# Fenland and East Cambridgeshire Priority Area

## School case studies

The case studies were collated and written by Prof Riikka Hofmann's research group
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The case studies in this document were written based on school leader interviews conducted in March 2025 and schools' documentation about their Priority Area projects.

The case study interviews explored project starting points, the identification and analysis of key problems to be addressed, the design of the projects, their implementation and mechanisms supporting it, outcomes to date and key learnings.

The exploration and analysis of the school case studies, as reported here, was informed by research on change mechanisms influencing school's implementation of research-informed interventions to enhance equitable learning outcomes (Hofmann, 2024) and findings from earlier analyses of school projects in the region during the preceding Opportunity Area programme (Hofmann & Ilie, 2022).

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## Case Study: Nene School & Ramnoth Junior School

### The school and the challenge: Reading, vocabulary, and writing in lower KS2

Nene and Ramnoth are neighbouring infant and junior schools in Cambridgeshire, co-located on one site and serving around 560 pupils aged 4 to 11. The schools identified persistent challenges in early reading, vocabulary, and writing. While phonics instruction had already seen investment, the schools were looking to deepen reading culture, extend vocabulary, and build writing stamina, particularly in lower Key Stage 2.

### Analysing the sources of the problem to inform the intervention

#### *Improving phonics fidelity sustained early gains*

The schools had already introduced the *Little Wandle* phonics programme but needed to maintain fidelity to that scheme through staff training. Priority Area support enabled continued training for staff across EYFS, KS1, and lower KS2, reinforcing a consistent phonics approach and shared language. This included explicit modelling, consistent application of the *Little Wandle* phonics approach throughout the school, and an evaluation of the book stock to ensure quality. As one staff member reflected, “It’s a huge thing to help a love of reading that you open a book, and it doesn’t fall apart, and everyone has the same thing.”

#### *Talk for Writing and oracy development gave structure to vocabulary and expression*

The schools noted that vocabulary instruction was not embedded across subjects, students lacked confidence in using a range of vocabulary in both spoken and written communication, and they had limited first-hand experiences to support purposeful writing.

To raise writing outcomes, the schools introduced Talk for Writing (T4W) across all phases. Teachers and teaching assistants received training to ensure consistency in teaching strategies and build a shared language. TAs appreciated accessing the same development as teachers: “Sometimes TAs will move between classes, and being able to use different skills to support different students in accessing their learning has increased our adaptability and inclusion as a result.”

In the second year, the schools invested in a whole-school Voice 21 membership to support oracy and language development. Teachers created structured opportunities for students to speak, using sentence stems and deliberate oracy strategies. Oracy practice began influencing other subjects as well.

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## Outcomes of the intervention so far

### *Staff confidence and practice improved through a shared approach*

Training and follow-up support helped embed adaptive classroom practice and consistent expectations across the school. Teachers reported a deeper understanding of T4W story mapping, modelling, and feedback. Vocabulary was embedded through curriculum themes and visual displays, and writing tasks were planned with clear audiences and purposes.

In phonics, staff confidence grew as teachers and TAs used *Little Wandle* resources and catch-up sessions effectively. Surveys showed a growing sense of capability and clarity among staff in delivering both phonics and writing lessons.

### *Student voice and vocabulary are visibly improving*

Teachers observed that pupils became more deliberate in their speaking and writing. Oracy strategies helped students grow in confidence, engage in structured discussions, and express themselves with greater precision. As one leader described, "Voice 21 is not just a short-term project; this is something we're investing in over years to help our children leave primary school able to articulate themselves and stay safe."

Reading and phonics attainment improved in EYFS and KS1, laying stronger foundations for later learning. Vocabulary and spoken fluency supported pupils' reading comprehension and writing, particularly in lower KS2. Books showed stronger sentence structure and editing, and students began using feedback more independently.

## Mechanisms facilitating/hindering change

### *Staggering the rollout prevented overload and protected quality*

Leaders were intentional about sequencing initiatives. T4W was introduced first, while the oracy programme began a year later. This allowed each new approach to take root before the next began. Leaders balanced strategic ambition with a realistic sense of staff capacity: "The school has to be at a point where they can actually take something else on."

### *Leadership and staff worked in step to embed change*

The executive headteacher and vice principal led the strategic implementation, aligning new approaches to the broader curriculum vision. The phonics lead oversaw training and catch-up provision, ensuring no child was left behind. Teachers and TAs committed time to training and adjusted planning to align with new strategies. Training sessions often ran after school, after their regular teaching meetings, demonstrating the depth of staff commitment.

### *Families are part of the journey*

Parental engagement increased, with record attendance at phonics information meetings. Leaders plan to extend this further, helping parents support oracy and vocabulary development at home.

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## Important learnings

- **Vocabulary needs deliberate teaching**. Oracy and writing improved when teachers planned opportunities for language use and made vocabulary visible.
- **Whole-school approaches build consistency**. T4W and phonics succeeded through shared training and modelling.
- **Sequencing change matters**. A staggered approach protected staff energy and supported deeper implementation.
- **Oracy is not an add-on**. Making speaking visible and deliberate helped prepare pupils for secondary school and beyond.
- **Shared leadership supports sustainability**. Senior leaders, teachers and TAs, and families worked in alignment to deliver change.

The schools used their Priority Area funding to strengthen and embed literacy practice. They have since extended their investment with a further three-year membership to Voice 21, signalling a commitment to long-term change grounded in student voice, vocabulary, and writing confidence.

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