

## Author visits in schools, and children and young people's reading and writing engagement in 2023

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Author visits provide vital opportunities to engage children and young people with literacy. We last explored the importance of author visits in [2019](#) when we showed that there was a positive relationship between author visits and children and young people's reading. Indeed, in 2019 we found that children and young people who told us that they had had an author visit at school had higher reading scores than their peers who said that they didn't have such an experience. This report revisits the link between author visits and children and young people's literacy engagement.

We know that author visits are not easily accessible for all schools, particularly in the light of increasingly tight budgets. A 2023 [report](#) by Great School Libraries found the percentage of schools that said they had a writer, author or poet visit the school in the past year had declined from 3 in 5 (61%) in 2019 to fewer than 1 in 2 (46%) in 2022 (46%). There were differences by school type, with 1 in 2 (49%) maintained schools having had a writer, poet or author visit compared with 3 in 5 (62%) independent schools. The report also showed that fewer schools with higher numbers of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSMs) had these visits.

This report draws on data from our latest Annual Literacy Survey, which was conducted between January and mid-March 2023 and reached 64,066 children and young people aged 8 to 18. In addition to wider questions about children and young people's reading, writing, speaking and listening, the survey also included questions about school literacy provision, such as author visits.

This report also includes testimonials from children and teachers that highlight how important author visits can be in helping children connect with literacy.

## Key findings

### Who had an author visit in 2023?

- In 2023, 1 in 5 (21.3%) children and young people aged 8 to 18 said that they had had an author visit their school. This is lower than the percentage of children and young people who said this in 2019 (26.9%).
- More primary-school children aged 8 to 11 said that they had an author visit (26.8%) at school compared with those in secondary schools. There was some variation within secondary-school-aged children and young people, with more of those aged 11 to 14 (21.5%) saying that they had an author visit compared with their peers aged 14 to 16 (15.9%) or 16 to 18 (15.8%).
- More children and young people in England said that they had had an author visit (21.2%) compared with those in Scotland (18.7%), Wales (13.0%) and Northern Ireland (5.8%). The finding from Northern Ireland needs to be treated with caution as we only had a small sample from this nation (n = 138).
- There was considerable regional variation in access to author visits across England, with more children and young people in the North East (32.7%), North West (23.3%) and London (26.7%) saying that they had had an author visit compared with their peers in the East Midlands (16.0%) or West Midlands (20.0%).
- There were, however, no differences in whether children and young people had experienced an author visit at school by urban (21.4%), rural (21.7%) or coastal (20.4%) school location.
- More children and young people who attended independent schools told us that they had an author visit compared with those from maintained schools (28.6% vs. 20.9%). Only 5.3% of children and young people attending Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) told us that they had had an author visit.
- Fewer children and young people from schools with a high percentage of pupils eligible for FSMs said that they had had an author visit (16.7%) compared with their peers attending schools with a medium (21.9%) or low FSM intake (24.7%).

### The link between author visits and enjoyment of reading and writing

There were differences in how many children and young people enjoyed reading and writing in their free time by whether or not that had experienced an author event at school. In 2023:

- More children and young people who had experienced an author visit said that they enjoyed reading in their free time compared with their peers who hadn't had a visit (58.6% vs. 39.3%).
- More children and young people who had had an author visit said that they enjoyed writing in their free time compared with their peers who hadn't had a visit (43.2% vs. 32.2%).

These differences were also apparent when looking at levels of reading and writing enjoyment at school:

- More children and young people who had had an author visit said that they enjoyed reading at school compared with those who hadn't had a visit (59.0% vs. 40.7%).
- More children and young people who had had an author visit said that they enjoyed writing at school compared with those who hadn't had an author visit (52.8% vs. 31.5%).

## The link between author visits and wider reading and writing engagement

- More children and young people who had attended an author event at their school said that they read daily in their free time compared with their peers who hadn't had such an event (39.7% vs. 24.8%).
- Slightly more children and young people who had attended an author event at their school also said that they were writing something daily in their free time compared with their peers who hadn't had such an event (22.0% vs. 18.6%).
- More children and young people who had an author visit at school rated their reading skill as high compared with their peers who didn't have an author visit their school (43.1% vs. 28.6%). Equally, more children who had experienced an author visit also rated their writing skill as high compared with their peers who hadn't experienced a similar visit (24.4% vs. 17.1%).
- More children and young people who had attended an author event at their school said that they went to their school library as well as their local library to access reading materials compared with their peers who hadn't had such an event (71.8% vs. 58.2% and 23.3% vs. 14.6%).

## Spotlight on the link between author visits in schools and the reading and writing enjoyment of disadvantaged children and young people

- Slightly fewer children and young people who received free school meals (FSMs) told us that they had had an author visit (18.4%) at school compared with those who didn't receive FSMs (21.9%), meaning that fewer economically disadvantaged children and young people are able to access the benefits that author visits can provide.
- This is important as more children and young people who received FSMs who had attended an author visit at their school told us that they **enjoyed reading in their free time** (58.9%) compared with their FSM peers who hadn't attended an author event (36.1%), and their peers who had attended an author event but who didn't receive FSMs (54.4%).
- Similarly, more children and young people who received FSMs who had attended an author visit at their school told us that they **enjoyed reading at school** (58.5%) compared with their FSM peers who hadn't attended an author event (39.0%), and their peers who had attended an author event but who didn't receive FSMs (54.7%).

These differences also extended to writing enjoyment, both in their free time and at school.

- More children and young people who received FSMs who had attended an author visit at their school told us that they **enjoyed writing in their free time** (49.1%) compared with their FSM peers who hadn't attended an author event (36.2%), and their peers who had attended an author event but who didn't receive FSMs (41.2%).
- Similarly, more children and young people who received FSMs who had attended an author visit at their school told us that they **enjoyed writing at school** (55.8%) compared with their FSM peers who hadn't attended an author event (43.7%), and their peers who had attended an author event but who didn't receive FSMs (51.0%).

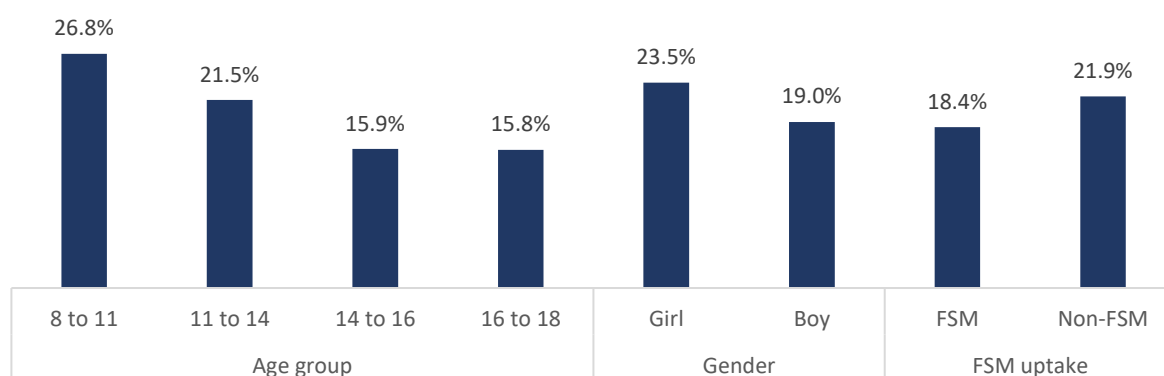
Our previous research has shown that reading and writing enjoyment are linked with attainment, with more children and young people who enjoy reading or writing also reading and writing above the level expected for their age. It is also important to note the consistent connections our research has shown between reading, writing, mental wellbeing, empathy, creativity and self-expression. It is important to note that our survey provides an annual

snapshot of children’s literacy attitudes and behaviours and only allows us to explore associations rather than causal relationships. More research is therefore needed to identify the nature of the link between author visits and increased reading and writing enjoyment. Nonetheless, given the link between reading and writing enjoyment and author visits at schools, particularly for children and young people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, it is now more important than ever to provide these opportunities to more pupils in schools.

### Author visits in schools in 2023

In our 2023 Annual Literacy Survey, 1 in 5 (21.3%, n = 13,648) children and young people said that they had had an author visit at school. This was slightly lower for boys (19.0%) than girls (23.5%, see Figure 1). More children aged 8 to 11 reported that they had an author visit (26.8%) than those aged 11 to 14 (21.5%), 14 to 16 (15.9%) or 16 to 18 (15.8%). Also, slightly fewer children and young people who received free school meals (FSMs) told us that they had an author visit (18.4%) than those who did not receive FSM (21.9%).

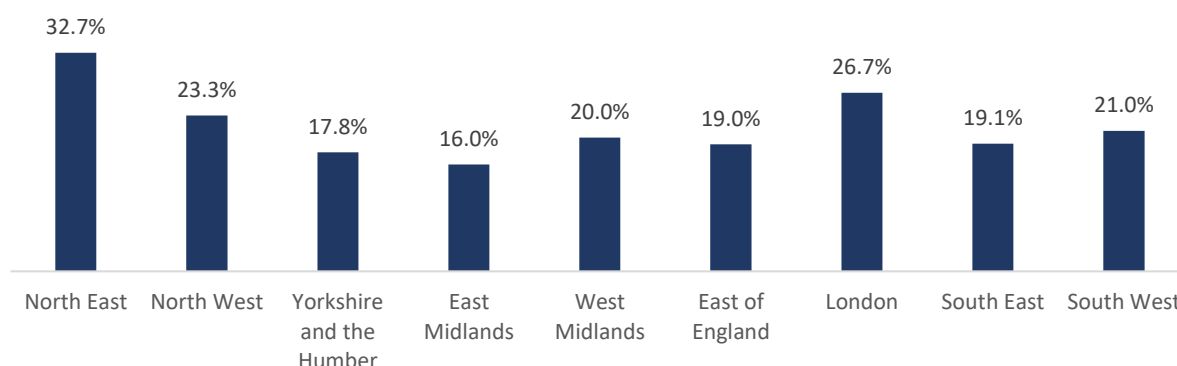
**Figure 1: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who reported in 2023 that they had an author visit their school, by gender, age group and FSM uptake**



There were geographical differences in the percentage of children and young people reporting having had an author visit, with around 1 in 5 children in England (21.2%) and Scotland (18.7%) saying they had a visit, compared with 1 in 8 (13.0%) in Wales and 1 in 20 (5.8%) in Northern Ireland. (Note: the finding from Northern Ireland should be treated with caution as we only had a small sample from this nation [n = 138]).

There were also considerable regional differences in the percentage of children who told us that an author had visited their school (see Figure 2), with more children and young people in the North East (32.7%), North West (23.3%) and London (26.7%) saying that they had had an author visit compared with their peers in the East Midlands (16.0%) or West Midlands (20.0%). Indeed, twice as many children and young people in the North East of England reported having had an author visit than those in the East Midlands.

**Figure 2: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who reported that they had an author visit their school by region**



There were no significant differences between the percentage of children who told us that they had author visits in urban (21.4%), rural (21.7%) or coastal (20.4%) schools. However, we did find that there were differences in the percentage of children who had experienced an author visit depending on the type of school they attended, with more children and young people who attended independent schools telling us that they had an author visit compared with their peers attending maintained schools (28.6% vs. 20.9%). Overall, only 1 in 20 (5.3%) children and young people who attended Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) told us that they had an author visit their school.

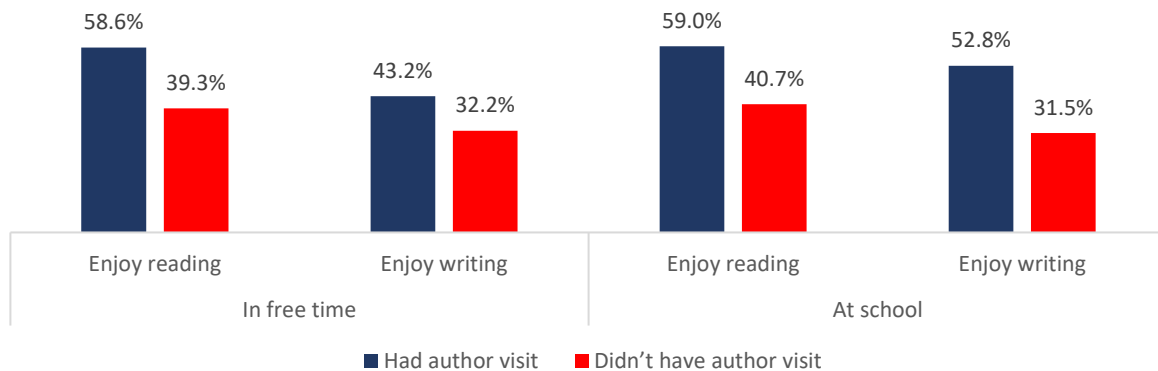
### **The link between author visits in schools and enjoyment of reading and writing**

There were differences in how many children and young people enjoyed reading and writing in their free time by whether or not they had experienced an author event at school (see Figure 3).

Around 3 in 5 (58.6%) children and young people who had an author visit told us that they enjoyed reading in their free time. This was higher than levels of reading enjoyment for those who hadn't attended an author event at their school (39.3%). Similarly, more children and young people who had had an author visit said that they enjoyed writing in their free time (43.2%) compared with their peers who hadn't had an author visit (32.2%).

These differences were also apparent when looking at the levels of reading and writing enjoyment at school. More children and young people who had had an author visit said that they enjoyed reading at school (59.0%) compared with their peers who hadn't had a visit (40.7%). In addition, more of those who had had an author visit also said that they enjoyed writing at school (52.8%) compared with their peers who hadn't had a visit (41.5%).

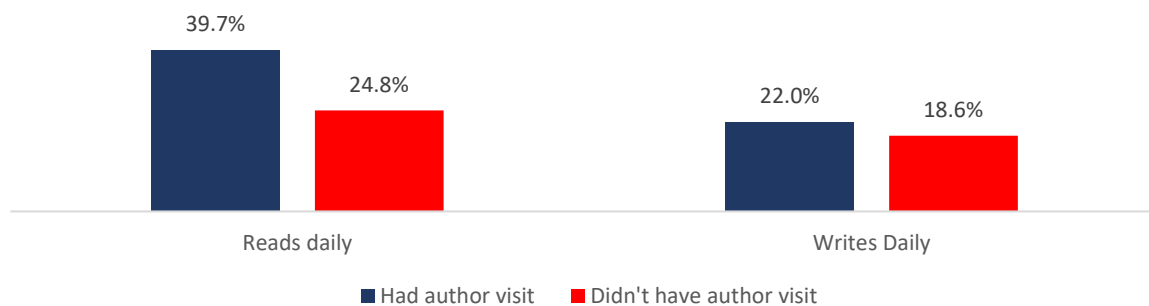
**Figure 3: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who enjoyed reading and writing either in free time and at school in 2023 by whether or not they had an author visit at school**



### The link between author visits at school and wider reading and writing engagement

More children and young people who had attended an author event at their school said that they read daily in their free time compared with their peers who hadn't had such an event (39.7% vs. 24.8%; see Figure 4). Slightly more children and young people who had attended an author event at their school also said that they were writing something daily in their free time compared with their peers who hadn't had such an event (22.0% vs. 18.6%).

**Figure 4: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who read and wrote daily in their free time in 2023 by whether or not they had an author visit at school**



There was also a link between author visits and children and young people's self-perceptions of their reading and writing skill. As shown in Figure 5, more children and young people who had an author visit at school rated their reading skill as high compared with their peers who didn't have an author visit. Twice as many of those, in turn, rated their reading skill as low. Similarly, more of those who had an author visit at school rated their writing skill as high compared with those who didn't have an author visit.

**Figure 5: Self-reported ratings of reading and writing skill of children and young people aged 8 to 18 by whether or not they had an author visit at school**

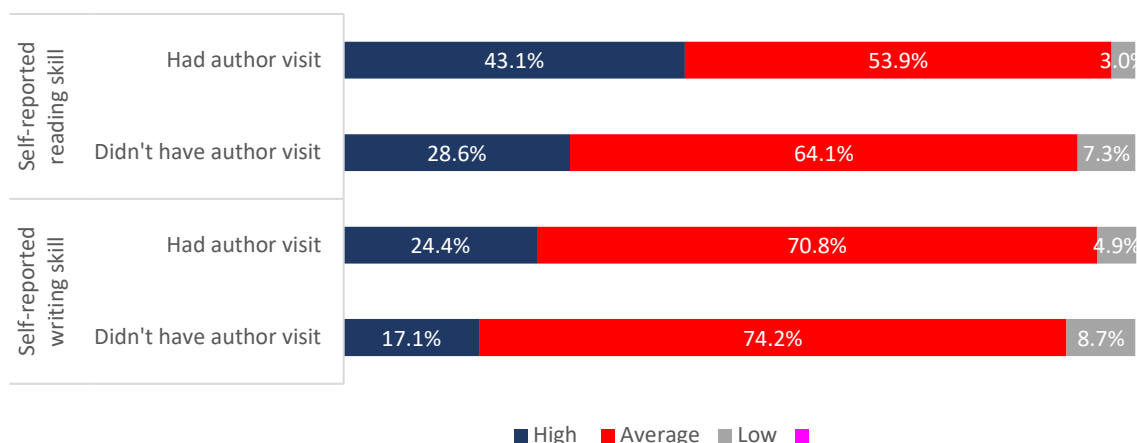
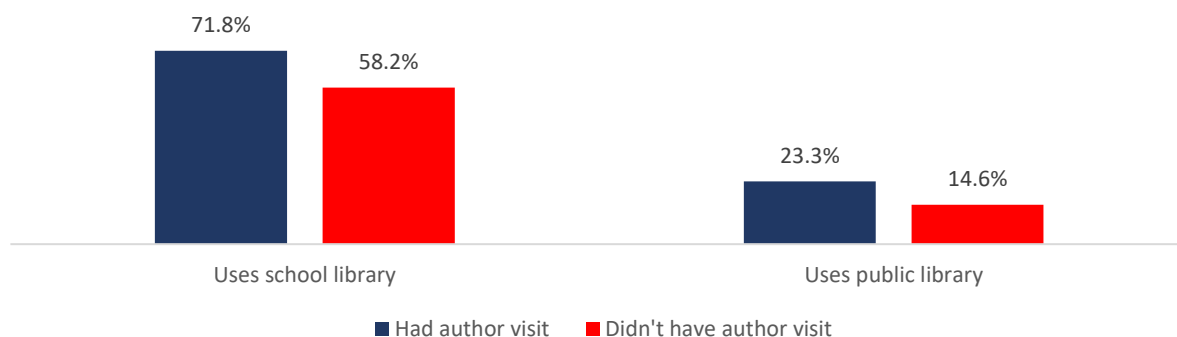


Figure 6 shows that more children and young people who had attended an author event at their school also said that they went to their school library as well as their local library to access reading materials compared with their peers who hadn't had such an event (71.8% vs. 58.2% and 23.3% vs. 14.6%).

**Figure 6: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who reported using their school and public library by whether or not they had an author visit at school**



### A closer look at the link between author visits and economic disadvantage

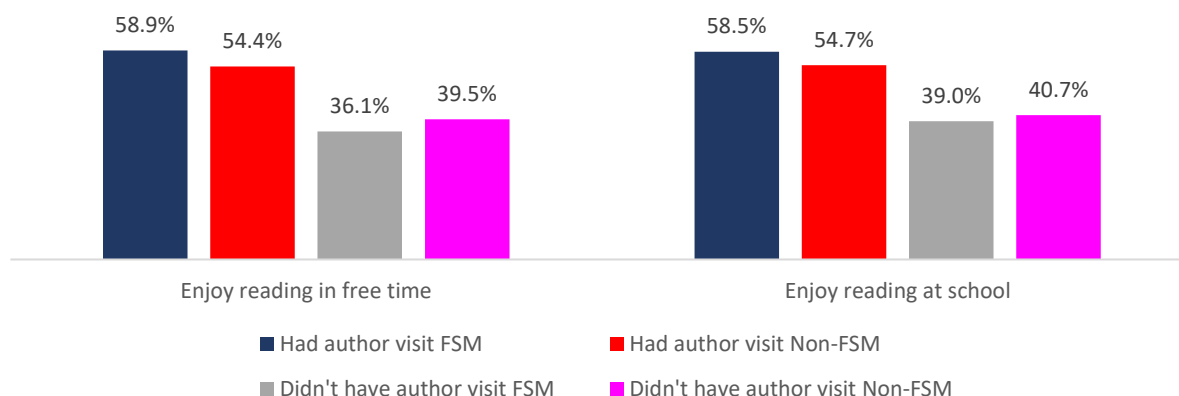
As mentioned earlier, slightly fewer children and young people who received free school meals (FSMs) told us that they had had an author visit at school compared with those who didn't receive FSMs (18.4% vs. 21.9%), meaning that fewer economically disadvantaged children and young people are able to access the benefits that author visits can provide.

This is important as, as shown in Figure 7, more children and young people who received FSMs who had attended an author visit at their school told us that they enjoyed reading in their free time (58.9%) compared with their FSM peers who hadn't attended an author event (36.1%), and their peers who had attended an author event but who didn't receive FSMs (54.4%).

Similarly, more children and young people who received FSMs who had attended an author visit at their school told us that they enjoyed reading at school (58.5%) compared with their

FSM peers who hadn't attended an author event (39.0%), and their peers who had attended an author event but who didn't receive FSMs (54.7%).

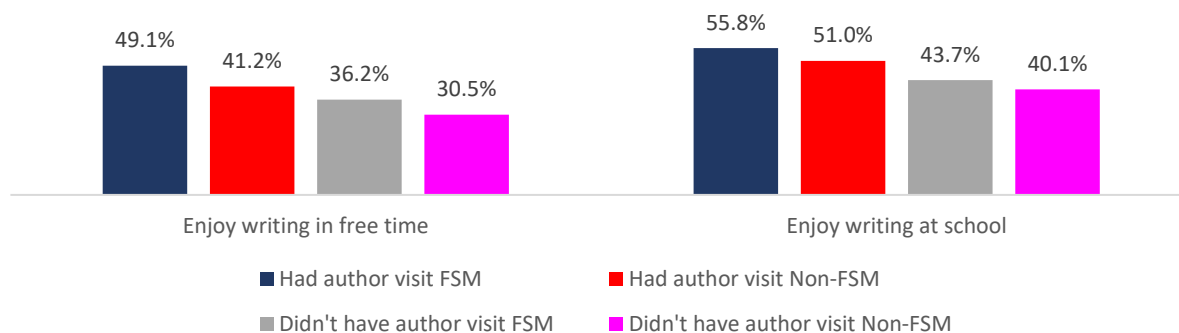
**Figure 7: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who enjoyed reading either in their free time and at school in 2023 by FSM uptake and whether or not they had an author visit at school**



These differences also extended to writing enjoyment, both in their free time and at school (see Figure 8). More children and young people who received FSMs who had attended an author visit at their school told us that they enjoyed writing in their free time (49.1%) compared with their FSM peers who hadn't attended an author event (36.2%), and their peers who had attended an author event but who didn't receive FSMs (41.2%).

Similarly, more children and young people who received FSMs who had attended an author visit at their school told us that they enjoyed writing at school (55.8%) compared with their FSM peers who hadn't attended an author event (43.7%), and their peers who had attended an author event but who didn't receive FSMs (51.0%).

**Figure 8: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who enjoyed writing in their free time and at school in 2023 by FSM uptake and whether or not they had an author visit at school**





## A note of caution

As the survey provides an annual snapshot of children’s literacy attitudes and behaviours, and it allows us to explore associations rather than causal relationships, more research would be needed to identify the nature of the link between author visits and increased reading and writing enjoyment. For example, children and young people who have experienced author visits may also have a more supportive literacy environment in general.

At the same time, as shown in the next section, comments from teachers and children indicate that many feel inspired to read and write as a direct result of having an author visit.

## Testimonials from children and teachers

Testimonials from children and teachers show how important author visits can be in helping children connect with literacy. For example, teachers shared that pupils were inspired to read and write after hearing from authors:

“The girls were so inspired by meeting Maeeda, hearing her story and being motivated to go for their dreams. Such a treat, we are extremely grateful for, as you know budget cuts have restricted us from offering such experiences. They will all (150) be reading Maeeda’s book over the summer.”

Headteacher, Belle Vue Girls School

“They are all inspired to become an author! They are particularly excited to hear the next instalment of the book!”

Teacher, Premier League Primary Stars Digital Author Day

“It was amazing to meet the author and now children are reading her books.”

Teacher, Premier League Primary Stars Club Author Day

Children’s comments echoed those of teachers, suggesting that meeting an author motivated them to try writing themselves:

“It was fun and it made me want to write my own story because I understood where to start.”

Pupil, Premier League Primary Stars Digital Author Day

Teachers also commented on the value of interacting and engaging events, and of supporting author visits with books, where relevant:

“The children and staff really enjoyed the visit from [the author] – she was very engaging and entertaining. The book was very suitable for the children we were targeting.”

Teacher, Love Reading author event

“Providing children with a physical copy of the book and then meeting the author through Zoom helped to provide really good connections for the children and helped them engage and relate to the author’s work.”

Teacher, See Myself in Books programme

“Receiving the books in time to enjoy them before the author coming to visit to build excitement. Author was engaging and kept the children involved.”

Teacher, Love Reading author event

“Copies of the text to be able to put in the relevant classes - children enjoyed having these during the author visit and some went on to read it.”

Teacher, Love Reading author event

Teacher comments also suggested that author visits could add another dimension to sharing books and stories alone:

“Pupil engagement was excellent. The author was clearly very familiar with working with younger children She questioned them appropriately, had suitable activities, had prizes etc. The children loved it and some even asked to borrow the books to take home to show their parents. It was a lovely afternoon.”

Teacher, Love Reading author event

Comments from teachers involved in an intervention focusing on writing for wellbeing provide further insights into the benefits of meeting an author for children’s confidence and creativity:

“Pupils do not get a chance to explore this style of writing within our core curriculum. The chance to produce their own work and share this with a professional was also a really powerful experience for some of our students.”

Teacher, Writing for Wellbeing Clubs

“I saw that by the end of the sessions, children had found their own individual ways of expressing themselves through writing, collage and verbal methods. They were really passionate about doing this. This showed a progression in their creativity which will be great for their writing.”

Teacher, Writing for Wellbeing Clubs

## Summary and discussion

Author visits have long been a highlight in the school calendar of events supporting reading for pleasure. The potential benefits of meeting an author for children and young people's literacy may seem self-evident, and, perhaps as a result, studies exploring and explaining the impact of author visits are limited. Our previous research provided some insight into the links between author visits and positive reading and writing attitudes and behaviours, with children who had experienced an author visit reporting higher levels of both reading and writing enjoyment than those who had not. At the same time, we found that some children were far more likely to say they had this experience than others. For example, in 2019, twice as many children and young people who attended an independent school said they had had an author visit than children attending other types of schools.

This report shows that the positive associations between author visits and reading and writing attitudes remain consistent in 2023. Once again, many more children who had an author visit than those who had not told us that they enjoyed reading and writing, whether in school or in their free time. At the same time, the association was particularly pronounced for enjoying

writing at school, with more than half (52.1%) of children who had an author visit saying they enjoyed this compared with 31.8% of children who had not. We also found links between author visits and a variety of literacy behaviours including reading and writing daily, and visiting school and local libraries.

It is important to consider these findings in the light of downward trends in reading enjoyment and the mutually reinforcing relationships between enjoyment and attainment seen in our own research and that undertaken by [others](#).

It is therefore of some concern that the percentage of children and young people reporting having had an author visit has decreased in recent years, with just 1 in 5 children and young people saying they had an author visit in 2023 compared with more than 1 in 4 in 2019. It is also important to note significant disparities in who had an author visit by region and school type. For example, while 1 in 3 children in the North East reported having an author visit, just 1 in 6 in the East Midlands did so. Similarly, just 1 in 20 children and young people in PRU settings told us they had an author visit compared with 3 in 10 children in voluntary controlled or independent school settings.

Ever-increasing pressures on school budgets may put access to author visits beyond the reach of many schools, even though children have so much to gain from the positive experience of meeting an author. Recognising the many potential benefits for children's literacy, author visits are an integral part of our work at the National Literacy Trust. Over the past year, our programmes have brought hundreds of authors from across the UK into schools and libraries to provide children and young people with the opportunity to hear their stories. However, such initiatives cannot reach all children and young people, so many will continue to miss out on the unique experience of meeting an author and, consequently, its potential benefits for literacy engagement.

As these events are not mandated and do not appear in the curriculum, it is worth noting that those departments that are likely to prioritise organising one of these events may also be departments with the resources and/or capacity to support students' literacy in other ways, and this may be an additional reason for the observed differences in enjoyment, frequency and confidence.

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.

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