

VOTESFORSCHOOLS & ORACY

Guidance for Education & Teaching Staff

CONTENTS

Oracy is fast becoming one of the focal points of education. Voice21, the UK's leading authority on oracy in schools, have devised their own framework that breaks oracy skills down into four distinct but interlinked strands. The framework also highlights the ways in which improved oracy opportunities can help break down important social, pedagogical, and emotional barriers.

This document outlines VotesforSchools' natural synergy with Voice21's framework and the opportunities the programme provides for staff to develop sophisticated oracy skills in students.

03 WHAT WE MEAN

04 WHAT WE DO

05 WHY WE DO IT

06 HOW WE DO IT

10 HOW YOU DO IT

12 WHERE TO FIND US

VotesforSchools supports a range of curriculum and policy areas; more information about these areas, which include British Values, character education and SEND & accessibility, can be found on your Teacher Dashboard.

WHAT WE MEAN

When we talk about oracy in schools, we are referring to students' ability to articulate their ideas, build knowledge, and interact with their peers through speaking, listening and communication.

Under the oracy skills umbrella are four interlinked strands, as per Voice21's framework:

1. physical
2. linguistic
3. cognitive
4. social & emotional

Use of VotesforSchools in schools helps support students to develop all of these skills in different ways that will be elaborated upon in this document.



WHAT WE DO

Each week, VotesforSchools provides schools with resources to facilitate discussion and debate on a real-life issue that is relevant and engaging to young people. These discussions reinforce schools' curriculum offer across areas such as PSHE, personal development, British Values and Prevent while simultaneously developing crucial speaking, listening and communication (oracy) skills.

These skills are not only improved on a peer-to-peer level, but also between students and staff; the resources are designed so that staff do not need any prior knowledge or experience of the topic at hand, meaning they can focus solely on engaging with their students and understanding these issues from their perspective.

We are firm believers in the power of student voice to enact positive change, and this begins with classroom conversations. The result of each debate is sent to external stakeholders, and their feedback is then shared with students. This emphasises the importance of speaking up about what matters and gives students confidence that their views carry weight.





WHY WE DO IT

Knowing how to communicate effectively is a key skill that all students should have the chance to develop. This is precisely what VotesforSchools provides, and schools that use the programme have reported transformational impacts.

“One of the best decisions we made to improve oracy within our school. We love it and rave about it to every single teacher and school we meet.”

Primary school

“VotesforSchools has transformed my lessons! Students love the fact that their voice really does matter and that important organisations are sent their opinions.”

Secondary school

HOW WE DO IT

VotesforSchools aligns with the four strands that make up the oracy skills defined in Voice21's framework. The result of mastering these key skills is confident, articulate communicators who can engage meaningfully with complex topics and diverse viewpoints. This applies across all key stages and settings.

Strand 1: Physical

VotesforSchools lessons naturally develop physical oracy skills through structured discussion activities:

- **Finding their voice:** Weekly debates require students to speak clearly to a range of audiences including partners, groups and whole classes. This allows them to develop appropriate volume and pronunciation for different contexts.
- **Learning body language:** Presentation opportunities within VotesforSchools lessons encourage students to use suitable body language when sharing ideas, expressing viewpoints, or leading discussions.
- **Expressing themselves:** The interactive nature of VotesforSchools discussions naturally develops engagement skills as students are encouraged to maintain eye contact and responsive facial expressions.



Strand 2: Linguistic

The platform's focus on current affairs provides an array of contexts for linguistic development:

- **Using their words:** VotesforSchools topics range from climate change to the cost of living, AI to anti-racism, naturally expanding students' vocabulary with topic-specific terminology and mature discourse.
- **Reading the room:**
Students learn to adapt their language for different audiences from peer discussions to formal presentations of voting outcomes. As a result, they develop a sensitivity to formal and informal contexts.
- **Questioning effectively:**
The debate format encourages students to use persuasive devices, metaphors, and structured arguments to support their viewpoints effectively. Schools are also provided with a range of display materials to help reinforce these techniques consistently across the curriculum.



Strand 3: Cognitive

VotesforSchools is a proven tool for developing higher-order thinking skills:

- **Choosing wisely:** Students engage with carefully-crafted lessons on real-life issues, learning to select relevant information and judge what content is most compelling for their arguments.
- **Working together:** The platform's discussion format requires students to actively listen to each other and to respond thoughtfully to their peers' contributions. They also hone collaborative thinking skills that help them to build on others' views (both within the classroom and beyond).
- **Establishing structure:** The weekly VoteTopics provide clear and consistent frameworks for students to organise their thoughts and present coherent arguments on complex societal problems.
- **Thinking critically:** The Yes-No questions presented each week ask students to question their own pre-existing ideas on a topic, and to remain open-minded to changing these views. The information provided to contextualise these questions challenges students to examine ideas critically and constructively.
- **Justifying themselves:** The voting process requires students to have courage in their convictions and use evidence and reasoning to support their ideas and opinions.





Strand 4: Social & emotional

VotesforSchools creates powerful opportunities for social and emotional oracy development:

- **Taking turns:** The structured weekly discussions students participate in through the lens of a real-life issue teaches them to manage conversations respectfully, ensure all voices are heard, and recognise the value of their own contributions.
- **Listening actively:** The platform's emphasis on having "informed, considered discussions" requires students to listen carefully to diverse viewpoints. This is presented as a necessary step towards forming their own opinions, rather than an unnecessary detour.
- **Making themselves heard:** With as many as 60,000 young people voting each week, students recognise that their voices are contributing to a national conversation and they feel confident of their ability to impact policy and practice.
- **Knowing their audience:** Students learn to tailor their communication for different groups or contexts, from classroom peers through to the wider community of stakeholders that sees their voting results and accompanying comments.



HOW YOU DO IT

VotesforSchools is specifically designed to be used consistently across the whole school in order to provide the most optimal results for students and staff. Below are some suggestions of how to successfully embed it in your setting.

1 FOLLOW A CORE LESSON STRUCTURE

Below is a proposed structure that utilises all four oracy skills strands. It is based on the usual trajectory of the lessons:

- **Opening discussion** | Students practice voice projection while sharing their initial thoughts
- **Information analysis** | Students examine the contextual information shared at the beginning of the lesson to better understand the relevant vocabulary and key issues
- **Structured debate** | Students can apply all oracy skills while exploring different perspectives
- **Voting & reflection** | Students justify choices and reflect on learning.

2 UTILISE CROSS-CURRICULAR LINKS

VotesforSchools lessons are mapped to a variety of curriculum areas, which supports oracy development across a range of subjects, not just in designated speaking and listening sessions. By utilising the weekly curriculum guides provided alongside each topic (as well as the half-termly curriculum overviews) you can track how oracy is being embedded across the school and how it is supporting effective delivery of other statutory duties.

3 BUILD IN ASSESSMENT OPPORTUNITIES

VotesforSchools provides natural assessment opportunities aligned with Voice21's principles as well as other areas of the curriculum:

- **Formative assessment** can be carried out during observations of weekly sessions
- Students have opportunities for **self-reflection** when justifying their points of view
- During collaborative activities, students can engage in **peer assessment**
- Students can use the VoteDiary provided as part of VotesforSchools for **progress tracking** of their oracy skills.



WHERE TO FIND US

If you would like to know more about the information outlined above, please contact us:



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