

School library programmes: 2023 evaluation

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Introduction

“Excellent programme. Really developed a deeper understanding of reading for pleasure and increased my awareness of authors/books. Invaluable tool to help transform the library.”

School libraries are invaluable for children and young people’s academic achievement and literacy outcomes. Research has shown that reading for pleasure is associated with school library use ([Clark & Teravainen-Goff, 2018](#)), with children who use their school library being more likely to enjoy reading and read more often. However, reading for pleasure among children and young people is on a downward spiral. In 2023, only 2 in 5 (43.4%) children and young people aged 8 to 18 said that they enjoyed reading, and fewer than 3 in 10 (28.0%) read daily outside class ([Clark et al., 2023](#)). This is the lowest rate of reading enjoyment we have recorded since we began tracking this metric in 2005 (51.4%, [Clark et al., 2023, p.12](#)), and reinforces what was also found in PIRLS 2021 data, whereby only 29% of pupils in England said that they like reading ‘very much’ ([Department for Education, 2023](#)). It is therefore timely to see the Department for Education’s Reading Framework position inspiring children and young people to read for pleasure as a collective responsibility and priority to create lifelong readers ([Department for Education, 2023b](#)).

Total expenditure for primary and secondary school libraries fell by 17% from 2020–21 to 2021–22 ([CIPFA, 2023](#)), so there is an urgent need to encourage reading and reading for pleasure, as well as focusing resources on school libraries. As a recent Book Trust (2022) report highlights, libraries can play a transformative role in children’s early literacy development and may act to combat the reduction in reading for pleasure.

A survey conducted in the summer of 2022 on behalf of the Great School Libraries with the Primary School Library Alliance (PSLA), and supported by the National Literacy Trust, Foyle Foundation, Penguin Random House and the Lightbulb Trust, found that 1 in 7 (14%) state primary schools in the UK did not have a school library, meaning that over 750,000 children did not have access to books that we know enable better educational outcomes and greater wellbeing ([PSLA, 2022](#)).

The survey also showed that children from schools with an above-average intake of children eligible for free school meals were more likely to say that they didn’t have a

school library compared with children from schools with a below-average intake of children eligible for free school meals (16% versus 10%, [PSLA, 2022](#)). Given that 1 in 10 (9.7%) children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds didn't have a book of their own at home in 2022 ([Cole et al., 2022](#)), this is particularly concerning as schools can act as the first opportunity for children to discover the magic and benefits of reading.

In November 2021, The National Literacy Trust and publisher Penguin Random House UK founded the Primary School Library Alliance (PSLA), which works with its flagship partners to address the chronic lack of investment in primary school libraries and bring together relevant parties to help solve this urgent issue. Our 'Phase 1' goal is to transform 1,000 primary school libraries by 2025, giving them the books, training and support they need. The campaign will now be known as Libraries for Primaries.

The National Literacy Trust ran four separate programmes designed to support primary school libraries during the academic year 2022–23: World of Stories, Chase Rewarding Futures, OUP: Raise a Reader, and Get Islington Reading. This evaluation report compiles the insight collected across the first three programmes. A separate report will be published for Get Islington Reading, although some early insight will be included in this report.

World of Stories

World of Stories, developed in partnership with Puffin and running since 2018, equips primary schools with the books, materials, training and resources they need to champion reading for pleasure across the whole school. Since 2021, World of Stories has been funded by Arts Council England and Penguin Random House. The World of Stories programme aims to address some of the key challenges facing reading for pleasure in schools by working to transform their libraries and reading spaces into hubs of creativity and imagination. The programme also creates a team around the school library leads by linking them up with public library services and school library services.

Chase Rewarding Futures

The Chase Rewarding Futures programme is a partnership between retail bank Chase and the National Literacy Trust, supported by Puffin and first formed in 2021–22. The programme works to support schools to develop a whole-school reading culture with reading for pleasure at its heart. Participating schools benefit from highly rated training on reading for pleasure, 400 new books, digital resources selected by the school, and audiobooks so children can access stories in a range of reading formats. The transformation of libraries aims to create a positive and

encouraging reading environment for children. In 2022-23, participating schools received a library furniture package including shelving and soft furnishings, with 21 'Flagship' schools receiving a full library renovation.

OUP: Raise a Reader

The Oxfordshire Raise a Reader campaign is a two-year collaboration with Oxford University Press, with the goal of raising a generation of readers in schools and families in Oxfordshire's most disadvantaged and under-served communities. Championing reading across 10 Oxfordshire schools in the first year and a further 10 in the second year, the programme sees schools receive a donation of 500 books each (300 books donated by OUP and 200 books published by independent publishers), as well as a range of soft furnishings and book storage to create their own dedicated reading spaces. Participating schools have access to in-person specialist training to help develop effective whole-school reading strategies as well as receiving a subscription to Oxford Reading Buddy, a digital reading service of nearly 500 books, and the opportunity to host author visits.

Get Islington Reading

Get Islington Reading is a three-year borough-wide campaign that includes a fully funded programme for Key Stages 2 and 3 in 16 local schools to embed reading for enjoyment in school communities and support the transition from primary to secondary education. The project is delivered by the National Literacy Trust and The Reading Agency, funded by Mercers, and involves working with local partners Islington Council Library Service, Islington Education Library Service and Islington School Improvement Service. The programme involved reviewing current provisions, facilitating participation in a wide range of reading activities, providing new books for school libraries, and connecting schools and public libraries to build a strong community of readers in Islington. Given that Get Islington Reading is delivered jointly with The Reading Agency and other local partners, the findings are reported separately in our joint report.

Key Findings

Practitioner insight

603 practitioners completed the survey at the start of the school year, and 158 completed it at the end of the school year. Of the 158 who completed the survey at the end of the school year, we were able to match the responses of 104 with their responses at the start of the school year. Insights in this report are taken from both the 104 matched practitioner responses and the 158 practitioners who completed the reflective questions in the survey at the end of the school year.

School library provision

Through taking part in the programme, schools improved their library provision...

- More practitioners described their school library provision as 'very good' or 'good' at the end of the school year when the library had been revamped, compared with the start of the school year (90.0% vs. 61.8%).
- Almost all (98.1%) practitioners rated the diversity of authors, topics and characters represented in the book collection as 'very good' or 'good' at the end of the school year.

Support during the cost-of-living crisis

The programme supported access to books during the cost-of-living crisis...

- Crucially, improved provision is also helping schools to support their pupils with access to books: 3 in 4 (74.2%) practitioners told us that they have been better able to support pupils' reading during the cost-of-living crisis because of the improved school library.

Practitioner confidence, knowledge and understanding

Training and support improved practitioner confidence, knowledge and understanding of how to run an effective and engaging school library...

- While 7 in 10 (72.5%) practitioners told us at the beginning of the school year that they felt confident in their ability to create an engaging school library, nearly all (99.1%) practitioners said this at the end of the school year. This

included knowledge of how to improve the book collection (97.1%), which books to buy (97.0%) and how to organise the book collection (96.2%).

- Practitioners also reported greater understanding of how to engage children with the school library after taking part in these programmes. While 3 in 5 (60.2%) rated their understanding of how to engage with children in the school library as ‘very good’ or ‘good’ at the start of the school year, nearly all (96.2%) did so at the end of the school year.
- Almost all (98.1%) practitioners told us that their knowledge of new and current children’s books and authors, and knowledge of children’s reading materials overall, was ‘very good’ or ‘good’ at the end of the school year.

Whole school reading for pleasure

The programme boosted the prioritisation of reading for pleasure in schools...

- Practitioners also told us how participating in the school library revamp has empowered them to promote reading for pleasure across the school. Almost all (95.6%) practitioners said that their understanding of how they can support reading for pleasure across the school improved. 94.3% also said that their confidence to promote reading for pleasure across the school improved.
 - Looking specifically at the school library, at the end of the school year, all (100.0%) practitioners were confident in how to promote reading for pleasure in their school through the school library, compared with 3 in 5 (62.7%) at the start of the school year.
 - Nearly 9 in 10 (85.6%) practitioners said that there were key activities supporting reading for pleasure happening in their school regularly at the end of the school year compared with 7 in 10 (70.5%) who said this at the beginning of the school year.

Sustainability

The impact of the programme will go beyond the year of delivery...

- Nearly all (98.7%) practitioners are planning to continue improving the library going forward, and nearly 9 in 10 (87.0%) report that their school has invested more time and funds into the library, indicating that the school library is being prioritised as a result of taking part in the programme.

Child insight

1,356 children aged 7 to 11 answered a survey at the end of the school year when their school library or reading space provision had just been improved.

Impact of changes to the school library

- 2 in 3 (66.2%) children had noticed a change in their school library or reading space over the school year.
 - Most children perceived those changes very positively. 4 in 5 children told us that the changes made them want to use the school library more (84.7%), made them enjoy reading more (82.5%) and made them want to read more things (81.5%).
 - 4 in 5 also now perceive the school library as a nice space to spend time in (83.8%) and somewhere where they can find help if they need it (81.8%). 4 in 5 (82.1%) felt the changes made them feel more confident to use the school library.

Sustained impact of the programme

We also collected insight from 44 children aged 7 to 11 from seven 'alumni' schools: schools that took part in one of our school library programmes in the previous year (2021-22). We matched that sample in terms of the demographic make-up to one we had collected in summer 2022 (n = 398) so that we could begin to explore the longer-term impact of having improved library provision on children's reading outcomes.

- More children told us that they enjoyed reading a year after their school library provision had been improved compared with children in 2021-22 when the library provision had just been improved (81.8% vs. 75.1%).
- More children also told us that they were confident readers a year after their school library provision had been improved compared with children in 2021-22 when the school library provision had just been improved (100% vs. 87.4%).
- 9 in 10 (91.9%) children told us that they used their school library or reading space immediately after it had been improved in summer 2022. Engagement with the school library continued to be high and even slightly increased one year on, with 95.5% of children saying that they had continued to use the school library in summer 2023.
- 4 in 5 (81.8%) children told us immediately after their school library or reading space had been improved that they enjoyed going to the library. A year on, this percentage had increased to 97.6%.

Together, these findings display the importance of creating well-stocked, up to date, engaging library spaces that meet the needs of all children for years to come.

Practitioner insight

Practitioners were asked to complete a survey at the start and end of the school year to assess their knowledge and confidence in the school library and reading for pleasure provision. 603 practitioners completed the survey at the start of the school year and 158 completed it at the end of the school year. Of the 158 who completed the survey at the end of the school year, we were able to match the responses of 104 with their responses at the start of the school year. Insights in this report are taken from both the 104 matched practitioner responses and the 158 practitioners who completed the reflective questions in the survey at the end of the school year.

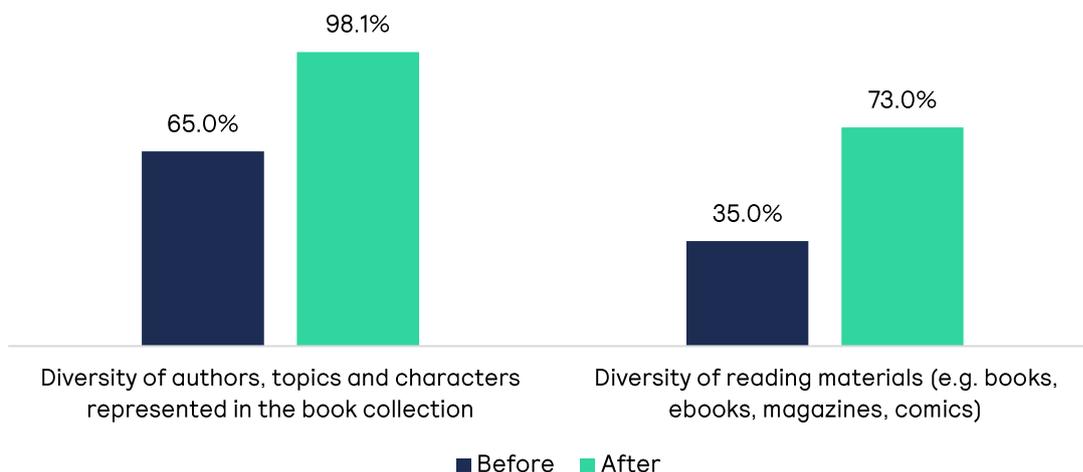
Overall, practitioners had a very positive experience of the programmes. Nearly all practitioners rated their experience as 'good' or 'very good' (96.8%) and all would recommend the programmes to other schools.

Changes in the school library provision

Insight from practitioners showed that the quality of the school library provision improved as a result of taking part in the programme. Overall, across the various aspects of provision mentioned in Figure 1, the percentage of practitioners who rated their school library provision as 'very good' or 'good' increased from 61.8% at the beginning of the school year to 90.0% at the end of the school year.

For example, as shown in Figure 1, the percentage of practitioners who rated the book collection as 'very good' or 'good' in terms of the diversity of authors, topics and characters increased from 65.0% to 98.1%. This is especially important as we know from our own research that 1 in 3 (32.7%) children and young people aged 9 to 18 say that they don't see themselves in what they read, and 2 in 5 (39.8%) would like more books with characters who are similar to them ([Best, Clark & Picton, 2020](#)). Finally, 3 in 4 (73.0%) practitioners rated the diversity of reading materials as either 'very good' or 'good' at the end of the school year, up from 35.9% at the start of the school year. This is indicative of greater access to different reading formats, including e-books, magazines, and graphic novels.

Figure 1: Percentage of practitioners who rated the various aspects about their school library provision as ‘very good’ or ‘good’ before and after the programme



The improved provision enabled schools to support their pupils with book access: 3 in 4 (74.2%) of the 158 practitioners who completed the post-survey told us that they have been better able to support pupils’ reading during the cost-of-living crisis because of the improved school library. This is especially important as our earlier research found that 1 in 4 (26%) parents and carers have asked their children to borrow books from their school library as a result of the cost-of-living crisis (National Literacy Trust, 2023). The programmes were therefore found to open the opportunity for these children to access books, regardless of their financial situation at home.

Practitioners also directly commented on the improved provision in their school libraries in the post-survey:

“We now have a well-stocked library which includes a diverse and contemporary range of texts, as well as texts from award winners.” (World of Stories)

“Lots of new books have helped us when we have cleared our existing stock of books. Organisation is getting better with books and children having more say of what is in the library.” (Rewarding Futures)

“School library moved from Library Bus to the Grove (main area when you enter our school), which the Raise a Reader volunteers helped to renovate and make look appealing with new books etc. The children now enjoy going there and regularly change their books, choosing their own to read for pleasure.” (Raise a Reader)

“School library has been completely revamped. Dated reading material has been removed and new books installed in their place. The library has been streamlined to allow for easier access. Space has been re-decorated to upgrade.” (World of Stories)

“It is now an excellent provision: stock of [many] books and more being added each term, plus Yoto audio player and audio books, and supplemented with online Oxford Owl and Oxford Reading Buddy; LMS catalogue browsable by anyone, from any device, at any time.” (Raise a Reader)

Case study 1: Raise a Reader

Before embarking on the Raise a Reader Programme, John Henry Newman was a primary school without a set library space.

“We had a shared area in our key stage one and our key stage two areas that were just kind of shelves of really old books. A lot were torn, and they went orange, because the books had sun on them, and they were just not appealing at all to the children... it wasn't a reading for pleasure space at all... and it definitely wasn't used as a library.”

The Raise a Reader programme has transformed this. The library is now colourful, stocking a variety of authors and books, with characters from different backgrounds.

“For the children in our school, when they first went into the library, they were like, ‘wow’. They looked around at the books and they were amazed. It wasn't just books that they hadn't seen before, there were some classics as well... As a school, obviously, with funding and things, we wouldn't be able to make that big of an impact, just like that. Without doing the programme, it would have taken us years to get that many different titles and that range of diversity. So just to have it was amazing.”

The schools also received in-depth training on reading for pleasure, helping them to make the best use of their new resources and reading spaces, and also helping them develop their whole-school reading culture.

“The biggest thing I took away from the training was how to engage people in the library once we have it. There were lots of little tips that we are drip feeding into our library to help pull that engagement together. And different

ways to keep it exciting... to keep it fresh and new, so that it's not just a space that is the same every time children go."

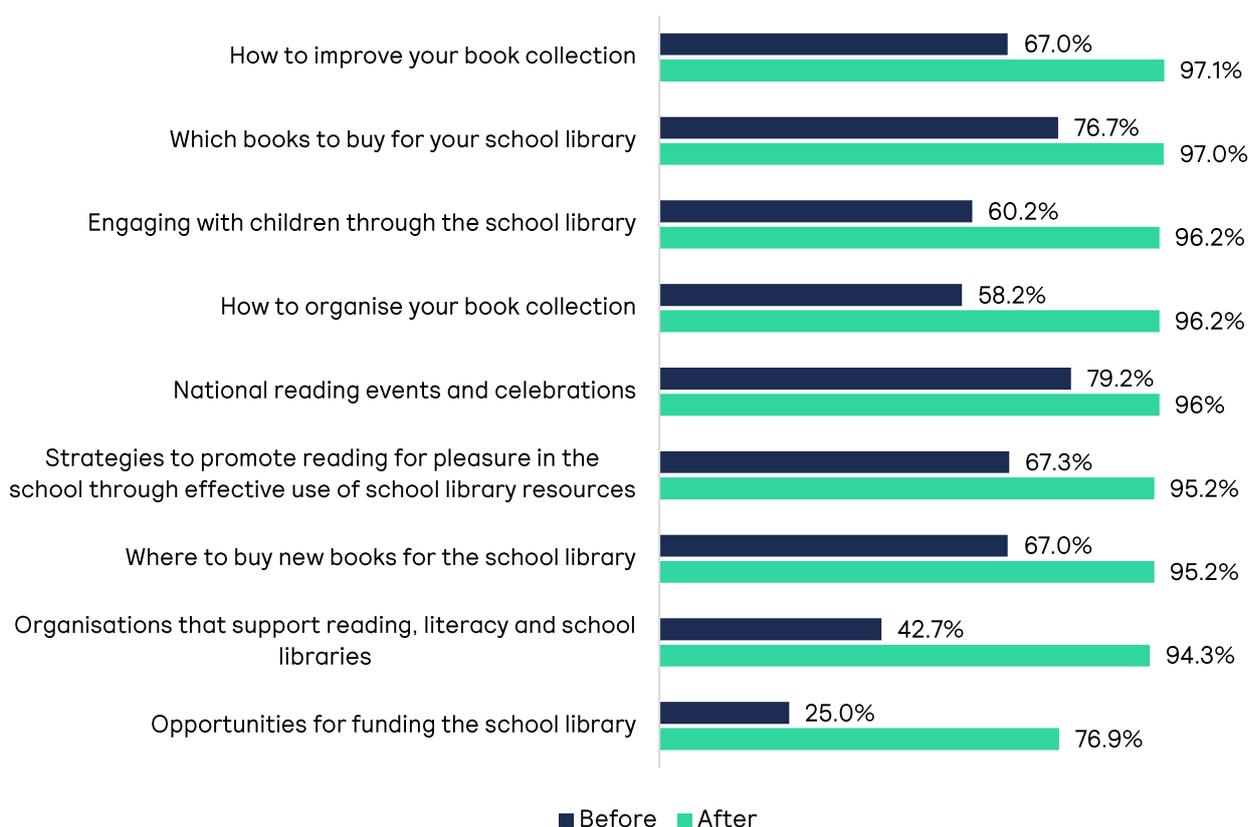
The library has become a part of each class's weekly timetable, with the whole school sharing a book of the week. This has encouraged conversations between peers and siblings in different year groups and has also supported parental engagement.

"We open [the library] to parents after school... we have a range of families who come to that, and we've had up to 10 families at a time come in and use the space... reading a book together or taking them home and swapping them every week and it's really lovely... We're hoping to get another shelf in the library and fill that with books for adults so when parents bring their children along, they can come and choose a book as well."

Changes in practitioners' knowledge and confidence

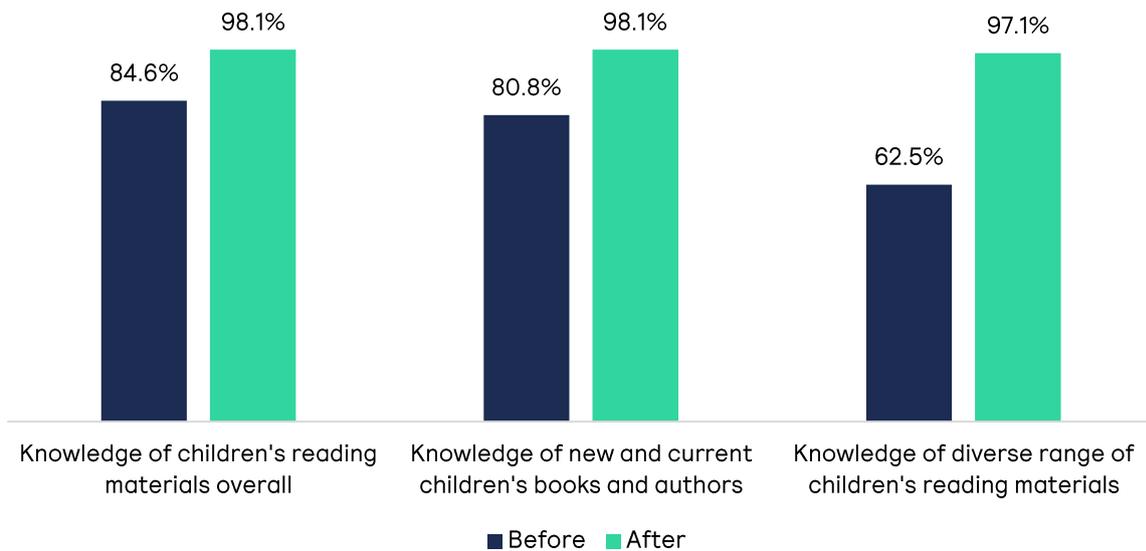
Our school library programmes recognise the importance of confident and informed staff supporting library provision and aim to increase awareness of a variety of library-related areas through training and support. The data indicates that this aspect of our programmes was very successful. For example (see Figure 2), the percentage of practitioners who felt their understanding of how to improve their book collection was 'very good' or 'good' increased by 45%, from 67.0% to 97.1%, while the percentage of those who rated their understanding as 'very good' or 'good' in organising the book collection increased by 65%, from 58.2% to 96.2%. While 3 in 5 (60.2%) rated their understanding of how to engage with children in the school library as 'very good' or 'good' at the start of the school year, nearly all (96.2%) did so at the end of the school year. Finally, three times as many practitioners also reported being aware of funding opportunities for their school library after taking part in the programme than before (increasing from 25.0% to 76.9%).

Figure 2: Percentage of practitioners who rated their knowledge and understanding of various aspects of the school library as ‘good’ or ‘very good’ before and after the programme



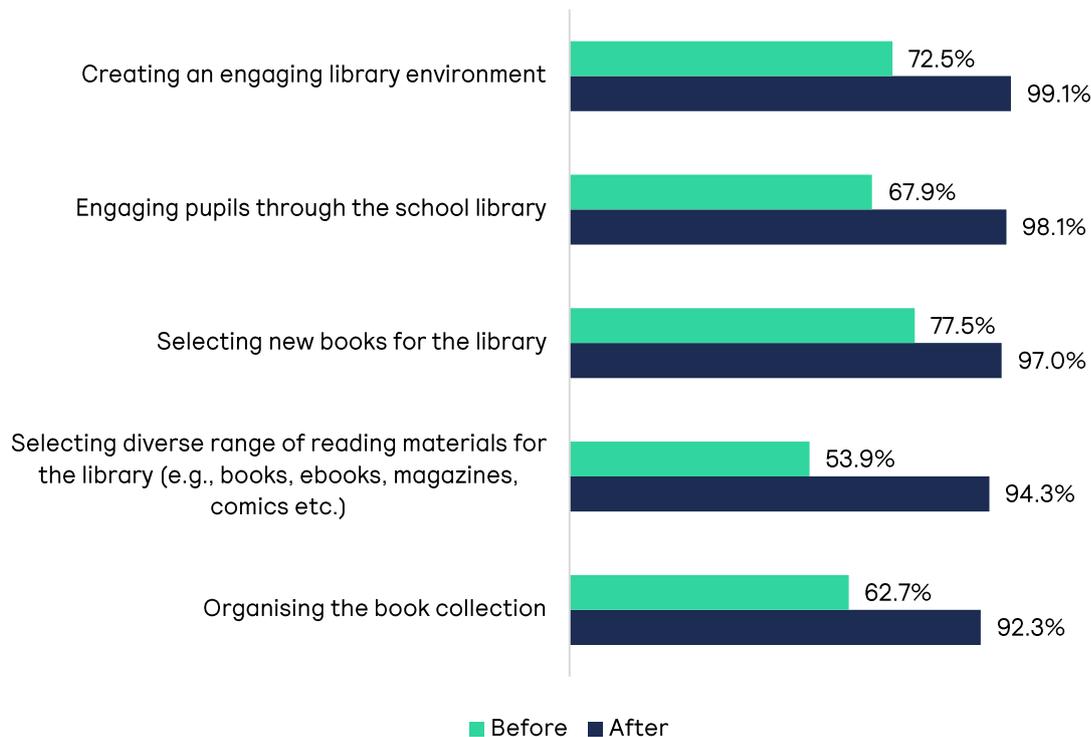
While knowledge around reading materials was already high for practitioners, the programme further boosted their understanding. For example, as Figure 3 shows, nearly all practitioners rated their knowledge of children’s reading materials overall (98.1%), and of new and current children’s books and authors (98.1%), as ‘good’ or ‘very good’ at the end of the school year, compared with around 4 in 5 at the start of the school year (80.8% and 84.6% respectively). Knowledge of a diverse range of reading materials improved the most, with the percentage of practitioners who rated their knowledge of a diverse range of children’s reading materials as ‘good’ or ‘very good’ increasing from 3 in 5 (62.5%) at the start of the school year to nearly all (97.1%) at the end of the school year.

Figure 3: Percentage of practitioners who rated their knowledge of children’s reading materials as ‘good’ or ‘very good’ before and after the programme



Practitioners’ confidence to improve their school library provision also increased over the school year (see Figure 4). For example, the percentage of practitioners who felt confident in creating an engaging library environment increased from 3 in 4 (72.5%) at the start of the school year to almost all (99.1%) practitioners at the end of the school year. Additionally, the percentage of practitioners who felt confident about selecting a diverse range of reading materials for the library almost doubled, increasing from 53.9% to 94.3%. Finally, the percentage of practitioners who felt confident about organising the book collection increased by 47%, from 62.7% at the start of the school year to 92.3% at the end of the school year.

Figure 4: Percentage of practitioners who rated their confidence around the school library 'good' or 'very good' before and after the programme



These changes were also evident from practitioners' comments who reflected on the knowledge and confidence they gained as part of the programme:

"This is such an amazing programme to have been part of. I've learnt so much that over time will be shared with staff to improve reading for pleasure, to strengthen our book collection, to improve staff confidence, to improve parent confidence and we will continue to work on a relationship with a local library." (World of Stories)

"I feel that as a result of this training I am now much more confident with all of the above." (Rewarding Futures)

"Amazing opportunity – we have learnt a lot and it has really given us the knowledge and resources to improve reading in our school – thank you!" (Raise a Reader)

"Excellent programme. Really developed a deeper understanding of reading for pleasure and increased my awareness of authors/books. Invaluable tool to help transform the library." (World of Stories)

Linking school libraries and public libraries: Excerpt from external evaluation

As part of World of Stories, we commissioned a team led by the University of Edinburgh to undertake an evaluation of the public library aspect of the programme. The aim of this evaluation was to explore the impact of the programme on the relationship between schools and their local libraries.

Using data collected from teacher pre- and post-surveys (n = 43), reflective post-programme survey responses (n = 68) and in-depth interviews with teachers (n = 2), the latest interim report was completed in September 2023. Selected findings from the report show that:

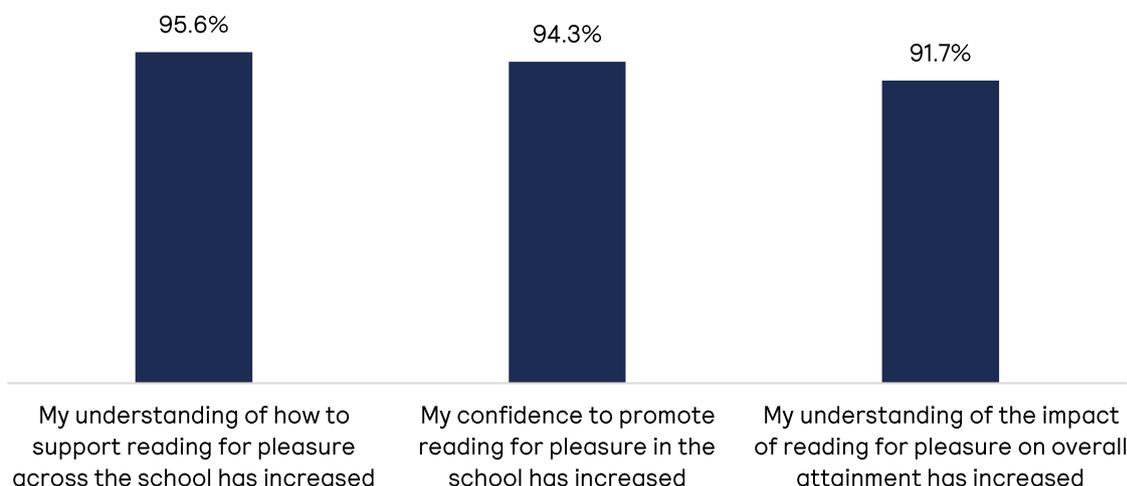
- “21/22 teachers maintained their pre-established relationship with their local library and 9/20 teachers who previously reported no relationship, now reported having a relationship with their local library, suggesting World of Stories was effective at establishing new relationships.”
- “Teachers were most positive about World of Stories increasing their understanding of why public library and school relationships are important, but less positive about World of Stories resulting in an increased number of visits between school and local library (although still more positive than negative in response to this question).”
- “Motivations to take part in World of Stories [for schools] included a desire to support children to read for pleasure, increase their library use/relationship and improve book provision for children. From these teachers’ perspectives, World of Stories has increased reading for pleasure quality (both provision and ideas) and has supported children’s reading engagement and agency in relation to reading for pleasure.”
- “Teachers felt that library visits have given children new careers ideas, supported them to get library membership and inspired future library visits. Children were also thought to now have a better knowledge/awareness of what a library is, know where it is, know their librarian better, and were thought to be visiting their local library and school library more. Finally, teachers were generally very positive about the World of Stories training (in terms of networking opportunities and new ideas to inform practice) but some would have preferred more regular meetings and a list of other participating schools in their local area.”

Changes in practitioners' knowledge and confidence to improve reading for pleasure in the school

Reading for pleasure sits at the heart of our school libraries work. Indeed, we know that children who read for pleasure do better at school ([Clark & Teravainen-Goff, 2020](#)) and have stronger mental wellbeing ([Clark and Teravainen-Goff, 2018](#)). We also know that there is a link between reading for pleasure and school library use ([Clark and Teravainen-Goff, 2018b](#)), making it vital to incorporate a focus on reading for pleasure within our work with teachers.

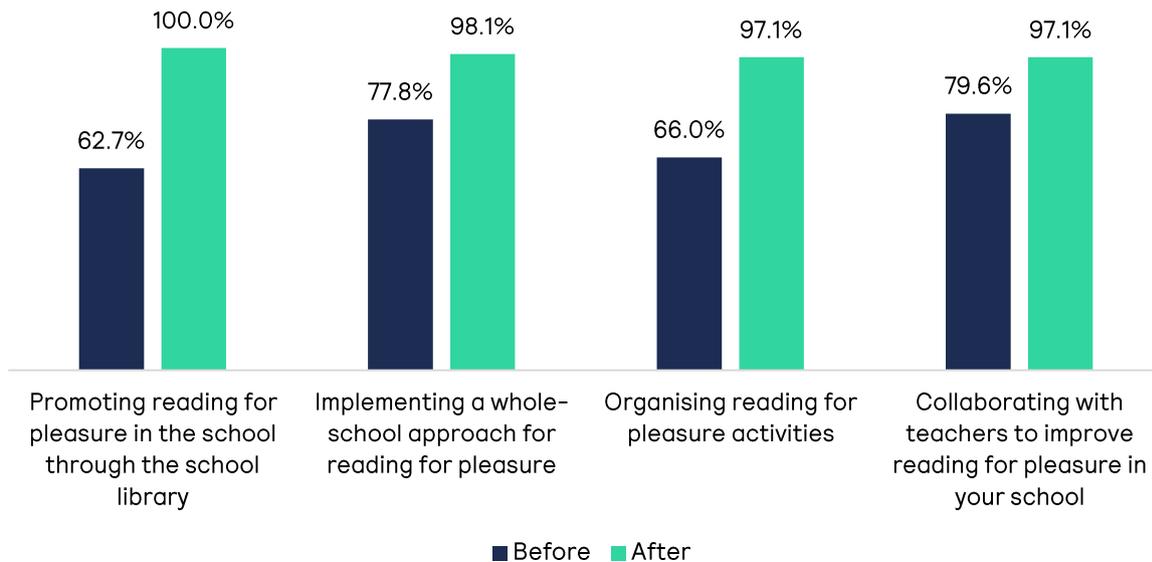
Reflections from the 158 practitioners who completed the post-survey showed that many felt the programme improved their knowledge and confidence to support reading for pleasure (see Figure 5). Nearly all practitioners indicated that their understanding of how to support reading for pleasure in their school (95.6%), their confidence to promote reading for pleasure (94.3%) and their understanding of the impact of reading for pleasure on attainment (91.7%) had increased.

Figure 5: Percentage of practitioners from the reflective post-survey who indicated improvements related to reading for pleasure as a result of the programme



In a similar vein, the percentage of practitioners whose confidence in promoting reading pleasure in the school through the library increased by 59%, from 62.7% to 100% (see Figure 6). Similarly, more practitioners felt confident to implement a whole-school approach for reading for pleasure (increasing from 77.8% to 98.1%), organising reading for pleasure activities (increasing from 66.0% to 97.1%), and collaborating with other teachers to improve reading for pleasure in the school (79.6% to 97.1%).

Figure 6: Percentage of practitioners who rated their confidence of various aspects of supporting reading for pleasure as ‘good’ or ‘very good’ before and after the programme



After taking part in their school libraries programme, practitioners also told us in the open-ended comments how their school better promotes reading for pleasure:

“Live reading by a member of staff every Wednesday morning.” (World of Stories)

“Author webinars.” (World of Stories)

“We used to solely use levelled reading books but now they have a reading for pleasure book alongside their levelled reading book.” (Raise a Reader)

“Reading challenge, local library visits.” (World of Stories)

“Our library has been recently refurbished and has new books. A new timetable has been created for children to visit it to read books for pleasure in school time and their own time as well as curriculum-related learning.” (Rewarding Futures)

“New inviting KS1 and KS2 libraries, stimulating reading areas in classrooms.” (World of Stories)

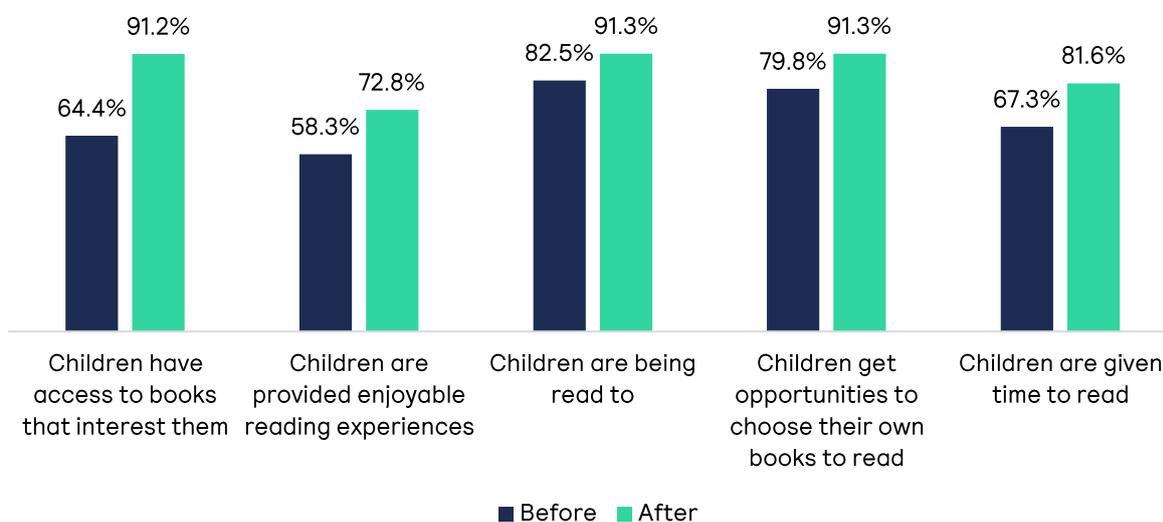
“We have class librarians to promote reading.” (World of Stories)

Changes in reading for pleasure provision

In addition to the changes in practitioners' understanding of the importance of reading for pleasure, the programme also supported schools to improve their provision for reading for pleasure. The percentage of practitioners who rated the promotion of reading for pleasure across their school as 'excellent' or 'good' increased by 47%, rising from 57.7% at the start of the school year to 84.6% at the end of the school. 93.0% of the 158 practitioners who completed the post-survey told us that the culture of reading for pleasure in their school had strengthened since taking part in the programme.

Figure 7 presents the frequency of key activities supporting reading for pleasure in schools. The percentage of practitioners who said children have access to books that interest them regularly increased by 42%, rising from 64.4% at the start of the school year to 91.2% at the end of the school year. Similarly, while at the start of the school year, 3 in 5 (58.3%) practitioners reported children regularly being provided enjoyable reading experiences, nearly 3 in 4 (72.8%) said this happened regularly at the end of the school year. Interestingly, while 93.0% of practitioners agreed that the culture of reading for pleasure in their school increased, only 3 in 4 (72.8%) said that children were provided with enjoyable reading experiences. Future evaluations could collect examples of what best practice for reading for pleasure looks like across different schools.

Figure 7: Percentage of practitioners who report key activities supporting reading for pleasure happening in their school regularly before and after taking part in the programme



Sustained changes in the libraries

Nearly all (98.7%) practitioners told us that they plan to continue to improve their school library going forward, and nearly 9 in 10 (87.0%) report that their school has invested more time and funds into the library, indicating that the school library is being prioritised as a result of taking part in the programme. We can be confident that the changes will continue in the schools as 86.4% of participants had shared learning from the programme with their colleagues either formally or informally.

Case study 2: Chase Rewarding Futures

Ellie Prince is the literacy leader working across a partnership of primary schools in Southampton, three of which were part of the Chase Rewarding Futures School Library Programme for the 2022–23 school year. Describing the impact of the programme for Mansfield Park, Holy Family and Sinclair primary schools, Ellie told us that: “It has had a humongous impact. Everybody is talking about the libraries again, which is fantastic.”

The disruption of the pandemic led to the school library spaces being underutilised, while book stock was depleted as a result of books being sent home during lockdown and not returned.

“People started to forget about the library, I think, because it wasn’t that hub that it was, due to all of the different things that were in place. The area wasn’t really being used; children weren’t visiting to read for pleasure quite so much.”

Participating in the programme offered the three schools the opportunity to refocus their attention on their library spaces, and on developing a culture of reading for pleasure. Since joining the programme, all three schools have now expanded their library spaces, using the Reading Zone furniture and donation of 500 books to complement these new spaces. Mansfield Park have doubled the size of their library since taking part, Holy Family have created a new KS1 library, while Sinclair have overhauled their library space and created more topic areas for pupils to find books to inspire them.

The programme has also had a positive impact on teaching staff at the three schools, a development that is helping to promote reading for pleasure in the classroom.

“I have to say the biggest change has been in the teachers. By giving them the responsibility and the reins, rather than it coming from SMT and me, as a literacy lead, by handing them the reins, they’ve been the most integral in driving things forward. And as they’re all still in class, they are then firing up their children as a result, which is fantastic. They’re promoting it and driving the library time themselves, their children want to go to the library, we’re seeing many more children in the library during teaching time, which is fantastic.”

Teachers valued the training as an opportunity to focus their time and energy on reading for pleasure and came away from training with plans to implement the ideas and strategies that were discussed. They also benefited from the opportunity to network with other teachers in the local area to share ideas and best practice. Going forward, they want to focus their efforts on continuing to build a diverse library collection, and to promote reading for pleasure with pupils and parents in creative ways.

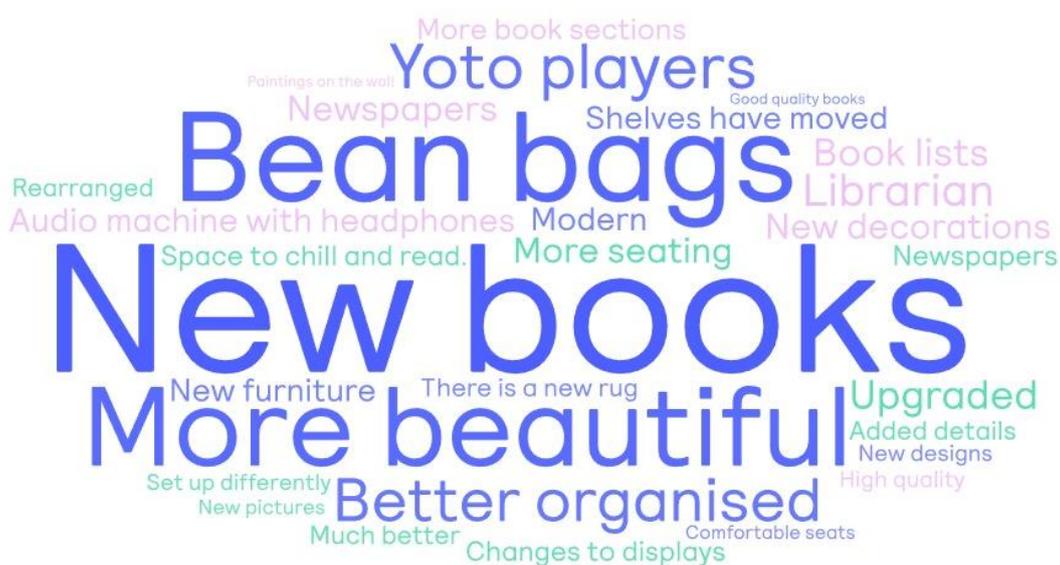
Child insight

To better understand the impact of our school library programmes, we also surveyed pupils to see if they noticed any changes in their libraries or reading spaces. We also asked about their views of the impact that these changes had on their reading attitudes and behaviours. In total, 1,356 children¹ aged 7 to 11 answered a survey at

¹ 44.0% (n = 586) were boys, while 50.5% (n = 672) were girls. 4.3% (n = 57) didn’t want to say their gender, 1.2% (n = 16) described themselves another way, and 25 pupils skipped this question. Half (47.6% = 632) of the respondents received free school meals, while 29.8% (n = 396) did not, 17.7% (n = 235) didn’t know, 4.9% (n = 65) would rather not say, and 28 pupils skipped this question. There was also variety by year group, with 27.5% (n = 366) of respondents from Year 3, 15.6% (n = 208) from Year 4, 30.3% (n = 403) from Year 5, and 26.5% (n = 353) from Year 6.

the end of the school year when their school library or reading space provision had just been improved. 2 in 3 (66.2%) said that they had noticed a change in their school library or reading space over the school year. As shown in Figure 8, children noticed a variety of changes including new books, audio devices, and furnishings. Pupils described their school library as ‘high quality’, ‘better organised’, and ‘upgraded’.

Figure 8: Word cloud of the changes pupils noticed in their school library or reading space



Most pupils perceived the changes to their school library very positively. As shown in Figure 9, more than 4 in 5 (84.7%) told us that the changes made them want to use the school library more, made them enjoy reading more (82.5%) and made them want to read more things (81.5%). More than 4 in 5 also agreed that the school library was a nice space to spend time in (83.8%) and was somewhere they could find help if they needed it (81.8%). Finally, 4 in 5 felt that the changes made them feel more confident to use the school library (82.1%).

Figure 9: Perceived impact of changes to the school library or reading space



Case study 3: World of Stories

Colegrave Primary School is a three-form entry school serving a diverse community in the London Borough of Newham. The school joined the World of Stories programme at the beginning of the 2022-23 school year, looking for support to develop their reading for pleasure culture. Prior to joining World of Stories, the Assistant Head and English told us that the reading curriculum at the school was strong and effective, but she had identified reading for pleasure as an area in need of improvement. The World of Stories book collection acted as the spark to reignite the love of reading for pleasure for pupils through an all-school assembly to introduce their new books.

“The assembly was that spark, that moment of, ‘Oh, I love reading in school, and I’m going to read out of school and read all of these books, which I can now take home with me’.”

The book corners and collections have been shared between the school’s classroom reading corners, and it was noted that such is the excitement from the arrival of the new books, pupils have been searching out books from other

reading corners, and anticipating the books they will be able to read in future years.

“There was a bit of jealousy, in a good way, like ‘Year 6 got Noughts and Crosses?’. This was a year 5 child, so I was like ‘Well, next year!’. And then they’re like, ‘Oh, I can’t wait to be in year six!’ With the children we have at Colegrave, having books is so valuable to them and they do really appreciate it.”

Through World of Stories, Colegrave have also been able to expand their morning book club. This successful initiative offers a calm and welcoming space for selected pupils to come in and read before the school day starts. The book club is run by the safeguarding lead at the school, and the new book collection has enabled the school to significantly expand the choice and quality of books available to pupils attending book club. It has also provided the opportunity for members of the book club to have a voice in suggesting the texts they would like to see on offer, and have those texts made available to them:

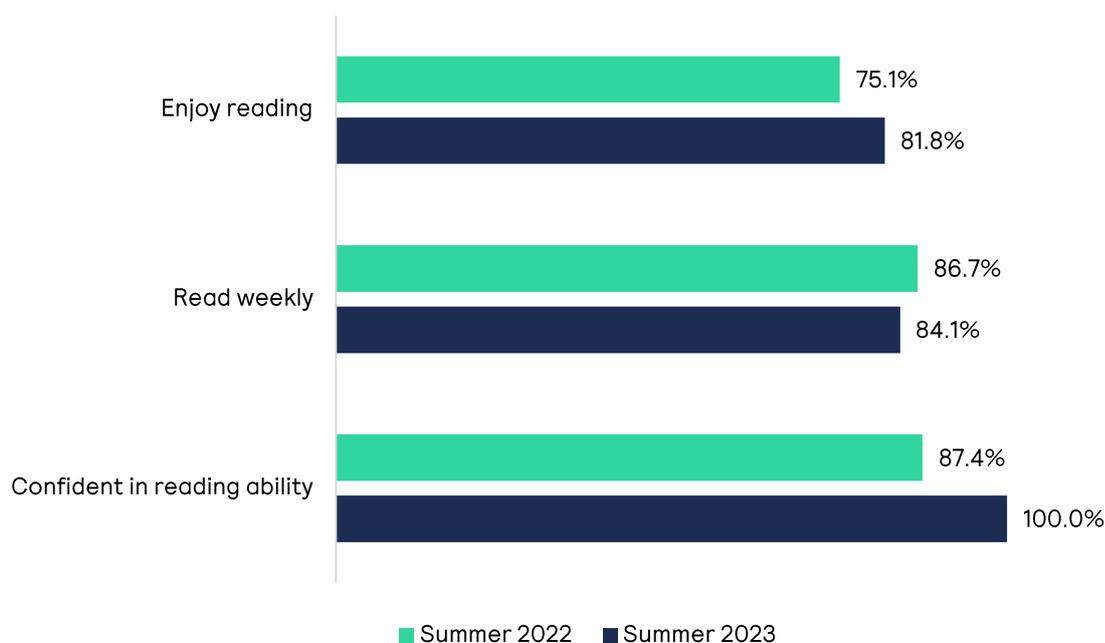
“The safeguarding lead began this club and had a very small selection of books... They came back and said, ‘Oh, is there any chance there are any graphic novels?’ I took some graphic novels and made sure that that was in their pile. It was that idea that children have a voice and it being almost instantaneous. Like ‘We’ve heard you. Look, we actually have these, what do you think of these? We’ve got them for you.’ The timing of it all was just perfect. If you can get vulnerable children from really challenging homes hooked on books, you can’t ask for much else. I think that’s been our big moment.”

Changes in school library provision and children’s reading engagement: a longer-term view

This year we also collected insight from 44 children aged 7 to 11 from seven ‘alumni’ schools. These are schools that took part in one of our school library programmes in the previous year (2021-22). We matched that sample in terms of the demographic make-up to one we had collected in summer 2022 (n = 398) so that we could begin to explore the longer-term impact of having improved library provision on children’s reading outcomes.

As shown in Figure 10, the percentage of children who said they enjoyed reading improved from 3 in 4 (75.1%) immediately after their school library provision had improved to 4 in 5 (81.8%) a year later. At the same time, the percentage who told us that they read weekly remained steady, but dropped off slightly to 84.1% a year later, compared with 86.7% immediately after their school library provision had improved. Finally, the percentage of children who rated themselves as confident readers increased from 87.4% to 100% across the same timescale. These increases suggest that the school library revamp had a sustained longer-term impact on children’s engagement with reading.

Figure 10: Children’s reading behaviours in summer 2022 and summer 2023



There are several reasons why the impact of the programme may have lasted into the longer term. Firstly, the programme provided children with greater access to a diverse range of books and resources, which created an opportunity for greater engagement going forwards. Additionally, the programme helped create a more positive reading for pleasure culture across the school, whether through the teacher training sessions, greater provision, or the school library revamp.

That the impact of the programme was sustained a year on suggests that the programme forms the building blocks of long-lasting reading engagement. The children who participated in the programme continued to enjoy reading and rated themselves as confident readers even after the programme had ended. This

suggests that the programme had a lasting impact on reading habits, either sustaining their reading behaviours or further improving them.

Engagement with the school library or reading space

Of the alumni pupils, 9 in 10 (91.9%) told us that they used their school library or reading space immediately after it had been improved in summer 2022. Engagement with the school library continued to be high and had even improved slightly a year on, with 95.5% of children saying that they had continued to use the school library in summer 2023.

4 in 5 (81.8%) told us immediately after their school library or reading space had been improved that they enjoyed going to the school library. A year on, this percentage had increased to 97.6%, indicating that the changes made to the school library may have sustained pupils' enjoyment of using the space.

Some pupils told us in more detail in summer 2023 why they liked going to their school library, commenting on the variety of books, exciting new paintings, decorations or furniture, and the peaceful atmosphere their school library or reading space continued to provide:

“Because we get to get a different book each day, we go so I read even more. The library has paintings of characters on the walls. One of the seats you can rock on it.” (Boy, Rewarding Futures)

“Because you can choose whatever books you want and there are lots of new and interesting books.” (Girl, Y3, World of Stories)

“Because it is interesting to keep reading. It has lots of books and I just like reading so many books. I love the paintings and all the books. I think it is amazing.” (Boy, Rewarding Futures)

“I like to go to the reading space because it makes me calm, chill and relaxed.” (Girl, Y5, World of Stories)

“Because we are allowed to read books and take them home and then bring them back to school. I like it because you can sit down and read.” (Girl, Rewarding Futures)

“I like it because it has got different languages and different genres of books.” (Girl, Y4, World of Stories)

“Because it has loads of different books. We can also see the reception and year 1 children playing. I really like that it’s calm and quiet and there are bean bags to lie on.” (Girl, Y3, Rewarding Futures)

“The space is inviting with lots of reading areas filled with cushions, bean bags, stools and sofas. There is a wide variety of texts (authors). There are inspirational quotes around the walls and it’s bright and colourful – it makes reading the books in the library more enjoyable because it’s calming. There are beautiful drawings and illustrations of books on the walls. The books are enjoyable and there is fiction and non-fiction to choose from. The library is quiet which is different from our class reading area. The organisation by authors (alphabetically) helps us to choose books easier especially if we have a favourite author. The shelving is also at our eye level, so we do not have to stretch. There are books on display, on display stands, on the top of the bookshelves which helps us to choose. We like that we can use the checking out system ourselves.” (Did not disclose gender, Y5, Rewarding Futures)

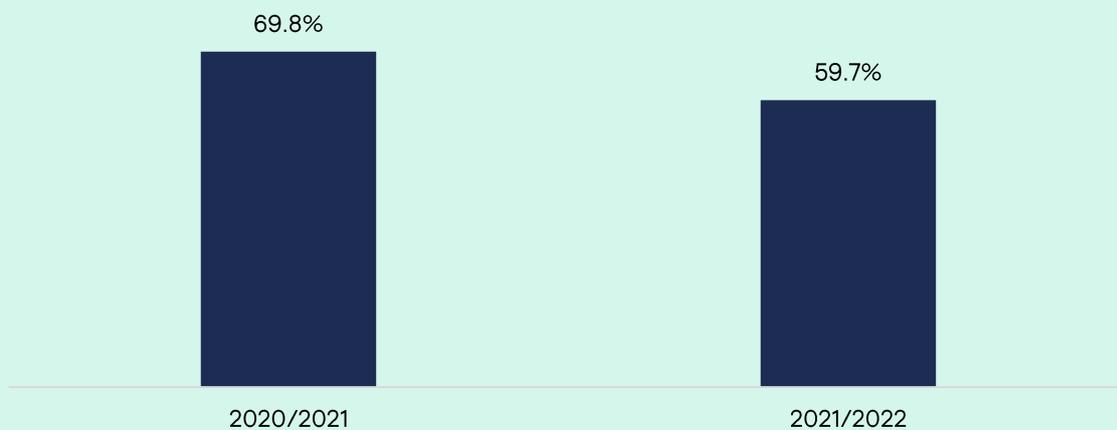
“I like it because my school library has a wide range of books to borrow, and I don’t see why I should buy them when they are in your grasp.” (Boy, Year 8)

Get Islington Reading: Focus point

As mentioned earlier, Get Islington Reading, funded by Mercers, involves reviewing current provisions, facilitating participation in a wide range of reading activities, providing new books for school libraries, and connecting schools and public libraries to build a strong community of readers in Islington.

As shown in Figure 11, there were some positive changes in library use following Get Islington Reading. 7 in 10 (69.8%) of those who didn't use the school library in 2020 (n = 44) had started to use it a year later. Similarly, 3 in 5 (59.7%) of those who didn't use the library in 2021 (n = 65) had started to do so in 2022.

Figure 11: Percentage of children and young people participating in Get Islington Reading who now use the school library but did not before



Teachers also noticed some changes in engagement with the school library after participation in Get Islington Reading:

“As we have grown our library resources to include magazines (NatGeo Kids), graphic novels, manga, etc. and improved the diversity of our books, pupils are excited by visits to the library and many children are regularly coming in at break times and becoming independent readers.”

“We haven't had a library for a while and it is now a purposeful space which students enjoy visiting.”

Conclusion

Overall, this evaluation shows that the school library programmes have had a positive impact on the quality of reading materials, diversity of authors, topics and characters, and the confidence of practitioners in their ability to create an engaging library space. The improved provision has been found to be especially important in providing book access for children during the cost-of-living crisis. Practitioners have reported an increase in their understanding of how to promote reading for pleasure across their school, as well as their confidence to do so. Nearly all practitioners are planning to continue improving their school library or reading space going forward, and they have told us that their school has invested more time and funds into their library as a result of participating in the school library programme.

The school library programmes also had a positive impact on children within the school. Immediately after the delivery of the programmes, children showed improvements in their perception of their school library, identifying that these changes encouraged them to engage with their school library or reading space more than before. This positive impact was sustained over time, with analysis of pupils one year later showing improvements in their enjoyment of reading and their confidence as readers.

Together, these findings display the importance of creating well-stocked, up to date, engaging library spaces that meet the needs of all children. Indeed, they show that investing in school libraries is a key way to promote reading for pleasure.

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.

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