



**The Communication Trust**  
Every child understood

## **Speech, language and communication**

Information for managers and school staff



# Introduction

The Communication Trust has developed this short guide to help schools support children's speech, language and communication. It outlines some key information on speech, language and communication useful for all teaching staff but of particular interest to SENCOs, literacy co-ordinators and those working with children who have speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).

This booklet provides information on resources developed to help school staff support speech, language and communication including a **free resource** supported by The Communication Trust and developed by I CAN and the BT Better World Campaign. This booklet also provides information on a range of organisations providing support in this area and signposts further support via [www.communicationhelppoint.org.uk](http://www.communicationhelppoint.org.uk)

## Speech, language and communication in primary schools

We expect that when children start primary school, they do so with proficient speech, language and communication skills; we expect they will be able to understand much of what is said, express themselves clearly, share their feelings and make their needs known. Language is the vehicle for most learning and we know this proficiency in speech, language and communication is critical to the development of children's cognitive, social and emotional well-being.<sup>1 2</sup>

All children can benefit from support in speech language and communication. We know how important language is for learning and attainment.

There are links between speech, language and communication with learning, behaviour, social skills and self-esteem. Good understanding and use of language is needed to support the success of programmes such as social emotional aspects of learning (SEAL).<sup>3</sup> Speech, language and communication skills are essential in the development of skills for life and work.

But it is important to define what we mean when we talk about speech, language and communication.



# What do we mean by speech, language and communication?

## By speech we mean

- The speech sounds children use to build up words, saying sounds accurately and in the right places
- Speaking fluently, without hesitating, prolonging or repeating words or sounds
- Speaking with expression and a clear voice, using pitch, volume and intonation to support meaning

## By language we mean both talking (expressive language) and understanding of language

*By expressive language we mean;*

- Having words to describe objects, actions and attributes
- Using these words to build up sentences
- Using these sentences to build up conversations and narratives
- Following the rules of grammar, so that things make sense

*By understanding we mean;*

- Processing and making sense of what people say
- Understanding words being spoken
- Understanding the rules of grammar used

## By communication we mean the way in which language is used to interact with others

- Using language in different ways; to question, clarify, describe and debate
- Using non-verbal rules of communication: listening, looking, knowing how to take verbal turns and how to change language use to suit the situation
- The ability to take into account other people's perspectives, intentions and wider context

We need all three elements in order to get our messages across. Each of the three elements is multifaceted and multilayered. Without aspects of any one of these elements, what children say and understand can become confused. With all these elements, children can maximise their attainment.



# The importance of speech, language and communication

**Many teachers are aware of the importance of speech, language and communication, though they may also feel they do not have the skills needed to support pupils with difficulties. Teachers have reported a lack of confidence both in assessing the spoken language of their pupils and in implementing strategies to support the development of communication skills, particularly when children have difficulties.<sup>4</sup>**

It is vital that all primary school staff, from the head teacher to lunchtime supervisors, have the skills and knowledge to support communication in the classroom and the school community as a whole.

Professional development is key and has been identified as critically important in achieving positive outcomes for all children.

## **Why we all need to think about speech, language and communication**

Language is fundamental to all learning and crucial for development in primary school children; <sup>5</sup> poor language skills will impact on children's attainment in school.

We know that many teachers recognise how important language and communication is for children's progress. Teachers have also expressed concern that many children are starting school with inadequate language skills.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to the children coming into school with 'delayed language', there is a group of children with more persistent long term difficulties.

These can be divided into two groups; the first group, around 5-7% of all children, has speech, language, communication needs (SLCN)<sup>7</sup> arising from a primary and specific language impairment, that is language impairment in the absence of any other learning difficulty.

The second group has SLCN as part of another underlying learning need, such as autistic spectrum disorder or learning difficulties.

SLCN is identified by DCSF in the pupil level annual school census (PLASC)<sup>8</sup> data as one of the SEN subtypes. The Communication Trust uses the term SLCN as an umbrella term to include all children who are experiencing difficulty with any aspect of speech, language and communication, those with long term more persistent needs and those with delayed language.

We all need to concentrate on speech, language and communication because of the massive impact these skills have on children's overall development. All children, including the most able, will benefit from support with speech, language and communication.



# What happens when language doesn't develop?



**There is a substantial amount of evidence linking SLCN with other areas of difficulty. We know that children with SLCN have difficulties across many areas of their lives.**

Children with SLCN have more difficulty with many aspects of learning compared to their peers. They can have difficulties with developing all aspects of literacy skills, (reading, writing and spelling), causing difficulties in accessing all areas of the curriculum.

Listening and understanding teachers' instructions is challenging for those children with difficulties understanding language. For example, they may know and understand how to build a rocket, but not understand the verbal instructions that tell them what to do.

Many children with SLCN have poor understanding and use of vocabulary, meaning every aspect of the curriculum can be confusing and their ability to learn the vocabulary can be significantly impaired.

They often have difficulties with skills such as reasoning and predicting, so although they could demonstrate what will happen next in a science experiment, their language does not allow them to verbalise it. Sometimes they just need more time to process language – it may be that while they are listening and processing one instruction, the next piece of information has already been said.

The pace and level of language used to teach the curriculum therefore acts as a barrier to learning, rather than a facilitator.

Children's frustrations can bubble to the surface when trying to learn in an environment where their weakness is also the vehicle for learning. As a result, many children with SLCN can demonstrate behaviour difficulties ranging from occasional bouts of unpredictable behaviour to specific patterns of misbehaviour. Conversely, we also know that many children with identified behavioural, emotional, social difficulties (BESD) have unidentified language difficulties.

Without good communication skills, the ability to form and maintain friendships can be affected. Some children become withdrawn, whereas others display behaviour difficulties.

As they move towards the end of their primary years, children with long term SLCN become much more aware of their areas of difficulty and research has shown they view themselves in a more negative light, both educationally and socially, than their peers.<sup>9</sup>

Language is an all day every day activity, it pervades the primary school curriculum and community and has a massive impact on children's learning and school experience. As such, it is something that needs to be considered and planned for across the curriculum.

We all need to know what to expect from children at different ages. These are the foundation skills for learning and socialising. Without them, success in other areas is seriously at risk.

# Resources to support the children's workforce

## The Speech, Language and Communication Framework (SLCF)

The SLCF has been developed by The Communication Trust to help all people working with children to consider their professional development in relation to children's speech, language and communication. It maps to teachers professional standards and supports development for wider school staff groups.

It provides competences at four different stages, from *Universal*, supporting awareness of communication for the entire children's workforce (in schools this would mean teachers, teaching assistants, midday meal supervisors etc.), to *Extension*, for highly specialised practitioners. All staff can work through the Framework and identify their strengths and areas for development.

The SLCF can be used by individuals to evaluate their knowledge and skills, or as a whole school staff group to identify where the skills lie and support planning for whole school development. The SLCF aims to improve outcomes for all children by being clear about what skills and knowledge staff need to support good communication skills.

It highlights strengths and identifies areas for development. It also helps staff to find relevant training courses and consider other practical or collaborative ways to develop skills and knowledge in those areas identified for development. As a competence based framework, that is related to the Integrated Qualifications Framework (IQF), it could be used to support staff at different levels in their work

towards achieving recognised qualifications eg. NVQs.

The SLCF also provides guidance on what training courses are available and would meet the needs of individuals or school settings. It is a tool for staff to think about supporting communication in all children, including those with particular needs. Please visit [www.communicationhelppoint.org.uk](http://www.communicationhelppoint.org.uk)

## The Communication Cookbook

This is a new free resource produced by the BT Better World Campaign, developed by I CAN and distributed by The Communication Trust. It is a free resource targeted at parents and teachers of children in reception and year 1, though it can be used and easily adapted for other age groups.

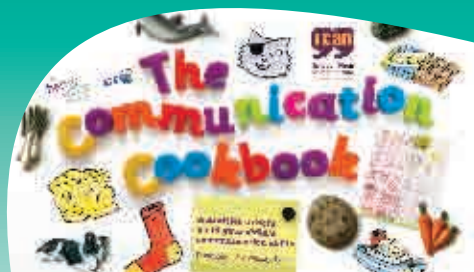
It consists of:

- A book, full of information and activities to encourage language and communication skills in children
- A DVD demonstrating some of the activities, including feedback from the schools who tested the book and more information about speech, language and communication
- Online interactive games for children to support their language skills
- A library of 160 picture cards to download and use in the games

To help teachers and parents involve speech, language and communication in their day to day lives, *The Communication Cookbook* contains lots of activities concerning different areas of speaking and listening.



# Resources to support the children's workforce



*The Communication Cookbook* contains 20 activities across the following core strands of language:

- Attention and listening skills
- Vocabulary
- Building sentences
- Telling stories
- Conversations

We know how busy teachers and parents are, so we have tried to make the activities easy to understand and quick to use without too much preparation. The picture library helps with this and can also be printed to create a really useful resource which could be used in many different ways. We have used vocabulary from Ann Locke's *Living Language* programme,<sup>10</sup> a well-regarded programme for supporting vocabulary and language development, to ensure words are relevant to the age of children involved.

Simple language is used throughout and is predominantly presented in the present tense to support 'here and now' understanding. We have also given simple information on each activity which helps parents, teachers and children themselves to understand what they are learning whilst playing the games.

The games support different elements of effective speaking and listening which are needed for development of language and communication. Setting the games and activities within an environment that supports communication enhances them even further. To support this idea there is an additional set of activities to help teachers and parents create an

environment which supports communication. Sometimes just being more aware of language and communication can help staff to make the small changes that have the biggest impact on children's speaking and listening.

*The Communication Cookbook* is a simple yet effective resource. It has been trialled with teachers and parents who have been positive about how easy it is to use and the changes they've seen in children. **Here are some of their comments...**

"The staff were really pleased to have something concrete to help them get going with speaking and listening."  
**SENCO**

"It's good to make it all explicit – we do it, but we don't make it explicit."  
**Teacher**

"You wouldn't believe the change in the children in one day.. it was 'eye popping.'"  
**Reception class teacher**

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# Resources to support the children's workforce

## **AFASIC**

Afasic is the UK charity representing the needs of children and young people with speech and language impairments, providing help, information and support to parents and professionals working with this vulnerable group.

Afasic has a range of resources and materials for parents and professionals, which includes information about different types of impairments, speech and language therapy, educational provision, and strategies to support children and young people. Please visit the Afasic website [www.afasic.org.uk](http://www.afasic.org.uk) or if you have an immediate concern please ring the Afasic Helpline on **08453 55 55 77**.

## **The BT Better World Campaign**

BT Better World provides an extensive range of free resources to help teachers, parents and children improve their communication skills, with a particular focus on dialogue. In addition, BT offers in-school support from BT volunteers, drama teams and trainers. All the resources are based on the TalkWorks model of communication. See [www.btbetterworld.com](http://www.btbetterworld.com) to download and order free resources.

## **The Communication Trust**

The Communication Trust links to the SLCF and contains a range of resources including links to over 20 different voluntary organisations in this field. [www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk](http://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk)

## **I CAN**

I CAN is the children's communication charity. It offers a whole range of resources with the aim of raising awareness of the importance of speech,

language and communication and supporting schools and parents to identify and support those children with SLCN.

## **Talking Point**

Talking Point is the first stop online for information on communication in children, including some great tips for supporting children's communication in the classroom and essential information for parents. Visit [www.talkingpoint.org.uk](http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk)

## **Targeting Talk**

Was developed between I CAN and Serco giving detailed level descriptors linked to P Scales and the National Curriculum, from P4 to Level 5, focused on pupils' expressive, receptive and social use of language.

It has a reference bank of successful classroom strategies to promote speaking and listening skills. Its aim is to support teachers to be able to identify levels of children's functioning in speech, language and communication.

## **Primary Talk**

*Primary Talk* is being developed by I CAN in partnership with Somerset Total Communication (STC) and Somerset Local Authority. It follows on from the successful *Early Talk* programme, though focussed on the primary phase of education. It is a systematic approach to developing all children's communication skills through training and service development.

## **I CAN Talk Series**

*I CAN Talk* is a series of papers exploring contemporary issues in children's communication



# Resources to support the children's workforce



development. *I CAN Talk* papers review current research and literature and offer practical evidence-based solutions to inform debate and to support practitioners, parents and policy makers. The latest issue is called *Speech, Language and Communication Needs and Primary-aged Children*.

## **I CAN schools**

I CAN has two day and residential schools which provide intensive support for pupils with severe and complex communication needs aged 4-19. Meath School, Surrey (for ages 4-11) 01932 872302 or [meath@meath-ican.org.uk](mailto:meath@meath-ican.org.uk) Dawn House School, Nottinghamshire (all ages) 01623 795361 [dawnhouse@ican.org.uk](mailto:dawnhouse@ican.org.uk)

## **Communication Skills Centres (CSC)**

Meath School and Dawn House School operate Communication Skills Centres which provide independent assessment of children's communication skills and their impact on learning.

Outreach and consultancy services are also offered from the CSCs; these include audit, advice, guidance and training for individual pupils, schools, statutory, voluntary and commercial sectors.

For more information on I CAN go to [www.ican.org.uk](http://www.ican.org.uk)

## **National Strategies**

### **Inclusion Development Programme (IDP): Dyslexia and Speech, Language and Communication Needs**

Offered through the National Strategies, this is an interactive DCSF-funded training resource

which takes the form of a DVD and web-based materials. The resource has been designed to serve two purposes:

- to support headteachers, SENCOs and leadership teams in planning to raise the attainment of children with dyslexia or SLCN
- to support teachers and support staff in planning for inclusion and in the further development of teaching strategies to effectively meet the needs of pupils with dyslexia or SLCN.

The resource is not intended to provide high-level specialist training. Rather, it is designed to increase the confidence of teachers and others when identifying and addressing SEN. Although focusing specifically on Communication Needs and Dyslexia, the material presented represents good quality first teaching (QFT) and is therefore more generally applicable.

It is targeted at both primary and secondary schools, in order to support continuity and progression, with elements specific to primary or secondary and some elements that are for both. The DVD includes video exemplification drawn from primary and secondary schools, a glossary of terms and a library of resources, as well as with links to useful websites which provide access to routes to further professional development, training and resources. The resource can be accessed through the National Strategies website at [www.standard.dfes.gov.uk/primary/features/inclusion/sen/idp](http://www.standard.dfes.gov.uk/primary/features/inclusion/sen/idp)

# Two conversation games

## From *The Communication Cookbook*

**These games provide children with the opportunity to practise their conversation skills.**

The games are great to play with a single child whenever you have a few minutes to spare; for example, when you're driving, waiting in a queue, having a meal, and so on.

If you play as a group, sit the children in a circle, if possible on chairs (this seems to work better). About eight is the ideal number. Remind the children how important it is to take turns and do 'good listening'. Once the children are familiar with the game, let them each have a go at being the group leader.

It's important for you to join in and play an active role. And don't forget to praise helpful behaviour. 'That was lovely listening, Kim. You knew exactly what Darren said.'

### 1. Introductions

Say your name very clearly and then add a detail about yourself that begins with the same sound as your name. For example: 'My name is Jane and I like jogging.' The children take turns at making their own statements. 'My name is Ramesh and I like rhubarb.' 'My name is Alana and I like apples.'

You can change the style of the introduction. For example: 'My name is Mathew and I don't like mice.' 'My name is Christopher and I don't like carrots.'

Another variation might be: 'My name is Sally and I am sweet.' 'My name is Carlos and I am quick.'

### 2. Presents for all

Children take turns at saying what they would give each other for a birthday or Christmas present – and (very importantly) why. Example: 'I'd get Jane a Dr Who money box because Dr Who is her favourite TV show.'

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## The Communication Trust

Every child understood

The purpose of The Communication Trust is to raise awareness of the importance of speech, language and communication across the children's workforce and to enable practitioners to access the best training and expertise to support the communication needs of all children.

The Trust was founded by Afasic, BT Better World Campaign, Council for Disabled Children and I CAN. The Trust is supported by over 20 voluntary and community groups who deliver services and support to children with SLCN.

The Communication Trust is also working closely with a number of lead bodies in the

field of workforce development including the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) and the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) and with professional groups in the field of speech, language and communication including Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) and National Association of Professionals concerned with Language Impairment in Children (NAPLIC).

The Trust's work is being supported by the Department for Children, Schools and Families and other funders. The Trust is hosted by I CAN and works to a representative board.

[www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk](http://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk)



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The Trust has a stakeholder group of expert organisations across the voluntary and community sector. If your organisation has expertise in the area of children and young people's speech, language and communication and you are interested in joining the stakeholder group, please contact Anita Kerwin-Nye or Cara Evans for further information.