

Mental Wellbeing, Reading and Writing

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Mental wellbeing, reading and writing explores the relationship between children's mental wellbeing and their reading and writing enjoyment, attitudes and behaviours.

The report is based on findings from our eighth Annual Literacy Survey of 49,047 children and young people aged 8 to 18 in the UK.

As this is the first time we have explored the link between reading, writing and mental wellbeing, we developed two new measures to enable us to better understand these relationships:

Mental Wellbeing Index: We quantified children's responses to questions on life satisfaction, coping skills and self-belief on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 is the highest level of mental wellbeing.

Literacy Engagement Score: We quantified children's responses to questions on how much they enjoy reading and writing, how often they read and write outside school, what they think about reading and writing, and how good children think they are at reading and writing. Scores were then given out of a total of 52, where 52 is the highest level of engagement with literacy practices.

Our analysis found that:

Children and young people who are the most engaged with literacy have better mental wellbeing than their peers who are the least engaged (Mental Wellbeing Index scores of 7.9/10 vs 6.6/10)

Children who are the most engaged with literacy are three times more likely to have higher levels of mental wellbeing than children who are the least engaged (39.4% vs 11.8%)

Conversely, children who are the least engaged with literacy are twice as likely to have low levels of mental wellbeing than their peers who are the most engaged (37.4% vs 15%)

Children with above expected reading skills are three times more likely to have high levels of mental wellbeing than their peers with below expected reading skills (40.3% vs 13.1%)

As children transition from primary to secondary school, their levels of literacy engagement and mental wellbeing both begin and continue to decline

Boys who are the most engaged with literacy have higher levels of mental wellbeing than girls who are equally engaged (Mental Wellbeing Index scores of 8.1/10 vs 7.6/10)

The report also includes new analysis from University College London which shows an enduring relationship between mental health and verbal scores, with those who have low verbal ability having worse mental health outcomes than those with higher verbal ability. This finding is true when one considers children from the 1970 British Cohort Study as well as children from the more recent Millennium Cohort Study.