

# Case Study: Creating seasoned writers at Summerhill

**How a Talk for Writing project at Summerhill Primary School transformed writing**



Summerhill Primary School, in Tipton in the West Midlands, has been on an exciting and inspiring Talk for Writing journey. It is a four-form-entry school with 760 pupils and 109 staff – a large and complex organisation that requires clear strategic direction to ensure consistent and effective implementation of curriculum structures and teaching processes. In the summer of 2016, senior leaders were looking for a strategy that would ensure improvement in writing outcomes. The overall aim was to develop a whole-school approach to writing that would consistently use the same process from EYFS through to Year six. They decided to explore Talk for Writing and agreed that the key elements of the journey would be senior leadership commitment, investment in training for all staff and clear and consistent structures in School to support teaching staff to implement TFW effectively. So, in September 2016, Talk for Writing was introduced as the schools' preferred strategy for improving writing outcomes for all children.

Senior leaders first engaged with Talk for Writing in July 2016 during a visit to St Matthew's C of E Primary School in Birmingham when they attended a Spotlight on Talk for Writing in the Classroom session, delivered by the Deputy Head and Talk for Writing Lead, Sonia Thompson. Leaders could

see that Talk for Writing could provide the clarity and structure that was required for a large school and were impressed by the results that were being produced through the use of the energetic and interactive programme. Overwhelmed and impressed by the standard of writing from Reception through to Year six, they decided that this was something that they wanted for Summerhill. The school's leaders were excited by the approach and confident that, as a team, they could introduce Talk for Writing, but also nervous about ensuring consistency in a large school and encouraging staff to adopt the approach in their teaching of writing and across the curriculum.



A key element in resolving their concerns has been the investment in training. Staff that have seen the approach in action have embraced it enthusiastically. Initially, the leadership team planned a phased implementation strategy throughout the academic year 2016/17 and introduced a Literacy Team, who would be instrumental in ensuring a consistent delivery model across the school. The Team consisted of senior and middle leaders for each key



stage and phase. The plan was that each middle leader in the team would undertake a 3-week trial of Talk for Writing in their classroom in September 2016 ending with a review of practice and assessment of outcomes. This would then be put into practice in a selection of classes throughout the rest of the academic year. A training session for all staff was planned for October 2016 in order to gain a thorough understanding of the key principles within each stage of the Talk for Writing process. Following the training session delivered by St Matthew's for all staff, the Phased Implementation Plan was quickly discarded as all of the staff returned to school talking enthusiastically about the training and wanting to trial all of the stages immediately.

*'The training has given me so many good ideas about how to motivate children's learning.'*

Summerhill School staff member

The whole-staff training (picture top right) gave staff an invaluable insight into the strategic concepts behind the imitation, innovation and independent application stages and enabled them to start to introduce the strategies into their teaching practice. However, it also raised some challenges for them as they quickly tried to implement all of the elements of the training into their writing lessons straightaway. Initial feedback from the staff identified a variety of misconceptions about the transition between the imitation and innovation stages: How long should the text map be? Should I include arrows and keywords in my text map? How many 'Box Ups' are needed during the innovation stage?

The Literacy Team identified the need for the staff to have further support to be able to fully implement Talk for Writing and that being able to see the approach in action would be extremely useful. They decided to send all of the teachers to the Spotlight for Talk for Writing training sessions at St Matthew's School. This enabled them to focus on the following key elements: observing a Talk for Writing lesson; identifying the clear procedures used during each of the three stages; looking

at the student's books; talking to phase leaders and, most importantly, meeting and discussing the Talk for Writing process with the pupils.

*'It was great to have the opportunity to see TFW in action, to see books and to talk to teachers about how they implement TFW in lessons and across the curriculum. The children's books demonstrated the Talk for Writing process in action and showed clear evidence of progress.'*

Summerhill School staff members

### **The story continues in the words of the school**

Our journey is still at an early stage, but we can already see the positive impact in the children's books and writing is now being confidently showcased in the school – the picture (above right) shows information writing by a pupil in Year 4. We feel that the Talk for Writing approach has been embedded well and is providing a consistent approach to teaching writing. Our children are becoming confident and coherent writers and are no longer reluctant to write and create stories. A fundamental part of this process has been due to the increased emphasis on enhancing the students' linguistic and creative writing skills. There is a general sense of enthusiasm in the air when discussing the writing process from students and teachers.

As leaders, it has been exciting to watch the teachers grow in confidence and develop the ability to teach writing in a more creative way. There is a buzz of excitement around the school and staff are proud of the work the pupils are producing. They display it constantly around the school which makes our pupils and staff feel proud of their achievements. Our journey is in its infancy, but we anticipate that the renewed passion for writing will ultimately secure good outcomes for all our pupils throughout the school and in other curriculum areas too. If you are interested in training from St Matthew's, take a look at their training page via the Talk for Writing website ([www.talkforwriting.co.uk](http://www.talkforwriting.co.uk)).