

## PRECISION ASSESSMENT AT WESTGARTH PRIMARY SCHOOL



***“The process that we undertook with the assessment maps basically outlined a whole school ethos about how we make judgments about student progress and achievement and how we work as a team.” (Principal)***

***“It puts you in a position where you are really engaging with the curriculum [as a] continuum rather than just seeing it as a single, isolated year level... it challenges your own ideas on where you think the standard is.” (Teacher)***

***“Teachers appreciated the unpacking of the [curriculum] standards... punctuation is obvious but some of the standards like ‘students use language features to show how ideas can be extended’... What does that really mean?” (Teacher)***

***“When we talk about assessment, we talk about fair, accurate and on-balance judgments. And that fairness means that if I am in Year 3 and operating at, say, Level 6.5, you do not mark me as a 3 because you are worried about next year’s teacher... that’s not fair or accurate. Or if I am in Year 3 and I am really operating at F.5, there is no point marking me at 2.5.... If F.5 is where I am, then that is where I am. [As a teacher, it’s about] knowing what I need to do in terms of my planning of teaching and learning to meet that specific point of need.” (Assistant Principal)***

Interviewees for this case study included

- Jo-Ann Wheeler, Principal
- Donald Eddington, Assistant Principal
- Seven teachers (Prep, Grade 2, Grade 4, Grade 3, 2 x Grade 5 and Grade 6), interviewed in a group of four and a group of three; the group of four had been at the school since the change began, the group of three had come to the school part of the way through the change
- Two parents, one who had been associated with the school for a longer time and one who was newer to the school

## PRINCIPAL

Jo-Ann Wheeler

## SCHOOL CONTEXT

Westgarth Primary School is in the inner northern Melbourne suburb of Northcote and has a fulltime equivalent enrolment of 652 students and is growing each year. The school has been on site since 1924 and spreads itself across two adjacent school locations on Brooke Street and Clarke Street, Northcote. Westgarth Primary School has 38.0 full-time equivalent teaching staff and 8.7 full-time equivalent non-teaching staff.

## ASSESSMENT SIGNPOSTS

When Jo and Donald were appointed to Westgarth Primary School in 2015, they observed:

- discrepancies between NAPLAN results and teacher judgements in English and Mathematics
- a potential reliability issue in that some teachers were overly conservative in their judgements in the belief that it would motivate students to higher levels of performance
- teacher judgements seemed to be influenced by standardised tests such as PROBE, TORCH, CARS, and non-standardised tests such as Essential assessment (for mathematics)
- school-generated assessments were insufficiently anchored to the achievement standards, and limited students' ability to reveal the breadth and depth of their learning (e.g., one test had nine questions on the same skill; in most areas of the curriculum, nearly all students were 'at' standard)
- in many cases, teacher judgements were being made against learning test scores and the content descriptions of the curriculum instead of the achievement standards
- concerns with a high proportion of high-achieving, low-growth students.

Parent opinion survey feedback and parent focus groups undertaken via Westgarth's Education Sub-Committee of the School Council also highlighted reporting issues. Parents felt their children's reports 'did not reveal where their child was at in their learning' and 'offered little more than general descriptions of what was happening in the classroom'. Parents wanted to know:

- where their child was 'at' in their learning, communicated clearly and succinctly using simple visuals and/or plain language
- that their children are making progress and are working to their potential
- how to support/complement their children's learning in the home; and
- that the teacher 'knew' their child as a learner and a person (e.g., could describe the children's level of engagement in learning and personal capabilities such as resilience, creativity, and ability to work collaboratively).

Teachers also had concerns with the formal report. As one teacher described it:

*"One thing that really stood out for me, and I've been here for a while, [was that] we were literally writing the same thing across year levels. I read a Year 2 report and a Year 6 one, it was exactly the same with tiny nuances of difference, and very jargonish. And it was so much work."*

## THE PROCESS

### 1: Critically engaging with and unpacking the Victorian Curriculum achievement standards

In 2015, Donald began building teachers' capacity by deepening their understanding of the Victorian Curriculum achievement standards. Teams were released for half a day at a time to pursue this work together, beginning with English and then moving onto Mathematics. As Donald described it, *"We looked at the achievement standards – unpacking them piece-by-piece. What were the achievement standards actually saying? In each case, I would ask, 'What does this part mean?' The response was often, 'Actually, I'm not sure' due to the jargon used in the standards."*

When this happened, Donald supported teams to engage with other Victorian Curriculum resources, previous curriculum frameworks, resources from other educational jurisdictions and the educational evidence-base to clarify what the achievement standards might mean in a quantifiable way.

### 2: Translating each achievement standard into a series of plain language statements, and making them accessible

After team dialogue and sense making, the achievement standards were translated into a series of plain language statements that were personally and collectively meaningful to teachers. In 2016, plain language statements were written for the other learning areas and capabilities of the curriculum. For Donald, *"The power [of the plain language statements] is in the translation – in contextualising it. Teachers understand what the statements mean and [now] they have increased confidence to make judgements against the achievement standards for reporting purposes, both above and below the expected level"*.

These plain language statements were then reviewed by parents on the Education Sub-Committee and modified based on their feedback: *"When parents said, 'I don't know what that means,' we rewrote it. It was about ensuring that the 'edu-speak' was not there"*. In the past, a jargon-buster had gone home with the student report. Donald's response had been, *"Why not just express it more clearly, and plainly so parents/carers can understand what is written?"*

Foundation	Experiments with capital letters and full stops
Level 1	Uses capital letters and full stops appropriately
Level 2	Uses capital letters, full stops, question and exclamation marks Recognises that commas are used to separate items in a list
Level 3	Uses apostrophes for contractions (e.g., writes you're for you are)
Level 4	Experiments with quotation marks for dialogue, titles and quotes
Level 5	Uses accurate punctuation (e.g., uses possessive apostrophes)
Level 6	Uses punctuation for clarity (e.g., uses commas to separate clauses)
Level 7	Uses punctuation to support meaning (e.g., uses prepositional phrases and embedded clauses)
Level 8	Uses accurate punctuation (e.g., uses colons, semicolons, dashes and brackets in formal and informal texts)

Figure 1: Example Westgarth plain language indicators for English (punctuation)

All teachers interviewed for this case study spoke very positively about the plain language statements. As one teacher put it, *“In the end, it was the best feeling when we saw it [the plain language statements]... it’s clarity for us, and for our students. It’s clarity for the parents. That’s what I love. It’s solid.”*

The school’s continua of plain language statements is available via a school-developed curriculum and assessment portal (Figure 2) which is hosted on the school server. The portal is also downloadable to teachers’ notebooks. The plain language statements have also been shared with parents in paper form and in student reports. The portal was developed with a web interface to facilitate interactivity. It allows embedding of resources including videos, teaching materials and student samples but could be easily created in a word document with hyperlinks to folders or as an interactive PDF. Donald added, *“The thing with this portal is that it acts as a continuum and feels like a continuum, [something] that you can navigate”.*

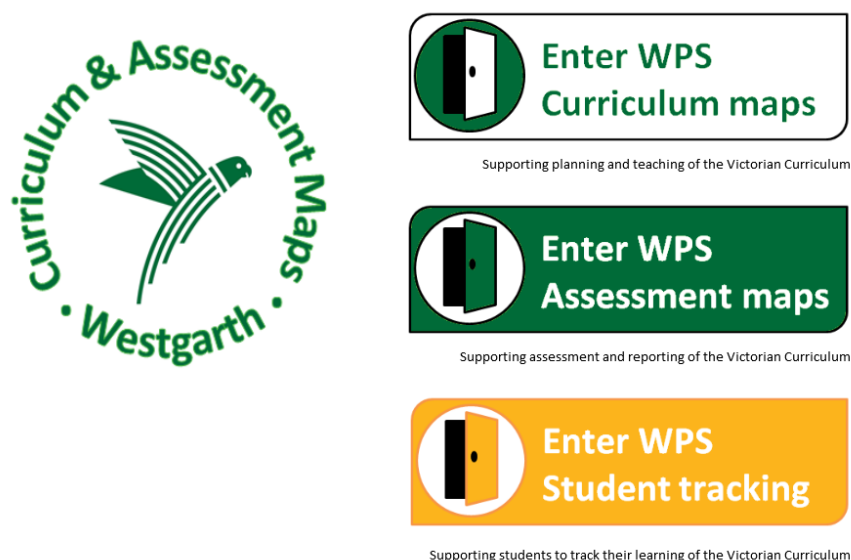


Figure 2. Landing page of the Westgarth PS curriculum and assessment portal

### 3: Developing rich assessment maps that illustrate the plain language statements, and makes them accessible

The next step was to develop assessment maps, in order to illustrate ‘What student progress and achievement might look like’ at each increment within a progression of learning (Figure 3). Student work samples were collected strategically – for example, in preparation for deepening teachers’ understanding of Writing. Each year, the school selected a different genre on which to focus (i.e. narrative, persuasive, recount). One ‘above’, ‘at’ and ‘below’ the expected level work sample was submitted by every classroom teacher at the end of the previous year. These samples are unnamed, so the focus was on making judgements about the work sample, rather than making judgements about a student. The fact that samples are from *actual* students in the school has heightened teachers’ feelings of collectively responsibility for ‘getting this right’.



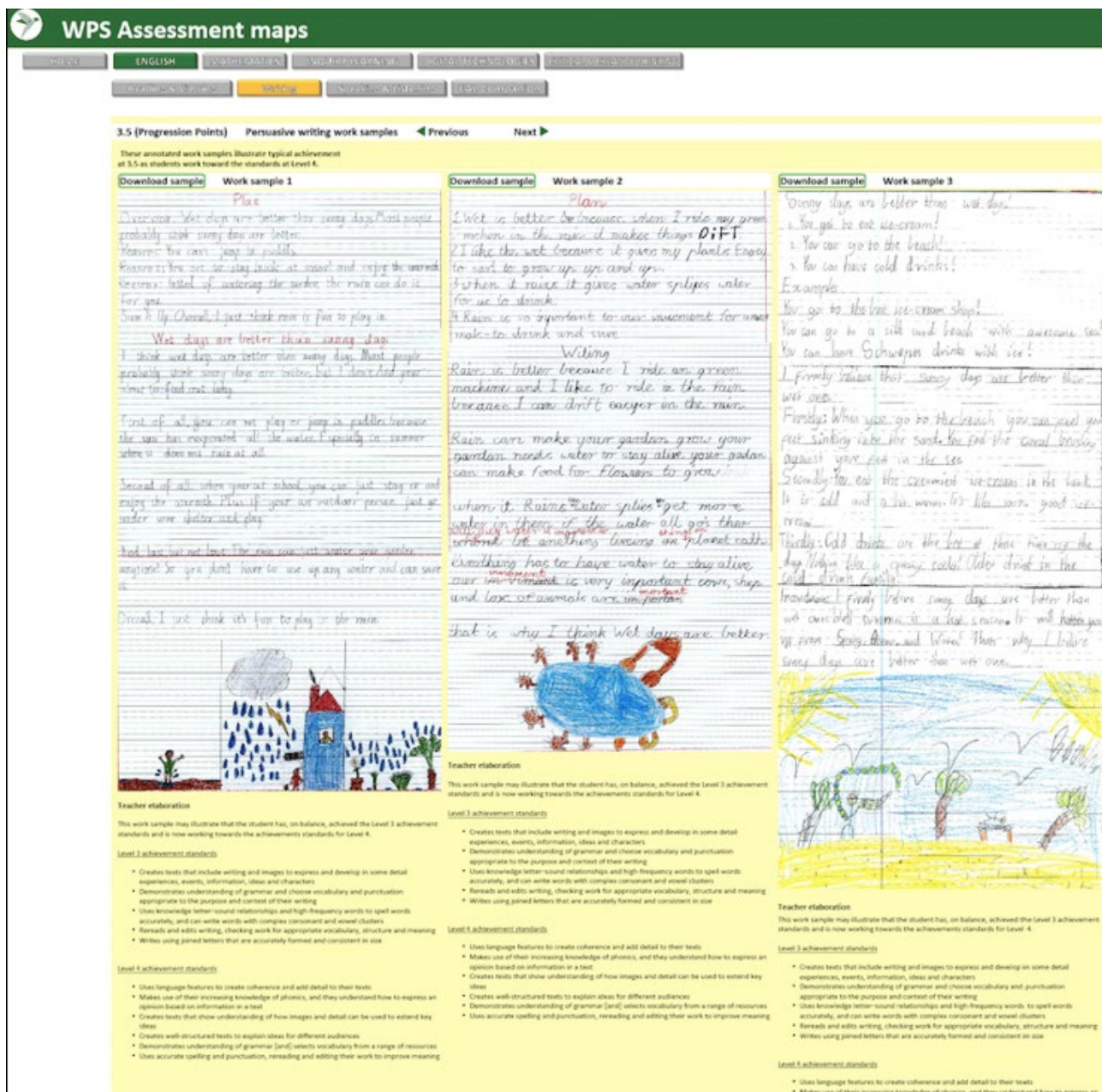


Figure 3: Westgarth student work samples at each increment of learning progression

As a Year 3 teacher described this part of the portal, *“It’s just so impressive and so helpful to guide you with your assessment”*. Her Year 5 colleague added, *“And so easy to use... if you are looking at Level 5, you click on Level 5 there’s an explanation and multiple example s for each... as a resource for where to take your teaching and how to assess. I find it invaluable”*.

Work samples are downloadable, to support teachers who prefer to have a hard copy to refer to when making judgements about progress and achievement for students in their classes.

#### 4: Strengthening objectivity in judgements through quality moderation practices

Moderation practices were (and continue to be) systematically undertaken in mixed teams (e.g., Prep, Year 3 and Year 6 teachers – and a mix of years of experience), using these unnamed samples to moderate during two after school meetings. *“Each group is given a pack of student samples – we go through the plain language statements and tick off what this sample shows. Importantly, teachers are asked the question ‘What stops this piece of work being marked at the next level? What is the student not doing?’ Teams then make a judgement (e.g., 2.5). We do not need to moderate if all team members agree; when we disagree, we discuss it deeply.”* Focussing on what students are *not* demonstrating in their writing is used to inform future planning at particular year levels, as it indicates knowledge and skills students are yet to master.

Interviewers asked several of the teachers interviewed for this case study to reflect on the differences (if any) between moderation practices at Westgarth PS and other schools they had worked in. One shared that, *“In the school I used to teach at, we would moderate, but each team [made up of teachers teaching the same grade levels] had its own idea [of what was at, above, below]... you didn’t necessarily go to a different team [to confirm this]... so you [ended up with] your own little vision of what each level was”*. Another commented, at Westgarth *“we moderate them [the samples] in groups across the school, it was me [Year 5] and a Prep teacher and a specialist and a Year 2 teacher, and we moderate work samples from Foundation all the way up to Level 6 and beyond. Being in a mixed team puts you in a position where you are really engaging with the curriculum and the continuum rather than just seeing it as a single isolated year level. It’s a great sharing experience when you do that with teachers from different levels”*.

#### 5: Planning for and continuously assessing learning along a continuum

In consultation with team leaders at each year level, Westgarth teachers work collaboratively at the beginning of each semester to select which plain-language statements they intend to include in the report in line with what they are teaching. As one teacher described it: *“It’s then job embedded – recording as you’re going”*. Recording is principally for formative purposes – to monitor student learning and growth, and to better target teaching – but *at the same time* it provides the foundation for meaningful reporting to parents.

In planning, teachers’ pay very close attention to the *range* of past achievement of their students. As one teacher described it: *“Say in Year 3, we have got kids from Level 1.5 to Level 4.5, so when we are planning we are looking at the curriculum across those levels so that we know how skills are going to be built... the curriculum maps are a great resource for this because you can click on one particular skill and it’s laid out for you”* (Figure 4).

	FOUNDATION	LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4
Mode	Writing	Writing	Writing	Writing	Writing
Strand	Literature	Literature	Literature	Literature	Literature
Sub-strand	Creating literature	Creating literature	Creating literature	Creating literature	Creating literature
	<p><i>Creating literary texts</i></p> <p>Retell familiar literary texts through performance, use of illustrations and images</p>	<p><i>Creating literary texts</i></p> <p>Recreate texts imaginatively using drawing, writing, performance and digital forms of communication</p>	<p><i>Creating literary texts</i></p> <p>Create events and characters using different media that develop key events and characters from literary texts</p>	<p><i>Creating literary texts</i></p> <p>Create imaginative texts based on characters, settings and events from students' own and other cultures including through the use of visual features</p>	<p><i>Creating literary texts</i></p> <p>Create literary texts that explore students' own experiences and imagining</p>
		<p><i>Experimentation and adaptation</i></p> <p>Build on familiar texts by using similar characters, repetitive patterns or vocabulary</p>	<p><i>Experimentation and adaptation</i></p> <p>Build on familiar texts by experimenting with character, setting or plot</p>	<p><i>Experimentation and adaptation</i></p> <p>Create texts that adapt language features and patterns encountered in literary texts</p>	<p><i>Experimentation and adaptation</i></p> <p>Create literary texts by developing storylines, characters and settings</p>
Strand	Literacy	Literacy	Literacy	Literacy	Literacy
Sub-strand	Creating texts	Creating texts	Creating texts	Creating texts	Creating texts
	<p><i>Creating texts</i></p> <p>Create short texts to explore, record and report ideas and events using familiar words and beginning writing knowledge</p>	<p><i>Creating texts</i></p> <p>Create short imaginative and informative texts that show emerging use of appropriate text structure, sentence-level grammar, word choice, spelling, punctuation and appropriate multimodal elements</p>	<p><i>Creating texts</i></p> <p>Create short imaginative, informative and persuasive texts using growing knowledge of text structures and language features for familiar and some less familiar audiences, selecting print and multimodal elements appropriate to the audience and purpose</p>	<p><i>Creating texts</i></p> <p>Plan, draft and publish imaginative, informative and persuasive texts demonstrating increasing control over text structures and language features and selecting print and multimodal elements appropriate to the audience and purpose</p>	<p><i>Creating texts</i></p> <p>Plan, draft and publish imaginative, informative and persuasive texts containing key information and supporting details for a widening range of audiences, demonstrating increasing control over text structures and language features</p>
	<p><i>Editing</i></p> <p>Participate in shared editing of students' own texts for meaning, spelling, capital letters and full stops</p>	<p><i>Editing</i></p> <p>Reread student's own texts and discuss possible changes to improve meaning, spelling and punctuation</p>	<p><i>Editing</i></p> <p>Reread and edit text for spelling, sentence-boundary punctuation and text structure</p>	<p><i>Editing</i></p> <p>Reread and edit texts for meaning, appropriate structure, grammatical choices and punctuation</p>	<p><i>Editing</i></p> <p>Reread and edit for meaning by adding, deleting or moving words or word groups to improve content and structure</p>
	<p><i>Handwriting</i></p> <p>Understand that sounds in English are represented by upper- and lower-case letters that can be written using learned letter formation patterns for each case</p>	<p><i>Handwriting</i></p> <p>Understand how to use learned letter formation patterns to represent sounds and write words using combinations of unjoined upper- and lower-case letters</p>	<p><i>Handwriting</i></p> <p>Write words and sentences legibly using upper- and lower-case letters that are applied with growing fluency using an appropriate pen/pencil grip and body position</p>	<p><i>Handwriting</i></p> <p>Understand the conventions for writing words and sentences using joined letters that are clearly formed and consistent in size</p>	<p><i>Handwriting</i></p> <p>Handwrite using clearly-formed joined letters, and develop increased fluency and automaticity</p>
	<p><i>Use of software</i></p> <p>Construct texts using software including word processing programs</p>	<p><i>Use of software</i></p> <p>Construct texts that incorporate supporting images using software including word processing programs</p>	<p><i>Use of software</i></p> <p>Construct texts featuring print, visual and audio elements using software, including word processing programs</p>	<p><i>Use of software</i></p> <p>Use software including word processing programs with growing speed and efficiency to construct and edit texts featuring visual, print and audio elements</p>	<p><i>Use of software</i></p> <p>Use a range of software including word processing programs to construct, edit and publish written text, and select, edit and place visual, print and audio elements</p>

Figure 4. A continuum of English concepts across year levels

Teachers make an effort to keep their assessment tasks broad in order to accommodate the diversity of student 'starting points' within their classes, and to afford opportunities to students to work to their full potential. This is an area of further exploration and experimentation this year – how to create such rich tasks and have this happening across the school (see 'Next Steps, below).

## 6: Building the assessment-capability of students

At the end of 2017, Donald engaged Westgarth teachers in developing plain language content description statements for students for all areas of English and mathematics (from Level D to Level 10). Several teachers – all relatively new to the school, and at different stages of their careers – have taken the opportunity in Term 1 2018 to explore and experiment with their use. Two examples of this, and their impact, are outlined below.

### Example 1: Punctuation

In this example, the teacher – using the newly-developed student friendly content descriptions students in Writing and a good understanding of *where the student is at* in their learning and development and *where to next* – has created an individualised audit sheet (Figure 5) given to each student that outlines a progression of learning (of increasingly sophistication) in the use of punctuation in writing.



## Writing - Punctuation

1.	I can identify the capital letter for my name in other words.	✓		
2.	I can point to full stops at the end of a sentence.	✓		
3.	I can use capital letters at the start of a sentence.	✓		
4.	I can use capital letters for someone's name.	✓		
5.	I can use full stops at the end of a sentence.	✓		
6.	I can use full stops to mark the end of a sentence.	✓		
7.	I can use a question mark to ask questions.	✓		
8.	I can use exclamation marks to show emotions and give commands.	✓		
9.	I can use capital letters to show the start of a sentences and the names of people and places.	✓		
10.	I can use capital letters for names of places, people and things in my writing.	✓		
11.	I can use commas to separate items in a list in my writing.	✓		
12.	I can use apostrophes to signal missing letters in contract words.	✓		
13.	I can use quotation marks to show dialogue.	✓		
14.	I can use quotation marks to show titles.	—		
15.	I can use quotation marks to show quoted ( <i>direct</i> ) speech.	✓		
16.	I can use apostrophes to show possession in proper nouns (e.g. <i>John's bag</i> ).	✓		
17.	I can use apostrophes to show possession in common nouns (e.g. <i>the dog's dinner</i> ).	✓		
18.	I can use apostrophes to show possession in nouns that end in s ( <i>James' house, for goodness' sake</i> ).	—		
19.	I can use apostrophes to show possession in plurals: • <i>The girl's bags – singular girl.</i> • <i>The girls' bags – plural girls.</i>	✓		
20.	I can use commas to separate clauses (e.g., <i>The mountains are nice, but the beaches are better</i> ).	✓		
21.	I can use punctuation in complex sentences to support meaning.	✓		
22.	I can use punctuation correctly when using <u>prepositional phrases</u> and <u>clauses</u> .	✓		
23.	I can explain and use punctuation conventions including: • colons	✓		
24.	• semicolons	—		
25.	• dashes	—		
26.	• brackets in formal and informal texts.	✓		

Figure 5. Audit sheet pasted into students' workbooks (✓ = I think I can do it, — = I think I know a little bit about it but I am not confident, " — " = I don't know anything)



The teacher then invited her students to self-assess against this set of indicators *and* substantiate this with multiple forms of evidence from their workbooks (Figure 6) or other assessment items or tasks, thus proving that they know what it means (Figure 7). In dialogue with the teacher, this self-assessment is then validated, and a learning focus for the student defined.

As the teacher described it:

"In the audit, if you [the student] think you can do it, you tick it... if you think you know a little bit about it but you are not confident, you put a dash... and if you don't know anything, you leave it blank... [as a teacher] it's really interesting because it shows you straight away what the kids think they can do and what they can't do and you have some idea about whether they are not confident".

26-3-2018

Swimming lessons shouldn't be compulsory

How would you feel if you were forced to go outside in the cold & swim for a full 45 minutes? It gets worse. Imagine doing this every single day for 2 weeks! Imagine finishing your lesson & miserably trudging off to school; teeth chattering & keep about King Henry the VIII. It is conspicuous that swimming lessons should not be compulsory. Swimming lessons are painstakingly dreadful & it is beyond me how those innocent children manage to survive the treacherous brutality of swimming in the icy depths of these chlorinated waters. Why the government doesn't see that school swimming shouldn't be compulsory because of the minor possibility of hypothermia because of the exhaustion it gives you & because of the unnecessary strokes the instructors make you do, I don't know.

\*Being taught to swim

Evidence of No. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 8, 13, 15, 21, 24

Firstly, with the temperature of the water at nine am, there is no denying that there is a possibility of hypothermia; if not worse. I bet that's never in your life, have you ever made your way down to the outdoor pool at nine am. If you hear it must be in summer, in 35°C. You'll probably shudder at the thought. And ~~shudder~~ shudder too do these children, in nothing but a lycra bathing suit, ~~swimming~~ swimming up & down in the shivering waters. As Professor Jeremy Winters says, 'The temperatures of pool water keep getting colder & colder & some pools aren't heated at all. If your child has their swimming lessons at one of these pools, on the colder days, they could run a serious risk of

hypothermia."

I can use new vocabulary, obtained from different sources, in my own writing.	✓
I can use different words (vocabulary) to make meaning more precise.	✓
I can explain how words can have different meanings in different contexts (e.g. rules rule a king; rule to govern).	✓
I can explain how vocabulary choices, including evaluative language can express shades of meaning, feeling and opinion.	✓

Modality word wall ✓ Conspicuous  
Precise words ✓ Exhausted.

Figure 6. A student's written work sample enhanced by having an understanding of the content descriptions against which their work will be assessed

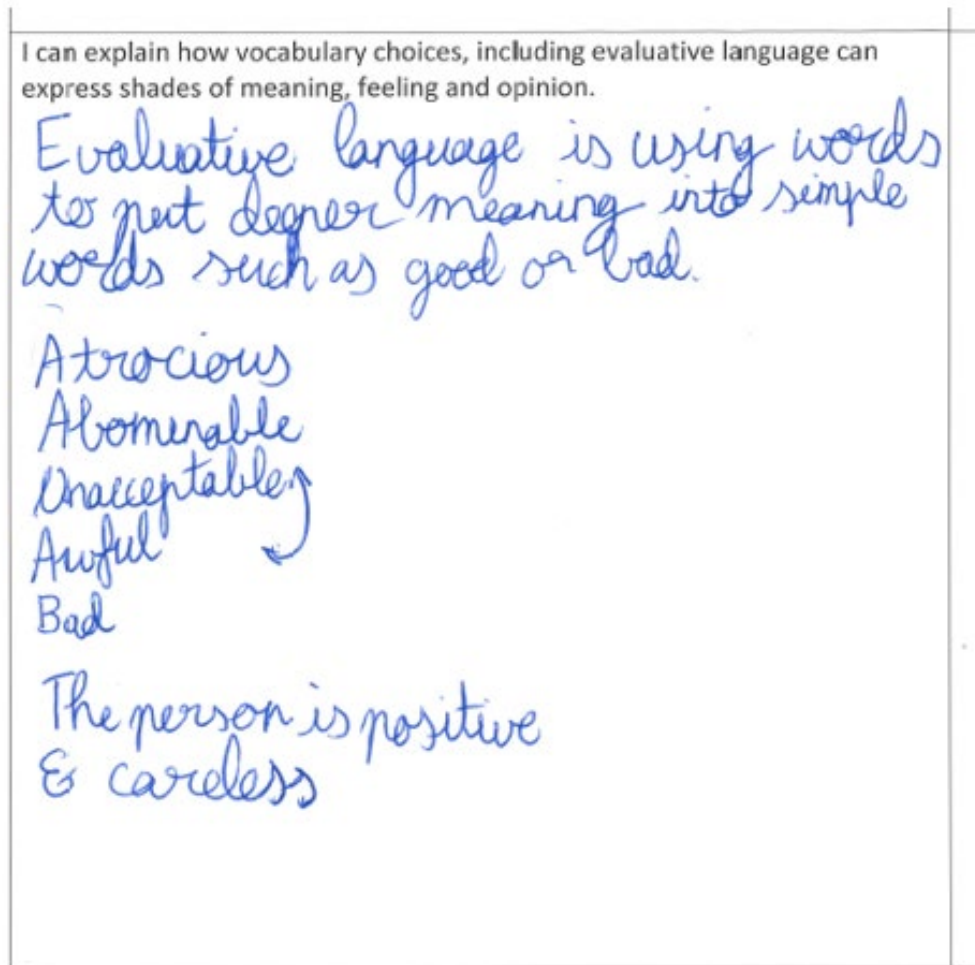


Figure 7. Example of a Year 5 student-substantiating their understanding of the content description

The teacher in question went on to describe an unexpected (yet welcome) feedback loop that this has created:

*“One of my highly able students highlighted a focus in the middle of the page... [I realised that] it is unlikely that she can’t do that one... she probably just hasn’t had the opportunity to practise that because we don’t often have to do that in our writing... it’s interesting feedback to the teacher... you can see straight away the gaps where we haven’t taught them”.*

Of course, once a student develops a learning focus, the teacher then needs to respond to it:

*“Depending on what it is, some of the kids just need help to write their sample sentence, or to do some research and work it out for themselves or in a little group; others need the learning to be more explicitly scaffolded or taught.”*

### Example 2: Persuasive Writing

In this example, another teacher – having a good understanding of *where the students were at* in their learning and development and *where to next* – selected a range of Writing work samples from

the Assessment Maps portal that demonstrated less and increasingly sophisticated performance. These samples were critically examined by the students in dialogue with one another and their teacher, with dialogue focussed on what a progression would look like (characteristics, indicators) if each piece was to be improved. Pieces of text were then 'cut up' into digestible paragraphs and teams assigned to improve each paragraph of writing. When it came to their own writing, application of new learning resulted in a significant improvement in quality (see Impact / Evidence, below, for more on this)(Figure 8).

The teacher's reflection on this was revealing, "Kids are also very good in saying 'I'm finished!' [when it can still be improved]. By practising that skill of improving something that's 'finished,' it has helped them to recognise that even though they think something is finished, there is always something more they can do."

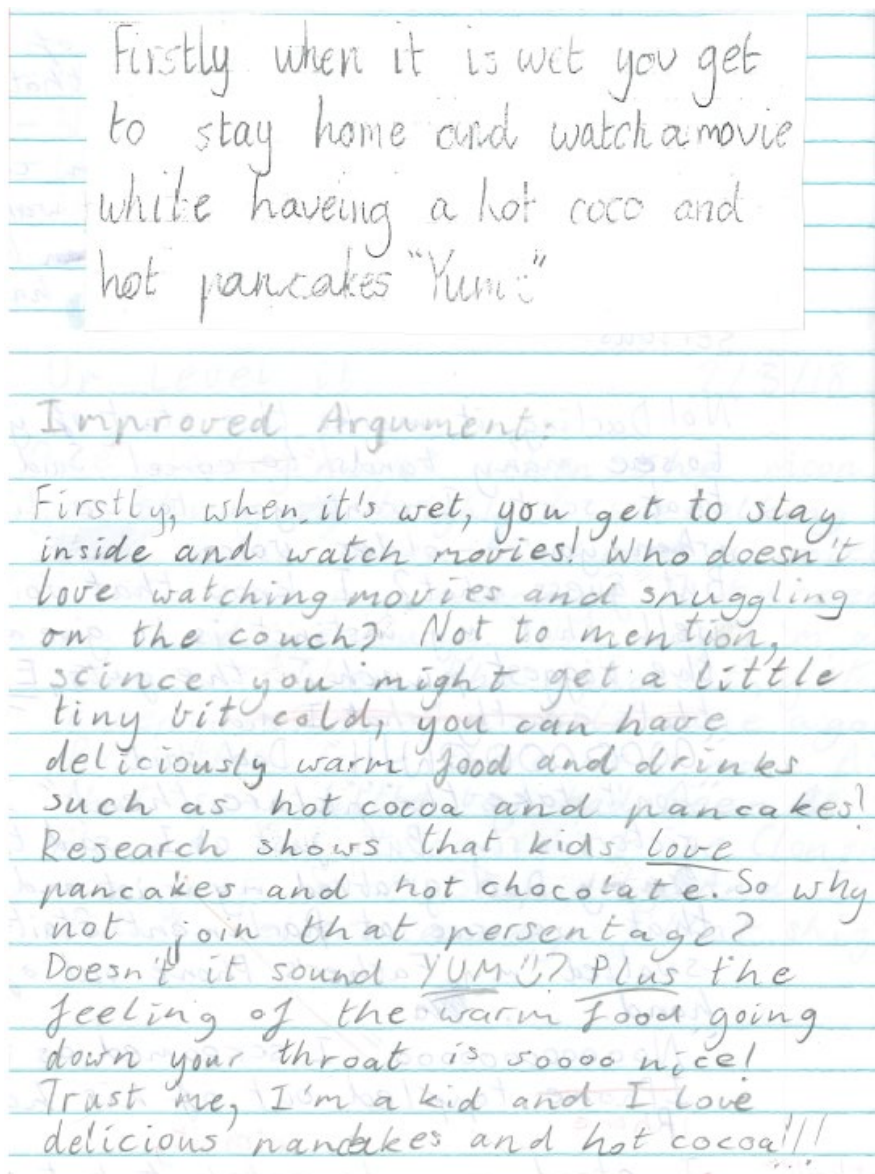


Figure 8. A sample of an improved persuasive writing piece



## IMPACT / EVIDENCE

### *Informed curriculum and assessment planning*

The most recent staff opinion survey data (2017) showed significant improvement in the measure 'Guaranteed and viable curriculum'. As Jo remarked, *"If you look at before we did any of this work, it was 48% of staff in agreement... now it's 80%. The measure of 'Collective efficacy is [also] very high in our school".* When teachers plan together, they explicitly design learning opportunities and assessment that will lead to the *"development of a skill, knowledge or a disposition specific to every student".* They also routinely *"look at the curriculum across several levels so that we know how the skill is going to be built or developed over time."*

### *Growth in student learning*

Teachers who experimented in Term 1 with the Writing plain language content descriptions for students found much better than expected growth in student learning. As one teacher remarked, *"In 95 per cent of cases, there's been a massive improvement... more than what you would expect... [their writing is] much more detailed, more cohesive".*

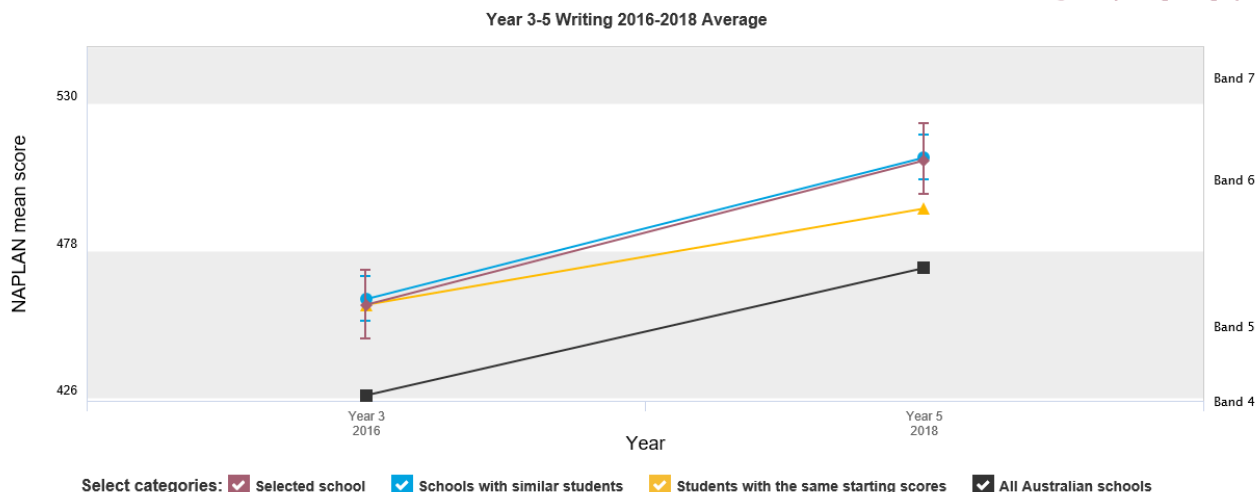
Student understanding that *learning is a continuum* has increased. As another teacher described it, *"They can now see what they have achieved and where they need to get to. It's allowed [students] to extend themselves as they can better understand what is expected in each and every task".* Another teacher concurred, *"Students are clearer about what progress looks like, especially students who were often not achieving as well as others".*

Looking at the NAPLAN data for Writing, Westgarth's student population is in excess of 650 students and 92% of scores are available, making improvements made at the school more compelling. Westgarth students are making significantly greater gains than students with the same starting score and are way above all Australian schools. This is in addition to 'closing the gap' in relation to similar schools.



Year 3-5 Writing 2016-2018 Average Submit

Interpreting this graph



Percentage of students in this year level for whom previous NAPLAN results (2 years prior) are available: 90%

- ◆ Average or median achievement of students in the selected school and margin of error at 90% level of confidence
- ◆ Average or median achievement of students in schools with similar students and margin of error at 90% level of confidence
- ▲ Average or median achievement of students with the same starting score
- Average or median achievement of students in all Australian schools
- Dotted line represents the transition from paper to online

### Strengthened professional dialogue and morale

Both Jo and Donald report witnessing a clear shift in the quality of professional discussions over last 2.5 years and teacher interviewees endorsed this view. Parents had also noticed a change: *“Staff morale has changed massively. Every teacher has a new lease on life.”*

Table 1: Staff Option Survey Data, showing a big improvement in the targeted measure

“Guaranteed and viable curriculum”	2015	2016	2017	2018
Percent Endorsement – Whole School	47.90	75.60	78.00	80.30

### Improved student reporting

The quality of student reporting has increased. As one teacher described it, *“The plain language statements increase your accountability. It’s a clear expectation. It’s actually freed us up... now our reports are tied to the assessment. I can roam around and use this [the plain-language statements] as my notepad as we are assessing to standards... we’re assessing in real time.”*

In the words of one of the Westgarth parent interviewees, *“These new reports are amazing...they are providing an access point for stuff I couldn’t work out for myself. Now you’re getting a deeper understanding. It has a lot more depth. It’s more specific.”* Both parent interviewees gave “full credit” to the school – Jo, Donald and the Westgarth staff – for their work in this space.

## ENABLERS

### *Timing*

Timing mattered. Jo and Donald were new to the school when the Victorian Curriculum was released: “It was perfect timing, in a way”. At that time, Westgarth Primary School had also been without a principal for 15 months. Teachers therefore welcomed having vision and direction in curriculum and assessment.

### *Attention to strengthening the learning culture for adults and students*

Change was visibly driven, and enacted, by school leaders. Their approach was developmental, focussing on building the capacity of adult learners to lead the learning of others (e.g., their own, colleagues and students). Their approach also built commitment, as teachers were empowered to critically engage with the Victorian Curriculum and develop personal and collective meaning. As Donald remarked, *“The power is in teachers being supported to do the work themselves... I could have done the work myself and said here it is, but that does not build anyone’s capacity”*.

### *An architecture for learning*

Time for learning was critical, and was provided (e.g., initial time release for teams, as well as curriculum days and scheduled meetings) through Department funding of half days for Victorian Curriculum implementation to work with Donald. This ‘sent’ a message that this work was valuable. An important adult learning scaffold was provided by the Westgarth Curriculum and Assessment Portal, which provided ease-of-access for teachers to resources that would support them in strengthening their practice. They continue to afford time for moderation after school.

### *Personal leadership of professional learning and capacity building*

Donald brought specific expertise and experience from a recently-completed Master of School Leadership, which comprised a three-year research study into assessment mapping: in particular, how to build teachers’ knowledge of the achievement standards, their confidence in making judgements against the standards above and below a student’s nominal year level, and consistency in judgements across and within teams via moderation practices. Sustainability has been attended to. As one teacher remarked, *“There is a lot of stuff on T-drive, so if he [Donald] left it’s all there”* [T-drive is an electronic document storage and retrieval space on a school server].

### *Authentic partnering with parents*

The processes employed authentically positioned both students and parents as partners in learning. One parent interviewee described the change as a vehicle for, *“Bringing school and home*

*together to work as a partnership” through more explicit reporting and by parents providing feedback on plain language statements across the curriculum. The school employed a model of parental engagement, with genuine and substantive opportunities offered to parents to shape school policy / practice, supported by structures and processes that were flexible and inclusive. Donald saw it simply: “If you are asking for the feedback, then you have to be open to the feedback.”*

#### *A strategic and focussed approach*

The changes at Westgarth Primary School have been purposeful and strategic in design. They have been driven by a clear vision not only for assessment and reporting, but for learning. A ‘big picture’ has always been in mind. Everything they do is connected to this picture.

## BARRIERS

Westgarth Primary School has not experienced significant barriers to the proposed change, which is an outcome of the approach described above. Initial resistance by some teachers to new ways of working was a feature, but teachers (and parents) are now realising the benefits, and those not embracing the change are in an increasing minority.

Westgarth teachers who were interviewed for this case study late in 2017 wondered about how the school would approach inducting staff new to the school, who had not been part of the learning journey to date, as their capacity and commitment couldn’t be assumed. Interviews conducted in 2018 with new teachers explored this wondering further. New teachers felt strongly that *not* being part of the development of the plain language statements was *not* an issue for them. This was because the statements were so embedded into the ‘fabric’ of planning, dialogue and learning in the school, that capacity was always being built. As one new teacher remarked, “*They [the statements] are constantly referred to in things that we do, like... our planning or reporting; everything is anchored to them... they are not an ‘add-on’.*”

## NEXT STEPS

Donald and the teachers see student agency in assessment as a critical next step. This work has already started. The school has an aspiration that it builds every students’ capacity to articulate:

- What is it that I know?
- How can I show that I know?
- Where to next for me?

In 2018, teachers have continued to refine the plain language content descriptions through dialogue with students and their explicit use in the classroom. Teachers also added illustrations to many of these statements to assist with students’ understanding (Figure 9).

## Writing - Punctuation

✚



Level D	✂	I can identify the capital letter for my name in other words.									
		<b>My name is Sam. The dog is big.</b> 									
		I can point to full stops at the end of a sentence.									
		<b>My name is Sam.</b> 									
Foundation	✂	I can use capital letters at the start of a sentence.									
		<b>The cat sat on the mat.</b>									
		I can use capital letters for someone's name.									
		<b>My friend's name is Max.</b>									
		I can use full stops at the end of a sentence.									
		<b>The cat sat on the mat.</b>									
Level 1	✂	I can use full stops to mark the end of sentences.									
		<b>The cat sat on the mat. The cat sat quietly.</b>									
		I can use a question mark to ask questions.									
		<b>What is sitting on the mat?</b>									
		I can use exclamation marks to show emotions and give commands.									
		<b>Get off the mat!</b>									
Level 1 & 2	✂	I can use capital letters to show the start of a sentence and the names of people and places.									
		<b>Today Sam and I went to New York.</b>									
Level 2	✂	I can use commas to separate items in a list in my writing.									
		<b>I like red, blue, pink and green.</b>									
Level 3	✂	I can use apostrophes to signal missing letters in contract words.									
		<table><tr><td>it is = it's</td><td>he is = he's</td><td>she is = she's</td></tr><tr><td>I am = I'm</td><td>I will = I'll</td><td>you are = you're</td></tr></table>	it is = it's	he is = he's	she is = she's	I am = I'm	I will = I'll	you are = you're			
it is = it's	he is = he's	she is = she's									
I am = I'm	I will = I'll	you are = you're									
Level 4	✂	I can use quotation marks to show dialogue.									
		<b>"I can hear something," whispered Sam.</b>									
		I can use quotation marks to show titles.									
		<b>I saw the new "Star Wars" movie.</b>									
		I can use quotation marks to show quoted (direct) speech.									
		<b>She asked, "Why?" and I said, "Why not!"</b>									

Figure 9. Illustrated I can statements for English – punctuation



In 2019, Mathematics work samples – associated with mathematically rich tasks – are being developed and collected and will be a focus of professional dialogue and moderation practice in the coming months. Further down the track, this work may be extended to Science and the Humanities.

## CONTACT

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## RESOURCES

- Westgarth plain language statements / Curriculum and Assessment Portal (contact school)
- Research paper: Assessment Maps – A study of the Potential for Distributive Leadership and Professional Learning Communities to Impact Upon Teachers' Summative Assessment Practice (contact school)

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