



Department  
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# What is the research evidence on writing?

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## What is the research evidence on writing?

This evidence note:

- Synthesizes statistical and research evidence on writing, including domestic and international sources in five areas: pupils' achievement, effective teaching, gender gap, pupils' attitudes and writing as an activity outside school.
- Identifies key gaps in the evidence base.

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## 1. Key findings

### What is the profile of pupils' performance in writing?

- Writing is the subject with the worst performance compared with reading, maths and science at Key Stages 1 and 2.
- Results from the Foundation Stage Profile stage indicate that in 2012, 71 per cent of children were working securely within the early learning goals of the Communication, Language and Literacy learning area (DfE, 2012d).
- At Key Stage 1, 83 per cent of children achieved the expected level in 2012 national teacher assessments in writing (DfE, 2012a).
- At Key Stage 2, 81 per cent of pupils achieved the expected level in 2012 teacher assessments in writing (DfE, 2012b).
- Writing is part of the English assessment at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. In 2012, 84 per cent of pupils achieved level 5 at the Key Stage 3 teacher assessments in English. At Key Stage 4, 568,600 pupils attempted a GCSE in English, and 69 per cent of those achieved a grade A\*-C (DfE, 2012c).
- Overall, the evidence shows that there is a gender gap in pupils' performance in writing with girls outperforming boys throughout Key Stages.

### What are the predictors of pupils' attainment and progress in writing in early years?

- Evidence found that preschool variables significantly associated with writing competence at school entry included mother's education, family size, parental assessment of the child's writing ability and a measure of home writing activities. The latter was still significant at the age of seven (Dunsmuir and Blatchford, 2004).

### What does effective teaching of writing look like?

Research evidence has found that the following approaches are effective in teaching writing in primary and secondary schools (What Works Clearinghouse, 2012; Gillespie and Graham, 2010; Andrews et al, 2009; Graham et al, 2011; Santangelo and Olinghouse, 2009):

- Teach pupils the writing process;
- Teach pupils to write for a variety of purposes;
- Set specific goals to pupils and foster inquiry skills;
- Teach pupils to become fluent with handwriting, spelling, sentence construction, typing and word processing;
- Provide daily time to write;
- Create an engaged community of writers.

### Teaching of grammar, spelling and handwriting

- The contextualised teaching of grammar has also a significantly positive effect on pupils' writing development. The approach is more effective for the most able writers (Myhill et al, 2011).

- Sentence combining is an effective strategy to improve the syntactic maturity of pupils in written English between the ages of 5 and 16 (Andrews et al, 2004a).
- Therapeutic teaching practices can be more effective than sensorimotor teaching practices in teaching pupils to improve poor handwriting (Denton et al, 2006).
- Multisensory approaches to teaching handwriting may be more effective for pupils in their second year of school than cognitive approaches (Zwicker and Hadwin, 2009).
- There is some evidence that the use of ICT to teach spelling can be more effective than conventional methods, but it is not statistically significant (Torgerson and Elbourne, 2002).

For struggling writers and pupils with specific learning difficulties or Special Educational Needs (SEND), the approaches below are effective (Mason et al, 2011; Santangelo and Olinghouse, 2009; Brooks, 2007; Humphrey and Squires, 2011):

- Use explicit, interactive, scaffolded instruction in planning, composing and revising strategies;
- Use cognitive strategy instruction;
- For pupils with SEND, strategies that involve effective use and monitoring of pupils' data, which can be accessed by a range of stakeholders and can be reviewed by both teachers and parents, having structured conversations with parents and a comprehensive range of interventions have been effective in raising pupils' achievement in English.

### **What do we know about the gender gap in writing?**

Evidence suggests that boys perform less well than girls in writing. Research evidence has identified a range of factors behind their underperformance (Daly, 2003; Estyn, 2008; DfES, 2007). These include:

- Factors related to *the quality of teaching* such as teaching grammar separately from contextualised writing, inappropriate use of interventions, misuse of writing frames and a lack of connection between oral and writing work.
- *School-level factors* such as not offering children an active and free-play environment which has been associated with more progress in reading and writing.
- *Classroom-level factors* such as ineffective use of ICT, setting and streaming.
- *Behavioural and social-level factors*.
- *Factors related to the way lessons are conducted* such as too much emphasis on story writing, not giving boys ownership of their writing, a discrepancy between boys' reading preferences and writing topics, using 'counting down' time strategies and a dislike by boys of drafting and figurative language.

The following strategies for raising boys' performance have been identified (Daly, 2003; Ofsted, 2005b):

- *School and classroom level approaches* such as using active learning tasks; appropriate approaches to discipline; target setting, monitoring and

mentoring; using older pupils as male role models; focusing on the learning nature of schools.

- *Effective teaching* from teachers who have confidence in their abilities and have high expectations from boys.
- A focus on key approaches inherent in the teaching of writing such as explicit teaching of language; topic selection in narrative writing; planning writing using mnemonics; effective use of drafting and writing frames.
- *Literacy-specific activities* such as appropriate use of oral work; poetry; use of emotionally powerful texts.
- Effective use of visual media and ICT facilities.

### **What is the role of new technology in pupils' writing habits?**

The existing evidence suggests that usage of text abbreviations (textisms) is positively associated with word reading ability; evidence from the same study found no evidence of a detrimental effect of textisms exposure on conventional spelling (Plester et al, 2009).

International evidence suggests that even though teenagers engage in technology-based writing, they do not think of it as 'writing'. Some of them admitted using technology-based features such as text shortcuts into their school assignments (Pew Internet, 2008).

### **What are pupils' attitudes toward writing, including enjoyment and confidence?**

The evidence suggests that overall a large proportion of pupils enjoy writing, and these findings broadly mirror the ones about reading (Clark and Dugdale, 2009; Clark, 2012).

- Pupils enjoy writing for family and friends more than for schoolwork (Clark and Dugdale, 2009).
- As with reading, the evidence suggests that enjoyment of writing is related to attainment (Clark, 2012).

In relation to confidence in writing ability, the evidence suggests that approximately half of pupils think that they are average writers (Clark, 2012). In addition:

- Girls and older pupils are more likely to consider themselves as good writers in comparison to boys and younger pupils respectively (Clark, 2012).
- Blog owners and pupils using a social networking site reported to be significantly better writers compared to pupils who don't use blogs or social networking sites (Clark and Dugdale, 2009).

Finally, the evidence suggests that overall, pupils have positive attitudes to writing (Clark, 2012).

- A quarter of pupils thought that writing is cool and three quarters that it improves with practice (Clark, 2012).
- Girls are more likely than boys to say that the more they write, the better they get (Clark and Douglas, 2011).

- Most pupils agree that writing is an essential skill to succeed in life (Clark and Douglas, 2011; Pew Internet, 2008).

### **What writing activities do pupils engage in out of school?**

Overall, the evidence suggests that most pupils engage in technology-based forms of writing such as text messages, social networking messages, emails and instant messages at least once a month. Pupils engage in non-technology writing too, such as letters, lyrics, fiction, diaries and poems but to a lesser extent (Clark, 2012).

- Older pupils (at Key Stage 3 and 4) are more likely than Key Stage 2 pupils to engage in technology-based forms of writing.
- There are no differences between pupils eligible for Free School Meals and non-eligible for Free School Meals in relation to technology-based writing.

### **What are the evidence gaps?**

- There is no evidence on why pupils perform less well in writing in comparison to reading and the other core subjects.
- There is little evidence on specific interventions to help pupils with writing, and little evidence on interventions for secondary school pupils.
- There is limited evidence on the predictors of pupils' achievement in writing.
- There is very little evidence on the effective teaching of spelling.
- There is little evidence on pupils' performance in writing in studies of international comparisons.

## 2. Introduction

This paper reports on the statistics and research evidence on writing both in and out of school, covering pupils in primary and secondary schools. It includes domestic and international evidence, and makes references and comparisons to reading where appropriate.

The research questions are:

- What is the profile of pupils' performance in writing?
- What do we know about pupils' writing in schools?
- What does effective teaching of writing look like?
- What do we know about the gender gap in writing?
- What is the role of new technology in children's writing habits?
- What are pupils' attitudes toward writing, including enjoyment and confidence?
- In which types of writing activity do pupils engage out of school?

The evidence base:

There is a general agreement in the literature that there is less evidence about writing than about reading (Myhill and Fisher, 2010). International studies such as the Programme for International Student Achievement (PISA) and the Progress in International Reading and Literacy Study (PIRLS) use indicators from reading as proxy measures for literacy and don't include writing in their assessments.

Definition of writing

Writing is a complex task. It requires the coordination of fine motor skills and cognitive skills, reflects the social and cultural patterns of the writer's time and is also linguistically complex (Myhill and Fisher, 2010; Fisher, 2012).

Writing genres (types)

Writing encompasses a range of genres, divided mainly in *fiction* and *non-fiction*. The latter can be defined as outputs which inform, explain and describe (such as reports, explanations, manuals, prospectuses, reportage, travel guides and brochures); persuade, argue and advise (essays, reviews, opinion pieces, advertisements); and analyse, review and comment (commentaries, articles etc). The last two categories can be described as 'argumentational' writing (Andrews et al, 2009).

## 3. What is the profile of pupils' achievement in writing?

Overall, the evidence indicates that although there has been an improvement in pupils' achievement in writing, it is the subject where pupils perform less well compared to reading, mathematics and science. In addition, there is a gender gap with girls outperforming boys in all Key Stages. A detailed analysis of pupils'



achievement in writing is presented in the Annex, so only the key points are included below:

### 3.1 Pre-school attainment

Children attending Reception Year have been assessed using the Foundation Stage Profile (FSP) scales<sup>1</sup> until May 2012. From September 2012 a revised, simpler version of FSP came into force.

Analysis of the 2012 data shows that the majority of children (ranging from 71 per cent to 92 per cent) continued to work securely within the Early Learning Goals, in each of the 13 assessment scales (DfE, 2012d). Writing is one of the topics assessed in the Communication, Language and Literacy learning area, and in 2012, 71 per cent of children were *working securely within* the early learning goals. This means they had a scale score of 6 points or more, and it was the lowest score in comparison to other learning areas. In addition:

- Girls performed better than boys in the assessment.
- Writing had the lowest proportion of children working securely within the early learning goals (71 per cent of children compared to 79 per cent in reading, 83 per cent in linking sounds and letters and 87 per cent in communication and thinking).
- Writing was also the assessment scale with the highest proportion of children *working towards* the early learning goals (i.e. achieving a total of 1-3 points).
- There has been a five percentage point increase in the Communication, Language and Literacy learning area since 2009.

### 3.2 Key Stage 1

In 2012, 83 per cent of pupils achieved the expected level (level 2) or above in national KS1 teacher assessments in writing (DfE, 2012a). In addition:

- Pupils performed less well in writing in comparison to the other core subjects.
- Pupils' performance in writing has remained more or less stable in the last three years.
- Girls outperform boys by 10 percentage points (88 per cent of girls compared to 78 per cent of boys).
- Only 70 per cent of children eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) achieved the expected level compared to 86 per cent of all other pupils.

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<sup>1</sup> The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile measured achievements of children aged five against 13 assessment scales, with 9 points within each scale ('scale point'). The 13 assessment scales are grouped into six areas of learning: personal, social and emotional development; communication, language and literacy; problem solving, reasoning and numeracy; knowledge and understanding of the world; physical development; creative development.

### Reading compared to writing

Additional internal analysis explored pupils' performance in writing in comparison to reading in order to look at the characteristics of the struggling writers in detail, using data for 2011. It concluded that:

- Pupils achieving level A (absent), D (disapplied), IN (inapplicable) and W (working towards the test level) in writing tend to achieve the same in reading.
- There is a spread of results from level 1 and above in reading levels achieved compared to writing results. For example, out of the pupils achieving a level 2B (the expected level) in reading, only 51 per cent achieve the same level in writing. Overall, 44 per cent of pupils achieving level 2B in reading are achieving a lower level in writing.
- The same pattern occurs with pupils achieving level 2A and 3 in reading. Girls are more likely to perform better than boys, with over half of girls achieving level 3 or above in both reading and writing compared to only 38 per cent of boys.

### **3.3 Key Stage 2**

In 2012, 81 per cent of pupils achieved the expected level (level 4 or above) in writing based on teacher assessments, compared to 75 per cent of pupils achieving the expected level in 2011 based on national test results. Some difference between test and teacher assessment results can be expected as the outcomes are measured in different ways (DfE, 2012b). Other key points include:

- Pupils perform less well in writing compared to other subjects (i.e. 84 per cent achieved the expected level in mathematics and 87 per cent in reading).
- The gender gap is still evident, with 76 per cent of boys achieving level 4 compared to 87 per cent of girls.
- Additional internal DfE analysis comparing the 2011 Key Stage 2 reading and writing levels of pupils found a similar pattern to the one in Key Stage 1: there is a spread of results from pupils achieving level 3 and above in reading levels compared to writing results. For example, out of all pupils achieving a level 4 in reading, 68 per cent achieve the same level in writing.

### **3.4 Key Stage 3**

In October 2008, the DfE (then DCSF) announced its decision to discontinue national testing at KS3 in English, mathematics and science for 14 year olds (i.e. externally set and marked tests). Since then pupils have been assessed through on-going teacher assessment, with regular real-time reports to parents. End of Key Stage teacher assessments continue to be published at the national and local authority level. National Curriculum tests were published for last time for the academic year 2007/08.

Writing at Key Stage 3 is part of the English assessment. Teacher assessment results for 2012 show that (DfE, 2012c):

- Eighty four per cent of pupils achieved level 5 or above, an increase of five percentage points since 2010 and ten percentage points since 2007.

- Ninety per cent of girls achieved level 5 or above to 79 per cent of boys.

### **3.5 Key Stage 4**

Writing is not assessed separately at Key Stage 4 but it is part of the English assessment.

At Key Stage 4, the latest data shows that in 2012 (DfE, 2012c):

- 568,600 pupils attempted a GCSE in English, and 69 per cent of those achieved a grade A\*-C.
- The gender gap is still evident with 76 per cent of girls getting a grade A\*-C compared to 62 per cent of boys.
- Sixty eight per cent of pupils made the expected level of progress in English in 2012 compared to 72 per cent in 2011.

#### What is the role of coursework in gender differentiated achievement?

There has been some discussion in the research literature around the role of coursework in relation to the gender gap.

In 2012, there was a 12 percentage points gap in the proportion of girls and boys achieving the expected level of progress in English between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4. The equivalent figures for 2006 were 66 per cent for girls and 53 per cent for boys, which suggest a big improvement in the proportions of pupils making the expected progress and a reduction in the gender gap (DfE, 2012c).

Research suggests that girls outperform boys in most types of coursework, and they do relatively better on coursework than on examinations, but only marginally (Elwood, 1995). In addition, coursework tends to have a higher influence over final grades for boys than for girls (Elwood, 1995; 1999). No evidence linking coursework in English and boys' or girls' achievement has been identified. Coursework in all GCSEs has been replaced by controlled assessment in the last years.

### **3.6 International evidence**

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) study in United States is carried out every five years and in 2011 assessed, among other things, the writing skills of 8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students in a computer-based assessment. It found that (NCES, 2012):

- In 2011, about one quarter of students at both grades 8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> performed at the 'proficient' level, demonstrating the ability to communicate well in writing.
- Fifty-four per cent of students at 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and 52 per cent of students at 12<sup>th</sup> grade performed at the 'basic' level in writing.
- Three per cent of students at 8<sup>th</sup> grade and 3 per cent of students at 12<sup>th</sup> grade performed at the 'advanced' level.
- There were differences in students' performance by race/ethnicity, gender and school location.

### **3.7 What are the predictors of pupils' attainment and progress in writing?**

There is a growing body of longitudinal research looking at the factors in children's early and family life which act as predictors of educational attainment. In the United Kingdom, studies such as the Effective Provision of Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education (EPPSE 3-16), the Avon Longitudinal study (ALSPAC) and the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) have explored the relationship between early years and literacy and numeracy outcomes. In most cases, literacy is measured using the attainment in reading, so the evidence about writing is limited.

#### School-entry age

Evidence from the ALSPAC study found that the following factors have a positive impact on school entry assessments<sup>2</sup> (in reading, writing and mathematics):

- Children's early language development such as their understanding and use of vocabulary and their use of two-three word sentences at 24 months, irrespective of their social background.
- Children's communication environment, including early ownership of books, trips to library, attendance at pre-school, parents teaching a range of activities and the number of toys and books available to them.

The same analysis also found that there was a strong relationship between children's communication environment and their ability to use words at the age of two. The amount of time that TV is on in the home had a negative impact on children's assessment scores (Roulstone et al, 2011).

#### Key Stage 1

A small study<sup>3</sup> looking at the predictors of writing competence in children aged 4-7 years was conducted in England between 1993 and 1996 and found that (Dunsmuir and Blatchford, 2004):

- Preschool variables significantly associated with writing competence at school entry were: mother's education, family size, parental assessment of child's writing ability and a measure of home writing activities.
- Child-related variables measured at school entry and significantly associated with writing proficiency at the age of seven included season of birth, vocabulary score, pre-reading skills, handwriting and proficiency in writing name.
- Home writing was the only preschool variable that maintained its significance in relation to attainment at the age of seven.

#### Key Stage 2

The EPPSE project also explored the factors predicting better progress and attainment at Key Stage 2. In relation to English, the analysis found that prior

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<sup>2</sup> The analysis didn't look at the assessments separately, therefore the findings cover all three areas (reading, writing and mathematics)

<sup>3</sup> Due to the small sample size of the study these findings should be treated with caution.

achievement has the largest influence on outcomes, with reading and writing at Key Stage 1 having the strongest influence (Melhuish et al, 2006).

### Key Stage 3

At Key Stage 3, the researchers found that pre-school effectiveness, as measured by schools promoting pre-reading skills, had a continuing effect on English, but this was weaker than at younger ages (Sammons et al, 2012).

## **4. Teaching of writing**

This section looks at the teaching of writing in classrooms, starting with pedagogical approaches that have been proved effective in improving pupils' performance in writing and finishes with evidence about teaching practice in classrooms of primary schools.

### **4.1 Approaches for effective, whole-class teaching**

The following table lists approaches that have been found to be effective in the teaching of writing by research reviews of international evidence (What Works Clearinghouse, 2012; Gillespie and Graham, 2010; Andrews et al, 2009; Santangelo and Olinghouse, 2009).

Teaching practice	Examples of how it can be done
Teach pupils the writing process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Teach pupils strategies/tools for the various components of the writing process such as : planning; drafting; sharing; evaluating; revising and editing; summarising; sentence combining</li> <li>○ Gradually shift responsibility from the teacher to the pupil so that they become independent writers</li> <li>○ Guide pupils to choose and use suitable writing strategies</li> <li>○ Encourage pupils to be flexible when using the different writing components</li> <li>○ Engage them in pre-writing activities where they can assess what they already know, research an unfamiliar topic, or arrange their ideas visually</li> </ul>
Teach pupils to write for a variety of purposes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Help pupils understand the different purposes of writing e.g. 'describe'; 'narrate'; 'inform'; 'persuade'/'analyse'</li> <li>○ Develop pupils' concept of what is 'audience'</li> <li>○ Teach pupils explicitly how to use the features of good writing and provide them with models of good writing</li> <li>○ Teach pupils techniques for writing effectively for different purposes: for example, for 'describe', use the 'sensory details' technique: what did you see? How did it look? What sounds did you hear?</li> </ul>

	What did you touch? How did it feel? What could you smell? What did you taste? (see Annex B for a complete list)
Teach pupils to become fluent with handwriting, spelling, sentence construction, typing and word processing (please also see separate section below)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Teach very young pupils how to hold a pencil correctly and form letters fluently and efficiently</li> <li>○ When teaching spelling, connect it with writing</li> <li>○ Teach pupils to construct sentences for fluency, meaning and style</li> <li>○ Teach pupils to type fluently and to use a word processor to compose</li> </ul>
Set specific goals to pupils and foster inquiry skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The goals can be created by the teacher or the pupils themselves (and reviewed by the teacher) and can include adding more ideas to a paper or including specific features of a writing genre</li> <li>○ Encourage self-motivation e.g. by personal target-setting</li> <li>○ Give pupils a writing task which involves the use of inquiry skills e.g. establish a clear goal for writing or researching/exploring concrete data on a topic</li> </ul>
Provide daily time to write	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Pupils should be given at least 30 minutes per day to write in their first year in primary school</li> <li>○ Teachers can make links with other subjects e.g. ask pupils to write a paragraph explaining a maths graph</li> </ul>
Create an engaged community of writers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Teachers could model their writing in front of pupils, and share real examples with them such as a letter or email</li> <li>○ Give pupils opportunities to choose the topics they write about</li> <li>○ Encourage collaborative writing</li> <li>○ Use oral work to inform writing work</li> <li>○ Ensure that pupils give and receive constructive feedback throughout the writing process</li> <li>○ Publish pupils' writing and reach for external audiences</li> </ul>

In addition, the evidence indicates that the above strategies should not be used as a writing curriculum per se. Teachers should tailor these practices to meet the needs of their individual pupils as well as the whole class, use them in conjunction and monitor or adjust them as necessary (Gillespie and Graham, 2010).

#### The teaching of grammar, spelling and handwriting

Most of the research to date has focused on the explicit teaching of grammatical features. A randomised controlled study was conducted in UK and aimed to explore

the effect of contextualised grammar teaching on pupils' writing development. By contextualised grammar teaching the researchers referred to: (i) introducing grammatical constructions and terminology at a point which is relevant to the focus of learning; (ii) the emphasis is on effects and constructing meanings, not on the feature or terminology itself; (iii) the learning objective is to open up a '*repertoire of possibilities*', not to teach about correct ways of writing.

Findings from the study were promising, showing a significant positive effect for pupils in the intervention group, taught in lessons using the above principles. They scored higher in the writing tests compared with pupils in the comparison group. An interesting finding was that the embedded grammar suited most the more able writers but the design of the study couldn't explain why (Myhill et al, 2011).

In relation to the teaching of syntax, there is no high quality evidence that its teaching makes an impact on the quality and/or accuracy of written composition (Andrews et al, 2004b). The evidence on sentence combining has found it to be an effective means of improving the syntactic maturity of students in written English between the ages of 5 and 16 (Andrews et al, 2004a).

#### *Strategies to improve handwriting that is already poor*

A small-scale randomised controlled trial provides evidence that self-instruction can be an effective way of teaching pupils to improve their handwriting (Robin et al, 1975). Other evidence has found that therapeutic<sup>4</sup> teaching practices can be more effective than sensorimotor teaching practices in teaching pupils to improve poor handwriting (Denton et al, 2006).

Evidence suggests that certain teaching programmes may be particularly effective. Research shows that the 'Handwriting Without Tears' programme can be effective in teaching elementary-aged pupils lowercase and uppercase formation, while the 'Loops and Other Groups' programme can be effective in helping pupils to improve the legibility of their cursive formation (Marr and Dimeo, 2006; Roberts et al, 2010). The evidence also suggests that multisensory approaches to teaching handwriting may be more effective for pupils in their second year of school than cognitive approaches (Zwicker and Hadwin, 2009).

#### *Effective ways to teach spelling*

Very little evidence exists on effective ways to teach spelling. The one study identified suggests that the use of ICT to teach spelling may be more effective than 'conventional' forms of spelling teaching but the effect size is not significant (Torgerson and Elbourne, 2002).

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<sup>4</sup> Therapeutic approaches to teaching handwriting use skill-based practice and specific motor learning strategies which include practiced, dictated and copied handwriting as well as writing from memory.



## 4.2 Approaches for struggling writers and pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

Evidence suggests that children with literacy difficulties need coordinated help in order to catch up with their peers (Brooks, 2007). Pupils with writing difficulties, many of whom have also specific learning difficulties, often struggle with the planning, composing and revising skills which are needed for good writing (Mason et al, 2011). Research has identified the following approaches as being effective in the teaching of writing:

- Explicit, interactive, scaffolded instruction in planning, composing and revising strategies: a good example is the Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) instruction which is effective for both primary and secondary school pupils with learning difficulties. Pupils should be encouraged to develop background knowledge, discuss, model and memorize the strategies taught. In addition, pupils should be guided and explicitly taught to set goals, monitor their performance and self-instruct (Mason et al, 2011; Santangelo and Olinghouse, 2009).
- Cognitive strategy instruction which addresses how a pupil is taught, in addition to what is taught. It includes explicit and systematic instruction, direct instruction, scaffolding and modelling and has been used in several curriculum areas. Pupils learn specific strategies for writing and also 'how a person thinks and acts when planning, executing and evaluating performance on a task and its outcomes'. With cognitive instruction, pupils should be able to engage more fully in the writing process and be independent writers (Santangelo and Olinghouse, 2009).
- In addition, research has shown that struggling writers can benefit from explicit and targeted instruction in word-, sentence-, and paragraph-level skills, handwriting, spelling, vocabulary and sentence construction skills. This is more effective when it teachers use examples from a wide range of contexts (Santangelo and Olinghouse, 2009).
- An evaluation of Every Child a Reader (ECaR) and Reading Recovery, a reading intervention programme, found beneficial effects for writing as well: in the second year of its implementation, ECaR improved school level reading attainment at Key Stage 1 by between 2 and 6 percentage points. In the second and third year of operation it improved writing attainment by between 4 and 6 percentage points (Tanner et al, 2011).
- Qualitative evidence from the Every Child a Writer study found that one-to-one tuition writing sessions had a positive effect on pupils' enjoyment and confidence in their skills (Fisher et al, 2011).
- An evaluation of the Achievement for All (AfA) pilot found that it had a positive effect on pupils with SEND, by raising their achievement in English and mathematics (Humphrey and Squires, 2011). The evaluation found that all four year groups in the target cohort of the pilot (Year 1, Year 5, Year 7



and Year 10) made significantly better progress in English during the course of the pilot compared to pupils with SEND nationally over an equivalent period of time. Additionally, pupils in Year 1, 5 and 10 made significantly better progress compared to pupils without SEND nationally. The evaluation identified the following school characteristics, practices and approaches associated with improved pupil outcomes:

- Schools with higher attendance and achievement, smaller pupil populations and stronger home-school relations before AfA started.
- Schools viewing AfA as an opportunity to build on existing good practice, with teachers taking responsibility for teaching all children in the class, rather than allocating SEND children to teaching assistants or other staff.
- Headteachers or members of the senior leadership team being the AfA lead.
- Involving teachers and parents more frequently in reviewing individual pupil targets.
- Communicating information to parents about pupils' progress using a range of methods.
- Sharing information about pupils with a range of professionals.
- Completing 2 or 3 structured conversations for a larger proportion of pupils: the conversations took part on the basis of forming a collaborative, trusting relationship, exchanging ideas, aspirations and concerns.

The evidence also suggests that most of the whole-class approaches can also be used for struggling writers (Santangelo and Olinghouse, 2009).

#### **4.3 Evidence from classroom observations and school inspections**

Evidence from studies with an element of classroom observations in their methodology and evidence from school inspections can highlight features of effective teaching of writing, which complements the above findings. Key points of evidence on effective teaching include (Ofsted, 2011; Fisher et al, 2011):

- Teachers make good use of oral work in order to improve writing, including presentations and class debates and make links with reading.
- Good use of drama sessions can also lead to an improvement of children's vocabulary and expression.
- Systematic phonics is incorporated into the writing lessons.
- Teachers make careful use of assessment and data monitoring pupils' progress.
- Schools place a lot of effort in meeting individual pupils' needs.
- Schools make also good use of ICT facilities and resources to enrich pupils' writing.
- In the best lessons, guided writing offers targeted instruction to the needs of pupils, who are encouraged to write independently, choose a topic and evaluate their writing.
- Pupils' best written work was found in lessons where teachers worked on meaning and communicative effect.

#### 4.4 What do we know about teaching practice and pupils' views in primary schools?

##### Evidence from a study of Year 3 and 4 pupils

Qualitative evidence of the evaluation of Every Child a Writer (ECaW) study used data from classroom observations and collection of writing samples in ten schools to provide a snapshot of classroom practice at one point in the academic year 2009/10. They are valuable as they give an insight into the teaching of writing and into what pupils write nowadays (Fisher et al, 2011). Key findings include:

- In the lessons observed the integrated nature of the literacy curriculum was evident, as apart from writing some lessons involved talking activities, reading or linking work to other curriculum areas.
- Lessons formed part of a block of planning, and there were based on narrative, non-fiction texts, poetry or play scripts or persuasive text. Even though there were clear learning objectives, in some cases it was evident that a good plan may not necessarily lead to an effective lesson.
- Teachers used a range of resources, including Talk for Writing, commercial and Local Authority resources.
- In some classes, teacher subject knowledge was weak; for example, they considered linguistic features as good or bad rather than exploring how effective they could be in the context of writing.

##### *Analysis of the writing samples showed that:*

- Most writers were confident in using simple, compound and complex sentences. There was some evidence of pupils overusing 'and' and other coordinating conjunctions.
- Teachers were using scaffolding extensively. This included the FANBOYS<sup>5</sup> acronym; the use of pre-written text which needed to be altered; the use of the modelled poem, etc. In some cases it was limiting pupils' learning, as it created over-dependence.
- Lessons plans and feedback from teachers focused on particular grammatical constructions such as connectives, verbs, adjectives, sentence starters etc, but pupils didn't always know how to use them effectively.
- In addition, teacher feedback often didn't cover meaning and communication; as a result, the writing task was considered more of an exercise in demonstrating usage of grammatical features rather than a communicative task.

##### *Evidence from the pupil survey*

The quantitative strand of the evaluation included a pupil survey, which was administered in both the intervention and comparison group of pupils in two times during the course of the evaluation. Phase 1 took place in the autumn term of 2009/10 and Phase 2 in the summer term. The pupil survey explored pupils' attitudes to writing, mainly covering writing in school, and therefore the findings are

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<sup>5</sup> FANBOYS is an acronym (For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So) which acts as grammar mnemonic for coordinating conjunctions

reported in this section. Section 6 presents pupils' attitudes towards informal writing or writing out of school.

Overall, the findings didn't suggest large differences between the intervention and comparison group, but there was a decrease in some figures in Phase 2, which is in line with other research on children's attitudes (i.e. that positive attitudes decrease as children grow older). Key findings include (based on tables from Fisher and Twist, 2011):

- The majority of pupils had paper and pens or pencils to write at home. Around 57 per cent of pupils in both groups in Phase 1 reported that at home a grown-up helped them with their writing when they asked for help.
- Around seven in ten pupils in both groups in Phase 1 said that they liked to get help with their writing at school. The vast majority of them agreed with the statement 'I like it when we all share our ideas for writing and the teacher writes them on the board'. Just over eight in ten pupils also reported that they liked it when their teacher helped them write in a small group.
- A significant proportion of pupils reported that sometimes they can't think of what to write (around 71 per cent in the intervention and 75 per cent in the comparison group, both in Phase 1). Around 86 per cent of pupils in both groups of Phase 1 said that they liked to choose what they write about. Similar proportions of pupils reported that they wrote more slowly than other children in their class (56 per cent in the intervention and 58 per cent in the comparison group).
- Around seven in ten pupils reported that they liked writing in a group, and around six in ten would like to do more writing in class.

#### Evidence from a study of Year 5 and 6 pupils

Another small-scale study investigated the features of narrative writing in five classes of Year 5 pupils, which were followed up after 12 months, when pupils were in Year 6 (Beard and Burrell, 2010). Even though the study explored a range of features in children's writing using a repeat design, it couldn't tell us anything about the classroom, school or child's individual or socio-economic factors associated with good writing.

Analysis of children's writing<sup>6</sup> found that:

- Over the year there was an improvement in all of the features examined in the study, such as 'attention to the specified story prompt', 'awareness of reader', 'awareness of purpose/attempt to engage reader'.
- Comparative analysis of writing samples indicated that a significant proportion of children used some features in one year but not the other. For example, a lot of children used the following features in Year 5 but not in Year 6: 'a developed main event'; 'the elaboration of character through

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<sup>6</sup> Children were tested using NFER's *Literacy Impact Test B*.

- action’; ‘the elaboration of the main event through action’; ‘the use of exclamations for impact’; ‘the use of adventurous vocabulary’.
- There was also a low initial level of use, followed by a significant increase in the use of connectives to introduce suspense and the elaboration of the resolution through dialogue.
- However, there was also a significant proportion of pupils who used one of these features in Year 5 but not in Year 6. In sum, the main findings suggest that children used a range of narrative techniques and their writing developed through a variation of means.

## 5. What do we know about the gender gap in writing?

This section summarises research evidence on the reasons behind boys’ underperformance in writing and the known available strategies to help them.

### 5.1 What are the reasons for the gender gap in writing?

As explained in section 3, pupils perform less well in writing than in reading, with girls outperforming boys throughout primary and secondary schooling. The underachievement of boys in English has been observed in many English-speaking countries. One way that research has looked at it is the relationship between male identity and achievement, suggesting that boys have been stereotyped as being not good at English and not seeing any value in literacy for success in life. Other research however has indicated that gender alone cannot explain underachievement and wider socio-economic factors should be considered (Ofsted, 2005b).

Inspection and research evidence has explored the possible causes behind boys’ underperformance in writing (Ofsted, 2005a; 2005b; Younger et al, 2005; Estyn, 2008; Daly, 2003; DfES, 2007). These include among else:

- Factors related to *the quality of teaching* such as teaching grammar separately from contextualised writing, inappropriate use of interventions, misuse of writing frames and a lack of connection between oral and writing work.
- *School-level factors* such as not offering children an active and free-play environment which has been associated with more progress in reading and writing.
- *Behavioural and social-level factors* as boys are more likely to be affected by negative peer pressure. Boys are also more likely to experience criticism and a sense of failure at school, whereas girls are more inclined to give high status to hard-working pupils. Boys are more likely to be deprived of a male adult role model, both at home and in school, and this has a negative effect on their achievement in general.
- *Classroom-level factors* such as ineffective use of ICT, setting and streaming.
- *Factors related to the way lessons are conducted* such as an emphasis on story writing, not giving boys ownership of their writing, a discrepancy between boys’ reading preferences and writing topics, using ‘counting down’ time strategies and a dislike by boys of drafting and figurative language.

## 5.2 Strategies for helping boys with writing

Evidence has identified the following strategies that can help boys with writing (Daly, 2003; Ofsted, 2005b):

Type of strategies	Examples
School and classroom-level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Use of active learning tasks, including drama strategies e.g. thought-tapping<sup>7</sup> and hot-seating<sup>8</sup></li> <li>○ Use appropriate, non-confrontational approaches to discipline</li> <li>○ Target-setting, monitoring and mentoring</li> <li>○ Use older pupils as male role models for example as 'reading buddies' or to publish their work for younger classes</li> <li>○ Schools as learning organisations which foster and support teachers</li> </ul>
Strategies about teaching in general	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Teachers having confidence in their abilities and having high expectations from pupils</li> <li>○ Support independent pupil awareness and encourage pupils to be responsible for their work</li> <li>○ Lesson planning and organisation, as boys can benefit from tightly structured and well-organised lessons with clear learning goals</li> </ul>
A range of specific strategies for writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Explicit teaching about language, for example subordination and co-ordination. In addition, boys (and girls) can benefit from a range of diverse interventions such as stepped instructions using mini plenaries and task cards; using visual organisers and frames to scaffold text structure; the use of drama conventions to explore aspects of character, setting or plot; incorporation of 'talk for writing' time into literacy lessons so that pupils can talk about their text before start writing it</li> <li>○ Topic selection in narrative writing</li> <li>○ Medium term planning using frameworks which are adapted to meet pupils' diverse needs</li> <li>○ Planning writing using mnemonics as boys often have difficulties with timed writing and the process of 'beginning, middle and end'</li> <li>○ Effective drafting should be an integral part of pair, group and whole-class teaching. Explicit teaching of drafting skills should include the use of photocopied</li> </ul>

<sup>7</sup> A drama strategy where individuals are invited to speak their thoughts or feelings aloud - just a few words. This can be done by tapping each person on the shoulder.

<sup>8</sup> In this strategy, a character is questioned by the group about his or her background, behaviour and motivation.

	<p>scripts for editing exercises, reading transcripts, hearing the drafts of other pupils and drafting targeted sections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Writing frames which are most effective when they are modified to meet the specific needs of pupils</li> <li>○ Make writing tasks purposeful and give pupils opportunities to write frequently and at length</li> </ul>
Literacy-specific activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Effective use of oral work and poetry</li> <li>○ Let boys hear and read emotionally powerful texts with strong narrative structure and poems</li> <li>○ Teachers' knowledge and 'belief systems' about literacy are also important</li> </ul>
Use of resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Effective use of visual media such as cartoons, television, video and computer games</li> <li>○ Use of ICT facilities such as spell checkers, alterability of text on screen, use of composition features (e.g. highlight and font) to focus on cohesion, vocabulary chains and excessive coordination.</li> </ul>

## 6. Writing as an activity out of school

This section summarises the research evidence on pupils' writing activity out of the classroom settings. In the recent years there has been a lot of discussion about the increased role that the new technology and communication play in young people's lives. Studies in United Kingdom and abroad have been looking at the new types of writing young people engage with (such as text messages, internet blogs, social media postings) and how this relates to formal writing (i.e. writing in the classroom).

### 6.1 The role of new technology in literacy outcomes

A small-scale study investigated the relationship between text message abbreviations (textisms) and school literacy outcomes on 5 classes of 10 to 12 years-old pupils. Despite its limitations (having a small sample and asking pupils explicitly to write text messages in response to ten different scenarios), the study found no evidence that children's written language development is being disrupted by the use of text abbreviations. On the contrary, the study found evidence of a positive relationship between use of textisms and word reading ability. As the authors note, this may be explained by the fact that use of textisms requires a certain degree of phonological awareness (Plester et al, 2009). Other evidence has also found a positive relationship between textisms and spelling (Wood et al, 2011).

International evidence suggests that even though teenagers engage in technology-based writing, they do not think of it as 'writing'. Sixty per cent of teenagers taking part in the Pew Internet research project did not think that technology-based writing such as text messages, emails, instant messages or posting comments on social networking sites was 'writing'. In addition, even though they did not believe that technology has a negative influence on the quality of their writing, they admitted

that use of some ‘technology-influenced’ features appeared on their writing for school. For example, 50 per cent of teenagers said that they sometimes use informal writing styles instead of proper capitalization and punctuation in their school assignments, and 38 per cent have used text shortcuts such as ‘lol’ (‘laugh out loud’) (Pew Internet, 2008).

## **6.2 Enjoyment of writing**

Findings from the National Literacy Trust (NLT) studies suggest that overall a large proportion of pupils of all ages enjoy writing. The 2009 study suggests that 45 per cent of pupils enjoy writing (Clark & Dugdale, 2009), while the 2011 study gives a slightly higher figure of around 47 per cent of pupils enjoying writing very much or quite a lot, with 14 per cent not enjoying it at all. The same study found that in 2011 50 per cent of pupils enjoyed reading (Clark, 2012).

The evidence also points out to a difference in enjoyment levels between writing for family/friends (70 per cent of pupils) and writing for schoolwork (53 per cent of pupils). Blog owners were significantly more likely to enjoy writing for family/friends compared to non-blog owners. There was no relationship between mobile phone ownership and enjoyment of writing. Pupils who were using a social networking site were more likely to say that they enjoy writing more for family/friends compared with those who didn’t use a social networking site; however this difference was not statistically significant (Clark & Dugdale, 2009).

There are differences among groups of pupils (Clark, 2012):

- There is consistent evidence that girls enjoy writing more than boys.
- Younger pupils, at Key Stage 2, enjoyed writing more than older pupils (at Key Stages 3 and 4).
- Pupils from the White ethnic group enjoyed writing less than pupils from Mixed, Asian and Black ethnic<sup>9</sup> groups. For example, 46 per cent of White pupils enjoyed writing very much or quite a lot, compared to 55 per cent of pupils from the Mixed ethnic group, 57 per cent of the Asian group and 59 per cent of the Black group.
- However, there were no big differences between pupils eligible for FSM and pupils not eligible for FSM.

As with reading, the evidence suggests that enjoyment of writing is related to attainment: for example, 49 per cent of pupils performing above the expected level for their age and 46 per cent of pupils who perform at the expected level for their age enjoyed writing very much, compared to just 5 per cent of pupils who performed below the expected level of attainment for their age. It was not possible to provide separate figures for primary and secondary school pupils (Clark, 2012).

### Confidence in writing ability

Overall, the evidence suggests that there is a split between pupils’ confidence in their own writing abilities. Data from the NLT studies suggest that about half of

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<sup>9</sup> As the authors note, the grouping of ethnic groups into three main categories (Mixed, Asian and Black) may mask differences between ethnic groups



pupils think they were average writers, about one in three that they are very good writers and one in six that they are not very good writers (Clark and Douglas, 2011; Clark 2012).

There were some differences between girls and boys, with more girls than boys saying that they were good writers. Confidence in writing abilities seemed to decrease with age, with Key Stage 4 pupils less likely to say that they were very good writers compared to Key Stage 2 and 3 pupils. The evidence suggests that overall pupils non-eligible for FSM consider themselves as better writers compared to eligible pupils.

Regarding ethnicity, pupils from Black backgrounds were more likely to say that they were very good writers compared with pupils from the Asian or Mixed ethnic groups, whereas White pupils were the least likely to say that they were very good writers (Clark, 2012).

Blog owners and pupils using a social networking site reported to be significantly better writers compared to pupils who don't have blogs or social networking sites (Clark and Dugdale, 2009).

When asked about reasons why they thought they were good writers, most pupils said it was because they used their imagination, and they know how to type and spell. Reasons for not being good writers included not being very good at writing neatly, not enjoying writing very much, not being very good at spelling and not being very good at checking their work (Clark and Dugdale, 2009).

### 6.3 Attitudes to writing

The NLT study explored pupils' attitudes to writing through a series of statements with which pupils had to say whether they 'agree', 'disagree', 'neither agree or disagree' or 'not sure'.

**Table 1: Proportions of pupils agreeing with attitudinal statements**

	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Not sure
Writing is cool	26	37	26	11
Compared with other students I am a good writer	31	33	18	18
Girls tend to enjoy writing more than boys	27	28	31	14
A pupil who writes well gets better marks than someone who doesn't	58	23	11	9
I have trouble deciding what to write	42	28	23	8
Writing is more fun when you can choose the topic	74	14	7	6
It is easier to read than to write	50	26	16	8
I would be embarrassed if friends saw me write	14	18	59	9
If I am good at writing, I'll get a	48	29	12	11



better job				
The more I write, the better my writing gets	75	13	6	6

Source: Clark and Douglas, 2011

Overall, the evidence suggests that pupils have positive attitudes towards writing. A quarter of pupils taking part in the 2011 NLT study believed that writing is cool (26 per cent) and only 14 per cent said that they would be embarrassed if friends saw them write. Three quarters of pupils said that writing is more fun when they can choose the topic. The majority of pupils also thought that writing improves with practice (75 per cent) and that a pupil who writes well gets better marks than someone who doesn't (58 per cent). Half of pupils said that it is easier to read than to write (50 per cent) and that if they are good at writing they'll get a better job (48 per cent).

There were differences in these findings by groups of children: girls were more likely than boys to say that the more they write, the better their writing gets and that writing is cool. In contrast, boys were more likely than girls to say that reading is easier than writing, a pupil who writes well gets better marks and that girls tend to enjoy writing more than boys.

Younger pupils (at Key Stage 2) were more likely than older pupils (at Key Stage 3 and 4) to say that writing improves with practising, that it is easier to read than it is to write and that compared with other pupils they are good writers. Older pupils in contrast were less likely to say that they write in "txt" speak in class.

Pupils belonging in the Black ethnic group were the most likely to say that writing is cool and that compared with others, they are good writers, whereas White pupils were the least likely to say so.

The same study found that overall pupils who have positive attitudes towards writing were also more likely to perform at or above the expected level for their age compared with those who had more negative attitudes (Clark, 2012).

International evidence found that teenagers were motivated to write when they can select topics that are relevant to their lives, and when they had the opportunity to write creatively. Lessons which are challenging, interesting curricula and detailed feedback from teachers also motivate them (Pew Internet, 2008). These findings are similar to the ones reported in the section about effective teaching strategies.

#### Importance of writing to succeed in life

Evidence from the NLT study suggests that overall the majority of pupils believe that writing is important or very important to succeed in life. The study didn't find significant differences between girls and boys, older pupils and younger pupils and pupils eligible for FSM and non-eligible for FSM. It did find differences however by ethnic group, with pupils from Asian ethnic group considering writing as more important to succeed in life than young people from a White background (Clark & Douglas, 2011).

These findings mirror the ones from United States. The majority of both teenagers and their parents who took part in the Pew Internet project agreed that good writing was an essential skill to succeed later in life. This belief was particularly high among Black families and families of lower levels of education (Pew Internet, 2008).

#### Views of what it means to be a good writer

Evidence suggests that most pupils thought that a good writer means enjoying writing, using one's imagination, using correct punctuation and knowing how to spell, among other things. Boys were more likely than girls to say that a good writer writes neatly, whereas girls were more likely to say that a good writer uses his or her imagination, reads a lot, tries things out and talks about writing.

The study also revealed age differences, with more older pupils (at Key Stage 3 and 4) saying that a good writer uses his or her imagination, uses punctuation correctly, checks his or her work, knows how to spell, reads a lot and enjoys writing. In contrast, more younger pupils (at Key Stage 2) said that a good writer writes neatly and writes a lot (Clark & Douglas, 2011).

### **6.4 Frequency and types of writing activity**

#### Frequency of writing

Evidence from the NLT studies suggests that most pupils write regularly. For example, Clark and Dugdale (2009) report that 75 per cent of pupils write regularly, with more girls than boys doing so. In addition, Clark (2012) found that 27 per cent of young people write every day and a similar proportion writes a few times a week. Again, the study found a relationship between writing frequency and attainment, with less able pupils writing less frequently than better achieving ones.

The following section summarises findings from the latest NLT study about the types of written activity children engage with.

**Table 2: Types of material written at least once a month by gender**

	All pupils	Boys	Girls
Text messages	69	65	74
Emails	47	48	50
Social networking site	52	49	54
Notes	35	26	44
Instant messages	45	41	46
Letters	29	24	34
Diary	23	11	36
Fiction	24	19	28
Lyrics	26	16	35
Blogs	14	13	15
Essays	12	12	13
Poems	16	12	21
Reviews	11	11	10
<b>Base</b>	17,089	8,680	8,267

Source: Clark, 2012

The evidence suggests that most pupils engaged in technology-based forms of writing at least once a month. Girls were more likely than boys to write text messages, emails, messages on social networking sites and instant messages. Girls were also more likely to write notes, letters, diaries, fiction, lyrics and poems.

There were no statistically significant differences between boys and girls regarding activities associated more with school life, such as essays and reviews.

Older pupils (at Key Stage 3 and 4) were more likely than Key Stage 2 pupils to engage in technology-based forms of writing.

The same study didn't find large differences between pupils eligible for FSM and non-eligible for FSM in relation to technology-based writing. However, pupils eligible for FSM pupils were more likely to write letters, poems, and lyrics.

The analysis revealed several differences in the writing activity of different ethnic groups. For example, pupils from the White ethnic group were more likely to write text messages and on a social networking site. Pupils from Asian and Black ethnic groups were more likely to write in a diary at least once a month. Pupils from the Black ethnic group were more likely to report writing poems, lyrics and essays.

Additional analysis looked at the relationship between types of writing and pupils' attainment. Certain types of writing were associated with higher writing attainment such as poems, fiction, reviews and diaries (Clark, 2012).

An international study found that teenagers who communicate frequently with friends and own computers or mobile phones were not more likely to write more for school or for themselves in comparison to teenagers who are less communicative and less gadget-rich. Bloggers however were more likely to write online and offline (Pew Internet, 2008).

## **7. What are the evidence gaps?**

- There is no evidence on why pupils perform less well in writing in comparison to reading and the other core subjects.
- There is little evidence on specific interventions to help pupils with writing, and very little evidence on interventions for secondary school pupils.
- There is limited evidence on the predictors of pupils' achievement in writing.
- There is very little evidence on effective strategies for teaching spelling.
- There is little evidence on pupils' performance in writing in studies of international comparisons.

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## 9. Annex A: detailed analysis of pupils' achievement in writing

### Background information to assessment and testing (Key Stage 1 to 3)

All children in maintained primary schools are required to be assessed by teachers in reading, writing, speaking and listening and mathematics when they reach the end of Key Stage 1 (KS1). They measure the extent to which pupils have the specific knowledge, skills and understanding which pupils are expected to have mastered by the end of KS1.

The National Curriculum standards have been designed so that most pupils will progress by approximately one level every two years. This means that by the end of KS1, pupils are expected to reach level 2, and by the end of KS2 they are expected to reach level 4.

Assessments in English for Key Stage 2 (KS2) changed significantly in 2012, following the recommendations of Lord Bew's independent review of testing, assessment and accountability at the end of primary school. Writing composition is now subject only to summative teacher assessment, and schools are no longer required to administer a writing test and submit it for external marking. As a result, measures based on writing teacher assessments have been introduced for the first time. A measure of overall attainment in English has been produced based on reading tests and writing teacher assessment results in place of the previous English measure which was based on the outcome of the reading and writing tests (DfE, 2012b).

Teacher Assessments at Key Stage 3 are made in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science and also in the non-core subjects, such as geography, art and music. Results from non-core subjects are no longer collected centrally and cannot be reported in this statistical release. Statutory tests are no longer taken by 14-year olds. By the end of Key Stage 3 pupils are expected to achieve Level 5 or 6 (DFE, 2012c).

The table below shows the age of child related to year group, Key Stage & expected attainment:

**Table 3: Age of child related to year group, Key Stage & expected attainment**

National Curriculum Year Group	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Key Stage	1		2			3			
Expected National Curriculum level at end of Key Stage	2		4			5/6			



## **Pre-school attainment**

Children attending Reception Year have been assessed using the Foundation Stage Profile (FSP) scales<sup>10</sup>.

Analysis of the 2012 data shows that:

- The majority of children (ranging from 71 per cent to 92 per cent) continued to work securely within the Early Learning Goals, in each of the 13 assessment scales.
- Writing is one of the topics assessed in the Communication, Language and Literacy learning area, and in 2012, 71 per cent of children were *working securely within* the early learning goals. This means they had a scale score of 6 points or more, and it was the lowest proportion of pupils among all learning areas.
- Girls performed better than boys in the assessment.
- Writing was also the assessment scale with the highest proportion of children *working towards* the early learning goals (i.e. achieving a total of 1-3 points) (DfE, 2012d).

## **Key Stage 1**

In 2012, 83 per cent achieved level 2, the expected level, or above in national KS1 teacher assessments in writing, compared with 87 per cent of children who did so in reading, 88 per cent in speaking and listening, 91 per cent in mathematics and 89 per cent in science. Fourteen per cent of all pupils achieved level 3 or above, which again was the lowest proportion among all subjects.

Looking at the last five years, pupils' performance has increased slightly, from 80 per cent achieving level 2 in 2008 to 81 per cent between 2009-2011. There has been a one percentage point increase in the proportion of pupils achieving level 3 in 2012 since the previous year. The table below presents detailed data for the proportions of pupils achieving level 2 or above.

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<sup>10</sup> The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile measured achievements of children aged five against 13 assessment scales, with 9 points within each scale ('scale point'). The 13 assessment scales are grouped into six areas of learning: personal, social and emotional development; communication, language and literacy; problem solving, reasoning and numeracy; knowledge and understanding of the world; physical development; creative development.

**Table 4 Percentages of pupils achieving Level 2 or above in Key Stage 1 teacher assessments and by pupil characteristics, 2012**

	Reading	Writing	Speaking and Listening	Mathematics	Science
<b>All Schools<sup>1</sup></b>					
All pupils	87	83	88	91	89
<b>State-funded schools (including Academies)<sup>2</sup></b>					
All pupils	87	83	88	91	89
<b>Gender</b>					
Boys	84	78	85	89	88
Girls	90	88	91	92	91
<b>Ethnicity</b>					
White	87	83	89	91	90
Mixed	88	84	89	91	90
Asian	88	84	85	90	86
Black	87	82	85	88	86
Chinese	90	87	85	96	90
<b>First Language</b>					
English <sup>3</sup>	88	84	90	91	91
Other than English <sup>4</sup>	84	80	81	88	84
Unclassified <sup>5</sup>	56	52	57	64	57
<b>Free School Meals (FSM)</b>					
FSM	76	70	79	82	80
All Other Pupils <sup>6</sup>	90	86	90	93	92
All pupils	87	83	88	91	89
<b>Special Educational Needs (SEN)</b>					
No identified SEN	95	93	95	97	96
All SEN pupils	55	46	60	66	64
SEN without a statement	58	49	64	70	68
School Action	63	53	70	74	73
School Action +	50	41	53	61	59
SEN with a statement	24	17	20	26	24
Unclassified <sup>8</sup>	44	41	48	54	47

*Source: National Pupil Database*

1. Includes all schools with pupils eligible for assessment at Key Stage 1. Participation by independent schools is voluntary, therefore only includes results from those independent schools which chose to make a return and which met the statutory standards for assessment and moderation.

2. Characteristic breakdowns are sourced from the school census and are only available for state funded schools (including Academies).

3. Includes 'Not known but believed to be English'.

4. Includes 'Not known but believed to be other than English'.

5. Includes pupils for whom first language was not obtained, refused or could not be determined.

6. Includes pupils not eligible for free school meals and for whom free school meal eligibility was unclassified or could not be determined.

8. Includes pupils for whom SEN provision could not be determined.

As can be seen from the above table there are stark differences between groups of children: girls outperform boys in all subjects, but the biggest gap (10 percentage points) is in writing, with 88 per cent achieving the expected level in writing compared to 78 per cent of boys. Regarding differences by ethnic group, Chinese pupils are the most likely to perform well and achieve the expected level in writing, whereas pupils from the Black group are less likely to achieve the expected level.

Children whose first language was 'other than English' were less likely to achieve the expected level in writing compared with children whose first language was English (80 per cent versus 84 per cent). Only 70 per cent of children eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) achieved the expected level in writing compared to 86 per cent of all other pupils.

Regarding Special Educational Needs (SEN) status, 46 per cent of all SEN children achieved the expected level in writing compared to 93 per cent of pupils with no identified SEN. This gap has remained consistently large over previous years but has narrowed by 2 percentage points in the last year. Compared to other subjects at KS1, pupils with SEN struggle most with writing.

Where a pupil has a statement of SEN or is School Action Plus, their primary need is recorded. The figures suggest that 35 per cent of girls with specific learning difficulty achieved the expected level in writing compared to 28 per cent of boys. Among pupils whose primary need is speech, language and communication needs (the largest group of SEN primary need), 41 per cent of girls achieved the expected level in writing, compared with 38 per cent of boys (DfE, 2012a).

Detailed data for pupils' achievement in writing by primary need are presented in the table below. The figures indicate that large proportions of children with moderate learning difficulty (78 per cent), severe learning difficulty (98 per cent) and profound and multiple learning difficulty (98 per cent) do not meet the expected level in writing.

Table 5: Percentage of pupils achieving each level in Key Stage 1 teacher assessments by SEN primary need

Key Stage 1 Writing	Number of eligible pupils <sup>3</sup>	Percentage of pupils achieving:									Achieving level 2 or above
		Absent	Disapp lied	Working towards Level 1	1	2C	2B	2A	3	4	
<b>SEN Provision</b>											
No identified SEN	460,281	0	0	0	6	17	33	26	17	0	93
All SEN pupils	119,125	0	0	12	41	26	15	4	1	0	46
SEN without a statement	108,258	0	0	8	43	28	15	4	1	0	49
School Action	69,986	0	0	4	43	32	16	4	1	x	53
School Action +	38,272	0	0	15	44	21	13	5	2	x	41
SEN with a statement	10,867	0	1	57	24	8	6	2	1	0	17
Unclassified <sup>9</sup>	2,427	4	3	30	22	15	15	8	3	0	41
All pupils	581,833	0	0	3	14	19	29	21	14	0	83
<b>SEN Primary Need<sup>10</sup></b>											
Specific Learning Difficulty	2,922	0	0	18	51	20	8	2	1	0	30
Moderate Learning Difficulty	9,041	0	0	25	53	15	5	1	0	0	22
Severe Learning Difficulty	1,755	x	2	87	9	1	1	0	0	0	2
Profound & Multiple Learning Difficulty	739	x	x	89	6	1	1	x	0	0	2
Behaviour, Emotional & Social Difficulties	8,608	0	0	13	39	23	17	6	2	0	48
Speech, Language and Communications Needs	15,862	0	0	19	42	21	13	4	1	x	39
Hearing Impairment	1,076	0	0	12	30	20	22	11	5	0	58
Visual Impairment	657	0	x	11	26	21	27	x	4	0	63
Multi-Sensory Impairment	71	0	0	35	23	21	11	6	4	x	42
Physical Disability	2,143	0	1	23	28	17	17	8	4	0	47
Autistic Spectrum Disorder	4,216	0	1	39	28	13	12	6	2	0	33
Other Difficulty/Disability	2,049	0	0	18	37	18	16	6	4	0	44
All SEN primary need pupils <sup>10,11</sup>	49,139	0	0	24	40	18	12	4	2	x	36

Source: National Pupil Database

1. Absent and Disapp lied are not reported in science main level but are reported as Unable. Science (main level) is not disaggregated into Levels 2A, 2B or 2C, but recorded as Level 2 in science.

2. Figures for 2008 - 2011 are based on final data, 2012 figures are based on provisional data.

3. Pupils who were significantly absent so that no TA could be made on that pupil or who were unable to access the National Curriculum, were recorded as 'x'.

4. Includes pupils for whom ethnicity or first language was not obtained, refused or could not be determined.

5. Includes 'Not known but believed to be English'.

6. Includes 'Not known but believed to be other than English'.

7. Includes pupils not eligible for free school meals and for whom free school meal eligibility was unclassified or could not be determined.

8. Includes pupils who are looked after children. Figures are available for 2012 in December.

9. Includes pupils for whom SEN provision could not be determined.

10. Includes pupils at School Action Plus and those pupils with a statement of SEN. It does not include pupils at School Action.

11. Includes 24 pupils in 2008 and 1 pupil in 2011 whose SEN primary need could not be determined.

. = Not applicable.

x = Figures not shown in order to protect confidentiality. See the section on confidentiality in the text for information on data suppression.

Percentages have been rounded to nearest whole number, so may not sum to 100.

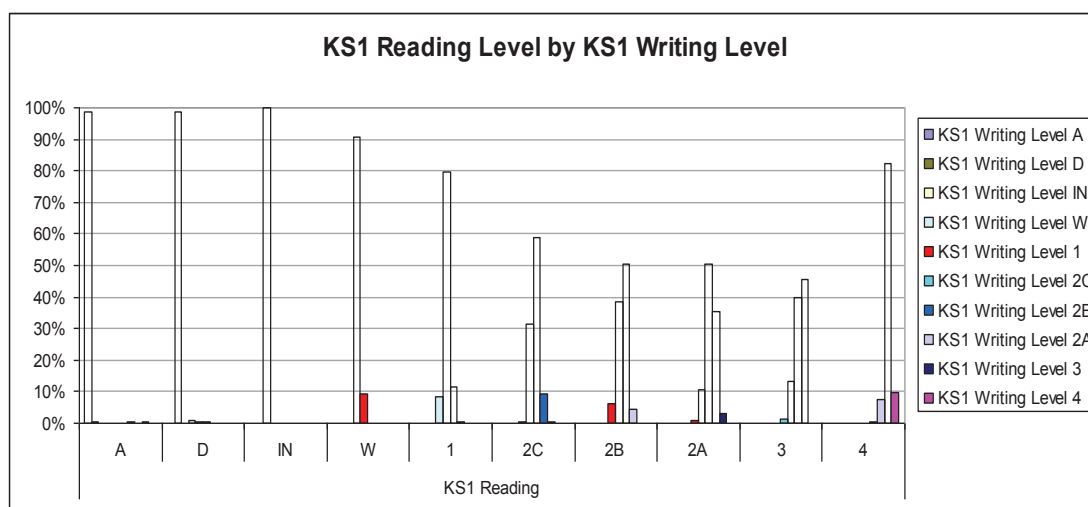
## Reading compared to writing

DfE internal analysis investigated pupils' performance in writing in comparison to reading, using the 2011 KS1 reading and writing levels of pupils. It also compared the results of pupils achieving the highest levels in KS1 reading (i.e. level 2A and above) and their KS1 writing results, by pupil characteristics.

The analysis shows that pupils achieving level A (absent), D (disapp lied), IN (inapplicable) and W (working towards the test level) in writing tend to achieve the same in reading. However, there is a spread of results from level 1 and above in reading levels achieved compared to writing results. For example, out of the pupils achieving a level 2B (the expected level) in reading, only 51 per cent achieve the same level in writing, with 5 per cent achieving a level 2A, 38 per cent achieving a

level 2C and 6 per cent achieving a level 1 in writing. Overall, 44 per cent of pupils achieving level 2B in reading are achieving a lower level in writing.

**Table 6**



The same pattern occurs with pupils achieving level 2A and 3 in reading. More than half of these pupils (who are performing above the expected level in reading) are achieving a lower level in writing. Girls are more likely to perform better than boys, with over half of girls achieving level 3 or above in both reading and writing compared to only 38 per cent of boys. FSM and SEN pupils are less likely to perform as well in writing as they do in reading compared to pupils not eligible for FSM and without SEN respectively.

Children whose first language was 'other than English' are slightly more likely to perform as well in writing as they do in reading compared to children whose first language was English. The performance of most ethnic groups is similar for reading and writing outcomes.

## **Key Stage 2**

In 2012, 81 per cent of pupils achieved the expected level (level 4 or above) based on writing teacher assessment, compared to 75 per cent of pupils achieving the expected level in 2011, based on national tests. Eighty seven per cent of pupils achieved the expected level in reading and 84 per cent in mathematics. Some difference between test and teacher assessment results can be expected as the outcomes are measured in different ways. Reading and writing teacher assessments are not available prior to 2012, but a comparison of English test and English teacher assessment outcomes since 2007 suggests that they differed by no more than 2 percentage points in any year (DfE, 2012b).

Looking at the writing results in more detail, the gender gap still persists, with 76 per cent of boys achieving the expected level compared to 87 per cent of girls. The gender gap is less pronounced in reading, mathematics and science.

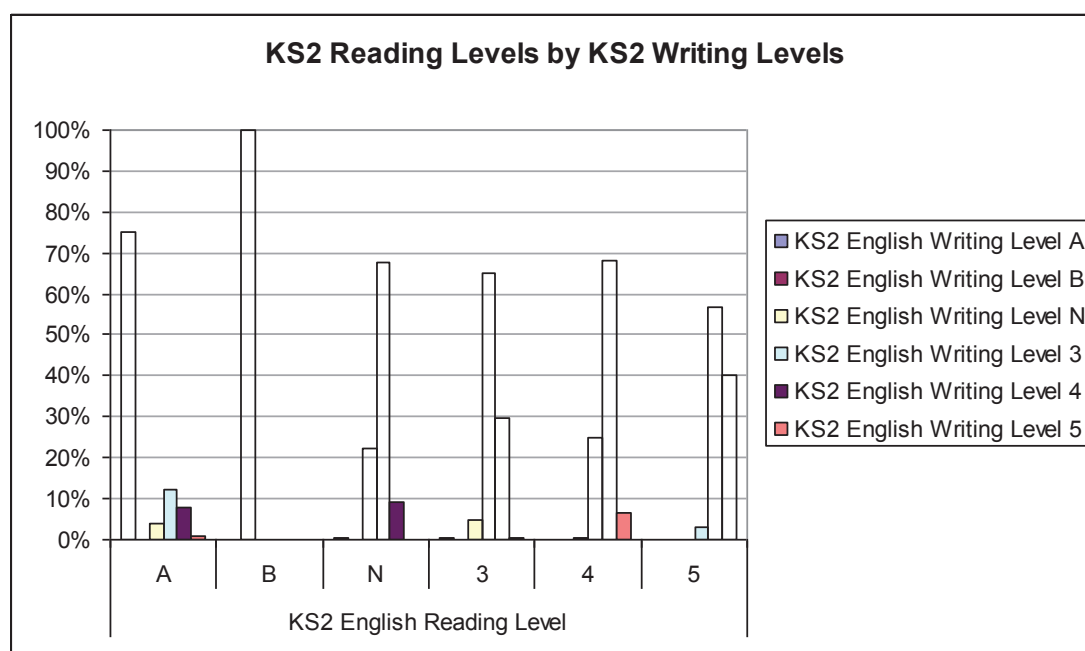
Twenty eight per cent of pupils achieved level 5 or above, with girls outperforming boys (35 per cent compared to 22 per cent). Writing was the element with the lowest performance compared to reading, mathematics and science (DfE, 2012b).

### Writing compared to reading

As with Key Stage 1, additional internal DfE analysis compared the 2011 Key Stage 2 reading and writing levels of pupils. Overall, the same pattern that we saw in Key Stage 1 is repeated at Key Stage 2.

The table below shows the breakdown of levels achieved by pupils in Key Stage 2 reading and their corresponding Key Stage 2 writing levels:

**Table 7**



Source: DfE internal analysis using NPD, 2011

Pupils achieving level B (working below the level assessed by the tests) are reported in this way in both reading and writing. For pupils who are achieving an A (absent) or N (no test level awarded) there is a spread of results that they achieve in writing.

There is also a spread of results from pupils achieving level 3 and above in reading levels compared to writing results. For example, out of the pupils achieving a level 4 (the expected level) in reading, 68 per cent achieve the same level in writing, with 25 per cent achieving a level 3, and 6 per cent achieving level 5 in writing. Of pupils achieving level 5 in reading, 60 per cent achieved a lower level in writing.

Regarding the achievement of certain groups of pupils, fewer boys than girls are likely to perform as well in writing as they do in reading. Pupils who have a SEN and pupils eligible for FSM are less likely to perform as well in writing as they do in reading compared to non SEN pupils and non FSM pupils respectively.

Children whose first language was 'other than English' are slightly more likely to perform as well in writing as they do in reading compared to children whose first

language was English. The performance of most ethnic groups is similar for reading and writing outcomes.

### **Key Stages 3 and 4**

In October 2008, the Department (then DCSF) announced its decision to discontinue national testing at Key Stage 3 (KS3) in English, mathematics and science for 14 year olds (i.e. externally set and marked tests). Since then pupils have been assessed through on-going teacher assessment, with regular real-time reports to parents. End of Key Stage teacher assessments continue to be published at the national and local authority level. NC tests were published for last time for the academic year 2007/08.

Writing at KS3 is part of the English assessment. Teacher assessment results for 2012 show that 84 per cent of pupils achieved level 5 or above, an increase of five percentage points since 2010 and ten percentage points since 2007. Ninety per cent of girls did so compared to 79 per cent of boys (DfE, 2012c).

### **Key Stage 4**

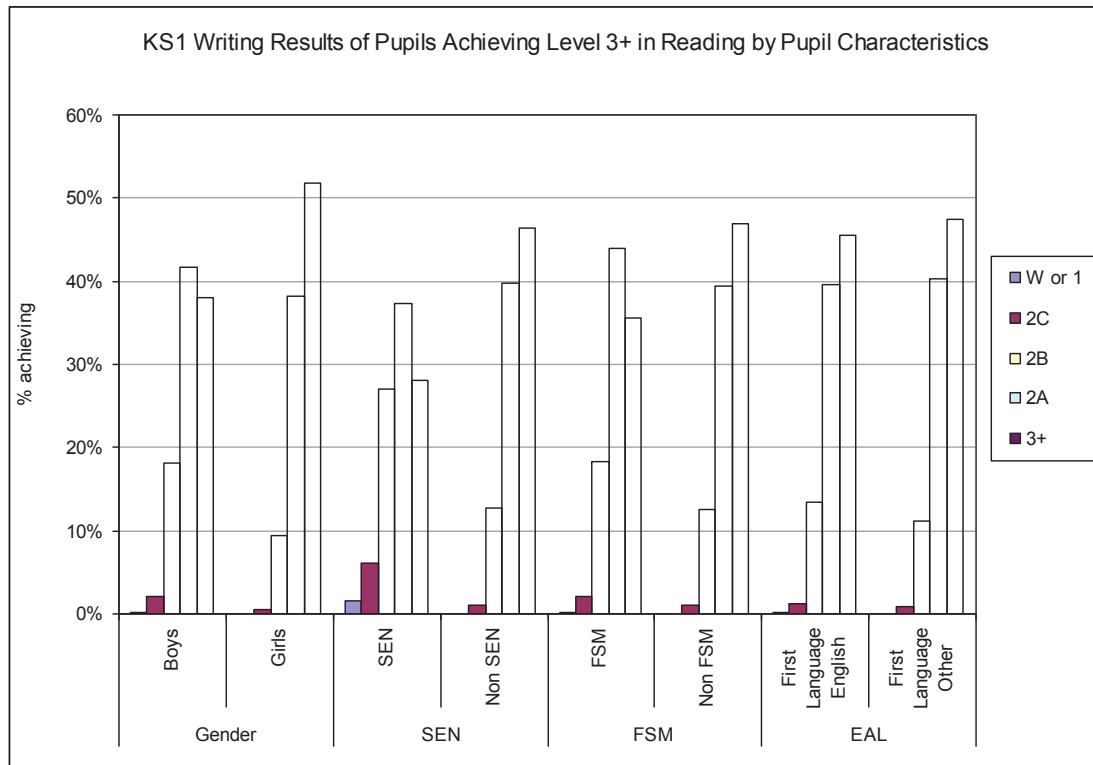
Writing is not assessed separately at KS4 but it is part of the English assessment, together with reading, speaking and listening.

At KS4, the latest data shows that in 2011/12 in state-funded mainstream schools in England 568,600 pupils attempted a GCSE in English, and 69 per cent of those achieved a grade A\*-C. The gender gap is still evident with 76 per cent of girls getting a grade A\*-C compared to 62 per cent of boys.

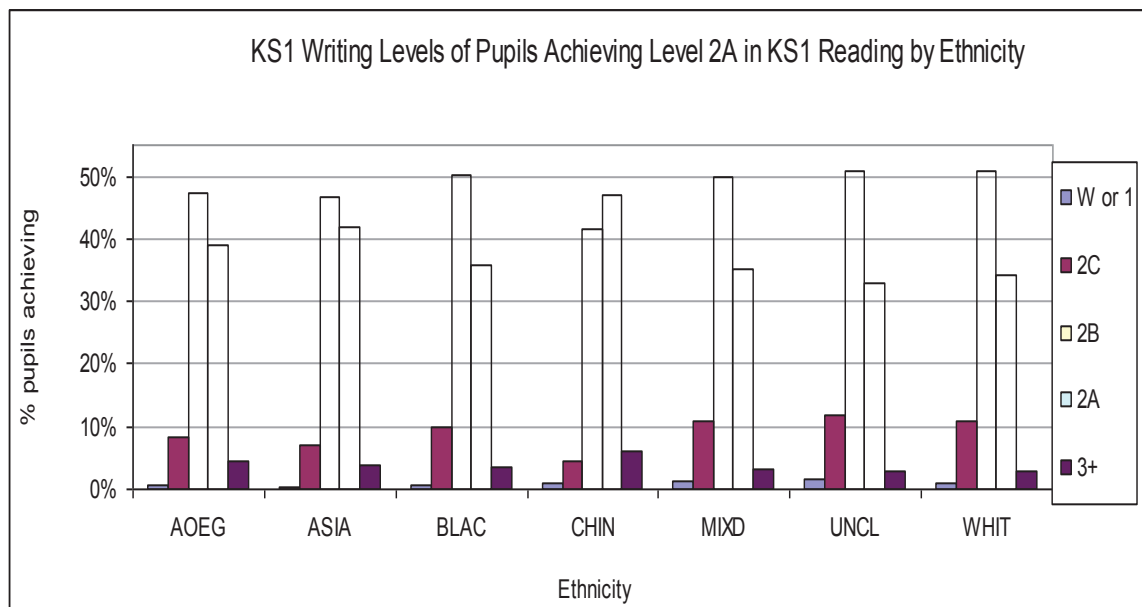
The percentage of pupils achieving the expected level of progress in English is one of the main indicators in the GCSE tables: in 2012, the gap between the proportion of girls and boys achieving the expected level of progress in English between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 was 12 percentage points, with 75 per cent of girls achieving so compared with 63 per cent of boys. The equivalent figures for 2007/08 were 70 per cent for girls and 59 per cent for boys, which suggest a big improvement in the proportions of pupils making the expected progress and a reduction in the gender gap. For comparison purposes, the equivalent figure for the gap in mathematics in 2012 is 4 percentage points (DfE, 2012c).

**Additional tables showing KS1 and KS2 writing attainment by pupil characteristics.**

**Table 8**

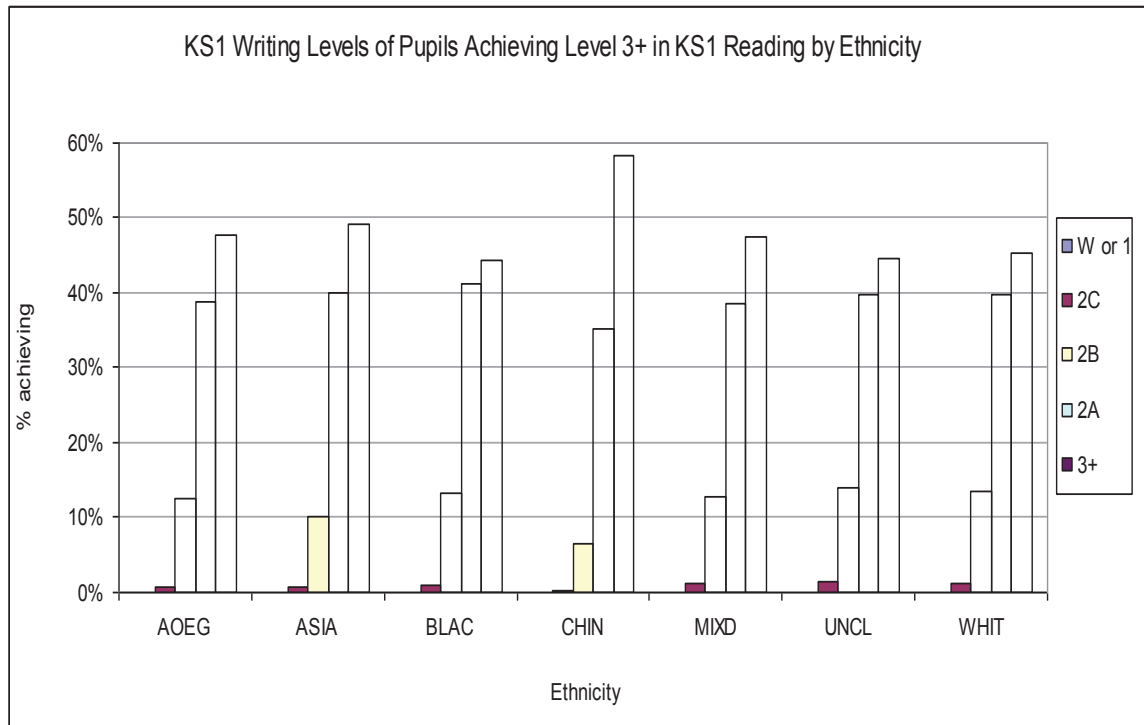


**Table 9**





**Table 10**



**Table 11**

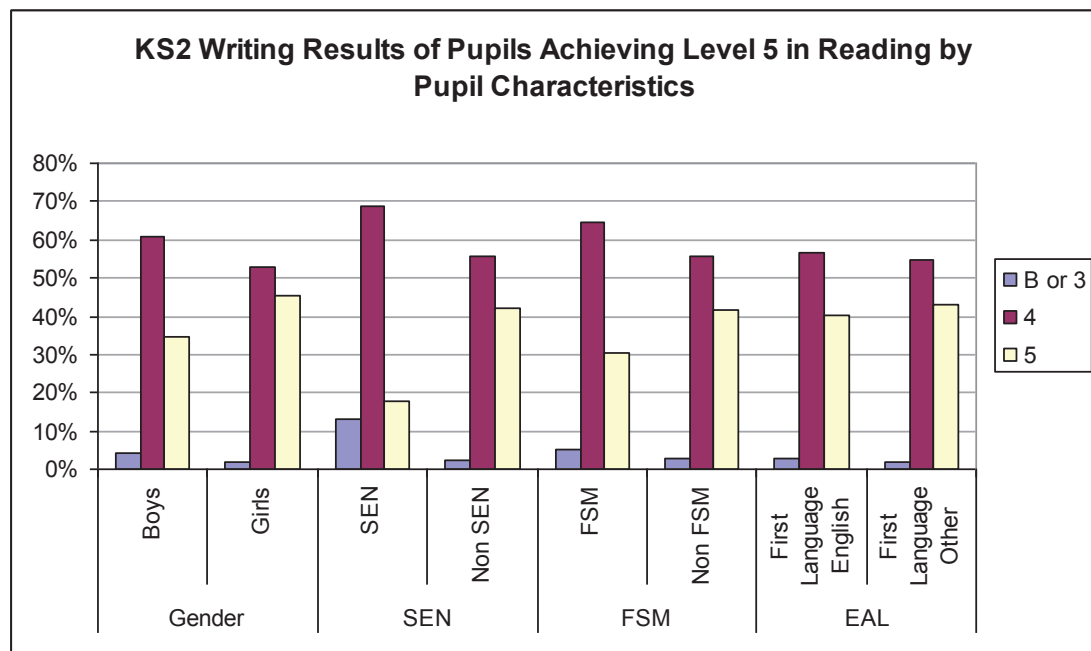
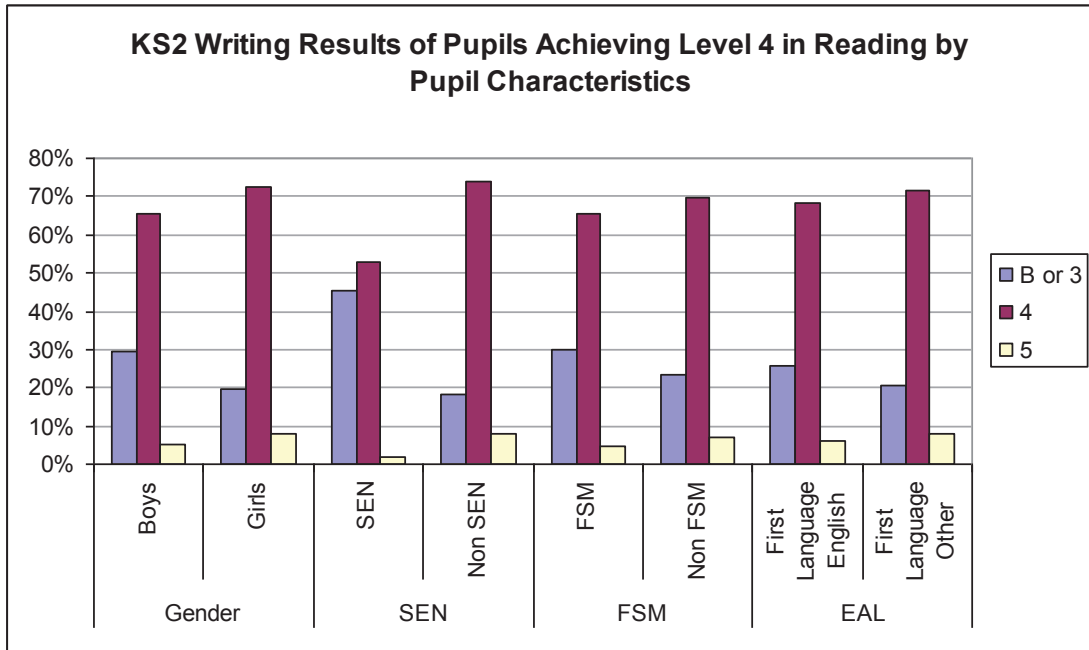


Table 12



## 10. Annex B: examples of techniques within the four purposes of writing

Purpose	Specific Technique	How Students Can Use the Technique	Grade Range
Describe	Sensory details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use their five senses, as applicable:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What did you <i>see</i>? How did it <i>look</i>?</li> <li>What sounds did you <i>hear</i>?</li> <li>What did you <i>touch</i>? How did it <i>feel</i>?</li> <li>What could you <i>smell</i>?</li> <li>What did you <i>taste</i>?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	K-3
Narrate	Story grammar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider the following questions when developing their story:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Who</i> are the main characters?</li> <li><i>When</i> does the story take place?</li> <li><i>Where</i> does the story take place?</li> <li><i>What</i> do the main characters want to do?</li> <li><i>What</i> happens when the main characters try to do it?</li> <li><i>How</i> does the story end?</li> <li><i>How</i> does the main character feel?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	1-3
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In older grades, expand the strategy in the following ways:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tell the story from the point of view of a character other than the main character.</li> <li>Add an interesting or surprising twist to the story.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	4-6
Inform	Report writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete a K-W-L chart:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What I <b>K</b>now</li> <li>What I <b>W</b>ant to know</li> <li>What I <b>L</b>earned</li> </ul> </li> <li>In the K-W-L chart, gather appropriate information:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brainstorm. (What do I know about the topic?)</li> <li>Extend brainstorming. (What do I want to know about the topic? What other information would be helpful to learn about the topic?)</li> <li>Gather additional information and add to the chart. (What have I learned? Did I list anything during brainstorming that was inaccurate and needs to be crossed off the chart?)</li> </ul> </li> <li>Review the K-W-L chart and circle the most important ideas to include in the report.</li> <li>Develop an outline, showing which ideas will be included in the report and the order in which they will be presented.</li> <li>Continue planning while writing, gathering new information, and adding to the outline as needed.</li> <li>Be sure to implement each aspect of the plan as they write.</li> </ul>	2-6
Persuade/ analyze	STOP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Before they write, STOP and:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Suspend judgment.</li> <li>Take sides.</li> <li>Organize ideas.</li> <li>Plan to adjust as they write.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	4-6
	DARE <sup>53</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DARE to check their paper to be sure they have:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developed their thesis.</li> <li>Added ideas to support their ideas.</li> <li>Rejected arguments on the other side.</li> <li>Ended with a strong conclusion.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
	TREE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As they write:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tell what they believe. (State a topic sentence.)</li> <li>Provide three or more Reasons. (Why do I believe this?)</li> <li>End it. (Wrap it up right.)</li> <li>Examine. (Do I have all my parts?)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	2-3
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In older grades, expand the strategy as follows:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Replace the Examine step with Explain reasons. (Say more about each reason.)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	4-6

Source: What Works Clearinghouse (2012)

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