Pie Corbett’s tips and advice on effective grammar teaching

How do you teach grammar effectively?

The Key understanding
Words only yield their meaning when they’re in a sentence. Think about the ‘job’ or ‘function’ of a word in a sentence.

For example, the word ‘green’ can fulfil different functions, e.g.

Example:  
- I saw the green parrot.  green = adjective
- I’m going to play on the green this morning.  green = noun
- The council are greening the cities.  green = verb

Grammar is about the function of words in sentences, how sentences work and are tied together.

Cumulative teaching
Cumulative teaching leads to deep grammatical understanding.

- Make sure children get a ‘feel’ for grammar as early as reception and Year 1.
- Formally introduce basic grammatical terms in Year 2 (verb, adverb, adjective, noun, sentence, connective) though many Year 1 pupils can also understand such terms.
- Deepen their understanding through KS2.
- Create a grid showing exactly which terms are to be introduced in each year. Make this cumulative.

Teach in context
Concentrate on the areas of grammar that children are finding difficult. Keep using grammatical terminology and understanding during teaching of reading and writing.

Applying grammar teaching

- Run some focused and creative grammar sessions – keep them lively, interactive and multi-sensory. Children should see it, hear it, read it, then try it out.
- Discuss grammar in shared reading over a range of different text types.
- Deploy grammar skills in shared writing – choosing words, constructing sentences and linking them together.

Top tip
Hold a class quiz every half term to revisit what has been taught and assess what the children have learnt. This will help to spot any gaps in their grammar learning. The results of the quiz can then inform the next run of teaching.

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