

The Rochdale Graphic Novels Project

Clare McGreevy

Rochdale Virtual School, Children's Services,
Rochdale Council



Winner of the Harper Collins Reading for Pleasure Award
In partnership with the OU and UKLA 2025
Community Reading Champion Category

 **HarperCollins Publishers**

 **The Open University**

UKLA
UK LITERACY ASSOCIATION

The Rochdale Graphic Novels Project

Context

I am an Advisory Teacher for Children With A Social Worker in Rochdale Council's Virtual School (CWSW). This is a strategic role, which aims to promote the educational outcomes of CWSW. This cohort often underachieves in education because of the challenges they face and are 25%-50% less likely to attain a strong pass at GCSE in English and Maths in comparison to peers without Children's Social Care involvement.



Research inspiration and rationale

The Graphic Novel Project, involving ten schools across Rochdale, was inspired by the OU RfP research and funded by Rochdale Council's Virtual School and KPMG. The project had the universal aim to develop all children's reading and writing for pleasure. However, it primarily sought to support schools with positively engaging disadvantaged children (CWSW).

The project aimed to support schools to foster RfP effectively by developing the following OU strands of research:

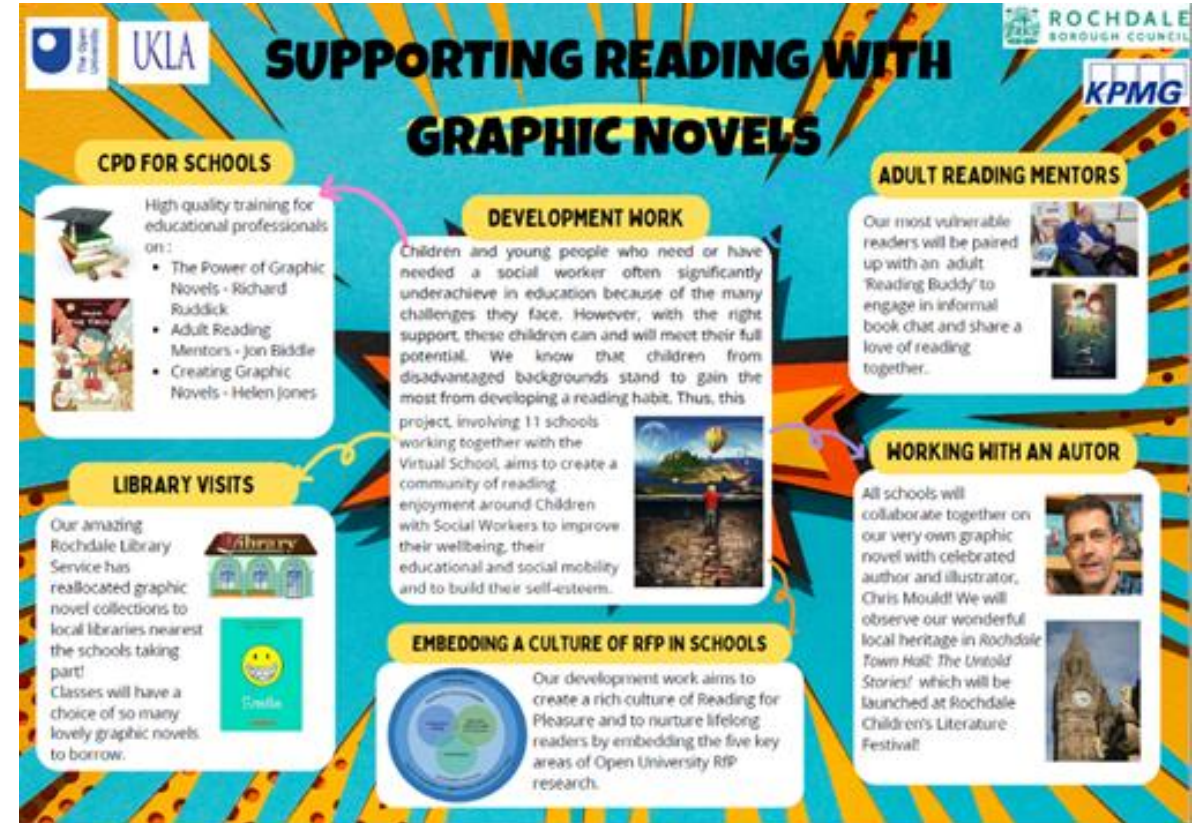
- **Considerable knowledge of children's literature and other texts**
- **Reading communities that are reciprocal and interactive**

(Cremin et al., 2014).

The project also aimed to impact the wellbeing of vulnerable children: research in Children and young people's engagement with comics in 2023 | National Literacy Trust states that the graphic novel/comic medium positively impacts self-esteem and confidence.

Aims

- To increase schools' knowledge of graphic novels and how they are a valuable resource to support reading;
- To support enjoyment of reading specifically for disadvantaged children;
- To involve children in a reciprocal reading community (classmates, adult reading mentors, school staff, library visits);
- To increase links between schools and libraries and awareness and use of libraries;
- To empower children as the authors and illustrators of their own texts;
- To raise aspirations, self-esteem and confidence, specifically for the target children.



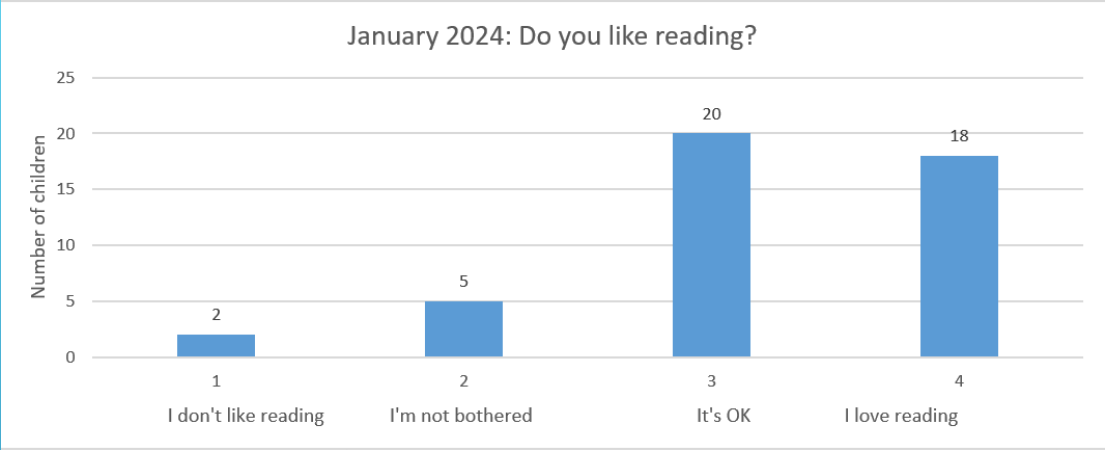
Outline

The project supported children’s Reading for Pleasure by encouraging them to read graphic novels and use local libraries; it also supported Writing for Pleasure through comic making activities and collaboration on a graphic novel about Rochdale Town Hall, a key local heritage site.

The project primarily sought to support schools with positively engaging disadvantaged children – those who currently or previously had a social worker - in Reading and Writing for Pleasure, sustained by their wider school community. These children were the class Reading Champions.

Schools met with the focus children’s parents/carers to share project aims. Schools shared qualitative and quantitative data at the beginning and end of the project. Many of the target children were disengaged with reading – only 18 out of 45 said they liked reading and related this to skills rather than pleasure.

Schools were provided with a bespoke programme of training and support (outlined as follows).

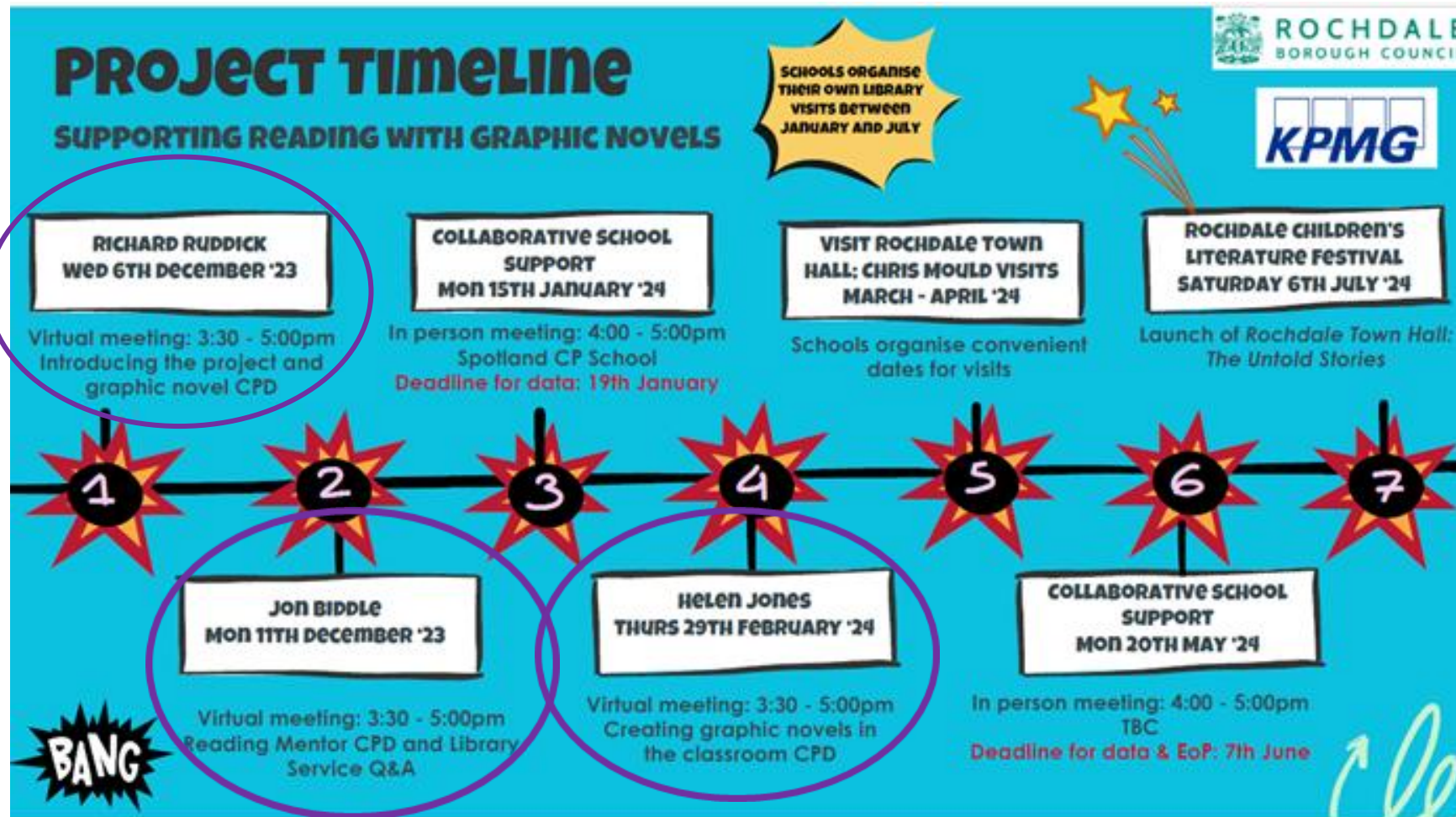


1	Sample pupil survey responses	
2	Do you like reading?	Why do you think this?
3	I'm not bothered	I find it boring.
4	It's ok	Depends on the book.
5	It's ok	Sometimes I enjoy it but sometimes when I read a book I get bored.
6	I don't like reading	I don't want to read
7	It's ok	Some words don't know how to say
8	It's ok	Because I like what the characters in the book are doing
9	I'm not bothered	I find it a bit tricky.
10	It's ok	It helps you get smarter but it's pretty boring.
11	It's ok	Some books are boring
12	I love reading	It makes me intelligent
13	I love reading	Because it helps me with some sentences and some grammar
14	It's ok	I don't like to read but I have some books
15	I don't like reading	It's a bit boring for me and I can't sit still.
16	It's ok	Because sometimes when I read I don't like that it's too long.

CPD for Schools

All school staff involved in the project received online CPD from experts in the field (circled below).

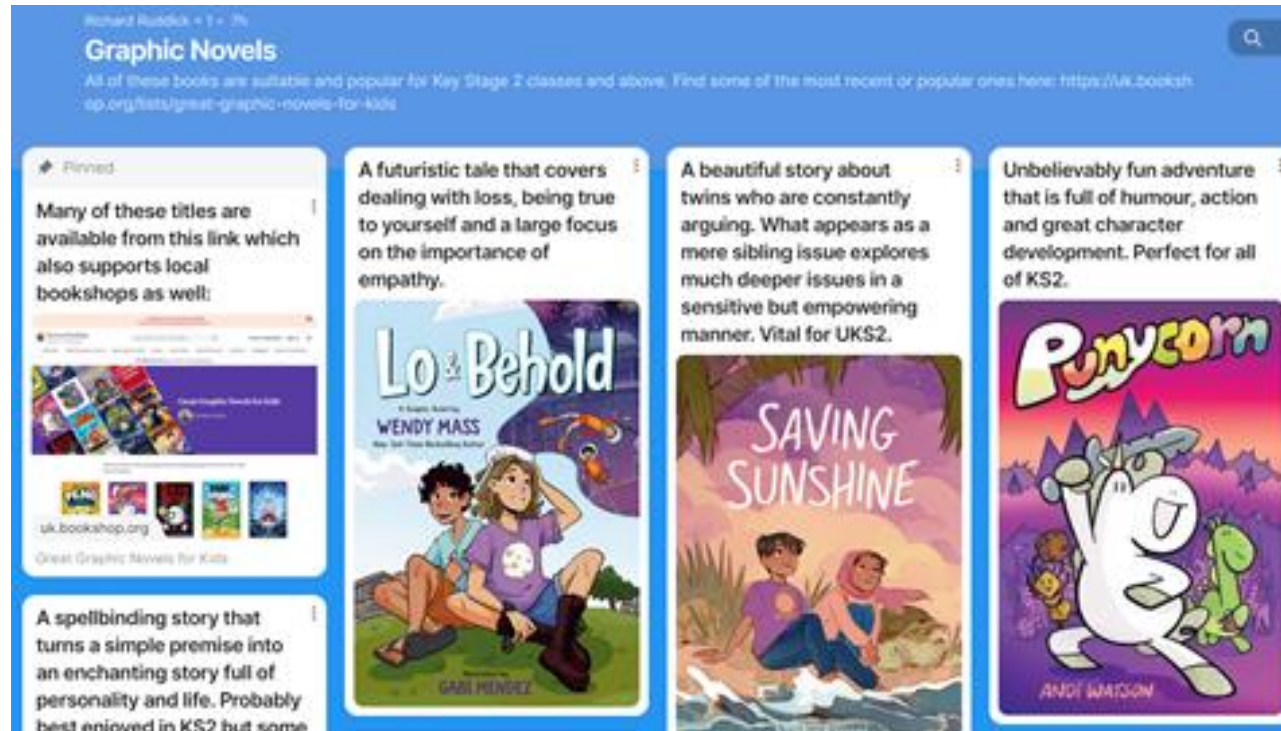
I also provided ongoing RfP support.



Graphic Novel Starter Pack

Schools received funding for graphic novels starter packs, using Richard Ruddick's Padlet to support choices.

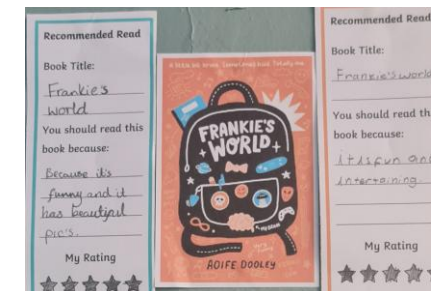
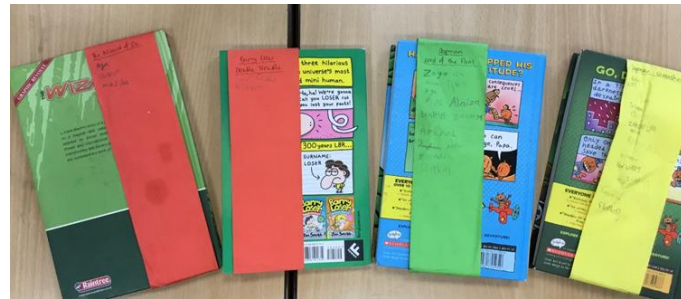
The young Reading Champions also had a voucher to choose further titles.



Promoting Reading for Pleasure

Schools received support (CPD, supportive visits, the group Padlet and direction to the OU RfP website) to promote reading using the OU's RfP pedagogy:

- Tempting comics (*texts that tempt*);
- Attractive reading areas (*social reading environments*);
- Daily opportunities for social reading (*time to read and hear texts read*);
- Book recommendations using book bands, post-it notes and displays (*booktalk*).



Reading Buddy Support

Target children met 1:1 with adult mentors weekly to share reading interests.

Reading Champion Roles

The target children became the school Reading Champions and graphic novel experts. Their role involved:

- choosing new titles;
- sharing recommendations;
- maintaining book corners;
- leading assemblies;
- reading extracts to the class.

Reading Buddies by Jon Biddle

Context

I'm currently English Coordinator and Reading Champion at Moorlands Primary Academy in Norfolk. The school has had a turbulent few years (high turnover of staff, disappointing KS2 SATs results, etc.) but has recently started to rebuild around creating a genuine, schoolwide Reading for Pleasure culture. Many children, staff and parents are already engaged and enthused by the progress that has been made.

Research inspiration and rationale

Much of the recently published research about Reading for Pleasure has emphasised the need for schools to build reciprocal reading communities. Indeed, one of the key recommendations from the UKLA Teachers as Readers report (Cremlin et al, 2008) was for schools to develop more equivalent reading relationships between staff, pupils and family members. As a school, we felt we needed to focus our efforts on some of our more vulnerable pupils and those who needed extra personal attention, and then gradually begin to bring their families on board.

Aims

- To provide some of our more vulnerable children with a 'reading buddy' – somebody who would show interest in them as a reader and who would share their own reading life.
- To introduce and develop a genuinely whole school reading initiative, one that would involve class teachers, support staff, office staff and non-class based SLT.



Harwood Park School Reading Area



Library Support

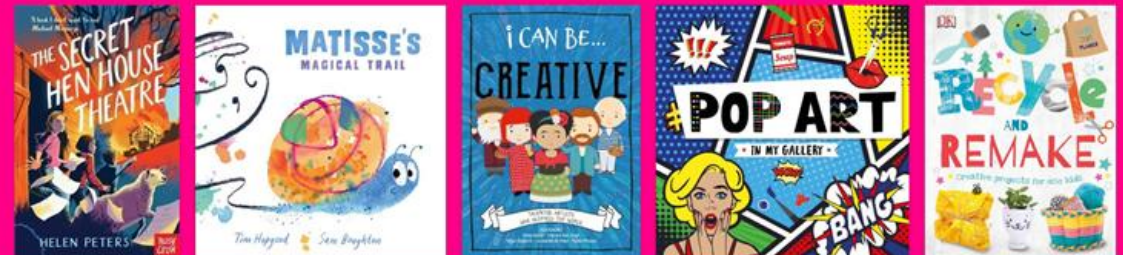
Rochdale Library purchased **extra graphic novel stock**, allocating to libraries nearest the schools.

Schools **visited their local library regularly** so children knew they could borrow comics for free too.

The Library Service focused their **Summer Reading Challenge** on the project children, to encourage reading over the summer holidays.

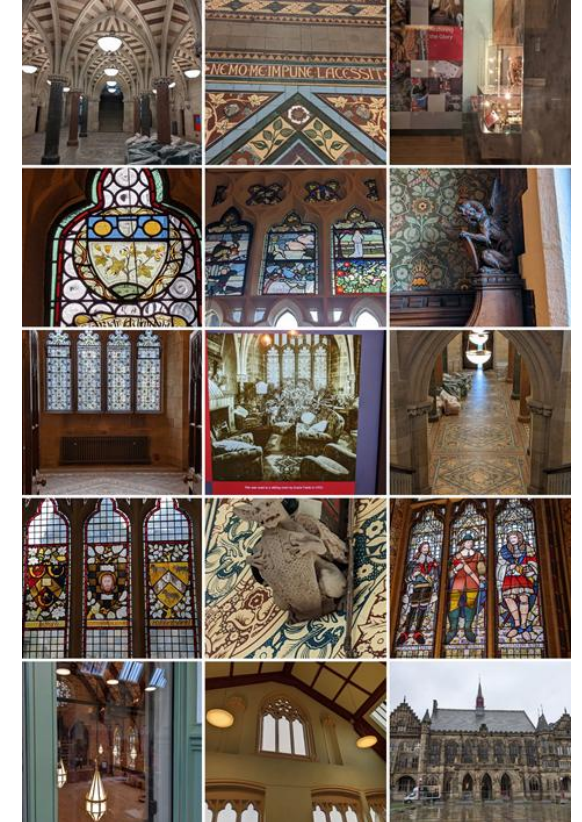


Summer Reading Challenge 2024



Rochdale Town Hall Visits

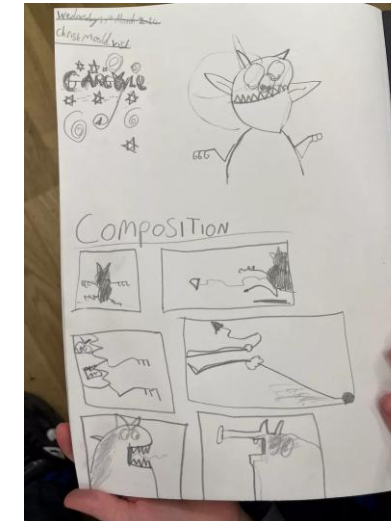
Each school visited the Town Hall. They used the guide created by author/illustrator Chris Mould to explore the whole building and discussed storylines for their section of the graphic novel.



Author Visits

Chris Mould visited each school and discussed his career and shared books that had inspired him as a child.

In his workshops, he showed the children how to turn their ideas for the Town Hall graphic novel into a comic format.



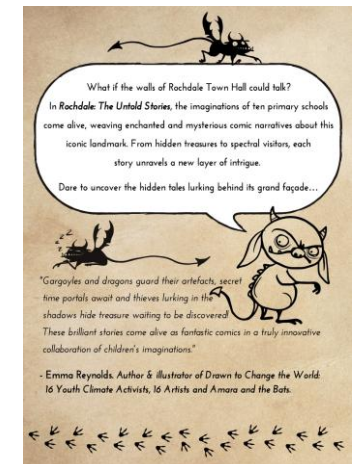
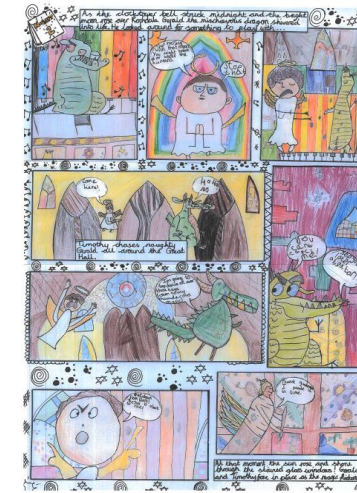
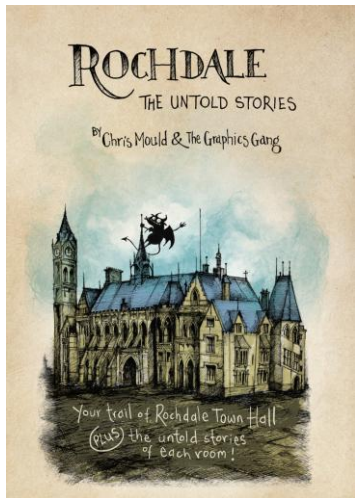
Pulling Together *Rochdale: The Untold Stories*

Schools drafted and redrafted their comic pages before submitting them to fit the agreed structure. The final graphic novel was then published.

"Gargoyles and dragons guard their artefacts, secret time portals await and thieves lurking in the shadows hide treasure waiting to be discovered!"

These brilliant stories come alive as fantastic comics in a truly innovative collaboration of children's imaginations."

- Emma Reynolds. Author & illustrator of *Drawn to Change the World: 16 Youth Climate Activists, 16 Artists and Amara and the Bats*.



Book Launch and Celebration at *Rochdale Children's Literature Festival 2024*

We had a launch celebration at RCLF on Saturday 6th July 2024.

Physical and digital copies were shared with schools and libraries.



Impact: Child Surveys

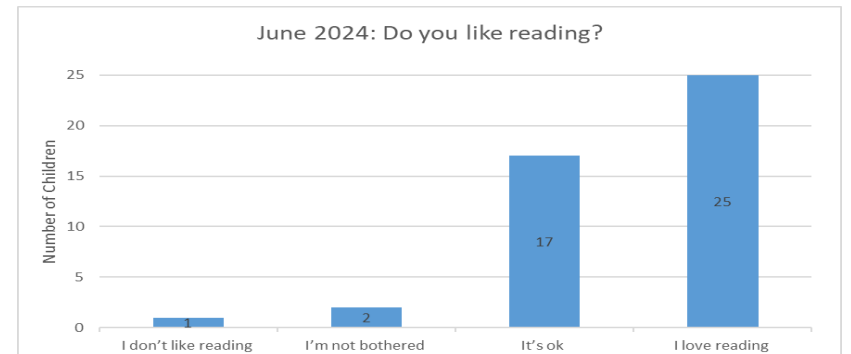
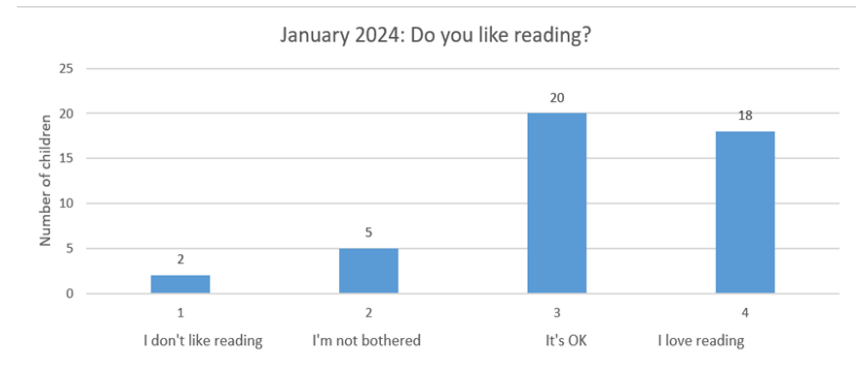
Out of the 45 children surveyed, in January 40% of children said that loved reading. In June, this percentage had moved to 55.6%. Some of the children's comments referenced the positive impact that the graphic novels project had on them as readers:

"When I first started, I wasn't as good at reading as I am now. I think this project has helped that."

"It has made me more into books - graphic novels are so funny."

"Graphic novels make me calm because they are funny and stop me from being angry or stressed."

"It helps your imagination, and I love being able to escape in my head to cool little places."



Impact: Child Surveys (cont'd)

Approximately* 98% said they enjoyed being a Graphic Novel Champion and 78% said that the project has helped them enjoy reading more.

"I love getting to pick out new different books and recommending ones I like to my class."

"I like reading the books and reading to people I wouldn't normally like my uncle as he like them too."

"I get to read to different adults and got to meet a famous author and illustrator."

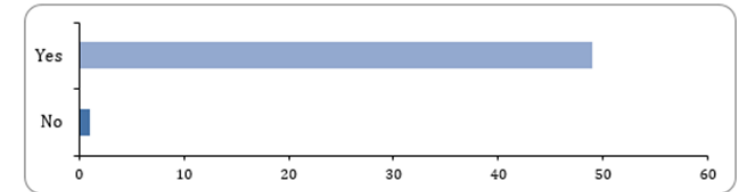
"It's nice to be in charge of something."

"I love swapping graphic novels and visiting the library."

Do you enjoy being a Graphic Novel Reading Champion?

Do you like reading comics or graphic novels?

There were 50 responses to this part of the question.

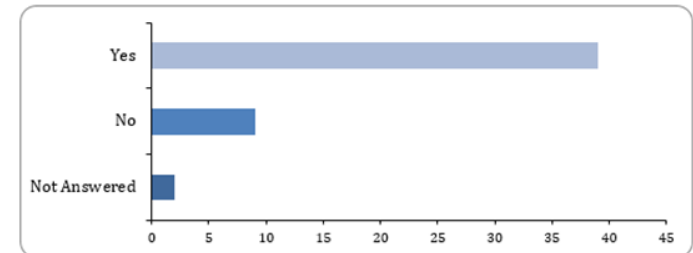


Option	Total	Percent
Yes	49	98.00%
No	1	2.00%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

Has the Graphic Novel Project helped you enjoy reading more?

Has the Graphic Novel Project helped you enjoy reading more?

There were 48 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
Yes	39	78.00%
No	9	18.00%
Not Answered	2	4.00%

* Please note, some children accidentally answered the question again, which has led to responses over 45, hence the use of 'approximately' when discussing data.

Teacher survey feedback

I see X engrossed in reading more often. He's especially enjoyed creating & drawing his own stories.

X is much more engaged in school in general. He is keen to talk about books and the graphic novels in particular. He regularly asks about future books we might get and is eager to organise swapping books with other classes.

I have overheard X recommending books to other children. He said 'Evil Emperor Penguin' was the 'best book ever'. X was not previously a child who was interested in reading.

X loves recommending books to others and saying what he has read and what he thinks they should read next.

X has continued to get their book out at all times even sitting and reading at break times and is talking about their book more to other children and adults.

X has been very enthusiastic and keen to share what they have been reading with their friends and family. He is reading more at home too.

X speaks about it often and asks frequently when she can next read with her adult. X has been telling me and her peers about the graphic novel she has read and her favourite one at home.

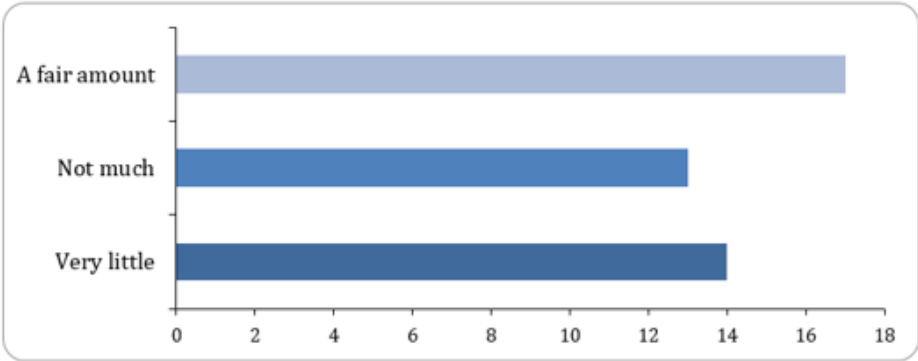
Teacher survey feedback (cont'd)

Does the child currently choose to read for pleasure in class?

January 2024

Does the child currently choose to read for pleasure in class?
Does the child currently choose to read for pleasure in class?

There were 44 responses to this part of the question.

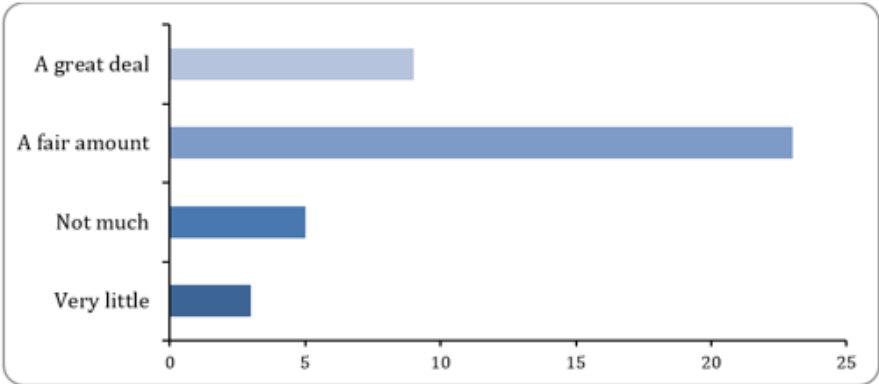


Option	Total	Percent
A great deal	0	0.00%
A fair amount	17	38.64%
Not much	13	29.55%
Very little	14	31.82%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

July 2024

Does the child currently choose to read for pleasure in class?
Does the child currently choose to read for pleasure in class?

There were 40 responses to this part of the question.



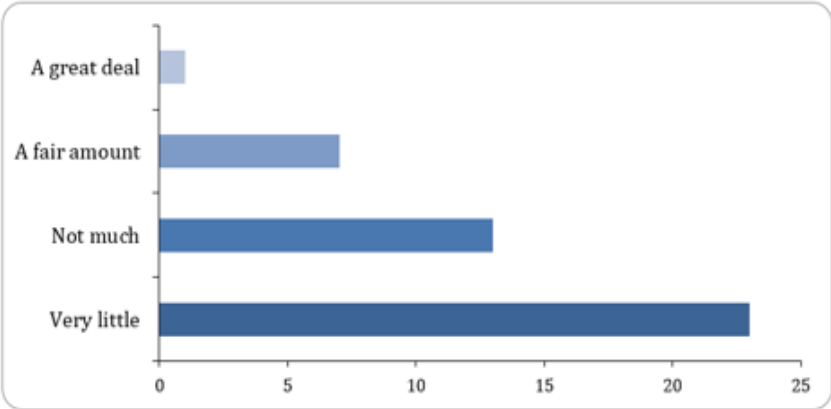
Option	Total	Percent
A great deal	9	22.50%
A fair amount	23	57.50%
Not much	5	12.50%
Very little	3	7.50%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

Does the child engage in reading for pleasure at home?

January 2024

Does the child engage in reading for pleasure at home?
Does the child engage in reading for pleasure at home?

There were 44 responses to this part of the question.

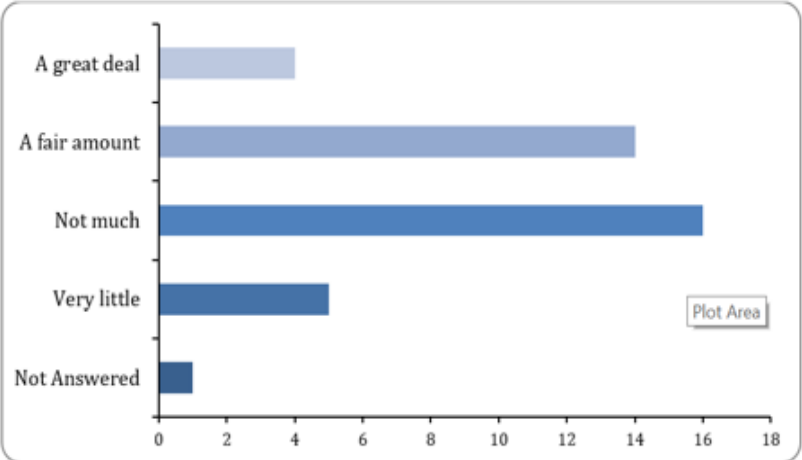


Option	Total	Percent
A great deal	1	2.27%
A fair amount	7	15.91%
Not much	13	29.55%
Very little	23	52.27%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

July 2024

Does the child engage in reading for pleasure at home?
Does the child engage in reading for pleasure at home?

There were 39 responses to this part of the question.



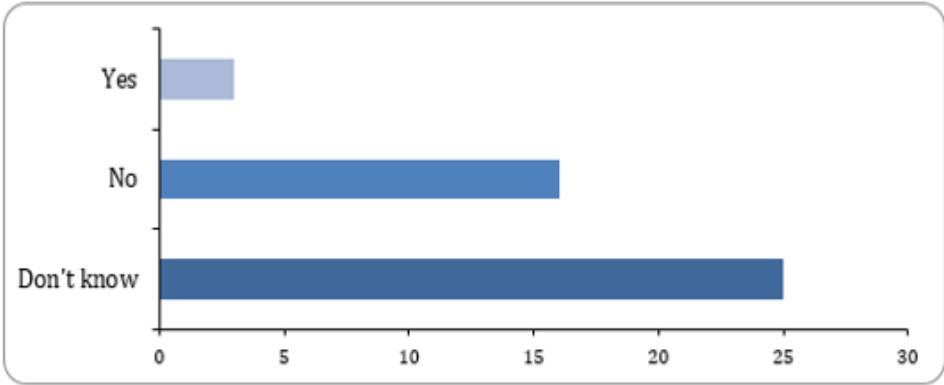
Option	Total	Percent
A great deal	4	10.00%
A fair amount	14	35.00%
Not much	16	40.00%
Very little	5	12.50%
Not Answered	1	2.50%

Does the child read graphic novels/comics at home?

January 2024

Does the child read graphic novels/comics at home?
Does the child read graphic novels/comics at home?

There were 44 responses to this part of the question.

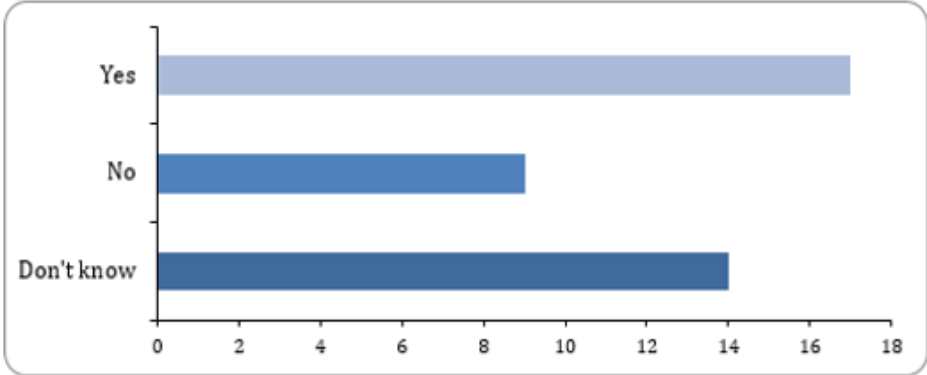


Option	Total	Percent
Yes	3	6.82%
No	16	36.36%
Don't know	25	56.82%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

July 2024

Does the child read graphic novels/comics at home?
Does the child read graphic novels/comics at home?

There were 40 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
Yes	17	42.50%
No	9	22.50%
Don't know	14	35.00%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

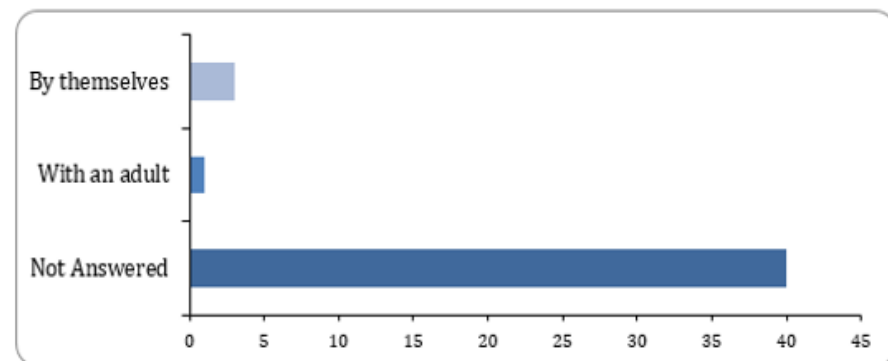
Who do they read at home with?

January 2024

If yes, do they read graphic novels/comics at home? (tick as many as is appropriate):

If yes, do they read graphic novels/comics at home?

There were 4 responses to this part of the question.



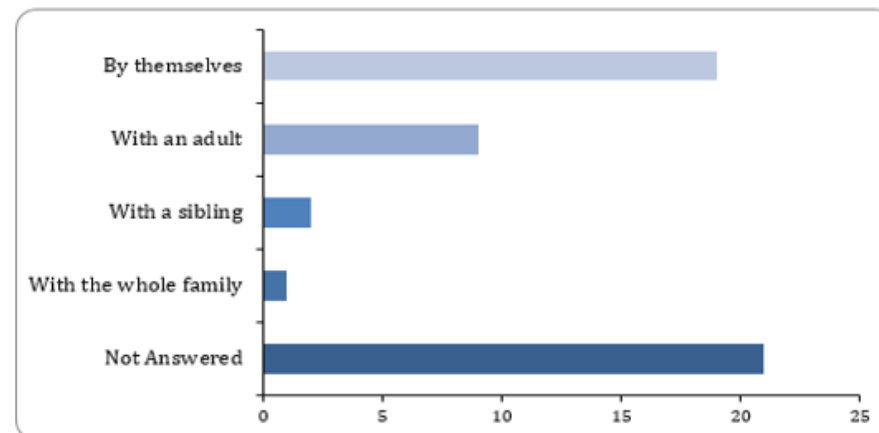
Option	Total	Percent
By themselves	3	6.82%
With an adult	1	2.27%
With a sibling	0	0.00%
With the whole family	0	0.00%
Not Answered	40	90.91%

July 2024

If yes, do they read graphic novels/comics at home? (tick as many as is appropriate):

If yes, do they read graphic novels/comics at home?

There were 19 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
By themselves	19	47.50%
With an adult	9	22.50%
With a sibling	2	5.00%
With the whole family	1	2.50%
Not Answered	21	52.50%

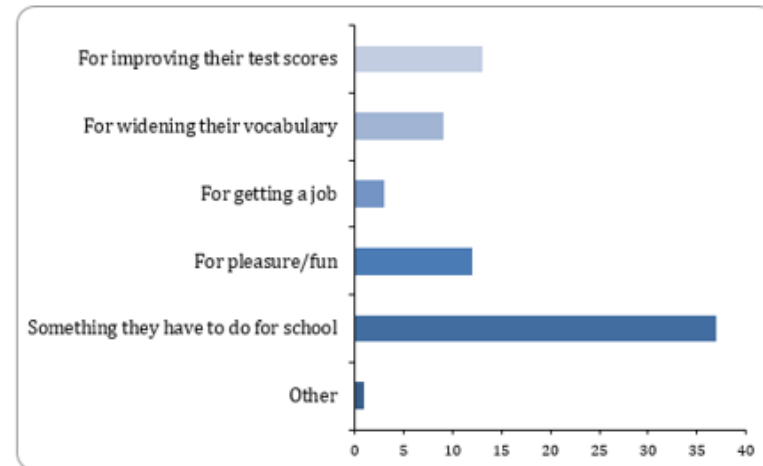
What do you think the child considers the purpose of reading to be?

January 2024

What do you think the child considers the purpose of reading to be? (Tick all that apply)

What do you think the child considers the purpose of reading to be?

There were 44 responses to this part of the question.



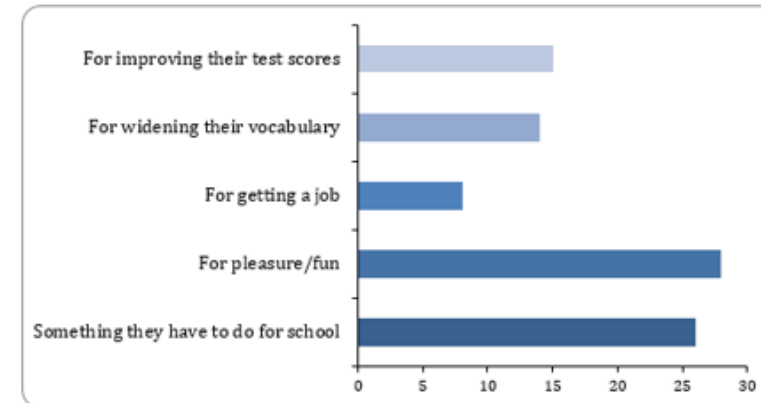
Option	Total	Percent
For improving their test scores	13	29.55%
For widening their vocabulary	9	20.45%
For getting a job	3	6.82%
For pleasure/fun	12	27.27%
Something they have to do for school	37	84.09%
Other	1	2.27%

July 2024

What do you think the child considers the purpose of reading to be? (Tick all that apply)

What do you think the child considers the purpose of reading to be?

There were 40 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
For improving their test scores	15	37.50%
For widening their vocabulary	14	35.00%
For getting a job	8	20.00%
For pleasure/fun	28	70.00%
Something they have to do for school	26	65.00%
Other	0	0.00%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

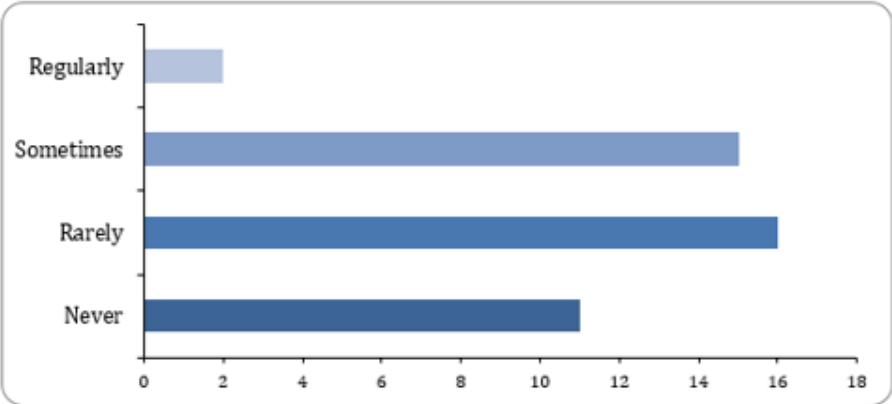
How often does the child contribute ideas and suggestions about reading spaces and books in the classroom?

January 2024

How often does the child contribute ideas and suggestions about reading spaces and books in the classroom?

How often does the child contribute ideas and suggestions about reading spaces and books in the classroom?

There were 44 responses to this part of the question.



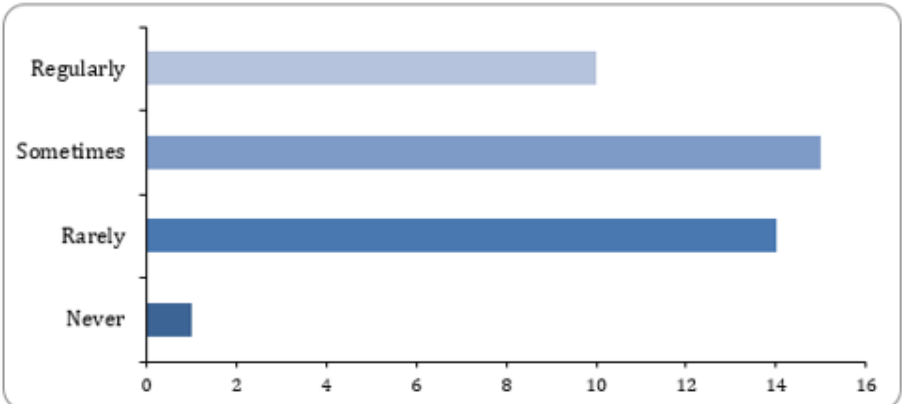
Option	Total	Percent
Regularly	2	4.55%
Sometimes	15	34.09%
Rarely	16	36.36%
Never	11	25.00%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

July 2024

How often does the child contribute ideas and suggestions about reading spaces and books in the classroom?

How often does the child contribute ideas and suggestions about reading spaces and books in the classroom?

There were 40 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
Regularly	10	25.00%
Sometimes	15	37.50%
Rarely	14	35.00%
Never	1	2.50%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

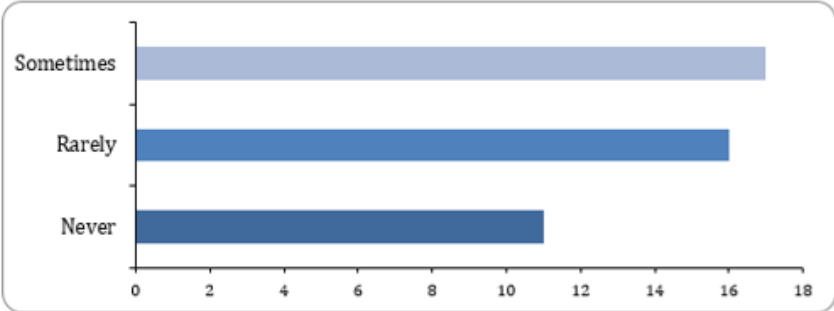
How often does the child talk about reading with others in the classroom outside of a planned literacy and guided reading sessions?

January 2024

How often does the child talk about their reading with others in the classroom outside of planned literacy and guided reading sessions?

How often does the child talk about their reading with others in the classroom outside of planned literacy and guided reading sessions?

There were 44 responses to this part of the question.



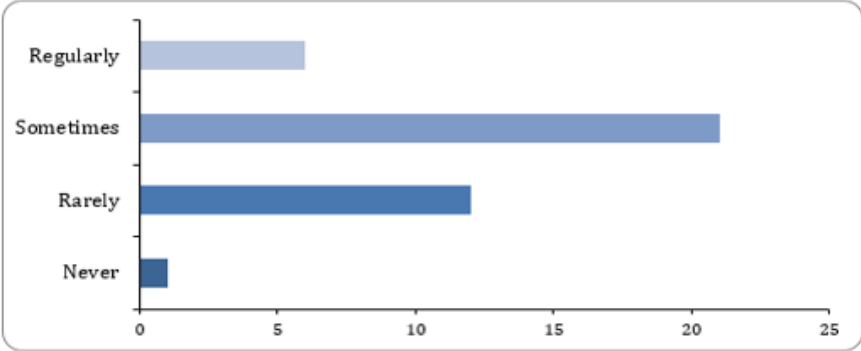
Option	Total	Percent
Regularly	0	0.00%
Sometimes	17	38.64%
Rarely	16	36.36%
Never	11	25.00%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

July 2024

How often does the child talk about their reading with others in the classroom outside of planned literacy and guided reading sessions?

How often does the child talk about their reading with others in the classroom outside of planned literacy and guided reading sessions?

There were 40 responses to this part of the question.



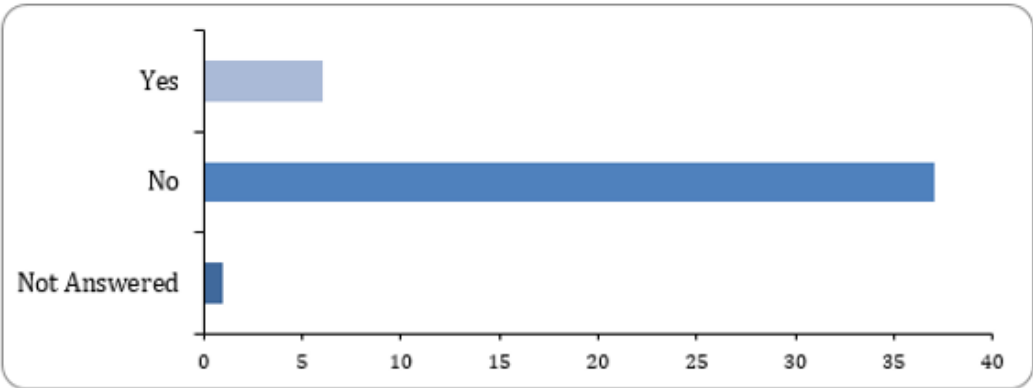
Option	Total	Percent
Regularly	6	15.00%
Sometimes	21	52.50%
Rarely	12	30.00%
Never	1	2.50%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

Do you and the child recommend books to each other?

January 2024

Do you and the child recommend books to each other?
Do you and the child recommend books to each other?

There were 43 responses to this part of the question.

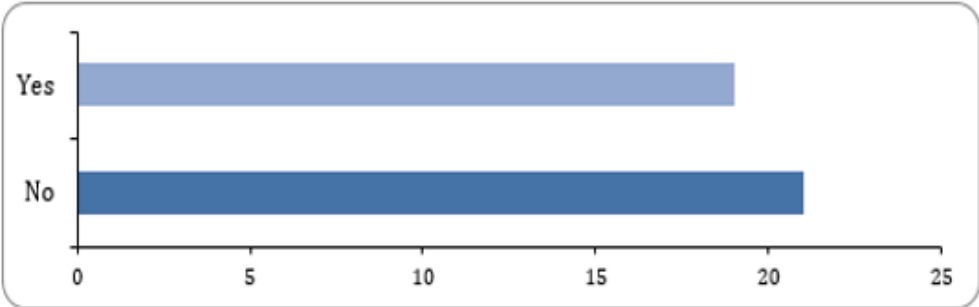


Option	Total	Percent
Yes	6	13.64%
No	37	84.09%
Not Answered	1	2.27%

July 2024

Do you and the child recommend books to each other?
Do you and the child recommend books to each other?

There were 40 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
Yes	19	47.50%
No	21	52.50%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

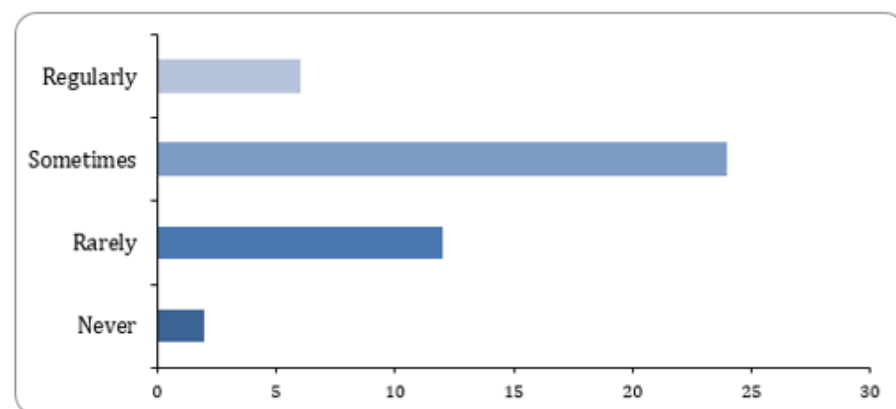
How often does the child have opportunities to talk informally about books with other children in the class?

January 2024

How often does the child have opportunities to talk informally about books with other children in the class?

How often does the child have opportunities to talk informally about books with other children in the class?

There were 44 responses to this part of the question.



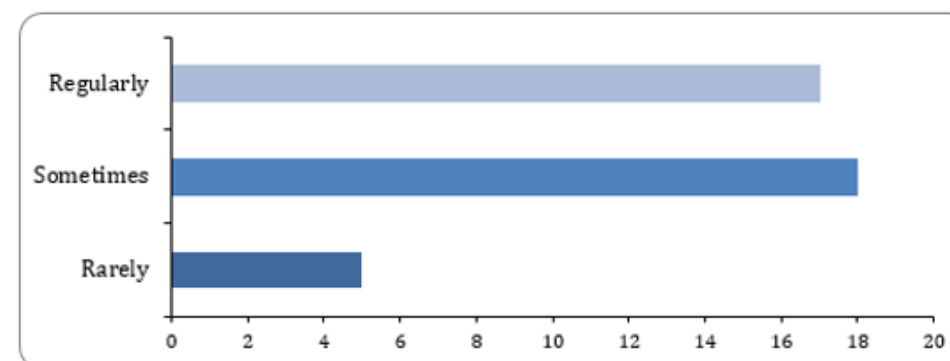
Option	Total	Percent
Regularly	6	13.64%
Sometimes	24	54.55%
Rarely	12	27.27%
Never	2	4.55%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

July 2024

How often does the child have opportunities to talk informally about books with other children in the class?

How often does the child have opportunities to talk informally about books with other children in the class?

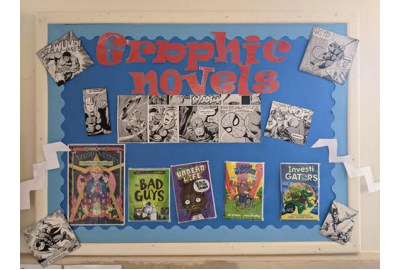
There were 40 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
Regularly	17	42.50%
Sometimes	18	45.00%
Rarely	5	12.50%
Never	0	0.00%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

Reflections on the impact that research had on your practice

The project was shaped by my experience of leading the **OU/UKLA RfP Teachers Group** and my understanding of Reading for Pleasure pedagogy, which helped me to support schools develop a rich reading culture. Teachers gained a deep knowledge of age-appropriate graphic novels and accessed curated resources like Richard's Padlet to continue their professional development. **Collaboration across schools and the use of the OU website supported a shared bank of practical strategies.** They recognised the value of graphic novels not only as a means of engaging reluctant readers but also as a way of building strong and interconnected peer-to-peer and child to adult reading relationships.



The project **highlighted the power of inclusive texts and reciprocal reading communities** in cultivating reading for pleasure. Particularly for vulnerable and disadvantaged children, **graphic novels served as a bridge**, inviting all readers in, while the collaborative culture around them sustained motivation, discussion and creativity. Reading naturally led to writing, and children importantly **began to see themselves as both readers and creators, empowered to share their own stories.** As a result, children's self-esteem and sense of wellbeing was positively impacted.



Libraries benefitted significantly by expanding their knowledge of graphic novels, improving their ability to recommend and stock diverse, relevant titles. Children also realised they could freely access high-quality graphic novels from libraries, breaking down financial barriers to reading. One of the most powerful outcomes was the growth of inclusive reading communities. **Children, teachers, librarians, families, and authors connected through shared reading experiences,** with graphic novels offering an accessible and engaging medium for all.



Next steps are to share the success of the project, both locally and nationally.