

Written evidence

Members of the Oracy APPG will consider written, verbal and audio-visual evidence and oversee oral evidence sessions. All evidence will inform the final report.

The extended deadline for submitting written evidence is 20th September 2019. We would appreciate if the submissions would follow the following guidelines:

- Be in a Word format
- No longer than 3000 words
- State clearly who the submission is from, and whether it is sent in a personal capacity or on behalf of an organisation
- Begin with a short summary in bullet point form
- Have numbered paragraphs
- Where appropriate, provide references

Please write your evidence below and email the completed form via email to inquiry@oracyappg.org.uk with the subject line of 'Oracy APPG inquiry'

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Full name:

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School or Organisation:

Oracy Lead

Role:

Written evidence:

Summary

At Elmhurst Primary School, and more widely through our Multi-Academy Trust, Teaching School Alliance and work as an English Hub, we have long valued and promoted oracy as a vital way of empowering all children to develop academically, as well as providing enrichment opportunities with personal, emotional and even societal benefits.

In this submission, we aim to address all three areas of the inquiry (value & impact, provision & access and barriers to improving oracy education) by detailing the following:

- How a focus on talk in EYFS has allowed us to support successive cohorts, which have come to Elmhurst with the majority of children below age-related English language expectations, to perform above the national average in the KS1 SATs.
- How a continued prioritisation of oracy across the curriculum and throughout key stages, most notably through consistent and structured partner talk, has been key in developing comprehension and fluency that have contributed to sustained above average KS2 SATs results.
- How oracy-based enrichment opportunities, such as debating, drama, speech making and poetry retreats, have allowed students to develop into confident, personable and engaged citizens.
- How we strive to provide oracy opportunities for all members of our school community, including teachers (through tailored CPD) and parents (by inviting them into the classroom, engaging them with oracy-based work alongside their children at home and providing them with the platform to take part in debates etc) and the impact this wider involvement has had on our pupils.
- The barriers we have faced at Elmhurst to developing oracy and how we have overcome these. The biggest has been very high proportion of our children who have English as an additional language, often one not spoken outside of school. However, through consistent support and, where required, interventions, we have been able to ensure all our children make significant progress with their speech and confidence.

1. Talking is not a single skill but rather, like reading and writing, the confluence of many. Just as with reading and writing, all these facets within an oracy-based education need to be identified, taught and developed (Stott and Gaunt, 2018). At Elmhurst, we believe this must start from the first moments of EYFS provision. This is even more imperative due to the nature of the community we are proud to serve, with approximately 95 percent of our students having English as an additional language and many speaking other tongues outside of school.
2. Faced with this linguistic deficit compared to the national average, our EYFS practitioners have adopted many strategies to foster our children's speaking skills. A balance of high expectations and support is the key factor, with children consistently encouraged and helped to speak in full sentences and key vocabulary pre-planned into activities, with these words displayed and repeatedly referred to. This focus on language sees the children make rapid progress in their confidence and eloquence.
3. These strategies build towards the children beginning their leaning of phonics. Our school teaches synthetic phonics using Ruth Miskin's Read Write Inc programme. This approach is well-embedded at Elmhurst, after years of refining. What marks this strategy out is that it aims to produce not just fluent readers and writers, but also fluent speakers, accepting the fact that reading and writing float on a sea of talk (Britton, 1970). Towards this end, the scheme is structured around the use of 'partner talk', to allow pupils the opportunity to share and build ideas, as well as the modelling of language use through 'my turn, your turn' strategies. Furthering this work, we are also involved in a pilot scheme with educational expert Charlotte Raby, which sees children spend extended periods of time really learning, analysing and, most importantly, discussing a specific book.
4. The effectiveness of this approach is shown by the progress made by the children during their first few formative years at school. Having started behind the national average in their language development, cohort after cohort has gone on to excel at the KS1 SATs. This year, 82 percent of pupils achieved

expected standard and 84 percent reached this level in both of the previous two years, all of these are above the national average.

5. We have been seeking to use our expertise in this oracy-rich approach to support and develop other schools through our work as one of the newly instituted English Hubs. Last year, we supported 83 different schools and forged a network of 20 partner schools across London and Essex. The aim of our work with these institutions has been improving early language development, phonics and reading for pleasure, all of which have oracy at their centre.
6. The focus on oracy is not left behind in the early years of an Elmhurst education. Rather, it is maintained across the curriculum and throughout year groups. The simplest, but perhaps most powerful, manifestation of this in the classroom is the use of 'partner-talk'. This is where each child has a designated 'talk partner' with whom they are given opportunities to discuss questions or ideas before the teacher takes feedback from the class. This initially grew from our championing of the 'Literacy and Language' scheme (also created by Ruth Miskin and transitioning naturally from her RWI phonics programme), as 'partner-talk' is embedded throughout the resources. It long ago spread beyond literacy lessons in our school and is employed by teachers in all subjects, particularly in mathematics, where it is a key plank of the teaching for mastery agenda.
7. However, it is vital to stress that simply telling children to talk to each other is not enough, they need to be taught how. Just as worthwhile talk needs something worth talking about, it also needs clear structure, understood rules and defined roles (Dawes, Mercer, Wegerif, 2000). Towards this end, our staff has received training and resources on how to effectively teach how to talk. It is important to note that this is done within curriculum lessons, rather than as distinct oracy sessions as has been tried in other schools, as we believe the clear objectives and content provided by lessons gives much needed direction to the talk.

8. The benefits of this approach have been clear, evidenced both by feedback from teachers and KS2 SATs results. To start with the former, teachers have consistently reported that by allowing children to discuss and rehearse ideas in pairs prior to a whole class discussion, it promotes a deeper understanding as children push each other through questioning, creates a 'no opt-out' culture as all pupils are required to participate, provides peer-support and scaffolding for those who are struggling, teaches how to talk for a purpose, builds confidence ahead of whole class interactions and also moves teaching towards a dialogic approach as opposed to the 'guess-what-answer-the-teacher-wants' scenarios that have often characterised more didactic forms (Alexander, 2005).

9. As mentioned, the second set of data commending our oracy-based approach is our KS2 SATs results, which have consistently exceeded national averages and trends. In 2018, 91 percent of our children reached expected level in writing, 92 percent in reading and 97 percent in maths. There are, of course, a number of factors contributing to this sustained success but the development of oracy is a facet in them all. In terms of reading and writing results, Elmhurst has long championed a reading for pleasure pedagogy (in recognition of this, we won the Egmont Reading for Pleasure Whole School Award this year) and promoting writing for pleasure has been a more recent priority. At the heart of both of these is purposeful talk. This is promoted through a number of initiatives, such as an after-school book club for KS1 based around structured discussion of texts, building both language comprehension and talk skills that are then built on throughout KS2. Every class also has a 15-minute daily story time, where teachers read aloud to their classes and facilitate productive book talk. This again both develops children's ability to discuss texts and provides vital peer support and modelling to improve comprehension. We also have weekly 'class reader' lessons as part of our literacy curriculum, where classes study a text in depth, with many of the activities employed being oracy-based, from role playing to debates. In terms of writing, we have a strong ethos of using oral-rehearsal prior to writing, allowing children to develop their language and grammar ahead of committing ideas to paper. This has proved effective in raising the quality of writing across year groups. The consistent use of these strategies allows children to develop talk skills that deepen their

comprehension abilities and writing fluency, contributing to their year six results.

10. Our KS2 maths results can also be credited, in part, to the strong foundation of oracy at the heart of our teaching of the subject. We use the Maths No Problem scheme based on the mastery pedagogy first developed in Singapore. At the core of this scheme is an acknowledgement of and commitment to the importance of teaching children how to 'talk maths'. By teaching and developing the tools within pupils to talk through both methods and misconceptions, we move them from an instrumental to a relational understanding of mathematics (Skemp, 1989). This allows children to deepen their content knowledge but also their reasoning and ability to apply what they know to new contexts. This approach has allowed our children to perform consistently well in their SATs and was also highlighted as a case study of best practise by the NCETM when our current cohort of year sixes were in year four (as they were the first year group to be taught with this approach from the beginning of their schooling).

11. Outside of our core classroom curriculum, Elmhurst has a proud tradition of offering oracy-based enrichment opportunities to our children. Perhaps primary among these is our debating programme. We are now in our eighth year of developing debating at Elmhurst, to much success (we have been crowned Debate Mate national champions on more than one occasion, most recently in 2018, and were ranked second in the country last year). Competitive debating has given our children the chance to speak at institutions such as Oxford University and to figures from the world of business and politics, as well as in front of world champion debaters such as Lewis Iwu, all of whom have commented on their confidence, fluency and understanding of complex issues.

12. However, competitive success is a recognition of the benefit brought by debating, rather than the benefit itself. The advantages of debating are well supported by research. As well as the obvious boost to confidence, students who learn these skills make an additional two month's progress in literacy and science, and one additional month's progress in maths (EEF, 2015). Debating has several strands at Elmhurst which children can access. First, every Friday

afternoon we run a debating class, where children are taught both the stylistic and analytical techniques of debating. The 30 children in this class are drawn from across KS2 and it serves both those identified as showing promise as competitive debaters and also those who lack speaking ability. The progress of both groups has been profound, with marked improvement noticed by class teachers in both confidence and academic attainment. We also run three heavily over-subscribed debating clubs, one at lunchtimes for KS1 and two afterschool for KS2. The latter two are run in conjunction with the charity Debate Mate, who provide mentors to work alongside our teachers. These clubs feed into the local, regional and national competitions in which our students face other schools. We also run annual year group debates, where each class fields a team to debate against another on a topic they have studied that year. This begins in year two and continues until year six. It has gained huge popularity among students, with many always vying to obtain a place on the squad. This is on top of both formal and informal debating being woven in to lessons across all subjects. Through these avenues, we aim to ensure every child at Elmhurst has had an experience of debating. While this is a work in progress it's a goal we are moving ever closer towards.

13. Alongside debating, we have a long-established Shakespeare scheme, where students from across KS2 learn and perform a Shakespeare play, including in front of a large external audience at the annual Shakespeare Schools Festival. We have a teacher and a professional actor who work with the children once a week both during school time and afterschool. A strong focus is put on text comprehension and performance skills, a strand of oracy that is different but equally beneficial to the exploratory talk developed in the classroom. The confidence this instils is clear for all to see but there are also a tangible emotional and academic benefits as children develop their emotional intelligence and comprehension skills.

14. A girl who was in year six at Elmhurst last year provides an inspiring case study of the impact these enrichment activities can have. She joined our school in year two, having moved from India, and spoke very little English upon arrival – even by the end of her time with us, her parents required translators for interactions with the school, so English was not the main language spoken at

home. However, due to language interventions and the support of her teachers, she was able to involve herself in Shakespeare (giving a fluent performance) and debating (she was the summary speaker and captain of the squad ranked second in the country by Debate Mate last year). While a particular success, she is not an outlier. Rather she is a testament to the progress children can make when oratorical skills are purposefully and consistently nurtured.

15. Through our work as a Teaching School Alliance, we are outwards looking with our promotion of oracy-based enrichment. We have three key ongoing projects. The first is a poetry retreat for sixty year five students from across six schools. They travel away from home for a week and work with professional poets and specialist teachers to write and perform poetry. This is all done with speech at its heart and the impact on the confidence of the students is continually remarked upon by teachers and parents. This actually builds on an annual poetry recital we hold at Elmhurst for our own pupils, where students from every class memorise and perform poems in front of their whole key stage, with many even writing their own to deliver. Secondly, we run the East London Speechmaking Festival, which last year involved eight schools and this year is set to grow. It sees teachers receive training at Elmhurst to support them helping their students both write an original speech and learn a famous piece of oratory. These are then performed at a celebratory day of performances. The third enrichment opportunity we offer to other schools is the East London Debating League and Cup, which we run in conjunction with Debate Mate and involves 18 schools including Elmhurst. Through this initiative, hundreds of students learn how to debate and apply these skills in a competition setting. The benefits of this have already been laid out above.

16. We acknowledge at Elmhurst that if we want students to develop their oracy skills, we need to engage our whole community, most notably teachers and parents. For teachers, we have provided CPD on how to develop oracy skills within their classes, both in general and subject specific contexts. This has been provided by our school's oracy lead and external consultants. For parents, we have several avenues to include them in the development of their children's oracy skills. The first of these has been inviting parents in for story

sessions, where they can read and discuss stories with their children. The aim is to encourage this activity at home, thus supporting all the work done at school around book talk, which has already been outlined above. Secondly, we have set whole school homework which requires children and parents to engage in purposeful dialogue, therefore promoting oracy skills. The most recent of these was at the end of the last academic year, when children were tasked with collecting family stories. Pupils were taught to interview people and were provided with resources to help them question family members to draw out stories about their own backgrounds and histories. This revealed some incredible stories within our community and led to many children orally retelling these tales both in the classroom and beyond. Thirdly, we host an annual community debate, watched by students and involving pupils, teachers and parents. It is always on a topical issue and we have great parental involvement. The parents are given training and support ahead of the actual debate and always put on an impressive show. It has been so popular that we have been approached by parents who wish to establish a parent debating club to continue to develop these oracy skills within the wider community. This is an interesting possibility which we are currently exploring.

17. Our 'oracy journey' has been incredibly rewarding for all involved, but not without challenge. As detailed at the start, we serve a community that has English levels well below the national average. When working with children who are new to the country or the language, our staff have had success in supporting language development through targeted interventions. These often focus on reading but hinge on engaging children in talk, which raises their ability and confidence to speak. This progress can then be transferred to the classroom and beyond.

18. At Elmhurst we are proud to prioritise oracy both in our classroom and our wider curriculum offering. We have seen first-hand the huge impact this can have on all pupils, regardless of background or current attainment. By allowing students to claim their voices, we empower them to achieve academically, socially and emotionally and leave us already developing into citizens with the tools to understand and shape the world around them.

