



School Improvement Planning

Reading for Pleasure: Exploring the evidence base

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Overview

Context

The benefits of reading for pleasure

- Intellectual
- Social
- Emotional

Summary

UK declines in volitional reading

- Children and young people's reading enjoyment and engagement is at an all time low (Clark et al., 2024).
- Increased policy and practice commitment towards 'reading for pleasure'

Clark et al. (2024). Children and young people's reading in 2024.
https://nlt.cdn.ngo/media/documents/Children_and_young_people_reading_in_2024_Report.pdf

Report finds 'shocking and dispiriting' fall in children reading for pleasure

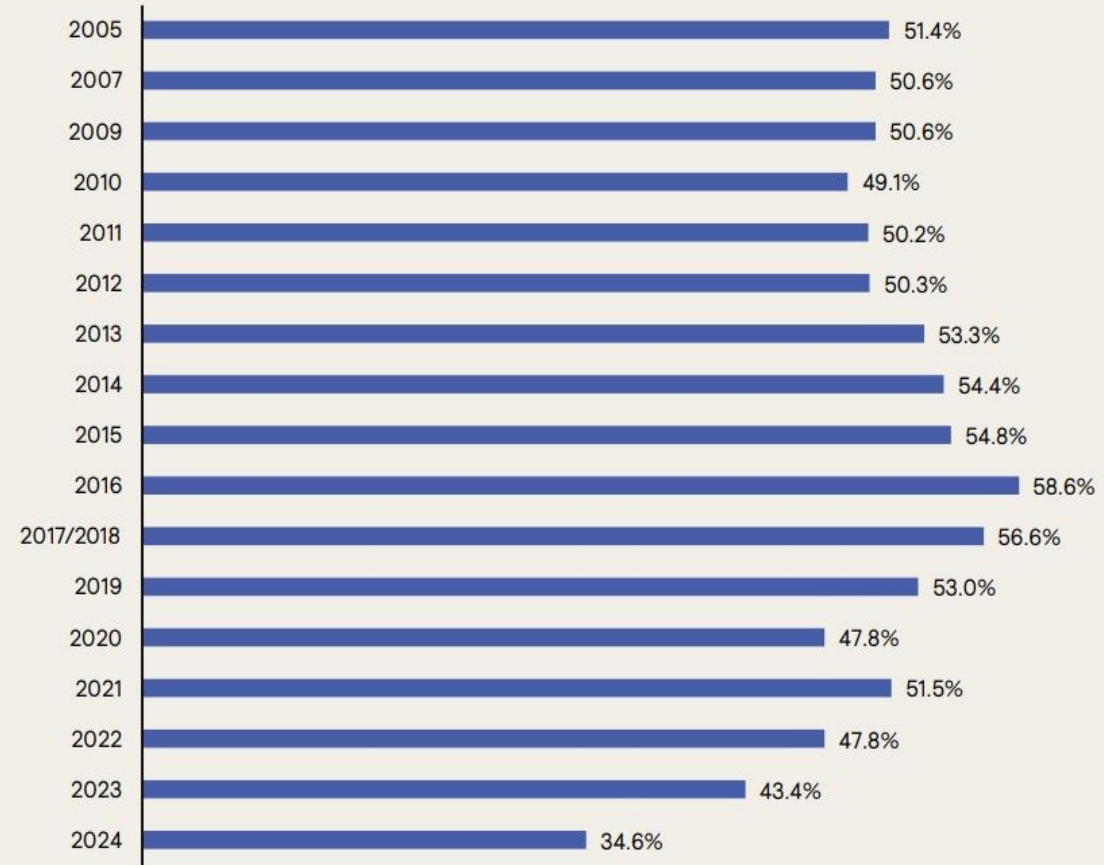
National Literacy Trust finds only 35% of eight to 18-year-olds enjoy reading in their spare time, a sharp drop on last year to the lowest figure yet recorded



UK declines in volitional reading

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Figure 1: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who enjoyed reading in their free time either very much or quite a lot from 2005 to 2024



Clark et al. (2024). Children and young people's reading in 2024.
https://nlt.cdn.ngo/media/documents/Children_and_young_people_reading_in_2024_Report.pdf

Clark et al., 2024: based on n >76,000 aged 5-18

Reading for pleasure: Challenging socioeconomic inequalities

- Fifteen-year-olds whose parents have the lowest occupational status but who are highly engaged in reading achieve better reading scores than students whose parents have high or medium occupational status but who are poorly engaged in reading.

OECD (2002)

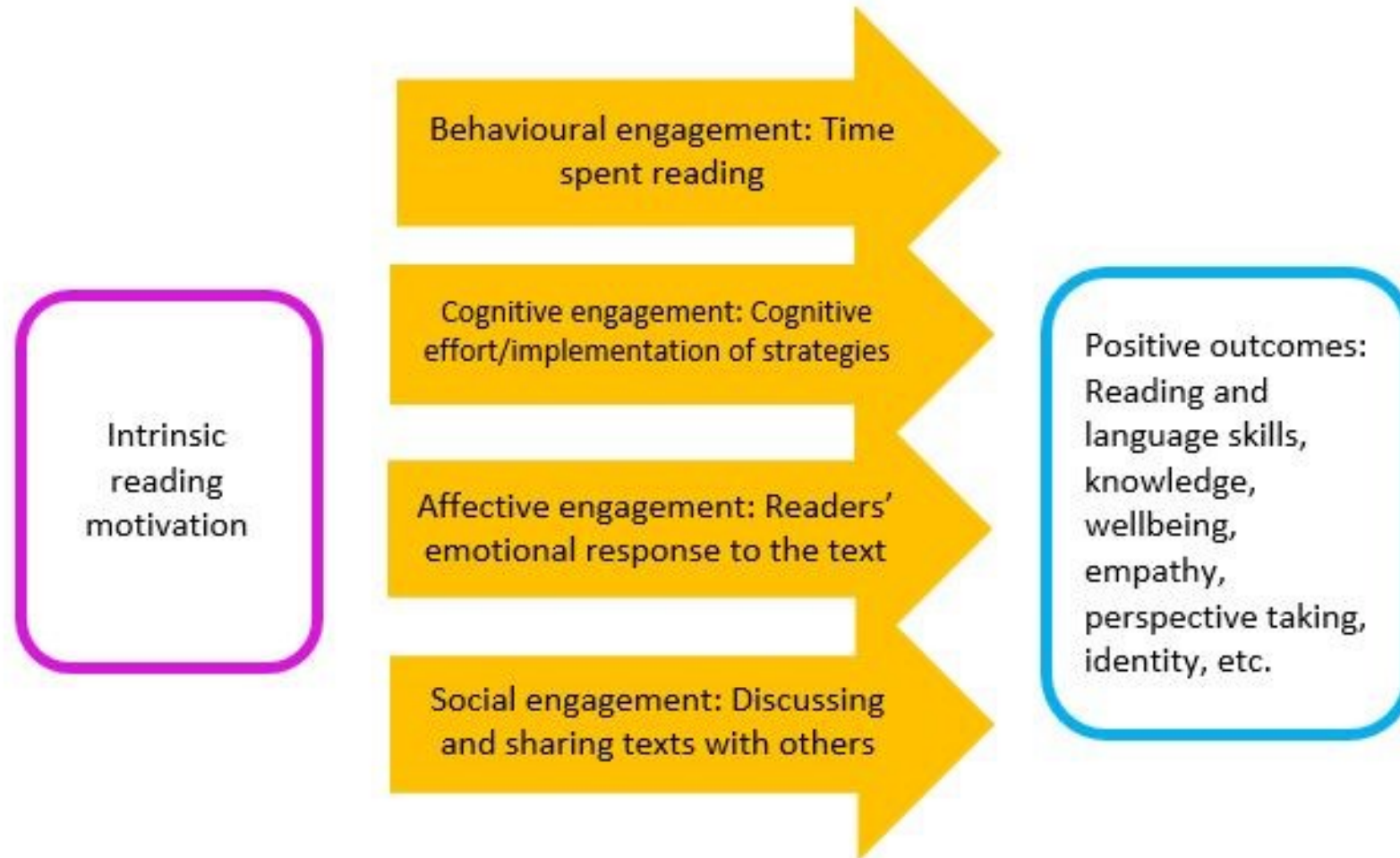
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*‘engagement in reading, as measured by attitude, motivation and practice, has the potential to reduce the gaps between the reading proficiency scores of students from differing backgrounds. **The challenge is to find effective ways of increasing engagement**’ (OECD, 2002)*

Reading motivation, engagement and positive outcomes



Reading for pleasure

Explore the evidence base (quantitative) and broaden and deepen understanding (qualitative) of the benefits of reading for pleasure/volitional reading

- Intellectual
- Social
- Emotional

Intellectual: Quantitative

Educational

Better academic outcomes (Clark & Rumbold, 2006; OECD, 2002; Sullivan and Brown, 2015).

Literacy

Book reading is associated with better reading skills (Jerrim & Moss, 2018; McGeown et al, 2015) and growth in reading comprehension and spelling skills (e.g. Mol & Bus, 2011; Torppa et al., 2019).

Language

Book reading is associated with better vocabulary and language abilities (Mol & Bus, 2011; Nation et al., 2022; Sullivan & Brown, 2015).

Jerrim & Moss (2018). The link between fiction and teenagers' reading skills: International evidence from the OECD PISA study. British Educational Research Journal, <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3498>

Nation et al (2022). Book Language and Its Implications for Children's Language, Literacy, and Development. Current Directions in Psychological Science, 31. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/09637214221103264>

Intellectual: Qualitative

Broad range of academic/educational skills

General knowledge

Consolidate and inspire learning

‘I think it’s improved my writing, especially like my descriptive writing and describing like a character’

‘I felt like after going-, like moving into high school, I really found my love for reading and it's really helped with my literacy and my, like, analysis and interpretation skills’

‘in some books, it’s fiction, but they put facts into it and you can read the story while also being interested by the facts and things’

Currie et al., (under review) Exploring the relationship between reading and wellbeing: Qualitative insights from children.

Currie et al., (under review). How does reading fiction support adolescents’ wellbeing? A qualitative study examining positive affect, connection and personal growth.

Both available on request.

Social: Quantitative

Perspective taking and empathy

Books offer opportunities to see things from other people's perspectives and develop empathy (Eekhof et al, 2022; Gasser et al, 2022; Van der Kleij et al., 2022).

Prosocial behaviour

Reading for pleasure is associated, albeit weakly, with prosocial behaviour (Mak & Fancourt, 2020)

Reduced prejudice

Books can reduce improve attitudes towards stigmatised groups (Vezzali et al., 2014).

Mak & Fancourt. (2020). Reading for pleasure in childhood and adolescent healthy behaviours: *Preventive Medicine*:. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2019.105889>

Vezzali et al., (2014). The greatest magic of Harry Potter: Reducing prejudice. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12279>

Social: Qualitative

Enhanced knowledge and understanding of others (both known and unknown)

Internal insights

Empathy (cognitive, affective and behavioural)

‘It makes me understand that people are fighting battles that you have no idea about.’

‘but I don’t know about what it's like to have other neurodivergences, so I think I benefit from that by learning about others that have similar things to me, but not the same as what I have’

‘...sometimes I already knew what they were going through and I feel sorry for them’

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Emotional: Quantitative

Emotional symptoms

Reading for pleasure is associated, albeit weakly, with lower emotional problems (Mak & Fancourt, 2020).

Wellbeing

A positive, albeit weak, relationship between book reading and positive mental health/wellbeing (Clark & Teravainen-Goff, 2018; Kennewell et al., 2022; Sun et al., 2023).

Clark, & Teravainen-Goff (2018). Mental wellbeing, reading and writing.

[https://nlt.cdn.ngo/media/documents/Mental_wellbeing_reading_and_writing_2017-18 - FINAL2_qTxyxvg.pdf](https://nlt.cdn.ngo/media/documents/Mental_wellbeing_reading_and_writing_2017-18_-_FINAL2_qTxyxvg.pdf)

Sun et al. (2024). Early-initiated childhood reading for pleasure: associations with better cognitive performance, mental well-being and brain structure in young adolescence. *Psychol Med.* <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0033291723001381>

Emotional: Qualitative

Understanding of self

Sense of belonging

Self kindness

Ambitions and future aspirations

Connection with others (friends, family)

Wellbeing

‘It makes me feel, like, a bit good, because, like, tells me about, like, even if it’s not a real person, like, shows that someone else at least went through the same things that I went through.’

‘I remember my friend gave me a book because she mentioned it and it had kind of like, issues I was dealing with at the time and she was like, you should read this book.’

‘I think it helps to really relax, like, if you’re stressed you can start reading and it just, like, relaxes you and helps you, like, go into, like, a different mood.’

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Summary

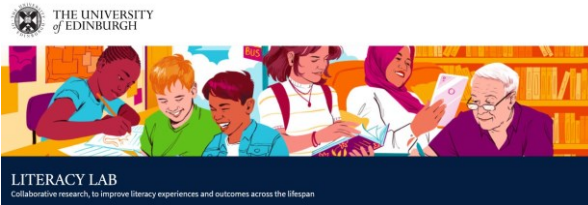
Reading for pleasure should be a priority for schools:

- Potential for positive intellectual, educational, social and emotional outcomes, and can challenge socioeconomic inequalities – but only when children and young people are choosing to read, and engaging deeply with what they read.
- Reading Schools offers a framework to embed reading for pleasure in a coherent and systematic way.

Further reading and resources

McGeown, S., & Wilkinson, K. (2021). Inspiring and sustaining reading for pleasure in children and young people: A guide for teachers and school leaders. UKLA Minibook

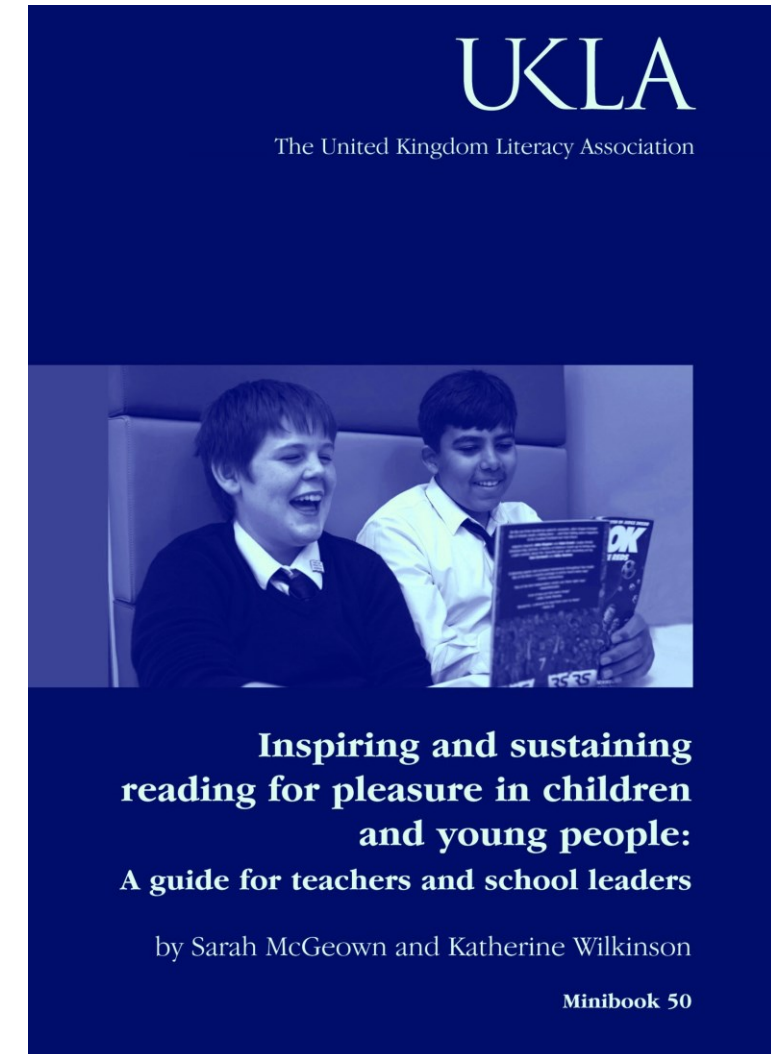
Websites:



<https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/literacylab/>



<https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/lovetoread/>



Thank you for listening



University of Edinburgh Literacy Lab:

<https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/literacylab/>

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