# How this international school is closing achievement gaps in writing

> Brightpath provides built-in professional development for teachers. Some of our teachers were less confident in teaching writing, but once they started using Brightpath, it helped them better understand how students learn to write and how to teach writing.
>
> – Sara Kay Covill, Head of Primary and ELC Curriculum

## *Key points*

- ***Whole school approach to teaching writing***
- ***Consistent teacher judgment***
- ***Differentiated instruction***
- ***Students involved in their learning***
- ***Track student growth over time***

We recently met with Sara Kay Covill, Head of Primary and ELC Curriculum and Sarah Dehouche, a classroom teacher and Head of English to discuss how Brightpath has been implemented at Victoria International School of Sharjah, and how Brightpath has helped school leaders and teachers.

## About the school

*Victoria International School of Sharjah (VISS) was founded in 2007 through a collaboration with the Government of Sharjah and the State Government of Victoria, Australia. VISS which is located in the United Arab Emirates, comprises of five campuses and educates approximately 1350 students from Kindergarten to Grade 12. The school follows the Australian (Victorian) Curriculum. 95% of their students attending VISS speak English as a second or additional language.*

## Why did VISS choose Brightpath?

Following an external school inspection in 2023 that identified writing as an area of need, Sara drew on her prior experience with Brightpath — developed through her work with Independent Schools Queensland — to explore whether the program could raise the standard of writing at VISS.

Despite her familiarity with and high regard for Brightpath, Sara was committed to trialling the program first to ensure it was the right fit for the school, and that it would raise the standard of their students' writing.

In 2023, Brightpath was successfully trialled on four campuses with Grade 2 and 3 students. Once senior school leaders saw how Brightpath supported teaching and learning, that their teachers greatly valued the moderation processes and that Brightpath provided data with which to evaluate their school writing programs, they agreed to school-wide implementation.

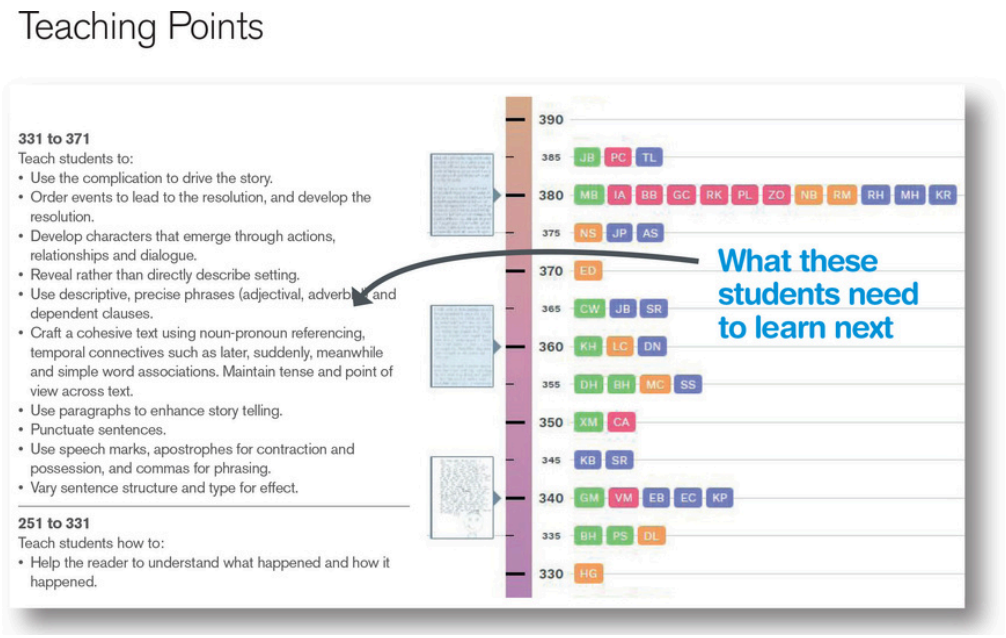
## How has Brightpath helped school leaders and teachers?

### A whole school approach

Since teachers began using Brightpath, VISS has found that they now share a common language across all grade levels and campuses, enabling more detailed and meaningful conversations about student work.

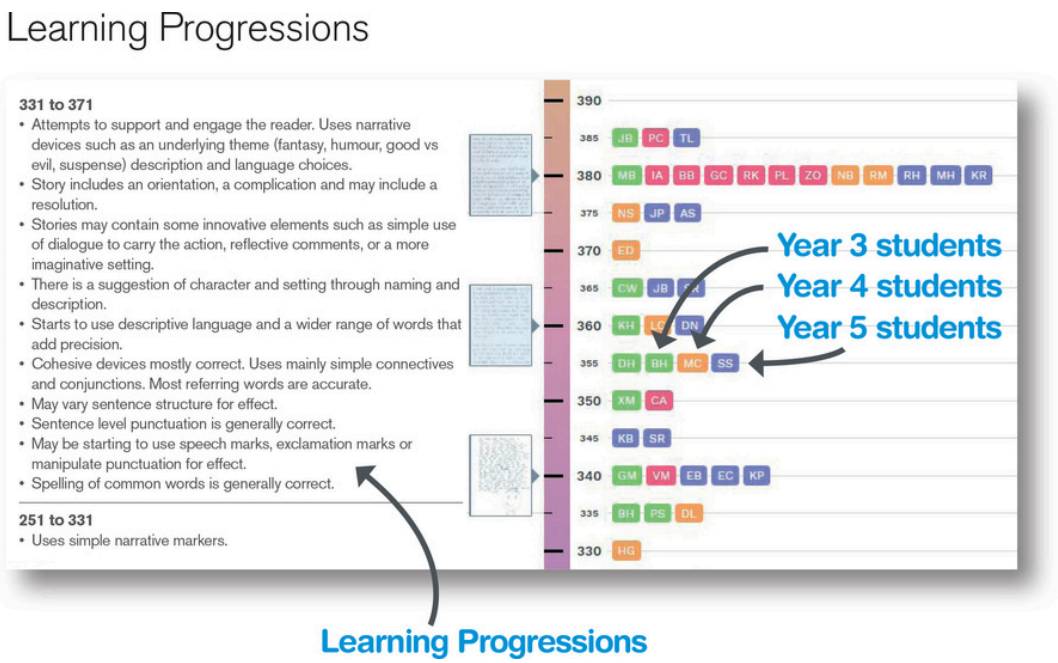
Teachers can now speak more confidently about what their students can do and what they need to learn next, and as a result, are more likely to collaborate when planning their writing programs. Sara noted that **Brightpath has made such a significant contribution to the teaching of writing that the school has now embedded it into their new structured literacy program.**

> Brightpath informs our curriculum documentation, our planning, how we think about writing and how we support teachers to be able to embed writing in their classrooms.
>
> – Sara Kay Covill




## School moderation

Each campus uses Brightpath to moderate teacher assessments of student writing. In practice, staff work together to ensure that scores are comparable across grade levels. Campus representatives then meet to verify consistent scoring across campuses.



> We've found the process to be hugely beneficial to **ensure that our judgments are consistent,** that our next steps are consistent, that our administration of the assessments is consistent. The process is really powerful because it ensures that we are not just having conversations in isolation within a campus, but we are talking about writing across the whole school.
>
> – Sarah Dehouche

## Differentiation

Sarah shared how **Brightpath has made it much easier for her to differentiate her teaching.** By scoring students at a more fine-grained level than a simple above or below standard judgement, Brightpath enables her to identify each student's point of need and teach to it more effectively.

Once she has scored students on the Brightpath scale, she can see the full spread of ability in her class relative to the teaching points.

> I can readily group students and know how to extend each group, regardless of their ability. I can see exactly the focus of teaching needed for each group and for individual students.
>
> – Sarah Dehouche

## Feedback and student agency

VISS places a strong emphasis on student agency in the context of the Victorian Curriculum and the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme (PYP). The VISS teachers have found that Brightpath not only aligns well with both curriculum requirements but allows teachers to more readily meet those requirements in how they teach writing.

> Because we can share the Brightpath performance descriptors and teaching points with students, the students are necessarily more involved in their learning. They can see an example, and they know what they're striving for. We can explicitly show them what we're expecting. We have found this particularly valuable for our students where English is not their first language.
>
> – Sarah Dehouche

Teachers now use Brightpath as part of their three-way conferences with parents and students, allowing students to show parents where they are in their learning and what they need to work on next.

Sarah also described how students use Brightpath to give each other feedback.

> We've found the process to be hugely beneficial to ensure that our judgments are consistent, that our next steps are consistent, that our administration of the assessments is consistent. The process is really powerful because it ensures that we are not just having conversations in isolation within a campus, but we are talking about writing across the whole school.'
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**It is not just the teachers who have noticed the difference. Here is what some students had to say when asked about their experience with Brightpath:**

"I used to just write and hope it was okay. Now I check the goal list to make sure I've used things like interesting adjectives or different types of sentences."

"It's fun to help my friend. I can show them exactly where they are on the ruler and help them find a way to reach the next level or get a higher score."

"I like seeing the examples because I know what a better story looks like and how to make mine look like that too."

## Brightpath is not an add-on

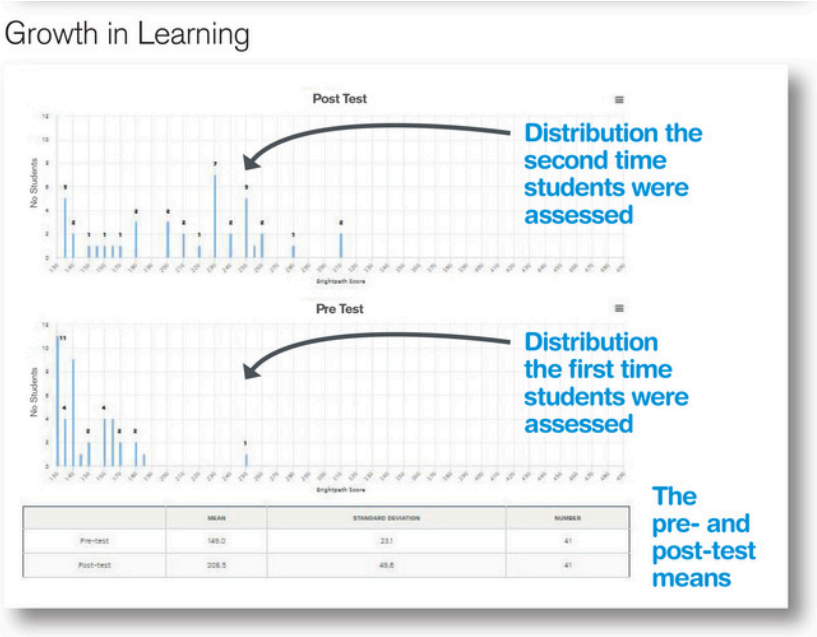
At VISS schools, Brightpath is seen as a tool that enhances the school's pedagogical approach and goals.

> 'Brightpath is not used as an add-on. It is embedded into our everyday teaching practice. It complements our teaching and learning framework and is very much part of our process now.
>
> – Sarah Dehouche

## Closing reflections – improving the teaching of writing at VISS

Before we finished our conversation, Sarah reflected on how rewarding it had been to collect data that demonstrated the effectiveness of her teaching:

> 'While we maintain a focus on the Victorian Curriculum standards, Brightpath has allowed us to track longitudinal growth more precisely. We have seen a measurable narrowing of achievement gaps, particularly within our EALD cohort. The data allows us to prove that our structured literacy sessions and MultiLit interventions are translating directly into writing proficiency.
>
> – Sarah Dehouche



Sara expanded upon Sarah's reflections and shared her insights on how Brightpath has led to improved teaching at VISS.

> Our teachers are now more confident in explicitly teaching all aspects of writing including the conventions of writing and the ways writers can manipulate language to achieve their effect.
>
> – Sara Kay Covill

Sara concluded, 'We cannot speak highly enough about Brightpath and how it supports us in terms of implementing the Australian curriculum in an international context.'

**We would like to thank Sara Kay Covill and Sarah Dehouche for taking the time to meet us and share their experiences and expertise.**