

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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Role:

Written evidence:

Oracy: A Submission of Evidence and Conclusions
Nicholas Robson, Associate Head: Holland Park School
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1. Summary

- 1.1. Oracy is essential in students' education. In order to be successful in employment, education and socially, children need the skills of spoken language to present themselves, express themselves and give themselves the best opportunities to enter new worlds, curry favour and exert influence.
- 1.2. The distinction between literacy and oracy is frequently exaggerated. Developing not only a familiarity with a wide range of vocabulary and idiomatic expression but also understanding of nuance is best supported in conjunction with the written word - not in isolation from it.
- 1.3. Oracy is not only an intellectual skill, but a social one. The capacity to communicate, to understand how to influence different audiences, reading moments to speak and moments to listen, knowing how to couch an unpopular argument - these are all essential in any social context.
- 1.4. The national movement away from marking (Ofsted's insistence that they do not require it, pressure groups like No More Marking aim to rid marking from its traditional place in schools) means that oral feedback is becoming more and more essential for students' academic progress in every subject.
- 1.5. Being orate in a class is different from being orate one to one. A central part of oracy is understanding context, tone and register and how different contexts require different ways of talking: the formal versus informal; the group setting versus the private interview.
- 1.6. Just as all language development requires immersion, the oral skills of teachers are essential in developing students' capacity. This is partly about range of vocabulary, but it is also about quick wittedness, versatility, humour, passion and - that most archaic of concepts - rhetoric.

2. Oracy as an essential aim of education.

- 2.1. The value of oracy to young people is difficult to overstate. Socially, economically, educationally, medically, spoken communication is the predominant method of how human beings interact with the rest of the world. To be skilful in this area can open up opportunities for young people that can shape futures, improve incomes, ensure health and enhance happiness. Developing oracy is therefore a fundamental aim for social justice.
- 2.2. The current teenage social habitat is more hostile to oracy than ever before. Most methods of social media encourage written forms of communication, where presentational style is entirely unimportant. Even in those forms of social media that involve oral communication, they are for the most part 'one way', not engaging in dialogue, but monologue. The notion of needing to be responsive in real time to one's audience is anathema to this way of communicating.
- 2.3. Much has been written about the removal of the 'speaking and listening' component as a meaningful contributory part of the assessment of the English

Language GCSE. This is a significant change and one that - without question - has changed English teachers' attitudes to oracy in the curriculum. It would be a grave and facile mistake, however, to make any suggestion that oracy has therefore been removed from the core curriculum, or even to conclude that the change has been damaging to oracy more generally. In some senses, the change has liberated teachers from paying lip service to this incomparable curriculum end, by pinning all of its significance onto a small corner of a small part of coursework of a single qualification. Teachers now are able to give significance to the place of oracy in every subject and ensure that it is not an isolated skill separable from all other learning.

2.4. At Holland Park, teachers may know that written work ultimately secures students' academic qualifications, but they also know that correcting vocabulary, encouraging extended speaking and setting high standards of spoken expression are essential principles in lesson time. Standards are key, so 'like' or 'kind of' are forbidden in the classroom.

3. Oracy is best developed in conjunction with literacy

3.1. It is easy for less effective teachers to reduce the substance of oracy, thinking it contained entirely in the concept of confidence of communication. In such a way, it is arbitrarily and harmfully separated from literacy. In fact, literacy and oracy are conjoined twins, whose coexistence makes the other stronger, happier and better nourished.

3.2. The art of reading is essential in making sure that students are exposed to a wide range of vocabulary and syntactical and idiomatic forms. Knowing how style in *Private Eye* differs from bulletins in the *Financial Times*, guidance documents on the NHS website and prose in a George Eliot novel assists students in finding the appropriate register for different contexts and for different purposes. And yet it is not only the separation of different styles, but also their contagion, that develops flair in writing and in speaking.

3.3. There is a practical point here. In a classroom of 30, if everyone (including the teacher) were to speak equally in an hour's lesson, each person would have the spotlight for less than 2 minutes each. This is not even accounting for feedback given by the teacher for each spoken contribution. An essential way in which children can develop their oracy, simply in terms of their language development, is to have written practice (and written feedback). Just as Mozart says in Peter Shaffer's stage play, *Amadeus*, the composer can have numerous ideas and set them all down 'at the same time'; similarly in a classroom in which all children are writing, all are expressing themselves at the same time.

3.4. There is a converse benefit here. In a number of lessons at Holland Park, children are told to 'speak the essay'. Taking their time, children dictate the opening of an answer for a teacher to write down onto the whiteboard for the whole of the class to see and comment on. This oral approach improves students' written work, as the public arena places a sharp focus on every word and expression. This approach raises standards as students see their written answers as poetry in which every word must be perfectly placed.

4. Oracy is not just an intellectual skill, but a social one

- 4.1. The development of oracy is important as it assists in the social development of young people. Some of this, as controversial as it might sound, is about class and about ensuring that no student is judged for the way they have been taught to speak. At Holland Park, the difference between less and fewer, cups of tea (versus 'a tea'), must have (versus 'must of') are all important in ensuring students are going into the world able to avoid the judgment of those with superior English and inferior tolerance. Just as we teach the western canon in literature, art and music, so that students are able to compete with their peers in more privileged settings, so too do we see the understanding (if not permanent adoption) of standard English to be a central pillar in social mobility.
- 4.2. But oracy is also about reading the tone, body language, word choice and subtext of how people speak and using this to adapt one's own speech accordingly. Knowing when to crack a joke and when to be in earnest, when another person wishes to be heard and when they are seeking another's viewpoint - these are essential skills in getting on in life. Such social graces allow young people to build relationships and trust and have access to unfamiliar territory, power and promotion.

5. Movements away from marking make oracy all the more important

- 5.1. A wide range of bodies, including Ofsted, government reports into teacher workload and pressure groups such as the organisation No More Marking, have made the traditional practice of marking very unfashionable. In such a context, ensuring there is good oracy in lessons is essential for students to practise their newly developed skills and understanding and receive feedback from teachers.
- 5.2. At Holland Park, we remain (despite the current trend) utterly committed to marking, because - together with oral methods - it is a powerful way to place significance into verbal expression. Marking the work of 30 people is the only way of individualising guidance to an entire class, so that it is suited to individuals.
- 5.3. Such individual guidance is essential in oracy, since the best speakers develop their own unique style and register. It would be easy for teachers to dispense model phrases and exemplar sentences; in fact, marking allows teachers to develop the individual voice of students on a one to one basis. Without marking, teachers have to work harder to be able to provide feedback and guidance to students on their spoken style that is not generic.

6. Classroom oracy is not its only form

- 6.1. Being able to speak in a classroom to a group of 30 people is different from being able to hold one's own in a one to one interview, or deliver a presentation to 100 delegates. The Speaking and Listening component of the English Language examination (legacy and reformed) is frequently understood in a very narrow context because the presentations given by students tend to be given only in a classroom context. The fact is that the skills of oracy demand a different type of

performance in a private interview versus in a 200 person assembly hall. Some find a classroom an easeful environment (partly because it is so familiar a setting for children) but are paralysed by nerves in one to one interviews.

6.2. At Holland Park, Interview practice for our Sixth Form students is an essential part of out-of-class learning. Skills such as sitting comfortably, giving oneself time to think, being confident to change one's mind, how to finish answers to questions and giving eye contact to interviewers are all skills not learned in the traditional English classroom. Arguably, however, these are skills that have the greatest bearing on career success and educational trajectory and at Holland Park, teachers work hard to provide this practice outside the timetabled day.

6.3. Similarly, opportunities in assemblies for students to talk in a space of 250 students and teachers are essential for providing familiarity with what will be the likely format of conferences and lectures in students' futures. This exists not at all in any national curriculum, but is a ubiquitous experience for university students and employees undertaking professional training.

7. Oracy development is contingent on the quality of oracy of teachers

7.1. In a climate of teacher shortages, the presence of confident, articulate, lucid, charismatic and erudite speakers amongst students is more critical than ever before. Unlike the development of literacy where texts can stand in for the poor written capacity of teachers, students will have a large part of their schooling dominated by teachers talking to them. If this is substandard, we are letting students down.

7.2. Just as there is a clear national consensus that languages teaching is most successful when students are immersed in the target language, so too does it follow rationally that the development of oracy (and particularly the skills of dialogue) when students are immersed in a climate of the highest of standards of oracy and encouraged to engage with it on that level.

7.3. At Holland Park, assemblies offer students experience of some extraordinary public speakers who happen to teach at the school. This is particularly true of Colin Hall, the head, but not limited to him. Similarly, the school invites in public speakers frequently to talk with students (in recent months Sheila Hancock and Simon Russell Beale) to exemplify some of the best presentational skills. Debating clubs ensure that students are able to marshal their arguments and sharpen their tongues in a war of words, steeped in the pleasantries of courtesy, respect and decorum.

Additional guidance:

Value and impact

1. Given many teachers recognise the importance of oracy, why does spoken language not have the same status as reading and writing in our education system? Should it have the same status, and if so why?
2. What are the consequences if children and young people do not receive oracy education?
3. What is the value and impact of quality oracy education at i) different life stages, ii) in different settings, and iii) on different types of pupils (for instance pupils from varied socioeconomic backgrounds or with special educational needs)?
4. How can it help deliver the wider curriculum at school?
5. What is the impact of quality oracy education on future life chances? Specifically, how does it affect employment and what value do businesses give oracy?
6. What do children and young people at school and entering employment want to be able to access, what skills to they want to leave school with?
7. What is the value and impact of oracy education in relation to other key agendas such as social mobility and wellbeing/ mental health?
8. How can the ability to communicate effectively contribute to engaging more young people from all backgrounds to become active citizens, participating fully in social action and public life as adults

Provision and access

1. What should high quality oracy education look like?
2. Can you provide evidence of how oracy education is being provided in different areas/education settings/extra-curricular provision, by teachers but also other practitioners that work with children?
3. What are the views of teachers, school leaders and educational bodies regarding the current provision of oracy education?
4. Where can we identify good practice and can you give examples?
5. What factors create unequal access to oracy education (i.e. socio-economic, region, type of school, special needs)? How can these factors be overcome?
6. Relating to region more specifically, how should an oracy-focused approach be altered depending on the context?

Barriers

1. What are the barriers that teachers face in providing quality oracy education, within the education system and beyond?
2. What support do teachers need to improve the delivery of oracy education?
3. What accountability is currently present in the system? How can we further incentivise teachers to deliver more oracy education to children and young people?
4. What is the role of government and other bodies in creating greater incentives and how can this be realised?
5. What is the role of assessment in increasing provision of oracy education? What is the most appropriate form of assessment of oracy skills?
6. Are the speaking and listening elements of the current curriculum sufficient in order to deliver high quality oracy education?
7. What is the best approach – more accountability within the system or a less prescriptive approach?
8. Are there examples of other educational pedagogies where provision has improved and we can draw parallels and learn lessons?

