



Literacy for Learning

Improving Literacy in Secondary Schools

Programme evaluation: 2019-2022

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Foreword

Literacy for Learning is the National Literacy Trust's flagship evidence-based programme for secondary schools. As this report describes, it is powerfully transforming literacy teaching and outcomes in a significant proportion of England's secondary schools.

The impetus from the programme came from the **OECD's 2012 international comparison study of adult literacy**. Its findings were a wake up call to educators in the UK: 16.4% of adults in England scored at the lowest levels in literacy. But the picture relating to young adult's literacy was particularly worrying: Contrary to international patterns, the oldest age group (aged 55-65) had higher average scores than those aged 16-18, and England's 16-18 year-olds were lowest ranked in terms of literacy skills amongst participating countries.

What made this particularly worrying was that this cohort of young people had been through the English education system at the time of the National Strategies, that had changed teaching and learning in schools in the first decade of the century and were celebrated as boosting numeracy and literacy skills. This cohort was reasonably expected to have the highest levels of literacy of any age group in society. However here was conclusive evidence that their literacy attainment at the end of Primary had not translated into skills which would equip them for the workplace and for life.

The National Literacy Trust's response to the research focused on developing a stronger analysis of literacy in the secondary sector, to understand why children assessed to have higher levels of literacy at the age of 11 than older age groups could be leaving secondary school with literacy skills actually weaker than older age groups.

To a large extent literacy had been framed as a primary issue, the early effective teaching of a finite set of skills, which would in effect provide the student with a passport to later education. In the secondary sector literacy was generally not a whole school priority, but something which was dealt with in the context of SEN and EAL. By implicitly assuming that the literacy skills that are sufficient to get "expected level" in reading and writing at the age of 11 are the same as the skills required to pass GCSEs and A levels and progress to the workplace or tertiary education, the education system was not grasping the challenge of explicitly teaching the increasing complex systems of language which frame and underpin academic subject knowledge.

The Trust's analysis also considered the student's cultural and personal experience of reading and writing and the significant drop in reading for pleasure that occurs at the start of secondary education and explored the ways in which latest insights into the psychology of reading, could be used to promote self-motivated reading and writing in secondary schools.

With the support of the JJ Charitable Trust, the National Literacy Trust turned this analysis into Literacy for Learning – a programme which simultaneously embeds disciplinary literacy across the school and motivates young people to read and write through activities and events that engage their interests and aspirations.

Literacy for Learning was developed from a robust evidence base and early models were tested and trailed with school improvement leads in a group of academy trusts. The programme's development was significantly strengthened by the research analysis undertaken by the **Education Endowment Foundation**, which particularly boosted the focus on disciplinary literacy. This report evaluates the mature version of the project which since 2018, with the JJ Charitable Trust's support, over 500 secondary schools in England are now using.

Literacy for Learning is now a national movement. It is making literacy a priority in secondary education and raising students' literacy skills. At the same time, it is strengthening the teaching of subjects across the curriculum, as this research shows. This is improving outcomes for all pupils but particularly for the most disadvantaged. The explicit teaching of academic literacy radically democratises access to the curriculum, as it reduces the advantage that pupils with middle class language codes, more closely aligned to academic language, benefit from. As such the ultimate goal of Literacy for Learning is not simply higher levels of literacy skills amongst secondary school leavers but an impact on society itself, where higher levels of literacy impact so clearly on employment options, earnings and ultimately on social mobility and social justice.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jonathan Douglas". The signature is written in a cursive style and is placed on a white rectangular background.

Jonathan Douglas CBE,
Chief Executive Officer, National Literacy Trust

Introduction

“Young people who leave school without good literacy skills are held back at every stage of life. The outcomes are poorer on almost every measure, from health and wellbeing, to employment and finance.”

(Education Endowment Foundation, 2018)

Literacy for Learning (LfL) is the National Literacy Trust’s secondary-school improvement programme. Recognising that literacy is one of the greatest barriers to social mobility and equality, the programme provides professional development and training to secondary teachers to mobilise the effective teaching of literacy within their subjects, as a key lever to improving educational outcomes for all students. This is particularly important for **schools and communities with high levels of deprivation**: in 2020, students from disadvantaged backgrounds scored an average of 1.24 GCSE grades lower than their non-disadvantaged peers.

LfL’s beneficiaries are secondary-age young people. The programme recognises that a key way to improve academic outcomes, particularly for students experiencing greatest disadvantage, is to equip them with the literacy skills they need to access all their subjects, and that one of the most powerful ways to do this is through increasing teacher expertise in the teaching of literacy.

The programme offers a wide range of CPD and training, which is open to all secondary schools. Since 2016, the National Literacy Trust has delivered training and resources to secondary teachers through a mixture of funded and traded activity. From 2019 to 2021, funding from the JJ Sainsbury’s Foundation enabled the National Literacy Trust to deliver this project at scale and to target support at schools in areas of high student disadvantage. It is this funded programme that this report evaluates. The findings of this evaluation will be used to drive forward and inform the National Literacy Trust’s secondary school improvement place-based work and its universal offer to schools.

The programme’s core focus was disciplinary literacy, which refers to the specific reading, writing and communication skills in each subject across the curriculum. When embedded effectively, disciplinary literacy can support students in accessing the curriculum and help improve outcomes since it emphasises communication and understanding of specific knowledge within subjects (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). The goal for this programme was for teachers to develop an understanding of the literacy skills specific to their subject, and to see literacy as a powerful tool to unlock subject content.

In addition, LfL aimed to build communities of practice around the teaching of literacy, bringing together practitioners who had subject-specific expertise alongside senior leaders and literacy experts. These groups worked collaboratively to explore how disciplinary literacy-led approaches could afford students greater access to their subject and, therefore, be a driving force in levelling up pathways to success.

“Initiatives that utilize the expertise of content teachers within learning communities where they are afforded autonomy and time to collaborate have the best chance of gaining the benefits intrinsic in disciplinary literacy instruction.”

(Lent and Voigt, 2019, Disciplinary Literacy in Action)

Programme aims

Driving systemic change: embedded and distributed leadership of literacy, building capacity and promoting sustainability

“Improving the quality of teaching is the single most important in-school factor in improving outcomes for children, especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.”

(Department for Education, 2022, Opportunity For All: Strong schools with great teachers for your child)

The programme sought to achieve this by:

- Working with leaders to develop a coherent literacy improvement strategy and implementation plan
- Supporting schools to develop effective practice in disciplinary literacy, thereby creating a sustainable model for expert leadership and teaching of literacy within subject areas
- Developing a community of “expert” literacy leaders and practitioners on a local and national level whose practice could inform and influence that of secondary schools beyond the programme

Supporting behavioural change: providing high-quality professional development and learning opportunities for teachers

The programme sought to achieve this by:

- Providing a coherent sequence of training and CPD over time to increase levels of teacher confidence and understanding of literacy in their discipline and how this supported access to subject content
- Linking research and practice, supporting teachers with strategies to implement and evaluate change in reflective, collaborative ways and encouraging action research
- Developing teacher confidence and knowledge of teaching literacy in their subject so that students are equipped with the reading, writing and communication skills to reach their potential at GCSE

Building a community of practice: collaborative learning and reflection to address shared issues and objectives across a community or school

The programme sought to achieve this by:

- Applying the National Literacy Trust's **place-based approach**, working with local clusters of schools to develop and share best practice, and find collective solutions to common literacy issues
- Providing opportunities for leaders and practitioners to come together to build an intrinsic model of literacy leadership that can be sustained beyond the lifespan of the programme
- Facilitating a forum for professional and evidence-informed discussions around effective teaching of literacy within curriculum subjects and its importance for raising standards, particularly for the most disadvantaged students

Student impact

This programme is based on a robust body of evidence that underlines the importance of a disciplinary approach for improving student outcomes. As outlined by the Education Endowment Foundation's guidance report on improving literacy in secondary schools, for students to progress, teachers need to include explicit literacy instruction in every subject. This includes reading widely, speaking like an expert, accessing more specialised vocabulary, and writing in more technical and varied ways.

“As students progress through an increasingly specialised secondary school curriculum, there is a growing need to ensure that students are trained to access the academic language and conventions of different subjects.”

(Education Endowment Foundation, 2018, p. 7)

Not only does this approach help students succeed in specific subjects, such as through raising standards of written examinations and coursework, but research suggests that it benefits them in the longer term in their ability to express themselves and navigate a wide range of modes of communication once they have left education. As Moje (2008) suggests:

“A reconceptualized view of secondary school literacy suggests that a person who has learned deeply in a discipline can use a variety of representational forms – most notably reading and writing of written texts, but also oral language, visual images, music, or artistic representations to communicate their learning, to synthesize ideas across texts and across groups of people, to express new ideas, and to question and challenge ideas held dear in the discipline and in broader spheres.” (p. 99)

These student-specific outcomes start with strategic literacy training and planning at a school-wide, or even multi-school-wide, level. Returning to the Education Endowment Foundation guidance outlined above, the first recommendation is that disciplinary literacy should be prioritised across the curriculum, which includes specific training in every subject to ensure all teachers are supported “to understand how to teach students to read, write and communicate effectively in their subjects” (p. 4). While this programme includes some individual student-facing elements, such as the Science Writers in Schools project (see Appendix 6), the main focus was at this strategic teacher-led level to ensure literacy improvement could be rolled out at scale.

The findings below demonstrate that the programme was highly successful in building strategic approaches to literacy in the schools and learning communities and providing a sustainable model for school improvement. This will benefit students year on year – not just those in this cohort. Recognising that there are multiple factors that impact on student outcomes, evidence harnessed from teacher focus groups, training evaluations and case studies shows the positive impact that a focus on literacy can have on students’ confidence, engagement and success in their learning.

Rationale

In order to reach the aims detailed, and in line with the National Literacy Trust’s place-based approach, schools were recruited in areas where weak literacy skills are a significant barrier to social mobility.¹ These areas were: Birmingham City, Nottingham City, Greater Manchester (Salford and Wigan) and across the North East of England. More than 40 schools were recruited from a range of Multi-Academy Trusts, Faith School Providers and Local Authority settings, providing opportunities to bring together practitioners from a range of contexts to explore what constitutes effective practice in literacy leadership and pedagogy. A small number of special schools and alternative-provision settings were also recruited, which enhanced opportunities to disseminate practitioner learning across a wide range of contexts.

In line with the place-based approach, a regional lead was appointed for each area, with responsibility for running training, providing bespoke consultancy support and facilitating the development of a community of practice.

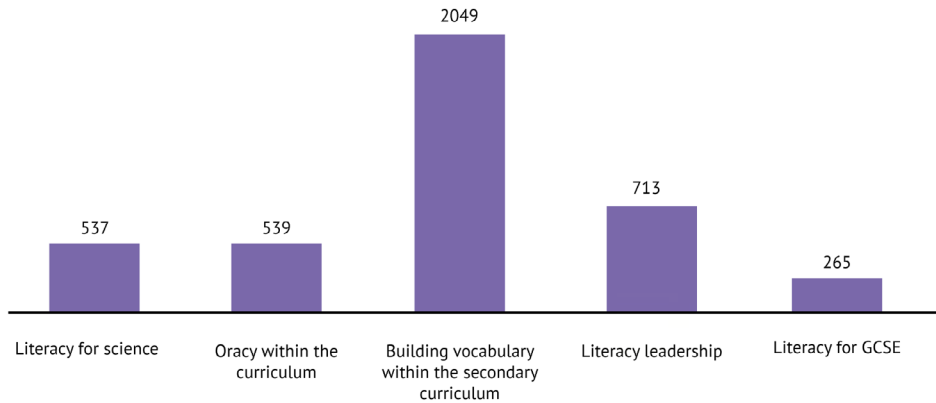
Reach

Across two years the programme engaged over 40 schools from 4 UK regions. Training was cascaded to individual departments and teachers, further evidence of which will be explored below. In addition, online participants’ areas made resources available to training participants and their colleagues. As shown in Figure 1, downloads from selected courses totalled over 4,000, with the most popular resources being downloaded from the “Building the vocabulary within the secondary curriculum” course.²

1 For more information see literacytrust.org.uk/communities/

2 Note: these numbers may also include figures from ticketed events that ran concurrent to LfL courses, since the resources were the same.

Figure 1: Download rates for some of the most popular courses

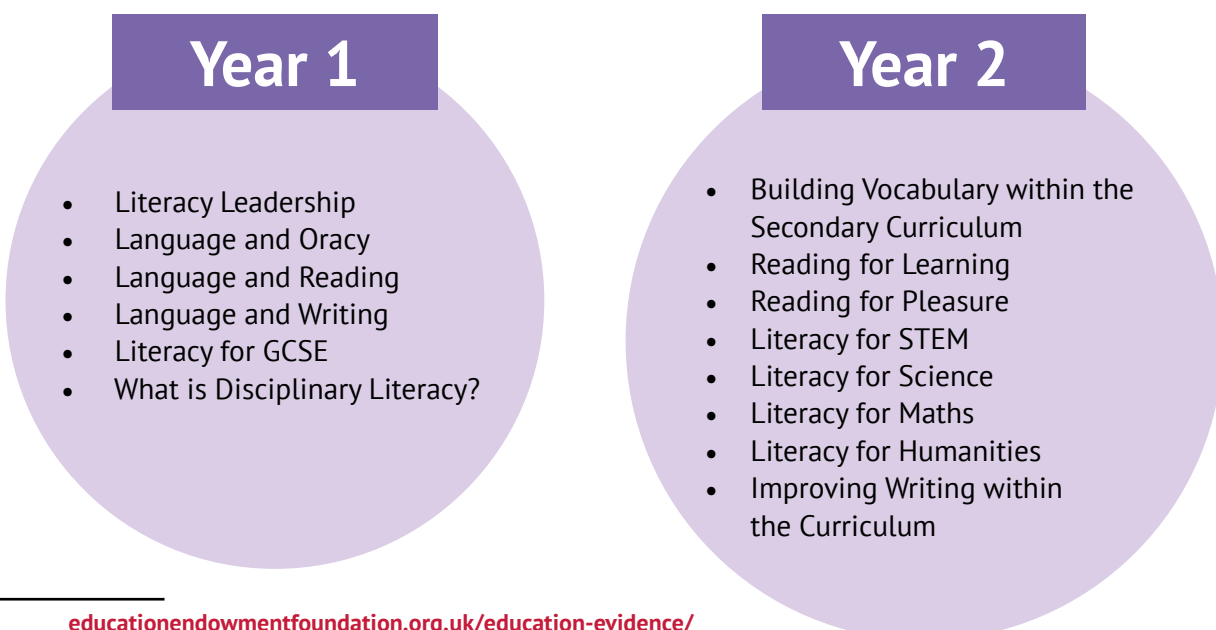


Delivery model

The delivery model was based on the following principles:

- A place-based approach with a cluster of schools to develop local capacity and sustainability to deliver improved year-on-year outcomes for multiple cohorts of students
- A sustained programme of professional development over a two-year period, with a logical sequence of building blocks moving from the guiding principles and pedagogy of effective literacy teaching to disciplinary literacy within the individual subject domains, enabling teachers to support students in every subject
- An emphasis on building the leadership of literacy at senior strategic and subject level in line with the Education Endowment Foundation Guidance³
- Support tailored to local and individual school need through the appointment of regional leads

The programme included a range of different courses in addition to network meetings and tailored support from expert consultants. Following a model that would build expertise over two years, bringing in more specialised staff once the strategic overview had been established, these courses included:



³ educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/implementation

The training model was based on the Department for Education's recommendations for effective professional development with the following provisions in place⁴:

1

Professional development should have a focus on improving and evaluating pupil outcomes.

- a. A core focus on disciplinary literacy: oracy, **academic reading, building vocabulary,** and subject-specific literacy training such as **developing literacy in science** and **writing within subject areas**
- b. Development of additional training to respond to the emergent learning needs as a result of the pandemic, focusing on disciplinary literacy, writing at transition from Key Stage 2 and 3, and supporting reading for pleasure at home and at school

2

Professional development should be underpinned by robust evidence and expertise.

- a. Full **National Literacy Trust Membership** providing access to a wide range of expertly produced resources and research

3

Professional development should include collaboration and expert challenge.

- a. A cycle of literacy-leader network meetings to develop leadership of literacy and provide opportunities for practitioners to share resources and ideas
- b. A delivery sequence designed to build on learning in prior modules, consolidating approaches to the teaching of disciplinary literacy within the curriculum
- c. Access to bespoke consultant support schools' individual contexts

4

Professional development programmes should be sustained over time.

- a. A structured programme of sustained leader and teacher professional development over two years to build local capacity and sustainability

5

Professional development must be prioritised by school leadership.

- a. A memorandum of understanding issued to senior leaders at the start of the programme to ensure buy-in and clarity from the start
- b. A robust evidence base outlining the importance of literacy approaches in overall school improvement

The evidence base for this guidance was taken from a review of a range of CPD courses and programmes conducted by Cordingley et al. (2016), which will be revisited throughout this evaluation⁵.

⁴ For more information, see [gov.uk/government/publications/standard-for-teachers-professional-development](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/standard-for-teachers-professional-development)

⁵ Cordingley et al., 2016, Developing Great Teaching: Lessons from the international reviews into effective professional development

COVID-19 response

With the emergence of the pandemic in March 2020 and the associated lockdowns and school closures, the delivery model developed to be responsive to the emergent needs of teachers and students. This included adapting delivery models (moving training online, for example) and creating new content.

Evaluation methodology

Evidence was gathered using the following methods:

- Feedback forms following each training session to measure key outcomes, such as increases in confidence and understanding. Approximately 920 forms from across the courses listed above were gathered.⁶
- 4 online focus groups in Year 1 and 8, and one-to-one interviews in Year 2 with teachers and leaders, as well as consultants, run by evaluation managers. Interviews were written up into case studies by the evaluation team and signed off by participants.
- Additional evidence gathered through emails from participants, comments from OFSTED reports and in case studies created and provided by the schools themselves.
- Responses from 44 teachers at LfL schools to a national secondary practitioner survey carried out in Autumn 2021, compared with responses from 374 teachers at non-participating schools.

Key findings

- All training was rated as good or excellent by nearly all (97.6%) teachers
- Nearly all (94.9%) teachers across all courses agreed that they felt confident to put what they had learned into practice
- Almost all (94.5%) teachers said that their understanding of the training topic had improved as a result of taking part
- Feedback from teachers showed that they valued practical strategies, space to explore ideas and expert input in building their practice
- Feedback also reflected significant appreciation and respect for the training consultants as inspirational experts
- Case studies from schools showed that robust literacy strategies have been implemented in a range of different ways to support students at every level
- The programme adapted successfully during the COVID-19 pandemic, with online learning remaining engaging and with teachers responding positively to the increased flexibility of remote working, and in facilitating increased support for students learning remotely
- The reach of the programme went beyond key partners being trained, with leadership approaches and interventions being cascaded across the school and resources downloaded widely across the regions enabling higher numbers of teachers and students to benefit from the programme

⁶ Owing to various practical considerations, not every training session included gathering feedback and not every response included answers to every question, so figures are based on percentages of responses

- A legacy of the programme has been to increase capacity to deliver training at scale, with online conferences, increased learning and development pathways and ongoing course development
- The programme has also strengthened the National Literacy Trust's place-based offer to schools in areas with the highest level of deprivation as community-based activity is mirrored by robust school-improvement strategies, which helps support those students most in need

Driving systemic change

Embedded and distributed leadership of literacy, building capacity, and promoting sustainability.

Transforming school culture

One of the most significant improvements in the programme has been the impact on whole-school approaches to literacy. Having a sustained programme of CPD over a period of time meant that there were increased opportunities to embed approaches to literacy across the school.

Leadership training

In the first year of the project, leadership teams were given specific training on how to embed approaches and ensure sustained impact of the programme. This training included:

- Reviewing current school development plans
- Defining the challenges and planning for developing key literacy leadership roles and whole-school support
- Exploring the **Education Endowment Foundation's guide** to implementation alongside resources developed by the National Literacy Trust
- Understanding policy writing, planning for appropriate interventions, and creating subject-specific literacy plans

The response from teachers on this course was very positive, with 100% rating the training as excellent or good. In addition, 9 in 10 (89.8%) strongly agreed or agreed that their understanding of the subject had improved, and nearly all (96%) strongly agreed or agreed that they felt confident putting what they had learned into practice.

Moving into the second year, leaders were given continued support through less formal network meetings and access to resources. Comments from case studies suggested that participating schools had seen systemic change over the course of the programme. For example, Bluecoat Aspley Academy, one of the schools in the Archway Learning Trust (Nottingham) who took part as a group, now have a literacy team of about 17 staff members including staff mentors, English as an Additional Language (EAL) specialists, and learning-support assistants. This visible commitment to literacy also demonstrates its importance in a way that has impact across the school. A P.E. and psychology teacher from Nottingham Emmanuel, another school in the trust, remarked:

“I think once you see the impact that it is having across the school, you understand that the initiative is really important.”

This strategic improvement has also been noted in a school in the North East whose OFSTED rating went from Requires Improvement (RI) to Good over the course of the programme, with whole-school literacy gains being noted in the report:

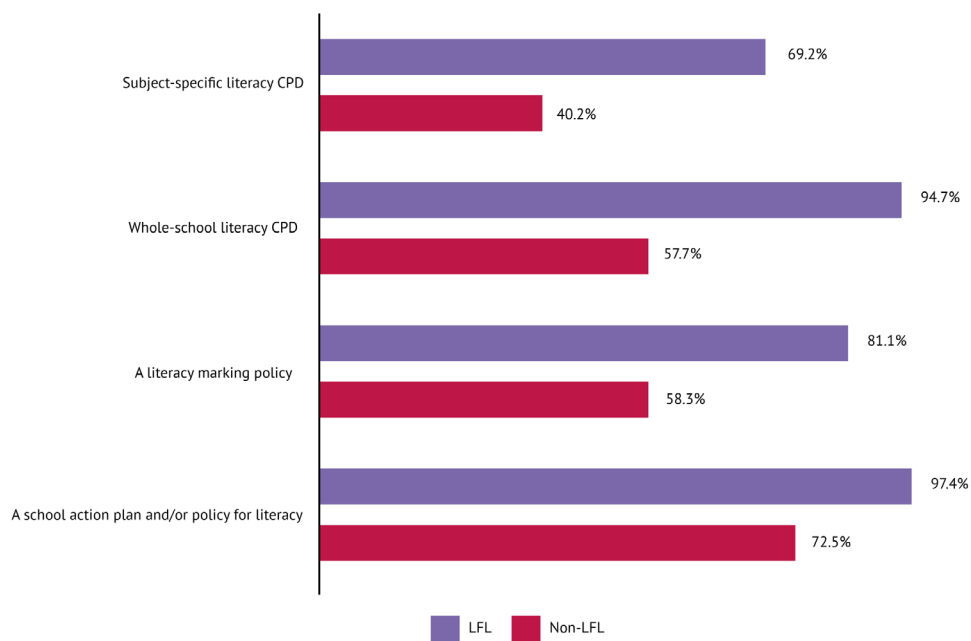
“Leaders place great importance on pupils reading across the curriculum and for pleasure. Faculties find opportunities for pupils to read more widely about their subjects. There is effective help for pupils who need support with their reading, including small group reading sessions... Teachers are enthusiastic about the training and professional development that leaders arrange for them. Staff appreciate the time available to share good practice. Teaching has strengthened as a result.”

Comparing Literacy for Learning with non-Literacy for Learning schools

In autumn 2021, we conducted a national survey of teachers, librarians and other education professionals to gauge attitudes to and confidence in disciplinary literacy. Of the 418 respondents, just under 50 came from schools on the LfL programme, enabling us to compare findings from those with national responses in terms of attitudes to literacy.

As shown in Figure 2, more teachers in LfL schools answered “yes” to questions regarding literacy-related initiatives in their school. It is perhaps unsurprising that there are more LfL participants saying they had received either subject-specific or whole-school literacy CPD, since that was the focus of the programme. However, more also noted strategic changes within the school: 4 in 5 teachers at LfL schools said that their school had a literacy marking policy compared with 3 in 5 in non-LfL schools. Furthermore, almost all teachers in LfL schools said that their school had an action plan and/or policy for literacy, but just under 3 in 4 teachers from non-LfL schools said this.

Figure 2: Percentage of respondents answering “yes” when asked if their school had the following in place



Leadership training and school-specific practice

Key to this programme is that CPD is not a self-contained event, but rather a series of sessions designed to frame action research projects in school. We know that every setting is different and that there will be a huge diversity of abilities and priorities even within a school, and part of the action research model that this programme follows involves teachers interpreting approaches applicable for their own setting and priorities.⁷

Returning to the 2020 focus groups, teachers reported that the support visits from the National Literacy Trust were instrumental in launching the project, and that they had already implemented concrete change in their settings.

Numerous teachers mentioned how the initial support of a local representative, who is also responsible for delivering the training, was key to launching the programme in their setting:

“[The initial meeting] helped us to really think quite critically about what we were trying to do in school.”

One teacher spoke to us about how all staff have changed teaching practices as a result of the programme:

“[The training] introduced us to PIE questions - prepare, identify and elaborate, which we did as a whole school CPD and was taken on board by everybody.”

7 See, for example, bristol.ac.uk/education/study/continuing-professional-development-cpd/actionresearch/

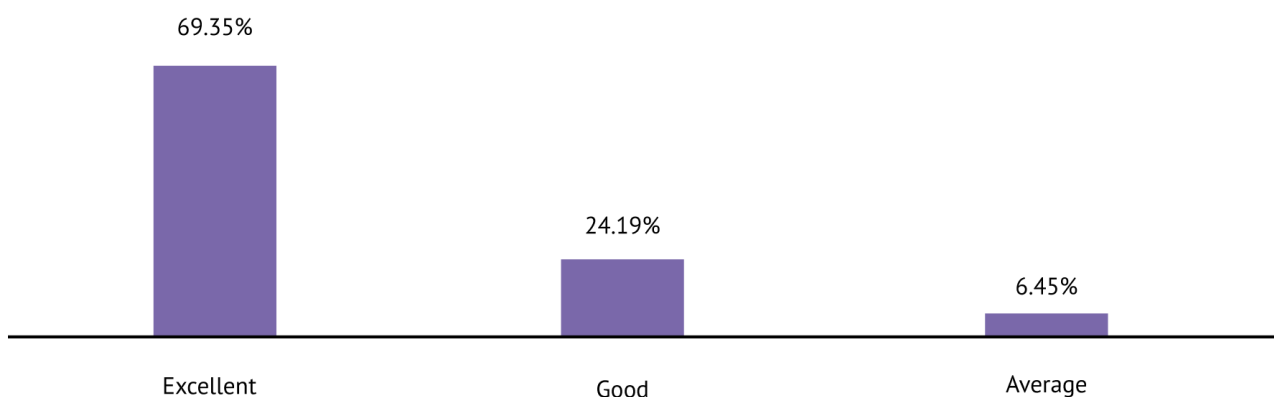
Creating a whole-school culture of reading

There has also been a strong focus on reading within the curriculum, both in terms of skills and establishing a whole-school culture of reading for enjoyment. We know young people who enjoy reading are three times more likely to read above the level expected for their age than children who don't enjoy reading (30.1% vs 8.1%) (Clark and Teravainen-Goff, 2020). In the second year of the programme, this included **specific training on reading for pleasure**, which has been a core part of the National Literacy Trust's wider training for many years. This training content includes:

- Current research to reflect the impact of lockdowns on reading for pleasure
- Best practice to support intrinsic motivation for reading
- The use of digital tools to encourage reading for pleasure in school and at home, and supporting a blended learning approach
- The role of school libraries in addressing diversity and promoting a rich and broad reading experience
- Ways of using multi-modal reading to encourage reading for pleasure

As shown in Figure 3, over 9 in 10 (93.6%) participants rated this training as good or excellent. In addition, all except 1 participant (who said they neither agreed nor disagreed) agreed or strongly agreed that they felt confident to put what they had learned into practice.

Figure 3: How participants on the Reading for Pleasure course rated the training



Comments from teachers suggested that what they found most valuable in these sessions included practical strategies that they could take into the classroom alongside the opportunity to share ideas with colleagues from their own and other settings.

“[The most useful aspect was] the practical ways in which we can build a Reading for Pleasure school.”

One school changed their transition practice as a result of the training:

“This year... when we’ve put out the transition questionnaires to parents and students, I’ve included in there “how often do you read?” [...] So we’re trying to kind of get this message across to families who haven’t even joined our school community yet that we’re passionate about reading.”

Legacy projects

Literacy for Learning Professional Development Pathways

The development and evaluation of this course has enabled the team to roll out nationwide versions of the training, meaning that leadership can be developed at scale. The National Literacy Trust has offered different formulations of literacy leadership and disciplinary literacy training for many years, but the move to online delivery has enabled the team to offer a programme of ticketed events to teachers nationwide, and even internationally, examples of which are shown in Figure 4. Some of these training events are funded through individual ticket sales and others are sold as packages to local authorities, Multi-Academy Trusts and other funding bodies.

Figure 4: Screenshot of ticketed training courses as advertised on the National Literacy Trust website

Developing disciplinary literacy within subject areas

This pathway deepens understanding of the literacy requirements in subject areas

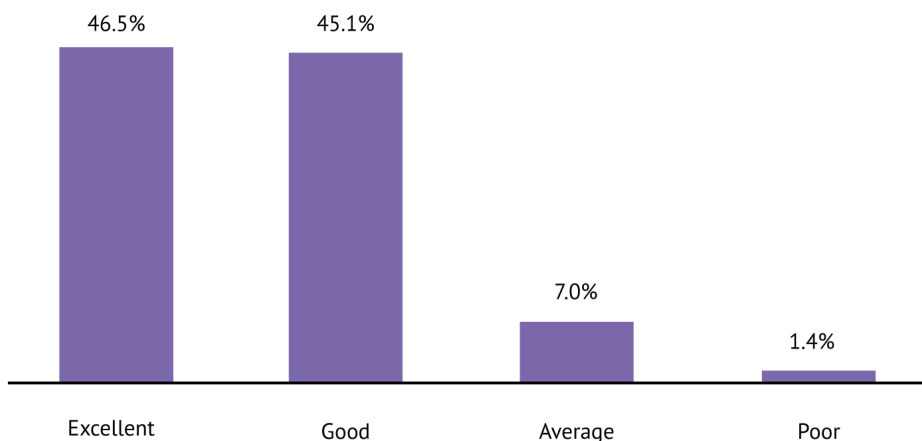
It is suitable for:

- Secondary subject leaders and practitioners
- Literacy leaders, who may be supporting a subject area
- Line managers of subject areas

<p>Disciplinary literacy in KS3 mathematics</p> <p>Disciplinary literacy in KS3 mathematics</p> <p>This professional development course is for teachers of mathematics at KS3 who teach groups with weaker communication skills. It may also support higher-level teaching assistants...</p> <p>View details ></p>	<p>Developing literacy in science</p> <p>Developing literacy in science</p> <p>Using evidence from research and theory, this course investigates effective literacy strategies for teaching and learning in science</p> <p>View details ></p>	<p>Developing literacy in English</p> <p>Developing literacy in English</p> <p>Explore the use of reading strategies to support active reading of fiction, non-fiction and 19th century literary texts</p> <p>View details ></p>
<p>Developing literacy in geography</p> <p>Developing literacy in geography</p> <p>Learn how to make reading in geography interactive, improve extended writing and help students unpack exam questions</p> <p>View details ></p>	<p>Developing literacy in history</p> <p>Developing literacy in history</p> <p>Explore the role of academic language and literacy in the secondary history curriculum, and how to promote ways of developing talk, reading and writing in this subject</p> <p>View details ></p>	<p>Developing literacy in Physical Education</p> <p>Developing literacy in physical education</p> <p>This professional development programme is for teachers or coaches of physical education at KS3 (part one only) or teachers of GCSE PE and BTEC at KS4 (parts one and two)</p> <p>View details ></p>

As shown in the figures below, feedback from ticketed events has been equally positive. As shown in Figure 5, 9 out of 10 (91.6%) participants in the 2020-21 training programme rated it as good or excellent.

Figure 5: Participants from ticketed events' ratings of the events they attended



This has also enabled individual teachers to engage in their own professional development.

"I am completing my NPQH and doing a whole school project on reading – this has given me 100s of ideas for CPD. Thank you."

Science Writers in Schools

Science Writers in Schools was a collaboration between LfL and two other National Literacy Trust courses: Young Writers and **School for Writers**. In addition, the project involved the **Linnean Society** (the world's oldest active society devoted to natural history), a group of science writers and professionals, and Booker-nominated author and literacy specialist **Wyl Menmuir**.

Science Writers in Schools provided secondary students with the opportunity to work with science writers such as journalists, science communicators, researchers and/or science-fiction writers to create their own piece of science writing. The project was an innovative collaboration that brought together a range of expertise from different organisations to facilitate a multi-disciplinary approach to literacy. The programme also included the opportunity for students to engage in a memorable experience with a writer.

All these scientists were accustomed to and skilled in writing for a range of professional purposes including academic papers, science-based social media accounts and journalism, as well as drama and comedy events. These writers were recruited to the project to learn how to use their expertise to inspire young people, and to develop their skills in working with secondary-school-aged students, particularly those in disadvantaged areas.

Reach

- We worked with almost 2,000 students in 20 schools in Birmingham, Nottingham, the North East and North West.
- The science writers featured in the National Literacy Trust's Festival of Science and Imagination, which took place online in July 2021. There were over 350 logins to writer events during the festival week and more than 600 viewings of session recordings. A significant number of these login and viewing figures would have been from a whole class attending with a teacher signing in.

Outcomes for students

The limitations of COVID-19 on face-to-face contact meant that we were unable to conduct in-person focus groups with students. Instead, the 60 facilitating teachers were surveyed to ask them about the impact of the project on their students. Results from these surveys, alongside feedback emails from teachers, indicate that all teachers rated the workshops as either good or excellent. In their feedback, teachers also commented on how their students found the sessions engaging and informative:

"It worked so well, incredibly informative, interactive and thought provoking. My students loved it!"

In addition, one scientist delivered a lunchtime workshop for National Literacy Trust staff. Many colleagues work directly and indirectly with schools and so understanding the role of literacy in science was an opportunity for staff to find out about how the disciplinary literacy approach could hold relevance in their own projects and share and disseminate findings across more of the National Literacy Trust's work.

The full evaluation of Science Writers in Schools is included in Appendix 6 of this report.

Secondary literacy conferences

The inaugural Literacy for Learning Conference Secondary virtual conference 2021 received very positive feedback on the opportunities to explore literacy practice and research:

- **98.9%** of attendees who completed feedback surveys rated the conference as good or excellent, and the same percentage said that they would recommend the conference to a colleague
- **91.3%** agreed that the conference provided examples of good practice
- **85.9%** agreed that the conference provided insight into the latest research

The sessions informed the practice of the attendees:

“A fantastic conference. Lots of brilliant ideas which I will now take back to my school. Thank you.”

As the conference was online, it had a wider reach, fewer limits on capacity and the flexibility for people to combine it with other activities at a busy time of year. It also meant that the sessions could be recorded for people to access at their own convenience.

“I particularly liked the fact it was online which enabled me to participate in something so useful.”

“(There were) a good mix of workshops but also the ability to watch those you couldn’t attend.”

Subsequent conferences have been focused on national agendas around literacy, with an online conference in February 2022 focused on ‘Levelling up through literacy’ and an in-person conference taking place in June exploring how developing students’ reading skills can improve academic outcomes, support wellbeing and drive social mobility.

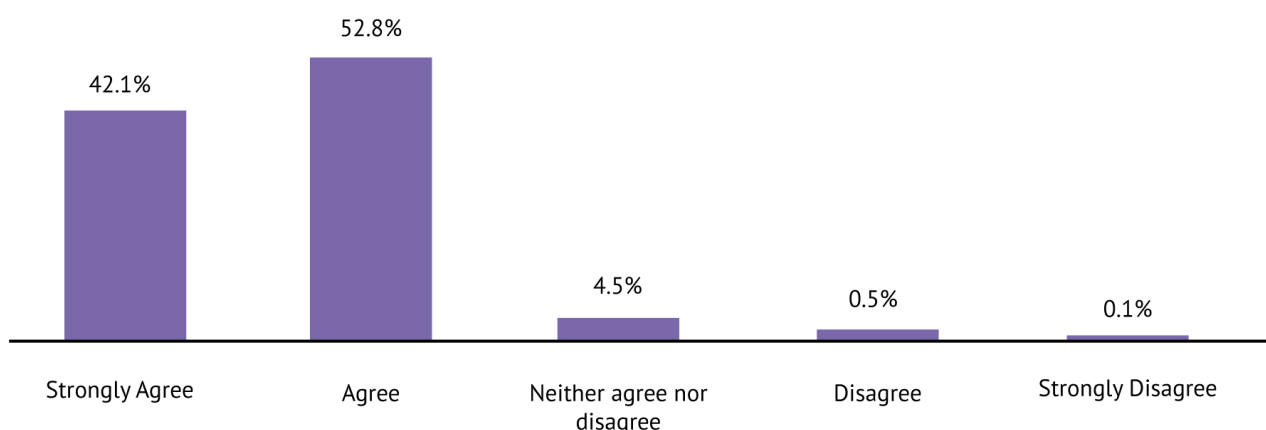
Supporting behavioural change

Individual teachers' attitudes and confidence

As well as raising the profile and improving leadership of literacy at a whole-school (or even multi-school) strategic level, a crucial part of the programme was to build an understanding of literacy, and confidence in subject-specific literacy instruction, for non-specialists and teachers of subjects other than English.

Training was delivered across a range of topics (explored in more detail below) in both years but, across all sessions and across both years, participants were asked whether they felt confident to put what they had learned into practice. As shown in Figure 6, nearly all (94.9%) participants strongly agreed or agreed that they felt confident to put what they had learned into practice. This is particularly encouraging because equipping teachers to implement approaches and strategies in the classroom was a key outcome of the training, which was supported through access to National Literacy Trust resources.

Figure 6: Agreement with the statement “I’m confident to put what I’ve learned into practice” from participants across all training courses



Comments from the training sessions also suggested that participants left feeling inspired:

“A fantastic session, delivered with infectious enthusiasm and impressive subject knowledge. Very inspiring for librarians and English teachers. Thank you!”

Indeed, analysis of the comments from teachers shows that having the space to explore ideas and build practice, reflect on strategy, and discuss approaches were all common themes in feedback, as represented by the word cloud in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Text analysis of open-ended comments from feedback surveys

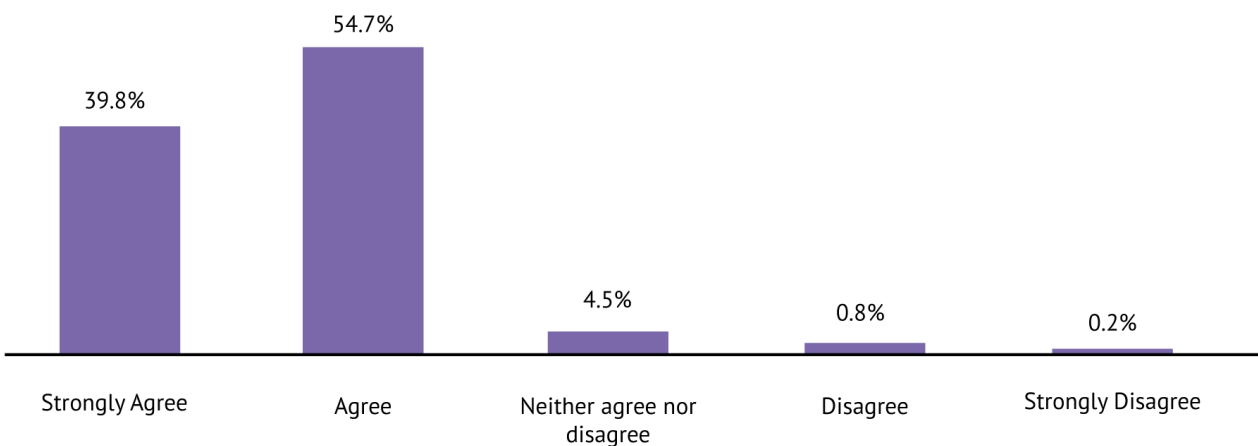


Subject knowledge

As outlined below, the programme continued to include subject-specific training across departments, which were focused on different elements of literacy.

It was important to differentiate these and to recognise the ways in which, for example, writing in a STEM subject might be different from a humanities subject, or how vocabulary instruction might work in different situations. It was therefore crucial that subject teachers had a strong understanding of the approaches as they were introduced in order to develop their own practice. As shown in Figure 8, over the two years, nearly all (94.5%) teachers strongly agreed or agreed that their understanding of the subject in question had improved after the training.

Figure 8: Agreement with the statement ‘My understanding [of the subject] has improved’ from participants across all training courses



This improved subject knowledge was also evidenced in comments from subject teachers when asked what they found most useful about sessions:

“Looking at how we can use cohesion in science texts and in particular looking at pronouns and nouns.”

“The recipe task was interesting, and really got me thinking about the importance of disciplinary literacy. The ability to understand how I could easily decipher it with the correct contextual knowledge of the genre was eye opening.”

“Looking at ways to teach students tier 2 and tier 3 vocab in preparation for a sequence of lessons.”

Specific examples of this also emerged from case studies. For example, at Nottingham Emmanuel School, a teacher in the psychology department focused on word walls, encouraging students to reduce their use of colloquial speech with the phrase “say it again, better” prompting students to articulate their sentences in Standard English. Staff saw clear improvements in the language of their students as a result of this practice. At Tile Cross Academy in Birmingham, meanwhile, model examples of scientific texts were introduced to students before they completed a piece of work. Students would read and label example texts to help them write in that format themselves.

Teaching writing

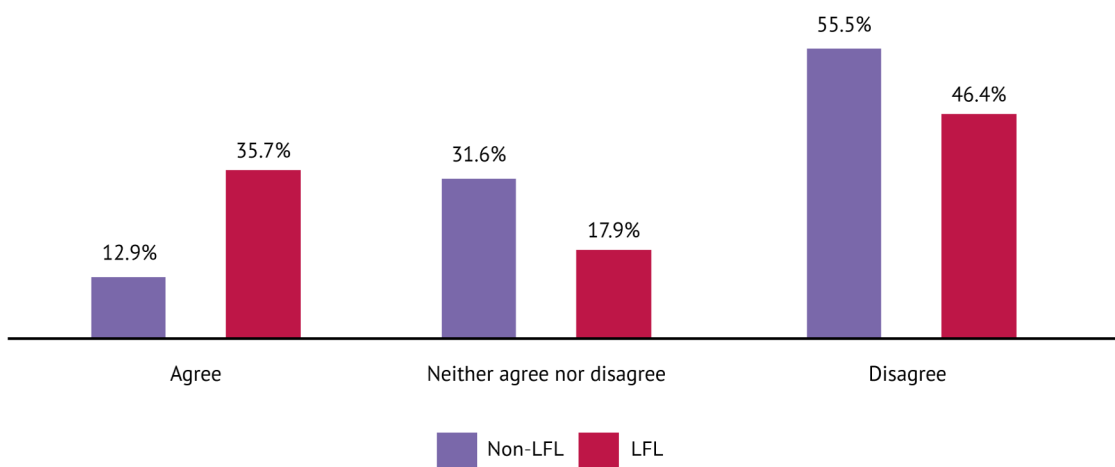
The Education Endowment Foundation (2018) recommend that teachers should “combine writing instruction with reading in every subject”.

Improving writing in secondary subjects

Improving writing in secondary subjects supported teachers to reflect on and develop their practice in teaching writing. 97.7% of teachers rated the training as good or excellent and the same percentage (97.7%) would recommend the training, while 95.5% said that they found it engaging or highly engaging. Teachers were asked to share what they felt was the most useful aspect of the programme: responses included references to productive discussions with the group, access to resources and models, research information, and the sharing of practical advice to implement in the classroom.

Responses from the 2021 practitioner survey suggested that this programme was effective in building non-literacy specialists’ confidence in teaching writing. As shown in Figure 9, the percentage of non-English-specialist teachers from LfL schools who agreed with the statement ‘I feel confident teaching writing’ was almost three times as high as those from non-LfL schools (35.7% vs 12.9%).

Figure 9: Agreement from teachers of subjects other than English with the statement ‘I feel confident teaching writing’, comparing LfL teachers with teachers from other schools

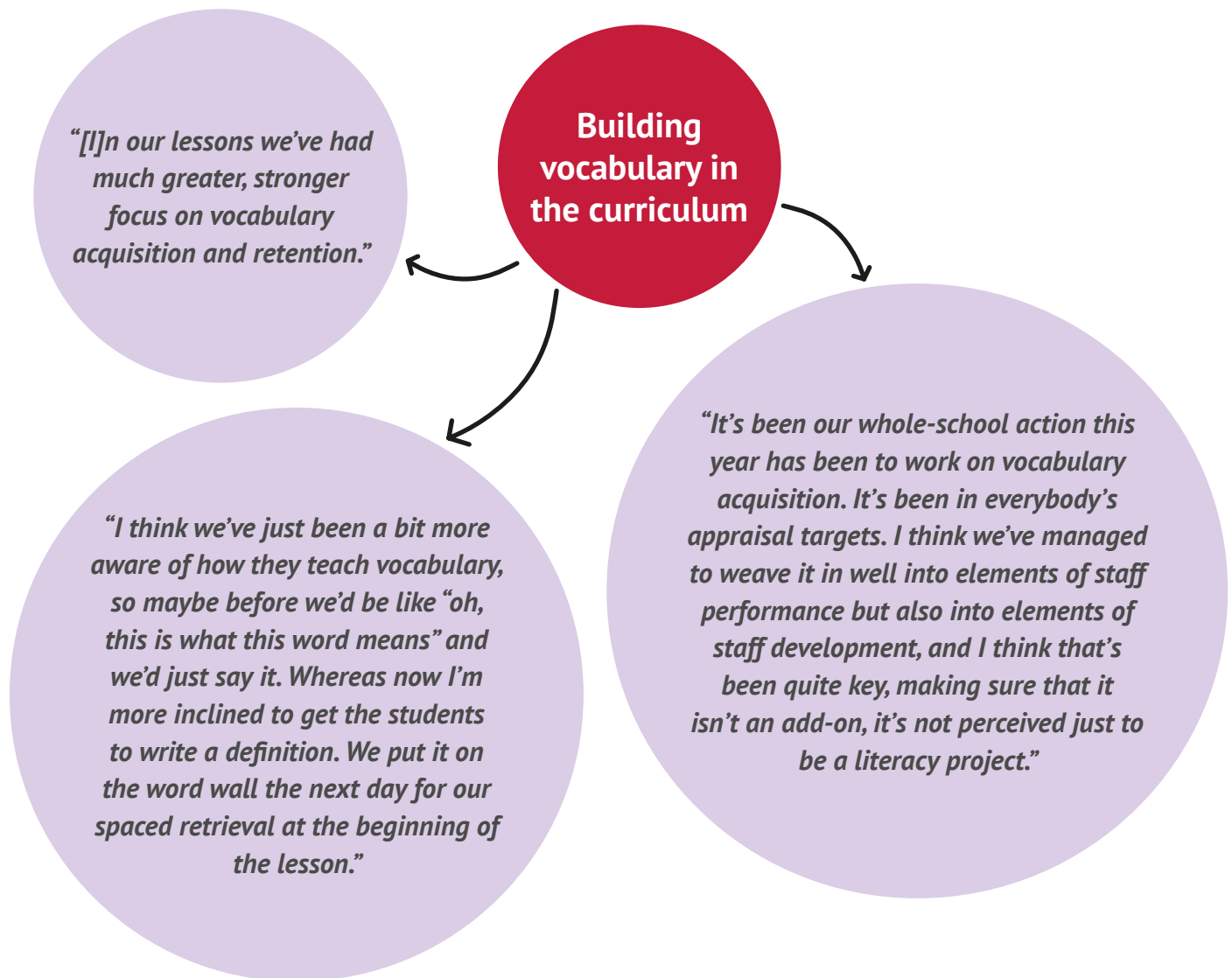


Changing approaches to grammar and vocabulary

The Education Endowment Foundation (2018) also recommends that teachers should “teach spelling, grammar and punctuation explicitly [to] improve students’ writing.” Some focus-group participants reported a high take-up of these specific areas across subjects:

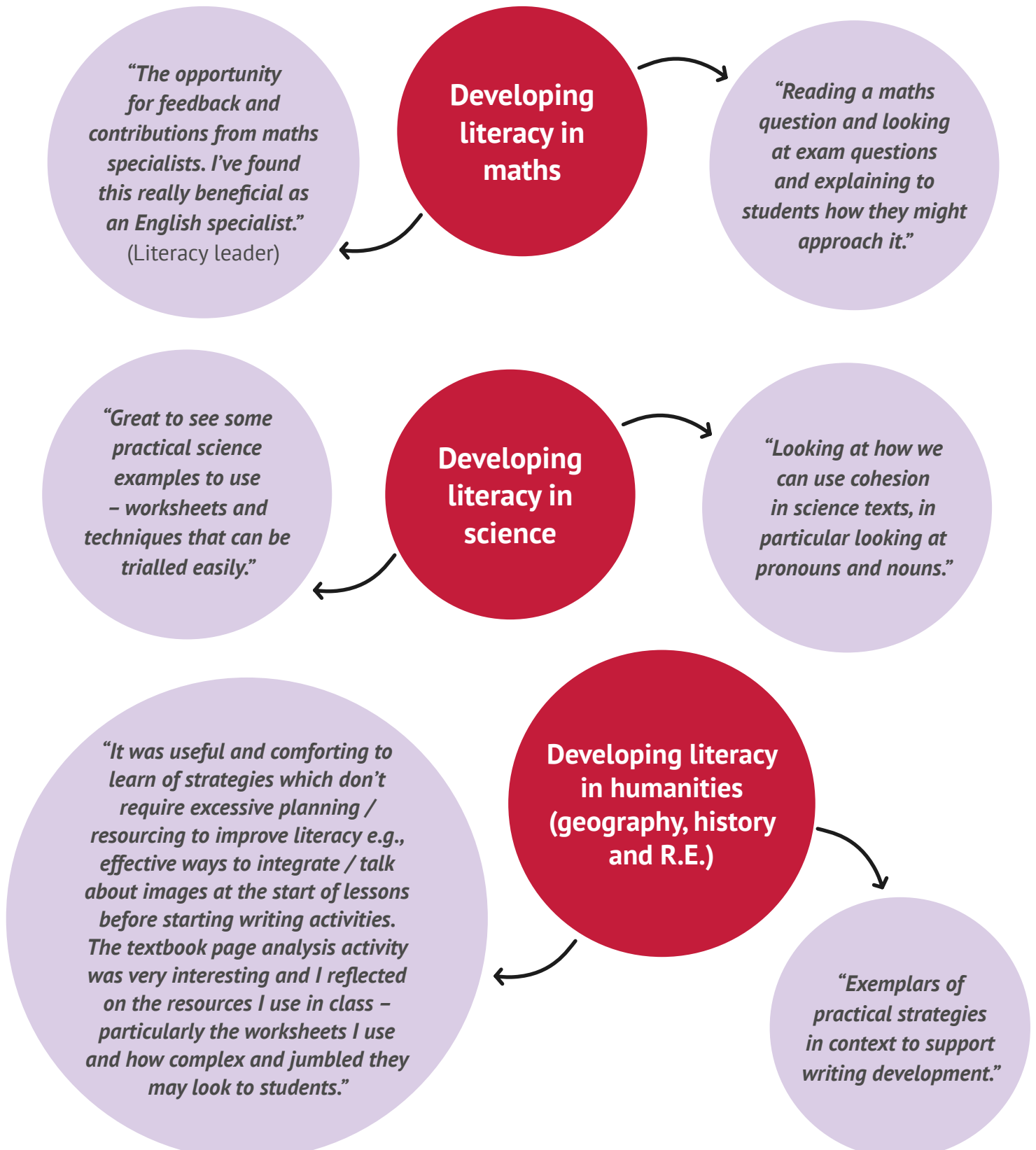
“We talked a bit about prefixes and suffixes and we had a go at guessing the meaning based on their prior knowledge, and they had to actually articulate why they thought that was the meaning, and they did really well at making the implicit ideas more explicit. And I think everyone’s just a bit more aware in that sense across the school.”

The Education Endowment Foundation (2018) makes similar recommendations about building vocabulary, recommending that '[t]eachers in every subject should provide explicit vocabulary instruction to help students access and use academic language'. Many participants reported a strong focus on vocabulary in lessons, with one school embedding vocabulary instruction at a strategic level by including it in appraisal targets:



Developing disciplinary literacy within subject areas

Developing disciplinary literacy within subject areas included developing literacy in mathematics, science, geography, history and R.E. Each session was tailored and targeted to the specific subject. Of the feedback collected from these courses, 95.9% rated the training as good or excellent and 91.6% would recommend the training to another school. We asked teachers to share the most useful aspect of the training:



Student outcomes

While it was noted at the start of this report that student outcomes could not be evidenced or measured at scale for the project, there are some examples from case studies and discussions of the beginnings of progress in particular areas. The report by Cordingley et al. (2016) also states that **“making links between professional learning and pupil learning explicit through discussion of pupil progression and analysis of assessment data”** (p. 6) will help support professional development. Using lesson observations and having gained a better understanding of how to use data, teachers were able to make specific decisions about interventions and plan accordingly.

Teachers taking part in the focus groups discussed how there were also specific literacy techniques implemented across different subjects, such as how to respond to command words in exams (for example, what ‘evaluate’ or ‘summarise’ might mean in the contexts of different subjects)⁸. These were particularly successful with lower-ability- and EAL students.

“There was some work around [...] command words and questions in exam papers. And I think that that will be really useful for our lower-to-middle abilities at GCSE, just when, maybe, just their understanding of what the question is asking will develop because of that, and they can just, maybe, get the extra few marks that they need if their response is just a bit more aimed at the question.”

Improving students’ literacy attitudes

Teachers suggested that students were getting a good grasp of literacy across the curriculum, and recognising its importance in different subjects.

“I think the students will realise that there’s a whole joined-up approach and it’s not just an English teacher doing it, and it’s not just one random person.”

“[W]e’ve moved to a culture where we are talking about the words we use, questioning why we use those words, we’re building a culture of that at school and I think that’s what’s been the most exciting thing this year [...] to see students and teachers taking ownership of this and believing that they have got the skills to do it has been really powerful.”

8 For more information about how to teach command words in different subjects, see literacytrust.org.uk/resources/exam-command-words-case-study-william-perkin-school

Improvements in students' literacy skills

In the focus groups, teachers told us how encouraging students to use the same techniques to improve their writing across different subjects helped children improve their grammar more rapidly across the curriculum.

“We both noticed that the students were picking it up far better in their extended writing in both history and English once we'd both covered that.”

Consultants

Vital to the success of the project was the use of expert National Literacy Trust consultants who combined the subject knowledge, experience and enthusiasm to make teachers feel both inspired and empowered to develop their learning. Comments from participants where they name consultants reflect this.

“[The trainer] was incredible! I genuinely felt so comfortable in the sessions and I wanted to communicate all successes and findings with them. I loved the way they presented information and let us talk about and investigate things, but also got to share and receive ideas too.”

Building a community of practice

In their evidence review, Cordingley et al. found that '[t]he only common finding across all reviews was that peer support was a common feature in effective CPD, with all participants having an opportunity to work together to try out and refine new approaches'.⁹ Working across a variety of settings, with space for collaboration and sharing ideas and expertise, has been well received by the groups.

Teachers in focus groups discussed how networking with other teachers and sharing knowledge was a valuable aspect of the training.

"[G]oing to the event was also beneficial because you were able to meet other literacy coordinators or colleagues from other schools and hearing their ideas and their insight was quite valuable as well."

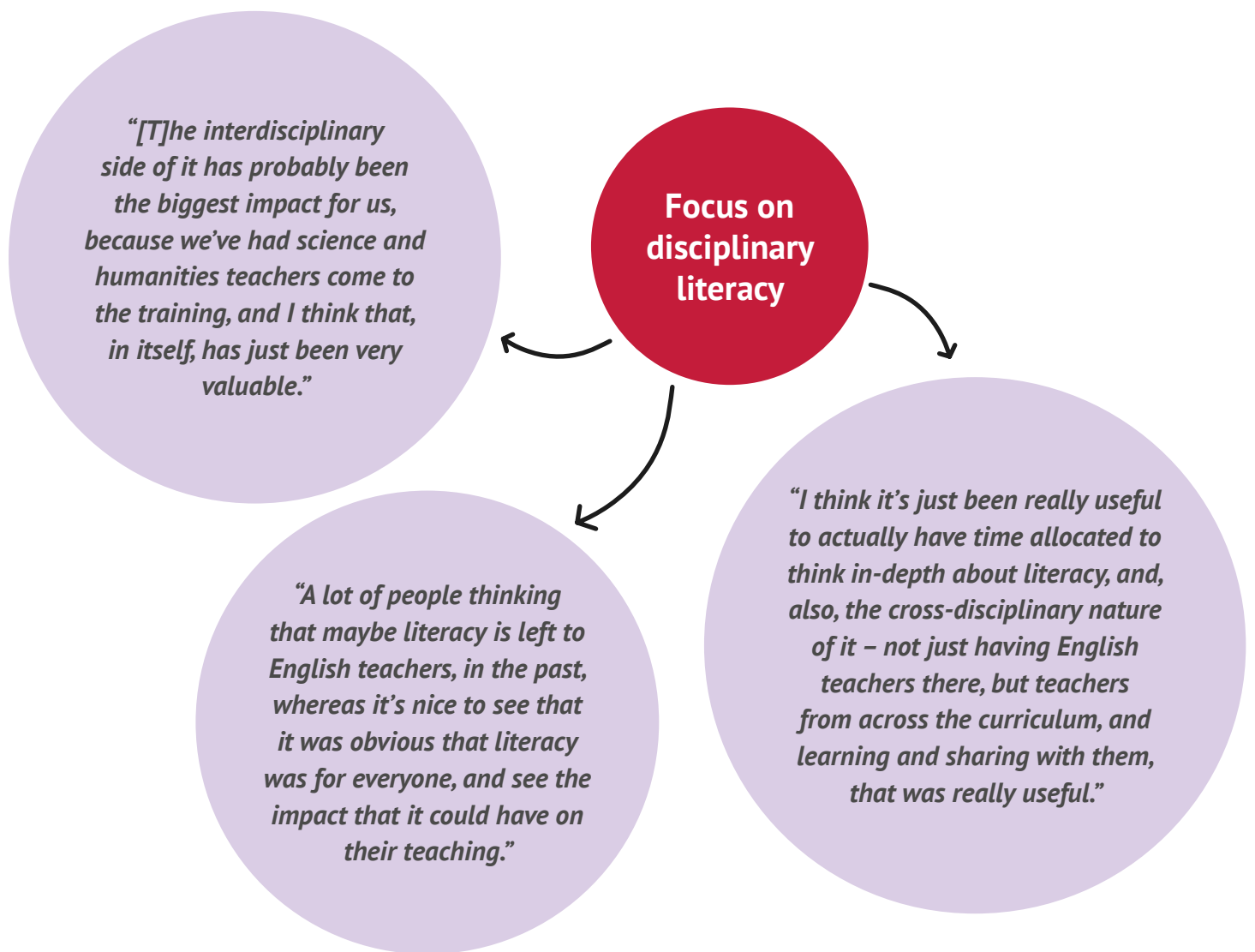
Several mentioned how having a dedicated space to share ideas with colleagues from other departments and other schools was particularly valuable to them.

"[I]t's that peer space, the balance between having lots of information that's really useful at the training alongside time to work with peers across different schools."

The dedicated time away from the setting to plan a school-wide literacy strategy was an important aspect of the sessions to teachers:

"I think that is so powerful when everybody's really busy, and to have the time away to say 'we've got this time, we can do something really powerfully together'"

In addition to enabling space for collaboration, participants were very pleased with the involvement of different subject areas, both in terms of attending the training and cascading approaches in schools. This has helped reinforce and encourage the idea that literacy should be a whole-school approach and not limited to English teachers. This was exemplified by feedback from participants.



In taking approaches back into the classroom and giving colleagues opportunities to plan their own next steps, the impact of the training has been more sustained.

"What I found with these training programmes is you can talk to someone two weeks later and they're still plotting, and they're still considering, and they're saying, 'I've tried this,' and, 'I've done that.' And it's that sustainability that I think has been absolutely vital, because to actually make interdisciplinary literacy work, you've got to bring on the DT teacher, the PE teacher."

Echoing the findings from the training feedback, teachers reported the training inspired them with new ideas and, crucially, they wanted to share and build on these ideas with colleagues.

"[The trainer's] training has been really good, and all the people that I've taken on the CPD have come away with it with inspired things they want to do in their own classrooms and share with their own department areas."

The training has also helped transformed people's attitudes to CPD, helping them build confidence:

“So I guess that's been great that this opportunity that is actually a great opportunity for CPD has meant that those members of staff feel like ‘yeah, literacy CPD is for me and that's kind of something I now want to research and to do more on’. So that's great, and if we can spread that sort of attitude, that'd be really powerful.”

Delivery and collaboration

As noted in the third point of the DfE's Standards for Professional Development (2016), it should include opportunities for collaboration and expert challenge. By working with clusters of schools across each area, expert consultants were able to encourage exchange of ideas and sharing of best practice, even once sessions had moved online. The frequent mention of discussion in teacher feedback suggests that the collaborative element was not lost through the remote delivery of the programme.

“The discussions with other schools and subjects were really interesting and the focus on research to support practice. I particularly like the idea of it being an interdisciplinary strategy and I like that this project could be a great precursor to rolling out writing strategies school wide.”

Hubs-based approach

The work of the Literacy for Learning programmes in different areas has been pivotal in building area-wide relationships between schools and local authorities and the National Literacy Trust.

In Nottingham, for example, this has enabled the National Literacy Trust Hub (the hub is branded as **Read On Nottingham**) team to work directly with English teachers and other subject leaders, librarians, senior leaders and headteachers who value the service and resources provided to them and their students. The team ran a transition project, which the Hub Manager designed in conjunction with the literacy leader in a school that had been part of the Literacy for Learning programme from the beginning. The research and the use of a fiction book set in Nottingham was welcomed by the literacy leader, who appreciated the inclusion in the project of local knowledge of the area, the school and its students. The transition programme was subsequently rolled out across Nottingham City and into Derby and Derbyshire.

Since then, the Nottingham Hub team has run a Key Stage 3 teacher reading group as part of Cheltenham Literature Festival's **Reading Teachers=Reading Pupils** network, which has largely been attended by schools that have worked with the National Literacy Trust on school-improvement projects. The book group has discussed a wide variety of texts in different formats, and the teachers and librarians who attend value the opportunity to discuss the texts, listen to others' opinions and chat about how they will use the books in their schools to build and promote a joy of reading.

This programme has led to schools running their own literacy festivals, which the National Literacy Trust Hub team have been able to support through inviting local authors to join their events, running online and live workshops, as well as providing book donations for student book groups.

The success and quality of the Literacy for Learning school-improvement work has created a foundation stone on which to engage and extend the wider offer of literacy engagement and improvement from Read On Nottingham and the National Literacy Trust. In their incredibly busy and difficult working lives in school and throughout the pandemic, it is rare for schools and teachers to ask for more meetings, training sessions, conferences, activities, volunteers into schools, non-specific curriculum projects and programmes to enhance literacy and reading for pleasure. This group of schools and teachers do, which is greatly encouraging.

COVID-19 Response

Online delivery

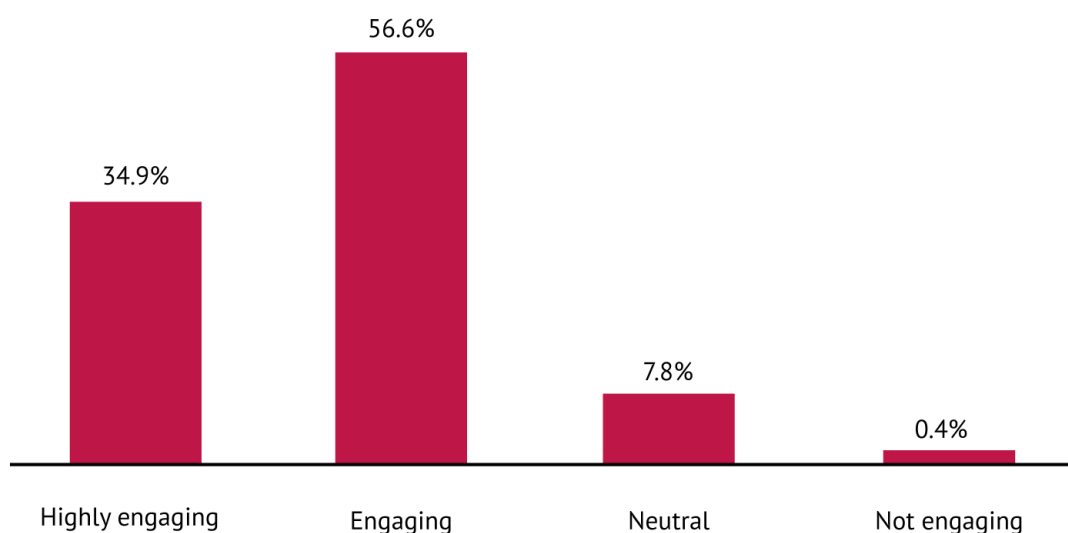
In March 2020, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and related lockdowns and school closures meant that the team needed to pivot very quickly to online delivery. To do this, all the consultants were given training by an expert Zoom webinar facilitator, and courses were adapted into shorter sessions to be delivered online. These training sessions were successful. One consultant said sense of collegiality, along with the in-school commitment to the literacy focus that had been there in the face-to-face sessions, remained. There was also an encouraging growth in confidence and interaction from practitioners when participating in online training, which the consultant suggested was helped by the fact that the sessions were not recorded; people felt less exposed and more comfortable speaking up.

Participants also noted that despite the challenges of working remotely, such as screen fatigue and a preference for face-to-face training, the team did a good job of keeping them engaged:

“Very enjoyable, even after a long day on the laptop!”

This enthusiasm for online delivery is also reflected in participant feedback. As shown in Figure 10, when asked how engaging the online delivery of training was, over 9 out of 10 said that it was either engaging or very engaging.

Figure 10: Responses from participants when asked how engaging they found the online delivery of the programme



Conclusion

LfL has succeeded in building and establishing a disciplinary literacy-led approach to school improvement in the key focus regions and, through its scalability, across schools nationwide. This evaluation has charted progress and gathered feedback and reflections from across the two years of the funded programme, and the evidence here shows that it has been effective developing understanding at a local and national level.

Following the rationale and evidence base that a whole-school strategic approach to disciplinary literacy is most effective in driving student outcomes, we are confident that this programme has succeeded in putting such measures in place. The schools and teachers engaged with the programme have shown positive shifts in understanding of on-the-ground support for students in every aspect, and indeed, the sustainable approach means that more students will continue to benefit from this support year on year. Additional activities such as the Science Writers in Schools project have also added value in this regard.

Systemic change has been driven through close working with leadership teams at school and multi-school level, leveraging the support of expert consultants to establish school-wide commitment to and understanding of literacy in every subject. The feedback from the leadership training alongside the reflections from course participants shows that these leaders feel confident in taking this approach forward, demonstrating and modelling a disciplinary approach and prioritising literacy in school-improvement strategies.

Systemic change has also been achieved through the scaling up of the programme, with teacher conferences well-attended, extension projects such as Science Writers in Schools showing positive results, and a robust traded training offer that can be delivered at scale. Teachers can also continue to benefit from the expertise of the team and the learning of the programme through high-quality resources downloaded from the National Literacy Trust website.

The programme has been equally successful in supporting behaviour change through effective research-led training of individual teachers. As this evaluation demonstrates, feedback from this training has been consistently and overwhelmingly positive, and case studies and individual teacher feedback shows that participants have valued the opportunity to develop literacy in the context of their own practice. The high level of resource downloads also suggests that additional staff members, who may not have received training directly through the National Literacy Trust, will have benefited from the cascaded approach with heads of department and subject leads disseminating learning to their teams.

Through discussions of collaborative practice, it is evident that a place-based approach has been effective in building learning communities. This was evident even after the training moved online during the pandemic, with teachers within and across schools noting the benefits of hearing examples of best practice from their peers. The approach has also been successful in its mapping across existing National Literacy Trust Hubs, with LfL activity feeding into and benefiting from wider activities supported by the National Literacy Trust.

It is encouraging to see the success and impact of this programme in its driving of school improvement through disciplinary literacy, and to see how, going forward, the approaches have been scaled up to a wider offer. The programme has demonstrated the importance and effectiveness of a disciplinary approach, and the effectiveness of upskilling teachers and leaders to build their own practice.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Case study for Archway Learning Trust

Bluecoat Aspley Academy and Nottingham Emmanuel School are two of nine schools in the Archway Learning Trust, which serves communities across Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire.

The rationale

Both schools had worked through a three-year cycle of reading, writing and oracy focuses. Literacy had been a whole-school priority, with responsibility for training sitting with the literacy lead. Literacy for Learning therefore enabled literacy to become the responsibility of a whole range of staff at the schools who worked together to produce, share and trial ideas in the classroom. It also provided an opportunity to continue asserting the importance of literacy in all subjects and provided extra support and resources for students in an explicit way.

“It’s just making it more explicit to students, that literacy isn’t just reading and writing, it’s working out about what underpins all of that reading and writing and vocab, and just explicitly making it clear on a plan and using visuals for them to see, so they can just learn to do it in a more natural way.”

(PE and psychology teacher, Nottingham Emmanuel School)

Implementation across the Archway Learning Trust (Multi-Academy Trust)

Schools within the Archway Learning Trust often collaborated during the training, providing staff with opportunities to network and build links with others. This collaborative approach enabled schools to compare approaches and share best practice.

As well as the benefit of meeting new people and building relationships with teachers from other schools, the training enabled staff from different faculties to collaborate. While they often adopted techniques in slightly different ways, all staff benefited from seeing what other faculties were doing.

Implementation within the schools

At Bluecoat Aspley Academy, staff from timetabling, pastoral care, curriculum leads, and sixth form were chosen strategically to take part in the training. This ensured that these staff could understand what they would be signing off and facilitating in terms of new literacy interventions and activities. Next, subject leads attended the training to give specific insights into how literacy could be adopted and used in their lessons. In the training sessions, teachers found strategies that would fit well with their own subject areas and subsequently requested meetings to run ideas within their teams to implement literacy in their lessons. The online delivery of the training meant that recordings could be saved and uploaded for staff to watch at various times. In this way, while not all staff attended the training first-hand, all benefited from those who did.

From this, staff were able to adapt the whole curriculum to ensure every faculty was integrating literacy effectively. Bluecoat Aspley Academy now has a literacy team of about 17 staff members including staff mentors, English as an Additional Language (EAL) specialists, and learning-support assistants.

Nottingham Emmanuel has also run literacy festivals, where outside speakers came in to talk about literacy strategies. The staff dressed as their favourite book characters and read stories to the students.

Implementation in Science at Bluecoat Aspley Academy

For students working towards their GCSEs, where content is very information-heavy, science staff at Bluecoat Aspley Academy were keen for students to gain a conceptual understanding of the content they were learning. One activity implemented from the programme was a Pictionary-style activity where students were given labelled diagrams that they had to replicate in their own way and share with other students.

“I think the big impact on us as an academy is the fact that literacy is embedded.”
(Literacy Lead, Bluecoat Aspley Academy)

Another strategy involved students sitting back to back, with one student sharing the information they had been given and the second trying to reproduce this information. A third student would listen to the conversation and try to put it all together. Students would work as a team to put the information together, making information recall more interesting and interactive, and supporting students to process the information.

A third method was a jigsaw activity where students were given cards with questions and answers and had to match them up correctly with the cards of other students in their class. This meant that rather than just giving students the answer, they were required to read, communicate and listen to one another.

These techniques incorporated elements of reading and writing as well as oracy, which the teacher felt made the information real and “brought it off the page”.

Implementation in psychology at Nottingham Emmanuel School

A model from the programme that has been effective with psychology students is the K.I.M Model (Key word – Important information – Memory clue/sentence). This tool encourages students to write down mnemonics, acronyms or drawings that may help their recall of specific words. In each lesson, students are asked to answer 10 questions that use tiered language. For any questions they get wrong, it is their responsibility to add the key word/piece of terminology to their K.I.M model. Students are constantly adding to their models with mnemonics, acronyms and drawings to help their recall. Additionally, the use of tiered language matches with command words in exams, enabling students to consider how the same word might be used differently in different subjects or contexts.

“It’s [about] them being more responsible for making sure that they can understand that word next time, and not confuse it with another word. And so, it matches with their metacognitive understanding of how they learn.”
(PE and psychology teacher, Nottingham Emmanuel School)

Another strategy that has been implemented is the use of inference where students look at the context of words and try to work out what they mean rather than just being told. This encourages students to build their metacognition and articulate their thoughts effectively.

In addition, the use of word walls has encouraged students to reduce their use of colloquial speech, with the phrase “say it again, better” prompting students to articulate their sentences in Standard English. Staff have seen clear improvements in the language of their students as a result of this practice.

Implementation in PE at Nottingham Emmanuel

“...being a practical subject, it’s working out how we can still embed articulation, key words and terminology into lessons and not always make it about how practical sport is.”
(PE and psychology teacher, Nottingham Emmanuel School)

Since the programme, teachers are going into greater detail and breaking words down to support student understanding. This helps students to find links between words across subjects, for example in Science and PE, and has encouraged interesting conversations in the classroom, when students find links between different words or ideas. These new words are often added into students’ K.I.M models.

“In GCSE and A-Level PE, a lot of words come up quite often, and students don’t see the links, but now that we say to them ‘where have you heard this part of this word before?’, they start to unpick it themselves, and because they’re having to think for themselves, it’s better for their long-term recall.”
(PE and psychology teacher, Nottingham Emmanuel School)

Impact of engagement for students

Literacy for Learning has had a substantial impact on students at Bluecoat Aspley Academy, providing them with a “really good opportunity to develop their literacy”. When asked to discuss the programme, many students felt that the tools were so well embedded in the curriculum that they assumed it to be the way of teaching in all schools. Students were invited to produce a video for Sainsbury’s, articulating some activities that they have trialled in lessons, which was a great opportunity for them to share their experiences of literacy in the classroom.

At Nottingham Emmanuel School, key improvements were seen in the oracy of students. This was rewarding for both staff and students. Students are now able to provide more detailed responses to questions in the classroom, and are also more able to find links between key words across different subjects.

“It’s really lovely to see how some of them will go to speak, and you can see they consciously stop and think before they speak, and then what comes is a much more coherent sentence.”
(PE and psychology teacher, Nottingham Emmanuel School)

Since the programme

Bluecoat Aspley Academy

Since the programme, literacy initiatives across the school are gaining momentum. Bluecoat Aspley Academy has appointed a Literacy Intervention Lead who will soon begin their role. The school has worked with other Literacy leads at other Trust schools to share their vision and practice more widely. For example, the history team have embedded at least one book into their curriculum and are in regular contact with the literacy team for fiction text recommendations to read to their classes. They have also started history reading groups in Years 7 and 8, which will be supported by Year 10 students, using a range of active reading strategies to read a book related to their unit of study.

“With regards to Bluecoat Aspley in particular, there’s a real vision and enthusiasm at the moment as our departments take ownership of some of the strategies that we’ve suggested and make them their own. There are lots of things happening which are now being driven by staff.” (Literacy lead, Bluecoat Aspley Academy)

Bluecoat Aspley Academy also recently held a Lit Fest with the support of the National Literacy Trust, which involved activities for students such as writing articles, competitions, receiving new books (some of which were signed by the author), author visits/online calls, workshops and even a Scholastic Book Fayre. The event helped to promote reading across the academy.

The National Literacy Trust is also now working with Bluecoat Aspley Academy’s sixth form on other National Literacy Trust programmes including Words for Work and Women in Leadership. The academy has approached the National Literacy Trust to request further training to support them with presenting their literacy initiatives to the next cohort of staff. They hope to run some sessions for members of the Archway Learning Trust to keep literacy thriving across the curriculum.

“[I]t’s become even more sustainable. And now it’s a case of continuing and developing and making sure that it’s not just one teacher”
(Literacy lead, Bluecoat Aspley Academy)

Nottingham Emmanuel School

At Nottingham Emmanuel School, it was undeniable that the strategies learnt were hugely impactful and important for staff. In the words of their PE and psychology teacher, “the training has been a huge advantage to our students”. While this staff member is moving to a role at a new school, she is keen to take these strategies forwards with her to make sure to promote literacy explicitly with her new students.

“I think once you see the impact that is having across the school, you understand that the initiative is really important.”

(PE and psychology teacher, Nottingham Emmanuel School)

Appendix 2: Hummersknott School case study

The rationale

While literacy had always been a part of the whole-school development plan, the assistant principal at Hummersknott was keen to relaunch literacy as a core priority in the school with the support of the National Literacy Trust, primarily to create a more joined-up approach. Staff felt as though they had seen literacy come and go, and so hoped to inject a fresh sense of enthusiasm with the initiative.

“The message that teachers are getting loud and clear is that literacy needs to feature in all their lessons, in all their schemes of work, and in all their curriculum overviews.”

(Assistant principal)

Implementation

The support from the National Literacy Trust helped the literacy lead to shape and frame the development plan for literacy, get different subjects on board, and maintain a focus on literacy in the classroom.

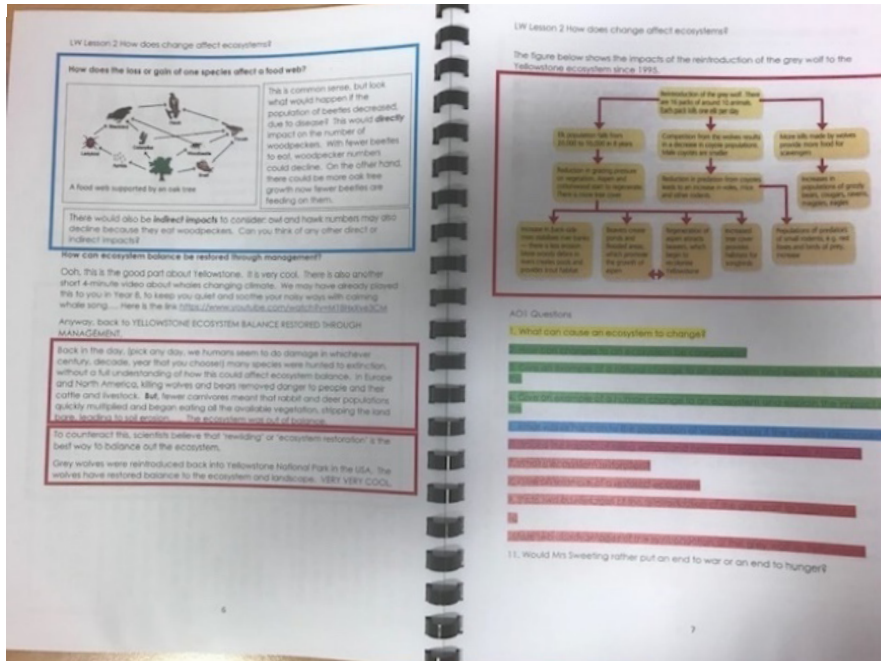
Reading for pleasure

For reading, a form reading programme was launched, with teachers encouraging students to read aloud, engage with the text, and answer questions on vocabulary and content within the book. This reading involves a range of fiction and non-fiction texts in addition to texts that are being studied in the year group English classes. Hummersknott has also improved its Learning Resource Centre and in September 2021 incorporated fortnightly library sessions for Year 7 students. As part of their reading for pleasure initiative, they have continued to encourage reading from home and have organised author visits and theatre trips, including a production of Blood Brothers, which is a Year 9 text.

Writing

For writing, word walls and banks have been introduced in geography, maths, science, DT and PE classrooms with key words that students can use in their written work. The geography department have also created “gibles” (a play on the word ‘bible’), which are re-written geography textbooks that are read and used by students at home and in the classroom (see Figure 11).

Figure 11: Example of a geography “gible”



PAT-IPEELL (Purpose-Audience-Text Type/ Introduction-Point-Explain-Ending-Links-Language) is being used for lower- to middle-ability learners to provide a framework for writing. This started in geography but has now been extended across humanities. Students also took part in the National Literacy Trust’s Science Writers in Schools initiative, with a visit from a professional scientist building enthusiasm for and understanding of the importance of effective communication in science.

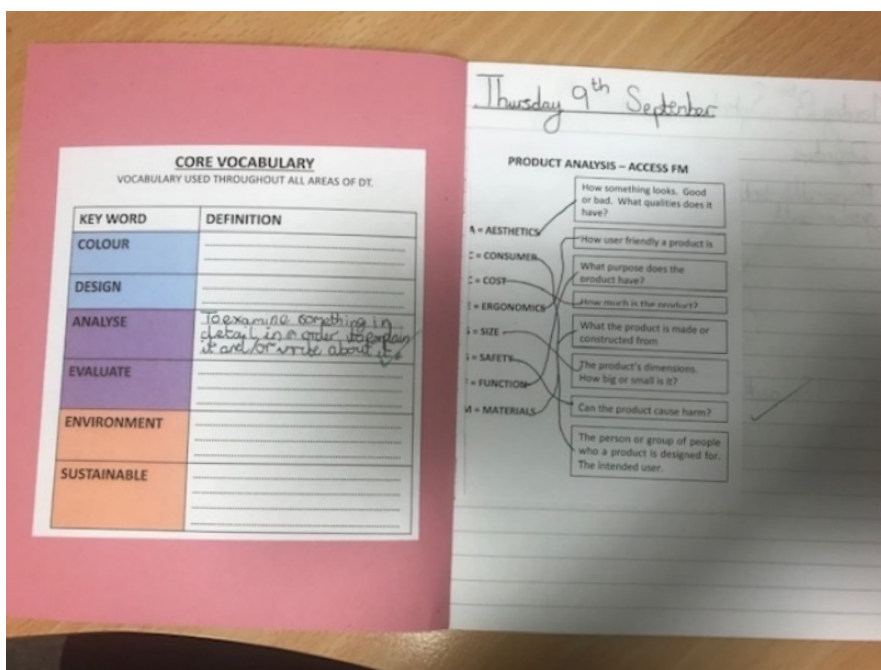


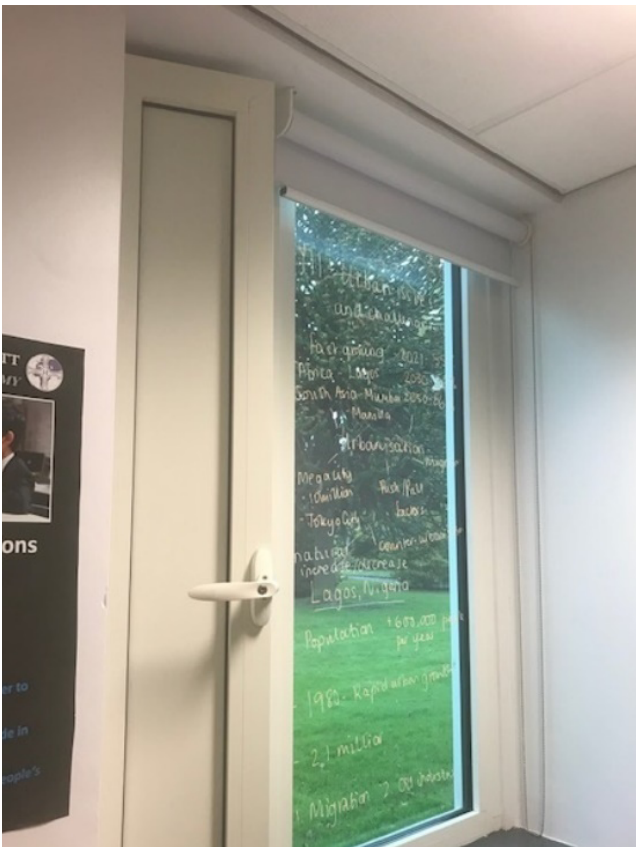
Figure 12: Example of a vocabulary booklet in design and technology

Vocabulary

The maths department has introduced Word of the Week to broaden vocabulary. Vocabulary booklets were created by the design and technology department (see Figure 12) for students to write key words, definitions and glossaries, which can support their written and spoken word.

Performing arts and PE have also been given support for subject-specific vocabulary that can be implemented in classrooms. In geography, vocabulary has been presented via word walls and other displays (see Figure 13).

Figure 13: Vocabulary display in a geography classroom



The science department have focused on making morphology (how words are put together) and etymology (the origins of words) explicit through teaching, classroom displays and student resources.

Spelling

For spelling, the school has a subscription to Spell Zone, a spelling software that can be used independently or at school to support reading for all levels including SEND and EAL students. Hummersknott has also launched a year-long spelling programme across subjects, which aims to test tier-three vocabulary.

“The National Literacy Trust, through their training, have given me a lot of ideas on how I can help... A one-size-fits-all approach to literacy is just not appropriate.”
(Assistant principal)

Since the programme

Literacy initiatives across the school are gaining momentum, maintaining the motivation to support and improve students' literacy skills. Hummersknott has a new literacy coordinator and a new learning resource coordinator who are both helping to strengthen the focus on reading for pleasure. The school has also trialled a readathon and, in October 2021, started Wednesday reading club for struggling readers as well as a lunchtime intervention group for Year 7 students.

“I now have a Literacy Steering group with 10 representatives from different subjects in the school, all volunteers! They are working on a different literacy project in their areas which is very exciting.” (Assistant principal)

Additionally, initiatives introduced in specific subjects have shown success and are now being distributed across the school. For example, the reciprocal reading programme in Year 7 English has shown significant impact and is now intended to be shared with other year groups and subjects later in the academic year, such as in history. Additionally, the PAT-IPEELL method is now being rolled out to all Year 7 classes in all humanities subjects, having initially been piloted in one history and geography classroom.

Going forward, the school hopes to continue taking part in training sessions with the National Literacy Trust to provide more staff with support to implement literacy effectively.

“I’m a big fan of the project, it’s been so helpful, and I can’t thank the National Literacy Trust enough. For somebody like me coming into this job quite blind, it’s really helped me.” (Assistant principal)

Appendix 3: St Thomas More School case study

The rationale

Previously, literacy at St Thomas More School had some disciplinary elements such as vocabulary lists in science and a recognition of writing tasks, but it also referred largely to spelling, punctuation and grammar. The project lead was keen to promote literacy in a wider sense across the curriculum and ensure that it was being considered in every subject, as well as developing the expertise of the literacy leads in each department (previously the role of departmental literacy leads was to share and communicate information between their department and senior leadership).

Implementation

Since taking part in the programme, departmental literacy leads have developed the expertise needed to train colleagues and to model new approaches. These leads meet every half term and are given priority at training events, while other staff members are also given the opportunity to attend sessions, widening the reach of the programme. Staff across the school, not just those who attended training, also used National Literacy Trust resources. These resources have been used to help inspire activities in class, as well as being given directly to students for “gap-filling” tasks.

“The materials that you’ve given us are a really powerful lever and way in.” (Literacy, Library and Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) lead)

It was not only resources directly from the National Literacy Trust that benefited the school, but also the opportunity for interaction with staff from other schools on group training days.

“There are some people who have been [at the training] regularly, and I’ve enjoyed hearing what they’re doing in their school. I think that was useful... working with them in terms of sharing ideas and good practice. Exchanging ideas, that’s always interesting.”
(Literacy and EPQ lead)

PAT-IPEEL: Purpose-Audience-Type/Introduction-Point-Elaboration-Ending-Links-Language

From speaking with other schools, staff were able to pick up new ideas, including tips for the writing project they have been running (PAT-IPEEL: Purpose-Audience-Type/Introduction-Point-Elaboration-Ending-Links-Language). An example of an IPEEL structure sheet can be seen in Figure 14.

Figure 14: PAT-IPEEL structure sheet completed by a Year 8 student

PAT Purpose: to justify my view Audience: New Orleans state government. Type: a report.	Structure - IPEEL Introduction Point Elaboration Ending Links (discourse markers) Language
Opening sentence (which option and why) I think option D is the best as it is cheaper and helps more people	
Point 1 this is the best because it gets more businesses	Explanation and evidence 1/2 (30%) the bank force let so they need money so they can pay for products on website
Point 2 building on High land	Explanation and evidence this means if there is a flood the few less money would need passed. (from 100 to 50 billion dollars from a dam)
Point 3 the best option \$5 billion only cost	Explanation and examples So people can better coming because you can't populate the city again
Concluding sentence	
Links (discourse markers) Adding information: another, further, also, in addition, Causal: so, because, which, that Giving examples: for example Contrasting: however, on the other hand	
Language Future tense: will, would, Verbs to explain: protect, prevent, control, build, rebuild, allow, dredge, make, encourage Subject vocabulary: emergency plan, levees, floodwalls, residential areas, hurricane, flooding risk	
SPaG: edit work Subject vocabulary Apostrophes Spelling Capital letters and full stops	

Subjects that have run IPEEL include religious studies and geography. This is currently being piloted but the school hopes to introduce it properly next year for use with A-Level students with a view to running it across the whole school.

Peer review and reading tasks

Following the training, staff were asked to plan reading tasks, develop an analysed piece of writing that flagged various language features for teaching vocabulary explicitly, and create reading tasks for students linking reading and writing tasks. An example of a tool used in geography is shown in Figure 15.

Figure 15: Peer assessment sheet

Geography scoring Sheet: Self/Peer Assessment			Pupil score	Teacher score
Name:				
I	Introduction	Clear introduction, explaining the option chosen, with a reason: 1 mark		
P	Point: 3	Included 3 relevant points in a sensible order: 1 mark each Max: 3 marks		
E	Elaborate	Added extra detail to explain the impact of each point: 1 mark each. Max: 3 marks		
E	Ending	Included an ending: restated reasons: 1 mark		
L	Links	Used appropriate discourse markers: 1 - 2 marks		
L	Language	Used verbs to explain the impact and key words: 1 - 3 marks Punctuation / Spelling: 2 marks		

While different departments are at different stages of the process, all are asking questions and working to implement literacy in their curriculum. Subjects like DT are involving new initiatives that they've never used before, such as Quizlet, to promote literacy in their classrooms.

Additionally, CPD (Continuing Professional Development) time has been dedicated to working on disciplinary literacy twice each half-term. This enables the literacy lead to run projects with staff, as well as giving staff time to investigate ways of teaching reading and writing, which is part of their school-development plan. These initiatives were introduced as a direct result of the National Literacy Trust's programme.

Impact of engagement for students and teachers

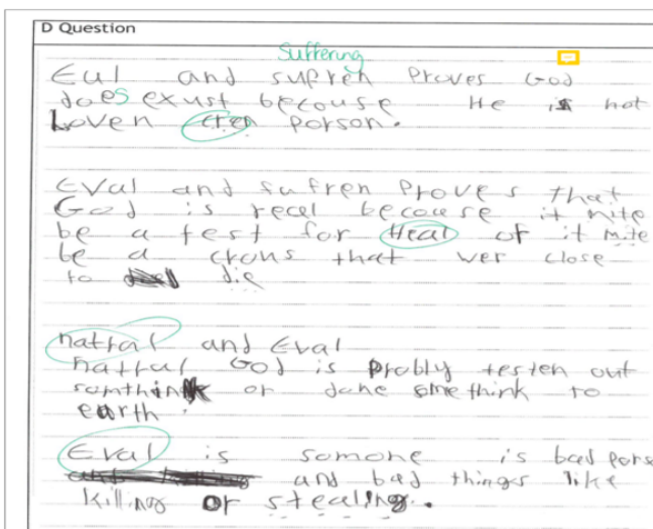
Students showed gains in writing, and teachers acknowledged that it didn't always come naturally to them, but they benefited from the insight into the importance of implementing literacy in their subjects.

"We picked disadvantaged students who weren't achieving very well, and there were some amazing gains in their writing from before and after. I've got some examples that I'm going to use at the September training day, when I'm talking about writing."
(Literacy and EPQ lead)

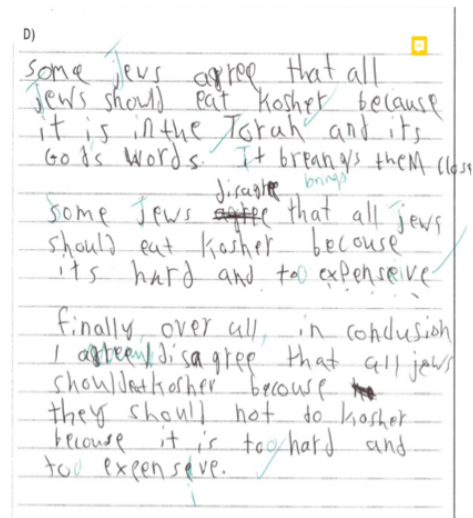
Writing ability was compared for students over the course of the academic year, as can be seen below.

Figure 16: Writing for the autumn and spring terms (before and after the improving-writing programme) for an EAL student who had arrived in the UK in Year 5 with poor literacy in their home language. Moved to top set in Year 9

Autumn Term



Spring Term (After improving writing programme)



There was also a significant attitude shift for teachers of specific subjects who didn't previously feel that there was a need to teach literacy in their subject.

"I think it's understanding as well... People think they teach writing, but they don't teach it in a way that's very language conscious."
(Literacy and EPQ lead)

Since the programme

Since the programme, St Thomas More has been working with other schools, including Houghton, to share resources. These conversations have resulted in new ideas being implemented in their own school, such as the use of literacy stickers for marking spelling, punctuation and grammar. Further network meetings have been organised to extend the sharing of good practice between schools. The literacy lead has also taken the initiative to create a blog on disciplinary literacy that contributes to thinking about how literacy can be enacted in schools.

Staff at St Thomas More have added Learning Talk to their teaching and learning principles, which will also be added to their curriculum plans, to ensure effective vocabulary is bolstered in all subjects. Individual staff who attended the training sessions also plan to present their learnings to the rest of the staff, as they did after the previous year's training.

Appendix 4: Case study from Tile Cross Academy

The rationale

While there were whole-school literacy drives before the programme, the school was keen to develop a more coordinated approach across the faculties. At Tile Cross Academy, the reading age of students was a particular area of concern. Reading for pleasure and reading academically were also areas that the school hoped to improve throughout the programme. Tile Cross Academy has also been enrolled in a Voice 21 programme for two years.

Implementation

When Tile Cross Academy joined Literacy for Learning, the head of faculty for English selected literacy leads from maths, humanities, science, and creative technology to incorporate the literacy techniques from the programme in different ways across faculties. As well as attending the National Literacy Trust's training sessions, they ran their own whole-school training sessions where faculties would work together in groups to discuss, for example, ways of breaking vocabulary down for reading.

“... every literacy lead from the different faculty presented on something that they've been doing in their faculty to demonstrate how reading could be improved.”

(Head of faculty, English)

In addition to working with the staff in the school, the literacy team also worked with other schools from the Multi-Academy Trust (MATs) to share ideas and initiatives. This meant that where faculties did not have a literacy lead, there would often be one from another school who could share resources.

Staff activities

One useful exercise, initially introduced on one of the National Literacy Trust's training days but used again in the school, involved staff looking at the different analytical verbs that were used in exams. Staff found that often the same verbs were used in different ways across subjects, which could likely confuse students. As a result, they took down keyword displays and definitions that were subject specific.

“... that was really eye opening, because faculties realised they were covering all of them [the verbs], but they meant something different in each subject! So that kind of opened our eyes, because they did have, up until then, keywords on the wall, but then they realised actually, we've got to take those definitions down, because in my exam when we have to explain, it's different marks to when you have to do it in your exam!” (Head of faculty, English)

Staff were also trained in dictogloss, a type of dictation where the teacher reads a short text and students try to produce their own version, which is as close to the original as possible. This was particularly favoured by the creative technology literacy lead, who gained further advice and tips from the lead of modern foreign languages (MFL), who also uses this technique. In mathematics, word association was used in classes to ensure that students fully understood the question they were being asked. Time is taken in class to unpack questions to ensure all of the words were understood.

“[Take the phrase,] ‘In a stadium, how many people will be sitting...’ So it was pulling apart those words like ‘stadium’. So, what does that mean? Is there a root to the word? Here's a picture of a stadium, what other words could we use for stadium? Just using maths questions, but to really expand that understanding, because if students are weak readers, they didn't understand the vocabulary that they were getting in the maths questions, they couldn't really picture it.” (Head of faculty, English)

In science, model examples of texts were introduced to students before they completed a piece of work. Students would read and label example texts to help them write in that format themselves.

*“So if they're writing a scientific report, they'd read a scientific report first.”
(Head of faculty, English)*

Reading for pleasure

A form-time reading programme has been launched, which has been positive so far. Additionally, the school has launched a new library system where students can book out library books on their phones. The home screen displays the top 10 borrowed books as well as recommended books from a student's previous borrowing. This provides an accessible way for students to browse different books. Students can also submit reviews for the librarian to edit before posting onto the software for other students to see.

A popular aspect of the software is that anyone can create reading lists, such as a teacher's top 10 books or books related to a specific topic being studied in class. These lists are similar to an earlier technique used in the school – a reading tree – where all English faculty members put their favourite book. This was a successful initiative, with students asking to borrow the books from faculty members. The school is currently investigating a way to add eBooks and audiobooks to the software to provide wider access. This will be useful for any future lockdowns or for when students are off sick.

With the push for reading for pleasure, the school made a conscious effort to incorporate more texts from authors of colour. Displays and books about racism were explicitly accessible to students.

“So not dropping *Of Mice and Men* like a hot potato, but actually using it to address racism, and understanding where it sits in texts, and why we can't obliterate it. That's been really quite positive.” (Head of faculty, English)

Overall, reading has been bolstered by ensuring that all faculties incorporate reading in their curriculum provision, that the reading tasks are targeted for the right level of each student, and that reading for pleasure is continually promoted.

Since the programme

Tile Cross Academy has benefited well across the curriculum, with new techniques to use both in and out of the classroom. Going forward, they hope to maintain their focus on reading by continuing to adjust their form-time reading programme, making audiobooks accessible on their new library software, and reuniting with other schools in their Multi-Academy Trust to share resources and ideas.

Appendix 5: Consultant case study

Background and entry to the project

Paul Clayton has worked with the National Literacy Trust in a freelance capacity for several years, delivering training to secondary schools on the courses included in Literacy for Learning. A specialist in secondary English, a National Strategies consultant and previously Chief Executive Officer of the National Association for Teachers of English (NATE), Paul has worked in education for over thirty years, frequently in schools serving areas with high levels of disadvantage. Throughout this time, Paul has been called on to deliver whole-school literacy strategies in many different forms. He notes, however, that over this time it was rare to see a focus on literacy within the curriculum such as is embedded in the disciplinary approach taken at the National Literacy Trust.

“In the days of the [National Strategies], the notion of ‘disciplinary literacy’ wasn’t fully formed. [...] The idea that reading, writing, speaking and listening might be substantively different in different subjects – in other words, the idea that ‘to read like a historian’ required a different habit of mind than that needed to ‘to read like a scientist’ – was not really part of the general orthodoxy. It might have been nascent, or emergent, but certainly not established and embedded! So the National Literacy Trust’s work on the literacy requirements of GCSE in different subjects felt like something fresh, something new.”

Experience of working with the schools

Paul visited each of the schools he worked with at the start of the project and was struck both by the commitment and passion of the practitioners themselves and by the culture of every school as innovative and research-led.

“With each [school], when you walked in, you got a sense of innovation. You felt that these schools had a willingness to move things along at pace.”

This commitment was backed up and reinforced, Paul observed, by a local authority team who were both invested in the project and understood the schools and their individual situations. This helped significantly with getting the project off the ground and establishing an ethos of collaboration across the schools.

“I think we were blessed in the North West with some really good practitioners who were very keen to see this through.”

Paul suggested that part of this success might have been attributable to the features of the area itself: Wigan and Salford are well-defined areas with their own clear and distinct identities. Teachers could meet at Buile Hill Park Hall in Salford, which was relatively central and easily accessible from all of the schools. This meant that participants could get there in good time, in turn meaning that they could be released from school with minimal impact on teaching time, so sessions were well attended.

Teachers' professional development

Some participants used their experiences as evidence to support their National Professional Qualifications applications, such as in middle leadership. Others were promoted to senior leadership positions.

“They carried with them their commitment to literacy, and they also nurtured it in others to make sure that it got taken through.”

Paul also noted that, set against the impact of knowledge-rich curricula, this project helped teachers feel confident in more active teaching styles, getting students to engage with learning.

Moving online during COVID-19

As the pandemic hit and schools moved to online teaching, the trainers all received coaching on how to deliver training sessions on Zoom. The ability to attend sessions remotely provided flexibility and allowed them to attend sessions from school. At a time when staff absences were high, having more staff onsite and less time off-timetable was helpful. It also meant that teachers were able to access a wider range of CPD because many online courses and remote-learning opportunities were signposted and made available.

Despite disruption to school routines, participants remained committed to the sense of collaboration even when working online. Paul remarked that the sense of collegiality, along with the in-school commitment to the literacy focus, remained. There was also an encouraging growth in confidence and interaction from practitioners when participating in online training. Paul suggested this was helped by the fact that the sessions were not recorded and people felt more comfortable to speak up.

Impact of COVID-19 on practice

Some schools had focused on oracy initially but were unable to continue this focus with social distancing and with teaching and learning taking place online, so they moved towards reading for pleasure instead. Paul saw a lot of people sharing their ideas about how to promote reading through online lessons and online libraries. It was very encouraging to see practitioners engaging with online platforms and creative solutions in this way.

Paul also noted that staff retention has remained high since the start of COVID-19. While this is in part attributable to a natural reduction in churn, Paul suggested that the opportunities to focus more on teaching and personal professional development have been welcomed by staff:

“Because teachers weren’t necessarily contending with some of those daily issues around behaviour, they could focus a bit more on the content of their teaching. They actually began to enjoy the opportunity to sit down, think through what they’re going to do and produce it.”

Final thoughts

All children have been affected by the pandemic and Paul felt that this programme has been well positioned to respond and adapt to the challenges it presented. As noted, since the school closures, many have moved towards reading and it has been encouraging to see a renewed focus on this. More broadly, though, the last two years have shown how literacy in every subject and every aspect of a child’s life is crucial to their success.

“It is perhaps clearer than ever that literacy is important not simply to improve academic outcomes, but also the big lifelong benefits of it. The fact that you can live a happier, more contented life and make better relationships and understand those relationships because you have that lexicon with which to discuss your emotional life as much as anything else.”

Appendix 6: Science Writers in Schools evaluation

The Science Writers in Schools project, modelled on the School for Writers¹⁰ training course, provided secondary students with the opportunity to work with science writers such as journalists, science communicators, researchers and/or science-fiction writers to create their own piece of science writing. Our research shows that a child's enjoyment and motivation to learn are strongly linked with their attainment. For example, children and young people who enjoy writing very much are seven times more likely to write above the level expected for their age compared with those who do not enjoy writing at all (50.3% versus 7.2%)¹¹. Enjoyment of writing is therefore a key factor in improving writing attainment and, consequently, a child's chances of educational success.

Research has shown that giving children and young people a memorable experience, such as visiting a cultural venue or engaging with authors, can be an effective way of inspiring them.¹² Children who had an author visit their school reported higher levels of writing enjoyment (43.9% vs 32.4%) than their peers who didn't receive a visit, but only 1 in 4 (26.9%) students said they had a writer visit their school.

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) recommends more subject-specific support is given to promote disciplinary literacy, which is an approach to improve literacy across the curriculum. Further, they found that good literacy skills are crucial to closing the science attainment gap in the UK. Our Literacy for Learning programme seeks to address this through working with science teachers to build their understanding of literacy in their subject.

The Science Writers project was an innovative collaboration that brought together a range of expertise from different organisations to facilitate a multi-disciplinary approach to literacy. The collaboration included two National Literacy Trust programmes, **Literacy for Learning** and **Young Writers** from the **Linnean Society** (the world's oldest active society devoted to natural history), a group of science writers and professionals, and Booker-nominated author and literacy specialist Wyl Menmuir.

The aims of the project were to:

- provide opportunities for students to have a memorable experience (workshop) with science communicators and writers
- develop students' communication skills and enjoyment of writing in science
- ignite new and galvanise existing interests in the field of science communication
- develop science writer and science teacher confidence in broadening students' experience of popular science writing

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, all the workshops bar one were delivered online between May and July 2021.

10 National Literacy Trust. (2019). School for writers. literacytrust.org.uk/resources/school-writers

11 Clark, C. (2016). *Children's and Young People's Writing in 2015: Findings from the National Literacy Trust's annual literacy survey*

12 Education Endowment Foundation (2018), IPEELL: using self-regulation to improve writing (re-grant), November 2018, educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/ipeell

The process

Recruiting the writers

With the aim of exposing students to aspects of science writing that they may not have encountered, or even considered to be grounded in science communication, the National Literacy Trust, in collaboration with the Linnean Society, recruited 11 writers with a broad range of disciplines from acoustical and structural engineering to neurology.

All these scientists were accustomed to and skilled in writing for a range of professional purposes including academic papers, science-based social media accounts and journalism, as well as drama and comedy events. These writers were recruited to the project to learn how to use their expertise to inspire young people, and to develop their skills in working with secondary-school-aged students, particularly those in disadvantaged areas.

Training the writers

- The writers attended a series of workshops run by the National Literacy Trust and led by author and literacy specialist Wyl Menmuir. The workshops explored how to work effectively with secondary schools and how to design and deliver an online writing workshop.
- These sessions were followed up by one-to-one workshop planning sessions with the workshop leader, and a member of the National Literacy Trust and the Linnean Society team. In addition, each writer was assigned a mentor from either the National Literacy Trust or the Linnean Society for ongoing support with delivery of the workshops.
- Final workshop plans submitted by the writers were quality assured by the specialist team. In addition, mentors observed the online workshops and gave feedback in order to provide ongoing coaching and quality assurance.

Reach

- We worked with almost 2,000 students in 20 schools in Birmingham, Nottingham, the North East and North West.
- The science writers featured in the National Literacy Trust's Festival of Science and Imagination, which took place online in July 2021. There were over 350 logins to writer events during the festival week and more than 600 viewings of session recordings. A significant number of these login and viewing figures would have been from a whole class attending with a teacher signing in.

Outcomes for science writers

A focus group was conducted with the scientists to gather their experiences throughout the project. The science writers reported that the structured training and coaching process delivered by the National Literacy Trust and Linnean Society had developed their confidence in working with school groups:

"[There were] so many good ideas and suggestions that really boosted my confidence working with that age group."

They also cited improved knowledge, skills and understanding of how to plan and deliver writing workshops to secondary students:

“They helped give me ideas that I wouldn’t have considered in terms of the writing workshop because I didn’t have that writing experience.”

They welcomed and felt that they benefited from the ongoing coaching and feedback of their planning and delivery:

“Science Writers in Schools has been a really fantastic initiative to be a part of – thank you for making it happen and for your support and encouragement, particularly in my first schools’ workshop. Both Wyl’s training beforehand and your kind positive feedback afterwards really boosted my confidence.”

As a result of their improved confidence and skills development, many scientists also stated that the project will impact the work they do in the future, such as broadening the groups of people they work with and in extending their portfolio and scope of work:

“I’m now looking to extend my schools’ workshops offering as part of my freelance portfolio.”

“I previously exclusively would only work with or for adults [and now] feel a bit more confident about [working with young people].”

“I think it’s made me confident to do more workshop formats.”

Outcomes for students

The limitations of COVID-19 on face-to-face contact meant that we were unable to conduct in-person focus groups with students. Instead, the 60 facilitating teachers were surveyed to ask them about the impact of the project on their students. Results from these surveys, alongside feedback emails from teachers, indicate that all teachers rated the workshops as either good or excellent. In their feedback, teachers also commented on how their students found the sessions engaging and informative:

“Very engaging! Alex grasped the attention of the students and delivered a really effective lesson into becoming a science writer.”

Comments also highlighted the interactivity of the sessions as a positive element. Teachers reported that students enjoyed being able to ask questions and directly interact with the science writers:

“The fact that they were getting immediate responses to any questions they asked was a real positive.”

“They (the students) were hooked by the idea of a successful female engineer talking directly to them. They loved being able to ask questions and were interested in the key words linked to concrete.”

Legacy

Further opportunities for science writers

In addition to the science writers working with the schools, they were invited to present at the National Literacy Trust’s Festival of Science and Imagination, which, as noted earlier, reached hundreds of teachers. We are looking to engage them further in our 2022 festivals, with different science-related themes including STEM, environment, and careers in STEM.

Furthermore, we invited one science writer to deliver an online training session to staff at the National Literacy Trust. Not only did this give that writer a further opportunity to build their practice in delivering work to non-specialists but it also helped National Literacy Trust staff understand the importance and implications of literacy in different subjects in secondary school, which is a key concern across much of our work. In engaging the science writer in this way, we were able to raise the profile of science and literacy, releasing potential for its inclusion in other programmes and resources across our work. For example, one participant asked the speaker via the Zoom chat to recommend science-fiction books that might be used in our reading programmes:

“Thank you! I was wondering if you have any science fiction writers you are a particular fan of? Maybe for young people especially?”

Looking forward, we would like to explore further opportunities to collaborate with the Linnean Society to continue and grow this work.

Conclusion

In summary, this project gave students the opportunity to write and speak like scientists, improving their skills and understanding of what literacy in science subjects looks like. It also helped students understand that science professionals can come from all sorts of routes, in turn building their aspirations for a career in science or science writing.

While the restrictions of COVID-19 meant that face-to-face activity was limited, the team were able to deliver online sessions and give over 2,000 students direct access to experts in some of the most cutting-edge areas of science. This reach was increased through an online conference accessed nationwide by whole classes of students.

Alongside this, the scientists themselves were given the knowledge and understanding to translate their work into a school setting. Not only does this expand their portfolio of skills to widen the reach of the work they do, it also helps build the literacy skills and aspirations for the next generation of science communicators.

As evidenced by the wider Literacy for Learning programme and campaign, the National Literacy Trust is committed to building literacy skills in different subjects through our disciplinary literacy activities. We approach this both through working directly with students, teachers and, in projects like this, with subject specialists too. We have worked with a range of STEM specialists to develop **CPD for teachers** in these subjects, where we explore the role of academic language so that teachers can help their students read and write like experts. Alongside this, our partnership with the Linnean Society has enabled us to build a project that utilises the expertise and excitement of effective science communicators to build the science and literacy skills of young people while continuing to develop a sector-wide understanding of literacy within the curriculum. We look forward to building on the legacy of this project.

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About the National Literacy Trust

Our charity is dedicated to improving the reading, writing, speaking and listening skills of those who need it most, giving them the best possible chance of success in school, work and life. We run Literacy Hubs and campaigns in communities where low levels of literacy and social mobility are seriously impacting people's lives. We support schools and early years settings to deliver outstanding literacy provision, and we campaign to make literacy a priority for politicians, businesses and parents. Our research and analysis make us the leading authority on literacy and drive our interventions.

Literacy is a vital element of action against poverty and our work changes life stories.

Visit literacytrust.org.uk to find out more, donate or sign up for a free email newsletter. You can also find us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter.

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