Develop students’ ability to read complex academic texts

• Training focused on teaching reading is likely to help secondary school teachers teach their subject more effectively.
• To comprehend complex texts, students need to actively engage with what they are reading and use their existing subject knowledge.
• Reading strategies, such as activating prior knowledge, prediction and questioning can improve students’ comprehension.
• Strategies can be introduced through modelling and group work, before support is gradually removed to promote independence.

Break down complex writing tasks

• Writing is challenging and students in every subject will benefit from explicit instruction in how to improve.
• Teachers can break writing down into planning, monitoring and evaluation, and can support students by modelling each step.
• Targeted support should be provided to students who struggle to write fluently, as this may affect writing quality.
• Teachers can use a variety of approaches, including collaborative and paired writing, to motivate students to write.

Combine writing instruction with reading in every subject

• Combining reading activities and writing instruction is likely to improve students’ skills in both, compared to a less balanced approach.
• Reading helps students gain knowledge, which leads to better writing, whilst writing can deepen students’ understanding of ideas.
• Students should be taught to recognise features, aims and conventions of good writing within each subject.
• Teaching spelling, grammar and punctuation explicitly can improve students’ writing, particularly when focused on meaning.

Provide opportunities for structured talk

• Talk matters: both in its own right and because of its impact on other aspects of learning.
• High quality talk is typically well-structured and guided by teachers.
• Accountable talk is a useful framework to ensure talk is high quality, and emphasises how talk can be subject specific.
• Teachers can support students by modelling high quality talk, for example including key vocabulary and metacognitive reflection.

Provide high quality literacy interventions for struggling students

• Schools should expect and proactively plan to support students with the weakest levels of literacy, particularly in Year 7.
• Developing a model of tiered support, which increases in intensity in line with need is a promising approach.
• Assessment should be used to match students to appropriate types of intervention, and to monitor the impact of interventions.
• Creating a co-ordinated system of support is a significant challenge requiring both specialist input and whole school leadership.

Prioritise ‘disciplinary literacy’ across the curriculum

• Literacy is key to learning across all subjects in secondary school and a strong predictor of outcomes in later life.
• Disciplinary literacy is an approach to improving literacy across the curriculum that emphasises the importance of subject specific support.
• All teachers should be supported to understand how to teach students to read, write and communicate effectively in their subjects.
• School leaders can help teachers by ensuring training related to literacy prioritises subject specificity over general approaches.

Provide targeted vocabulary instruction in every subject

• Teachers in every subject should provide explicit vocabulary instruction to help students access and use academic language.
• Effective approaches, including those related to etymology and morphology, will help students remember new words and make connections between words.
• Teachers should prioritise teaching Tier 2 and 3 vocabulary, which students are unlikely to encounter in everyday speech.
• Teachers and subject leaders should consider which words and phrases to teach as part of curriculum planning.

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