



CASE STUDY REPORT

Support for Writing: The local authority approach in Cambridgeshire

Karen Smith

This study was originally published in 2009 as part of the 'What Works Well' initiative, part of the National Strategies for Education in England.

Abstract

Background: The purpose of the study was to raise attainment in writing by developing teaching approaches and use of curriculum resources in targeted schools, and to measure progress towards success criteria using CVA data, teacher assessment, text-type guidance, progression papers, steps in learning, and pupil writing targets.

Aims: The main aim of this development work was to raise attainment in writing by developing teaching approaches and using curriculum resources in targeted schools, especially for teachers who recently joined the profession. Drawing attention to existing materials, inspiring teachers with texts, and providing guidance on text types, steps in learning, and pupil writing targets were all key elements of this work. The main barriers to successful implementation were lack of confidence and headspace among teachers, and competition for staff meeting time.

Methods: Participants included Head of School Improvement, National Strategies Consultants, Y2 and Y4 teachers, Literacy Subject Leaders, NQTs, and experienced teachers, all of whom were inspired by texts and found Progression papers and text types guidance to be the most useful. Barriers to successful implementation included lack of confidence and headspace due to being overloaded, and competition for staff meeting time. Methods used included targeted support in school, coaching model, demo guided writing, team teaching, and tailored impact measures devised by the literacy team to review progress.

Findings: The main findings are that teachers need more confidence and resources to successfully implement new ideas, and that targeted support and CPD sessions have had a positive impact on teaching and school organisation.

Implications: The findings suggest that teachers need more support and resources to successfully implement new approaches to teaching, such as guided writing. Additionally, there needs to be more time allocated for staff meetings and lesson study, as well as more funding for CPD.

This abstract was generated by Camtree using a large language model (LLM) and added to the original report in 2023.

Keywords: Primary education; English - writing

Introduction

What were your reasons for doing this type of development work?

To raise awareness and usage of the National Strategies Support for Writing materials, in order to raise attainment in writing. Local authorities were urged to focus their school improvement work in literacy on these materials in Autumn 08.

Who might find this case study useful?

- Head of school improvement
- National Strategies consultant

Description

What specific curriculum area, subject or aspect did you intend to have impact on?

- English - writing

How did you intend to impact on pupil learning?

This being a local authority initiative, the impact on pupil learning was to be achieved by developing the teaching approaches and use of curriculum resources in targeted schools

What were your success criteria?

Success criteria were negotiated with each target school in the context of their current performance:

- KS2: Achieving level 4 and above target - % pupils
- KS2 Achieving 2 levels of progress in English - % pupils
- KS1: Achieving L2B and above - % pupils
- KS1: 90% of children achieve school's target for KS1
- Year 4: 90% of children make 1 level of progress from KS1

What information or data did you use to measure progress towards your success criteria?

- CVA data
- Periodic teacher assessment

Describe the CPD approaches you used

The LA focused on either Year 2, Year 4 or Year 6 in targeted schools. The schools were offered support on the basis of analysis of performance in literacy over time. Schools were encouraged to send two teachers on the initiative, because of the increased effect on the teaching and learning in the school when more than one teacher is involved. The programme of targeted support, entitled 'Making Good Progress in...' for Y2, Y4 and Y6 teachers in these selected schools comprised 3 cluster meetings through the year, with gap tasks and 5 school visits by a Literacy Consultant. For the purposes of this case study, we are detailing the support for Y2 and Y4 teachers.

Cluster meeting 1 (Oct 08): Improvement agreements (See blank template below). The team outlined the initiative. Teachers brought progress data and pupils' work and analysed using tracking grids and materials (see below) The Nottinghamshire tracker shows progress from KS1 baseline with an indication of where pupils should be, so it helped teachers adjust their expectations. These trackers were returned to at the end of the year. The team led training on Assessment for Learning, Assessing Pupil Progress (APP) and the Assessment focuses for

Writing.

Gap task: to complete APP for up to 6 pupils (target group). Supported by 2 consultant visits, the first to support assessment, the second addressing planning needs and what goes in a collection for APP. This latter point is a challenge to teachers, especially in Year 2 where gathering a range of writing across the curriculum can be an issue. Consultants may not necessarily do a lesson observation or demo lesson, depending on what the teacher feels is most appropriate. The gap task was completed by every participant. APP helped them see the gaps in learning that needed addressing through their planning.

Cluster meeting 2: This included training on planning the teaching sequence ; Support for Writing; Talk for Writing; Guided writing; stressing key messages and informal moderation of assessment judgements. Y2 looked at Text-type guidance on poetry, Steps in learning, and how to incorporate these into Teaching sequences on superheroes poems; similar with Y4 but with narrative.

Gap Task 2: Revisiting APP, and adapting teaching sequences as appropriate in the light of the APP outcomes. Supported by two more school visits.

Visit 3: further analysis of strengths and areas for development, focusing on APP and planning to address gaps in learning, referring to SfW and TfW as needed. The support referred to two units we developed - Y2 Narrative Unit 3 (The Whisperer by Nick Butterworth) and Y4 Narrative Unit 3 (Rickshaw Girl by Mitali Perkins). These fully exemplified plans were used with targeted schools, very scaffolded support aimed at giving teachers the feel of good teaching with good text, always linked to the local priorities and identified together with the school. We worked with teachers in adapting plans for class, modelling the way one plans for oneself. We bought a set of books to lend to high level support schools. There were advantages in providing fully exemplified plans:

- it was good CPD for the team (doing what teachers are expected to do for themselves)
- it provided local examples of how to address our local priorities
- it showed how they could plan within the planning grid they are using anyway; an example of one route through planning.
- it included links across to other subjects - to promote writing in other curriculum areas

These plans were well received, not just copied but adapted as their own. Teachers planned for their own guided writing within the exemplified plan.

Visit 4: very similar, often focused on Guided Writing, making reference to SfW materials where possible in planning with teachers. Consultants supported with observation to get to know the focus children, then modelled Guided Writing the following week, then discussed planning to build on that learning for those pupils and other children.

Where there were pairs of teachers in one school, both teachers were observed or observed each other, so although it wasn't lesson study they were observing and feeding back to each other. Teachers focused on pupils' learning and gave feedback on that. Consultant visits may or may not have included observation or demonstration, depending on the needs of the school.

Cluster meeting 3 (March 09): Reviewed progress of underachieving pupils and the target groups, with forward planning of focuses for summer term to sustain progress, and which pupils needed further focus. More APP moderation.

Visit 5: It was decided to build in a 5th visit in the summer term to collect the data and review progress, how many Y4 pupils on track to make a levels progress since KS1. It was important to gather Y4 progress data in targeted schools in order to identify impact and inform our planning for 09/10. The focus for 5th visit was decided by the teacher(s) - planning, guided sessions, etc. We were careful to tailor support all the way through

whilst keeping the focus on improved outcomes for the children, for whom we now had detailed knowledge from working with them in class.

Impact measures - the day with our Regional Adviser in December 08 confirmed our understanding and use of impact measures and made us more confident to commit and plan ahead for impact. Impact measures were devised in January for targeted schools and shared with schools on one-to one basis during the spring term. Consultants termly review meeting considered progress against impact measures, gathering information noted in Notes of Visits and evaluating impact school by school and overall.

We put an APP writing element into all our training: HT CPD Day 3-it was important to brief Headteachers about APP as early as possible in order to ensure key messages were clear; for all literacy subject leaders and Y1/3/5/ Teachers who attended Improving Writing training in Spring 08, Y2/3/4 teachers and Literacy Subject Leaders who attended Improving Writing training in Autumn 08 and Spring 09. Leading Teachers thought APP was good, but often found it difficult to get started; once experienced, they were very positive. Experience suggests we need to address what 'starting slowly and scaling up quickly' means for a school - some teachers introduced APP too slowly, with too few pupils. They need to get a feel with one pupil and then do all six focus pupils quickly. The first round of schools focusing on APP (6 focusing on literacy and 6 on maths) found it more challenging than the next round of 10 schools, probably because it was less familiar so approached more slowly. It needs repetition of APP over time to sink in, like any complex activity involving new concepts. It is important to see APP and SfW together because then SfW makes sense, teachers can see why and how to use the materials. If we were doing SfW now, it would go down much better because schools are familiar with APP.

This ran alongside the targeted Y2 and Y4 SfW initiative. The Universal Offer 08-09 was a day in Autumn term and Spring term for all schools for either a Y2, Y3 or Y4 teacher, joined by their Literacy Subject Leader (LSL) in the afternoons, with a gap task between. There were separate days for years 2,3 and 4.

Autumn Day: Morning sessions on: APP for Writing, a session on SfW which provided an overview of the materials.

Afternoon (with LSLs) feedback session from morning, then a close look at text-type guidance and the planning sequence - We identified age-related expectations in the context of planning, talked through using SfW and text-type materials to help teachers understand the progression that meets expectations. In retrospect, it would have worked better to have had all year group teachers together in order to support an understanding of progression but we could not change our course planning at short notice.

Gap task: assess focus pupils using APP, feed back to staff on SfW, use collaborative lesson study or similar to explore identifying and planning for progress. Spring 09 day (NS 'Day 4'): Talk for Writing. see agenda

An additional Summer Network Meeting for Literacy Subject Leaders was planned and funded for all schools. This was a one-day course done 5 times around the county. It included a session evaluating impact of CPD this year and a school case study of how SfW was implemented and used to support guided writing in one school. Schools completed an evaluation of impact feed back form to help to inform future planning for LA Literacy CPD. For most schools, SfW is not a clearly identified (separate) resource but is seen as encompassed within Primary Framework planning exemplification and support materials. The most useful elements for schools at the moment are the text type guidance, the progression documents and the pupil targets. Where Steps in Learning are used, especially where consultants are working one to one with teachers in school, they have been very effective.

What CPD materials, research or expertise have you drawn on?

Cambridgeshire Literacy and English website

Who provided you with support?

- External agency

How were you supported?

National Strategies CPD materials.

Impact

What has been the overall impact on pupil learning?

Impact on targeted schools in this Y2 and Y4 initiative.

Progress in specific areas of the writing curriculum has been made because of the tailoring of curriculum to focus pupils. Where it has been well used, it has had good impact. Where well disseminated by strong subject leaders, good impact has been identified by the subject leader, but they have also identified a need to revisit in light of APP. SfW makes more sense where APP has been implemented. It will have more impact on learning next year, because this year impact has been on teachers and it takes time to become embedded in practice.

Any targeted work has little impact when there are 6000 pupils in a cohort (203 schools). We supported 17 schools for Y4; 70-100 focus pupils would be 1.66% of whole cohort, so capacity of team to impact authority-wide is limited with such an initiative.

But it has had a big impact at school level:

- One City Centre Primary School reported that 96% of Y4 pupils with end of KS1 level, (so not including new arrivals) are now working within the level above their KS1 level in writing. 81% have made a whole level of progress within the 2 years.
- Another City Centre Primary School reported 88% of Y4 pupils with KS1 level made at least one level (or 6 points) of progress in writing, 53% have made more than a level of progress. (small school, so 1 child = 3%)

Thoughts you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

Pupil turnover - if pupils joining after KS1 are taken out of data calculations, schools are achieving expectations. We need to encourage schools to target how to support new arrivals so they quickly make progress.

Quotes you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

Children more confident with text-type vocabulary.

Y6 teacher

Improved results.

Literacy Subject Leader and Y3/4 teacher

Staff are using TfW materials in their lessons. However children are still finding it difficult to get their ideas on paper in a structured and detailed way.

Y2 teacher

Quantitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Periodic teacher assessment

Qualitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Observation outcomes
- Pupils' work

Describe the evidence of impact on pupil learning

Our evidence is largely pupil progress data, and evidence from visits to schools.

What has been the impact on teaching?

We are confident that there has been impact on teaching, as the evaluations, teachers' perceptions and our review visits inform us this is the case. This initiative is tailored to schools', teachers' and pupils' needs. As a new Literacy Subject Leader in a challenging school said, 'Targets are tailored to classes, so teachers and children have greater ownership.' It wasn't externally imposed from a national perspective of what pupils should be learning, but started from where they were in each school and worked towards pupils making improved progress. The initiative had good impact on teachers whom we have met face to face – we are not so confident it has had impact across whole schools. Y2 and Y4 teachers demonstrate increased confidence in tailoring planning to pupils' needs. Greater awareness of the difference between group and guided work.

The participant audience was mixed, from NQTs to very experienced. They bought in to APP more than SfW, because APP is clearly definable, whereas SfW is a suite of materials to be used as and when appropriate; some elements are universally used, eg Text-type guidance, while others may be less familiar, especially if teachers came in to the profession recently. Drawing attention to existing materials that are good was a valuable element. If we ask teachers what has had an impact this year, they haven't said SfW – they'll say Primary framework, because everything is interwoven. It's not identified as SfW, despite the literacy team considering, discussing and recording SfW in every visit.

Teachers were inspired by texts – teachers are increasingly choosing texts as a result of text-type guidance, and asking for ideas for good texts. Progression papers and text types guidance were by far the most useful to teachers – they can print off and use to refer to in planning and teaching. Steps in learning and pupil writing targets were harder to use unless they understand their purpose and are already familiar with guided writing.

Main barriers to successful implementation, collated from evaluations:

- Confidence of teachers in school to have a go at changing their approach to teaching – due to lack of 'headspace' to think about and try new ideas. This is seen in some cases to be a consequence of being overloaded.
- Staff meeting time – all booked up well in advance, competition for time – eg maths priority may override considerations of literacy.
- Lack of funding for lesson study
- LSL off sick or didn't attend; also change of LSL, new one didn't know, lack of continuity
- No non-contact time
- Navigating National Strategies site difficult, too much material. Change of site unhelpful as trained with old site on DVD, no advance access to new site for LA trainers.
- Lack of motivation by some teachers – not their area of interest
- Anxiety of subject leader, having to disseminate to staff who are not receptive, so doing it as briefly

as possible

Last year (07-08) 50% of schools said they'd completed the gap task (fed back at staff meeting, used APP materials with some pupils, and carried out lesson study). This year most will say they have completed part of the gap task, and 60-70 % will have carried out a key literacy action, such as having a go with APP with some children.

Quotes you think are relevant to the impact on teaching

SfW focused the Y4 teachers on targets and progression.

Literacy subject leader and Y4 teacher

We took time to identify our strengths and areas where we would like support. Modelled Talk for Writing to colleagues and parents. We shared practice with children in a workshop style with parents and other staff. This had a huge impact and made the children feel valued. Also allowed parents to see how they can engage with children at home.

Year 6 teachers in one school

All staff aware of Steps in Learning and have found Text-type overviews very useful. Staff are using this support within their planning.

Y2 teacher

Y4 planning improved as a direct result of SfW. Staff more confident in using SfW materials.

Y4 teacher

SfW Follow-up CPD in school: Not yet. Looking to incorporate into new curricular targets in Sept after data analysis and then linking it to APP gaps in Dec/Jan. (Not covered this year as main emphasis in terms of planning/ primary framework is Maths. Guided writing main focus in literacy)

teacher

There will be two of us with knowledge of APP and support for writing who can trial and present to the rest of the school. Our teaching will be more focused because of steps for learning.

Y2 teacher and subject leader

Using planning tools and resources to help with planning. The objectives and the ability to track them across the year groups was very helpful.

Better idea of what is missing from plans via APP and other learning materials.

My year four children have had an unfortunate year and their writing is very worrying. This input has spurred me on to identifying the areas they need to develop.

Evidence of impact on teaching

- Evidence from observation and monitoring
- Evidence from planning
- Teacher perceptions

Describe the evidence of impact on teaching

Feedback and evaluations; quality of professional dialogue during school visits.

What has been the impact on school organisation and leadership?

Participants in SfW initiative have been equipped with materials and modelled sessions to support dissemination in their schools, and this may have had a positive effect on subject leadership. We asked subject leaders and classroom teachers to feed back to the rest of staff and lead on dissemination but that was often difficult to achieve. Our impact session with subject leaders in Summer 09 ought to support Subject Leaders in looking for the impact of CPD in school. Overall, impact on Subject Leadership is limited because of focus on Y2 and Y4 teachers in SfW – less capacity to support subject leadership, so are returning to Subject Leader twilights in 09/10.

Evidence of impact on school organisation and leadership

Evaluations (see Impact on teaching tab)

Summary

What is the crucial thing that made the difference?

- Linking SfW to APP
- Targeted support in school, in class, bespoke programme of support and school visits, coaching model, demo Guided Writing, team teaching
- Drip-feeding key messages, making SfW relevant to every visit, every CPD where it was appropriate – making SfW high profile – planning for impact
- Impact measures devised with schools, used to raise expectations and measure impact; constantly referred to in visits.

What key resources would people who want to learn from your experience need access to?

Support for Writing materials:

- Text-type guidance
- Progression papers
- Steps in learning
- Pupil writing targets

What CPD session and resources were particularly useful?

Cluster meetings and visits for targeted schools.

If another individual or school was attempting to replicate this work, where would they start and what would the essential elements be?

- A clear well-thought through work plan, based on knowledge of schools and clear, transparent criteria of selection of target schools
- Effective communication within LA between SIPS and PNS teams
- Tailored impact measures devised by Literacy team, used to review progress in notes of visits and at termly meetings and in one to one supervision meetings

Supplementary Materials

This report is accompanied in the library by the following supplementary material:

- Improvement agreement template
- Examples of evaluations
- Agenda for Improving Writing Day for all schools, Autumn 08
- Consultants work plan for Y2 support

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This case study was originally published as part of the 'What Works Well' section of the National Strategies for Education in England. The National Strategies were professional programmes aiming for improvements in the quality of learning and teaching in schools in England. 'What Works Well' involved teaching practitioners from all phases and areas of education sharing accounts of real developments which had improved learning and teaching, and made a difference to pupil progress. 'What Works Well' case studies were designed to support practice transfer and include sufficient detail and resources to enable others to implement the effective practice described. They were reviewed by experts prior to publication as 'User Generated Content' (UGC) under a licence which encouraged reuse and derivative works, but which precluded commercial use.

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