

Study uncovers literacy challenge among teenagers due to lack of reading focus in secondary school

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Most Popular Book Titles in Scottish Primary Schools

Rank	Book	Author	Number of times read
1	The Midnight Gang	David Walliams	1,217
2	Gangsta Granny	David Walliams	1,145
3	Diary of a Wimpy Kid	Jeff Kinney	1,135
4	The Twits	Roald Dahl	1,128
5	Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Double Down	Jeff Kinney	1,039
6	Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Dog Days	Jeff Kinney	1,029
7	Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Roderick Rules	Jeff Kinney	992
8	Billionaire Boy	David Walliams	971
9	Diary of a Wimpy Kid: The Ugly Truth	Jeff Kinney	924
10	Diary of a Wimpy Kid: The Last Straw	Jeff Kinney	904

A UK-wide study of children's reading habits has found that Scottish secondary school pupils, like their peers in other countries, are not reading challenging enough books.

The What Kids are Reading Report, analysed by the University of Dundee's Professor Keith Topping, was written using data compiled by literacy and assessment provider Renaissance UK. It looked at the reading habits of almost 1 million children across Scotland, England, Wales, Northern Ireland, and, for the first time, the Republic of Ireland.

This year's report was the largest in the 10-year history of What Kids are Reading. The study of 29,524 pupils across Scotland also reveals the most popular [books](#) and authors among Scottish [school](#) children. It highlights a persistent problem across the UK in encouraging secondary school pupils to read challenging and age-appropriate books.

Book difficulty levels rise sharply in the early years of formal education, meaning that primary pupils are typically reading more advanced books for their [chronological age](#). However, this progress stops at around age 11 and the difficulty of books read falls as pupils get older. This decline exists among both boys and girls and across all parts of the UK.

In the final year of primary school, Scottish pupils are reading one year less than their chronological age but this gap doubles by the first year of secondary school. In the later years of secondary school, pupils are reading at least three years below their chronological age – meaning that many pupils sitting their National 4 and 5 examinations at age 16 have

the reading ability of a 13-year-old or lower.

Professor Topping, Professor of Education and Social Research at Dundee, said, "The uniformity of the fall in literacy levels is striking as it cuts across boys, girls and all parts of the UK.

Most Popular Book Titles in Scottish Secondary Schools

Rank	Book	Author	Number of times read
1	The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas	John Boyne	434
2	Diary of a Wimpy Kid	Jeff Kinney	418
3	Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Double Down	Jeff Kinney	416
4	Diary of a Wimpy Kid: The Long Haul	Jeff Kinney	381
5	Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Roderick Rules	Jeff Kinney	380
6	Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Dog Days	Jeff Kinney	376
7	Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone	J K. Rowling	366
8	Gangsta Granny	David Walliams	357
9	Diary of a Wimpy Kid: The Third Wheel	Jeff Kinney	352
10	Billionaire Boy	David Walliams	334

"To avert a further slide in literacy levels in [secondary schools](#), pupils should be encouraged to push themselves to read more difficult books.

"By their teenage years pupils are more likely to take advice from their friends and peers than their teachers and parents about the types of books they should be reading. With this in mind, teachers could encourage them to talk more openly about what they are reading and make appropriate suggestions to their classmates."

The Renaissance study also found that primary school pupils read books with a greater understanding than their secondary school counterparts, with reading comprehension falling sharply in teenage years in relative terms. Pupils in secondary school are also reading books that are no harder than those in primary school.

Few secondary schools build dedicated reading time into the timetable when compared with their primary counterparts. Renaissance is calling for secondary schools to consider building dedicated reading time into the curriculum to ensure that teenagers do not fall further behind.

Renaissance UK Managing Director Dirk Foch said, "The vast majority of primary schools place an emphasis on developing pupils' literacy skills. However, this is rarely continued once pupils go to secondary school. This makes maintaining literacy levels among teenagers a persistent challenge for teachers and policy makers.

"The fall in teenagers' reading ages is striking. By the time many come to sit their National 4 and 5 examinations, many will have a reading age of 13 or less, meaning that they could even struggle to comprehend their exam papers. This could have a significant impact on their future academic success.

"Evidence shows that pupils make the most progress when they read for just 15 minutes per day, so I would encourage all secondary school teachers to build some dedicated reading time into the timetable to avert a further fall in [literacy levels](#) among young people."

Provided by University of Dundee

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