# Fenland and East Cambridgeshire Priority Area

## School case studies

The case studies were collated and written by Prof Riikka Hofmann's research group
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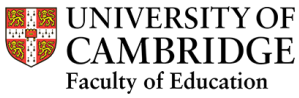

The case studies in this document were written based on school leader interviews conducted in March 2025 and schools' documentation about their Priority Area projects.

The case study interviews explored project starting points, the identification and analysis of key problems to be addressed, the design of the projects, their implementation and mechanisms supporting it, outcomes to date and key learnings.

The exploration and analysis of the school case studies, as reported here, was informed by research on change mechanisms influencing school's implementation of research-informed interventions to enhance equitable learning outcomes (Hofmann, 2024) and findings from earlier analyses of school projects in the region during the preceding Opportunity Area programme (Hofmann & Ilie, 2022).

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## Case Study: Thomas Eaton Primary School

### The school and the challenge: consistency and outcomes in KS1 writing

Thomas Eaton is a small, rural primary school serving 130 students, including preschool. Many of its families face socioeconomic challenges, and the school has historically struggled with parental engagement in student learning. Writing outcomes at the school were below national KS1 averages.

### Analysing the sources of the problem to inform the intervention

#### *Inconsistent instruction and low student engagement hindered writing development*

A key barrier to writing development was the inconsistency in instructional approaches. Teachers reported a lack of confidence in delivering writing instruction, often due to insufficient training in shared writing processes and principles. Without a unified approach, teachers relied on individual methods, resulting in fragmented instruction and variable outcomes.

Additionally, low student engagement in reading and writing, both at home and at school, compounded the problem. Many students lacked the confidence to view themselves as capable writers, and some entered Reception with underdeveloped oracy skills, further limiting their writing potential.

#### *Talk4Writing was introduced for consistent writing instruction*

To address these challenges, the school adopted the Talk4Writing approach, a structured, evidence-based writing development scheme. This intervention included comprehensive staff training to build confidence and subject knowledge, led by the assistant headteacher through ongoing coaching sessions. The strategy also included peer observations and library enhancements to foster a literacy-rich environment.

The intended outcomes of the intervention include short-, medium-, and long-term improvements in staff confidence and planning quality, as well as gains in student vocabulary, written expression, and overall writing proficiency, ultimately surpassing national benchmarks.

#### *Teachers now use materials from the scheme, but still add their individual tweaks*

While the Talk4Writing approach provides a consistent framework, teachers continue to make context-specific adaptations, reflecting the unique needs of their students. The shift from creating bespoke lesson plans to using standardised materials has freed time for teachers to focus on targeted support for individual learners. However, this transition

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required some adjustment, as it meant moving away from long-standing personal resources and approaches.

Interestingly, despite the prescriptive nature of the scheme, teachers have found opportunities for micro-innovation, such as tailoring slide content, which has fostered peer learning and cross-pollination of ideas.

## Outcomes of the intervention so far

### *Consistency and fidelity to the Talk4Writing scheme have increased student outcomes*

Early results indicate a 10% improvement in student writing outcomes this term. This progress is attributed to greater consistency in instruction, fidelity to the Talk4Writing model, and a shared understanding of grade-specific writing techniques, such as sentence modelling. Teachers are now more confident in setting clear objectives and assessing writing quality, resulting in more purposeful instruction and measurable gains in student performance.

## Mechanisms facilitating/hindering change

### *Given change fatigue, slow implementation and staff buy-in were key*

Staff initially expressed reservations about the new approach, reflecting a broader sense of 'change fatigue' after multiple leadership transitions in recent years.

> *'Probably the teachers were the most pessimistic to start with and we were again… as a small school we've got quite a unique situation… I think it's five head teachers in three years. So there's been an awful lot of change. When I was talking with the deputy head, we recognised there is a there's a change fatigue, if you want a better phrase. Which is why we had a slow implementation plan. Like I said, I piloted it, allowing the teachers to come in to observe what I was doing in my year group. At staff meetings I shared updates. We were looking at data kind of and books to see what was going well'.*

To address this, the school adopted a phased rollout, including piloting the scheme in one class to build trust and create local champions for change. This approach allowed staff to observe the practical benefits of the new approach and foster a sense of ownership over the process.

### *Peer learning and CPD were important for staff development*

Investing time in CPD and having staff release gave protected time to teachers to observe others' practice through in-house observations and peer observations in partner schools. Apart from teachers heavily investing themselves in training and observation and feedback with mentors and peers, support staff were trained on how to use the writing scheme. Funding was a key mechanism for enabling resources for staff release and protected time. Staff had discussions about adaptations and changes to the scheme and mentioned things

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that did not work. They also received practical advice from peers regarding managing the implementation and delivery of units and resource sharing, such as slides.

Finally, seeing how children reacted and behaved to quality expert teaching felt great for teachers, and they got an insight into what their students could achieve.

***Student buy-in was an unexpected challenge***

Children were informed how writing is being changed and what is different, and how lessons were going to be delivered to understand the change. The same information was shared with parents on ClassDojo. However, many students resisted the prescriptive nature of the new writing instruction, where all students follow the same procedures regardless of where they are, their abilities, and preferences. Everyone starts from thinking, ideating, to writing. All students transition from controlled practice (I do, we do) to free practice (you do). In this process, students who think they are ready for free practice feel restricted by the scheme and resist saying: 'Why can't we just write? '

## Important learnings

- **Create space for peer learning**. Providing time for staff to observe and learn from each other's practice is critical for sustained improvement.
- **Build trust through gradual change**. Phased implementation can mitigate resistance and build long-term commitment.
- **Tailor approaches to local needs**. Even standardised programmes may benefit from local adaptation to ensure relevance and impact.

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