



Date	April 2016
Key stages	KS1—KS2
School type	LA maintained, primary
Themes	English, literacy, writing, pupil premium

# Narrowing the gap in writing

## Alban Wood Primary School and Nursery

### Context

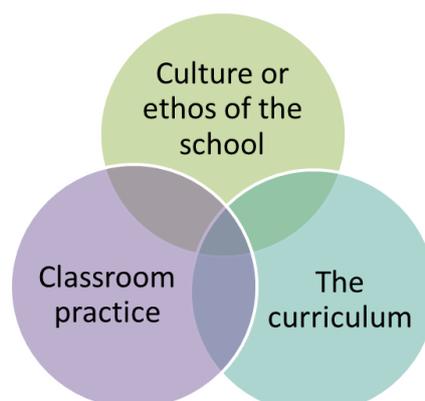
Alban Wood Primary School and Nursery is an average-sized school located in the Watford district of Hertfordshire. Over a quarter of pupils at the school are from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who are eligible to receive pupil premium funding is above average with roughly one-third of each year group being eligible for free school meals (FSM).

### Brief description

Alban Wood School has successfully narrowed the gap in writing between its high proportion of FSM pupils and non-FSM pupils, both in terms of attainment and progress from key stage 1. In 2015 FSM6 pupils achieved 29.5 average point scores (APS) in writing, compared with non-FSM pupils who scored 30.0 APS; a gap of 0.5 APS. 100% of FSM pupils made the expected progress in writing in 2015 and 75% made 3 levels of progress in writing.

Historically, writing results at the school were significantly below the national average and hence the school instigated change to address the particular needs of the pupils. The Deputy Headteacher of Alban Wood, Charlotte Davis, met with Herts for Learning (HfL) Assessment Advisor, Clare Hodgson, to inform her of the strategies which the school uses to narrow the gap for FSM/FSM6 pupils in regard to their writing results. These strategies are outlined in this case study.

It is clear that Alban Wood's approach to ensuring greater progress for disadvantaged groups is multi-faceted (as shown in the Venn diagram below) but also single-minded, in that there is an unwavering determination to make a real difference to pupil premium and FSM6 pupils.



## Strategies used to close the gap in writing

### Classroom practice

The school uses the following strategies to narrow the gap in writing through classroom practice:

- There is an emphasis on supporting pupils to become independent in lessons. For example if pupils have covered diary writing in literacy and are writing a diary for another topic, teachers will remind them that they have already looked at diary writing and will not 'over' support them by giving out success criteria again.
- Pupils are allocated time to write in topic work in other areas of the curriculum as teachers often feel that an hour in literacy is not enough.
- The school has invested in having visualisers (a projector allowing teachers to display pupils' writing on the board) in every classroom which are used daily. These are used to support pupils in editing their work, which has been a key focus of the school in the past year. Pupils will usually write one day and then peer and self-assess the following day. Using the purchased visualisers the process of 'edit and improve' is modelled and the thinking process is externalised. Visualisers are also used for a whole class critique.
- Writing displays in classrooms show not only finished 'published' work, but also the writing journey. The displays celebrate the positive side of literacy.
- 'Take one book' weeks have helped the school to hone in on particular authors, looking at their writing style and writing journey.
- The school has introduced a poetry focus to encourage pupils to analyse poems and develop an enjoyment and appreciation of language. A poetry appreciation evening will take place in May, where pupils will perform their favourite poems.
- There is no ability setting across classes. Pupils are taught in mixed attainment groups and targeted support is provided to challenge high achievers and support middle and low attaining pupils.

### Continuous professional development for staff

A key lever in the school is the pursuit of excellence in quality first teaching where English and mathematics have been the largest focus. In 2014 - 2015 the focus extended to the rest of the curriculum. There is a clear program of continuous professional development (CPD) to support teachers in the classroom covering:

- Medium-term literacy planning
- CPD on guided writing in literacy and other topic work. It was agreed that this must be teacher-led and supported by teaching assistants.
- Assessment for learning
- Staff meetings focused on developing and ensuring consistency in success criteria in literacy across the school.
- Data and target setting

### The curriculum

The following practice has been developed into the curriculum to improve literacy results:

- Literacy is embedded across the whole curriculum and pupils complete extended writing tasks in all topic work.
- Teachers carefully pick high quality texts to develop the skills of pupils and make them aware of their writing journey. This approach has resulted in pupils applying those skills in topic books.
- There is an emphasis on 'write, write, write' as evidenced by the filled exercises books in every year group and curriculum time dedicated to writing. Every pupil has at least three filled literacy exercise books in Year 6 and the school plans to incorporate topic work into these literacy books so the number of exercise books will no doubt grow in the next academic year.
- Pupils are given opportunities for repetition, rehearsal and practice in writing.
- A tangible result of the school's emphasis on writing is when pupils write letters to parents on behalf of the school. Pupils in Year 2 or above negotiate amongst themselves about who will write the letter, who will check it, and who

types it - making the pupils more aware of each other's strengths. Parents enjoy reading the letters a lot more when pupils write them while pupils become more aware of the purpose of writing in the process.

- The school uses the strengths of its teachers to their advantage. Year 5 and 6 are taught literacy by teachers who particularly enjoy and are passionate about literacy teaching while mathematics is taught to Year 5 and 6 by staff whose strength is in mathematics teaching.

## Tracking progress and data

Rigorous tracking, data analysis and discussions of whole cohorts involving all staff ensure that all teachers have an in-depth knowledge of the strengths, weaknesses and progress of all pupils and vulnerable learners.

The school utilises AM7 reports to track each pupil individually rather than only as a group or sample. This ensures that no child is overlooked and the appropriate support can be provided for all pupils, even to help middle attaining pupils become high achievers.

Pupil progress meetings for all pupils, led by the headteacher and the inclusion co-ordinator, take place four times a year and have become part of the ethos of the school. The first pupil progress meeting in the autumn term is informal, lasts 45 minutes and focuses on asking the class teacher how the pupil is progressing, what they have noticed about the class and how their interventions are going. The school uses CAT scores to raise questions and awareness in the first pupil progress meeting and if the pupil has a high CAT score they discuss how they can achieve more.

Support staff, who often lead interventions, are involved in pupil progress meetings and fill in a form which highlights actions taken in the intervention and what changes took place if the dynamics did not go to plan. After the pupil progress meetings all support staff have a meeting together to discuss notes and further actions.

## Support and interventions

The senior leadership team has facilitated a wide range of interventions to support progress in literacy:

- The deputy headteacher runs a boys reading club for Year 4 and 6 pupils. Pupils enjoy attending this club and one measure of the success of the Year 6 reading club is that one boy turned up to the club during SATs week when it was not running and was disappointed that it wasn't running as he still wanted to attend!
- The school also runs a boys writing club for reluctant writers, where pupils can decide what they write about. The club has recently acted as a website improvement project after the boys told the staff that the school website needed improving and wanted to re-write it. One pupil felt that the club changed his own views around writing, from reluctant to keen, and noticed marked improvements in the quality and output of his writing.
- Between 2014-15 the school ran a Level 6 GAPS intervention group. The school deliberately targeted pupil premium/FSM pupils, who made up one third of the group, along with other pupils who were not making the expected progress. These pupils were put forward to take the L6 GAPS test and the intervention letter was sent home in order to further raise aspirations.
- The school uses pupil premium funding for 1:1 tuition and targeted interventions. This is delivered by a teacher in school who is familiar with the pupil and regularly reports back to the SLT on progress. The intervention is based on supporting the pupil in areas they are struggling with in class.
- The school runs a lunchtime homework club three days a week where pupils can go and complete their learning or write letters to parents on behalf of the school.
- A teaching assistant stays with a year group throughout the day and can support pupils to transfer skills learnt in the morning to the afternoon.

## Ambition and aspiration - changing the culture

The three core values at Alban Wood - respect, kindness and ambition, are promoted throughout the school to encourage a culture of high expectations for all pupils.

- There has been a recent shift in culture in target setting for teachers. Initially staff were not so familiar with using AM7 attainment and progress data. However data reports circulated to all teacher and CPD on using data has resulted in a culture where the class teacher often needs to be talked down from an aspirational target that they have set.
- The school has high expectations for all pupils and encourages them to 'aim higher' through pupil progress meetings and raising the bar by offering level 6 entries at key stage 2.
- Pupils' views on learning, school affairs and writing are taken into account through time dedicated for pupil dialogue and reflections, offering pupils choice for writing topics (school website in the boys' writing group) and allowing them to write letters to parents.
- Pupils are given the chance to lead change through writing. Recently when pupils wanted to create a mound on the field that could be used as a slide, or to sledge down when it snows, they wrote a letter to SLT to outline why they wanted the change. Through this letter their plans were approved and pupils achieved their aim of creating their own legacy as well as learning how to write a persuasive letter.
- The school engages parents through parent workshops, curriculum evenings and letters. Staff ensure that they regularly catch up with parents to share their child's success and discuss what they have covered in an intervention group.

## Impact

Overall it is clear that there is no one strategy or solution that has led to writing success at Alban Wood but rather a combination of efforts in all three areas of the curriculum, classroom and culture. Key levers in good practice include the emphasis on quality first teaching and CPD, the involvement and deployment of teaching assistants, positive partnerships with parents, frequent and responsive use of data and evidence and flexibility in responding to needs of pupils through interventions and support groups. All these levers feed into and feed from the culture and ethos of the school.

Alban Wood's Raiseonline (2015 validated full report) indicated that pupil attainment in writing is above national average. Pupil progression from key stages 1 to 2, as indicated by added (VA) scores is higher than expected, being significantly over 100 overall, and three year averages of VA are significantly above 100 for writing (TA).

In 2015 100% of pupils at Alban Wood made at least two levels of progress in writing and 75% of disadvantaged pupils made three levels of progress in writing. 93% of pupils achieved a level 4 or above in writing, including 83% of disadvantaged pupils.

FFT Aspire data indicates that FSM6 pupils in Alban Wood have made significant progress in their writing over the last three years. Further reports from FFT Aspire and the local authority data summary report *Narrowing the Gaps* corroborate further the progress made by FSM 6 pupils at Alban Wood.

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Related documents and links	<a href="http://albanwood.herts.sch.uk/">http://albanwood.herts.sch.uk/</a>

If you have an aspect of interesting practice that could be shared or are interested in finding out more about a case study please get in touch by emailing [exchangingexcellence@hertsforlearning.co.uk](mailto:exchangingexcellence@hertsforlearning.co.uk)

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