

**Report of Pilot Study Introducing Speech Link into 25 Primary Schools in
Derby City - 2007**

What is Speech Link?

Speech Link is a multimedia package which enables speech and language therapists (SLTs), teachers and assistants (TAs) to work together in schools to screen children for developmental speech sound difficulties. With training and on line support from SLTs, school staff manage children with straightforward speech delays and learn to prioritise those with more complex difficulties who need referral to the Speech and Language Therapy Service for specialist support.

The Speech Link software consists of a screening assessment for children 4 to 8 years, a website, training video and picture resources. The member of school staff (usually a TA), records the child's responses to naming pictures onto the software. The computer package then generates individual speech programmes and/or advises teachers to contact the Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) Service if the child has complex speech sound difficulties. Speech Link helps highlight children whose specific difficulties may not otherwise have been identified, and enables pupils to get class based and specialist therapy earlier.

Background

In March 2006, Derby City Local Authority purchased Speech Link software packages to use in 25 schools. A Speech Link strategic group consisting of SLT team managers and senior Local Authority staff oversaw the implementation of the project.

In the summer of 2006, staff from each of the schools were trained by an SLT and specialist teacher to use the software. In addition, school staff were offered ongoing advice from an SLT via email. The project ran until the end of March 2007.

Children prioritised for specialist SLT services are those with complex speech sound difficulties that are following an atypical pattern of development.

Prior to the Speech Link project, referrals for school aged children with speech sound difficulties showed a wide amount of variation. (Flowchart 1)

Many children didn't reach the criteria for SLT because their:

- Speech was developmentally appropriate for their age.
- Speech followed a normal pattern, but was developing at a slower rate.
- Referral forms were incomplete (155 incomplete referrals between March 2006 and March 2007)

In the period March 2006 to March 2007, SLTs spent 30 hours (one working week) in total screening and prioritising referrals to the service. Many children would not be seen for assessment and therapy at the end of this process.

Objectives

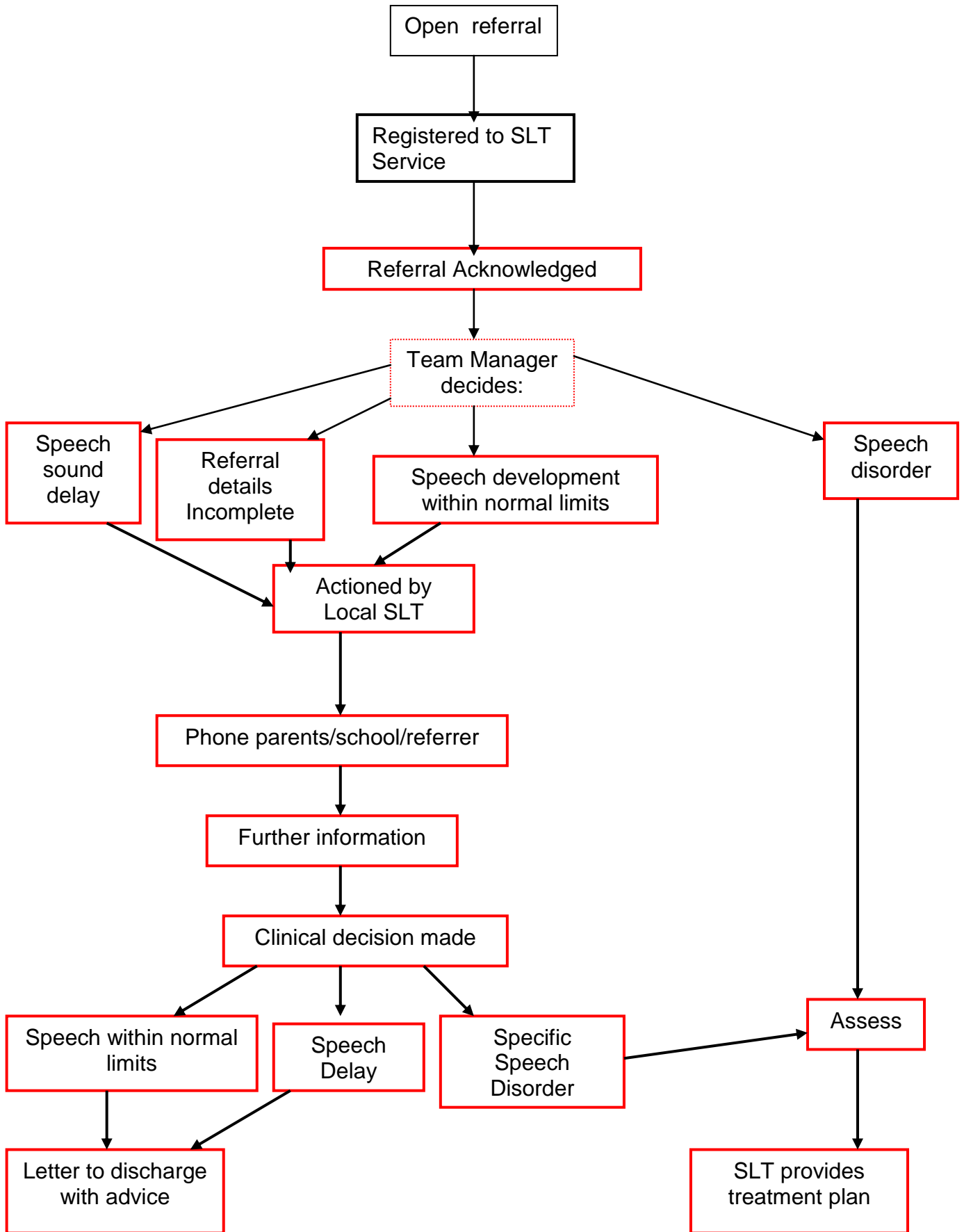
- Reduce the number of referrals to Speech and Language Therapy of non-speech disordered children.
- Improve the quality of the referrals.
- Reduce speech and language therapists time spent telephone screening of referrals
- Raise school confidence levels when supporting children with delayed speech development.
- Provide education staff with quality training and resources.

Results (Flowchart 2)

130 children in Derby City Schools participated in the pilot project and their speech development was assessed using the Speech Link software.

- 33 children (25%) had no problem.
- 60 children (46%) had delayed speech. The software recommended school staff should follow its speech programmes.
- 33 children (25%) required speech programmes and teachers were recommend to discuss the results with a speech and language therapist.
These children had:
Some atypical speech sounds (disordered development)
Several delayed speech sound substitutions occurring together
Needed their speech pattern verified by an SLT
- 16 children (12%) were supported by Speech Link Programmes only
- 17 children (13%) were referred to the Derby City SLT Team
A therapist assessed all these 17 children in their schools.
5 children (4%) were referred back to try Speech Link programmes, as they had speech sound delay.
- **12 children (9%) of the total 130 children in the project were diagnosed with speech sound disorder and were offered ongoing therapy from the service.**

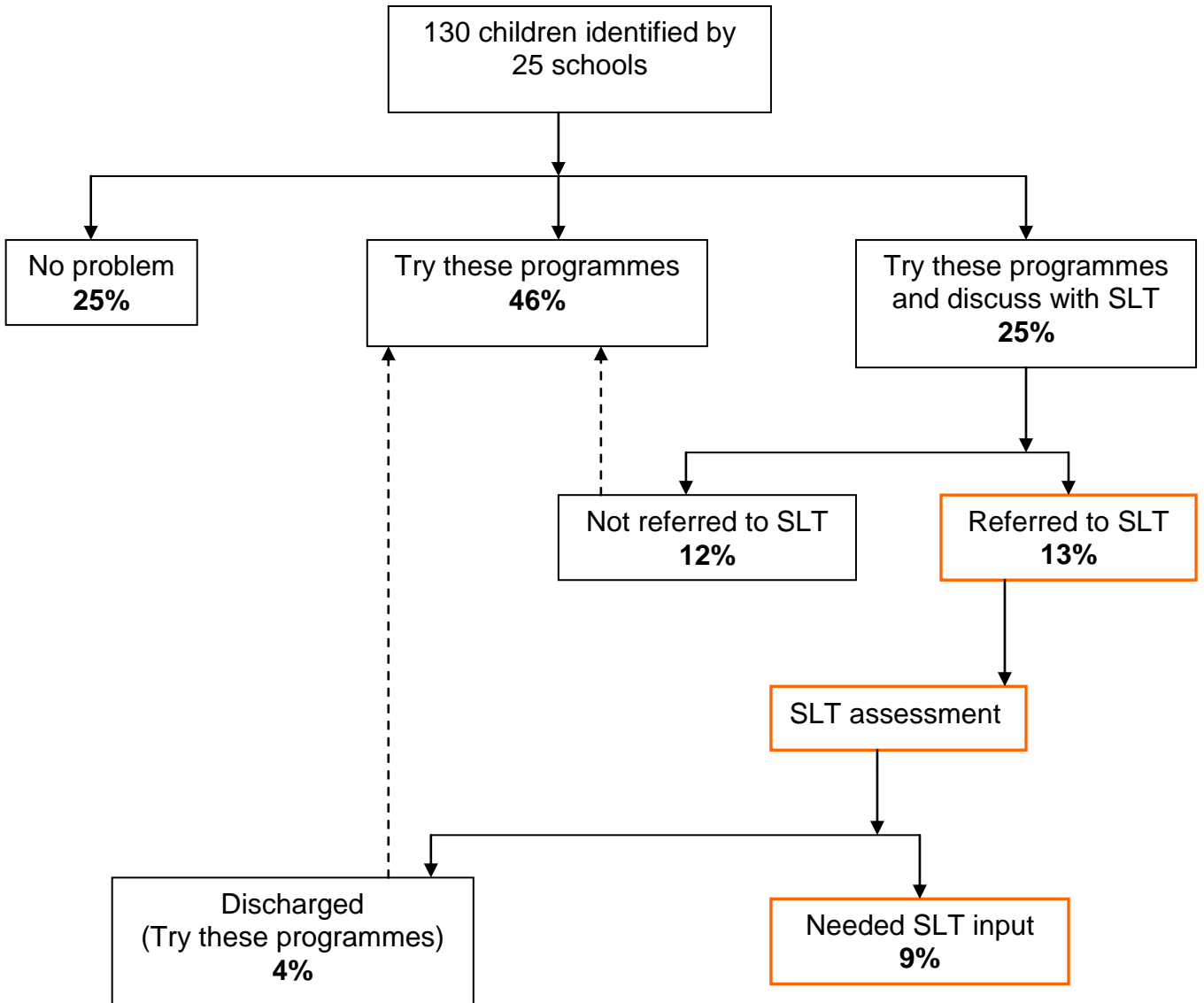
REFERRAL TO THE SERVICE WITHOUT SPEECH LINK



- School led input
- SLT led input

Speech and Language Therapy Service

SPEECH AND LANGUAGE SERVICE WITH SPEECH LINK



School led input

SLT led input

Outcomes

- The majority of children with delayed speech are managed by school staff.
- Referral rate to SLT is significantly reduced. Only 9% (12 children) within the pilot needed ongoing speech and language therapy input.
- All Speech Link referrals include the child's full assessment details and no follow up investigation is needed.
- Telephone screening of referrals has been discontinued in the City team.
- SLT time is targeted to manage children with the most complex difficulties.
- Waiting times for initial assessment for all children in the SLT service is reduced.
- No child in the 25 participating schools has an unidentified speech difficulty.
- The project promotes ongoing joint working between therapists, teachers and teaching assistants.
- School staff are empowered to identify speech difficulties and implement programmes appropriately.
- Schools have a wealth of high quality resources to support children with speech delay.
- Teaching Assistants have developed additional skills and experience in identifying and supporting children with speech difficulties.
- Teachers and therapists are establishing emailing links for quick access to advice, support and exchanging information.

.....and what the teachers have to say!

A post project questionnaire was sent out to schools in the summer term and opinions of SENCOs were sought at a Network meeting.

- "Speech Link helps us to determine the difference between delay and disorder."
- "We know if a referral to speech and language is relevant."
- "Speech Link must help the SLT prioritise. When I made a referral to SLT through Speech Link it was addressed very quickly."
- "We are not so dependent upon the Speech and Language Therapy service."
- "We do not have to wait for a therapist to give us a programme."
- "Excellent resources, and I am able to send high quality resources home with child."
- "Children are motivated by the resources."
- "Programmes are very useful to implement by teaching assistants."
- "Very good support following referral from the speech and language therapists."
- "Reassured parents who have concerns."
- "Precise, quick identification of how best to support child."

All schools reported that they found some difficulty allocating time in the school day to follow Speech Link programmes.

Acknowledgement

This Project was the outcome of joint work between Derbyshire County Primary Care Trust and Derby City Children and Young People's Services.

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For further information about Derbyshire County Speech and Language Therapy Service and Speech and Language Link Software please visit: www.speech.derby.nhs.uk and www.speechlink.info