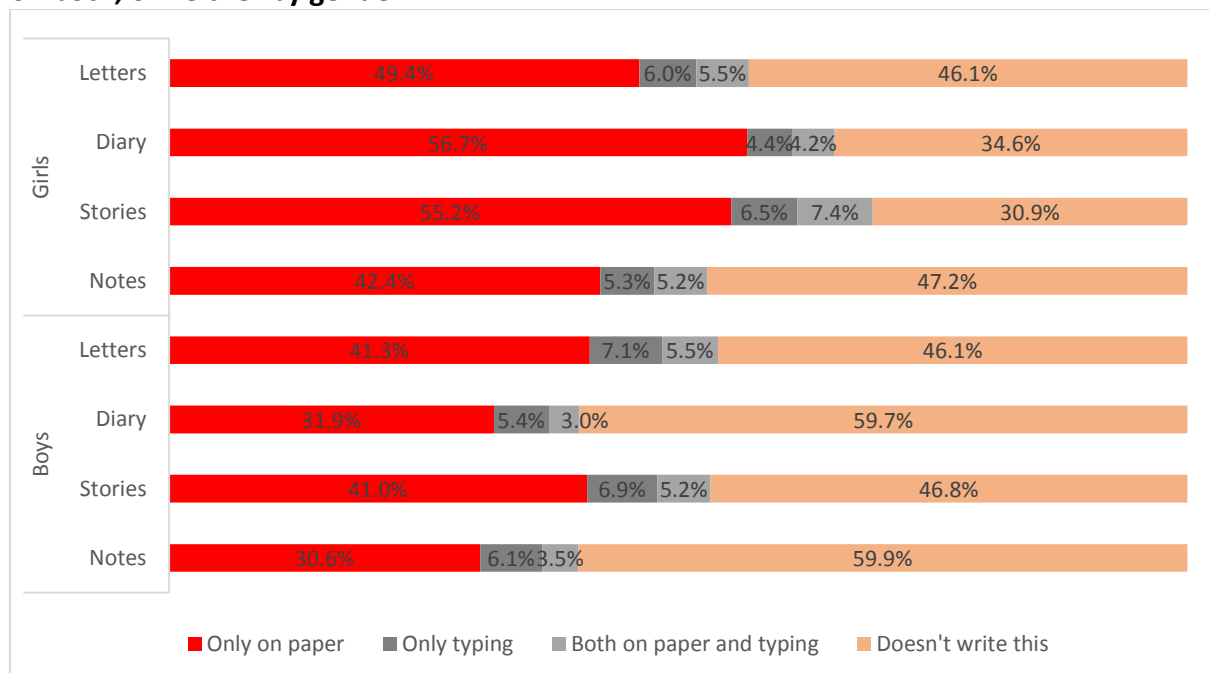


Figure 16 below shows that there are also gender differences in what and how children aged 5 to 8 write. Generally, girls are more likely to write letters, diaries, stories and notes on paper. Interestingly, the differences in the percentage of children who type any of these formats are marginal.

**Figure 12: Percentage of children aged 5 to 8 who write various formats on paper, typing, on both, or neither by gender**



## Conclusion

This baseline report shows that overall children aged 5 to 8 enjoy reading and writing, have positive attitudes towards reading and writing, and see themselves as good readers and writers. At the same time, fewer children actually engage in reading and writing outside class and many still hold somewhat negative attitudes towards these activities. In addition, many children aged 5 to 8 say they do not have a book of their own at home.

The findings of this report also corroborate earlier findings with older children and young people, which show that girls are more likely to enjoy reading and writing, read and write daily outside class, and hold positive attitudes towards reading and writing. Similarly, we can also see that children who enjoy reading and writing, who read and write daily, who see themselves as good readers and writers, and hold positive attitudes towards reading and writing are generally also more engaged in the other aspects of literacy.

Going forward, these findings will be used to track trends year on year and will be compared with how children aged 9 to 18 think about reading and writing and how often they engage in reading and writing. Together, these findings will allow us to establish a long-term picture of reading and writing enjoyment, attitudes and behaviours throughout childhood in the UK.

## Appendix 1

**Table 1: Percentage agreement with reading attitudinal statements by reading enjoyment, daily reading and self-perception of reading skill**

	Enjoys reading	Doesn't enjoy reading	Reads daily	Doesn't read daily	Has high perception of reading skill	Has low perception of reading skill
I only read when I have to	28.0%	36.0%	25.4%	35.3%	28.9%	34.3%
I find it easy to understand what I read	60.0%	33.5%	61.5%	45.1%	61.6%	25.7%
There are lots of things I want to read	67.1%	24.2%	68.0%	44.4%	62.8%	35.5%
I would be happy if I got a book as a present	71.0%	37.9%	71.2%	53.7%	66.7%	48.6%
Learning new words is fun	74.7%	49.5%	75.5%	61.2%	72.3%	55.6%

**Table 2: Percentage agreement with writing attitudinal statements by writing enjoyment, daily writing and self-perception of writing skill**

	Enjoys writing	Doesn't enjoy writing	Reads daily	Doesn't read daily	Has high perception of reading skill	Has low perception of reading skill
Writing is fun	70.9%	14.5%	72.5%	44.9%	65.5%	30.0%
I only write when I have to	31.3%	45.4%	30.8%	38.0%	32.3%	42.3%
Writing is easy	60.1%	30.9%	65.9%	42.9%	61.4%	26.3%
I never know what to write	17.3%	21.6%	18.2%	18.3%	16.6%	23.5%

Our sincere thanks to McDonald's for the generous financial contribution that enabled us to conduct this survey.

### About the National Literacy Trust

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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