

Writing enjoyment, behaviours and attitudes in 8 to 11-year-olds in 2017/18

Findings from our Annual Literacy Survey

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April 2018

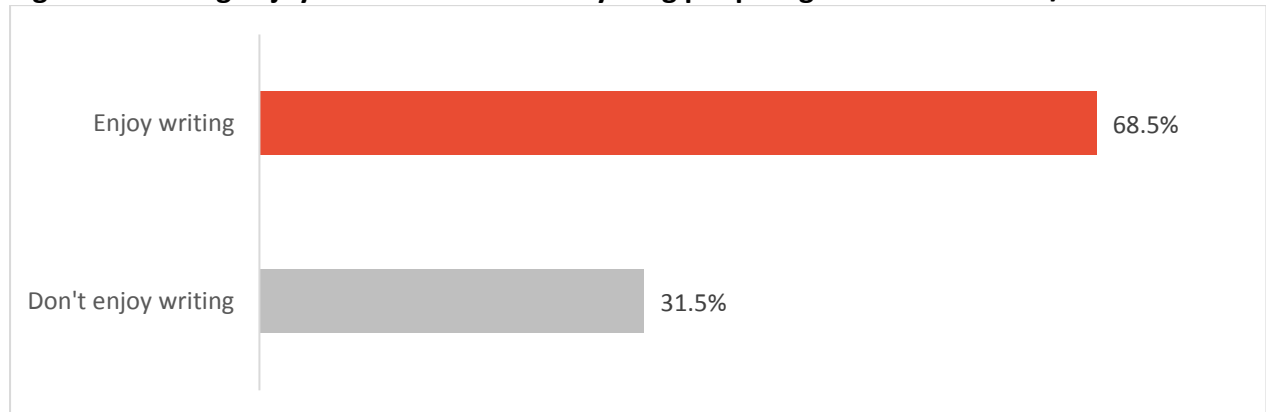
This report explores the writing enjoyment, behaviours and attitudes of 8 to 11-year-olds in the UK in the 2017/18 academic year. It supports the launch of author and National Literacy Trust ambassador Cressida Cowell's Free Writing Friday initiative; a new campaign designed to encourage primary school children to write for pleasure.

In this report we look at how many pupils enjoy writing, how often they write in their free time and whether they face any barriers to writing, using data from 9,170 pupils aged 8 to 11 who answered writing questions as part of our Annual Literacy Survey that we conducted between November 2017 and January 2018.

How many pupils enjoy writing?

Our data from 2017/18 show that two-thirds (68.5%) of 8 to 11-year-old pupils say they enjoy writing (see Figure 1). However, this also means that just under a third (31.5%) say that they don't enjoy writing.

Figure 1: Writing enjoyment in children and young people aged 8 to 11 in 2017/18



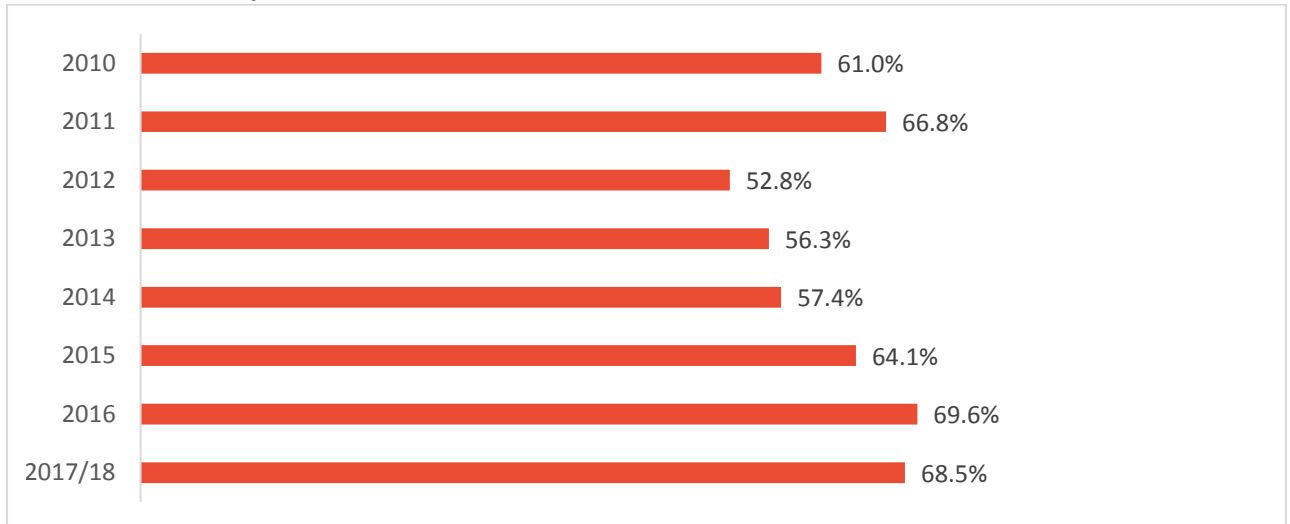
Fewer pupils aged 8 to 11 in 2017/18 said that they enjoy writing compared with the previous year. Figure 2 shows that the number of children who enjoy writing decreased by

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1.1 percentage points between 2016 and 2017/18. This is after we recorded the highest levels of writing enjoyment in 2016 since we first started surveying children and young people in 2010.

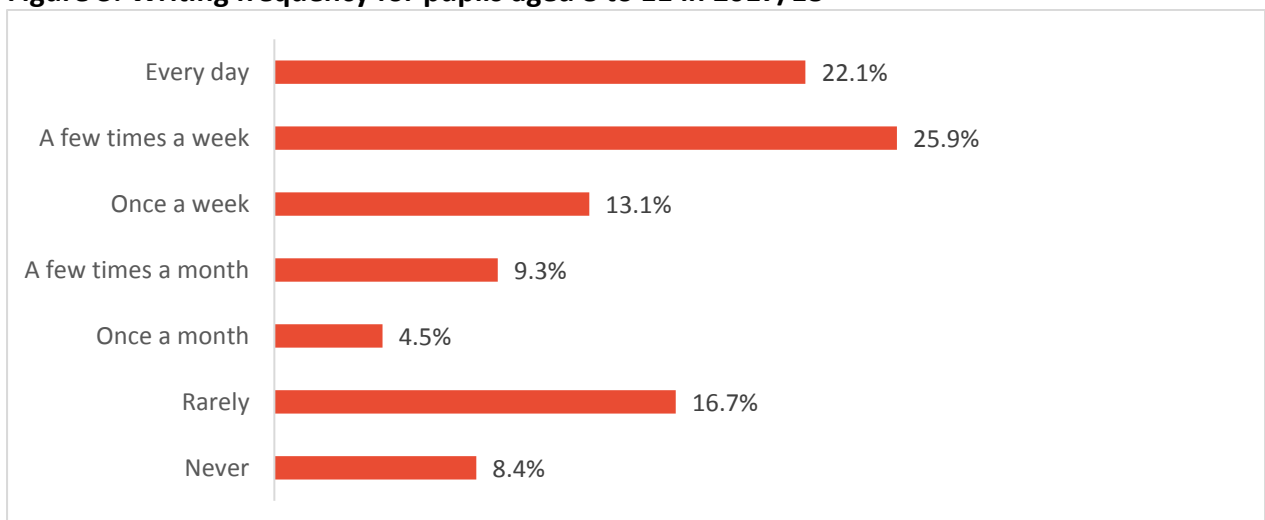
Figure 2: Percentage of 8 to 11-year-olds who enjoy writing either very much or quite a lot from 2010 to 2017/18



How often do pupils write in their free time?

As can be seen in Figure 3, only 1 pupil in 5 aged 8 to 11 say that they write something in their free time on a daily basis, while 1 in 4 say that they write something that isn't for school a few times a week. Overall, 1 in 4 pupils aged 8 to 11 say that they rarely or never write something in their free time.

Figure 3: Writing frequency for pupils aged 8 to 11 in 2017/18



Fewer pupils aged 8 to 11 in 2017/18 said that they write daily in their free time, compared with the previous year. Figure 4 shows that the number of children who write daily in their free time decreased by 2 percentage points between 2016 and 2017/18. The percentage of

8 to 11-year-olds who write daily outside school is at its lowest level since we first started surveying children and young people’s writing behaviours in 2010.

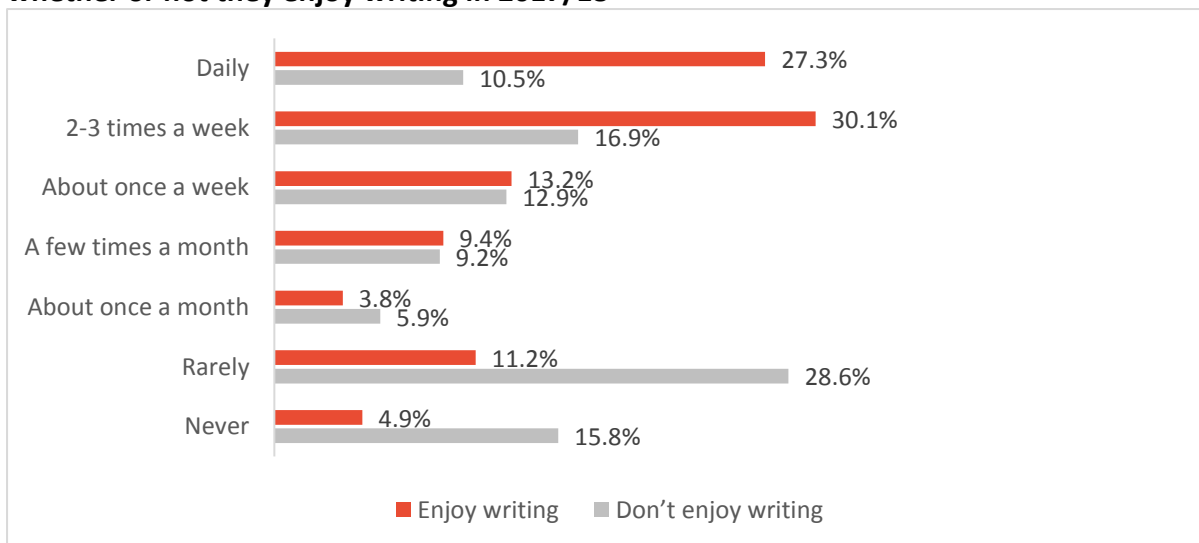
Figure 4: Percentage of 8 to 11-year-olds who write daily in their free time from 2010 to 2017/18



Is there a link between writing enjoyment and writing frequency?

Our data suggest there is (see Figure 5). Pupils aged 8 to 11 who say they enjoy writing are nearly three times as likely to say that they write something daily in their free time as their peers who don’t enjoy writing (27.3% vs 10.5%). Conversely, three times as many pupils who don’t enjoy writing say that they rarely or never write something in their spare time compared to their peers who enjoy it (44.4% vs. 16.1%).

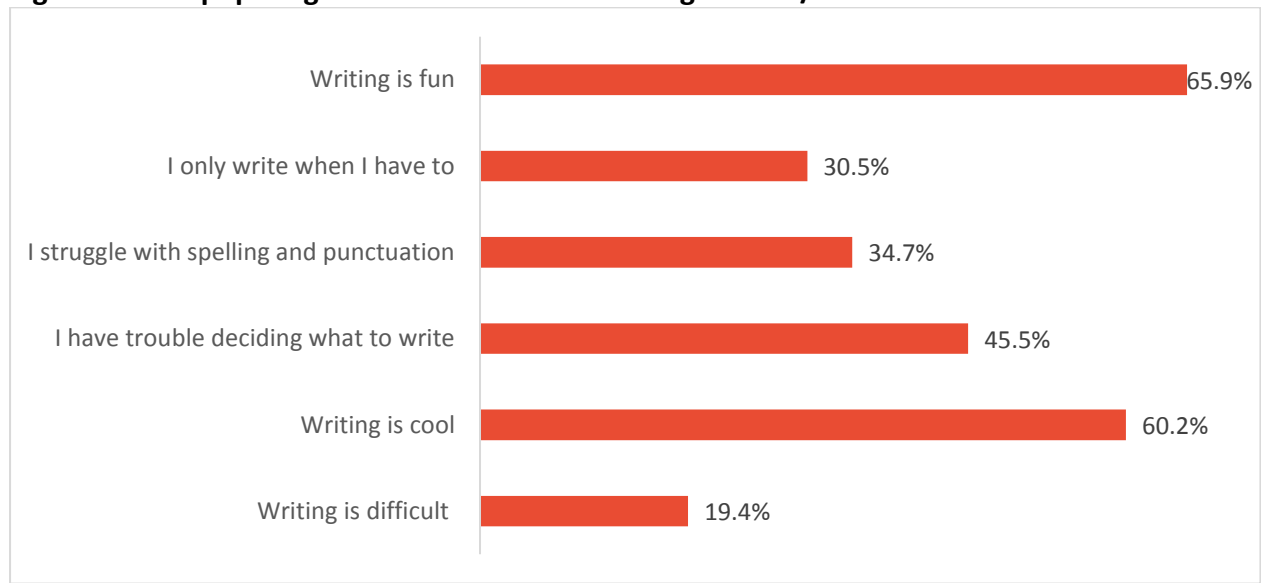
Figure 5: How frequently pupils aged 8 to 11 write outside class in their free time by whether or not they enjoy writing in 2017/18



How do pupils feel about writing?

As shown in Figure 6, around three-fifths of pupils aged 8 to 11 have positive attitudes towards writing, believing that writing is fun (65.9%) and cool (60.2%). However, 1 in 3 (30.5%) pupils said they only write when they have to and large numbers of pupils in this age group also reported facing significant barriers to writing, including having trouble deciding what to write (45.5%), struggling with spelling and punctuation (34.7%) and finding writing difficult (19.4%).

Figure 6: How pupils aged 8 to 11 feel about writing in 2017/18



What impact does writing enjoyment have on pupils' attitudes towards writing?

As Figure 7 shows, over three times as many pupils aged 8 to 11 who say that they enjoy writing say that writing is fun (84.5% vs 25.4%) and writing is cool (76.5% vs 24.4%) compared with their peers who don't enjoy writing.

Children who don't enjoy writing are significantly more likely face barriers to writing than their peers who do enjoy writing, in particular, finding writing difficult (32.2% vs 13.7%), only writing when they have to (48.9% vs 22.1%), and having trouble deciding what to write (55.7% vs 40.8%). However, the gap narrows when we look at how many pupils struggle with spelling and punctuation (39.6% vs 32.4%), suggesting that this barrier to writing outside school in particular overrides the benefits of writing enjoyment.

Figure 7: How pupils aged 8 to 11 feel about writing by whether or not they enjoy writing in 2017/18



Conclusion

This report finds a year-on-year decline in how much pupils aged 8 to 11 enjoy writing and how often they write something that isn't for school on a daily basis. This is a worrying trend when taking into account previous research by the National Literacy Trust that shows that children's writing enjoyment and attainment are linked¹. Indeed, in 2016 seven times as many children and young people who enjoy writing wrote above the expected level for their age compared with those who don't enjoy writing (23.2% vs 3.2%).

This report also finds that while the majority of 8 to 11-year-olds believe writing is fun or cool, significant numbers of pupils face barriers to writing: struggling with spelling and punctuation, having trouble deciding what to write, finding the task of writing in itself difficult, and only writing when they have to. These barriers are more considerable for children who don't enjoy writing.

The Free Writing Friday initiative by Cressida Cowell aims to remove these barriers in an attempt to boost pupils' levels of writing enjoyment. The initiative gives pupils a set time every week where they have the freedom to write whatever they want, however they want, without fear of their work being seen, marked or corrected by their teachers, parents or carers. It is hoped that the initiative will create new opportunities for all children to explore their thoughts and ideas through writing, regardless of their attitudes towards writing.

¹ Clark, C. and Teravainen, A. (2017). [Enjoyment of Writing and its Link to Wider Writing: Findings from our Annual Literacy Survey 2016](#). London: National Literacy Trust.

Our sincere thanks to Slaughter and May for their generous financial contribution that enabled us to conduct this annual survey.

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