

Children and young people's reading engagement in 2022

Continuing insight into the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on reading

Aimee Cole, Ariadne Brown, Christina Clark and Irene Picton

September 2022

We have been asking children and young people about their reading since 2005, which has given us unparalleled insight into changes in their reading enjoyment, attitudes and practices over time. More recently, our annual survey has also allowed us to explore children and young people's reading engagement before, during and after educational disruption relating to the Covid-19 pandemic. Notably, having reached a 15-year low just before the first lockdown in spring 2020, the percentage of children and young people who said they enjoyed reading increased to its second highest point since we started asking this question during the lockdown. Children's comments suggested that simply having extra time to read had (re)engaged many of them with reading for pleasure.

This report shows that any gains made in terms of children and young people's reading engagement during the early part of the pandemic had completely eroded by early 2022. Indeed, fewer children and young people enjoyed reading and read in their free time in 2022 compared with the previous two years, and many of the years before. This is particularly the case for children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, and, within this group, for boys. It is clear that much more must be done to support children and young people with the lowest levels of reading enjoyment, recognising the role that families, schools and the wider community have to play in ensuring this downward trend does not extend into future years.

The context

Research focusing on children's reading skills during the academic years affected most by the pandemic suggests that, broadly speaking, pupils in Key Stage 1 (ages 5 to 7) and Key Stage 3 (11 to 14) experienced the greatest learning loss in reading as a result of educational disruption¹. At the same time, Key Stage 2 SATs showed that the percentage of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading increased from 73% in 2019 to 74% in 2022². However, notable differences were found between pupils from more- and less-disadvantaged backgrounds. For example, while non-disadvantaged secondary pupils were two months behind expectations in reading by autumn 2021, those from disadvantaged backgrounds were 3.5 months behind³.

Complementing these findings, our research into children and young people's reading during the first national lockdown in spring 2020 showed that more children and young people were enjoying reading and more were reading more often than before the pandemic⁴. Children's comments suggested that this was because they suddenly had time to (re)engage with reading, having fewer activities vying for their time. However, we also found that existing gaps in reading enjoyment increased manifold during lockdown, with boys, and specifically boys from disadvantaged backgrounds, at risk of poor reading engagement as a result of the pandemic.

Any gains that we saw in reading enjoyment and reading frequency during the first national lockdown had eroded slightly by the time we surveyed children and young people again in early 2021, a period that coincided with the third national lockdown in the UK. The gap between boys' and girls' reading enjoyment that had opened up during the first lockdown in 2020 persisted into early 2021, with more girls than boys enjoying reading.

More worryingly, however, the gap between those who received free school meals (FSMs) and those who didn't doubled over the course of the year (from 2.1 percentage points in early 2020 to 4.6 percentage points in early 2021), with more non-FSM than FSM pupils saying that they enjoyed reading. Indeed, the year between early 2020 and early 2021 had a particularly detrimental impact on the reading enjoyment of boys who received FSMs.

This report

This report builds on these previous findings and highlights findings from our annual literacy survey, which we conducted between January and the end of March 2022. 70,403 children and young people aged 5 to 18 from 327 schools in England, Scotland and Wales participated in this online survey.

¹ See, e.g. <https://d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net/documents/projects/EEF-School-Starters.pdf?v=1652814985>; https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1063488/Understanding_Progress_in_the_2020_to_2021_Academic_Year

² <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/key-stage-2-attainment-national-headlines/2021-22>

³ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1063488/Understanding_Progress_in_the_2020_to_2021_Academic_Year

⁴ <https://literacytrust.org.uk/research-services/research-reports/children-and-young-peoples-reading-in-2020-before-and-during-the-covid-19-lockdown/>

Key findings for 2022 include:

Reading enjoyment

- Levels of reading enjoyment were at one of their lowest levels in 2022, with fewer than 1 in 2 (47.8%) children and young people aged 8 to 18 saying that they enjoy reading. Indeed, levels of enjoyment were back on par with those we recorded in 2020 (just before the pandemic) when we reported the lowest levels since we first asked the question in 2005.
- Fewer children who receive FSMs (43.8%) said they enjoy reading in 2022 compared with those who don't receive FSMs (48.8%).
 - The percentage-point-gap in reading enjoyment between FSM and non-FSM pupils has more than doubled from 2.1pp in 2020 to 5.0pp in 2022.
 - Boys who received FSMs in 2022 had the lowest levels of reading enjoyment. More specifically, levels of reading enjoyment for boys who receive FSMs have dropped by 6.5 percentage points over the past two years, decreasing from 46.3% in 2020 to 39.8% in 2022.
- Fewer boys (45.6%) than girls (54.9%) said they enjoy reading in 2022.
 - The percentage-point-gap in reading enjoyment by gender has increased from 2.9pp in 2020 to 9.3pp in 2022.
- Reading enjoyment decreased with age, from 3 in 4 (75.4%) 5- to 8-year-olds, to 45.3% of those aged 14 to 16.
- There were regional differences in reading enjoyment, with levels being highest in Greater London (54.2%) in 2022 and lowest in the East Midlands (43.6%).
 - Compared with 2021, reading enjoyment levels have decreased in all regions in England, except for Yorkshire and the Humber where it has increased marginally by 1.6pp since 2021. Overall, reading enjoyment has decreased the most in the East Midlands (-7.5pp) and West Midlands (-6.7pp), and least in the South East (-0.7pp) and the North East (-2.9pp).

Daily reading

- Fewer than 3 in 10 (28%) children and young people aged 8 to 18 said that they read daily in their free time in 2022. This is the second-lowest level we have ever recorded. It was only marginally higher than the lowest-ever level we reported in 2019, when 1 in 4 (25.4%) children and young people told us that they read something daily in their spare time.
- Fewer children who receive FSMs read daily (24.7%) compared with those who don't receive FSMs (28.9%).
 - The FSM gap in daily reading has increased from 3.2pp in 2019 to 4.2pp in 2022.
 - Only 1 in 5 boys who receive FSMs read daily (20.6%) compared with 1 in 3 (32.6%) girls who don't receive FSMs.
- More girls (34.3%) than boys (26.5%) read daily. However, the gender gap in daily reading has nearly doubled over the past three years, increasing from 4.6pp in 2019 to 7.8pp in 2022.

- There were regional differences in daily reading, with levels being highest in the North East (31.1%) and lowest in Yorkshire and the Humber (25.2%).
 - Daily reading decreased in all regions in England except Yorkshire and the Humber between 2021 and 2022. While daily reading levels in Yorkshire and the Humber increased slightly (5pp) between 2021 and 2022, this region still has the lowest percentage of daily reading in 2022 (25.2%).
 - Daily reading has decreased the most in the North East (-5.1pp) and the East Midlands (-3.4pp), and the least in the South East (-1.3pp) and North West (-1.8pp).
- Reading enjoyment and daily reading are linked: of those who enjoy reading, half (48.5%) read daily compared with 1 in 11 (9.3%) of those who don't enjoy reading.

Why do children and young people read? (8 to 18 only)

- Children aged 8 to 18 told us why they read, with more than half reading to learn new words (54.9%), to relax (55.4%) or to learn about new things (53.5%). Two in 5 (41.0%) read to feel happy, while nearly 2 in 5 read to understand the views of other people (38.8%). 3 in 10 (28.7%) read to learn about the issues and causes they care about.
- The differences in reasons for reading by FSM uptake were small. A similar percentage of those who received FSMs and those who didn't said they read to relax (53.5% vs 55.9%), to learn new words (55.3% vs 54.5%), to learn about new things (52.3% vs 53.5%), to feel happy (40.0% vs 41.0%), and to understand the views of other people (38.7% vs 38.9%). However, more of those who received FSM said they read to feel confident (30.3% vs 25.5%), to deal with problems (26.4% vs 22.7%), and to spend time with others (14.0% vs 9.4%).
- There were differences in motivations to read by gender, with more girls than boys reading for mental-wellbeing purposes. For example, 56.0% of girls read to relax, while only 2 in 5 (41.5%) boys said the same. There were smaller differences by gender for reading to learn. For example, 50.6% of girls read to learn about new things compared with 45.6% of boys

What do children and young people think about reading?

Children aged 5 to 8 had typically positive views about reading:

- 9 in 10 (87.9%) said they would be happy to get a book as a present, and that there are lots of things they want to read (92.1%). 2 in 3 (67.0%) said that they thought learning new words was fun. However, only 1 in 2 (50.0%) said they found it easy to understand what they read.
- More girls than boys aged 5 to 8 had positive opinions towards reading, with 9 in 10 (92.2%) girls being happy to get a book as a present compared with 8 in 10 (83.8%) boys.

Children and young people aged 8 to 18 had mixed views about reading:

- 1 in 4 (26.5%) said that they cannot find things to read that interest them. Around 2 in 5 (43.3%) said that they find more things to read that relate to their interest online (43.3%), while half (53.3%) said that they find inspiration for things to read online. 2 in 5 (41.9%) told us that reading makes them feel better.

- Differences in motivations to read by free-school-meal uptake were small. However, more of those who received FSMs than those who didn't agreed that they found inspiration for things they'd like to read online (56.7% vs 52.9%). 1 in 3 (34.7%) of those receiving FSMs agreed that they only read when they have to compared with 3 in 10 (29.3%) of those who didn't receive FSMs. 1 in 4 (25.4%) of those not receiving FSMs agreed that they cannot find things to read that interest them, rising to 3 in 10 (30.2%) of those who received FSMs.
- There were differences in views about reading by gender. For example, more girls (59.7%) said that they find inspiration for things they'd like to read online than boys (45.6%). Also, while 1 in 2 (48.6%) girls said that reading makes them feel better, only 1 in 3 (33.9%) boys said the same. 1 in 3 (35.8%) boys said they only read when they have to, compared with 1 in 4 (25.7%) girls.

What do children and young people read?

5- to 8-year-olds read a variety of materials, although mainly on paper:

- 3 in 4 (77.1%) read stories on paper (21.7% on screen), while half (53.6%) read about facts (17.6% on screen). More than 1 in 3 (36.3%) read magazines on paper (6.4% on screen), while 1 in 3 (32.1%) read poems (14.4% on screen).
- Fewer children aged 5 to 8 in 2022 read stories or facts compared with 2021.
- More 5- to 8-year-olds read poems on paper (+4.5pp) in 2022 than in 2021, while fewer 5- to 8-year-olds read magazines on paper (-3.8pp) in 2022 than in 2021.

Those aged 8 to 18 also read a variety of materials, on both screen and paper:

- Half (52.0%) read fiction on paper, while 1 in 4 (26.6%) read it on screen.
- Just less than half (45.1%) read non-fiction on paper, while 17.6% read it on screen.
- 2 in 3 (65.6%) read song lyrics on screen, making this the most popular reading material for either screen or paper.
- Slightly more children and young people aged 8 to 18 read fiction on screen (+1.7pp) and on paper (1.0pp) in 2022 compared with 2021.
- At the same time, more children and young people read comics (+3.8pp) and poems (+5.1pp) on paper compared with 2021.
- Fewer children and young people read magazines (-0.6pp), the news (-4.5pp) or poems (-1.5pp) on screen in 2022 compared with 2021.

Access to reading resources (8 to 18s only)

Children varied in their access to resources that supported them with their reading:

- A little fewer than 2 in 5 children and young people said they had bought (39.0%) or borrowed (38.8%) books in the last four weeks.
- 1 in 5 (20.7%) said their friends helped them find things to read in the last four weeks, while 1 in 4 (27.8%) said their parents had done the same.
- Almost 2 in 5 (37.4%) said their parents helped them find things to read.

There were differences in access to reading resources by free-school-meal uptake (FSM):

- Fewer children and young people who receive FSMs said that they had been encouraged to read at home in the past month compared with their peers who don't

receive FSMs (40.6% vs. 45.9%). Fewer also had talked about what they were reading with their family (33.8% vs. 38.1%) in the past month.

There were also differences when we looked at the interaction between gender and free-school-meal uptake:

- Slightly more boys who received FSMs received support from their friends for things to read (16.1%), than boys who didn't receive FSMs (12.5%).
- More girls receiving FSMs said that they borrowed books (46.0%) than girls who didn't receive FSMs (42.6%), and fewer said that they had bought books (39.2%) than girls who didn't receive FSMs (46.2%).

There were differences in access to reading resources by gender:

- 1 in 3 (33.1%) boys said they talked about what they were reading with family in the last four weeks compared with 2 in 5 (41.5%) girls. 1 in 5 (20.9%) boys compared with almost 2 in 5 (37.7%) girls said they had talked about what they were reading with friends in the past four weeks.
- The percentage of girls (26.9%) who said their friends had helped them find things to read was double the percentage of boys (13.4%) who said the same.
- More girls than boys said that they had bought books (44.8% vs. 32.1%).

There were differences in access to reading resources by age group:

- Overall, 8- to 11-year-olds felt that they received the most support for their reading over the last four weeks. Over half (51.8%) of 8- to 11-year-olds said they had borrowed books in the last four weeks, but only 2 in 5 (41.7%) 11- to 14-year-olds, 1 in 5 (20.5%) 14- to 16-year-olds and 1 in 5 (20.6%) 16- to 18-year-olds said the same.
- Almost 3 in 5 (58.3%) 8- to 11-year-olds said their parents had encouraged them to read compared with 1 in 4 (24.9%) 16- to 18-year-olds.

Reading enjoyment

In early 2022, 2 in 5 (22.7%) children and young people aged 5 to 18 said that they enjoy reading very much, with a further 3 in 10 (28.3%) saying that they enjoy it quite a lot (see Figure 1). However, nearly 1 in 9 said that they don't enjoy reading at all (11.2%) and nearly 2 in 5 (37.7%) only enjoyed reading a bit (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Levels of reading enjoyment for children and young people aged 5 to 18 in 2022

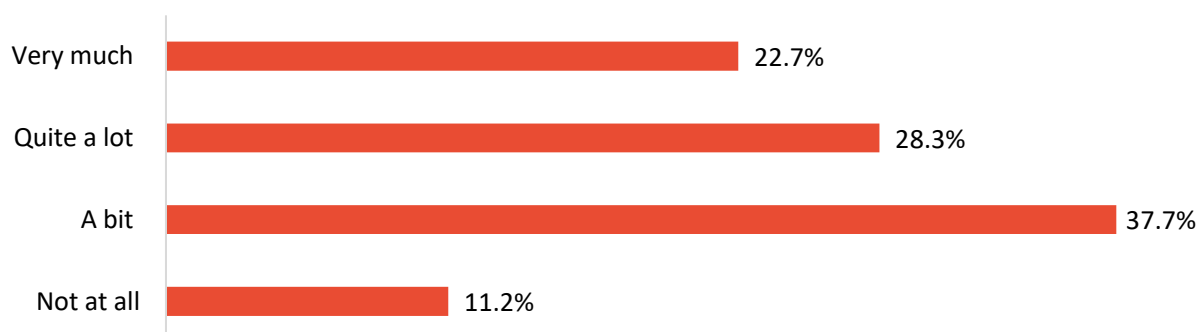
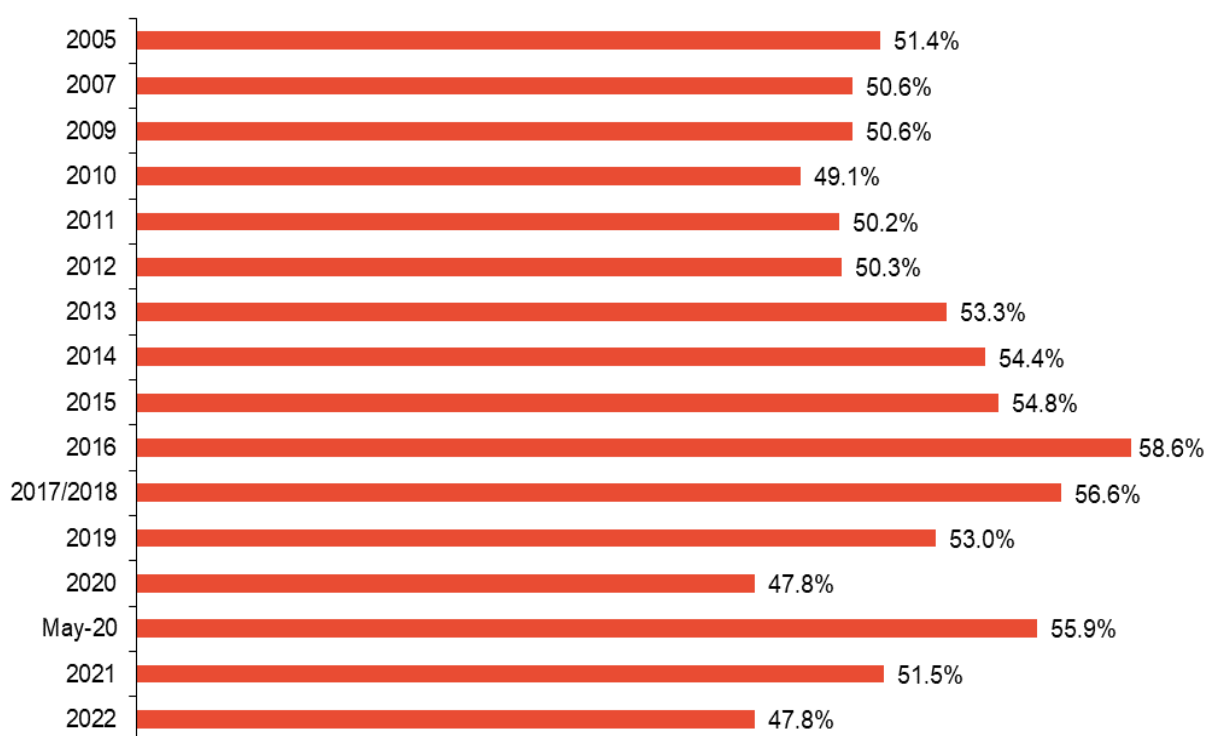


Figure 2 shows levels of reading enjoyment for children and young people aged 8 to 18⁵ over time and shows that in 2022 fewer than 1 in 2 (47.8%) in this age group told us that they enjoyed reading either very much or quite a lot. Indeed, levels of reading enjoyment in 2022 had dropped back to a level last seen in early 2020 (47.8%) when we recorded the lowest level of reading enjoyment since we began surveying children and young people in 2005.

Figure 2: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who enjoyed reading either very much or quite a lot from 2005 to 2022

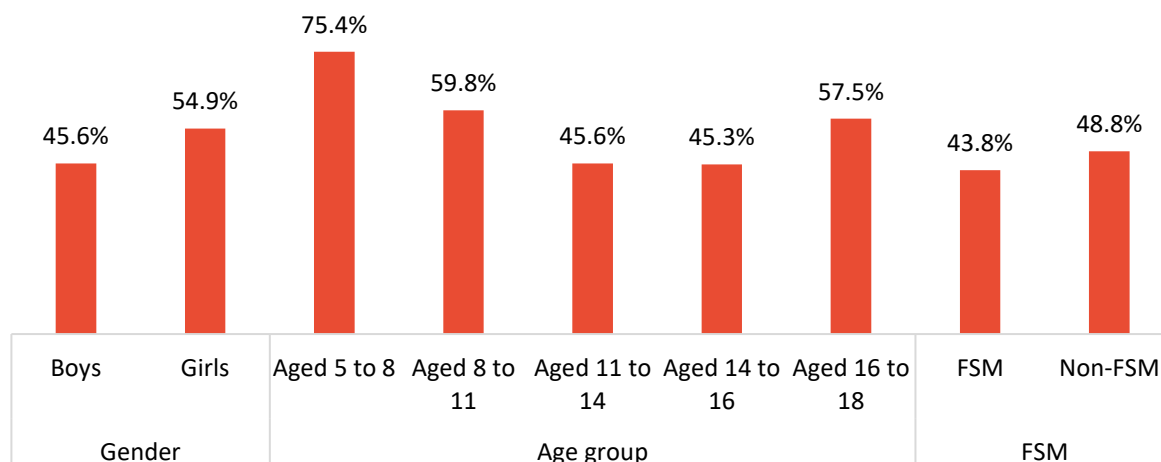


As shown in Figure 3, more girls than boys said that they enjoy reading⁶ in 2022, with over half of girls (54.9%) saying this compared with just over 2 in 5 boys (45.6%). Figure 3 also shows that reading enjoyment declines with age, with 3 in 4 (75.4%) 5- to 8-year-olds saying that they enjoy reading compared with 2 in 3 (59.8%) 8- to 11-year-olds, and 2 in 5 (45.6%) 11- to 14-year-olds and 14- to 16-year-olds (45.3%). However, levels recovered somewhat for those aged 16 and above, with nearly 3 in 5 (57.5%) saying that they enjoy reading. Fewer children and young people who receive free school meals (FSMs), our proxy of socioeconomic background, say that they enjoy reading (43.8%) compared with their peers who don't receive FSMs (48.8%).

⁵ We didn't start collecting information from 5 to 8-year-olds until 2019. For comparison-over-time purposes this analyses only contains data for children and young people aged 8 to 18 (n = 62,193)

⁶ Boys: 45.7% (n = 32,156), Girls: 48.1% (n = 33,848). 3.3% (n = 2,306) didn't want to specify their gender and 2.9% (n = 2,093) describe themselves another way. Aged 5 to 8 = 9.2% (n = 6,444); Aged 8 to 11 = 13.0% (n = 11,135); Aged 11 to 14 = 57.3% (n = 40,325); Aged 14 to 16 = 14.1% (n = 9,913); Aged 16 to 18 = 3.7% (n = 2,586). For those aged 8 to 18 only: FSM: 14.9% (n = 9,274); Non-FSM: 74.9% (n = 46,586); Didn't want to say: 1.4% (n = 851); Didn't know: 8.8% (n = 5,482). The demographic make-up of our 2022 sample is comparable to that of our 2021 sample.

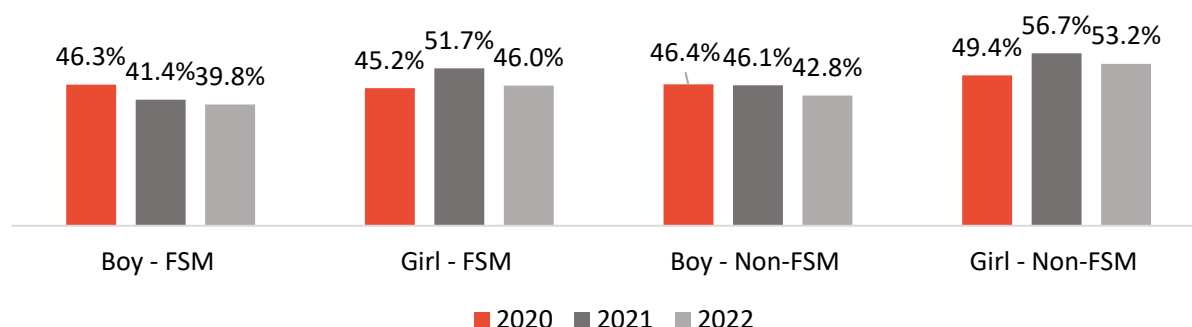
Figure 3: Percentage of children and young people aged 5 to 18 who enjoyed reading in 2022 by gender, age group, and free-school-meal uptake (8 to 18s only)



As shown in Figure 4, more girls than boys said they enjoyed reading in 2022. Indeed, this was the case regardless of free-school-meal uptake (see Figure 4). Of boys who receive free school meals, only 2 in 5 (39.8%) said they enjoyed reading compared with almost half (46.0%) of girls who received free school meals. The same distinction is seen between boys who do not receive free school meals (42.8%) and girls who do not receive free school meals (53.2%). Within each gender, fewer of those who received FSMs said that they enjoyed reading than those who didn't (39.8% vs 42.8% for boys and 46.0% vs 53.2% for girls).

Interestingly, these differences have increased in the past few years, with the percentage of girls who enjoyed reading increasing between 2020 and 2022 (the highest levels of reading enjoyment were in 2021), while the percentage of boys who enjoyed reading decreased, regardless of free-school-meal uptake. The most notable differences appeared for boys who received free school meals, dropping from 46.3% in 2020 to 39.8% in 2022, and for girls who did not receive free school meals, increasing from 49.4% in 2020 to 53.2% in 2022.

Figure 4: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who enjoyed reading in 2020, 2021 and 2022 by gender and free-school-meal-uptake

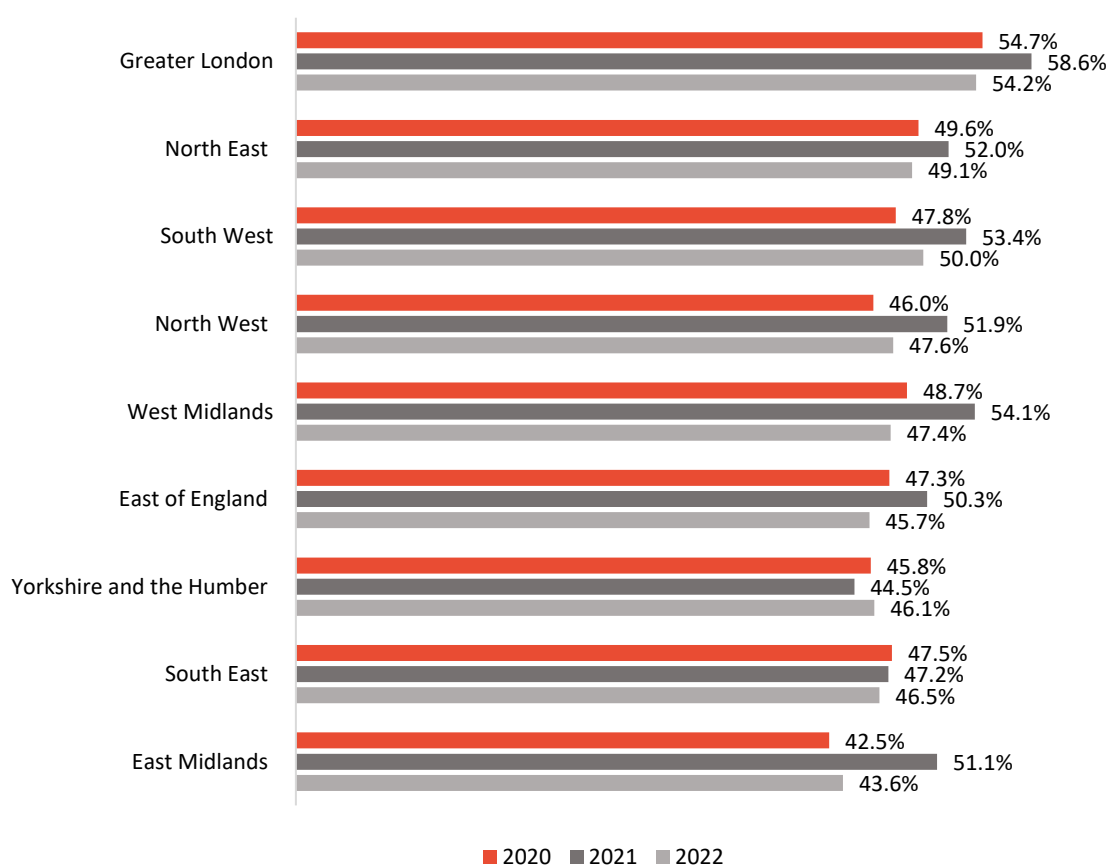


Looking by region (see Figure 5), we see that reading enjoyment has decreased everywhere since 2021 except for Yorkshire and the Humber. These reductions have brought reading enjoyment across the regions closer to that which we saw in 2020.

Overall, reading enjoyment in 2022 was highest in Greater London (54.2%), the North East (49.1%) and the South West (50.0%), and lowest in Yorkshire and the Humber (46.1%), the East of England (45.7%) and the East Midlands (43.6%). Yorkshire and the Humber, the only region where reading enjoyment increased marginally (+1.6pp) from 2021 to 2022, continues to be the region of England with the lowest levels of reading enjoyment, although it has increased slightly from 2020 (45.8%).

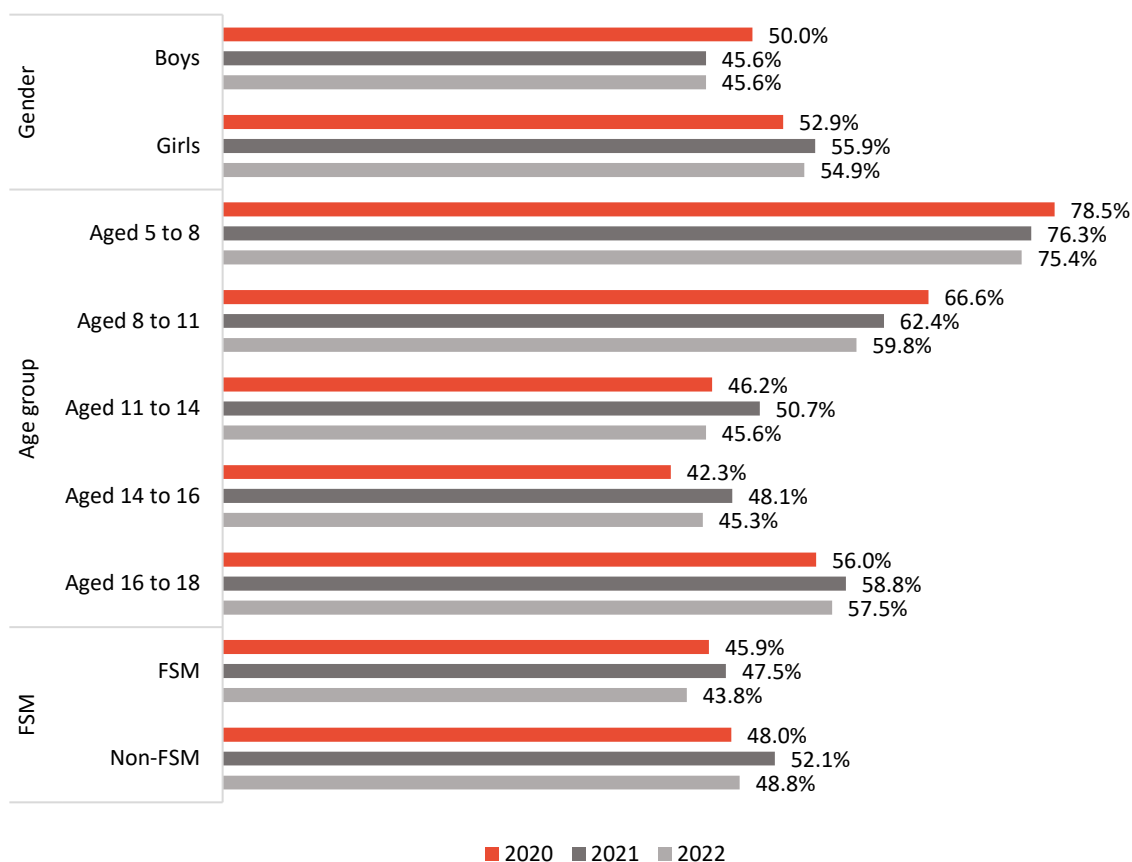
Overall, reading enjoyment has decreased the most in the East Midlands (-7.5pp) and West Midlands (-6.7pp), and least in the South East (-0.7pp) and the North East (-2.9pp) from 2021 to 2022.

Figure 5: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who enjoyed reading in 2020, 2021 and 2022 by region



Looking across the last three years (see Figure 6), we found that for boys (45.6%), reading enjoyment has remained stable from 2021 (45.6%), but is still lower than in 2020 (50.0%). For girls, reading enjoyment has reduced slightly since 2021 (to 54.9% from 55.9%), but is still higher than in 2020 (52.9%). The gender gap in reading enjoyment has also widened from 2.9pp in 2020 to 9.3pp in 2022.

Figure 6: Percentage of children and young people aged 5 to 18 who enjoyed reading in 2020, 2021 and 2022 by gender, age group and free-school-meal uptake (8 to 18s only)



For those aged between 5 and 14, Figure 4 (above) shows that reading enjoyment has reduced slightly since 2020⁷. However, for those aged 14 and above, reading enjoyment increased slightly between 2020 and 2021, and decreased again in 2022⁸.

Reading enjoyment has decreased since 2020 for those who receive FSMs (-2.1pp), while it has increased marginally for those who don't (+0.8pp). The gap in reading enjoyment of FSM and non-FSM pupils has also doubled, increasing from 2.1pp in 2020 to 5.0pp in 2022.

Daily reading

More than half (52.4%) of 5- to 8-year-olds said they read daily or almost daily in 2022, with 1 in 3 (32.0%) saying they read 1-2 times a week (see Figure 7). Fewer than 1 in 10 children aged 5 to 8 said they read only 1-2 times a month (7.9%) or never (7.7%).

In comparison, nearly 3 in 10 (28.0%) 8- to 18-year-olds said they read daily or almost daily in 2022. A similar number (27.5%) said they read a couple of times a week, and roughly 1 in 8 (13.0%) said they read about once a week. Although 1 in 10 (9.7%) of the remaining said they read a couple of times a month, and 7.0% said they read about once a month, around 1 in 7

⁷ -3.1pp for 5- to 8-year-olds, -6.8pp for 8- to 11-year-olds, and -0.6pp for 11- to 14-year-olds.

⁸ +3pp for 14- to 16-year-olds and +1.5pp for 16- to 18-year-olds

(14.7%) young people aged 8 to 18 said that they rarely or never read, which is double the percentage of 5- to 8-year-olds who said they never read (7.7%).

Figure 7: Reading frequency for children and young people aged 5 to 18 in 2022

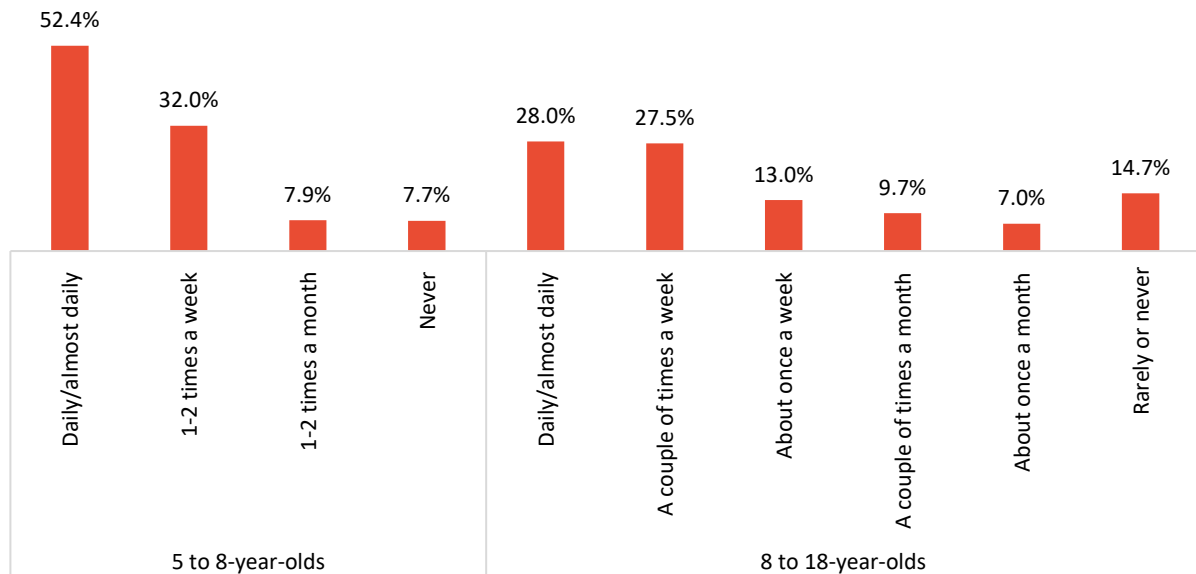
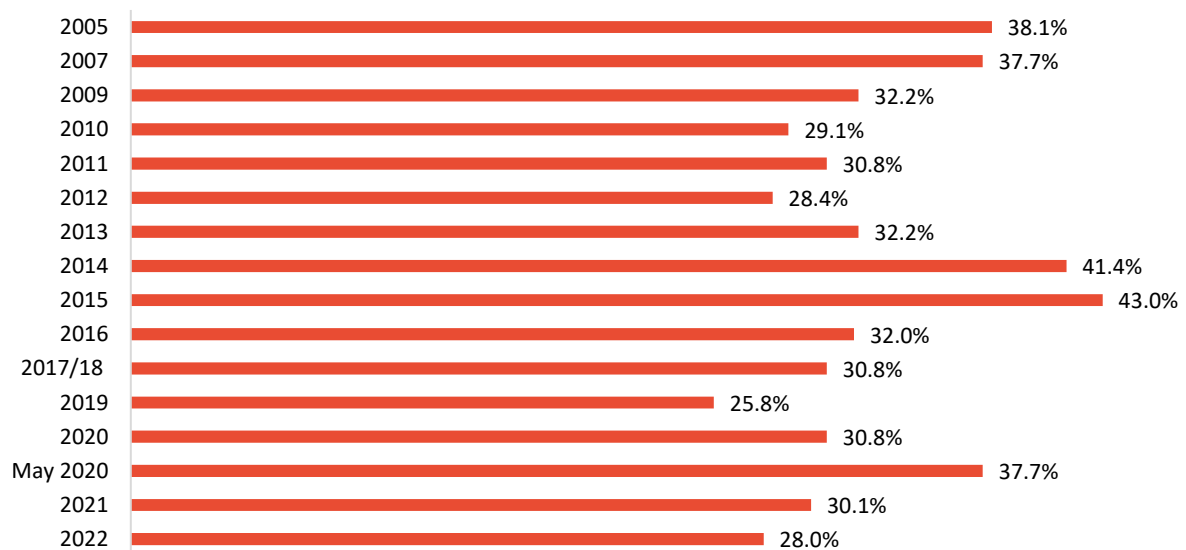


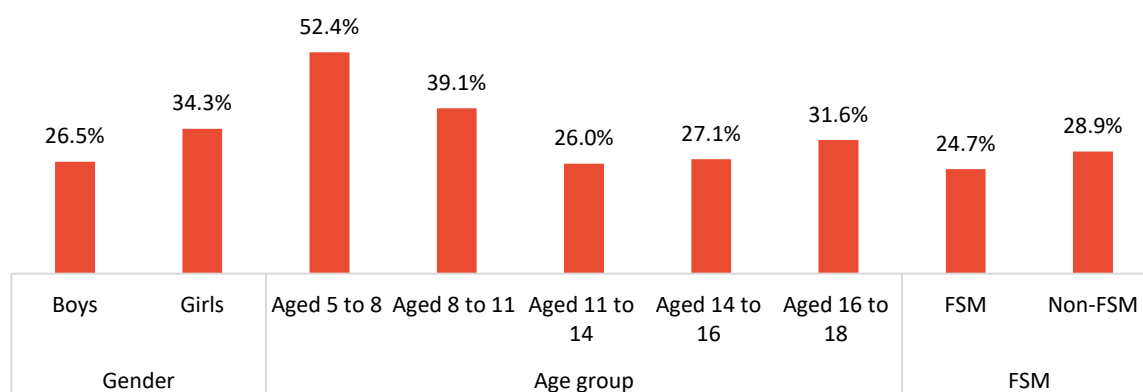
Figure 8 shows the percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 reading daily over time. In 2022, fewer than 3 in 10 (28.0%) said that they were reading daily. Daily reading levels in 2022 are similar to those recorded just before the pandemic in 2019 (25.8%) and early 2020 (30.8%), decreasing further from the levels of daily reading recorded in May 2020 (37.7%) and 2021 (30.1%).

Figure 8: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who read daily from 2005 to 2022



1 in 3 (34.3%) girls and 1 in 4 (26.5%) boys said they read daily in 2022 (see Figure 9). Daily reading also decreased by age group, from more than half (52.4%) of 5- to 8-year-olds, to 2 in 5 (39.1%) 8- to 11-year-olds, and 1 in 4 (26.0%) 11- to 14-year-olds. Daily reading then increased slightly for 14- to 16-year-olds (27.1%) and 16- to 18-year-olds (31.6%). Fewer of those who receive FSMs said that they read daily (24.7%) than those who don't (28.9%).

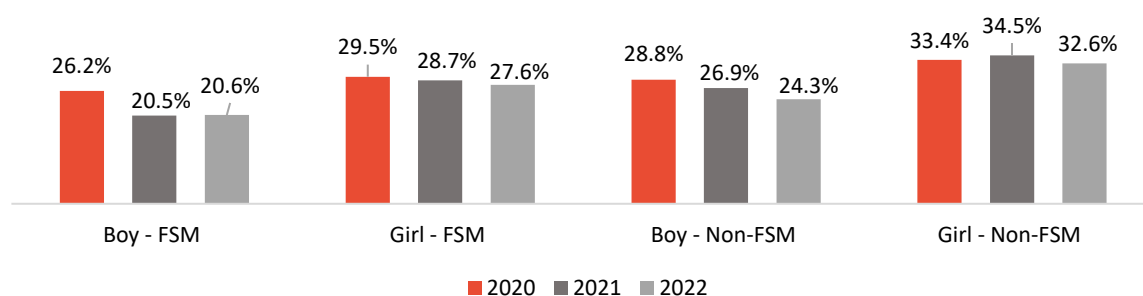
Figure 9: Percentage of children and young people aged 5 to 18 who said they read daily in 2022 by gender, age group and free-school-meal uptake (8 to 18s only)



Only 1 in 5 (20.6%) boys who received free school meals said they read daily in 2022, a decrease from 1 in 4 (26.2%) who said they read daily in 2020 (see Figure 10). A similar pattern appears when looking at boys who did not receive FSMs, dropping from around 3 in 10 (28.8%) saying they read daily in 2020, to only 1 in 4 (24.3%) reading daily in 2022.

Similarly, among girls who receive FSMs, only 27.6% said they read daily in 2022, a decrease from the 3 in 10 (29.5%) who reported reading daily in 2020. Though, unlike other demographics, more girls not receiving FSMs reported reading daily in 2021 (34.5%) and 2020 (33.4%), 2022 still recorded the lowest levels of daily reading in the past three years, with fewer than 1 in 3 (32.6%) saying they read daily.

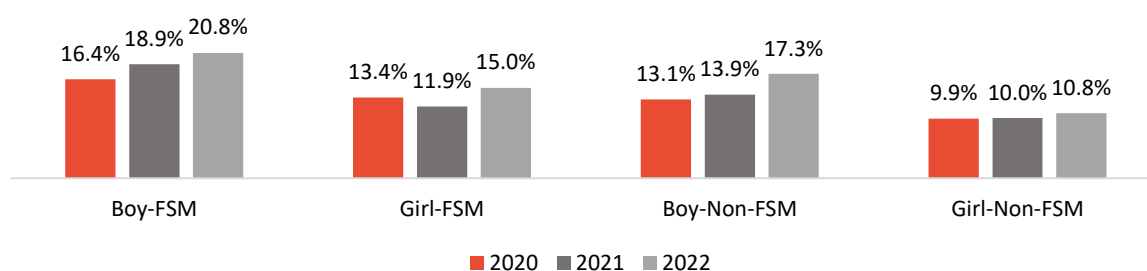
Figure 10: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who read daily in 2020, 2021 and 22 by gender and free-school-meal uptake



Conversely, as shown in Figure 11, we find that 1 in 5 (20.8%) boys who receive FSMs said they read rarely or never, an increase from 2021 (18.9%) and 2020 (16.4%). A similar pattern is seen with boys who didn't receive FSMs, with 17.3% saying they read rarely or never in 2022, compared with 13.9% in 2021 and 13.1% in 2020.

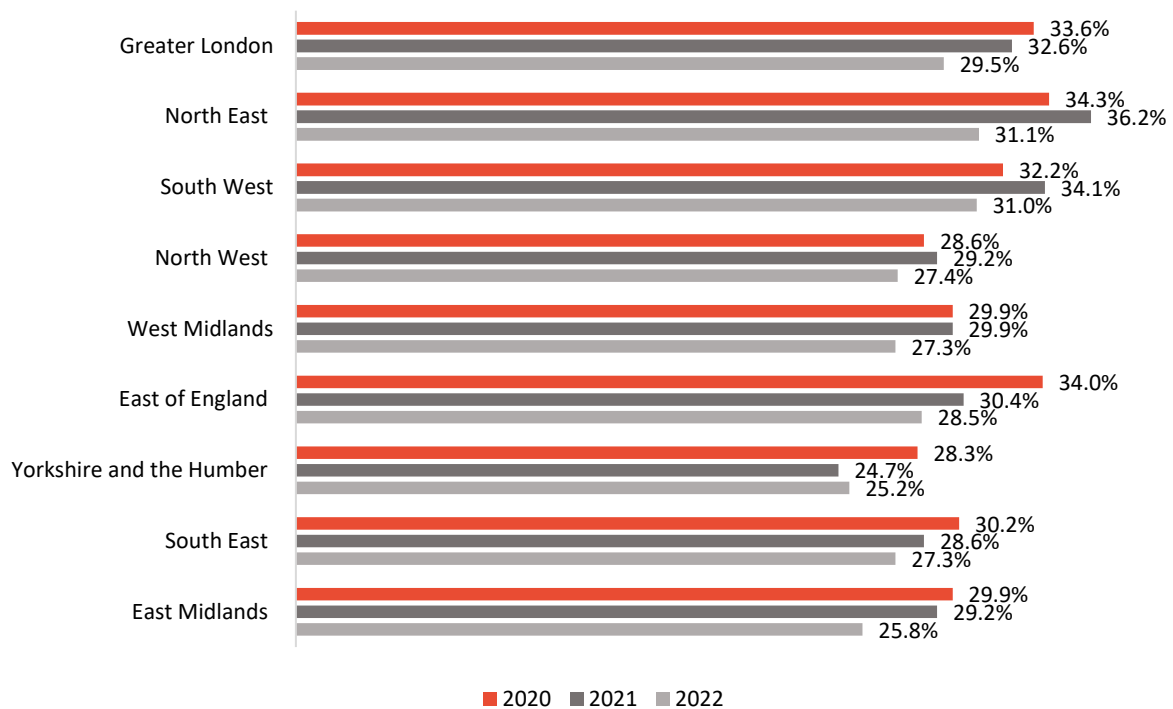
A slightly different pattern was seen among girls, although the percentage of those who read rarely or never was still higher in 2022 than 2021 or 2020. Indeed, 15.0% of girls who received FSMs in 2022 said they read rarely or never, compared with 11.9% in 2021 and 13.4% in 2020. A much smaller difference was seen across the years for girls who didn't receive FSMs, with 1 in 10 reading rarely or never in 2022 (10.8%), 2021 (10.0%) and 2020 (9.9%). Overall, boys who received FSMs in 2022 were most likely to say that they read rarely or never (20.8% or around 1 in 5), while girls who didn't receive FSMs were least likely (10.8% or 1 in 10). More boys who didn't receive FSMs (17.3%) in 2022 were said they read rarely or never than girls who received FSMs (15.0%), indicating that gender may have been a stronger predictor of reading rarely or never than FSM status.

Figure 11: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who read rarely or never by gender and free-school-meal uptake



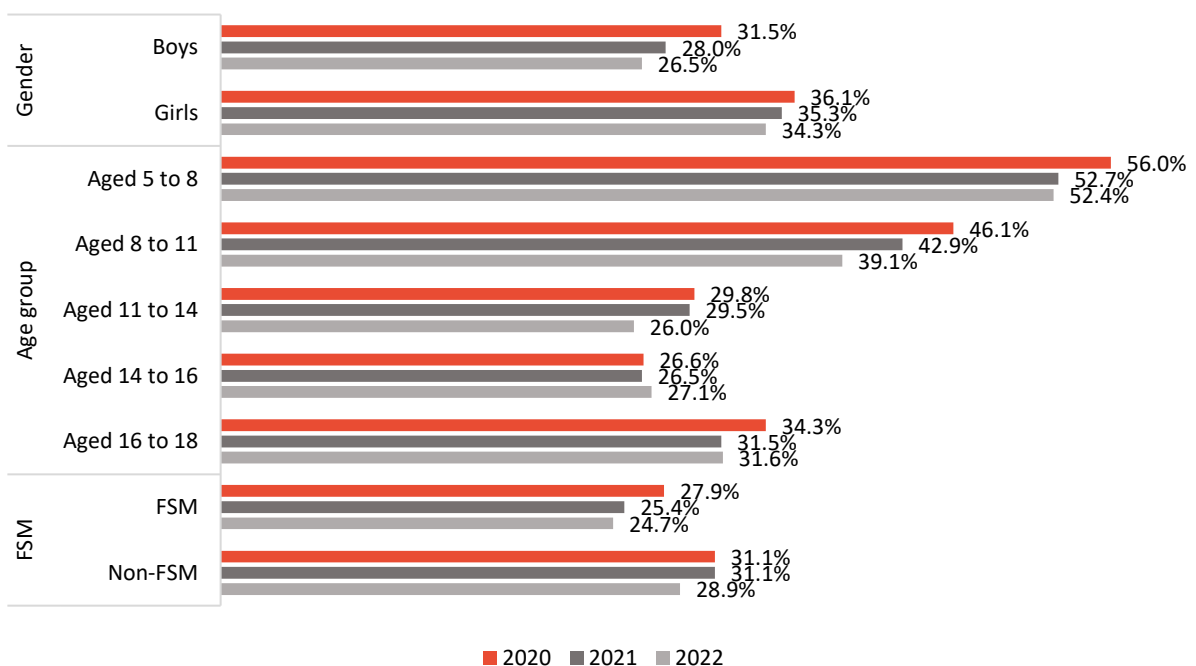
As shown in Figure 12, daily reading also varied by region. Indeed, daily reading decreased in all regions from 2020 to 2022, and all regions excluding Yorkshire and the Humber (marginal increase of 0.5pp) from 2021 to 2022. In 2022, daily reading was highest in the North East (31.1%), South West (31.0%) and Greater London (29.5%), and lowest in the East Midlands (25.8%) and Yorkshire and the Humber (25.2%). Although daily reading increased marginally in 2022 (+0.5pp) in Yorkshire and the Humber, it remains the region with the lowest rate of daily reading in England. Daily reading has decreased the most in the North East (-5.1pp) and the East Midlands (-3.4pp), and the least in the South East (-1.3pp) and North West (-1.8pp).

Figure 12: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who said they read daily in 2020, 2021 and 2022 by region



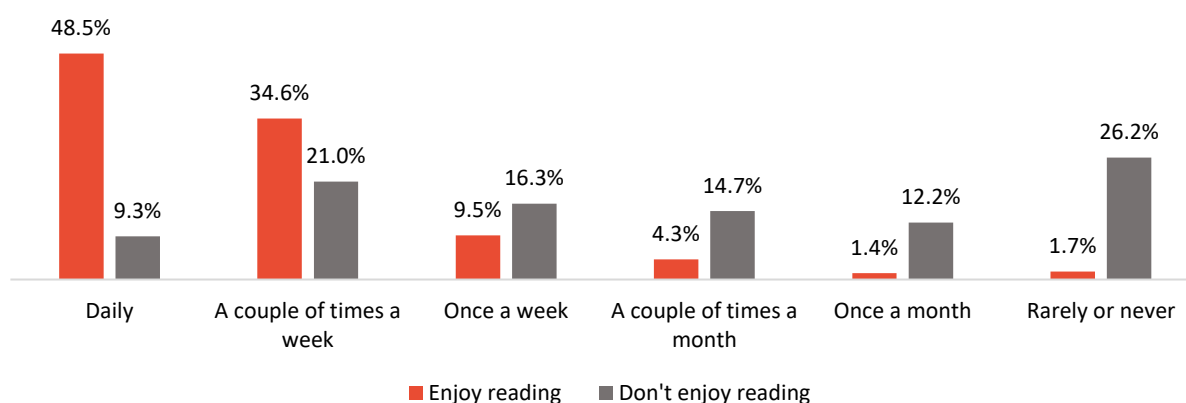
Daily reading has decreased for both boys (-5pp) and girls (-1.8pp) since 2019 (see Figure 13). Across this time, the gender gap in daily reading has increased from 4.6pp to 7.8pp. Daily reading has also decreased since 2019 for every age group, except for those aged 14 to 16 where it has increased by only 0.5pp since 2019. For FSM, daily reading has decreased since 2019 more so for those who receive FSMs (3.2pp), but also for those who don't (2.2pp).

Figure 13: Percentage of children and young people aged 5 to 18 who read daily in 2020, 2021 and 2022 by gender, age group and free-school-meal uptake (8 to 18s only)



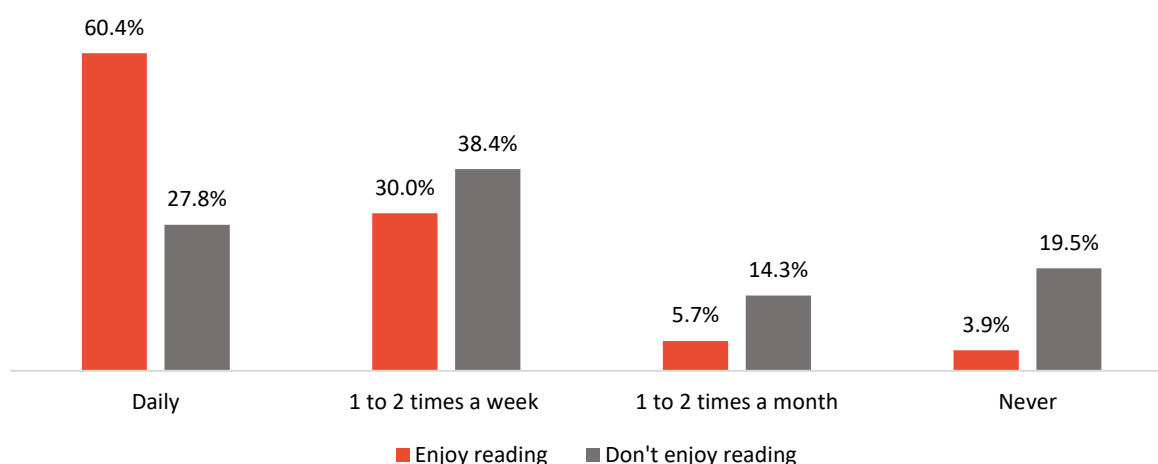
Of those aged 8 to 18 who enjoy reading, almost half (48.5%) read daily, while another 1 in 3 (34.6%) read a couple of times a week (see Figure 14). Only 1.7% of those who enjoy reading read rarely or never. Conversely, of those who don't enjoy reading, only 1 in 10 (9.3%) read daily, while 1 in 5 (21.0%) read a couple of times a week. One in 4 (26.2%) of those who don't enjoy reading said they read rarely or never.

Figure 14: Reading enjoyment x reading frequency in 2022 for children and young people aged 8 to 18



Of those aged 5 to 8 who enjoy reading, 3 in 5 (60.4%) said they read daily, while 1 in 3 (30.0%) said they read 1 to 2 times a week (see Figure 15). Only 3.9% of those who enjoy reading said they never read. Of those who don't enjoy reading, 1 in 4 (27.8%) still read daily, while 2 in 5 (38.4%) said they read 1 to 2 times a week. One in 5 (19.5%) of those who don't enjoy reading said they never read. The differences in the relationship between reading frequency and reading enjoyment are therefore smaller when we look at those aged 5 to 8 compared with those aged 8 to 18.

Figure 15: Reading enjoyment x reading frequency in 2022 for children aged 5 to 8



Why do children and young people read? (8 to 18 only)

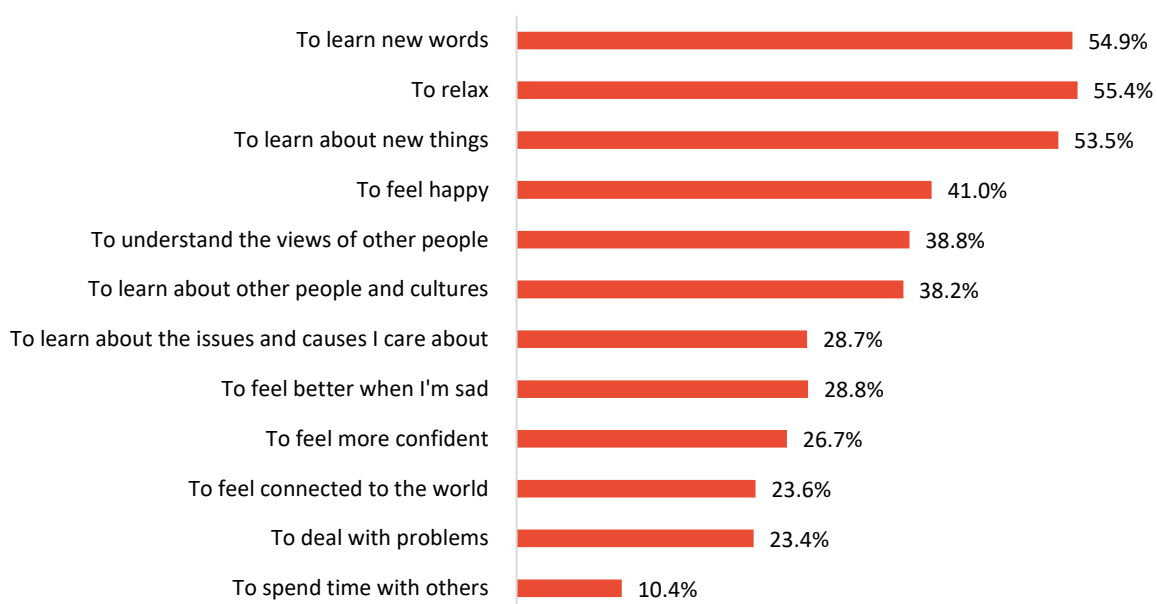
When asked for their reasons for reading in 2022, children and young people aged 8 to 18 gave a variety of motivations. As shown in Figure 16, many said they read to learn, with more

than half saying they read to learn new words (54.9%) or to learn about new things (53.5%), while just under 1 in 3 (28.7%) said they read to learn about the issues and causes they cared about.

Likewise, many indicated reasons to read for wellbeing, with over half saying they read to relax (55.4%) and 2 in 5 (41.0%) reading to feel happy. Furthermore, 1 in 4 children and young people said they read to feel more confident (26.7%) or to deal with problems (23.4%).

Reading to connect with others was also a notable motivation, with 2 in 5 children and young people reading to understand the views of others (38.8%) and to learn about other people and cultures (38.2%). Similarly, 1 in 4 (23.6%) said they read to feel connected to the world and 1 in 10 (10.4%) said they read to spend time with others.

Figure 16: Children and young people aged 8 to 18's reasons for reading in 2022⁹



Children and young people also shared some more details about their reading in response to open-ended questions on the topic. Many of the 56,632 responses we received were about their reasons for reading. For example, more than half (55.4%) of 8- to 18-year-olds told us that they **read to relax**:

“Books are like my happy place they make me feel positive and help me start or finish the day, it helps me relax more and if I’ve had an argument or something happens at school I sit down by the window and read.”

“I like to read because it helps me relax and switch off for a while and it gives me something else to think about.”

“I like to read because it helps with my anxiety a lot.”

⁹Those who said they rarely or never read (n = 9,137) were excluded from this analysis.

“It helps me cope with things better. I read books that either relate to me and that I find safety in or help me know I’m not alone.”

One in 4 (23.6%) said they read **to feel connected to the world** (see Figure 20) through ways such as:

“I read to my nieces and nephews sometimes so they can fall asleep.”

“Reading helps me talk to my friends via text.”

“To feel less lonely.”

“I read to my grandma so I get to speak to my grandma.”

“I enjoy it and my sister and I talk about the book if we both have read it afterwards.”

“Having that community, over the past 6 months getting into reading has brought me so many new friends from book clubs and brought me closer to old friends.”

“I love to read whatever my friends are reading if I like the sound of it as I can talk to them about the book and we can engage in a good conversation about it.”

“Allows for more conversation and to build connections with people over this similar interest.”

“When I was little my parents read stories to me and now that I have 3 younger sisters I love reading to them too.”

“I also read books to my little sisters and I like to talk about books with all of my cousins.”

For reading to **understand the views of others** (38.8%), and learn about **issues and causes they care about** (28.7%), children and young people shared:

“It raises awareness of issues throughout the world that I otherwise wouldn't have known of from a personal perspective of a character.”

“Reading is a good way to get a different perspective of the world without only my own.”

“Reading helps to understand people better and feel more connected to people with differences (mental health, disabilities etc.).”

“The more you read more you learn and it’s always good to learn a thing or two in your free time.”

“It helps us learn things about different cultures and different religions. It helps us by telling us about animals, humans, environment, freedom, etc.”

“I read as it teaches me about culture and other world view points.”

“I love reading news articles or books about world problems such as LGBTQIA+ inequality and gender equality issues, and how we can fix those problems for the better.”

“I like understanding what life is like for other people. I also think it’s important to read books to understand different perspectives in life. Since my life is pretty normal, which I am grateful for of course, when I read books, I learn to be more empathetic towards other people and it helps me not to judge people too quickly.”

Additionally, they shared other reasons for reading, including **to process emotions, or experience a form of escapism:**

“It helps me escape this world and helps me in learning about what I am feeling. That is because I have a hard time expressing my emotions and would rather not bother anyone.”

“Reading makes me realise that I’m not alone and that I’m not the only one who has problems in and out of school.”

“Depending on the books I read, it helps me convey my emotions into writing. If I’m feeling sad or upset then I’ll read a book that makes me feel those same emotions and it’ll help me counteract it so that I feel better.”

“Reading distracts me from issues I experience in real life. I have an opportunity to set my mind free and imagine a more peaceful scenario.”

“I love the fact that with fiction books, I can be transported to another world.”

“It’s like getting trapped (in a good way) in a whole new world and it’s like I can feel everything that’s happening in the book happen around me. I like reading fiction because I’m learning in a more enjoyable way than in the classroom. Personally don’t know what I would do if all the books in the world suddenly disappeared!”

Others told us that they read to **improve writing and reading skills** and to support general school work:

“It helps me read other things better. It helps me use new words in my writing and schoolwork.”

“It helps me learn new words and helps me be a better reader.”

“Reading helps me in my school work.”

“It helps when I remember a phrase and good description to put in my school work.”

“It helps me understand things like school work and homework when I don’t have anyone around me.”

“Because reading increases your vocabulary and your knowledge of how to correctly use new words. Reading helps you clearly articulate what you want to say.”

“Because it helps me to learn new vocabulary to use in my writing/homework.”

“I read because it helps me become better at English since it’s my second language and allows me to learn new words.”

“I also love to read because it gives me inspiration to write my own stories, song lyrics and poems!”

Some said that they read to **get away from technology**:

“I also feel entertained when reading, and it’s a good way to get a break from technology.”

“Also reading helps give me something to do instead of watching TV.”

“I read to exercise my brain and to keep me away from electronics.”

While others told us they read to **get involved with technology**:

“Sometimes I read news articles online, text messages and social media posts.”

“What makes me want to read is when a certain book seems to be popular or trendy online.”

“If you’ve seen a movie that has been based off of a book, you might want to read the book it has been based off of, which is sometimes what I do. Also if I see a book that has been reviewed online with good ratings, I’ll try to get that book and read it.”

“Online I love to read about fashion.”

“Online reading is ok as my eyes struggle to read off the page.”

Some also said that they read to **learn more about the topics or things they enjoy**:

“I read because I like expanding my knowledge on my favourite subjects (I like reading about sharks).”

“Reading helps maintain my fitness levels during lockdown as I was able to learn some interesting workouts.”

“Reading makes me learn about new football skills I can try to do when I play matches.”

“I am aspiring to become a journalist and in my free time I read because it’s fun and it keeps my brain healthy.”

“I love singing, so personally I enjoy reading good song lyrics and writing my own lyrics.”

“If a book is relevant to my interests or aspirations, like someone in medical school might read a book about life as a doctor.”

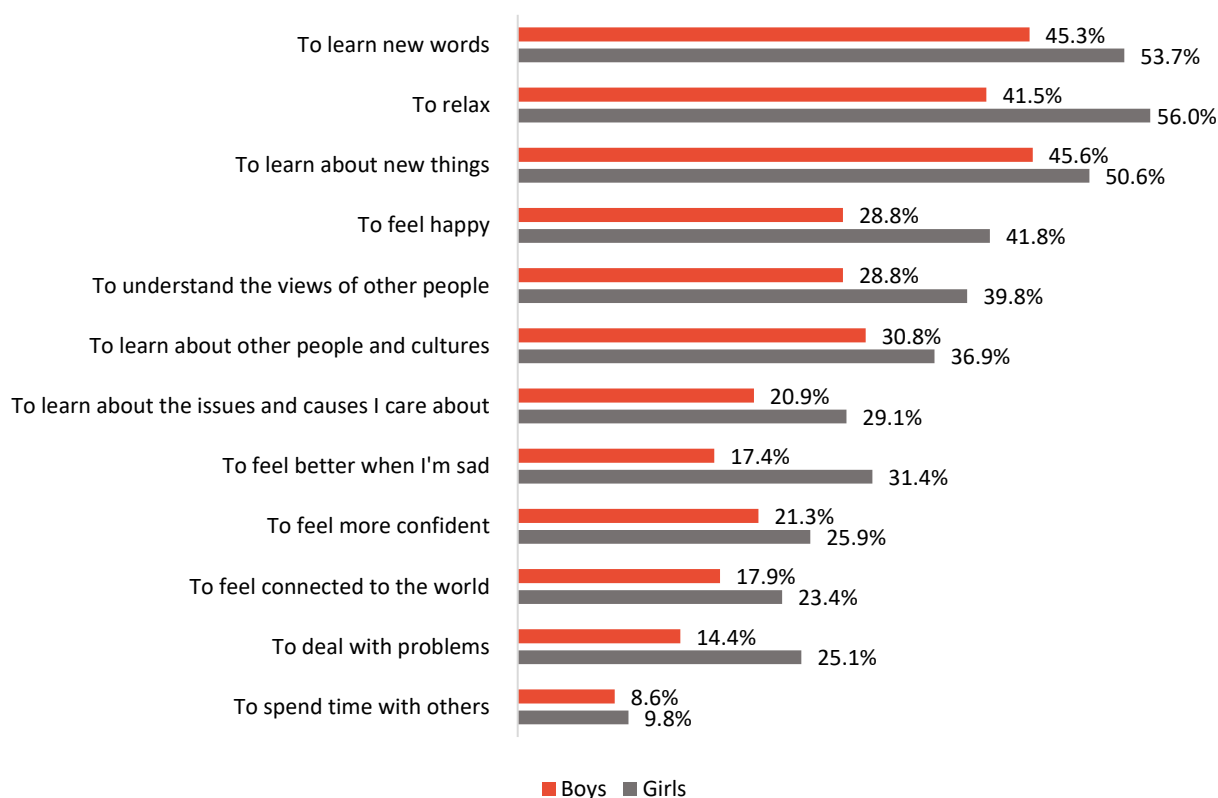
“I often read books about the past and history motivates me as it is a really interesting insight into people’s lives in the past.”

“I want to be an actor when I grow up and it helps me learn lines.”

Looking at reading for mental wellbeing purposes more specifically shows that there are clear differences between boys and girls (see Figure 17). For example, while 56.0% of girls shared that they read to relax, only 2 in 5 (41.5%) boys said the same. Additionally, while 2 in 5 (41.8%) girls read to feel happy, 1 in 4 (28.8%) boys said the same. 1 in 3 (31.4%) girls said they read to feel better when they are sad, but fewer than 1 in 5 (17.4%) boys said the same. Finally, while 1 in 4 (25.1%) girls read to deal with problems, only 1 in 7 (14.4%) boys said the same.

There were smaller differences between girls and boys when it came to learning new words (53.7% vs 45.3%), learning about new things (50.6% vs 45.6%), about other people and cultures (36.9% vs 30.8%), or about the issues and causes they care about (29.1% vs 20.9%). Finally, a similar percentage of girls and boys said that they read to feel connected to the world (23.4% vs 17.9%), to feel more confident (25.9% vs 21.3%) or to spend time with others (9.8% vs 8.6%).

Figure 17: Children and young people aged 8 to 18’s reasons for reading in 2022 by gender

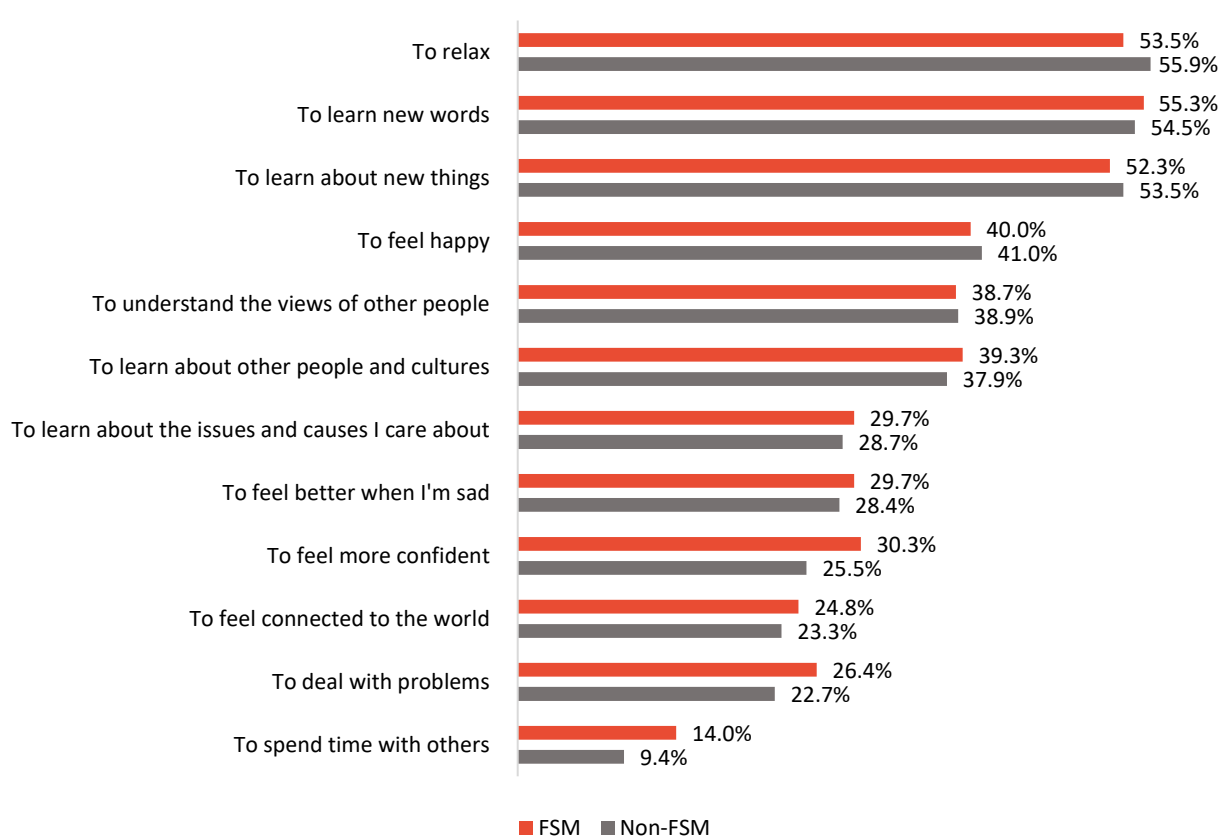


In comparison with the differences revealed when examining reasons for reading by gender, free-school-meal uptake revealed only minimal differences in reading motivations (see Figure 18). Similar percentages of 8- to 18-year-olds who received FSMs and children and young people who didn’t said they read to relax (53.5% vs 55.9%), to learn new words (55.3% vs 54.5%), to learn about new things (52.3% vs 53.5%), to feel happy (40.0% vs 41.0%), and to understand the views of other people (38.7% vs 38.9%). Likewise, differences between those who received FSMs and those who didn’t were small between those who read to learn about

other people and cultures (39.3% vs 37.9%), to learn more about the issues and causes they cared about (29.7% vs 28.7%), to feel better when they were sad (29.7% vs 28.4%), or to feel connected to the world (24.8% vs 23.3%).

The most notable differences were for reading to feel confident, with more of those who receive FSMs agreeing with this than those who don't (30.3% vs 25.5%). A similar pattern was found for reading to deal with problems (26.4% vs 22.7%), and to spend time with others (14.0% vs 9.4%). However, the differences observed between boys and girls are rather small, suggesting that free-school-meal uptake had a minimal impact on reasons for reading among 8- to 18-year-olds in 2022.

Figure 18: Children and young people aged 8 to 18's reasons for reading in 2022 by free-school-meal uptake



What do children and young people think about reading?

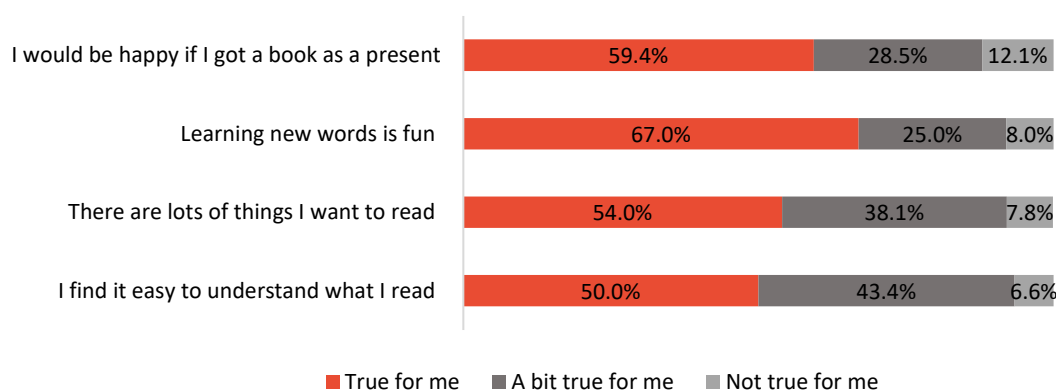
Aged 5 to 8

We also asked children aged 5 to 8 what they thought about reading in 2022 (see Figure 19). Attitudes were typically positive, with 9 in 10 (87.9%) children saying that the statement “I would be happy if I got a book as a present” was ‘true’ for them (59.4%) or ‘a bit true’ for them (28.5%), and just over 9 in 10 rating the statement “There are lots of things I want to read” as ‘true’ for them (54.0%) or ‘a bit true’ for them (38.1%).

Likewise, attitudes were positive to learning new vocabulary, with more than 2 in 3 (67.0%) children rating the statement “Learning new words is fun” as ‘true’ for them, while 1 in 4

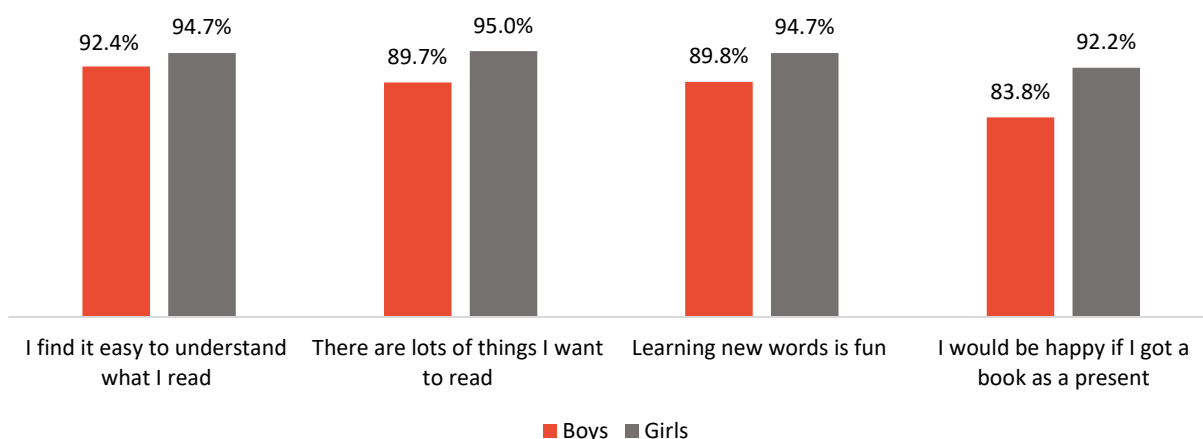
(25.0%) rated it 'a bit true' for them. Promisingly, most children also said they found it easy to understand what they read, with half (50.0%) rating the statement "I find it easy to understand what I read" as 'true' for them, and over 2 in 5 (43.4%) rating the statement as 'a bit true' for them.

Figure 19: What children aged 5 to 8 think about reading in 2022



The attitudes to reading among children aged 5 to 8 did show variation between genders, with more girls than boys indicating positive opinions towards reading (see Figure 20). Fewer boys (92.4%) than girls (94.7%) said they found it easy to understand what they read and, likewise, fewer boys (89.7%) than girls (95.0%) said there were lots of things they wanted to read. Similarly, more girls (94.7%) than boys (89.8%) said learning new words was fun, although the largest percentage difference was apparent for those who said they would be happy to get a book as a present, with just over 4 in 5 (83.8%) boys agreeing with this and over 9 in 10 (92.2%) girls.

Figure 20: What children aged 5 to 8 think about reading by gender



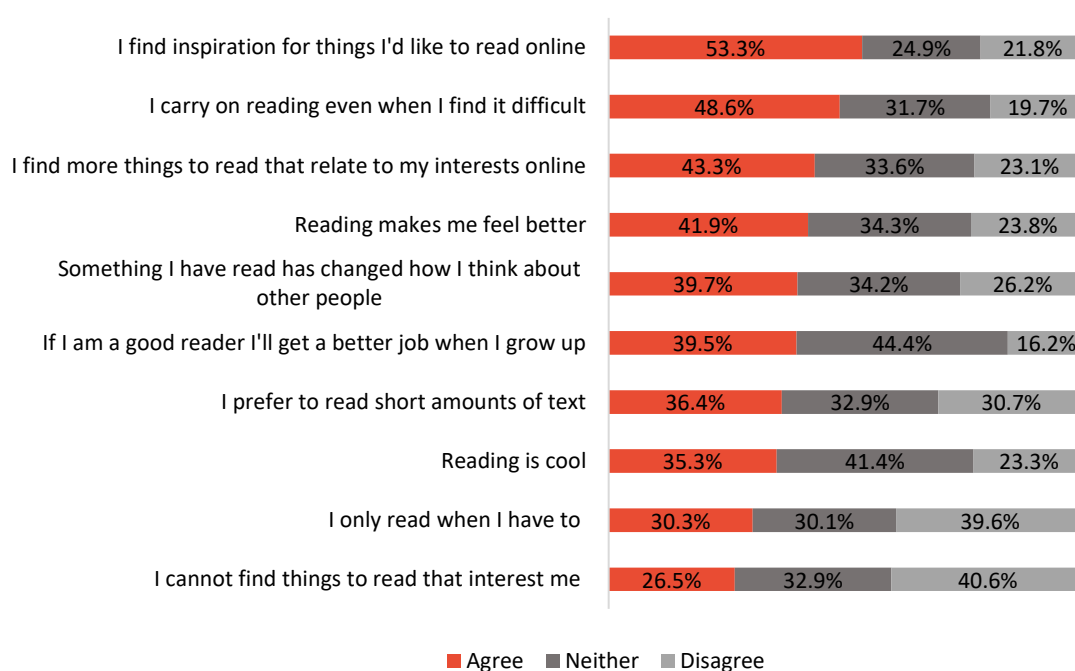
Aged 8 to 18

As shown in Figure 21, when asking children and young people aged 8 to 18 what they thought about reading in 2022, attitudes were mixed. 2 in 5 (41.9%) agreed with the statement "Reading makes me feel better", while just under 1 in 4 (23.8%) disagreed. Around 1 in 3 (35.3%) agreed that they thought reading was cool, with 1 in 4 (23.3%) saying they disagreed, and 2 in 5 (41.4%) saying they neither agreed nor disagreed.

Furthermore, 3 in 10 (30.3%) agreed with the statement “I only read when I have to”, while around 2 in 5 (39.6%) disagreed. Over half (53.3%) agreed with the statement “I find inspiration for things I’d like to read online”, while only 1 in 5 (21.8%) disagreed, indicating the relevance of technology in supporting children and young people’s reading decisions. Promisingly, 2 in 5 (40.6%) disagreed with the statement “I cannot find things to read that interest me”, though more than 1 in 4 (26.5%) agreed. Meanwhile, 2 in 5 (45.5%) agreed with the statement “I find more things to read that relate to my interests online”, potentially showing changing preferences in reading formats.

Just under half (48.6%) agreed with the statement “I carry on reading even when I find it difficult”, and only 1 in 5 (19.7%) disagreed, indicating an encouraging amount of determination towards reading. While just over 1 in 4 (26.2%) disagreed with the statement “Something I have read has changed how I think about other people”, 2 in 5 (39.7%) agreed that something they have read has impacted how they think about others. Responses to the statement “I prefer to read short amounts of text” were divided, with 36.4% agreeing with the statement, while 30.7% disagreed and 32.9% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Figure 21: What children aged 8 to 18 think about reading in 2022



The statement “If I am a good reader I’ll get a better job when I grow up” gained the smallest percentage of disagreements (16.2%), though only 2 in 5 (39.5%) children and young people agreed with the statement. Notably, this statement also received the largest percentage of undecided opinions, with more than 2 in 5 (44.4%) saying they neither agreed nor disagreed that being a good reader would mean they’d get a better job.

As shown in Figure 21, 1 in 4 (26.5%) 8- to 18-year-olds agreed that they cannot find things to read that interest them. This was also reflected in some of the open-ended comments, with children and young people sharing **barriers to books that are enjoyable to them, or suitable for their ability**:

“There aren’t many books available in my school because the library is closed and most of the books contain extensive vocabulary that I find hard to comprehend.”

“Reading is a little bit hard for me because sometimes I mix up the words with others. Sometimes I read at home but mainly at school because there are more books of my choice.”

“The books teachers and parents tell us to read don’t interest us. Like 19th-century books, my mum is repeatedly telling me to read *Pride and Prejudice* but I think reading is boring.”

Additionally, 1 in 5 (19.7%) children and young people shared that they **don’t continue reading if they find it difficult**, with comments including:

“I do not read much because I struggle with some things and I do not believe in myself.”

“I have a big problem reading. I really like books, I just can’t read them on my own.”

“I pick books that have a print that is bigger and is easier to read because of my dyslexia.”

“I just find reading boring and hard. I can’t read in front of people because I get too nervous and some of the words are too hard.”

“I’m not great at reading, and I have a very little attention span so reading is normally very hard for me, but once I find something good I’ll be fine.”

Finally, some children and young people shared that their **experience of reading in school had made them not want to read in their spare time**:

“I stopped reading because primary school forced us to read which took the fun out of it.”

“I don’t have a teacher that makes reading and writing seem fun.”

“The main reason I don’t like to read is due to the ways my primary school managed it. They would punish us if we didn’t read enough. This put me off reading.”

“I think that if people didn’t force me to read then I would see it as less than a chore and more as something I actually want to do.”

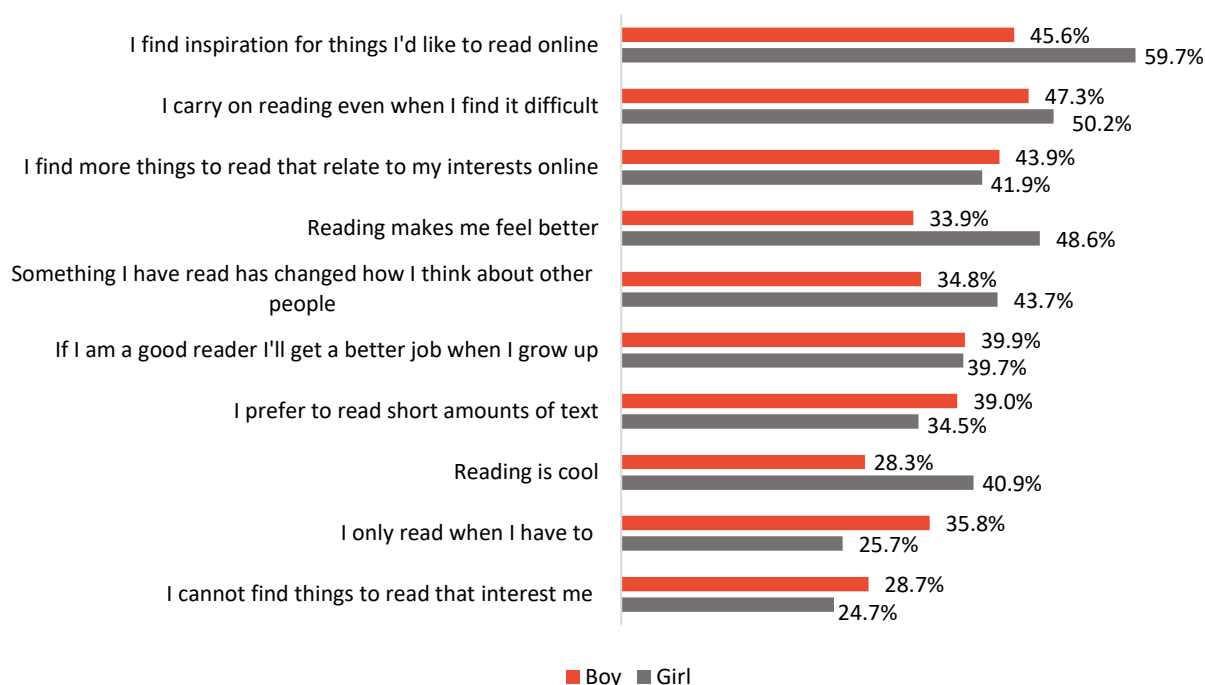
There were differences in what 8- to 18-year-olds thought about reading across genders (see Figure 22). In 2022, more than 2 in 5 (40.9%) girls said they thought reading was cool, while fewer than 3 in 10 (28.3%) boys thought the same. Furthermore, almost half (48.6%) of girls said that reading makes them feel better but only 1 in 3 (33.9%) boys said the same, indicating a notable difference in attitudes towards reading.

More girls (59.7%) than boys (45.6%) said that they found inspiration for things they’d like to read online, and slightly more boys (43.9%) than girls (41.9%) said they found more things to read that related to their interests online. Indeed, just under 3 in 10 (28.7%) boys said they could not find things to read that interest them, compared with under 1 in 4 (24.7%) girls.

Compared with only 1 in 4 (25.7%) girls, 1 in 3 (35.8%) boys said they only read when they had to, and 2 in 5 (39.0%) boys said they preferred to read short amounts of text, compared with around 1 in 3 (34.5%) girls. Beyond this apparent reluctance to read and preference for shorter text, fewer boys (34.8%) than girls (43.7%) agreed that something they had read had changed how they think about other people.

However, the percentage of boys (47.3%) who agreed they would carry on reading even when they found it difficult was only slightly below the percentage of girls (50.2%), indicating a similar level of persistence when reading regardless of gender. Interestingly, the percentage of boys (39.9%) and girls (39.7%) who agreed that being a good reader meant that they would get a better job when they were older is very similar, showing minimal differences between girls' and boys' thoughts on how reading impacts their future prospects.

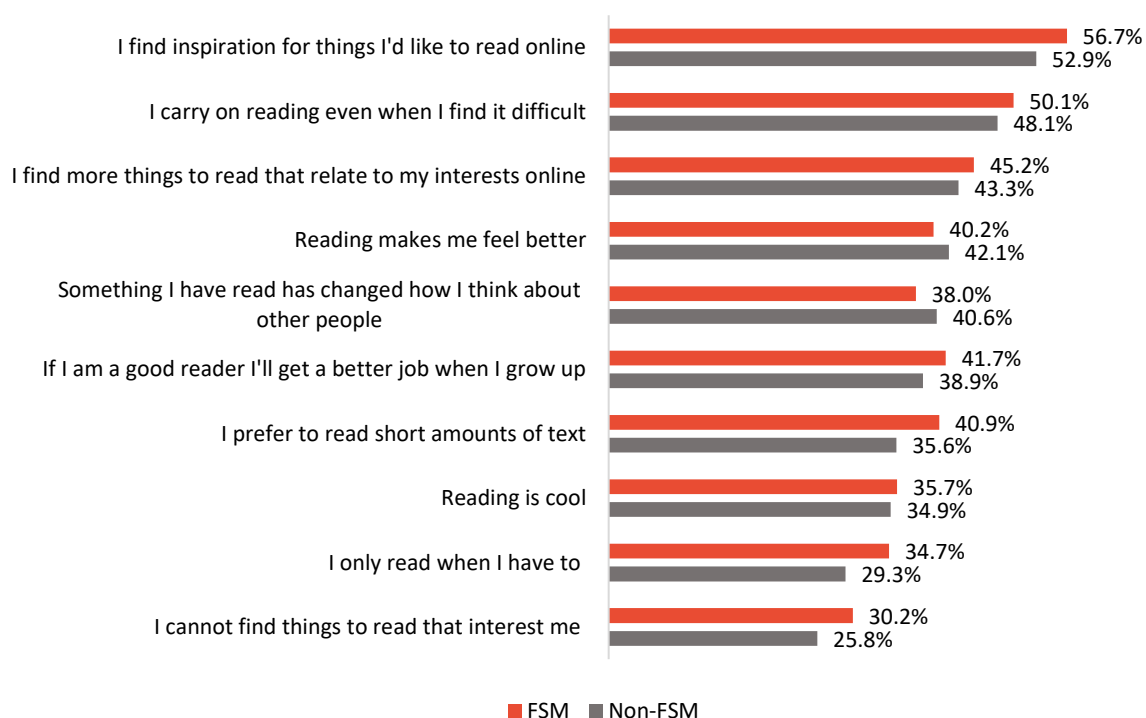
Figure 22: What children aged 8 to 18 think about reading in 2022 (agreement only) by gender



As shown in Figure 23, there were some differences in what children and young people aged 8 to 18 thought about reading in 2022, depending on free-school-meal uptake. Though differences were smaller than those across genders, more of those who received FSMs than those who didn't agreed that they found inspiration for things they'd like to read online (56.7% vs 52.9%), that they carried on reading even when they found it difficult (50.1% vs 48.1%), that they found more things to read related to their interests online (45.2% vs 43.3%), that reading was cool (35.7% vs 34.9%), and that if they were a good reader, they would get a better job when they grow up (41.7% vs 38.9%). More of those who didn't receive FSMs (42.1%) agreed that reading made them feel better than those who did (40.2%), and the same was true for those who agreed that something they have read changed how they think about other people (Non-FSM: 40.6% vs FSM: 38.0%).

Notably, some differences emerged in responses to the statement “I only read when I have to”, with only 29.3% of those not receiving FSMs agreeing with the statement, while 34.7% of those who did receive FSMs agreed. Similarly, more 8- to 18-year-olds receiving FSMs (40.9%) agreed that they preferred to read short amounts of text than those who didn’t receive FSMs (35.6%). While only 1 in 4 (25.4%) of those not receiving FSMs agreed with the statement “I cannot find things to read that interest me”, this rose to 3 in 10 (30.2%) of those who did receive FSMs, which is similar to the difference observed between girls and boys.

Figure 23: What children and young people aged 8 to 18 think about reading in 2022 (agreement only) by free-school-meal uptake

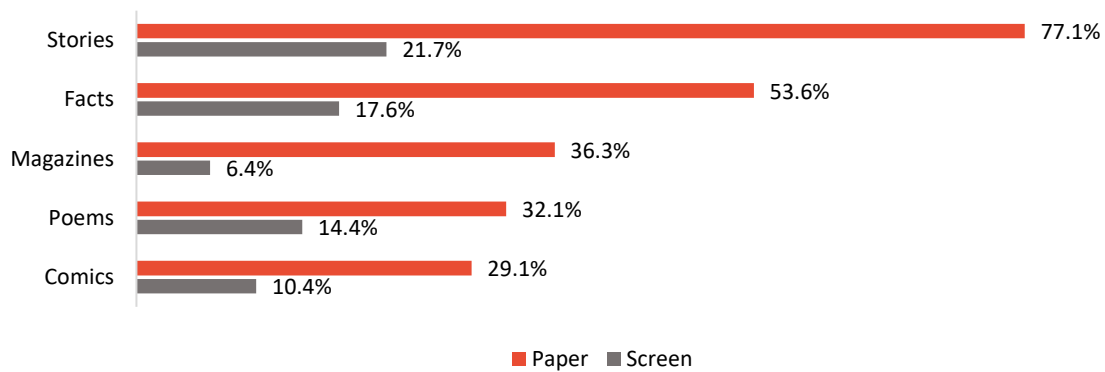


What do children and young people read?

Aged 5 to 8

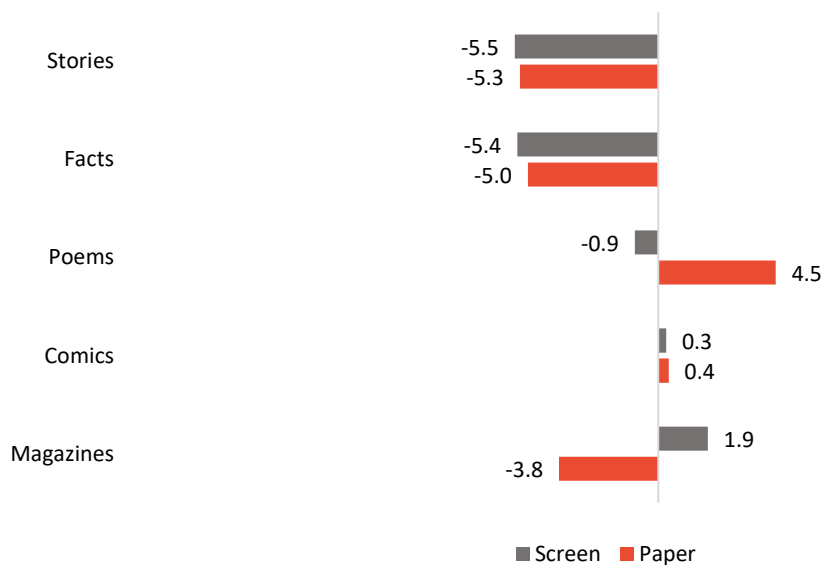
We asked children and young people what they read in their spare time, both on paper and on screen (see Figure 24). For those aged 5 to 8, 3 in 4 (77.1%) shared that they read stories on paper, more than half (53.6%) read facts (i.e. non-fiction), 1 in 3 read magazines (36.3%) and poems (32.1%), and 1 in 5 (29.1%) read comics. Although less common, some children did read on screen. Indeed, 1 in 5 (21.7%) said that they read stories on screen, while just less than 1 in 5 read facts (17.6%). 14.4% of children read poems on screen, 1 in 10 (10.4%) read comics, and 6.4% read magazines.

Figure 24: Materials read either on screen or on paper in their spare time by children aged 5 to 8



Next, comparing reading formats to last year, we see that fewer children aged 5 to 8 were reading stories and facts, both on screen and on paper (see Figure 25). Interestingly, while fewer read poems on screen (-0.9pp), more read poems on paper (+4.5pp) in 2022 compared with 2021. Slightly more children in 2022 read comics on screen (+0.3pp) and on paper (+0.4pp) compared with 2021. Finally, fewer children read magazines on paper (-3.8pp), while more read magazines on screen (+1.9pp).

Figure 25: Percentage-point difference in various formats being read either on a screen or on paper by children aged 5 to 8 between 2021 and 2022

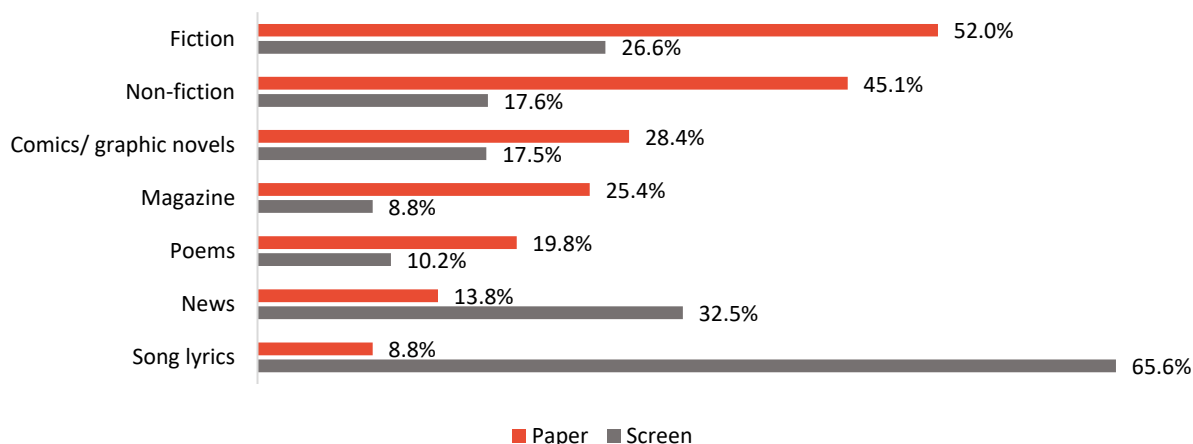


Aged 8 to 18

For those aged 8 to 18, half (52.0%) said that they read fiction on paper in their spare time, with a similar number saying they read non-fiction (45.1%; see Figure 26). Nearly 3 in 10 (28.4%) said they read comics/graphic novels on paper, while 1 in 4 (25.4%) read magazines. 1 in 5 (19.8%) said that they read poems on paper, while 1 in 7 (13.8%) read the news, and 1 in 12 (8.8%) read song lyrics.

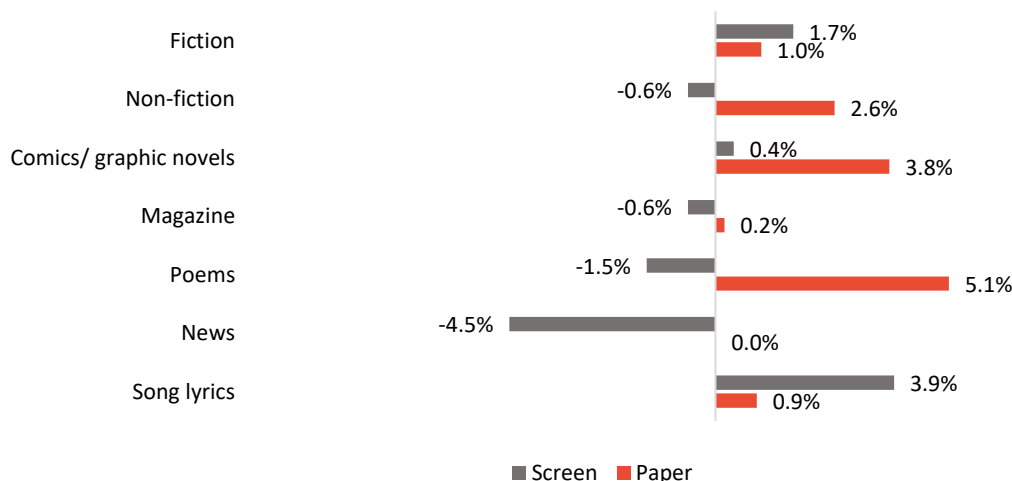
Screen reading was more common for those aged 8 to 18 than those aged 5 to 8. Indeed, 1 in 4 (26.6%) said that they read fiction on screen, while just fewer than 1 in 5 said that they read non-fiction (17.6%) and comics/graphic novels (17.5%). Just less than 1 in 10 (8.8%) read magazines on screen, while 1 in 10 (10.2%) read poems. Interestingly, 1 in 3 (32.5%) read news on screen, while 2 in 3 (65.6%) read song lyrics, making it the most popular material being read on screen.

Figure 26: Materials read either on screen or on paper in their spare time by children and young people aged 8 to 18



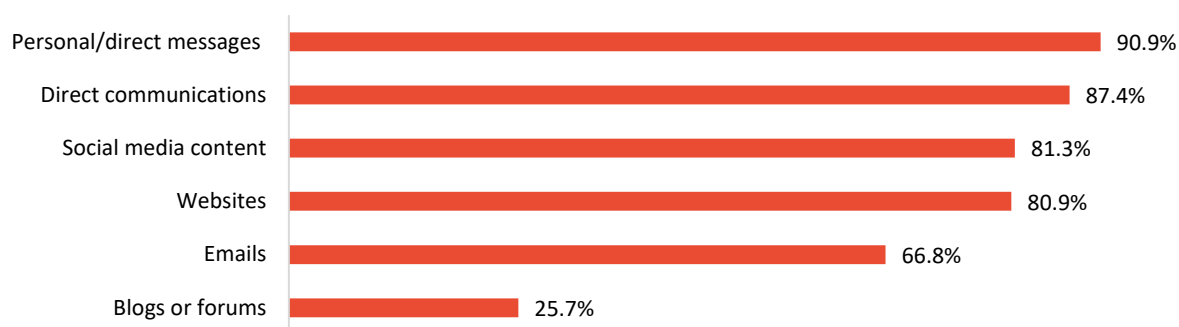
Comparing reading habits to last year, slightly more children aged 8 to 18 read fiction, both on screen (+1.7pp) and on paper (+1.0pp) (see Figure 27). While fewer children read non-fiction on screen (-0.6pp) this year, more read it on paper (+2.6pp). More children and young people read comics/graphic novels both on screen (+0.4pp) and on paper (+3.8%). Slightly fewer read magazines on screen (-0.6pp), while slightly more read magazines on paper (+0.2pp). Those who read poems on screen decreased (-1.5pp), but those who read poems on paper increased by 5.1pp. While there was no change in the percentage who read the news on paper, fewer read the news on screen this year (-4.5pp). Finally, more children read song lyrics this year both on screen (+3.9pp) and on paper (+0.9pp).

Figure 27: Percentage-point difference in various formats being read either on a screen or on paper by children and young people aged 8 to 18 between 2021 and 2022



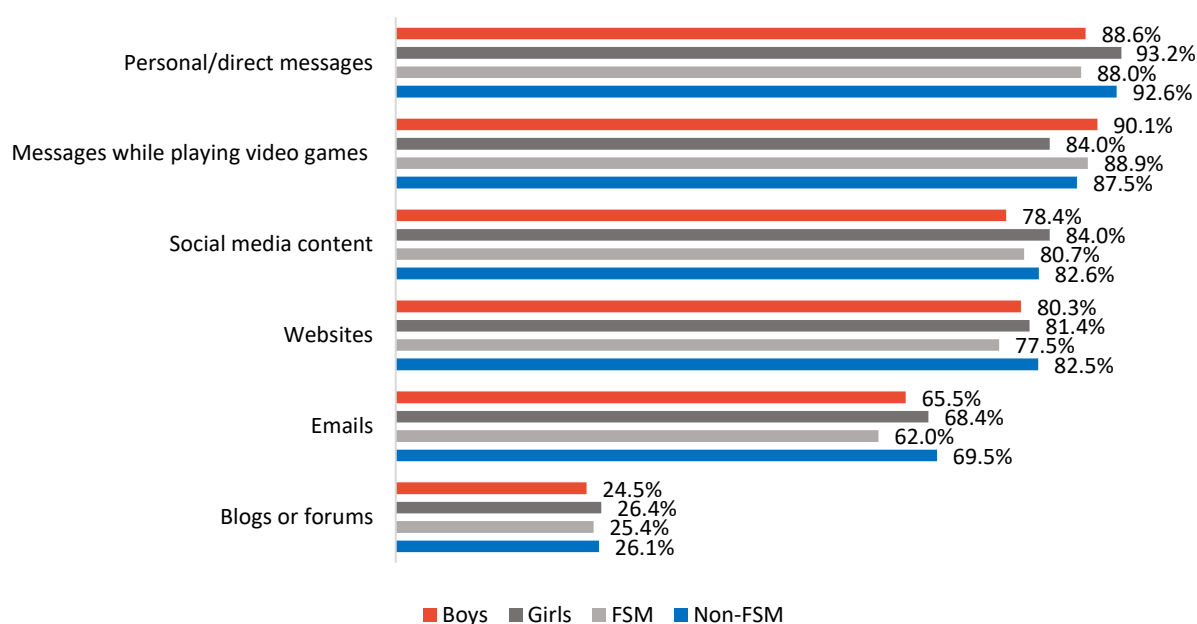
As shown in Figure 28, we also asked children aged 8 to 18 to share whether they read any formats that were exclusively on screen. 9 in 10 (90.9%) children and young people read personal/direct messages, while slightly fewer than 9 in 10 (87.4%) read messages while playing video games. 4 in 5 read social media content (81.3%) and websites (80.9%), while 2 in 3 (66.8%) read emails, and 1 in 4 (25.7%) read blogs or forums.

Figure 28: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 reading various exclusively on-screen formats in their spare time in 2022



Looking at how reading exclusively on-screen formats varies by gender and FSM status, we see that more girls than boys read personal/direct messages (93.2% vs 88.6%), social media content (84.0% vs 78.4%), websites (81.4% vs 80.3%), emails (68.4% vs 65.5%) and blogs/forums (26.4% vs 24.5%), while more boys said that they read messages while playing video games (90.1% vs 84.0%) (See Figure 29). At the same time, more children who don't receive FSMs read personal/direct messages (92.6% vs 88.0%), social media content (82.6% vs 80.7%), websites (82.5% vs 77.5%), emails (69.5% vs 62.0%) and blogs/forums (26.1% vs 25.4%), while more children who do receive FSMs said that they read messages while playing video games (88.9% vs 87.5%).

Figure 29: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 reading various exclusively on-screen formats in their spare time in 2022 by gender and FSM uptake

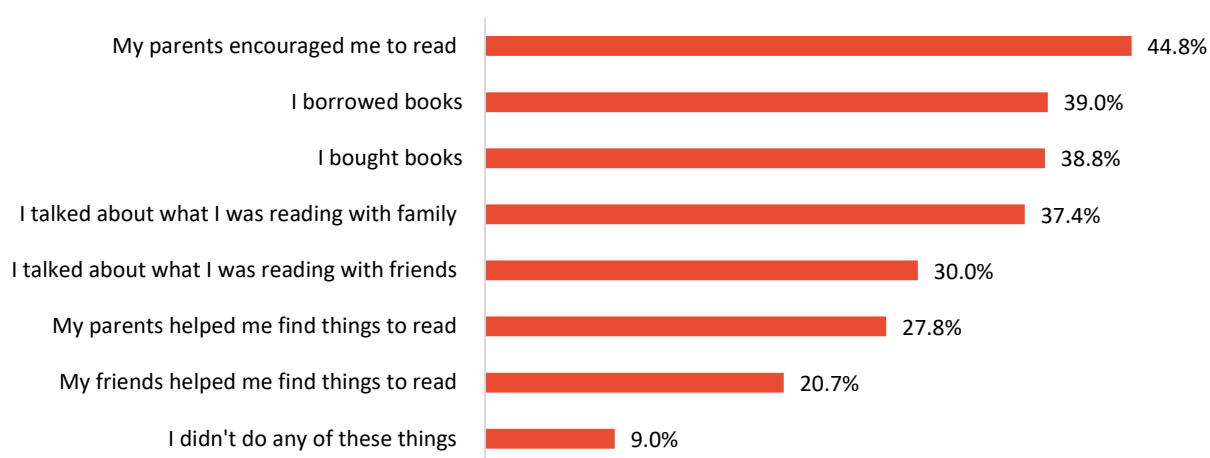


Access to reading resources

We asked children aged 8 to 18 to share the ways in which they had been supported to engage in reading in the past four weeks, whether by friends, family, or their own behaviours (see Figure 30).

Firstly, almost half (44.8%) said that their parents encouraged them to read. Almost 2 in 5 said that they borrowed (39.0%) or bought (38.8%) books. Slightly more children said they talked about what they were reading with family (37.4%) than friends (30.0%). Just over 1 in 4 (27.8%) said their parents helped them find things to read, while 1 in 5 (20.8%) said that their friends helped them find things to read. Finally, 1 in 10 (9.0%) said that they had not been supported to engage in reading the past four weeks by any of the mentioned routes.

Figure 30: Children and young people aged 8 to 18's access to reading resources



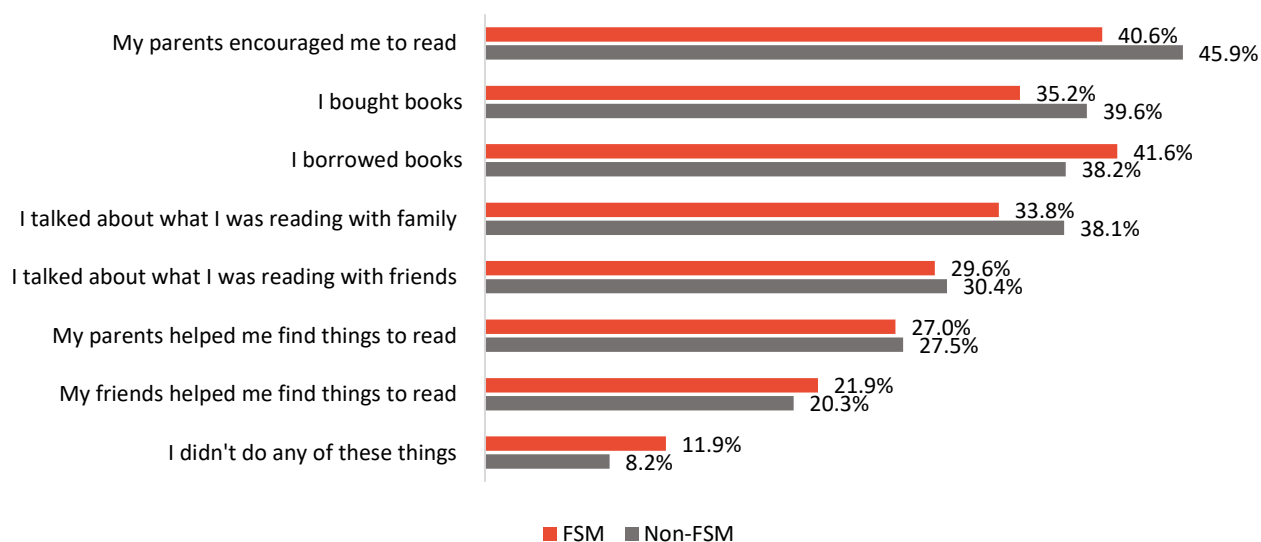
Free-school-meal-uptake revealed some differences in access to reading resources, as shown in Figure 31. More of those who didn't receive FSMs (45.9%) said they had been encouraged to read by their parents in the last four weeks than those who did receive FSMs (40.6%). More also talked about what they were reading with their family (38.1%) than those who received FSMs (33.8%). However, the percentage of 8- to 18-year-olds who said their parents helped them find things to read was only 0.5 percentage points higher for those who didn't receive FSMs (27.5%) than for those who did (27.0%).

Regarding the support for children and young people's reading engagement from their friends, the percentage of 8- to 18-year-olds not receiving FSMs (30.4%) who said that they had talked about what they were reading with friends was only 0.8 percentage points higher than those who did receive FSMs (29.6%). Indeed, the percentage of FSM pupils (21.9%) who said their friends had helped them find things to read was in fact higher than that of those not receiving FSMs (20.3%).

Interestingly, though more children and young people who didn't receive FSMs (39.6%) said they had bought books in the past four weeks than those who did (35.3%), this pattern was reversed when it came to borrowing books. Slightly more 8- to 18-year-olds who received FSMs (41.6%) said that they had borrowed books in the past four weeks compared with those who didn't receive FSMs (38.2%), demonstrating the significance of being able to borrow books.

When considering those who said they had not accessed any of the listed reading resources, more than 1 in 10 (11.9%) children and young people receiving FSMs said they had not been supported in their reading engagement through any of the ways listed. In comparison, only 8.2% of those not receiving FSMs said the same, showing a 3.7-percentage-point difference between those without support for reading engagement, compared with the 1.9-percentage-point difference found between girls and boys shown in Figure 32.

Figure 31: Children and young people aged 8 to 18's access to reading resources by free-school-meal uptake



Looking by gender, there are some observable differences (see Figure 32). Encouragingly, just under 1 in 10 (9.8%) boys said they hadn't been supported in their reading engagement by any of the listed routes, and only 7.9% of girls reported the same.

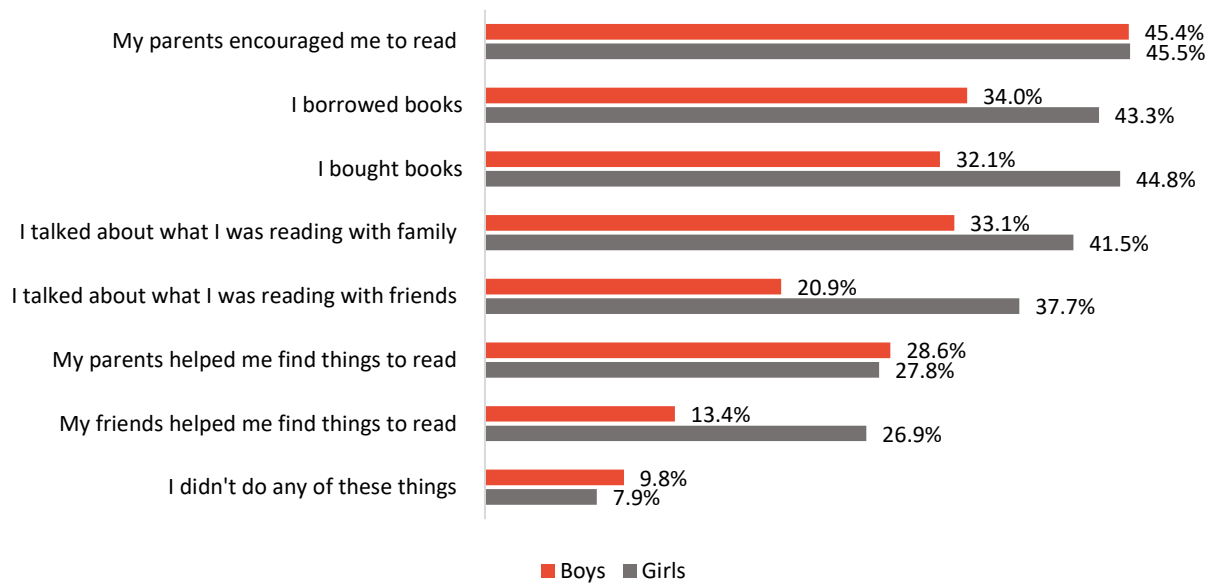
Differences appeared to be minimal regarding parental support, with nearly half of boys (45.4%) and girls (45.5%) saying their parents had encouraged them to read, and almost 3 in 10 boys (28.6%) and girls (27.8%) saying their parents had helped them find things to read. Interestingly, however, despite small differences regarding parental encouragement and support in finding reading material, only 1 in 3 (33.1%) boys said they had talked about what they were reading with family, compared with 2 in 5 (41.5%) girls.

Larger differences also emerged in other areas, with 1 in 3 boys (34.0%) saying they had borrowed books in the past four weeks, compared with over 2 in 5 (43.4%) girls. A similar pattern emerged for those who said they had bought books in the past four weeks, with more than 2 in 5 (44.8%) girls reporting that they had bought books, while fewer than 1 in 3 (32.1%) boys said the same.

The most notable differences emerged when considering interaction with friends regarding reading. Compared with only 1 in 5 (20.9%) boys, nearly 2 in 5 (37.7%) girls told us they had talked about what they were reading with friends in the past four weeks. Likewise, the percentage of girls (26.9%) who said that their friends had helped them find things to read was double the percentage of boys (13.4%) who said the same. This, along with the previously

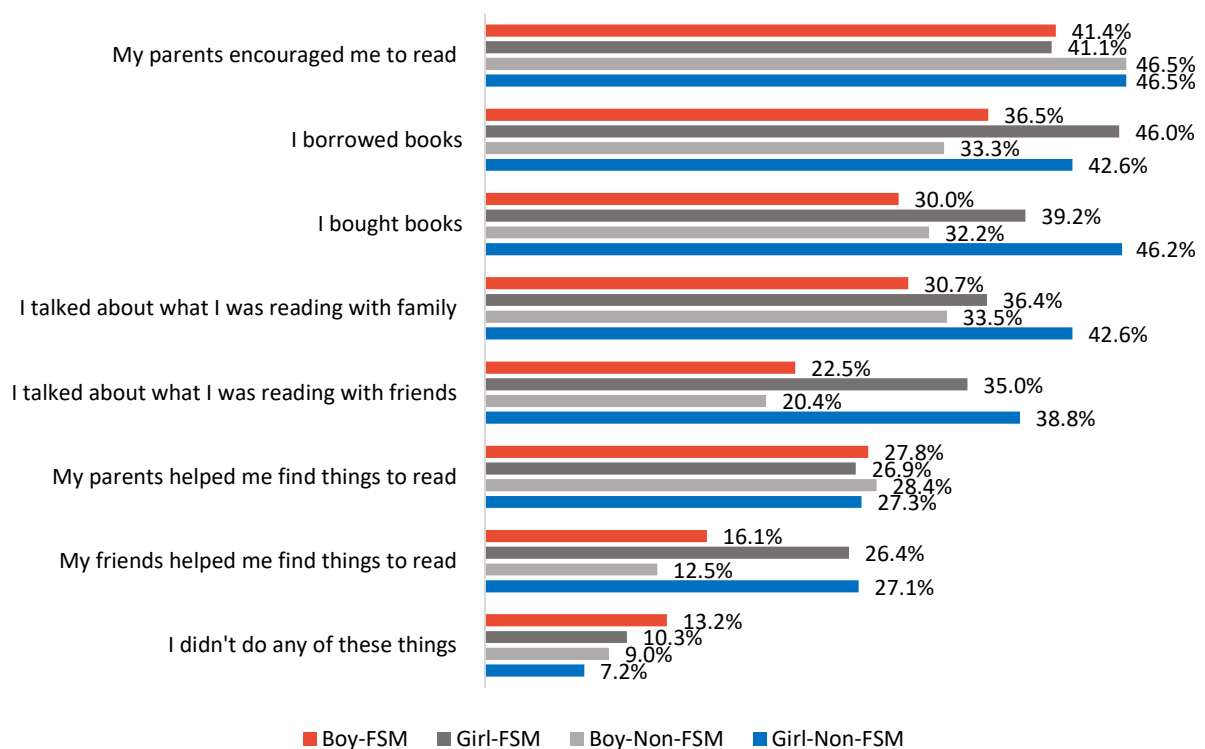
mentioned variation regarding discussion with family, could indicate a substantial difference in how boys and girls interact with reading socially.

Figure 32: Children and young people aged 8 to 18’s access to reading resources by gender



We also looked at the interaction between free-school-meal uptake and gender when it came to children and young people’s access to reading resources (see Figure 33). Boys who received FSMs were the most likely not to have accessed any of the listed resources in the past four weeks (13.2%), followed by girls who received FSMs (10.3%).

Figure 33: Children and young people aged 8 to 18’s access to reading resources by free-school-meal uptake x gender



Nearly 2 in 5 (38.8%) girls not receiving FSMs said they talked about what they were reading with their friends, a slightly higher percentage than girls who did receive FSMs (35.0%). Interestingly, fewer boys who received FSMs (22.5%) and those who didn't (20.4%) said that they spoke about their reading with friends than girls, indicating that gender could be more relevant than FSM when it comes to accessing some reading resources. Additionally, girls who did (27.1%) and did not receive FSMs (26.4%) were relatively similar in the support they received from friends to choose books, while boys who received FSMs (16.1%) accessed slightly more support in that areas than boys who didn't (12.5%).

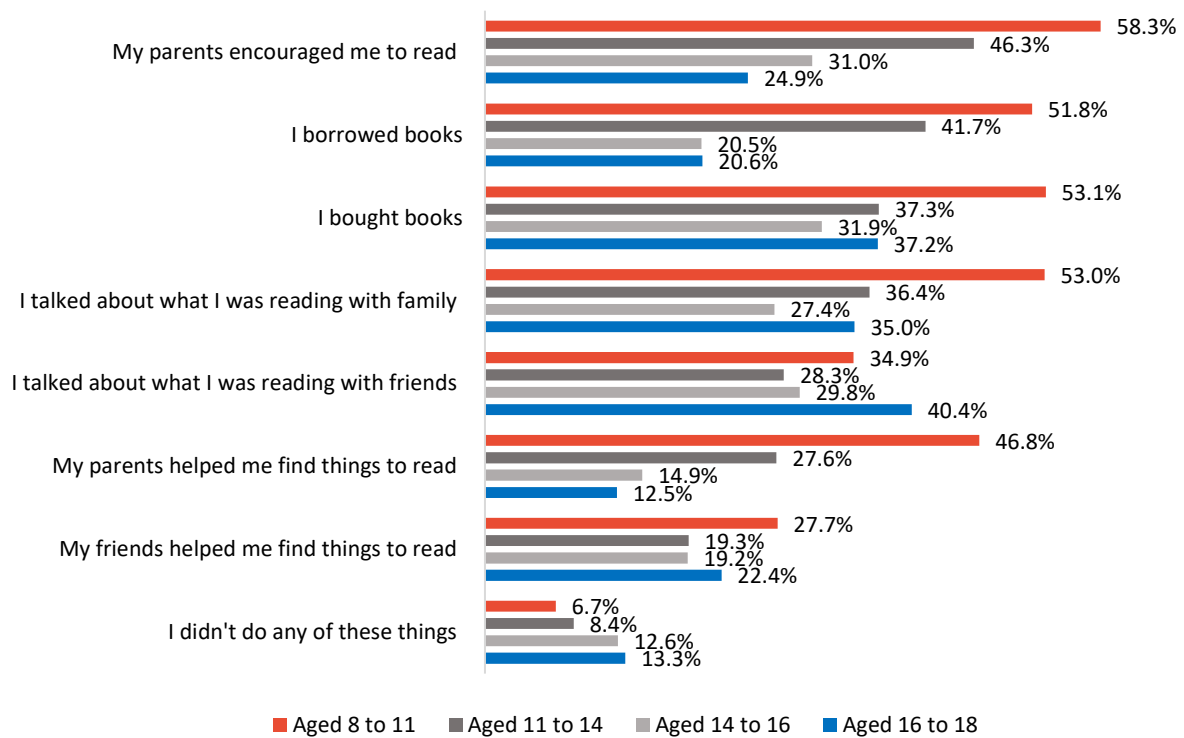
It is of note that the percentage of girls not receiving FSMs who said they had bought books in the past four weeks (46.2%) is very similar to the percentage of girls receiving FSMs who said that they had borrowed books in that timeframe (46.0%). Indeed, more girls receiving FSMs said that they had borrowed books (46.0%) compared with girls who didn't receive FSMs (42.6%). By contrast, fewer said that they had bought books (39.2%) compared with girls who didn't receive FSMs (46.2%). Overall, fewer boys had borrowed or bought books, regardless of free-school-meal uptake. However, for both boys who received FSMs and those who didn't, more said they had borrowed books in the past four weeks (FSM: 36.5%, Non-FSM: 33.3%) than had bought books in the past four weeks (FSM: 30.0%, Non-FSM: 32.2%).

Perhaps most notably, there were differences in parental support for reading engagement. More girls who received (36.4%) and didn't receive FSMs (46.2%) said they spoke about what they were reading with their family than boys, with boys receiving FSMs being the least likely to speak about their reading with family (30.7%). However, variation in the percentage of children and young people who said their parents helped them find things to read was relatively small, with all demographics showing a similar level of access. More boys who received (27.8%) and didn't receive (28.4%) FSMs said that they had been supported by their parents in finding reading material than girls who either received (26.9%) or didn't receive (27.3%) FSMs. However, compared with access to other reading resources, this difference was minimal.

Interestingly, while gender appeared to play a more significant role in most other avenues to support reading engagement, encouragement from parents appeared to be split predominantly by free-school-meal uptake. The same percentage of girls and boys who didn't receive FSMs said they were encouraged by their parents to read (46.5%), and the percentages of FSM girls (41.1%) and boys (41.4%) who were encouraged to read by their parents were also very similar to each other, although both were lower than those who didn't receive FSMs.

Looking at the differences in support for reading engagement between age groups, we can see that 8- to 11-year-olds appear to receive the most support for their reading (see Figure 34). Around 1 in 8 16- to 18-year-olds (13.3%) and 14- to 16-year-olds (12.6%), compared with only 8.4% of 11- to 14-year-olds and 6.7% of 8- to 11-year-olds said they hadn't accessed any of the listed reading resources in the last four weeks.

Figure 34: Children and young people aged 8 to 18's access to reading resources by age group



Over half (51.8%) of 8- to 11-year-olds said they had borrowed books in the past four weeks, compared with 2 in 5 (41.7%) 11- to 14-year-olds, 1 in 5 (20.5%) 14- to 16-year-olds and 1 in 5 (20.6%) 16- to 18-year-olds. These differences were slightly less pronounced for buying books, as just under 2 in 5 11- to 14-year-olds (37.3%) and 16- to 18-year-olds (37.2%) said they had bought books in the past four weeks, while 1 in 3 (31.9%) 14- to 16-year-olds said the same.

Notably, 16- to 18-year-olds seemed to be among the most likely to be supported in their reading engagement by friends. While around 3 in 10 (27.7%) 8- to 11-year-olds said their friends had helped them find things to read, more than 1 in 5 (22.4%) 16- to 18-year-olds said the same, slightly below 1 in 5 11- to 14-year-olds (19.3%) and 14- to 16-year-olds (19.2%). Indeed, 16- to 18-year-olds were the most likely of all age groups to discuss what they were reading with their friends (40.4%). 1 in 3 (34.9%) 8- to 11-year-olds also said they talked about their reading with friends, while 28.3% of 11- to 14-year-olds and 29.8% of 14- to 16-year-olds said the same.

Among the most notable differences were variations between how age groups were supported by their parents in their reading engagement. Perhaps unsurprisingly, 8- to 11-year-olds reported more parental support than the other age groups. Almost 3 in 5 (58.3%) 8- to 11-year-olds said that their parents had encouraged them to read in the past four weeks. Among 11- to 14-year-olds, around half (46.3%) said that their parents had encouraged them to read, and among 14- to 16-year-olds this percentage dropped to 3 in 10 (31.0%).

Only 1 in 4 (24.9%) 16- to 18-year-olds said that their parents had encouraged them to read in the past four weeks. Likewise, just under half (46.8%) of 8- to 11-year-olds said that their parents helped them find things to read, while less than 3 in 10 (27.6%) 11- to 14-year-olds said their parents helped them find reading material and even fewer 14- to 16-year-olds (14.9%) and 16- to 18-year-olds (12.5%) could say the same. Finally, more than half of 8- to 11-year-olds (53.0%) said they talked about what they were reading with their family, though unlike previously mentioned areas of parental involvement, older age groups also said they were accessing this support. More than 1 in 3 16- to 18-year-olds (35.0%) and 11- to 14-year-olds (36.4%) said they had spoken about what they were reading with their family, and more than 1 in 4 (27.4%) 14- to 16-year-olds also spoke with their family about their reading material.

To sum up

When we first started asking children and young people about their reading in 2005, just over half (51.4%) told us that they enjoyed reading. This percentage reached its highest level just over a decade later in 2016, when almost 3 in 5 (58.6%) 8- to 18-year-olds told us that they enjoyed reading. However, by early 2020, levels had dropped by more than 10 percentage points to 47.8%, the lowest level since we first asked this question in 2005.

The first national lockdown in spring 2020 was a very difficult time, but it also saw an unprecedented increase in levels of reading enjoyment. Our research into children and young people's reading during this time showed that more enjoyed reading, and read more often, than before the pandemic. Indeed, 55.9% of children told us that they enjoyed reading while schools were closed (only slightly lower than the 2016 peak), with many saying that simply having more time had helped them to (re)engage with reading.

However, existing gaps in reading enjoyment increased during this period, with boys from disadvantaged backgrounds particularly at risk of poor reading engagement. Furthermore, the overall increase in reading enjoyment levels was only partially sustained as children returned to school. This year's survey shows that any gains in reading enjoyment and frequency seen in the early part of the pandemic have since been completely eroded, with the percentage of children and young people enjoying reading in 2022 dropping back to its lowest level of 47.8%. In addition, the gaps in reading enjoyment that had opened up during the first lockdown and persisted into early 2021 increased further in 2022. For example, the gender gap in reading enjoyment increased threefold (from 2.9 to 9.3 percentage points) between 2020 and 2022, while the gap between children who receive FSMs and their peers more than doubled (from 2.1 to 5.0pp). Boys who receive FSMs continue to be of particular concern, with just 2 in 5 (39.8%) of this group enjoying reading in 2022 compared with 46.3% in 2020.

The picture is not much better when it comes to reading frequency, with just 3 in 10 (28%) of children and young people reporting reading daily in their free time in 2022, the second-lowest level recorded since 2005. Again, gaps in daily reading in relation to gender and socio-economic background have increased in recent years, with the gender gap almost doubling between 2019 and 2022 (from 4.6 to 7.8pp) and the gap between children who do and do not receive FSMs increasing from 3.2 to 4.2pp.

Studies show that educational disruption in relation to the pandemic had a particularly detrimental effect on children from lower-income homes. At the same time, the government has set ambitious targets for increasing the percentage of children leaving primary schools reading at the level expected of their age. Taken together with the findings above, it is clear that efforts to encourage reading and support reading enjoyment in all children, but especially boys and those receiving FSMs, must be redoubled. Families, policymakers, schools and the wider community all have a role to play if we are to address downward trends in reading enjoyment and frequency, and ensure these do not extend into future years.

Our sincere thanks to all of the schools that participated in our survey this year. We couldn't do it without you!

About the National Literacy Trust

Our charity is dedicated to improving the reading, writing, speaking and listening skills of those who need it most, giving them the best possible chance of success in school, work and life. We run Literacy Hubs and campaigns in communities where low levels of literacy and social mobility are seriously impacting people's lives. We support schools and early years settings to deliver outstanding literacy provision, and we campaign to make literacy a priority for politicians, businesses and parents. Our research and analysis make us the leading authority on literacy and drive our interventions.

Literacy is a vital element of action against poverty and our work changes life stories.

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.

Copyright

© National Literacy Trust 2022. You may report on findings or statistics included in this report if you accredit them to the National Literacy Trust.

Suggested reference for this report is: Cole, A., Brown, A., Clark, C. and Picton, I. (2022). Children and young people's reading engagement in 2022: Continuing insight into the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on reading. London: National Literacy Trust.

We will consider requests to use extracts or data from this publication provided that you:

- Acknowledge that the content is the work of the National Literacy Trust and provide appropriate references in any publications or accompanying publicity;
- State that any views expressed are yours and not necessarily those of the National Literacy Trust.