

## Using checklists

**By Elizabeth Arkle**

This year, in English, I really wanted to make children's planning of their writing more meaningful and something that they actually used. I noticed that all too often children would plan a piece of writing through a sequence of lessons but then almost abandon the plan and just try and write from memory. They would frequently go and get a SPAG checklist, or a year group assessment grid, and then write something that was often poorly organised and did not meet the purpose for the writing.

I wanted to give children a way to plan ideas for vocabulary and sentence structure, but also see clearly what should be in their writing so I decided to use a checklist to act as a prompt.

Before a piece of writing, I plan a checklist together with the children, that is specific to that piece of writing. We call it 'ingredients for success'. As it is developed *with* the children, not just given to them, they take it very seriously. I always start the process off by adding some non- negotiables - these will be my specific aims for this piece of writing. For example, it might be to include speech, or to focus children on expanded noun phrases for description. From there the children will start to offer what they think should be included and we develop this together. Lastly, if they have been given a next step target from their last writing, for example - to remember commas in a list - they will add this to their own.

What we include in the checklist varies from piece to piece, but means we have a very specific and relevant checklist to guide children through their writing. Pupils are encouraged to physically tick things off on their list as they go to keep them on track.

It also gives me the chance to give my children writing at greater depth a further challenge by adding other elements to their work. Similarly, I can remove elements from some children's checklists to help keep them focused on the skills they need to work on.

Planning writing in this way has really helped children to develop independence in their writing. It did need a conscious investment of time at the outset. To begin with, children would sometimes come up with simple punctuation points. Now however, they are beginning to think for themselves about what makes a good piece of writing and will make much more thoughtful contributions, such as starting sentences in different ways.

One other advantage of these more specific checklists is I can add specific targets for individual children very easily. For example, one child - although a good writer- was persistently using 'and then' in their writing. By adding this to their checklist, over a couple of pieces of writing, they have almost completely stopped doing this.

I have found checklists to be a vital resource when building pupil independence whilst still providing a form of scaffold.