



# Get Talking in Pupil Referral Units

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A Voice 21 Project supported by NESTA & Dulverton Trust

August 2020

### Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the staff and students in all the PRUs that participated in the 'Get Talking in PRUs' project. It has been a pleasure and an inspiration to work alongside such dedicated members of staff in PRUs around the UK. We are hugely appreciative of the time dedicated to assisting us in our evaluation, whether collecting baseline data or participating in phone interviews.

We are very grateful for the support of Nesta and the Dulverton Trust in making this project possible. The legacy of the support given can be seen in the difference made for staff and students in our participating PRUs, and will continue to be seen in its impact on Voice 21's future work with this critical part of the education sector.

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## Executive Summary

### Why 'Get Talking in PRUs'?

Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) serve young people who have been formally excluded (or at risk of being formally excluded) from mainstream education. Compared to their peers in mainstream education, young people in PRUs are “twice as likely to be in the care of the state, four times more likely to have grown up in poverty, seven times more likely to have a special educational need and ten times more likely to suffer recognised mental health problems”.<sup>1</sup>

Diagnosed or undiagnosed speech, language and communication needs often underlie the social, emotional and behavioural problems of young people. Studies have found two thirds of young people with serious behavioural problems also had a language impairment.<sup>2</sup> With the majority of school exclusions being related to behavioural challenges<sup>3</sup>, PRUs are a high-need, intensive context for Voice 21’s intervention, which works with teachers to use oracy to improve students’ social/emotional competencies and perceptions of self.

“Well why would anyone care what a kid from a PRU has to say anyhow?”  
(Student in a participating PRU<sup>4</sup>)

Teachers in participating PRUs confirmed the need to work with students on their oracy skills, and identified improved SPECTRUM skills as key outcomes. They also reported a strong sense of social exclusion from students, and many reported hoping to use oracy work to show students that their voice had value, and help them to engage with the local community to get their voices heard.

### The Project

Voice 21 worked with teachers in eleven Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) in England from September 2019-July 2020, funded by Nesta and the Dulverton Trust, providing an evidence-informed professional development and whole-school improvement

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<sup>1</sup> Gill, Quilter-Pinner and Swift, 2017. *Making the difference*. IPPR.  
<https://www.ippr.org/files/2017-10/making-the-difference-report-october-2017.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Communication Trust. *Let’s Talk About it*:  
[https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/media/12285/let\\_s\\_talk\\_about\\_it\\_-\\_final.pdf](https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/media/12285/let_s_talk_about_it_-_final.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> DfE:  
<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/permanent-and-fixed-period-exclusions-in-england>

<sup>4</sup> PRU 4

programme (addressing curriculum & pedagogy). We delivered a tailored programme of support for each PRU, working with teacher Oracy Leads to embed coherent, contextually informed and progressive changes to curriculum, pedagogy and culture.

The March 2020 school closures disrupted the delivery of the programme, but Voice 21 continued to provide participating PRUs with remote support via remote meetings and an online learning platform. We will continue to provide remote support to the participating schools for their first term back in September 2020. This support will be focused on re-embedding practice developed as part of the project and planning ahead. All PRUs interviewed as part of the evaluation of the project are keen to continue developing oracy in their settings.

### *Key Conclusions*

We are pleased with the conclusions of the 'Get Talking in PRUs' project. Whilst circumstances surrounding Covid-19 curtailed our initial evaluation plan, we have good evidence that participating PRUs saw positive school, teacher and student outcomes. We are satisfied that our ways of working, developed in a mainstream context, are appropriate (with adaptations) in a PRU context, and are likely to be comparably successful in achieving impact.

“I’d just like to say thank you to K. particularly, she’s been an amazing support... in terms of developing oracy. She’s obviously really really knowledgeable and the training she has delivered and the time we’ve spent working together has been fantastic. I think sometimes you know these projects are made by the people and K.’s definitely been brilliant which I think is part of the reason why it’s been embraced so well within our school” (Oracy Lead, PRU 5)

“I think it was definitely worth it and we’re glad as a school that we took part in it. It’s not going to be one of those one year things that we do once and not again. Next year we’ll definitely still keep a focus on oracy and try to finish it, the things that we did this year.” (Oracy Lead, PRU 10)

The 'Get Talking in PRUs' project has also enabled us to further refine our operating model and evaluation approach, in response to what we learnt this year. These include improvements to the cost-effectiveness of the project, alterations to which members of staff we ask PRUs to commit to us working directly with, and adjustments to the content and timing of our work with PRUs. We have refined our evaluation approach to

offer improved insight into the teacher outcomes in our Theory of Change, and to make it easier for PRUs to submit the necessary data.

## Introduction

### *The 'Get Talking in PRUs' project*

Voice 21 worked with teachers in eleven<sup>5</sup> Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) in England, with project planning and recruitment starting in March 2019 and delivery taking place September 2019 - July 2020, funded by Nesta and the Dulverton Trust, providing an evidence-informed professional development and whole-school improvement programme (addressing curriculum & pedagogy). The aim of this was to develop students' oral communication, listening and collaborative skills, in order to improve their social, emotional and cognitive competence.

Excluded students are disproportionately from lower incomes and likely to have (often untreated) speech and language needs<sup>6</sup>. Research identifies excluded boys had significantly poorer expressive language skills than their peers who had not been excluded from school; many of their difficulties had not previously been identified<sup>7</sup>. PRU leaders have highlighted the inability to articulate thoughts, ideas and emotions, challenges with peer collaboration, lack of understanding of voice and low self-confidence as limiting factors on the life chances of their students<sup>8</sup>.

The small pupil numbers in PRUs mean interventions like Voice 21's are often prohibitive on cost but PRUs provide a high need, intensive context for our intervention where the primary interest is in how oracy enhances social and emotional skills of students. In addition, teachers in PRUs generally have little access to professional development for curriculum and pedagogy.

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<sup>5</sup> Eleven PRUs at any one time - one PRU from the original group of eleven withdrew from the project and was replaced with a PRU on the waiting list.

<sup>6</sup> Centre for Social Justice, 2018, *Providing the Alternative*.: <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/core/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Providing-the-Alternative-Final-V.pdf>; ICAN and RCSLT, 2018. *Bercow: 10 years on*: <https://www.bercow10yearson.com/>; Communication Trust. *Let's Talk About it*: [https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/media/12285/let\\_s\\_talk\\_about\\_it\\_-\\_final.pdf](https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/media/12285/let_s_talk_about_it_-_final.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Ripley, K. and Yuill, N., 2005. Patterns of language impairment and behaviour in boys excluded from school. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 75(1), pp.37-50.

<sup>8</sup> Voice 21 consultation with teachers and leaders working in PRUs, particularly those at Robson House PRU (Camden) and TBAP multi-academy trust (11 alternative provision settings across three regions of the UK), alongside learning from other professionals and organisations with experience working in PRUs.

### *Oracy and SPECTRUM skills*

Spoken communication is the primary means by which young people develop relationships, express views and emotions, learn from and understand the perspective of peers and adults, and signal their sense of self at a given time. Voice 21's proven model develops teachers' knowledge, understanding, tools and strategies to explicitly teach spoken language and listening skills. Teachers are trained to develop an oracy curriculum, apply pedagogical approaches (structures, scaffolds, modelling and reflection) and adapt school culture to create meaningful contexts for purposeful talk and self-expression, and establish high quality dialogue. This enables students to become agile, confident and empathetic communicators who can self-regulate, articulate and explore their intellect, ideas and emotions and interactions through spoken language.

### *Voice 21's Approach*

Working alongside the PRUs, Voice 21 applied a four stage multi-layered approach, designed to build the competencies and capabilities PRUs need to embed coherent, contextually informed and progressive changes to curriculum, pedagogy and culture:

- Exploring: understanding context, assets, opportunities & needs through auditing process;
- Preparing: identifying key catalysts to create a whole-school oracy action plan;
- Delivering: inputting Voice 21's expertise, strategies, tools and guidance to upskill teachers/leaders to deliver action plan;
- Sustaining: continually reviewing, assessing and co-planning for sustained impact and connecting to a wider community of practice.

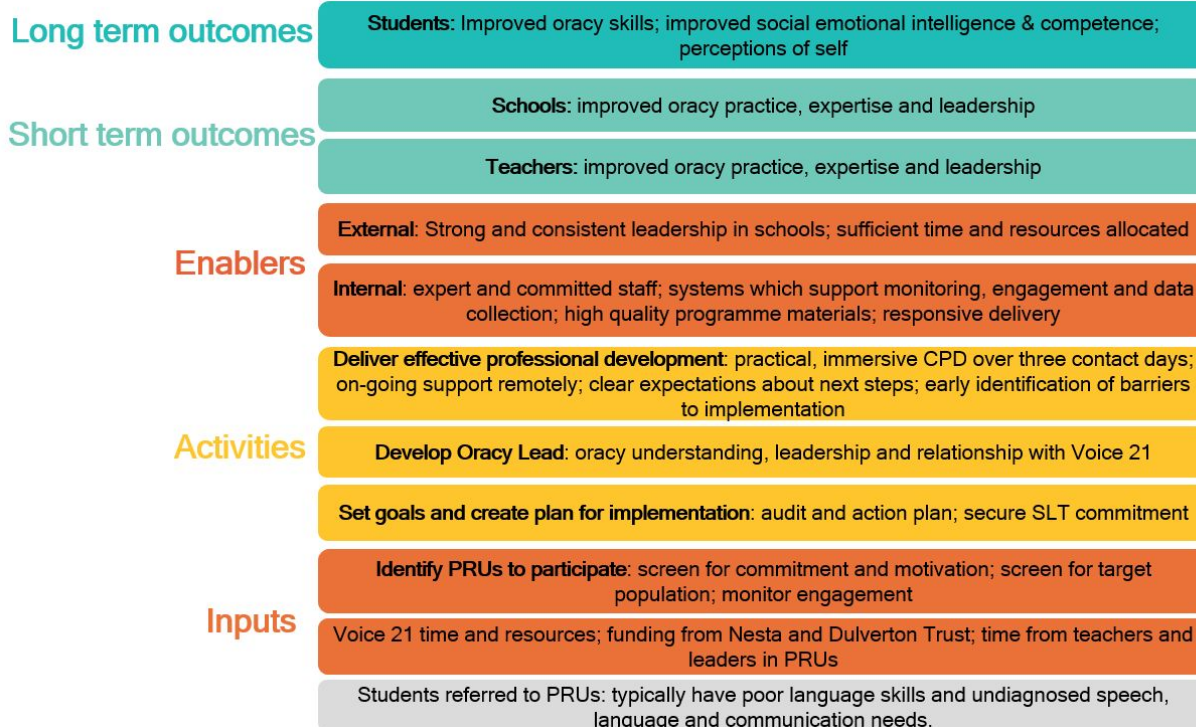
This approach was guided by teachers and leaders working in PRUs, particularly those at Robson House PRU (Camden) and TBAP multi-academy trust (11 alternative provision settings across three regions of the UK), alongside learning from other professionals and organisations with experience working in PRUs. It was important to us that PRUs were consulted as we adapted our model for mainstream schools, to ensure the specific needs of PRUs would be met.

The project was designed to be delivered to PRUs through four contact days per setting (Voice 21 staff to visit the PRUs to provide coaching, CPD and consultancy, e.g. whole-staff oracy training, lesson observations and feedback, co-planning and design of lessons or curricular material etc.). After the first visit, Voice 21 would provide



an Oracy Report for each setting, outlining strengths and weaknesses, and assisting each PRU to create a tailored Action Plan. Voice 21 would then work with PRUs for the remaining visits, and provide remote support between visits, to help PRUs achieve their Action Plan goals.

### Theory of Change:



### *Evaluation Objectives*

The evaluation of ‘Get Talking in PRUs’ was designed with three key objectives:

1. To measure the student outcomes indicated by our Theory of Change (improved oracy skills, improved social emotional intelligence & competence and perceptions of self) to see whether there was an improvement across the life of the project.
2. To understand and assess school and teacher outcomes (improved oracy practice, expertise and leadership). PRUs and mainstream settings differ in a number of ways that may mean that “good” looks different in PRUs. For example, smaller class sizes, often irregular attendance and often short-stays for students in PRUs may require teachers in PRUs to use different or adapted strategies to develop students’ oracy. The size and culture of the settings may

require different leadership approaches. Therefore, an objective of our evaluation was to learn from PRUs what changed over the life of the project, and what barriers and enablers they experienced (rather than assessing them against a pre-existing standard developed primarily from work in mainstream settings).

3. To understand the efficacy of Voice 21's own processes and ways of working with schools in the PRU context: we are of course always interested in learning from schools about what is and isn't working for them - the objective of this evaluation was to identify if, and in what ways, there were patterned differences between the needs of PRUs and the needs of mainstream schools, and therefore what (if any) additional adjustments we should make to our model to make it well-suited to PRUs.

## Methodology

### *Research design & principles of research approach*

The evaluation of this project was designed with support from the University of Sussex (referred to throughout as ‘Sussex’), provided as part of Nesta’s Future Ready Fund. Sussex worked with Voice 21 to develop a Theory of Change, design an evaluation, select appropriate standardised measures, and provided support in analysis, including performing a secondary analysis of baseline data.

This research design takes a mixed-methods approach (a concurrent mixed design<sup>9</sup>). This enables us to answer a diverse set of research questions, selecting appropriate tools for each. It is argued that: “The mixed methods design considers multiple viewpoints, perceptions and standpoints, which is believed to generate insights into the research questions, resulting in enriched understanding of complex research problems”<sup>10</sup>.

In our case, we consider the evaluation of Voice 21’s work in schools to constitute a ‘complex research problem’. As noted by Turner and Meyer, “classroom research is messy”<sup>11</sup>, because there is a complex relationship between a school or classroom context, and “good” teaching and learning. In other words, you cannot understand what ‘good’ looks like by looking at what a teacher knows and does, without also understanding the context in which they work. When you add to this that in our case, we are interested in teachers’ development only insofar as it has positive outcomes for students, there are further challenges: we know that whilst of course, in general, good teaching results in good learning, we also know that there are many other variables that will affect student outcomes - whether these are likely to be constant across a school year, like their prior learning/attainment, or subject to change, such as the influence of outside events, e.g. challenges at home or with peers.

Therefore, we have designed this evaluation in a way that gives us insight into:

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<sup>9</sup> Teddlie, C. and Tashakkori, A., 2006. A general typology of research designs featuring mixed methods. *Research in the Schools*, 13(1), pp.12-28.

<sup>10</sup> Pavanelli, R., 2018. The flipped classroom: A mixed methods study of academic performance and student perception in EAP writing context. *International Journal of language and Linguistics*, 5(2), pp.16-26.

<sup>11</sup> Turner, J.C. and Meyer, D.K., 2000. Studying and understanding the instructional contexts of classrooms: Using our past to forge our future. *Educational psychologist*, 35(2), pp.69-85.

- Both teacher and student outcomes - not relying solely on our Theory of Change and assuming that if one changes, the other will (although that is our hypothesis)
- Teachers' own understanding of changes in school, teacher and student outcomes (not solely applying a predetermined success metric)

We sought to meet Nesta's Level 2 Standard of Evidence, "data can begin to show effect but it will not evidence direct causality"<sup>12</sup>. Given the size of the project (eleven PRUs) and level of resource, we felt this was the highest level that it was practical to aspire towards for this project. Voice 21 intends on using learning from this project to strengthen our approach to evidence for future research.

### *Implementation and process evaluation methods*

Throughout the project, Voice 21 used the following methods to evaluate our implementation and processes. We used these formatively, and they also serve as source material (alongside the qualitative methods discussed below) for the implementation and process evaluation in this report:

- Monthly 'Get Talking in PRUs' check in meetings. We used our risk register to monitor for anything that may pose a risk to the success of the project.
- Schools Tracker - we kept a log of the activities and levels of engagement of participating PRUs. We rated schools monthly as either red, amber or green. Where schools were not rated green, we discussed and agreed how to improve the situation.
- Remote support from Programme Leads: during remote support via email or telephone, Programme Leads consulted Oracy Leads to discuss what was going well and where they needed additional support.
- We kept records of key documents and events, e.g. number of site visits, school oracy reports, Action Plans, etc.

Throughout the project we used this information to ensure that schools were meeting key goals as per the project goals, and that Oracy Leads were responding positively to Voice 21 support.

### Quantitative measures and intended statistical analysis

The quantitative aspect of our evaluation was a pre-post design measuring student outcomes. We chose to measure multiple student outcomes (self-efficacy, attitudes to oracy, self-perception of oracy-competence, social emotional competence) - our Theory of Change hypothesises that these are linked, and we wished to test this assumption. We chose to use both teacher and self-report to triangulate the data, mitigating the risk of low reliability if using self-report alone. Further, having both measures mitigated a risk of missing data.

The table below shows the instruments used:

Outcome measure	Data collection method	Time frame
Self-Efficacy Questionnaire for Children (SEQ-C): Muris, 2001 <sup>13</sup> - Social self efficacy subscale	Student self report completed on paper by each student. Administered by teachers in PRU.	Baseline: September Endline: June Mid-phase admissions to complete on entry and exit
Child Behaviour Scale: Ladd and Profilet 1996 <sup>14</sup> - Aggressive with peers and prosocial with peers subscales	Completed online by one main teacher for each student.	Baseline: September Endline: June For mid phase admissions - on entry and exit
Attitudes to oracy <sup>15</sup>	Student self report completed on paper by each student. Administered by teachers in PRU.	Baseline: September Endline: June Mid-phase admissions to complete on entry and exit
Self-perceptions of oracy	Student self report completed	Baseline: September

<sup>13</sup> Muris, P. A Brief Questionnaire for Measuring Self-Efficacy in Youths. *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment* **23**, 145–149 (2001). <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1010961119608>

<sup>14</sup> Ladd, G. W., & Profilet, S. M. (1996). The Child Behavior Scale: A teacher-report measure of young children's aggressive, withdrawn, and prosocial behaviors. *Developmental Psychology*, *32*(6), 1008–1024. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.32.6.1008>. Version used with modified response scale, available here:

<http://education-webfiles.s3-website-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/childcare/pdf/afterschool/CHILD%20BEHAVIOR%20SCALE%20TEACHER%20REPORT%20documentation.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Four items rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Items generated through Voice 21's pre-existing work with schools: I enjoy taking part in class discussions; I learn from listening to what my classmates say in class; I know how to use talking to help me learn in class; I feel listened to in class

competence <sup>16</sup>	on paper by each student. Administered by teachers in PRU.	Endline: June Mid-phase admissions to complete on entry and exit
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These instruments were chosen in consultation with the University of Sussex. We chose standardised measures that gave insight into the outcomes we wanted to learn about, and that were suitable for use in this context - i.e. used accessible language and weren't too lengthy for students to complete.

### Analysis

The intention was to use these measures to test for changes in student outcomes, comparing scores “before” and “after” the intervention, and testing for significance using paired t-tests. We also intended to consider (where sample sizes permitted) whether there were any relevant differences (in pre/post test scores; in magnitude of change) when the following subgroups were analysed separately:

- Students eligible for free school meals (FSM)
- Students eligible for pupil premium (PP)
- Students who spoke English as an additional language (EAL)
- Students with special educational needs or disability (SEND)
- Boys
- Girls

We also intended to check for correlation between scales, as we hypothesised (as per our Theory of Change) that these different student outcomes would correlate.

We were aware that a significant risk was high levels of missing data, and that many students would not complete a full school year at the PRUs. The team at the University of Sussex were going to help us to mitigate this as best we could, in particular by factoring the amount of time students had spent at the PRU into the analysis (i.e. considering time at the PRU as a ‘dosage’ of the intervention), and by helping us to work with an incomplete data set.

### *Qualitative data analysis methods*

We intended to gather qualitative information from/about schools in the following ways:

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<sup>16</sup> Two items rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Items generated through Voice 21's pre-existing work with schools: I am a good speaker; I am a good listener

- Interviews with members of school staff<sup>17</sup> (on site and by phone)
- Interviews/recordings of students (on site or submitted by teacher)
- Interviews with Voice 21 Programme Leads<sup>18</sup> (at Voice 21)
- School action plans (submitted by teacher)
- Other school policy documents e.g. curriculum maps, lesson plans & resources etc., where appropriate

Having compiled this material, we intended to conduct a thematic analysis<sup>19</sup> on the interview material, reviewing once to see what themes emerged, and re-reading to see in how many cases the interviewees spoke to those themes. We chose this approach because allowing the themes to emerge would give us flexibility to highlight what the PRU staff and students found important, and how they interpreted concepts like “good practice”; but also gave structure to seeing in what ways PRUs had a common experience, helping us to understand the impact on students overall, and how to refine and improve our ways of working.

School action plans and other school policy documents were to be used during the life of the project as part of our process evaluation. They would, further, be used as prompts in interviews.

### *Evaluation Risks*

The key risks for the quantitative data collection were:

- Missing data reducing our sample size such that it ceased to be viable
- The transience of the student population in PRUs being too great for our pre/post design - too few students being present in PRUs for a long time would present problems with the statistical analysis. There are also some unknowns here regarding how transience would interact with observed changes in student outcome scores. On the one hand, you might expect to observe smaller changes for ‘short stay’ students, as they’re not exposed to the benefits of oracy teaching for as long. On the other hand, you might expect larger changes for ‘short stay’ students, as their pre-intervention tests would broadly reflect teaching at their prior setting, which may have been less talk-rich than the PRU.

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<sup>17</sup> See Appendix 1 for a list of prompt questions

<sup>18</sup> Conducted towards the end of the project. The interview was to focus on materials provided by the schools, to enable the evaluator to interpret and contextualise these.

<sup>19</sup> Clarke, V., Braun, V. and Hayfield, N., 2015. Chapter 10: Thematic analysis. *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods*, pp.222-248.



We mitigated these risks by providing substantial support for PRUs in the administration of the quantitative measures. Schools received the materials they needed, and were supported by Voice 21 throughout. Voice 21 provided reminders by email and telephone to prompt the timely submission of quantitative data.

The key risks for the qualitative data collection were:

- Teacher time - we know that staff in PRUs often have significant workloads. They often have less time “off time-table” than those in mainstream schools. This can make administrative tasks (e.g. submitting data to Voice 21) challenging and reduce time for planning and reflection.
- Disruption in classrooms - in any school setting, qualitative research can be disruptive. Putting aside time for student interviews can be challenging, students can be shy with strangers, recording a lesson can change the dynamics of a room. We suspected that these issues would be magnified within a PRU setting as the students are often more vulnerable young people than those in mainstream settings, and as such may respond less predictably to changes in their routine.

We mitigated these risks by taking a flexible approach to the collection of qualitative data. Rather than require regular submissions (which we thought might be an unreasonable expectation upon PRU staff, but also interfere with the time they had available to take part in the active part of the project), we scheduled site visits for Voice 21 evaluation staff. To increase the chance of young people being able to participate, these site visits were scheduled towards the end of the project when oracy work in school would be more established, and therefore students better able to discuss their learning (as oracy would be more visible to them).

We asked PRU staff to submit lesson recordings/transcripts to us as and when practical. Action Plans were to be submitted by every participating PRU as part of the project, but the submission of other documents was optional.

### *Limitations of the evaluation design*

We were aware at the outset of the following limitations:

- Lack of a control: as we had no ‘control’ group, we were aware that the interpretation of our findings would be limited. We would not necessarily be able to attribute changes in, in particular, the quantitative measurements, to Voice 21’s work.



- Lack of standardised measure for oracy: There is an oracy assessment toolkit developed by Oracy at Cambridge<sup>20</sup>, arising from work with Voice 21 to develop the Oracy Framework<sup>21</sup>, which we use with schools. However, the toolkit is challenging for schools to implement, as it requires a lot of time to complete all the assessment tasks, and a confident assessor in each setting. Previous evaluations using this toolkit found it to have limited reliability<sup>22</sup>. Therefore, we felt it would not be a benefit proportionate to the costs of asking teachers to complete this assessment. Instead, we included non-standardised items on attitudes to oracy and self-perception of oracy competence to the student survey, as indicative measures.
- Limited qualitative material: we knew that within the resources available, it would be possible for evaluation staff to do a limited number of interviews and site visits. Information gathered by Programme Leads would also be limited, as of course on their site visits they had many objectives regarding the delivery of the project. Therefore, as in any project of this nature, we knew we had to balance depth and breadth - multiple visits/interviews with a smaller number of our PRUs, or fewer visits/interviews across all PRUs.

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/research/projects/oracytoolkit/>

<sup>21</sup> <https://voice21.org/oracy/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/voice-21/>

## Covid-19 Response

The response to Covid-19 included the partial closure of UK schools on 20 March. Schools remained open to the children of key workers and vulnerable children. This had mixed effects for the PRUs we worked with. For some (mostly those settings with a primary provision), many students continued to attend the PRU, although not all staff were able to do so. For others, whilst many students were classed as vulnerable, few chose to attend. One PRU, which is generally a part-time provision for students, closed its site completely.

All PRUs therefore had significant changes to their ways of working. Some of those with students on-site reported that they delivered less curricular learning, focusing on well-being for students. Those who mostly had students off site reported an increase in time spent on well-being checks (either by phone or visiting students at home), and in some cases other community support (e.g. delivering food), and attempting to steer home learning in a very challenging context (with the vast majority of students lacking access to technology, and being supported by parents who themselves had often had a patchy school experience).

### *Impact on programme delivery*

Most PRUs had received three or four of their four scheduled contact days. We moved our support online, and PRU staff joined a 'Get Talking in PRUs Classroom' where they had access to webinars and other resources. PRU staff participated online, sharing resources with each other, and teachers from three PRUs delivered an online Teacher Masterclass on oracy in AP settings. This was supplemented by direct support from Voice 21 (phone calls and emails).

### *Impact on evaluation*

The school closure had a significant impact on our quantitative evaluation. By 20 March we had received 439 sets of baseline surveys<sup>23</sup>. In a small number of cases we had collected endline surveys for students who had left their PRU before March. However, this is a very small number of cases and is too small to use in any analysis.

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<sup>23</sup> Student and teacher questionnaires (all quantitative measures as described above) from all PRUs except one who joined the programme in January 2020 following the withdrawal of another school.

It has not proved possible to collect further endline data, as the school closures were only reduced close to the end of term. It would not have been reasonable of us to request they used their limited time with students, at this challenging time, to conduct the time-consuming process of administering surveys, especially given that we are not confident we would be able to meaningfully interpret the results, as most students have spent a significant amount of time away from schools.

The school closure also had an impact on our qualitative evaluation. In particular, we lack the student perspective, as these had been planned following site visits in March-July. Scheduled site visits were of course cancelled. In light of this, we adjusted our approach and interviewed staff from all of the PRUs (instead of multiple interviews and visits to a smaller number). In most cases these interviews were 30-40 minutes in length, although in some cases our time was cut short due to other pressures on PRU teachers' time.

In more general terms, school closures have affected our evaluation by affecting the project. Whilst in some settings, developments to oracy teaching and learning were put in place rapidly at the start of the school year, in many, implementation had begun in force in January (term 1 having primarily been concerned with staff development and planning). As such, in many cases the benefits for students were only just beginning to be seen by staff by March 20.

Voice 21 will continue to provide remote support to the participating schools for their first term back. This support will be focused on re-embedding practice developed as part of the project and planning ahead. Whilst of course, the results of this support are outside the scope of this evaluation, we did seek to assess the likelihood of PRUs wishing to engage with this support.

## Results

### *Quantitative data*

This section summarises our baseline data. For a more detailed description, please see our earlier report (Appendix 2)

#### The Students

We received a good amount of baseline data, which would be sufficient for analysis. This is promising for our future evaluation efforts.

We received complete sets of baseline data from 439 students, of which 237 were in Nesta-funded PRUs, 202 in Dulverton-funded PRUs. This was a good number of students, forming a sufficiently large sample. As expected, it fell well below the number of students on roll (767 across all PRUs: 467 in Nesta-funded PRUs and 300 in Dulverton-funded PRUs). Teachers reported that in some cases this missing data was due to student absence - whilst we had thought teachers could fill in their surveys even if a student was absent whilst classmates filled out their survey, this did not take into account that in some cases the level of absence is so high that teachers don't have enough information about the student to fill in the teacher-questionnaire. In some cases, students declined to consent to participate.

In most cases sample sizes were sufficient to permit subgroup analysis. Whilst boys outnumbered girls approximately 3:1, there were 102 girls<sup>24</sup>. There were approximately even number of students eligible/not eligible for free school meals (FSM), for pupil premium (PP), or on the SEND register. The only subgroup we intended to consider, but lacked a large sample size for was whether students had English as an additional language (only 7% of students had EAL status).

#### Baseline results

Our analysis and a re-analysis of the data by the University of Sussex, found that<sup>25</sup>:

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<sup>24</sup> Students were given the options Boy; Girl; Prefer Not to Say. As expected, only a very small number of students chose Prefer Not to Say, and so they were excluded from the gender subgroup analysis.

<sup>25</sup> Detailed tables of results for the first two bullet points can be found in our previous report on baseline data, in Appendix 2. The third bullet point pertains to analysis performed by the evaluation support team at University of Sussex - Voice 21 is happy to re-run these tests to provide detailed results tables, on request.

- There was good internal consistency of our standardised measures. In other words, students and teachers both responded in reliable ways to the questions that they were asked.
- The non-standardised oracy items (self-perception and attitudes to oracy) also had a good internal consistency - a positive result for questions at this stage of their development.
- The different measures were associated with one another in more or less the manner we would expect: self-efficacy (student-report) was very strongly associated with positive attitudes to oracy (student-report), and marginally associated with prosocial behaviour (teacher-report). Positive attitudes to oracy (student-report) was significantly associated with prosocial behaviour (teacher-report). The aggressive and prosocial ratings given by the teacher were inversely related to each other.

This set of results suggests that this approach to evaluation is promising. The data sets were good - few missing values, and showing the level of reliability and association between measures that we had hoped for. We look forward to repeating the use of these measures with PRUs engaged in academic year 2020-21, as part of follow-on funding from Nesta.

### Subgroup analyses

Voice 21 and Sussex analysed the data to look for differences between subgroups. We found that<sup>26</sup>:

- Self-efficacy (student-report) scores were lower for students with SEND, and higher for older students
- Aggressive behaviour scores (teacher-report) are higher (less positive) for those eligible for pupil premium and for those with SEND, and is inversely associated with attendance
- Prosocial behaviour (teacher report) is higher (more positive) for girls and is positively associated with attendance

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<sup>26</sup> Detailed tables of results can be found in our previous report on baseline data (Appendix 2) for the subgroups PP, FSM, SEND and boys/girls. Analysis on age and attendance was performed by Sussex - Voice 21 is happy to re-run these tests to provide detailed results tables, on request.

- Positive attitudes to oracy & self-perception (student-report) scores (these items were combined to give a single 'score' for each student) were lower for students with SEND

These results are broadly in line with expectations. They suggest that this approach to evaluation is promising, as it indicates the sort of differences in student outcomes that the standardised measures are able to detect.

### *Qualitative data*

This section reports the results of a thematic analysis conducted on interview data with members of PRU staff and our Voice 21 programme lead. It also reports an analysis of the PRUs' action plans.

We conducted one interview with the Oracy Lead in 8/10 schools (all PRUs except PRUs 2&7) in the Get Talking in PRUs project. In one case (PRU 10) we conducted two interviews. I interviewed a Voice 21 Programme Lead who had held the relationship with 8/10 PRUs in the project (all PRUs except PRUs 9 &10). The Programme Lead interview took place across 8-9 July 2020.

### Participating PRUs and interview dates:

The eleven participating PRUs formed a diverse group. There was a mix of rural and urban settings (ranging from a PRU in remote coastal Lincolnshire to those based in cities); regional diversity (London, Trafford, Leeds, Barnsley etc.); a mix of primary, secondary and mixed settings; and a range of size of settings (ranging from a school role of just 20 to 178).

PRU	PRU description	Interview(s) date
1	Large PRU (school roll >150) across five sites in Buckinghamshire.	5/5/20
2	Mid-sized PRU (school roll 50-100) in North London. Only AP setting in borough.	No interview with evaluation staff, did subsequently contact Programme Lead.
3	Mid-sized PRU (school roll 50-100) near Liverpool.	5/5/20
4	Mid-sized PRU (school roll 50-100) in North London. Recently joined a new MAT.	11/5/20

5	One site of a mid-sized PRU due to become four independent PRUs (one per site) with a school roll 50-100. Based in remote coastal Lincolnshire.	5/5/20
6	Mid-sized PRU (school roll 50-100) in West Yorkshire. One of a two-school group serving pupils from five local authorities.	15/5/20
7	Small PRU (school roll <50) near Manchester	No interview with evaluation staff
8	Mid-sized PRU (school roll 50-100) serving a town near Manchester. Part-time provision supporting students at risk of exclusion.	6/6/20
9	Mid-sized campus (school roll 50-100), one of three in a PRU in East London.	19/3/20 <sup>27</sup>
10	Small PRU (school roll <50) serving primary students in a central London borough.	13/1/20 6/5/20
11 (withdrew)	Mid-sized PRU (school roll 50-100) with sites across a South Yorkshire town.	n/a
12 (joined Jan 2020)	Mid-sized PRU (school roll 50-100) in West Yorkshire. One of a two-school group serving pupils from five local authorities.	15/5/20 (same Oracy Lead as PRU 6)

In our original plan, site visits in March and April would have yielded qualitative material through interviews with multiple members of staff per site. These would then have been followed up with further site visits (in some cases) and telephone interviews.

Unfortunately, Covid made site visits impossible, and with increased pressure on PRU staff's time and on resources at Voice 21, it was not possible to collect the planned volume of qualitative material.

However, the Programme Lead had spoken to most PRUs in the project by the time of her interview in July, and so in some cases was able to provide further insight into progress PRUs had made and how they had responded to Covid between March and July.

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<sup>27</sup> This interview is much earlier than the others because it was arranged in lieu of a site visit which was planned for this date, but cancelled due to Covid-19. In other cases of cancelled site visits, PRUs used the day for Covid-response, and arranged to be interviewed at a later date.

## Overview of themes

These themes are organised against the outcomes of Theory of Change (for schools, teachers and students). The interview and Action Plan analysis also fed into our implementation and process evaluation.

For each theme, there is a description of the interview material and relevant aspects of the Action Plans. Full interview transcripts are not included<sup>28</sup>, but illustrative quotations are chosen, and indication given of how many interviewees also spoke to that theme. Where there were differences of opinion between PRUs, this is also noted.

<b>Theory of Change</b>	<b>Themes</b>
Teacher outcomes	Improved oracy practice & expertise
	Staff oracy confidence
School outcomes	Whole-school oracy approaches
	Wider community engagement
	Project sustainability
Student outcomes	Improved oracy skills
	SPECTRUM - oracy and social/emotional competence (including self-regulation; relationship-building)
	SPECTRUM - oracy and perceptions of self
	Unexpected student outcomes

## Teacher Outcomes

We hoped to see improved oracy practice, expertise and leadership from teachers involved in the project. The qualitative evidence suggests that teachers in participating PRUs did develop their practice and expertise, with leadership from Oracy Leads.

### *Improved oracy practice & expertise*

By the time of the Oracy Lead interviews, the results of this were positive. All PRUs interviewed reported the use of Voice 21 strategies, 9/10 Oracy Leads reported an

<sup>28</sup> Transcripts are stored by Voice 21.



increased personal understanding of oracy. In some cases, progress in teacher outcomes was limited to a subsection of the teaching body (e.g. a particular department or year group), which is in line with our experiences in mainstream - it takes time to embed whole school change. The Voice 21 Programme Leads reported seeing good levels of staff buy-in during site visits. As in mainstream schools, we found that oracy practice was elevated rather than perfected by Voice 21-led professional development (INSET days, twilights and/or 1:1 or small group support such as observation and feedback), and continued to improve throughout the year with support and further training from the Oracy Leads.

“The first time she [Voice 21 Programme Lead] did some work with all our staff to give them some strategies to help in class and, and went through, you know, all the different strands and everything so that all the staff were trained. And we felt that one particular area would be maths. We thought that the oracy in maths is the one where as a staff we would struggle with the most. But some of the ideas and activities K. gave us were really, really good and we've been able to use that across the lessons. So what we did after that training, we asked staff to start using that in their lessons, and some lessons were more successful than others. Things like PSHE, obviously, were very much the ones that most people found success with, because it kind of lends to PSHE, doesn't it? I think science was quite good.” (Oracy Lead, PRU 3)

Voice 21 recognised that PRUs were often highly talk-rich environments at the start of the project, particularly in comparison to mainstream secondary schools. PRU staff were therefore accustomed to the inclusion of talk as a key aspect of teaching and learning. However, we found that few staff reported having formal training on oracy, and as such Voice 21 support was welcomed in the following ways:

- The Oracy Framework was a very helpful tool to structure teachers' understanding of the components of talk. They reported using this diagnostically, identifying students' strengths and weaknesses, and in planning lessons/curricula
- Despite doing a lot of talk, Voice 21's strategies (e.g. Talk Roles, Discussion Guidelines) were welcomed as positive additions to ensure that classroom talk was maximally beneficial for the students

“A lot of our teachers do use oracy quite a bit, it's just that no-one's ever taught teachers how to teach it... I think that's why especially the training was good as well - because I really liked the foundation - the Oracy Framework - that was a

good way to look at oracy and think of children and be like: Oh actually these particular kids are good at this and this and this, this is an area we need to work on so we're going to work on this." (Oracy Lead, PRU 10)

"As a school I think we've taken a massive step forward and we've seen progress in all areas of school. I think it looks different in different places, and I think K. would echo this - I think as a primary team we're probably a bit more ahead of this, in terms of our teaching, because there is such a big value of it in the curriculum. I'd say our KS4 have probably made the biggest progress, working through the games they're doing oracy tasks then daily and our KS3s have been a little bit slower I'd say." (Oracy Lead, PRU 5)

### *Staff oracy confidence*

Despite the talk-rich nature of many PRUs, Voice 21 staff were surprised to find that many PRU teachers lacked confidence with oracy:

"I think one of the things we [Voice 21 Programme Lead and a PRU Oracy Lead] talked about yesterday is making sure the staff felt confident to know - yeah students are talking, but whether or not they're developing specific skills. I guess it's sort of naming what they [the teachers] do in a way... I think it's just being really explicit. And maybe that's where they sometimes feel unsure if they're just having a chat or if they're deliberately developing a specific aspect of the framework. And sometimes they see it as something more complicated than it is as well!" (Voice 21 Programme Lead)

With support from Voice 21 and PRU staff, many Oracy Leads<sup>29</sup> reported an increased confidence from teachers:

"I think like with anything if you add a little structure people become more confident in doing it, and I think that's what happened with the teachers, and the teachers really have a better understanding of oracy now, of how to teach it. And a lot of the other staff who might not necessarily have thought oracy was important, have a better appreciation for how important it is." (Oracy Lead, PRU 10)

One Oracy Lead expressed an initial lack of confidence with oracy teaching, which they overcame with support from Voice 21):

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<sup>29</sup> PRUs 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10. Additionally Voice 21 Programme Lead reported the Oracy Lead in PRU 2 said staff confidence had improved.

“So when we were doing this, it was like, I can't teach oracy! I don't speak properly myself! Give me numbers! But then when we had the training and everything, you kind of saw some of the things you're actually doing in class and it was like: Oh, actually, I'm doing a lot more than I thought I was.” (Oracy Lead, PRU 3)

### School Outcomes

We hoped to see improved practice, expertise and leadership of oracy at a school-level, e.g. through the enactment of oracy policies or curriculum-planning documents. The qualitative evidence suggests that PRUs in the project took different approaches to embedding oracy across the school, and worked at different paces. All had made good progress towards achieving ‘School Vision’ goals on their Action Plans by March, although as many PRUs had used for the first term for planning, testing and refining, they often reported feeling they were ‘just getting off the ground’ when schools closed in March. All PRUs interviewed in May, and an additional PRU who contacted their Voice 21 Programme Lead in June, reported plans to continue with the implementation of whole-school development of oracy upon students’ return to school, and in particular with the start of the new academic year in September.

### *Whole school oracy approaches*

Two PRUs<sup>30</sup> chose to deliver oracy as a set of discrete lessons to secondary-age students. This would be unusual (although not impossible) in a mainstream secondary context. They worked with Voice 21 Programme Leads to design bespoke oracy curricula for their schools, which took into account their students’ needs and the fact that high student population transience meant the curriculum needed to work both ‘start to end’ and for students who joined at a mid-point and/or left before the end. This is an important learning point for Voice 21, as in a mainstream context we would more commonly encourage schools to design curriculum materials that develop students’ skills cumulatively across the whole school year, and commonly across KS3-4.

“We did some planning with A. and decided that our first half term after Christmas was going to have a discussion focus, so thinking about what discussion is and kind of taking baby steps towards trying to listen to each other or everyone having an opinion - going around in a circle. And this half term

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<sup>30</sup> PRUs 4&9

we've been focusing more on - or trying to because it's been extremely challenging - more formal debate type skills" (Oracy Lead, PRU 9)

The remaining PRUs chose to deliver oracy primarily through their curricular learning, using Voice 21 support to increase the quality of provision and improve the extent to which oracy teaching and learning was 'joined up' across the school.

"And my staff have just been amazing. I mean, I'm the only teacher downstairs [in the primary unit], but my staff have just picked it [oracy teaching] up and run with it. My mentors teach the afternoon curriculum for half the children and they've really taken it on there. And put it into their planning and just checking for ways and ideas for using it. So it yeah, it has been - it's been really good from the first staff meeting where people were going, 'what's oracy'. So when K. came and introduced the whole staff to the ideas, and the different structures she gave to them actually picking up and saying, "oh, what about if we did this with it; ooh this would fit in to this" - So this has just been a real journey for us. It's been really good. (Oracy Lead, PRU 8)

Some PRUs focused first on improving teaching and learning and staff confidence, with curriculum planning falling later in the year (with a view to being established in the new school year):

"They devised a different curriculum from Easter [due to covid disruption] to the end of term, and used that as a sort of practice, putting oracy at the centre of that." (Voice 21 Programme Lead on PRU 3)

"And this group [of PSHE teachers] are going to prepare a presentation [for SLT] looking at oracy in the classroom, oracy planning over a series of lessons, and oracy planning across subject topic areas in a more longer term view. To then present to the other teaching groups, to show them how oracy can be developed over time, planned in lessons for a topic, but also delivered in a classroom in a one off lesson." (Oracy Lead, PRU 6)

### *Wider Community Engagement*

Both PRUs and mainstream schools often report a relationship between oracy and community engagement - bringing external speakers or finding an authentic audience for students' work can often boost their oracy, and a focus on developing oracy in school can ensure that all students have the competencies and confidence they need to express their ideas to others.

Some PRUs<sup>31</sup> in this project reported a particular focus on engaging families in oracy, e.g.

“We invited them [parents and carers] in for our Come and Share afternoon. So every half term, they’ll come in and do activities with us, and then we’ll show off the books. So one of the things we’ve been using quite a lot is QR codes to evidence oracy, and you can see pic-collages, so we got the children to sort of articulate their learning and then the parents watch the QR codes as well which they really enjoyed. They said that it was really nice to see the children be so confident and reading really well; their performance and their gestures and their confidence has improved. And they said it was a really nice way of evidencing things they perhaps wouldn’t have seen before.” (Oracy Lead, PRU 5)

Others<sup>32</sup> reported the importance of ensuring students were engaged using external speakers to give oracy status in school, or connecting oracy learning to preparation for life after the PRU<sup>33</sup>.

“The assembly was really positive and the kids were really enthusiastic about it - we did it whole school but for a couple of the projects we decided we were just going to focus on year 10... They could really see the value in it, they could really see how improved oracy would definitely - what’s the word - impact on their lives, they could see the connection with maybe college interviews or going further in the world, and definitely around conflict as well.” (Oracy Lead, PRU 4)

### *Project Sustainability*

Voice 21 always aims to work with schools in a sustainable way. Our professional development focuses on long term approaches that improve practitioners’ expertise, and enable them to continue developing their oracy practice after a period of Voice 21 support ends. Sustainable practice is important to us because we know that embedding high-quality oracy teaching and learning in any setting is never a flash-in-the-pan intervention, and with stable school leadership the benefits for students can continue to accrue long after the project is over, as teachers develop their practice and the school culture is established.

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<sup>31</sup> PRUs 5, 10. Additionally Voice 21 Programme Lead reported the importance of engaging families in the case of PRU 4.

<sup>32</sup> PRU 4

<sup>33</sup> PRU 4 & 6

An important school outcome for us is therefore evidence that schools intend to continue developing oracy teaching and learning in their setting. 9/10 of the PRUs in the project spoke to either our evaluation or programme staff to express their desire to continue working on oracy in the new academic year. They were keen to continue to receive remote Voice 21 support and to learn from and with the new cohort of PRUs.

“I think it was definitely worth it and we’re glad as a school that we took part in it. It’s not going to be one of those one year things that we do once and not again. Next year we’ll definitely still keep a focus on oracy and try to finish it, the things that we did this year.” (Oracy Lead, PRU 10)

Given the context of Covid-19, many PRUs expressed that it would be particularly important to use an oracy-rich approach when students return to school:

“I think that in the transition period when they first come back, to be expecting, particularly our students, particularly to be jumping straight back into the most complex work is a big ask. There will be an awful lot of welfare-led lessons to start with. We are more likely to have engagement and progress if we are not only listening to our students but giving them opportunities to talk. (Oracy Lead, PRU 6)

### Student Outcomes

We hoped that students would improve their oracy skills, social/emotional competences and self-perception throughout the life of the project. The qualitative evidence shows that, because PRUs implemented changes to oracy at different times in the school year, and in different ways, they reported differences in student outcomes. Seven of the eight PRUs interviewed by Voice 21 evaluation staff reported that were seeing benefits for students, with the remaining PRU saying it was “too soon to tell”<sup>34</sup>.

Voice 21 feels the results as outlined below are promising, given the interruption of the project by school closures in March. Given that we saw good progress on teacher and school outcomes, we feel that there is a high likelihood that students in PRUs in the project will continue to see improved outcomes after the formal end of the project, and hope to follow-up with schools in the new academic year to improve our picture of the ongoing impact on students.

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<sup>34</sup> PRU 1

### *Improved oracy skills*

PRUs reported a change in students' oracy skills, including a new-found ability and willingness to participate in particular activities such as debates<sup>35</sup>, telephone calls<sup>36</sup>, conversational skills with younger students<sup>37</sup>, external visitors<sup>38</sup> or at home<sup>39</sup>; and improved vocabulary or decision-making within their existing vocabulary<sup>40</sup>. Many PRUs reported that they felt the impact on students was only starting by the time of the March school closures.

“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, PRU 10)

“If you take these lockdown conversations - we call them safe and well calls - if we’d have done them in September I think it would have been quite hard to hold a conversation with these children every day but what’s really nice now is we’ll have a bit of a conversation, but they’ll actually ask questions back and they’ve got a bit of confidence. ‘Some of the children they’ll say oh Miss L., I know you like going for a walk past the zoo every day, what animals did you see today?’ and you know, starting to take note of what I’m doing as an adult and actually ask questions based on what I’m telling them. And that’s massive progress, because before you’d ask them how they were and they’d never ask questions back to kind of hold a conversation, it would be very much one word answers, but now they’re actually speaking in sentences, able to articulate themselves better, and you can see that on the playground as well.” (Oracy Lead, PRU 5)

### *SPECTRUM - oracy and social/emotional competence*

Four out of the eight PRUs<sup>41</sup> interviewed by Voice 21 evaluation staff reported seeing improvements in students' social/emotional competence. The other four felt it was too soon to tell: one<sup>42</sup> was three weeks into an ambitious integration of oracy into students'

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<sup>35</sup> PRU 10

<sup>36</sup> PRU 5

<sup>37</sup> PRU 8

<sup>38</sup> PRU 4, PRU 10

<sup>39</sup> PRU 6

<sup>40</sup> PRU 3, 8, 9, 10

<sup>41</sup> PRUs 5, 8, 9, 10

<sup>42</sup> PRU 4



coaching for transition, which focused on students' emotional regulation; one had not yet implemented a planned revision of the PSHE curriculum, which would have oracy interwoven<sup>43</sup>. It seems likely that had these changes to teaching and learning not been interrupted by school closure, we would have seen improvements to student outcomes.

Most PRUs<sup>44</sup> reported that oracy was an important part of building and maintaining relationships within the PRU, whether with peers, at home or with staff. Several PRUs reported SPECTRUM benefits in terms of improved relationships - students' oracy skills made them better able to express their needs, and make positive choices in terms of how they interacted with others. Improved oracy led to improved self-regulation, leading to improved relationships - and we saw how important this was in a report from one PRU who said oracy improved playground behaviour and peer relationships, enabling previously impossible role-play for primary students, which is an important way in which younger students continue to improve their communication and social/emotional competencies.

“When the primary pupils used to go through [the secondary unit], you would hear choice language. And they wouldn't be very good at thinking, ‘Oh, these are younger more impressionable pupils’, but actually, now, they are beginning to stop, think about what they're saying, hold doors open for them, ask them how they're doing. And it's really nice to see those interactions building.” (Oracy Lead, PRU 8)

“Before we'd have really really structured play, which helped them with their behaviour because obviously most of them are with us because of their behaviour. What we've been able to do is kind of loosen that to allow them to have their own time, and they're now role-playing more like they were playing cops and robbers, and they'd got the Jenga blocks and they were using that as money, things like that - they would never have role-played before but they're now able to.” (Oracy Lead, PRU 5)

Two PRUs<sup>45</sup> reported that oracy had played an important role in improving students' ability to regulate their emotions. Self-regulation is an important aspect of development, and is particularly important for students at PRUs to develop as they transition to mainstream schools or to college/work.

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<sup>43</sup> PRU 6

<sup>44</sup> PRUs 1, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10

<sup>45</sup> PRUs 9 and 10



“Most of the time our kids will have SEMH [social/emotional/mental health] difficulties, they don’t want to get into trouble - they just find it really difficult to manage so something happens that triggers something and they find it really difficult to self-regulate. I honestly think if they had those oracy skills to say I need to take myself away, that would really help... One of the main things we work on is helping them self-regulate and oracy’s a big part of that. I feel like now we really have a good understanding about using oracy as well to build up their self-regulation skills.” (Oracy Lead, PRU 10)

### *SPECTRUM: self-perception*

Five of the eight PRUs<sup>46</sup> interviewed by Voice 21 evaluation staff reported improvements in students’ self-perception. They reported that students were more confident and willing to take part in discussions, more confident to discuss their learning at home and taking more pride in their work, and themselves as learners.

“I know that quite a few of them were really building in confidence. We have a unit that has quite a few pupils with autism. And their communication skills were really building and we were getting parents telling us how much they’ve improved at home as well.” (Oracy Lead, PRU 3)

“We did an Earthquakes information text and using Adobe Spark I got them to read over the top of the writing, record their voices - at first a couple of them were a bit shy hearing their own voices but they were really proud and actually when SLT came round they got them to scan their QR codes [linking to the spoken work] with their phones. In that way they were really confident to show off and they wanted praise for the work they’d done.” (Oracy Lead, PRU 5)

“I had one kid that was silent for at least a month, maybe six weeks and then through another couple of kids quite getting into talking about stuff, he just gradually opened up more and more and it got to the stage where he was talking more than the others... I just kind of relentlessly give them a space to talk and they - after a few weeks they’ll get that and know that they’re not going to say anything wrong and they can say something and it’s fine.” (Oracy Lead, PRU 9)

### *Unexpected student outcomes*

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<sup>46</sup> PRUs 3, 5, 6, 9, 10

In mainstream environments we are used to schools using oracy as a vehicle to improve students' academic performance, e.g. to develop literacy or problem-solving. PRUs Action Plans often included similar elements, planning oracy within subject areas and in relation to Functional Skills qualifications.

One unexpected link that one PRU<sup>47</sup> made was that there was a possibility that oracy could be used as a way of improving students' assessment performances in vocational subjects, where a spoken contribution could be submitted to the exam board in lieu of written work, which students often found challenging.

### *Implementation and Process Evaluation*

This section is organised against our Theory of Change. For each item on the Theory of Change there are a number of themes under which we report what we learnt.

<b>Theory of Change</b>	<b>Themes</b>
Identify PRUs to participate	Number of sites
	Primary and Secondary Provision
Set goals and create plan for implementation	Action Plans
	SLT commitment
Develop Oracy Lead	Engagement with Voice 21
Deliver Effective Professional Development	Feedback on quality of Voice 21 support
	Inclusion of all PRU staff
	Challenges of working with PRU staff on-site
	Importance of learning from other PRUs
Enablers: external	Role of Oracy Lead within the setting
	Time and resource allocation
Enablers: internal	PRU staff and ethos
	Systems supporting evaluation
	Voice 21 - responsive delivery

<sup>47</sup> PRU 1

### Identify PRUs to participate

PRUs were required to apply to be part of the project. Voice 21 screened for commitment and motivation, and target population.

#### *Number of sites*

Five of the PRUs<sup>48</sup> had multiple sites, or multiple units (e.g. a primary and a secondary unit on the same site). Our Programme Lead reported that this sometimes created challenges for the Oracy Leads, in terms of cascading learning or observing teaching in the other unit.

“And I think one of the challenges of that was that they're three very different units. So perhaps having an oracy vision that was kind of coherent across each unit was a potential challenge as well.” (Voice 21 PL on PRU 1)

“I think a bit of a challenge there in terms of oracy leads having the reach to cascade and to see things in action beyond their own classrooms.” (Voice 21 PL on PRUs 1&5)

#### *Primary and secondary provision*

PRU 8 had both primary and secondary provision and reported that one of their motivations was to use oracy as a theme that was “pulled through” both primary and secondary, in line with an Ofsted recommendation.

Voice 21's Programme Lead reported that she felt uptake of our approach and strategies was faster in primary settings than secondary ones, which is something we have also observed in mainstream:

“I think sometimes it is more of a mindset shift for secondary teachers and sometimes that's subject dependent, whereas I feel we get a much quicker buy in with primary... I feel by the time the kids reach Y8 and 9 and they're in AP [alternative provision], there are just so many more barriers put up to communication as well, in school, so it's just how to engage them in the idea of oracy in a way that breaks through those barriers - so there's a bit of a challenge in terms of presenting oracy to secondary students and them engaging with it.”

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<sup>48</sup> 1, 5, 6, 7, 8

In PRU staff interviews, making an active or deliberate attempt to engage students in oracy (or overcoming a reluctance from them) was only mentioned in a secondary context. It was mentioned by four PRUs<sup>49</sup>, e.g.

“When we tried some of the ideas [oracy strategies] staff... found it quite forced.... But how the project went on, I think it needed to be really focused, getting kids ready to leave and sort of talk for work if you like...” (Oracy Lead, PRU 1)

### Set goals and create plan for implementation

#### *Action Plans*

Action Plans were received from all PRUs except PRU 6. The initial deadline for schools to complete Action Plans was October - in line with our practice in mainstream settings. However, many settings found this challenging with 4/10 PRUs submitting Action Plans after the deadline.

All PRU Action Plans contained plans pertaining to the development of SPECTRUM skills, and some contained additional goals related to the use of oracy to boost academic attainment. There is (as you might expect) a correspondence between the content of a plan and the reported outcomes - e.g. reflecting a focus on oracy in maths. The Action Plans broadly shared the same themes - staff training/confidence, specific areas of focus (e.g. subject area or year group), specific SPECTRUM-related outcomes (e.g. preparing students for transition, improving relationships within the PRU etc.).

Some Action Plans were much more detailed than others, which seemed to reflect the personality/preferences of the Oracy Lead. There is no noticeable correspondence between the detail or scope of an Action Plan and the school, teacher or student outcomes.

#### *SLT Commitment*

As expected, SLT commitment was important to the programme. All PRUs that remained engaged with the project demonstrated SLT commitment, whether through extensive use of SLT time<sup>50</sup> or noting the value of the Oracy Lead themselves being a member of SLT (PRU 9). For PRU 7, who ceased contacting Voice 21 in March, suspected lack of SLT support had been flagged as an area of concern in November:

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<sup>49</sup> PRUs 1, 4, 8, 9

<sup>50</sup> PRUs 1, 2, 5, 6, 8

“Amber. OL on it but Action Plan hasn’t been shared with HT so buy-in questionable and OL is on her own. Competing priorities in school for SLT”  
(Voice 21 School Tracker)

### Develop Oracy Lead

#### *Engagement with Voice 21*

Level of engagement with Voice 21, as assessed monthly by Voice 21 Programme Lead, seems to be a good predictor of teacher and school outcomes, with two notable exceptions (PRU 2&6). Most PRUs were rated green with the occasional amber, and the qualitative evidence suggests they made good progress against their Action Plans (Covid interruption notwithstanding). Four PRUs were frequently rated amber or red. Of these, one withdrew (PRU 11) and one stopped communicating in March (PRU 7).

However, the other two seem to have made good progress despite less frequent communication with Voice 21: the Oracy Lead at PRU 2 used initial input from the Programme Lead to develop oracy resources for internal use, and was modelling that to increase staff confidence. The Oracy Lead at PRU 6 has used input from our Programme Lead and Voice 21 resources to lead a working group in designing a PSHE curriculum with oracy interwoven.

### Deliver effective professional development

Voice 21 delivered professional development through on-site development days (e.g. whole staff training or working with Oracy Leads to develop oracy expertise), learning walks and observations, feedback and coaching, and remote support with e.g. planning. Professional development was designed with an understanding of the context and motivations of each PRU, and bearing in mind the goals as stated on their Action Plans.

In most cases PRUs reported developing staff in their setting through whole staff training from Voice 21, supported by further CPD led in school (e.g. observations, working groups, cascade CPD from the Oracy Lead).

#### *Positive feedback from Oracy Leads:*

All PRU staff interviewed were positive about the quality of Voice 21’s support:

“I’d just like to say thank you to K. particularly, she’s been an amazing support... in terms of developing oracy. She’s obviously really really knowledgeable and the training she has delivered and the time we’ve spent working together has been fantastic. I think sometimes you know these projects are made by the people and K.’s definitely been brilliant which I think is part of the reason why it’s been embraced so well within our school” (Oracy Lead, PRU 5)

“So brilliant, I think Voice 21, everyone I’ve worked with there has been amazing. I think the depth of knowledge and also the quality of resources and links and information, it’s been amazing. Really, really brilliant” (Oracy Lead, PRU 4)

Key features of Voice 21’s support that were commented on by interviewees are:

- Responding to context - feeling like their PRU’s circumstances were understood and the support given was therefore tailored to them
- Knowledge/expertise apparent either in Voice 21 staff or resources
- Enthusiasm/passion of the Voice 21 Programme Lead
- Quality of supporting resources (Voice 21 Exchange, emailed information/supporting resources, materials used during site visits)
- Quality of whole-staff training (Oracy Leads reported positive feedback from other members of staff)

#### *Inclusion of all PRU staff*

Compared to Voice 21’s experience in mainstream schools, PRUs were more likely to include all members of staff in professional development (not just teachers). For example, training sessions would be attended by student achievement mentors and family support works. This enabled schools to develop a truly ‘whole school’ approach that from the outset understood the value of oracy in everyday interactions outside, as well as inside, the classroom. This was especially the case in small settings.

#### *Challenges working with PRU staff on-site*

For three PRUs<sup>51</sup>, our Programme Leads reported challenges working with staff on site:

- Staffing and changing circumstances making it impossible to release all key staff for scheduled on site professional development

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<sup>51</sup> PRU 2, 3, 9

- Staff unable to dedicate full attention to on-site work (e.g. interruptions from staff and students, being needed elsewhere in the PRU)
- Urgent challenges within the PRU taking up staff attention and preventing them from working with the Programme Lead

Whilst of course these issues also occur in mainstream settings, we encountered them at a higher rate during this project. By no means was this reflective of the dedication of PRU staff - rather, the fact that PRUs were more volatile environments, student-issues were more likely to need solving by a specific member of staff who had a good relationship with that student (making providing cover challenging), and PRUs were more likely to be under-staffed.

#### *Importance of learning from other PRUs*

PRUs reported both in interview<sup>52</sup> and to Programme Leads that they valued being able to learn from other PRUs, whether through seeing PRU-specific examples of good practice, opportunities to observe staff in other settings teach (e.g. videos or site visits) or through sharing resources, ideas etc. with other PRUs (e.g. through the Voice 21 Exchange).

We acted on this, especially in response to Covid, creating online events (e.g. an Alternative Provision Teacher Masterclass) to bring the cohort together, and a Voice 21 Programme Lead reported encouraging results from that:

“She was really interested in the AP masterclass ... It's a good example of that chance to feedback and learn from each other, and she is really interested in Adobe Spark and using that as a tool for capturing oracy which is what [S. at PRU 5] was doing. She's going to link up with S. and hopefully collaborate a little bit and find out more. So that sounded like a potential relationship that can be established beyond the project.” (Voice 21 Programme Lead talking about PRU 1 being inspired by practice at PRU 5)

It is common in mainstream schools also that teachers reported being inspired by practice in other schools. It seemed more important in a PRU context, where they seem to have fewer opportunities to connect with colleagues in other PRU settings.

#### Enablers (external)

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<sup>52</sup> PRUs 1, 4, 5, 8

The qualitative material did not suggest the need to include further enablers in our Theory of Change.

### *Role of the Oracy Lead*

As expected, the Oracy Leads played a critical role in the success of the project. Across the PRUs, they cascaded professional development, supported staff confidence, continually assessed development of staff in the PRU, modelled good practice and motivated staff and students. Features of Oracy Leads that seemed to help them achieve results in school included:

- Enthusiastic/passionate about oracy - passion often pre-existed the project and in some cases was the reason for applying to the project (all Oracy Leads reported passion for oracy)
- Good understanding of oracy or willingness to develop a good understanding of oracy. In three cases Oracy Leads reported significant levels of prior experience/knowledge of oracy teaching and learning<sup>53</sup>.
- Part of a cohesive staff body - the team shares a common vision and works well to develop as a team
- On or able to influence SLT

### *Time and resource allocation*

We found that PRUs were more vulnerable than mainstream schools to changes in availability of time and resource compromising the project. Limitations in this regard were the source of one formal and one possible withdrawal from the project:

One PRU (PRU 11) withdrew from the project in December, and was replaced by another PRU linked to PRU 6. They cited “operational difficulties that have to be addressed urgently” as the cause. They had a significant change of leadership, due to sickness, during the autumn term. Another PRU (PRU 7) did not formally withdraw, but became unresponsive to our Programme Lead in March. A site visit was planned for March but did not take place due to Covid-19. They did not respond to Voice 21 evaluation staff. Our Programme Lead noted that:

“They’ve had a real struggle engaging consistently. When I went in H. was very enthusiastic and she could talk about a lot of things she was doing with staff - sharing little strategies and so on but I think the reality is that the project got put to one side. I think it was due to their student numbers, they were massively oversubscribed so I think any sort of PPA time got taken off-timetable... And

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<sup>53</sup> PRUs 1,9,10



they were moving sites... I think they were just chronically understaffed.” (Voice 21 Programme Lead on PRU 7)

These withdrawals indicate that, whilst in any school setting there can be challenges with changes in available time and resource, PRUs may be particularly vulnerable as they are often smaller settings, and often under-resourced (especially secondary settings) compared to mainstream.

Two Oracy Leads<sup>54</sup> mentioned issues with timetabling for oracy - they chose to deliver discrete oracy lessons. However, they were able (although it required a longer lead in time) to secure timetabling - suggesting PRUs are possibly more likely than mainstream secondary schools to be able to secure timetabling for discrete oracy lessons.

### Enablers (internal)

The qualitative material did not suggest the need to include further enablers in our Theory of Change.

### *PRU Staff and Ethos*

We found throughout the PRUs were more likely than mainstream schools to find that oracy teaching and learning integrated easily with their school ethos. Three PRUs<sup>55</sup> mentioned cohesion with their ethos and the Programme Lead reported it in two further cases<sup>56</sup>.

“At the end of the day while the core subjects are important to us, our main job is to help children to regulate their emotions. Oracy’s just one of those things that teachers use - they used it before as well but they’re more confident in it, and that’s just another tool we use to help our kids. And we do have freedom in that sense to focus on those things.” (Oracy Lead, PRU 10)

There seemed to be a good fit between Voice 21’s approach and existing pedagogical practices. PRUs are more likely than mainstream schools to be talk-rich environments, and eight PRUs commented on this<sup>57</sup>.

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<sup>54</sup> PRUs 4&9

<sup>55</sup> PRUs 1, 8, 10

<sup>56</sup> PRUs 2, 5

<sup>57</sup> PRUs 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10

“I suppose as a PRU a lot of what we do is through talk, as well, a lot of our curriculum is PSHE based curriculum, which is done a lot through talk and discussion.” (Oracy Lead, PRU 8)

Voice 21 staff reported throughout the project (after site-visits) the strong existing practice within PRUs. Staff were often highly skilled practitioners, used to using a wide variety of techniques within a challenging context. It was exciting to build on this strong foundation, adding structures (e.g. through the Oracy Framework) and feeding in new ideas to help staff to develop their expertise.

As in other settings, we found that securing staff buy-in was critical. Oracy Leads were well-placed to guide this, e.g. through deciding on the mix of internal and Voice 21-led training, and sharing their passion for oracy among the staff body.

### *Systems supporting evaluation*

Many schools found the evaluation process challenging, due to the time needed to administer questionnaires and submit the requisite data for the project. Voice 21 had to follow-up with most schools to maximise data collection. Almost without exception, optional elements of the evaluation were not performed.

The evaluation process was specifically challenging in PRUs because of:

- Use of staff time, especially in smaller secondary settings (staff often had little or no PPA time)
- High levels of student absence (impossible to administer student surveys all on one day or class by class if the number of students was to be maximised)
- Unlikely to have administrative support staff, especially in small settings
- Online teacher forms - Oracy Lead did not have a direct view on how many teachers had completed the online forms, Voice 21 had to feed this back to them.

Despite these challenges, participating PRUs understood the importance of the evaluation process and were universally supportive and tried hard to get as much data to us as they could. They were understanding and receptive, even when they received many reminders on the subject.

### *Voice 21 - responsive delivery*

Voice 21's delivery was tailored to meet the needs of the PRUs in the project, and be responsive to their contexts. For example, Voice 21 tailored staff professional

development to meet needs and concerns expressed by Oracy Leads and co-designed lesson/activity resources and curricular material.

PRUs mostly fed back that our Voice 21 strategies were effective in their context, and they worked with Voice 21 to tailor their implementation (e.g. adapting Talk Roles to make them easier for students to adopt them). One Oracy Lead (PRU 1) did remark that many of the strategies were not appropriate for her students, but went on to work successfully to create a talk for work-focused oracy approach for her setting. Teachers in mainstream settings also tend to adapt Voice 21's strategies for their context (we've never delivered training on specific lesson plans or "out of the box" activities), but this is of course especially important in a PRU context as the classroom environment in general tends to require greater levels of creativity and adaptability on the part of teaching staff.

Feedback from PRUs suggested we were successful in matching support to their needs.

"It's just been really great K., came in and just took us for who we were, looked at our starting point and just helped us work forward with it. K. is just so easy to get along with and talk to and grab those ideas from, and so enthusiastic as well, that it really does rub off. And I think starting from that first staff meeting when my staff were like, 'another project' but now they're enthused as well."  
(Oracy Lead, PRU 8)

## Discussion - lessons learned and project development

This section describes how we have interpreted our findings, and how it has influenced our plans for working with PRUs in the future. Each aspect of our Theory of Change is addressed in turn, followed by what we learnt about the evaluation process itself.

*Inputs: Voice 21 time and resources, funding from Nesta and the Dulverton Trust, time from teachers and leaders in PRUs*

### Voice 21 time and resources

#### *'School-facing' time and resources*

The programme delivered for Get Talking in PRUs was modelled on Voice 21's Partner School programme: a year-long programme of support which included three in-school contact days led by a Programme Lead. For this project, we increased the number of in-school days to four, in order to better support our evaluation data collection at the end of the year. Our estimation for additional time for remote support, preparation and follow-up was also increased to reflect this.

We had front-loaded many of the in-school days into the first two terms to give the greatest possible period for PRU staff to apply their learning in the spring and summer terms and our expectations about the time needed were broadly matched by our experience in these first terms. This suggests our estimations, based on working with mainstream schools, were in line with working with PRUs. However, the effect of Covid-19 and school closures did affect the type of work and resources needed in the spring and summer terms, as we moved to remote, online programme delivery.

#### *Project management time and resources*

We also estimated the amount of additional staff time needed from the Voice 21 team, typically in 'behind the scenes' roles. This included programme design, project management, evaluation and administrative support. Again, much of the time and resource needed for this was 'front loaded' in the planning and preparation stages.

This project was the first time Voice 21 had collected evaluation data from students (as opposed to teacher programme participants) and we had allocated a significant amount of time and resource to do so. We did not gather 'end' data, but had we done so, we expect that we would have used significantly more staff time to do this than we

had anticipated due to the challenges of collecting data from PRUs (as discussed previously). We have used this information to adjust our expectations for subsequent rounds of evaluation, and make more realistic estimates for project management time.

### Funding from Nesta and the Dulverton Trust

The Get Talking in PRUs project was made possible by funding from Nesta and the Dulverton Trust. A key outcome of the project was to pilot Voice 21's approach to working with PRUs and write a business plan which reflects our learning from the project in a model which is suited to a PRU context.

The process of refining our programme offer, through this initial pilot project, has resulted in a new model which reduces the per school cost for PRUs through the provision of a professional development course, alongside a reduced number of in-school consultancy days. This will enable Voice 21 to work with a greater number of PRUs at a lower cost per school. However, given the specific challenges of PRUs with regards to funding and capacity (low pupil numbers/high staff to student ratios/limited access to mainstream teacher development funding streams), and their importance in our charitable mission (high numbers of target population students), Voice 21 will seek to subsidise PRUs' take up of our programme.

### Time for teachers and leaders in PRUs

We found that teachers and leaders in PRUs were under significant time pressure, and were more prone to last minute, unavoidable constraints than their counterparts in mainstream schools. We will continue to screen for commitment and motivation. We have made further adaptations to our activities, as detailed in the discussion of our activities below.

### *Identify PRUs to participate*

#### Number of sites

We found that Oracy Leads working across multiple sites or units found it harder to cascade learning, and to maintain oversight over the progress of staff in other sites/units. In response, we have placed increased focus on evidence of cross-site working and collaboration as part of our application process. For successful applicants with multiple sites, we have also made adaptations to the programme offer. For example, we have offered a school split over five sites additional places on our teacher

professional development course so that one teacher at every site has been trained by us and can act as an Oracy Champion for their site.

### Primary/Secondary Provision

Voice 21 has always worked with mainstream schools in both primary and secondary settings and this has been noted as a strength of our approach as it builds understanding between teachers in different phases. We wanted to do the same for this project, and recruited a mixture of primary, secondary and all-through settings.

Our experience in this project was that primary settings tended to find it easier than secondary schools to introduce oracy into their curriculum and link it to both subject learning and extracurricular activities. This echoes Voice 21's experience in mainstream settings and is likely in part to be a result of the (externally-driven) focus on written assessment and tightly packed subject curriculum for GCSE. We also found that teachers in PRUs were often teaching subjects they were not themselves specialists in (due to small staff numbers) and so sometimes lacked confidence in introducing more talk into their subject teaching.

In response to this, we provided schools with more subject-specific examples (e.g. oracy in maths) and this is an area we continue to develop through case studies, resources and online masterclasses. We will also spend a significant part of our new Oracy Pedagogy and Practice course exploring the role of talk in different subjects to ensure teachers have a strong grounding in talk across the curriculum.

### *Activities: Deliver effective professional development*

Based on the findings of our implementation and process evaluation, we intend to make the following changes to the way we work with PRUs:

- All participating schools will become 'Voice 21 Oracy Schools' with membership of our national network for the duration of the project. This will facilitate greater sharing between PRUs and also with mainstream schools Voice 21 are working with. This reflects the importance PRUs placed on learning from colleagues.
- We have moved to a blended delivery model of on-site (2 days) , off-site (3 days) with wrap around consultancy support and online learning. This enables a stronger connection between teachers on the programme as they will be bought together online and in-person, rather than always working on a 1:1 basis with Voice 21.

- The 12 PRUs will form a PRU-only cohort for the 'Oracy Pedagogy and Practice Course' to enable a close peer learning community.
- Our programmatic days, inter-cohort conference and online events will be specifically focused on sharing PRU-specific examples e.g. AP masterclasses; stories from classrooms. Online learning brings more opportunities for flexible engagement, mitigating the challenges PRU staff face in terms of time - and with access for every teacher in each school (rather than for lead contacts as per 2019 cohort), enabling improved cascade within schools
- The Oracy Pedagogy and Practice CPD for two 'Oracy Champions' who will then be equipped to share practice in school to ensure that 'base level' confidence in oracy practice. This is in response to the importance of the Oracy Leads' roles in supporting others' professional development and modelling good practice.
- Each school will have a Voice 21 Consultant who will provide 1:1 support to the school's lead. This support is designed to support whole school implementation and also to ensure that teachers who attend the Oracy Pedagogy and Practice Course are supported to apply learning back into their own contexts. This reflects the success of the bespoke elements of the project - it is important PRU staff continue to see support tailored to their needs.

*Activities: develop Oracy Lead (Theory of Change to be updated to "develop Oracy Champions and Voice 21 School Lead")*

We will provide professional development to two 'Oracy Champions' instead of a single Oracy Lead in each school. This is designed to support the capacity and teaching expertise of these teachers, who in turn are key to cascading training and developing the practice of peers. This mitigates against the challenge that oracy may also have been 'new' to the Oracy Lead who is responsible for leading practice across the school.

We will also work closely with a Voice 21 School Lead through our consultancy support (including the two in-school days). This person may also be an Oracy Champion, or they may be someone different (for example, a member of SLT). By creating a distinction between these two roles - Oracy Champions for expert classroom practice and Voice 21 School Lead for whole school implementation - we intend to build a stronger oracy team and draw upon SLT support where appropriate.

This change to our activities is also designed in response to the pressures on staff time - sharing the work between members of staff; mitigating the risk of staff

turnover/absence; ensuring the School Lead and Oracy Champions have colleague(s) in school with whom to collaborate. We will continue to monitor engagement, and have refined our process for doing so across all the schools Voice 21 works with, with a new system under development for the academic year 2020-21.

*Activities: Set goals and create plan for implementation*

In response to the challenges PRUs faced turning their Action Plans around for an October deadline, we intend to be flexible in supporting PRUs to set a realistic deadline for their circumstances (within a reasonable timeframe given the year-long nature of the support). We will also provide PRUs with a greater level of support to write their action plans, using examples gathered from this project and additional materials in an online ‘classroom.’

*Enablers (external): strong and consistent leadership in schools, sufficient time and resource allocated*

This year’s findings confirmed that these enablers are critical. There are no new external enablers to add to our Theory of Change.

Our approach to risk management seeks to mitigate situations where these enablers are partially/wholly absent:

- An application process to identify schools’ suitability to take part, commitment to engaging with programme contact days, understanding of the evaluation requirements and commitment from the headteacher. A waitlist of schools will be kept should a school withdraw due to unforeseen circumstances.
- Establishing relationships at both classroom and senior leadership levels; maintaining proactive communication
- Changes to activities (detailed above) to increase flexibility for time-poor PRU staff

*Enablers (internal): expert and committed staff; systems which support monitoring, engagement and data collection; high quality programme materials; responsive delivery*

This year’s findings confirmed that these enablers are critical. There are no new internal enablers to add to our Theory of Change.



From this year's project, we found that most enablers were likely to be present. The only one where we encountered significant challenge was on systems supporting monitoring, engagement and data collection. We are addressing this by:

- Asking PRUs to name a contact in school who will support them with data collection, so the project responsibilities do not all lie with the Oracy Lead.
- Additional changes to our evaluation methodology (detailed below)

### *Outcomes for schools, teachers and students*

Our qualitative analysis indicated that the project is promising in terms of the observed outcomes, especially at the level of schools and teachers. In some cases we saw good evidence that there were improvements in student outcomes, but in many cases this proved challenging in light of March school closures.

The qualitative evidence indicates a strong likelihood that school, teacher and student outcomes will continue to improve in the next academic year, as schools build on their work so far.

We may make some adjustments to our Theory of Change to reflect the language and concerns of PRU practitioners, regarding the following:

- Teacher outcomes - inclusion of staff confidence as an outcome that featured in many Action Plans and interviews with Oracy Leads
- Student outcomes - inclusion of relationship-building/maintenance as it was key focus for PRUs in the project

### *The Evaluation Approach*

We learnt a lot about our evaluation methodology during this project, despite the interruptions of Covid-19. We intend to reflect this learning as we proceed to work with more PRUs from September 2020:

#### Quantitative data - implementation

We were pleased with the baseline data, which showed that the quantitative evaluation approach taken was promising. However, whilst we had expected a high level of student transience, we learnt during the year that student departures were often very abrupt, which presented a high risk of missing data. Further, we noted that schools found the evaluation process very challenging despite their commitment to doing so.

In response we will:

- Include in our support for PRUs lesson/activity plans & resources to introduce students to key concepts addressed by the questionnaires, to improve consistency between PRUs in how the questionnaires are administered (learning from another Nesta FRF participant)
- Ask PRUs to administer questionnaires to students termly. We hope in this way to maximise the number of students for whom there is both base and end-line data (given the combination of absence and transience).
- Moving to paper forms (rather than a mix of paper and online), which teachers and Oracy Leads found it easier to track
- Asking each PRU to provide an administrative point of contact to reduce the burden on the Oracy Lead

### Quantitative data - design

We felt as the year progressed that we lacked a quantitative element to assess teacher and school outcomes. Whilst we were pleased with the qualitative results, we would like to improve our evaluation process by ensuring we are learning about teacher and school outcomes in a way that is more uniform across PRUs than is possible using qualitative methods.

In response, we have developed a pre-post Benchmarking tool design to assess teachers and schools against Voice 21's Oracy Benchmarks<sup>58</sup>, which describe good practice. We will be using this tool with both PRUs and mainstream schools that we work with, beginning in academic year 2020-21. The Benchmarking tools are at an early stage of development, with the next academic year representing their first widespread use. We will therefore seek to analyse the data they offer alongside qualitative information, and as ever remain receptive to the support and feedback of all stakeholders.

### Qualitative data - implementation

Our main reflection is that we underestimated the challenge of gathering qualitative data in the PRU context, particularly regarding collection methods that involved students (interviews, lesson observations etc.). We reflected that during the evaluation

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<sup>58</sup> For more detail please see Voice 21's Oracy Benchmarks Report:  
<https://voice21.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Benchmarks-report-FINAL.pdf>

design, we were over-ambitious in listing ‘optional’ qualitative elements that we hoped the school could provide during the year: for next year, we have narrowed this list to the most important items, and have clear targets for how many PRUs we wish to sample.

We learnt that it took a long time to develop the trust needed for visitors to the school not to be quite disruptive to students’ learning, particularly in the secondary settings. Student voice is very important to us, and so its absence in this report is something we intend not to repeat next year. In response we intend to recruit two PRUs (volunteers) within the project to help compile student case studies, (including the views of their parents/carers) using interview prompts that the teacher can use to conduct student interviews, which will be less disruptive than an external visitor.

## Conclusion

Voice 21 worked with eleven PRUs across the academic year 2019-20 to improve schools' and teachers' oracy expertise, practice and leadership. Through doing so, we saw some positive initial outcomes for students' oracy skills, social/emotional competencies and self-perception before the project was disrupted by school closures in March 2020. Voice 21 will continue working with affected PRUs in the new year to build on their successes so far.

We are pleased that the results of our implementation and process analysis suggest that, with the exception of one PRU which withdrew from the project in December, and one PRU who stopped responding to communication with Voice 21 in March, Oracy Leads were engaged and enthusiastic about the project and working with Voice 21 throughout. We know (in the case of the withdrawal) and suspect (in the other case) that the less engaged PRUs were as such due to the absence of key enablers identified in our Theory of Change (time and resource in the PRU), rather than poor implementation on our part.

We are committed to continually improving the work we do, and our implementation and process analysis has fed into a number of changes in the way we intend to work, based on the things we have learnt this year. These include improvements to the cost-effectiveness of the project, alterations to which members of staff we ask PRUs to commit to us working directly with, and adjustments to the content and timing of our work with PRUs.

Whilst we are disappointed not to be able to complete our quantitative evaluation through the collection of end-lines (due to school closures), we are glad that our baselines measures indicate that the approach taken is a promising one. We intend to continue using it in the next academic year, and are making some adjustments to make it easier for participating PRUs to implement.

Based on our experience this year, we have made a number of adjustments to our evaluation methodology to improve the level of insight it gives into our Theory of Change. In particular, we have made adjustments to improve the level of rigour with which we are able to understand changes to teacher and school practice (using a new Benchmarking tool), and narrowed the focus of our qualitative work to ensure that we use our resources efficiently to collect rich data, including hard-to-capture student voice.

## Appendices

### *Appendix one: questions supporting Oracy Lead interviews*

The questions below were used as a support by the Voice 21 evaluator. Not all questions were asked to all interviewees, as the conversation was allowed to develop naturally. Questions in bold were generally asked, with the further items in italics sometimes used to follow up or rephrase.

#### **Describe what motivated you to introduce oracy into your classroom/school**

*Why did you want to get involved with the 'Get Talking in PRUs' project?*

*Are there any specific groups of students you thought would benefit?*

*Do your students face any particular challenges that you hoped oracy would help with?*

*The baseline data shows students with SEND and PP get lower initial scores (interestingly, not FSM) - is this in line with your expectations? Do you think oracy will help 'narrow the gap' for these students?*

#### **Describe how you have embedded oracy into your teaching practice and/or across the school**

*Where relevant, please make reference to the Oracy Benchmarks*

#### **Describe the impact that this has had on your students**

*How have your students' oracy skills improved?*

*What effect has an improvement in oracy skills had on your students?*

*Is this the change you expected?*

*(Follow up on mentions of students' oracy; social/emotional; perceptions of self)*

#### **How has the lockdown affected your setting?**

*How is oracy used now?*

#### **What do you plan to do next with oracy in your school/classroom?**

*Why have you chosen this goal?*

#### **What has been your experience of working with Voice 21?**

*What did you expect from the programme?*

*How does Voice 21's approach work in your context?*

#### **Is there anything else you'd like to say?**

*E.g. for Voice 21 to know, or for a wider audience.*

### *Appendix two: baseline report*

Attached separately as 'GTPRU baseline description'.