

# TEACHING OF WRITING

## A STATEMENT

May 2016



**Members of the Society of Authors who write for children are concerned about current government policy in England\*. We believe it undermines children's pleasure in writing, while also failing to develop skills.**

As professional writers, we are experts in how language works. Between us, we write all types of books that are used in homes, libraries and schools. Many of us also have been teachers; some of us still teach, in institutions from primary schools through to universities. As children's writers, we want every child to experience the power and pleasure that control over language gives, enabling self-expression and contributing to success in every area of life.

We recognise that understanding grammar and syntax facilitates such control. However, the teaching of grammar needs to be meaningful, valid and not for its own sake but with the sole aim of increasing the power that the child has over language.

We are worried that when the Government steps in too far, the resultant teaching no longer reflects what writing really does. This happens, for instance, when the Department of Education in England uses new terminology for grammatical structure (such as 'fronted adverbs'), or states that exclamation marks must only end sentences that begin with 'what' or 'how'. These practices risk alienating, confusing and demoralising children with *restrictions* on language just at the time when they need to be excited by the *possibilities*.

We want teachers to be allowed to give all children the chance to love language, play with words, be bold and creative, express themselves - and to learn proper control of language alongside these joyful experiences. Teachers must be allowed to teach the rules of writing in the context of *supporting* expression and control, not affording *primacy* to those rules. We condemn the trend towards more and more testing for the sake of testing. We echo the fears of primary school teachers that too many of the new tests for young children seem designed to show children failing.

Therefore, we call on Government to allow the current generation of school children in England\* to enjoy language, to be empowered by their skill in it, and not to become tangled in rules which have no application outside the narrow confines of a National Test. Amongst these children must be the next generation of novelists, screenwriters, biographers, poets and science writers. We need our children to become fluent, eager and expressive writers, able to persuade, entrance and uplift with language, able to create empathy and delight in their readers. We *cannot risk* destroying their enjoyment, confidence and power at such an early age.

*\*We welcome support from colleagues in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, where education is devolved. We call on the powers there to avoid falling into this damaging pattern of wrong-thinking.*