



Spotlight on Bishop Alexander L.E.A.D. Academy

Bishop Alexander L.E.A.D. Academy in Newark-on-Trent was the winner of the Early Years Setting of the Year Award at the 2017 Shine a Light Awards.

Believing that speech, language and communication is the foundation to all learning, the head teacher and teaching staff at Bishop Alexander L.E.A.D. Academy have successfully developed practice in all areas of the school, starting with the Foundation Unit.

In order to ensure every child is given the best start at school, each child is assessed when they arrive to establish their level of speech, language and communication using the Every Child a Talker (ECAT) progression tool. Once completed, the teaching staff take this knowledge and use the 'three-tiered approach' to determine which direction is best for each individual child, whether that be universal, targeted or specialist.

The academy believes that providing a universal approach is key to allow the development of all its children's speech, language and communication. Recognising that the environment plays a big part in children's learning, the academy ensures that engaging opportunities are planned both indoors and outdoors to create communication-friendly spaces wherever possible, focusing on 'hotspot' areas such as their mud kitchen, digging area and den-making area.

For the children who require more targeted support, specific targets are set and delivered on a one-to-one basis or in a small group. For those who are identified as needing more specialist interventions, the SENCO works collaboratively with external agencies such as speech and language therapists, early years specialists, family support workers and paediatricians to ensure children's targets are addressed.

Developing communication skills is so important to the academy that setting individual targets is just part of its Language Lead action plan. Strategies for staff to use whilst interacting with the children are developed, with core strategies worn on keyrings to act as a reminder for all staff.

The academy provides as many ways as possible for all children to access the curriculum including signs and symbols, visual props, real objects and photographs, with planned activity timetabled, for example 'Talk Buddies' where children of different cultures and home languages are buddied up to facilitate the development of language.

Bishop Alexander L.E.A.D. Academy believes listening to its children's needs is important to their development. The Foundation Unit is currently planning to develop an outside construction area.

It's not just about the children either. The staff team at Bishops Alexander L.E.A.D. Academy make a concerted effort to interact with parents as much as possible. Their 'parents as partners' attitude results in teachers sharing skills and knowledge with regular workshops and activity days, providing parents with a speech, language and communication information pack and regular updates, with a family support worker also on hand.



Staff have access to dedicated speech, language and communication training and information packs. Their knowledge and skills are continuously monitored through observation and against the Speech, Language and Communication Framework (SLCF).

The results of Bishop Alexander L.E.A.D. Academy's commitment to pupils, parents and staff are clear to see. Upon arrival to the Foundation Unit, just less than 80% of pupils are below age-expected level; when progressing into the school, 55% of children are at age-expected level and over 20% are above.

Bishop Alexander L.E.A.D. Academy has been awarded the *Early Years Setting of the Year Award* for its leadership at all levels; its integration of communication in day-to-day activities; the breadth of people they work with, including specialists and parents; as well as its ability to create a model of best practice that could be replicated elsewhere.