

Children and young people's reading in 2017/18

Findings from our Annual Literacy Survey

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We first began asking children and young people about their reading habits in 2005. Acknowledging the importance of yearly trend data, we established our Annual Literacy Survey in 2010, which tracks UK children and young people's reading and writing enjoyment, attitudes and behaviours year-on-year.

This report outlines findings from our eighth Annual Literacy Survey relating to children and young people's reading. 49,049 children and young people aged eight to 18 in the UK participated in our survey between November 2017 and January 2018. Where possible, we relate our findings back to the reading surveys we conducted from 2005.

Key findings

- **After six years of increasing reading enjoyment levels, we saw a decrease in enjoyment in 2017/18.** In 2017/18, 56.6% of children and young people enjoyed reading either very much or quite a lot; 33.1% only enjoyed reading a bit and 10.3% did not enjoy reading at all. Overall, the percentage of children and young people who enjoyed reading is down from 58.6% in 2016.
- **Levels of daily reading decreased again.** While daily reading levels had consistently increased between 2012 (28.4%) to 2015 (43.0%), they dropped in 2016 to 32.0% and declined further to 30.8% in 2017/18.

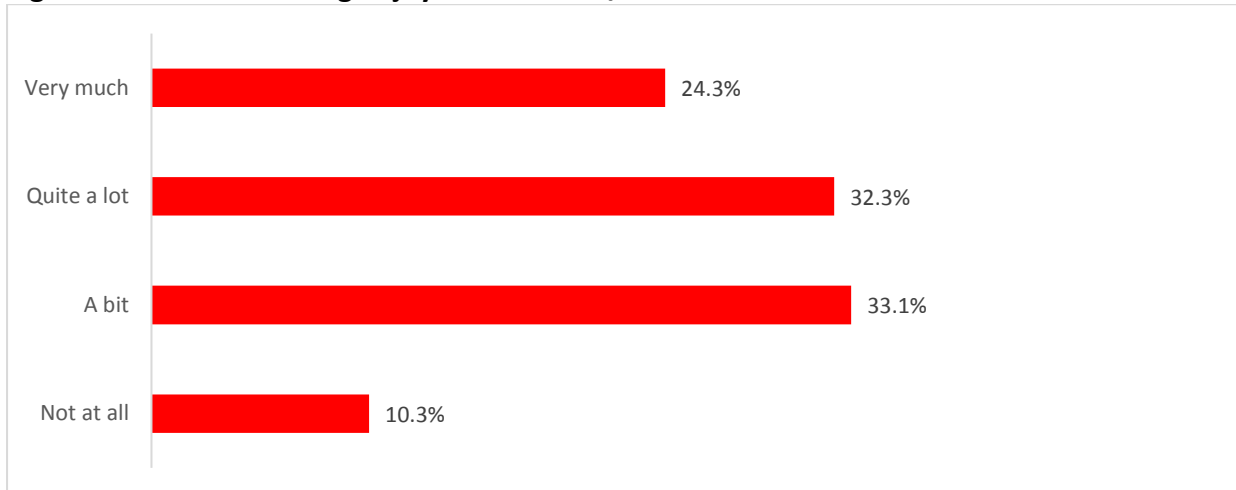
- **Overall, reading engagement has declined gradually over the past four years.** Children and young people’s reading engagement (their enjoyment of reading, reading frequency and attitudes towards reading) has steadily fallen from 14.03 out of 19 in 2013 to 12.47 out of 19 in 2017/18.
- **Children and young people are slightly more likely to read more formats in print than digitally.** In 2017/18 we asked children and young people to indicate whether they read seven formats either in print or digitally. Poems, non-fiction, comics, magazines and fiction are still predominantly read in print format, though a sizeable percentage also read these formats digitally. By contrast, the news and song lyrics, in particular, are mostly read on screen. On average, children read 2.95 print formats outside school at least once a month compared with 2.12 formats on screen.
- **Children and young people generally thought positively about reading in 2017/18.** For example, 83.0% agreed that reading will help them learn more and 54.1% agreed that there are lots of things they want to read. However, only 41.1% agreed that reading is cool, and a sizeable percentage agree that they cannot find things to read that interest them (33.7%) or that they read only when they have to (30.0%).
- **Children and young people who enjoy reading and read daily are more likely to read above the level expected for their age.** In 2017/18 we had reading skill data for 1,098 pupils aged 11 to 15. Children and young people who enjoy reading are five times more likely to read above the level expected for their age compared with their peers who don’t enjoy reading (17.0% vs. 3.5%). Similarly, children and young people who read daily in their free time are four times more likely to read above the expected level for their age compared with their peers who don’t read daily (22.3% vs. 5.7%).

Levels of reading enjoyment decreased in 2017/18 for the first time in six years

Raising levels of reading enjoyment across the UK is a central part of our programme and policy work. Our annual survey therefore contains a question that assesses how much children and young people enjoy reading.

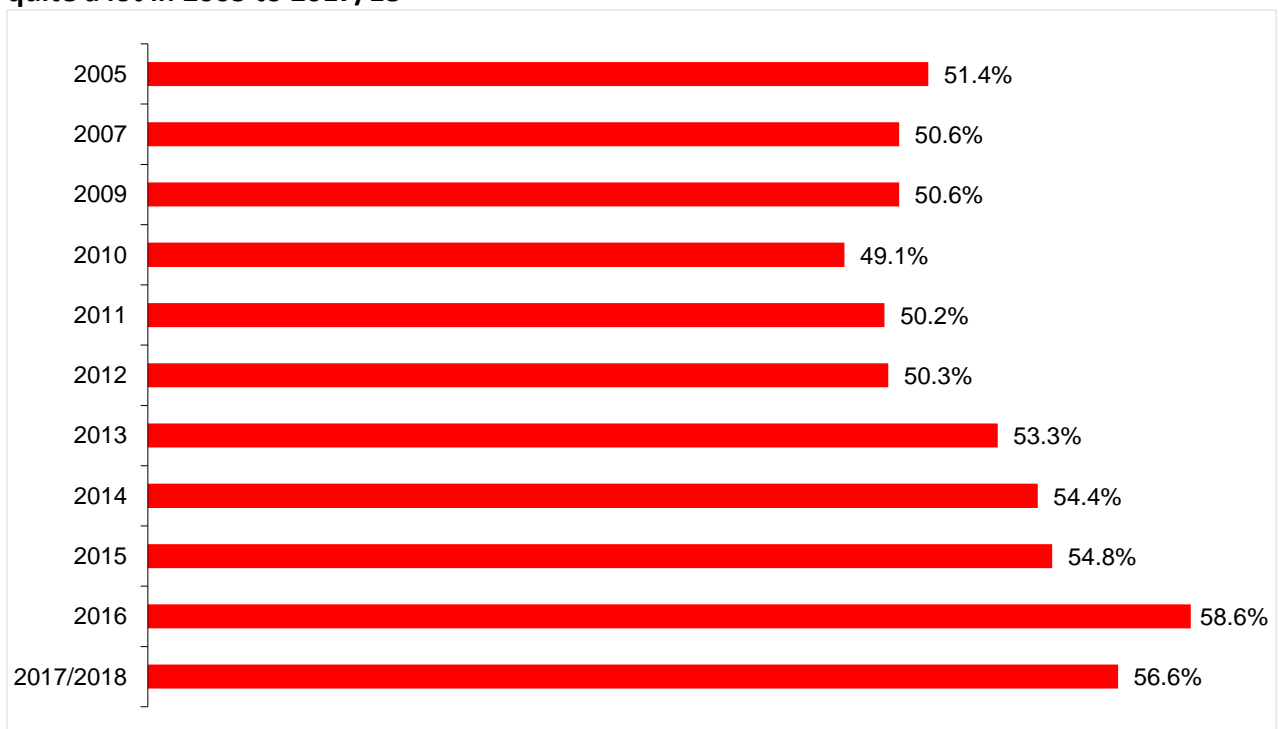
Our data from 2017/18 show that nearly 1 in 4 children or young people enjoyed reading very much, while almost 1 in 3 enjoyed reading quite a lot (see Figure 1). This means that nearly 3 in 5 said that they enjoy reading either very much or quite a lot, using a combination of responses to compare trends over time (see below). Only 1 child in 10 said that they don’t enjoy reading at all.

Figure 1: Levels of reading enjoyment in 2017/18



As can be seen in Figure 2, children and young people’s levels of reading enjoyment decreased between 2016 and 2017/18; the first decrease in six years. This follows a year when we recorded the highest levels of enjoyment since we first starting surveying children and young people in 2005.

Figure 2: Percentage of children and young people who enjoy reading either very much or quite a lot in 2005 to 2017/18



Who enjoyed reading in 2017/18? Figure 3 shows that more girls than boys said that they enjoy reading either very much or quite a lot. There are also differences by age, with nearly twice as many children aged 8 to 11 as those aged 14 to 16 saying that they enjoy reading.

Last year we reported that the enjoyment gap between those who receive free school meals (FSM) and those who don’t closed in 2016, with an identical percentage of FSM and non-

FSM pupils saying that they enjoy reading. This year, that gap opened up again, with more non-FSM than FSM pupils saying that they enjoy reading.

Finally, fewer pupils from white ethnic backgrounds said that they enjoy reading compared with pupils from other ethnic backgrounds. Pupils from Asian backgrounds are most likely to say that they enjoy reading.

Figure 3: Enjoying reading either very much or quite a lot in 2017/18 – demographic breakdown

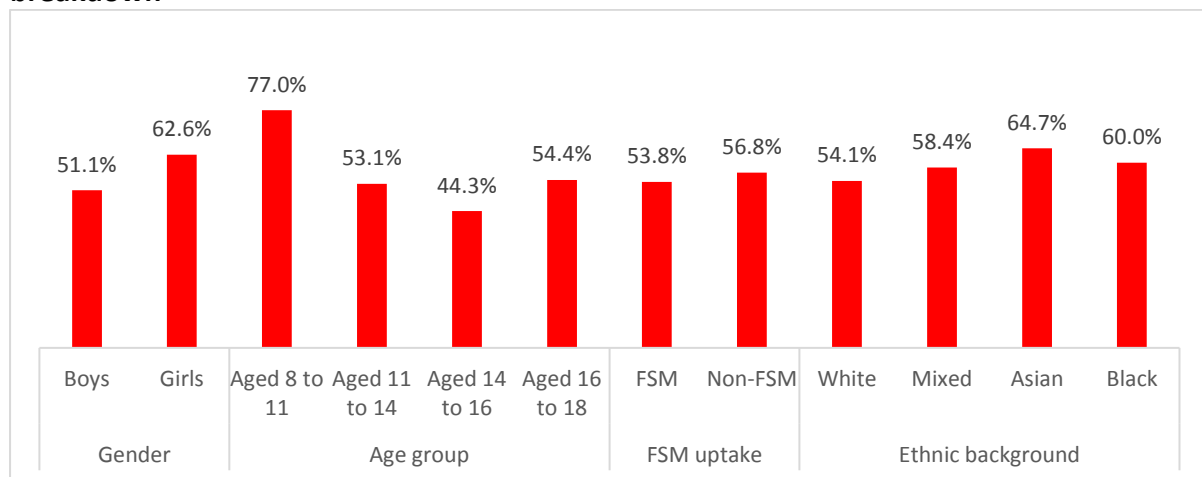


Table 1 overleaf shows levels of reading enjoyment by demographic background over time between 2005 and 2017/18.

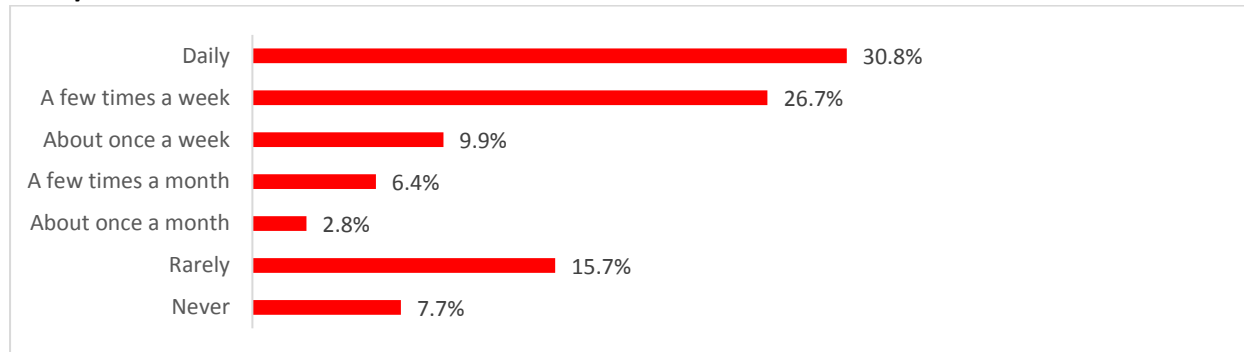
Table 1: Enjoying reading either very much or quite a lot by demographic breakdown between 2005 and 2017/18

	Boys	Girls	Aged 8 to 11	Aged 11 to 14	Aged 14 to 16	FSM	Non-FSM	White	Mixed	Asian	Black
2005	46.1%	56.8%	67.5%	44.3%	32.0%	46.5%	50.2%	-	-	-	-
2010	42.3%	55.4%	68.1%	45.8%	32.5%	44.1%	49.7%	48.3%	55.4%	55.1%	54.9%
2011	43.7%	56.7%	73.0%	47.2%	34.4%	45.3%	50.8%	49.4%	56.8%	58.2%	60.7%
2012	43.9%	56.8%	64.0%	45.5%	36.3%	47.7%	50.7%	49.5%	54.9%	56.5%	53.9%
2013	47.1%	59.8%	65.8%	49.5%	36.7%	49.6%	53.9%	53.5%	57.4%	59.1%	49.7%
2014	47.2%	61.6%	65.6%	50.3%	43.4%	50.4%	54.9%	53.6%	60.6%	61.1%	59.8%
2015	47.8%	61.2%	72.6%	51.7%	40.2%	53.4%	55.1%	53.9%	58.3%	61.4%	59.9%
2016	52.4%	64.9%	77.6%	55.2%	43.8%	58.3%	58.3%	54.5%	59.6%	64.8%	59.5%
2017/18	51.1%	62.6%	77.0%	53.1%	44.3%	53.8%	56.3%	54.1%	58.4%	64.7%	60.0%

Levels of daily reading continue to decline

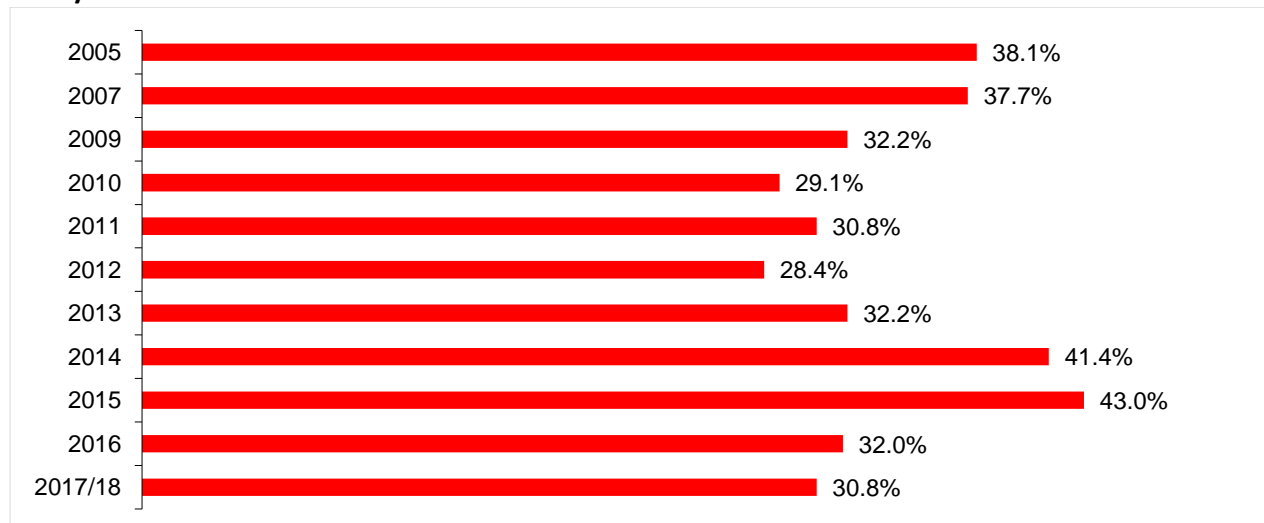
In 2017/18, nearly 3 in 10 children and young people said that they read something in their free time every day (see Figure 4). A further 1 in 4 said that they read something a few times a week. However, 1 in 6 rarely read in their free time, and 1 in 13 said that they never read.

Figure 4: Levels of frequency with which children and young people read outside class in 2017/18



The percentage of children and young people who say that they read outside class on a daily basis has continued to decline over the past year (Figure 5), dropping by 1.2 percentage points from 32.0% in 2016 to 30.8% in 2017/18.

Figure 5: Percentage of children and young people who read daily outside class in 2005 to 2017/18



Who reads daily outside class in 2017/18? As can be seen in Figure 6, more girls than boys said that they read daily outside class. There are also differences by age, with twice as many children aged 8 to 11 as those aged 14 to 16 saying that they read daily in their free time. More non-FSM pupils than FSM pupils say that they read daily, and pupils from white and Black ethnic backgrounds are least likely to say that they read every day in their free time.

Figure 6: Percentage of children and young people who read daily outside class in 2017/18 – demographic background

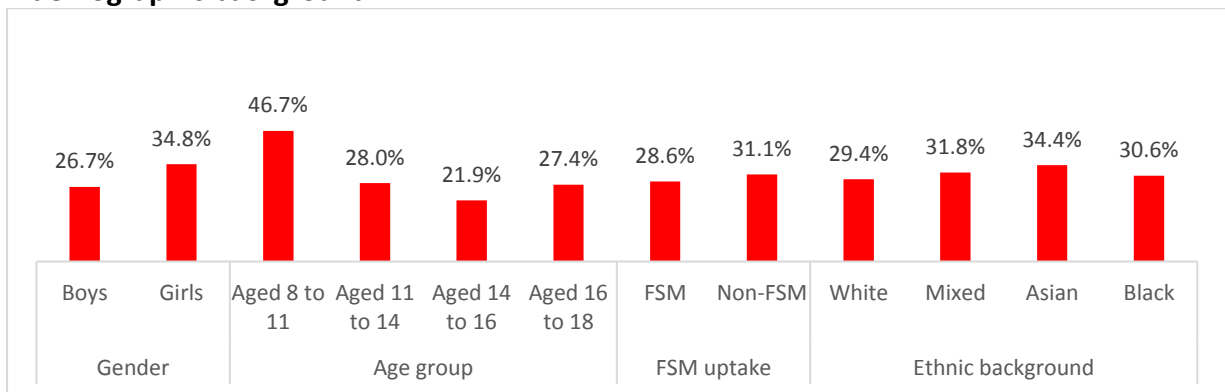


Table 2 (overleaf) outlines the percentage of children and young people who read daily outside class broken down by demographic background

Reading engagement

So far, we have looked at the trends over time for reading enjoyment and daily reading. In addition to this, we thought it might be interesting to explore how children and young people’s engagement with reading as a whole has changed over time.

To this end, we constructed a variable that summed the responses across several of our reading variables that have been asked since 2014, with positive responses being allocated higher scores (for a total of 19 scores). The components summed are reading enjoyment (max score of 4), reading frequency (max score of 7) and four reading attitudes: ‘I only read when I have to’, ‘reading is cool’, ‘I cannot find things to read that interest me’ and ‘if I am a good reader then I will get a better job when I grow up’ (max score of 8).

Figure 7 looks at the average reading engagement scores since 2013 and shows that children and young people’s engagement has gradually been declining.

Figure 7: Average (mean) reading engagement score (out of 19) between 2013 and 2017/18

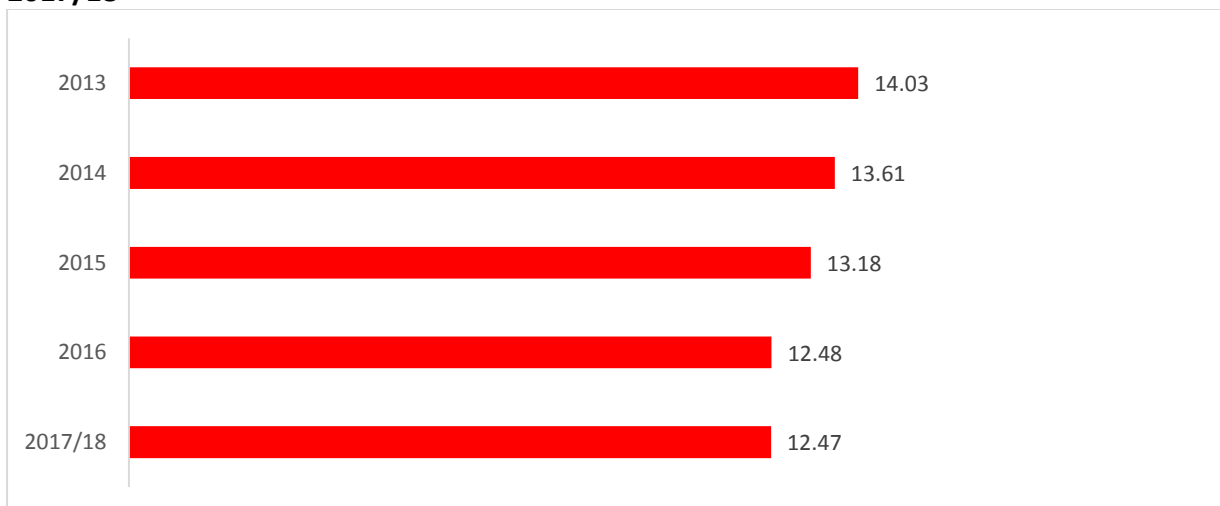


Table 2: Percentage of children and young people who read daily in their free time by demographic breakdown between 2005 and 2017/18

	Boys	Girls	Aged 8 to 11	Aged 11 to 14	Aged 14 to 16	FSM	Non-FSM	White	Mixed	Asian	Black
2005	35.0%	42.0%	40.5%	25.8%	21.4%	31.0%	39.0%	-	-	-	-
2010	24.1%	33.8%	40.9%	26.7%	21.7%	22.9%	30.2%	29.3%	32.4%	28.6%	32.6%
2011	26.3%	35.3%	42.9%	29.0%	22.9%	28.6%	31.2%	30.7%	34.2%	32.6%	38.3%
2012	24.3%	32.5%	37.6%	24.5%	20.3%	24.9%	29.0%	28.7%	28.8%	27.8%	32.8%
2013	28.2%	36.6%	40.7%	28.4%	24.6%	28.7%	32.8%	32.7%	33.7%	32.2%	35.0%
2014	35.8%	46.5%	45.9%	38.5%	38.2%	36.5%	42.1%	42.2%	44.9%	39.8%	42.8%
2015	36.0%	49.5%	45.5%	42.0%	42.4%	38.2%	44.0%	43.8%	46.0%	41.9%	47.6%
2016	27.5%	36.5%	46.3%	28.9%	22.6%	28.8%	32.0%	31.6%	32.1%	34.5%	31.6%
2017/18	26.7%	34.8%	46.7%	28.0%	21.9%	28.6%	31.1%	29.4%	31.8%	34.4%	30.6%

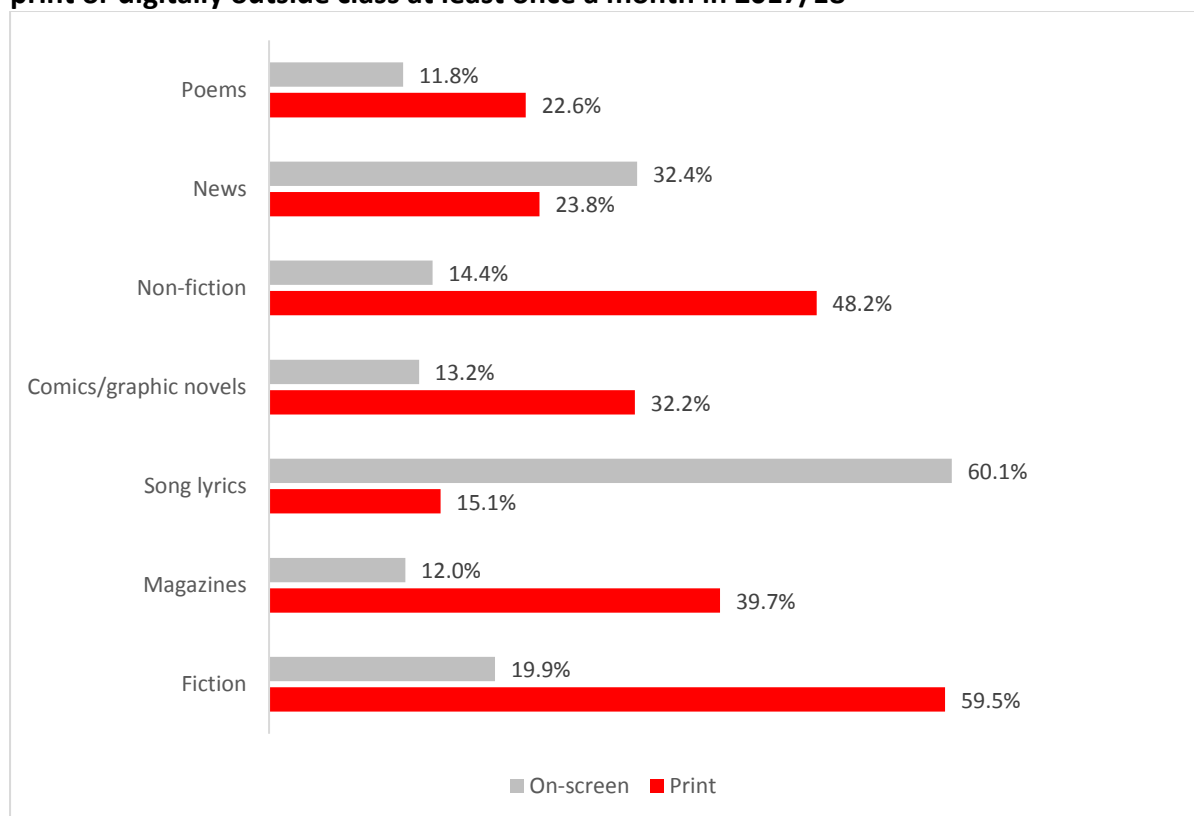
Other findings for 2017/18

Formats being read

In 2017/18 we changed the way we ask children and young people about the formats they read in their free time, which means that we will not be able to look at trends in this respect. However, we will now be able to track over time how many children read various formats either in print or digitally.

In 2017/18 we asked children and young people to indicate whether they read seven formats either in print or digitally. Figure 8 shows that poems, non-fiction, comics, magazines and fiction are still predominantly read in print format, though a sizeable percentage also read these formats digitally. By contrast, the news and song lyrics, in particular, are mostly read on-screen.

Figure 8: Percentage of children and young people who read a variety of formats either in print or digitally outside class at least once a month in 2017/18



Overall, children and young people are, on average, slightly more likely to read more formats in print than digitally (2.95 vs 2.12 formats).

We also asked about three formats that can only be read on-screen: websites, text messages and instant messages. As can be seen in Figure 9, most children and young people

said that they read text messages in their free time, followed by websites and instant messages.

Figure 9: Percentage of children and young people who read a variety of online formats outside class at least once a month in 2017/18



Table 3 (overleaf) outlines the percentage of children and young people who read various formats either in print or on screen broken down by demographic background.

Table 3: Percentage of children and young people who read various formats on screen or in print by demographic breakdown in 2017/18

	Boys	Girls	Aged 8 to 11	Aged 11 to 14	Aged 14 to 16	Aged 16 to 18	FSM	Non-FSM	White	Mixed	Asian	Black
Poems - Screen	8.7%	14.4%	17.5%	10.7%	9.1%	12.3%	14.2%	11.2%	9.3%	15.0%	16.2%	15.8%
Poems - Paper	17.2%	27.5%	37.0%	19.4%	18.1%	14.8%	24.8%	21.8%	18.4%	26.6%	30.8%	28.0%
News - Screen	30.7%	34.3%	17.3%	32.1%	49.1%	71.8	26.6%	34.5%	32.1%	35.4%	39.0%	34.0%
News - Paper	23.9%	23.8%	26.3%	23.2%	22.1%	27.9%	23.2%	24.1%	21.5%	26.7%	29.2%	30.8%
Non-fiction - Screen	14.4%	14.0%	15.4%	13.6%	15.4%	19.8%	15.9%	14.3%	12.5%	17.4%	18.1%	18.0%
Non-fiction - Paper	48.5%	48.9%	60.1%	47.8	34.7%	41.1%	44.2%	48.7%	46.2%	49.5%	54.8%	50.4%
Comics - Screen	16.7%	9.5%	12.6%	13.1%	14.9%	12.0%	15.7%	12.7%	10.9%	15.9%	16.9%	19.0%
Comics - Paper	39.9%	25.5%	38.9%	33.1%	21.8%	12.7%	32.1%	32.0%	29.8%	38.5%	37.2%	36.7%
Song lyrics - Screen	47.8%	71.9%	48.9%	62.1%	65.6%	66.8%	60.4%	60.9%	60.2%	66.3%	60.8%	64.3%
Song lyrics - Paper	10.9%	18.6%	21.3%	14.6%	9.5%	8.1%	15.8%	14.7%	14.6%	17.2%	13.1%	17.0%
Magazines - Screen	10.2%	13.4%	8.7%	11.2%	18.4%	24.9%	12.4%	12.1%	11.5%	13.1%	12.2%	16.3%
Magazines - Paper	34.8%	45.6%	45.2%	40.4%	30.2%	28.2%	36.7%	39.9%	41.3%	41.2%	36.8%	37.0%
Fiction - Screen	16.7%	22.5%	18.6%	19.5%	22.7%	26.0%	22.0%	19.7%	17.9%	23.3%	23.2%	24.5%
Fiction - Paper	54.9%	65.2%	68.2%	60.7%	44.5%	45.2%	52.7%	60.7%	58.1%	61.4%	66.7%	60.6%
Websites	82.4%	86.2%	68.0%	86.5%	93.0%	96.0%	79.9%	86.1%	85.1%	86.7%	86.7%	85.0%
Text messages	86.3%	91.4%	63.2%	94.2%	96.2%	97.1%	84.4%	90.8%	91.5%	90.7%	84.5%	89.2%
Instant messages	76.3%	81.7%	43.4%	84.8%	93.4%	96.1%	75.2%	81.2%	81.5%	82.3%	75.4%	82.1%

Reading attitudes

We also asked children and young people whether they agree or disagree with several statements that explored their attitudes towards reading, which were subdivided into five components:

- **Future orientation:** contains two items that explore children and young people’s view of the value of reading for their future in terms of their learning as well job opportunities
- **Interest:** contains three items that assess the extent to which children and young people feel able to find reading materials that align with their interests and motivations
- **Perseverance:** made up of one item that explores children and young people’s commitment to reading even when they struggle
- **Cultural relevance:** contains one item that looks at the cultural norm around reading
- **Self-efficacy:** contains two items that explore the degree to which children and young people believe that they can improve their reading and whether they think that reading is difficult

Figure 10 shows that children and young people generally thought positively about reading in 2017/18. For example, 4 in 5 (83.0%) agreed that reading will help them learn more and 1 in 2 (54.1%) agreed that there are lots of things they want to read. However, only 2 in 5 (41.1%) agreed that reading is cool, and a sizeable percentage agreed that they cannot find things to read that interest them (33.7%) or that they read only when they have to (30.0%).

Figure 10: Percentage agreement with reading attitude statements in 2017/2018

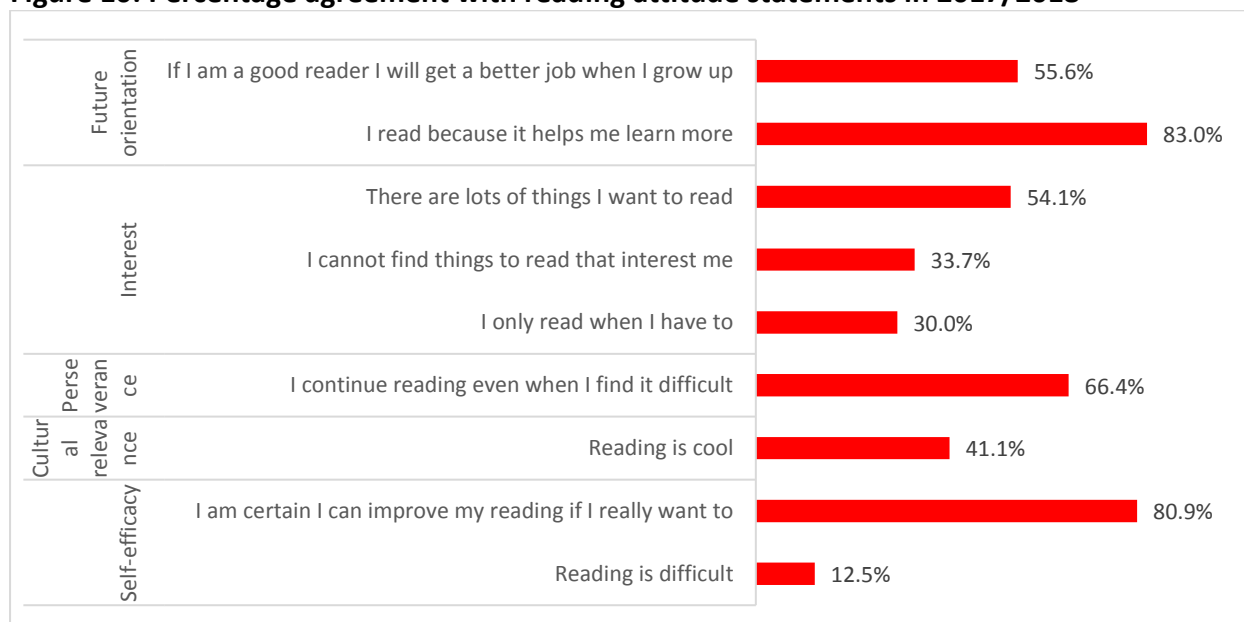


Figure 11 (overleaf) compares the percentage of children and young people who have agreed with four attitudinal statements about reading since 2013. It shows that, with the exception of responses in 2016, attitudes towards reading have remained relatively stable.

Table 4 (also overleaf) outlines the percentage of children and young people who have agreed with all attitudinal statements asked in 2017/2018 broken down by demographic background.

Figure 11: Percentage agreement to four attitudinal statements about reading between 2013 and 2017/18

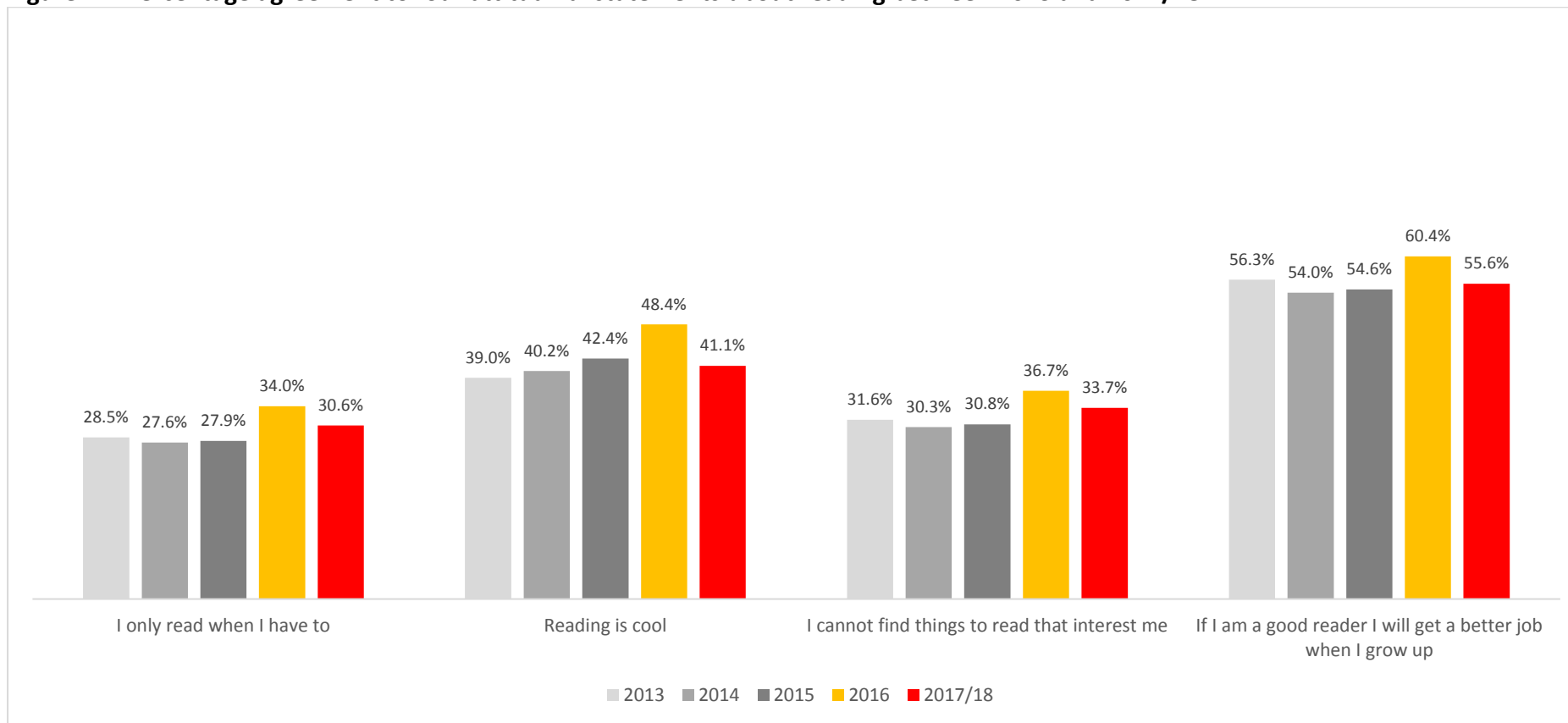


Table 4: Percentage agreement with attitudinal statements in 2017/18 by demographic background

	Boys	Girls	Aged 8 to 11	Aged 11 to 14	Aged 14 to 16	Aged 16 to 18	FSM	Non-FSM	White	Mixed	Asian	Black
If I am a good reader, I will get a better job when I grow up	57.1%	55.0%	67.4%	54.7%	44.9%	43.0%	59.9%	55.1%	54.6%	55.2%	58.8%	58.7%
I read because it helps me learn more	81.0%	86.3%	91.8%	81.7%	76.7%	80.4%	83.0%	83.3%	82.2%	84.3%	86.9%	86.4%
There are lots of things I want to read	49.6%	59.1%	75.8%	50.1%	42.6%	54.4%	55.7%	53.7%	50.6%	55.6%	64.8%	60.4%
I cannot find things to read that interest me	35.3%	31.4%	24.5%	35.4%	39.6%	27.5%	38.0%	33.1%	34.8%	34.1%	28.2%	31.6%
I only read when I have to	34.4%	25.1%	24.2%	30.0%	37.7%	31.2%	35.2%	29.1%	30.8%	29.4%	24.5%	28.4%
I continue reading even when I find it difficult	65.5%	68.4%	77.8%	65.2%	57.2%	58.3%	66.8%	66.5%	66.4%	67.0%	68.0%	68.0%
Reading is cool	37.6%	45.8%	70.7%	36.2%	26.0%	37.5%	44.8%	40.4%	37.2%	42.3%	52.2%	47.8%
I am certain I can improve my reading if I really want to	79.3%	83.9%	83.7%	80.8%	78.2%	76.2%	80.5%	81.6%	80.4%	81.6%	84.9%	85.2%
Reading is difficult	13.2%	11.4%	14.5%	12.3%	11.1%	8.6%	18.1%	11.2%	12.8%	11.6%	8.5%	10.3%

Link to reading skill

In 2017/18 we had reading skill data for 1,098 pupils aged 11 to 15, which allowed us to explore the link between reading enjoyment, reading frequency and reading skill. Schools measured reading skill using different assessments, and we therefore categorised pupils into three groups depending on whether or not they were reading at the level expected for their age: reading below expected level (13.2%), reading at expected level (75.5%) and reading above expected level (11.3%).

Table 5 shows that children and young people who enjoy reading are five times more likely to read above the level expected for their age compared with their peers who don't enjoy reading. Indeed, those who don't enjoy reading are nearly 12 times more likely to read below the level expected for their age compared with those who enjoy reading.

Table 5: Reading skill by whether or not children and young people enjoy reading

	Below expected level	At expected level	Above expected level
Enjoy reading	2.4%	80.7%	17.0%
Don't enjoy reading	28.1%	68.4%	3.5%

It is not only enjoyment that is linked to reading skill, so is reading frequency. As Table 6 shows, children and young people who read daily in their free time are four times more likely to read above the expected level for their age compared with their peers who don't read daily, who, in turn, are nearly seven times more likely to read below the expected level.

Table 6: Reading skill by whether or not children and young people read daily

	Below expected level	At expected level	Above expected level
Read daily	2.7%	75.0%	22.3%
Don't read daily	18.5%	75.8%	5.7%

To sum up

In 2016 we reported the highest level of reading enjoyment since we began asking children about it in 2005. However, over the same time period, the number of children and young people who read daily in their free time had dropped quite significantly and we wondered whether 2016 was an anomaly or whether the two previous years, for one reason or another, were the odd ones out.

Our 2017/2018 data now show that 2016 had indeed been an odd year. Levels of reading enjoyment decreased in the last year and we can now say with some certainty that the decline in daily reading level is an enduring one. This decline is also reflected in children and young people's reading engagement. At the same time, reading attitudes have remained relatively stable – with the exception of 2016, where attitudes were at their highest level.

In 2017/18, gaps in children and young people's reading enjoyment, frequency and attitudes continue to exist across gender and age, with girls and younger children reporting more positive reading behaviours and habits.

The relationship between children and young people's reading enjoyment, frequency and skill continues to be positive, further supporting the fundamental elements of many of the National Literacy Trust's programmes, training, policy work and campaigns.

Looking to the future, we have adapted our Annual Literacy Survey to ensure that we can track the ways in which our rapidly changing, digital world is interacting with children and young people's literacy lives.

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

Visit www.literacytrust.org.uk to find out more, donate or sign up for a free email newsletter. You can also find us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter.

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