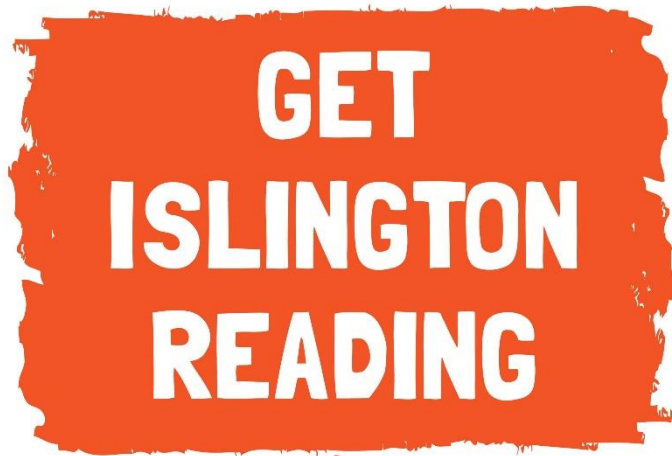




Get Islington Reading

Final evaluation report 2024

National Literacy Trust & The Reading Agency



Change your story



Change your story





“If we’re going to make a difference to people’s lives through reading in Islington, it had to be a collaboration. [...] The library service wasn’t going to do it on its own. Schools weren’t going to do it on their own. If we can kind of take ourselves out of our daily situation and just spend some time together, we can actually achieve a lot.” – Librarian

“We always knew the importance of events [focused on supporting reading for pleasure] but without [Get Islington Reading], we wouldn’t have been able to share our vision with the rest of the school or build a legacy for the future.” – Teacher

“I hope people can read at school. Because obviously we read a lot in school. And... just look at all these books. We read at a library, a place with, again, lots of books. I love to read there...” – Pupil

Introduction

Get Islington Reading was a three-year campaign to develop a community of happy, confident young readers aged 9 to 14 across the London Borough of Islington. From 2020–23, Get Islington Reading was funded by the Charity of Sir Richard Whittington through The Mercers’ Company and delivered by The National Literacy Trust and The Reading Agency in collaboration with Islington Council Library Service and Islington School Improvement Service.

Building on the work of the council’s borough-wide strategy to promote reading, Islington Reads, the partner organisations worked together to deliver an evidence-based programme of activities to build and develop reading engagement and enjoyment, with The Reading Agency focusing on public libraries and community groups and the National Literacy Trust working with a range of local schools. This was all done in tandem with other local cultural partners, charting a course of collective effort and shared vision: to grow and embed the culture of reading for pleasure in Islington, both inside and outside the classroom.

While national and local reading levels were already in decline when Get Islington Reading was launched, the national picture has since grown even worse.

Get Islington Reading focused primarily on children aged 9 to 14 (year groups 5 to 8), offering support during the transition from primary to secondary education, a time when reading for enjoyment levels drop significantly. For example, in 2023, while



56.2% of pupils in years 3 to 6 of primary school enjoyed reading, only 40.4% of their peers in years 7 to 9 in secondary school did so¹. By focusing on children during this challenging transition period, we have the greatest opportunity to create lifelong readers, preventing declining levels in reading for pleasure and the educational impact that follows.

Why Islington

Islington was selected for this pilot project as a borough with low literacy levels and high socio-economic disadvantage. When Get Islington Reading was launched in 2020, over half (55%) of Islington wards ranked in the most deprived deciles, and 100% of wards identified as being most at risk of low literacy². Upon leaving primary school, a fifth (22%) of children in Islington were unable to read well³. However, Islington Council also had a strong commitment to supporting children and young people's reading, in part through a series of Reading Strategies (2012-15 and 2016-19) recognising the importance of reading for pleasure, as well as through the collaborative Library Services and Education delivery of a Year of Reading campaign in 2018.

Prior to the project, however, Islington lacked a borough-wide approach of integrated education and community resources to address their local reading and literacy challenges. The transition years were identified as a gap in their provision, where efforts to provide access to reading among this age group had not translated into engagement. A roundtable event in May 2019 also acknowledged the challenge in creating an acceptable cultural offer for secondary-school-age students and the need for a better focus on the transition from primary to secondary in order to ensure cultural enrichment is taken forward at this crucial stage of development.

The key aims of the programme were to build a reading community by inspiring young people and their families to develop and sustain a love of reading and connecting schools and public libraries to share best practice.

¹ https://nlt.cdn.ngo/media/documents/Reading_trends_2023.pdf

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-curriculum-assessments-key-stage-2-2018-provisional>

This evaluation report outlines the activity undertaken as part of the three-year programme and the extent to which Get Islington Reading achieved its core outcomes.

Key findings

1. Get Islington Reading was successful in achieving its key outcomes. For example:
 - **More children and young people enjoy reading**
 - Increased reading enjoyment was also supported during the transition to secondary school.
 - **More children and young people engage in positive reading behaviours**
 - For example, children read more frequently and use the school and public library more often
 - **More children and young people think positively about reading**
 - **More children and young people feel confident about reading**
 - **More children read for empowerment** (i.e. children show increased self-confidence, mental wellbeing, resilience and social connections)
 - For example, more children and young people were reading or sharing stories with friends and family, and more reported that reading makes them feel better
2. The positive pupil findings are underpinned by changes for teachers, schools and the community.
 - For example, the cross-borough activity and collaboration ensured children felt connected to a wider network of role models outside of schools and across the local community
3. An integrated cross-authority way of working (linking schools, libraries and cultural organisations) facilitated powerful knowledge-sharing between partners.
4. The funding that underpinned the project often acted as a catalyst for schools and community organisations to fulfil plans, activate projects and kick-start long-term Reading for Pleasure programmes.

Programme activity

Across three years of Get Islington Reading activity, we worked with over 10,000 local members of the community, including:

- **19** schools
- **10** libraries (all branches in Islington)
- **60** librarians
- **47** teachers
- **33** authors and illustrators
- **10** local arts and culture professionals
- **6,670** pupils in KS2 and KS3
- **3,556** members of the community reached through summer holiday activity

Get Islington Reading hosted a range of events and activities to support a borough-wide community of readers, including:

- **33** steering group meetings
- **15** teacher CPD sessions
- **62** author events
- **198,000+** books distributed
- **250** class visits to libraries
- **8** pupil focus groups for research/co-production and evaluation purposes

The key activities delivered as part of the programme include:

- **Reviewing existing school-based provision with teacher audit**

The National Literacy Trust devised an evidence-based teacher-led audit tool for schools to assess and Red /Amber/ Green (RAG) rate their current reading for pleasure activities and resources. This informed where to focus the funding on a school-by-school basis to ensure specific needs in each setting were being answered. This process was repeated at the start of each academic year so that teachers could reflect on the achievements and progress, as well as identify future areas of improvement.

- **Providing consultation in partnership with the School Improvement Service to identify key areas to improve and activities that would target those areas** (e.g., engaging boys, more exciting events, revitalising reading spaces in schools)

The National Literacy Trust and the Islington School Improvement team held regular meetings with the reading or English leads and/or school librarians in each school to discuss progress and specific challenges, and to provide expertise and examples of best practice.

- **Financial investment in schools**

Each school was allocated a budget of £1,200 per year, with close and careful consultation on how to utilise this investment, including suggested booklists and signposting to evidence-led activities.

- **Book gifting and distribution**

Each school received a bespoke collection of diverse titles that included sets of The Reading Agency's Reading Well for children and Reading Well for teens collections to support mental wellbeing, and the National Literacy Trust's Books for Big Change to support the transition to secondary school. Schools who subscribed to the Islington Reading Road Map through the Islington Education Library Service were supported with additional sets of books to embed the resource and broaden its reach.

- **Teacher CPD support and building a local network**

Each year, the Get Islington Reading partner organisations hosted five teacher twilights on topics that varied from diversifying library collections to creative writing and supporting the transition. These CPD sessions included presentations from the National Literacy Trust, The Reading Agency, the Library Service, and the Islington School Improvement team, as well as guest speakers from local cultural partners, publishers and academics. They also allowed teachers to share best practice across settings and form closer links with their local feeder schools.

- **The Anchors and Sails transition project**

The National Literacy Trust worked with author Sita Brahmachari to develop a strand of activity to support children moving from primary school to

secondary school. Each school was provided with a set of carefully curated books on the theme of big change, as well as workshops with Sita and teaching resources around her book *When Secrets Set Sail*. Sita delivered sessions with each Year 6 class, and followed up with assemblies in each of the secondary schools on their ‘transition day’ when the rising Year 6s come to visit their new secondary school. Pupils learned about how reading can be a touchstone during turbulent times. They also took part in self-reflective activities such as letter-writing to their future selves. The National Literacy Trust also developed summer holiday story trails in partnership with Islington Libraries to encourage families to discover clues about local history and explore the library during the break. These activities created a pathway of connected moments with familiar themes and motifs for pupils moving between settings, supporting reading habits and wellbeing during the transition period.

- **An integrated programme with local libraries**

Across the three years of programming, events and activities were hosted across Islington libraries. They were aimed at inspiring more children and their families to engage with reading and the local library offer.

For example, the very successful Earth Day event in April 2023, delivered as a joint project, featured a panel of authors and activists and empowered young people to become activists through reading and writing. There were also a number of virtual author events open to all schools held across the borough, with authors such as Cath Howe and Tom McLaughlin.

Library-based activities supported by The Reading Agency also included creative reading and writing workshops and celebration events for the School of Rhyme and Andrea Levy legacy project. Other workshops were held as part of Holocaust Memorial Day, Empathy Day, and Windrush Day, alongside school visits to library-based workshops for Children’s Mental Health Week, British Science Week and Refugee Week.

- **Meet at the library wallets**

The Reading Agency gifted over 600 cardholder wallets to Year 7 students. The wallets invited them to use the library, promoting the space as somewhere safe to go after school, complete homework and offer children the opportunity to read a variety of free books and access other resources.

- **Summer holiday activity**

From 2021 onwards, The Reading Agency and Islington Libraries delivered a new integrated local authority model of the Summer Reading Challenge. The new model is based on strategic partnerships between Islington Libraries and education partners across the local authority, supporting more children and their families living with disadvantage to access the local library service, engage with the challenge, and read during the summer holidays. The Summer Reading Challenge forms a core strand of reading activity for children before the transition to secondary school, which is strengthened and amplified by this cross-authority approach.

The National Literacy Trust also trialled a series of Story Trails for families during the summer holidays, encouraging them to explore their local community, solve clues, and visit the library to discover local history and stories.

- **Creative reading and writing initiatives**

Across the 2023 spring and summer terms, and in collaboration with The Reading Agency and Islington Libraries, All Change Arts delivered a creative project with young women in Year 8 to celebrate the legacy of Andrea Levy. Weekly sessions led by professional artists Rakaya Fetuga (writer) and Chanté Timothy (illustrator) supported young women to create, perform and publish their own creative writing and poetry, drawing inspiration from Andrea's writing and life story. As the project culmination, All Change Arts published a zine entitled *Highbury Girl* featuring original poetry and creative writing by the young women. Each participating young woman received their own copy of the *Highbury Girl* zine, and Highbury Fields school received copies to put in the school library and distribute among the school community. The zine has been published and deposited with the British Library and ALDL. To launch the *Highbury Girl* zine and celebrate the end of the project, an event was held in the school library where young women performed their original poems to an audience of family, friends and invited guests.

In addition, Year 4 and Year 5 pupils at Laycock Primary School took part in the School of Rhyme, a collaboration between Islington Libraries, The Reading Agency and poet Paul Lyalls. Paul Lyalls held a series of workshops in school and at Central Library in Islington that aimed to inspire pupils to engage positively with reading and writing by reading poetry aloud together and creating their own poetry. Pupils then performed their poetry to peers, teachers and families at a celebration event, and the *School of Rhyme*

anthology was published as a book and online. Copies of the poetry anthology are available in all 10 Islington library branches.

- **The Reading Adventure Game**

Islington schoolchildren were the first in the country to try out a new personalised online game designed to encourage and maintain reading for pleasure during the transition from primary to secondary school. Called The Reading Adventure, the game has been developed by The Reading Agency in partnership with Islington Council's Libraries Service and young people. In the game, players control an avatar (designed by Year 6 students) inhabiting a virtual reading room. After selecting an avatar and subject, children can choose any text that relates to their specific challenge. These can be long or short texts, audiobooks, graphic novels, comics or online information. Every child should be able to play The Reading Adventure, regardless of their reading interest or ability.

Evaluation of the programme

To evaluate the benefits of the programme and gather feedback from children, young people, schools, libraries and community partners, both the National Literacy Trust and The Reading Agency collected data from various sources annually. This report presents the findings from the following sources of data:

- Pupil survey data on reading enjoyment, behaviours, attitudes and confidence from 117 pupils whose responses we were able to match between 2020 and 2021, and 228 pupils whose responses matched between 2021 and 2022.
- Pupil reading-enjoyment data for those in Year 7 in the three secondary schools that took part in the survey every year (2020 n = 307; 2021 n = 155; 2022 n = 228).
- Teacher reflection surveys 2022 (n = 10) and 2023 (n = 8) providing their perceptions of the impact of the programme on their own practice, their pupils and the school overall.
- Insight from four pupil focus groups conducted for evaluation purposes in the winter of 2023.

- Insight shared by project partners through interviews conducted in 2023.
- Pupil data from surveys distributed to pupils before the first School of Rhyme workshop, and after the final workshop whose responses we were able to match in November 2022 and January 2023 (n = 32).
- Teacher reflection surveys circulated at the end of the School of Rhyme workshops (n = 2) alongside insight from poet Paul Lyalls.
- Family feedback collected at the final celebration event for the School of Rhyme (n = 23).
- Pupil data from surveys distributed to pupils before the first Andrea Levy workshop, and after the final workshop whose responses All Change Arts were able to match (n = 19).
- Insights from national surveys distributed to families taking part in the Summer Reading Challenge in 2021 (n = 1,966), 2022 (n = 1,300) and 2023 (n = 1,106).
- Insights collected from monitoring and evaluation data from the Reading Adventure platform (n = 959).
- Insights from pupil feedback to Earth Day pledge-card surveys and a case study on the panel event.

Changes in children and young people's reading behaviours, enjoyment, attitudes and confidence

Get Islington Reading aimed to deliver activity that helped support more children to read for pleasure, especially across the transition years.

An initial pupil survey conducted by the National Literacy Trust as part of Get Islington Reading in 2020 showed that more than half (56%) of the children and young people in Islington reported they already enjoyed reading very much or quite a lot. To better understand the nuances of impact with the cohort, annual analyses focused on exploring changes in reading enjoyment for those children and young people who didn't initially enjoy reading.

The data shows that the outcomes were positive for those children and young people who previously didn't enjoy reading. Exploring the changes between 2020 and 2021, and between 2021 and 2022, we see that almost 1 in 3 (31%) of those who didn't enjoy reading had started to do so a year later⁴.

Similarly, the initial pupil survey conducted in 2020 showed that just over a third (37%) of children in Islington were reading daily in their free time. 1 in 4 (24%) of those who didn't initially read daily indicated reading daily a year later⁵.

Evaluations of specific projects that make up Get Islington Reading also support an increase in reading enjoyment in children in Islington over the course of the programme. For example, the creative writing and reading initiatives led by The Reading Agency in partnership with Islington Libraries were found to support these same reading outcomes through providing in-depth opportunities for children to work together with peers and local artists.

At the project strand level, the 959 pupils who signed up for The Reading Adventure Game and 4,364 children participating in The Reading Agency's seasonal Reading Challenges in Islington across 2021, 2022 and 2023 (some of whom may have participated in multiple years), in partnership with public libraries, demonstrated positive reading behaviours by reading different types of books and maintaining an interest in reading across multiple weeks, as well as supporting positive attitudes around reading enjoyment. Evaluation findings from these programmes indicate an increase in the number of pupils taking part in the game who report reading frequently; and, of children participating in the Summer Reading Challenge, reading more over the summer holidays (76%), reading different types of books (71%), and enjoying reading more (66%)⁶.

For the School of Rhyme, reading enjoyment increased before and after taking part by 12 percentage points across the cohort, with 72% saying they 'like' or 'love' reading at the start compared with 84% by the end. Teacher feedback also highlighted an increased enthusiasm and motivation to read and write. For the Andrea Levy project,

⁴ Based on analysis of two different cohorts of children and young people: 34 who didn't enjoy reading in 2020 and 97 who didn't enjoy reading in 2021.

⁵ Based on analysis of two different cohorts of children and young people: 76 who didn't read daily in 2020 and 129 who didn't read daily in 2021.

⁶ N = 4,372.



the number of students who said they read for enjoyment increased from 20% at the beginning to 46% at the end.

The National Literacy Trust also asked teachers to reflect on changes they've noticed in the school as part of the programme. It was evident from their comments – both in 2022 and 2023 – that their pupils enjoyed reading more, thought about reading more positively, and were more engaged with reading overall:

“Pupils sharing reading amongst themselves.”

“There is more talk about books around the school. Particular books have waiting lists as students are hearing about them from friends and siblings...”

“They are more accepting of peer recommendations and more willing to share their reading likes and dislikes with other students.”

“A wider selection of titles being read. More non-fiction, graphic novels and ‘trending’ books on TikTok – often very popular and the library runs out of copies. This is relatively new!”

“Children are proud to be readers and most in KS2 have identified the genre and/or topic of books that they enjoy reading.”

Attitudes towards reading

The evaluation of Get Islington Reading also aimed to understand the extent to which a three-year borough-wide campaign such as this could impact children's attitudes towards reading over time.

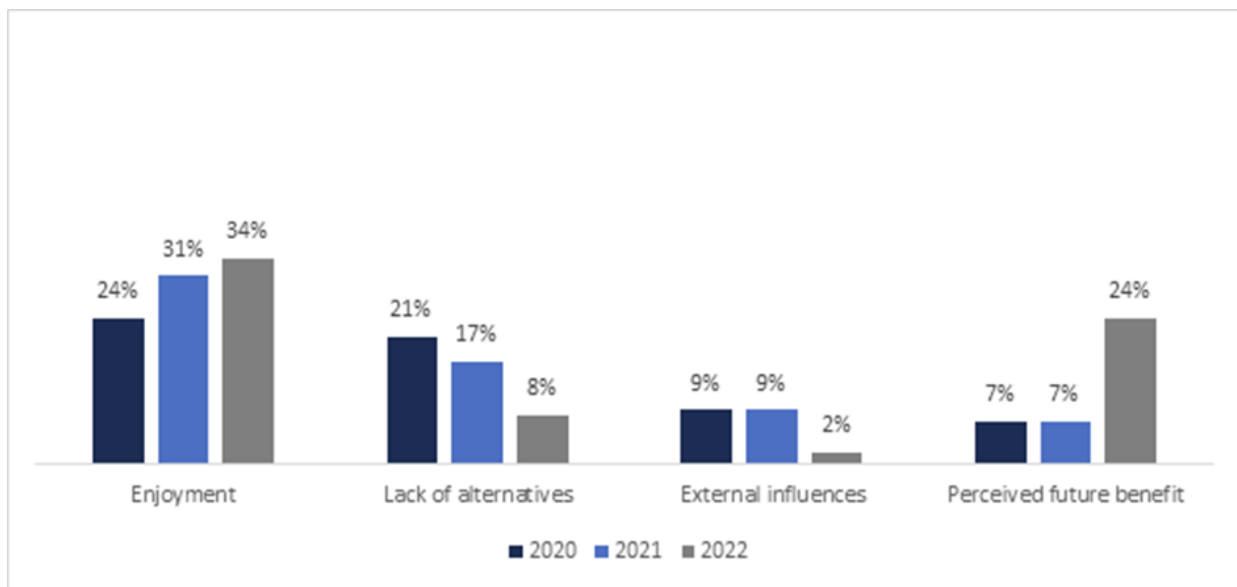
Using the National Literacy Trust's Annual Pupil Survey, children and young people were asked to describe the reasons they read in their own words. Exploring these reasons thematically⁷ indicates positive changes in their attitudes towards reading

⁷ To do this, each comment was labelled. This resulted in seven overall categories. Four of these relate to attitudes and motivation to reading: reading for enjoyment, reading because of lack of alternatives, reading for external reasons, and reading for perceived future benefit. Two categories relate to situation-specific motives: reading because of interest in certain books and reading as a routine, such as with specific people. These are excluded from further analyses as they do not relate to the general attitudes and motivations the programme aimed to improve. The final category, reading to regulate emotions, will be discussed in a later section on reading for empowerment.

over time. Of the comments shared by the children and young people in 2020, 1 in 4 (24%) referred to reading for enjoyment purposes, which increased to 1 in 3 (34%) comments in 2022 (see Figure 1). Similarly, the percentage of comments that cited the benefits of reading for the future (e.g., getting a better job or increasing their vocabulary) more than tripled between 2020 and 2022 (increasing from 7% to 24%).

At the same time, more than 1 in 5 (21%) of the reasons for reading related to a lack of alternative leisure activities. In 2022, 1 in 12 (8%) cited this reason for reading⁸. Similarly, the percentage of comments providing external reasons for reading (such as influence of parents) decreased from 9% to 2%.

Figure 1: Children and young people’s reasons for reading in 2020, 2021 and 2022



The National Literacy Trust and The Reading Agency further explored these reasons, as well as other questions around reading engagement, through a series of focus groups conducted with pupils in 2023. These discussions also provided examples of positive reading attitudes, changes in reading enjoyment and being exposed to new genres and formats. While we cannot directly relate all the changes to the programme alone, it is encouraging to see many children and young people

⁸ It is important to note that the data collected in 2020 might reflect children and young people’s experience of the Covid-19 pandemic, when many would have picked books at home when lockdowns prevented them from engaging in their regular activities.

discovering the love of reading in recent years, sometimes with a clear indication of the school supporting their reading:

“Before I kind of like when I was really young, I didn’t read much because I couldn’t read. I um, before I start reading graphic novels, I really really really didn’t like reading.”

“So when I was younger, I felt how with now but when I was like, kind of eight nine, eight and nine, like seven, eight and nine. I used to hate reading. I don’t know why. But I completely regret that phase now. I love reading. And it’s like one of the best things now.”

“Yeah, it’s just like Miss being over there. Ever since like, she’s been with me for two years now. She’s been with me for two years now in year four, and now in year five. And it’s like I didn’t like reading before. Like, she’s helped me so much... She’s helped me with the reading roadmap. She’s helped me find books like *The Hobbit* that I really enjoy.”

“And I wasn’t really interested in reading like a few years ago. I was like, oh, it’s boring. But now I realised that it can be all different types of books. And some of them might be my like, liking.”

“Because when I was younger, it reading always seemed like just so boring just like words you know on some paper. And now I look at it now. It’s really, really amazing. Because I could just read one of those words on paper, and start thinking of a one time story in my head.”

“I definitely kind of like reading more. And I think is obviously because I’ve gotten older but I think like, as I’ve started to join this school I’m reading a lot more than my old school, because I used to go to different school, I think in that school where I wasn’t really reading and I was not really into reading I’m still into it now, but wasn’t really that nice in it. So I that just some here and there. But then now, as I joined this school there’s a lot I think it can help there’s quite a lot of books here, lots to read. So yeah, I’ve gotten more into it now as well.”

Reading confidence

Get Islington Reading also aimed to increase children’s reading confidence. Data from the National Literacy Trust’s annual Get Islington Reading pupil survey indicates

an improvement in children’s self-perception of their own reading skills. Exploring changes for children shows that more than 2 in 5 (45%) of those who initially didn’t see themselves as good readers (defined as rating their own skill as 6 or below on the scale from 1 to 10 where 10 is very good) had started to do so a year later⁹.

At the project strand level, The Reading Agency’s evaluation findings show that 69% of children taking part in the Summer Reading Challenge reported feeling more confident about their reading, reinforcing results from an independent evaluation revealing statistically significant increases in reading confidence for children participating in the challenge. Similarly, by the end of the Andrea Levy project, fewer participants said they found it hard to finish books, and all of the young women taking part rated their reading as 7 or above on a scale of 1 to 10 (where 10 is excellent and 1 is not good at all).

Both creative reading and writing initiatives culminated in celebration events where the children’s work was published in a zine (Andrea Levy) and anthology (*School of Rhyme*), as well as with live performances of their poetry to peers, teachers and families. Feedback from children, parents and teachers shows that these efforts supported children to see the value in their work and nurtured a sense of achievement and confidence in their reading and writing abilities:

“Mum, today’s the day I become a published author!”

“Several children are now regularly asking to read their work to the class.”

Reading confidence also featured in some teachers’ reflections on the benefits of Get Islington Reading, as captured by the National Literacy Trust:

“There is definitely more of a buzz around reading – our school feels like a reading community now with staff and students sharing recommendations and talking more confidently about their reading. Being able to buy the books that students want to read (and the ones we think they’ll want to read) rather than make excuses about money and school budgets has been transformational.”

“Children are much more eager to complete their classwork in anticipation of being able to read their books. Children have developed more confidence with their

⁹ Based on analysis of two different cohorts of children and young people: 22 who didn’t feel confident in 2020 and 41 who didn’t feel confident in 2021.

reading and writing and are more keen to read about to the class, both class texts and extracts of their own work.”

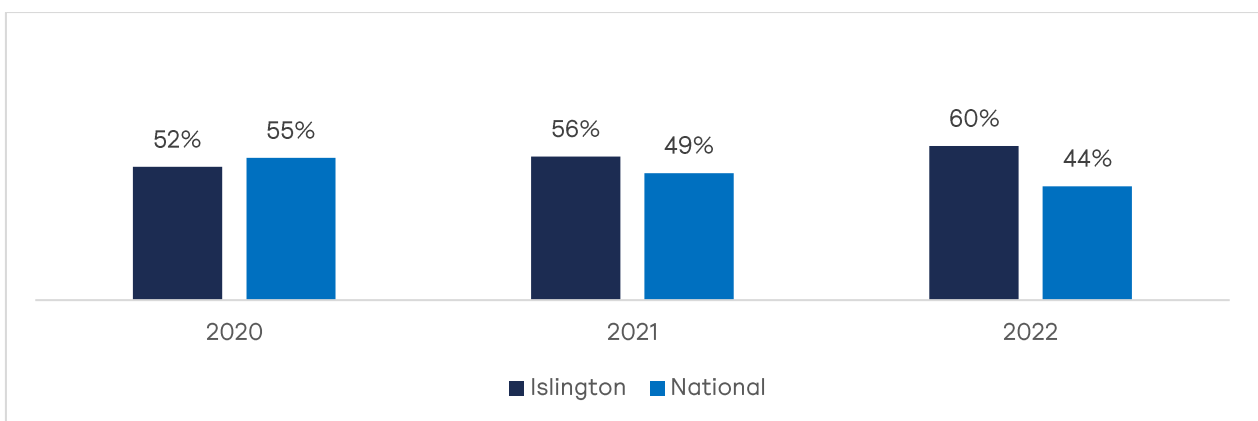
“Students have been more confident in choosing their books appropriate to their needs etc.”

Focus on supporting reading for pleasure during transition to secondary school

As one of the overall aims of the programme was to counteract the drop in reading engagement in the transitional year between primary and secondary school, the pupil survey conducted by the National Literacy Trust also explored the changes in reading enjoyment for young people in Year 7 in the three secondary schools that took part in the survey every year (2020 n = 307; 2021 n = 155; 2022 n = 228).

The findings show that there was a steady increase in reading enjoyment in the first year of secondary school in Islington, indicating that the programme has been successful in supporting reading for pleasure during the transition. It is notable that the increase in reading enjoyment we see in Islington over time is in contrast to what we see nationally for young people in Year 7 as reading enjoyment is on a downward trajectory (55% in 2021 vs. 49% in 2022 vs. 44% in 2023¹⁰).

Figure 2: Percentage of young people in Year 7 who enjoyed reading in 2020, 2021 and 2022



¹⁰ Based on unpublished data from the National Literacy Trust’s Annual Literacy Survey

Case study: Sita Brahmachari and Books for Big Change

All but one of the 19 teachers who provided their reflections on the programme in summer 2022 and summer 2023 felt that the author visit from Sita Brahmachari and Books for Big Change supported pupils in their transition to secondary school. In their comments, many told us how the activities provided by the programme have been helpful:

“When Sita visited us, some of the Y6 students recognised her from visits to their primary schools – it was lovely to see them greet her – a familiar face in an unfamiliar space. I think this continuity will help the transition in September. It is also very special for them to feel like they have their own famous author who knows and cares about them.”

“The guided reading material and author visits have helped ease new Year 7s into starting secondary school.”

“Our Y6s loved the transition visit and we have now added Sita’s book to our curriculum map for the summer term for Y6 going forward so that the themes can be explored more fully for upcoming Y6 classes.”

“It has been good to have resources in school that reflect the children’s upcoming transition. The more grown-up books are great to have and help them prepare to take the next step. The visit from Sita helped us to carve out some time for reflection in all the madness of end of year activities. The children are enjoying the book and we will continue to teach it at the end of Y6 after the end of the project. Hopefully we will be able to arrange a visit from Sita again even though the project is finished!”

Changes in children and young people’s library use

Through the Annual Pupil Survey conducted by the National Literacy Trust, we also see positive changes in library use over time. More than 3 in 5 (65%) of those who

didn't initially use the school library had started to do so a year later¹¹. Similarly, more than 1 in 4 (28%) of those who didn't use their local library in 2021 (n = 93) indicated they were using the local library in 2022¹².

Teachers also highlighted the increased library use in the reflection surveys collected by the National Literacy Trust:

“As we have grown our library resources to include magazines (NatGeo Kids), graphic novels, mangas, etc. and improved the diversity of our books, pupils are excited by visits to the library and many children are regularly coming in a break-times and becoming independent readers.”

“More interest in non-fiction books and paired reading. They like to recommend more than before. An interest in working in the library. Like to see themselves or their friends in books.”

“More enthusiastic about reading aloud, reading from whole class texts, reading their own work, keen to visit the library and to complete books so that they can start a new one.”

“We have loved having conversations with students about their books when they visit the library. It has been a huge success – sometimes it has been one-in-one-out as it has been so busy.”

We also see wider family engagement with the library space through community-based reading activity. The Reading Agency's evaluation findings from children participating in the Summer Reading Challenge who responded to our Family Survey show that 68% reported using the library more as a family by taking part in the challenge¹³.

These wider evaluation findings show that important factors driving reading enjoyment and motivation for participants are how the challenge and library space encourage reading discussions and empower children to choose their own reading materials, aspects children noted they didn't often experience in educational spaces. Teachers involved in the School of Rhyme creative reading and writing

¹¹ Based on analysis of two different cohorts of children and young people: 44 who didn't use school library in 2020 and 65 who didn't use school library in 2021.

¹² We were unable to compare local library use between 2020 and 2021 due to the Covid-19 lockdowns.

¹³ N = 4,372.

project further highlighted the ways in which the poetry workshops had nurtured a real interest in visiting the public library:

“The children are also excellent at reminding me about our class library slot – they love to go and sit in the library, choose new books, take part in some quiet reading, and enjoy me reading a book to them.”

Case study: Andrea Levy Legacy Project with Rakaya Fetuga and Chanté Timothy

The evaluation of the Andrea Levy creative reading and writing project, a partnership between Highbury Fields School, All Change, Islington Council Library Service, and The Reading Agency, also showed a positive change in public library use and school library use.

The number of students using their school library less often than once a term was 25% at the beginning of the project. Over the span of the project, this improved and, by the end of the project, 41% said they used the school library once or twice a month.

“The different writing activities that we have done, and editing, especially the writing exercises ‘somewhere new’ and ‘recipe for adults’. I liked being in a different setting and talking with different people in my year. Doing work with Chanté and Rakaya on illustration and writing was the best bit.”

Most young women involved in the project also reported using their local public library with their family to do homework and borrow books.

“I enjoyed being in the library and spending time with my friends. I have improved at public speaking; at first I was scared to share and now I can’t stop!”

Words the young women used to describe their local library include:



Case study: Earth Day panel event

Following a discussion about the importance of reading and writing in supporting young people to voice their concerns about the climate, to celebrate Earth Day 2023 Get Islington Reading invited Year 7 and 8 pupils from four local schools to come together with local libraries and arts organisations to explore creativity, action and the environment. Climate change is a significant and growing concern for all children, and many experience climate anxiety, which can manifest itself as an overwhelming sense of fear, helplessness and stress.

Research shows that 81% of children and young people want to do more to look after the environment, and children and young people who read non-fiction are more likely to want to take care of the environment compared with those who don't read non-fiction (68% vs 49%). Through using the appeal of environmentalism and interest-based pathways, Get Islington Reading aimed to make reading and writing accessible for those who may not always enjoy it at school.

The event featured a panel of artists, writers and activists, and discussed themes of climate anxiety, activism through art, and how young people can use reading and writing as tools to drive positive change.

The event began with a panel discussion, with partner organisations and community arts organisations leading. Panellists included performing artist Love Ssega and writers Anouchka Grose and Sita Brahmachari. They discussed how they practise climate action on a local level as well as what inspires them and how their relationships with the environment have changed over time. During the event, Love Ssega delighted students by performing his song about air pollution in South London: Our Earth (Fight for Air). He encouraged them to use poetry, music and song-writing to give voice to the issues they cared about. The panel also discussed the role that reading and writing can play in engaging with topics like climate change. Ssega reflected:

“Reading helps us to use the imagination. With a film, the director decides where the camera goes but, when you’re reading, you decide. It’s your own story that you interpret in your own way.”

The panel talked about the role that creativity can play in community-building. Sita, who works with refugee families and new arrivals to the UK, reflected on how reading can be a force for good in forging intergenerational conversations:

“One of the first things that I do for families who are newly arrived to the UK and Islington is to take them to the library. A book in your hand is such a powerful force and reading for me is a way to navigate through the world and a way to do so while holding hands across generations.”

During the workshop, the students explored their ‘circle of control’, ‘circle of influence’ and ‘circle of concern’. They shared reflections and engaged in thoughtful and thought-provoking conversations about what and who they could influence. Students completed ‘pledge’ cards and even found creative ways to express their pledges, with some writing poems that laid out their promises.

Changes in reading for empowerment

One of the key aims of the programme was to support reading for empowerment, that is reading to improve self-confidence and as an activity to comfort, reduce stress, help to relax, feel connected to other people and as a means of spending time together, as well as providing overall support for wellbeing. Research shows that children who enjoy reading are also three times as likely to have higher levels of wellbeing than children who are the least engaged with reading¹⁴.

The creative reading and writing initiatives provide opportunities for the children to connect with their peers and families. For example, on the Andrea Levy project, the number of students reading or sharing stories with friends and families increased from most students selecting 'once a month/rarely' or 'never' at the start to the majority selecting 'once a week or more' at the end. More pupils said they like talking about books with other people and expressing their opinions about the books they have read.

“I enjoyed writing poems and being able to write down my thoughts, and expanding on my thoughts and explaining them. I liked being able to spend time with my friends and learn with them about things to do with writing. I’ve developed being able to write more and better improved poems and different types of things like poems, novels, plays. I have improved reading and writing skills by practising and doing more genres.”

The creative reading and writing initiatives also provided children with the opportunities to develop wider social and emotional skills through reading¹⁵. For the School of Rhyme, 77% of children said they were more likely to try again if they have a setback, while 64% said they were more likely to try new or unfamiliar things, both of which are indicators of increased resilience. For the Andrea Levy project, the evaluation showed an improvement in participants’ self-confidence, with more willing to share their work with others by the end of the project. There were also increases in the number feeling optimistic about the future, feeling relaxed, feeling listened to by those around them, and feeling that what they said and did will make a difference to their own life.

¹⁴ https://nlt.cdn.ngo/media/documents/Mental_wellbeing_reading_and_writing_2017-18_-_FINAL2_qTxyxvg.pdf

¹⁵ <https://literacytrust.org.uk/research-services/research-reports/mental-wellbeing-reading-and-writing/>

“Writing poems makes me happy, illustrating has given me a new hobby. I’ve improved my arts skills, and listening and contributing ideas.”

“I did things I don’t normally do, I don’t really like to write poems or reading them but the [Andrea Levy] project was a chance to do them and enjoy it more. I think I’ll carry on writing poems in the future. I enjoyed learning new ways to write poems because it was an opportunity to make something new that I don’t usually speak or write about. I got more confident in writing and creative poems because I never used to like them.”

“I enjoyed being in the library and spending time with my friends [during the Andrea Levy project]. I have improved at public speaking, at first I was scared to share and now I can’t stop!”

Feedback from attendees at community and library events, aligned with national awareness days, memorial days and celebrations, shows that these community-based activities provided a platform for children to develop social connections through reading, widen their knowledge, explore new interests and improve self-confidence. The Reading Adventure Game also developed children’s awareness of where reading can take place, expanding reading environments and knowledge, as well as supporting some pupils to feel more relaxed while reading.

“It was fun to read a different book to what we normally read in school.”

“Great learnt a lot of stuff.”

“It was fun because I got to read some news that I’ve never saw before.”

“Calming and relaxing.”

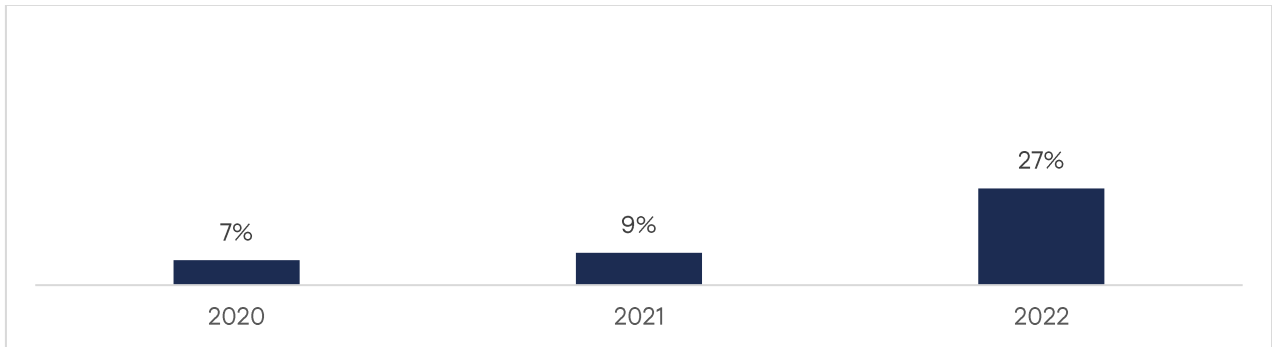
“I enjoy reading a book about something I wouldn’t usually pick.”

“Interesting to research my favourite sport and learn more about a local team.”

The thematic analysis of children and young people’s reasons for reading also showed positive changes in reading for empowerment. As Figure 3 shows, the percentage of comments that referenced reasons for reading including help for feeling better, improving mental health, clearing one’s mind and helping with negative feelings, such as anger, increased from only 7% in 2020 and 9% in 2021 to 27% in 2022. This suggests that throughout the Get Islington Reading programme,

many students have discovered reading as a tool to help them manage their mental wellbeing.

Figure 3: The percentage of children and young people who read for emotional regulation



Reading as an activity supporting wellbeing also emerged from many pupils in the focus group discussions conducted in early 2023. For example, pupils described reading as something that offers an escape from everyday life and something that has a calming effect:

“When I read it kind of immerses me to a different world.”

“I picked like the empty room and stones [to describe what reading means to me] because I feel like the stones have like a symbolism of being calm, and reading is really calming and tranquil and it’s very nice and it makes me feel like I’m alone. That’s why this reminds me of being alone while reading.”

“It’s like I’m there, watching that person live their life and reading their book like I’m reading their diary. It’s like really calming and I don’t feel alone in what I do and what I like.”

“... when I read it makes me feel calm, but sometimes, like if I read like a comic book or another type of book, it makes me feel like really excited, like a murder mystery book or something like that.”

“Yeah, because when I read, it’s like, you know how people say that when you read a book like Dr. Seuss’s, quote, the more books you read, the more places you go, the more things you learn. Like for me reading a book is sort of like the world. It calms me, it relaxes me.”

“I chose the one with the bouncing rocks [to describe reading], because it makes because I read it makes me feel at peace for the most part. Like if I get to a bit that literally makes my heart beat really fast then I’m just like all the rocks.”

In the reflection surveys by the National Literacy Trust, some teachers also provided insight on the benefits of the programme for reading for empowerment:

“It has been great to hear about all of the things happening in Islington libraries and resources such as the children’s manga list have been great. It has been useful to learn about campaigns such as Reading Well and the availability of themed booklists.”

“Access to more activities and resources has kept interest alive around literacy. The access to current and relevant books has helped promote interest in certain areas such as wellness and reading as a tool for mental health.”

Changes in supporting reading in schools

The changes observed for children are underpinned by positive changes in the reading for pleasure provision in schools overall.

The teacher reflections captured by the National Literacy Trust indicate that many of them have benefited in terms of their own practice of supporting reading for pleasure. Many have reflected on their improved knowledge of how to support students’ reading:

“My knowledge of what our students are reading has improved and for me communicating with our leadership team how to promote reading for enjoyment that is not curriculum focused.”

“The research-based sessions such as the one on the benefits of reading graphic novels were really interesting and covered aspects of reading that I had not thought about before. It has been useful to see what has been happening in primary schools and other secondary schools in terms of knowledge of prior reading experience and sharing ideas and resources.”

“I have a lot more knowledge of children’s authors, which has allowed me to recommend books to children.”

“I have benefited from the CPD sessions where I have, in particular, learned more about Barrington Stoke and Graphic Novels. The research session on pedagogies of poverty was very powerful and I want to take that back to school to look at our curriculum provision more generally.”

“I have developed my knowledge of RfP [reading for pleasure] pedagogy, which I have shared with staff at my school to support the roll-out of tutor time group reading with non-English specialist teachers. I have developed my knowledge and understanding of the value to be found in reading comics. We are considering adding an element of comic-reading to our Y7 Heroes unit of study. Next year we will use elements of the primary school writing project to provide our students with the opportunity to write for a real audience and to have their creativity celebrated in print.”

Some teachers also provided examples of how they have already changed their practice to better support reading for pleasure as a result of the programme:

“I have used the resources for parents to help me plan out-of-school activities. Learned some ways to support transition into secondary.”

“Choosing texts and making texts available that will get the children engaged and excited.”

“I try to ensure that each lesson (not just literacy based lessons) are accompanied by a rich reading text.”

One of the most interesting themes emerging from teachers’ quotes on the benefits of the programme relates to creating connections with others and receiving inspiration in order to improve their provision and practice around reading for pleasure:

“Connecting with other literacy agencies and other schools and librarians has meant access to more knowledge and support for our school library. It has been a good source of inspiration.”

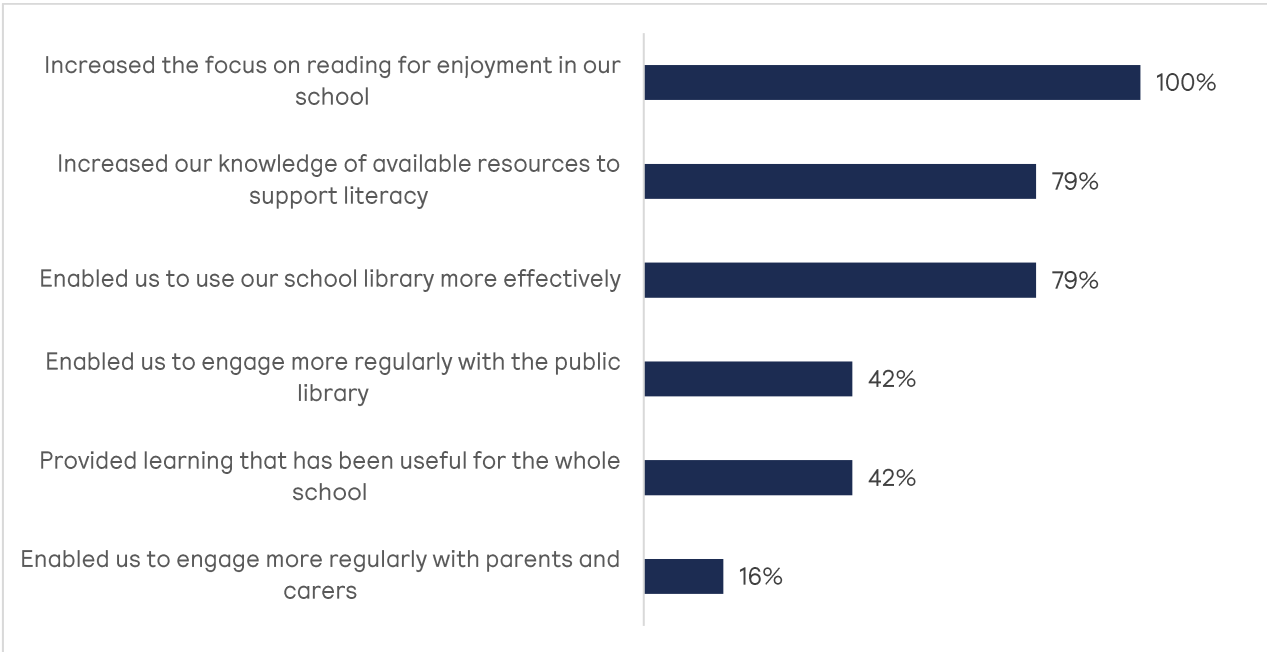
“The initiative has ensured reading is a priority and we have the resources to make it engaging for our students. It has really supported me as we do not have a librarian so the support has been invaluable (recommendations, displays and sharing ideas with other schools).”

“It has been invaluable to be part of a community of professionals who recognise the importance of reading for pleasure. So many school meetings are data focused and it has been great to take time to share ideas about enriching the children’s lives through literature.”

“Through GIR we have been able to push reading to the forefront. It has given those of us who are passionate about the importance of reading in schools the autonomy to make decisions that we know will benefit the school community (but that aren’t always easy to get budget-holders on board with as the impact is not easily measured). It has been so valuable to build connections with other schools and to share experiences and ideas with the GIR community. GIR sessions were always full of practical advice and interesting ideas and information – thank you.”

Data collected from teachers in the summer of 2022 and 2023 as part of the National Literacy Trust’s teacher reflection survey also showed that all teachers across the two years (n = 19) reported that the programme had increased the focus on reading for enjoyment in their school (see Figure 4). 4 in 5 (79%; n = 15) indicated that their knowledge of available resources to support literacy had increased and that the programme had enabled them to use the school library more effectively.

Figure 4: Teachers’ perceptions of changes in their school as a result of taking part in Get Islington Reading



Teachers provided a wealth of examples of how promoting reading for pleasure in the schools has improved. These include improving the library and increasing diversity of reading materials in the school, as well as improving confidence of the staff to help promote reading for pleasure:

“We have also made sure that our students see a diverse range of authors and characters on our shelves – we want them to know that books are for everyone!”

“We were able to stock a mini-library in an unused classroom in Y1 (2) of GIR. This demonstrated the enthusiasm our students had for reading the right kinds of books and the commitment of key staff members to supporting and promoting RfP. I believe this was key in the decision from SLT to provide a proper library space at the heart of the school and to invest in a full-time school librarian. These changes have been fundamental to raising the profile of reading across the school.”

“Pupils love the new diverse books. They want to borrow them. They pay attention to the displays and therefore are interested in reading books they would not have considered. The special school who share the site with us are timetabled. Adults more familiar with wider range of books and authors. Teachers and TA more confident with leading library sessions and helping pupils choose.”

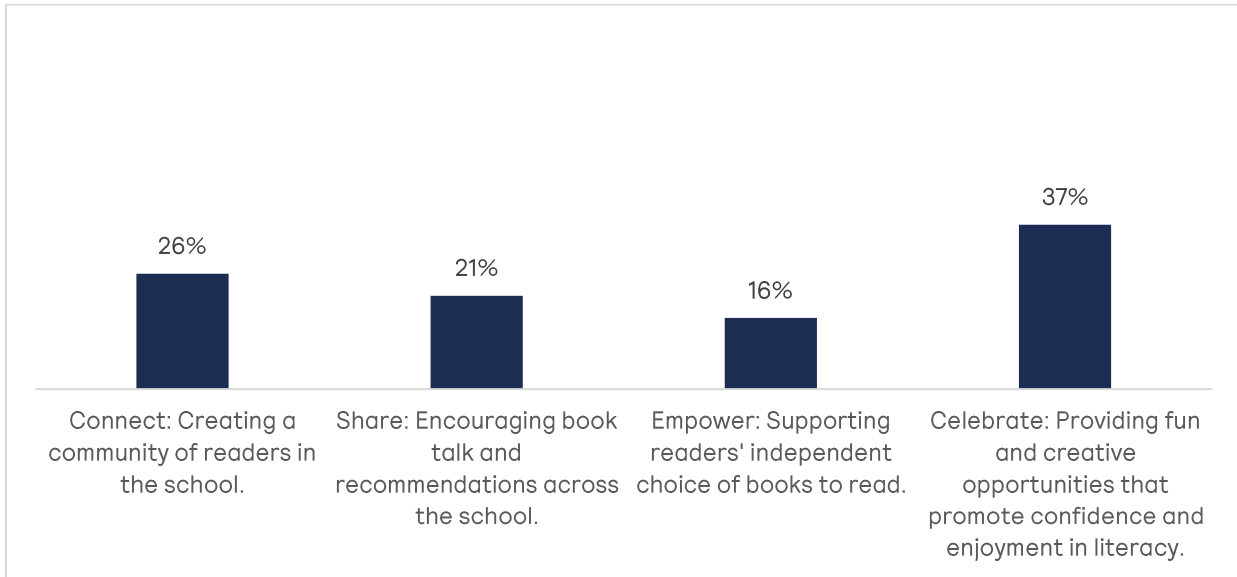
“I think the massive improvement in our provision of engaging, diverse books has inspired pupils. The CPD around graphic novels was especially beneficial because it opened up reading more challenging texts to some more reluctant readers. Lots of children now see themselves as readers where they didn’t before.”

“Starting conversations about reading and finding out what students want to read so that we could provide desirable books; encouraging conversations between students to recommend books to one another; Library Blo; student-voice-led registration reading.”

“We now have a whole school culture of regularly visiting the school library. We need to expand this out to regularly visiting the local library.”

Reflections from teachers also suggest that schools had successfully implemented celebrating reading for pleasure within their provision (see Figure 5). This aspect of the project encouraged the participating schools to provide fun and creative opportunities that would promote confidence and enjoyment in literacy.

Figure 5: Which theme of improving reading for pleasure do teachers think they have most successfully achieved as a result of the programme activities?



The changes in reading for pleasure provision in the schools has also been reflected in a report conducted by Ofsted, suggesting that the changes in the school are not merely cosmetic but instead represent lasting cultural shifts for the schools involved. One of the participating schools received an Ofsted Inspection towards the end of the project in June 2023:

“It has enabled us to make reading exciting for our students. Reading was identified as a strength of our school in our recent Ofsted inspection (June 2023): ‘Leaders have created a positive reading culture. They quickly identify pupils who struggle with reading and give them the extra help that they need to become confident and fluent readers. Leaders also foster pupils’ love of reading. Pupils read regularly and have frequent opportunities to read in lessons.’”

Exploring the Ofsted reports for the other schools who took part, we find several examples of reading for pleasure at the forefront of the work since the programme started:

“Leaders also prioritise a love for reading. They choose class texts which reflect pupils’ diversity. Pupils read for pleasure often, both at school and at home.”

“Older pupils enjoy reading regularly in school, including in the welcoming library space. Pupils readily discuss what they like about their favourite authors. They are also very enthusiastic about the Reading Roadmap, which sets them a goal of

reading 40 books over the year. In classrooms, teachers have developed attractive spaces for reading. They suggest books with the aim of broadening pupils' experiences of authors and genres."

"Leaders promote a love of reading through various strategies, including library lessons and reading in form time."

"Leaders are ambitious that every pupil develops a love of reading."

Case study by Emma Zipfel, Arts and Media School Islington

"In 2019, Arts and Media School Islington (ASMI) was without a school librarian (and therefore also without a functioning library). I am an English teacher and had responsibility for RfP in a school with low levels of literacy and engagement with reading. I had read a book, released that year, called *Oh My Gods* by Alexandra Sheppard who, it turns out, lives not far from our school. I wrote to Alexandra, describing our school and explaining how important I feel it is for students to see that authors can come from the same places that they do and can look like them. I also explained that I had no budget to pay for a visit. Alex agreed to come in and talk to our Year 8 students for free and her visit was a great success!

I always maintained that when some money for an author visit became available, I would invite Alex back in for a paid visit. Then COVID happened...

As we all settled into post-COVID life, AMSI was invited to join the final two years of the three-year GIR project, which came with funding to encourage RfP so it was an absolute dream! We spent much of our first year's budget on building a mini-library, basically from scratch, carefully curated to our students' needs.

Aside from the funding, another incredible aspect of the GIR programme was collaboration with the primary schools and support with transition projects. We took up the offer of running the transition project with Sita Brahmachari and began to think of how we could embed the idea that we are a school that truly values RfP in our keen new Year 7 cohort. We decided to use some of our funding

to purchase a copy of a recently published book to gift to our new students when they visited us on transition day.

I had taken my own children to listen to a presentation and reading by Jasmine Richards at the Black British Book Festival. Her new book, *The Unmorrow Curse*, stood out to me as the perfect transition book. Jasmine was also an engaging and inspirational presenter who had grown up in the local area. We thought it would be nice for students to read Jasmine's book over the summer and then meet her in September. So we now had a plan for both Alex and Jasmine to visit and, with GIR funding, we could afford to book them. But we felt the opportunity to meet a writer should not only be for Years 7 and 8, so why not build a week-long event with a visit for each year group?

We planned our first Lit Fest over the summer term. It would take most of our budget for the final year of GIR but we now had a well-stocked, well-used mini-library and we felt it was important to bring literature to life through a diverse range of author visits, something that had been sorely lacking. Yomi Sode and Breis completed our line-up and the event was a huge success. We even had the capacity to invite some Y6 students from local primaries to join our Y7 talk.

At the end of Lit Fest week, those of us who had organised and run the programme were exhausted (but very happy). Our headteacher was pleased with how it had gone and told us she would like it to happen again in 2023. We knew that the GIR programme, and therefore the funding that made Lit Fest 2022 possible, would have finished but the head had seen the value in the event and the buzz it created among the students and said she would fund the next one.

Since Lit Fest 2022, the headteacher has invested in a proper school library (with a budget for books) and a full-time school librarian. GIR gave us the opportunity to show that there was a demand for books/a library among our students and the positive impact author events can have on the engagement and aspirations of our young people. We are now at the end of Lit Fest week 2023 and have had Raymond Antrobus, Michael Mann and Arji Manuelpillai give amazing talks and workshops. Today, we are closing our event with our transition author, Zohra Nabi. On the penultimate day of Lit Fest, the head

informed us that, in addition to Lit Fest, she would now like an author event in the library each term so the impact continues to grow.

GIR funding gave us the opportunity to bring Lit Fest to life and, in doing so, to share our vision with the whole school community. It has enabled us to demonstrate the value of such events and secured future investment from the headteacher so that this can be the beginning of an ongoing legacy for AMSI and GIR.

We are already building our 2024 Lit Fest wish-list and are forever grateful for being invited to join a project that has been life-changing for our school community.”

Changes in supporting reading across the community

A central aspect, and one of the key successes, of Get Islington Reading was its basis in strong cross-authority partnerships between education providers, the library service and other community organisations, as well as support from the National Literacy Trust and The Reading Agency. In line with other research showing the positive impact of cross-authority partnership models of delivery for initiatives supporting children’s reading, our Get Islington Reading evaluation findings indicate that the positive outcomes for children involved in the programme were strengthened by positive changes in the reading for pleasure provision across the local authority.

Reflections gathered from partners from Islington Library Service and the School Improvement Service indicate the ways in which strategic relationships across Islington ensured that children’s reading environments were expanded into the local community, across schools and their libraries, public libraries and the home environment.

Partners highlighted the value of working collaboratively on Get Islington Reading, particularly where they were able to share expertise and knowledge between the education and library sectors.



“I think the way that we’ve all worked together, the partnership work across the National Literacy Trust, The Reading Agency, the School Improvement Service, and the Library service has been really good and everyone’s bought into that. Everyone’s committed and done their bit. [...] There’s a really good sharing of expertise.” Islington School Improvement Team, Islington Council

“I really agree with what you’re saying as well about access to expertise. Because amongst the Get Islington Reading group, there is so much knowledge and expertise. And I think that we’ve worked really well as a group so that if somebody comes to you and asks you something particular and you don’t know, you feel confident to refer them to somebody else who can help with that query.” Islington School Improvement Team, Islington Council

A representative from Islington Library Service highlighted the value in receiving expert support from the National Literacy Trust and The Reading Agency, as well as the partnership between the library service and the School Improvement Service in terms of opening up capacity, providing advocacy and enabling relationships between the library and education sectors:

**“The experience and the knowledge from the National Literacy Trust and The Reading Agency together, one looking more at the library side, one looking at the school side enabled us to unpack part of Islington Reads that we all wanted to unpack, but we just didn’t have the time financially [...] having Get Islington Reading come in gave us all that to explore for three years. It opened up that capacity a little bit and gave the space to delve into things and try things as well. To use the opportunity to try out some things which we have done and to learn from that.”
Islington Library Service**

“There’s no way we could have done any anything without the library service and without the school improvement team. Each linchpin of this project has been vital to its success.” Islington Library Service

Representatives from the School Improvement Team discussed the key successes of Get Islington Reading, highlighting changes to the physical library space within schools themselves (as explored in the previous section). They also noted how the initiative led to whole-school approaches to engaging children in reading, resulting in an expansion of children’s reading environments outside the classroom setting. Beyond that, the author visits and other visits from local authority figures – including the mayor, an Islington Councillor and other key ambassadors for reading in Islington like the Arsenal football team – led to greater advocacy for the project itself and

also ensured children felt connected to a wider network of role models across the local community.

“I think they’ve really, really benefited from that real connection to the authors. I also think the access to opportunities [...] there’s been loads and loads of opportunities that people have taken up. You know, having this transition stuff, all the online things, being connected to a part of a bigger group. I think that that sense of being part of the network has been really important.”

“In terms of the schools just raising that spotlight on reading for pleasure, the audit I think was a really useful tool in allowing those schools to look at particular areas and think about it more strategically, whereas I think perhaps schools in the past, when we think about reading for pleasure, have seen it as a single tick box kind of, you know, yes, we have book corners, type of thing and I think it really helps to frame their understanding of what we actually mean and how it can be developed as an ethos within the school.”

“They had a visit from the mayor. And I think that raising status through the programme for those schools has been a positive change.”

While members of the School Improvement Team noted that engaging parents and caregivers had proved difficult, our evaluation findings gathered from Islington families suggest that longer-term projects, such as the School of Rhyme, had a positive impact on children and garnered huge interest and support from their families. Library service representatives noted the positive outcomes when this worked:

“In terms of the wider community, I think there are some projects which you can see it’s rippled out to parents and teachers and when that rippling starts, it does go out to the wider community.”

“I’d probably pick the local school of rhyme [as a favourite moment]. ... coming out to see those children and their confidence and the enjoyment and the parents enjoying it and we enjoyed it was kind of like ... this is what it’s all about.”

“It showed me why I’ve done it for over 40 years. You have to see the impact and I think that’s always been very special and probably what drives all of us are those moments where you know whatever you’ve been doing, you can actually see what the impact is on children or parents or adults.”

While partners noted that school and library closures had impacted the initial delivery of the programme, their feedback also highlighted the key successes of the final year of the programme. Many partners selected School of Rhyme as their favourite project across the three years because it was underpinned by a strong long-term partnership between the library service and school.

“We obviously planned it all before the pandemic and then people’s focuses and priorities shifted quite quickly. So I guess that was a challenge. I think this final year feels more like what it might have looked like.”

Staff from schools and libraries saw the value in building connections, and that these connections allowed for longer-term collaborative working between education and library partners. It was clear to the library service that future development of the programme might build new connections and engage more schools in the catchment area.

“Explore further extension of the reading-inspired writing projects to engage more schools and allow them to build long-lasting relationships with the library.”

Feedback also underlined the significant role of funding in supporting children’s reading across the borough, and in building a cross-organisational approach to delivery. Partners from the School Improvement Team remarked on the key success of the programme in not only providing important funding to schools and libraries, but also that the provision of expert support and advice on how best to use this funding was instrumental in delivering a programme of activity supporting children’s reading across the local authority.

“I think it’s really interesting that when schools have got that money, there have been occasions where we’ve had to go please spend the money [...] The support in how to spend is really helpful and the tool that you gave around some suggestions about how they might spend it and how it links to the audit was really helpful.”

“The audit, the fact that it said: this is what good practice looks like in each of these areas, has been really good. A lot of staff talk about resourcing in terms of stock, just being able to get good new stock, and that’s about funding, but it’s not just about the money, it’s about support for spending the money. So it’s different from just saying you know here’s £2,000 a year to support reading, it’s that guided support there.”

This was also borne out in feedback received from representatives of the library service when asked about recommendations for other local authorities or organisations thinking about supporting transition-age reading.

“I would actually say you can’t do it on your own. You need the National Literacy Trust and The Reading Agency to be that support mechanism between local schools and local libraries. Because we don’t have the resources and I doubt whether they would have the resources to do it without and I know that comes down to funding.”

Conclusions

Key learnings from the programme

What we learned that could be useful for future place-based projects with this methodology:

- We saw significant impact through longer-term projects (e.g. creative reading and writing and in transition projects) that were hosted in local libraries and schools. These created longer-standing, stronger, better-integrated relationships between local authority organisations and sectors working towards the same goal.
- The in-depth consultative way of working with a relatively small number of schools supported bespoke approaches, facilitating a richness of contextually meaningful activity that spoke to each setting’s challenges and strengths.
- Close consultation meant that development of the programme was iterative on a termly basis. This responsiveness was a key driver of the success of the programme.
- The project re-confirmed the need for teachers or other education professionals and librarians to be given long lead-in times and ongoing communication, particularly when juggling multiple responsibilities. The scope to touch base and recalibrate supported agency and impact at an individual level.

- It was important to provide targeted capacity-freeing support to schools to empower them to make effective use of the budgets available to them. Resources such as menus of activity and easy-to-access booklists, clear signposting and a budget towards teaching cover made the programme more accessible to time-poor teachers.
- This project truly affirmed our belief in the value of co-creation. We saw the importance of involving co-creators at every stage. It was vital to gain perspectives from all partners and bring them together to help shape strategy. They were also able to give invaluable insights that could steer and guide decisions.
- When applying a place-based approach in a new community, it was important that local stakeholders were consulted and their existing work in the borough was celebrated and signposted at every opportunity.
- The voices of the young people of Islington were also integrated into the programme. Providing authentic opportunities for them to feed in and feed back on initiatives both in and outside of school was crucial.

Legacy: How Get Islington Reading will continue to have an impact

Get Islington Reading has been instrumental in bringing local and national partners together around a shared reading agenda. Connections between schools and libraries in Islington are improved, with more schools connected to their local library and existing relationships reported to be stronger and more meaningful.

Islington commissioned The Reading Agency to develop a library-led council-wide Reading for Pleasure strategy, incorporating learnings from the community partnerships that have developed through this project and delivery model.

The National Literacy Trust is continuing libraries' work in Islington through the Bloomberg Coronation Libraries programme, which is part of the Libraries for Primaries campaign. This will draw on the rich partnerships and learnings built through Get Islington Reading to augment this new programme that will enrich school library spaces across the borough. Based on the transition strand of Get Islington Reading, the National Literacy Trust has also developed new resources for schools supporting pupils moving from primary to secondary school.

GET ISLINGTON READING



Overall, the project will have a genuine legacy, both in Islington itself and as a potentially scalable way of working that could be replicated elsewhere. It has proven the value of a place-based model of working, which both partners are adopting into future project planning, as well as the merit of using 'interest pathways' to engage children with reading, especially at transition age. The project will have ripples that should be felt further afield (ideally at national level) over the next few years, creating a powerful new approach in the rich landscape of Reading for Pleasure practice and reading communities.