Thomas Telford School

Whole School Literacy and Catch up Policy

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Aims

The aim of this policy is to provide clear guidance, challenge myths and misconceptions and promote practices that have been validated by empirical research. In 2017 17.5% of the Year 7 cohort entered the school with a spelling age below their chronological age. 5.5% had a reading age below their chronological age. Although it is usually perceived as a specialist area in secondary schools, literacy pervades every area of the academic curriculum. Illiteracy has a negative impact on comprehension and writing in all subject areas. This inevitably leads to poorer examination performance.

A significant minority of our pupils struggle to access the reading material that is integral to the academic curriculum of the school. The new GCSE and A level specifications have raised the demands placed upon our pupils and the vocabulary requirements needed for success. Literacy is simply the ability to read, write and communicate properly. If someone is literate in a language or discipline, they are able to understand and communicate within it fluently. Here we see a connection between Literacy and our own subject areas. We are all Literacy teachers because the language in which we communicate is English. Therefore we are all responsible for the literacy of our students; we must teach the language of our subjects alongside the knowledge.

The English Department use a number of strategies to ensure that vocabulary, reading and writing are taught effectively. A rigorous intervention scheme supports those who are identified as needing extra support on entry. However, it is vital that literacy is taught in a more structured way in all subject areas for all pupils. Reading is the primary medium for gaining academic knowledge so it is important that every teacher has the necessary expertise to teach literacy effectively.

Knowledge

The importance of knowledge in the curriculum cannot be overstated. In recent years subject knowledge has been excluded in favour of transferrable skills. This has had the unfortunate effect of proliferating educational inequality. Pupils with a better general knowledge are more likely to understand reading material. Also, if pupils don't know a topic well, they can't write about it in an informed way. Therefore, knowledge is vital for improving literacy. We must teach the knowledge and academic language needed to be successful in each subject area in school. Not only will this make pupils more literate, it will enable them to be more successful in the subjects we teach.

Vocabulary

Alongside socio-economic status, a child's vocabulary is the significant factor influencing the chances of achieving the desired outcome in terminal examinations. Vocabulary size relates to academic success, and schooling is crucial for increasing the breadth of children's vocabulary (Ofsted 2018). A developed vocabulary not only improves reading and comprehension but it also encourages more accurate and sophisticated writing. Experts have sorted vocabulary into three categories:

Tier 1 – everyday words (people, good, other, happy)
Tier 2 – important academic words used frequently across the school curriculum (assess, examine, enquire, contrast)
Tier 3 – subject specific vocabulary (polynomial, allegro, photosynthesis)

All Departments have developed a list of key academic and subject specific vocabulary to be taught in their subject areas. A list of Tier 2 vocabulary is also available on the Shared Area and should be promoted and modelled by all staff. Vocabulary needs to be taught explicitly and clearly with coherent planning throughout the curriculum. Regular retrieval practice should be used to ensure key vocabulary is embedded in the long term memory and can be used accurately in oral and written communication.

Year 7 Intervention Programme

All pupils currently take a test on entry to identify their spelling and reading ages. Those who are identified as performing below the required standard at the point of entry to secondary will be targeted in a number of ways within English and other subject areas. This will include:

- Smaller group / focus group teaching
- Learning Support assistance
- Session 3 programmes as required
- Differentiated resources and lesson activities
- Relevant reading catch-up programmes
- Frequent progress assessments

Students are extracted from their English sessions to receive reading and writing instruction from a specialist English teacher. These sessions focus on improving vocabulary, fluency, pronunciation, confidence and grammar. 6.1 students volunteer to become 'Reading Mentors'. This involves listening to Year Seven students read on a one to one basis, prompting, supporting and encouraging them where necessary. The Year Seven students all enjoy the experience and our 6.1s find it incredibly rewarding. The progress of these students is checked to ensure the transition to Key Stage 3 is effective, preparing them for the demands of all subject areas.

Guidance

When formulating a whole school approach to literacy departments are encouraged to consider the following questions:

- How challenging are the reading texts that we expect pupils to read and understand in our lessons?
- What background knowledge do we need to teach so that our pupils can understand these texts?
- What vocabulary do the pupils we teach need to know, understand and use to be successful in our subject areas?
- How do we select and teach the vocabulary we have identified as important?
- How can we explicitly teach our pupils to write about the subject content they have mastered in a more structured manner?

Once this information has been carefully considered, the following strategies can be implemented with the relevant guidance and support:

Vocabulary Instruction

- Develop a list of key academic and subject specific vocabulary to be explicitly taught in all subject areas.
- Teach academic vocabulary explicitly and clearly, with coherent planning throughout the curriculum.
- Promote and scaffold high quality academic talk in the classroom.

Writing Instruction

- Promote, model and scaffold high quality academic writing.
- Give clear, focused instructions when setting writing tasks and avoid the ambiguous language of assessment criteria and examination rubrics.
- Model and deconstruct examples of excellent writing.

Feedback

- Expect all written work to be proofread before it is submitted.
- Use the proofreading code that is available on the shared area.
- Use feedback more effectively for teaching literacy as well as subject content.

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This guidance needs to be supported by promoting a knowledge rich curriculum to develop stronger reading and writing in all subject areas. It is important that we choose curriculum content that builds our pupils' cultural capital in order to address educational inequality. This content should be revisited and tested frequently to consolidate and secure it in the long term memory. Once our pupils have mastered this curriculum content they will be in a much stronger position to read and write about it in an accurate and effective way.