

St Matthew's CE Primary School, Birmingham

The story of how Talk for Writing helped transform St Matthew's C E Primary School, Nechells, Birmingham from a disaster into a shining example, by Headteacher Paulette Osborne MBE.



Paulette receiving her MBE for Services to Education in March 2016

There are some moments when one sits back and reflects on life. For a headteacher, this is often just before and after an Ofsted visit (or when a parent makes an appointment for the second time in the same week to inform you that their son/daughter has now lost the other foot of their PE pumps!)

Interestingly enough, a reflective opportunity presented itself as I was sitting in the 'Picture Gallery,' at Buckingham Palace, waiting to enter the Ballroom to be presented to her Majesty. I spent the time reviewing the key moments in the journey to 'outstanding' for St Matthew's CE Primary School.

Flash back to 2009 and I am sitting in my office, having been appointed to my first headship at St Matthew's CE Primary School - in Nechells, Birmingham. It was around week three into the job and I was asking myself,

what have I done? Why hadn't I been more observant and read up on the school a bit more? If I had, then maybe I would have noticed that the school was in a bit of a mess! A mess that now fell to me to try to sort out.

The SATS results had arrived and all I could do was gulp: 34% combined; English Level 4+ 48% and Maths Level 4+ 52%. Key Stage 1 hadn't fared much better! On average boys writing was a 1A; and the lower APS to boot!

I'd known the school context: in the 5% of most deprived areas nationally; 78.5% of children eligible for free school meals; 88.5% of children with English as an additional language with very low attainment on entry into school, but I hadn't thought the results could be this bad.

PING! An email arrived and it was a reminder about the Nechells schools' training event. Apparently a PIE Corbett (never heard of him!) was coming to deliver training on something called 'Talk for Writing'. Fast forward to the Friday and there we all were: staff from six schools in the Education Action Zone, gathered together under one roof awaiting words of wisdom from Pie, particularly me, in the hope of finding inspiration that would help us to move things forward at St Matthew's.

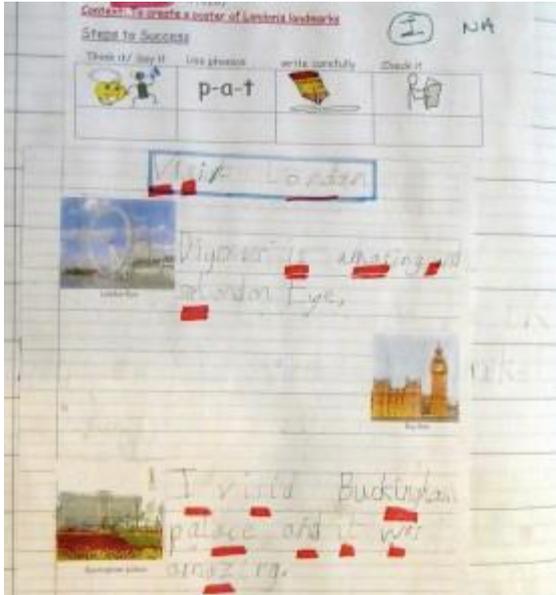
"I can't believe that I'm back in Nechells for the second time training the same group of schools how to implement Talk For Writing. School leaders, take note, the children of Nechells need you to give them the very best education. Listen up, I won't be coming back a third time". I'm paraphrasing a little here, but Pie Corbett's message was clear! We needed to listen, learn and implement!

I took a moment to feel smug: I was a new head and, of course, wasn't in post for Pie's first visit. But I was hooked – this man had a heart; he had moral purpose; he knew educational right from educational wrong!

Four years later: A dynamic deputy was appointed with a passion for English and a working knowledge of Talk for Writing. A deputy, who delivers high quality inset, backed up with timely team teaching and the right resources. A further inspirational moment in St Matthew's mission.

By 2013, outcomes at KS2 had soared – Reading Level 4+93%; Writing Level 4+ 97% and Maths Level 4+ 97%.

Fast forward to February 2015, when Ofsted made their call: right in the middle of one of our topic weeks – the one where we forego discrete Maths and English for a week, in favour of cross-curricular artwork!



A story map of the visit to London drawn by one of the children.

Talk for Writing follows the principles of building on how children learn to develop key language needed for a particular topic before using it imaginatively to write creatively. This approach has been used at St Matthew's in all curriculum areas, including maths, to enhance children's skills and knowledge. Our approach to 'Talk for Art' and our confidence in the children to be able to apply their skills in reading and writing across the curriculum saw us through. We were judged to be 'Outstanding' in all areas.

So, as I prepare to step into the Ballroom at Buckingham Palace, to be awarded my MBE for services to Education, I thank God for supportive parents; great friends; a wonderful set of school leaders; the privilege to work in such an inspirational community and for that Talk For Writing training day on the 25th September 2009.

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