HAVE YOUR SAY

TAKE PART IN THE LINK SURVEY

SPOKEN LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION SPECIAL

CATCHING UP ON LANGUAGE
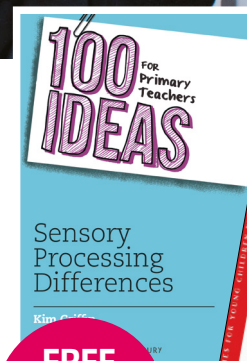By Jean Gross CBE, author of the best-selling book 'Time to Talk', published by Routledge.
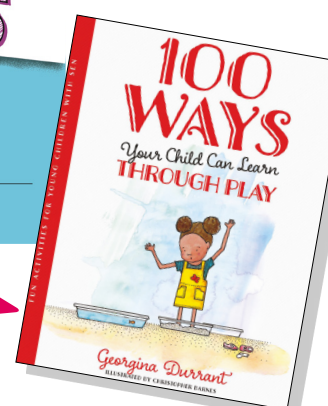
Page 14

RISING TO THE CHALLENGE
Straightforward ideas for supporting children with more complex SLCN in a mainstream setting.

Page 10

100 IDEAS FOR Primary Teachers

Sensory Processing Differences

Kim Griffin

FREE GIVE AWAYS

100 WAYS Your Child Can Learn THROUGH PLAY

Georgina Durrant

CONTENTS

**FREE
GIVE
AWAYS**

Editor's Letter

Welcome back, I hope you had a good summer break.

Concerns about children and young people's language development have received a lot of interest in the media recently. Our paper, "Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the receptive language skills of Infant children," has been accepted for the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) conference 2021 and the data from 50,000 Infant Language Link assessments contributed to the BBC report on the effect of lockdown on children's speech and language skills.

This issue focuses on spoken language and communication. Our articles aim to provide guidance for developing a joined-up approach, while working collaboratively with local speech and language therapy services.

Jean Gross CBE defines the different 'Waves' of SLCN support needed in school, along with why we should never underestimate the gaps in children's knowledge of 'easy' words on page 4.

Juliet Leonard looks at the current climate of SLCN support in schools and gives her advice on how to ensure the relationship between the speech and language therapist, the SENCo and the support package, provides the best support for your pupils, page on 5.

Findings from the recent #BuildBackBetterSLT survey, carried out by the RCSLT, "demonstrate why spoken language and communication must be the key element of the curriculum for children and young people of all ages and not just in the early years". "We believe a more joined up approach, starting in early years and throughout the school years is needed." On Page 18, Heather Stevens clarifies what this means in terms of our own practice, while our editorial on page 7-8 illustrates how Speech Link and Language Link fit the bill in providing 'joined-up' support for all pupils.

More and more children with complex needs are attending mainstream settings. In **Sophia Parinchy's** case study, page 10, she provides practical solutions that staff can use to support a child who is nonverbal and how practitioners can build on these solutions as progress is made.

Page 13 features two new publications packed with tips, activities and ideas to support children with SEN in play and through sensory activities. We have one copy of each book to give away!

Finally, we often want to test our children to check a child's understanding, but "modelling should take priority when teaching", say guest contributors, speech and language therapists, **Jade Dixon and Vicky Hitchman**.

Save the Date!
The Link Live '22 will be held on Friday 11th March next year, and we are delighted to announce that children's poet and author **Michael Rosen**, will be our very special guest speaker. Subscribe to **The Link News** e-newsletter to get an early bird discount code for your ticket.
www.speechandlanguage.info/linknews

Best Wishes
*The Speech and Language Link
Editor*

**HAVE
YOUR SAY**

We are inviting all schools to complete the **'Have Your Say'** survey, in order to gather your views on school-based SLCN support. See the back cover for more info.

ASK A THERAPIST:

5 Good Habits for Becoming an **SLCN friendly NQT**

By Sophie Mustoe-Playfair, speech and language therapist

Answer: It's fantastic that you want to start your career with communication needs in mind right from the outset! My best advice for teachers who are just getting started is to build good habits which, over time, will become so embedded in your teaching that you will support countless pupils, year after year, with ease.

1 Make a habit of your visual timetable
There's a reason why speech and language therapists are so keen to promote visual timetables. They can reduce anxiety, develop organisation skills, promote readiness for learning, extend attention and listening, support understanding, and more! To use them effectively, use meaningful symbols or photographs, break the timetable down into appropriate chunks, and refer to the timetable often, making it part of the routine when transitioning from one activity to the next.

2 Create opportunities for pupil talking
In most classrooms, the adults in the room will do far more talking than any of the children. But to support development of good language skills, children need to be given opportunities and *reasons* to talk for a range of different purposes throughout the day. Use strategies to support students to ask questions, make requests, comment, discuss and negotiate with adults and with one another.

3 Develop vocabulary – focussing on breadth and depth of word learning
To develop a wide vocabulary, children need more than just exposure to lots of new words, particularly if those children have SLCN. Children need to be exposed to a new word several times, hearing it repeatedly and in lots of different contexts to embed that word's meaning effectively. They need to make links between that new word and words that they already know. To make this a part of your practice, consider using a framework for introducing new words, thinking about the sounds, meaning and links (e.g. category), and build time for vocabulary into your daily classroom routine to ensure repeated exposure to words.

4 Know how to check understanding
Firstly, this means providing sufficient processing time for students to be able to understand – apply the 10 second rule for pupils with SLCN before you repeat, alter or add to what you've said. Then, avoid simply asking students "do you understand?". Pupils are likely to say "yes" regardless of their actual understanding. Instead, make a habit of asking pupils to tell you – or, even better, *show* you - what they have understood. This will paint a more accurate picture, allowing you to adjust your teaching accordingly.

5 Encourage independence in learning
Communication skills and independence in learning go hand-in-hand. Children need to be able to recognise and indicate when they do not understand something, and then seek support in an appropriate way. Make a habit of using visual confidence indicators as a universal strategy in your lessons to promote this skill.

CATCHING UP
ON LANGUAGE

By Jean Gross CBE, former government Communication Champion for children and author of the best-selling book 'Time to Talk', published by Routledge.

> "
> MY KIDS ARE SLOWLY LOSING THE ABILITY TO TALK TO OTHER PEOPLE."
>
> *That's what one parent said about the COVID lockdown period.*

As a result, we are seeing more children who struggle with language – too many children to refer to speech and language therapists, and a greater need to target therapy at the ones who need it most. So, more than ever we will need a 'Three-Wave' approach.

Identifying needs

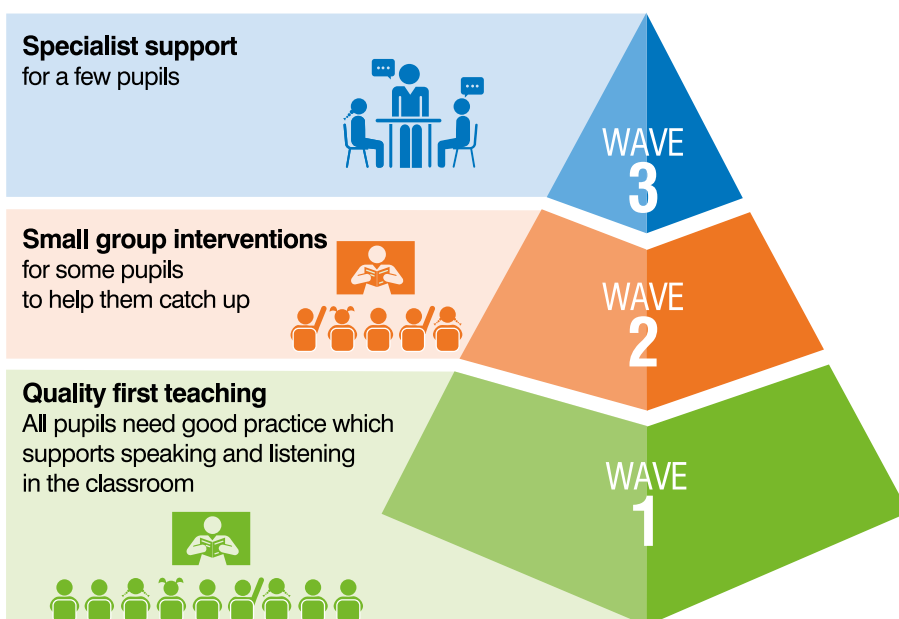How do we know who needs help, and at what Wave? Nationally, there is ever-increasing interest in tools to identify speech, language and communication needs. I've been involved in Public Health England's work on a tool called ELIM (Early Language Identification Measure) which health visitors are now using to spot two-year-olds with early signs of SLCN. Sadly, there isn't the same national policy for older children, but if you are using Speech and Language Link's tools you are well-placed to identify needs and target support accurately.

Myths and wrong turnings

When we look at Wave 1, I'm troubled by a trend in many schools to think we can close the word gap by simply introducing children to fairly randomly chosen new vocabulary – the 'word of the day' approach.

Teachers often focus on advanced 'wow' words, rather than the ordinary words that are useful right across the curriculum (Isobel Beck's Tier 2 words, or the 'Goldilocks' words in the 'Word Aware' books and training). This is a really important distinction.

Suppose children come upon the

Specialist support
for a few pupils

WAVE 3

Small group interventions
for some pupils
to help them catch up

WAVE 2

Quality first teaching
All pupils need good practice which supports speaking and listening in the classroom

WAVE 1

word 'incandescent'. It is a word they may enjoy, but are they going to need it regularly in their schooling? The word 'constructed', however, is going to come up in technology, in art, in literacy. So 'incandescent' should be briefly explained. But 'constructed' must be explicitly taught and practised until **everybody** can understand and use it.

We should never underestimate the gaps in children's knowledge of apparently 'easy' words. A headteacher told me recently how he asked a Y5 class who knew the meaning of the word 'fortnight' (as distinct from the computer game). Only two hands went up.

So we need to choose our words carefully, teach them and then return to them regularly. I always suggest we draw on the science of memory and use spaced practice, using quick 'word pot' games to review taught words at progressively greater intervals: at the end of the lesson, at the end of the day, at the end of the week, at the end of the half term, at the end of term and so on.

Another common misunderstanding is that wide independent reading is the best way for children to broaden their vocabulary. Unfortunately, to work out the meaning of unfamiliar words from context a reader needs to be able to read and understand 95-98% of the **other** words in a passage. Many children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) will be nowhere near this figure.

Reading aloud **to** children, of course, can overcome this problem, so increasing the number of 'read-alouds' is important right now. One school scheduled daily whole-school story time; in Term 1 teachers positioned themselves around the school with a favourite book to read aloud to groups, in Term 2 older children read to younger ones, and in Term 3 children within the same class were paired, with stronger readers reading aloud to partners. In another school, staff made videos of themselves reading favourite stories aloud and posted them on Facebook so that children could listen to them at bedtime.

👍 TOP TIPS

1. Teach vocabulary children will use right across the curriculum
2. Keep going back to words taught earlier, or they won't stick
3. Model new vocabulary yourself: "In the next *fortnight* – that means the next two weeks – our maths learning will be about…"
4. Reflect back what children say to you, adding extra vocabulary: "Oh, so your mum was going on at you, *criticising* you?"
5. Look at your timetable and see where there could be more opportunities for read aloud/paired reading sessions

THE **TRIANGLE** IS THE STRONGEST SHAPE

By Juliet Leonard,
speech and language therapist

Do you remember when speech and language therapists used to come into schools, take a child out for therapy and then take them back to class? Juliet Leonard, speech and language therapist discusses the important shifts that have occurred in supporting children and young people with SLCN and how the SENCo, the local speech and language therapy service and the school SLCN support package, can together create the most effective partnership.

The current climate: the speech and language therapist

The role of the speech and language therapist in schools has seen seismic shifts over the past twenty years. A growing population, an increase in awareness of SLCN and an understanding of the benefits of a collaborative approach have all shaped the changes that have occurred. Whilst the amount of time offered to individual schools by a speech and language therapist has generally seen a downward trend, the knowledge and skills of teaching staff in identifying SLCN and supporting children and young people continues to rise.

The COVID-19 pandemic has by far been the most disruptive recent event, having a long reaching impact on how speech and language therapists work in schools. Many therapists were redeployed to acute NHS services during the pandemic, appointments cancelled, and school closures meant that services could not run as normal. In the recent 'Building Back Better: Speech and Language Therapy Service after Covid-19' published by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists in March 2021, it was reported that 73% of the 0–18 year-olds in the study had not received in-person speech and language

therapy since the end of the first lockdown. This study also showed that 76% of children and young people reported that "speech and language therapy makes their life better".

It is clear that speech and language therapists play a vital role in the lives of children and young people with SLCN. So how can their reach extend to all of the children who need it?

The SENCo

The school SENCo plays a pivotal role in the upskilling of school staff: the unsung hero, they are highly

> AS AWARENESS OF BARRIERS TO LEARNING INCREASES, SO TOO HAS THE SENCo'S DIVERSE SET OF ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES.

skilled at liaising with large numbers of visiting professionals, identifying and supporting training needs for staff and ensuring that the child and their family is at the centre of the discussion. In addition, they often take a key role in the school's senior leadership, lead an army of teaching assistants and are a key point of contact for many parents and carers. As awareness of barriers to learning increases, so too has the SENCo's diverse set of roles and responsibilities. They embrace a whole school approach and understand that to be truly inclusive, it is the environment that needs to progress and adapt as much as the individuals within it.

The support package

It is vitally important to identify children and young people with SLCN; we know the inextricable link between SLCN and educational outcomes and the importance of early identification and intervention. The support package is therefore the tool which can be used by the school to inform and understand the strengths and needs of their students, in liaison with the local speech and language therapy service, who can provide more in-depth assessment and support for the children who need it the most. The support package can be used universally for assessment and then offer targeted support to those children who need it.

The perfect combination

Ensuring a school community has the best access to speech and language support is not without its challenges: A lack of resource, time and a changing workforce are but a few. These factors can be frustrating and disheartening for those with a passion for supporting children with SLCN.

Marie Gascoigne, creator of The Balanced System® explains that a successful collaboration and support system for SLCN starts with a leadership and management team who value meaningful outcomes and support the workforce with training and development to upskill staff, working towards the common vision: **a communication friendly school environment**. Once this foundation is in place, interventions and support can be tailored according to the needs of the children in that school. The universal, targeted and specialist interventions being offered by the specialist workforce, alongside a wider workforce who know the children, can implement the best support, for the best outcomes. A commitment to developing this is an indicator that everybody is both willing and ready to pool their shared knowledge and resources.

Language Link

Identifies and supports children with mild to moderate SLCN.
To find out more visit
www.speechandlanguage.info

JOINED-UP

A whole school approach to SLCN identification and support

Why a joined-up whole school approach to SLCN is important

Much attention has been paid recently to supporting children's language on school entry, and this is undoubtedly very welcome. However, many language difficulties can remain hidden in early years.

As children move through school and language demands increase with the curriculum, underlying language difficulties can undermine literacy development, attainment, and wellbeing. Language development also takes time, and problems with developing higher-level and complex language skills may not become apparent until children are older. This means that it is essential to continue to monitor children's language development throughout the infant, junior and secondary years.

Without this, there is a risk of missing or misidentifying children's needs and valuable time can be lost, for example managing behaviour, when the underlying need is for language support.

Modular system of support

This is why our speech and language team created the Speech and Language Link modular system of support, which flexibly meets the needs of your school.

Each Speech and Language Link package includes training, assessment, intervention and Help Desk support and all packages work together to collate your data and resources, creating a joined-up approach to SLCN within your school.

PACKAGES

Infant Language Link Years R to 2 (P1 to P3)

Junior Language Link Years 3 to 6 (P4 to P7)

Secondary Language Link Years 7 to 9 (S1 to S3)

Speech Link Ages 4 to 8

Training
To facilitate use of the support packages and to help staff develop their understanding of SLCN. Train all users at no extra charge.

Edtech Impact Recommended

Help Desk (BETT Award finalist)
Support that goes above and beyond, our famously friendly Help Desk and dedicated team of speech and language therapists helps tie everything together for you.

THINKING

Identification
Standardised and norm-referenced screening highlights where extra help may be needed and suggests discussion with a therapist where appropriate.

Standardised with the University of Cambridge
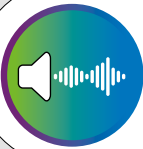
Resources
Hundreds of full colour pdfs are available in each support package, providing a resource for every intervention activity.

ERA Award winner

Intervention
Plans and resources for classroom, targeted small group and 1 to 1 activities are included, all built on sound speech and language therapy approaches.

Working with Parents
Activities for parents and carers to do with their children are included and all subscribers get continuing free access to our award winning SLCN Parent Portal.

Measuring Progress
Easily accessible data are presented for individual students, classes, and year groups, allowing you to track progress and impact effectively.

Teach Primary Awards 2020

RISING TO THE CHALLENGE:

How to support children presenting with Special Educational Needs in mainstream settings

Specialist speech and language therapist, Sophia Parinchy shows how mainstream practitioners really can make a difference as she shares three top tips for inclusion.

Achieve Communication

Sophia Parinchy – Speech and Language Therapist and Director of Achieve Communication – an independent speech and language therapy company offering consultancy, training and therapeutic support for paediatric clients and education settings across the UK.
A-communication@outlook.com

Every child is unique and presents with an individual set of strengths and needs. Over time and with multi-agency support, staff in mainstream settings can gain a greater understanding of the provision that is required and adaptations that need to be made.

The key point here is 'time' - valuable time. Where identification and subsequent plans to meet those needs come late, it might be time that some children simply do not have.

There are however simple strategies with a proven track record of increased inclusion and engagement that can be implemented from the first day a child enters a mainstream setting.

Let's take a look at Aisha's story:

Aisha* is four years old, in a mainstream reception class with 30 other students supported by one teacher and one teaching assistant. Aisha has a diagnosis of Autism; she is nonverbal and is not yet following verbal instructions. The classroom team describe Aisha as being 'in her own world'.

THE PROBLEM:

With one teacher, one teaching assistant and no additional funding, there was no member of staff available to work with Aisha. The class team all worked hard to engage Aisha as and when they could, although this was often fleeting moments and brief opportunities. Staff were frustrated and disheartened.

THE SOLUTION:

TOP TIP 1: Focus on one part of the routine - Identify one part of the daily routine when a consistent member of staff is available to support the child.

Instead of trying (and failing) to support Aisha throughout the day, the class team were encouraged to first identify one time during the daily routine that they could consistently provide Aisha with support from an adult. They recognised two adults were not needed during the group reading time, resulting in one adult being available every morning for 15 minutes to work with Aisha.

This protected time quickly became the catalyst for change. The consistency and predictability meant Aisha was able to quickly build rapport with staff while staff had the opportunity to observe, engage and understand how Aisha interacted with the world around her.

After one week, staff noticed Aisha spending more time within the classroom seeking out familiar adults. She also started to engage more, using touch to communicate by holding her teacher's hand and sitting close by adults in the classroom.

ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE:

Start small, aim for a short period of time which can be increased as the child becomes more independent and familiar with what is going to happen.

*Real name changed for confidentiality

THE PROBLEM:

Aisha's class team found it difficult to identify what she was motivated by. She did not show any interest in the toys available in the classroom.

In the classroom Aisha was constantly on the move - walking, jumping and spinning. She would stop briefly, placing her face close to others to feel their eyelashes. She did show some fleeting interest the painting area but would put her hands in the paint rather than make marks on the paper.

THE SOLUTION:

TOP TIP 2: Adapt activities to identify motivators - Observe the child during free flow play. Record what they naturally gravitate towards and use this information to identify motivators.

Looking closely again at observations three motivators were identified:
• Movement
• The texture of eyelashes
• Paint

It was now time to get creative and use these motivators to create opportunities for increased engagement. For Aisha this meant introducing objects and activities replicating the experiences Aisha would seek out during free flow play.

• **Movement:** An exercise ball was introduced for Aisha to bounce on and roll over with support from an adult.
• **The texture of eyelashes:** A box of feathers were used for Aisha to explore how they felt against her skin.
• **Paint:** Aisha was encouraged to use her hands and feet to explore paint and make prints.

Aisha started to provide increased eye contact during these activities, she engaged for a longer period of time and also started to vocalise to show her excitement. Aisha would pull and take adults towards motivating items, initiating interaction. She also chose to explore paint independently during free flow play, using sponges to make marks on the paper.

ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE:

A motivator can be anything the child will reach for when it is in sight, or prompt resistance when finished or taken away.

THE PROBLEM:

Although Aisha was now happier and exploring an increased number of activities in the classroom, she continued to find transitions difficult. She would become very upset when transitioning to and from the playground.

THE SOLUTION:

TOP TIP 3: If in doubt – make it visual! - Visuals often are the key to unlocking a child's full potential. Visuals provide our children with the roadmap to navigate a confusing and ever-changing world.

Aisha was experiencing anxiety and it was important the class team understood why. As Aisha was not yet able to understand the verbal instructions used at playtime she was left asking – Where am I going? How long for? When will I be back?

To answer these questions, visuals were used:

• **Transitional object:** An object the child enjoys is shown before the transition and then carried with them as they transition to the new location. For Aisha this was a water bottle filled with glitter.
• **Now and Next board:** To show Aisha when she will be transitioning outside and also what motivating activity will follow when she returns to the classroom.
• **Timer:** A large sand timer showing Aisha how long she will be spending outside, this was consistently available during playtime.

One member of staff implemented these visuals for 10 minutes before transitioning outside and 5 minutes when transitioning back into the classroom.

The transitional object was hailed a success, quickly providing Aisha with the visual prompt she needed to transition into the playground.

Although she did not immediately engage with the 'Now and Next board' after consistently using this alongside the sand timer Aisha began moving the symbols independently and using these symbols to choose her reward after playtime.

ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE:

As with anything new, don't expect results to be immediate! Perseverance will be your superpower!

One last thing…

For Aisha, it was the determination and consistent approach of her classroom team that enabled her to access the world around her. She was now ready for multi-agency support to reach her full potential.

Teaching staff have the skills and the knowledge to achieve inclusion for these children, but consistency and belief are key. These strategies may have little impact on the first day. They may not even have any noticeable impact a week later. However, by being consistent with your practice you will see more engagement as you move closer to achieving inclusion within the mainstream classroom.

BOOK SPOTLIGHT

Two new publications packed with ideas to support children and young people with play and with sensory processing. For a chance to win a copy for your school email: **office2@speechlink.co.uk**

Ways to Develop Speech, Language and Communication Skills Through Play
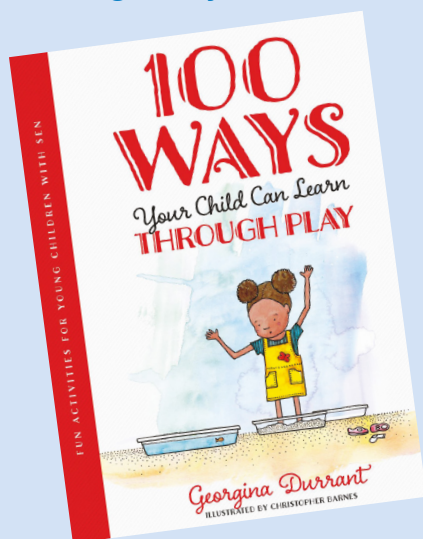
Play can help children to develop a whole range of skills from fine motor and gross motor skills to speech, language and communication skills.

In her new book **'100 Ways your child can learn through play - Fun activities for young children with SEN',** Georgina Durrant provides 100 creative and engaging ideas for children to learn while they play.

Nail Salon Activity

Description

Set up your very own nail salon, complete with cardboard nails to paint! Children will love asking their cardboard clients how they would like their nails painting today.

Equipment

Card, pencils, paints, brushes and sequins/glitter.

How to

1. Help your child to draw around their hands onto the card.

2. Support them to cut out the hands, then draw where the nails are.

3. Encourage them to pretend they work in a nail salon, asking their 'client' how they would like their nails today, thinking about the colours, patterns and embellishments before painting the nails on the cardboard hands.

Georgina Durrant is a former teacher/SENDCO. Director of Cheshire SEN Tutor Ltd Founder of the award-winning website The SEN Resources Blog - **www.senresourcesblog.com**

FREE GIVE AWAYS

Primary teachers - do you need some sensory inspiration?

Kim Griffin's first book with Bloomsbury '100 Ideas for Primary Teachers: Sensory Processing Differences' is a handbook of practical ideas and tips focussing on sensory processing.

Idea 77: Ear defenders

❝ WE USED THE EAR DEFENDERS DURING ASSEMBLY AND LUNCHTIMES AS THEY REALLY HELPED OSCAR TO STAY IN THE SPACE AND ENGAGE."

Ear defenders, or noise-blocking headphones, are a common piece of sensory equipment. They can be helpful for pupils who are sensitive to sounds. Some pupils prefer ear plugs over ear defenders. Ear defenders won't work for all pupils, as some pupils don't like wearing them as they muffle sounds.

Typically, pupils will use the ear defenders during noisier periods.

This might be during music lessons, assembly or when in the lunch hall. Sometimes, pupils will wear them when they need to sit and focus on work. Other pupils will use them when their classmates start to become louder.

The pupil should be reasonably independent in putting these on and off. Some pupils might need a reminder to put them on. Other pupils will independently decide when they will use them.

More recently, noise-cancelling headphones are being used by some pupils. These can be expensive, and typically parents have purchased them. The noise-cancelling feature can be used with or without music playing.

Teaching tip

Teach the pupil to access the headphones when they need them. Have them freely available for the pupil to access and put on and off.

Bonus idea

For pupils with larger heads, sometimes gardening noise protection headphones are more comfortable as these come in adult sizes.

Kim Griffin is an occupational therapist with 20 years' experience supporting children, their families and teachers. She currently provides online training, support, and online sensory assessments via her website **GriffinOT.com.**
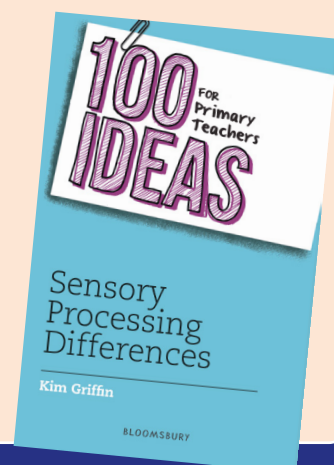
MODELLING VS TESTING

WHEN SHOULD WE ASK QUESTIONS (TEST) AND WHEN SHOULD WE MODEL LANGUAGE?

By Jade Dixon, Clinical Lead, Talk Therapy, independent speech & language therapist and Vicky Hitchman, Team Leader, Talk Therapy, independent speech & language therapist.

When interacting with children we often find ourselves asking lots of questions e.g., "What's teddy doing?" "How many cats are there?" This type of testing has its place during assessment, but it's really important that we don't do this when teaching new skills. Modelling is where we use lots of language which we would like the child to pick up on and learn; the quality and quantity of this is also important to consider and language must be modelled within a variety of contexts.

Why do we need testing?

When teaching children a new skill, testing can be helpful to check what a child is understanding as part of the learning process and asking questions is part of this. However, modelling must take priority when teaching, and that without modelling language all day every day, children with language difficulties will struggle to learn the language they need to access the curriculum.

What is modelling & why is it useful?

Modelling is essentially taking the time to give children the language they need, with an emphasis on avoiding questions and a "repeat after me" style of communication. When we model language, the child gets to hear the words used many times over. Children require a lot of exposure to new words before they fully understand them, and subsequently use them in their own language.

Modelling; Key Strategies

1. Repeating - say the language again, in an accurate and grammatically correct way

2. Emphasising - place emphasis on key words you wish the child to learn

3. Expanding - add words to their sentences to make them longer

4. Provide a running commentary - comment on what the child is doing, focus on quantity of words used, but also quality, using a wide range of words

How do typically developing children learn new words?

A typically developing child will pick up 6-8 words per day throughout their years at school, to reach the average adult vocabulary of 30,000. They learn these words by simply hearing them being used by other people on a regular basis. No special effort is made to teach these words. The child hears the adult model, stores it in their own vocabulary, and uses it appropriately again later. All children benefit from adults providing lots of exposure to new words, hearing a wide range of words, and having meaningful conversations which allow a balance of listening, waiting and responding.

How do children with language difficulties learn new words?

Current evidence from the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists suggests that 'language disorder of any kind affects nearly 1 in 10 children' suggesting at least 2 children in a class of 30 will have language difficulties.

Children with language difficulties often enter school with fewer words than their peers, in turn they must learn at a much faster rate to reach the average adult target of 30,000 words. To bridge this gap, children need to be explicitly taught vocabulary preferably on a 1:1 basis or in small groups and have lots of opportunities to hear this vocabulary within their daily routine.

We cannot stress enough the importance of visuals and non-verbal communication when teaching language to provide the child with a lasting reference to the words they need to use and learn.

Children need 12 different exposures of a word before they can store it and use it correctly. E.g., read about a 'tiger', sing about a 'tiger', play with a toy 'tiger', visit the zoo to see a 'tiger', colour in a 'tiger', pretend to be a 'tiger'.... **A child with a language difficulty needs 24 - 36 exposures of a word before they can store it and use it correctly.**

(Parsons and Branagan, 2017)

If you were placed in a foreign country, where you didn't speak the language and everyone asked you questions, you wouldn't learn any new vocabulary.

If others labelled items and showed you these in different contexts, you would soon pick up the vocabulary.

STRATEGIES FOR A COMMUNICATION FRIENDLY SETTING:

- Use **word mats** for key topic vocabulary
- Place key words for subjects onto a **word wall**
- **Pre-teach** vocabulary
- Use a **multisensory approach** to teach new words
- Use **symbols** around the school to identify key places and people
- Train staff in visual approaches such as **Makaton**

SPECIFIC STRATEGIES FOR PUPILS WITH SLCN:

- Use **simple** sentence structures
- **Rephrase** what you have said
- Give instructions on **1:1** basis
- Give a **task planner**
- Avoid **non-specific words** such as 'this, that, is'
- Get the child to **repeat** a task back to you
- Give the child **time to respond**
- Offer **choices** to answers
- **Can you turn your question into a comment?**

sequence

investigate

clarify

WHERE DOES **SPOKEN LANGUAGE** FIT INTO THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM?

By Kate Freeman, consultant - speech and language in education

How might you answer this question? Some may say 'that's the focus of the English department', or 'we are building maths concepts here'.

What about the question 'Who is responsible for spoken language in schools?' Do you answer 'Me!'? Many might look to someone to be responsible for developing spoken language skills in school.

The truth is that, unless we take responsibility for enabling good spoken communication skills, other skills and knowledge that we try to impart may well fall at the first hurdle. Consider everything from understanding what is said in class, developing good vocabulary, sentence structures and knowing how to use these appropriately in different contexts, including when writing.

Spoken language is the medium of education. Children or young people who can't understand information given verbally, will be limited in their abilities to discuss, debate and describe concepts or issues. They may struggle to write information coherently and will find exams difficult.

Movement though the Key Stages appears to increasingly separate out skills for spoken language, however looking more closely we see this is not true.

The early years foundation stage (EYFS) curriculum includes a strong recognition that communication and language are central to learning. The EYFS refers to the crucial role of the 'serve and return' exchanges between an infant and adult, where communication connections are first formed and relationships built[1]. An even greater emphasis on supporting communication skills is highlighted in the programme summary and in the 'Early Learning Goals for Communication and Language'.

Across the whole primary and secondary curriculum for England (key stages 1-4)[2], there is a statement which identifies *"Every state-funded school must offer a curriculum which is balanced and broadly based, and which:*

- *promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society, and*

- *prepares pupils at the school for*

the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life."

Without appropriate spoken language skills, access to opportunities responsibilities and experiences of later life are restricted. This includes relationships, employment and mental wellbeing[3].

The English curriculum across Key Stages 1 to 4 also states *"Teachers should develop pupils' spoken language, reading, writing and vocabulary* **as integral aspects of the teaching of every subject**. *English is both a subject in its own right and the medium for teaching; for pupils, understanding the language provides access to the whole curriculum."*

Specific reference to spoken language is made across all Key Stages and all subjects: *"Pupils should be taught to speak clearly and convey ideas confidently using Standard English. They should learn to justify ideas with reasons; ask questions to check understanding; develop vocabulary and build knowledge; negotiate; evaluate and build on the ideas of others; and select the appropriate register for effective communication. They should be taught to give well-structured descriptions and explanations and*

---

1 Revised EYFS - In focus… Communication & Language | Nursery World
2 www.gov.uk/national-curriculum
3 www.bercow10yearson.com/
4 Oracy All-Party Parliamentary Group Inquiry (April 2021) *Speak for Change; Final report and recommendations*

5 Ofsted, September 2020, COVID-19 series: briefing on schools
6 https://cfey.org/reports/2020/12/speak-for-change-oracy-appg-inquiry

develop their understanding through speculating, hypothesising and exploring ideas. This will enable them to clarify their thinking as well as organise their ideas for writing."

There is specific detail on vocabulary development i.e. *"Pupils' acquisition and command of vocabulary are key to their learning and progress across the whole curriculum. Teachers should therefore develop vocabulary actively, building systematically on pupils' current knowledge…"*

As well as attainment targets for spoken language in English, secondary maths and science curricula specifically mention *"The National Curriculum for [mathematics /science] reflects the importance of spoken language in pupils' development across the whole curriculum – cognitively, socially and linguistically. The quality and variety of language that pupils hear and speak are key factors in developing their [mathematical/scientific] vocabulary and [presenting a mathematical justification, argument or proof/ articulating scientific concepts clearly and precisely]. They must be assisted in making their thinking clear to themselves as well as others and teachers should ensure that pupils build secure foundations by using discussion to probe and remedy their misconceptions."*

Spoken language skills are required in any attainment target stating a pupil must: *'ask questions'; 'discuss'; 'understand the concept of.'; 'define'; 'describe'; 'sequence'; 'memorise'; 'recall'; 'use and understand the terms.'; 'label'; 'interpret'; 'classify', 'report on'; 'evaluate'* etc. (Key Stage 1 and 2 terms) and in Key Stages 3 and 4: *'interpret'; 'express'; 'solve problems'; 'derive'; 'analyse'; 'reason'; 'develop understanding'; 'evaluate'; 'pay attention to'; 'develop a line of enquiry'; 'make predictions'; 'record observations'; 'investigate'; 'test'; 'gain perspective'; 'extend and deepen their knowledge'* etc.

The recent APPG report on oracy states a survey where over 50% of teachers described 'no consistent approach' to oracy[4] development among pupils in their schools.

Worryingly, the same report highlights 92% of teachers believing school closures during lockdown contributed to a widening of the 'word gap'. Ofsted also raised concerns of children "regressing in basic skills and learning", including language, communication and oral fluency[5].

Oracy improves children and young people's cognitive development and academic attainment, their wellbeing, and life chances by enabling them to develop the spoken language skills necessary to thrive in further education, training and employment[6].

Our challenge, therefore, is to revisit our curriculum areas and identify where requirements rely on strong spoken language. The next step is to consider strengthening these underpinning skills in schools and with individual pupils.
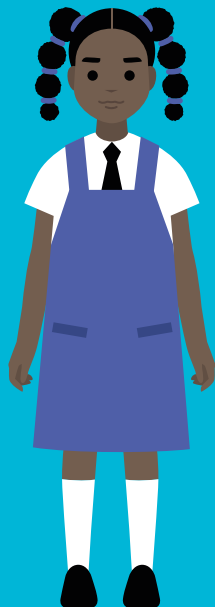
THE TRUE MEANING OF **EARLY** INTERVENTION

By Heather Stevens,
speech and language therapist

" TRUE EARLY IDENTIFICATION IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF ALL EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS, WHETHER THEY BE INFANT, JUNIOR, OR SECONDARY PRACTITIONERS."

We're all familiar with the term 'early intervention' but do we all have a clear understanding of what it means in the context of our own practice?

It is a term that's heard widely in early years and EYFS practitioners can easily appreciate its relevance to them.

In Year R/P1, as children arrive in school with a wide range of differences in preschool experience, teachers are acutely aware that they are responsible for identifying any areas of weakness so that they can plan the right sort of support and put that support into place as soon as possible.

But what does 'early intervention' mean to KS2 and KS3 practitioners and is it something that is given as much priority by them?

'Early intervention' simply means that any difficulties a child may encounter are identified and addressed as soon as possible, at whatever stage in their school career that may be. For some children, these difficulties will be

apparent as soon as they start school or early in their school career. For others, they may not start to become evident until they move further through school. This is particularly the case with language difficulties. Many children will cope with the demands of language in a KS1 classroom, developing appropriate vocabulary and understanding basic concepts, but language development doesn't follow a smooth trajectory. Many children will struggle to take the 'next steps' necessary to keep their literacy and general learning on target.

In KS2 the language of the classroom changes in a number of ways and children need to understand increasingly complex language in order to continue to develop their learning.

Skills such as the ability to make inferences, understand implied meaning, and understand figurative and idiomatic language are

considered to be higher level language skills that children would be expected to have mastered before they are around 9 years old.

The language of the KS2 curriculum introduces a wide range of abstract concepts. Children with SLCN find these abstract concepts difficult to understand. They may have developed a reliance on visual support and are particularly challenged by the fact that abstract ideas cannot easily be represented visually.

The links between literacy and language have been widely researched and reported. As a pupil moves through school, more and more of their learning depends on their literacy. Learning across subjects becomes increasingly dependant on their ability to access written information and measures of pupil progress tend to be based on their literacy, not only through tests of reading but with pupils having to present written work to illustrate their learning. A pupil with SLCN, who may have been able to develop basic reading and writing skills in KS1 may struggle with the literacy demands of a KS3 classroom.

It can be difficult to identify pupils who have SLCN during their first few years at school. They become experts at using coping strategies and masking their difficulties. They will rely heavily on any visual clues such as the gestures of the speaker and the wealth of visual support material used routinely in KS1. They will quickly learn to follow classroom routines and to watch and follow the actions of their classmates. Many will make themselves "invisible" …being quiet and compliant and not volunteering information.

When these "invisible" children reach KS2 they are likely to be

noticed, but not necessarily for the right reasons. What might be seen as lack of progress in literacy or poor overall achievement of learning targets can often be an indicator that a pupil is struggling to understand the language of the curriculum. Gaps in their learning, an increased awareness of their problems and the ongoing struggle of using strategies, often result in behaviour issues. In order for early intervention to be put in place, early identification is vital. It's important to identify issues as soon as possible, to work out the underlying cause, and to ensure that appropriate interventions are in place.

Now, following prolonged periods out of school, we are hearing about the impact on pupils' communication skills. Recent reports suggest that 1.5 million children are facing difficulties with their speech, language and communication skills following lockdown. Social distancing and isolation, lack of face-to-face contact with peers and longer periods of screen time are all contributing factors.

This term, early identification will be key, not only for those children starting school for the first time, but for all pupils whether they are moving into a new year group or key stage. Only by screening the language skills of pupils as they progress on their journey through education, can you ensure that difficulties are identified and supported as soon as possible.

True early identification is the responsibility of all education professionals, whether they be infant, junior, or secondary practitioners. The sooner difficulties are identified the sooner intervention can be put in place and the better the chanc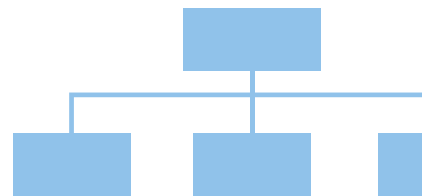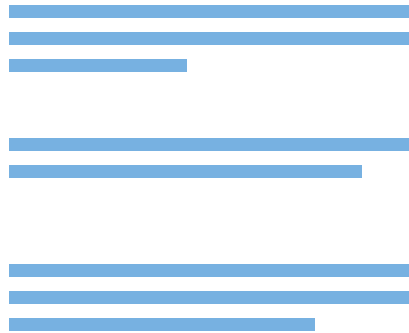e that the intervention will have a successful outcome.