

Speech, Language and Communication Needs

Speech, language and communication underpin everything we do including making our needs known, expressing our likes and dislikes, interacting with others, making relationships and is crucial for learning. Some children have speech, language and communication needs or SLCN as they find an aspect of communication difficult. It is not always obvious that a child has a SLCN and sometimes only becomes diagnosed after a child starts school.

Speech, Language and Communication Needs are split into 3 main areas:

- Difficulties with speech sounds.
- Difficulties with understanding and producing language, also known as receptive and expressive skills.
- Difficulties with social communication skills and includes Autism Spectrum Disorder and Asperger's Syndrome.

Some children may have difficulty in only one of these areas but others may have difficulties in more than one. Some children may have difficulties that can be helped quite easily, whereas others may have greater needs. Sometimes children develop their skills in the usual way, but at a slower rate. This is often called a 'delay' or 'delayed speech and language development'.

To support pupils with SLCN, Whitstable Endowed recognises and uses a range of strategies. These include visual reinforcements, social stories, visual timetables, Comic strip conversations, social groups, pre-teaching vocabulary, Clicker 5, task management boards, word banks, word wizard and working walls. We also provide targeted interventions for speech, language and social skills.

Speech, language and communication in primary schools

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

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

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

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

Speech

By speech we mean;

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

A child's speech is an important part of their development and it is vital for developing reading and spelling skills. Most children will be using a wide range of speech sounds by the time they are 5 years, but some children will have difficulty in developing these skills.

The areas of difficulties can be due to the following reasons:

- Muscles used to create different sounds. This can be due to muscle weakness and may be linked to difficulties like cerebral palsy.
- Sending messages from the brain to make different speech sounds. This may sometimes be described as 'dyspraxia'.
- Learning and using different sounds to make words. This can be called 'phonological difficulties'.

A child may use only use a small number of sounds, swap one sound for another e.g. saying 'tat' instead of 'cat', missing the ends off words or have difficulty with vowel sounds e.g. saying 'poor' instead of 'pear' or 'pot' instead of 'pat'.

If a child has difficulties with their speech, Whitstable Endowed will assess them using Language Link and an intervention programme will be agreed. A referral to NHS Speech and Language Service, may be recommended if adequate progress is not made following the intervention.

Language

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

By expressive language we mean;

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

By understanding we mean;

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

Language is the vehicle for learning. It enables understanding and expression of thought, it supports thinking, problem solving and reasoning and it's accepted as being critical to cognitive development. Language is split into two areas, receptive and expressive language.

- Receptive – Understanding what has been said to us.
- Expressive – Being able to put say a sentence in a logical way, putting the right words in the right order or being able to recall words (word retrieval).

At Whitstable Endowed we use two types of assessment for assessing language, which are called Language for Learning and Language Link. Pupils can be assessed using Language Link or Language for Learning, if needed.

If a child is assessed and considered to have difficulties with language, they will be provided with a block of interventions to help develop their understanding of language. If a child continues to have difficulties it will be recommended that they are referred to NHS Speech and Language Service for further assessment.

Social Communication Difficulties

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

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

Children with SCD have difficulty with “*pragmatics*”, the unspoken and subtle rules of spoken language that allow people to connect. They don't always understand the give-and-take of a conversation. Some of them monopolise conversations or interrupt a lot whereas others are reluctant to talk at all.

- Some children will have a diagnosis of Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or Asperger's Syndrome, which covers a set of developmental disabilities that can cause significant social, communication, and behavioural challenges. ASD affects children in different ways and can range from mild to severe.

At Whitstable Endowed we support pupils with social communication skills through social skills interventions such as Lego Therapy and small group social interventions. Pupils can also be supported through the use of social stories, nurture groups and a buddy system.

If a child requires additional support for their social communication difficulties we can support a referral to Community Paediatrics for an assessment for ASC. A referral to LIFT (Local Inclusion Forum Team) can also be made to gain advice from specialist teachers service.

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

[Things Parents Can Do To Stimulate Language Development](#)

[Early Years](#)

- Verbally respond to your baby's vocalisations.
- Talk to your baby.
- Around six months use shared attention and sign language (gestures). Point and name things that they see. Use exaggerated voice when you describe things. Use feeling words.
- Sing to your child from babyhood until they ask you to stop.
- Have older children make up songs.
- Use songs to communicate things like time to go to bed, time to clean up, etc.
- Make of songs that are silly or that communicate affirmations related to their positive qualities.

Older Toddler and Preschooler

- Initiate conversations with your child related to recent events, what they are doing.
- Make up stories along with your child. Each contributes. This not only stimulates language but thinking, creating and a sense of humour.
- Gradually increase the complexity of grammar and vocabulary you use to communicate.
- Provide children with expanded information about events, things they see and how they feel.
- Read interactively to engage their participation. Ask questions, use dramatic inflections, let them guess what will happen next, point to pictures and describe them, ask your child to do the same.

School Age and Beyond

- Keep the conversations going.
- Have family meetings.
- Have dinner together at the table and encourage conversation.
- When you go out to dinner, keep the electronics at home or turned off.
- After seeing a film or TV show talk about what happened.
- Encourage reading. When they finish a book get their thoughts and feelings.

Recognising Problems

Check out the time lines and look for delays. Remember that there is quite a range of time for the achievement of each milestone.

- Look for poor eye contact and lack of attention and focus.
- Listen to how they pronounce words. Are they hard to understand?
- Can they understand simple directions?
- Are they having trouble with basic social skills?
- Does your child not seem to be interested in having you read to them?
- Do they repeat what you say or say the same thing over and over?
- Do they lack empathy for the feelings of others?
- Do they avoid conversations?
- Are they only interested in talking or reading about one subject?
- Is your preschooler not engaging in fantasy play? Do they lack a sense of humour?

Useful Websites:

www.talkingpoint.org.uk

www.ican.org.uk

www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk

www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/earlyyears.aspx

www.kentautistic.com

www.autism.org.uk

www.hacw.nhs.uk/slcw-pathway/