

Stories in Schools

Reading engagement outcomes

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Thank you for allowing us to participate in this programme; it has been wonderful to see how positively the students have responded to them and how their relationship with reading has changed as a result.

(Teacher)

Read for Good's mission is to get all children reading for pleasure. Their Readathon¹ has been doing that for over 30 years by motivating children to read whatever they choose, on their own terms and in their own time. A new interactive programme, Stories in Schools, aims to take this approach one step further.

Stories in Schools is a programme of workshops designed to help pupils develop a love of reading. The programme aims to transform even the most reluctant readers' attitudes towards reading, motivating them to read for pleasure in their own time. The intervention offers pupils an inclusive, creative experience with no assessment or follow-up activities required and no marking for teachers. At the end of the programme, and as an integral element of the programme plan, each participating pupil chooses a free new book of their own to keep.

The programme consists of three days of storyteller-led workshops over a six-week period. While a number of different storytellers led the workshops across all participating schools, the same storyteller hosted each school's workshops for all three sessions. Each workshop followed a similar design, and the same resources were provided to all schools. Three to four workshops took place on each of the three days, with each workshop involving up to 10 pupils selected by the participating school. The same pupils attended each of the three workshops.

¹ <https://readforgood.org/a-great-idea/>

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Schools are advised that the programme targets Year 5-6 or Year 7-8 pupils who are either reluctant readers or read below the level expected for their age. It also includes a few pupils who enjoy reading so that they can inspire the others. The focus is on children who receive free school meals (FSM) and the pupil premium (PP).

The aim of the programme is to engage disengaged and/or struggling readers, to increase their reading enjoyment and reading motivation, and to improve their reading behaviours. In early 2018, Read for Good's initial test in one secondary school in a disadvantaged area had very positive results: it surprised students by enabling them to challenge their entrenched attitudes to reading while having fun at the same time. Read for Good were keen to evaluate the programme more widely in a structured evaluation across a number of schools.

This evaluation

Read for Good commissioned the National Literacy Trust to evaluate the outcomes of this pilot intervention. The aim of the evaluation is to find out if the storytelling workshops help to improve reading enjoyment and behaviours, and if they could help close the gap between reluctant readers and engaged readers. Additionally, we were interested to find out if the workshops work better for certain demographic groups (based on age, gender, SES), and whether any improvement lasts beyond any initial surge in enthusiasm.

The project ran in 11 schools between September 2018 and March 2019 (six primary schools and five secondary schools). Schools were invited to apply to take part online, and applications were judged using criteria including percentage of children eligible for FSMs and location. Teachers in the schools selected for the Stories in Schools pilot were advised to select less keen and confident or underachieving readers to take part in the sessions. Pupils participated in a series of three sessions led by a professional storyteller during a school term. The number of pupils taking part in the workshops at each school ranged from 12 to 52. Overall, the programme was open to 440 pupils across the 11 schools. Sessions focused on children in Years 5, 6, 7 and 8, meaning that children were aged between nine and 13.

Key findings

Children who participated in Stories in Schools felt that the workshops had inspired them to read and write more. Specifically:

- 79.7% of pupils who took part in Stories in Schools said that as a result of taking part in the workshops they now **want to read more books**, while 76.9% said that they now **feel excited about reading**. 71.4% also now felt **better at writing their own stories**.
- As a result of taking part in the workshops, 53.1% also said that they **now enjoy listening to stories** more than they had before, while 36.9% now feel **inspired to tell more stories**.
- 62.7% believe that Stories in Schools would inspire other pupils to read more.

Comparisons with peers who hadn't taken part showed that:

- Pupils who took part in Stories in Schools improved their levels of **reading enjoyment** slightly at the end of the six-week intervention period, with levels of enjoyment

remaining stable until the end of the academic year. By contrast, levels of reading enjoyment declined over the same time period for their peers who didn't take part in the programme. There is some indication that young people aged 11 to 14 benefited the most, with the percentage of participating 11- to 14-year-olds who enjoyed reading increasing by almost 10 percentage points (from 41.7% to 51.4%) over the course of the project, while the percentage of their non-participating peers who enjoyed reading decreased by 7.4 percentage points (from 59.3% to 51.9%).

- Fewer pupils who took part in Stories in Schools **read daily** at the beginning of the year compared with their peers who didn't take part (27.8% vs. 31.0%). While daily reading levels of their peers declined over the course of the year (25.1%), levels for pupils who took part in Stories in Schools remained stable (26.5%).

These positive changes were more pronounced for **young people aged 11 to 14** than those aged eight to 11.

There is also some indication that **reluctant readers** (those who only enjoyed reading a bit or not at all in our pre-assessment) also benefit from taking part in Stories in Schools:

- More children and young people who didn't enjoy reading but who took part in Stories in Schools said that they read daily at the end of the programme compared with their peers who didn't take part in Stories in Schools.
- While their peers in the comparison group didn't show any change over time, more children and young people who started Stories in Schools as reluctant readers said that they read for at least 10 minutes.

Teachers also observed changes, with 87.5% seeing an increase in participating **pupils' reading motivation**, while 37.5% felt **pupils enjoyed reading more and were more confident writers**.

- All (100%) teachers agreed that Stories in Schools had demonstrated how this specialist programme could engage reluctant readers and almost all (eight of nine) believed the workshops had supported literacy.
- Seven of nine would recommend Stories in Schools to other schools and felt the workshops were relevant to the curriculum.
- More than half (five in nine) were inspired to run similar events in the future.

Stories in Schools – reading engagement outcomes

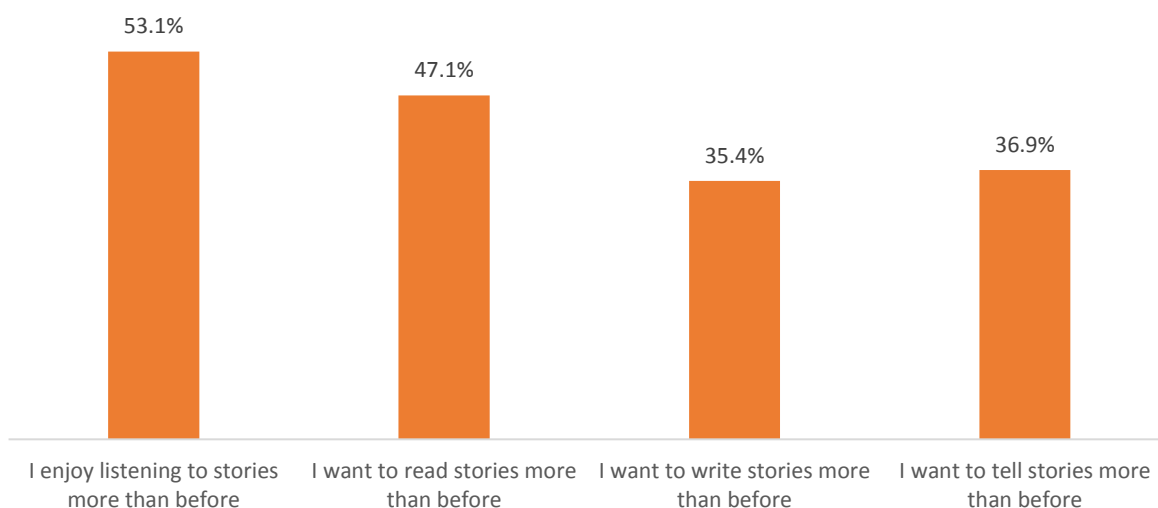
At the end of the Stories in Schools series of workshops, children who had taken part in the programme (n = 225) were asked whether the workshops had inspired them to read and write more. As can be seen in Figure 1, nearly four in five participating pupils said that as a result of taking part in Stories in Schools they wanted to read more books, while three in four said that they now felt excited about reading. Seven in 10 also now felt better at writing more of their own stories.

Figure 1: Perceived benefits of Stories in Schools by participating pupils



Over half of them also said that they now enjoyed listening to stories more than they had before the workshops, while nearly half felt inspired to read more stories (see Figure 2). Over a third of participating pupils also felt that they now wanted to write more of their own stories and wanted to tell stories more than before.

Figure 2: As a result of taking part in Stories in Schools, pupils now do the following more than before



Overall, over three in five (62.7%) feel that taking part in Stories in Schools would encourage other pupils to read more stories.

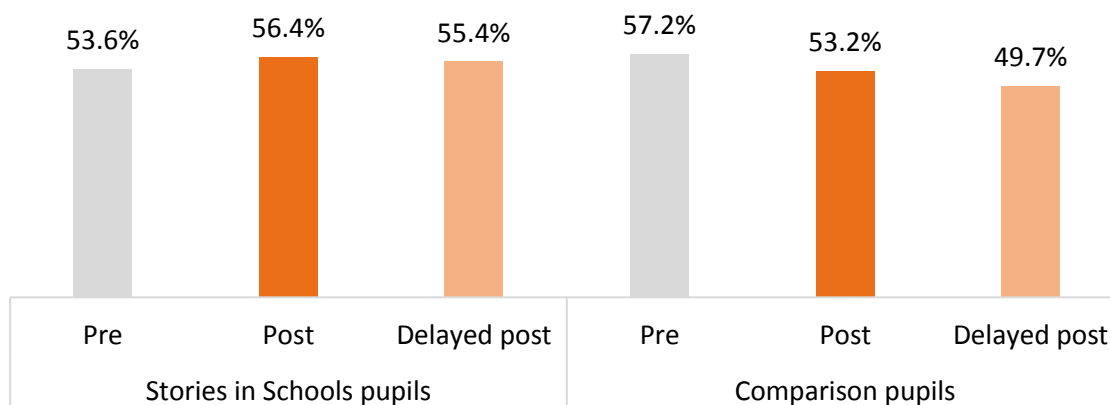
Comparisons with their peers who didn't take part

We were also interested in seeing how children who took part in Stories in Schools fared in terms of their reading engagement compared with their peers who hadn't taken part. To that end, we collected information from pupils on their enjoyment of reading, reading frequency and reading attitudes three times in the 2018/2019 academic year. We first collected data from classes before any Stories in Schools workshops began. Classes then re-did the survey after workshops had been completed. To see whether any changes would be sustained, we also asked for the classes to be surveyed one last time at the end of the academic year.

We had data spanning these three time points from 311 pupils. 124 (39.9%) of these participated in Stories in Schools, while 187 (60.1%) did not. There was no gender difference between those who took part in Stories in Schools and those who didn't. However, there was a greater percentage of FSM pupils who took part in Stories in Schools than in the comparison group (24.7% vs. 10.1%) – reflecting the particular programme's emphasis on certain groups of pupils.

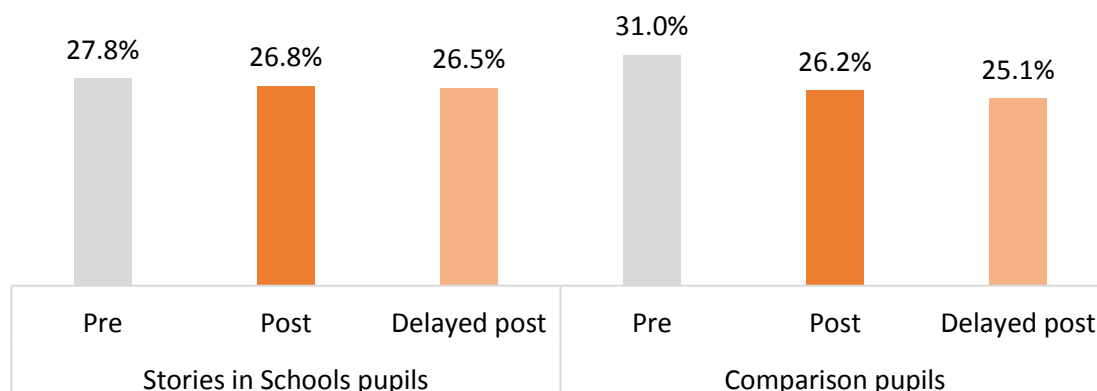
As can be seen in Figure 3, pupils who took part in Stories in Schools started the programme with slightly lower levels of reading enjoyment compared with their classmates/peers who didn't take part. Reading enjoyment levels increased slightly for those who took part in Stories in Schools, while the levels for those who didn't take part decreased over the same time period. Furthermore, the enjoyment levels of pupils taking part in Stories in Schools remained stable, while levels in pupils who hadn't taken part continued to decline.

Figure 3: Percentage of pupils enjoying reading (either very much or quite a lot) over time by whether or not they took part in Stories in Schools



As Figure 4 shows, fewer pupils who took part in Stories in Schools read daily at the beginning of the year compared with their peers who didn't take part. While daily reading levels of their peers declined over the course of the intervention, the levels for pupils who took part in Stories in Schools remained stable.

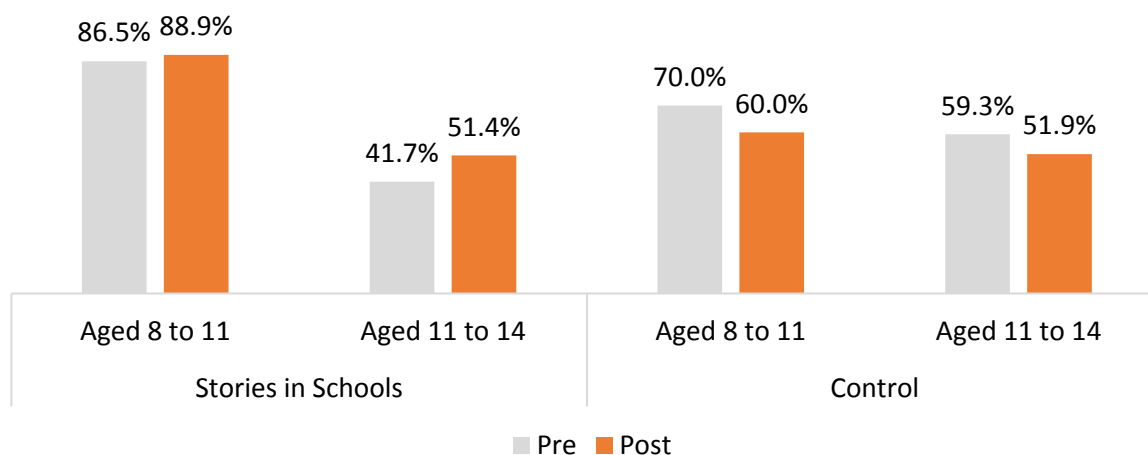
Figure 4: Percentage of pupils reading daily in their free time over time by whether or not they took part in Stories in Schools



As the sample of 311 children was too small to split into further subgroups, we looked at pre- and post-intervention matched data we had for 508 pupils; 146 (28.7%) were pupils who had taken part in Stories in Schools and 266 (52.4%) were pupils who hadn't. The remaining 96 (18.9%) pupils weren't sure whether they had participated and were excluded from the following analysis.

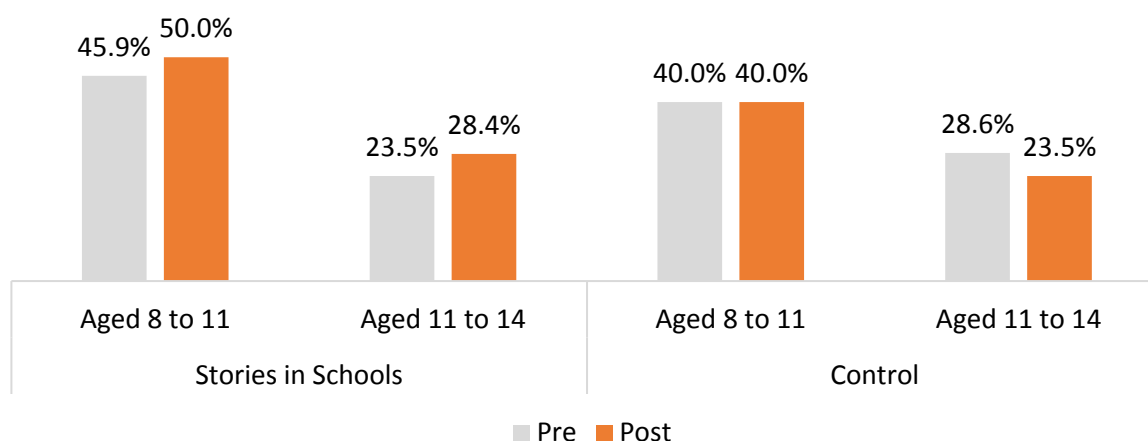
These data show us that gains in reading enjoyment and daily reading were particularly pronounced for pupils who took part aged 11 to 14 (Key Stage 3). As shown in Figure 5, one in two young people aged 11 to 14 said that they enjoyed reading at the end of Stories in Schools compared with four in 10 at the beginning, an increase of 23.3%. By contrast, the increase in reading enjoyment over time was modest for those aged eight to 11. Figure 3 also shows that reading levels declined in the comparison group over time, regardless of age group.

Figure 5: Percentage of pupils enjoying reading (either very much or quite a lot) over time by whether or not they took part in Stories in Schools and by age group



Similarly, the positive change in terms of daily reading was greater for young people aged 11 to 14 (20.8% increase over time) than it was for those aged eight to 11 (8.9% increase over time; see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Percentage of pupils reading daily in their free time over time by whether or not they took part in Stories in Schools and by age group



These findings are particularly interesting. Research from the National Literacy Trust has repeatedly shown that reading enjoyment and reading frequency decline in the transition between primary and secondary schools. While we saw a similar dip in this evaluation study, these findings also indicate that this programme might help buffer the decline normally seen in this age group.

While being part of Stories in Schools resulted in a positive change in pupils' reading enjoyment and daily reading, there were no differences in children's levels of reading confidence or how they thought about reading as a result of taking part in Stories in Schools. There were also no differences in their reading length and how many formats they read in their free time as a result of taking part in Stories in Schools.

The particular benefit to reluctant readers

Overall, no differences were found in the experience of the project by gender or by free school meal uptake. However, there is some indication that Stories in Schools has particularly benefited those who could be classed as reluctant readers at the beginning of the programme i.e. the children and young people who told us beforehand that they only enjoyed reading a bit or not at all.

More children and young people who didn't enjoy reading but who took part in Stories in Schools said that they read daily at the end of the programme than their peers who didn't take part in Stories in Schools (see Figure 7). Indeed, those who didn't enjoy reading at the beginning and who didn't take part in Stories in Schools saw a decline in daily reading over time.

Figure 7: Percentage of reluctant readers who read daily in their free time over time by whether or not they took part in Stories in Schools

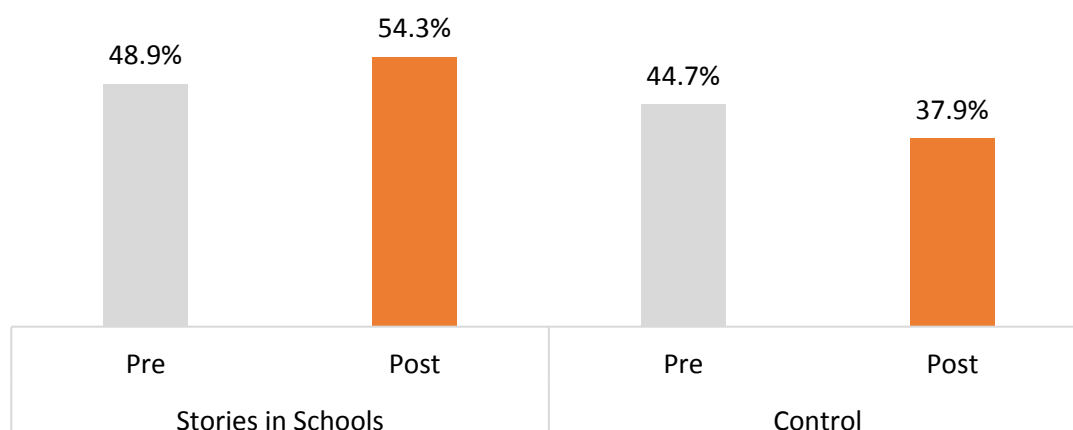
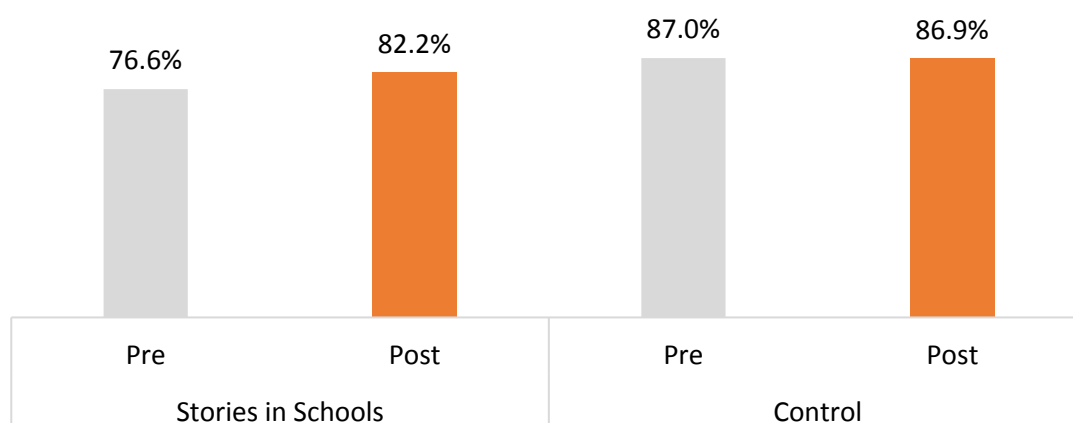


Figure 8 outlines the percentage of children and young people who are reluctant readers who say that they read for at least 10 minutes when they read. It shows that those who took part in Stories in Schools were less likely than their peers in the comparison group to say that they read for at least 10 minutes at a time. However, while their peers in the comparison group didn't show any change over time, more children and young people who started Stories in Schools as reluctant readers said that they read for at least 10 minutes.

Figure 8: Percentage of reluctant readers who read for at least 10 minutes in their free time over time by whether or not they took part in Stories in Schools



Children's perceptions of the workshops

Children taking part in Stories in Schools were invited to comment freely on what they thought of the workshops. All comments were positive, with the most commonly used word being 'exciting' (see Figure 9).

Figure 9: Children's description of Stories in Schools workshops



When asked to share what elements of the programme they had liked in particular, many comments mentioned aspects such as creativity, imagination and discussion:

You could talk about what stories you like and make your own with your imagination.

How Miss listened to everything we had to say.

That I was able to relax and talk about what books I like and I can talk about how I feel about reading.

Participating pupils' appreciation of being given the time and space to be creative was also observed by storytellers:

I've found the pupils who have got involved with my storytelling/story-making days so alive, welcoming and imaginative, absolutely relishing the opportunity to venture into a 'safe and creative space'.

We had four lively sessions with engaged, thoughtful and happy children ... we had some amazing shared moments of laughter and appreciation at students' ideas. The work is also very much valued by the [teacher] with the notes being kept to be ... shared with others in their classes – making each group 'story experts'.

Finally, participating pupils were asked if they felt Stories in Schools might encourage other children to read more stories. Representative responses included:

Yes, because if they don't like reading then I definitely know at the end of it they will like reading.

Anyone would enjoy reading after the workshop.

Because we talk about books all the time and I really like that also we encourage each other to read more. Also, we recommend books we've all read so that makes us read.

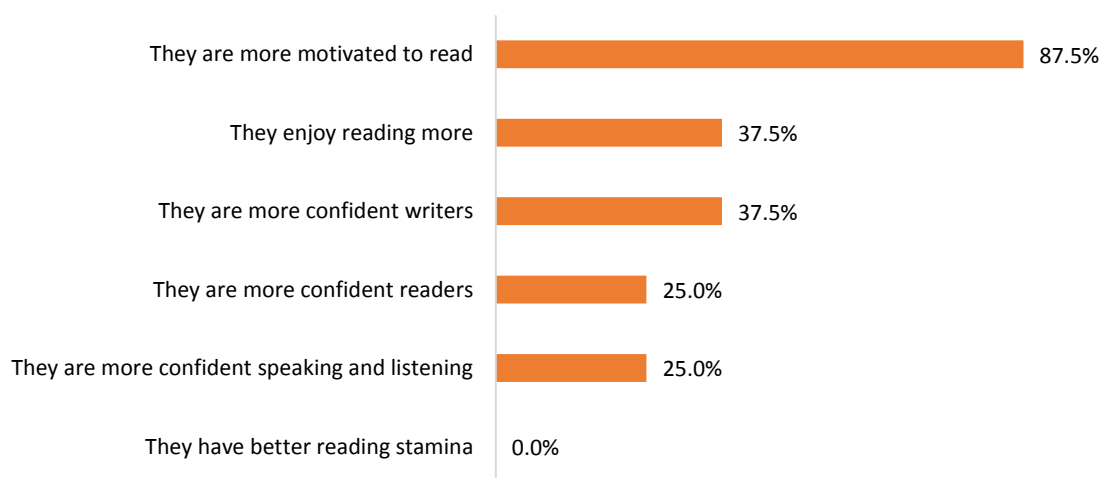
Teachers' perceptions

Class teachers in participating schools were invited to complete a short post-intervention survey to provide their professional perspective on any changes they may have noticed in pupils taking part in Stories in Schools workshops. Teachers from eight of the 12 schools participating responded, and, as one school had two responses, nine were received in total. These were split evenly between primary and secondary schools, with 55.6% of respondents teaching Year 5 pupils and 44.4% of children in Years 6, 7 or 8. Five of nine (55.6%) had taken part in Stories in Schools workshops over the autumn term in 2018 and the remaining four of nine (44.4%) were in the spring term of 2019.

All teachers said they had found the Stories in Schools workshops easy to organise, with seven (77.8%) rating them 'very' easy and two (22.2%) 'somewhat' easy to organise. Almost all of the teachers responding to the survey attended some or all of the workshops with their pupils, with four (44.4%) attending them all, three (33.3%) attending some and just two (22.2%) not attending any workshops. **Eight of nine** (88.9%) teachers considered the workshops to have been beneficial for the pupils they worked with, while one teacher felt they'd been 'not at all' beneficial, two rated them 'somewhat' beneficial and six 'very' beneficial.

When asked about the most noticeable change in participating pupils' literacy, most teachers observed increased reading motivation, with **seven of eight** respondents to this question saying they'd noticed this (see Figure 10). Three of eight (37.5%) felt pupils enjoyed reading more, or were more confident writers, while two in eight said participating pupils were more confident readers. No respondents noticed an impact on pupils' reading stamina.

Figure 10: Teachers' perception of impact on pupils' reading and writing attitudes



All but one teacher (eight of nine, or 88.9%) believed that taking part in Stories in Schools would benefit all pupils but, when asked to consider a particular group of pupils or an

individual who had benefited, several comments reflected responses relating to increased reading motivation or remarked on the benefits for children’s creativity:

Some of our Year 5 boys who are reluctant readers seemed to get a lot out of the workshops. They liked that the story creation was more ‘free’ and they enjoyed discussing the kinds of books they liked reading.

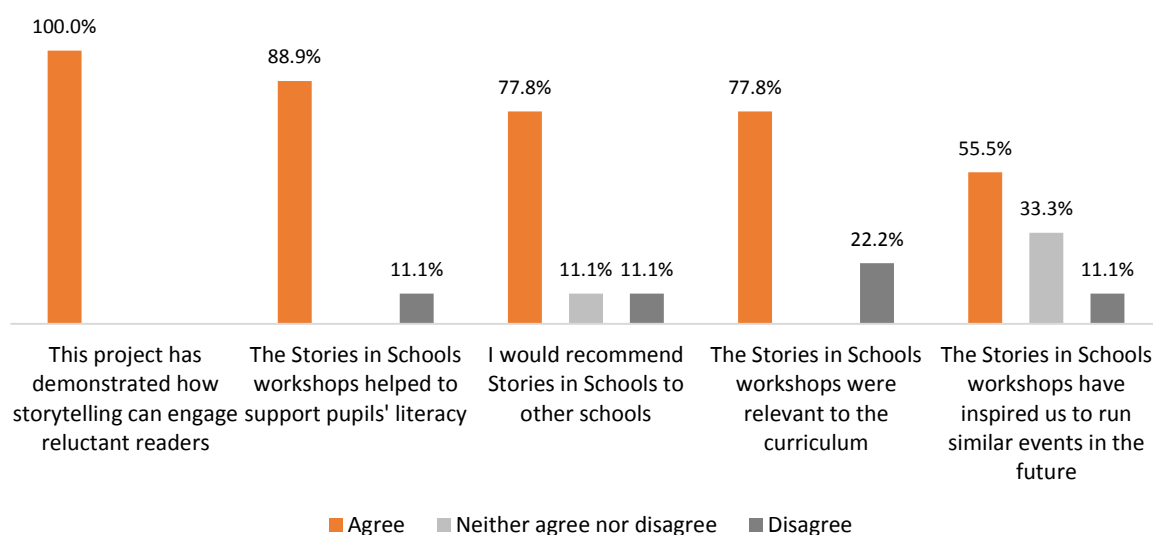
Many pupils. A couple who have challenging social barriers enjoyed the time to talk, relax and feel safe within a reading scenario. Their interest and creativity was permitted in the context and they felt confident to do so.

During the first session one boy could only think of Fortnite-based stories and struggled to participate. However, in the final session he was much more engaged and creative.

A fantastically engaging programme sure to engage even the most reluctant reader.

All (100%) of the respondents agreed that Stories in Schools had demonstrated how the programme can engage reluctant readers (see Figure 11) and almost all (eight of nine) believed the workshops had supported literacy. Seven of nine would recommend Stories in Schools to other schools and felt the workshops were relevant to the curriculum. More than half (five in nine) were inspired to run similar events in the future.

Figure 11: Teachers’ agreement or disagreement with statements about Stories in Schools



Teachers were invited to comment further on any specific aspects of the workshops that they felt had been most useful in supporting pupils’ literacy. Some felt that the structure of the workshops had been an important factor in their success:

The structure of the workshop series, which started casual and chatty, became more and more formal until they had done some writing and received

a book. It was like a crescendo. They almost didn't notice that they had achieved stuff so it dealt with the confidence issue some of the students have.

Many teachers mentioned the opportunities for supporting talk and discussion around books and stories:

The conversation generally. Practise picking books. The gift of a book.

Giving pupils time to enjoy stories, discuss and explore literature.

Several comments focused on the resources provided through the programme:

The 'advent calendar' worked beautifully to show children how spontaneous storytelling could be lots of fun. It inspired them to create stories. It was also great to make up a story 'just [because]' rather than in a formal classroom setting with criteria to meet. I also thought that the final session teaching children the skills they need to make book choices for themselves was really good. I will be repeating this with other groups of children. It feeds brilliantly into the English action plan, promoting reading for pleasure and developing a school that is a community of readers.

Indeed, when teachers were asked for their thoughts about the 'story calendar' resources in particular, comments were universally positive. While Stories in Schools included elements designed to encourage all aspects of literacy (i.e. speaking, listening, reading and writing), most feedback related more to discussion and reading-based outcomes than impact on pupils' writing, with the exception of comments relating to the 'story calendar':

Loved them – we're going to do something similar with a full year group next year.

Although I didn't see these being used, the students were very keen to show me what they'd made. I thought these were a fantastic example of using careful scaffolding to help students to structure their writing. I particularly liked how the sentence starters became less and less structured ... to enable the students to feel more confident about completing whole sentences/steps in the story of their own.

The children really enjoyed them. They were a positive way to engage the children and demonstrate how easy it could be to write a story and how anyone could do it.

Storytellers also mentioned positive outcomes from this aspect of the programme:

[Children's comments included] 'Best lesson I've had and it helped me make a story. I've never been interested in writing a story before.'

A number of comments mentioned the importance of the role of the storyteller for the workshops' success:

Amanda's caring, fun and nurturing nature helped our children to feel safe in their thoughts and she provided them with opportunities to enjoy stories.

The workshops are completely reliant on the skill of the workshop leader and we were incredibly lucky to have Jen.

The person leading the sessions was a great role model for the students and they really enjoyed working with him.

The books that participating pupils were invited to choose from at the end of the programme were also a very popular element of Stories in Schools. All (nine of nine, or 100%) teachers felt “there was a good choice and most children found a book they liked”, and other comments included, “Amazing selection” and “A great balance of books”. One teacher praised every aspect of the programme, noting the impact of both the resources and the books on participating pupils’ reading attitudes and confidence:

Many students returned from the workshops with a more positive attitude towards reading; one ... asked to read out for the first time in class immediately after attending the second workshop. Many students responded very positively to being given a book of their own choice, and took any opportunity to read these over the subsequent days; one group even asked if they could spend some of their English lessons reading in silence. I think in general the workshops managed to raise the profile of reading, to create a sense of buzz and excitement around reading and to allow the students to feel as if they were part of something special.

Storytellers’ perceptions

Storytellers were also invited to provide feedback to the Stories in Schools team, and several comments reflected their observations on the impact of the programme on children’s enthusiasm for reading. For example, Workshop 3 included an opportunity for pupils to choose and keep a new book, and several comments noted children’s excitement at being invited to find a book that reflected their personal interests and reading ability, particularly some of the most disengaged pupils:

... each child had a strong understanding of their own tastes, styles and preferences. Gaming was also an influence, especially for the boys, so books which they could relate to [included] gaming themes like heroes and battling. I was so impressed by the responses of some of the boys who had been the most resistant in the previous visits. These were the ones who ... appreciated the books the most and became immediately engrossed.

The boy who nearly got removed [and] who then loved his book said, ‘This is my book now. I’m over the moon with mine’ and ‘I’m going to read it in detention.’

Indeed, one storyteller observed that some of the pupils selected for the sessions were only ‘reluctant readers’ in that they weren’t keen to read books that didn’t reflect their interests:

They ... just kept asking when they’d get the books! So much for reluctant readers. There was a resounding expression that the books they were being

offered at school were 'boring' and this offered them an opportunity to talk about the kinds of books they'd like to be reading.

Conclusion

National Literacy Trust research has highlighted associations between reading enjoyment and reading attainment, and between book ownership, reading enjoyment and reading attainment. It has also found that reading enjoyment decreases significantly over the transition from primary to secondary school. We were therefore interested to conduct this evaluation of the benefits of the innovative Stories in Schools programme, which was targeted at reluctant readers in primary and secondary schools serving areas of disadvantage. Quantitative and qualitative findings from pupils aged between eight and 14, teachers and storytellers suggested a variety of positive outcomes for participants, particularly children who began the programme with the lowest levels of reading enjoyment.

The Stories in Schools programme aimed to engage disengaged and/or struggling readers, to increase their reading enjoyment and reading motivation, and improve their reading behaviours. The evaluation was designed to explore whether the workshops and resources helped to improve participants' reading enjoyment and behaviours, and if they could do so enough to close the gap between reluctant readers and engaged readers. Additionally, we were interested to find out if the workshops work better for certain demographic groups (based on age, gender, SES), and whether any improvement lasted beyond any initial surge in enthusiasm.

Survey data indicate that pupils taking part in Stories in Schools ended the six-week intervention period with increased levels of reading engagement compared with their peers who had not. Furthermore, participating pupils' levels of reading enjoyment remained stable in follow-up surveys, while reading enjoyment in the comparison group declined. In addition, while non-participants' levels of daily reading declined over the period of the intervention, they remained stable in pupils taking part in the programme. This demonstrates the value of Stories in Schools for developing and sustaining the affective and behavioural processes that help develop and sustain the cognitive processes associated with reading (Clark and Teravainen, 2017). It is particularly encouraging to note the impact of the programme on those who began with the lowest levels of reading enjoyment, and on young people aged 11 to 14. Those who began Stories in Schools as self-reported 'reluctant readers' were more likely to say they read every day, and for at least 10 minutes, than their peers, having taking part.

Confirming findings from children's surveys, teachers and storytellers believed that increased reading motivation was one of the key benefits for children taking part in Stories in Schools. In addition, all teachers agreed that Stories in Schools had shown that this innovative approach could engage less-keen readers, 89% felt that the workshops had supported pupils' literacy, and 78% said that they'd recommend Stories in Schools to other schools. Taken together with outcomes from pupil surveys, these findings indicate that the resources and support from professional storytellers provided by the programme had a positive and lasting impact on participating pupils' literacy.

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About Read for Good

Read for Good is a national charity motivating whole schools and communities to read for fun because we know that loving reading changes lives. Our vision is for all children in the UK to be given the opportunity, space and motivation to develop their own love of reading, benefiting them throughout their lives – for good. We do this through Readathon, the UK's longest-running reading challenge; we get whole communities reading through our citywide reading campaigns and we work intensively to inspire reluctant readers in schools. Our unique hospital programme delivered in 30 major children's hospitals across the UK helps seriously ill children travel from Narnia to Middle Earth through our regular supply of brand new infection-free books and visits from storytellers. In short, we work relentlessly to make sure every child has the opportunity to become a reader.



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