

Independent Evaluation of University of Exeter's Grammar for Writing programme

A Cluster Randomised Controlled Trial

TRIAL PROTOCOL

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Roles and Responsibilities

Evaluation Team

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The evaluation team will be responsible for the design, conduct, analysis and reporting of the independent evaluation

DT and CT – Design of trial; write protocol; oversee all stages in the design, conduct, analysis and reporting of trial, including recruitment and retention of schools, report-writing; supervise work of trial manager and researchers, statistician and data managers on the trial.

NM – Write protocol; register trial; trial co-ordination and data management, contribution to the analysis and write up.

HA and LJ – Trial co-ordination assistance.

HB – Write trial analysis plan, randomisation, conduct analyses, contribute to write up.

CH – Assist with trial co-ordination and data management; co-ordinate independent outcome assessments

Sponsor

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Implementation Team

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University of Exeter (implementation team) will be responsible for school recruitment and on-going relationship with schools, informing parents and pupils, intervention development, including writing detailed description of intervention to allow others, if necessary, to be able to replicate the intervention in other areas, intervention training and delivery, baseline data collection.

National Association of Teachers of English

NATE is a project partner and will assist the University of Exeter with the recruitment of schools and subsequent liaison with them. They will also facilitate communication of the project outcomes.

Funder

Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), Registered charity 1142111, Millbank Tower, 21-24 Millbank, London SW1P 4QP.

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The Education Endowment Foundation has funded both the Transitions Project (Improving Writing Quality) and the independent evaluation. They will have oversight of the project.

Ethics Committee

Durham University School of Education Ethics Committee

University of York, Department of Health Sciences, Research Governance Committee (by Chair's Action)

Advisory Group

Durham University School of Education and CEM EEF panel of evaluators and York Trials Unit panel of evaluators will provide advice on any aspect of the design, conduct and reporting of the evaluation when and as required.

Approvals

Protocol Version 1.4 dated 12.02.13 – Approval given by Durham University School, School of Education Ethics Committee: 14.02.2013.

Protocol Version 1.4 dated 12.02.13 – Approval given by University of York, Health Sciences Research Governance Committee (by Chair's Action): 20.02.2013.

Protocol Version 1.4 dated 12.02.13 – Approval given by EEF: 12.02.2013.

Protocol Version 1.4 dated 12.02.13 – Approval given by University of Exeter: 12.02.2013.

Protocol Version 1.5 dated 30.04.2013 – Approval given by EEF: 15.05.2013.

Protocol Version 1.5 dated 30.04.2013 – Approval given by University of Exeter: 21.05.2013.

Background and significance

The Education Endowment Foundation has funded the University of York and Durham University to evaluate the *Grammar for Writing* intervention being delivered and supported by the University of Exeter.

This curriculum intervention is aimed at improving writing skills in Year 6 children who are less able writers. The intervention will be a modified version of an existing grammar intervention aimed at improving writing skills in older children. An evaluation of the existing intervention was undertaken by the developer (Jones et al, 2012; Myhill et al, 2012).

The trial will compare a modified intervention with a “business as usual” control group. Such a comparison will allow us to estimate whether or not there is an important intervention effect. It is proposed to recruit 60 schools for this evaluation, each with approximately two Year 6 classes. We estimate (from national data) that there will be up to 12 eligible pupils in each class of 27 pupils (the national average size of a KS2 class).

The implementation team (Exeter) will be responsible for developing and delivering the *Grammar for Writing* intervention. They will write up a detailed description of the intervention.

Research Question

What is the effectiveness of the one to one or small group *Grammar for writing* intervention compared with a “business as usual” control group on writing skills of participating children?

Design

This will be a pragmatic cluster randomised trial with a split plot design. Sixty schools will be recruited and randomised at the class level into two groups: a *Grammar for writing* group and a business as usual group. Within the intervention classes individual children, who meet the inclusion criteria, will be randomised to receive either enhanced small group support or to remain within the wider class. This design is known as a partial split plot, a variant of a factorial design, due to the combination of cluster and individual randomisation.

The trial will be designed, conducted and reported to CONSORT standards (Altman et al, 2011) in order to minimise all potential threats to internal validity, such as selection bias and a range of post randomisation biases (Cook and Campbell, 1969; Shadish, Cook and Campbell, 2002; Torgerson and Torgerson, 2008). In this way, unbiased estimates of the impact of the intervention will be provided.

Recruitment

The University of Exeter, in collaboration with the National Association of Teachers of English, will recruit appropriate schools and pupils. Recruitment will be undertaken during the development phase of the intervention (i.e., between January and March 2013). The York/Durham evaluation team will prepare information documentation about the evaluation for schools and pupils/parents. This will include details of the trial design. It is anticipated the intervention will be delivered in June 2013.

Inclusion criteria

Recruitment of schools will preferentially target schools with high proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals and high proportion of children achieving Level 3 or borderline Level 4 in English.

Within the intervention class, teachers will identify pupils who are eligible for individual randomisation using pre-specified criteria: Year 6 pupils expected to achieve Level 3 or borderline Level 4 in English by the end of Key Stage 2 (based on teacher assessments). Schools will inform parents of pupils about the study (material provided by the evaluation team). Parents will have the opportunity to withdraw their child’s data from being used in the evaluation (opt out).

School participation

In order for schools to be eligible to take part in the evaluation and to receive the intervention we will put in place a memorandum of understanding with the schools which will specify the following:

- Enthusiasm for the project and for professional development
- Agreement to be in the independent evaluation
- Willingness to allow the random allocation of Year 6 class(es) to either intervention or comparison group
- Willingness to allow randomisation of individual pupils to receive the intervention in small group/one to one or within the class
- Willingness to identify all eligible pupils using pre-specified criteria
- Willingness to participate in coaching and teaching of a 'trial' lesson
- Willingness to implement the intervention
- Provision of baseline data about pupils
- Willingness to administer a writing test to all children in the trial within 2 weeks of the intervention ending (the test will be marked independently by external markers)
- Attendance at professional development days and a plenary conference

Exclusion criteria

Exclusion from individual randomisation will occur for children scoring below Level 3 as the intervention is considered inappropriate for these pupils and, with the post-testing, may cause undue anxiety among such pupils.

Randomisation

An independent individual at York Trials Unit will use a dedicated computer program to carry out all randomisation on 1st March 2013. As noted previously, there will be two levels of randomisation. For class level randomisation, schools with two classes of Year 6 pupils will be targeted for recruitment. Once the schools have been recruited the two classes will be randomly allocated to the intervention or control condition.

For the individual randomisation non-identifiable details about pupils will be sent to the York Trials Unit and these will be entered onto a dedicated computer program to randomise to intervention or control condition taking into account factors such as, expected level (e.g., level 3 or unstable level 4) or gender.

Sample size calculation

The focus of this evaluation is on children who are performing at either Level 3 or fragile Level 4 and hence the sample size calculation is based upon this subgroup of children.

Assuming 60 schools are recruited with an average of 54 pupils per school, this will result in a total sample size of 3240 pupils. Assuming 27 pupils per class and an intracluster correlation coefficient of 0.19, this leads to a design effect of 5.94. When divided into the total sample size, this produces an *effective sample size* of 546 pupils. However, if we assume a pre and post-test correlation of 0.70

this would increase the effective sample size up to 1114. Allowing for an attrition rate of 10% leads to a final effective sample size of 1002 pupils which would allow us to detect a difference of 0.18 standard deviations in the writing scores of the intervention and control classes, should one exist.

For the individually randomised component of the project, the following assumptions are made in calculating the sample size. There are approximately 8 children per class in the 30 classes (240 pupils in total) that are allocated to the intervention. The pre and post-test correlation is 0.70, increasing the effective sample size from 240 to 490. With allowance for an attrition rate of 10% this would give an effective sample size of 442 and enable us to detect a difference of 0.27 of a standard deviation (80% power; $2p = 0.05$) in writing scores between the two randomised groups, if one existed. If there were a modest intra cluster correlation of 0.05 remaining, despite individual randomisation, then the effect sample size might decline to 328 participants as there would be a design effect of 1.35. This effective sample size would allow us to detect an effect size of 0.31 standard deviations, should one exist.

Analysis

Analysis will be conducted using the principles of intention to treat, meaning that all classes and pupils will be analysed in the group to which they were randomised irrespective of whether or not they actually received the intervention.

For analysis purposes, pupils meeting the individual randomisation inclusion criteria in control classes will be randomised into two groups. One will become a comparison group for the one-to-one or small group intervention pupils and the other will become a comparison group for the intervention pupils randomised to remain within the whole class.

Statistical significance will be assessed at the 5% level unless otherwise stated. Regression based methods of analysis will be used. 95% confidence intervals will be provided as appropriate. Methods for handling missing data and further detail on analyses will be provided within a statistical analysis plan.

Individually Randomised Part of Trial

Primary Analysis

The primary objective of this part of the study is to investigate the effectiveness of the intervention on the writing skills of included children when delivered in a small group or one to one basis. The design of the trial does not allow for disentanglement of the intervention effect from any effect which may result from pupils receiving small group attention and this will be taken into account at the interpretation stage.

Regression analysis will be used to compare the difference in writing scores between pupils receiving the intervention at a small group level and those pupils in the control group randomised into the corresponding comparison group. The model will use post-test score as the response variable and, as a minimum, predicted KS2 score, any factors used in randomisation at the individual level and an indicator variable of intervention or control arm as covariates. Adjustment will be made for cluster randomisation using the Huber-White method which will yield robust standard errors.

Secondary Analyses

The design of the trial also allows for investigation of whether one to one or small group delivery of the intervention is more effective for improving the writing scores of pupils meeting the inclusion criteria than delivery at the class level. A similar approach to that used in the primary analysis for this part of the trial will be taken to compare the two randomised groups in the intervention arm. The model will be very similar except for, instead of an indicator covariate of intervention or control arm, an indicator covariate of small group or whole class intervention will be used.

Regression methods will also be used to compare differences between the intervention and control groups with respect to the secondary outcomes of reading, spelling and grammar.

Subgroup analyses will be undertaken on children who are eligible for FSM to assess the effect of the intervention in terms of mean post-test score.

For all analyses conducted within the individually randomised part of the trial, the impact of non-compliance (should this occur) will be assessed using Complier Average Causal Effect (CACE) analysis.

Cluster Randomised Part of Trial

Primary Analysis

The primary objective of this part of the trial is to investigate the effectiveness of the *Grammar for writing* intervention on the writing skills of all pupils at Level 3 and above who receive the intervention within the whole class setting. Although children in the control arm who were randomised to the one-to-one or small group comparison group will be removed from analysis to improve comparability, the effect of a reduced class size on the intervention pupils will not be distinguishable from any intervention effect.

Regression analysis will be used to compare the difference in writing score between pupils in the intervention and control groups will be compared using a regression analysis with post-test score as the response variable. As a minimum, group allocation and predicted KS2 score will be used as covariates in the model and adjustment will be made for cluster randomisation using the Huber-White method which will yield robust standard errors.

Secondary Analyses

Regression methods will also be used to compare differences between the intervention and control groups with respect to the secondary outcomes of reading, spelling and grammar.

The effect of the intervention in terms of mean post-test score will also be analysed in the subgroup of pupils who are eligible for FSM.

For all analyses conducted within the cluster randomised part of the trial, the impact of non-compliance (should this occur) will be assessed using Complier Average Causal Effect (CACE) analysis.

Outcome measure

We propose to use the Progress in English 11 (Long Form), GL Assessment, for our main literacy outcome. The primary outcome will be the combined score on the two writing tasks within the test. Secondary outcomes will be scores on the reading, spelling and grammar components of the test. The assessment will be carried out within 2 weeks of the intervention ending. All Year 6 pupils will take the post-test with the exception of pupils identified as below level 3. It is anticipated that all tests will be completed by July 2013. Long term outcomes can be collected through the National Pupil Database.

Observation

Independent observer(s) will attend at least one session at one of the participating schools to observe the delivery of the intervention at both class and small group/individual level.

Data Protection Statement

Durham University's data protection policy is publically available at:

<http://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/data.protection/dataprotectionpolicy.pdf>

"Durham University is committed to protecting the rights and freedoms of individuals in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998. The requirements to which University staff and student who process personal data must adhere are set out in the University's Data Protection Policy"

The University of York's data protection policy is publically available at:

<http://www.york.ac.uk/media/recordsmanagement/documents/dataprotectiondocs/Data%20Protection%20Policy.pdf>

Risks

Low risks associated with this project include operational and project specific risks. For the operational risks such as staffing and IT / assessment system we are confident that we have systems and procedures in place to minimise any risks, but would nonetheless be very happy to provide further details.

School and pupil recruitment – whilst this will be the primary responsibility of the implementation team, the evaluation team have a good track of recruiting schools, and will help with this if necessary.

Attrition and loss to follow up – in a study such as this it is essential that this is kept to a minimum. Whilst this will be the primary responsibility of the implementation team, our involvement, as with the recruitment, will help to minimise attrition.

Maintaining fidelity (intervention and control) - it is essential that as many as possible schools maintain a high level of implementation fidelity. Again whilst the primary responsibility will lie with the implementation team we will provide some support, for example, by emphasising the importance of contributing to the process of building good evidence.

References

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Cook TD & Campbell D. (1979). *Quasi-experimentation: Design and Analysis Issues for Field Settings*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

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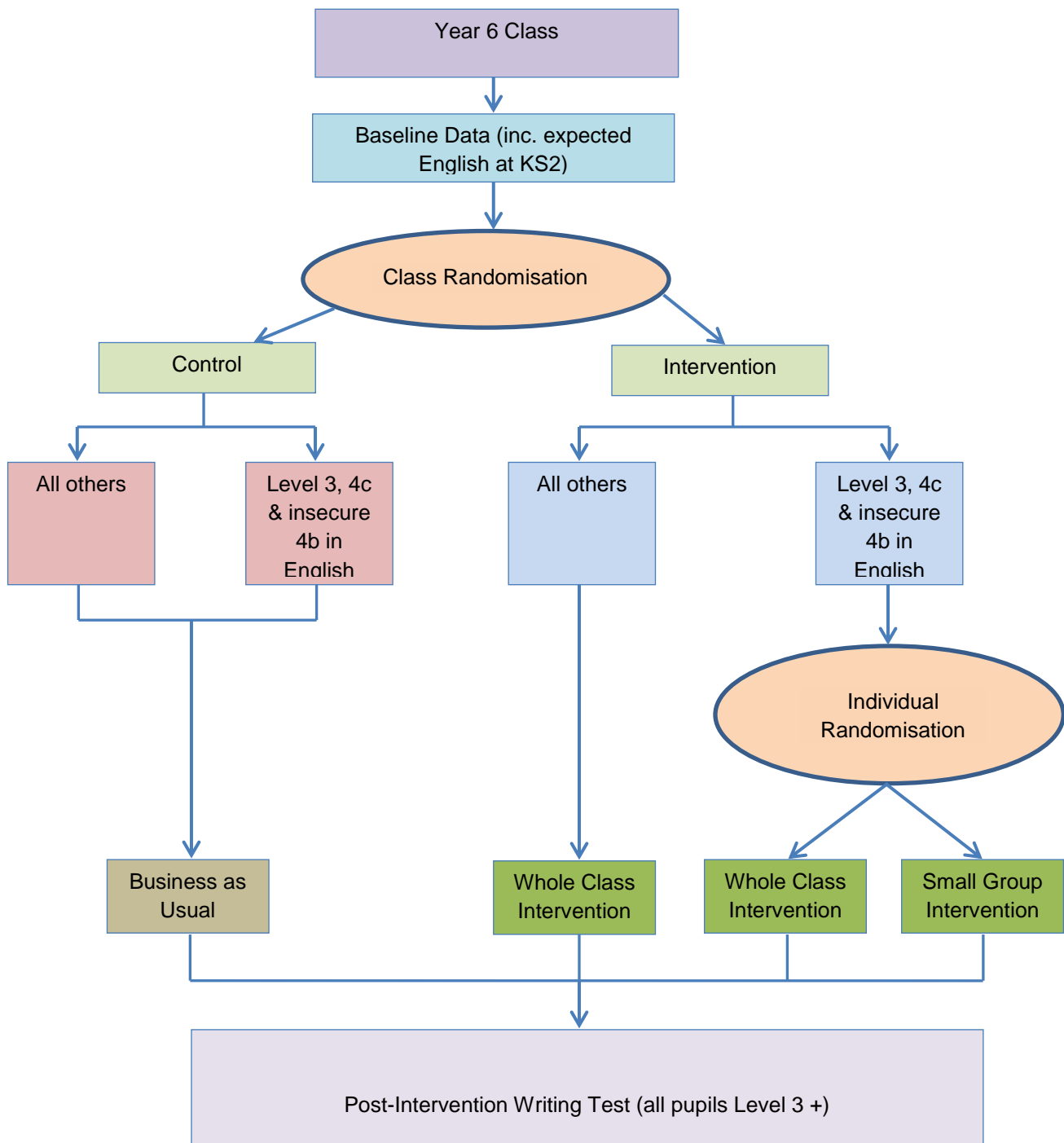
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Appendices

Appendix A: Trial Diagram



Appendix B: Trial Timelines

Grammar for Writing Timeline													
	Dec-12	Jan-13	Feb-13	Mar-13	Apr-13	May-13	Jun-13	Jul-13	Aug-13	Sep-13	Oct-13	Nov-13	Dec-13
Apply for University Ethics													
Intervention Development													
Recruitment of Primary Schools													
Recruitment of Pupils & Parents													
Randomisation													
Baseline Data Collection													
Delivery of intervention													
Post Intervention Testing													
Analysis & Report Writing													

Appendix C: Exeter school recruitment strategy

For schools with two classes of year 6 pupils.

To be recruited schools must be prepared for the classes to be randomised to the *Grammar for writing* intervention or to control. Because of random allocation schools will not be able to influence which of the two classes receive *Grammar for writing*. If schools have a preference for one or another of their classes receiving *Grammar for writing* or think for one of the classes it is not suitable then such schools should not be recruited.

For schools with one year 6 class

These schools may be recruited if they accept the 50% chance that they will not be randomised to *Grammar for writing* (i.e. randomised to control) AND that if they are randomised to control they will agree to contribute baseline data and allow follow-up testing to occur. If they agree such schools will be put in a 'block' with other single class schools and exactly half of the schools will get *Grammar for writing* and the other half will not.

For schools with 3+ year 6 classes

These schools may be recruited if they agree that at least one of their classes will *not* receive *Grammar for writing*. If there is more than one such school they will all be put into a 'block' with the other schools and randomisation will be undertaken so that there will be an equal number of classes in the *Grammar for writing* group and the control group. For example, if we have two schools with 3 classes: in one school two classes will receive *Grammar for writing* and in the other school only one class will receive *Grammar for writing*.

Individual recruitment

Children within the intervention classes who meet the inclusion criteria will be identified by the teacher. After consent has been received exactly half of the children will be randomised to small group support or not. If teachers think that small group support is not suitable for a given child or for some other reason the child could not have the small group assistance (e.g., anticipated school absence) these children should not be recruited.

Appendix D: Project Briefing Sheet for Schools



CHOICE AND CONTROL: CONTEXTUALISING GRAMMAR WITHIN WRITING

Centre for Research in Writing

Recently, our research team completed a large national study which investigated whether drawing attention to specific grammar features during the teaching of writing, might help raise student attainment in writing. The results showed a significant improvement for all students, with a higher rate for able students; it also revealed the influence of the teacher's own grammatical knowledge on students' learning.

In partnership with the National Association for the Teaching of English (NATE), we have now been awarded funding by the *Education Endowment Foundation* to undertake another project to explore whether this approach will work for writers who are both socially disadvantaged and currently under-achieving in writing. In this project, we will be working with year 6 classes, that have a high proportion of students who receive Free School Meals and are achieving Level 3 or borderline Level 4 in writing. We will be designing Guided Writing interventions for use in the classroom with this group and out-of-class interventions offering additional support: these interventions will address the particular writing needs of these writers. Part of the intervention will be providing professional support for the teachers involved with three training days, and one day where each individual teacher is mentored and given feedback on an observation lesson. This will include specific subject knowledge development on the grammar used in the intervention. We hope that the way this project is designed with CPD on grammar and writing will itself be a significant advantage for teachers involved and will benefit all children: we cannot be sure, of course, whether the intervention will work for these most disadvantaged and weak writers.

What kind of schools are we looking for?

Because this project focuses on students who are below or borderline level 4 in writing and eligible for Free School Meals, we are looking for schools who have relatively high numbers of students in this category, and, ideally, who have two year 6 classes, one which will be an intervention class, the other a comparison class.

What commitment would this project require?

- Enthusiasm for the project and for your own professional learning
- Attendance at the three CPD training days and the plenary conference
- Willingness to participate in coaching and teaching of a 'trial' lesson
- Willingness to implement the Guided Writing and out-of-class interventions during June 2012
- Willingness to allow the random allocation of one Year 6 class to the intervention and one year 6 class to be a comparison group
- Willingness to allow random allocation of the Level 3 FSM writers in one class to the intervention
- Willingness to allow the administration of a writing test by external consultant in early July 2012
- Provision of baseline data about your class

When will this project take place?

The project begins in January but the three CPD days will be in March, April and May. The intervention will be implemented after the summer half term.

Is there funding to support my involvement?

Yes, there is supply cover to cover your attendance at the CPD training days plus another 9 days of supply cover to support the running of the intervention. You might, for example, need to bring in a supply teacher to allow you to do the one-to-one interventions. We will also provide the results to the school for the children in the study.

Evaluation

There will be an independent evaluation of the project conducted by the University of York and Durham University. The Universities are supported by the Educational Endowment Foundation to undertake the evaluation but have played no role in the development or implementation of the intervention. The evaluation team, led by Professor Carole Torgerson (Durham University) and Professor David Torgerson (University of York) will provide further information of on the design and implementation of the evaluation. Pupils' test responses and any other pupil data will be treated with the strictest confidence. The responses will be sent to and marked by GL Assessment and accessed by Durham University. Named data will be matched with the National Pupil Database and shared with Durham University and EEF. No individual school or pupil will be identified in any report arising from the research

If you would like to know more, please contact Debra Myhill (d.a.myhill@ex.ac.uk) or Susan Jones (susan.m.jones@ex.ac.uk)

Appendix E: Primary School Agreement to participate form



Evaluation of University of Exeter's Grammar for Writing intervention

Primary School Agreement to Participate

- ☐ I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above evaluation and have had the opportunity to ask questions;
- ☐ I understand that all children's results will be kept confidential and protected using encryption software and that no material which could identify individual children or the school will be used in any reports of this evaluation;
- ☐ I agree to provide baseline data about pupils in Year 6 to the evaluation team, University of Exeter and EEF (excluding any pupils for whom opt out forms have been returned);
- ☐ I understand that named baseline data will be matched with the National Pupil Database and shared between the evaluation team, University of Exeter and EEF;
- ☐ I agree to random allocation to implement the 'Grammar for Writing' intervention in 2013;
- ☐ I agree to providing an information letter to all parents of children in Year 6;
- ☐ I agree to staff attending professional development days;
- ☐ **I consent to the school taking part in the above study**

Name of headteacher

Name of School

School Tel no

Headteacher Email address

Name of School Contact (if not headteacher).....

School Contact email address.....

Signature of headteacher.....Date.....

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research. Please return this consent form by post to:

Debra Myhill, Professor of Education, Associate Dean for Research: SSIS, Graduate School of Education, University of Exeter, Heavitree Road, Exeter EX1 2LU

Appendix F: Parent and Pupil Information Letter Year 6



[INSERT DATE]

[INSERT SCHOOL NAME]

Dear Parent / Carer

Your child's school is taking part in Exeter University's *Grammar for Writing*, which is a new way of teaching writing.

Durham and York Universities are finding out how well the *Grammar for Writing* programme helps children's writing. This study is funded by the Educational Endowment Foundation, which has been given money from the Government to evaluate new forms of education.

In your child's school, one Year 6 class is using *Grammar for Writing* and one Year 6 class is having normal teaching. The choice of class is decided by chance, like in a lottery. We will compare results from both classes. We would like to collect some information about your child from your child's primary school. Your child's school will provide information including your child's name, unique pupil number, gender, date of birth, details on your child's current National Curriculum writing level and free school meal status. Your child will do a test designed by GL assessment. When the test is completed the test will be sent to GL assessment for marking, they will send the test results to Durham University and to your child's teacher. We need this information to find out if *Grammar for Writing* works.

Your child's information will be treated with the strictest confidence. To see if there is a long term impact, named data will be matched with the National Pupil Database and shared between the evaluation team, University of Exeter and Education Endowment Foundation. We will not use your child's name or the name of the school in any report arising from the research. Your child's information will be kept confidential at all times.

If you are happy for your child's information to be used you do not need to do anything. Thank you for your help with this project.

If you would rather your child's school did not share your child's information for this project, please complete the enclosed opt out form and return it to your child's school by [INSERT DATE].

If you would like further information about the Improving Writing Quality evaluation please contact Natasha Mitchell the Evaluation Coordinator: natasha.mitchell@york.ac.uk; 01904 321655

Yours faithfully

Professor David Torgerson (York University)
Professor Carole Torgerson (Durham University)
Professor Debra Myhill (University of Exeter)
Education Endowment Foundation

Grammar for Writing Evaluation: Opt Out Form

If you **DO NOT** want your child's data to be shared for use in the *Grammar for Writing* evaluation, please return this form to your child's school asap.

☐

I **DO NOT** want my child's data to be shared for use in the Grammar for Writing evaluation

Parent/Carer Signature..... Date.....

Child's Name.....

Child's School.....

Appendix G: Variable Summary

DP^Δ = Delivery Partner (Exeter) **EV** = Evaluators (York and Durham) **GL** = GL Assessment
EVD = Evaluators (Durham) **EVY** = Evaluators (York) **EEF** = Education Endowment Fund

	Variable	Required By
School Information:	School Name	All
	School DCSF code	GL
	School Address + Postcode	GL
	School Telephone Number	GL
	School Assessment Lead Name	GL
	School Assessment Lead Email and Role	GL
	Number of tests required	GL
	Number of Pupils on Roll	EV
	% pupils FSM	EV
	% pupils from minority ethnic groups	EV
	% pupils supported at school action plus without SEN statement	EV
	Special measures (binary variable)	EV
Group Information:	Group ID (First Pupil Initials)	EV
	Group Reference (A/B) [°]	EV
	Group size	EV
	Group Type (Mixed ability/literacy group) [†]	EV
	Min and Max Attainment Levels [‡]	EV
	Number of eligible pupils per class [‡]	EV
	Number receiving FSM	EV
Teacher Information:	School Name	EV
	Group ID of Class	EV
	Teacher Initials	EV
	Grammar Knowledge Score	EV
	Age	EV
	Gender	EV
	Years Teaching	EV
	Qualifications	EV
Pupil Information:	Pupil Name	EEF, EVD, GL
	UPN	EEF, EVD, GL
	Unique ID [*]	EV
	DoB	EEF, EV, GL
	Predicted KS2 English Level (before randomisation)	EEF, EV
	Gender (M/F)	EEF, EV, GL
	FSM	EEF, EV
	PP	EEF, EV
	EAL	EEF, EV
	Group Reference (A/B) [°]	EV, GL
	Eligible for Individual Randomisation (Y/N)	EV
Post Intervention:	Pupil post test results [‡]	EEF, EV
	Fidelity Data	EEF, EV

^{*} Comprising of School ID, Class ID then Pupil ID

[†] To inform individual randomisation allocation ratio

[‡] Provided by GL Assessment to Evaluators at Durham

^Δ All required by DP

[°] Collected indirectly as data collected on spreadsheet with separate tabs for each class