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Implementing the Thrive Approach in the primary classroom
Laura Hanser

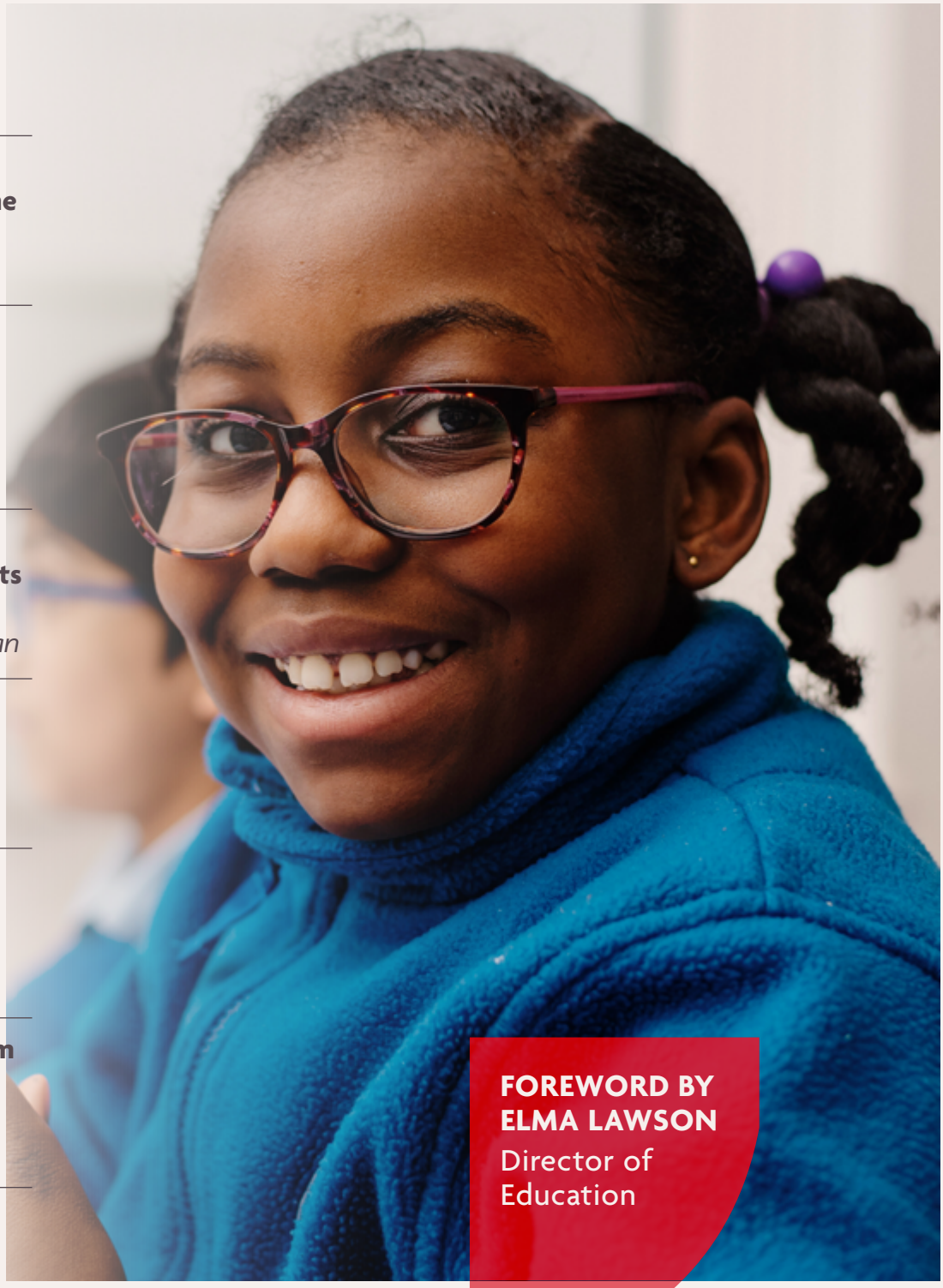
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FOREWORD BY ELMA LAWSON
Director of Education

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By Elma Lawson

Director of Education

Anthem Schools Trust



Welcome to the final edition of *Versed* for this academic year where once again, unapologetically, we revisit our *every student* mission.

We are continuing with the theme from our last edition, of great adaptive teaching strategies being implemented across our schools. Whilst we have made great strides with adaptive practice, we are still some way off achieving our mission in *every lesson, all the time*. Our data from Progress Teaching and CRD feedback tells us that adaptive practice is our biggest area for development.

Before I develop this further let's take a moment to remind ourselves of our 'why'! Why is our *every student* mission so central to the vision of Anthem? What drives us as educators? To make a difference and help shape the lives of young people? To share the passion, we have for our subject/s? A love of children? Its daily unpredictability? Wanting to make a difference to society and contribute to improving social mobility?

For me it was all the above, but I have a particular passion for improving social mobility for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and education is the key. The attainment gaps we are tackling continuously are a significant factor with the pandemic having a major impact. Data suggests disadvantaged primary children are 4.6 months behind their advantaged peers in reception, rising to over 19 months at KS4.

The best thing we can do to improve social mobility and educational attainment for every student is to identify and close those attainment gaps, providing these students with the best teachers, the best resources and many opportunities to increase their cultural capital.

The strategic work we are focusing on next academic year at EYFS and KS3 will go a long way in supporting schools with their planning for this. We also need to inspire, motivate and prepare these students for higher education, and actively ensure that all our students have opportunities to integrate among students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds to foster social capital.

At our last conference Oxford Spires Headteacher Louise Cowley shared with us her relentless approach to tackling the disadvantage gap in her school. The impact she and her team are having is phenomenal. Our new Personal Development Strategy shows the trust's commitment to developing the whole student, working together to foster that sense of belonging and enhance cultural capital experiences.

This edition of Versed widens our lens to consider the role of culture and leadership. Via the implementation of the Inclusion strategy, Thrive programme and the belonging project, we know that an incredible culture is necessary to complement pedagogy. Students need to feel that they belong to be able to learn and teachers need to create that culture through routines and relationships.

Several articles make the link between the *behaviour, relationships and routines* strand of The Anthem Way and their individual school and classroom culture. Providing clear, transferable models for other schools to adapt, Amy and Christina from Mount Street describe how they have taken the teaching prompts for this strand of The Anthem Way a step further for our youngest and most vulnerable students, some of whom require specialist provision. Maja from Oxford Spires talks about the role of dual coding in reducing cognitive load around routines, allowing students to focus on learning. Without exceptional behaviour and routines, combined with a relational approach, learning is lost, and no student can thrive, never mind our most vulnerable.

'I have a particular passion for improving social mobility for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and education is the key.'

This focus on adaptive strategies for behaviour, relationships and routines is timely. *The Infinite Game* rulebook outlines that as leaders our strategic focus *at this* point needs to be on preparation for September. There is so much power in planning now for consistency of routines to ensure the strongest possible start for both staff and students.

In her article, Jennie at St Mark's discusses the St Mark's streamlined CPD model which we have recommended to all secondaries for September via our Secondary Blueprint. This is perfectly replicable at primary level. The key is forensically planned CPD which incorporates deliberate practice, with relentless follow-up from leaders.

It all comes back to leadership! The way to ensure excellent provision for every student every lesson, all the time, and thereby contributing to improving social mobility in society, is by being relentless in our leadership of teaching and learning. It's an Infinite game!

There are many trust resources to support schools with their relentless drive on this; our new Teacher Development Strategy, **The Anthem Leaders toolkit**, the Anthem Institute. Exciting resources are being developed to further support our adaptive practice, from CPD modules on the TA Anthem Way to the new granular action steps on Progress Teaching. This will allow leaders to forensically track teacher success with progress towards action steps and be even more targeted with CPD and coaching.

Thank you to our contributors for this edition - Christina, Amy, Laura, Jennie, Rohan and Maja - for providing tangible, adaptable strategies which can be adapted to fit all our contexts with the right leadership.

Happy reading!



'The way to ensure excellent provision for every student every lesson, all the time, and thereby contributing to improving social mobility in society, is by being relentless in our leadership of teaching and learning.'

By Laura Hanser
Deputy Head Teacher
Grampian Primary Academy



Implementing the Thrive Approach in the primary classroom

At the beginning of this academic year, Grampian was chosen to be one of the first wave of schools to receive training in the 'Thrive Approach'. This approach uses a developmental model to help us understand social and emotional development from birth to adulthood, providing a lens through which we can look at and interpret children's behaviour.

As educators, we are familiar with the term that 'all behaviour is communication'; the Thrive Approach helps us to understand what a child is trying to tell us. With trust-wide implementation led by Kelsey Clark-Davies (Anthem's Head of Inclusion and SEND), the roll-out of training will see a Thrive Licensed Practitioner in each school.

Application of the Thrive Approach will be an integral aspect to complement the *Behaviour, Relationships and Routines* strand of the Anthem Way. The pedagogical strategies in The Anthem Way alone are meaningless without teachers understanding the 'why' behind behaviours and being able to live and breathe our Relational approach. The teaching prompts within the strand of The Anthem Way contain guidance on structure and routine, but they also contain guidance on non-verbal communication, language and de-escalation.

The Thrive programme provides the 'how' for this as well as the 'why' and will cascade theory underpinned by models of child-development, attachment, trauma-informed approaches and neuroscience – further supporting the application of The Anthem Way and our Relational approach into schools via high-quality CPD.

A timely solution

It was important to us that we were in wave 1 of Thrive because at Grampian Primary Academy, we have seen increasing complexity in the social, emotional and mental health needs of our students in recent years. For some, the presentation of these needs has had a detrimental impact on their capacity to respond safely to the demands of the classroom. Unsurprisingly, this has often translated into outcomes that do not reflect the true capability and potential of these students.

Despite the use of interventions and deployment of initiatives, the ever-increasing complexity of need, combined with depleted local support services, has meant that there has been little measurable impact on students' wellbeing or outcomes until now. The Thrive Approach offers what we have been seeking – child-centred assessment of the

thrive
Removing barriers to learning

developmental needs that are being signalled by behaviour and the identification of appropriate, targeted interventions designed to meet those needs.

After completion of the Thrive Licensed Practitioner training, I led a whole-school CPD day to enable staff to understand the Thrive Approach. This introduced staff to the neuroscience, child development and attachment theory that underpin the approach. The intention of this focus was to encourage staff to understand that, at times, a student's behaviour may be unexpected for their age, whilst being entirely expected given the gaps – or 'interruptions' – in their development.

We explored the types of trauma and loss that may lead to developmental interruptions – and soon realised that many, if not all, of our students are likely to have had these experiences to some extent. In reaching this realisation, it encouraged us to shift our perception of the behaviours we witness from these children; from defiant and disobedient to distressed and dysregulated.

New learning takes place all the time...

Our learning in neuroscience allowed us to understand the neuro-plasticity of the brain – that new learning takes place all the time, and despite early trauma, or developmental gaps, there are always opportunities for reparation.

This reinforced for us the importance of the structure and routine in the *Behaviour, Relationships and Routines* strand of The Anthem Way and allowed us to go deeper into the teaching prompts around communication. We felt we needed to model and give staff even more tangible strategies on how to 'be' when relating to students. We considered how students with developmental interruptions need the safety of a calm, predictable classroom environment and the ways in which this can be created.

Firstly, we explored the stance of PACE: Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy – developed by Dan Hughes, a Clinical Psychologist over 20 years ago. We examined how making even subtle tweaks to our interactions with students could build a sense of safety for them. Secondly, we explored Thrive's four Vital Relational Functions (or VRFs): Attunement, Validation, Containment and Regulation.

Attune: match the child's energy using your body, face and voice. *"Oh wow! I can see your face is red and your fists are clenched."*

Validate: let the child know it is OK to have that feeling. *"I'm wondering/imagining/noticing/guessing that you might be feeling sad/cross/frightened right now. If that had happened to me, I might feel that way too."*

Contain: be alongside, as a safe and supportive adult. *"I can see this is tricky for you. I will keep you safe."*

Regulate: soothe or stimulate the child back to social engagement. *"Let's just breathe together slowly for now."*

We used scenarios to consider how these VRFs might enable us to respond to the earliest signs of distress and dysregulation in behaviour using 'WING' – I'm wondering, I'm imagining, I'm noticing, I'm guessing. This half-term, we will continue to develop these aspects of our practice as we look to preparing our students for the transition period.

Hope and optimism

We are finding that this isn't always easy – we have emotions and we're human too! To support us as the children's 'co-regulators', we have learned about our own stress regulation systems and how to calm these. We are developing the skill of swapping-in and utilising support from other members of the team when needed.

We are at the very start of our Thrive journey and recognise that there may be twists and turns as we continue our implementation of the approach. However, we know that, with everyone heading for the same destination with hope and optimism, we will have the greatest possible impact on the lives and outcomes of the students in our care.

The approach will support everyone with regulation, routine and psychological safety which, in time, will reduce cognitive load in the classroom and alongside phenomenal Anthem Way pedagogy will lead to improved outcomes. Watch this space!

By Christina Horton

Assistant Headteacher and SENDCO

Mount Street Academy



Improving inclusive access to learning through internal specialist provision Hedgehogs

At Mount Street Academy inclusion is at the heart of everything we do, and our universal offer intentionally includes excellent quality first teaching in line with The Anthem Way. This includes curriculum and pedagogy adaptations and intervention support. These are vital in helping us in working towards the mission statement *every student, every lesson, all the time.*

For the majority of our cohort, children with SEND can access the curriculum with peers and feel safe and valued. However, for a small minority of children with complex needs this offer, even with the significant scaffolding available within The Anthem Way lesson structure, was not enough to ensure inclusive access to classroom learning.

Even with additional adult support through EHCP provision, a small number of children were frequently dysregulated and unable to access the classroom environment, finding it incredibly difficult to access the teaching within their cohort. Therefore, it was crucial that we started to think differently about what inclusive practice looked like for these children.

Following a conversation with Kelsey Clark-Davies (Head of Inclusion) last October, we began to develop a bespoke provision to meet their needs. In line with the Anthem Inclusion Strategy strands of ensuring evidence-based intervention and support and the effective use of TAs, we started to think differently...

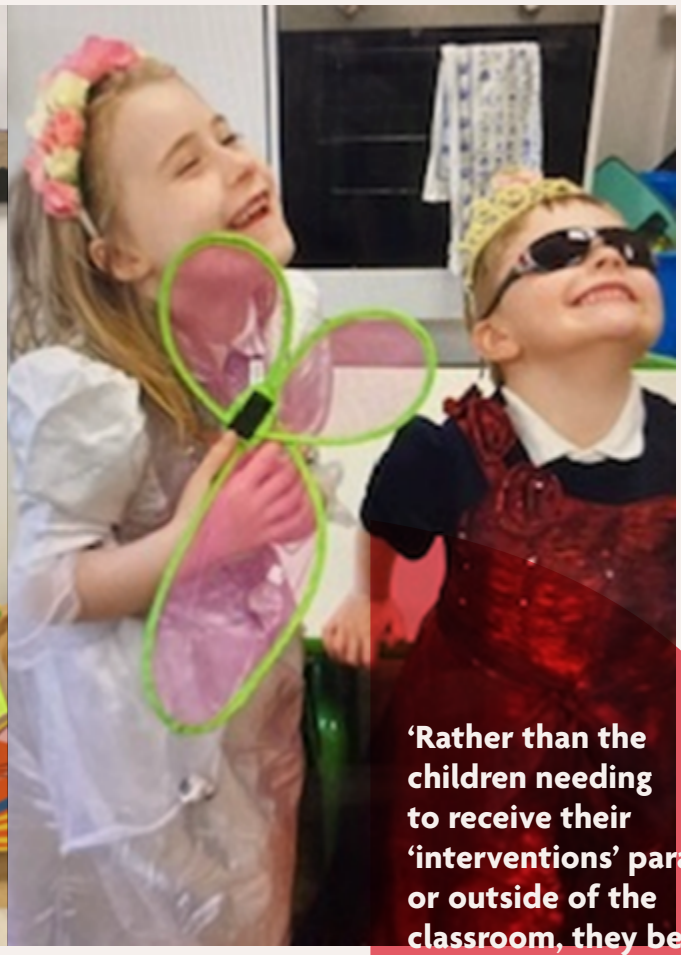
Getting it right from the start

It was important that the needs of the children were at the centre of the provision plan for both the curriculum and environment. Therefore, this was a collaborative approach including the expertise of outside agencies, Mount Street Academy staff and parents.

A planning meeting was held with our Educational Psychologist to ensure that all EHCP provisions were in place, and we had considered all of the elements to an enhanced, specialist offer. During thorough mapping of these provisions, many of the interventions that the children required, such as Attention Autism, sensory stories etc, were common throughout. So, these became the basis for our daily timetable, interspersed with bespoke learning opportunities based on their current level of attainment.

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classroom, they became a central part of our curriculum, so that every child was included and felt part of the class. This also supported a key area which was to improve both focus and attention on an adult led agenda and develop interactions.

Listening to the experts

As communication and interaction was the most significant need within this group, the most valuable resource available to us was being able to work collaboratively with the Lincolnshire Autism Intervention outreach service. They were incredibly helpful during conversations around planning the environment, supporting transitions and thinking about effective autism practice.

We knew via The Anthem Way, both the structure in itself and the *Behaviour, Relationships and Routines* teaching prompts, that consistency of routines and expectations are key for all children. Even more so for this cohort of children! So, we put a great deal of planning into how we could evolve the mainstream prompts within The Anthem Way for this cohort. For example, we implemented visual timetables, alternative forms of communication for some children, consistent group times and individual learning times.

Developing their engagement with learning was going to be an initial challenge, so the use of work and finished trays was suggested and implemented,

with great success. Our Specialist Outreach Teacher supported training for the staff working in the provision, including the SPELL approach, sensory integration and sensory circuits. She supported in developing our sensory profiles with bespoke sensory circuits for our children and increasing the confidence of staff.

The provision (which we christened Hedgehogs) is absolutely aligned to the EYFS curriculum, with regular opportunities for phonics and writing, and pedagogy still follows the I DO, WE DO, YOU DO structure for direct instruction. We build feedback for both teachers and TAs around use the teacher prompts from The Anthem Way.

We look forward to utilising, from September, the new TA feedback prompts and the prescribed action steps to provide really granular next steps on Progress Teaching. We will use both for direct instruction, and the additional EYFS prompts for continuous provision when coaching and developing staff.

As a leader, it was important to know that our offer for our children was bespoke and purposeful but also evidence-informed best practice, and accessing the experts ensured that this was the case. Through having a clear implementation plan we were able to implement effective strategies and train staff to deliver these ready for opening our classroom doors in January.

Our first term – impact so far!

Without sounding too cliché, the first term has been a rollercoaster for all involved, yet a joyous one. The impact we have seen already has been overwhelming, for both staff and parents alike. We have been using the AET progression framework to target set and assess progress and are seeing those small steps of progress already, although it is early days with regards to assessment and data.

However, what we have seen consistently are children who are fully included and learning together coupled with phenomenal progress evident in writing books. Our children are engaging in learning (this looks different for each of them), they are engaging with staff and building positive and nurturing relationships and are beginning to show enjoyment through being with each other.

This term we have had parent share afternoons and are planning our first sports day, all of which these children would have been too dysregulated to join previously. Hedgehogs has given us the flexibility, time and access to expertise to be able to really make a difference and truly say we are *creating a haven in which children flourish.*





So what next?

The next step in our journey is focusing on more specific assessment for this high level of need, this is something we are working on with the trust to secure consistency in assessing those small steps of progress and target setting.

With ever-growing numbers of children needing Hedgehogs support, it will be exciting to see how we continue to develop and grow over the next academic year. We would also welcome the opportunity to collaborate with other schools across the trust who are developing internal specialist provision.

We know that every child and every cohort is different and so our own ongoing reflection and professional development is important in enabling us to be flexible and responsive to need each year.

By Rohan Dhillon-Freeman

Deputy Headteacher

Gladstone Park Primary



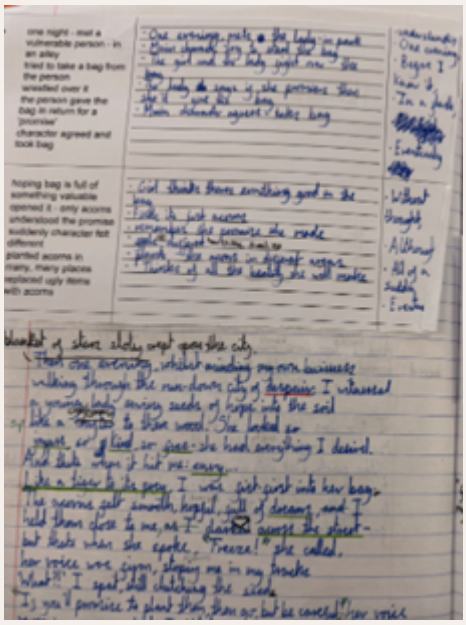
The six-part Anthem Way lesson structure and its impact on writing

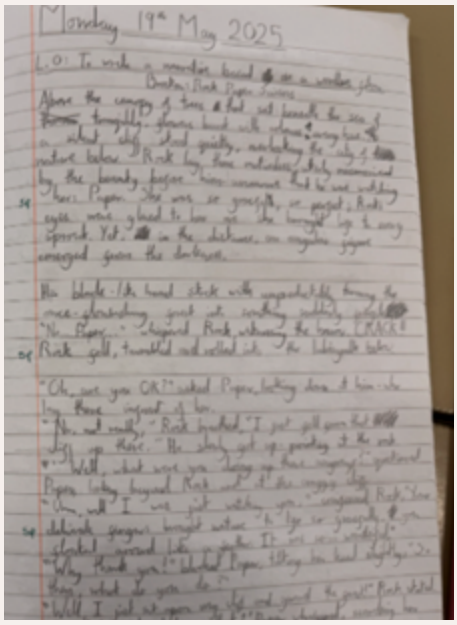
As teachers, we are constantly seeking strategies that not only inspire children to write, but that also ensure their writing is clear, coherent, and grammatically accurate.

To support with this at Gladstone Park we have recently implemented a six-part lesson structure based on The Anthem Way to be extremely clear and reduce the cognitive load for both staff and students so that they can focus on the learning and application rather than the tasks.

We've made a couple of tweaks to the conventional I DO, WE DO, YOU DO lesson structure by integrating explicit grammar instruction into every writing lesson. Combined with a well-sequenced, interactive (for high think and participation ratio), and reflective lesson design, this model supports students in making meaningful, sustained progress in writing.

We know, from the Anthem Way and the primary oracy strategy, that talk for writing is so important, both in terms of think and participation ratio but also cognition. This is true for all students, but we felt especially important for our significantly EAL cohort at Gladstone Park. Hence the need to be so explicit and codify it in our lesson structure – it really does support *every student, every lesson, all the time.*





Right: A comparison of Y6 writing before (l) and after (r) the strategy.

What is the six-part lesson structure?

1. (Retrieval) Do Now – An opportunity for students to respond to the feedback provided the previous day or a quick revisit of a misconception which arose last lesson. This will also link prior learning with new learning.

2. New Learning (I DO) – **Students are explicitly taught a grammar concept or skill, such as fronted adverbials or the use of commas in a list.**

According to Myhill et al. (2012), grammar instruction is most effective when embedded within the context of authentic writing tasks. The *New Learning* phase of the six-part lesson begins with direct teaching of a grammar concept, clearly showing its function and effect in writing. It is shown it its simplest form and the examples are linked to the themes in the text being studied.

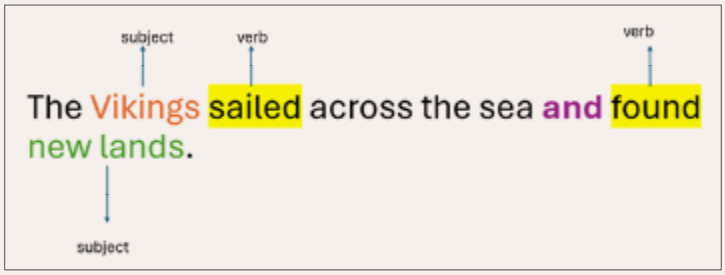
This explicit instruction helps demystify grammar for pupils and aligns with Rosenshine's (2012) *Principles of Instruction*, particularly the importance of clear explanations and modelling. Rosenshine's (mixed with a sprinkling of Teach Like a Champion) of course, was the inspiration for The Anthem Way.

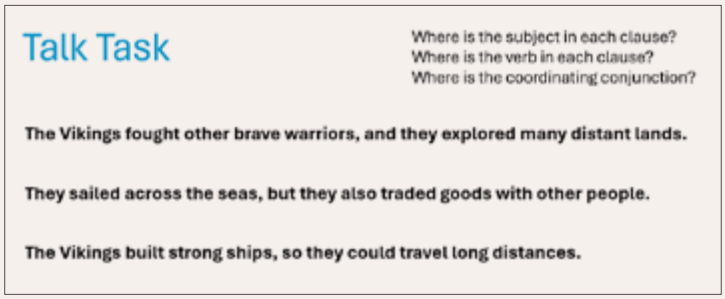
During this part of the lesson, the teacher would complete an I DO, talking out loud the feature and its use. Another example would then be displayed before the WE DO is completed.

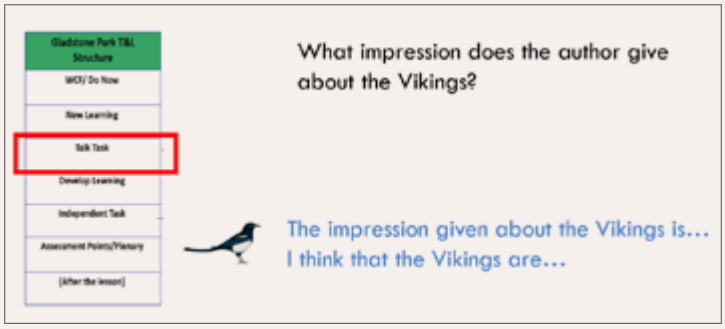
3. Talk Task – Students engage in structured discussion or oral rehearsal of the grammatical focus with their peers.

Top: Demystifying grammar with explicit examples.

Middle and bottom: Students consolidate learning through Talk Tasks.







This is an intentional, deliberate element of the model and allows students to explore and rehearse the focus grammar in a low-stakes, interactive context. The section where through oral rehearsal, students consolidate their understanding, receive immediate peer feedback, and begin to internalise new linguistic structures. This could be done purely as a talking task or through a short, written task on a whiteboard, for example including the grammar feature within a sentence.

4. Develop Learning (WE DO) – The teacher models the writing task, deliberately weaving in the grammar skill taught earlier, making the application of the skill explicit and purposeful.

Students benefit from seeing the talking out loud thought process of an expert and seeing what success looks like. The teacher also uses questioning and co construction to assess pupils' understanding of the concept.

This phase serves as a cognitive scaffold, showing students not only how to use the grammar skill but why it improves the writing. It mirrors Collins et al.'s (1989) concept of *cognitive apprenticeship*, where learners are guided by expert modelling before gradually taking on more responsibility. Teachers demonstrate metacognitive processes – planning, revising, editing – so students see grammar not as a bolt-on, but as a tool embedded within the writing craft.

5. Independent Task (YOU DO) – Students produce their own writing, embedding the grammar focus with increasing autonomy.

By this point, students have been exposed to multiple representations of the grammar concept – explicit teaching (I DO), oral rehearsal, and modelled writing (WE DO) - which supports dual coding (Paivio, 1986) and increases the likelihood of long-term retention and application.

In this phase, in line with any Anthem Way YOU DO, teachers circulate relentlessly and live mark. This provides instant feedback and fixes to misconceptions as well as helping teachers to identify patterns and next steps for re teaching.

6. Plenary – A reflective opportunity for students to self-assess their writing against success criteria, reinforcing metacognitive awareness.

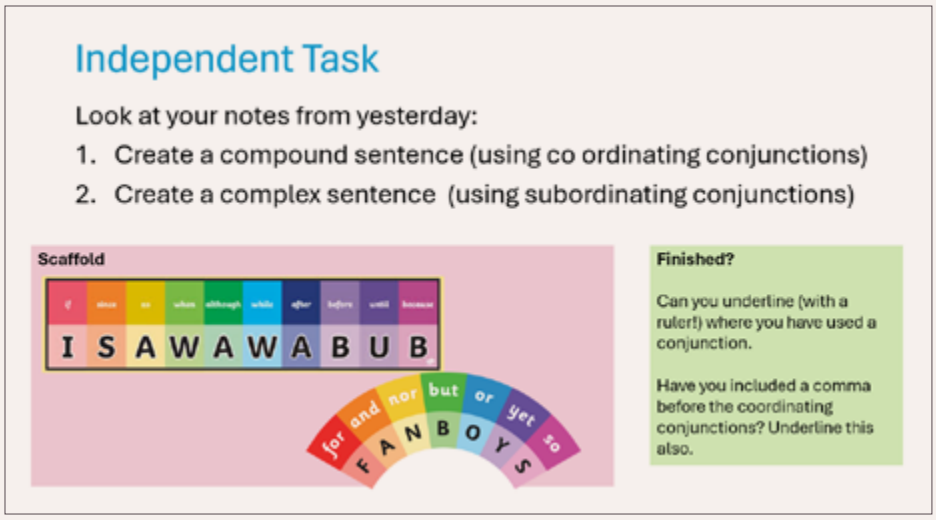
This stage invites students to reflect on their writing, often using success criteria or checklists to self-assess their use of grammar. Self-assessment encourages pupils to engage critically with their work, identify areas for improvement, and take responsibility for their progress. It also reinforces the idea that grammar is not just a compliance task, but a tool for better communication.

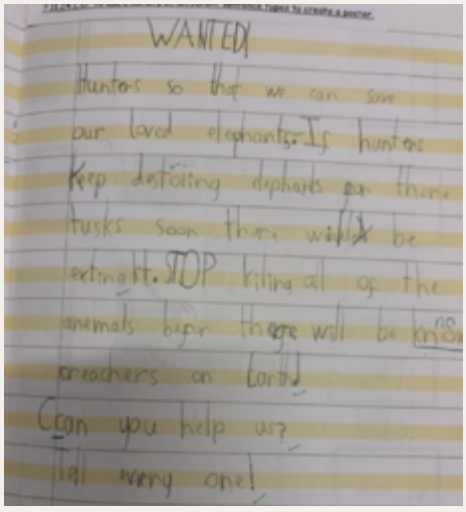
Conclusion

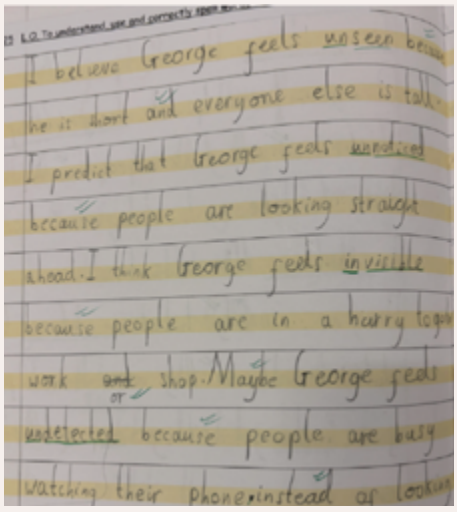
The six-part lesson structure moves beyond teaching grammar in isolation and instead embeds it within a purposeful writing journey that is interactive, scaffolded, and reflective.

By supporting explicit instruction, talk for learning, cognitive apprenticeship, and metacognitive reflection, this model ensures that students not only understand grammar but can apply it effectively – leading to writing of higher quality, accuracy, and impact. The impact of this has been clear to see at Gladstone Park since we introduced it in summer 1 this year.

Note from LG, Head of Curriculum, Assessment and Pedagogy: *A huge focus next year is improving the volume and quality of writing at KS3 to ensure that students are challenged more and we close the notorious 'writing gap/dip' i.e. the disparity in expectations and quality of writing at KS3 compared to KS2. This could certainly be a model we could adopt in secondary schools. Watch this space to see how the secondary SCP for English implements our new Y7 writing curriculum and how we continue to learn from our primary colleagues.*







Top: Independent tasks provide the YOU DO stage to embed grammar concepts.

Bottom: A comparison of Y2 writing before (l) and after (r) the strategy.

By Amy Paine

Assistant Headteacher & EYFS Leader

Mount Street Academy



Building strong foundations: Why connection and consistency matter most during EYFS

At Mount Street Academy, the demographic of children attending our infant and nursery school has become increasingly diverse, particularly over the past five to six years, reflecting the rich cultural context of our wider community.

We serve families speaking many languages other than English at home; with 33 different languages represented in our school. This shift has brought a vibrant and enriching mix of traditions, experiences, and perspectives into our classrooms.

Regaining focus through The Anthem Way

Our response has always been rooted in our commitment to being inclusive, culturally aware, and to how we tailor and adapt support to ensure every child feels valued, understood, and able to thrive. As a three-form infant school setting with a large nursery, we have always sought to give children the best start to their education. But these demographic changes brought challenges that meant we had to adapt our approach to how we ensure we consistently uphold our vision of *creating a haven in which children flourish.*

With most children joining us with very low starting points we know that interactions, connections and consistency are key for our children to thrive and to maximise their progress. The launch of The Anthem Way came at a pivotal point for us and brought us a research-led tool which we really stopped and reflected on. It prompted us to realise as a leadership team that we needed to go back and focus again on *Behaviour, Relationships and Routines* as well as *Literacy and Oracy*.

Communication and Language was our area in EYFS that we felt was least effective along with self-regulation. This knowledge helped inform our decisions on actions we needed to take, including our CPD offer. We were also delighted to help formulate the EYFS teaching prompts in version 2.0 of The Anthem Way which have really influenced drop-ins and coaching for EYFS teachers across the whole trust.

Developing 'The Mount Street Way'

A working party was put together to establish what our consistent 'Mount Street Way' should be within each EYFS classroom, focused on behaviour, relationships and routines. We considered how we expected

the children to stop to listen. What would be the consistent cues used for all children across the stage? How would we signal their move from the carpet to provision? What did tidy up time look like? Which visuals did we use to support children?

As a result of this exploration, the 'Mount Street Way', closely linked to The Anthem Way teaching prompts but with an EYFS specific spin, was developed, agreed and rolled out within every classroom. The impact was carefully observed within our monitoring and evaluation schedule and tracked on Progress Teaching which enabled us to identify the focus for next steps in CPD as well as coaching for individual teachers.

We quickly noticed that these actions meant all children thrived from the consistency and predictability of the school day, particularly during transition times. They were able to self-regulate better, as all children knew what to expect. Visuals supported all children as they provided a scaffold that overcame language barriers. Children knew that all adults expected the same behaviours, used the same language and visuals wherever they were in school e.g. indoor/ outdoor classrooms, corridors, toilets, lunchtimes, assemblies etc.

Exploring interactions

Once these changes were in place we looked further into the interactions of adults in EYFS. Again, we explored and evaluated existing practice, concentrating on the impact of adult interactions with the children, focusing on



Children have thrived from the consistency and predictability of the school day.



'Building strong foundations for children through connection and consistency is not just beneficial – it's essential for their long-term growth and wellbeing.'

the children's communication and language development.

The evaluation was closely tied to the *Literacy and Oracy* strand of The Anthem Way. Staff worked together to develop a bank of stem sentences that are now used within both child-initiated/led learning and adult-led sessions. Tiered vocabulary is now used and defined, with tier one vocabulary sent home for pre learning for all EAL children as well as children working below the expected standard, in order to close the gap.

As part of the CPD offer to staff, we looked at *Every interaction is an intervention* by Dr Karen Treisman, the EEF ShREC approach and the book Interacting or Interfering by Julie Fisher.

The impact of enhancing both Anthem Way strands, with the actions we have taken, has been less disruption. Children feel safe, connected to the children and adults within our setting and we are seeing more reluctant talkers now willing to share their ideas, particularly within their own play. Children with limited English are expressing their needs using widgets and communication boards in every classroom as well as spoken English.

Connection and consistency are key

We have learned, and still are learning, many lessons as we change and adapt our teaching approaches along with each cohort of children and the different challenges they bring. Our curriculum and approaches will constantly need to change and adapt to meet the needs and interests of each individual child.

However, one key message will always remain the same and that is that connection and consistency will continue to drive our practice forwards as we get to know each child and meet them at their next step. That is where progress and narrowing the gap lies and codification in line with The Anthem Way has been so powerful.

Building strong foundations for children through connection and consistency is not just beneficial — it's essential for their long-term growth and wellbeing. When children feel secure in their relationships and know what to expect from daily routines, from adults and from each other, they develop the confidence to explore, learn, and grow.



This in turn nurtures emotional resilience, fosters a love for learning, and helps children to navigate the world around them.

As we continue to prioritise connection and consistency in EYFS we are not just preparing children for academic success, we are setting them up for a lifetime of healthy relationships, self-regulation, and the ability to face challenges with strength and optimism.



Children feel secure in their relationships and know what to expect from the adults around them.

By Maja Sabljak

Teacher of English & Head of Year 8

Oxford Spires Academy



Unlocking understanding with dual coding: Embedding visual routines to support all learners

At Oxford Spires Academy, in line with the Anthem *Every student* vision, we've made a school-wide, firm commitment to ensuring every student has equal access to learning.

Our cycle 2 CPD for all teachers has focused particularly on adaptive teaching strategies grounded in cognitive science. One such strategy has been the implementation of dual coding — the use of both visual and verbal inputs — as part of our wider effort to improve everyday classroom teaching and make learning more accessible for every student, in every lesson, all the time.

Clear, consistent structures

Dual coding is a feature of the teaching prompts in the I DO section of The Anthem Way. We have expanded this to link also the *Scaffold and Challenge* and *Behaviour, Relationships and Routines* strands, supporting students with EAL, SEND, and low prior attainment by providing clear, consistent structures that help them confidently engage with learning.

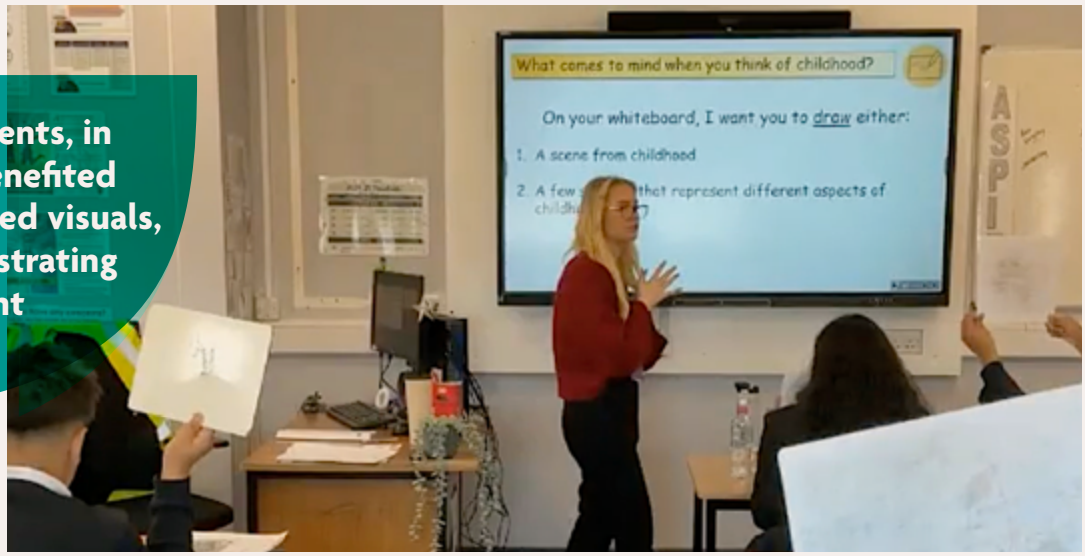
As a school, we had recognised a barrier — students were using their working memory on *how* to follow the task instead of engaging *with* the task. i.e. they were worrying about what do to on a task instead of thinking about the learning that the task involved.

Dual coding draws on the principle that the brain processes and retains information more effectively when it is presented in both visual and verbal forms. When used thoughtfully, it reduces cognitive load, makes instructions more accessible, and helps students engage more confidently and independently with learning.

The power of visual cues

Our journey began with a powerful all-staff Teach Meet, placing staff in the shoes of an EAL student. The impact was immediate – staff experienced first-hand how isolating it can be to receive instructions they couldn't process, and how visual cues dramatically support comprehension.

‘EAL and SEN students, in particular, have benefited from the dual-coded visuals, with many demonstrating greater engagement and participation.’



Dual coding the Oxford Spires way - part of the school’s wider effort to improve everyday classroom teaching for every student.



Following this, we adopted a whole-school strategy to develop and implement general and subject-specific banks of dual-coded images. These visuals were designed to be embedded within existing routines — not as an add-on, but as tools to enhance clarity and strengthen what we already do well.

Our first focus was identifying core instructions and routines across departments, such as mini whiteboards, active listening, and exit tickets, where clear visual support would make the greatest impact.

Engagement and participation

We began with a focused pilot in Year 7, including our English unit on *The Bone Sparrow* — a text rich with opportunities for inference, empathy, and layered discussion — all areas where clarity of instruction supports deeper engagement. Ongoing feedback from both staff and students was instrumental in shaping and refining our approach. We gathered insights through learning walks, staff reflections, and student voice. One student summed up the impact clearly, noting that the dual-coded images are ‘helpful because they show you what to do and when to do it’.

In our Year 7 English unit on *The Bone Sparrow*, we’ve observed notable improvements in student learning behaviours. Students are showing increased independence, initiating tasks more quickly, and contributing more confidently during discussions. For example, teachers have reported a smoother transition between activities and fewer requests for repeated instructions.

EAL and SEN students, in particular, have benefited from the dual-coded visuals, with many demonstrating greater engagement and participation. This has led to more inclusive classroom dynamics and a noticeable reduction in behaviours linked to confusion and disengagement. As a result, the learning environment has become calmer and more focused, allowing all students to access the curriculum more effectively.

Embedding the approach

Our next steps involve expanding the dual coding approach beyond Year 7, ensuring that all departments build and maintain dual-coded image banks aligned to their core routines.

Ultimately, we want dual coding to become embedded in how we support learning across the curriculum for every student.

By Jennie Khan

Vice Principal

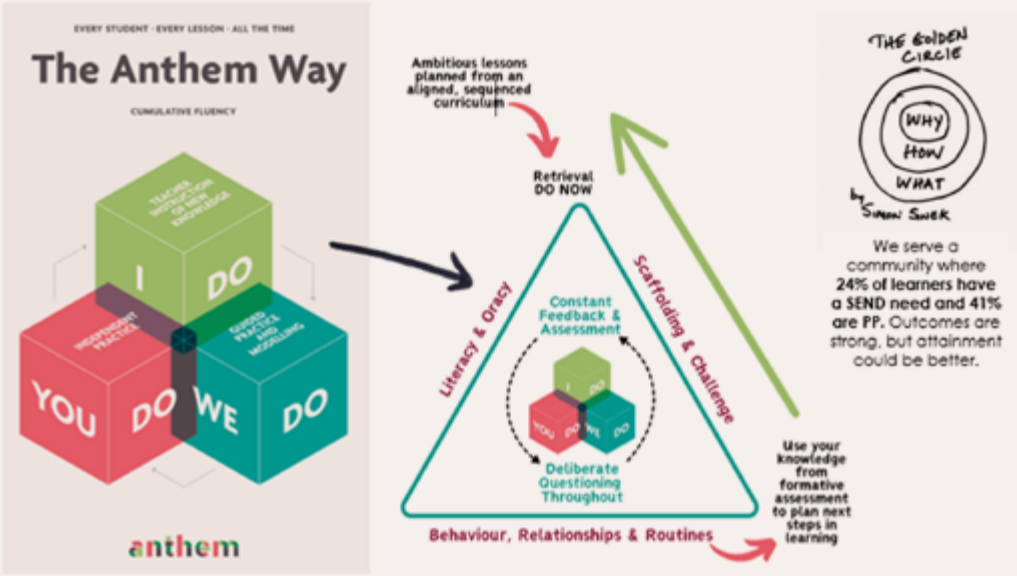
St Mark's Academy



How a responsive and integrated CPD Curriculum has driven adaptive practice at St Mark's

In recent times, one of the key areas for school improvement has been a focus on effective and principled curriculum design. We know a strong curriculum with clear and sequenced knowledge development directly impacts student outcomes. We know from educational research that the biggest impact on student performance is the strength of the teacher in front of them day in day out.

However, despite the clear links and parallels, often when it comes to our teacher's learning and the continuous professional development that supports them, the rigour and reflection inherent in curriculum design approach is sometimes missing. At St Mark's, we have developed our approach to ensure that we treat CPD like any other curriculum, intentionally designed with a clear focus, sequenced and integrated into whole school systems with methods of measuring impact. These are principles which for 2025-26 have been adapted into our Anthem Secondary Blueprint and will be applied trust-wide to ensure that CPD impacts teacher habits in a sustained way. The principles are also perfectly adaptable to primary.



Finding focus for CPD through The Anthem Way.

Why a responsive approach to CPD?

The Ambition Institute outlines 10 key principles of effective curriculum design for students; all of which are transferable to CPD for teachers.

1. What and why
The choices you make about the focus of your CPD programme need to be rooted in the wider aims and the key priorities of the school and more importantly staff need to know the 'why?' behind the content that you are delivering. At St Mark's this means always linking our CPD focus back to our core mission of 'transformation for all' and placing every CPD within the framework of the Anthem Way. In early 2025 our streamlined focus was adaptive practice in response to what data from Progress Teaching, CRDs and coaching on Steplab was telling us. We linked this back to our mission with staff.

2. Breaking it down
When we are planning CPD at St Mark's we start off by mapping out the whole year, considering the competing priorities and where there will be natural crunch points in terms of workload. Just like backwards planning of curriculum, leading up to the assessment, we are considering where we can deliver the right CPD to make it the most impactful.

This might mean starting the year refocusing on behaviour expectations and routines, building in time back for marking or moderation around mock exam windows, having a focus on literacy after NGRT testing to support teachers to understand the testing results. One key thing to note is that whilst we block where we are going to touch on key areas of practice, the concrete focus of the sessions are decided responsively every half-term based on feedback from learning walks and QA of the practice in classrooms.

3. Focus
Just like our students, teacher suffer from cognitive overload so each half-term we have one key focus: what's most important this half-term to develop teaching. This core focus will only change when we feel that staff are now secure in that practice in the classroom. Sometimes this means sticking with the same CPD focus for a term and constantly refining sessions based upon on the ground feedback.

4. Coherence
To ensure that we are building our staff's schema, we ensure that our Monday CPD sessions do not sit in isolation. Understanding arises through connection and so we build in opportunities for connections.

Whatever our CPD focus for the half-term is will also be the focus of our learning walks, our instructional coaching, our ECT training, our line management conversations with Heads of Departments, Department Meetings and our Progress Teaching Drop-Ins to ensure that we are flooding the school with our focus and making it part of our teachers everyday practice in the classroom. This also means constantly linking back to previous CPD foci and making links between different pedagogical practice explicit for the staff.

5. Progression
Building progression across CPD sessions ensures that staff can see how they are developing, rather than CPD feeling like series of piecemeal or one-off events. Each session has builds on the previous one. Here is an example of the progression in our adaptive practice series:

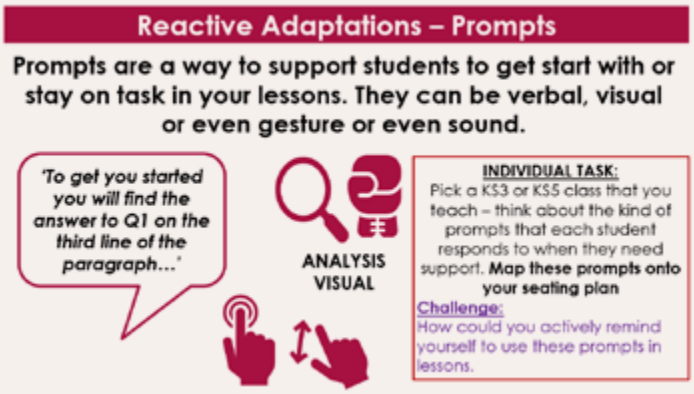
Session 1 – The what and the why of adaptive practice and the effective use of student one page SEND profiles in the classroom

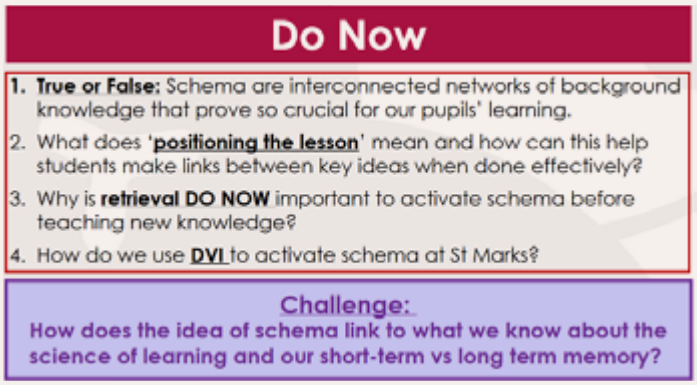
Session 2 – Proactive adaptive responses before the lesson

Session 3 – Reactive adaptive responses during the lesson

All our sessions ensure that there are no missed opportunities to supermodel The Anthem Way for staff, for example they use cold calling, DVI and I DO, WE DO, YOU DO.

6. Pace and space
One of our key points of learning as a leadership team over the course of the past few years was building in enough time for teachers to action their learning in CPD. As a result, we moved to a fortnightly model of input so that teachers had time to try out things in the classroom and come back to the next session with ideas and reflections on what had worked on what they wanted to improve.





7. Orient attention

What we focus on is what we learn so we need to ensure that CPD felt valuable to what teachers are doing in the classroom rather than simply theory and research about pedagogical practice. These links are there for teachers who want to explore them, but the focus of sessions is putting their learning into the context of their lessons then and there.

Staff are regularly asked to bring a print-out of lesson slides with them and given time in the session to script, adapt or re-design an element of their lesson so that they understand the practical value of CPD.

8. Big picture, fine detail

Whilst planning our CPD curriculum, we are always thinking about how to deepen our teachers understanding by making links between the fine details of their learning in each session and the big picture built through the yearly CPD sequence.

Sessions start with retrieval starters which supermodel our approach to building cumulative fluency for staff as well as students. This approach builds staff confidence as they trial new strategies as they can 'stick' these to their prior experiences.

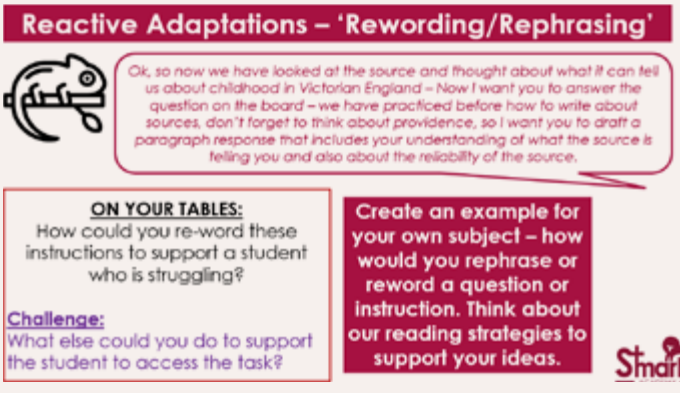
9. Variation in action

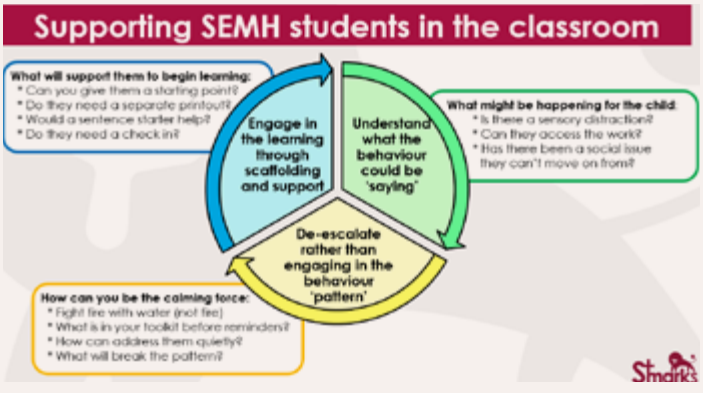
For staff to develop a detailed understanding of what we are focusing on we can vary the way in which content is presented, practiced, and retrieved. This means supermodelling techniques in CPD through whole-school strategies, such as retrieval and turn and talk, being used. It also means building in workshop-style approaches into Twilight where our best practitioners teach mini lessons to their peers to model to the teachers how strategies work in the classroom. Touching back on the same content in several ways ensures that the learning for staff has longevity.

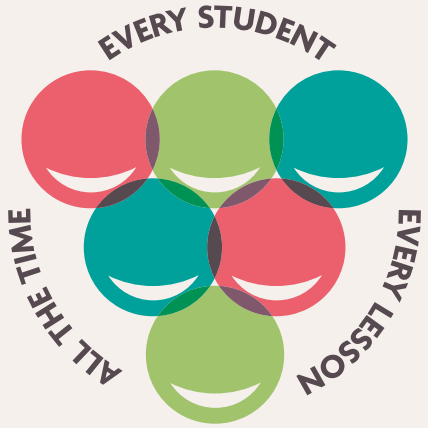
10. Review and refine

What makes our CPD programme so impactful is the constant process of review and refinement. Every cycle of CPD is reviewed against our Progress Teaching and learning walk data to ensure that CPD is having impact in the classroom. The data also allows us to re-focus the next series of sessions. Just like teachers in the classroom constantly adapt their lessons based on their assessment results to close gaps in student learning, the Quality of Education team use the data to replan and re-focus the CPD for the next half-term.

Above and below: Examples of St Mark's CPD resources for staff.







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