Fenland and East Cambridgeshire Priority Area

Elm Road Primary School

Elm Road Primary School, part of the Elliot Foundation Academies Trust, is a 206-pupil school in Wisbech, Cambridgeshire. It continues to be graded 'Good' by Ofsted following the most recent inspection in July 2024.

Working with the Fenland and East Cambridgeshire Priority Area team, the school has been supported under the Priority Area Local Needs Fund which targets improvements in specific thematic areas in a number of settings that have the lowest attainment/progress and highest rates of disadvantage. In particular, it funds evidence-based programmes or activities that will address locally identified needs, including via grants.

For Elm Road, the focus has been on Literacy (Phonics and Writing) at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. Following a diagnostic phase (March-July 2023), a theory of change and support table, and two-year implementation plan were developed and approved in partnership with a Fenland and East Cambridgeshire Priority Area link coach (Emma Fuller), who worked with the school to identify strengths and areas for improvement relating to their priority.

Challenge: Improving outcomes in (and teaching of) writing and phonics

Under the leadership of Amanda Williams, a Year 6 teacher and Literacy Lead, Elm Road School was seeking to improve pupil outcomes in both phonics and writing, and evidence greater consistency in writing across the whole school.

In 2023, only 38% of Key Stage 1 children and 69% of Key Stage 2 children were achieving age-related expectations in writing. “We knew we needed to improve writing in our school – that was our fundamental issue upon starting the programme,” Amanda said. “Originally, there was a huge outcome that we wanted to achieve in our plan, but our Priority Area coach helped us to specify what we needed. Fundamentally we are a one-form entry school in the Fens, not all children read at home, and writing levels were low in school. It was a case of really looking at how we can improve, and we identified that a focus on sentence structure is the key area of writing holding children back even in Year 6. There was nothing set on sentence structure, and a lack of detail on approach across the school, so we have focused our energy on that.”

Whilst a move to purchase Little Wandle resources supported a huge difference in their summer 2023 phonics data (with 82% of pupils achieving the screening check), and work has continued to further implement and embed this in school, including via release time for mentoring and support for early career teachers, the main focus of the £26,875 grant awarded by the Priority Area Local Needs Fund *(breakdown available in the school’s theory of change and support table)* has been dedicated to writing.

In particular, the programme was intended to provide a clear long-term plan and clarity of expectations in opportunities for writing, leading to continued improvement in data/outcomes; whole-school consistency in the development of teaching of writing; and through this for staff subject knowledge and confidence to develop, and impact, on the teaching of writing.

Also for colleagues to feel confident supporting with next steps in writing as demonstrated in books, through marking and feedback and in moderation staff

meetings; and for pupils to be able to explore ways in which to edit and improve their own writing.

Implementation: Explicitly teaching and modelling sentence structure daily

To support these objectives, Elm Road Primary School invested in The Write Stuff (subscription, books and resources, and training) and visited other schools to inform their approach as part of its long-term plan developed in partnership with the Priority Area coach.

"The biggest change is we have gone from having no writing scheme and no clear structure – teachers would dip in, dip out of the teaching of writing – to having one solid programme," Amanda explained. "Implementing The Write Stuff, which I researched over summer 2023 and watched lots of videos, has been the turning point for us. I trialled this with two units in Year 6 before Christmas, and then colleagues have delivered them from January 2024. We were very positive about the immediate impact, with staff fully engaged and the feedback from pupils, who we find love the structure of it, was positive."

Throughout the remainder of the 2023-24 academic year, Elm Road continued to embed The Write Stuff across the school, including via visits from the English Hub, and the Ofsted inspection report that summer observed that "the school has acted decisively to improve standards of attainment" in reading and writing (and mathematics), and "there have been significant improvements, for example, in the quality of pupils' writing in English lessons."

Writing across the curriculum then became a specific target on the school improvement plan for 2024-25. Amanda commented: "We are pleased with the reference in the Ofsted report, but there is a long way to go. A year into the

programme, we have made some tweaks, because some things worked and some less so. We are a small team, we share and talk to each other, and we can be adaptable. For example, with one teacher we agreed it is better to have less sentences, to ensure good quality sentences. However, we are working across the curriculum now, finding ways to do longer pieces of writing in topics, and are seeing better quality in geography and science for example. Most units are linked to books. Reading here is a priority, pupils' are consistently given access to high-quality texts from a range of authors in their class, and their use of vocabulary is good."

There is also a continued focus on expectation and development of editing, and writing staff meetings have looked at how editing is taught and modelled, potentially supported by the use of classroom visualisers.

Outcome: Rising data, and staff/pupil confidence

In summer 2024, Key Stage 2 writing was 60% (in line with the target). Reading was 70% and Year 1 phonics was 80%. Moderation reports more consistency in books and across the school, and better quality writing in terms of vocabulary, sentence structure and familiarity with grammar terms. Opportunities for more cross-curriculum writing continue to be pushed by the school, and a review of potential handwriting and spelling schemes which are linked to The Write Stuff and Little Wandle phonics, are ongoing.

"I have greater depth writers this year for the first time," Amanda said. "I have been amazed by what children can produce, how teachers scaffold (with different degrees of scaffolding), including for lower attainers. Pupils model this every day, there is a purpose for the words they use, and now we see this in book looks and independent write. The Write Stuff gives them an enthusiasm to want to write because the range consistently adds new texts/new units, and builds over weeks.

When children produce their independent piece of writing, the previous sentence stacking teaching provides them with the skills needed. When staff are moderated, and are told writing is really good, they can see it is working. CPD has become more meaningful too."

Amanda, with Headteacher Stuart Mills, attended the Priority Area Schools' Implementation Day in September 2024 and she reflected on this and value of the wider collaboration. "The implementation days are very beneficial, especially hearing from guest speakers and influential peers, and joining fellow staff who are doing the same things as us (all for our children) and valuing a discussion on what worked/what hasn't," she revealed. "Our Priority Area coach has been brilliant. We have some good relationships going now, including a visit to Robert Arkensall Primary School, where we had a look at The Write Stuff scheme and that helped us to determine what was possible and where to go next. Emma has listened, she has been there to help and guide us on what we think we can do and where we can improve, and, for us, success continues to be that staff have a greater understanding of writing, including where children need to be by the end of the Year 6."

She added: "Children are now encouraged to write on a daily basis – and previously they weren't. They know how The Write Stuff works and this has provided the stimulus they needed. It runs all the way through the school now."

PRIORITY AREA COACH FEEDBACK

"With The Write Stuff, leaders quickly saw the impact in books, particularly lower down the school where pupils surpassed previous expectations of them, and with lower attaining pupils who can feel successful within this structure. In a tour of the school in February 2024, there was lots of writing evident across the curriculum in

both classrooms and in the corridors demonstrating the focus there is on writing; the progress in pupils writing from the previous visit was also evident in all year groups. In May 2024 the book looks also showed the clear progression that pupils have made across the academic year in each year group. It was also good to see the high-quality vocabulary work clearly going on in all year groups as evidenced by the vocabulary choices in pupils' books. The progress made by pupils in Years 1-4 at the expected standard or higher is notable and there was clear impact of the teaching structure supporting the pupils to become more successful. In more recent visits the impact of The Write Stuff continues to be seen through both the quality and quantity of writing that pupils are producing. Recent discussions have been able to focus on how to further develop further including identifying and targeting pupils for greater depth throughout the school and ensuring a range of opportunities are planned that give pupils greater autonomy as writers. If this project is successful, the data should improve over time as pupils come up through the school."

Emma Fuller

Case study developed: March 2025