

Ashmole Trust Blog

How Oracy and Debating
Are Transforming Learning
Across Ashmole Trust

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How Oracy and Debating Are Transforming Learning Across the Ashmole Trust

As with many state secondary schools, Ashmole Academy has had some small successes with debating over the years: reaching regional finals; individuals who have stood out in poetry competitions, etc. However, these were too few given our talented student body, and the general feeling was that many students lacked confidence in public speaking, and some lacked the confidence contributing to class discussion.

Addressing this has become a Trust priority, and our two main aims have been:

- Develop the oracy skills of all pupils to increase inclusivity
- Broaden student engagement with debating as an opportunity to hone key oracy skills

Establishing a Shared Oracy Framework

We developed a set of non-negotiables for oracy in the classroom: simple, research-led expectations that work in all year groups and can be easily adapted to meet the disciplinary needs of any subject.

These were complemented by a brilliant programme designed by the Academy's Literacy Lead and delivered in every Personal Tutor session, training students in the finer details of high-quality oracy. They tackled intonation, eye contact, listening with kindness and more, skills—which empower students to feel confident to engage in lessons and the world around them.

Every student then delivered a presentation to their form showcasing the skills they had learned.

Igniting a Passion for Debating

To ignite a passion for debating, we increased the number of clubs across our schools. They quickly became popular as we discovered students were eager to share their voices with others, enjoying the deep thinking that debating brings.

We benefit from having an ex-Oxford Union graduate on the staff, and he helped us to engage with opportunities we previously hadn't. Students (and the staff) involved relished the chance to pitch their talents against much more experienced individuals, and the passion grew.

Growing Opportunity Across Phases

We expanded our programme to include debate training for our Primary schools and they have now successfully competed with other schools and are eager to try again.

Our Academy Senior team won the Bingham Cup in the summer of 2025, a notable recognition of how far the students had come in a short period. This team now supports the development of younger students, sharing their experience and skills.

Oracy Club and Inter-School Collaboration

Oracy Club is the latest step in broadening opportunities for all. In an effort to give more students the chance to refine skills against unfamiliar opponents, eight schools from across North London met at Ashmole Academy in February for our first local inter-school debate competition.

Twenty-two teams of students ranging from Year 7 to Year 12 met for the sheer pleasure of respectful discussion and critical thinking, and we hope this will be the first of many similar opportunities. A similar event will run in April for our local Primary schools.

Why This Matters

Current research suggests that our young people need a broad set of skills to complement their academic achievement: curiosity, adaptability, analytical thinking and emotional intelligence. We believe many of these are encapsulated in the process of debating and oracy.

As a vital part of our provision, it is crucial that students feel confident to articulate their ideas to others and shared practise is one of the best ways to provide this for all.

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