

Renaissance



GL
Education®

A Renaissance Company



WHITEPAPER
MARCH 2026

Between the Lines

What teachers really think about
children's reading in 2026

Contents

3 [Foreword](#)

4 [Introduction](#)

5 [What challenges do children have to face?](#)

6 [Whose job is it?](#)

7 [Do teachers believe the problem can be fixed?](#)

8 [What about 15 minutes a day?](#)

9 [What stops children reading at home?](#)

10 [Does it have to be a book?](#)

11 [Where does this leave us?](#)

12 [About Accelerated Reader](#)

12 [Methodology](#)

12 [Footnotes](#)

Foreword

As I sift through my memories from when I first began to think of myself as ‘a reader’, my reflections cluster around the early years of middle school.

Two experiences come to mind.

First, Miss Layne’s English lessons, where she regularly read aloud to us. I vividly remember this being a pleasurable experience. Then, even more notably, the regular time our school set aside for independent reading. Each Wednesday, class times were shortened to allow for a 30-minute reading block during which we could read anything we wanted.

Some of my classmates chose magazines. As the child, nephew and little brother of teachers, magazines were not an option for me. I was sent to school with ‘quality’ literature. I remember briskly making it through an entire set of books from The Great Brain Series, by John D. Fitzgerald, the first series I ever read. Not only did I enjoy them, but my friend John eagerly awaited his turn to read each one as soon as I finished.

In his book *Raising Kids Who Read*, Daniel Willingham asks us to consider whether students today would consider being a reader as part of their self-concept. Would they say reading is one of the things they regularly do? That reading is a part of who they are? He notes that although children may enjoy reading in the early years of school, their attitudes become more and more negative as they get older, and that by secondary school the average child is at best indifferent to reading.

The YouGov research in this report confirms how widespread that indifference has become – and how clearly teachers see it. Nine in ten know the evidence about daily reading. A third doubt the problem can be fixed. And the gap between what schools know and what happens at home has never been more stark.

This report sets out what teachers across the country are seeing and thinking. Alongside it, we’ve published a set of practical companion pieces on supporting book choice and building 15 minutes of daily reading into the school day.

As a lifelong reader it’s difficult to accept the reality of students’ indifference to reading. But let’s recommit to countering it – not least because thanks to tools like Accelerated Reader, we know it can be done. After the initial thrill of learning to read wanes, we need our new readers to keep reading year after year. Let’s work to help them find books and reading materials that interest them, that intrigue them, that keep them guessing, that make them look forward to finding another great read once they’ve reached that last page.



Dr Gene Kerns
Chief Academic Officer
Renaissance

Introduction

In January 2026, Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson formally launched the National Year of Reading – the first such campaign since 2008 – bringing together schools, families, libraries and more than 60 partner organisations under the banner ‘Go All In’. The campaign aims to tackle the steep decline in reading for pleasure by connecting reading with popular culture and everyday interests.

The timing is not coincidental. The National Literacy Trust’s 2025 survey of nearly 115,000 children and young people found that just one in three 8 to 18-year-olds enjoyed reading in their free time – the lowest level in 20 years. Fewer than one in five read something daily. Among boys aged 8 to 18, the figure was one in four. And this at a time when England placed fourth out of 43 countries in the most recent international reading study: strong attainment, but declining enjoyment. The contradiction is hard to ignore.

The government has responded. A new statutory reading test for Year 8 pupils, announced in October 2025, targets what ministers call the ‘lost years’ of early secondary school. A new target of 90% of children meeting the year 1 phonics standard has been set – currently 80%, unchanged from 2024. An expanded English Hubs programme begins in September 2026. And the Curriculum and Assessment Review has recommended a combined oracy, reading and writing framework across the entire secondary curriculum.

This then is the context in which we commissioned polling company YouGov to find out how those on the front line see the reading challenge and what they think can be done about it. The results, presented here and based on a survey of 1,013 UK teachers conducted in February 2026, paint a picture that is both reassuring and troubling.

In short:

- Virtually all teachers (99%) identify at least one reading challenge, with screen time (86%) and insufficient home support (82%) being the biggest obstacles
- Seven in ten place primary responsibility for reading outside school squarely with parents
- 82% are confident that their school has the expertise to support pupils who are struggling with reading, but only 64% are confident the challenges can actually be addressed
- Nine in ten (91%) teachers know the evidence on 15 minutes of daily reading – but less than a quarter (23%) think parents do
- Just 28% of secondary schools have a daily reading period, compared with 62% of primary schools
- Teachers broadly agree that alternative reading formats* count as reading (81%) – fewer (42%) think parents share this view.

What challenges do children face?

The first question we asked was simple: what challenges do teachers think children are currently facing with reading?[†] The answer was near-unanimous. Virtually all teachers identified at least one challenge. The top three tell a clear story:

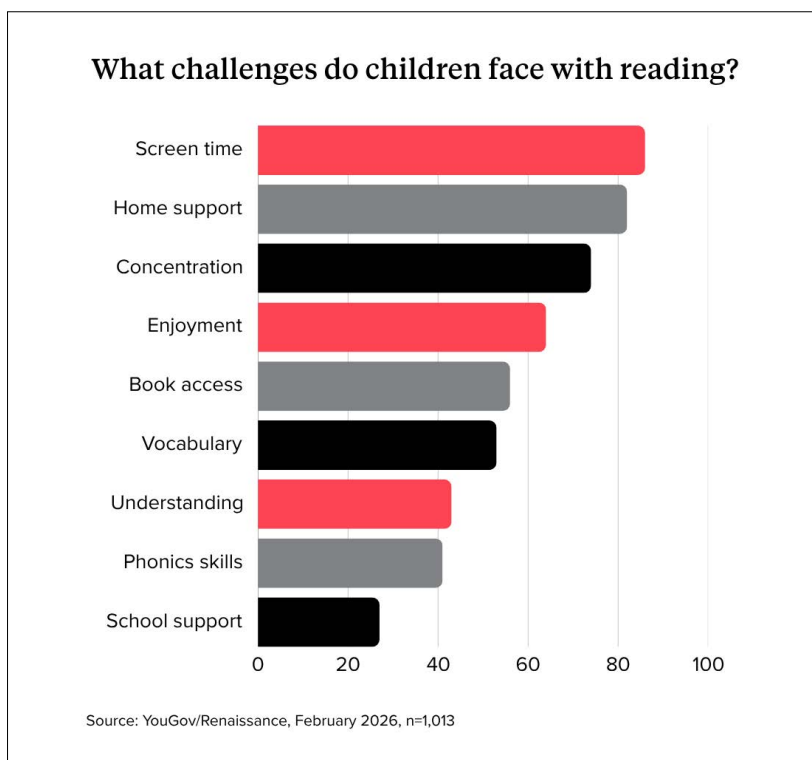
- Too much time on screens or digital devices – cited by 86% of all teachers
- Insufficient support with reading at home – 82%
- Concentration or attention problems when reading – 74%

Behind these sit a cluster of related difficulties: lack of enjoyment or motivation (64%), limited access to books at home (56%), limited vocabulary (52%) and difficulty understanding what they read (43%). Only around one in four (27%) point to insufficient support or resources within schools themselves.

From the options given, teachers overwhelmingly locate the root of the reading problem in the home environment and in children’s digital habits, not in their own provision. And the pattern sharpens when you look at deprivation.

Teachers in the most deprived schools are roughly twice as likely as those in the least deprived to cite limited access to books at home (73% vs 36%), limited vocabulary (65% vs 43%) and poor phonics or basic reading skills (53% vs 34%)[‡]. Screen time remains the top concern everywhere, but the gap between affluent and deprived settings is widest on the foundational building blocks of literacy.

There is also a notable primary/secondary split. Secondary teachers are markedly more likely to identify lack of enjoyment or motivation (71% vs 60% in primary), consistent with the well-documented disengagement from reading during adolescence. Primary teachers, meanwhile, are more alert to limited vocabulary (56% vs 46%) and insufficient home support (86% vs 76%) – which perhaps reflects their closer involvement in foundational literacy.



‘What challenges do children face with reading?’

Data: Too much time spent on screens or digital devices 86%, Insufficient home support 82%, Problems with concentration or attention when reading 74%, Lack of enjoyment or motivation to read 64%, Limited access to books at home 56%, Limited vocabulary 52%, Difficulty understanding what they read 43%, Poor phonics or basic reading skills 41%, Insufficient support or resources in schools 27%.

Source line: YouGov/Renaissance, February 2026, n=1,013

Whose job is it?

This is one of the most emphatic results in the entire survey. Asked who should take primary responsibility for encouraging children to read outside school, seven in ten teachers (70%) say parents and carers. A further 29% say it should be shared equally between schools and parents. Virtually nobody – just 1% – says this is the school’s sole responsibility.

There is no meaningful variation by phase, seniority or school type. The message is unambiguous: teachers believe the home is where reading habits need to be addressed and reinforced. The only minor variation comes among teachers aged 55 and over, where 41% favour shared responsibility (vs 29% overall).

Set against the National Literacy Trust’s finding that only half of parents now read with their child daily – down 15 percentage points since 2019 – and that nearly one in four parents say there are fewer than 10 children’s books at home, this unanimous view from teachers carries considerable weight. There is also a notable primary/secondary split. Secondary teachers are markedly more likely to identify lack of enjoyment or motivation (71% vs 60% in primary), consistent with the well-documented disengagement from reading during adolescence. Primary teachers, meanwhile, are more alert to limited vocabulary (56% vs 46%) and insufficient home support (86% vs 76%) – which perhaps reflects their closer involvement in foundational literacy.



Do teachers believe the problem can be fixed?

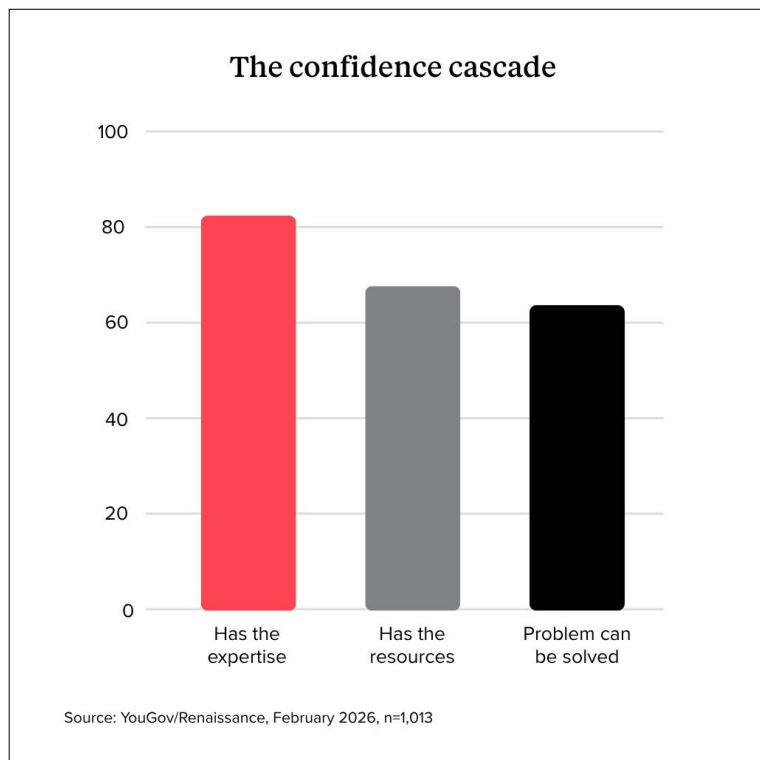
We asked three confidence questions, forming a cascade from the specific to the general. The pattern they reveal is important.

On whether their school has the expertise to support struggling readers, 82% of teachers are confident – a solid majority, with primary teachers more assured (87%) than secondary (74%). On whether their school has the resources to support pupils who are struggling, confidence drops to 68%. And on whether the reading challenges children face can actually be addressed, it falls further to 64%.

Stated differently: a third of all teachers (33%) aren't confident that the reading challenges children face are solvable. They recognise the problem. They believe they have the knowledge to tackle it. But they are less sure they have the tools – and even less sure the wider difficulties can be overcome.

The primary–secondary divide is again the dominant fault line. Secondary teachers are 13 percentage points less confident about expertise in their school (74% vs 87%) and 8 points less confident that challenges can be addressed (59% vs 66%). This aligns with a structural reality: reading support is less embedded in the secondary curriculum, and many secondary teachers have not been trained as reading specialists. The government's new statutory Year 8 reading test will sharpen the accountability pressure, but for now, secondary schools appear to feel less equipped to respond.

Deprivation widens the gap further. Teachers in the most deprived schools are 15 percentage points less confident about resources than those in the least deprived (65% vs 81%)[‡]. Independent school teachers are more confident that challenges can be addressed (79%) compared with the state sector average (63%). The schools with the greatest need feel the least equipped to meet it.



'The confidence cascade'

Three bars descending: (Their) school has the expertise needed to support pupils who are struggling with reading 82%, (Their) school has the resources needed to support pupils who are struggling with reading 68%, The challenges children are facing with reading can be addressed 64%.

Source line: YouGov/Renaissance, February 2026, n=1,013

What about 15 minutes a day?

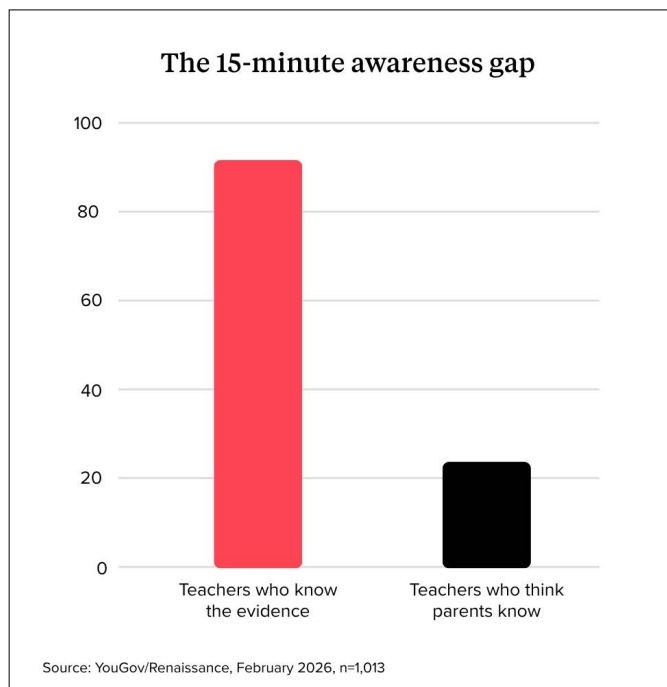
The evidence that 15 minutes of daily reading makes a measurable difference to skills and attainment is well established. Renaissance’s own research shows the scale of the impact: students who consistently average 15 mins of reading a day from Years 1-10 will encounter 5 million more words and see a higher than expected progression in their reading skills. The gap is more than 12 million words across a school career.

Nine in ten teachers (91%) are already aware of the benefits of children reading for 15 minutes a day – rising to 94% among primary teachers and 93% among senior leaders. So far, so encouraging. But when asked if they think parents are aware, only 23% think so. Almost two-thirds (63%) believe parents do not know. This is the single biggest awareness gap in the survey: the people who teach children to read understand the evidence; the people who could make the biggest difference at home, by and large, are perceived as not knowing it.

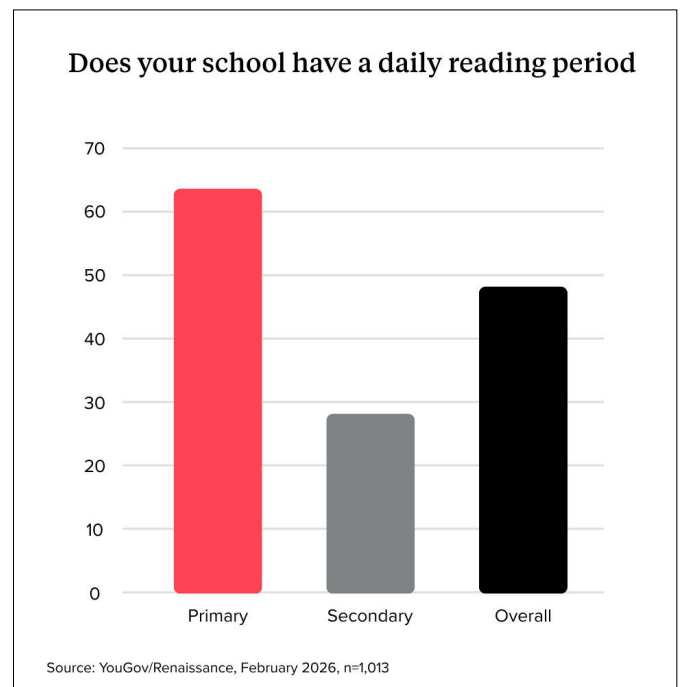
What about practice? Just under half of all teachers (48%) say their school has a daily reading period of 15 minutes or more. But here the primary–secondary split is stark: 62% of primary schools have one, compared with just 28% of secondary schools – a 34 percentage point gap.

Among schools without a daily reading period, timetable constraints are overwhelmingly cited as the main barrier (71%), followed by competing curriculum priorities (53%). Primary schools without one cite timetable pressure even more acutely (83%). And the qualitative responses add colour: some secondary schools have tried and abandoned reading periods because, as one teacher put it, students simply refused to engage. The challenge in secondary settings is cultural and practical, not just structural.

Yet when asked whether a 15-minute daily reading period would be feasible, 64% of teachers say yes – and secondary teachers are actually more likely to agree (69%) than primary (61%).



‘The 15-minute awareness gap’. Two figures: Before taking part in the survey, they were aware of the benefits of children reading for 15 minutes a day 91%, They believe most parents are aware of the benefits of children reading for 15 minutes a day 23%.
Source line: YouGov/Renaissance, February 2026, n=1,013



Does your school have a daily reading period? Two bars: Primary school teachers who answered yes 62%, Secondary school teachers who answered yes 28%. Overall 48%.
Source line: YouGov/Renaissance, February 2026, n=1,013

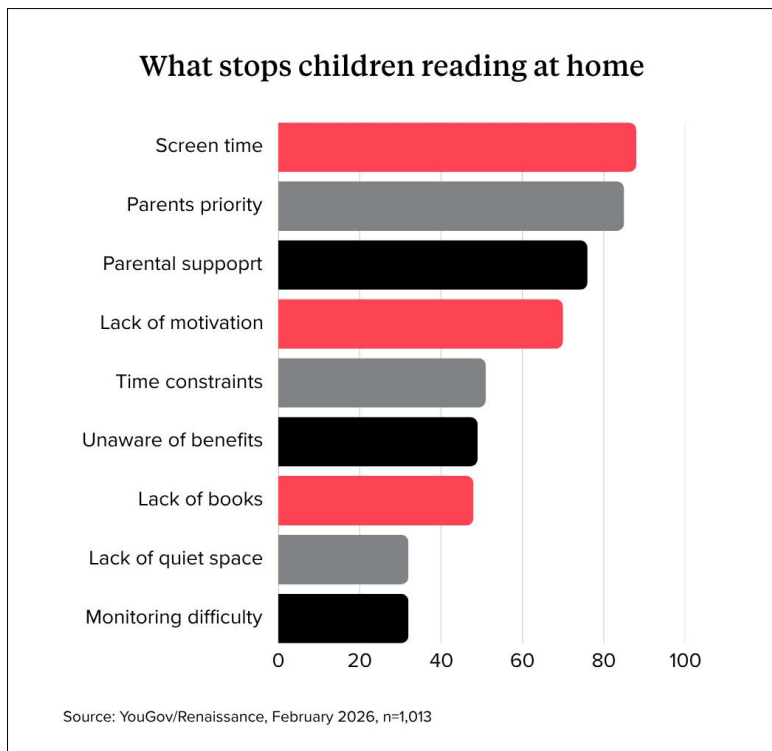
What stops children reading at home?

Screen time is perceived as the biggest problem (88%) stopping students reading regularly at home, followed by parents not prioritising reading time (85%) and lack of parental support (76%). Seven in ten teachers (70%) also cite children lacking motivation to read at home.

Teachers in the most deprived schools are roughly twice as likely as those in the least deprived to cite perceived lack of access to books at home (66% vs 33%) and lack of a suitable quiet space to read (48% vs 24%)[‡]. Lack of parental support runs at 86% in high-deprivation schools, compared with 65% in the most affluent – a 21 percentage point gap.

Half of all teachers (49%) believe parents are simply unaware of the benefits of daily reading. And around a third (32%) say it is difficult for teachers to monitor or support what happens with reading at home – a practical acknowledgement that even the most committed school can only do so much.

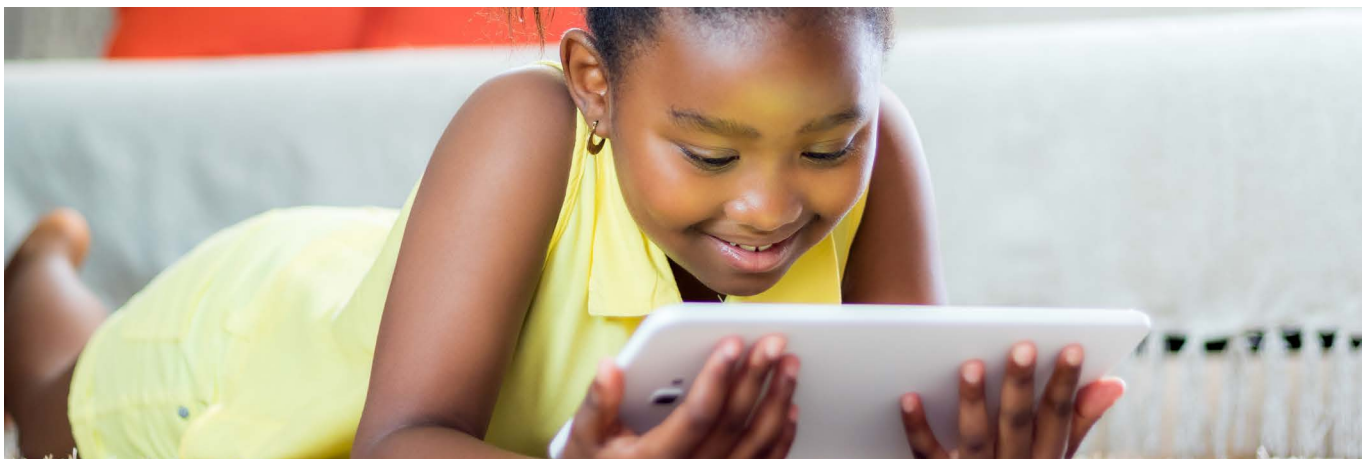
In the qualitative research several teachers point to parents who cannot read themselves, or who cannot read in English because it is not their first language. Others describe a generational gap: parents who do not read, and whose children therefore have no reading role model at home. As one teacher put it: ‘Parents don’t read, so children don’t have a role model at home.’



‘What stops children reading regularly at home?’

Data: Screen time and devices competing for attention 88%, Parents/carers not prioritising reading time 85%, Lack of support from parents/carers with reading 76%, Children lacking motivation to read outside school 70%, Families having limited time due to other commitments 51%, Parents/carers unaware of benefits of daily reading 49%, Lack of access to books at home 48%, Lack of a suitable quiet space to read at home 32%, Difficulty for teachers to monitor whether reading is happening at home 32%.

Source line: YouGov/Renaissance, February 2026, n=1,013



Does it have to be a book?

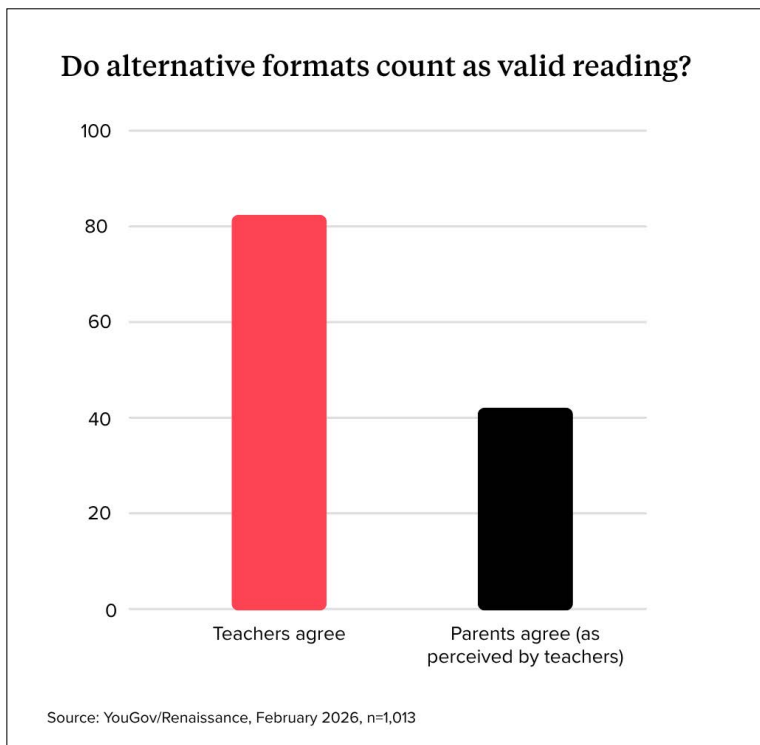
The National Year of Reading has explicitly promoted a broad definition of what counts as reading – from picture books to audiobooks, fan fiction to the football pages. But do teachers agree?

Broadly, yes. Eight in ten teachers (81%) agree that alternative formats – audiobooks, graphic novels, comics, reading on screens – should count as valid forms of reading. Three-quarters (76%) feel confident encouraging parents to use them with their children. Primary teachers are more likely to agree they are valid forms of reading (85% vs 75% in secondary) and more confident recommending them to parents (83% vs 66%).

But when asked whether parents consider these formats valid reading, opinion among teachers is split: 42% agree, 38% disagree, and a notable 20% say they simply don't know.

This matters because the National Literacy Trust's February 2026 report on teenage reading found that many boys – particularly teenage boys – are already reading through games, subtitles, articles, Wikipedia and online platforms, even when they do not enjoy or identify with printed books. Their reading is broader and more fragmented than traditional definitions capture.

Teachers in the most deprived schools are notably more pragmatic: 84% accept alternative formats as valid, compared with 75% in the least deprived‡.



‘What challenges do children face with reading?’

Data: Too much time spent on screens or digital devices 86%, Insufficient home support 82%, Problems with concentration or attention when reading 74%, Lack of enjoyment or motivation to read 64%, Limited access to books at home 56%, Limited vocabulary 52%, Difficulty understanding what they read 43%, Poor phonics or basic reading skills 41%, Insufficient support or resources in schools 27%.

Source line: YouGov/Renaissance, February 2026, n=1,013

Where does this leave us?

What this survey reveals is a confidence cascade: teachers are aware of the problem, trust their own skills, are less certain about their school's resources, and even less certain about the wider system. A third even doubt the challenges are solvable. In secondary schools, where daily reading periods exist in barely more than a quarter of settings and where enjoyment of reading falls off a cliff in adolescence,[§] the confidence gap is particularly wide.

The most consistent findings concern reading at home. Seven in ten teachers say parents should bear primary responsibility for reading outside school. Almost nine in ten perceive screen time and parental not prioritising reading as the main barriers to students reading regularly at home. And while 91% of teachers know the evidence on 15 minutes of daily reading, only 23% believe parents do.

There are also grounds for cautious optimism. The broad acceptance of alternative reading formats (81%), the high awareness of the 15-minute evidence base, and the fact that nearly two-thirds say a daily reading period is feasible all point to a profession that is willing to act. The question is whether the support – in time, resources and parental engagement – will be there to match the willingness.

For schools looking for practical tools to support that effort, Accelerated Reader offers a structured approach to independent reading practice – one that helps teachers match children with books at the right level, build reading stamina and make progress visible. It is not a replacement for teachers, or for parents reading with their children at home. But as one part of a wider reading culture, it has helped more than 6,000 UK schools and 1.5 million students put 15 minutes of daily reading into practice.



About Accelerated Reader

Accelerated Reader (AR) is a reading practice programme used by more than 6,000 schools and 1.5 million students across the UK. It is designed to support independent reading by helping students choose books within their personal reading range, building fluency and comprehension through regular practice.

The programme works alongside Star Reading, a computer-adaptive assessment that identifies each student's reading level and provides a personalised reading range (known as ZPD – Zone of Proximal Development). This range helps to guide student book choice and, after reading, they take short quizzes to check understanding. Teachers receive real-time data on reading activity, quiz performance and progress over time.

Data from the National Literacy Trust's Annual Literacy Survey shows that among pupils eligible for free school meals, 37% of AR users said they enjoyed reading, compared with 32% of their peers. Among boys, 31% of AR users reported enjoyment versus 27% of non-users.

Renaissance's annual What Kids Are Reading report, based on data from 1.2 million pupils across more than 6,700 UK and Ireland schools, found that students using Accelerated Reader read an average of 20.7 books per year. The programme is designed to augment – not replace – the work teachers already do, providing the structure and data to help schools build a reading culture where every child reads, every day.

For more information, visit uk.renaissance.com/products/accelerated-reader

Methodology

This survey was conducted by YouGov plc using an online methodology, with fieldwork running from 9 to 21 February 2026. A total of 1,013 UK teachers completed the survey. The figures have been weighted to be representative of teachers in the UK.

Key sub-group base sizes: NET Senior Leaders (headteachers, deputies, other senior-level teachers) n=402 unweighted / 396 weighted; NET Teachers (classroom teachers and supply teachers) n=611 / 617; Primary phase n=547 / 567; Secondary phase n=431 / 416.

All figures in this report are percentages unless otherwise stated. Where figures do not sum to 100%, this is due to rounding or multi-code questions.

Footnotes

* Including audiobooks, graphic novels, comics, and reading on screens

† Chosen from: Lack of enjoyment or motivation to read; Poor phonics or basic reading skills; Limited vocabulary; Difficulty understanding what they read; Problems with concentration or attention when reading; Too much time spent on screens or digital devices; Limited access to books at home; Insufficient support with reading at home; Insufficient support or resources in schools; Other; N/A – I do not think children are facing any challenges with reading; Don't know.

‡ This compares those with 35% or more children with Free School Meals (FSM), with those of up to 9% with FSM.

§ National Literacy Trust – Teenage reading: (Re)framing the challenge <https://literacytrust.org.uk/research-services/research-reports/teenage-reading-reframing-the-challenge/>

The full Renaissance/YouGov data, including the question wording, is available here.

Renaissance



Connect with us

Website : <http://cn.renaissance.com/>

Email : international@renaissance.com

WeChat Official Account : Renaissance_Learning

Hotline : 400-1515-021