

A faded, blue-tinted background image of a young person sitting at a desk, looking down and writing on a piece of paper with a pencil.

Oxfordshire schools
successfully pioneer
a new method of
collaborative assessment
and moderation

Case Study

Oxfordshire Schools

Introduction

Church Cowley St. James is a two-form entry school in Oxford with nearly 500 children. There are 45 different languages spoken there, by children representing 48 different nationalities. Approximately 30% of the children are on a Special Educational Needs register.

The school had taken a leading role in local partnership moderation. However, this was logistically challenging in terms of bringing together different schools, and whilst each teacher would bring a few examples of work, they were from different writing tasks making it difficult to get a true idea of what “good” work looked like.

The school had previously used marking, using rubrics to support assessment in school. Traditional marking of books was time consuming for teachers, adding to their workload, yet having little impact on the children’s learning.

To compound this, some teacher workload – such as in Year 6 – was increased as they were asked to make thousands of separate judgements on children’s work over the year for SATs and moderation.

Church Cowley head teacher Steve Dew was looking for a more impactful way of assessing written work, supporting improvements in writing, and developing easier methods of collaborating with other local schools. He decided to work with RM Results to pilot its new digital assessment solution: RM Compare.

The pilot, led by Church Cowley St. James School, brought together 14 previously unlinked primary schools to work together on assessing writing tasks by Year 6 children. The pilots ran from June 2018 until July 2019.

Goals

- To find a valid and reliable way of assessing writing that would give a true idea of the standards of writing across the whole partnership, and benefit all the teachers and children in the school.
- Develop a way of using the RM Compare sessions to inform formative assessment, by enabling teachers across the partnership to see a wide range of anonymous writing from outside their school.
- Reduce time spent marking and improve the impact of time spent using professional judgements with colleagues, improving the quality of writing across the school / partnership.

Key Challenges

- The adoption of a different approach to assessing writing in each school, that helps to reduce subjective opinion and bias.
- The logistical, time-consuming challenges of getting schools together, to collaborate on the assessment and moderation of writing.
- To find an easy and reliable way of marking work across a large cohort of schools, as well as creating a consistency of writing tasks across the group.
- To provide teachers with a comprehensive overview of the standards of writing across multiple schools, enabling everyone to establish “what good looks like”, whilst reducing their workload.

Solution

RM Compare is a new interactive digital assessment solution from RM Results. It is designed to enable an easy and flexible approach to formative assessment and collaborative learning.

The cohort of 14 schools each set the same task for their Year 6 children – a written narrative based on a video stimulus. Instructions were sent to each school on how to administer the test to ensure fairness and parity. Each school had a week to carry out the writing assessment, and then a week to make their judgements.

Once each school had uploaded all of their scripts, each teacher received an email with a link to their personal judgement page. The technology is based on the proven methodology of Adaptive Comparative Judgement (ACJ), which proves that people are better at making comparative, paired judgements, rather than absolute ones.

RM Compare shows teachers two anonymous pieces of work side-by-side on a screen, and the teacher judges which of those best meets the simplified assessment criteria. The ACJ technology uses a unique algorithm to intelligently select and pair pieces of work based on previous judgements, displaying similarly ranked work side-by-side. The intelligent pairing

reduces the time it takes to accurately place a piece of work on the professional consensus rank order it then generates.

Schools received anonymised data with the results, which allowed them to see not only where children sat within their own school, but within the whole cohort of schools taking part. This method is particularly beneficial for subjects where the work may be more open-ended, such as English, music and art.

By the end of each assessment at least 20 teachers across the schools had appraised each child's writing, creating a collective professional consensus of what "good" work looks like across the whole cohort of 14 schools taking part, rather than just within their own class or year group.

The trials found that teachers could evaluate children's performance in different styles of writing at a much more granular level. This helped to boost their children's attainment, and aided strategic lesson planning: for example, if other schools were receiving higher marks for descriptive writing, a teacher would know to focus efforts on developing this competency in lessons. Using the tool for formative assessment has led to increased attainment for children in their writing tasks.



Teachers could compare their own judgements with that of teachers from other schools, which aided their continuous professional development (CPD).

The assessment method was also fairer, helping to combat common assessment biases and reducing the impact of any unintentional preference caused by the assessor knowing the child. The inherently more natural comparison process of adaptive comparative judgement, rather than marking each

piece of work against a mark scheme, reduced the time spent assessing children's work, allowing for a more manageable workload and helped to combat teacher fatigue.

An additional benefit was that, as children transitioned to the next year group, the new teacher was given access a huge amount of helpful insight on that child's skills across different styles of writing tasks.

The flexible nature of RM Compare enabled easy collaboration between the 14 schools, and was completely adaptable for any style of task and scalable for any size cohort. The schools found that the writing assessments had a much more authentic feel and allowed the children to write expressively.

Following the successful pilot, Church Cowley St. James School has completely transformed the marking of written work. The traditional book marking process using a formal mark scheme for writing tasks has been replaced with the use of RM Compare to assess writing across Years 1 – 6, ten times a year.

This has reduced the workload of teachers and delivered valuable insights for teacher CPD. Teachers at the school have improved collective professional discussions about their children's progress and needs, as well as their own professional judgement. The assessment process covers a range of writing styles, maximising the opportunities for every child to create their "best" piece of writing, rather than by judged solely on one standardised test at the end of the year.

The whole school approach to formative assessment adopted by Church Cowley St. James School has now expanded to include five schools in their local area, using RM Compare has allowed for greatly improved moderation. Schools collaborate by using the same script, prompt and writing task, rather than trying to compare different tasks set by each school. It avoids discrepancies or unfairness where some children may have received more modelling, or different scaffolds. Each piece of work is independent, and so the judgements made are truer, and schools receive an on-going understanding of the expected standard in writing, and are working together to raise their attainment levels.



Testimonial



"We had previously led local partnership moderation and were looking for a valid way of assessing writing, whilst also hoping to cut down on the time it would take to get everyone involved. RM Compare and the power of Adaptive Comparative Judgement gave us the ability to work and achieve our goals in a completely different way. It's such a simple process and had really positive feedback from all the teachers and head teachers involved. Each teacher receives a comprehensive overview of all of the children's work, so we are collectively raising standards in a very collaborative way.

Due to the inherently more natural comparison process, rather than marking each piece of work against a mark scheme, we found that the time spent assessing the work was reduced, creating a more manageable workload.

RM Compare gave us a much more reliable assessment and far greater insight into each child's strengths and weaknesses. The assessment method is also fairer, helping to combat common assessment biases and reducing the impact of any unintentional preference caused by the assessor knowing the child.

It helps to boost the attainment of learners and improves the teacher's judgements, as they have a clearer view of what good quality writing looks like, leading to better professional conversations between teachers at school. The tool is very flexible, so it has been straightforward for us to implement it however we choose. I think any literacy leader or head teacher who is keen on reducing the amount of time teachers spend marking would benefit from the use of RM Compare.

It allowed us to moderate and benchmark writing across a group of schools. RM Compare made it easy for us to connect. Whilst we undertook the trial with 14 schools that were geographically close, there is no reason why we couldn't use this on a larger scale, nationally and even internationally.

It has reduced the teacher workload hugely – most of our teachers now leave school at half past four and don't take any books home. The time that we used to spend marking, we can use more strategically – planning and delivering the highest quality of learning in the classroom."

Steve Dew

Head teacher, Church Cowley St. James School

Interested in
finding out more?

To find out more about RM Compare,
or request a demo, please visit:

rmresults.com/rmcompare