

Assessing Secondary Writing

Writing attainment in year 7, September 2020

20th October 2020

Impact Analysis

SUMMARY REPORT

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1 The Writing Attainment of Pupils in Year 7

In September 2020, 112445 year 7 pupils from 644 schools across England sat a one hour open-ended writing assessment on the topic of their future career. The assessment was judged collaboratively by teachers across the schools using Comparative Judgement. The process of shared judging ensures that all scores across all schools are standardised, not only between schools, but also with assessments taken by pupils across the Primary phase of education in 2019-2020 (Wheadon, Barmby, Christodoulou & Henderson, 2020). The task set for year 7 was identical to the task sat by year 5 pupils in October 2019, and a representative sample of 50 scripts from this Year 5 assessment were included in the judging. Teachers were therefore directly comparing the year 7 performance to the year 5 performance, and indirectly placing the writing on the wider measurement scale.

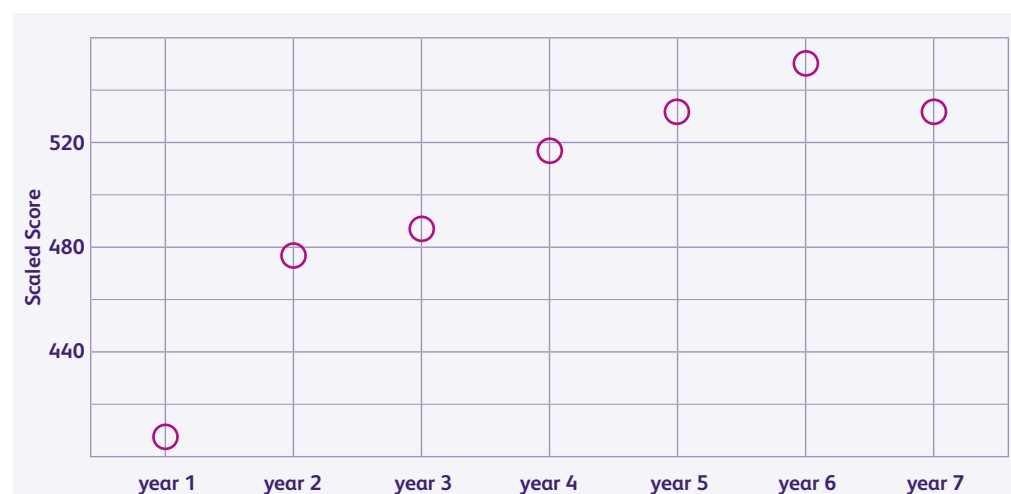
The average Key Stage 2 and GCSE outcomes of the schools participating are very similar to the national averages, suggesting that the samples are not skewed to either high or low ability.

The results from the year 7 assessment show that the pupils performed at roughly the same level as pupils who took the same assessment in November of their Year 5 (Table 1). In other words, the year 7 pupils' writing was judged by the teachers to be at the same level as that produced by pupils 22 months younger.

Table 1:
Scaled Score
(2019-2020)

Year Group	Session	Pupils	Scaled Score	
			Average	SD
year 1	Jan 20	29826	410	58
year 2	Mar 20	31394	476	49
year 3	Oct 19	33945	485	44
year 4	Jan 20	33695	517	42
year 5	Nov 19	33095	531	40
year 6	Mar 20	28772	550	35
year 7	Sept 20	112445	533	41

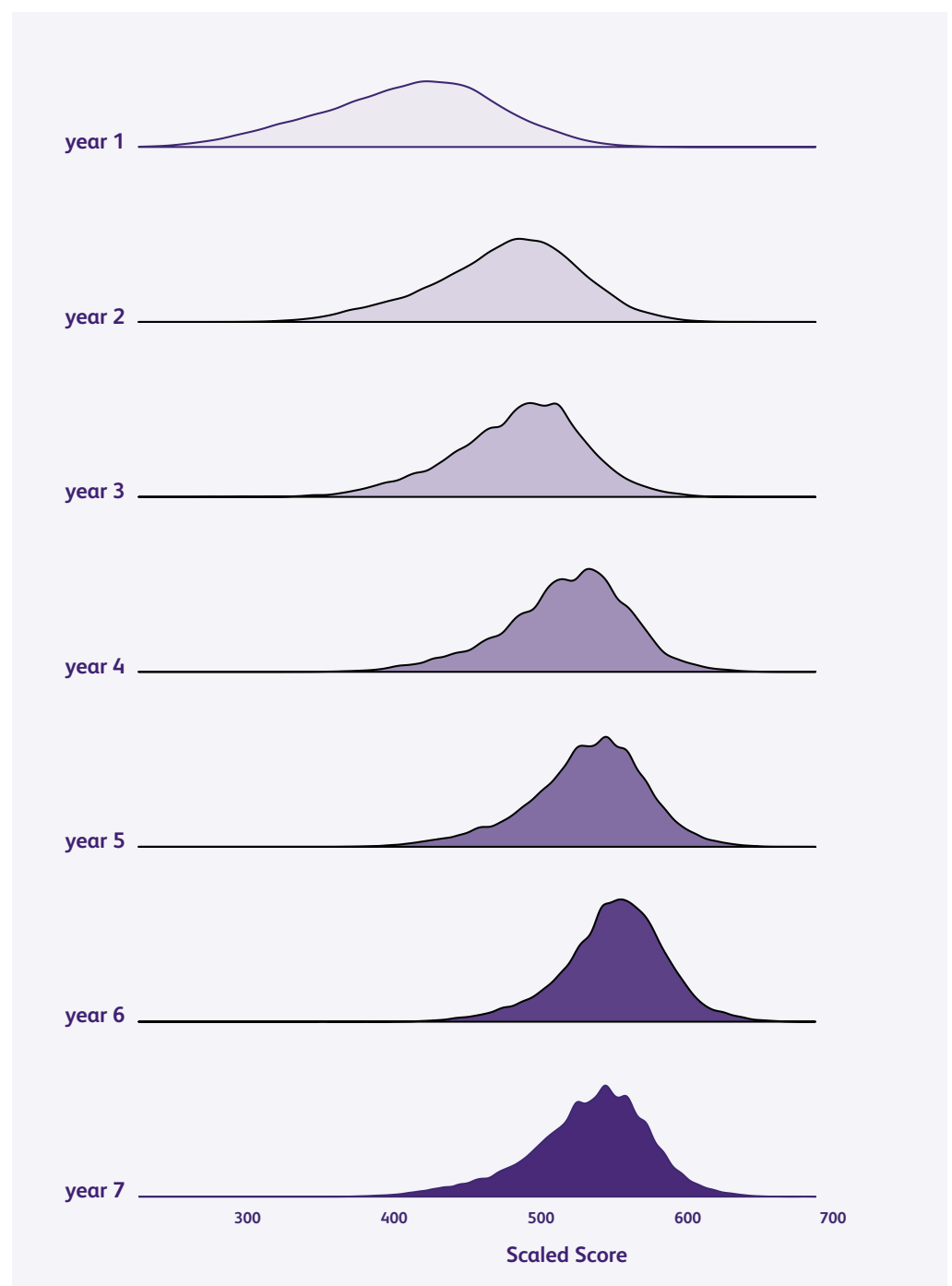
Figure 1:
Average scaled scores



2 Within Year Group variation of writing attainment

There is a substantial variation of writing attainment within each year. The range of attainment does, however, appear to fall as pupils progress through school (Table 1). This process is reversed in year 7 as the range returns to its year 5 level (Figure 2).

Figure 2:
Range of Attainment



3 The Gender Gap

The gender gap shows some sign of decreasing as pupils progress through school, with the smallest gap apparent in year 6. In year 7, however, the gap has widened back to a level similar to year 4 (Table 2).

Figure 3:
The Gender Gap

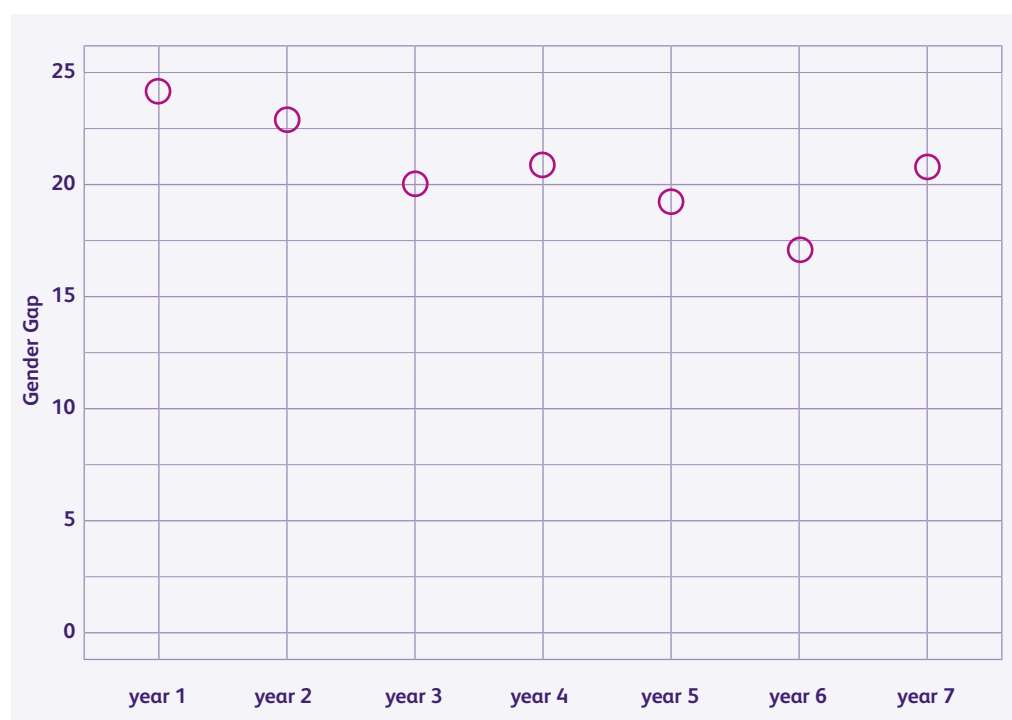


Table 2:
The Gender Gap
(2019-2020)

Year Group	Pupils		Scaled Score		
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Gender Gap
year 1	15017	14809	398	422	24
year 2	15896	15498	465	488	23
year 3	17140	16805	475	495	20
year 4	16915	16780	507	528	21
year 5	16707	16388	522	541	19
year 6	14505	14267	541	558	17
year 7	56293	56152	522	543	21

4 The Pupil Premium Gap

The Pupil Premium gap is as wide as the gender gap in year 1, but falls more rapidly than the gender gap between years 1 and 6. In year 7 it does appear to have widened again following the school disruption (Table 3) but the increase in the pupil premium gap from year 6 to year 7 is half the size of the increase in the gender gap. The lower percentage of pupil premium pupils in year 7 may be due to schools under-reporting the pupil premium pupils in their year 7 at this stage, so the year 7 figures are as yet provisional.

Figure 4:
The Pupil Premium Gap

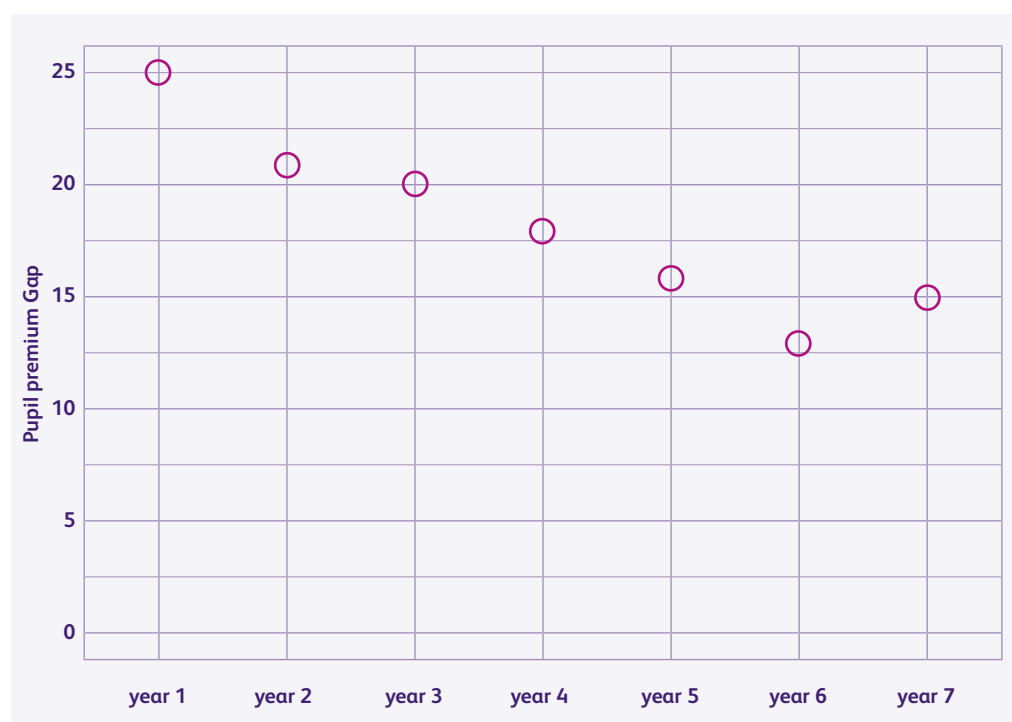


Table 3:
The Pupil Premium Gap
(2019-2020)

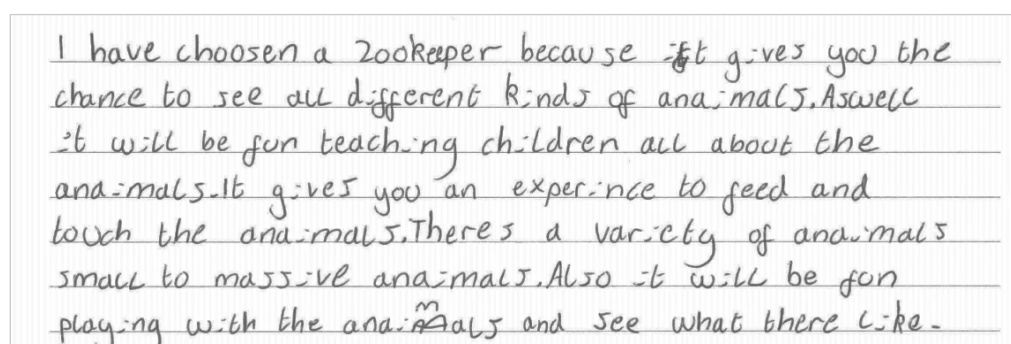
Year Group	Pupils		Scaled Score	
	% of Pupils with Pupil Premium	Not Pupil Premium	Pupil Premium	Pupil Premium Gap
year 1	17	414	389	25
year 2	20	481	460	21
year 3	19	489	469	20
year 4	23	521	503	18
year 5	24	535	519	16
year 6	26	553	540	13
year 7	21	536	521	15

5 What does 22 months in writing attainment look like?

Our results suggest a substantial fall in writing attainment equivalent to around 22 months of learning. Here are some examples of what the fall looks like.

Firstly, the first paragraph of a script that scored 533, the mean score in the Year 7 assessment, two marks higher than the mean score in the November Year 5 assessment.

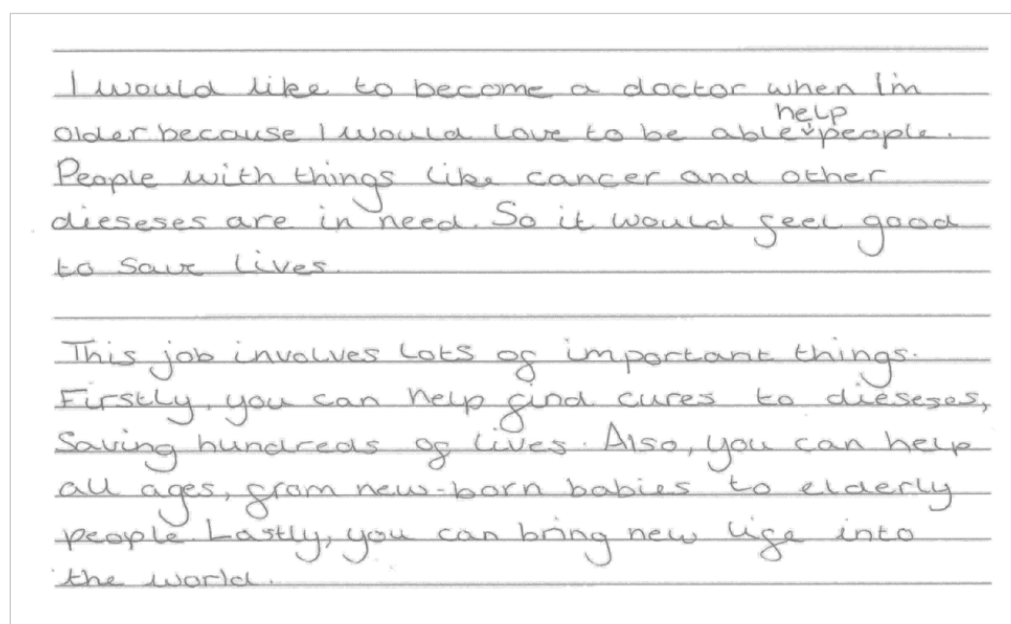
Figure 5:
Year 7 writing, scaled
score 533



I have choosen a Zookeeper because ~~it~~ gives you the chance to see all different kinds of animals. Aswell it will be fun teaching children all about the animals. It gives you an experience to feed and touch the animals. There's a variety of animals small to massive animals. Also it will be fun playing with the animals and see what there like.

Figure 6:
Year 7 writing, scaled
score 550

Secondly, a piece with a score of 550, which was the mean score when year 6 were assessed in March, 17 scaled score points higher.

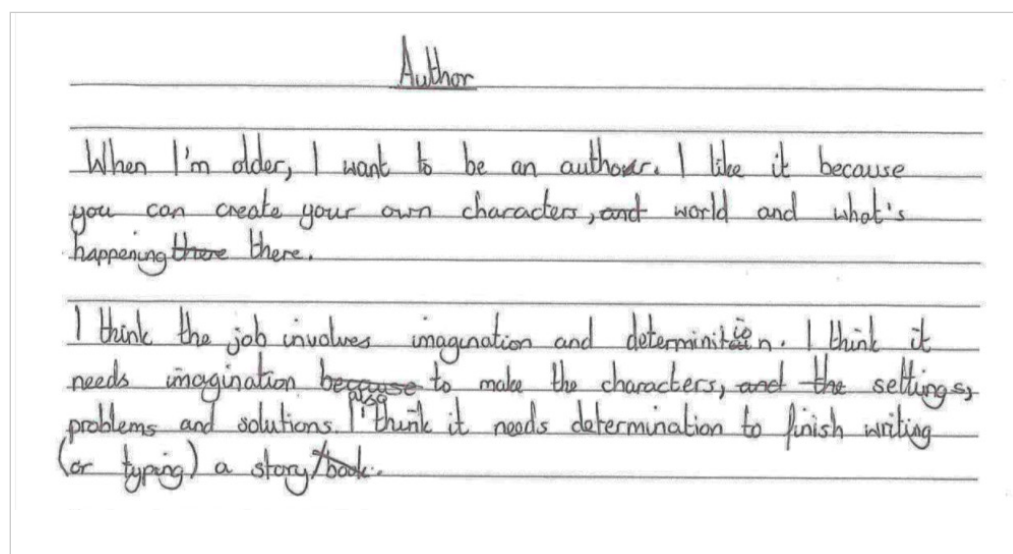


I would like to become a doctor when I'm older because I would love to be able ^{help} people. People with things like cancer and other diseases are in need. So it would feel good to save lives.

This job involves lots of important things. Firstly, you can help find cures to diseases, saving hundreds of lives. Also, you can help all ages, from new-born babies to elderly people. Lastly, you can bring new life into the world.

5 What does 22 months in writing attainment look like?

Figure 7: Year 7 writing, scaled score 557 Finally, a piece with a score of 557, one which we might have hoped year 7 would have achieved given the time difference between the year 6 and year 7 assessments.



The gap between a score of 533 and 557 is substantial and meaningful. Writing with a score of 557 tends to be more sophisticated and to employ a greater variety of vocabulary and sentence structures than writing with a score of 533.

6 Conclusions

This report shows that writing attainment at the start of year 7 in secondary schools in England in September 2020 is at the same level as that of pupils 22 months younger. The writing attainment appears to have been affected adversely by a combination of the summer holiday, school transition, and prior disruption caused by COVID-19. Despite widespread fears, the widening in the pupil premium gap in writing is small, and outweighed by the increase in the gender gap.

We cannot say for sure that the disruption due to COVID-19 alone is responsible for the fall in writing attainment, as this is the first time we have ever tested a large nationally representative sample of Year 7 pupils. We would expect writing attainment to continue improving from Primary education into Secondary education, but the rate of improvement may well decline, and be impacted by a transfer to new schools and a new context. Research on the summer holiday effect and transition in England is limited and largely anecdotal, however, a recent review (Morgan *et al.* 2019) suggested that pupils from poorer backgrounds may take several weeks to catch up with the levels of numeracy and literacy that they achieved prior to the summer holidays. A meta-analysis in the US suggested that pupils appear to regress in the spring vacation by around 1 month, or 1 tenth of a standard deviation, although vocabulary scores may actually increase following a holiday (Cooper, Nye, Charlton, Lindsay & Greathouse, 1996).

Our analysis suggests that the fall in writing attainment is measurable in years rather than weeks, although we cannot say how long it will take pupils to catch up with the levels of writing they were achieving before the national lockdown.

References

- Cooper H, Nye B, Charlton K, Lindsay J, Greathouse S.** The Effects of Summer Vacation on Achievement Test Scores: A Narrative and Meta-Analytic Review. *Review of Educational Research.* 1996;66(3):227-268. doi: 10.3102/00346543066003227
- Morgan K, Melendez-Torres GJ, Bond A, Hawkins J, Hewitt G, Murphy S, Moore G.** Socio-Economic Inequalities in Adolescent Summer Holiday Experiences, and Mental Wellbeing on Return to School: Analysis of the School Health Research Network/Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children Survey in Wales. *Int J Environ Res Public Health.* 2019 Mar 28;16(7):1107. doi: 10.3390/ijerph16071107. PMID: 30925676; PMCID: PMC6480971.
- Wheadon C, Barmby P, Christodoulou D, Henderson B.** A comparative judgement approach to the large-scale assessment of primary writing in England. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice.* 2020; 27:1, 46-64, doi: 10.1080/0969594X.2019.1700212