



Voice North East 2025-26

Impact Report

Introduction

We are empowering young people in the North East to use their voices and shape the future of our region.

Choosing to prioritise oracy education across the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) was an easy decision. Three years ago, a group of schools emerged who wanted to implement a high-quality oracy education. After securing funding through our Investment Fund, we began working in partnership with Voice 21 to deliver oracy professional development across the area.

Oracy has been a key component of our Excellence in Education Programme and aligns with other initiatives across the North East MSA focused on economic development and job growth priorities.

We know that oracy skills are central to success in the workplace, and we hope that by ensuring that every child in the region leaves school with these skills, we will be giving them an edge in the job market, promoting economic growth across the North East and working towards economic prosperity.

We have seen wide-ranging impact across the region and the feedback from teachers and school leaders is incredibly positive. Students are more confident, we have seen greater collaboration and learning between schools, as well as strengthening teacher agency and development.

The best environment in which to implement new programmes is undoubtedly one where schools have ownership of the process.

This project has given schools the impetus to come together, to talk and learn from each other in the most significant way I have seen in the last few years.

By bringing together the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority and Voice 21 on the Voice North East Oracy Project, we are empowering young people in the North East to use their voices and shape the future of our region.

Andrew Garrad

Senior Programme Manager,
North East Mayoral Strategic Authority



The partnership between Voice 21 and the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority has set the national standard for the regional provision of oracy education.

For the last three years, Voice 21 has been working in partnership with the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority.

We have built a network of schools who can drive systematic change, exemplify good practice and reshape education across the North East.

Across Voice North East schools, oracy is now 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, and also presents data on improvements in teachers' oracy confidence and progress towards embedding a high-quality oracy education.

At Voice 21, we know that we are most effective when our work is context-driven and tailored to local communities.

Working across the North East has presented a unique opportunity: oracy supports and underpins the priorities and agendas of the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority and local authorities, including economic development, job growth and employability.

By developing young peoples' oracy skills through Voice North East, we are supporting schools and young people to create bright futures for themselves and for the region as a whole.

Kate Paradine
CEO, Voice 21



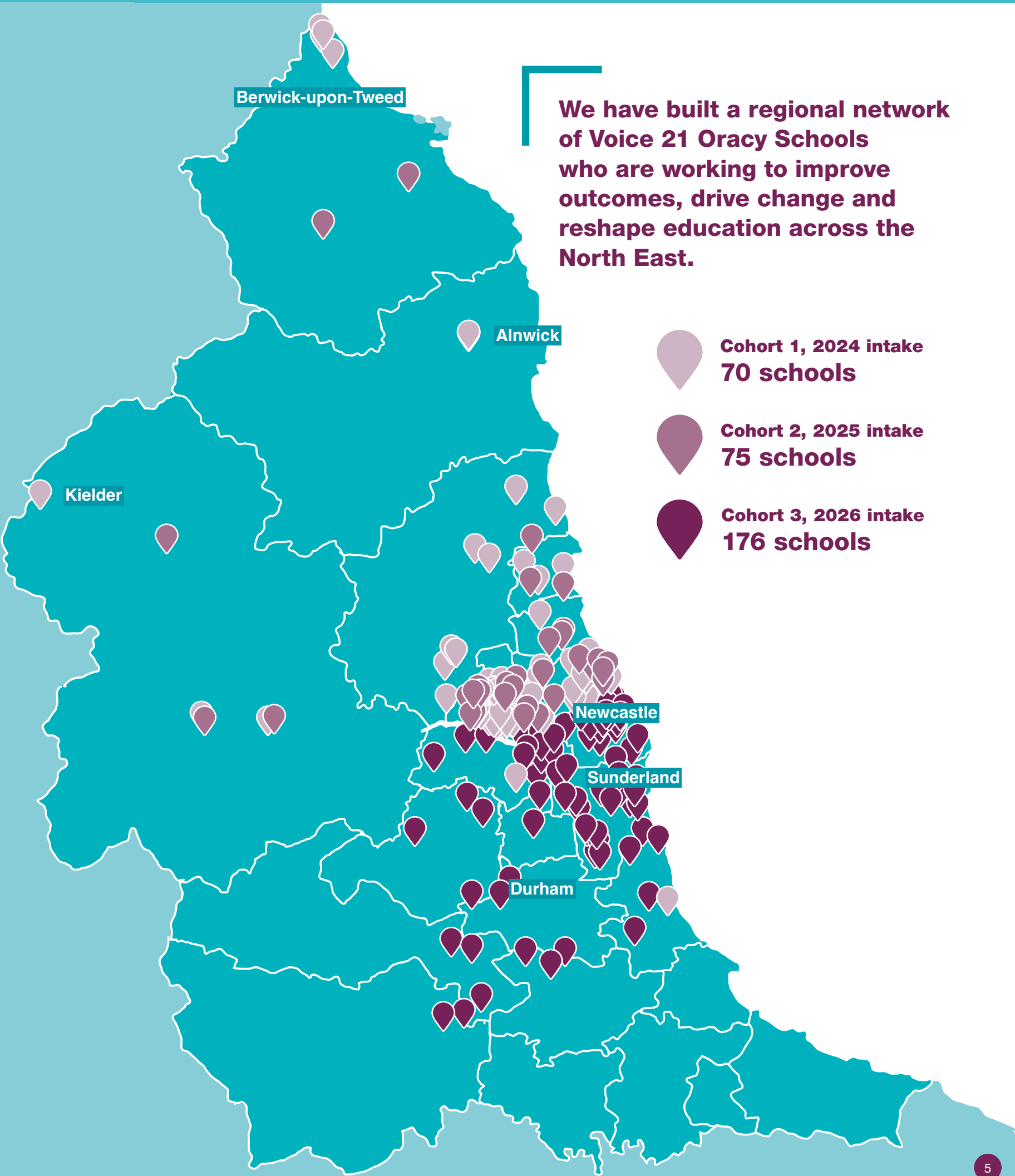


Oracy is articulating ideas, developing understanding and engaging with others through speaking, listening and communication.

Three years ago, Voice 21 and the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority partnered to drive change across the North East.

The project has aimed to ensure that young people across the region leave school with the essential oracy skills that they need to succeed in school and in life.

Voice North East has now worked with 176 schools across the region, equipping them with the knowledge and skills to provide a high-quality oracy education for every child.

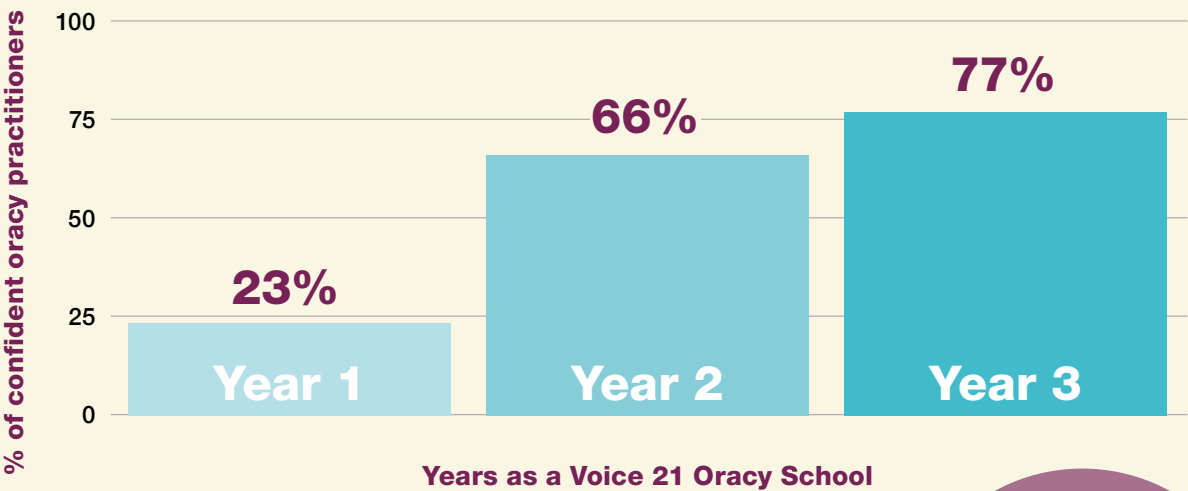


Project timeline



Three years ago, Voice 21 and the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority partnered to support schools across the region to deliver high-quality oracy provision.

More teachers in the North East have become confident oracy practitioners



176
Voice North East
Oracy Schools

380
Oracy Champions

3296
Teachers



The Voice North East project has reached 59,000 students across the region.

 **96%**

of students think it's important to be a good speaker and listener

“

[Oracy is] important to me because it's a way to show your passion to your partner and they will feel more confident to tell you their views

“

[Oracy] is important to me because it sets you up for future situations where you need to be able to speak confidently like a job interview

 **88%**

of students think talking with classmates is a good way to learn

 **88%**

of students enjoy having discussions with their classmates in lessons

“

I like having discussions with my friends; we talk in science about our experiments and then share with the class



Taking a local approach to implementing oracy

Durham County Council identified communication and language as an area of need across the region. In the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile data for the area, around 33% of children were identified as not meeting the expected level in Communication & Language and Literacy areas of learning.

County Durham is one of the seven local authorities that make up the North East Combined Authority

This year, 20 schools in County Durham are part of the Voice North East project, working to ensure that young people are being equipped with the oracy skills that they need to succeed in school, work and life.

To improve outcomes in early years, Durham County Council selected three priorities for improvement across nursery and reception phases:

Priority 1 Improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Priority 2 Improving language, communication and vocabulary.

Priority 3 Improving provision and attainment for vulnerable children including disadvantage (FSM) and those children with SEND.¹

1. Education Durham. Best Start Local Plan. durham.gov.uk/article/35238/What-we-plan-to-do

“Little Voices Growing:” a joined-up strategy to address communication needs

In response to these priorities, Durham County Council aligned approaches to communication, coordinating everything under a county wide strategy to address communication needs in the area: “Little Voices Growing.”

Durham County Council aligned approaches to communication across the county





Taking a regional, place-based approach ensures that oracy provision is locally driven, integrated into their county-wide strategy, and tailored to the context of the area

Oracy plays a key role in this strategy

For Durham County Council, developing schools and teachers to deliver a high-quality oracy education for every child is an essential part of improving teaching and learning.

Through the Voice North East project, Durham is supporting participating schools to become talk-rich environments where students are given the opportunities and tools that they need to develop essential oracy skills.

Oracy also supports every day formative assessment in the classroom, helping teachers identify gaps in knowledge and equipping them with the tools that they need to identify students who are struggling with speech, language and communication.

Developing schools and teachers to deliver a high-quality oracy education for every child is an essential part of improving teaching and learning

Creating talk-rich schools is an essential part of Durham's approach to supporting students with Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN)

Oracy is an important foundation for universal provision supporting students with SLCN and SEND and creating classrooms that are inclusive by design.

The Voice North East project empowers Education Durham to create a network of practice-sharing and collaboration that identifies and builds upon existing local strengths and resources that connect schools, enabling them to learn, develop and grow together.

“Working with the Voice North East project has helped schools in the region share practice, learn from each other, and ensure consistency in the oracy provision that schools are working towards.”

JOANNE WATSON, EDUCATIONAL ADVISOR
AT DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

11 schools from the Voice North East project have been accredited as Oracy Centres of Excellence.





Voice 21 Oracy Centres of Excellence are leading the way in providing a high-quality oracy education for their students.

These schools exemplify excellent oracy practice and will continue to serve as beacons of good provision across the North East, sharing practice and creating a community of schools who are driving change.

Case Studies

1

Schools have built a shared understanding of oracy

Schools are creating a shared understanding of oracy by collaborating with staff on planning, ensuring there is a consistent, whole-school approach to implementation and by developing sustained and wide-ranging curricula for oracy.



Cotsford Primary School

At Cotsford Primary School, oracy is planned through carefully sequenced curriculum overviews across every year group. This guarantees that speaking and listening opportunities are not incidental, but integral to learning with purposeful talk embedded in meaningful and authentic situations as students move from one year to the next.

From EYFS, students are explicitly taught the foundations of communication across all four strands of the Oracy Framework. These foundational skills are systematically built upon, supporting students to develop a repertoire of oracy skills that is applied in increasingly challenging contexts for talk. This progression ensures that oracy knowledge and skills evolve over time.



Hawthorn Primary School

Leaders at Hawthorn Primary School developed an experiential approach to staff development by modelling oracy-rich activities to teachers and teaching assistants and creating time for reflective conversations about how to adapt strategies for different contexts across the school.

This collaborative approach means staff feel valued, included and motivated to support the

implementation of oracy. **Creating a shared understanding and responsibility for provision across the school has led to increased staff confidence in teaching oracy.**

Classroom practice now consistently supports the development of pupils' communication skills.

2 Oracy is the foundation of teaching and learning

Teachers ensure that oracy is a central part of everyday teaching and learning. Teachers facilitate purposeful and carefully planned talk, maximising opportunities for learning both to and through talk in the classroom.

St Michael's Church of England Primary School

Teachers at St Michael's Primary School model specific oracy skills that support productive discussion, helping students to learn to talk. They also model disciplinary ways of thinking and speaking, supporting students to learn through talk. For example, in science lessons, teachers demonstrate making observations, reasoning and drawing conclusions, sharing metacognitive processes and reflection out loud.

Across the school community, teachers, support staff and students regularly connect opportunities for spoken language to the Oracy Framework, developing a shared language for oracy and a culture of reflective oracy practice. **Students are more engaged with their learning and better equipped to develop effective communication skills.**

Langley First School

At Langley First School, oracy underpins their approach to improving literacy. The school chose to gradually introduce oracy in the younger year groups with an emphasis on creating talk-rich literacy teaching, ensuring that students were given a solid foundation for both literacy and oracy from the outset.

Approaches include a strong emphasis on skills from the physical strand of the Oracy Framework, connecting with prosody while the linguistic and cognitive strands support vocabulary development and the organisation of ideas.

These approaches support students to refine and organise their thinking through oracy before writing. **Oracy provides an essential building block for literacy.**



3

Oracy supports inclusion

Oracy supports inclusive teaching and learning, providing an essential universal layer of support for speech, language and communication needs in the classroom. Schools on the project adapt common approaches to oracy thoughtfully to meet the needs of all students.



Atkinson Road Primary Academy

When universal scaffolds to support talk were introduced, teachers in the Additional Resourced Provision (ARP) worked closely with the school's Oracy Lead to adapt these for their class, based on the needs of students. Teachers in the ARP have also integrated and adapted planned oracy opportunities ensuring that all students can access the school's oracy curriculum.

At the start of the year, baseline assessments showed that 50% of students were on track to achieve expected standard in speaking and listening benchmarking. Following the universal implementation of an oracy curriculum and strong oracy provision for all, the school now expects 70% to be achieving this benchmark. **This demonstrates the power of an inclusive whole-school approach to oracy.**



Kingston Park Primary School

Kingston Park Primary School has a strong vision for oracy that has been designed to ensure that every member of the school community is represented, using oracy to foster a sense of belonging. **The school has created an inclusive approach to oracy by establishing a nurturing culture; students genuinely value all voices and invite peers with complex learning needs to share their thoughts and ideas.**

Staff are trained to develop the oracy skills of students with SEND, and appropriate scaffolds are used to encourage participation and improve confidence. All students have the opportunity to engage in different types of talk, for different purposes, and in front of a range of audiences and recognise the impact that oracy is having on their wellbeing as well as attainment.

Moorbridge MAEPS

Putting the needs of students at the heart of planning from the outset has ensured that the school's oracy provision is effectively tailored to students. Focusing on oracy has led to a substantial drop in behaviour incidents; there has been a 71% decrease in incidents of verbal abuse from the start of implementation to now. There has also been a reduction in verbal abuse suspensions: from 29 in the

24/25 school year to 11 in the 25/26 school year to date.

The impact of prioritising oracy has been notable on students' wellbeing, helping them articulate their emotions, self-regulate, and acknowledge and communicate when they are struggling to cope in school.

Cheviot Primary School

Teachers at Cheviot Primary School have shifted the focus of formative assessment from written to spoken outcomes making a tangible difference for students who face difficulties with writing. This allows staff to assess learning and knowledge retention without relying solely on written work, **providing a clearer understanding of the progress across the curriculum of all students.**

In Additional Resourced Provision classes, students are supported to participate in oracy outcomes by adaptive practice that meets the needs of the students. This includes teacher modelling, repetition, extending students' answers and the addition of Maketon gestures and visual aids which accompany speaking.



4

Schools understand the impact of oracy

Schools on the Voice North East project are showing accountability for the impact of oracy and proactively adapting practice based on what they know. Teachers give specific feedback on oracy and regular praise to students.

Wingrove Primary School

At Wingrove Primary School, teachers use Sir Charles Parson's Assessment and Reporting Tool (SCART), a formative assessment tool specifically designed for children with additional and complex needs. The assessment tool supports teachers to understand the needs of students. Using the results of these assessments, **teachers design bespoke oracy targets that are tailored to the ability and needs of each individual student.**

Using a formative assessment tool and setting specific and tailored targets for oracy skills ensures teachers are better able to identify gaps in students' understanding of the curriculum alongside focal areas for language and communication development. They are also able to provide immediate oracy feedback and modify learning in real time.

Bridgewater Primary School

Developing a positive culture of feedback and praise at Bridgewater Primary School is improving engagement with learning, deepening students' understanding of the

Oracy Framework and building social and emotional skills.

One of the key ways this is done is through classes exploring a topic, presenting their learning and receiving feedback from students in other year groups, providing them with new audiences for talk. Students give precise oracy praise and feedback to each other. This improves both the social and emotional skills required to give constructive feedback, while also making students feel valued and heard through specific praise of their oracy skills.



5

Oracy is visible beyond the classroom

Building a culture of oracy that reverberates beyond classrooms ensures that the whole school community understands and values oracy education. Project schools are ensuring that oracy is woven through every aspect of school life.

Westgate Hill Primary Academy

Teachers identified lunchtimes as an opportunity to further develop students' language skills. They set up a wide range of play opportunities which promoted real-life, meaningful contexts for talk through OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) and encouraged students to draw upon the oracy skills they were learning in lessons to support communication in these spaces.

Teachers have noticed wide-ranging impact. **Students have been observed negotiating rules, roles and resources.**

Newly arrived EAL students are also now better supported through practical, contextual language use, and so are able to build their basic interpersonal communication skills more quickly.



