Raising the Achievement of Boys in English at KS1 and KS2
Great Expectations: Improving Boys’ Writing

Introduction
Improving outcomes in English for boys in Cumbria continues to be a priority. With this in mind, we have put together a short collection of case studies from schools where effective strategies have helped boys to achieve success, particularly in writing.

We have also included a summary of the key points arising from Gary Wilson’s ‘Breaking through the Barriers: Raising Boys’ Achievement’ training event held in Cumbria in 2016.

A list of recommended books for boys, provided by Cumbria’s Library Service for Schools, is also included for your information.

We hope that you find the resources and ideas helpful in your work to improve outcomes in your own schools. Please email any feedback to rachel.laverack@cumbria.gov.uk

Rachel Laverack
(General Advisor, Learning Improvement Service)

Acknowledgements
We would like to thank the following schools for their willingness to share their strategies and tips for improving outcomes for boys in their schools:

- Newbarns Primary and Nursery School, Barrow
- Bransty Primary School, Whitehaven
- Dearham Primary School, Maryport
- Ghyllside Primary School, Kendal
- Houghton Church of England Primary School, Carlisle

Thanks to the following members of the CASL Primary English Group for producing the case studies:

- Louise Payton, St. Patrick’s Catholic Primary School, Workington
- Karen Stringer, St. George’s Church of England Primary and Nursery School, Barrow
- Jackie Piper, Arnside National Primary School
- Carl Barnes, Distington Community School, Workington
- Becky Atkinson, Warcop Church of England Primary School, Appleby.
Newbarns Primary and Nursery School

A visit to Newbarns Primary and Nursery School would immediately alert you to the fact that the school values and celebrates writing. The writing is very definitely on the wall! In the foyer, there are examples of blog writing with pupils’ photographs alongside their work. Within minutes of my visit, two year 6 pupils skipped down the stairs discussing the relative merits of a piece of writing and the use of adjectives within. So, how does the school promote a love of writing and immerse children in text and what is the impact on the school’s KS2 data, in particular for boys?

Information about the school
Newbarns Primary and Nursery school has almost 450 pupils in full time education divided between 15 classes. There are over 80 staff employed in the school.

KS2 results boys’ writing (2013-2016)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>L4+</th>
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<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>56.3%</td>
<td>68.8%</td>
<td>73.5%</td>
<td>76%</td>
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Over a 4 year period, the school has seen a significant increase in the numbers of boys achieving a Level 4/expected standard in writing. What is behind this positive trend?

Mr Birkett, the Headteacher, said that there is no single factor attributable to the improvement in achievement and that each of the following strategies has contributed, in varying amounts, to improvements in writing. As writing stems from reading, equal attention has been given to both aspects of the English curriculum.

More accurate judgements
Some members of staff at Newbarns have trained as moderators. The school now regularly moderates for reassurance with other schools. Being part of a bigger cluster group has provided a diverse range of writing, making the process of moderation far more comprehensive. The school uses Ros Wilson for moderation purposes. Each year group meets with other schools in the cluster, promoting cohesion. This prevents the onus being left to Y2 and Y6 teaching staff.

Carefully chosen texts
The school provides individual books for the pupils, as having access to their own text has been proven to improve outcomes. Texts from the Power of Reading, part of the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE), are adapted using the Power of Reading approach and teaching strategies. Books relating to the termly topics, with special appeal for boys, are selected. Children are immersed in different styles and genres of writing and are given opportunities to use different styles for recording their ideas.

Chunking the writing
Writing tasks are broken down into the introduction, next steps and conclusion in order to avoid outfacing the children and to provide support in understanding the purpose of the text.

Encouraging reading
Reading is encouraged from the minute the pupils start school. Each class has daily dedicated reading time for all pupils. Class stories are part of the curriculum; less able children might not be able to access the language, but by having books read to them, they have the opportunity to listen and respond to rich and varied texts.

Vocabulary books
Each child in Y6 has a vocabulary book which children add to as they are being read to, as well as in their individual reading time. Teachers pause on particularly rich vocabulary and children “steal” words which can later be used in their own writing. On the face of it, children’s reading appears good or proficient. However, the Headteacher noted that not all children understand the nuances of language. The focus in the new curriculum on word meaning and vocabulary has been part of Newbarns’ curriculum for the past 4 years and teachers are now reaping the rewards of this approach of extending vocabulary at every opportunity.

Reading Journals
Pupils have a reading journal and a Power of Reading book and a pupil progress book which helps keep track of reading and writing. The pupil progress book is used every half term and follows the child up through school. All the books are quality products with thick paper, making them extra special. Older children use pens to write in these books.

Targeted authors
At the start of each term, every year group focuses on a targeted author. For example, during the visit, Y1 was exploring the books of Emily Gravett. Children become familiar with the style of writing of their particular author.

Displays
Word walls and working walls all help to promote independence in writing. Children have ready access to dictionaries and have frequent dictionary work to support the use of a dictionary to enhance their writing.
Drama
Using high quality texts, such as those provided by Power of Reading, as well as the different drama strategies helps to take the pressure off teachers to initially come up with ideas. Now staff have adopted the techniques and strategies suggested by the Power of Reading programme and use them for their own selected texts.

Competitions
Children participate in different competitions such as the BBC Radio 500 words story writing competition, Post Office letter writing competitions and Reading Buddies. There is no set programme of competition entry but each year group chooses competitions to suit the cohort or year group.

Initiatives
Initiatives are needs driven and not selected for their popularity. For example, a register of pupils not reading at home is taken. Parents are then phoned and reminded about listening to their child read. These children are picked up at school by staff and listened to by parent helpers and other volunteers. The number of men on the staff helps to promote reading as they are seen as good role models by the boys.

One of the ongoing initiatives is Story Club for Key Stage 1 which is held in the well-stocked library. A previous initiative was the Kindle Club, which proved very popular. The library is well stocked and a County Librarian is employed to work with the children each half term and then re-stocks the library. This takes the stress and strain away from staff as the Librarian has up-to-date information about the latest books and ones suitable for the topics. All the books are current and of high quality, with no books older than 12 years. A librarian is employed to ensure the library is an attractive and welcoming place. An electronic system for recording the 5500 books helps keep track of what is being read and what is popular. The school also has regular library bus visits which help by giving children the chance to make choices over what they are reading.

Caught Reading
Photographs are taken of pupils reading in unusual places which are then used to inspire others. Parents participate by emailing photographs of their children reading outdoors or in unusual places in the home and this reinforces the home-school reading for pleasure strategy. Cumbria’s Spellbinding initiative for KS2 pupils was over-subscribed, showing that pupils are eager to take on the challenge of reading.

English Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling
This is taught as a discrete subject, mainly because of the demands of the new curriculum. A particular concept is taught, then a piece of writing follows which incorporates that particular punctuation or grammar point. Literacy Shed is used as a motivator and, because of the film clips, it is received positively by boys in particular, helping them to engage more fully in the texts.

Foundations for writing stem from the reading. The school works hard to ensure reading is at the heart of the school so that writing can flourish. The staff (23 teachers, 80 staff) are passionate about books and reading, even sharing books amongst each other, which in turn feeds into children’s enthusiasm for reading.

CPD
There has been a focus on more CPD for all staff and for all staff to participate in the same CPD so that consistency and expectations are the same. External consultants have been employed to provide refresher courses and training. Lancashire Grid for Learning resources and spelling courses through the local teaching school (LASL) have further ensured that all staff have the same expectations and understanding.

Rewards and motivation
Children’s work is rewarded, photographs are taken and a link home is made by sending a letter home. Each week praise certificates are handed out. Writing is prominently and proudly displayed. There are lots of displays around school. Good Work Assemblies focus on and praise writing. Older pupils write books for younger children, for example, Y4 pupils wrote Mr Men books for Infant pupils. Good writing is shared and celebrated cross phase and between classes, which lend further weight to the value of writing.

Phonics
Phonics starts in Nursery. The school streams for phonics within the year group as they have enough staff to do so. These small targeted groups support spelling and improve the technical aspect of writing.

Pupil Progress Meetings
All staff are responsible for pupils’ progress. Interventions are analysed and individual children are tracked. Next steps are suggested. These are then reviewed on a termly basis. Booster-style writing sessions are given to targeted groups of pupils. Attention and resources are focused on what is needed and the staff have the confidence to do this. Initiatives are chosen so all children have access and are inclusive.
Use of Teaching Assistants
Teaching Assistants deliver interventions for individuals and small groups. Extra support is put in the classrooms. Every year group has at least one TA supporting in the morning. The Teaching Assistants are highly regarded, experienced and well-qualified.

Accountability
Achieving the balance between accountability and support is something that the staff at Newbarns have worked hard to achieve. The three English Coordinators have all degrees in English and this helps with disseminating subject knowledge and knowing the needs of both staff and pupils. The three Coordinators are needed because English is such a broad subject with different phases and aspects: EYFS, KS1, KS2, phonics, writing, drama, reading and library.

Monitoring
Frequent and regular monitoring of books ensures consistency of approach. The whole school has the same agenda and is working towards a common aim. The range of writing is checked. Children are also asked for their views on writing. Learning walks and informal drop-ins by the Headteacher and the English Coordinators help ensure consistency of approach. There is high quality teaching throughout school and this is evidenced during the learning walks.

Resources
Dictionaries and word banks are available for writing at all times and children become accustomed to using them. Staff actively promote and encourage the use of these as well as working walls. There is explicit teaching of editing for older children – the process is modelled; work is up-levelled and there is directed teaching of strategies to use. The school runs blogs; positive comments from pupils and parents are sought and encouraged. The blogs, set up by David Mitchell, can be seen on their website.

Peer assessment is through the blogs and within the children’s books, with the focus being on the positive. The school use a “critical friend” approach to editing. Children enjoy project-based writing and like working with a partner or on ipads. This keeps the writing interesting and varied.

The school subscribes to Skoolbo which helps with developing reading and maths. Staff can monitor the success of pupils using it at home. Parental support for homework and reading is high.

Handwriting focus
Pupils start early with handwriting: Reception class start with cursive script. There is a focus on handwriting during the first two weeks in Y2 which ensures all children can join their writing, alleviating the problem of struggling with the physical aspect of writing. This means that more focus can be given to the technical aspect of what children write.
Competent handwriting makes writing flow and frees up children for the next stage in the writing process. Even disaffected boys learn to achieve success in the mechanics of handwriting and take pride in presentation.

There is the expectation that standards of writing do not change between subjects and what is learnt during English lessons is applied in Foundation subjects.

Visits and visitors
Visits from authors help to promote a pleasure of reading and ignite children’s enthusiasm for books. Andy Cope was booked for October to do the Art of Being Brilliant for Y6 and Spy Dog for the rest of the school.

Theatre groups are carefully chosen. This year children are going to the theatre in Manchester to see George’s Marvellous Medicine.

Celebration of writing
Whole school assemblies allow staff to share children’s work and children also have the opportunity to see other children’s work which acts as both encouragement and inspiration. Each Early Years class has a writing area with different styles of paper which support children’s independent writing. There is a focus on children sharing and celebrating their written work.

Conclusion
The Headteacher and Mrs Walker, one of the English coordinators, explained that the consistency of approach, quality teaching and careful selection of texts, as well as whole school CPD and the celebration of writing have helped to improve their whole school results, not just those of the boys. The enthusiasm of the staff for writing is palpable and this is evident in the quality of writing seen around the school. Hard work and determination to improve standards have resulted in providing an environment where children want to write.

K Stringer
Houghton C of E Primary School

Information about the school
Houghton Church of England School is a semi-rural primary situated on the outskirts of the city of Carlisle. It has approximately 140 pupils on roll. The school has a high proportion of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) pupils on roll (19.4%). The school currently has around four/five pupils who frequently relocate and then rejoin the school at a later date; some of these pupils have missed considerable amounts of schooling during this time. The school also has a high number of pupils with SEND, with 14.9% of pupils who fall into this category. The school has five classes. Some of these classes are mixed-age. Some of the children entering into the school have low starting points in English, especially in regards to their spoken language skills. The school moved from ‘satisfactory’ to ‘good’ in their last Ofsted inspection in 2012. The Ofsted inspection report stated, “Pupils of all backgrounds thrive in this happy school. They are well cared for and grow in confidence.”

Attainment
Writing results at both KS1 and KS2 improved between 2013 and 2015 although there was a drop in 2016.

KS1 boys’ writing

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<td>KS1 boys’ writing</td>
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<tr>
<td>L2+ (2013)</td>
<td>63.6%</td>
<td>72.7%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>50%</td>
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KS2 boys’ writing

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<td>KS2 boys’ writing</td>
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<tr>
<td>L4+ (2013)</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>85.7%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
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Barriers to learning
In a research report entitled ‘Improving the outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils: final report’ (2010), it states that, “there is still concern that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils are reported to be amongst the lowest achieving ethnic groups within schools in England, are more likely to be identified as having special educational needs (SEN), and are four times more likely than any other group to be excluded from school as a result of their behaviour (DfE, 2005; DCSF, 2009a).” Houghton C of E Primary School has a high percentage of GRT pupils on roll; therefore they have not just had to narrow the gap between boys and girls, but also between children from GRT backgrounds and children from other ethnic groups within the school.

The school initially identified a number of barriers, which they felt had impacted significantly on their writing results. Some of these included:

- Lack of motivation to write, particularly boys, across the school
- Lack of real life experiences – some pupils had a narrow range of life experiences which affected their ability to write
- Lack of stimulus to inspire writing
- Insufficient time to complete quality pieces of writing (curriculum moving on too quickly)
- Lack of parental support. Parental weaknesses in literacy skills made it difficult for them to support their child/children

These were issues that the whole school aimed to address in various ways. When considering boys’ views towards writing in particular, one of the class teachers suggested that, prior to changes to the English curriculum, boys would have said that, “writing was boring.” The member of staff feels that changing boys’ opinion of writing is pivotal to improving writing results, suggesting that it is important that boys do not see writing as, “something they can’t do, don’t enjoy and can’t improve.”

Cross curricular writing
In recent years the school has moved away from using the Primary National Strategy units and this has given pupils greater opportunities to engage in a wider variety of cross curricular writing activities. The staff feel that having more flexibility over writing topics has allowed them to dedicate more time to writing tasks. When choosing writing topics teachers have tried to give the pupils a voice, so that they feel a sense of involvement. In particular, teachers have tried to listen to the views, interests and opinions of the boys, aiming to select topics that they will be more willing to engage with from the outset. Selecting writing topics in this way has allowed the school to ensure there is more of a purpose for writing. Teachers have also tailored writing tasks so that pupils can access and complete writing tasks in different forms such as diary entries, leaflets etc.

The school has also tried to provide the pupils with ‘real life’ experiences so that they can draw upon these during writing activities. For example, in Y6, the children completed a short first aid course in CPR and then each wrote an information booklet to educate others. The children then used ICT to put their information into a leaflet format.
During the school’s Ofsted inspection in 2012, inspectors commented positively on cross curricular writing stating that, “School leaders have sharpened the focus on helping pupils to use their reading, writing and mathematical skills through links with other subjects and this is ensuring that pupils make more rapid progress from their starting points. For example, visits to the local organic farm have been linked to topics in literacy, history and science. Pupils grew vegetables, harvested, prepared and cooked them just like the ‘Land Army’ in the Second World War.”

**Promoting engagement**
The school regularly uses ‘Power of Reading’ texts to engage children at the start of the writing process. The school also encourages teachers to create their own model texts to use in lessons. The school believes that the children engage more willingly with texts written by the class teacher for the class pupils.

Teachers use drama, music, art and technology at various stages during the writing process in order to motivate and engage pupils. During the school’s last Ofsted inspection in 2012, it was recognised that, “Teachers’ good subject knowledge in English helps pupils to make good progress.” The use of drama to develop writing was also praised in the report. It stated that, “drama was used exceptionally well to teach pupils how to write speech. Pupils re-interpreted and acted the story of Hansel and Gretel complete with dialogue in a threatening ‘witchy’ voice.”

**Time**
The school now dedicates more time to completing writing tasks and they feel this has had a significant impact on outcomes. They believe that the curriculum changes they have made have allowed them more time to complete ‘high quality’ pieces of writing. Setting more realistic time expectations has allowed the children more time to complete written pieces, including drafting, editing, re-drafting and publishing these pieces. It has also increased the quantity of writing with staff feeling that children across the school now write at greater length.

Dedicating more time to individual writing tasks has allowed the teachers to focus on specifically teaching the skills of editing, improving and re-drafting work. The school believes that this has been pivotal to improving results. In a previous Ofsted inspection, the recommendations focused on children editing their work and the development of teachers’ marking, stating that some pupils are, “unsure how to check and improve their work. Marking does not always help pupils to improve their writing.” Since this inspection the staff have attended a Chris Quigley ‘Marking and Feedback’ course, which they believe has had a huge impact on how feedback is given to pupils across the school. The school has also introduced their own marking and feedback codes which have provided pupils with a structure to follow when editing their work.
Display
The school uses displays not just to present work, but to give writing across the curriculum a real purpose. They aim to ensure displays are visually appealing and, where possible, that they include interactive elements which aim to engage children in writing activities. Parts of the displays are designed so that children can physically remove elements, to take to their table, to support them with their writing. In KS2 children are encouraged to create parts of displays in groups.

Parental involvement
The school acknowledged that a small proportion of parents had difficulties with reading and writing themselves and realised that sending letters home was not always an effective method of communication. As a result, staff now talk to parents more frequently on the playground or phone them in order to pass on information. This has also helped staff to develop positive relationships with a variety of parents as reflected in the last Ofsted inspection report which stated, “There are good links with parents. They are confident their children are safe and taught well.”
Bransty Primary School, Whitehaven

Improving Boys’ Writing

Information about the school
Bransty Primary School is smaller than the average-sized primary school. The school has resourced provision for hearing impaired pupils. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. A few pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds and speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding provided for children in local authority care, those from armed service families, and those known to be eligible for free school meals) is above average. The school offers both a breakfast and after-school club managed by the governing body. The school has Healthy School status, Activemark, Kidsafe and the Let’s Get Cooking initiative.

KS2 results boys’ writing 2013 -2016

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<thead>
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<th>2013 (L4+)</th>
<th>2014 (L4+)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
<td>87.5%</td>
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Parental links
The school has excellent links with parents and home/school logs are updated weekly so that parents have a clear understanding of what their child is learning and how they are performing. Text messages are sent to parents when a child has done well and this has immediate impact. Parent evenings are held at the start of term so that the school can look forward rather than reviewing the term.

High expectations
The school has very high expectations of all pupils and has built a culture of good behaviour through reward and praise. They have very ‘boy-heavy’ cohorts and have worked hard to offer rewards that boys aspire to. The school uses class dojos as a positive reward and children are encouraged to do a walk round school with any pieces of successful work so that all teachers and children can offer praise. In their 2013 inspection, Ofsted said, “Teachers and teaching assistants have high expectations of pupils’ achievement and behaviour. Staff have good relationships with pupils; they offer lots of praise and encouragement and are successful in raising pupils’ self-confidence and self-esteem. This helps pupils to be enthusiastic and willing to learn.”

Extra-curricular opportunities
Dinnertime clubs are used to encourage good behaviour and are designed to interest and engage boys. These include clubs such as Lego, minibeasts and computing. This feeds into raising boys’ self-esteem and builds their emotional literacy. They then feel more confident to tackle all new experiences – including writing!

The Writing Curriculum
The curriculum at Bransty School is based on real-life experiences, including many ‘out and about’ days to inspire writing. In Foundation Stage, children visit local farms, shoe shops, Chinese restaurants and take train journeys to various places - all of which build and ground their learning of new vocabulary. This continues through the school where all classes link their literacy to real experiences. Recently Y1 and Y2 visited the local harbour and lighthouses when reading ‘The Light House Keeper’s Lunch’. Author visits, such as M.P Robertson and Robin Price, are used regularly and successfully to inspire writing throughout the school.

Real Purposes and Audiences
Children are given frequent opportunities to write for real purposes and audiences. Children recently redesigned the internet based ‘Lunch Shop’ menus to make them more appealing. Pupils in Y6 have written formal persuasive letters to the local council about the amount of dog fouling close to the school grounds.

Writing across the Curriculum
Writing opportunities are often linked to other curriculum areas. For example, children are given opportunities to become an ‘expert’ for the day. Once a term, the children create a presentation on their chosen area of expertise such as Minibeasts or Top Gear. The school has even had presentations on ‘The History of the Dyson’! This has proved to be extremely motivational. These presentations are then shared with the rest of the class. Ofsted recognised this in their 2013 report and stated, “The school has concentrated on improving writing, particularly for boys. A wide range of good quality writing is displayed along the corridors showing how successful this focus has been. Writing is woven successfully through other subjects.” An example of this would be writing in a particular genre during history, newspaper reports during the 2nd World War topic or non-chronological reports to present science results.
Talk for Writing
Talk for writing is very important at Bransty School and starts in Nursery. New vocabulary is specifically taught to those with limited speech and language at home. This is then tested every Friday and a numerical score is given to parents.

Checklists and WAGOLL
Explicit checklists are provided for writing and the school uses WAGOLL effectively to improve writing. WAGOLL stands for ‘What a Good One Looks Like’. In order for children to become outstanding writers, they are given the opportunity to see outstanding writing or at least writing that models what they are working towards. They set the standard for the quality of work needed in order to achieve the lesson objective. WAGOLL also allows children to:

- **Identify** features of a particular genre
- **Magpie** sentence structures and vocabulary
- **Analyse** and assess the text
- **Compare** the text to their own writing
- **Develop** success criteria
- **Be exposed** to new sentence structures and styles of writing
- **Become motivated** to write
- **Memorise** through talk for writing rehearsal

Building Learning Power
All rewards are linked to Building Learning Power, which the school has successfully introduced to promote and develop the four key areas of:

- Resilience
- Resourcefulness
- Reflectiveness
- Reciprocity.

Bransty use BLP to develop ‘The Language for Learning’ in school and this enables them to engage all pupils in a dialogue using a common language, which is embedded throughout the school, to support and develop their understanding of how learners learn. The children use the language for learning to explain ways in which they achieved or approached tasks and how they can move on to the next chapter in their learning.
Raising the Achievement of Boys in English at KS1 and KS2

Ghyllside School, Kendal, Cumbria

Information about the school
Ghyllside is a larger than average primary school, with 475 children from Nursery to Year 6. It converted to become an academy school on 1 September 2012. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is around the national average. The school has a below-average proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, while an average proportion speaks English as an additional language.

Data shows that Ghyllside Primary School has managed to narrow the gap between boys and girls in their writing assessments at the end of KS1 and KS2. This case study attempts to discover how they have achieved this. During a meeting with the Literacy Coordinator, we discussed the psychology of boys in their approach to learning. At Ghyllside, they feel that children need to be taught to develop fine-motor skills before they feel confident to attempt to write. It is this confidence that is nurtured throughout the school, enabling the boys to take risks with their learning, knowing they have the skills to succeed.

Developing Fine Motor Skills
Children’s fine and gross motor skills are assessed on entry to the school. In PE, activities are differentiated in order to specifically address the skill areas in need of development. Groups are streamed according to their fine motor skills.

Daily movement and music helps to support core strength, shoulder pivot, elbow pivot and wrist pivot. This is followed by a quiet song in which activities are introduced to develop bilateral movement and the progression of dexterity in fingers. One afternoon per week is dedicated to developing the pivots or dexterity in the fingers. Children have access to different writing utensils such as big chalk, paint brushes and big felt pens. Children also have access to foam, pebble, wooden and cube letters to help them to form words if they are not yet confident enough to make a mark. As a school they use the Jolly Phonics programme. They incorporate 5 minutes of finger play into this.

This focus upon the development of fine-motor continues throughout KS1, with dough work and work in the outdoors through Forest Schools. It is believed that it is this focus that enables boys to feel that they are secure in their ability to attempt to write when they are ready, which in turn maintains a positive attitude towards writing from the start.

In KS2, the outdoor focus is continued with the introduction of Expedition Club, in which children are taught skills to plan and carry out expeditions in the Lake District. It is believed that this not only develops fine and gross motor skills but also organisational and relationship skills that enable the children to express themselves more effectively with confidence.

This whole-school approach to the development of key skills and confidence could well be one of the reasons why the boys succeed in English. It provides a base on which all other learning can take place uninhibited.

Developing Gross Motor Skills
The development of Gross Motor Skills is also a focus at Ghyllside, with scooters, balance boards and balancing equipment being used on a regular basis in outdoor play. Gymnastics sessions are planned to support the development of writing, following the research of Madelaine Porter (A Handbook of Dyspraxia). There is also a weekly session of physiotherapy for those with poor gross motor skills, which follow the movement and exercises developed by Sally Goddard Blyth (Attention, Balance and Co-ordination - the A, B, C of Learning Success, published by Wiley-Blackwell (2009)). ‘Move4Words’ (a classroom sensory training programme) and Val Sabin’s ‘Activate’ programme are both used regularly in classes to improve children’s physical development.

Parents are also involved and informed in the development of gross motor skills in partnership with the school. The importance of physical activity in the child’s development is highlighted with parents throughout school in workshops for writing.

Reading
At Ghyllside Primary School, it is recognised that boys can be put off reading in KS2 so they invest heavily in boy-friendly books, updating their resources regularly in response to reading questionnaires where they establish what the children would like to read. Code X and Moondog books are firm favourites with the boys in KS2.

The children have Phonics Passports, which they take to share with parents. The passports contain a list of useful websites for the consolidation of learning at home.
Writing

Ghyllside School uses The Big Write approach to encourage children to write independently, which they can use to assess the children's writing and set targets for development. They are developing Assertive Mentoring to reward children who achieve their targets in reading and writing, which they find is successful in keeping the boys motivated. They use Ros Wilson's VCOP concept to enable the children to evaluate and improve their own work, with laminated reminders on each table. Talk for Writing is used throughout the school to enable children to discuss their ideas before they put pen to paper. This gives them confidence and enables those who struggle to come up with ideas, to share and to experiment before writing.

Good writing is modelled by all teachers to scaffold writers. The use of writing ladders enables children to understand what is expected of them in their writing and to evaluate and improve their work according to specific expectations. Clicker 6 is used as a further support for SEND children, for whom writing is a struggle.

Conclusion

At Ghyllside School, there is not seen to be a single reason as to why the boys have achieved so well in English, instead it is a focus on the whole child which leads to the development of confident children with good motor skills. The wide and varied curriculum enables the nurturing of children so they are safe in the knowledge that their work is valued.
Dearham Primary School

Information about the school
Dearham Primary School is located in West Cumbria. It converted to an academy in November 2011. It is an average sized primary school with approximately 270 pupils on roll. The school is expanding continuously and they have had increasing numbers for several years. The school is currently one form entry into KS2 and two form entry into EYFS and KS1. The school's percentage of disadvantaged children is broadly in line with the national average. The Senior Leadership Team at the school is highly experienced and has supported other schools in different capacities.

The school’s ethos focuses on each child’s experiences and the school aims to ensure that all children who attend Dearham Primary School are nurtured, cared for and educated to the highest standard. The also aim to offer all children a wealth of experiences and opportunities, as well as ensuring that learning is fun. The school’s most recent Ofsted report, in December 2012, graded the school as outstanding in all areas and highlighted the schools outstanding work with its pupils.

KS1 Boys’ Writing
Dearham Primary school saw an upward trend in the percentage of boys achieving L2+ between 2013 and 2015.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>L2+ (%)</th>
<th>L2+ (%)</th>
<th>L2+ (%)</th>
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<tr>
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Curriculum
The school tries to ensure that all children are excited by their learning and fully involved in the process of learning. The last Ofsted report (December 2012) stated, ‘From an early age, pupils develop a love of books. This was seen first-hand in the Early Years Foundation Stage as the children excitedly engaged in the story of The Stick Man.’

The SLT are extremely supportive of teachers and actively encourage them to take creative risks in the classroom in order to fully engage and stimulate children. Whenever possible, writing in topic-based to maximise the engagement of pupils, especially boys. This has led to boys becoming more enthusiastic about writing as they see a direct link with the topics they are covering. They regularly use Power of Reading texts, linked to the topics, in order to further stimulate a love of reading. Information about texts, topics and learning is shared with parents on a regular basis.

The Literacy Subject Leader works in partnership with staff to identify areas for development within the curriculum and to target groups of children who may require additional support or challenge. Through half-termly pupil progress meetings held between the Subject Leader and members of staff, the school is able to successfully identify any underperforming children and produce action plans in order to support their specific needs.

Assessment
At Dearham Primary School writing assessments are carried out each term. Children complete a writing task related to their current class work. They use information from these assessments to set individual writing targets for children and highlight each child’s next steps for learning. Each child’s writing assessments are placed in an individual writing portfolio. This portfolio travels through the school with the child. The school also uses spelling, punctuation and grammar assessments (Rising Stars) and all results are tracked carefully to inform any target setting that takes place. Personalised targets are shared with parents and parents are actively encouraged to support learning and development at home.

Conclusion
Dearham Primary School prides itself on its child-centred approach and this is reflected in the teaching of writing. They celebrate writing achievements of all pupils around school and highly value the thoughts and opinions of each child. Their child-centred approach to teaching and learning is an essential feature in their continued success and achievements. Children at Dearham Primary School enjoy the writing process and are extremely proud of their achievements. Learning at Dearham Primary school is stimulating, engaging and, most importantly, fun.
Raising boys’ achievement

Gary Wilson training 2016

Summary of key points

- Research suggests that the vast majority of boys learn best by ‘doing’ or through active learning. Many adults are visual learners so there is often a mismatch between teaching style and learning style.

- Importance of self-esteem and constant reinforcement of positive message. NO to statements like, ‘Boys will be boys!’ and YES to statements like, ‘Boys will be brilliant!’

- Constant focus on the development of independence. Give them a sense of responsibility. ‘We really disable our boys when we do everything for them’ - Steve Biddulph (Australian author/expert on boys’ education)

- Bring our personalities to school (Educating Yorkshire. Mr Burton and Musharaf example)

- ‘Yes, I can...’ images of boys around school being successful in a range of situations from winning a football tournament to taking part in a charity event to winning in a prize in a writing competition to reading 10 books.

- Boys need more praise and encouragement than girls but it needs to be targeted and specific.

- Praise postcards. Make sure they arrive on a Saturday morning so that there is a greater chance that the family/carer can celebrate the achievement together.

- Texts to mobiles in order to celebrate achievement and not just inform about events etc.

- Postcards home to parents to tell them that tests/mocks are coming up and 5 ways they can support their boys in preparing (e.g. importance of breakfast, importance of some downtime after computer before they sleep)

- Challenge – boys love to be challenged. Use this terminology in your lessons.

- The importance of talk. Girls generally develop language earlier than boys so they are more experienced language users. We need to maximise the opportunities for boys to talk. Sitting boys side by side can be an effective strategy. The talk is more important than the eye contact.

- Left brain/right brain exercises - Stroop test, ear and nose reversal activity

- Writing – boys often have fantastic ideas but find it difficult to write them down and can’t see the point of putting them down on paper.

- Pie Corbett ‘If we do it dull, so will they!’ As teachers of English we need to demonstrate a genuine passion for our subject and excite and ignite the imagination of our pupils.

- Value all the things your boys bring to the table. Show genuine interest in their hobbies and interests.

- Try, if possible, to give some choice in writing tasks. For example, report, flow chart, mind map, poem.

- ‘Think it, Map it’ by Oliver Caviglioni – useful book. Ask pupils to work in pairs to produce some kind of mind map at the end of a lesson to summarise learning. Revisit at the start of the next lesson.

- Use of visualisers throughout lessons – helps with chunking and redirection of writing.

- Use of unusual props to stimulate discussion. How might this object relate to the book/character we are studying? Getting pupils to think outside the box and explore possibilities, take risks.

- Mini whiteboards provide a ‘risk-free’ writing opportunity- not permanent.

- Use of powerful fiction to develop emotional intelligence. Fiction helps to expose boys to a wide range of experiences, attitudes and people. Fiction aids understanding of what others think and feel and do. It starts to build empathy as boys start to identify with characters and understand their own emotions. Fiction gives them strategies to deal with dilemmas and conflicts. Fiction gives them words to express themselves.

- Non-fiction/stories of famous people and heroes can illustrate perseverance, hard work and determination in overcoming obstacles. (Joseph Valente –Apprentice 2015)

- Use of drama activities such as hot-seating, mantle of expert, forum theatre, conscience alley (help to build confidence and can provide the first ‘chunks’ in the writing journey.) Importance of modelling.
• ‘Lend me your Literacy’ website – worldwide audience for children’s writing. This site has proved very motivational for boys.
• Raising Boys’ Achievement in writing - UKLA report. This report highlighted the value of a teaching model which integrated drama and visual approaches in the teaching of writing and led to a rapid improvement in the standard of boys’ writing.
• Literacy Shed website. Use of film clips and other visual resources to stimulate discussion and writing
• ‘Yes he can’ – Ofsted report. Still valuable in terms of tips and advice.
• Tim Rylands. Check out the website for ideas and resources to stimulate the creative writing process.
• The Fantastic Flying Books of Morris Lessmore by W E Joyce (see Youtube film clip and picture book)
• Erika’s Story by Ruth Vander Zee
• Graphic novels
• Talking photograph albums. Boys put together a collage of images or photographs around a theme and attach sound files to the images.
• Crazy talk –facial animation software using text and voice.
• Real purpose, real audience – write letters to real people for real reasons. Ask local shops, dentists, library, medical centres to display writing from your school.
• Boy/girl seating- not particularly effective in raising achievement
• Many boys hate working in silence. One boy said, ‘It’s like being dead!’
• Role models/experts – boys often thrive in this role.
• Exemplar work from previous year, preferably from a boy who might be considered ‘cool’ or respected by others for some reason e.g. sporting skill
• Use of success criteria but not just at the start of the task but part way through as well.
• Check your classroom displays. Is there a fair balance of work from boys and girls? Be aware of this around school too. Entrance area? School website images?
• Use of word ‘thank you’ instead of ‘please’ – suggests compliance, that the pupil will do it!
• When in doubt, give boys a clear system. For example, you might want them to do research on a particular issue for homework. You do not want 25 pages printed from Google. Give them 10 websites to check, ask them to identify the top 3 for quality of information and then use the highlight tool to highlight top 10 facts.
• Write a story in less than 50 words.
• Tape a lesson and listen back to yourself and your interactions with boys and girls. Do you speak differently to them?
KS1 Books for Boys Booklist

Simon Bartram **Man on the Moon**
Looks at a day in the life of Bob. Find out what he does on the moon: cleaning and tidying, welcoming visitors, performing tricks for tourists and much more. He knows almost everything there is to know about the moon - but there’s something going on behind his back that he hasn’t spotted.

Julia Donaldson **Superworm**
Award-winning Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler, tell a romping story of Superworm, a new hero on the block. Good old Superworm! Using his special superpowers, he can rescue Beetle when she falls down the well, save a baby frog from being run over on the road, and entertain bored children by turning himself into a skipping rope. But someone evil wants to make use of those special power… Can the other creatures rescue Superworm and take their revenge on the Wicked Lizard? A cracking storyline delivered in bouncing rhyming couplets.

Julia Donaldson **The Gruffalo**
“A mouse took a stroll through the deep dark wood. A fox saw the mouse and the mouse looked good.” So begins the story of how a clever little mouse outwits his big scary enemy. The tasty little mouse needs to make his way through the deep dark woods. How will he do it? By inventing the Gruffalo, a fearsome creature with terrible claws, terrible tusks and terrible teeth in his terrible jaws. It’s a brilliant trick. The little mouse’s self-preservation is a witty scam that delights children time after time.

Jonny Duddle **Gigantosaurus**
Bonehead offers to become the lookout for the terrifying Gigantosaurus that is roaming near their home, but then he cries wolf to his friends once too often he finds his friends take no notice and he finds himself in lots of bother. A cautionary tale that tricking and lying is not the answer but does Bonehead survive to tell the tale and learn the error of his ways. The rhyming text, some in speech bubbles, makes this a great book to share.

Gareth Edwards **The Disgusting Sandwich**
There’s a great joke running right through this witty picture book to the excellent punch line. Badger is always hungry and now his tummy is rumbling! He so badly wants the fresh white bread and peanut butter sandwich which he sees in the little boy’s hand. But others want their hands on it too… A squirrel, a fox, a frog and a crow are just some of those who also covet the sandwich. After several accidents in which it gets gloopy, squishy, squelly and slimy the sandwich does not look as good as it once did. Will anyone eat it now?? A hilarious treat of disgustingness!

Johnathan Emmett **The Clockwork Dragon**
Max and Lizzie’s kingdom is being terrorized by a ferocious dragon named Flamethrottle. But if you think they are frightened you had better think again! They have a daring plan to chase that dastardly dragon out of town... ‘Cocktail of dastardly dragons, mechanical and otherwise, wily and determined child characters and a rip roaring adventure’.
Oliver Jeffers Lost and Found
Celebrating the value of friendship, this is an exquisitely illustrated picture book with a simple story line. Opening his door and finding a penguin on it, the little boy takes pity on the sad looking creature who he immediately assumes is lost. Together they set out on an adventure across icy-blue wastes to find the penguin’s real home. The cool of the landscape makes a perfect backdrop to the warmth of the friendship between the pair.

David Lucas Grendel
This is a charming and clever tale of a little monster who loves chocolate. Grendel loves his mum and Grendel loves his dog, but most of all Grendel loves CHOCOLATE! When he is magically granted three wishes, what does he wish for? More chocolate of course! He gets rather more than he asks for when his whole world turns to chocolate and starts to melt... Whatever can he do?

David Melling Tale of Jack Frost
There was once a group of trees who were fed up with living in a deep, dark and crowded valley - so they moved to the enchanted forest. But as everybody knows, trees cannot walk without magic. This is the story of how Jack, the small boy with the frozen touch, wanders into the forest and ends up saving the magic from the greedy goblins outside. An exquisitely illustrated and beautifully told story.

Chris Riddell Wendel’s Workshop
When Clunk, his robot assistant, fills the sock drawer with cups and saucers and makes tea in a Wellington boot, Wendel throws him on the scrapheap and makes himself a new assistant: the Wendelbot. But he gets more than he bargained for, and soon Wendel finds himself on the scrapheap. Can he win back his workshop from the mighty Wendelbot? The highly detailed robotic illustrations provide endless delight while also conveying a serious message about conservation.

Alex T Smith Egg
Egg rolls up to the house of the wicked Foxy DuBois. Foxy invites Egg in - she’s always very kind to strangers - but she’s got a glint in her eye, and has devilish plans for what she’s going to do to the little egg. The clues are there: recipe books, and pictures of fried eggs adorning her walls. Be careful, Egg!

Kristina Stephenson Charlie Stinky Socks and the Really Big Adventure
The best-selling children’s picture book about one brave knight and a whole lot of adventure. Once upon a time, there was a deep, dark forest, where monstrous trees groaned, terrible beasties moaned and wiggly woos waited to tickle your toes. Nobody ever went there until...

A swashbuckling, funny and charming adventure from best-selling picture book author/illustrator Kristina Stephenson.
Lower KS2 Books for Boys Booklist

Giles Andreae **Billy Bonkers and the Wacky World Cup**
Put your trainers on, Billy Bonkers is back with more amazing adventures! This time he’s landing a plane and flying through the air in a hot-air balloon to watch the World Cup’s final. Billy and his family are so wacky, you will laugh your socks off!

Laurence Anholt **Daft Jack and the Beanstack. Seriously Silly Stories Series**
Daft Jack is such a silly-billy. Who else would swap a cow for some baked beans - and think it’s his lucky day?

Jan Burchett **Undercover Pirate: Skeleton Island**
Sam Silver lives near the sea and enjoys beach-combing for pirate treasures. When he finds an ancient message in a bottle he thinks it will make a great new relic for his collection, but the bottle holds a very special secret... Inside is a gold doubloon which whisks Sam back in time to 1705. Suddenly he’s on board a pirate ship - the Sea Wolf - surrounded by her fearsome captain and crew and sailing the Caribbean Sea. If Sam can’t think of a very good reason why they should keep him alive, he’ll be forced to walk the plank!

Humphrey Carpenter **Mr Majeika Joins the Circus**
When Class Three and Mr Majeika go to the circus, it’s definitely not as fun as they imagined. Everyone’s a bit old, creaky and rubbish really! So when Mr Majeika casts a small spell to help the performers with their circus show, it’s no surprise that Billy Balance, the slack rope walker, kidnaps Mr Majeika so that Mr Majeika can magically help him every time! Things get worse whilst Mr Majeika is trapped when Wilhelmina Worlock takes the opportunity to turn Class Three’s classroom into a circus and the children spend all afternoon running away from lions and alligators! But Mr Majeika’s magic saves the day, Class Three and the circus end up on the news and once again Mr Potter, the headmaster, misses it all!

Julian Clary **The Bolds**
The Bolds, Julian’s 1st story for children is a real treat – a funny story with a ludicrous but hugely enjoyable plotline, lots of jokes, some nail-biting moments and wonderful characters. The Bolds live happily in Teddington where Mrs Bold sells hats and Mr Bold writes the jokes for Christmas crackers, jobs for which they are perfectly suited. Hardly anyone knows they are actually hyenas! Their secret nearly comes out when they attract the attention of their grumpy next-door neighbour, but maybe he’s got things to hide too.
Roald Dahl **George's Marvellous Medicine**
George’s grandma is a grizzly, grumpy, selfish woman with pale brown teeth and a small puckered-up mouth like a dog’s bottom. Four times a day she takes a large spoonful of thick brown medicine, but it doesn’t seem to do her any good. She’s always just as horrid after she’s taken it as she was before. So when George is left alone to look after her one morning, it’s just the chance he needs...

Jonny Duddle **Jolley-Rogers and the Ghostly Galleon**
The first in a brilliant, all-action adventure mystery. A sleepy seaside village appears to have a pirate problem as on each full moon a mysterious ship is seen on the horizon and their museum gets plundered. Feisty Matilda decides to call upon her friend Jim Lad whose grandpa, a friendly pirate, sails a ship called the Blackhole to try and solve the crime. Matilda, Jim Lad and his family, the Jolley-Rogers together with Jim’s trusty dog, Bone come up with a cunning plan to rid the village of their mystery and to reclaim the museum’s lost treasure. High-jinks and adrenalin-fuelled action ensue but when Jim Lad is caught it seems it’s all over but can Bone and Matilda win the day?

Vivien French **Dragon's Can't Swim**
Sam J. Butterbiggins’ only ambition is to be a Very Noble Knight, but he has a problem - he’s been packed off to the castle next door to stay with his aunt and uncle while his parents are away. Not only does he have to put up with his annoying cousin Prune, there’s also the weird creatures his aunt looks after in her Luxury Accommodation for Dragons, Griffins and other Regal Beasts to contend with! But when Godfrey the dragon gets stuck down a well, Sam and Prune have to work together to come to the rescue. Inside the well they make an incredible discovery - a scroll giving instructions on the six quests to be completed in order to become the perfect knight! Sam’s ambition seems close at hand - if only Prune would stop getting in the way...

Neil Gaiman **Fortunately the Milk**
Award-winning Neil Gaiman brilliantly weaves a spell-binding story taking readers up and away on a wild fantasy in which dinosaurs and space travel happily coexist. And all because…Dad has to go out and buy the milk! Chris Riddell’s line illustrations capture the invention perfectly. Children of all ages (and lots of childish grown-ups) will be swept along laughing with glee as Dad tries to get the milk home…and possibly save the universe along the way!

A.F. Harrold **Fizzlebert Stump and the Boy Who Ran Away from the Circus**
There are many boys in the world, all slightly different from one another, and most of them are referred to by names. These are often John or Jack or Desmond, but sometimes they are James or Philip or Simon. Once, and once only, there was a boy whose name was Fizzlebert.’ Fizzlebert Stump lives in a travelling circus. But although he gets to hang around with acrobats, play the fool with clowns, and put his head in a lion’s mouth every night, he’s the only kid there - and he’s bored. But then Fizz decides to join a library, and life suddenly gets a lot more exciting, when a simple library card application leads to him being kidnapped by a pair of crazed pensioners! Will he ever see the circus again?
Gill Lewis **Pip and the Paw of Friendship. (Puppy Academy Series)**
Pip the Labrador puppy is learning the skills he needs to be an assistance dog for Kayla, a young girl in a wheelchair. He’s desperate to have a human of his own, but will Kayla want his help? And how will he ever get his Resist Temptation badge and become an assistance dog if he can’t stop himself from chasing any ball that moves? Puppies to the rescue! From award-winning author Gill Lewis, Puppy Academy is a fun series introducing young readers to a team of plucky, irresistible puppies, learning their jobs as working dogs.

**Chris Mould The Great Cheese Robbery. (Pocket Pirates Series)**
In the junk shop at the end of the street is a dusty old ship in a bottle. And when the world isn’t watching, a tiny pirate crew come out of the ship to explore. They aren’t much bigger than a matchstick, but they have a HUGE appetite for adventure...When the skirting-board mice kidnap Jones, the ship’s cat, and ransom him for cheese, the Pocket Pirates spring into action. But to get the cheese, they must venture to the freezing cold place where it’s always winter ...The place called Fridge. Can the Pocket Pirates survive their perilous journey and get their ship’s cat back...?

**Andrew Murray Ghost Rescue**
When Charlie goes on a trip to Fairfax Castle, he meets a family of very unhappy ghosts. They are being forced to sing songs against their will! Can Charlie rescue them and find them somewhere less musical to haunt?

**Francesca Simon Horrid Henry and the Cannibal Curse**
The final collection of four brand new utterly horrid stories; Horrid Henry’s Bake-Off sees Henry and Margaret go head-to-head in a hotly contested baking competition, Henry triumphantly reveals his top tips in Horrid Henry’s Extra Horrid Guide to Perfect Parents, he reads an interesting book about Evil Evie, a really naughty girl not too dissimilar to himself in Horrid Henry’s Bad Book, and conjures up an ancient cannibal’s curse to deal with his enemies and small, annoying brother in Horrid Henry’s Cannibal Curse.

**Rex Stone Saving the Scaly Beast. (Dinosaur Cove Series)**
The boys are off on a thrilling new adventure in Dinosaur Cove. This time they meet up again with a gentle and friendly pareiasaurus and discover that it is in deadly danger. Will they be able to save it from the enormous carnivorous anteosaurus that has decided it will make the perfect dinner? Loads of new dinosaur facts spill from the pages of this exciting adventure.

* Reviews taken from lovereading4kids.co.uk
Upper KS2 Books for Boys Booklist

Frank Cottrell Boyce Cosmic
Comic and cosmic, this is a roller coaster adventure that takes Liam Digby up into space with a handful of other children and their parents. It's an hilarious journey of discovery as Liam hurries around the world finding out exactly what makes children and adults different.

Roald Dahl Charlie and the Chocolate Factory
A book that requires no introduction as it is probably Dahl's best-known and most read creation and deservedly so. The secretive and magical world of Willy Wonka's chocolate factory is revealed to five 'lucky' children, each of who has won a golden ticket. However, each child gets their comeuppance in some way, except Charlie of course.

Martyn Ford The Imagination Box
There is a box. Anything you imagine will appear inside. You have one go, one chance to create anything you want. What would you pick? That's exactly the question ten-year-old Timothy Hart gets to answer after discovering The Imagination Box. The greatest toy on earth. The top-secret contraption transforms his life but when the box's inventor, Professor Eisenstone, goes missing, Tim knows he has to investigate. With the help of a talking finger monkey called Phil, he sets out to find the professor. In order to rescue his friend, he must face his darkest fears and discover the true potential of his own mind.

Michael Foreman War Game
It was Christmas Day in the trenches in France during World War One and a remarkable football match took place. British and German soldiers put down their weapons and took up a game of football instead. For one day, the enemies are friends: they talk and play instead of fighting. But, the war isn’t over and next day they pick up their weapons and the lads from Suffolk are ordered to go over the top... An astonishing story beautifully told in words and pictures...

Matt Haig Shadow Forest
Winner of the overall Blue Peter Book of the Year 2009 and category winner of 'the book I couldn’t put down'. A dramatic adventure story set in an enchanted magical world. Samuel Blink’s life changes forever when a giant log crashes out of the sky and kills his parents. As a result, he and his sister Martha are forced to move to Norway where Martha disappears into the Shadow Forest, a mysterious world ruled over by the evil Changemaker. It’s a world full of deadly truth pixies, one-eyed trolls and a witch who steals shadows. People who enter, never return. How will Samuel get Martha back?
Shane Hegarty *Darkmouth*

Darkmouth might appear to be a normal seaside town, but it’s really not the kind of place you’d want to go on holiday. In fact Darkmouth is a blighted village, one of the last places on Earth where there are gateways to other worlds, and all sorts of nasty things lurk behind those gates. Fortunately for us, 12 year old Finn, the last remaining Legend Hunter, is there to keep them out, and what he lacks in fighting skills, he more than makes up for with affability. Book one in a new series, Darkmouth is full of monsters, and some monster fights. It’s exciting, very readable and nicely mixes domestic drama in with the action, along with lots of humour.

Anthony Horowitz *Alex Rider: Stormbreaker*

A fabulous story that crackles with suspense and daring and shows that a bit of cheek will take you a very long way. Alex Rider is fourteen when his whole world is turned upside down. Already an orphan, his guardian is killed in suspicious circumstances and Alex finds himself forcibly recruited into MI6 to train as a super spy. He performs deeds of unimaginable daring, faces terrible danger – and lives to tell the tale. A great, pacy read.

Gabrielle Kent *Alfie Bloom and the Secrets of Hexbridge Castle*

Alfie Bloom is just an ordinary boy. Until he receives a letter summoning him to raven-like solicitor Caspian Bone’s office. Here, Alfie learns that he has inherited a castle. And through mysterious circumstances surrounding his birth, he has also been entrusted as the caretaker of a centuries-old magic. Unfortunately for Alfie, dangerous forces are after this powerful magic. With the help of his cousins Maddie and Robin, Artan the flying bearskin rug, and Ashford (a rather special butler), Alfie must keep the magic safe from terrifying adversaries and make sure the secrets of Hexbridge Castle stay secret for ever...

Michael Morpurgo *This Morning I Met a Whale*

At sunrise, young Michael spots a whale on the shores of the Thames and thinks he must be dreaming. But the creature is real and it has a message for him - one that only an open-minded child can deliver to the rest of the world. The whale warns that the earth’s days are numbered and that humans must put right the damage they are doing, but how can Michael fulfil his promise to tell others when neither his teacher nor his classmates will believe his story? Within hours, the city and the wider world have learned of London’s remarkable visitor, and all eyes are on the whale’s struggle against the receding tide. Michael must now join his new friend in a race against time to reach the ocean, and hold fast to his promise in the race to save the world itself.

Simon Nicholson *The Magician’s Fire*

Houdini was the world’s most famous magician, but before his name became legend, Harry Houdini is just a penniless street urchin dabbling with a few escape tricks. But when a well-known magician goes missing in mysterious circumstances, Harry and his friends, Arthur and Billie, are sucked into a deadly adventure. Now Harry must put all his extraordinary skills into action - not just to solve the mystery - but to stay alive. Because when he falls into the clutches of some of Manhattan’s most dangerous villains, his spectacular escapes won’t be for show - they’ll be a matter of life and death!
Andrew Norris I don't Believe it Archie!
Odd things happen to Archie every day. Some very odd things. On Monday, a piano rolls down the hill and traps his new friend Cyd in her mum's car. And then a lorry tips a load of gravel on top of it. At least Cyd finds it exciting. Though of course she doesn't believe that this sort of thing happens to Archie every day. Until Tuesday, when Archie finds a dead dog in his pocket...
Join Archie and Cyd for a whole week's worth of completely surprising and outrageously funny escapades.

Tom Palmer Free Kick. Football Academy Series
James has been a junior player at United for a long time. Everyone expects him to follow in his dad's footsteps and play for England one day, but James isn't so sure. He has something he wants to do even more than football. Something that means he would have to give up football. The problem is he doesn't want to disappoint his dad. At a tournament in London, where he is pitched against Arsenal and Chelsea players, James finally makes his mind up.

Philip Reeve Oliver and the Seawigs
Award-winning Philip Reeve spins a hugely original yarn encompassing moving islands, a short sighted mermaid, a stuck-up boy by the name of Stacey de Lacey and his private army of cheeky, smelly green sea monkeys and a charming hero Oliver whose search for his parents brings him into contact with all of the above. Sarah McIntyre's ebullient illustrations capture the quirky nature of this adventure perfectly.

J. K Rowling Harry Potter and the Philosophers Stone
This is where the adventure begins, as Harry Potter discovers that he is no ordinary boy but a wizard of great renown, as well as expected at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Moreover, at Hogwarts, he encounters "He Who Must Not Be Named", a master of magic whose ambition is more dark and terrifying than Harry can possibly imagine.

Any Stanton You're a Bad Man Mr Gum
Mr Gum is a complete horror who hates children, animals, fun and corn on the cob. This book is not just about him - there’s also a little girl called Polly, an evil butcher, heroes and Jake the dog who must be saved from terrible, terrible evil. Perfect for fans of Roald Dahl and David Walliams.

* Reviews taken from lovereading4kids.co.uk