

NewsWise evaluation report 2020-21: Executive summary

The Guardian Foundation, the National Literacy Trust and the PSHE Association developed the NewsWise programme in 2018, based on a shared mission to create a generation of news-literate children. The programme aims to empower children with the skills and knowledge to engage with news, and to feel confident to ask questions and to challenge misinformation. NewsWise provides free, high-quality and cross-curricular news literacy education resources including teacher training and webinars, newsroom-style pupil workshops, opportunities to hear from journalism students and professionals, lesson plans and online resources. Funding from organisations including Google and the Garfield Weston Foundation allows the programme to be offered free to all settings teaching 9 to 11-year-olds across the UK.

This document summarises findings from a longer report¹ evaluating the impact of the third year of NewsWise, from August 2020 to July 2021, a period of exceptional educational disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, NewsWise reached a total of 1,878 pupils and 568 teachers in 35 primary schools and 58,368 free resources were downloaded. Remarkably, despite the need for virtual programme delivery, evaluation indicates that the NewsWise programme was, overall, able to sustain or even exceed positive news literacy outcomes compared with previous years. Data across a variety of indicators shows that pupils' news literacy attitudes, behaviour, confidence and skills improved after taking part in the NewsWise workshop, and more than double the number of pupils were able to correctly identify real and fake news stories at the end of the programme.

Furthermore, teachers reported increased confidence in teaching news literacy in the classroom, suggesting involvement in the programme has the potential to have an impact on those they teach in years to come. Almost 9 in 10 teachers who took part in a NewsWise teacher training session would recommend it to other schools, while one teacher described the NewsWise workshop as "one of the best literacy-based workshops I have been a part of". Another teacher stated:

"I have rarely seen children so engaged. They saw the power of the media in changing minds. They realised that they aren't powerless, that news organisations can change governments' minds."

It has never been more essential to help children develop the news literacy attitudes and behaviours that allow them to evaluate the reliability of news sources effectively. These findings suggest that the NewsWise programme can foster the skills and confidence that will empower children and young people to become responsible news creators and consumers.

¹ Picton, I., Teravainen-Goff, A. and Clark, C. (2021), NewsWise evaluation report 2020-21, London, National Literacy Trust
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Summary of key findings

Pupils have improved news literacy behaviour

- At the end of the programme, **more than double** the number of participating pupils say they would check whether a news story was reported by other news companies (**32.8% to 75.0%**) while the percentage saying they would check whether a news story came from a news company or a person they trusted increased from **41.5% to 82.1%**.

Pupils have increased news literacy skills

- The percentage of pupils who were able to correctly identify whether news stories in a news quiz were fake or real **more than doubled**. Before NewsWise, **32.1%** of pupils scored two points or more out of three in the quiz; this increased to **73.8%** at the end of the programme.
- Conversely, the percentage of pupils unable to identify any of the three stories in the news quiz correctly decreased from **32.4% to 7.0%**.

Pupils are more confident navigating the news

- While a third (**32.9%**) of pupils felt it was ‘easy’ or ‘very easy’ to tell whether a news story is trustworthy before taking part in NewsWise, this increased to 9 in 10 (**90.7%**) after taking part in the programme. This compares with a national average of **60.3%** of Key Stage 2 pupils² who say they find it easy.

Pupils have increased interest in the news; however, active engagement decreased marginally over the course of the project

- The number of pupils interested in the news **almost doubled** following participation in the NewsWise workshop, with the percentage of pupils interested in the news rising from **35.5% to 67.4%**.
- The percentage of pupils who read, watched or listened to the news either daily or weekly decreased slightly from **60.4%** at the time of the workshop to **57.4%** in post-NewsWise surveys carried out several weeks later. This echoes findings from wider UK research, which found some children and young people disengaged with the news during the COVID pandemic ([Ofcom, 2021](#)).

Pupils have an increased critical awareness of the elements of trustworthy news

- After taking part in NewsWise, the percentage of pupils who believed news stories should be balanced increased from **34.0% to 66.0%**. Similarly, the percentage of pupils who felt that news should be truthful increased from **41.2% to 58.8%**.

Teachers found the training high quality and believed the programme had a positive impact on pupils’ news literacy skills and confidence

- 9 in 10 (**92.8%**) of teachers rated the NewsWise online pre-project training as ‘excellent’ (46.4%) or ‘good’ (46.4%) and **100.0%** felt more confident in supporting pupils’ news literacy.
- **100.0%** of teachers feel pupils have increased skills in thinking critically about news, while **91.7%** say pupils are more likely to use more than one source to check facts.
- **100%** rated the teacher webinars as ‘excellent’ (78.1%) or ‘good’ (21.9%).

² Based on data from the National Literacy Trust’s Annual Literacy Survey 2021 (n=3,699)