

# The Link

ISSUE 2 2014

## Engaging parents and pupils

The new SEN Code of Practice will involve parents and pupils more in target setting. How to support them on page 10.

## The communication friendly classroom for SLCN and EAL pupils

Includes a FREE environment audit.

## FREE POSTER

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# Editor's Letter

Welcome to the latest edition of The Link magazine. Here at The Link our aim is to provide clear, accessible information for teachers who are supporting pupils with communication difficulties. This issue is packed full of practical suggestions to try as well as free resources and free downloads.

## Language Development

Do you know if your pupils' talking is appropriate for their age? Find out which language skills develop at which ages and when you should be concerned about a pupil's language development on pages 4 and 5.

## Communication Friendly Classrooms

How communication friendly is your classroom? Which are the most effective strategies for supporting pupils? On pages 6 and 7 we explore some practical ideas for making your classroom inclusive for pupils with SLCN and EAL.

## Teacher Talk

We often overlook the fact that we ourselves are the best classroom

resource for supporting children's language development. Find out how to adapt your talking style to maximise inclusion for SLCN pupils on pages 8 and 9.

## Engaging Parents

The draft of the new SEN code of practice gives parents much more control over the decision making process for their children. On pages 10 and 11 we explore ways to involve parents and pupils in target setting.

To find out more about any of these topics or how the Language Link packages could benefit your school,

visit our website

[www.speechlink.info/thelink](http://www.speechlink.info/thelink)

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**Contributors: Sarah Wall and Heather Stevens**

Derry, Heather and Sarah are Speech and Language Therapists.

**FREE**

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# NEWS IN BRIEF



## Time to Talk: Implementing outstanding practice in speech, language and communication

Jean Gross 2013

In this easy to read resource Jean Gross reports on examples of good practice that she observed around the country in her role as Communication Champion. Illustrated with powerful case studies, she describes ways in which educational settings have maximised the opportunities to encourage communication. She focuses on the need to provide a place and a reason to talk and looks at ways of teaching and supporting talking.

### Did you know?

The average noise level in classrooms is around 60 decibels whereas recommended levels are no more than 35.

### Did you know?



Classroom background noise (children's chatter, heating and lighting, fish tanks and computers) means that children miss one in six words (Greenfield 2007)

### Did you know?

Ofsted commented favourably on role play in KS2. A Salford school extended the impact of EYFS role-play work into other areas of the school (Ofsted 2011b)

## Have you heard of the RALLI campaign?

RALLI: Raising Awareness of Language Learning Impairments (in association with Afasic) is a campaign that has produced a series of helpful online videos. The videos cover how to identify and support pupils with specific language impairments and include interviews with teachers, parents and pupils themselves. You can view these fantastic videos at: <http://www.youtube.com/user/RALLIcampaign> or follow the campaign on twitter @RALLIcam

Check out the RALLI campaign's videos on YouTube – fantastic!



## PRIZE DRAW



Like our Facebook page to enter a prize draw for 5 lucky schools to win a staffroom hamper. Go to the Speech Link Multimedia Ltd page.



# Case Notes:

## Speech and Language Development

When it comes to speech and language development, it can be difficult to know what to look for, and what steps to take in your investigations. Sarah Wall uses three case studies from a Kent school to explain the steps needed to inform decisions about support in the classroom.



Speech, language and communication needs are the most common type of primary SEN in primary schools making up 29% of the total (DfE school census data 2012). However it is not always easy to identify when a child is having difficulties with their speech and language development. If a pupil's speech is difficult to understand you may consider they have a speech difficulty, however not all speech sounds are well established by the time a child starts school. So how do you determine if your pupil is having difficulties or is performing at an age appropriate level?

When it comes to a pupil's understanding of language it is even harder to observe a difficulty. If you give a pupil an instruction and they struggle to understand then you may have concerns.

But was it a problem with the pupil's understanding or was your instruction too long and complex? You may have used unfamiliar vocabulary or the context of what you were saying was unclear.

When you give a pupil an instruction and they are able to complete it, the picture is even more confusing. How can you be sure they have understood the words? They may have simply copied the rest of the class, or used visual or contextual cues, or perhaps you were asking them to do something that takes place as part of the everyday classroom routine.

### Language Link Top Tip:

A good way to test understanding is to ask the pupil to do something unusual e.g. "When you have finished your yoghurt put the pot under the table".

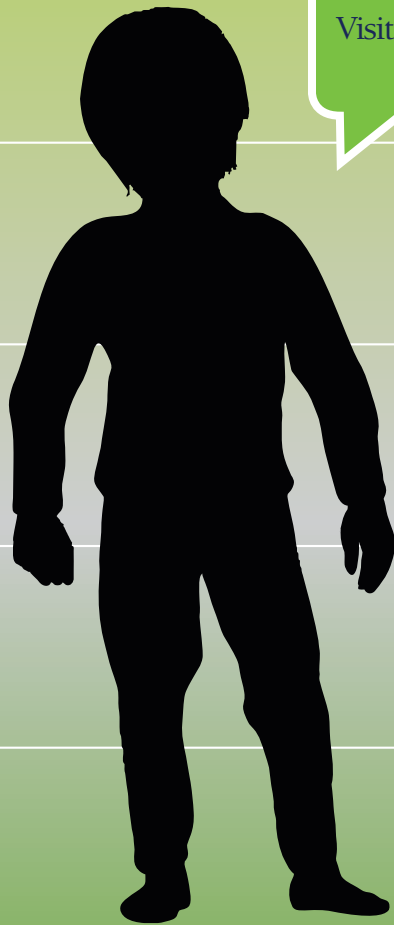
How confident are you that your pupils are doing what they should be for their age in terms of speech and language development? Download our free speech and language development tables from [www.speechlink.info/thelink](http://www.speechlink.info/thelink) to help you decide.

### Ben

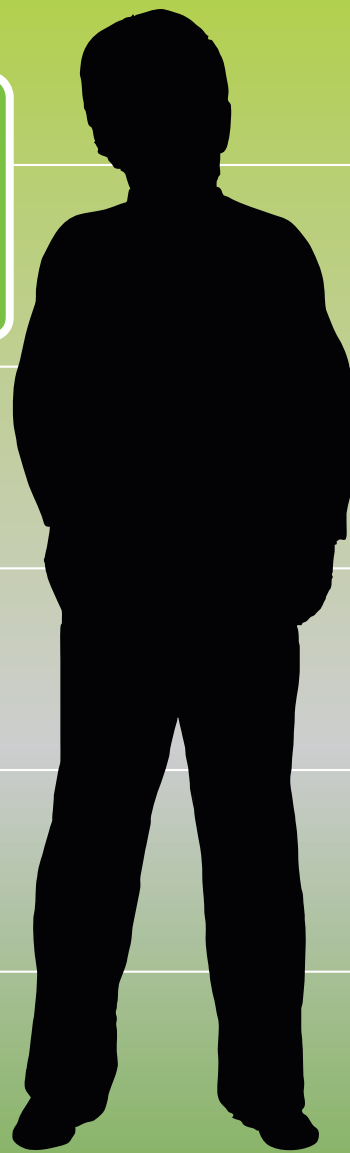
Ben is in Year 3. Every Monday morning Ben arrives at school and tells you, in great detail, all about his fishing trip on Saturday. Ben often distracts his peers and staff with talk about topics that interest him. He is slow to get on with his work, asking lots of questions about what he has to do, and hardly ever completes a task. You notice that he is immature and likes to hang around the teaching assistant during lessons and break times.

### What could you do?

Checking Ben's understanding



Find out what happened next with Ben, Tom & Cassie. Visit [www.speechlink.info/thelink](http://www.speechlink.info/thelink)



of language is essential. His seemingly good spoken language could be masking his difficulties with understanding. He can talk at length, but only about a topic he knows lots about. Use the Language Link screening tool to assess Ben's understanding. This will provide you with classroom strategies and resources to support Ben and will help you decide if you need to discuss him with a Speech and Language Therapist.

### Tom

Tom is in Year 1. He is a shy child and does not offer any comments in class. He answers questions with one word only. He is a slow worker and is reluctant to ask for help. He follows his peers in class and at break time. Tom can complete instructions you give him individually. His parents say he is quite different at home where he is chatty and bosses his little sister around.

### What should you do?

Tom could have difficulty understanding language but he may be lacking in confidence. He may be reluctant to make a mistake and look for reassurance, which explains why he is slow to begin a task and follows the lead of his friends. You should check his understanding to be sure. Use the Language Link screening tool to check Tom's level of understanding.

### Cassie

Cassie is in reception class. She is a very sociable girl and has many friends. She is often the first child to put up her hand in class. She is able to follow classroom instructions without difficulty and finishes her work quickly without much help. However Cassie's speech is very unclear. Staff say they can only make out about a third of her words, and can only work out what she is saying by using the context. They

are beginning to 'tune in' to her speech and understand more of what she is saying. Cassie's Mum is not concerned and says she can understand everything Cassie says at home.

### What should you do?

By 3 years old a child should be at least 75% intelligible. You should investigate her speech sound production further. Use the speech and language development tables to see which sounds Cassie should be producing. Carry out the Speech Link screen. This will provide recommendations for speech sound work and will help you decide if you need to discuss her with a Speech and Language Therapist.

**To find out more about Language Link and Speech Link and to find out what support was put in place for these three pupils visit [www.speechlink.info/thelink](http://www.speechlink.info/thelink).**

# How Communication Friendly is your classroom?

Heather Stevens explores ways to maximise the classroom space to support language development.

If a stranger walked into your school what would be their first impression?

How does your school welcome them? Perhaps their eye would be drawn to your displays? Where would they see children working together? How easy would it be for them to identify the places that encourage children to talk?

The new National Curriculum recognises the need to improve oracy for all pupils. OFSTED's recent survey, *Removing Barriers to Literacy*, reported that a common feature of the most successful schools was the attention they gave to developing speaking and listening. This also led to improved standards in writing.

## Creating communication friendly spaces

Effective communication friendly spaces give children a reason to talk as well as offering a place in which to do it. The best spaces will have:

- A level of intimacy – e.g. a den, tent, large cardboard box
- Lower levels of background noise
- Role play opportunities that encourage dialogue through sharing or co-operation e.g. shops or work places, telephone conversations, gardening, etc.

Former Communication Champion, Jean Gross, highlights the importance of identifying places to talk throughout the school. She suggests carrying out an audit of your environment to identify areas that are hotspots for encouraging talking and those which need to be developed to make them more communication friendly.

## References:

Removing Barriers to Literacy available from [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)  
Gross, J. (2013) *A Time to Talk: Implementing outstanding practice in speech, language and communication*. Routledge: Oxon

Visit our website  
[www.speechlink.info/thelink](http://www.speechlink.info/thelink)  
to download your copy of The Link's talk friendly environment audit to see where the best talking spaces are in your school.



## Some things to try

Simple changes can make a big difference. Here are some suggestions...

Try keeping back some equipment for an activity to encourage children to ask for what they want.

Define an outdoor space with a circle (use logs or old tree stumps) or put out a circular table with four chairs round it.

Display story starters and sentence starters in your communication friendly spaces to provide adults with examples of language to use to get children talking.

Make a den and theme it to a topic or a story that the children enjoy.

The Elizabeth Jarman Trust has developed a tool-kit called "Communication Friendly Spaces" which focuses on 'de-cluttering' the learning environment to support children's listening and speaking skills.

Visit <http://www.elizabethjarmantraining.co.uk/> for more information on the Communication Friendly Spaces approach and to view the wide range of books and resources available.

### Using the existing space to encourage communication

Sometimes it's not about creating new spaces for talking but rather adapting existing spaces to give children a reason to talk and question. Wall displays around the school provide an excellent conversation starter for all pupils.

### Communication friendly displays should:

- Pose questions for pupils e.g. what's missing, why is this picture on the wall?
- Link to targets in pupils' work.
- Use topic vocabulary.

- Provide a consistent approach to colour coding or question formats e.g. colour coded questions, use of symbols.
- Encourage pupils to look beneath the surface e.g. lift the flap.
- Be placed at the right level for children to access them easily.

For some examples of communication friendly display boards visit [Linda Hartley's blog at http://classroomdisplays.org.uk](http://classroomdisplays.org.uk).

Watch out for our feature on creating interactive displays in a future issue of *The Link*.

Use old mobile phones as conversation creators.

I'm your  
conversation  
creator  
:-)



# Teacher Talk

**Sarah Wall explains how teachers can adapt their talking to support children with SLCN.**

Teachers today face a bewildering array of classroom resources and multimedia packages. A visit to the TES Special Needs exhibition in London would confirm that there are resources out there for pretty much everything, from apps to help pupils with their mental maths to large pieces of adapted play equipment. However, few budgets can stretch to all the new ideas. We can be in danger of forgetting that teachers themselves are the greatest resource in the classroom.

The way teachers communicate

with pupils and plan opportunities for interaction with and amongst their pupils is the most successful way to develop speech and language skills. Adults who can adapt their own style of talking will maximise the pupil's language learning experiences. The National Literacy Trust research report (2010) provided evidence to show that adults who let the child lead in interaction had a more positive effect on the pupil's language development.

## Commenting

A key element of adapting teacher talk is the use of questions and comments. Language development opportunities arise when adults use less directive styles of communication, incorporating more

open questions and comments following observation of the child. For example, when observing a child engaging in pretend play with the farm animals, comment on what the animals are doing, e.g. "The brown horse looks a bit cross", "I like when the sheep dog chases all the sheep", "Oh look the pigs are having a sleep. I'm feeling sleepy too".

Every Child a Talker provides clear guidance for teachers on how to use their interaction with pupils to promote language development. It recommends using the hand rule – use four comments to every one question.

## Open Questions

When the adult does ask questions, open questions are the best for





promoting language opportunities. Open questions are questions that don't restrict the child to a yes or no response. For example questions such as "What would happen if...?", "How do you think we could...?" or "Tell me how you did that..." require the child to produce phrases to answer them.

### Expansion and Recasts

Recasting and expansion are useful techniques for correcting (recast) and extending (expansion) a child by modelling back correct language. When an adult recasts a pupil's contribution the pupil is hearing a correct model in terms of sounds, grammar and vocabulary. For example

**Pupil:** "He goed over to John 'puter"

**Adult:** "Ah he went over to John's computer" (Recast)  
or

**Adult:** "Ah he went over to John's favourite computer and logged on" (Expansion)

### Context

Jean Gross (2013) argues that using comments, open questions and expansion will help pupils but adults must also endeavour to provide a good reason for children to want to talk. Asking questions to check knowledge will probably always be part of classroom interaction but asking questions, where the answer is already known by the adult doing the asking, does not provide an authentic reason for communication. Classrooms where teachers ask questions to which they themselves don't know all the answers will ensure pupils need and *want* to talk.

To review and develop your teacher talk go to [www.speechlink.info/thelink](http://www.speechlink.info/thelink) to download a Teacher Talk checklist

## More teacher talk tips:

**Silence:** Never underestimate the power of silence. If you leave a long enough pause pupils will try to fill it. Use the "wait 10 seconds" rule before moving on.

**Display examples:** Display comments or sentence starters on the wall to remind all staff which language to use in areas of the classroom. For example, 'I wonder how...', 'You've used...' (Gross, 2013), plus some open ended questions.

**Negation:** Tell the pupils what you want them to do, not what you don't want them to do! Sentences containing negation (don't, can't, wasn't, shouldn't, not) can be difficult for children to understand. You may be surprised at how many negative statements are given in school throughout the day.

**Instructions:** Use a pupil's name before giving instructions to gain their attention. Give instructions before an activity, not during it. Give instructions in the order you want them carried out. Check for understanding of instructions as you go along.

## Top tips for encouraging talking:

Introduce an element of surprise e.g. a mystery to solve, an unopened parcel, a crime scene, or put out all the wrong equipment for an activity.

### References

Gross, J. (2013) *Time to Talk: Implementing outstanding practice in speech, language and communication*, Routledge.

DCSF (2008) Every Child a Talker. Available from <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk>

# Listen Hear:

## Engaging parents and pupils

Derry Patterson considers some creative ways to involve parents and pupils in target setting.

Most practitioners would agree with involving parents and pupils in decisions. Listening to pupils' views as part of target setting is crucial to help them fulfil their potential. Most parents have a clear idea of the outcomes they wish for their children. Roulestone & Lindsay (2011) found independence and social inclusion were the most commonly reported desired outcomes among parents of pupils with speech, language and communication needs. However the Lamb enquiry (2009) into special educational needs and parental confidence reported that parents often felt they did not have enough opportunities to discuss the outcomes they wanted for their children or how best to achieve them.

### How do you reach out to more parents?

Engaging parents can be challenging with schools having to be increasingly creative in their approaches. Gross (2013) describes an initiative called talking boxes which was used in a group of schools in Cheshire. Parents were invited in to decorate a box with their child. The box was then filled

with things that were meaningful to the child. This approach enabled schools to begin a dialogue with parents.

Most schools involve parents when setting targets for SEN pupils but many parents feel they are simply being asked to agree to the targets set by practitioners. It is much more challenging, but ultimately more effective, to ask parents what long term goals they would like their children to achieve and then work backwards to establish small steps towards these outcomes.

Hayley Goleniowska (2013) surveyed parents to find out what they wanted from SENCOs. Parents wanted SENCOs to remember that the overall aim for all children was independence. Goleniowska cautions us not to lose sight of the big picture in the pressure for pupils to achieve. If the overall aim is for independence, small goals are as valid a measure of successful progress as attainment data. A very good way to measure successful progress is through consideration of pupils' views.

### Pupil voice

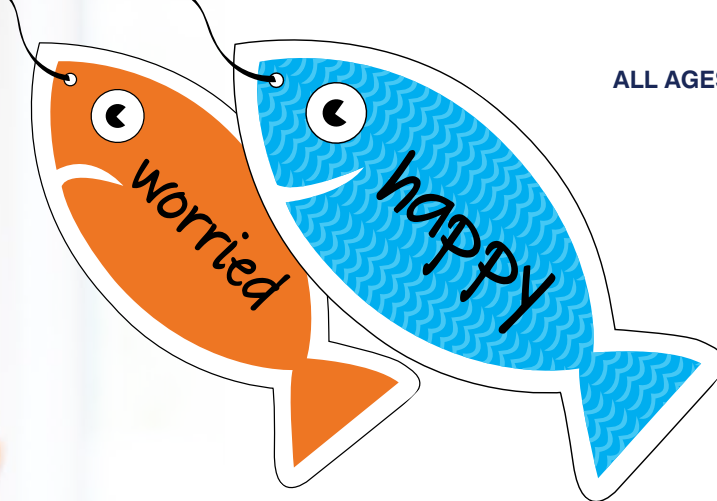
Pupil voice is not a new idea. Many authors have used it as a tool for measuring engagement. Most work has focused on how pupils feel about their environment with some emphasis on the content of lessons. However less attention has been given to what pupils want to learn and the skills they want to develop. Roulestone and McLeod (2011) investigated the views of pupils with speech, language and communication needs and found a mismatch between targets set for pupils and what the pupils themselves wanted to change. They highlight the importance of considering quality of life measures such as happiness and friends alongside skills to be developed.

It can be challenging to collect this information from pupils with SLCN and other special needs. Young children find it difficult to self-reflect and pupils with SLCN may have additional challenges understanding the questions or expressing their ideas.

Visit [www.speechlink.co.uk/info/thelink](http://www.speechlink.co.uk/info/thelink) to download our free pupil's views target setting sheet.

### References:

- Lamb, B. (2009) *The Lamb Enquiry. Special educational needs and parental confidence*. Nottingham: DCSF Available from <https://www.education.gov.uk>
- Goleniowska, H. (2013) What do parents think of SENCOs? *SEN Magazine*, Issue 63, March 2013, pp 26-27
- Gross, J. (2013) *Time to talk: Implementing outstanding practice in speech, language and communication*. London: Routledge pp 136-145.
- Roulestone, S. & McLeod, S. (2011) *Listening to children and young people with speech, language and communication needs*. Guildford: J&R Press
- Roulestone, S. & Lindsay, G. (2012) *The perspectives of children and young people who have speech, language and communication needs and their parents*. London: DFE Available from <https://www.education.gov.uk>



Here are some ways to engage pupils in the target setting process.

### Fishing game

Make fish with quality of life words written on them e.g. happy, sad, worried, relaxed, hard, easy, confused etc. The child selects a fish and then has to talk about things that make them feel that way.

### Picture conversations

Ask young pupils to draw a picture of themselves talking to someone. Use the picture to discuss what the conversation is about e.g. Who is in the picture? Why do you like talking to them? What are you talking about?

### Helpful Teachers

Draw a large outline of a person. Ask children to think of things that make that person a good helpful teacher. Write these words around the outline of the body.

### Story Board

Use a visual timetable alongside some facial expression cards denoting happy, sad and worried faces. Talk through the pupil's experience of the day to work out the pressure situations and what the child would like to change. Use this as a basis for developing strategies to make changes.

### Camera Missions

Ask older pupils to complete a mission using disposable cameras or a digital camera e.g. *A day in my life*, *A tour of the school*, *Things in school I want to change*.

To find out more about any of these approaches see Roulestone, S. & McLeod, S. (2011) *Listening to children and young people with speech, language and communication needs*. Guildford: J&R Press



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