

Work Sampling and Pupil Questioning

Amanda Smith, South Wigston Community College

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The Context

During the academic year 2002-2003, South Wigston High School received consultant support from Juli Sims. As part of this support, we decided to undertake work sampling and pupil questioning.

The department already had a picture of how pupils were performing from SATs results and the results of internal assessments. These told us that writing was a weakness, particularly where boys were concerned.

As part of the Key Stage 3 Strategy, a departmental audit was carried out. Based largely on teachers' opinions, this also told us that writing was a weakness, especially at sentence level.

We wanted to carry out pupil questioning and work sampling in order to:

- gain a fuller, rounder picture of what was going on;
- confirm that sentence level work was what we needed to concentrate on;
- see if there was anything else we had missed out.

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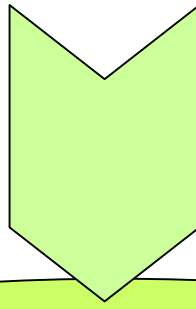
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Work Sampling

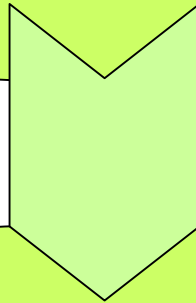
The most important consideration was that the sample was both manageable and meaningful. Because of what assessment results had told us, we decided to focus on boys' writing.

Talking to class teachers, we identified one top, one middle and one lower ability boy from each year group. Our sample therefore consisted of only nine pieces of work. One piece of non-fiction writing was photocopied from each boy's exercise book, along with any relevant planning. We decided that it would create difficulties if we tried to compare non-fiction with fiction.

At this point, we passed on the sample to our consultant for examination. If you carry out the examination of the work yourself, then the LEA website has useful grids, based on the assessment focuses, to help you focus your scrutiny.



Preparation of the work sample took approximately one and a half hours. It then took our consultant about three hours to examine the work. In the absence of a consultant, you could use departmental meetings in order to examine work samples. It would be useful and informative to include as many members of the dept in the work sampling as possible.



The next time we carry out work sampling, we will:

- take a larger sample (this time we were also carrying out a larger cross-curricular sample, so we were limited in our English sample);
- include girls;
- possibly take two samples – one fiction, one non-fiction.

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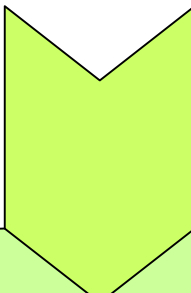
Pupil Questions

This is a time consuming process, but we found it to be incredibly rewarding. This followed on naturally from assessments, audit and work sampling. Again, our aim was to create a fuller picture, to confirm what we had already found out and to see if new issues would be raised. Again, our starting point was writing.

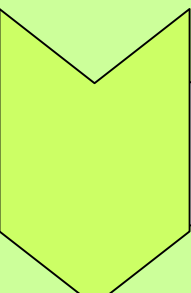
Thorough preparation ensured that the day went smoothly.

We identified a suitable day. Make sure that it doesn't coincide with anything else happening in school, a trip for example.

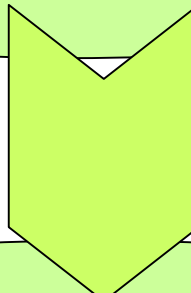
A day's supply cover was required. This is well worth arguing for with your head. Your questioning could also cover cross-curricular issues and would therefore be useful for the whole school.



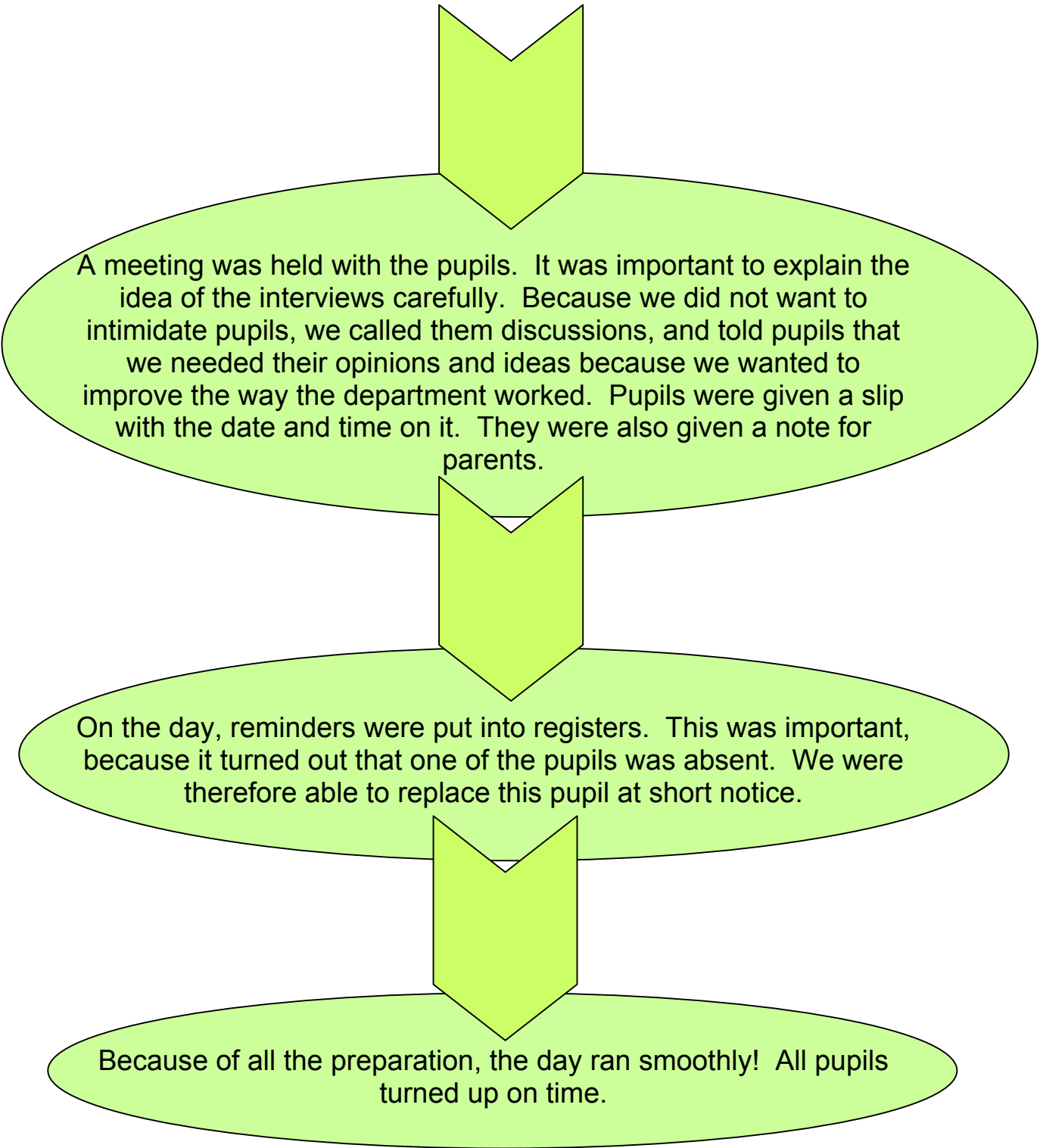
Our consultant attended. It is absolutely necessary to have two people listening to the interviews. One should ask the questions while the other simply sits and listens, with both of you making notes. It is an incredibly intense and tiring process and you won't be able to concentrate the whole time. With two of you listening, you can compare notes after each interview and see if you have missed anything. Additionally, it is worth involving an adviser for the extra expertise that they bring and an objective view point.



We carefully identified our pupils. We decided to interview pupils in mixed sex pairs. We wanted a gender balance and we also wanted pupils to have peer support in the interviews so that they would not feel intimidated. With the involvement of class teachers, a top, middle and lower ability pair was identified in each year group. It's particularly important to use class teachers in the identification process because you need talkative pupils! A timetable was then created, identifying which lessons these pupils would be missing.



Next, we communicated what would be happening to everyone who would be involved. This included: talking to SMT about what we planned to do, getting them on board; announcing the interviews during a staff briefing, well in advance; sending a memo to all HoDs involved with the timetable, asking for their help and also asking them to circulate the memo around their dept.



A meeting was held with the pupils. It was important to explain the idea of the interviews carefully. Because we did not want to intimidate pupils, we called them discussions, and told pupils that we needed their opinions and ideas because we wanted to improve the way the department worked. Pupils were given a slip with the date and time on it. They were also given a note for parents.

On the day, reminders were put into registers. This was important, because it turned out that one of the pupils was absent. We were therefore able to replace this pupil at short notice.

Because of all the preparation, the day ran smoothly! All pupils turned up on time.

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Conclusions

We used the questions that you can find on the LEA website. There are sets of questions on speaking and listening, reading and writing. You won't be able to ask all of the questions, so again it is necessary to have a focus. We had already decided to focus on writing, highlighting the questions that we wanted to ask prior to the interviews.

The questions are divided into knowledge and skills, and attitudes. You will also find a set of notes, outlining what you might be looking for. We found these to be useful after the interviews. We did not have time to refer to them while we were listening to pupils. Afterwards, it was useful to compare what pupils actually said with what they might have said.

Starting with top set year 7, we worked our way through the day. As already mentioned, this was incredibly tiring, but very interesting. I colour coded my notes, so that later I was able to see which were the top, middle and lower ability replies. I then typed up the findings that evening, so that the notes were fresh in my mind.

Warning! Be ready to hear things that are painful! I certainly did. I also heard many things that I had never thought of before. You will gain many action points from the day, but you won't be able to act on all of them.

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Next Steps

- ✓ Having done the work sampling and the pupil questioning you will have a great deal of information from which to make decisions for the department action plan.
- ✓ You will not be able to act upon all of the information but can take the key issues and decide what action needs to be taken. Tie this in to your schemes of work, training issues for the dept and teaching strategies.
- ✓ The questioning and sampling is the beginning of a process, but can be used again at various points throughout the year to establish what changes have been made and what progress is taking place