

# Speech, Language, and Communication Toolkit

For schools

Children's Speech and Language Therapy  
in Luton and Bedfordshire

Central  
Bedfordshire



Luton



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# Background

This toolkit was developed as part of the wider training model offered by the Children's Speech and Language Therapy (SaLT) Service in Luton and Bedfordshire, referred to as the SaLT service, to enable schools to better meet the needs of Children and Young People (CYP) with Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN). The toolkit and training model are built on the evidence base and what we know to be good practice from the literature.

## In partnership with our local authorities

The toolkit has been developed in partnership with Central Bedfordshire Council, Bedford Borough Council and Luton Borough Council. The SaLT service works with children and young people across all three local authorities, making a shared vision and strong partnership approach essential.

This work has been supported through the national Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS) programme, which aims to foster sustainable, supportive and neuro-inclusive cultures within schools<sup>1</sup>. The programme focuses on:

- Upskilling school staff
- Creating strong home-school partnerships
- Promoting early intervention
- Creating supportive environments

In addition to this toolkit, there is also an 'Early Years Communication and Language Toolkit' produced by the SaLT Service. Visit [www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/SLT-toolkit#early](http://www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/SLT-toolkit#early) to access. Consider which is the most appropriate for your setting and the pupils you support; it may be appropriate to use both.

## Key abbreviations

**CYP** = Children and Young People / Child and Young Person  
CYP will sometimes be interchanged with the term 'pupils'.

**EHCP** = Education, Health, and Care Plan

**SEND** = Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities

**SENDCo** = SEND Co-ordinator

**SEND CoP** = SEND Code of Practice (2015)<sup>2</sup>

**SLC** = Speech, Language, and Communication  
All CYP develop these necessary skills as part of typical development.

**SLCN** = Speech, Language and Communication Needs  
An umbrella term to describe CYP who have difficulty in some aspect of SLC skills and who may require additional support.

**SLTist** = Speech and Language Therapist

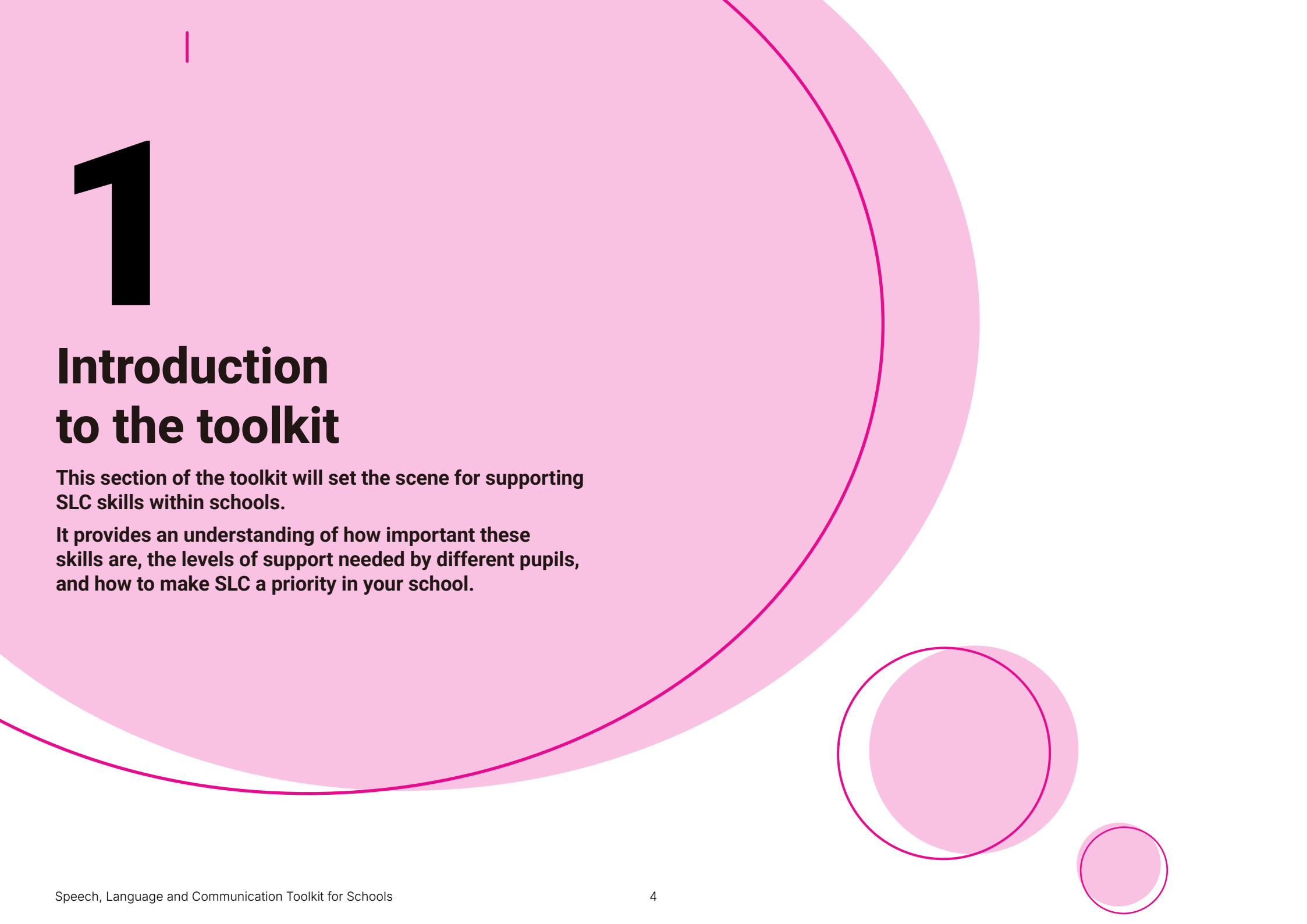
**SaLT** = Speech and Language Therapy

**Parents** = In line with the SEND CoP, the term parents will be used which includes all those with parental responsibility (parents and those who care for the CYP).

**SMART** = Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time bound

## References

- 1 Department for Education and NHS England (2025) Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS).
- 2 Department for Education & Department of Health and Social Care. (2015). SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years.



# 1

## Introduction to the toolkit

**This section of the toolkit will set the scene for supporting SLC skills within schools.**

**It provides an understanding of how important these skills are, the levels of support needed by different pupils, and how to make SLC a priority in your school.**



## Aim of the toolkit

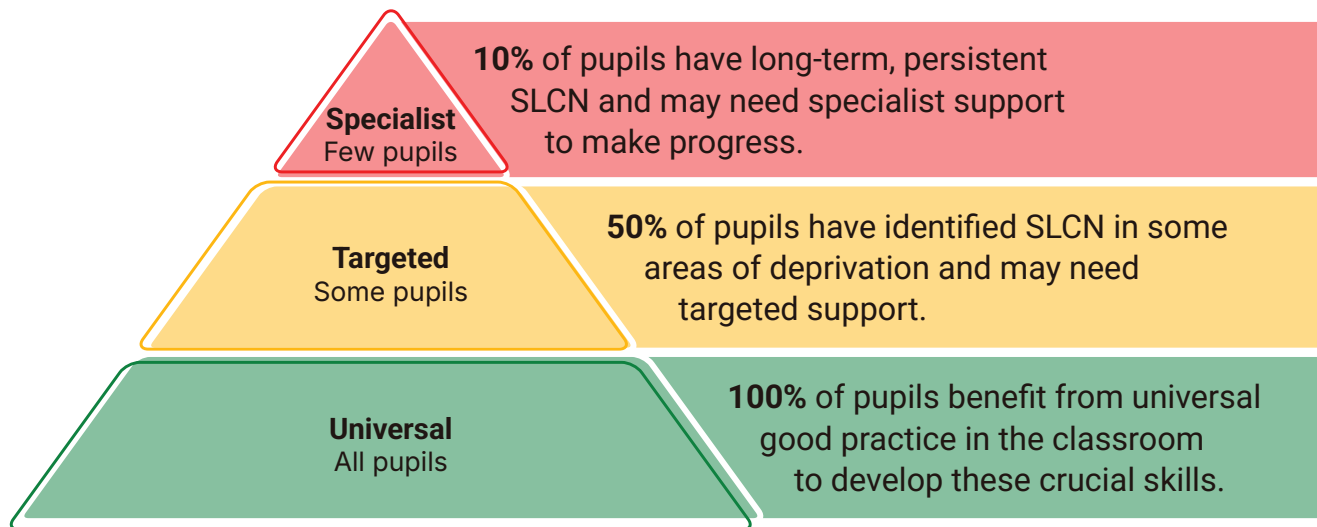
The aim of this toolkit is to provide mainstream schools with information and resources related to SLC. It aims to provide a strong knowledge base and increased confidence to support all pupils to develop the necessary SLC skills to succeed in life. The toolkit is a central resource which sits within a wider framework of training and support.

All teaching and support staff are encouraged to use this toolkit to develop confidence in supporting pupils with SLCN. The SENDCo should have a thorough understanding of it, as they play a key role in coordinating support for pupils with SLCN.

The toolkit is a guide to the whole process of supporting SLC skills within the school environment.

# Universal, targeted and specialist support

Many healthcare providers and educational settings now adopt a tiered approach to supporting pupils, encompassing three levels of provision: universal, targeted, and specialist. All pupils with SLCN (with or without EHC plans) should be supported in schools and there should be an inclusive approach to practice. Here is an explanation of what each level means and what it looks like for pupils within school.



**Universal Level:** All pupils should be supported to develop SLC skills within the classroom and school setting as part of good practice, often referred to as 'high-quality teaching'. This includes promoting communication-friendly environments, accessing SLCN training for all staff, providing quality adult-child interactions, and offering advice sessions for parents.

**Targeted Level:** Some pupils require additional support when a need is identified. This may include delivering interventions, developing sustainable interventions and resources, and embedding advice and strategies within the pupil's everyday experiences.

**Specialist Level:** A few pupils may require specialist support in order to make progress. This may include collaboration with the SLTist, ongoing progress monitoring, implementation of specialist interventions, integration of strategies into classroom learning and targeted training or coaching to address specific areas of need.

## Key messages

Pupils with SLCN should be identified at the earliest opportunity and support should be given at the right level.

It is important to recognise that not all pupils with SLCN will require specialist provision.

Equally, the levels of provision are not mutually exclusive. For example:

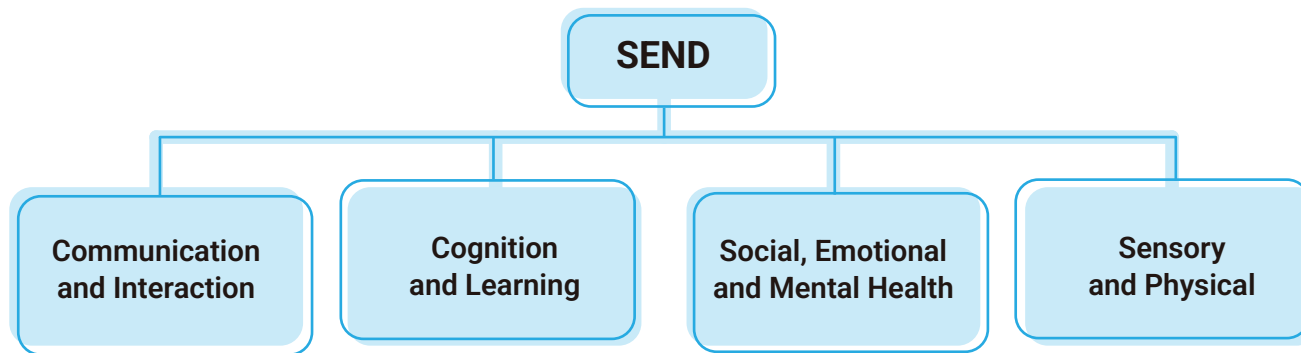
- Pupils at **targeted** or **specialist** level will always require **universal** support, e.g., staff to adapt their language and use visual support within the classroom for pupils to access the curriculum.
- Pupils at **specialist** level may also require some **targeted** support, e.g., small group interventions.

This toolkit will help you identify which level of support a pupil needs and how to support them.

The 2026 SEND reform consultation<sup>3</sup> describes layered support in mainstream settings. In this toolkit we use **Universal** / **Targeted** / **Specialist**. In some reform documents you may also see an intermediate layer, Targeted-plus, to describe pupils who need sustained, higher-intensity support in school and/or coordinated multi-agency input, but not necessarily specialist placement.

# The SEND Code of Practice

There are four broad areas of need as described in the SEND CoP. SLCN falls under the category of 'Communication and Interaction'. However, these broad areas of need are not definitive. Pupils often have needs across all of these areas, and these needs may change over time. The purpose of identification is to work out what action is needed, not to fit a pupil into a category.



## Quick definitions

SLC is an abbreviation for Speech, Language and Communication

- **Speech:** the way we use our sounds and our voice to communicate our message in a smooth and fluent way.
- **Language:** understanding (receptive language) and talking (expressive language).
- **Communication:** how we share information and interact with other people including non-verbal communication (NVC).

# Importance of SLC for other areas of development

Speech, language, and communication skills underpin other areas of development.

## Learning

**Around 75% of families report that CYP with SLCN find school and learning difficult.<sup>4</sup>**

Learning is highly social and relies on language; pupils listen to verbal information, take part in discussions, and share ideas.

Understanding and using curriculum vocabulary is essential, and academic language often differs from conversational language.

Strong spoken language and phonological awareness support literacy development. See the reading model in section 4.

## Behaviour

**Research shows that 40–54% of pupils with behaviour difficulties also have language challenges.<sup>5</sup>**

Behaviour may reflect a communication difficulty, sensory need, or emotional overwhelm rather than intentional actions.

A neuroaffirming approach looks beneath the behaviour, considering possible speech, language, sensory, emotional, or physical factors before responding.

## Social Development

**CYP with stronger language skills tend to show significantly higher social competence.<sup>6</sup>**

Communication underpins friendships, group work, and social problem solving.

If pupils struggle to understand others, express themselves, or join in appropriately, it can affect their ability to build positive and secure relationships.

## Emotional Development

**Pupils with difficulties understanding or using language are twice as likely to experience mental health challenges.<sup>7</sup>**

SLCN can make it harder to recognise emotions, explain worries, or interpret others' intentions, sometimes leading to frustration or disproportionate responses.

Supporting communication skills helps strengthen emotional regulation, improves understanding, and promotes more positive relationships and behaviour.

# SLC at the heart of your school

All pupils need to develop SLC skills, with different levels of support to achieve this. It is therefore important for schools to consider how they can make SLC a priority in their school. Here are some principles towards achieving this.

## School leadership

Headteachers and senior leaders are central to creating a whole-school commitment to SLC. They shape the school's ethos, ensuring communication is seen as essential to learning, wellbeing, literacy and academic achievement. This includes making SLC a strategic priority within development plans and aligning policies, curriculum design and assessment with this focus.

Leaders ensure that clear systems are in place to identify and support pupils with SLCN, including access to targeted interventions and specialist input. By modelling inclusive communication and championing SLC across the school, leaders create the conditions for consistent, high-quality practice.

## Workforce development

Around 53% of teachers feel they lack the skills needed to meet the communication needs they encounter in classrooms.<sup>7</sup>

Senior leaders therefore play a key role in ensuring sustained professional development including:

- Access to high-quality, ongoing SLC training
- Opportunities for coaching, mentoring and reflection
- Support for staff to use evidence-based strategies consistently across lessons

'The involvement of Speech and Language Therapy in training and support for the wider workforce has the potential to improve identification of [CYP] with persistent SLCN...'<sup>8</sup>

### Communication-friendly environments

A communication-friendly environment removes barriers to communication, and enables all pupils to participate, understand and be understood.

Staff contribute by:

- Using clear visual supports, structured routines and well-organised spaces.
- Creating frequent, purposeful opportunities for communication.
- Embedding universal communication strategies.
- Modelling language, scaffolding interactions and checking understanding.

### Effective early identification of SLCN

Early identification relies on whole-school systems, not individual judgement. Shared procedures ensure identification is consistent and equitable.

Structured approaches—such as universal screening on entry and ongoing monitoring—help schools identify pupils who may benefit from early support, improving inclusion, engagement and academic progress.



Creating a **Communication Champion** team is a highly effective way to strengthen your whole-school approach to SLC. Communication Champions act as an additional point of contact in their setting for all SLCN matters. They have completed the SaLT service's accredited training. By developing this skilled team, schools can enhance workforce confidence, support early identification, and embed communication-friendly practice across the environment, reinforcing senior leadership's commitment to speech and language.

#### More information:

[www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/SLT-training#champion](http://www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/SLT-training#champion)

## Sharing the priority of SLC with families

Schools should actively involve parents in understanding the importance of SLC and how it supports learning and wellbeing. Families value information about:

- Typical SLC development
- The school's approach to supporting communication
- Practical ways to help at home, such as:
  - Using everyday activities as learning opportunities.
  - Making time for distraction free conversation.
  - Explaining new vocabulary.
  - Trying simple SLC focused activities.

The SEND CoP makes it clear that parents are central partners in their CYP's SEND journey. It requires schools, local authorities, and services to actively involve parents in identifying needs, planning support, and reviewing progress, ensuring their views, wishes, and knowledge shape decisions.

It is important for CYP to have communication supportive environments both at school and at home.

## Useful links

To help parents understand what to expect at different ages:

[www.bedsiltonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/speech-language-communication](http://www.bedsiltonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/speech-language-communication)

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

## Section 1 references

- 3 Department for Education. (2026). SEND reform: putting children and young people first [Consultation].
- 4 Speech and Language UK, Family and Young People survey, 2024
- 5 Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists. (2020). Promoting social, emotional and mental health [Factsheet].
- 6 Wieczorek, K., DeGroot, M., Ganshorn, H., & Graham, S. A. (2025). Connecting language abilities and social competence in children: A meta-analytic review.
- 7 Speech and Language UK (2023) Listening to unheard children – findings and recommendations.
- 8 Public Health England (2020) Best start in speech, language and communication: Guidance for local commissioners and service leads.

# 2

## Identifying SLCN

**This section of the toolkit covers:**

- How to identify SLCN, including the range of tools that are available for schools to use.
- Factors to consider when identifying SLCN.

# Identifying SLCN

There are increasing concerns about the number of pupils starting school with SLC skills below age related expectations.<sup>8</sup>

Identifying SLCN can be challenging; some difficulties are more visible than others and some needs may be masked by other characteristics.

Many pupils go through school without their needs being identified. For some pupils their needs may not be apparent until they are older, e.g., when the demands of the curriculum increase.

At least 60% of young offenders have language difficulties and many of these needs are unidentified.<sup>7</sup>



## Key messages

Any procedure for identifying SEND should be stated in the school's SEND information report, including the use of checklists and/or screening tools.

It is important for all staff to have an awareness of typical SLC development and to look out for pupils who may be struggling. Remember, SLCN may not be easy to identify and we need to look at all aspects of the pupil's presentation and skills. Pupils may have associated academic, emotional, or behavioural difficulties.

# Supportive conversations

Talking with parents about their CYP's SLCN can feel sensitive and sometimes challenging, but these conversations are an important opportunity to build trust and work together. A supportive approach helps parents feel heard, respected, and empowered to take positive steps.

## Start with empathy and understanding

Actively listen and acknowledge parents' views and concerns. Be mindful that some parents may not have any concerns, and that pupils can present differently at school compared to at home. Try to understand the pupil's home life and family situation.

## Highlight strengths as well as areas of need

Share what the pupil is doing well alongside areas where they may need support. Ask parents how they feel their CYP's SLC skills are progressing. This helps parents feel reassured and keeps the conversation balanced.

## Be honest and specific about concerns

Use clear, jargon-free language and provide concrete examples to illustrate your observations. You may want to refer to notes, videos, photographs or examples of the pupil's work to illustrate your views. This makes the information easier to understand and relate to.

## Be solution focused

Frame recommendations positively, e.g., "X needs support to develop..." rather than "X cannot..." This encourages a proactive and hopeful outlook. Signpost parents to other sources of information, locally or nationally.

## Allow time and offer ongoing support

Set aside adequate time in a space with minimal distractions. Recognise that some parents may need additional time to absorb the information. Let them know when and how they can follow up to continue the conversation.

### Useful links

Watch this video for more information on talking to parents about their CYP's SLC development:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=78lQunDHL3o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=78lQunDHL3o)

# Screening for SLCN

Some pupils may have SLCN as part of a broader developmental delay or special educational need. In this case it is important to look at their overall learning profile, not just their language skills. Often their language abilities will match the rest of their development. To assess this accurately:

- Use tools or resources that show typical developmental milestones.
- Compare the pupil's speech and language levels with their general developmental stage, rather than their age alone.

This helps ensure expectations are realistic and support is targeted appropriately.

1

## Know what typical development looks like

Understanding typical SLC development is essential for identifying when a pupil may need additional support.

### Tools to support:

- a. What's Typical Talk at Primary?
- b. What's Typical Talk at Secondary?

These quick reference posters aim to support professionals to understand typical SLC development but also support in identifying pupils who may need more support.

They can be downloaded for free or purchased as an A3 poster for a small cost on the Speech and Language UK website: [www.speechandlanguage.org.uk](http://www.speechandlanguage.org.uk)

2

## Observation

School staff are often best placed to notice communication differences because staff know pupils well and see them interacting across a range of everyday situations. Careful observation of how a pupil communicates with peers and adults, copes with change, and uses language in real contexts is usually the most valuable starting point.

### Tools to support:

- a. Universally Speaking
- b. Communicating the Curriculum
- c. SLCN indicators checklist
- d. English as an Additional Language (EAL) vs SLCN indicators checklist
- e. Spotlighting pupils

## Universally Speaking

Universally Speaking is a set of practical guides designed for professionals. These resources outline typical stages of communication development for different ages.

Education staff can use them to check whether pupils are developing their speech, language, and listening skills as expected, discover strategies that support communication, and identify next steps if there are concerns about a pupil's progress.

This can be downloaded for free from the Speech and Language UK website: [www.speechandlanguage.org.uk](http://www.speechandlanguage.org.uk)

## Communicating the Curriculum

Communicating the Curriculum is a practical resource designed to help primary schools define and monitor progression in the National Curriculum Programme of Study for Spoken Language for Years 1–6.

Closely aligned with the National Curriculum, this resource supports teachers in accurately describing and evidencing pupils' progress in spoken language, ensuring that language development is effectively integrated into classroom practice.

Communicating the Curriculum can be accessed here:

[www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/additional-info-educational-settings](http://www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/additional-info-educational-settings)

## SLCN indicators checklists

Pupils with SLCN will have strengths and needs in different areas. Use these checklists as a starting point to reflect on the pupil's needs. Then compare to what is expected for their development using 'What's Typical Talk' or 'Universally Speaking'.

To download the Primary and/or Secondary SLCN indicators checklist, visit:

[www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/additional-info-educational-settings](http://www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/additional-info-educational-settings)

## EAL vs SLCN indicators checklist

It can sometimes be unclear whether a pupil's language abilities are due to EAL or SLCN. For more on EAL see page 20. Use this checklist as a starting point. This helps to identify how the pupil is using their home/main language. Remember to ask the questions to parents or ask a staff member who speaks the same language (if possible).

To download the EAL vs SLCN indicators checklist, visit:

[www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/additional-info-educational-settings](http://www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/additional-info-educational-settings)

## Spotlighting pupils

In some areas, up to 50% of pupils start school without the SLC skills they need. These pupils are particularly vulnerable to missing out on quality interactions with staff; typically, pupils with less language receive less interactions. These pupils are not at the expected levels for SLC but do not yet need a referral to SaLT; instead, they can benefit from 'spotlighting'. Through planned quality adult-child interaction and, where needed, targeted interventions or support, these pupils' language skills can be developed. If they continue to have SLCN, they can be monitored carefully and considered for referral as needed.

Increasing staff awareness of these pupils, and planning quality interactions and support is essential. For more information on how to identify which pupils would benefit from spotlighting, visit:

[www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/spotlighting-pupils](http://www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/spotlighting-pupils).

## 3

## Screening tools

The specific screening tool used is less important than understanding its purpose and interpreting the results alongside other information about the pupil. These suggested tools may be helpful, but use any that your school already has in place:

- a. Progression Tools
- b. WellComm
- c. First language assessment tool
- d. Speech sound screener

## Progression Tools

The Progression Tools are based on theoretical information about typical development. They have been developed in collaboration with school staff and have been tested on many mainstream pupils.

They should be used alongside other sources of information to build a comprehensive picture of the pupil's abilities.

The Progression Tools cover 6 areas of SLC skills including:

- Understanding spoken language
- Understanding and using vocabulary
- Sentences
- Storytelling and narrative
- Speech
- Social interaction

The Progression Tools will help to identify what level of support the pupil needs:

- **Universal Support** to continue developing their SLC skills
- **Targeted Support** to support an identified area of need
- **Specialist Support** to consider a referral to specialist services following local procedures.

Watch this video on how to use the Progression Tools:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=5V6uluil0b4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5V6uluil0b4)

The Progression Tools can be bought from the Speech and Language UK website: [www.speechandlanguage.org.uk](http://www.speechandlanguage.org.uk)

## WellComm

WellComm helps identify pupils who may have SLCN. It includes a 15-minute universal screening tool that will help you identify how the pupil's speech and language is developing:

- **Green** indicates expected development
- **Amber** indicates targeted support may be required
- **Red** indicates a more complex need and possible referral to SaLT service.

It also includes 'The Big Book of Ideas', a number of activities for building language skills.

WellComm can be bought from GL Assessment's website:

[www.gl-assessment.co.uk/products/wellcomm](http://www.gl-assessment.co.uk/products/wellcomm)

## First language assessment tool

The first language assessment tool is intended for pupils whose language abilities raise concerns at home or in school. It can be used with pupils who may simply be learning EAL, as well as those who might have broader difficulties with language development. This is an informal assessment. It is essential that the assessment is carried out by someone fluent in the pupil's home language and familiar with the correct dialect.

The first language assessment tool can be downloaded here:

[www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/additional-info-educational-settings](http://www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/additional-info-educational-settings)

## Speech sound screener

The speech sound screener helps identify which sounds a pupil finds challenging in different positions within words. It supports understanding of typical developmental patterns and the impact of speech sound difficulties on communication with adults and peers. Designed for children aged 3 and above, it provides a structured way to assess speech sounds, while younger children or those unable to complete the assessment can be observed in everyday language contexts.

The speech sound screener can be downloaded here:

[www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/additional-info-educational-settings](http://www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/additional-info-educational-settings)



# Factors to consider when identifying SLCN

Screening tools can help identify pupils who may have SLCN. However, communication profiles are rarely explained by a single factor alone. A range of developmental, sensory, cognitive and contextual influences can affect how a pupil understands and uses language. Many pupils have more than one influencing factor or diagnosis, and it is often the combination of these, rather than any single need, that affects how they use and understand language in school.

## Autism

Autism is a lifelong neurodivergence that influences how people communicate and interact with the world. Autistic people are different from each other, but for a diagnosis they must share differences from non-autistic people in how they think, feel and communicate.<sup>9</sup> These include differences in:

- **Communication:** how they use and understand words, tone of voice and body language.
- **Behaviour and interests:** having focused interests, repeated movements or behaviour and a preference for predictable routines.
- **Sensory processing:** being much more or much less sensitive to sensory inputs such as sound, touch, taste and smell.

Some autistic pupils may mask their communication differences in school, which can delay identification and increase emotional strain.

### Useful links

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

[www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/neurodiversity-support](http://www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/neurodiversity-support)

'Autism, Identity and Me' is a useful resource for older pupils to support understanding of their diagnosis and well as advocating for themselves. [www.routledge.com/9781032396545](http://www.routledge.com/9781032396545)

## EAL

It can be difficult for schools to identify SLCN in EAL pupils. The EAL vs SLCN indicators checklist can support your decision making.

More information about EAL can be found on page 20.

## Hearing

Hearing is critical for the development of SLC skills. The two main types of deafness include:

- **Sensorineural deafness:** damage to the inner ear, e.g., cochlear. This is a permanent deafness.
- **Conductive deafness:** sound which cannot pass efficiently through the outer and middle ear, often caused by blockages such as wax or glue ear (a build-up of fluid). It is usually temporary, however, it can be permanent in some cases.

It is also possible to have both types of deafness, known as a mixed deafness. Deafness can occur in either one (unilateral) or both (bilateral) ears. If there are any concerns regarding a pupil's hearing, consider a referral to audiology for a hearing test.

### Useful links

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

## Language disorder

Difficulties with language can affect understanding (comprehension), talking (expression) or both.

The term 'language disorder' refers to any condition in which language differences are likely to be long term and the pupil may continue to need adaptations and support to access learning alongside their peers. Language disorder creates a barrier to communication or learning in the pupil's everyday life (functional impact; see more on this on page 75).<sup>10</sup>

Language disorder can occur on its own or in the context of other known conditions such as autism, Down's syndrome, cerebral palsy.

**Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) refers to significant difficulties using and/or understanding language. It is not part of a complex disorder like autism or deafness; it is the pupil's primary area of need. 1 in 14 people have DLD.<sup>11</sup> It is a lifelong disorder. DLD commonly occurs with ADHD, dyslexia, and reading comprehension difficulties.**

### Useful links

[www.radld.org](http://www.radld.org)

[www.afasic.org.uk/developmental-language-disorder-dld](http://www.afasic.org.uk/developmental-language-disorder-dld)

[www.rcslt.org/speech-and-language-therapy/clinical-information/developmental-language-disorder](http://www.rcslt.org/speech-and-language-therapy/clinical-information/developmental-language-disorder)

[www.dldandme.co.uk](http://www.dldandme.co.uk) This website, plus its accompanying book 'Supporting Children and Young People with Developmental Language Disorder', is a useful resource for older pupils to support understanding of their diagnosis and well as advocating for themselves.

## Speech sound disorder

Speech sound disorders are difficulties with how sounds are heard, made, or represented, or issues with voice quality. They can occur on their own or alongside language difficulties. They include:

- Articulation disorder (difficulties physically producing sounds)
- Phonological disorder (difficulty understanding sound patterns)
- Motor speech sound disorders such as dysarthria (weak muscles) or Childhood Apraxia of Speech (difficulty with co-ordinating speech muscles)
- Structural speech sound disorders related to cleft palate and other orofacial differences

### Useful links

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/dysarthria](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/dysarthria)

[www.speechandlanguage.org.uk/help-for-families/resource-library-for-families/childhood-apraxia-of-speech](http://www.speechandlanguage.org.uk/help-for-families/resource-library-for-families/childhood-apraxia-of-speech)

[www.clapa.com/what-is-cleft-lip-palate](http://www.clapa.com/what-is-cleft-lip-palate)

## Working memory

Working memory is the ability to hold and work with information for a short time. Working memory is sensitive to task demands, distraction, and cognitive load, which means some pupils benefit from reduced language load and clear scaffolding. Working memory strongly affects learning and social interaction. Difficulties are common in pupils with DLD, dyslexia, autism, ADHD, and can also impact EAL learners managing unfamiliar language.

# English as an Additional Language (EAL)

A CYP is classified as having EAL if they regularly use a language other than English at home, regardless of whether they were born in an English-speaking country.

Being EAL offers numerous benefits, including enhanced social connections, improved cognitive skills, broader career opportunities, and greater cultural awareness. Globally, it is more common for individuals to speak multiple languages than only one.

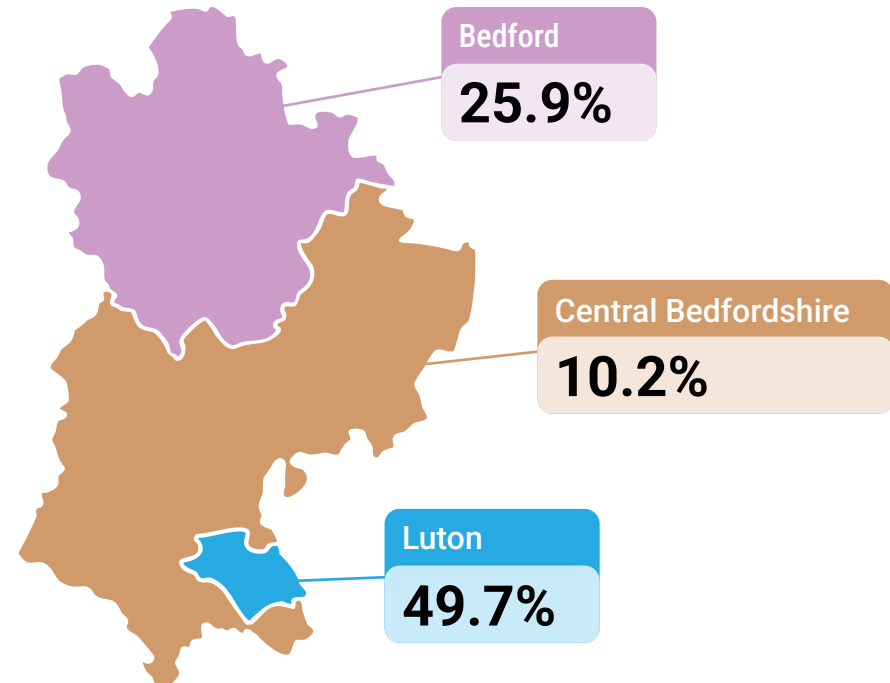
CYP learn additional languages more effectively when they have a strong foundation in their home language. When parents use their home language with their CYP, they are actively supporting their communication, social, and emotional development.<sup>12</sup>

## Key messages

- Learning more than one language does not cause SLCN.
- EAL pupils are at no greater risk of SLCN.
- Pupils' SLCN are at risk of being over- or under-identified because of learning an additional language.
- Parents can support their CYP's language development by speaking their home or strongest language.

The proportion of EAL pupils is steadily increasing across England, presenting both opportunities and challenges for schools. 21.4% of all pupils are recorded as being EAL.<sup>13</sup>

Locally these figures are:



Research shows that pupils who are new to English typically take 1 to 2 years to develop basic conversational language for everyday communication. However, developing the deeper, academic language proficiency necessary to fully access the curriculum generally takes 5 to 7 years or longer, depending on the pupil's background and educational support.<sup>14</sup>

It is typical for pupils to go through a short period of minimal verbal communication. During this time, involve them in classroom activities and provide commentary on what they are doing, but avoid pressuring them to speak before they are ready.

## Supporting EAL

- Celebrate all languages in the school to reinforce pupils' linguistic identities and sense of belonging.
- Create an inclusive communication environment by normalising spoken errors, valuing accents, and encouraging pupils to ask for clarification or repetition.
- Consider classroom seating and peer support to encourage language practice and social interaction.
- Provide clear modelling and low-stakes rehearsal opportunities that allow pupils to practise language structures and vocabulary before using them in higher-demand tasks.
- Be mindful of variations in NVC, including gesture, facial expression and eye contact, and support pupils in understanding how tone of voice is used in English, e.g., rising intonation for questions.
- Recognise differences in speech sounds between English and a pupil's home language and consider how this may impact pronunciation or perception of sound contrasts.
- Prioritise functional, cross-curricular vocabulary, e.g., 'comparing', 'evaluating', 'predicting' etc., alongside subject-specific terminology.
- Use visuals such as graphic organisers, word mats, flash cards, visual timetables and labelled resources strategically to reinforce key concepts and reduce language load.
- Harness the pupils' home languages as a learning tool, e.g., by carrying out research for homework tasks, including languages other than English on display boards and encouraging parents to discuss school topics in the home language.

### Useful links

[www.bell-foundation.org.uk](http://www.bell-foundation.org.uk)

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

The first language assessment tool

[www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/additional-info-educational-settings](http://www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/additional-info-educational-settings)

### Section 2 References

- 9 National Autistic Society [www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk)
- 10 Bishop, D. V. M., Snowling, M. J., Thompson, P. A., Greenhalgh, T. and the CATALISE-2 Consortium (2017). Phase 2 of CATALISE: A multinational and multidisciplinary Delphi consensus study of problems with language development: Terminology. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*,
- 11 Norbury, C. F., Gooch, D., Wray, C., Baird, G., Charman, T., Simonoff, E., & Pickles, A. (2016). The impact of nonverbal ability on prevalence and clinical presentation of language disorder: evidence from a population study. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*
- 12 Bratlie, S. S., Grøver, V., Lekhal, R., Chen, S., & Rydland, V. (2025). Home literacy environment, language use, and proficiency: Bilingual profiles in young learners. *Early Childhood Development and Care*.
- 13 Department for Education. (2025, June 5). Schools, pupils and their characteristics: Academic year 2024/25. Explore education statistics.
- 14 Creagh, A., et al. (2025). The 'how long' question: language learning trajectories of EAL learners in NSW schools. *The Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*.

# 3

## Planning support for SLCN

This section of the toolkit covers:

- How identification fits into the graduated response through an 'Assess-Plan-Do-Review' cycle
- How to plan support for pupils with SLCN, including SEND support plans and outcomes

# The Graduated Response

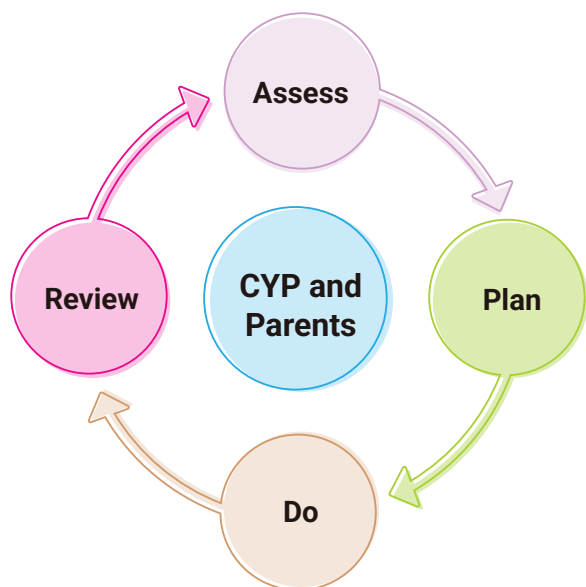
SLCN is the most common type of SEND at the SEND Support level. It is also the most common primary need for pupils with SEND in primary schools.<sup>15</sup>

SEND support may be needed when a pupil is not making progress despite high quality teaching at the universal level. The SEND CoP states that when a pupil requires SEND support, this should take the form of a four-part cycle of 'Assess-Plan-Do-Review'. This is known as the graduated response.

## Assess-plan-do-review cycle

It is important to put the pupil and their parents at the centre of the work that you do, ensuring that at each stage of the process there is effective participation. This includes having early conversations to discuss needs and desired outcomes, sharing what is currently working well, both at school and home, and keeping them informed of progress.

The decision to involve external specialists can be made at any stage of the process, with parents always involved in this decision.



### Assess

- Gather information from multiple sources (teacher assessment, progress data, screening tools, observation)
- Capture parental and pupil views/aspirations
- Identify strengths and barriers

### Plan

- Collaborate with parents and pupil
- Define specific goals (SMART)
- Outline interventions
- Identify any necessary resources including any additional adult support, staff training, maximising the use of Communication Champions

### Do

- Put the planned interventions and support into practice
- Monitor progress, ensuring the pupil's views are captured
- Keep parents informed of progress

### Review

- Review progress against targets
- Use feedback from the pupil and their parents
- Assess the impact of the support
- Agree next steps and update the plan if necessary



**Reviewing progress should be an ongoing process, rather than an annual event.**

# Person-centred outcomes

The SEND CoP defines an outcome as “the benefit or difference made to an individual as a result of an intervention”.

“Outcomes should be personalised, aspirational and specify what success looks like for the CYP.”<sup>2</sup>

Equally, it is essential to work in partnership with parents at every stage, including when setting, reviewing, and refining outcomes, so that support reflects the shared insights of the pupil, their family, and the wider team.

Long term outcomes can be broken down into achievable steps.

**Outcome:** The long-term, aspirational goal for the pupil, reflecting what they are ultimately working towards.

**Target(s):** The specific, measurable steps that will enable the pupil to progress toward the outcome.

**Strategy:** The approaches, techniques, or resources that will support the pupil in achieving their targets.

Outcomes should be made for every pupil on the SEND register, whether they have an EHC plan or not.

Outcomes and provision should be recorded on the SEND support plan applicable to your school or local authority.

Example outcomes and targets are provided throughout Section 5 of the toolkit. These are intended as guidance to support high-quality, inclusive classroom practice. It is important to note that having an outcome does not automatically mean a pupil needs specialist therapy input. Many communication needs can be met through strengthened universal and targeted provision, with specialist input used where it adds additional benefit and is required to make progress.

## Pupil voice

There is a statutory duty from schools to find out from the pupil:

- What their views, wishes, feelings, interests, and aspirations are
- What outcomes or goals they want to achieve
- What support they need to do this

Some pupils with SLCN may experience barriers to participation, particularly when communication demands are not well matched to their needs.

An adult who knows the pupil well should help the pupil take part by considering how the pupil communicates best, ensuring information is accessible, and checking understanding. Strategies should be tailored to the individual, but the following principles are helpful for all pupils:

- **Adult use of language and visual support:** Use clear, simple language, avoid jargon, and build in pauses to allow processing time. Visual aids can reinforce understanding.
- **Demonstration and practice:** Some pupils may have had fewer opportunities to practise decision making in accessible ways. Providing demonstrations or opportunities to practise these skills beforehand can build confidence.
- **Discussing future aspirations:** Talking about the future can be challenging for some pupils with SLCN. Begin with the present, what is going well now and what could be improved, before moving on to longer-term goals.

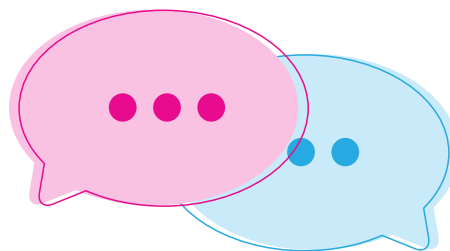
From age 16, young people are legally presumed to have capacity to make decisions about their education and future plans. When supporting 16 year olds with SLCN, staff should help them understand information, express their wishes, and take an active role in planning their next steps, in line with the Mental Capacity Act.<sup>16</sup>

# Including pupils in meetings about their SLCN

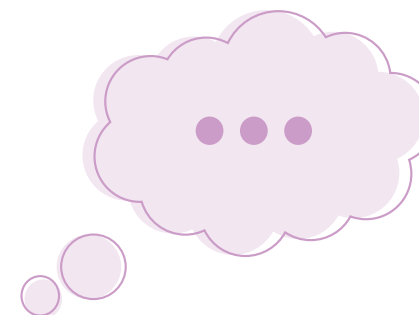
Ensure pupils are actively involved in meetings about their learning, progress, or support, and that their voice is heard and respected.



1



2



3

## Before the Meeting

**Share the agenda in advance:** Use simple language and, if needed, visuals to help the pupil understand what will be discussed.

**Invite input:** Ask the pupil if there are topics they want to add or questions they want addressed.

**Prepare materials:** Provide accessible versions of documents, e.g., easy-read, diagrams, or summary sheets.

**Plan support:** Consider communication needs, sensory needs, or attention span. Include breaks if needed.

## During the Meeting

**Create a welcoming environment:** Greet the pupil, explain everyone's role, and check comfort levels.

**Use clear, simple language:** Avoid jargon; explain any technical terms or acronyms.

**Give the pupil space to speak:** Ask directly for their thoughts or provide alternative ways for them to contribute, e.g., writing, drawing, using communication aids.

**Respect power dynamics:** Ensure adults do not dominate; encourage all voices equally.

**Allow processing time:** Pause between discussions so the pupil can think and respond.

## After the Meeting

**Provide a plain-language summary:** Include decisions, next steps, and actions.

**Invite reflection:** Ask the pupil if they feel their views were heard and if they have anything further to add. Keep communication open for questions or additional input after the meeting.

## Involving parents

Creating an open and honest relationship lays the foundation for collaborative outcome setting. Parents bring unique expertise about their CYP's communication strengths and needs. When parents feel heard and respected, they are more likely to engage positively in the process.

- **Start with listening and understanding**  
Give parents space to share their hopes and concerns for their CYP. Use open questions to explore what matters most to them and reflect back what you have heard to show understanding. Affirm their efforts and perspectives to build trust.
- **Provide clear, accessible information**  
Explain what outcomes mean and why they matter in simple, jargon-free language. Consider parents' own communication needs to ensure they feel confident and informed.
- **Work together on meaningful goals**  
Agree on realistic, achievable outcomes that align with the CYP's needs and the family's priorities. Make sure parents understand how these goals will benefit their CYP and how they can support progress both at school and at home.

### Section 3 reference list

- 15 Department for Education (2024) Special educational needs in England: 2024-25. Explore education statistics
- 16 HM Government. (2005). Mental Capacity Act 2005.



## Useful Resource

### Talking Mats

A Talking Mat is a visual tool that supports pupils with communication difficulties in expressing their thoughts, feelings, and opinions. While it can be used for a range of activities, it is particularly effective for involving pupils in decision making when setting outcomes.

A Talking Mat can be developed physically using symbols, pictures or words, or digitally using a tablet or laptop.

### Using a Talking Mat

1. Choose a topic to discuss
2. Prepare choices related to the topic; these could be symbols, pictures or words
3. Set the top scale using symbols, e.g., happy, unsure, unhappy, to represent feelings or preferences.
4. Present each choice one at a time. Ask the pupil to consider how they feel about it.
5. The pupil positions each option under the appropriate top-scale symbol to show their view.

Watch a short video of Talking Mats being used digitally with a young person:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=SzAgGmLYpE0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SzAgGmLYpE0)

More information, resources and training can be found at:

[www.talkingmats.com](http://www.talkingmats.com)

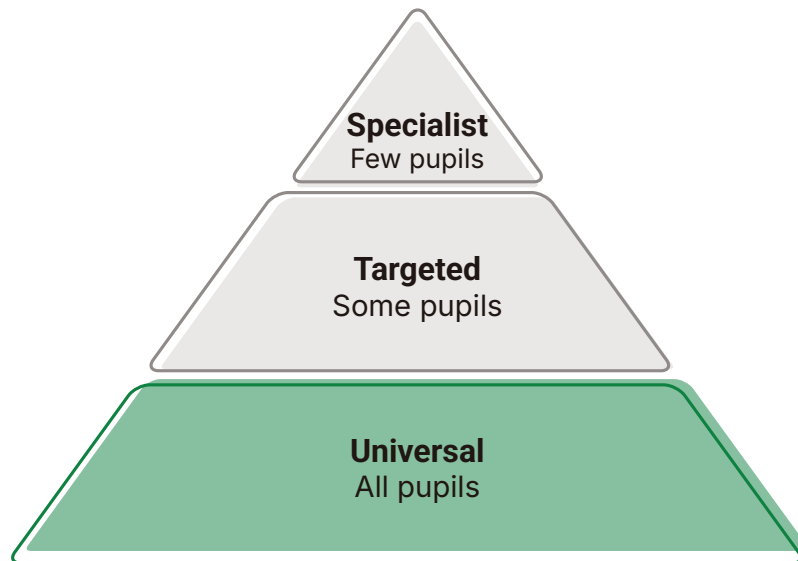
# 4

## Universal Support

This section of the toolkit covers universal strategies that all schools should routinely have in place to support all pupils to develop their SLC skills.

# Universal strategies

Universal strategies support the development of all pupils' SLC skills. They also create more inclusive opportunities for pupils who communicate differently or have identified SLCN. They help pupils understand instructions, join in with learning, and feel confident about expressing themselves. By using these approaches for all pupils, our settings become more inclusive, fair, and supportive for all.



## Evidence based practice

The strategies in this section are based on research and clinical expertise. Beyond these, the following databases contain up-to-date evidence-based interventions:

Speech and Language What Works database:

[www.speechandlanguage.org.uk/educators-and-professionals/what-works-database](http://www.speechandlanguage.org.uk/educators-and-professionals/what-works-database)

Education Endowment Foundation:

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit>

# Communication-friendly environments

A communication-friendly environment is designed so that all pupils, however they communicate, can understand, participate, and express themselves confidently. It provides opportunities for everyone to understand and take part in order to support their academic, social, and emotional development.

Providing a communication-friendly environment involves making considerations about the following areas:



**Physical environment**



**High-quality classroom talk**



**Adult use of language**



**Whole-school approach**

To access a video on communication-friendly environments along with some handy audit tools, visit: [www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/additional-info-educational-settings](http://www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/additional-info-educational-settings).

# Physical environment

Pupils' confidence and skills are shaped by their physical and emotional environment. A well-planned environment helps remove barriers to communication. It also supports pupils' learning, social skills, and wellbeing. The physical environment makes communication easy, effective, and enjoyable. It provides opportunities for everyone to talk, listen, understand, and take part.



## Space, layout, and seating arrangements

This refers to how the physical environment is organised to make communication easier, more comfortable, and more effective for everyone, especially for pupils who communicate differently or have identified SLCN.



### How this might look in my setting:

- Arrange settings so that all pupils can see the adult(s), board, displays etc.
- Clearly define the areas in each setting, so pupils understand the purpose of each space.
- Plan seating carefully to support whole-class learning, group work and discussions.
- Offer imaginative role play areas and ensure they are available for pupils beyond Early Years.
- Design classroom displays to be visually appealing, supportive of learning, pupil-friendly, interactive, multisensory, and discussion promoting.

- Involve pupils in deciding what goes on displays so the environment reflects their interests, strengths, and communication styles. Support pupils in learning how to use displays in ways that work for them.

## Light and noise levels

This refers to how lighting and sound in a space affect a pupil's ability to communicate comfortably and effectively.



### How this might look in my setting:

- Monitor background light, including glare from windows, because it affects pupils' visual attention.
- Consistently minimise background noise and distractions. Reduce noise from equipment and use soft furnishings to absorb sound, reduce echo and help pupils process sounds around them.
- Provide quiet, low-demand areas for pupils who benefit from reduced sensory input or extra time to process information.

## Visual support

This refers to the use of signs, symbols, pictures, diagrams, objects, and colour-coding. It also includes NVC such as natural gestures, facial expression, and body language. Visual support can help pupils to:

- Understand spoken and written information
- Maintain their focus of attention
- Follow instructions and routines
- Express themselves
- Become more independent in their learning and communication



### How this might look in my setting:

- Use labels with photographs and words to support understanding of location, e.g., on trays and cupboards to show where resources are kept or above pegs to show where pupils hang their coats and bags. Symbol-based software like Widgit can help achieve consistency across settings – [www.widgit.com](http://www.widgit.com).
- Use visual resources in areas beyond the classroom, e.g., literacy areas, quiet spaces, playgrounds and dinner halls.
- In primary schools, consistently display a labelled visual timetable in each classroom. Offer a consistent procedure for timetable changes and use the timetable throughout the day, so pupils always know what activity they are currently completing. When pupils move around the school, e.g., for phonics groups, PE, etc., ensure the timetable remains available and used.
- In secondary schools, adapt personal timetables where needed, e.g., by using colour to correspond to the colour of exercise book of a particular subject, a picture to represent the subject, or a photograph of the teacher for each subject.

- Provide task plans, checklists and/or visual plans to support understanding of language and promote independent working. Encourage older pupils to write key points in their workbook or similar and then use this as their checklist.
- Demonstrate new activities to support pupils' understanding.
- Display word walls with themed vocabulary and accompanying pictures.
- Provide interactive topic displays with key vocabulary, pictures and real objects. Update these displays to show examples and models as the curriculum content evolves.
- Provide multi-sensory exploratory areas that tie in with topics, e.g., magnifying glasses, seeds, bulbs, soil, pots, trowels etc.
- Use word maps and mind maps to explore new vocabulary and topics. For older pupils, websites like [www.mindmeister.com](http://www.mindmeister.com) can be used to create collaborative visual mind maps.
- For older pupils, use semantic maps to make links between word features and other words. Websites like [www.visuwords.com](http://www.visuwords.com) provide visual representation of how words are associated.
- Bring stories to life by using objects, pictures, gestures, actions, role-play, puppets, props, signs and drawing.
- Provide story-rich areas:
  - At lower primary level, this could include role-play spaces with topic-linked themes, props and small-world play.
  - At KS2 and secondary level, this could include newsroom or podcast studios, courtroom or debate rooms, detective / investigation boards, and artefacts from historical events.

# High-quality classroom talk

Language development can be supported through learning opportunities within the classroom. When staff encourage pupils to think for themselves, ask questions that invite pupils to expand on the idea, and provide justified answers, pupils' oracy skills develop. See more on oracy on page 38.



## Accepting all communication methods

Communication methods are the ways people share information, ideas, or feelings with each other. These methods can be grouped into verbal, non-verbal, written, visual and digital communication.



### How this might look in my setting:

- Adults accept, use and promote all methods of communication where appropriate, e.g., speaking, gestures, signing, pointing, communication boards/books, high-tech Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC). This reduces communication pressure and supports autonomy.

**AAC refers to tools, strategies, and technologies that supports pupils to communicate. They include symbols, signing, objects, activity boards, core boards, communication boards, communication books, switches and Voice Output Communication Aids.**

For more information, view our video: <https://vimeo.com/839660933>

- Adults accommodate opportunities to demonstrate learning through drawing, talking, acting etc., rather than just writing.

## Peer to peer communication

This refers to how we create opportunities to use discussion to support learning and socialisation. It can take place in either whole class discussions or small groups. Communicating with peers helps pupils work out their ideas, share their thinking, and learn from each other.



### How this might look in my setting:

- Plan opportunities for pupils to discuss their ideas and learning with peers on 1-to-1 level or in groups, e.g., 'Think-Pair-Share', role play / acting out of learning etc. This supports attention, understanding of language, vocabulary, use of sentences and stories, and social communication.
- Include and engage all pupils in small group activities, regardless of their method of communication.
- Acknowledge and value all contributions, including non-verbal ones.
- Create shared guidelines for discussion that help all pupils participate comfortably.
- Provide examples of expected answers, e.g., "A good answer might sound like...".
- Allow sufficient time for feedback following group work.
- Consider how pupils are seated depending on the format of discussion.
- Provide conversation areas beyond the classroom, e.g., a 'communication corner' / 'talk stop' in outside areas.

## Pupil to staff communication

This refers to how we create opportunities to share information between staff and pupils; this can be formal or informal. Communicating with staff allows pupils to formulate their thoughts, share their ideas and reflect upon their learning. It builds trust and a positive learning environment, and it helps staff to understand and clarify pupils thinking.



### How this might look in my setting:

- Plan opportunities for pupils to discuss their news, ideas and learning with staff. This can be 1-to-1, in small groups and in whole-class discussions, e.g., 'show and tell', 'class news', recap of weekend / field trip / a hobby / personal narrative.
- Provide opportunities for pupils to discuss their ideas and learning beyond the classroom, e.g., during breaktimes, in the dining hall, on arrival in the morning.
- Where appropriate, staff use open-ended questions to gain detailed answers and recognise that some pupils may respond in different ways or need extra processing time. Ask questions such as 'how?' and 'why?' to facilitate detailed answers beyond recall.
- Extend pupils' thinking through suggestions and offering alternative opinions. Encourage differences in opinions and different viewpoints.
- Plan opportunities for staff to provide interactive book reading.
- Celebrate all communication and education attempts, not just accuracy, to build confidence.
- Ensure a system for pupils to request help, say they do not understand or request repetition is provided. Create an ethos that needing help is accepted; this supports pupils to feel safe to express their needs. This is particularly important for secondary and older primary pupils.
- Use motivating activities to support learning of new words, e.g., quiz, crossword, hangman, matching pairs, guess what, 20 questions.

## Pupil to parent communication

This refers to how we create opportunities for pupils to share information with their parents. This can be about their learning, their ideas, to ask questions, or share their feelings. It allows parents to support learning and personal development, and helps them stay informed about school life and progress.



### How this might look in my setting:

- Encourage positive communication between parents, pupils and the wider family, e.g., taking turns, reducing questions etc.
- Share information about learning topics and suggested home discussions with parents.
- Use learning journals to share pupils' work with their parents.
- Use 'ask me about...' prompts, e.g., as a sticker for the pupil to wear, on your parent messaging system etc.

# Adult use of language

Pupils learn language by hearing it in everyday situations. When all staff use good language models and engage in quality interactions with pupils, it extends and maximises the opportunities for pupils to learn, opening them to their full communicative potential.



## Engagement

This refers to how we provide opportunities for pupils to join in and show interest in ways that suit them.



### How this might look in my setting:

- Position yourself so the pupil can see you when you are communicating.
- Get down to their level. This encourages pupils to feel secure, confident, and more willing to communicate while allowing adults to better observe their interests and follow their lead.
- Incorporate pupils' interests into learning and activities.
- Use a multi-sensory approach to support learning including objects, pictures, diagrams, timelines, videos, story sacks, story grids, word maps, mind maps, signing, singing, props etc.
- Include demonstrations and/or practical tasks when learning.
- Provide opportunities to learn in short chunks, e.g., listening, having a go, movement etc.

## Supporting understanding

This refers to how we help pupils make sense of new information, concepts, or instructions so that they can apply, respond to, or use the knowledge effectively. It involves breaking information into smaller steps, explaining it clearly, giving examples and using strategies that match each pupil's level of learning.



### How this might look in my setting:

- Speak slowly and pause often. This gives pupils time to understand what you said and think about their answer.
- Provide an overview, context, or recap, for the lesson or activity.
- Keep instructions concise (chunking) and give them in a logical sequence.
- Repeat instructions or simplify them by rephrasing or explaining key words where needed.
- Give instructions in a logical order, e.g., "Pack away your books, then go to lunch" rather than "Before you go to lunch, pack away your books".
- Reduce use of technical words and jargon. If technical words do need to be used, explain what they mean.
- Emphasise key words using intonation, stress and pausing.
- Use gestures, pointing, facial expressions, objects and pictures to support what you say.
- Be explicit in what you want pupils to do, e.g., "walk" rather than "don't run". This reduces ambiguity, which supports many communication styles.
- Demonstrate how you solve a problem or come to a reasonable conclusion.

- Use the **'hand rule'** when communicating.

**i** 1 question to 4 comments: for every 5 things you say to a pupil, only 1 should be a question, and the others should be comments.

- Be aware of the **4 Blank levels** and keep them in mind when asking questions.

**i** Blank's levels puts questions and directions into 4 levels. It starts with basic questions that require simple responses. Moving up the levels, the questions get more complicated, and can require abstract answers. See more: [www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/blanks-levels-of-questioning](http://www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/blanks-levels-of-questioning)

- Use the **'think time'** rule when asking questions.

**i** 'Think time' rule: Providing wait time increases the length of responses and participation from pupils who need more processing time. It also decreases the number of "I don't know" or no responses.<sup>17</sup> The recommendation from SaLT is a wait time of 10 seconds.

- Be aware of non-literal language, e.g., sarcasm, irony, metaphors etc. that may need explaining.

## Supporting expressive language

This refers to how we help pupils communicate their thoughts, ideas, needs, or feelings in ways that work for them. It involves providing strategies, prompts, or models that enable pupils to use any communication methods to convey meaning.



### How this might look in my setting:

- Comment on what you can see, hear or feel, using language which is appropriate for the pupils.
- Make links between current discussions and previous learning.
- Repeat, comment, expand and/or explain when responding to pupils.
- Provide time to formulate ideas and provide answers.
- Emphasise key words when introducing new vocabulary.
- Link new vocabulary to existing knowledge.
- Use examples and comparisons to demonstrate a word's meaning, e.g., "A habitat is a place where an animal lives. A forest is a habitat for owls. A desert is a habitat for camels."
- For older pupils, provide opportunities to derive word meanings from contexts using clues.
- Pair spoken words with gestures, signing or pictures.
- Where possible use real, tangible objects to explain new words and topics.
- Narrate actions, describe objects, and give detailed instructions in everyday interactions, e.g., "Look, the leaves are crinkly, green, and rough to touch!"

- Model sentences, stories and events in a step-by-step logical manner that includes sequencing vocabulary. There are different types of modelling, all of which can support pupils to use sentences and stories:
  - Self talk: Talking about what you are doing whilst you are doing it, e.g., a demonstration.



**“[Adults] who talk as they go about their everyday activities expose [pupils] to 1000-2000 words per hour.”<sup>18</sup>**

- Parallel talk: Talking about what the pupil is doing using rich vocabulary and sentences, e.g., “That’s an impressive map you have drawn; I can see how the explorers would have used it to plan their route”.
- Expanding: Repeating what the pupil said and adding more detail, e.g., Pupil: “The volcano is sleeping”, Adult: “The volcano is dormant because it hasn’t erupted for a long time”.
- Recasting: Repeating an error back with the error corrected. This might mean adjusting the word order, adding missing vocabulary or adding grammatical markers.
- When modelling, there is no expectation for the pupil to say/repeat anything back; the aim is to expose them to the correct sentence structure.
- For older pupils, games like Taboo, Articulate, Scattergories and Rapidough all provide opportunities to enhance vocabulary.

# Whole-school approach

Supportive communication strategies need to be embedded into everyday practice. This works best when all staff have the underpinning knowledge of how SLC skills develop, how to notice when a pupil may benefit from extra support with communication, and how to seek support, whilst working effectively with parents. This means leaders, teachers and support staff all work in the same way.



## How this might look in my setting:

- Everyone is responsible for supporting communication, not just SENDCo / Communication Champions / SEND staff. This means pupils get the same support from all adults.
- There is a whole-school ethos on supporting different communication styles.
- CPD on SLCN is provided on an ongoing basis, including modelling and coaching.
- SLCN strategies are embedded across all year groups, all subjects and in all settings, to make communication accessible for all pupils.
- There is a school-wide framework for:
  - Teaching vocabulary (see page 37)
  - Building oracy (see page 38)
  - Supporting emotional regulation (see page 41)
  - Building phonological awareness (see page 42)

# Vocabulary teaching

Vocabulary teaching helps pupils understand, remember, and use words to support learning and communication. It is more than giving pupils a list of words. Effective teaching shows pupils what words mean and how to use them. It also teaches pronunciation and spelling when needed. Teachers use a variety of approaches to help pupils apply words when communicating, reading, and writing.

Pupils' vocabulary size is the best predictor of success on future tests. Pupils with reduced vocabulary skills at age five are twice as likely to be unemployed and three times as likely to have mental health problems during adulthood.<sup>19</sup> Early support can make a meaningful difference.

## Vocabulary framework:

1. Agree on the vocabulary being taught: Create a shared understanding of Tier 1 (everyday words), Tier 2 (high value academic words), and Tier 3 (subject specific terms)<sup>20</sup> so everyone uses the same terms.
2. **Teach vocabulary in consistent and explicit ways across the school: All staff use agreed strategies to introduce, model, and revisit new words so pupils experience a joined-up approach.**
3. Build vocabulary into curriculum planning: Make vocabulary expectations clear in curriculum documents and lesson plans, so key words are identified in advance.
4. Provide targeted support where needed: Offer additional input and scaffolding for pupils who require more help to build their vocabulary. See **section 5** for more information.
5. Review how well the approach is working: Monitor and evaluate regularly, including gathering pupil feedback on what helps them learn new words.

## Key features of vocabulary teaching:

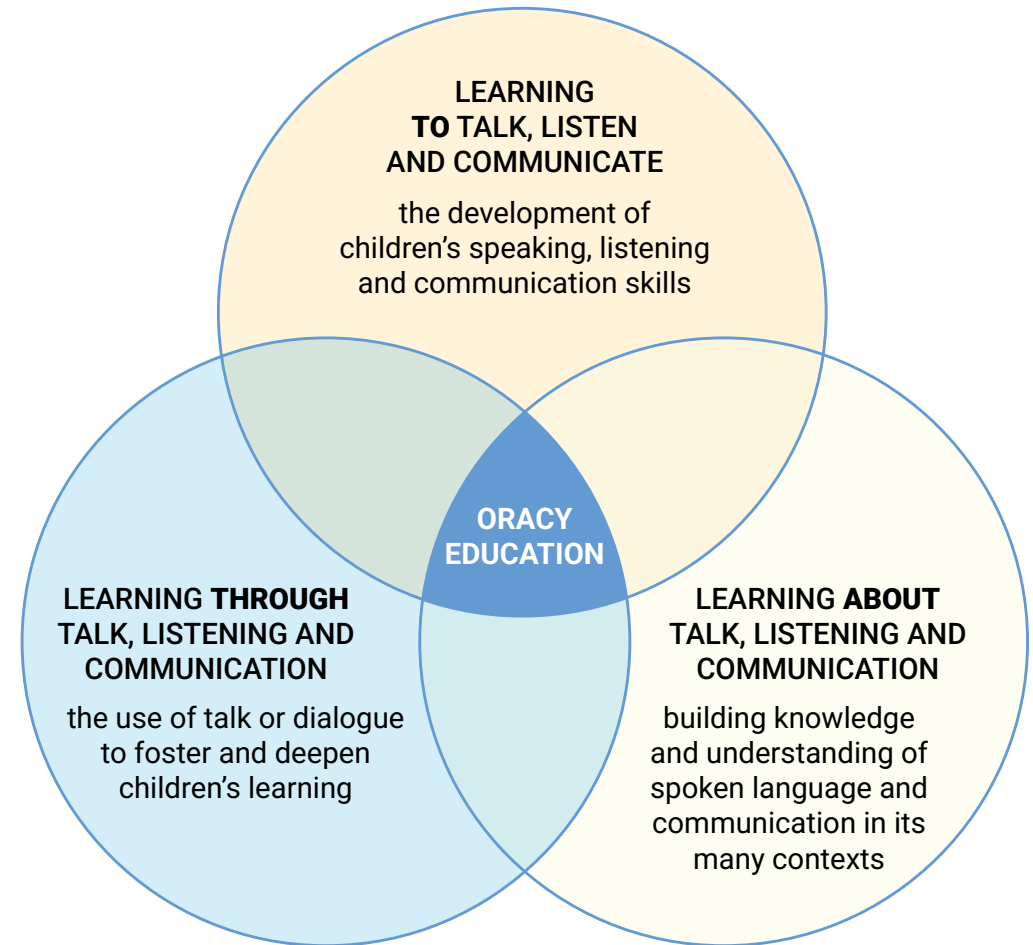
1. Choose the most useful and relevant vocabulary from a topic, focusing on words that pupils are likely to encounter frequently or need to understand key concepts.
2. Teach the words step-by-step. This involves focusing on the words' meanings, their phonological make-up (how they sound), and how the word is used grammatically. Highlight any words that are related, e.g., 'act' – 'action' – 'activate'. Help words 'stick' by using visuals, diagrams, colour coding, actions, roleplay, writing, drawing, and structured talk.
3. Provide opportunities for pupils to engage with and use new words in learning and social contexts, in ways that feel accessible and meaningful. This supports integration of new vocabulary into their lexicon (word bank). Highlight when key vocabulary appears in different curriculum areas to help pupils deepen understanding and transfer knowledge.
4. Revisit the words regularly to support familiarity and long-term retention, e.g., at the end of a lesson, the next day or week, and later in the term.

# Oracy

Oracy incorporates speaking, listening, and communicating in ways that work for each pupil, including verbal, non-verbal, signed and AAC. There is no single 'right' way to communicate; pupils can engage using a range of communication methods. Supporting oracy leads to significant improvements in pupil outcomes.<sup>21</sup>

Developing speaking and listening skills helps pupils learn in school. Oracy skills support active learning, encourage critical thinking, and help pupils engage more deeply with their learning.<sup>22</sup> It also supports confidence and communication in the long-term. Effective verbal communication results in improved collaboration in the workplace<sup>23</sup> and positively impacts on mental and physical wellbeing.<sup>24</sup>

There is growing evidence that strengthening pupils' language skills in secondary school can have a positive impact on their overall achievement. Many pupils at this stage still need explicit support to develop the communication tools that help them interact effectively and work collaboratively.



Note. Diagram adapted from "We need to talk" (2024) by the Oracy Education Commission.

## Oracy framework:

1. Agree what 'oracy' means in your setting: Create a shared definition that covers the full range of skills pupils need, including:
  - Physical skills (voice, clarity, fluency)
  - Linguistic skills (vocabulary, grammar, sentence structures)
  - Cognitive skills (reasoning, organising ideas, summarising)
  - Social and emotional skills (listening, turntaking, awareness of others)
2. Map out clear progression across key stages: Set out what good speaking and listening look like at each stage and make this visible in curriculum and assessment. Include skills such as explaining clearly, justifying opinions, asking thoughtful questions, building on others' ideas and presenting formally.
- 3. Teach and model oracy skills explicitly in every subject.**
4. Use whole-school talk routines for consistency: Agree simple routines that every class uses, such as: Think–Pair–Share, discussion roles, e.g., summariser, questioner, etc.
5. Promote oracy beyond the classroom: Create a culture of talk across the school; assemblies, clubs, group work, enrichment, and transitions can all reinforce strong speaking and listening.
6. Ensure adjustments are in place for pupils with SLCN; this is covered in section 5.
7. Align oracy with curriculum, assessment and SEND processes: It should be planned into schemes of work, referred to in SEND support and provision maps, and built into assessment of learning and progress.
8. Review how well the approach is working: Monitor and evaluate what is working, including gathering pupil feedback on how they feel about their speaking and listening skills.

## Key features of oracy building:

- Teach and model the physical skills of speaking. This includes experimenting with pace, volume and pitch depending on contexts, working on clarity of pronunciation and voice projection, and using effective body language to support meaning and confidence.
- Explicitly teach linguistic choices. This includes providing sentence starters, discussion stems and modelled examples to support appropriate vocabulary and grammar, teaching metaphor, emphasis, persuasive language etc. for more extended talk such as debates, explanations or presentations, and highlighting how academic language differs from informal talk.
- Support the cognitive processes behind oracy. Teach pupils how to organise, select and explain their ideas. Model how to build on others' ideas, summarise key points, and ask clarification questions to move learning forward. Embed routines that help pupils to structure their contributions, e.g., 'Think–Pair–Share'.
- Build social and emotional skills for effective interaction. Model and practise turn-taking, group-work roles, and active listening behaviours. Teach pupils how to give and receive feedback respectfully and manage disagreements. Create a safe classroom culture where pupils feel confident to speak, take risks and express ideas.
- Practise and reflect on oracy skills regularly. Provide opportunities for pupils to reflect on their own talk including what went well, what changed, and what they want to improve. Use simple visual prompts or pupil-friendly frameworks to help them self-monitor, e.g., "Was my voice clear?" "Did I build on someone's idea?"

Younger pupils	Older pupils
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use puppets or role play to practise voice projection or expressive intonation.</li><li>• Use sentence frames for talk during peer-to-peer discussions.</li><li>• Highlight new vocabulary during play, reading, and learning.</li><li>• Use graphic organisers to support planning of what to say.</li><li>• Teach simple question stems, e.g., 'Why?', 'How do you know?' to strengthen reasoning.</li><li>• Use structured group roles, e.g., speaker, listener, summariser.</li><li>• Celebrate confident attempts, not just correct answers.</li><li>• Games like 'Conversation bingo', 'Would you rather' and 'If I ruled the world...' can support younger pupils' oracy skills.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Encourage pupils to use short presentations to practise audience awareness.</li><li>• Reflect on how tone and pace influence meaning in debates or discussions.</li><li>• Explicitly teach academic vocabulary, e.g., justify, evaluate, contrast.</li><li>• Model how to shift from informal peer talk to formal presentation language.</li><li>• Use structured debate formats to promote reasoning and critique.</li><li>• Teach note-taking and summarising strategies before a discussion.</li><li>• Teach explicit strategies for managing discussions, e.g., 'inviting others in'.</li><li>• Provide rehearsal opportunities before larger audience tasks to build confidence.</li><li>• Extending on games 'Conversation bingo', 'Would you rather' and 'If I ruled the world...' as well as using Articulate, Taboo, Head Bandz, Guess the Emotion plus debates around morals and dilemmas, can support older pupils' oracy skills.</li></ul>

# Emotional regulation

Emotional regulation means noticing feelings and using strategies to manage them in ways that feel safe and work for the pupil. Adults and environments play a key role through co-regulation and predictable routine.

The ability to regulate emotion is associated with greater wellbeing, income, and socioeconomic status.<sup>25</sup> School environments and adult support can make a meaningful difference.

## Emotional regulation framework:

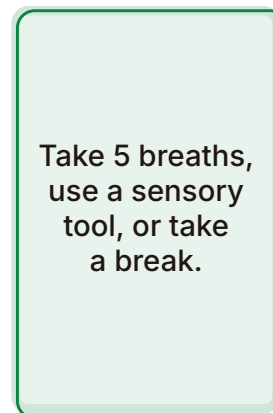
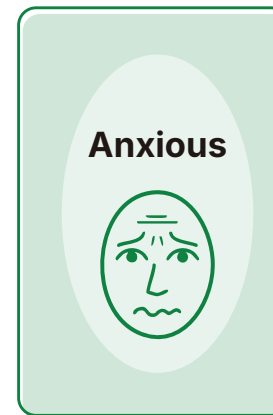
1. Agree what emotional regulation means and why it matters: Create a shared, simple definition so everyone understands how regulation supports learning, communication and wellbeing.
2. Provide a graduated approach to support: Have universal strategies for all pupils, with personalised plans and adaptations for those who need more help.
3. **Teach emotional literacy explicitly.**
4. Use co-regulation as a whole-school practice: Adults actively model calm responses, guide pupils through strategies, and offer supportive language.
5. Use consistent language and tools for regulation: Agree schoolwide approaches such as emotion scales or zones, scripts, regulation prompts and calming techniques.
6. Create emotionally-predictable environments: Use clear routines, visual timetables, consistent expectations, and advance warnings of changes.
7. Recognise sensory and interoceptive needs: Provide movement breaks, sensory tools and low-demand spaces, supporting pupils to notice and respond to internal signals.
8. Adapt communication demands, especially for pupils with SLCN: Use clear language, supported choices, reduced verbal load and visuals to prevent dysregulation linked to communication challenges.

9. Plan regulation strategies proactively: Ensure supports are built into the day, not only during or after incidents. Involve pupils in choosing strategies, spaces and signals.
10. Align emotional regulation with behaviour, SEND and safeguarding systems: Make sure emotional regulation is reflected in behaviour policies, SEND support plans, trauma-informed practice and safeguarding processes.
11. Review how well the approach is working: Monitor and evaluate what is working, including gathering pupil feedback.

### Key features of supporting emotional regulation:

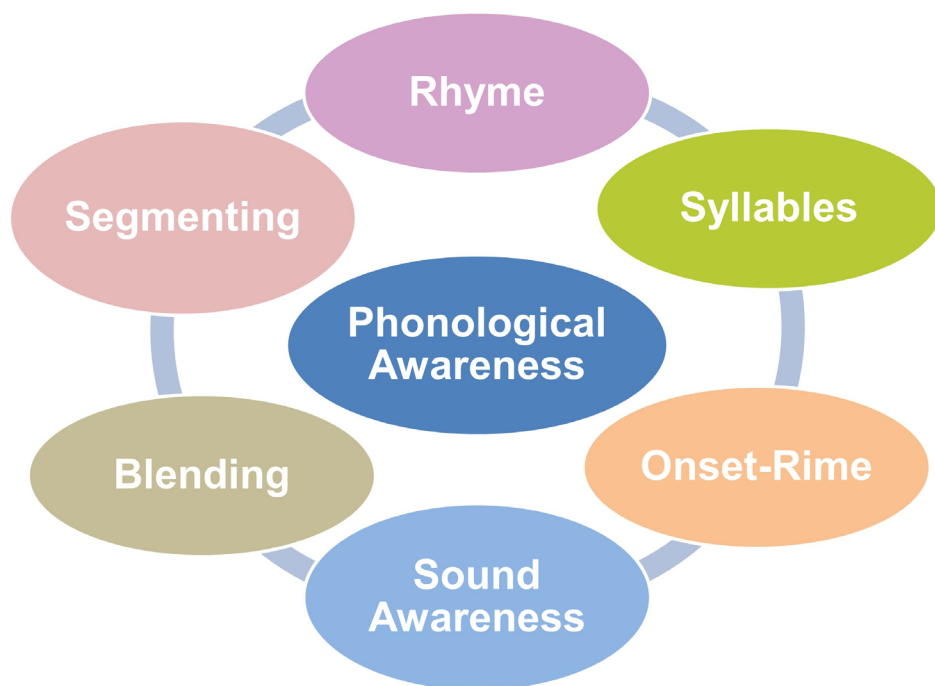
#### Help pupils learn to:

- name emotions
- understand their triggers
- notice body signals
- use regulation strategies and visual supports confidently



## Phonological awareness

Phonological awareness is the ability to recognise and manipulate the sound structures of spoken language, including words, syllables, onsets, rimes, and individual phonemes. This directly links spoken language to written print, enabling pupils to decode words, blend sounds, and understand the alphabetic code. It is the foundation for learning to read and spell.<sup>26</sup>



## Phonological awareness framework:

1. Recognise that phonological awareness can be developed at any age: Skills progress through school, for example:

Early Years / KS1: listening skills, rhyme recognition, syllable segmentation, onset-rime blending.

KS2: phoneme segmentation, blending and manipulation.

Secondary: phoneme manipulation, segmenting long words, blending unfamiliar words, identifying tricky sound-spelling patterns.

2. Use a consistent whole-school approach: All staff understand key terminology and techniques, and phonological awareness is valued beyond the Early Years.
3. Identify pupils who need extra support: Simple screening or monitoring help staff spot learners who would benefit from additional phonological support.

### 4. Teach phonological awareness explicitly: Build short, structured practice into daily routines.

5. Link phonological skills directly to literacy: Embed segmentation and blending within reading, writing and spelling lessons so pupils can apply the skills meaningfully.
6. Make adjustments for pupils with SLCN: Reduce auditory load, allow extra processing time, and provide multimodal input to support access to learning.
7. Involve pupils in choosing what works for them: Help them explore different tools and approaches so they become active, confident learners.
8. Review how well the approach is working: Monitor and evaluate what is working, including gathering pupil feedback.

## Key features of building phonological awareness:

Quick, fun and frequent activities, for example:

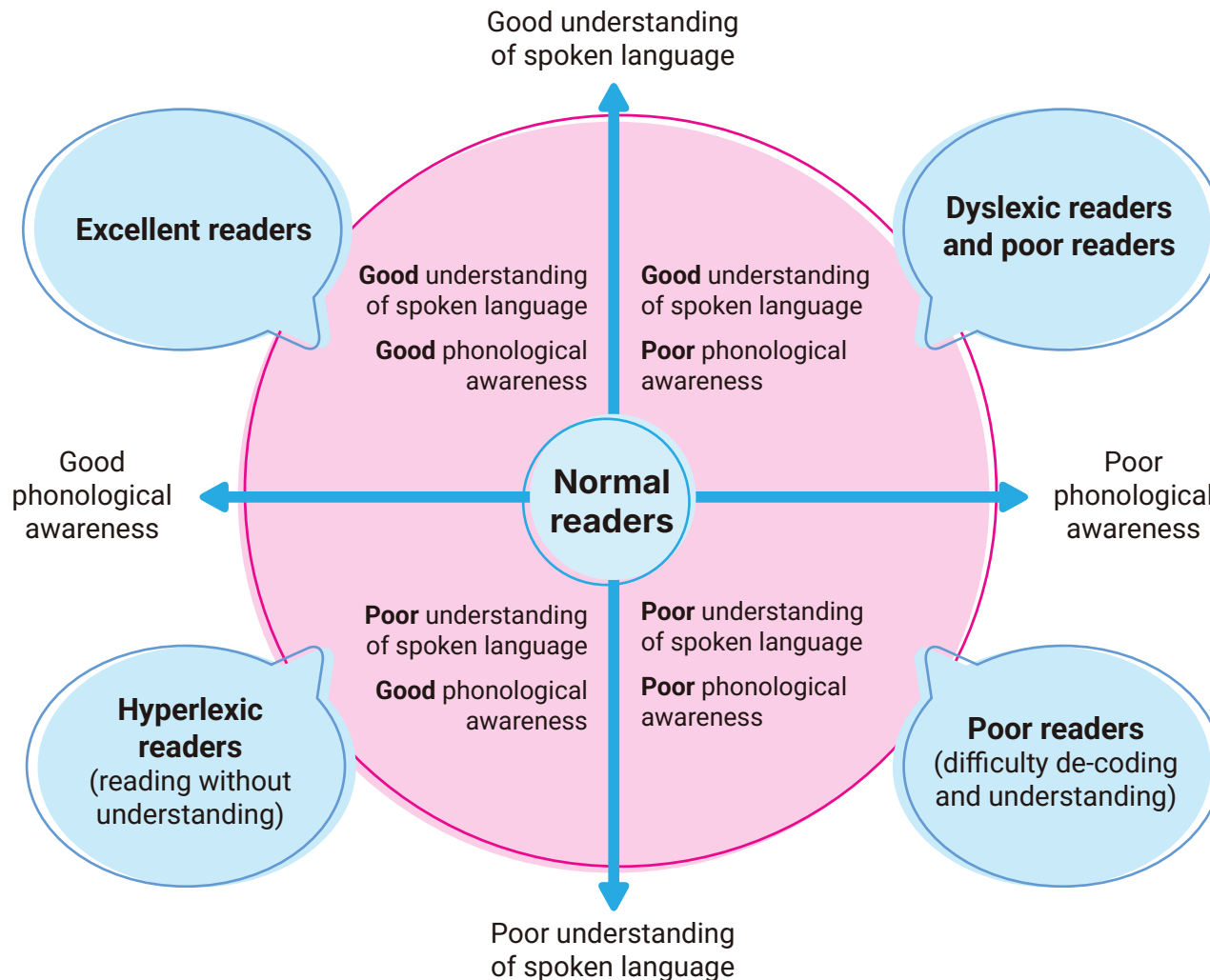
Younger pupils	Older pupils
Singing nursery rhymes, reading books with rhyming patterns, rhyming games, clapping / tapping / beating syllables, "I spy," sound matching and sorting games, sound walks, robot talking, blending and segmenting games.	Word surgery, e.g., using highlighters/slashes to cut words into syllables, sound swap challenge, syllable sorting, "I say / You say" blending with harder words, prefix-suffix builder, odd one out, spelling detective. The above can all be themed around subject vocabulary.

Consider multisensory learning: Use visuals, magnetic letters or tiles, movement, e.g., jumping into hoops, tapping, songs, chants, and rhymes to make learning engaging and memorable. Consider using different environments, not just at a table.

# Reading abilities diagram

Reading develops from a foundation of spoken language skills.<sup>27</sup> Phonological awareness acts as the bridge between the sounds we hear and use in speech and the letters and patterns we encounter in print, making it a crucial stepping-stone for successful reading.

## The link between spoken language and phonological awareness:



### Section 4 reference list

- 17 Rowe M. B. (1974). Pausing phenomena: Influence on the quality of instruction. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 3(3), 203–224. 10.1007/BF01069238
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- 21 Education Endowment Foundation (2025) *Oral Language Interventions: Technical Appendix*
- 22 Education Endowment Foundation (2025) *Oral Language Interventions, in Teaching & Learning Toolkit*
- 23 Haq, I. U., & Faizan, R. (2023). Communication within the workplace: systematic review of essentials of communication. *International Journal of Applied Business and Management Studies*, 8(2), 1–18.
- 24 Fisher, C. L., & Roccotagliata, T. (2017). Interpersonal communication across the life span. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*.
- 25 Côté, S., Gyurak, A., & Levenson, R. W. (2010). The ability to regulate emotion is associated with greater well-being, income, and socioeconomic status. *Emotion*
- 26 Ehri, L. C. (2004). Learning to read words: Theory, findings, and issues. In M. Snowling & C. Hulme (Eds.), *The science of reading: A handbook* (pp. 301–320).
- 27 Snowling, M. J., & Stackhouse, J. (1996). *Dyslexia, speech and language: A practitioner's handbook*.

# 5

## Targeted support

This section of the toolkit covers targeted strategies for those pupils you have identified with SLCN.

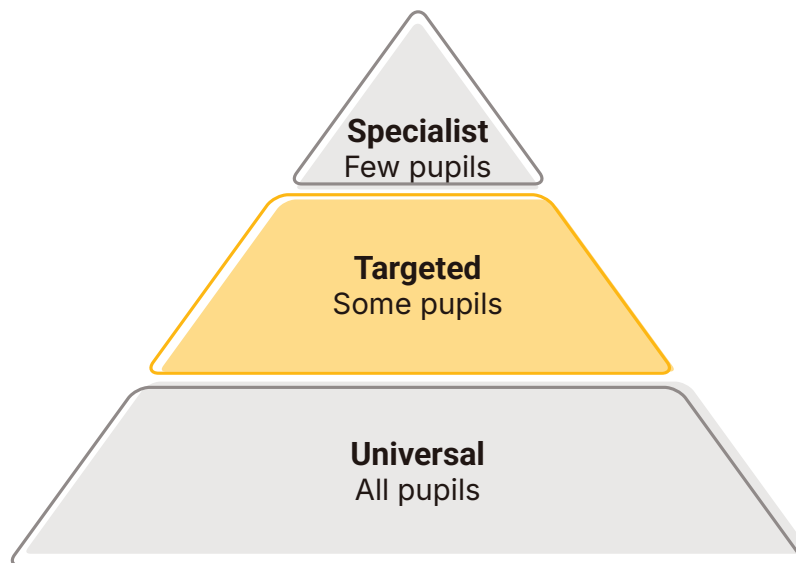
# Targeted strategies

These are strategies and structured interventions designed to help pupils who need additional practice or reinforcement of specific SLC skills beyond universal strategies.

Using a screening tool (see page 16) can help you identify which areas of SLC the pupil has difficulty with, e.g.,

- Understanding of language
- Understanding and using vocabulary
- Using sentences and stories
- Social communication
- Speech

**Ensure you are already applying the universal strategies from section 3, as the strategies and interventions in this section will build on those.**



# Evidence-based practice

As before, the strategies and interventions mentioned here are based on evidence from clinical expertise and research.

There may be other programmes which you are familiar with that are not mentioned in this section. It is important to consider which aspects of SLC skills they target and how strong the evidence base is for these programmes.

# Foundations for communication

This refers to the communicative behaviours pupils may use that do not involve spoken language, including eye contact, gestures, sounds, body language, signs, and pictures.

## What you might notice

- Reduced or emerging use of verbal language.
- Uses AAC or other non-verbal communication methods regularly.
- Differences in social communication (see page 60) and play/interaction patterns.
- Differences in understanding of language (see page 49).
- Showing signs of frustration when not understood.
- Benefitting from visual cues, gestures, or demonstrations.
- Differences in sensitivity to external stimuli.

## Impact

- Reliance on adults or familiar routines to communicate.
- Fewer effective methods to convey feelings, needs, ideas or preferences.
- Experiencing barriers to accessing parts of the curriculum without appropriate support.
- Reduced participation in academic and social activities without adjustments or support.
- Communicating uncertainty or overwhelm through behaviour or withdrawal.
- Reduced self-esteem and confidence.
- Increased risk of misunderstandings or withdrawal in peer interactions.

# Strategies to embed within all settings



## Physical environment

- Ensure AAC tools are always accessible, including transition times, play, and learning activities.
- Place AAC tools at eye level in all areas of the classroom.
- Ensure resources, seating and visual schedules are consistently provided in the same place to reduce cognitive load.
- Consider colour-coded zones to support pupils to navigate the environment independently.
- Provide cushions, wobble-stools, or low-stimulation corners for pupils who communicate through movement or need a calm space.
- Use partitions, small tents, or screens to allow pupils to self-regulate and communicate without distraction.
- Use 'Now and Next' boards and shorter visual timelines to support understanding, predictability and transitions, e.g., registration to break-time.
- Use visual cues or objects/pictures of reference to support routines and transitions.
- Display step-by-step instructions, with accompanying pictures, for common routines.



## High-quality classroom talk

- Provide structured turn-taking opportunities through paired or small-group discussions, use of visuals, and predictable routines.
- Integrate AAC, gesture and visual use in discussions. Accept, use and promote all methods of communication.
- Provide sentence starters with symbols or pictures.



## Adult use of language

- Respond immediately and positively to communication, providing the requested object or activity to reinforce the behaviour.
- Model using the AAC tools and the accompanying word(s) when pupils are playing / learning / socialising.
- Utilise the different types of modelling (see page 35) to support individual pupils' needs.
- Extend wait time after asking a question or giving a prompt to allow processing and response via gesture, AAC, or other non-verbal methods.
- Offer limited, structured choices with clear verbal and visual cues.
- Allow pupils time to formulate and share their ideas / likes / dislikes.



## Whole-school approach

- Ensure there is use of shared symbols, visuals, objects, and AAC systems across all environments including outside spaces, dining hall, and transport.
- Use consistent key vocabulary for routines and transitions so all staff and peers use the same words, gestures, or symbols.
- Ensure regular review of AAC use, visual supports, and strategies, so adaptations are updated and consistent.
- Share useful strategies and progress between staff through team meetings, planning sessions, or communication logs.

- Ensure all staff know about the foundations of communication.
- Signpost staff to training opportunities that will support the foundations of communication (see below).
- Share useful strategies and activities with parents so they can support communication at home.

## Resources

- The SaLT website [www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/foundations-for-communication](http://www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/foundations-for-communication) contains lots of information about the foundations for communication. There are also videos on AAC, objects of reference, choice boards, object exchange and signing.
- The Foundations for Communication workshop supports staff to recognise and support pupils' level of understanding and use of communication: [www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/foundations-for-communication-workshop](http://www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/foundations-for-communication-workshop)

## Example outcome

### Outcome:

- X will consistently communicate their needs and choices, using their preferred communication methods, i.e., symbols or hand leading, across classroom activities, to reduce frustration and support engagement.

### Targets:

- X will independently make requests for objects, activities, or people in at least 3 different familiar contexts, e.g., snack, play, transitions, with 80% consistency.
- X will indicate their preferred activities, people, or places during structured tasks or free play, in at least 5 routine situations per day.

# Understanding of language

Understanding of language, also called receptive language, means processing and making sense of what people communicate. It involves gaining information and meaning from routine, visual information within the environment, sounds, words, grammar and written information.

Understanding language can encompass other skills such as auditory processing, attention and listening, understanding vocabulary, verbal reasoning (working out answers using spoken information), problem solving and working memory. Please refer to other sections of the toolkit for more specific recommendations.

## What you might notice

- Benefiting from instructions being repeated, clarified, or broken into smaller steps.
- Delayed responses, no response, or responses that may not match the expected question.
- Using peers or trusted adults as visual or contextual cues for what to do next.
- Finding unexpected changes in routines or expectations more difficult to process.
- Appearing unsure, overwhelmed, or distressed.
- Following some parts of instructions but missing others, particularly when information is complex or delivered verbally.
- Showing signs of frustration when communication demands are high.
- Communicating needs or distress through behaviour.
- Finding it harder to sustain attention.
- Finding social interactions more challenging.

## Impact

- Work is incomplete or varies from the task set.
- Avoiding or disengaging from tasks that place high demands on language processing.
- Appearing inattentive or reluctant to engage.
- Difficulties with reading comprehension.
- Experiencing barriers to accessing parts of the curriculum without appropriate support.
- Reduced participation in academic and social activities without adjustments or support.
- Communicating uncertainty or overwhelm through behaviour or withdrawal.
- Reduced self-esteem and confidence.
- Increased risk of misunderstandings or withdrawal in peer interactions.

## Strategies to embed within all settings



### Physical environment

- Consider seating arrangements that support access to learning, e.g., seating that reduces distractions or allows clear access to visual information.
- Use 'Now and Next' boards and shorter visual timelines to support understanding, predictability and transitions, e.g., registration to breacktime.
- Use visual cues or objects/pictures of reference to support routines and transitions.
- Display step-by-step instructions, with accompanying pictures, for common routines.
- Explain and provide visual task plans.

- Use colour coding symbols and signs consistently across learning, e.g., to support understanding of question types 'who', 'when', 'why', etc. as well as within displays and resources.
- Provide clear information zones, e.g., a board which includes the lesson's learning objectives, key words, diagrams and sentence starters.
- Teach and model simple note-taking structures, e.g., key words, bullet points.
- Provide graphic organisers for writing and comprehension tasks.
- Use structured classroom activities, e.g., barrier games, practical tasks, to practise following multi-step instructions in a low-pressure way.



### High-quality classroom talk

- Be explicit in peer-to-peer discussion tasks, e.g., "tell your partner three facts from the text."
- Provide sentence starters or frames for discussions, e.g., "I think..., because...", "First..., then...".
- Model paraphrasing and summarising: "Can you repeat that in your own words?"



### Adult use of language

- Gain the pupil's attention, e.g., by using their name, before giving an instruction or introducing an activity.
- Simplify and structure your vocabulary / instructions / sentences.
- Provide additional processing time.
- Ask pupils to repeat instructions in their own words to confirm they have understood.
- Explain non-literal or ambiguous language.
- Be explicit with instructions, rather than using inferred language, e.g., "close the window please" rather than "it's a bit cold in here now".

- Be mindful of how many information-carrying words are in your instructions.



Information-carrying words, or key words, provide meaning and contain an element of choice. See more: [www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/information-carrying-words](http://www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/information-carrying-words)

- Be aware of the complexity of questions. E.g., 'how?', 'when?', and 'why?' questions (Blank levels 3 and 4) require inferencing skills, which may be particularly challenging to answer.
- Revisit and recap key points at the end of activities / lessons.



### Whole-school approach

- Ensure all staff use shared vocabulary, routines, and phrasing for instructions and routines.
- Ensure useful strategies and visuals are provided in all environments, e.g., PE hall, outside areas, dining hall.
- Provide staff with resources and guidance for adapting lessons to support a range of comprehension needs.
- Share useful strategies and progress between staff through team meetings, planning sessions, or communication logs.
- Ensure all staff know how to escalate concerns about language comprehension.
- Signpost staff to training opportunities that will support pupils' understanding of language (see resources).
- Share useful strategies and activities with parents so they can support understanding of language at home.

## Resources

- The SaLT website [www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/supporting-understanding-language](http://www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/supporting-understanding-language) contains lots of information for supporting understanding of language, including concepts, information-carrying words, categorising, the Blank model and non-literal language.
- The SaLT service provides workshops to support understanding of language:
  - The Lift Off to Language workshop supports staff to provide a language programme. It is typically designed for pre-school children but may be appropriate for some pupils in Reception. [www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/lift-off-to-language](http://www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/lift-off-to-language)
  - The ChatterCats workshop supports staff to provide a language programme for pupils in Reception. This aims to boost their understanding and use of concepts and sentences. [www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/chattercats](http://www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/chattercats)
  - The Blank model workshop supports staff to identify the level of language that pupils can understand and to set appropriate targets where there are concerns. This workshop is appropriate for pupils in all key stages. [www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/blanks-workshop](http://www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/blanks-workshop)
- Elklan Language Builders for 5-11s provides advice and activities to promote primary aged pupils' communication skills, including understanding of language. [www.elklan.co.uk/Shop/Language\\_Builders\\_for\\_5-11s](http://www.elklan.co.uk/Shop/Language_Builders_for_5-11s)
- Elklan Language Builders for 11-16s provides advice and activities to promote secondary aged pupils' communication skills, including understanding of language. [www.elklan.co.uk/Shop/Language\\_Builders\\_for\\_11-16s](http://www.elklan.co.uk/Shop/Language_Builders_for_11-16s)
- Elklan CuBIC Word Pack incorporates information-carrying word principles to use with curriculum topics for Key Stage 1 pupils. [www.elklan.co.uk/Shop/CuBIC\\_Word\\_Pack](http://www.elklan.co.uk/Shop/CuBIC_Word_Pack)

- Black Sheep Press provide resources to support understanding of language including:

- Barrier Worksheets
- Semantic Skills 5-11 Bundle
- Semantic Skills 11+ Bundle

Search the above titles at [www.blacksheepress.co.uk](http://www.blacksheepress.co.uk)

- Language for Thinking is a resource for supporting comprehension, reasoning and problem-solving skills. [www.routledge.com/9781909301931](http://www.routledge.com/9781909301931)
- The Big Book of Ideas from Wellcomm contains activities that support understanding of language. [www.gl-assessment.co.uk/products/wellcomm](http://www.gl-assessment.co.uk/products/wellcomm)
- Language for Behaviour and Emotions is a resource for supporting older pupils to understand language and emotions, monitor their comprehension, and build their verbal reasoning, amongst other skills. [www.routledge.com/9780367331832](http://www.routledge.com/9780367331832)
- Talk for Work is a targeted intervention for older pupils with SLCN. It aims to support pupils to develop essential communication skills for the workplace, such as listening, speaking, and understanding instructions, through a series of 13 sessions. Search 'Talk for Work' on [www.speechandlanguage.org.uk](http://www.speechandlanguage.org.uk)

## Example outcomes

### Outcome 1:

- X will increasingly access classroom learning by understanding and responding to spoken instructions and key information shared during lessons.

### Targets:

- X will follow two-step verbal instructions during classroom activities in 4 out of 5 opportunities, with visual support as needed.

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### Outcome 2:

- X will access whole-class teaching by identifying and sharing key ideas from spoken explanations and discussions.

### Targets:

- X will identify and summarise three key points from an adult explanation or video in 4 out of 5 lessons, using visual or written scaffolds where appropriate.

# Understanding and using vocabulary

Vocabulary refers to the collection of words and their meanings used within a language. Vocabulary can be split into groups, like nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions. It supports us to communicate about objects, events and ideas, including those that are not immediately present or have a physical form. Vocabulary is combined to make sentences and paragraphs.

Understanding vocabulary refers to knowing what a word means, and how definitions can change depending on the context. Using vocabulary refers to selecting and using words to communicate meaning.

## What you might notice

- Finding it harder to learn, retain, or retrieve new words
- Finding it harder to name items / objects / feelings.
- Smaller range of vocabulary.
- Experiencing word-finding difficulties.
- Use of invented words, including non-words (jargon) or descriptive words, e.g., “clothes-washer” for “washing machine”.
- Using a limited range of familiar words.
- Frequent use of general or placeholder words, e.g., “thingy”, “that”.
- Use of fillers or hesitations, e.g., “um”, “er”.
- Use of non-verbal communication to aid expression.
- Finding certain social expectations or group dynamics more demanding.

## Impact

- Finding it harder to understand new or unfamiliar words.
- Difficulties with reading comprehension.
- Finding it harder to express thoughts and ideas.
- Experiencing challenges with reading and writing.
- Experiencing barriers to accessing parts of the curriculum without appropriate support.
- Reduced participation in academic and social activities without adjustments or support.
- Communicating uncertainty or overwhelm through behaviour or withdrawal.
- Reduced self-esteem and confidence.
- Increased risk of misunderstandings or withdrawal in peer interactions.

## Strategies to embed within all settings



### Physical environment

- Provide individual vocabulary scrapbooks or glossaries to support pupils in accessing and using new words.
- Support pupils to engage with word walls and topic displays.
- Provide topic word mats and/or key vocabulary cards personalised to the pupils' current level or needs.



## High-quality classroom talk

- Pre-teach vocabulary through discussion and multi-sensory approaches, i.e., visual, auditory, tactile, or experiential. For older pupils, this could include creating short glossaries.
- Provide structured opportunities to practise new vocabulary in context.
- Provide sentence starters for pair/group discussions, e.g., “I noticed that...”, “I agree because...”
- Offer lead-in phrases to scaffold expression, e.g., “A glacier is...”, “We use a thermometer to...”
- Allow pupils to point to answers, choose from options, draw or show you their thoughts and ideas.
- Encourage extra oral rehearsal before writing to help pupils organise their thoughts and vocabulary.



## Adult use of language

- Model rich words which are appropriate to the pupils’ level during explanations. Prioritise high-frequency, curriculum-critical words.
- Provide multiple encounters with the same words, revisiting them across contexts to support understanding and retention.
- Expand on pupils’ range of vocabulary, e.g., “big” – “massive”, “ran” – “sprinted”, “mad” – “furious”, “open” – “release”, “poor” – “impoverished”, “hot” – “torrid”.
- Use open questions to encourage practising vocabulary in context.
- Offer choices containing rich vocabulary to reduce pressure on word-retrieval.
- Anticipate potential word-retrieval difficulties and provide supportive cues in advance, i.e., phonological, semantic, or visual.



## Whole-school approach

- Ensure a vocabulary-rich environment is provided in all environments, e.g., PE hall, outside areas, dining hall etc.
- Encourage consistent language modelling by all staff, so rich vocabulary is modelled in every interaction, and consistency in terminology is used across subjects.
- Ensure vocabulary teaching (see page 37) occurs in all subject areas.
- Organise school-wide initiatives to celebrate and explore vocabulary, e.g., ‘word of the week’, vocabulary challenges or competitions, ‘dress up as a word’ day.
- Share useful strategies and progress between staff through team meetings, planning sessions, or communication logs.
- Ensure all staff know how to escalate concerns about vocabulary.
- Signpost staff to training opportunities that will support pupils’ vocabulary development (see below).
- Share resources, word lists and topic information with parents to support vocabulary at home.

## Resources

- The SaLT website [www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/vocabulary](http://www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/vocabulary) contains lots of information for supporting vocabulary.
- The SaLT service provides workshops to support vocabulary:
  - The Lift Off to Language workshop supports staff to provide a language programme. It is typically designed for pre-school children but may be appropriate for some pupils in Reception. [www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/lift-off-to-language](http://www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/lift-off-to-language)
  - The ChatterCats workshop supports staff to provide a language programme for pupils in Reception. This aims to boost their understanding and use of concepts and sentences. [www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/chattercats](http://www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/chattercats)

- The vocabulary workshop supports staff to understand how they can help pupils of all key stages develop their vocabulary skills. [www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/vocabulary-workshop](http://www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/vocabulary-workshop)
- Elklan Language Builders for 5-11s provides advice and activities to promote primary aged pupils' communication skills, including vocabulary. [www.elklan.co.uk/Shop/Language\\_Builders\\_for\\_5-11s](http://www.elklan.co.uk/Shop/Language_Builders_for_5-11s)
- Elklan Language Builders for 11-16s provides advice and activities to promote secondary aged pupils' communication skills, including vocabulary. [www.elklan.co.uk/Shop/Language\\_Builders\\_for\\_11-16s](http://www.elklan.co.uk/Shop/Language_Builders_for_11-16s)
- 'Word Aware' is a structured whole school approach to promote pupils' vocabulary development. [www.thinkingtalking.co.uk/word-aware](http://www.thinkingtalking.co.uk/word-aware)
- Black Sheep Press Vocabulary Builder is a bank of nouns and verbs that can be used to screen and support vocabulary knowledge. [www.blacksheepress.co.uk/product/nouns-and-verbs-vocabulary-builder-level-1](http://www.blacksheepress.co.uk/product/nouns-and-verbs-vocabulary-builder-level-1)
- The National Literacy Trust provide a host of resources and workshops that support vocabulary development, including oracy workshops for primary pupils, and a resource to develop vocabulary in secondary schools. Their resources are here: [www.literacytrust.org.uk/resources](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/resources) and their staff training is here: [www.literacytrust.org.uk/training-and-workshops](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/training-and-workshops)
- 'Nuffield Early Language Intervention' is a programme for Reception aged pupils that aims to improve their communication skills, including vocabulary. [www.teachneli.org](http://www.teachneli.org)
- 'Vocabulary Enrichment Programme' aims to enhance the understanding and use of vocabulary in secondary school pupils. [www.routledge.com/9780863887987](http://www.routledge.com/9780863887987)
- The Big Book of Ideas from Wellcomm contains activities that support vocabulary. [www.gl-assessment.co.uk/products/wellcomm](http://www.gl-assessment.co.uk/products/wellcomm)
- Language for Behaviour and Emotions is a resource for supporting older pupils' vocabulary, amongst other skills. [www.routledge.com/9780367331832](http://www.routledge.com/9780367331832)

## Example outcomes

### Outcome 1:

- X will add detail to spoken and written work by using describing words when talking about characters, objects and settings, with their chosen communication methods.

### Targets:

- X will use at least one appropriate describing word when describing a picture or object, with adult support as needed.

### Outcome 2:

- X will develop and apply a wider range of subject specific vocabulary to support learning in history, geography and RE.

### Targets:

- X will use at least 2 new subject-specific words accurately in a spoken or written sentence during a lesson, with support as needed.

# Using sentences and stories

Being able to tell a story or describe a series of events in a way that others can follow is an important communication skill for pupils. It is also referred to as 'narrative'. Narrative can include fictional stories or accounts of real events, shared through spoken or written language. We use narrative skills in everyday situations, e.g., talking about what happened at the weekend, reporting an incident in the playground, retelling a plot from a book, film or TV programme, having a conversation with friends, making plans or predictions about future events etc. This section also explores ways to support learners with the grammatical structures that can help them communicate their ideas in sentences and stories.

## What you might notice

- Using a reduced amount of spoken language.
- Finding it harder to link words together.
- Using developing or emerging grammatical forms, e.g., tenses, plurals.
- Preferring simple sentences or short phrases.
- Leaving out some words.
- Using varied word order, which may make sentences harder to follow.
- Finding it challenging to retell and/or write a story/event.
- Providing limited context when describing a story/event.
- Having difficulty sequencing or organising ideas.
- Including limited detail or leaving out some information.
- Opting for familiar or highly-preferred topics.

## Impact

- Finding it difficult to express thoughts.
- Difficulty with critical thinking.
- Challenges with reading (including comprehension) and writing. Issues with spoken sentences will also appear in written work.
- Experiencing barriers to accessing parts of the curriculum without appropriate support.
- Reduced participation in academic and social activities without adjustments or support.
- Communicating uncertainty or overwhelm through behaviour or withdrawal.
- Reduced self-esteem and confidence.
- Increased risk of misunderstandings or withdrawal in peer interactions.

## Strategies to embed within all settings



### Physical environment

- Use motivating photos, e.g., weekend activities or preferred topics, to support discussion.
- Ensure visual timelines are used to support sequencing skills and understanding of past events.
- Use story planners, grids and maps to help structure stories, including aspects like the 'beginning', 'middle' and 'end', or 'introduction', 'setting', 'characters', 'problem', 'solution', 'ending'. These can also support memory and recall.
- Provide story vocabulary on displays or individualised mats, e.g., 'long ago', 'first', 'suddenly', 'out of nowhere', 'at last'.
- Provide voice recorders / tablets so pupils can record and listen to their ideas, summaries or stories.

- Use colour-coding symbols and signs across learning as well as within displays and resources. This can support grammar skills.
- Provide graphic organisers for writing tasks.



### High-quality classroom talk

- Provide explicit language structures for initiating and extending narratives, e.g., “At this point in the story...”, “The problem began when...”
- Use oral prompts based on typical story elements, e.g., “Where were they?”, “Who was there?”
- Provide sentence starters or frames for discussions, e.g., “I think..., because...”, “First..., then...”
- Model paraphrasing and summarising, e.g., “How would you say that in a different way?”.
- Give each partner a role in peer discussions.
- Provide low-stakes speaking opportunities, e.g., “What are the three most important things we learned about the Romans?”, “60 seconds to tell your group how you built your circuit and made electricity pass through”.
- Engage in increased oral rehearsal before writing is expected.



### Adult use of language

- Utilise the different types of modelling (see page 35) to support individual pupils’ needs.
- Support reflection by asking “Is there another way you might say that?”
- Provide alternatives or prompting, e.g., “is it ‘caught’ or ‘caught’?”
- Give immediate clear feedback, e.g., “Let’s add how he was feeling. That will help your listener understand.”



- Emphasise descriptive vocabulary and time connectives when speaking.
- Give pupils time to formulate their sentences.



### Whole-school approach

- Include narrative competence as a whole-school priority alongside literacy and numeracy.
- Ensure all staff are familiar with accepting all forms of communication, and an expectation for verbal communication is not the norm.
- Ensure oracy is embedded across the curriculum, so all subjects include opportunities for oral explanations, storytelling and recounting. For more on oracy, see page 38.
- Display story scaffolds, sentence stems, time connectives, and cause-effect language in communal areas.
- Encourage cross-curricular storytelling projects, e.g., history timeline presentations, science experiment explanations, drama improvisations.
- Ensure all staff are familiar with and use the different types of modelling (see page 35), depending on the scenario.
- Share useful strategies and progress between staff through team meetings, planning sessions, or communication logs.
- Ensure all staff know how to escalate concerns about narrative development.
- Signpost staff to training opportunities that will support pupils’ narrative development (see resources).
- Provide parents with useful strategies and activities so they can support narrative development at home.

## Resources

- The SaLT website [www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/using-sentences-stories](http://www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/using-sentences-stories) contains lots of information for supporting narrative.
- The SaLT service provides workshops to support narrative:
  - The Lift Off to Language workshop supports staff to provide a language programme. It is typically designed for pre-school children but may be appropriate for some pupils in Reception. [www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/lift-off-to-language](http://www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/lift-off-to-language)
  - The ChatterCats workshop supports staff to provide a language programme for pupils in Reception. This aims to boost their understanding and use of concepts and sentences. [www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/chattercats](http://www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/chattercats)
  - The 'using sentences and stories' workshop supports staff to understand how they can help pupils of all key stages develop their narrative skills. [www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/sentences-stories](http://www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/sentences-stories)
- Elklan Language Builders for 5-11s provides advice and activities to promote primary aged pupils' communication skills, including narrative skills. [www.elklan.co.uk/Shop/Language\\_Builders\\_for\\_5-11s](http://www.elklan.co.uk/Shop/Language_Builders_for_5-11s)
- Elklan Language Builders for 11-16s provides advice and activities to promote secondary aged pupils' communication skills, including narrative skills. [www.elklan.co.uk/Shop/Language\\_Builders\\_for\\_11-16s](http://www.elklan.co.uk/Shop/Language_Builders_for_11-16s)
- Colourful Semantics is a system developed by Alison Bryan that aims to support spoken and written language learning across the curriculum. There is lots of information on Colourful Semantics online, particularly on Twinkl.
- Black Sheep Press provide resources to support grammar and narrative skills including:
  - Grammar bundles

- Sequencing bundle
- Sentence builder
- Reception narrative pack
- Speaking and listening through narrative
- From oral to written narrative
- Story starters
- Secondary talk narrative
- Creating superhero stories

Search the above titles at [www.blacksheepress.co.uk](http://www.blacksheepress.co.uk)

- The National Literacy Trust provide a host of resources and workshops that support narrative development, including oracy workshops for primary pupils, and resources for National Storytelling Week for all ages. Their resources are here: [www.literacytrust.org.uk/resources](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/resources) and their staff training is here: [www.literacytrust.org.uk/training-and-workshops](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/training-and-workshops)
- 'Nuffield Early Language Intervention' is a programme for Reception aged pupils that aims to improve their communication skills, including expressive language. [www.teachneli.org](http://www.teachneli.org)
- Helicopter Stories is a storytelling approach for lower Primary pupils with the aim of improving expressive language skills. [www.helicopterstories.co.uk](http://www.helicopterstories.co.uk)
- 'Narrative Intervention Programme' aims to support secondary school pupils to understand, sequence and retell stories. [www.routledge.com/9780863887970](http://www.routledge.com/9780863887970)
- The Big Book of Ideas from Wellcomm contains activities that support narrative. [www.gl-assessment.co.uk/products/wellcomm](http://www.gl-assessment.co.uk/products/wellcomm)
- Language for Behaviour and Emotions is a resource for supporting older pupils' narrative skills, amongst other skills. [www.routledge.com/9780367331832](http://www.routledge.com/9780367331832)

- Talk for Work is a targeted intervention for older pupils with SLCN. It aims to support pupils to develop essential communication skills for the workplace, such as listening, speaking, and understanding instructions, through a series of 13 sessions. Search 'Talk for Work' on [www.speechandlanguage.org.uk](http://www.speechandlanguage.org.uk)

## Example outcomes

### Outcome 1:

- X will share personal experiences and ideas using clear, grammatically organised sentences with their chosen communication methods.

### Targets:

- X will use a simple subject–verb–object (SVO) sentence to describe a picture or experience.

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### Outcome 2:

- X will summarise key texts using clear sentences and an organised structure.

### Targets:

- X will produce a 3–4 sentence summary of a key text, including the main idea and two supporting points.



# Social communication

Social communication refers to the way people use both verbal and non-verbal communication to connect and interact with others. It can include sharing information, expressing needs, building relationships, having conversations, and interpreting a range of communication cues. People may use and understand these skills differently, and this section explores how we can support a wide range of communication styles.

## What you might notice

- Finding it hard to interpret body language, e.g., gestures, facial expressions, stance.
- Differences in own use of body language.
- May not show facial expressions that express how they are feeling.
- Pre-verbal skills, e.g., pointing, eye contact, turn-taking, may develop differently.
- Finding it hard to start, maintain or end a conversation, or providing context to a conversation.
- Shifting topics or following their own train of thought during conversations.
- Finding it difficult to recognise what information a listener might need.
- Finding it hard to understand non-literal language, e.g., sarcasm, idioms etc.
- May use echolalia or scripting as a way to communicate.
- Language skills may develop unevenly or differ from peers, and may be highly advanced in some areas.
- Difficulties with shared attention and listening skills.
- Interacting in ways that differ from peers, or may benefit from support to join in.

- Engaging in repetitive play or have highly focused interests.
- Transitions, unstructured times, or changes in routine may feel challenging or overwhelming.

## Impact

- Peer relationships may be more complex to navigate without support.
- Unstructured activities, e.g., break-time, may feel unpredictable or demanding.
- Difficulty adapting to new or unfamiliar social situations.
- Experiencing barriers to accessing parts of the curriculum without appropriate support.
- Reduced participation in academic and social activities without adjustments or support.
- Communicating uncertainty or overwhelm through behaviour or withdrawal.
- May experience isolation or exclusion.
- Reduced self-esteem and confidence.
- Increased risk of misunderstandings or withdrawal in peer interactions.
- More vulnerable to bullying.

# Strategies to embed within all settings



## Physical environment

- Ensure there is a clear, predictable layout with defined areas in all settings.
- Be consistent in your use of visual timelines or 'Now and Next' boards to reduce the need for verbal processing.
- Provide visual prompts for conversation skills, e.g., a bean bag or printed symbol: 'my turn – your turn', 'ask a friend'.
- Display visual cues for social routines, e.g., greetings, lining up, taking turns.
- Use visual posters with clear, accessible information about what usually happens in different areas, e.g., 'library voice', 'playground rules'.
- Provide calm, low-stimulation zones to support emotional regulation. These include soft seating, low lighting and appropriate sensory tools, e.g., headphones, fidget items.
- Create small-group interaction zones with clear seating arrangements, e.g., a semicircle table, to encourage peer communication.
- Provide collaborative activity stations, e.g., games, puzzles, building sets etc., where interaction is naturally scaffolded.
- Use visuals to support identifying feelings, e.g., Zones of Regulation, and 'check-in' with the pupil at regular intervals.
- Use Social Stories to support understanding of specific situations, skills or concepts.
- Use Comic Strip Conversations to support pupils to identify what others might think, feel or say.



## High-quality classroom talk

- Be explicit in what you want to achieve from peer-to-peer discussion tasks, e.g., "tell your partner three facts from the text".
- Provide structured talk scaffolds, e.g., sentence starters, conversation frames, turn-taking prompts. "I agree/disagree because...", "Can you explain...", "I'd like to add..."
- Establish predictable talk routines, e.g., 'talk partners', 'morning share', 'debate circles' etc., with the same structure each time.
- Encourage paired/small group rehearsals before sharing ideas with a larger group.
- Facilitate group discussions by modelling questions, expanding on answers and gently encouraging turn-taking.
- Use role-playing and acting opportunities to specifically explore what other people might think, feel or say.
- Play games that naturally promote turn-taking and back-and-forth discussion.
- Use low stakes, motivating discussion topics to build confidence.



## Adult use of language

- Use clear, concrete and simple language, avoiding non-literal language unless it is immediately explained.
- Provide additional processing time.
- Use consistent phrases for routines, e.g., "time to pack away", "time for lunch", "time to move to your next lesson".
- Demonstrate how you solve a problem or come to a reasonable conclusion.

- Be explicit with instructions, rather than using inferred language, e.g., “close the window please” rather than “it’s a bit cold in here now”.
- Be aware of the complexity of questions. E.g., ‘how?’, ‘when?’, and ‘why?’ questions (Blank levels 3 and 4) require inferencing skills, which may be particularly challenging to answer.
- Explicitly model social communication skills, e.g., “my turn to talk, now your turn”, “I didn’t hear that, tell me again”.
- Support pupils to maintain topics of conversation by reminding them of the topic when they get sidetracked.
- Support pupils to understand how much information is useful for a listener, i.e. say when you have not been given enough, have been given enough, or too much.
- Talk about your own feelings and model appropriate responses or coping strategies.
- Reduce language load during emotional dysregulation.
- Offer language for feelings, if helpful, while allowing the pupil to confirm or correct it.



### Whole-school approach

- Ensure there is a consistent visual support system in all settings, including corridors, toilets, outside spaces.
- Provide clear, predictable whole-school routines and expectations for regular and irregular activities, e.g., assembly, transitions, class trips, lining up.
- Ensure there is a school-wide focus on oracy and inclusive communication, and these are embedded into the school values.
- Provide inclusive social opportunities, e.g., structured playground activities, social clubs, ‘friendship benches’, buddy or peer-mentoring system. Adults may need to support pupils in joining or playing games.

- Ensure transitions or changes to routine are planned for and adequately supported in a similar fashion across the school. This can be from minor changes like ‘wet play’, school photo day, using a different area for phonics, to moving to the next year group, going on a trip, moving to another school.
- Share useful strategies and progress between staff through team meetings, planning sessions, or communication logs.
- Ensure all staff know how to escalate concerns about social communication.
- Signpost staff to training opportunities that will support pupils’ social communication skills (see resources).
- Provide parents with useful strategies and activities so they can support social communication skills at home.

### Resources

- The SaLT website [www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/supporting-social-communication-interaction](http://www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/supporting-social-communication-interaction) contains lots of information and videos for supporting social communication skills.
- The local neurodiversity support website provides information, resources and signposting and has a section on supporting social communication [www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/neurodiversity-support](http://www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/neurodiversity-support)
- Black Sheep Press provide an ‘Informal Assessment of Communication Skills’ pack that aims to assess social communication skills. [www.blacksheepress.co.uk/product/informal-assessment-of-communication-skills](http://www.blacksheepress.co.uk/product/informal-assessment-of-communication-skills)
- Elklan Language Builders for 5-11s provides advice and activities to promote primary aged pupils’ communication skills, including narrative skills. [www.elklan.co.uk/Shop/Language\\_Builders\\_for\\_5-11s](http://www.elklan.co.uk/Shop/Language_Builders_for_5-11s)

- Elklan Language Builders for 11-16s provides advice and activities to promote secondary aged pupils' communication skills, including narrative skills. [www.elklan.co.uk/Shop/Language\\_Builders\\_for\\_11-16s](http://www.elklan.co.uk/Shop/Language_Builders_for_11-16s)
- Zones of Regulation is a system developed by Leah Kuypers that aims to support pupils to develop self-regulation skills using a system of four colour-coded zones. [www.zonesofregulation.com](http://www.zonesofregulation.com)
- Comic Strip Conversations are a visual communication tool, developed by Carol Gray, that uses simple drawings and symbols to support understanding of social situations and conversations. [www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/comic-strip-conversations](http://www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/comic-strip-conversations)
- Social Stories are a visual communication tool, also developed by Carol Gray, that use short, descriptive narratives to support understanding and navigation of social situations. [www.carolgraysocialstories.com](http://www.carolgraysocialstories.com)
- 'You Are a Social Detective' is a book with ideas to support pupils to use observation, context clues and critical thinking to understand social rules, emotions, and how to respond appropriately. It is available to purchase from Amazon and other book providers.
- LEGO®-based therapy is a structured play therapy that uses collaborative LEGO® building to support pupils develop social skills like sharing, turn-taking, problem-solving, and communication. [www.legobasedtherapy.org](http://www.legobasedtherapy.org) and <https://uk.jkp.com/products/legobased-therapy>
- Socially Speaking is a structured social skills program that aims to boost self-esteem and teach vital skills for relationships and independence, covering communication, friendship, and practice. N.B. there is mixed evidence on the effectiveness of running social skills groups, but the principles covered in this book could be used in small social groups to benefit self-esteem, independence, friendships etc. It is available to purchase from Amazon and other book providers.
- Language for Behaviour and Emotions is a resource for supporting older pupils to problem solve in social situations, amongst other skills. [www.routledge.com/9780367331832](http://www.routledge.com/9780367331832)

## Example outcomes

### Outcome 1:

- X will participate in classroom learning and play in ways that feel comfortable for them.

### Targets:

- X will use an agreed social greeting and take 3 turns in a structured small-group activity in 4 out of 5 opportunities, with adult support.

### Outcome 2:

- X will contribute to group learning by listening, responding appropriately and sharing ideas linked to the topic.

### Targets:

1. X will ask one relevant question or make one related comment during a structured group activity at least twice.
2. X will share at least 2 relevant ideas with the group when appropriate.

# Speech sounds

Speech sounds refer to the basic units of sound that make up words when we speak. For example, the sounds 'p', 'b', 'cl', 'tr', 'a' are speech sounds, the word 'cat' is made up of three speech sounds, 'c', 'a' and 't', and the word 'blocks' is made up of four speech sounds, 'bl', 'o', 'ck', 's'.

## What you might notice

- Speech that is difficult for others to understand.
- Using different sounds in place of others.
- Leaving out some sounds when speaking.
- Variations in sound production across attempts.
- Longer or more complex words may be harder to produce.
- Difficulties with phonological awareness.

## Impact

- Familiar and/or unfamiliar listeners find the pupil's spoken language harder to understand.
- Phonics learning requires additional support or adaptations.
- Increased risk of reading, spelling, and writing difficulties (if there are phonological awareness difficulties).
- Choosing not to speak in certain situations or with certain words when communication feels effortful or stressful.
- Adults may underestimate the pupil's understanding.
- Experiencing barriers to accessing parts of the curriculum without appropriate support.
- Reduced participation in academic and social activities without adjustments or support.

- Communicating uncertainty or overwhelm through behaviour or withdrawal.
- Reduced self-esteem and confidence.
- Increased risk of misunderstandings or withdrawal in peer interactions.

## Strategies to embed within all settings



### Physical environment

- Consider seating arrangements, e.g., may need to be near an adult who can support communication, or seated with supportive peers.
- Ensure background noise is kept to a minimum so adults and pupils can hear each other without the need to ask for repetitions.
- Provide a quiet area for small-group work so all peers and adults have optimum listening opportunities.
- Provide opportunities to communicate often, e.g., role play, puppets, small-world play, 'newsroom' or podcast studios, courtroom or debating areas.
- Provide opportunities to record talking which can encourage self-monitoring.



## High-quality classroom talk

- Use paired or small-group discussions before whole-class contributions.
- Accept short or partial verbal responses when appropriate.
- Avoid placing the pupil in high-pressure speaking positions, e.g., speaking across a noisy room, or at assembly, unless they have requested this.
- Accept responses via NVC, in written form, using pictures, via recordings, or with adult support.
- Encourage all pupils to actively listen, focusing on the content rather than the clarity.
- With older pupils, set short, achievable daily focus goals such as “Today I’ll focus on using my target sound in science discussions”.



## Whole-school approach

- Ensure all staff are familiar with accepting all forms of communication, and an expectation for verbal communication is not the norm.
- Ensure all staff are familiar with modelling back clear pronunciation without an expectation that the pupil will copy.
- Provide inclusive social opportunities, e.g., structured playground activities, social clubs, ‘friendship benches’, buddy or peer-mentoring system.
- Share useful strategies and progress between staff through team meetings, planning sessions, or communication logs.
- Ensure all staff know how to escalate concerns about speech sound difficulties.
- Signpost staff to training opportunities that will support pupils’ understanding of language (see resources).
- Provide parents with useful strategies and activities so they can support speech sounds at home.

## Resources

- The SaLT website [www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/supporting-speech-sounds](http://www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/supporting-speech-sounds) contains lots of information and videos for supporting speech sounds, including phonological awareness.
- The SaLT service provides workshops to support speech sounds:
  - The Sail into Sounds workshop supports staff to provide a speech sound programme for pupils in Reception. This aims to boost their phonological awareness. [www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/sail-into-sounds](http://www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/sail-into-sounds)
  - The Speech Sounds workshop provides staff with strategies and activities to support speech sound development. [www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/speech-sounds-workshop](http://www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/speech-sounds-workshop)
- Elklan Language Builders for 5-11s provides advice and activities to promote primary aged pupils’ communication skills, including speech sounds. [www.elklan.co.uk/Shop/Language\\_Builders\\_for\\_5-11s](http://www.elklan.co.uk/Shop/Language_Builders_for_5-11s)
- ‘School Start Targeted Intervention in Reception Class’ and ‘School Start Targeted Intervention in Year 1’ both provide a programme for supporting sound awareness (as well as language) for these two year groups.
  - Reception: [www.routledge.com/9781909301580](http://www.routledge.com/9781909301580)
  - Year 1: [www.routledge.com/9781138573956](http://www.routledge.com/9781138573956)
- Black Sheep Press provide many resources to support phonological awareness and speech sound production. [www.blacksheepress.co.uk](http://www.blacksheepress.co.uk)

## Example outcomes

**Important:** For pupils with speech sound disorder (see page 19), their outcomes will be set by a SLTist. The suggestions below are for staff who feel confident starting to support a pupil's production of sounds without SaLT involvement, or whilst awaiting assessment or review.

### Outcome 1:

- X will be increasingly understood by others by using clearer speech sounds in classroom activities.

### Targets:

1. X will hear the difference (discriminate) between the sounds /f/ and /b/ with 100% accuracy during structured listening activities.
2. X will use /f/ accurately at the beginning of words in 80% of opportunities during supported classroom activities.

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### Outcome 2:

- X will use the speech sounds /r/ and /l/ clearly to support effective communication across the school day.

### Targets:

- X will use /r/ and /l/ accurately in longer sentences and rehearsed speaking activities in 4 out of 5 opportunities.

# Stammering

Stammering, also known as stuttering, is a difference in how speech sounds and words flow. It can develop gradually or appear suddenly and typically starts in the Early Years. Many children experience periods of increased stammering as their communication skills are rapidly developing during this time.

## What you might notice

- Repeating sounds, e.g., “a-a-a-apple”.
- Repeating whole words, e.g., “and and and I like apples”.
- Lengthening sounds, also known as ‘stretching’, e.g., “mmmmmmilk”.
- Blocking, where no sound comes out when the pupil is trying to speak.
- Using fillers, e.g., “um” or “ah”.
- Trying harder to produce sounds when speech feels effortful.
- Showing physical tension or secondary body movements when trying to speak.

## Impact

- Choosing not to speak in certain situations when communication feels pressured, e.g., social events or responding to questions in class.
- Choosing not to use certain sounds or words.
- Masking their stammer, e.g., changing what they were going to say mid-sentence, to manage social expectations.
- Communicating uncertainty or overwhelm through behaviour or withdrawal.
- Reduced self-esteem and confidence.
- Feelings of fear, frustration or shame.
- More vulnerable to bullying.

- Reduced participation in academic and social activities without adjustments or support.

## Strategies to embed within all settings



### Physical environment

- Consider seating arrangements, e.g., seat next to peers who are patient, supportive and understanding.
- Provide calm zones where pupils can regulate their emotions or speak to adults/peers without pressure or interruption.
- Ensure background noise is kept to a minimum so adults and pupils can hear each other without the need to ask for repetitions.
- Provide a predictable environment with consistent routines to reduce pressure.



### High-quality classroom talk

- Use objects or signals to encourage turn-taking, e.g., a bean bag.
- Consider paired and small-group discussions to ensure pupils are well supported and have a fair chance to participate verbally.
- Provide sentence starters or structured prompts to scaffold discussions, e.g., “I agree with X because...”.
- Encourage paired/small group rehearsals before sharing ideas with a larger group.
- Encourage all pupils to actively listen, focusing on the content rather than the fluency of their talking.
- Avoid unexpected pressure to speak; offer cues when their turn is coming up.
- Accept responses via NVC, in written form, using pictures, via recordings, or with adult support.



## Adult use of language

- Slow down your own rate of speech to model a calm pace and reduce pressure.
- Provide additional time for the pupil to formulate their responses.
- Focus on what the pupil is saying not how they are saying it.
- Avoid interrupting or finishing the pupil's sentence for them.
- Pause to think aloud occasionally, showing that taking the time that you need is normal.
- Encourage and model turn-taking and active listening.
- Avoid telling a pupil how to manage their stammering, e.g., instead of saying "start again", "slow down" or "take a deep breath", show that you are listening and waiting.



## Whole-school approach

- Ensure all staff are familiar with accepting all forms of communication, and an expectation for verbal communication is not the norm.
- Include stammering awareness in school policies, e.g., SEND, anti-bullying etc.
- Ensure all staff are familiar with strategies for responding to stammering.
- Educate pupils about diverse communication styles, including stammering, to encourage patience and acceptance.
- Incorporate stammering awareness into PSHE or assemblies to reduce stigma and encourage empathy.
- Provide inclusive social opportunities, e.g., structured playground activities, social clubs, 'friendship benches', buddy or peer-mentoring system etc.

- Share useful strategies and progress between staff through team meetings, planning sessions, or communication logs.
- Ensure all staff know how to escalate concerns about stammering.
- When appropriate, access and/or signpost staff to training opportunities that will support pupils who stammer. An invite to this will be given if a stammering pupil is known to the SaLT service.
- Provide parents with useful strategies so they can support confidence and communication at home.

## Resources

- The SaLT website [www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/stammering](http://www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/stammering) contains lots of information for supporting pupils who stammer.
- The British Stammering Association (STAMMA) is a UK charity supporting people who stammer and their allies. Their website contains lots of useful information, including for school staff. [www.stamma.org](http://www.stamma.org)
- The Michael Palin Centre for Stammering website contains advice for school staff, as well as for parents and pupils themselves. [www.michaelpalincentreforstammering.org](http://www.michaelpalincentreforstammering.org)
- Action for Stammering Children is another UK charity supporting children and young people who stammer, and those around them. Their website contains information and advice, including a free Stammer Awareness Toolkit. The Toolkit is an interactive e-learning resource designed to help school staff create an inclusive and supportive environment. [www.actionforstammeringchildren.org](http://www.actionforstammeringchildren.org)
- 'My Stammering Tap' is a short, animated video explaining what it feels like to have a stammer. It was made to raise awareness of stammering, and support pupils who stammer to feel less alone. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=OCaTka\\_dsPQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OCaTka_dsPQ)

# Voice

Voice refers to the sound produced in the larynx and expressed through the mouth or nose. Some people experience differences or changes in their voice quality, pitch, or loudness, or may temporarily lose their voice. These changes can be related to how the voice is used or to an underlying medical condition. Ears, Nose and Throat (ENT) specialists play an important role in assessing and supporting voice health.

## What you might notice

- Voice quality that sounds hoarse, croaky, strained, breathy, or quieter than usual.
- Pitch that is higher or lower than expected or varies unexpectedly.
- Volume that is higher, lower, or harder to control.
- Periods of reduced or absent voice.
- Increased vocal effort.
- Frequent coughing or throat clearing, which may impact the voice.

## Impact

- Finding it harder to participate in academic activities that rely heavily on spoken voice, e.g., reading aloud or peer discussion.
- Reduced self-esteem and confidence.
- Reduced participation in academic and social activities without adjustments or support.
- More vulnerable to bullying.
- Communicating uncertainty or overwhelm through behaviour or withdrawal.

## Strategies to embed within all settings



### Physical environment

- Reduce background noise to reduce vocal strain.
- Consider seating arrangements, e.g., close to the teacher / staff.
- Use soft furnishings to reduce echo.
- Consider use of microphones or voice amplifiers.
- Use visual timetables or task plans to avoid the pupil having to repeatedly ask.
- Provide quiet zones where pupils can participate without needing to strain their voice.
- Ensure the pupil has consistent access to water to keep their throat hydrated.
- Consider humidity levels and dust to reduce vocal dryness or irritation.



### High-quality classroom talk

- Encourage paired/small group discussions to reduce need to speak aloud to large groups.
- Use objects or signals to encourage turn-taking, e.g., a beanbag.
- Encourage all pupils to actively listen, focusing on the content rather than the production.
- Accept responses via NVC, in written form, using pictures, via recordings, or with adult support.



## Adult use of language

- Model appropriate speaking volumes.
- Support pupils to use vocal volumes that are comfortable and sustainable, and explain that shouting, screaming, and whispering can place extra strain on the voice.
- Provide additional processing time so pupils do not have to request repetitions.
- Encourage periods of vocal rest by having a balance between activities that require voice, and those that do not.



## Whole-school approach

- Ensure all staff are familiar with accepting all forms of communication, and an expectation for verbal communication is not the norm.
- Encourage school-wide routines that support pupils to drink water and rest their voices.
- Educate pupils about voice differences to reduce stigma and encourage supportive peer interactions.
- Provide inclusive social opportunities, e.g., structured playground activities, social clubs, 'friendship benches', buddy or peer-mentoring system etc.
- Share useful strategies and progress between staff through team meetings, planning sessions, or communication logs.
- Ensure all staff know how to escalate concerns about voice use.
- Provide parents with useful strategies so they can support vocal health and reduce strain at home.

## Resources

- The SaLT website [www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/voice](http://www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/voice) contains information for supporting pupils with voice difficulties.
- The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists website has information on voice disorders and how to support them. [www.rcslt.org/speech-and-language-therapy/clinical-information/voice](http://www.rcslt.org/speech-and-language-therapy/clinical-information/voice)
- The British Voice Association is a UK charity which aims to support healthy voice use [www.britishvoiceassociation.org.uk](http://www.britishvoiceassociation.org.uk).
- Great Ormond Street Hospital has information and advice on using healthy voices [www.gosh.nhs.uk/conditions-and-treatments/procedures-and-treatments/encouraging-your-child-produce-healthy-voice](http://www.gosh.nhs.uk/conditions-and-treatments/procedures-and-treatments/encouraging-your-child-produce-healthy-voice).

# Advice for interventions

The advice provided in Sections 4 and 5 should be embedded into everyday practice, in all settings, where possible. Sometimes, additional focused support or guided sessions may be helpful for individual pupils or small groups.

## Considerations

- Interventions should be time-limited and have clear, meaningful goals, reviewed regularly.
- Repeatedly withdrawing pupils from key learning is not beneficial, so consider how to balance their in-class access with any additional support.
- For group interventions, consider how many pupils are needed to make it beneficial, and which pupils will work well together. Pupils who communicate confidently or are comfortable with the session structure can help create a supportive environment for others.
- Interventions should be delivered by a consistent staff member who has been trained and/or supported in the aims of the intervention.
- Interventions should be pre-planned into staff and pupil timetables to ensure:
  - Availability of staff and rooms
  - The pupil knows what to expect and feels comfortable with the routine
  - Execution of the intervention
- Sufficient time should be allocated to staff leading interventions in order to prepare resources before the session, record progress after the session, and to feedback and liaise with others such as class teachers.

- Goals for interventions should align with and extend learning from the classroom and should be reinforced naturally within classroom routines and activities to support transfer of skills.
- Effective strategies from Sections 4 and 5 should be utilised during interventions too, e.g., visual timetable, seating considerations etc.
- Use a range of engaging activities to practise skills required to meet the target(s). Build on pupils' strengths, interests, and preferred ways of learning. Make use of physical space where possible. Respond flexibly to pupils' attention, energy and sensory needs, and move to a new activity when required.
- Use a record form to reflect on progress after each session. Reflect on whether the pupil has achieved the target and if they are ready to move onto a different target. Where possible, capture the pupils' opinions, e.g., how they felt the session went or what helped, within the record form.
- Consider how you will measure progress, e.g., use of a screen before and after the period of intervention, recognising that progress may look different for each pupil. Some published programmes have their own screening tools for measuring progress.
- Inform parents about the intervention aims and targets, with practical guidance provided to help them support carry-over of skills at home. Regular updates strengthen consistency between home and school.

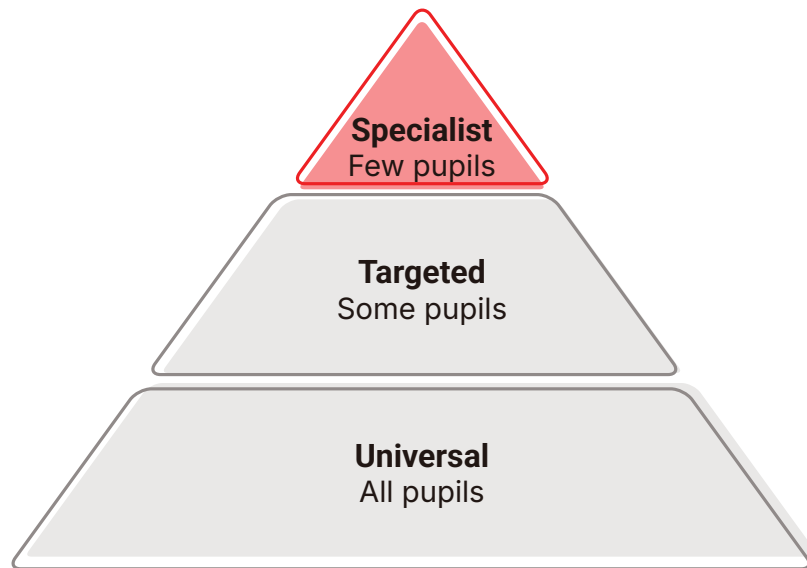
# 6

## Specialist support

**This section of the toolkit focuses on when to refer to the SaLT service in Luton and Bedfordshire, while recognising that many of the principles outlined will also be relevant when referring to other specialist services.**

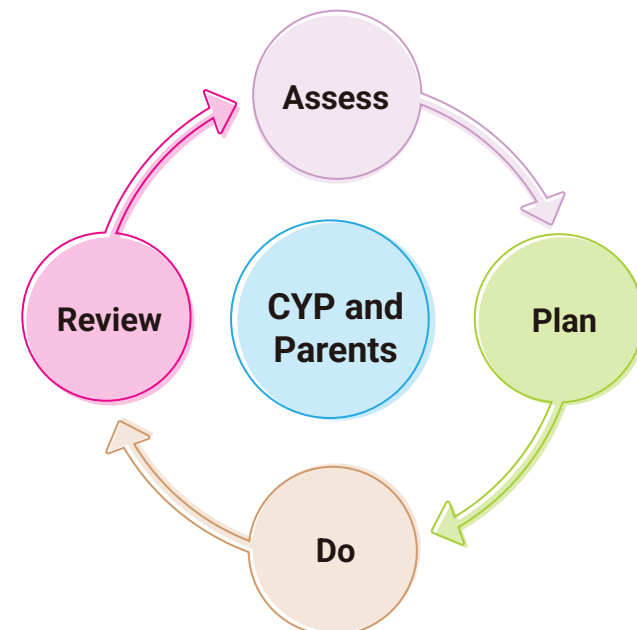
# When to seek specialist support

For pupils with long-term or ongoing SLCN, extra support from specialist service is sometimes required. This might include a Paediatrician, a SLTist, or an Educational Psychologist. These services can provide additional expertise, tools, or guidance to support the pupil's communication development.



The decision to refer to the SaLT service typically arises at one of two points within the 'assess, plan, do, review' cycle:

1. During the 'assess' stage:
  - a. where information indicates that specialist input may be required to make progress, e.g., scoring within the red zone on the Progression Tools (see page 17).
  - b. a differential diagnosis has been given, e.g., speech sound disorder (see page 19).
  - c. AAC is needed/used (see page 31).
2. During the 'review' stage, where the pupil has made less than expected progress despite **targeted interventions**. See 'Decision making following targeted support' on page 74.



# Decision making following targeted support

## Response to interventions

Pupil makes progress.  
Aims of the intervention met.  
Pupil needs fewer prompts to support their SLC skills.  
Pupil now has expected SLC skills for their stage of development.

## Other observations

No further concerns about underlying cause, e.g., DLD.  
Limited functional impact, e.g., accessing the curriculum, social skills, or emotional wellbeing (See more on functional impact on page 75).

## Indication of need

The pupil's language difficulty may have been due to limited exposure or EAL.

## Next steps

May step down to universal level of support only.  
Continue monitoring in school as necessary.  
As a pupil progresses through school, the language demands increase so the pupil may need support again at a later time.  
A referral to SaLT service may not be required at this time.

Pupil makes less progress than expected.  
Aims of the intervention not met.  
Pupil needs more prompts to support their SLC skills.  
Pupil continues to have SLCN, not as expected for their stage of development.

Concerns about underlying cause, e.g., DLD.  
Functional impact evident, e.g., accessing the curriculum, social skills, or emotional wellbeing (See more on functional impact on page 75)

The pupil may have persistent SLCN.

The pupil may require specialist level of support in order to make progress.  
The pupil may need an assessment, specific recommendations and possibly an individual programme from a specialist.  
Schools should continue providing universal and targeted support.  
Consider referring to SaLT service (see page 75).

# Making a high-quality referral

In areas where there is a link SLTist, speak to the SLTist during the termly planning meeting if you are considering making a referral.

The referral form can be found on the service website here:

[www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/SLT#referral](http://www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/SLT#referral)

For school-aged pupils, referrals must come from the school, unless:

- The pupil is home-educated.
- The pupil is not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET).
- The pupil is transferring from another SaLT service.

## Include information on:

- Related needs and challenges: Sensory profile, e.g., hearing, vision, sensory sensitivities, cognitive profile, e.g., memory, processing speed, emotional or mental health needs, and any learning differences or additional needs.
- Response to strategies and interventions: Progress to date, level of prompting or scaffolding required, and strategies that have been helpful, e.g., visual supports, modelling, structured routines.
- **Functional impact.**
- Communication profile: Areas of difficulty, e.g., speech sounds, understanding language, expressing ideas, social communication, with brief classroom examples and any relevant assessment information, e.g., Universally Speaking, Progression Tools.
- Other professionals involved: Involvement from services such as Educational Psychology, Paediatrics, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), or other relevant professionals.

## Functional impact

Functional impact refers to how a pupil's communication needs affect their daily life at school, at home, or in the community. It looks at what helps them take part and where extra support may be needed.

While there are currently no formal assessment tools for measuring functional impact in pupils with SLCN, the following areas should be considered:

Access to learning and the curriculum, e.g.,

- Literacy skills (reading and writing).
- Ability to maintain attention and listening during lessons.
- Participation in language-based tasks, e.g., discussions, answering questions.
- Learning and retaining new information.

Social interaction, e.g.,

- Preferring solitary play or smaller groups in situations where social engagement is expected or needed for learning.
- Finding group activities or social situations challenging.

Emotional wellbeing, e.g.,

- Signs a pupil may be stressed, e.g., anxiety, withdrawal.
- Signs a pupil may be overwhelmed, e.g., frustration, distressed behaviour.

# Packages of Support

Following a referral to the SaLT service, an initial assessment will help determine the most appropriate level of support. If this is the best option for the pupil, they will be offered a Package of Support (POS).

A POS is an individualised plan of care designed to help the pupil work towards their identified communication goals. Each POS is tailored to the pupil's unique needs and strengths, so no two POSs will look the same. The plan is agreed collaboratively with the setting and parents/carers.

What might a POS include?

- Information and guidance on communication tools, e.g., visual supports.
- Suggested strategies and methods to support everyday communication.
- Practical sessions to demonstrate strategies and techniques.
- Training workshops for parents and professionals to build confidence in supporting communication.

**Important:** A POS may not include all of these elements; it is personalised to what will make the biggest difference for the pupil.

The SLTist will review whether the POS is complete and whether the pupil has been appropriately supported to work towards their targets. Where necessary, additional strategies or supports may be identified.

Closing a POS does not mean the pupil no longer has a communication need. It means the right strategies are now in place, and adults can continue using them in school and at home. A new POS can be started later if more support is needed.

# Further information

Explore the website for information, resources, videos and training opportunities



[www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/SLT](http://www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/SLT)

For specific clinical queries please contact the SLTist for your dedicated area.

Contact the Children's Health Hub for general enquiries



0300 555 0606 (Option 3)



[ccs.bedsandlutonchildrenshealthhub@nhs.net](mailto:ccs.bedsandlutonchildrenshealthhub@nhs.net)

Our social media channels share regular, evidence-informed tips and practical strategies to support pupils with SLCN.



[www.facebook.com/sltbedfordshireluton](http://www.facebook.com/sltbedfordshireluton)



[www.instagram.com/sltbedfordshireluton](http://www.instagram.com/sltbedfordshireluton)

