

Parentzone Scotland Literacy Consultation

June 2025



EducationScot



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1. Introduction

Parentzone Scotland provides information and advice primarily for parents and carers about education in Scotland from early years to beyond school. The site includes practical ideas to support learning at home in a variety of curriculum areas such as literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing and science, as well as information on additional support needs; and also tips on how parents can get involved in their child's school and education.

As part of the ongoing review of the website, it was identified that the text and videos on the 'Supporting Literacy at Home' pages required to be refreshed. Undertaking a consultation with parents was considered to be a necessary approach to inform the new content.

1.1 Scope of the study

The findings of this consultation provide an in-depth analysis on what children and parents like to read, write, listen to and talk about. In doing so it has revealed a variety of ways that children and parents access the wider aspects of [literacy](#). It also outlines the existing approaches taken by parents and families in their endeavours to support their children's literacy. Further insight is gained into the resources utilised by parents and families, and the professionals they approach.

1.2 Disclaimer

The mention of any authors, brand names, products, or companies in this paper is solely for the purpose of reporting consultation findings and does not constitute an endorsement or promotion of any specific brand by Education Scotland. All references are included based on their relevance to the research and do not imply preference, support, or commercial affiliation.

1.3 Terms

'Parent(s)' – The term 'parent(s)' in this document refers to people with parental responsibilities (within the meaning of Section 1(3) of the [Children \(Scotland\) Act 1995](#)) and others who care for or look after children or young people. A person with 'parental responsibilities' refers to someone with the rights and responsibilities that parents have in law for their child. Individual family units will comprise a wider range of people who might also contribute and support a child's learning at home, in the community and in settings or schools.

‘Child’ – For the purposes of support for children and families, ‘child’ means a person under the age of 18 years. The term ‘child’ in this consultation refers to all age groups represented.

‘Family’ – In relation to a child, family includes any person who has parental responsibility for a child and any other person with whom the child has been living ([Children \(Scotland\) Regulations](#), 1995).

2. Methodology

2.1 Introduction

This section provides an overview of the methodological approach which underpins the consultation. It has been structured around a discussion of the different stages of the consultation process including the questions, design, recruitment of participants and data analysis.

The data collection used in this consultation was semi-structured individual or group interviews. The consultation design sought data from participants about their child's literacy (reading, writing, listening and talking) as well as their own.

The fieldwork was conducted between August and November 2024 with participants online (Microsoft Teams).

2.2 Sample selection and recruitment of participants

The consultation design required participants who had children of all ages. The information in Figure 1 below was sent to Parental Involvement and Engagement Officers in every local authority across Scotland requesting that this be distributed across existing communication channels and networks with parents and families. Parents then volunteered to be part of the consultation either by replying direct to the local authority or Education Scotland. Many parents had close connections with their child's school which took various forms including the Parent Council. Others had outside interests such as the Children's Panel.

Figure 1: What does your child like to read, write, listen to and talk about?

Education Scotland would like to talk with parents of children of all ages, on what their children like to read, write, listen to and talk about. This information will help us provide useful information for parents on how to support their children's learning at home. If you would be able to spare an hour of your time and would like to help us with this, please email:

beverley.ferguson@educationscotland.gov.scot. If suitable, we can meet with parents online at a time which is convenient to you.

2.3 Consultation sample

Twenty-one parents (nineteen female and two male) were interviewed between August and November 2024. As shown in Tables 1 and 2 below, participants came from nine different local authorities across Scotland and had children across various sectors including Early Learning and Childcare settings. The terms in Table 1 are those used by parents. Please note that 'other' in the table below could denote employment, college or university.

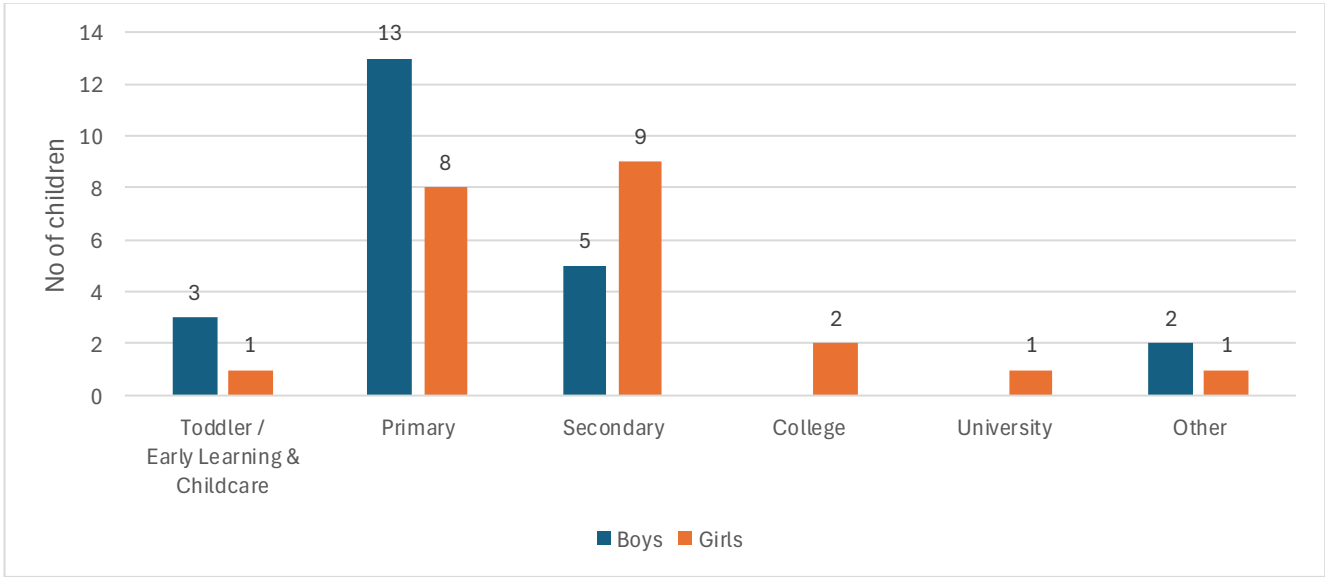
Table 1: Individual and group interviews

Interview No.	Parent	Stage of children	No. of people in group
1	Abbi	Nursery, Primary	1
2	Elise Jack	University, Other Nursery, Primary	2
3	Paige	Primary, Secondary	1
4	Shelby	Primary, Secondary, Other	1
5	Tara Nia	Secondary Primary	2
6	Britney Erika	Nursery, Secondary Primary, Secondary, College	2
7	Adrienne	Primary, Secondary	1
8	Alexis	Primary	1
9	Tamsin James	Primary, Secondary	1
10	Kiera	Primary	1
11	Olivia	Nursery, College	1
12	Amelia Isla Ava Bonnie	Secondary Primary Primary Primary	4
13	Grace Mia	Secondary, Other Primary	2

Local authorities represented:

- Clackmannanshire
- Dumfries & Galloway
- East Ayrshire
- East Lothian
- East Renfrewshire
- Glasgow
- Moray
- Perth & Kinross
- Scottish Borders

Table 2: Stages of children in the consultation



The views of forty-five children across the various stages were represented by their parents throughout the consultation (see Table 2 above). Within this, there were two sets of twin boys of primary school age and one set of twin girls of secondary school age.

2.4 Consultation questions – Guide for Interviews

Members of the Parents and Families and the Literacy Team within Education Scotland met to develop the question set (see Appendix 2). These questions were used by way of a guide to conduct all individual and group interviews with the aim of trying to ensure consistent results. The consultation questions were formed around the wider aspects of literacy including reading, writing, listening and talking. Some of the questions focused on the child’s and the parent’s preferences and feelings about the four areas of literacy. Other questions in the interview guide focused on challenges, barriers, family routines, technology, sources of support, and asking for help.

2.5 Data analysis

All interviews were transcribed as soon as possible following the interview and this was a crucial step at the start of the analysis to help become familiar with the data and to provoke thinking and reflections. The interviews were transcribed in full and verbatim where possible. Transcripts were checked for accuracy with Education Scotland colleagues who attended the interviews.

Each transcript was read through several times and the computer software package for analysing qualitative data (NVivo, v15) was used to facilitate the coding of the transcripts. The themes, interesting ideas and patterns which began to emerge from the interviews during the early stages were entered into the computer as notes. Importance was placed on ensuring that the individual meanings of the data were retained and that participants' perspectives were not misrepresented. Links between the categories of data were grouped thematically and sorted under main headings and then sub-headings.

2.6 Implications for policy and practice

Based on the qualitative accounts of twenty-one participants in this consultation, the findings have highlighted some of the experiences faced by parents and families when trying to support their children's reading, writing, listening and talking. The primary purpose of the consultation is to develop Parentzone Scotland. However, the consultation goes some way towards offering explanations for the challenges and barriers encountered by parents and families regarding supporting their children and it will also be informative and assist professionals across Scotland in a number of educational contexts.

3. Reading – children

‘Reading is one of those things that takes me away from everything going on day to day, or like the hug of a book’
(Olivia, Interview No. 11).

This consultation has taken place some time after Covid. Even though it didn't focus on the pandemic specifically, it still acknowledges that each parent who participated will have seen some impact on their child's experiences and interests during that time.

3.1 Does your child like reading?

Talking about one of his daughters (Primary 3), Jack said ‘She was the generation that didn’t go to nursery [because of COVID]. She is just not motivated [to read] in the same way’. This he considered to be very different to his older daughter (aged 9).

Parents used different words to describe their child’s feelings about reading. These included ‘likes’, ‘enjoys’, ‘loves’, ‘doesn’t enjoy’, ‘doesn’t find it easy’ and ‘likes being read to’. Although there was an unequal number of boys and girls represented in the consultation, the following observations have been made from the data. It should be noted that these observations do not follow national trends.

Toddler / Early Learning and Childcare

- Three children in this stage were aged either 3 or 4 and so far they liked looking at books and/or reading. The fourth child was 2 years of age and the parent didn’t comment on their reading.

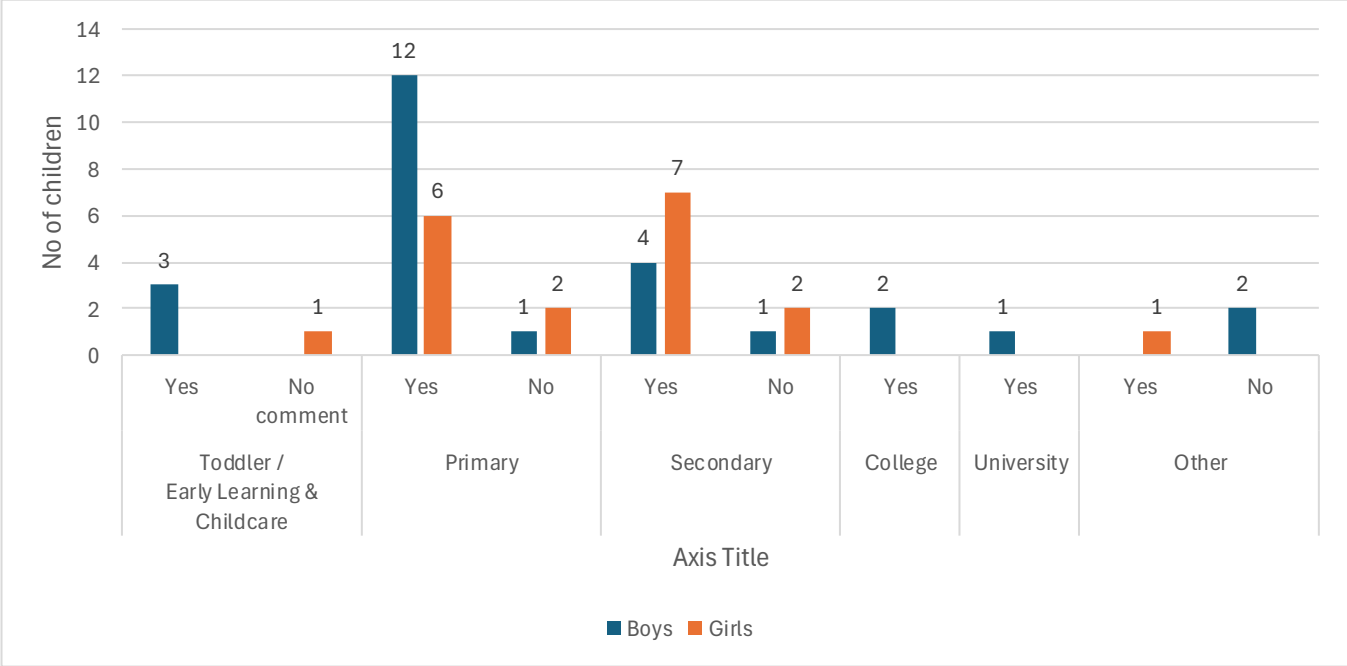
Primary

- A higher number of boys in primary school liked reading compared to girls (see Table 3).

Secondary

- A higher number of girls in secondary school liked reading compared to boys (see Table 3).

Table 3: Does your child like reading?



General observations

Olivia introduced books to her children while she was pregnant with them. She was keen to make sure that books would be a big part of their lives. Both of her children, now aged 20 and 4, love books and reading.

Alexis described a number of concerns about her children's reading habits and the steps she took to mitigate them. She described a 'secret fear' that her children (aged 5 and 8) would grow up not reading because of digital competition. She had gone to great efforts to 'litter the house with books in the hope that it would subliminally sink in'. Books were also kept in the family car for the same reason. Reading also took place while the children were out, for example, signs in shop windows, road signs and menus in food venues. While Alexis felt her children did enjoy reading, they did not show 'the same level of excitement, joy or wonder as a moving picture or going to the cinema. It was more a harmonious embracing'.

Paige talked about her children (aged 7, 12 and 14) going through phases of wanting to read and phases of wanting to play outside.

Elise talked about her daughter loving books when she was younger and then suddenly stopping with the introduction of TikTok. This had since reversed, and her daughter (now aged 17) is back to reading and is part of an online book club.

3.2 What does your child like to read?

The parents described a range of reading materials that their children liked to read. These included: action books, illustrated books, non-fiction, auto-biographies, pop-ups, picture books, short stories, comic - cartoon style, books that made a noise, 'touchy feely' books, interactive, picture books, rhymes and animals. Some parents described books their children liked to read in terms of topics. These included: geography, history, body, dinosaurs, volcanos, sharks, science, fantasy, transport, cars, monster trucks, politics, social policy, world affairs, the Titanic, wars, building, and sport. Examples of the actual books which parents referenced are provided in Appendix 1.

Paige spoke about how she taught her three children to bake cookies and cakes. While one of her two boys was less interested in reading books, he was very keen and able to read recipe books. Each of her children had their own favourite recipes.

Some parents described the books their children liked to read in terms of topics. These included:

- geography, history, body, dinosaurs, volcanoes, sharks, science, fantasy, transport, cars, monster trucks, politics, social policy, world affairs, the Titanic, wars, building, and sport.

Additional Support Needs

Olivia and Paige mentioned that their children who were on the spectrum, liked books with facts, figures, maps, landscapes, history, geography, how things work, general knowledge, and cartoon style books.

General comments

Several parents commented that their child was still reading even when that did not involve a book. Examples quoted included receiving and sending text messages, reading digitally, and reading instructions (e.g. for football games).

3.3 Reading for enjoyment or for school

Parents were keen to instil that books and reading be seen as fun and the 'gateway to adventure' rather than associated with a 'drag', 'an obligation' or 'negative thing' (Alexis). Olivia felt it was really important for children to start off by reading what they love. This was necessary to provide a good basis for wanting to read and learn. Reading at an early age for pleasure was

more important than what they have to read. Tamsin commented that her two children got a sense of achievement in reading books designed for their age. Four parents, believed children should be given the choice of which books they wanted to read (Alexis, Elise, Liza, Amelia). Kiera mentioned that her child (aged 8) gets a choice of books from the school library, or a book can be taken into school for reading.

3.4 When does your child like to read?

Ten parents talked about reading being part of their children's bedtime routine (Alexis, Elise, Nia, Ava, Kiera, Shelby, Nia, Abbi, Grace, Adrienne). Children would be bathed and then they would be read a story or would listen to a story on audio books before going to sleep. Night time was viewed by Paige as being a better time for her two boys (aged 7 and 12) to read because they were more settled at that time than during the day. Her daughter (aged 14) was more willing to read at any time of the day.

3.5 Using technology to read

Nine parents who had children in primary, secondary, college, university, and other commented that their children preferred a physical book rather than a digital device for reading (Kiera, Paige, Shelby, Elise, Tara, Erika, Britney, Ava, Olivia). Reasons for this included the feel, smell and sensory aspect of a book.

Four parents commented that their children get more digital reading from school rather than a physical book (Alexis, Paige, Shelby, Nia). Four different parents stated that their children preferred to read online (Kiera, Jack, Tara, Britney). For one of these parents (Tara), her child hadn't been reading beforehand but was doing so now because of digital options. Three parents commented that their children liked a mixture of physical books and online (Tara, Erika, Britney).

Electronic devices and apps used for children to read or listen to stories included:

- Toniebox (cubed speaker with various characters), mobile phones, iPads, Kindle, tablet, Amazon app, Disney Plus, Reading Eggs app.

Some of the challenges parents mentioned with these approaches was getting books which are of the right level for children, and parents needing to know what to look for. Whereas schools and libraries have books already grouped into age or ability levels.

With schools posting more homework online, this was forcing children to use technology more to read. It was viewed positively in terms of cutting down on paper, but challenges were acknowledged for parents and grandparents who either did not have the money, devices, data, knowledge or skills to access this.

Parents recognised that technology has a place in society but there was a feeling by some that it had reduced creativity and imagination out with that [technology].

3.6 Approaches that help develop confidence in reading

Parents described a range of approaches they felt had helped develop their child's confidence in reading. These included:

- Reading and singing from pre-birth and at a very early age
- Praise, encouragement, feedback, support at home and school, rewards at school, Accelerated Reader
- Going to the library
- Having books in the home
- Options to exchange books free of charge e.g. at the local supermarket
- Reading while outside e.g. menus, street signs, notices in shop windows
- Community in school – hearing and seeing peers reading
- Modelling from other siblings and peers
- Reading their own books
- Using voices, changing tones
- Parents modelling a love of reading
- Getting the right book that will spark their imagination and interest
- Using audio books rather than physical books
- Library reading challenge
- Being given books (Christmas and birthdays), books being part of the child's life
- Bookbug, Read, Write, Count book gifting

- Children reading to parents and vice-versa
- Book fayres
- Information on where children should be in their learning at various stages

3.7 Challenges and barriers to reading

Parents identified a number of challenges and barriers to their child's reading. These included:

- Parents balancing work commitments
- Child's additional support needs e.g. undergoing testing for dyslexia, ADHD, autism
- Children's eyesight and hearing - getting them tested
- Not having the right environment e.g. crowds, noisy environments
- Names in books that they [parent and child] hadn't heard before and were challenging to pronounce
- COVID – progressing at a slower pace
- Not being able to get to the local library
- Settling down to read when other things such as social media is fast paced and instant
- Knowing what to read after finishing a book

3.8 Taking turns to read and explore a book

Parents of younger children would generally take turns to read and explore a book together. This could be dependent on how tired the child was or how they were feeling at that time. One parent mentioned her youngest child enjoyed being read to by her oldest child because she would put on different voices. Reading to children and taking turns to explore a book changed as the child got older and then parents encouraged more independent reading. Some schools use Primary 7 pupils to read to the Primary 1-3 children. This was considered to be less intimidating than an adult reading to them.

3.9 Local libraries

Many parents talked about the importance of the role of libraries and school resources. Overwhelmingly, libraries and library staff were valued by parents who had access to them and were used often when they were open. Alexis commented 'libraries, they do a great job. If they are busy, I will take a book. They played with the Lego in the library, used the computers. The librarian is quite interesting. We have a good association with the library. Chatting with the

librarian. I am sometimes sad when the library is closed. Two days a week the library is closed and one of those days is when I would go if I could’.

Eight parents mentioned that they still do or have previously visited their local library or mobile library when their children were young. Apart from borrowing books, parents accessed libraries for other reasons such as attending a Lego club, Bookbug, using the computers, talking with the librarian and asking questions. These were greatly valued and welcomed opportunities. Borrowing a book from the library often resulted in purchasing it afterwards. Children also accessed the library in their own setting or school. Public library closures and restricted opening hours made it challenging at times to access them in the same way as previously. Shelby explained ‘We live in a small community and the library is only open certain hours. It changes on a fairly regular basis. It has become a council hub...maybe open 3 days a week between 11:00 am and 2:00 pm’.

3.10 Parental modelling in reading

No specific question was asked during the consultation about parental modelling behaviour in reading, writing, listening or talking. However, this came up during several interviews.

The ‘love of books’ was something Olivia felt she had got from her own mother. This had helped her to also love reading from an early age. It was something she was very keen to also pass on to her own two children as well. Incorporating reading into the bedtime routine was considered by Nia to be a way for parents to model that behaviour.

Parents mentioned making a conscious effort to model what they perceived to be good parental reading behaviours. These included:

- Messaging around loving books
- The practice of going to the library to get a book
- Having books available in the child’s room or in the home
- Having books in the car
- Balancing screen time and reading books
- Ensuring parents are not always seen by children to be on their laptops or phones
- Passing on books once they have been read.

4. Reading – parents

‘Mum always read to me at night, a lot of chapters back and forward. I was an only child. Definitely parental engagement made a difference for me’
(Shelby, Interview No. 4).

4.1 What do you like to read?

Parents provided the following examples of things they personally like to read:

Types of books

- Crime, romance, feel good books, autobiographies, detective stories, information technology, hiking, travel, wellbeing, child development, The Economist, Architect's Digest, gory, twists and turns, escapism, darker books, dragons, vampires, magic, murder mystery, history books, fantasy.

Names of books

- Chiplet Design, The Therapist, I am a scientist, Chronicles of St Mary's.

Examples of authors

- Jenny Colgan, Tricia Britney, Daphne de Maurier, B.A. Paris, Dan Brown, Stephen King, Jodie Taylor.

4.2 Supporting your own reading

Many parents talked about being confident with their own reading. Parents who said they were confident spoke about the correlation between their childhood reading experiences and the role their parents had played in developing their reading. Invariably, parents who said they were confident about their reading had early positive reading experiences where there was familial nurture and a culture of reading within the home.

Elise said ‘I read now to disconnect from day, week, month, life because with all family situations but particularly with teenagers, life can be quite stressful. That is why I read dragons and witches and magic because it is so escapism. Good to utterly switch off’.

Knowing what to read and finding books was more challenging because libraries are less accessible. Adrienne commented 'Book groups are useful but require someone to run them. When you lose access to the librarians who can give advice. Books are expensive. A lot of the best seller books are there because they are pushing that. It just has a lot of publishing and merchandise behind it. There are online adverts for books and social media, but they go down one specific trend. I am part of a book group because I do like being exposed to books I wouldn't pick up myself....Libraries are closing and that is the biggest loss of resource'.

4.3 What helped you as a child with your own reading?

Shelby said 'Probably my mum's persistence in reading with me. Mum always read to me at night, a lot of chapters back and forward. I was an only child. Definitely parental engagement made a difference for me'. Paige stated that grandparents helped with her reading although this could at times feel forced rather than an enjoyable experience.

Interestingly, some parents spoke about the importance of reading and having a culture of reading in the home even when they described their own early experience of reading as not being a positive one. Abbi said 'Sometimes I felt that growing up I wasn't the best. I wasn't interested in reading. I think that is why it is so important for me to encourage it with them. I preferred magazines'.

Reading out in class was the biggest fear for Erika and Kiera. It resulted in Erika only reading what she had to read and not what she chose to read. She said, 'When I got asked to read out loud in class I shut into myself'.

A small number of parents spoke about a perceived learning difficulty and described what they identified as difficulties that affected their reading (and writing) in a number of ways. Tara said 'I struggled with my own reading. Think I might be dyslexic. Haven't been tested. Takes me a long time to read a book'. Olivia explained that she struggled to hold a book for a long time because of her own health issues. This may result in her having to invest in an e-book to be able to continue reading.

Several parents talked about their concerns regarding their own children and the decline of reading standards and the impact of technology on reading habits. Many parents described their wariness of technology and the need to balance its use particularly around social media.

Additionally, several parents restricted the amount of screen time their children would have on devices and would be vigilant about monitoring the time spent on them.

Shelby said, 'I think as a skill it is important. Technology is important but if it goes and you can't write you are stuck. If you have it as a core skill; I always encourage them to write a thank you note, birthday card, to keep that skill'.

Several parents were very passionate about reading themselves. Alexis said 'I have piles of books that I want to read but never do.....I prioritise work, structure (e.g. laundry and grocery shopping) and exercise. After that there is nothing left....By the time I get to bed I am done'.

Being exposed to a wide range of books at a young age (including the classics) along with being taken to the Edinburgh writing festival was something that Adrienne really enjoyed as a child. She felt 'screens are a barrier to reading. It is easier to sit and watch Netflix'. Her children would normally have asked if they could watch the television but are now out of this habit. A conscious effort was needed she felt to try and change this.

Elise talked about her experience of studying English and how she really enjoyed the books she was studying as 'the teachers talked round it, because you were able to get into it and understand it'. Concerns existed amongst parents that children are now being taught to answer the questions in exams. This was considered a 'lost opportunity to get children to read books and understand them rather than memorising'.

4.4 Supporting your child's reading

Many parents were confident in identifying where they could find advice and information to support their children's reading. Predominantly, school was mentioned by the majority of parents as the first place they would consider to access support in relation to their child's reading (and writing).

While some parents experienced positive communication between the school, a few parents spoke about inconsistent communication (volume of contact and also method of communication) from the school to the parent about their child's learning at school.

Abbi said 'I'm really happy with the school. [They've] got class Dojo and you are able to message the teacher. If I have any concerns, I will message and she will reply. She was struggling with maths and I contacted the school. Trying to do some worksheets at home with her. [My local authority] use Dojo. They keep you up-to-date. Dojo is a great way to communicate with parents. It is tailored for your child. It is personal to her, but you get to see everything that is going on in the school. We just get to see our class. Or just get to see the nursery. Everybody gets to see their own class'.

Shelby said 'I was in a very fortunate position where I could contact the Educational Psychologist. If I hadn't been in school, I would never have been able to access that. It is very difficult to get an Educational Psychologist referral. If there are educational issues it would go to Occupational Therapy, websites, anything physical would be referred to another team'.

Mia stated 'having someone at home with a love of books encouraged them [children] to read. It's really important that kids have books around the house. The Read, Write, Count bags are great for this, and we need to remember to use the library'. Several parents felt that attending PEEP classes and Bookbug helped support their children's reading. They said, 'Where parents are able to carry on that learning and that discussion at home...it has helped to cement different things within the nursery and at home' (Olivia). Additionally, Nia suggested that having 'good honest feedback' from the setting or school on children's progress in their learning was considered helpful to parents.

4.5 Information that would be helpful to parents

Parents talked about what they described as assumptions by the school around their knowledge and understanding of the curriculum being taught. Some parents had a broad understanding of it but not necessarily the delivery. A few parents also spoke about a presumption by teachers that parents had a knowledge and understanding of the pedagogy being taught in the class. Nia said 'When you go to a parent's night and then you get the report card before that. People don't know what first level or second level is. That doesn't mean anything to parents. Then you get to around May time. If there is anything there about first and second level. There is something about the communication and how we bridge that'.

Many of the parents were not able to say where they would look to find support for their own reading (and writing). A few parents did say that they would find such information useful, and, if

they knew where to look, would seek advice on effective reading (and writing) strategies and resources.

Tamsin said 'I would perhaps speak with other parents [through Group Chat] or colleagues at work. Would be useful to have instructional videos to help'.

Abbi talked about support groups being run at family centres which are available and really helpful for parents on a practical level but also to come together in a community cohesive sense to discuss and share experiences. She stated 'I went to loads of things. Music, songs, dance, messy play, gymnastics. We were never in. A lot of social aspects. Literacy was integrated through those classes. [And a] good way to support literacy and health and wellbeing'. Abbi along with many parents would draw on professionals such as Health Visitors to access helpful links and community programmes (such as 'Bookbug') to enhance their children's reading experiences. Engaging in activities such as using puppets, props and fun activities to tell stories were viewed as useful.

5. Writing – children

‘Picking up a pencil now as a teenager is a drama. He can do it, he doesn’t like doing it’
(Shelby, Interview No. 4).

5.1 Does your child like to write or mark make*?

*Children make marks to express meaning, to explore the world around them and represent their thoughts and ideas. Marks might be described as ‘scribbles’ and the child does not have a great deal of control over the marks they make.

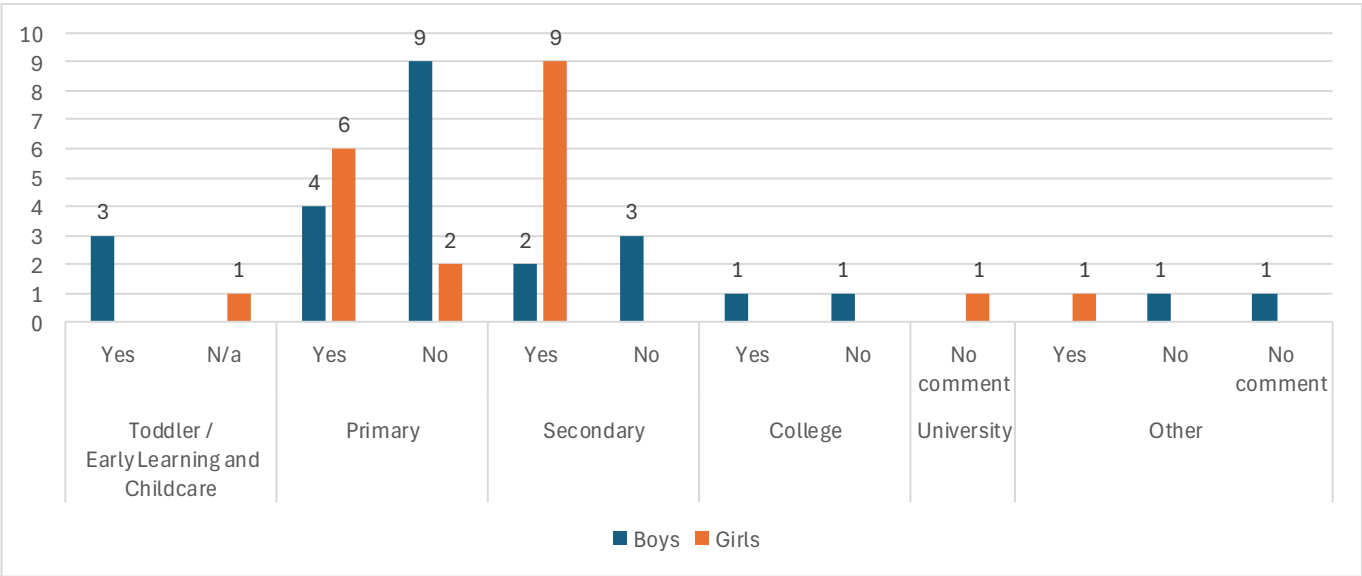
Toddler / Early Learning and Childcare

Three children in this stage were aged either 3 or 4 and so far, they liked to write or mark make. The fourth child was 2 years of age and the parent didn’t comment on their mark making.

Primary and secondary

A higher number of girls in primary school liked to write or mark make compared to boys. This gap between boys and girls increased significantly in secondary school (see Table 4).

Table 4: Does your child like to write or mark make?



Ava talked about how her twin boys (aged 8) liked mark making in nursery as it was quite novel at that stage but ‘now it is an effort to get them to sign a birthday card’. Her boys will use iPads

at school, but they don't particularly enjoy writing. This parent made comparisons with the way she was taught to write in school and how children nowadays were made to sit down and learn.

Olivia commented that her oldest child (aged 20) who was at college and had additional support needs preferred to draw maps. Her youngest child (aged 4) who was still in nursery loved drawing anywhere and on anything he could get his hands on. She said, 'currently I have a rather nice mural on my living room wall'.

Kiera talked about her child's feelings and preferences towards reading and writing. She also voiced her concerns over devices autocorrecting spelling and automatically finishing the word after you start to type. Erika believed the autocorrect function on her daughter's laptop helped her daughter see where she was with things and that encouraged her to do more at home. Paige and Britney talked about the quality of their child's writing not being the best. Sometimes their writing deteriorated because the children lost attention or rushed their work. At other times, parents described their children's writing as 'perfect because they took pride in their work'. Paige spoke about how her son writes in a cartoon style more than her other children.

Alexis mentioned that although her son (aged 8) didn't like writing, his handwriting was very neat when he did write. Writing was like 'some post-traumatic stress to him'. Despite this, the parent made a real effort to ensure that writing materials were available and that her children didn't need to ask for them. This parent spoke about how her son used to take pride in his work, but this had started to deteriorate, and he had lost interest in writing between P6 and S1.

Isla talked about how both her girls (aged 6 and 9) loved mark making with chalks outdoors. They also loved to write stories. Bonnie and Amelia said their boys (aged 8, 10 and 15) currently or previously engaged well with writing using foam.

Nia felt that timing for writing and doing homework was key. Setting the right conditions at the right time was necessary for homework to ensure children would do this quite happily. This combined with an activity which they found interesting, providing encouragement, coaching and taking breaks all helped.

5.2 What does your child like to write or mark make?

Parents described a range of things their children liked to write or mark make (e.g. drawing pictures, using technology). These included:

- Stories, people, shapes, letters, birthday or Christmas card messages, flowers, thank you letters, sketches, signs for bedroom door, characters, cars, trucks, houses, futuristic self-portraits, animals, puppies, kittens, foxes, scenes, gardens, butterflies, dinosaurs, dragons, stick men, dogs, rainforest, ships, pictures, colouring in, family pets, going to the park, friends, things of interest, army men, 3 marker challenge game to come up with the best picture, drawing round children on lining paper, number of seeds planted, making 3D books.

Parents also mentioned a variety of places, objects and materials their children would use to write on, and mark make. These included:

- *Places* - the walls, floor, table covers, outside
- *Objects* - diaries, lining paper, paper, chalkboard, magna doodle, rice or lentils on a tray, shaving foam, cornflour, sand
- *Instruments or materials* - pens, pencils, crayons, chalk, paints or paint sticks, tracing, crafts, paint brushes

In addition to using paper and technology for writing and mark making, parents talked about how their children liked to mark make using playdoh and foam (sometimes in the bath or in the kitchen). One parent used playdoh to incorporate the learning of everyday skills like using a knife and fork. This was important for her son who had dyspraxia and struggled to use a knife and fork. Alexis explained that her son preferred to draw a picture rather than creatively write something with words. In general, writing at home was considered more freestyle, personal choice and less directional compared to school.

Abbi talked about how writing and drawing was a 'nice quiet time' for her children. They would get their pens, pencils, chalkboard and 'play teachers or boss each other about'.

Shelby talked about how as parents they try every night to encourage one of their children to mark make using 'multi-sensory mucky rubbish' approaches but it 'just puts the heckles up' and her son knows what they are trying to do. She said, 'he is much more physical; he would rather

kick a ball and climb a tree'. Shelby did also try paintbrushes outside but her son preferred mark making in foam rather than actual writing.

Jack found it refreshing that his child's school was allowing the children to write rather than focusing on marking the mistakes. He considered it more important that children understood how to write. For his other child, finding the right topic to stimulate and motivate her was the key. Getting her to write about a topic she wasn't interested in would 'have been torturous'.

5.3 Differences between writing or mark making at home and school

Several parents talked about how their primary aged children didn't want to come home from school and do the same things. Parents tried to make writing and mark making less structured and more creative at home. Adrienne felt her children had more imagination at home compared to school and this was possibly because they could 'do what they liked'. At school all the children in the class will be learning about a specific topic and there will probably be 'more rules to follow in terms of their writing – it has to be this or that'. Only one parent (Abbi) mentioned that what her daughter does at school and home was similar.

Jack talked about how his oldest girl (aged 9) probably did more writing at home in addition to homework from school.

5.4 Using technology to write or mark make

Shelby mentioned that her son had all the ideas in his head for creative writing, but he couldn't commit the ideas to paper through writing. Giving him a keyboard enabled him to be able to get the ideas down. Her son had no problems using video games like Minecraft but was less keen on using the smartboard at school. As a parent, she did not want her children to get 'locked into digital'. She wanted them to have writing skills and not lose that.

Parents with children in primary 4 upwards talked about technology being introduced at school. Mia considered technology to be helpful to support writing but only when they were older. Access to technology was something that several parents were keen to restrict at home.

Technology was considered to be a part of everyday life, but Paige didn't want her children to use it all the time. Using technology to look something up was considered acceptable. She

preferred her children to be out and about doing things like going for a walk with the dog. For some parents, technology would be used to help settle and quieten them down, but it was limited.

Tara talked about her twin girls (aged 12) using technology to create and edit videos for fun but not for posting them on social media. Nia talked about her daughter using notebooks and laptops and Microsoft packages like PowerPoint for assignments.

Erika mentioned that her daughter (aged 12) uses notes and her phone to write down what she has been thinking about that day. This was an approach suggested by her counsellor.

Britney commented that her three children use technology to play games rather than draw or write. Tamsin mentioned that as materials are cheaper both her children have everything they needed to write or mark make. Her daughter who is in S2 doesn't use pens as much now. She would choose virtual where possible.

Adrienne talked about one of her daughters (aged 15) using technology (an iPad and pencil) for digital drawing. Her other daughter (aged 8) would use Microsoft computer packages like PowerPoint to create presentations, but she would also write about her friends and animals. While this daughter did not use the computer to draw, she would use an app called 'Toca Boca'.

Tamsin said her daughter (in S2), had neat handwriting but she tended to type more on her phone and physically write less. Seeing children using technology (tablets) rather than writing was more common and she questioned whether that was the future. Tamsin talked about her children using technology to ask it questions. This was of particular concern to her because she felt her children weren't using their brain to think and this in turn was resulting in them not knowing as much as they should.

5.5 Approaches that help develop confidence in writing or mark making

Parents described a number of approaches they felt developed their child's confidence in writing or mark making. These included:

- Practice – developing 'little habits of writing' e.g. writing a shopping list
- Going to school – empowers children
- Teachers

- Older children in primary school - role models
- Inspiration about who you want to be
- Topics that captured children's interest and they enjoy
- Having resources available along with experiences and the opportunities to practice
- Feedback from settings or schools
- Squared paper for maths, thicker pencils
- Books to support writing – wipeable books, dot-to-dot
- Sound cards
- Bedtime reading
- Understanding the sounds – singing, songs, poetry – finding an avenue and trying to get the comprehension through that

Ideas of what might be helpful:

- Writing group or club at the local library
- Getting stars or rewards at school
- Teachers marking work to encourage and praise them and avoid children losing interest
- Non-verbal animated films to provoke discussion
- Bringing in authors
- Taking children to festivals
- Voice dictation, scribes

5.6 Challenges and barriers to writing and mark making

Several parents shared their efforts and frustrations when trying to get their children to write. At school children have to write for a purpose but where they have an interest, they don't need the purpose. Encouraging children to write and mark make at home could be challenging at times. Bonnie and Isla considered their children had the mindset that learning happened at school and home was 'their time'. Mia mentioned that her child's school had no policy for homework so the children would write at school but not at home.

Amelia discussed how she felt there was very little she could do to actively support her son's writing because children were using so much technology. She commented 'when you are sitting there with a pencil you can hold their hand and help them. You can do all that when they are writing or painting. When it is digital stuff, it is impossible to do that. Don't know where he

should be with these skills'. Her son didn't want to write for writing's sake, technology was the mechanism he felt he had to use to get his work done.

Using 'technology-based writing' to text his friends and family members was considered by Amelia to still be writing but through a different means. She did voice her concerns about the world that her son would eventually be working in and how this will be so different. Amelia, as a child loved calligraphy and using all sorts of different coloured pens. Her son does not like that and will 'do enough to make sure he isn't drawing attention to himself' [at school]. Amelia did comment on how her son was happy to read and write music as it was something he was interested in for himself and because he teaches other younger children.

Paige commented that both her boys (aged 7 and 12) thought anything to do with pen and paper was a punishment. Initially one child had a support worker in the classroom to help with his writing, but this support had now stopped because of funding cuts.

Kiera compared her son's writing with his reading and felt that it wasn't as good. Because he was still young and learning, a lot of his writing was back to front. She thought that over time she would have started to see some improvement but wondered whether that was a personal expectation of how her child's writing should look. As a parent, she did question whether or not she actually understood where he should be for his age and stage and considered discussing this with his teacher at the next Parents Evening. Kiera felt her son didn't have much of a passion for writing but was quite hard on himself about it. Despite parental encouragement her son 'put himself down' when it came to writing and it possibly just wasn't a preference for him.

Shelby described the challenges she had with her oldest son when he was at nursery. The teacher would ask him to write something down, but he never saw the need for it because he was able to say the answer. Her younger son is also following a similar pattern. After exploring different tests and options, some progress is being made by using a triangular grip chunkier pencil. Another parent (Adrienne) talked about the differences between her daughters who loved to write and draw and her son who found it difficult. She said it was 'a real battle with him....[he] never enjoyed drawing [the challenges were] never about fine motor skills, they were okay. His ability to write or draw is still awful'. Adrienne said 'he likes and is very good at creating a story if someone can scribe for him. He has significant barriers to writing. He will do as little as possible because he finds it so hard'. Adrienne did question whether writing was a gender issue and if girls had a much more natural aptitude for it.

Three parents (Jack, Kiera, Nia) mentioned that a challenge for parents was them not understanding what stage their children should be at with their writing for their age. There is a presumption that parents understand the pedagogy that is used by staff. Some parents understand how children learn through 'phonics', the terminology used in settings/schools, have the confidence and know who to ask if they need help, but others may not. The parents felt that having a greater understanding and exposure of this would be helpful. Part of the barrier is considered to be generational where parents and children have been taught in different ways.

Parents expressed their willingness to help support their child's writing but stated they were not always given feedback from the school on their child's progress and/or the information about what to work on at home. Nationally, some local authorities have Family Learning teams who can provide positive support, resources and additional help but that isn't the case for everyone. Parents thought practitioners needed to consider how they could create the right opportunities and environment to build relationships in order that they [parents] could feel more secure. Possibly trying to connect education with community learning and development would, they felt, be helpful.

Additional Support Needs

Grace discussed the challenges her dyslexic son (aged 20) had when it came to sitting exams. He had said that he did not like writing, especially spelling and handwriting and that it had always been a struggle for him. Grace reflected that because of this, 'he shied away from a career which involves a lot of writing'.

Olivia talked about her son's challenges with writing because of his dyspraxia (aged 20). Sitting and writing was difficult but now that he is a little older, he uses a laptop for college. Erika talked about the challenges she has in getting her daughter (aged 6) to do her written homework. She planned to talk to her child's teacher about it in due course. Two of her children have hypermobility and struggle to hold pencils but were managing and working round this.

5.7 Writing and mark making together as a family

Writing and drawing together as a family was common across seven of the families represented. Sometimes this involved parents, grandparents or siblings writing or drawing

together. Children would often copy what their parents were drawing. Colouring in books was also an activity that families undertook together.

Jack talked about a STEM club that his family are involved in and the national competitions they have participated in. His children have to 'describe it and put little markers as to why they have designed this'.

Writing or mark making was described by Shelby as 'torture for everyone'. Paige commented that writing together as a family was something they had only done during COVID, but it wasn't something she had thought about doing since then.

5.8 Parent modelling in writing

Tamsin talked about her husband's love of drawing. Kiera mentioned that her husband was an artist. Although her child enjoyed drawing, 'it wasn't something he would actively choose to do as a day-to-day hobby'. However, whenever he saw his dad drawing this enticed him to get his pen and paper out and also start drawing. Her son (aged 8) had started to write a book about a dragon but never finished it. Kiera drew by numbers, and this was something that she and her son would do together.

Alexis mentioned her concern about her children's perception of her when it came to writing. She would make a conscious effort to sit down at the weekend and write her shopping list. Writing on her notepad was something she liked doing when planning for the week ahead, but it wasn't a 'joyful' experience. It was something she could easily do on her iPad and take notes then transfer it, but modelling writing behaviour to her children was considered really important.

Drawing patterns that looked like letters was a method in which Olivia used to help her children with letter formation. Encouraging her children to develop their writing skills and telling them that it didn't matter if it wasn't perfect, was important for Olivia. For her, it was about practice and didn't mean they were failing.

6. Writing – parents

‘It was me time. I was happiest when writing. Any time I read a new book I would write something, a story of my own to go along with the book’
(Tara, Interview No. 5).

6.1 Experiences of writing as a child

Due to time constraints during individual and group interviews, not all parents had the opportunity to respond to this question. Alexis talked about having ‘very happy memories from primary school’ and how ‘all that positivity allows you to do your own thing. It doesn’t prevent you from doing things’. Parents recalled not having the same things to entertain them when they were younger compared to present day children. Remembering her experience Kiera said ‘you really only had what you had in your room. That was all I had, my writing pad. Nowadays they have a phone that they can go to or their Xbox’.

Shelby remembered her parents’ preference for playing noughts and crosses or join the dots rather than writing and board games. She reminisced that television only had three channels on it and that pens and pencils were always available to her. Other parents had memories of writing on blackboards rather than whiteboards, writing out words in class from the board to their homework jotter, writing one sentence for each word.

6.2 What helped you as a child with your own writing

Similar to their comments on reading, most of the parents talked about being confident with their writing. Many parents who spoke about being confident with their writing were in employment where they were required to write to varying degrees as part of their job. Other parents commented on the reduction in the physical act of writing being replaced by the keyboard. As Alexis put it ‘I process my thinking while I write. I write now only for pleasure’.

Olivia talked about the challenges she had because she was a left-handed person. Because of this she struggled with letter formation and getting the right spaces between words. Being in a small group as a child helped her to manage and work through it.

Many parents spoke about their early writing (and reading) experiences in a way that was different to how they described the other elements of literacy – such as listening and talking. These parents described their childhood writing experiences as a form of retreat or escapism.

As Tara said, 'It was me time. [I was] happiest when I was writing. Really into Enid Blyton, The Far Away Tree stories, Famous Five and adventurous stories. Any time I had read a new book, I would write something to go along with it - a story of my own to go along with the book'.

Erika commented that she did not have any problems with writing, but she struggled trying to put her thoughts down on paper. The ideas were in her head but 'getting the words for my brain to function to get them down on paper' was a problem. She said 'more templates, layouts, what you would expect to write in an essay or plots in a story' would have been helpful to her.

A technique which helped Alexis as a child with her writing was 'little rhymes like up to the top of the hill and down again'. It was a combination of rhyme and singing. 'Snaking round and round the corner' helped with the basics of getting the letters right. This she felt helped build her memory and how she remembered songs.

6.3 Information that would be helpful to parents

As with their comments on reading, many parents were confident in identifying where they would find advice and information to support their children's writing. Again, predominantly, school was mentioned by the majority of parents as the first place they would consider when looking to access support in relation to their child's writing (and reading).

Abbi said 'I just find the school would give support. That is the first place. They are very helpful. Would give you worksheets that you could do with them at home. They give you a QR code and they have Sumdog. You scan that QR and it opens up other resources'. Another parent (Paige) had purchased a book to support her child's handwriting.

For parents who had children with a learning difficulty, accessing support was less straightforward. The type and complexity of the learning difficulty was a significant aspect to finding and getting support.

Adrienne whose son was formally diagnosed with a learning difficulty at the age of eight said 'I did a lot of research to try and find help (for my son). I found it quite disheartening; there isn't a lot of support or knowledge about dysgraphia - about the condition. There are a few things about the physicality of writing, nothing on the organisational blocks of trying to write. Dysgraphia even trying to diagnose it doesn't happen. Think it fits under the dyslexia umbrella. Educational Psychologist doesn't diagnose, other professionals don't diagnose. I have a 13 year that could produce 3 or 4 sentences an hour but with a scribe could produce 3 or 4 paragraphs. A lot of the research says purely working on handwriting will not solve the problem. (My son) being taken out of the class to do handwriting did not benefit him in any shape or form. I fought hard to stop him from doing it as it was stopping him from wanting to go to school. It set barriers and made him want to do it less. There are a lot of kids out there in a similar boat, who in written format can't do it. More information, discussion is needed'.

Some of the parents' awareness of support and resources appeared to be dependent on their employment (if they were in or around the education sector) and/or their social networks (if individuals in these wider networks were aware of how to access resources). Additionally, it was apparent that having the confidence to seek out support and resources was amongst other things dependant on the parent's own level of literacy. It was evident that the majority of these parents did not have the same confidence or socio-economic status as parents who were able to speak with confidence about accessing support or resources.

It was observed that a small number of the parents were unlikely to search for resources or attempt to make contact with anyone because they were not confident about their own literacy. Paige said 'maybe if I had read someone else's story' that might help but 'you would need to think to do that. I didn't think it was too much of an issue'.

6.4 Practical support

Talking about homework, Erika said 'I know the schools are short of money but workbooks that I could help the kids with would help both of us....for homework they do backwards writing, pyramid words. I had to explain to my daughter what pyramid words are. They are just getting told an action. We are having to look at the sheet and try and work it out ourselves because there is no explanation'. Having completed examples sent home from the school would for Erika, be extremely useful so that parents can support their children with homework activities.

She felt this was necessary because of the different way that parents learned when they were at school.

Adrienne felt that it would be good if schools were able to tell children about forthcoming 'story writing competitions' and help children to 'try and get the motivation or encouragement to do it'. In her personal experience 'there wasn't any encouragement to do creative writing'.

Having events in the evening, possibly at the local library or online where parents could go and attend these with their children was considered by some parents to be helpful.

Instructional videos to help parents would also be useful. Shelby thought that exploring materials such as broad chalk, metallic, or making games out of it for the children like knots and crosses might be of assistance.

Being a left-handed parent with two right-handed children made it difficult for Olivia to support them. Information on how best to support their writing at home would have been helpful to her.

7. Listening and watching – children

'We have always been very willing to give them a voice and a chance to talk. They have always been actively included and we have always listened to what they were saying even if it is about Minecraft. Their opinions matter and that has been huge'
(Adrienne, Interview No 7).

7.1 What does your child like to listen to or watch?

In response to the above question, parents mentioned the following examples of what their children liked to listen to or watch:

Listen

- Baby Shark, Minions, Sing, Haaland, world cup type songs, music (from 1960s onwards), musicals, Audible (app) - A bear called Paddington', 'Peter Pan', 'Rapunzel', 'Sleeping Beauty', 'Gruffalos child', Horrid Henry, music, football games, audio books.

Watch

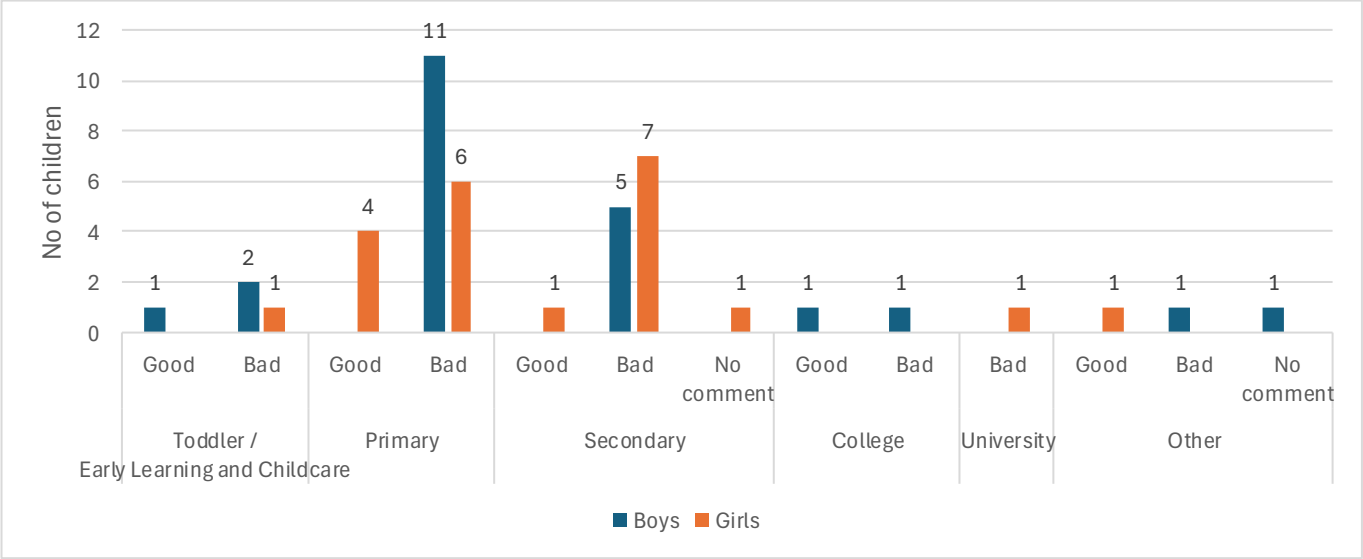
- YouTubers, American families, Diary of a Wimpy Kid, Friends, Cosby show, Peppa Pig, Lego, action, films, Disney movies, Moana, Sing, Super Mario movies, Minions, CBeebies, Newsround, teenage programmes, comedies, PAW Patrol, Flashbang adventure, Ackley Bridge, Family Guy, Bluey, Spiderman, The Goonies, Indiana Jones, Ghostbusters, musical theatre, concerts, YouTube videos to learn a language, Inside Out, How to Train Your Dragon, programmes with facts and information, The Artful Dodger, music band, Harry Potter films, Cocomelon, Netflix, David Attenborough, scary things e.g. horror movies.

7.2 Listening skills – Challenges and barriers

A few parents talked about the challenges they had in getting their children to listen in general but also the influence on them of the various programmes they watched and the devices they used. Some children found it hard to listen at school as well as at home. One child found listening difficult, but this was the result of a hearing issue. Isla mentioned that talking to 'Alexa' (Amazon's voice service platform at times was more impactful than speaking in person to her children.

As Table 5 below shows, it was evident that more boys in primary school were less likely to have good listening skills compared to girls. Interestingly, this was reversed in secondary school where girls were less likely to have as good listening skills.

Table 5: Children’s listening skills



Listening and practicing taking turns in conversation as well as listening to instructions was mentioned by Olivia as something she had to work on with her eldest child (now aged 20). Her younger child (aged 4) was very keen to share immediately what he was thinking. Learning to wait and not interrupt when an adult was speaking was a work in progress.

Tamsin and Kiera talked about how their children did listen, but they weren’t sure how much information was being processed. They said their children’s concentration levels were not good and there were times when it didn’t look like they had been listening. Listening was a skill both parents acknowledged they themselves were not good at because of their lack of concentration particularly during a conversation. After getting support for two years, Tamsin stated that her listening skills had now greatly improved.

Alexis felt her three children’s listening skills were selective. Listening and responding to instructions was not good but they did hear and want to be part of conversations that were not intended for them. She used an example where her children started talking about a topic she had been discussing earlier which led her to suspecting that they had been secretly listening from upstairs. Her analysis of her children’s listening skills was that they could be self-centred. They would listen if the conversation helped or served them and their purposes.

Paige and Shelby commented that their children's listening skills were good when the task was of interest to them. For example, listening skills were good when baking a cake but not good when sitting down to learn something or when the alarm clock goes off in the morning. Paige felt that COVID had negatively impacted her youngest child's (aged 7) listening skills. However, she reflected that her two older children's listening skills did not seem to have been impacted as much as the youngest one.

7.3 What helps your child to listen?

Parents discussed a range of practical methods that helped their children to listen. These included:

- Putting the television off, removing distractions and headphones, quietness
- Protecting mealtimes - no digital devices
- Parent slowing down, taking time to listen to their children and not talk over them
- Parent giving children a voice and the opportunity to talk, listening to them and letting them know their opinions matter and their points are valid
- Learning a musical instrument
- Incentives – something for their own self-gratitude, satisfaction or for fun
- Board maker to help with routines
- Topics which are of interest to children
- Reading books at bedtime
- Choosing the right time and environment which will facilitate processing skills to listen
- Talking to children as they grow up
- Social opportunities

7.4 Approaches that help develop confidence in listening

Parents listed the following approaches they felt helped develop their child's confidence in listening:

- Participating in extra-curriculum activities outwith school e.g. boxing, football, gymnastics, dancing, swimming, national recitation competitions, drama club
- Independence as a child gets older
- Focusing on the child
- Time

- Friendships in general. For children with additional support needs, having friends who had similar needs and who understood them helped build confidence
- Group participation at school
- Home-school link worker
- College

7.5 Parent modelling

Parents felt it was important to let their children know they were interested in listening to them and that they were being heard. Many of them suggesting that if what their children were talking about was important to them it should be important to the parents. Taking time to stop and talk to them, ask about their day and listen to them helped children feel valued. Taking time to show children how to listen, not talk over each other or be unavailable by being on a digital device were other behaviours parents were keen to model. Encouraging children to listen before 'arguing' was also considered important.

8. Listening and Watching – parents

‘I think encouraging parents to sing to and read to their children even if they are very small. I don’t think parents realise that even from an early age children are taking in what they are listening to.....gives you one-on-one time with them. Helps with bonding and helps them develop confidence in themselves’
(Olivia, Interview No. 11).

8.1 What do you like to listen to or watch?

Due to time constraints in the individual and group interviews, not every parent had the opportunity to respond to this question. For those who did, they gave the following examples of what they liked to listen to and watch:

Listening

- Music, podcasts, Paul Noble, Audible app, radio.

Watching

- Greys Anatomy, Death in Paradise, Waking the Dead, Spooks, Scummy Mummies, Love is Blind, Friends, Sherlock Homes, Criminal Minds, Only Murders in the Building, Downton Abbey, Married at First Sight, Frazier.

Types of programmes

- Medical dramas, comedies, thrillers, soaps, detectives, sports, football, anything to switch off, American programmes, reality TV.

8.2 Supporting your own listening

Most parents talked about being confident with their own listening and talking skills. Abbi who was involved in the local Children’s Panel, said ‘I think the children’s panel has helped my listening. You have got to be an active listener and wait for your turn to talk. I’m really glad to have done the children’s panel’.

Some of the parents who spoke about being confident with their listening and talking described early familial environments which played a part in developing their confidence.

Shelby said 'I grew up with mum and dad and myself in the house, apart from school I was always taken to clubs to socialise. I had lots of peers, friends, cousins, having those experiences with the older generation and a mixture of people. That was very much a part of my childhood'.

Parents mentioned the following examples that they felt helped them to listen:

- Listening to podcasts
- Attending a parenting programme or group designed for parents
- Family centre – taking part in classes e.g. music, songs, dance, messy play, gymnastics, puppets
- Listening and talking to other new mums

Alexis and Kiera talked about not being good listeners and not being able to ask for help or know who to contact. Shelby was aware that she was very astute at listening when she was at work but possibly less so at home.

8.3 Supporting your child's listening skills

Parents identified the following examples of things that had helped them support their child's listening skills:

- Speech and Language Therapy helpline
- Own experience as a practitioner
- Internet
- Health Visitor, Early Years Family Learning Practitioner, Home-School Link worker, Doctors, School Nurse
- Early learning and childcare setting or school
- Reading to child
- Time – sitting and talking to them, listening to their response, engaging in how they are feeling
- Recognising how parents feel affects their children
- Conversations at mealtimes
- Bookbug sessions at the local library
- Speaking to friends, family members, colleagues or other parents
- Local library – this was a place parents felt comfortable
- Baby sign language

9. Talking – children

‘She tells me her stories and I listen. I tell her mine.....Mainly they ask what are we eating all day long’
(Paige, Interview No. 3).

9.1 What does your child like to talk about?

In response to the above question, parents mentioned the following examples of things their children liked to talk about:

Early learning and childcare / school children

- Dinosaurs, stories that they have read, vehicles – positional language (faster, slower, bigger, smaller), counting wheels on vehicles.

Primary

- Pokémon, Minecraft, Thomas the Tank engine, general topics of interest, things their friends/peers did at school, what time their friends stay up to, YouTubers and influencers, football – players, matches and statistics, musical theatre, dance, concerts, things they (children) have been doing, ways of making money, football, Newsbeat, current/forthcoming events at school – sports day, sleepovers at friends, people in general, death of family member, cats, dinosaurs, illness (cancer), animals, dragons, life and work on the farm, playing teachers, gymnastics, cars, talking to Alexa – requesting songs, cricket, rugby.

Secondary

- Animals (puppies, kittens), making money, starting a business, ‘more intelligent things’, football, things the child(ren) feel they need and want, TV programmes e.g. I’m a Celebrity, murder mystery, Agatha Ogada, law programmes, family pet tortoise, latest book being read, Films on Netflix, skincare, scouts, camping, outdoors, climbing, gaming, online safety and talking to strangers.

College, university, other

- Musical theatre, Ru Paul Drag Race, television programmes, actors/actresses, work, households, keeping your own house, pregnancy, politics, local current events, general news, people known to the family and the things they do, offloading events of the day, Anime.

General comments

Olivia believed it was important for parents to allow their children, regardless of age, to talk about the things they loved even if you had heard it several times before. This she considered helped develop their confidence and widen their vocabulary.

Tamsin felt parents should take 15-20 minutes every night to listen to their children. This she felt would make a big difference to families. It was acknowledged that listening was not a skill that came easily to every parent.

Parents' experiences of their children talking varied. These ranged from some of their children who never stopped talking about all different things to others who were less keen on sharing too much information. The level of detail also varied from everything that happened, to very little or no detail. Paige referred to her children as more 'gossipers'.

9.2 Children's feelings about talking and communicating

Responses from parents were clearly divided in terms of their perception of their child's feelings about talking and communicating. Some parents commented that their child preferred to talk on a one-to-one basis as this was easier to get their active attention. Other children preferred a small group setting or had no reservations about talking. Talking to strangers in person or online was a concern for parents and generated conversations about knowing who to talk to and who not to talk to. As one parent said, it was easier and more comfortable for the children to talk to family and friends than it was talking to new people. It took time to get over the shyness when talking to new people.

Alexis commented that two of her children (aged 5) were brilliant with their words and able to express their points of view and put forward their arguments. Even at their young age they had developed negotiation skills. Her oldest child (aged 8) was at the stage where he didn't want to

talk about something when he knew he was in trouble. Similarly, teenagers did not like talking when they knew they were in the wrong because of how uncomfortable it made them feel.

Some parents made comparisons between their children's talking habits and their own. They were aware that their children's talking behaviour reflected their own. Sometimes this was constantly talking to the point of exhaustion (for the listener), other times it was a refusal to talk, or just being a person of very few words and keeping opinions to themselves.

Parents were aware of patterns and preferences about when their child liked to talk. Sometimes this was at breakfast, on the way back from school, in the evenings, or when they were getting ready for bed.

Younger children would generally tell their parents about any problems, but Elise described how it got harder to have meaningful conversations during the middle years of high school because her children were busy with friends and the focus was on pushing the boundaries. During the teenage years, Elise felt she didn't always know about some of the challenging times her children had gone through until afterwards because they didn't want to talk about it, even though they knew they could. This was considered a familiar pattern amongst teenagers and temporary due to their age and stage.

Having the confidence to talk and communicate was viewed passionately by Jack and considered to be the key to progressing in life because academic qualifications would only get you so far. He viewed communication to be a bigger challenge in his local authority than gaining an academic qualification. Being a confident learner was considered, by him, to be different to having confidence in yourself.

9.3 Approaches that helped to develop confidence in talking

Parents listed the following approaches that they felt helped develop their child's confidence in talking:

- Carving out time as parents to have conversations. Not trying to multi-task but dedicating time to talk
- Speech and Language Therapy
- Independence as a child gets older
- Friendships
- Talking to children as they grow up - working on talking together at home

- Taking part in extra-curriculum activities outwith school e.g. drama club
- Circle time at school
- Allowing children time – stepping back and letting them be who they are and the confidence in talking will come out in its own time

9.4 What does talking look like at home or elsewhere (out and about)?

Parents talked to their children while out and about and they made a conscious effort to look out for things that you wouldn't normally notice and bring them to each other's attention. Games such as looking for specific items and counting how many you could spot were played. Conversations could be about activities on the outing or more generally. Talking was considered a two-way conversation whereby parents would ask their children about their day but also share what they had been doing.

Important matters such as staying safe, watching out for traffic, who would be picking them up from school were often talked about before going out. Different tones of voice would be used where necessary. Parents were aware that there were times and places for talking about certain issues. For example, talking in the park about something serious may not work because the children would be playing in the leaves or climbing trees. However, for others, outdoors was considered to be less distracting and a better environment for talking. Creating the right environment made the conversation a far richer experience. Some children might talk about things they saw while out and about e.g. dogs, squirrels, leaves, seasons, weather, clothes. Others preferred to experience it rather than talk about it – something which Alexis described as an 'eye to action'.

Topics that families talked about could be dependent on the activity they were doing together. For example, playing a board game or watching a programme. Some children liked to reminisce about things they had done together as a family.

Talking and listening on a one-to-one basis was considered best at times unless the full family was engaged in an activity. Car journeys were thought to be a less threatening environment and a good opportunity to talk but this was dependent on the child themselves as well as their age. As children got older, some children used the journey to do their own thing or listen to something on a digital device.

9.5 Challenges and barriers to talking

Olivia discussed the challenges she had had when both her children stopped talking and having to work around helping them to communicate again. Alexis discussed her initial anxieties when her family were moving back to Scotland particularly with her children having a different accent from their peers at school. Language terminology was also different e.g. Primary 2 rather than year 2. In the end, Alexis said her three children all settled in and adapted with no issues.

9.6 Talking together as a family

Parents identified the following times when they talked together as a family:

- the children come in from nursery, school or college
- Mealtimes
- Bedtime – when reading a story
- In the car
- Ongoing constant dialogue in the house amongst the family
- Organised games nights
- Family holidays or days out

Less conversation happened at breakfast time for Shelby's family as everyone was getting up and getting organised. Erika made a conscious effort to have separate and private conversations with her children. This could be hard at times but it worked. Adrienne described the challenges of talking together as a family because of the various activities that each of them was involved in. Figuring out a suitable mealtime for everyone was challenging. Family holidays were considered a really important time to re-engage with each other. Adrienne noticed that her son engaged more in conversation when there was more physical contact such as holding his hand or putting her arm around his shoulder. That would be the time when he would 'download information'.

Parents identified some places where they usually talk together as a family. These included:

- At the dinner table
- In the kitchen
- On the phone or via digital devices

Talking together as a family was, for Grace, considered to be easier when the children were younger and they were able to do more things together. This changed as her children got older and no longer wanted to go out together as a family. The children spent much more time in their rooms.

9.7 Parent modelling

Parents were keen to model behaviour when talking together as a family or with friends. For example, children were told that if an adult is talking, they need to wait until they [the adult] had finished speaking. It was important to parents that younger children did not dominate everyone's conversation and were taught to wait for their turn and not interrupt. Shelby called it the 'rules of conversation' and being courteous. She also felt it important to reinforce to her children that people do not always agree but they are entitled to their opinion.

Alexis mentioned that she and her husband would speak Spanish on holiday. Having a good association with languages, saying things with a different sound and seeing them as parents in a natural environment speaking a different language would, she felt, help normalise it for her children.

10. Talking - parents

10.1 What helped you as a child with your own talking

Parents described a range of experiences which helped them with their talking as they were growing up; they also described experiences they felt that didn't help.

Experiences that helped with talking included:

- Being part of a larger family which generated more conversation on a range of subjects
- Spending time with family at events
- Going to [afterschool] clubs e.g. the Guides to socialise
- Experiences with the older generation and a mixture of family and friends
- Singing and talking in the car with parents

Experiences that didn't help with talking included:

- Having a dominating sibling(s)
- Not getting help at school [e.g. with spelling]
- Teachers not recognising signs of anxiety to talk out in class

10.2 Supporting your own talking skills

Erika mentioned that listening to her own children talk about their feelings and seeing how it helped them has encouraged her to open up more to her children and start talking about how she feels.

Having access to practitioners like Home-School Link workers, attending parenting programmes (PEEP and Incredible Years) and going to events like coffee mornings were helpful to open up conversations but also to generate adult dialogue.

10.3 Supporting your child's talking skills

Parents felt that it was important to work out what their children liked to talk about and then use this to develop prompts. For example, speaking to children about television programmes or activities they did together as a family also helped support their talking skills.

11. Professionals

11.1 Who would you talk to?

Many of the parents were able to say who they would speak to if they had questions about their child's literacy. They mentioned a range of professionals they would feel comfortable approaching with questions about their child's learning including their reading, writing, listening or talking. These included:

- School or school nurse
- Home-school link worker
- Health visitor
- Nursery
- Internet e.g. Speech and Language, BBC Bitesize, Read Write Count website
- Professionals e.g. Doctors, Opticians Speech and Language Therapist, Occupational Therapist
- Friends network – someone in a similar situation
- National organisations e.g. Dyslexia Scotland
- Colleagues

Evidence from research shows that following COVID restrictions, parents have been reluctant to go back into schools. Parents in the consultation expressed similar reservations but also added that they felt staff in schools were so stretched and extremely busy. Because of this, parents would often wait until Parents Evening to raise any concerns, but the delay ran the risk of the concern being forgotten about. Grace commented that 'by the time children get to secondary school they do not want you [parent] to go anywhere near the school, so they [parents] have had to go online for help'.

A few parents described how identifying and accessing professional support could be difficult. Jack said 'It would be great to have this joined up with the NHS. These formative years, people know that they need support. People are being left for months and years. Diagnostic services for neurodiverse [children], it is years [to wait] and it is the years that they need the support. Fixing it early is key'.

Adrienne said 'It is hard as a parent to know what is right and what is wrong. Parents of children with ASN (additional support needs), [about] how to access support and when to access support. Are some things down to parenting or support? How do you determine that?'

11.2 What would you ask?

Parents commented that the questions they would ask professionals would be dependent on what was going on at that particular time for their children. More specific questions about their child might be asked at Parents Evening. Examples of other questions included:

- Where is my child in comparison to their peers?
- Are you seeing any bullying?
- Are they doing the same things at school as they are at home?
- How can I help improve their learning at home?
- Tips on how to help children learn at secondary school and revise for exams
- Ideas to support children who prefer to work in different ways
- Ways to help children use their strengths e.g. encouraging talking and listening rather than lots of writing
- Information about how exams and coursework is structured as different subjects do it different ways

11.3 How do you prefer to access support?

Parents were clearly divided in their opinions about how they preferred to access support (online or in person) and the reasons for this. Overall, having a mixture was welcomed.

Online

- Watching things on YouTube was considered helpful but this was dependent on the topic being researched. Online was fine but this was dependent on how isolated someone was feeling and whether or not they had a support network. Short video clips about different resources that might help your child was thought to be useful for parents.

Face-to-face

- Accessing health centres or venues had logistical challenges but this did not mean online was preferred. Face-to-face was considered to be beneficial and provided more support including feeling listened to.

12. Themes from transcripts - parent questions

- Parents stating the importance of reading and having a culture of reading in the house (even if the parent has had a negative experience);
- Parents recognise the importance of reinforcing what is being taught at school within the home and where possible/practical will try to do this;
- Parents understanding of how the school day can affect their child particularly regarding energy levels and the impact this can have on what learning can occur in the home;
- Acknowledgement of differences around teaching & learning since the parents' time at school but frustration at teaching methods around exams e.g. rote learning to pass exams;
- Wariness of technology and the need to balance its use particularly social media (positive examples e.g. Use of TikTok to re-engage with reading – comparing books with films);
- Understanding of the curriculum – some parents have a broad understanding of it but not the delivery to their children;
- Presumption by teachers of an understanding by parents of the pedagogy being taught;
- Hierarchy of the different literacy elements – reading and writing over listening and talking – reading and writing as a form of retreat or escapism;
- Undiagnosed dyslexia amongst parents;
- Parents' awareness of resources dependent on employment and/or social networks and their own level of literacy - more likely to seek resources or make contact with professionals if confident about their literacy;
- Libraries and library staff valued and used often when they are open
- Interest in and continued encouragement of reading to their child strong with parents where there was earlier familial nurture and culture of reading;
- Inconsistent communication (volume of contact and also method of communication) to the parent(s) from the school/teachers (out with parent evenings) about the child's learning at school;
- Reliance on wider family relationships/networks to provide practical support allowing parent(s) increased capacity to meet the needs of the family;
- Challenges experienced by first child provide lessons learned, skills and knowledge acquisition by parent to help subsequent children (particularly in relation to neurodiversity issues)

Appendix 1 – Examples of books children liked to read

Parents mentioned the following books as examples of what their children liked to read:

Primary school children

- Toddler Waddle, Very Hungry Caterpillar, The Gruffalo, The Gruffalo's Child, Dinosaur Adventures, Bluey, The Twirlywoos, Captain Underpants, Duckman, Roald Dahl, Horrid Henry, The Breakfast Club Adventures, Spot and Dot, Monster Detective, General Knowledge, Dog Man Unleashed, The Pirates are Coming, The Boy and the Rainbow, Mr Men, A Little Kid Called Rocket, Monsters Academy, Beast Quest, Animorphs, David Walliams books, Diary of a Wimpy Kid, The World's Worst Children, The Tiger who came to Tea, Peter Rabbit, Enid Blyton, Dr Zeus, The Wizards of Once, Twice Magic, Famous Five short stories, Cherrytree publishing short stories, Kid Normal, Arc of a Scythe, Grime and Punishment, A Court of Thorns and Roses, The Chronicles of St Mary's, Julia Donaldson series, Matilda, Going on a Bear Hunt, Monkey Puzzle, Fantastic Mr Fox, The Twixt, Jill Murphy, Superhero books, Usborne books – Farmyard Tales, Shoot annuals, FIFO, Billy Goats Gruff, Biff, Chip and Kipper, Michael Morpurgo books, The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas, Astronic, Oi Dog, Oi Frog, 'This Week' - Junior Current Affairs magazine, World Wildlife magazine, How To Train Your Dragon.

Secondary children

- A Tiny Bit Lucky, It Ends With Us, How To Train Your Dragon, Geek Girl, One of Us Is Lying, Poison Study, The Hunger Games, Maze Runner, Forbidden Island, Harry Potter, Doctor Who, Stand by Me - Fan Fiction, All that Glitters, Tally's Blood, Game of Thrones, books by Tolkien.

Appendix 2 – Questionnaire for participants

Introductory question

- Can you tell us what you like to read, watch or listen to?

Question ideas about children (Reading)

- Does your child(ren) like reading?
- What do they like read, watch or listen to - do they have a preference?
- Is it about what they enjoy reading or more about what they have to read for school?
Different types of books?
- Are you finding that your child(ren) are reading using digital devices, online or are they using books?
- How does your child feel about reading?
- Is there anything that helped develop their confidence?
- Are there any challenges and barriers your child experiences?
- Do you take turns as you explore a book together?
- As a family, would you visit your local library?

Question ideas for parents (Reading)

- Is there anything that you feel would be helpful to you as a parent to support your own reading?
- Is there anything that helped you as a child with your reading?
- If you were looking for advice and information to support your child's or your own reading, where would you look, what format (e.g. video) would be helpful?
- Is there anything you feel would be helpful to you as a parent which would support your child's reading?
- What information or topics would be helpful – e.g. fun ideas to encourage good reading habits?

Question ideas (Writing)

- Does your child(ren) like to write or mark make - either on paper, drawing pictures, using technology?
- What do they like to write or mark make? Do they have a preference?
- How does their experience of writing or mark making at home differ from their writing or mark making at school?
- Is your child(ren) using technology to write or mark make in any way?
- How does your child feel at writing or mark making?
- Is there anything that helped develop their confidence?
- Are there any challenges and barriers your child experiences?
- Are there any times when you write or mark make together as a family?

Question ideas for parents (Writing)

- Is there anything that you feel would be helpful to you as a parent to support your own writing?
- Is there anything that you feel would be helpful to you as a parent to support your child's writing?
- Is there anything that helped you as a child with your writing?
- If you were looking for advice and information to support your child's or your own writing, where would you look, what format (e.g. video) would be helpful?
- What information or topics would be helpful – e.g. fun ideas to encourage good writing experiences?

Question ideas (Listening and talking)

- What does your child(ren) like to talk about, watch, or listen to at home?
- How do you find your child's listening skills?
- What helps your child to listen?
- What does listening and talking look like at home or elsewhere (out and about)?
- When do you like to talk together as a family?
- How does your child(ren) feel about talking or communicating?
- Is there anything that helps develop their confidence?
- Are there any challenges and barriers you think your child experiences?

Question ideas for parents (Listening and talking)

- Is there anything that you feel would be helpful to you as a parent to support your own listening and talking?
- Is there anything that helps you to support your child's listening and talking?
- Is there anything that helped you as a child with your listening and talking?
- If you were looking for advice and information to support your child's or your own listening and talking, where would you look, what format (e.g. video, audio, podcast) would be helpful?
- What information or topics would be helpful – e.g. fun ideas to encourage good listening and talking experiences?

Questions – (Professionals)

- If you had any questions about your child's listening, talking, reading and writing who would you talk to?
- What would you be most likely to ask?
- Would you prefer to access support online e.g. another parent, health visitor, teacher, librarian, S<?

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