

Lancashire Education Awards



Case Study

Establishment name:	St Catherine's
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Lead contact name	Clare Malcolm
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Project title	Raising children's knowledge and application of vocabulary through role play.
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Award gained

Award category	X
Innovate <i>A project that demonstrates practice that is new or ground breaking, which successfully engaged and enthused learners.</i>	
Achieve <i>A project had measurable impact on raising outcomes for pupils.</i>	X
Invest <i>A project that has had a positive impact upon an aspect of the wider school community.</i>	
Collaborate <i>A project that involved work across more than one school or work with other agencies.</i>	
Include <i>A project in provision for pupils with Special Education Needs and Disabilities</i>	
Inspire <i>A project that demonstrates embedded exceptional provision of an aspect of the curriculum. Practice will have been developed and refined over time.</i>	

Project summary (maximum 200 words)

Key staff at KS1 worked with literacy consultant Sarah Atkinson on a case study to improve vocabulary through role play and through remembering the importance of vocabulary throughout the school day and across all subjects. This was implemented throughout KS1 and Foundation stage, with the aim of developing in the children a love and understanding of language and vocabulary in a safe and stimulating adult-led environment. Key to this was the development of class role play areas to enhance the 'activate' stage of the teaching sequence where the child connects the new word to his/her own understanding of the world, in an active, engaging way, and where children are stimulated by their experience to need and desire talk.

Two staff presented a key note speech to colleagues at a county-wide conference on the development of role play at Key Stage 1, and the impact of this on the attitude and attainment of boys in particular. It was tremendously well received, and they have written an article for a leading literacy teaching magazine, and to present further at a Talk for Writing conference.

How did you identify the need for this project? What were you hoping to achieve?

Attainment at the end of KS1 in 2016 was slightly below national in reading and in writing, particularly the performance of boys.

82% of questions on the KS1 SATs assessed retrieval and inference skills - this was identified in school as an area for development. It was part of a wider school improvement target: to improve the attainment of children working at below age-related expectation throughout the school, with a particular focus on boys in English. We were hoping to achieve a rapid improvement in standards through this targeted initiative.

Who led the project?

Clare Malcolm, English Subject Leader

What steps/actions did you take?

We began the project by meeting with Sarah, the teaching and learning consultant from Lancashire. Together, we discussed our findings concerning the level of vocabulary of our children and the impact this was having on their learning. During the following weeks, we used a range of publications to research the importance of vocabulary and the mechanics of language acquisition. We met again with Sarah and shared our findings. Together we planned our next steps forward, using many of the techniques and ideas from our research but adapting them to suit the needs of our children. Our first step was to introduce focussed role play areas within our classrooms with a sharp emphasis on the use of vocabulary. We trained other adults working in our classrooms to facilitate vocabulary rich conversations and learning opportunities. Children were engaged in new themes and topics through the use of first hand experiences and visitors within the classroom, making firm and real links with the role play. The children were involved through the planning process for the role play areas and were responsible for 'fleshing out' the

areas with vocabulary cards and 'magpied' words from quality texts and stories which they created and wrote themselves. We also focussed on the learning opportunities for new vocabulary throughout our daily routine and lessons, picking out technical vocabulary linking to topics and subjects along with high utility words found across a range of texts aimed at our age groups. These included specific mini-lessons to teach the meaning of the words, the pronunciation and the spelling. Examples of these include clapping games, vocabulary badges, partner work and word raps. It was key that the application of vocabulary was modelled within the role play area by adults demonstrating language structure, intonation and meaning. It was important that the area was seen as a space that was constantly evolving to facilitate and promote the importance of word choice and how to use them. The role play areas were used in conjunction with our reading and writing lessons to practise stories, test new vocabulary within the story setting, develop an understanding of the language before including it in writing, and experimenting with different problems and dilemmas when innovating our stories. We then looked for the use of the focus vocabulary within the children's writing and praised them when the super vocabulary was used. This approach was also used in our reading sessions where we look for the children to recognise new/interesting vocabulary in their texts and then discuss the different meanings before trying to use some of the vocabulary when discussing the text.

The vocabulary focus extended beyond the classroom, particularly with the use of vocabulary badges. Children were issued with laminated badges with a key word written on it. They would wear it for the duration of the day/session and it was their job to tell others about this new word whenever they were asked. All staff were briefed to keep an eye out for the badges and ask the children to tell them about the word when they saw them. This proved very popular and gave the children a sense of ownership about the word.

What was the impact of the project and how was this measured/assessed?

KS1 results in 2017 showed that the percentage of pupils attaining at least the expected standard in reading was 84%. This was above the national average, and an improvement on the 74% in 2016. The percentage of children attaining greater depth in reading was 28%, again above the national average, and an improvement on the 16% attained last year.

In writing, 80% of children attained the expected standard in writing, above the national average of 68%, and an increase on last year's percentage of 64.5. At greater depth, 24% attained the standard, above the national average of 16%, and an increase on the 12.9% of pupils who attained greater depth in 2016. The percentage of boys attaining greater depth in reading improved to match that of girls. There was little impact on the percentage of boys attaining the expected standard - this will clearly take more time for the initiative to embed.

Across KS1, the percentage of children attaining the expected standard in reading and writing improved.

Throughout this study we could clearly see the benefits of developing the use of role play in the classroom to promote and teach vocabulary. This was further illustrated when we spoke to our children at the end of the topic to find out how they felt about learning new words. The response was really positive. They felt shocked that they could learn 'huge' words and the children did not worry when they encountered an unknown word - they had strategies in place. The children will now come with a book that they are reading to point out a new word, and they enjoy going home and telling grown-ups about the new words they have been learning about.

Application of the new vocabulary has been clearly evident in the children's written work across all attainment groups. We found that the children were benefitting by having more time and adult support to master the skills and vocabulary used in their role play without adding to our class timetable. The children could return to the area to practise the taught skills and embed them orally and at the independent writing station

What are the next steps? How will you follow up this work?

The initiative is continuing this year, and has rolled out throughout KS2. We will continue to measure the impact through formal assessments, through pupil response, and through scrutinies of children's work.

Do you have any other advice for establishments that might be considering a similar project?

Staff presented the impact of the initiative at a KS1 conference to colleagues. Advice centred around classroom culture: becoming excited and enthusiastic about words, setting high expectations for talk, planning for talk opportunities, instigating lots of discussion. Words beyond the child's understanding may result in a very superficial knowledge, e.g. where they are able to recite a definition but not apply the word meaningfully/appropriately. Equally, be wary of merely reinforcing existing words - "an inefficient use of time"
High expectations!