

Teachers and reading in 2023

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Introduction

Teachers and schools across the UK have an immense responsibility for ensuring young people leave school with the literacy skills they need to succeed in life. This is an ongoing challenge, with burnout rates high (Teacher Tapp, 2023) and retention rates low (French, 2023). Post-COVID, where much of the work done to narrow the disadvantage gap was lost, this challenge is tougher than ever. At the same time – and sharing common roots – disadvantage continues to increase for children and young people in the UK. Teachers have the power to effect change when they are empowered to do so.

We are committed to inspiring and supporting teachers through our programmes, training and resources. In 2022, for the first time since 2015 (Clark and Teravainen-Goff, 2015), as part of our [Annual Literacy Survey](#), we ran a survey for teachers and other school staff, asking about their attitudes to literacy as a whole, as well as reading, writing and speaking and listening.¹ We received responses from 1,535 teachers (see methodology below for more detail) from across primary, secondary and other settings. The survey was anonymous, and we asked teachers to tell us about the sorts of provision they had in their schools, and also about their own attitudes to literacy and what they saw their role to be. As outlined below, we were particularly interested in how this would differ across primary and secondary settings, as well as by different roles and levels of seniority.

Children and young people's reading for enjoyment was at an all-time low in 2023, with just 2 in 5 (43.4%) 8- to 18-year-olds saying that they enjoyed reading (Clark, Picton & Galway, 2023). As the release of the new Reading Framework (DfE, 2023) signposted, teachers have a key role to play in addressing this, both as reading role models and through explicit teaching of reading strategies. To achieve this, teachers should consider themselves as readers (Cremin et al, 2009) as well as receiving training on reading instruction. With this in mind, we asked teachers

¹ <https://literacytrust.org.uk/research-services/annual-literacy-survey/>

about their own reading habits and enjoyment, as well as looking at the training they had received and what whole-school reading approaches might be in place.

This report forms part of a series, alongside writing and whole-school literacy, that outline our findings in relation to these specific areas.²

Key findings

Whole-school culture and provision

We asked teachers about the culture of reading for pleasure in their school, and what activities were in place to promote it. As can be seen below, reading-for-pleasure-related activities link with a perception of a good whole-school reading culture, with more teachers reporting a strong culture where such measures are in place.

- 3 in 4 (75.6%) teachers said that the culture of reading for pleasure in their school was good or excellent, with 1 in 5 (20.2%) rating it as average and fewer than 1 in 20 (4.1%) rating it as poor or very poor. More primary than secondary school teachers reported engaging in activities that promote reading for pleasure. For example, far more teachers in primary than secondary schools (88.3% vs. 69.2%) said they engaged in celebration days; a difference of 19.1 percentage points. The difference was most pronounced for author and/or story telling visits, with 50.8% of primary school teachers saying that they are doing this compared with 33.0% of secondary school teachers.
- Perhaps unsurprisingly, teachers who rated their school's reading for pleasure culture as excellent or good reported engaging in a range of reading for pleasure activities. For example, nearly three times as many of those who said they had an excellent or very good reading culture in their

² See writing and whole-school literacy reports: <https://literacytrust.org.uk/research-services/research-reports/teachers-and-reading-writing-and-whole-school-literacy-in-2023>

school reported having designated regular reading for pleasure time compared with their peers who rated their school reading for pleasure culture as poor or very poor (69.4% vs. 26.3%).

Classroom reading strategies

We also asked about the teaching of reading, and what strategies they taught explicitly. Across the board, more primary than secondary teachers said they taught reading strategies explicitly, but this was most pronounced for comprehension and fluency.

- More than twice as many primary teachers (53.5%) as secondary (21.1%) taught fluency explicitly. Similarly, nearly twice as many taught comprehension (60.3% vs 32.7%) and reading aloud (49.7% vs 25.9%).
 - There was a similar difference for reading for pleasure (35.4% of primary vs 18.3% of secondary) and reciprocal reading (26.6% of primary vs 13.3% of secondary).
- Of all reading strategies, reading comprehension was taught explicitly by more teachers than any other, with 2 in 5 (39.7%) doing so. Reciprocal reading was taught the least with just 1 in 6 (16.7%) doing so.

Reading is not an explicit curriculum component of teaching across different subjects in Key Stage 3, and the primary national curriculum states that '[b]y the end of Year 6, pupils' reading and writing should be sufficiently fluent and effortless for them to manage the general demands of the curriculum in Year 7' (Department for Education, 2013, p.41). However, we know that reading is a key component of disciplinary literacy, and the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) advises that '[t]raining focused on reading is likely to help secondary school teachers teach their subject more effectively' (EEF, 2018. p.4). We therefore asked secondary teachers whether they had received training in teaching reading and whether they enjoyed it and felt confident doing so. We found that while fewer than half of secondary teachers had received training, a higher percentage enjoyed it and felt confident doing so. While hardly any disagreed with this statement, many said that they neither agreed nor disagreed.

- Just over 3 in 5 secondary teachers enjoyed teaching reading (64.3%) and felt confident doing so (63.9%) but just 2 in 5 (44.5%) had received training in teaching reading.
 - Around a quarter said that they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statements, which perhaps speaks to the fact that many teachers outside of English departments do not see teaching reading explicitly as part of their job.

Teachers' own reading habits

In addition to teaching reading, we asked teachers about their own reading behaviours and attitudes. Overall, more said that they enjoyed reading in general than said they did so at least once a week, suggesting perhaps a lack of time or energy to do so. We also looked, specifically in the secondary space, at whether teachers who enjoyed reading enjoyed teaching it and felt confident doing so.

- Nearly 9 in 10 (85.8%) teachers said they enjoyed reading but just over three quarters (76.9%) did so at least once a week.
- 2 in 3 (67.6%) of those who enjoy reading also enjoy teaching it, compared with 2 in 5 (42.3%) who do not enjoy reading
- 2 in 3 (66.5%) who enjoy reading feel confident teaching it compared with just over 2 in 5 (44.4%) who don't enjoy reading.

This report highlights the importance of reading to be made explicit in all its forms, whether in the classroom, through whole-school culture and provision and in the case of teachers as readers. The findings are broadly encouraging and, while literacy strategies are less explicit in some cases, the commitment to and passion for literacy across the board suggests a hopeful future.

Methodology

We surveyed 1,535 teachers from across different settings, with the majority being from primary and secondary schools.³ The data set comprised classroom and subject teachers, teaching assistants, heads of department and librarians, with several others.⁴ We use 'teachers' here as a shorthand to cover any professional working in a school, including librarians and teaching assistants as well as technical and administrative support staff.



³ First school/infants school n = 49, Primary school/junior school n = 443, Middle school n = 3, Secondary school/high school/upper school n = 931, Sixth form or other post-16 setting n = 16, All-through school n = 34, Other/not answered n = 59.

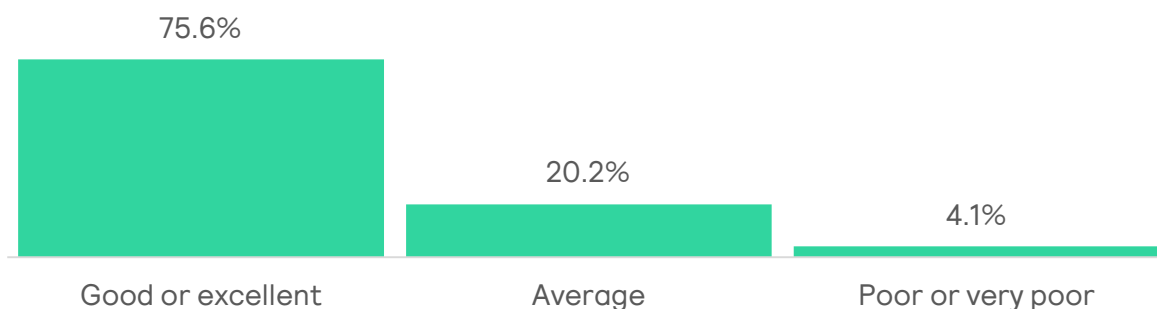
⁴ Supply teachers and cover teachers are counted as classroom teachers. Subject co-ordinators are counted as heads of department. Head of phase counts as head of year. Where someone has said they are a trainee, they are counted as being in the role they are training for. Assistant heads are counted as heads. Librarian includes library assistants.

Findings in detail

Whole-school reading for pleasure

We asked teachers how they would rate the provision for reading for pleasure at their school, and 3 in 4 rated it as good or excellent (Figure 1). A further 1 in 5 rated it as average, while fewer than 1 in 20 rated it as poor or very poor.

Figure 1: Teachers' rating of reading for pleasure provision in their school



In addition, we asked what happened in the teachers' schools to promote reading for pleasure (Figure 2). As can be seen here, the most commonly identified activities were celebratory days such as World Book Day, which 3 in 4 teachers said took place. 3 in 4 teachers also said that there was library time designated for choosing books, while around half had designated reading for pleasure time, reading for pleasure displays, and reading and book groups. Just under 2 in 5 had author or storyteller visits, while only a quarter had book-recommendation platforms, and just 1 in 5 had dedicated assemblies on books or reading for pleasure. Open-ended responses on other activities included dedicated free reading time in lessons, reading schemes and book clubs.

Figure 2: Reading for pleasure activities that happen in teachers' schools

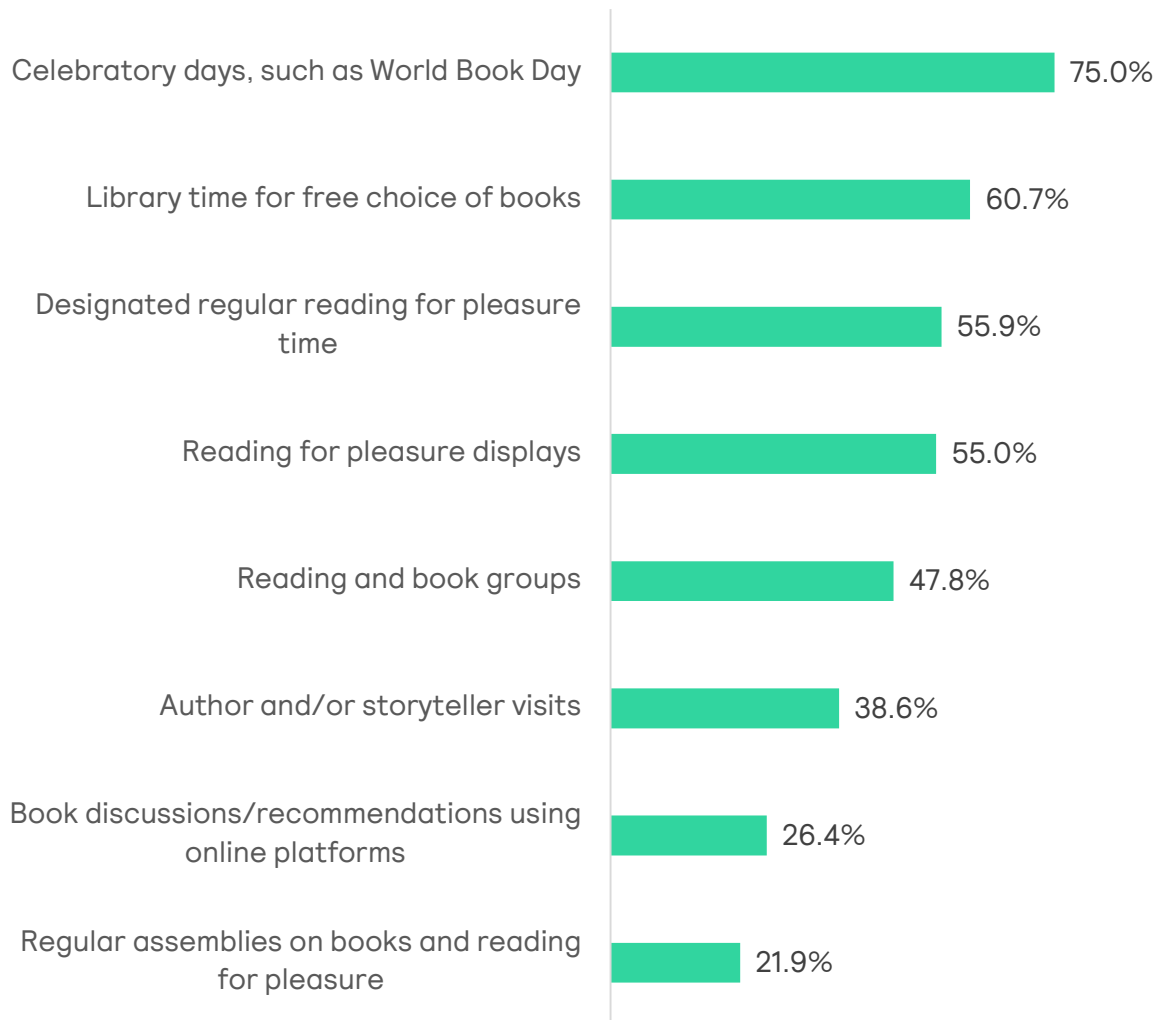
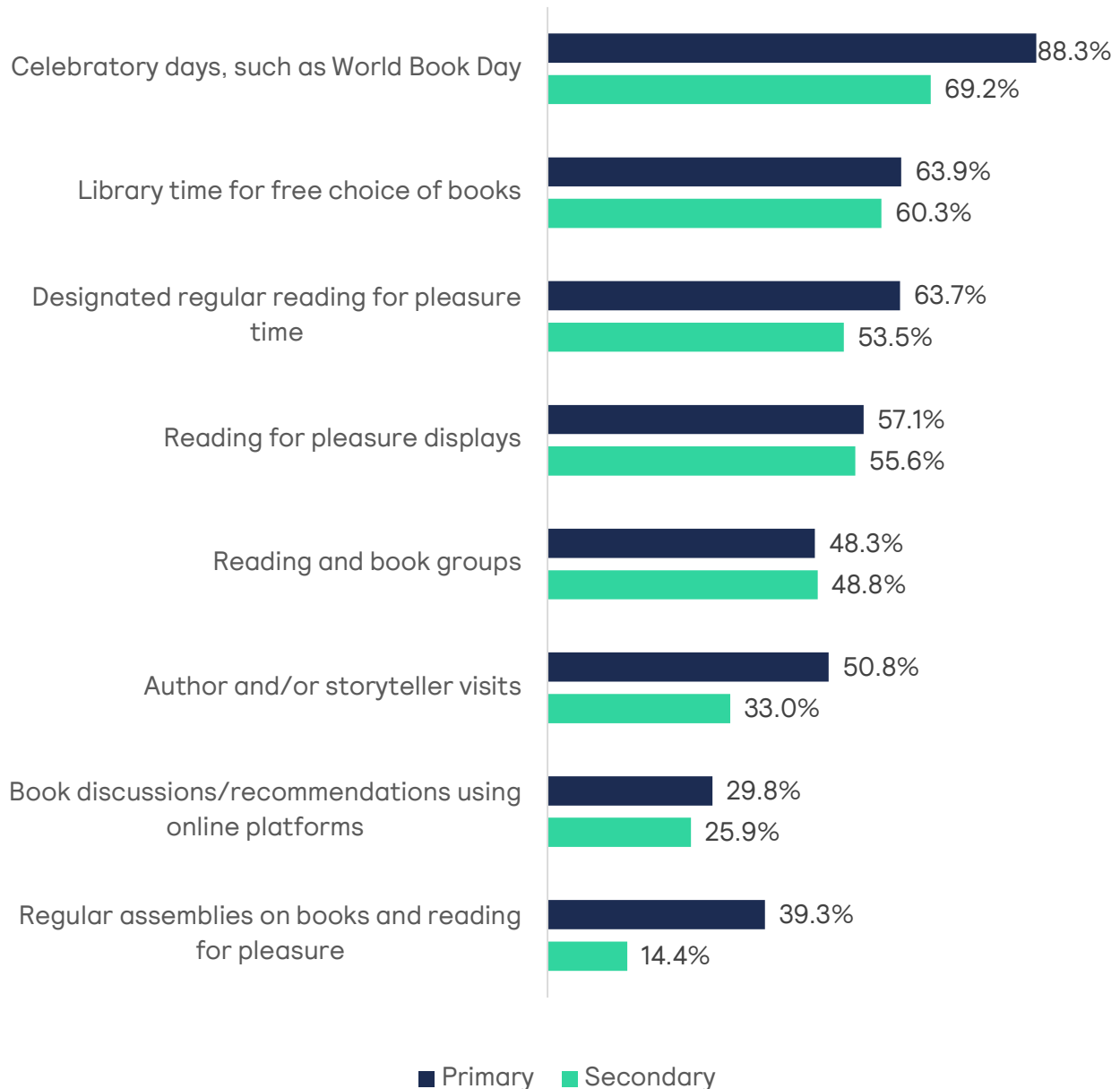


Figure 3 suggests that there is some differentiation between primary and secondary settings when it comes to reading for pleasure activities. For example, far more teachers in primary than secondary schools (88.3% vs. 69.2%) said they engaged in celebration days; a difference of 19.1 percentage points. Every other activity also had a higher percentage of primary than secondary teachers involved, with the most pronounced differences relating to having author and/or storytelling visits, with 1 in 2 primaries saying this compared with 1 in 3 secondary teachers, and regular assemblies on reading where 2 in 5 primary teachers engaged compared with just 1 in 7 secondary teachers.

Figure 3: Provision of reading for pleasure activities in schools by phase



Open-ended responses on other activities included dedicated free reading time in lessons, reading schemes and book clubs.

“Bookbuzz, rewards, different form groups’ favourite books featured each week.”

“I ran an after school ‘Storytelling Club.’ We’ve had ‘Million ord Challenge’ to encourage reading more. Also reading a whole class novel for enjoyment and discussion.”

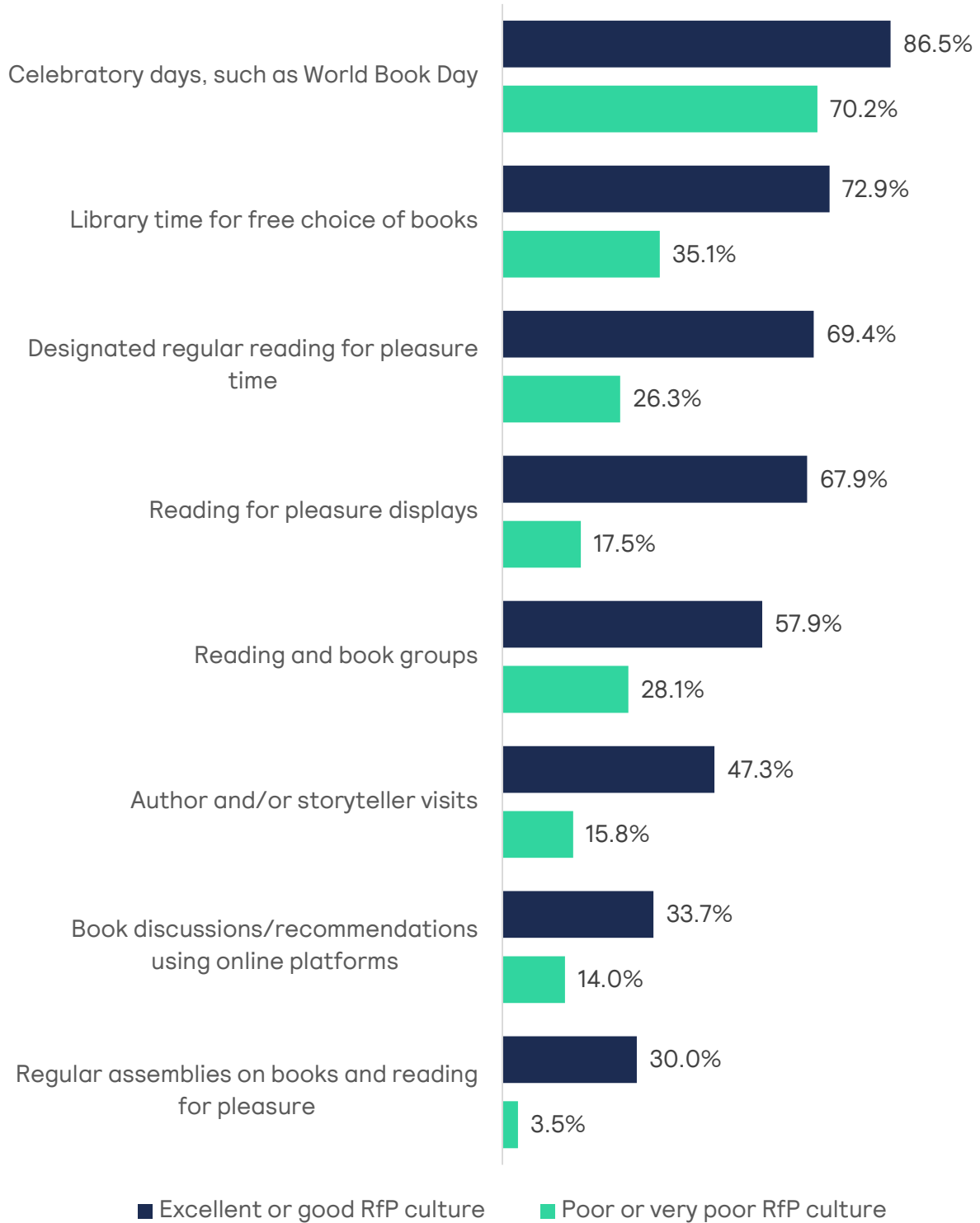
“Accelerated Reader programme at KS3 and online library; reading buddies; reading starters in English; reading time in form; active librarian led reading competitions/groups etc; story time in library for Year 7 etc.”

The relationship between perceived reading for pleasure culture in schools and specific reading for pleasure activities

As shown in Figure 4, there is a clear relationship between teachers reporting having an excellent or very good reading for pleasure culture in their school and a range of reading for pleasure activities that occur in the school. Teachers reported their school putting on celebratory events, such as World Book Day, regardless of whether they rated their reading for pleasure culture in their school as excellent or poor. However, many more teachers who reported an excellent or very good school reading for pleasure culture also reported engaging in more activities compared with their peers who felt that their school’s reading for pleasure culture was poor or very poor.

Some of these differences were very pronounced. For example, nearly three times as many of those who had an excellent or very good reading culture in their school reported having designated regular reading for pleasure time compared with their peers who rated their school reading for pleasure culture as poor or very poor. Over eight times as many teachers who rated their school reading for pleasure culture as excellent or good also reported regular assemblies on books and reading for pleasure compared with their peers who rated their school reading for pleasure culture as poor or very poor.

Figure 4: Whether teachers feel their school has a good reading for pleasure culture by activities in place



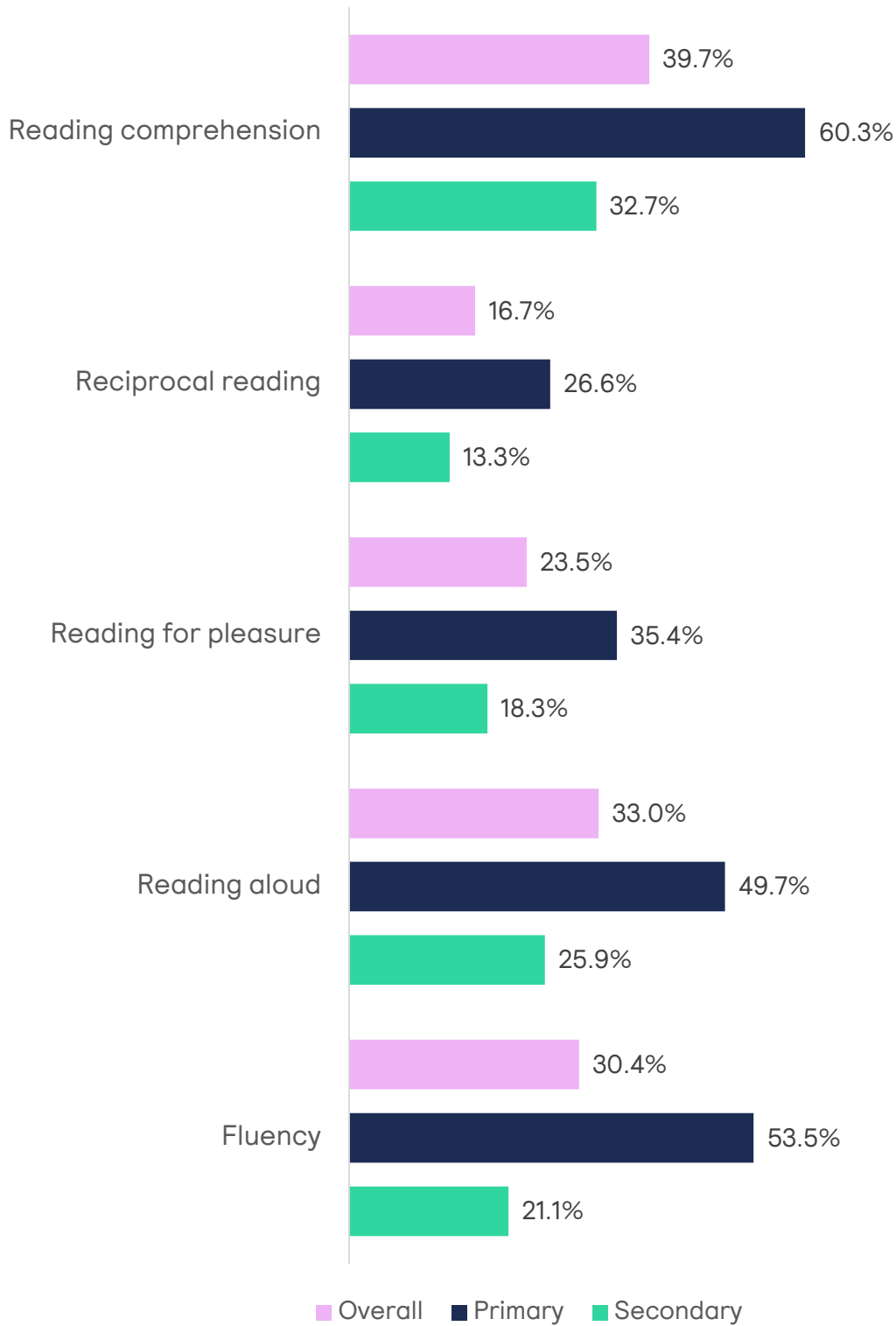
Teaching reading

We asked teachers about a range of reading strategies, and specifically whether they taught these strategies explicitly. Explicit teaching strategies, as outlined by the EEF, refer to ‘teacher-led approaches focused on teacher demonstration followed by guided practice and independent practice’ (EEF, 2020, p.24). It is important to note that not all respondents will have direct teaching responsibilities, which may impact on results in some cases.

These findings are shown in Figure 5, overall and divided by primary and secondary. More teachers (2 in 5) said they explicitly taught reading comprehension than any other strategy, while just 1 in 6 said that they taught reciprocal reading explicitly. Across the board, around twice as many teachers in primary settings as in secondary said that they taught these strategies explicitly. The biggest gaps were for fluency, with a difference of 32.4 pps between primary and secondary teachers teaching it explicitly, and reading comprehension, with a difference of 27.6 pps. There was a far smaller disparity for the explicit teaching of reciprocal reading, with a difference of 13.3 pps but, as noted, this had the fewest teachers teaching it explicitly overall.



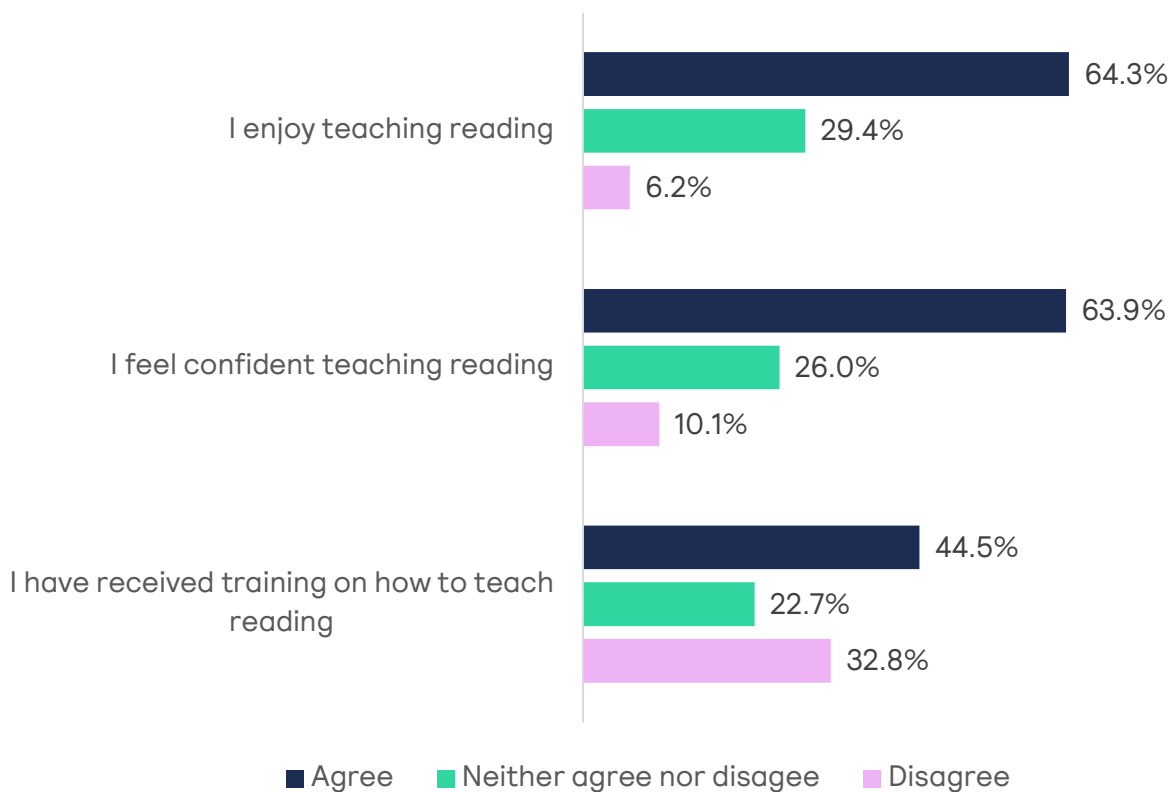
Figure 5: Teachers' teaching-reading strategies explicitly overall and by phase



Teaching reading (secondary only)

Since, broadly speaking, reading is embedded already in the day-to-day practice of primary school teaching, we were interested specifically in how teachers in secondary settings felt about teaching reading. As Figure 6 shows, just over 3 in 5 said that they enjoyed teaching reading and that they felt confident teaching reading, but fewer than half said that they had received training on how to teach reading. Around a quarter said that they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statements, which perhaps speaks to the fact that many teachers outside of English departments do not see teaching reading explicitly as part of their job.

Figure 6: Secondary teachers' attitudes to teaching reading



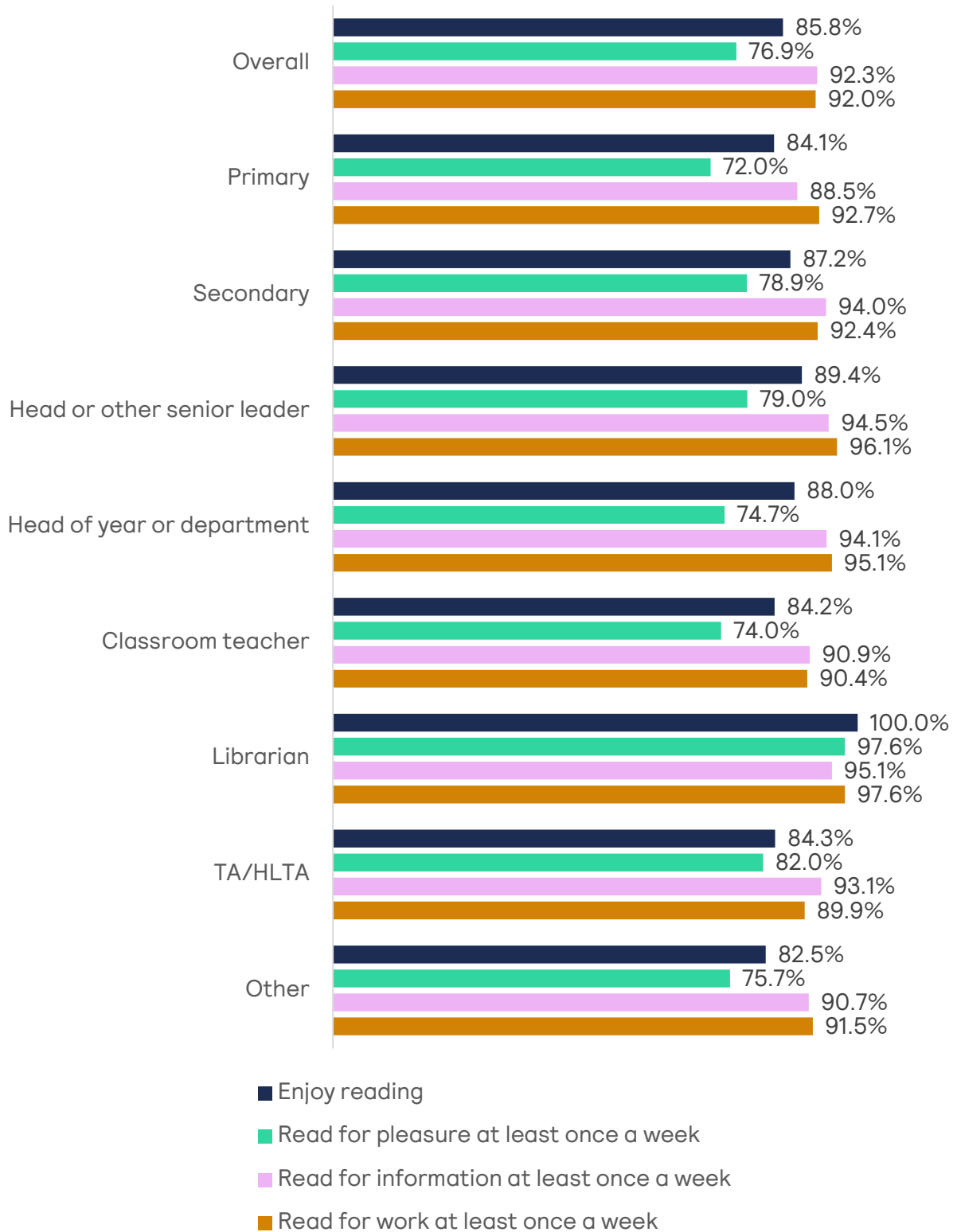


Teachers' own reading enjoyment and habits

We asked teachers whether they enjoyed reading and if they read for pleasure, for information or for work once a week or more. As can be seen in Figure 7, nearly 9 in 10 overall said that they enjoyed reading, while just over 3 in 4 said they did so for pleasure at least once a week, suggesting that some who enjoyed reading were not doing so. Furthermore, at least 9 in 10 said that they read for information and for work.

In detail by role and phase, slightly more secondary than primary teachers said that they read for pleasure and for information at least once a week, while an equal proportion of both said they read for work at least once a week. For senior leaders, heads of department and classroom teachers there was around a 10-pps gap between those who enjoyed reading and those who read for pleasure at least once a week, suggesting that there were some who enjoyed reading but did not read much, perhaps owing to lack of time, energy or other constraints. 100% of librarians enjoyed reading and nearly all (97.6%) said that they read for pleasure at least once a week.

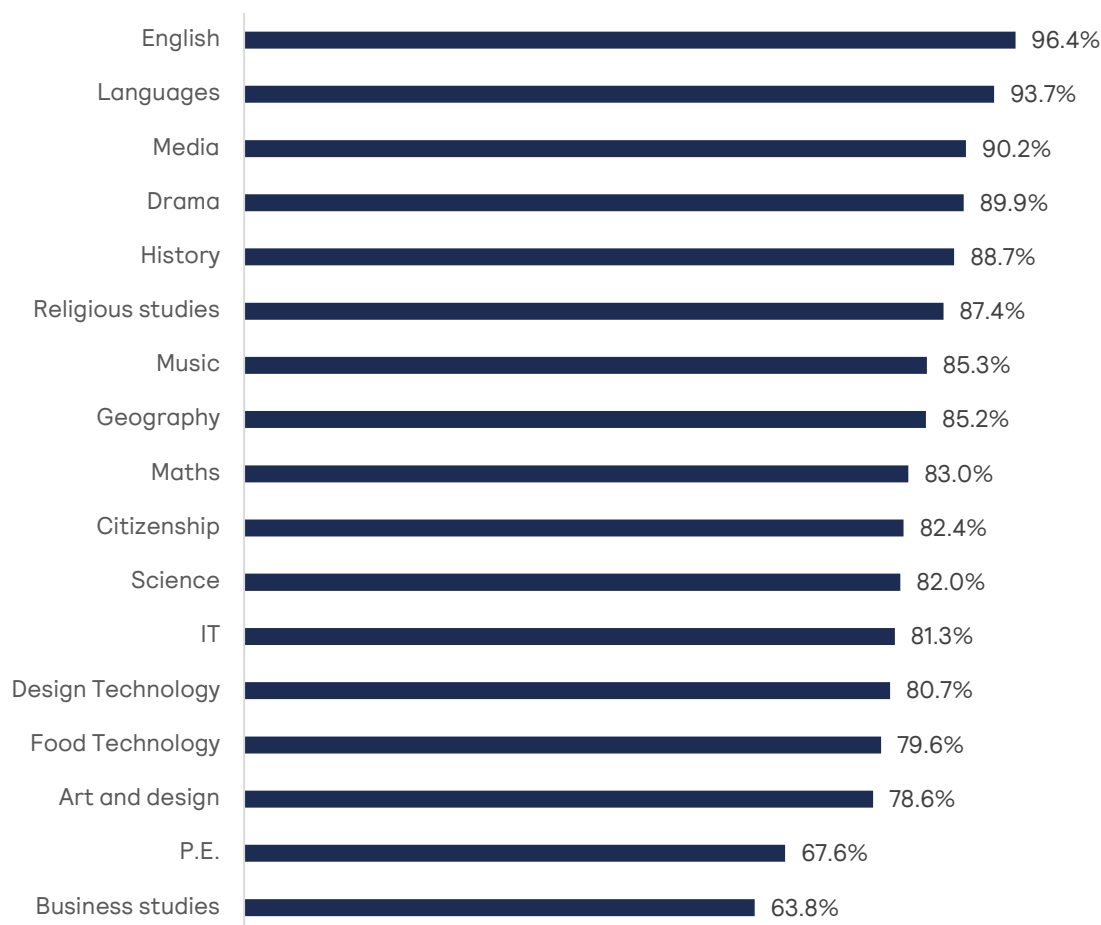
Figure 7: Teachers who enjoy reading and who read for pleasure, for information or for work at least once a week by role



Looking at Figure 8, which shows the subjects teachers specialised in (or had previously specialised in), more English teachers than those who taught any other subject enjoyed reading (96.4%). Humanities subjects, performing arts and languages were generally higher than STEM subjects. The lowest levels of enjoyment were among business studies teachers, of whom just over 3 in 5 (63.8%) said they enjoyed reading. While there is some difference here, still more than half the teachers in the subjects with the lowest levels of reading enjoyment said they enjoyed reading.

We also asked teachers to recommend texts that they would also recommend to their students, examples of which can be found in the appendix to this report. A range of topics and formats were recommended across fiction and non-fiction, showing a good awareness of texts among teachers across different disciplines.

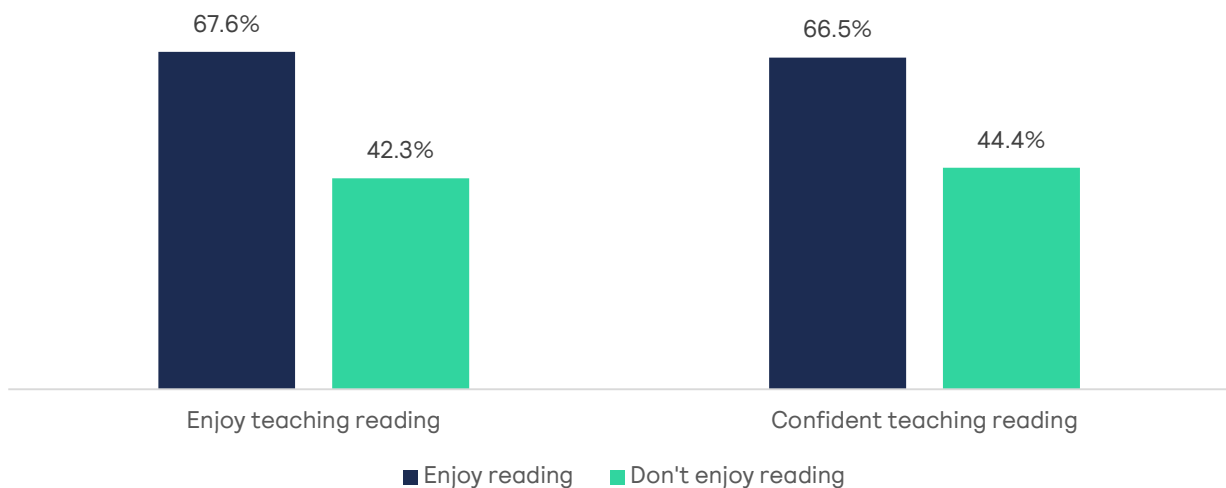
Figure 8: Teachers who enjoy reading by subject specialism



Relationship between reading enjoyment and teaching reading

As shown in Figure 9, more teachers who enjoyed reading also enjoyed teaching reading and felt confident doing so: 2 in 3 of those who enjoy reading also enjoy teaching it, compared with 2 in 5 who do not enjoy reading, while again 2 in 3 who enjoy reading feel confident teaching it compared with just over 2 in 5 who don't enjoy reading. This supports Cremin's (2009) assertion that building teachers as readers can support their teaching, not only through modelling themselves as readers but also in enabling them to access (and therefore recommend) a wider range of texts (again, as noted in the appendix). It is therefore encouraging, if unsurprising, to see that there is a strong correlation between enjoyment of reading and enjoyment of and confidence in teaching reading.

Figure 9: Secondary teachers' enjoyment of and confidence in teaching reading against whether they enjoy reading



Conclusion

This report shows that many teachers believe their schools have a good or excellent approach to reading for pleasure and that reading strategies, such as celebratory days and whole-school policies, are widespread. As noted, the relationship between in-school reading activities and overall culture is unsurprising, but it nevertheless underlines the importance of implementing explicit activities to support reading for pleasure, especially beyond the English classroom. However, with reading for enjoyment among children and young people at an all-time low, it remains crucial that schools do as much as possible to encourage reading. There is relatively low take-up of some activities, for example reading and book discussions and groups, dedicated assemblies and author visits, but teachers from schools where these activities are in place do more frequently report a good or excellent culture of reading in their school.

Meanwhile, it is reassuring to see a high percentage of teachers across each phase and level of seniority enjoying reading. While there is some variation by subject, even for those where levels of enjoyment are lower it is still above half. In detail, it is notable that with reading, as with writing (see writing report [ref] for more detail on the latter), more of those teachers who say they enjoy reading outside of school also say that they enjoy and feel confident in teaching it, suggesting that encouraging these activities could have a positive impact on teaching. In addition, the range of recommendations for wider reading and listening suggest an awareness of and enthusiasm for subject-specific content beyond fiction (see the appendix).

At a time when teachers and other education staff are under more pressure than ever with limited resources, our priority is to offer support and inspiration for them to embed literacy wherever possible. These findings are broadly encouraging and, while literacy strategies are less explicit in some cases, the commitment to and passion for literacy across the board suggests a hopeful future.

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Appendix: Book recommendations

We asked teachers whether there were any books (or other media) they would recommend to their pupils, and why. Table 1 provides some examples of their responses. A wide range of reasons was given, and recommendations were not limited to books. As shown, some teachers recommended books based on access to subject information, such as environmental concerns, politics and history. Others, meanwhile, focused on the quality of the language and vocabulary. Lastly, there were books that teachers would recommend simply because their pupils would enjoy them.

Table 1: Book recommendations and explanations from teachers

Title	Reason (in teachers' own words)
The Rest is Politics (podcast)	It makes politics accessible
To Kill A Mockingbird	Well written. Covers issues linked to the rest of the English (and wider) curriculum.
'Macavity: The Mystery Cat' by T.S. Eliot	It is a multifaceted poem that I think all children in Key Stage 2 should study. As well as being a brilliant example of rhythm and rhyme it can also be used to teach children interesting vocabulary like 'fiend' and 'depravity,' that can be used in their writing
Planet Omar by Zanib Miam	It is something that the children in Year 3 would enjoy. It also opens up many discussions.
You're Dead to Me (podcast)	This I feel appeals to a secondary audience – it uses humour to engage, unearths unusual information about historical figures and has a game show style format.
The God Delusion by Richard Dawkins	For philosophy students to examine the strength of the argument. Consider strengths and weaknesses of what is said.
Boy, Everywhere by A.M Dassu	It very clearly sets out the story behind why families seek asylum and challenges stereotypes.

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