



## Educating News Literacy:

A summary for researchers and practitioners

### Research Briefing: May 2024

#### Summary

- The NewsWise programme aims to cultivate news literacy in primary school children aged 9-11 in the UK. Key findings from the evaluation of the programme suggest that NewsWise was effective in developing children's news literacy.
- What was found to work effectively in terms of the programme has implications for news literacy education practitioners in primary schools. More specifically:



The development of children's critical skills is crucial in the context of delivering news and media literacy education.



Besides encouraging pupils to think critically about the news, news literacy education can, and should be delivered in ways that, enable children to develop an interest in, and engage more actively with, the news.



It is important that children are taught different strategies in terms of how to spot mis and disinformation. Equally important is to teach them how to write a news report. Both these activities were found to be effective as well as enjoyable.



It is essential that teachers tasked with delivering news literacy education are supported and provided with adequate resources and training.

### The importance of developing children's critical skills through news and media literacy education

Results from the evaluation of NewsWise (which employed both quantitative and qualitative methods) found that the programme improved participants' ability to detect fake news and this difference sustained to the follow-up period. Similarly, after taking part in the news literacy intervention, pupils were found to be more aware that not all news stories can be trusted, while they had also learned strategies to spot misinformation.

Critical literacy skills are key to children's resilience to mis and disinformation. This approach underpins the NewsWise programme, helping children to develop the skills not only to identify if news is real or fake, but to interrogate information and assess its quality by questioning different sources, distinguishing facts from opinions, recognising bias and looking for balance.

The programme provides children with memorable, practical strategies for questioning and checking information, such as the NewsWise code: Stop; Question; Check; Decide. In addition, the programme encourages children to consider the consequences of misinformation, misrepresentation and bias. The study found that NewsWise made pupils more conscious that misinformation may have negative repercussions for individuals and for society and the political system at large. Relatedly, it was effective in developing not just pupil's news literacy but also their civic engagement, thus contributing to their desire to be involved in their communities, to undertake acts of service, and to participate in politics in ways that are appropriate to their age.





## Developing pupils' engagement with, and interest in, the news

The study found that taking part in the NewsWise programme encouraged children to engage more actively with the news, thus developing not just their ability to evaluate, but also their interest in following, new stories. Indeed, the programme gives children the opportunity to explore and discuss age-appropriate real news stories, and this authenticity and relationship to the real world is a core approach.

Embedding learning in the real-life context of the newsroom helps children to understand what news is, where it comes from, how it is made and why it is important. Exploring real news stories encourages debate, active listening and respecting the opinions of others, and also gives young people the chance to better understand their world.

## The impact of encouraging children to engage with elements of media production

Alongside learning about mis and disinformation, asking children to write a real news report about a local issue was found to be one of the most enjoyable elements of the programme by both pupils and teachers. Giving children the opportunity to produce a news story themselves consolidates their learning, as they experience elements of media production themselves. This also helps them to deconstruct media texts in future. Using an immersive approach with children in role as journalists further engages pupils and shows how their learning is grounded in the real world. Reporting on events happening in their local area allows pupils to make their voices heard. In addition, it highlights issues that are important to them and their communities, encouraging in turn their civic engagement.

*"My favourite part of it was seeing different types of stories, and like finding out if they are true or false. And then when we wrote about our story that we were going to do, it was like fun because we got to find out what had been happening all around our area..."*

- Pupil in a focus group, after participating in the NewsWise programme

## Supporting teachers to deliver news and media literacy education in the primary classroom

The research presents several opportunities as well as challenges for teachers and schools to embed news literacy in their settings.

All schools, teachers, classes and children are unique, and different levels of engagement across schools and teachers impacts delivery. As found by the evaluation of NewsWise, it is important to consider both individual and contextual differences between schools when evaluating the impact of news literacy interventions.

Support from senior leadership in schools is instrumental in achieving successful delivery of news literacy in classrooms and to embedding these skills at a school level. To secure this, it is important that the positive impact of news literacy education on children's learning is made clear, as well as how news and media literacy skills can help to support core reading, writing and oracy skills. The demands of the primary curriculum can mean it is hard for teachers to find space for something new. NewsWise is mapped onto the English/literacy (reading, writing and oracy skills) and PSHE curricula, so nothing has to be 'dropped' from the curriculum. Teachers taking part in the study felt adequately prepared and praised the lesson plans and resources designed and provided as part of the programme.

The NewsWise lessons cover key skills that teachers already need to teach, but provide a new context for learning these skills. This context is new for many. Therefore, teachers need support and training from experts, such as those comprising the NewsWise team, both to increase their own knowledge about the subject, and to develop their understanding of the wider implications of news literacy (or the lack of it) among children.

## Further Information

For more information, please visit the project website <https://jubileecentre.ac.uk/project/news-literacy-and-civic-engagement/> or contact Professor Tom Harrison ([t.j.harrison@bham.ac.uk](mailto:t.j.harrison@bham.ac.uk)).