



Change your story

Children and young people's engagement with poetry in 2026

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For the past sixteen years, we have tracked children and young people's engagement with poetry as part of our wider research into their literacy lives. Over this period, our findings have consistently shown that poetry holds an important place in the lives of many children and young people. Reading and writing poetry can support their engagement with literacy while also providing a distinctive space to explore ideas, express emotions and experiences, and develop their own voice.

Our research has also looked beyond levels of engagement to develop a richer understanding of children and young people's relationships with poetry (Bonafede et al., 2024). This has included exploring what motivates them to read and write poetry, what they value about it, and how poetry relates to their wider reading, writing and creative practices. Together, they highlight the value of continuing to monitor who engages with poetry, how they engage with it and whether opportunities to do so are changing over time.

This report provides the latest evidence on poetry engagement among children and young people. Drawing on data from our 2026 Annual Literacy Survey, it examines their poetry reading and writing behaviours and attitudes, with a focus on engagement in their free time. It also considers how engagement has changed over time and how trends vary by gender, age and Free School Meal (FSM) status, helping to identify which groups are most and least likely to engage with poetry.

This report

We asked 125,375 children and young people aged 5 to 18 from 479 schools across the UK who took part in our Annual Literacy Survey about their reading and writing in 2026 (see Appendix A for more information on the sample).

In 2026, 88,086 children and young people aged 8 to 18 answered our questions about reading poetry in their free time, while 75,142 answered our questions about writing poetry.

Our findings show strong engagement with poetry in 2026. The percentage of children and young people reading poetry in their free time reached its highest level since 2010, while poetry writing reached its second-highest level over the same period. However, engagement varied considerably by gender, age and FSM status, with particularly high levels of poetry reading among younger children and those receiving FSMs.

Some of the key findings in greater detail include:

Poetry reading reached its highest level since 2010:

- 3 in 10 (30.7%) children and young people aged 8 to 18 said they read poetry in their free time at least once a month in 2026, which is the highest percentage recorded since 2010.
- More girls than boys reported reading poetry in their free time at least once a month (34.2% vs 25.8%).
- Nearly twice as many children aged 8 to 11 (43.6%) told us that they read poetry in their free time compared with any other age group (ranging between 26.4% and 28.9%).
- More children and young people who received FSMs reported reading poetry in their free time compared with their non-FSM peers (38.9% vs 27.9%).
- Children and young people most often read poetry on paper. Overall, 17.0% read poetry on paper, compared with 9.5% who read it on screen and 4.2% who read it in both print and digital formats. This pattern was consistent across gender, age and FSM status.

Poetry writing reached its second-highest level since 2010:

- 1 in 5 (19.4%) children and young people aged 8 to 18 said they wrote poetry in their free time at least once a month in 2026, which is the second-highest level recorded since 2010 (surpassed only by 19.7% in 2020).
- Nearly twice as many girls as boys told us they wrote poetry in their free time at least once a month (23.3% vs 13.8%).
- Poetry writing declined with age, with 1 in 4 (25.3%) children aged 8 to 11 writing poetry in their free time compared with 1 in 6 of those aged 16 to 18 (16.1%).
- Slightly more children and young people who received FSMs reported writing poetry than those who did not receive FSMs (21.5% vs 18.7%).
- Overall, 11.4% of children and young people wrote poetry on paper, 5.0% wrote it on a screen and 3.0% wrote it in both print and digital formats. This trend was consistent across gender, age and FSM status.

Reading and writing poetry were connected:

- Reading and writing poetry were positively related ($r = .34$), so children and young people who read poetry also tended to write poetry, although the relationship was moderate.
- Almost 2 in 5 (39.6%) poetry readers also wrote poetry, compared with only 10.5% of those who did not read poetry.

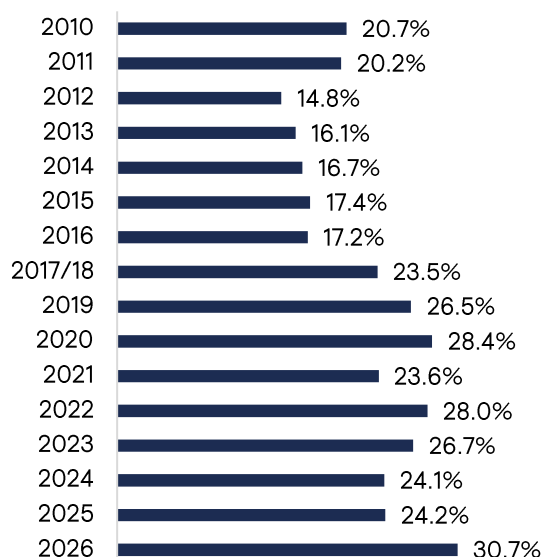
Overall, the increases in both poetry reading and writing in 2026 provide an encouraging indication that poetry continues to hold relevance for children and young people. However, demographic differences show that engagement is not shared equally. Sustaining this progress will depend on ensuring that all children and young people have opportunities to encounter, enjoy and create poetry, particularly those who are currently less likely to feel that poetry is for them.

Children and young people as readers of poetry

In 2026, 3 in 10 (30.7%, n = 27,012) children and young people aged 8 to 18 said that they had read poetry in their free time at least once a month. Overall, 17.0% read poetry on paper, 9.5% on screen and 4.2% in both formats.

In fact, more children and young people were reading poetry in their free time in 2026 compared with any other year in the past 16 years (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who read poetry in their free time at least once a month between 2010 and 2026.

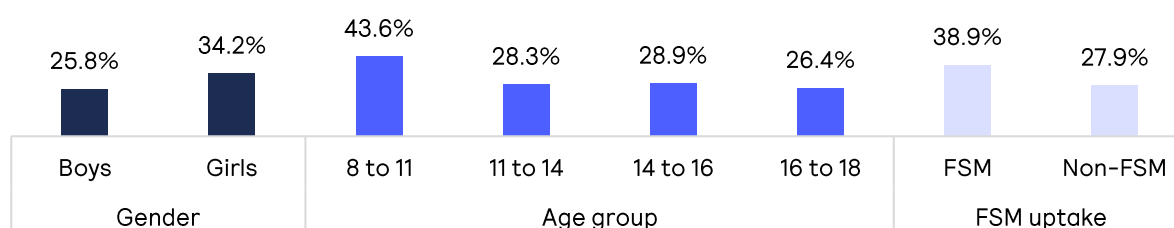


Who read poetry in 2026?

Among children and young people aged 8 to 18, poetry reading differed by gender, age and FSM uptake (see Figure 2 and Appendix B for more information by nation and region). More girls than boys reported reading poetry in their free time at least once a month. Poetry reading was highest among those aged 8 to 11, with nearly twice as many children aged 8 to 11 reading poetry in their free time compared with

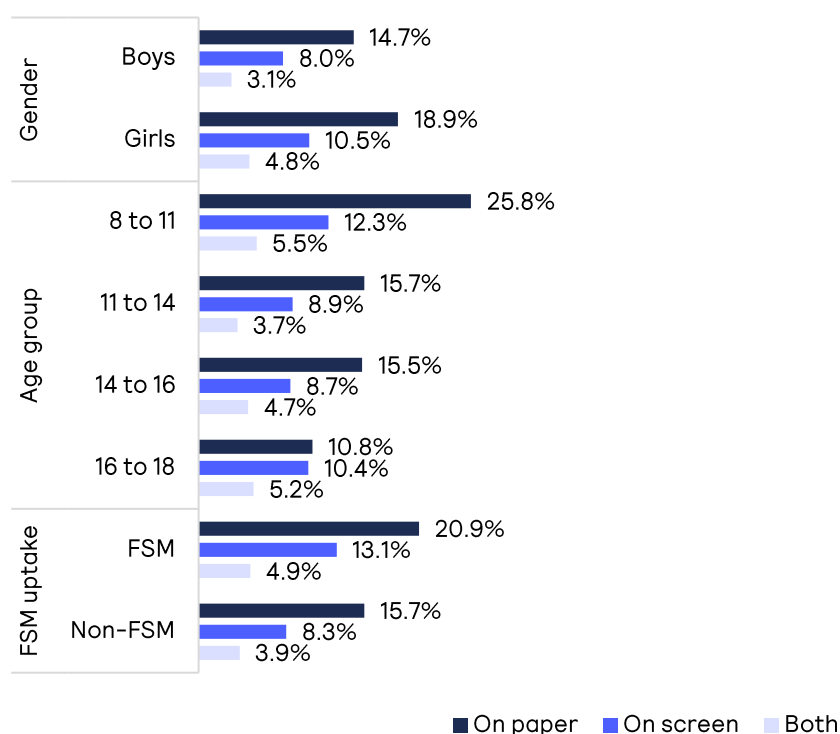
any other age group. Continuing a recurring trend in our findings over time, more children and young people who received FSMs also reported reading poetry in their free time compared with those who did not receive FSMs.

Figure 2: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who read poetry in their free time at least once a month in 2026 by gender, key stage and FSM uptake.



Across gender, age and FSM status, reading poetry in print was the most common format (see Figure 3). Reading poetry on screen was generally the second most common format, while reading poetry in both print and digital formats was the least common across all groups.

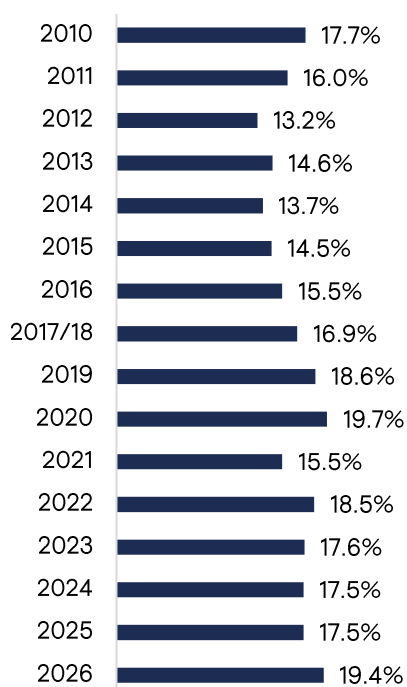
Figure 3: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who read poetry in their free time at least once a month on paper, on screen or across both formats in 2026 by gender, age group and FSM uptake.



Children and young people as creators of poetry

In 2026, 1 in 5 (19.4%, n= 14,644) children and young people aged 8 to 18 said that they wrote poetry in their free time at least once a month (see Figure 4). Overall, 11.4% reported writing on paper, 5.0% on screen and 3.0% used both formats. In 2026, poetry writing reached its second-highest recorded level since 2010, surpassed only by the 19.7% that we recorded in 2020 (see Figure 4).

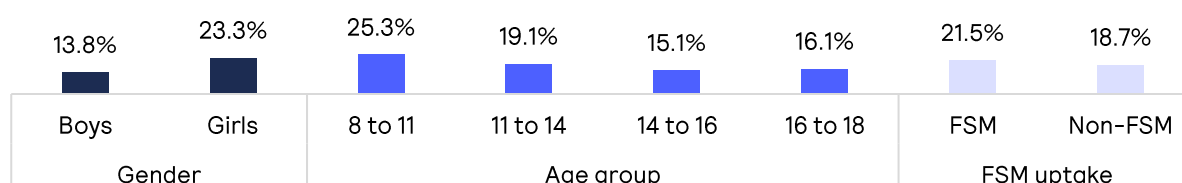
Figure 4: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who wrote poetry in their free time at least once a month between 2010 and 2026.



Who wrote poetry in 2026?

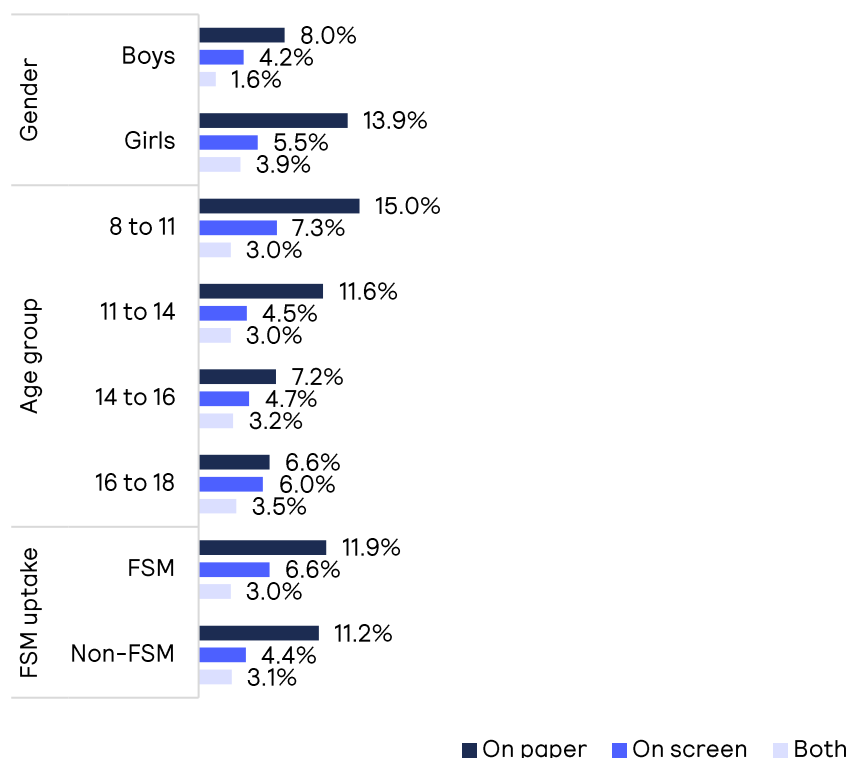
Among children and young people aged 8 to 18, poetry writing differed by gender, age and FSM status (see Figure 5; see Appendix C for information by nation and region). More girls than boys told us that they wrote poetry in their free time at least once a month, with just under twice the number of girls reporting this than boys. Another notable difference in poetry writing was seen across age groups, where writing declined with age, dropping by 9.2 percentage points between children aged 8 to 11 and those aged 16 to 18. Slightly more children who received FSMs reported writing poetry than those who did not receive FSM.

Figure 5: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who wrote poetry in their free time at least once a month by gender, key stage and FSM uptake in 2026.



Most children and young people who wrote poetry did so on paper, regardless of gender, age or FSM status (see Figure 6). Writing on screen was less common, while fewer wrote poetry using both screen and paper.

Figure 6: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who wrote poetry in their free time at least once a month on paper, on screen or across both formats in 2026 by gender, age group and FSM uptake.



Readers of poetry are also creators of poetry

We also wanted to see whether there was a connection between reading and writing poetry. Specifically, we explored whether readers of poetry also tended to write poetry.

Our data suggest that there was a moderate positive correlation between reading and writing poetry ($r = 0.34$). 2 in 5 children and young people who read poetry in their free time also told us that they wrote poetry (see Table 1). By contrast, only 1 in 10 of those who did not report reading poetry in their free time did the same.

Table 1: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who told us whether or not they read or write poetry in their free time at least once a month in 2026.

	Poetry readers	Not poetry readers
Poetry writers	39.6%	10.5%
Not poetry writers	60.4%	89.5%

Discussion

Our latest findings reveal an encouraging rise in children and young people’s engagement with poetry: 3 in 10 read poetry in their free time at least once a month in 2026 – the highest percentage recorded since 2010 – while 1 in 5 wrote poetry, the second-highest percentage over the same period. This is especially encouraging against a backdrop of concern about children and young people’s wider reading and writing engagement.

However, engagement was not equally high across groups. In 2026, fewer boys than girls reported reading and writing poetry, while engagement generally decreased with age. These differences raise questions about how poetry is encountered as children grow older and whether the opportunities, forms or contexts available to them continue to support voluntary engagement.

Our 2026 findings also highlighted comparatively high engagement with poetry among children and young people receiving FSMs: more reported reading poetry, and slightly more reported writing it, than their non-FSM peers. The higher level of poetry reading among those receiving FSMs continues a recurring pattern in our

previous findings. This engagement should be recognised as an existing strength and supported through continued opportunities to encounter, enjoy and create poetry.

Finally, findings showed that more poetry readers were also poetry writers, suggesting that engagement may extend beyond consuming poetry to drawing on it as a form of self-expression. Although this does not establish that one activity leads to the other, it suggests that providing opportunities to both read and write poetry could support engagement with poetry in different ways.

At a time of considerable concern about children and young people's wider reading and writing engagement, our 2026 findings offer an important counterpoint. Exploring what sustains poetry engagement for some groups, and what changes as children grow older, could help identify lessons extending beyond poetry itself. It may offer useful insights into strengthening children and young people's literacy engagement more widely.

Appendix A

Sample description

The make-up of our 2026 sample was largely comparable with that of 2025 and previous samples.

The table below provides a breakdown of the sample in detail.

		n	%
Gender	Boys	55,039	46.5%
	Girls	58,692	49.6%
	Would rather not say	2,567	2.2%
	Describe themselves another way	2,027	1.7%
Age	8-11	15,888	13.4%
	11-14	81,412	68.8%
	14-16	16,326	13.8%
	16-18	4,699	4.0%
Free- school-meal uptake	FSM	19,417	16.4%
	Non-FSM	83,186	70.3%
	Don't know	11,255	9.5%
	Would rather not say	4,467	3.8%
UK region (by nation)	England	108,571	91.8%
	Wales	2,933	2.5%
	Scotland	4,248	3.6%
	Northern Ireland	2,067	1.8%
England region	North East	6,214	5.3%
	North West	12,600	10.6%
	Yorkshire and Humberside	7,406	6.8%
	East Midlands	7,928	6.7%
	West Midlands	8,345	7.1%
	East of England	16,249	13.7%
	London	11,705	9.9%
	South East	23,320	19.7%
	South West	14,760	12.5%

Appendix B

Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who read poetry in their free time at least once a month in 2026 by nation and region.

ENGLAND		30.7%
	North East	34.0%
	North West	30.7%
	Yorkshire and the Humber	32.9%
	East Midlands	35.4%
	West Midlands	34.0%
	East of England	30.2%
	London	32.4%
	South East	27.4%
	South West	28.5%
WALES		34.4%
SCOTLAND		26.8%
NORTHERN IRELAND		29.2%

Appendix C

Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who wrote poetry in their free time at least once a month in 2026 by nation and region.

ENGLAND		19.3%
	North East	21.6%
	North West	17.5%
	Yorkshire and the Humber	20.2%
	East Midlands	19.6%
	West Midlands	18.4%
	East of England	18.9%
	London	21.8%
	South East	17.5%
	South West	21.0%
WALES		25.0%
SCOTLAND		19.2%
NORTHERN IRELAND		20.7%

Acknowledgements

A huge thank you to all the schools that took part in our survey this year. We couldn't do it without you!

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Our charity is dedicated to improving the reading, writing, speaking and listening skills of those who need it most, giving them the best possible chance of success in school, work and life. We run Literacy Hubs and campaigns in communities where low levels of literacy and social mobility are seriously impacting people's lives. We support schools and early years settings to deliver outstanding literacy provision, and we campaign to make literacy a priority for politicians, businesses and parents. Our research and analysis make us the leading authority on literacy and drive our interventions.

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