



South Lanarkshire Council

In the 2022-23 academic year, three schools supported by South Lanarkshire Council began using Scholastic [PM Writing](#), a complete learning, teaching and assessment package focusing on the writing process through the primary phase.

As part of a year-long case study (with a view to rolling this out to other schools in the local authority), Blackwood, Bent and Milton primary schools adopted the resource as they sought to develop their approach to the teaching of writing and improve attainment. Each school is very different, both in pupil numbers and catchment areas, and they wanted to see if PM Writing could positively impact all learners.

High-quality Career Long Professional Learning (CLPL) was provided by Stephen Graham throughout the year to ensure that all teachers and senior leaders had the knowledge and skills to teach writing with confidence in the three schools. This enabled the schools to plan, moderate and carry out peer visits with a shared understanding of expectations, and to engage in professional dialogue.

Post-Covid, Blackwood Primary School identified through self-evaluation a need to review its current literacy programme to ensure that it was fit for purpose. As runners-up to a West Lothian Council school in 2019 at the Scottish Education Awards for Raising Attainment of Literacy, their curriculum model for literacy seem a good starting point. This was supported further by professional reading and a critical analysis of available Scottish ACEL data.

A visit to West Lothian cemented the beginning of the partnership with Scholastic PM Writing, and it became clear that to raise attainment in literacy the school had to make radical changes, within a strategic framework, to its current thinking and methodologies. This involved a critical review of its pedagogy and an understanding that to make a difference it had to be explicit in the teaching and modelling of the stages of writing across its school community.

For the other two primary schools, one of the priorities in Bent's 2022-23 Improvement Plan was to raise attainment and improve the provision of teaching and learning in writing. Whole school attainment in writing was 59%, and the school targeted significant attainment gains and improvements in reading culture to be transferred and extended to writing contexts, as well as focusing on enriching the teaching and learning of all aspects of writing. Creating a strategic partnership with Scholastic PM Writing was the key intervention cited in the plan.

Milton Primary School also had a priority in its Improvement Plan to raise attainment in writing and overall average of Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence (ACEL) data in writing from 72% to 80% through the implementation of a whole school pedagogy, and provide opportunities for moderation and assessment throughout the year in school and with the two other schools in the learning community.

Here we capture the perspectives of each school's Head Teacher following their first 12 months using Scholastic PM Writing, a year which saw literacy teams supported in the training and implementation of explicit and systematic writing instruction across the whole school.

The PM programme has provided clarity and a progressive pathway which enables all our learners to experience success. From our learners' perspective engagement is high, classrooms are buzzing with creativity and what was perceived as dull and hard is now fun.

Christine McMillan, Head Teacher, Blackwood Primary School

"Raising attainment in literacy is a national and local priority. For our school, we are looking at a three-year strategic plan to develop a bespoke literacy curriculum. Acknowledging all aspects of literacy are co-dependent, our plan in its simplest format translates to writing in year 1, followed by listening and talking in year 2, and finally in year 3 a focus on reading.

In educational circles, 'the attainment gap' is a phrase used to discuss learners' attainment. I believe in order to tackle this we need to acknowledge and attend to teachers' 'literacy gap', which is a lack of knowledge and confidence in how to

teach literacy and in particular writing. Teachers need to be supported with training, tools and time if we are to make a difference. Scholastic has offered us a complete programme to build a robust literacy curriculum. High-quality CLPL has been provided online regularly throughout the year with access to continued support. Resources are purchased in response to our literacy journey. Time has been allocated through our working time agreement at a manageable but effective pace.

At the end of year one, the culture in our school has changed. Teachers are confident and feel empowered. They are part of a whole school pedagogical approach to writing. The PM programme has provided clarity and a progressive pathway which enables all our learners to experience success. From our learners' perspective engagement is high, classrooms are buzzing with creativity and what was perceived as dull and hard is now fun. My 'WOW' story is one child who started Primary 4 on Early Level and finished the year achieving First Level. This child readily transfers taught writing frameworks for description, procedure, information reports and explanation into their writing for pleasure jotter.

Recently, Blackwood Primary hosted a two-day learning workshop with Stephen Graham for our staff and learners. This was attended by all staff from Milton and Bent as well as representation from Lesmahagow High School, Dumfries and Galloway, East Ayrshire, South Lanarkshire and senior council leaders. Word is definitely spreading that this pedagogical approach makes a difference and we are getting that snowball effect across our authority as it gathers momentum.

As an experienced Head Teacher within South Lanarkshire Council I am supporting other schools as they embark on their own PM journey. Building this literacy community supports the acronym of TEAM – Together Everyone Achieves More. I am confident that our experience will be replicated, and attainment will be improved."

Colin Thomson, Head Teacher, Bent Primary School

"After reflecting on the slow progress our school had historically made in writing attainment we began considering a range of appropriate writing resources. It became clear quickly that PM Writing was an excellent pedagogical fit for our school.

I was impressed by the holistic nature of Scholastic PM Writing as it encompassed writing, grammar, listening, talking, reading, as well as being supported by a robust CPD programme.

Traditionally teachers have found teaching writing difficult and complicated, however PM Writing has given clarity, coherence and challenge to our writing programme across the school.

It offered an accessible one-stop-shop for improvement in writing. The resources are high quality and the Big Books which have been so popular amongst everyone are now moving online to improve accessibility for teachers. Furthermore, it is a fantastic model to support for grammar and talking and listening conversations. A lot of comparator resources we considered failed to make links and integrate grammar skills, which we believe are so important.

PM Writing has enthused all stakeholders and motivated our children with engaging resources and step-by-step procedures for each writing text type. The resource makes clear links to salient teaching points for teachers, the model is much easier to understand, and it has impacted greatly on teacher confidence as they have a toolkit to teach lessons. The CPD programme was important as we needed to up-level our skills quickly, and have had the opportunity to work with Stephen Graham over six sessions. These CPD sessions have allowed us to build positive links with other schools and learning communities, and the fact this is happening after one year is incredible.

Our own writing attainment data has had a 6% uplift this year – and we expect this to be duplicated for the year ahead. Having recently received our Reading Schools Gold Award we are now looking to accelerate our programme to reading, and our teachers are excited by the links to writing and reading. Being a small school with less than 100 pupils, we have been able to integrate Scholastic PM Writing quickly and absorb the key messages, and initial signs of gaining improvements in attainment are hugely encouraging. Traditionally teachers have found teaching writing difficult and complicated, however PM Writing has given clarity, coherence and challenge to our writing programme across the school.

There are many positives to PM Writing, and having done the hard work over the first year, we look forward to moving towards a holistic literacy lesson which integrates reading, writing, listening and talking. As part of this, we have purchased the PM Oral Literacy pack.

A vital part of our success has been the excellent levels of expertise and communication offered by Scholastic's Education Sales Consultant Kalitza Thomson. She has been a superb support to our learning community and delivered high-quality CPD sessions on other aspects of literacy such as PM Benchmarking. The resources offered have hugely supported our literacy improvement plans and I would wholeheartedly recommend the programme to any school considering making changes to improving the quality of teaching writing and enriching learning."

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Lorna James, Head Teacher, Milton Primary School

"Our projected ACEL data highlighted a drop in pupils on target to achieve their expected Curriculum for Excellence level within writing, which was quite concerning. We identified that increased time was needed for the preparation and scaffolding of writing as well as further opportunities for writing at length with a variety of genre experiences. We wanted to look at tools outside of our own school to help us achieve that.

Attainment in writing is rocketing after the first year of Scholastic PM Writing. It is child-centred, pupils are keen to write, and their confidence, enjoyment, enthusiasm, ownership and independence in class have all improved. Staff confidence and engagement in different areas of writing has also gone up, as measured by our writing survey in May. Overall confidence in teaching writing before the PM input was 2.97/5, and 4/5 after five online training sessions with Stephen Graham. There is also increased knowledge of the approach behind writing, and better understanding, helped by the clarity of structure.

As one teacher wrote, 'PM provides a clear and consistent pathway to the children's learning and you can see the progress more readily.' Another said that 'Differentiation within PM has been helpful in the classroom. PM has allowed me to better notice children who require support and those who can be further pushed. I have created a challenge group and their

confidence has increased over the course of the year'.

Overall, everyone is engaged and on board to teach Scholastic PM Writing, and there is an all-round buzz as our teachers are so excited by it. The icing on the cake in the past year was hearing Stephen speak at Blackwood Primary School.

In a three-year programme, our objective is for writing to feed into grammar and spelling, talking and listening, and reading: and create a literacy lesson comprising lots of different approaches. We know we can't do everything at once, so we will continue to build on the resources we have, and upskill new staff who are joining us for the 2023-24 academic year to continue to model this in school and our communities."

Case study developed: September 2023