



STORYTIME IN SCHOOL

Farshore

STORYTIME TRIAL

Research Report

Abstract

The findings from a longitudinal study carried out with 20 primary schools across England who adopted a daily storytime in the spring term of 2023

Contents

Introduction	3
Foreword	4
Background	6
Research context.....	7
School and child context.....	8
Summary of findings	9
Methodology	12
Recruitment.....	12
Data gathering	12
Salford Sentence Reading and Comprehension Test.....	13
Main report: key findings	14
Impact on reading attainment in Year 4	14
Impact on comprehension attainment in Year 4.....	15
Comparing changes in reading with changes in comprehension ages	18
Impact on children's attitudes towards reading across Year 3, Year 4 and Year 5	18
Impact on children's reading behaviour across Year 3, Year 4 and Year 5	20
Case studies: the impact of storytime on specific children	22
Josh: high attainer but not a reader	22
Lucie: struggling reader	22
Khalid: switched on to reading through 'Goosebumps'	22
Lucas: SEND child; pending diagnosis	22
Impact on children's well-being and wider behaviour	23
What did the children say?	24
Reasons for wanting to continue	25
Negative feedback	26
What did the teachers say?	27
Positive feedback.....	27
Concerns over storytime	27
Conclusion.....	28
Appendix A: Overview of trial schools.....	30
Appendix B: Methodological discussions	31
Schools' performance on Salford	31
Reading age data outliers	32
Reading and comprehension age standardised score 'ceiling' factors.....	32
Analysis of pupils' pre- and post-trial responses:.....	33
Appendix C: References	34

Introduction

Alison David, Consumer Insight Director, Farshore

If a child *can* read, it does not mean they will *choose* to read for pleasure. There is a world of difference between reading because you *have to*, for schoolwork, for homework, because your parents tell you to, and *wanting* to do it because it is fun, interesting, exciting, rewarding, compelling, because you just can't put the book down.

It's widely known that children who read for pleasure do better in life. They achieve more academically, it builds their cultural capital, they have better well-being, empathy, resilience and concentration. But only 25%¹ of 0–17s read for pleasure 'every day or nearly every day'. In 2012, the figure was 38%. Concurrently, 'rarely or never' read grew from 13% in 2012 to 21% in 2022.

It's clear that more children need to be encouraged to read for pleasure, and at Farshore we have a driving purpose 'to make every child a proud reader'. We publish a broad portfolio of children's books, aiming to entice, interest and excite every child. And we invest in research to understand the barriers and the enablers to reading for pleasure. Broadly, our findings are that children don't read because they'd rather be using screen-based entertainment, because they think of reading as a school subject and something they have to do, and because they are not read to at all, or not read to often enough, at home. We've found that these barriers can be overcome; children are greatly motivated to read by having a wide and free choice of books, and by being read to.

Being read to often is transformational in the home setting. We've seen this with the many families we have worked with, and we can see a clear data correlation too. For instance, when 8–10-year-olds are read to at home on between 1 and 3 days a week, 28% of those children choose to read daily themselves (in addition to being read to). However, when 8–10-year-olds are read to on 4+ days a week, 73% of those children choose to read daily themselves². Reading aloud to children works because it creates time for reading, makes a routine, and because it changes the atmosphere; with no expectations, just a gift of time and attention from their parents, children feel no pressure and they can relax and enjoy the story. Being read to becomes an enormous treat and children are enthused and motivated to try it for themselves.

However, the proportion of parents who read aloud to children at home is in decline. Additionally, we have found that as children get older, parents tend to think they don't need to read to them any more. Current data shows 46% of 5–7s are read to daily/nearly every day at home, but by the time children are 8–10 years old, this has reduced to 25%³.

Could reading aloud to children daily, just for the fun of it, be transformational in the school setting too? It's clear that for many children, hearing a story at school might be the only time they are read to. But our data shows currently 24% of 8–10s are read to daily at school just for fun and relaxation⁴, so there is clearly a gap to fill. Teachers are under pressure to ensure that 'every minute counts' and this means using every opportunity to teach and embed decoding and comprehension skills, close the word gap, and use the text as a springboard into other activities. Even in schools where children are read to, the purpose is usually instructional.

Our Storytime in School research hypothesis is:

Reading aloud to children at school when there are no expectations like worksheets or tasks makes children associate reading with fun, not learning. It reduces the pressure and allows children to relax, enjoy and listen, which in turn enthruses and motivates children to read for pleasure independently.

We commissioned Independent Education Market Researcher Melissa Mackinlay to manage the research and Dr Rebecca Coles of The Open University consulted on the project.

Foreword

Reading aloud for pleasure matters

Professor Teresa Cremin, The Open University

'By the light of the moon, a little egg lay on a leaf.'

'The night Max wore his wolf suit and made mischief of one kind and another...'

'Mr and Mrs Dursley of 4 Privet Drive were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much.'

'The monster showed up just after midnight. As they do.'

'Lyra and her daemon moved through the darkening Hall taking care to keep to one side, out of sight of the kitchen.'

Reading aloud for pleasure matters. Maybe as you read these opening lines from five well-known children's books, memories of being read to surfaced? Do you remember it at home? In school? If so, what do you recall about the experience? The people involved – the books – the places? Do your memories evoke emotions? A sense of comfort and connection, perhaps? Maybe you were sometimes suspended in another space and time – in a fictional world co-created by the author's words, your imagination and the adult's reading and presence.

Of course, it might not be narratives you remember, but the words of faith texts spoken, non-fiction, news extracts or the music and rhythms of poetry. *'The owl and the pussycat went to sea ...'*; *'On the ning nang nong where the ...'*; *Tyger Tyger burning bright ...'* Highly patterned, evocative texts may never have been learnt, but often still sing in our inner ear and can be recalled with relative ease.

Personally, I wasn't read to at home. I checked with my parents, and they assured me that they didn't read to us. Indeed, my mother found the question puzzling and asked *'Why would I have done that?'* She had no idea of the value of it, and merely wanted her three children to learn to read – which she saw as the school's job.

I was lucky. I had the same class teacher for two years in primary school and Miss Leiching loved literature. She took us on many adventures, and we travelled together to faraway countries, to the bottom of the ocean, to magical lands and into the past, and we met all manner of characters on our journeys, learning about life on the way. Through introducing me to the world of stories Miss Leiching opened my eyes, tuned my ears, often made my heart beat faster and, most significantly of all, she motivated me to read on my own. Were you as lucky? Should this be down to luck? Of course not.

In school, reading aloud for pleasure is essential. This is in addition to reading aloud as part of English teaching (DfE, 2023). Reading aloud for pleasure can enable children to access rich, challenging texts, offer a model for silent reading, and prompt deep affective engagement and discussion. It can also create a valuable communal experience that connects young readers and nurtures new relationships.

This is exactly what you can see in this exciting **Farshore Storytime Trial**. Teachers were offered quality texts (narratives, non-fiction and more) to select from, and junior children (Years 3–5), were able to experience 20 full minutes of reading aloud for pleasure, every day of the week across the spring term. This was new for many in the study, previous practice appeared to have been less regular and more haphazard in some classrooms. What is particularly potent here is the professional flexibility offered within the set time, enabling teachers to be responsive to the interests and needs of their learners, and to sometimes read without discussion and at others to invite dialogue around the text. What is also very striking is the children's accelerated progress in reading and comprehension, and the highly positive impact on their attitudes towards books, and their reading dispositions and behaviours.

Previous research undergirds these findings and the value of this new work in England with 8–11-year-olds. Recent studies in Italy indicate that regular read aloud enhances primary children's language, cognitive and emotional development (Batini et al., 2018; 2020, 2021, 2022) and another in England shows comprehension gains with teenagers (Westbrook et al., 2018). In two of these particular studies, significant advances in comprehension were evidenced in a relatively short time with intense commitment to reading aloud, and skillful text discussions that sought to explore and enrich students' understanding and engagement.

Other studies in the field highlight that interactive read aloud approaches are effective in motivating readers and developing their vocabulary. Such approaches nurture 'extra-textual dialogue' and 'non-immediate talk', which goes beyond the information contained in the text or illustrations, and makes connections to past experiences, other texts, or the real world (Zucker et al., 2021). Prior reading of the text is needed alongside thoughtful preparation, open-ended questions and non-judgmental attitudes. These can make read aloud an equitable experience and enable all children to participate in making meaning with others through relaxed, conversational engagement. Displays of the books read aloud in class are also seen to support children in making intertextual connections between their shared 'books in common' and texts they have chosen to read themselves (Cremin, Harris and Courtney, 2022).

Careful text selection is vital. The 200 enticing books given to each of the schools in the Farshore Storytime Trial will undoubtedly have influenced the children's attitudes to reading, supported by regular opportunities to hear some of them. Some schools create reading spines for reading aloud *for pleasure*, which attend to diversity, ensure a rich mix of text types and styles and include progressively more challenging texts. Those that 'sing' and capture the imaginations of the young can be marked out for reading aloud. However, such collections need to be reviewed and updated regularly, and spontaneous and responsive book reading aloud is also vital; professional judgment and flexibility are always needed. Valuably, read aloud sometimes includes attention to follow through, with recommendations of books to borrow by the same author, or on the same theme, perhaps with sign-up charts. This can support recreational reading at home, but again is dependent on a rich text collection as this research makes clear.

In addition to the advances in comprehension, the **Storytime Trial** findings regarding the children's attitudes and dispositions towards reading and books are a delight to read, not surprising, but nonetheless invaluable. Their views and those of their teachers combine with the quantitative evidence, and underscore the power and potential of reading aloud *for pleasure* to nurture readers who not only can, but *do* choose to read in their own time.

Reading aloud *for pleasure* matters.

Background

What if children were read to at school every day, purely for enjoyment? No worksheets, no testing, no follow-up learning activities or tasks. Just 20 minutes of total immersion in a book. How might this impact on their attitudes, behaviour and even attainment in reading?

This was what we set out to explore in Farshore's Storytime Trial.

We know that when parents read aloud to children at home, this is a very powerful way to encourage children to read themselves. However, reading aloud at home is in decline, and in addition, parents tend to think that as children get older they don't need to read to them any more. Current data shows 46% of 5–7s are read to daily/nearly every day at home, but by the time children reach 8–10 age group, this has reduced to 25%⁵. For many children, hearing a story at school might be the only time they are read to. However, the curriculum – even at primary school – is packed. Teachers are under pressure to ensure that 'every minute counts', and this means using every opportunity to teach and embed decoding and comprehension skills, close the word gap, and use the text as a springboard into other activities. Even in schools in which children are read to, the purpose is usually 'instructional'.

The current reading orthodoxy based on phonics as the central decoding strategy, supported by explicit teaching of literacy skills, has benefited children's reading attainment. Despite the disruptions of the Covid pandemic, England's score in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) which tests the reading standard of 9–10-year-olds remained stable, boosting it to 4th place in the international league tables. This is a fantastic testament to teachers' hard work and commitment. However, reading enjoyment levels have declined: Only 29% of children in England say they enjoy reading, compared to the international average of 42%. The government has credited the attainment results to the DfE's prioritisation of phonics, but learning to love reading is about more than decoding the words on the page.

This project builds on a similar small-scale pilot conducted by Farshore in 2018 (in one single-form entry state primary school) which found that a daily storytime substantially increased children's enthusiasm, motivation and well-being. But it wasn't just children's attitudes and behaviour towards reading that changed. Their reading attainment improved too. Over a period of five months, children's comprehension in Key Stage 2 grew by an average of 10.3 months; this was twice the expected rate. Reading ages were measured at the beginning and end of the study using Hodder Education's New Salford Sentence Reading Test.

Would we see the same results if the trial was scaled up?

We worked with 20 primary schools around England over the spring term of 2023 whose KS2 teachers agreed to allocate 20 minutes a day to reading to their pupils in Year 3, 4 and 5 (7–10-year-olds) purely for pleasure and enjoyment. In order to measure the impact on children's reading attainment, we asked the schools to test their Year 4 pupils at the start and end of the term using the same standardised reading test as that used in the pilot (albeit a more recent edition). Of the 994 Year 4 pupils who participated in the trial, we were sent data for 772 children.

In this report, we share the evidence from this trial: evidence that includes feedback from staff and their children gathered before and after the trial, along with the pre- and post-trial test data. The findings exceeded our expectations and paint a truly positive picture of what happens in a typical classroom when, every day, a teacher and their pupils share a story together.

Research context

It is widely known that reading for pleasure has a strong reciprocal relationship with reading attainment⁶. More recently, research has also uncovered a relationship between reading and well-being among children and young people⁷. Yet reading for pleasure in England is in decline. In research conducted in 2022, fewer than half of the children and young people asked said they enjoyed reading and fewer than a third said that they read daily⁸. Although many can read, they choose to do so less frequently than children elsewhere: research comparing the practices of 9- and 10-year-olds internationally reveals that reading attitudes in England are comparatively low compared to reading skills⁹. Levels of volitional reading are consistently lower among boys and those from poorer economic backgrounds and decrease as children move through the years of schooling¹⁰.

An extensive body of academic research, including large-scale trials internationally and over time, has explored the impacts of reading aloud to children in the classroom and shown its positive effects on literacy: on listening comprehension and on vocabulary, decoding and reading fluency¹¹. These effects have been found to have an equalizing effect on the reading outcomes of students from different home literacy environments¹².

The impacts of reading aloud are likely to be both direct and mediated by motivational dimensions, increasing children's desire to engage with reading. Across a range of studies, teachers have reported multiple motivations for reading aloud to their students, which include the 'instructional' – such as modelling and fostering vocabulary acquisition, comprehension and fluency – and also the 'affective' – such as opening children to a love of books, to read aloud time and to the community feel it evokes. Teachers also describe the importance of selecting texts for 'meaning making' – to address the interpersonal needs of the students and to offer students diverse experiences of the wider world¹³. Research with children, meanwhile, has explored what a powerful experience being read to can be, predominantly eliciting feelings of relaxation, happiness and belonging¹⁴. As Teresa Cremin writes:

when children are read aloud to, they are 'enveloped' in a risk-free learning environment that 'removes the pressure of achievement and the fear of failure, allowing the freedom to wonder, question, and enjoy [...]'¹⁵.

However, despite the broad and well-established benefits of reading aloud, it is often not prioritised, especially beyond the early years of primary education. Teachers often struggle to make room for it within a busy curriculum and 30% say they do not read aloud to their class¹⁶. Teachers also struggle to access the resources and knowledge needed to introduce a diverse range of quality contemporary literature to the classroom¹⁷. Research indicates that reading aloud was given extra time after the pandemic because of its broad impacts – on children's access to books and models of reading fluency, on their concentration, language and comprehension, and on community building and social and emotional life. Yet in 2021–2, more than 60% of classrooms had no access to a budget for new books¹⁸.

School and child context

The priority given to reading for pleasure among the trial schools was already high. 86% of teachers rated their school's commitment to reading for pleasure as a medium to high priority. This is to be expected: schools were recruited via the UKLA website, which is likely to attract teachers from schools with an interest in reading and this intervention aimed at promoting reading for pleasure. However, under 20% had received reading for pleasure training over the past 18 months, and a third noted there were gaps in their reading books for children, notably graphic novels, comics, non-fiction and books for boys and by culturally diverse authors.

When applying to participate, trial leads stated that there was little or no time allocated to reading aloud to children during the day at their school, although when teachers themselves were asked this question at the start of the trial, 60% said that they were reading to their children outside English, while a further 35% said that they tried to do so when time permitted. A third said they read daily, while 21% said it was a few times a week. The remaining participants said it was one or twice a week, or when they had time.

Children meanwhile reported that they read at home for fun or for enjoyment: 28% reported reading 'every day' and 49% 'a few times a week' or 'once a week'. Fewer, however, reported being read to at home: only 13% reported being read to at home 'every day' and only 25% 'a few times a week' or 'once a week'.

At the end of the pre-trial form, trial applicants were asked what they were hoping to achieve by taking part in this trial. Overwhelmingly, responses referred to **'developing a love of reading'** among their children:

- *For those children that aren't keen on reading, to develop a passion for books. That love for books becomes a lifelong experience- especially through teenage/ young adulthood.*
- *I hope certain children will stop seeing reading as a 'task' or something they 'have' to do. Instead know they can take real pleasure from reading a book.*

Respondents also **mentioned their hope it would foster skills like empathy, resilience, concentration or mindfulness** and improve mental well-being:

- *I would like the children to use reading as a way to relax and improve their well-being.*

Respondents talked about **the power of books to open new worlds, feed children's imagination or build cultural capital**:

- *Increase the children's love of reading, their cultural capital, and their empathy for others.*

A further hoped-for outcome was **an improvement in children's reading attainment** or an improvement in specific reading skills:

- *Supporting lowest 20% to catch up and empower them to choose books that they enjoy.*

For more information about the information provided by trial participants, and a summary of the schools by type, location, size, percentage of Pupil Premium and reading progress please, see Appendix A.

Summary of findings

Among those familiar with the extensive body of research which points to the wide-ranging benefits of reading for pleasure, and the importance of reading aloud to children as part of a reading for pleasure culture, the findings of this study will not be surprising.

Across all 20 schools, and all three of the year groups involved in this trial, teachers and their pupils told us what storytime meant to them and – for the majority of participants – how it had boosted their enjoyment of books. We also heard how listening to a daily story had benefited children and their teachers more widely too, delivering a range of gains for children's wider learning, their personal and social development, and their sense of well-being. Overall, many of our trial participants believed that their classrooms were happier places when they read to their children on a daily basis.

These are the main outcomes of the trial

Storytime is effective in raising standards and encouraging a love of reading

The extensive evidence (comprising assessment data and 'descriptive', self-reported qualitative and quantitative data) captured from teachers and pupils who participated in this trial points to the effectiveness of storytime as an intervention that:

- Accelerates progress in reading and comprehension, leading to 'value added' gains in reading attainment.
- Has a positive impact on children's attitudes towards books and reading.
- Increases reading for pleasure 'behaviours'.

Storytime inspired children who weren't 'readers' to start reading

In each of the schools which participated in post-trial interviews, teachers talked about children for whom storytime had opened the door to reading for pleasure. For some, it was the discovery of a genre or author, for others who struggled with decoding the words, it was the opportunity to experience age-appropriate books, while for a few children with behavioural difficulties, storytime allowed them to immerse themselves in a story and find the focus that eluded them in other lessons.

Storytime improved classroom well-being

Teachers and pupils believed that storytime had boosted children's mental well-being and supported the development of social skills. Many talked about the welcome feeling of 'calm' during storytime and said that they timed it strategically to support key transition points in the day. Many teachers themselves reported that reading to their children had left them feeling calmer and happier too. Others talked about the way in which storytime had strengthened the bond between themselves and their class.

Storytime is an easy and effective way to start or consolidate a reading for pleasure culture

Teachers who'd participated in the trial described a range of other reading for pleasure strategies they had adopted alongside their daily storytime session, indicating that reading aloud on a daily basis to their children either started their reading for pleasure (RfP) journey, or encouraged them to expand on their existing 'RfP' strategies.

As one reading lead said: *If you started with storytime, it's the point at which book chats emerge organically. It's your way in to a RfP culture, children wanting to discover books. Storytime is that beating heart for other RfP practices that should go on in school.*

What teachers told us also helped us understand more about how and why storytime works for teachers in practice. One of the key elements of this trial was the decision not to over mandate or prescribe how teachers delivered storytime. The only requirements were it had to be done daily, for 20 minutes, and mustn't be associated with 'learning tasks'. We wanted schools – and individual teachers – to use their professional judgement over when to do it, which books to choose and how to choose the books. Of the 'expectations' we set, our findings indicate that two matter most: the daily routine and the importance of reading purely for pleasure. Otherwise, findings suggest it is important to allow schools to decide what, when and how to read.

This is what we found about delivering storytime

Teachers were confident about sharing fiction books, but less so when it came to non-fiction

The vast majority of books that were chosen for storytime were fiction (although the Farshore and HarperCollins Children's Books gift of 200 books comprised a mix of all genres, including fiction and non-fiction). When describing the range of techniques they used to enhance children's enjoyment of stories, it was clear that teachers are confident 'storytellers'. They struggled, however, to think of ways of sharing non-fiction books, and this reticence over choosing non-fiction was shared by their pupils: it seems that children also assumed 'storytime' meant fiction. Teachers need more support on how to read aloud non-fiction titles to ensure that children have access to an even wider range of genres.

Storytime must be consistent to be effective

Teachers who were interviewed said that one of the main differences between their approach to storytime during the trial, compared with reading aloud previously, was the daily routine. As one trial lead said: *It needs to be every day: it's a ritual*. Teachers talked about children's sense of anticipation, and the importance of knowing it was scheduled into the day. The daily regularity meant that the story didn't lose momentum. Implicit in both the children's and teachers' feedback was also the importance of storytime with the class teacher. Children loved hearing their teacher put on voices and bring the story to life, and a few teachers noted that if another colleague or supply teacher covered for them, children were less engaged.

A daily storytime is more important than doing it for 20 minutes

Some teachers were ambivalent over the duration of storytime, saying that 20 minutes was a long stretch to keep children's attention. Particularly with younger children, teachers felt it might be better to start with a shorter session, and build up towards 20 minutes as children's listening stamina increased. Starting with 20 minutes may also feel less daunting for teachers, some of whom were worried about finding the time, and managing children's behaviour if they became fidgety or distracted. However, as their confidence and enjoyment grew, 20 minutes was considered a good target as it allowed children time to immerse themselves in the story. Several teachers said that they would probably make it shorter in the future. Others believed that teachers should use their professional judgement to decide when to end storytime, by observing children's behaviour and choosing an exciting moment to heighten children's anticipation for the next instalment.

Whether teachers opted for 'non-stop' reading versus pausing to reflect didn't matter, but it was essential not to set follow-up tasks

Teachers adopted different approaches to reading, with some aiming for 'total immersion' without interrupting the flow of the story, while others would pause to reflect and encourage children to predict what would happen. Teachers made the distinction between encouraging reflection to increase children's engagement, versus asking 'comprehension questions'. Teachers' approaches drew on their knowledge of their own class, and their own preferences as a reader. Although this trial didn't aim to compare the relative effectiveness of these two approaches, based on 'soft' feedback it seemed that both worked, and it was

important for teachers to feel empowered to choose their preferred strategy. Either way, the important element was that children knew that they wouldn't be set any learning 'tasks' based on the books they'd shared. All who commented on this agreed that this was intrinsic to the trial, allowing children to feel 'safe' to ask questions and talk about the story without being judged.

Having a selection of new, high-quality books is key

All schools were gifted 200 new books at the start of the trial, and we expected this to have a positive impact on teachers' and children's attitudes to taking part in the trial. We weren't disappointed. We received spontaneous expressions of excitement, anticipation and enthusiasm from trial leads when the books were delivered.

- *We needed the books, and the documentation about reading for pleasure – it reminded us why it was important. That perfect harmony of the books and the reason for doing it.*
- *Thank you so much for ... all the beautiful books we received this week. The children are over the moon.*
- *THANK YOU so much for all our wonderful books. Teachers had a fabulous meeting discussing the books and picking books they know their classes will love.*
- *The books are amazing- our teachers are delighted!*

After years of budget cuts, followed by the devastating impact of Covid on many children, the books generated excitement, goodwill and enthusiasm among staff and children.

As this Year 4 teacher said: *There are 30 children in my class who've had a very difficult time through covid. A lot of issues. The culture of reading was they didn't love it. ... Since the trial, we've had access to incredible texts especially for children who don't get taken to libraries. They've been exposed to brand new books, exciting titles – some have never held a new book. With covid, libraries and schools being shut, they were just reading what was at home. This class missed out on books – picture books, non-fiction books. They just loved it.*

When launching a 'read-aloud' initiative, access to a range of high-quality children's books is intrinsic to children's and teachers' enjoyment, and an important success criterion for introducing a daily storytime.

The trial also prompted teachers to share their experiences of which books were most effective, the strategies that helped to boost children's engagement with the story, and the benefits of opting for a consistent time in the day, versus being flexible over the timing. These are shared separately and may be useful for schools considering how to start their own storytime initiative.

Methodology

Recruitment

Working with UKLA via their [November 2022 e-bulletin](#), teachers across England were invited to apply to take part in Farshore's Storytime Trial by completing a short online application form in which they provided information about their school and their current approach to reading for pleasure (RfP). In total, we received 115 applications. Participation was incentivised through the offer of 200 free books from Farshore and HarperCollins Children's Books, worth approximately £1,500. The selection of books was made by Professor Teresa Cremin (Co-Director, Literacy and Social Justice Centre, The Open University) and David Reedy (Independent Literacy Consultant and past President of UKLA).

Twenty applicants were chosen from a range of primary schools across England, based on geographical spread, school size, pupil demographics and their self-reported evaluation of their school's progress in reading score. Because of the suspension of end-of-KS2 national testing due to the pandemic, schools' performance in reading was not available as a selection criterion. Seven said their school had 'below average' progress in reading, eight gave an 'average' rating, and five rated their progress in reading as 'above average'. Applicants were also asked whether their KS2 teachers currently read aloud to the children, in order to screen out those who were already offering a daily storytime.

The nominated 'trial lead' in each participating school was asked to sign and return an MOU setting out the tasks and obligations required of their staff and pupils. This was countersigned by the school's head.

Data gathering

The **Farshore Storytime Trial** was a longitudinal study which ran over the spring term of 2023. Each school received 200 free books from Farshore and HarperCollins Children's Books, plus enough copies of Hodder Education's Salford Sentence Reading and Comprehension Test Form A and B and associated record sheets for all Year 4 pupils, plus the Teacher's Manual at the start of the term. Year 4 was selected for the reading and comprehension test because, according to Professor Kate Cain of Lancaster University, a collation of studies show that in the very early stages of reading development, word reading accuracy is the best predictor of reading comprehension and that between 8–10 years it is listening comprehension that becomes the stronger predictor of reading comprehension.

Pre-trial data gathering:

- Teachers involved in the trial were sent a googleform questionnaire asking about their current RfP training, strategies and practice, and their goals and aspirations associated with the trial. They were also invited to comment on their perceptions of the attitudinal and behaviour-related barriers to RfP among their pupils. In total, 86 teachers completed the form.
- Each child in Year 4 was individually assessed by staff at the school using the Salford standardised test (form A) and given a reading accuracy and comprehension score.
- Teachers were sent a googleform questionnaire to gather pre-trial attitudinal and behavioural feedback from their pupils in Year 3, 4 and 5. In total, 2354 pupils submitted their responses.

Post-trial data gathering:

- Teachers were asked to complete a post-trial googleform in which they provided feedback on their approach to storytime (When did they do it? Which books did they choose? Were children involved

in choosing?) as well as their observations on the impact on children's attitude towards reading and reading behaviour. We also asked them to describe any unexpected changes (positive or negative) in the children, and comment on any impact on themselves as practitioners. In total, 67 teachers submitted responses.

- Each child in Year 4 was individually assessed using the Salford standardised test (form B) and given a reading accuracy and comprehension score.
- Teachers were sent a googleform questionnaire in order to gather post-trial attitudinal and behavioural feedback from their pupils in Year 3, 4 and 5. Schools returned 1558 post trial pupil responses.
- A further six schools took part in a post-trial interview in the summer term, in which they provided further detail on their trial experience and reflected on the ongoing impact on their teaching practice.

Salford Sentence Reading and Comprehension Test

The latest edition of this test was re-standardised with a sample of over 5980 children in 2022. It is a one-to-one assessment in which children read a series of progressively difficult sentences aloud to an adult (teacher, teaching assistant or SENCO) until they make their sixth reading error, which gives their reading age. They are asked three comprehension questions (to assess their literal and inferential understanding and vocabulary) on each sentence which gives a separate comprehension age. This may be different from their reading age. Using lookup tables provided in the manual or Hodder's free online analysis platform (MARK), the standardised and age standardised scores are then calculated.

Trial participants were invited to attend a webinar explaining how to administer the tests, supplemented with additional information on administering and scoring the tests and using MARK. This was hosted by Hodder Education. Additionally, Hodder provided email support for teachers at both testing points in the trial. However, the administration of the tests was not overseen by the research team.

The reasons for choosing this test were:

- The test is designed to track small steps of progress and monitor the impact of interventions over time. In the case of this trial, the duration was relatively short, lasting only one term.
- It is relatively quick to use, taking up to 10 minutes per child.
- It had been used in the previous, small-scale Farshore trial in 2018.

Main report: key findings

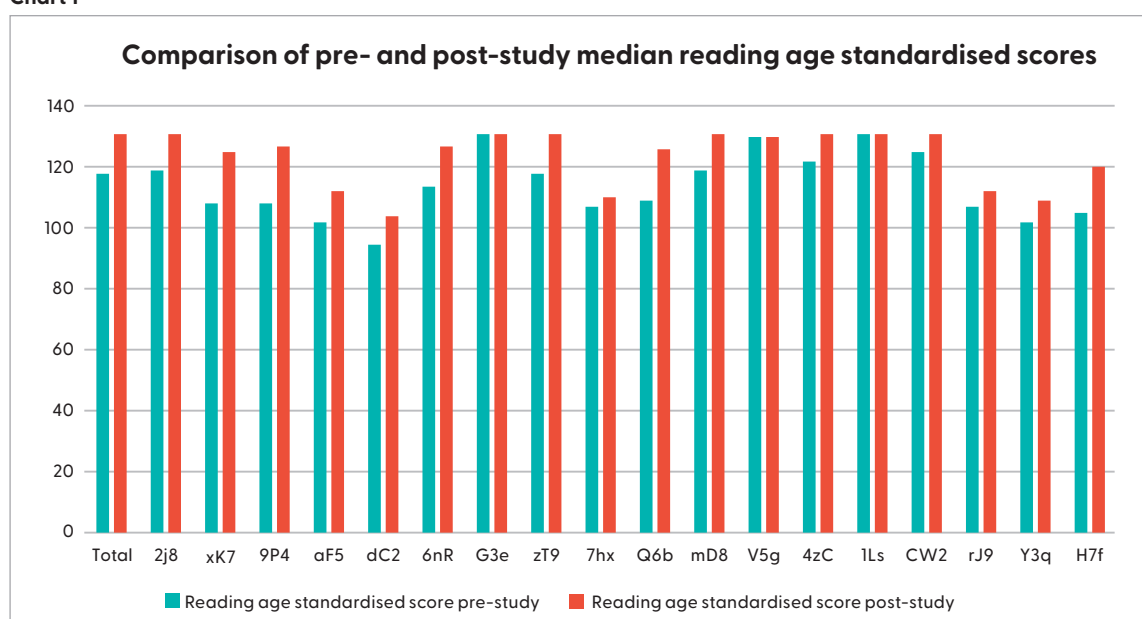
Deciding when to run a longitudinal study in schools is always a difficult choice as every term brings pressures associated with the annual school calendar. Choosing the spring term of 2023 for this trial brought unforeseen challenges for our trial schools. Industrial action on a range of dates across February, March and April saw schools across England either partially or fully closed, including some of the trial schools. Supply teachers were needed to provide cover for other staff who succumbed to a particularly virulent round of viruses, including Covid-19. Finally, the term itself had a staggered start date, which saw some schools losing up to a week of the trial. Despite this, all 20 schools submitted some data or evidence of impact to the research team.

Impact on reading attainment in Year 4

- In total, 18 schools submitted age standardised scores indicating reading attainment for their Year 4 children. This represents test results for 724 children. **All 18 schools showed gains in their average age standardised scores for reading.** This means that average reading attainment across the sample increased from 'average/age appropriate' to 'well above average'. This is in the space of just one term.
- **The median gain in reading age across the sample was 7 months**, while the average gain was just under 12 months.
- Across the sample, **432 children (60%) made more than 2 months' gain in reading age.** This means that their reading age increased more than their actual age over the trial duration, representing a 'value-added' gain when comparing their pre- and post-trial reading attainment.
- **36% (over a third) gained more than 13 months on their pre-trial reading age.**

The chart below shows each schools' **median** age standardised score for the first and second tests. Note that the maximum age standardised score (ASS) is 130, which was the median score for some schools in test 1 and/or test 2.

Chart 1

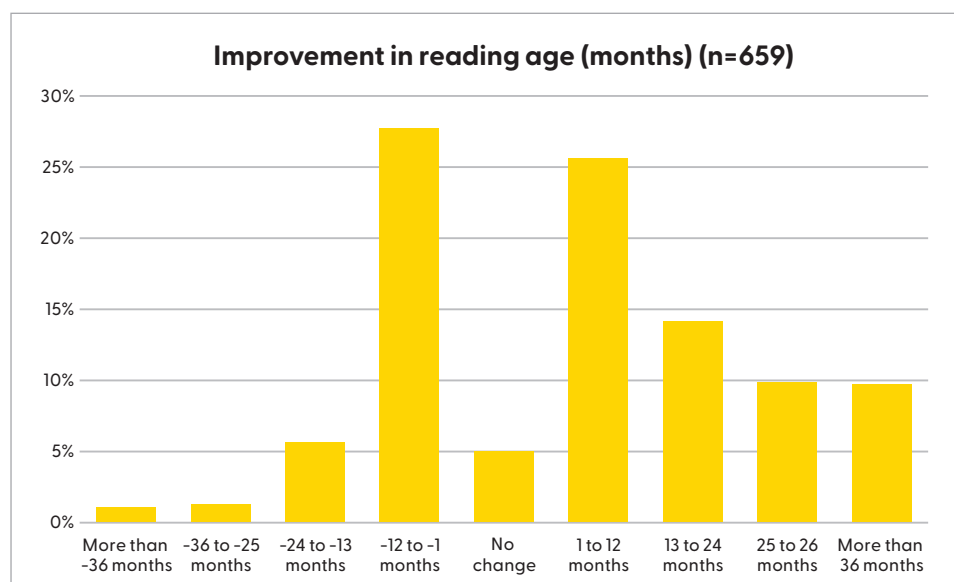


Note: School names have been pseudonymised in order to hide their identities. Salford Sentence Reading and Comprehension Test (SSRCT) has been standardised to an average score of 100, allowing schools to compare their scores with the national standardisation sample.

In total, 521 children's reading age improved over the trial. Given that the trial duration spanned one entire term, it is to be expected that most children would make some gains on reading age.

In the chart below, the difference in children's age between the first and second test is subtracted from the change in their reading age between the two tests to calculate the 'net' change in their reading age.

Chart 2



[Not all children's age in years and months was supplied.]

As this shows, more than half the sample (60%) saw greater gains in their reading age than in their chronological age. This indicates that these children may have seen accelerated improvements in their reading attainment as a result of the storytime intervention.

Please see Appendix B for further discussion of these statistics.

Impact on comprehension attainment in Year 4

In total, 17 schools submitted comprehension attainment data for their Year 4 children. This represents test results for 695 children.

Across the sample as a whole, **average and median age standardised scores (ASS) for comprehension lagged behind those for reading at both the start and end of the trial.** (Although in eight schools, their average age standardised score for comprehension was higher than their average age standardised score for reading at the start of the trial, and in seven, the median comprehension age standardised score was higher.)

Although the gains made in comprehension were in line with reading gains, this meant that comprehension attainment, although higher at the end of the trial, was still weaker than reading attainment.

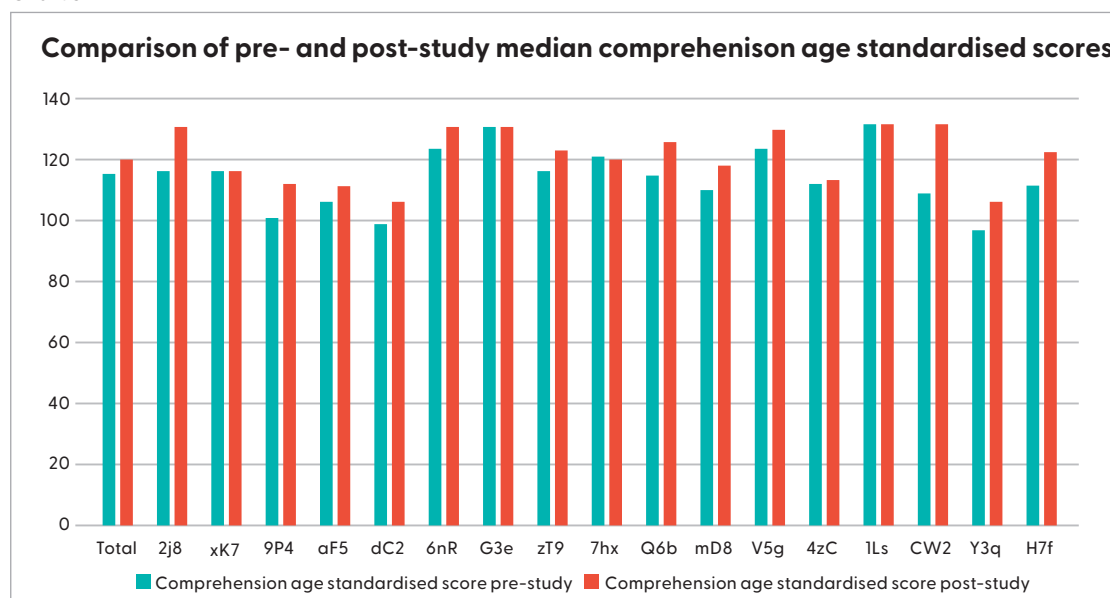
All schools saw their average age standardised score (ASS) for comprehension go up over the duration of the trial. At the start of the trial, the average age standardised score for comprehension across the total sample was 112.15; this increased to 116.19 at the end.

Schools saw a shift towards 'excellence'. At the start of the trial, 49% of the sample was deemed either 'well above average/excellent'; at the end of the trial this had gone up to 60%. That said, three schools did not have any pupils scoring in the 'excellent' band. These three schools saw a shift from 'average' to 'well above average'.

The chart below shows the **median** pre- and post-trial age standardised scores for comprehension for each school. Note that the maximum ASS is 130, which was the median score for some schools in test 1 and/or test 2.

Of the children for whom we had comprehension ages (380 pupils), **56% saw a value-added gain**: in other words, their comprehension age went up by more than their 'actual' age over the trial duration.

Chart 3



Note: School names have been pseudonymised in order to hide their identities. Salford Sentence Reading and Comprehension Test (SSRCT) has been standardised to an average score of 100, allowing schools to compare their scores with the national standardisation sample.

Again, there were considerable variances across the 17 schools, with some scoring below 100 (the 'average performance' score for the national standardisation sample for children of this age), and others already scoring in the 'well above average' category (116-130) at the start of the trial.

Table 1, to the right, shows the change in comprehension ASS broken down by school and attainment category. In order to interpret the score ranges, the test publisher has provided guidelines on organising ASS scores into 'bands' from 'very weak' to 'excellent'.

Using this, we can see **that every school shows a shift towards a higher performing band**, although some were still not seeing any children in the 'excellent' band at the end of the trial.

Chart 4

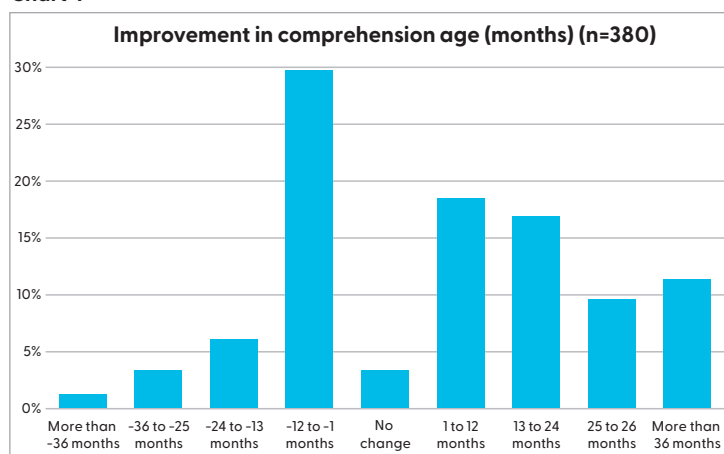


Table 1

Age standardised score	Qualitative interpretation
>130	Excellent
116-130	Well above average
110-115	Higher average
85-115	Average/ age appropriate
85-90	Lower average
70-84	Well below average
<69	Very weak

There are some exceptional changes in the scores below:

- One school went from 4% to 52% scoring 'excellent'.
- Another went from 29% to 61%, and another from 7 to 21%.

Others saw the biggest increase in the percentage scoring in the 'higher average' bands:

- In one school, none of their pupils achieved in the 'higher average' band at the start; by the end, 24% were deemed 'higher average'.

This is a useful analysis as it reveals gains across all the attainment categories.

Table 2

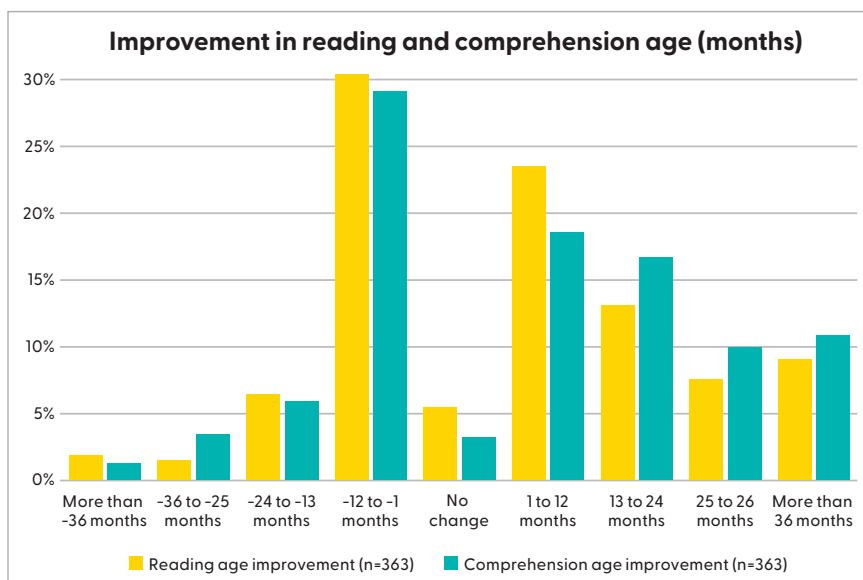
Comprehension age standardised score 1

		<70 Very weak %	70-84 Well below average %	85-90 Lower average %	91-109 Average %	110-115 Higher average %	116-130 Well above average %	>130 Excellent %	n =
TOTAL	Pre	3	5	5	27	11	25	24	692
	Post	2	3	4	23	9	27	33	696
2j8	Pre	6	3	6	23	10	23	29	31
	Post	3	3	0	6	0	26	61	31
xK7	Pre	5	3	0	26	15	51	0	39
	Post	5	3	0	10	28	43	13	40
9P4	Pre	0	10	3	66	0	21	0	29
	Post	0	3	10	31	24	31	0	67
aF5	Pre	6	10	7	34	9	19	13	67
	Post	0	9	13	24	10	21	22	67
dC2	Pre	10	10	20	30	10	3	17	30
	Post	10	7	3	33	20	13	13	30
6nR	Pre	0	7	3	27	7	17	40	30
	Post	0	7	0	23	7	10	53	30
G3e	Pre	1	2	4	7	5	19	62	108
	Post	0	2	0	10	5	15	69	108
zT9	Pre	1	4	7	29	6	19	35	84
	Post	1	0	5	22	7	30	36	87
7hX	Pre	0	0	0	27	13	33	27	15
	Post	0	0	0	27	13	20	40	15
Q6b	Pre	5	5	0	33	10	19	29	21
	Post	5	5	5	19	5	29	33	21
mD8	Pre	4	4	0	35	23	33	0	48
	Post	2	2	2	33	4	56	0	48
V5g	Pre	0	7	0	14	14	64	0	42
	Post	0	7	0	10	7	76	0	42
4zC	Pre	2	2	4	30	23	21	17	47
	Post	2	0	2	40	13	23	19	47
1Ls	Pre	0	0	6	11	0	22	61	18
	Post	0	0	0	17	0	11	72	18
cW2	Pre	0	0	11	41	30	15	4	27
	Post	0	0	11	37	0	0	52	27
Y3q	Pre	3	17	14	34	14	10	7	29
	Post	3	3	7	41	3	21	21	29
H7f	Pre	0	7	7	37	7	30	19	27
	Post	0	7	0	26	7	26	33	27

Comparing changes in reading with changes in comprehension ages

Because not all schools provided comprehension ages, we also did a 'like for like' analysis to show the comparison between changes in reading and comprehension ages, showing the data from schools which provided both (this amounted to 363 children). Although the overall pattern is similar, in these schools, the percentage of children whose comprehension age showed a 'net/ value-added' gain of more

Chart 5



than a year is greater than the percentage whose reading age went up by more than a year (30% of the sample saw their reading age go up by more than a year, versus 38% which saw their comprehension age go up by more than 12 months). This indicates that for some children there was a substantial gain in comprehension: a crucial skill when reading for pleasure.

Impact on children's attitudes towards reading across Year 3, Year 4 and Year 5

In order to understand how being read to daily by their teacher, purely for pleasure, influenced children's reading attitudes, we asked both teachers and pupils for their views. This convergence of teachers' observations and children's self-reported feedback provides a robust indication that children's attitudes to reading improved.

- All teachers who completed the post-trial survey believed that they observed an impact on all or some children's attitudes towards reading.
- Meanwhile, more children reported positive attitudes at the end of the trial when re-asked the same questions about how they felt about reading.
- Conversely, there was a decrease in negative attitudes towards reading when children's pre-trial and post-trial responses were compared.

All 67 teacher respondents – when asked to rate the observed impact of storytime on their pupils' enjoyment of being read to, enjoyment of reading independently, and confidence as readers – reported seeing some impact, and the majority reported seeing an impact on 'some' or 'all' of their pupils.

In a post-trial interview, one teacher described a dramatic impact on a Year 4 girl whose phonics decoding at the start of the trial was still not secure, and who hadn't progressed from early phonics titles. Storytime allowed her to experience stories which she couldn't read independently, and the difference in her attitude and reading ability was dramatic. Not only did her reading age increase by 2 and a half years over the trial, but she wanted to ask questions, and discuss the book. The teacher said: *She's just been reassessed and her fluency has gone*

up to 96 words per minute and that's a big jump. Our early years Reading Lead has said we can take her off Read Write Inc [phonics programme published by OUP] as she's made that amount of progress.

Children were also more likely to agree with positive statements about reading. A greater percentage reported positive attitudes towards reading in their post-trial survey, compared with the pre-trial feedback, even though their initial responses had already been overwhelmingly positive.

Children were less likely to say they only read when they had to or felt reading was boring, and fewer children believed reading was hard. Bearing in mind the relatively short timespan of the trial, these small changes are important, and are indicative of a shift in attitudes and behaviour.

Chart 6

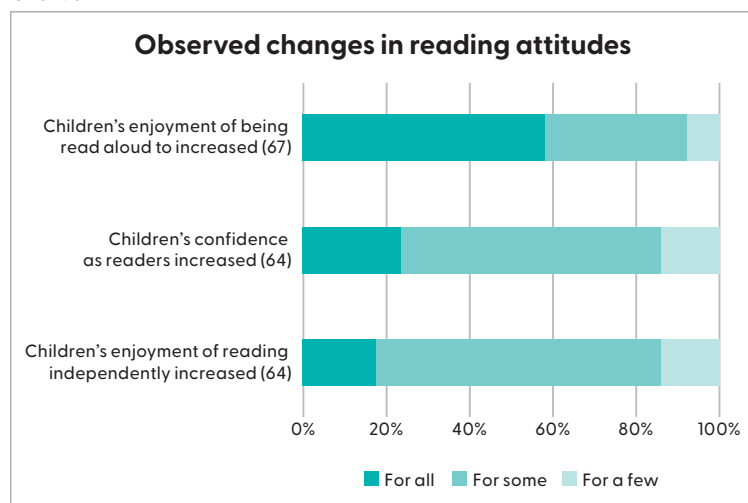
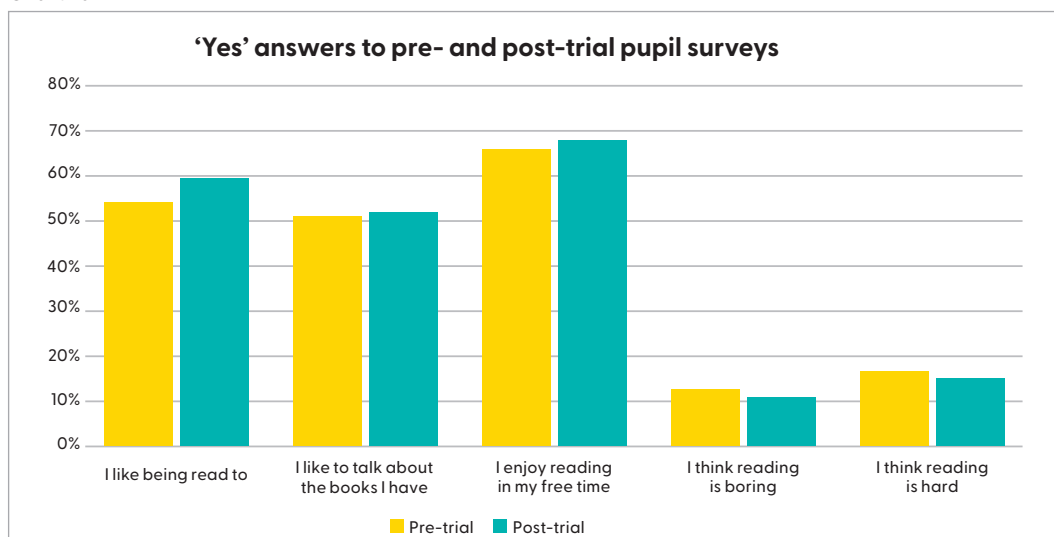
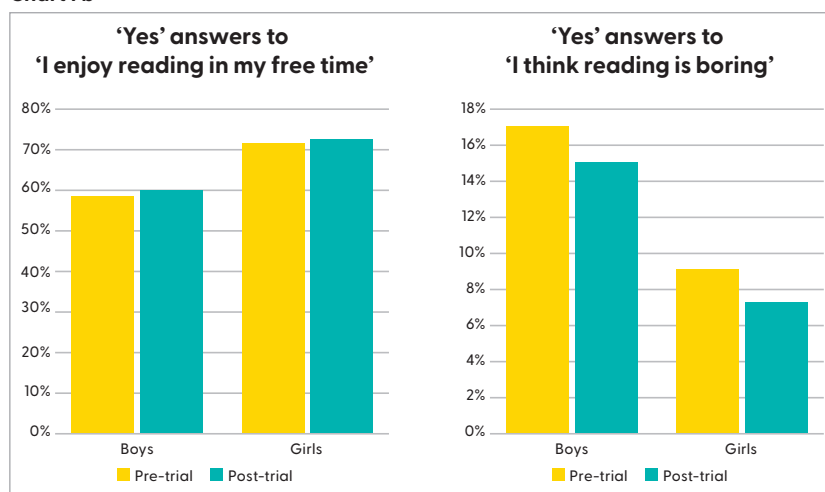


Chart 7a



Although boys were found to have slightly less positive attitudes to reading, the attitudes of both boys and girls improved over the course of the trial.

Chart 7b



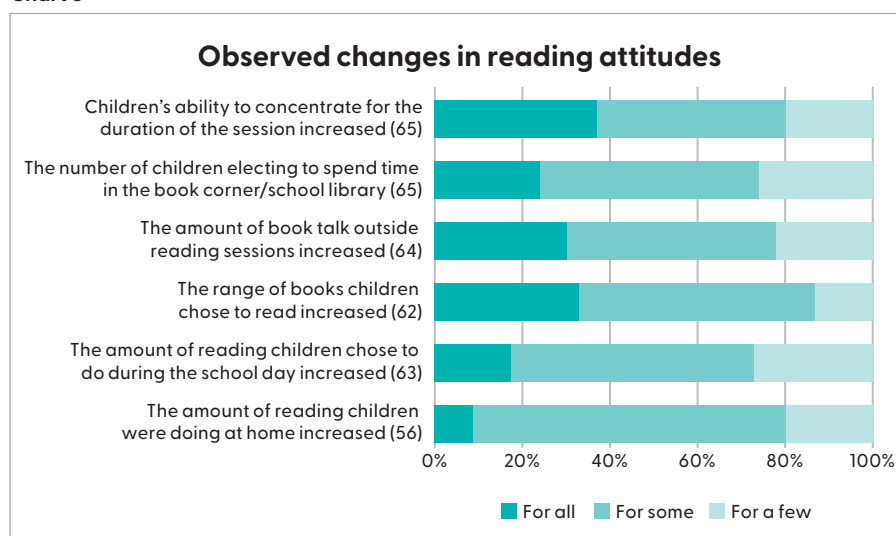
Impact on children's reading behaviour across Year 3, Year 4 and Year 5

Both teachers and pupils agreed that the trial had impacted a range of 'reading' and 'book' behaviours. Teachers particularly reported seeing changes to children's ability to concentrate during storytime sessions, to the range of books children chose to read, and to the amount of book talk they observed in the classroom. Many children, meanwhile, believed that they were reading more after the trial, compared with before.

Overall:

- Teachers reported that the prevalence of 'positive' reading behaviour increased, and – most importantly – that children's enjoyment of books went up too.
- Several commented on the impact on specific groups of children, such as reluctant readers, boys, Pupil Premium children and those reading at a lower level.
- Children were more likely to identify as 'readers' by the end of trial: they discovered new authors and genres, and had greater self-awareness of their own reading preferences, actively seeking out titles to read independently. They were also more likely to see themselves as 'a community of readers', and teachers observed informal book discussions among classmates.

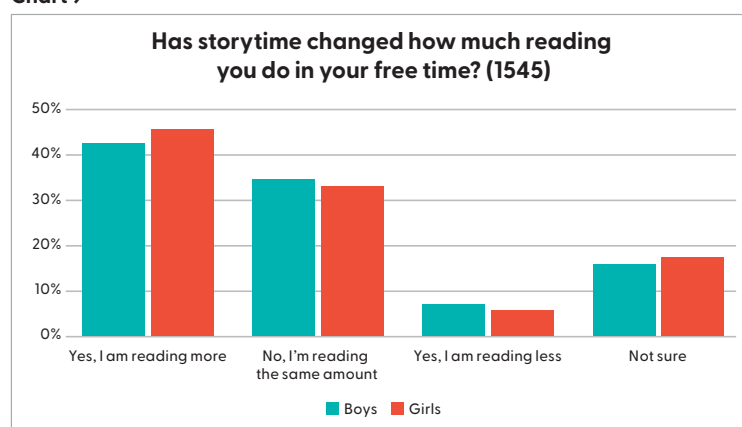
Chart 8



When asked about changes to how often they chose to read, 44% of children (676) believed that they were reading more at the end of the trial than before. Girls were slightly more likely to report a positive change.

When broken down by year group, the percentage who believe that they are reading more after the trial compared with before drops in each successive year group. This reflects other research which shows that children's propensity to read for pleasure declines as they get older.

Chart 9



The following findings are drawn from teachers' feedback from the post-trial survey and in-depth interviews with the researchers.

Many observed children's growing engagement when being read to.

One teacher reported how the class would *cheer when it was story time - and remind me if I had forgotten to put it on the timetable or if I ha[d] had to move it to a different time*. Teachers described how children listened with their full attention – either quietly or expressively. As one put it: *most of the class sat in rapt silence, completely absorbed and enjoying the story [...and] some children cannot help but laugh, gasp, and even act out what is happening*.

Teachers reported that storytime encouraged children to read aloud with more confidence and enjoyment.

During our English lessons, one teacher observed, *whenever I choose any pupil, they show confidence and resilience when reading aloud to the whole class*. Another commented that *children are trying to use more expression in their reading* and another described how, during a drama project the class was able to get involved in acting out the characters feelings – *using their faces and hands - to act out the story*.

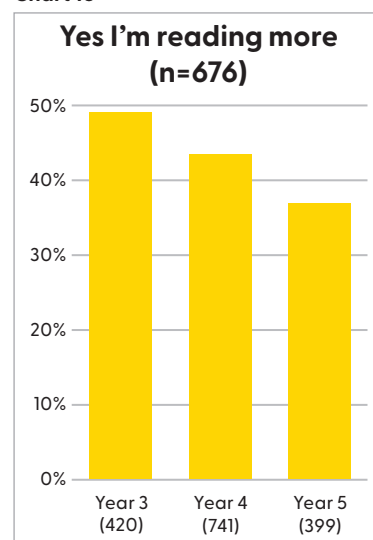
Some teachers talked about a greater understanding among children of their own reading preferences.

They reported that enjoying storytime books prompted children to seek out other similar books: *Some children wanted to read the books we had read for themselves and others were happy to find that they could read books by the same author or others in a series*. One teacher observed how *children brought in books by similar authors to the ones we had read in class* and another noted that *they actively sought out the sequels in our library or at the local bookshop*. A teacher even reported that *storytime inspired some of the children to develop a new favourite author, which they went on to write to*. Teachers also reported some children became interested in books they would not have known about before, commenting that *storytime helped them to make more informed choices when they went to the school library* and that the class became *keen to challenge themselves in their reading and to explore different genres*.

Teachers described how their class became more interested in discussing books. They reported that their class were eager to participate in teacher-led discussion – *asking way more questions than in an English lesson* and also wanted to *talk about the story and draw pictures of the story in their free time*. One teacher described how they *could hear them chatting about it even after the session finished* and another wrote about how the class wanted to talk about their book with others in school: *[They] became excited when they knew other classes were reading something that they'd already finished. They were excited for them to experience the story and, without giving any spoilers, they couldn't wait to discuss the books with them*. As another teacher put it: *They wanted to know about other children and staff members as readers*.

Some chose to comment on specific categories of children. When sharing observations about children on the Pupil Premium register, one teacher said: *I have noticed having a better attitude – at the beginning they were more resistant, more fidgety – but are now more settled and I'm more likely to see them with a book in their hand, taking more opportunities to read*. Another teacher commented that *It was good to see some of the boys more engaged with reading by listening as a few don't like to read independently* while another said that the children in the class *who didn't know this already, realised what fun and how enjoyable books can be*. Yet another commented on their lower ability readers whose confidence was boosted when rereading familiar books that they'd heard the teacher read.

Chart 10



Case studies: the impact of storytime on specific children

During the post-trial interviews, teachers were invited to share the stories of children who stood out for them, where they believed that storytime had started their reading for pleasure journey.

Josh: high attainer but not a reader

Josh's mum used to say he wouldn't pick up a book, but because he's high attaining it's gone unnoticed. He could read, but he didn't want to. It's hard for boys sometimes to see themselves as readers. They think it's a girly activity. They want to be outside doing things. Storytime has changed that for Josh, it's meant that he's now reading, and he sees himself as a reader. He's also happy for others to know that he's a reader: he's going to be a reading buddy next year. Storytime – and the books we got – have helped him find a genre that he can relate to. His mum says he's started to read graphic novels he's got from school. The graphic novels are a great way of getting them reading – it's a comic. He's now reading for pleasure.

Lucie: struggling reader

The child that's really surprised me is Lucie, the youngest child in Year 4. She lives with her grandad, no parents: he does his best but she doesn't have any other family. She's had a lot happen in her life – family issues – so perhaps her emotional understanding is more developed than other children her age, those in a conventional family, because she's had to be more empathetic. Her reading was wobbly and she came to me without secure phonics skills. Before the trial, her reading was plodding along as you'd expect, but the big change has been in her comprehension. It's spiked, and when we assessed her on the Salford test, her inference column was really high. Before we started the storytime trial, she was quite passive in class; not the child who puts her hand up. She'll speak if she's forced to, but she'd rather take a back seat. Now we know that she understands far more than we realised, and her reading has also progressed onto the amber colour band. So although she's still rated as 'RED' on our RAG rating, we can see her progress and we know her inferential understanding is far more developed than her reading ability.

Khalid: switched on to reading through 'Goosebumps'

Khalid has been working towards expectations in reading since Y2, so he's slightly below his expected level. But the biggest problem was his attitude towards reading: he just hated it and didn't want to do it. Our day starts with 15 minutes independent reading, and he would do anything to avoid it, including coming in late. When he was told it was reading, he'd sigh and roll his eyes; he was openly resistant. The first story the teacher read to the class, he wasn't excited, but he didn't walk out. After finishing that book, they chose the Goosebumps book, and that was when it happened. He would be the first to sit down; he wanted to sit at the front. He then asked to read it at home. Then a lot of the boys in the class caught on, and we've now bought a set of Goosebumps for the library. We realised that he didn't know which genre he liked; it feels like the start of his reading journey. A lot of our boys think it's not cool to read. He loves football: he's one of the cool kids, so having that happen is really brilliant. It's so small, but so big for him.

Lucas: SEND child; pending diagnosis

Lucas presents with many of the classic symptoms of ADHD: he struggles to focus, and to relate to his peers; he's very easily distracted. Before storytime he was reluctant to share his thoughts on a character, give an opinion or make an inference. Since we started the trial, I've noticed a big change in his behaviour: how rooted he became, how still and how engaged. To the point where he would gasp or laugh out loud, he was so immersed. To the point where I would look down and when I was gesturing it was as if he was seeing it in front of him. His imagination went with it. Since Storytime I've seen that his reading across the curriculum is much more engaged and enthusiastic, and he goes to that imaginative space and he can talk about it. He

said he felt more confident in reading and writing. And he really enjoys it. It's had that impact and I can see it academically and also in terms of enjoying the story. Something has clicked.

These are just some of the children whose stories we heard. There were many others, and it's clear storytime can make a huge impact on children. Note: names have been changed to protect the children's identities.

Impact on children's well-being and wider behaviour

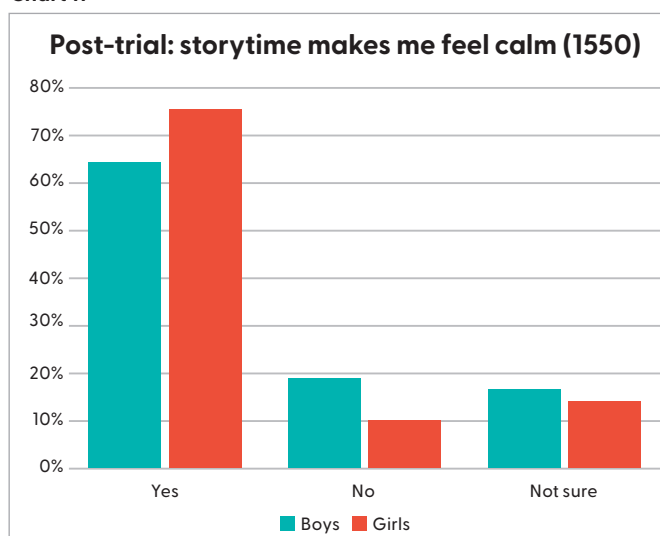
The changes reported by teachers weren't limited to just children's reading attitudes and behaviour.

- Teachers frequently commented on the calming effect of storytime. Not only did children's engagement with the story have a calming effect, allowing them to focus, but also that the feeling of being 'calm' in turn allowed them to inhabit their own imaginations more freely.
- The storytime books were a gateway for children to explore their own emotions, boosting their empathy for their classmates. Several said that they believed that their children were more emotionally literate by the end of the trial.
- Storytime was also a bonding experience for many, with teachers saying it had strengthened their relationship with their pupils.

Many teachers commented on storytime's ability to calm children, especially at transition points such as the beginning of the day, the beginning of the afternoon or the end of the day. They reported that it helped to: *calmly start the day, to settle and calm them for the afternoon, ready for their learning; or to calm and slow down at the end of the day.* Several also observed that their class became calmer in general during the trial, reporting that *school days are on the whole a little calmer and a little more focused.*

Children's self-reported feedback corroborates this finding. When asked, at the end of the trial, whether they agreed that *storytime makes me feel calm*, the majority agreed.

Chart 11



Teachers reported that storytime had a positive impact on children's ability to focus, making them more receptive to learning. *They were calmer [...] which meant they were more focused* commented one. Another described how her class's *ability to settle, listen and engage improved over time* and also how their *imaginative functioning improved* – they became *better able to make inferences, imagine and dream.* Teachers described how her class were able to make a shift to *reading books without pictures and creating their own pictures in their minds instead* and to *talking more confidently about characters and taking ideas from our story into their writing.*

Exposure to different books also opened the door to other cultures and experiences or allowed children to see their own culture or experiences validated through stories. One teacher stated: *It was great for our children to see life in different cultures and for some of our Muslim children to see their prayer times, food*

and culture represented in the book. It really opened the discussion about different ways of life. Teachers commented that children drew on characters and narratives in the books in order to talk about their own experiences. Some children spoke to me about the books we had read and talked about their own lives or the lives of people they knew in relation to this, one commented.

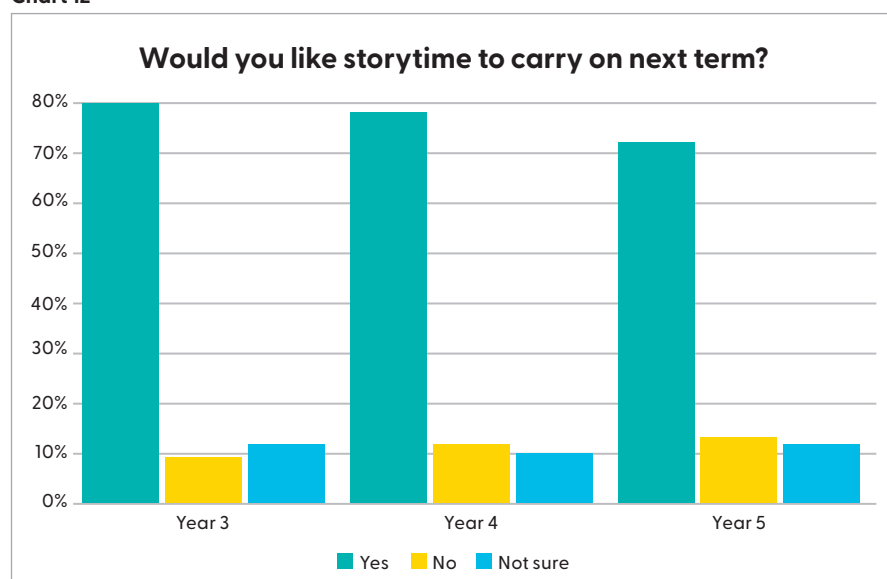
Some teachers described how children's emotional literacy improved. Over the course of the trial, their ability to infer and discuss characters choices, thoughts and feelings increased. One wrote: *Some children drew links to the story – 'This is like when the Creakers...'. This reference to the experiences of characters in books made it easier for them to communicate their feelings.* Teachers described how their class were able to empathise more with each other: *They seemed more interested in their peers' lives and prior experiences* one teacher reported. *I think it had an impact on some of the children's emotional well-being,* another summarised.

Storytime also strengthened teachers' relationship with their pupils. One described it as *quality time* with them. *It was a great experience to strengthen relationships,* another wrote. *Having this shared time brought the class together,* another reported. *Loved the different teacher pupil relationship that it developed.* *Opportunity to laugh together,* another said. *It was a bonding experience for me and my children,* reported another. *It made me feel closer to the children,* yet another commented. *It's strengthened the bond with the children, so thank you. They felt very special having the reading experience every day. I got to know them better.* Several noted that it had given them a far better insight into the books their children enjoyed. *As a teacher I got to find out about my children's interest in reading. Quite a lot love horror books – I was surprised. It was a nice time for me to enjoy getting to know the children.*

What did the children say?

Across all three year groups, the overwhelming majority of children said that they would like storytime to continue. Overall, this represented the preferences of 77% of children.

Chart 12



Reasons for wanting to continue

Children were prompted to provide a reason for their preference. Among the 1199 children who answered positively, the majority [1132] gave reasons why they want storytime to continue. Their responses fell into five main categories: I enjoy being read to (35%); It is calming (29%); I like the books we read (19%); It helps me learn (16%); I like reading with others (1%). Children's quotes have not been edited.

Children stated the enjoyment they took in being read to. Many made simple statements such as *I like being read to*. Some commented that they liked storytime because they liked reading in general: *Because I just love reading*. Others specified that it was being read aloud to that they enjoyed: *I like when other people read to me*. They wrote that being read to was easier than reading themselves: *Because I can understand story's more and if a teacher reads I can understand but not wen I read; [...I]ts easier to picture it in your head when someone else is reading it*. One child described how he wanted to continue because storytime had allowed him to enjoy reading when he hadn't before: *Yes because it has made me like books a lot more and I feel like if we don't carry then I will go back to hate reading. Also I feel like it has made a lot of people in my class like reading*. Some children went on to describe what they liked about being read to. For some, it was being drawn into a new world: *Because it takes you on a journey; When you read, i imagine myself in the own adventures and it is fun; like it because it makes me feel like I'm in the story*. Others commented on how their teacher's ability to read the story with expression enhanced their enjoyment: *It is really fun with the different expressions my teacher does; Well I love it when Mrs— does her accents for Mr Gum and all the other characters she makes it so fun and I want her to read Mr Gum to us MORE! :) Mr Gum books are very funny especially because of Mrs—*

Some children reflected on **the significance of the books they had been read:** *I think storytime is really instresing cause the books are really nice; I think this because I like the books and they're very exciting*. They commented on the suspense reading them had caused: *Because I want to no what happens next; I want it to carry on next term because I want to read more books and find out what happens in all the endings* or the interest they had in them: *The current book we are reading is very interesting and I wish to finish it*. Others described their preferences for specific genres, including: narrative *I think because i like story books*; comedy *because the book might be funny and people will laugh like the land of roar*; action *[...] I like action and all the books were action*; and non-fiction *because I like information books*. A few commented that they enjoyed the experience of reading different books they wouldn't have read otherwise: *Because you get to experience new books; To learn about more books and the books I have never read before*. One child described the insight books gave into other people and themselves: *In my opinion I think that reading is good because it is a window to other people and me*. Some reported that they appreciated being able to choose storytime books and wanted to continue *Only if we get to vote the books*.

Others said they wanted to continue with storytime because it helped their learning or improved their reading skills. Through storytime, they learnt new things *Because you can learn new things* and improved their reading: *BECAUSE I WANT TO PRACTISE READING; The more you read the more your skills improve. I like learning facts from non-fiction books*. They mentioned expanding their vocabulary: *i want it to continue because i want to learn more words and be smart* and improving their writing: *because it helps with writing and creative writing*. Children said storytime fired their imagination and gave them inspiration: *Because it helps your imagination grow and it can help you learn*. Children reported that storytime should continue because it encouraged them to read: *because it incourages me to read more*.

Many stated that storytime helped them feel better in themselves. They said they wanted it to continue *Because it calm me down and makes me happy; I think that storytime should carry on because it makes the class feel peaceful*. It was described as a calming way to end the day or to begin the afternoon: *Because It helps me calm down after lunch break; Because it calms me down before I go home*. Children described storytime helping them regulate their emotions: *Because it make me happy; I think this because it makes*

me concentrate and makes me feel better when mad or sad. They also reported it helped them to focus: because it helps me to focus; because it clears my mind; Story time makes me feel ready for the rest of the day. A few reported that it had improved their confidence and self-esteem: Because it gives me confidence; I think this because reading helps me build my self-esteem.

Children reported that they enjoyed the collaborative aspect of sharing a story. *I want to carry on storytime because it is good to read as a class; I think it should carry on because some books are interesting and instead of enjoying it myself I can enjoy it with other people who enjoy it too.*

These children's words are a powerful endorsement of the impact of a daily storytime session. Their comments show that an immersive experience of listening to a story purely for enjoyment deepened their engagement with books and reading in many different ways.

Negative feedback

Storytime didn't receive unanimous approval, however. 11% (178) said that they didn't want storytime to continue. Of these, 130 also provided reasons, which were categorised as follows: I didn't enjoy it (50%); I couldn't concentrate for the duration (18%); I didn't enjoy being read to (16%); I didn't like the books (16%).

Among those who said they didn't enjoy it, **the main reason stated was that they didn't like reading in general and/or found storytime boring.** They wrote: *its just really boring I don't like it; I just don't like reading.* Some commented that they hoped they would have more of other activities if storytime did not continue: *We will have more time for lessons; I like doing maths more than storytime; we have no time for show and tell.*

For others, it was too long, or they could not maintain their concentration. They revealed: *Because 20 minutes is too long; I think this because I can't concentrate on the story.* Another commented that storytime was held at a time of day at which they couldn't concentrate: *Because I get hungry.*

Not all those who opposed storytime didn't like reading: there were some who **preferred reading independently**, or who felt that the idea of storytime was patronising. *I don't like story time because I don't like it when other people read I prefer reading to myself; I believe we should be able to read ourselves and share what has happened. Maybe even children read to the class.* One elaborated that reading independently gave them more choice: *I prefer reading to myself and I can read at my own pace and I can choose the books I want to read.* Others felt being read to was for younger children, answering that that they didn't want to continue: *because I'm not a baby; I think we will be too old for storytime.*

Choice of books was another reason given among some who were less positive about storytime. This highlights the challenge of allowing the class to choose, which risks switching off those whose preferred title wasn't selected. As one child put it: *I just don't like them books when they pick the ones I don't really like.* For some this was information books: *I like reading books but not the boring information ones I want stuff like lol.* While for others it was 'long' story books: *I think this because all the books we read are so long and I don't like the Tom Gates book; We always have story books and it always makes me bored.* One only wanted to read a specific genre: *books are boring unless they are manga.*

Many of the reasons given by children for not wanting to continue with a daily read could be overcome with strategies such as: ensuring all have the chance to see their book chosen (possibly by steering selection towards shorter books), starting with shorter sessions to build up reading stamina, 'renaming' storytime for older children, and choosing a different time of the day when children aren't tired or hungry. Some of the trial participants said that they too asked children for their feedback on storytime, and this may be an advisable strategy: by inviting, acknowledging and 'problem-solving' the barriers that stop engagement, storytime could be seen as a positive experience for an even greater majority of children.

What did the teachers say?

It wasn't just the children who benefitted from storytime. Teachers said that they loved doing it too. Some, however, struggled to find a place for it within the packed curriculum.

Positive feedback

Teachers (61 of 67) commented on how much they enjoyed reading aloud to the children in storytime. As well as enjoying it, 25 teachers (37%) shared that storytime made them feel calmer and more relaxed. *I felt more relaxed entering into the afternoon too! I have giggled with them and put me in a good mood. The sessions certainly contributed to my well-being, finishing each day calmer and with a greater sense of connection with my class.*

Several said storytime had boosted their confidence. For a few, including some who were sceptical at the start of the trial, it supported their own reading journey:

I personally find reading quite difficult [but...] I was pleasantly surprised to see that I also enjoyed reading these stories and could engage with them well having read it aloud and got involved in conversations the children would have around the story. I found myself wishing I had found this world of stories when I was a child but am so pleased I have found it now.

Reading aloud every day made me feel more like a storyteller than a teacher. There is something very pure, almost primal, about having a storytime. It provides a space, a connection point, to dream, imagine and empathise. The sessions certainly contributed to my well-being, finishing each day calmer and with a greater sense of connection with my class.

I have personally started reading more at home [...] and have enjoyed reading aloud to the class as well. I will continue to rave on about the benefits of reading for our mental health to the class, as they are a particularly sensitive group of children.

Concerns over storytime

A small minority of teachers, however, believed it had exacerbated the stress and pressure they were under, as it was yet another thing to fit into their day. Comments associated with this heightened feeling of anxiety included: *Became worried I would not fit everything else I needed to fit into the day as we also have other class books we have to read; It would have been much more enjoyable for me if it hadn't been for time constraints. My afternoon sessions had to be shortened because of the reading sessions and it was a challenge to fit everything in; If a typical school day wasn't so busy, this would be a fantastic contribution to the day but at the minute it is another pressure.* Yet, even among this 'less positive' group of teachers, negative comments were offset against the rewards: *I also found it relaxing in one sense. It was a lovely way to end each day. However, I did feel the pressure of time in fitting other things into the afternoon; I was worried about finding the time as it's such a busy day but it's exactly what we need and I really look forward to it now.*

Reading aloud to children was seen as a guilty pleasure. It was described as something teachers loved doing but was the first casualty of a packed day or competing priorities: *Before it was something we felt we should do, but [...] it was the first thing to go if time was short. No one would think of dropping maths.* Teachers talked about the trial 'giving them permission' to read a story purely for pleasure and enjoyment. Because the school had opted into the trial, reading aloud to the children every day was no longer a choice, it was an expectation for the duration of the term: *Before we did this, I loved it but felt guilty reading to the children. But this gave us permission to read for pleasure.* One of the participants said that they needed

the evidence from the Farshore trial to 'show the impact' of storytime to the Senior Leadership Team and strengthen the case for introducing it across the school.

When asked for their views on whether storytime should be made compulsory, most teachers (59 of the 67) favoured making it a curriculum requirement. They believed this would mitigate the 'guilt' of allocating time to reading for pleasure and ensure that its place in the day was ringfenced. Others (eight), however, expressed concern that mandating it would detract from the enjoyment, making it just another task to do, rather than something teachers and pupils chose to do: *No. I feel this would take the pleasure and excitement out of it, and would make it another task/pressure to fit in to an already packed curriculum, rather than a break to read for pleasure.*

Conclusion

The benefits associated with storytime are compelling. Based on this one-term trial, it delivered quick, tangible wins for teachers and their pupils, evidenced through a range of positive outcomes. As a strategy for boosting reading for pleasure (one of the most commonly cited aims of teachers at the start of the trial), it worked for most children. Across the trial sample, children and teachers enjoyed storytime, and felt it had made the classroom a calmer, happier place in which reading for pleasure was seen as a worthwhile and valuable activity.

When asked whether storytime should continue beyond the spring term, the response was an overwhelming 'yes' from children and teachers. 80% of children in Year 3, 78% in Year 4 and 72% in Year 5 said that they would like storytime to carry on the following term. Teachers were also strongly in favour of retaining storytime: 61 of the 67 who completed the post-trial survey said that they intended to continue reading aloud to the children.

Storytime is highly effective in encouraging a love of reading and raising standards when it is consistent. It needs to happen every day. Access to a range of high-quality children's books is intrinsic to children and teachers' enjoyment, and an important success criterion.

- *Our kids don't get storytime at home, they don't read with their parent, so it was so important to give them this experience to learn to love to read.*
- *It should be made mandatory. It's been good for the teachers' well-being as much as the children's. It's not just another curriculum area. Its benefits are bigger than the time it takes.*
- *We would all love 20 mins a day. Sometimes it is a choice between foundation subjects and Storytime. But making the time was worthwhile – I was sceptical at first, but I've been won over. Doing it every day has helped. If it wasn't every day, it wouldn't have the same impact. For my mental health, it has been great!*

As a simple intervention, it's clear that storytime is a low cost, high value proposition. It requires little or no training. It has an astonishingly positive effect on children's motivation to read, their reading and comprehension attainment and their well-being. In the Department for Education's recently published 'The reading framework'¹⁹ (July 2023) the case for reading aloud to children as part of a reading for pleasure culture is clearly stated:

As with younger children, reading aloud to older pupils is a key way of supporting their development as readers, 'even though pupils can now read independently'. Teachers should consider providing story time for every key stage 2 class, at least four times a week for 20 minutes.... Daily 'story time' might sometimes be viewed as an indulgence at key stages 2

and 3 or it can find itself being squeezed or skipped to accommodate other demands. However, if done well, it is a powerful driver for improving pupils' reading and all-round education, as well as having a positive impact on their social and emotional well-being. It can also be a time of genuine enjoyment for the whole class, a shared experience sparking reflection and discussion.

From the Department for Education's 'The reading framework 2023', section 8 (July 2023)

But daily storytime is not mandated. Should it be? Statutory and non-statutory have different benefits and drawbacks. Mandating it would ensure every child is read to every day at school, thereby unlocking the benefits that reading for pleasure brings. (If mandated, teachers' professional judgment and flexibility on delivering storytime is key to its success.) However, mandating storytime may make some teachers feel they are doing it because they must, not because they want to. And the challenges teachers face in delivering an already jam-packed curriculum may mean that even if mandated, it's simply not possible to achieve and it would put even more pressure on teachers.

Given the impact that reading for pleasure has on children's outcomes, and that storytime can help turn children into readers, this feels like a worthy debate.

I would say it's changed our children's lives. For me, I was brought up in Tower Hamlets with no stories at home. School made me a reader and I love it. Every child in my class is now exposed to high quality texts and has a fairer chance of making it. It's a whole school initiative now. You've opened the doors to that by providing the books. Access to stories can't be a lottery.

Teacher at a school in East London

Appendix A: Overview of trial schools

Table 3

Pseudonymised to:	Location	School size	School type	Percentage EAL	Percentage PP	2022 progress score in reading (self reported)
2j8	London	380 on roll	Community school	69.50%	31.28%	Average
xK7	Merseyside	362 on roll	Voluntary aided	28.70%	65.36%	Below average
9P4	London	216 on roll	Community school	57.40%	42.93%	Below average
aF5	Manchester	537 on roll	Foundation school	19.20%	71.58%	Below average
dC2	Sunderland	275 on roll	Community school	3.30%	69.23%	Below average
6nR	West Yorkshire	412 on roll	Community school	1.70%	4.61%	Above average
G3e	Essex	877 on roll	Community school	92.20%	18.46%	Well below average
zT9	London	627 on roll	Community school	30.30%	10.05%	Above average
yB1	Hampshire	432 on roll	Academy	2.10%	60.15%	Average
7hX	North Yorkshire	75 on roll	Voluntary controlled	0.00%	10.67%	Below average
Q6b	London	210 on roll	Academy	65.70%	40.11%	Above average
mD8	Hull	460 on roll	Academy	5%	58%	Average
V5g	London	408 on roll	Community school	77.20%	34%	Average
4zC	Buckinghamshire	256 on roll	Voluntary aided	12.50%	40.60%	Above average
1Ls	Leicestershire	146 on roll	Academy	5%	26%	Average
cW2	Essex	158 on roll	Academy	29%	59%	Average
rJ9	Northamptonshire	239 on roll	Community school	74%	16%	Above average
Year 3q	Devon	465 on roll	Academy	5%	26%	Below average
bS6	Hertfordshire	293 on roll	Free school	37%	10%	Average
H7f	Cheshire	453 on roll	Community school	24%	14%	Average

Based on information provided on Gov.uk

Appendix B: Methodological discussions

Teachers who participated in the interviews were asked whether their children's performance in the tests tallied with other assessment results and their own professional judgement. On the whole, teachers seemed confident that the scores were an accurate reflection and believed that taking part in storytime had seen an uplift in the average attainment across their Year 4 cohort. One trial lead said that the results were in line with children's scores on a separate standardised test. Another said that only one Year 4 class at the school had taken part in the trial and comparisons of the progress made by the two classes over the spring term indicated that the storytime intervention class had made greater gains.

Below, however, we discuss potential limitations of our reading attainment data.

Schools' performance on Salford

The Salford Sentence Reading and Comprehension Test is standardised to an average score of 100, which is the score representing the 'average' age-related performance for children across the standardisation sample (as of 2022). This enables a comparison of pupils' performance in the test against the national performance level.

The average pre-trial age standardised reading score across the trial sample was higher than the national norm for this age band.

Of the 18 schools which submitted age standardised reading score data, three had a Year 4 average pre-trial score of 100–104.33, meaning that they were deemed 'average' compared with the national standardisation sample. Based on their cohort's average Year 4 pre-trial performance, the rest were in the higher average or well above average category. This is despite schools' own self-reported performance indicating a wide range of attainment and progress in reading.

This could indicate that the Farshore sample is anomalous: based on the range of schools which took part in the trial, we expected to see a range of 'cohort averages' for the schools in terms of reading and comprehension performance, both at the start and end of the trial. It is, however, worth noting that schools were responsible for administering their own tests, and may have been generous in their assessments, resulting in scores that inflated children's reading attainment.

Additionally, not all children's attainment scores increased between test 1 and 2: some went down over the duration of the trial. Others, in contrast, made dramatic gains. What does this mean?

- Tests are just a snapshot of a child's performance on any one day. Factors outside the school gate, and in class, can have a huge impact on children's mental and physical state, their emotions, and their ability to focus and concentrate on the day of the test, so poor performance in the first test followed by a 'good' second test will suggest greater improvement than is the case. The reverse, where an 'accurate' first test is followed by a poor second test experience could suggest their attainment has gone backwards.
- Children who lack confidence may have found the first test daunting. One trial lead said some of her pupils may have been 'freaked out' by it. By test two, they were more confident, and 'realised it was a friendly thing'. She described the results from her class as 'a mixture of anomalies and genuine progress'.
- Children's development isn't linear: the intervention spanned just one term. Some children may have simply plateaued. In our calculation in which we subtracted the change in actual age from the change in reading age, a child who had the same reading age for both tests will show a negative difference in the charts.

Reading age data outliers

The increases in reading age varied a great deal across the sample of 18 schools for which we have reading age data. The table below shows the breakdown, by school, of the total number of children in each Year 4 cohort whose reading age went up by more than 2 months. Some children made enormous gains. Of those who made gains of over 2 months, the table also shows those whose reading age went up by more than 24 months.

Table 4

	Count		Average	
	>2 Months	>24 months	Median	Mean
TOTAL	432	153	7	11.94
2j8	25	13	15	23.81
xK7	26	10	8.5	11.60
9P4	24	5	15	15.48
aF5	43	16	8	11.60
cC2	14	6	2.5	13.71
6nR	20	4	8.5	11.53
G3e	43	8	2	4.26
zT9	50	23	4	10.55
7hX	9	1	3	2.64
Q6b	8	2	1	7.81
mD8	39	16	14	19.34
V5g	28	6	5	9.71
4zC	26	15	12	18.38
lLs	12	3	3.5	8.39
xW2	16	3	7	9.31
rJ9	16	8	9	14.08
Year 3q	16	7	8.5	16.69
bS6	0	0
H7f	17	7	6	12.04

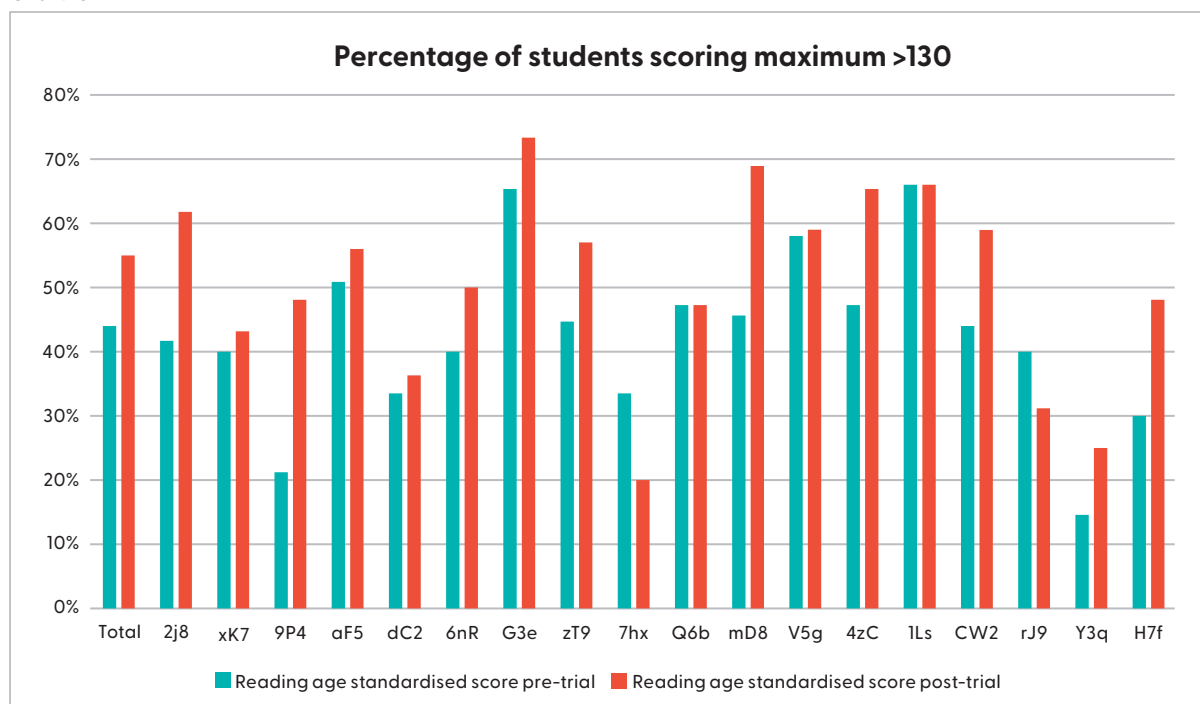
Because the ‘mean’ gains are likely to be exaggerated by data outliers (i.e. children whose second scores are questionably higher than their first scores), it makes sense to look at the median gains across the sample. [Note: the difference between the number of pupils in each school who’ve made gains greater than 2 months, and the total cohort size for the school is because some children regressed or scored the same in both tests.] Because published KS2 performance data has not been available since 2019, trial leads were asked to state their school’s KS2 Progress in Reading rating. This is set out in appendix A, along with the percentage of children across each school deemed PP and EAL.

Reading and comprehension age standardised score ‘ceiling’ factors

Schools were asked to supply age standardised scores for reading and comprehension. Not all did so. (18 submitted ASS for reading, and 17 submitted ASS for comprehension.) However, among those who did, a large proportion of children scored the maximum ASS for reading. A smaller proportion scored the maximum ASS in comprehension.

Chart 13 shows the percentage of pupils at each school which scored >130 in reading. 130 is the maximum age standardised score a child could achieve; any child scoring above this is given a score of >130. This imposes a ceiling which means that pupils with an average ASS of >130 in test 1 won't show improvements between the first and second set of results. Actual gains between test 1 and 2 will therefore be greater than the age standardised scores indicate.

Chart 13



Fewer pupils scored the maximum ASS in comprehension: the total percentage who achieved this in test 1 was 29%, while the total percentage for test 2 was 38%.

Analysis of pupils' pre- and post-trial responses

In line with data protection regulations, and the right to privacy and anonymity to which research participants are entitled, and safeguarding of children's personal data, we did not gather names or identifying information from staff or children who participated in this study. This meant that we were not able to match individual respondents' pre- and post-trial responses to the survey questions.

This analysis draws on all the data from all schools who returned both pre- and post-trial responses. Schools frequently returned significantly fewer post-trial than pre-trial questionnaires (pre n=2277, post n=1158). This of course makes any findings from comparative analysis less robust but, as the number of post-trial questionnaires is large, it does not invalidate them. Ten identical questions were asked at the beginning and end of the trial.

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STORYTIME IN SCHOOL