**Harriet**

**If we could start off then with just, if you could just tell me a little bit about your current role and whether or not you taught both or either of the content of the Key Stage 1 or 2 tests at all?**

Yes. Right, well I’m currently the Assistant Head Teacher at the school. I teach 3 days a week or 2 and a half days a week as a part time role teaching and then headship in Year 2 so I’ve been in Year 2, I think I’ve done about 5 punctuation and grammar tests and now I’ve come back to Year 2 and since I’ve been back, I think this is my third year back in Year 2 and I’ve been doing the tests there. They’re optional but we do decide to do them and I was a Year 6 teacher, I was teaching in Year 6 for about 4 years and the first year when the tests were introduced. I’ve administered Year 2 and Year 6.

**So you’ve had quite a lot of experience then in seeing the tests and how they impact on schools etc.**

Yes.

**Could you just briefly describe your very general feelings about those tests?**

I think when they were first introduced and I was in Year 6 and it was like oh my word, another test. What on earth are we doing this for? and it was quite scary and I was very anti-tests, very anti; I thought it was another one, why are we doing this? What’s the purpose, what’s the benefit? My mindset has changed; I don’t necessarily agree with testing and the way we’re doing it but it has turned into a positive in the whole school with our English framework rather than having to keep to the tests, we kind of teach what’s in the tests for our writing. And so we’ve kind of used it as a positive and as a result, the levels of our, the standards of our writing have improved.

**That’s really interesting so a change in feelings then from quite negative to some now more positive thoughts about the tests.**

Yes, I think the Key Stage 1 tests obviously it’s optional but we have in the school done it the last few years because it does give us information and data and now, we can track progress from Year 2 to Year 6 and you know everybody’s progress, measures and everything. But again, I think the content of the Key Stage 1 tests doesn’t really help focus children’s writing. You know the grammar, the nouns, the adjectives, the verbs, the punctuation, the different sentence types, enabling children to understand that within their writing I think has been really useful. Again, you know they have to do a test; we don’t like the test but actually, knowing that there is the test, it has sculptured the way we teach our English framework. We do try and teach grammar quite differently to how the test lays it out though, I should say. Because the test kind of wants you to teach decontextualized grammar, just labelling bits of language, but as much as possible, we try and do it differently. That’s when you see the impact on writing I think.

**So are you teaching grammar more in context?**

Yes, we’ll do it. We pitch it through a text. Basically we teach our English and our writing through a text; each unit will probably take 2 to 3 weeks to complete but within that unit, we will teach all the statutory grammar throughout the year and so rather than it being a tick box exercise, we’re actually doing it through the tests, looking at the tests, the examples and it isn’t just boring [04:33] grammar lessons. The spelling is slightly different; a lot of it in Key stage 1 is done through phonics and the standard spelling tests and bits and pieces but the grammar and punctuation is done through our [04:48] lighting framework.

**It’s really nice to hear that you’re teaching grammar in that way. You mentioned before that you’re not doing a kind of tick box approach. Is there a risk do you think that the grammar tests might lead/steer teachers into teaching grammar in that way, it that tick box approach?**

I would think yes. If you know, I think going back to Year 6; I think some of the content in Year 6 is a little bit highbrow and unnecessary. You know we didn’t always used to teach grammar in contextualised ways though. When the test first came in we were like wow we’re going to have to do some serious isolated kind of discrete grammar teaching here to get through this. But I like to think, or at least I hope, we’ve left that behind now. It does still happen so much throughout other schools though I know, I hear from other teachers. And it’s just like, really? I mean some of those terms are just – it’s like, why on earth are they here?

**Some of the terms and things?**

The verbs, the past, perfect, present and all that kind of stuff; I don’t think that is necessary. I think some of the contents in the Year 6 is ridiculous [05:51] I don’t think that helps improve children’s writing, the punctuation and the grammar. Some of it I think is done brilliant but I do think some of the contents for the Year 6 is tick box, box ticking and unnecessary.

**It’s interesting because you’re talking about teaching grammar in context.**

Yes.

**And yet the tests assess very decontextualized grammar.**

Yes, yes.

**So do you think that’s where the risk is then, that you can fall into decontextualized grammar because of the way that the tests are designed?**

Yes, I think there are; the Key Stage 1, I think it’s pitched appropriately and [06:40] we can kind of put into our writing framework quite easily. Like I say, some of the contents in Year 6 I don’t think is that inspiring. We do give them practice tests so that they are familiar with the format and some of the grammar work that we’re doing through a context might be filling in a sheet of nouns, adjectives and put in the missing, do you know what I mean? But yes.

**It’s really nice to hear that that link is being made quite nicely then between writing and grammar and different genres you talked about in the response to the survey for example which is great.**

Like I say, I was so sceptical when it was first introduced and I was in Year 6 and it was like ‘oh no, something else we’ve got to try and do’ but actually teaching the children the grammar and the punctuation and everything that’s in there, and then it fed into their writing. We were teaching it to improve their writing, not to pass the tests and I do think the children the test that they have to do is possibly their favourite one as well because most of it is ticking boxes.

**That’s really interesting. One of the things that a lot of teachers have talked to me about is the fact that, I think there’s lots of issues with the tests, the decontextualized nature of it is maybe a little bit problematic and a lot of the teachers have suggested to me that they have a real issue with the way that language is talked about on that test and what I mean by that is the use of adjectives like ‘circle a correct verb’ for example or ‘which example is wrong’ or ‘which example is right’ and a lot of teachers seem to have issue with the way that that kind of presents quite a binary, quite reductive way of thinking about language in terms of the right/wrong distinction as such. Is that something that you as a school or you as a teacher ever thought about or come across before?**

No, I hear what you’re saying. I don’t know. I think language is changing, children’s vocabulary is changing, reducing significantly and you know we’re very aware of the vocabulary and the difference in the [09:51] children with a big vocabulary and children with a limited vocabulary and I think actually putting that to the forefront if it’s for a test, it’s something that as a nation we need to be aware of. I don’t know. I understand and I guess it’s an issue, I guess it’s all about mindset as well and how you embrace this.

**Yes, definitely, definitely. Do you have a lot of children in your school who use non-standard regional forms of the language then?**

We have quite a significant number of children with EAL who don’t always speak with correct verb tenses and language structure; it’s really hard with those children and we just have to keep modelling it through writing and modelling it through different channels. It’s something that we’re trying hard to do and whether there was a test there or whether there wasn’t a test, I don’t think it would make a difference in what we are trying to achieve with our children.

**That makes sense. In terms of subject knowledge then, I’m thinking about you as a teacher but also your other colleagues as well that you work with; you talked a little bit about some of the content at Year 6 for example in verb tenses perhaps being a bit too high brow or challenging. How has the demands of the Curriculum in terms of grammatical subject knowledge played out in your school then?**

I know when the Year 6 tests were first introduced, we actually had a staff meeting; we asked all the staff, the working groups to have a go at completing one of them and some of it’s quite straightforward and this is where I kind of think a lot of staff struggled; they would still struggle and so it has made, especially the teachers who are actually teaching it, we have had to upskill. And again, a lot of it is very relevant but some of it I’m using the verb tenses and understanding the past progressive; I don’t think it makes a difference. That would be my bug bear, that some of it isn’t having an impact other than being able to [12:43] a sentence. I don’t think that makes. If it has an impact, if it’s improving the quality of life then yes, teach it but if it is just to pass a test then there’s no impact other than that. [13:02] I think the Year 2 test does do that; it does help improve standards [13:08] Year 6 it doesn’t have an impact other than children can start a past progressive sentence.

**And that simple, there’s nothing wrong with learning about grammar but the simple just identification of grammatical parts in a sentence. A teacher used a lovely metaphor the other day; she said you can label the parts of a bicycle but that doesn’t mean you’d be able to explain how the bicycle works. She was talking about that in the context of grammar and I thought yes, that’s really accurate.**

Yes, and it’s the impact and if there’s no impact or it doesn’t help. That’s definitely a big issue with the tests because you know, they are very decontextualized. I love teaching about language and grammar and words and things but the tests are quite artificial. Sometimes it feels that they’re not really about language, you know?

**Sure. And so do you think that sometimes because of the emphasis on just labelling and identification in the tests, does that have an impact at all on the way that grammar then gets taught in the classroom do you think?**

I guess lessons along those lines, they do become quite dry and monotonous and less engaging for the children.

**Yes, I’m sure. Can I ask a little bit about the way, you talked a lot about these great grammar pedagogies that link clearly to writing etc.?**

Yes.

**In your school, do you have a policy for the teaching of grammar then in the sense that do you have discreet grammar lessons? I think you mentioned this in the survey that you have grammar taught during English lessons.**

Yes. No, it’s part of our writing framework, within our writing framework. When we’re planning our writing out, if you like, our final piece, we go through phases and within that phase we’ll do a lot of, we’ll start with a lot of [15:04] then we’ll look at the different grammar and sentence structure and it’s all part of that. There may be certain lessons in Year 6 that are just box ticking, that won’t have an impact on the writing but [15:24].

**So at times of the year, there’s crunch points where you have to teach it a little bit out context because of the test, is that what you’re saying?**

Yes, yes and that’s where it is, it does become dry.

**I see what you mean. What’s the general feeling about grammar in the school then from your staff? Are they on board with the amount of grammar and the tests and things?**

Yes, generally speaking I think now that we’ve done it so it fits into the writing framework, it’s been done without it having to be separate grammar lessons and it’s just how we do it; it’s not ‘we must do it’; it’s just how we teach children to write.

**So it’s become much more a natural part of what teachers are doing in their everyday practice anyway?**

Yes, yes.

**That’s really interesting to hear. It’s nice to hear that you’re getting some meaningful things out of the grammar curriculum as well and this good impact that it’s had on your students’ writing is brilliant.**

Yes. And I think I guess I spoke about mind space, how you sell it to the children and we’re doing a lot of work in the interim about [17:00] and spelling and bits and pieces and I can’t tell you how many children are coming in in the morning ‘I found another [17:09].’ It’s how you sell it to them.

**Sure. If you’re encouraging a love of language and for them to be aware of language then that’s great, isn’t it but just spotting things on a test.**

Reading is a high priority in our school so often if we [17:31] a lesson, we’ll then read a book and look through the different examples within text and so we’re just trying to fit it in in different ways but without it being just tick a box process.

**That’s really nice to hear and it sounds like it’s working really well. I think we’ve probably pretty much touched on everything that I wanted to ask. Is there anything that you’d like to comment on that you haven’t had the chance to do so or anything that you’d like to revisit or clarify at all?**

No, I don’t think so. It’s a weird one. I do kind of think if they were to be abolished, writing would deteriorate as a consequence so although it’s a weird one but I think we’re perhaps ahead of the game and we’re a bit more open-minded as to how they’ve been used in school.

**That’s really interesting and there’s definitely some patterns there with things that other teachers that have said and also some differences as well so it’s really interesting and great to hear again that you’re seeing this positive effect on writing but that’s obviously down to the way that you’re teaching it I think.**

Yes.

**And the embedded contextualised approach that you’ve got and that’s what the research says; the research says if you teach grammar that way then it will improve writing.**

Yes, absolutely. We have done that. Like I say, the Year 2 tests of 6 and 7 years old is not the end of the world and we don’t actually pass it but knowing we’re doing it, it does give us something to focus our planning on and so that’s helpful. The Year 6, when I was first in Year 6, it was when we did the Level 3 to 5 tests and the Level 6 test and now it’s just one test fits all and I think we’ve had quite a few children that have got the Level 6 in theirs and [20:04] it was the way to sell it to them.

**Okay, thanks so much for your time.**