Prioritise ‘disciplinary literacy’ across the curriculum

Provide targeted vocabulary instruction in every subject

Develop students’ ability to read complex academic texts

Break down complex writing tasks

Combine writing instruction with reading in every subject

Provide opportunities for structured talk

Provide high quality literacy interventions for struggling students

• 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.

• 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.

• 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.

• 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 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.

• 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.

• 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.

• 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 coordinated system of support is a significant challenge requiring both specialist input and whole school leadership.