

Children's reading in Birmingham in 2018: A baseline

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Introduction

Birmingham Education Partnership (BEP) commissioned the National Literacy Trust to undertake this survey as part of a data-gathering exercise at the start of a Strategic School Improvement Fund (SSIF) project to improve reading in primary schools in the city. We hope to repeat this exercise towards the close of the SSIF project as part of the evaluation process.

The National Literacy Trust based the survey on a questionnaire used nationally to gather responses from nearly 50,000 children and young people between November 2017 and January 2018. Responses to many questions could therefore be compared with the national picture for England. Some questions in the national survey, which focused on writing, were removed and replaced with questions on vocabulary and understanding so as to improve BEP's understanding of possible barriers to reading attainment.

All schools who submitted data have received their own individual reports.

Key findings

Based on data from 4,230 children aged 8 to 11 from 41 primary schools in Birmingham who participated in a city-wide reading survey in April/May 2018, key findings include:

- 73.1% of children in Birmingham say that they enjoy reading either very much or quite a lot
- 36.6% say that they read in their free time on a daily basis
- On average, children rate their own reading skill towards a very good range of a scale (7.88 out of a 1 to 10 rating scale, where 1 = not very good and 10 – very good).
- Most children say that they usually read between 6 and 20 minutes when they read in their free time. Nearly 1 in 5 say that they tend to read for half an hour or longer.
- Children tend to think positively about reading, with 90.3% believing that reading will help them learn more, while over 3 in 4 persevere with reading even when they

find it difficult. 3 in 4 also believe in their own comprehension skill, saying that they usually understand what they are reading quite easily, while 7 in 10 think they can make sense of what they are reading quite quickly. 7 in 10 children also think that reading is cool.

- Most children tend to enjoy learning new words (74.3%).
- On average, children read 6 different types of materials in their free time at least once a month, predominantly fiction and non-fiction, followed by song lyrics and poems.
- Half of children (55%) say that they read with someone at home; mostly on a daily basis or 2 to 3 times a week.
- Nearly 2 in 3 (65.1%) say that they use their school library.

Boys aged 8 to 11 in Birmingham are less engaged with reading than girls. They are less likely to enjoy reading, are less likely to read in their free time and are less likely to think positively about reading. They also tend to read fewer materials in their free time, are less likely to read with someone at home and are less likely to use the school library.

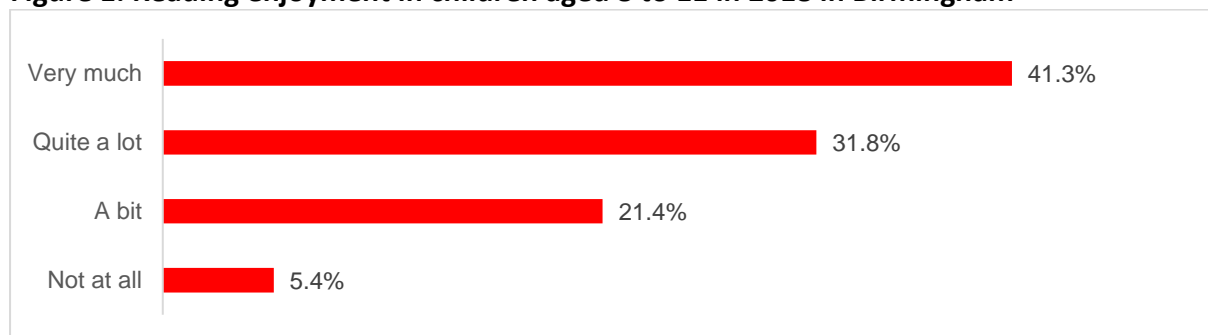
Similarly, children who say that they only speak English at home are less engaged readers than those who say that they speak a language other than English at home. They are less likely to enjoy reading, are less likely to read in their free time daily and are more likely to read for shorter periods of time. They are also less likely to say that they enjoy learning new words and are less likely to use the school library.

While there are likely to be stark differences between children who receive free school meals and those who don't in terms of their reading attainment, there were only a few differences in terms of their wider reading behaviour. Children who receive free school meals are less likely to say that they read daily in their free time and were more likely to say that they read only when they have to or that they find reading difficult. They are also more likely to say that they find learning new words hard.

Comments on key questions

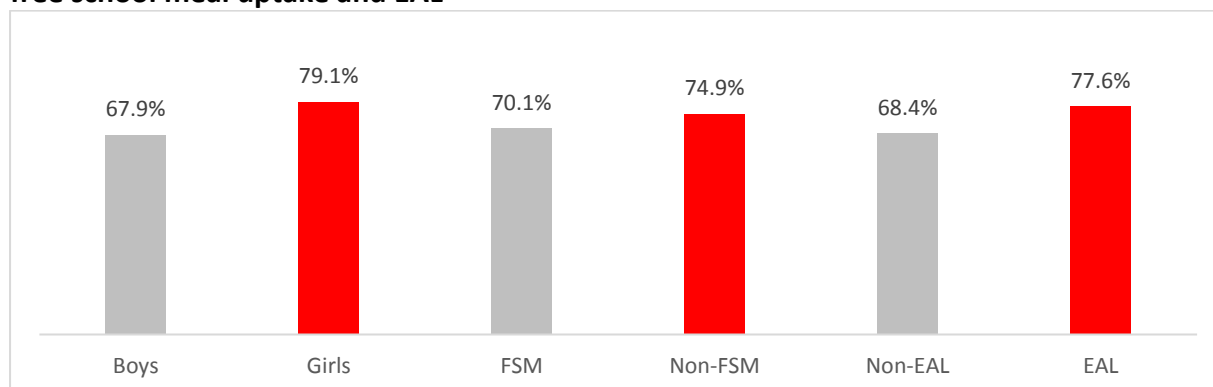
How many children in Birmingham enjoy reading? Our data from 2018 show that nearly 3 in 4 (73.1%) children enjoy reading either very much (41.3%) or quite a lot (31.8%) as can be seen in see Figure 1. Around 1 child in 5 only enjoys reading a bit, while 1 child in 20 says that they don't enjoy reading at all.

Figure 1: Reading enjoyment in children aged 8 to 11 in 2018 in Birmingham



So, **who enjoys reading?** Figure 2 shows that **more girls¹ than boys enjoy reading**, with nearly 4 girls in 5 saying that they enjoy reading either very much or quite a lot compared with only 2 boys in 3. A pupil's socioeconomic background², using **free school meal (FSM) uptake as a proxy**, was not associated with reading enjoyment in Birmingham in 2018. While slightly more pupils who don't receive FSMs said that they enjoy reading compared with their peers who receive FSMs, this difference was not statistically significant. Also, children who say that they speak a **language other than English³** at home are more likely to say that they enjoy reading compared with their peers who say that they only speak English.

Figure 2: Reading enjoyment in children aged 8 to 11 in 2018 in Birmingham by gender, free school meal uptake and EAL



¹ We had information on gender from 4,169 children. 2,044 identified as male and 2,019 identified themselves as female. 17 chose the 'Other' option, while 89 didn't want to say. The latter two responses were not included in any subsequent analysis by gender due to the small numbers

² We had information on socioeconomic background, using free school meal uptake as a proxy, from 4,097 children. 871 indicated that they receive FSMs and 2,344 said that they don't. 618 didn't know whether or not they receive free meals, while 264 didn't want to say. The latter two options were excluded from any subsequent analysis by FSM uptake.

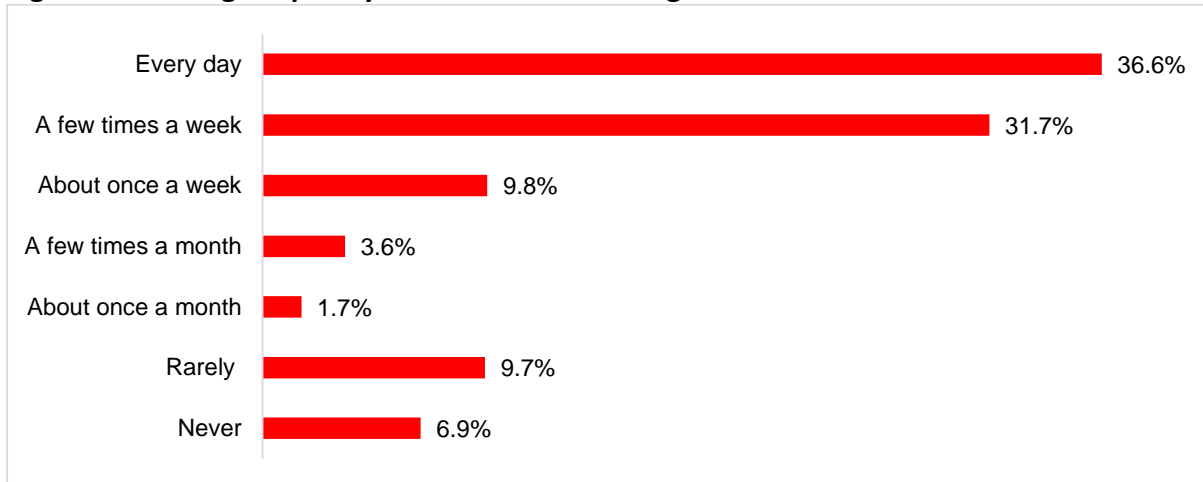
³ Our survey contained a crude self-report question on whether or not children only speak English at home. 4,018 children answered this question, with 1,741 (43.3%) saying that they only speak English at home and 2,277 (56.7%) saying that they speak a language other than English at home.

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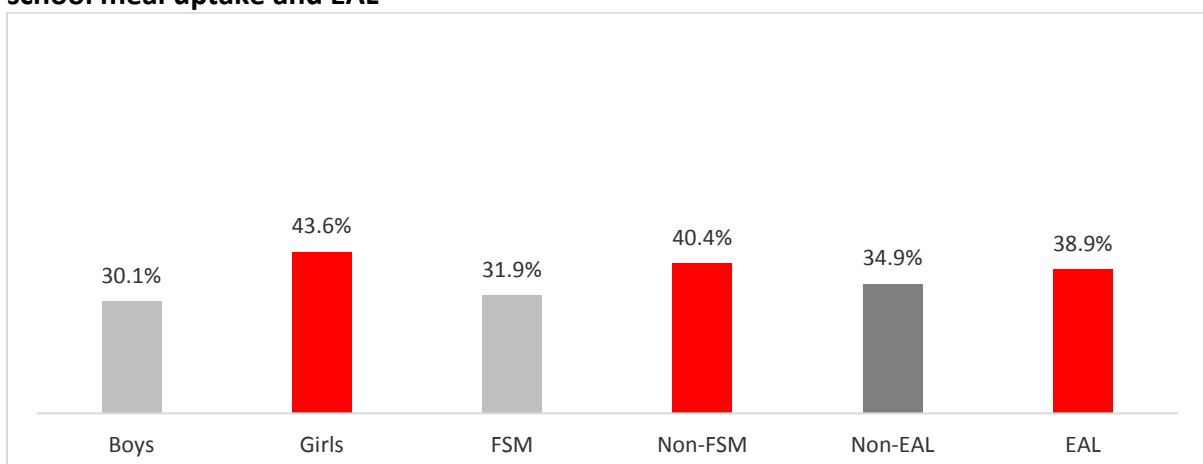
How often do children and young people read outside class? Over 1 child in 3 from Birmingham said in 2018 that they read something daily in their free time (see Figure 3). Overall, nearly 8 in 10 (78.0%) children said that they read something outside class at least once week, while 1 in 6 (16.6%) said that they rarely or never read in their free time.

Figure 3: Reading frequency for children in Birmingham in 2018



As we saw above, around 1 in 3 read something in their free time on a daily basis. **Who are the children who read daily outside class?** As shown in Figure 4, **more girls than boys** say that they read something outside class on a daily basis, with over 2 in 5 girls saying this compared with 1 in 3 boys. **More non-FSM than FSM children** also read something daily in their free time, while children who say that they speak **another language than English** at home are more likely to read something daily in their free time compared with children who say that they speak only English.

Figure 4: Daily reading in children aged 8 to 11 in 2018 in Birmingham by gender, free school meal uptake and EAL

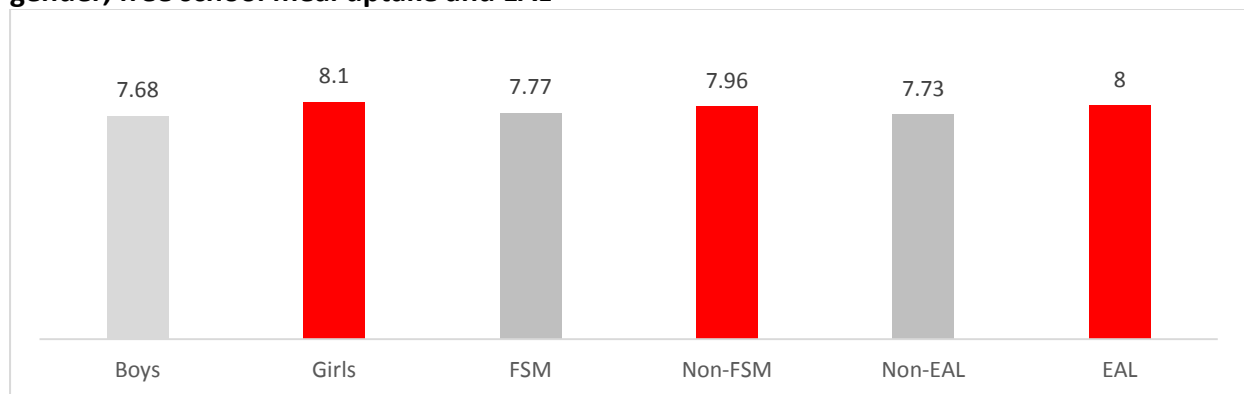


How good a reader do children think they are? When asked to rate how good a reader they think they are on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 = not a very good reader and 10 = a very good

reader, children on average rated towards the very good range of the scale (average = 7.88, standard deviation = 2.37).

Figure 5 shows that **girls rate themselves as better readers than boys** as do children who say that they speak **a language other than English** at home compared with their peers who say that they only speak English at home. While non-FSM children were slightly more likely to rate themselves as better readers compared with FSM children, this difference was not statistically significant.

Figure 5: Self-reported reading skill in children aged 8 to 11 in 2018 in Birmingham by gender, free school meal uptake and EAL



How long do children read for? When asked how long they usually read for when they read in their free time, a fifth of children say that they read for 11 to 20 minutes, followed by 6 to 10 minutes (see Figure 6). Nearly 1 child in 5 said that they usually read for longer than half an hour.

Figure 6: Reading length for children in Birmingham in 2018

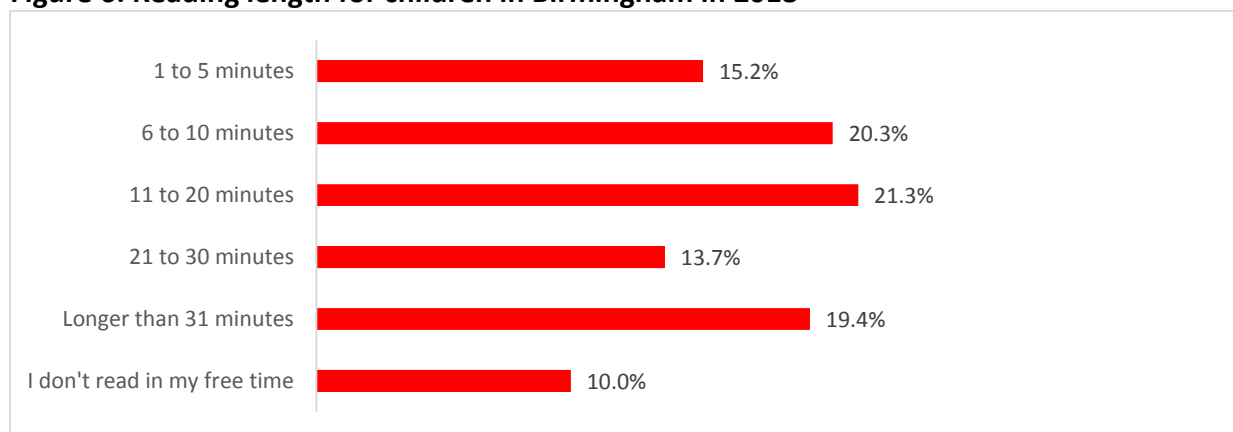


Table 1 indicates that a similar percentage of **boys and girls** say that they usually read for 1 to 20 minutes in their free time. However, more girls than boys say that they read for 21 minutes or longer outside school, while nearly three times as many boys as girls say that they don't read in their free time. Children who receive **free school meals** and those who don't receive meals read for similar lengths of time in their free time, while children who say

that they speak a **language other than English** at home tend to read for longer periods of time outside school compared with children who say that they only speak English at home.

Table 1: Reading length in children aged 8 to 11 in 2018 in Birmingham by gender, free school meal uptake and EAL

	Boys	Girls	FSM	Non-FSM	Non-EAL	EAL
1 to 5 minutes	15.7%	14.8%	17.5%	13.8%	18.0%	13.1%
6 to 10 minutes	20.8%	20.0%	20.6%	19.9%	20.6%	20.1%
11 to 20 minutes	21.4%	21.5%	19.4%	21.2%	20.3%	22.1%
21 to 30 minutes	12.1%	15.5%	13.4%	14.3%	12.0%	15.1%
Longer than 31 minutes	16.2%	22.7%	17.1%	22.2%	17.1%	21.7%
I don't read in my free time	13.8%	5.5%	12.0%	8.6%	12.0%	7.9%

What do children think about reading? Children were also asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with 12 statements that explore their attitudes towards reading. As can be seen in Figure 7, children generally hold positive attitudes towards reading. For example, 9 in 10 say that reading will help them learn more, while over 3 in 4 said that they persevere even when they find reading difficult. 7 in 10 agree that reading is cool and that they will get a better job if they are a good reader. Only 3 in 10 say that they only read when they have to, and 1 in 4 say that they cannot find things to read that interest them.

Figure 7: % agreement with reading attitude statements in children aged 8 to 11 in 2018 in Birmingham



Girls tend to hold more positive attitudes towards reading than boys (see Table 2). For example, more girls than boys say that there are lots of things they want to read and that reading is cool. They are also more likely to agree that they will persevere even when they find what they are reading difficult. By contrast, more boys than girls say that they only read when they have to and that they cannot find things to read that interest them.

There were only few differences in reading attitudes between children who **receive FSMs** and those who don't. In particular, more FSM than non-FSM children said they only read when they have to and that reading is difficult.

Overall, children who say that they speak a **language other than English** at home tend to hold very similar attitudes towards reading to their English-only speaking peers. Notable differences, however, include more EAL children saying that reading is cool and that there are lots of things they would like to read.

Table 2: % agreement with reading attitude statements in children aged 8 to 11 in 2018 in Birmingham by gender, free school meal uptake and EAL

	Boys	Girls	FSM	Non-FSM	Non-EAL	EAL
I believe reading will help me learn more	87.9%	93.3%	90.3%	91.5%	88.6%	82.0%
I am certain I can improve my reading if I really want to	82.7%	85.8%	81.1%	86.2%	82.2%	85.9%
I carry on reading even when I find it difficult	72.9%	81.4%	78.8%	77.0%	77.6%	77.4%
I usually understand what I'm reading quite easily	75.1%	78.9%	74.2%	79.2%	74.8%	78.7%
There are lots of things I want to read	71.6%	81.7%	75.6%	77.9%	72.7%	79.7%
Reading is cool	65.9%	76.7%	68.2%	72.6%	65.9%	74.9%
If I am a good reader it means I'll get a better job when I grow up	70.4%	70.1%	72.2%	69.4%	67.8%	72.1%
I can usually make sense of what I'm reading quite quickly	67.5%	70.7%	68.6%	71.2%	69.8%	68.7%
I only read when I have to	33.9%	25.6%	35.3%	27.1%	31.4%	27.4%
I cannot find things to read that interest me	26.8%	22.6%	27.9%	23.4%	27.2%	23.9%
Reading is difficult	17.6%	13.8%	21.1%	13.8%	16.5%	14.8%

What are children's views on vocabulary? 3 in 4 children agree that learning new words is fun, while 9 in 10 agree that having a large vocabulary can make them a better reader (see Figure 8). However, over 1 in 3 also say that they find it hard to learn new words.

Figure 8: % agreement with statements about vocabulary in children aged 8 to 11 in 2018 in Birmingham

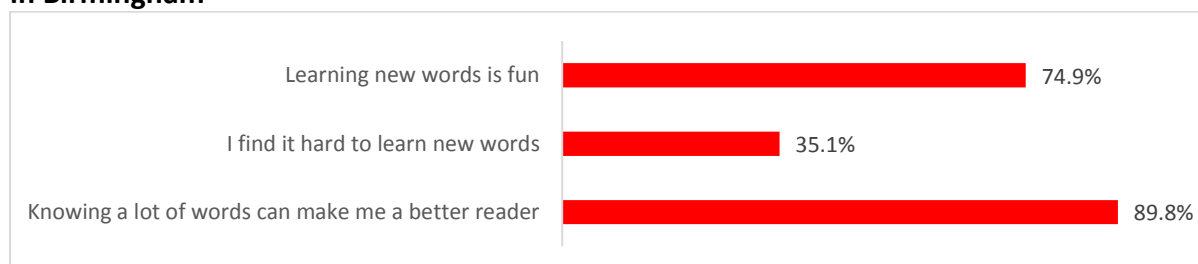


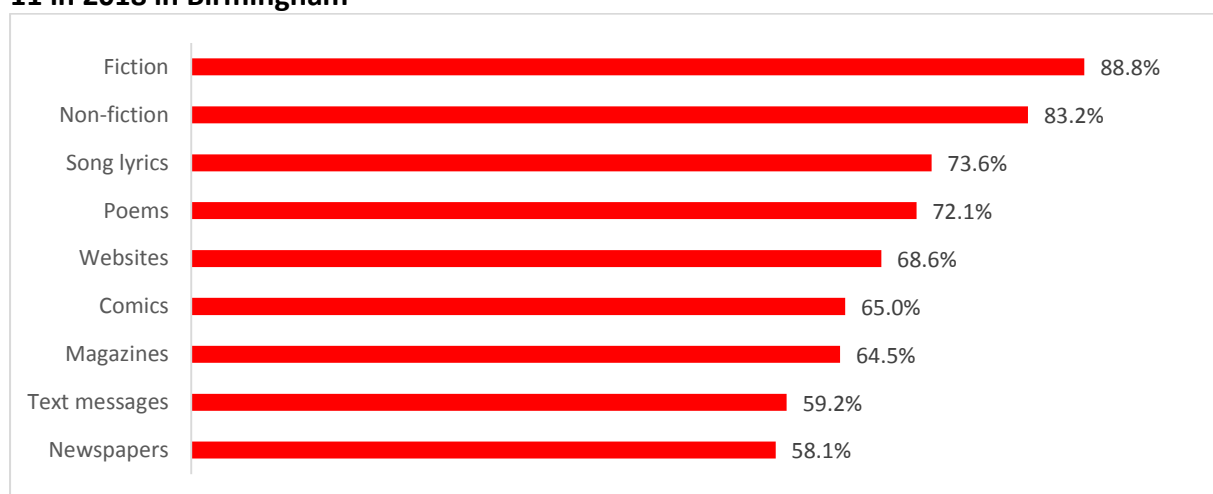
Table 3 shows that more girls than boys agreed that learning new vocabulary is fun, while more boys than girls agreed that they find it hard to learn new words. More FSM than non-FSM children agreed that learning new words is hard, while more children who say that they speak a language other than English at home agreed that learning new words is fun.

Table 3: % agreement with attitudes towards vocabulary in children aged 8 to 11 in 2018 in Birmingham by gender, free school meal uptake and EAL

	Boys	Girls	FSM	Non-FSM	Non-EAL	EAL
Learning new words is fun	72.4%	77.8%	77.9%	75.2%	71.0%	78.1%
I find it hard to learn new words	37.6%	32.6%	42.2%	32.6%	34.9%	34.8%
Knowing a lot of words can make me a better reader	89.4%	90.4%	89.0%	90.7%	88.0%	91.9%

How widely are children reading in their free time? Children were asked to indicate whether they read any of nine possible materials in their free time at least once a month. These were poems, song lyrics, magazines, fiction, non-fiction, comics, newspapers, text messages as well as websites. In general, children say that they read an average of 6.1 materials in their free time, with most children reading fiction and non-fiction, followed by song lyrics and poems (see Figure 9).

Figure 9: Types of materials read in free time at least once a month in children aged 8 to 11 in 2018 in Birmingham



Girls read slightly more widely than boys (average of 6.4 materials vs. 5.9 materials for boys). However, there was no difference in how widely **FSM and non-FSM** children read outside class (6.14 materials vs. 6.18 materials respectively) or how widely **non-EAL and EAL** children read (6.03 materials vs. 6.25 materials respectively).

Table 4 shows that more girls than boys said that they read song lyrics, poems and websites, while more boys than girls said that they read comics at least once a month in their free time. A similar percentage of FSM and non-FSM children said that they read each of the nine materials outside class at least once a month, while more children who say that they speak a language other than English at home said that they read poems and newspapers.

Table 4: Types of materials read in free time at least once a month in children aged 8 to 11 in 2018 in Birmingham by gender, free school meal uptake and EAL

	Boys	Girls	FSM	Non-FSM	Non-EAL	EAL
Fiction	85.9%	91.8%	86.0%	89.8%	87.4%	89.9%
Non-fiction	81.0%	85.5%	82.2%	83.6%	79.5%	85.8%
Song lyrics	65.5%	82.2%	75.9%	73.9%	72.7%	74.4%
Poems	65.5%	78.8%	72.9%	71.5%	66.9%	76.1%
Websites	64.2%	73.5%	69.3%	69.4%	67.6%	69.5%
Comics	72.3%	57.3%	64.9%	64.2%	63.4%	66.1%
Magazines	62.3%	67.0%	64.3%	62.9%	67.3%	62.2%
Text messages	58.7%	62.6%	59.1%	60.4%	61.6%	57.7%
Newspapers	57.6%	58.8%	59.7%	57.3%	54.9%	60.3%

Do children read with someone at home? Half (55.0%) of children said that they read with someone at home, with most of these children reading with someone 2 to 3 times a week (37.1%) or on a daily basis (26.4%).

More girls than boys said that they read with someone at home (58.5% vs. 51.6%), while there was no statistically significant difference between children who receive FSMs and those who don't (58.1% vs. 54.4%) or between those who say that they only speak English at home and those who say that they speak another language at home (55.8% vs. 54.6%). There was also no difference in how often they read with someone at home by gender, FSM uptake or whether they speak a language other than English at home.

Do children use the school library? Nearly two-thirds (65.1%) of children said that they use their school library. Over a fifth (21.6%) said that they don't, while nearly 1 in 8 (13.3%) said that they don't have a school library. More girls than boys said that they use their school library (69.6% vs. 61.3%) as do children who speak a language other than English at home (70.9% vs. 58.4%). There was no difference in school library use by whether or not children receive FSMs (70.5% vs. 66.1%).

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