

The Link

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**DYSLEXIA AND
SPEECH AND
LANGUAGE
DIFFICULTIES**

**– Is there a
connection?**

**INTRODUCING A BUDDY
BENCH TO YOUR SCHOOL**

**WHAT IS AUDITORY
PROCESSING DISORDER?**

- how may it affect learning?



3

Raising Awareness of DLD

4-5

Dyslexia and Speech and Language Difficulties**Is there a connection?**

By Rachael McMullen, Education Manager,
British Dyslexia Association

6

What is ResearchSEND?

By Michelle Haywood, founder of
ResearchSEND

8-9

What is Auditory Processing Disorder?**How may it affect learning?**

By Dilys Treharne, Specialist SLT, APLLS

10

From One TA to Another**Introducing a Buddy Bench to your School**

By Claire Chambers

12-13

Case Notes**Noah's Story**

By Derry Patterson,
Speech and Language Therapist

14

Ask a Therapist**What does Phonological Awareness mean?**

By Shelley Parkin, SLT

Editor's Letter

The Link magazine is published by Speech Link Multimedia Ltd and posted FREE of charge to all UK primary schools. We aim to provide helpful speech and language articles for any school staff supporting children with SLCN.

In this issue 13, the British Dyslexia Association has contributed an article on **Dyslexia and Speech and Language Difficulties**, a complex subject for SENCOs and teachers seeking to identify exactly why a child in his/her class is struggling. Rachael McMullen writes about any similarities and differences between dyslexia and SLCN and provides helpful tips for a communication friendly classroom.

Auditory Processing, a potential factor in dyslexia, is developed further by Dilys Treharne, specialist SLT in her explanation **What is Auditory Processing Disorder? And how may it affect learning?** Her classroom suggestions for how to support children identified with this disorder are useful for all schools.

Speech Link Multimedia Ltd works with several organisations which focus on SLCN either directly or indirectly and we hope that

interested SENCOs and teachers will be inspired to investigate them further. **NAPLIC** and **ResearchSEND** both have upcoming conferences, which may be of use should you wish to develop your knowledge of SLCN or research skills.

Our regular articles, **From One TA to Another** and **Ask a Therapist**, return with Claire sharing her experience of introducing a place in school for children with SLCN to open up and talk and Shelley explaining **What is Phonological Awareness?**

As always, please do contact us if you have a subject that you would particularly like us to present in a future issue of *The Link* magazine.

Finally, may we blow our own trumpet? We are thrilled that Infant Language Link, one of our SLCN support packages, has been shortlisted by BESA for its ERA Awards 2019. It is a privilege to be recognised by the British Educational Suppliers Association as a tool for leadership, management and assessment. The gala awards ceremony will be held on 22nd March so we're breaking out our best dresses - wish us luck!

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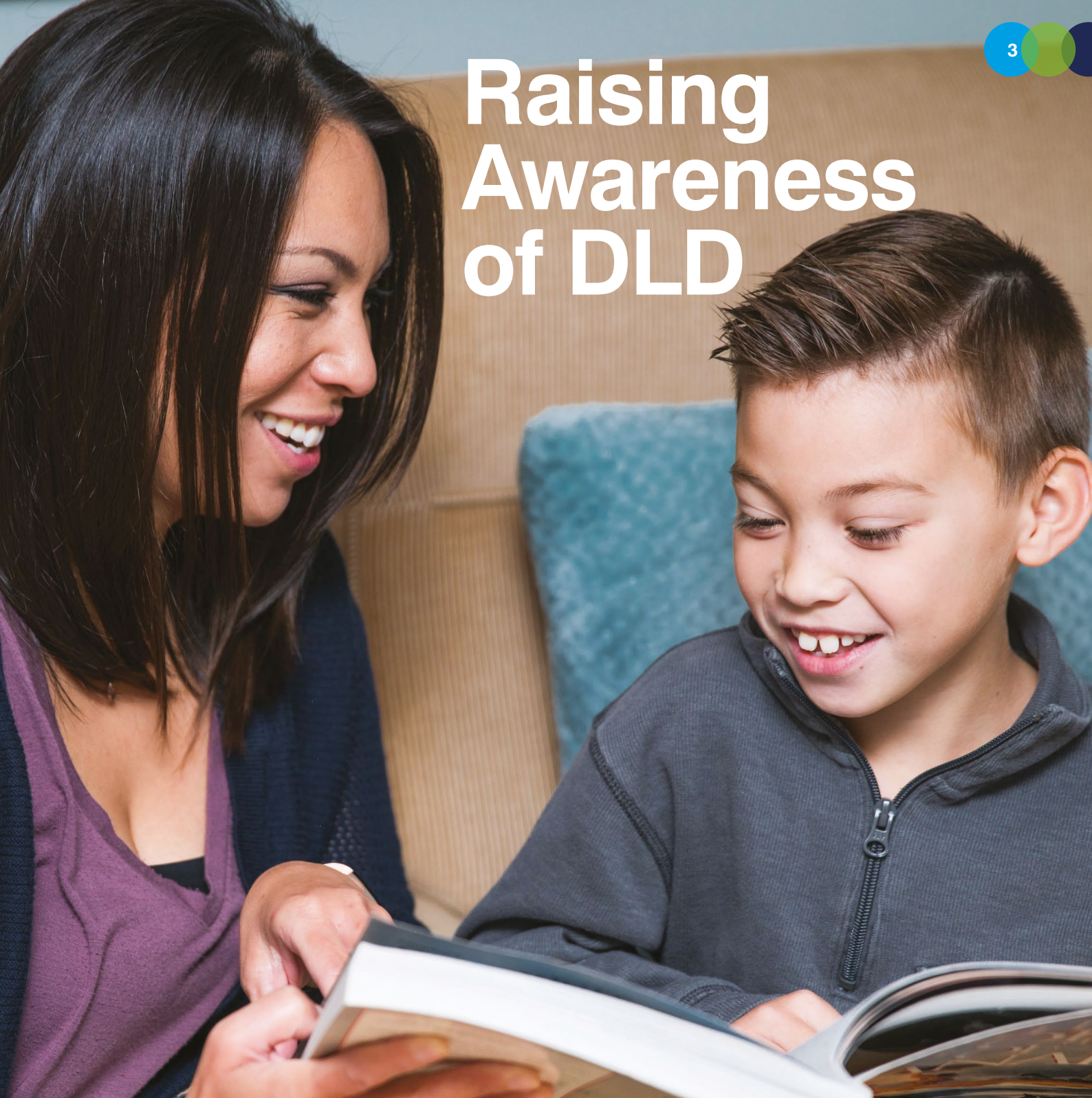
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Raising Awareness of DLD



What is DLD?

Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) is a diagnosis given when a child or adult has difficulties talking and/or understanding language, where there is not any known cause for the language difficulty.

DLD is not always easy to spot but it affects approximately 2 children in every classroom. Unsupported it can have serious impacts on literacy, learning, friendships and emotional well-being. It is a lifelong condition which children just 'don't grow out of' so identification and support are essential. Many

students who exhibit behaviour or reading difficulties may have DLD.

Finding out more with NAPLIC

To watch a great video, go to www.naplic.org.uk/dld, or attend NAPLIC's conference on May 11th, 2019 in Birmingham. Details are at www.naplic.org.uk/conferences.

Finding out more with RADLD

An international day for raising awareness of DLD will be held on October 18th, 2019. For details, visit www.radld.org.

NAPLIC

Professionals supporting language and communication development



DYSLEXIA AND SPEECH AND LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES

– IS THERE A CONNECTION?

Rachael McMullen, Education Manager, British Dyslexia Association



Dyslexia – a learning difficulty affecting accurate and fluent word reading and spelling – is based in language. Its roots lie in phonology, the sounds in speech which are the fundamental components of language and which children need to perceive and blend together to make words when they read, and break up in words when they spell. Mapping these sounds to letters is at the core of learning to read and spell. Enhancing a child’s phonological awareness of how sounds make up and break up words, and how letters relate to sounds, improves their ability to decode words when reading and encode them when spelling.

Learning to read is not just about decoding a word. Successful reading requires both decoding and language comprehension. We read to understand, to get meaning from the strings of letters, and to do that we need language skills. Understanding of vocabulary and grammar plays a key role in comprehending both oral language and what we read. Once words are decoded we use our oral language skills to understand what the writer is communicating.

Even when a child can decode words well, persistent difficulties with understanding language, causes problems comprehending what they have read. Weak oral language skills are one of the main contributors to reading comprehension difficulties and improving language skills and vocabulary knowledge is crucial in developing reading for meaning. Training children in the relationship between letters and sounds improves decoding skills, but we must not

focus only on phonics and neglect language development.

So, both phonological awareness and language knowledge contribute to reading and children who have difficulties in both these areas are at greater risk of developing reading problems. However, not all children with speech and language difficulties have dyslexia. Dyslexia is one of a group of specific learning difficulties and a child whose writing and reading skills are in line with their spoken language skills may have broader difficulties with learning rather than dyslexia. And not all children with dyslexia have problems with spoken language – dyslexia is primarily a difficulty with written language and many children with dyslexia have good verbal skills. It is often the difference between a child’s

HOW CAN WE MAKE THE CLASSROOM MORE COMMUNICATION FRIENDLY?

ability to verbally express interesting and complex ideas and their difficulties with reading or spelling which is the first sign that they may be dyslexic. For these children their good knowledge of language can be a compensatory factor and can help them to have good comprehension of text even when they find it difficult to read fluently. Listening to audio books and accessing text through text to speech software is a way of developing their love of 'reading' even when they find the mechanics hard.

Dyslexia and difficulties in speech and language share very similar cognitive processing characteristics. Phonological awareness, verbal memory and auditory processing

their heads will present challenges in the classroom. When spelling a child needs to pull individual sounds in words apart and hold them in memory when writing them down. This is demanding of verbal memory and for children with deficits in this area, spelling will be difficult.

Being able to process complex language or a series of instructions at speed is crucial in the learning environment. Children may need extra time to process information and store it in long term memory before that information is lost, or to process instructions, formulate answers to questions, or both. They will have difficulties reading unfamiliar words, particularly at speed and this will



speed all underpin communication and difficulties in these areas are features of dyslexia.

A child with weak phonological awareness may not be able to hear individual sounds and manipulate them to create new words, and they will find sounding out words to read or spell them challenging. Rhyming games, breaking words into syllables or blending syllables, breaking words into individual sounds and asking children to manipulate sounds in words are all great ways of building phonological awareness.

A child with verbal memory difficulties will struggle to transfer the meaning and sounds of new words from their short-term memory into their long-term memory. Following instructions, remembering information and working on it in

impact on reading comprehension - being able to read fluently without pauses and gaps improves our comprehension of what we read.

As with children with communication difficulties, every child with dyslexia is unique and individuals vary in the severity of the difficulties they face. For any child, it is important to understand their individual needs and the strategies they are using successfully to support their own learning. Despite sharing many of the same characteristics, no child is the same even if they do meet the criteria for a diagnosis of dyslexia and/or a speech and language difficulty – knowing the child well is key to putting in place relevant and effective support.



TOP TIPS

- ✓ Support pupils in processing verbal information by
 - removing noise distractions,
 - making sure the classroom is completely quiet when giving instructions
 - building in quiet working time
- ✓ Use pupils' names to focus their attention before you give instructions
- ✓ Give instructions one at a time and in the right order to help with verbal memory difficulties.
- ✓ Monitor your own language and avoid complex vocabulary and figurative language.
- ✓ Moderating the pace of your speech will help pupils think about what they are hearing and keep pace with the information being given.
- ✓ If a pupil does not appear to understand, repeat what you have said in the same way rather than rephrasing it which merely gives the pupil another set of language to understand. If this doesn't work then try simplifying it and check pupils' understanding at regular intervals.
- ✓ Allow pupils more time to make sense of what they have heard and to formulate an answer – even if the wait feels uncomfortably long!
- ✓ Above all, make things visual - introduce new vocabulary with visual support, and show what you want them to achieve through visual representations of tasks. Show pupils as much as you tell them.

What is ResearchSEND?

Michelle Haywood, founder of ResearchSEND, provides an overview of ResearchSEND, its journey, what it does and invites us to attend future dates

ResearchSEND was developed in February 2017 to promote the importance of research in meeting the needs of learners with SEND through events, collaborations, publications and research projects.

Over the last year it is possible that you have read about ResearchSEND in publications, attended a national ResearchSEND Conference or seen ResearchSEND represented within other conferences such as The Space events run by The Chartered College of Teaching and NasenLive.

ResearchSEND was developed to be three strands:

Researching the bigger picture

set out to consider research undertaken across the educational landscape and research undertaken by large research organisations such as EEF and large-scale work undertaken by Universities.

New researchers, New voices

encourages teachers undertaking their own personal research to have the space to share that work. Contributions for this strand have come from trainee teachers on PGCE courses undertaking specialist SEND modules, the National SENCo Award and Schools who have undertaken research for the first time.

ChangeMonday focuses on how research can inform classroom practice in terms of supporting pupils with SEND, whilst examining the different sources of research and how to access them. Many examples include continuous professional development and the use of journal clubs to create a research centred culture through discussion around different types of research to support learners with SEND.

Overall ResearchSEND has started to explore what it means to be a teacher researcher. During our

events and presentations, we regularly discuss how to read and respond to different types of research, as well as encouraging participants to try some research out for themselves. We have focused on quashing myths, such as all research has to be published in peer-reviewed journals, and exploring re-occurring research terminology, such as **quantitative** and **qualitative** data, in a **sequential mixed method**, so that teachers can undertake their own small-scale research and inquiry.

We have promoted different ways to research and support good practice, by the use of social media, such as the use of Twitter to ask colleagues about good practice and examining more traditional methods of interviewing, observing and the use of questionnaires.

We know when supporting learners with SEND that we have a significant amount of research awareness, as much of the practice that informs our teaching in both Special and mainstream environments is based around sound judgments, which we gathered through experience of knowing what works and we should be celebrating and sharing this.

If we take Speech, Language & Communication Needs (SLCN) as an example, we often look to established research which has built up over the years, such as Sheridan's *Birth to Five Years*, which is a key piece of work on the developmental progress of pre-school children, and has been used to inform a number of different

publications and assessments such as the *Schedule of Growing Skills*, of which one of its nine areas is the assessment of expressive and receptive language. Most schools allocate about five days a year to whole staff development, of which several will often focus on delivering some aspect of curriculum content, while others will focus on statutory responsibilities and the operational aspects of the role. Very little of this time, if any, is spent on translating research findings into effective classroom practice.

Using identified and published pieces of research can transform practice, and when teachers undertake their own research, it changes not just what teachers do but what they think as well. The use of research contributes to gains in knowledge and encourages reflection and analysis of personal performance and in doing so, helps to understand and improve outcomes for learners.

For SENCOs and SEND Leaders in School, research knowledge is invaluable in providing evidence of the success of research-based interventions but there is no doubt that undertaking continuous professional development (CPD) which impacts on practice is a challenge, with limited time to undertake it and other demands on time getting in the way. ResearchSEND is attempting to fill this gap.

Come and join the debate at our next ResearchSEND event. We are currently putting together the agenda for our 15th June event in London. Please save the date.

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What is Auditory Processing Disorder? How may it affect learning?

Dilys Treharne PhD, MSc, CertMRCSLT
Specialist Speech and Language Therapist at APLLS

Have you ever been to a talk, conference or a meeting with speakers who talk quickly while presenting new concepts? There is also some noise outside with people talking and setting out tables and cups for coffee or maybe lunch.

At the end of the talk could you identify and remember the key points being presented? Did your attention drift at any point during the session? If there were several speakers like this during the day how tired did you feel by the end of the afternoon?

These are the problems experienced by some children and adults with auditory processing difficulties (APD). Although a teacher may be speaking relatively slowly and clearly, many children with APD require more time to recognise sounds and words and to process a sentence. As a result,

they miss part of what is said and so do not understand the information or the task to be completed.

Background noise exists everywhere and is important for establishing our location and mindset. Once we have done that, we can ignore the ambient noise. In a classroom noise seeps in from outside and is present from movement within the room, dropped pencils, feet moving, children shifting in their seats while working, central heating pipes and fans, computers and smartboards. An apparently quiet room is really quite noisy. Download a decibel

meter onto your smartphone and measure the levels in your classroom. Most people can ignore these irrelevant sounds which are the fabric of the classroom and focus on the target speech, but some cannot. Complex noise from a mixture of sources and of different pitches and volumes can mask or hide parts of the teacher's speech making it difficult to follow. Most listeners can fill in the blanks using stored knowledge of language, probability and contextual information. People with auditory processing difficulties are less likely to be able to do this. Slow processing of sound and problems with background noise are the most frequently occurring features of APD but there are others. All

10 SIGNS OF POSSIBLE AUDITORY PROCESSING DIFFICULTIES IN SCHOOL

This is not an exhaustive list but are the difficulties most frequently found in the children attending APLLS clinic for assessment. Few children will have all these problems. It is essential to obtain a full assessment from a suitably qualified and experienced clinician in the field of Audiology or Speech and Language Therapy if you suspect a problem.

1. Complains of not being able to hear the teacher but when tested hearing is satisfactory
2. Has difficulty following instructions and requires frequent repetition
3. Copies other children and requests help from them
4. Appears to day dream /lose attention often worse in group settings
5. Problems become more noticeable from year 3/4 as teaching becomes more class based.
6. Difficulty with reading and/ or spelling
7. May have problems expressing himself clearly in speech or writing. Grammatical and sequential errors.
8. May present with some features of Dyslexia but does not fully fit the picture.
9. Problems at school are at odds with perceived cognitive ability
10. Problems with rhythm and pitch discrimination noticeable in music activities and possibly speech.

cause difficulty in understanding instructions and information. Concomitant problems of short working and processing memory add to the difficulties.

We initially learn language by hearing it spoken and poor processing of speech can lead to language problems. The most frequent ones related to APD are difficulties with the less stressed, short and weak aspects of language such as tense endings and pronouns. There may be difficulties in plurality when the number is indicated in the verb form rather than noun such as

The fish is swimming, or the fish are swimming.

Due to the problems with auditory processing, reading and spelling may also be affected.

Children (and adults) with auditory processing problems may also have processing difficulties in other areas such as visual processing and movement. Research shows that as many as 16% of children may have sensory processing problems affecting one or more modalities (Mukherjee 2014).

The problems experienced by the child may produce difficult behaviours which must be managed sensitively. Auditory processing disorder can co-occur with behaviours associated with the autistic spectrum, attention problems and developmental language disorder. It is important to determine the primary problem producing or contributing to these behaviours.

How can I help this child at school?

It is important to obtain a full assessment, so a tailored programme of support and intervention can be prepared. In most cases the child will need support throughout their educational journey and even into the workplace.

- Modify the environment
Preferential seating: near the teacher, facing the teacher, away from disruptive or chatty children, and central heating, air conditioning, computer or smart board fans.
Use wall hangings, blinds or curtains, cloths on display tables, to reduce echo from hard surfaces unnoticed in normal circumstances but it does have a distorting effect on sound.
Rubber feet on metal chair and table legs, soft floor covering to absorb noise
- A personal fm system will help many children but a full assessment is needed before going down this route.
- A trained teaching assistant to check child's understanding by asking him to what he has to do rather than just repeating the instruction
- If instructions or information needs to be repeated use slow speech in short sentences or phrases allowing processing between them.
- Use visual support whenever possible such as pictures or written notes or demonstrations.
- Pre-teach key words so the child recognises the them in lessons
- Check the homework diary, provide pre-prepared sheets to be stuck in the diary or have it available on a pupil website.
- Reduce the amount of homework bearing in mind it takes the student with APD longer to complete any task involving reading or writing, learning spellings etc
- Be prepared to use alternative methods to teach reading and spelling.
- Additional teaching in some subjects may be necessary
- Allow use of a laptop for written work for older primary and secondary age pupils. Some will

benefit from a reader and /or a scribe.

- Additional time for tests and examinations is usually needed and can be arranged for national tests
- A quiet room for tests to avoid problems with background noise
- Be aware that apparent loss of attention is usually due to information overload. A quiet corner for respite can be helpful.
- Computer rooms, swimming pools, high ceiling halls and gyms cause particular problems

At first glance this seems a very long list of adjustments, but they are mostly easy to arrange and once organised become part of the daily routine. Using the appropriate support for the student at any age reduces demands on teaching staff and resources. It also means that the individual can enjoy learning and achieve his potential. Many people with APD go on to complete training courses, apprenticeships and higher education, entering into professions or work that suits them and enables them to become successful members of society. Without the support in the early years this does not happen, and children drop out of education as soon as they can.

There is no single cause of APD for various reasons the brain connections develop differently. APD affects all social groups and all levels of intellectual ability.

Information sessions and courses are run from time to time by professionals working with children with sensory processing problems. These may be advertised on the SENCO Forum, the BSA website or local special needs interest groups.

From One TA to Another

Introducing a Buddy Bench to your School

By Claire Chambers

Despite staff and parents making every effort to ensure school is a welcoming, stimulating and exciting environment for all pupils, school can be a lonely place for a child without a friend to play with and talk to. If this child's communication skills are not at the same level as their peers', initiating conversations and making friends may be a challenge that is too difficult to manage alone.

At break times this challenge is heightened. We all have seen the child standing by themselves, watching a group play together and desperately trying to act as though they are happy on their own. Another child spoils others' games by not behaving appropriately and is then ostracised by their peers. A shy child may be 'invisible' to children and, sadly, some staff too or perhaps the child has given up trying to be included by the other pupils and spends every break time clinging to the adults on playground duty. Is it any wonder that, for some children, these feelings of isolation and not fitting in can lead to more serious difficulties affecting mental health, attendance and behaviour?

With young people communicating more and more through their smart phones and tablets, it couldn't be timelier to remind all pupils of the value of communicating with their peers without these devices. A way of doing this is to create a designated place for communication; a space where face to face communication is demonstrated and supported.

An existing bench in a quiet location in the playground is an inexpensive option for schools. Perhaps the bench could be painted in bright colours so that children feel good using it. The 'communication' bench is not a new concept – we had one at the junior school I worked at. We had to be mindful that the bench didn't become known as a place where 'kids who haven't got any friends sit'. We had a week of assemblies focussed on introducing and promoting the bench to the school and in PSHE we explored feelings around friendships and why communication is such an important part of making a friend.

So how can a communication/buddy bench be successful?

Here are some ideas that may help your communication-friendly safe place become somewhere that your most vulnerable pupils will feel comfortable visiting - hopefully helping them develop new friendships along the way!

Monitor – a key staff member and buddies ensure that it is being used appropriately and help facilitate communication

Limit – avoid having too many pupils using the space at any one time so that it is not too overwhelming and pupils who need support are not ignored

Choose – allow pupils to book a time when they would like to use the bench - perhaps a post box in the hall where they can make a request?

Invite – pupils who have been identified

Explore – different ways of communicating through music, dance, signing, different languages, shared reading and of course, talking

Allocate – sessions so that pupils get a fair opportunity to visit the bench – perhaps each day of the week is set aside for a particular year group or class

Think – about an alternative space to use when it is wet play and cover staff who will take over if the regular member of staff is not in school.

Sustain – most importantly ensure enthusiasm doesn't tail off. Some children will be waiting for their turn...

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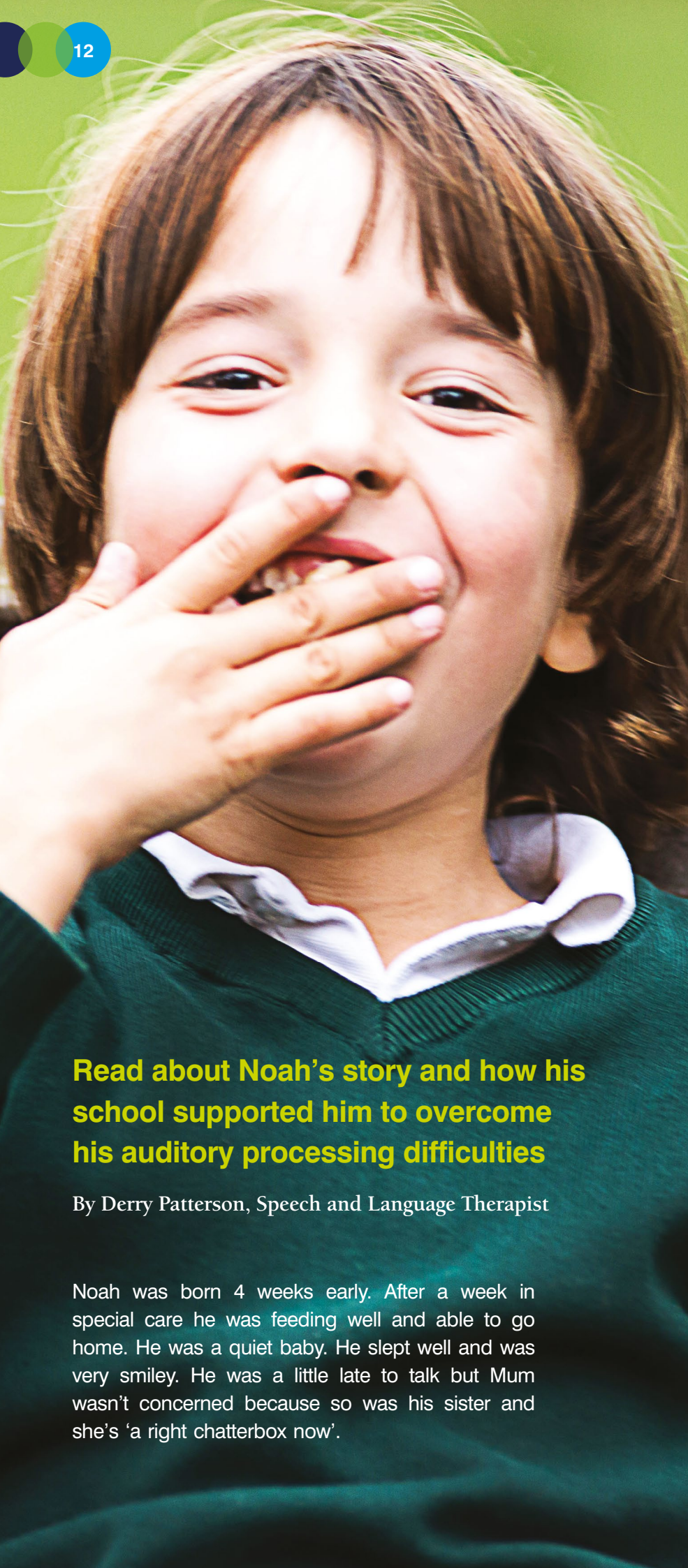
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Read about Noah's story and how his school supported him to overcome his auditory processing difficulties

By Derry Patterson, Speech and Language Therapist

Noah was born 4 weeks early. After a week in special care he was feeding well and able to go home. He was a quiet baby. He slept well and was very smiley. He was a little late to talk but Mum wasn't concerned because so was his sister and she's 'a right chatterbox now'.

Nursery

NURSERY

Noah started nursery when he was three. He was talking a little by then but staff reported that he needed some encouragement to join in. He never stayed long on any task and often copied what the other children were doing. He had one good friend who he followed around. Noah liked trains and was always happy to talk about 'Thomas the Tank Engine'. He could remember the names of all the engines. He sometimes didn't respond when staff were talking to him but when his hearing was tested he was fine.

What did the staff do? *Staff were concerned that Noah might not be understanding. They made sure they always got his attention by calling his name before giving him instructions. They showed him what to do and used lots of repetition. They played simple listening and language games to help develop his understanding and vocabulary skills.*





Case Notes

Infants

INFANTS

Noah found it hard to settle into school at first. He was very clingy and cried a lot for his Mum. It took him a long time to learn where to put things in the classroom. He was slow to learn his letters and performed poorly in the year 1 phonics test. He still liked trains and engines and was happy to talk about them but otherwise was very quiet in class. He preferred to watch what the other children were doing. His behaviour was not disruptive but he found it very hard to listen and concentrate. His year 2 teacher noticed that he seemed to be falling behind.

What did staff do? *Noah's school screened him for language difficulties in Year R and found that he was behind his peers. He joined a small group to work on listening and language games and he made very good progress. In year 1 his teacher gave him extra time to answer questions and complete tasks. She simplified instructions for him. He received extra support for phonics. In year 2 staff introduced some simple task management boards so Noah could keep track of the steps in each task. These worked well so his support was reduced. They noticed that when the support was withdrawn he fell behind.*

Juniors

JUNIORS

Noah continued to get extra help at school. Although his reading had improved he still found it hard to answer questions about text. His Year 4 Teacher thought he may be dyslexic but an assessment was inconclusive. She was concerned because she felt he should be doing better. Noah struggled with classroom instructions and always seemed to forget what he should be doing. He was not disruptive but often seemed to be distracted and unaware of what is going on around him. Noah really started to struggle in Year 5. He never seemed to be able to answer a question right. He became more forgetful and started to show signs of frustration. His Mum was concerned about how he would cope at Secondary school.

What did the staff do? *In year 5 Noah's teacher, Mr Hansen, made sure Noah sat near him away from any noisy children or distractions. He introduced some visual support to keep Noah on track during class. A visual timetable was used across each day and Noah continued to use task management boards and story planners for written work. The class TA always made sure Noah knew what to do by asking him to demonstrate or tell her. She helped Mum support him by writing in the homework diary daily. Mr Hansen made sure that he sent home a list of topic vocabulary before teaching any new topics.*

Secondary

SECONDARY

Noah found transition to secondary school hard at first and often needed some time out. He struggled to keep up the work and tried not to answer any questions in class. He had a small group of friends but seemed overwhelmed in larger groups. He was interested in computers but found games and PE challenging. He was often distracted in class but had learned to 'keep his head down and stay out of trouble'. At parents evening staff reported that he was difficult to engage and was a bit of a dreamer.

What did the staff do? *A transition support plan was put in place for Noah. He was paired with an older year 10 boy as his mentor. He showed Noah around the school and was often seen chatting to him in the dining hall. His year group tutor met with Noah once a week. She checked that staff were helping Noah complete his homework diary and contacted Mum by email to let her know what Noah needed to do. Noah continued to find it hard to listen and concentrate in lessons so the AENCo worked with his subject teachers to promote paired work and practical tasks in class. She also made sure he had a quiet space when he needed some time out.*

Noah has chosen his GCSE subjects. He wants to become a mechanic. He still loves trains!

Names have been changed.



Ask a Therapist

By Shelley Parkin, Speech and Language Therapist

QUESTION:

Can you explain what the term 'Phonological Awareness' means?

Answer: This is something that Speech and Language Therapists talk about a lot. It's a really important first step in learning to read, before letters are even introduced - so it should be encouraged to develop before Phonics instruction begins in school. Phonological awareness refers to the awareness of and ability to work with the sounds in the language you speak. This means

being able to tune in to the sounds in words, understand and generate rhyme, understand how words can be broken up into syllables, notice repetition of sounds (alliteration) etc. Children will usually be able to notice these things first before they learn to start manipulating the sounds and generating their own examples.

Children usually start to notice rhyme first and should enjoy nursery rhymes and stories with rhyming elements. Clapping out the 'beats' (syllables) in words is another fun one for younger children. They will start to notice phrases with the same sound repeated often, e.g. 'Seven silly sausages sat silently.' As their skills develop, they will begin to recognise and pick out individual sounds in words, e.g. 'What sound can you hear at the

beginning of cat?' Being able to pick out those individual sounds is called Phonemic Awareness - a subset skill of phonological awareness. A 'phoneme' is a distinct unit of sound within a language, which can be distinguished from other sounds, e.g. 'b', 't', 's'. It is trickier for children to master than rhyme and syllable clapping, but it's really important to be able to map sounds onto letters in order to learn to read.

Speech and Language Therapists often work on phonological awareness in conjunction with speech sound work, but in fact all children need to be developing these skills from a young age to support literacy development.

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