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Commitment to communication

Maxine Whitmore looks at best practice in supporting kids with SLCN in primary school

Every school should prioritise children's communication to ensure that all pupils are given the opportunity to enjoy learning and achieve to their full potential. This can be especially important for pupils with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).

There are a number of key things primary schools can do to provide a holistic approach to supporting pupils speech, language and communication. Here are some of the things that have made a difference at our school.

Undertake regular staff training to ensure that student teachers, newly qualified teachers and all school staff are knowledgeable regarding early identification of pupils with SLCN. Experienced staff members should provide training using up-to-date support strategies. This helps ensure successful integration if teachers and support staff are skilled in providing differentiated learning opportunities to children.

Prioritise language and communication development through ensuring that "at risk" children are identified and supported as early on as possible. If your primary setting works closely with a children's centre or nursery, language and communication development can be encouraged through stories, songs and creative activities, whilst some settings can offer activities such as "bucket time", which encourages attention and early language development. Communicating with these early years settings can provide valuable information about new pupils.

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Screen for SLCN on school entry, allowing children to be identified early and then prioritised for relevant intervention and support. Programmes such as an eight-week "Just Arrived At School" oral language programme can target vocabulary and expressive language development, helping pupils to start on a strong footing.

Link topic and skills curricula across the whole school, ensuring that all areas of learning are linked to an overarching theme. Regular school trips supporting a "living language" approach can provide essential experiences as a focus for communication.

Utilise whole-school visual support systems to support learning such as communicate in print, shape coding, cued articulation and Makaton. Prioritise regular training to all staff to ensure that children with SLCN are continually supported.

Foundations for literacy can be laid down through specific oral programmes, such as Partners in Talking and Talk for Writing.

Run speaking and listening activities throughout the whole school including national events, such as

No Pens Day Wednesdays and the Chatterbox Challenge. Whole-school events help foster confidence and functional communication for all.

Involve the whole school community to support children with SLCN from the headteacher to the caretaker.

Prioritise parental involvement in children's learning through teaching of specific support strategies.

Maintain close liaison with multidisciplinary services such as local speech and language therapy, hearing impairment and educational psychology services. This will help ensure that all barriers to learning are identified and successfully supported early on. [SEN](#)

Further information

Maxine Whitmore is Specialist Speech and Language Therapist at Aerodrome School. The school has recently been awarded Primary School of the Year at the Shine a Light Awards, in recognition of the work of school staff, parents and Croydon's multi-disciplinary services in supporting children with SLCN:
www.aerodromeprimary.co.uk

The Shine a Light Awards are organised by Pearson in partnership with The Communication Trust:
www.pearsonclinical.co.uk/results

Valuing speaking and listening

Rhona MacDonald explores the importance of whole-school active listening approaches to learning

More and more schools and settings are prioritising communication as a core value running throughout lessons and across the whole school. This includes focusing on developing communication, speaking and language skills through active listening and effective communication amongst staff and students.

There are a number of approaches and programmes available. The Listen-EAR (Enjoy, Achieve, Respect) incorporates a communication audit that uses lesson observation to diagnose the communication issues and opportunities within a school.

In many schools, teachers spend a lot of time talking about listening, but mostly to redirect students who are not listening. This causes stop/start lessons. Alternatively schools face challenges where some students are great listeners but require help in speaking out loud.

With the best of intentions, staff often start off by thinking big in their solutions, but starting small by embedding different elements of Listen-EAR has been the way forward to prioritising communication in our school.

A real advantage of prioritising communication in your setting is the realisation that programmes can



Good practice should be embedded across the school.

Reward students for good communication, making rewards small and regular

help teachers as well as students; for example, taking turns to talk gives students more space to speak and helps stop teachers' minds racing ahead to the next part of the lesson whilst students are still answering.

Top tips to prioritise communication

- secure the support of your senior leadership team in taking forward activities and ideas
- start small, testing one strategy in a class at a time and observe the results before rolling it out
- undertake a listening audit of your school. Observe a number of lessons and review the results.
- show students that the strategies are there for everyone, not just for them. Games and rules can change how you interact with students, giving you both more time to speak
- use more visuals and slow down, taking the time to explore new vocabulary
- try nominating a "teacher talk monitor". This encourages students to be involved in the challenge, as well as creating more opportunities for the class to communicate
- reward students for good communication, making rewards small and regular. This could be,

for example, "star of the hour" or "speaking and listening stars"

- embed good practice from the start so that new students know what is expected of them
- take part in communication related activity; for example, students can create "wordles" that are shown in assemblies to represent different year groups' experience of the school.

Remember that improving communication is a long game; one whole-school INSET is not enough to change a school's culture. Some teachers will embrace new strategies and some will take longer. However, with increasing support from a growing number of staff who find that working on listening really improves results for their students, change will start to come. A whole-school commitment to speaking and listening recognises that good communication is at the heart of learning. Good listening means good speaking – which leads to good writing – not just for students with SEN but for every learner. **SEN**

Further information

Rhona MacDonald is Lead Teacher for Listen EAR at Hampstead School, which recently won the Secondary School of the Year Award at the Shine a Light Awards: www.hampsteadschool.org.uk www.pearsonclinical.co.uk/results

The people pictured are not from Hampstead School.