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Improving oracy across a trust to address rising speech and language needs

A trust wide focus on oracy

School/Background Context

This Multi Academy Trust is a collaborative network of both Primary and Secondary schools based in the West Midlands, committed to delivering high-quality education and improving outcomes for students across a range of educational settings. The Trust places a strong emphasis on academic excellence, inclusion, and community involvement, working closely with families and local stakeholders to enhance the educational experience and create pathways for success.

Approx. 5200 students of whom 20+% have SEN.

The Challenge

Across the Trust, school SENDCos collaborated with Senior leaders & other relevant colleagues to analyse whole school data in relation to Behaviour, Attendance and referrals to both internal and external pathways (such as internal MH or SEN referrals or external requests for assessment) and identified that Speech and Language was an area of increasing need but that support and provision (both externally and internally) was not always available and/or not having the desired impact. SENDCos analysed their school data (students with identification of need, screening tools, available hours of support etc), alongside discussions at collaborative SENDCo Network meetings to further inform this decision to focus on a whole school strategy to improve S&L.

Through discussion with the Regional Lead, the Trust identified the specific area of Oracy as a key focus for its projects as each school were at different stages on this journey.

Schools were therefore supported through the Professional Development Group, alongside the school & Trust Teaching & Learning leads to plan Oracy related projects in relation to their own school context.

What They Did

The first step following identification of the project focus was to get buy in from the Headteachers & CEO as this would require a commitment from them to make Oracy and the Project a priority.

SENCOs and T&L leads were supported to collaborate by: protecting their time to attend PD meetings & Strategic working party meetings at Trust level; to have Co-construction time with colleagues in other schools; having opportunity to deliver staff CPD within their schools; to attend external training etc.

What They Did (continued)

Relevant resources were shared widely with staff within each school through CPD, staff briefings (WAGOLLS), as well as across the Trust through the Strategic working parties (SEND and T&L) & Teams channels.

Meetings were held at least half termly to share good practice & update colleagues on the individual school's project progress. This was also discussed in each of the [PD meetings].

The MAT supported schools in identifying and negotiating contracts in relation to supportive programs such as 'Texthelp', 'Flash Academy', 'Read, Write, Inc.' and 'Voice 21' to enable a consistent offer across our Trust. At the same time, Oracy was launched to all staff as the T&L focus for the next 3 years and was a key theme thread throughout the MAT Conference day in January 2025.

Opportunity for peer support across the Trust came from visiting each other's schools. In addition, the project and its progress was discussed at all SEND review meetings/Inspections carried out with both internal & external reviewers.

Some challenges presented along the way such as changes of staff or absences which caused some delay in progress however, due to the collaborative nature of the projects, they were quickly picked back up or reassigned to colleagues to continue moving things forwards.

Outcomes and Anticipated Impact

The hard data is difficult to gather at this time however, staff voice has captured comments in relation to Language rich environments, such as *"walking around the school we can see & hear the impact of this project. The children know more, they can say more and they have more confidence."*

Parents and Carers have been involved in the projects related to Read, Write Inc. Phonics training and have shared that they have 'seen the impact in the home too' or that they are 'delighted' that their child from the resources provision is able to join more mainstream lessons as a result of the project.

In some instances, SENDCos reported that staff attitudes &/or understanding of communication and language has changed and children are therefore mirroring these positive behaviours. Using phrases such as 'Good job' have been heard said by reception children to the Headteacher!

Practice has evolved in numerous ways across the Trust and can be seen not only through Learning walks and book looks but through communication & language and behaviours & attitudes already.

Next steps from a Trust perspective are to keep the momentum and focus on Oracy as the Teaching & Learning priority across all our schools through continued collaboration with each other; investment in Voice21 for all our schools; a planned Oracy day across the Trust & regular CPD opportunities offered throughout the year.

Within individual schools, the SENDCo and T&L lead have committed to: evolve their projects to target a different Year group; to capture parent and/or student voice as necessary; to participate in further coaching and mentoring; to review communication plans and to continue to drive this priority through opportunities such as staff briefings/WAGOLLS, CPD sessions etc.

