



# The Gift of Reading in 2011

## Children and young people's access to books and attitudes towards reading

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*Transforming Lives*

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## Introduction

Our research has consistently highlighted the link between reading for pleasure and reading attainment. Worryingly, we have found that the number of children and young people who say that they own a book seems to be rapidly decreasing. In 2005, 1 in 10 of the children and young people we surveyed said they did not have a book of their own at home; while in 2011 the figure stands at a startling 1 child in 3. With one in six people in the UK having the literacy level expected of an eleven year old, this is of great concern.

In this new report we explore children's reading in 2011 with findings from our first annual survey of literacy in the UK. The report also includes some data from Dugdale, G and Clark, C. (2008) Literacy Changes Lives. The report examines children's ownership of books, access to reading materials, frequency of reading and attitudes to reading. We also consider how these factors could all affect children and young people's reading abilities.

For information about how the survey was conducted and for demographic details of the sample please see the appendix.

## Receiving books as gifts

Numerous studies show that access to books and other reading materials is particularly important in children's language and literacy development. Receiving books as presents is one way to enrich learning at home and can help to encourage children and young people to enjoy reading for pleasure. Yet, 19% of young people said that they had never received a book as a present, while 12% have never been to a bookshop and 7% have never been to a library.

There is a clear relationship between receiving books as presents and reading ability. Children who agreed that they had never been given a book as a present were less likely to be reading above the expected level for their age (see **Table 1**). Of children that had never been given a book as a present, 37.9% read above the expected level for their age. Of those that disagreed with the statement, 54.3% were above the expected level.

**Table 1: Percentage agreement and disagreement with items and reading attainment (N = 5,580)**

		<i>Below expected level %</i>	<i>At expected level %</i>	<i>Above expected level %</i>
<b>I have never been given a book as a present</b>	Agreement	18.4	43.9	37.9
	Disagreement	7.7	38.0	54.3
<b>I have never been to a bookshop</b>	Agreement	21.6	44.4	34.0
	Disagreement	8.1	38.5	53.4
<b>I have never been to a library</b>	Agreement	21.4	41.0	37.6
	Disagreement	8.9	39.4	51.7

Giving the gift of reading is particularly important to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Our results have found that young people who receive free school meals (which indicates their family is economically disadvantaged) were less likely to report access to books. For example, 27.7% had never been given a book as present, compared with 17.3% who do not receive free school meals (FSM). Similarly, 17.7% had never been to a bookshop in comparison to 11.1% of those who do not receive FSM and 10.3% had never been to a library compared with 6.7% of those who do not receive FSM.

## Books of their own

Large-scale international research has demonstrated that the relationship between book ownership and literacy attainment is comparatively very strong in England (PISA 2009 and PIRLS, Twist et al., 2007). In fact, recent research from Nevada (Evans et al., 2010) found that the number of books in the home has as great an impact on children's attainment as parental education levels.

In our research we found that 1 young person in 3 did not have books of their own (33.2%). Girls are more likely than boys to say that they have their own books, with 7 in 10 girls compared with 6 in 10 boys saying that they have books of their own. Fewer older pupils say that they have books of their own, with only 5 in 10 KS4 compared with 7 in 10 KS2 and KS3 pupils saying that they have their own books. Young people who do not receive free school meals (FSMs) are more likely to say that they have books of their own compared with (the more disadvantaged) young people who receive meals, with 7 in 10 compared with 6 in 10 saying they do have their own books.

At a crude brushstroke, young people who have books of their own are more likely to be girls, in KS2 or KS3, socio-economically better off, from White or Mixed ethnic backgrounds and without a special educational need. Having books of your own is associated with clear literacy outcomes. When compared to peers who do not have books of their own, children who own books:

- enjoy reading more
- read more books
- read more frequently
- read for longer lengths of time when they do read
- have more books in the home
- read more of every kind of material not just books
- are more likely to have been bought a book as a present
- are more likely to have ever visited a library or bookshop
- have more positive attitudes to reading
- find it easier to find books that interest them
- have higher attainment

Whether young people say that they have books of their own is also related to their reading attainment (see **Table 2**). Of the children and young people who have books of their own, the majority (55%) read above the expected level for their age, while over a third read at the expected level. Of those who have books of their own, less than 10% read below the level expected for their age. By contrast, of those who don't have books of their own, nearly a fifth read below the expected level, while the majority (46%) read at the expected level and a third read above the expected level for their age.

**Table 2: Percentage of young people who read below or at or above the expected level and whether they have their own books or not (N = 5,580)**

	<i>Below expected level</i> %	<i>At expected level</i> %	<i>Above expected level</i> %
<b>Have books of their own</b>	7.6	37.4	54.9
<b>Don't have books of their own</b>	19.0	45.3	35.7

In addition to receiving books as gifts and having books of their own, we also asked young people to estimate the number of books in their home. Although the accuracy of these estimates may be questionable, they will provide an insight into the perception of number of books, rather than accurate actual numbers, which in turn can be taken to be an indicator of the value of books in the home.

Of those who report having no books at home, over 37% read below or at the level expected for their age, while a 25% read above the expected level. Even having just a few books in the home has a benefit. Of those who report having up to 10 books in the home, 20% read below the level expected for their age, while 52% read at the expected level and 29% above the expected level. By contrast, of those who estimate to have more than 500 books in the home, only 10% read below the expected level for their age, 22% read at the expected level while over 68% read above the level expected for their age.

## Attitudes to reading

**Table 3** shows that there is a clear relationship between reading enjoyment and reading attainment, with a greater proportion of young people who enjoy reading either very much or quite a lot also reading above the level expected for their age when compared with young people who only enjoy reading a bit or not at all.

81% of young people who enjoy reading very much are above the expected level of reading and 16% are at the expected level. In comparison, 33% of children that do not enjoy reading are below the expected level of attainment and 42% are at the expected level. Overall, young people who do not enjoy reading at all were 11 times more likely than those who enjoy reading very much to read below the level expected for their age.

**Table 3: Enjoyment of reading and reading attainment (N = 5,580)**

	<i>Below expected level</i> %	<i>At expected level</i> %	<i>Above expected level</i> %
<b>Very much</b>	3.0	16.3	80.8
<b>Quite a lot</b>	4.5	37.8	57.7
<b>A bit</b>	13.6	54.1	32.3
<b>Not at all</b>	33.6	42.6	23.8

Attitudes towards reading were also related to reading attainment. **Table 4** shows that a greater proportion of those who agree with the statement that reading is cool read above the level expected for their age compared with those who disagree with the statement. By contrast, a greater proportion of those who agree with the statements that they prefer watching TV to reading, that they do not read as well as other pupils in their class, that they read only when they have to, that they cannot find anything to read that interests them, that they would be embarrassed if their friends saw them read and that reading is more for girls than boys read below the level expected for their age compared with those who disagree with those statements.

**Table 4: Percentage agreement and disagreement with attitudinal items and reading attainment (N = 5,580)**

		<i>Below expected level %</i>	<i>At expected level %</i>	<i>Above expected level %</i>
<b>The more I read, the better I become</b>	Agreement	8.3	39.4	52.4
	Disagreement	24.0	34.7	41.3
<b>I prefer watching TV to reading</b>	Agreement	14.4	45.9	39.6
	Disagreement	5.5	24.6	70.0
<b>Reading is cool</b>	Agreement	5.2	28.8	66.0
	Disagreement	19.5	47.3	33.2
<b>I do not read as well as other pupils in my class</b>	Agreement	28.0	51.6	20.4
	Disagreement	2.8	25.5	71.7
<b>I only read when I have to</b>	Agreement	22.0	47.9	30.1
	Disagreement	5.2	33.3	61.5
<b>I cannot find things to read that interest me</b>	Agreement	21.9	47.7	30.4
	Disagreement	5.0	32.9	62.0
<b>I would be embarrassed if my friends saw me read</b>	Agreement	18.2	42.6	39.2
	Disagreement	8.0	37.1	55.0
<b>Reading is more for girls than boys</b>	Agreement	18.4	39.0	42.7
	Disagreement	8.0	37.8	54.1

## Access to books and attitudes to reading - why do they matter?

Our research has shown that receiving a book as a gift is clearly linked to children's reading abilities and having books of one's own is associated with more frequent reading. Young people who have their own books are twice as likely as their peers who don't have books of their own to say that they read every day. In turn, book ownership is also directly linked with attainment in reading.

Reading any type of material outside of class at least once a month was also associated with greater reading attainment. For example, 51% of children and young people reading magazines at least once a month were above the expected skill level. Those who read the more traditional materials, such as fiction and non-fiction, are more likely to read above the level expected for their age compared with those who read text messages, websites and the like.

**Table 5** clearly shows that there is a relationship between the number of books read in the past month and young people's reading attainment. Even just reading a few books a month appears to have some benefits. While a quarter of those who have read no book in the past month read below the level expected for their age, this percentage drops to only 11% of those who have read up to three books in the past month and 8% for those who have read at least four books in the past month.

75% of children who read more than 10 books in a month read above the level expected for their age, while only 6% of these read below the expected level. By contrast, of those who read only one to three books a month, 10% read below the level expected for their age and this figure jumps to 27% of those who do not read any books in a month.

**Table 5: Number of books read in the past month and reading attainment (N = 5,580)**

	<i>Below expected level</i>	<i>At expected level</i>	<i>Above expected level</i>
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
<b>0</b>	26.8	44.6	28.6
<b>1 - 3</b>	10.7	46.0	43.3
<b>4</b>	8.3	40.1	51.7
<b>5 - 8</b>	5.7	34.4	59.0
<b>9 +</b>	6.2	18.4	75.3

Reading for pleasure has been revealed as the most important indicator of the future success of a child (OECD, 2002), and improvements in literacy, at any point in life, can have a profound effect on an individual. Socio-economic background and many other factors may be outside the control of individuals. However, what matters is that for many addressing literacy skills is a key first step in beginning to address and overcome other related factors that lock individuals into a cycle of disadvantage. Ensuring children and young people enjoy reading, and can access books and other reading materials should therefore be a priority for schools, homes and communities across the UK.

## Appendix: Background information on our omnibus survey

We have been surveying children and young people on all sorts of literacy matters since 2005. This has given us great insight into the views and attitudes of children and young people on reading, writing, speaking and listening skills, home resources, role models, perceptions of themselves as readers as well as technology use.

However, what is still lacking in the attitudinal landscape in the UK is annual data on how young people feel about literacy to help us build a continuous picture of their attitudes year-on-year. It is the purpose of the National Literacy Trust Omnibus survey to plug this gap in the evidence base.

Combining previous National Literacy Trust survey topics, the Omnibus survey explores young people's attitudes towards reading, writing and communication skills as well as their technology use. More specifically, the key objectives of the Omnibus survey are to explore:

- Whether young people enjoy reading, how good they think they are at reading, how often they read and for how long, what type of materials they read outside of class, how many books they have in the home and what they think about reading
- Whether young people enjoy writing, how good a writer they think they are, what makes a good writer, what types of materials they write and what they think about writing
- What they think good communication skills are and how important they are to succeed
- How often they use a computer and mobile phone and for what?

In addition to exploring children's and young people's attitudes towards reading, writing, communication and technology use, we will also explore their link to attainment in a subsample of pupils for whom attainment data are available.

These objectives were further broken down into a number of questions. These included the following:

- Do reading enjoyment, behaviour and attitudes differ according to gender, age, socio-economic and ethnic background or educational needs?
- Do writing enjoyment, behaviour and attitudes differ according to gender, age, socio-economic and ethnic background or educational needs?
- Do attitudes towards communication skills and their perceived importance differ according to gender, age, socio-economic and ethnic background or educational needs?
- How is technology use related to gender, age, socio-economic and ethnic background or educational needs?

### Methodology

An invitation to participate in the online survey that most of the data in this report is taken from was sent out in National Literacy Trust (NLT) newsletters at the beginning of September. Schools were invited to express their interest to participate in one of three surveys:

- 1) A simple Omnibus survey (without attainment data or name field)
- 2) An amended Omnibus survey with two attainment questions for pupils to fill in

- 3) An amended Omnibus survey with a name field and schools were asked to send us the reading and writing attainment data for participating pupils

The basic online survey consisted of 33 questions exploring young people's background, reading and writing enjoyment, behaviour and attitudes, attitudes towards communication skills and technology use. Due to the complexity of the questions and some concepts, the decision was made to restrict the age range of participating pupils to upper KS2 (9 to 11 years) and older.

148 schools expressed an interest in taking part in one of the three surveys. A link to the online survey alongside guidance notes for teachers was emailed to the schools at the beginning of November. The survey was online between 15 November and 10 December. It took an average of 25 minutes for young people to complete the survey. Schools were offered a school-specific summary report as an incentive to take part.

### Participation rate

Overall, 18,141 pupils from 111 schools participated in our online survey, of which 100 were schools from England, three from Wales, three from Scotland and three from Northern Ireland. Two international English-speaking schools with a UK curriculum also took part. However, data from these schools are not included in the analyses in this report.

### Sample characteristics: Demography and attainment

Overall, 18,141 young people participated in this survey in November/December 2010. There was an almost equal gender split in the sample, with 48.2% of boys (N = 8,680) and 51.8% of girls (N = 9,320) participating in this survey.

**Table A1** shows that the majority of pupils were 11, 12 and 13 years old. To investigate the impact of age, three broad categories were identified according to key stages: KS2, KS3 and KS4. The KS2 category (22%, N = 3,704) refers to pupils aged 7 to 11, KS3 (63%, N = 10,842) refers to pupils aged 11 to 14, while KS4 (15%, N = 2,543) applies to pupils aged 14 to 16.

**Table A1: Sample age**

	%	N		%	N
8	5.1	911	13	18.1	3,258
9	6.9	1,247	14	9.5	1,717
10	8.0	1,430	15	6.3	1,134
11	21.3	3,846	16	2.0	361
12	22.2	4,007	17	0.5	86

(based on N = 18,017)

The percentage of pupils who receive free school meals (FSM), which is frequently used in educational research as a crude indicator of socio-economic background, was 13.8%. The percentages of FSM uptake in this study are lower than the national average for primary and secondary pupils (17% and 14%, respectively; DCSF, 2010).

Using additional help at school as a crude indicator of educational needs, the percentage of young people who say that they receive help at school was 25.7%, which is slightly higher than

the national average. According to DfE figures from 2010, 20.9% of young people have a SEN (2.7% with statement; 18.2% without statement).

When asked how they would describe their ethnic background, most pupils said that they were White British (72.3%, N = 11,381). The second and third most frequent ethnic categories in this sample were Asian or Asian British Pakistani (5.6%, N = 877) and White other (3.0%, N = 480).

### **Attainment data**

Attainment data for reading were available for 5,580 **KS2** and **KS3** pupils. Since our attainment data contained a varied set of levels and spanned young people aged 9 to 14, we standardised the data to form three crude categories to be applied to all ages: below expected level for their age, at expected level for their age and above expected level for their age.

In line with official attainment figures, over 8 in 10 young people read at or above the expected level for their age. However, nearly a fifth read below the expected level for their age.