

## **Understanding the Impact and Characteristics of School Libraries and Reading Spaces**

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Each year, the National Literacy Trust conducts an Annual Literacy Survey of children and young people aged 9 to 18 across the UK. In the 2019 survey, a subset of questions focused on children's and young people's use of school libraries, with the intention of better understanding the extent of children's use of these spaces, their views on them, and how these factors related to children's attitudes to reading, reading confidence, reading behaviours and reading attainment.

The National Literacy Trust asked Nottingham Trent University to analyse these data, and to conduct a review of international research published in the last 10 years that has examined the potential impacts of school library use. This report summarises the outcomes of this work, starting with the literature review before moving on to present the results of the Annual Literacy Survey analysis.

### **Key findings**

- The review found that there was evidence of an association between school library use and reading attainment, although there was no clear-cut evidence that library use 'caused' increased reading attainment, due to a lack of experimental or longitudinal studies in this area.
- In relation to pupil wellbeing, the review found that there was some evidence of an association between school library use and mental wellbeing, but only a small percentage of school librarians saw pastoral care to be an important part of their job.
- The literature review also revealed that demographic factors like age, gender and ethnicity of pupils were related to school library use, and the nature and quality of the book stock carried was also important. The library being seen as a friendly space, and a place that can support students to do better at school, was also important.
- The analysis of the Annual Literacy Survey data set focused on a subset of 694 children and young people for whom standardised reading scores were also available.
- Overall, children and young people who used the school library had better levels of reading enjoyment, reading for pleasure, reading confidence, writing for pleasure,

writing confidence, and reading attainment than those who did not. They also tended to read and write a greater variety of material relative to non-library users.

- For children and young people receiving free school meals, library users in this group showed higher reading enjoyment, increased reading and writing for pleasure, and tended to read and write a greater variety of material relative to non-library users.
- When we consider just the boys from the whole sample, we find that library users had better scores for reading enjoyment, reading for pleasure, reading confidence, and reading attainment than boys who did not use the school library, and these children and young people also read more diverse forms of text than those who were not school library users.
- When we consider just the girls from the whole sample, we find that library users show better levels of reading and writing enjoyment, and they read and write for pleasure more often than non-users of school libraries. They also tended to read and write a greater variety of material relative to non-library users.
- However, attitudes to reading and writing were found to be negatively related to school library use, both overall and in the case of each of the subgroup analyses conducted.

We recommend that more work is undertaken to look at the impact of school library use on pupil outcomes over time to unpick cause and effect of these results. We also recommend collaboration between staff and pupils of all ages to build more appropriate collections of reading material, and that issues of library access and availability of trained library staff are addressed at policy and school leadership levels.

## **Part 1: The Literature Review**

### **Background to this Literature Review**

Previous reviews of research into the impact of school library use by children have highlighted the importance of staffing, budgeting and high-quality provision on increasing the use of school libraries (Hughes, 2014), and on pupils' reading attitudes and behaviours (Clark, 2010; Teravainen & Clark, 2017; Clark & Teravainen-Goff, 2018). Variables such as gender, age, geographic location, ethnic and socioeconomic background further influence these outcomes (Clark, 2010; Teravainen & Clark, 2017; Clark & Teravainen-Goff, 2018). Moreover, those who use school libraries appear to have higher reading levels (Clark, 2010; Teravainen & Clark, 2017; Clark & Teravainen-Goff, 2018), academic attainment, writing skills as well as transferrable skills in other academic areas than those who do not use the school library (Teravainen & Clark, 2017). However, school library use in the UK appears to have dropped by approximately 5.5% since the 2010 Annual Literacy Survey (Clark, 2010; Clark & Teravainen-Goff, 2018).

Recent literature has also investigated the impact of school library use on wellbeing, with arguments made that school libraries positively influence children's feelings of being cared for through tactical provision and assistance that aids them in dealing with adverse circumstances (Harper, 2017). Children and young people who use school libraries appear to have improved interpersonal outcomes including feelings of success or achievement and self-

esteem (Clark, 2010; Teravainen & Clark, 2017; Clark & Teravainen-Goff, 2018), as well as exhibiting greater average mental wellbeing scores (Clark & Teravainen-Goff, 2018). Conversely, proposed obstacles to pupil care and, ultimately, wellbeing include limited school library accessibility and inadequate funding (Harper, 2017).

Nevertheless, the quality of empirical research that has considered the impact of school libraries can be mixed, insofar as it can lack rigour in terms of design and/or analysis. Consequently, it is difficult to say with any degree of certainty what impact school library use does have on pupils, if any, without a more considered analysis of results in relation to the methods used to obtain them. As a result, this review examined empirical research published in the last 10 years with the intention of differentiating between studies that used robust methods and those that did not.

### **Review Methodology and Key Publications**

This review examined literature that considered the impact of school libraries on pupils' attainment and wellbeing, as well as factors that might influence school library use. The following search terms were included in a search of the British Education Index, Google Scholar, ProQuest Central and the NTU library's OneSearch Pro: 'school libraries'; 'attainment'; 'literacy'; 'wellbeing'; and 'reading'. The search was restricted such that the publications had to be produced after 2009 (i.e. published in the last 10 years) and written in English. Literature exploring public libraries rather than school libraries were also excluded from this review.

This search resulted in a total of 29 papers, which were then read and appraised for quality (see Appendix for full details of all papers reviewed and their characteristics and evaluations). Of these 29, 14 were considered to demonstrate sufficiently robust methodology to address their research questions. Four of these papers are not discussed within this paper as they were either not directly relevant to the topics being considered in this report or did not report new empirical data. To ensure that the conclusions of this review have rigour, only findings reported by the remaining 10 papers are considered in this section. Each of the 10 papers are briefly summarised below with an explanation of why each study was considered to have merit.

#### **Bleidt, S. A. (2011). How students utilize and perceive their school library. *American Secondary Education*, 39(3), 67 – 85.**

Bleidt (2011) conducted a study examining how and why students use their school library in addition to their perceptions of its usefulness. Retrospective online surveys that consisted of 21 questions were carried out by 1509 11-15-year-old students from rural South Texas middle schools. The sample comprised a range of ethnic backgrounds but the students were predominantly Hispanic (77%). The large ethnically diverse sample is noteworthy, and the paper presents clearly identified points of interest for further research and development. There was also an equal gender split in the sample. Furthermore, Bleidt (2011) took steps to ensure there was no missing data within the dataset (participants were required to complete questions in order to move on to the next question).

**BMG research (2019). *National survey to scope school library provision in England, Northern Ireland and Wales.***

In a study mapping school library provision across England, Northern Ireland and Wales, BMG research (2019) used a retrospective online survey to gather data from 1,750 primary, middle, secondary and all-through schools. This study exhibits a large geographically and socioeconomically varied sample (with the United Kingdom being especially pertinent in the framework of this review), increasing the statistical power of the ensuing dataset. This study examined in detail the contrasts between primary and secondary school provision, considering variables related to school library staffing and budgeting. It also considered schools without standalone library provision. The extent of data and detailed analyses demonstrated in this study surpassed that of weaker studies considered by this review.

**Clark, C. & Teravainen-Goff, A. (2018). *School libraries: Why children and young people use them or not, their literacy engagement and mental wellbeing.* London, England: National Literacy Trust. Retrieved from [https://literacytrust.org.uk/documents/2175/School\\_libraries2018.pdf](https://literacytrust.org.uk/documents/2175/School_libraries2018.pdf)**

Clark and Teravainen-Goff (2018) gathered the data of 45,523 UK school-aged children and young people via the National Literacy Trust's Annual Literacy survey, with the intention of determining how they used the school library, why they may or may not be using it, and how using the school library potentially links with literacy and reading behaviour, attainment and wellbeing. Variables including gender, free school meal (FSM) status, age, ethnicity and geographical location were taken into consideration within their analysis. This study demonstrates an exceptionally large and varied sample, as well as a robust mixed methodological approach most suited to the objective of their research.

**Clark, C. (2010). *Young people's reading habits and attitudes to their school library, and an exploration of the relationship between school library use and school attainment.* London, England: National Literacy Trust. Retrieved from [https://literacytrust.org.uk/documents/127/2010\\_06\\_01\\_free\\_research\\_-\\_school\\_libraries\\_and\\_reading\\_in\\_2009\\_Zacc2TE.pdf](https://literacytrust.org.uk/documents/127/2010_06_01_free_research_-_school_libraries_and_reading_in_2009_Zacc2TE.pdf)**

Clark (2010) obtained the data of 17,089 pupils (boys 51.2%, girls 48.8%) from 112 UK schools by means of the National Literacy Trust's Annual Literacy Survey. The aim of this survey was to examine young people's perceptions of school libraries, whether they are using them and why, the influence of demographics on school library use, and school library use's impact on attainment and how this relates to reading behaviours. The survey consisted of 32 questions including age, ethnic background, free school meal (FSM) status, school library use, why pupils do or do not use the school library, reading ability, reading frequency and attainment. This study exhibits strength with a large participant sample and equal gender split. Clark (2010) also recognised variables that had the potential to influence the data, thus using multiple analyses to account for these variables.

**Gildersleeves, L. (2012). Do school libraries make a difference? Some considerations on investigating school library impact in the United Kingdom. *Library Management*, 33(67), 403 – 413.**

Gildersleeves (2012) carried out a pilot study in which online surveys were completed by head teachers, library staff and pupils in 60 UK secondary schools, with selected school and university samples of parents and students where possible, and supplementary pupil focus groups from a sub-sample of schools. The aim of this study was to establish the impact of school libraries and librarians on pupil learning and development. Gildersleeves (2012) used a mixture of methodological styles based on previous studies to gain international comparability. Additionally, this study demonstrated a clear and appropriate rationale for their sample selection criteria.

**Lance, K. C. & Hofschire, L. (2012). *Change in school librarian staffing linked with change in CSAP reading performance, 2005 to 2011*. Colorado, USA: Colorado State Library, Library Research Service. Retrieved from [https://www.lrs.org/documents/closer\\_look/CO4\\_2012\\_Closer\\_Look\\_Report.pdf](https://www.lrs.org/documents/closer_look/CO4_2012_Closer_Look_Report.pdf)**

Lance and Hofschire (2012) conducted a study to determine the impact of school librarian staffing changes on Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) reading scores. Data on school librarian staffing obtained from the Colorado Department of Education (CDE), as well as student reading scores gathered via the CSAP were collected between 2005 and 2011. The use of specifically developed matrixes accounted for changes and anomalies in staffing levels and reading scores over the study period, with analysis used to control for participants receiving free or reduced-cost school meals. The matrixes caused this study to be prominent as one with merit as confounding variables were accounted for in the analyses. Lance and Hofschire (2012) noted limitations in their prior research and measures undertaken to enhance their current methodology. The Colorado-based studies mentioned in this paper were by far the most widely referenced studies throughout the school library literature appraised within this review.

**Longfield, A. (2018). *Growing up North. Look North: A generation of children await the powerhouse promise*. London, England: The Children's Commissioner's Office. Retrieved from <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Growing-Up-North-March-2018-2.pdf>**

In a study using focus groups of 14- and 15-year-olds from northern regions of the United Kingdom, Longfield (2018) endeavoured to explore children's progression, attitudes and prospects across these regions. This study takes advantage of a large geographically and socioeconomically diverse sample as well as a mixed quantitative/qualitative approach that provided the most appropriate dataset to address their aims and research questions. The array of data collected is comprehensive and formatted in a way that can be understood. Longfield (2018) presents a robust project advisory board, encompassing a variety of significant professionals adding external credibility to the study.

**Shaper, S. & Streatfield, D. (2012). Invisible care? The role of librarians in caring for the ‘whole pupil’ in secondary school. *Pastoral Care in Education*, 30(1), 65 – 75.**

Shaper and Streatfield (2012) carried out a retrospective survey in which 1,044 state secondary and independent school library managers (50% qualified) completed e-questionnaires regarding the nature of their role. As a coincidental finding, they obtained data on the pastoral role of school librarians regardless of this not being the primary objective of their study. This study presents a comprehensive assessment of previous pastoral role literature to complement their own study and further propose why the pastoral role is significant. Shaper and Streatfield (2012) provide qualitative accounts relating to pupil pastoral support. This study was deemed to be strong as the methodology was created to ensure high response rate from their already large sample.

**Softlink (2018). *The 2018 Softlink UK & Europe school library survey report*. Oxford, England: Softlink. Retrieved from**

**[https://www.softlinkint.com/downloads/2018\\_Softlink\\_UK\\_School\\_Library\\_Survey\\_Report.pdf](https://www.softlinkint.com/downloads/2018_Softlink_UK_School_Library_Survey_Report.pdf)**

Softlink (2018) conducted a survey in which 364 primary/preparatory (22), middle (4), secondary (233), sixth form (14), secondary & sixth form (22), and all-through (69) UK schools completed online questionnaires. These questionnaires consisted of 28 questions on staffing, school library use and support, school library services, perceived development, and the school library's collection. The methodology within this report was reinforced with qualitative open-ended data, which complements the findings of the qualitative dataset. Softlink (2018) also exhibited an investment within this field of research after initially instigating their work almost 40 years ago. In addition, they have expanded their domain of study across 60 countries, adding external credibility and international comparability.

**Teravainen, A. & Clark, C. (2017). *A literature review of current provision and evidence of impact*. London, England: National Literacy Trust. Retrieved from**

**[https://literacytrust.org.uk/documents/210/2017\\_06\\_30\\_free\\_research\\_-\\_school\\_library\\_review\\_XxR5qcv.pdf](https://literacytrust.org.uk/documents/210/2017_06_30_free_research_-_school_library_review_XxR5qcv.pdf)**

Teravainen and Clark (2017) collected the data of 604 pupils from UK schools. The objective of their research was to explore the impact of UK school libraries and what factors make a good school library. Their survey looked at whether pupils used the school library, reading test scores, reading enjoyment, reading confidence, number of books read per month, and reading motivation. This study has a good sample size and varied methodological approach. There are also clearly acknowledged points for further research and development.

## **Review Questions**

The above papers were considered in relation to three key research questions regarding the impact of school libraries on academic attainment and pupil wellbeing, as well as understanding the factors that impact pupils' use of school libraries as a resource. These questions are considered in turn below.

### **1. Do School Libraries Impact Academic Attainment?**

Based on the reviewed literature, we argue that school libraries do appear to have the potential to influence academic attainment, particularly when accompanied by qualified librarian staffing and ample provision of material.

Using the National Literacy Trust's Annual Literacy Surveys, it has been identified that school library use is associated with increased reading levels. Fundamentally, those who read at or above their expected reading level are three times more likely to disclose that they are school library users (Clark, 2010; Clark & Teravainen-Goff, 2018), as well as school library use being related to higher reading and writing skills and greater wider academic attainment (Teravainen & Clark, 2017). However, it should be noted that these studies report concurrent data, and so direction of causality is not clear.

School librarians seem to contribute to children's reading scores either directly or through facilitated reading activities. For example, Lance and Hofschire (2012) established that after controlling for socioeconomic variables, the presence of a school librarian (whether endorsed or not) was associated with advanced reading scores. Similarly, Shaper and Streatfield's (2012) study indicated that structured paired reading schemes facilitated by qualified school librarians, in which older children support a younger child, encouraged the development of reading skills. It was further found by Gildersleeves (2012) that library provision was related to increased literacy development and that a large, varied selection of good-quality material strengthened literacy development. However, it was acknowledged that it was not possible to map achievement as a whole onto library use within this pilot study.

The perceptions of children and young people who are the primary users of the school library service are also essential to consider. Pupils' views largely appear to be optimistic when it comes to their opinions of how the school library can benefit their learning. For example, Bleidt (2011) found that 97.9% of students attending South Texas middle school libraries believed that the school library was constructive in some way to their learning.

### **2. Can School Libraries Impact Pupil Wellbeing?**

The evidence from the review to do with impact of school libraries on pupil wellbeing is weak. However, the perception of some librarians was that school libraries could have an impact on wellbeing. Shaper and Streatfield (2012) discovered that just 5% of school librarians felt pastoral care to be an important aspect of their role. This was interpreted to include general support, building positive relationships, creating a safe and welcoming environment, promoting social inclusion, self-esteem and appropriate behaviour, as well as providing emotional support. Shaper and Streatfield (2012) argued that the approachability and availability of the school librarian was imperative in establishing the school library as a safe space, as well as identifying the space as a safe haven that enriched the lives of

distressed pupils rather than an area of punishment. Moreover, through offering voluntary school library assistant roles, pupils with extra needs were believed to be able to develop a sense of ownership. Despite the potential benefits of school librarians pursuing a pastoral role, there is no requirement for school librarians to take this on, and the data from this study showed that the majority of school librarians did not see this as part of their job. Likewise, Softlink (2018) established that 86% of respondents believed the principal service delivered by the school library was provision of a friendly and engaging environment, furthering the findings of Shaper and Streatfield (2012) on the librarian's contribution to pupil wellbeing through effective management and use of the school library space.

The National Literacy Trust's Annual Literacy Survey data has revealed that school library use is related to outcomes linked to wellbeing such as reading and writing confidence (Clark, 2010, Teravainen & Clark, 2017). Moreover, those who self-reported being school library users had greater average mental wellbeing scores (Clark & Teravainen-Goff, 2018), although again these data were concurrent and so it is not clear whether school library use causally impacted these data. Additionally, it was observed that pupils valued the school library environment and were more likely to use it when they perceived it as a friendly and relaxing space (Clark, 2010; Clark & Teravainen-Goff, 2018).

### **3. What Factors Influence the Use of School Libraries?**

Factors that seemed to be particularly influential when it came to school library use included geographic/socioeconomic and ethnic background, gender, provision of material, school library accessibility, budget allocated to school library resources, school library staffing and the school library space suitability.

The data obtained via the National Literacy Trust's Annual Literacy Survey identified that lack of statutory requirement for school libraries and condition of provision, determined by decreasing school library budgets, then negatively influence school library use (Teravainen & Clark, 2017). Gender was also identified to impact school library use, with more female than male users. In addition, ethnic background was a variable discovered to be influential in school library use, with more pupils of Asian backgrounds than other ethnic backgrounds making use of the school library. Furthermore, school library use also seems to decline with age (Clark, 2010; Clark & Teravainen-Goff, 2018). Pupils identified several reasons for wanting to use their school library, such as it containing interesting books, being a friendly and relaxing space, feeling that the library can help them to do better in school, and the location of computers there. Reasons for not using the school library included a lack of interesting books/material, the absence of friends using the space, not believing it will help them with school, and perceiving it as a space for younger pupils only (Clark, 2010; Clark & Teravainen-Goff, 2018).

BMG research (2019) discovered socioeconomic disparities between schools' library facilitation across the UK, as well as establishing that 87% of schools possessed a standalone school library, with the majority being in independent English schools. Accessibility throughout primary and secondary schools varies greatly: 55% of schools were accessible for six hours or fewer per day, and this increased to 64% in primary schools. However, 29% of secondary schools reported being open for more than eight hours per day. As a result,



children's ability to use the school library is likely to be restricted by school opening and closure times.

Similarly, there was variation in the quantity and variety of material, including format between primary and secondary schools, signifying that secondary schools chiefly have better provision and accessibility than primary schools. Only 54% of all the schools surveyed had designated school library staff, increasing to 96% in secondary schools, with only 51% of the staff employed to work in school libraries overall having relevant qualifications. The school library literature emphasises the value of having a full-time qualified school librarian, so there are many schools foregoing beneficial outcomes. Only 43% of schools reported having a designated school library budget in place, with 86% of these schools seeing either no change or a drop in comparison with previous budgets. The effects of a lack of adequate budgeting are apparent for the 41% of schools that reported losing their standalone library provision as a result. Combined, these variabilities will affect pupils' school library use. Moreover, Softlink (2018) determined that school type and funding body influenced full-time equivalent (FTE) school library staffing: all-through, secondary schools, and sixth form colleges have on average a significantly higher percentage of FTE staffing than primary schools.

Furthermore, independent/private schools are on average more highly staffed, whereas state schools are staffed by the lowest percentage of FTE. All-through schools and independent/private schools report having the most qualified librarians, but all schools state having at least 40% of their FTE staff made up of qualified librarians. Overall, schools report that their staffing levels decreased by 13% in 2018, and 67% feel that their school libraries are not adequately budgeted or staffed. In their open-ended responses, it was largely perceived that pupils enjoyed using their school libraries, and school library usage is relatively high regardless of school type or funding body. In addition, Gildersleeves (2012) showed that some pupils who were not school library users felt that they had no use for it, potentially suggesting they are unaware of what it was able to offer them.

## **Part 2 – Analysis of the Annual Literacy Survey Sample**

The literature review has indicated that there is still limited research that has directly examined the impact of children's use of school libraries and other school-based reading spaces on pupils' personal and academic development. There is some evidence of an association with children's reading outcomes, but less attention has been paid to other wider but related outcomes, such as writing ability, frequency of reading or writing for pleasure outside school, or confidence in their literacy abilities. There is also limited information from children on the reasons why they either do or do not use the libraries.

With this in mind, we undertook an analysis of the 2019 National Literacy Trust Annual Literacy Survey data to consider whether children and young people who use school library facilities show better outcomes in relation to concurrent measures of reading ability, frequency of reading outside school, reading confidence, reading frequency, reading attitudes and how diverse their reading materials were. We also considered writing confidence and writing for pleasure in our analyses. In line with the literature reviewed, we anticipated that children and young people who did use their school libraries would have higher scores on all the outcome variables relative to those children and young people who did not.

### **Participants**

711 children and young people in Key Stages 2 and 3 were selected from the larger sample who completed the 2019 Annual Literacy Survey, based on whether they answered the question 'Do you use your school library?' with a yes or a no, and whether a standardised reading score was available for that pupil. The sample comprised 363 girls and 301 boys, with a further 30 children reporting neither / prefer not to say. 115 children and young people in the sample received free school meals. There were 551 children and young people who reported that they did use their school library, compared with 143 who did not. The remaining children and young people did not have access to a school library. These children were not included in this analysis so the report is focused on a final sample of 694 children and young people.

### **Questionnaire**

The Annual Literacy Survey comprises a series of questions that explore children's and young people's thoughts and behaviours in relation to reading and writing, and also includes questions on their use of school libraries. From these questions, the following variables were considered for analysis: reading enjoyment, writing enjoyment, reading confidence, writing confidence, frequency of reading for pleasure, frequency of writing for pleasure, number of different types of reading material read by the children, number of different types of writing produced by the children and young people, attitudes to reading, attitudes to writing, and standardised reading scores. The children and young people were also asked to explain why they either used or did not use their school library, and open-ended responses were recorded.

## Results

The data were analysed by comparing the answers of children and young people who self-reported that they did use the school library with those who said that they did not. Separate analyses were then conducted for children and young people who were in receipt of free school meals (FSM), and for boys and girls separately<sup>1</sup>.

School library users showed significantly better scores than non-library users on the following outcome measures: reading enjoyment<sup>2</sup>, reading frequency<sup>3</sup>, reading confidence<sup>4</sup>, writing enjoyment<sup>5</sup>, writing frequency<sup>6</sup>, reading score<sup>7</sup>, diversity of material being read<sup>8</sup>, and diversity of writing<sup>9</sup>. Non-library users showed significantly more positive reading attitudes<sup>10</sup> and writing attitudes<sup>11</sup>. Library users were also significantly younger than non-library users<sup>12</sup> (see Table 1).

*Table 1. Mean scores (with standard deviations) by group for variables that indicated a statistically significant difference between groups. Note that for variables marked \* a higher score indicates a poorer outcome.*

Outcomes	Library Users	Not Library Users
Reading enjoyment*	2.11 (.83)	2.69 (.80)
Reading frequency*	2.23 (1.45),	3.45 (2.06)
Reading confidence	7.26 (1.65)	6.78 (2.01)
Writing enjoyment*	2.56 (.87)	2.80 (.94)
Writing frequency*	3.39 (1.85)	3.97 (2.04)
Reading score	104.65 (15.69)	100.91 (12.72)
Diversity of material read	4.49 (2.23)	3.51 (2.19)
Diversity of writing	2.62 (2.10)	1.90 (2.47)
Reading attitudes*	12.18 (3.59)	14.98 (4.01)
Writing attitudes*	14.69 (3.12)	14.69 (3.75)

The analysis was repeated for children and young people who received free school meals (FSM). This analysis revealed the following outcomes for those who were school library users: more reading enjoyment<sup>13</sup>, higher reading frequency<sup>14</sup>, greater writing frequency<sup>15</sup>,

<sup>1</sup> All analyses reported are non-parametric (Mann-Whitney U tests) because of the ordinal nature of the data under analysis.

<sup>2</sup> U=53791.5, N=692 p<.0005

<sup>3</sup> U=53010.5, N=694, p<.0005

<sup>4</sup> U=33878.0, N=692, p=.013

<sup>5</sup> U=45247.5, N=691, p=.002

<sup>6</sup> U=45378.0, N=692, p=.002

<sup>7</sup> U=51584, N=694, p=.017

<sup>8</sup> U=29525.0, N=694, p<.0005

<sup>9</sup> U = 30914.0, N=694, p<.0005

<sup>10</sup> U=51199.0, N=672, p<.0005

<sup>11</sup> U= 46697.0, N=672, p<.0005

<sup>12</sup> U=51584.0, N=694, p<.0005

<sup>13</sup> U=1750.5, N=112, p.<005

<sup>14</sup> U=1702.5, N=113, p=.001

<sup>15</sup> U=1564.0, N=113, p=.021

more diverse material being read<sup>16</sup>, and more diversity in the children and young people's writing<sup>17</sup> (see Table 2). As before, we also note that attitudes to both reading and writing were significantly higher for FSM pupils who did not use the school library<sup>18</sup>.

*Table 2. Mean scores (with standard deviations) by group based on children with **FSM status** only for variables that indicated a statistically significant difference. Note that for variables marked \* a higher score indicates a poorer outcome*

Outcomes	Library Users	Not Library Users
Reading enjoyment*	2.18 (.90)	2.90 (.67)
Reading frequency*	2.31 (.90)	3.79 (2.14)
Writing frequency*	3.39 (1.88)	2.79 (.86)
Diversity of material read	4.31 (2.0)	3.24 (2.32)
Diversity of writing	2.80 (1.90)	1.79 (2.0)
Reading attitudes	12.89 (4.09)	15.34 (3.68)
Writing attitudes	13.14 (3.07)	15.86 (3.20)

Next, we considered only responses from boys, and this reveals a consistent effect of library use on reading outcomes. The boys who were school library users showed significantly better scores for: reading enjoyment<sup>19</sup>, reading frequency<sup>20</sup>, reading confidence<sup>21</sup>, diversity of material read<sup>22</sup>, and reading score<sup>23</sup> (see Table 3). Once again, attitudes to both reading and writing were significantly higher for boys who did not use the school library<sup>24</sup>.

*Table 3. Mean scores (with standard deviations) by group based on **boys only** for variables that indicated a statistically significant difference. Note that for variables marked \* a higher score indicates a poorer outcome*

Outcomes	Library Users	Not Library Users
Reading enjoyment*	2.20 (.79)	2.95 (.64)
Reading frequency*	2.36 (1.48)	3.90 (2.1)
Reading confidence	7.35 (1.71)	6.54 (2.14)
Diversity of material read	4.26 (2.38)	2.98 (2.06)
Reading score	105.65 (16.08)	98.68 (12.32)
Reading attitudes	12.20 (3.65)	15.80 (4.36)
Writing attitudes	13.49 (3.31)	14.74 (4.21)

<sup>16</sup> U=834.0, N=113, p=.011

<sup>17</sup> U=812.5, N=113, p=.007

<sup>18</sup> U = 1597.5, N=109, p=.003 and U=1693.0, N=109, p<.0005, respectively

<sup>19</sup> U=10613.0, N=290, p<.0005

<sup>20</sup> U=9906.0, N=292, p<.0005

<sup>21</sup> U=5534.5, N=291, p=.007

<sup>22</sup> U=4859.5, N=292, p<.0005

<sup>23</sup> U=8636.0, N=292, p=.002

<sup>24</sup> U = 9586.0, N=280, p<.0005, and U = 8111.5, N=281, p=.012, respectively

When we repeated the analysis for girls, we found library use was associated with better scores with respect to: reading enjoyment<sup>25</sup>, reading frequency<sup>26</sup>, writing enjoyment<sup>27</sup>, writing frequency<sup>28</sup>, diversity of material read<sup>29</sup>, and diversity of writing<sup>30</sup> (see Table 4). As we saw with the boys, attitudes to both reading and writing were significantly higher for girls who did not use the school library<sup>31</sup>.

*Table 4. Mean scores (with standard deviations) by group based on **girls only** for variables that indicated a statistically significant difference. Note that for variables marked \* a higher score indicates a poorer outcome*

Outcomes	Library Users	Not Library Users
Reading enjoyment*	2.05 (.85)	2.49 (.85)
Reading frequency*	2.10 (1.40)	3.16 (1.92)
Writing enjoyment *	2.38 (.85)	2.74 (.85)
Writing frequency*	3.10 (1.68)	3.86 (1.97)
Diversity of material read	4.73 (2.17)	4.10 (2.14)
Diversity of writing	3.13 (2.11)	2.03 (1.80)
Reading attitudes	12.12 (3.48)	14.09 (3.44)
Writing attitudes	12.92 (2.92)	14.49 (3.26)

### Why pupils used their school library

The children and young people were also asked to indicate the reasons why they used their school library, and these are summarised in Figure 1. Of the pupils surveyed, the most common reason was that they used their school library to complete their homework (49.8%). Additionally, 46.4% used the library because it had books that they found interesting. A high percentage listed the friendly and comfortable environment of their school library as a reason for its use, and others were motivated to use it because they felt that it would help them to do better at school. The behaviour of friends was also a key influence.

<sup>25</sup> U=126688.5, N=357, p<.0005

<sup>26</sup> U=13474.0, N=357, p<.0005

<sup>27</sup> U=12206.0, N=357, p=.002

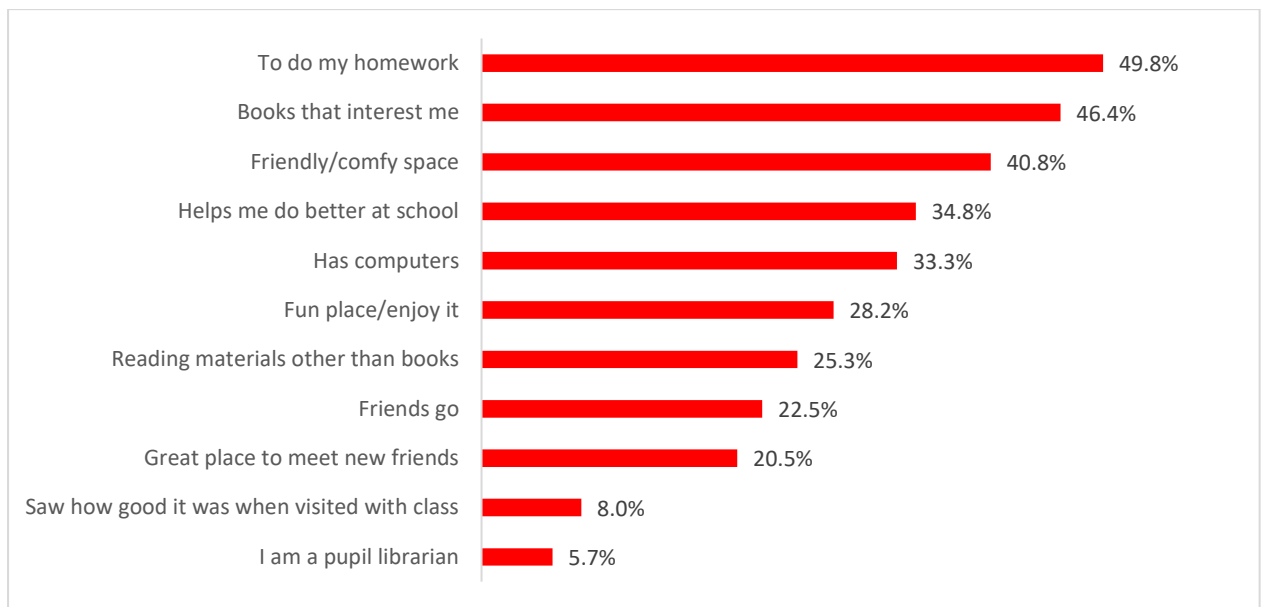
<sup>28</sup> U=12279.5, N=356, p=.001

<sup>29</sup> U=8223.0, N=357, p=.025

<sup>30</sup> U=6877.0, N=357, p<.0005

<sup>31</sup> U = 12682.5, N=349, p<.0005, and U = 12347.0, N=349, p<.0005, respectively

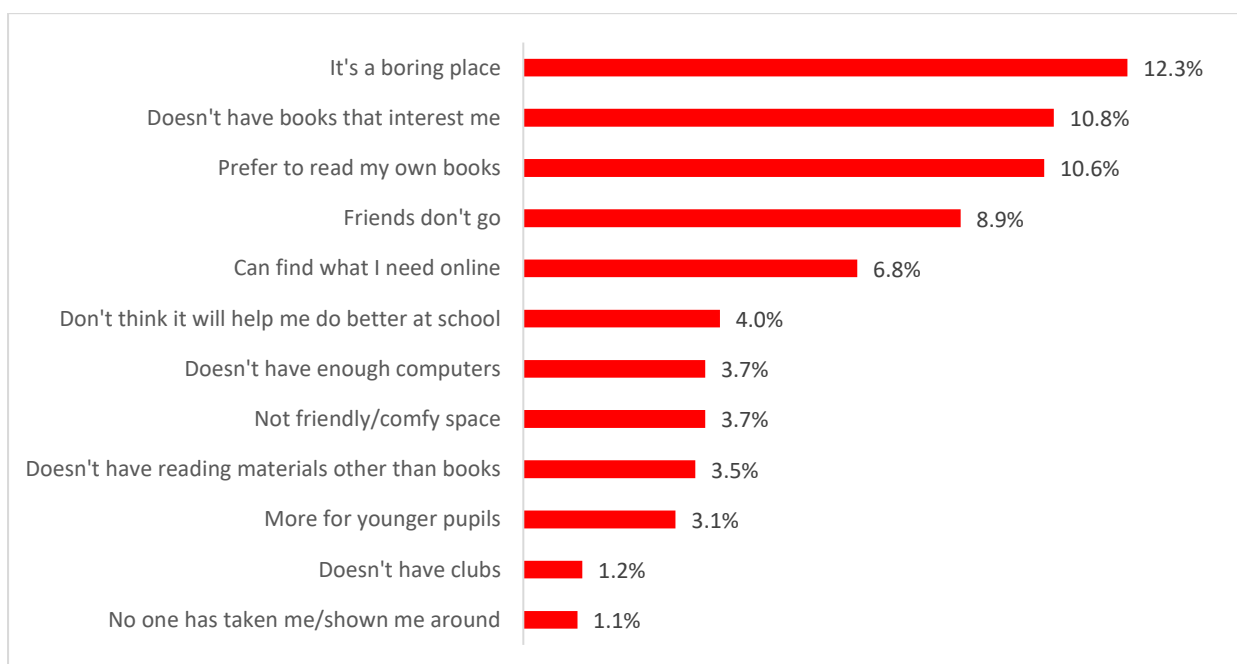
*Figure 1: Ranked summary of the reasons pupils use their school library*



### **Why pupils did not use their school library**

The most commonly reported reason for not using the school library was due to it being perceived as a boring place. The quality and relevance of book stock relative to books that the children and young people owned at home was also important, and appears to help us to understand the reason why there were higher reading attitude scores in non-library users. The influence of digital sources is also clear from these data, with accessibility of information online and the absence of digital resources being listed as reasons for not using the library. A full list of reasons is presented in Figure 2.

*Figure 2: Ranked summary of the reasons pupils do not use their school library*



The data obtained from this survey further suggest that provision is a significant influence on pupils' use of their school library or reading spaces. One of the most commonly reported reasons for using this space was having a collection of books that was of interest to the pupil. Conversely, a barrier to school library use occurred where there was a lack of interesting books and, consequently, the pupils prefer to read their own material. Environment also seems to be important since the school library being a friendly, comfortable space was rated highly as a reason for its use, and the space being considered 'boring' was the top reason for its lack of use. Moreover, in the qualitative open-ended responses, environment was highlighted by 27 pupils as a reason for either using or not using their school library or reading space. Additionally, elements related to wellbeing were emphasised in the open-ended responses by seven pupils.

## **General Discussion**

Children and young people in this sample who used their school library seemed to have more positive reading and writing behaviours, higher academic attainment and were more confident readers. They also read and write a greater diversity of texts than their non-library-using peers. These findings are consistent with indications from past literature and previous National Literacy Trust Annual Literacy Survey results.

However, it was the children and young people who did not use their school library who had more positive attitudes to reading and writing on average, and this is noteworthy since it does not seem to agree with what would be expected based on previous literature. We speculate that this finding may best be understood in relation to library stock quality, as children and young people who own their own books and are engaged with reading outside school may see school library spaces as redundant to their needs, but we would still expect these children and young people to show a positive attitude to reading and writing.

It may also be related to the finding that school libraries were perceived to be a place for younger readers; non-users of libraries are not necessarily children and young people disengaged from reading, but perhaps children and young people who have outgrown the resources of the school library. There are potential benefits to be had from involving these children and young people in school library spaces, in terms of changing the perception of the library, and supporting the development of younger readers through peer support.

For children and young people who received free school meals, those who used the school library showed increased enjoyment and, importantly, increased frequency of both reading and writing for pleasure outside school; library use was linked to diversity of texts both read and written by this group. It is logical to suggest that school libraries enrich the literacy experience of these children and young people by offering them greater access to texts, which may stimulate extracurricular literacy activities. More work to understand this association is needed, plus the experience of children from low-income homes in relation to spaces for extracurricular literacy activity.

The benefits for boys and girls showed different profiles. For boys, library use was linked to reading benefits in most areas, but not for writing activities. Not only were the boys' enjoyment and confidence around reading higher if they used the library, but they also read more frequently outside school, read more diverse material and had better reading scores.

Boys may need more targeted library-based writing activities if we are to see equivalent benefits for their writing behaviours. For the girls, we found that library use was particularly associated with the enjoyment of both reading and writing, and, consistent with this, frequency of reading and writing for pleasure outside school. Overall, these data indicate that both male and female library users may be stimulated to find texts that they enjoy, which in turn could explain the increased levels of extracurricular literacy activity. More work to explore learners' experiences of this and their development over time is needed to understand this relationship.

Although promising, it should be noted that it is not possible from the available data to determine whether it is library use per se that is leading to increased reading and writing outcomes, or whether it is the children who are already engaging in these positive behaviours who are simply using the school library as a result. Future National Literacy Trust surveys should explore linking data from each year to better understand development from one year to the next in the same children.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the reviewed literature and data analysis in this report, we recommended that:

- There must be collaboration between pupils and school library staff to build collections of material that the children and young people (especially older pupils) want to read and are age appropriate and contemporary.
- The school library space should be accessible for disabled pupils and staff as standard.
- There should be a layout that allows for a variety of furniture options, with a designated quiet area available for pupils who are studying, and a social space for pupils who wish to use the library with friends or to do noisier activities.
- There needs to be sufficient availability of computers and network-accessible technology.
- School leaders need to be aware of the value of qualified school librarians, appropriate school library staffing and the importance of allocating adequate budget for school library provision, especially for schools where there is a high proportion of children on free school meals or in receipt of the pupil premium.
- Collaboration between librarians and teaching staff is recommended to develop creative, insightful academic programs and activities, which can be enhanced by the contribution of qualified librarians, especially given the requirement for schools to address reading for pleasure by OFSTED.
- It is vital that findings within school library research are being conveyed effectively to the appropriate policy makers and governance with the authority to effect change. It is important to draw particular attention to the geographic and socioeconomic disproportion throughout educational provision and its subsequent outcomes.
- Longitudinal and experimental research that assesses the impact of children's and young people's engagement with school libraries, school-library-based programmes, and qualified library staff is still required.



There is a profound need for high-quality school library research that encompasses a vast range of spheres impacting pupil outcomes to construct a more conclusive understanding of the influence of school libraries.

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