

Executive Summary

Little Wandle Code Project Report on Reading for Pleasure

Commissioned by Wandle Learning Trust
Conducted by The Open University (2025)

Overview

This report presents findings from the KS3 Little Wandle Code reading intervention, drawing on survey data from over 4,000 Year 7 pupils. The study examined adolescents' reading attitudes, self-perceptions and practices at a critical point in their literacy development. The research was commissioned in response to sustained national and international concern regarding declining reading motivation among teenagers. It sought to:

- Examine pupils' dispositions towards reading
- Analyse differences between Little Wandle Code and non-Little Wandle Code groups
- Identify genre preferences and reading practices
- Explore the social dimensions of reading
- Provide recommendations to strengthen reading for pleasure provision

The findings confirm that early secondary school is a pivotal stage for reading engagement – and that targeted intervention can make a measurable difference.

Key Findings

1. Reading enjoyment declines at KS3 – but Little Wandle Code mitigates this decline

Consistent with national trends, reading enjoyment drops significantly at age 11–12. However, pupils participating in the Little Wandle Code intervention experienced a reduced decline in reading enjoyment compared with peers not in the programme. In a phase typically associated with falling motivation, Little Wandle Code helped stabilise pupils' attitudes to reading.

2. Little Wandle Code strengthens reading self-efficacy

Participants reported increased confidence in themselves as readers over time. This is a significant outcome, given the well-established reciprocal relationship between motivation and reading skill: pupils who believe they are capable readers are more likely to choose to read, which in turn strengthens attainment. Supporting self-efficacy at this age is therefore foundational to long-term literacy development.

3. Reading frequency and digital engagement

The Little Wandle Code group demonstrated increased reading frequency on digital devices. This reflects contemporary reading habits and suggests that incorporating digital texts where appropriate may enhance engagement for this age group.

4. Genre preferences highlight the importance of relevance and accessibility

Across both groups, the most popular genres were:

- Fiction: horror and mystery
- Non-fiction: sports, games and activities

Pupils in the Little Wandle Code group also showed particular interest in:

- Funny fiction
- Art and craft non-fiction

These genres tend to include visually engaging design and shorter, accessible text formats, indicating the importance of matching texts to reader confidence, interests and preferred formats.

5. A limited social reading culture

A notable finding was that a large proportion of pupils reported not discussing reading with anyone; by the end of the study, nearly half indicated they did not talk about reading at all. This suggests that reading is often experienced as solitary and instructional rather than social and identity-forming. The absence of a strong social reading culture may contribute to declining motivation during adolescence.

Overall Impact of Little Wandle Code

The KS3 Little Wandle Code intervention demonstrated positive effects across several dimensions of reading for pleasure:

- Reduced decline in reading enjoyment
- Increased reader self-efficacy
- Support for digital reading engagement
- Enhanced access to appealing texts
- Relational and safe spaces for reading

Importantly, the intervention appears to protect motivation at a stage when it is most vulnerable.

Recommendations

The report recommends that the programme continues to:

- Prioritise enjoyment and reader identity within sessions
- Support adults to model themselves as readers
- Provide access to a diverse and engaging range of genres
- Recognise the role of digital reading
- Embed more explicit opportunities for informal, peer-led reading conversations.

Conclusion

The evidence from this large-scale KS3 study reinforces a central principle: the will to read and the skill to read are mutually reinforcing. In an educational climate focused on attainment, this report demonstrates that investment in reading motivation is not peripheral but essential. The Little Wandle Code intervention provides evidence that structured, relational and text-rich provision at KS3 can meaningfully support adolescents' reading engagement at a critical developmental stage.