

## Little Paxton Primary School – Report of Governor Visit

**Date:** 29<sup>th</sup> March 2017

**Focus of Visit:** Teaching of handwriting, spelling and grammar

**Personnel:** R Jenkins (DHT), P Conway (governor), Teachers, TAs and Children in classrooms

**Purpose of Visit:** To monitor how changes introduced as a result of the introduction of the new primary curriculum have impacted on the teaching and learning of handwriting, spelling and grammar.

**Background:** The new curriculum placed a far greater emphasis on the secretarial skills associated with writing; that is on handwriting, spelling and grammar. Those for handwriting and grammar were introduced in September 2015, those for spelling in September 2016.

As part of priority 2 on the school improvement plan (to develop leadership capacity across the school) 2 members of staff undertaking NPQML (National Professional Qualification for Middle Leaders) are carrying out projects specifically linked to handwriting, spelling and grammar. B Embrey, who is the new Upper KS2 Phase Leader, is looking at improving provision and outcomes for grammar across Years 2 to 6. N Stott, who is the new KS1 Phase Leader, is looking at spelling and handwriting from EYFS to Y2.

### Evidence seen during visit:

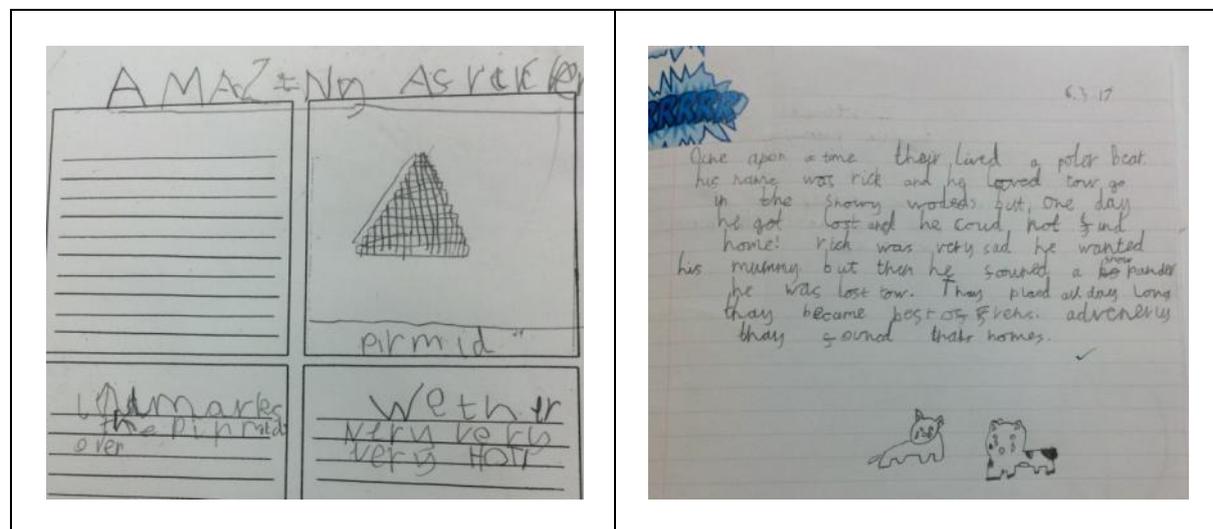
- Penpal (a commercially available handwriting scheme) was trialled. Staff found that there are some good aspects to it but it has been adapted and sharpened to meet the needs of our children.
- N Stott has introduced “Handwriting Heroes” to KS1. Each week a child whose handwriting has shown significant improvement is given a certificate in KS1 assembly recognising this and they also have a crown to wear for the following week. Children are aware of what they need to do to improve their own handwriting and therefore how they can become that week’s Handwriting Hero.



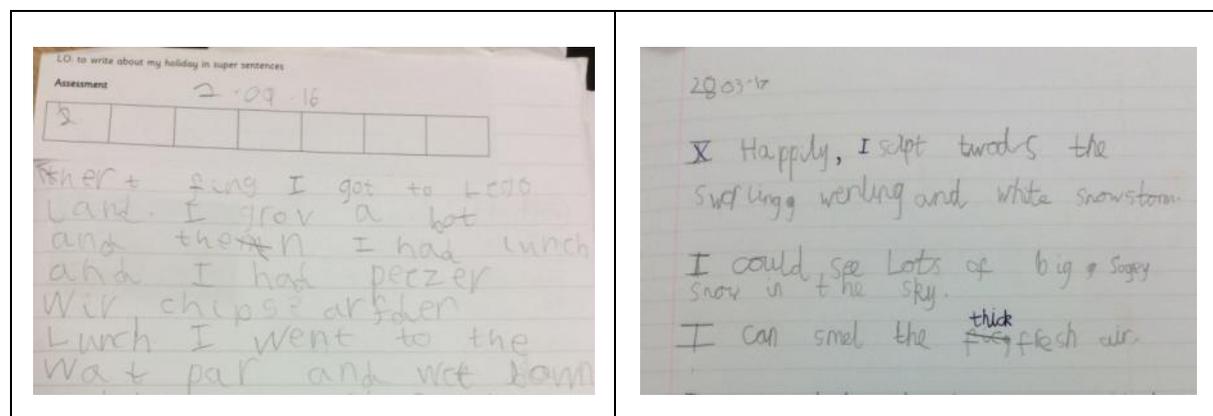
A very proud handwriting hero demonstrating his skill.

- The use of the handwriting hero award has proved very motivational especially for children who, in the past, have shown little interest in writing generally and even less in improving their handwriting.
- Pupils in EYFS practice letter formation every day as part of their phonics sessions. Here the emphasis is very much on correct letter formation from the start. A variety of media are used in order to maintain children's interest.
- In KS2 children work towards achieving their pen licences. When their handwriting has improved to a sufficient standard they are presented in assembly with a pen licence and a named pen. Just like with a driving licence, this licence can be removed if standards are not maintained over time. Children seem to have responded well to the challenge and like to feel very grown-up when they progress from using a pencil to using a pen.
- Children's workbooks show improvement of handwriting over time.

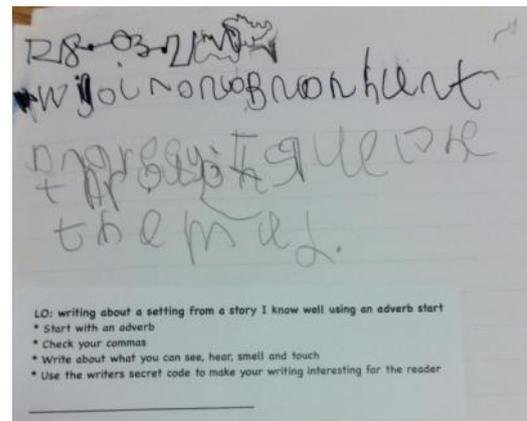
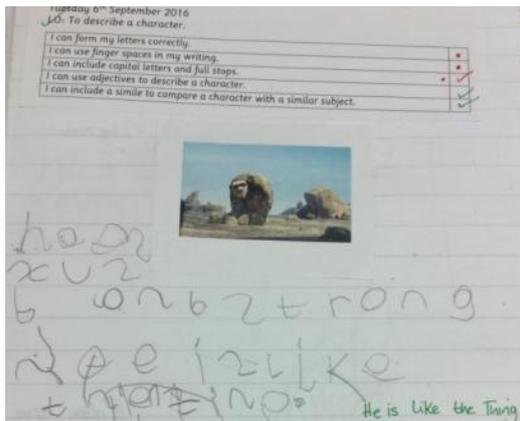
Samples of Y2 children's writing from early in the autumn term and now:



This shows clear progression for a child whose writing at the beginning of the year was large, un-joined and not always appropriately spaced or placed on the lines.

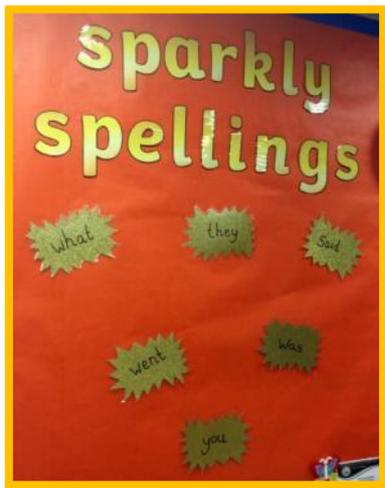


A child whose writing contained no joins is now consistently joining letters when writing.



A child with significant difficulties with writing has progressed from poor and inconsistent letter formation to writing letters correctly (the second piece is about going on a bear hunt and squelching through mud).

- D Neal and R Jenkins are working together to lead English. For some time now R Jenkins has been the English Subject Leader for the whole school. As the school grows such roles will be shared and D Neal has already taken on leading English in KS2. They have both attended what they describe as inspirational courses and are incorporating ideas from these within the teaching of reading, writing and spelling.
- Children in Years 2 to 6 are given lists of spellings, based on their focus spelling pattern, to learn each week. Words are introduced to children using the National Curriculum Spelling Lists and spelling patterns.
- In Year 1 children are learning to read and spell the Year 1 Common Exception Words
- Words on the week's spelling list are used for handwriting practice at least once each week throughout KS1 and KS2. This approach is improving handwriting as well as ensuring all children practice the spellings.
- Using Read, Write, Inc (incorporate), Spell (part of the Oxford scheme) children practice using their new spellings in context.
- An "alien" explains spelling patterns to pupils and reasons for many of the less obvious spellings of some English words. The children seem to really enjoy this aspect and it enables them to remember the spellings more easily.



- In KS1 the week's spellings are known as "sparkly spellings". These are displayed on the classroom wall. Children are encouraged to use the words as often as possible in anything that they write throughout the week. For using these spellings correctly in their writing pupils receive points for which, when sufficient have been gained, they receive stickers, merits or pens.
- As these words are prominently displayed in the classroom it is a class non-negotiable that they are correctly spelt.
- Staff, including TAs, reported that children are really benefitting from "sparkly spellings" and are keen to show they can use the words in their work.

- Pupils in KS1 and KS2 have a spelling test each week. Those in KS2 have to redo the test if their score is too low. However, the emphasis is on using the words, correctly spelt, in written work rather than just learning a list of words for a test.
- N Colledge, the Reading Recovery Teacher, has delivered 2 training sessions to all staff looking specifically at the teaching of spelling.
- Spellings are used as homework but not just as a list to be learnt. There is a menu of games to play to help children learn their weekly spellings. Children report enjoying this way of working.
- It is each child's responsibility to ensure they have learnt their spellings which encourages independence. It is not expected that parents will be "drilling" their children.
- Work has begun on developing a whole school approach to the teaching of grammar. Year 6 have a grammar test as part of the KS2 SATs but there is no test for grammar in Y2. However, the curriculum is being taught from Y2 onwards as staff feel it benefits the children's writing and makes Y6 a far less stressful experience.
- Grammar Hammer (a commercially available scheme) has been trialled but was not as successful as hoped. B Embrey is developing a scheme for use with Y2 to Y6 which will suit the needs of pupils at our school.

**Findings:**

- Good to see that staff critically evaluate commercially available materials and rapidly adapt them to meet the needs of children at Little Paxton.
- There is clear evidence of the positive impact of various strategies introduced.
- Children are clearly enjoying the challenges they are set and the reward systems in place.
- Despite the increased emphasis on the "secretarial" skills of handwriting, spelling and grammar children are still being given many opportunities to write imaginatively. The teaching of handwriting, spelling and grammar is, where ever possible, incorporated within the writing of meaningful texts written for a purpose rather than as a more sterile standalone activity.

**Recommendations:**

- It will be necessary to monitor that the strategies introduced remain as effective as children become used to them.
- Continue to use "in-house" expertise to disseminate good practice and raise standards, especially as budgets become ever tighter.

My thanks to all staff and children who spoke with me and shared their work.

Penny Conway