

PL Subscription Case Study

Building Sentence Writing Across a Whole School

Setting the scene

St Felix Catholic Primary School in Bankstown caters for students in Years K–6, the majority of whom come from a Language Background Other Than English. This linguistic and cultural diversity brings rich language resources, while also requiring explicit, systematic teaching of written English, particularly in sentence construction and punctuation.

School data showed that many students, even in Year 5, were writing at an early Stage 1 level. NAPLAN and internal assessment data pointed to the same issue: students were not yet able to construct complete, controlled sentences or use punctuation with accuracy. As the leadership team looked more closely, the pattern became clearer: This wasn't just a student gap. It was a whole-school instructional gap.

Focusing the work

Like many schools, professional learning was already in place, but it had not yet resulted in consistent teaching practice across classrooms. The school defined a precise problem in practice:

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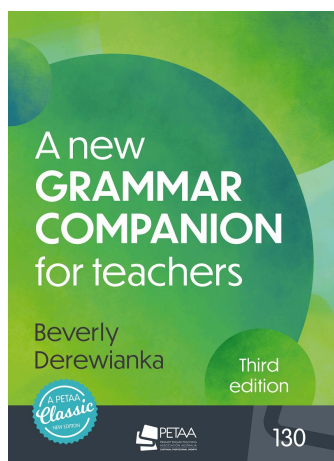
How do we build consistent teacher knowledge and practice in sentence construction and punctuation across all classrooms?

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This became a key priority in the school's improvement plan and required a systematic, sustained approach. It allowed leadership to align professional learning, classroom practice, and data monitoring around a **single, shared goal**.

Using PETAA PL Subscription Membership to structure the work

The school used PETAA's [PL Subscription School Membership](#) as the foundation for their professional learning approach. With approximately 60 staff, the priority was coherence, consistency, and shared knowledge, with professional learning strategically applied through this lens.



All teachers were directed to complete [targeted courses](#) included in the PETAA PL Subscription membership that focused on sentence writing, created by world-leading grammar expert Professor Beverly Derewianka ([A New Grammar Companion for Teachers](#)).

This ensured that every teacher was building:

- the same core knowledge
- the same understanding of sentence structure
- and a shared language for discussing writing

Embedding the change within existing structures

Rather than scheduling additional sessions, the school reallocated existing time:

- Courses could be completed flexibly
- Staff could complete these courses in lieu of attending twilight staff meetings (2.5 hours, three times a year)
- Staff engaged with the learning across the year, fully embedded in staff practice rather than kept to isolated and separate sessions.

These were deliberate decisions



This **approach protected time for professional learning, avoided adding to staff workload, and centred this key priority as a topic of continual discussion.** This enabled professional learning to be adopted as core work, not an optional extra.

Accountability and visibility

To ensure the learning translated into practice:

- Teachers completed written reflections on each course
- Reflections were linked to programming and classroom application
- Evidence needed to be shown of how those reflections were integrated into lesson plans and teaching practice
- Leadership could see how learning was being taken up across the school

This means the professional learning was not just completed as a box-ticking exercise. It was an improvement tool that had a clear goal of shaping future planning: the school made sure the insights in these courses were used by all teachers in all classrooms, not left as a collection of notes.

What changed in teaching practice

Having internalised the language and strategies of sentence writing, teachers were able to identify sentences in students' work and provide immediate, context-based instruction, particularly during shared reading sessions.

This hands-on application helped consolidate teacher understanding while supporting student learning outcomes. It also allowed teachers to target sentence writing issues in their specific classrooms as supported by NAPLAN and internal assessment data.

In classrooms, this showed up in practical ways. Teachers could identify sentence-level issues in student writing more precisely; they began to use shared reading and writing as opportunities to teach sentences in context; and feedback to students became more specific and instructional, rather than general.

For example, during shared reading, all teachers could:

- draw attention to how a sentence was constructed
- explain how meaning was built through word groups and punctuation
- support students to apply similar structures in their own writing

The shift was from correcting writing after the fact to teaching how sentences work as part of everyday instruction: that is, the reading-writing connection in action.

Building consistency across K–6

Because the work involved all staff, the impact extended beyond individual classrooms.

The school began to see:	This made it easier to:
• more consistent expectations for sentence writing across year levels • a shared language used by teachers and students • clearer progression in how sentence construction was taught	• respond to patterns identified in NAPLAN data • support students as they moved between classes • sustain focus on sentence-level writing over time

Efficiency for leadership

The approach also reduced the complexity of leading professional learning. Using PETAA's PL Subscription courses meant:

- no need to design or source separate PL materials
- no need to run multiple differentiated sessions
- no duplication of effort across teams
- ensured quality of evidence based, effective instruction and professional knowledge

Instead, leadership could focus on monitoring implementation, supporting consistency, and tracking impact through student work and data

Staff response

Staff valued both the structure and the relevance of the learning.

Completing courses within existing time allocations made the approach manageable – there was no increased impact to workload, especially when twilight meetings could be replaced with online course completion, and the clear link to classroom practice made it worthwhile.

Teachers reported that the courses were:

“Practical and enjoyable – with ideas we could apply straight away in our teaching.”

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What this approach made possible

Using PETAA's PL Subscription Membership in this way allowed the school to:

- align professional learning with a clearly defined problem in practice
- build shared teacher knowledge across a staff of 60 with equal access and priority
- embed learning within existing school structures
- and translate that learning directly into classroom instruction



Note

Rather than professional learning sitting alongside practice, it became a crucial part of how teaching improved across the school.

Looking ahead

The school continues to build on this work, maintaining a sustained focus on sentence writing and extending teacher knowledge over time.

The combination of:

- a clearly defined instructional focus
- whole-staff engagement
- and accessible, high-quality professional learning

has created a strong foundation for ongoing improvement in English and literacy.

How this could look in your school

This approach is not complex to implement, but it does require clarity, consistency, structured reflection, and maintained access to quality resources. A starting point could look like:

- Identify a precise problem in practice
e.g. sentence construction, vocabulary, or paragraph cohesion — based on your NAPLAN and internal data
- Select 1–2 targeted courses for all staff
Build a shared knowledge base, rather than offering multiple PL options
- Use existing meeting time
Replace one or two sessions with structured course completion across the term
- Set a clear expectation for application
Ask teachers to reflect on their learning and show how it is shaping planning and classroom practice
- Look for evidence in student work
Focus on what is changing in writing — not just course completion.

Ready to embed sustainable improvement practices at your school?



Learn more about PETAA's [Professional Learning Subscription School Membership](#), and email info@petaa.edu.au to get started.