St Christopher's

Reading and Literacy Bulletin

Half Term 1 | September 2024

'The reading and writing of Standard English, alongside proficient language development, is the key to unlocking the rest of the academic curriculum. Pupils who struggle to read struggle in all subjects and the wonders of a knowledge-rich curriculum passes them by unread.'

Ofsted Reading Framework 2021

The theme of this half term's bulletin is the lasting impact of the pandemic on literacy, the challenges facing schools, and what can be done about it in our classrooms.

Alex Quigley wrote a blog around this issue in May 2023 where he summarised the problem as *'a hidden problem with the damage wrought by the pandemic on pupils who have joined secondary school. The evidence of a dip in national date at both Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 1 is obvious. The solutions to such national and school level challenges are less obvious. Writing has often been described as the 'neglected R' compared to reading and 'rithmetic (maths). Schools can invest in programmes and interventions, but consistent high-quality teaching is going to be essential for the greatest number of pupils.'*

The following graphic summarises the impact of the pandemic on outcomes, found here:
COVID-19 and literacy: Analysis and recommendations | National Literacy Trust

Attainment gap

The attainment gap between pupils from lower and higher income backgrounds has widened, with studies suggesting pupils in Key Stages 1 and 3 were particularly affected by learning loss during the pandemic (**EEF, 2022**; **DfE, 2022**). Notably, results in both Key Stage 2 national tests (SATs) and GCSEs showed the attainment gap was found to be at its highest level for a decade (**Department for Education [DfE], 2022**; **DfE, 2022a**).

Educational inequality

During school closures, children and young people's experience of learning at home depended on their school's ability to support remote teaching (**Montacute and Cullinane, 2021**), their access to resources (**Teach First, 2021**; **Ofcom, 2021**), their parents' time, confidence and ability to support their learning (**Elliot Major et al., 2021**) and their own mental wellbeing and motivation (**Anders et al., 2021**).

Learning loss - primary

At Key Stage 1, just 62% of disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected level of the phonics screening check, compared with 80% of their peers. In reading, just 51% of disadvantaged pupils met the expected standard, compared with 72% of non-disadvantaged pupils (**DfE, 2022b**).
At Key Stage 2, 61% of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSMs) reached the expected standard in reading, compared with 79% of their peers (**DfE, 2022**).

Learning loss - secondary

By Autumn 2021, commercial reading assessments showed that secondary pupils from non-disadvantaged backgrounds were 2.0 months behind expectations in reading, while disadvantaged backgrounds were 3.5 months behind (**RL & EPI, 2022**). While, overall GCSE results were higher in 2022 than 2019 (with outcomes at grade 4 and above at 73% vs. 67% in 2019), the attainment gap had widened, with results showing a reversal of a decade of progress in closing the gap (**DfE, 2022**).

A report from the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) shows that the negative impacts on reading progress from Covid partial school closures was greatest among Key Stage 1 pupils, particularly those in Year 1.

The study, which analysed trends across several Covid education impact papers published between June 2020 and February 2022, also suggests that by summer 2021, maths attainment was most severely affected among Key Stage 2 pupils and maths learning recovery in this age group was much slower than reading for Key Stage 2.

Figure 1: Covid gap by primary school year for reading

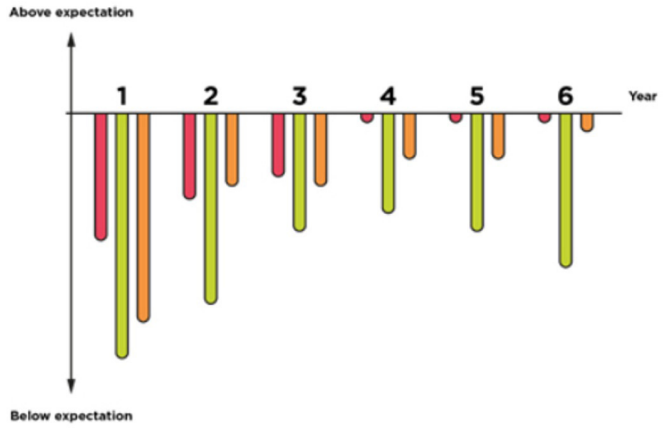
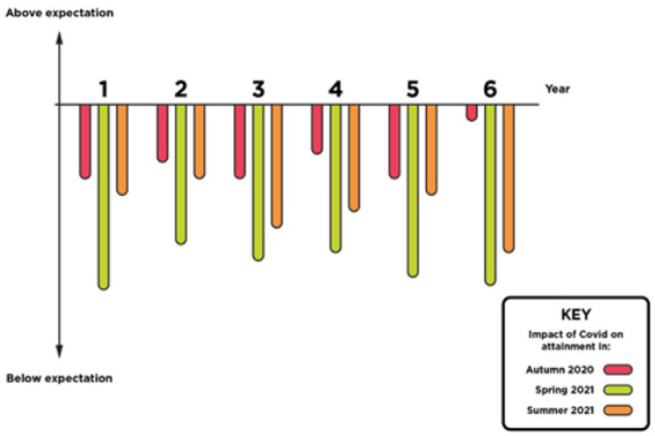


Figure 2: Covid gap by primary school year for mathematics



However, in more positive news, more recent research suggests that overall, primary education has not been as badly affected as first feared (perhaps reflecting efforts at recovery from the primary sector) although this is certainly not true for disadvantaged pupils. **Reading among England's primary children not affected by pandemic: new report | University of Oxford**

> "We can't be sure of all the ways [the pandemic] affected teaching and learning, but the fact we do not see a decline in reading achievement in England since 2016 is encouraging"
> **Dr Ariel Lindorff**

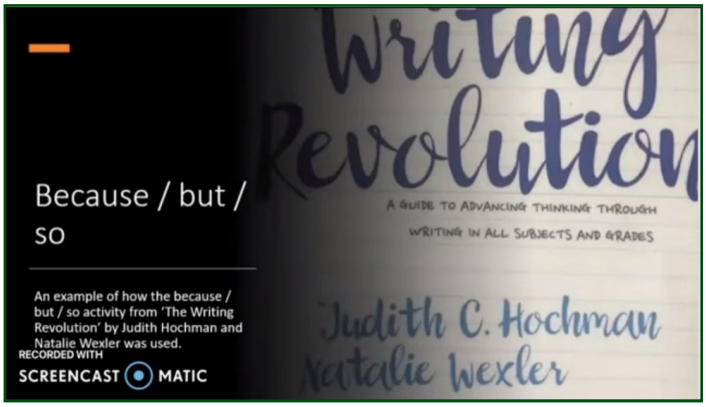
Whilst whole school initiatives are important, and **Alex Quigley outlines 9 key strategies** commonly in place across education, closing the literacy gap can also be addressed in our own classroom practice, but this cannot ever be the sole responsibility of 'writing' subjects such as English or History.

Our role is therefore not simply about big picture intervention, but 'little picture' lesson support. In an article from 2018, Judith Hochman notes that in his excellent introduction to a series of blog posts on writing in science, Pritesh Raichura writes,

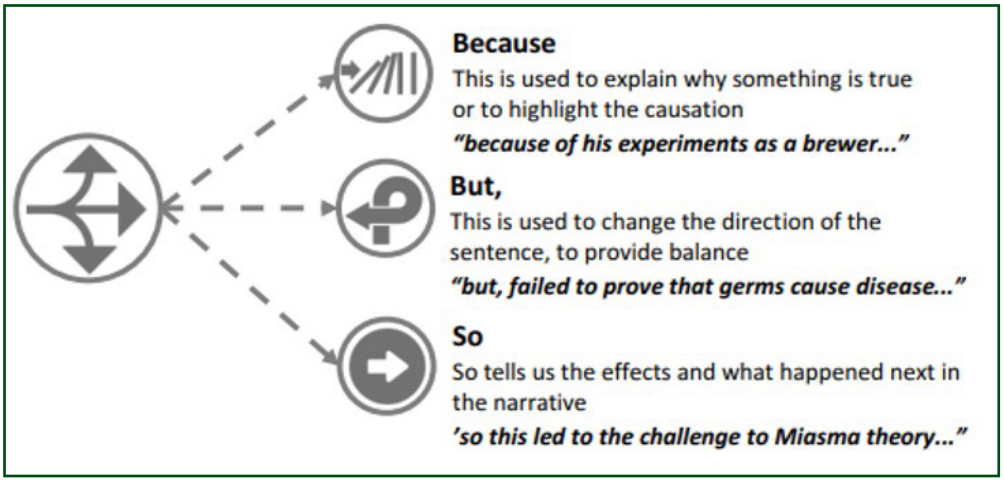
"The task of teaching pupils is not reserved solely for English teachers. You cannot teach writing devoid of content, and you cannot truly say you teach a discipline unless your pupils become proficient at explaining the ideas of your subject in prose. So, teaching writing through your subject is inevitable."

Although Raichura and other teacher-authors in this online symposium are writing about science, much of what they describe is applicable to all disciplines. **Full blog found here.**

Hochman is the originator and champion of 'The Writing Revolution' which promoted the 'because, but, so' technique, something all subjects can use, and has proved remarkably effective for many at KS3. You may wish to watch **this clip** to explain Because, But, So further.



This graphic, helpfully summarising the key principle of 'Because, But, So' comes from an excellent summary pdf for History can also be found here.



This graphic, helpfully summarising the key principle of 'Because, But, So' comes from an excellent summary pdf for History. It can also be found here with further resources from the excellent @mrthorntonteach found on his blog here and on twitter/X here.

In keeping with the earlier quote from Pritesh Raichura's blog, here is a further example from which Science demonstrates the technique nicely:

- *A solid melts to form a liquid, **but** it can also sometimes sublimate to form a gas.*
- *A solid melts to form a liquid **because** heat or pressure causes the ordering of molecules to break down.*
- *A solid melts to form a liquid **so** a glacier is really water waiting to happen.*

A more complex KS4 answer may look as follows:

- *Aerobic respiration is similar to anaerobic respiration **because** both start with glucose and make ATP.*
- *Aerobic respiration is similar to anaerobic respiration, **but** anaerobic respiration does not require oxygen.*
- *Aerobic respiration is similar to anaerobic respiration, **so** both autotrophs and heterotrophs use aerobic and anaerobic respiration.*

Further reading:

- The impact of Covid-19 on the reading behaviours and experiences of adolescents Academic article from the Educational Institute of Scotland
- How to make your writing suspenseful - Victoria Smith YouTube Video
- The Writing Revolution: An Overview of the Hochman Method YouTube Video
- Writing instruction in the era of higher standards Podcast with Judith Hochman
- Does writing *really* matter in art and design? (theconfidentteacher.com) A topic which we may explore in the next bulletin…

Check out our Library resources:

Recommended Reading for KS3 | Challenging Reading for KS3 | A Guide to Support Reading at Home for Parents