How systematic writing assessment led to enhanced teacher efficacy and student achievement

> Brightpath has equipped teachers with a range of new strategies to support writing instruction and improve student understanding of the writing process.
>
> — Signe Langi

About the school

Deebing Heights State School, an Independent Public School situated in a southern suburb of the City of Ipswich, Queensland, educates just over 700 students. It opened in 2016 and is a co-educational school that caters for Prep to Year 6 students.

The Challenge

Early in the foundation of the school, the leadership team at Deebing Heights established a clear and successful process for assessing, planning and teaching **reading**. The school recognised the value of systematic collection, analysis and mapping of data, and wanted an equivalent approach for **writing**. In particular, the leadership team identified several related concerns about their writing program:

- a lack of consistency in how writing assessments were administered
- teachers' lack of confidence in assessing writing, and
- a need for greater instructional support in the teaching of writing.

Why did they choose Brightpath?

The school admin team selected Brightpath as it provided a research-based framework that mirrored the school's approach to assessing, planning and teaching reading. They felt Brightpath aligned with the school improvement agenda and supported staff performance planning goals.

Teachers reflect on the use of Brightpath at Deebing Heights

The Brightpath team recently met with *Chloe Heinrich*, Year 5 teacher and Leader of Curriculum and Inclusion for Year 6; *Signe Langi,* Year 4/5 Leader of Curriculum; and *Donna Whitman,* Head of Department, Student Services and active member of the English Vertical Team.

The meeting provided a wonderful opportunity to speak with expert educators and hear their detailed reflections on how Brightpath has supported the effective assessment and teaching of writing at Deebing Heights.

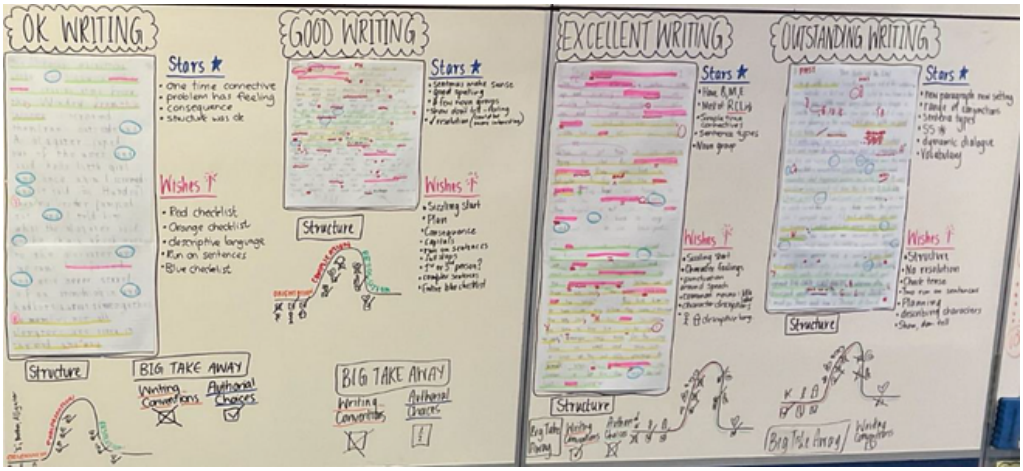
The Deebing Heights team discussed how the use of Brightpath has made a difference at their school. They noted that Brightpath has led to:

- ***Consistent, efficient assessment and feedback practices based on a quality-assured marking continuum***
- ***Improved teaching of writing across the school***
- ***Enhanced feedback and conversations with students about their writing***
- ***Developed assessment and moderation processes***
- ***Reduced teacher workload***

Consistent, efficient assessment and feedback practices based on a quality-assured marking continuum.

Teachers greatly value the way in which Brightpath clearly shows the increasing complexity and progression of writing skills from one year level to the next.

As a result, Brightpath has supported teachers in developing a consistent approach to teaching writing and a shared understanding of authorial choices and writing conventions. The school admin team has observed that the detailed terminology provided in Brightpath, about writing development, is now embedded in classroom lessons and used to create “Bump It Up” wall visuals which allows students to regularly engage with the language of writing success criteria.



An example of a Bump It Up visual (at DHSS) aligned with Brightpath Teacher's Ruler and Exemplars. Students are explicitly taught how to reflect, improve and provide feedback on writing.

> The consistent use of a shared language has helped students develop a stronger understanding of writing expectations and achievement standards. Embedding this terminology throughout lessons has also strengthened teacher clarity when modelling writing skills and providing feedback to students.
>
> — Donna Whitman

Improved teaching of writing across the school

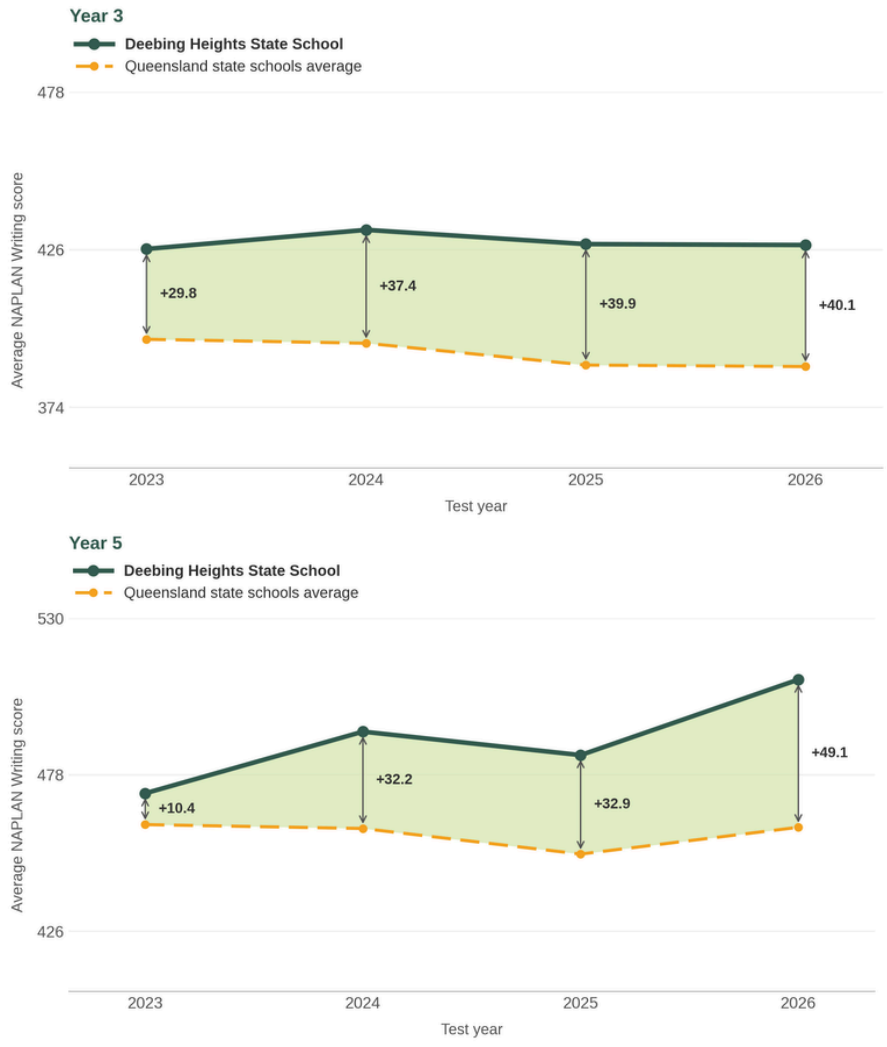
Prior to using Brightpath, teachers at the school focused on the teaching of the conventions of writing (spelling, punctuation, and grammar). Since implementing Brightpath, teachers now have a far greater understanding of the need to teach the authorial aspects of writing. These are the aspects of writing authors manipulate to achieve their effect. They include style and voice, tone, text structure, vocabulary, and ideas.

The team observed that the use of Brightpath has resulted in their teachers having greater confidence in teaching the less apparent authorial aspects of writing development. They have found that their teachers now read and discuss writing through a broader lens and there is a more balanced approach to writing instruction and clearer targeted feedback for students.

As readers will appreciate, assessment alone does not lead to improved student learning. The school has found that Brightpath contributes to the improved teaching of writing because teachers can readily match students to targeted learning goals and they have greater confidence in identifying students' next steps in learning and teaching to their students' point of need.

> Brightpath has equipped teachers with a range of new strategies to support writing instruction and improve student understanding of the writing process. Through the use of authorial choices and writing conventions, teachers have been able to more explicitly teach the features of effective writing and guide students in understanding how these elements impact the quality of their work.
>
> — Signe Langi

Deebing Heights Year 3 and Year 5 writing performance in NAPLAN



Enhanced feedback and conversations with students about their writing

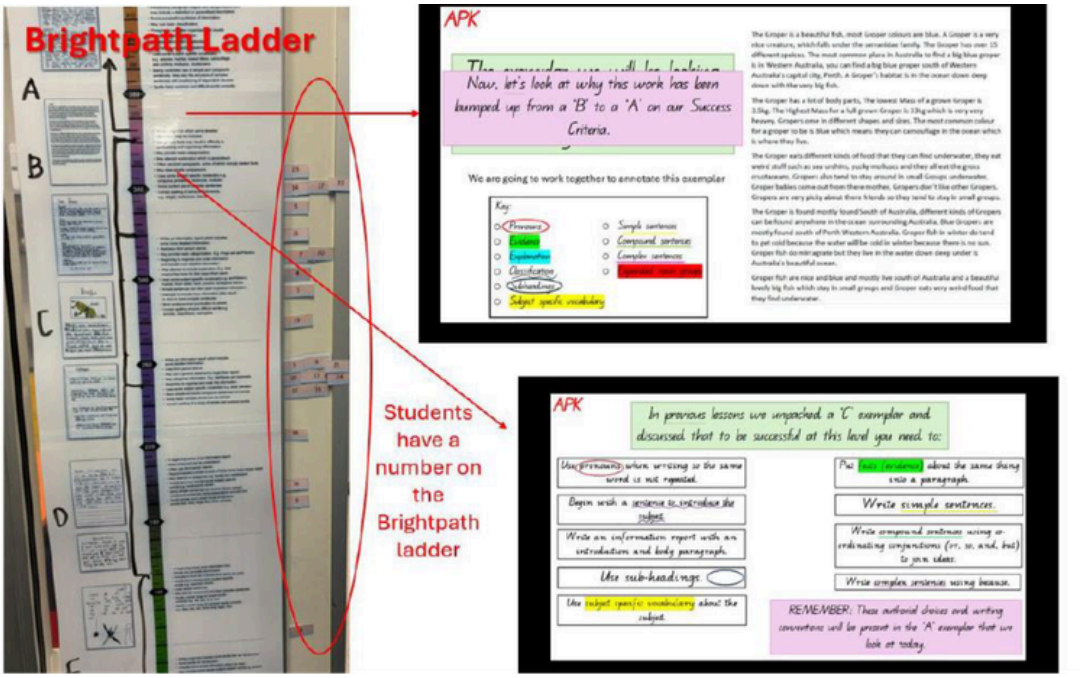
Brightpath has strengthened the way teachers at Deebing Heights provide feedback to students. Their teachers use the language of the Brightpath criteria and exemplars more consistently, allowing feedback to be more specific and purposeful. This has also encouraged richer conversations between students about writing and improvement strategies.

The use of “Bump It Up” visuals and interactive exemplar activities have become more purposeful within classrooms. Students actively examine exemplars, identifying writing elements, and discussing why certain pieces of writing demonstrate higher achievement levels.

> Students have developed a clearer understanding that strong writing is made up of a range of different elements and skills that can be improved over time.
>
> — Chloe Heinrich

Teachers have noticed that their students have a more strategic, metacognitive approach to their writing. They check for the required text elements, structure, punctuation, and language features against success criteria. They more consistently review their work to ensure key components such as paragraphs, sentence variety, and text-specific features are included during planning and writing time.

Qualitative improvements in student writing are evident, particularly in students’ confidence and efficiency during the writing process. Students are more willing to independently generate and record their ideas rather than spending excessive time deliberating over whether their ideas are “right” or “better.” This has supported greater writing fluency and improved time management during assessment tasks.



Using Brightpath to provide specific and purposeful feedback to students

Developed assessment and moderation processes

As mentioned in the introduction, in 2022 Deebing Heights State School sought a writing assessment program to strengthen teachers' confidence in assessing writing and to address concerns about inconsistencies in how writing assessments were administered across the school.

The school has subsequently found Brightpath to be a valued solution. Their teachers can now readily view student writing development across cohorts as well as report against the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) achievement standards.

The school has worked hard to learn how best to refine their assessment and moderation processes. It took time for teachers to appreciate the importance of aligning assessment conditions with Brightpath expectations.

Support was provided throughout the implementation process through professional development sessions, year-level moderation meetings, and vertical moderation sessions across Prep to Year 6. These collaborative opportunities allowed teachers to analyse the Brightpath exemplars, discuss their scores, and ensure consistency of marking across the school.

Teachers have gained confidence in using their professional judgement alongside Brightpath. They appreciate that Brightpath is a supportive moderation tool that improves teacher judgement rather than replacing it. The school now confidently uses teacher assessments of their students' writing to evaluate the success of their teaching programs.

Reduced teachers' workload

Teachers initially expressed concerns about "double marking", as student work was being assessed against both QCAA requirements and Brightpath scoring criteria. Planning meetings were used to ensure curriculum alignment with Brightpath expectations and terminology. The school is now confident that Brightpath aligns closely with curriculum expectations, achievement standards and marking guides.

	Year 6 A BP range 510 -550	Year 5 A Year 6 B BP range 450 - 510	Year 5 B Year 6 C BP range 390 - 450	Year 5 C Year 6 D BP Range 330 - 390	Year 5 D BP Range 270 - 330
Writing Conventions The rules of writing that make meaning clearer for the reader.					
Cohesion The way you link your ideas together using correct referencing, consistent tense, conjunctions and connectives.	• Noun-pronoun referencing is **usually correct within and across sentences.** • **Uses connective to link information** e.g. also, not only, however, since.	• Noun-pronoun referencing is **often correct.** • **Uses connectives** to link information e.g. as a result, alternatively, whereas.	• Noun-pronoun referencing is often **controlled.** • **Some use of connectives to link ideas.**	• **Noun-pronoun referencing is often correct.**	• As the complexity of information increases, **noun-pronoun referencing may not always be accurate.**
Sentences Using a variety of sentence types including simple, compound and complex.	• Uses a variety of sentence structures which are **controlled.** • **Often varies positioning of dependent clauses in complex sentences.**	• Uses a variety of sentence structures which are controlled.	• Varying sentence structures. • Mainly controlled use of simple and compound sentences. • May vary structure of complex sentences with positioning of dependent clauses.	• **Simple sentences are often used to present information.** • Some correct use of complex sentences.	• Simple sentences are often used to present information. • Attempts to include more information often results in **errors in more complex** sentences.
Paragraphing Related facts are grouped together under a topic sentence and sub-heading.	• **Groups like information together in paragraphs.** • Some paragraphs may have a **topic sentence.**	• Groups various aspects of the subject together e.g. habitat, diet, appearance.	• Paragraphs are often **organized** and usually **contain related information.**	• Often use **brief paragraphs,** some of which include related facts. Included information does not always directly address the subheading.	• -
Punctuation Creates a text that is easy to read and comprehend.	• **Controls** sentence level **punctuation**. • Uses apostrophe for contraction and possession, commas in lists, capitalization of proper nouns and brackets.	• Sentence level punctuation is **mostly correct** • Uses commas in lists and for phrasing, capitalization of proper nouns, brackets and **apostrophes for possession.**	• **Mostly correct use of sentence level punctuation.** • Use of commas in lists, apostrophe for contraction, capitalization of proper nouns and may use commas for phrasing. • May attempt use of brackets.	• Sentence level punctuation is **often correct.** • Sentence structure and punctuation may have errors as more information is included. • Uses commas in lists, some capitalization of proper nouns.	• **Most sentence level punctuation is correct.** • May use **commas in lists.** • **Some capitalization of proper nouns.**
Spelling Making considered choices when spelling words. Makes an effort to get simple words right.	• **Spells a range of difficult words correctly**	• Spells many common and a **range of difficult** words correctly.	• Spells **many common** and some **difficult** words correctly.	• Correct spelling of **many** simple and common words. • Correct spelling of some difficult words.	• **Correct spelling of a range of simple and common words.** • Correct spelling **of some difficult words.**

A further and unexpected benefit of Brightpath was the reduced need for cluster moderation with neighbouring schools, saving teachers a considerable amount of time.

Final comments: Advice for schools starting their Brightpath journey

Deebing Heights staff value Brightpath. However, as with the implementation of all new initiatives, teachers need time and support to learn a new program. The school's leadership provided teachers with plenty of time to navigate new processes and build confidence in the platform.

Teachers find the platform easy to navigate, however, they need time to learn how to assess their students' work against the calibrated Brightpath exemplars. The team said that this time was well spent as they now have greatly improved marking processes across the school and importantly there is a far greater understanding of how to teach both the authorial aspects of writing as well as the conventions.

Acknowledgements and thanks

We would like to acknowledge and thank Chloe Heinrich, Signe Langi and Donna Whitman, for providing us with very detailed descriptions and discussion about how Deebing Heights State School uses Brightpath. We learnt a great deal from them and we are delighted to share their journey with you.