



# Speak for Change



**Final report and recommendations from the  
Oracy All-Party Parliamentary Group Inquiry**

April 2021

# Acknowledgements



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This is not an official publication of the House of Commons or the House of Lords. All-Party Parliamentary Groups are informal groups of Members of both Houses with a common interest in particular issues. The views expressed in this report are those of the Oracy APPG.

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# 1 Foreword

Parliament is famous for being a place where talk matters – its name literally comes from the French ‘to talk’. Talk is the currency of politics – how we express our views, how we influence and persuade, how we negotiate and navigate disagreements and how we deliberate and come to decisions. But talk is also the currency of learning - how we develop and grow our ideas, understanding, thoughts and feelings and share them with others.

When my colleague and I launched this Inquiry in 2019, we said that spoken communication is as vital in the corridors and classrooms of our schools as it is in the committee rooms and chambers of Westminster.

Part-way through the Inquiry the classrooms across the country closed and we discovered with even greater clarity what we lose when education is silenced.

As a primary school teacher for ten years, I saw first-hand how young children’s ability and confidence in spoken language provides the bedrock for their learning. Throughout this Inquiry we were reminded of the educational benefits of effective and purposeful talk at every stage of schooling and how a greater focus on oral language improves outcomes for the most disadvantaged students.

We heard how it provides a foundation for social and emotional wellbeing, enabling children and young people to literally talk through their thoughts and feelings.

The evidence also showed how oracy’s long tail of benefits extends far beyond the school gates, improving young people’s chances of securing their preferred education and training pathway as they leave secondary school, and boosting their employment prospects. And we heard how oracy nourishes healthy debate, helps us bridge divides, navigate disagreement and understand different perspectives. The increasing and rightful prominence of climate change and anti-racism in our social and political discourse is down in no small part to young people using their voices, powerfully and constructively.



NOISY CLASSROOM DEBATE WORKSHOP



THE OAKS PRIMARY SCHOOL



As a group of parliamentarians, we established this Inquiry due to our shared view about the importance of oracy, and concern that its value is not fully recognised in our education system. The children and young people who would disproportionately benefit from oracy education and are hit hardest by its absence, were our main motivation. The Covid-19 pandemic shone a light on the deep-rooted disadvantage in our education system and exacerbated it. Recent research by the Centre for Education & Youth and the University of Oxford highlights how the pandemic has had a devastating impact on oracy. Two thirds of primary teachers and nearly half of secondary teachers say school closures have had a negative effect on the spoken language development of their most disadvantaged students compared with 1 in 5 teachers saying it has had a negative impact on their most advantaged pupils.

This has increased the imperative to act now.

We need a shift in emphasis with regards to the status of oracy in the education system - there is an opportunity for the Government and other agencies to play a much stronger role in building on this momentum and empowering schools and teachers. As our conclusions show, this is about balancing high expectations across the system and universal access to high-quality support and resources, with flexibility to ensure that teachers can respond nimbly to their pupils' needs. Together we can achieve so much more if oracy is rightfully valued and supported as a golden thread throughout education.

We have reason to be optimistic. Despite the challenges posed over the last year, the Inquiry found that young people, teachers, school leaders and employers place a high priority on oracy. There are many bright spots where schools and organisations are developing excellent oracy provision, proving that our ambitions are realistic and achievable. And this Inquiry has unearthed a depth and breadth of interest, experience of and commitment to oracy that we can harness.

I am so grateful to all who generously contributed their time and experience and pleased but not surprised that we have uncovered such support for our cause. We received evidence from experts, practitioners and young people, living and working across the UK, and representing a wide spectrum of political and educational viewpoints. It would be impossible to capture and represent the range and richness of contributions shared in a report. We have tried to draw out the key themes, ideas, opportunities and needs we heard. We have defined the vision we should work towards and the steps that can be taken now to help us make progress. This report is the start of the conversation, a means of opening up the channels of communication with those who can take action. So let's get talking – we have been quiet about oracy for too long!



**Emma Hardy MP**

Chair, Oracy All-Party Parliamentary Group

“

We need a shift in emphasis with regards to the status of oracy in the education system

Emma Hardy MP

”



## 2 The Speak for Change Inquiry

### 2.1 Background

*"Speech, language and communication skills are crucial to every person: for brain development in the early years and our attachment to others, for expressing ourselves and understanding others, for thinking and learning, for social interaction and emotional wellbeing, in school, as part of society and in the workplace. Yet despite their centrality, the importance of these skills continues to be widely underestimated."*<sup>1</sup>

**Bercow 10 Years On report, 2018**

The term oracy was first coined by Andrew Wilkinson in 1965 to describe 'ability in oral skills' (including speaking and listening)<sup>2</sup>, which he argued should sit alongside literacy and numeracy at the heart of schooling. But recognition of speaking and listening skills as a fundamental pillar of education goes back much further:

*"To be educated in the ancient world meant receiving formal training in speech, gesture, comportment, argumentation and listening skills. Oracy has been the heart of Classical rhetorical training. The ability to speak well was a central component of good education for centuries."*

**Dr Arlene Holmes-Henderson, University of Oxford , evidence to the Inquiry**

In 1975, the Bullock Report, *A Language for Life* stated:

*"We welcome the growth in interest in oral language in recent years, for we cannot emphasise too strongly our conviction of its importance in the education of the child. We have discussed at length the part it plays from the pre-school years onwards, its essential place in preparing a child for reading, its function as an instrument of learning and thinking, its role in social and emotional development."*

*As a consumer, a worker, a voter, a member of his community, each person has pressing reasons for being able to evaluate the words of others. He has equally pressing reasons for making his own voice heard."*

*Too many people lack the ability to do either with confidence. Too many are unable to speak articulately in any context which might test their security. The result can be acquiescence, apathy, or a dependence upon entrenched and unexamined prejudices."*

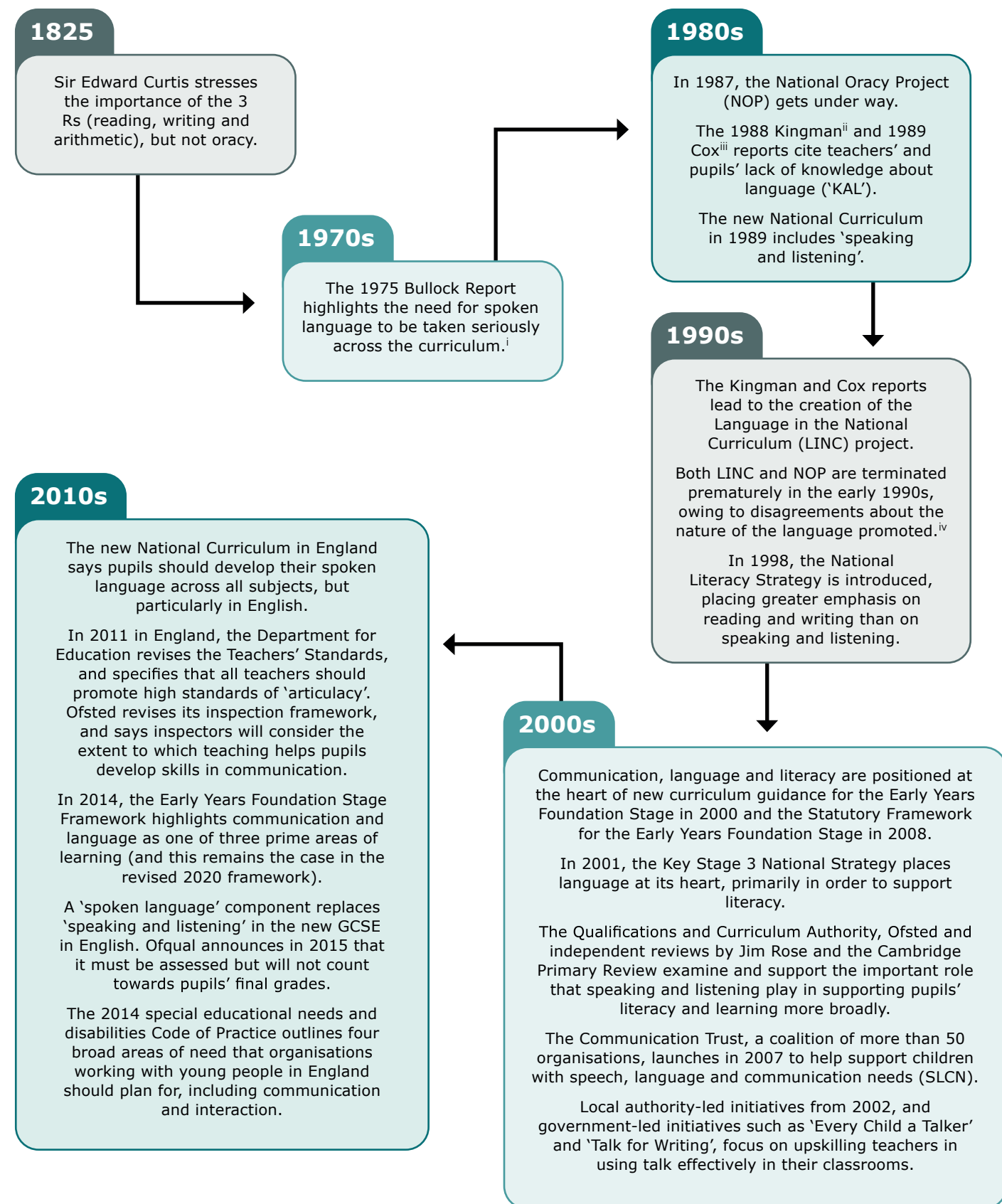
*In recent years, many schools have gone a very long way to asserting this aspect of education as one of their most important responsibilities. But there is still a great deal to be done. A priority objective for all schools is a commitment to the speech needs of their pupils and a serious study of the role of oral language in learning."*  
**Bullock report, A Language for Life, 1975<sup>3</sup>**

Over 45 years later, interest in oral language is again growing but despite the successes of the National Oracy Project in the 1980s and 90s, the introduction of the National Curriculum and influential reports such as the Bercow Report, Bullock's priority objective remains largely unmet.

Concerned about the impacts of the continued lack of status of oracy in education and inconsistencies in access to, and provision of, oracy education, the Oracy APPG launched the *Speak for Change Inquiry* in May 2019.

## 2.2 Oracy's place in policy

The following infographic provides a policy timeline from 1825 right up to the present day.



<sup>i</sup> Department of Education and Science (1975) *A Language of Life* (The Bullock Report), Department for Education and Science.

<sup>ii</sup> Department of Education and Science (1988) *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Teaching of English Language* (The Kingman Report), The Stationary Office

<sup>iii</sup> Department of Education and Science (1989) *English for Ages 5 to 16* (The Cox Report), HMSO.

<sup>iv</sup> Jones, D. (undated) 'Talking about talk: reviewing oracy in English primary education', <https://bura.brunel.ac.uk/bitstream/2438/13437/3/FullText.pdf>



# 3 About the *Speak for Change* Inquiry

## 3.1 Aims and scope of the Inquiry

The Inquiry aimed to investigate the provision of oracy education in the UK, to assess its impact and identify actions to enable all children to access the benefits of oracy.

The Inquiry set out three main areas of interest:

### 1. Value and impact

What is the impact of oracy education at different life stages, from the Early Years through to employment, and how does the delivery of effective oracy education contribute to individual and societal outcomes?

### 2. Provision and access

What is the current state of provision of oracy education across the UK, primarily in England, who is missing out and what factors create unequal access to oracy education?

### 3. Barriers to improving oracy education

What are the barriers to the provision of a quality oracy education for all, and what is the role of government and other bodies in addressing these?

The Inquiry primarily focused on oracy education in schools in England but we also explored the opportunities for, and impact of, oracy in wider settings, and among wider age groups, from the early years to post-16.

With the Covid-19 pandemic emerging part-way through the Inquiry, we extended the scope of the Inquiry and issued a new call for evidence regarding the impact of school closures and disruption to teaching and learning on oracy.

## 3.2 Evidence-gathering process

We welcomed evidence from hundreds of contributors from the education sector, businesses, academia and individual teachers, parents, children and young people including:

- 130 written submissions representing a diverse range of individuals and organisations.
- Additional research and polling undertaken by CfEY and the University of Oxford in March 2021 (Teacher Tapp - 7019 respondents, YouGov - 511 respondents, and Watchsted). In addition, the Inquiry has directly received data from the Oracy Network on the polling of parents (conducted by Parent Ping, August 2020, 500 respondents) and teachers (conducted by Teacher Tapp, March 2020, 6205 respondents).
- Two surveys of teachers (268 responses).
- Polling of parents (conducted by Parent Ping, August 2020, 500 respondents), teachers (conducted by Teacher Tapp, March 2020 and March 2021) and young people (conducted by YouGov), led by Voice 21 and CfEY.
- Seminars and events organised by Oracy Network members and other organisations.
- Case studies submitted by schools.

All submissions are listed in Section 10 of this report and the full evidence is available on the [Oracy APPG website](#).

In December 2020, we released an interim report highlighting emerging themes and areas for action.<sup>4</sup>

## 3.3 Reporting

This report is not a full digest of all evidence received and does not aim to provide detailed analysis of all the available research or practice relating to oracy.

Using the evidence submitted to the Inquiry, we aim to present a case as to why oracy education matters, the changes required to ensure that all children and young people can benefit from oracy education and the practical steps that need to be taken now to make progress on achieving this.

TORRIANO PRIMARY SCHOOL



# 4 Introduction

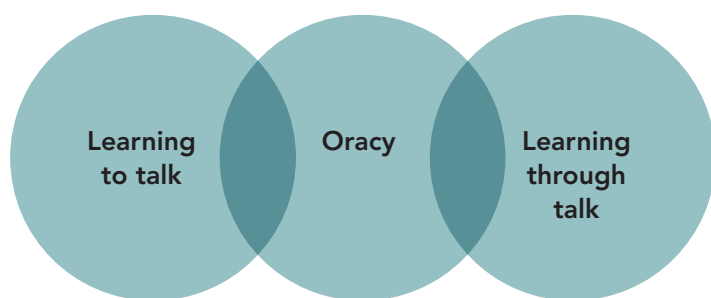
## 4.1 What is oracy?

There is no single definition of oracy accepted across the education sector and a wide range of terminology is used to describe the concepts, ideas and approaches encapsulated in this Inquiry. Indeed, the lack of a shared language and understanding of the meaning of oracy (and related terms such as dialogue, spoken language, oral communication, and speaking and listening) was identified as a barrier to advancing oracy education. Contributors argued that the merging of terms and the loose application of language to describe oracy education was unhelpful and resulted in confusion of purpose, mixed messaging and obfuscation.

Whilst recognising the risks of imprecise language and the advantages of shared language and understanding, this Inquiry did not seek to provide a definitive position. Instead, to capture a wide range of contributions, we adopted a deliberately broad definition of 'oracy' for the purposes of the Inquiry:

Oracy is the ability to speak eloquently, to articulate ideas and thoughts, to influence through talking, to collaborate with peers and to express views confidently and appropriately.

Oracy refers both to the development of speaking and listening skills, and the effective use of spoken language in teaching and learning. It is to speech what literacy is to reading and writing, and numeracy is to Maths.



VOICE 21

## 4.2 What is oracy education?

The Inquiry also purposely took an expansive view of what constitutes oracy education. We received many submissions defining and outlining the hallmarks, features, labels and components of effective, high-quality oracy education.

Our understanding encompasses the range of views expressed in submissions to the Inquiry, which suggested that oracy education:

- involves learning the specific linguistic, cognitive, physical and social-emotional knowledge and skills that support effective spoken communication in a range of contexts and settings
- includes structuring ideas verbally, choosing the right vocabulary, using rhetorical devices and tonal variation, and understanding one's audience
- involves both processes and outcomes: learning through talk on the one hand and learning to talk on the other
- includes both presentational talk for sharing ideas more formally with others (such as public speaking, debate and interviews) and the exploratory talk we use to develop shared understanding, solve problems and achieve creative solutions through discussion
- involves listening and valuing everyone's voice
- is about what pupils and their teachers say and do
- is inclusive, taking account of our most vulnerable children with poor language, whether due to limited experience or a developmental language disorder
- involves speaking confidently and appropriately across a variety of contexts
- is not limited to standard English and includes all educationally and socially productive talk regardless of pronunciation or dialect<sup>5</sup>
- supports young people's learning and development in school and in their later lives, at work and in their communities.

## 4.3 Summary of the latest research findings on oracy in schools

New research conducted by The Centre for Education and Youth and the University of Oxford draws on polling of young people and teachers in March 2021 by YouGov and TeacherTapp.

### The impact of the pandemic on oracy in schools

Two thirds of primary teachers (66%) and nearly half (44%) of secondary teachers say school closures during the pandemic had a negative effect on the spoken language development of pupils eligible for free school meals. 1 in 5 teachers said this of their most advantaged pupils.

7 in 10 teachers said teaching online had a negative impact on opportunities for developing pupils' oracy skills. Teachers working in state-funded settings were more than twice as likely teachers in private schools to say that online teaching had a 'significantly negative' impact on pupils' oracy skills.

### The prioritisation of oracy across schools

As schools re-open, teachers place a high priority on oracy. 8 in 10 headteachers say oracy should be essential or high priority as schools re-open; 6 in 10 classroom teachers say this. Prioritisation differs by phase, with nearly three quarters (73%) of primary teachers saying oracy should be high priority as schools re-open, in comparison with nearly half (49%) of secondary teachers.

Despite it being a statutory part of the National Curriculum, less than a quarter (23%) of secondary teachers and less than half (46%) of primary teachers say they are confident in their understanding of the 'spoken language' requirements outlined in the National Curriculum. 4 in 10 secondary teachers (39%) say they are 'not at all confident'.

### What young people think about oracy

Young people place a high priority on oracy, with three quarters saying it is very important to young people (contrasting with 54% saying this of numeracy).

Worryingly, while 8 in 10 (78%) young people say schools should prioritise oracy 'a lot', only a third (32%) say their school/education did so.

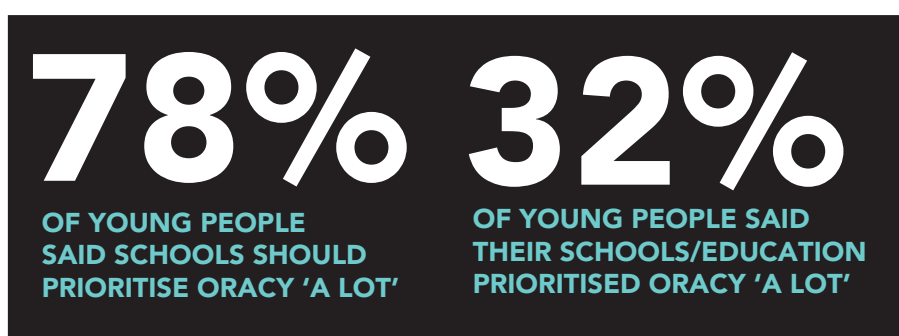
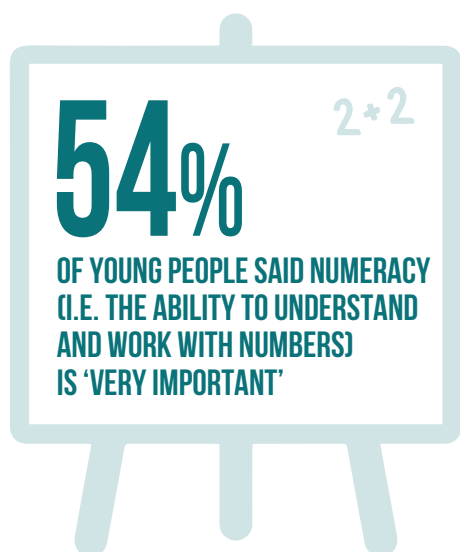
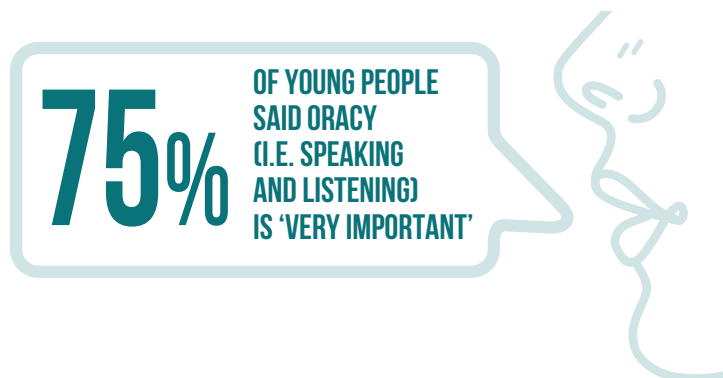
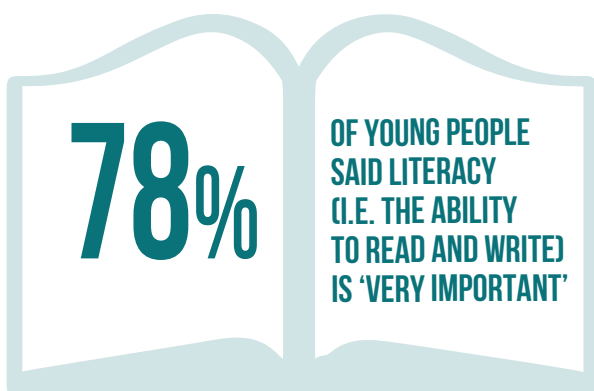
Furthermore, less than half of unemployed young people (47%) believe their schooling/education helped them develop good oracy skills. This contrasts with two thirds of full-time students (67%) and employed young people (69%).





## 5 Why does oracy education matter?

How important is oracy to children and young people? (n=511)



CENTRE FOR EDUCATION & YOUTH AND THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD, MARCH 2021

CfEY's and the University of Oxford research in March 2021 shows that three quarters of young people say oracy is 'very important' to young people. They see oracy as of comparable importance to literacy, and more important than numeracy. However, young people believe that schools do not prioritise oracy highly enough: more than 7 in 10 (71%) of young people said their school prioritised literacy and numeracy 'a lot', but less than a third (32%) said their school prioritised oracy 'a lot'. This stands in sharp contrast to the extent to which young people feel schools *should* prioritise oracy. Nearly 8 in 10 young people (78%) said schools should prioritise oracy 'a lot'. 92% of parents and 96% of teachers think education should help children develop a range of skills like critical thinking, problem solving and communication.<sup>8</sup>

*"Some people are naturally good speakers but others may need to be taught in order to become confident public speakers. Speaking is similar to a sports skill, you have to practise. Most jobs we can think of require you to communicate in some way or another."*

**Year 5 pupil, Plymouth Oracy Project, evidence to the Inquiry**

*"Not being able to express yourself confidently, it can affect different aspects of your life. That can be making friends, going to a new workplace, it doesn't matter only on a broader scale but it's the little things as well. In the long run your wellbeing will be impacted if you are not able to speak confidently."*

**We Speak, evidence to the Inquiry and schools evidence session**





YEAR 3 READING LESSON AT ST FRANCIS DE SALES CATHOLIC JUNIOR SCHOOL

Over the course of this Inquiry, we have heard compelling evidence from educational experts (both UK-based and international), research bodies and academics, school leaders, teachers, parents, children and young people as to why oracy matters and the detrimental effects of an absence of oracy education.

The evidence identified the multifaceted and manifold benefits of oracy education in promoting and supporting learning, and developing children and young people's oral language skills. It improves their competence, agility, and confidence as communicators, and enables success in life beyond education.

The evidence related to three main areas:

### **Cognitive, academic and learning outcomes**

- Academic outcomes
- Literacy
- Teaching and learning

### **Personal, social and non-cognitive skills**

- Wellbeing, mental health, and social and emotional skills
- Confidence and self-esteem

### **Outcomes in life beyond school**

- Employability
- Progression to further and higher education

## **5.1 Cognitive, academic and learning outcomes**

More than three quarters of teachers (77%) think oracy is vital for overall attainment across the curriculum.<sup>9</sup>

Submissions to the Inquiry outlined the robust evidence base demonstrating the positive impacts of oracy education on children and young people's cognitive development, learning and academic outcomes throughout their schooling.

*"Cognitive gains associated with effective spoken communication skills include improved attainment in traditional subject learning; literacy skills; cognitive reasoning; [and the] transfer of comprehension and reasoning skills to other subjects."*

### **Oracy Cambridge, evidence to the Inquiry**

*"[We] see spoken language as the foremost medium of learning which includes the full potential range of oral forms and functions and the ability to draw on a wide, diverse and flexible repertoire as well as indicating the social, cultural and individual nature of language. In the classroom, spoken language is a vehicle for learning but should also be seen as an area of language study in its own right."*

### **UK Literacy Association, evidence to the Inquiry**

### **5.1.1 Academic outcomes**

Contributors emphasised the interrelationship between language and cognition in early child development and how exposure to language and interaction in a child's early years affects their cognitive development and subsequent academic achievement. Language levels at age two predict reading, writing and Maths ability when starting school. Children with poor language skills at age 5 are at high risk of low achievement at age 7 and beyond.<sup>10</sup> Children with poor language at age 5 are 6 times less likely to reach the expected standard in English at age 11 than those with good language at that age, and 11 times less likely to achieve the expected standard in Maths.<sup>11</sup>

*"Oracy is a crucial part of the early child development that takes place during the Early Years Foundation Stage (the period from birth to five years old). It is only once we have learned to speak that we can express our ideas, needs, feelings and wishes, and communicate effectively with those around us."*<sup>12</sup>

Oracy's contribution to accelerating academic progress has been evidenced by Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) trials and guidance. Pupils who participate in oral language interventions make approximately five months' additional progress over a year, rising to six months for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.<sup>13</sup>

## Early Years

In the Early Years, a focus on communication and language is beneficial in supporting children's language development, vocabulary and reading.

The EEF Early Years Toolkit finds that children who are supported with communication and language approaches make approximately six months' additional progress over the course of a year<sup>i</sup>, with some studies showing larger gains for disadvantaged children.

**"Early communication is seen as essential for the development of thinking and reasoning, self-regulation, behaviour and access to education."**

Karen Daniels, Sheffield University, evidence to the Inquiry

**"Early Years providers and primary schools, in particular, have a critical role to play as they are the first substantial and significant influence on children outside of family and friends. Establishing strong oral skills and a willingness to speak and listen as a part of a child's self-identity, at an early stage, is important."**

Kate Irvine, Early Years Network Lead Teacher, SLE for Language & Literacy, Bristol, evidence to the Inquiry

## Primary

At primary stage, spoken language forms an important part of the EEF's guidance for improving literacy at Key Stages 1<sup>ii</sup> and 2<sup>iii</sup>. A focus on oral language skills is especially important for the development of a range of reading and writing skills in this age group.

Similar patterns to those in Early Years are apparent throughout both primary and secondary schooling, with the EEF noting in its Teaching and Learning Toolkit:

**"Overall, studies of oral language interventions consistently show positive impact on learning, including on oral language skills and reading comprehension. On average, pupils who participate in oral language interventions make approximately five months' additional progress over the course of a year."**

EEF-funded studies, such as on dialogic teaching, have found evidence that cognitively challenging classroom talk can lead to gains for Key Stage 2 pupils in English, maths and science.<sup>iv</sup>

The EEF finds that while all pupils appear to benefit from oral language interventions, some studies show greater benefits for younger children and pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

**"Spoken language is the bedrock of children's personal, social, cultural, cognitive, creative and imaginative development. It is a means of thinking through ideas as well as a medium of communication and the most important resource for teaching and learning in and beyond the classroom."**

UK Literacy Association, evidence to the Inquiry

**"Our Year Six's wanted to be confident and ready for the next phase. They need to be able to speak for themselves, and take an active role in their own learning as they get older. They want to be able to leave us at primary being able to listen well, have a good social confidence, understand [that] body language and eye contact are key in a conversation and be able to conduct and influence a detailed and articulate conversation."**

Laura Fletcher, Wexham Court Primary School, evidence to the Inquiry

## Secondary

The EEF's guidance report *Improving Literacy in Secondary Schools*<sup>vii</sup> highlights the value of providing opportunities for structured talk to all secondary students across all subjects. The report emphasises the idea that talk matters both in its own right and because of its impact on other aspects of learning, including reading and writing, across the curriculum.

Elsewhere, studies have shown how better language ability is linked with improved GCSE grades in English and maths.<sup>viii</sup>

**"Foremost among the current arguments for an emphasis on spoken language in classrooms is the**

**link between speech and language proficiency and subsequent outcomes in education and beyond."**<sup>ix</sup>

**"The National Curriculum for mathematics reflects the importance of spoken language in pupils' development across the whole curriculum cognitively, socially and linguistically. The quality and variety of language that pupils hear and speak are key factors in developing their mathematical vocabulary and presenting a mathematical justification, argument or proof."**

Cathy Mellor, Oracy for Everyone, evidence to the Inquiry

<sup>i</sup> Education Endowment Foundation (undated) 'Communication and language approaches', Education Endowment Foundation website, <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/early-years-toolkit/communication-and-language-approaches>.

<sup>ii</sup> Education Endowment Foundation (2020) *Improving Literacy in Key Stage 1*, Education Endowment Foundation, <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/tools/guidance-reports/literacy-ks-1>.

<sup>iii</sup> Education Endowment Foundation (2017) *Improving Literacy in Key Stage 2*, Education Endowment Foundation, <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/tools/guidance-reports/literacy-ks-2>.

<sup>iv</sup> Education Endowment Foundation (undated) 'Oral language interventions', Education Endowment Foundation website, <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit/oral-language-interventions>.

<sup>v</sup> Education Endowment Foundation (2017) 'Dialogic teaching', Education Endowment Foundation website, <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/dialogic-teaching>.

<sup>vi</sup> A follow-up study found no impact on KS2 results, although the EEF notes it is likely that many schools did not implement the programme in Year 6, prior to the KS2 testing; see Education Endowment Foundation (2019) 'Addendum – added 2019', to Education Endowment Foundation (2017) *Dialogic Teaching: Evaluation report and executive summary*, Education Endowment Foundation, [https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Projects/Evaluation\\_Reports/Dialogic\\_Teaching\\_addendum\\_report%2C%2AD\\_final\\_for\\_publication.pdf](https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Projects/Evaluation_Reports/Dialogic_Teaching_addendum_report%2C%2AD_final_for_publication.pdf).

<sup>vii</sup> Education Endowment Foundation (2019) *Improving Literacy in Secondary Schools*, Education Endowment Foundation, <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/tools/guidance-reports/improving-literacy-in-secondary-schools>.

<sup>viii</sup> Spencer, S., Clegg, J., Stackhouse, J. and Rush, R. (2017) 'Contribution of spoken language and socio-economic background to adolescents' educational achievement at age 16 years', *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*, 52(2), pp. 184–196, [https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/98306/9/WRRO\\_98306.pdf](https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/98306/9/WRRO_98306.pdf).

<sup>ix</sup> Knight, R. (2020) *Classroom Talk: Evidence-based teaching for enquiring teachers*, Critical Publishing.

The development, articulation and rehearsal of thoughts and ideas in speech improve the quality of academic work. In line with the EEF's findings, contributors explained how purposeful classroom talk aids knowledge retention and recall as well as the transference of knowledge between subject domains.

*"Children who were taught the art of reasoned discussion significantly improved their scores in Maths and science. They also increased their scores on Raven's Progressive Matrices test, a standardised psychology test of non-verbal reasoning."*

**Professor Neil Mercer, University of Cambridge, evidence to the Inquiry**

In another study, pupils who experienced just 20 weeks of dialogic teaching made, on average, two months more additional progress in English and science, and one month in Maths.<sup>14</sup>

*"If students can articulate themselves clearly, effectively and confidently in conversation, they are far more likely to be able to express themselves well in writing. That is why teachers must demand excellent standards of oracy in their classrooms and again, explicitly model how to use academic language in their subject, mindful that everything they say in a lesson is a form of modelling."*

**Commission on the Forgotten Third<sup>15</sup>**

Case studies and research findings from teachers and school leaders detailed how a focus on oracy had improved learning and increased standards; subject specialists outlined how oracy supports achievement across the curriculum.

*"History is about identifying, supporting, and articulating a judgement – sometimes around very controversial topics – and so oracy is key. Oracy is not just about speaking but [also] listening, and the consideration of an opposing argument is key to justifying your own: it is a poor historian who fails to even acknowledge an alternative stance!"*

**Rhian Fender, head of History, Hinchingsbrook School, evidence to the Inquiry**

*"It does a disservice to students if oracy-based pedagogies are limited to their traditional domain of English and performing arts. Teachers should enhance oracy through their teaching regardless of their subject and that all teaching can be enhanced by oracy regardless of the subject. Maths and science teachers are as passionate about the power of oracy as drama or modern foreign languages departments. Their enthusiasm for incorporating oracy in their lessons is not because it makes them fun, engaging or dynamic (although it does), but because it works."*

**Voice 21, evidence to the Inquiry**



SCHOOL 21



BISHOP YOUNG ACADEMY





## Case Study: The Oaks Primary School

The Oaks Primary School in Ipswich serves an area of relatively high deprivation. Their school leaders wanted to find ways to improve academic outcomes in Key Stage 2, and they turned to oracy.

As Ipswich received funding as an opportunity area, The Oaks was able to use this to access high-quality support and continuing professional development (CPD) on oracy. Using the funding they formed a partnership with 10 other local schools, developing their whole school approaches to oracy, and cascading this learning to their colleagues.

"Across our ten schools, we experienced many students who did not benefit from 'talk-rich' environments or the early-life experiences of their more advantaged peers. We are therefore passionate about driving change in this area and are committed to improving the oracy skills of our students in the hope of closing this gap. We meet regularly to share best practice, hold teach-meets, tour each other's schools and we have hosted an oracy showcase event for all the schools to participate in."

At The Oaks, this training was led by an appointed oracy lead, but buy-in from senior staff really made the difference:

"Throughout this the input of the senior leadership team has been crucial. Oracy was written into the school development plan for this academic year. We had a staff development plan, and asked teachers to have an oracy outcome at the end of their topics."

Teachers use oracy progression statements to help them track pupils' progress in oracy and inform lesson planning. During lessons, teachers use techniques including: using sentence stems to scaffold pupils' talk; and pupils taking on talk 'roles', such as 'summariser', 'questioner', 'balancer', 'builder', 'challenger' and 'motivator'.

Staff at the school believe oracy is having a positive impact on teaching and learning, particularly in areas such as vocabulary, Pupil Premium underachievement, engagement, positive learning behaviours and retention of facts.

"It's still early days, but we are seeing some improvements in written work as well as obviously in spoken language. We were [also] seeing improvements in their Maths reasoning skills. To actually see tangible outcomes in mathematics, particularly in reasoning which is an area that has traditionally been a challenge for us, has been very exciting and we've now seen those improvements in other areas of the curriculum as well."

**Jeremy Pentreath, headteacher**

**Voice 21 and The Oaks Primary School, evidence to the Inquiry**



## 5.1.2 Language development, vocabulary acquisition and literacy

Whilst much of the evidence highlights how oracy underpins and reinforces learning and academic achievement in general, contributors stressed the specific role of oracy education in relation to language development, vocabulary acquisition and literacy.

Oral language and literacy are described as “inseparable friends who take turns to piggy-back on each other during the school years and beyond”<sup>16</sup> and James Britton famously stated that “reading and writing float on a sea of talk.”<sup>17</sup>

*“Oral language skills at kindergarten are the strongest overall predictor of reading performance, stronger even than early reading skills themselves.”*

**Professor Julie Dockrell, UCL Institute of Education, evidence to the Inquiry**

In their 2017 review of early language development, Law et al. note that children’s oral language skills support their reading and writing ability<sup>18</sup>, and Hulme et al.’s research emphasises the causal role of phoneme awareness and letter knowledge in learning to decode print.<sup>19</sup>

The reverse is also true, with Breadmore et al.’s 2019 review of literacy development highlighting how oral language difficulties often precede reading comprehension difficulties.<sup>20</sup>

*“The strong push on phonics in schools has increased the level of decoding skills amongst children in the first two years of school. However, children are failing to gain the equivalent of level 4b in reading at the age of 11 predominantly because of poor comprehension skills. This highlights the importance of spoken language in relation to literacy. Government must signal that it takes this challenge seriously. Spoken language skills should also continue to be valued as an essential element of literacy.”*

**National Literacy Trust, evidence to the Inquiry**

Importantly, evidence indicates that a focus on pupils’ oral language can improve literacy, including reading, writing and vocabulary, throughout their schooling, from the Early Years through to Key Stage 4:<sup>21</sup>

*“Starting with the development of speech, language and communication in Early Years, through phonics, early reading and the acquisition of an extended vocabulary, oracy is an integral part of children developing the necessary literacy skills to be successful at school and beyond. This includes the development of disciplinary literacy that supports further academic and vocational studies and employment.”*

**Stephen Tierney, Headteachers Roundtable, evidence to the Inquiry**

*“Being able to understand and be understood orally is the key to success later in life but also in learning; if you can’t say it, you can’t write it. ... If a child can talk well, they are more likely to write and read well.”*

**Bec Tulloch, associate assistant headteacher, St Ambrose Barlow RC High School, evidence to the Inquiry**

Evidence also suggests that structured and purposeful talk in the classroom is one of the most effective means of building vocabulary:<sup>22</sup>

*“Rich, structured talk is a solution to closing the vocabulary gap in our classroom. If this is twinned with high-quality reading instruction, then we are well on the way to helping children thrive with any curriculum.”*

**Alex Quigley, Education Endowment Foundation<sup>23</sup>**

A limited vocabulary affects a child’s academic performance<sup>24</sup>, but the knock-on effects can also be significant. It can impact their ability to engage with and access learning which can lower their self-esteem, increase the risk of poor behaviour and dropping out of education, and ultimately hamper their prospects.

Whilst oracy’s contribution to vocabulary development is often considered to be primarily a concern of Early Years and primary settings, contributors highlighted the beneficial impacts on vocabulary of sustaining a focus on oracy beyond primary school.



Research has found that teachers believe the transition between primary and secondary school can negatively impact pupils' vocabulary. Year 7 pupils are exposed to a huge amount of new language, up to 3 or 4 times as many words a day, partly as a result of the increase in "academic vocabulary", with 43% of pupils identified as having a word gap<sup>25</sup>. The research identifies oracy as playing an important role in helping to bridge this transition<sup>26</sup>. Well-planned and structured talk has a unique efficacy with regards to vocabulary development as Beck et al. note:

*"The problem is that it is not so easy to learn word meanings from written context. Written context lacks many of the features of oral language that support learning new word meanings, such as intonation, body language, and shared physical surroundings. As such, written language is a far less effective vehicle for learning new words than oral language."*<sup>27</sup>

A talk-rich classroom enables students to hear, understand and use new vocabulary in context with their teachers and their peers.

*"We strongly believe that children need a rich language environment to close the word gap...children's vocabulary and language mastery needs to be fully supported throughout their school journey both by teachers and parents to ensure they can truly express themselves and fulfil their learning and life potential. Without this, confidence, enjoyment of school, academic outcomes, a sense of wellbeing and future employment prospects all suffer."*

**Oxford University Press, evidence to the Inquiry**

GEORGE SALTER ACADEMY. PHOTO CREDIT, CUREE



## Case study: Vocabulary language support at transition

"We have worked with over 102 schools in Blackpool, Sandwell, Staffordshire, Walsall, Hereford and across the country in an EEF trial. The focus has been on supporting children (around the KS2/KS3 transition) who are struggling to access the curriculum because of barriers to literacy, through use of a structured diagnostic process and interventions by teachers that are carefully matched to precisely identified needs.

Our evidence demonstrates that without an emphasis on developing oracy skills, pupils can struggle to gain key reading skills, which in turn leads to them finding it difficult to access the curriculum as they enter secondary school. This can lead to a vicious cycle of frustration and behavioural issues that impact on their engagement in learning.

In the Blackpool area, approximately 20% of children were entering KS3 with KS1 reading levels. The children were sufficiently 'streetwise' and 'classroom wise' to have masked the issues.

In this project many of the schools used a vocabulary intervention, where teachers introduced valuable vocabulary, modelled usage and gave children opportunities to discuss the word meaning and read the words aloud prior to completing writing activities exercises. [We have found] a very targeted approach can be beneficial for pupils."

**Professor Philippa Cordingley, Bart Crisp and Rebecca Raybould, CUREE, evidence to the Inquiry**

### 5.1.3 Quality of teaching

Along with the direct benefits to student learning, spoken language is at the heart of effective teaching practice.

*"Talk is the most powerful tool of communication in the classroom and it is fundamentally central to the acts of teaching and learning".*

**Professor Frank Hardman, University of York<sup>28</sup>**

Teachers described how explicitly and deliberately focusing on oracy and talk had improved the quality of their teaching, elevating the talk used within the classroom, raising expectations and enabling them to be more effective at understanding and responding to students' learning needs.

*"Dialogic teaching helps teachers. By encouraging students to share their thinking, it enables teachers to diagnose needs, devise learning tasks, enhance understanding, assess progress and assist students through the challenges they encounter...[It] is more than just 'classroom talk'. It is a distinct from the question-answer and listen-repeat routines which most of us experienced at school as it's from everyday conversation aiming to be consistently more searching and reciprocal than both."*

**Professor Robin Alexander, University of Cambridge, evidence to the Inquiry**

Many contributors emphasised the critical skills required of the teacher in guiding and creating the conditions for oracy in the classroom.

*"Well-guided talk enables students to go public with their own ideas, listen attentively to other ideas, dig deeper into their own reasoning models and evidence in sync with build-on and critique."*

**Professor Lauren Resnick, University of Pittsburgh, evidence to the Inquiry**

## 5.2 Non-academic skills and outcomes: Wellbeing, social and emotional skills, confidence and self-esteem

*"The benefits of oracy skills go far beyond academic achievement and employability. They boost a whole range of social, emotional and interpersonal skills, including self-confidence, self-awareness, resilience and empathy."*

**The Sutton Trust, evidence to the Inquiry**

### 5.2.1 Wellbeing, mental health, and social and emotional skills

Beyond oracy's role in learning, many contributors addressed the value of oracy in supporting personal development, wellbeing and mental health by providing students with the skills and opportunity to express their thoughts, feelings and emotions, ask for help, interact effectively and positively with peers and adults and feel listened to and valued.

*"Oracy plays a foundational role in young people's wellbeing, carrying important social and emotional benefits."*

**Fair Education Alliance, evidence to the Inquiry**

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) noted in its evidence to the Inquiry the link between poor spoken language and wellbeing, associating early language problems with anxiety disorders among adults. It highlighted how, of the 10% of children under the age of 16 known to have a clinically significant mental health illness, nearly half of these are likely to have speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). Furthermore, Bryan et al. have found that more than 60% of young people in the youth justice system can have difficulties with speech, language and communication.<sup>29</sup>

*"Oracy has a strong role and impact on...wellbeing and mental health. Everybody needs to feel confident enough to talk and share their feelings at any given time, not just children, [but] adults too."*

**Wexham Court Primary School, evidence to the Inquiry**

THE OAKS PRIMARY SCHOOL





Submissions identified how oracy education supports children and young people's emotional intelligence, social and emotional competence and self-regulation.

Recent research by Voice 21 on the impact of oracy education on excluded students (in Pupil Referral Units) found positive effects on students' behaviour, self-regulation and ability to manage conflict outside the classroom.<sup>30</sup>

*"I've been observing a debate between the [primary-age] children and they've been able to go, 'I agree on this point but I disagree on this point', and things like that might seem little to a lot of people but for children who find it really difficult to self-regulate, being able to voice that they disagree on some things without getting really upset is huge, so that's been wonderful."*

**Oracy lead, small PRU, London**

*"Poor language skills can contribute to high levels of anxiety, stress and frustration, culminating in poor behaviour. The ability to communicate and express feelings is crucial in being able to manage challenging circumstances."*

**Dr Jim Rogers, Research and CPD lead for the South West, Teaching School Council South West, evidence to the Inquiry**

Other contributors highlighted how oracy develops social competence, helping children to navigate interactions and self-advocate.

*"Children want to be able to ask for help and support if they need it. Without oracy, it is very difficult to feel part of a group or organisation and 'fit in' socially."*

**Noctua Teaching School Alliance, evidence to the Inquiry**

Following the Covid-19 closure of schools and household



ELMHURST PRIMARY SCHOOL

lockdown, teachers expressed concerns as to the impact of social isolation and a lack of interaction on children and young people. Several contributors described the potential for oracy to support pupils' re-integration and recovery.

*"Social isolation will have affected both mental health and language opportunities...Many children and young people will need support to learn or re-learn the social communication skills which they need to participate in group and class work as well as to socialise with their peer group."*

**I CAN, evidence to the Inquiry**

*"People need to talk as they can't see each other, so oracy became more important in friendship. People had to make the effort to talk to each other at different times in a new way."*

**Year 6 pupil, Torriano Primary School, evidence to the Inquiry**

*"I think some children's wellbeing and confidence may have suffered by not being able to go outside as often or play with friends, where a lot of words are exchanged. By giving them oral language support and supporting oral progression, it will help children to build up their confidence and happiness."*

**Teacher, Oracy APPG survey**



## 5.2.2 Confidence and self-esteem

Teachers of all subjects place a high value on the importance of developing oracy skills for their students, particularly in building their confidence. 86% of teachers polled in a Teacher Tapp survey in March 2020 believed that oracy improves their students' confidence and self-esteem.<sup>32</sup>

In oral evidence sessions, young people told us how important oracy had been in developing their confidence and sense of identity:

*"Oracy has increased my confidence as a brown/Asian girl as I faced much racism growing up. In Year 7, I didn't know how to be myself as I was scared of others' perceptions of me. I didn't know how to speak on important matters without the fear of backlash...Oracy has changed all of that and made me a confident young girl in my own skin...I feel like Oracy has helped me to deal with issues of identity."*

**Year 9 pupil, St Ambrose Barlow RC High School, evidence to the Inquiry**

*"When I first moved up to secondary school I had low confidence and could not talk comfortably in front of large groups of people. This proved a challenge when participating in lessons because I struggled to communicate my views and opinions, which caused me high levels of anxiety when called on by a teacher to answer a question. I was never explicitly taught oracy skills in school, so I had to use my own initiative and engage in extracurricular activities in order to develop them...over time I began to engage more in conversations and now I am able to confidently express my opinions to the group and lead collaborative debates on any issues that arise. It took me a long time to develop the skills...had I been taught oracy as part of my curriculum, I believe that I would have been much more articulate at a younger age."*

**Year 12 pupil, Biddenham School, evidence to the Inquiry**

Teachers also described how a long-term focus on oracy in the classroom and across the school provides the opportunity for children and young people to build their confidence in speaking and self-expression over time in a safe and supported environment. This they felt was good preparation for more high-stakes contexts for oracy that students would face in future life, such as job or university interviews. Some of the schools described how they had adapted their curriculum to include more talk-based outcomes (such as speeches, debates or discussions), introducing regular opportunities for pupils and students to speak and be listened to such as talking assemblies (weekly sessions where pupils discuss issues as a large group), flipped parents evenings (where students talk through their learning and achievements, questioned by teachers and parents) and students taking roles in the school such as tour guides or class ambassadors.



SCIENCE LESSON AT ST FRANCIS DE SALES CATHOLIC JUNIOR SCHOOL



TORRIANO PRIMARY SCHOOL



## 5.3 Life beyond school

*"Oracy skills equip young people to make the most of their educational experiences, to develop the skills needed for the future, for success and satisfaction in their work, and for life in general by helping them develop life skills and supporting confidence and access."*

**Pearson, evidence to the Inquiry**

### 5.3.1 Progression to further or higher education

Teachers, employers and young people themselves are united in recognising how oracy skills support young people's transitions into further education, training and employment.

More than two thirds of teachers (69%) say oracy is important for students to succeed in higher or further education<sup>33</sup>. Contributions to the Inquiry also highlighted how a lack of ability and confidence to articulate thoughts can hinder progression and the ability to thrive at university:

*"Seminar teaching expects the ability to articulate your thoughts within a wider academic dialogue. To critically engage with material, assess evidence and to compare different interpretations and approaches is at the heart of much of the study of the humanities, arts and social sciences. If a student's prior experience of this is limited they are ill prepared for the rigour of higher-level academic practice."*

**Noisy Classroom, evidence to the Inquiry**

*"Students who haven't received explicit oracy education leave school as less effective communicators when it comes to future pathways, higher education and relationships; and potentially display a lack of confidence in these areas compared to their peers."*

**Newham Sixth Form College, evidence to the Inquiry**

*"One consequence of students lacking oracy skill is that they are less able to access top universities like Oxford, reducing potential for social mobility and limiting future life chances. ... Strong oracy skills are essential to succeeding in the Oxford admissions process and on-course as they contribute to attainment, strong interviewing skills and the ability to engage in tutorial teaching."*

**Trinity Access Project, University of Oxford, evidence to the Inquiry**

In their evidence, Pearson highlighted that oracy skills are an important part of a young person's 'cultural capital' when transitioning from school or college into university or to work. In 2017, Pearson in partnership with the University of Exeter undertook a piece of research

## Case Study: Harris Westminster Sixth Form

Harris Westminster Sixth Form opened in 2014 in Westminster as a mainstream 16-19 provision as part of the Harris Federation. It was rated as Outstanding by Ofsted in 2016. The school has a higher than average disadvantaged cohort and a higher than average percentage of pupils remain in education or go into employment once leaving the school (90%). In the year 2015-16, the school brought seventeen students to Oxbridge interviews, of whom seven were offered places. By 2019-20, these figures were eighty-one interviews (from 300 students) and thirty-six places. Many students who apply to Russell Group universities are successful.

Harris Westminster Sixth Form builds oracy into their curriculum. Ofsted has highlighted the subject-based societies, or debate lessons, that students participate in every Wednesday which are designed to increase confidence, leadership, oracy skills, and positive interaction with the curriculum. As a sixth form, a significant proportion of the curriculum is designed to prepare pupils for higher education and employment and an oracy education fits within that model.

**New Schools Network, evidence to the Inquiry**

to "better understand the experience of BTEC students at a Russell Group university. The research showed that in many cases BTEC learners (usually educated in state schools) lacked confidence and the means to express themselves, not because they were necessarily of a lower ability, but they did not have the inter-personal skills and confidence to do so."<sup>34</sup>

BPP Law school has introduced a 'small talk' initiative, helping students develop confidence in speaking alongside their legal studies. Their Head of Outreach & Student Recruitment, Jonny Hurst, explained that the confidence and competence of postgraduate students in speaking varies hugely. Jonny Hurst and his team are "acutely conscious that the recruitment process is stacked against those who struggle with oracy."<sup>35</sup>





## Case study: The Laurus Trust

The Laurus Trust is a multi-academy trust of seven schools with Cheadle Hulme High School, the founder school, at its centre.

“The Laurus Trust believes that Oracy skills should run as a thread through the entire curriculum...At the Laurus Trust we recognise that if our students are to achieve their potential in school and progress to be able to compete at the highest level at top universities, apprenticeships and working environments, then they need to be confident, articulate and highly competent speakers. We also recognise that in many schools Oracy is seen as the ‘Cinderella’ of the required Literacy skills and that teachers are often unsure about how to increase their own vocal confidence and competence and include the development of Oracy skills in the curriculum without seeming to be promoting old style ‘elocution’.

We acknowledge the dangers to society that exist in ignoring the fact that too many children leave school unable to speak with confidence and feel that this can lead to an apathy and acceptance of low-level aspiration. Our curriculum develops attributes and behaviours directly related to employability: we believe that employers want to recruit young people who have not only relevant technical knowledge and skills, but who are effective public communicators and collaborative problem

solvers. By the time they leave us, we want each student to have that true sense of self-worth which will enable them to make wise choices, stand up for what is right and what they believe in and, in doing so, be of value to society.

The new Year 7 cohort are interviewed individually prior to their arrival in September...we make note of any pupil who is particularly reticent and nervous when speaking to a new adult and these students are ear-marked for oracy confidence intervention. This can take the form of Confidence in Communication workshops as well as small social communication discussion groups: the intervention is personalised and adapted according to need but is part of our recognition of the importance of every child having a voice that is ‘heard’. Parents are encouraged to support the Oracy Curriculum with tips and strategies shared and at KS3 information evenings Oracy is afforded the same amount of time and attention as the skills of reading and writing.”

The Trust has appointed a Head of Voice who is currently delivering and developing a programme of study for all Year 7, 8, 9 and 10 students as well as a series of 6th Form electives.

**Sue Bradley, Trust Director for Oracy, Literacy and Reading; Trust Head of Voice, evidence to the Inquiry**

### 5.3.2 Employability

## Children and young people’s views on the importance of oracy

“When I left university and I was going to grad schemes and interviews, everyone seemed to be extremely polished. There were times when I felt like I did well, and I tried to be authentic and genuine. I was very honest with the fact that I did struggle with interviews. Maybe my cynical side believes that is why that I didn’t get the job.”

“When you go into networking opportunities, I do believe there is a culture that you should be able to articulate yourself well, and know exactly what to say at exactly

the right time, and if you do fumble, then it’s almost as though you are showing your weakness.”

“Parents often come to our oracy events and say that they wish they had done this at school. This clearly demonstrates that we are removing a barrier to adult life, oracy works.”

**We Speak, evidence to the Inquiry and schools evidence session**

# 1/2

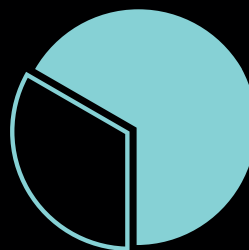
## OF UNEMPLOYED YOUNG PEOPLE

(52%) believed they left or will leave school/education with the oracy skills necessary for future success in further education, training or employment

# 3/4

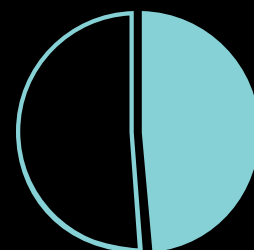
## OF YOUNG PEOPLE

who are full-time students (72%) or working (72%) believed they left or will leave school/education with the oracy skills necessary for future success in further education, training or employment



## TWO THIRDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

who are full-time students (67%) or working (69%) believed their schooling/education helped them develop good oracy



## LESS THAN HALF OF UNEMPLOYED YOUNG PEOPLE

(47%) believed their schooling/education helped them develop good oracy

*"You cannot be recruited if you cannot speak effectively. [These skills] are a passport to work – a fundamental requirement – as important as the oxygen we breathe when it comes to opportunity in the future."*

**Paul Drechsler, former CBI (Confederation of British Industry) Chair and former Chair of Teach First, evidence to the Inquiry**

In evidence to the Inquiry, business leaders and recruiters expressed the high value employers place on oral communication skills. This is reflected in surveys of skills demands in which employers consistently rank verbal communication skills very highly.

In a recent City of London Corporation and Nesta survey of 100 employers, oral communication skills were rated as the top transferable skills by employers.<sup>36</sup> Communication was also identified as one of the top 8 skills that employers rate as an 'Essential Need of the Career Readiness Competencies' in the National Association of Colleges and Education, Job Outlook Survey 2019.<sup>37</sup>

Despite this clear and strong demand, evidence suggests that the education system is not adequately developing the essential oral communication employers require.

A 2016 survey by the CBI and Pearson found that 50% of businesses were not satisfied with school leavers' skills in communication, compared to 32% for literacy and 29% for numeracy.<sup>38</sup> And a 2018 LinkedIn study on the skill gaps in the workforce found oral communication skills emerged as the biggest skills gap by a large margin.<sup>39</sup>

*"Employers are not only interested in degree classifications and subject knowledge, but also graduates' ability to communicate, problem-solve, work in teams, present or pitch and so on."*

**Professor Steve West, Vice-Chancellor of the University of West of England, quoted in Pearson evidence to the Inquiry**

79% of secondary state school teachers (almost 4 in 5) think that developing their students' confidence and competence in spoken language and listening skills would make the students more employable.<sup>40</sup>

Another poll of almost 5,000 teachers commissioned by The Careers & Enterprise Company found that teachers now think that workplace skills have a higher value than academic qualifications in preparing school and college leavers for the post-Covid world of work.<sup>41</sup> Almost three-quarters (74%) said skills such as teamwork and public speaking will equip pupils to secure a good job.

*"Employers need staff to be able to, with confidence, articulate information clearly and coherently, to extract key details from conversations and to be ready to present a case to peers and colleagues. Leaving compulsory education without adequate spoken and communication skills is a serious blight on young people's lives and a major handicap when they're looking for work."*

**The CBI (Confederation of British Industry), quoted in Voice 21, evidence to the Inquiry**

Disconcertingly in the March 2021 CfEY and University of Oxford polling, unemployed young people were around twice as likely as those in employment or full time students to feel that their schooling did not give them sufficient oracy skills for success in later life. They were also around twice as likely to say that their education did not help them develop good oracy skills.

Skillsbuilder's latest report<sup>42</sup> has sought to establish the value of essential skills in young people's employment outcomes: "There is evidence of a wage premium of around 15% or £3,400 per year for full-time workers aged over 19... This wage premium is substantially increased in cases where young people report confidence in applying their essential skills in a range of scenarios. In this case, the wage premium for those individuals rises to £10,200."

Furthermore, researchers have found that children who had normal non-verbal skills but a poor vocabulary at age 5 were more likely to be unemployed in adulthood. And a study of unemployed young men found that 88% had some level of language difficulty.<sup>43</sup>

*"When it comes to adult life and employment, the entry points for the socially mobile are marked by barriers that have as much to do with language as with qualifications: whether that be university interviews, job interviews, networking opportunities, or the many small tests and challenges that emerge from a collective cultural mindset that relies on articulacy as a measure of intelligence and value."*

**Hashi Mohamed, Barrister and author<sup>44</sup>**

Apprenticeship organisation Multiverse described how oracy can make or break young people's employment opportunities:

*"In our mission to hire and train diverse talent, we also need to consider that prior oracy education (or lack thereof) may not have prepared apprentices for employment success."*

**Multiverse, evidence to the Inquiry**

## 5.4 Citizenship and agency

Providing opportunities for students to express their ideas and critically engage with their peers in dialogue, deliberation and debate is essential if young people are prepared to leave school as active, engaged, and reflective citizens.

*"Talk is a fundamental prerequisite for democratic engagement."*

**Professor Robin Alexander, University of Cambridge evidence to the Inquiry**

*"I think the capacity of young people to think for themselves, to manage and resolve conflicts and tensions and dilemmas, to create, you need to be imaginative and all of those actually closely relate to agency, to the capacity of young people to express themselves. I do think in our future critical and instructional system they deserve a much, much stronger role. Otherwise, there is a risk that our schools are educating second class robots, not first class humans."*

**Andreas Schleicher, OECD, evidence to the Inquiry**

*"Democracy consists of everyone being able to have an equal opportunity to voice their opinions and in order to do so everyone needs to have enough confidence in their speaking abilities."*

**Year 11 pupil, Welland Park Academy, evidence to the Inquiry**

*"Speaking skills are really important for our generation because, with the climate change movement, young people need to be more confident in their speaking to be able to express feelings and really effect change.... If we are letting older people speak for us, we aren't getting involved, so we aren't creating something useful for the future."*

**Year 6 pupil, Torriano Primary School, evidence to the Inquiry**

### Contributors to the Inquiry highlighted oracy's role in:

#### Strengthening democratic participation and political literacy:

*"Communicative competence is required in order to carry out many of the practical objectives set out in the Citizenship National Curriculum, but skills for speaking in public are not taught in any formal way as part of the curriculum."*

**Professor Stephen Coleman, University of Leeds, evidence to the Inquiry**

*"Oracy skills are not only needed to speak up about topical issues, they are also important for establishing the truth about them."*

**Economist Educational Foundation, evidence to the Inquiry**

#### Helping young people negotiate difficult conversations and empathise with alternative perspectives:

*"The more we encourage children to talk and to see things from multiple perspectives, the more they begin to see and understand others' viewpoints."*

**Judith Stephenson, Barbara Priestman Academy, evidence to the Inquiry**

#### Empowering young people to advocate for themselves:

*"One child said to us she just felt like a parcel being passed around in care. Oracy can be powerful for those children to help them, to empower them to speak up for themselves and make it harder to overlook them and have things done to them."*

**Office of the Children's Commissioner, evidence to the Inquiry**

*"In many schools, pupils learn that their voice does not matter...rather than involving the most able students, the teachers we work with want to create a system where schools say to every pupil 'we want to hear your voice, and here is how you do it...Alongside good quality oracy education, good quality citizenship activities, there is a need for a structural shift to support universal active citizenship and better oracy, particularly in marginalised communities."*

**Smart School Councils, evidence to the Inquiry**



# 5.5 When does oracy matter most?

|             | <br>Academic | <br>Wellbeing | <br>Social justice | <br>Employment | <br>Transitions | <br>Access and inclusion | <br>Citizenship and agency |
|-------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Early Years | ✓                                                                                             | ✓                                                                                              | ✓                                                                                                   |                                                                                                 | ✓                                                                                                  | ✓                                                                                                           | ✓                                                                                                             |
| Primary     | ✓                                                                                             | ✓                                                                                              | ✓                                                                                                   |                                                                                                 | ✓                                                                                                  | ✓                                                                                                           | ✓                                                                                                             |
| Secondary   | ✓                                                                                             | ✓                                                                                              | ✓                                                                                                   |                                                                                                 | ✓                                                                                                  | ✓                                                                                                           | ✓                                                                                                             |
| FE / HE     | ✓                                                                                             | ✓                                                                                              | ✓                                                                                                   | ✓                                                                                               | ✓                                                                                                  | ✓                                                                                                           | ✓                                                                                                             |
| Adulthood   | ✓                                                                                             | ✓                                                                                              | ✓                                                                                                   | ✓                                                                                               | ✓                                                                                                  | ✓                                                                                                           | ✓                                                                                                             |

The Inquiry received evidence from educators and organisations representing different stages and phases of education. All made a strong case as to why oracy was particularly important for the purpose, priorities and the specific needs of children and young people at those phases from:

- The foundational underpinning, focus on cognitive and early language development and opportunity for early intervention of early years;
- the vital relationship to literacy at primary level;
- the potential to illuminate, expand and deepen knowledge across subjects at secondary;

- the contribution to enabling progression and access to higher and further education, training and employment opportunities post 16; and
- enabling wellbeing, confidence, self-esteem and belonging through all phases and, critically, at transition.

Oracy should therefore be viewed not as an intervention at a specific stage of education but as a sustained aspect of both the curriculum and pedagogy throughout a child's time in school.

THE ECONOMIST EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION'S BURNET NEWS CLUB PROGRAMME AT NEWBURY PARK PRIMARY SCHOOL



# 6 Who needs oracy education most?

*"Teaching oracy is an issue of social equity."*

**Peter Hyman, Big Education<sup>45</sup>**

With the weight of evidence demonstrating the critical importance of oracy to children and young people's opportunities and outcomes in school and in life, the long-term consequences of not developing good oracy skills are significant and far-reaching.

Oracy education matters for all children and young people; the benefits are accretive and go beyond addressing deficits. However, our Inquiry found that oracy education can have a disproportionate impact on the learning and life chances of some children and young people for whom the blight of an absence of oracy will also be most damaging.

## 6.1 Children and young people experiencing disadvantage and poverty

*"Children with poor life opportunities are impacted most by poor focus on oracy in education."*

**UCL Centre for Inclusive Education, evidence to the Inquiry**

Research consistently finds that children from low-income families start school with lower language levels than their more advantaged peers: of the children who persistently experienced poverty, 75 percent arrive at school below average in language development. Around 50% of children in some areas of deprivation begin school with delayed language.<sup>46</sup>

*"My research programme has unequivocally demonstrated wide variation in the oral language competences children have at the start of their school careers. From the very beginning, those children with poor oral language are struggling academically, socially, and behaviourally, and these challenges are maintained throughout the primary school years."*

**Courtenay Norbury, UCL, evidence to the Inquiry**

*"If students do not acquire this language at home, school is their second chance. If they are not getting it in school, they are not getting it. Oracy, therefore, is not just an educational choice but a moral imperative".*

**Professor Neil Mercer, University of Cambridge, evidence to the Inquiry**

*"Many children, especially the disadvantaged, may begin school with a language gap and schools are their chance to try and close that gap...addressing language gaps early and continuing to focus on closing these is key to reducing the disadvantage gap in schools, the workplace and in society more generally."*

**Teacher, Oracy APPG survey**

Currently gaps in language development between more and less socio-economically advantaged children tend to widen rather than narrow as children progress through school.<sup>47</sup> The gap between children from disadvantaged areas and their peers cannot all be attributed to the pre-school years. Analysis of data from the Millennium Cohort Study identified that even if children from disadvantaged backgrounds do well in vocabulary tests at age 5, they are almost as likely to have below-average reading ability at age 7 (50%) as those children who had below average vocabulary at age five but who had never experienced poverty (52%).<sup>48</sup>

Meanwhile, E.D. Hirsch found that the reading age gap between children with good oral language skills and those with poor oral language skills widened from just a few months at age 6, to 5 years' difference by the age of 14.<sup>49</sup>

This has a knock-on effect on educational outcomes. Of the 31.6% of pupils from state-funded schools – equivalent to 167,000 pupils – who did not achieve at least a grade 4 in English Language in 2017, more than 40% were disadvantaged (eligible for free school meals) at some point between Year 6 and Year 11.<sup>50</sup>

*"At the heart of their underachievement our Commission came to a view that their sad inarticulacy is often a reflection of their inability to achieve a standard pass."*

**Roy Blatchford, Chair, Forgotten Third Commission, evidence the Inquiry**

*"The widening of this gap indicates that many children, particularly those that are most persistently disadvantaged, miss out on the benefits of oracy development when it is not explicitly taught, encouraged and embedded in the classroom from an early age."*

**Fair Education Alliance, evidence to the Inquiry**

Oracy education can help to address this damaging gap in outcomes, securing socially-just outcomes, by improving the life chances for children facing disadvantage.

*"While all students benefit from classroom discussion activities, talk also appears to be particularly beneficial for low-attaining students and those from disadvantaged backgrounds."*

**Professor Becky Francis, Education Endowment Foundation, evidence to the Inquiry**

*"The educational consequences of social disadvantage can be compounded by children's difficulties in oral development and communication. However, oracy can also be an effective means of re-engaging the disengaged and closing the overlapping gaps of equity and attainment."*

**Professor Robin Alexander, University of Cambridge evidence to the Inquiry**

Throughout the Inquiry, we heard of the importance of oracy education in tackling entrenched social immobility and dismantling barriers for children and young people from less advantaged backgrounds to increase equity and social justice.

*"Addressing social disadvantage through increasing students' confidence in speaking, self-presentation and debating, undoubtedly helps them become leaders of their own learning and develop the interpersonal skills they will need for further training and employment."*<sup>51</sup>

*"Cultural capital is on a highly uneven playing field. By empowering our children with language capital, they stand a greater chance of levelling that [uneven] playing field."*

**Sandeep Kaur, deputy head teacher, Highlands Primary School, evidence to the Inquiry**

Contributors explained how a lack of opportunity for children who experience disadvantage to develop the verbal communication skills and confidence that aid transitions into further and higher education and are

prized by employers, hampers not only educational outcomes but their chances in life beyond school. In research on the non-academic barriers to elite professions, the Social Mobility Commission found that strong communication skills are important for improving social mobility and workplace opportunities.

The Commission identified 'soft' skills as a barrier to social mobility and emphasised the importance of spoken communication skills.<sup>52</sup>

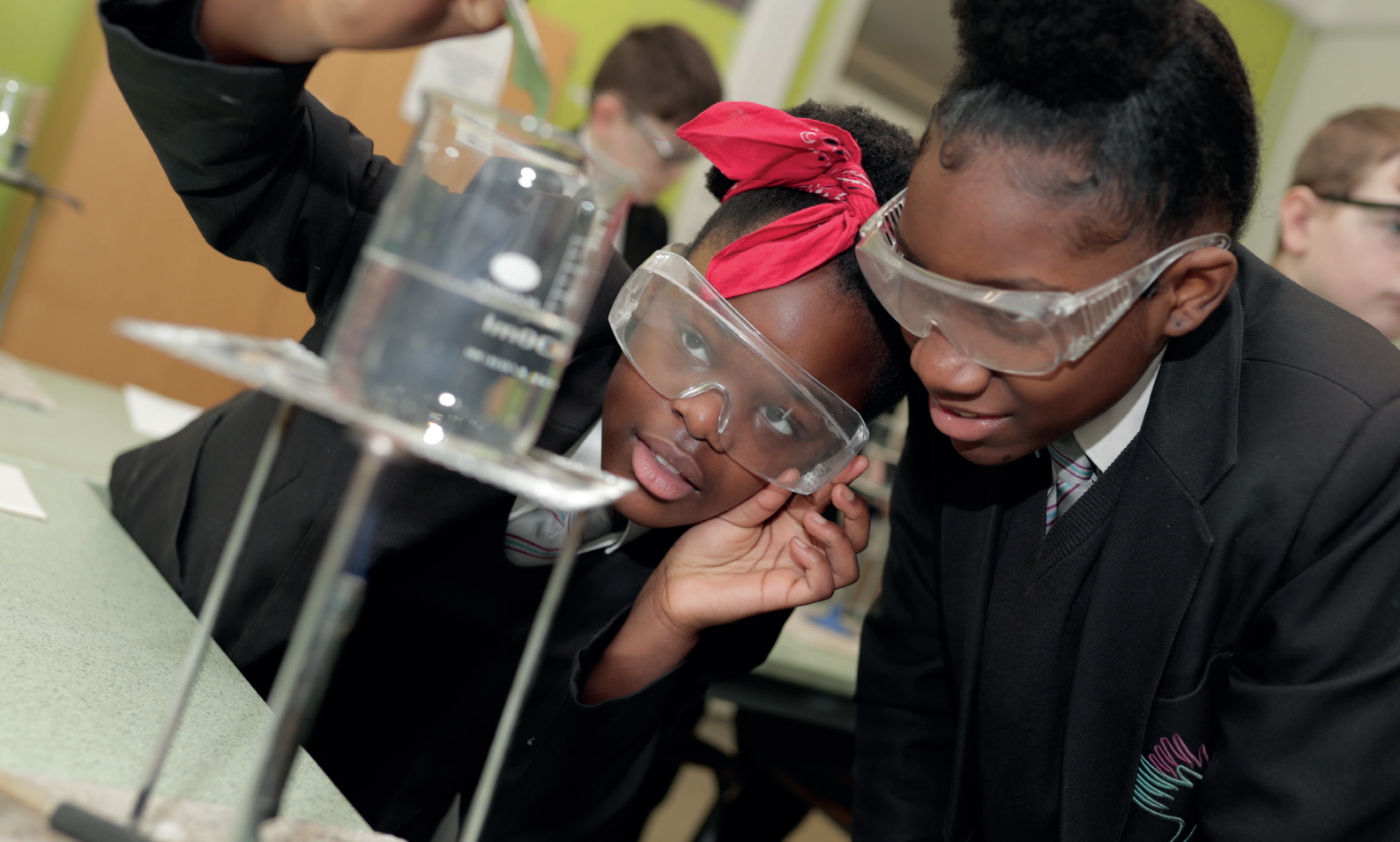
*"Ultimately oracy, communication, articulation: these are all elements that are really driven by the element of social capital. ... [I]t seems to us that social mobility is a key part of the success of young people. That is largely driven by their ability to communicate, especially in the workplace, [and] how to sell themselves to employers."*  
**Alice Barnard, Edge Foundation, evidence to the Inquiry**

The importance of oracy education in schools is compounded by evidence showing that young people from less well-off backgrounds are less likely to have access to the benefits that enrichment activities outside the classroom can bring, such as debating, volunteering and the performing arts:

- Secondary schools with the lowest proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals are twice as likely to offer debating clubs as schools with the highest (70% compared to 35%). There are similar issues within performing arts, with 90% of the most advantaged state schools offering performing arts activities, compared to 68% of the least advantaged.
- Where schools do offer opportunities to develop these skills, there are also disparities in the take-up of activities with pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds less likely to take up extracurricular activities than their better-off peers (46% compared to 66%).
- There are also disparities between the levels of provision reported by teachers and actual take-up by pupils: 45% of teachers say their school provided debating, yet just 2% reported participating.<sup>53</sup>







## Case study: Using oracy to improve outcomes among disadvantaged pupils – Bishop Young Academy, Leeds

Bishop Young Academy is a secondary academy in Seacroft, Leeds, an area with high levels of deprivation and crime. In 2017, Ofsted judged the school to be 'inadequate'. In 2018, the school put oracy at the heart of its school improvement plan, and began work with Voice 21 to develop a whole-school approach to oracy.

All staff set oracy-focused professional development targets, and participated in training and lesson inquiries to help them develop their practice. Of the staff, 98% strongly agree that their pedagogy has improved through the oracy continuing professional development (CPD) programme.

The leadership fully backs the embedding of oracy, including the sharing of good practice with other academies within the multi-academy trust. This backing has given oracy the necessary profile across the school to ensure teachers make it a focus in their lessons. The leadership encourages all staff, including teaching assistants, to see oracy as their responsibility.

Teachers are developing oracy progression maps for schemes of work. This involves identifying subject- and oracy-based objectives for each lesson, including teacher- and peer-based oracy assessments. Pupils set themselves targets using the 'Oracy Framework'. Pupils are encouraged to think about tone and register, and

to discuss their writing. The latter has helped assuage teachers' concerns about oracy taking place 'at the expense' of written work. Teachers provide feedback to parents about pupils' oracy during parent consultations.

Mel Carlin, deputy headteacher at the academy, attributes the academy's improving Attainment 8 and Progress 8 scores to its *"unwavering focus on oracy at all levels"*. She says the gap in outcomes between disadvantaged pupils and their peers is closing, as is the gap between pupils with and without forms of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Of the pupils, 94% feel that the focus on oracy has supported them to make better progress. The school's leadership believes that oracy has helped improve attendance and behaviour.

"In the classrooms we've noticed that misconceptions are picked up much earlier because of the students' improved ability to articulate themselves."

**Paul Cooper, headteacher**

"I think it's completely transformed my teaching. We don't know how we ever taught Maths without oracy."

**Niamh Gee, Maths teacher**

**Voice 21 and Bishop Young Academy, evidence to the Inquiry**

## 6.2 Children and young people with SLCN and SEND

Alongside universal benefits of oracy for all children, we received a large volume of evidence on how oracy can improve access to and subsequent inclusion in education for children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) and with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

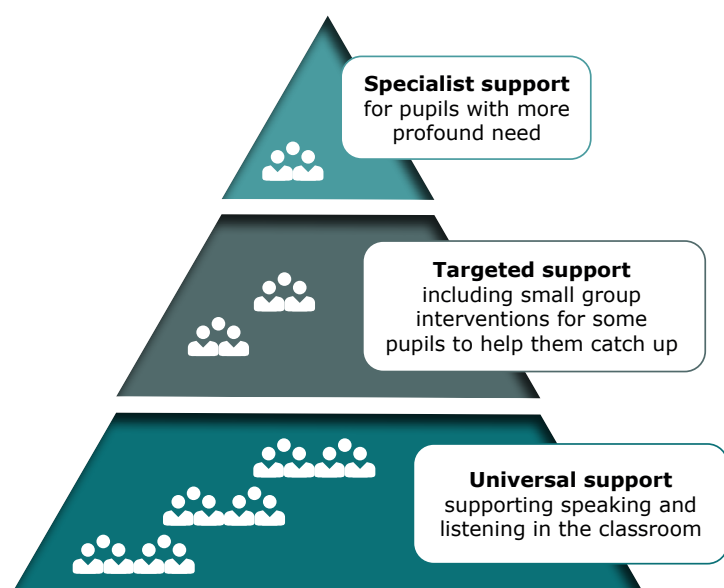
### 6.2.1 Speech, language and communication needs (SLCN)

*"[Schools] need that bottom layer of quality oracy in the classroom for all pupils. The better that is, the fewer children will then need targeted small-group interventions and specialist support. This foundation tier, an oracy curriculum, as part of a coordinated approach, has been shown to be effective in both primary and secondary schools – improving outcomes for pupils with SLCN."*

**I CAN, evidence to the Inquiry**

SLCN experts contributing to the Inquiry highlighted how universal oracy provision, complementing targeted provision, has the potential to help transform schooling for children with these needs.

Chair of *Bercow: 10 Years On*, Jean Gross, described the different ways in which oracy can support children with SLCN through a pyramid, showing how targeted and specialist approaches build on universal provision.



Teachers and Speech and Language Therapists reinforced the value of oracy-rich classrooms for children with SLCN.

*"I'm the SENCO [special educational needs coordinator] at the school, and I think [oracy has] had an impact on students with speech and language difficulties, being able to rehearse and talk to a peer is vital to supporting them with their progress."*

**Vicky Abery-Bone, Key Stage 1 and SENCO lead, The Oaks Primary School, evidence to the Inquiry**

All children – including those with specific language or speech difficulties – should benefit from high-quality oracy education but contributors warned of the risk that oracy could further hamper inclusion of children and young people with SLCN if their needs are not fully considered and supported in the planning and provision of oracy education.

*"Children and young people with SEN/SLCN/DLD [special educational needs/speech, language and communication needs/developmental language disorder] may not be at a level to benefit from existing oracy education which is targeted broadly at typically developing children and young people."*

**Stephen Parsons, NAPLIC, evidence to the Inquiry**

*"We recognise the importance of oracy in the curriculum but we do not think this will be effective in reaching those with poor language...Such children need extra provision, delivered by trained personnel."*

**Professor Maggie Snowling, evidence to the Inquiry**

Organisations supporting children and young people with SLCN also emphasised the importance of recognising and valuing forms of communication other than spoken language – such as British Sign Language and Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) methods – to enable participation.

### 6.2.2 Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

For children with additional needs, oracy plays a vital role in supporting access to learning.

The Wellcome Trust's Language and Reading Project, based at the University of Oxford's Department of Experimental Psychology, found that early intervention improves children's language and reading development:

*"Intervention programmes delivered at school can be helpful for supporting the development of reading and language in children at risk of dyslexia."<sup>54</sup>*

*Alongside the "critical importance of oral language" in addressing reading disorders, oracy also supports wider social and emotional development."<sup>55</sup>*





## Case study: Using oracy to support pupils speaking English as an additional language – Elmhurst Primary School, Forest Gate, London

*"As an academy for students with ASD (Autistic Spectrum Disorder), we believe that the development of oracy skills is a fundamental part of our students' learning and impacts positively on their reading and writing levels as well as increasing their confidence, enjoyment and their ability to engage in learning with increasing confidence."*

**Barbara Priestman Academy, evidence to the Inquiry**

*"Oracy education often supports pupils with special educational needs, particularly those affected by an inability to express themselves. This inability to express themselves can lead to social isolation, frustration and behaviour difficulties. Oracy education can help develop their communication skills, which are vital for independence in adult life."*

**New Schools Network, evidence to the Inquiry**

*"Oracy skills, developed from an early age, can help bridge the social mobility gap for people like me, with disabilities such as autism."*

**Young person, English Speaking Board, evidence to the Inquiry**

### 6.2.3 Children speaking English as an additional language

For children and young people new to English or where English is not the language spoken within the home, the Inquiry heard how explicit oracy education and immersion in talk-rich learning environments accelerate language development and thereby increase their ability to engage in learning.

*"Good oracy education is particularly important for specific groups such as EAL [English as an additional language] pupils who are new to English. Oracy is paramount and needs at least a year's taught focus. If oracy is not taught, it holds them back, e.g. pronunciation, intonation, stress timing, support for spelling and understanding sound symbol correspondences in a second language which are otherwise hard to read."*

**National Literacy Trust, evidence to the Inquiry**

"Elmhurst Primary School is a large outstanding primary school in Forest Gate, London. The school serves an ethnically and culturally diverse area, and 95% of the pupils speak English as an additional language.

At Elmhurst Primary School, and more widely through our multi-academy trust, Teaching School Alliance and work as an English Hub, we have long valued and promoted oracy as a vital way of enabling all children to develop academically, personally and socially. For most students, there is often not one word of English spoken outside of school. However, through consistent support and, where required, interventions, we have been able to ensure all our children make significant progress with their speech and confidence, which has a massive impact on their academic attainment and social mobility."

Teachers throughout the school – from the Early Years through to Year 6 – carefully structure and model talk in their lessons and set oracy-based homework for pupils to undertake with their families at home. Staff say this helps ensure that pupils who enter the school with low levels of spoken and written English go on to achieve sustained above-average Key Stage 2 Standard Assessment Test (SAT) results.

The school also provides a range of oracy-based enrichment activities, such as debating, drama, speech writing and poetry retreats.

One pupil arrived at the school at the end of Year 2, speaking almost no English. When she left the school in Year 6, she was captain of the debating squad and had played a lead role in a school production. A teacher said that "while a particular success, she is not an outlier. Rather she is a testament to the progress children can make when oracy skills are purposefully and consistently nurtured.

We are proud to prioritise oracy both in our classroom and our wider curriculum offering. We have seen first-hand the huge impact this can have on all pupils, regardless of background or current attainment.

[Oracy] needs to be part of a whole school approach, not just as a decoration or a cherry but really as a cornerstone of the curriculum."

**Samuel Creighton, Oracy lead, Elmhurst Primary school evidence to the Inquiry**



## 6.2.4 Underrepresented and vulnerable children and young people

At the heart of oracy is the concept of voice - empowering young people to express their thoughts, share ideas with the world and be heard.

The entrenched inequalities in our society mean that some voices dominate our public discourse and others struggle to cut through the prevailing noise. This not only diminishes those whose voices remain unheard but has a detrimental impact on society in general. Addressing this requires a significant cultural and institutional shift but contributors to the Inquiry, especially children and young people identified how oracy can help children and young people gain the confidence to speak truth to power and provide platforms for their voices to be shared.

Oracy can empower some of the most vulnerable and marginalised children and young people in our society by giving them the tools and confidence to say what they think and be listened to.

*"Sadly, some of the children who most often need to advocate for themselves can be lacking in oracy skills (the child in front of the magistrate explaining why they did what they did, the child on a child protection plan, explaining what it feels like to live with domestic abuse, the child in care, saying why they want to live with their own foster carer). Of course, it's our duty and responsibility as professionals, as advocates for them to seek out their voices and to make sure that their views and feelings are heard."*

**Office of the Children's Commissioner, evidence to the Inquiry**

*"As someone from one of the most marginalised groups in the country I believe that it is even more important that the children and young people from marginalised groups have a voice, and one that is going to allow them to have a place in the world. One that is going to allow them to create better opportunities for themselves in education and in the world of work and self-employment. Good oracy empowers children, young people and their teachers to communicate more effectively. The benefits of this are tremendous."*

**Young person from Reclaim, English Speaking Board, evidence to the Inquiry**

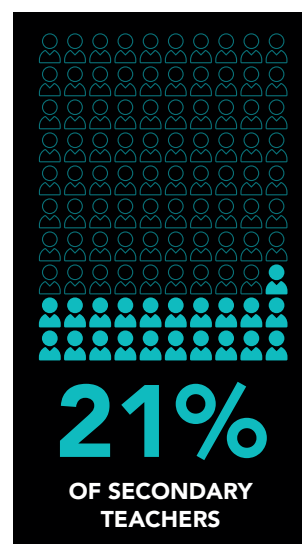
## 6.2.5 Children and young people negatively impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic

The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and resultant school closures on pupils' spoken language development have not been felt evenly.

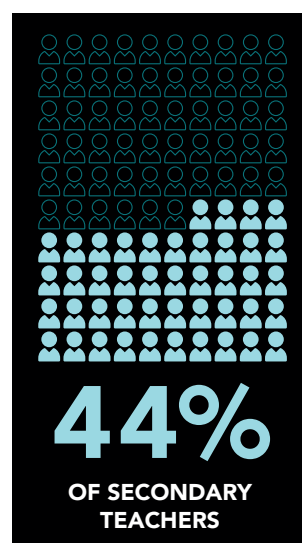
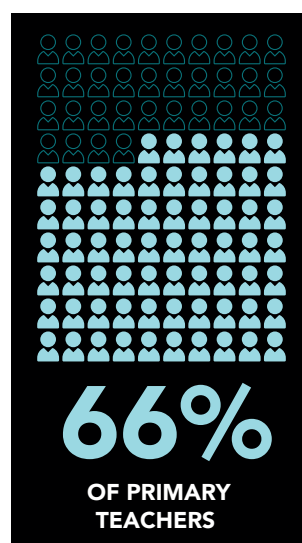
In the March 2021 poll, conducted by CfEY and the University of Oxford, teachers reported that for students eligible for the pupil premium, the school closures had an overwhelmingly negative impact on spoken language development.

**7 in 10**

TEACHERS SAID TEACHING ONLINE HAD A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPING PUPILS' ORACY



said school closures during the pandemic had a negative effect on the spoken language development of their **most advantaged** pupils



said school closures during the pandemic had a negative effect on the spoken language development of pupils **eligible for free school meals**

*"I've got a lot of evidence, anecdotal, that children from more affluent families with professional parents, those young children's language has just come on in leaps and bounds in the last two months because they have been exposed to a lot of adult conversation. They've been at home with their parents and they have gone from two words to sentences in a very short space of time. But if you are in a home in lockdown period where you're not having those conversations, then that won't be happening. So that could widen the gap."*

**Jean Gross, formerly England's Communication Champion for children and young people, evidence to the Inquiry**

More than 9 in 10 teachers (92%) believe that the 'word gap' (where children have a vocabulary below age-related expectations) has widened further following school closures.<sup>56</sup> Sixty-four per cent of parents agreed that the school closures have reduced the opportunities for children to develop their oracy skills.<sup>57</sup> Some contributors to the Inquiry commented that interactive and dialogic teaching was harder remotely:

*"Some leaders said that children had fallen behind in language and communication skills and others said pupils' oral fluency had regressed. The 'hardest-hit' group of young children have suffered from time out of school, going backwards on words and numbers."*<sup>58</sup>

But some contributors found that remote learning could foster many opportunities for oracy:

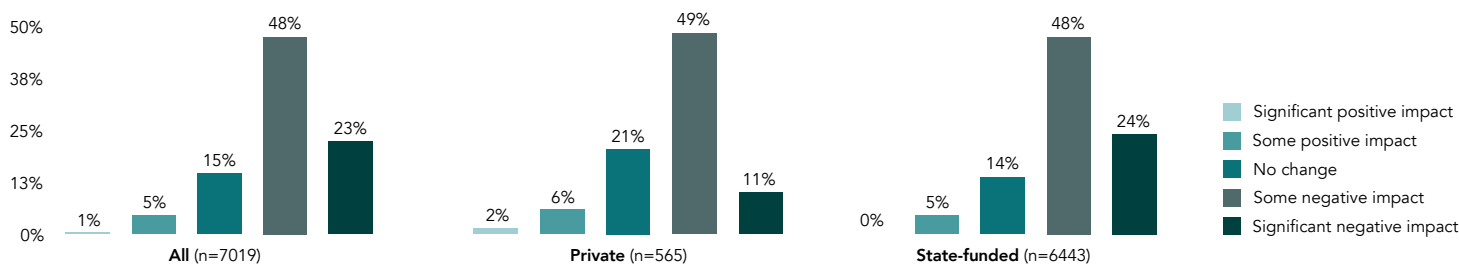
*"Initially online education was very much delivery by teacher and some participation on the chat but as skills improved it was possible to set up small break-out groups online. These were very successful as they kept students in touch with each other and helped ameliorate the isolation that many felt."*

**Yvonne Williams, Portsmouth High School, evidence to the Inquiry**

This is reflected in the wider CfEY and the University of Oxford polling data. Overall, 7 in 10 teachers (71%) said teaching online had a negative impact on opportunities for them to develop pupils' oracy. Teachers working in state-funded settings were more than twice as likely to say this negative impact was 'significant'.

**Teachers working in state-funded settings were more than twice as likely as teachers working in private schools to say online teaching had a 'significant negative' impact on pupils' oracy**

**How has teaching online affected the opportunities you are able to provide for developing pupils' oracy (their spoken language skills)?**



## Children and young people's views on the impact of the pandemic and oracy

*"Oracy is really crucial following lockdown and isolation. It's really decreased our time with each other."*

**Year 6 pupil, Ryders Hayes School, evidence to the Inquiry**

*"Thanks to the pandemic, there haven't been the same opportunities to do work placements. When employers and universities can only judge on interview, oracy is so important."*

**Year 10 pupil, Hinchingsbrooke School, evidence to the Inquiry**

*"We believe that without these crucial oracy skills, settling back into school would have been a real difficulty. Our oracy culture has enabled us to speak, be heard and be valued and for getting back on with our learning."*

**Year 6 pupil, Ryders Hayes School, evidence to the Inquiry**

# 7 Conclusions

1. There is a powerful cross-sector consensus on the importance of oracy supported by a robust evidence base.
2. Oracy is a core component of an effective education that enables a child to flourish in learning and in life.
3. In order to develop confidence and competence in spoken language, children and young people need consistent opportunities to develop and practice these skills throughout their schooling.
4. There is demand for a stronger emphasis on oracy in education from teachers, school leaders, parents, children and young people, employers and civil society.
5. The benefits of oracy education are significant, wide-ranging, evident in learning and academic achievement as well as personal and societal outcomes, and have the most impact on children and young people experiencing disadvantage.
6. The absence of oracy education hampers children and young people's long-term opportunities and capabilities, with disadvantaged children and young people experiencing the most detrimental effects.
7. There are exemplars of effective oracy education (from within formal education and beyond) that can inform policy and practice.
8. The imperative to narrow gaps in outcomes, growing concern with regards to wellbeing and mental health, changes in the employment market, increased awareness of unheard voices in society and the impact of the Covid -19 pandemic amplify the need to prioritise oracy education now.
9. As the next section shows, the Inquiry has found concerning variation in the time and attention afforded to oracy across schools, leaving the development of many children and young people's oracy skills and abilities to chance.

The barriers to oracy education at systemic, school and classroom level





# 8 The APPG's vision for oracy

The APPG believes that there is an indisputable case for oracy as an integral aspect of education and that all children and young people should benefit from high-quality oracy education as a consistent and comprehensive entitlement of their education in school.

The status and provision of oracy education in England today falls significantly short of this vision - achieving it will require shifts in values, policy and practice.

Our Inquiry heard about the barriers to oracy education at systemic, school and classroom level and the potential opportunities to accelerate and amplify oracy education.

We also heard strong support for increased focus on oracy from teachers, school leaders, employers, parents and students and how the Covid -19 pandemic has further prioritised the need for oracy education.

The Oracy APPG are therefore calling for a shift in educational culture and values, policy and practice to:

1. Raise the status and priority of oracy in education.
2. Agree shared expectations for oracy and increase understanding of how these can be achieved.
3. Equip and empower teachers and schools to provide sustained, and comprehensive high-quality oracy education.

In support of these overarching aims, we have identified practical steps that should be taken to make progress now.

## 8.1 Raise the status and priority of oracy in education

The status of oracy in the architecture of our education system (the National Curriculum, accountability frameworks, guidance and education policy) does not fully reflect its value and importance to children and young people's outcomes in school and life. Contributors argued that the lack of focus and emphasis on spoken language and oracy across educational policy and currency in the qualifications system, the challenges of assessing oracy, and the pressures to meet external accountability targets, disincentivised schools and teachers from giving it the attention they felt it deserved.

*"England's system of public education is highly centralised and many teachers feel compelled to concentrate on what is required and tested at the expense of what they may believe to be educationally desirable or even essential."*

**Professor Robin Alexander, University of Cambridge, evidence to the Inquiry**

Whilst there appears to be a general consensus that oracy is important in principle, contributors argued that it was positioned as a peripheral rather than central concern and schools report focusing on oracy despite, not because of, the prevailing climate of policy and accountability.

The implications of this are evident in the polling outcomes referenced throughout this report, showing the gap between the value young people, schools and teachers ascribe to oracy and the patchy and inconsistent implementation of oracy education within schools.

*"Policy-makers, particularly over the last decade, have reshaped qualifications, curriculum and pedagogy. Skills of oracy have been among the casualties of this reshaping, and it is imperative that they are fully restored to health, as a central element in a broad programme of education, which can engage and develop learners at all levels"*

**National Education Union, evidence to the Inquiry**

*"The current climate is one where the debate on standards is prevalent within a culture of increased testing and accountability of both schools and teachers. This is not a context which encourages teachers to deviate from curriculum emphases which are tested and prescribed. It is a context however in which innovative research and practice continues and in which talk as a means of learning and a subject in its own right, deserves to be acknowledged and promoted by government and policy makers."*<sup>59</sup>

**Dr Deborah Jones, Brunel University, evidence to the Inquiry**

THE ECONOMIST EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION'S BURNET NEWS CLUB PROGRAMME AT NEWBURY PARK PRIMARY SCHOOL



8.1.1 National Curriculum

*"The teaching and learning of oracy should be seen as valuable in its own right and at the centre of the curriculum."*

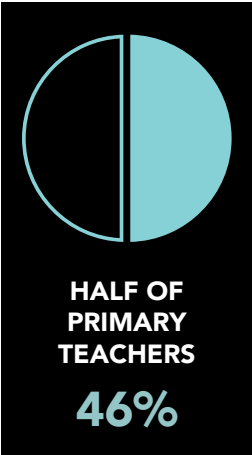
**Dr Karen Daniels, Sheffield Institute of Education, evidence to the Inquiry**

Whilst the current National Curriculum in England includes a statutory spoken language programme of study and oral language skills are further integrated within other areas of the curriculum, evidence suggests that this is not being realised in schools.

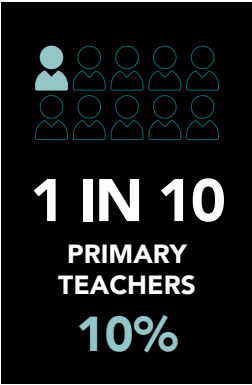
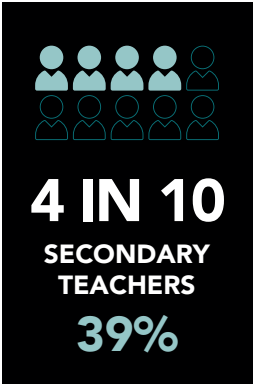
Polling shows significant variability in teachers' understanding of the statutory 'spoken language' requirements outlined in the National Curriculum. Only half or primary teachers and a quarter of secondary teachers say they are confident in their understanding of these requirements, with nearly 4 in 10....'.<sup>60</sup>

69% of primary school teachers and 36% of secondary school teachers felt their school is meeting the statutory requirements. Only 14% of classroom teachers felt that their school was meeting the spoken language requirements of the National Curriculum to a great extent compared to 40% of school leaders.<sup>61</sup>

In oral evidence to the Inquiry, Tim Oates, Group Director of Assessment Research and Development at Cambridge Assessment and one of the architects of the current National Curriculum, explained that in his view the National Curriculum in England makes clear the statutory position of spoken language. He went on to suggest that there is a gap between the intention of the 2014 National

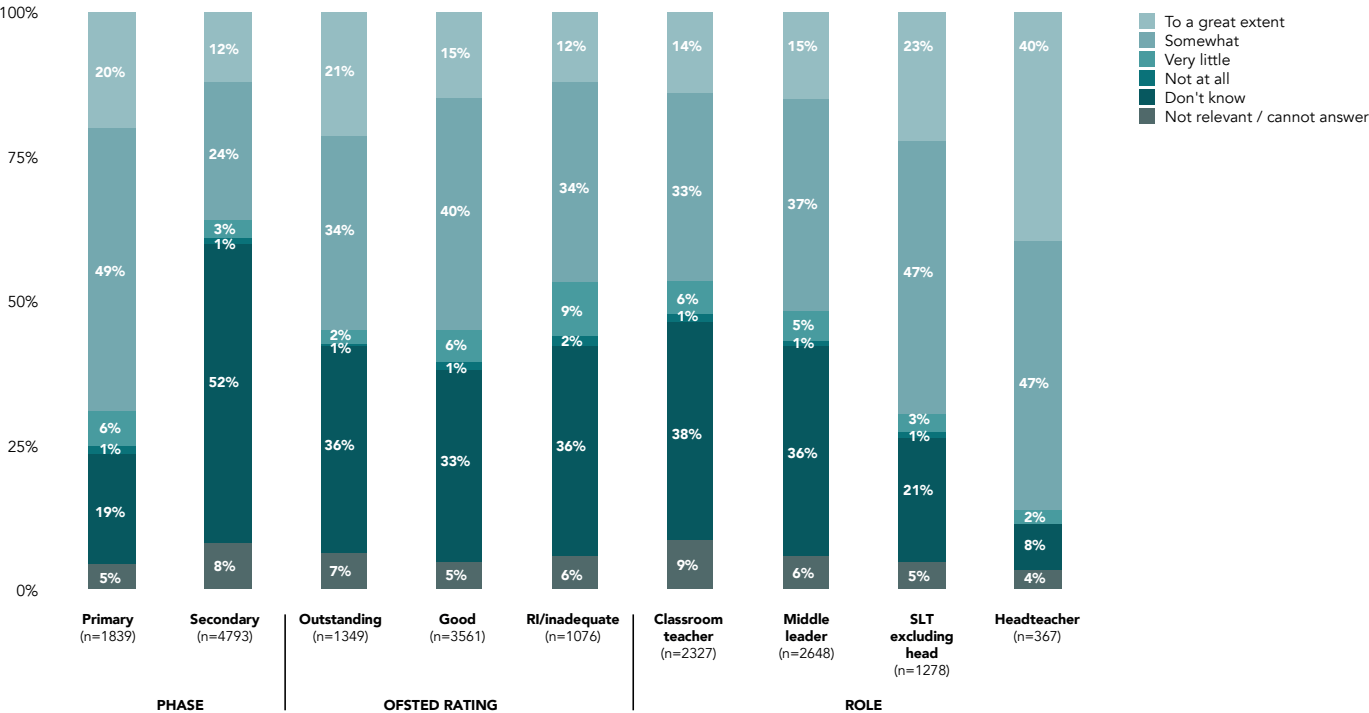


said they are confident in their understanding of the statutory 'spoken language' requirements outlined in the National Curriculum



said they are 'not at all confident' in their understanding of the statutory 'spoken language' requirements outlined in the National Curriculum

To what extent does your school meet the statutory 'spoken language' requirements outlined in the National Curriculum?



*"We have specific understandings of oracy. We have good theorisation, we know what we're after. What we don't have is effective practices. We do have a clear statement in law repeated across all subjects in relation to the importance of oracy, but it's not being enacted in all schools."*

**Tim Oates, Cambridge Assessment, evidence to the Inquiry**

Many of the contributors to this Inquiry felt this gap between the aspiration of the intended curriculum and the reality of the enacted curriculum in schools emanates from a lack of specificity and ambition for oracy in the National Curriculum.

*"Current provision in the National Curriculum is not significant enough to make a difference or push the importance of speaking and listening.... The focus [on spoken language] isn't as strong as it should be. ... [The National Curriculum does] not explain in any detail the necessary requirements that a child actually needs to be successful."*

**Laura Fletcher, Wexham Court Primary School, evidence to the Inquiry**

At a Fair Education Alliance (FEA) roundtable, conducted as part of its submission to the Inquiry, teachers said that whilst spoken language is included in the National Curriculum for primary and secondary, its inclusion is very 'top level' in comparison with reading and writing. There are no age-related expectations, so there is no universal framework or clarity for teachers as to what each year group should be able to do, and there is no government-endorsed guidance that sets this out.

This view was echoed in other evidence that suggested that there was a paucity of guidance, narrowness of scope and lack of progression in expectations for oracy within the National Curriculum.

*"The Spoken Language skills breakdown and expectations for pupils are not well delineated, with a single page of guidance covering years 1 to 6, so that teachers are not supported in planning activities which will develop pupils' oracy skills. This contrasts with other subjects, which have detailed year-by-year breakdowns."*  
**Oracy Cambridge, evidence to the Inquiry**

*"There is not enough differentiation in the current National Curriculum for English in terms of spoken language to facilitate the delivery of high-quality oracy education, and the guidance given is insufficient for such a crucial skill set. The requirements focus largely on formal speaking and listening (presentations, speeches, debate, performance) and do not make enough reference to the broader range of talk possibilities."*  
**Tina Renshaw, English Speaking Board, evidence to the Inquiry**

Consequently, some contributors to the Inquiry felt that oracy has been 'downgraded' in the National Curriculum compared to its prominence in previous iterations. However, in their evidence to the Inquiry, Ofsted explained that the onus was on schools to fill in the detail stating that the National Curriculum:

*"[The National Curriculum] "provides useful, high level spoken language goals, which defines what people should know and be able to do by the end of key stage two and the end of key stage four [and that these high-level goals] can support schools in the important job of planning and sequencing the building blocks for success in spoken language across the subjects across all key stages."*

**Ofsted, evidence to the Inquiry**

**Oracy All Party Parliamentary Group  
Schools Question Time**





## 8.1.2 Statutory assessment

*"There are currently no incentives for teachers or senior leaders to focus on oracy, other than their intrinsic belief that it is the right thing to do for the children."*

**Wendy Lee, speech and language consultant, evidence to the Inquiry**

Spoken language has no currency in statutory assessments beyond the Early Years Foundation Stage and Modern Foreign Languages.

Whilst the inquiry heard a spectrum of views as to whether oracy should be formally assessed, and the potential role that oracy could play in formal assessments of other areas of learning, there was general agreement that the absence of currency and accountability undermined oracy's status and value.

*"[If oracy] is an important curriculum objective, and it is in England, then you know it should be mirrored in a way in which learning outcomes are being examined. And I think that will have a backwash effect on the learning activities."*

**Andreas Schleicher, OECD, evidence to the Inquiry**

*"The relatively low status of spoken language in England is related to the high-stakes accountability system which focuses on reading and writing."*

**UK Literacy Association, evidence to the Inquiry**

Whilst the inclusion of oracy in high-stakes testing would confer status and focus energy and resources on oracy education, the APPG was minded that increasing the burden of statutory assessments and accountability on schools is a blunt tool with many potential negative implications and consequences.

*"Ill-conceived tests in oracy at a national level could be disastrous. They could close down talk rather than open it up, and tests are individual, talk is collective and reciprocal."*

**Professor Robin Alexander, University of Cambridge, evidence to the Inquiry**

We were also made aware of the significant challenges of assessing oracy fairly and feasibility at scale including:

- standardising conditions for testing
- the interactive and interdependent nature of spoken language
- separating content knowledge from performance skills
- moderation of teacher-assigned marks/grades is not practicable
- the risk of pupils practising the end-goal (composite final performance) rather than the curriculum elements required to achieve the composite at a high standard.

Nevertheless we heard interesting examples of how oral language assessments worked in non-statutory settings, other sectors (including higher education and professional training) and other educational jurisdictions with suggestions worthy of further investigation and trialling as to how this could be achieved in mainstream education.

*"It's a brave secondary school that does anything in its mainstream curriculum that does not contribute directly to its examination 'bottom line'."*

**Mike Berrill, executive principal, Biddenham School, evidence to the Inquiry**

A significant proportion of submissions to the Inquiry highlighted the implications and impact of the downgrading of the spoken language element of the English Language GCSE from a component of the overall grade to a standalone endorsement.

Whilst contributors acknowledged the limitations of the assessment, their concern centred on the signal that its removal had sent regarding the importance of oracy, for both students and teachers in terms of time allocation, focus and motivation.

*"The removal of Speaking and Listening from English Language GCSE in 2014 had a huge impact as it deprioritised oracy in the eyes of non-English teachers, but more importantly in the eyes of increasingly exam-focused students ... the standard of oracy among the students coming in from GCSE has clearly declined compared to when it was still assessed."*

**Rebecca Pinfield, assistant principal and English teacher, Newham Collegiate Sixth Form Centre, evidence to the Inquiry**

*"No amount of euphemistic packaging will change the fact that [oracy] makes no difference to the overall final GCSE result."*

**Laurus Trust and Altius Alliance, evidence to the Inquiry**



Others felt that the nature of the GCSE Spoken Language assessment had itself undermined the value of oracy by marginalising spoken language as a small element of one subject. At present, students in England give a prepared spoken presentation for their assessment, whereas in Northern Ireland, for example, there are three controlled assessment tasks: an individual presentation and interaction, a discussion and a role play,<sup>62</sup> which contributes towards 20% of the final grade. In Wales, the English Language GCSE has two tasks: an individual presentation and a group discussion, which contribute towards 20% of the final grade.<sup>63</sup> In Scottish National 5 English, students are required to either prepare and give a presentation or take part in a group discussion.<sup>64</sup>

*"Much has been written about the removal of the 'speaking and listening' component as a meaningful contributory part of the assessment of the English Language GCSE. This is a significant change and one that - without question - has changed English teachers' attitudes to oracy in the curriculum...In some senses, the change has liberated teachers from paying lip service to this incomparable curriculum end, by pinning all of its significance onto a small corner of a small part of coursework of a single qualification. Teachers now are able to give significance to the place of oracy in every subject and ensure that it is not an isolated skill separable from all other learning."*

**Holland Park School, evidence to the Inquiry**

CfEY and the University of Oxford polling of secondary teachers found appetite for the statutory assessment of spoken language (including among English teachers) is

not high. Overall, contributors were unconvinced of the value and purpose of the current oracy endorsement at GCSE in its current form.<sup>65</sup>

Beyond GCSE, we heard how standard testing at Key Stage 2 can impede talk and discussion-rich teaching, with studies that have shown that "a culture of high-stakes testing is associated with increasingly teacher-centred pedagogy."

The desire for a more significant overhaul of statutory assessments was expressed by some contributors. In 2019, the Association of School and College Leaders' (ASCL) Forgotten Third Commission said that a "working group representing the Department for Education, Ofqual and the professional associations should be established to introduce a Passport in English to replace the current GCSE English Language". They explained that the qualification would be taken by all students 'graduating' from school/college into the workplace or higher education and should include a "significant oracy component."<sup>66</sup>

Those advocating for reform of our whole approach to assessment and accountability argued that the disruptive effect of the Covid-19 pandemic presented an opportunity to rethink the approach to enable the inclusion of a broader range of skills such as oracy. Contributors agreed this could serve to rebalance the curriculum from a narrow set of academic achievements.



### 8.1.3 Accountability

Alongside statutory assessment, the Inquiry heard how Ofsted and the inspection framework influenced the status and value attributed to aspects of education.

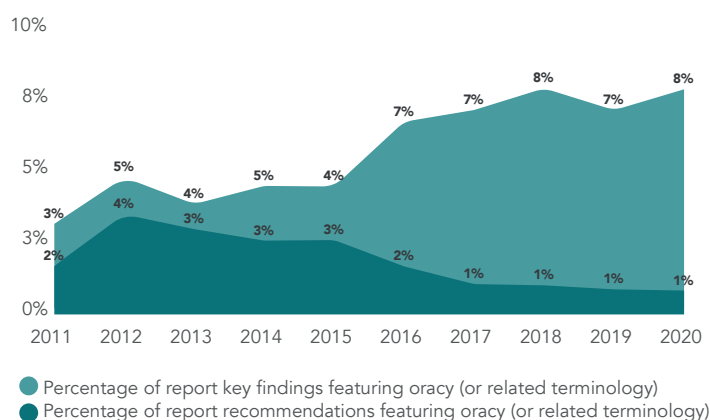
Analysis of Ofsted school inspection reports found only a small minority make reference to oracy or associated terminology, including ‘spoken language’, and this has been the case for a decade. When taken in the context of all school inspections taking place each year, it is striking how little oracy features. For example, in 2019, only 7% of inspection reports mentioned oracy or associated terms.<sup>67</sup>

In its submission to the Inquiry, Ofsted stated that:

*“Inspections show that there is confusion between using spoken language as a pedagogy and spoken language as a curriculum object. Giving pupils opportunities to speak is not the same as delivering a curriculum plan with clear steps towards confident and sophisticated spoken communication.”*

This confusion was reflected in the CfEY and the University of Oxford analysis, which found that it was often unclear in reports whether it is teachers’ or pupils’ talk that Ofsted is commenting on.<sup>68</sup>

Proportion of Ofsted reports referencing oracy



Where Ofsted makes positive reference to oracy, this is generally in relation to good pedagogical interventions that teachers have been making. Negative references tend to relate to pupils’ attainment.

*“The relatively low status of spoken language in England is related to the high-stakes accountability system which focuses on reading and writing.”*

**UK Literacy Association, evidence to the Inquiry**

The Inquiry heard anecdotal evidence that where schools had explicitly focused on oracy, this had been reflected

in their inspection report but that the provision of oracy education was not routinely addressed by inspectors. Contributors felt that the guidance to inspectors and schools should explicitly recognise the importance of oracy in the “provision of an ambitious curriculum which provides students with the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in life”.<sup>69</sup>

In line with Ofsted’s approach to reading, inspectors should ensure that school leaders and teachers are able to articulate their intent for the development of their students’ spoken language, and demonstrate how this is realised through teaching and learning and the impact this is having on outcomes. Further, they should explain both how oracy supports learning and personal development in general, and how students specifically develop the spoken language skills required to succeed beyond school.

With strong evidence as to the efficacy of oracy for disadvantaged learners, when considering the effectiveness of a school’s provision to close gaps in attainment, Ofsted should recognise the role of purposeful and explicit oracy teaching in closing the language gap between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers.

In addition, Ofsted should ensure that schools have appropriately high expectations for learners’ oracy skills and that schools offer a wide range of contexts and opportunities for learners to develop and practise these skills to enable them to become agile communicators equipped to succeed in life.

### 8.1.4 Evidenced-based policy

*“Reading and writing are viewed as pre-eminent to the detriment of talk in UK classrooms. Government policy, particularly in England, undervalues oracy, thus signalling to other sectors that spoken language is less important than reading and writing.”*

**Dr Deborah Jones, Brunel University, evidence to the Inquiry**

Government policy, guidance and investments are key levers for change and provide impetus to approaches and initiatives. Government should consider the implications for oracy and the opportunity to encourage and further high-quality oracy education as an outcome of evidence-based policy development. The recent catch-up investment in oral language interventions in early years is to be welcomed but the Department of Education should look to sustain this investment beyond Early Years and fully integrate oracy into all policy relating to literacy, pupil premium, social mobility, area-based initiatives, teacher development and school improvement.



The current status of oracy varies across the four nations of the UK, as illustrated by the following infographic.

### Scotland

In 2010 in Scotland, the 'Curriculum for Excellence' (CfE) is launched, which emphasises that pupils should be given opportunities to *"think and talk together, to discuss ideas, analyse and solve problems"*.

National Qualifications in English in Scotland assess pupils' talk.

The CfE offers both English medium and Gaelic medium education (GME). For both tracks, 'listening and talking' are regarded as core aspects of literacy, which underpins all curriculum areas.

Oracy is fundamental to GME. As most learners receiving GME are native English speakers, the GME curriculum is immersive, placing a strong emphasis on listening and talking.

'Listening and talking' feature explicitly in the National Improvement Framework, which supports accountability by requiring schools to submit data on the Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels (ACEL) annually.

**"We are developing children and young people who are successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens, and oracy is essential to the development of all those four capacities."**

Nicola McDonald, Dundee City Council, evidence to the Inquiry

In Scottish National 5 English, there is a spoken language assessment which is compulsory but not graded.

### Northern Ireland

The Northern Irish National Curriculum positions 'communication' as a cross-curricular skill.

The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment's (CCEA) guidance specifies standards for moral and spiritual development, in addition to civic development, and regards literary and communication skills as necessary to learners' personal and ethical development.

Communication is measured at the end of key stages across talking and listening, reading and writing. As an accountability measure, schools are required to submit learners' work to the CCEA for external moderation.

For GCSE there are three spoken language assessment tasks which together contribute towards 20% of the final grade.

### England

Communication and language are a prime area of learning in the early years foundation stage (EYFS), and there is an explicit spoken language programme of study in the National Curriculum in English, as well a statement on the importance of spoken language across the curriculum.

English Language GCSE has a spoken language component which is compulsory but does not contribute to the final grade.

The 2019 Ofsted Inspection Framework highlight how that the provider's curriculum should be "coherently planned and sequenced towards cumulatively sufficient knowledge and skills for future learning and employment" and teachers should be "promoting appropriate discussion about the subject matter they are teaching"

### Wales

In 2016, Curriculum for Wales says oracy is one of three main routes to literacy.

Oracy contributes to 20% of pupils' final grades in the English Language GCSE.

The Welsh school inspectorate, Estyn, publishes reports on the quality of oracy in Welsh schools.<sup>1</sup>

The 2022 Curriculum for Wales incorporates languages, literacy and communication as one of six key areas of learning.

**"We think it's important to mention that oracy has the same status in our inspection framework as reading and writing. And this reflects the National Curriculum in Wales. We focus on how well people learn to talk, as well as how pupils learn through talk. This is because we evaluate and report on how well people develop the repertoire of oratory skills in their language and literacy lessons, as well as how they use and apply these skills in learning contexts across the curriculum."**

Richard Thomas and Liz Berry, Estyn, evidence to the Inquiry



<sup>1</sup> Estyn (2017) 'Developing oracy through self-assessment and new teaching strategies', Estyn website, <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/effective-practice/developing-oracy-through-self-assessment-and-new-teaching-strategies>; Estyn (2018) 'Rapid development of pupils' oracy skills', Estyn website, <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/effective-practice/rapid-development-pupils-oracy-skills>.

## 8.2 Agree shared expectations for oracy and increase understanding of how these can be achieved

Our Inquiry found a disconnect in expectations and understanding of oracy that resulted in patchy provision of variable quality, meaning that many children and young people were missing out on the many benefits of oracy education discussed in this report.

The lack of consistency in access to oracy education related to Geography, type of school, age and phase of student and subject area. For example, CfEY and the University of Oxford research found that young people growing up in certain areas of England (and particularly the East and North East of England) were less likely to feel that oracy was prioritised during their schooling.<sup>70</sup>

At the heart of the problem is that oracy is seen as optional. Without shared expectations and understanding, provision too often depends on an individual teacher's perceptions of the value of oracy, their subject area and the particular challenges their school faces.

Many contributors felt that tackling a fundamental lack of understanding of oracy, spoken language and language development and how they are developed and taught was the first step to securing a greater access to high-quality oracy education for all:

*"There is a perception that children arrive at school having already learned to talk, and that they extend their vocabulary and skills entirely naturally through casual interaction with other children, and by listening to adults. These assumptions are not supported by the evidence."*

**Oracy Cambridge, evidence to the Inquiry**

*"There is a long-held belief that children develop the language skills they need in the Early Years period, and that this is sorted by the time they reach school. The Early Years is definitely an important time, but language skills continue to develop right through school and into adulthood."*

**I CAN, evidence to the Inquiry**

*"One of the barriers, I believe, is that the power of talk is poorly understood. And so there are plenty of assumptions that because virtually everyone makes sound that that just happens organically."*

**Mary Myatt, education consultant, evidence to the Inquiry**

*"Spoken language is too often seen as something that will develop naturally and is therefore not given the curricular thinking seen in other subjects... Teachers are empowered when they have the necessary knowledge to teach all aspects of spoken language. Some teachers do not have a strong enough subject knowledge to ensure pupils learn these building blocks."*

**Ofsted, evidence to the Inquiry**

*"In our classrooms [as teachers], we need to be facilitators of oracy and aware of the assumption that purposeful talk is something that just 'happens' to us as we grow."*

**Nina Kewin, St Christopher's Church of England High School, evidence to the Inquiry**

To tackle these assumptions and increase the consistency of access and provision, contributors called for shared expectations of oracy education to be articulated. These expectations would outline a child and young person's oracy education entitlement and should ensure that oracy is deliberately and explicitly taught to all children and young people at all ages and stages of education, across all areas of the curriculum as well as in English.

THE ECONOMIST EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION'S BURNET NEWS CLUB PROGRAMME AT WOODHILL PRIMARY SCHOOL



## 8.2.1 Oracy is explicitly and deliberately taught

*"Too much oracy is left to chance. So it's the explicit teaching of it, which is crucial."*

**Roy Blatchford, chair of the Forgotten Third Commission, evidence to the Inquiry**

*"Classroom talk is an unstructured break in a lesson rather than a fundamental and integral part of teaching and learning. Students are rarely given feedback on the quality of their verbal contributions; teachers don't plan the purpose of a discussion item; and neither pupil nor teacher has a consistent view as to what 'good talk' looks, sounds and feels like."*

**Voice 21, evidence to the Inquiry**

*"There is no common agreement in the profession about how it might be taught"*

**Pie Corbett, Talk for writing, evidence to the Inquiry**

The lack of shared understanding of what should be taught, when and for what end was identified as a significant barrier to the consistency and coherence of oracy education.

*"Spoken language is not treated in the same way as reading and writing, because it does not have a defined and sequenced body of knowledge which supports pupils to progress in their spoken communication. It is difficult to conceptualise progression in spoken language because there is a lack of clarity about the curricular building blocks which lead to confidence in spoken language/make up the spoken language curriculum."*

**Ofsted, evidence to the Inquiry**

At a Fair Education Alliance (FEA) roundtable, conducted as part of its submission to the Inquiry, teachers said there are no age-related expectations for oracy, no universal framework or clarity for teachers as to what each year group should be able to do, and there is no government-endorsed guidance that sets this out.

The lack of shared expectations also results in some aspects of oracy dominating what is taught, whilst others receive scant coverage. Contributors highlighted that performative oracy (public speaking and debate) is often given more attention than exploratory talk for learning as

it is self-contained, easier to evaluate and more visible.

With no common understanding of the scope and content of oracy education, there is a risk that all 'speaking and listening' is deemed as oracy, with little critical consideration of purpose or intent, leading to the proliferation of unhelpful notions of what constitutes a good oracy education. A number of contributors highlighted this challenge in relation to the teaching of standard English.

*"Good oracy education recognises that there is no such thing as 'proper' spoken language; there is simply language that is more or less appropriate in any given context and for any given purpose."*

**Rob Drummond, Manchester Metropolitan University, evidence to the Inquiry**

*"There is a tendency within the statutory requirements and guidance to conflate two different kinds of talk in a way that is unhelpful: talk as performance and talk for learning. In relation to talk as performance, pupils are required to develop the skills necessary to give speeches/presentations and participate in structured debate. Within these formal (and semi-scripted) speech events, it makes sense that pupils should 'control their speaking ... consciously and ... use Standard English' (DfE 2014). However, when it comes to talk for learning, the aim is to think aloud and contribute spontaneously to an evolving argument. This kind of talk necessarily involves hesitation, lack of fluency, half-formed statements and emergent ideas, and for the sake of equitable participation, it is crucial that pupils feel able to respond, question, challenge and elaborate their thinking using whatever language they find most comfortable, which for many will be their local dialect. There is no reason why this thinking aloud should be done in Standard English, because it is possible to express complex ideas in a variety of linguistic forms and styles."*

**Dr Julia Snell, University of Leeds, evidence to the Inquiry**

*"When teachers do not have a thorough understanding of oracy and how it can be developed in the classroom, we have found that they are more likely to introduce blanket, linguistically inappropriate expectations such as 'students must speak in full sentences', rather than teaching their students about the changing expectations for talk in different contexts. It is this lack of confidence and expertise which leads to misguided but well-intentioned attempts to police students' language with 'word jails', a perverse incentive for students to use Standard English in the classroom] risking alienation and the devaluing of their linguistic repertoires."*

**Voice 21, evidence to the Inquiry**



Finally, regarding the absence of shared expectations and a common understanding of progression in oracy, contributors were concerned that expectations for both the quality of oracy teaching and student progress in oracy could be too low.

In developing a shared framework for oracy and common understanding of high-quality oracy education, the inquiry heard of examples of established practice that can act as a starting point including the Communication Trust's *Communicating the Curriculum*<sup>71</sup>, Voice 21's and Oracy Cambridge's *Oracy Framework*<sup>72</sup>, frameworks for progression from assessment providers including the English Speaking Board<sup>73</sup> and the Voice 21 Oracy Benchmarks.<sup>74</sup>

## 8.2.2 To all children and young people

To realise the academic and wider societal benefits of oracy, it must be an integral part of every child's education. It is important, then, that there is equality of provision across and between all schools. Oracy should not, for example, be annexed to a one-off themed week or an after-school debating club for a self-selecting few, although these could be valuable enrichments to an oracy education.

The Inquiry found worrying variation in the time and attention afforded to oracy across schools with independent schools much more likely to devote time and resources to oracy compared to state schools, which risks exacerbating gaps. Research suggests that students in independent schools are more likely than those in state schools to receive a oracy education; independent school teachers were significantly more likely to agree that their school has a consistent approach to oracy<sup>75</sup>. Over the years, polling has shown that independent school teachers place a higher priority on oracy, and this was the case both before and after March 2020 when the first lockdown began in England<sup>76</sup>. State school teachers are less likely than independent school teachers to feel that it is 'very important' to develop oracy skills, and less likely to report that their school has extra-curricular oracy activities available.

This is something parents feel too, with more than half of parents feeling that children in independent schools are better supported to develop their spoken language skills than those in state schools.<sup>77</sup>

This is particularly important when we take into account the contribution of oracy education to social equity.

## 8.2.3 At all ages and stages of education

Whilst evidence to the Inquiry rightly stressed the importance of early intervention in minimising language gaps on entry to school, the diminishing focus on oracy as children move through schooling means we are denying children and young people the many ongoing positive impacts of oracy on learning and outcomes.

The emphasis and value ascribed to oracy and spoken language needs to be sustained beyond Early Years and throughout the stages and phases of education.

*"There is still insufficient public awareness and understanding among decision-makers and professionals about the importance of speech, language and communication, particularly beyond the early years of life...Beyond the early years, education policy puts very little emphasis on spoken language."<sup>78</sup>*

*"We believe that a focus on high-stakes testing for reading from the phonics screening check onwards fails to recognise the importance of oral language to literacy development as well as to mathematics and learning across the curriculum."*

**Professor Maggie Snowling, University of Oxford, evidence to the Inquiry**

Sustaining a focus on oracy also matters because in oracy – as with other areas of learning, including literacy – we observe a 'Matthew Effect'. In other words, children with high levels of language development on starting school tend to progress more quickly, while those with lower levels of language progress more slowly. Children with poor language at age 5 are 6 times less likely to reach the expected standard in English at age 11 than those with good language at that age, and 11 times less likely to achieve the expected standard in Maths.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, around 30% of pre-school children with low language abilities continue to show persistent difficulties into their primary school years.<sup>80</sup>

*"Best practice is often seen in more disadvantaged areas in early years...Children often have poor speaking skills or speaking skills in a different language – so it's given a lot of attention. This drops off as the focus becomes more academic higher up the education system."*

**Fair Education Alliance, evidence to the Inquiry**

*"The Early Years and Key Stage 1 curricula emphasise support for the foundations of literacy and spoken language. However, this emphasis lessens as you move up the school system. Our findings suggests that children would make greater progress with more focus on supporting oracy, listening, reading and writing in Key Stages 2 and 3 (and beyond)."*

**Dr Jessie Ricketts, Royal Holloway, University of London evidence to the Inquiry**

It is important to note that CfEY and University of Oxford polling showed, that concern about the impact of the pandemic on children's spoken language among primary school teachers was consistent between reception, KS1 (71%) and KS2 teachers (63%).

### 8.2.4 Across all areas of the curriculum as well as in English

*"We think that actually oracy should be something that doesn't add to teacher workload necessarily but becomes more of the vehicle that leads learning across the curriculum...it's not that it's an add on, but it's a golden thread that goes throughout your curriculum."*  
**Nicky Pear, assistant headteacher, Cubitt Town Junior School, evidence to the Inquiry**

Just as oracy should not be a concern or priority in only one phase of education, neither should it be siloed within English alone.

*"There is a strong case for revisiting the 1975 Bullock Report's advocacy of 'language across the curriculum' in order to underline the argument that educationally productive talk is the responsibility of all teachers, not just those who teach English"*  
**Professor Robin Alexander, University of Cambridge, evidence to the Inquiry**

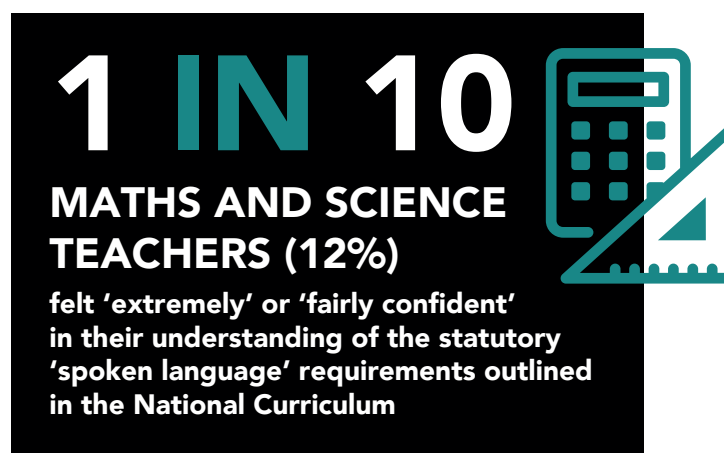
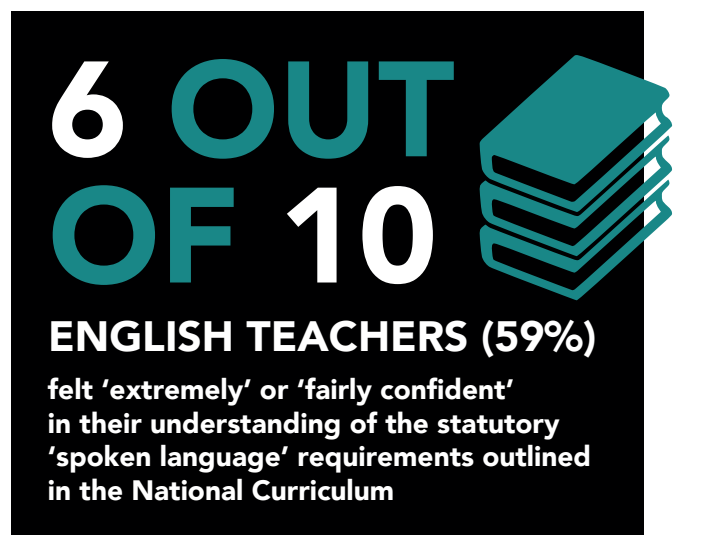
The Inquiry heard how high-quality oracy education and purposeful talk enhance learning in all areas of the curriculum but that many teachers feel that oracy is the English department's responsibility. This can result in teachers in other curriculum areas under-valuing oracy in their subjects or lacking confidence in how to teach oracy.

This was reflected in the 2021 CfEY and the University of Oxford March 2021 polling, which showed that English and language teachers were more likely than their colleagues to see oracy as a priority as schools re-opened after lockdown. English and language teachers were also significantly more confident in their understanding of the statutory expectations for spoken language in the National Curriculum compared to their Maths, science and physical education colleagues.<sup>81</sup>

Whilst oracy is a specific concern of English teaching, there is a substantial body of research from around the world which emphasises the importance of generating rich talk opportunities in a range of curriculum subjects, including mathematics, science and Geography as well as English.

*"You should be able to embed [oracy] in everything from Geography to math that actually communication is at the heart of every human activity."*  
**Alice Barnard, Edge Foundation, evidence to the Inquiry**

*"Oracy-based pedagogies can improve science education when taught well. ... [we must ensure] that spoken language education is being implemented at a high standard across all subjects, including the sciences."*  
**Royal Institution and the British Science Association, evidence to the Inquiry**



## 8.3 Equip schools to provide sustained, consistent and comprehensive oracy education in schools

*“Speaking and listening skills have long been the Cinderella of the curriculum, particularly at a secondary level. Whilst their importance is acknowledged in terms of accessing learning and as life skills, there hasn’t been proper investment and priority given to oracy in schools. Stephen Tierney, headteachers roundtable, evidence to the Inquiry*

Whilst increasing the status and developing shared expectations and understanding of oracy should serve to galvanise and incentivise improvements to access, provision and the effectiveness of oracy education, children and young people’s experience of oracy education will ultimately depend on what happens in their schools and classrooms every day.

Evidence shows that pupils’ oracy education may hinge on particular teachers’ practices and interests.

*“In 2018 assessment for the UK, only 39% of students said that their teachers encouraged them to express their opinion in most classes...but you had 37% of students who said that teachers pose questions to them that motivate them to participate actively in the classroom in most classes, and that is actually slightly higher than the OECD average of 35%. But what you can see from this is that learning in British classrooms is still a kind of passive phenomenon where actually this act of contribution doesn’t seem to be consistently encouraged.”*

**Andreas Schleicher, OECD, evidence to the Inquiry**

The Inquiry repeatedly heard how the importance of oracy needs to be reflected in a school’s culture, curriculum and practice, and teachers and school leaders need to be equipped to provide a consistent and coherent high-quality oracy education for all children and young people.

In the *State of Speaking in Our Schools*<sup>82</sup> teachers identified the barriers they experienced in the classroom:

- Lack of time - time is a precious commodity for school managers, and lack of time is often what accounts for lack of a standardised approaches to oracy.
- Perceptions that oracy-based approaches can be challenging to manage and are therefore not always time-efficient and the pressures of getting through curriculum content can inhibit the use of talk.
- Anxiety that shy and under-confident pupils might struggle, or that pupils’ behaviour will get worse.
- Priority being given to other tasks (in particular, pupils’

writing) as a result of the challenge of demonstrating progress in oracy and accountability targets.

- A lack of confidence and expertise, exacerbated by a paucity of training, resources and guidance.
- Perceptions that oracy is only occasionally relevant when teaching or relevant only in certain subjects such as English.

### 8.3.1 Increasing teacher confidence and capability in oracy

*“I would emphasise that oracy is not just an academic pursuit, although it supports academic progress, it’s not just about fairness, although that is really important to create a culture where everyone knows they’re valued, it’s about a way of teaching and learning...How do we help our teachers to be as confident as they can be in enabling the best from their students. It does take a confident teacher to ask their students what they think.”*  
**Dame Alison Peacock, Chartered College of Teaching, evidence to the Inquiry**

As a central pillar of teaching and learning, oracy should feature in all initial teacher education programmes from Initial Teacher Training, through the Early Careers Framework and in Continued Professional Development.

*“Lack of high-quality CPD in this area is a factor and the inclusion of this in teaching training and for teachers early in their career would improve confidence and lead to better provision.”*

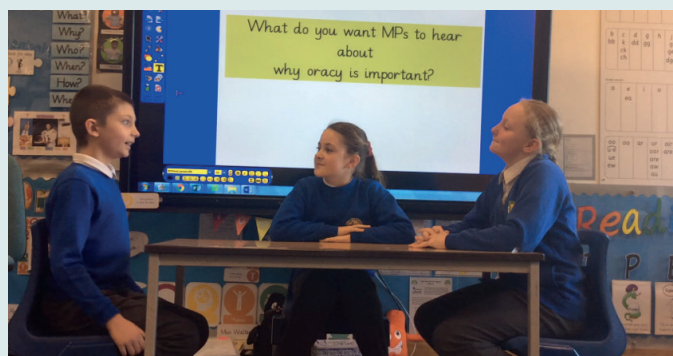
**Tudor Grange Academy SCITT programme, evidence to the Inquiry**

*“Schools tell me they need more specialist support and an explicit structure that allows school leaders to prioritise, monitor, and deliver high-quality programmes to improve oral language. Some have also expressed a desire to learn more personal strategies to facilitate communication in the classroom.”*  
**Courtenay Norbury, University College London, evidence to the Inquiry**

Contributors highlighted that practical application of Initial Teacher Training (ITT) learning remains a key challenge. Alongside concerns about quality assurance across ITT providers, it was flagged that the ITT core Content Framework and Early Career Framework could be interpreted too narrowly when it came to spoken language, risking too little emphasis on its importance.

Teachers and school leaders highlighted to the Inquiry that CPD on oracy needs to be sustained and embedded as opposed to one-off training days. Offers on oracy can be fragmented and there is a need to harness what is available, and encourage and enable schools to access it. Capacity and resourcing concerns mean investment is needed to ensure access to high-quality training and





## Case study: The Plymouth Oracy Project

Plymouth Teaching School Alliance (PTSA) and Plymouth Marjon University worked together on an 18-month project funded by the Department for Education's Strategic School Improvement Fund, aiming to improve oracy in 45 participating schools. These schools were a mix of primary, secondary and special schools. Deprivation is high in parts of Plymouth, with some local wards in the highest 1% of deprivation nationally.

The focus of the project was on improving the oracy development and educational outcomes of pupils falling into the 'disadvantaged' category, to 'close the gap' between pupils from poorer socioeconomic backgrounds and those from more affluent backgrounds.

Two leaders from each school participated in training sessions focused on increasing teachers' repertoire of talk techniques. Specialist Leaders in Education (SLE) and Plymouth Leaders in Education (PLE) have also provided targeted support to specific schools.

As part of the project, staff developed the 'Plymouth Assessment Tool' to help teachers capture and track pupils' oracy proficiency. Quantitative and qualitative evidence indicates that the project is positively shaping outcomes from the Early Years, through primary and at secondary, including a narrowing of the attainment gap in test scores at the end of Key Stages 2 and 4. From what was learned, The Plymouth Oracy project continues to support schools to develop an approach to Oracy within the region. One project member said:

"Across the board there has been an improvement in pupils' progress in the classes where we made oracy a focus. A hugely positive outcome is that disadvantaged pupils have made more progress than their peers, which means they're starting to close the gap in attainment in subjects across the curriculum...What has also been positive for pupils is the improvement beyond the classroom. We've found that the project has impacted their emotional wellbeing, confidence, behaviour and even attendance."

**Plymouth Oracy Project, evidence to the Inquiry**

### 8.3.2 Tools and resources for Oracy

Contributors also emphasised the need for high-quality tools and resources to support oracy teaching, especially in relation to assessing and monitoring pupil progress. This would serve to enhance teacher confidence in planning purposeful talk into lessons and providing effective feedback to pupils to aid progression.

*"Oracy's role in learning is less well understood. School staff are under-confident in their ability to support and monitor pupils' language...There are a range of training opportunities available, and tools which are available to support school staff, but despite this, there is a need for more well-validated tools to track language across age and phase."*

**Tudor Grange Academy, evidence to the Inquiry**

*"There are few assessment tools that education practitioners might use to identify children's oracy skills and those that are commonly available only capture language skills in younger children up to the age of six."*

**Professor Julie Dockrell, UCL Institute of Education, evidence to the Inquiry**

A number of contributors called for better signposting and validation of the quality of available tools.

### 8.3.3 Whole-school policies and culture that values talk and oracy

Only 8% of teachers strongly agree that their school has a consistent approach towards developing the confidence and competence of students' spoken language and listening skills. In secondary schools, 62% of teachers don't think their school has a consistent approach towards oracy.<sup>83</sup>

Without leadership and school-wide recognition, contributors asserted that oracy education would be negatively impacted by significant in-school variation of provision.

*"Teachers continue to adapt their own pedagogy to incorporate their own ideas for 'talk' within their own classroom. Most schools don't have a whole-school policy on oracy but it is mentioned within the English/Literacy policy to include opportunities for drama, role play and possibly book talk."*

**Noctua TSA, evidence to the Inquiry**

School policies insisting on evidence of learning in books were viewed as counterproductive and a particular barrier to oracy education.

*"In primary schools teachers are torn as they know using oracy is important and can lead to larger knowledge retention but senior leaders are insistent on always having written evidence in books for fear of judgements made on them. Even in schools where oracy is highly valued there is a feeling that oracy should be evidenced in books."*

**Plymouth Oracy project seminar to gather evidence for the Inquiry**

*"Too many secondary teachers believe themselves to be under pressure to produce something tangible from pupils' learning. As a result, they focus upon writing and, at Key Stage 4 in particular, examination preparation."*  
**Estyn Wales, evidence to the Inquiry**

*"In changing the climate of our curriculum, we need to address the preconception that change equals extra work for our colleagues, and so must add curriculum time, assessment, a sense of value and 'kudos' to the process of talk."*

**Nina Kewin, lead practitioner and English teacher at St Christopher's Church of England High School, evidence to the Inquiry**

### **8.3.4 Dedicated leadership and capacity for oracy**

Alongside a whole-school policy, contributors identified leadership support as a critical factor in enabling sustained provision of high-quality oracy education. Leadership of oracy was felt to be important in setting a positive culture and conditions for oracy to thrive, including, coordinating activity to support professional learning and ensuring effective resourcing and consistent standards.

*"Teachers need quality INSET and time to plan oracy into their curriculum. They also need to have the permission of their senior leaders to experiment with different ways of using oracy and support to try again when it does not go to plan."*

**Nicola Spencer, Herts and Bucks Teaching School Alliance, evidence to the Inquiry**

*"Opportunities for pupils to develop their oracy skills are also limited in schools where there is a lack of effective coordination of provision for the development of literacy skills. This is most commonly where there have been changes in staffing, where the initiative is not supported robustly enough by senior leaders or where shortcomings in teachers' professional knowledge and skills have not been identified and addressed well enough. There remains a need for more effective specific professional learning opportunities for all teachers in oracy, particularly in the secondary sector."*

**Estyn Wales, evidence to the Inquiry**

### **8.3.5 Access to good practice for school-to-school learning**

Throughout the Inquiry, we heard from schools with a strong focus on oracy about their practice, approach and the impact on learners. Sharing this good practice and creating opportunities for school to school learning and school-led improvement for oracy, would be hugely valuable to raising standards and showcasing what is possible, as demonstrated in a number of the case studies included in this report.

### **8.3.6 Adequate provision and funding of Speech and Language therapy services in all areas and training for teachers in SLCN**

*"Significant variability exists between geographical areas and within schools as to how children with language needs are supported."*

**Dr Ioanna Bakapoulou, University of Bristol, evidence to the Inquiry**

To ensure that all children's voices are valued, those most in need must have the specialist speech and language therapy they need, when they need it. Delays in accessing provision can have serious long-term implications for pupil's progress academically and socially and no child should miss out on this essential support due to where they live and the availability of services in their area. For those children and young people with an identifiable speech and language need, a universal approach to oracy and spoken language can complement but is no substitute for specialist provision. Without it they risk being further excluded from fundamental aspects of education.

Speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) are not a fringe issue. In its submission to the Inquiry, the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) highlighted that more than 1.4 million children and young people experience these issues. Speech and language disorders affect nearly 10% of all children.<sup>84</sup> And on average, two children in every classroom have developmental language disorder (DLD), a condition where children have problems understanding and using spoken language.<sup>85</sup> If undiagnosed, communication issues can have profound effects on children's lives:

*"Additionally, children with unexplained language deficits were twice as likely as peers with good language to be rated by teachers as having social, emotional, and behavioural problems."*

**Professor Courtenay Norbury, University College London, evidence to the Inquiry**

Poor understanding of and insufficient resourcing for SLCN mean that too many children and young

people receive inadequate or miss out on vital support. This impacts on their educational outcomes, their employability and their mental health.

The Covid-19 pandemic has further inhibited support to these young people, with a new RCSLT survey in March 2021 showing that 81% of children and young people received less speech and language therapy during lockdown and 62% did not receive any therapy at all. Referrals were down by around 50% in April and May 2020. And 90% of speech and language therapists said there were children on their caseload who had not received an intervention since the start of the pandemic.<sup>86</sup>

In addition to access to specialist support, teachers need to be better equipped to identify and support children with SLCN, as well as to support the development of speech, language and communication skills.

*"Despite the evidence that training education and SLT (speech and language therapy) students together improves linguistic and curricular knowledge, the impact of such training has not been reflected by instructional practice to date."*

**Professor Julie Dockrell, UCL Institute of Education, evidence to the Inquiry**

A survey by The Communication Trust found that 42% of teachers reported receiving no training about how to identify and support children with SLCN in their initial training, and 39% had not received learning about

speech, language and communication development."<sup>87</sup>

*"While appropriately trained teachers and other education staff have an important role in supporting speech, language and communication, some children will require assessment and intervention from a speech and language therapist, who is uniquely skilled and qualified to identify and support SLCN. Speech and language therapists also play a key role in providing training to teachers and other school staff on developing a whole-school approach to supporting speech, language and communication, as well as more individualised training and advice on how to adapt teaching and resources for children's needs."*

**Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT), evidence to the Inquiry**

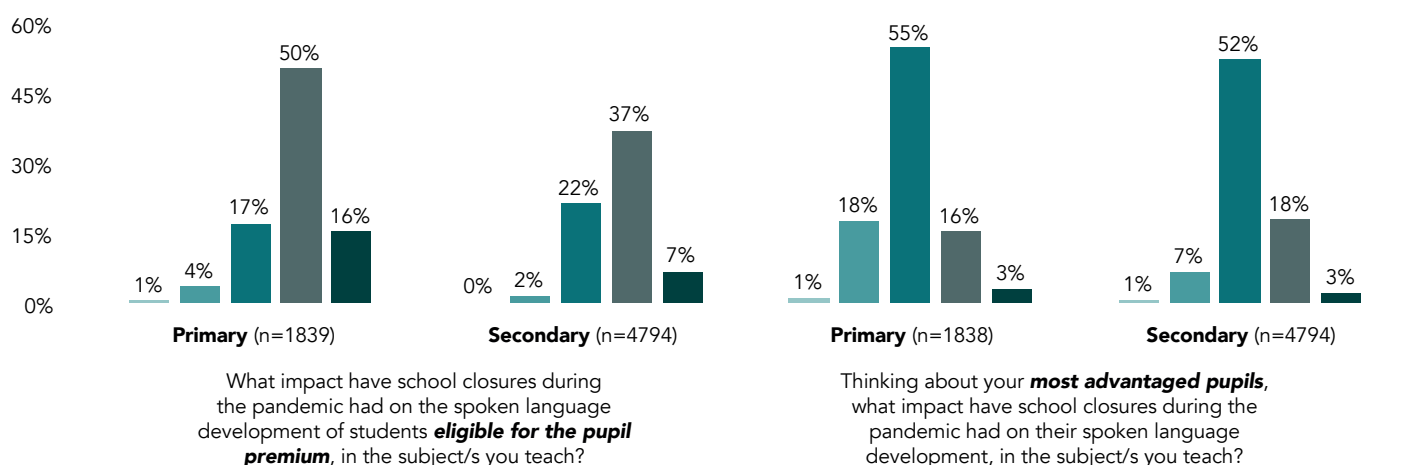
SCHOOL 21





## 8.4 Support for Covid-19 recovery

### Impact of school closures on pupils' spoken language development



The negative impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic prompted contributors to call for oracy to be seen as a specific priority in supporting post-pandemic recovery in schools. Polling in March 2021 found that 81% of head teachers felt that oracy is an essential or high priority as schools reopen.<sup>88</sup>

For many students, it was the opportunity to discuss, debate and collaborate with others that they missed most when schools were closed.

The Chartered College of Teaching's report on the impact of school closures highlights the importance of "helping children re-establish social relationships and make connections with others [...to support] their wellbeing by promoting stability and recovery," emphasising the importance of promoting "interaction between students in the form of supportive partner work, team projects and class discussions [...] after long periods of social distancing."<sup>89</sup>

Given research which has found that progress made to narrow the attainment gap between the most and least advantaged students since 2011 has not improved as a result of school closures<sup>90</sup>, it is more important than ever to ensure that every child is able to benefit from an oracy-rich education and the improved academic outcomes associated with this approach.<sup>91</sup>

Contributors have argued that a focus on oracy in the current climate is not a nice-to-have but rather a moral imperative, due to the link between a child's ability to use spoken language and his or her level of educational attainment, as well as the sobering statistics on mental health.

With the evidence demonstrating the impact of school closures as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic on pupils' spoken language development as well as wellbeing and mental health, ensuring schools and teachers are enabled to provide high quality oracy education should be a priority of 'catch up' support.

Responding to the Oracy APPG survey of 250 teachers from May-July 2020, they unanimously expressed concern that school closures will inhibit students' oracy development, and widen existing gaps, along the lines of disadvantage, SLCN, and EAL status. Teachers identified the factors of school closures and lock down which will negatively impact students' oracy development: increased screen time, diminished exposure to vocabulary, lack of modelling, lack of formal contexts, lack of peer-to-peer and adult conversation in some households.

Ofsted recently raised its concerns that children hit hardest by the pandemic are "regressing in basic skills and learning", including language, communication and oral fluency.<sup>92</sup>

With the very real possibility that Covid has widened the language gap at all ages, measures to compensate for this are needed, and an even greater focus on oracy than we had before.

*"Children will be hugely affected by lack of challenging language use in home environment, fewer opportunities for self explanation and students with EAL immersed in home language."*

**Oracy APPG teacher survey**

*"For us, many of our parents do not have high levels of vocabulary or the ability to use language effectively through questioning or conversation. Many of our children will not have had a full conversation in the whole lockdown period. They may not have been asked a question higher than a comprehension level. They would not have had excellent language role models. They will have missed out on hundreds of hours of exploratory, story and formal language."*

**Bev Knuckey, Llanedeyrn Primary School, evidence to the Inquiry**

Furthermore, now teachers are not only dealing with the implications of the lockdown but the pedagogical challenges presented by social distancing and mask wearing.

*"We are quite concerned. I think the social distancing requirements are limiting the kind of pedagogical experience very significantly"*

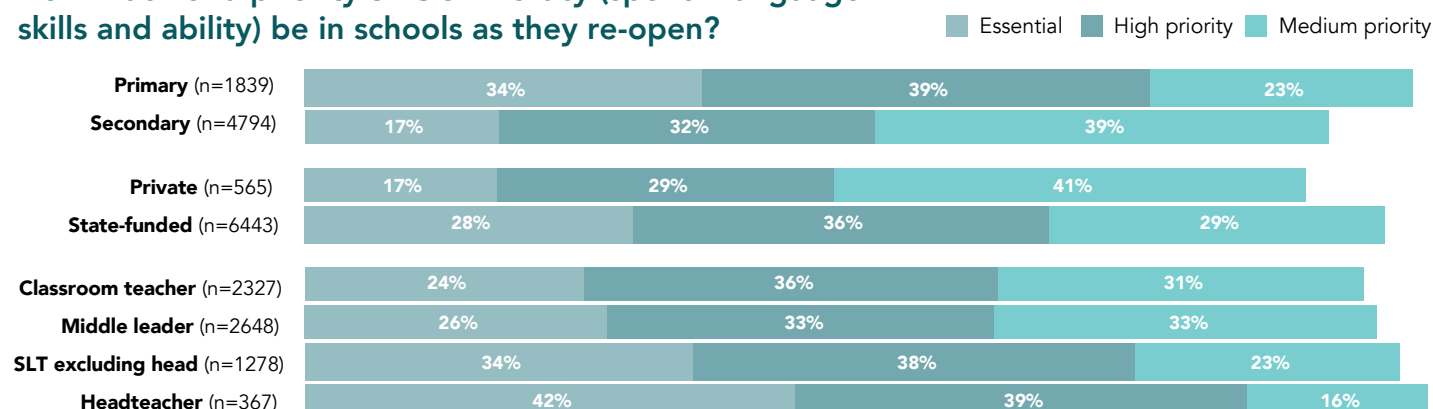
**Andreas Schleicher, OECD, evidence to the Inquiry**

Professor Robin Alexander acknowledged the challenges teachers currently face adhering to guidance on reducing social contact and maintaining safety. However, he states:

*"Talk is shaped by many forces and factors. One of them is the physical setting in which it takes place, which in turn influences its dynamics....The disadvantage of desks/tables in rows facing 'the front' (i.e. the teacher and the whiteboard or screen) is that it signals, and permits, only a limited range of talk, especially by the pupil....Given that the Oracy APPG is being advised by many of its witnesses to encourage pupil talk of the richest possible diversity and quality this should be a matter of interest and perhaps concern; doubly so when children have been deprived by the pandemic not only of good quality pedagogical talk but also of the wider benefits of social and verbal interaction with their peers."*

**Professor Robin Alexander, University of Cambridge, evidence to the Inquiry**

## How much of a priority SHOULD oracy (spoken language skills and ability) be in schools as they re-open?



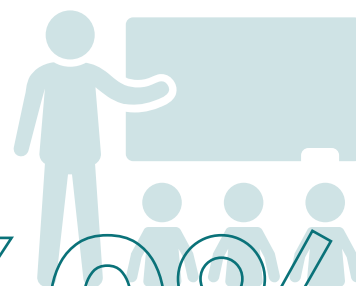
# 81%

**OF HEADTEACHERS  
SAID ORACY SHOULD  
BE ESSENTIAL OR  
HIGH PRIORITY AS  
SCHOOLS RE-OPEN**



# 60%

**OF CLASSROOM TEACHERS  
SAID ORACY SHOULD  
BE ESSENTIAL OR  
HIGH PRIORITY AS  
SCHOOLS RE-OPEN**



# 9 Recommendations

## Steps the Department for Education can take

8. Publish non-statutory guidance (like the Gatsby Benchmarks or Model music curriculum) for how schools can embed the statutory spoken language requirements set out in the National Curriculum. This non-statutory guidance should include:
  - Evidence on effective approaches to oracy
  - Clear expectations for oracy teaching and learning accompanied by a learning progression building on existing frameworks such as those developed by The Communication Trust<sup>96</sup>, English Speaking Board<sup>97</sup>, Voice 21 and Oracy Cambridge<sup>98</sup>
  - Specific guidance supporting the oracy of pupils with forms of speech, language and communication needs and those speaking English as an additional language
  - Case studies of good practice in oracy education across a range of settings
  - Signposting of training, tools and resources on oracy.
9. Commission a review of existing evidence on the role of oracy in closing attainment gap and improving outcomes for pupils from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, and include this evidence and examples in guidance for schools on how to use the pupil premium and catch-up funding.
10. Recognise the ongoing importance of oracy and language development beyond early years by extending catch-up investment and fully integrating oracy across stages and phases of education into all policy, guidance and investments relating to literacy, pupil premium, social mobility, area-based initiatives, teacher development and school improvement.

11. Provide funding for high-quality continued professional development for oracy which can be used to share training and resources across schools, including extending the remit of English Hubs beyond Reception and Year 1 to all primary teachers with oracy as a key support area alongside early language, phonics and reading.
12. Ensure the provision of high-quality initial teacher training on oracy and consistency across providers via the ITT Market Review, which represents the full breadth of oracy in terms of curriculum and pedagogy.
13. Increase funding and access to specialist support for children with additional speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) across all stages of education and work with the Department of Health and Social Care to ensure effective coordination of agencies involved in supporting children with SLCN, with a focus on ensuring that children are identified as young and as early as possible.

## Steps training providers can take

1. Develop training, guidance and support to ensure the implementation of the spoken language elements of the Initial Teacher Training Core Content Framework and the Early Careers Framework generate a broad interpretation and understanding of oracy.<sup>94,95</sup>
2. Provide targeted guidance on oracy pedagogy and strategies for non-English-subject teachers.
3. Ensure National Professional Qualifications (NPOs) for middle and senior leaders includes oracy's value and role in supporting pupil outcomes.
4. Provide universal language support training for all teachers to identify potential language and communication needs and the impact of any interventions to support spoken language.
5. Ensure SENDco training upskills practitioners in providing targeted support in school to pupils with forms of SLCN.





## Steps Ofsted can take

15. Conduct a review to increase understanding of the educational value of oracy and the conditions for effective oracy education, highlighting areas of strength and weakness in school provision.
16. Review the current position of oracy in Ofsted inspections and develop training and guidance for inspectors on how to consistently and effectively evaluate schools' oracy provision.
17. Use consistent language when referencing oracy in inspection reports including clarity about whether findings and recommendations relate to: pupils' talk, teachers' talk or both; and universal, targeted or specialist provision.
18. Monitor and report on the consistency of oracy focused training, by training providers.

## Steps Ofqual can take

21. Review the best means of assessing spoken language at GCSE or equivalent to ensure assessment at this vital stage is fit for purpose.
21. Reinstate an improved form of English Language GCSE spoken language assessments as a contributory element of the GCSE grading.

## Steps professional bodies and oracy organisations can take

22. Establish an Oracy Association (equivalent to a subject association) in partnership with existing relevant bodies with the capacity to award an oracy kitemark to schools with excellent oracy practice.
23. Secure support to provide schools (or groups of schools including Teaching School Hubs) awarded the kitemark training grants (from the DfE) to enable them to upskill teachers in other local settings.
24. Create an 'Oracy Portal', providing a one-stop shop for oracy resources, guidance and training materials, and highlighting kitemarked schools with a relevant training offer.
25. Work together to continue to develop tools to support teachers and schools in assessing and appraising pupils' oracy skills at all ages and phases.



## Steps school leaders and teachers can take

26. Embed oracy across schools' curricula and school policies, ensuring that all staff see oracy education as their responsibility and that spoken language is seen as part of quality first teaching.
27. Appoint an oracy lead/s to galvanise, coordinate, monitor and support oracy provision across the school, year, subject and/or phase.
28. Build a school-wide culture of oracy through regular and sustained curricular and extracurricular opportunities for pupils to develop their oracy including a wide range of contexts, purposes and platforms.
29. Introduce shared expectations for oracy and a system to support teachers in tracking pupils' progress in spoken language.
30. Invest in regular, high-quality workforce development for oracy for all staff.
31. Ensure all staff are confident in supporting spoken language and able to identify and access necessary support (including specialist provision), where pupils are identified as struggling.

# 10 Evidence received

## 10.1 Written evidence received

All evidence received by the Inquiry so far is published on the [Oracy APPG website](#).

Access Team, Trinity College, University of Oxford  
ACE centre  
Achievement for All  
AFASIC  
AimHigher London Oracy Project  
Amber Page-Moss, University-Schools Liaison Officer  
Articulacy  
Association of Colleges  
Auditory Verbal UK  
Barbara Priestman Academy  
Better Communication CIC  
Biddenham International School & Sports College  
Bristol Early Years  
British Stammering Association  
Chartered College of Teaching  
Chatta  
City of London Corporation  
Claire Buchanan, Speech and Language Therapist  
Colette Thompson, Ballyclare High School  
Cubitt Town Junior School  
CUREE  
Dandelion Education  
Debating Mental Health  
Dr Arlene Holmes-Henderson (Speaking Citizens)  
Dr Deborah Jones, Brunel University London  
Dr Ioanna Bakopoulou, University of Bristol  
Dr Jan Hardman, University of York  
Dr Jessie Ricketts, Royal Holloway, University of London  
Dr Julia Snell, University of Leeds  
Dr Karen Daniels, Sheffield Institute of Education, Sheffield Hallam University  
Dr Katerina Loukopoulou, Middlesex University  
Dr Rob Drummond, Manchester Metropolitan University  
Dr Rupert Knight, University of Nottingham  
Durham Commission on Creativity and Education  
Economist Foundation  
Education Endowment Foundation  
Education Scotland  
Education Works Ltd on behalf of Oracy@GwE  
Elmhurst Primary School  
English & Media Centre  
English Speaking Board (International Ltd)  
English-Speaking Union  
ESTYN  
European Speechwriter Network  
Fair Education Alliance  
Fit 2 Learn  
Gearies Primary School  
Harrington Nursery school  
Hatchlands Primary School  
Heacherteachers Roundtable  
Head of English and Drama Portsmouth High School  
Herts and Bucks TSA (St Clement Danes School)  
Highlands Primary School  
Hinchingbrooke School  
Holland Park School  
Holy Rosary Teaching School Alliance  
I CAN  
Independent Thinking Ltd/ Association for Language Learning  
Isle of Man Government (Department of Education, Sport and Culture)  
Laurus Trust and Altius Alliance  
Let's Think in English (King College London)  
Madeleine Holt, The Media Coach  
Mayespark Primary School  
Multiverse

NAPLIC  
National Education Union  
National Literacy Trust  
National Theatre  
New Schools Network  
Newham 6th Form Centre  
Noctua Teaching School Alliance  
Noisy Classroom  
Northampton School for Boys  
Ofsted  
Oracy Cambridge  
Oracy for Everyone - Find Your Voice  
Oxford University Press  
Parc Eglos School  
Parentkind  
Pearson  
Plymouth Oracy Project  
Professor Alan Finlayson, University of East Anglia  
Professor Charles Hulme FBA, University of Oxford  
Professor Courtenay Norbury, University College London  
Professor Elizabeth Stokoe, Loughborough University  
Professor Julie Dockrell, UCL Institute of Education  
Professor Maggie Snowling CBE, University of Oxford  
Professor Robin Alexander, University of Cambridge  
Professor Stephen Coleman, University of Leeds  
Royal College of Speech & Language Therapists  
Royal Institution and British Science Association  
Ryders Hayes School  
Sally Harper, independent supply teacher and consultant  
SAPERE  
Siddiqui Education Ltd  
Siobhan Boyce, communication/behaviour specialist  
Smart School Councils  
Speech Link Multimedia Ltd  
Speakers' Corner Trust  
Speech Bubbles  
Spinney Academy  
St Ambrose Barlow RC High School  
St Anne's Primary School  
St Christopher's C of E High School Academy  
St Mary's CE Primary Academy  
Storytelling Schools  
Stour Vale Academy Trust  
Sutton Trust  
Swakeleys School for Girls  
Talk for Writing/Talk for Reading  
Talk the Talk  
Talking Mats  
Teach First  
Teaching London  
Teaching School Council South West  
The Centre for Education & Youth (formerly LKMco)  
The Philosophy Foundation  
Thomasin Seddon, parent  
Topsy Page, freelance oracy trainer and consultant  
Tudor Grange Academy Solihull  
UCL Centre for Inclusive Education  
UK Literacy Association  
Voice 21  
We Speak  
Wendy Lee, speech and language consultant  
Wexham Primary School

## 10.2 Online oral evidence sessions

All online oral evidence sessions were conducted by the Oracy APPG between June and December 2020.

### **Can oracy help tackle the disadvantage gap and address inequalities?**

**2nd June 2020, chaired by Emma Hardy MP**

- Professor Becky Francis, Chief Executive, Education Endowment Foundation
- Jean Gross CBE, Chair, Bercow: Ten Years on Inquiry
- Roy Blatchford CBE, Chair, Forgotten Third Commission
- Professor Sonia Blandford, Founder and CEO, Achievement for All
- Alice Barnard, Chief Executive, Edge Foundation
- Harriet Waldegrave, Office of the Children's Commissioner for England

### **What is the place for oracy in curriculum, assessment and the accountability system?**

**14th July 2020, chaired by Ian Mearns MP**

- Professor Robin Alexander, Fellow of Wolfson College, University of Cambridge; Professor of Education Emeritus, University of Warwick; Chair of the Education Section, the British Academy.
- Professor Neil Mercer, Director, Oracy Cambridge
- Tim Oates CBE, Director of Assessment Research and Development at Cambridge Assessment
- Mary Myatt, education consultant and author
- Professor Dame Alison Peacock, Chief Executive, Chartered College of Teaching
- Sarah Hubbard, Schools HMI and Subject Lead for English, Curriculum Unit, Ofsted and Jonathan Keay, Senior HMI, Curriculum Unit Ofsted

### **What can we learn from international approaches to classroom talk?**

**9th September 2020, chaired by Emma Hardy MP**

- Andreas Schleicher, Director for Education & Skills – OECD (Education & Employment)
- Professor Lauren Resnick, Professor of Psychology & Cognitive Science, University of Pittsburgh
- Dr Sandra Berkowitz, World Schools and Public Forum debate coach, and former professor of Communication Studies at the University of Maine
- Dr Arlene Holmes-Henderson, Senior Research Fellow, University of Sussex, and Research Fellow, University of Oxford

### **What status does oracy have in the Scottish and Welsh education systems?**

**17th September 2020, chaired by Marion Fellows MP & Tonia Antoniazzi MP**

- Paul Morgan, Senior Education Officer, Education Scotland
- Nicola McDonald, Education Support Officer, Children and Families Service, Dundee City Council
- Gillian Campbell-Thow, Quality Improvement Officer with strategic remit for language learning & Gaelic Medium Education, Glasgow City Council
- Jim Whannel, Director of Gaelic Education at Bòrd na Gàidhlig
- Eleri Goldsmith, Welsh government (Lead for the Languages, Literacy and Communication Area of Learning and Experience for the new Curriculum for Wales, Curriculum and Assessment Division)
- Richard Thomas and Liz Barry, HM Inspectors, Estyn
- Julian Dessent, Curriculum lead for Carmarthenshire Council and Seren Lead for Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire
- Cathryn Billington-Richards, Strategic Lead for Languages, Literacy & Communication at the Central South Consortium

### **Schools evidence session**

**9th December 2020, chaired by Lord Watson and Marion Fellows MP**

- Welland Park Academy
- Madani Schools Federation
- Ryders-Hayes School
- St Francis de Sales Catholic Primary School
- Hinchbrook School
- Torriano Primary School
- Biddenham International School & Sports College
- St Ambrose Barlow School
- Northampton School for Boys

We are also grateful to Voice 21 for hosting additional roundtables on oracy teaching training and CPD (chaired by Professor Sam Twisleton OBE), and the assessment of oracy (chaired by Professor Rob Coe), as well as a seminar to gather evidence from teachers. Thank you also to the Plymouth Oracy Project and the Fair Education Alliance who also held additional seminars to gather evidence for their submissions.



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