The project

Grammar for Writing is a literacy intervention that aims to improve writing skills of Year 6 pupils by providing contextualised grammar teaching. It encourages pupils to improve how their writing communicates with the reader by making connections between a linguistic feature and the effect it has on writing, rather than by focusing on grammatical inaccuracies. It can be delivered as both a universal and targeted intervention.

In this evaluation, the programme was trialled as both a whole class and small group approach, with pupils expected to achieve between Level 3 and 4b at Key Stage 2. The intervention involved 15 guided writing sessions, delivered over four weeks, in June/July 2013, and involved 53 primary schools from four geographical regions across England. Teachers in intervention classes received three days of training in the Grammar for Writing approach.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GROUP</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>EFFECT SIZE</th>
<th>ESTIMATED MONTHS' PROGRESS</th>
<th>95% CONFIDENCE INTERVAL (CI)*</th>
<th>EVIDENCE STRENGTH**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class level intervention vs. control</td>
<td>1,982</td>
<td>+0.10</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>-0.09 to 0.30</td>
<td>★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small group intervention vs. control</td>
<td>817</td>
<td>+0.24</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>0.00 to 0.49</td>
<td>★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small group intervention vs. whole group intervention</td>
<td>631</td>
<td>+0.21</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>0.04 to 0.38</td>
<td>★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class level intervention vs. control without small group</td>
<td>1,772</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>-0.15 to 0.28</td>
<td>★★★</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Effect sizes with confidence intervals that pass through 0 are not ‘statistically significant’, which means the difference could be due to chance.

**Evidence ratings are a new measure under development based on a number of factors including study type, size and drop-out. Ratings are provisional and are not given for sub-group analyses, which will always be less secure than overall findings. For more information about ratings visit: http://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evaluation.

What impact did it have?

The overall effect size of the class-level intervention compared to the ‘business as usual’ control was small (+0.10, estimated two additional months’ progress) and statistically insignificant (i.e., may have occurred by chance). A larger effect was observed when children were taught in small groups (+0.24, estimated three additional months’ progress), although this is very similar to the difference in effect size between the small group intervention and the whole class approach. This suggests that the observed gains in writing outcomes are likely to be as a result of teaching pupils in small groups, rather than any intrinsic benefit of teaching Grammar for Writing. There is, therefore, little evidence that the intervention provided additional gains in writing outcomes.

The study does demonstrate that small group teaching is an effective strategy to increase writing skills among pupils between Level 3c and 4b, which is reasonably consistent with the emerging evidence base for small group tuition.

The subgroup analysis showed no evidence of the intervention differentially benefiting pupils eligible for free school meals.

How secure is this finding?

This evaluation was set up as an effectiveness trial to test the impact of a four-week version of Grammar for Writing, delivered with the developer leading the recruitment and retention of the schools and participants and the training, and overseeing the provision of the intervention. EEF effectiveness trials aim to test whether an intervention can work at scale, in real-world conditions.

In each school, one Year 6 class was randomly assigned to the intervention group and one Year 6 class was randomly assigned to continue with teaching as usual. Within the intervention class, eligible pupils were randomised on an individual basis to receive either whole group Grammar for Writing teaching or the whole group approach plus small group Grammar for Writing teaching. At the end of the intervention period all pupils were asked to complete the Progress in English 11 (Long Form) Test developed by GL Assessment, as a measure of general writing ability.

This study was a well conducted, relatively large study with independent randomisation. Intention to treat analysis was used (i.e. pupils were compared in the groups to which they were originally randomly assigned); blinded marking of test papers was undertaken, and correct statistical adjustment was made for class randomisation. There was about 20% drop-out in terms of the primary outcome, but this was evenly spread between the groups and there was no evidence that it introduced selection bias. The process evaluation indicates the programme was delivered with good fidelity (i.e. as intended by the
A previous trial evaluation of Grammar for Writing showed a statistically significant impact among older children, but methodological issues in the way the data were analysed means that there are doubts about the validity of the findings.

How much does it cost?

The cost of the approach is estimated at £20 per pupil. This estimate includes resources (estimated at 50p per pupil), direct salary costs of teachers (£250), initial training (£700) and on-going monitoring and support (£250). Estimates are based on a school delivering the intervention to 60 pupils, with six out-of-class intervention pupils and two teachers trained.

Key conclusions

- Grammar for Writing is not effective in improving general writing among Year 6 pupils when delivered as a whole class intervention over four weeks.
- Grammar for Writing is modestly effective in improving writing as a small group intervention, although this is likely to be a result of small group teaching, rather than an intrinsic benefit of Grammar for Writing itself.
- The evidence for Grammar for Writing from this evaluation is insufficient to recommend widespread adoption among Year 6 pupils.
- Small group teaching amongst Levels 3c to 4b pupils does seem an effective strategy to increase writing skills.
- Possible further research question: Is small group teaching for children at Levels 3c to 4b effective and cost-effective over a longer time period?