

**National  
Literacy  
Trust**

Change your story

# Children and young people's book ownership in 2024

Irene Picton, Christina Clark and Nick Oram

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# Introduction

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Book ownership is associated with reading engagement, academic attainment and lifetime earnings, and, as such, is a matter of social justice.

Studies have shown that growing up in a home with books has a lasting impact on life outcomes, with links to increased academic attainment ([Evans et al., 2010](#)) and lifetime earnings ([Brunello et al., 2015](#)). More recently, book ownership was found to be one of the top three predictors of children's reading performance at age 10, with higher numbers of books in the home associated with higher scores ([Lindorff et al., 2023](#)).

Our annual surveys of children and young people aged 5 to 18 have allowed us to track trends in book ownership regularly over long periods of time. Over the last decade, our research has consistently found that more children and young people who have books of their own at home also tell us that they choose to read daily in their free time, and that they enjoy reading, compared with those who do not have a book of their own (see, e.g., [Picton & Clark, 2023](#)). However, we also find that fewer children and young people from lower-income homes report having a book of their own at home compared with their peers from higher-income backgrounds. This may limit their opportunities to read for enjoyment, and to develop their reading skills and confidence, in their free time.

Recognising the links between book ownership and reading engagement, reading performance and broader life outcomes, increasing book ownership may be seen as a matter of social justice. This report aims to provide evidence and insights for all those seeking to ensure that children and young people have access to the resources they need to develop the literacy skills to thrive in later life.

In 2024, 1 in 10 (9.8%) 5- to 18-year-olds told us they did not have a book of their own.

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## Method

### About the Annual Literacy Survey

The Annual Literacy Survey, run annually since 2010, includes questions about reading, writing and listening as well as about children and young people's home learning environment and access to resources at home. Questions about speaking were added to the survey in 2024; other topical questions change each year. We made three surveys available in 2024: one for children aged 5 to 8 (Year 1 to Year 4, or Primary 2 to Primary 5 for Scotland), one for children and young people aged 8 to 16 (Year 4 to Year 11, or Primary 5 to Secondary 5 for Scotland), and one for those aged 16 plus. The surveys contained similar questions but the one for the younger age group was shorter and more pictorial, while the one for those aged over 16 had additional questions more relevant for that age group.

Taking place from January to the middle of March every year, schools are recruited from autumn onwards through our networks, newsletters and social media followers, as well as through partner organisations like World Book Day and Renaissance. Participating schools receive a school-specific report as a thank you, which means they can compare their responses with national data when we publish the national reports. 76,131 children and young people aged 5 to 18 took part in 2024. A breakdown by age, gender and free-school-meal status, is provided in Appendix 1.

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## Key findings from 2024

### Children and young people aged 5 to 18

- In 2024, 9 in 10 (90.2%) children and young people aged 5 to 18 said that they had a book of their own at home.
- This percentage is marginally lower than in 2023 when 91.4% of children and young people aged 5 to 18 reported having a book of their own.
- However, this also means that 1 in 10 (9.8%) children and young people aged 5 to 18 told us that they didn't have their own book in 2024.

### Focus on children aged 5 to 8

- 86.7% of children aged 5 to 8 told us in 2024 that they owned a book at home.

- This is an increase on the year before when 80.8% of children from this age group told us that they had a book of their own at home. It is also highest percentage of book ownership since we first started asking this age group this question in 2019.
- At the same time, it means that 1 in 8 (13.3%) children aged 5 to 8 did not have a book of their own in 2024.

The percentage of 5- to 8-year-olds who said they had a book of their own increased from 80.8% in 2023 to 86.7% in 2024, an increase of 5.9pp.

### Focus on children and young people aged 8 to 18

Focusing on children and young people aged 8 to 18 allows us to look at different aspects of book ownership (for example, how it relates to age and socioeconomic background) over time:

- More than 9 in 10 (90.9%) children and young people aged 8 to 18 said they had a book of their own at home, meaning that 1 in 11 (9.1%) did not.
- The percentage reporting having a book increased slightly between 2016 and 2020, reaching a peak of 94.3%, but it has since decreased. In 2023, it was 92.9%, representing a 2-percentage-point (pp) change over the last year.
- Fewer children and young people who received free school meals (FSMs) told us they had a book of their own compared with those who did not receive FSMs (87.6% vs 92.0%). While the gap in book ownership was smaller in 2024 than in 2023 (4.4pp vs 6.6pp), this was because a lower percentage of those who did not receive FSMs owned a book, rather than more of those who did receive FSMs having a book of their own.
- As in previous years, more girls than boys aged 8 to 18 said they had a book of their own at home in 2024 (93.4% vs 88.4%). Book ownership also decreased slightly with age, with fewer young people aged 16 to 18 saying they had a book compared with children aged 8 to 11 (87.2% vs 92.8%).

## Regional differences in book ownership

- There were slight differences in book ownership depending on where in England children and young people went to school, with most reporting having a book of their own in London (93.4%) and fewest in the North West (88.3%). For children aged 5 to 8, while 9 in 10 (90.5%) in the South West said that they had a book of their own at home, this decreased to 84.9% of children in the North West.
- Ranking book ownership by English region over the last decade reveals a persistent north-south divide, with regions in the south of the country (the East of England, London, South East and South West) consistently in the top three places and those in the north (the North East, the North West and Yorkshire and the Humber) most frequently in the bottom three.
- At the same time, the percentage-point gap between the top and bottom regions has halved from 10.3pp in 2014 (with 92.3% of children in the West Midlands saying they had a book compared with 82.0% of those in the North West) to 5.1pp in 2024 (93.4% in London vs. 88.3% in the North West).

Over the last decade, the gap in the percentage of children owning a book in the top- and bottom-ranked English regions has halved from 10.3pp to 5.1pp.

## Why does book ownership matter?

- Book ownership is linked with reading skill: more children and young people who told us that they didn't have a book of their own at home read below the average (16.7% vs. 7.3%) and fewer read above the average (10.6% vs. 22.5%) compared with their peers who said that they had a book of their own.

More children and young people who told us they didn't have a book of their own at home read below the average (16.7% vs 7.3%).

- Book ownership is also associated with reading enjoyment, frequency and confidence. In 2024, more than three times as many children and young people aged 8 to 18 who had a book of their own at home said they read daily (23.1% vs 7.0%). In addition, almost four times as many told us that they enjoyed reading compared with those without a book (38.7% vs 10.1%).

More than three times as many book owners aged 8 to 18 said they read daily compared with those who didn't have a book (23.1% vs 7.0%).

- Similarly, more children aged 5 to 8 who owned a book told us that they read daily (50.0% vs 35.6% of those who did not own a book), while 2 in 3 (67.1%) said they enjoyed reading compared with 1 in 2 (50.2%) of those who did not own a book.

These findings emphasise the need to provide children and young people with the resources they need to support their literacy at school and in the home environment. Increasing access to books for all children, particularly those from lower-income homes, has the potential to encourage more regular reading, higher reading engagement and more positive reading attitudes, which in turn can support improved reading performance and better life outcomes.

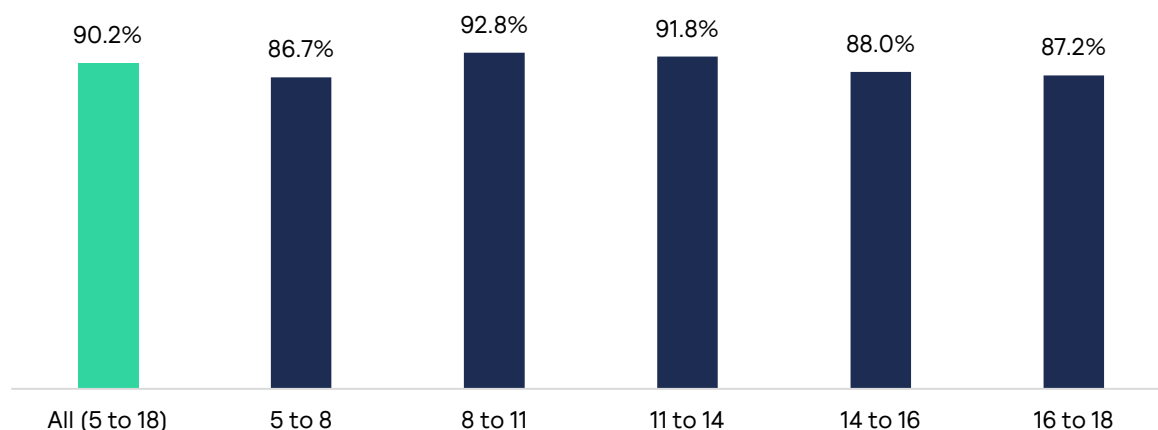
# Children and young people's book ownership in 2024

## Book ownership in children and young people aged 5 to 18

In 2024, 9 in 10 (90.2%) children and young people aged 5 to 18 said they had a book of their own at home, meaning 1 in 10 (9.8%) did not have a book of their own.

As in previous years, levels of book ownership were marginally lower in the youngest age group (see Figure 1), with 86.7% of children aged 5 to 8 saying they had a book of their own. Book ownership was highest in children aged 8 to 11, with levels reducing somewhat as children and young people get older.

**Figure 1: Percentage of children and young people who told us that they had a book of their own at home in 2024 by age group**



## Book ownership over time

### Book ownership in children and young people aged 8 to 18 between 2014 and 2024

Focusing on children and young people aged 8 to 18 allows us to track book ownership over the past 10 years, while we didn't ask children aged 5 to 8 about it until 2019. In 2024, 9 in 10 (90.9%) children and young people aged 8 to 18 told us they had a book of their own at home, meaning that 9.1% (1 in 11) did not own a book.

Over the past decade, there have been incremental increases in levels of self-reported book ownership for children and young people in this age group, reaching a peak of 94.3% in 2020 (see Figure 2). However, since this time, the percentage of 8- to 18-year-olds who say they have a book of their own has been decreasing year on year. In 2024, the percentage (90.9%) was the lowest since 2016.

**Figure 2: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who told us that they had a book of their own at home from 2014 to 2024**

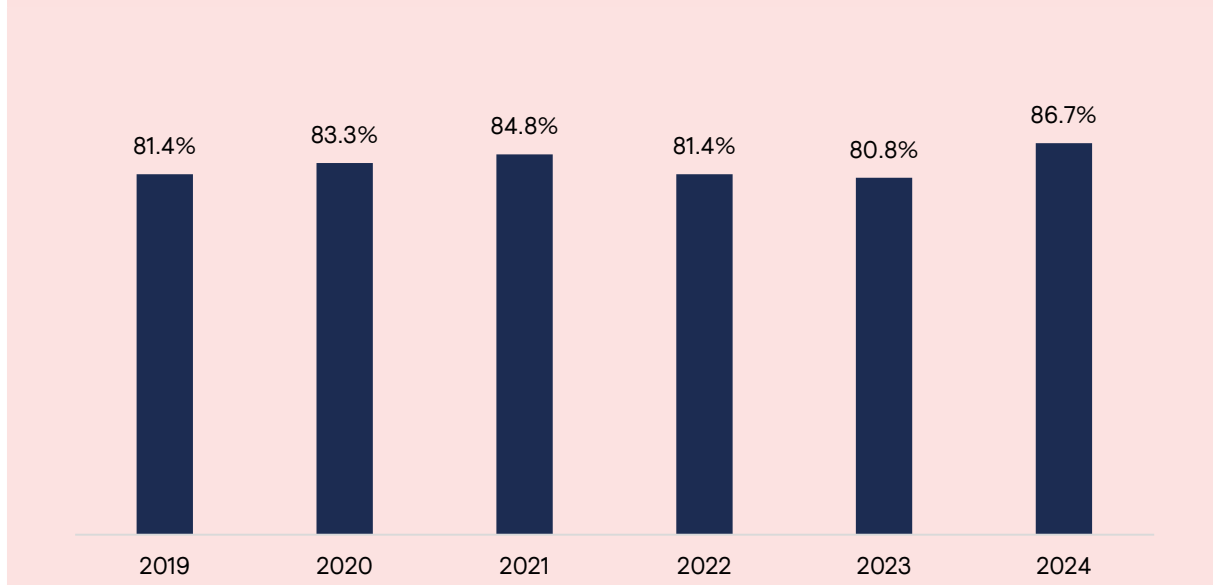


**Book ownership in children aged 5 to 8 between 2019 and 2024**

We first started asking children aged 5 to 8 about their book ownership in 2019. Following slight increases in reported book ownership in 2020 and 2021, in 2023, the lowest percentage of children in this age group said they had a book of their own (80.8%). However, in 2024, this trend reversed, and we saw the highest percentage of children aged 5 to 8 saying they had a book of their own since we started asking this question (86.7%). This represented an increase of 5.9 percentage points compared with 2023.



**Figure 3: Percentage of children aged 5 to 8 who said that they had a book of their own at home between 2019 and 2024**



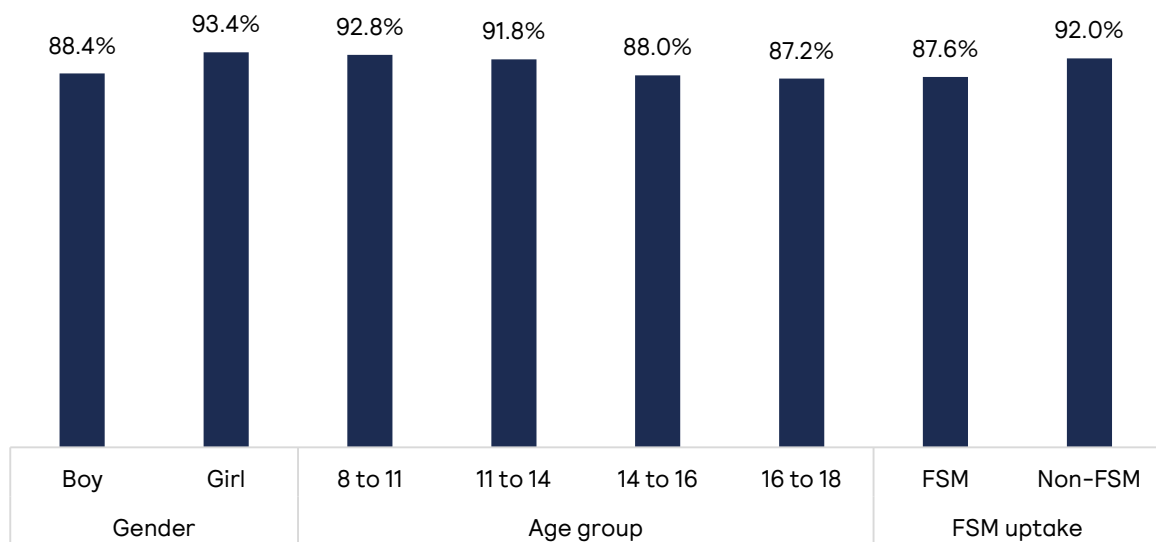
The percentage of 5- to 8-year-olds who say they have a book of their own has increased from 80.8% in 2023 to 86.7% in 2024, an increase of 5.9pp.

## Who had a book of their own at home in 2024 (ages 8 to 18)?

Book ownership in children and young people aged 8 to 18 varied by gender, age and socioeconomic background (see Figure 4). As in previous years, more girls than boys aged 8 to 18 said they had a book of their own at home in 2024, with 93.4% of girls reporting having a book compared with 88.4% of boys (a 5 percentage-point [pp] gap). In addition, book ownership decreased slightly with age, with fewer young people aged 16 to 18 saying they had a book compared with children aged 8 to 11 (87.2% vs 92.8%).

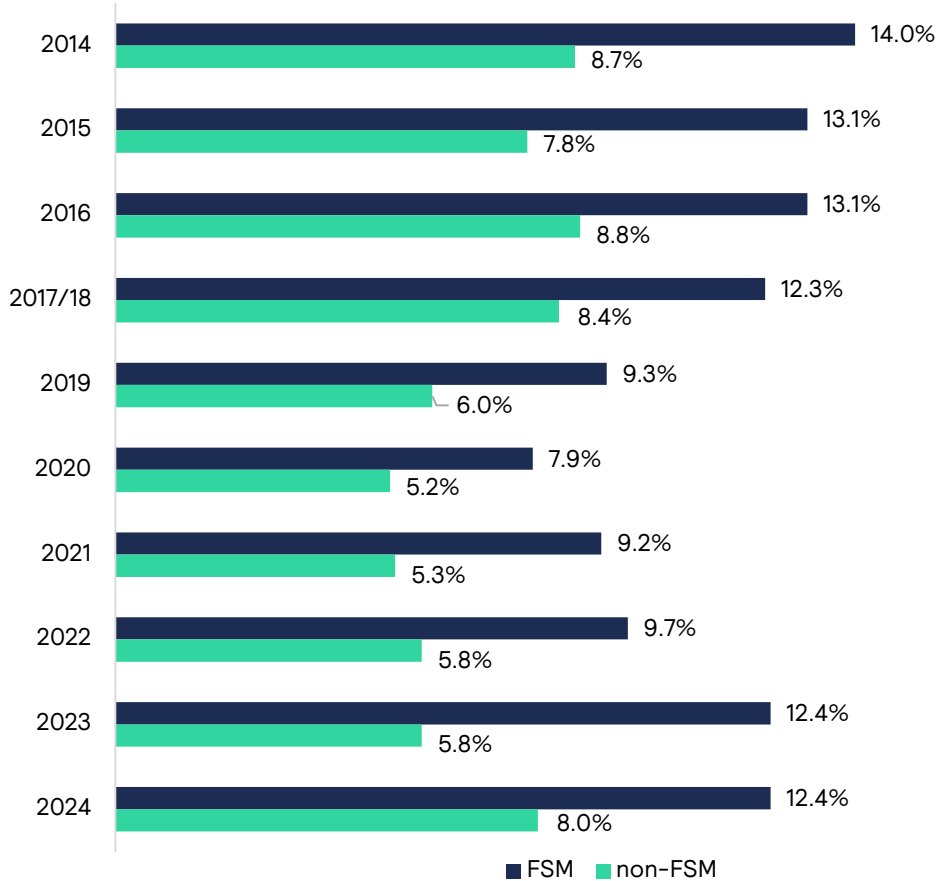
There was a 4.4pp gap in book ownership between children and young people who did and did not receive free school meals (FSMs), with 87.6% of those who received FSMs having a book compared with 92.0% of their peers who did not. While this was narrower than the 6.6pp gap in 2023, this was because a lower percentage of children who did not receive FSMs said they owned a book in 2024, rather than more of those who did receive FSMs having a book of their own.

**Figure 4: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who said that they had a book of their own at home in 2024 by gender, age and FSM status**



Looking at the data another way, the percentage of children and young people who received FSMs who said that they did not have a book of their own in 2024 (12.4%, or 1 in 8) is the joint highest since 2016 (see Figure 5). Similarly, the percentage of those who did not receive FSMs who did not have a book (8.0%, or 1 in 13) is the highest since 2019.

**Figure 5: Children and young people aged 8 to 18 who said that they did not have a book of their own at home by FSM status between 2014 and 2024**



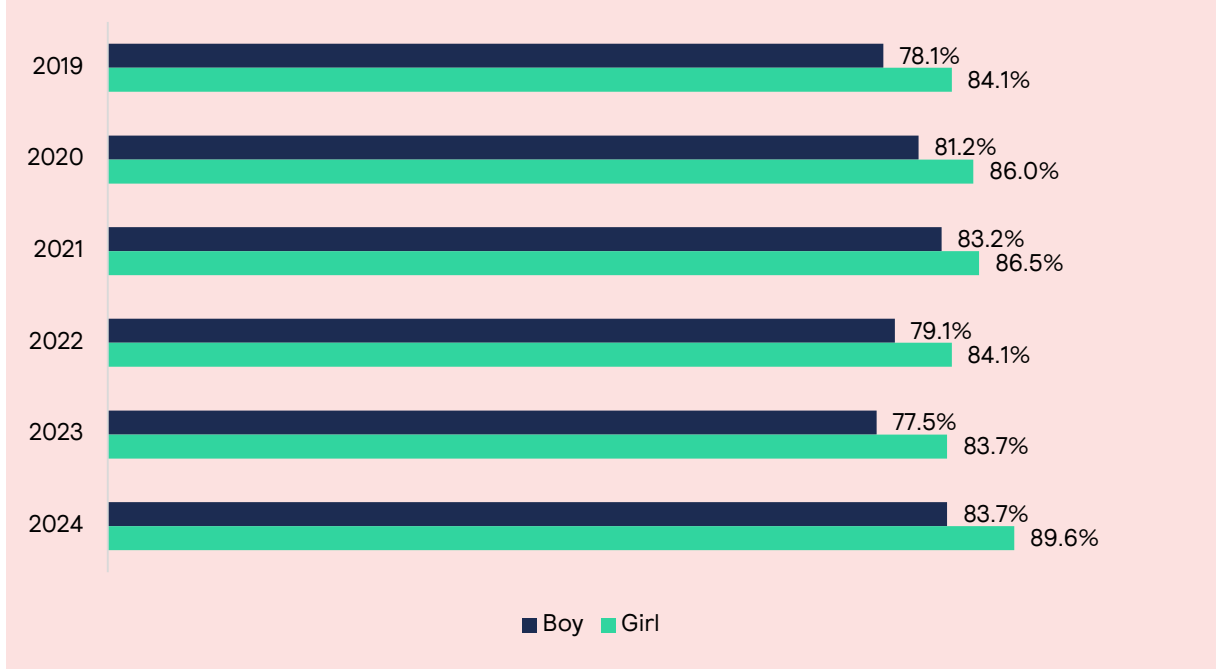
In 2024, 1 in 8 (12.4%) of those receiving free school meals did not have a book of their own. This is the joint highest percentage since 2016.

### By gender, who had a book of their own in 2024 of those aged 5 to 8?

Reflecting findings with their older peers, there was some variation in book ownership by gender in children aged 5 to 8, with more girls than boys reporting having a book of their own in 2024 (89.6% vs. 87.3%). This has been the case since 2019 (see Figure 6), with an average percentage-point gap of 5pp between

boys and girls between 2019 and 2022. The gap increased to 6.2pp in 2023 but decreased slightly to 5.9pp in 2024.

**Figure 6: Percentage of children aged 5 to 8 who said that they had a book of their own at home by gender between 2019 and 2024**



## Regional differences in book ownership in 2024

There were some differences in children and young people’s book ownership depending on where in England they went to school. Slightly more children and young people from London (93.4%) said they had a book of their own at home compared with their peers in other regions (see Figure 7). The lowest percentage of children and young people who said they had a book of their own were in the North West (88.3%), representing a 5.1pp gap between this region and London.

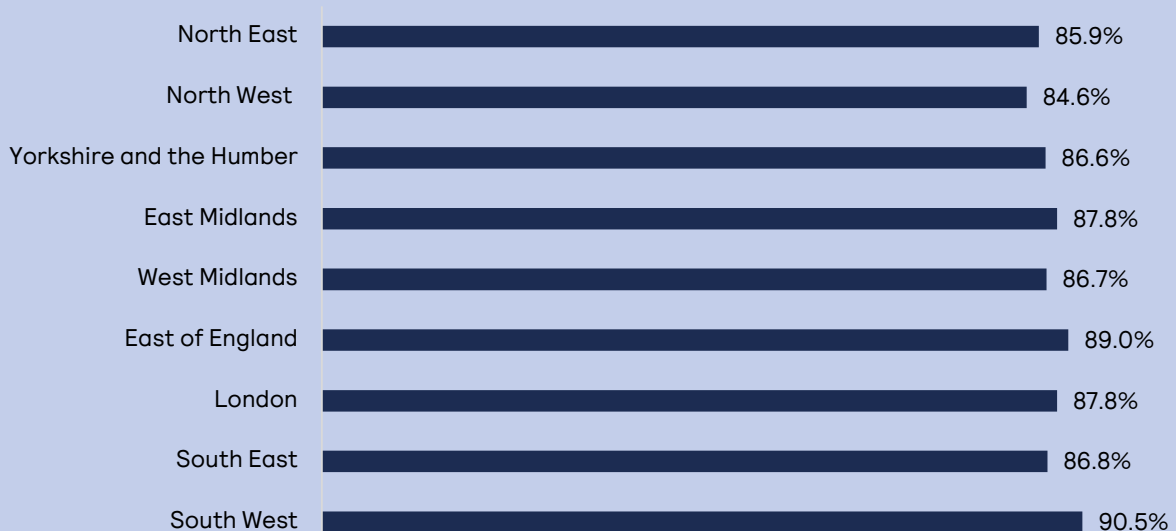
**Figure 7: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who said that they had a book of their own at home in 2024 by English region**



### Regional differences in book ownership for children aged 5 to 8

Differences were also noticeable in relation to those aged 5 to 8 (see Figure 8). There was a 5.9pp gap in book ownership between the English regions with the highest and lowest percentage of children in this age group reporting having a book of their own (i.e. the South West [90.5%] and the North West [84.6%] respectively).

**Figure 8: Percentage of children aged 5 to 8 who said that they had a book of their own at home in 2024 by region**



### Regional differences in book ownership for those aged 8 to 18 over time

Looking at differences in book ownership over the last decade reveals something of a north-south divide. Ranking percentages of children and young people aged 8 to 18 reporting owning a book between 2014 and 2024, we can see that the English regions in the south of the country (i.e. the East of England, London, South East and South West) are consistently in the top three places (see Figure 9)<sup>1</sup>.

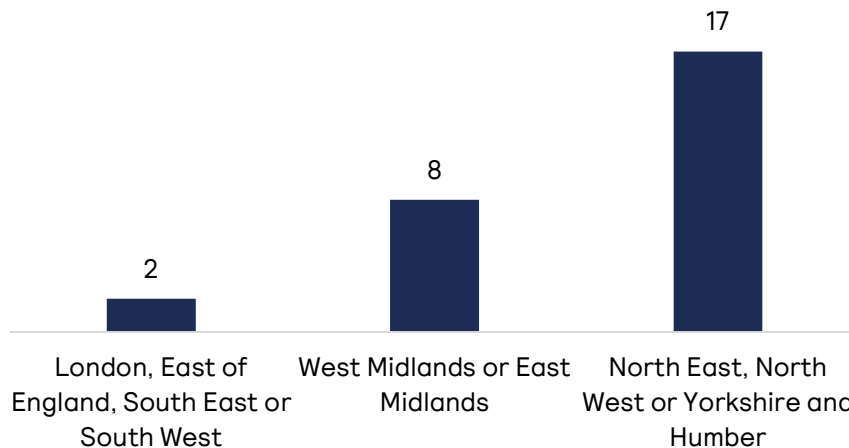
**Figure 9: Number of times English regions have ranked in the top three for percentage of children and young people reporting having a book of their own between 2014 and 2024**



By contrast, English regions in the north (the North East, North West and Yorkshire and the Humber) have appeared in the bottom three places far more frequently over the last decade (see Figure 10).

<sup>1</sup>Based on data for nine of the last ten years (2014, 2016, 2017/18, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024), meaning total possible top three rankings is 27

**Figure 10: Number of times English regions have ranked in the bottom three for percentage of children and young people reporting having a book of their own between 2014 and 2024**



Regarding regions in the Midlands (East Midlands and West Midlands), while the West Midlands was ranked top for book ownership in 2014, these regions have subsequently appeared towards the middle or bottom of the rankings in most years since.

These findings appear to suggest something of a persistent north-south divide in children and young people reporting having a book of their own at home. At the same time, while the percentage-point gap between the regions appearing at the top and bottom of the table was 10.3pp in 2014 (with 92.3% of children in the West Midlands saying they had a book compared with 82.0% of those in the North West), this gap has halved over the subsequent years and in 2024 was 5.1pp.

Over the last decade, the gap in the percentage of children owning a book in the top- and bottom-ranked English regions has halved from 10.3pp to 5.1pp.

## Book ownership and reading skill

Recent studies have found links between book ownership and reading performance in English 10-year-olds (Lindorff et al., 2023), and we were also interested to explore any associations between reading assessments in children and young people taking part in our survey and whether they said they had a book of their own at home.

In 2024, we had reading-skill data for 3,861 children and young people aged 8 to 14. Of these, 3,751 also answered questions about book ownership as part of our Annual Literacy Survey, which allowed us to explore again the link between book ownership and reading skill. When we last explored this in 2019, using data from a much smaller sample of 712 children and young people aged 11 to 14, we found that there was a link between the two.

To make this research possible, we worked with 15 schools that were all using the same reading-skill measure routinely to assess their pupils' reading ability – namely Star Reading<sup>2</sup>. Star Reading provides a standardised reading score that takes into account children and young people's ages and compares children and young people with others nationally of the same age. Like most other educational skill tests, it is standardised so that the average score is 100, while the spread of scores (the standard deviation) is set for 15. This means that children and young people who have standardised scores of 85 to 115 fall within the average reading-skills band, while those scoring below 85 are below average and those scoring 115 and above are above average.

As shown in Figure 11, children and young people who said that they had a book of their own at home (n = 3,535) had higher average (mean) standardised reading scores than children and young people who told us they didn't have a book of their own (n = 216). This difference was statistically significant<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://uk.renaissance.com/products/star-reading/>

<sup>3</sup>  $t(3749) = 7.311$ , ( $p < 0.001$ ), Cohen's  $d = .512$



**Figure 11: Average (mean) standardised reading score by whether or not children and young people aged 8 to 14 said they had a book of their own in 2024<sup>4</sup>**



As we did in 2019, to further compare children and young people with different reading scores, we divided them into three groups based on their standardised reading score: having a below average score (<85, n = 294), an average score (85 to 115; n =2,638) and an above average reading score (>115; n = 819).

Table 1 shows that more children and young people who told us that they didn't have a book of their own at home read below the average and fewer read above the average compared with their peers who said that they had a book of their own.

**Table 1: Percentage of children and young people reading below, at or above the average by whether or not they had a book of their own in 2024**

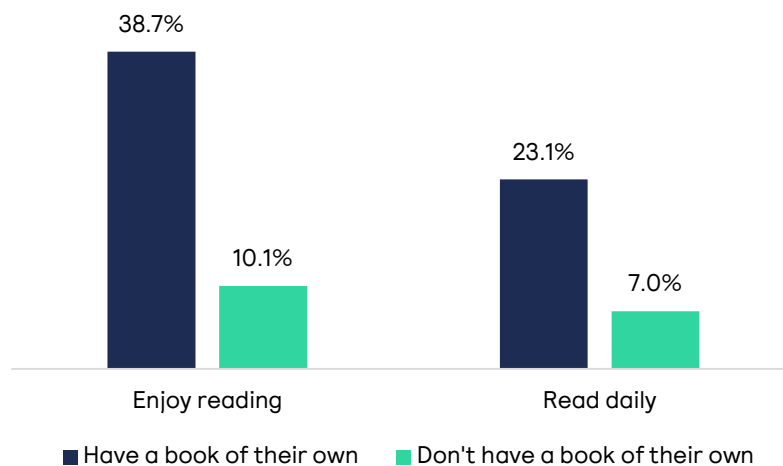
	Below average	Average	Above average
<b>Have their own book</b>	7.3%	70.2%	22.5%
<b>Don't have their own book</b>	16.7%	72.7%	10.6%

<sup>4</sup> Have a book of their own SD = 13.59; don't have a book of their own SD = 13.72

## Book ownership and reading enjoyment, frequency and confidence for those aged 8 to 18

Our research has consistently found a link between children and young people having a book of their own and their reading enjoyment and frequency. In 2024, almost four times as many children and young people aged 8 to 18 who had a book of their own at home told us that they enjoyed reading compared with those without a book (38.7% vs 10.1%, see Figure 12). In addition, more than three times as many of those who had a book said they read daily (23.1% vs 7.0%).

**Figure 12: Book ownership, reading enjoyment and reading frequency in 2024 for those aged 8 to 18**



Conversely, more than three times as many children and young people aged 8 to 18 who said they 'rarely or never' read was significantly higher in those who didn't have a book of their own (55.4% vs. 17.0% of those who did have a book).

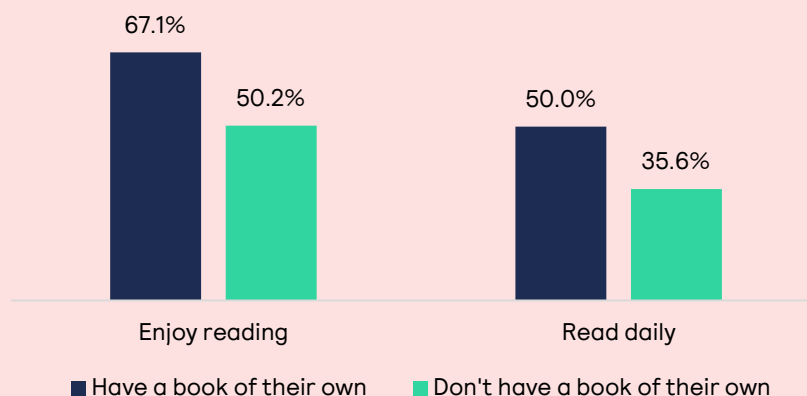
More than three times as many book owners aged 8 to 18 said they read daily compared with their peers who did not own a book (23.1% vs 7.0%).

We also found differences in self-reported reading confidence between children and young people who did and did not have a book of their own at home, with around 2 in 3 (63.1%) children and young people who did not have a book of their own rating themselves as confident readers compared with more than 4 in 5 (84.9%) of those who did have a book.

### Book ownership, reading enjoyment and frequency in those aged 5 to 8

Differences in reading enjoyment and frequency between children who had a book of their own at home and those who didn't were less pronounced for those aged 5 to 8. As shown in Figure 13, 2 in 3 (67.1%) children aged 5 to 8 who owned a book said they enjoyed reading compared with 1 in 2 (50.2%) of those who did not own a book. More children who owned a book also said they read every day, with 1 in 2 (50.0%) reading daily compared with 1 in 3 (35.6%) of those who did not own a book.

**Figure 13: Book ownership, reading enjoyment and reading frequency in 2024 for those aged 5 to 8**



Additionally, twice as many children aged 5 to 8 who did not have a book said they 'never' read compared with children who did have a book of their own at home (20.8% vs 8.3%).

While 88.8% of children aged 5 to 8 who had a book felt they were a good reader, this decreased to 77.6% for those who did not have a book.

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## Summary and discussion

Reading for pleasure is confined neither to books, nor to books that you own. Nevertheless, every year we find that many more children and young people who say they have a book of their own at home report reading daily in their free time and enjoying reading compared with those who do not have a book. In 2024, more than three times as many children and young people aged 8 to 18 who had a book of their own reported reading daily, while almost four times as many said they enjoyed reading compared with those who did not have a book. In addition, this year we also found that almost three times as many children and young people who had a book of their own saw themselves as readers compared with those who did not have a book of their own.

This research adds to a wealth of existing studies demonstrating links between book ownership, reading engagement, skills and life outcomes (see, e.g., Lindorff et al., 2023). Taken together, the findings suggest that increasing book ownership, particularly in children and young people from lower-income backgrounds, may make an important contribution to wider efforts to support both literacy and social justice.

Of course, book ownership in and of itself isn't the answer. Simply handing a child a book from a pile is likely to do little to change their life outcomes. Choice and agency have been shown time and again to be key to encouraging reading motivation and persistence, especially for reluctant readers. Wherever possible, we must also ensure that the books children choose are diverse in genre and themes, feature characters from a range of backgrounds, and are high quality, ability-appropriate and appealing.

Findings from our survey in 2024 present a mixed picture of book ownership levels. On one hand, while fewer of the youngest children (aged 5 to 8) told us they had a book of their own at home, the percentage has increased over the last year and is currently at its highest level since we first started asking this age group about book ownership in 2019. This is something to be celebrated.

At the same time, among those aged 8 to 18, the percentage reporting having a book of their own has been decreasing steadily since 2020 and is currently at its lowest since 2016. We can also see a continuation of trends over the last decade. Persistent divides remain when it comes to both gender and region. We should

not take for granted that if you are a boy or if you live outside the south of England, you are consistently more likely not to own a book of your own.

Additionally, as we have seen for over a decade, fewer children who receive FSMs report having a book of their own at home compared with their peers who do not receive FSMs. While this gap was slightly narrower in 2024 than in 2023, unfortunately this is not because more children from lower-income backgrounds have a book of their own this year, but rather because fewer of those from higher-income backgrounds have one.

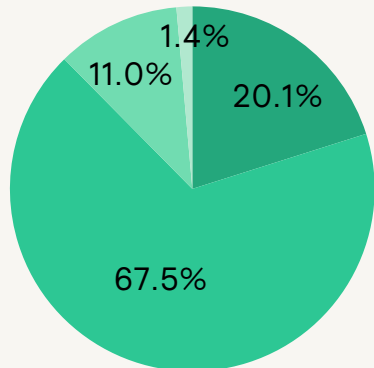
With ongoing pressure on household budgets affecting families' ability to support reading at home (see, e.g., [NLT, 2023](#); [Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2024](#)), school and public libraries play an ever-more-vital role in supporting children's reading for pleasure. It is, however, important also to acknowledge the associations between book ownership and reading enjoyment, attainment and longer-term outcomes. Support for book ownership should be targeted at groups with the most to benefit, allowing them the same opportunities as their peers to enjoy reading their own books at home.

## Appendix 1: the 2024 sample

**76,131**

Children and young people aged 5 to 18 from the UK participated between 3 January and 14 March 2024.

### Free School Meal (FSM) Status



■ FSM                      ■ Non-FSM  
■ Don't know            ■ Prefer not to say

**28.7%** 5-11s receiving FSMs

**17.6%** 11-18s receiving FSMs

### Gender

**48.6%** boy

**47.5%** girl

**3.3%** would rather not say

**0.6%** described themselves another way

### Age of respondents

**6.0%** 5 to 8 years

**26.8%** 8 to 11 years

**39.8%** 11 to 14 years

**24.0%** 14 to 16 years

**3.5%** 16 to 18 years

**405**

Schools across the UK participated in 2024.



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More than three times as many book owners aged 8 to 18 said they read daily compared with those who didn't have a book (23.1% vs 7.0%).

”

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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