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Here are my suggestions for how to make literacy stick:

1. The school needs a literacy leader, not a co-ordinator.

This is a very important role and should be designed, advertised and fought for. A literacy leader must be able to command the trust and respect of staff. If they do their job well, then staff will feel challenged. If you are already leading on literacy in your school, then ask yourself: who holds me regularly to account? Who in the leadership team has ultimate responsibility for literacy development? If you have a free hand in literacy, you are both fortunate and doomed! You should demand to be held accountable and should ensure that there is a published literacy development plan that sits within the whole school improvement plan.

2. Call together some good people from different departments and thrash out the issues.

Talk about the literacy skills that are holding students back. In other words, focus on what matters, not simply on what students can't do. For example, it might be true that students can't use apostrophes, but it doesn't really matter. No-one's perfect, and their abuse probably won't hold back students' learning. The same with homophones: many of us love to bang on about them, but that helps no-one. Inform your decisions about what matters with evidence: talk to students, read their work, watch some lessons. Try to agree on high value items which are achievable, will make sense to students and staff, AND will have impact on students' progress. Move on from simple and marginal actions such as key words displayed on walls. Agreed action should be about what *teachers* do every lesson, and about beneficial impact on learning outcomes. When teachers really take literacy seriously, it will discomfort routine teaching. Students will notice what is happening.

“...a teacher must ...demonstrate an understanding of and take responsibility for promoting high standards of literacy..., whatever the teacher's specialist subject.” *Current Teachers' Standards*, DfE

Try to include the literacy co-ordinators from your main partner primaries in the process of identifying issues and possible solutions.

It is important that you choose the literacy priorities for yourselves, but make sure that chosen literacy focuses are not confined to the passive margins of students' experience - marking, words on walls, underlining headings; instead, the chosen focuses should be enshrined at the heart of that experience - in active, explicit teaching. I would suggest that **there are five literacy items that really matter** in terms of improving student outcomes, and their capacity as learners.

Literacy item	Key issues
<p>1) Spelling the words that are important across the curriculum (e.g. <i>independent</i>) and in subject areas (e.g. <i>muscle</i>)</p>	<p>Don't try to improve spelling by correcting errors or by getting students to 'learn' the spellings they have got wrong.</p> <p>Do insist that students check their own (and others') writing for errors. Teach <i>spelling strategies</i> such as mnemonics, word structures, breaking down and sounding out, and so on. Teach students to choose a strategy that suits the word they are unsure of.</p>
<p>2) Writing better sentences, i.e. effective and accurate grammar and punctuation</p>	<p>Don't (except perhaps in English!) teach grammar and different sorts of sentence. There are simpler and more reliable ways to improve sentences.</p> <p>Do model for and with students how to write clear and straightforward sentences that start with a capital letter, end with (usually) a full stop, and are not too long. Bad writers tend to write sentences that are far too long. Teach students to make good use of connectives to organise their ideas and to vary the structure of sentences for suitable emphasis. Regular live modelling is the key teaching strategy here.</p>
<p>3) Developing and organising content, i.e. better extended writing</p>	<p>Don't just set extended writing tasks and expect students to find their own way through.</p> <p>Do give students the time and opportunity to generate and sort content. Wherever possible, let them share with and learn from each other. Three heads are much better than one in planning. Draw students' attention to how different texts are organised and ask them to replicate the structures of these texts in their own writing.</p>
<p>4) Reading efficiently, i.e. using the appropriate strategy, particularly skimming and scanning</p>	<p>Don't give students texts to read without also giving them a clear purpose and strategy.</p> <p>Do teach students to use appropriate, efficient reading strategies, so that they 'absorb' information as quickly as possible. Teach them to <i>skim</i> texts to get their gist and to determine their usefulness. Teach them to <i>scan</i> for specific information using clues such as key words, synonyms, numbers, headings.</p>
<p>5) Effective research, i.e. finding and using sources in a systematic way</p>	<p>Don't ask students to go and find out about something. They will helplessly google, copy and paste.</p> <p>Do teach a stepped model for finding out: deciding on purposes and outcomes for research; choosing sources wisely; actively reading/engaging with sources; evaluating sources; taking and synthesising from sources (note-making); (re)presenting ideas and information.</p>

These skills matter because they are common literacy weaknesses for students, but if they were strong and confident in them they would be more independent, more successful and more delightful learners!

3. Arrange appropriate training.

The important thing is to choose training that is ‘fit for purpose’. You may well decide to book an outside expert for a big, whole-school launch, but only if the expert presents practical approaches to a pre- identified literacy issue (see above), rather than engaging in rhetoric about the importance of literacy. We all know it’s important. It’s just that we don’t necessarily know what to do about it in our science and PE lessons, for example. Meaningful training can take lots of other forms as well. The golden rules about whole-school training are that:

- YOU determine its content
- subject teams get the chance to agree on how they will implement their learning
- the training results in clarity around practical approaches.

For example, if you decide to focus on spelling, then by the end of the training session, all departments should know three effective strategies for teaching the spellings that are important to their subject, and they should have planned to use these strategies in a specific timescale. Make sure that ‘training’ does not *end* with the big bang literacy launch.

4. Try to get at least five key departments working on the same literacy focus, using similar methods over the same period of time - at least half a term.

That way they can make the message clear and consistent, use the same language and support students in operating the same skills in different contexts. To have achieved the latter is the mark of a literate student.

5. Limit the focus in each period of time - don’t try to cover too much.

However, don’t drop each focus in the next period of time, add to it. It’s ok to start small and limited. However, you must always have a plan to scale up: more teachers, more departments, the whole school. Unless you keep pushing forward, you will become inward-looking, marginalized and suddenly colleagues will start dropping out.

6. Particularly in the early stages, review the impact of the literacy initiative.

Discuss and agonise over the findings, report them widely, celebrate them. Draw conclusions. Ongoing, unflinching evaluation keeps literacy at the heart of the school’s development. Without it, literacy becomes no more than a hobby.