NAME	Speakers Trust
SUBJECT	Speaking confidence
SCHOOL	1,000+ state schools in England
CLASS	213,355 students over 7 years

Who gets heard?

Speaking confidence in England's state secondary schools, 2026

Fewer than 1 in 4 young people in England's state secondary schools feel confident speaking in front of a group. In the classrooms left out, it is fewer than 1 in 7.

Where we are, why it matters and how to ensure every young person leaves school a confident speaker

LOOK INSIDE →

SpeakersTrust
Speak and Be Heard

NOVEMBER 2026

WHO WE ARE

Speakers Trust is the national charity that gets young voices heard.

We help young people, especially those who have faced disadvantage, find the confidence and skills to speak up, and we create platforms for them to be heard.

We start with confidence, because young people who don't believe their voice matters rarely use it. This year we are working with 40,000 young people in 700 state secondary schools across every region of England, many in the most disadvantaged areas, and with their teachers. In one school day, a trained facilitator takes a class of 30, including many who would never put themselves forward, from talking in pairs to each giving a speech on a subject that matters to them. We usually work with more than one class in each school, and in some with the whole year group. Many start with little or no speaking confidence, and we measure the change in every one of them.

Beyond the classroom, young people speak to their school at assembly, to their community at local and regional events, and to MPs in Parliament through My Maiden Speech, nominated by youth charities across the country. Over 21 years, more than 600,000 young people from over 1,000 state secondary schools.

WHERE THE DATA COMES FROM

213,355
young people since 2019, the same questions every time

4 million+
answers from young people about speaking

700
state secondary schools this year, every region

Every young person rates their own confidence on paper, at the start and end of the day, linked to their school: so it can be broken down by school, free school meals, region and gender. Notes on page 15.

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

79%
more confident speaking to others

Independently evaluated. In a University of Cambridge-led programme for Year 9s using our workshops, students' oracy scores rose significantly against a control group, on an assessment built from the Oracy Framework.

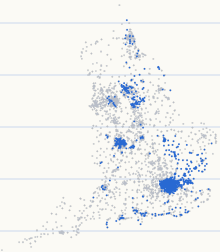
THE POLICY MOMENT

Oracy is to have equal status with reading and writing in the national curriculum. *"Nobody left out because they can't speak up."* Lucy Powell, Education Secretary, 15 October 2026. This report sets out where young people start from.

Speakers Trust workshop data since 2019. Evaluation: neaco, *Raise Your Words* 2024/25.

Fewer than 1 in 4 young people in England's state secondary schools feel confident speaking in front of a group.

More than a third, 37%, have little or no confidence at all.



Since 2019 we have asked more than 200,000 young people, mostly in Year 10, the same question at the start of every workshop:

"How confident do you feel when you speak in front of a group?"

Every dot is a state secondary school in England. **Blue:** schools we have worked in since 2019, in every region.

THREE THINGS TO KNOW

Speaking confidence is unequal, it lasts, and it can be built.

WHO IS LEFT OUT	**9 vs 4**	confident speakers in a class of 30: affluent boys in London against less affluent girls outside London. *p. 7*
WHY IT MATTERS	**82% vs 30%**	Twelve years on, 82% of confident school leavers still are. Only 30% of the rest have caught up. *p. 8*
WHAT WORKS	**4 → 10**	After one school day, the classroom left out has more confident speakers than the privileged one has today. Skills, empathy and belonging rise with it. *p. 14*

WHAT WE ARE CALLING FOR *p. 14*

Every young person should leave school with the confidence to speak in front of a group. Today, fewer than 1 in 4 do.

Back schools to build it, starting with those left out, and measure it every year.

Speakers Trust data since September 2025: 40,000+ young people, weighted to England's state secondary pupils.

Edition 1 · v3 · November 2026

11 in a class of 30 feel comfortable speaking up in class

QUESTION 1 · IN CLASS

"I usually feel comfortable speaking in this class."

Answering questions, discussion, group work: the oracy of every lesson.



At their desks: a typical class of 30 in England

- **11 comfortable** (7 to 10)
- 14 in between (4 to 6)
- 5 with little or no comfort (1 to 3)

> *"I became more comfortable talking … even when I stutter."*
>
> Girl, London · 42% free school meals

> *"With the increase of technology, social media and social isolation (when not online) these valuable skills are not being practiced by students naturally. They need to be explicitly taught the communications standards of the real world."*
>
> Teacher, Barnsley · 49% free school meals

Now ask them to stand up

Speakers Trust data, weighted to England. Quote: Speakers Trust teacher survey, 2024.

7 in a class of 30 feel confident speaking in front of a group

QUESTION 2 · IN FRONT OF A GROUP

"How confident do you feel when you speak in front of a group?"

Presenting, debating, interviews: standing up and being heard.



At the front: the same class

- **7 confident** (score 7 to 10)
- 12 in between (4 to 6)
- 11 with little or no confidence (1 to 3)

In 2019/20, the year Covid closed schools, it was 4 in 30. It has risen since.

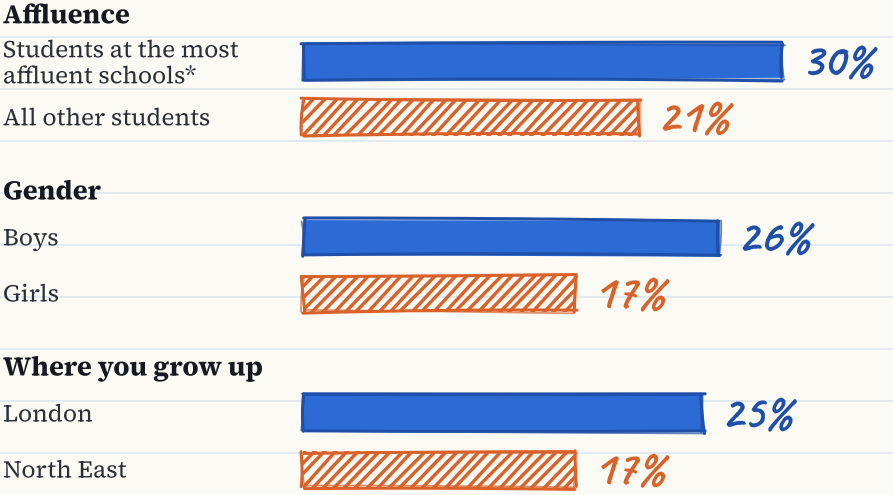
> *"Many students lack the confidence to articulate themselves in front of a group, especially if they are in front of strangers. They need to be secure that their voice matters."*
>
> Teacher, Essex · 23% free school meals

That average hides who is left out. →

Speakers Trust data since September 2025, weighted to England. Quote: teacher survey, 2024.

Gender, geography and affluence are determinants of speaking confidence.

Share of young people who feel confident speaking in front of a group (7 or more out of 10):



Independent schools are not in our data; we would welcome the chance to compare.

> *"All the fee paying schools near here foster communication skills... Closing the oracy gap between the state and private sector will make society a fairer and equitable place."*
>
> Teacher, Brighton · 23% free school meals

Put the three gaps together. →

Speakers Trust data since September 2025, weighted to England. *Schools with under 10% of pupils on free school meals.

An affluent boy in London is more than twice as likely to be a confident speaker as a less affluent girl outside London.

A privileged classroom



A classroom left out



9 affluent boys in London

4 less affluent girls outside London

● confident (7–10) ● in between (4–6) ○ little or no confidence (1–3)

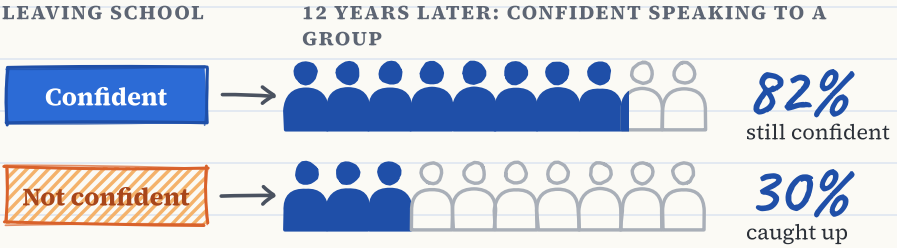
Being less affluent, a girl and outside London each lower the number. Together: from 9 confident speakers in 30 to 4.

> *"...the idea of having a voice and that voice being valued is incredibly important to young people, especially those from a deprived background where this may be the first time they feel that way."*
>
> Teacher, Birmingham · 76% free school meals

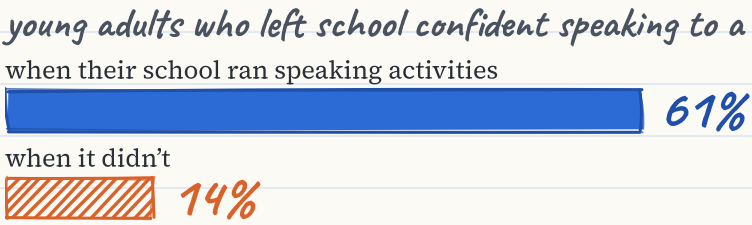
And it doesn't fade after school. →

Speakers Trust data since September 2025, mixed schools, weighted to England. Affluent: under 20% of pupils on free school meals; less affluent: 40% or more.

82% of those who leave school confident are still confident 12 years later. Only 30% of the rest catch up.



YouGov asked 2,010 adults aged 18 to 39, for Speakers Trust, how confident they were speaking to a group when they left school, and how confident they are now. School made the difference:



The real cost won't be found in GCSE grades. It shows up years later, in job interviews, at work and in life. For most young people, if school doesn't build these skills, nothing later does.

> *"...pupils often leave school without the ability to speak confidently and so go into adulthood without being able to make their voices heard."*
>
> Teacher, Dorset · 33% free school meals

What young people want →

Sources: YouGov for Speakers Trust, 2,010 adults aged 18–39, March 2026; Speakers Trust teacher survey, 108 teachers, March–April 2024.

38% of 13 to 18 year olds want more help at school with their communication skills.

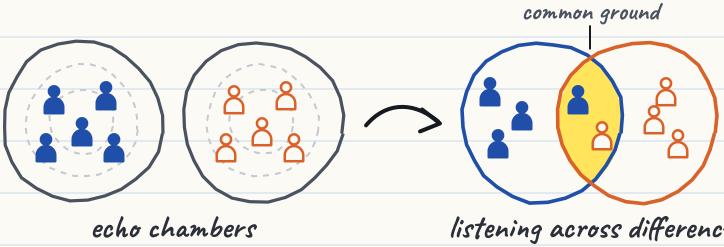


nearly 4 in 10

> "Having a chance to speak out in front of a group, which is rarely something you have a chance to do in everyday life."
>
> Girl, Ealing

> "Being able to communicate and use it as a skill in the future."
>
> Girl, Croydon · 51% free school meals

And it matters beyond them. 75% of teachers have seen speaking and listening bring better social cohesion.



> *"It goes beyond job skills; it's about building kind, thoughtful and cohesive communities where differences of opinion can be debated rather than us all being divided into echo chambers."*
>
> Teacher, Peterborough · 38% free school meals

> "everyone expressing different beliefs and opinions"
>
> Boy, Manchester · 50% free school meals

So what works? →

Sources: Survation for BBC News, 2,000 aged 13–18, October 2026; Speakers Trust workshop feedback, 2026; Speakers Trust teacher survey, 108 teachers, March–April 2024.

We have been building young people's speaking confidence for over 20 years, and have learned what works.

Over 21 years and 600,000+ young people, we have learnt what builds speaking confidence. The closing speech uses all four strands.

OUR WORKSHOP, MAPPED TO The Oracy Framework from Voice 21 & Oracy Cambridge	Physical	Linguistic	Cognitive	Social & emotional
1 **Build connections** Games, movement and pair talk build safety: everyone speaks early.	●	◐	○	●
2 **Speak on the spot** Big questions, answered out loud with an opinion and reasons.	◐	●	●	○
3 **Tell a story** A personal story to a small group, with feedback from peers.	◐	●	◐	●
4 **Build a speech** On a topic they care about: a hook, three points, a close.	○	●	●	◐
5 **Speak out** To the whole group. At least 1 in 5 then get more chances to speak, at assembly and at regional events.	●	●	●	●

● major focus ◐ also included ○ not the focus

Underpinned by our five teaching principles

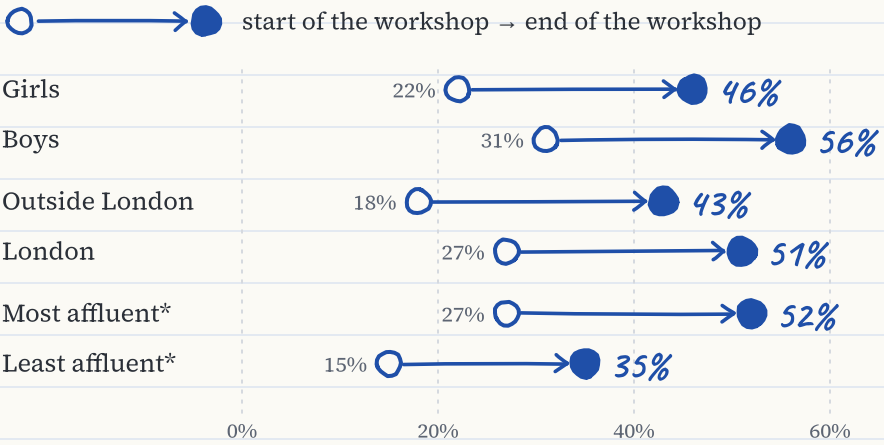
Try	*Shrink*	*Build*	*Play*	*Show*
safe to have a go	their voices fill the room	one step bigger each time	on their feet, moving	modelled, not lectured

Does it work? →

In one workshop, the share of confident speakers doubles: from 25% to 50%.

Speaking confidence and skills can be developed. This half term, 8,206 young people rated how confident they feel speaking in front of a group, at the start and end of a Speakers Trust practical oracy workshop, led by a trained facilitator. Confident speakers rose from 25% (slightly above the national 22%, page 5) to 50%.

And the gaps narrow. Confident speakers, start and end:



Girls finish well above where boys started; young people outside London, well above where London started. Outside London, the least affluent more than double.

> *"There were a number of students who are typically quite anxious and shy that [now] felt able to speak in front of the class.* ***That isn't a small thing at all."***
>
> Teacher, Bristol · 24% free school meals

More than confidence: four outcomes →

Live data from this half term: 8,206 young people at 134 schools. *Schools outside London, by free school meals.

Speaking confidence unlocks the rest.

Being able to speak up with confidence is where success in work and in life starts, and where young people connect with each other and find they belong.



Confidence to speak

25% → 50%

confident speaking to a group, in one day (page 11)

> *"How to be confident even if I don't feel like it."*
>
> Girl, Bradford · 60% free school meals · confidence 3 → 9





Skills for work and life

92%

learnt skills for their next step

> *"It will help me with my future and career."*
>
> Girl, Sheffield · 72% free school meals



Empathy

95%

understand more about classmates' views, faiths and feelings

> *"The interaction between everyone and the respect we all shared"*
>
> Girl, Southampton · 59% free school meals



Belonging

31% → 57%

feel their opinions are heard and valued (page 13)

> *"When I said my speech, it showed me that my voice was heard and many people thought the same."*
>
> Girl, Lambeth

Teachers need confidence too. Many tell us they don't feel confident teaching speaking. Staff learn alongside their students, and we train teachers directly.

Beyond the workshop →

Outcomes: start and end of each workshop, this half term: 8,206 young people.
Evaluation: neaco, *Raise Your Words* 2024/25.

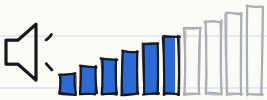
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Feeling heard connects young people to their community. With skills, confidence and a platform, it rises from under 1 in 3 to over 8 in 10.



31%

feel heard and valued at the start of a workshop



57%

by the end of the workshop



84%

young people speaking at a regional event, to their community

"I feel that my opinions and beliefs are heard and valued": 7 or more out of 10. Young people at regional events are a separate group.



When young people feel their voice matters, they have more of a stake in society. Speaking at assembly and at regional events takes their voices beyond the classroom, building connection and belonging with families, local leaders and strangers.

> *"It's important for young people like me to share our stories as there aren't many spaces in which youth voices are taken seriously."*
>
> Young person, Lambeth, after speaking at a regional event

> *"...It really boost my confidence. I'm actually making a difference, impacting someone else's life."*
>
> Young person, Salford, after speaking at a regional event

TEACHERS, ASKED WHAT GOVERNMENT SHOULD DO

> *"More platforms for young people to hear, speak and have their voices heard."*
>
> Teacher, Barking and Dagenham

> *"Recognise the imbalance in opportunities to hold meaningful and respectful conversations. Some children are at a serious disadvantage as a result of their background."*
>
> Teacher, Barnsley · 38% free school meals



93% of volunteer judges say hearing young people **changed their perspective**

> *"If you ever hear anyone saying that young people don't care about anything, bring them to one of the Speak Out events"*
>
> Volunteer judge, Central Essex

Workshops this half term (7,426); young people at regional events 2022–26 (364); judges 2024–26 (466); teacher survey 2024.

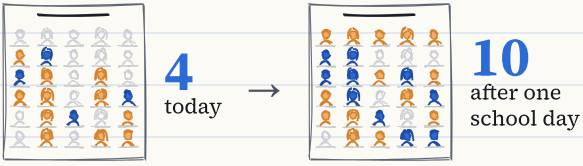
Every young person should leave school with the confidence to speak in front of a group.

Today, fewer than 1 in 4 do.

BUILD IT

Back schools to build it, starting with those left out.

Poorer pupils, girls and young people outside London are the least likely to be confident. Our evidence shows that confidence and skills can and should be explicitly nurtured.



MEASURE IT

Measure it every year.

Build the evidence base continually on the state of speaking confidence in schools, how it is developed, and the individual and societal benefits.

> *"Learning that my voice matters."*
>
> Boy, Barnsley · 32% free school meals · confidence 3 → 6

WHAT WE BRING

21 years of a proven programme that has built speaking confidence in more than 600,000 young people. Seven years of detailed data on how confidence is built, who misses out, and how it shapes young people's wellbeing, relationships and prospects.

Where the data comes from →

Speakers Trust data, weighted to England's state secondary pupils; half term workshops, Sept–Oct 2026, 8,206 young people.

ABOUT THIS DATA

The same question, asked the same way, of 213,355 young people.

Every young person in our workshops answers the same short questions on paper, from 1 to 10, at the start and end of the day: 213,355 since 2019, mostly in Year 10, in more than 1,000 state secondary schools in every English region. 7 or more counts as confident. Answers are read and recorded individually, more than 4 million in all.

WHAT IT CAN BE BROKEN DOWN BY

Each answer is linked to the young person's school, so the data can be broken down by school; school characteristics such as the share of pupils on free school meals; region and local area; gender; and year, since 2019. We would be glad to share it at any of these levels.

HOW THE NATIONAL FIGURES ARE MADE

National figures are weighted to England's state secondary pupils by region, gender and free school meals. "Half term report" pages use matched start and end answers from 8,206 young people, September to October 2026.

WHAT IT CAN AND CANNOT TELL US

Schools choose to work with us, so this is not a random sample, but it is large, national and consistent. Confidence is young people's own rating: that is the point of asking them, and it is why we also report the University of Cambridge-led controlled evaluation of oracy skill. The YouGov findings on adults are associations, measured on average 12 years after school.

OTHER SOURCES

YouGov for Speakers Trust (2,010 adults aged 18–39, March 2026); Survation for BBC News (2,000 aged 13–18, October 2026); our teacher survey (108 teachers, 2024); neaco, *Raise Your Words* (2024/25).

What young people tell us, across England

Confidence · Skills · Empathy · Belonging



1 **CONFIDENCE**
"I have improved my confidence and felt more comfortable talking."
Girl, North East · 38% FSM

2 **BELONGING**
"...the most rewarding thing I've ever done in my life. It makes you feel listened to as a young person."
Young person, North West, after speaking at a regional event · 40% FSM

3 **CONFIDENCE**
"When I started I was petrified to express myself but now I feel as if my opinion matters."
West Midlands · 45% FSM

4 **EMPATHY**
"To understand and respect people and that there are other people going through much more"
West Midlands · 29% FSM

5 **SKILLS**
"Learning composure, and how to come across well in interviews."
Boy, Essex · 35% FSM

6 **BELONGING**
"That I could speak up about things I want to speak up about ... without feeling judged."
Girl, London · 59% FSM

7 **BELONGING**
"Feeling comfortable, accepted and being myself around my peers."
Girl, South West · 31% FSM

8 **BELONGING**
"Everyone listened"
Boy, East Midlands · 28% FSM

600,000+ young people in 21 years · **1,000+** state secondary schools · every region

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