

## Children's and Young People's Reading in 2016

### Findings from our Annual Literacy Survey 2016

Christina Clark and Anne Teravainen  
July 2017

We have conducted the national annual literacy survey since 2010 and have surveyed young people on literacy issues since 2005. This report outlines findings about children's and young people's reading from our seventh annual literacy survey conducted in November/December 2016 and where possible relates those findings back to our other reading surveys dating back to 2005.

42,406 children and young people aged eight to 18 participated in our online survey in 2016<sup>1</sup>.

### Key findings

- **Levels of reading enjoyment again increased.** In 2016, 58.6% of children and young people enjoyed reading either very much or quite a lot; 32.7% only enjoyed reading a bit and 8.7% did not enjoy reading at all. Overall, the percentage of children and young people who enjoyed reading is up from 54.8% in 2015.
- **Levels of daily reading decreased significantly.** While daily reading levels had increased between 2013 and 2015, they dropped again in 2016 to levels last seen in 2012, decreasing from 43.0% in 2015 to 32.0% in 2016.
- Text messages, websites and song lyrics were most frequently read outside class at least once a month by children and young people in 2016. With the exception of

---

<sup>1</sup> 42,406 children and young people aged 8 to 18 from over 200 schools participated in this online survey, which we conducted in November/December 2016. There was a near identical gender split in our sample in 2016, with 21,353 (50.4%) of boys participating versus 21,053 (49.6%) of girls. 9,754 pupils were in Key Stage 2 (aged 8 to 11), 24,960 pupils were in Key Stage 3 (aged 11 to 14), 6,620 pupils were in Key Stage 4 (aged 14 to 16) and 1,072 pupils were in Key Stage 5 (aged 16 to 18). Our overall sample in 2016 contained 4,835 (11.4%) free school meal (FSM) pupils and 32,291 (76.1%) non-FSM pupils. 4,300 (10.1%) pupils didn't know whether or not they received FSMs and 711 (1.7%) would rather not say. Excluding the "don't know" and "I would rather not say" responses means that 13% of pupils in the 2016 survey said that they receive FSMs. 72.9% (N = 25,418) pupils in our sample identified themselves as coming from a White ethnic background, 6.3% (N= 2,207) identified themselves as Mixed, 14.4% (N = 5,009) identified themselves as Asian, and 6.4% (N = 2,241) identified themselves as Black.

song lyrics and non-fiction, **reading across all formats decreased between 2015 and 2016.**

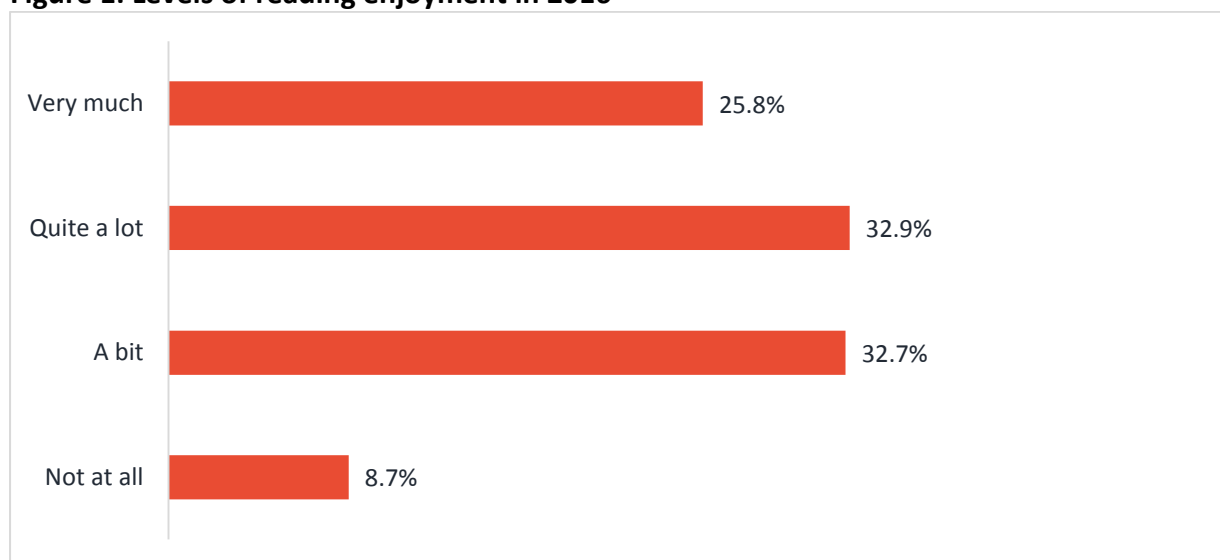
- On average, children and young people **read 4.6 books in a typical month.**
- In 2016, children and young people **spent**, on average, **2.5 times as many minutes reading something online** (88.28 minutes) as they **spent reading a book** (32.99 minutes).
- Nearly 6 in 10 children and young people (58.9%) in 2016 said that they have a **favourite book or story.** This percentage is slightly lower to the one we reported in 2015. *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* continues to be the children's and young people's favourite in 2016, followed by Harry Potter, Tom Gates and *Girl Online.*
- Children and young people in 2016 were mostly **motivated to read** by achievement, followed by interest and an extrinsic concern of reading for approval.

### Levels of reading enjoyment increased again in 2016

Raising levels of reading enjoyment across the UK is a central part of our programme and policy work<sup>2</sup>. Our annual survey therefore contains a question that assesses how much children and young people enjoy reading.

Our data from 2016 show that 1 in 4 children or young people enjoyed reading very much in 2016, while another 1 in 3 enjoyed reading quite a lot (see Figure 1). This means that in 2016 nearly 1 in 6 said that they enjoy reading either very much or quite a lot, using a combination of responses to compare trends over time (see below). Only 1 child in 11 said that they don't enjoy reading at all.

**Figure 1: Levels of reading enjoyment in 2016**

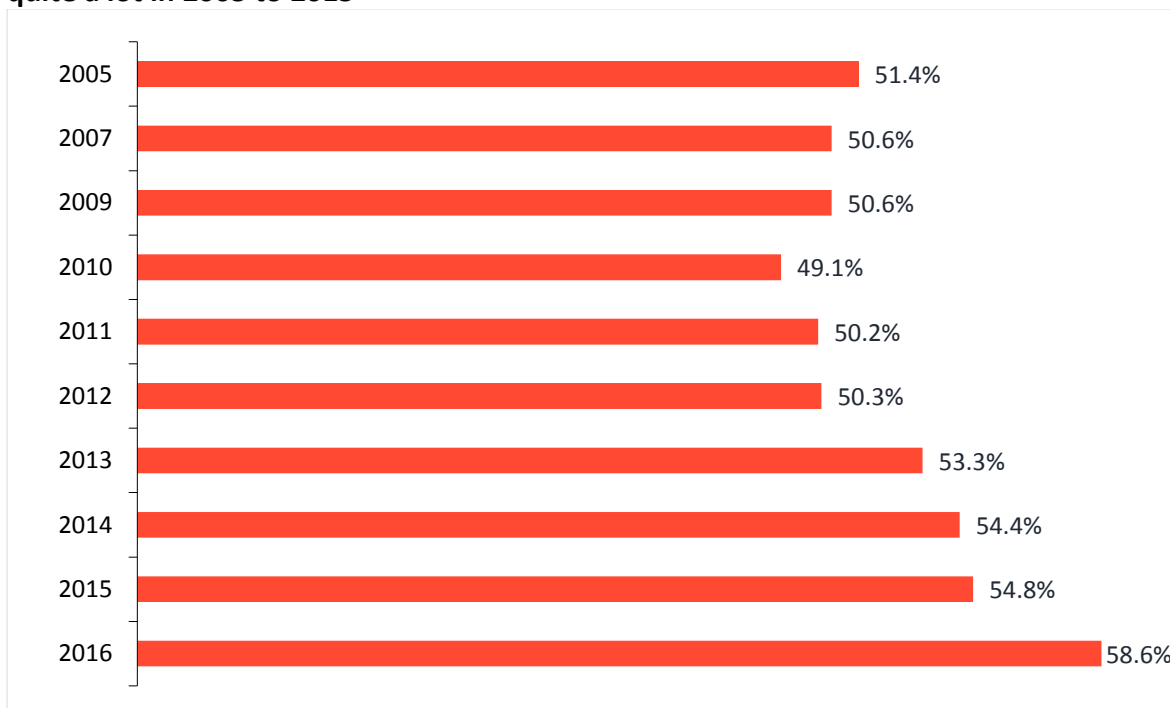


<sup>2</sup> For more information on who enjoyed reading in 2016 and how it relates to wider reading and reading attainment see: [http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/research/nlt\\_research/7858\\_celebrating\\_reading\\_for\\_enjoyment-findings\\_from\\_our\\_annual\\_literacy\\_survey\\_2016](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/research/nlt_research/7858_celebrating_reading_for_enjoyment-findings_from_our_annual_literacy_survey_2016)

As can be seen in Figure 2, while children’s and young people’s levels of reading enjoyment (enjoying reading either very much or quite a lot) had remained stable between 2005 and 2012, they have been rising steadily since 2013. Levels rose again between 2015 and 2016<sup>3</sup>, increasing by 3.8 percentage points from 54.8% in 2015 to 58.6% in 2016.

Indeed, we recorded the highest levels in 2016. Overall, between 2005 and 2016 there has been a 14% increase in the number of children and young people who say that they enjoy reading.

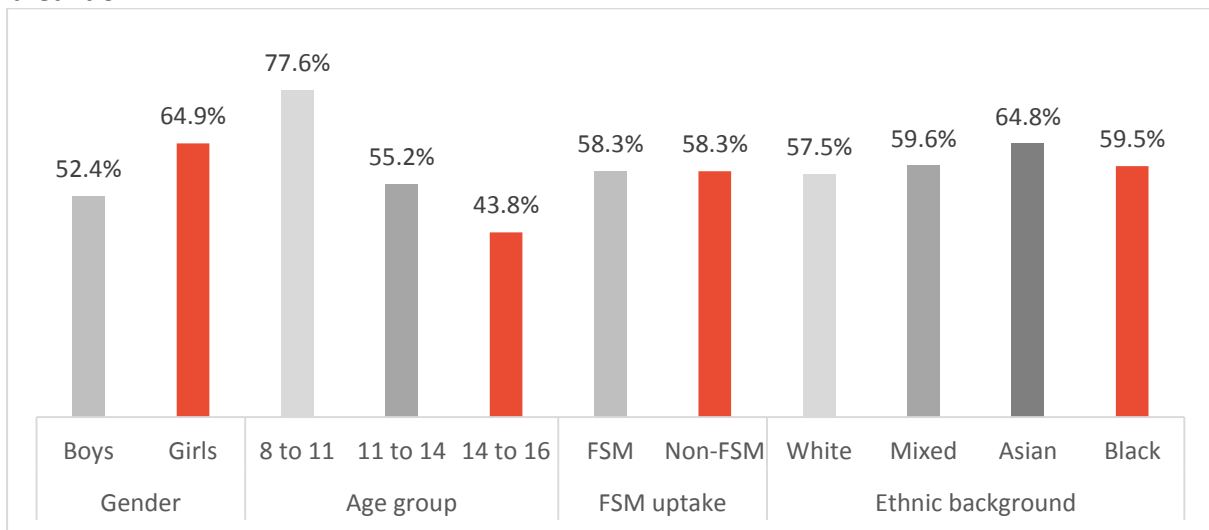
**Figure 2: Percentage of children and young people who enjoy reading either very much or quite a lot in 2005 to 2015**



Who enjoyed reading in 2016? Figure 3 shows that more girls than boys said that they enjoy reading either very much or quite a lot. There are also differences by age, with nearly twice as many children aged 8 to 11 as those aged 14 to 16 saying that they enjoy reading. While we have recorded an enjoyment gap between those who receive free school meals (FSMs) and those who don’t since 2005, this gap closed in 2016, with an identical percentage of FSM and non-FSM pupils saying that they enjoy reading. Finally, pupils from White ethnic backgrounds are least likely to say that they enjoy reading.

<sup>3</sup> The difference in reading enjoyment between 2015 and 2016 was statistically significant:  $p < .001$ . The 2015 and 2016 samples were comparable in terms of gender (boys: 47.9% vs. 50.4%), age (aged 8 to 11: 22.3% vs. 23.6%; aged 11 to 14: 64.6% vs. 60.4%; aged 14 to 16: 13.1% vs. 16%) and FSM background (FSM uptake: 14.6% vs. 13%). The 2016 sample contained slightly fewer pupils from White backgrounds (72.9% vs. 76.3%), and slightly more pupils from Asian (14.4% vs. 13.2%) and Black (6.4% vs. 4.5%) ethnic backgrounds. The percentage of pupils from Mixed backgrounds was nearly identical (6.3% vs. 6.1%).

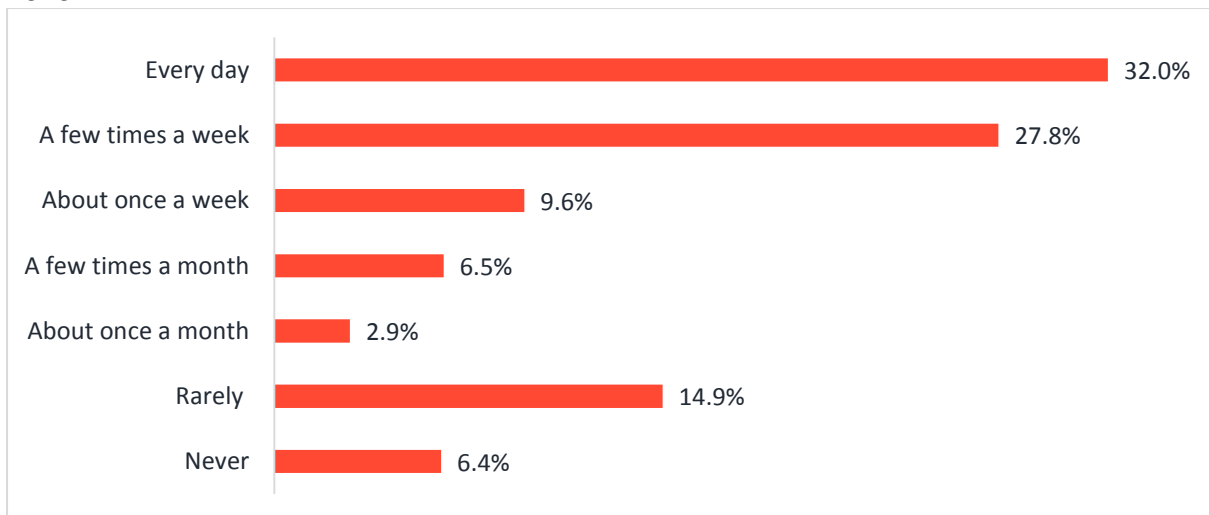
**Figure 3: Enjoying reading either very much or quite a lot in 2016 – demographic breakdown**



### Levels of daily reading declined dramatically in 2016

In addition to finding out how much children and young people enjoy reading in any given year, we also want to know how often they read in their free time. In 2016, nearly 1 in 3 children and young people said that they read something in their free time every day (see Figure 4). A further 3 in 10 said that they read something a few times a week. However, 1 in 7 rarely read in their free time, and 1 in 16 said that they never read.

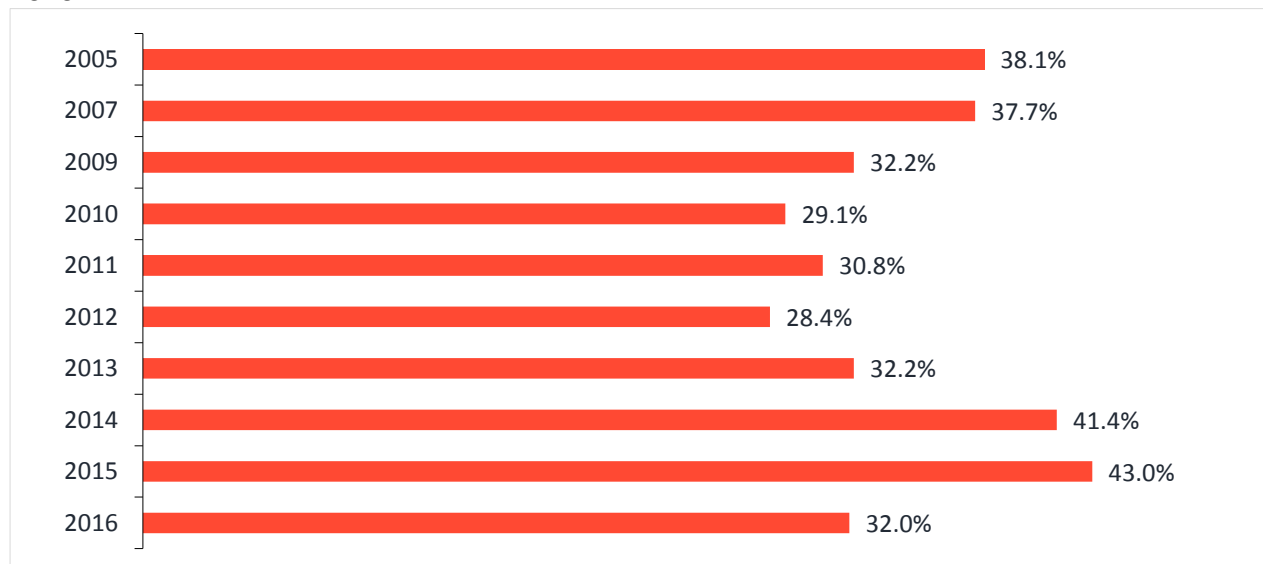
**Figure 4: Levels of frequency with which children and young people read outside class in 2016**



The percentage of children and young people who say that they read outside class on a daily basis has declined in the past 12 months (Figure 5), dropping back to a level we last evidenced in 2013. While we evidenced an increase in daily reading levels in 2014 and 2015,

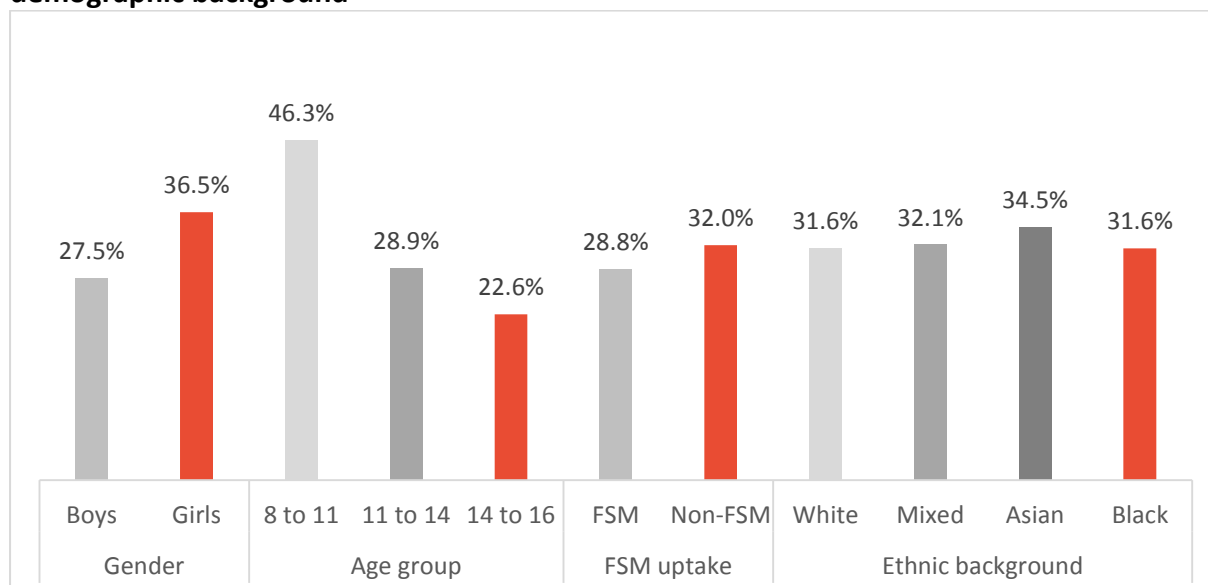
our data show that daily reading levels dropped by 11 percentage points to 32%<sup>4</sup> between 2015 and 2016. This is despite the fact that our samples are comparable in terms of background variables.

**Figure 5: Percentage of children and young people who read daily outside class in 2005 to 2016**



Who read daily outside class in 2016? As can be seen in Figure 6, more girls than boys said that they read daily outside class. There are also differences by age, with twice as many children aged 8 to 11 as those aged 14 to 16 saying that they read daily in their free time. More non-FSM pupils than FSM pupils say that they read daily, and pupils from White and Black ethnic backgrounds are least likely to say that they read every day in their free time.

**Figure 6: Percentage of children and young people who read daily outside class in 2016 – demographic background**



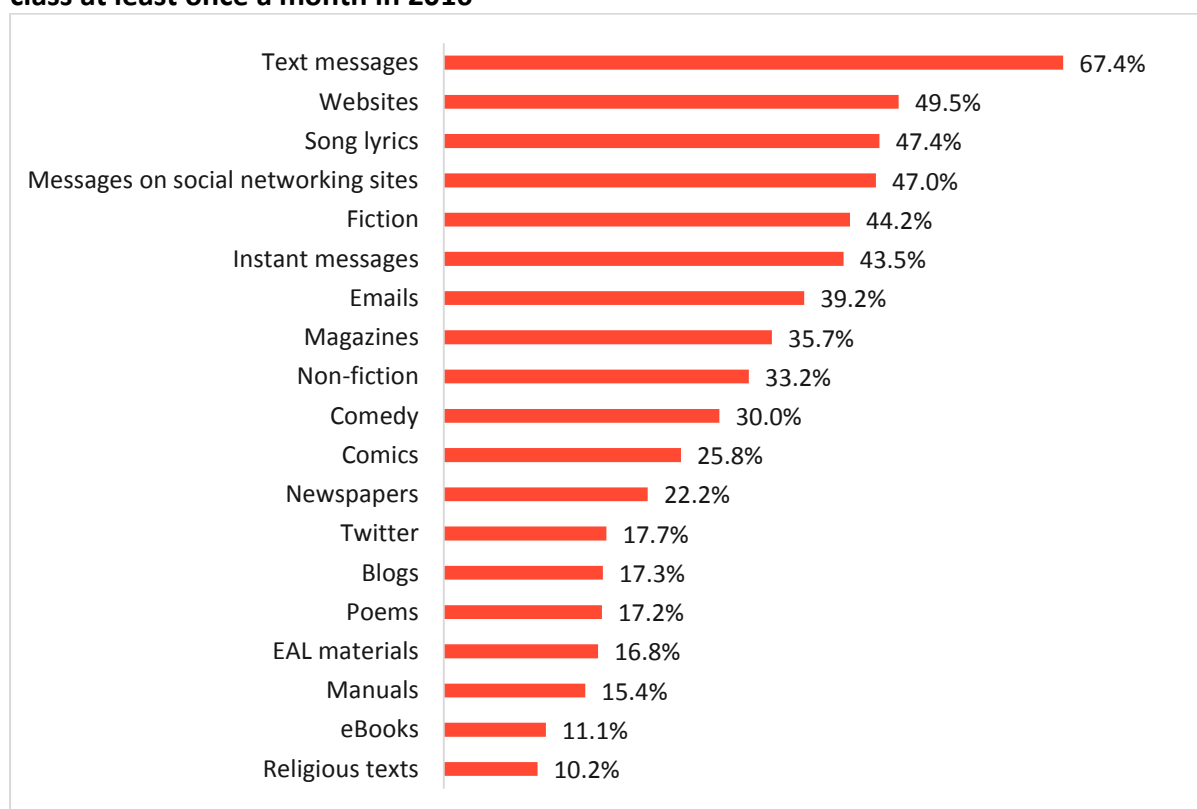
<sup>4</sup> The difference in children's frequency of reading between 2015 and 2016 was statistically significant,  $p < .001$

## Reading across most formats again sees a decrease in 2016

In addition to asking children and young people how much they enjoy reading and how often they read in their free time, we also ask them which materials, from a range of 19, they read outside class at least once a month. As can be seen in Figure 7, most children and young people in 2016 said that they read text messages outside class at least once a month, followed by websites and song lyrics. Over 4 in 10 also say that they read fiction in their free time at least once a month.

Overall, children and young people say that on average they read 5.9 different formats<sup>5</sup> outside class at least once a month.

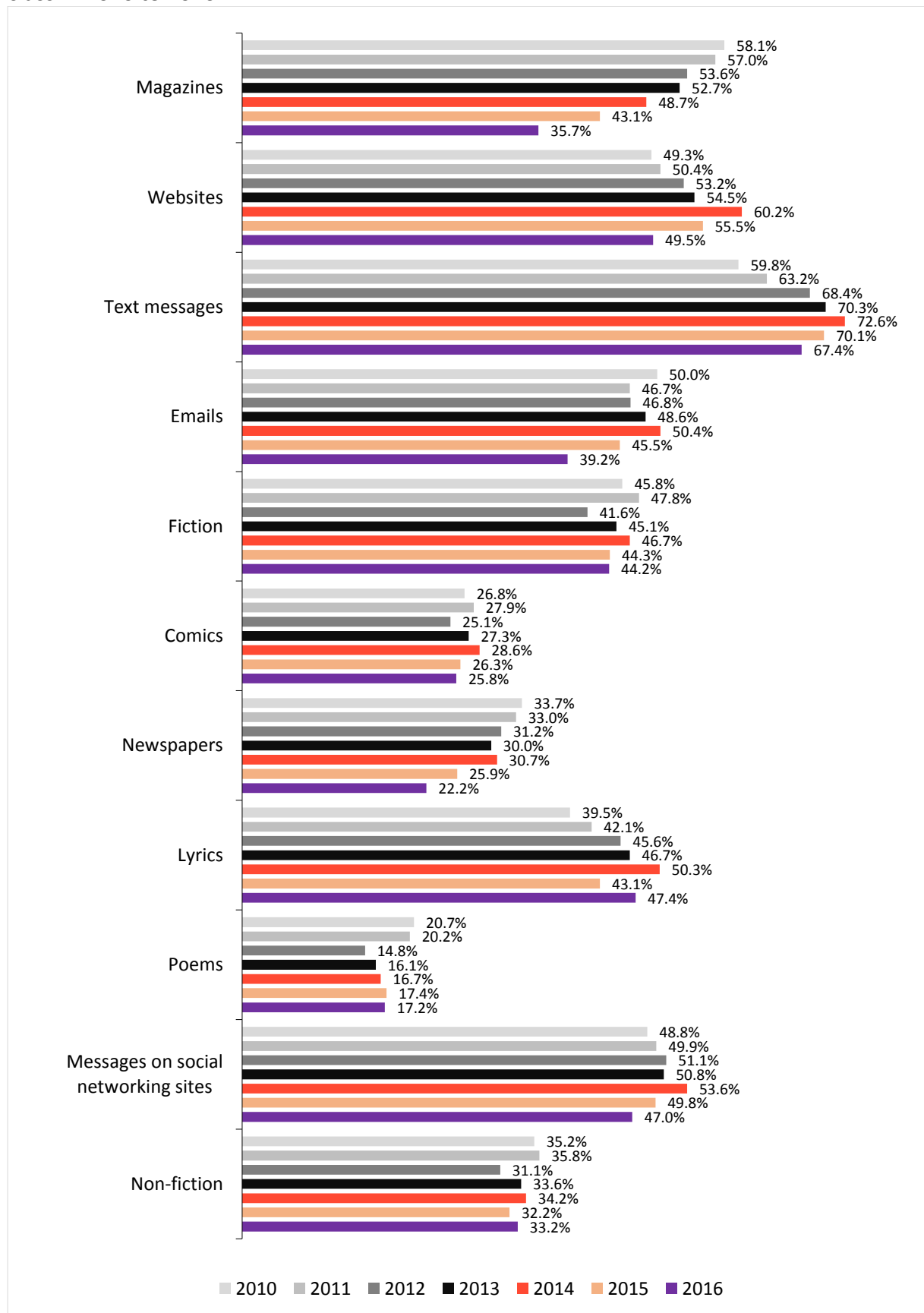
**Figure 7: Percentage of children and young people who read a variety of formats outside class at least once a month in 2016**



While most formats of reading, particularly technology-based ones, saw an increase between 2010 and 2014, that trend changed in 2015, with reading across most formats decreasing compared with the previous year. This trend continues in 2016. As can be seen in Figure 8, fewer children and young people said that they read most formats outside class at least once a month. The exceptions to this trend in 2016 were song lyrics and non-fiction, which increased slightly compared with 2015.

<sup>5</sup> To measure how widely children read in their free time, we counted up the responses to our questions that asks pupils to tick whether they read any of 19 materials provided (maximum score 19) in their free time at least once a month. The range of materials provided includes poems, fiction, non-fiction, website, instant messages, text messages, song lyrics, comics and many more.

**Figure 8: Percentage of children and young people reading different materials outside class in 2010 to 2016**

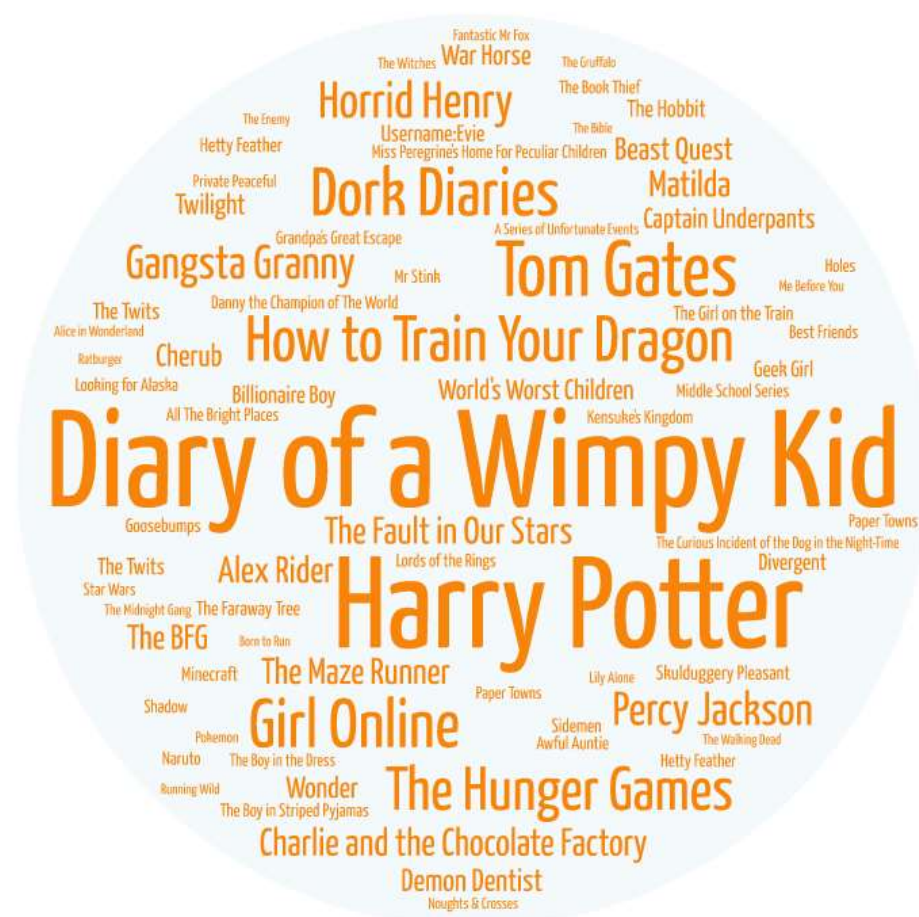


## Other findings for 2016

We also asked children and young people a few book-related questions. For example, we asked them to estimate how **many books they read in a typical month**. Our data show that in 2016, children and young people said that they read on average 4.66<sup>6</sup> books in a typical month.

Nearly 6 in 10 children and young people (58.1%) in 2016 said that they have a **favourite book or story**. This percentage is slightly lower than the one we reported in 2015 (61.0%). Figure 9 highlights some of the most frequently named stories or books when children and young people were asked about their favourites. 22,896 children and young people responded and as the word cloud shows, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* (N = 2,011) was most frequently named by children and young people in 2016, followed by Harry Potter (N = 1,795), Tom Gates (N = 665) titles, *Girl Online* (N = 505), *Dork Diaries* (N = 499) and *The Hunger Games* (N = 403).

Figure 9: Some frequently mentioned favourite stories or books in 2016



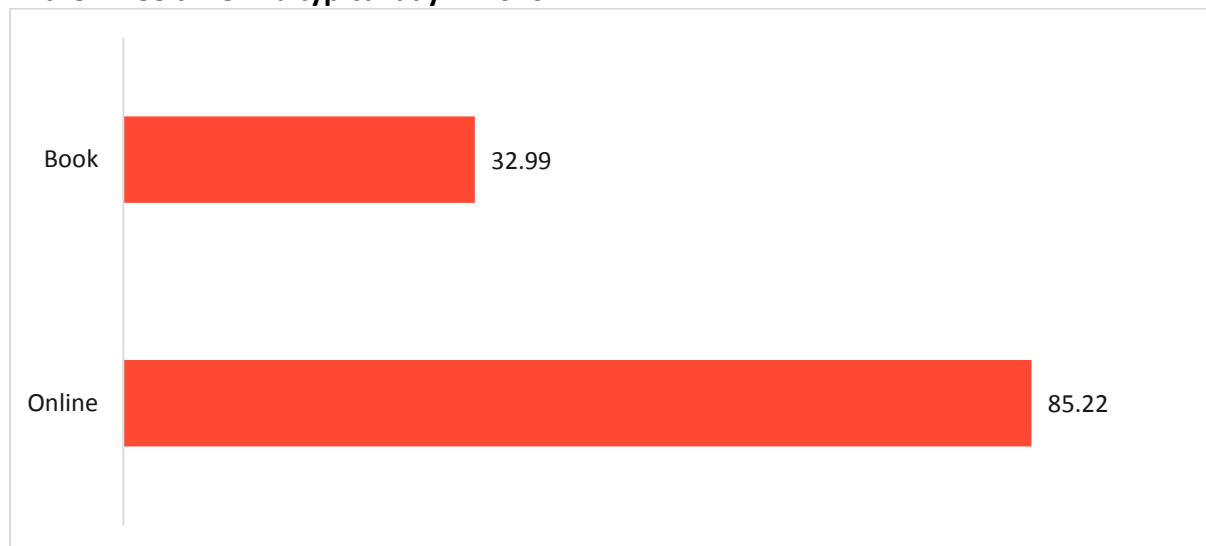
As outlined earlier (Figure 7), the reading diet of children and young people in 2016 was dominated by technology-based formats such as text messages, websites and messages on social networking sites. It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that when we asked children and young people to estimate how **many minutes in a typical day they spend reading**

<sup>6</sup> Range: 0 -30, SD = 5.87



**materials online** and **how many minutes they spend reading a book in their free time**, we found that children and young people say that, on average, they spend 2.5 times as many minutes reading something online as they spend reading a book<sup>7</sup> (see Figure 10).

**Figure 10: Average (mean) number of minutes spent reading a book vs. something online in their free time in a typical day in 2016**



Finally, our 2016 survey also included items that tapped into children's and young people's **motivation to read**<sup>8</sup> (please see Appendix A for more information on the scales used in this survey). Previous research has shown that reading motivation is a complex, multidimensional construct with several theoretical approaches available for research. Nonetheless, reading motivation is most commonly divided into intrinsic motivation, i.e. children choosing to read because of personal interest or enjoyment; and extrinsic motivation, i.e. children choosing to read for an external reason, such as a reward or praise.

In particular, we wanted to know to what extent pupils are motivated to read by:

- interest – choosing to read because of personal interest
- approval – choosing to read to receive praise or a reward
- achievement – choosing to read because it helps to achieve something, such as learning more
- self-efficacy – driven by a sense of their own capabilities

We found that children and young people were motivated to read mostly by achievement, followed by interest and self-efficacy. Children and young people were least likely to be motivated to read by approval<sup>9</sup>. Figure 11 outlines the percentage agreement for each motivational item to illustrate this in greater detail. It shows that most children and young people agree that the more they read the better they become, that reading will help them learn more and that reading is important. Around half of children and young people agree

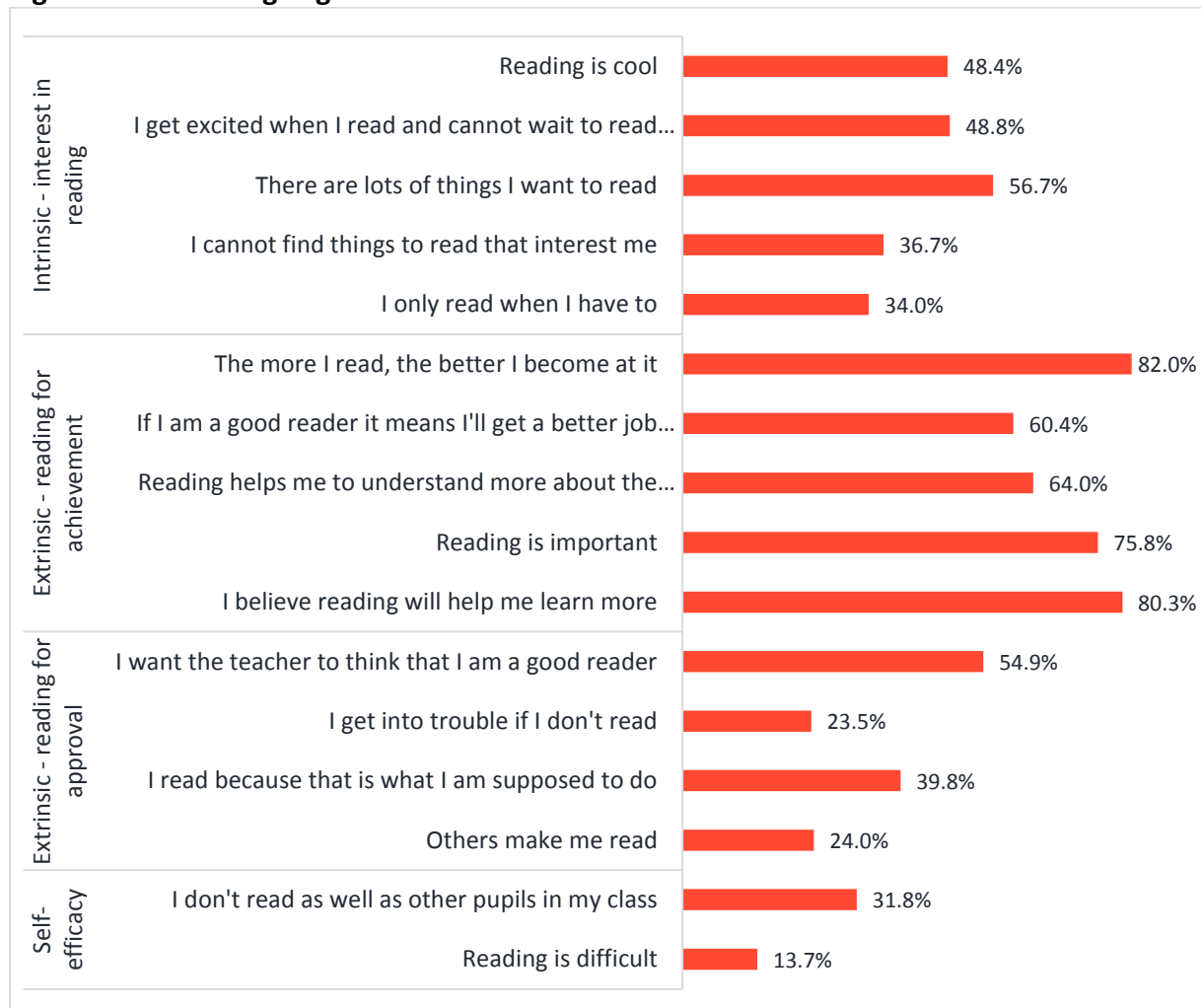
<sup>7</sup> Minutes spent reading a book: range = 0 -1,000, SD = 50.82; minutes spent reading something online: range = 9 – 1,000; SD = 131.03

<sup>8</sup> Several of these were used by Coventry University in the independent evaluation of one of our programmes, Premier League Reading Stars. We changed the response options to an agreement Lickert scale for these items to align them with the rest of the survey.

<sup>9</sup>

that reading is cool, that they get excited when they read and cannot wait to read more. Nearly 6 in 10 also agree that there are lots of things they want to read. Interestingly, over half of children and young people agree that they read because they want the teacher to think that they are a good reader, while nearly 2 in 5 read because that is what they are supposed to do.

**Figure 11: Percentage agreement with motivational items in 2016**



**To sum up,**

2016 had a few changes in store for children’s and young people’s reading. Firstly, we evidenced the highest level of reading enjoyment since we began asking children about it in 2005. While this is something that is celebrated across the sector, it is somewhat curious that over the same time period the number of children and young people who read daily in their free time has dropped quite significantly. We will need to see what 2017 brings to see whether 2016 is the “blip” or whether the two previous years, for one reason or another, were the odd ones out.

Fewer children and young people also indicated in 2016 that they read a variety of formats outside class at least once a month. In particular, fewer children and young people said that

they read technology-based materials or magazines. By contrast, song lyrics were an increasingly popular reading matter, showing an almost 10% increase in the number of children and young people who said that they read song lyrics in their free time between 2015 and 2016.

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

### About the National Literacy Trust

We are a national charity dedicated to raising literacy levels in the UK. Our research and analysis make us the leading authority on literacy. We run projects in the poorest communities, campaign to make literacy a priority for politicians and parents, and support schools.

Visit [www.literacytrust.org.uk](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk) to find out more, donate or sign up for a free email newsletter. You can also find us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter.

### Copyright

© National Literacy Trust 2017. You may report on findings or statistics included in this report if you accredit them to the National Literacy Trust.

Suggested reference for this report is: Clark, C. and Teravainen, A. (2017). Children's and Young People's Reading in 2016: Findings from our Annual Literacy Survey 2016. London: National Literacy Trust.

We will consider requests to use extracts or data from this publication provided that you:

- Acknowledge that the content is the work of the National Literacy Trust and provide appropriate references in any publications or accompanying publicity;
- State that any views expressed are yours and not necessarily those of the National Literacy Trust.

## Appendix A: Motivational items

Items tapping into pupils' reading motivation were assessed on a 5-point scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". Of the 22 items included, two items did not correlate highly with any other item (above .3) and were therefore excluded from the analyses.

Principal component analysis of the remaining items revealed three underlying factors, which were identified as intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and self-efficacy. Overall, the three factors explained 53.6% of the variance.

### Intrinsic motivation

A closer inspection of the items loading onto the intrinsic motivation factor (N = 8) shows that items could be divided thematically into enjoyment subscale (N = 3) and interest subscale of intrinsic motivation (N = 5). However, our survey also contained a reading enjoyment single item measure. Subsequent regression analyses indicated that the enjoyment scale didn't add anything to the prediction achieved by the single item measure. The enjoyment scale was therefore disregarded from the present analyses and only the interest scale was included. One of the items, "I cannot find things to read that interest me", was included despite cross-loading onto two factors.

**Interest:**  $\alpha = .839$ . Items included: reading is cool; I get excited when I read and can't wait to read more; there are lots of things I want to read; I only read when I have to; I cannot find things to read that interest me.

### Extrinsic motivation

The items loading onto the extrinsic motivation factor were initially grouped into one scale ( $\alpha = .777$ ). However, closer inspection of the scale revealed that the items loading on the factor appear to be tapping into different parts of the extrinsic motivation continuum as identified in the Self-Determination Theory (SDT): external regulation, introjected regulation and identified regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This grouping was used to create two scales of extrinsic motivation: reading for approval (combined external and introjected regulation in SDT) and reading for achievement (identified regulation in SDT). These names were considered to better reflect the items in the scales.

**Reading for approval:**  $\alpha = .620$ . Items included: I read because I want the teacher to think that I'm a good reader; I read because I'll get into trouble if I don't read; I read because that's what I'm supposed to do; I read because others make me read

**Reading for achievement:**  $\alpha = .824$ . Items included: if I'm a good reader it means I'll get a better job when I grow up; I read because I want to understand more about the world; I read because it's important for me to read; the more I read, the better I become at it; I read because reading will help me learn more.

### Self-efficacy

Three items were found loading on self-efficacy. However, when all the items were combined in a scale, it did not reach a satisfactory internal consistency ( $\alpha = .515$ ). Therefore, only two items were combined into a scale to measure self-efficacy ( $\alpha = .655$ ). Items included in the scale: I do not read as well as other pupils in my class; I think reading is difficult.