

# Evaluation of First Minister's Reading Challenge

Final Report

Scottish Book Trust

August 2017



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## 1. Introduction

### The First Minister's Reading Challenge

- 1.1 The First Minister's Reading Challenge (FMRC) was launched by the First Minister in September 2016, and was targeted initially at pupils in P4–7. It was developed by the Scottish Government and is being delivered on their behalf by Scottish Book Trust.
- 1.2 The Reading Challenge was driven by the Scottish Government's commitment to drive improvement in the attainment gap, and by the strong personal interest of the First Minister and her desire to share her own love of reading with Scotland's young people.
- 1.3 The purpose of the Reading Challenge is to encourage children to read for pleasure and develop a life-long love of books, and to support a culture of reading in schools and communities. It was specifically designed to be flexible and inclusive, and aims to:
  - Create and embed a reading culture in schools;
  - Work in partnership with libraries and communities to deepen engagement with reading; and
  - Celebrate pupils' individual reading journeys.
- 1.4 The initiative recognises the relationship between reading for pleasure and future attainment and wellbeing. It builds upon work already underway through Scottish Book Trust, schools, libraries and through wider Scottish Government policies and programmes.
- 1.5 Blake Stevenson Ltd. was appointed to undertake an evaluation of the first year of the Reading Challenge and our findings are outlined in this report.
- 1.6 The initiative has subsequently been rolled out to P1–3 but this report focuses only on P4–7 implementation.

### Policy context for the Reading Challenge in Scotland

- 1.7 A significant proportion of adults in Scotland experience problems with literacy, a trend exacerbated by inequality and also reflected in the experience and attainment levels of children and young people. The Scottish Government's Literacy Action Plan published in 2010 has four key priority areas:
  - Breaking the link between poor literacy levels and deprivation;
  - Improving the skills of those who have difficulties with basic literacy, particularly those who are vulnerable;

- Ensuring young people progress successfully from basic to advanced literacy skills; and,
- Raising advanced literacy skills for all.

- 1.8 In 2015, the Standing Literacy Commission reported that “the available data and evidence point to a generally improving picture for literacy levels in Scotland from early years, through schools and colleges to adult learning. In each of these areas literacy enjoys a higher, and ever-increasing priority, which is of significant longer-term benefit to Scotland and its people, society and economy. However, the stand-out issue, where more progress needs to be made, is the gap in attainment between the most and least disadvantaged young people.”
- 1.9 However, the most recently published Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy 2014 (Literacy) indicated that the proportion of pupils performing well, or very well, in reading had dropped from 83 to 78 per cent in P4, from 90 to 88 per cent in P7, and from 84 per cent to 80 per cent in S2.
- 1.10 In 2012, the Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy asked about attitudes towards reading and reading habits. Pupils were asked how much they enjoyed reading and the results showed a marked decline in positive responses as children progressed through school, from 92 per cent of pupils at P4 to 80 per cent at P7 and 62 per cent at S2. These findings were similarly reflected at the time by the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) which found that 43% of Scottish pupils did not read for pleasure.
- 1.11 In addition, more recent results show a decrease in literacy rates among pupils in Scottish schools between 2012 and 2016. The Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy<sup>1</sup> found that less than half of S2 pupils were performing well in writing (49%) in 2016, compared with 64% in 2012. The figures have dropped from 72% in 2012 to 65% in 2016 among P7 pupils and from 64% to 62% among P4 pupils. In terms of reading, performance is higher but there have been decreases between 2012 and 2016, from 84% to 82% in S2, 90% to 88% in P7, and 83% to 77% among P4s.
- 1.12 The broader national policy context is also directly relevant to the development of reading among children. The Early Years Framework and Curriculum for Excellence are of central contextual significance for the Reading Challenge, along with the National Improvement Framework for Education, which has improvement in attainment – particularly in literacy and numeracy – as a key priority. Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC), the national

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<sup>1</sup> Scottish Government (2017), ‘Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy 2016’, <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0051/00517651.pdf>, accessed 28 June 2017

programme for all who work with children, also provides important context for this programme.

- 1.13 The Reading Challenge is also being implemented in the context of Scottish Government reforms in schools. These are intended to allocate more responsibility to schools to control funding, and to head teachers for closing the attainment gap, choosing school staff and deciding curriculum content<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, significant importance is placed on parental involvement and recent revisions to the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 emphasise the important role parents have to play in raising attainment. The revisions note a need to further develop the “learning at home” strand of the Act, and to further promote family learning. This is important in the context of our findings related to parental engagement in the Reading Challenge.

### Impact of reading for pleasure

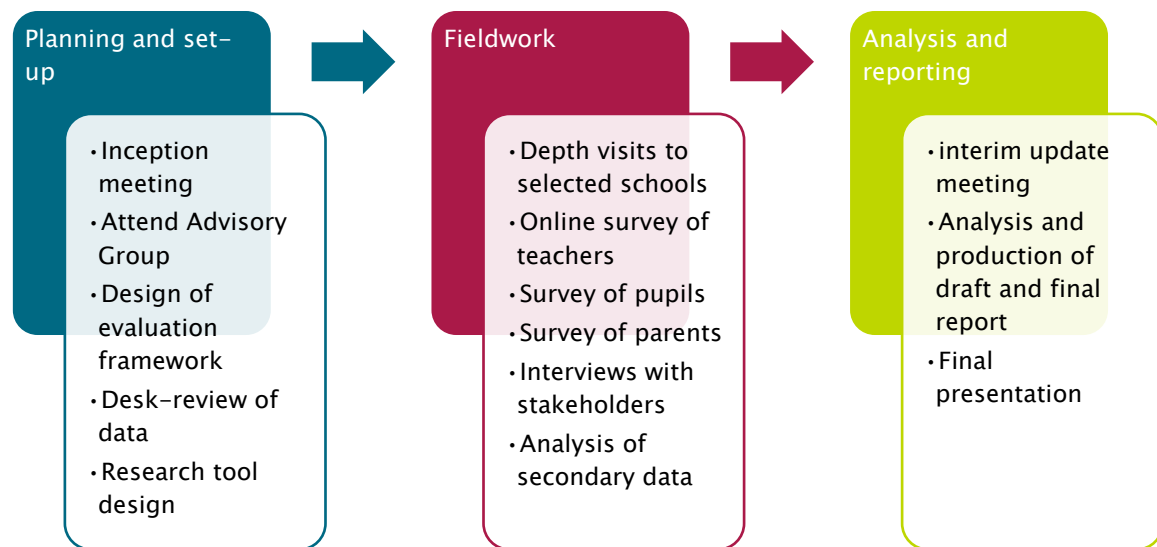
- 1.14 As well as a policy context which reflects the importance and benefits of reading for individuals and the wider community, a significant body of research supports the benefits of reading for pleasure and links this to increased attainment and wellbeing.
- 1.15 Reading for pleasure is widely reported to result in positive personal outcomes for children and young people such as increased attainment, the development of emotional intelligence, empathy, creativity and imagination, and improved communication skills. In later life reading for pleasure has been seen to have a positive effect on mental health and in reducing the symptoms of depression and dementia.
- 1.16 Wider family social and community outcomes have also been evidenced and specific initiatives such as those run by Scottish Book Trust, e.g. Bookbug for the Home, are examples of successful models of delivery.
- 1.17 However, although the link between reading for pleasure and success across the wider curriculum in schools is well recognised, the Reading Challenge sought to support schools to further encourage children to develop a reading habit, without which this success might be unattainable.

### Evaluation methodology

- 1.18 Our evaluation methodology involved a three-phase process shown in the diagram below:

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<sup>2</sup> BBC News (15 June 2017), ‘Sweeping new powers for Scottish head teachers’, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-40275330> (accessed 28 June 2017)



1.19 We encountered two key challenges in implementing this methodology including:

- Some schools being unwilling to take part in a case study due to lack of staff capacity to support our visit; and,
- A lower than expected response rate to the teacher and pupil surveys, which we believe was in part due to the survey not reaching some of those it was targeted at (distribution was through SBT, which in turn distributed it through local authority contacts, who shared it with schools. We believe that direct contact with a named person in each school would have been significantly more successful.)

1.20 However, we believe that the responses we did receive are likely to be broadly representative, and support the views gathered through our case study visits to schools, and interviews with stakeholders.

1.21 Appendix 1 contains a profile of survey respondents.

1.22 We also attended the final celebratory event for the Reading Challenge in June 2017 which gave us a further opportunity to learn about good practice across Scotland. Some of this learning has also been incorporated into this report.

## 2. Programme overview

### Description of First Minister' Reading Challenge

#### Timeframe

- 2.1 The First Minister's Reading Challenge was launched on 1st September 2016. At this time the website opened for registrations and Inspiring Classrooms, which offered registered schools the chance to apply for funding for an author visit, books and reading materials, opened for applications. Regional teacher and librarian information events were held later that month.
- 2.2 Inspiring Classrooms applications could be submitted up until late November 2016 and Inspiring Classroom events took place between January and June 2017. Challenges set through the Reading Challenge (which are described further later in this chapter) ran through to May 2017 and a final celebratory event was held in June 2017.

#### Participation rates

- 2.3 At the outset, it was challenging for the Advisory Group and those involved in implementation to forecast expected levels of participation, especially as they were aware that the lead-in time for the first round of the initiative was short and did not fit ideally into school planning cycles.
- 2.4 However, in practice participation in the Reading Challenge has been exceptionally high and this is a real success for the programme. As at June 2017, 1,558 schools participated, which constitutes 75% of all primary schools (including independent schools) in Scotland. In Table 2.1 below, we provide a breakdown of schools by local authority area, and indicate the percentage of participating schools in each area.

**Table 2.1: Number of schools registered with FMRC in each Local Authority**

Local Authority	Schools Registered in FMRC	Total number of primary schools	Percentage of schools registered in FMRC
Aberdeen City	34	52	65%
Aberdeenshire	84	154	55%
Angus	33	52	63%
Argyll & Bute	47	82	57%
Clackmannanshire	19	19	100%
Dumfries & Galloway	65	99	66%
Dundee City	29	36	81%
East Ayrshire	33	43	77%
East Dunbartonshire	29	36	81%
East Lothian	25	38	66%
East Renfrewshire	21	23	91%

Local Authority	Schools Registered in FMRC	Total number of primary schools	Percentage of schools registered in FMRC
Edinburgh City	78	102	76%
Eilean Siar	20	23	87%
Falkirk	38	51	75%
Fife	111	136	82%
Glasgow City	124	150	83%
Highland	125	173	72%
Inverclyde	18	22	82%
Midlothian	26	32	81%
Moray	16	48	33%
North Ayrshire	50	50	100%
North Lanarkshire	80	120	67%
Orkney	13	20	65%
Perth & Kinross	59	78	76%
Renfrewshire	47	49	96%
Scottish Borders	44	62	71%
Shetland Islands	20	28	71%
South Ayrshire	34	42	81%
South Lanarkshire	119	126	94%
Stirling	36	41	88%
West Dunbartonshire	22	33	67%
West Lothian	59	67	88%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,558</b>	<b>2,087</b>	<b>75%</b>

- 2.5 As can be seen above, rates of registration were particularly high in some areas. In half (16) of the 32 local authority areas, over three-quarters of schools registered for the Challenge and in two areas (North Ayrshire and Clackmannanshire) all schools registered. The only area where less than 50% of schools registered was Moray (33%).

### Implementation

- 2.6 Below we describe the registration process that schools had to follow to take part in the Challenge, along with details of the resources provided to schools, and the challenges that they were able to participate in during the Reading Challenge.

### Registration

- 2.7 Schools were required to register for the First Minister's Reading Challenge in order to take part. The head teacher or another nominated teacher submitted details online about the school and the number of children likely to take part in the Reading Challenge. The key contact was then sent an email to confirm registration of the school and a link for class teachers to use to register their class. This process should have been relatively straightforward, and for some schools it was, but we understand that there were also a





number of schools that had challenges with getting the registration part of the FMRC website to work, and required support from SBT to help them to do so. For some, this process became quite onerous. We anticipate that this was related to teething problems with the new website, but it is important this is addressed for future programme implementation.

**Resources**

2.8 Once registered with the Reading Challenge, schools had access to a broad range of online and physical resources designed to engage pupils, parents, teachers and librarians in the Challenge. The resources available included the following:

*Reading Passports*

2.9 Reading Passports were an optional part of the Challenge but could be used by pupils to keep track of the challenges they set themselves, list and review the books they read, and to note books they would like to read in the future and any recommendations they received. SBT sent printed Reading Passports to schools that requested them, and schools were able to order more or download additional pages from the FMRC website if they required them.

<p>■ Book title: .....</p> <p>Author(s): .....</p> <p>I started reading this book on (date): .....</p> <p>I finished this book on (date): .....</p> <p>I award this book: </p> <div style="border: 1px dashed black; padding: 10px; min-height: 150px;"> <p><b>What I thought:</b></p> </div> <p style="text-align: center;"><a href="http://www.readingchallenge.scot">www.readingchallenge.scot</a></p>	<p>■ Book title: .....</p> <p>Author(s): .....</p> <p>I started reading this book on (date): .....</p> <p>I finished this book on (date): .....</p> <p>I award this book: </p> <div style="border: 1px dashed black; padding: 10px; min-height: 150px;"> <p><b>What I thought:</b></p> </div> <p style="text-align: center;"><a href="#">Visit your local library to borrow new books!</a></p>
<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>

A sample page from the Reading Passport

### *Teachers' Guide*

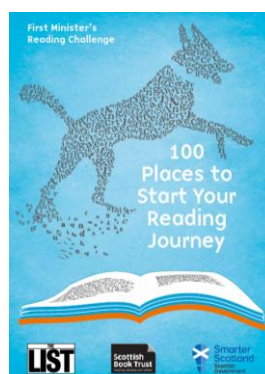
- 2.10 A Teachers' Guide, which was issued to all participating schools, included advice on building a reading culture, engaging with parents and communities as well as ideas for activities including:
- For individual pupils: activities such as setting individual reading challenges and completing their Reading Passports;
  - For classes: activities such as giving the class time to read every day and doing a class project on a specific novel;
  - For the whole school: for example, holding author events or sessions where the whole school reads for a certain amount of time; and
  - For the wider community: for example, inviting librarians to the school to talk to the children about reading, or taking part in a community-wide reading project.

### *The FMRC website*

- 2.11 The FMRC website contains various downloadable resources including display materials, adaptable PowerPoint slides, and review templates as well as case studies and a blog featuring contributions from schools and pupils taking part in the FMRC.
- 2.12 The website also contains downloadable and customisable certificates for pupils to recognise their participation and an online, searchable list of recommended books containing information about 300 books covering various genres and topics and selected to be suitable for P4–7. These were not intended as mandatory titles but rather to inspire teachers, pupils and parents to start and continue reading.

### *'100 Places to Start Your Reading Journey'*

- 2.13 This booklet, produced in partnership with The List magazine, includes details of 100 children's books selected by booksellers, writers, librarians, teachers, SBT staff and other people familiar with children's literature. There are descriptions of each book along with a further two recommendations for similar books. The collection includes a range of genres including non-fiction, folklore, poetry, graphic novels, history and adventure.



The '100 Places to Start Your Reading Journey' publication

## Challenges

- 2.14 The Reading Challenge involved a number of “challenges” which schools could participate in if they wished to – participation was not compulsory.
- 2.15 Each challenge offered prizes to the winners, and the challenges were intended to encourage pupils to read more and to read more widely, and to encourage schools and communities to develop a reading culture. The challenges were:
- Pupil Reading Journey – celebrating pupils who undertake a reading journey;
  - Pupil Reading the Most Books – celebrating pupils who read widely;
  - School Reading the Most Books – celebrating schools whose pupils read widely;
  - School Reading Journey – celebrating schools that make progress in developing a reading culture;
  - Gaelic Medium Education Reading Journey – celebrating Gaelic Medium Education schools and units that make progress in developing a reading culture; and,
  - School and Community Partnership Reading Journey – celebrating schools and communities (including libraries) that work together to make progress in developing a reading culture.
- 2.16 Schools could enter one, some or all of these challenges, and also had the freedom to create their own additional challenges. SBT provided resources to help schools develop these challenges for individual pupils, class groups, smaller groups of children, the whole school and/or the wider community.
- 2.17 Pupils and schools could be creative about the format in which they submitted their entry, for example, using mixed media, a blog, a drama piece, a comic strip, a picture diary or a written report.

## Examples of implementation

- 2.18 One of the key underpinning principles of the Reading Challenge was that it could be implemented flexibly – enabling schools and teachers to use the resources and partners around them and/or take a school-based approach to implementation. The wide range of ways in which the Reading Challenge has been implemented are testament to this principle.
- 2.19 Approaches taken have included focusing on individual and group reading, such as giving classes time to read silently in class, and teacher-led reading; discussing books through activities such as reciprocal reading; taking part in challenges; and recording books read in the Reading Passports. Schools also came up with other creative activities linked to characters and stories such as writing book reviews, writing newspaper reports

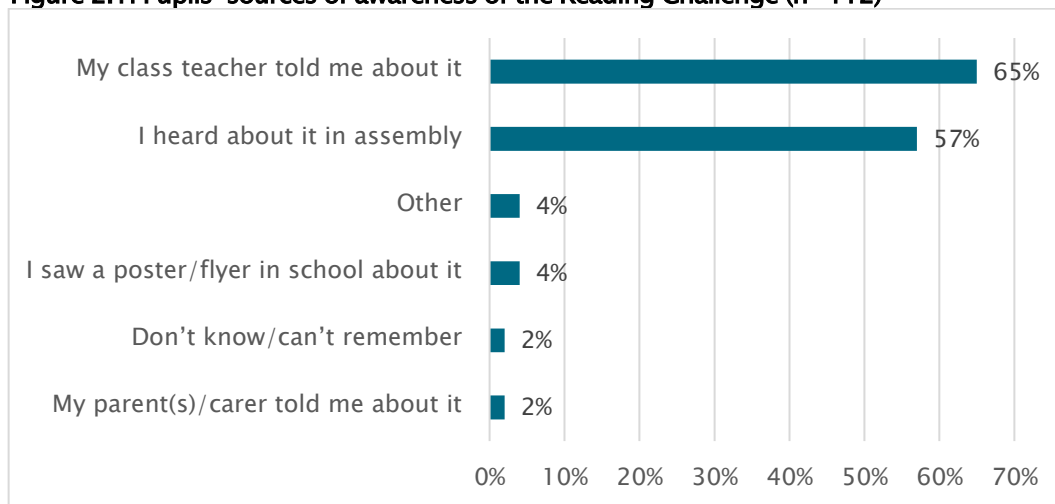
based on events in books, drawing comic strips based on books, and dressing up as characters from books for World Book Day.

- 2.20 Further examples of approaches taken to implementing the Reading Challenge are included in Chapter 3, and detailed case studies are provided in Appendix 2.

### Awareness of the First Minister's Reading Challenge

- 2.21 Awareness of the Reading Challenge seems to have been high. The high level of take-up by schools is in itself a clear indication of this, and our surveys of pupils and parents confirms this. The vast majority of respondents to our survey of pupils indicated that they were aware of the Reading Challenge (112, 88%) and Figure 2.1 shows that, of the 112 respondents who had heard of the Challenge, most had heard about it from their class teachers (73, 65%) or through information provided in school assemblies (64, 57%).

**Figure 2.1: Pupils' sources of awareness of the Reading Challenge (n=112)**



- 2.22 Most parents who took part in our survey (12, 86%) had heard of the Reading Challenge. Of those who had heard of it, most had been made aware of it through a letter or email from their child's school (8, 67%) and half (6, 50%) heard about it from their child or children. Parents taking part in focus groups conducted through the case study visits had also had clear communication from their children's school about the Reading Challenge. However, given the small proportion of parents who have been involved in this consultation process, it is not possible to know where this is a real indication of levels of awareness amongst parents. Our engagement with schools suggests that even where they had informed parents of the Reading Challenge, parent engagement with it was relatively low. We return to this issue later in this report.

## 3. Programme outcomes

### Introduction

- 3.1 In this chapter we examine the extent to which the Reading Challenge has delivered its expected outcomes. In doing so, we have taken account of the short timeframe in which the initiative was designed and implemented. We have also considered which outcomes it is realistic to expect schools to have made progress with within the first year of implementation, and where impact may take longer to be seen.
- 3.2 In the next section, we take each of the primary and secondary outcomes in turn and explore the extent to which the First Minister's Reading Challenge has delivered on these.

### Primary outcomes

#### Project design supports reading for pleasure

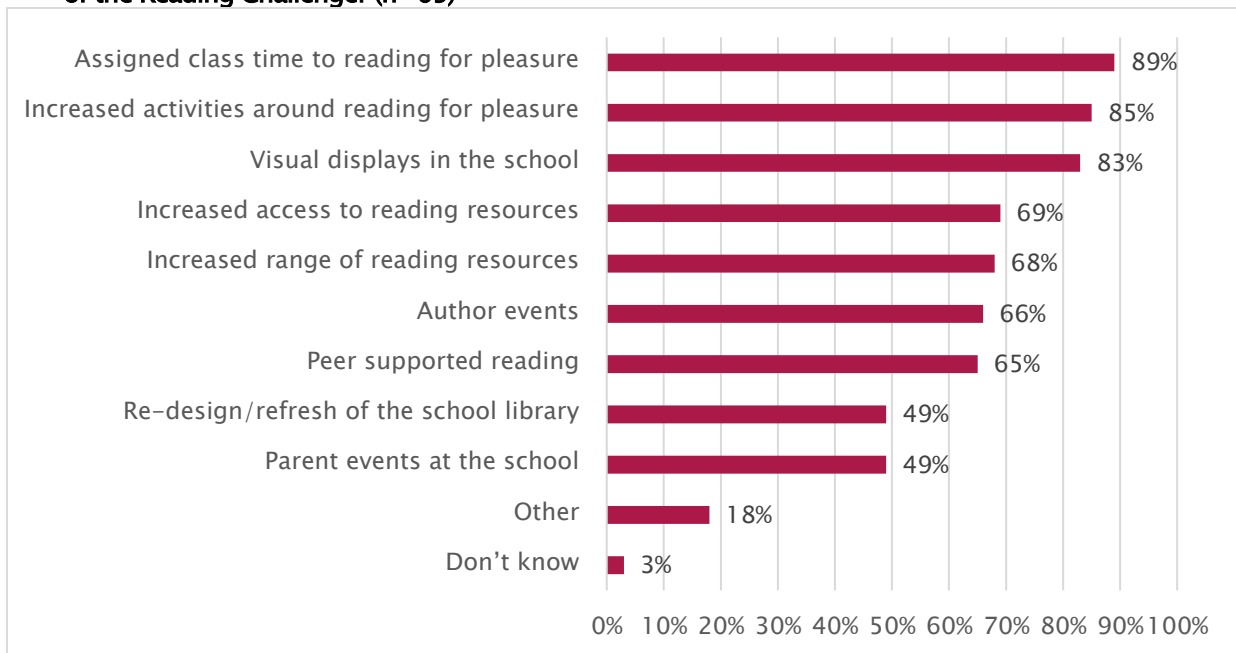
- 3.3 The design and structure of the Reading Challenge has supported reading for pleasure effectively. The flexible way in which it could be implemented, as already noted, was central to this success. The majority of teachers surveyed by us (58, 89%) strongly agreed or agreed that the Reading Challenge was designed in a way which led to increased reading for pleasure. Importantly, many of the teachers we consulted emphasised the importance of the Reading Challenge in giving them a new impetus to encourage reading for pleasure, and refreshing their enthusiasm for doing so.
- 3.4 Teachers also valued the way in which the Challenge complements other reading initiatives at their school with 88% (57) of survey respondents confirming that the Reading Challenge did this effectively. Many of the teachers consulted through the case study visits confirmed this. However, across the board some teachers, and Head Teachers particularly, also raised concerns about the wide range of initiatives that they are required to deliver on, and the challenge this presented in terms of planning and resources. This was exacerbated by the short lead-in time for the Reading Challenge.

#### *A broad and flexible range of activities for P4–P7 pupils*

- 3.5 The flexibility of the Reading Challenge was highlighted frequently as a positive aspect of the programme throughout this evaluation and we found extensive evidence that a wide range of activities were being delivered to the P4–7 pupils involved. As Figure 3.1 shows, of the teachers who responded to our survey nearly nine in ten (58, 89%) reported assigning class time to reading for pleasure and 85% (55) said they have introduced new activities related to reading for pleasure. Just over four-fifths (54, 83%) have introduced visual displays in the school, and over two-thirds reported increased access to reading resources (45, 69%) and an increased range of reading resources (44, 68%). Author events

(43, 66%) and peer supported reading (42, 65%) were also cited by many respondents as key activities being delivered through the challenge. The findings of the survey broadly reflect information gathered through the case study visits.

**Figure 3.1: Teachers: which of the following types of activities is your school involved in as part of the Reading Challenge? (n=65)**



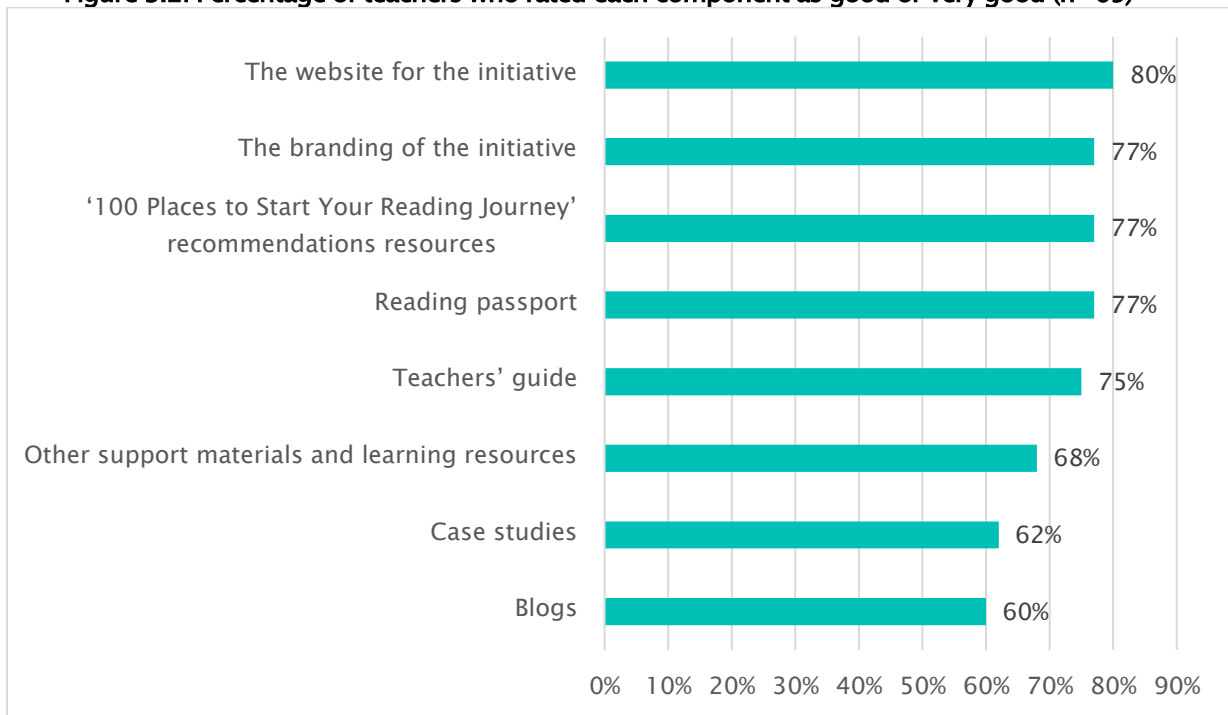
3.6 Similarly, pupils reported taking part in a wide range of reading activities designed to encourage them to read for pleasure. These included activities related to reading books, recording which books they had read, discussing books, and other activities related to characters and stories, for example:

- Reading, including:
  - reading for pleasure sessions in class;
  - challenges to read in strange or interesting places;
  - challenges to read specific types of book, such as books that their parents read as children; and
  - listening to teachers reading.
- Discussing books through activities such as reciprocal group reading.
- Recording what they have read by filling in Reading Passports.
- Activities linked to characters and stories such as book quizzes, drawing book front covers and comic strips to illustrate events in books, character cat walks, walking comprehension activities, dressing up as characters from books and other events for World Book Day, and making adverts for books.

### *Support and resources for teachers to embed reading for pleasure into school life*

- 3.7 As already described in Chapter 2, SBT provided a range of support and resources through the Reading Challenge to help teachers embed reading for pleasure into school life and teachers were positive about the quality and usefulness of these. Nearly all respondents to the teachers' survey (61, 94%) felt the materials were high quality and 89% (58) agreed they were useful. Four-fifths (52, 80%) agreed that the materials met their school's needs.
- 3.8 Figure 3.2 shows that teachers who responded to our survey rated each of the resources provided by the Reading Challenge highly. Four-fifths (52, 80%) rated the website as very good or good, and 77% (50) described the '100 places to start your reading journey' resource, the Reading Passport and the initiative's branding as very good or good. Case studies (40, 62%) and blogs (39, 60%) were least likely to be seen as very good or good but were still rated highly by a large proportion of respondents.

**Figure 3.2: Percentage of teachers who rated each component as good or very good (n=65)**



- 3.9 Some respondents reported experiencing technical difficulties with the website. For example, one of the case study schools said it was difficult and time consuming to use the website to register large numbers of pupils and a survey respondent said *"I could not log anything we did when you asked because every time it would not accept my log in details"*. We understand that these were teething issues associated with the website which have since been resolved, and are unlikely to arise again in future.

### 3.10 Some respondents also made suggestions about improving the design of the Reading Challenge and its materials:

- A significant number of teachers and stakeholders felt that counting the number of books read was not beneficial, and in some instances counter-productive: *"I don't think that the challenges involving counting the total of books read by an individual pupil/school are as beneficial. I feel it is important to promote quality and enjoyable reading for enjoyment and I don't feel tracking or rewarding the number of books read does effectively promote this"*. Another said, *"if anything the reading passport demotivated the children as they felt filling it in was a chore"*. Some schools reported successes when classes competed against each other to read the most – taking the emphasis off the individual number of books read onto a group challenge. Many of the young people consulted also questioned the validity of counting numbers of books read – with many concerned about the ease with which pupils could "cheat".
- Some teachers commented that the rewards for pupils for taking part were not clear and suggested that they should receive a tangible reward for taking part: *"The passports got lost and/or forgotten. It was a bit of a nightmare. The children did not regard it as a tangible reward. I had to come up with my own"*.
- Another said *"an official certificate for taking part might be an idea for pupils, as some of mine feel they put a lot into it for nothing in return"*. A few people observed that the design of the reading passport was not sufficiently appealing to children – for instance, one teacher commented that *"the pupils were put off by endless blank pages in the passport (especially those that already find literacy a challenge), the passports themselves were very unattractive and didn't look child friendly – they looked quite corporate"*.
- Some teachers felt they could have created more attractive and child-friendly resources themselves using the Twinkl online resource.
- A number of teachers did not know about all of the available resources and activities, including one teacher who observed: *"I wasn't aware of many of the things that were available as mentioned in this questionnaire"*. We return to the issue of communication later in the report.
- A number of research participants suggested that the reading list needed to be reconsidered. Some teachers were concerned that the reading list lacked diversity (both in terms of the range of books available and the medium), and others felt that it was dated – *"some of the materials on the list of books were quite old-fashioned and not what our pupils were interested in"*. Others were concerned that some of the suggested books were not readily available in school or public libraries.



*Creating opportunities for libraries, parents and other community partners to support reading for pleasure within and beyond the school environment*

- 3.11 The Reading Challenge has provided a wide range of opportunities for libraries, parents and other community partners to support reading for pleasure – and its flexible design has meant that schools were able to be innovative about how they did so.
- 3.12 At many schools, parents have had the opportunity to take part in reading activities. Three quarters of teachers who responded to our survey (49, 75%) said that they actively involved parents in the Reading Challenge and 57% of parents (8) said they have been actively involved in reading activities organised by their child/ren's school. One parent commented that *"it was a brilliant experience for us all"*.
- 3.13 However, some schools have embraced the opportunity to use this as a means of engaging parents more than others. A small number of parents suggested that improvements could be made in terms of their involvement: one said *"the parents could be involved more in school activities"* and another called for *"clearer communication with parents regarding how the Reading Challenge is being implemented in the school"*. A teacher noted that *"the parents need to be more actively involved as those children who are able readers will be reading anyway. The challenge needs to be to engage the less-motivated pupils at home as well as school"*. Many other teachers made similar comments.
- 3.14 Overall, parental engagement has been patchy – with schools noting that those parents most likely to engage with the Reading Challenge were parents already engaged in their child or children's learning. As noted earlier in this report, the revisions to the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 emphasises the important role that parents and other carers play in children's learning and development, and the need to further improve home/school partnerships. Those consulted during this evaluation emphasised the need for the Reading Challenge to develop this area of its influence further in future, but noted the significant challenges in doing so. There are some good examples of successful parental engagement in reading initiatives separate from the First Minister's Reading Challenge which could be learned from. The "Dunbar Reads Together" project, for example, involved the community heavily in encouraging people to read more and had some tangible successes in increasing young people's rates of reading, and improving parental involvement. One stakeholder consulted during the evaluation noted the importance of the impetus for enthusing young people to read more coming from the community, and not from schools where there are limits to the ways in which they can encourage active parental engagement.
- 3.15 Library staff, as well as other local partners including authors and community organisations, have been involved in activities to promote reading for pleasure in some libraries and schools, and their involvement is discussed later in this report. It is less clear how schools involved other partners, with only a few examples being given including one school engaging with a local third sector organisation supporting families; and another

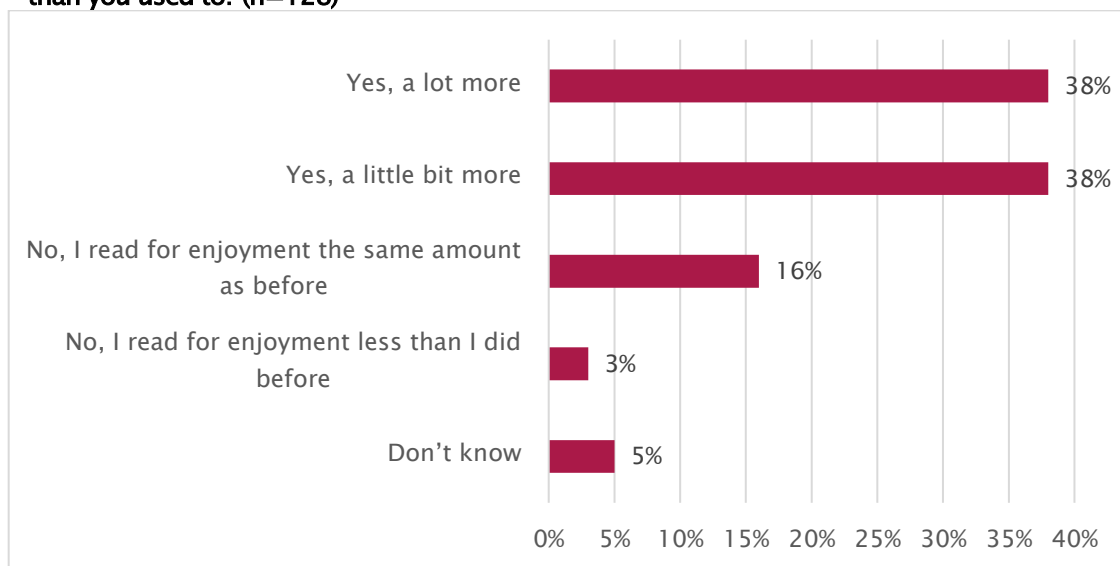
school involving the local community council in a number of its events. This is a development opportunity for future years, and one that is of critical importance if the Reading Challenge is to have a continued impact on literacy attainment.

### Reading for pleasure is valued and encouraged

#### *Children read for pleasure and are active readers*

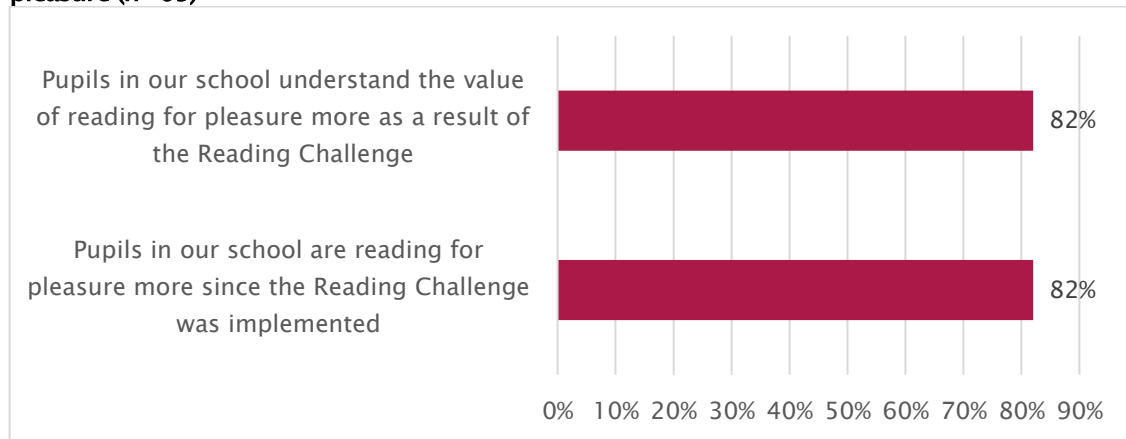
- 3.16 The evidence gathered through this evaluation suggests that the Reading Challenge has had a positive impact on the rates of reading for pleasure among pupils. Figure 3.3 shows that 76% of pupils who responded to our survey (97) said they now read either a lot (48, 38%) or a little bit (49, 38%) more than they used to. This was confirmed by our case study visits to schools where we universally heard that rates of reading for pleasure had gone up.

**Figure 3.3: Pupils: since taking part in the Reading Challenge, do you read for enjoyment more than you used to? (n=128)**



- 3.17 Figure 3.4 shows that teachers also observed an improvement among pupils' rates of reading for pleasure. Just over four-fifths (53, 82%) reported that pupils in their school are reading for pleasure more since the Reading Challenge was implemented and the same proportion felt that the Challenge has resulted in a better understanding of the value of reading for pleasure among pupils in their school.

**Figure 3.4: Teachers' views of the Reading Challenge's impact on pupils' rates of reading for pleasure (n=65)**



3.18 Some parents also reported an increase in the amount that their children read. Nearly two-thirds of the parents who responded to our survey (9, 64%) reported that their children have increased the amount they read for pleasure at home since the start of the Reading Challenge: *“My children love to read now. I think it is great”*.

3.19 In addition to an increase in the number of young people reading for pleasure, the Challenge also appears to have had a positive impact on the enjoyment that pupils gain from reading for pleasure. Figure 3.5 illustrates that over two-thirds of pupils who responded to the survey (87, 68%) said they now enjoy reading either a lot more (59, 46%) or a little bit more (28, 22%).

One pupil noted that:

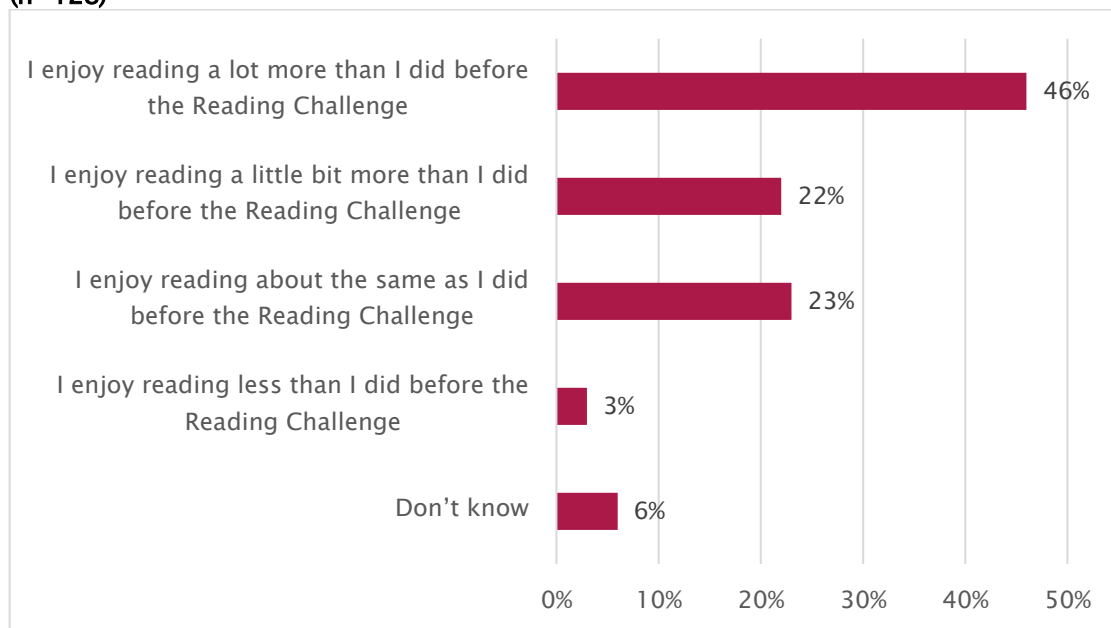
*“I never liked reading until I heard about the First Minister's Reading Challenge and I have read a lot more”*.

Teachers confirmed that this was the case:

*“We rolled out across the whole school from P1–7 as we could foresee the benefits for all pupils, not just P4–7. The younger children have thoroughly enjoyed it and it has created a good reading culture right from the beginning which will now develop as they move through the school”*.

*“It has been enjoyable to see pupils sharing reading books and what they are reading”*.

**Figure 3.5: Pupils: since taking part in the Reading Challenge, do you enjoy reading more?**  
(n=128)



- 3.20 Pupils who participated in focus groups during case study visits were also overwhelmingly positive about the difference the Reading Challenge had made to their levels of enjoyment of reading:

*"When you start a book at school it gets you interested, and you read more at home".*

*"My mum bought me lots of books, but until this year I hadn't read them and now I have".*

*"Now I turn off my TV an hour before bedtime and read books".*

*Children make reading choices and develop areas of interest which they pursue, as far as possibly, independently*

- 3.21 Pupil choice and interest has been an important factor in the Reading Challenge. The Challenge has encouraged children to choose what they read for pleasure and to develop new areas of interest. For some pupils this contrasts with their reading habits prior to the Reading Challenge – which involved reading only books assigned to them as part of their literacy work in school. The Reading Challenge has also been instrumental in helping pupils to understand that reading materials go beyond books, and that reading newspapers, online articles, and even audio books were a valuable part of reading for pleasure. For some this was a revelation, and teachers spoke enthusiastically of the difference it had made to levels of interest in, and time spent, reading.
- 3.22 Nearly three-quarters of pupils who completed our survey (91, 71%) said they now read new types of book that they did not read before. A teacher commented that *"I have*

*noticed that the pupils in my class are definitely reading a wider variety of books". Sixty-four per cent of parents (9) also said their children now read a wider range of books.*

- 3.23 Teachers in case study schools reported to us that giving the pupils free choice of what they read has been instrumental in engaging some pupils in reading more:

*"I have 21 boys in my class, and the reading sessions now are completely silent. Darren Shan books have transformed their attitude to reading".*

*"I like the idea that you don't have to read books and that you can read other stuff – like online, and listening to stories".*

- 3.24 Pupils we spoke to also highlighted how much they enjoyed being given this freedom:

*"We choose books for ourselves more now, because we know what we like".*

### Teachers feel empowered to deliver strategies to encourage reading for pleasure in the school environment

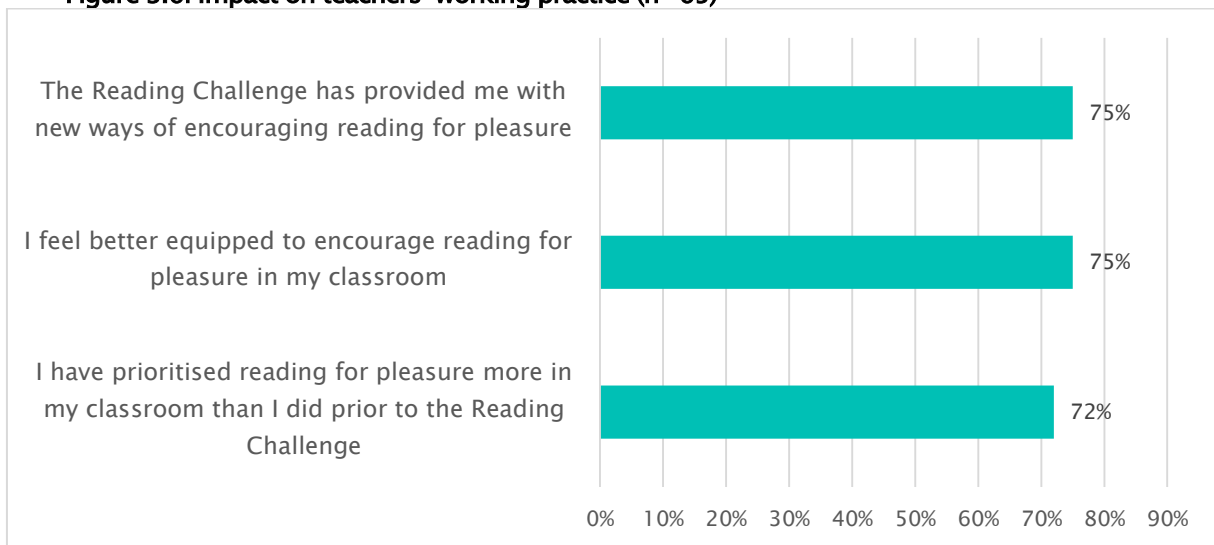
- 3.25 Many of the schools involved in the Reading Challenge already had a positive reading culture. Nevertheless, teachers participating in this evaluation reported that the Challenge had further supported them to implement reading for pleasure strategies in their schools. Three-quarters (49, 75%) reported that the Challenge has given them new ways of encouraging reading for pleasure and the same proportion feel better equipped to encourage reading for pleasure in their classroom than previously. Seventy-two per cent (47) said that they now prioritise reading for pleasure more in their classroom than they did prior to the Reading Challenge (Figure 3.6):

*"We have absolutely loved the experience".*

*"The School Literacy Co-ordinator has led this Challenge within the school – I am a probationer this year and this has helped me think about reading within my classroom".*

*"As a probationer – the resources have really helped me consider how to encourage reading for enjoyment".*

*"The Reading Challenge has brought reading for pleasure to the forefront again – it added weight to what teachers were saying to kids".*

**Figure 3.6: Impact on teachers' working practice (n=65)**

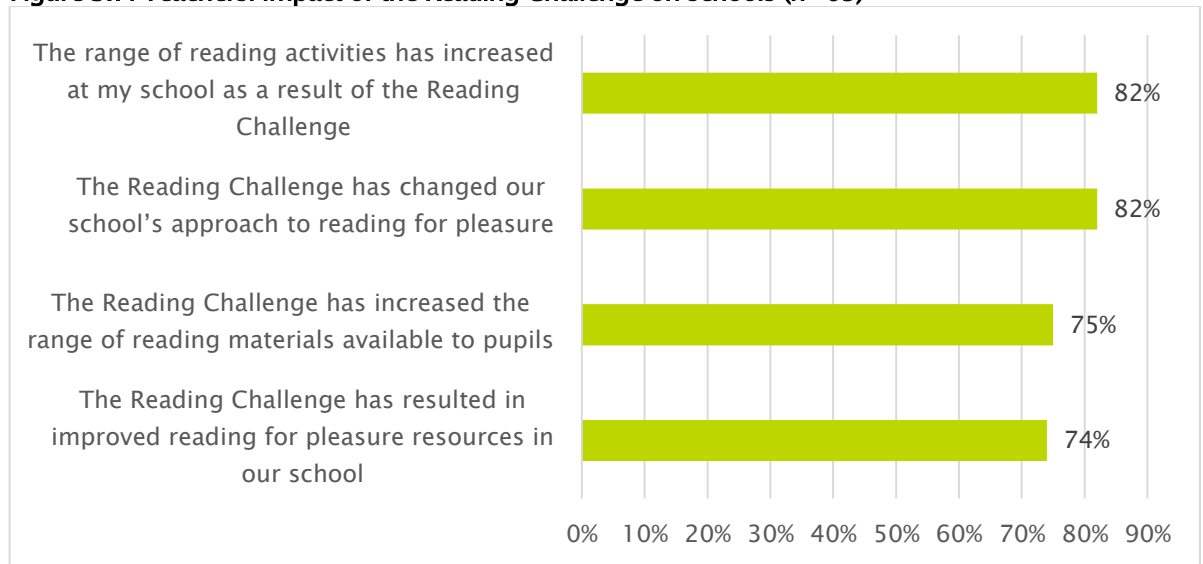
- 3.26 The percentages in Figure 3.6 also indicate, however, that some 25% of teachers did not find the Reading Challenge had impacted significantly on their practice in relation to encouraging reading for pleasure. We identified a number reasons for this – some teachers were working in schools which already had a very strong reading culture, and so the Reading Challenge did not add significantly to what they were doing anyway. For other teachers, their level of engagement with the Reading Challenge was limited, and so the Reading Challenge had less impact on their practice.
- 3.27 A number of teachers also raised concerns related to administering the programme and the impact it could have on their workload – *“keep it simple to administer. Don't add to the teacher workload or teachers will be loath to take it as a serious supplement to their reading programme”*. One principal teacher we consulted had undertaken all of the preparatory work herself for the initiative, in order to avoid adding to class teachers' workloads.
- 3.28 Some schools acknowledged that they still have significant progress to make in encouraging a reading culture. One teacher commented that *“we have really enjoyed taking part in the First Minister's Reading Challenge however we still have a long way to go in terms of engaging our most reluctant readers, those with little support from home and those with English as an additional language”*. This challenge was noted by teachers in other schools too, and we explore the issue of family support in Chapter 4.

#### Teachers and schools integrate reading for pleasure into the curriculum

- 3.29 The Reading Challenge has been an important stimulus for many schools to integrate reading for pleasure into the school curriculum and to enhance the range and quality of reading resources and activities they deliver. Just over four-fifths of teachers who responded to our survey (53, 82%) agreed or strongly agreed that the range of reading activities has increased at their school as a result of the Reading Challenge and the same proportion reported that the Challenge has changed their school's approach to reading

for pleasure. Three-quarters (49, 75%) said that the range of reading materials available to pupils has increased and 74% (48) felt that reading for pleasure resources (e.g. new activities, items to support activities) at their school have improved as a result of the Challenge (Figure 3.7).

**Figure 3.7: Teachers: impact of the Reading Challenge on schools (n=65)**



3.30 One teacher observed that *“the Reading Challenge helped us as a team – reassess and consider trying new things to encourage reading within the school”*. Another commented that *“reading for pleasure has become part of our routine – it is really embedded now”*.

3.31 In some cases, schools have altered the format of the school day in response to the Challenge, providing set times for children to read for pleasure in class. Pupils and teachers identified the benefit of this for both behaviour and engagement in class:

*“three times per week the whole school has 15 minutes of quiet reading time straight after lunch. This has allowed pupils a chance to enjoy and read for pleasure and also has helped to ‘calm’ pupils, particularly as we are an open plan school it has had an immense impact!”*

*“I think reading has helped me to concentrate more and let me relax”.*

3.32 In addition, 57% of pupils (73) reported that the types of books available in their school has got better, and nearly half the teachers (32, 49%) who responded to our survey reported that their school had undertaken a re-design or refresh of their library as part of the Reading Challenge. We know from the case studies that some used Inspiring Classroom funding to support this. Many of the teachers across the case study schools also reported significant changes in the range of reading materials and the extent to which they encouraged pupils to read a wider range of literature:

*“The Twitter feed has made reading modern for the kids”.*

*"We've got new books and they're more modern now. Before it was all the books teachers had brought from their houses from when they were kids, and that was a while ago".*

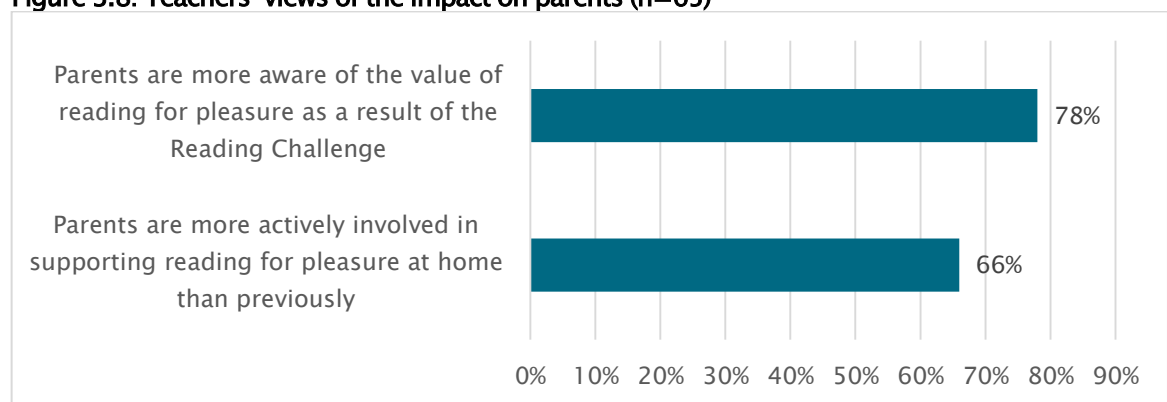
*"The old library wasn't a fun place to read in. People get really happy and excited to read now".*

- 3.33 Parents who responded to our survey also noticed a difference – 71% (10) think their children's school encourages reading for pleasure more since the Reading Challenge started and 79% (11) have noticed a difference in the reading activities and challenges brought home from school by their child/ren. Parents who were consulted during the case study visits also felt that their schools' culture in relation to reading for pleasure had improved.

### Parents understand the value of reading for pleasure and facilitate their children to do so

- 3.34 A significant proportion of teachers who responded to our survey believed that the Reading Challenge has helped parents to understand the value of reading for pleasure and has increased the extent to which they facilitate their children to do so. As shown in Figure 3.8, 78% of teachers (51) feel that parents have an increased awareness of the value of reading for pleasure, and 66% (43) reported that parents are now more actively involved in facilitating their children to read for pleasure at home than previously.

**Figure 3.8: Teachers' views of the impact on parents (n=65)**

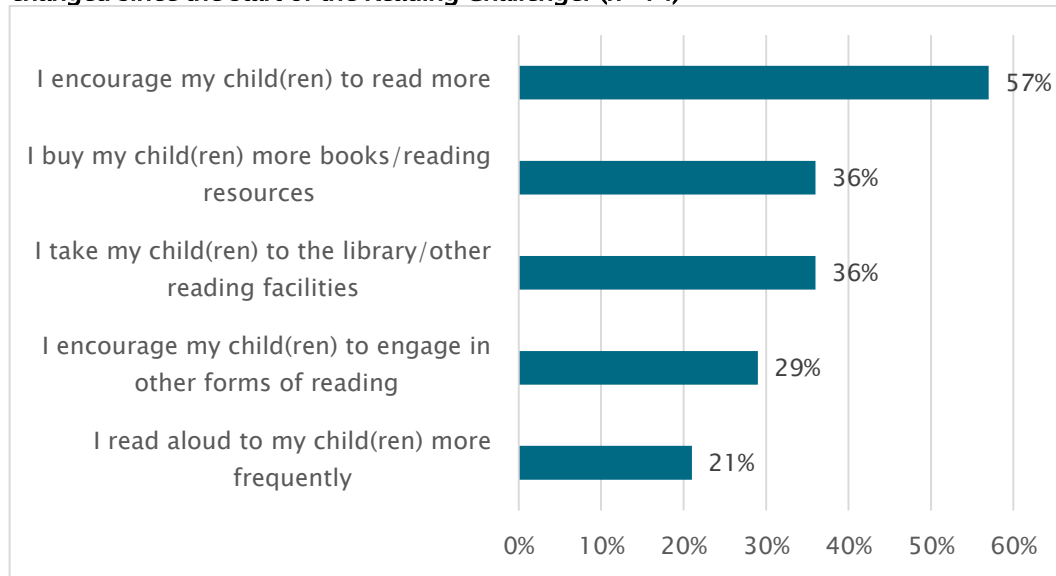


- 3.35 Teachers we consulted through the case study visits were less certain of any significant impact on parents, with most noting that the parents who engaged with the Challenge were those parents who regularly engaged with the school anyway. They felt that parents who had historically been disengaged from the school had not really engaged with the Reading Challenge. This is an area that would benefit from further development in future.
- 3.36 Over half of parents who responded to our survey (8, 57%) said they now encourage their children to read more and over a third (5, 36%) reported taking their children to the library



or other reading facilities more, and the same proportion reported buying more books or reading resources for their children (Figure 3.9).

**Figure 3.9: Parents: how has the support you offered your child(ren) to read for pleasure changed since the start of the Reading Challenge? (n=14)**



- 3.37 However, two-fifths (6, 43%) reported that the Reading Challenge had not led to any changes in the way in which they support their children to read for pleasure, although, as one said, *“the reason many aspects of reading has not changed for us is that our family are avid readers already”*.
- 3.38 It is unclear how representative this parent feedback is. Parents participating in focus groups during case study visits were parents who were already very active in engaging with the school and were parents of children who were already very keen readers, so again their feedback was not representative. This, combined with the low response rate to the survey, has made it challenging to fully understand the impact of the Reading Challenge on parents' habits, and this is something for further investigation in future.
- 3.39 Some pupils we consulted during case study visits, however, were very positive about the difference in their parents' attitudes to reading for pleasure:

*“My mum and dad don't speak much English and so they have been reading my books so that they can understand me”.*

*“My mum has started to read books more now too”.*

*“My mum is telling me to read more books now, because it will make me smarter”.*

*“My mum takes me to the library now, but we never used to”.*

### Schools and libraries make effective local partnerships to support reading for pleasure in the school and wider community

- 3.40 The Reading Challenge has encouraged the development and enhancement of local partnerships between schools, libraries and other community partners to support reading for pleasure in the school and wider community. Nearly half of teachers who responded to our survey (31, 48%) reported that their school had developed new partnerships as a result of the Reading Challenge. Most commonly these partnerships were with libraries (24 or 77% of the 31 who said their school had developed new partnerships) but some reported new partnerships with local authors (11, 35%), including author visits, and local community organisations (10, 32%).
- 3.41 The Challenge also appears to have encouraged greater use of libraries. Nearly three-fifths of pupils who responded to our survey (74, 58%) said that they have visited the library more than they used to over the past year, and pupils we spoke to during case study visits reported using both the school library and their local library more since the Reading Challenge had been implemented.

### Secondary outcomes

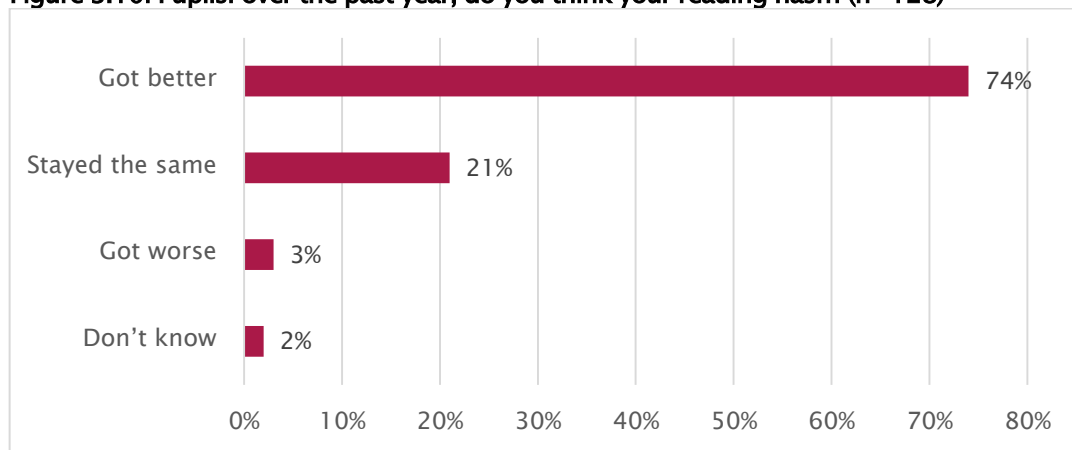
#### Reading for pleasure supports attainment in relation to literacy and English, as well as the wider curriculum

- 3.42 Eighty-six per cent of teachers surveyed (56) reported that the Reading Challenge has supported improved attainment in relation to literacy and English:

*"This has been a highly inspiring initiative. It was effective as it does not increase teacher workload but may still have a significant impact on attainment and is an initiative which is very easily sustainable".*

*"Our school has utilised the Reading Challenge to help raise attainment within our school. Our literacy co-ordinator has worked with HT to help drive forward... and the benefits have been excellent".*

- 3.43 Over half of parents (8, 57%) also said that their children are performing better in literacy at school since the Reading Challenge started.
- 3.44 Figure 3.10 shows that nearly three-quarters of pupils (95, 74%) reported that their reading has improved over the past year. Some teachers, particularly at senior management level, however, noted that whilst they believe the Reading Challenge has had some impact on attainment for some children, they are unable to attribute improvements in attainment solely to the Reading Challenge, and some believe that much more time will be needed to understand the real impact of the Reading Challenge. We return to this issue later.

**Figure 3.10: Pupils: over the past year, do you think your reading has... (n=128)**

3.45 Responses about the impact on the wider curriculum were more mixed, especially among parents where only five survey respondents (36%) reported improvements in other subjects.

3.46 However, pupils commented that reading more has helped them to improve in English and wider areas of the curriculum, and 71% of teachers (46) observed that the Challenge contributed to improvements in school subjects other than English. As one pupil said, *“it helped me know more stuff about the world and life”*. The most common responses from pupils related to improvements in:

- spelling (15) – *“if you read a word, you think back to when you were reading it and you remember how to spell it. I’m much better at spelling”*;
- writing (13) – *“The Reading Challenge [has] helped me with my story writing because I now add description and detail to my stories”*; *“Reading has helped me with language and spelling and vocab. I think my sentence structure has got better too”*;
- maths (9) – *“because you can read maths better you will get your questions right”*.
- learning new words (6) – *“it has helped me to read words that I never knew existed”*; and
- reading more complex and different types of book (6) – *“I could read books that are more difficult than before”*.

### Reading for pleasure supports closing of the attainment gap

3.47 We identified evidence that the Reading Challenge has contributed in some way to closing the attainment gap, although the full impact of the Challenge in this respect will only be seen in the longer term. Just over two-thirds of teachers who responded to our survey felt the Challenge has contributed to strategies to close the attainment gap (44, 68%).

- 3.48 However, we also heard from teachers of issues related to inequality – related, most commonly, to children not having parental support for reading in their home: *“some kids tell us they don’t have any books at home and no one to take them to the library so the Reading Challenge hasn’t impacted as much on them as a result”*; and not having reading resources available to them outside the school environment.
- 3.49 In addition, some teachers were concerned that the ‘100 Places to Start Your Reading Journey’ booklet was not sufficiently inclusive. Interviewees highlighted the limited range of types of reading materials, for example, an over-emphasis on fiction, hardly any reference to other forms of reading materials such as newspapers, online materials or audio materials, and a number complained that the list was old fashioned. Although the list was only designed to be a starting point for a reading journey, there was a sense that it would not be encouraging to a child who was not already an enthusiastic reader.
- 3.50 Schools who work with particular groups of children – for example children who speak Gaelic, children whose first language is not English, and children who are hearing impaired or deaf – did not feel that the Reading Challenge offered as many opportunities as it did to the wider pupil body.
- 3.51 In the case of one Gaelic school, interviewees emphasised the lack of appropriate books translated into Gaelic, and the lack of transferability of books into Gaelic (e.g. a Julia Donaldson book that suited a 5 year old in English, might translate into a book that was too complex for a 5 year old in Gaelic) which limited what they could encourage the children in their school to read.
- 3.52 Attribution was again an issue highlighted in relation to closing the attainment gap, with many schools noting how difficult it would be to attribute change solely to the Reading Challenge.

## 4. Key enablers and challenges

### Introduction

- 4.1 Throughout this evaluation we discussed with stakeholders and teachers what they believed the key enablers were to implementing the Reading Challenge successfully, and any challenges that had arisen. The evidence that informed this chapter was gathered through the case study visits to schools, the survey of teachers, and interviews with stakeholders (including members of the FMRC advisory group).
- 4.2 We outline these in the next sections. As is often the case, many of the enablers and challenges mirror each other – i.e. if an enabler is not in place or available to a school, this is likely to have presented a challenge in delivery.
- 4.3 We outline the ways in which we believe some of the challenges identified may be addressed in the final chapter to this report.

### Leadership and staff support for the initiative

- 4.4 In all of the case study schools, a dedicated and enthusiastic member of staff leading the Reading Challenge was considered to be key. In most of the schools we visited, the Reading Challenge was led by a Head Teacher, Depute Head Teacher or a Principal Teacher, but in some schools leadership of the challenge had been delegated to a P4–7 Teacher.
- 4.5 The success of the Reading Challenge also relied heavily on buy-in from P4–7 teachers who implemented it on a daily basis. Many embraced it wholeheartedly, and as a result children were enthused to take part. However, some senior staff noted that some teachers were less enthusiastic, and they had observed that as a result the changes in reading habits identified in those classes were fewer.
- 4.6 Staffing shortages were cited as a significant barrier to more extensive implementation of the Reading Challenge in some schools. They cited the challenges of finding supply teachers to enable them to release teachers to attend Reading Challenge events, but also of existing staff finding the capacity to deliver additional activities through the initiative. In one school we visited, a Principal Teacher took on all of the responsibility of preparation for Reading Challenge activities, in order to maximise the time the teachers could devote to implementation. Given the importance of improving attainment in relation to literacy, this challenge with capacity feels like a lost opportunity for some schools.

### Integration into school planning processes

- 4.7 Schools consulted emphasised the importance of being able to integrate new initiatives into their school planning processes. Some schools became aware of the initiative early enough (June 2016) to do so successfully, but other schools did not become aware of the Reading Challenge until well into the academic year and so integration with school planning was more challenging. Senior staff in schools told us that in order to integrate initiatives into planning effectively, notice of these needs to be given in March or April, to feed into the following academic year's plans. Where this had happened, the Reading Challenge appeared much more embedded in teachers' lesson plans, rather than being an add-on, and as such had more impetus, and was less onerous for teachers to deliver. There was, however, also widespread recognition that this was the first year of the Challenge, and that the short lead-in time may have been unavoidable.
- 4.8 Many of the teachers we consulted, particularly at senior management level, spoke of the huge number of initiatives that they are implementing at any one time, and the challenges this presents in relation to integrated delivery, prioritisation of time, and management time required. This is exacerbated in schools that have significant amounts of Attainment Challenge and Pupil Equity funded activities.
- 4.9 There was a strong message from senior management in schools that they would welcome fewer and more focused initiatives, in order to enable them to reduce the amount of management involved in what are effectively multiple contracts on which they must deliver, but which are often seeking to achieve the same outcomes.

### Support from Scottish Book Trust staff

- 4.10 Some schools benefited from one-to-one support and a visit from a member of the Scottish Book Trust team. There is clear evidence that this kick-started the process for them, and led to them being significantly more creative, adventurous and engaged than they may otherwise have been. They were also sign-posted to all of the available resources, and as a result made good use of these. Some schools we visited had not had this type of support and were significantly less aware of the resources available, and had been less creative in their approach to the Reading Challenge. There is a clear need for more of this outreach support to schools in future to enable the most to be gained from the Challenge.

### Flexibility of approach

- 4.11 As already highlighted, the level of flexibility that Head Teachers had to implement the Reading Challenge in the way that best suited their pupils, and took most advantage of local circumstances and resources was a key enabler, and something that should be continued in future. There was a strong sense from those we consulted that being too prescriptive about the approach taken would not have been successful.

### **Creativity and learning from good practice in other schools**

- 4.12 Our case study visits showed clearly that creativity of approach was a key element to the Reading Challenge's successful implementation. Many teachers noted that literacy had already been a high priority in their school, and so ensuring that the Reading Challenge stood out as something different was key to children's enthusiasm in embracing the challenge. Some excellent examples of how this has been done are contained within the Case Studies appended to this report.
- 4.13 Schools that were particularly active in implementing the Reading Challenge were also regularly accessing examples of good practice from elsewhere – either through their own contacts, or through the FMRC website and blogs. They really valued the opportunities to learn from other schools' approaches. This commitment to learning from others and sharing practice and approaches needs to be a fundamental element of taking the Reading Challenge forward.
- 4.14 Some schools had not used the FMRC website regularly, and did not therefore access the learning from other schools. This again feels like a missed opportunity, which is in part due to a lack of awareness of the information that was available, but also a lack of engagement in or enthusiasm for the initiative.
- 4.15 In addition, maintaining the level of creativity which has been exhibited to date may be challenging – and stakeholders in particular emphasised the need to continually encourage learning from each other, and fresh approaches to ensure that the level of momentum present in year one continues into further years (and year groups as it is rolled out).

### **Partnership working – with local libraries, third sector orgs etc**

- 4.16 The Teachers' Guide issued by SBT to schools actively encouraged schools and libraries to work together on the Reading Challenge and a further challenge was set for school and community partnerships to be strengthened or formed. Some schools embraced this opportunity and were able to share good examples of this with us.
- 4.17 For example, some schools were able to demonstrate strong working relationships with local libraries, other local community organisations, and with a range of other organisations.
- 4.18 These partnerships enabled schools to offer pupils additional opportunities such as more extensive library visits than previously, library staff visiting schools to run sessions with pupils, support with parent engagement, opportunities to engage with the business community, and local authors visiting schools to speak to pupils.
- 4.19 Some schools indicated that libraries took a while getting on board, and that they would have welcomed more input from them earlier in the process. Others observed that libraries need to make themselves more noticeable to both pupils and schools, in order to

maximise the opportunities available. We know that Scottish Libraries and Information Council actively promoted the Reading Challenge to libraries, and that schools and libraries are working closer together than ever, but there has clearly been variation in the ways in which libraries have engaged with it. This may be in part due to challenges with capacity, and may be an area for further development in future.

### Good school library facilities

- 4.20 Schools that had good school library facilities used these extensively to support implementation of the Reading Challenge. Some had been awarded Inspiring Classrooms funding to upgrade their library facilities, including measures to improve the décor and space, and increase the range of reading materials on offer – giving pupils, staff and parents a whole new enthusiasm for the library space. One school we visited had already offered access to the library to its private after school care provide, and was exploring the opportunity to open their library to the wider community (in partnership with the Community Council locally). They had also introduced a parent library at reception to encourage parents to read for pleasure more.
- 4.21 Some schools had very limited library space, with one school for example forced to re-locate their library into a hallway to make space for a classroom, and this limited how they could engage pupils in the idea of borrowing a wide range of reading materials.

*“We don't ever go to the school library any more, now that it has moved to the corridor”.*

### Close proximity to a library

- 4.22 Schools that were located close to a library were more able to take advantage of the opportunities offered by library staff. Schools that were not within easy reach of a library felt this was a disadvantage to their pupils and limited what they were able to offer them through the Reading Challenge. That said, some schools with strong relationships with a library (local or otherwise) managed to work around this challenge by, for example, having library staff visit the school. In addition, the flexibility in terms of implementation of the Reading Challenge should also have meant that alternative activities could be undertaken.
- 4.23 There is no doubt that library closures have impacted on schools' access to reading materials and staff resources, however many schools have reacted creatively to this challenge and taken alternative approaches to implementation. Availability of the Inspiring Classrooms funding was an important factor in the success of this.

### Author events

- 4.24 Author events were universally felt to be a unique opportunity to engage pupils in reading for pleasure. School teachers felt these were a fundamental way of engaging pupils,



particularly reluctant readers, and enthusing children to read – one described it as *“making reading come alive”* to the children. One school noted the importance of engaging with local authors to enable them to strengthen their pupils' sense of belonging in an area with high levels of immigration.

- 4.25 Across the board, Head and Deputy Head Teachers were concerned about the high cost of author events and said that they would love to offer more of these if the price was not as prohibitive. Some felt that these could offer some pupils a transformational experience and as such considered them to be a vital part of the school offer in relation to encouraging reading for pleasure. Some of the schools we visited appeared to be unaware of the Inspiring Classrooms funding which was available to support author events, among other things. However, Inspiring Classrooms funding does not provide a longer-term solution to the need for more author events, and opportunities to increase the number of author visits to schools is something that needs to be explored further.
- 4.26 One school noted how keen they would be to take their pupils to the Edinburgh International Book Festival but were prohibited from doing so due to the journey time and costs involved. They highlighted the need for more localised events of this nature.

### Pupil to pupil engagement/pupil ambassadors

- 4.27 A number of the schools we engaged with had systems in place to encourage pupils to support each other's reading. The approaches we saw included paired reading (where an older pupil read out loud to a younger pupil); reading ambassadors; book groups; and training P6 pupils to be librarians. These were received enthusiastically by pupils, and participation does not seem to be limited to those children which were already engaged in reading.
- 4.28 Peer support has been successful in many schools – with teachers recognising that children will accept recommendations and encouragement from other pupils that would not have the same impact coming from teachers. The child offering the support also gains from the experience – including developing confidence, communication and leadership skills.

### Pupil choice (i.e. of what they read)

- 4.29 A number of teachers, across a range of schools, emphasised the significance of the Reading Challenge allowing pupils to choose what they are reading for pleasure. For many children, reading to date has involved reading the text set by the class teacher for homework. Many do not read beyond this homework, and so being able to choose what they read has been a novelty and has been instrumental in increasing the amount that they read. Parents also reported enjoying supporting their child to read a book of their choice rather than the set homework books (which some had found boring to date).

- 4.30 Exposing pupils to a range of reading materials – from a broader range of literature, to audio books, newspapers and online materials – has further encouraged pupils to read more. However, the research did identify gaps in access to some reading materials including:
- Gaelic books, and Gaelic audio books;
  - Audio books that are read sufficiently slowly for autistic children; and,
  - Children's newspapers which are costly for schools to subscribe to.
- 4.31 If pupil choice has been such a significant part of the success of the Reading Challenge, this suggests a real need for schools to continually review and refresh their stock of reading materials, and we saw good examples of schools doing so in partnership with local libraries, and parents in creative, low-cost ways. There are valuable lessons to share with regards to this, and in terms of ensuring that all children and young people have equity of access to opportunities to improve their attainment through reading for pleasure, ensuring access to sufficient reading resources is a key contributor to this.
- 4.32 In addition, it emphasises the need to have good access to reading materials – something which is constrained by limited resources currently.

### Involvement of parents

- 4.33 Schools were encouraged to involve parents in the Reading Challenge as much as possible, with suggestions for encouraging them to engage including sharing Top Tips with them, providing them with information about the Reading Challenge, and encouraging them to take part in launch and celebratory events.
- 4.34 All schools we visited, and many teachers in responses to our survey, noted the importance of parental support in encouraging children to read for pleasure more. Most schools we consulted had a minority of parents who engaged with the school regularly, and in a positive way, but found it challenging to engage other parents. Schools located in areas that are more economically deprived found this to be even more challenging than schools located elsewhere.
- 4.35 Some contributors to the evaluation felt that promotionally, more could be done with parents, and that this engagement should be separate from the school – noting that if an initiative is linked to the school some parents can be turned off immediately, but that if it is external they may be more willing to take part.
- 4.36 Teachers across the board were keen to hear about approaches to engaging parents that had been successful.
- 4.37 We found excellent examples of parent engagement – including:
- Parents coming into a school to facilitate book groups in their native language;

- Parents contributing to the re-decoration of renovated school libraries;
- Parents donating books to the school;
- Setting up a library for parents in the school reception area; and,
- Parents taking part in a “speed-dating” type event with pupils to share with them their favourite books that they had read as children.

4.38 It is important that future expansion of the Reading Challenge considers the issue of how to engage parents and the community more comprehensively.

### Tools and resources

4.39 The Reading Challenge provided a number of new tools for teachers, including the 100 Places to Start Your Reading Journey booklet, the Reading Passports, the website, the Teachers' Guide, and a range of classroom activities, templates and display materials, which we have described earlier in this report.

4.40 Many schools used the tools provided, and welcomed these. Many also noted that the opportunities to share practice and learn from other schools' approaches were very helpful in determining their own approaches. In addition, many schools also developed their own tools to encourage the pupils to read for pleasure more.

4.41 One teacher noted that *“the resources supplied were fine, but the key to success is how these are used”*.

4.42 Some teachers we consulted, however, seemed unaware of the range of tools on offer which suggests a challenge in relation to how information was shared. We return to this issue later in the report.

4.43 Whilst the use of the Reading Passports was optional, all of those we consulted were aware of the Reading Passports and most had distributed these to their pupils. Opinions were mixed about the value of these. Teachers across the board reported that some pupils loved the passports and filled these in diligently, while many children were not inspired by them at all. Some schools asked children to insert the names of books they had read, but without requiring them to complete the review of the book which many were reluctant to do.

4.44 In addition, some schools raised concerns about the specific challenge which encouraged pupils to keep a record of the number of books they had read, and submit these to a competition for the pupil who had read the most books. In the Teachers' Guide this is described as being about celebrating pupils who read widely, but most teachers we consulted were sceptical that this was an appropriate measure of depth or quality of reading, or any incentive to reluctant readers to read more. Some schools introduced their own systems to reward pupils for things like who had read a wide range of literature, and

pupils who had read more complicated books than they had previously. One school had turned the competition into a competition between classes and rewarded the class which had read the most instead.

- 4.45 A number of people questioned whether a paper-based format was the best for the Reading Passports, citing the challenge of keeping track of where the Passport was (often being left at home by pupils), and one person suggested that an online passport may be worth considering in future.

### Branding

- 4.46 Schools were widely positive about the way in which the Reading Challenge had been branded. Whilst a few noted their concern that the motivation for the initiative could be seen to be about political gain, most teachers and parents we consulted felt that it had in practice been helpful that the First Minister had been seen by pupils to be encouraging them to read more. Teachers observed that the vast majority of children knew who the First Minister was, and that she was in a position of authority, and this therefore encouraged them to take part. The First Minister's active involvement through social media, and the celebratory event at the end further emphasised an ongoing commitment to the Reading Challenge and was regarded positively by many.
- 4.47 Advisory Group members emphasised the care they had taken to ensure that the implementation of the initiative was not seen to be politically motivated. It is important that this continues to be monitored by the Advisory Group, in order that any political motivation does not undermine the significant achievements of the initiative.
- 4.48 Stakeholders also noted the importance of this initiative being seen as a long-term programme to improve rates of reading for pleasure, which is the responsibility of whichever First Minister is in post, rather than this being an initiative only "owned" by the current party in government.

### Management of the Reading Challenge

- 4.49 Scottish Book Trust (SBT) was widely praised for its management of the Reading Challenge and this management has been important in underpinning the Reading Challenge's success. People we consulted acknowledged the short lead-in time for the Challenge and the speed with which SBT put systems and resources in place. They also praised the outreach support that SBT provided to some schools.
- 4.50 Stakeholders also noted the important role of the Advisory Group for the Reading Challenge and its key role in discussing the most appropriate approaches to take. Stakeholders noted in particular the Advisory Group's role in specifying the need for flexibility in relation to implementation of the Reading Challenge and the need for schools to be able to take account of local circumstances.

## 5. Value for money and sustainability

### Introduction

- 5.1 In conducting this evaluation we were not asked to conduct a cost/benefit analysis, however, we examined the value for money of the initiative and outline our findings below.

### Overview of key costs

- 5.2 The total budget for implementation of the Reading Challenge for P4–7 in Year 1 is £334,144, which includes a mix of staff and direct project costs.
- 5.3 Staffing costs cover salaries for one manager and an administrator.
- 5.4 Direct project costs include costs relating to production and distribution of the Reading Diaries; production and distribution of selected titles; website development and maintenance; marketing materials; teacher support resources; CLPL sessions for RAFA schools; costs for hosting a stall at the Scottish Learning Festival; awards, gifts and prizes (including Author Visits); an awards ceremony; and evaluation of the initiative.

### Value for Money

- 5.5 Given the number of schools and pupils involved in the Reading Challenge across Scotland, this initiative has been relatively low-cost to implement, with staffing costs modest for the scale of the initiative.
- 5.6 During this first phase of the Challenge, start-up costs have been incurred which will not need to be incurred in future, or at least will only be required in terms of updating existing materials rather than starting from scratch again. These include the costs of developing the website and the materials provided to teachers. These have also been able to be applied to implementation for P1–3 already with little amendment.
- 5.7 One of the more substantial costs related to the production of the Reading Passports and we would question the value of providing hard copies of these in future. Not all schools used the passports, and of those that did, not all schools used them in the way that was intended and some children used them very reluctantly.
- 5.8 Some teachers suggested that a printable version of the passport would have been equally easy to use and could allow for adaptations to be made to it to suit how a school chooses to use it. A few people consulted also suggested providing the Passport electronically, so that children or teachers could go online to update their progress with reading and we believe this suggestion may have merit. Whilst there would be an initial

cost of developing an online version, updates could be made relatively easily and cheaply. This would also enable the Reading Passport to become a more dynamic tool, and one which children growing up in a digital age may be more enthusiastic about completing.

- 5.9 The costs associated with production of the “100 Places to Start Your Reading Journey” booklet were also relatively high, and feedback on the content of the suggested reading list was mixed, with many people feeling that it was old-fashioned, and lacking in variety in terms of the range of reading materials it suggested. We recognise that this resource was only intended to be a starting point, and that opportunities exist on the Reading Challenge website to add to the suggested lists. However, it is our sense that incurring significant future costs on further developing this printed version of the suggested reading may not be best use of budget – and that instead encouraging schools, pupils and parents to make further recommendations to develop the online version of the suggested reading list may be more valuable.
- 5.10 Other costs examined seemed proportionate and good value for money for the scale of the initiative.

### Sustainability

- 5.11 The majority of those we consulted believed that there was value in continuing the Reading Challenge in future years, and this would appear to be possible at relatively low cost if the Challenge continues in its current or a similar form.
- 5.12 However, some teachers commented that the Challenge may require re-invigorating with new ideas and approaches to keep it fresh and to continue to keep pupils engaged. One senior member of staff had concerns that “it shouldn't be pushed beyond its lifespan”. Key to maintaining momentum is to ensure that schools are supported with fresh ideas on a regular basis.

## 6. Conclusions and recommendations

### Conclusions

- 6.1 The First Minister's Reading Challenge has been overwhelmingly positively received by teachers, pupils and their parents. During the first year of implementation some 1,558 schools have participated, which equates to 75% of all primary schools (including independent schools) in Scotland. This participation rate is far higher than was expected when the Reading Challenge was conceived and is a real success.
- 6.2 The Reading Challenge has delivered on all of the primary outcomes it set out to deliver (which focus on ensuring a range of reading activities, good resources for teachers, engagement of parents and local partner organisations, and increasing rates of reading for pleasure), and in doing so has significantly increased the number of children and young people engaged in reading for pleasure across Scotland. Whilst there remains scope to deliver further on these through further rounds of the Reading Challenge, this is a strong achievement in its first year.
- 6.3 The extent to which it has delivered on its secondary outcomes – those related more specifically to raising attainment in relation to literacy, English and the wider curriculum – has been less clear. There is anecdotal evidence from teachers and pupils themselves that this has happened to some extent, and for some young people, but the extent to which this is the case is harder to pin down – and partly due to the initiative being in its early stages, by which point such significant outcomes would be unlikely to have been realised, partly due to a lack of baseline to measure against, and schools' inability to isolate the impact of this initiative from others they are implementing. This is an area for development, and will inevitably need some form of longitudinal measurement to take place in order to better understand this impact.
- 6.4 There is evidence that even in schools that were already fully committed to improving and encouraging reading for pleasure, the Reading Challenge has made a difference, refreshing approaches and re-enthusing teachers. Ensuring that it remains exciting and inspiring is key to its future success.

### Programme design

- 6.5 Feedback about programme design has been largely positive, and this is almost certainly due to the flexible nature of the Challenge, allowing schools to adopt their own approaches to suit local need. It is also a reflection of the need for new ways to support improvements in literacy attainment, and the direct contribution that reading for pleasure can make to those attainment levels.

- 6.6 Pupil choice has been an important component of the programme design. Teachers noted that enabling pupils to choose what they read was critically important, and inspiring to pupils in a way that set academic texts are not. Pupils were overwhelmingly positive about the impact that choice had on their enjoyment of reading. Given that some pupils will have little or no access to reading materials in their home, this reinforces the need for schools to have a good range of reading resources and to refresh these regularly, in addition to tapping into local resources such as libraries to increase what they can offer to pupils.

### Partnership working

- 6.7 A key component of the Reading Challenge was to encourage schools to work in partnership with local libraries and other community organisations. Some are doing this very successfully, but with others this is less evident. In addition, austerity measures leading to cuts in the number of public libraries in some areas are an important backdrop to the initiative, and one which is impacting on some schools' ability to engage their pupils with their local library. This is concerning given the importance that case study schools placed on it as a facilitator of the initiative working.
- 6.8 However, some schools have reacted creatively to this challenge, and instead are working with local partners and parents to improve the opportunities they can offer their pupils related to reading for pleasure. There are important lessons to be learned with respect to this and these need to be shared widely.

### Tools and resources

- 6.9 The tools produced through the Challenge and made available to teachers have been welcomed by many, and confirmed as useful, well presented and easy to use (something which people noted they can rely on from Scottish Book Trust). However a significant number of people were not aware of the full range of tools and resources available and this is something which needs addressed for the future.
- 6.10 The Reading Passports have had mixed reviews, and whilst there may be a place for them moving forward, our sense is that some changes need to be made to these for maximum impact. The emphasis on counting numbers of books read was widely criticised, but many schools found their own systems to reward reading instead. Some schools did not think that asking pupils to write a review of the books they had read had been successful – instead it had turned some pupils off the challenge as it had felt like homework. However, these elements of the Reading Challenge, whilst criticised by some, have not had any detrimental impact on the schools' ability to implement the Reading Challenge successfully – they have either opted out of these activities or adapted them to suit their local circumstances, and the flexibility given to schools with regards to implementation enabled this to happen.



- 6.11 Likewise, the '100 Places to Start Your Reading Journey' booklet has been welcomed by many, and criticised by others, but again did not impact negatively on implementation. It is a useful resource to make available but SBT may wish to consider an enhanced version or alternative approach to suggested reading lists for future rounds of the programme, taking on board the feedback received and detailed earlier in this report, particularly with regards to making it more inclusive.

### Parent engagement

- 6.12 Parent engagement has been strong in some schools, but almost non-existent in others. This has in part been due to the extent to which schools tried to involve parents, but also due to the lack of willingness of parents to engage. Teachers highlighted lack of parental engagement and support a barrier to improving literacy (and attainment in the other areas of the curriculum) more generally, and were unsurprised that many parents were not engaged with the Reading Challenge.
- 6.13 That said, most schools were able to point to a small number of parents where the Reading Challenge had encouraged them to be more engaged with their child's reading, and scaled up across Scotland this is not to be disregarded as an important achievement. Considering carefully how to engage parents more and better in future is important for future roll-out of the Challenge, and one that fits with the intentions of the recently revised Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006.

### Information sharing

- 6.14 Confused lines of communication between schools and SBT have been a challenge which have resulted in some teachers being unaware of the range of tools and opportunities available through the Reading Challenge. This is not due to a lack of effort on SBT's part, and indeed feedback about their management of the initiative has been overwhelmingly positive. However, SBT usually communicates details of new initiatives through head teachers, but a number of staff highlighted to us the vast volume of information which head teachers receive each day, and as a result it seems that information is not always reaching staff leading on implementation. Given the wide range of initiatives that SBT is now responsible for, addressing this is a priority moving forward.

### The future

- 6.15 The vast majority of those we consulted are keen for the Reading Challenge to continue in some guise in future. There is widespread recognition that this is the sort of initiative which could take a long time for the full benefit to be felt, and that devoting this time to it should be a priority. However, some schools emphasised the need to continually refresh the approaches taken, so that teachers and pupils continue to feel inspired, which may prove challenging over a longer period of time.

- 6.16 Another key challenge will be to engage those schools that have chosen not to participate to date.
- 6.17 There are mixed views about whether the Reading Challenge should be extended to other age ranges. Extension to P1–3 earlier this year had a mixed reaction, with some schools welcoming this as a natural progression from the P4–7 Challenge, enabling whole-school approaches to be taken to the Challenge. Other schools, however, indicated that they felt that there were sufficient other initiatives already in place for the younger age group (such as Read Write Count) and that the Reading Challenge was an unnecessary addition.
- 6.18 We understand that pilots are being run in six high schools, testing how the Reading Challenge might be offered to senior school pupils. We believe that any such step should be taken cautiously, as implementation in a high school environment will in itself be challenging, and inspiring young people in the ways that worked with younger children may not be as straightforward. Fitting the Reading Challenge into a timetable environment with pupils moving around the school may also present a new set of challenges.
- 6.19 There is no doubt that there is an appetite for the Reading Challenge to be continued in future years. As highlighted earlier in this report, there are a number of things that have been critical to its success to date – these include strong leadership of the initiative from Head Teachers (or another member of staff); integration with other initiatives targeted at literacy; sharing good practice between schools; enabling a flexible, locally-appropriate approach to be taken to implementation; ensuring a good range of reading materials are available to pupils; engaging parents in understanding and supporting reading for pleasure in the home; and offering teachers a good set of resources to stimulate and support their work to encourage reading for pleasure amongst pupils.
- 6.20 The following set of recommendations seeks to further support these key enablers:

### Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** The Reading Challenge is continued, but roll-out to other year groups should only take place in close consultation with teachers. Some merging with other initiatives in place may address concerns about the multitude of initiatives currently being implemented by schools. We can envisage, for example, a natural fit with the book-gifting function that SBT also implements on behalf of Scottish Government.

**Recommendation 2:** Explore new ways to engage parents more significantly in the Reading Challenge, building on ideas tested in individual schools and communities already, and consider gifting book bags to parents to encourage them to read more in front of their children.

**Recommendation 3:** Continue to develop opportunities for teachers and schools to learn from each other's approaches.

**Recommendation 4:** Undertake longitudinal evaluation of the initiative over a number of years to better understand the impact of attainment.

**Recommendation 5:** Actively seek partnerships to build an evidence base for the role of reading in relation to the poverty-related attainment gap.

**Recommendation 6:** Explore opportunities to actively encourage more partnership working with libraries, the local community, and business, given the success of this approach in individual schools and communities.

**Recommendation 7:** Work with libraries to encourage a more active input to the Reading Challenge in areas where this is not currently happening.

**Recommendation 8:** Continue to offer Inspiring Classrooms, or alternative funding, to enable more Author Events to be delivered in schools, and to enable school libraries to be upgraded to be attractive and welcoming hubs for reading for pleasure, for pupils and the wider community.

**Recommendation 9:** Consider gifting of book bags to older pupils as a step to encourage more reading for pleasure, and to ensure access to good quality reading materials.

**Recommendation 10:** Review routes of communication, taking account of challenges in ensuring that information about the Reading Challenge reaches those it is targeted at, to ensure that opportunities to tap into the learning, tools and resources offered are not missed.

**Recommendation 11:** Explore opportunities to collaborate with book festivals and other similar initiatives to offer opportunities for pupils to engage with them locally as part of any further roll-out of the Reading Challenge.

**Recommendation 12:** Consider how the Reading Challenge might integrate with or contribute to local strategies to deliver literacy outcomes (for example through Community Planning Partnerships). Dundee, for example, has a commitment in its Single Outcome Agreement to ensure that “Parents/carers become engaged with and actively support their children’s learning in the early years”. There is an obvious fit here with the work of the Reading Challenge, and this is likely to be the case in other local authority areas across the country. Understanding the ways in which the Reading Challenge contributes or can contribute to delivering these local outcomes is an important development going forward.

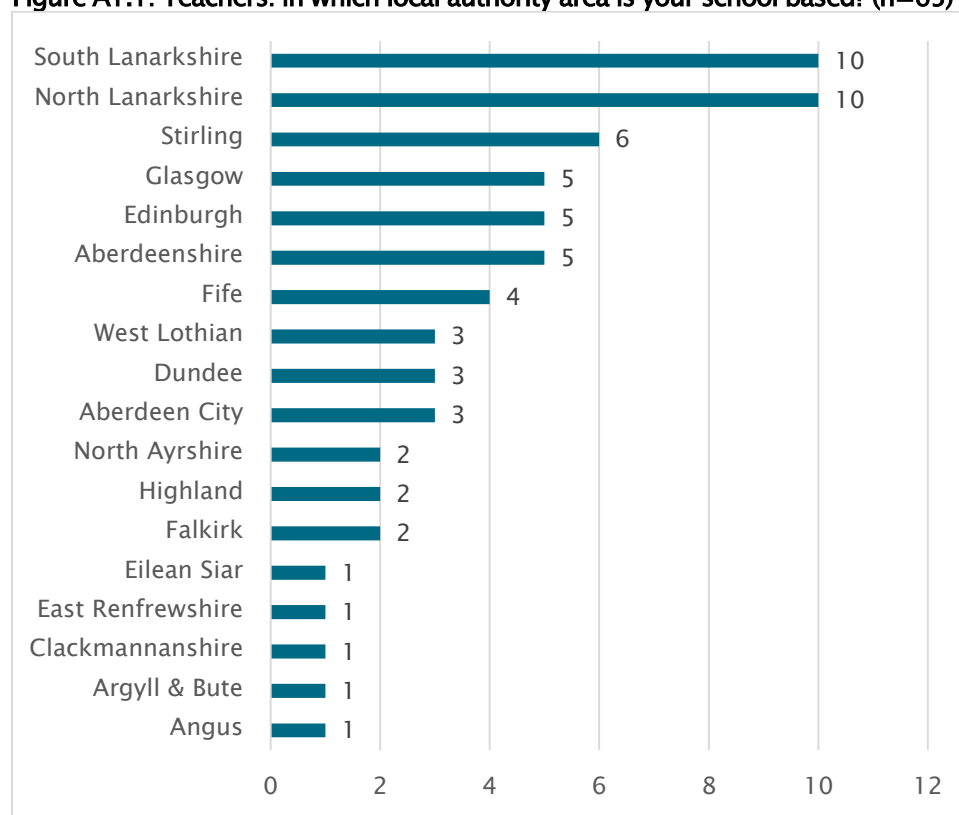
## APPENDIX 1 –PROFILE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

### Teachers

We received survey responses from 65 teachers from 41 primary schools, four of which were case study schools (6%).

Respondents were based in 18 local authority areas. South Lanarkshire (10, 15%) and North Lanarkshire (10, 15%) accounted for the largest proportion of responses, followed by Stirling (6, 9%) and Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeenshire (all 5, 8%) (Figure A1.1).

**Figure A1.1: Teachers: in which local authority area is your school based? (n=65)**

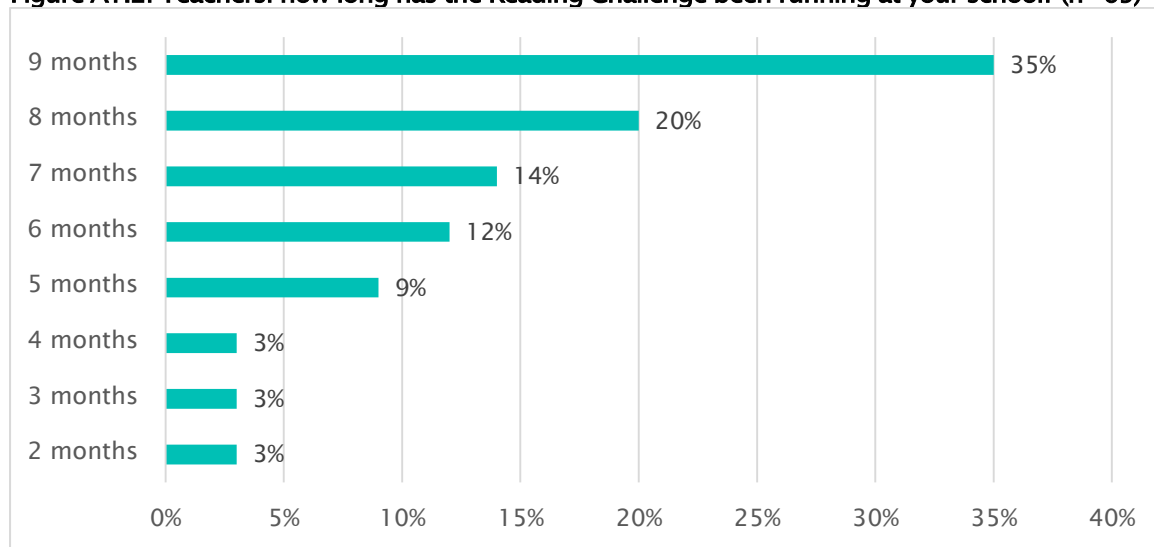


Most respondents (38, 58%) were P4–7 class teachers, nine (14%) Principal Teachers, seven (11%) P1–3 class teachers, three (5%) head teachers, one (2%) deputy head teacher and seven (11%) had other titles including Support for Learning teachers and a Classroom Assistant. We have included the P1–3 class teachers in our analysis because, although our evaluation has focused on the impact of the Challenge on P4–7, the Challenge has now been extended to P1–3 so it is useful to capture the views of these teachers.

The vast majority of respondents (54, 83%) have been directly involved in delivering the Challenge, just over a third (23, 35%) have overseen delivery of the Challenge and three (5%) have not been directly involved.

Figure A1.2 shows that most respondents come from schools where the Challenge has been running for eight (13, 20%) or nine months (23, 35%).

**Figure A1.2: Teachers: how long has the Reading Challenge been running at your school? (n=65)**



## Pupils

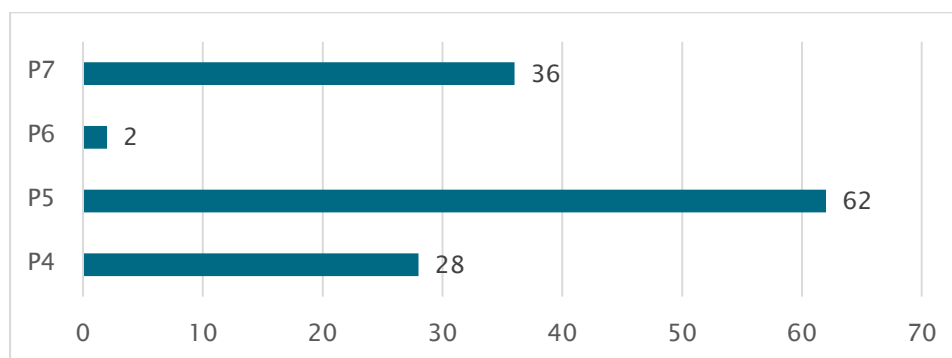
We received 128 survey responses from pupils.

Survey responses came from pupils at six different schools. Two-fifths of responses (49, 40%) came from pupils in two case study schools – nearly a quarter (28, 23%) from one in Edinburgh and just under a fifth (21, 17%) from one in Dundee.

Three-fifths of responses came from non-case study schools (73, 60%). Just over a quarter came from a school in South Lanarkshire (33, 26%), another school in the same local authority area accounted for 12% of responses (15), 11% came from a school in North Lanarkshire (14), 7% (9) from a school in Stirling and one response (1%) came from North Ayrshire.

The largest proportion of respondents were in P5 (62, 48%), 22% (28) were in P4, 28% (36) in P7 and only two (2%) were in P6 (Figure A1.3).

**Figure A1.3: Year groups of respondents to pupils' survey**



There was a fairly even split in the gender of respondents: 53% were girls (68) and 47% boys (60).

## Parents

We received 14 survey responses from parents of children at five different schools: nine responses (64%) came from a school in Stirling, three (21%) from schools in Glasgow, one from a school in North Ayrshire (7%) and one from a case study school in Dundee (7%). Respondents have sons and daughters in P4–7<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> One respondent has children in nursery and P1. We have included this respondent because the Reading Challenge is now delivered with P1 pupils.

## APPENDIX 2 – CASE STUDIES

Case studies are provided in a separate document.

