

Keeping in touch during the holidays: Children and young people writing postcards in 2016

Findings from our Annual Literacy Survey 2016

Anne Teravainen and Christina Clark

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Do children in 2016 still send postcards when they go on holiday? Who is most likely to do so and what, if any, are the relationships between writing postcards and writing in general? These are the questions this short report aims to address, using data from 39,145 8-to-18-year-olds who answered a question on postcard writing in our seventh Annual Literacy Survey, which we conducted in November and December 2016¹.

Key findings

- Over half of children and young people (52.1%) never write a postcard on holiday these days. Just over 1 in 10 children and young people (10.9%) always write postcards when they go on holiday, while the remaining 37.0% do so sometimes.
- While there is no difference in the percentage of boys and girls who always write a postcard when they are on holiday, more boys than girls say that they never write a postcard (54.8% vs. 49.5%).
- 2.5 times as many children aged 8 to 11 as those aged 14 to 16 say that they always write a postcard when on holiday (16.4% vs. 6.3%). 2 in 3 young people aged 14 to 16 say that they never write a holiday postcard.
- Slightly more pupils who receive free school meals never write postcards when on holiday compared with their peers who don't receive free meals (57.1% vs. 52.0%).
- Children and young people from White ethnic backgrounds are most likely to write postcards every time they are on holiday (12.5%), while their peers from Asian ethnic backgrounds are least likely to do so (4.7%).

¹ Overall, we had writing information from 39,411 children and young people aged 8 to 18 from over 200 schools who participated in our online Annual Literacy Survey, which we conducted in November and December 2016. Of these, 39,145 (99.3%) answered a question on whether they ever send postcards when they go on holiday (yes, always; yes, sometimes; no, never).

Why does it matter whether children and young people write postcards?

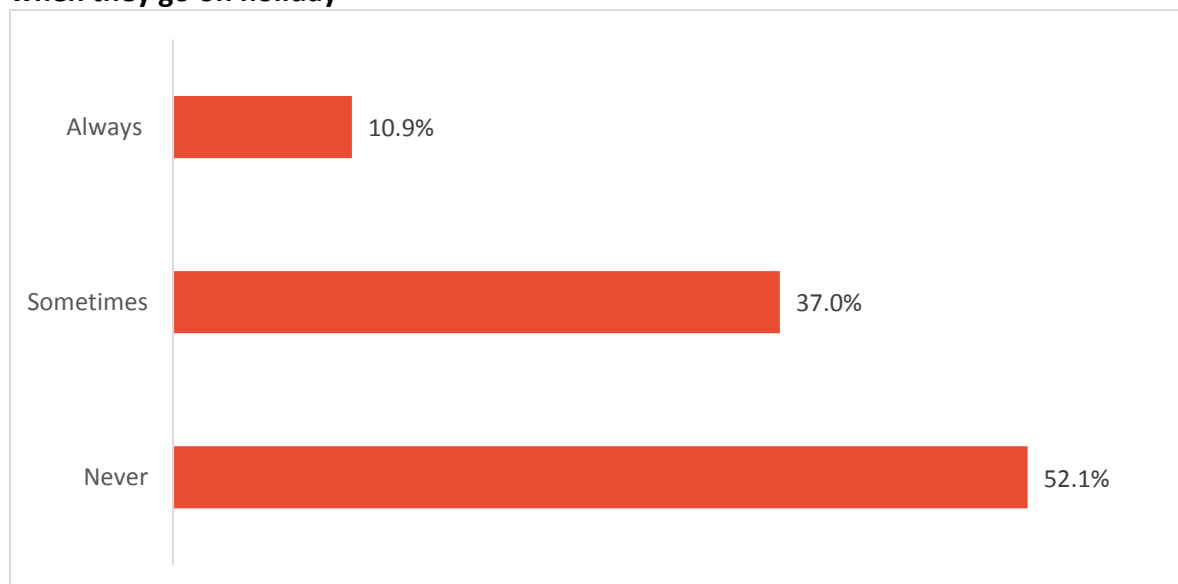
Compared with their peers who never write postcards when on holiday, children and young people who always write holiday postcards:

- Are a third more likely to say that they enjoy writing (66.1% vs. 43.8%),
- Are more likely to write something daily in their free time (27.3% vs .16.4%)
- Write a wider range of formats (6 vs. 4)
- Rate themselves as better writers (7.3/10 vs. 6.7/10)
- Are more motivated by internal reasons and achievement, and less motivated by external factors
- Are more likely to write above the expected level for their age compared with children who never write postcards (20.8% vs. 14.8%), although this difference is not statistically significant.

How many children and young people said that they write postcards when they go on holiday in 2016?

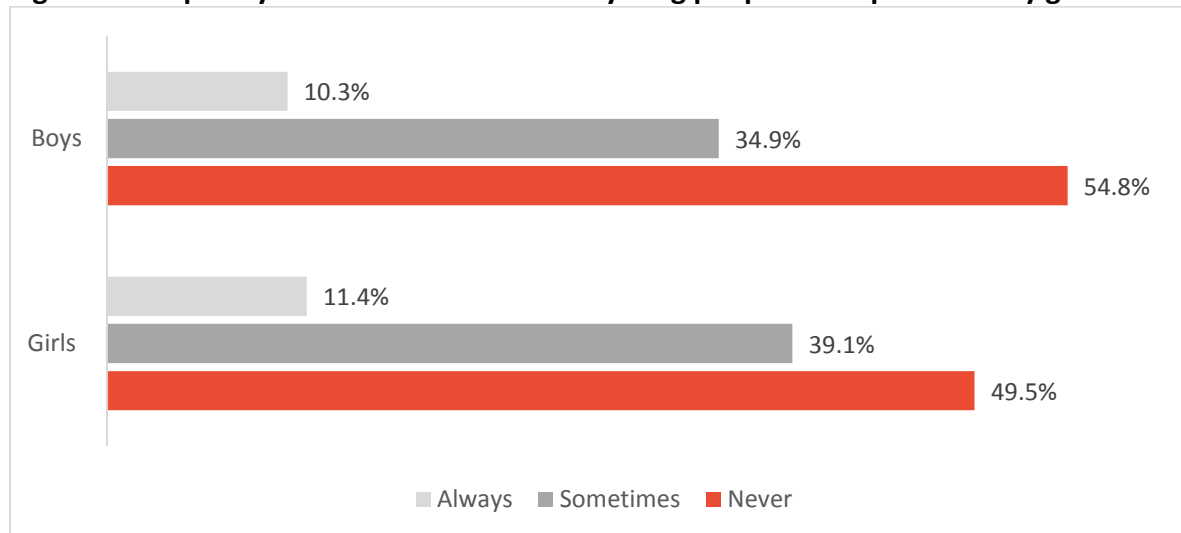
To what extent do children and young people still write postcards to tell others about their holiday? Data from our latest survey showed that only 1 child in 10 said that they always write a postcard when they are on holiday (see Figure 1). By far the most popular response was that they never write postcards when on holiday, with over half of children and young people saying this.

Figure 1: Frequency with which children and young people aged 8 to 18 write postcards when they go on holiday



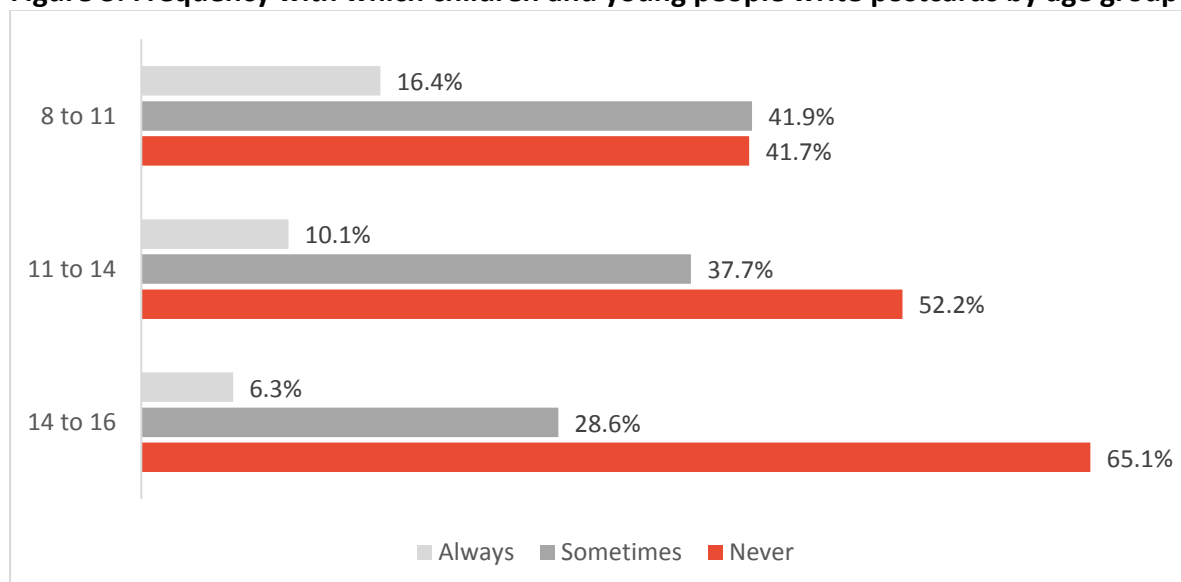
Girls are more likely to write postcards than boys². Figure 2 shows that while a similar percentage of girls and boys say that they always write postcards when on holiday, more girls than boys write sometimes, while more boys than girls say that they never write a postcard when on holiday.

Figure 2: Frequency with which children and young people write postcards by gender



Younger children are more likely to write postcards than older ones³. As Figure 3 shows, children aged 8 to 11 are 2.5 times more likely to write a postcard every time they are on holiday compared with young people aged 14 to 16. Indeed, 2 in 3 young people aged 14 to 16 say that they never write a postcard when on holiday compared with 2 in 5 children aged 8 to 11.

Figure 3: Frequency with which children and young people write postcards by age group

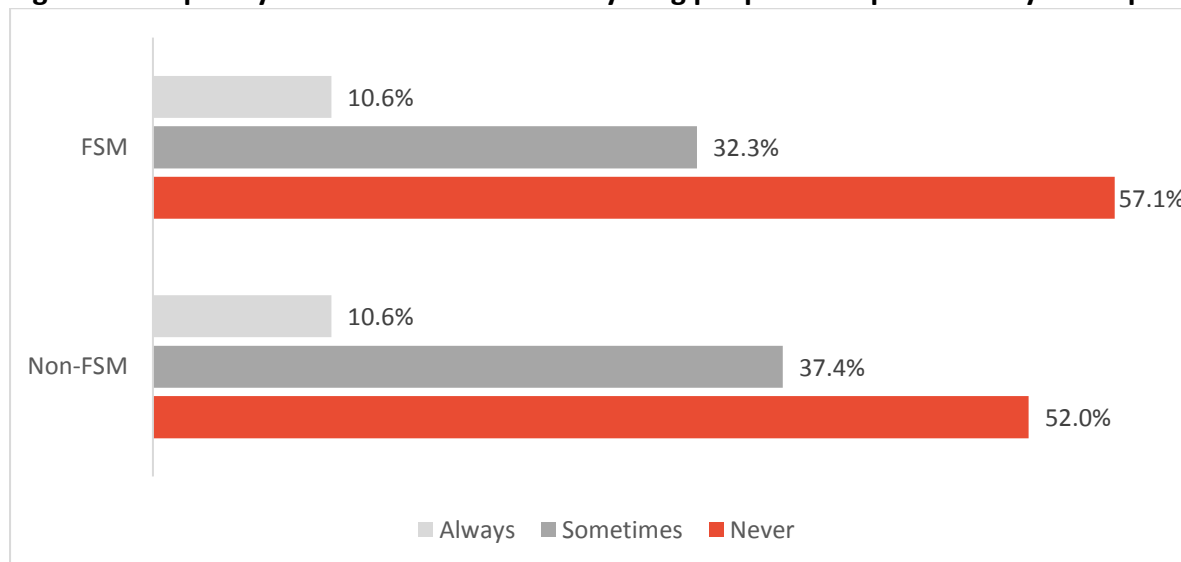


² Something on gender split

³ Something on age split

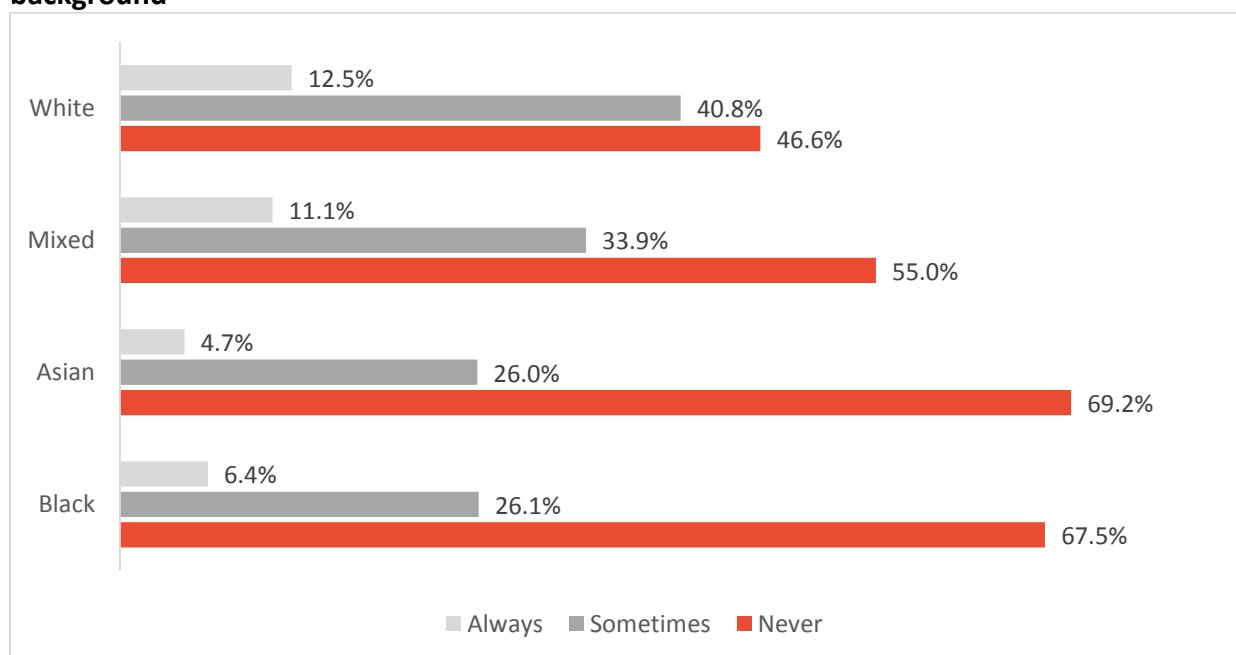
Pupils who receive free school meals (FSMs) are slightly less likely to write postcards when on holiday than their peers who do not receive FSMs⁴. While there is no difference between pupils who always write postcards (see Figure 4), fewer FSM pupils say they sometimes write postcards and more of them never write postcards when on holiday.

Figure 4: Frequency with which children and young people write postcards by FSM uptake



Our data also indicate cultural differences in whether or not children and young people write postcards. Figure 5 shows that children from White ethnic backgrounds are most likely to say that they always write a postcard when on holiday, while children from Asian ethnic backgrounds are least likely to say the same. Indeed, alongside children from Black ethnic backgrounds, they are most likely to say that they never write postcards when on holiday.

Figure 5: Frequency with which children and young people write postcards by ethnic background

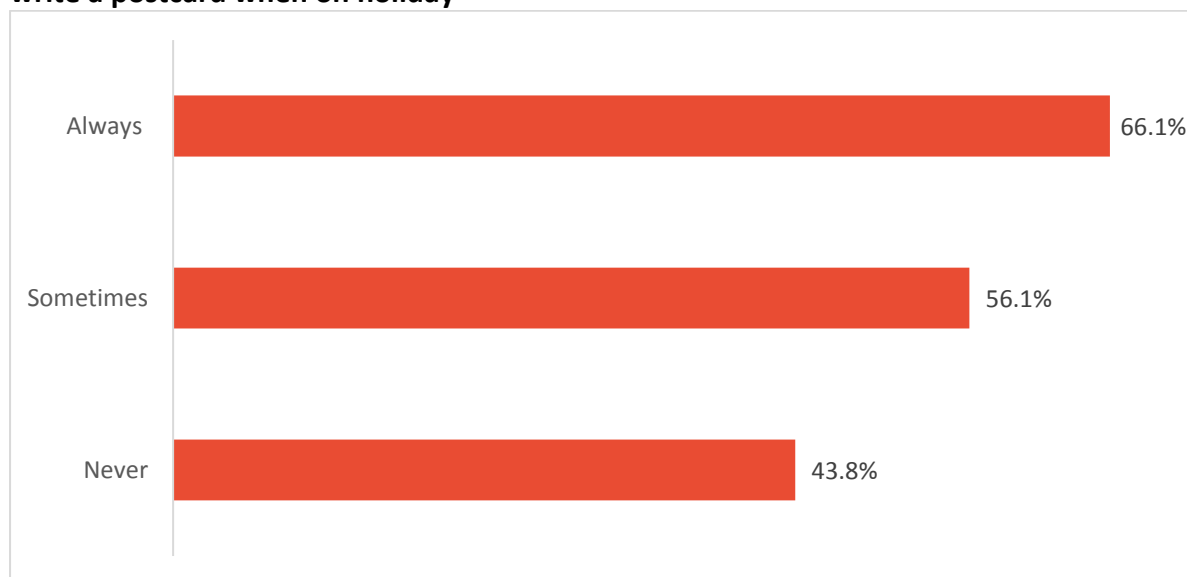


⁴ Our sample contained 4,395 FSM pupils and 34,290 non-FSM pupils

How does postcard writing relate to writing enjoyment, behaviour and motivation?

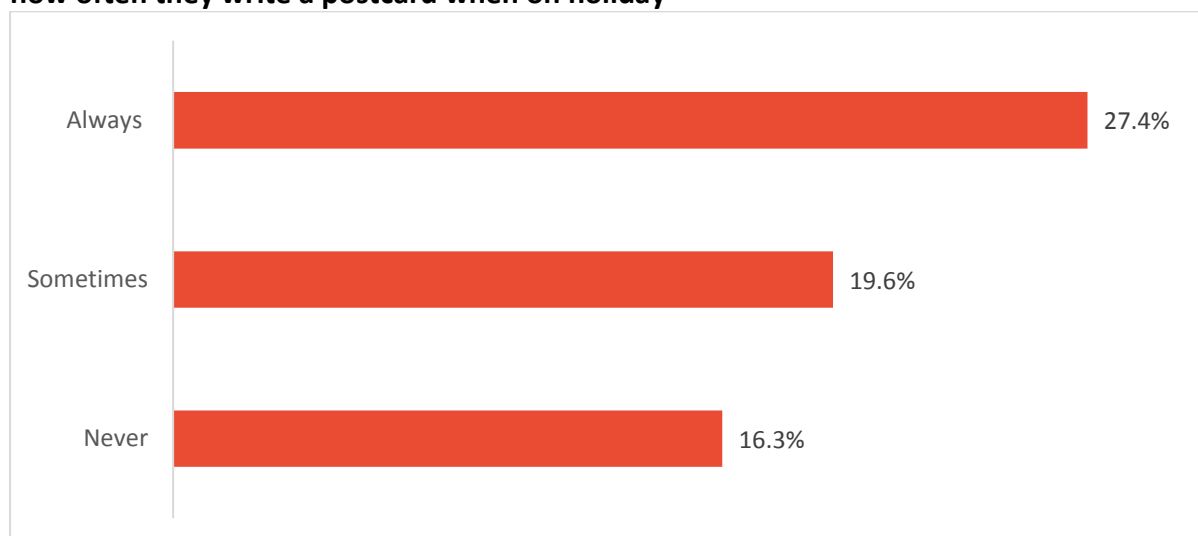
We also found that pupils' writing enjoyment, frequency, confidence, breadth of writing and motivation generally increased with the frequency with which they write postcards. For example, children and young people who always write postcards when on holiday are a third more likely to say that they enjoy writing compared with those who never write postcards (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Percentage of children and young people who enjoy writing by how often they write a postcard when on holiday



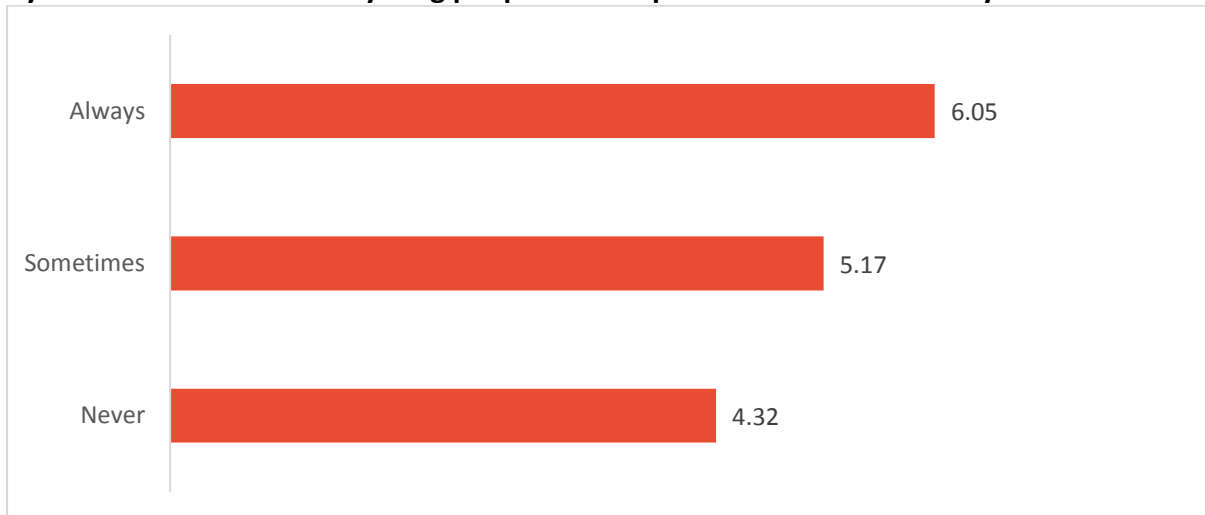
Similarly, over 1 child in 4 who always writes a holiday postcard writes daily outside class in their free time compared with 1 child in 6 who never writes postcards (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: Percentage of children and young people who write daily in their free time by how often they write a postcard when on holiday



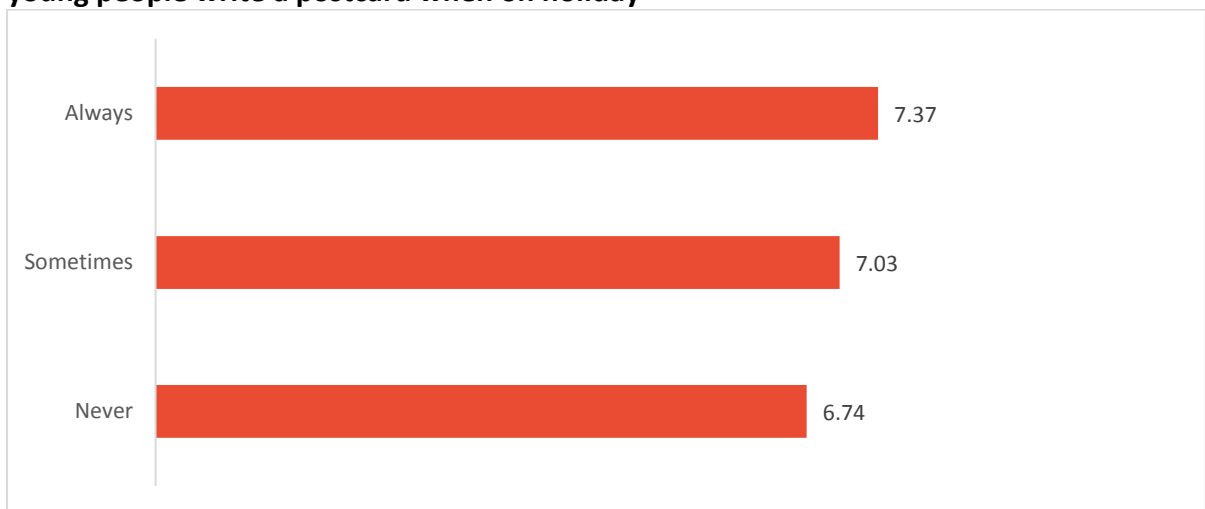
Not only are children and young people who always write postcards on holiday more likely to write something daily in their free time, but Figure 8 also shows that they tend to write a greater number of different formats at least once a month compared with their peers who never write postcards^{5 6}.

Figure 8: Average (mean) number of formats written outside class at least once a month by how often children and young people write a postcard when on holiday



Children and young people who always write postcards, on average, also rate themselves as better writers (see Figure 9) on a scale of 1 to 10 compared with children and young people who never write postcards when on holiday⁷.

Figure 9: Average (mean) ratings of self-reported writing skill by how often children and young people write a postcard when on holiday



10-point scale from 1 = not very good to 10 = very good

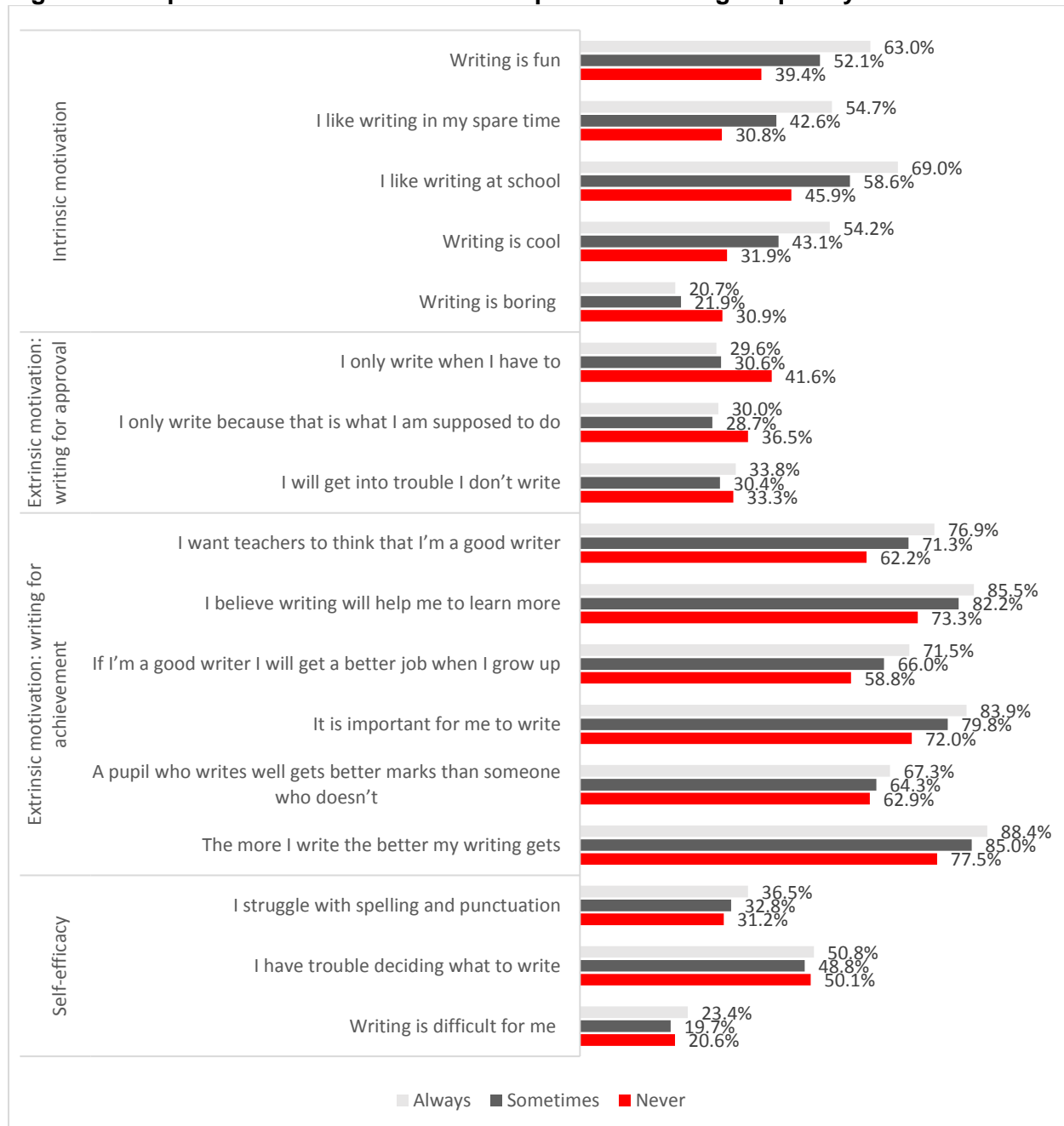
⁵ To measure how widely children write in their free time, we summed responses to our questions that ask pupils to tick whether they write any of 18 materials provided (maximum score 18) in their free time at least once a month. The range of materials provided includes poems, fiction, PowerPoints, reviews, instant messages, text messages, song lyrics, code and many more.

⁶ Always write postcards: SD = 3.93; sometimes writes postcards: SD= 3.19; never write postcards: SD= 2.98

⁷ Always write postcards: SD = 2.08; sometimes writes postcards: SD= 1.93; never write postcards: SD= 2.07

Pupils who always send postcards when they go on holiday have higher intrinsic writing motivation and higher motivation to write for achievement than their peers who sometimes or never send postcards on holiday⁸. In contrast, pupils who never write postcards have higher extrinsic motivation⁹. Postcard writing has no impact on pupils' self-efficacy, their belief in their own capabilities¹⁰. Figure 10 outlines the percentage agreement with each of the different motivational items.

Figure 10: Pupils' motivation based on their postcard-writing frequency



⁸ Intrinsic motivation: always send postcards: M= 3.656, SD= 1.040; sometimes send postcards: M= 3.396, SD= 1.008; never send postcards: M= 3.048, SD= 1.068; F(2, 38,256)= 830.016, p< .001, η^2 = .042; motivation to write for achievement: always send postcards: M= 4.155, SD= .712; sometimes send postcards: M= 4.003, SD= .657; never send postcards: M= 3.823, SD= .769; F(2, 38,254)= 492.647, p< .001, η^2 = .025

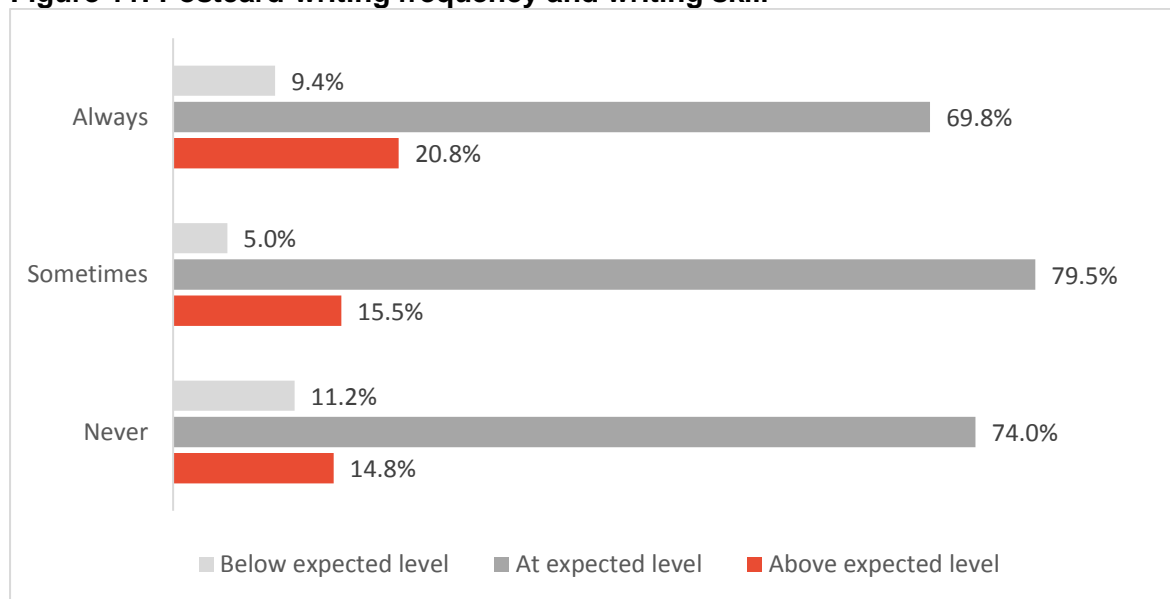
⁹ Always send postcards: M= 2.775, SD= 1.097; sometimes send postcards: M= 2.815, SD= .958; never send postcards: M= 3.000, SD= .989; F(2, 38,238)= 187.416, p< .001, η^2 = .010

¹⁰ p= .582

Finally, we also explored the link between how often children and young people write postcards on holiday and their writing skills. We had writing attainment data for 522 pupils aged 8 to 11 for whom we also had information about how often they write postcards¹¹. Of these, 91.8% wrote at either the expected level for their age (75.5%, N = 394) or above the expected level for their age (16.3%, N = 85). 8.2% of pupils (N = 43) wrote below the expected level for their age. Overall, writing attainment in this sample is in line with the national average for this age group¹².

As can be seen in Figure 11, there was a trend for more children who always write postcards to write above the expected level for their age compared with children who never write postcards, but the overall difference between the children was not statistically significant.

Figure 11: Postcard-writing frequency and writing skill



To sum up

We find that pupils' writing enjoyment, frequency, confidence, breadth of writing and motivation generally increase with the frequency with which they write postcards. Pupils who always write postcards when they go on holiday enjoy writing more, write more frequently and widely, and rate themselves as better writers. They are more motivated by internal reasons and achievement and less motivated by external factors than their peers who only sometimes or never write postcards.

¹¹ The attainment data contained a varied set of levels so we re-categorised the data to form three crude categories: below expected level for their age, at expected level for their age and above expected level for their age.

¹² https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/456343/SFR30_2015_text.pdf

Our sincere thanks to Slaughter and May for the generous financial contribution that enabled us to conduct this annual survey.

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