
Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Andrew Dilnot CBE

Rt. Hon. Nicky Morgan MP
Secretary of State for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
LONDON
SW1P 3BT

18 December 2014

Dear Secretary of State

STATISTICS ON LITERACY AND NUMERACY

On 10 December, Hansard reports that you made the following statement in the House of Commons:

“If the shadow Secretary of State wants to see a failure to prepare young people for the life of work, he ought to be thinking about the fact that under the previous Labour Government one in three of our young people were leaving primary school unable to read and write. That is a shocking statistic.”¹

On 4 December, I copied to you a letter regarding a statement which you made at the Conservative Party conference² to the effect that, under the last Government, one in every three children finished primary school “unable to read, write or add up”.³

The National Statistics on school performance show that, in tests taken in May 2010, 83% of pupils were assessed as reaching level four (the expected level at age 11), or above, at key stage 2 in reading, 71% in writing, and 79% in mathematics. Your Department has indicated that the figures you were referring to can be found in Table 2C of the 2014 statistical release *National curriculum assessments at key stage 2 in England: 2014*, which gives a time series of figures for pupils achieving level four or above in all three of reading, writing **and** mathematics.⁴ This statistical release shows that in 2010, 64% of pupils achieved level 4 or above in all three of reading, writing and mathematics.

I enclose published definitions of the levels, and note that children who do not reach level four, but nevertheless attain level three, are able to “read a range of texts fluently and accurately”, write in a way which is “often organised, imaginative and clear”, and they can “add and subtract numbers with two digits mentally and numbers with three digits using

¹ HC Deb 10 December 2014, c894

² <http://press.conservatives.com/post/98807929855/nicky-morgan-speech-to-conservative-party-conference>

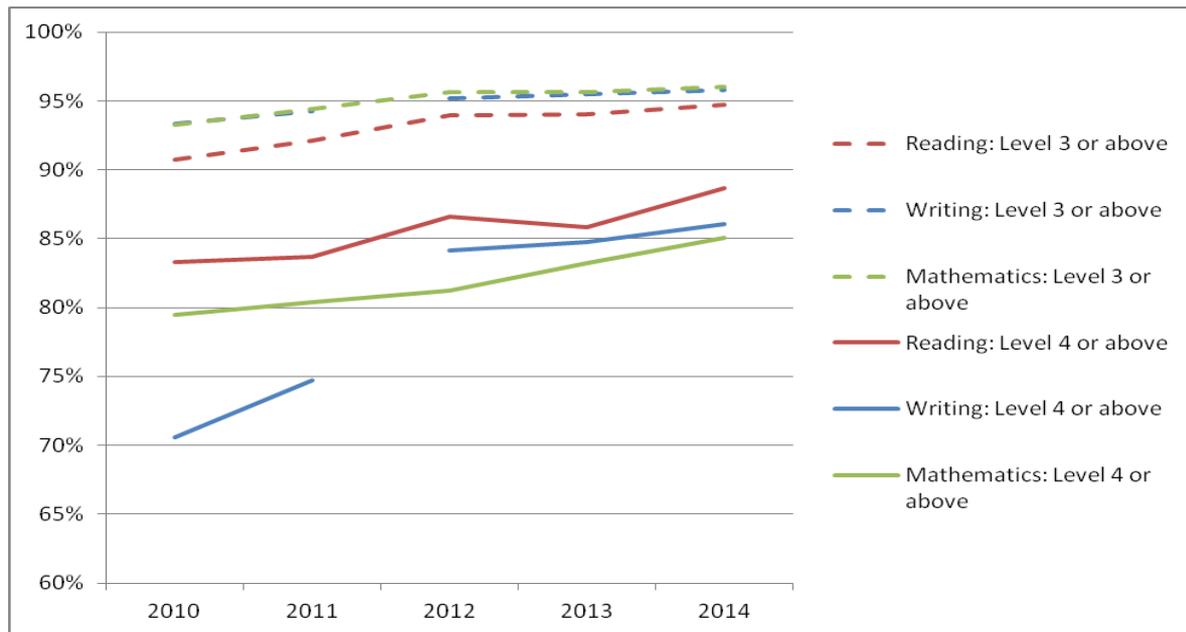
³ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/reports---correspondence/correspondence/letter-from-sir-andrew-dilnot-to-janet-downs-041214.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-curriculum-assessments-at-key-stage-2-in-england-2014>

written methods". The National Statistics on school performance show that, in tests taken in May 2010, 91% of pupils were assessed as reaching level three or above at key stage 2 in reading, 93% in writing, and 93% in mathematics.

The chart below shows the proportion of children who achieved level three or above, and level four or above, in each of reading, writing and mathematics at key stage 2 between 2010 and 2014. Data are included in tabular format in the attached Annex.

Key stage 2: Percentage of pupils achieving level four or above, and level three or above, in reading, writing and mathematics



Source: Department for Education, National Curriculum Assessments at Key Stage 2. See links provided in the Annex.

Note: For writing, results for 2010 and 2011 are based on writing tests. From 2012 onwards, results are based on teacher assessments. Figures for 2011 and earlier are therefore not comparable with those from 2012 onwards.

I think that it would be appropriate for you to reconsider these comments. You may also wish to take advice on whether the official parliamentary record should be corrected.

Yours sincerely

Sir Andrew Dilnot CBE

ANNEX Key stage 2: Attainment target level definitions (levels 1-5)

Reading⁵

- Level 1** Pupils recognise familiar words in simple texts. They use their knowledge of letters and sound-symbol relationships in order to read words and to establish meaning when reading aloud. In these activities they sometimes require support. They express their response to poems, stories and non-fiction by identifying aspects they like.
- Level 2** Pupils' reading of simple texts shows understanding and is generally accurate. They express opinions about major events or ideas in stories, poems and non-fiction. They use more than one strategy, such as phonic, graphic, syntactic and contextual, in reading unfamiliar words and establishing meaning.
- Level 3** Pupils read a range of texts fluently and accurately. They read independently, using strategies appropriately to establish meaning. In responding to fiction and non-fiction they show understanding of the main points and express preferences. They use their knowledge of the alphabet to locate books and find information.
- Level 4** In responding to a range of texts, pupils show understanding of significant ideas, themes, events and characters, beginning to use inference and deduction. They refer to the text when explaining their views. They locate and use ideas and information.
- Level 5** Pupils show understanding of a range of texts, selecting essential points and using inference and deduction where appropriate. In their responses, they identify key features, themes and characters and select sentences, phrases and relevant information to support their views. They retrieve and collate information from a range of sources.

Writing⁶

- Level 1** Pupils' writing communicates meaning through simple words and phrases. In their reading or their writing, pupils begin to show awareness of how full stops are used. Letters are usually clearly shaped and correctly orientated.
- Level 2** Pupils' writing communicates meaning in both narrative and non-narrative forms, using appropriate and interesting vocabulary, and showing some awareness of the reader. Ideas are developed in a sequence of sentences, sometimes demarcated by capital letters and full stops. Simple, monosyllabic words are usually spelt correctly, and where there are inaccuracies the alternative is phonetically plausible. In handwriting, letters are accurately formed and consistent in size.

⁵<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20131202172639/http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/curriculum/primary/b00198874/english/attainment/en2>

⁶<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20131202172639/http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/curriculum/primary/b00198874/english/attainment/en3>

Level 3 Pupils' writing is often organised, imaginative and clear. The main features of different forms of writing are used appropriately, beginning to be adapted to different readers. Sequences of sentences extend ideas logically and words are chosen for variety and interest. The basic grammatical structure of sentences is usually correct. Spelling is usually accurate, including that of common, polysyllabic words. Punctuation to mark sentences - full stops, capital letters and question marks - is used accurately. Handwriting is joined and legible.

Level 4 Pupils' writing in a range of forms is lively and thoughtful. Ideas are often sustained and developed in interesting ways and organised appropriately for the purpose of the reader. Vocabulary choices are often adventurous and words are used for effect. Pupils are beginning to use grammatically complex sentences, extending meaning. Spelling, including that of polysyllabic words that conform to regular patterns, is generally accurate. Full stops, capital letters and question marks are used correctly, and pupils are beginning to use punctuation within the sentence. Handwriting style is fluent, joined and legible.

Level 5 Pupils' writing is varied and interesting, conveying meaning clearly in a range of forms for different readers, using a more formal style where appropriate. Vocabulary choices are imaginative and words are used precisely. Simple and complex sentences are organised into paragraphs. Words with complex regular patterns are usually spelt correctly. A range of punctuation, including commas, apostrophes and inverted commas, is usually used accurately. Handwriting is joined, clear and fluent and, where appropriate, is adapted to a range of tasks.

Mathematics: Number and algebra⁷

Level 1 Pupils count, order, add and subtract numbers when solving problems involving up to 10 objects. They read and write the numbers involved.

Level 2 Pupils count sets of objects reliably, and use mental recall of addition and subtraction facts to 10. They begin to understand the place value of each digit in a number and use this to order numbers up to 100. They choose the appropriate operation when solving addition and subtraction problems. They use the knowledge that subtraction is the inverse of addition. They use mental calculation strategies to solve number problems involving money and measures. They recognise sequences of numbers, including odd and even numbers.

Level 3 Pupils show understanding of place value in numbers up to 1000 and use this to make approximations. They begin to use decimal notation and to recognise negative numbers, in contexts such as money and temperature. Pupils use mental recall of addition and subtraction facts to 20 in solving problems involving larger numbers. They add and subtract numbers with two digits mentally and numbers with three digits using written methods. They use mental recall of the 2, 3, 4, 5 and 10 multiplication tables and derive the associated division facts. They solve whole-number problems involving

⁷<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20131202172639/http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/curriculum/primary/b00199044/mathematics/attainment/ma2>

multiplication or division, including those that give rise to remainders. They use simple fractions that are several parts of a whole and recognise when two simple fractions are equivalent.

Level 4 Pupils use their understanding of place value to multiply and divide whole numbers by 10 or 100. In solving number problems, pupils use a range of mental methods of computation with the four operations, including mental recall of multiplication facts up to 10×10 and quick derivation of corresponding division facts. They use efficient written methods of addition and subtraction and of short multiplication and division. They add and subtract decimals to two places and order decimals to three places. In solving problems with or without a calculator, pupils check the reasonableness of their results by reference to their knowledge of the context or to the size of the numbers. They recognise approximate proportions of a whole and use simple fractions and percentages to describe these. Pupils recognise and describe number patterns, and relationships including multiple, factor and square. They begin to use simple formulae expressed in words. Pupils use and interpret coordinates in the first quadrant.

Level 5 Pupils use their understanding of place value to multiply and divide whole numbers and decimals by 10, 100 and 1000. They order, add and subtract negative numbers in context. They use all four operations with decimals to two places. They reduce a fraction to its simplest form by cancelling common factors and solve simple problems involving ratio and direct proportion. They calculate fractional or percentage parts of quantities and measurements, using a calculator where appropriate. Pupils understand and use an appropriate non-calculator method for solving problems that involve multiplying and dividing any three-digit number by any two-digit number. They check their solutions by applying inverse operations or estimating using approximations. They construct, express in symbolic form, and use simple formulae involving one or two operations. They use brackets appropriately. Pupils use and interpret coordinates in all four quadrants.

Mathematics: Shape, space and measures⁸

Level 1 When working with 2D and 3D shapes, pupils use everyday language to describe properties and positions. They measure and order objects using direct comparison, and order events.

Level 2 Pupils use mathematical names for common 3D and 2D shapes and describe their properties, including numbers of sides and corners. They distinguish between straight and turning movements, understand angle as a measurement of turn, and recognise right angles in turns. They begin to use everyday non-standard and standard units to measure length and mass.

Level 3 Pupils classify 3D and 2D shapes in various ways using mathematical properties such as reflective symmetry for 2D shapes. They use non-standard units, standard metric units of length, capacity and mass, and standard units of time, in a range of contexts.

⁸<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20131202172639/http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/curriculum/primary/b00199044/mathematics/attainment/ma3>

Level 4 Pupils make 3D mathematical models by linking given faces or edges, draw common 2D shapes in different orientations on grids. They reflect simple shapes in a mirror line. They choose and use appropriate units and instruments, interpreting, with appropriate accuracy, numbers on a range of measuring instruments. They find perimeters of simple shapes and find areas by counting squares.

Level 5 When constructing models and when drawing or using shapes, pupils measure and draw angles to the nearest degree, and use language associated with angle. Pupils know the angle sum of a triangle and that of angles at a point. They identify all the symmetries of 2D shapes. They know the rough metric equivalents of imperial units still in daily use and convert one metric unit to another. They make sensible estimates of a range of measures in relation to everyday situations. Pupils understand and use the formula for the area of a rectangle.

Mathematics: Handling data⁹

Level 1 Pupils sort objects and classify them, demonstrating the criterion they have used.

Level 2 Pupils sort objects and classify them using more than one criterion. When they have gathered information, pupils record results in simple lists, tables and block graphs, in order to communicate their findings.

Level 3 Pupils extract and interpret information presented in simple tables and lists. They construct bar charts and pictograms, where the symbol represents a group of units, to communicate information they have gathered, and they interpret information presented to them in these forms.

Level 4 Pupils collect discrete data and record them using a frequency table. They understand and use the mode and range to describe sets of data. They group data, where appropriate, in equal class intervals, represent collected data in frequency diagrams and interpret such diagrams. They construct and interpret simple line graphs.

Level 5 Pupils understand and use the mean of discrete data. They compare two simple distributions, using the range and one of the mode, median or mean. They interpret graphs and diagrams, including pie charts, and draw conclusions. They understand and use the probability scale from 0 to 1. Pupils find and justify probabilities, and approximations to these, by selecting and using methods based on equally likely outcomes and experimental evidence, as appropriate. They understand that different outcomes may result from repeating an experiment.

⁹<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20131202172639/http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/curriculum/primary/b00199044/mathematics/attainment/ma4>

Key stage 2: Percentage of pupils achieving level four or above, and level three or above, in reading, writing and mathematics

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Reading: Level 3 or above	91%	92%	94%	94%	95%
Writing: Level 3 or above	93%	94%	95%	96%	96%
Mathematics: Level 3 or above	93%	94%	96%	96%	96%
Reading: Level 4 or above	83%	84%	87%	86%	89%
Writing: Level 4 or above	71%	75%	84%	85%	86%
Mathematics: Level 4 or above	79%	80%	81%	83%	85%

Source: Department for Education, National Curriculum Assessments at Key Stage 2

Notes:

Reading: For all years based on reading tests

Writing: For years up to 2011, based on writing tests. For 2012 onwards based on writing teacher assessments. Figures for 2011 and earlier for writing are not comparable to those for 2012 onwards.

Mathematics: For all years based on mathematics tests

Key stage 2 assessments are mandatory for state-funded schools; a proportion of independent schools also take part in the assessments see for example p 14 of:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/384964/SFR50_2014_Qualityandmethodology.pdf (2014)

The source data can be found at the following links:

2014

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-curriculum-assessments-at-key-stage-2-2014-revised>

2013

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-curriculum-assessments-at-key-stage-2-2012-to-2013>

2012

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-curriculum-assessments-at-key-stage-2-in-england-2012>

2011

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/interim-results-for-key-stage-2-and-3-national-curriculum-assessments-in-england-academic-year-2010-to-2011>

2010

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-curriculum-assessments-at-key-stage-2-england-academic-year-2009-to-2010-revised>