

Oracy Engaged School July 26 visit report: Rockmount Primary School

Oracy Cambridge evaluators: Peter Dudley and Neil Mercer. Visit: 8 July 2026.

1. Executive summary (bullet points)

We were in complete agreement that Rockmount Primary School is a very **strongly oracy-engaged school**, in all respects meeting the Oracy Cambridge criteria.

- Children of all ages are confident, willing and enthusiastic to speak for a wide range of purposes in very different situations and for multiple audiences. They select register and speech genres to match these purposes and audiences moving between informal and formal, partners and group-talk to whole class and whole year group audiences and are aware of how they are doing this.
- Classrooms are bursting with enthusiastic, purposeful talk. The school gives both care and careful thought to make sure all children, including those who are less confident, those learning through an additional language and those who have learning, language, social or emotional challenges, disabilities or difficulties are supported to be included and to be able to participate meaningfully and developmentally in conversations and discussions.
- The school environment is relentlessly stimulating and deliberately thought provoking – prompting frequent discussions as well as mental consideration of questions or issues. These elicit both spoken discussion and can also provoke thoughtful wondering and internal consideration of ideas by pupils using the internal voice in the children's heads'. Children are aware of their opinions and of the need to understand and respect opinions of others.
- The school leaves no stone unturned in finding appropriate means to embed oracy in the curriculum – from rhyme-time whole class 'most fascinating sea creature-fact' discussion and odd-one-out initial sound sessions in early years to well-reasoned, philosophical discussions in upper KS2 *'In the end we all agreed that boys should be allowed to show emotion. "Otherwise, it's like saying that a girl who breaks her leg shouldn't cry.'*
- There is rigorous consistency in the ways teachers model the talk that the children are about to use. They also provide oral feedback on target expressions, structures and vocabulary that children use when using talk to reason aloud, qualify or elaborate upon what someone has said. Consistent and effective methods of managing whole class and group talk are in use throughout the school. There is a very strong emphasis from the start on listening – in fact the school has developed what, in reality, are ground rules for listening. Feedback to children on their oral contributions focuses on their listening skills as much as it does what they say. This feedback consciously refers to criteria and the strands

of the Oracy Skills Framework of which all staff and children are aware and use and which can be seen in classrooms. Children are familiar with discussion routines designed to maximise the opportunities for and provide confidence in every child to speak. For example, a legitimate response available to a child who has been asked a question in front of the class is to ask for a little more time rather than feeling stressed because a response is not yet on the tip of their tongue. Children also comment on and evaluate each other's responses in order to build the talk community – *'I'd like to build on what X said about...'*

- Teachers were strongly aware of the changes that introducing oracy are creating in their pupils: 'Oracy is helping them to think deeply and also to care for each other'; 'The children are increasingly managing their own talk and discussions.' 'They always provide clear reasons for what they say: explaining and justifying.' 'Oracy has made me realise how to actively listen to children'. Many examples were seen of children who have been helped to overcome considerable difficulties or disabilities in communication who are now participating fully. These are life-changing developments.
- Oracy is led exceptionally well by the headteacher, senior oracy leader and middle oracy leader.
- Parents and governors are clear how oracy is improving learning at the school. Parents gave examples of their own children's changed talk abilities which have even changes how conversations happen at home. They were effusive in their enthusiasm for oracy and see it as a game changer. Their clarity about the many ways in which the school is using oracy was helped by the range of ways the schools is communicating its oracy approaches in newsletters, on its website and other channels. Governors were very supportive of the oracy initiative and particularly of its success in ensuring the inclusion of children with special needs in the life of the school. It is clear that the governing body is closely monitoring this process.
- The school has developed clear expertise in oracy and a strong capacity at senior and middle leadership levels to spread their practice, whether through offering focused school visits to Rockmount or through beginning to provide professional learning opportunities to local schools.

2. Oracy knowledge and expertise

Evidence that the school's staff has engaged with knowledge about the three aspects of oracy development: learning to talk and listen more effectively; learning *through* talk and becoming more aware of and learning *about* their talk.

Evidence that a critical mass of teachers across all key stages and have engaged in assessing and learning about the oracy of a broad range of the pupils they teach in different, formal and informal 'talk' contexts - (a range *broad enough* to make an oracy focused visit by colleagues from another school (that, for example, Oracy Cambridge might have recommended) - a valuable and worthwhile experience for the visitor.

Knowledge about teaching of oracy in **curriculum subjects** to improve subject learning (and **changes they are making to teaching, learning or curriculum** as a result) and knowledge the school is gaining about **developing oracy across wider school life** and activity (and changes you are making as a result) and about supporting all children to participate in conversations.

It is evident that school and oracy leaders have strongly engaged in building both theoretical and practice-knowledge in dialogic teaching and learning and in strategies to support the development of effective spoken language for learning amongst children of all ages. They have taken on and implemented the content provided by the Oracy Cambridge webinars but have also gone well beyond. Leaders have read widely and explored resources from a range of providers. They have also visited schools where oracy is well established. They have put teacher enquiry into oracy to good use with their deployment and analysis of listening logs and in the way the oracy leaders have led the lesson study enquiries into exploratory talk and inclusive oracy practice sharing what they have learned with each other (and in the case of the lesson studies, well beyond).

They extended this approach to their implementation model, encouraging teachers to try out oracy approaches in pairs or with teaching assistants in their classes and then to share their innovations with others, building ownership and buy-in to oracy. In this way the school seems to have all teachers and teaching assistants fully engaged in the development of oracy in their classes. This was clear in class visits and reinforced in interviews with teachers and TAs who contributed authentic insights into their oracy development and into the impact on children's learning and development in equal measure and with the same level of enthusiasm and commitment to the change.

The evidence of this was seen in science, phonics and literature in the early years and KS1 and in discussions of moral dilemmas in Y5.

In addition to this general transformation in children's talk, the school has also focused simultaneously in ensuring that the benefits of oracy are felt by children facing a range of social-emotional, learning or communication challenges. We saw numerous examples of how oracy is helping children to overcome learning barriers, self-doubt and significant disabilities and to fully participate in learning conversations and group work.

3. Oracy Leadership: How effects of oracy on individuals' learning and development are monitored, responded-to, how this informs: feedback to pupils; assessment/reporting; and setting of oracy development priorities

Evidence of **steps** the school is taking to ensure all children benefit from oracy in their learning and development

Evidence of how pupil level improvements or concerns are monitored and acted upon by middle/senior leaders

Evidence of actions and processes set in train by the school's leadership and oracy leadership are doing to drive significant change in oracy a cross-school ambition to go deeper still, and that this already includes pupils, adults, parents, governors/trustees, community.

As stated above, the leadership of oracy is highly effective in developing consistency in approach (and enthusiasm for oracy) as well as a strong personal buy-in to the importance of high quality that is fuelled by the way leaders communicated success stories about improvements in children's learning, confidence and development resulting from their abilities to communicate effectively. Pupils consistently use the conversational skills they are learning in school – both verbal and gestural.

The staff discuss oracy theory and research findings, they consider examples of how these are enacted in classrooms and in year groups are encouraged to explore these and develop their own practices from them which are shared with the staff. Staff have kept thoughtful listening logs that opened their eyes and ears to their children's talk and listening abilities and practices. These have been shared with oracy leaders who have acted on the findings to tailor practice to address newly discovered needs. The school has also published their lesson study findings developing exploratory talk so that teachers everywhere can learn what they learned. Leaders have read widely on oracy and visited schools around London. One oracy leader recently spoke at a national oracy conference in Cambridge. An example of the research that leaders are undertaking in action was seen when we observed the school's middle oracy leader conducting an 'odd-one-out' phonics routine with EYs children who were learning initial sounds while also reasoning aloud.

4. Impact of oracy on pupils and their work

Evidence that what pupils are revealing about the effect of the school's oracy focus on their learning is helping to develop them: their talk (how they feel about talk and are using it), their confidence, engagement and self-esteem as learners; and the extent to which, as a result they feel valued, that their voice counts in class and in school.

Evidence of pupils' talk being promoted, 'visible' and valued and playing a central role in learning of **all** children - so each gets regular opportunities for meaningful discussion, with more time created for pupils to talk and thus more time for teachers to be listening to that talk.

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Teachers commented on how swiftly children grow in confidence as their assuredness in using appropriate dialogue moves and register in group or pair discussions helps them to contribute to productive discussion and to feel valued in the process. In whole-class discussions, teachers' use of 'lolly sticks' to ensure random selection of children (and the involvement of multiple children) in whole-class discussions showed that they appreciated and understood the nature and value of an evidence-based, dialogic approach to teaching. The effective use of 'talk moves' helped to encourage children to elaborate their thoughts and to question each other's ideas in a reasoned manner.

The quality of the school environment in promoting learning is exemplary in classrooms, corridors and across the school. There were many examples of how this has been

harnessed to promote productive pupil discussions and conversations with adults and peers as children walk between rooms, queue for lunch or play.

Children were clear that oracy has helped them learn. It guarantees opportunities to learn from each other and to feel safe, even in large discussions, because people will value one's contributions even if they challenge, and when they challenge they do so politely and constructively. The school's focus on allowing children to ask for more time or refer a question on to someone else has added to this feeling of psychological safety that encourages more openness and productive risk taking in children's oral contributions to discussions.

There was clear evidence from learning logs, lesson studies and changes in children's engagement with learning that learning is improving but it was too early for evidence from external measures such as KS2 tests to reveal this.

5. Impact of oracy on adults and community

Evidence that teachers, TAs and other pupil facing staff are changing the way they practice and think about spoken language in day-to-day classroom and other school activities

Evidence that new, oracy and spoken language focused out of classroom activities are being used across the school

Evidence that the processes set in train in 3 (above) are changing the views, attitudes of pupils, adults, parents, governors/trustees and community are bearing fruit and gathering support and buy-in.

The sections above provide many examples of how practice is changing across the school fuelling changes in children's development, social and intellectual growth and the development of a community with shared talk habits, behaviours and expectations which in turn fuel a belief in the process by all stakeholders and as well as a determination to go deeper and further into oracy development. This was observed in the responses of children, teachers, parents, governors and leaders. The school has developed a confidence and an assuredness in the value of oracy and in methods through which oracy can be developed in children by teachers that puts the school and its leaders in a very strong place to lead the development of oracy in local schools.

The capacity of the school's leadership to bring this about successfully is very clear and the role Rockmount leaders are playing – particularly the headteacher – in driving local oracy development with the right balance of quietly uncompromising high expectations alongside generous leadership by example, is quite exceptional.

Peter Dudley and Neil Mercer, Oracy Cambridge, 16 July 2026.