

The Link

SECONDARY

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THE SPEECH & LANGUAGE MAGAZINE FOR SCHOOLS

BEHAVIOUR OR LANGUAGE?

Is behaviour masking difficulties
with communication?



teach
SECONDARY
AWARDS 2023
FINALIST

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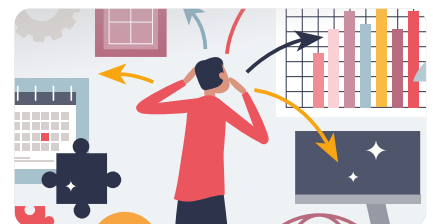
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THE SILENT STRUGGLE

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UNDERSTANDING THE FREEZE,
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CHOOSING THE RIGHT SLCN
SUPPORT PACKAGE FOR
YOUR SCHOOL

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£4.95

Welcome to **The Link Secondary** magazine, brought to you by the team at **Speech & Language Link**.

We were thrilled with the positive response to our first issue, and hope that this one proves just as valuable. We aim to help you in your continuous journey supporting your students' language development, while fostering an inclusive environment that embraces and celebrates neurodiversity.

Speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) frequently serve as the underlying causes of challenges in education, behaviour, and mental health. Crucial life skills such as literacy, communication skills, successful employment, and staying on the right side of the justice system may be unattainable for young people whose SLCN is missed or misdiagnosed.

An SLCN support package will empower you to make a long-lasting

difference for your students with mild to moderate SLCN, but how do you choose the right support package for your school? Specialist speech and language therapist, **Louise Burton**, steers you in the right direction on pages 10-11.

This edition of **The Link Secondary** magazine focuses on the challenges many autistic girls face. Speech and language therapist, **Jenni Lindinger** (page 4), provides insight into the huge disadvantage many autistic girls have when trying to find, and belong, to the "appropriate tribe" they so desperately wish to be part of. Specialist speech and language therapist **Natalie Strong's** recent interviews with 2 families paint a graphic picture of the trauma that a late diagnosis of ASD in girls can bring. (Pages 12-13.)

Persistent internal truancy is an increasing problem and one I remember all too well from my days working in school. Specialist SaLT, **Sophie Mustoe-Playfair**, unpicks the underlying reasons that

may contribute to students who go AWOL and provides food for thought for breaking this difficult cycle. See pages 8-9.

Please continue to let me know the elements of **The Link** you have found useful along with areas of SLCN that you would like to find out more about. I'd also love to hear how you are making a difference in the lives of your students with SLCN – your first-hand experiences will be a valuable addition to **The Link**.

Drop me a line at:
claire.chambers@speechlink.co.uk

Don't forget that **Speech & Language Link** runs **The Link Live Sessions**, termly speech and language twilight webinars for all secondary school staff. Session tickets are on sale now – see page 17 for more information.

Have a good term.



*Editor, The Link magazine
 Speech & Language Link –
 award-winning assessments
 and support for SLCN.*

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One TA to another



The power of

BODY DOUBLING

By **Claire Chambers**, editor – The Link magazine and former HLTA and NHS speech and language therapy assistant

Hearing the term ‘body doubling’ on the radio recently reminded me of a teacher I supported who regularly used this technique with students.

Body doubling is not a new idea, nor is it what you might first think (no, not actors using body doubles in films). Body doubling is when you sit/work alongside another person whilst you each get on with your own tasks. It enables you to harness someone else’s energy, focus or enthusiasm and is something many of us do without often realising it. Think of the times you’ve completed extra reps at the gym because the woman nearby was still going strong, or you were particularly focused and productive at the library because you were alongside other learners.

As of yet, there’s little scientific evidence to support its success, but there is plenty of anecdotal evidence of individuals, particularly those with ADHD and autism, citing its benefits in helping them to concentrate and complete frustrating tasks. I know it works for me.

My colleague and I decided to work at my house recently (rather than separately at our own). We both sat at my kitchen table – laptops open and, instead of the predicted chatting and laughing, we began to work. We were truly stunned by the volume of work (and we were working on different projects) that we got through. We didn’t keep stopping (as we might on our own) and even forgot to make tea or eat the cakes we’d bought! The companionship and solidarity of both being in the same boat worked for us.

So, isn’t that just mirroring?

The answer is no, not quite. Mirroring is closely observing and then matching speech and/or movements to that of another individual. When body doubling, individuals don’t need to be working on the same thing, but their presence may help anchor them to a task.

It may be a useful strategy to use with students who are sent to work in isolation (who make paper planes from their worksheets) or for those who find a whole classroom of body doubles too distracting but could focus better outside the classroom in a pair.

It could work at home too and help students find the motivation needed to get their homework completed on time. Working side by side with a family member or a friend – on the same or different task – may help them get going and stay focused.

So what do we know about body doubling?

- 1 The presence of someone else working hard at a task alongside you can increase motivation and follow-through (like going that extra mile at the gym)
- 2 It can regulate our emotions as we ‘match’ the arousal of those around us (like being productive at the library)
- 3 Body doubles need to be working alongside you, either physically next to you or via a video call
- 4 It is often used for individuals with ADHD to help them complete frustrating/dull tasks

What’s even better is if your body double is good at beginning and completing a task – it may rub off! Any strategy that can help students get started and finish something has got to be worth a try. If you already use body doubling or decide to try it out – please get in touch and let me know how it went!

USEFUL LINKS:

More information can be found online – here are a few websites that might prove helpful:

- psychcentral.com/adhd/adhd-body-doubling
- bodydoubling.com
- juliety.com/body-doubling-apps-websites

MORE INFO

Teenage girls and AUTISM



By **Jenni Lindinger**, speech and language therapist

Hidden amongst the busy corridors and classroom noise that fills every secondary school in the country lies an often-silent struggle; that of an autistic teenage girl attempting to successfully navigate a journey that feels of equal social and academic importance. But without the standard toolkit of resources that an average teenage girl comes equipped with for their expedition through this rocky terrain.

There is no doubt for anyone that secondary school is hard for all young people, and especially girls. The combination of puberty, identity formation, social hierarchies, peer pressures and increasing independence combined with social media and technology mean that many girls struggle at this stage. A report from the World Health Organisation in 2022 identified that almost 40% of girls aged 15 in the UK felt lonely. 15-year-old girls in the UK had an average mental health wellbeing score of just 38 out of 100, compared to boys who scored on average 57 out of 100. 57% of girls in the UK reported feeling 'low' more than once a week.

Humans are social beings. In the times of our ancestors, belonging was necessary for survival; as a group, we stood more chance against predators than we did alone. Today, adolescents who do not have friends are at an increased risk of bullying and victimisation (Wei & Jonson-Reid, 2011). "The desire to belong is a deeply rooted human motivation, that, underpinned by our ancestral origins, permeates our thoughts, feelings and behaviours." (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Furthermore, according to Roy Baumeister, a pioneering researcher into the field of 'Belonging', adolescence is the hardest time for belongingness, as children's need for belonging is no longer satisfied solely by their family, and now requires a peer group. This, combined with an increasing awareness of how others view them, make belonging vital for mental wellbeing.

Yet lessons on how to find an appropriate tribe, join that tribe, and then belong securely within that tribe are not something that is taught. Whilst it is hard for all young people, autistic girls are at a





huge disadvantage, as they often lack the insight into social relationships at the depth required, and struggle to interpret social behaviours accurately. Their need to belong is fierce, whilst their resources to navigate the path to belonging to a tribe are limited.

Historically, professionals have sought to address this with social skills groups; teaching autistic teenagers the importance of eye contact, how to greet people and ways to converse. But we now know, thanks to the feedback of the neurodivergent community, that this simply worsens mental health outcomes. Pretending to be like another in order to belong is, arguably, more damaging than being authentically yourself, but alone; many people have heard the quote 'You can feel lonely in a crowd'. Rather than actually belonging, these girls have to expend all their energy on seemingly 'fitting in', yet still feel like an outsider whilst often thinking the problem lies with them - that there is something fundamentally wrong with them.

We need to show these girls that there is nothing 'wrong' with them and help them to embrace their authentic selves. To do this, we must all now embrace neurodiversity. This means running social navigation groups that teach all young people that there are different brains, and different styles of communication, and that accepting and accommodating these different styles is kinder than expecting everyone to communicate in the same way. It means teaching neurodivergent girls that their brains work exactly how they are meant to; helping them to understand how they like to communicate and what they need, and how to advocate for this. It means teaching neurodivergent girls how neurotypical brains work, so that they can interpret this foreign language, and speak it

when they must, whilst simultaneously teaching neurotypical peers how different neurodivergent brains work, such as autistic brains, ADHD brains, dyslexic brains, manic-depressive brains, and teaching them how to interpret these different 'languages', teaching them how to adapt to speak in this way when needed. It means helping all girls to find the tribe that fits best for them.

It is often the case that autistic girls are drawn together and enjoy each other's company more than that of their neurotypical peers. This is natural, as they are able to be authentic and understood without anyone needing to 'interpret'. Neurotypical youngsters are drawn to each other for similar reasons. Whilst there is nothing wrong with this, all groups need to learn to respect, work with, and embrace the differences between each other, and learning to translate between these groups is a crucial part of secondary education. It is the role of professionals working in secondary settings to model and support this neurodiversity-affirming outlook and help all pupils to navigate a world with their equal co-existence.

“Their need to belong is fierce.”

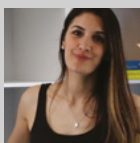
Jenni Lindinger is a speech and language therapist at **The Expressive Child**, an independent practice working with children and young people of all ages. Her special interest is in girls experiencing mental illness resulting from communication and social interaction difficulties. Alongside working directly with her clients, she provides training, workshops and is a speaker for schools, parents and professionals.



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Approaching CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR in secondary school



By **Shahana Knight**, founder and director of TPC Therapy

The number of young people struggling with their behaviour is increasing. Things like anger and aggression, violence, school refusal and walking out are becoming more frequent along with lower-level issues such as anxiety, low confidence and poor social skills. Young people are finding normal daily stressors more difficult to deal with and there is a noticeable difference in the resilience they have when dealing with challenges.

Many schools are finding their behaviour management strategies are not as effective as they once were, leaving teachers feeling disempowered and stuck between the demands of the teaching profession and the students' disengagement. In a secondary school setting, where young people are expected to be able to manage their behaviour and take responsibility for their actions, it can be difficult to understand what is going on. How can a 15-year-old, 'who should know better', be getting into fights and walking out of class? Why are they struggling to listen and follow the rules or concentrate in their lessons, despite the multiple warnings? To answer these questions, we must consider the science.

Alongside behaviour, mental health and wellbeing needs are also increasing, as are external factors such as childhood trauma, adversity and increased stress levels. Since COVID-19, more children are living with abuse, neglect, domestic violence, loss, alcoholism, drugs and low income and more households are stressed, anxious and under pressure – just

trying to survive. Alongside this, life itself is more stressful today, with young people opting for gaming, technology and social media which increase stress levels and dysregulation, leaving little time for young people to rest, reflect, think and feel calm.

When you pull together all these factors, the outcome is young people who are flooded with high levels of stress hormone. When your

“...conventional methods for ‘behaviour management’ are often hinged on rejection, punishment and shame which shut down the brain...”

body is exposed to prolonged stress, the survival part of the brain is triggered. This is activated whenever you feel overwhelmed or threatened and it responds with mechanisms to keep you safe and help you cope. As a result, you find yourself responding to demanding situations with the fight, flight or freeze response. Your survival brain will be in the driver's seat and hijack your ability to think, reason, reflect, problem-

solve and have empathy for others. You will also struggle to regulate your emotions and manage your behaviours. This explains why many of our young people are struggling with their behaviour as they are in a constant state of survival. As a result, smaller challenges such as going to class, hard work or managing conflict with peers, become more difficult and can often be interpreted as further 'threats' by the brain.

THINK:

- Students shouting, swearing and becoming aggressive (FIGHT mode)
- Refusing to engage, walking away and missing class (FLIGHT mode)
- Shutting down, zoning out and not listening (FREEZE mode)



Hear more from Shahana at The Link Live secondary Session on March 21st – ticket information on page 16.

If they knew how to manage things better, they would.

As adults, we can either see a young person who is choosing to misbehave, or we can see a young person who is struggling to manage their emotions, feels overwhelmed and needs help.

In truth, conventional methods for 'behaviour management' are often hinged on rejection, punishment and shame which shut down the brain, and perpetuate survival responses. We are not here to manage anyone's behaviour, instead we must help them manage their own. Our goal should always be to teach.

So, what can you do?

✓ Focus on feelings first

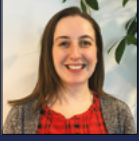
Usually, our first response is to focus on the behaviour. Instead, try focusing on the feeling behind the behaviour. Step back, look at their behaviour and the situation and think about what that feeling might be, then tell them so they have insight and can develop their emotional intelligence. The young person feels validated and safe and will reduce their feelings of stress, helping them access their rational thinking skills.

✓ Help them regulate

If a young person is angry and overwhelmed, they will not be able to calm down on their own. They will need help from a caring adult to model regulation and give them the tools they need to manage their feelings and emotions. Instead of giving them a consequence before they are ready, help them regulate in the moment. Can they go for a walk, have a drink of water, take some deep breaths, have 5 minutes in a calm room or listen to music? These things are not rewards but are tools to help them manage their emotional state and learn to calm down. Once they have calmed down, they are more likely to accept the consequence, make amends or re-engage because their brain is no longer feeling attacked.

Finally, remember that although secondary schools are big, and students move from teacher to teacher and class to class, every adult matters. Every interaction counts and the more each member of staff adopts the same nurturing, connective responses, the more secure the students will feel which will contribute to lowering stress levels, strengthening connections and the feeling of emotional safety ultimately reducing challenging behaviour over time.

Internal



By **Sophie Mustoe-Playfair**, specialist speech and language therapist

Before training as a speech and language therapist, I worked as a teaching assistant at a secondary school in a deprived area on the south coast of England. Although I wasn't familiar with the terminology, several of the pupils whom I worked with (all of whom had special educational needs) were frequently, internally truant.

Internal truancy is when students are present on school grounds but do not attend one or more lessons. It is, of course, a huge safeguarding concern, as young people engaged in internal truancy are very often unsupervised and therefore at risk.

Some students will make their own way to pastoral care, or their 'safe space' wherever that may be. However, behaviour can escalate, particularly where peer pressure is a contributing factor, and students may become disruptive to other lessons as they roam the corridors. Even where students are not actively disrupting their peers, skipping lessons can become a vicious and self-fulfilling cycle as the young person becomes increasingly disengaged from their learning, and struggles to reintegrate due to the feeling of having fallen behind.

It's always been a battle schools have faced, but anecdotal reports from schools nationwide indicate that the problem has increased considerably since the COVID-19 pandemic and associated school lockdowns. The scale of the problem, however, cannot truly be known, as there is no statutory requirement to report lesson-by-lesson attendance data, and it's therefore extremely difficult to gather evidence on a national level.

Much has been said in other publications about what sanctions may be appropriate (or effective) to mitigate internal truancy, but as a speech and language therapist, this isn't my area of expertise. Instead, I'd like to reflect on

the underlying causes of internal truancy and how these need to be addressed directly to truly tackle the loss of learning opportunities. After all, internal truancy sits at the extreme end of a scale which also includes inattention, lack of engagement, and various types of work avoidance inside the classroom.

So, why do children and young people engage in internal truancy? Often, it's a case of children and young people avoiding a situation which causes them distress for one reason or another. It's a sign they are unable to cope with the demands of the classroom, either educationally or socially.

Work avoidance is often attributed to 'attitude' or 'boredom', but it's difficult to be engaged by work that you cannot access. A student may feel unable to access the work in the classroom simply because they have missed learning already, which perpetuates the cycle, but we should also consider that a great many young people in our secondary schools have undiagnosed or unsupported educational needs, for example, speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).

Language difficulties are frequently referred to as hidden needs. Often it is easier to identify the consequences of language needs than it is to recognise the fundamental problem. Young people are instead noticed for poor academic progress, literacy problems, or behaviour difficulties which may include internal truancy. Identifying SLCN, using age-appropriate and objective tools, should be an important part of unpicking classroom

"It's a sign they are unable to cope with the demands of the classroom, either educationally or socially."



Truancy

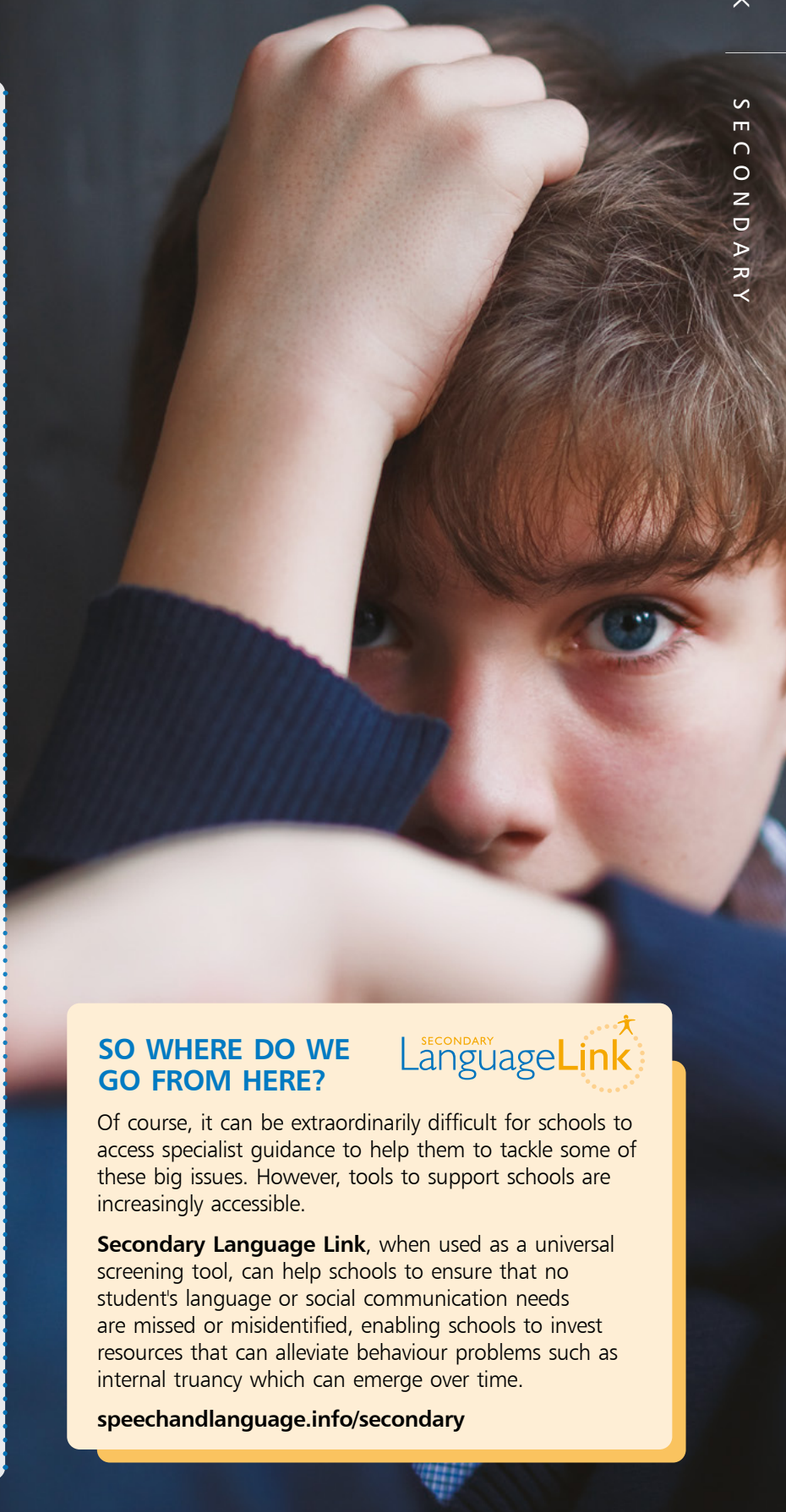
avoidance. Problems for pupils with SLCN may be mitigated by ensuring that all classrooms are accessible, communication friendly environments, that directly engage with their needs.

Young people with SLCN are particularly vulnerable to peer pressure and difficulties with peer relationships and will require high-quality pastoral support. Staff should familiarise themselves with strategies and interventions which they can call on to

help students develop insight, understand difficult social situations, and empower young people with resources they can access to increase their social independence.

Mental health is another significant contributing factor. NHS

England statistics indicate that in 2023, 20.3% of 8 to 16-year-olds had a probable mental disorder, and among 17 to 19-year-olds the proportion was 23.3%. Anxiety is extremely common and especially relevant for internal truancy. Mental health problems are also commonly linked to both SLCN and social vulnerabilities such as susceptibility to peer pressure and bullying. Internal truancy may be linked to known social, emotional and mental health problems, or it could be a key warning sign that a student needs support urgently. To successfully tackle the issue, there needs to be an acknowledgement of, and steps taken, to address SEMH and equip students with self-awareness, emotional regulation, and resilience in the face of challenges. These skills are crucial to academic success as well as wider wellbeing and long-term outcomes for young people.



SO WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?



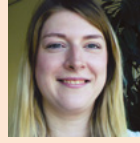
Of course, it can be extraordinarily difficult for schools to access specialist guidance to help them to tackle some of these big issues. However, tools to support schools are increasingly accessible.

Secondary Language Link, when used as a universal screening tool, can help schools to ensure that no student's language or social communication needs are missed or misidentified, enabling schools to invest resources that can alleviate behaviour problems such as internal truancy which can emerge over time.

speechandlanguage.info/secondary

Q. How do I choose the right SLCN support package for my school?

ASK A



By **Louise Burton**, specialist speech and language therapist

A.

Speech, language and communication are fundamental skills that underpin students' ability to learn across all subjects in school. Development of these skills, therefore, directly impacts on a student's academic and life outcomes. It is often thought that students' language ability is fully developed prior to secondary education, however these skills continue to develop throughout education, and our brains do not fully develop until we are 25! Added to this, at secondary school, language demands vastly increase, so students must be supported in understanding and using more complex language and in developing more sophisticated social skills.

Approximately 10% of young people have a long-term speech, language and communication need (SLCN), and upwards of 50% of students, particularly in areas of social disadvantage, have poor or limited language skills that are inadequate to support the next steps in learning.

Despite the known importance of language and communication development for learning, and the high prevalence of SLCN, development of these skills is not always a priority in schools. Secondary school staff need the tools to be able to identify and support students with SLCN, including interventions that will boost language skills and, as a result, attainment. But how should schools go about choosing a SLCN package and what are the important things to consider?



THERAPIST

Does the package support you to identify which young people have SLCN?

Receptive language difficulties are known as a 'hidden need' because it is impossible to identify that a pupil is having difficulty understanding from observation alone. This is even more challenging in secondary school because students are often more adept at hiding their difficulties, masking them with good surface language skills. This means students are more likely to be identified by more noticeable difficulties, such as challenging behaviour, which is often a symptom of struggling to understand language in the classroom. This results in many falling through the gaps without their underlying needs being identified or supported.



A SLCN package must contain an assessment to enable you to identify which students need support. The best assessments enable schools to target resources more efficiently by identifying those students who would benefit from targeted intervention from support staff in school and those who need specialist support to make progress.

Does the package foster a tiered framework of support for SLCN?

It is recommended that schools support SLCN through a tiered framework of universal, targeted and specialist support. This means that provision is available at all levels to meet the needs of every student, making the most efficient use of precious school resources.

Strategies for supporting the development of language and communication skills need to be embedded at a universal level in every classroom to boost the skills of all students, while a small number of them require additional targeted support, and an even smaller number of students require a referral to speech and language therapy services. A package needs to support schools to develop a tiered framework across the whole setting, providing an inclusive communication environment for all students.

Does the package build SLCN knowledge and expertise throughout the school?

Many packages are designed on the basis of one member of staff being trained to deliver interventions to identified students. However, this is not the most efficient way of supporting pupils with SLCN. All students (not just those with SLCN) are going to make the most progress within a communication friendly environment, where quality first teaching strategies are in place within the classroom.

Many pupils with SLCN can be supported through the use of classroom strategies alone, without the need for more targeted intervention. It is, therefore, crucial that all staff have the knowledge and skills to support students with SLCN, so it is important to look at what training and resources a package can provide for the whole school.

Is there evidence that the intervention works and is it feasible to deliver in school?

It is important to review the evidence base for the intervention to ensure that you are buying something that is going to work. When reading research studies, it is important to note the amount of intervention provided and how much progress was made as a result. For example, if within a study the students received daily intervention, this would be very difficult to achieve within a school timetable, affecting the treatment fidelity. You would be unlikely to see as much progress from implementing the intervention if you were unable to complete it as regularly.

What happens after you have purchased the intervention package?

Research shows that school staff can make a huge difference to young people's language skills, but as language skills are very complex, this is only the case if they have good quality and continuing support in place. It's important, therefore, to find out whether schools receive any ongoing support after purchasing an intervention. Equally crucial is knowing whether updates will be made to the intervention in line with advances in research and practice, and whether this is included or is charged as an extra!

LATE DIAGNOSES OF ASD IN GIRLS



By **Natalie Strong**,
specialist speech and language therapist

Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is highly under/misdiagnosed in girls. Girls have a greater ability to mask and often present with different, more subtle ASD characteristics. If diagnosed at all, it may be late, following the onset of significant external behaviours such as self-harming, depression and eating disorders.

Girls are often diagnosed with anxiety or a mental health condition rather than ASD as the root of their anxiety. Late or absent diagnoses can significantly impact girls' mental health as well as academic attainment and social participation, so parents and educators must be trained to spot the signs early.

Autism-related anxiety is usually rooted in sensory sensitivities, uncertainty, recognising emotions in others/selves, and performance anxiety. It may be caused by (even minor) disruptions to routines, unfamiliar/unpredictable social situations or times of transition.

If left unchecked, autism-related anxiety can lead to significant trauma with far-reaching impact. Here Annie* and her mum Belinda* share their experiences of Annie's ASD diagnosis at the age of 14, along with Grace* whose daughter, Evie* was also 14 when diagnosed.

"I felt so alone at school and, at home, these feelings wouldn't go away".



Annie's Story



Belinda: "I knew something wasn't right from an early age. Annie was very clingy with extreme separation anxiety. She had trouble making friends, found it difficult to share them with others and was forever falling out with them. In year 8, she started having emotional outbursts and coming home from school exhausted and going to bed."

Annie: "I used to not understand friendships. When my bestie at primary was with others, I felt hurt, and I'd end up on my own. At secondary, I was scared people wouldn't like me. I wanted to be in the popular group and changed myself to fit in, but the girls used and dropped me. I'm dyslexic so I was struggling to keep up with schoolwork as well as overthinking friendships. I got lots of detentions because I was depressed and couldn't or didn't do the work."

"I felt so alone – these feelings wouldn't go away. I would get thoughts about not living anymore, and self-harm – the physical pain would distract me from the emotional pain. I took paracetamol overdoses and ended up getting sectioned in a mental health hospital."

During her stay, Annie was diagnosed with ASD, though she doesn't want this as an excuse for her behaviour, but Annie made the decision to go to a special ASD school to get the right help and to complete her GCSEs. Although she was happier and people respected her more, she still didn't feel she fitted in. However, Annie stayed on, got her grades and is now studying psychology at university.

Annie: "Finally, I feel I understand myself better. I've learned to trust myself, trust my instincts, that I am enough for others; they are hanging out cos they like me. I feel more positive about the future! I needed mental health support at primary – then it wouldn't have escalated."

Belinda: "All the way through primary I tried to get help – she was assessed by various professionals but not one mentioned ASD. If they had, things could have been different".



Evie's Story



Grace's daughter Evie was diagnosed with ASD following a suicide attempt and, like Annie, Grace too knew something was wrong from an early age. Her daughter had extreme sensory sensitivities and was very rigid in how she dressed. Throughout primary school, she found friendships difficult to navigate and would come back from school exhausted and have emotional outbursts. By year 6 Evie had developed OCD rituals and started self-harming.

Grace: "In year 8 when her hormones kicked in, Evie fell apart. She didn't know who she was, she'd become obsessed with friends and then have big fallings out. She wasn't coping with the increasing pressure of secondary school and spiralling anxiety meant she was spending more and more time out of lessons until she refused to go to school completely. She told our GP that she was suicidal and was sent to the A&E psychiatric team who suspected that she fitted a pattern: young teenage girls struggling socially and mentally after moving to secondary school, self-harming and making suicide attempts and then being diagnosed with ASD.

Grace: "In hospital, following years of masking, Evie reached 'autistic burnout'. Her anxiety was so extreme that ASD traits were alarmingly obvious: she had acute sensory responses to noise, refused to eat anything but burgers, and obsessively whizzed through challenging Lego sets.

Evie was indeed diagnosed with ASD and now attends a specialist provision, part-time, and although much better, she continues to struggle with her mental health.

Grace: "An ASD diagnosis has been very helpful – allowing Evie to understand herself better, as well as us. We now parent in a completely different way".

Unfortunately, teachers receive little training around ASD during their teacher training. Many schools are working hard on improving awareness and training, but they can't do it alone. Parents, GPs and local support services also have key roles to play.

FOR MORE ADVICE:

The National Autistic Society: tinyurl.com/bde8p584
mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk

TO READ THE
ENTIRE ONLINE
ARTICLE CLICK HERE



“A Vision for Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) for the UK”



By **Kate Freeman**, consultant –
speech and language in education

October 2023 saw the publishing of an important document highlighting months of work involving a key partnership of organisations. "A Vision for Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) for the UK" outlines a comprehensive plan for addressing the challenges faced by individuals with DLD in five key ambitions:

The ambitions

1 Raising awareness of DLD:

Increased awareness is seen as crucial to improving services, policies, research, and support, ultimately enhancing the daily lives of those with DLD.

2 Accessible support:

The second ambition focuses on ensuring individuals with DLD can access the right support at the right time, calling for a fair and accessible system for all, regardless of geographical location or educational level.

3 Early diagnosis:

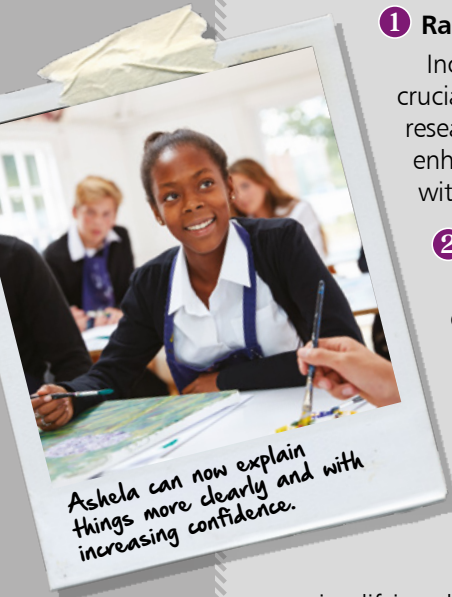
The vision advocates for simplifying the diagnostic process, sharing good practice, and addressing the difficulties parents face in obtaining a timely NHS diagnosis.

4 Inclusive schools and workplaces:

The vision suggests simple and low-cost changes, such as visual aids and inclusive job application processes, to create more supportive environments.

5 Independence:

This includes acquiring life skills for adulthood and eliminating the association between DLD and mental health issues in adulthood. The vision emphasises the need for services to address DLD throughout an individual's lifespan.



Ashela can now explain things more clearly and with increasing confidence.



Keanu's Communication Contact enables him to share with subject teachers the way he learns best.

Secondary
Language
Link success
stories



Jess is now aware of why she finds expressing herself harder than others do, and has strategies to make it easier.

SECONDARY
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HOW SPEECH & LANGUAGE LINK SUPPORTS THIS WORK

Speech & Language Link offers school-delivered tools and interventions, such as **Secondary Language Link**, to help ensure that pupils with DLD can access the right support at the right time. One of the mechanisms for achieving this is ensuring that speech and language therapy services are not overwhelmed by supporting children and young people whose needs can be managed in schools.

Speech & Language Link welcomes the work that has taken place in developing and articulating this vision. Read more about how our existing work ties into these 5 ambitions (tinyurl.com/mry6a6hm).

Poor behaviour or a speech and language need?



By **Sue White**, senior educational specialist
– Widgit Software

Around 1.4 million children and young people in the UK have long-term speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) that they won't grow out of: tinyurl.com/3hzt6a6c

So, it stands to reason that a significant proportion of these are young people who have moved up or, are preparing to transition, to secondary school with potentially unidentified speech and language difficulties.



Reduced vocabulary can make social interaction and learning-related communication challenging, and this could also have a negative impact on a student's behaviour in school.

If a student knocks over chairs when they get a low score in an English test or often lashes out at their peers on the sports field, the first question to answer should be: is this a behavioural issue or an indication that the student could be lacking in communication skills?

Taking action

Poor social comprehension and language can be a root cause of disruption inside and outside the classroom. This underlines a real demand for schools to build tailored strategies to support the development of language around social, emotional and mental health needs to help them manage issues promptly and effectively.

One relatively simple approach to take is to introduce visual cues across the school, which are used universally and are therefore

inclusive by design. You might add symbols to signs displayed on walls, in corridors and outside spaces that reinforce your school's ethos and values.

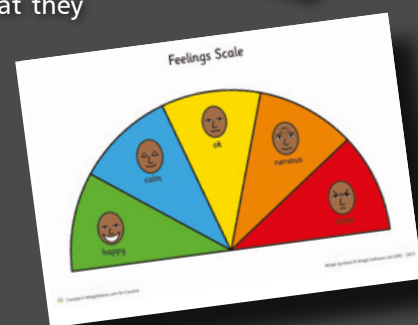
Symbolic images enable students to focus on the key messages you're trying to get across, whether that's to be kind, work hard or help others. This small step will help those who have gaps in their vocabulary to understand the school's expectations better and enable them to play a full and active role in the school community.

Expressing emotion

A student who has a sick grandparent or argued with a sibling before school may not have the language to communicate that they are scared or sad. This can lead to frustration and challenging behaviour in school.

However, students can be encouraged to communicate how they feel by pointing to the relevant image on a set of emotion cards.

Emotion cards include facial expressions which are useful tools students can use to indicate how they are feeling. These are particularly helpful for supporting those who have limited vocabulary. The ability to communicate emotions in a positive way could potentially stop a highly charged situation in its tracks, as well as provide a good opportunity to open a discussion and help.



welcome to

TheLink

SECONDARY
LanguageLink

teach
SECONDARY
AWARDS 2023
FINALIST

We are delighted that our speech and language support package, Secondary Language Link, was a Teach Secondary Awards finalist in the SEND category.

Secondary Language Link is an online, standardised assessment and interactive intervention package created by speech and language therapists in 2012. It is used to assess and develop the receptive language and functional communication skills of students in KS3.

Take a free, 2-week trial here:
speechandlanguage.info/secondary



Diary

Speech & Language Link has a very busy event calendar this year, please come and say hello if you're attending – we'd love to meet you!

We'll be at the following next term:

MARCH 15TH

National Pupil Premium Conference, Birmingham

MARCH 21ST

The Link Live Sessions, online

APRIL 27TH

NAPLIC, Birmingham

APRIL 30TH

Directors of Improvement Conference, CST Birmingham

MAY 1ST

SEND Conference/Schools and Academies Show, London

JUNE 6TH

SEND Conference, Devon

JUNE 14TH

National Education Show, Llandudno

SPEECH & LANGUAGE LINK PARTNER WITH THE SEND NETWORK!

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN JOINING A CONTENT AND KNOWLEDGE-SHARING HUB FOR SEND PRACTITIONERS?

The SEND Network provides a trusted space for like-minded professionals to connect, exchange ideas and access best practice content to support their day-to-day roles. The community, run by the team behind the Tes SEND Show, has grown to over 2,500 members.

Signing up for the SEND Network is completely free, so don't miss out on this opportunity to interact with your peers and access expert resources to support your work.



To join, visit: send-network.co.uk

Speech & Language News

Keep up with the latest news and advice to help you support students with SLCN. Speech & Language Link brings you a monthly round-up of SLCN news, blogs and resources directly to your inbox.

Sign up here for
The Speech & Language News:
speechandlanguage.info/linknews

Community

LinkLive SESSIONS

In November, Speech & Language Link hosted the first secondary-focused Link Live twilight session. It was great that so many of you registered for the online event. We hope you will join us again, on the 21st of March, for the next in The Link Live Session series.

Date Thursday 21st March

Time 15:30-17:30

Venue Online

Focus Challenging behaviour at secondary and the links to SLCN

Presenters

- Kate Freeman, consultant – speech and language in education

- Shahana Knight, founder and director of TPC Therapy

Who should attend?

SENcos, teachers, ECTs and support staff in secondary settings

Tickets cost
£25+vat
per ticket

**20%
DISCOUNT
FOR THE LINK
MAGAZINE
READERS***



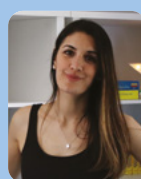
Kate Freeman

Consultant –
speech and
language in
education

BEHAVIOUR OR LANGUAGE?

Participants will consider:

1. How learning the vocabulary of emotions supports mental health.
2. Hear key research that demonstrates how emotion words are learnt and retrieved and
3. Strategies for use in school to support this.



**Shahana
Knight**

Founder of
TPC Therapy

APPROACHING BEHAVIOUR WITH CONNECTION

Learn:

1. Why increasing numbers of young people are struggling with their behaviour.
2. Why conventional methods of dealing with behaviour might not work.
3. Find out what you can do to support not only behaviour, but life skills and emotional intelligence too.

***FREE**
Secondary Language
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– see your homepage
for more details.

* Use code: TLLP0324TLM at checkout and pay just £20+VAT per ticket (normal price £25+VAT)



OUR FACEBOOK GROUP SPEECH AND LANGUAGE SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS

Join the conversation with over 900 members and receive weekly videos and posts from our speech and language team, take part in fun, short polls and surveys and share good practice.

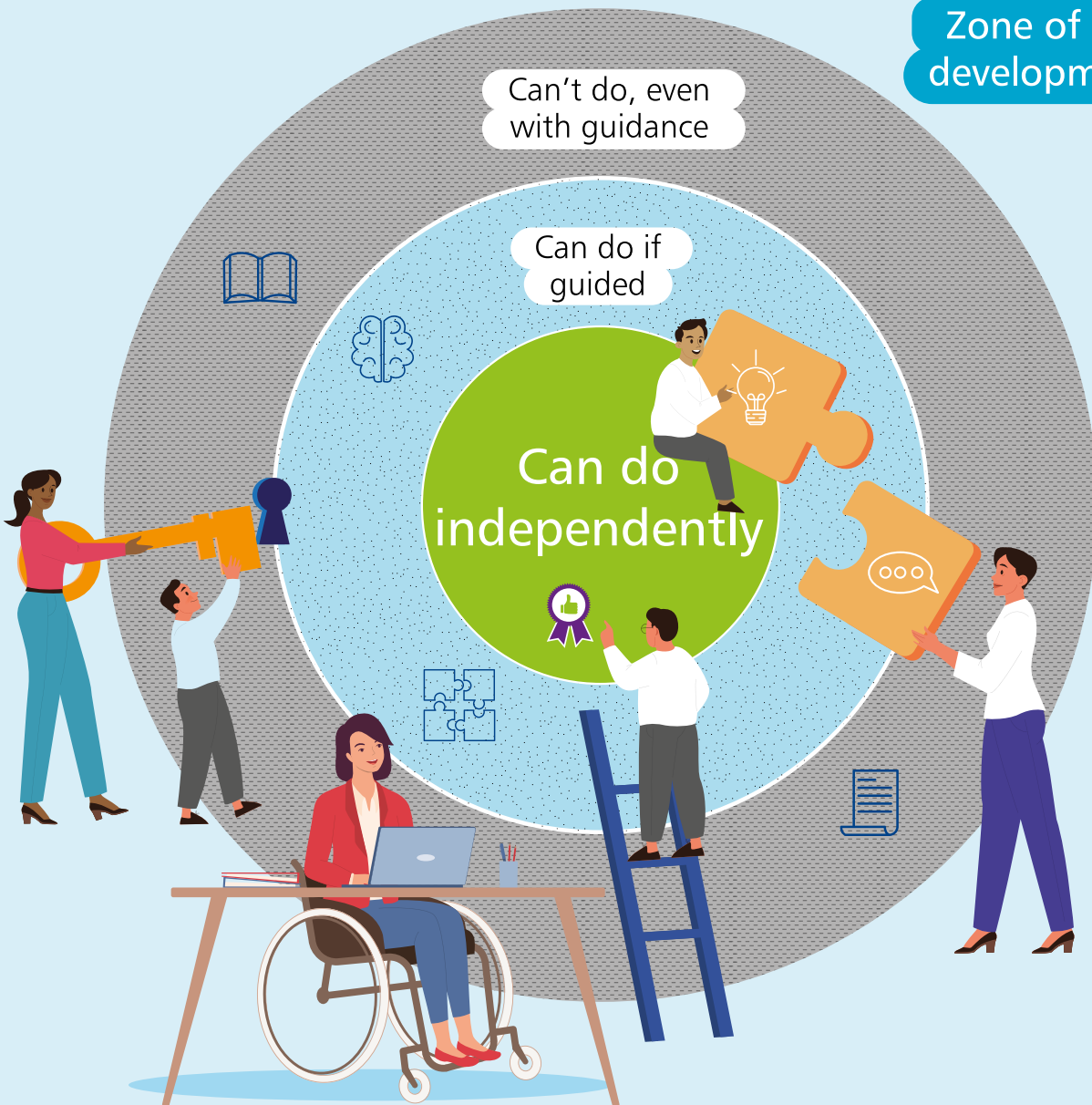


Adapting to ADAPTIVE TEACHING: strategies for communication success



By **Yin Collighan**, specialist speech and language therapist

Zone of proximal development (ZPD)



As we evolve in our educational approaches, the shift from differentiation to adaptive teaching becomes ever more important. With the increase in language complexity and the number of children with SLCN within secondary school, we need to use classroom strategies that are fluid and flexible to meet the needs of different pupils, as and when needed. Here's how:

Break It Down:

Lengthy teacher talk can overwhelm students, especially when the subject matter is particularly complex. It can overload the working memory and lead pupils to disengage. Many students with different types of SEN find processing and retaining information particularly difficult.



MY TIPS: Encourage students to deconstruct what is being taught in lessons. This could be group collaboration: working out how to break down projects and offering supportive prompts to help pupils to work more autonomously, fostering a feeling of accomplishment. Break down explanations and long episodes of teacher talk by supplying smaller chunks of information at any one time, especially when the tasks are particularly challenging. Incorporate more/longer pauses to allow processing time for students.

Explain Clearly:

Most classroom teaching at secondary school is delivered orally; verbal instructions are given and new material and complex ideas are discussed and explained. Students must actively engage with the information to develop a good understanding of the subject matter.



MY TIPS: Consider Vygotsky's "Zone of Proximal Development"*. Explanations must be pitched at the right level and subject teachers will need to consider that level based on their knowledge of their students.

Include also this range of techniques:



High redundancy instruction (ensuring that specific information is encountered many times, in different contexts)



Repetition of key concepts using language that is simpler but conveys the necessary knowledge – so being particularly direct and explicit



Making information compelling, engaging emotion where possible to keep it memorable, with explicit reference to students' experiences and prior teaching

Promote Independence:

Practising independent learning helps students to actively manage their studies and take responsibility for their research, time management and academic performance. Having ownership and autonomy of their own work is a crucial part of success at secondary school and beyond.



MY TIPS: Build subtle checks for understanding in the classroom so that students learn to self-monitor their comprehension and request clarification if they get confused or lost, e.g., providing RAG rating indicators. Encourage students to identify breakdowns when they struggle to understand and help them to find good strategies to support repair e.g., explicitly asking the teacher to clarify vocabulary.

Keep it visual:

Visual support can make a significant difference to learning for all students. Using visuals provides salient information and as such reduces cognitive demand and decreases the load on working memory.



MY TIPS: Visual aids at secondary school level can be fairly sophisticated. With schools' increasing use of technology, animations and video can bring lessons to life and educational software can help students to visualise scientific or mathematical concepts. Photos, illustrations and diagrams are really useful for depicting very complex ideas, with the latter two being of much benefit as they can be drawn ad-hoc meaning adaptations can be made on the spot. Students can use writing frames to create structure to aid spoken work, for example, if students were presenting information to the class or providing explanations this can help to prompt them to start.

As we implement these adaptive teaching strategies, we aim for a more inclusive, effective educational system. One that's not just about academic achievement but preparing our students for life beyond school, equipped with the skills and confidence to navigate a complex world. By embracing adaptive teaching with enthusiasm and commitment, we can accommodate our students' diverse needs and help them to reach their potential.



* <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1081990.pdf>

Speech & Language News

Sign up today for
your eNewsletter



Sign up for our monthly eNewsletter and receive:

- 👍 A comprehensive summary of SLCN-related news
- 👍 Relevant blogs, articles and practical advice from speech and language specialists
- 👍 Free resources and discounts

Speech & Language Link can help you support the development of the language skills that are essential for a positive future for ALL your students.

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