

OUR EXPERT INSIGHT

Response to the National Literacy Trust's Research Report
Children and Young People's Reading in 2024



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Head of Educational Development

Jo has many years of school leadership experience, working with schools all over the North West and beyond. She works across Early Years, KS1 and KS2 delivering leadership support, whole school curriculum and Literacy support. Jo is a self-confessed book addict who is passionate in supporting all children and staff in striving to be the best they can be.



Laura Buczko
Literacy Team Leader

Laura, a curriculum expert in KS1 and KS2 Reading for the DfE and an experienced lead moderator, specialises in providing bespoke training, monitoring and evaluation to schools across the curriculum. She leads the One Education Reading Award and is passionate about ensuring every child becomes a fluent reader who loves to read.

At One Education, we believe reading is the cornerstone of education and a key to unlocking a child's full potential. It should be accessible to every child, regardless of background, neurodiversity, EAL status, or other vulnerabilities. Reading goes beyond academic necessity—it sparks magic, awe, and wonder, opening doors to infinite possibilities and lifelong learning.

The recent findings from the National Literacy Trust's (NLT) 2024 report on children and young people's reading habits present a critical challenge:

- **A significant and continuing decline in reading enjoyment.**
- **Record-low reading engagement levels.**

Given the clear link between reading for pleasure, academic success, and personal happiness, these findings demand urgent, collective action that extends far beyond schools. We must think outside the box to create a culture where reading is woven into the fabric of homes, communities, and daily life.

The findings from this research with only 1 in 3 children enjoying reading in their free time, reinforce the urgent need to create a culture of reading for pleasure among children and young people. These concerning trends can be reversed if we work together as a sector and as a country, exploring opportunities to improve and further develop the love of reading for all within and beyond the school walls.

At One Education, we are committed to collaborating with schools, families, and communities to nurture a love of reading that transcends classrooms, enriches lives, and supports academic achievement across all subjects.

THE PICTURE IN THE NORTH WEST AND BEYOND

The report reveals that **only 34% of children in the North West enjoy reading in their free time**. Whilst this is higher than some regions in England, it is concerning that 66% of children do not enjoy reading in their free time, with the continuing downwards trajectory of this presenting a huge concern.

Multiple research studies¹ have shown the positive correlation between reading for pleasure and attainment in multiple subjects, yet in 2023-2024², **only 68% of children left primary school meeting the expected standard in reading**. This means 32% of children started secondary school Year 7, this academic year 2024-2025, without the requisite reading skills to support their learning.

As an education professional we need to now look at how we can support this increase in reading for enjoyment to reach all children in our classrooms and transfer this to continue outside of school, but we can't do this alone. Our strategies need to consistently engage families and the local communities and we need to do this collectively. NLT vow to support this and we too, at One Education, pledge to support schools to explore the many ways in which we can make a difference to the amount of children who are reading for pleasure in order to positively improve life chances for those in the North West and beyond.

THE CORRELATION BETWEEN READING ENJOYMENT AND LIFE CHANCES

The report reaffirms that children who enjoy reading and read daily achieve higher academic outcomes. Conversely, those who struggle with reading often dislike it, creating a cycle that hinders progress in multiple subjects and limits life opportunities.

Early intervention is critical to breaking this cycle. By identifying children at risk of falling behind early and providing tailored, evidence-based support, we can ensure every child has the foundational skills needed to read fluently and confidently. This is particularly important for SEND children, EAL pupils, and other vulnerable groups, who often face additional barriers - we know it is key to put every child first and give them the foundations to access reading and the key to unlock learning

At One Education we work with schools to ensure that enjoyment in reading can be viewed in multiple ways – a child who loves knowledge and information, for example, may not love reading in the sense that they would choose to read a novel and be exited at the possibilities of being transported to a different world but they may enjoy reading new facts, figures and gaining new insight into a topic they love. The narrative around what we define 'reading for pleasure' is must be fundamental in the conversations we have in relation to improving the amount of children who enjoy reading. We believe reading fluency is not just about competence—it's about igniting curiosity, exposing new knowledge, giving children the tools to explore new worlds, develop creativity, and discover the transformative power of all types of books.

¹ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09500782.2024.2324948>

² <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/key-stage-2-attainment>

BRIDGING THE GENDER GAP

The gender gap in reading enjoyment remains a persistent issue. The gender gap nearly tripled compared with the previous year, increasing from a **4.8-percentage-point difference in 2023 to a 12.3-percentage-point difference in 2024**. This is largely because of a greater drop in reading enjoyment in boys (12.3 percentage points) than in girls (4.8 percentage points).

This gap needs urgent attention, and One Education feels that we must be radical in our strategies to close it. Initiatives such as incorporating more non-fiction texts and gamified reading experiences into practice, have shown promise in engaging boys. However, it's clear from this report that we need to innovate further. We advocate promoting and investing in role models for reading, both from within school and the wider community. If students see people they respect and admire enjoying reading, we know this can be transformational and a step towards supporting more children to find the enjoyment that reading can bring.

IMPROVING ACCESS

A particularly worrying statistic from the report is that **only 21% of children aged 8-18 read something daily in their free time — a drop of 8% from previous years**, and now nearly half of the rates seen in 2005. Compounding this issue, the NLT's 2023 research, Children's Book Ownership in 2023³, found that 1 in 12 children aged 5-18 do not own a single book.

At One Education, we are committed to ensuring that every child has access to high-quality reading materials that resonate with their interests and experiences. We are actively working with schools and settings to gather the opinions of children and young people, building a picture of their interests and what they want to read. In supporting schools and settings to diversify their book stock, build in texts that are representative of children and the wider world, explore a range of issues and written by diverse voices, children have more opportunities to find books that spark their love of reading. We recognise the importance of children's book ownership, and so we partner with Wood Street Mission to support their Books Forever⁴ campaign. Through improving children and young people's access to books they want to read; we can make a real difference to reading enjoyment.

³<https://literacytrust.org.uk/research-services/research-reports/book-ownership-in-2023/#:~:text=In%202023%2C%20more%20children%20who,vs%209.7%25%20in%202022>

⁴<https://www.woodstreetmission.org.uk/our-projects/books-forever/>

READING IN ADOLESCENCE

The sharp decline in reading enjoyment among children aged 11-16 is especially concerning. This period of development is one of transition, with young people having to cope with the increasing demands of the secondary curriculum whilst navigating teenagerhood. Understandably, for those young people who have not yet developed a love of reading, reading can become even less important. The report underscores the need for reading for pleasure behaviours to be embedded early in the primary phase to ensure they are sustained during these formative years.

To combat the decline, we advocate for embedding reading habits early in children's lives, long before they reach secondary school. Building a whole school reading culture is something we are passionate about, with book clubs, recommendation systems, and peer-led discussions having a direct impact on engagement. We believe in the power of the school library as a hub for learning, and the importance of dedicated, trained staff as reading role models and facilitators of reading for pleasure.

A CHANGING WORLD

The report showed a **decrease of 9% in the number of children and young people who enjoyed reading in their free time**. This decrease in reading enjoyment coincides with the increasing presence of screens and digital devices in children's lives. Today's children are growing up in a different world, where screen time competes with traditional entertainment, including reading.

At One Education, we believe that digital platforms can complement, rather than detract from, efforts to promote reading for pleasure if used thoughtfully. Reading doesn't have to be limited to physical texts, but that reading on screen can be a wonderful tool to increase engagement, provided the content is engaging and interest-led. Our strategy focuses on making reading—whether on paper or on screen—exciting and relevant to children's lives. We are committed to helping schools incorporate digital texts as a central part of their reading offer, using screen time to support, rather than hinder reading for pleasure.

CONCLUSION

Reading is more than a skill—it is the foundation for accessing education and achieving potential. It should be accessible to all, regardless of background or circumstances. The findings in the NLT's report highlight the urgency of working together—across schools, families, and communities—to reimagine how we inspire children to love reading.

At One Education, we believe in the transformative power of books to ignite curiosity, inspire creativity, and unlock the awe and wonder of the world. Our work with schools through our consultancy, training and the One Education Reading Award can help in supporting educational settings with innovative approaches to ensure every child has the opportunity to discover the life-changing magic of reading.