Literacy across the curriculum

Launching a whole school literacy across the curriculum strategy to combat reading and vocabulary deficit the pandemic may have brought about!

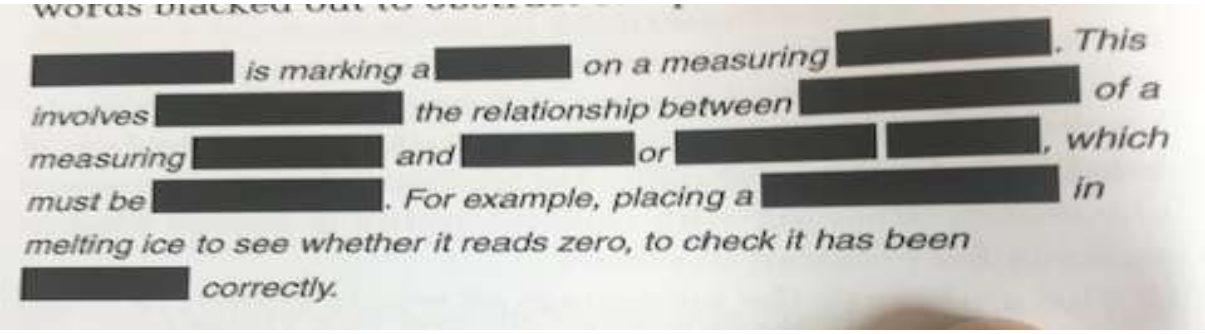
At our Academy pre-2021 our literacy strategy focused on sporadic departmental reading of texts and sources, challenge of SPAG during marking, targeted intervention for extreme cases of low literacy levels and English lessons!

In March 2020, the world changed and education suffered as much as anything. If the educational experiences that pupils from different backgrounds faced were unlevel before the pandemic, COVID made that imbalance even more extreme.

Literacy took a hit. Not all pupils had access to the level of texts they would have if in school. Pupils were not surrounded by new vocabulary like they would have if they were in school. SPAG was changed automatically by their computers so they did not have to think hard about their SPAG and correcting their SPAG independently. Many pupils did not have access to tier 2 and tier 3 vocabulary that surrounds a classroom through Oracy. It was clear that improving literacy is essential in the recovery of learning post pandemic.

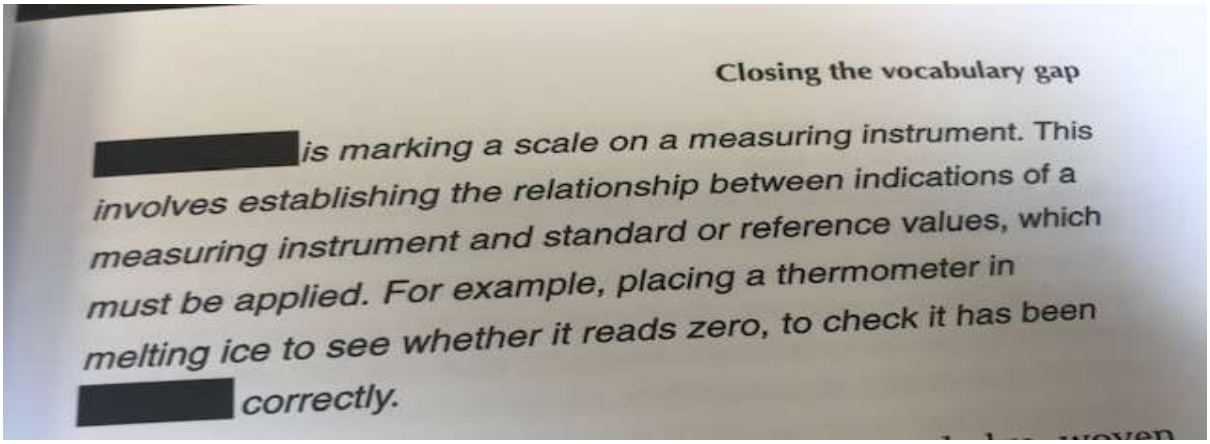
In the book 'closing the (vocabularly) gap', Alex Quigley signposts quite brilliantly how numerous research studies indicate alongside socio-economic background, reading age is a major contributing factor to exam outcomes. Maybe more surprisingly the research indicates reading age has a more significant impact in Maths and Science outcomes than indeed it does in English and History!

The research around the benefits of improving literacy can not be made more clear than the diagram below where someone with a slightly lower ready age (6 months) than their year group average will actually be reading a text as so..



And so the texts and potentially exam questions no longer become an assessment of knowledge, but more a non-inclusive measure where reading comprehension is the main barrier to true assessment of knowledge.

However, before you see this as a real challenge to overcome for the lower prior attaining pupils in your class and how the strategy should be targeted. According to Alex Quigley due to the higher complexity of vocabulary (tier 3) used in our texts and exams compared to previously, even pupils with a higher reading age than average for their year group can still expect to see something like so..



It is clear from the research that when you improve someone's literacy skills, you effectively unlock potential for greater outcomes in all subjects, but maybe more importantly you promote a wider skill of greater communication that is going to equip that pupil for success beyond their school years.

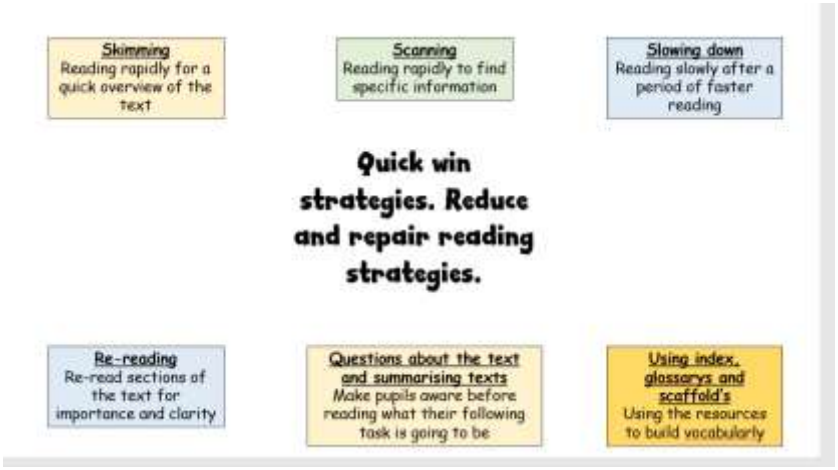
So how do we do it?

This will not be a quick fix, this will be strategy that will need to launch, will need momentum, will need reflection, refinement and embedding. We started by auditing staff to understaff what strategies were being used effectively to improve literacy in pupils and what we should target first..

Approaches that I currently do well	Approaches to improving Literacy	Approaches that I can do as part of the collective team in improving literacy
	Assessment of reading and early intervention	
	Development of a reading culture with my group for pleasure and purpose	
	Sequenced design of a cumulative reading curriculum	
	Explicit teaching of reading strategies including whole class reading approaches	
	Organised Vocabulary instruction	
	Supporting home reading/prioritising reading as part of homework	
	Explicit spelling and grammar reflection/direction	

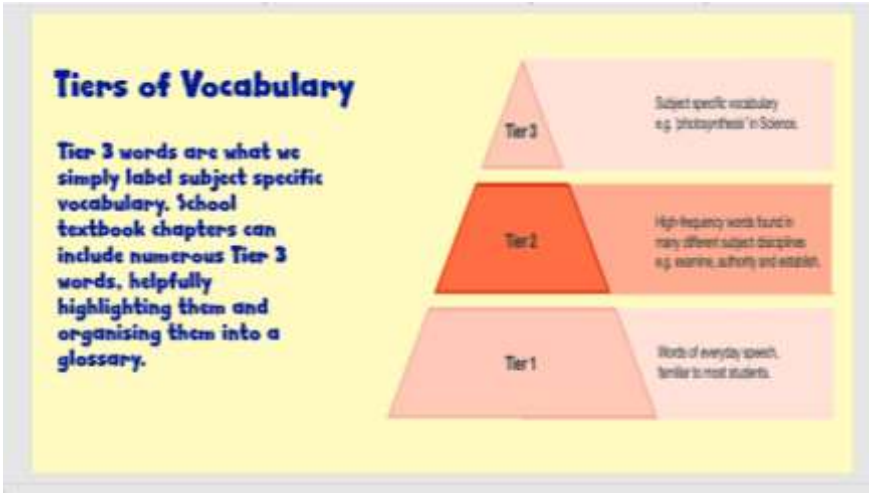
We prioritised in year 1 to focus on developing a reading curriculum that is coherently mapped and sequenced. Far greater explicit vocabulary instruction that utilises knowledge of Etymology and Morphology. Finally, to shine a spotlight and greater focus on spelling and grammar reflection and direction.

We reflected on and summarised some of the most effective reading strategies to support improved reading from pupils, and created a sequenced curriculum where pupils would have access to an e-library for 45 minutes once a fortnight to embed these reading strategies...



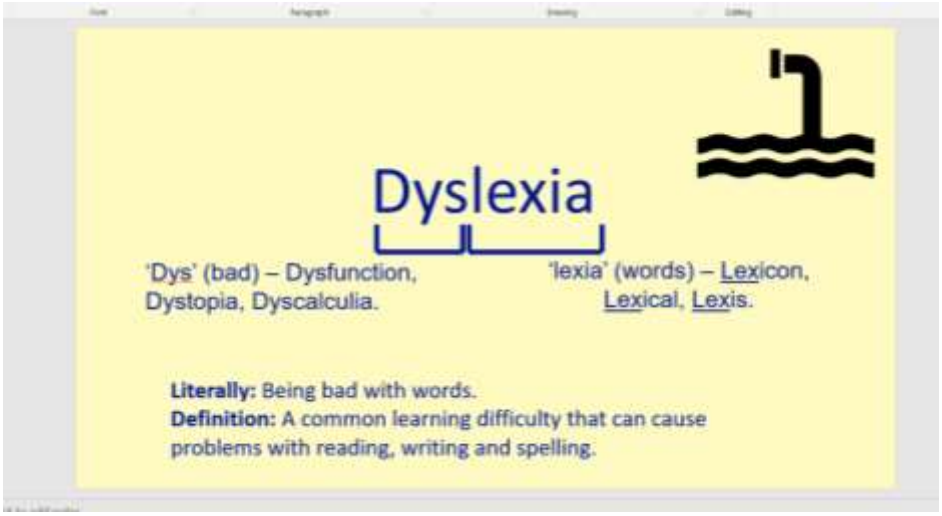
We shared, disseminated and trained staff on targeted areas from the EEF research on explicit literacy development..

From this starting point we reflected on how we can achieve these recommendations and had to reflect on Tier 3 vocabulary regularly used in our departments..



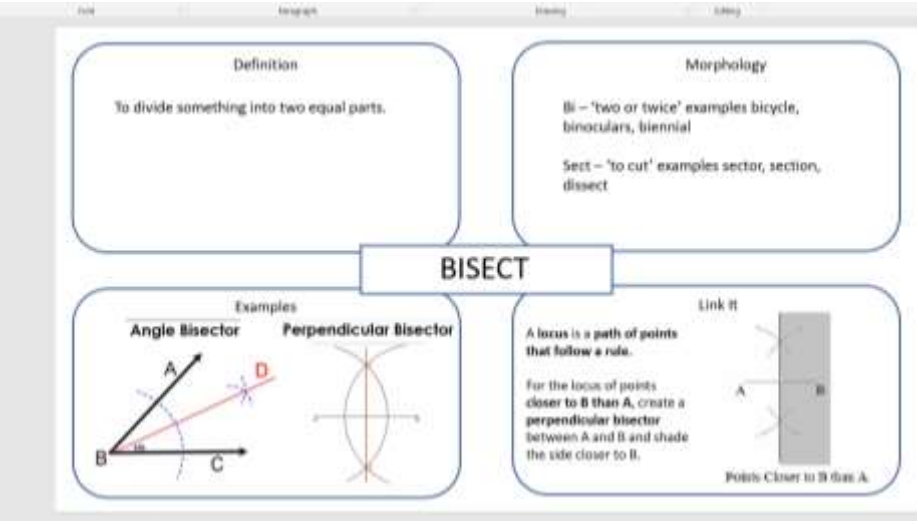
And how exactly could we unpick this language to build upon the vocabulary skillset for our pupils...

We focused on strand 2 of the EEF recommendations, and really focused on word origins and word stems to help positive transfer of learning and making connections in the long term memory to provide a great foundation base for pupils to expand upon and build new knowledge of vocabulary.



Our staff brought in to the project and strategy superbly well. Our focus for the Academic year was clear in this sense and now it was about actioning the strategies.

6 weeks after launch it was time to evaluate the impact of the launch. We asked staff to share with us some of the strategies they had used and the impact it was having. Some of the outcomes achieved were excellent (see below). The best examples were shared through the school share drive, were a folder of resources was collated.



82% of department leads had put literacy development as a key improvement target in their DIP's and this was being monitored and observed through QA measures. Books were representing explicit literacy development lessons observed were showing strategies being actioned. Pupil voice findings demonstrated a greater spotlight on literacy development with one pupil in year 10 acknowledging 'we are doing much more work looking at the history of words and words that are transferable across subjects'.

Our E-library usage reports went from averaging between 18-30 books taken out per week, to over 400 books being taken out by pupils per week, with this facilitated reading lesson. It was clear that pupils were reading more, it was clear teachers had used the strategies for explicit literacy development more in lessons to support this whole school drive.

At time of writing in term 2 after this launch, after a successful start the challenge is to maintain that momentum and reflect on what to keep, and what to change. Staff voice demonstrates a real engagement with the benefits of the reading lesson, however a big concern with curriculum time costs for their subject in a time where they already have the pressures of

'catching pupils up' and the higher levels of absence from staff and pupils that continues with the virus still around.

Pupil voice whilst very positive in a lot of cases, did highlight areas of concern and negatives around the process of logging on, forgetting passwords, disliking reading from screen, and taking away some of their favourite time of the week in their favoured subjects. Some noted that they can read at home, but they only have one opportunity a week to learn from a subject expert.

The next steps in this project is finding a way that achieves the positive outcomes we are experiencing around improved facilitated reading time and greater explicit literacy development, whilst overcoming some of the barriers raised through the feedback. I look forward to using this feedback to inform the next stage in this project which will be in term 3 when we trial a slightly adapted strategy to encourage reading fluency in a facilitated time that does not encroach on curriculum time. It is also essential to celebrate and have the outstanding work teachers have done in subject areas, with a showcase event planned for 28th June.

Whilst very pleased with the start compared to our initial starting points, the quest continues in our literacy across the curriculum strategy.

Further reading

Alex Quigley – Closing the (Vocabularly) gap

Alex Quigley – Closing the (Reading) gap

PIXL Reading (www.pixl.co.uk)

https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/literacy-ks3-ks4