

## Literacy Quizzes Mini-Action Research Project 2021-2022

### How can we make Literacy teaching productive and effective?

#### Introduction: Context and Literature

The teaching of Literacy in schools has long been a topic of research – and contention! Best practice has meandered from rote learning, decontextualised explicit teaching to no explicit teaching of grammar at all and then the more recent move at KS2 for high stakes testing in decontextualised grammar aptitude by way of the KS2 SATs, implemented in 2013 and including questions on 40 grammatical terms<sup>1</sup>.

The National Curriculum for English requires that students 'acquire a wide vocabulary, an understanding of grammar and knowledge of linguistic conventions for reading, writing and spoken language'<sup>2</sup> across all key stages. More specifically at KS3 it states that:

*Pupils should be taught to:*

- *consolidate and build on their knowledge of grammar and vocabulary through:*
- *extending and applying the grammatical knowledge set out in English appendix 2<sup>3</sup> to the key stage 1 and 2 programmes of study to analyse more challenging texts*
- *studying the effectiveness and impact of the grammatical features of the texts they read*
- *drawing on new vocabulary and grammatical constructions from their reading and listening, and using these consciously in their writing and speech to achieve particular effects*
- *knowing and understanding the differences between spoken and written language, including differences associated with formal and informal registers, and between Standard English and other varieties of English*
- *using Standard English confidently in their own writing and speech*
- *discussing reading, writing and spoken language with precise and confident use of linguistic and literary terminology\*<sup>4</sup>*

These bullet points suggest the importance of grammar teaching in terms of exploring meaning making and the effects created in texts and the appendix referenced goes on to state that 'explicit knowledge of grammar is, however, very important, as it gives us more conscious control and choice in our language'. This is best achieved through 'a focus on

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<sup>1</sup> Cushing, Ian, *Grammar Policy and Pedagogy from Primary to Secondary School*, in Literacy UKLA, Volume 00 Number 00, John Wiley and Sons, Oxford: 2018, P1.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-english-programmes-of-study/national-curriculum-in-england-english-programmes-of-study>

<sup>3</sup>

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/335190/English\\_Appendix\\_2\\_-\\_Vocabulary\\_grammar\\_and\\_punctuation.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/335190/English_Appendix_2_-_Vocabulary_grammar_and_punctuation.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [English programmes of study: key stage 3 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/335190/English_programmes_of_study_key_stage_3.pdf)

grammar *within* [my emphasis] the teaching of reading, writing and speaking' and students can then apply these concepts in their own speaking and writing<sup>5</sup>. This 'descriptive, functional and contextualised grammar'<sup>6</sup> policy, therefore, is incongruous with the rationale and application of grammar teaching demanded by the KS2 National Curriculum in English and with how students transitioning to secondary school will have experienced grammar teaching so far, as a high-stakes, high-stress, decontextualised set of 'prescriptive rules' and 'linguistic "correctness"' to be learnt and tested via synthetic sentences in questions ranging from 'multiple choice' to identifying 'grammatical concepts in sentences'<sup>7</sup>.

The wording of the KS3 National Curriculum on grammar teaching above suggests a need to contextualise grammar teaching which is supported by an abundance of recent research. In 2019, I attended a course called *Teaching English Grammar in Context* at UCL run by Ian Cushing, one such researcher and advocate of contextualised grammar teaching. His research explores the very incongruity<sup>8</sup> between the KS2 and KS3 curricula on grammar teaching, as well as factors affecting the attitude secondary school English teachers have towards grammar teaching, many privileging Literature and themselves perhaps not well versed in grammatical subject knowledge<sup>9</sup>, though he is clear to state that secondary school English teaching is, in the main, taught in a contextualised manner and that his concern is the incongruity of approaches in KS2 and KS3 as a result of SATs testing and the impact it has had on secondary school education<sup>10</sup>.

Cushing explained that there is no research to support decontextualized grammar teaching as the best method for developing reading and writing outcomes (in fact the *United Kingdom Literacy Association* issued a statement that decontextualised grammar teaching does 'nothing for writing development'<sup>11</sup>) but much research on the impact of contextualised grammar teaching on writing outcomes.

Contextualised grammar is defined by:

- The notion of grammar as 'choice' and 'meaning-making patterns', rather than 'rules' (totally contradictory to the Government's KS2 grammar demands)
- The use of 'authentic' texts and how these sit within a 'wider context'.
- Explorations of linguistic meaning and reader-response.
- Linguistic playfulness, experimentation and creativity.<sup>12</sup>

The course, whilst not trying to damn practices in schools, was trying to show how contextualised grammar teaching works. It suggests that explicit Literacy lessons or lessons on straight grammar teaching are not an effective approach, but that starting with the

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[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/335190/English\\_Appendix\\_2\\_-\\_Vocabulary\\_grammar\\_and\\_punctuation.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/335190/English_Appendix_2_-_Vocabulary_grammar_and_punctuation.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Cushing, Ian, *Grammar Policy and Pedagogy from Primary to Secondary School*, in Literacy UKLA, Volume 00 Number 00, John Wiley and Sons, Oxford: 2018, P3.

<sup>7</sup> Cushing, Ian, *Grammar Policy and Pedagogy from Primary to Secondary School*, in Literacy UKLA, Volume 00 Number 00, John Wiley and Sons, Oxford: 2018, P2.

<sup>8</sup> Cushing, Ian, *Grammar Policy and Pedagogy from Primary to Secondary School*, in Literacy UKLA, Volume 00 Number 00, John Wiley and Sons, Oxford: 2018, P1

<sup>9</sup> Cushing, Ian, *Grammar Policy and Pedagogy from Primary to Secondary School*, in Literacy UKLA, Volume 00 Number 00, John Wiley and Sons, Oxford: 2018, P1

<sup>10</sup> Cushing, Ian, *Grammar Policy and Pedagogy from Primary to Secondary School*, in Literacy UKLA, Volume 00 Number 00, John Wiley and Sons, Oxford: 2018, P4

<sup>11</sup> Cushing, Ian, *Grammar Policy and Pedagogy from Primary to Secondary School*, in Literacy UKLA, Volume 00 Number 00, John Wiley and Sons, Oxford: 2018, P3

<sup>12</sup> Cushing, Ian, Department of English Language and Literature, University College London, [i.cushing@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:i.cushing@ucl.ac.uk)

notions of Reader Response Theory and a reader's reaction and *then* exploring how reactions/effects are created, before picking apart the grammar that achieved that, is the best way. It is really using literary linguistics/stylistics as an approach to empower students to make systematic and rigorous interpretations. So, response-driven approaches to grammar pedagogy have reader's responses and 'effects' at their front-end, rather than grammatical terminology (so not device spotting, or at KS2 having a checklist of devices that must be included in the SATs paper to get the highest grades). Grammatical terms provide ways of *accounting* for responses to texts that readers have and ways of uncovering the 'texture' of literary texts.

The course at its purest suggests an overhaul of how grammar is taught but there are difficulties:

- The KS2 curriculum demands explicit, decontextualized grammar teaching.
- Schools tend to have Literacy lessons with explicit teaching so this method, whilst much is what KS4 and KS5 English teachers do anyway, would require complete overhauls of the system.
- Teachers who were educated between roughly 1970-1990 would not have been taught grammar in an explicit way and teacher training does not explicitly teach grammar in an in-depth way, exploring linguistics and stylistics. Unless one studied this at university, there is a knowledge deficit in teachers and confidence levels, in general, are not high.

In addition to my attendance of the UCL course, Putney High School has done extensive work with the Learning Scientists<sup>13</sup>, cognitive psychological scientists, whose research looks at memory and learning, with the aim of increasing the 'use of effective study and teaching strategies that are backed by research'<sup>14</sup> and rooted in science.

Their research finds that the principles of 'spaced practice'<sup>15</sup> (spreading studying/learning of a topic out over time), 'interleaving'<sup>16</sup> (switching between ideas/topics whilst you study, often going back over them in different orders<sup>17</sup>) and 'retrieval practice'<sup>18</sup> (the practice of bringing information to mind, without your notes, and taking as many practice tests as you can<sup>19</sup>) are the most effective strategies in sustained and deep learning, aiming to motivate students and increase the use of 'effective study and teaching strategies'<sup>20</sup>.

With Cushing's research and the work of the Learning Scientists and their principles of spacing practice, interleaving and retrieval practice in mind and alongside a desire within the English Department to make Literacy teaching more meaningful and practical, my colleague and I set about transforming how we teach Literacy in Year 7.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.learningscientists.org/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.learningscientists.org/ourteam>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.learningscientists.org/spaced-practice>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.learningscientists.org/interleaving>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.learningscientists.org/interleaving>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.learningscientists.org/retrieval-practice>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.learningscientists.org/retrieval-practice>

<sup>20</sup> [About Us — The Learning Scientists](#)

### Driver for Innovation: School Context and Need

As a highly selective, academic school, our students entering Year 7 will have some of the best KS2 SATs (or equivalent) results in the country. In theory, they know as much as they will ever need to know to be considered literate! So why have we insisted upon the reteaching of weekly literacy topics and half and termly testing throughout KS3?

In 2019, a colleague and I were charged with over-hauling Literacy in Year 7. This was motivated by a desire to move away from this weekly decontextualised grammar lesson, which repeated much of the KS2 curriculum and the 'prescriptive rules and linguistic "correctness"'<sup>21</sup> demanded by the DfE, and rather to build on the knowledge the students come into Year 7 with from KS2 in a meaningful and enabling<sup>22</sup> way, focusing time and energy on text teaching, with response and effect foregrounded. In addition, using the principles of the Learning Scientists, we aimed to maintain knowledge and proficiency of understanding in grammar topics already tested so heavily in the KS2 SATs tests. This is supported by Cushing:

*I have argued elsewhere (Cushing, 2018a) that current KS3 presents an ideal time for teachers to build on what students know about language, especially in making grammatical work more applied and contextualised.*<sup>23</sup>

In summary, the aim and objectives were as follows:

**Aim:** to streamline Literacy teaching in light of work done at Key Stage 2 and the principles of the Learning Scientists.

#### **Objectives:**

- To build on Key Stage 2 teaching rather than reteach grammar points already taught and tested at Key Stage 2.
- To apply the principles of spacing, interleaving and retrieval that the Learning Scientists have advocated.
- To free up time for contextualised grammar teaching, through textual study.
- To reduce teacher marking and data entry.
- To use the iPads more effectively and to move closer to the objectives of Apple Schools.
- To reduce paper use.

### The Method

Having had an INSET led by the Learning Scientists in 2019, my colleague and I were drawn to the concepts of spaced and interleaving practice. It seemed to us that we could use these concepts, along with the aforementioned desire to harness the incoming Year 7's retrieval skills and do away with decontextualised grammar lessons, to develop a way of creating Literacy quizzes which could test students' knowledge, building on the already established schedule of Literacy topics, into a spaced and interleaved online quiz, which we hoped would support Hermann Ebbinghaus' pioneering principle that '...with any considerable

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<sup>21</sup> Cushing, Ian, *Grammar Policy and Pedagogy from Primary to Secondary School*, in Literacy UKLA, Volume 00 Number 00, John Wiley and Sons, Oxford: 2018, P1

<sup>22</sup> Cushing, Ian, *Grammar Policy and Pedagogy from Primary to Secondary School*, in Literacy UKLA, Volume 00 Number 00, John Wiley and Sons, Oxford: 2018, P5

<sup>23</sup> Cushing, Ian, *Grammar Policy and Pedagogy from Primary to Secondary School*, in Literacy UKLA, Volume 00 Number 00, John Wiley and Sons, Oxford: 2018, P5.

number of repetitions a suitable distribution of them over a space of time is decidedly more advantageous than the massing of them at a single time."<sup>24</sup>.

With the help of James Mutton, a rather more technology savvy colleague and lead innovator at Putney High School, my colleague and I created Google Form quizzes, inputting 390 questions, linked to a spreadsheet which collated the data. The first 12 weeks of quizzes test a specific Literacy topic for the first 5 questions (see table below) before interleaving previous quiz topics into the subsequent 5 questions. After the first 12 weeks, all the quizzes are full interleaved, with questions testing students at random on any of the 12 topics.

As described, data is collated centrally and easily analysed to pick up on weaknesses at whole class and individual student level. Teachers could then undertake intervention 'live' as the data comes in, addressing misconceptions or errors, or could analyse data outside class to plan a specific lesson revising a topic or grouping students to revise topics by need. The data can also reveal year group-wide trends and students' performance across tests to identify more significant difficulties with Literacy, perhaps indicative of underlying learning needs.

Before we started the quizzing and to allow time for iPad distribution, we got the students to undertake a baseline test (a KS2 SATs-style paper) to identify any initial gaps in understanding (especially important over the Covid years where learning was impacted) and to acquire some base data from which to assess progress.

In summary:

1. In September, the Year 7s sit a baseline grammar test, modelled on a KS2 SATs test, which is marked and analysed by class teachers.
2. Over the first 5/6 weeks of term, students will have focused Literacy lessons on areas requiring intervention, highlighted by the above test.
3. Once students have their iPads after the October half term, they begin the interleaved Literacy quizzes, administered through GoogleDocs.
4. Teachers will allow a slot at the beginning of a lesson each week for students to take the quiz. This can be done by sending students a link, which they can click, following instructions.
5. Once students have taken the test, class teachers review the data, identifying any commonly made errors or any particularly low scores which require intervention.

#### Year 7 Literacy Topics

<b>Week</b>	<b>Topic</b>
1	Parts of speech
2	There/their/they're
3	Where/were
4	It's/its
5	Too/to/two
6	Me/myself/I
7	Sentence or phrase?
8	Subject or predicate?
9	Types of sentence
10	Conjunctions
11	Compound sentences
12	Plurals
Weeks 13-34	Fully interleaved quizzes based on all the topics above.

<sup>24</sup> [Optimizing Your Learning Schedule — The Learning Scientists](#)

## The Data

This project was not set up as action research in its infancy. It was simply a new way of approaching Literacy teaching, taking into account current research and thinking, already proven, i.e., abandoning decontextualised grammar teaching in favour of focusing on contextualised grammar teaching, whilst also using the science of learning to test students' retrieval practice of grammatical knowledge insisted upon at KS2.

Our data, therefore, is inconsistent and hard to evaluate. This is partly down to the fact that the quizzes were aimed at individual teacher delivery, analysis and intervention. Some classes did not complete many tests and there was a great variety in how teachers intervened and used the data. On top of this, having formulated the idea in Spring 2019 and launching the project in September 2019, we were thwarted by Covid from January 2020 to Spring 2021. The academic year 2021-2022 was the first complete year (which I am evaluating here) and academic year 2022-2023 will be the first year of ironing out glitches and consolidating learning.

## The Baseline Data

The baseline data was useful to gain a sense of each student's starting position but is hard to measure the success of the quizzes against because of the formatting and range of topics covered. The benefit of the baseline data was to establish a sense of raw Literacy ability, which helped the teacher differentiate for the class. See 'Evaluation and Reflection' for changes to baseline data collection.

## My Class

As a case study, I have taken my 2021-2022 class and looked at their baseline data versus weekly average over the tests we took to see if it yields any evidence.

Student	Baseline %	Weekly Average /10	Weekly Average as %
1	72%	7.3	73%
2	90%	8.4	84%
3	96%	9.1	91%
4	76%	7.7	77%
5	78%	7.9	79%
6	84%	7.5	75%
7	78%	8.4	84%
8	88%	7	70%
9	86%	8.4	84%
10	82%	7	70%
11	90%	8.5	85%
12	80%	8.7	87%
13	86%	8.2	82%
14	86%	8.7	87%
15	96%	9	90%
16	74%	7.9	79%
17	92%	8.3	83%
18	88%	7.4	74%
19	90%	8.6	86%
20	90%	8.6	86%
21	88%	8.7	87%
22	94%	8.3	83%
23	92%	7.9	79%
24	92%	8.4	84%

25	78%	7.4	74%
26	96%	9.1	91%
27	86%	8.6	86%
28	92%	8.7	87%
29	88%	8.3	83%
30	86%	8.6	86%

In the above table, the students whose weekly average on the Literacy quizzes was above or the same as their baseline data are highlighted in green. If their weekly average on the Literacy quizzes was within 5% of their baseline test the cell is highlighted in orange. The red cells indicate where students' weekly average is more than 5% lower than their baseline data. The data seems to suggest that only 30% of the class saw an improvement in their Literacy proficiency but given that the research shows that explicit grammatical knowledge is not in itself useful but only useful when applying it in 'studying the effectiveness and impact of the grammatical features of texts', 'using these consciously in their writing and speech to achieve particular effects' and to be able to use 'Standard English confidently'<sup>25</sup>. It stands to reason, therefore, that a better data analysis would be of the students' Common Assessment attainment. See 'Evaluation and Reflection' for a suggested improvement.

What I did notice, week-by-week as scores came in, was a pattern of students achieving consistently poorly on the tests. Over several weeks, I compiled a list of students either whose baseline test data or weekly quiz data gave me concerns about general Literacy aptitude – the main students are highlighted in yellow in the table above. I then liaised with the Learning Enrichment Department and met the SENCO to discuss my concerns. I did some analysis to see how the baseline and quiz data scores correlated with Common Assessment attainment. The highlighted students showed issues with Literacy in their Common Assessments too and were invited to attend sessions in Learning Enrichment. The student highlighted in blue has dyslexia but her Literacy was not a concern from the baseline or quizzing data.

Taking this student as a case study, her data is as follows:

Quiz	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Score	7	10	10	9	9	8	9	9	9	10	9	9	A	5	7	5	7

On the whole, she does well on the quizzes that have 5-questions on a topic but makes more mistakes on the quizzes that are fully interleaved (after quiz 12). I can go into the individual quiz data and see that on Quiz 15, for example, she got the questions on 'too/to/two', 'conjunctions' and 'parts of speech' wrong and in Quiz 16 she again makes two errors on 'parts of speech'. From this, I could then set specific work on those topic areas.

With this class, I used the data to inform my teaching. After 5 weeks of quizzing, for example, I had a lesson dedicated to targeted Literacy intervention.

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-english-programmes-of-study/national-curriculum-in-england-english-programmes-of-study>

Winnie, Melissa, Rhea, Tabitha,  
Daphne, Jess, Ava and Anna

**Complete missed quizzes first!**

# Literacy Intervention

Based on your Literacy Quiz test scores, I have worked out which area of Literacy you need to revise. You may only have dropped one mark, but the exercise of revision is useful for everyone!

You must complete the assigned tasks (sheet saved on Files to save paper) independently before you work with the others in your group to check your work and see if you agree.

There/Their/They're	Where/Were	It's/Its	To/Two/Too
Sophia Connie Martha Melissa Cathy Phoebe Jess Sophia Anna	Tabitha Kate	Hanaa Alisha Sophie Sofia Sophie Ella Nicole Audra Ava	Enaaya Lauren Penelope Grace Hannah Rhea Daphne Betty

**EXTENSION**

1. Compose 3 sentences that use your given homophone/easily confused words to challenge me! Leave a blank and I'll insert the correct word!
2. I might ask you to be a student-helper, going around the room to assist your peers – **Emma**.

Equally, I used the data in my book marking, getting students to focus on an area of most need.

Book Mark 16/11/21	
<b>Teacher Comment</b>	
<b>Dedicated Improvement and Reflection Time</b> For homework, complete the task(s) below that has been highlighted.	
Go through your book and do all the spelling and punctuation errors that are indicated by an 'sp' or 'p' in the margin.	Use a page in your book and, using the <i>Look – Say – Cover – Write – Check</i> process, revise the spellings that you got wrong in tests 1-3.
Make an aide memoire/revision poster on the 8 Parts of Speech.	Make an aide memoire/revision poster on the homophones there/their/they're.
Stick all your sheets in in the correct order.	Go through your book and underline all the dates and titles.



Teacher Response

The main interest I had was in teachers' attitudes to the testing and we asked for general feedback both in 2019-2020 and in 2020-2021. Teachers are very busy and responses to the requests were hard to get, though positive in response.

**2021-2022 Teacher Feedback**

Bailey, Lizzie (PUT) Staff 20/06 12:05

**Year 7 Literacy Quizzes Review**

2 - Year 7 Hi Year 7 Teachers! Only about 5 quizzes left to complete for the year, if that! We may, just may, have a complete set of data! I have worked so hard with Nick to work out the spreadsheet (which still has glitches that need fixing by James, the 'owner') and make it useful for us. So, time to review and learn! Could you all spend some time thinking about the answers to these questions and 'reply' to this post with thoughts, ideas and photos/scans of any evidence you have by the end of term? I am writing this up as a super-tiny-mini-mini action research project, so would appreciate some considered thoughts and, above all, evidence of how you used data and intervened.

1. How did you find administering the quizzes (i.e. copying the quiz codes and getting the students to do the quizzes on their iPads)?
2. Did you think topic coverage was appropriate for Year 7 (the topics chosen were from the original Year 7 Literacy programme of study)?
3. How did the data inform your planning? What did you 'do' in response to the data? Can you provide me with screenshots/photos/scans?
4. Did the quizzes with subsequent follow up help the students progress?
5. In your experience of the alternative of weekly whole-class decontextualised grammar lessons, what are the pros and cons of the Literacy Quizzes?

Thank you in advance! Lizzie

AB Barton, Antony (PUT) Staff 20/06 12:42

I had a Year 7 class once a week for a short period of time. I set a literacy quiz in each of these and was able to see the spread of results immediately, even watching the data as it came in to anticipate which questions I would need to address before the whole class had finished. This allowed for swift feedback and the opportunity to explain the rules behind the questions that a number of them answered incorrectly. On one or two occasions, I would need to set two literacy quizzes in one lesson in order to catch up. It was quite gratifying to give feedback on the first quiz and then see that misconceptions had been successfully addressed in responses to the lesson's second quiz.

[See less](#)

Administering the quizzes was easy (but relied on them having charged iPads) and I found the topic coverage appropriate. There were some glitches that we discussed, but they can easily be eliminated.

Pros: the regular quizzes make the importance of literacy very clear and, with timely feedback, should help students understand the rules and remember to follow them.

Bailey, Lizzie (PUT) Staff 05/07 09:26

2 - Year 7 Thank you Barton, Antony (PUT) Staff! I know it's the *last* thing you need this week and quite a bore to do but I'm writing this up in a very light way and need something to write in the outcomes box! HELP!

AB Barton, Antony (PUT) Staff 05/07 13:56

PHS English

Can anyone else help Lizzie? Just a few highlights (or, shudder, lowlights) would be good.

**2019-2020 Teacher Feedback**

SC Carter, Sophie (PUT) Staff 18/06 09:27

Hello everyone. May we ask for your thoughts and reflections on the year 7 literacy quizzes? As this was a time heavy project at the front end, we would like to have a really good sense of its impact on you and on the girls before deciding how to proceed with it in the future. May I ask you to take 5-10 mins to let us have your thoughts on the headings below? Please also add anything else that occurs to you. Thank you very much in advance.

- **Time taken** – were the tests time consuming to set up and administer? Did the time gained by not marking paper tests make up for this or not? Overall across the year did you spend more or less of your own prep time/class time on literacy?
- **Ease of use** – how easy was it to use the spreadsheet system? How easy was it for the girls to access the links?
- **Impact on teaching** – did you think this was positive or negative? Was your teaching more targeted because of the granular data, or did you find the data too varied? Did you end up teaching 'better' or just less? or even more?
- **Impact on learning** – did you feel the girls improved? Did you feel the use of the tests as formative rather than summative was effective? Was there a risk that mistakes were repeated without targeted correction or revision for tests? Did the girls develop a more positive attitude towards literacy learning? Did your students with consistent errors make use of the literacy lending library?
- **Any other thoughts** – Was there anything in the data that surprised you, for example consistent misunderstanding of something they were apparently taught in the junior school? did you find it hard to remember to do one each week? If you did not find the system easy what was the biggest stumbling block?

Thank you so much for your time on this – as this was such a big change for our teaching style and had a high administrative load, it is really important for us to see if it was a successful experiment!

With many thanks  
Sophie and Lizzie

**AB** Barton, Antony (PUT) Staff 18/06 10:24  
 I would just like to jump in and say a huge thank-you to Sophie and Lizzie for creating these tests and overseeing the whole project, and many thanks to all Year 7 teachers for administering these on a regular basis. The aim was always to make our literacy testing more useful and less time-consuming, so your detailed thoughts in response to these questions will be hugely appreciated as we decide where to take this in the future.

**MK** Kiek, Miranda (PUT) Staff 24/06 14:50 Edited  
 I think the girls rather like the quick test format and they had no problems accessing the test. I found them useful in helping me isolate areas of literacy which needed work. Although the mistakes students made in their written work did not necessarily correlate with the mistakes which they made in their tests. I did them consistently up until Spring 1 and then forgot to restart them after I completed all the tests which were at that point available. I would certainly want to use them again next year as I think the routine element is helpful.

[See less](#)

**EL** Ley, Emma (PUT) Staff 25/06 13:11  
 Time taken & ease of use - saved time teaching literacy and tests were quick and easy to access. The only time consuming element was the baseline test. Perhaps we could do this online in an IT room so it can be self-marked?

Impact on teaching - it was good to identify areas they all struggled with (e.g. parts of speech). I found it hard to keep up with the weekly tests and reflecting on that data weekly is perhaps too much of an ask. Maybe they should be fortnightly instead.

Generally a good idea and I liked the relief from full weekly literacy lessons. I did find it hard to keep on top of the tests and data though - but that is also because I could have been more organised! Now that I'm familiar with the system, I would try to do better to implement it consistently.

Summary of teacher responses:

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Efficient use of time and freed up lessons for contextualised Literacy teaching.</li> <li>• The students like the quiz format.</li> <li>• Immediate data to use.</li> <li>• Gives Literacy weight and importance</li> <li>• Develops good skills of retrieval and uses spacing and interleaved practice to maximise learning and memory capacity.</li> <li>• Use of technology to aid/inspire learning and to aid in data collection and evaluation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The time it took to administer and mark baseline tests.</li> <li>• Were baseline tests useful? Necessary?</li> <li>• iPad and technical glitches.</li> <li>• Spreadsheet glitches.</li> <li>• Class-teacher buy-in and commitment to the schedule and administering.</li> </ul>

**Conclusions**

Given that research agrees decontextualised grammar does 'nothing for writing development'<sup>26</sup>, our initiative, in its very foundation in adhering to learning science and acknowledging the need to spend time contextualising Literary learning, is a success. It is a time-efficient, environmentally friendly, pedagogically sound alternative to the traditional decontextualised grammar lessons which had existed before.

The roll-out of the initiative has made Literacy learning consistent across Year 7. Teachers have 'live' data from which to provide immediate diagnostic feedback and to address misconceptions because we are using the school's great technological capacity. Time is created for contextualised literacy learning, through text study and creative writing, and burdensome marking has been replaced by the functionality of the technology, helping teachers use data easily and efficiently.

In terms of data to assess progress, students did no better or worse, anecdotally, than they might have done in a formal termly Literacy test, but will have benefited, however, from the spaced- and interleaved-practice and retrieval skills to enhance long-term learning and

<sup>26</sup> Cushing, Ian, *Grammar Policy and Pedagogy from Primary to Secondary School*, in Literacy UKLA, Volume 00 Number 00, John Wiley and Sons, Oxford: 2018, P3

memory function. Teachers have found the quizzes easy to administer and data easy to access and use and, as a product of the data we have been able to collect from using Google Forms, we have year group-wide data available for analysis. More data more centrally than we had before.

As an Action Research project, I do think we need to be more systematic in exploring the effect of the project on outcomes for learners. In hindsight, given Cushing and the KS3 National Curriculum assertion that grammar knowledge is important insofar as it impacts writing outcomes and students' abilities to explore the 'effectiveness and impact of the grammatical features of the texts they read' and use 'these consciously in their writing and speech to achieve particular effects'<sup>27</sup>, we should have reviewed the impact of the Literacy quizzes in the students' Common Assessments. This could be done anecdotally by the class teacher or perhaps by having a subset of criteria for marking which looks at the Literacy topics tested to date and whether the students are making those errors or not in their assessed words (alongside general SPaG marking). In other words, assessing the correlation between Literacy quiz scores and Common Assessment attainment.

### **Evaluation and Reflection**

Once going, the Literacy Quizzes are self-sufficient and the data self-explanatory, with the benefits as outlined already. There are, however, several limitations which impact the expansion and longevity of the initiative.

After collaboration in the considerable effort to set up the initiative (creating the 10-question quizzes, question by question!), since September 2020, I have been the lead teacher on the initiative as Year Group Coordinator for Year 7. I am a limitation! Firstly, I do not have the level of technological skill required to deal with the functionality of GoogleForms and Excel. Whilst I can navigate an Excel spreadsheet and analyse data, my skills and access privileges mean that I have had to rely on James Mutton (whose own senior role and workload make the 'quiz admin' a low priority) and my husband, Nick, to set up the spreadsheet, link the data and do the coding which enables scores to be analysed and manipulated.

I am also a limitation in that, as a one-man-band, should I leave, the expertise and understanding of the initiative leaves. As with any initiative, and as found with the Government's own Test&Learn randomised control trial that I was involved in, the success of any initiative is in the expertise, enthusiasm and energy of the person or people running it.

Another associated issue is that of the responsibility and time commitment for the lead-teacher. Research and innovation are energising and inspiring and I love learning about learning! However, the hours spent on this have been enormous, especially on the technology front. Moving forward, I have ambitious visions for the initiative to roll out across Key Stage 3, building the interleaved and spaced practice and retrieval skills across three year groups, but the time required to create a further 72 quizzes and 720 questions, let alone set up the spreadsheets and then to monitor the delivery and outcomes, would be quite an undertaking.

The role and responsibilities could be taught and shared with colleagues but perhaps the biggest limitation has been the teachers! Whilst everyone is supportive of the idea and glad of the freed-up lesson time, time constraints and stresses at different points of the year mean that the quizzes often fell by the wayside: two of last year's four classes undertook as few as 5 or 7 tests in the year.

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<sup>27</sup> [English programmes of study: key stage 3 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/86222/English-programmes-of-study-key-stage-3.pdf)

The baseline tests were a feature of the teacher feedback and are something that I think we can do without. With new 11+ data, MidYis and Lucid scores (and the possibility of gaining KS2 SATs results), we have an abundance of information about the students' abilities before they start and there should be enough data to benchmark their progress in Literacy, as with Reading and Writing. This is a change we will make for the 2022/2023 academic year.

And we could use the data better, perhaps sharing best practice on what works and what does not in terms of interventions, using the Common Assessments throughout the year as a datapoint to review Literacy progress, either through a specific addition to the marking criteria or through general, informal observation by the class teacher. Again, this is something to be trialled in the 2022/2023 academic year.

A bolder contention is that any testing of grammatical knowledge is redundant if Cushing and his peers are correct in their assertions that knowing grammatical functions does not impact writing outcomes. But I do think that these brief tests, requiring students to retrieve knowledge, spacing and interleaving topics across a year, are a happy hybrid to maximise on students' KS2 knowledge and to focus time and attention on contextualised grammar learning, within Reading, Writing and Speaking and Listening skills.

**Bibliography and Appendix**

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