

# Primary school children's reading and the vital role teachers play in nurturing reading enjoyment

Research with children, families and teachers in the UK

## Introduction

Research shows that children who enjoy reading tend to read by choice more often, for longer, and become more skilled readers.<sup>1</sup> However, our latest analysis reveals a concerning trend in children's reading enjoyment: it starts to decline from Key Stage 1 (ages 5-7) and continues to decline as children progress through primary school. Our research also underscores the vital role teachers play in addressing this issue by providing pupils and families with essential access, support and inspiration for reading.



Children who read regularly experience a wide range of immediate and lifelong benefits. These include improved speech and language skills, higher academic achievement, better mental well-being, enhanced social skills, and stronger relationships. Reading also fosters imagination, empathy, and creativity.

Given the widening attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers over the last five years,<sup>2</sup> it is particularly important that children from low-income and vulnerable family backgrounds receive reading support to enjoy reading, helping to level the playing field and overcome disadvantage.

**Read more about the benefits of reading.**

## About this briefing

This briefing outlines key trends in reading enjoyment among primary school children and highlights the significant role teachers play in supporting children to enjoy reading.

This is one of a new series of BookTrust research briefings on **Reading in the Early Years**, which also includes:

- **Children's Reading Habits in the Early Years**
- **The Role of Multiple 'Reading Influencers' in Supporting Children's Reading Journeys**
- **Supporting Generational Cycles of Readers**
- **Why Starting Shared Reading Early Matters and the Role of Bookstart Baby**

## Research Methodology

This briefing draws on a range of BookTrust research, including:

- The latest analysis of BookTrust's Family Survey data, a nationally representative study involving 4,277 children aged 7-17 and 7,871 parents and carers of children aged 0-17 across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, conducted between February and March 2021.
- Our new Teacher Survey with 2,942 primary school teachers in England, conducted in August 2024.
- Qualitative research conducted with parents, carers and teachers between 2019 and 2024.

## What does this research tell us?

### Children's reading enjoyment declines as children progress through school

Our research highlights a concerning trend: children's enjoyment of reading decreases as they progress through primary school. The decline in reading enjoyment begins early, during Key Stage 1 (KS1), and continues through Key Stage 2 (KS2).



While **70%** of parents and carers report that their 2-4-year-olds 'love' or 'like' reading, this drops to **64%** for 5-7-year-olds (KS1). Parents tell us that by the end of primary school, only **51%** of children 'love' or 'like' reading.

Children report a similar decline in their enjoyment of reading through primary school.



While **33%** of 7-year-olds tell us they 'love' reading, this drops to **29%** at age 10 and further declines to just **25%** by age 11.

These figures are in line with the latest Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS).

**29%** of 10-year-old (Year 5) pupils in England report that they 'very much like reading,' compared to **42%** globally.

This represents a steady decline in children's reading enjoyment since 2016, leaving England in the bottom half of the 57 countries taking part in the study on reading enjoyment measures.<sup>3</sup>

Our new Teacher Survey indicates a similar pattern. Teachers' concern about levels of reading enjoyment among their pupils increases as children progress through primary school.

**48%** of EYFS/KS1 teachers express concern over reading enjoyment levels in their classes. This rises to **63%** of KS2 teachers.

### Barriers to reading enjoyment

We know from our research that there are challenges to getting children reading and sustaining their enjoyment in it.

**At home**, we know that shared reading - where an adult or an older sibling reads with a child - is crucial for fostering children's reading enjoyment. Aligned with broader research,<sup>4</sup> our data indicates a correlation between shared reading and children's reading enjoyment; the more children are read with, the more they enjoy reading.<sup>1</sup> When parents and carers and their children see each other's enjoyment, it motivates them to read together more.

178% of 2-11-year-olds who are read to daily are reported to enjoy reading compared to 55% of those who are not.

Unsurprisingly, as children grow older, shared reading declines, likely contributing to the steady decrease in children's reading enjoyment. Our research indicates that the decline in shared reading starts early in childhood.



While **67%** of 2-4-year-olds engage in daily shared reading with an adult, this drops to **54%** by age 5-7 (KS1) and to **40%** by age 8-11 (KS2).

In our qualitative research, families tell us that they can struggle to make regular shared reading happen at home as their children get older. Parents and carers face competing demands on their own time including the needs of other children and family members.

Some tell us they lack confidence in choosing the right books for their children. Others report a lack of confidence in engaging children with books and stories. For children, homework needs, and other interests including screen time can impact on time spent on reading.

**In schools**, primary school teachers face significant challenges in promoting reading for pleasure, which also become more pronounced as children get older. In our Teacher Survey, primary school teachers report a series of barriers including limited time available in the school day for pupils to read for enjoyment, lack of parental support for reading enjoyment – echoing challenges described by parents, limited availability of books to inspire children, and barriers linked to children's reading fluency and behaviour.

## The role teachers play in nurturing reading enjoyment

Our research with families highlights the crucial role that teachers and schools can play in supporting children's enjoyment.



**73%** of parents and carers of 5-11-year-olds believe their children's school effectively encourages a love of reading among its pupils.

After immediate family members, teachers are seen as the most influential in fostering children's reading enjoyment, surpassing extended family members, friends, and other adults like authors or social media influencers.

Parents and carers also tell us teachers and schools provide their children with valuable shared reading experiences and access to books to read for fun. Research has consistently shown that these types of support from teachers and schools can increase children's access to a wider range of books and help them develop positive attitudes toward reading.<sup>5</sup>



**62%** of parents and carers of 5-11 years olds report that their children regularly listen to an adult reading a book or story during school lessons.

**47%** of 8-11-year-olds (KS2) say they discover new books through their teachers.



Given that many parents struggle to make reading a part of family life and the important impact this has on children's reading enjoyment, time invested by schools in supporting these families can have significant impact.

“Each week my daughter brings home a storybook from school which we read at bedtime. So I tend to do at least 15 minutes with her reading a book a day.”  
**Parent, England**

“They have this thing called Story Star in my daughter's Reception class where the Story Star gets to pick out the book to be read that day, and they have a little special chair in the classroom so they can sit there while the teacher reads the book. I remember when my daughter had her turn to be the Story Star, she was so excited. When she went home she told me the story that they read in school that day.”  
**Parent, England**

It is widely accepted that without support from schools and teachers, many children would miss out on the immediate and lifelong benefits of reading. Our research with teachers also makes clear the need for support to schools and teachers to drive reading enjoyment in their school communities.



## How BookTrust is supporting schools and teachers to help children and families nurture reading habits?

BookTrust's mission is to ensure every child reads regularly and by choice. We run large-scale, national, behaviour change programmes for early years families in every community in England, Wales and Northern Ireland to support early shared reading practices.

As children get older, we support school staff to foster a love of reading in the children they work with.

Our work in schools recognises that shared reading at home for enjoyment has an important positive impact on children's outcomes but that shared reading is difficult for many families.

### We are working with schools to develop ways to respond to these issues in their own school communities:

- **The Primary School hub** on the BookTrust website hosts an extensive series of digital resources designed to support teachers to encourage reading enjoyment in their school communities. This **includes resources for engaging families in shared reading** - based on our large scale behaviour change programmes. We have videos, posters and social media assets that schools can download and use with families. We have tools to support teachers as key reading influencers, helping them to model sharing stories, to understand their pupils' reading preferences and to know the best books to inspire their pupils' reading.
- We **publish research on the benefits of reading** and **reading behaviours in the early years** to strengthen understanding in schools of the home environment for pre-school and school-aged children.
- We **host webinars** offering tips on how to support reading enjoyment in school and at home.

- We **review the latest children's books** to support teachers in finding the resources that are most likely to support pupils' reading enjoyment, regularly producing themed **booklists** for specific age groups, on specific issues and for curriculum topics. We have a particular focus on promoting diverse, inclusive and representative books.
- Every autumn term we publish a guide to the 100 best books of the last year – the **Great Books Guide** – to support teachers in their work. Every primary school in England receives a physical copy of this guide, and it is available on our website in English and Welsh.
- Our **BookTrust Represents** programme includes virtual visits from authors of colour and other groups underrepresented in the publishing industry, supporting teachers and children to discover the very best diverse children's books and to inspire a love of reading.
- We run the national early years programme, **BookTrust Storytime** in 90% of libraries. This programme showcases the best new literature for children aged 0–5 to inspire reading enjoyment. Reception teachers have taken pupils on school trips to enjoy BookTrust Storytime with their classes and others promote BookTrust Storytime in their school communities to encourage story sharing at home.
- In Wales, **Pori Drwy Stori**, our bilingual programme for nursery and reception aged children develops literacy, numeracy, speaking and listening skills, using physical and digital resources.
- We run **Letterbox Club**, the long-standing programme purchased by schools for children and families requiring additional, intensive reading support.





## About BookTrust

As the UK's largest children's reading charity, we want every child to read regularly and by choice.

We reach millions of children and families every year, inspiring them with books and resources to get them started on their reading journey. We provide a wide range of carefully curated and designed books, resources and support to help families start sharing stories and to continue reading throughout childhood. We offer more targeted support to children and families from low-income and vulnerable backgrounds because we know they stand to benefit the most from the benefits of reading.

Our support, designed to deliver reading behaviour change, is based on robust evidence including research with parents, carers and practitioners. We understand and design for the very diverse structures, circumstances and preferences of families in the UK.



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