

Bishop Young School, Seacroft

Whilst Bishop Young Academy, Leeds, is a secondary school, there are many lessons that can be learnt regarding the impact of a high quality oracy education on young people and how a national plan for oracy can support this.

Bishop Young Academy is situated in Seacroft in the east of the city. This is an area of high deprivation, according to the 2019 census, 92% of households are in the bottom two deciles of multiple deprivation decile and 60% of students live in the bottom decile for employment. Life expectancy is on average 4 years lower than in the city. It is one of the greatest areas of privation within the north of the country. Bishop Young Academy displays the importance of oracy in supporting all students and opening doors to opportunity.

The academy is an example of how a focus on oracy can facilitate further improvements in the school as a whole. This school has been on an impressive journey. Pre-pandemic, it was the most improved school in Leeds in terms of outcomes in 2018/19 and attainment and progress at the academy has improved each year since 2017, including a 0.5 improvement in P8 from 2018 to 2019. The gap in P8 between their disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils and SEND and non-SEND pupils was also eradicated as a result of a strong and unwavering focus on creating a school of 'talk-rich' classrooms.

Prior to this journey, students found it a challenge to express themselves and they had little grasp of academic language and code-switching. It was recognised that there was a fear of failure from students and a lack of willingness to use problem-solving skills. The majority of reading ages were below expected and the word gap was significant between disadvantaged pupils and their non-disadvantaged peers.

Now with a new focus on oracy, including a use of 100 tier 2 words for each year group and an academy formality scale to ensure pupils are empowered to use appropriate register and to code-switch, pupils are well prepared to flourish within and beyond the academy. In 2021 OFSTED judged behaviour in the school as good, largely due to the huge improvement in oracy skills and the impact this had on the ability of pupils to articulate themselves confidently and appropriately.

A focus on oracy also had impact on other aspects of school life, such as attendance. Pupils began to buy into the school more and enjoy lessons and as a result, attendance rose by 6% between 2017-2019.

Oracy can be a driver of school development, and can support all pupils socially, emotionally and educationally.