**Lucy**

**If you could just very briefly just outline what your current role is in your school and a little bit about how long you’ve been teaching?**

I am currently the Associate Head Teacher with this academy trust. This is my first year of headship. Prior to that, I have been a primary school teacher for 16 years, 11 of those in Key Stage 2 and 6 of them in Year 6 so for my personal self, I was one of the first, when the new primary test rolled out, I was teaching Year 6 at the time.

**So you’ve seen the tests right from the very beginning of their life as such then.**

Absolutely.

**In terms of your general feeling about the tests and in terms of the way that they’ve affected what happens in your classroom and your school more broadly, what impact, if any, would you say that they’ve had on things in the classroom?**

My personal opinion from the classes that I’ve worked in is that actually they’ve had a kind of good impact on children’s writing; you’ve got children employing conventions more within their writing because if you’re saying to them to use a subordinate clause or a relative pronoun, they’ve got that greater understanding, but sometimes they do just try and force the features in because of the way it is assessed

**So they’re able to take the grammatical features that are tested in the test.**

Absolutely. But sometimes not so much in a meaningful way? But generally, I think it’s good to have these things in their writing.

**And you’re seeing evidence that they’re then applying them into their writing?**

Indeed, yes.

**That sounds like, are you talking about that in a positive way?**

I am talking about it in a positive way and I think somebody like myself first of all, when I was in Year 6 the year it was rolled out, I’d come from Reception into Year 3 then into Year 6 so any professional when you’re in primary education when you’ve worked with the younger children and you go into Year 6, it’s quite scary and actually I think now that there is a framework like that, that can support you so you know where children need to get to, I think that’s better. However, that said, I do feel that as professionals, with the new grammar and all the terminology that’s associated, a lot of it has had to be self-taught. We had to really update our subject knowledge because so many teachers were really quite anxious about it, you know, quite scared of the demands that it placed on them and so many of them weren’t trained in grammar. So we had a lot of panicking and looking through the test was like oh my god how are we going to teach this stuff?

**Yes, I was going to ask that later on but perhaps I’ll ask it now, a question about subject knowledge then. You mentioned there that your staff feel that they’ve had to self-teach themselves. Do you feel like the curriculum was imposed upon teachers and the tests without much support from Government then?**

Absolutely, absolutely. We kind of had a framework came out and said what it means and there was a glossary of terms, with the best will in the world, it’s just like with children; that’s not the ideal way to be rolling it out. There was no process involved that involved teachers; just planted on them without any support.

**Yes, of course. In the time that the tests have been in place then, do you and your staff report a feeling that they’ve got a greater confidence in these things or are you still feeling a little bit anxious about them?**

No, I think there’s that anxiety if you’ve not taught it or if you’re in Key Stage 1 and you’re not a Key Stage 2 practitioner, yes, there is that anxiety with it and as much as you try to do whole staff training and CPD to try and alleviate that, but then I don’t think it’s any different to a Key Stage 2 practitioner who perhaps had never taught phonics.

**That makes sense. In terms of the tests, you mentioned earlier about the impact that they’re having on students’ writing; one of the criticisms of the tests has been that they assess grammar in a very decontextualized way. Do you have any thoughts about that at all, about whether or not the tests steer teachers towards teaching decontextualized grammar or have you seen that change at all as a result of the tests?**

I mean I’m an advocate of as much as you can interweave the grammar into whatever you’re teaching, whatever genre you’re studying the better; it is possible to do that if you select the right text or whatever genre that you are focused on but inevitably there are just some aspects of that Curriculum that will need to be taught discreetly so you will need to have that discreet lesson.

**Does your school have a policy around grammar teaching at all then in terms of discreet?**

It’s kind of interwoven into our English policy as much as possible where it should be taught as part of the English curriculum within the text that they are studying but then there are those bespoke lessons, if required, to make sure the children get the coverage of the Curriculum that they are entitled to and they should be experiencing. That said though, this year, the school that I’m at now is very different to the school that I come from so I have a very different intake, different catchment and this year I had to put on our school boosters for grammar because there were so many gaps that actually our children would not have been equipped to access that paper.

**That’s the grammar paper that you’re talking about there?**

Yes.

**What are your general feelings about the types of questions that are on that SPAG test then?**

To be honest, I think they’re quite fair. There are always one or two that you just think that are just unkind, they’re not right. I tend to find sometimes it goes through a bit of theme so last year I thought there was really a lot on formality; there’s a kind of shift isn’t there. But generally, on the whole I think they’re quite fair. Some children do panic at the amount of terminology, for sure. But you know, we have to teach it.

**You mentioned the word ‘formality’ there and I suppose thinking about standard English, does your school have a policy at all around either the explicit teaching of standard English or how you deal with non-standard language in the classroom for example?**

It’s kind of embedded into our English Curriculum overview so they know that that formality of standard English is there and yes, it comes through the Curriculum rather than a policy so we have Curriculum goals for Year Group. We tend to focus on standard English quite a lot now simply because of the content of the tests and the requirement for students to be using formal language.

**Has that increased because of the tests and the curriculum then?**

Yes, I think so. I think it has had to. We’ve got no choice because of the content of the tests, they just have to be able to speak in a certain way and use language in a certain way, and that’s definitely dictated by the tests and the glossary and things.

**How do you deal, if at all, with students’ use of non-standard language in the classroom, whether it be in speaking or writing?**

I mean in speaking you would obviously model the corrective way to phrase and then within writing, obviously we do a lot of explicit feedback; there is written model examples of how it should be, and we would yes, I guess correct students’ language if it was non-standard English, because well, the tests do explicitly require that, and I know that school isn’t just about preparing for tests, but we do have to make sure our students can use standard English. And that is obviously a big part of those tests.

**Thank you. In terms of, you talk quite a lot about some of the really nice positive things about the test in terms of writing and students’ increased grammatical awareness which is great. Do you have any negative thoughts about the tests in terms of your own perceptions or the impact that you think that they’ve had on classroom teaching at all?**

I mean, I don’t understand perhaps why they do it at Key Stage 1, I don’t know if you’re just focusing primarily on Key Stage 2 because actually that’s just used to inform teacher assessment and it’s not necessarily a measure that’s used by the Government or OFSTED so I don’t understand why we are putting 6 and 7 year olds through those kinds of papers. I do feel like with any element of testing, there is additional stress and anxiety on children, there is that and actually, some people will look at those scores and they will use them but some people, they’re just still primarily focused on the reading, writing and maths. As much as I am an advocate because I feel it does improve children’s writing and their understanding of what they need to employ when they’re writing, as a measure, I don’t know if we’re using it in the way that it was intended.

**Right, I see. So there’s perhaps a bit of a mismatch between.**

Yes.

**Right, okay, that makes sense. What do you think students’ perceptions are of the kind of increased focus on grammar and the tests?**

I don’t know because I mean the school I came from last academic year learnt the grammar; whenever I said that we were doing grammar, they were in [09:17] but that’s because the way that I teach; I play it in games, ways to make it more fun and memorable. The children in my current school are like ‘Oh no, not grammar again!’ and actually from all children that I’ve taught, I think what they find is terminology is so ridiculous to understand so when you’re looking at present perfect tense but actually it’s to do with the past tense, it’s so much for them to remember.

**It’s perhaps sometimes a little bit overwhelming would you say is fair?**

Absolutely.

**Do you have an opinion on the use of grammatical terminology at all and I suppose the emphasis on grammatical terminology that’s in the new Curriculum?**

Yes, I feel quite confident and I just, it just comes off the tongue now but I think back when it was early days, it was quite tricky and I think for our new teachers and the teachers that are on KS2 year groups, I think that’s still a bit of a barrier and something that they need to work on.

**Of course. I suppose that relates back to a little bit what we were saying earlier about subject knowledge and teachers’ confidence in subject knowledge.**

Indeed. Teachers needed support with it and it was nowhere to be found.

**Have you found that you or your school has had to invest much money then in terms of resources for the class room or specific training, specifically in terms of grammar at all?**

No, no. I don’t think schools do but I’m a firm believer it should underpin everything that we do so that the children can see the purpose of it. So no, we haven’t bought into any schemes or anything. You might use some resources or activities from the Internet to obviously supplement it if it’s something quite tricky that you’re not comfortable in teaching but no schemes, no.

**I think we’re almost covering most of the things that I wanted to ask you about. I’m getting a feeling that you have fairly positive thoughts about the tests, especially in terms of students’ writing. Would you say it’s fair to say that you think that the tests have had a positive impact on students’ writing in terms of the quality or the control of their writing?**

Yes, I would, yes, I would. You’re always going to have some groups of learners that aren’t because they might have additional barriers but on the whole, yes, I would agree with that.

**And perhaps some of the more negative things are especially the purpose of the Key Stage 1 tests and perhaps a little bit about teachers’ subject knowledge and perhaps the lack of support in terms of that from Government in the sense that these were just imposed upon schools. Is that fair to say as well?**

Yes, I would and I’d say I don’t think local authorities when they do their TPD and they put out their training, there’s really ever been an emphasis on it either, the training sessions.

**Oh really? Right, okay. So you’ve never had the option from local authority to have training in grammar?**

No, no.

**Interesting. In terms of developing your and your staff’s subject knowledge then in terms of having to teach the content of the tests, where have you got the resources from then? You mentioned things like the Internet or are there specific things that you’ve looked at?**

Yes, I suppose myself I’m quite lucky because my degree is in English as well so it’s been nice as well but I would it is generally from research and I think it’s collaboration with your cluster schools as well. One of my previous roles in my other local authority is that I was a lead literacy teacher so I was able to kind of network and do kind of support that way.

**So you sound like you having that subject specialism in English.**

Not everybody has that and that’s the thing, isn’t it?

**Of course, definitely. Is there anything else that you wanted to say that you haven’t talked about in terms of the test then, in terms of your perceptions?**

No, I think like I say, I do think they have a positive impact on children’s writing; I’m just not sure of it as a progress measure how it’s used, if it’s actually valued by anybody, do they look at it and they care? And I just do think it is another test and another additional stress to our children. I feel couldn’t we just teach that Curriculum without it actually being tested as such.

**Yes, of course. That makes a lot of sense so you’re in agreement with the content but perhaps less so about the nature of the high stakes’ assessment in general, is that a fair assessment?**

Yes, that’s fair, yes.

**Any final thoughts at all about things that you wanted to raise that you haven’t had the chance to do so?**

No, I think that’s, no, that’s enough.

**Great. That’s my questions done which has been super useful; I feel like I’ve got a good perception now of your thoughts of things and really nice to hear your views.**

I can imagine it’s very interesting because everybody will have such different views and I’ll be intrigued by the outcome of the research as well because I wonder if it’s geographical or if it’s kind of, I don’t want to be ageist but if there’s a certain age within staff that think things are; I’ll find it really interesting.

**Yes, and that’s one of the more complicated things that I’ll have to do in looking at the data in trying to kind of see if there are those correlations that you talked about. But if it’s okay, I’ll keep your name on the list and then when I’m ready to send out the results and the pre-publications, if it’s okay, I’ll send you a copy of that.**

Oh, absolutely.

**So you can have a look at it and yes, you’re right. What I’m finding so far is that it’s quite a diverse range of views and I think that some people are very critical of the tests but they’re not critical of students learning about grammar or language; they’re just critical of the way in which that knowledge is being assessed.**

And I think because it was just thrown at everybody; we didn’t really know it was coming, it came from no-where.

**Yes, of course and that puts an awful lot of pressure upon teachers which is obviously very unfair.**

Absolutely. We have to react to what the government ask us to do – like it or not.

**Okay, great. Well, I’ll keep you in the loop with regards to the results and things Lindsay but I won’t take up any more of your time so thanks very much again for giving up your time and your views and I hope that you have a well-deserved and relaxing summer.**

Thank you very much Ian.

**Okay, alright.**

Best of luck to you, take care.

**Thanks very much, take care. Bye bye.**