

Developing KS3 writing skills at Oxford Spires Academy

In the summer term of 2016, CfBT Schools Trust (CST)'s Oxford Spires Academy was buzzing with all things literacy as teachers across the school devoted two weeks to teaching Key Stage 3 students to develop their writing skills.

The fortnight was the culmination of an ongoing project, run by Debbie Clark (Literacy Coordinator), Helen Beech (Head of English) and Rachel Sewell (English Subject Specialist), to develop the teaching of written accuracy from Years 7 to 9.

Reviewing the situation

The project began on 28 January 2016 with a Literacy Review to explore best practice in the teaching of literacy at Oxford Spires.

This involved staff and students volunteering to take part in lesson drop-ins, a marking review, and one-to-one interviews with a teacher from each faculty to explore the strengths and opportunities for development in the teaching of Literacy at the school.

From here a team of Cross-Curricular Literacy Champions was born and, under the guidance of Debbie, Helen and Literacy Coordinators from across the Trust, this team worked to lead a market scene professional development session which shared ideas for teaching literacy across the curriculum, with an emphasis on writing skills. The same CPD session also relaunched Oxford Spires' literacy marking policy, and the use of green pens for editing and responding to marking.

Making a splash

Half a term later, Oxford Spires Literacy Splash saw teachers in every faculty work with their Literacy



Champion to develop a subject-specific writing task, and explicitly teach students how to research, plan, write and edit their work to produce their best possible writing.

Over the fortnight, teachers received daily ideas and resources via Twitter and email, which they used to develop their own creative approaches to teaching subject-specific writing skills. All these suggestions built on years of existing resources and ideas developed by Debbie and staff at the academy for teaching writing skills.

“The hype and excitement developed gradually across the fortnight, with students queuing at lunch times to take part in sixth form students’ Literacy Stall, playing games and quizzes and voting for a staff Literacy Legend,” says Rachel. “The winner, Drama’s Mr Shew, proudly wore his winning sash for a whole day following a close vote!”

Sense of success

For Debbie and Helen, the real sense of success came when, by the final Friday, their students gave endless examples of teachers who had taught them to improve their writing with green pens that fortnight. Helen says: “Students agreed that their sighs at ‘more green pens’ were a sign that actively correcting their writing was gradually becoming so entrenched that it would become a habit, and their technical accuracy would improve.”

For more information on how to use a school’s existing best practice to promote the teaching of literacy, check out #OSALiteracySplash or #OSALiteracySplash2016 on Twitter.

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