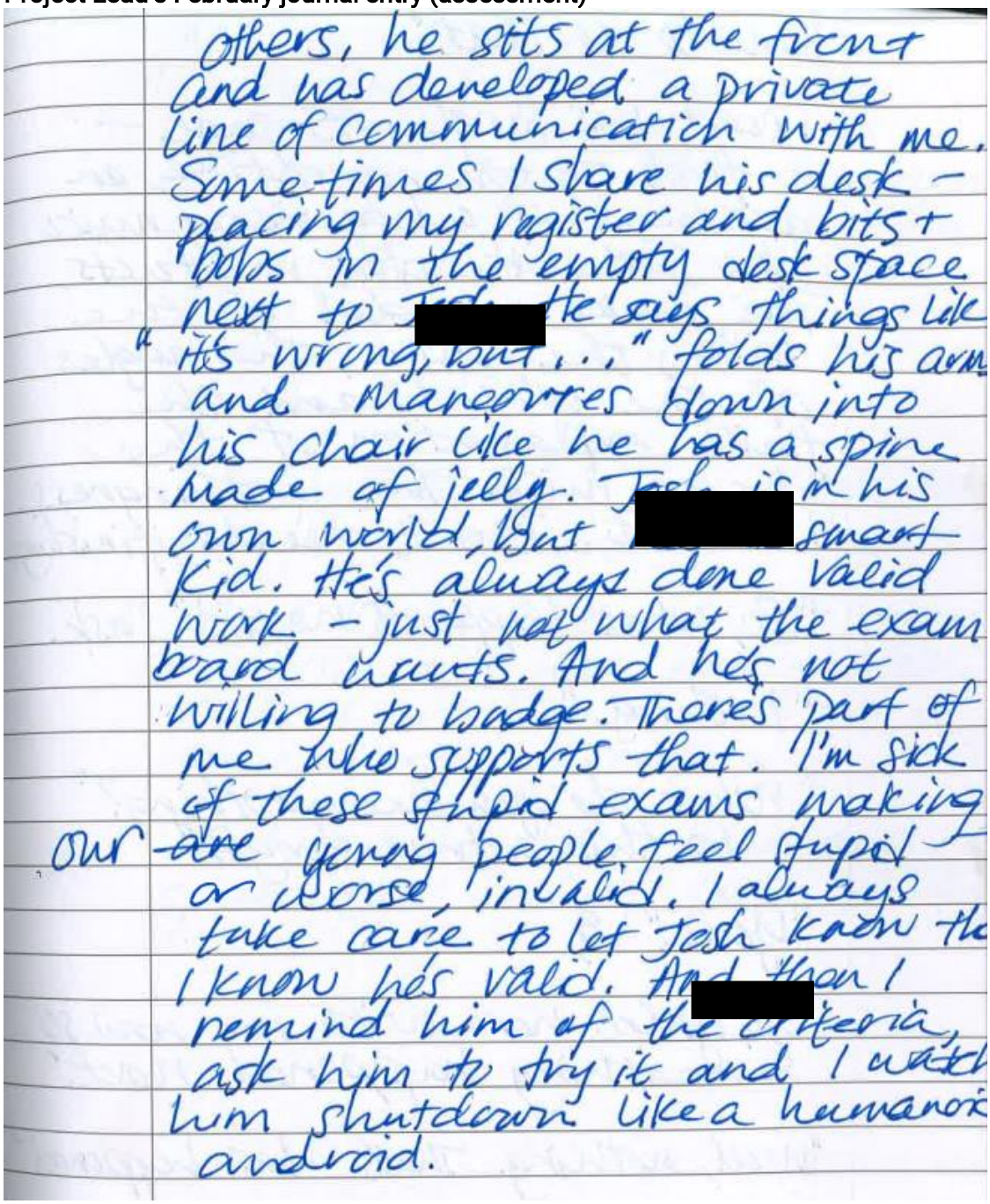
Appendix 5: Learning from this project (Uncomfortable Lessons)

Whilst lessons learned are plentiful here, it goes without saying that introducing change is not easy. There are so many factors one cannot control, so many factors outside our sphere of awareness, that in order to get to the root of the problem and open ourselves up to true learning, we need to get comfortable with being uncomfortable. Some of the lessons learned are uncomfortable lessons. There is no quick or easy fix, but I do feel more equipped to overcome these issues as a result of my awareness.

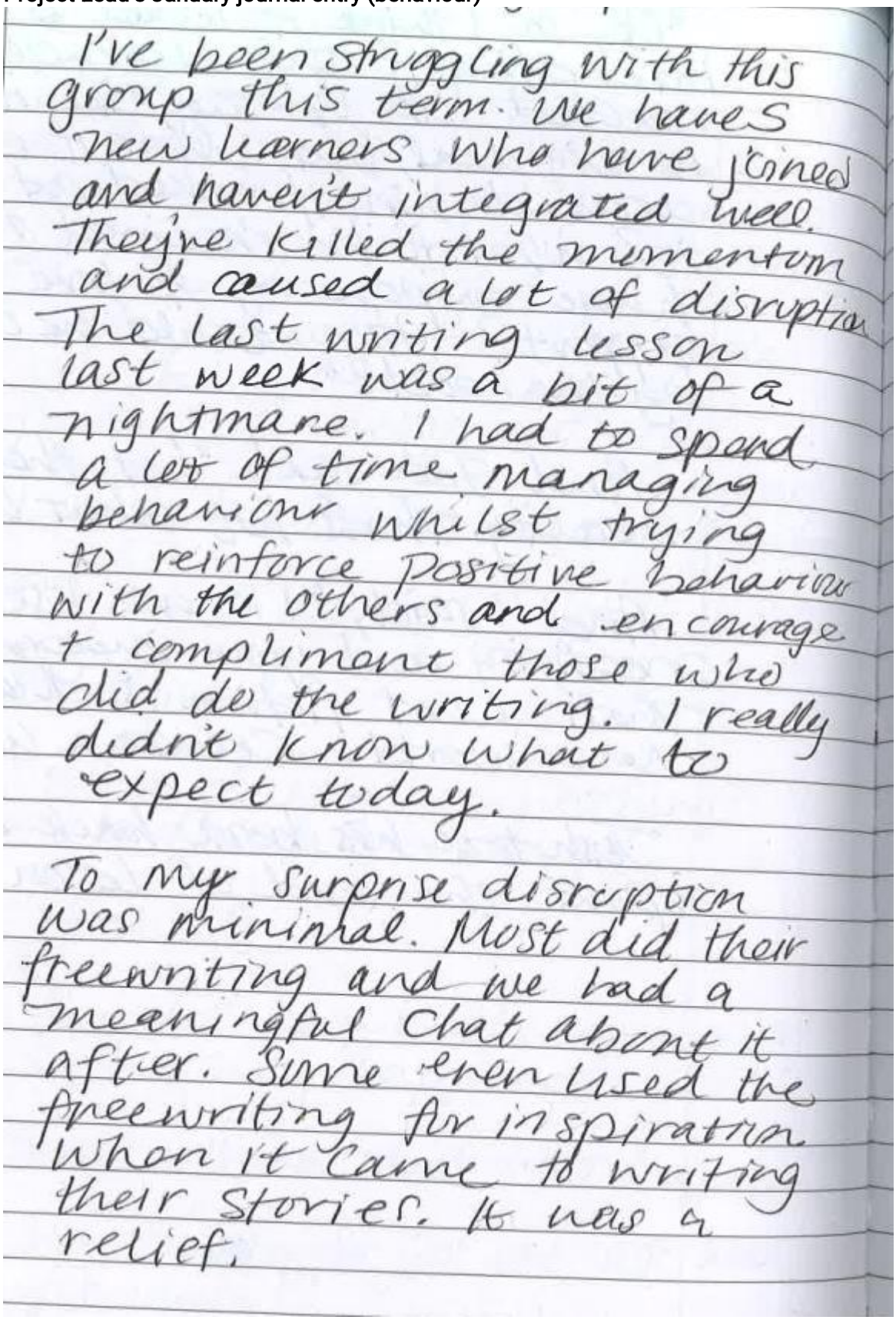
Project Lead's February journal entry (assessment)



- *Accept that some learners are just not ready or equipped to leap*

Some learners present as stubborn and determined not to engage. I have learned that all we can do is prepare for when they are ready. Learning requires openness and readiness. In order to achieve new heights, we have to be willing to leap. We take on new strategies and absorb more knowledge when we learn. These are stepping stones to new levels and higher competencies. Some learners may arrive in our classroom, despite not being equipped or feeling ready to learn. As Asraf and associates (2018) observe at the start of their study on freewriting, "Often, they cannot think beyond the surface meaning of writing prompts and are unable to generate ideas as they lack the skills." Building these types of skills takes time and persistence. If the learner is not ready, or available even, this can be an insurmountable barrier that the teacher may not be able to overcome. I had to accept this truth for a number of learners. Attendance, behaviour and significant skills gaps were issues we all had to face in this post-Covid year.

Project Lead's January journal entry (behaviour)



I've been struggling with this group this term. We have 5 new learners who have joined and haven't integrated well. They're killed the momentum and caused a lot of disruption. The last writing lesson last week was a bit of a nightmare. I had to spend a lot of time managing behaviour whilst trying to reinforce positive behaviour with the others and encourage & compliment those who did do the writing. I really didn't know what to expect today.

To my surprise disruption was minimal. Most did their freewriting and we had a meaningful chat about it after. Some even used the freewriting for inspiration when it came to writing their stories. It was a relief.

- Some problems can't be solved by the teacher or the learner alone

Whilst taking on any form of action research requires a hefty helping of optimism, we must accept that we may not (and at times cannot) solve all of the problems. Two learner participants suffered from extreme writer's block, something I had not faced before. They are bright young people who can verbally meet all the targets I could find, but simply struggled to put pen to paper. Whilst I recognised that they required some form of intervention, and I reported as much, I also recognised that I am not equipped to meet their needs in this respect. I would also argue that our GCSE English class was not the right place to address these issues.