

AUTHOR VISITS

In Primary and Secondary Schools



'School libraries should be mandatory, led by a professional librarian and given a workable budget so they can offer: a high-quality service; a wide range of up to date reading materials; events, such as author visits, readathons, book clubs etc. Reading for pleasure should be a mandatory part of the curriculum, it is often put to one side as teachers don't feel they can fit it in. Reading for pleasure extends children's vocabulary and fuels their imaginations. Children who read have better writing and literacy skills.'

Survey respondent

Introduction

The Society of Authors is a trade organisation representing over 9,000 professional authors, many of whom are children's authors, educational professionals, or academics, who are invited to speak at schools. Reading for pleasure has been highlighted by both the government and Ofsted as an area that has been neglected in schools and both bodies want to see a greater emphasis on reading for pleasure at all key stages, as stated in the revised English National Curriculum, due to be implemented in 2014.

Following our [letter](#) to the former Education Minister Nick Gibb (May 2012), we have gathered additional evidence of the role of author visits in promoting reading for pleasure, as previously outlined in the Arts Council England (ACE) report [Magic Dust That Lasts](#)¹. Our findings show that:

99.4% (all those respondents who had organised an author visit) considered author visits to be an invaluable enrichment that encouraged reading for pleasure, wider reading and creative writing. Respondents cite

- *'encouraging reading for pleasure'*
- *'generating enthusiasm for reading and writing'*
- *'building confidence'*
- *'broadening pupils' knowledge of literature'*
- *'inspiring students'*
- *'developing an ownership of books'*

as reasons for hosting authors. Visits are described as having *'a profound and lasting impact'* and *'they remain a strong memory for most'*. All pupils were positively engaged including (and particularly) reluctant readers and those with Special Educational Needs. Teachers detailed the benefit to their own teaching skills and value was further demonstrated by some schools going on to formally detail *'coordinating author-visits'* in respondents' job specifications.

'There is no doubt that author visits can encourage children to read for pleasure. The impact of one-off visits may not be sustained though. It will also need teachers to carry this work on. I believe that author residencies are the ideal for sustained impact. The work is vital.'

Survey respondent

The majority of participants commented that they would like to hold more visits, expand their provision and host regular visits and residencies for the benefit of pupils, but lack of funding prevented them.

'If school library budgets are slashed any further it will put this crucial opportunity in a child's education at risk.'

Survey respondent

¹ *Magic Dust That Lasts* (ACE, 2010), www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/Writers_in_schools.pdf

There is little support and training for teachers. Secondaries held the most visits as most were arranged by experienced librarians who could identify appropriate authors and develop funding strategies, but many of the primary respondents had only recently held their first visit or been appointed a literacy coordinator.

We asked our respondents if they had any message for Ofsted (or equivalent body):

'I think it is important to reiterate the importance of well-funded libraries staffed by professional librarians and for Ofsted to inspect these as part of investigating reading for pleasure.'

'More money please! We need to fund these important events. The children absolutely love it when an author visits, especially if they can enthuse and excite the children. We would do it more if there were more funds.'

'Testing a reader will not encourage children to read. It will do the opposite, especially to those who already find reading hard. You need to find ways to encourage children to read in a non-threatening manner, and have people ready to promote reading for pleasure and reading just because it is a good thing to do. Encourage every school to have a Patron of Reading to enthuse young people about reading for pleasure!'

'I believe that inspiration for reading comes at a very early age; this was made clear to me when I worked in a primary school for 9 years. In that time I only knew of one visit by an author and one by an illustrator. The children were enthralled with the visits and I find it tragic that schools cannot afford to promote reading in this way. With funding in local communities an issue and cut backs for local libraries, schools must play a large part in encouraging pupils' reading and writing. If every child had the opportunity to meet an author in every Key Stage I feel it would make a difference. As a secondary librarian I see a percentage of pupils who have decided it is not cool to read and some pupils joining us from primaries have already adopted this attitude. It is our job to work hard to convince them otherwise (hence as a passionate librarian I organise as many author visits as I possibly can). It should be our job to enrich, empower and expand pupils' reading without the hurdles of peer-pressure. Any pre-school child enjoys a story; this has to be kept alive and what better way than meeting authors? I am convinced that by authors in schools talking and working with children as often as possible at primary level we would begin to change the mind-set we have now.'

'I don't feel that the issue of reading for pleasure has been or is neglected by all schools. Before the issue of reading for pleasure was highlighted by the government this was an area that school libraries always supported and they have done a great deal of work with students - either in conjunction with supportive departments or through active after school and lunch activities. Now through the government's highlighting of the issue this has been lifted from school librarians' hands and placed into those of teachers, who are very busy with curriculum needs and do not have the background or understanding into the many issues surrounding reading for pleasure and why some students do not read. I would like government and Ofsted to make it clear that work in this area is often done by school librarians, and that their contribution to the subject is as valuable as that that may be done by any teacher.'

Survey respondents



Executive Summary

The 163 respondents were representative of the educational system with responses from state schools, academies and independent schools in England, Scotland and Wales, covering pre-primary to A-level provision.

1. 95% of **primary** visits were coordinated by teachers with 33% describing themselves as a literacy coordinator and 10% having 'coordinating author visits' formally written into their job specifications at

the outset. The majority of primary respondents tended to be inexperienced – most teachers had just done their first event or had only just taken on the role of literacy coordinator. It appeared from their comments that they had been given very little guidance on their schools' past strategy and it was left to them to make what they could of their role.

2. Primaries could be more flexible with their time and wanted to encourage pupils, but tended to hold a lower number of visits – 44% of primaries generally held one visit to specifically coincide with events such as [World Book Day](#) (WBD) or [Black History Month](#) and 21% commissioned talks to support topics on the curriculum. Primaries were more likely to commission authors for a day taking in several classes and then appearing to the whole school. This format was not taken up by secondaries, which may have specific pupil needs and a wider age-range that could not be encompassed by a single performance.



3. 89% of **secondaries** had librarians who were responsible for organising appearances. There was a clear distinction between primary and secondaries in that most secondaries benefit from a dedicated and established librarian who has the time, knowledge and experience to choose appropriate authors, pick up on curriculum links, secure funding, establish links with festivals or publishers (to benefit from pre-funded visits for the school) and also prepare pupils, with library displays etc. Consequently, secondaries were able to coordinate more visits per year than primaries, but they could suffer resistance from teachers for '*taking pupils away from lessons*' or from pupils at a '*difficult age*'. 59% of secondary events were arranged on an ad-hoc basis throughout the year with 34% of authors invited in to deliver an hour talk to one class.

4. 70% of overall respondents said they had spontaneously initiated author visits. Many commented '*I see it as an integral part of my role*'.

5. 99.4% of respondents had arranged an author visit and thought '*author visits are a vital part of a school's provision of exciting enrichment opportunities*'. Respondents could all give an instance where a visit had an impact on at least three of: individual pupil or staff, entire school, library or parent. Most commented that visits: had a profound and lasting impact; aided reading for pleasure; built confidence in reading and writing or positively engaged pupils with the process of writing; developed a wider knowledge of contemporary authors; positively affected pupils' view of books – generating a sense of 'ownership'; raised the profile of the library and use of library services resulting in increased loans of a diversity of titles and genres (often extending beyond the titles by the visiting author(s)); increased book-buying habits; or encouraged the idea of writing as a possible career choice.

6. The majority of respondents gave examples of how visits encouraged individual pupils – often the most reluctant and disengaged, but also whole classes, the school and parents. Around 5% reported a direct impact on teaching staff, with authors demonstrating techniques that teachers could incorporate into their lesson plans.

8. The vast majority of author visits were reported to be entirely successful. A small proportion had experienced a difficulty (under 10% of all visits). All respondents heavily qualified any negative experience, stating that a number of successful appearances had heavily outnumbered any disappointing visit. Problems were usually due to a combination of factors, including pupil misbehaviour, but also poor organisation, inexperience, or poor time-keeping by either party.

9. Funding was clearly the biggest concern and not having sufficient funding was cited as a barrier to arranging author visits. The majority felt they could provide only one visit a year, despite visits being seen as an essential enrichment provision. Many respondents commented that they would like to arrange residencies or more visits, but could not afford to do so.

10. Most state schools paid for events using overall school, departmental, or library budgets. A smaller number relied on PTA fund-raising. Independents often charged parents either in their overall annual costings or per individual visit. 46% of secondaries and 18% of primaries had benefited from visits sponsored by publishers.

11. 16% of all respondents experienced resistance by the school to arranging visits. Cost, and, with secondaries, time-tabling visits within a tight exam-led schedule was often an issue. A number of replies said *'indifference amongst other staff'* was a problem.

12. Most schools selected authors by word-of-mouth recommendation – 34% of primaries and 31% of secondaries. Following this, 23% of primaries sourced their authors from the internet whereas 21% of secondaries said 'other' – which included relationships with bookshops, arts festivals and library services. This correlates with the professional training and stronger support network an experienced and qualified librarian will have access to.

13. Respondents were innovative and creative with their visit formats, using a range of strategies including Skype sessions, Reading Patrons, author residencies and participation in external literary or arts festivals events or linking with public spaces (e.g. museums and libraries).



14. Only 11% of respondents reported that Ofsted inspectors (or equivalent body) had entered a library during an inspection. Of these, only six respondents said that the inspector verbally commented on the school's use of author visits. Only one inspector noted the use of an author visit in their final report – that school's literacy provision was recorded as outstanding.



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*Year 9 boys after a recent visit:
'I didn't know reading could be COOL!'*

Survey respondent

Our Recommendations

We recommend that author visits, libraries and other literacy strategies (such as participation in reading challenges, competitions etc.) be recognised by Ofsted (or equivalent body), and that they are detailed in the curriculum, as an enrichment for pupils. [The Ofsted School Inspection Handbook](#)² should be amended to encourage all inspectors to visit the library automatically and interview librarians (or the literacy coordinator of the school) - regardless of whether the school is deemed to be struggling with literacy.



- Each school should have its own library (to agreed specifications) and a librarian or trained staff-member. Given that both public library and school library service provisions are being eroded, more attention and support should be given to sharing resources between schools, via council provision or other means.

- There should be an increase in general guidance and training. Teacher-training modules and/or INSET days should address contemporary literature and the benefits of author visits. Training events should detail the different ways in which authors can be utilised - as [Patron of Reading](#) or Reading Champions, one-off visits, residencies and small group work. This not only to promote reading for pleasure, but also to foster teachers' and pupils' reading and writing skills. Literacy coordinators should be linked to trained librarians, whether by mentorship schemes, INSET days etc.

'I don't believe Ofsted have even ventured into the library. I'm not sure that they are aware how significant a morning or afternoon spent with an author can be in a child's life.'

Survey respondent

- Advice should be provided on how to raise funds, share costs and identify local authors (to reduce transport costs). Given that fees were found to be a barrier to holding visits, it is surprising that so few schools and libraries pool resources to share one-off visits or residencies. It would be beneficial to have a central database detailing subsidy schemes such as Scottish Book Trust's [Live Literature Funding](#)³ as well as nationwide literary festivals, libraries and other providers willing to liaise with schools and provide funded events as part of their outreach.

- Schools should hold regular events and/or secure a longer term relationship with authors; this would have the additional benefit of continuing pupil engagement and establishing reading for pleasure as a habit. This need not be costly, but can be built upon by using Patron of Reading or Reading Champions. In the survey, many teachers reported a long-tail positive effect on children's reading and a rise in library loans after an author visit; regular events would help to maintain a high level of interest and a wider diversity of reading.

'Reluctant readers start visiting the library and many start on a journey which they did not know existed and which lasts a lifetime.'

Survey respondent

- More assistance should be provided to teachers to help them identify a range of contemporary texts that reflect their pupils' interests and ages. Teachers would like to view short films of authors so they can become more familiar with viable alternatives and ascertain whether the author would be suitable. Such clips could not only provide a taster to encourage teachers to arrange visits, but would also help prepare and enthuse pupils in advance of a talk.

² *The Ofsted School Inspection Handbook* (Ofsted, 2013) www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/school-inspection-handbook.

³ See Appendix, p20.

- The Society of Authors can assist authors' Continuing Professional Development by: scheduling seminars on current practice; establishing a mentorship scheme between established and emerging authors; facilitating joint conferences with teachers; alerting members to appropriate seminars by organisations such as National Association of Writers' in Education ([NAWE](#)), [UKLA](#) etc.; and by annually updating and making publicly available our guidance on hosting and delivering events.



'The opportunity for pupils to meet and converse with an author plays a crucial part in the promotion of reading. It engages pupils in a "hands on" experience that can enhance their love of books and the benefits that this can provide.'

Survey respondent



Reading Lets Your Imagination Grow © Sarah McIntyre

Research Report

We surveyed 163 primary and secondary schools on their use of author visits and received responses from 94 secondaries and 60 primaries in England, Wales and Scotland. Nine responses were from 'all-through' schools and they have been counted in the figures for both primary and secondary. The UK Literacy Association's *Writers in Schools*⁴ pack states that 'Only 10% of schools in England work with professional writers of any kind' (QCA, 2008), so it was no surprise that our response rate was not higher, but we would have liked a greater response from schools that have never worked with an author as part of their literacy strategy, in order to discover why. This report will look at the responses as a whole highlighting, where appropriate, distinctions between primaries and secondaries. Teachers' and librarians' comments are in blue and are anonymous unless otherwise specified.

Primaries



25% of the total primary responses were from independent schools and 66% from state schools - this figure includes the nine 'all-through' academies. The remaining 9% of respondents either withheld details of their school or were based outside schools (e.g. a literacy consultant working for public library services who had a responsibility for a particular school or a number of schools).

'Primary age children really benefit from the realism of meeting authors. They become someone the children can talk and relate to, not just a name on a page. The children then recognise anyone can aim to be an author.'
Survey respondent

Of the primaries for whom we had Ofsted results⁵ 62% were graded *Good*, 27% *Satisfactory* and 11% *Outstanding* and one school was in special measures. This compares with the national figures *Good* 56%, *Satisfactory* 23% and *Outstanding* 18%.

As shown in fig. 1, the majority of responses were from teaching staff. Of the 43 surveys received from teachers, 21 were from senior staff (deputies and headteachers). This suggests that primaries rarely have dedicated librarians, and responsibility for author visits will be allotted to a member of teaching staff who will have dual job descriptions (e.g. deputy headteacher/literacy co-ordinator, teacher/librarian). Amongst those included in the category of 'other' were book group organisers and public librarians. It is clear from the feedback from primaries that literacy coordinators receive little training before taking up their position.

Secondaries

19% of the total secondary responses were from independent schools and 64% from state schools - 40% were academies. The remaining 17% of respondents either withheld details of their school or were based outside schools (e.g. worked for library services).

Of the secondaries for whom we had Ofsted results 61% were graded *Good*, 21% *Satisfactory* and 6% *Outstanding*. This compares with the national figures *Good* 49%, *Satisfactory* 28%, *Outstanding* 21%.

As shown in fig. 2, the overwhelming majority of these responses were from Librarians/Learning Resource Centre (LRC)

⁴ *Writers in Schools* (UKLA, 2010), www.ukla.org/publications/view/writers_in_schools.

⁵ See Appendix, p20.

staff, reflecting a marked contrast in the staffing and organisation of author visits between primary and secondaries.

Survey Responses

How many visits have you organised?

Respondents had various levels of experience across both data sets. Whilst some respondents had only hosted their first author visit, a number had been organising visits for over 20 years. Secondaries appear to have more visits, with a mode average of three and a mean average of five a year; whereas amongst primaries the mode average was one and the mean average was three. Most respondents commented that they aimed to hold one visit a year. Only one primary respondent had never arranged an author visit. We estimate that respondents had hosted a (conservative) total of 1,471 author visits⁶ (1,094 secondary and 377 primary).



How did you gain responsibility for visits?

Overall statistics in fig. 1 reveal that 53% of responses came from librarians followed by 28% who described themselves as teaching staff, 14% were literacy coordinators and 5% of schools had external Local Education Authority (LEA) library support. Fig. 4 outlines that 70% of overall respondents initiated author visits with 18% having the responsibility delegated to them and 12% having this role detailed in their job descriptions.

95% of primary visits were coordinated by teaching staff with only 33% describing themselves as a literacy coordinator. The remaining 2% were given external LEA library support and 3% were librarians employed at independent schools. 68% of the primary teachers stated that they had spontaneously initiated author visits whereas 22% had the duty delegated to them and 10% had 'coordinating author visits' formally written into their job specifications. See figs 2 & 5.

89% of secondaries had librarians who were responsible for organising school visits. 3% of visits were arranged by teaching staff and 8% of schools were given external support by LEA library services. See figs 3 & 6. Most of the secondary teachers stated that they had initiated visits and then had this duty incorporated into their job description following their appraisals.



As shown in figs 5 & 6, the responses from both data sets are roughly comparable. There was a strong sense across both primary and secondary responses that visits were viewed by senior staff as a bonus or 'extra' rather than an integral part of literacy in schools, but this may be partly due to financial or time pressures. The higher level of delegation apparent in the primary school figures may be because teaching staff are often doubling up as organisers. Many

⁶ See Appendix, p20.

primary responses were from teachers who had just undertaken or were about to undertake their first ever visit.

1. Age range

We received responses covering the full range of school ages. As mentioned above, the majority of responses were from secondaries; many within this group targeted author visits to the lower years (Key Stage 3) both because it is easier to get students off timetable pre-GCSE and because this age group (11-13) is seen as particularly responsive to author visits. Primaries, however, tended to commission visits where an author would typically work across an age range in one class at a time then appear to the whole school.

2. What do your visits usually consist of?

Across primaries and secondaries, there was generally a high level of flexibility about the format for visits, with most respondents using at least two methods and selecting a format as and when it was appropriate. Around 30% reported that they held talks with whole years followed by workshop sessions with smaller groups.

As shown in figs 5 & 6, very few schools had a residency scheme (six secondaries and one primary). Several secondary schools collaborated with another secondary or a feeder primary to run joint talks. This was used as a means of saving money by spreading the cost of a visit. Those from both primary and secondaries who answered 'other' used a variety of methods including taking students for outside visits, arranging competitions to coincide with the visit, and sharing authors by touring to other venues (schools, libraries, after-school clubs etc). Some had used innovative formats such as conducting talks to small groups using Skype.

3. What are your main reasons for hosting visits?



'Author visits are a vital part of a school's provision of exciting enrichment opportunities.'

'Pupils become enthused not only for reading and writing, but with one writer/illustrator, enthused about illustrating. Following her visit the teachers developed the book's themes into the curriculum and with success embedded it into the yearly planning.'

'Author visits are an important strategy in enabling readers to meet 'real' writers; sometimes an understanding of the inspiration behind a story will motivate a previously reluctant reader to pick up a book.'

Survey respondents

Overwhelmingly, respondents from both primary and secondaries cite 'encouraging reading for pleasure', 'generating enthusiasm for reading and writing', 'building confidence', 'broadening pupils' knowledge of literature', 'inspiring students' and 'developing an ownership of books' as reasons for hosting authors. Visits are described as having 'a profound and lasting impact' and 'they remain a strong memory for most'. They are also seen as a way of making reading and writing 'real', humanising writers, giving pupils confidence in their writing 'as something they can do', or sometimes simply to provide a new experience. A number of respondents also mentioned author visits as a means of raising the profile of the library and reported increased loans immediately after visits – some as spikes, before and after, but others having a long-tail impact.

4. How do you choose your authors?

As shown in figs 7 & 8, the majority of respondents from both primary and secondaries find out about authors through word of mouth. Primaries are more likely to use websites to find suitable authors whilst it appears that secondaries are more likely to be offered (and take advantage of) free visits from publishers.

Of those who answered 'other', and 8% more secondary school respondents ticked this box, many were provided with authors through relationships with bookshops, library services, arts centres, literary festivals (including Basildon's Adopt an Author) or participated in the [Patron of Reading](#) scheme. Other routes to authors were by hearing them speak at conferences or receiving recommendations at librarian events such as the [Youth Libraries Group](#), [School Library Association](#) and [Federation of Children's Book Groups](#) conferences. A minority said they consulted their students and then directly contacted selected authors.

5. When do you arrange visits?

Figs 9 & 10 reveal a great deal of flexibility concerning the timing of visits, with the overall majority of respondents choosing 'anytime'. Primaries were more likely to arrange visits to coincide with [World Book Day](#) whilst secondaries reported that they were under pressure to fit in with exam timetabling. Around 7% arranged visits around other events such as local festivals and awards. Cost was cited as a strong factor as schools may be more likely to want to book high-profile authors around WBD, but they were often expensive at these times and less likely to be available.

6. Has a visit made a significant difference to an individual child, staff member, entire school or parents?



Every respondent who had arranged an author visit gave an example for at least three categories. Most gave anecdotes about individual children - often the disengaged or difficult - as being enthused and inspired. There was a positive correlation between author visits and library loans and visits. Many respondents spoke of visits positively as showing 'a notable growth in confidence' of Special Educational Needs (SEN) students. Parents were keen to attend events and book-signings, buy titles and some specifically raised funds to hold an author event. Some children reported back to teachers that parents had gone on to buy more of the authors' titles or other titles in the genre for their children's personal collections. Around 5% of respondents

commented that author visits had had a direct impact on staff lesson plans and that they had learned skills and techniques that they could carry into their own work.

7. How important are author visits?

'We noticed that the percentage of parents wanting to meet the author was very high and created a buzz around the school for some time afterwards. The profile of reading became higher at home and pre-school pupils were included in the excitement where they might not have had exposure to books before.'

'There are often "new" faces seen in the library after an author event and students appear more confident to request books by that author.'

'Author visits enable our Advanced Skills teacher to glean new techniques and ideas which she can take into the classroom and pass onto other teachers.'

'Visits have sent (library) borrowing through the roof.'

Survey respondents



99.4% (all those respondents who had organised an author visit) considered author visits to be high priority and valuable in encouraging reading for pleasure and/or creative writing. Many used the word 'vital'.

'It is important to work on children's attitudes to reading (especially if they don't have reading role models at home). Unless children are enthusiastic about sharing stories and enjoy reading, then they're never going to make any advances with improving the reading skills which are necessary later to unlock the curriculum and ensure they fulfil their academic potential/ life-chances. A regular, properly funded and resourced programme of author visits throughout a child's school career can keep that enthusiasm alive and spur them on to read more and read better. With so many other distractions, reading needs to be 'live' for children and author events are a brilliant way of doing this.

In a survey I carried out last year among pupils, most stated that the only authors they had ever met were those they had met in school. In order for the relationship between reader and writer to develop, school librarians, with access to both pupils and publishers, have to take on this organisation themselves.'

Survey respondent

8. How do you fund visits?

Independents commented that they often simply charged parents via their termly bills or budgeted for visits, but state schools (both primary and secondary) reported that they used school library and literacy budgets which are strained and, in some cases, have been significantly reduced. The majority of participants commented that they would like to hold more visits but are bound by budgetary restrictions. As a result, many respondents draw on multiple sources of funding within the school (such as other departmental budgets e.g. English, History, SEN or Gifted and Talented).

Schools that held more than one visit a year usually depended on PTA fund-raising. A minority directly raised funds by charging each pupil. Many worked with external sources, collaborating with bookshops (usually independents, but including chains such as Waterstones), arts events and literary festivals. 54 respondents (11 primary and 43 secondary) had taken advantage of free (promotional) visits offered by publishers, but it appears that these are not consistently available to all areas of the country. Several respondents suggested that publishers should make greater use of school visits when promoting books. A small number drew on their own personal contacts to arrange free or discounted visits.

Generally those who organised a large number of visits were: very pro-active; innovative with funding options; involved with literary festivals or events; or had contacts in publishing - the majority were librarians.

'I fund author visits by whatever means I can. I try to take money out of other budgets, or acquire free visits from new authors, or use contacts I have developed over the years. They are expensive, but if the author costs £400 and 400 children have the opportunity to listen and talk to this author that's only £1 a head. If school library budgets are slashed any further it will put this crucial opportunity in a child's education at risk. The children are then reliant on a very pro-active librarian to ensure that they do not suffer as a result.'

Survey respondent

9. Have you experienced any resistance from fellow members of staff?



16% of respondents said they had experienced resistance from colleagues. Those from secondaries were more likely to experience objections (19% of respondents from secondaries compared to 8% from primaries). Of these, many reported that resistance was due to timetabling pressures or the cost. One respondent summed up the situation as *'lack of support rather than resistance'* from other staff and other respondents categorised it as *'indifference'* based on a general perception that author visits are non-essential. However, a handful of respondents recorded active support for author visits amongst senior staff, who would forward suggestions from their reading and pupils.

10. Are there any instances where a visit was not a success?

The vast majority of author visits were reported to be entirely successful. A small proportion had experienced a difficulty (under 10% of all visits). All respondents heavily qualified any negative experience, stating that a number of successful appearances had heavily outnumbered any disappointing visit. Problems cited included: misbehaviour by pupils; author failing to relate to the class; poor time keeping (by school or author); lack of advance preparation by the school (e.g. not getting pupils to read work by the author in advance); switching classes at the last minute; different expectations (e.g. commissioning a one-off fun session but expecting a long-lasting impact on reading habits); author pushing book sales; the school not matching the appropriate author to the age-group or interests of the class - even sending one year in to

'We have had one author visit that I felt wasn't a great success. This is because it was not incorporated within a lesson - it was just advertised for a drop-in session during lunch. I really believe the best visits have been the ones where both the library and the English department have been involved.'

Survey respondent

replace another. Overall, these responses suggested that greater guidance and support in choosing authors and arranging/preparing visits is needed.

11. Has your use of visits ever been commented on by an Ofsted inspection team?

The vast majority of respondents reported that inspectors did not notice or even enter the school library during visits to the school. Only 11% of respondents reported that inspectors had visited the library during an inspection (six primary and 12 secondary). Six respondents said that positive comments had been made in passing but author visits were not specifically mentioned in the final inspection report. One respondent revealed that inspectors had watched a session with an author and had gone on to record the lesson as 'outstanding'.



Lyn Hopson, whose school, Don Valley Academy, is used

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as a Best Practice Case study for literacy promotion on the Ofsted website and in [Moving English Forward](#)⁷, cited its author visits as a factor in its strong reputation; another independent school reported that its regular scheduling of events had been noted in the *Good Schools Guide 2012*.

Schools whose visits had been formally mentioned in inspection reports tended to have been inspected more recently (2011-12), and in September 2012 the Ofsted inspection guidelines have increased their focus on schools as reading environments.

'The school library is almost overlooked in inspections and it seems as though the work of school librarians is not appreciated. The inspectors do not seem to have a clear idea of what the role of a school library is. Library staff are often the only people in a school, especially at secondary level, who have knowledge about contemporary writing for children and teenagers. Librarians, both in schools and school/public youth library services, are key to encouraging the promotion of reading for pleasure.'

'Our most recent inspection took place the week before the Festival of Literature so evidence of this was all around the school and the inspectors were highly impressed'.

Survey respondents

12. Would you agree that all schools would benefit from author visits?

99.4% (162) respondents agreed that all pupils would benefit. There was only one exception - a primary teacher/literacy coordinator who had never arranged a visit and thought it depended on the quality of the talk.

⁷Moving English Forward (Ofsted, 2012), www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/moving-english-forward

'Nothing inspires, engages and heartens kids more than meeting a "proper" author - I have seen how much authors do to promote children's reading for pleasure and the difference it makes on every level.'

'Creativity is important to all of us... It inspires us and unleashes the mind. You can't measure the impact on learning of meeting authors or any other creative activity but you can see its effect over time.'

'Direct engagement with authors and illustrators is vital for children of all ages and has a positive impact on all areas of literacy: reading, writing, speaking and listening.'

Survey respondents



Appendix: Mapping Our Results

Respondent Occupations

Figure 1. Overall

■ Other teaching staff ■ Literacy Coordinator ■ External ■ Librarian

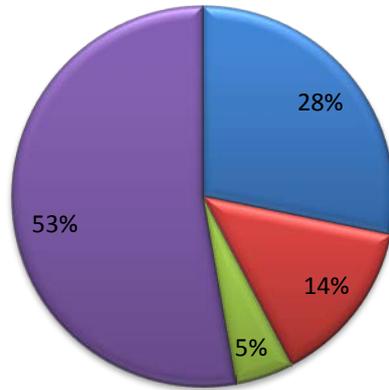


Figure 2. Primary

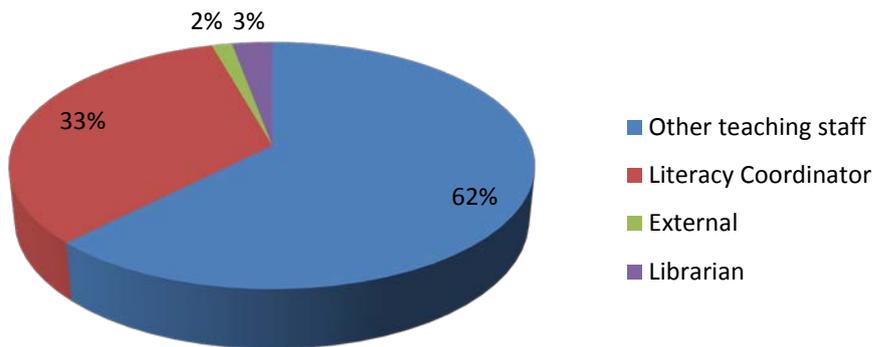
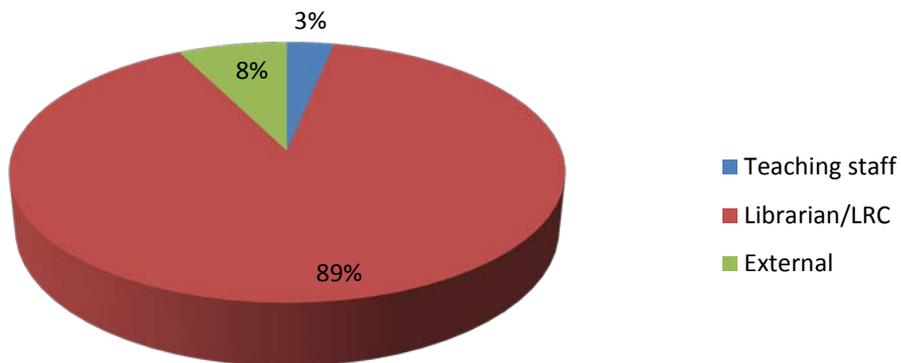


Figure 3. Secondaries



Q2: How did you gain responsibility for author visits?

Figure 4. Overall

■ A. Delegated ■ B. Job Spec ■ C. Initiated

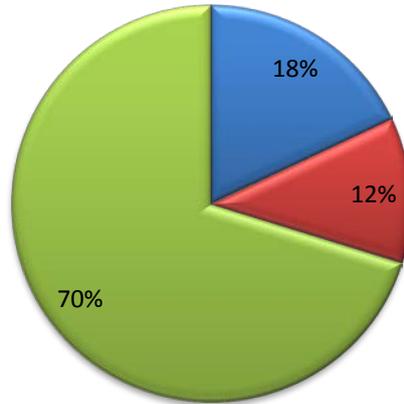


Figure 5. Primaries

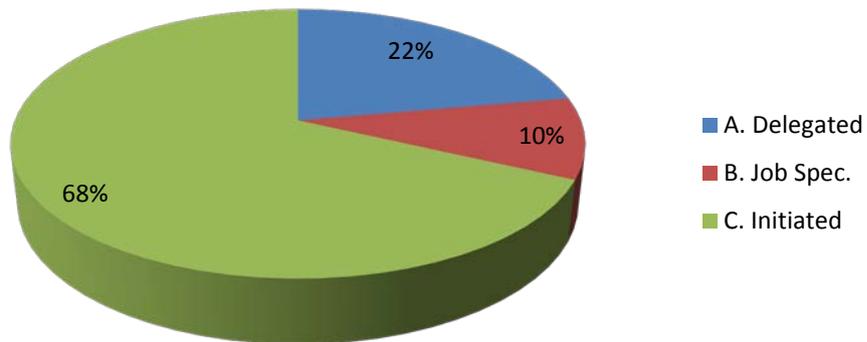
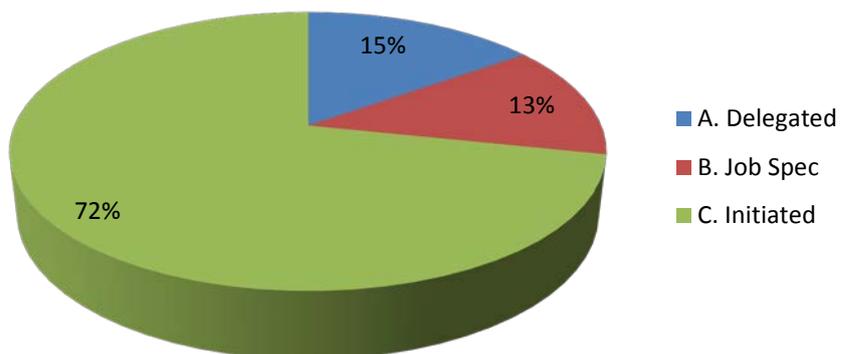


Figure 6. Secondaries



Q 4: What do your visits usually consist of?

Figure 7. Overall

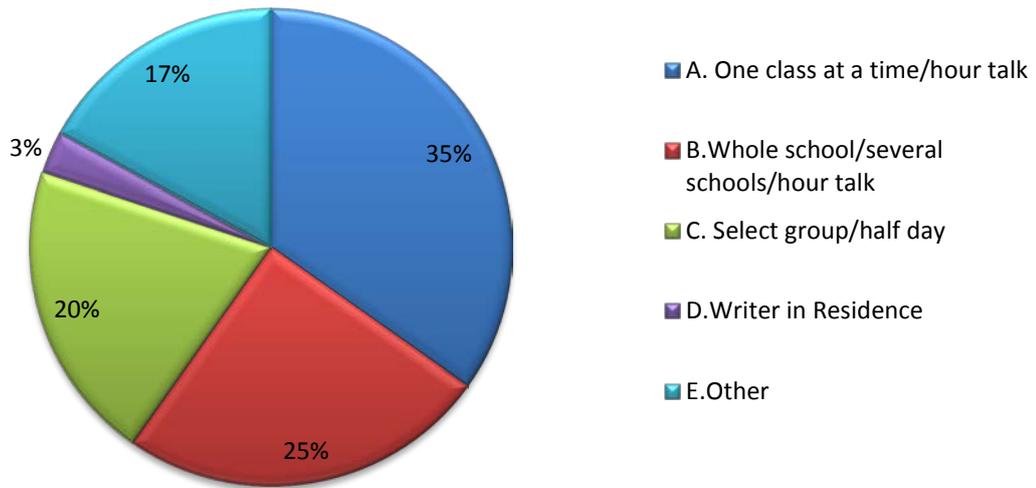


Figure 8. Primaries

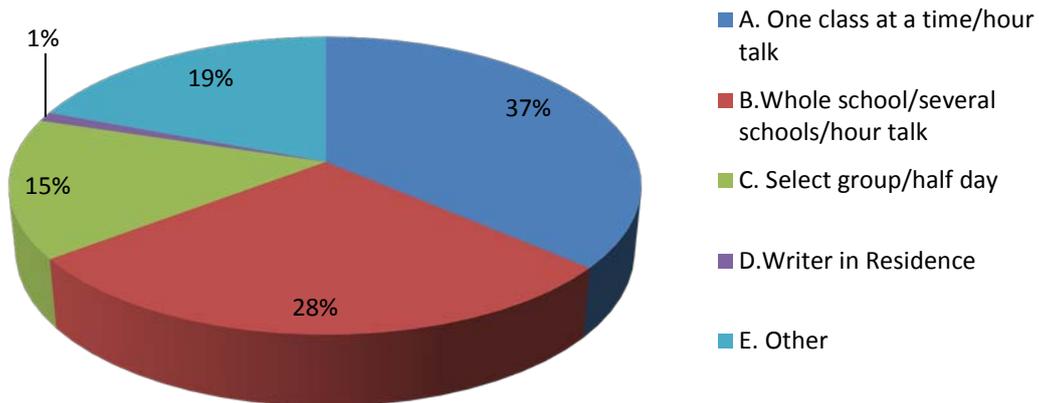
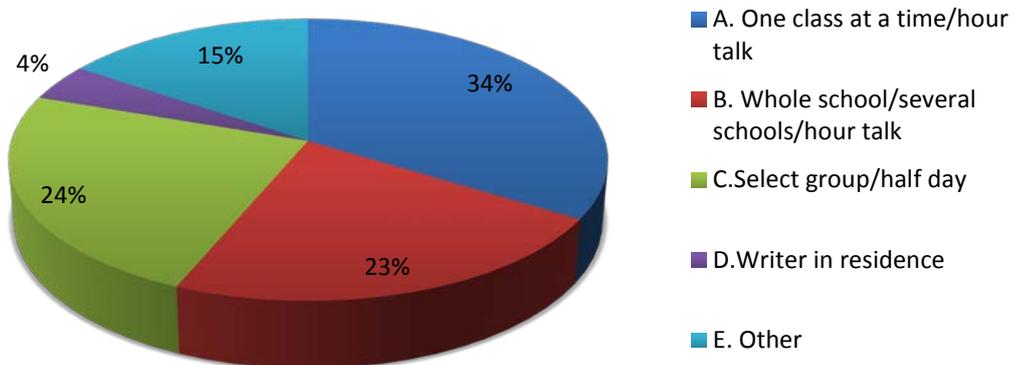


Figure 9. Secondaries



Q6: How do you choose your authors?

Figure 10. Overall

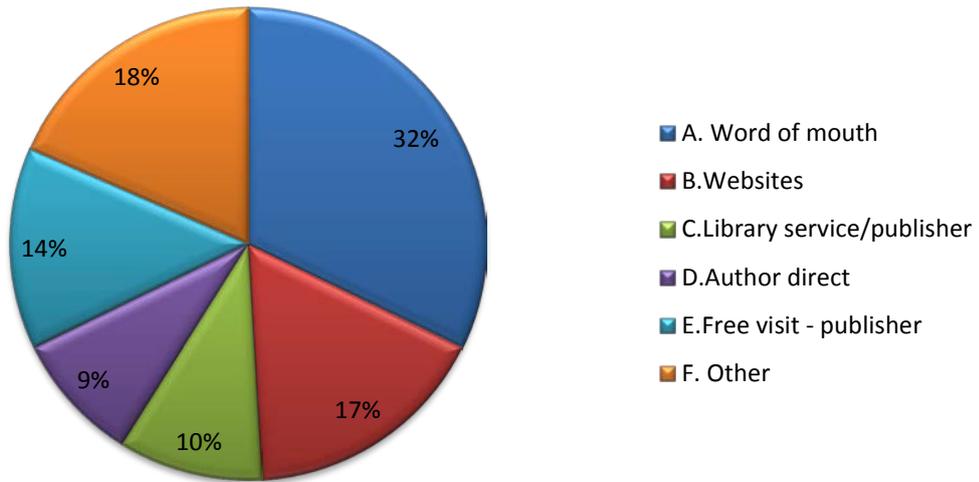


Figure 11. Primaries

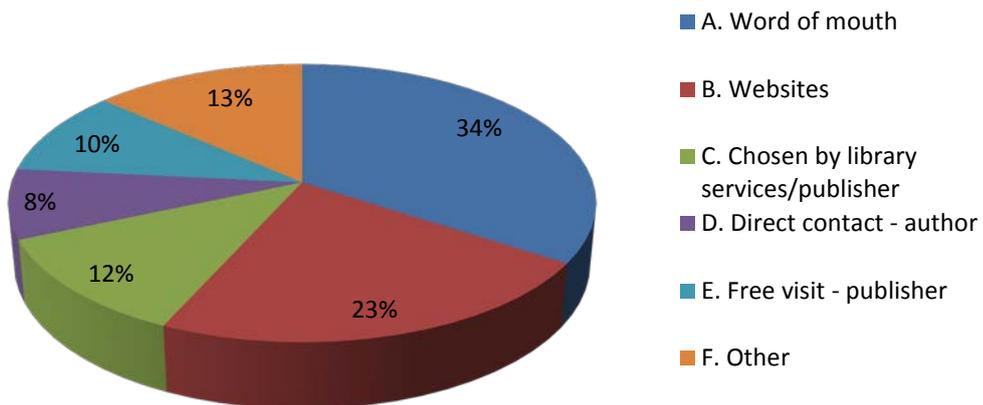
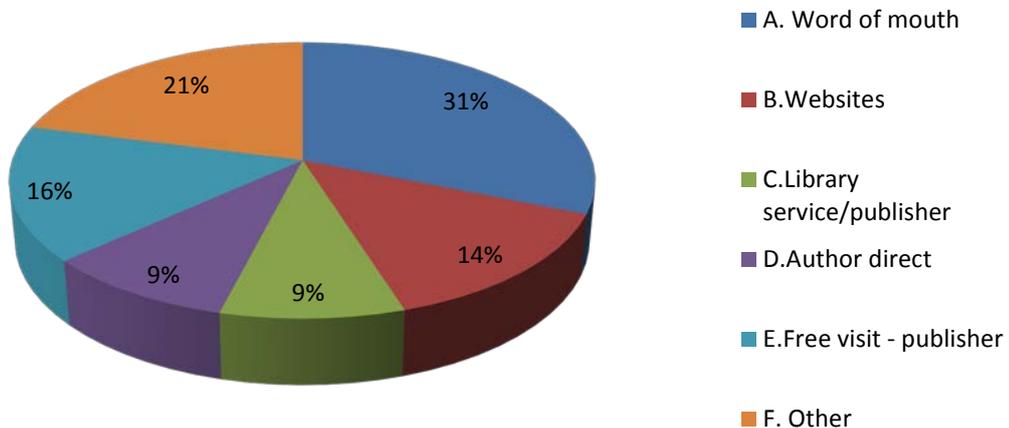


Figure 12. Secondaries



Q 7: When do you usually arrange your author visits?

Figure 13. Overall

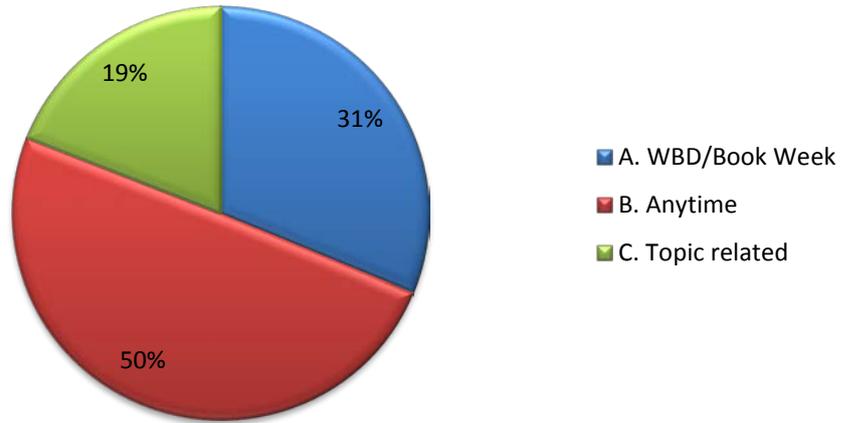


Figure 14. Primaries

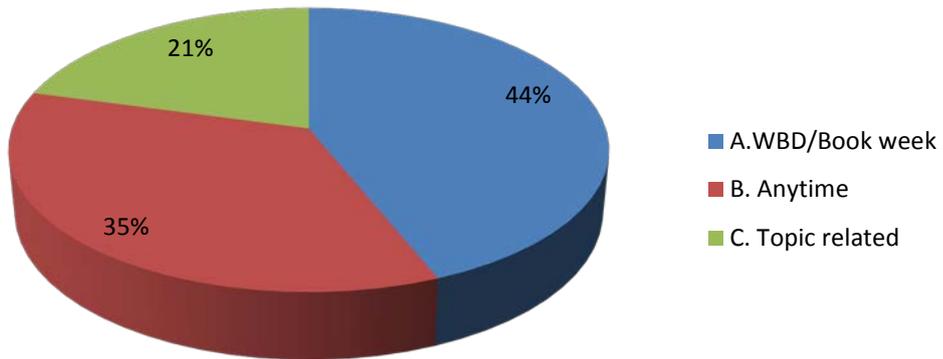
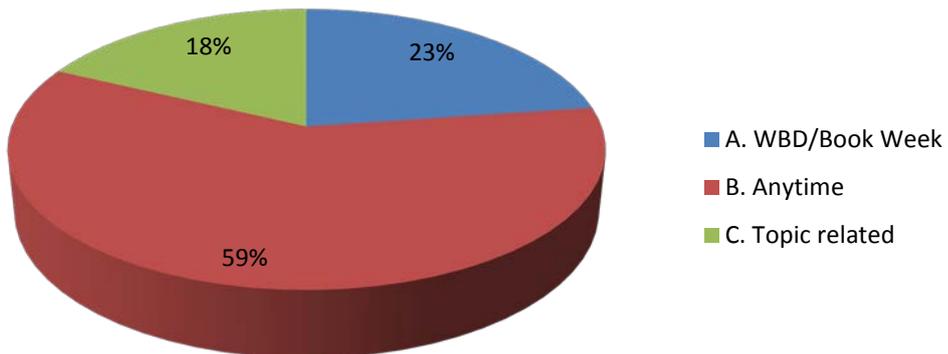


Figure 15. Secondaries



Endnotes

Page 1

1: *Magic Dust That Lasts* (ACE, 2010): www.artscouncil.org.uk, <http://bit.ly/GIiFLP>

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World Book Day: www.worldbookday.com

Black History Month: www.blackhistorymonth.org.uk

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2: *The Ofsted School Inspection Handbook* (Ofsted, 2013): www.ofsted.gov.uk, <http://bit.ly/1e3vDPa>

Patron of Reading: www.patronofreading.co.uk

NAWE: www.nawe.co.uk

UKLA: www.ukla.org

3: Scottish Book Trust: www.scottishbooktrust.com offers Live Literature Funding, <http://bit.ly/GH1IRs>, for selected schools and library events in Scotland. Since 2005 they have part-funded a fee of £150 plus travel and subsistence expenses per one-hour event. It is the only subsidy scheme available in the UK.

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4: *Writers in Schools* (UKLA, 2010): <http://bit.ly/198iUaY> 'Only 10% of schools in England work with professional writers of any kind' (QCA, 2008)

5: We were unable to gather Ofsted results for all schools. Some were new schools for which a report has not yet been released, others are not part of the Ofsted system (i.e. come under Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland, *Estyn* in Wales or are independent).

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6: This total number of visits (1,471 -1,094 secondary and 377 primary) had been calculated where respondents had informed us of the number of years they had arranged visits, the average number a year and/or how many visits they had organised over their career. Not all respondents gave us this much detail or could remember the number of visits they had coordinated. However, with the exception of one respondent who had never arranged a visit, we knew that all respondents had coordinated a minimum of one visit. This is a very conservative approach - the number of visits in practice is likely to be much higher.

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Youth Libraries Group: <http://bit.ly/GIi9NY>

School Library Association: www.sla.org.uk

Federation of Children's Book Groups: www.fcbg.org.uk

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7: *Moving English Forward* (Ofsted, 2012): <http://bit.ly/GH25eW>

Many thanks to all the teaching staff and librarians who completed the survey.

The photographs of children are for illustrative purposes only and are not necessarily pupils of surveyed schools.

Thank you to Nicola Smee and Sarah McIntyre for their illustrations and (pictured authors) John Dougherty, Sarah McIntyre, Michaela Morgan, Tom Palmer, Helena Pielichaty and Mal Peet for photographs of their events.

If you have any comments please email: info@societyofauthors.org

