

Voice North East

Impact Journal

2024-25



Our ability to articulate ideas, develop understanding and engage with others through speaking, listening and communication shapes our future life chances.

This is called oracy.

Yet, unlike literacy and numeracy, oracy is not routinely taught or valued in our education system, meaning that too many children do not develop these vital skills.

At Voice 21, we're on a mission to change this.

Introduction

We are proud to mark the completion of the second year of Voice North East — the largest oracy initiative of its kind in the country. So far, 95 schools across Newcastle, North Tyneside, and Northumberland have come together with a shared goal: to deliver consistently high-quality oracy education. This region is setting the national standard and leading the way for others to follow.

In 2025/26, Voice North East enters its third year and eighty more schools will join us across the seven Local Authorities of the North East Combined Authority. Building on the impact already achieved, we now have the opportunity to ensure that even more children and young people across the region benefit from an oracy education. This year we hope a number of experienced schools will apply to become Oracy Centres of Excellence, gaining national recognition and becoming hubs of best practice within the network.

Across Voice North East schools, oracy is embedded in teaching and learning, the curriculum, and wider school life. Students engage in rich, talk-based learning, supported by a culture of professional collaboration, where schools actively share expertise and best practices. This collective approach drives continuous improvement and ensures effective implementation across the network.

This report highlights oracy practice across a variety of educational settings in the region through three distinct case studies. It also presents data on improvements in teachers' oracy confidence and progress towards embedding high-quality oracy education in participating schools.

Voice North East is strengthening capacity across the region, creating a lasting legacy of confident, skilled and committed oracy practitioners. Together, schools in the North East are preparing a generation of children who are ready to use their voices, be heard and shape the future.

Dr Kate Paradine, Voice 21 CEO



This region is setting the national standard and leading the way for others to follow.



Two years ago, Voice 21 and the North East Combined Authority set out to drive change across the region.

To enable every child to use their voice to thrive in school, work and life by ensuring oracy is given the same status as literacy and numeracy in state schools.

Our impact:

We have trained **226 teachers** improving the quality of oracy teaching and learning across the North East.

19,000 students in **95 schools** across the North East are now benefitting from a high-quality oracy education.

81% of teachers in third-year Voice North East schools are confident oracy practitioners.

Our approach:

Equip a critical mass of teachers and schools

with the knowledge and skills to deliver high-quality oracy education, and build a network of schools that exemplify this in practice.

Demonstrate that oracy can and should be taught in schools,

with growing support from educators and policymakers.



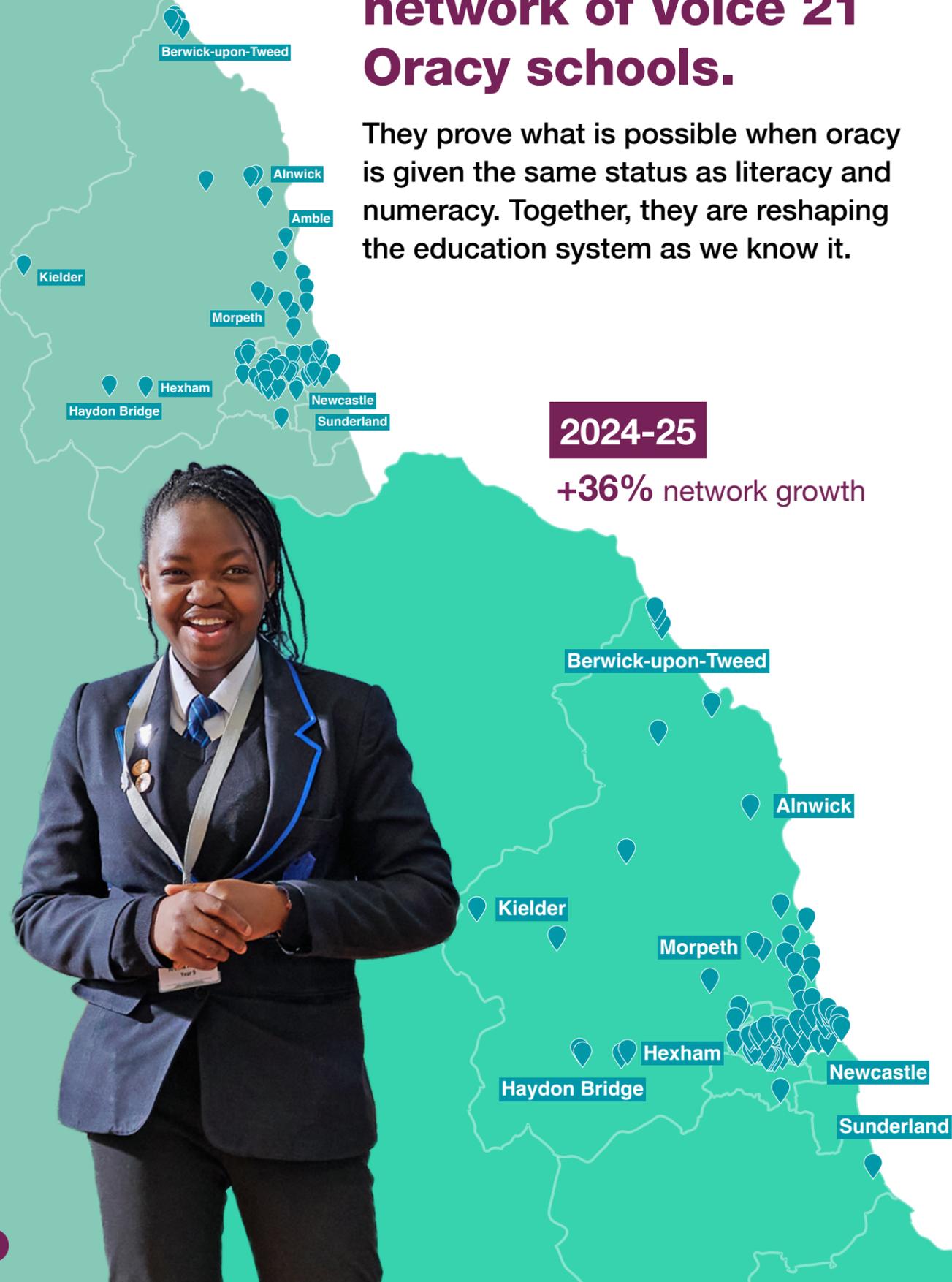
2023-24

We have built a regional network of Voice 21 Oracy schools.

They prove what is possible when oracy is given the same status as literacy and numeracy. Together, they are reshaping the education system as we know it.

2024-25

+36% network growth



Voice North East is powered by the passion and expertise of dedicated teachers and leaders.



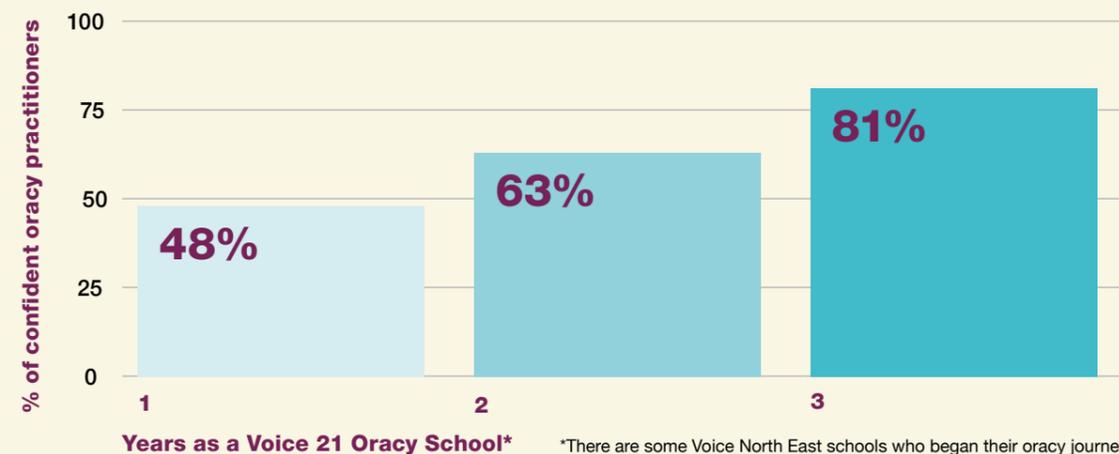
Since the start of the project, we have equipped **226 teachers** in **95 schools** with the knowledge and tools to embed oracy in their classrooms and across their schools – increasing expertise across the region.

Voice 21's sustained support empowers teachers to provide a high-quality oracy education to every child.

Each year, teachers and school leaders across Voice North East schools complete oracy surveys. These surveys allow us to track changes in teacher confidence, measure progress against the Oracy Benchmarks, and evaluate the overall impact of our work.

More teachers in the North East have become confident oracy practitioners

At the end of their first year, 48% of teachers in Voice North East schools are confident oracy practitioners, rising to 81% at the end of their third year.



*There are some Voice North East schools who began their oracy journey before the project began, offering an insight into what might be expected across the group by the end of next year.

82% say

teaching and learning has improved at my school

74% say

oracy has helped students to develop their love of learning

61% say

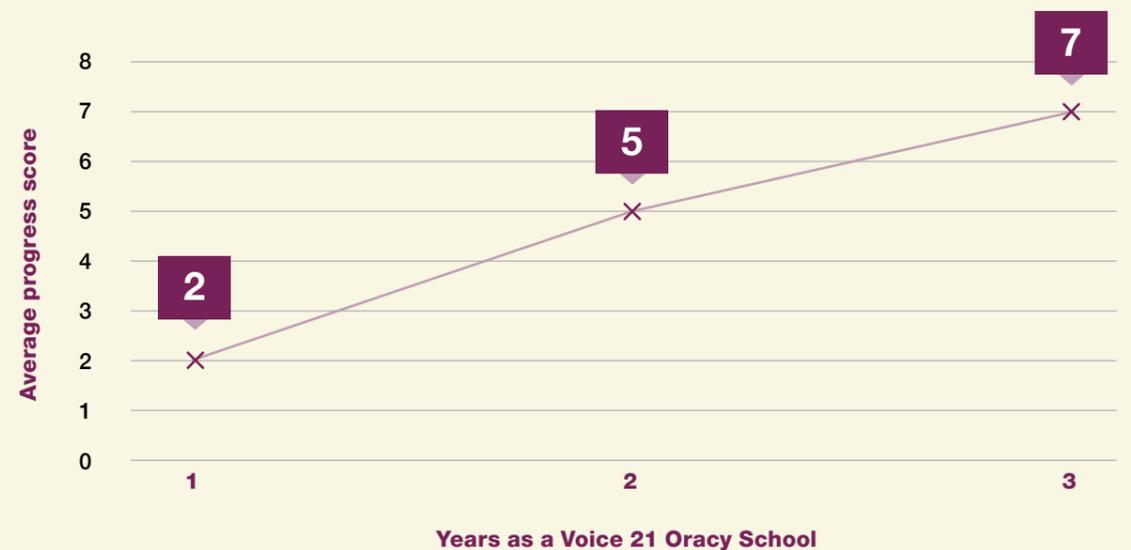
oracy has supported students' wellbeing

78% say

oracy has contributed to students' academic attainment

Progress scores improve over time

The Progress Score, ranging from 1 to 9, captures schools' progress towards meeting the Oracy Benchmarks in comparison to other Voice 21 Oracy Schools.



Case Study

Implementing oracy across the North East Combined Authority



Andrew Garrad, Senior Programme Manager for Education Improvement at the North East Combined Authority

Oracy across the North East

Now in their second year as a group, Voice North East has built on the foundations laid in year one to develop a more joined-up approach across the region. This has enabled both new and continuing schools to embed oracy more deeply, learn from one another, and share best practice.

The initial decision to implement oracy was school-led.

“ The thing that I am most proud of about this project is that it has been all school-led.

For Andrew Garrad, the Senior Programme Manager for Education Improvement at the North East Combined Authority (NECA), the best environment in which to implement new programmes is one that is school-led. This was the case with Voice North East; as part of a grants programme, a group of schools emerged that wanted to begin working toward high-quality oracy provision.

Once oracy had been identified as a priority for schools across the combined authority, funding was secured to begin working with Voice 21 on implementing oracy programmes across the area.

Oracy aligned with Combined Authority priorities.

Another key reason that Voice North East was funded was the alignment of oracy with the priorities of the NECA.

“ It was quite a straightforward decision to begin implementing oracy. This felt like it was something that would be really high-impact for the schools, and something that they really wanted to do. It really helps us with our response to local priorities as well. It fits with our programme of professional development, our priorities around school improvement and also our emphasis on inclusion.

For both the schools in the area and the NECA, oracy was the thread that wove all of these priorities together.

Oracy is a key part of the economic development and job growth priorities for the Combined Authority.

The NECA is also focused on their economic development agenda. Many new green jobs are being created in the region, and a focus for the NECA is to create and fill these jobs. They are the only combined authority that is approaching the economic development agenda in partnership with schools and the education sector. For Andrew, it is essential that young people across the region are learning the skills that they need to succeed in work while they are in education.

“ We want to provide more opportunities to build confidence and to get children to talk more. Our role is to create the jobs of the future, but we also have to prioritise the pupils and young people who are really soon going to come through and take those jobs.

Impact

The impact of implementing oracy education across the region has been wide-ranging — from boosting student confidence, to fostering school-to-school collaboration and strengthening teacher agency.

Working in a group has enabled more connection and knowledge sharing between schools across the region.

“ This project has given schools the impetus to come together and talk and learn from each other in the most significant way that I have seen post-pandemic.

After Covid, there was a decline in networking and inter-school opportunities for development. By working on the Voice North East oracy project together, teachers and schools have been reinvigorated to share practice with each other and learn together.

Next steps

Oracy continues to be a priority across the North East in order to continue supporting the goals of schools, local communities and local authorities. There is growing recognition of the importance of oracy to support students both in school and in their next steps.

“ Oracy plays a crucial role in fostering the creativity, critical thinking, and confidence that empower children and young people to express themselves and actively shape the future of our region.

“ It's been really great to share practice across schools who are at different stages. So in Newcastle, there's the West Trust who have been doing this for three or four years depending on the school, and they can really pass their experiences on to other teachers.

The impact is not just for students, but also for teachers.

While it is ultimately students who benefit from access to a high-quality oracy education, teachers are also getting a lot out of the project. They have been able to innovate, work together to develop approaches to oracy, and lead new initiatives across their schools.

“ Oracy has been reinvigorating some teachers' careers. I've heard quite a few times that a teacher has been given responsibility for oracy in their school, which has had a positive impact on their reputation and profile in the school. It's given teachers something really exciting to work on and develop.



Case Study | Primary

Newcastle upon Tyne

Cragside Primary School

Cragside is a primary school in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. They are in their second year as a Voice 21 Oracy School. Cragside has focused on refining the curriculum around oracy, creating time and space for students to learn both to and through talk in creative contexts.



Oracy at Cragside Primary

While other schools are adding to already packed programmes of study, looking at additional content, practices or interventions to support improved outcomes, Cragside has chosen to strip their curriculum back and focus on the fundamentals of foundation subjects as laid out in the National Curriculum.

Championing change

“ When redesigning the curriculum we asked: what do we have to teach and why don’t we just teach that really really well? ”

MARIA DOYLE, ORACY CHAMPION

Staff were conscious that going against the grain can leave a school feeling exposed to criticism. However, a deep passion for high-quality education and a strong belief in the professionalism and expertise of teachers and their knowledge of best primary practice emboldened Senior Leaders to make fundamental changes to how things were previously done.

“ Our SLT are unafraid to say: this is what we want to do and we’re going to do it. ”

Trialling new approaches

To support a more creative curriculum, the school has reimagined their approach to teaching, learning and assessment. The oracy-centred pedagogy developed through their work with Voice 21 enables students to engage in productive discussions about their learning resulting in less reliance upon writing as a form of assessment.

Implementing this new approach began with a trial in the summer term of 2024 and then a full roll out across Key Stage 1 in September 2024. Piloting the approach empowered teachers to take more risks and try new approaches to teaching and learning.

Impact

“ If it hadn’t worked, that would be OK. Some teachers were initially unsure how this would look for different subjects but in no time at all those same members of staff were coming up to me to say, ‘you know what, this is great – it really works’. ”

Developing oracy expertise

The leadership team at Cragside is developing teachers’ capacity to deliver their creative curriculum through high-quality oracy teaching and learning by ensuring that effective infrastructure is in place. Oracy is one of four key areas on the School Development Plan, each of which has a dedicated staff working group. Connected to this is regular meeting time and CPD allocated to each area. Teachers are also encouraged to regularly visit each other’s classrooms to see different approaches in practice and learn from each other.

Importantly, the school avoids a ‘top down’ approach and an emphasis on collective leadership also builds expertise as opportunities to develop oracy are integrated into subject lead and key stage lead meetings where teachers work together to identify the best opportunities for oracy and creative teaching across the curriculum.

The impact of implementing oracy and creative curriculum design is multifaceted resulting in clear benefits for both staff and students.

“ Staff feel like they have freedom and flexibility and the school always has a buzz about it. For students, we’re seeing a huge impact and notably for students with Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND). ”

Teachers have noticed how well students listen to each other and how confidence has improved both in the classroom and in wider opportunities for talk



Next steps

Oracy will be on the School Development Plan for the foreseeable future and over the next year the school aims to focus on embedding and sustaining what has worked so far as well as continuing to expand this year’s approach into Key Stage 2.

Ultimately, teachers at Cragside plan to continue fostering a vibrant culture where a creative approach to the curriculum unlocks opportunities for students to enjoy learning, build confidence and understand the value of their voices — supporting them to thrive in school and beyond.

Case Study | Middle School



Gosforth Central Middle School

Gosforth Central Middle School serves students from Years 5-8 in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. They are in their fourth year as a Voice 21 Oracy School.

“ We’ve always tried to find something that will work for us and our pupils, and make it personalised to what we do here. Oracy’s not a bolt-on, it’s got to be part of what you do.

Oracy in Gosforth Middle School

In their fourth year as a Voice 21 Oracy School, Gosforth have embedded rich opportunities to talk throughout school life, in all key stages. As a result, children are supported in expanding their linguistic repertoire, which enhances both their learning and wider development.

At Gosforth Middle School, oracy is part of school life. Voice 21 Oracy Lead Kate Tomkins has built a strong oracy team, over several years, representing both key stages and many subject areas. Together, they have found purposeful opportunities for students to engage in oracy that extends their learning within the curriculum; and enhances their co-curricular development. Their sustained focus on oracy means that each year, new layers are added to enrich students’ school experience, through talk, whilst providing opportunities for all teachers to develop their classroom practice, in order to deliver an increasingly ambitious oracy education.



Abundant opportunities for oracy

“ Our highlight is our Friday afternoons – we have our enterprise sessions in Key Stage 3. Teachers pitch termly projects, so students generally have an element of choice in what they do, and there’s always an oracy outcome. It’s something special we do as a school – that children are able to pursue something they’re interested in for a sustained amount of time – and it creates authentic opportunities for talk.

Whilst Key Stage 3 students engage in oracy-rich enterprise sessions, Key Stage 2 pupils develop their oracy skills through a PSHCE curriculum that features opportunities for debate and discussion. In addition, the whole-school approach to reading has had an oracy element introduced. As a result, all students in the school experience at least two planned oracy activities, every week – in addition to the learning *through* talk that is developing across subject areas as teachers build their own classroom repertoires and confidence in creating dialogic spaces.



Impact

“ The children can describe to us how they’ve built their oracy skills, how they’ve used talk for different reasons, and how that’s made them more confident. Teachers are committed and enthusiastic – they’ve seen it works, and we’re using that passion to drive our focus next year on ensuring oracy is embedded in every curricular area.

Increasing opportunities for disciplinary oracy across subject areas

Oracy is increasingly embedded across subject areas. The Oracy Lead has driven a careful attention to disciplinary oracy, working with Heads of Department to focus on the specific ways of speaking, listening and communicating that students need in each subject.

In French, students benefit from a focus on the explicit teaching of oracy skills that enable them to engage with the speaking and listening aspects of the curriculum:

“ Before, students would refuse [to speak in French in class], but now we’ve taken an oracy approach, it’s helped them remember the words better. It’s helped them be more confident. And because they’re more confident, they opt in more in lessons. And actually three years in, my colleague came to me the other day and she said these are the best speaking tests we’ve ever had because they sound French.

In Drama, oracy approaches are being used to elevate existing opportunities to give verbal feedback on performances; and when planning and discussing ideas:

“ He’s used the Oracy Framework and the talk tactics as a way to support children in giving meaningful feedback, rather than, ‘oh, it was good’ or ‘it wasn’t funny’. It also supports students to take on different roles in their discussion and their planning – teaching oracy explicitly really has elevated the quality of discussion.

Next steps

Next year the oracy team at Gosforth are planning to use oracy approaches to deepen the restorative practice approach and support quality discussion across the school. This approach, building excitement around oracy among both teachers and students, and continuously improving their provision, means oracy is going from strength to strength.

“ All of the foundations are there. It’s happening more naturally now. When everyone is confident at leading quality talk in the classroom, they’ve not necessarily planned it in a way that’s really showy. Perhaps what they’ve done is put a question on the board, and they’ve just led that discussion really well. So next year I want us to refocus – to re-examine where we’re at and move to the next level.

Case Study | Secondary



Moorbridge Alternative Education Partnership School

Moorbridge is an Alternative Provision (AP) and Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) in North Tyneside. They are in their second year as a Voice 21 Oracy School.



“Our role here is to give students the tools that they need to reach their full potential, and we’ve really embraced oracy wholeheartedly as a way to achieve that.”

DEBORAH GRIER, ORACY LEAD

Oracy in Moorbridge MAEPS

In their second year as a Voice 21 Oracy School, Moorbridge turned their focus from individual practitioners to whole-school approaches to oracy, with an eye on supporting restorative practices and conflict resolution.

Creating a whole-school culture of oracy

Deborah Grier, Voice 21 Oracy Lead at Moorbridge, decided that the best approach to oracy would be to start embedding little things regularly. They began by drip-feeding strategies including talk tactics, discussion guidelines and concept cartoons across the school, but ensured that they did not do too much too quickly.

“It needed to be a culture that grew gradually rather than changed immediately, so that students could get used to oracy practice and experience a more uniform and consistent approach.”

Oracy for conflict resolution

The behaviour support team lead the oracy initiative by adapting oracy strategies to support their interventions and prevent situations from escalating. The behaviour support team were the first to adopt the new strategies, but as soon as they felt comfortable



with them, they began sharing them out to the wider staff, including support and teaching staff.

Now, when staff are mediating conflicts between students or facilitating difficult conversations, they have restorative talk tactics and sentence stems out on the table in front of them for the students to use.

“We found that it took out that personal sting and the blame associated with whatever the conflict had been caused by and almost enabled them to talk as if they were in the third person. It gave them the language that they need to reflect and analyse the situation and therefore resolution was much easier to achieve without escalation.”



Impact

Moorbridge are working towards a whole-school approach to oracy, utilising both oracy approaches to conflict resolution and restorative talk, and also using classroom-based approaches to give students the tools that they need to communicate.

Oracy has significantly reduced the number of behaviour incidents at Moorbridge

When Moorbridge implemented their restorative talk tactics and sentence stems, they saw a major drop in behaviour incidents, including those involving verbal abuse and discriminatory language.

In their second year implementing oracy, of the total interventions used by the Social Emotional & Mental Health team, 48% of them were based on interaction and communication.

The impact has been huge on student behaviour and wellbeing; it has helped them reflect on their behaviours, acknowledge when they are struggling to cope, articulate their emotions and self-regulate. Students now advocate for their peers to enter into restorative conversations when they are having a difficult time.

Next steps

Moorbridge plans to incorporate oracy into their School Development Plan and staff performance management, in order to further codify and formalise oracy’s role in the school. They also plan to work more on oracy in teaching and learning, now that students have the tools to resolve conflicts and self-regulate through oracy.

“Oracy is absolutely crucial for our young people to navigate through their school and adult life in the best way possible. And I think we’ve always known that that was such a large part of our role in a PRU/AP setting, to help them become more resilient, to help them navigate through difficult times, and to help manage their frustrations.”

Oracy has resulted in more equitable classroom discussions

Oracy has also had an impact at the individual classroom level. Each class created personalised discussion guidelines, so that oracy could be adapted to the specific needs and issues of particular classrooms.

This has enabled Deborah to develop discussion guidelines specifically aimed at ensuring more equity in classroom talk.

“In my class, some of our students have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), so one of the big features of our discussion guidelines has been on allowing other students to talk and not to dominate discussions. It has really created an environment that is conducive to better communication in the classroom.”

Open mornings

At Voice 21, we know how powerful it is when schools come together with a vision. We want to create spaces for our schools to share ideas, empower each other, and form a community with students' voices at its heart. This year, we hosted two open mornings which gave participating teachers a chance to come together and see oracy in action in two schools.

The host schools, **Wingrove Primary School** and **St John's Primary School**, are both in their third year as Voice 21 Oracy Schools. They opened their doors so that other Voice North East schools could hear about how they have implemented oracy, share best practice and glean tips and advice. The open mornings focused on school leadership for oracy, and how they adapted oracy in their own context.



Thank you to all those schools in the project who have opened their doors to the network this year, either through our Group Collaborative Consultancy days or to host a School Open Morning.

If you would like to do so in 25/26, please let your School Relationships Manager, Mandy Craggs, know by emailing her at amanda.craggs@voice21.org.

This opportunity to showcase your oracy journey to date is particularly important if your school is planning to apply to become an Oracy Centre of Excellence in 2026.

