

# DRAYTON PARK PRIMARY SCHOOL

## ORACY POLICY



### **Oracy is Fundamental to Learning and Success at School**

The development of sophisticated language skills is key to pupils' success across the curriculum. Through language pupils access new material, communicate ideas and think. Traditionally education has focused on literacy - writing and reading - and spoken language has had lower status. However, oracy is fundamental<sup>1</sup>:

- Thought and language develop in combination and in social context, through conversational turns<sup>2</sup>.
- Oracy is the determiner of a pupil's literacy skills. Children can only comprehend as readers what they are able to understand as listeners. They can only write what they are able to say.

### **Oracy is an Equalities Issue**

The language skills pupils have when they start school are dependent on those of their parents and carers. High levels of exposure to sophisticated English at home provides pupils with the tools to fully access the curriculum in school and thrive academically. Conversely, limited exposure to sophisticated language creates a barrier to understanding and expression in school and thus a barrier to academic success.

Research demonstrates that pupils from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are often exposed to more limited language than those from wealthier families<sup>3</sup>. Pupils growing up in non-English speaking households may also be disadvantaged in terms of English language development. The combination of these two disadvantages is common in our school.

The language skills of a child's peers have a crucial impact on their developing oracy. Language is learnt through conversation with others. If a significant number of pupils in a class have limited oracy, the brakes will be put on everyone, whereas high-quality talk from peers has enormous beneficial impact on those with language delay.

Oracy is an equalities issue. We tackle it by actively teaching oracy to all pupils. We facilitate this by creating a culture of high-quality talk and discussion in our classes.

### **Oracy is a Behavioural Issue**

The ability to understand others well and express ourselves accurately and fluently enables us to stay in control of our interactions. Two year olds famously tantrum because they are unable to express their needs through language. This leads to frustration. Children who lose control of conversations and feel unable to express themselves verbally, are likely to feel frustration and the potential need to express themselves physically. Language is a key tool and creator of self-regulation. If our pupils can express themselves well, they are more likely to behave well.

### **Oracy is About Vocabulary and Syntax**

Using language well requires us to access a rich range of words (vocabulary) and put them together well (syntax). Content and structure work together to create meaning. The number of words young children know and their ability to construct sentences are joint predictors of future success<sup>4</sup>.

The development of vocabulary and syntax are interdependent. Words must be taught in context and through meaningful communication with others. Opportunity to reuse and refine language is essential to embed it in long-term memory.<sup>5</sup>

### **Specific Oracy Teaching**

Our schools have built lessons with a specific oracy focus into our curriculum. These include:

- [Philosophy for Children \(P4C\)](#): A structured whole class debate, taking place once every two weeks, as part of our writing cycle.

- **School Council:** this is a structured discussion about whole school issues. It involves all pupils in KS1 and KS2, as well as all staff, working in cross-aged groups. It takes place once every 2-3 weeks.
- **Debate Clubs:** We run a range of clubs, based on children's interests and talents, throughout the year. This regularly includes debate club.

## Oracy Throughout the Curriculum

The following strategies and approaches are used throughout teaching to develop oracy (click on links for more information):

- **Modelling:** Children naturally learn new words through exposure to them, in meaningful context and through communication. We need to expose our pupils to rich, sophisticated and accurate language. Throughout teaching, all staff should model high quality, sophisticated, standard English in their interactions with children and with each other, when in front of children.
- **Expectations:** We should maintain high expectations of the language children can understand and use. This includes the language we expose them to. It also means addressing mistakes in their verbal language when we hear them. We should expect pupils to speak in full sentences, using standard English.
- **Dialogic Teaching:** This is an approach to developing and sustaining probing discussion in class, in which pupils actively respond to each other's ideas.
- **Collaborative Learning:** Tasks that require pupils to work together generate purposeful discussion.
- **Questioning:** High quality questioning, used throughout teaching, is a key tool in developing language and thinking. Questions should be used purposefully to:
  - Encourage knowledge recall (often closed, single answer questions).
  - Encourage creative thinking (often open, multi-answer questions).
  - Prompt deeper thinking (secondary questioning, building on a child's initial answer).
  - Prompt discussion (see dialogic teaching above).
  - Encourage metacognition (see below).
- **Metacognition:** This is thinking about thinking. It is a key learning tool - can pupils reflect on their own work and analyse their effectiveness as learners? Metacognition requires and involves developing language for abstraction, analysis and evaluation.
- **Scaffolding:** When using the strategies above, giving pupils sentence starters can be a very effective means of encouraging more sophisticated language. Give pupils a choice of ways in which they have to start their sentences. These will require them to complete the sentences in certain ways.
- **Explanation:** Develop a culture in your class in which pupils are encouraged to share opinions and ideas, but are also required to justify them. Teach pupils how to explain their thinking and expect them to always explain why they think something.
- **Teaching Vocabulary:** The schools have structured approaches to developing pupils' vocabulary across the curriculum and teaching children new words. See [Teaching Vocabulary Guidance](#). This includes a system that enables pupils to highlight new words they do not fully understand, for them to be addressed at a whole-class level.
- **Grammar:** Grammar is regularly taught through our writing cycle. Grammar lessons should involve a significant element of speaking and listening, ensuring that the grammatical structures being taught become part of pupils' spoken, as well as written language.

## References

1 [Let's Think in English, Smith, 2019.](#)

2 [Thinking and Speaking, Vygotsky, 1934.](#)

3 For a summary of research evidence, see [Social Disadvantage and Early Language Delay, The Centre of Research Excellence in Child Language.](#)

4 [Early Language Development, Law et al, 2017.](#)

5 [When is a Word not a Word?, Dixon 2019.](#)